Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

GEORGE JAEGER

Interviewed by: Robert Daniels

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Part I: A very lucky start!

1. From Vienna to Brooklyn and beyond.

Q: Let's begin with personal background and the experiences that led you to a career in the Foreign Service, and then, more or less chronologically, go through your various assignments.

JAEGER: I was born in Vienna in 1926, the son of Frederick Jaeger, a gifted art Professor and rather successful Austrian painter who exhibited among other galleries in Vienna's prestigious 'Sezession'. My mother Emilie was one of Vienna's early self-made women, who had become business manager of a now long-defunct shoe factory, a job to which she worked her way up through grit, resilience and intelligence from very modest beginnings. She married my father some time after his return from the Italian front in World War I where he had been an artillery Lieutenant in the Austrian-Italian standoff in the Dolomites, today's South Tirol.

My parents were a warm, conscientious, caring people, who formed me and brought me up in our modest but, by the standards of the time, comfortable and sunny flat in Vienna's 14th District. During summers, when my father had over two months' vacation - the happy lot of Viennese professors in those days! - we packed up paints, easels, books and mountain boots and went off to Carinthia or East Tirol - sometimes staying in local inns, sometimes in "Pensions" run by the village priest: Idyllic months, full of long, happy days of walking in the hills and mountains, swimming in ponds, or helping carry my father's painting gear - in what was still a very unspoiled, isolated peasant world, much closer to the 19th than the 20th century. I clearly remember the excitement when a very lofty-looking English family in a formidable motor car, probably a Rolls Royce, came through Paternion in Carinthia one day in the late thirties, where we were staying in the local inn, stirring up dust and scattering the chickens. They spoke to me, patted me on the head and left me amazed at being confronted by people from another world!

In retrospect, I was a happy, secure and cheerful child - although an inveterate reader and a good, perhaps too dutiful student - who, to cite only one example, asked for and got a three volume set of Greek Mythology for his 10th birthday present in 1936!

Part of the motivation was that Austrian schools were highly competitive, and academic success was the key to getting into Gymnasium and later into University. For example, only eighty-some, out of a thousand applicants who wanted to enter the Seipel Gymnasium in the year I applied, actually made the cut, and, by the second year, only thirty-three were left! Even fewer normally made it through to graduation. The unmistakable lesson was that it was important to work hard, often memorizing and writing well into the night, if one didn't want to take one's chances in a world with few safety nets. As my mother insistently put it: "Remember, you are a Professor's son!"

In fact, it turned out to be a much better education than contemporary pedagogues might suspect. Memorizing Schiller's poems and pounding away at Latin grammar instilled a penchant for precision in language, thinking, and logical analysis, enormously helpful in later life in putting first things first and parsing complex human and political equations.

What's more, reading the classics, with their endless assertions of virtues and vices, attending mandatory religion classes and regularly going to church led, if not to lifelong faith, at least to a lifelong quest for meaning and the moral imperatives which flow from it, human dignity and human rights. Moreover, the sense of history instilled during those early years, however incorrectly and badly taught, laid the groundwork for an almost instinctive understanding in later years of the interrelating flows in time and space, which make up our world's fast-shifting multi-dimensional continuum.

It was all part of another time, not destined to last. There were clear forewarnings, even for a child: My first came on a gray, cold evening in February 1934, I was not yet quite eight, when my parents took me along to some friends' house for a late afternoon 'Kafe' - I was to recite some poetry as part of the entertainment - when, on our way, we were suddenly caught up in machine-gun fire: Part of the fierce, long-brewing but unsuccessful Socialist uprising against center-right Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. This crisis was followed in July by a Nazi putsch orchestrated in Berlin, during which Dollfuss was assassinated. The anxieties and tensions all this generated between Socialists, Austrian Nazis and the many caught between, was palpable even in the village inn in Carinthia where we spent that summer where the question was no longer whether the Nazis would have their way but when. Although Anschluss to Hitler's Germany was averted for another four years by Dollfuss' successor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, the handwriting was clearly on the wall.

Looking back, I certainly did not fully grasp the seriousness of these events even on the day, it was March 9, 1938, when, on returning home from Gymnasium, I found my alarmed parents listening intently to Schuschnigg's abdication speech on their tiny crystal radio set.

Only four days later, on March 13, standing on the sidewalk on Mariahilferstrasse on my way home from Gymnasium, I watched the Germans march in cheered on by ecstatic crowds: First long columns of tanks, trucks and troops, then Hitler himself, followed by Goering in his bulging white Marshall's uniform, then the rest of the top Nazis in Hitler's entourage, all driving by in swastika-flying tops-down black staff cars on their way to the Hofburg, where Hitler was to make his victory speech to hundreds of thousands jubilant Viennese!

Q: What happened then?

JAEGER: There were changes. Everyone started wearing little swastikas on their lapels; red boxes appeared on street corners to display the front-pages of the 'Stuermer' (the Nazis' virulent propaganda publication) with their wildly anti-Semitic headlines and caricatures of Jews with big ears and long noses; and Hitler youth formations were organized in all schools. As a fairly normal twelve-year old I secretly admired their shiny daggers, drums, marching and singing - mostly the Horst Wessel Lied - but never thought of joining.

Things changed in our Gymnasium as well. Our new history teacher and chief indoctrinator was a man in a 'brown shirts' uniform, complete with black boots and a swastika armband. I particularly remember his claim that the Germans had always been a greater civilization than the Romans or the Greeks! Unfortunately, he explained, they didn't leave archeological evidence behind because they built everything with wood! I got up and asked, if so, how did he know how great they were? This caused quite a rumpus. I learned later from my mother that my Latin teacher, Professor Ergens, whose favorite I was, had to go to bat for me at faculty meeting, where my 'subversive' question was discussed!

Things came to a head - I can't remember the precise date - when a uniformed SA man (Sturmabteilung, Storm Trooper or member of a special armed and uniformed branch of the Nazi party) came into our first year Gymnasium class one day and asked if anyone among the 30-some students was Jewish or had any Jewish grandparents.

Since all of us in the class were Catholic, nobody got up. When I mentioned what had happened that evening, my parents looked very distressed and told me that I did, in fact, have two Jewish grandparents, since my father came from a Jewish family but had converted to Catholicism before their marriage. They stressed that I must never be ashamed of this heritage. However, in the present fanatically anti-Semitic Nazi atmosphere, where 'Mischlings' (half breeds) like myself were treated almost as severely as Jews, this background was going to cause serious dangers, which I must come to understand.

Q: So until then, like Madeleine Albright, (the American Secretary of State during the Clinton administration) you didn't know about your half-Jewish background?

JAEGER: That's right, and the reason is that there was such profound anti-Semitism in Austria and Vienna...

Q: Yes, actually worse than in Germany.

JAEGER: ... actually worse than Germany. Many parents in mixed marriages were therefore anxious to assimilate their children by raising them as Christians. That may be what my parents tried to do - although even late in life my father always insisted that his conversion had been sincere and genuine. For me my new situation was all the more bizarre, since from early childhood I had had an almost intuitive spiritual awareness, which I retained throughout much of my life, and knew nothing whatever about Judaism.

Q: So what was the result?

JAEGER: The first thing I had to do, was to get up in class the next day and publicly report the correct version of my origins, an announcement greeted with scattered hoots and snickers by my Hitler Youth class mates.

Then things began to move fast. I don't remember all the details, except that I was frequently chased by my Hitler Youth classmates after school let out, and sometimes beaten up. Things came to a head that summer of 1938, when a group of Hitler Youths jumped me in the local swimming pool and came seriously close to drowning me, a nasty experience, even though I somehow managed to get free and make it home. Tension increased further that fall as we heard of people being arrested, dismissed from their jobs, or taken off to Dachau and other concentration camps. It was a time of intense uncertainty and worry, during which many who could began to leave.

Then, on November 9, 1938, came the famous 'Kristallnacht' when the SA unleashed pogroms across the Reich, ostensibly to take revenge for the assassination in Paris of Baron von Rath, a German diplomat, by Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year old Jew who wanted to avenge the deportation of his parents to Poland. Walking home from school that day, I vividly recall making my way through squads of uniformed Brown Shirts who were abusing and taunting Jewish people on Mariahilfer Strasse, systematically smashing up Jewish shops, ransacking apartments and dragging their terrified Jewish owners, including some very old and frail men and women, out onto the sidewalks. Everywhere you looked Jews were jeered, beaten and kicked while being made to scrub whitewashed Stars of David off the sidewalks which were covered with shards of broken glass. Some onlookers and passersby cheered the Nazis on. No one I saw did anything to help. It was a vile and cowardly scene, which I have never forgotten.

Q: What happened then to your family?

JAEGER: In the roundup that day and in the days ahead, some 30,000 Jews were arrested in Vienna alone and marched through the streets on their way to being transported to concentration camps. Contrary to postwar claims, when former Nazis were very hard to find in Vienna, this was a very public event. Everyone knew precisely what was happening.

For my parents and myself the first big blow came when they picked up my kind and generous uncle, Paul Jaeger, my father's brother, who owned a well-known stationary shop in the 1st district, and sent him to Dachau. He was released some months later, but collapsed and died on the steps of the Westbahnhof (the western railway station) in late January 1939, the victim of medical experiments. Uncle Paul had always brought me small presents and loved me a lot. It was my first major loss.

As the Nazi campaign progressed, most of my father's family were taken as well and died in various concentration camps, Dachau, Mauthausen and Theresienstadt. Even my father's mother, then in her eighties, was hauled from her bed in Innsbruck late at night, taken to Theresienstadt and died there.

It was obviously high time to try to get out, although, for most, it was already too late. Unbeknownst to me, my parents had been trying hard to send me to safety as well, even though 'Mischlings' like me (people who had some Jewish grandparents) were not yet prime concentration camp targets. Their effort, as they later told me, seemed almost hopeless, since the Catholic Church, under Cardinal Innitzer was playing it safe and offered no help. As for the Jewish community, they couldn't even save their own.

Then, one day in early February 1939, I had just finished my third semester of Gymnasium, I was told by my parents, to my great surprise, that a 22 year old English Quaker girl, whose name I never learned, had been sent to Vienna by her Norfolk Quaker community to find and save children like myself - and had somehow managed to arrange for thirty-some children, including myself, to go to England! I was to leave a few days later!

It was only in recent years that I learned that she was a representative of the now famous 'Kinder Transport', the brilliantly successful and generous British effort to save as many children as possible from the impending holocaust, launched in Parliament after 'Kristallnacht'. "Here is the chance", Sir Samuel Hoare, Britain's then Foreign Minister, told the House on November 21, 1938, "of taking the young generation of a great people, here is a chance of mitigating to some extent the terrible suffering of their parents and their friends". He carried the day and swayed the government to permit an unspecified number of children under the age of 17 to enter the United Kingdom; a dramatic humanitarian success, which stood in sharp contrast to the abject failure of the 8-nation Evian conference, which FDR had called a few months earlier to 'solve the refugee problem'.

All in all, about 10,000 children were saved through this unique operation in which innumerable ordinary British families opened their homes in an extraordinary act of national decency, which saved me and many, many others. It was only recently memorialized in a, I think, rather too sentimental film, 'Into the Arms of Strangers'.

It was as a result of this improbable series of events, that I and 30 or 40 other children found ourselves at 11 o'clock at night on February 20, 1939, waving a last good-by to our sad parents out of the windows of a 3rd class railway car - who stood forlornly on the gloomy, swastika-draped platform of Vienna's Westbahnhof. It was far from clear that we would see each other again.

Q: What happened then?

JAEGER: Our sealed car crawled across Austria and Germany at a snail's pace for almost three days, making way for virtually all other traffic. We had soon eaten the apples and sandwiches our parents had given us, and were all crowded together on the hard wooden benches, some sleeping, some crying, all dirty, tired and hungry.

Finally, when it seemed we had been completely abandoned, there was a sudden shriek of brakes, the train stopped and we were at the Dutch border! The doors were yanked open, and there, to our amazement, were four or five wonderful, pink, white-aproned Dutch women with huge pots of boiling hot chocolate and enormous dumplings! I'll never forget it. It was heaven. We all stuffed ourselves and instantly felt better and more hopeful. Somebody actually cared! We had, as I saw it years later, arrived in the West!

Q: Well, these are obviously very intense experiences.

JAEGER: The funny thing about children is that they are incredibly resilient. In a sense, I experienced all this as an adventure and didn't really understand the danger or fatefulness of it. It was only much later that it dawned on me how incredibly lucky I had been, and, as it turned out, would be, again and again throughout my life!

From then on it was all a fairy tale! A ferry took many of us from the Hook of Holland to Harwich where I was turned over to Miss Carr, a fortyish spinster, at first a bit austere in her country tweeds, but kind and thoughtful, who loaded me into her rattling little Austin convertible, and cheerfully whisked me off to Hedenham Hall, her wonderful Georgian country house near Ditchingham in Norfolk, a storybook place with a mile-square park full of old trees, hedges and streams, alive with rabbits and birds!

And, to round out the miracle, I was installed in my own little apartment overlooking old brick walls surrounding a little rose garden and a goldfish pond; assigned a kindly maid; informed that I was to have breakfast and sometimes lunch with the grown-ups - a daily treat of porridge, several kinds of eggs, toast , bacon and other fare in an array of gleaming chafing dishes - but was to have supper in my rooms; that I was to go to Bungay Grammar school and that I was henceforth to be known as 'Master George'!

I loved it, and was not, I am afraid, as homesick as I should have been, although I wrote dutiful weekly letters to my poor parents in Vienna! I loved English manners, the old walls, the rows of ancient, pigskin-bound folios in the library, the gardener who became my friend, the horses, spaniels and labradors, and especially the serenity and pervasive calm of people who were part of a tradition with deep roots in this green Norfolk countryside which became part of me.

Key to getting on, of course, was language. I learned English in the crook of an oak tree by reading Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist from cover to cover; proudly exchanged my Austrian lederhosen for flannel trousers at a tailors' in Norwich; survived two terms in Bungay grammar school, where I seem to have gotten good grades but remember learning very little; had my first-ever, awkward experience with team sports and was taught to smoke under a bridge by a class mate with whom I bicycled back to Hedenham every day after school. In short it was a 13-year old's paradise.

That fall, when my English had made sufficient progress, I was sent off to King's School in Bruton, a minor English Public School set in the rolling hills of Somerset, not far from Bath - exceptional generosity clearly beyond what a Viennese refugee youngster could have expected, even from very good-hearted sponsors!

Q: By public, you mean the English private schools?

JAEGER: Yes, the English private schools.

Academics there were much better than at the grammar school, particularly English history - I still have notebooks filled with knights in armor - although I was still well ahead in Latin, math and grammar from my Gymnasium days.

New also was the emphasis on sports and military training: Rugger, played in cold mud was a challenging part of daily life, as was compulsory ROTC drill with heavy 'Lee-Enfield' rifles in scratchy English field uniforms whose brass buttons needed daily shining. The defining "incident" occurred one cold, wet day, when, utterly pooped, I came off the drill ground with my tunic undone, dragging my rifle by the sling. Our handlebar-mustachioed Sergeant Major, a retired British NCO, caught me and, with a withering glare, boomed across the grounds for all to hear: "Jaeger, you are disgrace to his Majesty's Army!" I never forgot!

Being a 'fag', as new students were called, meant shining shoes and obeying whatever other orders senior boys chose to give; and, worst of all, getting up earlier than everyone else to carry hot water up a tight little gothic spiral stair to the line of basins in our dormitory on the upper level of what had once been a mediaeval chapel. In the end a group of us paid one of our fellows with jams from home and other wares to regularly do this worst chore for us.

Some other things stand out. One was the winter cold. As a new boy my bed was near the ancient gothic windows which opened on their vertical axis. When it snowed I was often covered and my blanket turned white. Another, was my discovery that, as in many British boarding schools, homosexuality was widespread, often nasty and took some avoiding. So was bullying. I settled that one day in the billiard room when a big fellow taunted my accented English once too often. I heaved a billiard ball at his head as hard as I could. He ducked, it splattered on the wall, and I was never bothered again! I revisited that room with some pride in 2004, 55 years later, when my wife Pat, our daughter Christina and I stopped in Bruton and were most kindly received by a rather surprised King's School administration!

The experience I most vividly remember of my two terms at Bruton involved my "conversion" of a number of my fellow class mates to Catholicism! On Sundays, we were all marched, in twos and twos down the long village street to the ancient parish church, wearing blazers and straw hats, to attend what we all thought were exceedingly boring sermons. I had heard that one of Somerset's very few Catholic priests made the rounds to his dispersed, small flock on his motor bike on Sundays to say masses. Being still firmly Catholic, I was given permission to bicycle to his nearest mass on Sundays, celebrated in a garage about six miles away. So, instead of marching to church with the rest for the weekly Anglican ordeal, I would merrily sail past them down the hill on my bike, waving my boater at my glum-looking church-bound school mates.

Soon, one or two, and then more, began to ask if they too could come, since they had just realized that they wanted to become Catholics! After a few weeks, during which I gave 'spiritual instruction', and the bicycle contingent swelled from Sunday to Sunday, I was called to see the Headmaster, a kindly man, who explained that he simply could not face his Anglican parents with the news that their boys had become Papists! Would I therefore desist and stop proselytizing them!

Being full of zeal and conviction, I refused! If the Holy Ghost led them to the true faith, who was I to undermine their conversions! Things got heated. Letters home were mentioned, as was expulsion. Like Luther I stood me ground, trembling but firm! The result was a mutually face-saving draw. I would stop active 'instructions' and the headmaster would grant permissions only to those he considered genuinely converted. On the following Sunday I was on my own again. Not a victory, but also not discreditable for my first, but hardly last, negotiation on an issue of principle!

Bicycling, by the way, came in handy in another way, since I had fallen desperately in love - a startling, but rather normal development for a boy of 13 which led me to bike to Bath through a snow storm during Christmas break to see the object of my affections, Julia Swann, the equally adolescent, but, I thought, radiantly beautiful daughter of a former British submarine commander, now Bath Cathedral's distinguished Dean. After a thirty-some mile ride across the snow-covered countryside, I collapsed on their door step, caused quite a bit of anxiety, happily spent the Xmas holidays in Bath, and learned to appreciate sherry and what I remember to be daring photographs administered and shown to me respectively by Julia's more experienced older brother - who was memorably dismissed from Christmas Day dinner for, it was claimed, getting Master George drunk! I was there but don't really recall.

In short, King's School, and all that went with it, was a rich experience. I learned that things didn't always come easily, that privilege and respect had to be earned, and that upper-class English life, for all its comforts, civility and beauty could be much tougher than I had first thought at Hedenham Hall.

For me, a Viennese refugee boy trying to develop a new identity and starting to grow up, my two terms at Bruton were invaluable: Evenhanded, competent, but not obsessive British schooling focused on fair play, chivalry, grammar, Latin, a bit of math and history, with a heavy dollop of all-weather outdoor sports and ROTC; in short it was still a gentleman-soldier's schooling, which is, after all, what English Public Schools were all about.

Q: By then, of course, the war had broken out, very shortly after you got to England?

JAEGER: The war had broken out on the first of September 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland. I don't recall that it affected our school life in those early months, except that jam and other small luxuries were in reduced supply. At Hedenham Hall the impact was greater. There was rationing, the flower beds and sweeping lawns were dug up to make way for potato and vegetable fields. And there were occasional air raid alarms and practices. I remember one such occasion, when I was asked to serve as a pretend casualty lying in a ditch with a lot of tags indicating various 'injuries'. The trouble was that I was somehow overlooked by the home guard and not found for hours, leaving me cold, wet and tired, as was so often the case in England in those years. But I did stick it out.

My most poignant recollection of those first months of the war, involves the five or six bright, cheery, rather elegant young men, all members of Miss Carr's family, who came up from Cambridge or Oxford between terms, had small house parties, played tennis, and often took me along on long walks across the park with Boogey, the spaniel, and other canine hangers-on, until the rather solemn day on which they all appeared in Royal Air Force uniforms.

We got the news, it now seems, only a few weeks later: They had, without exception, been shot down as RAF fighter pilots in the disastrous British effort to save Norway after the German invasion in April 1940.

Q: In Norway? Was this a squadron that was based primarily in Norfolk?

JAEGER: I don't know. As a young boy I didn't yet understand the war. All I knew was that they had become pilots, that they showed up now and then, were fun and terribly nice, took me fishing and shooting and then disappeared. The next thing we knew, they were dead. I had lost my first boyhood heroes. I grieved for them. Although England was as glorious as ever that spring, the war had become real.

I did see my father again in late April 1940, when he came through London on his way to New York - having succeeded in the nick of time in getting an American visa, after being rather ambiguously sponsored by Fordham University. Thanks to Miss Carr's thoughtfulness and generosity, we had a two-day reunion in London, which seemed shockingly drab and grey in this first year of the war, at a famous hotel, I think the Dorchester.

Father arrived with the equivalent of $10, all he was allowed to take out of Germany, rumpled by two days on continental trains. He spoke only very broken English, faced an, at best, uncertain future in New York and was visibly ill at ease. I too had changed more than I realized, and was no longer the little Viennese boy he had sent off from the Westbahnhof. So we 'celebrated' rather awkwardly in the understated elegance of this great hotel with its self-assured, tuxedoed waiters who, even in war time, flourished silver plate covers over gleaming tablecloths.

The crisis came early, when a huge bill was produced after our first dinner - even though Miss Carr had assured me that all was taken care of - which my mortified father of course could not pay.

After some very awkward explanations we were able to retain our room subject to clarification; but the rest of my father's visit was scaled down dramatically to fish and chips in paper cones and long inexpensive walks along the Thames. Poor Ms. Carr was crestfallen when she heard what had happened, and did the necessary.

The plan was that, once father was established in America and could save enough for ship tickets etc., my mother who, as an 'Arian', was not in direct danger in Vienna, was to follow - a process which turned out to be much harder and took much longer than any one expected. After endless efforts to get visas she did almost make it. But America went to war on December 7, 1941, a week or so before her ship was to leave Lisbon. So she was left on the other side of the great divide and spent the entire war in Austria under very difficult conditions. I was not to see her again until I found her in Vienna as an American GI in 1945.

As for me, my happy new English life came to an abrupt end, at high tea, to be precise, on a glorious spring day in May of 1940. High tea, even in those days, was still a grand affair, with the 20-foot long table in the library laden with cakes, pastries, watercress sandwiches, jams and goodies of all sorts, and the terrace doors open to the bright outdoors. The guests were always a cross section of Norfolk's tweedy and in part very distinguished gentry, often including friends like Lady Haggard, Sir Rider Haggard's widow, whom we sometimes visited, and Lady Salmond, mother, I believe, of the first Marshal of the RAF - the lot presided over by old Mrs. Carr, my Miss Carr's mother, a distinguished silver-haired lady who ran things with authority and natural precision and both loved and sometimes savagely beat her dogs after long and muddy walks.

It was at one such high tea in April, while I was contentedly munching some cake below the salt, that I heard Mrs. Carr's high voice above the babble saying to someone: "Master George, going to America? Why, the poor boy!"

That was how I learned that I was shortly to join my father in New York - where he had made a footfall: First as a floor sweeper at Herbert Dubler, a company which then imported Sister Hummel's Christmas cards and statuettes from Munich; then promoted, in one swoop, to be the company's Art Director making Hummel look-alikes, after Pearl Harbor suddenly cut Dubler's supply route from Munich. Within a short time he and his small staff began adding their own product lines, which imprinted my father's distinctive Austrian style on America's Christmas card industry for decades. Only a few years later, in December '1948, he was invited by Joyce Hall to become Hallmark's in-house art professor in Kansas City, a role he filled for another seventeen years, bringing him full circle from being an art professor in Vienna, by way of being a floor sweeper in New York, back to being the in time much-loved art teacher in Missouri.

Q: How did you get to America in wartime?

My own travel arrangements at the end of May 1940, were marked by exceptional security. My trip had somehow been arranged through wartime military channels - I think through a Brig. General related to the Carrs. I remember being taken by train to Liverpool, where I was turned over to someone else, and eventually left to wait on some church steps with orders to stay there until someone came for me! No other fail-safe instructions!

After some considerable time - it seemed an eternity - a gruff sailor showed up, told me to come along and took me to a pretty disreputable-looking hostel where there was much loud carousing and other maritime carryings on that night, all novel to a boy my age. On the following morning, May 30, 1940 I was taken to the ship - Cunard's SS Antonia - and ensconced, back in 'Master George' mode, in my own very pleasant upper deck cabin.

My next surprise came when I looked out the next day and discovered that there were British warships accompanying us from horizon to horizon!

Q: You were in convoy?

JAEGER: No. They were all warships! They accompanied us half way across the Atlantic, where a smaller array of Canadian warships turned up and relieved them. Why this major effort for a lone ship became clear only when we got to Halifax, after an otherwise un-eventful crossing. The docks were bristling with troops and Bren guns mounted behind sand bags - as Canadian troops unloaded a long stream of gold bars from our ship and stacked them in glittering pyramids on the pier. I had been traveling on the ship which carried part of the gold from the Bank of England to safety in America!

Q: The World War II transfer of the British gold reserves for safekeeping ?

JAEGER: At Fort Knox, precisely. So it was an unexpectedly historic voyage.

When, a few years ago, the cruise ship I was lecturing on stopped in Halifax, the historical people at Pier 30 - where all Canadian soldiers embarked and disembarked in World Wars I and II - interviewed me. They were particularly fascinated by the fact that there was an unexplained gap in their records in SS. Antonia's frequent Atlantic shuttles, which coincided precisely with my crossing and arrival. Given Antonia's vital mission we were officially never there!

2. From Milwaukee to Belgium: War Bonds, Monks and Guns

Q: So, how did you then get on in America?

JAEGER: My father, who had met me at the bus station in mid-town Manhattan on June 12, at that point lived in a very modest apartment in an Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn, where amply endowed ladies often sunned themselves on window sills across our noisy street. It was a far cry from the reserved gentility of Hedenham Hall and for me an exposure to an entirely different slice of life. Through the Catholic Committee for Refugees I was given a scholarship that fall to go to Pio Nono High School in Milwaukee, a musty, now defunct place on Lake Michigan where, as a sophomore, I was miserably bored, learned to build model airplanes but won the Wisconsin Poetry Reading Championship - mainly to spite the school's debating team which said I had an accent and wouldn't let me join.

Then I was sent off to St. Vincent's Prep School in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, run by monks of the Archabbey of the Benedictine Order in North America, where I happily finished High School and then my wartime-accelerated first two years of College.

St. Vincent's gave me a wonderful grounding in philosophy, logic, language and structure; I learned to play softball; earned my Bearcats football letter as team manager; became a debater and twice won the Pennsylvania state debating championship. I also gave many dozens of talks on my Nazi experiences in Vienna at public meetings and war bond rallies, including one in a Pittsburgh stadium before, I was told, an audience of 10,000 people. And, even though I was much on the road, I still, managed to get decent grades, partly because my Gymnasium training had really taught me how to study. My friend and constant supporter was Fr. Edmund Cuneo, the school's peripatetic Headmaster, who balanced days of intense activity, lightened by kind humor and passion for his causes, with unostentatious meditation and humility. I found him late one night scrubbing floors in the darkened hall ways. He was in monk mode doing penance.

None of this, of course, had much to do with foreign affairs, except for a crucial experience in my senior year in high school when, for the first time, I fully grasped the interconnectedness of distant, seemingly disparate events. Working the blackboard with sweeping arrows, Fr. Hugh, our gifted history professor, explained the allied tank wars in North Africa in the context of the larger strategic picture - as an effort to relieve pressure on the Russian southern front and to deny Hitler control of Suez and Middle Eastern oil. Suddenly a light bulb went on in my mind, as I began to grasp that all of history was like this, an interlaced stream of large and small currents; that one therefore always had to look for the interconnections in the broader picture; and that particular decisions and events do have broader and much longer-term effects and consequences.

And then there was Mr. Moynahan, a kindly, very wealthy supporter of the school in Pittsburgh. A few days after our debating team, Joe Hurley, Bob Height, Bill Ucker and I had won the Pennsylvania state championship he invited us and Fr. Edmund for a celebration, a baseball game at the stadium and a scrumptious steak dinner at his oak-paneled club. His message, after we made little talks to thank him, was simple: "I'll be richly rewarded", he said to us, "if you will do the same for others in your life times and so pass it on". He taught us the importance and power of gratuitous acts of kindness.

Perhaps the most lasting imprint of these years, however, was the daily Gregorian chant, the mediaeval plain song and haunting silences of the eighty-some Benedictine monks, the conversation with their Maker which has been underway for 1600 years and will, one hopes, continue to transcend injustice, war and misery, as the French say, 'pour jamais'. Given the virtual disappearance of American monastic life since then, and the decline of the Church's credibility in light of scandals and rigidities, this may not be a realistic hope.

Prep School - I had graduated in 1943 as Valedictorian - was followed by two accelerated years at St. Vincent College, an intellectual non-experience, as I remember it, studying chemistry in a desultory way, mostly because 'Doc Nolan', the extroverted Irish chemistry professor, had talked me into it. Throughout those years, the war remained only a worrisome backdrop, until it broke into our lives with a vengeance just after D-Day, during my second college summer term in 1944.

I still clearly remember walking across St. Vincent's softball field one lovely June day, when I heard someone say, "Rollo has been killed!" It was like a body blow. Rollo Champ had been our Prep School quarterback football star, a bright, agile boy, whose quick courage and ingenuity won games and whose kindness and thoughtfulness had won our loyalty and hearts. He went down on June 6, 1944 on Omaha beach in Normandy.

It was that fall, in September 1944, that I too joined the Army, half-way through college, and was sent to train in Fort McClellan, a sprawling training camp near Anniston, Alabama.

We stayed in five-man huts, each with a stove in a sand pit in its middle, drilled endlessly, learned to use rifles and mortars, did night exercises and, after only thirteen weeks of tough, accelerated training, finished with a three day combat exercise, whose climax, after a twenty-mile march with heavy packs, was a simulated gas attack. It was during that maneuver that I was summoned, told to put on my dress uniform, and driven to the courthouse in Anniston, where, on January 20, 1945, I became a citizen of the United States! I also vividly remember being gigged and put on extended KP peeling potatoes, for reading a book in my foxhole!

Only a few days later, it was off to Europe because, it was thought, replacements were still needed for the Battle of the Bulge - even though the battle had almost ended before we arrived. Five thousand of us crossed on an over-crowded troop ship, a former ocean liner, bunks stacked five high and only a foot apart in messy holds, riding heavy, grey winter seas. Given the pervasive seasickness, bad ventilation and congestion I was rather pleased with my assignment to a bulkhead deep down in the hold, which I was to close in case we were torpedoed by German submarines which our two destroyer escorts were constantly searching for. It was only after some days that I realized that due to a structural anomaly, once I had closed the bulkhead, I would have had no way out! Mercifully the Germans never caught us.

So we did make it to the Firth of Forth in Scotland, which was bustling with warships and transports of all kinds; thence on miserably crowded troop trains to some truly bad "repple-depples" (the replacement depots through which new troops were funneled) in the south of England; then via a channel transport, to our destination, the bomb-skewered docks of Le Havre. There we were met by an enthusiastic welcoming committee, hordes of highly motivated French ladies who offered cheap wine and other on-the-spot services to make us feel 'bien venu en France'. And, having thus celebrated our safe arrival, we were, to our surprise and chagrin, marched off again that night with all our gear to another miserable camp twelve miles away where we arrived in the wee hours of the morning. What with inebriation, exhaustion and residual seasickness, it was a march most of would rather not remember....

Then, it was on to Belgium.

Q: So you saw action there in Belgium?

JAEGER: Yes, but not very much. We were used to help with some mopping up operations, but the worst of the battle was clearly over. Most of the time, as I remember it, our replacement outfit moved forward in truck convoys over muddy cold roads, stopping only briefly in gray, usually badly damaged French, then Belgian villages. We were perpetually cold, dirty, smoking too much and eating K rations, although occasionally there was a field kitchen with some hot food slopped into our mess gear or helmets. Most of the time we didn't know where we were or where we were going. The main challenge was to stay warm and dry. Hot showers and a change of clothes were the occasional high points of our lives.

3. War Crimes and Concentration Camps: Hadamar and Flossenburg

Q: So, where did you end up?

JAEGER: One day a group of us was billeted in a Belgian barn waiting for orders. We were all lying on piles of straw in our combat gear, talking and playing cards, when a most improbable apparition appeared, a Second Lieutenant in creased pink pants and a pressed shirt from Fifth Corps Headquarters, who announced that he was looking for a Private Jaeger! I had, as it turned out, been reassigned to the Fifth Corps War Crimes Unit, where I was to be the new German interpreter, because my predecessor had, unfortunately, just stepped on a land mine!

So, leaving the spiky base plate of my 81mm mortar without regrets, I found myself the junior member of Fifth Corp's four-man war crimes team, a clearly more interesting task. Led by a good-natured, lanky major, our team consisted of a less than brilliant master sergeant who did our admin work, a driver and myself. Following closely behind the front lines we moved up to and beyond the Rhine which we crossed over the pontoon bridge which had been erected at Remagen after the Ludendorff bridge collapsed. Our script was a 'secret' compendium of wanted German war criminals compiled in Washington, as well as occasional fresh reports from the 5th Corps intelligence people. Although the situation was still chaotic, we diligently followed up as many leads as possible, often driving for hours over rutted or bombed out roads. Predictably, we didn't have much success, since our intelligence was often wrong, incomplete or, most frequently, the bird had flown. Still, driving around Germany in springtime, unencumbered by routine and discipline, was not heavy duty - even though we were surrounded by destruction, misery and the swelling streams of refugees.

We did, eventually, have one major success. It happened on a particularly nice Sunday in late March 1945, shortly after we had crossed the Rhine, when my Major, planning to enjoy the day, asked me to use my language skills to 'liberate' some cigars for him in a town called Hadamar.

Outside the cigar store an odd-looking man sidled up to me, chewing on his dirty tie, and said, in a low voice and in broken English, that he was a French intelligence officer who had been caught up in a German sweep. He had survived by pretending to be insane and, as a result, he was now a trustee inmate in the insane asylum just outside of Hadamar. The point he wanted to get across to me was that this institution was actually being used as cover for one of Hitler's extermination camps in which tens of thousands of people had been killed! I must come and see for myself!

I went along with him on a cautious reconnaissance, during which he showed me ovens which had been used to dispose of bodies and other evidence that the asylum was in fact what he had claimed. I instantly called my unit for help. Within a short time a nearby American infantry company quietly surrounded the place, and we succeeded in capturing the entire staff, who, hard to believe in retrospect, had relied on the credibility of their insane asylum cover to protect them from being discovered. Our team then began systematic interrogation.

The bottom line was that Hadamar was indeed an extermination camp where, over several years, the Germans had murdered at least fifteen thousand people. The first wave of killings, after 1941, involved gassing over ten thousand mentally or physically handicapped Germans in a basement. They were then burnt in the crematorium. The second wave, after 1942, involved the murder and disposition of at least 5000 more, some euthanasia victims, most Eastern European and Russian male and female slave laborers who had been sent there when they became too exhausted or sick to work in Nazi war production plants in the Ruhr, around Cologne and elsewhere.

Q: What a story. Go on.

JAEGER: They victims arrived in trucks once or twice a week, usually at night, having been told that they were going to a hospital for rest and treatment. They were then actually put into nice, clean beds in a tidy ward, where the chief nurse, Irmgard Huber, a motherly, pink-cheeked woman, whom I interrogated at great length, would give them a heavy injection of scopolamine which killed them in two hours. In the early stage the bodies were burned, a practice which was stopped when the townspeople began complaining of the stench. Then, to conceal the number of people killed regularly at Hadamar, they had the insane patients, who were retained as cover, dig deep graves in the asylum cemetery, in effect small mine shafts often a hundred feet deep, and simply stacked the bodies in them. We found some still open, full of people recently killed, which had not yet been topped off with soil and a little cross.

The staff's defense was that they were only following the asylum doctors' orders. The doctor, in turn, pointed the finger at the Director. The actual boss, we learned, was an obscure-looking administrative assistant, Alfons Klein, who, it turned out, was the Gestapo agent in charge. We found a pass to Hitler's chancellory in his belongings, with a notation that he was not to be questioned by anyone whoever. We also found and blew open two safes in the cemetery shed where we found complete hand-written records, kept with mind-numbing German tidiness, of the names of all who died there - most with a notation that they had died of TB!

Hadamar, it was later established was only one of a top secret system of six similar extermination sites across wartime Nazi Germany, code-named T-4, after the address Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin, part of Hitler's Reichskanzlei, where the program was administered. The others were Brandenburg, Grafeneck, Hartheim, Sonnenstein and Bernberg. All together 200,000 - 250,000 political prisoners, retarded people, exhausted, mostly Slav slave laborers, and 722 half-Jewish children from Vienna (!) were similarly disposed of - some of the last-named's brains pickled and preserved for racial research. Even so, I discovered at Hadamar, Jews were not the only victims of Hitler's Germany.

Years later, rummaging in Harvard's Widener Library, I found the printed records of the Hadamar War Crimes Trial - [the reference is 'Law-Reports of Trials of War Criminals, The United Nations War Crimes Commission, Volume I, London, HMSO, 1947'] which were subsequently held in Wiesbaden in October 1945. If I remember correctly, all were found guilty. Klein and two others we had arrested were hung. The chief nurse got away with 25 years. How long she actually served is unclear.

I briefly revisited Hadamar with my wife Pat during a short leave from Embassy Paris in the nineteen-seventies, and stopped to look around. No memorial, plaque or other indication was in evidence to suggest that anything remarkable had ever happened there. Many Germans even then were clearly not yet ready to face their past. It was only in 1991, I gather, that a memorial was erected, almost a half century after the fact. A German website http://www.gedenkstaette-hadamar.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-533/_nr-1/i.html now tells the essentials of the story and invites volunteers to explain to visiting groups what happened there.

Q: What happened after Hadamar?

JAEGER: Fifth Corps and its divisions moved on across Germany and our little unit continued to follow behind the lines to search for, or interrogate, people on our War Crimes list. At one point, our Fifth Corps HQ, no doubt for sound strategic reasons, was located at the very peak of the American Army's huge Ruhr Basin pincer movement, which had surrounded a whole German army in the 'Ruhr pocket' and was facing another; to the east, a rather risky place for a major command, with only ten miles or so between two fronts. As it turned out, all went well.

Our next move, we thought, would be the last sprint to Berlin, a victory lap which, to our great disappointment, was not to be! I always thought that this loss of nerve, and the subsequent failure to take Prague, were Eisenhower's two greatest mistakes - setting the stage for many of our post-war problems with the Soviets.

But that's getting ahead of the story, since, in the meantime, the capture of hundreds of thousands of German troops, for which we were logistically unprepared, created major headaches for us and serious hardship for them - including unnecessary deaths which led to subsequent accusations of Allied human rights abuse.

I got a graphic lesson in all this when, I was abruptly told one day to "take temporary charge" of a POW enclosure about ten miles to our north, holding over ten thousand Germans! What I found was an ocean of makeshift tents and lean-tos, with thousands of POWs simply lying on the ground, untended wounded, no medical supplies, inadequate latrines and minimal food rations. I asked who their senior officer was. It turned out to be a stiff German General out of central casting, who stood ramrod straight before his little tent in polished boots and full regalia! We - I think I was still a Private First Class at the time - had a short and rather difficult conversation, in which I told him I would do my best to help.

I tried. But we moved on the next day and relief probably came too late for many there. On the way, our team uncovered more bad stuff, particularly in Kassel, where I remember investigating a jail where one prisoner's torture consisted of deliberately covering him with lice. It was simply awful.

Q: Did you get to any concentration camps?

JAEGER: Yes, just before we got to the Czech border in Bavaria we were diverted to help open Flossenburg, which had been liberated on April 23, 1944.

It was a bizarre and terrible scene. As we arrived, the place was already swarming with dozens of Army brass, news people, investigators from all levels of command, and ordinary GIs. Streaming towards us were crowds of skeleton-like inmates in their famous zebra suits, holding out hands, welcoming us or simply holding on, too weak to stand or walk. Beyond them, near the prisoner's huts were six-foot high stacks of corpses, piled naked, men and women of all types and ages.

Although our team was outranked and had no real role, we went into some of the long huts with their rows of quadruple-decker wooden bunks, each shared by two or three starved and emaciated, sometimes demented prisoners, who welcomed us as best they could. It was clear that, liberation or no, for most of them it was too late. My sharpest memory is of the distinctive acrid smell of death, of unwashed bodies and despair.

We heard terrible stories. Of the backbreaking labor in the quarry pits, of the crematorium into which corpses slid down a long, mechanized incline, their number often exceeding its capacity. If so, they were stacked up or burnt outdoors. I heard that the SS made soap of the dead prisoners' bodies, and of the last-minute killings of many, just before the first GIs arrived. I later learned that over 10,000 were taken on a deliberate death march to the south, just days before we arrived. 7000 are said to have died en route.

Investigations and trials later established that probably many more than the officially estimated 100,00 Czechs, Poles, Russians, Jews, 'intellectuals', 'deviates', criminals and others on the Nazi hit list, were sent to Flossenburg and its sub-camps from over thirty nations, since it was opened in 1938. Of these, at the very least a third, and probably many more, were murdered or succumbed to mistreatment, illness and overwork in the quarries and war production plants run by Messerschmitt, Flick, Siemens, Osram, Junkers and others. Interestingly, there are some accounts of limited inmate resistance, albeit mostly from former East German Communist sources.

Flossenburg was also the 'home' of 'special political inmates', housed separately from the ordinary prisoners, including Austria's last Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, French Prime Minister Leon Blum, Pastor Martin Niemoeller and others. And it was the place of execution of major German resistance figures, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Admiral Canaris and General Oster.

Of all these people we were able to liberate only 1,527 in the main camp, and many of them did not survive.

Q: How on earth did you react to this experience?

JAEGER: I have often thought about this. The situation we found confirmed everything we already knew but surpassed it in its banal concreteness. I saw the corpses, the hundreds of living skeletons, talked to some, understood the immense evil which had been perpetrated there, knew this was an historic turning point, and shared in the intense feeling that this must never happen again, that they must not have suffered and died entirely in vain.

What I actually did - as generals, newspaper photographers, GIs of all sorts and ranks, and many others milled around in this nightmare - was to sit down in the light spring sunshine, not far from a pile of naked corpses. I pulled out my K rations, ate my lunch, because it was time and I was hungry, and said a deep silent prayer for all of them.

In later years I often thought that, in a way, I was no better than the Germans, that I should have cried, shown my grief, told everyone that I too had relatives who had died the same macabre deaths in Mauthausen, Theresienstadt, Dachau and Auschwitz, done something memorable for someone there.

The fact was, that none of us could handle it and so we just didn't talk much, went on in our jeeps next day, were secretly glad to be living and doing our jobs. Although farther down there was a deep, glowering anger and moral outrage at all we had seen there and elsewhere over the last months.

In my case, it broke through on several occasions: Once when I was billeted in a specially comfortable upper-middle class German house, undoubtedly belonging to well-to-do Nazis, I got massively drunk and then, single-handedly and systematically, smashed and broke every bit of furniture, glassware, bric-a-brac and what-have-you in the entire house. My Major gave me a bit of a talking-to, but clearly understood.

In one of the Hadamar interrogations, I also got close to the line when one of the prisoners who had participated in the killing of many inmates taunted me and told me that he was proud of what he had done and to have been a Nazi. I had a terrible impulse to shoot him on the spot. Mercifully, I reigned it in and didn't.

Even so, these experiences have remained etched in my mind and became one of the motives which led me, and so many of us of the World War II generation, to want to go on afterwards to build a more civilized, humane and better world.

4. Victory: Pilsen and Prague

Q: Did you then continue on to Czechoslovakia?

JAEGER; Yes. By early May the German Army had virtually disintegrated, the Americans and the Russians had met at the Elbe, the battle of Berlin was under way and we all knew, as we pressed on across the Bavarian border, that the war was almost over. In our final push Fifth Corps's Sixteenth Armored Division, supported by another Division from the south, liberated Pilsen on May 6, 1945 - a glorious, deliriously happy day.

I remember vividly how our command car, wedged into an endless column of muddy American trucks and tanks of the 16th Armored Division, rolled into town. The long streets running through Pilsen's then grubby, rundown suburbs were lined with thousands of jubilant, cheering Czechs! Girls were throwing us flowers, people were singing and shouting, everyone was waving flags and handkerchiefs and, although desperately deprived after years of war and occupation, people offered us sausages, bread and even bottles of the then very thin Pilsner beer. When we arrived in town, the main square too was jammed with cheering people and was already decked out with an American flag. It was all a smaller-scale rerun of the tumultuous scenes which had played out at the liberation of Paris! It was great!

The following day, May 7, 1945 the war was officially over!

Q: Did you see Patton there, as Commander of the Third Army?

JAEGER: Not that day, but we were given a photo-op! A stand had been set up in a field with his various flags. We were lined up, kept waiting interminably, then told that we would be permitted to take pictures for five minutes! Some guy shouted, "Who wants to take his picture!" Patton, as you know, was not much loved by his troops! The great man finally showed up, wearing his trademark silver helmet and holstered pistols on his leather gun belt, said a few words, posed for five minutes looking a bit like Mussolini, and left. It was not a high-point.

Q: So, what was left to do in Pilsen?

JAEGER; After that, it was R&R and light make-work at our 'liberated' HQs compound on the outskirts of town; civil affairs tasks; restoring basic services; doing initial damage assessments of Pilsen's Skoda Works, the huge war production plant the Eighth Air Force had bombed only a few days before to keep its machinery from falling into Soviet hands.

The only major remaining issue was whether we would go on to Prague. Our forward tank patrols had probed into its outskirts. According to Martin Gilbert's "The Second World War" (Revised edition p.690), at least three American vehicles were in Prague on May 7th, the day of the Czech uprising against the Germans, but were ordered to pull back. As we learned later, Churchill had pressed to take and keep every inch of territory we could, at least as bargaining chips with Stalin. But Truman deferred to Ike and opted to stick with a strict interpretation of what had been agreed at Yalta. So Prague fell to the Russians - with incalculable consequences during the long decades of the Cold War.

Q: How did this go over with the troops?

JAEGER: All of us in Pilsen understood that it was crucial for the Americans to take Prague. Later official claims that no one knew how badly the Soviets would behave are nonsense.

On the contrary, there was disappointment, even anger among the troops on the ground when we learned that our advance columns had been ordered to stop and the Soviet forces were able to come westward across much of Bohemia to a nearby demarcation line - preceded by a wave of German units, anxious not to end up dead or in Siberia.

5. Taking the surrender of an SS Division

JAEGER: For me, all this had one very unexpected consequence. On a particularly lovely day just after our arrival in Pilsen I 'liberated' a bike, slung my carbine over my back and, with a sandwich in my pocket, went off to explore the countryside. I may have gone several miles, whistling and celebrating in my own way that the war was over, when, coming around a bend on a narrow dirt road at the edge of a forest, I found myself staring directly into the cannon of an SS tank with a fresh and lively looking crew of SS soldiers on top! To make matters worse, behind it I could see a seemingly endless column of other tanks, their SS standards flying, their weathered, battle hardened crews perched on the turrets sunning themselves, all silently staring at me!

It was a totally absurd situation! The question, of course, was: What do you do on a bicycle, with your carbine on your back, when you are looking at a German SS Panzer division at about 20 yards. If I stopped and reached for my gun, I was clearly a dead duck. If I didn't, and just went on biking, I remember thinking, I would at least not be shot in the back and would show them that I was not a coward!

So I biked on, past the first tank, waved at the fellows in the tank, who looked absolutely "gobsmacked" (flabbergasted), as the British would say, then past the second. Nothing happened!

After passing a dozen or so more tanks, I saw someone waving farther down the line. An SS officer came running toward me. This is it, I thought. But he only signaled that I should stop, then stepped aside and left me facing the SS Panzer Division's leather-jacketed Commanding General standing between two tanks, surrounded by several other officers!

He explained, formally and very politely - my German was very helpful at this point - that they had retreated before the oncoming Soviet forces and had been hiding for several days looking for a safe way to surrender to the Americans! My arrival was therefore most fortunate, since they did not want to become involved in any accidental fire fight with the Americans. Would I therefore accept the Division's surrender on behalf of the United States?

I tried to look as dignified, under these clearly historic circumstances, as was possible for an only recently promoted Private First Class; said I would be glad to do so; but needed the General's Luger pistol as a token of his surrender to take to my superiors! He simply handed it to me, we shook hands and both saluted. I got back on my rusty bike and pedaled back, the way I had come, waving to my prisoners of war with new assurance!

Back at V Corps Headquarters it took a bit of convincing, given the nature of chains-of-command, to get some follow-up. When I told my sergeant that I had just accepted the surrender of an SS Panzer division, he came very close to putting me on a week's KP (kitchen police)! Even when I had talked my way up the ladder, a Major on duty was certain there were no stray Panzer divisions around. I finally spoke to the colonel in charge of our intelligence: "Oh my God," he said, "we've been looking for this division, and we couldn't find it. Thank you very much!"

So my facts were confirmed and a second more "official" surrender was arranged, to which, I am annoyed to report, I was not even invited! They even kept the Luger!

Q: Laughter

6. To Vienna through the Soviet Army!

JAEGER: The great personal issue I carried with me through all these experiences was that my mother had been left behind in Vienna, having been prevented by America's entry into the war after Pearl Harbor from reaching her boat in Lisbon and joining my father in New York.

As a result of this accident of history, she spent the entire war in Vienna or, for months on end, hiding in Sillian, a small village in East Tirol, where a kind veterinarian and his family took her in. She suffered greatly from deprivation, since the Nazis had denied her most of my father's small pension and she had only the barest financial means; from loneliness; and, of course, from constant fear of being arrested, even though she was the "Aryan" member of our family. Most painful was being cut off from her family in America, since the only means of communication during the war were very occasional short messages forwarded through the Red Cross.

The worst came during the last months of the war, in February and March of 1945, when, during the heavy American bombing of Vienna, she spent weeks in great danger and under severe hardship in the cellars below her tiny flat in the Palais Pallavicini in the 1st District, which was part of a network of cellars in that part of town. As she later described, it was a dreadful ordeal, as masses of starved, terrified, some of them crazed people tried to survive in the damp darkness of this rat-infested labyrinth.

During this time, the city endured a reported 80,000 tons of bombs aimed at electricity, gas and water supply, many of which missed their targets south-east of the city and destroyed residential structures and famous landmarks instead. Among the 12,000 some buildings destroyed, was St. Stephen's Cathedral, the Schwarzenberg Palais and the Vienna Opera, as well as the zoo in Schoenbrunn, all much beloved by the Viennese and later rebuilt and restored. Her final ordeal was the Soviet battle for Vienna and its attendant atrocities, followed by months of hunger as the Soviet-occupied city starved. She had a very rough war.

It was therefore my overriding concern to find her as quickly as possible after the war had ended, which proved difficult since the Soviets were now in full control of Vienna.

Q: Before the four-power occupation was worked out?

JAEGER: That did not happen till July 1945. Within days after we got to Pilsen and the war had ended, I went to see one of our Brigadier Generals who, after listening to my story, was kind enough to send a request to his Soviet counterpart across the new demarcation line to grant me a laissez-passer to Vienna on humanitarian grounds.

The Soviets responded with a prompt and resounding 'Nyet'! Although this was discouraging, my General friend was not ready to give up. There was, he explained quietly, a young Lieutenant in a nearby Artillery Company, for whom he had done some favors. If I wanted to be transferred there and then just went AWOL (absent without leave) for a few days, he would make sure that no one would notice. If I didn't come back on time, I would, of course, have to be viewed as a deserter and could expect no help. " I'll take the risk," I said. "Thank you, General, so very much! But, there is one more thing. May I take a guy along who knows about cars ?" He agreed to that too.

And so my adventure began. I was promptly transferred, found a tough, car-savvy buddy, Fred Kaufman, who was crazy enough to go along with me; 'liberated' a Tatra automobile in Pilsen; and then persuaded the new American-appointed, pliable Mayor of Pilsen to issue us very impressive documents with many seals and stamps which said in four languages that he, the mayor of Pilsen, permitted Pfc. George Jaeger and Pfc. Fred Kaufman to go to Vienna! [

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Equipped with this document and our pretty dilapidated car, we innocently set off toward the east on June 19 or 20, 1945 having absolutely no idea what we would encounter or the risks we were taking. Its something only a 19-year old would do!

We got through the first Russian checkpoint by simply waving our fancy document at the guards. We quickly deduced that only high-ranking Russians, KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti - Soviet Committee of State Security) officials and Soviet generals had private cars. So when check point guards, usually unkempt, sometimes drunken or illiterate Soviet soldiers, saw our car coming along, they assumed we were high-powered people they had to be careful with.

How rare cars were on the Soviet side became even clearer when we encountered the first of the many moving Soviet military units we were to run into or pass on our drive east to Vienna.

They were an extraordinary sight: The Soviet General riding stiffly ahead of his mounted staff officers, followed by mechanized artillery crawling along in grinding first gear at 3 or 4 miles/hour (!). Then came endless columns of marching infantry in their once white, now dirty tunics - an amazing tough, sunburnt and exotic-looking lot from every part of the Soviet Empire, followed by Cossack units on small prancing horses. And behind all of this would come the heavily laden American Lend-Lease trucks, decorated with flowers and pictures of Stalin, also grinding along in first gear at marching speed!

Finally, bringing up the rear, we would pass lines of rickety green horse-drawn wagons, often many dozens of them, laden with the unit's loot, their chickens, goats, pianos, bird cages, furniture and beds, and, of course, their camp followers - women of all origins and descriptions, sometimes plaintively singing Slavic peasant songs.

At first we were terrified when we encountered and passed these Soviet divisions on the move. Overcoming our fear, we came to realize that passing their long dusty lines at speed added to the air of authority we apparently projected, with the result that, on several such occasions, we were even saluted, and returned the salutes of the commanding officers as we overtook them!

In the end, Fred and I ran a gauntlet of, I believe, 12 successive Soviet Army roadblocks between the outskirts of Pilsen , Bratislava and Vienna. At some our 'dokument' worked fine, at others taking the guards' picture did the trick, supplemented by much-sought-after American cigarettes. We were hugely relieved each time when we got through!

The worst roadblock we encountered was some ways west of Bratislava, where the guards first wanted to turn us in, but then, after some tense negotiating, said, "Fine, we'll let you go, but you will have to take this woman off our hands", pointing to a huge, noticeably smelly peasant woman who weighed well above 250 pounds! We agreed, put her in the back seat, but drove only a few miles when a loud bang brought our Tatra to a wobbly halt!

The rear tire had burst irreparably under her weight! And we had no spare!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: So there we were, two AWOL GIs on the outskirts of Bratislava, deep behind Soviet lines, with our dubious laissez-passer and a broken-down car! We pushed the Tatra to a less conspicuous place and then spent nerve-racking hours looking for a new tire, hardly plentiful in Bratislava at that time! We were finally taken to a fellow who, in return for some of our nicest silk stockings and six (!) cartons of cigarettes, was willing to sell us a tire. Under the circumstances it was a bargain...and a very close shave indeed.

Our mobility restored, we found quarters for the night and a wonderfully warm reception in a farm house a bit south-east of Bratislava. Once they got over their amazement that we actually were Americans, we were royally feted with heaping plates of scrambled eggs, bacon and potatoes and plied with homemade schnapps!

Then they poured their hearts out with stories of what they had been through, first under the Germans, now under Soviet occupation. It was from these kind and simple farmers that we first learned why the Russians were so feared and hated. Their troops had no rations, therefore lived off the land, stripping farms and towns of everything edible, and stealing whatever was not tacked down. Stories of 'Russki' soldiers with six watches on their arm, or of the simple Siberian fellow who had stolen an alarm clock and machine gunned it when it went off, were already legendary. That this ramshackle military operation defeated the German war machine and made it from Stalingrad to Berlin, Budapest and Vienna, I wrote to my father at the time, was truly extraordinary!

The next day, rested and fed, we set off for the last lap into Vienna over increasingly pitted and cratered roads, making it, unchallenged, into Vienna from the east - first over the Reichsbruecke, the then only passable Danube bridge, then on a makeshift wooden pontoon over the 'Wien', the little damned tributary which runs through the eastern part of the city.

We were high in spirits but short on gas, and then - did something truly stupid! In Pilsen, we had always helped Russian soldiers who had wandered over to our side, given them gas or a meal, and sent them on their way back to their sector. So we assumed that once we got to Vienna the Russians might be helpful to us in turn. So we stopped in front of Vienna's neo-gothic City Hall on the Ringstrasse and said to the guard, "We're GIs, and we would like to ask you if we could have some gas."

He grunted: "Dokumenta!" and pointed upstairs. So I climbed up the sweeping marble steps, having very wisely left Fred in the car with the motor running for a possible quick get-away. Once upstairs, my worst premonition was confirmed. I was taken to a Russian officer in a large ornate, gilded room, his field-boots draped over a delicate baroque desk, who stared hard at me and also just barked: "Dokumenta!"

Well, I didn't like the looks of this! I turned abruptly, ran down the stairs as hard as I could, passed two startled sentries with fixed bayonets and jumped into our car. Fred had seen me coming and took off down the Ringstrasse with a roar, direction Hofburg. We got a good head start before some Soviet jeeps came roaring after us. They fired a few shots as they chased us down the Ringstrasse, my friend driving as hard as he could! What saved us was my intuitive childhood recollection of Vienna's 1st District's geography, because, after turning off the broad, and so most dangerous Ringstrasse into the ancient little streets and alleys of the 'Innere Stadt', I was able to yell to my friend, "Turn right. Turn left. Left again. Right, and so on."

We finally lost them and made it to the back door of the Palais Pallavicini which gives onto the narrow Brauener strasse, where I thought my mother lived. Fortunately, the high wooden carriage gate to the inner courtyard was open! We drove inside, slammed and barred the heavy portals, and disappeared up a narrow stair case where, soon after, I actually found my mother!

She was weak physically and shaken psychologically. She had been through a terrible time. What's more, my turning up so abruptly, in my GI shirt and boots, with no advance warning, was a major shock. We both had clearly changed a lot since she had last seen me as a boy of twelve! Even so, we spent two memorable and, on the whole, very happy days together - getting reacquainted.

The setting, of course, was grim. Vienna in June 1945 was pockmarked with cratered pavements, gutted buildings, roofs missing and askew, walls ripped open and everywhere grey, tired, frightened, undernourished people. Whole areas near the Prater, where the fighting had been heaviest, were virtually flattened, with only chimneys and bits of wall sticking up from the rubble. We went to see our old apartment house, undamaged, and to Schoenbrunn, the Emperor's summer palace, where the gardens where I had learned to walk, were in sad disrepair. We went to the Volksgarten, near the damaged Burgtheater, where mother had gone almost every day throughout the war, now fragrant with Vienna's famous lilacs which bloomed gloriously in stark contrast to their sad surroundings. We walked through the gutted shell of St. Stephen's Cathedral and saw the heavy damage to many of the historic and ordinary buildings.

In context, Vienna's destruction was not worse than I had seen in other cities - some suburbs in particular were less affected. Even so, the Viennese had paid heavily for their Nazi enthusiasms and their German Anschluss!

Q: You must have had quite a reunion!

JAEGER: We did. To celebrate my seemingly miraculous arrival, my mother invited her little circle of wartime friends for 'Kaffee" in her tiny flat to meet her soldier son: the Molnars, 'Pachi', the Margrave Pallavicini's old Hungarian caretaker, who had been good to her, Petzi, a close friend, and a half dozen others! They pooled their last bits of Ersatz coffee in my honor and sat solemnly around our little table, in their worn dark suits and austere dresses - as the sun set over the ancient roofs of Vienna's battered and now sadly occupied inner city. My arrival was their first sign that the war was really over!

Things, became more tricky that evening, June 22, when my mother took me to the ballet at the Volksoper - the Opera having been gutted in American raids. (According to the program notes saved in my file it was Mozart's 'Les Petits Riens', Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Capriccio Espanol' and Schuman's 'Carnival). We had bought tickets at the 'Theater Kasse' nearby on the Braeuner Strasse, where my mother had proudly introduced me to the man at the counter as "my American son." This produced great joy and prime tickets on the house - in third row center parquet! I thought no more about it, until, dressed in my unadorned green GI shirt without insignia, but wearing my dog tags underneath, just in case I had to prove I was an American GI, we appeared at the theater - a silver-haired, thin, elderly Viennese lady in an old- fashioned dark dress, and I, a very unpressed, hopefully incognito GI.

Then I saw, to my horror, that our prime seats were at the center of the section reserved for, and already populated by, what seemed, the entire General Staff of the Soviet Army in Vienna!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: It was too late to turn back. We made them all get up, because our seats, the best in the house, were in the very middle! One general sat next to my mother and another next to me, with no end of Soviet brass in sight in either direction. And this only two days after their MP jeeps had chased me down the Ringstrasse! I was sweating blood and saw myself in vivid colors en route to Siberia!

When nothing further happened, beyond polite nods all round, it gradually dawned on me that this was a replay of the salutes we had received from Commanding Officers on the road! Because of our clearly privileged seats they simply assumed that we were important somebodies, perhaps from Moscow or the KGB, in any case some privileged civilians not to be messed with. In short, they were afraid of us! My mother never realized how close a shave that was!

Even so, my visit to Vienna did not go unnoticed. On one of our walks near the Kaerntnerstrasse, I was accosted by a distinguished, older man who said quietly, " You are an American! Thank God you have finally come!" He had recognized the color of my GI shirt! He turned out to be the then Director of the Sacher Hotel, which had suffered during the war, had seen top Nazis come and go, and was now filled with Soviet troops, like all the other great hotels. I explained that I was not there officially but only to find my mother. He said, "Never mind. You are the first American soldier in Vienna! The others will now come! We finally have hope! Whenever you yourself come back, you will always be welcome at the Sacher!"

As it was, I never followed up this kind invitation, but do remember his shocked account of the arrival of the first Soviet troops, who built open fires on his hotel's lobby's marble floors to cook their food under tripods! I myself still have photos, taken that day, of herds of thin 'liberated' cows being driven down the Ringstrasse, the Praterstrasse and other main city arteries by Soviet soldiers for their evening meals.

What drove the Viennese's intense fear of the Soviet Army, and left an enduring image of Soviet barbarism, was the tidal wave of looting and rapes which followed their arrival. This was even my mother's uppermost concern, since there were many credible accounts that neither grand-mothers nor pre-adolescent girls were being spared! Later statistical studies showed an extraordinarily steep and abrupt increase of syphilis and other venereal diseases in Vienna's population, whose timing corresponds precisely to these events.

And yet, one of my most haunting memories of the Soviet Army during those fateful two days, are of the dozens of Soviet women soldiers sitting on window sills of the Bristol Hotel and other buildings, their legs dangling in the void, holding Tommy guns or balalaika's, and singing, deep-throated, deeply moving, moody Slavic songs as they surveyed the destruction which was then Vienna. For them too a terrible war was over.

For me two big problems remained to be solved: First, to provide my mother with a reliable source of food and emergency support till I could come back to Vienna officially; and secondly, that we still somehow needed to get a lot of gas if we were to make our way back through the Soviet lines to Pilsen.

Luckily, we were able to solve both. Food and help was arranged through an English relief office which had just been opened and which generously agreed that my mother could regularly come to eat there. As for gasoline, my mother had mobilized her friends. Word went out to the Viennese police that there were Americans in town who needed help. Furtively, quietly, dozens of policemen came to our obscure courtyard the next morning where our battered Tatra was parked, bringing little cans and bottles of carefully saved gasoline, and gradually, almost drop by drop, filled up, not only our gas tank, but two or three jerry cans - enough to give us a chance to make it back. And this in a post-combat Vienna where officially there was no gas!

I have never forgotten these anonymous helpers who came through, at great risk to themselves, when help was badly needed. I owed them my life. We were now set to go.

Q: And then you went back, on the 23rd?

JAEGER: Yes. Since the Soviets might now be looking for us, we traveled mostly over back roads and in the dark throughout that night, got lost several times, although we had fair maps, and were almost caught near the demarcation line just a few kilometers south-east of Pilsen. Eventually we did make it, almost out of gas, and fell onto some Army bunks totally exhausted but happy and grateful that we had been able to pull it off! Looking back, it was a remarkable five days, during which we had aged and learned a lot!

7. First Americans in Vienna?

JAEGER: There is one more aspect of this caper, which needs to be recorded. It happened as we were driving east out of Vienna toward the Reichsbruecke, on a long, then desolate road devoid of cars - I think it was the Lassallestrasse - when we saw an official, American-looking staff car coming towards us. I said to Fred, "No, we mustn't get involved! Step on it. Let's just keep going."

As luck had it, however, someone in the oncoming car twigged on the color of our shirts. They screeched to a halt, made a U-turn, followed us, overtook us. We all stopped. It turned out to be the very first party of reporters from the New York Times and one or two other news services, who had been given permission to come into Vienna after the war. And, as luck would have it, we were the first persons they met!

Q: (Laughter)

JAEGER: Their initial, rather human, reaction was chagrin at having been 'scooped' - since meeting two GIs coming out of Vienna as they were making their first post-war visit, was a bit deflating. Even so, notebooks came whipping out as they asked what we had been doing, how things were in town etc.

We tried to explain that we were in a seriously dangerous situation: That we were AWOL from the U.S. Army and could even be tried as deserters if the Army learned of our unauthorized excursion behind Soviet lines by reading about it in the papers!

They swore on a stack of bibles that they would protect us and would only use our info for background. So we did give them a brief account, that we had gone through the lines to find my mother and had succeeded.

When, a few days later, I got back to my billet in Bischofteinitz , I found a telegram from my father in New York on my bunk saying, "Wonderful news George! You made front page of New York Times, and I'm so glad mother is well!" He later sent me the clipping, which I have just reread as I revise this text. Under a headline, "Allies get ready to enter Vienna", dateline June 25, it reports that the Allies may move into sections of Vienna within three weeks under the command of Gen. Mark Clark, that the Viennese "are overjoyed at the prospect" (no one we met had heard of this when we were there!) and that their "expectancy had been stirred by the sight of other Americans in the city, unofficially"!

It then reports, under a heading "New Yorkers in Vienna", that "Americans 'unofficially' in Vienna, included Pfc. George Jaeger of 710 Riverside drive, NY who found his mother safe in the city. He was accompanied by Pfc. Fred Kaufman of 34-59 86th Street, Jackson Heights, Queens." The report also mentions Lieutenants Dan Larner and Peter Hart as having been part of the "American party", whom we neither knew nor met. With that qualification it is likely that we were probably among, or perhaps the first uniformed Americans in Vienna after World War II.

As it turned out, the Army never noticed this front page story, or if they did, chose not to pursue it. I was uneventfully reassigned in early July to a five-man military government team which was to run Marienbad.

8. 'Governor' of Marienbad.

Q: Which is in the western tip of-

JAEGER: Which is in the western tip of Bohemia. Its the famous spa.

Q: Yes. Of 'Last year in Marienbad' fame.

JAEGER: That's it, the elegant spa where Europe's aristocracy, its Kings and Emperors used to summer in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to socialize, take the waters, make deals, have treatments and so on.

When our team arrived, Marienbad, which the Czechs now call "Mariï¿½nskï¿½ Lï¿½zne", had suffered some war damage and was run down after years of abuse by military garrisons, but was otherwise essentially intact, although services were not functioning and water mains were out.

Moreover the place was a full of displaced persons, a crisscrossing snarl of unwashed, hungry, weary humanity, all on the move to somewhere: German soldiers whose Russian war was over walking the endless roads trying to go home. Sudeten Germans, who had earned Czech hatred for their support of the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia, who had just been evicted and trying to flee to Germany. Poles, gypsies, Russians, Ukrainians and all sorts of other people who had survived German PW or labor camps and were streaming in from the west trying to get home. Among all of them were many sick and injured and large numbers of women going in all directions looking for lost men. All were seeking food, shelter and some kind of life after the catastrophes that had befallen them.

That's what all of western Europe was like in those summer months of 1945. The world was like an ant heap, thousands of people moving in all directions, along endless roads in infinite grey lines, on foot, on carts and bicycles, in dilapidated cars and trucks, crisscrossing Europe.

Q: That was a major new challenge. How did your team cope?

JAEGER: Actually, with all the panache of a scene in M*A*S*H! The Major in charge had brought his Italian mistress and installed himself in a villa on Marienbad's famous golf course with the message: "Don't bother me unless there is a major crisis." Experience showed that he really meant it.

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Besides an otherwise useless driver, there was also a nice sergeant, standard army issue, who was clearly not the right choice to lead the reconstruction of Mariï¿½nskï¿½ Lï¿½zne. All of them had had a bad time in the Italian campaign and felt that their war was over. So it was decided that I, being the German speaker, should sit in the mayor's office in City Hall and let them know if I needed help! That's how, at the ripe age of not quite 19, I was for all practical purposes made the governor of Mariï¿½nskï¿½ Lï¿½zne - till we were abruptly withdrawn from Bohemia in November 1945.

My main problems were that virtually nothing worked, that there were no American resources to draw on, and that I had zero expertise. So, after taking stock and thinking about it for a few days, I called in my musty Czech assistant - a rumple-suited holdover in City Hall who later turned out to be working for the Czech communists waiting to take control when we left - and told him briskly that I wanted the 20-or so most influential people in Marienbad in my office the following day at three o'clock sharp.

Q: So you felt that Communist presence even then?

JAEGER: Oh, yes. They had a shadow government even at town level which caused us a lot of trouble.

So, to continue, the next day a couple dozen of pretty frightened, shabby-looking gents showed up at city hall, with no idea what I had in mind. I kept them waiting a bit to heighten the effect, then called them in and said as fiercely as I could: "Look, you have one week to get this town into working order. Its a disgrace! I want the water to run, sewers to work, electricity restored and the hospital open for basic services. Otherwise, there will be serious consequences!" They asked the obvious next question: "How?" Simulating the harsh bark their just-departed German occupiers might have adopted, I told them, "That's your problem! Now get to work!" My gamble was that they were used to German behavior and didn't realize that I had absolutely no capacity to enforce anything, that all this was a bluff!

Lo and behold! By the time I walked to my billet that evening, there were people all over town digging up sidewalks with picks and shovels. Within a week there was noticeable progress. We certainly didn't have the town in working order, even when we left in November, but some basic things were getting done. And, after a while, the effort gained some popular support as people began to understand what we were trying to do - my first lesson in 'nation-building'!

Q: That must have made you feel that you were making a difference.

JAEGER: Well, yes and no, because we were only inching forward a tiny bit on a narrow front in a context which was increasingly out of control. While the US Army did have some DP camps in the area, they were nowhere near the scale needed. And, as I learned later, the human crisis was aggravated by Allied agreement to the resettlement and expropriation of Sudeten Germans at Potsdam in July 1945 - eventually 1.7 million were to be sent to the American Sector in Germany, and perhaps three quarters of a million to the Soviet zone - a brutal process of ethnic cleansing which Eduard Benes new 'democratic' Czech government had set in motion by mid-June.

The struggle with the Communists also clouded the picture, even in my City Hall, since they constantly made their shadow presence felt. As a result of these Soviet-inspired pressures, Benes hope that his post-war Czech Republic would somehow become a "bridge" between east and west ended in tragic defeat, in the complete Soviet take-over of Czechoslovakia in 1948 under Gottwald, and in his own death three months later.

Q: Were you aware of this background at the time?

JAEGER: We knew next to nothing of this developing larger picture, and were left to cope as well as we could with our worms-eye perspective of the disasters developing around us. In my letters home I wrote again and again of the deprivation and despair which hung over the streams of humanity wandering the roads around Marienbad - as they were to wander all that year and much of the next all over Europe. I wrote of my disenchantment, my anger with the Czechs, who, barely liberated themselves, had not an ounce more mercy for the Sudeten Germans they were driving out onto the roads by the thousands, than the Germans had had for them. I was miserably frustrated by our inability to help the hundreds who lined up every day at our office looking in vain for lost relatives, food, money or help in recovering homes and properties. And I came back again and again in these letters to the innumerable individual tragedies we encountered, including the many, in other circumstances respectable women, who sold themselves, indeed vied for the privilege, for a meal, a bed, a little money and, perhaps, some warmth and affection.

Q: That must have been a tough experience.

JAGER: I did win one battle, although it was a short-lived victory. It happened one day when I got a call that the local Czech Communists were deporting a whole trainload of people they had rounded up in our area to work in the beet fields in Slovakia or even further east.

Q: Were these the ethnic Germans?

JAEGER: Yes, Sudeten Germans, a trainload of them parked on a siding at the railroad station. There were hundreds of people of all sorts, many older men - since most of the young had disappeared in the war - the majority women, some pregnant. They knew that, once sent east, they would most probably never come back.

I was, of course, aware of the role the Sudeten Germans had played in bringing about the downfall of Czechoslovakia, their often vicious collaboration with the Nazis before and during the war, and the extent to which they had done the dirty work in concentration camps and elsewhere.

But, I also understood that this was not how people should be treated, regardless of Czech grievances, that this was a new war crime in the making which would, in part, be on my conscience if I did not intervene.

So I called up our local Army HQ and urgently asked for a platoon of soldiers for immediate back up. We marched down to the train, fixed bayonets, told the Communists in charge to get out of the way, unloaded the train at gun point and sent the people home.

Q: Good!

JAEGER; Yes, it was a brief victory in what later came to be known as, the battle for human rights - even though I probably acted in contravention of America's Potsdam commitment! I wryly recalled all this years later, when we were struggling with the successors of these Czech communists over a human rights passage in the Helsinki Final Act we were negotiating in Geneva. The principles involved are just as relevant now, in view of our own atrocities and war crimes at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, in CIA rendition camps and elsewhere - a record of which we should not be proud.

Even in the short run my little effort did little lasting good. The minute we were abruptly pulled out of Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1945, the Czechs finished the eviction of Sudeten Germans in areas which had been under our control. My wife Pat and I visited southern Bohemia in the spring of 2002 on our way to Prague. We passed through Cesky Krumlov, Telc and other, once wholly Sudeten German towns, whose German roots have been erased and 'cleansed'. They are now all Czech.

Q: How was your own life in Marienbad?

JAEGER: Considering this was central Europe just after the end of the war, we lived extremely well, in bizarre contrast to the misery all around us. I was billeted in a pleasant room in one of Marienbad's elegant, if somewhat rundown hotels, my balcony overlooking lawns and gardens with old trees, fountains, neo-classic statues and even goldfish ponds! Meals were provided in a formal dining room with chandeliers, served by traditionally-clad waiters, often to the accompaniment of musicians and gypsy groups which the Army's admin people picked up from time to time.

Life in Marienbad was also stimulated by unusual people and events. There was the former American woman professor who had somehow been caught there by the war, whom our medics had nursed back to reasonable health and who then rewarded us at dinner with her rich, erudite, sparkling mind. There was the American Colonel who tried to smuggle a distinguished Czech friend's wife out into the American zone of Germany in the trunk of his car - and was caught, with tragic results. The newly arrived American Ambassador, Laurence Steinhardt, who became a notable player in the Benes drama, set off a day of unwonted spit and polish when he made a brief visit. And - this is a very peculiar memory - there was the mesmerizing bearded Jew who 'sent' for me one day out of the blue and had me led to his ample, richly carpeted hiding space in an old building, where, and this was the incredible part, he had survived the Nazis and the entire war! He laughed at me, offered some superb Cognac .... and his services - suggesting that he had had similar profitable contacts with the Gestapo before we came. I stayed clear of him and am not sure whether or not he was involved in a major drug ring reaching through the Balkans to Turkey which our intelligence people busted later in the fall.

To round out this totally surrealistic scene, I myself had somehow acquired use of a former SS riding stable with 20-some superb horses the Germans had stolen somewhere, and spent many off-duty afternoons cantering gloriously across the extraordinarily beautiful, largely untouched Bohemian countryside.

9. Paris, Chartres and Norfolk

JAEGER: By November 1945 we knew we would soon be leaving, although not before I was able to take my first leave since I had arrived in Europe: To visit Miss Carr at Hedenham Hall, and my aunt Lilly, one of the few holocaust survivors on my father's side, in London. The Army's rattling troop train, made up of 'forty and eight' cattle cars, traveled west from Pilsen, rumbling endlessly through the desolate, war damaged grey villages and towns of Germany and France. Packed-in, rumpled GIs were lying and sitting on the bare floors, smoking and drinking, playing cards, talking of their war, of girls, sex, the occupation and of eventually of going home ... after the war in Japan would finally be over.

For me the climax of our journey came when, just before we finally arrived in Paris, French thieves boarded the train and stole many of our duffle bags while we were sleeping; in my case containing not only my clothes but all my money and, most importantly, cartons of American cigarettes, the then most negotiable currency in Europe.

After a brief moment of panic I recouped by selling my splendid officer's sleeping bag at a spontaneous auction in a corner of the Gare du Nord, where, almost instantly, a crowd of shabby Parisians materialized, all facing a hard winter without heat, to compete for the comforts of this major prize! The proceeds were enough to pay for my ticket to London and to do some sightseeing in, at that time, bleak and dowdy-looking Paris, quite unaware that I would one day serve there for four years in much better times in our Embassy.

My happiest recollection of that leave involved the rainy day-trip I made on a rusty commuter train to Chartres, a place to which I was drawn even before I had read Henry Adams' 'Mt. St. Michel and Chartres'. When I arrived the cobbled cathedral square, not yet surrounded by todays hotels and restaurants, was wet, unwelcoming and empty. And the ancient cathedral looked somber, with creeping shadows obscuring the nave, admitting only dimly opaque blue light through its the famous windows. Still, the hour or so I spent there alone that day among the soaring columns disappearing into the cathedrals' gothic vaults were a deeply healing experience. My outlook on life was also dramatically improved by an absolutely glorious roasted chicken, cooked specially for me by a kind old French woman at a tiny, long-extinct bistro off the cathedral square and the memorable bottle of old Bordeaux she offered me which she had successfully hidden in her cellar from the Germans!

Some thirty-five years later I was to take my very old father back to Chartres a short time before he died. He too loved it, although the wine was no longer as good as that rare bottle had been in November '45 with which the old lady and I celebrated France's liberation. I felt restored and full of fresh happiness when I made my way back to Paris.

Then it was on to England and reunions, first with aunt Lilly in London, then, after an endlessly bumpy ride on locals, to Bungay, Norfolk, where a kind switchman, himself a veteran, invited this cold, soaked Yank into his warm railway shed for a cup of tea.

Miss Carr, visibly happy and excited, met me with the same, now even older Austin convertible with which she had once fetched me as a refugee child from the Harwich ferry! And at Hedenham Hall, they were all there to welcome me, my old maid, the gardener, and others of the family, including a young Brigadier on the British General Staff, who actually wanted to know my views on how our war had gone. Even old Mrs. Carr, more bent and fragile than I had remembered, was overjoyed that I had come back safely from the war.

It was a wonderful return to the quiet civility of my Norfolk 'home', where, the unstated message was that I had earned my place: Still far below the salt, with no promotion - but definitely, my place.

Q: How long did you stay in Marienbad after this leave?

JAEGER: After my leave things moved swiftly. By late November American forces had been withdrawn from Czechoslovakia, which was left to continue its sad decline into becoming a Soviet satellite. There were no good-bye parties. On the contrary, my letters recorded sadly, that many Czechs in our parts of Bohemia seemed actually glad to see us go since we had shared neither their enthusiasm for Soviet Communism nor for the ethnic cleansing of Sudeten Germans.

10.To Vienna, Visa No.1 and home

Q: I think this is all very interesting in setting the background. But before we go on, what happened to your mother?

My own fate, after some string-pulling, was to be reassigned to USAREUR (US Army Europe) Headquarters in the IG Farben building in Frankfurt, since I needed an effective springboard for a transfer to Vienna to bring out my mother. I succeeded, and shortly thereafter was reassigned from Frankfurt to the War Crimes unit in Gen. Mark Clark's Headquarters in Vienna, established after the Americans had moved into their sector in July. As a result, I found myself on an elegant sleeper train to Vienna on December 23 - in time to celebrate my first Christmas with my mother since I had left in 1939!

We had a wonderful reunion, went to the 'Fledermaus' on New Year's Eve and celebrated with her friends with the meager means available! Although my mother was still technically an 'enemy alien', so not entitled to use the PX system, I was soon able to arrange for an ample food supply through the generosity of another kind Brigadier General on Gen. Clark's staff who let me use his general officers' mess card once a month to buy supplies!

This became a major event, for each time I arrived in my mother's narrow Braunerstrasse with my jeep bulging with goodies, people would rush to their windows and call "Der Ami kommt!!" (The GI is coming!). My mother knew many of them from the nightmarish weeks they had spent together in the cellars during the American air raids and the Soviet attack, and shared our spoils as well she could. They were all terribly undernourished, in spite of the mountains of peas the American Army provided which made people bilious and were not an adequate diet.

As to her trip to America, there were still frustrating delays, since nothing could be done until the American Embassy had finally reopened in Vienna. When that finally happened, she received the very first non-quota Immigration visa issued in Vienna after the war from Vice Consul M.B. Lundgren on April 30, 1946. She rejoined my father, after a forced separation of seven years, in New York on May 25th.

Q: That's an incredible saga. Tell us a bit about your work there?

JAEGER: My war crimes work at Mark Clark's headquarters during those months in Vienna in 1946 was negligible and unproductive. I was detailed for a few delightful weeks to a unit in Gmunden, a beautiful little town on the Traunsee in the Salzkammergut, where the workload was even lighter and I spent many lazy days sailing a little borrowed boat on the Gmundner See, exploring the surrounding hills and forests, and waiting for someone to tell me what to do. There were some SS people in detention in the area who, I believe, we were supposed to interrogate. But that somehow never happened.

The only remarkable memory of that period - beyond the time I spent walking with my mother in the Volksgarten and other haunts in Vienna, and the many evenings I listened to Joseph Krips conducting the regenerating Vienna Philharmonic from a loge I had rented for the season - was of the huge 'top secret' volume which came across my desk one day in Vienna - a detailed intelligence record of the Warsaw ghetto massacre.

It was a dreadful document which, besides its long, detailed text describing what had happened, included hundreds of photos showing Jews being herded through the streets of the surrounded, burning and shell-pocked ghetto, jumping out of windows, being beaten and shot, desperate people who knew they were all doomed.

Q: Why was it secret?

JAEGER: Probably because it was raw investigatory war crimes material, circulated to help US and Allied forces identify and arrest the Germans involved. The document contained pictures of many German officers and soldiers carrying out sweeps, committing atrocities, as well as lists of those wanted for war crimes.

Q: So then you must have returned from the Army shortly after that?

JAEGER: Yes. Hundreds of us crossed Germany in June 1946 in a long troop train, a happy, celebrating crowd of GIs, unmindful of the hard benches and K-rations. We then awaited transport in a very relaxed transit camp in Bremerhaven, where some of us were even able to rent more congenial quarters in a nearby village, checking in only for roll call in the morning.

The subsequent crossing on a troopship was also uneventful, except that, as we were coming in sight of New York harbor, the ship's loudspeakers went off: "Sergeant Jaeger. Sergeant Jaeger. Would Sergeant Jaeger take charge of the latrine detail on deck three!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: It was thus that I managed to miss the Statue of Liberty and the by then standard little band on the dock playing march music to welcome us home!

I was discharged with the exalted rank of sergeant in Fort Dix on July 25, 1946.

Part II: From Harvard, via State, USIA and McCarthy, to the Foreign Service.

1. From St. Vincent's to Harvard

Q: Let's now turn to your return to the U.S. and the resumption of your education. How did that go?

JAEGER: Well, after I was discharged from the Army, I packed up my Eisenhower jacket, visited my parents in Kansas City and returned to St. Vincent's College in Latrobe, Pa. to finish college.

Compared to the devastated Europe I had just left, St. Vincent seemed timelessly tranquil and untouched by the cataclysms which has just torn the world apart - a transition which required some major readjustments. Like so many GIs, I too found that my wartime experience had broadened and transformed me. Although I did not have coherent views on foreign affairs as yet, it was quite clear to me, as it was to so many other returning WWII soldiers, that we badly needed to get busy building a better world. So I abandoned chemistry, which I had never much liked anyway, and for my last two years in college focused on history, philosophy and government. I also gained some practical experience in editing the college paper and continued debating. I evidently did well, since I graduated com laude in 1948 and was asked to be Valedictorian of our class, but don't remember these rather sheltered years as particularly challenging or exciting.

The foreign affairs side of the story only began late in my senior year, when my government professor, Paul Mahady, a dashing local lawyer, who had been a Harvard graduate, brought his convertible to an abrupt halt near where I was sitting on the grass watching a softball game and called out that I should come to see him, because I was "going to Harvard!".

Needless to say I was stunned. Mahady, who had evidently thought well of me, had simply written to his friends at Harvard without my knowledge and arranged to have me accepted in the new Littauer International Affairs Program, which even offered some financial aid to supplement my GI Bill of Rights!

It was another of those many gratuitous events which again and again completely changed the direction of my life! I have often wondered whether in today's much more competitive and bureaucratic academic environment, I could even have made the cut!

2. The Harvard International Affairs Program

Be that as it may, I was off to Harvard in the fall of 1948, one of twenty members of the second class of the Littauer Program for International Affairs, a special, interdepartmental two years' Masters program designed to fill America's new post-war need for broad-gauged people to help manage and carry out our foreign affairs.

For me it was an amazing, transforming experience. I quickly discovered that my Benedictine education had made me fairly expert in mediaeval philosophy - I was quickly nicknamed the "little Thomist" - but left me at a disadvantage in the broader world of liberal education. In our seminars, and particularly in the great, barracks-like graduate dining hall, where people from all the faculties carried on constant, fascinating conversations about everything from Gropius' new architecture and methodologies of literary criticism to Renaissance and contemporary politics, I found that I clearly had some serious catching up to do. I somehow managed and gradually began to thrive in this exciting new environment.

Part of it was the caliber of my fellow students, many of whom were indeed remarkable. A year ahead of me in this two-year program, were Henry Kissinger, (the prize student of Professor William Yandell Elliott), as well as Zbigniew Brzezinski, then as now brilliant, acerbic and clearheaded. There was Sam Huntington, now famous for his prescient book on the 'Clash of Civilizations'; and of course Stanley Hoffman, our bemused French-American colleague, now one of Harvard's University Professors, then as now intensely competent, wise and perceptive.

There were other, subsequently less famous but in their various ways equally important colleagues: Frank Keenan my sage and patient roommate in Divinity Hall, from whom I learned much of American politics. He has remained a lifelong friend and over the years contributed importantly as a senior Congressional staffer. There was Peter Warker, enthusiastic, super hard working, and later my roommate in Washington when we were both impecunious beginners there. He became an eastern European economist in the Foreign Service and later worked in private enterprise. Another was our irrepressibly cheerful and highly competent Canadian colleague, Lennie Wainstein, later of ARPA and the Rand Corporation who too has remained a good friend. Last but not least I should mention a somewhat older, and to me impressively cosmopolitan member of our group, who had done some hush-hush work, presumably with the OSS, and later became a high-level executive in the Central Intelligence Agency.

The International Affairs Program itself, like so much at Harvard in those days, was a loosely coordinated, almost casual interdepartmental operation, run by a young Government Professor, Alan Burr Overstreet, who taught courses on international organization and on the newly created UN. We of course had some shared requirements and discussions, but were otherwise free, under his general supervision, to take any of a wide range of graduate courses and seminars across the spectrum of Arts and Sciences offered by a pantheon of eminences: Carl Friedrich, later the author of Germany's new constitution; William Yandell Elliot, the political theorist and spellbinding lecturer, who had been advisor to FDR and father of the Bureau of the Budget, a device designed to help Presidents get a grip on Cabinet departments and bureaucracies; brilliant young McGeorge Bundy, later of Vietnam fame; the new Sovietologists, like Adam Ulam, at the Russian Research center; Talcott Parsons, the student of Max Weber, whose dense, difficult lectures were full of Germanic syntax and seminal insights about the mechanics and structures of social organizations; and, last but not least, Alois Schumpeter, the former Austrian Finance Minister in the 20's, who became one of the world's most influential economists with his theory of creative destruction. I took and survived his course on Socialism, even though he often cited quotations in four or five languages! There was a host of others.

This rich and challenging environment was supplemented by the constant stream of world class visitors to Harvard, who ranged from TS Eliot, whom I heard read from the 'Wasteland', and Siobhan McKenna, who brilliantly performed her famous St. Joan, to a parade of political and intellectual leaders from all corners of the world, as well as gifted musicians, artists and performers of all sorts. They all constantly enriched our lives and tempted us away from our work.

I also had my first opportunities to teach undergraduates as Dr. Oversteet's Assistant and even inflicted a full-dress lecture on them on 'Policy Formation in the US Government', a performance which, given my lack of experience, could not have been very enlightening.

It all came to an end in late spring 1950, when our group was awarded their MAs on a sunny day in Harvard Yard. We had spent two superb years reading, working hard, discussing policy and country issues and growing much faster than we realized. It was a brilliant and exciting time.

The issue I then faced was whether to leave and go into the Washington bureaucracy, or stay on to become an academic, as some people urged. I remained ambivalent but decided to remain at Harvard at least till I had finished my doctoral oral examinations, which I passed in January 1951.

3. State Department intern.

One of the great advantages of the International Affairs Program had been that it arranged for unpaid summer foreign affairs internships, my first in the summer of '49 as a gopher in the Office of the Secretary of State! I still remember how awestruck and inspired I felt on seeing our national capital for the first time and how privileged to have been asked to begin my practical foreign affairs education at the center of the process.

a. When not to read 'Das Kapital'

Actually I may have owed this chance to the inattentiveness of an FBI agent. I was taking Schumpeter's course on 'Socialism' that spring and one sunny afternoon was sitting in my room in Divinity Hall trying not to go to sleep over some particularly dense pages of Karl Marx's 'Das Kapital", part of Schumpeter's assigned reading, when suddenly there was a knock and an FBI man appeared. He said he was working on my security clearance and wondered if he could ask me some questions. He sat down at the corner of my desk, just a few inches from my open copy of 'Das Kapital', interrogated me for over an hour, but never once looked at what I was reading! Given the growing anti-Communist hysteria of the time, I have often wondered what my fate would have been if he had noticed!

b. Cranking the Xerox machine in Acheson's front office.

Q: What did they have you do in Acheson's office?

JAEGER: I was attached to a small group of assistants who were in a sense the precursors of the huge 'seventh floor' apparatus of more recent years.

My boss for the summer was to John Kuhn, who patiently took me under his wing as I learned to help backstop the interdepartmental committee then planning the first Military Assistance Programs. It was a terrific first look at government wheels in motion at a senior level, since I was able to attend all their meetings in the Department and hearings on the hill and had my first contact with people like Assistant Secretaries in these committees. I don't, unfortunately, remember much of the details of these discussions, except that they left me with a new understanding that, regardless of level, one was still only dealing with human beings, who, were fallible and not always even well informed; and that internal Department politics were a major driving force in policy formulation. Among the senior staffers I particularly remember Brad Patterson, whose passion was effective high-level organization and who in later years became a senior staff officer in the White House. His book on 'The White House Staff', published by Brookings, is still very much worth reading.

In sum, I spent an exciting summer doing fascinating, high-class donkeywork. Among the papers that an intern was asked to take to the Xerox machine were as often as not drafts of what later became famous NSC (National Security Council) documents on critical issues. You trotted them around to the Policy Planning Staff, the Secretary's office or to other high-level places in what was then New State.

Looking back, what proved most valuable and important, were not the specific policies I became familiar with, but the topflight people I met and the atmospherics I absorbed. While Washington itself was still a sleepy southern city, these were my first contacts with serious foreign policy makers and their staffers who made the system work - major role models in their various ways for later years.

Q: Were there ever any crises while you were there?

JAEGER: I do recall that even this lowly intern had a few moments of genuine responsibility, to whit when, on my turn on the duty roster, I was occasionally awakened at night by various bureau duty officers and asked to decide whether a particular issue was of sufficient importance to wake up the Secretary of State. If I thought so, my instruction was to call a Mr. Brown, who was the permanent senior duty officer in 'S', who in turn would phone the Secretary. It was on one such occasion, I think when some Central American government was unexpectedly overthrown, that Brown told me patiently but firmly that this was the sort of thing that should almost always be decided in the negative. If there was nothing the Secretary could or needed to do in the middle of the night, the lesson was, err on the side caution!

c. Austria and the Marshall Plan

Q: That seemed a sensible defense against eager beavers. Were you able to return in your second summer?

JAEGER: No. My second internship, in the summer of 1950, was on the German-Austrian desk in the Economic Cooperation Administration which had been created to administer the Marshall Plan. My job description listed high-flown tasks like evaluating projects for investment guarantees and assisting staff economists on national accounts and balance of payments problems. What I remember was a rather less productive assignment assisting 'Penny', a nice young woman economist, with drafting Congressional letters and other routine tasks she didn't have time to do.

As for the larger picture, I never found out, since nobody, in that then hyper-busy crowd seemed interested or willing to explain it to me. So I went back to Harvard that fall with not much to show for my time, except the impression that Eleanor Dulles, busy turning Austria into a ski resort, was a force to be reckoned with and that economics, for the time being, was not my dish.

The good part of this exceptionally hot summer, during which I lived in a cheap boarding house near Catholic University, was that I came to know some of the bright and dedicated young people then gathering in Georgetown who shared my view that righting the world was our generation's destiny.

4. Kissinger

Q: During those Harvard years, did you come to know Henry Kissinger?

JAEGER: We met in various contexts, but I had my first real exposure in William Yandell Elliot's seminar for which Kissinger wrote a huge paper on the early German romantic philosophers. The requirement called for 30-60 pages. Elliot opened the meeting by saying " I have read Henry's brilliant paper. I don't claim to understand it, but I am sure Henry will explain it to us." Henry did, droning on for most of two hours about the dense ideas and relationships of various early 19th century German worthies. It was clearly a very learned paper. There was no discussion.

Henry was approachable but pompous and competitive and contributed much to the repartee in seminars, particularly when he was sparring with Brzezinski. While he had some detractors and made some enemies, he was generally seen as someone likely to become a first class academic. The idea that this young German refugee with an incorrigibly thick accident would become a major world statesman was not yet obvious to any of us - perhaps not even to Prof. Elliott who took him on as his protï¿½gï¿½ after he had blown Harvard College away with an almost straight A average and a 600 page thesis - for which he had earned a rare 'summa cum laude'. He was reportedly so impecunious that in his undergraduate years he only had one pair of pants and so had to stay in bed till they came back from pressing!

At some point in Henry's graduate career, Elliott steered him away from a purely academic track, encouraging him to write his doctoral thesis on Metternich, thus foreign policy and statesmanship, and then by making him Director of the subsequently famous International Seminar for young foreign leaders at Harvard. The wide range of contacts he made in that capacity and the success of his book on 'Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy' projected him into orbit and history.

A footnote concerning Elliott's deep disappointment with Kissinger for divorcing his first wife, who had stuck with him loyally through the hard early years at Harvard and beyond and for his increasingly domineering and arrogant behavior as Nixon's National Security Advisor, which he expressed to me in stentorian terms when we ran into each other years later on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. "That boy" Elliot said angrily as he stomped away "is a disgrace!"

Q: Did you have any contact with Kissinger after those Harvard years?

JAEGER: I had been on fairly friendly terms with Henry in Cambridge. Many years later, when I was working on east-west relations and the NPT in the Political Section of the Embassy in Bonn, he asked me during a brief visit to get in touch with him when I was next in Washington to talk about Germany. I did phone his office that fall, and was told to meet him in New York the following day, November 25 1968. As I was about to leave for the airport, the phone rang and his secretary explained that he had an unexpected conflict.

I learned later that Henry, who had been working for the Rockefellers, had been called to see Nixon who wanted to make him his National Security Advisor. I often wondered whether Henry would not have brought me along to his NSC staff had the Nixon meeting come a few days later. As it was he never got back to me. I think I was lucky.

Our only other, indirect, but illuminating meeting was one night at the Ambassador's Residence in Paris during one of Henry's many Paris visits during the Vietnam Peace negotiations, a story I will leave for later in this narrative.

5. Career decisions

Q. So, getting back to your career, what happened after you passed your doctoral orals in 1951?

JAEGER: I began tinkering with a thesis. I had chosen to write on Irving Babbitt, an American conservative under Carl Friedrich, although my heart was never really in it. Partly, the topic was too esoteric (why I chose it remains a mystery!), partly, Friedrich was an advisor in name only, and partly, having had a taste of Washington I really wanted to go back.

a. Turned down by Truman for being foreign-born.

In fact the whole doctoral project was almost abandoned before it got underway in 1950, when Elliott , who must have thought well of me, asked me one day to go down to Washington to call on Admiral Sidney Souers, who had been the newly created CIA's first Director, and was then Executive Secretary of the recently created National Security Council at the White House under Harry Truman.

This was very heady stuff. I got my best suit pressed, went down to Washington (those were the days when I still got shivers on my spine when I looked at the national capitol and the flag flying above it), and for the first time ever walked into the White House.

I found Admiral Souers to be a kind, thoughtful, clearly very effective man who interviewed me at some length. At the end of our meeting he explained to me what my duties would be as his assistant. His role, I remember him emphasizing, was not to run American foreign and security policy! It was simply to provide a setting in which the cabinet members could have proper discussions so that the President would get the best possible advice. Occasionally this required that Admiral Souers would sum things up for him, either orally or in writing, without intruding himself or his staff's views in the process. If appointed, he said, I would help him provide modest secretariat functions, preparing meeting schedules, agendas, occasional briefing papers, etc. Still, a pretty spectacular beginning for a new foreign affairs career!

Q: That's a very different concept of the NSC staff's role than it has become!

JAEGER: I was about to say that I have often thought about the stark contrast between this very modest original definition of the NSC staff's role and the swollen behemoth it has become. It was clearly not Truman's intent to create a major new bureaucracy to oversee State, Defense, the CIA etc., but only a cabinet-level forum, chaired by the President himself, with perhaps a few subcommittees, to help him pull together the main strands of foreign policy.

Q: To get back to your story, what happened?

JAEGER: Ending my interview, which I thought had gone well, Admiral Souers said he was going to talk to the President about this. "I'll give you a ring when I get the answer, but I suspect that all will be well."

So with his evidently strong support, I assumed I had managed to land this exceptional job at the highest level and was walking on air - until, two days later Admiral Souers called to say that he was terribly sorry to have to tell me that the President had turned me down! Souers had made a strong case for me, but to no avail.

I asked "Why?" He said, "Well, the President's only concern was that you are foreign-born, although he read and liked your file and thought that you were otherwise fully qualified. Given his problems in the Congress, the President was worried that he would be attacked for hiring a foreign-born American for this most sensitive position."

Q: Even at a relevantly junior level ?

JAEGER: I would have been the junior member of a staff of only four or five people.

Q: Well, that shows that Truman was already running scared against his Republican critics.

JAEGER: He wanted to avoid creating unnecessary new targets for attack. As for myself, it was quite a sobering experience to be turned down by the President himself for being foreign born - in spite of my military service in World War II. Discrimination clearly was still very much alive in the 1950's! Interestingly, the same thing happened to me again when I first took the Foreign Service Exam, but that's later in our story.

In spite of this experience I was and remained a great admirer of President Truman. When he made his first major foreign policy speech after a period of rather wounded withdrawal subsequent to leaving office, I wrote him a longish letter of appreciation and support, which included a few cavils and "suggestions"! To my intense surprise I received a wonderful, hand-typed personal letter from him (as evidenced by several typos and corrections) a few weeks later, in which he carefully responded to my various points!

b. William Yandell Elliott

Q: Let's talk a bit about Elliott, who was also my lecturer in my Harvard freshman government class in 1943. He clearly played an important role in getting you and many other of his students into government,

JAEGER: Elliott, was a powerfully broad-gauged southern intellectual and public servant, a senatorial figure out of central casting and famous, in my time, for his undergraduate survey course of the great Western political figures in which I became his assistant. His weekly segments swept majestically from Plato, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and other major political philosophers, to Karl Marx - and impressed generations of young people with the importance of public service. I remember how, at key points in these famous lectures, he would glare at the several hundred Harvard undergraduates in the auditorium and launch a stentorian challenge: That they must not become another lot of passive bystanders but accept the public responsibilities which a great Harvard education confers! "If you," he would say, "will not be the leaders of this nation so that bad things do not occur to us, who will be? You have to see to it that these things do not happen in America." He consistently helped his students find positions in government where they could practice what he had tried to teach.

Q: Can you tell us a bit more about him and his accomplishments?

JAEGER: Elliott was an extraordinarily multi-faceted man. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol, where he studied under A.D. Lindsay and invented the subsequently banned forward pass for Balliol's Rugby team; an artillery battery commander in World War I; one of the southern 'Fugitive Poets"; author, in the late twenties, of the "Pragmatic Revolt in Politics", which presciently condemned fascism, syndicalism and communism; and Professor of Government at Berkeley, then Harvard for forty years while commuting to Washington to advise six Presidents.

Most importantly, he was a Roosevelt brain-truster in the 1930's and 40's and, as we have already said, invented the Bureau of the Budget as a way for FDR to more effectively control his cabinet departments through their purse strings. He was, throughout, a committed internationalist, who foresaw World War II and the Cold War and did his best to prepare the way for American involvement. Indeed we owed much of our World War II supply of rubber, tin, nickel, and molybdenum to his sense of urgency. During the War he became Vice President of the War Production Board in charge of civilian requirements and accompanied Roosevelt to the Yalta Conference, where he warned, presciently but unavailingly, of the oncoming Cold War.

Q: That's right. He played a critical wartime role, and even later.

JAEGER: During the Cold War he was an advisor to the National Security Council and later a member of Vice-President Nixon's "Kitchen Cabinet" party which confronted Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow in 1957. He wrote some speeches for Nixon's 1960 campaign against John F. Kennedy. Had Nixon won, some say that he might have become his National Security Advisor.

Elliott retired from Harvard in 1964, taught for several years more at American University in Washington, D.C., and eventually retired to his farm in the Blue Ridge mountains. He died in 1974.

I owe a great deal to the breadth and wisdom of this man who combined deep knowledge of history and political thought with a passion for public service, which he did his best to pass on to all of us.

c. Off to the State Department and Public Affairs

Q: Well, since you didn't get the White House job, what happened next?

JAEGER: I stayed at Harvard during the fall semester of 1950/1951 doing research and assisting Professor Sigmund Neuman, a visiting political scientist, in his 'International Politics" course. By April of '51 my civil service appointment to the State Department came through as a member of a special young executives program, called the "Young Officers Group", assigned to the Office of Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Ed Barrett - a former Dean of the Columbia Journalism School and Newsweek editor.

The "P" area, as the Assistant Secretary's office was called, in those days reigned over a vast empire, which included not only State's own information activities, i.e. press briefings, public correspondence and the Historical Office, but the huge bureaucracy, of some 10,000 people (later reconstituted as USIA, a separate agency) who carried out America's increasingly intense Cold War information activities through the Voice of America and other operations in Washington and overseas. 'P' was also responsible for providing policy guidance to all concerned, so that our official media and spokespersons would sing from more or less the same page.

Q: And how did you fit into all of this?

JAEGER: I was to work for Jesse McKnight, a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary who was a key player in 'P's inner sanctum. He liaised with other parts of the Department, represented State on interdepartmental committees, made sure that our media were quick off the mark in reacting to Soviet propaganda initiatives around the globe, had a strong voice in overseeing both staffing and operations, and, I believe, had some hush-hush functions involving American grey or black Cold War propaganda.

Q: Was he a Foreign Service officer?

JAEGER: No. Jesse was a former Justice Department civil servant who had moved to State. I found him intimidating at first but discovered that behind his rather forbidding exterior - he was monosyllabic, a bit of a curmudgeon and demanded high standards from himself and others - was an actually very intelligent, committed and caring man. His specialty was to constantly shower the information bureaucracy with little chits assigning tasks, needling them over prompt follow up and sending them sharp reminders when there were lags. I suspect, his most important contribution was the blunt, principled advice he usually gave his superiors, who were under heavy pressures arising from the intensifying Cold War and the strong emotions stirred by the Korean war.

Q: Who were some of the other senior people in the front office?

JAEGER: The one I remember best was Walter Schwinn, a cherubic, literate man who had been Consul General in the Trucial States, sat in on Policy Planning Staff meetings, served as a senior advisor and liaised with the NSC, the OCB and the British on information policy and operations. He later returned to the Middle East and, if I remember correctly, became editor of the Hartford Courant.

Q: So what happened to you?

JAEGER: Typical junior officer chores, particularly in the beginning. Culling masses of current intelligence and operational reports, accompanying or representing McKnight at Operations Coordinating Board meetings, drafting correspondence and memos and, when the Assistant Secretary's Intelligence Advisor was absent, giving the intelligence briefing at Mr. Barrett's large daily staff meeting.

My first appearance in that role, soon after my arrival, was a disaster. I was called late one afternoon and told that I would be giving the intelligence briefing the following morning and that the cables for my review would be available as of 5 AM! When I arrived at that ungodly hour I found myself staring at a stack of hundreds of messages from all over the world, but had no idea what the key issues were or what the Assistant Secretary was interested in. I began to read and sort, and soon began to panic. When my turn came at the staff meeting to address the twenty-some senior people around the table I simply choked up and couldn't say a word - until someone, after what seemed an eternity, moved the meeting on to the next item.

I slunk back to my office, utterly ashamed and furious with myself, the one-time debate champion and public speaker, and was convinced my career was at an end - until in mid-afternoon the phone rang. It was Howland Sergeant, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary, who, instead of telling me that I was fired as I expected, asked me to come to see him. He received me with a reassuring smile, said he understood how hard this morning must have been for me, gave me some simple guidelines and asked me to try again a few days later. I did, all went well, and I was mercifully reprieved.

d. The North Korean atrocities issue

Q: What were the major substantive issues with which you became involved?

JAEGER: We worked on the whole gamut of Cold War propaganda issues, how to respond to shifts and tacks in Soviet tactics and how to handle domestic and international events in our media and on the Voice of America. The latter was often a concern, since their broadcasters, usually passionately involved native speakers, sometimes projected personal views at variance with US policy. In preparing our daily guidances there were also frequent coordination problems with regional bureaus in the Department and other parts of the government, who either did not want some issue to be reported, affecting credibility, or wanted to spin it in ways which would have been counter productive.

By far the most critical issue I became involved in arose in the OCB sub-committee on Korean war information projects, on which Jesse McKnight represented State. Anxious to increase American domestic support for the war, the Pentagon's Psychological Warfare people proposed putting pamphlets, patterned after Life Magazine, in every American mailbox across the country filled with graphic full page photos of gruesome atrocities allegedly committed by the North Koreans.

The issue this raised was twofold: Whether it was in the US interest to conduct atrocity propaganda at all? And, even more importantly, whether it was appropriate or legal for the US government to subject the American people to a deliberate propaganda campaign to pump up support for the Korean war.

Speaking for State, Jesse MacKnight, vigorously opposed this project on both counts in increasingly acrimonious meetings at which the pressures became emotional and personal. The subtext was the same as it has been during the current second Iraq war: That special times justify special methods, and that, if you disagreed, you were unpatriotic, did not support the troops, or worse.

I substituted for MacKnight at some of these meetings and helped hold the line. In the end, nothing came of this domestic project; although, once the Eisenhower administration was installed, the NSC did, at the Army's Psychological Warfare Branch's behest, approve vigorous overseas and UN campaigns to publicize North Korean atrocities, which were much in the news in that late fall of 1953. [Note: Extensive exchanges on this subject are cited in Senator McCarthy's Executive Session Hearings, published in 2003]. I have always suspected, that it was this issue which eventually led to the final chapter in my relationship with McKnight, when he was suspended without pay on the grounds that his continued employment was inconsistent with national security!

e. The suspension of Jesse MacKnight.

Q: Fascinating. Tell us what happened.

JAEGER: Well that's actually getting ahead of the story, since I had by then returned to Harvard. In early October 1954, I received a long, shocking letter from Jesse reporting that, on returning from a leave, he was informed that he had been summarily suspended from his job without pay, was under investigation and could no longer even enter the State Department building, where his safe had been sealed and his materials seized - depriving him of the records with which he could vindicate himself.

He was charged with associating with persons "allegedly sympathetic to the Communist ideology or having records of Communist front activity"; contributing to "alleged administrative failure in the implementation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act; and, to me most interestingly, having in his position and "in connection with his official duties involving the Operations Coordinating Board (!) consistently attempted to obstruct, hamper or nullify plans, proposals or policies designed to prejudice or embarrass the USSR and her satellite nations".

MacKnight was, quite obviously, the latest victim of State's new Security Chief Scott McLeod, a former FBI man and staffer for far right-wing New Hampshire Senator Styles Bridges, who had been appointed shortly after Eisenhower came into office to "immunize" the State Department from Senator McCarthy's charges that it harbored people "soft on Communism": The same man who famously tried to block Chip Bohlen's appointment as Ambassador to Moscow. What role in this affair was played by MacKnight's then boss, Carl McCardle, Dulles' press spokesman and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, is unclear, although it is hard to imagine that he was unaware.

As it turned out, the Department itself quickly dropped the third charge concerning his OCB work, since MacKnight's positions had all been carefully cleared within the Department. After some weeks the other charges too were withdrawn, after over a hundred of Jesse's colleagues and friends had submitted affidavits attesting to his loyalty and commitment. I too wrote a strong, detailed paper in his defense, in which I argued vigorously that everything in our relationship led me to believe that he was utterly loyal and deeply dedicated.

When it became clear that McLeod had no case, MacKnight was reinstated and given a 'finding' that his continued employment at State was "clearly consistent with the interests of national security". He sent each of us who had written on his behalf a touching letter expressing his gratitude for the support of "so many, many people have shown their decency and understanding". Eventually he also received an apology of sorts from the then Under Secretary of State.

Even so, the experience made a permanent hash of MacKnight's life and career, which never really recovered its momentum. He was one of the many victims of the witch hunts of that period, made possible because Eisenhower and Dulles did not adequately protect their staffs from unfounded ideological attacks.

f. Information policy work and USIA

Q: Those were very troubled times. But let's now get back to you and how you ended up back at Harvard?

JAEGER: My assignment to 'P' had gone through several permutations. When McKnight left for a year at the War College in October 1951, I was moved to 'P's' Information Policy Staff, the small group which prepared and coordinated information policy within and beyond the Department and gave specific guidance to our media.

After USIA became a separate Agency in 1953, our group became USIA's Information Policy Staff, to which I was seconded and where I continued my work on Eastern Europe, a key area in the cold war. My colleagues and mentors were "Butch" Leveridge, a wise and tested FSO who had served as DCM in Bucharest where he was able to see Soviet 'salami-tactics' at first hand, and Lou Revey, a wonderfully intense, demanding man of Hungarian descent.

Lou understood Eastern Europe with compelling clarity, wrote incisive, often acerbic memoranda which pushed back against the increasingly hysterical atmosphere in the Dulles years and passionately resisted amateurish projects which would boomerang. This took not only brains but guts in the atmosphere in which we operated.

In sum, Lou and I (I had became his deputy) fought endless bureaucratic battles similar to the Korean atrocities project I mentioned earlier, on issues like, "Should we have thousands of Bibles dropped secretly over Eastern European countries?" Or "should we have covert distributions of various black and gray propaganda materials here and there?" Lou's principle - which did not endear him to many of the enthusiasts in USIA, the Pentagon and elsewhere, and which taught me a great lesson which I applied again and again in later stages of my work - was that you should never ask or incite people to do things if you're not prepared to back them up.

Q: The issue that came up again in Hungary in 1956?

JAEGER: Exactly, and which, but for Lou Revey, might have come up earlier in other contexts. Our work during this period was an example of the adage that the greatest successes of diplomacy sometimes have to do with things that don't happen, rather than things that do.

Q: So in USIA you had at least some who wanted to pursue responsible propaganda in the classic sense?

JAEGER: Oh, yes, as did the Eastern European desks in the Department who often helped us resist the zanier projects and hold down the gung-ho enthusiasts. They appreciated good analysis - I still have, for example in my files a memo from Bob McKisson, the then head of Eastern European Affairs at State, commending Revey's analysis of the rise of Rï¿½kosi in Hungary and my paper on the 1953 World Peace Congress in Bucharest.

Q: Who were the most gung-ho cold war warriors? The pre-war isolationists?

JAEGER: They were certainly part of it. But the main factors were Dulles' shift in emphasis from 'containment' to his forward-leaning policy of 'liberation'; the increasing stridency of McCarthyism; as well as Washington's anxiety over the fact that the USSR had acquired nuclear weapons. All this produced an over-charged atmosphere which tended to spawn Cold War propaganda projects out of touch with realities behind the Curtain and elsewhere.

Q: When USIA was formally made an independent agency, and you went with them in '53, what led to the split with State?

JAEGER: Since I worked in the Assistant Secretary's office, I had a certain amount of insight into the politics of the split-off.

The central issues really had to do with money and status. Here were 10,000-some people in the Department's overseas information business who all worked for one Assistant Secretary, whom none could equal or exceed in rank or pay regardless of their actual responsibilities. As a result pressures built up to remedy this.

In addition, the information staffs had developed a strong sense of organizational and professional identity, which, many felt, was not adequately appreciated or recognized by the State Department - which was seen as paternalistic and uninitiated into the mysteries of psychological manipulation. With the support of senior media executives in New York and elsewhere these pressures gradually prevailed.

Q: How did it work out?

JAEGER: There was much debate about the wisdom of the move, particularly since the new USIA was, in many respects feeling its way, and because, as a new cabinet-level agency, it wanted to test the scope of its new independence. So relations with State sometimes became a little tense.

USIA's first Administrator, Theodore C. Streibert, a media executive who stayed on till 1957, did get things off to a good start, since, in spite of the turbulent times in which he served, he emphasized accurate reporting and credibility. It was this which in the longer run made such an impact behind the Iron Curtain, where the 'radios', VOA, Radio Free Europe and to a lesser extent Radio Liberty, became the lifelines which connected many millions to the to the West.

Q; Why did they abolish USIA in the end under Clinton?

JAEGER: The USIA experiment lasted till 1999, when the end of the Cold War undercut the Agency's raison d'etre. So it was folded back into State and dismembered.

The irony is that the need for effective public diplomacy is now, if anything, greater than ever before, although, as George Allen, USIA's second Administrator, pointed out many years ago, information programs can only be as effective as the quality of the policies they are selling.

That's why no one has succeeded in making the world like American hegemony as practiced by Bush II, although there has been no lack of trying.

g. McCarthy's attack on USIA

Q: You must have lived through McCarthy's attacks on USIA, the Voice and the US Information Centers abroad? Can you talk about that?

JAEGER: USIA and its senior staff were among his prime targets and put us under growing pressure.

Q: Which became intense with the Republican takeover of the Senate in '53 when McCarthy assumed the Chairmanship of the Investigating Committee?

JAEGER: That's right. It was a bizarre and frightening time, partly because McCarthy played to an approving national stage. Even as late as 1954 when his star was already fading, over 50% of the American public still supported what McCarthy had been doing.

Most people today remember the Army-McCarthy hearings, which proved to be his undoing, and the outrageous antics of his abrasive assistants, Cohn and Shine, in the USIS libraries in Germany, where they removed controversial books and bullied and abused staffs. What is less well remembered is the intensity with which McCarthy pursued USIA's senior staff: Outstanding people like Reed Harris, its first Deputy Administrator, who received a severe going-over memorialized by Edward R. Murrow, and key people who worked on information issues at State, like Harold Vedeler, the distinguished FSO then in charge of Eastern European affairs.

My own experience was limited to McCarthy's inquisition of our Information Policy Staff which he suspected of being 'soft on Communism' and, perversely, of being, at the same time, insufficiently conversant with Communist ideology to combat it effectively - the accusation leveled against our very able Director Brad Connors! As a result, Connors too became one of the prime targets of the McCarthy hearings. (See Executive Sessions of the Permanent Subcommittee of Investigations of the Senate's Government Operations Committee, published 2003)

I wish I had kept a diary of those critical weeks in early 1953 when, one after another, the senior members of our group and many others from the Voice of America and our Information Services were hauled up before McCarthy's committee, or summoned for private interrogations by Cohn or Shine.

What does stick in my memory was the Kafkaesque atmosphere of fear which pervaded our meetings during this time as various members were called to testify. When Brad Connors got his summons to appear before McCarthy during a staff meeting he literally fainted. It was like being present when people were reading out execution lists during the French revolution.

The wide-spread belief was that McCarthy had an informer on our staff who was fingering people, specifically Francis Knight...

Q: Of the passport office?

JAEGER: ...who was subsequently reportedly rewarded by being made the powerful, and feared head of State's Passport Office - a job she held past retirement age until she was finally terminated under Jimmy Carter. I remember watching her participating coolly in our meetings while information that she was believed to have passed to McCarthy was being replayed against whoever was up that day before the Grand Inquisitor.

Not one of them, as far as I know, was ever proven guilty of anything. In retrospect, I had a ringside seat at a historic witch hunt, which, like others before it, damaged many and was a national disgrace. To our own surprise, neither Lou Revey or I were ever called. We did our best to carry on in spite of our demoralized senior echelon.Q: What effect that all this have on you?

JAEGER: Needless to say, it was a miserable time, which made me increasingly unenthusiastic about spending the rest of my life in Washington, in spite of its many personal attractions.

For Georgetown at the time was full of extraordinarily bright and interesting young people who shared the vision of our generation that we needed, in one way or another, to help build a better new world. And there were mentors, in my case an extraordinary man to whom I owe much, Charles Burton Marshall.

h. Charles Burton Marshall and the Policy Planning Staff

Q: Tell us about him.

JAEGER: Burt Marshall was a Harvard Ph.D. who in World War II had served as Port Commander of the Port of Manila, the supply hub for the Pacific, where he established priorities and resolved complex stand-offs between competing interests - important lessons for his later foreign affairs career.

After the war, he did a stint with the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, and then, from 1947-1950 served as Staff Consultant and I believe Staff Director for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where he developed a reputation as a keen thinker and prolific worker and became well-known in Washington. In 1950 he was asked to join Acheson's Policy Planning Staff, which Paul Nitze had just taken over from George Kennan.

It was sometime in 1951 that we met, I can't recall when or where. Whatever the circumstances, he evidently thought I had some promise and, since I had all the necessary clearances, took me on as a tutee in how foreign policy is and should be made. As a result, we spent many evenings over beer, steak or spaghetti and reviewed the issues which were at that point confronting the Policy Planning Staff until he left in 1953.

Q: What was his position or title on the staff?

JAEGER: He was just one of the 10 or 12 members. That was the thing that was so amazing and, in retrospect, so important about Acheson's Policy Planning Staff. It was constituted as a group of equals, chosen for their knowledge and good judgement, rather than as a hierarchy of ambitious, competitive people. Among them were people like Louis Halle, who later wrote an important book, still very much worth reading, called "Civilization and Foreign Policy" published by Harper in 1952, which remains a seminal text on the good management of American power. They were searchers rather than ego-trippers. That made all the difference.

The method they developed was also unique. As Burt Marshall described it, the members would discuss the issue at hand until everybody was on board. The ground rules were that one didn't lose face if one changed one's mind, even if one had argued vigorously for another position. Many of their discussions were genuinely Socratic exercises, quite unusual in bureaucracies.

The central question they faced were how the United States should respond to the unexpected new threat posed by an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union in the context of the nuclear weapons now possessed by both sides; and its subsets, how to respond to Soviet pressures in particular contexts. In trying to formulate responses, their discussions inevitably led to questions of definition, i.e. what America's ends should be in this situation, and what means were suitable to reach them. This led them to appreciate that our means should neither exceed or excessively strain our capacities, nor morally damage what we are - in short, that there was an economy of means to consider before defining a major course of action.

Put another way, they recognized that America was not omnipotent and that there were material, moral and cultural limits to our capacity to conduct our foreign relations. Marshall developed this concept as a Policy Planning Staff paper, which became the basis of his book, "The Limits of Foreign Policy", published by Henry Holt in 1955. It's still very much worth reading, particularly in the context of the current second Bush Presidency's squandering of American power on ill-defined, open-ended objectives, often using profoundly questionable means.

Now all this may sound like a verbal exercise, but unless one can answer these basic questions adequately, Marshall often stressed in our meetings, one ran the risk that means would become ends in themselves, or that posited ends would only be vaporous concepts not achievable by any imaginable means. Making the world safe for democracy comes to mind as one example, or, in today's context, the notion of an endlessly undifferentiated 'war on terror'.

For a young person in Washington, all this was tremendous education. I wrote an enthusiastic review of Halle's book for 'Commonweal', which expounds virtually the same concepts, and tried to apply and preach this basic methodology throughout my career.

Q. How did the Policy Planning Staff relate to the NSC and the White House?

JAEGER: When you look at Harry Truman's biography and Acheson's biographies there are frequent references to the Policy Planning Staff as the place they looked to for thoughtful advice on the major longer-term foreign policy issues facing the country. As a result, there was a certain degree of coherence and clarity about American policy in those early years. We now have a labyrinth of NSC working groups and interdepartmental committees, a process of bureaucratic infighting in pyramids of interdepartmental committees, which rarely produces policies based on the kind of fundamental examination the early Policy Planning Staff's Socratic meetings could achieve.

Q: So the clarity was not just due to the primary focus on the Soviet problem, but also on the method of working out policy-

JAEGER: That's right.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Acheson's role, was he an active participant?

JAEGER: Very much so. Although General Marshall had established the Policy Planning Staff, he was not a hands-on manager. It was Acheson, first as his Under Secretary and then as Secretary of State, who developed S/P, to use their in-house initials, turned it into his principal foreign policy think-tank under George Kennan, and made constant use of it by tasking it with issues and questions. The central cluster was, of course, what should be done about the Soviet Union. But there were others, for example one arising from Truman's and Acheson's concern as to how Presidential transition should be handled in the new nuclear age, since previous administrations had no mechanisms to assure foreign policy continuity. The Policy Planning Staff's paper, which Truman much appreciated, proposed the arrangements which have assured effective Presidential transition arrangements in the foreign and security fields ever since.

But this was only one of dozens of fundamental studies, which the Policy Planning Staff undertook in those years at their own initiative or at Acheson's or Truman's request.

Q: Did Acheson sit in on any of these meetings?

JAEGER: As is so often the case, the physical setup was important. Acheson wanted his thank-tank nearby, so assigned them a conference room which shared a back door to his own office. So, between his own meetings, Acheson would often take his coat off, join them or just listen to the discussions under way. It was a synergistic relationship in which Acheson played a key role.

Q: Did Marshall give you any insights into the differences between Kennan and Nitze?

JAEGER: When I met Burt Marshall, Kennan had already been succeeded by Paul Nitze. Although Acheson admired Kennan he had grown weary of Kennan's somewhat moralistic, hyper-intellectual approach. While Kennan's 'containment' policy had won general acceptance, Kennan was uncomfortable, as the Cold War ratcheted up, with Washington's growing emphasis on military means. As Kennan's views came to seem more and more unrealistic and out of touch, they created frictions.

Nitze was the counterpoint, arguing for a strong all-round American response, an outlook Acheson shared and which was reflected in NSC-68, the famous policy paper. Contrary to Kennan's much more nuanced views, it formally defined Soviet intent as world-domination and called for much more activist political, psychological, military and even nuclear containment.

I came to know Nitze slightly, and remember him with much respect and admiration: He was an elegantly brilliant figure, realistic and hard-headed but intellectually open, a man with remarkable retentive capacity, fluency and range of interests, passionate about the importance of public service.

His world, in turn, came crashing down, when John Foster Dulles was sworn in as Secretary of State, and Nitze's firm but balanced policies came into conflict with the Eisenhower administration's approach of cutting defense budgets and putting more of the weight of American security on the doctrine of massive retaliation. I remember, as Burt Marshall recounted it at the time, that Nitze came out of Dulles' office on one of his first calls white as a sheet, growling "Either he is insane or I am, and I don't think its me!"

Q: That was about 'more bang for a buck'!

JAEGER: That's right. Nitze left S/P shortly thereafter, in May 1953.

Q: Nitze was generally thought to be quite hawkish throughout most of his career until perhaps the '80s when he seemed to reverse his position.

JAEGER: Perhaps. He always remained clear about America's strategic interests, but became a strong believer in building down the two sides' by then vast nuclear forces and became our leading arms control negotiator. Strobe Talbott has captured this brilliantly in his book on Nitze, "The Master of the Game", published by Knopf in 1988.

Q: Well, these were all fascinating experiences. But let's now get back to your career. Here you were in the midst of the McCarthy attacks on USIA trying to do good work on Eastern Europe. What happened next?

JAEGER: By the spring of '54 I decided that I needed a reprieve from the McCarthy-dominated Washington atmosphere (McCarthy had not yet been censured and the Army-McCarthy hearings were still in full swing) and asked Harvard if they would allow me to come back. They promptly agreed, the State Department to which I was still formally attached, granted me a year's leave of absence and, feeling somewhat like a political refugee, I was back in Cambridge by late September as a Resident Tutor and Teaching Fellow, ensconced in a very comfortable oak-paneled suite in Adams House with a working fire place.

Q: That must have been pleasant.

JAEGER: It was a reassuring experience. Elliott asked me to be one of his assistants in his famous "Political Theory" course which gave me a chance to steep myself in many of the basic texts, from Plato to Marx - a needed refresher, since I had to teach sections of thirty-some students twice a week. Later on I did the same for McGeorge Bundy, the brilliant young Harvard Dean, in his "International Politics" course. Much time was also taken by my duties at Adams House, tutoring students majoring in government, advising on senior theses and joining students and other faculty members around the long polished dining room tables at lunch or dinner, where the daily discussions ranged across the spectrum and were an important part of the undergraduates', and my own further education.

A few experiences may be worth recording. One involved a young Jordanian tutee, son of a former Prime Minister, a very good student with whom I worked during most of that year. He began to slip in the second semester and was clearly paying the price for carousing. Things came to a head one day, when our meeting went particularly badly, when he stopped, looked at me and said, 'Mr. Jaeger, what I really need to know, does Allah exist? Does he?". I knew we had come to the crux of the matter, made a difficult decision and said: "Yes". It was a critical moment and my first direct experience with the corrosive impact of Western culture on Middle Eastern faith, which has caused so much difficulty in our relations over the last decades. We were to meet again many years later when he was Prime minister of Jordan.

Other tutees were very different, such as the brilliantly febrile Charlie Brower (son of the advertising executive of the same name, who had been the immensely successful President of B.B.D&O) with whom I spent many hours, analyzing and discussing. He later had an impressive legal career, became Acting Legal Advisor at the State Department, a Senior Partner at White and Case and later a Judge at the International Court of Arbitration, but never felt satisfied that he had reached his real potential. Wisdom is the hardest thing to teach.

And, by way of counter point, there was the tutee who trepidatiously knocked on my Adams House door a few minutes after I had encountered a thoroughly naked young lady retreating down the hallway waving a towel. In 1954 this was still a capital crime, which called for blood and expulsion. His question, "Could I somehow manage not to have noticed?" I was assured that the entire floor would be in my eternal debt, and that none would ever again cause me any trouble. They never did.

My own affairs were more opaque. Out of the blue an offer arrived from Wesleyan University of an Assistant Professorship in Political Science - a wonderfully generous offer, since one usually started as an Instructor, instigated by Prof. Sigmund Neuman. It forced me to examine my life and to decide what I really wanted to do.

I came to the conclusion that I really didn't want to be a college professor, but wanted to apply what I had learned in the Foreign Service, even though it would mean coming in at the bottom. The trouble was that one had to be an American citizen for 10 years in order to join. Having been naturalized as a GI during basic training in Alabama in January 1945, I couldn't apply until the spring of '55, which I then promptly did.

i. Too foreign-born to join the Foreign Service

Q: So how did you make out?

JAEGER: Well, I passed the written examination with adequate grades and then went before the Board of Examiners for orals in Boston in November. My examiners turned out to be stereotypical Consul General-types with vests and watch chains who asked questions for over an hour. I got all but two right and thought I was in.

Q: So what did happen?

JAEGER: The custom at that time was that the examiners would go into executive session after the interview, had you wait outside and then told you whether you had passed or failed. In my case the chairman came out and said, "Well, Mr. Jaeger, you did splendidly, but you see, we have enough native-born Americans, so we don't need to take foreign-born applicants. The Board has therefore decided against you."

Q: So you were caught again by your foreign-born status?

JAEGER: That's right. Mercifully things have changed a great deal since then, but its interesting how recently discrimination was still alive and well in the Foreign Service.

Q: So then, how did you actually get into the Foreign Service.

JAEGER: As you can imagine I was outraged and decided to write to Cromwell Riches, the then Executive Director of the Board of Examiners in Washington, to ask for an appointment. After I told him my story, he got out my file and confirmed that I had indeed done "very well" and had been turned down only because I was foreign-born. I said, "Well, Mr. Riches, is that really how America should run its affairs?"

He gave me a long look and said, "Actually, no. And we're going to do something about that!" He then explained that he couldn't change the board's decision, that I would have to go through the whole exam process a second time, but that he himself would chair the Board before which I would retake my orals. He then added rather emphatically, "My advice is that you have a thorough knowledge of Gunther's Inside USA." I was a bit mystified, but took the hint and virtually memorized both volumes of this then very popular book in the ensuing months.

To cut a long story short, I appeared before Cromwell Riches and three other examiners in Washington on March 19, 1956 and fielded esoteric questions for an hour and a half, all of which he had taken directly out of Gunther's Inside USA: Questions like. "What are the chief imports in the port of Galveston in the winter?", or "Who was the poet laureate of Tennessee in such and such a year?"

Q: Was this to demonstrate to the other members of the board that you knew America so well, that being foreign-born didn't matter?

JAEGER: That's right. I was challenged by another board member on only one answer involving the author of a particular poem. Riches intervened and said, "I looked this up before I asked the question. The candidate is right!"

Q: Ouch!

JAEGER: When it was all over Mr. Riches simply looked right and left and he said, "There is no question, is there, my colleagues, that this foreign-born American should be a member of the Foreign Service?" Everybody nodded. And that's how I got it in.

It took a bit of smoke and mirrors, but it got me there.

Part III: Early years: Consular training, the Estimates Group and Liberia

Q: Now let's talk about your new life in the Foreign Service.

JAEGER: Well, it began with a bit of a setback, since I was appointed as an FSO-6, but, because of a short delay to take a vacation, unexpectedly fell under a new law restructuring the Foreign Service and so was sworn in in July 1956 as an FSO-8!

1. The Consular Course

JAEGER: Be that as it may, some twenty of us reported full of high expectations for Basic Officers Training, a course then housed in a rather run-down four story brownstone building on C Street, where the present State Department building is now located. Each of us was given an old-fashioned school desk surrounded by dark stains, the sweat of earlier generations of young FSOs who had sat there through stifling hot Washington summers before us!

We were all very excited about starting our new careers, even though the training turned out to be pedestrian. First came some broad-brush weeks on State Department organization and history, with lots of dull charts and tables of organization. Then came the famous basic consular course, a six-week effort to teach us consular law and practice, since most of us were expected to start as consular officers. It droned on through the hot summer, and was less a learning experience than an endurance test. Consular law was still strict in those days, and it was impressed on us that we would judge, in light of the 600-some pages of consistently inconsistent Immigration law, who would make the grade and got visas and who would not.

Q: Normally FSI is thought of in terms of foreign language courses.

JAEGER: They do that too, of course. The thing I found most interesting was that in this introductory course there was no mention, as far as I can remember, of either foreign affairs or the policy making process. There were talks on practical issues like security, efficiency reports, per diem, travel arrangements etc. which were useful. But a visiting outsider asking how America trained its incoming diplomats would have been amused and disappointed at the lack of substantive discussion.

Q: It reminds me of how the navy taught me to be a paymaster.

JAEGER: Even so, it was an important experience, in which many of us bonded and all of us assumed our new Foreign Service identity. The people I remember most clearly were Tom Hirschfeld - a clear, and witty thinker who, to the distress of some subsequent superiors had a disconcerting tendency to go to the heart of the matter - with whom I later served in Germany, and who, with his lovely wife Hannah, has remained a lifelong friend. There was Doug Hartley, always positive and sane, who too has continued to stay in touch.

Another was Jay Peter Moffat, the gifted, rather aristocratic son of a former Under Secretary famous for opposing the liberalization of immigration law which would have permitted Jews to escape Nazi Germany. Peter, as he was called, genuinely liked me, introduced me to the concept of 'A' and 'B' social lists when giving a party, and once said to me earnestly that it was too bad that, even though I was brighter than he, he would become an Ambassador before me because of his better connections. He was right.

Then there was quiet and reserved Jack Matlock, the brightest and most hard-working of all of us, who later became famous as Ambassador in Moscow during the Gorbachev/Yeltsin period; as well as Peter Lord and Everett Briggs, both destined to become heavy hitters.

2. The Estimates Group

Q: When did they hand out your first assignments?

JAEGER: The great moment came at the end of the summer. For me it was not a surprise, since, throughout that spring and summer, I had been in touch with Allan Evans, the third-ranking officer in the State Department's then huge Bureau of Intelligence and Research in charge of 500-some researchers and analysts, organized, like the State Department itself, into major regional and functional offices.

Evans had suggested, while I was still at Harvard, that I join his office as a mid-level civil servant, to serve as Secretary to the Estimates Group, succeeding Henry Owen, an already rather renowned senior figure who was about to move on to the Policy Planning Staff. He later became a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, and still later served in the White House. When I made my choice to become a career Foreign Service Officer Allan Evans nevertheless accepted this kindly and had me brought in as an FSO-8! This was an additional challenge for me, since I had to prove myself in a quite senior assignment, replacing a very respected official at the top of the civil service scale.

Q. Tell us about Allan Evans, he sounds unusual.

JAEGER: He was. Allan Evans was originally English, had during the war been seconded to the OSS in London in a senior liaison capacity, became an American citizen after the war and was brought over into the State Department as the number-three man in INR in charge of the hundreds of research analysts who had been brought in when OSS was dissolved. He was an urbane, widely read, utterly civilized man, who ran his research empire with a bemused touch and a misleading air of seeming absent-mindedness. Evans clearly understood that good policy judgement had to rest on incisive analysis. His primary effort therefore was to make sure that happened, which is where the Estimates Group came in.

Q: So what did the Estimates Group do?

JAEGER: The Estimates Group was the committee of INR's regional and functional Office Directors (the people in charge of the various research branches, like the Middle East, Europe, the USSR or Economic issues) which Evans had created to vet the State Department's contributions to National or Special Intelligence Estimates. NIEs and SNIEs, then as now, were the coordinated judgments of the entire intelligence Community based on each agency's written contributions. Subjects ranged across the spectrum, from the annual NIE on the USSR, to NIE's on regional trends and individual countries. SNIs were the special estimates on faster-moving crisis situations.

The system Allan Evans developed to assure that INR produced sound, airtight analyses was bureaucratically unique and, I thought, very effective. Each NIE draft contribution, for example a country paper on Egypt, was distributed to and studied by all the other Office Directors and then discussed when they met as a body in an Estimates Group meeting, chaired by Allan Evans.

My rather perilous and exciting job was to be the front office gadfly at these meetings, because Allan Evans didn't want to ask all the nasty questions of the senior members of his staff. The idea was not to flatter the authors, but to critique and ask pointed, sometimes painful questions, to see if the draft was comprehensive and could stand up to critical analysis. If it did it was sent on to the CIA as the State contribution. If not, and that was often the case as a result of these meetings, which usually occurred twice, even three times a week, they were amended and sometimes even completely rewritten.

The reason this made not only substantive but bureaucratic sense and produced no enmities, was that all the Office Directors subjected each other to this process, no one was singled out, and all agreed that it greatly improved the result. The point was to make sure that the State Department's contribution didn't simply replay the pet themes of some particular analyst or Office Director in INR, but represented a balanced and coherent view.

Q: Walk us through the process from the start to the finished NIE.

JAEGER: Some NIE's were ordered by the White House, some requested by one of the agencies in the Intelligence Community, some were periodic, like the Soviet estimate, which was done on an annual basis. A calendar was established by the CIA, determining when contributions from all agencies were due. Then drafts would be prepared around town, in our case in the appropriate office of INR, which was then vetted through the Estimates Group as we just discussed and submitted to the Agency.

CIA's analysts would then incorporate all this material, including its own contribution, into a composite draft NIE which would be reviewed at one or more inter-agency meetings at which everyone was represented. When, as was often the case, there were differences, i.e. between State and Army or the CIA, they were either reconciled or, if that proved impossible, the dissenting agency or Department would "take a foot note", indicating that it did not agree with this or that judgement and why. This put policy makers reading the NIE on notice that there were differences of opinion. In some cases these footnoted judgments were important red flags involving major issues.

All this was of course an absolutely fabulous education, although, being very junior, my role as the institutional gadfly was frequently delicate. I somehow managed it, nevertheless, without making permanent enemies of the powerful division chiefs. The ones I liked and admired most were Phil Habib, later of Saigon-fame, Ed Doherty, a wonderful Irish intellectual who was a kind and generous mentor, and the brilliant and incisive Charlton Ogburn, who, after he left State, wrote "The Marauders", a best-seller on his combat experiences in Burma and a series of books on the authorship of Shakespeare's plays which attracted wide interest. His account of his travels along the north eastern shore in "The Winter Beach" is considered a classic of nature-writing.

Q: Do any of these NIE's stand out in your recollections?

JAEGER: Yes, the urgent Sputnik SNIE of 1957, after the Russians had put their first satellite in orbit - a breakthrough which had come as quite a shock to the American government and public.

Q: What was your role in this?

JAEGER: Well, Allan Evans asked me to coordinate and be one of the coauthors of the State Department's contribution. The general line was that America, because of budget cuts, lassitude and educational problems, had fallen behind the curve; that the Russians had stolen a march on us; that this was having, and would have, a considerable adverse propaganda effect throughout the world which would affect perceptions of the US in the cold war, and that, in effect, we needed to pull up our socks.

We thought that was an unexceptionable and correct position. So did most of our colleagues in the CIA whose contribution ran along similar lines, until Allen Dulles, the then CIA Director, took the preliminary draft to President Eisenhower. According to then accounts Eisenhower went through the roof and asked Dulles to have the SNIE toned down significantly.

Q: Eisenhower objected to crediting the Russians with any such lead?

JAEGER: He clearly wanted a less exciting paper.

Q: But there already was much excitement in the press and Congress!

JAEGER: Of course. Perhaps Ike didn't want to add unnecessarily to the hysteria or was less alarmed because he may have been confident that we would soon catch up and surpass the Soviets, as we did with 'Explorer' in 1958.

Be that as it may, what I recall was that there were two successive meetings with Allen Dulles to which I was taken along by Allan Evans and another colleague. At the first, in the Old Brewery in Washington, Allen Dulles asked whether the people responsible for this paper would agree to tone it down as the President had requested. No one agreed. I remember Allen Dulles sitting there, puffing his pipe, and glaring at us. Everybody was fidgeting and was, of course, extremely uncomfortable. The best he could get was an agreement to make a few minor editorial revisions, which wouldn't really change the thrust of the paper.

Shortly thereafter there was a second meeting at a secure site, I think in New Jersey, at which the slightly revised version of paper was on the agenda,. We landed in a helicopter on a golf course surrounded by guards with Tommy guns and met in the country club. When the SNIE came up we went through pretty much the same scenario. It was one of those exceptional times when the working folks in the government stood their ground. Although somewhat lower key in tone, the final SNIE stuck to its guns - judgments which were important in providing the intelligence basis for accelerating our technological and educational efforts in this country.

Q: Do you think the Sputnik estimate made a major contribution to that?

JAEGER: I think it played a role. Those who wanted to save defense dollars would have preferred something that said, "Look, this is a just blip on the landscape, a Soviet PR exercise, which doesn't really mean very much." What this paper deprived them of was the ability to add, "and the intelligence community agrees with us." They could still make the argument, but they couldn't claim to base themselves on our best collective judgment. It was all very heady stuff for an FSO-8!

Q: Speaking of estimates, what about the reaction to the Hungarian and Suez crises in the fall of '56?

JAEGER: That happened when I was just getting my feet wet, so my memory is a bit hazy, except that there were very intense discussions. One of the concepts was Habib's "mattress theory of the Middle East", the idea that if you push down on one end it will pop up on the other. While not very scientific, I still think of it occasionally as the Middle East goes through successive action/reaction cycles.

Q: Do you remember any other subjects on which NIEs were prepared?

JAEGER: There were many: On the state and likelihood of further nuclear proliferation, on various regional political and economic trends, i.e. the prospects for military dictatorship Latin America and estimates on many individual countries. I remember being asked to take the lead on a SNIE on Antarctica, which I helped launch, contributed to and guided through the process. I still have a letter of commendation from the then head of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Hugh Cummings, on this work. Last, but far from least, was the major annual NIE on the Soviet Union, which absorbed a great deal of our energy. Some of these SNIEs and NIE's have been declassified and can now be studied with the benefit of hindsight.

Q: Quite an experience for a first assignment!

JAEGER: For me it was all fascinating, multifaceted work, which stretched me. I was pretty good at analyzing logical sequences and finding gaps in accounts and arguments, or playing devil's advocate for some proposition not dealt with in a draft, but had as yet had no direct experience in any of the places we discussed.

In retrospect, I have learned how important it is to understand countries not only in the abstract but from the "inside", and wonder how naive I must have seemed to some of my much more experienced colleagues. Even so they were consistently tolerant of my sometimes very persistent probing. Officialdom also seemed satisfied and I received my first promotion to the exalted level of FSO-7 in March of 1958! When I left INR that summer Allan Evans sent me one of the kindest and most appreciative letters I have ever received, thanking me for my work with him. He was a gentleman, a scholar and a kindly prince.

Q: One last question before we move on. What happened to INR institutionally since then?

JAEGER: Over the years, the intelligence side of the State Department was cut back to its present modest size through successive budget cuts. While this saved money, it represented a huge loss of institutional memory, since the hundreds of civil servants who staffed it in those post-war years were sometimes rumpled, crotchety or odd, but, for all that, highly qualified academics and specialists inherited from wartime agencies. They had collectively watched and could recall the ins and out of every corner of the globe, either from memory or because they had squirreled away the information in their many bulging file cabinets. The State Department's other bureaus necessarily had a much shorter memory span, since the FSO's who staffed them were moved in and out of country assignments every two to four years. As INR shrank, its memory base disappeared proportionally, although it did preserve a tradition of taking the longer view.

That this can be crucial was again shown in INR's recent dissents from intelligence community judgments claiming Saddam Hussein was building weapons of mass destruction which erroneously helped to justify the second Iraq war.

3. Liberia

Q: Where did you go from INR?

In July of 1958 my phone rang one day and someone from Personnel said, "Well, Mr. Jaeger, you seem to have done okay in your first assignment, but we have the feeling you've so far been looking at the Foreign Service from one end of the telescope. We thought that your next assignment should give you a chance to see it through the other."

"Well, what do you have in mind?", I said, thinking we were now starting an urbane negotiation. "Actually I am calling to tell you ", he said, "that you have been assigned as Third Secretary of Embassy for Commercial Affairs in Monrovia, Liberia!" I blurted out, "Where on earth is that?"

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: The guy said, "Well, you need to find out, that's one of the reasons you're going there. You're to report there in three weeks."

Needless to say that was a bit more of a shock than a surprise, since my Washington career had so far been in relatively high- level jobs and I had somehow developed the idea that things would simply continue that way. The notion of being a 'third' secretary in a country I could only place vaguely as being somewhere on the west-African coast, did not fit these expectations. I was to learn within a matter weeks that the Personnel people in fact had it absolutely right: First, because up to that point I had no idea what the bread and butter work in the Foreign Service was all about and had much to learn; and secondly, because, as it turned out, Liberia was to be one of the most important experience of my life and a place which, to my great surprise, I came to love.

Q: So you left the comforts of Washington for the trenches on the equator.

JAEGER: That's right, although this first involved getting properly equipped. The key to any degree of success in Monrovia, I discovered was being properly dressed, - which in those days, when William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman was still President, meant the 'works': White tie, black tie, morning coat, white gloves, spats, and of course a sturdy collapsible topper, all of which one acquired at S.S.S. Schwartz, the famous Foreign Service haberdasher in a Baltimore loft who has clothed generations of FSO's for their assignments across the globe.

When, after some searching, I found their establishment, one of the three Schwartz brothers promptly told me to stand on a wooden box, asked where I was going and shouted to some assistants across many racks of clothing, "Monrovia"! The needed accoutrements appeared in succession from various corners of the loft, Mr. Schwartz fitted me with incisive expertise, told me that George Kennan had been there just a short time ago, congratulated me and wished me luck.

When I had completed my next purchase, a used black two-door Ford, which I had fitted with extra-heavy springs to withstand what I had been told were Liberia's abominable roads, and had consigned my modest worldly goods to the shipping company, I was set to go.

a. Leaving Washington

This first overseas trip since I had returned from Europe at the end of World War II was an exciting prospect, although it meant leaving behind not only my, by now elderly, parents in Kansas City, but an intense and happy social life in Washington. Georgetown in the '50s was full of interesting people, who, to a much greater extent than I experienced in later years, seemed seriously dedicated to solving world problems and shared a sense of personal commitment which often transcended careers.

Among them were my old Harvard roommate Frank Keenan, now a liberal Republican staffer on the Hill, and his lovely new wife Joan; Guy Wiggins, an elegantly rakish and witty fellow-FSO who later, following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps became an accomplished painter; Larry Carp, a young lawyer who had served briefly in the State Department, become Associate Counsel of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights in '56 and then went on to a very successful career as an immigration lawyer in St. Louis, and a lifetime of passionately boosting and contributing to the UN - most recently as a Public Member of the US Delegation; urbane and somewhat older Jeff Kitchen, involved, I always thought, in less visible government activities, and his brilliant wife, who ran a magazine on Africa and brought us in contact with some later famous African leaders like young, idealistic Julius Nyerere; and Peter Warker, my housemate at Mary Crook's on Legation Street, also in the Foreign Service, who would go on to a career as an Eastern European specialist and later worked in several private corporations.

b. Sadako Ogata

Last, but far from least among our Georgetown group was Sadako Nakamura, later Sadako Ogata, the recently famous head of the United Nations Refugee Organization, admired for her indefatigable efforts on behalf of millions of refugees in the first Iraq war, the Bosnian war and during a multiplicity of other concurrent dreadful crises.

The Sadako we knew in those earlier years was a lovely, keenly interested, hardworking young Japanese graduate student at Georgetown, whose modesty and humor concealed that she was the granddaughter of a former Japanese Prime Minister, a member of Japan's aristocracy and had, from childhood had a ringside seat at the cascade of events which ultimately led the Japanese to total disaster.

I came to know 'Sada' well, was very fond of her, and much admired her fierce dedication to clear thinking about international problems and quiet determination to be of service to humanity. It's one of the wonderful things about following people's careers, that, some actually achieve what they set out to do. My wife Pat and I met her again fifty years later over dinner in New York, after she had retired from the UN. Although now an elder statesperson, somewhat bent, her face marked by years of long and difficult service, she was still battling on, speaking of the book she had written on her years at UNHCR and the new projects and commitments she was undertaking, for Japan and the UN.

c. Off to Monrovia

Q: So you went off to Monrovia?

JAEGER: Yes, in September 1958. Getting there was an experience in itself, since I crossed the Atlantic on a Pan American Clipper which took off from the East River in New York, stopped some 18 hours later in the Azores and eventually got to Lisbon. It was the first and last time I really enjoyed a commercial flight. The plane had commodious seats, which, at night transformed into full-length double decked bunks, as in a Pullman car; excellent meals were prepared by an onboard cook and served on crisply pressed linen table cloths in genuine china with silverware. When dinner and 'digestives' were finished the stewardesses made up our bunks, which had curtains so that you could put on pajamas, stretch out and get a good nights sleep. I still remember that, just before I dozed off in a cozy upper, a hand pulled my curtain aside a bit and, as a last nice touch, a voice asked what I would like for a nightcap? I recall a very satisfying vintage Cognac!

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: After Lisbon, life got real on Pan Am's long, much more basic, but equally memorable flight across the West African Sahara and the Sahel to Roberts Field in Liberia; which had been built by the US in 1942 and 1943 as part of a backdoor route, via Brazil, to ferry supplies and troops to the North African campaign. Together with the Port of Monrovia, Roberts Field and the 5000-some US troops based in Liberia at the time, also assured access to Liberia's huge rubber resources, primarily at the Firestone plantation, which were critically important in World War II as well.

On our flight I had my first encounter with a cross-section of Africa's colorful traveling public - weary-looking Lebanese traders, some returning European business people, marked by years of living in the tropics, and all sorts of African men and women in a variety of striking robes and headgear speaking a multiplicity of languages. It was also an impressive introduction to West Africa's very different climate, since we passed through immense thunderclouds over the Sahara which shook our plane like a butterfly in the wind and left us all very glad when we finally landed safely at Roberts Field! And that, in spite of the unkempt air of its wet, desolate-looking landing strip carved out of the bush, the pathetic little hut which was the only airport building and the several snakes I noticed then and later under the benches in the small, stiflingly hot waiting room. Whether or not they were deadly mambas has remained unclear.

Q: Sounds like quite a trip!

JAEGER: Yes, it was the transition from one world to another. Waiting for me in the grey rainy season drizzle, was Bill Rush - my rumpled-looking new boss, the head of the Embassy's two-man economic section of which I was to be the junior member - who bundled me into a black Embassy car for the 20 mile drive on unpaved laterite roads into Monrovia.

I don't remember much of our conversation because I was so astonished by the succession of native Liberian villages we passed, which, with their thatched huts set in palm groves, bare-breasted women and naked children, looked just like New Yorker cartoons. The experience was rounded out by village men, suffering from schistosomiasis and therefore urinating frequently, simply turning in our direction, so as not to miss the passing show, and spraying away.

Needless to say, by the time we arrived at the Embassy compound and Bill got me settled down in the quite comfortable house I was to share with Bob Allen, the Political Officer, I had a first-rate case of culture shock! It was during a little reception which had been arranged to welcome me that Bill Rush memorably recognized the symptoms and said: "Actually George, you look like a rabbit. We'll have to see what we can do with you."

Q: Laughter.

JAEGER: Not, I thought, a very good beginning!

d. Learning about WAWA: Crashed fire engines and sinkingships

Over my first weekend I ventured out to explore downtown Monrovia, at the time a depressing scene of badly maintained buildings, rusting corrugated roofs and potholed streets.

As I stood at the main intersection, wondering which way to head next, I suddenly heard what I thought were two fire engines. When I saw them, coming up the left and right sides of the same block on whose corner I was standing, I realized that they couldn't see each other, but were heading straight toward my corner where they were going to meet. I thought: "No, they're not going to do this! They are not going to do this!" But, they did! They totaled each other in front of me, sirens still going!

Next day, Monday, I attended my first staff meeting, and was welcomed by Ambassador Richard Lee Jones, a mild, friendly African-American who had been a Chicago department store executive, and one of the few black brigadier generals in the US Army during World War II.

Q: Just to interject, were there other blacks in the Embassy staff at that time?

JAEGER: Only the Public Affairs officer, a tall, competent, very nice man.

Q: Well, continue the story about this first staff meeting.

JAEGER: Everyone around the table made some report. When my turn came, having just arrived, it was assumed that I would just briefly say how pleased I was to be there. Instead I spoke up and said, "Well, I do have something to report, that is that I took a walk downtown yesterday and saw two fire engines, both pretty new, which totaled each other coming at speed from two sides of the same block."

The Ambassador just said, "Oh my God!"

I then learned that these fire engines had only a few weeks earlier arrived from the States and been ceremoniously turned over as a present to President Tubman. I had witnessed their virgin call to duty - with its disastrous results!

The next event was even more unnerving. Only a few days or so later was to be the great ceremonial launch of the first Liberian-built and owned cargo ship at a dry dock on the Mesurado River, a project specially dear to President Tubman. Although Liberia's flag vessels were crisscrossing the oceans, and so brought in a certain amount of income, up to that point not even one ship was actually owned by Liberia, much less constructed there. This launch was intended to remedy that and show the world that Liberia had the potential to become a real, albeit small part, part of the maritime scene.

Be that as it may, everybody who was anybody in the country was in the reviewing stand that sweltering day; the band struck up the national anthem, "The Love of Liberty brought us here"; Liberian flags did their best to flutter slightly in the stifling heat; and the huge wooden ship began to slip sideways toward the river after Mrs. Antoinette Tubman had vigorously swung the bottle and christened it.

Then everyone sucked in their breaths. For the ship slid and slid and kept on sliding - until it hit the water and began to sink! At first no one could believe their eyes. But there it was, the few sailors on board had jumped off into the dirty river, pretty soon the deck began to disappear, then the bridge went under, until, with a final shudder and a huge belch, the smokestack vanished under the lazy brown-green flow! There was a deathly silence, only punctured by the oinking of some frogs, until, after what seemed like an eternity, Tubman rose slowly and walked out.

What had happened was that the inexperienced shipwrights had indeed built a lovely ship, but had used heavy hard woods, abundant in Liberia, and then compounded the problem by fitting the vessel with a set of heavy engines. The 'Antoinette Tubman' never had a chance.

The Westerners that week made mostly snide comments and chattered about "WAWA" ("West Africa wins again!"), although, as I came to understand, there was poignancy in these often failed and even ludicrous attempts to bring Liberia up to Western standards: The result either of inadequate preparation and training, or, more often, a consequence of the deep cultural differences between our societies which frequently produced wholly unexpected reactions or results.

It was on this instructive note that my assignment in Liberia began.

e. First trips upcountry

Q: What were the next lessons?

JAEGER: I was to learn over the coming months that Bill Rush was a very bright guy and a pretty good economist, but that, most importantly, he had come to understand that you didn't learn much of any importance in West Africa by hanging around the Embassy social circuit - then, as probably now, a hyper-active cultural defense mechanism against the real and imagined risks of actually getting involved in Africa.

Instead he believed in going out into the bush as often as we could, meeting chiefs, missionaries, district commissioners, traders and our own economic development people at work in the up-country areas, as well as ordinary Africans. As a result we came to understand the country and its problems, were better able to advise on what might or might not work, and often scooped the folks who stayed in town following the rumor mill. Bill's tough love, hands-on training was a tremendous lesson on how, in principle, good reporting and analysis should be done.

Q: How did Rush start you off?

JAEGER: Well, at the outset I understood none of that, and was therefore intensely surprised when, on the second weekend after my arrival, Bill stopped by my desk and announced that "we are leaving at eight tomorrow to go up-country. Try to be on time and have your gear ready for an overnight" !

I felt too intimidated to ask where we were going or why, but was ready with a little pack at the appointed time, piled into our jeep and set off. Bill drove about hundred miles north towards Gbarnga on a terribly potholed and rutted laterite road, passing village after village - with their palaver huts, topless women pounding cassava, naked children and more and more forlorn-looking Lebanese traders the farther north one went - stopping only occasionally to call on someone, and then continuing.

Q: What's laterite?

JAEGER: It's reddish dirt, prevalent in most of Liberia - red because of its high iron ore content.

Q: Oh.

JAEGER: None of this helped much with my culture shock and growing confusion as to what, less than two weeks out of Georgetown, I was doing in this god-forsaken wilderness! To make things worse, it was beginning to get dark. Being the new junior, and trying to get an idea what the plan was, I said, "You know, Bill, I haven't made any reservations (!). Where do you think we should stay tonight?" He burst out laughing, and allowed as to how as yet he hadn't figured that out either, but added cheerfully "Let's see what we can do."

So, a few miles on, he turned into a sketchy path which eventually led to a village where Bill asked for the chief. When we found him in the palaver hut, (an airy thatch-roofed structure found in most villages where the men discuss policy issues and hang out while the women pound cassava and do most of the other work) Bill told him that we needed a place to stay and wondered, pointing suggestively to some gin we had brought along, "if we could also have a little party".

All this seemed very agreeable to the chief; some topless ladies were promptly dispatched to sweep out a hut (the Maidenform bra was to appear in Liberia only in the following year); a tom-tom sounded just as in the movies to summon people to the celebration; and we were soon installed in our new mud-walled, utterly bare home - with people of all ages crowding the empty window frames to watch us unpack our kits.

Actually, we got off rather lightly that night, since on another occasion, still farther in the interior, a big menacing growl went up from the onlookers in the windows as we began eating the food we always brought along; which, it was explained by a youngster who knew some English, expressed their shock that we didn't wash before eating - as "Africans always do!".

We, of course, offered to do so, and soon saw an amply endowed woman set down a little wooden board outside our hut, followed by a steaming enamel basin of hot water, both clearly meant to be used for our wash. So we went out, stood on the board, washed hands and faces, smiled all round and went back to try to eat.

No way! There were more, and more menacing growls, growing quickly louder. What was required, we were told, and what all people from that village did when they came in from the bush, was that we strip and let the nice woman wash us properly!

Bill, shaking with laughter, suggested that I go first. So I shed my clothes, stood on the board and grimly determined to let myself be cleansed, as a circle of intensely interested young onlookers of both sexes pressed in closer and closer to get a good look at all aspects of this amazing white phenomenon. My turn to laugh came moments later when it was Bill's turn to strip tease!

My experience on our first upcountry trip was less taxing. A big fire was started in the village center as we were eating our rations and, after a while, more and more women began chanting and dancing around it, to the stirring beat of the 'big' drums which sounded out over great distances, and the staccato cross rhythms of the smaller ones - some set on the ground, others held under the arms of the village musicians.

As the gin and palm wine made the rounds, the dancers' movements became more hypnotic, and they began to glow and glisten in the fire light as they danced and danced till the wee hours of the morning! Listening to the chanting and the pounding drums reach out across the vast dark night sky and the endless African bush all around us, was a deeply moving, humanizing experience, which on our many later trips I came to love. It is an amazing discovery when one comes to understand that these people, so much closer culturally to the stone age, are as essentially human as we are, and, like us, have constructed belief systems, reflected in ceremonies, music and art, to explain the mystery of what and where we are.

Exciting as all this was, my first night in the bush nevertheless became rather harrowing. We slept, or rather tried to sleep, in hammocks which we had hung up on the hut's wooden rafters, although rats kept trying to make it down the ropes, mosquitos and other insects buzzed around our nets, and the chief sent around two of his wives, in a well-meant offer, which we gratefully declined!

The next day, as we drank the coffee we had made, I realized that I had in fact survived - and overcome my fears! That, of course was Bill's point, and from then on I began to enjoy and savor my new life of exploring and coming to understand this complex and fascinating African country. By quickly getting me over my instinctive anxieties about Africa, Bill had done me a huge favor which made my assignment in Liberia one of the best in my career.

f. Reporting on Liberia

Q: Good. What did you work on on these upcountry trips?

JAEGER: We would focus on the state of the rural economy, the impact of development projects, how our AID projects were doing, or what the chiefs and missionaries had on their minds about local conditions or government policy. We usually came back with first-hand information on the state of rubber at Firestone and other plantations, the rice and cassava crops, Liberia's major iron mining project in the Nimba mountains in the north bordering Guinea, the illicit diamond trade with Sierra Leone or political nuggets nobody in Monrovia knew about - all of which helped make our reporting real.

Q: Much of your work must also have been focused on the more conventional sectors of Liberia's economy?

JAEGER: Most of it, in fact, was focused on Liberia's expanding economy, the result of President Tubman's opening of the country to foreign investment. It had produced a boomlet by the 1950's, not only at the Freeport of Monrovia, which attracted all sorts of distributors, but across the spectrum. For instance, investors came who wanted to gobble up as much as a million hectares of Liberia's prime timber lands full of valuable hardwoods, including ebony - a case in which I got into a major scrape by advising that no kickbacks should be paid. (Tubman personally let Ambassador Jones know that he was "vexed", although the latter to his credit backed me up). Others wanted to build hotels, roads, infrastructure, all, of course, badly needed; and, most importantly, there was the huge new LAMCO investment, by the Liberian-American Minerals Company, a mega-million Swedish/American consortium, which was preparing to mine the rich Nimba iron ore deposits. This required building a railroad to carry the ore from high on the Guinean border to the port of Buchanan and the modernization and expansion of that port. All of this called for extensive reporting and analysis of implications for the future.

Q: Do you remember some of your reporting?

JAEGER: Some of it, and for a variety of reasons.

i. My very first Despatch (sic).

Just after I had arrived, Bill Rush asked me to take look at a small rubber plantation, which was doing poorly. I went to visit it, came back with a lot of notes and impressions and wrote an ingoing five page analysis with reflections on the rubber industry in general and this poor specimen in particular - a first effort of of which I was rather proud. It came back the next day with a fat red line across it and the comment: Boil! So I boiled it down a bit. It came back again. We played this game for over a week, by which time my masterpiece had been reduced to one tight page, and finally came back signed! The lesson: Good reports should be concise and to the point if they are meant to be read in Washington!

Q: Well, that was a learning experience for a Harvard man!

ii. Trade complaints and the Salami brothers

The bread and butter work of a Third Secretary for Commercial Affairs in those days were the trade complaints filed with the Commerce Department by American businesses, in our case almost invariably against Monrovia's many Lebanese traders; usually matters of bills not paid or sales agreements not lived up to.

Whatever it was, each required a trip to Waterstreet - pulsing with dense crowds of all sorts of tribal people, Bassa, Kpelle, Mende, the seagoing Kru, or tall, aquiline Mandingos from Guinea and beyond, and their usually still topless women effortlessly balancing heavy loads on their heads. This is where most of the Lebanese had their metal-shuttered depots and retail businesses, all smelling pungently of spices, dried fish and mounds of rice and other staples, where you could buy virtually anything, from frozen Danish steaks to nails, screwdrivers or even cars. Among them Salami Brothers were preeminent.

Whoever it was, our conversations, usually over a lukewarm Coke, were invariably civilized and friendly and involved long obscure explanations why there had been an unfortunate 'misunderstanding', followed by promises that the issue would somehow be resolved. Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn't, but my visits were always interesting, because the Lebanese grapevine, stretched like a web across the country, was the best-informed by far.

iii. Doing Liberia's first-ever National Accounts

JAEGER: Another very different project came much later. It was in the depths of rainy season (Liberia gets about 180 inches in a period of six months), most of our required work had been done, and Bill and I were drinking Brandy Alexanders. I have an idea, he said, let's work up Liberia's first-ever National Accounts!

So we got out Samuelson's freshman economics textbook which had some examples of how to calculate national accounts, made up large spreadsheets, listed Liberia's sources of economic value, and started filling in the empty spaces. Current figures for things like rubber and iron ore production, port activity etc., were easy, although future projections would depend heavily on world market conditions. Others, like attaching values to the gathering of fire wood, pounding of cassava roots or reflecting in palaver huts, were harder to quantify. But, we were intrepid, dreamed up best-guess figures where we had no statistics, footnoted the whole thing heavily to emphasize that this was at best a rough approximation, not to be used to predict Liberia's economic future, and sent it off to Washington.

The first result was a glowing commendation from the Commerce Department for our maiden effort. Then months passed until one day a well-turned out banker from one of New York's most eminent establishments, I think it was Citibank, appeared in Monrovia, called on the Finance Minister, presented him with a laminated, gold-tasseled folder with his Bank's projections of Liberia's brilliant economic future and made clear that his bank would be glad to arrange for some extensive loans. The Minister couldn't resist this unexpected offer, bit off much more than he rationally should have, commodity prices promptly dropped, the new debt went into arrears and Liberia almost went bankrupt!

We came to understand what had happened only when got one of these folders in the mail. It was essentially a reprint of our seat-of-the-pants national accounts report - without the qualifying footnotes! Lesson learned: Never volunteer anything that can even remotely be misused!

iv. The Crocodile bar

Still another, involved my discovery of the 'Crocodile Bar', a dingy, Dickensonian establishment with green slimy door steps near the St. Paul river, which, I somehow discovered, was the late-night drinking hole frequented at the time by most of Tubman's cabinet. Usually it was graced by a languid nude extended over the length of the bar whom everyone pretended to ignore and was run by an American fugitive from the law from Brooklyn, who had somehow washed up in Liberia.

So, bushy-tailed as I was, I would began to include the 'Crocodile' in my late evening rounds when it was cool. Dressed only in tennis shorts and sneakers, I would first pass through the large native parts of town, where people would sit quietly around fires or kerosene lamps in front of little huts murmuring a reassuring 'evenin boss'. Liberia in those years was still a safe and very peaceful place. I might then stop for a while at "Peanut 1" or "Peanut 2", the two thumping establishments famous for their 'Ghana dancing" to watch the colorful, heaving crowd and join the fun. Around midnight I might finally make my way through dark alleys to the 'Crocodile', where, after a while I came to be accepted as a regular by the cluster of Ministers who gathered there to relax after a hard day running the country. I learned a great deal of what was happening behind the scenes and was happy to note that my reports at staff meetings almost always proved more correct than the rumors passing for information which were circulating around town.

The lesson, which was to prove so critical in my later assignments, was that genuine human, not just official, contact is essential to any meaningful exchange.

v. Sierra Leone and the diamond trade

One of the rotating chores of the more junior officers in those days was to fly to Freetown in Sierra Leone once a month to provide consular services, since we did not have an Embassy there during British colonial rule. My first visit was memorable on several counts.

First, one's day under British protection started early, since a uniformed servant would bang on the door of one's billet at six AM to bring "tea", not the first requirement when one had been taken along by some Brits on a late-night carouse. Freetown was also interesting because its look and feel was similar to Monrovia, but subtly different - more colorful, lively and vital, particularly the markets which were bursting with life - and, at that time, a bit more orderly, as a result of colonial rule. Traffic, for instance, was smartly controlled by British-trained policemen in sharp contrast to Monrovia's chaos.

The dramatic part of my visit took place that afternoon when, after I had finished my stint at a hotel issuing visas, and visited the dilapidated bar at the City Hotel made famous in Graham Greene's 'Heart of the Matter', I stopped by the British officer's club. I was standing at the bar pensively having a beer, when a Major came up to me, knocked me down with one punch and walked away, saying: "That's for Suez, Yank!" I was picked up, my bleeding nose taken care of, and profuse apologies offered over some fresh drinks. Just a bit later a smart-looking aide to the Governor General arrived hurriedly, proffered the GG's apologies and an invitation to a delightful tea at the residence - where I was driven in the official Rolls and which I much enjoyed, even though my suit was a bit the worse for what it had been through.

Apologies having been accepted I was invited the next day to the Brits intelligence HQ, since I had expressed some interest in the diamond trade. Although it was an interesting visit to a rather high-tech bunker, I didn't learn much, except for a story proudly told, of how the Brits recently dealt with a rather middle-aged Soviet "graduate student", clearly a KGB officer, who had arrived a few months ago to "work on his thesis on Sierra Leone". Anxious to avoid a fuss with Moscow which kicking him out would have involved, he was 'helped' to leave under his own steam only a few weeks after arrival with, what my interlocutor described with understated satisfaction, a impressively blooming case of syphilis! Ah, perfidious Albion!

While all this made for good one-time reporting, the continuing theme was the diamond trade which, then as now flowed through Monrovia. It became one of my specialties, the subject of a long series of reports, since I had developed a good range of contacts among the principal traders, was able to obtain reasonable estimates of the amounts involved, and could fairly accurately diagram the flows, including Soviet interest in commercial diamonds. Diamonds were a constant cause of trouble in Sierra Leone, although their illicit export through Liberia was at the time effectively condoned.

vi. The Liberian population issue

JAEGER: One of the most basic issues we puzzled over was the uncertainty surrounding the size of Liberia's population. The official figure at the time was around 2 Million, a number Bill Rush and I found difficult to accept since we could not account for half that number in our travels in the interior. Our hunch was confirmed when we obtained a US Air Force aerial photo map of the country made some years earlier as part of an African mapping project. One rainy day we sat down on the floor with that large, detailed map, started counting villages, then made estimates of huts per comparably sized villages, made a generous guess as to how many people to count per hut, and finally added a hyper-generous number for Monrovia.

No matter how we stretched it, we couldn't even reach a million; a conclusion which, when we first casually mentioned it to some Liberian Ministers at a dinner, produced an explosion of anxiety! They allowed as to how this was the country's only real state secret, and begged us not to report it to Washington and the UN, since all their aid requests were based on the 2 Million number!

We, of course, felt required to do so, leading to subsequent readjustments. Official statistics now roughly confirm our estimate and set the 1958/9 population at a bit over 900,000 (we thought at the time that the real number was closer to 750,000) and acknowledge that earlier figures were inflated. In retrospect our bit of research resulted in an important breakthrough, since its not often that you can cut the population of a country by half in one afternoon!

If current statistics can be believed, the population has since quadrupled to over 4 Million, an amazing explosion, in spite of the terrible intervening wars, which, if correct, will have far-reaching implications for the country's future.

g. Tubman, the Honorables and Liberian politics.

Q: Looking a bit to the larger picture, how was President Tubman doing while you were there? Did you get to know him?

JAEGER: Tubman's great contributions were that he had given the tribal people the vote, which diluted the power of the 'Honorables', and that he opened Liberia to foreign investment. He was a shrewd, but benevolent autocrat, who skillfully manipulated Liberia's 'democratic' system; didn't kill an awful lot of people, except when they were caught plotting to overthrow him, as was the case a year or so before I got there; and held only a few hundred political prisoners in undoubtedly quite unpleasant upcountry camps. He was also a great friend of the United States, not only because of Liberia's historic relationship with America, but because he really liked Americans and understood the importance of being on good terms with Washington to gain as much aid and support as possible.

Q: Liberia, of course, was traditionally run by the descendants of American slaves, who then settled there...

JAEGER: There is a lot of irony in Liberia's history, since the freed American slaves, who arrived there through the first half of the 19th century, never integrated with the African natives they encountered. On the contrary, conscious of the skills and knowledge they had gained as American plantation slaves, they promptly set themselves up to rule and exploit the tribal people. In my time you could still see the overgrown remains of their white mini-mansions here and there in the bush, complete with pillars and porticos, which the 'Americans', as the early settlers called themselves, built in emulation of their former masters.

The irony extends to the national anthem's claim that "The love of Liberty brought us here". Actually they had little to do with getting there, since the were sent to Africa. Officially the impulse to free them, beginning in the time of President Monroe - hence Monrovia - and extending to about the middle of the 19th century, was Christian brotherly love - a sense of compassion for this rather small number of mostly house slaves, which was certainly not extended to the rest.

The real reasons may have been less admirable. Virtually all the freed American slaves who arrived in Liberia were mulattos, who, so the unofficial story goes, were a growing embarrassment to their former American masters and particularly to their wives, because they were so clearly fathered by members of these families. Hence the sudden upsurge of enthusiasm to free them and send them back to Africa, even though, once arrived, only some ten percent survived the rampant malaria and yellow fever to which they were no longer immune. They became the 'Honorables', kept their former American masters' names - the Tubmans, Tolberts, Dukeleys, Eastmans, Hortons and so forth - and were still, in the years when I was there, Liberia's ruling class. Having never subsequently been colonized, they, in effect, owned and ran the country like a farm, albeit one with, until very recently, virtually no infrastructure or facilities.

Q: So what, specifically, did Tubman do about this?

JAEGER: Tubman understood that this was an untenable situation as the twentieth century willy-nilly broke into Liberia's isolation during and after World War II. To preserve Liberia's stability and to keep himself and the Honorables in power, he therefore tried to bring about carefully controlled change: Political participation and slow progress for the tribal people, gradual modernization of the country and an adequate share of goodies for the ruling class to keep them happy and content.

In practice this meant encouraging foreign businesses to locate in Liberia - in addition to the Firestone Rubber plantation which had already been established in 1923 - through Tubman's 'Open Door Policy'. This was facilitated by the conversion of the Port of Monrovia into a, by my time, rather busy free port, the establishment of some other rubber plantations and the discovery of iron ore in the Nimba range, which eventually resulted in the building of a new rail line to the port of Buchanan by LAMCO, a Scandinavian-American firm, which by the seventies made Liberia the biggest iron exporter in the world.

As resources, including some American aid, gradually increased, the streets of Monrovia were paved, although deplorably maintained; a basic sanitation system was created; some basic laterite roads were built so that cars and occasional trucks could, weather and ruts permitting, make their way upcountry; some medical facilities came into existence, although most serious care (for Westerners and Firestone's employees) was dispensed by its hospital on the plantation; and literacy and other educational program were gradually advanced.

As a result of all this, Liberia's average annual growth was impressive in the fifties and sixties, a feat less remarkable than it might seem when one considers that it started from scratch. By the time I arrived, Monrovia, while still a ramshackle potholed place, sported an inefficient Ford garage; there was a certain amount of automotive traffic on its roads; small representations had sprung up for all sorts of modern products, from Italian typewriters to Beck's Beer; and most modern necessities and even some conveniences could be provided by Liberia's Lebanese traders. There were even a small handful of local entrepreneurs, including one Honorable, Stephen Tolbert, who started a tiny fishing fleet. While desperately slow, some economic progress was at least beginning.

The results of 'Unification', the other pillar of Tubman's policies, were more ambiguous. In a startling effort to bridge the historic divide between the oppressed tribal majority and the ruling Honorables, Tubman had enfranchised native Liberians and women for the 1951 election. While this made him popular upcountry, pleased the international community and gave him leverage against potential Honorable competitors in Monrovia, it did not create real democracy. Tubman's notoriously corrupt True Whig party's electoral machinery, which he controlled, kept him in power and the Honorables on top for twenty eight years by lopsided voting margins reminiscent of Iron Curtain 'elections'.

Why he thought this was necessary, given his genuine popularity, remains unclear, although I always thought that, in addition to really enjoying his undisputed role, he deeply distrusted the ability of others to keep the country united and moving forward. These fears were realized in spades when, after his successor William Tolbert did allow the creation of an opposition party, the True Whig party fell apart and the country was taken over in 1980 in a bloody putsch, in which Tolbert and then a large number of Honorables were murdered by its first tribal ruler, Master Sergeant Doe. From there it was all down hill.

h. Tubman's Inauguration

Q: Were you there for any of Tubman's Inaugurations?

JAEGER: Yes, Tubman's Fourth, in 1959, after he had "defeated" William Bright, an 'independent' whom they ran to create the appearance that there had been an election. He got all of 55 votes of the 500,000 allegedly cast, after a campaign that had been all show and little substance, punctuated by huge colorful rallies of Tubman's True Whig Party, some of which I attended. Besides endless speeches idealizing Tubman, there were delegations in full tribal attire from all over the country waving streamers and slogans, all sorts of native dancers, noisy bands, etc. It was great fun but not serious politics. By then Tubman had been President since 1943, was hugely popular in spite of some criticism of his autocratic rule, and was to continue in office until his death twelve years later.

The Inauguration itself took place on an exceptionally hot and rainy day, on which we trudged through the muddy unpaved streets in white tie (!) and top hats to attend the two and half hour long inaugural morning service in a stifling church whose windows remained closed throughout. We then returned to the Embassy for lunch and to change into our morning coats (!) for the afternoon garden party at the Executive Mansion, while our houseboys urgently cleaned and pressed our white ties which were again required for the Presidential dinner that evening at 8 PM.

I remember a large hall with many card tables for four, on each of which stood an unopened bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label and some glasses. Protocol had me seated with the Postmaster General, his stolid wife and another equally uncommunicative Liberian lady of impressive proportions. Then we all waited for Tubman to arrive, when drinks could officially begin.

The trouble was he didn't. Initial awkward introductions lapsed into surreal silence which lasted for four hours until, a bit after midnight, an ebullient Tubman finally showed up, having clearly started his celebrations elsewhere, opened his traditional bottle of Black Label and offered his lengthy toast. The rest of the night was a long, weary blur, first an interminable dinner, then more toasts and then the muddy slog back to our houses.

As the paper said the next morning, a "wonderful time was had by all!"

i. The Embassy's role: 'Young Turks', AID and unintended consequences.

Q: Besides political and economic reporting, what did the American Embassy try to achieve while you were in Liberia?

i. 'Young Turks'

JAEGER: When I arrived, Bob Allen, our bright and able Political Officer, had launched his 'Young Turks' scheme, of identifying the most promising young people and sending them to American schools under the Fulbright and other programs. The hope was that, after their return, they would replace the massively ineffective and often corrupt older generation of 'Honorables' in government, at the university, and in other key social and economic roles.

Although Bob caught cerebral malaria - I had to tie him down on his bed with rope while he was lucidly arguing with God until Monrovia's ex-Nazi German doctor could be found to administer some sedatives - his concept was implemented and carried forward. It worked to an extent, until Sergeant Doe shot most of this 'Young Turk' generation of 'Honorables' on Monrovia's beach.

That life with the 'Young Turks" was not going to be all clear sailing either was brought home to me by my friend Earnest Eastman, then a young Assistant Secretary in Liberia's tiny Foreign Office and a prime example of what the next Western-educated generation might look like, who had studied at Columbia and married an African-American girl in the States. Although he had had the full American experience, he returned in a rage about American racial discrimination and hypocrisy; engaged me in sometimes bitter debates which eventually corroded our relationship; tried to treat his American wife like a native, which destroyed the marriage; and consistently debunked Liberia's relationship with the US.

I got a practical lesson in what Eastman was talking about, when I tried to take a high-level, sophisticated Liberian visitor out to dinner in Washington late in 1960. We were asked to leave three well-known restaurants and finally had our meal in a 'black' restaurant on Georgia Avenue!

ii. Aid

The main action agency, however, was our 53 person AID mission, which through its development programs reached into every part of Liberian society. The commitment of all involved bordered on the heroic and I developed enormous respect for many of their advisors, experts, midwives etc. who were often living under very difficult conditions deep in the interior, alone or with their families. Unfortunately, as I came to understand it, the AID program, and parallel US military efforts, had intrinsic flaws which in the end contributed to disastrous unintended consequences.

Q: Can you explain that?

JAEGER: Let's start with AID. Not too long after I had settled in, the AID Director sent us his program plan for review, the night before the Ambassador was to approve it. Bill Rush and I pawed through the two-inch thick document which outlined fifty or so conceptually unrelated projects, which ranged from gauging the flow of the St. Paul River to an experimental rice farm upcountry, via forestry projects, educational programs etc. When we argued at staff meeting the next day that the plan lacked coherence, the explanation was that the spread of projects reflected the range of expertise on the staff, and that eliminating one or more would require the expert involved and his family to be transferred or sent home!

For better or worse the tail was wagging the dog.

More serious were the issues created by AID's major project, of giving Liberia a system of farm-to-market roads, a new grid which would reach horizontally across the country and meet on a much improved north-south trunk road, from Monrovia to Gbarnga and beyond. To anchor the project, a new K 1-12 school system was to be built at each end so that people from all over could get an education.

On the face of it the project made sense, particularly for people, like many in the AID Mission, who had first-hand experience with the benefits of farm-to-market roads. The trouble was that this was not the American farm belt, but Liberia. Native villagers are not commercial farmers. Moreover, as the road crews arrived, and were followed by beer and many other trucks, the stone age tribal system simply cracked, since the villagers could see that these new forces were clearly stronger than their chiefs and witch-doctors who were the traditional glue which held tribes and villages together.

The practical result was that, within weeks, Monrovia was flooded with hundreds of young girls offering their services, refugees from the polygamous tribal life where a wife could be bought for a sack of rice; and where most of them had been the unhappy property of the villages' old men, the only ones who could afford them. Going downtown became a matter of wading through streams of opportuning girls, crying "10 cents, boss. I can do it better than my sister!"

In retrospect, what had happened was that, by penetrating the country with roads, with the Nimba railroad to move LAMCO's iron ore to the new port at Buchanan and with a growing number of other well-intentioned Western projects, the Tubman administration and we had, with best intentions, punctured and discredited the stone age culture which had held Liberia's tribal society together; a basic transformation which set the stage for the later bloody uprising of tribal people, who were increasingly adrift between their long-held traditions and beliefs and the new world taking charge around them.

iii. Come the military

The detonator for that disaster was also supplied during my two-year tour, when it was felt in Washington, that an American Cold War ally like Liberia needed something better than Tubman's rag-tag ceremonial guard evident at public events. As a result, a capable and very nice African-American Lieutenant Colonel turned up, took over a large coastal tract west of town, built a simple military camp which came to be known as the Barclay Training Camp, and attracted recruits. These eventually numbered over 5000 drawn primarily from young tribal men.

I watched them train in visits which involved wading across crocodile-infested streams behind a protective phalanx of dispensable recruits. The program was clearly a success, if only one didn't dwell on the underlying issue that we were, for the first time in Liberia's modern history and with Tubman's evident consent, arming the tribes with fairly modern infantry weapons. The incorrect assumption was that they would maintain discipline and loyally serve the 'state'. What happened, in practice, was that, once the True Whig Party's control was compromised some years later, they wiped out the Honorables under the leadership of Sergeant Doe, shooting them by the dozens on the beach, a revolution which in turn precipitated the subsequent total meltdown of Liberia.

A subset of this was the decision to give Tubman two Navy motor torpedo boats, to "safeguard" his coast. They arrived, were ceremonially turned over, and, under newly trained local command, sped off, one to crash and sink within hours on some rocks, the other to disappear while its Commander paid an extended visit to his tribe on a river down the coast.

iv. The importance of unintended consequences

I have often reflected on these well-intentioned mistakes as I watched us make new and even bigger ones, particularly our disastrous current forays in the Middle East. The point is, of course, that before messing with the structure of a society it is crucial to really understand it in depth, and to reflect on the impact actions are likely to have on its stability, if one is to avoid unexpected, often deadly boomerangs. Translated to a broader scale this is also Sam Huntington's warning in his pathbreaking work on the "Clash of Civilizations".

Hank Cohen, an experienced Africanist who later became Assistant Secretary for the region, has argued for the same reasons that, to be safe, development must be a much slower process of adaptation, requiring at least a generation just to adjust to the hand-operated wells and wooden plows with which one might cautiously start things of. The trouble is, of course, that its now too late, since our disparate cultures have already come into full contact and have clashed. The ongoing turmoil in much of Africa is the result.

v. Dr. George Harley

Q: Were there any people who really understood all this?

JAEGER: Certainly the late Dr. George Harley. He stood out as the one person I came to know who had a deep and clear understanding of the country and the effect of the then current policies.

Q: Tell us about him:

(a). Life and work

JAEGER: Harley had come to Liberia as a Methodist missionary and medical doctor in 1926, only two years after the more famous medical missionary, Albert Schweitzer, had returned to his mission at Lambarene in the Congo. It took Harley and his wife Winifred over two weeks to cover the two hundred-some miles from Monrovia to Gbarnga and then beyond to Ganta in the Mano country near the present Guinean border, which was the site of his mission selected by former President King. Native bearers carried all their belongings in chests and bundles - household goods, tools, books, medicines, as well as an American car, which Harley had disassembled on the assumption that someday a road would be built on which he could actually drive it.

Working with the local tribal chiefs, the Harleys then built a big livable stone house, a chapel and the region's first hospital in a mission compound and began catering as much to the bodies as the souls of their native neighbors. Their simple hospital was soon overflowing, as Harley became the first-ever Westerner to establish a trusting relationship with the natives and their chiefs, even though he and Winifred were at that point the only white people in this part of the interior of Liberia. Although Harley could be irritable and demanding, particularly when I came to know him in his later years, when decades of living in the tropical bush had taken their toll, the tribal people came to understand that his only purpose was to do good and learned to appreciate and respect him.

As a result, as he told me during one of my several visits to the Ganta Mission, he was increasingly accepted by the chiefs and paramount chiefs and so, being among other things an anthropologist, was able to learn a great deal about tribal customs and religion. He was, he once told me, the only Westerner ever to be initiated into the highest level of their secret society, which gave him an unparalleled insight into the forms and meaning of tribal religious practices, but got him in trouble with his Methodist superiors in America, who accused him of going native.

(b). Accomplishments

Q: What did he accomplish?

JAEGER: The results were remarkable. The Ganta Mission eventually expanded to 26 buildings built entirely with native labor, including a dispensary, school house, teachers' dwellings, a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, three dormitories, a guest house, and a leper colony. All the necessary craftsmen, carpenters, mechanics, masons, medical technicians etc. were trained by Harley on the spot.

Moreover, Harley's medical work was entirely self-supporting through a sort of native health insurance scheme involving over 50,000 people. Of all the missions I visited in Liberia, this was by far the most impressive, and could usefully have served as a non-disruptive model for our own aid and development work.

As it was, Harley sometimes complained bitterly that the Embassy people, although well-intentioned, were doing more harm than good, and wished they would listen to people like himself who understood the country. Perhaps because I was willing to listen, he and Winifred welcomed me on a number of visits and offered kind hospitality.

(c). Peabody Museum collection and writings

Q: Did he make any record of his findings?

JAEGER: Yes. For one he collected and then, in 1937, gave to Harvard's Peabody Museum over 350 magnificent masks and artifacts, which still constitute a central part of its African collection. He was also a major figure in Liberian anthropology as an Associate at the Peabody Museum and published two monographs in 1941: 'Notes on the Poro in Liberia' and 'Native African Medecine with special reference to its practices in the Mano tribe of Liberia'. He also made major contributions to the massive, now unavailable, report of the Peabody Museum's Expedition to Liberia, entitled 'Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland', published in 1947 - of which he generously gave me copy which I still have. Finally he wrote his fascinating 'Masks as Agents of Social Control in Northeast Liberia', in 1971.

After his retirement in the States, his wife Winifred summed it all up in 'A Third of a Century with George Way Harley' in Liberia', a book of which I only recently became aware and have not yet read.

(d). The heart of the matter: Masks

In our several conversations, Dr. Harley told stories about his experiences, took me on tours of the mission, showed me his collection of masks and talked about their meaning. The central theme, which I found startling and important, was that the African mask in its pure form is analogous to Christian communion, the swinging gate between time and eternity.

Q: Oh!

JAEGER: Harley argued that the power of the mask was not just the juju and witchcraft of its bowdlerized versions. In its pure form, it was the door through which the deceased speak to their living relatives and vice versa. It is for these reasons that tribal rules regarding masks have, generally speaking, been so strict, although specific practices vary widely and are often distorted by local influences and traditions.

From then on, when I watched masked witch doctors dancing in a village, it was no longer just a native cultural 'show' as most Westerners perceived it. The witch doctors or their female counterparts, covered in long skirts of straw, their awe-inspiring ancient masks accentuated by striking headdresses, darting here and there, shuffling rhythmically or balancing on stilts, were really part of our universal human experience of trying to reach from time to eternity: The theme discussed so eloquently by Joseph Campbell in his "Masks of God"- in which he established that all humanity, terrified by the abyss, is led by its heroes to the other side. The mask, in Liberia as elsewhere, as Campbell too points out, is the intercom between the sides.

Q: Did you bring back any Liberian masks?

JAEGER: Dr. Harley generously gave me two Mano masks which I still have in my study. I was also able to buy a rare "small" mask, a 2 inch portable replica of a normal mask, as well as an exquisite, old Mano chief's chair, its four stubby legs only a couple of inches high - the idea being that everyone else sits on the ground except the chief - which our Vermont visitors invariably think is some sort of English children's chair.

I also acquired another totem on a trip Bill and I made to the northern Ge or Gio region. Its a human size grey clay head, studded on its cheeks and forehead with large protruding leopard's teeth, eyes marked by cowry shells, the whole topped with feathers. I found it in a village which had never encountered white people before, a half days march through the bush from where the road ended at that time. It was one of at least twenty such heads kept on shelves in their sanctuary, a low palm frond-covered hut. This type of totem or three-dimensional mask is quite rare, and was at the time unknown in Monrovia. There is a reference to it, and an oversimplified illustration, on p. 316 of the Peabody Expedition's Report. Mine, which I had acquired for $5 in a very open negotiation with the heads' keeper, was for some years on display at the African Museum in Washington, D.C. and is now at my home.

Q: That's all fascinating. Was English understood widely enough in the tribal society that one could use it as the lingua franca?

JAEGER: Versions of pidgin English were spoken by at least some people in the parts of the country touched by roads. Harley, having spent a long time in Liberia, had, of course, learned Mano and a number of other native languages.

(e). Harley's legacy

Q: Is he still appreciated?

JAEGER: I think he was then and is now a neglected prophet, even though he was legendary in Liberia when I was there. He and Tubman had a very respectful, mutual relationship, even though Harley disagreed with many of his policies. When I knew him towards the end of his time there, he was already suffering from high blood pressure, didn't suffer fools gladly, but was kind if you showed interest in what Liberia was all about.

There is a key question his work has left unresolved: Whether even his very slow and careful intrusion into stone age Liberian culture could in the longer run have avoided the consequences which our less subtle development efforts have produced; indeed, whether any approach could have forestalled the massive impact of Western culture on Africa and prevented the subsequent meltdowns in Liberia and elsewhere on the continent.

In retrospect, I am afraid, the answer is no.

Be that as it may, I was greatly privileged to have been among those who could call Dr. Harley one of their mentors and owe him much.

j. Memorable occasions: The Ambassador's speech, finding a use for City Hall, and our Xmas vacation in Guinea,

Q: Well, you gained some important insights. Were there other events you particularly remember?

i. The Ambassador's speech

JAEGER: Two come to mind. The first was a lesson in integrity. It all started with our growing sense that the Liberian government was not making optimal use of the $3 Million of aid we were making available. When it fell to me to draft Ambassador Richard Lee Jones's speech on the occasion of the dedication of a new AID building, which Tubman was to attend, I put in a polite but clear paragraph expressing our expectation that there would be improvements in the future. The text was cleared up the line, including by the Ambassador, who then read it at the noontime dedication ceremony. When he came to my exhortatory paragraph and raised his voice a notch or two, something quite unexpected happened. Tubman rose, interrupted him to say hoarsely that he hadn't come to be lectured by anyone, and without another word walked out, followed by his entire Liberian entourage!

After a stunned silence - most of the Ambassadorial corps and many other dignitaries were there besides the AID and Embassy staffs, Ambassador Jones too got up slowly and left, as the rest of us followed. No one spoke to me as I too went back to my office and closed the door. The general feeling was that I had I had written the speech, and that it was therefore all my fault.

At four in the afternoon the phone rang to announce an Embassy-wide staff meeting. When we were all assembled, the Ambassador opened by saying, that it had been a pretty rough day, but that he wanted everyone to understand that "George here wrote a very good speech, a speech which I fully approved and would give again. If there is any fault, it is my own in not preparing Tubman that there might be some words of criticism...".

I will never forget my sense of relief and appreciation for this unexpected act of remarkable integrity. The buck, Jones was saying, stops here!

ii. The City Hall

The second, was funny and also had a happy ending. We had, among other things, financed a beautiful new Monrovia City Hall, an elegant white two story structure with lots of offices, halls and facilities. When it came time to use it, it turned out that Monrovia's small mayoral staff could not possibly fill all the new space, hence a certain embarrassment as to what to do with this white elephant. At about that time the Commerce Department sent a Trade Mission to West Africa, for which I was to be responsible in Liberia, which would require extensive exhibition space.

The fit was perfect. I "rented" the still empty, brand-new City Hall, a move which the local paper happily cited as proof of the building's usefulness, the exhibits fitted elegantly in the brand new space, and all was in place for opening night when President Tubman was in theory scheduled to cut the ribbons at 6 PM. Since senior Liberian officials were almost never on time he was actually expected to turn up later.

So it was with some horror that, just after six, I heard the sirens of Tubman's car heading in our direction, before neither the Ambassador nor the Embassy's senior staff had arrived and I, still a mere Third Secretary, was the only official presence on the floor. Well, there was nothing for it, I screwed up my courage and went out to greet the President and then started to show him the exhibit, while one of the crew was frantically phoning the Embassy to mobilize the Ambassador.

A good ten minutes later, Ambassador Jones turned up breathlessly, mumbled apologies and clearly meant to take over. Tubman let him off the hook just a bit by saying that he had had thought the invitation meant "6 o'clock white people's time", that is, to be on time, but then waved him off. "This young man George is doing a great job showing me around. Let's just continue!"

So the President and I spent a good half hour together, he deliberately taking his time, while the Ambassador and a slew of others were made to follow. Even so, Ambassador Jones was again gracious and later thanked me for saving the day. From then on President Tubman always recognized me warmly at various functions, a contact which proved important some years later in Yugoslavia.

iii. Christmas in Guinea

Q: Did you take trips to other neighboring African countries, besides your visit to Sierra Leone?

JAEGER: The most memorable, was our pretty hair-brained Christmas 'vacation' in Guinea in December 1958. Contrary to all good sense, we set off toward Liberia's northern border in Bill Rush's aging Chevy. By the time we had reached the high tropical forests in the Nimba range on Christmas eve, we had had all of fourteen punctures. The last, was terminal. There was nothing for it but to abandon ship.

So we sat down next to our wreck wondering whether we would come out of this alive and waited. After what seemed like hours listening to the strange night sounds of the high forest, we finally saw a beam of light from, what turned out to be, a small, merrily painted mammy-wagon, which heaved into sight and rescued us. We climbed gratefully into the back where we found an odd assortment of fellow travelers seated under the canvas canopy on two benches, one on each side, all bound for Nzerekore, the first small town on the Guinean side of the border. I remember a Catholic priest, a Lebanese trader, a couple of native Liberians, and, up front, the driver and a woman, with whom he was passionately intertwined while swigging from a bottle of beer and driving.

Then disaster struck again. A huge tree, at least five feet in diameter, had fallen across the already 'so-so' road, blocking our way. Some futile efforts were made to go around it. In the end we all went back to our places in the Mammy wagon, exhausted and dripping with perspiration, resigned to spending this strangest of all Christmas nights in the high Nimba. Someone produced some beer, some Christmas carols were tried and abandoned, and a prayer was said by the priest. For Bill, it was all one disaster too much. He stretched out on the floor between everyone's feet, declared this was the end and mentally took his leave as a new wave of driving rain drummed on our canvas roof.

Maybe it was the prayer, or voodoo or the grace which comes with Christmas, but another hour or so later there was a sudden movement in the woods and a group of small, virtually naked natives, who evidently live in the Nimba forests, appeared mysteriously - how they knew we were there was never explained - and went to work cutting the tree apart with primitive saws and axes to make an opening just sufficient to let our wagon through. In the process, a wet and messy job, what with rain, mossy ground cover and tangled limbs, one of them cut off most of his big toe, which I tentatively stuck back where it belonged and taped, while the priest blessed the proceedings. By dawn we were finally off the mountain and across the border, and, weary, hungry, dirty and wet, left our fellow travelers at a Caravanserai near Nzerekore, where we decided to rest and spend Christmas day.

The place, it turned out was run by another fugitive from the law, an outgoing, very hospitable Viennese murderer, who for reasons he did not elaborate had done away with one of his close female relatives - if I remember correctly an especially annoying aunt. He now found himself the proprietor of this single story caravanserai on the edge of nowhere, its sandy garden baking in the unforgiving sun, its stony periphery absurdly decorated with forlorn-looking Christmas lights.

He made us warmly welcome, gave us each an adequate room and let us sleep; in my case only after I had evicted a huge lizard which almost frightened me to death, since getting in bed with what, at first I thought was a large snake, is obviously not very funny. When we had marginally recovered, the Christmas celebrations proper got under way with a surprisingly good dinner, I think I remember Wiener Schnitzel 'a l'Africain', and a great deal of champagne and other wash-me-downs. I have the impression there were six or eight of us, a characteristically motley but congenial crew which had somehow washed up that broiling Christmas day on the frontier of Guinea and Liberia.

The next day, lo and behold, a spanking new red Ford pick-up truck turned up in the mid-day heat on its way to Kankan, Guinea's third-largest town some 250 miles north across flat and increasingly dry savannah, which had been the object of our expedition. We negotiated a ride and found ourselves fairly comfortably ensconced in the open back, where the breeze ameliorated the late afternoon heat. All went well until sunset when we learned that savannah can get as cold at night as it is hot during the day. Dressed only in tropical weight shirts and shorts, we froze even under the tarpaulin we had found, and were much relieved when we finally pulled into Kankan in the early hours of the morning and our driver dropped us at a small hotel.

The scene there could not have been more astonishing. For the place was jumping with Frenchmen loudly celebrating their last night in Guinea, determined not to leave behind one bottle of French champagne or tin of pate de foie gras! They asked us to join them, which we did with enthusiasm after our stark adventures, and ate, drank, listening to their song and laughter, until well after 3 AM!

We had, we shortly came to realize, run into the last phases of the French exodus from what had been a French colony since 1890; an exodus precipitated by Guinea's rejection of De Gaulle's proposed constitution for the Fifth Republic in a referendum which had been held on October 2. As a result, Guinea had become the first French African colony to gain independence under its new leader, a former labor agitator, now socialist-leaning autocrat Sekou Toure.

As it turned out, the new regime found us faster than we could have wished. At 7 AM, after only a few hours sleep which had not yet made much of dent in our hangovers, there was a loud banging on our doors, armed Guinean soldiers entered, ordered us out of our beds and marched Bill and myself at bayonet point, dressed only in our pajamas, to one of Kankan's public squares.

The scene was memorable. A little table had been set up, covered with cloth, behind which sat our three "judges"; a fairly large colorful crowd had already gathered; and we were told to stand to hear the charges that were then sonorously read out in French: That we were American spies and subversives who had seditiously consorted with French agents and provocateurs. What did we have to say?

Q: Did you know any French at that point?

JAEGER: I had only a smattering, but Bill spoke passable French.

Q: Well that was quite a situation!

JAEGER: It certainly was. Standing there in this square in front of these obviously hostile 'judges' cheered on by the native chorus behind us, it was clear we were in a rather serious fix.

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: Bill Rush then put on one of the greatest impromptu performances I have ever witnessed in the Foreign Service. He drew himself up, mustering as much dignity as he could dressed in his rumpled baby-blue pajamas, looked sternly at our 'judges' and told them that we come from a country which had a greater witch doctor with more 'medicine' than anybody in Guinea, or in fact in all of Africa! He told them that our 'medicine' was called the atom bomb, and that our great chief did not like it when tribes in foreign countries harassed and threatened members of his tribe. In short, Bill announced, with a stern, straight face, if they so much as touched a hair on our heads and didn't release us promptly, an atom bomb would come down on Kankan, and they would all be dead!

There was a great murmuring in the crowd and all the turbans began wagging. The judges nervously consulted with each other, while we stood there as nonchalantly as we could, trying to look unconcerned. The lead 'judge' eventually announced that there were mitigating circumstances, and that some lesser sentence would be applied to us, like telling us to get out town - which is what we did after a much-needed, excellent breakfast at our hotel.

We then got on the next plane and flew to Conakry, where, to our amazement, we were again arrested!

Q: The capital of Guinea?

JAEGER: Yes, where we were again arrested at the airport! There was, we were told by a not very experienced interrogator, a record, of Bill's earlier visit to Cote d'Ivoire during which he had asked 'suspicious questions' about the country's mineral production! The policeman interviewing us presumed therefore that we were both spies, in spite of our loud protestations that we were just American diplomats on a fraught Christmas vacation!

The only possible explanation for this latest crisis was that the French had left behind their files on the activities of foreign diplomats in their African colonies. We confirmed this when the officer went to the bathroom and left Bill's 'file' on his desk! It took a couple more hours of palaver until we were released, with admonitions never to return, and flew back to the safety and comforts of Monrovia!

In retrospect what we had witnessed were the first, turbulent and awkward pangs of African independence, a historic earthquake which had begun in Guinea earlier that year and became a continent-wide flood in the 1960s, when colonialism finally met its end almost everywhere across the African continent.

k. New colleagues

Q: What happened in the second part of your tour? Were there new people?

JAEGER: Ambassador Jones was replaced late in 1959 by Elbert Mathews, a distinguished Foreign Service Officer who struck me, both in looks and demeanor, as a model senior diplomat, whom I came to admire greatly. He and his wife Naomi, introduced a new spirit of professionalism in the Embassy which improved morale as well as our relations with President Tubman, who had grown a bit weary of Ambassador Jones' not too effectual bonhomie. Tubman probably welcomed this shift to a professional Ambassador as a sign that the US was taking Liberia more seriously and clearly liked Mathews' polite briskness.

To be fair, the groundwork for the US-Liberian Mutual Defense Agreement of 1959 was laid during Ambassador Jones' time, when Tubman decided to resist earlier temptations to play the Cold War down the middle - after the US had obliged him to cancel a planned Moscow visit in 1956. However, the relationship blossomed in the Mathews era, which, for better or worse, led to the erection of a huge VOA transmitter on the outskirts of Monrovia, and a series of new communications and defense arrangements, which made Liberia a full-dress partner in the final stages of the Cold War. To get a sense of the size and scope of this transformation, Liberia received over $500 Million in aid by the end of the Reagan era, in spite of Sgt. Doe's flagrant human rights abuses, as compared to the $3 Million we provided when I was there.

Whether, as I suggested earlier, all this was good for Liberia or contributed to its implosion, is a question which, as far as I know, neither Tubman nor the Embassy's leadership considered at the time.

There were other changes. Philip Narten, a competent but driven and slightly brash FSO succeeded Bill Rush as head of our two-man Economic Section. We generally worked well together, although Phil, often preoccupied with his sometimes temperamental wife Theresa and their children, spent comparatively little time upcountry, and on occasion worried us when he went for long swims, sometimes at night, in Liberia's notoriously dangerous surf. For all that, we got along well, and met again, many years later, in Paris, where he was then living by himself after leaving the Foreign Service, doing demanding, perhaps deliberately punishing, bicycle tours all over France.

There was also Allan Davis, who succeeded Bob Allen as Political Officer, a socially adapt, clever, civilized young officer from Tennessee, whose finely-tuned sometimes sardonic sense of humor was matched by his extraordinary gift for understanding and remembering the complex human web which made up Liberian higher society. He was, among other things, a brilliant dancer, usually seen with the tall, elegant daughter of the distinguished Haitian Ambassador. We briefly housed together but met only once in later years, when Allan was Political Advisor to the Army Command in Stuttgart. He remained an Africanist and eventually served as Ambassador in Guinea and Uganda.

Lastly, I should mention Milner Dunn, Paul Guest's genial successor as DCM - a lanky, humorous, consistently friendly man who chafed at spending long hours in our unairconditioned offices. Finding ourselves to be kindred spirits, we soon joined forces in building a get-away beach house some twenty miles east of town; a project fascinating in itself, since it required many trips on back roads to talk the local villagers into leasing us some beach front and then building us a small, but splendid bamboo house - open on all sides but offering protection from the scorching sun. Apart from a girl's bush school across a lagoon, there was nothing to be seen except the endless reach of the Atlantic and the wide, curving, empty beach with its fringe of palm trees, which extended for many miles in both directions with not a soul in sight. It was a wonderful place to read and meditate, a tranquility only sometimes disturbed by giggly visits from the bush school. When I finally had to leave this African paradise, the village chief, who had become a friend, asked if I would take his son to America to have him educated. Given the uncertainties of Foreign Service life, I was seriously tempted, but had to turn him down.

I. Dinners, David and Congressional visits

Q: Well, those were telling adventures. Can you describe a bit what the rest of Embassy life was like in those days?

JAEGER: We worked and some of us lived in the same compound on Mamba point, with its spectacular views of the south Atlantic, which the Embassy occupies to this day - although, judging from Google aerial views, a number of buildings, tennis courts and pools have been added.

I first shared a house there with Bob Allen, the Political Officer, but, after his departure, was assigned the ground floor apartment in a rather primitive local duplex a bit up the road, where Bill Rush had the upstairs unit; an arrangement which, led to some memorable joint culinary ventures during the long rainy season.

i. Duck a l'orange

The most notable was our decision, on a particularly drenched and hopeless day, to prepare a 'duck a l'orange' from scratch. We pooled our two houseboys and their two 'assistants', assigned one team the preparation of the sauce, the other of the ducks fetched from the Embassy freezers, and, reinforced with sips of Brandy Alexanders, read them successive step-by-step instructions from the "Joy of Cooking", our teams reporting back as each task was completed. The end product was delicious, and became the 'piece de resistance' of a memorable and, if I remember correctly, rather liquid party.

A bit later I was given a lovely house of my own, with glorious views of the sea and a plethora of tropical trees and plants, which, among others, produced an oversupply of papayas and bananas. My kind and loyal house boy David cooked, cleaned and handed me my gin-and-tonic when, drenched with rain or perspiration I came home from work, and over time learned to make some quite excellent dinners.

ii. Gin fizz and driver ants

David had been with me since my arrival, when he had helped me put on my first ever dinner party! The obligatory guests of honor were the Deputy chief of Mission Paul Guest, a perceptive but rather cautious man with gold-rimmed glasses and sharp pencils with which he constantly improved the grammar and syntax of our telegrams and despatches(sic); and his delicate wife who was determined not to get a suntan on the equator, so staid largely indoors, behind valuable Chinese screens, and let it be known through body language and demeanor that her stay in this God-forsaken outpost was an indignity due only to her husband's failure to make a better career.

Things that evening got off to a bad start when Mrs. Guest asked if I could make a gin-fizz, and, when I brought a reasonable facsimile, having first had to look up the recipe, asked her husband what on earth had happened to the Foreign Service, since "they no longer even know how to make a decent gin-fizz"!

Things, got worse when, as we sat down to a pretty decent Danish steak, there was loud shriek, followed by a stampede away from the table, which was being traversed by a six inch-wide army of driver ants, having come in through an open window! The crowning disaster was desert, for which David brought little plates, each with ten perfectly squared and polished cubes of hard-frozen strawberries, decorated with a squirt of whipped cream! He later explained how carefully he had sawed the tins of frozen strawberries into these precise cubes and had had the dickens of a time keeping them from melting until it was time to serve! Needless to say, the Guests never came again.

iii. Playing God

It was some much more successful dinners and receptions later, when David told me that, since he was the main provider for his extended family and I was his boss, it was now my role to settle some nasty disputes which had arisen in his extended family. Could they all come on a certain day, so that I could hear the cases and render judgement! I had, to my amazement, become their de facto chief!

Well, the day came, and I found at least thirty tribal people of all ages and shapes sitting on every available surface in my living room when I came home from work. I sat down in my biggest chair as David had suggested, opened the proceedings, and then listened to a long series of largely incomprehensible charges and countercharges, mostly involving impenetrable issues of marital infidelity, hence questions of who was to pay how much to whom, which David translated as best he could.

After two long hours of palaver I had no idea who was in the right and asked David what to do. He said, to my renewed surprise, that it really didn't matter as long as the argument was resolved. I should just decide as best I could and, he assured me, they would all be grateful and accept my verdict. I did, ruled in favor of one party and against the other, and, to my further astonishment, saw that that almost everyone was pleased and shuffled out with exclamations of: "Thanks, boss!" David said I did fine and was evidently pleased as well.

iv. Black 'white' men and Inspectors

David especially rose to the occasion when he thought it counted, for instance the day our African-American Public Affairs Officer came to dinner, and David asked: " Boss, is that black white man coming tonight?", a question which underscored that it was not skin color but culture which made the difference in Liberia!

He also outdid himself, leading a temporarily enlarged team of assistants, in producing receptions and dinners while our State Department Inspectors were visiting the Embassy. Knowing that Liberian officials and Honorables tended to be casual about invitations, sometimes never showed up, or might drift in an hour late, Bill Rush and I had personally called on virtually all of our contacts beforehand and reminded them that the Economic Section had done many good things for Liberia in general and them in particular, and that this time it was we who needed help. They were to show up at our reception for the Inspectors on time and without fail - and, when the appointed hour came, they actually did! There was a long line of impeccably dressed, sober and serious-looking members of Liberia's elite lined up before our door, much to the astonishment of our old-school tie Inspectors.

Needless to say the party was a great success, our guests were much pleased with their own performance and some even asked, on the way out, if they had done OK! It was all a lovely tribute and an affirmation that we had made real friends.

The disillusionment came, when the Chief Inspector, a southern gentleman of distinguished lineage, told me on the last day how well we had done, and added that he really admired how we managed to work under these incredibly primitive conditions with all these negroes!

The guy was unreconstructed and didn't have a clue!

By contrast, David sent me a Christmas card some months after I had left Liberia with the message that he had given $10 to his church (he only made about $20 a month) so that they would pray for me! It closed: "You need it!" Even though David had only a second grade education, suffered from malaria, schistosomiasis and God knows what else, he was a wonderful servant and, more importantly, a loyal, valued friend.

v. Dressing a Congressman

There was only one Congressional visit during my tour, since Liberia, in those days, was clearly not on the Washington power circuit, an elderly Congressman who was a member of the Armed Serves Committee. As his 'control officer' I thought it was terrific that I could billet him as one of the very first guests in the brand-new Mamba Point Hotel, an imposing, modern building put up by an Israeli firm, with magnificent views and all the latest conveniences. Having settled him in, I was to pick him up again for the Ambassador's black-tie dinner in his honor.

So it was a bit of a shock when my phone rang late in the afternoon and there was the Congressman shouting at me in a rage that "all his clothes were gone!". I found him in his room a few minutes later, stark naked and still raving, demanding that I "do something!". What had happened, of course, was that the Hotel had had to hire a virtually brand-new, untested staff, mostly young men straight out of the bush. When our Congressman's attendant saw his luggage, he must have thought that this was more wealth than he could acquire in a lifetime, and had simply made off with it and disappeared into the bush. I rang the Embassy's alarm bells and collected enough formal clothing so that the Congressman could in fact show up for the dinner - albeit, only somewhat mollified. He left soon thereafter never to be heard from again.

m. Last days in Liberia.

Q: When did you then leave Monrovia?

JAEGER: As my tour came to its end I had become so attached to Africa that I wanted to make an African career and had asked to be assigned to the African seminar at the Foreign Service Institute. However, personnel, like God, works in mysterious ways. Their decision arrived in April 1960, when I learned that I had been assigned instead to nine months of intensive Serbo-Croatian language training in Washington, for onward assignment to Yugoslavia. Although I would have preferred Russian and then Moscow, the pill had been sweetened by my second promotion, to FSO-6, earlier that spring. Although I would still be a Vice-Consul, I was now to be a Second Secretary! Almost a real person!

By July I was off, after the usual haze of packing, parties and arrangements, first to see my parents in Kansas City and then to take some leave. As the plane lifted off Roberts Field and arced out over the ocean, I looked back on Monrovia and the endless miles of palm-fringed beach which extended west and east to the horizon, and choked up with sadness. I had, to my own intense surprise, come to love this country, for all its terrible problems and its many faults. In a very real way it had become home.

Part IV: Zagreb, Aviation and European Affairs

1. Learning Serbo-Croatian at the Foreign Service Institute

Q: So the next chapter in your life was to learn Serbo-Croatian. What was that like in those days?

JAEGER: Language training was held in cramped quarters in Arlington Towers on the other side of the Potomac River. The five or six students in the Serbo-Croatian class and our two instructors met for six hours a day for the next nine months in a small windowless, badly ventilated room, all seated around a rectangular table just big enough to hold us. Among our group were Bill Dyess, a bright sardonic southern conservative, who had just entered the Foreign Service and was to make his mark in the Reagan administration when he became Department spokesman and was then kicked upstairs as Ambassador to the Hague and Goody Cook, a bright and very effective officer who went to the Political Section in Belgrade and eventually became Ambassador to the Central African Republic.

a. Jankovic and Popovic

The instructors were the then famous Serbian cousins, Jankovic and Popovic, who came from the same Serbian village near Belgrade, had both been attorneys, had both served as cavalry officers in the Serbian Army, had both survived the war as German POWs, and then came together to the US. Here they lived in the same house with their respective wives, two sisters, and both ended up as FSI instructors. Yet for all that they were as different as two people can be. Janko Jankovic was a poetic soul, a grammarian, a person who cherished Serbian literature, and had deep feelings for Serbian culture. Although less enthusiastic about other parts of Yugoslavia, he was always moderate in his views.

Dragutin Popovic was quite a different kettle of fish. A round-headed, large, energetic man, he never let anyone in doubt that he had been a Serbian cavalry officer and that this was the formative experience in his life. His oft-repeated story, which he told us at least three times in the course of our months together concerned the day when, as a young lieutenant, he was riding somewhere on his horse, and found a soldier in the process of raping a peasant girl in the bushes. He rode up to him, he would recount with emphasis, and "meted out swift Serbian justice!" Then a dramatic pause, "I cut his head off!"

So, Jankovic and Popovic, besides endlessly repeating sentences, which we tried to repeat by rote, were our main introduction to the polarity of Serbian civilization, and of the tensions between Serbians, Croatians and the rest, and supplied pretty much the sum total of our country knowledge; since, apart from a few occasional talks, FSI made no serious effort to supplement our intense language training with the historic, cultural, political or economic background of the country where we were about to serve.

Q: Must have felt unreal!

b.George Kennan comes to visit

JAEGER: It was. And the sense of unreality was, if anything, reinforced when, about two-thirds into the course, George Kennan, about to go out to Belgrade as Kennedy's new Ambassador, paid us a visit to meet some of his future staff trying to learn this awful language.

It turned out to be an unforgettable experience. Kennan, utterly relaxed, slung his leg over a chair and, instead of talking about the Yugoslav situation or his plans as the new Ambassador, launched into a fascinating, historic disquisition about Yugoslavia's orthodox monasteries and their roles in Balkan mediaeval history, with advice as to which ones were particularly beautiful and must therefore be visited while we were there. What, I think, he was trying to convey, was that it was through these magnificent monasteries that we might come to some understanding of the essence of this complex region.

Q: That sounds like Kennan.

JAEGER: Well, yes. I had come to know him slightly when I had dated his daughter Grace for a while, and had had a similar Slavic-mystical experience one evening in Princeton listening to him as he was sitting on the kitchen table in a Russian nightgown playing the balalaika and absently singing deeply moving Russian folk tunes.

But back to our meeting at FSI. After listening to him for some time with respectful attention, I asked the question which I thought was on everybody's mind: " Mr. Ambassador, we will certainly try to see the orthodox monasteries. But for now, is there anything you would like us to do before we get to Yugoslavia? Are there any special things you'd like us keep in mind when we get there?"

His reply was unforgettable. "Oh, you mean all that policy stuff? Don't worry about it, I'll be the one doing all that." In case we had missed the point he spelled it out: "You know, you are just being given a wonderful opportunity to absorb Slavic culture, and I would hope you would make the very best use of it and spend your two-year tour sopping it up, the way I did when I was a young officer in Russia."

On that note he left us, somewhat bewildered, very charmed, and looking forward to see how this division of labor would actually work in practice. But that's a story for later on.

c. Learning like children

Q: I bet reality was somewhat different. But, back for a moment to FSI, tell us how the language training process actually worked.

JAEGER: The emphasis was exclusively on the spoken language, the intention being to get us up to a level where we could communicate and function effectively in Yugoslavia. No effort was made to teach us to write.

Q: This was the oral method of language teaching?

JAEGER: Yes. Either Jankovic or Popovic - they took turns because it was very tiring - would repeat sentences from FSI's book, which we then repeated. You kept doing that, initially without understanding what the words meant or how the sentences were structured, one chapter a week if you were having a good week and one chapter in two weeks if we were having problems. Repeating and repeating, ad nauseam. The underlying idea was that you learned the way a child learns by simply hearing and repeating.

Q: Had the fact that you were already bilingual in German helped?

JAEGER: Not really. The FSI method was not based on teaching grammar, which came far later in the course. The beginning, in particular, was purely inductive and repetitive, until we began to recognize certain patterns ourselves and learned to understand and use them. Grammatical explanations were filled in retrospectively, and drills of conjugations, declensions etc. came only toward the end.

Q: How steadily did people progress in practice? Or was it an uneven ride?

JAEGER: We were told from the outset, that all of us, at one time or another, would hit plateaus - periods when we didn't seem able to make an inch of progress for days and sometimes weeks, and would keep stumbling and having difficulties in spite of working hard. Then, suddenly, there would be a breakthrough. Language training is really a sort of mental programming to which people have psychological reactions, sometimes including periods of depression. I hit a bad patch just before Christmas of that year. Even so, the system worked for most people, as our teachers and the FSI linguist kept assuring us, although they got there at somewhat different rates.

Q: Did you have electronic equipment or tapes?

JAEGER: Yes. We were told to listen to tapes in our language lab for another hour or two after each day's work with our instructors, again repeating the same stuff. When you got home you were supposed to do still another hour with a tape recorder, although for me that was over the top.

Q: Was there a test at the end of the course?

JAEGER: Yes, and we all passed. I then spent a few weeks in the Mid-Career course, a light foreign affairs once-over which did not leave a very deep impression. It was then time to pack up to try out what we had learned in Yugoslavia.

d. Off to Zagreb

Q: You had received your assignments?

JAEGER: Yes, I knew by mid-February that I was going to be a Vice Consul at our Consulate General in Zagreb. Although I had hoped to go to the Political Section in the Embassy in Belgrade, I had never actually done any consular work, either in my first or second assignments, and so understood Personnel's reasoning in making this assignment.

i. Crossing in style

Q: So you went over in the early fall?

JAEGER: The plan was to arrive in mid-October, after, what in retrospect, was a really delightful Atlantic crossing. I went over on the SS United States, the great liner which had done yeoman service ferrying troops in World War II. What's more, diplomatic officers in those days still traveled first class, even lowly Vice Consuls. So I was assigned a splendid cabin and was on several occasions invited to eat at the Captain's table. The most remarkable fellow traveler among the dignitaries on board was Salvador Dali, whom I discovered one morning on the bow of the ship gazing dramatically out to the horizon, his cape spread wide, fluttering in the breeze. He did not encourage conversation. On arrival in Genoa the local English paper provided still one more ego booster by listing Vice Consul George Jaeger among the 'notable arrivals'! Those really were the days!

ii. The training worked!

Q: So, did the training actually work when you got to Yugoslavia?

JAEGER: That, of course, was the key question in my mind when I finally drove my newly acquired Volkswagen from Trieste to the Yugoslav border on my way to Zagreb. Except for Jankovic and Popovic, I had never spoken to a real Yugoslav and had no idea whether the strange noises they had taught us to repeat in Washington would actually work.

So I remember stopping at the Yugoslav border post with some trepidation. When the tough looking border guard came over, I said with as much firmness as I could muster: "Dobar dan. Kako ste?", as we had been taught - and was greatly relieved when he clearly understood, smiled a little and gave the textbook answer: "Hvala, druze. Vrlo dobro!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Our language training had actually worked!

iii. Bleak Zagreb

Q: So, how did you find in Zagreb?

JAEGER: Although that autumn the weather was lovely, Zagreb in 1961 was grimly grey and silent. After the bustle of Genoa and even Trieste, what struck one first was the absence of crowds, the reserve on people's faces, the colorless clothing, the clearly much lower standard of living than in the West. There were cars, but hardly any traffic jams. Streetcars jangled all over town and were still, for most people, the principal form of transportation.

At night the street lights were weak and left deep shadows. Only Republik Square, at the center of town, was bright, but with the stark, dehumanizing brightness of rooftop neon signs advertising soulless collective enterprises. They etched people and the surrounding, once elegant, 19th century buildings, against the dark in weird ghostly patterns, particularly when the large square was pelted by rain or snow and the glare was reflected in the slush. (Note: At this writing Republik Square has been restored to its earlier, pre-Communist name, Jelacic Square, after a 19th century Croatian leader who defeated the Hungarians and is again a lively, bustling place).

In short, even a few days in Zagreb left no doubt that this was still a highly controlled Communist police state, with a backward, limping economy, struggling to recoup the enormous wounds inflicted on it and its people by the ravages of World War II - in spite of the fact that Tito's Yugoslavia was far ahead of its satellite neighbors and Croatia and Slovenia were by far the most prosperous parts of a country, where repression here never assumed the proportions that it had in the Soviet empire. Even so, for most people in Zagreb the name of the game was still personal survival, keeping your nose clean and making do. Only those in power and those favored could live well, and some of those lived very well indeed.

Q: Were there any bright spots? What did young people do?

JAEGER: Zagreb had restaurants and nightspots, but only the privileged were usually there. We often went to places like the Gradski Podrum, a popular brick-tiled cellar on Republik Square, where a gypsy band played the usual favorites for a scattering of customers - mostly officials, local journalists, people from other Consulates, or the odd tourists passing through. The fare was standard Yugoslav cuisine, things like raznici, cevapcici, the occasional 'steak' of dubious origin, goulash or noodle soup, served up with fairly decent Dalmatian wines or thinnish beer, and followed, after some "Strudel" for desert, by one or more rakijas, Croatia's then usually very raw plum brandy.

Students went to less expensive places for dancing and drinking from what, I later learned, was called, 'internal exile' - you shut out the grey Communist world by building yourself a happier, strictly private reality with your girlfriend in some little rented room.

To be fair, theater, occasional opera and museums were doing well and keeping cultural life alive with conservatively chosen favorites. The university too remained an important driving force and still had a number of significant Professors, although Communist political correctness remained key to academic survival.

Q: All sounds like a slightly upgraded version of standard Communist reality. Did you see any signs of tension or dissent?

JAEGER: There were occasional signs, although on the whole Yugoslavia in 1961 was still very disciplined. The newspapers, which we read daily didn't provide much insight, since they only carried carefully censured news and ideologically correct speeches by Communist functionaries extolling the regime. Moreover, even the fairly limited circle of people who showed up at Consulate functions, or whom one met or called on in the course of business, spoke only rarely about what was going on. So it took some time for a neophyte like me to piece things together and, when occasion presented itself, to ask the right questions.

iv. The Consulate General in Zagreb

Q: We'll certainly get back to that later. But for now, can you tell us a bit about how you found the Consulate, and about your work?

JAEGER: The Consulate General was housed in a typical 19th century apartment house dating back to the Hapsburg era. On one side it faced Strossmayerov Trg, a section of a long, tree-lined park, with trees and tended gardens. Its entrance was on a side street now called Hebrangova Ulica. After Croatia's declaration of independence the building became the Chancery of the American Embassy. In fact, the office I was to occupy in my second year, with its French windows and balcony, was the Ambassador's office until, after 9/11, the fortress-like new Embassy compound was built in a wheat field outside of town.

Q: So the old building was not very secure considering you were in a Communist country?

JAEGER: Hardly. Since there were no marine guards, the building was opened and closed every day by our devoted Albanian janitor and man-of-all trades Stojan, who also washed the floors and faithfully hung and took down the American flag from its flagstaff on the balcony which overlooked the street, the streetcar tracks and the park.

It was on that sidewalk, by the way, that thousands of people were to leave a mountain of flowers and lay down a bed of candles when President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963.

The rest of the building's layout was equally relaxed. The Consular Section was on the ground floor, so that our local staff and visitors could come and go unimpeded. The Consul General's office, the secure file fault and code room, and all other offices were on the second floor, protected, if I remember correctly, only by 'limited access' signs and locked with ordinary keys at night.

On the third floor was a bachelor apartment with fading, lumpy furniture and old-fashioned facilities, which for my first year in Zagreb was to be my home. I was lucky to have inherited Invanka Skudas as my maid and cook, a intensely conscientious and good-hearted Slavonian woman who made the place livable, took care of my little establishment, cooked wonderful dinners for me and my guests when I entertained, and came with me when, in my second year, I was assigned a lovely suburban house on 'Tuskanac', a prestigious street on a Zagreb hillside, which even had a swimming pool.

The apartment became famous after I had left Zagreb when our then American secretary and code clerk became enamored of a Croatian 'riding master' whom she had "happened" to meet on leave in Vienna; moved him in with her in my former third floor apartment where he stayed unnoticed for almost a year (!) and eventually gave him the Consulate's crown jewels. Needless to say he was a senior officer in the UDBA, Yugoslavia's intelligence service.

v. Joe Godson

Q: Well, things certainly have changed. What were the people like at the post?

JAEGER: My first Consul General, when I arrived in the fall of '61, was Edward Montgomery, a genteel, literate, thoughtful career officer, who unfortunately left Zagreb only a few weeks after my arrival.

He was succeeded by Joe Godson, who was a very different kettle of fish: A Jewish childhood immigrant from Poland, who had studied at CCNY, got a law degree from NYU, and was a product of the American labor movement, Joe was a tough, sardonic, extremely bright, combative and demanding man. He had became a protï¿½gï¿½ of Jay Lovestone, who shoehorned him into the State Department, because of his reliably strong anti-Communism.

Q: Lovestone was the right-wing communist who broke with Stalin and eventually became the intensely anti-communist director of foreign operations for the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations)?

JAEGER: That's right, and at the time we are discussing, he was the Executive Secretary of the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the West's anti-communist labor movement, which had extensive ties to official Washington and greatly influenced the appointment of Labor attachï¿½s. Godson was first made Labor Attachï¿½ in Ottawa in 1950, then moved to London for five years, where he reportedly played a major behind-the scenes role in Hugh Gaitskell's battle with the left in the British Labor Party. He was then moved to Belgrade for two years, and then, in 1961, to Zagreb.

Q: What was Godson like to work for?

JAEGER: Well, it was usually a roller coaster. Joe and his chirpy, pleasant wife Ruth, a former Israeli Foreign Service officer, could be generous and even charming, particularly when everyone was in agreement and he liked what one was doing. More often, however, he was abrupt and demanding. We spent a great deal of energy after his arrival making sure that his residence was up to snuff and the Godson family's many needs promptly taken care of. Moreover, he didn't suffer fools gladly, which was a problem in a small post where none of us escaped his scathing outbursts for some "stupidity", and where some, like Chips Chester, the gentle scion of a rich Milwaukee family, who looked a bit like a member of the British Royal family, were on his black list almost as soon as they arrived.

But then there was the positive side. Godson had genuine credentials as the battle-scarred veteran of major political labor wars in the US, Britain and elsewhere. As a result, he had an almost uncanny understanding of what made the Yugoslav leaders tick, and, unlike the rest of us, read the daily Communist press in plain text - that is, he instinctively picked up the nuances which, under the veneer of endless propaganda, told some of the actual tale.

Perhaps it was because they knew about his past or saw something in him of themselves, Communist heavy-weights like Vladimir Bakaric, the Secretary of the Croatian Communist party, who had been one of Tito's closest associates in World War II and was the undisputed boss of Croatia in our time, respected him, accepted his invitations and tolerated him when, on occasion, he turned his acid scorn on them.

vi. Godson and Vladimir Bakaric

Q: Were you present at any of these exchanges?

JAEGER: Yes, although they took place in my second year in Zagreb, when I had become Godson's deputy and Economic Officer.

For one, there was the famous evening when Martha Graham's ballet put on a splendid USIA-arranged performance. Godson had invited Bakaric and some of his Croatian Central Committee colleagues to join him in the center loge and had asked me to come along. Afterwards there was a lavish dinner at the residence, with a lot of wine and 'slivo' (plum brandy), which lasted into the wee hours.

As things got increasingly raucous, and the discussion more and more animated, Godson told Bakaric that it was just outrageous that a country that claimed to be a communist success still couldn't produce enough agricultural products to feed its people and had to import what it lacked at great expense! "Why don't you just break up what remains of the collective farm system and let the farmers farm?".

Bakaric gave him a long searching look, then replied like the real partisan he was: "Mr. Consul General" - long pause - "do you think we ran this revolution only to be hung from the lamp posts by our peasants? They will stay where they are." In other words, Bakaric understood perfectly well, that their still partly collectivized agricultural system was operating far below capacity, that the regime was very unpopular with the farmers, and that the continuing large deficits in wheat production had to be made up by imports. Party control, and its leaders' survival, clearly continued to came first.

Q: That's a curious exchange. I thought collectivization had largely been suspended within two or three years after the break with Moscow. Tito then liberalized agricultural policy, and left the majority of the peasants, as I understand it, independent, but probably hampered by the inability to hire labor, the pricing system, and so forth.

JAEGER: Actually Tito had abandoned only unprofitable collective farms, while others were retained.

Q: That's right. They were retained both in Croatia and in the Vojvodina where agriculture lent itself to large-scale farming.

JAEGER: At the same time, there was, as you say, an important private agricultural sector at the time of this exchange , although the great majority of private holdings were still limited to ten hectares and many were obliged to work with "agricultural cooperatives" because they lacked farm machinery and other services. The bottom line was that the farm economy was still sharply restricted and that deficits had to be made up by imports, which I suspect the US helped finance.

The important point was that Bakaric did not try to defend their policy on economic or ideological grounds, but was, in effect, saying 'don't be naive', we need to keep farms under control to assure continued Communist party rule.

As it turned out, agriculture was to be increasingly liberalized in subsequent decades and, as a result, returned to prosperity - while the Communist party disappeared as Bakaric had foreseen.

Q: Well, that is fascinating. What was your second experience with him?

JAEGER: Toward the end of my tour, the US had just given the Yugoslavs a small plastics plant on the outskirts of Zagreb. Although we were invited to the ribbon-cutting, not a word of thanks appeared in the Yugoslav or Croatian press. Indeed, the U.S. role was hardly mentioned in what was pretty extensive coverage.

Q: Well, the Yugoslavs never did show much appreciation for the American aid they were getting.

JAEGER: Precisely. At a dinner, on the night of the dedication of the plant, at which there were only five or six of us present, Joe Godson confronted Bakaric: " God damn it, Vladimir! We're giving you all this stuff, and spend millions, and you never once tell your people how much we are actually doing for you!"

Bakaric again countered with a touch of acid irony: "Gospodin Godson, I thought you were a smart man! Its enough that we know who pays for what!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Clearly, Tito's old guard was still anxious to deny Moscow unnecessary talking points. They were tough, unembarrassed and focused on survival. And, Joe Godson, the professional anti-Communist, understood them well, was able to make convivial contact with them, asked blunt questions, and, in spite of their equally blunt rejoinders, remained respected and usually got our message across.

vii. The rest of the staff

Q: Well, he must have been quite a character. Who else was in Zagreb at the time?

JAEGER: Joe Godson's deputy and the post's Economic Officer was Woody White, a nice, rather wobbly man who went with the flow and tried to keep things on an even keel. My immediate boss in our two-man Consular section was David Milbank, a well-educated, hard working young officer who taught me the ropes and made sure I knew what I was doing, since I had forgotten most of what I had learned two years earlier in the Consular Course in Washington.

The undisputed seniors among our locals were Mrs. Gregoric, whose booming voice remains unforgettable, and her more compliant colleague Mrs. Herzog. Having served there for decades they were both genuine authorities on all aspects of consular regulations. It took real courage for a raw Vice Consul to overrule their recommendations, which they appended to each file, and to overcome their subsequent displeasure!

The powerhouse in the place, however, was Neda Zepic, a thoroughly competent, younger can-do person, who knew lots of people, had lived in Vienna, had a quizzical, sharp-edged sense of humor and endless energy and laughter. While the old guard never really liked her because she made herself so useful to all of us, from Joe Godson on down, we appreciated her greatly for helping with all kinds of projects, even though, unfair as this may have been, one could not be wholly trusting, since we had no idea which of our staff, if not all of them, were regularly reporting to the UDBA (the Yugoslav intelligence service). Indeed, one junior staffer, Anna Aschberger, had to be fired after admitting that she had been an agent - although it was hard to see what else a local could have done under the pressure they were often put under to report.

Be that as it may, Neda has remained a life-long friend of generations of FSOs who worked with her and came to know her. My wife Pat and I visited her in Zagreb in the late '90's when, long retired, we were assisting with Bosnian elections. Among other things, Neda, now walking with a cane, proudly showed us a warm personal letter of thanks and commendation for her service from Under Secretary Larry Eagleburger, who had been a junior member of the Political Section in Belgrade in my time.

viii. Zagreb consular work

Q: What was the consular work like?

JAEGER: Part of it was dealing with the sheer numbers and variety of people who crowded into our small, musty consular space, having often traveled long hours from all over Croatia and Slovenia. Many wanted to visit or emigrate to America, where most had relatives; many more came for passport renewals or to resolve Social Security problems; a few professionals and students turned up who had American job offers or scholarships; and there were the occasional American travelers, who needed help when they had somehow got trouble.

All were first interviewed by our staff, and given the right forms and papers to fill out before David Milbank or I would the see them; a necessarily slow and tedious process, since all work was still done with clanky typewriters, usually in triplicate with dirty carbon paper and preserved in stacks of ancient file cabinets, while the street cars clanged by outside.

Q: What were the biggest problems?

JAEGER: We had frequent difficulties with the many visitors visa applicants who lacked compelling evidence that they really planned to return and whom we therefore had to refuse. Many of these decisions were necessarily intuitive.

The most difficult, however, were the citizenship cases because so many Yugoslavs who had gone to work in the US, returned to Yugoslavia to retire on their Social Security pensions, which, at a time when the dollar was so strong, made them relatively rich. Many of them would then foolishly do things forbidden under US citizenship law as it existed at the time. They would swear oaths of allegiance to Yugoslavia to vote in local elections, take some official job or sign up for government programs open only to Yugoslav citizens. Some young ones even got themselves drafted into the army.

Q: So you had dual citizenship problems?

JAEGER: That's right. The issue would come up when they were questioned in connection with renewal of their passports, or produced passports they had allowed to expire. These poor people, many of them septuagenarians or older, would try to explain: Well, you see, we forgot, or we didn't know, we just did what is normal and swore an oath, or whatever the thing may have been. The trouble was that this unavoidably triggered an 'investigation' and the writing of elaborate 'citizenship opinions', which in many cases led to their having their American citizenship taken away. It was often a heart-rending job which I was glad to leave behind!

Q: Were there any memorable cases of Americans who got in trouble?

JAEGER: The most famous was the case of the lady who was hit by the toilet!

It involved an elderly American woman and her husband, rare tourists on a swing through Yugoslavia, who were staying at the Palace Hotel near the Consulate General. When using the facilities she pulled the cord and the whole water closet on the wall above her crashed down on her head. As a result she had a bad concussion, spent some time in the hospital and of course raised the issue of compensation for the hotel's evident negligence. The Palace Hotel agreed there was a problem, but argued that there were no provisions under its five-year plan to pay for the damages involved. The issue eventually had to be taken by Joe Godson to the Central Committees of Zagreb and Croatia, until their claims were satisfied.

The second case was even more bizarre. I received a call one afternoon that an extremely large American woman had fallen off the end of a train in the railway tunnel through the Alps connecting Slovenia with Carinthia in Austria, apparently thinking she was backing into a toilet! She was rescued with some difficulty, taken to a hospital in Ljubljana and put into an enormous plaster body cast, since here spine was broken. The problem then was that the cast's circumference was so wide that she could not be put on any passenger train. After several intense days, the problem was eventually solved with the help of relatives who arranged to fly her to Athens on a plane whose rear gate could just accommodate her.

Still another involved the Yale Glee club, en route from Zagreb to Belgrade, which was arrested 'en masse' in a village some fifty miles south of Zagreb, because one of their number had tossed a bottle out of their bus window an hit a young peasant bicycling by who suffered a concussion. After first springing the innocent members of the Club, it took me two days of difficult, face-to-face negotiation with a very stubborn official to get the young perpetrator released from the local hoosegow, after making extensive apologies and helping to negotiate the payment of some quite considerable compensation.

ix. New duties as number two

Q: Sounds like the life of consular officers rarely has a dull moment! What happened in your second year in Zagreb?

JAEGER: My next promotion came through, to FSO-5, which raised me to the exalted rank of Consul, and I succeeded Woody White as Joe Godson's deputy and Economic Officer. "Chips", more formally known as John Chapman Chester, replaced me as head of the Consular Section; Jim Fletcher had arrived to take David Milbank's place; and Bob Barry [Robert Barry] and his lovely wife Peggy blew in in a blinding blizzard around Christmas time as an extra hand. Taken together it was a first-rate team. Chips, happily married to his socially and intellectually gifted wife Clara, later became DCM in Malawi and spent many years as a staff member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Bob Barry, thin, brilliant and reserved, was to be even more successful as Consul General in Leningrad, Deputy Director of the Voice of America, Ambassador to Indonesia and Bulgaria and, after his retirement, head of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Mission in Bosnia and a succession of other trouble spots. Both have remained lifelong friends.

Q: How was it working directly for Joe Godson?

JAEGER: Not always smooth sailing. Part of it was shielding the staff from Joe's frequent outbursts of sarcasm and wrath, particularly Chips, whom he considered 'naive' and 'born with a silver spoon'. Perhaps because of this, I was probably too painstaking from Chips' and Bob's perspective in making sure that all was done properly and on time.

Then there was Godson's endless war with the USIA!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Our Branch Public Affairs Officer Nealy Turner was, I thought, a competent and rather nice man, who ran his little operation with brio and ï¿½lan. It included the very active and popular USIA Library under Corinne Spencer, a delightful old hand who knew Zagreb and its people inside out; visiting art exhibits and performers; student exchanges and some limited PR efforts. The trouble arose from USIA's constant tendency to assert their independence from the State Department, which, in Zagreb, translated into an all-consuming turf battle. Nealy took the view that he worked for his USIA superiors in Belgrade, while Joe felt that, as the Consul General, Nealy was part of his staff and should clear all his activities with him - a classic management problem which should have been worked out on an informal, cooperative basis.

Instead there were memorable shouting matches, slamming of doors and an ongoing war of personalities between Joe and Nealy and wounding quarrels with the Public Affairs people at the Embassy in Belgrade - notably Walter Roberts, the equally self-important and assertive Public Affairs Officer. The frequent, often angry telephone exchanges between Joe in Zagreb and USIA in Belgrade must have been fun for the UDBA eavesdroppers to listen to.

On the other hand, working for Godson was also an education in competent, albeit tough-minded political analysis and all sorts of lessons in how and how not to deal with our Yugoslav Communist hosts.

x. The omnipresent UDBA

Q: You mentioned the UDBA, Yugoslavia's secret police, several times. Was it an ongoing problem?

JAEGER: It set the stage for our work. The general impression of the Tito period is that it was pretty benign, that he was a 'soft' communist, kind of Western, and that this justified or explained why we were giving him aid. The reality at the time was quite different. Actually the UDBA remained a powerful force as Tito's control device and his means of keeping himself informed. We were giving him covert and overt aid, not because he was a nice guy and a Jeffersonian democrat but because he was effectively blocking out the Soviet Union.

Q: To what extent was the UDBA infiltrated or controlled by the Soviet KGB?

JAEGER: That came to light only in 1966, some years after I had left, when Rankovic, one of Tito's closest wartime associate, and the Minister of the Interior, was implicated in bugging Tito's bedroom. In the ensuing scandal it was learned that Rankovic had been a KGB agent, that the UDBA had been controlled by the KGB for a long time and that the Soviets had played a very powerful intelligence game in Yugoslavia throughout this period.

Q: Was this when Rankovic was finally fired?

JAEGER: Yes.

Q: How did UDBA operate against you in Zagreb?

JAEGER: Our perception was that they had six or seven intelligence officers working full time against our four or five American officers and one American secretary. Part of this involved standard wiretapping and bugging - for instance, official visitors always ended up in the same numbered rooms, i.e. 9, 19, 29 etc. on various floors of the nearby Palace Hotel. Another part was the constant pressure on our local staff, as well as on many of our social guests and neighbors, to report our official doings and personal proclivities. And there were their direct operations. One of their consistent objectives was to find out whether one of us was a CIA officer, and, if so, who it was and what he was up to.

Curiously we got little sympathy or help from the Embassy, which tended to downplay our reporting of these pressures and thought we were exaggerating. Perhaps the UDBA was more reticent in Belgrade with its large number of diplomatic establishments or the Embassy did not want to undercut Washington support for aid to Yugoslavia. Whatever the reason, the Embassy generally thought we were a little hyper. We did not.

Q: Any examples?

JAEGER: Among the more notable events in Zagreb during this period was the visit of Commerce Secretary Benson for a high-level trade negotiation with Yugoslavia. Although we strongly counseled that their strategy meetings be held outdoors or in a more or less secure area in the Consulate which was regularly swept, he insisted on meeting in the Palace Hotel where they all stayed, and was then upset when the Yugoslav delegation seemed to outmaneuver him at every turn. After they had left our Admin officer found that the chandelier in their meeting room had been studded with listening devices.

Their direct operations were often nastier. For instance, men in raincoats would try to frighten the wives of some of our people while their husbands were away on official trips and start reading poems about children drowning in rivers. This happened to Mrs. Koch, the wife of the junior USIA officer. Chips Chester reported that his wife received an anonymous, totally untrue letter claiming that he was having an affair with one of our local staff. Sometimes just plain threatening letters were found, or curious near-accidents reported. And we were, of course, routinely followed by teams of cars when we made trips.

To protest these incidents, either Joe Godson or I we would call on Peter Nemac, the Protocol Chief for Croatia who represented the Foreign Office and had close ties to the UDBA and got brushed off with comments like: "This is all just in your Western imagination. These things are not really happening." The frustration was that they were, and that we had no means to stop them.

xi. Rough stuff , and a personal close shave

Q: What were the most serious incidents?

JAEGER: The most egregious, and from the UDBA's perspective most successful operation, was the seduction of an American secretary and code clerk, which I have already mentioned. The most brutal, during my time in Zagreb, was aimed at the British Consulate General, then headed by Basil Judd, a genial, old diplomat, who had made his career in the Middle East. Judd's problem was that his attractive, rather younger wife was noticeably promiscuous, a fact which had not escaped the UDBA's attention. One day she went to a famous old castle with her latest lover, an UDBA plant. Their tryst was interrupted at its high point by a team of UDBA interrogators who burst into their room, refused to let her get up or get dressed and, in this condition, interrogated her for many hours, all the while taking photographs. What they most wanted to know was who the intelligence officer was on the British staff and what he was doing. Some said she spilled quite a lot of beans. Be that as it may, she was left with a complete nervous breakdown and had to be sent to a British sanatorium. Judd, of whom more later, left promptly thereafter and retired.

Q: That's pretty rough stuff. Did anything ever happen to you personally?

JAEGER: There was one, quite serious incident in my second year, when I had planned to spend a winter weekend in Villach, across the alps in Austria. Since it had snowed I had asked the Croatian Deputy Tourist Minister - who, I later learned, was also a senior UDBA officer - when I ran into him at a reception, which of the Alpine passes would be open. He promised to call back and assured me that the Wurzen Pass was clear.

So I set off in my little Volkswagen on a clear and very cold Friday night and got up to the first level with growing difficulty, since even to that point the road turned out to be hazardous and was covered with increasingly deep snow. Once on the plateau, where the actual ascent over the pass begins, it became clear that I had been misled, since the road over the pass was snowed in and impassable.

It was at this point, while I took a few minutes to look at the extraordinarily bright, starlit sky and the icy mountain peaks, that I somehow sensed something was wrong and instinctively jumped back into the car and slammed the door. A second later, the whole car, hood, windshield and all, was covered by a pack of ferocious dogs, which a guard had released without warning to go after me. I gunned the motor, dogs went flying in all direction, got clear and managed to get back down the mountain road. It was a very close shave. Some days later, I again ran into the Deputy Tourist Minister in Zagreb, who asked me with a little smile, how I had enjoyed my trip over the pass!

xii. The bigger picture

Q: Life in those days in Zagreb clearly wasn't uneventful! Looking at the bigger picture, what was your general impression of the political atmosphere in Yugoslavia and the opinion towards the U.S. at that time?

JAEGER: The party-controlled media consistently downplayed and were often critical of the US, and only doled out occasional positive reports. Even so the US was widely admired by ordinary people for its democracy and freedom and seen as the dream land of opportunity, where one didn't have the kind of problems they had in Yugoslavia. This was reflected in the consistent success of our USIA Library, the number of people who listened to VOA and RFE, the many visa applicants, the interest shown in American exhibits and musical or ballet performances, as well as in the casual comments many people made. It became most apparent in the huge outpouring of sympathy over President Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

On Yugoslav domestic issues opinion seemed even more tightly controlled. Although we met lots of people at dinners, parties and receptions, as well as in many informal situations, and heard lots of rumors, few were willing to discuss what was going on in concrete terms. Apart from occasional grumbling, regime jokes or criticism by innuendo, it still paid not to rock the boat. UDBA pressure clearly was effective.

There were some few - I remember notably a young doctor and his family - who did speak fearlessly of their unhappiness with Yugoslavia's poorly functioning autocratic system and were willing to offer detailed examples. Generally, however, the most outspoken tended to be working class people and peasants, the people who bore the brunt of the country's problems and had the least to lose. They sometimes complained very explicitly about 'conditions' and did not care who was listening.

xiii. Croatian Nationalism

Q: How about Croatian nationalism?

JAEGER: There were occasional hints that Croatian nationalism was still alive under the veneer of Communist conformity. The most significant, in my time in Zagreb, occurred at a performance of 'Zrinski' - a patriotic opera celebrating the heroic death of Croatian Count Zrinski at the hands of the evil Turkish invaders - when the young audience burst forth in raucous cries of 'Nasa Zastava', ('Our flag') instead of the Yugoslav hammer and sickle displayed on the stage - an outcry party officials present failed to quell. We also frequently heard anti-Serbian jokes and complaints that Croatia and Slovenia contributed more than their just share to the national economy, and consistently subsidized the less developed parts of Yugoslavia. And there were occasional whiffs that some senior Croatian officials were pressing Belgrade for further economic liberalization and greater scope for cultural expression.

But none of this was at a level to suggest the deep underlying ethnic and religious divisions in Yugoslav society of later years, which Milosevic and Tudjman managed to stir up and tap into after Yugoslavia had broken up, which led to the Bosnian war.

Q: Referring to the Presidents of Serbia and Croatia?

xiv. Brotherhood and Unity prevailed.

JAEGER: Yes. On the contrary, during the two years I was there, "Bratstvo" and "Jedinstvo" (Brotherhood and Unity) was still the prevailing ethos. Not only was the slogan everywhere - on red banners, flags, posters and all over the media - but people by and large supported it; first, because only a united Yugoslavia could survive under the then Cold war circumstances; secondly, because there was a degree of economic progress, and thirdly, because of Tito's effective policy of sticks and carrots with which he secured his rule.

In short, there were nationalist pressures but not on a scale which came even close to destabilizing Yugoslavia. Subsequently declassified National Intelligence Estimates for the period, (see NIE 15-61 and NIE 15-67 available on the National Intelligence Centers website) confirm this. The consensus view in Washington, as among us on the ground, was that Yugoslavia was politically stable and the regime was actually gaining domestic support.

Q: Did you see the story in the press the other day about Tito's granddaughter? She supports both Yugoslav unity and democratization, fully realizing the contradictions between the two in such an ethnically diverse region.

JAEGER: Svetlana Broz? Yes. Perhaps in the very long run she will be proven to right, once the harsh edges of the recent war are rounded off, and people again realize that the former Yugoslav Republics were in fact economically quite complementary. Perhaps a new 'bratstvo' and 'jedinstvo' will some day encompass a somewhat larger Balkan region in the shared context of EU membership.

xv. The Yugoslav disaster could have been avoided.

JAEGER: I myself have come to the conclusion that the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia was not inevitable, but the result of two critical factors: The fatally and predictably inadequate succession arrangements, calling for a rotating Presidency, which Tito put in place, which virtually guaranteed the country's disintegration, and Western negligence in not facing up to this problem or reacting to it in time, when it became quite clear that rotating the Presidency between the country's Republics was failing.

This was all the more surprising, since even we in Zagreb were aware that the succession arrangements after Tito's death would be critically important. As it turned out, there were endless discussions at all levels, but nothing effective was done.

xvi. Kennan's predictions

Q: Did George Kennan ever talk about these issues when he was Ambassador?

JAEGER: Your question, Bill, brings to mind one of the most interesting experiences in those two years, when I was asked to accompany Kennan on a three day trip through Croatia and Slovenia.

Q: Now Kennan became Ambassador about the time you went to Zagreb?

JAEGER: Yes, he arrived a bit earlier, in March of 1961, and served until July 1963. On this, his only longer visit during my time, he wanted to meet leading government people, journalists, and other movers and shakers in both Croatia and Slovenia. When we got back to Zagreb after a busy and very pleasant three days, which I had arranged, Kennan surprised me by referring to the trip as "a significant experience!" When I offered to draft a reporting telegram, Kennan surprised me again by saying, " That won't be necessary, I'll just sit down in your code room, if I may, and write it up." He emerged after a couple hours with a long hand-written draft and asked me to read it over and tell him what I thought.

I did, and was absolutely amazed. The people we had met had, with minor exceptions, told us pretty much what the party line then called for. But what Kennan had written was that his trip through this northern region of the country had confirmed his sense of the impending disintegration of Yugoslavia after Tito!

Q: Really! That early?

JAEGER: Yes. The thrust was that there were great tensions in the country, and that the people he had seen had given him significant indications of this.

Q: Of course, the Slovenes were the most separatist element when the breakup came. They really started the trouble because they felt they'd been economically exploited to support the backward regions in the south.

JAEGER: That's right. Basically Croatia and Slovenia were economically supporting Serbia and the rest, a situation which caused some discontent, but not to the extent Kennan's telegram described it. I felt at the time that there was an amazing disparity between what I had heard on the trip and what he had written.

In retrospect, it may well be that Kennan's antennae were finer than mine, or that the inherent logic of the situation had led him to this far-reaching conclusion which he then wanted to document. Even so, he got the timing wrong, because he thought the crisis was clearly more imminent than it actually turned out to be. Still, his was the first explicit warning, as far as I know, of what was to come.

Needless to say, the report was greeted with skepticism, both in the Embassy - which didn't believe that nationalism was very powerful at the time and usually asked us to tone down our occasional reports of Croatian nationalist behavior - as well as in Washington.

xvii. Kennan, the Embassy and State

Q: Hmm. They didn't much appreciate him in the Department, did they?

JAEGER: Kennan's personally written telegrams often reached entirely different conclusions than the Embassy's routine reporting. As his 'Memoirs' make clear he saw the Embassy diplomatic and USIA staff as "being from another generation", people, he wrote, "who had come up in a different sort of bureaucratic environment: Less human, less personal, vaster, more inscrutable, less reassuring. Some of them tended initially ..... to be wary, correct, faithfully pedantic, but withdrawn and in a sense masked. The studied absence of color, in personality and in uttered thought, had become a protective camouflage. But of course they were real people underneath, and in most instances very valuable and intelligent ones....".

Tellingly, not one of them is mentioned in his 'Memoirs' by name even though it was a first-rate team, which included Eric Kocher, his competent DCM, Walter Roberts the assertive and flamboyant PAO, and a Political Section headed by shrewd and perceptive Alex Johnpoll, whose members included the highly articulate, if somewhat self-important Jim Lowenstein, later a prominent Congressional staffer, and a young, discouraged Larry Eagleburger, later Secretary of State, who did not hide the fact that felt badly underused. Indeed, I remember a lunch in Belgrade at which Larry complained that he was on the verge of quitting the Foreign Service. It was I who told him to toughen up and hang in there, which he did.

In sum, there was a basic, rather sad disconnect between Kennan and the staff.

Some of this may have been due to the fact that Kennan saw himself by then as an agent of historic transformation and had come to Belgrade with his own agenda: To restore mutually confident American-Yugoslav relations, implying a larger strategy of wresting it still further away from the USSR. The symbol and centerpiece of the policy was to be most-favored-nation status for Yugoslavia.

What this did not adequately take into account was the continuing deep distrust of anything 'Communist' in Congress, feelings kept alive by hyper-active Croatian and Serbian ï¿½migrï¿½ groups in the US; and the fact that Yugoslav Communist behavior did not always lend itself to benign interpretation from Washington's perspective. Tito's leadership of the non-aligned movement, his repressive domestic policies and his refusal to ally himself with the West all contributed to this. Although Kennan fought hard, his effort foundered on these obstacles, leaving him feeling betrayed by the Department, which, of course, had to deal pragmatically with the political realities as they existed at the time.

Taken together, all this led to important misunderstandings with the Department's Eastern European people and eventually to his unhappy departure from Belgrade, feeling that he had not been appreciated or understood.

Kennan was a brilliant seer, advisor on major issues and interpreter of history, but, for all that, fatally indifferent to the short-term stuff which makes up the daily fare of government bureaucracy. As a result he became a tragic figure in American diplomacy, who, although he shaped the post-war world as much as anyone, spent most of his career at odds with the State Department and later in prestigious Princeton exile.

xviii: Archbishop Seper and the Church

Q: Well, that all fits in. How about relations with Church?

JAEGER: One of the things Joe Godson asked me to undertake was to maintain relations with Zagreb's Archbishop, the Croatian Primate Franjo Seper, who was the successor to Cardinal Stepinac. Seper was made Cardinal by Paul VI in 1965 and appointed Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in 1968. Although a generally orthodox theologian, he supported religious freedom from state control and the vernacular mass during the Second Vatican Council - no doubt reflecting his ample experience with a state which tried to control the Church and suppressed expressions of Croatian identity. I found him to be a modest, kindly, welcoming man whose empathy and human touch helped make him a well-liked and widely respected prelate. For me, his sense of the profound historical drama involved in the Church's conflict with atheistic Communism, indeed his extensive theological and historical knowledge of Croatian and Balkan history made my conversations with him especially rewarding.

Archbishop Seper received me a number of times and seemed to enjoy our conversations. His main concern was the constant surveillance he and his priests were subjected to by the UDBA and the limits party functionaries constantly tried to place on Church activities. But even in these difficult periods he retained his confidence in the faith of the Croatian people and the ability of the Church to survive. One day, after coffee and cake in his study, he took me for a walk around Zagreb cathedral and pointed to its massive foundations. These, he said, have been here for a thousand years and will still be hear a thousand years from now.

As it turned out, Cardinal Seper survived Tito's death in 1980 by a year, and so must have been aware that Yugoslav communism's force, as Stepinac and he had experienced it, was spent. That the Church in Croatia then too became identified with the worst aspects Croatian nationalism is yet another story.

xix. Chips Chester: God's hero in Glina!

Q: Were you aware of any anti-religious incidents yourself?

JAEGER: One day we received an official invitation to the rededication of the Orthodox church in Glina, a village in Croatia's southern borderland, where the Croatian Ustashi (the ferociously brutal Croatian-Nazi front which had worked in tandem with the German occupying Army in world War II) had committed one of their most infamous wartime atrocities. The church was burnt down while hundreds of Serbs they had rounded up were locked inside, all of whom perished horribly.

After the war American Serb ï¿½migrï¿½ groups financed the church's reconstruction. As it was, neither the Consul General, nor I were free to attend, so I asked my good friend Chips Chester if he would go and represent the US. In mid-afternoon I received a call from the Protocol Chief, Peter Nemac, to protest the "outrageous" behavior of our Vice Consul Mr. Chester during the dedication ceremonies. I told him I would get back to him.

When Chips turned up a bit later he told the following tale: "Well, it was all kind of amusing. They had built this platform with Communist banners in front of the new church, facing a field filled with 'babushkas' (Croatian peasant women) all of whom were looking down rather despondently at the ground. On the platform were officials from the Central Committee of Croatia and the region, selected leaders of the American Serb ï¿½migrï¿½ community, several important locals, an Orthodox bishop and a couple of his priests, and then there was me."

I said, "So what happened? Why are they so mad?"

He said, "Well, when it came time to make speeches each of the officials, as well as the co-opted clergy, spoke in turn about this and that, but nobody mentioned God. So I thought to myself, since I was the last to be asked to speak that I would say something about God, so I ended my short remarks with, 'God bless this church, God be with you!'"

At that point, Chips recounted, the babushkas, in fact the whole village and even some of the officials, rose up en masse and began

cheering because they had been waiting for someone finally to say something about what a church is really all about.

I thought this was just great and was very proud of Chips! I told Mr. Nemac that my Vice Consul had done just splendidly! I think Glina also helped get Chips his next promotion in the Foreign Service!

Q: Laughter. Any other stories worth recording?

xx.Seizing a merchant ship

JAEGER: Yes, my seizure of an American merchant ship! I don't exactly remember when it happened in my second year, but we received a report one day that there had been a mutiny on an American-owned freighter which had just put into port in Rijeka.

As you may know, consular officers are among many other things 'protectors of seamen' under legal provisions which go far back in American law, and have considerable powers, including the ability to detain ships, to carry out this responsibility. Since an American investigation was clearly necessary, I ordered the ship to remain in Rijeka under the authority vested in Consuls, and asked the master and the crew to come to Zagreb to be interviewed. This provoked a flurry of telegrams and phone calls from owners, insurance companies, politicians and other interested parties protesting this action and asking that the ship be released and sent on its way!

It turned out after a couple of days of recorded meetings with officers and crew, that there had been serious abuses by the former and increasingly mutinous reactions from the latter. We submitted these conclusions to Washington and, after consultation, released the ship with instructions that both officers and crew were to cease all offensive behavior and with the further stipulation that it stop in a series of ports on its return to the States, where local American consular officers would visit the ship and assure that conditions were peaceful enough to allow it to proceed. How it all got sorted out by the US Coast Guard and in the maritime courts I never found out.

xxi. The Cuba crisis

Q: Consuls really do do all sorts of things! On another subject, were you in Zagreb during the Cuba crisis? What happened?

JAEGER: It was, without question, one of the most exciting and fraught 24 hours I lived through in my Foreign Service career. It occurred in the third week of October '62. Joe Godson and his wife had decided to go on leave in Rome, so, as his deputy, I was temporarily in charge. I remember, his parting shot as he got into his car: "Nothing important is likely to happen, so you ought to be able to manage!"

A couple of days later the Cuba crisis broke. As the situation escalated, and we were trying to stay abreast of the reams of telegrams flooding in, our local staff brought in reports that there were thousands of 'students' massing at the university with instructions to be ready to storm the American Consulate. Subsequent scouting trips confirmed these reports of large crowds waving anti-American banners, being exhorted by party activists to move against us when the crisis became critical. Needless to say I sent urgent messages to Belgrade and Washington. The situation was dangerous, since we had no Marines or safe rooms and our corner building, facing one of Zagreb's busiest streets, was completely exposed.

The tension mounted by the hour as the standoff between the Soviet Union and Washington continued and the Soviet ships continued to steam toward Cuba. Early on in the crisis I sent our locals home, leaving only us five Americans in the building. We burnt the most sensitive materials and began to barricade doors and windows. In the meantime our young Administrative officer began to make rope ladders in case it should become necessary to escape through the rear windows of the building into the adjoining backyards, which conceivably could offer an escape route.

Then, when we had done what we could, we waited. The key question was, of course, whether to abandon the building and let it be overrun, or to stand our ground? In the end, after we had all discussed the pros and cons, I decided we would stand our ground, and try to escape over the rope ladders only at the last minute. It was a hair-brained scheme, but, who knows, it might have worked.

It was in this atmosphere, with steadily growing pressure on us and across the world as the day proceeded, that we suddenly got the news that the USSR had blinked! The Soviet ships had turned around and the Cuba crisis was over. Almost simultaneously the massed crowds who had been threatening us simply vanished, and the assault on the Consulate never took place. Tito had clearly meant to make a measured gesture of support to Khrushchev with a 'spontaneous' assault on the small American post in Zagreb, rather than risking a major confrontation by threatening the Embassy. When Khrushchev caved, Tito immediately called off the dogs.

That night, we, and the rest of Zagreb's consular corps, which included several Iron Curtain countries, as well as a number of Croatian officials, were invited for drinks at the British Consulate General. When my colleagues and I walked into Basil Judd's richly carpeted reception room there was only a terrible silence, since the various Communists present probably hadn't been told yet how to react. I will never forget lovable old Judd standing on the other side of the huge Persian carpet booming out: "Jolly good show, Yanks! I knew you could do it!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: There was polite clapping from the Communist side and only somewhat greater enthusiasm from our Western allies, some of whom had waffled during the crisis and most of whom were still in shock. It was thus that the Cuban crisis ended in Zagreb.

I have always remembered this moment and was sorry and angry over Basil's subsequent fate at the hands of the UDBA. He was a wonderful old man and a seasoned friend.

xxii. The Zagreb Trade Fair

Q: So then your tour of Zagreb ended in '63?

JAEGER: Actually in February '64, since I was asked to stay a few extra months beyond my two-year assignment to help Joe Godson with the big annual job of backstopping our representation at the Zagreb Trade Fair where we had an American pavilion.

It was a big deal. Lots of American and other companies from many other countries came and showed the many thousands of people who visited what American and other non-communist economies could achieve, in contrast to the stodgy and by and large backward Iron Curtain and Soviet exhibits. It of course created openings for communication between Croatian and western firms and was heavily covered by the press, since the Fair was a major official event. So it was worthwhile all around and part of the price the Tito regime had to pay to maintain essential productive contacts with the Western economies.

Getting everything coordinated and set up in time involved massive work but was one of the most useful things the Consulate did.

xxiii. Tuskanac, Ivanka and good-byes

Q: How was your personal life in your last year in Zagreb?

JAEGER: With my last promotion had come a move to a lovely villa on Tuskanac, a winding, tree-lined street in the upscale part of Zagreb in the gently rising hills above the town. It had a terrace, a walled garden a few trees and even a swimming pool. In short, it was a great improvement over the gloomy third-floor apartment in the Consulate. With the help of Ivanka, who came along as my housekeeper and cook, I was now able to do quite a bit of entertaining, sometimes, when the weather was clement, on the terrace and around the pool - occasioning some complaints from the aged nuns who were my neighbors to the north and the irascible Croatian general to the south, both of whom were used to and expected silence. The most memorable evening on Tuskanac was the traditional New Years eve stag dinner for twelve which Ivanka produced. It involved a whole suckling pig, baked in the local baker's oven, which graced the center of our table and a bottle of Dalmatian red at every place. Needless to say it was a great success.

The story would not be complete without an end-note on Ivanka. As I said earlier, she was the second wife of Zagreb's preeminent barber Stefan Skudas, a solemn little man generally dressed in black, who, after the death of his first wife, had acquired her in her native Slavonian village. Although Stefan must have had quite a good income, she was almost immediately sent off to work and eventually became a prized domestic for successive Americans at the Consulate. Besides being a good-hearted, generous person and an indefatigable worker, I quickly discovered that she was an excellent cook and, most importantly, intensely loyal. None of us ever suspected her of being an UDBA informer.

Indeed she would regularly tell us how they had called her in again and again, and recount how she had frustrated or circumvented their questions. Although she loved her Slavonian homeland, she had no more use for the Ustashi who ruled there during World War II than for the UDBA of our time. She told me one day of the Ustashi concentration camp which existed during World War II not far from her village when she was still a girl. In spite of the great dangers involved, she would sneak up to the barbed wire fence and, risking her life, bring food to the half-starved Jewish children. She was of that sturdy peasant generation, more Hapsburg than modern in their attitudes, who still had a strong sense of right and wrong, knew who they were and believed in giving full measure. I was very fortunate that she decided I was worth while taking care of.

Q: And then your tour in Zagreb came to and end.

JAEGER: Yes, in February 1964, with a wonderful good-bye party. To celebrate the occasion my colleagues had draped a big room in Joe Godson's residence with a huge Communist-style red banner, inscribed as usual with a slogan in gold letters. Instead of the customary "Workers of the World Unite", however, this one was a play on the Croatian word "pupak", meaning "belly button", whose improbable plural "pupci", had lately become an in-house source of amusement at the Consulate. So the banner read" "Pupci svjeta ujedinjete se!", or "Bellybuttons of the world unite!" Although clearly making fun of the usual tiresome propaganda banners, even the Communist officials present took it in good stride.

c. Off to Washington and Aviation!

Q: So what happened to you next?

JAEGER: To my great surprise I had, after some home leave, been assigned to the Aviation Division of the State Department's Economic Bureau, an assignment all the more startling because I was really not an economist, although I had done some economic work in both Monrovia and Zagreb, and certainly knew nothing about aviation. I reported there in late February 1964.

The Aviation Division's main job was to negotiate and monitor the growing number of comprehensive bilateral aviation agreements, which defined reciprocal route structures, capacities, frequencies of service, landing rights and so forth, in conformance with prevailing perceptions of US interest - since both domestic and international aviation was then still largely government controlled.

My new boss, John Snowden, the Director of this seven or eight man office, was a long time, taciturn civil servant, who had been involved in aviation administration virtually his entire career, so was a major authority. Although the work was nominally divided among the members of his staff by region and airline, he was clearly the ultimate decider.

It was obvious from the outset, that, he didn't have a clue as to what to do with me, and had no intention of making an effort to teach me even the basics of this highly technical and complicated field. I was given a desk only after several days and for several weeks did literally nothing except read telegrams and wait for somebody to tell me what to do. If the State Department wanted to send Snowden a totally unprepared and unqualified officers, his reply was, so be it.

i. Saving Loftleidir

Q: Any idea why you were assigned to this operation?

JAEGER: Absolutely not a clue!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: It was not until several weeks after my arrival, during which I had complained more and more loudly about having nothing to do, that I was finally told that I could work on the Icelandic question. The issue was that PanAm had filed a series of complaints against Loftleidir, the tiny cut-rate Icelandic airline, and wanted us to produce the necessary adverse findings.

So I threw myself into that. I read the files and listened to both sides who came in to explain their positions. Essentially PanAm's complaint was that Loftleidir underbid it on the Atlantic route by using older, slower planes and charging cheaper prices and that all this was taking a small bite out of its apple. Loftleidir argued that they were our NATO allies; that, given their mid-Atlantic position, they needed air communications with both America and Europe; and that it was natural that they should charge less than the official rate structure called for, since they flew different routes and their slower and less comfortable planes were the only ones they could afford. Nevertheless, I quickly gathered, the prevailing view in the American aviation community was that we should just kill them off and let Pan Am rule the waves.

When it became clear that I was not just going with the flow, but taking my time and seriously studying the issue before making recommendations, PanAm reinforced its point with invitations to some of Washington's best clubs, where I enjoyed some very good oysters and excellent red wines. Their rep made the further major mistake of referring to some classified telegrams I had just written to our Embassy in Reykjavik, making it clear that PanAm had its own real-time pipeline into the State Department!

Q: What did you recommend?

JAEGER: Well, all my experience told me that that this sort of question shouldn't just be resolved on a purely technical basis of equipment and prices, which was the standard aviation policy approach, but that we also needed to take our strategic interests in Iceland into account as a geographically important NATO partner,

Q: That's right.

JAEGER: So I wrote a very strong memorandum arguing that Iceland was a crucial strategic partner, that it needed to have air service to Europe and America, that Icelandic Airlines provided a reliable, useful service for a segment of Americans who couldn't afford to travel on PanAm, and that, in any case, the harm to Pan Am's profits was negligible. To my surprise, and his credit, Snowden signed off on it, it went up the line and Dean Rusk, the then Secretary of State approved it. Icelandic airlines was saved!

d. Staff Assistant in the European Bureau

JAEGER: Having won my battle I, nevertheless, felt strongly that I didn't want to spend two more years in this very specialized business. My free time roaming the corridors paid off, since after some months, I heard that William Tyler, the formidable Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs was looking for a new Staff Assistant. I applied, he interviewed me and to my delight and surprise I got the job. What's more, I had again been promoted , that spring to FSO-4. So things were very much back on track when I started my new assignment in 'EUR' in September 1964.

Q: What was the European Bureau's area of responsibility in those days?

JAEGER: A huge chunk of the world and of American foreign policy: All of Western and Eastern Europe, the USSR and its European satellites, Canada, as well as a grab-bag of Europe's various remaining colonies.

i. Bill Tyler

Q: And what about Bill Tyler, what was he like?

JAEGER: He was exceptional: A carefully groomed, invariably polite, cultivated, broadly educated man, he looked a bit like Monsieur Poirot, with his little mustache, precise manners and somewhat European demeanor. Born in France and bilingual, Tyler was that rare combination of someone who not only had the organizational ability and intellectual precision to deal with the multiplicity of issues which running European affairs entailed, but who brought sound political and cultural instincts and historic depth to the job. He was a genuine diplomat and, for juniors like myself, both a model to emulate and somewhat intimidating.

Q: He sounds interesting and unusual. Do you know anything more about his background?

JAEGER: His education was English, Harrow and then Oxford, where he studied philosophy, politics and economics. Then a stint with a bank in New York, which he didn't much like, which decided him to get a PhD in art history at Harvard. Before finishing, having failed his physical for the wartime draft, he volunteered to do the French short-wave service for a private radio station in Boston. It was soon taken over by the US Office of War Information (OWI), where Tyler managed the radio output for several countries. He was then sent to run OWI's radio operation in Algiers aimed at France, Italy and Spain, as well as the German troops in Africa and elsewhere. After our invasions of Sicily and France, he went on to London with OWI. Although he had hoped to go back to Harvard after the war, he never did and stayed on in senior positions with USIA, into which OWI had indirectly morphed, until a took his Foreign Service Exam, for transfer from the FS Reserve, and was integrated as Class 1. Once in the Foreign Service he became Political Counselor in Bonn, then Deputy Assistant Secretary in EUR. He was moved up to Assistant Secretary in the spring of 1962.

ii. The Staff Assistant's job

Q: What, in those days, did the Staff Assistant to an Assistant Secretary do?

JAEGER: Assistant Secretaries nowadays have Special Assistants, ordinary Assistants, and sometimes the assistants have assistants. In my days there was one Staff Assistant, and I was it. Halfway through my tour a beginning officer, a brand-new FSO-8, was assigned to help me, a very good chap, but not yet ready to play any substantive role. That was the extent of Bill Tyler's staff, which also supported his three Deputies, Richard Davis, the Eastern Europeanist, Bob Schaetzel, the passionately articulate Europeanist, and Bob Creel, the most junior of the three, a competent no-nonsense guy who did everything else.

My first priority, of course, was the Assistant Secretary. Hundreds of telegrams, staff papers and other reports had to be screened by the time he came to the office, which meant that I usually had to be there at six or six-fifteen, plow through all the paper which had come in overnight, and have the most important 20 or 30 telegrams and reports, the things he really needed to be aware of, ready for him before he went to the Secretary's and Under Secretary's staff meetings at eight.

Needless to say this made for a fairly stressful start, particularly in the beginning, when I was not yet sure of my judgement as to what was critical and likely to come up for discussion. Over time it became more routine, although, even at best, the days were extremely long - usually fourteen hours or more - and were invariably marked by unexpected flaps and crises.

All this made it critically important to have good human relations with EUR's Office Directors and key action officers, who were the key players in producing quick responses, as well as the never-ending stream of briefing books and memoranda for the Secretary, the President etc.

Of these the most important was the Office of Political/Military Affairs, (RPM), because it handled the major controversies then raging over nuclear issues and their management within the NATO alliance. It was then headed by David Popper, knowledgeable and clear-headed, and had a cast of luminaries: George Vest, a sagacious, very able senior officer, who later became Assistant Secretary for Europe himself, Vince Baker, a slightly sardonic, omniscient sage and Ron Spiers, Tyler's protï¿½gï¿½ and arguably the brightest guy at State. Like Tyler, Ron had moved into the Foreign Service laterally after a rapid rise through the nuclear weapons world. After several major Ambassadorships Ron ended his career rather counter-intuitively as Under Secretary for Management.

Other Offices also played major roles, notably BNA, which handled our complex special relations with Britain and the Commonwealth; GER, under Al Puhan, on the Berlin and German issues which were at the heart of most cold War discussions and was a power center of its own; SOV and EE , who respectively handled our complex relations with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites and Yugoslavia; as well as the major country desks, like France, Greece and Turkey.

iii. Working with 'SS'- the Secretary's Executive Secretariat

JAEGER: My most difficult ongoing challenge was to get all these important and self-important tigers to do their thing to meet Tyler's and the Secretary's needs, which meant producing needed staff paper in the proper formats and on time - an often difficult and sometimes fractious task , since most of them were constantly overworked and stressed, and often had their own, strong ideas as to priorities and how issues should be argued and presented.

This problem - the basic challenge for people in staff capacities - was compounded by the Executive Secretariat (SS), which controlled the paper flow to the 'seventh floor', (the offices of the Secretary, his Deputies and the Counselor) and imposed strict rules as to length, format and organization. EUR's action officer in SS at the time was Dick Moose, later himself Assistant Secretary for Africa, a strong, articulate personality with a special gift for concise writing, who sternly enforced the rules and insisted that memoranda could only be a page long, no matter what the substance, and even limited attachments.

Given the complexity of many of EUR's issues this obviously created problems. People like George Vest or Ron Spiers, or some of the other senior eminences would prepare closely argued memos on major issues, which Tyler would want Dean Rusk, George Ball or McGeorge Bundy in the White House to read in full, to assure that they had the correct context for this or that question and recommendation. Even so, if they were more than a page long, or, in Dick's view, loose or dense, he would draw red lines across them, and send them back with notations like: "Wordy, too long, rewrite by 5 PM."

Q: That put you sort of the middle?

JAEGER: That's right. I would then have to go back to our people and ask them to rewrite under, at times, excruciating time pressures. Their substantive complaint was that SS's rules were unsound because complex questions should not be compressed to a page. SS's response was also reasonable, that people like the Secretary simply didn't have the time to plow through piles of long epistles. For me it was a no-win situation. Even so, both Bill Tyler and most of the Office Directors understood the conflicting pressures I was under, and did not hold it against me personally.

The lesson was, of course, that Secretariats can be too devoted to form and so damage the substance of what can make a foreign office great.

iv. Working with Tyler

Q: What was your personal relationship with Tyler?

JAEGER: Tyler was invariable kind and thoughtful, but did not always clue me in on what he was doing. He clearly wanted a Staff Assistant, not an Executive Assistant. At the same time he was aware of the constant pressures I was under and sometimes showed his appreciation by coming by to ask how things were going, or giving me invitations to events he could not go to personally. It was thus that I came to attend an art auction where the extensive collection of a recently deceased Italian Ambassador was sold, where I acquired a beautiful Rembrandt engraving and a genuine Durer woodcut, for the amazing sum of $200. They are still in my study as I write.

He also showed his confidence in other ways. On a number of occasions when he was very troubled by developments, he would give me an open, hand written note to the Secretary, usually containing only four or five sentences, and ask me to give it only to Dean Rusk's Personal Assistant, bypassing the whole system and underscoring that the issue involved, in Tyler's view, was of the greatest importance.

v. A non-starter: the Multilateral Nuclear Force.

Q: Leaving the procedural issues, what were the main substantive issues EUR was involved in at the time?

JAEGER: The core issue was the battle over the MLF, the European Multilateral Nuclear Force.

It arose because the growing number of American nuclear weapons deployed in Europe during the Eisenhower administration made many in Europe feel like potential Soviet nuclear targets, without having any effective control over the weapons deployed on their soils. This increased the risks of nuclear proliferation in Europe and, with it, increased splintering of its tentatively evolving unity.

The MLF was dreamed up in Washington to defuse these issues and encourage greater European defense cooperation. It would also, it was hoped, give West Germany a reasonable level of participation in the management of NATO's nuclear weapons, and so preempt any German temptations to go nuclear. And it might, just possibly, assuage French resentment over American unilateral control of nuclear weapons on French soil, an irritant which was a major factor in de Gaulle's decision to evict the NATO command from France in 1966 and to create his own force de frappe in 1967.

Q: How did MLF propose to do all this?

JAEGER: Well, the idea was to create a multilateral submarine or surface fleet armed with nuclear weapons under multinational NATO command, manned by multinational crews representing all NATO nations.

Needless to say the proposal raised a host of complicated new issues, i.e. how NATO could make the requisite launch decisions, particularly if there was a lack of unanimity; how multinational command would work; whether multinational crews would be able to overcome language and political differences sufficiently to function in a crisis; whether the use of submarines would not leave the impression that the US still controlled the show, since we alone could build them (the reason President Kennedy rejected this option and preferred a fleet of MLF surface ships built in Europe, even though they would be more vulnerable to a Soviet strike); how to satisfy British demands for a continued special nuclear relationship etc.

Underlying these and other important but technical issues was the broader question of creating a viable united Europe, which could in time become a full partner of the US. The Europeanists on both sides of the Atlantic thought the MLF pointed to the answer, since a new NATO-led nuclear force might in time become the training ground and then the backbone of the new Europe's military power and so provide the critical element in 'Europe's' further evolution.

As it turned out, the MLF inflamed rather than lessened Allied disagreements. The French were flatly opposed, while the United Kingdom wanted serious revisions, protecting their special role. Efforts to resolve the host of unanswered technical questions and to work out a compromise among U.S., British and German views consumed most of 1964 and 1965. In the end, the MLF project sank under its own weight and proved unworkable politically.

Q: All this must have provoked intense debates in Washington?

vi. The MLF debate in Washington

JAEGER: The intense debates swirling around these issues divided the folks in Washington as much as the Europeans. The core supporters of MLF, were an in-group of passionate 'Europeanists' who wanted to bring about the rapid creation of a united Europe. The were led by George Ball, the then Undersecretary at State and Robert Bowie, who headed Policy Planning, Henry Own, of Bowie's Staff (who had been my distinguished predecessor years earlier when I was made Secretary of Allan Evan's Estimates group in INR) and Bob Schaetzel, Tyler's Deputy for European and Atlantic issues in EUR. Beyond this core group were a host of lesser fry in RPM and elsewhere.

Ranged generally on the other side were McGeorge Bundy in the White House, my boss Bill Tyler and Ron Spiers, none of whom opposed MLF ideologically, but had various levels of skepticism as to its wisdom and feasibility. Secretary of Defense McNamara also became a skeptic. Dean Rusk supported the official line, took little interest and stayed generally above the fray.

In effect the battle lines cut right across our office. And it was an intense, ongoing battle. Everyone agreed that the nuclear issues in Europe required rethinking, but that's pretty much where agreement ended. And, since President Johnson or Secretary Rusk left the issue unresolved, the 'Europeanists' had time to use their extensive official and private contact networks to keep the battle going as issue after issue came to the forefront.

Q: So it became an intense lobbying contest?

JAEGER: Yes. On one side was the official traffic. On the other, a constant stream of informal communications to key Europeans, and like-minded 'Europeanist' members in our Embassies in those countries, explaining what the other side was doing, or would be doing next, advising them on strategies and setting out next steps. The whole thing became a diplomatic mess of the first order.

Q: And you were again in the middle?

JAEGER: Right. Bill Tyler, a concise and logical thinker, was clearly aware of MLF's many problems, of which the first and foremost was that it would be extremely hazardous in an East-West confrontation to rely on MLF for effective decision-making and execution, when you have a medley of people from every corner of Europe who could delay or frustrate. The result could not but weaken the credibility of our deterrent.

Bob Schaetzel, two doors away, on the other hand was passionately committed to the project, and constantly in touch with Bowie, Henry Owen, etc. and with their many contacts across the Atlantic, passing on information and coordinating next steps. The result was a high level of mutual distrust and things often got heated.

Q: How did you get involved?

JAEGER: In all kinds of ways. First, because, as Tyler's Staff Assistant, my loyalty was to him, and most of Schaetzel's effort was aimed at outflanking him. Secondly, because I too thought the MLF was a Rube Goldberg construct bound to fail, which did not deserve support. And, most importantly, because I was the custodian of Tyler's telegrams and papers.

Some of them were NODIS, which meant they were totally privileged traffic, to be seen by no one except the Assistant Secretary, unless he decided otherwise. Tyler and his British, and other European counterparts used this channel for their most private exchanges. I was therefore often opportuned for "just a quick look", and always refused.

One day I came back from lunch and found Bob Schaetzel, Henry Owen and other pro-MLF 'Europeanists' pawing through Tyler's NODIS file, which they had filched from my safe. They looked like a bunch of kids caught with their fingers in the cookie jar. The argument was that senior people can't be kept from reading diplomatic traffic. I countered that these were exclusively the Assistant Secretary's messages. The thing ended in a huge row between Schaetzel and Tyler whom I, of course, had to inform. It was one of a series of events which gradually made his situation in EUR untenable.

vii. Losing the battle and winning the war

Q: What else was going on during this time?

JAEGER: There was a welter of other, greater and lesser issues, ranging from US-Soviet relations, to Germany and Berlin, the Satellites and Yugoslavia, US relations with Canada, and the fuss over Cheddi Jagan, the controversial Prime Minister of Brutish Guiana, whom Washington opposed because of alleged Soviet links, who consumed an inordinate amount of time. All of these issues worked against the background of the Vietnam war which constantly preoccupied our diplomatic work in Europe as elsewhere in the world.

But the core concern was the resolution of the nuclear uncertainties in Europe, which had been greatly aggravated by the new American doctrine of flexible response, which made it much more important, from the European perspective, to have some say over when to pull the trigger. Ron Spiers later floated and put over the idea of a NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) which has helped greatly in involving the allies in nuclear issues over the years.

Tyler handled it all deftly and honestly, but in the end paid the price for his good judgement and integrity. As the MLF was sinking, he was abruptly replaced by John Leddy, an economist from the 'European' camp. We were all shocked and crestfallen.

Q: When did that happen?

JAEGER: That happened in May 1965. Time or one of the major magazines said in a comment on his departure that 'the last light was going out at State'. I think I was the only one still in the office on the night he actually left. He smiled and said, "Well, George, here is the glow worm turning off!"

Q: What did you most value about this experience?

JAEGER: Although I had been doing staff and not policy work, I learned an enormous amount.

Part of it was that the job was one of those very rare windows where you see across the full range of issues, which intellectually brought me back to the experience I had had in the early days with my informal tutelage under Burt Marshall. Part of it was the management and human relations challenges the job posed, for which I was not at all prepared and sometimes had to learn the hard way as I went along.

Most important, was my exposure to Bill Tyler as a role model. He thought about issues with sober realism, informed by unusual understanding of the societies we were dealing with, and expressed his conclusions simply, dispassionately and with utmost clarity. I think he was one of the unsung giants of that age.

viii.Moving on.

Q: What happened to him after he left EUR?

JAEGER: Tyler went on to be Ambassador at the Hague, a pleasant consolation prize, and subsequently spent a number of happy years as Director of Dumbarton Oaks' Research Center in Washington. He and his wife, a great-niece of Napoleon III, finally retired to their vineyards in Burgundy, of whose history and wines he was a recognized expert, and where he was ultimately at home. We exchanged handwritten Christmas notes for years. [It was only in the course of editing this text that I learned that Bill Tyler had died, not in France, as I had presumed, but in Bristol, Vermont in November 1993, not more than 20 miles from where we lived in Middlebury - presumably while visiting his granddaughter Gioia Thompson, an Environmentalist at the University of Vermont. I assume the Vermont connection came about because he is a descendent of Royall Tyler, who once courted Abigail (Nabby) Adams, helped suppress Shay's rebellion, became a famous lawyer, teacher and dramatist and was, in 1801, appointed to the Vermont supreme Court.]

I, myself, was also provided for. Since Leddy clearly wanted his own staff, Mr. Tyler arranged for me to be transferred to Berlin, an assignment I appreciated but had not sought.

Part V: Berlin and Bonn

1. Defending Berlin

a. Supervisory Political Officer

Q: So Mr. Tyler arranged for you to go to Berlin. What was your new capacity?

JAEGER: The assignment read 'Supervisory Political Officer', which meant, as I had been told in Washington, that I was to be the Deputy Chief of the Political Section at the US Mission in Berlin - a nice step forward which turned out to be a problem.

Q: How so?

JAEGER: It became clear, when I arrived in Berlin, that this 'top-down' assignment, in which EUR had 'parachuted' me into the No. 2 job in the Political Section, had caused resentment in the Mission and, Assistant Secretary Tyler having left EUR, was simply not going to be honored. So I was made Political-Military officer in the Political Section instead, responsible for the Berlin Wall and the Access Routes to Berlin - a clearly demanding job, but which, as was made clear to me, involved no supervisory responsibilities. I think their difficulty was that having me serve as Deputy to Jim Carson, the recently arrived Political Counselor, would have implied putting me above Brandon Grove, a formidable, well-connected officer, who had been Assistant to Under Secretaries Chester Bowles and to George Ball, who followed events in City Hall where Willy Brandt was officiating.

In spite of my tacit acquiescence to this change in my assignment, I never escaped the sense that I was seen as an interloper, a feeling compounded by the fact that Carson and I got off to an awkward start personally which did not improve over time.

b. The US Mission in Berlin

Q: Well, that's not a great way to start a new job. Before we get into that, let's first set the stage a bit: Tell us about the US Mission in Berlin, how it was organized, and what it was supposed to do.

JAEGER: The U.S. Mission was America's headquarters and representation in the US Sector of Berlin, established under the quadripartite arrangements worked out after the war.

Q: Was it under the authority of the American Embassy in Bonn?

JAEGER: Yes and no. The head of the U.S. Mission was always an American General with his own line of command, in charge of the Berlin Brigade and responsible for all military aspects of the Berlin operation; whereas the Deputy Chief of Mission was a senior Foreign Service Officer, who took care of Berlin's political and economic policy issues and reported both to the Embassy in Bonn and the State Department. It was, and by necessity, had to be a harmonious arrangement, in which good personal relations across complex organizational lines were essential if we were to handle Berlin's Byzantine issues and frequent crises effectively.

Q: Who were the key Foreign Service people at the Mission when you arrived?

JAEGER: The Deputy Chief of Mission was an American Minister, John Calhoun, a stylish, competent bachelor, who got on well with the military and had everyone's respect. His passion was music, which he indulged on free evenings at the 'Philharmonie', Berlin's brilliantly cantilevered post-war concert hall where Herbert von Karajan presided. His Deputy, Arthur Day, was a bright, tightly organized officer, who kept the Mission running on all cylinders - a major challenge even when Berlin was not in crisis-mode, which, as often as not, it was.

Q: Besides the Political Section, were there other staffs in the Mission?

JAEGER: Most, importantly, the Eastern Affairs Section, a separate political/economic unit which followed developments in the Soviet Sector of the city. It was headed by Frank Meehan, an experienced Eastern European hand, and included several bright staff members like Bill Woessner, whose wry sense of humor often made the harsh drabness of the East German world they focused on a bit less depressing. Even though they were limited, as far as I know, to published sources and had no human contacts on the other side, they often did remarkably interesting work teasing out shifts in GDR policy from the dense and dull pages of "Neues Deutschland' and other official output.

There were also an Economic Section, which followed Berlin's then somewhat precarious economic health; a consular section; a very active Public Affairs staff, including my friend, the then Press Officer John Brogan, and a Legal Advisor.

As for the less visible parts of the Mission, CIA's famous Berlin station, I can only say that I had no working relationship with them, and had only a general idea where their office was located. We did, of course, get some of the intelligence output, although probably only a fraction of what was produced.

c. Managing the wall and access routes

Q: Can you show us how all this machinery worked through the perspective of your own experience?

JAEGER: As I said earlier, my job was to stay on top of all issues and incidents involving our access routes to Berlin, as well as the incidents which continuously happened at the 'Wall'. As a result a great deal of my work was conducted at night. A duty officer might call, let's say at 2:30 in the morning, and report that some poor guy had tried to flee across the wall in our Sector, had been shot, and that there was a big flap in the area, police, klieg-lights, potential tension.

The first step was usually to inform the British and the French on the inter-Berlin network, the mechanism through which the three Western occupying powers kept each other up-to-date and through which we coordinated joint positions on an almost real-time basis. I would, at the same time, attempt to rouse somebody on the Soviet

side and take whatever action within our own system was needed to assure coordination on the ground.

Q: You worked with the Soviets rather than with the East Germans?

JAEGER: Yes, but it was a continual battle since, every time one asked for the Soviet duty officer, or any Soviet military officer, one invariably got an East German major or colonel. Their idea was to undermine the Western position that Berlin's quadripartite administration, established in post-war agreements, applied to the Soviet sector of Berlin as well as ours and that the Soviets, and not their East German puppet regime, were responsible for what happened there. This was just one of many fronts on which constant effort was required to preserve the Berlin agreements and all that flowed from them, making for a complex, precedent-based and legalistic relationship.

Q: Must have gotten quite frustrating at times.

JAEGER: Of course. The way it played out in practice, I would usually have to waste a great deal of time telling the East German on the other end of the line, that I was only authorized to speak to Soviet officers, and that it was very important I do so promptly if we were to avoid escalation of the issue, et cetera, et cetera. Sometimes the Soviet duty officer would consent to talk to me, listen to our report of what happened and accept our protest. But those were the exceptions. Usually they would simply not respond.

Once I got to the office in the morning, the formal paperwork would follow, more detailed inter-Berlin reports were transmitted of what had happened, and draft texts of protests were coordinated. When issues were more complex or important they would be put on the agenda of our frequent tripartite meetings with the British and the French before being presented to the Soviets in writing or at infrequent quadripartite meetings.

So, to sum up and get back to your earlier question, the Mission was not only our headquarters in the American Sector but an intrinsic part of the tripartite system which dealt with the problems created by the GDR and their Soviet overseers and, in a congenial and usually light-handed, way supervised the Berlin government in City Hall.

Q: Did you work on air access to Berlin. There were still occasional problems there during your time?

JAEGER: Actually air and rail access produced only very occasional problems. Most of my time was taken up by incidents on the Helmstadt Autobahn over which, under the post-war agreements, we had the right to transit the GDR with military convoys.

There were, of course, all kinds of incidents, retrieving broken-down military vehicles, getting military personnel released who had been arrested by the East Germans for some usually trumped-up offense, dealing with medical emergencies which would arise, etc. We were helped in all this by the fact that we had a fairly reliable call-in system enabling us to know where at any time a train or convoy was located.

d. What's a 'convoy'?

Q: What was the most difficult problem of this sort you ever faced?

JAEGER: Believe it or not, the pesky issue of what constituted a 'convoy'. Over time a certain modus vivendi had developed under the quadripartite agreements on access, and western military convoys, the life-line for the American, British and French Brigades and all our other operations, traveled to Berlin routinely on the designated Autobahns. There were, of course, frequent 'incidents', as I have said, to harass us and keep us aware that we could be cut off at any time. Even so, when I arrived, convoys moved fairly reliably in both directions.

We then began to have trouble with what came to be known as 'small convoys', usually convoys of three or four jeeps. After being permitted to start down the Autobahn, they would be stopped somewhere and detained, forcing us into urgent efforts to get them released. It gradually became clear that the Soviets agreed that a 'convoy' might involve twenty trucks, but drew the line at anything as small as three or four jeeps - a clearly theological distinction intended to irritate and assert their local dominance.

I spent an absolutely enormous amount of time on this. Every few days I would be awakened in the middle of the night by a military message saying that a small convoy of, say, four jeeps and a command car had been stopped on the autobahn somewhere in East Germany, that the East Germans would not let them continue, and could I please get them unstuck? Sometimes it sufficed to raise hell on the telephone with the other side, sometimes it had to be escalated to the highest levels in Berlin, and sometimes the issue had to be taken to Washington. At the same time we engaged the Soviets in negotiations aimed at getting them to agree that even four jeeps constituted a 'convoy'. After months of back and forth we finally worked it out, and I think I can lay claim to having done it. But it was a long, hard slog.

Q: That's typical Soviet behavior, trying to create issues where something wasn't precisely nailed down in agreement.

JAEGER: That's right. I still have a wonderful cartoon painted by one of my colleagues which they gave me when I left Berlin, showing me, St. George, standing on the neck of the writhing small convoy dragon, with Carson, Brandon Grove and others riding through a raised barrier on four jeeps, waving and saluting - while I modestly accept their accolades with my broken lance.

e. Steglitz Station house

Q: Tell us about other major issues which arose during your time.

JAEGER: There are two others that are worth mentioning. The first came to be called "the Battle of Steglitz Station House, " a typical cold war story which involved some important lessons for policy makers, and succeeded in averting a major crisis.

Q: Well that sounds meaty. Tell us about it.

JAEGER: West Berlin had for some time been building a circumferential highway to link the three western sectors of the city; since, as a result of Berlin's gradual economic recovery, it had become increasingly time-consuming to drive through the existing, often narrow streets, let's say, from the French sector in the West via the British Sector in the middle, to the American Sector on the south- eastern part of Berlin. As far as we were aware, work had been progressing without a hitch, and long sections of the new elevated circumferential could be seen awaiting final connection.

Then, one day, word came from City Hall, that they needed to meet with us to discuss a major problem. It turned out that West Berlin officials had known for several years that the circumferential, as designed, would have to cross the East German-owned 'S-Bahn' at Steglitz - a borough in the south-eastern part of West Berlin - and that it would have to pass directly over the Steglitz Station building, which, and there was the problem, was owned by the East Germans.

Why this was so, involves another bit of Berlin lore: In brief, although the U-Bahn was clearly an East-German rail system, it made a big loop from East Berlin into West Berlin and back and, while passing across the three Western sectors, carried a large amount of local traffic. It had therefore been agreed years earlier, that the GDR would continue to operate this vital West Berlin segment and, besides being well paid for this service, would retain full ownership of all of the S-Bahn's rail and equipment, even though located in the Western Sectors.

Q: How had the Berlin officials hoped to get around this obstacle?

JAEGER: They told us sheepishly, that they had been in telex correspondence with the S-Bahn's officials for years, had offered them millions of Deutschmarks and all sorts of other goodies if they would allow them to move the Steglitz station house out of the way of the circumferential, but had been consistently brushed off. Now, things had reached the crisis point. The circumferential was within 50 yards on both sides of Steglitz station house, and the whole project had had to be stopped pending resolution of this question.

The good news was that the Berlin press had so far not yet twigged on this. But the Berlin officials were desperately afraid that they would, any moment, publish pictures of the two ends of the circumferential looming ridiculously over the gap occupied by the Steglitz Station and that Berlin's City Hall would have no credible explanation as to how or when this issue would be resolved. Even worse, the East Germans might never agree to let West Berlin close the Steglitz gap. The result, would not only be the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars for this high-visibility project, but a huge political fiasco for the Berlin Senat (the City Hall administration).

Clearly, Berlin's City Hall had been very foolish not to come to us much earlier.

Q: Quite a mess.

JAEGER: And it landed squarely on my desk. As things stood, it seemed obvious that more appeasement wouldn't work: The GDR didn't care about the money, but were stonewalling to make the West lose face. There was therefore only one way to deal with this, to show the East that we meant business.

I drafted a simple action plan, whose first step was a telex to the GDR Railway Administration presenting them with an ultimatum: If they agreed within 24 hours to our moving the Steglitz Station house the previous financial offers would be honored. If not, the Allied powers would simply remove it. To my delight and surprise, my telegram was cleared without a hitch and quickly approved in Washington, even though everyone understood that our ultimatum could precipitate another major Berlin crisis.

Q: Who had to approve this sort of message?

JAEGER: Besides my boss, the American Minister Mr. Calhoun, as well as the Berlin Commandant. In Washington, State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and probably the White House. Locally the plan was also coordinated with our Embassy in Bonn, as well as the British and the French.

Q: I see.

JAEGER: So the agreed strategy was: Let them know that they were now dealing with the Western Allies; give them one more chance to resolve things amicably; insist on a prompt, constructive reply; and, make it crystal clear that if we don't receive one by the stipulated time, we would move in unilaterally and simply take down the Steglitz station house.

Q: So how did it play out?

JAEGER: Well, it was a big show. On the appointed night American troops, as well as some British and French elements, were quietly deployed in the misty gloom of side streets, together with all sorts of heavy equipment, while Steglitz Station house was starkly illuminated and set off against the drizzly dark by glaring arc lights. All the tripartite brass was there, as well as the senior diplomatic people. Tension was running fairly high, since our telex had been sent to the GDR the evening before and, as expected, there had so far been no reply. The action - appropriately nicknamed "Nacht und Nebel Aktion" (Night and Fog Action) - was to begin at ten o'clock.

But just before ten there was a crisis. For just as the wrecking ball was about to swing into action, someone discovered that moving the complicated railway clock, which regulated U-Bahn traffic, across the track to the temporary platform we were constructing on the other side, was more challenging than the West Berlin railway techies had expected and, if mismanaged, would disrupt the whole system. As it turned out one them knew the man in East Berlin who was the S-Bahn's expert on railway clocks. In a rather desperate 'Hail Mary' play, he called him on the S-Bahn's own service phone and told him, I thought quite implausibly, that he was making some repairs and asked if he could help!

To our huge relief, the East German bought the story and dutifully talked him through the process of disconnecting and reconnecting the clock; helping us avoid a huge public mess, since S-Bahn traffic through West Berlin needed to resume normally at 6 AM the next day. As it was, the big wrecking ball went into action only an hour or so later and, in short order, knocked down the station house.

Then it was a matter of waiting to see how the East Germans would react. It was not till a bit after midnight that an S-Bahn train arrived at top speed and screeched to a stop. Its only passenger was an East German General in full uniform. He got out, looked at the remains of the station house with obvious amazement and said, "What in hell are you people doing?"

Our senior people told him. The West had sent them endless messages. They had ignored them. They had been given an ultimatum, and had ignored that. We then went ahead, as we said we would.

The General, still looking bewildered, simply said, "Well, we were all wrong! None of us thought you'd have the guts to do this!" He then got back on his train and left. The next morning, the S-Bahn ran on schedule, as of nothing had happened!

Q: Well, that was quite a success, and must have shaken them up on the other side.

JAEGER: It did indeed. We learned through intelligence channels some months later, that there had been a major purge in the East German Railway Administration, as well as in some of their intelligence organizations. The bottom line was that they had assumed the West would chicken out and that they could win a propaganda victory by hanging tough. Instead we won.

Q: There some lessons to be drawn from this, no?

JAEGER: I have always thought so - and still have a small piece of one of the bricks from Steglitz station house on my desk in Vermont as a reminder that competent diplomacy sometimes does have to resort to force, but only when the cause is just, the game plan has been carefully thought through and one has done everything reasonably possible to avoid it.

f. Check Point Charlie: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Q: You mentioned there was another major issue which arose during you time in Berlin. What was that about?

JAEGER: This was about access by US diplomatic personnel to East Berlin. Since the West was trying to maintain the principle that Berlin was under quadripartite rule, the three Western allies asserted their right to be and to be seen in the Soviet Sector of Berlin, even after the Wall had gone up. Simply put we had a monthly schedule, under which our diplomatic people would be assigned to go to East Berlin to spend a few high-visibility hours having lunch or dinner, going to the opera, the Brecht theater, concerts, or museums. The idea was to get the word around in that drab, sealed-off, police-ridden Communist world that we were still there and would not go away.

I myself went over many times and often found these visits richly rewarding. I particularly remember one evening, when three or four of us went to have dinner at the Writers Club in East Berlin, where a little band usually played. As we came into the room the music stopped, and they began playing the theme song of the 'Bridge on the River Kwai', as we were being shown to our seats! The yearning for freedom was palpable. It was deeply moving.

A similar thing happened when my fiancï¿½, Pat Clark and I went across to East Berlin toward the end of my tour. Among other things we went to the famous Berlin Zoo. When we came out we found a bouquet of fresh flowers on the windshield of my Volkswagen, which, of course had diplomatic license plates.

Q: Those were still grim times. But, how did your problem arise?

JAEGER: My boss, Jim Carson, thought it was important to rationalize some of the crusty and illogical Berlin procedures which had developed over time. One day the proposal surfaced, with his strong support, that instead of the prevailing system of showing identity cards as members of the U.S. Military Mission when we passed Checkpoint Charlie on trips to East Berlin, which had worked reliably, we should make clear who we are and produce new diplomatic identity cards, equivalent to diplomatic passports.

I thought from the outset that this was just asking for trouble. Since I was the political-military officer responsible for wall issues, and so directly involved, I argued in staff meetings that we were just offering the Soviets a pretext to cause difficulties. If something works, why fix it, particularly since this proposal would reopen basic questions.

Q: Wouldn't using diplomatic ID, or passports, have implied recognition of the Soviet Sector as part of an independent state? The quadripartite administration of Berlin was a military arrangement.

JAEGER: You have gone right to the heart of the matter. The thing was fraught with problems if the Soviets chose to make use of them.

So I argued against this project at length over a period of weeks, pointing out that we didn't need to create new Berlin crises where there weren't any and should just go on using the military ID cards to go to East Berlin as we had done for years.

Well, the Mission's decision went against me and the project was approved in Washington. New ID cards were printed identifying us as diplomatic officers, and messages were sent to the Soviets that we would henceforth be using these new IDs at Checkpoint Charlie. Since the Soviets did not promptly reply, Carson decided we should have a series of 'probes'. The first went fine. Our guy went to Checkpoint Charlie, was waved through and came back. No problem. Then six, eight, ten more people were sent to East Berlin with the new ID's, and all still went well. So one day, Carson came into my office dropped my new ID on my desk and said rather sarcastically, "Well, everybody else has got through OK. It should be safe enough now for you."

So I took my new diplomatic ID card, and drove to Check Point Charlie, where, it was instantly obvious, there was unusual activity. There were film cameras, people on roof tops, and more uniformed people than usual on the ground.

Q: They had reached a decision.

JAEGER: Yes. I nevertheless drove into the slot at Checkpoint Charlie, handed the guard my new ID card and was immediately told it was no good: "We only accept military cards. What's this?" I did my best to explain that I was a diplomatic member of the American Military Mission, and that this was my new diplomatic identity card, about which the Soviets had been informed. He said, "Not acceptable! Turn around and go back to where you came from!"

Our standard rule was that if we encountered a problem at the checkpoint, we would stay put as long as reasonable so as not to look as if we were turning tail. So I simply said, "No, I am entitled to go through!" and blocked Checkpoint Charlie by sitting in the slot for about twenty minutes - creating a major fuss.

Eventually somebody from the Western side came running over to me and said, "OK. You have made your point. The Mission wants you to turn around and come back."

When I walked into the Mission, there was a deathly silence in my section. The next morning a message came from Washington saying that the diplomatic ID experiment had clearly not worked and that we should go back to using our military cards.

Q: Well, the Soviets just took a while to react. And you were proven right.

JAEGER: Yes, but it was a pyrrhic victory. Carson's embarrassment came on top of several other unfortunate encounters - the worst of which occurred when I was the duty officer during a Command Post Exercise simulating an attack on our access routes and needed to have him come in. When reached at home, he was too inebriated to respond. None of this endeared me to him or helped my efficiency reports, which had a pretty negative undertone and suggested that I had a lot to learn.

Q: Did that hurt your career?

JAEGER: Not seriously, although it did delay my next promotion. Luckily, I must have developed a better reputation at the Embassy, since in early January 1967 I got a message from Martin Hillenbrand, the Deputy Chief of Mission, saying that he'd like me to come to Bonn to work on our negotiations with Germany on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the FRG's relations with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union! This was a wonderful break, which opened a whole new future.

g. The Brandt years in Berlin

Q: Well, that's a happy ending. Before we go on to Bonn can we round out the Berlin story with a bit of atmospherics. What were the Brandt years like, and how was you personal life there in what was clearly a difficult assignment?

JAEGER: Berlin, even in the sixties was an exciting city, for all kinds of the reasons: There was the Berliners' sharp, aggressive humor, their "Schnauze", or 'big mouth', which kept up spirits even in the glummest times; their conviction that, even though the West Berlin economy was limping, and much of the place was still grey and run down, they were holding their own; and that the troubles on our Western side were as nothing compared to the misery of the fear-ridden regimented people in East Berlin and in the GDR. There was West Berlin's lively cultural scene, its bustling cabarets, excellent theater, and above all Herbert von Karajan's magisterial concerts at the Philharmonie, Berlin's new cantilevered concert hall. Last, but not least, there was the political presence of Willy Brandt, Berlin's extraordinary mayor during the first part of my tour.

Together with his long-time advisor, and Berlin Press Secretary, Egon Bahr, Brandt had cautiously pointed the way to a less confrontational future, with his slogan of 'Wandel durch Annï¿½herung', or 'change through rapprochement'. Its central theses were first presented in Egon Bahr's famous speech before the Tutzing Academy, rejecting the 'Hallstein Doctrine', which had argued that only pressure and isolation would bring the East German state to collapse. Instead, Brandt, who was both Berlin mayor until 1966 and head of the SPD, and Bahr called for a policy of 'little steps' to induce change in East Germany through detente as a way station to his new concept of two German states in one nation. When he became Foreign Minister in Kiesinger's Grand Coalition in 1966 he was better able to advance these views, but had to remain restrained, given the CDU's and most of the Allies' Cold War thinking. Eventually, however, Brandt prevailed and provided the basis, once he was Chancellor, for the 1971 Four Power Agreement on Berlin, and the Basic Treaty signed by the two Germanys in 1972.

Q: How did Brandt's views affect work at the US Mission while you were there?

JAEGER: Actually not a lot. As Mayor Brandt had succeeded in arranging for a limited number of passes, enabling divided families to see each other occasionally. And Brandt, or Bahr made occasional forward-looking statements outlining their views. But, in the main, things were still frozen in solid Cold War confrontation. Brandon Grove, who did the liaising at City Hall, worked mostly with Brandt's aide Stoltenberg. The issues he reported on were usually technical and rarely fundamental. In fact few, on our side foresaw the enormous role Brandt's 'Ostpolitik" would soon play in changing the whole east-west equation.

h. Surviving Berlin

Q: And how did you fare personally in all this? Were there any bright spots?

JAEGER: Of course. I spent wonderful evenings listening to Karajan, enjoyed exploring Berlin, both east and west, gave talks to groups of students at the Freie Universitï¿½t, the Free University, which was already stressed by the sometimes violently rebellious attitudes of the sixties, and learned a great deal about the whole range of German issues.

Even so, Berlin was a confining experience. And the relentless killing and maiming on the wall, and the continuing pressures on our access routes, sometimes got to me. I particularly remember one winter evening when things had not been going well. The somber pine tree outside my apartment window, dripping with cold rain, seemed to embody the essence of the darkness we were all caught up in.

I did the smart thing, and went to see whom I might phone to cheer me up. In paging through my little black book, Pat Clark jumped out, the lovely, bright blond girl I had met briefly on Mykonos on a leave after my tour in Zagreb. We had only had a coffee together, in the bright morning sunlight of that enchanted island - not yet destroyed by cruise ships and mass tourism. But she had come to see my ship off that evening when I had to go back to Athens, and I still remember her standing on the dock and waving as we steamed off into the Aegean sunset!

So I phoned Pat in Brussels, where she was working, and asked if she would like to have dinner the next night, a Saturday. She seemed delighted, as was I. So I got on the US troop train which rattled across the GDR that night, went on to Brussels and found Pat unchanged, just as I had remembered.

We celebrated at a glorious dinner at 'Comme Chez Soi', the three star restaurant, which Churchill, Monet and many others had thought the best in Europe. As the kind, old, red-nosed waiter brought second and third helpings of 'mousse de becasse' through the narrow swinging doors of the venerable restaurant, with its green leather banquettes facing each other in a space not much wider than a diner, and we drank the first of what, over the years, would be many bottles of 'Domaine du Chevalier '55', Berlin fell away from me, and I new that I had finally come home.

2. NPT and Ostpolitik in Bonn

Q: Knowing both of you, that was a wonderful outcome. Now, let's shift gears and go on to your new assignment at the Embassy in Bonn. What was the situation there?

a. Bonn and Plittersdorf

JAEGER: Coming to Bonn in February 1967 was an exhilarating experience. I had not fully realized to what extent our insular Berlin life, surrounded by hostility and oppression, had colored my life until I took my first meander along the tree lined banks of the Rhine, which flowed by our vast barracks-like Embassy building, and began exploring Bonn, Cologne and the lovely surrounding villages and towns. Although Berlin had been sharp-edged, lively and cultured, there was a mellow depth about the Rhineland, for all its provincialism, which was deeply therapeutic.

Q: Where did one live at the Embassy?

JAEGER: Living arrangements, were simple. Everybody lived in the Plittersdorf housing area on the outskirts of Bonn not far from the Embassy. Essentially it was a "Little America" in a sea of Germans, a collection of two story military-type apartment buildings, with an officers' club, a PX, a school, a movie and all the other usual American amenities - all overlooking the Rhine river which flowed by below.

Apartments were assigned on a rank basis, just like in the Army. If you got a promotion you got a better apartment. It was all very convenient but tended to keep many of the Americans rather insulated from German life.

Q: So it was not just the American military, but the whole embassy staff who lived there?

JAEGER: That's right. The administrative office simply assigned you. I remember I got a rather nice, large apartment with a pleasant enough view. Even so, life in Plittersdorf was a bit like living on an Army base, and was not a great place to entertain one's German friends and contacts, who always felt as if they were going to a foreign country.

Q: Were you there during your whole tour?

JAEGER: Funny you should ask that. When Henry Cabot Lodge arrived as Ambassador in Bonn in May of 1968, succeeding George McGhee, who was the Ambassador when I arrived, he took one look at Plittersdorf and said, "I want my senior officers out of here!" He realized instantly that, for all its convenience, Plittersdorf segregated us into a self-imposed American ghetto. Perhaps because he was an unrepentant aristocrat, and had clear ideas how diplomats should live to be effective, Lodge hated that whole scene.

Our admin people, who were appalled by this threatened revolution, hoped Lodge wouldn't be able get money to rent houses. But, a few months later, he did.

Q: That must have stirred things up!

JAEGER: Indeed. The word went out from the front office that all First Secretaries and up were invited to leave Plittersdorf, and could now set themselves up in nice new rented houses in the Bonn community. This didn't affect me since I was then still a Second Secretary. But, when push came to shove, nobody wanted to go. Absolutely nobody wanted to go! There were all sorts of excuses, children in school, health reasons, you name it. The truth was that the main street in Plittersdorf, where all the seniors had their apartments, was a wonderful vantage point for socializing, networking, and knowing what your colleagues and their wives were up to!

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: So one day Tom Stern, the Admin. Counselor called me in and said, "George, I'm in deep trouble. Lodge got his money, and none of the senior people want to move out of Plittersdorf. All their wives say they want to stay there and be near the officers' club and the swimming pool. You're a bachelor. Would you go?" I said, "Of course I'll go!"

So for the second half of my tour, I ended up with an absolutely gorgeous villa on a wooded hillside above Bonn, on a posh street called 'Am Stadtwald', with all kinds of bedrooms, balconies, servants quarters, gardens and views. My neighbors were some of the FRG's senior politicians and other eminences from the University and elsewhere. I installed myself there with Ivanka, my housekeeper from Zagreb, whom I had brought along. All this was particularly fortuitous, because Pat and I were married in January 1970 and we were able to start our new life together in this ideal setting. I and the few others who had abandoned Plittersdorf ended up being the envy of the Embassy.

b. The cast of characters.

Q: Sounds like an ideal place. You mentioned Henry Cabot Lodge. Why don't we talk a bit about him and the several other Ambassadors you worked for, as well as some of the other senior people at the Embassy.

JAEGER: My first Ambassador, after I was assigned early in 1967 as Second Secretary in the Political Section was, as I said, George McGhee - originally an oil man, who had been Director of Policy Planning and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs before President Johnson sent him to Germany in 1963. He was a Henry the Eighth type, florid, full-chested, self-confident and hard charging, liked action and good food, and was clearly in his element in Bonn. I certainly was in awe of him, and liked and respected him. I still have some notes he sent me, saying that he particularly liked this and that telegram.

Q: Could you sketch in the context?

JAEGER: Although he looked and acted the part of a pro-consul, McGhee actually presided over a certain loosening of relations between the US and the FRG, after Erhard's right-center coalition was replaced by the Grand Coalition between the CDU and the SPD in 1966, and Willy Brandt became Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister. There were sharp disagreements over a range of issues, particularly German off-set payments for American troops and equipment stationed in Germany (increasingly divisive because of our growing problems in Vietnam), non proliferation and Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik which Washington initially found threatening, but which McGhee personally rather welcomed as a much-needed breath of fresh air.

Of the three Ambassadors I served under, I think McGhee certainly cared most deeply about Germany, and maintained close and cordial relations, first with Chancellor Erhard, and, in my time, with Kiesinger and Brandt.

Q: Who was his DCM?

JAEGER: First, Martin Hillenbrand, then Russ Fessenden. They were both wonderful people. I had admired Hillenbrand ever since, as a graduate student at Harvard, I had come across a published version of his doctoral thesis at Columbia on 'Power and Morals' - since I too had always been concerned over the relation of our ethical and moral traditions to the management of power. Unfortunately he left shortly after my arrival to become our first Ambassador to Hungary - we had only had Ministers there before. He was succeeded by Russell Fessenden, a less formal, kind and very thoughtful man, with a wry sense of humor, who was wonderful to work for. Of the two, Russ was the more approachable, less hierarchical.

Q: How did DCM's actually run this huge Embassy?

JAEGER: They didn't micromanage, but oversaw and gave direction on the major policy and administrative issues. Bonn had an extraordinarily gifted staff at that time, which was like a very good orchestra. We picked up very fast when the conductor wanted, let's say, a little more adagio.

Q: Laughter. Who were the other major players?

JAEGER: The Political Counselor Jim Sutterlin, a cultivated, deft, literate and gifted diplomat, who later had a long and distinguished second career at the UN. He was succeeded by Jonathan Dean in August '68, a brilliant, bigger-than-life workaholic who had vast experience in Germany and with European issues. My immediate superiors, were Jack Shaw, an experienced, thoughtful Eastern-Europeanist who unfortunately died only a few years later; followed by bright, articulate, manipulative Gerry Livingston; and finally Jock Dean himself.

Q: Who else stands out in your recollections?

JAEGER: It was a cast of extraordinary characters. There was Nelson Ledsky, Bonn's Berlin man, a loud, flabby take-no-prisoners type, straight out of central New York casting, who in spite of his abrasiveness, had everyone's respect for his huge productivity, consistent competence and hard work; Phil Wolfson, who philosophically followed German domestic politics; and Hans von Imhof, a hugely overweight former Viennese Baron of the Imhof banking family - wise, shrewd and consistently pessimistic - who became a good personal friend.

Besides being the Embassy's acknowledged sage, Hans was the Embassy's link to Herbert Wehner - the tough former member of the German Communist party's Central Committee, who had gone to Moscow in 1933, survived Stalin's purges (some say by denouncing other Germans) left the Communist Party while imprisoned for espionage in wartime Sweden, and then, after the war, became a leading light in West Germany' Social Democratic Party, the SPD and. as such, critically important to Willy Brandt's election as Chancellor. Wehner was the SPD's leader in parliament in my time in Bonn, didn't suffer fools gladly and made it clear that he only wanted to deal with Imhof at the Embassy.

Sadly, Hans died soon after he returned to the States following his Bonn assignment, perhaps from depression or the effects of his passion for genuinely great cuisine. I found him anxiously waiting for me one day, when I returned from a world class lunch at the French Ambassador's residence, where some important current issues were discussed, with only one question: "What was on the menu?".

There were others. Dennis Kux, bright and capable but, I thought, rather too flexible on issues; my always clear-thinking and perceptive classmate and friend Tom Hirschfeld; and Herma Plummer - the elderly Margaret Rutherford-like graduate of the Nï¿½rnberg trials and Allan Dulles' World War II operation in Geneva - who liked me because I too sometimes swam against the tide. That, as she never tired of explaining, was also her main role as Deputy in Ray Cline's huge Bonn station - to shoot down enthusiasts and ill-founded projects which she said popped up relentlessly, like daisies.

Herma, Pat and I remained in touch for years, and we even visited her after she had retired in Vevey on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, still fulminating as ever against our government's "stupidity". She was mercifully spared the second Bush administration.

Q: There must have been many more?

JAEGER: Yes, of course. I should certainly add Joachim von Elbe, the small, sharp-nosed former Prussian lawyer who had been a figure on John McCloy's legal staff when the latter was High Commissioner for the American Sector. Better than anyone, he knew and embodied the complex legal lore of Germany's post-war arrangements and so was often the key advisor in choosing just the right technical argument in some east-west dispute.

Although he could be mildly snippy, I was fond of Joachim, not only for his courtly manners and knowledge of history, but because of his unusual avocation: He was arguably the leading expert on Roman remains in Germany and even produced a small, much-appreciated tourist guide to Germany's Roman sites. I once asked him how he found the locations of erstwhile Roman camps. "Well, its simple", he said, "You just look for piles of oyster shells!" It seems all the Roman officers had oysters brought north over the Roman road system and left the indestructible shells behind! I always wondered, given the then lack of refrigeration, how they could possibly have avoided getting sick!

Q: It must have been quite a challenge running so big an operation?

JAEGER: Of course, it was a huge Embassy, with extensive military representation, a large economic section, treasury attachï¿½s, all kinds of folks doing various things. When Russ Fessenden took over from Hillenbrand he ran this empire efficiently but with an even lighter touch.

He did, I suspect, have a difficult relationship with Jock Dean, who invariably insisted on being center stage. Russ managed this with finesse and subtlety, even when he himself was sometimes put in the shade - and quietly protected Dean's staff who chafed under his constant pressure for quality and production.

Q: Quite a cast of characters. Henry Cabot Lodge became Ambassador with the advent of the Nixon administration?

JAEGER: Actually a bit earlier, in May '68

Q: After he had served as Ambassador in Vietnam and had run for Vice President?

JAEGER: Yes. He was there only till January '69, and used Bonn as a platform to keep his hand in Vietnam. The odd thing was that although he really didn't do squiddly-doo for the Germans, worked very gentlemanly hours, and did not convey the intensity of leadership the times called for, he became an overnight celebrity in the FRG and was lionized, I assume for his aristocratic background and status in American politics. McGhee had battled hard for the Germans in Washington and had cared deeply, but was seen as a sort of imperial legate and so got a rather low-key goodbye when he left. Lodge, on the other hand, received a hero's send-off after a very brief, I think, largely unproductive tour.

Q: And then, to round things off, there was Kenneth Rush.

JAEGER: Yes, after an interregnum of several months when Russ Fessenden was chargï¿½. Rush, a former President of Union Carbide and Nixon's one-time law professor, arrived in the summer of 1969. I remember him as a nice, friendly man starting on a rather steep learning curve, who didn't speak a word of German, needed a lot of backstopping and had the great good sense of letting Jock Dean and others show him the way on policy.

Although Dean later claimed that Rush was a go-getter, I had the impression during my final months in Bonn that it was really Dean who seized the lead and guided Rush, first to and then through the critically important Four-Power talks on Berlin in 1970; talks which later lead to the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin in 1971 and the Basic Treaty of 1973, a pathbreaking process which reversed the Hallstein doctrine, secured the status of and access to Berlin and led to the reciprocal recognition of the GDR and the FRG. It was Jock Dean's vision, drive and relentless determination - reflected in a complex and enormously labor-intensive process, involving back-channel contacts with the Soviets and vast numbers of detailed daily briefing papers, which guided Rush through these talks, broke the German log jam and, in time, culminated in the reunification of Germany.

Although the Cold War would continue, these fundamental changes ultimately vindicated Brandt's Ostpolitik.

c. Adenauer's funeral and Mrs. Dulles

Q: Those were certainly important and dramatic times. Before we go on to your own work in the Political Section you must have just arrived in Bonn when Lyndon Johnson came for Adenauer's funeral?

JAEGER: It was actually my first major experience in Bonn. Ambassador McGhee had been urging President Johnson to visit for some time, but nothing came of it until Adenauer's Funeral, which brought the President to Bonn with a large entourage from April 23-26, 1967. Although quickly arranged, there was all the usual fuss with advance teams and complex arrangements. The President, it was decided, would stay at the DCM's house, one of several residences beyond the front ranks of the Plittersdorf apartments, because it was conveniently located, had a nice view over some lawns to the Rhine, was fairly capacious, and was generally bright and pleasant. Russ Fessenden and his family were, of course, evicted for the duration.

The advance teams then decided the house would, in effect, have to be redone. First, word came down that the President didn't like to look at rows of bookshelves - Russ was an avid reader with a large library - they would have to be covered up with false walls.

Q: How depressing!

JAEGER: That was just the start. The President, we were told, also required super-sized shower heads because he liked to have a very vigorous stream of water when he had his shower. So it was decided that all the standard German shower heads in the DCM's residence would have to be replaced! This backfired disastrously, because when President Johnson first used his super-duper shower head, it blew out of its setting, pipes burst and there was, to venture an understatement, a national crisis

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: By putting in these high-pressure White House shower heads they had somehow overlooked that this might stress the whole water system in the house.

There was a long list of other requirements for this three-day stay, for which the President's own super-sized bed had to be flown over from Washington and installed with considerable difficulty.

Q: Incredible.

JAEGER: Well, yes. The Embassy itself, of course, went to battle-stations, involving 24-hour-a-day backstopping, including senior and various mores specialized duty officers, military liaison, medics and so on. Nothing had been overlooked.

Anyway, the great day finally arrived, and we all went out to the airport in Cologne, where Air Force One landed and came to a majestic halt that evening in a blinding circle of klieg lights. From there Marine helicopters were to fly the President, Secretary Rusk and the other members of his large party to Plittersdorf and Bonn. Our job was to meet the particular member of the President's party to whom we had been assigned as he or she descended from Air Force One and to make sure they got safely onto the helicopter to which they had been pre-assigned.

I had drawn Mrs. Eleanor Dulles.

Q: Oh, the famous sister of John Foster and Allan Dulles, who played such a role in German and Austrian post-war affairs?

JAEGER: Yes, she was still a rather feared power-house in the Department and had, of course, known Adenauer well.

Q: So how did you make out?

JAEGER: As you will see, not too well. I did get to Mrs. Dulles, who was the last to get off Air Force One, which was rather a challenge in all the confusion of helicopters landing and taking off, German and American security people, VIPs and blinding lights. I was about to usher her onto, what I gathered was, the last helicopter when Mrs. Dulles said to me with emphasis that she needed to go to a bathroom!

I guided her in the general direction of where I thought there might be some bathrooms, when a security type stuck his gun in my face and told me to stop. I said, "Well, this is Mrs. Dulles. She needs to go to a bathroom." He explained that he didn't give a damn who it was, his orders were that nobody was to leave this perimeter! Things clearly were getting desperate. Looking around for some solution, I spotted a German General in full dress uniform and red epaulets, and explained to him that I had a very senior White House damsel in intense distress. He clicked his heals and with impeccable courtesy personally escorted Mrs. Dulles to the ladies' room and back, an arrangement which the security types apparently found acceptable.

Q: Close call!

JAEGER: It was a nightmare! For, having barely managed to solve the first part of my problem, I now had to face the fact that I had no helicopter, since the bird Mrs. Dulles had been assigned to had long since taken off! How on earth was I going to get her to Bonn in time to catch up with the President's party? I spotted a Marine Lieutenant essentially just standing there and decided to toss the problem in his lap. "Lieutenant," I said, "I need a helicopter for Mrs. Dulles!"

Totally unfazed he just said, "Yes, sir," talked into his walkie-talkie and said, "Come down number 12. Come down number 12. Mrs. Dulles needs to go to Plittersdorf," And out of the black sky above the klieg lights came the spare helicopter! So, against all odds, Mrs. Dulles went off to Plittersdorf, and left me standing there in the middle of the tarmac to find my way back as best I could!

Q: [Laughter] Now that they were all there, how did the visit play out?

JAEGER: Adenauer's funeral was simple, moving and memorable for the immense outpouring of respect for this man who had given Germany a new sense of decent identity and backbone when it most needed it. As for President Johnson's visit, he used the occasion to see a number of European leaders, including, of course, German President Luebke and Chancellor Kiesinger, as well as Charles de Gaulle, Wilson, Aldo Moro, the Turkish Prime Minister Demirel, most of the Scandinavians and a few others. He received most of these people in his quarters for discussions to which none of us were privy.

My only contact with President Johnson occurred on the night when I was the senior duty officer for the visit. The red telephone, which only Johnson would use, rang late that night in our special command post. I picked up and heard this gruff, unmistakable voice saying, "Son, you fellows got any more bourbon down there?"

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: I said, "Yes, Mr. President, we certainly do!" and sent a marine sergeant to take a fresh bottle to the President's residence. Perhaps it helped him struggle with the devils plaguing him over Vietnam, where he had just recently escalated the bombing. I think it was the next day they all went home, and life gradually returned to normal.

d. Eleanor Dulles

Q: Let's go back for a moment to Eleanor Dulles. What was her position in the State Department?

JAEGER: She had a long and distinguished history of public service in her own right. In the post-war years she was the major figure in Austria's economic recovery program, in effect creating Austria's ski industry from scratch - by developing ski resorts like Lech am Vorarlberg and its essential access routes. In 1949 she moved to the German desk, where she stayed for ten years and played a similarly powerful role in the reconstruction of Berlin and the FRG. She is, for instance, credited with having been the driving force behind the construction of the Berlin Congress Hall, the 'Philharmonie', the Berlin Medical Center and other major projects. That her brother, John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State during part of this period, of course did not hurt, since she reportedly never hesitated to phone him for help when she ran into bureaucratic opposition.

Q: They must have loved that!

JAEGER: That's one way of putting it! She was used to getting her way, was very strong willed and often proven to have been right in the end. She became a constant gadfly in the Office of German Affairs, where they never quite figured out how to deal with her. She was in the system, but actually above it, because of her powerful connections.

Q: Did you have any contacts with her other than during Adenauer's Funeral?

JAEGER: She was often in Bonn, where on at least one occasion I was her 'Control Officer', managing her appointments, going along if appropriate, and generally making sure that she was taken care of. All that usually went without a hitch, except for one evening when she had no dinner invitation. Since I didn't just want to send her back to her hotel, I arranged for us to have dinner at one of the nice restaurants on the banks of the Rhine. Now, this really gets gossipy....

Q: That's what the project wants!

JAEGER: Is that what the project wants?

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Well, when we were settled at a lovely table, I asked her, "Mrs. Dulles, what would you enjoy?" Rummaging in her huge carpet bag, which was her trade mark, she said: "Oh, nothing at all. I brought my sandwiches!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: At which point things got icky. The waiter said, "Well, we don't let people just sit here." I said to the waiter, "Look, my friend, that may be the case, but this is Mrs. Eleanor Dulles!" He said something unprintable in German, along the lines that he didn't really care what kind of an Eleanor she was, and made it even clearer that she couldn't sit there and not eat dinner in their restaurant!

Q: Did she know German, by the way?

JAEGER: Oh, yes, quite adequately! She simply ignored all this and started unwrapping her sandwich. With the situation rapidly spinning out of control, I resolved things by ordering two dinners, one of which got eaten. Eleanor seemed oblivious, clearly enjoyed our evening on the Rhine, and never, then or later, offered to reimburse me. I learned a bit more that evening about Calvinism and self-righteousness, and was left in no doubt that she was her brother's sister.

e. Coaxing Germany to sign the NPT

Q: Let's move on now to your own work in the Political Section in Bonn during this complex and rather historic period?

JAEGER: Marty Hillenbrand had brought me down from Berlin to take on the increasing workload generated by the then ongoing negotiations over German adhesion to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to help cover Ostpolitik, Germany's rapidly evolving relationship with Eastern Europe and the USSR, which had become an issue of prime interest since Brandt became Foreign Minister in the Grand Coalition and then Chancellor. The evolution of Ostpolitik was slow and incremental, so had to be discovered, since good parts of the process remained obscured in secrecy.

Later, I was also asked to follow the FDP (the Freie Deutsche Partei), a small right-of-center party critical to the balance of political power in German coalitions, a much more straight-forward task.

Q: Let's focus first on the non-proliferation work. What happened?

JAEGER: Right. The notion of limiting nuclear proliferation goes back to the earliest years of the nuclear age, when Bernard Baruch warned the world of the risks of spreading nuclear arsenals. Driven by the dual impeti of peaceful uses of atomic energy and weapons development, the nuclear age took off, if one may put it that way, with a bang.

By 1958 the CIA estimated that there were 16 potential nuclear weapons states, a number which threatened to expand further. Moreover, both the US and the USSR were supplying their forces with vast numbers of nuclear weapons, some of which were farmed out to allied states. Although various test-ban and other arms control initiatives were launched, not much happened until the Cuba missile crisis put the dangers of an anarchic nuclear world in blindingly clear perspective. It was as a result, that Kennedy pushed hard for a global non-proliferation regime, and in effect put it over.

Q: How did the FRG react?

JAEGER: Although this is not well known in the United States, the German government was initially very reluctant to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Q: Both Kiesinger and Brandt?

JAEGER: Kiesinger much more so than Brandt, who had long thought that Germany needed to renounce nuclear weapons. On the CDU side there was a consistent record of resistance to anything which would close the door to German nuclear weapons going back to Adenauer. Their basic point was that the FRG accepted the fact that, as the loser of World War II, Germany could not expect to be allowed to become a nuclear power in the short run. However, many of the CDU's politicians, particularly on the right, did not want to make this a permanent limitation on the German state. Given the ongoing French and British nuclear programs, most Germans were keenly conscious of the fact that, by signing NPT, they would put themselves in a position of permanent inferiority within Europe.

Their first preference was therefore not to have to agree to the NPT at all, and, if that became unavoidable, to leave large enough loopholes to give Germany fullest access to nuclear know-how and at least some theoretical possibility of becoming a nuclear power under different circumstances. The issue for Bonn was all the more poignant because, under the then prevailing NATO war plans, the FRG's Tornados had, in fact, been assigned nuclear missions once the Soviet Union had attacked, using weapons stored at Ramstein and elsewhere.

At the same time, it was clear to everyone, that the USSR, and many others, would not sign the NPT unless Germany adhered.

The FRG's agreement was therefore crucial.

Q: Whom did you deal with on the German side?

JAEGER: Once the NPT project was launched, senior-level discussion between the Embassy and the Foreign Office had run into major roadblocks. By the time I appeared on the scene the principal German negotiator, Ambassador Swidbert Schnippenkoetter - a tall, cultivated diplomat of the old school, whom we respected personally even though he gave us a terrible time - had submitted something like 117 textual changes to provide the FRG the loopholes we were just talking about, and discussions were stalled. I was asked to work on this at the working level as well as I could, simply to keep the discussion going.

Q: You were brand new to all this?

JAEGER: Completely. I read the files, studied the backgrounders and talked to everyone I could who might be able to shed some light on this arcane and daunting subject. Even after I had achieved some degree of familiarity, Ambassador Schnippenkoetter's many proposed changes often seemed impenetrable and daunting.

Then one day I met a thoughtful, civilized, young German diplomat at the Foreign Office, Dieter Genscher, approximately at the same level as I, who worked in a rather junior capacity under Schnippenkoetter. He had served in India, believed passionately that Germany must never relapse into militarism, loved art and music, had a lovely young family and played the flute.

As we got to know each other it became clear to me that Dieter was as frustrated as we were by his government's resistance to the NPT. Although he wanted Germany to be treated fairly in the nuclear field, he did not want it to become a potential nuclear weapons state and, like myself, thought that a globally binding non-proliferation regime was essential.

Q: Well, that was a good start,

JAEGER: Right. So, after we got to know each other a bit, I said to Dieter, "You know, maybe we could meet weekly or biweekly, spend time together and look at Schnippenkoetter's 117 or whatever proposed changes. Who knows, maybe we can actually find some compromises here and there and get things going again?"

Q: The working-level approach.

JAEGER: Yes. We tried it for a while, but the answers remained ambiguous and didn't move the overall position. Then the atmosphere at higher levels got so bad that Dieter and I had, what amounted to, surreptitious lunches, usually in an obscure third-rate restaurant in Bonn.

Well, we ate a lot of goulash, came to know each other's positions better and gradually saw that some minor trade-offs might be possible. I would go into Washington with messages saying, "He can't make progress with Schnippenkoetter on this, but he might be able on that. Can we give him some ammunition to help him argue for a quid pro quo?" To establish credibility I would, from time to time, show him my highly classified instructions so that he could see in writing what the fallback position was and what my limits were. In time, Dieter would reciprocate.

Lo and behold, we began to inch forward, and we began to restore a certain amount of trust. We kept eating goulash and negotiating, and eventually reached mutually acceptable compromises on a number of the most difficult points.

Then Schnippenkoetter absolutely floored us by producing a new set of objections, which he had been quietly working up while we were negotiating the first batch! The message was that even though some underbrush had been removed, the CDU/CSU were not yet prepared to fold. So the process went on. Eventually though enough progress was made that the senior people began talking again, the logjam was broken, and, in due course, the Germans adhered to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Q: How high a price did we have to pay to get there?

JAEGER: Pretty high. To protect their high-tech industry, the Germans wanted to assure free flow of technical information so that it not be frozen but equalized. That's the point of Article IV, which probably would not have been included but for German insistence. They also achieved limitations on the numbers and roles of inspectors, since, as a very high-tech country, they were jealous of and wanted to protect their trade secrets. These and a host of other larger and minor changes were designed to allow the Germans to achieve a 'just under the threshold' capability in plutonium production, which would leave them only a short leap if they were ever to militarize and break the Treaty. Since these concessions also had to be given to the other signatories, the deal made with the FRG both saved and weakened the NPT.

Q: Even so, NPT has significantly slowed the expansion of nuclear weapons states.

JAEGER: That was the pay-off. Most of those we thought might go for nuclear weapons programs in the fifties and sixties did not do so and became signatories, making the NPT a major success. Our problems are with the relatively few countries who held out.

Q: What happened to Schnippenkoetter?

JAEGER: Its interesting you should ask that. Shortly before I left Bonn, I was in Baden-Baden for some reason and learned of a public meeting where then just retired Ambassador Schnippenkoetter was to speak on Germany's acceptance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. He did his best to explain the subtle trade-offs in which the FRG got a good deal of what it wanted without having to take the blame for scuttling non-proliferation. But his nationalist audience would have none of it. As the old diplomat tried to hold his own on the stage he was yelled at, booed and jeered, and finally accused of betraying Germany's historic future. In the end he turned on them and said with great anguish that he had spent his whole life in the service of the German interest and that no one had a right to call him unpatriotic - and then began crying in anger and in shame.

Q: Really? Did these critics of the NPT represent a significant political force within the Christian Democratic Party?

JAEGER: Certainly Franz-Joseph Strauss and his Bavarians had been clamoring for a hard line. While the issue was not center stage in public discussion, there was significant sentiment among the center Right and beyond, who felt that Bonn should not permanently be denied a nuclear option and become a 'lesser' country than France.

Q: What was the Free Democrats' position on all this?

JAEGER: They weren't really major players, since this was the time of the Kiesinger/Brandt Grand Coalition. They were on the nationalist side, but didn't seriously rock the boat.

Q: Well, this is very interesting, and shows how important issues can sometimes be ironed out at relatively low diplomatic levels.

JAEGER: That's right. It certainly helped in this case where, in the NPT's darkest hours, we were the only two people left in Bonn who were talking about it constructively and so helped keep it from dying.

Needless to say, the NPT was a game played at many levels and in several arenas. For instance, Germany's eventual commitment to sign the NPT was one of the key concessions Brandt, as the grand Coalition's Foreign Minister made to get Brezhnev to take Ostpolitik seriously, and was the sine qua non of the Brandt-Kosygin treaty signed in Moscow in August of 1970. Kissinger's hand in all this is still another story.

Q: Well, that's what I mean. A diplomatic disagreement gets tentatively resolved at your level and then eventually you get the people up above to come together on it.

JAEGER: In practical terms, what's critical in negotiating is the quality of the people involved and their personal relations, not position and rank. I have seen Ambassadors go in, make stiff formalistic speeches on instruction and get absolutely nowhere. What generates compromise and agreement is a degree of mutual trust and empathy; a very firm grip on the issues; and then patient give and take until a balanced outcome begins to take shape that arguably respects everybody's interests. To get there both sides invariably have to be willing go a little bit beyond the edge of the cliff, beyond their authorized instructions. Its a creative, and therefore risky process at whatever level.

f. Ostpolitik and changing east-west relations.

Q: What were some of the other issues in your work in Bonn?

JAEGER: Besides NPT, there were other the arms control questions, i.e. early stirrings of Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) driven by Congressional interest in reducing the level of US troop commitments in Europe, there was the Seabeds Treaty etc. But the major focus of my work was on Brandt's Ostpolitik and its effects on East-West relationships.

Brandt, had successively pushed his new principles of east-west detente, first in the Berlin context, then as Foreign Minister and finally as Chancellor. As we said earlier, this had initially caused some anxiety in Washington, particularly since it was feared Brandt's Ostpolitik could precipitate Soviet recognition of the GDR as a separate German state, thus ending post-war quadripartite arrangements and creating a permanent division of Germany. The irony was, that that's precisely what happened, except that it occurred with our approval and participation in 1971, and laid the basis for the eventual reunification of Germany some decades later.

It was a dramatic high stakes game with major ramifications for France and the future of the European project, played out against the backdrop of Viet-Nam in the late Johnson and early Nixon years, when we were still hanging very tough.

Q: You were there during critical years. Did you appreciate the complexity and full import of this historic maneuver at the time as you watched it unfold in fits and starts, as we now do when so much has been declassified and written about it?

JAEGER: Only gradually. The first thing one had to grasp was that the CDU/CSU coalition had not one but two foreign policies, since Brandt, then Foreign Minister, was prepared to go much farther with his Ostpolitik than Chancellor Kiesinger. The result was an evolving compromise, with slowly increasing emphasis on detente as the lever to transform things and eventually achieve German reunification, replacing the CDU's traditional policy, enshrined in the Hallstein doctrine, of trying to isolate East Germany. Within this context Brandt and the SPD were consistently out front calling for more and further moves, such as acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line, de facto, but not yet de jure, recognition of the GDR, agreement to the NPT etc. All were agreed, however, to expanding trade with the USSR, the GDR and the other eastern European satellites, a commercial policy which proved eminently successful and seductive.

Q: How did Moscow and its satellites react to all this?

JAEGER: That was still another dimension of this intricate story. Among the satellites, the DDR was consistently the most negative and felt most threatened, even though it too accepted increased trade and substantial FRG credits. The first major breakthroughs came in Bonn's establishment of relations with Bucharest and later Belgrade, both somewhat costly successes since they led to renewed pressure by the hardline countries, Poland, the DDR and Moscow, to block Hungary and Czechoslovakia from following suite; and led to a general hardening of Moscow's position. This was reinforced by the rapidly evolving situation in Czechoslovakia where liberalization was threatening to spiral out of control, with Novotny's replacement by Dubcek early in 1968. Soviet diplomatic notes and declarations became increasingly harsh and uncompromising.

Even so, there were interesting nuances which suggested that, even during this tense time, Moscow was not entirely disinterested in or insensitive to what Brandt's Ostpolitik was trying to achieve, since some there undoubtedly understood that a successful east-west rapprochement would substantially reduce the need for American forces in Europe and so weaken the US role on the continent. Abrassimov, Moscow's pro-Consul in the DDR, for instance, told Brandt, at a time when the DDR was beating the drums, that they too wanted to keep the Berlin issue quiet. Other subtle differences emerged, for instance in Moscow's tacit failure to insist on de jure recognition of the DDR in discussions with Brandt, which Honecker still shrilly insisted on.

Last, but far from least, were the still broader questions of how all this played in Paris, in the European and in the Atlantic contexts, each of which had their own, often quite different reactions, which in turn became parts of the parallelogram of forces which affected the players positions.

Q: So how on earth did you manage all this?

JAEGER: Most of the work was necessarily day-by-day information gathering, reporting and analysis. You do learn quite a lot from what you are told officially and from careful readings of speeches and official statements, where shadings in emphasis usually suggest evolving policy positions. You then follow up and try to find out what really happened and what it might mean, on the usually correct assumption that official accounts you get at the Foreign Office or elsewhere are at best only half the story.

That meant talking to journalists who follow the story and have good contacts; exchanging information with other Embassies; getting around parliamentarians of various parties who also want to know what's going on and have their own sources; staying in touch with scholars who follow these issues; and, last but not least, maintaining contacts with the Soviets and particularly the Eastern Europeans, each of whom tended to have their slightly unique line on Ostpolitik developments.

The trick was to quickly get a reasonably rounded picture of a particular event, i.e. a German negotiation with Poland, or a Brandt meeting with the DDR to find out and then coherently report what happened and what it meant. As successive episodes coalesced we were able to produce periodic think pieces on the larger picture as we came to understand it.

Q: To pick up on one point you just made, you did have contacts with the Soviet and East European representatives in Bonn?

JAEGER: Yes, we had a good number of contacts in the satellite Embassies and even a few among the Soviets. But they were always cautious and were reported to the CIA. I'll never forget the first Soviet Embassy officer I had lunch with in Bonn, a green KGB type fresh from some training school in the USSR who literally didn't know how to order a pizza in an Italian restaurant. But that was not the norm, Many of the eastern Europeans were fairly sophisticated people, some with good language skills, and some were occasionally willing, sometimes even eager, to tell us their versions of some current events. The trouble was that in all these contacts there was always the risk of being compromised. An additional complication was that our parties and receptions were sometimes used as rather too transparent cover by the Bonn Station to cultivate Soviets or Eastern Europeans they were interested in.

g. The Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion

Q: You were in Bonn there during the Prague Spring? What was your take?

JAEGER: The arrival of Dubcek as head of the Czech Communist party in early 1968 was seen from the outset as a critical event which, if successful, would substantiate Brandt's argument that change in the Soviet orbit was possible. The sixty four thousand dollar question was, of course, how much liberalization could be brought about before Moscow felt threatened and decided it had to react. The next question was whether a Soviet clampdown would be the end of rapprochement and Ostpolitik, or only a temporary blip.

We therefore watched Dubcek's high-wire act with intense interest as he introduced his "Socialism with a Human Face," which permitted greater freedom of expression and less censorship, while he and his officials tried to reassure Moscow that they were still good Communists and had no intention of withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact - so as not to repeat the mistake, some argued, which had been made by Hungary in 1956.

The Czechs' reaction, as you know, was electric. Dubcek quickly gained mass support and it became obvious that the pressures for greater freedom would be difficult to restrain and might well spread to other Soviet satellites. We now know that the Kremlin had some hesitations before it to reached the decision to intervene on August 20, 1968, when the USSR and some of its other Warsaw Pact allies marched in, deposed Dubcek and occupied the country - a clear act of aggression which Moscow subsequently tried to rationalize with the Brezhnev doctrine.

It was not until the doctrine was again put to the test in 1989, when Gorbachev proved unwilling to use force to maintain Warsaw pact discipline, that Czechoslovakia, this time inspired by Vaclav Havel's Velvet Revolution, was to regain its freedom and the disintegrating Soviet empire its end.

Q: What were you doing when all this happened?

JAEGER: We had of course been following events closely and were hoping against hope that Dubcek would somehow get away with it.

The crisis came at two or three in the morning on August 20, when, as the Embassy duty officer, I was called by our communications people and told that I had better get myself to the office quickly because the Russians were invading Czechoslovakia. I got there in record time and found a storm of top secret and flash telegrams from Washington and elsewhere.

Our instruction was that Embassy Bonn was to make sure that the American military commands understood that they were to stand down, that they were not to move troops, that everybody was to stay in their barracks, and that we were not even to go to a significant alert status. The point was not to give the Soviets any reason whatever to think that we would intervene, and so risk a broader conflict - a huge let-down for the Czechs, who had been heartened by the progress they had made and had probably been misled by the enthusiastic support Dubcek had been getting in the Western press.

Q: What did you do at that point?

JAEGER: Well, it was very dispiriting work. I called the Duty Officers at all our major commands to pass these instructions along, the idea being to reinforce orders they had presumably already received through their own military channels. I was then able to open a telephone channel with our Embassy in Prague, to ask if they needed help. As we were speaking, I could hear the Soviet machine guns rattling in the background, and the muffled noise of the street battle in Prague. Our colleagues thought that they were safe for the time being, but we kept the line open just to be sure.

Q: Must have been pretty hair-raising to be a witness to all this.

JAEGER: Yes. All in all, it was probably the worst night I spent in the Foreign Service, because of our utter impotence. Washington, quite predictably, had decided not to intervene; no major moves were to be made to reverse this Russian aggression; and, so, the Prague Spring, which had filled us all with such great hope, was obviously down the drain.

Q: Much like the Hungarian situation in 1956?

JAEGER: Precisely. For me, the historic drama being played out on the streets in Prague, had a ludicrous counter-point.

For, besides all the major stuff we were trying to cope with, one of the most immediate issues we had to resolve was when we should wake up Ambassador Lodge!

Lodge had left clear instructions that he was not to be disturbed at night unless there was a "major war." Since we were clearly not yet at that point, I had several discussions during that night and early morning with our DCM, Russ Fessenden, as to when it was safe to wake up the Ambassador to tell him that there was an invasion going on next door. I think it was finally decided to do so at 6 AM, and remember hearing that Lodge was none too pleased.

Q: So what happened next?

JAEGER: After this long dramatic night, I was relieved from duty around mid-morning to get some rest, but couldn't sleep. So I wandered aimlessly around Bonn for hours - it was a drizzly sort of a day - trying to sort out my thoughts and emotions. I was walking down a small street when I heard absolutely divine sounds coming from the windows of a Gymnasium I happened to be passing. It was a chamber music concert. I followed the sounds, went in and found the Novak Quartet, a famous group from Prague, in an afternoon concert I had in fact seen advertised, performing exquisitely on the school's modest stage. I sat down and listened, enthralled. It was the cathartic experience I had needed.

And then I had an idea. Our instructions were to do absolutely nothing about the invasion, no speeches, rallies, protests or statements. Even so, I thought, nobody could blame us if we simply put on a concert!

So, in the intermission, I went backstage, introduced myself, and said to Novak and his three colleagues, "If I can arrange it, would you come and play at the American Embassy in a tribute to the Prague Spring and the Czech spirit of liberty and resistance? If so, we'll invite all the key people in Germany!" Since this would be dangerous for them personally, they said they needed a little time to consider and would give me their answer after the concert. The answer was wholeheartedly, yes.

I took my project back to the Embassy, where Russ Fessenden, who was Chargï¿½, gave it his immediate and unstinting support. So we went to work and three days later two hundred some dignitaries, representing the cream of the FRG's political and cultural world, were assembled in a salon at the Residence. Besides Brandt, there were cabinet ministers, senior party leaders, parliamentarians, Presidents of some of the Laender, key journalists, Ambassadors, as well as distinguished academic and business leaders.

There was a moment of intense silence before the Novak Quartet began - not with Dvorak, as we had all expected, but with Hayden's deeply moving "Kaiser Quartet", the source of the German national anthem - perhaps to thank their German neighbors for their sympathy. They then played Mozart, some Beethoven, and finally did end with the 'Moldau', with tears streaming down their faces. It was a very, very moving event which helped get the message out to people across Germany that, in spite of our official silence and inaction, we did deeply care.

After the concert the Novak quartet came to my place for dinner, drank a lot of wine and listened to some of my classical records, which they thought incredible, because good records were still so scarce behind the Curtain. The issue they then had to face was what to do next. By the time they left my place, two had decided to defect to the West, and two, including Novak himself, went back to Prague. Novak, at least, survived the experience, since I've occasionally seen his name on programs in subsequent years. They inscribed a group photo for me, which I still have, to mark the event.

h. Brandt in power.

Q: As we know in retrospect, the Czech invasion didn't put an end to Ostpolitik. As you saw it, what happened when Brandt became Chancellor, and the SPD/FDP government succeeded the Grand Coalition in 1969?

JAEGER: The new left-coalition, as it was called, reflected an evolving shift in German public attitudes: Greater acceptance of detente with Moscow, increased willingness to accept the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's eastern border, and fewer illusions about early German reunification, or for that matter European unification.

Most importantly, by being willing to accept the existence of the DDR de facto, the new Brandt/Scheel government was in effect agreeing to the division of Germany temporarily, hoping that Ostpolitik would produce the further improvements in east-west relations, which, in time, would make reunification possible. It was Brandt's great merit that this vision would in fact be realized.

Q: I remember hearing of differences in this period between Brandt and his SPD colleague Helmut Schmidt? How did that play out?

JAEGER: Helmut Schmidt, then Defense Minister, was a firm Atlanticist who thought Herbert Wehner, the dour sage of the SPD's left wing, and Egon Bahr, Brandt's principal advisor, were leading the FRG astray by too great an emphasis on detente with the east, a discussion we at the Embassy tried to follow closely. Since the shock of the Czech invasion had underscored the continuing importance to the FRG of its Atlantic security ties in a world of nuclear parity, Brandt, one had the impression, steered gingerly between these conflicted SPD forces. As it turned out Ostpolitik would be a much more fundamental threat to the Soviet system than to NATO, although no one knew that at the time.

Q: So how did all this play out in practice?

JAEGER: In a series of complex interrelated negotiations, all of which I followed and reported on. There were negotiations between Bonn and Moscow, in which Gromyko in effect accepted the principle of de facto recognition of the DDR; difficult and slow FRG-Polish negotiations, which eventually succeeded and made clear that the FRG accepted the Oder Neisse line; parallel negotiations and contacts with the other satellites, particularly Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as well ongoing consultations with Yugoslavia; and, for the first time, direct meetings between Brandt and the DDR leader Willy Stoph in early 1970 in Erfurt and then in Kassel, in which Stoph regurgitated standard East German positions, including his insistence on de jure recognition. Even so, they were a useful and necessary prelude to the subsequent Berlin negotiations, which were eventually successful. Last but not least, there were successive major Bundestag debates on Ostpolitik, which I also covered.

After I had left Bonn in June 1970, the story went on with the fall of Ulbricht, who had resisted Moscow's now increasing interest in detente, and finally in the East-West German negotiations which regularized the relationship further. Besides all this, there were of course trade and credit negotiations to help lubricate the process, the signature of the NPT, critically important to gain Moscow's assent, and discussions and agreements which prepared the ground for the eventual European Security Conference, which in due course produced the Helsinki Final Act.

Taken together, Brandt and Bahr's Ostpolitik had changed the course of German relationships with the East dramatically and set the stage for the ultimate breakup of the Soviet system.

Q: It must have been tremendously interesting to be involved in all this.

JAEGER: Yes and a great deal of often very intense work involving reams of reports and analyses. It would be interesting, in retrospect to be able to reread this material to see how much of what was going on we actually understood. I suspect there were major gaps, since I and my Embassy colleagues were not privy to much that Kissinger was doing as the then National Security Advisor, and did not have a full picture of Egon Bahr's sometimes very secretive dealings with Moscow, the DDR and others. Even so the major outlines of the issues involved were clear. (Note: An official US summary of these complex events is at http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga5-710903.htm)

i. German domestic politics

Q: What about German domestic politics in this period '6'70?

JAEGER: I did also work a bit on some German domestic issues, and particularly on the FDP.

Q: The Free Democratic Party?

JAEGER: I had the opportunity to go to their political conventions, and to meet lots of their politicians, including the young, high-octane member of parliament, later Brandt's Interior Minister in the SPD/FDP coalition, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. He was the party's rapidly rising star.

Q: And subsequently foreign minister for many years.

JAEGER: ...and subsequently foreign minister. As we came to know each other he would sometimes give me a lift into town, the only person I knew at the time who could drive a car and talk on a phone at the same time. This was still so unusual, that it produced cartoons in the press showing an overweight Genscher, driving frantically, while yakking into his mobile telephone.

Q: This was a very different world from the major east-west negotiations and NPT.

JAEGER: Yes. It was much easier to follow and report on the political intrigues and shenanigans of leading FDP politicians, who managed this slightly right of center swing party, and to follow their discussions on social and foreign policy. Their critical decision was to overcome their traditional conservatism and join the SPD in the Brandt/Scheel coalition, when the chance to come to power presented itself in 1969

j. Jock Dean

JAEGER: I think it might be useful in this context to say a word about Jock Dean, who was Sutterlin's successor as Political Counselor.

He was one of the most effective, and perhaps least loved, American diplomats of his time, who combined broad knowledge of German affairs with a fierce determination to move the process forward. Jock has had many detractors. He needed teams of often exhausted secretaries to dictate his lengthy telegrams and memos, which were usually perceptive, sometimes brilliant, but might often have benefited from extensive pruning.

Nor was he, to put it politely, particularly gifted in human relations or office management, since he was consistently demanding, never suffered fools gladly and was often curt and sarcastic with people to the point of wounding. I vividly remember the scene he made when his wife Thea ran out of some wine he was serving at one of his lunches; or the chill at the huge good-bye party he gave for his Deputy Gerry Livingston, myself and a few others at the end of our tours. When it was Gerry's turn he gave him a long object wrapped in newspaper, which turned out to be a stick of bamboo. "To help Gerry", Dean said to the assembly of Embassy staff and German officials, "stiffen his backbone!". Everyone literally gasped. I got off rather easily by comparison with a nondescript gift and a few kind words. I do owe him gratitude for his forbearance while I made several trips to the States during my mother's final illness in 1969. She died in Kansas City on September 8.

Where Jock did shine was in his capacity to insert himself into the German conversation and to get the highest-level Germans to confide in him or to discuss their problems and differences in our presence - a process which not only provided critical real-time information, but enabled him to make himself, and some of us, part of their policy process.

His most effective device was his famous "Dean lunch", at which, once a week, he would gather eight or ten senior political figures and government officials at his house over very good food and first-rate wines, and then throw major questions on the table. The results were sometimes extraordinarily frank and penetrating debates among his German guests, which framed the ongoing issues and enabled him to inject not only further questions but positions and ideas. As a result Dean's lunches became a unique policy forum, which brought people together from across the political spectrum, at which major issues were discussed across party and policy lines and sometimes resolved.

Q: Did he tape record all this?

JAEGER: No, that wouldn't have been necessary, since he always included one or two of us to participate and help report. This always produced a stream of telegrams, on foreign policy and domestic issues, since the people invited - Ministers or other senior officials, party leaders or their deputies, leaders in the Bundestag, senior intellectuals etc. - were all major players whose views were important. They, in effect, provided a unique forum to influence and cross-fertilize thinking which was, I think as much appreciated by the Germans as ourselves. Without these lunches the reporting and analytic tasks of this important period would have been much more difficult.

k. David Binder

Q: I assume journalists often tried to pick your brains about all these issues?

JAEGER: Of course, journalists were constantly trying to find out what was going on. Because of my work on the east-west issues, I had a close, but somewhat fraught, relationship with David Binder of the New York Times, who was brilliantly covering the Bonn scene during much of this period, but twice came close to getting me in trouble. One case involved a potential Eastern European defector, the other Cardinal Mindszenty's aborted plans to leave the Embassy in Budapest before Ambassador Hillenbrand's arrival; coupled, if I remember this correctly, with rumors Binder had picked up in Budapest that Hillenbrand might bring with him the Crown of St. Stephen, which had been safeguarded in Ft. Knox - a move which would have greatly upset anti-Communist and ï¿½migrï¿½ Hungarians and did not take place until 1977 when President Carter decided to return the crown. It took considerable effort on my part to persuade Marty Hillenbrand, whom I respected enormously and for whom I had great affection, that I was the victim of overeager journalism. Binder, who had a passion for scoops, would pick up scraps here and there and then somehow try to source them to the Embassy. That said, he was a first-rate, very prolific reporter and, generally, a fine analyst.

Q: Any personal reflections about the years in Bonn?

I. Getting married.

JAEGER: I have almost left out the main event, that Pat and I got married!

1969 had personally been sad and difficult because my mother, then over eighty, was suffering from increasingly serious cardiac problems and I had to make several emergency trips on military flights to Kansas City to see her before she finally died on September 8. She had had an extraordinarily hard and challenging life, had been a strong and intensely loving wife and mother, and left me with a great sense of loss.

But life goes on. On New Year's eve 1970 I got a call asking me to return to Washington urgently to be Deputy Staff Director of John J. McCloy's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. This was obviously a super-opportunity, so we put wedding plans into high gear and were married on Monday January 12 1970 in the great Abbey Church of Einsiedeln in Switzerland's Canton Schwyz.

As all this happened very quickly, it was only on the preceding Friday that I walked into Jock Dean's office, frantically dictating telegrams and looking tense and distraught, interrupted and said, "Jock, I'm off for two weeks because I'm getting married!"

This was a bombshell, since I had been commuting to Brussels, and met Pat at other places for weekends, and no one at the Embassy had been aware of Pat, or of our plans. Jock, interrupted his dictation just long enough to say "No way! You still owe me three telegrams!" It occurred to me later that I should perhaps have done more to prepare the ground. As it was, I just said, with as much calm as I could muster, "Well, that's too bad. I'm getting married!" And with that I left on somewhat less than friendly terms.

It was during our wedding service at Einsiedeln, as an ancient monk was saying mass at a baroque side altar, and the great organ was playing Bach, that another monk in old slippers shuffled towards us bearing a silver salver with an envelope which he put on my pew. It was a telegram with the European Post Offices' markings of highest urgency to be used only in case of imminent war or similar major crises, which, as I was told later, the only priority justifying the interruption of church services in Europe.

I thought, of course, that somebody had died or something equally dreadful had happened. I opened the envelope and there was a message from Jock Dean. It said, "Okay, you bastard. Wish you the best of luck. I wrote your telegrams. Jock."

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: So, after our honeymoon in Klosters, we returned with Jock's blessings and in good graces. Since, as it turned out, we didn't have to leave for Washington for several more months after all, Pat and I were able to make the most of our villa 'Am Stadtwald' that spring, had parties and receptions and much enjoyed our new life together.

The only fly in the ointment proved to be my housekeeper Ivanka, who, instead of making us lovely meals, fell ill and for several weeks required nursing, a process in which her dark-suited husband, visiting from Zagreb, was of zero help. So Pat had a rather stressful introduction to her new life. But things picked up again after this episode was over and our life together over the last twenty eight years has been happier and more rewarding than anything I could have hoped for.

Part VI: The General Advisory Committee, then National War College

1. Staff Director of the McCloy Committee

Q: So in 1970 you moved from Bonn back to Washington?

JAEGER: Yes. As I said, my old friend Tom Fina rang in the middle of our New Year's eve party to tell me that I needed get back to Washington as soon as possible, because John J. McCloy wanted me to be Deputy Staff Director of his General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament. Fina, who then had the top job, said he would be leaving soon to work at the White House, and wanted to break me in to take over his job. I told Tom that Pat and I were getting married, hence couldn't leave immediately, but that we could make it in a month.

a. First, three months in INR

JAEGER: As it turned out, it was a premature alarm, since the McCloy job didn't open up till the following November. We therefore stayed in Bonn till June, and then, after home leave, had a three month interim assignment in the just created Office of Strategic and General Research, a start-up operation in INR (the Bureau of Intelligence and Research) with a tiny staff and access to 'all source' intelligence, which was supposed to look at major issues on a global basis.

Their unsolved problem was how to define those issues in ways relevant and useful to senior policy makers, so they did the next best thing, filling gaps in INR's existing coverage. In my case - I had been asked to work on arms control - this meant doing a spate of papers on the proposed treaty on arms control on the seabeds, possible new naval arms control measures, the problems facing the International Atomic Energy Agency in developing and applying safeguards, and German attitudes on Mutual Balanced Force Reductions.

While all this was interesting and perhaps useful, the office was still a project-in-search-of-a-mission. At that point it had neither the resources, leadership nor high-level 'customer' base to assure success.

Q: Even though this is quite a crucial time in arms control when the Nixon administration was moving towards those negotiations and treaties with the Soviet Union?

JAEGER: Remember, I was one guy supposed to do INR's 'global' thinking for State's arms control community, which at that point knew a great deal more about their business than I did. Perhaps if I had stayed for several years, built up a reputation and become an integrated part of the senior arms control world the job could have become significant. As it was I laid a few bricks in an unfinished building and was rather glad when, in November 1970, I was finally able to move over to my new role as Deputy Staff Director on the McCloy Committee.

b. How the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control andDisarmament came into being.

Q: Tell us first about the General Advisory Committee and its origins and history.

JAEGER: It all goes back to the beginnings of the Kennedy administration, when the new President was trying to bring some of the major east coast establishment figures into the cabinet to give it experience and weight, even though they were mostly liberal Republicans. The preeminent figure, of course, was John J. McCloy, the formidable New York lawyer, who had played critical roles before and during World War II, built the Pentagon, ruled the American Sector of Germany as High Commissioner after the war, was a key player in the international oil world and the centerpiece of the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, the establishment's home base.

As Kai Bird reported in his McCloy biography "The Chairman", Kennedy tried to get him to accept Defense or Treasury, but didn't offer him State, the one job McCloy really wanted, but which Kennedy thought he needed to fill with a Democrat, Dean Rusk. In the end he asked McCloy if he would be his Disarmament Advisor, a broad undefined role in a critically important field in which McCloy was keenly interested.

The rest is history. Besides quickly becoming a key intermediary with the USSR on the test-ban issue and the development of broader disarmament principles, he met for several days with Khrushchev in the Crimea in friendly but in the end unproductive discussions. When the USSR tested shortly thereafter, Kennedy followed McCloy's advice and responded with American tests. Although McCloy was a firm believer in nuclear disarmament, he thought it essential that we not let the Soviets push us around if a sound basis for negotiations was to be laid.

His main contribution, after difficult negotiations both within the Executive Branch and with the Congress, was the passage of the Arms Control and Disarmament Act of 1961, which McCloy had pressed for with passion, because he was convinced that no coherent long-term arms control policy would emerge if left to the existing Departments.

The result was ACDA, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, a quasi-independent organization within State, reporting both to the Secretary of State and the President. To assure himself a long-term role in the process, McCloy included in the Act a provision establishing the 'General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament', whose broad mission paralleled ACDA's: "To advise the President, the Secretary of State and the Disarmament Director respecting matters affecting arms control, disarmament and world peace". McCloy was sworn in by President Kennedy as its first Chairman in April 1962.

c. The GAC's role in the Nixon years.

Q: So you came along not quite ten years later.

JAEGER: That's right. In the intervening years the GAC, as the Committee came to be called, had had its ups and downs and had become rather moribund in the late Johnson years. When Nixon was elected, McCloy recalled in one of our many conversations, the new President decided to reconstitute the GAC with a new group of heavy-weights as part of the administration's effort to gear up for the several major arms control negotiations about to be launched with the USSR, and asked McCloy to continue as Chairman.

The issue was, of course, whether the reconstituted GAC would have any clout or would share the fate of most advisory groups, who are formed, then sidelined and forgotten. In his characteristically blunt and honest way, McCloy said, as he recounted it, "Mr. President, I've served under a whole bunch of Presidents, and lately this Committee hasn't been listened to very much, and hasn't played a very important role. Frankly, I can get a better chicken lunch in New York. So, if, from time to time, you really do want our advice, the Committee would need to have unrestricted access to all source intelligence and the authority to summon anyone we need to hear to appear before it. If that can be agreed, I will be happy and honored to serve."

Nixon readily agreed and the GAC was back in business.

Q: Who were the members when you came on board?

JAEGER: It was in every sense a blue-ribbon group, attracted by the critical importance of the issues the Committee was to consider and by McCloy's continued chairmanship. The members were:

JAEGER: I'll skim over the surface. After many years during which no major arms control agreements had been achieved, the Nixon administration had decided to enter the Helsinki negotiations on 'Strategic Arms Limitation' or SALT I, as it came to be known, in November 1969. The object was to reduce the threat of nuclear war, increase long-term strategic stability and improve the international environment so that further reductions might become possible in the future.

This meant, in the first place, identifying what weapons systems were to be covered, a task which posed considerable problems because of the asymmetries involved. By May 1971, it was agreed to concentrate initially on an Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) agreement and on an interim agreement on limiting offensive strategic weapons.

The rationale was that unconstrained ABM development would simply lead to the deployment of more and more offensive systems, undermining stability and so driving the arms race. By eliminating ABMs, except for two tightly defined complexes on each side, and arresting the number of offensive strategic weapons, the burgeoning arms race might, it was hoped, be arrested by SALT I, to be further ratcheted down in follow-on negotiations.

Each of these issues in turn, involved a large number of critical subsidiary issues, some of which were highly technical, such as the size and location of the two eventually agreed ABM deployment areas, the nature of acceptable ABM radars and the distance by which they must be separated; or, in the case of offensive weapons, whether, besides Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Sea Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) or land-mobile ICBMs should be included, and whether the limitations should apply to both missiles and warheads and, if so, how.

In addition there were major qualitative issues to consider and negotiate, such as a prohibition of conversion of 'light' to 'heavy' missiles, and most importantly the question of MIRVing, i.e. whether limitations should be placed on missiles with 'multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles' (MIRVs), a category in which we were ahead at the time, but which threatened to be profoundly destabilizing.

Finally there was the matter of reliably verifying whatever agreements were to be reached, issues which involved the capabilities of satellites and other 'national technical means' as well as political commitments not to interfere.

As if all this were not enough, beyond these complex SALT I issues there were still others: Ongoing ruminations about possible Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiations of the two sides' forces in Europe, a process which would be launched at the Moscow Summit in 1972; further work on safeguards and verification under the Non-Proliferation Agreement; as well as the discussions and negotiations carried on at the UN's 'Conference of the Committee on Disarmament' (the CCD) in Geneva on extending the partial nuclear test ban to cover underground nuclear tests, on limiting chemical and biological weapons etc..

Q: So that was the universe of questions the GAC had on its plate. How on earth did you address all this?

JAEGER: I had the good fortune that my friend Tom Fina, McCloy's first Staff Director, had not only established the Committee's very effective operating pattern, but had carved out a consensus on the central issues on which its advice to the President, the Secretary of State and the Director of ACDA would be important.

In effect when I took over as Staff Director in early April 1971 the McCloy Committee had already, in a series of letters to the White House and its other advisees, unanimously endorsed the importance of reaching an interim SALT I agreement, coupled with an ABM and MIRV ban, a package which, taken together would have gone far to stabilize the nuclear arms race.

Even so, Fina frustrated by Kissinger's consistent opposition to a MIRV ban without which strategic stability could clearly not be achieved, left the GAC for, what turned out to be an unhappy experience, working for Peter Peterson in the White House,

Moreover, the Committee had not had an opportunity to present its views directly to the President, and was not certain that its recommendations, routed through Kissinger, had ever been read by President Nixon in full. Tom also felt, as he reiterates in his own Oral History, that McCloy had not fought hard enough to win this critical battle with the Pentagon on MIRVs, a weakness to which he attributes the somewhat earlier resignation of Douglas Dillon from the GAC. In short he felt he had done all he could, and that it was time to go.

Q: Did you share this view when you took over?

JAEGER: My view was that the battle wasn't over till it was over; that this exceptionally high-level group was clearly willing to work hard on these vital issues; and that, besides endorsing general positions, it was essential that the GAC stay on top of the evolving details, if its advice was to be taken seriously.

Q: How did the GAC do this in practice?

JAEGER: We continued to meet at least once a month in one of State's conference rooms over a first-rate catered lunch - I thought this was important to give the members the sense that the Government appreciated their service and cared - to hear senior witnesses on political, strategic or technical aspects of the major issues arms control issues.

To give you a sense of the level and quality of these discussions, the perhaps hundred-some witnesses I invited during my tenure included Henry Kissinger, the then Deputy Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the JCS, the service chiefs, the head of ACDA, uniformed and civilian senior managers of and experts on relevant weapons systems such as the Admirals in charge of our Trident submarine fleet, senior intelligence experts on Soviet programs, the President's Science Advisor, heads of major nuclear and other research centers, low-level experts on some particular, but important technical issue, as well as Sovietologists, European and Far Eastern Experts and other analysts to help put the advice we were given in context. Since all the Committee members were fully cleared, much of the governmental testimony was at the Top Secret level and above, including a great deal based on compartmentalized programs or intelligence.

What was remarkable was that our high-level, busy members attended these Washington meetings most conscientiously and worked hard at what for many of them were rather esoteric issues. Usually McCloy would open with a few remarks, then invite our witness to lead off on the assigned subject, he himself seeming to withdraw into what sometimes looked like a little nap, a deceptive habit he had which witnesses underestimated at their peril. After a sometimes too long, or unclear disquisition he would snap his head up, and in a few lucid sentences summarize what had been said and then ask a question which went directly to the heart of the matter.

Although in his middle-seventies, a bit bent and often tired from incessant work and travel, he was deeply committed to this work and convinced of the importance of getting it right before we gave advice.

Q: How did you organize the meetings?

JAEGER: For each Committee meeting - they were usually focused on one or two major themes, I would prepare a briefing book for Mr. McCloy and each member, outlining the issues, providing background on the witnesses, and suggesting key questions which could usefully be raised. In this and the many logistical arrangements with which we were constantly faced, I was greatly helped by Norman Terrell, a very competent mid-level FSO and, after his departure, by Richard Gookin, who later became the State Department's Deputy Chief of Protocol.

Normally I would go over all this with Mr. McCloy before the meeting, he usually came down from New York the night before and often stayed at the Metropolitan Club, where we frequently met over a simple supper, and only rarely found that he wanted to make major changes. We would usually meet again after the meetings to discuss how things had gone and what the next step in the preparation of the argument should be.

Q: Were any of these meetings particularly memorable?

JAEGER: They were all fascinating, although my first one was most poignant because it occurred only a few days after our daughter Christina was born at Women's' Hospital in Washington on April 21, 1971. We were in the last, rather tense, stages of finalizing agenda, briefing papers etc., when Pat decided the moment had come. So I spent the balance of that day reviewing and signing out a stream of highly classified drafts brought by my staff to the maternity ward, to the great puzzlement of doctors and nurses! Pat forgave me, I think, and understood. As for Christina, she has been the joy of our lives and is now herself the mother of lovely, lively twins, Magnus and Henry Tyson.

Q: That's a wonderful vignette, which underscores the human dimension of all this policy stuff. Now getting back to the GAC, how frequently did the Committee offer its advice?

JAEGER: My recollection is that we prepared and sent letters to President Nixon and our other principals three or four times a year, sometimes on key issues in the SALT negotiations, sometimes on ABM and MIRVs, sometimes on still other matters like MBFR, the test ban issues or chemical/biological weapons.

I would normally prepare a draft based on my understanding on where the group's consensus was, push the envelope a bit to see if stragglers could be prevailed on to get on board, review the text with Mr. Cloy and, after incorporating any changes, submit the draft for Committee discussion and approval.

Q: Did the front line SALT negotiators draw on what your committee was doing?

JAEGER: There was no direct relationship, since the Committee's advice was provided only to the President, the Secretary of State, as well as the director of ACDA. ACDA undoubtedly took note of the Committee's views and may have been either encouraged or influenced by some of them. Everyone involved at the time recognized that the GAC were a serious, independent, but fully informed group of unusually experienced and influential people.

Q: Can we talk a bit more about the specific issues?

JAEGER: The SALT issues took up a great deal of the Committee's time, and dealt with problems like the inclusion or exclusion of nuclear missile submarines, the relations between total numbers of land and sea-launched missiles, the possible qualitative restraints which would assure that heavier or more modern missiles would not replace the older ones the SALT I agreement proposed to limit, the inclusion or exclusion of mobile missile systems, and most importantly the questions of reliable verification.

Other discussions focused on the implications for strategic stability of putting MIRVs (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle) warheads on our ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles), and the proposal to include an ABM (Antiballistic Missile) agreement, which would, in effect, prohibit the deployment of defensive missile systems-

Q: The same one we're arguing about still?

JAEGER: The very same. We considered both of these questions from every conceivable point of view.

I remember long and detailed discussions about the feasibility of deploying an effective antiballistic missile system, the vexing technical problems posed by phased array radars, the problems posed by decoys and ways of banning ABMs while still safeguarding the nations' most critical sites - an issue raised by the fact that the Soviets were not willing to give up their not very effective Moscow anti-missile complex. Throughout these far-ranging explorations the Committee sustained its collective view that both an ABM agreement and a MIRV ban were essential, since either or both ABM and MIRV deployment would dramatically drive and so destabilize the arms race.

The committee also spent considerable time on the question of how one might best curb the underground testing of nuclear weapons, which at that time had already become a very important question. While we did not reach as firm a conclusion on this as we did on other issues, the committee, generally speaking, concluded that curbing underground testing was important, and that even the then-existing safeguards would probably be sufficient to make for a quite reliable verification system.

Q: That is being able to detect anybody else's surreptitious testing?

JAEGER: Yes, the meteorological systems and geological detection systems, which could be put in place, to do this.

d. The meeting with President Nixon

Q: In the end, did the McCloy Committee ever meet with President Nixon?

JAEGER: Yes, McCloy had pressed again and again for a meeting and finally succeeded, probably because the White House, where these issues were overseen by William Hyland and Helmut Sonnenfeldt, wanted the Committee's endorsement for whatever emerged from the SALT negotiations then approaching their end phase.

The meeting took place in the Cabinet Room on March 21, 1972 and started with a minor incident as the members filed in, followed by Mr. McCloy and myself. Sonnenfeldt stepped in front of me and said I was not invited. McCloy turned and told Hal, who had known me for years, that he wanted me to come, took me by the arm and led me in. Hal, who served as note taker at the meeting was visibly annoyed but clearly not ready to take on McCloy. I report this because it was a small indicator of the extent to which the Nixon White House distrusted the State Department and ACDA and wanted us kept out and in the dark.

Q: How did the meeting go?

JAEGER: Well, after this little contretemps, there we were in the cabinet room, I in the second row directly behind McCloy who sat across the table from the President, with the other members of the committee grouped around. The event was memorialized in a photo, which was reprinted in ACDA's 12th Annual Report to Congress for 1972.

McCloy opened with a pithy summary of the GAC's views on the major issues, along lines we had previously sent to the White House. Everything went well in the ensuing discussion of SALT, because the Committee's position and specific suggestions were very close to the Administration's at that point. McCloy also made it clear that we were very vigorously opposed to American deployment of antiballistic missile systems and very supportive of the notion of the ongoing negotiation of an antiballistic missile treaty.

The trouble started when McCloy told Nixon that we were also deeply concerned about the possibility that the United States might go forward with MIRVing its ballistic missiles, on the grounds that this would inevitably accelerate the arms race and make arms control a great deal more difficult in spite of SALT, and that in our view our deterrent was more than sufficient.

Nixon, slouching a bit in his chair, had up to this point been friendly and outgoing, listening with apparent interest and asking only occasional questions. However he became visibly disturbed when McCloy summarized the Committee's strong position against MIRVing. In itself this was not a surprise, given Kissinger's long opposition to a MIRV ban.

What was surprising was Nixon's blunt and emotional reaction: "God damn it, Jack!" He said, "I can take one of these toys away from the military, but I can't take them all away. So if you don't want us to have ABMs, I've got to leave them with at least the MIRVs!" Then, looking at these very distinguished people sitting around the table, he said, "Anyway, do all of you really agree with Jack (McCloy) on this?"

This impugned McCloy's integrity. He reared half-way up out of his chair, and, leaning powerfully forward across the cabinet table said to Nixon, "Mr. President, I've advised Presidents for over 20 years and have served seven of them. Not one of them has ever questioned my word." The President looked around, and said, "Well, what do you fellows think? Are you all with Jack?" The response was clear and unanimous. The Committee's advice was to ban MIRVs.

And thus, rather unhappily, we left.

Needless to say the Moscow Summit two months later produced SALT I, 'The Interim Agreement with respect to the Limitation of Offensive Arms', and an ABM Treaty - but not a MIRV ban. As the GAC had predicted, and Bill Hyland, one of Kissinger's senior staffers admitted years later, the result was an explosion in the numbers of US warheads, which increased from 1700 in 1972 to over 10,000 in the 1980's, with similar increases on the Soviet side: A dangerous and vastly expensive exercise in overkill which could and should have been avoided.

Q: Did you ever find out why they were so opposed?

JAEGER: Only much later, as the official records of the time came to leak out. Indeed, its now clear that, as Tom Fina had concluded, the game, as far as a MIRV ban was concerned, was over well before Tom had left the Committee and that our continuing hope of influencing Nixon through well-reasoned arguments was, in retrospect, naive.

In that sense our meeting with the President was a charade. Still, we didn't know that at the time, and would have been profoundly derelict had we not tried.

The story, as it has later emerged is actually much worse, because, in his compulsive need to control events, Kissinger had deceived everybody, the senior staff at ACDA, the Secretary of State, Gerry Smith and his negotiating team in Helsinki, and even, at certain points, Nixon himself - by negotiating much of the substance of the Moscow Summit agreements with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and others in complex back channel operations, which at various points were difficult to reconcile with the overt negotiations.

Indeed the spider web was even more extensive, since these back channel deals also included key issues in the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, being simultaneously negotiated by Ambassador Rush and Jock Dean in Bonn. The best account of what really happened, as far as I am aware, can be found in Walter Isaacson's 1992 biography of Kissinger, published by Simon and Schuster. Although it ignores the GAC's role as a bit player in this drama, it offers a scathing account of Kissinger's maneuvering, whose main purpose seemed to be to cut out all other players, particularly the State Department, and to keep all the strings in his own hands.

e. The final year

Q: Did McCloy stay on after that meeting?

JAEGER: The Committee continued to function until February 1973, when McCloy and all the members submitted their resignations in view of the upcoming election. In the meantime McCloy felt strongly that, regardless of the setback on the MIRV issues, there remained other major arms control questions in play, especially SALT II and MBFR on which it was important that the Committee stay informed and offer its advice. So we continued our work until it was time to wind up.

For me that meant foregoing a planned assignment to the Imperial Defense College in London, although I was subsequently selected to attend the National War College class of 1974, a ten month course which began that fall.

f. The General Advisory Committee's records.

JAEGER: After McCloy and the GAC's members had all left, it remained to decide what to do with the Committee's extensive, highly classified verbatim stenographic records, since each of its sessions had been carefully recorded from the outset. I decided that this constituted an important historic resource for future historians, who will want to know what a whole range of key players of the period thought on the strategic issues of this time.

I therefore arranged to have the records transcribed to microfiche and personally took the two boxes of Codeword Top Secret records to the National Archives where they can be found in Record Group 383.3 'Records of the General Advisory Committee for Arms Control and Disarmament' 1969-1972 (39 rolls of microfilm) under the 'Records of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency'.

I hope someone will someday have them declassified and use them as the basis, for what could be a very fascinating book.

g. Working with McCloy.

Q: Tell us a bit more about working with McCloy, what was it like?

JAEGER: In retrospect, the greatest benefit of these two and a half years was my unique relationship with Mr. McCloy. Although substantial, he was not a large or imposing man, and, met on the street on in a hallway, would not have left anyone with the sense that they had just encountered a formerly all-powerful High Commissioner in Germany, a former President of the World Bank, or the most distinguished partner of the New York law firm of Milbank Tweed, who was President of the Council on Foreign Relations and widely acknowledged to be the cornerstone of the 'East Coast Establishment'.

He would lope along, wearing a battered old hat and a much-used gabardine rain coat, carrying a large worn leather brief- case; ate sparingly and simply; and, although always busy with multiple commitments, lived fully in the moment. I was always amazed at his capacity to notice and relate to the people who made up the supporting cast of his complex life, from the doorman or cigar counter attendant at the Metropolitan Club to the world's mighty and famous, most of whom he knew; and over his willingness to consider, not only the critically important issues but also much that was ordinary and mundane. McCloy was of course a powerhouse. But he was also a thoughtful, kindly man, deeply attached to his wife and family, his now faded world and his country.

As to our meetings, he more than paid his dues physically and intellectually because of the great importance he attached to the issues involved. But he also enjoyed the camaraderie of being with the members, with each of whom he maintained differentiated but always cordial relationships. After all, they too, with one or two exceptions, were part the Establishment.

Q: Did McCloy sometimes talk about his background?

JAEGER: Sometimes, after a long day of Committee meetings, he would sit in his semi-darkened office, go over the days events or other major issues, doodle on a yellow pad and reminisce. At other times he would ask me to come along with him for supper.

I learned in these conversations that, unlike most of his friends, he did not start life with a silver spoon but was born on the poor side of the track and worked his way up. He believed in giving full measure, loyal service, and honest advice, regardless of which way the wind was blowing. While he and most of his friends were old-fashioned 'liberal' Republicans, he was not partisan but judged people and issues on their merits.

Ultimately, McCloy was a deeply committed patriot, dedicated to serving the vital interests of our country regardless of the party or President in power. He was not perfect, sometimes had strong preconceptions and clearly made some misjudgments during his long career. Even so, they were the errors of a great man, trying to do what he thought was best for our nation.

Q: There has been criticism, for instance, about McCloy's resistance during the war to bombing the Auschwitz concentration camp. Did he ever mention that?

JAEGER: Yes, we discussed that. Contrary to claims that he was indifferent to the fate of the Jews McCloy expressed great compassion for the victims of the Hitler regime, but maintained the view that for military reasons this would have been an unsound use of American air power.

The argument was that heavy bombers would have had to be used, that they could not be spared from critical wartime missions, that the attrition rate would have been high, and that many inmates would also have been killed.

Even so, I think the record on this is not in McCloy's favor, since raids were undertaken to near-by targets, and his biographer, Kai Bird, argues convincingly that he never adequately immersed himself in the horrible realities involved. Whatever one may say, his refusal to bomb Auschwitz was probably more a matter of his sense of military priorities, mistaken as that may have been, than a reflection of insensitivity to what was later to be called the holocaust.

Q: Speaking of Kai Bird's biography, what do you think of it?

JAEGER: Its a fair and detailed account, from which McCloy emerges pretty much as I knew him during these two and a half years. Bird mentions the GAC and explains Kissinger's 1970 decision to go ahead with MIRVing against McCloy's and the GAC's advice, as well as McCloy's difficulties with Kissinger and his staff. And he sets these issues in the context of McCloy's involvement, throughout his seventies and into his eighties, of a broad range of other major public issues.

Still, its a pity that, to the best of my knowledge, neither Tom Fina nor I were interviewed by Kai Bird to talk about the arms control part of McCloy's later life, which remained a passionate commitment well into his advanced years.

Q: Didn't McCloy find this constant travel difficult?

JAEGER: He was physically burdened, walked leaning forward, and sometimes napped in his office, occasionally visibly exhausted, Even so, throughout this period, he insisted on coming to Washington as often as he could manage and continued to work on major issues in his law firm as well, almost to the end. The only concession he allowed himself towards the latter part of our work together, was that he often had me come up to New York to bring him draft papers and the latest top secret intelligence at his corner office high up in the Chase building, rather than make an extra trip to Washington.

Q: You mean you had to take all this highly classified stuff to New York?

JAEGER: Yes. I was given an official ACDA courier's license and would fly to New York with a briefcase full of probably the most top-secret papers in the U.S. government.

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: All went well, until one day when I took a cab at La Guardia, which, in a congested intersection just beyond the Brooklyn Bridge, crashed into another car. It was pure chance that we weren't injured and that this briefcase full of Washington's crown jewels wasn't found by God-knows-who on the streets of New York. I'm afraid I put duty first, jumped out and, leaving a 10 buck consolation prize on the back seat, left the cabbie to deal with the police, disappeared into the crowd with my briefcase and made it to the Chase building without further incident.

Q: Did McCloy write you a nice report before you left?

JAEGER: Its funny you should ask. When the issue came up after my first year he wrote me an efficiency report which was three sentences long; something to the effect, "Jaeger is a very good man. He's one of the best Foreign Service Officers I have worked with. He should be promoted." Signed McCloy.

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: This, of course, is not in the Foreign Service tradition, which requires lengthy efficiency reports on a complicated form. So I went into his office and said, "Mr. Chairman, I am most appreciative of this very kind report, but, the trouble is that it isn't going to do anything for me in the Foreign Service." He said, "What's the matter? I said you should be promoted, and you're doing a great job here!" I tried to explain. But McCloy , who could be very stubborn, wouldn't budge: "Well, you tell them I am John Jay McCloy, and that's what I think!" As it was, Phil Farley, the Deputy Director of ACDA wrote a very helpful covering memo. And since I had just ben promoted to FSO-3 in 1971, all this was important but not crucial.

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: The next year, and then for my final report, McCloy still refused to use the forms but dictated wonderfully blunt, detailed memoranda describing our long work together in warm and generous terms and urged my promotion to FSO-2. Phil Farley again supplemented them with covering notes giving me a good share of the credit for helping to guide the Committee through the great complexities of the arms control issues and being the principal drafter of the Committee's recommendations to the President.

In retrospect these were rich and privileged years. It was exciting to play a bit part in the great battle over arms control. But the best part was serving a man who, for all his foibles and faults, embodied much that was best in our culture and ideals. He himself put it best in his reply to praise showered on him at a star-studded dinner on his 90th birthday at the Council on Foreign Relations. "In know', he said," that many of the things said tonight were exaggerated, but they made me feel warm. My record has its pluses and minuses. I only hope that it has been credible, that people can say of me: He did his damnedest, the angels can do no more."

That's what he was all about. When McCloy died in 1989 an era came to end.

2.National War College Class of 1974

Q: So then you were off to the War College in the fall of 1973. How do they choose who gets to go?

JAEGER: Like all personnel processes that's a bit of mystery. I suppose they pick the best people available between regular assignments and send some to the Senior Seminar, which in State is the most prestigious, some to Universities and places like the Imperial Defense College in London, where I most wanted to go, and 20 or 25 to the War College at Fort Leslie McNair in Washington. In any case its a assignment most people welcome.

Q: What was the size of the class and how was it composed?

JAEGER: I don't know how it is now, but our class numbered about 145, with the great majority, I would guess 100, coming from the uniformed services. Most of them were Lt. Colonels or Navy Commanders, although there were a few Colonels and Navy Captains, all chosen because they were considered potential General officer material. The civilian component was much smaller, 35 or so, with the majority from State, mostly senior FSO-3's. The rest came from the CIA and other unmentionable places, including, in our class, the very first War College Student from the FBI. Hoover had taken the position that the War College was much too liberal and that his FBI officers might get subverted by it. So our FBI classmate, who had been on the FBI's Soviet Embassy surveillance staff, was sort of a trial balloon. We came to know each other a bit and he was just delighted to have this chance to breathe some fresh air - although he confided at one point that he would still have to keep a low profile so as not to 'screw things up' for others after him!

Q: This was after Hoover had left the scene?

JAEGER: Yes. The year after Hoover left in 1972.

a. McCain and the other seven officer POWs from the Hanoi Hilton.

JAEGER: The really special thing about our class were the seven officer POWs who had just been released by the North Vietnamese in February 1973, the most famous of whom was John McCain, later Senator and Presidential Candidate. Another was Captain William Lawrence, who was clearly the wisest and most respected among our returning POWs. He later became Commander of the Third Pacific Fleet and Commandant of the Naval Academy,

All seven had been sent to the War College for a year of recuperation before resuming military careers. It was a sobering experience to watch them during the first weeks and months, unsure, introverted, somewhat confused, trying to get over their physical and emotional hurts and struggling to work and live their way back into a world which had changed since they were captured years earlier. Some of them returned to find their wives had remarried, others that old affections were difficult to revive. It was all human drama at close range.

The heartening and exciting thing for the rest of us was to gradually see them recover their health and self-confidence as the year went along and watch most of them become active, indeed first-rate participants. Initially McCain seemed rather shaken and seemed glad to have some of us help a bit with term papers and other stuff. But he participated from the outset, worked hard at PT and sports, and gradually recovered his spark. Although friendly and thoughtful, he could be brusque, and probably hoped even then that there was still a significant future awaiting him.

How significant would probably have surprised him, since he was at that point not one of the outstanding people in our class. What I think he wanted was to just get back in the game and perhaps, with luck, make Admiral. For John, then and now, was above anything else the son and grandson of Admirals, who had to live up to a great tradition.

Q: Did you get to know any of the other former POWs?

JAEGER: Not all of them, but some. The one who was perhaps most remarkable was Air Force Col. Fred Cherry, the only black among the seven former POWs at the War College, who probably had been abused and tortured more than any of the others at the 'Hilton'. He was in painful therapy much of the year and perhaps had the hardest time of all of them.

Then a remarkable thing happened unexpectedly. A black nurse/therapist, I think from Florida, had read about him in the papers and, out of the blue, offered to come up to Washington to take care of him. She did, and she did absolute wonders. My last recollection of them was at our class's graduation ball, when these two people, he no longer the suffering invalid but an elegant military figure in his dress uniform and she radiant with pride and joy in her white ball gown, waltzed magically at the center of the floor while all of us simply stood around, full of gladness and admiration. I hope they had a rich and rewarding life together.

The Vietnam war, as far as further offensive action was concerned, had ended in January 1973, and most of the POWs were released in February. The presence of seven of them, as well as of many others who had fought at one time or another in that pointless conflict, distinguished our class and, I think, made it wiser and more mature.

b. Mixing civilians and military officers.

Q: How did mixing of civilian and military officers work out? Isn't there usually a lot of cultural tension and misunderstanding between the civilians and their military counterparts?

JAEGER: The War College's approach of mixing civilian and military field grade-level officers, which I think is an approach George Kennan introduced years earlier to overcome these cultural cross-currents, was a real success.

Early in the year the civilians tended to be the more prominent. They were generally better informed on world affairs, better able to articulate, more confident in raising questions and clearly had an easier time writing papers. The military, in most cases, were less verbal and, initially at least, had a harder time expressing nuanced views, tending to see issues in black or white terms, you either do or you don't. There was also an initial difference in basic attitudes, the military, as you would expect, tending to be more conservative while the civilians were clearly the more liberal.

The fascinating thing was that, as the year progressed, and apparently this has been an annual pattern, some of these initial distinctions tended to blur and in some cases reverse, as the two groups came to understand and learn from each other.

Q: Can you illustrate?

JAEGER: I remember a sandwich lunch four or five of us had one day. I don't remember the fellow's name, but there was a guy sitting next to me who had hardly said anything for the first six weeks or so. When we asked him at one point about his war, he explained that he had been a squadron commander in Vietnam and described in plain, soul-wrenching terms what it was like to lead a squadron into a wall - the term he used - of antiaircraft fire, what it was like to lose people, and the tremendous responsibility and stress he had felt in commanding raids which were supposed to be successful, while trying not to get people killed who were his closest comrades and friends. Writing memos at State seemed a lot easier from then on by comparison.

I remember another conversation with a fellow student who had been in charge of the flight deck of an aircraft carrier in the Pacific which brought home to a number of us the tremendous management skills this sort of job required, involving responsibility for the safety, security continuing direction of hundreds of people and of many millions worth of equipment. It was in its own way awesome.

In short we civilians learned how much strategic and technical knowledge, courage, skill, bravery and dedication our military colleagues brought to the table. They, for their part, learned, I think, that we were not just glib pencil pushers in cushy jobs, but were just as deeply concerned for our country's national interest, who brought different skills to bear. So we learned as much, if not more, from each other than from the official program the War College offered.

Q: Did this change people's attitudes?

JAEGER: Yes. By year's end the roles of the two groups had almost reversed - the civilians had become more conservative, more aware of strategic considerations and the role and management of military power in national decision-making; whereas the military seemed to have a much greater appreciation of the political, economic and historic contexts in which great issues play out on the international stage, had become more 'liberal' and were less inclined to see the world as a zero-sum game.

As a result, we, as others before us, left with the hope that we could help mitigate the cultural gulf between the military and civilian parts of our government, partly by maintaining informal channels with each other as we returned to our respective careers for solving the intractable civilian/military issues which regularly arise. Sometimes this has actually helped.

c.. The Program

Q: That's interesting and at somewhat encouraging. Could we now talk a bit about the content and format of the official War College program?

JAEGER: Well, it essentially consisted of twice-daily lectures in an upward-sloping auditorium, so that people could look down on the speaker in the pit below. The lectures focused first on the organization of the government's national security universe, and the many issues this poses; then on the major strategic and arms control questions facing the United States; and lastly on the many evolving regional, functional, and bilateral issues which define the context in which the US pursues its short and longer-term interests.

Q: How good were these presentations?

JAEGER: Some of them were routine, bureaucratic yawners, designed to protect the briefer rather than illuminate the subject. But the majority were interesting and sometimes highly instructive, since the War College often succeeded in getting first-rate people from the academic, diplomatic, military, intelligence and executive worlds to talk to us. I can't reconstruct a list of them, but they ranged from members of the Joint Chiefs, to White House and senior State Department officials, to all sorts of famous experts on everything from the Soviet Union to African development.

After their lectures, there would be an extended question-and-answer-period, in which we were expected to question these people in depth, challenge their conclusions and produce our own ideas. Often these discussions which followed the lectures were as probing and interesting, if not better, than the actual lectures themselves.

Q: Were there any central themes or threads which tied it all together?

JAEGER: 1973/74 was a time of profound transition. Vietnam was over, the Nixon Presidency was rapidly waning - he came to the War College in April '74 for a tub thumping speech defending his record on Vietnam; relations had been opened with Beijing; and detente and major arms control initiatives were beginning to change the strategic context, as well as our relations with the USSR - with corollary implications for Germany, NATO and our other alliances. In the Middle East the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 created new tensions as well as opportunities. In short, the central theme was that the world was changing fast, and that the US needed to rethink assumptions and find a new balance in foreign and military policies.

d. The Middle East trip

Q: The War College used to end its year with a three or four week trip to some part of the world. Did you get to go on one of these?

JAEGER: Yes, that was by far the most exciting part of the experience. To flesh out lectures and reading with some actual experience, the Pentagon provided four aircraft - they still had money for that sort of thing in those days - and a general officer to lead us on a month's trip of our choice around key areas in Latin America, the Far East, Europe or the Middle East. A War College faculty expert spent several preceding months making the many arrangements and high-level appointments necessary with the help of our Embassies.

Q: Which did you choose?

JAEGER: The Middle East, because I knew least about it. That turned out to be a brilliant choice, because the program was spectacular. We started in Israel and then went to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and finally to Egypt and, and American prestige being near its apogee, were received at the highest levels throughout.

i. Golda in Israel

For example, in Israel we had a two-hour session with Golda Meir , who turned up dragging her famous carpetbag, looking, in her shapeless print dress, like a stereotypical Jewish mother-in-law of the early 'fifties. She sat down at a simple desk, chain smoked, and gave us a tough but thoughtful and surprisingly balanced overview of the problems Israel faced in those days as she perceived them. We also met with Moshe Dayan, brilliant, civilized and British in his inflections; some Israeli generals who explained the tactics of the Yom Kippur war; and were taken on a field trip to Nablus in the West bank, bristling with Israeli military positions, where some Army people tried to persuade us how well Palestinians were being treated. Still, senior Israeli officials, while passionate about the survival of Israel, seemed more nuanced in their thinking than recent ideological hard liners like Benjamin Netanyahu - even though they had just been through the '73 war.

ii.Old students in Jordan

Q: What did you do next?

JAEGER: After three days in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv we made a stop in Amman. With 'special permission' from both countries we had been allowed to drive across the Allenby Bridge and were welcomed in a pleasant, verdant valley near the border by a Jordanian military unit, which welcomed us with a splendid al fresco lunch - a traditional 'lamb-pull' served on large braziers covered with rice and roasted lamb.

We all stood around, dug in with our right hands as we had been told, and enjoyed the warmth of this genuinely friendly welcome. Then a fairly senior Jordanian officer, with whom I had been talking, asked me if I would honor him by accepting a cup of Jordan's 'special drink'? I said, of course, and was served a cup of lukewarm somewhat curdled yogurt, which still smelled a bit of barn, in the center of which floated a large lamb's eye! Our leader, the Rear Admiral, and my War College classmates watched intently to see whether I was up to it. So I closed my eyes, slurped mightily and got most of it down, including the glaring eye! Everybody cheered, including the Jordanians. I had passed.

Then it was on to Amman, still a medium-sized, largely Arab town clustered around the Roman amphitheater - not yet the attractive modern city it has become. There were visits to an Arab legion base, technical military briefings which de-emphasized Jordan's role on the Syrian front in the Yom Kippur war, and a warm, friendly reception by King Hussein. None of it was very illuminating about what had been, or was, going on in the Middle East, but fascinating for all that.

For me the most startling experience was our group's meeting with Prime Minister Zaid al-Rifai, the scion of a powerful Jordanian political dynasty, who, patient readers of this text will remember, had years earlier been my tutee at Adams House at Harvard - and had then asked me the central question facing modernizing Moslems in this secular age, whether Allah existed. I had decided that I should not exploit my previous contact with him and was sitting in the back of this large meeting, at which he was flanked by several of his ministers.

Even so, Zaid had somehow learned that I was there, and, to the mystification of my classmates and Tom Pickering, the American Ambassador, began his speech by saying how "difficult it was for him to rise and speak before his teacher!" Everybody in the room looked around until it gradually it became clear whom he was talking about. It was his way of saying thank you.

Decades later, after I had retired, my wife Pat and I were his dinner guests at his striking family compound in Amman. He showed me an inscribed book I had once given him at Adams House, which he had kept in his library all these years, and again, before his large assembled family, expressed his thanks before launching into a broader conversation illustrating the difficulty of Jordan's balancing act between the US, Israel, the Palestinians and all the other forces in the Middle East.

iii. To Riyadh to meet the King

Q: After Jordan Saudi Arabia was quite a change of pace?

JAEGER: Yes, it was actually a shock. Far from the moneyed capital it is today, Riyadh in 1974 was still an austere, sand colored little city set in the middle of the vast Arabian desert, dominated by a water tower; a place where the religious police cruised the streets; and where a woman had been stoned to death in a plastic bag for adultery only a week before our arrival! Although a few lavish palaces were beginning to appear on the outskirts, our hotel was a badly maintained relic of the 1920's with a pervasive toilet smell. Some said it was reserved for infidels.

Be that as it may, it was our first encounter with Wahhabism and the stricter versions of Islam. There were the predictable lectures by our Ambassador and others on oil, Saudi Arabia's critical role in the Middle East, its efforts to modernize, etc. But what stuck with me most was the haunting experience of Arabia, that vast mysterious desert kingdom and its age-old tribes which I later rediscovered in reading Lawrence's 'Pillars' and biographies of Gertrude Bell.

The high point, of course, was our meeting with King Faisal in a vast gilded reception room in his palace. We were seated on chairs at one end, the king on the other framed by a half dozen aged counselors, biblical-looking figures, huddled closely behind and next to him. He gave a brief, rather vague speech stressing the Kingdom's good relations with America and then invited questions. I was one of the few who had the gumption to speak up and asked - in retrospect very naively - how the Kingdom was spending its vast income to improve the lot of its people. There was a long pause, the advisers whispered. More pause. Then came the answer from the throne: "How the Kingdom spends its money is the Kingdom's business!" I think the American Ambassador was not pleased.

The Saudi military were more forthcoming and hospitable and offered us a sumptuous 'lamb-pull' in a beautifully carpeted circular space high up in a water tower which dramatically over-looked the city. It was a terrific party, with all of us in the first row squatting on the carpet before the overflowing braziers and eating to our hearts content. We gathered from our hosts that the polite thing to do was to burp loudly when one had had enough and then to get up to make room for the second and third rows of people waiting behind us for their turns. When it came, they threw themselves on the remaining scraps with memorable ferocity until there was literally nothing left.

The dinner had a sequel, of which we learned just as we were leaving. King Faisal had somehow heard about out, was outraged that someone had had the audacity to dine in a place which looked down on the King's palace, and immediately ordered the water tower's dining area closed!

iv. India and Pakistan

Q: Its a pity you could spend only a few days. What happened next?

JAEGER: We were off to India, then to Pakistan. We met defense ministers and some military people in both countries, who talked cautiously of their recent rapprochement, offered us starkly opposing views about Kashmir and made politely sure that we understood their somewhat differentiated, in Pakistan's case evolving, view of non-alignment.

The real benefit came from getting a feel for these extraordinary countries, where the layers of successive cultures reach back almost to the beginnings of mankind; where human density is such that everything everywhere seems to move; and where ones eyes are continually shocked by unexpected shapes and colors.

Odd things made an impression. In Delhi, while waiting in some official's outer office I was struck by the number of his secretaries. Actually he had only one, but she needed a deputy, in case she was absent or sick, and both these ladies were too high-ranking and skilled to allow them to put new ribbons in the typewriter or to bring supplies or tea. So they needed an assistant, who in turn needed another deputy - an obvious make-work program, particularly when projected across every office in the country, which was rational only in a nation's with India's massive oversupply of human beings.

A related point was made by the poor man I found sitting on the door mat in front of my elegant hotel room in New Delhi, who, when asked why he was there, explained that it was possible I might need something at some time. He stayed there day and night throughout our stay and seemed content when I gave him a few rupees when we left. So we learned indirect lessons, about India's poverty, caste structure and economic problems, as well as its yearning to become a serious modern state which were given shape by briefings at the Embassy.

There were also lighter moments, as when I resisted the temptation of buying a cobra...

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: .....on the way to the Taj Mahal and settled for a necklace of semi-precious stones which my wife Pat still wears; and our excursion to the Ambassador's weekend house in one of the former British hill stations, facing the mighty, even higher ranges which are the foothills of the Himalayas.

Our visit to Pakistan offered different perspectives. Besides the usual officials we were received in his glittering office by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who told us his version of his country's complex recent history, talked about his peace agreement with Indira Gandhi, the difficulties involved in his recognition of Bangladesh, his nationalization of industry and land which he wanted to redistribute to the poor, the ongoing tensions between Pakistan's parties, and his recent approval of a new Constitution which, fatefully, made Pakistan an Islamic Republic.

In retrospect his was also the time when Pakistan started its nuclear program, which greatly upset Washington. Needless to say we were unaware of this and Bhutto did not mention it. I came away with the sense that Bhutto was aware that he was doing a political high wire act likely to end badly. It did. He was hanged, after what may well have been a rigged trial in 1979.

Perhaps that's the real lesson we learned in Pakistan, that its essentially an ungovernable country. The British thought they had it tamed, as the Victorian parade grounds of Rawalpindi wistfully impy. Since becoming a separate state, brief attempts at democracy have been succeeded by long episodes of military rule. At this writing, Bhutto's daughter, trying to battle her way back to power, has just encountered the same maelstrom of discordant forces and been assassinated.

One more recollection is perhaps worth recording. Before we left, the legendary, still dashing Col. Byroade, who was then our Ambassador in Islamabad, offered us a splendid afternoon reception to which he invited a cross section of Pakistan's elite. It was held rather romantically under a vast rug canopy in the residency's front yard, held up by a little forest of wooden poles, as is the local custom, against the backdrop of the vast mountain chains framing Islamabad.

As the fashionable and important were mingling and a little army of white-clad servers dispensed drinks and canapï¿½s, a sharp breeze suddenly came down from the foothills of the Himalayas. Without warning, the whole heavy structure, rug, poles and all, came crashing down, leaving us all sprawled on the ground in total darkness. Extracting oneself was not without peril as an English lady, whom I had unintentionally encountered while groping forward, angrily made clear. Eventually we all emerged, largely unscathed, but caked in red dust! No group photographs were taken.

v. Afghanistan

Q: I am glad you survived! What happened next?

JAEGER: We left for Kabul and flew up the Khyber Pass at low altitude in our big, four-motor Air Force plane. It was my turn to sit in the cockpit with the pilot, which gave me a memorable close-up of this fought-over terrain and the turbaned tribesmen making their way up or down the pass or sitting on rocks waving their rifles and Kalashnikovs; a sight both out of Kipling's world and today's. When we had crested the pass, the pilot put the plane in a gut- wrenching descent down the other side and swept to a perfect landing in Kabul.

Q: What was Afghanistan like in 1974?

JAEGER: Two things stand out: The pervasive Soviet influence, most noticeable at the military academy we visited, where we met all kinds of Russian-trained instructors and heard briefings which emphasized the influence of the USSR; and the diversity of this ancient poor, mountainous land which has defied effective government and conquest.

We were there only a year after Daud Khan had taken advantage of the King's absence in Rome to take over the government at a time of rising Soviet influence; after the US had declined to help with arms sales, lest they offend Pakistan. The Soviets trained the military and built roads leading to the USRR. The US, we heard from Ambassador Ted Eliot also built some roads but focused mainly on health and agriculture, the latter an uphill fight at a time of intense drought. The American community, lively and dedicated, also had active outreach programs, including one to women in remote villages who made Afghan products for eventually sale. All in all we found an air of modest optimism, that somehow we and the Soviets could, with our competing efforts, somehow help Afghanistan turn the corner. As we now know that was a forlorn hope.

Q: Did you have a chance to see any of this for yourselves?

JAEGER: Our program unfortunately was tightly scripted and didn't allow for field trips or much sightseeing. My main recollection is Kabul itself - at the time a modest-sized town with a lot of adobe-type buildings set in a vast dusty basin surrounded by grey forbidding mountains.

What most sticks in mind were Afghanistan's amazing people, the tough-looking men with craggy, timeworn faces, large noses and dramatic eyes, topped by all sorts of colorful headgear and turbans; the women, some in burqas, some not; almost all, except for a small westernized upper crust, showing the effects of the country's harsh and isolating mountainous environment, of age-old poverty, endless wars and current drought. There were a few cars and trucks on the streets, but many more camels, goats, dogs and push carts. It was a country just beginning to take its first tentative steps into a more modern age.

Sadly, western efforts at institution-building and promotion of human, particularly women's, rights has been reversed by the Islamist fighters we armed and supported to fight the Soviet occupation. While that enterprise succeeded, the Taliban, now using modern weapons to resist 'unislamic' change, has in turn become the central problem.

But all that hadn't happened yet. On the contrary, I remember one afternoon standing on the balcony of the Intercontinental Hotel, which sits on a hill, which then overlooked a large flowering orchard. There were two young lovers walking among the trees holding hands, a scene of sweetness and peace, as in a Persian miniature, which has stayed with me through all these years.

vi. Iran: A bubble ready to burst

Q: A fascinating kaleidoscope of impressions.

JAEGER: Our next stop, Tehran could not have been more different - a bustling largely modern city, with huge traffic flows - to the extent that smog was sometimes obscuring the Alborz mountains - many large modern buildings and a clearly educated, sophisticated upper class.

This was brought home to me at a reception in a wealthy suburban home, which was as sophisticated and glamorous as anything one is likely to encounter in New York or Paris. People were elegantly dressed, spoke English, French and other languages, had studied in various major universities, had all sorts of high-level professions, and, under the Shah's benevolent protection, clearly enjoyed the good life - as long as they behaved themselves. It was equally clear, however, simply by watching the human flow in the streets, that the majority of Iranians, the many manual workers and particularly the peasants in the country villages, were still, to varying degrees, living in an earlier, simpler age, much less educated and still deeply attached to their age-old Muslim faith.

Q: Did you get to meet the Shah?

JAEGER: Yes, that was one of the extraordinary things about this visit. The Shah received us in a small ornate room in the palace, and spoke to us for two and a half hours. He was an elegant, but diminutive man, slender with small feet, a controlled and quietly assertive personality - surrounded by people clearly in awe of him. While he himself tried to appear informal in a rather stiff sort of way, his entourage made absolutely sure that royal protocol and decorum were observed.

The essence of the Shah's message was pure megalomania: That he was building a new, modern Iran which would come to be seen as the "Prussia of the Middle East", would become the dominant power in the region in his lifetime and rival the Persia of Cyrus the Great in magnificence and power. The rest was detail. How he was building steel mills, subways, military power, improving health and education and so on. Very little was said about Islam, which he clearly saw as the great impediment to modernization.

Q: Yes. An idealized return to the power pre-Muslim Persia. What did he say on his relations with the US?

JAEGER: Predictably he had only kind words for President Nixon and Iran's US relations. As we had learned at the Embassy, Nixon had assured him that he could buy whatever military hardware he wanted [except atomic weapons]; a commitment which ended the ambivalence which tended to prevail during the Johnson period when the Shah, to Washington's annoyance, would go to the USSR whenever the US would not sell him something. To pay for all this the Shah, of course, needed high oil prices and control of his oil resources, all of which the US accepted in return for his support of US interests in the region.

Q: How did the Shah's grand vision play elsewhere in Iran? Any indicators?

JAEGER: Our meetings with other officials were mostly party-line elaborations, partly because some were evidently afraid of doing otherwise. Even the Deputy Defense Minister pointed to the ceiling, suggesting that there were microphones there, while giving an obviously non-responsive answer to a challenging question. The Shah's new Persia clearly depended on its secret police and coercion to assure consent. But even this would soon prove inadequate to sustain the regime.

Q: Did you get a sense of the tensions the country was actually feeling?

JAEGER: We were there only a few days, but to me at least it became crystal clear that Iran was straining at all levels to cope with the multiplicity of projects the Shah wanted accomplished by an educated class of, if I remember correctly, only eight percent of the population.

Q: Did you actually see any of these problems play out?

JAEGER: Yes, most graphically during our visit to a helicopter base in Isfahan where, to my absolute amazement, there were 500 helicopters, most of them parked and baking in the burning sun.

Q: American made?

JAEGER: Yes. The briefer assured us that all these helicopters would soon be flown and maintained by Iranians, and that the very expensive American mechanics currently doing most of this would soon be replaced. Since this seemed a bit sanguine, given the huge number of copters involved, I went outside where an American mechanic was leaning against the door having a smoke. I said, "Look, what's the real story here? What's going on?" He said, "It's a f***ing disaster."

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: He went on, " The Shah promised us that there would be an adequate number of educated, well-prepared young people to fly these choppers when he bought them. When the first squadron arrived we got 20 or 30 youngsters who were trainable. After that we got farm boys, who couldn't even do arithmetic and don't have a clue about running or maintaining machinery, computers, or anything of the kind. So we had to start from scratch, teaching them basics. That's a slow, frustrating process." In short, "most of these copters are not flyable, because we don't have the people to fly them or maintain them, so they just sit there in the sun."

I then asked, "How do people around here like this?" My mechanic friend, who had been in Isfahan for some months, said, "Oh, it's creating enormous stress, since everyone knows the Iranians aren't up to the job, feel put down and blame the Shah for the whole mess."

Q: But was this a unique situation?

JAEGER: Even though we were In Iran only a few days, we heard of other examples in which great projects were, in effect, stuck, or in crisis, because of inadequate human and material resources and needed high-priced foreign technicians to do the job. Even so, the Shah was pushing for more and more, rather than expanding the economy at an absorbable pace.

The most telling, and I gather true, story illustrating his megalomania involved the Shah's visit to an aircraft carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean. On the bridge with the admiral watching the maneuvers, the Shah turned to him and asked: "How much?" The admiral said, "Your majesty, you mean this aircraft carrier?" The Shah said, "No, the whole thing, everything, your whole fleet here." The admiral, so the story goes, looked him in the eye and said, "Your Majesty, the U.S. Navy is not yet for sale!"

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: I can't swear to this story but it reflects the atmosphere.

Q: Two other questions? You have spoken of the Shah's exorbitant ambition and the inability of Iran's population to do all that was being asked of it. Didn't all this also threaten the underlying Islamic culture of the country?

JAEGER: Yes, of course, although the organizers of our visit were careful not to let us meet anyone who would actually say so. There was another factor, the yawning disparities in wealth between ordinary Iranians, particularly in the countryside, and the opulence evident in the Shah's palaces and the very comfortable life style of the upper classes. It was clear some people were profiting very handsomely from Iran's meteoric economic expansion, while many others were not.

Q: Did they understand all this at the Embassy?

JAEGER: Let me tell you the story of our briefing by the Brigadier General in charge of military sales to the Shah. He stressed that President Nixon had given the Shah a letter saying, anything you want you get, and that our military therefore plied him with hardware and sold him as much stuff as he wanted.

Q: Right.

JAEGER: When it came to question period, I got up and said, "Well, General, we've just been around the country and what is most obvious to some of us are the huge stresses which seem to be developing as result of the Shah's too rapid expansion. There isn't a large enough educated workforce to handle all the projects. There are growing disparities in wealth and increasing tension between the modernizers and the traditionalists. What limits are being put on this thing to ensure that we don't end up with a revolution or a social breakdown in Iran?"

Q: Well, you were right on the mark!

JAEGER: The general got very red in the face - I had obviously touched a raw nerve - looked hard at me and said that he was "not aware of the fact that Commies were now being admitted to the National War College."

Q: That was his answer?

JAEGER: That was his answer. When we got back to Washington all this still bothered me. So I decided to see the Iranian desk officer at State to tell him of my concern over what I had seen in Iran and of our apparent blindness to the potentially disastrous implications of pandering to the Shah's megalomania; a feeding frenzy for Iran's oil money which in fairness had infected the French, the Germans and others almost as much as the US.

The desk officer said something flattering to the effect that, for a four day visit, I had certainly got right to the heart of the matter. He assured me that he and others in the Department understood all this perfectly well, were very concerned but powerless in view of the President's sweeping decision.

Q: So a lot of people understood the risks.

JAEGER: That's right. I for one was not surprised when Iran finally blew up in 1979 and the Americans were kicked out. Almost forty years later we are still paying the price for the Shah's and Nixon's folly and are now facing a potentially even more disastrous and hostile situation.

Q: It would have taken just a little common sense to prevent all this! How sad. Before we go on to Egypt, did you get to see anything of the country in Iran besides officials and helicopters?

JAEGER: Besides Tehran, which we have talked about, only Isfahan, which was still breathtakingly beautiful. We stayed at the famous, then somewhat rundown, Shah Abbas Hotel with its spectacular rose gardens, which is full of memories of famous people who have spent time there. And I did have time to explore the exquisite Shah mosque - renamed the Imam mosque since the revolution - with its shimmering seven-colored and blue tiles, built by Shah Abbas in the early 17th century. I also managed to wander around the back allies and streets of Isfahan for a while, which gave me a chance to see what ordinary provincial life was like. The contrast with upscale, busy Tehran was stark. Unfortunately it was a very tightly scheduled, time-limited visit.

vii. Finally Egypt and Sadat.

Q: From Iran you went on to Egypt?

JAEGER: Yes, we flew to an air strip in the Egyptian desert, the first visit by any official American group after the '73 Yom Kippur War. Anwar Sadat had evidently decided to agree to this War College visit as a small step in the process of restoring Egyptian-American relations.

Q: This was before the American AID program to Egypt recommenced?

JAEGER: That's right. US aid was not resumed till 1975, after a seven year hiatus, and did not reach major proportions until a short time after the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty was concluded in 1979, part of the deal for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai.

Q: What was the Egyptian message during your visit?

JAEGER: Their thrust was that the Egyptian Army had really done well and would have won the war if the Israelis had not received massive outside help; in short, that this was not such a terrible defeat for Egypt. Be that as it may, it was the psychological perception that they had not acquitted themselves too badly which allowed Sadat to move so quickly toward a totally unprecedented peace agreement with Israel.

Q: That really was a remarkable turnaround. Now tell us more about your visit.

JAEGER: Well, we were driven in open command cars across the desert to what looked like a sand dune, which, when we got closer, turned out to have an entrance under extensive camouflage netting. We were being taken to an Egyptian underground military headquarters with all the amenities.

After some briefings on the recent war, we were taken three or four levels down to an officers' dining room where they gave us a magnificent lunch, which ended with a baked Alaska, the last thing you would expect deep under the Egyptian sands! Something about that lunch was my undoing. I don't know whether it was the baked Alaska, unfiltered ice cubes or what, but not long after we got back into our open command cars and started roaring across the desert I became violently ill. So ill that I don't recall the rest of our trip to Cairo. I did go on a sight seeing tour which had been arranged for us to the Grand Mosque in Cairo, but then relapsed and spent the next 18 hours in bed in our hotel. It was not till later the next day that somebody woke me up and said that I should get dressed to go to the airport, since we were off to Lisbon and then home.

Q: Were you able to manage?

JAEGER: Yes, although when we got on our bus I still felt seriously ill and just hung on to the seat in front of me hoping we would get to the airport soon. Then, suddenly, I saw this big white blobby face in front of me, which turned to be the admiral leading our group. He said, "George! Pull yourself together. Sadat has just sent a motorcycle escort to turn us around because he wants to see the group."

Q: (Laughter)

JAEGER: He went on, "You're the State Department guy in the group, and you're going to have to lead the discussion. You absolutely have to do this, its really important." I knew this was do or die, so I said "Admiral, if you can get me to sit right next to a door that leads to a toilet, I will be delighted to talk to Sadat!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: "But I'm really not in very good shape." "We know that", he said, "but we know we can rely on you."

So the bus was turned around, and we drove for what seemed like an eternity to Sadat's lovely villa on the Nile, where we were ushered into a huge airy room with lots of windows looking out to the gardens and an enormous, extraordinarily beautiful Persian carpet. To my horror I saw that there were thirty-some little Louis Quatorze chairs set in a rectangle in the middle of the room, at the open end of which was a little ornate desk where Sadat was obviously going to sit. To make things worse, Egyptian protocol put me on the right side, the place farthest from the exit!

Sadat came in, smiling and relaxed in his loose, comfortable galabiyya and sandals, welcomed us and spoke informally for some time about the war, Egypt's problems and aspirations, and the importance of renewed good relations with the US.

To put it in context, our meeting took place only a few months after the 'Sinai 1' agreement, which had provided for a very limited Israeli withdrawal and just a sliver of land east of the canal for the Egyptians; an agreement Cairo officialdom had found deeply disappointing but which, we now know, Sadat had decided to sign on the grounds that he might be able to obtain more later if he did not rebuff Kissinger on this first try.

It was also the time when the difficult 'Golan 1" negotiations were still under way, which produced only a meager disengagement agreement on that front.

In retrospect, I think, Sadat's object at our meeting, at which Ambassador Herman Eilts was busily taking notes, was to send positive vibes to Washington which might help obtain restoration of more of the Sinai and economic aid.

After his talk, Sadat stayed on to answer questions, returning again and again to the theme of reconciliation. He clearly enjoyed the meeting and wanted us to see him not as a head of state who had just lost a war, but as a warm, outgoing, sophisticated human being who was glad to meet with us. At the end, an Air Force lieutenant colonel went up to him, unpinned his wings from his uniform and offered them to Sadat. "Mr. President," he said, "I just want you to know that we Americans too want peace, and I want you to have my flying wings as the only thing I can give you." Sadat was pleased as punch, hugged the guy and promptly pinned the wings on his galabiyya! He really was a great warmhearted man.

Q: Well, your account certainly squares with the picture of Sadat as a remarkable leader. But I began to wonder, as you were describing this embrace of your delegation, if Sadat had already been given to understand that there would be a lot of American aid in the offing if he turned his policy around?

JAEGER: The record seems to suggest that aid came later, although its hard to say what inducements may have been held out on a discreet basis. The Egyptians certainly had high hopes that aid would be forthcoming. Even so, the impression we took away from our encounter was of a self-confident and tranquil leader, not someone urgently trying to drum up help.

Q: How did you survive the meeting personally?

JAEGER: It was a nightmare, but I somehow hung in there and managed to ask a few questions. I don't remember much of the trip to Lisbon where I woke up the following day, or for that matter of our subsequent trip home.

e. Best thesis, speaker at graduation

Q: You clearly had a remarkable and memorable trip. Was that the end of the War College year?

JAEGER: Not quite. There was still Alumni Day and Graduation, and a totally self-serving story. On one of our last days at McNair I was called to Ambassador Leonhart's office, the pugnacious, sometimes a bit boozy but deeply dedicated Deputy Commandant of the War College. He was pacing up and down, turned to me and said, "Jaeger!" I said, "Yes, sir?" He said, "For reasons that totally escape me, your War College thesis was picked by the faculty as the best paper in the class. The trouble with that is that you will have to present a summary on Alumni Day before the Joint Chiefs of Staff and all the rest of the Pentagon brass."

"The point is" he said, as he continued pacing, " that you will be the first civilian who has ever been selected for this honor in the War College's history. If you f*** this up Jaeger, I will personally cut your balls off! Do you understand?" "

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I said I clearly understood, thanked him and rushed home to start preparing a fifteen minute summary of a very complex technical paper which I now somehow had to turn into an oratorical success.

Q: What was the thesis about?

JAEGER: 'The United States and Europe's Nuclear Defense'. The question was how one might create a European nuclear arrangement in which the British, the French, as well as the Germans could all take part in spite of the limiting provisions of the McMahon Act and the Europeans' own concerns about German nuclear rearmament. I had been intrigued by this issue ever since I was a bystander in EUR to the rise and fall of the MLF (Multilateral Nuclear Force) project and wanted to see if I could came up with a different model.

Q: Do you remember the general argument?

JAEGER: In retrospect it was a bit of a Rube Goldberg construct. As I remember it, my small European nuclear deterrent force would have used British access to American nuclear technology under the McMahon Act as its basis, built France into the framework through its prowess with missiles, and brought in Germany, without breaking its commitments under the NPT, by letting them pay for most of it.

The point was that, while retaining national responsibility for the system's components, the Brits for the nukes, the French for the missiles and the Germans for financing, there could then be a shared European command structure, allowing the Germans a finger on a European nuclear force without being itself a nuclear power.

Why, in retrospect, I thought the French might agree to this escapes me, since De Gaulle had already established their force de frappe and Paris probably had no intention of ever letting the Germans near nukes or triggers. Be that as it may, I had fun building my model and was very surprised that the War College thought so highly of it.

Q: So how did your presentation fare?

JAEGER: Come Alumni Day, I had a pretty bad case of stage fright, which got worse when saw my audience. The entire Joint Chiefs of Staff and all sorts of other three and four star brass were sitting in the front row in full dress uniform, with several more rows of military and other bigwigs behind them. When my turn came at the rostrum, I apparently did rise to the occasion and made an effective presentation.

So I survived intact and the following day graduated with distinction, a fact the Commandant subsequently communicated to a no doubt deeply interested Henry Kissinger. What was even nicer was that John McCloy wrote me a lovely note a few weeks later congratulating me on doing the War College with "flying colors". I never discovered how he found out.

Part VII: Negotiating the Helsinki Final Act and east-west relations at Embassy Paris

1. Off to Paris

Q: What happened next?

JAEGER: To my delight and surprise I was next assigned as First Secretary for Political Affairs in the American Embassy in Paris: Delight because this was obviously a challenging assignment, surprise because I didn't have more than a smattering of high school French and so had never expected to be sent to this very sought-after post.

Personnel explained that they wanted me there to help strengthen the Political section which apparently had some problems, and packed me off to FSI for three months of intensive French from which I 'graduated' just before Christmas of 1974.

Q: And then you were off.

JAEGER: Yes. Pat, our infant daughter Christina and I arrived to a warm welcome from my new boss, Political Counselor Hank Cohen - later Assistant Secretary for African Affairs - who met us at the airport and took us to our temporary quarters. As it turned out, I had hardly time to settle into my new office when word came from Washington that they wanted me to go to Geneva on a temporary assignment to help Ambassador Sherer and his delegation negotiate the Helsinki Final Act!

For Pat this was particularly hard, since, after 58 false starts, she had finally found a wonderful large apartment for us overlooking Place d'Auteuil in the 16th Arondissement. What's more, our shipment of effects had just been delivered and stood around in large not yet unpacked cases, when I had to explain that, for an as yet unspecified number of months, she would be on her own in Paris!

2. Negotiating the Helsinki Final Act.

JAEGER: I arrived in Geneva in April of 1975 to join a thoroughly frustrated American delegation of a dozen officers to the 'Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe' who had been there for well over a year trying to negotiate the terms of what came be called the Helsinki Final Act - and, so far, had gotten virtually nowhere. In fact the 35 western and eastern nations, plus the Vatican, who comprised the CSCE conference, had not been able to agree on much more than chapter headings and a few scattered paragraphs here and there - the rest being blank space where language would have to be inserted.

a. Some background

Q: Let's first recall the background. The Helsinki process derived from the USSR's longstanding desire for a European Security Conference to ratify its post-war borders which went back to Molotov's proposals in the fifties, no?

JAEGER: That's right. The USSR had again and again resurrected the idea of a multilateral European conference to confirm its post-World War II borders and serve as a de facto peace treaty. This, of course, implied Western acceptance of the division of Germany, recognition of the GDR's western and eastern boundaries and confirmation of the USSR's grip over Eastern Europe and the Baltic states - issues which in fact came to haunt President Ford and probably led to his defeat after the Final Act was solemnly signed in Helsinki, on August 1 1975.

The most important price the US and our European allies hoped to exact in return was extensive human rights language, including cultural, religious, economic and journalistic freedom, with which to combat Soviet abuses and weaken its totalitarian grip. Curiously, Kissinger did not originally see human rights as the key issue for the West, since he was focused on resolving the tangle of major diplomatic questions still facing a European settlement. In the end he came to understand that getting Brezhnev to sign up on human rights was probably the major accomplishment of the whole process.

Q: We won't go into the whole complex history of the Helsinki process, but perhaps you could give us a brief overview to set the stage?

JAEGER:? As we said, Nixon and Kissinger had originally been lukewarm about this project, which gained momentum after the Berlin treaties of the early 1970's which validated Brandt's Ostpolitik and ratified the division of Germany. US reticence moderated further after it was agreed that decisions would only be reached by consensus, that the US and Canada would be full participants and that real gains might also materialize for the West, i.e. implied Soviet acceptance of NATO and the US presence in Europe, and opportunities for making Brezhnev accept human rights provisions.

Others, particularly the French and their diplomatic allies, Belgium, Italy and Spain, had other motives. Under France's leadership, these countries had for some time seen an over-arching, permanent East-west security structure, which the CSCE promised to create, as a way of reducing NATO and American influence, without entirely eliminating them. By steering closer to Moscow than the other allies, they were therefore both occasionally troublesome and influential.

The French also played a major role in the Mediterranean context, where countries like Malta, Italy and some on the north African littoral wanted the Med to be recognized as an entity with special interests, issues in which I became much involved.

To promote these and other, partly inconsistent interests, participating countries formed informal caucuses in which they coordinated their positions: For example there was a NATO and a separate European community caucus; the more neutral counties, including Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Yugoslavia, Malta, Cyprus, Lichtenstein and the Vatican, tried to be peacebrokers with a relatively more muted agenda; the Mediterraneans met to work out their positions, etc. So it was a very complex conference, not only because of the number of states involved, but because each of the groups had special interests which it pursued.

b. The Helsinki "baskets"

Q: We obviously won't be able to go into all these subsets, but explain at least how all this was officially organized?

JAEGER: Essentially in three major and some minor 'baskets', each of which was negotiated in separate large conference rooms by 36 representatives of the participating states all sitting around a very large table.

Basket I dealt with Security issues - such as sovereign equality of the participating states, refraining from the threat or use of force, the inviolability of frontiers, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, etc., as well as confidence building measures and notification of major maneuvers and military movements - subjects which caused particular difficulties.

Basket II focused on Cooperation in Economics, Science, Technology and, interestingly, the Environment, calling for free, unimpeded trade, business contacts, exchange of technical information, industrial cooperation, scientific exchange, tourism etc.

Basket III was the famous human rights basket, "Humanitarian and other fields." which dealt in detail with facilitating family contacts and reunification; freer travel and tourism; encouraging sports exchanges and meetings among young people; improved conditions for journalists; improved access to and exchange of information; greater cooperation and exchange in all aspects of culture and in education - in short the whole range of human rights issues which would make for greater openness behind the Curtain.

Lastly, there were two special 'Baskets', one on provisions which should apply to the 'Mediterranean'; the other, called the ' Follow-on' Basket, to determine the vexed question whether the Helsinki Final Act would be a one-off event, would result in one or more follow-on conferences, or become a permanent organization - which in fact it did: First as the CSCE (the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe) and, more recently, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), which has been much in the news because of its work organizing and supervising elections in Bosnia, Kosovo and elsewhere.

c. Months of Frustration, then the road opens to Helsinki.

Q: What then was your task when you got to Geneva?

JAEGER: The head of the American delegation, Ambassador 'Bud' Sherer - an affable and very able career officer who had been Ambassador in Prague - asked me to be the American representative in the Mediterranean and the Follow-on baskets - negotiations which involved two separate sets of frequent meetings at the International Conference Center at which my 35 colleagues and I would, as a result of Soviet Bloc obfuscation, accomplish virtually nothing for weeks on end!

Throughout April and May, as for many months before, the Soviet Bloc delegates would get up in turn, spout virtually the same lines and refuse to budge. As a result, we all had lots of time on our hands for leisurely lunches and long walks on the Geneva waterfront, and doubted that the negotiation would come together soon, if ever. All this was, of course, intensely frustrating, particularly since I missed my family and hated my antiseptic Swiss hotel. All this induced a severe stomach ailment which vanished as soon as Pat came to join me at the house of old friends in Montreux.

I have since read Jack Maresca's book "To Helsinki: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1973-1975", Duke University Press 1985 - he was Bud Sherer's Deputy, and the coordinator of our delegation - who paints a more nuanced picture of gradual, perhaps even accelerating progress as roadblocks are successively overcome in Geneva, by Kissinger and Gromyko and others in the capitals. He had the broader view since he bases his account on discussions in the Coordinating Committee of delegation heads. All I can say, is that that was not apparent to me or my colleagues at the negotiating level. What does stand out is my recollection that, toward the end of May, Bud Sherer called Maresca and me in urgently, and said, " The Soviets have just called up and said, 'Would we come over to their residence?'" That was unusual.

So the three of us went over to the Soviet residence. There was Yuri Dubinin, the tough, lanky Soviet DCM, later Soviet Ambassador to the UN, then to the US, with his leg casually draped over a chair. He handed us all a drink, looked at Bud Sherer and said, "Well, Bud, how much is it going to cost us to cut the mustard?" Sherer said, "You mean for the whole thing?" Dubinin said, "Yea, how much?" Bud Sherer, still clearly astonished, said, "Well, you know how much. You've got to sign onto all the human rights language, the religion language, the journalism language, and all the rest. " Dubinin said, "Fine." We said, "Well, how are you going to do this given the record over the last 12 months, because we wont go back on our position. Dubinin said, "Oh, we don't expect you to. It'll work out."

Q: He got new instructions from Moscow?

JAEGER: That's right. When Sherer asked, "What brought all this about?" Dubinin replied, "Well, he's [Brezhnev] decided that he wants the [Helsinki] conference to happen, and wants it on the proposed date, so we're going to finish it."

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: For the next six weeks we watched this amazing process in all the baskets, including mine, in which the Soviet bloc countries, who had been stonewalling for many months, would gradually take turns in moving, step-by-step, from their previous rigid positions. When time was up we had a text close to 90 percent of what we had wanted and, as Dubinin had said, the road was clear for the formal signing of the Final Act at Helsinki on August 1, 1975!

Q: So essentially you had your way and didn't have to split the difference with Moscow?

JAEGER: Certainly there was some negotiating. But basically they inched systematically toward our positions, even though during these last six weeks they made us work hard for it.

Q: Trying to understand this Russian turnabout, how much did it have to do with West Germany's Ostpolitik?

JAEGER: No doubt German Ostpolitik was the key underlying factor, since confirmed post-war German and Polish frontiers were essential from Moscow's perspective before Soviet detente could go much further. But there were other things in it for the Soviets, i.e. the Final Act by implication ratified Soviet control of the Baltic states and seemed to confirm its grip on eastern Europe. Another major factor was Brezhnev's vanity, since he clearly did not want to miss starring at Helsinki, which he saw as the most important post-war conference since Versailles. Tactically the turn-around was made possible by the secret negotiations between Kissinger and the Soviets while we were in Geneva doing our working level stuff - a parallel high-level track to which I, at least, was never privy to. I suspect that Bud Sherer too was at least partly in the dark, since he seemed as surprised as the rest of us over the Russian turnabout.

Q: Did you get over your illness?

JAEGER: Quickly. This final phase was a much happier and satisfying time. After committee meetings I took the train to Montreux, where Pat would pick me up for the short drive up to Baugy sur Clarens where Pat, Christina and I were staying with her cousin Edita and her husband Franco in their lovely old farm house. I wrote my daily reporting telegrams while speeding along Lake Geneva, spent a nice evening with Pat, Franco and Edita, and then trained back to Geneva early in the morning, when I would hand in my telegram. Washington never realized that there was a time gap between my meetings and the dispatch of my reports. It was in the end a happy and satisfying time.

d. How the Soviets miscalculated.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the Soviets outside the official meetings at the conference?

JAEGER: Yes, the most telling encounter involves a lunch at an elegant Geneva restaurant with the coordinator of the Soviet delegation, a very bright, competent diplomat, to celebrate the conclusion of our negotiations. After several toasts, I said to him, "You know, what I simply can't grasp is why in the end you accepted all the human rights stuff. It will undo the USSR." He looked at me with amusement - we were munching on some very nice smoked salmon at the time, part of our non-proletarian lunch...

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: ....and said, "Mr. Jaeger, please! I thought you were experienced diplomat. I think your question is, if I may say, naï¿½ve! Do you really think that the Soviet Union will pay the slightest attention to any of this?"

Q: He said that?

JAEGER: Yes. I said to him, "You know, let's meet 20 years from now and see who has been naï¿½ve. I think you will find that these words you agreed to will have a corrosive effect on your system, like water dripping on a rock! As your people hear about them, and we will of course make sure they do, they will want you to live up to them, and step by step the Soviet Union is going to be forced to accept a lot of these principles, with far-reaching results."

Q: You said that?

JAEGER: Yes. Which, of course, they did. Although we parted on friendly terms, he left unconvinced that the USSR had signed more than a scrap of paper of no consequence.

As the USSR disintegrated some years later - in some significant part because of the human rights campaigns, reinforced by Soviet commitments in the Final Act, I often thought of that lunch, and was rather proud of what we had wrought.

Before we all left Geneva, Bud Sherer asked me if I would do a wrap-up telegram assessing the CSCE negotiation, which would put what we had negotiated into its broader perspective. Apparently he and people in Washington liked the telegram. I myself always thought it was too long, too wordy, and wished that I had George Kennan's gift of dealing with great issues in plain and simple terms.

Be that as it may, the argument I made in that concluding telegram was the same one I made over lunch with the Soviet diplomat, that the impact of the Helsinki text on the Soviet Union would be that of water dripping on stone. Although the totalitarian Soviet system seemed impregnable in 1975, over time, perhaps over a long time, the fundamental principles they signed on to at Helsinki would wear them down and undo their regime. In retrospect this has been the case. The Helsinki Act was a major turning point.

e. The Mediterranean Basket

Q: Why don't we talk a bit now about the two baskets in which you were the US representative, beginning with the Mediterranean. What happened there?

JAEGER: Let's first set the stage for what turned out to be a hilarious denouement, in which we ended in cahoots with the Soviets trying to deal with Malta - and failed!

From the outset, even in the preparatory talks in 1973, there was pressure from the European Mediterranean states that the Mediterranean region should have some distinct status and that part of the Final Act should be devoted to it.

Initially there were battles over who was to be recognized as a Mediterranean state - since the Maltese pressed for the inclusion of Algeria and Tunisia, which in turn raised the question of all the other littoral states, including Israel.

The solution arrived at with some difficulty allowed all such non-participating states to make written presentations to the preparatory CSCE meeting, proposing agenda items and questions relating to Baskets I and II, but not Basket III, which would have opened the door to discussion of the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel.

These issues arose again early in the Geneva phase when the Mediterranean member states again pressed for agreement to allow the non-participating states to return for follow-up questions and explanations, which was, very reluctantly, granted. In short, there were north-south divisions at the conference from the outset which required careful tending so that they would not distract from or impede the major east-west issues the Helsinki process was primarily meant to deal with. This became all the more tricky, as we will see, because all CSCE decisions had to be unanimous.

Later, in June '74, the nine European Community states - led by Italy, France and Malta - tabled a joint 'Mediterranean Declaration', which the US at first resisted, fearing that it would introduce the Israel-Arab dispute into this already highly complicated conference; but then accepted, after the Europeans appealed to Kissinger, stressing the importance of their relations with the Arabs. This in turn resulted in the creation of the Mediterranean working group on which I was to sit, and prompted the introduction of an even more ambitious draft by the Maltese.

Even so, the Mediterranean issue did not come center stage until late April or early May 1975, after I had just joined the working group. After agreement had finally been reached on a long but anodyne Preamble to the eventual text, the Maltese dropped their bomb shell - calling for language that would establish special links between the Mediterranean states and the Arab world and require the gradual withdrawal of Soviet and American forces from the Mediterranean area!

At first, all of us largely ignored this proposal, which was just as unwelcome to the Soviet Bloc as to the Western powers. We all assumed it was being made for the record and would in due course be withdrawn.

However, as time pressure to finish the negotiations mounted in June, Malta's Ambassador Victor Gauci, a dear and kindly diplomat who understood the situation perfectly, warned us again and again that Malta's Prime Minister, Dom Mintoff, was utterly serious and not bluffing. By the end of June the Maltese tone hardened further, as Gauci made clear on instruction that Mintoff was prepared to withhold Malta's consent to the Final Act, in effect sinking the Helsinki process since unanimity was required, until his demands were met. The mouse had roared!

Q: Well that must have put the cat among the pigeons!

JAEGER: And how! Efforts were of course made to meet the Maltese part way with broad language encouraging 'better relations with the non-participating states', including 'all states in the Mediterranean'. But Mintoff remained unimpressed and responded by having his representative block the follow-on agreement as well. It was now clear that the Helsinki process hung in the balance and that all of us, east and west, were facing a full-dress crisis.

After a final appeal was made to Dom Mintoff, he sent a team of four Maltese Ambassadors to Geneva on July 10 who, together with Ambassador Gauci, were to meet with five diplomats representing the Mediterranean Working group. I was asked to be the American negotiator.

The meeting in the Conference Center was to begin at seven PM. I went there at about five-thirty and ran into Soviet Ambassador Lev Mendelevich, a rotund Jewish gentleman, who was my Soviet counterpart. Mendelevich hailed me with a touch of sarcasm, "Ah, Meester Jaeger. I suppose you are well prepared for this negotiation." I said, "Well, you know, we have our positions, and I think we're prepared." Mendelevich went on the offensive, "I don't think so at all. Have you eaten?" Somewhat taken aback, I said, "Well, no, but I expect there'll be a sandwich or something."

He said, "I thought so! Let me teach you first Soviet principle of negotiation! Make sure Soviet representation eats so that we will be strong, and the other side does not eat, therefore hungry and weak. America and the USSR are partners this time in dealing with these Maltese. The Maltese are flying in late, won't have had time to eat. So let's go to the restaurant together and eat!"

We did, but only found a forlorn-looking waiter setting tables who told us the restaurant was closed. Mendelevich was undeterred, shouted at the poor wretch that he was an Ambassador of the USSR and asked that the manager be sent for. When the latter appeared a few minutes later, and again tried to explain that the restaurant was closed, Mendelevich went into a table-banging tantrum and, as a small crowd of onlookers gathered around, threatened the manager with an official complaint from the USSR which would get him fired! The manager got the point, rousted out a crew and a few minutes later served us a hearty meal.

When we had finished, Mendelevich, again in high good humor, said, "OK. Now we have taken care of our bodies. What's your plan for winning in this negotiation?" I said, "Well, I guess we'll see what they have to say, and then advance our positions. It will help that this time you and I will be in agreement." " Yes indeed", Mendelevich said, "But how are we going to wear them down?"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: "Here", he continued, "is the game plan. I will play the bad guy as usual, and you will be the good guy. When the five Maltese Ambassadors come in, I will begin to insult them. Then, as the talks get under way, I will insult them some more. I will tell them that they're representatives of a totally insignificant, irrelevant little country, that they are being objectionable and that their positions are an affront and make no sense. After this has gone on for a while, and they are upset, you will you will intervene and say, 'Mr. Soviet Ambassador, you are being a little bit strong with these nice friends of ours. Don't you think that a little politer tone might get us a further in this discussion?'" Then Mendelevich got to the point. "Each time we go through this, they will make a small concession because they will be so grateful to you. We will keep this up as long as necessary until we win. This", he concluded," is Soviet negotiating method. It always works."

Q: Not totally new to people who've dealt with the Russians, but fascinating that he would lay it out for you!

JAEGER: Well, we tried it his way. The Maltese came, Mendelevich was rude to them and got more and more insulting as the evening went on. I played the good guy and our British colleague soon joined in, appealing to him to moderate his insulting behavior. And you know what? The Maltese didn't budge an inch!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Not one inch!

Q: So his game plan didn't work?

JAEGER: It got to be eleven o'clock, then midnight. Everybody was getting tired and the Maltese were increasingly annoyed as Mendelevich kept escalating his insults and abuse. At one o'clock the Maltese head of delegation said, "We have had enough. We're going home. Good night gentlemen. This is the end of the discussion," and walked out.

I couldn't help but turn to Mendelevich and say, "Well, so much for Soviet diplomacy, eh?"

Q: Laughter. So how was it all resolved?

JAEGER: What I, at least, didn't know was that Kissinger and Gromyko were also meeting in Geneva that night, and, as Maresca reports in his book, heard Kovalev, the Head of the Soviet Delegation, argue that, since the Maltese could not be permitted to hold the Helsinki process hostage, they should simply be isolated and cut out.

Kissinger then asked Ambassador Sherer for his view. Sherer argued to the contrary that the principle of unanimity was so central to the CSCE, that breaking it would only lead others to side with the Maltese and undermine the whole process.

The next day, the Maltese, under continuing high-level pressure, agreed to accept the palliative paragraph they had been offered, provided the phrase "reducing armed forces in the region" was added as an additional objective of contacts with non-participating states. It was the same poison pill in new language!

Since Mintoff held all the cards, the US, the USSR and all the other delegations were in the end instructed to swallow their objections and accept Mintoff's language - with the agreed mental reservation that it would just never be put in practice. So the Helsinki process was saved and the ignominiously agreed text made part of the Final Act under" Questions relating to Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean". Paragraph 412 contains the Conference's concession to Dom Mintoff's blackmail. The road was cleared to Helsinki, where the Final Act was solemnly adopted on July 30.

Q: So everyone agreed to handle Malta the way the Russians thought they were going to handle human rights.

JAEGER: I am afraid that's right. Even so, the drive by Malta, Italy and others did give the Final Act a Mediterranean dimension which subsequently produced some modestly constructive projects under the CSCE umbrella. And subsequent Maltese governments did not persist in Dom Mintoff's campaign to 'neutralize' the Mediterranean.

f. The 'Follow-on' negotiation

Q: What happened in the other committee on which you were the US representative?

JAEGER: That was the 'Follow-on' working group and the question it faced was what should happen after Helsinki.

Views on this evolved, since most delegations wanted to see what the outcome of the CSCE would be before taking final positions on follow-on. The USSR, which had for years been pressing for a permanent trans-European organization of nations, and might have been expected to favor a structured follow-on, retreated and argued for limiting the follow-on to the 'possibility' of a new conference - presumably to prevent the creation of any permanent mechanism to check on their human rights compliance.

Conversely, the Romanians, represented by Ambassador Lipatti, a spectacularly many-sided, able diplomat, argued vigorously for periodic follow-on meetings, in what sometimes sounded like a crusade to open the way to greater interaction across the Iron Curtain - the only satellite to do so.

France, which, like the USSR, had originally been supportive of an over-arching 'European' system, also retreated somewhat, limiting itself toward the end to supporting the Danish proposal for a single review conference, presumably out of concern over possible US or Soviet use of a permanent organization to meddle in European affairs. Other NATO members took a more positive view and generally felt that regular follow-on meetings would be in everyone's interest. The neutrals too did not want the process to end with the signing ceremony at Helsinki.

As for the US, the view was that we did not want an overarching system of nations, which could interfere with and potentially overshadow NATO, which the USSR and France could use to weaken America's role in Europe. Our position therefore was simple, we wanted no follow-on to the Helsinki Final Act, end of story.

Q: Not very helpful from a human rights point of view?

JAEGER: Right. But, given these instructions, I held firm for a number of weeks against almost everyone else, since the general feeling, as I have just outlined, was that there should be some follow-on. So, I was officially the bad guy in that committee, although personally we were all on very cordial terms. Things got to such a level of frustration, that France's Director for European Affairs Jacques Andrï¿½ani, (the equivalent of our Assistant Secretary of State) came to two meetings to see for himself why the Americans were so adamantly holding up progress. Once I returned to Paris we had a warm and very productive relationship. But in Geneva we were for a time on opposite sides of the argument.

Eventually, I reached the conclusion that Washington's position could not prevail and recommended that we inflect our position. Subsequent instructions were more flexible and permitted me to negotiate towards language which would broadly endorse continuation of the multilateral process started by the CSCE and permit at least one follow-on conference to assess implementation and consider the "modalities of other meetings".

This compromise was in the end adopted, and satisfied Washington's related concern that the CSCE process not result in the creation of a permanent secretariat, like the NATO bureaucracy or the Headquarters staff of the European Union.

A follow-on conference did take place in Belgrade in 1977 and, with new US support, lead to a succession of further high-level CSCE, then OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conferences. They in turn created sub-organizations and a permanent staff to support whoever the Foreign Minister was who served as Chairman-in-Office on a rotating basis. An outline of OSCE's current structure and activities can be gleaned from its website at http://www.osce.org/about/13509.html. As the Cold War subsided the US reversed it initial hesitancy further and became a leading supporter of OSCE's work, particularly its role of promoting human rights and organizing and monitoring elections, from Bosnia and Kosovo to Putin's Russia.

3.Then back to Paris

a. Another new beginning.

Q: When the Geneva conference ended in July 1975 you went back to the Embassy in Paris?

JAEGER: Yes, still another beginning in, what in retrospect, was one of the most challenging assignments of my career. As second ranking officer in the Embassy's large Political Section I now had broad reporting and policy responsibilities for France's east-west relations; a charge later expanded to include France's Western-European and Mediterranean relations, including special issues like Cyprus and Portugal's struggle to become a democratic country. Still later, I was made Deputy Political Counselor, a new position which was created for me, with management responsibility for the work of the section.

Q: That sounds like quite a challenge!

JAEGER: The trick was keeping all these balls in the air, while making and maintaining effective contacts at the Quai d'Orsay, the Elysee, among Paris's intellectual and journalist elite and with its many Embassies, including the Soviet and the swath of Iron Curtain Missions.

Personally it was a wonderful, if often stressful, time. Pat, Christina and I gradually settled into our lovely top-floor apartment overlooking the Place d'Auteuil, with its bustling, colorful biweekly market, the Auteuil subway station and an oyster merchant virtually at our door. Our kitchen was cramped and separated from our elegant dining room, with its French windows, by a too long corridor which made serving hot food a daily challenge. But these shortcomings were made up for by the large and airy formal rooms which were ideal both for our family life and for entertaining. Christina, now five, was enrolled at Notre Dame des Oiseaux on Rue Michel Ange, virtually around the corner, came to speak French like a native and, I think, rather liked playing Madeleine in this strange new world.

In due course, we even shared a weekend get-away from the pressures of Paris with our colleagues Bob and Mette Beecroft - a damp gatehouse on an estate owned by dour and impecunious Lionel Armand Delisle, near Dampierre in the Beauce - whose chimney smoked uncontrollably whenever a fire was lit to overcome the cold.

Getting there, or anywhere beyond the city confines, involved hours of fighting Paris weekend traffic. But the rewards were long walks on the paths crisscrossing the wooded estate, picnics and games, and the special fun of surreptitiously liberating a few of Delisle's thousands of pheasants which he kept penned up, to be released from time to time for his commercial 'hunts', when rich Germans popped away at them and were then rewarded with an 'authentic' hunters' banquet at the chateau - decked out and candle-lit for the occasion. Although Armand Delisle suspected that I was the culprit, I redeemed myself when I found and returned his beloved riding horse, one day, which had gone astray.

When, after some months, the smoke and damp of our gatehouse had lost their charm we rented a more comfortable weekend retreat from Jacques Leprette, then French Ambassador to the UN - an ancient farm house near Toucy in northern Burgundy, which, with its ancient windmill, overlooked the wheat field where Charlemagne's nephews had divided France at the Battle of Fontenoy in 841 AD. That battle, according to recent research, was a huge affair which left tens of thousands dead. Ironically, the short inscription on the nineteenth century obelisk commemorating the carnage does not lament this first failure to maintain a united Europe, but remarks with unabashed nationalism, that "it was here that the victory of Charles the Bald, separated France from the Western Empire and established the independence of the French nation".

Q: Hardly surprising for the time, although not quite the text they would choose if the monument were to be replaced.

JAEGER: History aside, our weekend perch in Burgundy was a marvelous place from which to explore Burgundy's ancient towns and villages, including Autun, Cluny and other medieval treasures, the area's fabulous vineyards, and, last but not least, the region's many restaurants, among the best in France. I also discovered that French officialdom in Paris was one thing, but that 'la France profonde' lived in the Provinces, where people were warm and outgoing, Americans were welcomed for their roles in two World Wars, and where all French politicians ultimately had their roots.

I am digressing.

b. The Political Section and its travails.

Q: Right, but still relevant and interesting. Let's go back now to the challenges you faced in getting started in the Political Section and with your work at the Quai d'Orsay and elsewhere. Tell us first a bit about the Political Section and the Embassy.

JAEGER: We were a section of 19 political officers - somewhat an overstatement since almost half were from the Station and kind of floated in and out.

Q: Are we supposed to infer from that what was going on?

JAEGER: Well, if you like. Particularly after I was made Deputy Counselor, I was supposed to know them all but didn't. So it was sometimes disconcerting when somebody I had never seen before would come gushing up to us at a cocktail party and say, "Oh, my husband is enjoying so much working in your section." I would, of course, smile brightly and then say to Pat, "Who the hell was that?"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: To get back to the point, the regular members of the Political Section were a brilliant bunch. The Counselor, Hank Cohen, an outstanding Africanist, French expert and gifted analyst, focused mainly on the French left and was adept at running productive staff discussions. He would introduce some major question and deftly weave everyone's contributions into a coherent whole, which would then form the basis of a major, often very perceptive telegram. Hank was much less gifted as a manager. In his Oral History of the period he describes the very capable but strong-willed officers in this Political Section as typically 'superior' 'Europeanists', a description clearly not meant as a compliment which said more about Hank's own insecurities than the generally very high caliber of his staff. From my perspective the main problem was his cautious, self-protective management style - he would simply disappear into his office and type away on telegrams - which left the obvious conflicts in the section unresolved and me often in the middle.

The key problems, when I arrived, were between John Dobrin, a brilliantly verbal, undisciplined youngish officer and so-so drafter, who would come in when he pleased and do what he wanted - but who knew France better than any of us and had developed extraordinary contacts with the French left, including Francois Mitterrand and other key people in the Socialist and Communist parties.

On the other end of the spectrum was Marvin Humphries, the Embassy's high-strung, intensely turf-conscious tall and handsome Political/Military Officer, who was in constant combat with Dobrin, whom he despised, and who also had major difficulties with the Brigadier General who was the Embassy's Military Attachï¿½ and others. Marvin prepared for my arrival by letting it be known at the Quai d'Orsay that I was a junior officer who worked for him, and that he should always be consulted if anything I said produced questions or doubts. Needless to say, it took some effort and time to set the record straight.

Things improved markedly when Humphries was replaced by competent and relaxed John Kelly - who later became Ambassador to Lebanon and Finland and Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs; although Marvin gave us one last, horrendous shock when we learned from news reports that, some months after he had returned to Washington, he had shot his two young sons and his lovely wife, whom we all knew and liked, and then committed suicide! He was a deeply troubled personality whose illness should have been diagnosed and dealt with long before.

Q: How horrible. No wonder there were problems! What were the rest like?

JAEGER: Varied and uniformly able. In no particular order, there was Mark Pratt, our experienced Far East and Vietnam expert, who helped Henry Kissinger on his frequent meetings with the Vietnamese in Paris, and was famous for the mounds of classified and other papers which always graced his desk and produced endless security violations and for the superb Chinese dinners which he prepared for the favored, which sometimes included Pat and myself, in his bachelor digs. There was 'Frecky' (Fredrick) Vreeland, the urbane son of Diana Vreeland, our UN expert, who may also have had other less visible duties, perhaps having to do with his long relationship with the king of Morocco and others at the top levels of the social world. I will never forget the day the phone rang and a deep feminine voice said hoarsely: "Is Frecky there? This is the Duchess of Windsor!" There was also Chuck Redman, a bright, gifted young officer, joined the French internal politics reporting unit, did excellent work and enhanced amity. He later became Department spokesman. I should also mention Phil Rizik, the scion of a Washington clothing store, who headed the internal unit and did a fairly competent job, although managing Dobrin was beyond him.

Q; Was Hank Cohen there throughout your tour?

JAEGER: No, he was replaced for a few months in '77 by Jack Myerson, a delightful, experienced Europeanist who had just finished a gig as Ambassador to the UN Economic and Social Council and was in a holding pattern before becoming the Embassy's highly respected Economic Counselor: A voluntary step down which enabled him to live in Paris. Jack and I had met and become friends years earlier through Pat, who had known him in Brussels and were both delighted at this chance to work together. He was soon replaced by Warren Zimmerman, who was to become famous as our 'last Ambassador to Yugoslavia'. Warren ran the place like the serious pro he was, did a brilliant job at developing high-level contacts and raised the work of the Section to a new level. As his then Deputy I much liked and greatly admired him.

c. A study in contrasts: Ambassadors Rush and Hartman

Q: Before we get back to your work, tell us briefly about the Ambassadors during your time.

JAEGER: The first was the same Kenneth Rush for whom I had worked in Bonn. He had, in the meantime, been Nixon's Deputy Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of State and, after Nixon's resignation, had been asked by President Ford to take on Paris. He was a thoroughly nice man, consistently kind and appreciative of our work, but didn't speak a word of French and, in spite of his years in Bonn, didn't have a deep understanding of European affairs. The residence at rue Saint Honorï¿½ reflected his mid-western background and tastes, mostly American cowboy pictures and wild west stuff. French officialdom, predictably, did not relate to him or appreciate his mild but frequent English-language admonitions through which he thought he was advancing American positions. Rush and his wife did not seem to notice, and, instead of getting to know the real France, spent a good deal of time visiting and hobnobbing with France's now largely impotent aristocracy in their various great chateaus.

Q: Sounds like a typical political appointee.

JAEGER: Well, maybe a shade above, since he really was a kind and good-hearted man. He became a burden only when he went on official trips to various parts of France, because he required major, grotesquely detailed briefing books for every stop he made, even if it was only at a 'mairie' in some minor town.

There were also some major gaffes which made the rounds of Paris, such as the one about Mr. and Mrs. Rush's visit to Chartres cathedral, whose dignitaries, as you would expect, had put on a big show. After the presiding bishop had shown them the stained glass windows and discoursed on the cathedral's history, he invited them to join him in going up the tower to enjoy the famous view of the town and its surrounding countryside. At which, and I can vouch for this since I was there, Mrs. Rush famously blurted out, "Kenny, do we really have to? My feet hurt!" "Well, honey," Rush replied, " in that case, maybe we better cut this short, and let's just go straight to lunch." The French, of course, were appalled. I recount this not to ridicule but to explain why he probably was not our most distinguished Ambassador to France.

Q: Did he launch any worthwhile new projects?

JAEGER: Yes. He thought all of us should find out first hand what people were thinking across France during the run-up to the important municipal elections, in which Francois Mitterrand's Socialist-Communist alliance threatened, to Washington's chagrin, to carry the day. Some grumbled that in a country as centralized as France one can follow the regional press and opinion polls from one's office and so get elections right without making long time-consuming trips. The counter-argument was that many of the politicians with their fingers on the pulse were local mayors or had other hometown roles and were more available in the provinces than they were in Paris. I for one strongly agreed that we could all benefit from the chance to spend over a week out of the office interviewing journalists, mayors and ordinary people in the provinces.

I, for my trip, had drawn the south-west, starting my explorations in Limoges and Pï¿½rigueux and then drove on through small towns and villages to Cahors and Albi. At each stop I was overcome by the unexpected warmth of people, who might or might not have given me much time in Paris, who were clearly delighted that I had come to see them in their home towns. As a result there were many long and informative discussions over splendid meals in cozy local restaurants. My only trouble was that I was invariably asked if I would try the specialty of the region, which, just as invariably, was delicious, but very rich cassoulet de confit d'oie, washed down with great local wines and finished with desserts and vintage armagnacs.

So I came back to Paris noticeably heavier than I had left, but a good deal more aware what France was thinking and, for that matter, what it was all about. The trip was also an opportunity to see things I might otherwise have missed, such as the vineyards of Cahors, the fortress church in Albi with its frightening murals which mother church erected to remind future generations what it could do to heretics, and the almost mystic beauty of the French countryside in the cold mists of early March.

All in all Rush was right to send us out of town, although our basic prediction, that Mitterrand's Socialist/Communist coalition would sweep the municipal election remained unchanged. As it turned out the left won 155 of 221 cities and towns with populations over 30,000.

Q: Well, Rush did make a contribution after all. Who followed him?

JAEGER: Arthur Hartman arrived later in 1977 and could not have been more different: A superb career Foreign Service officer, who had just been Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Hartman had the stature and breadth of experience the job called for and, with the help of his gifted wife Donna, immediately took Paris by storm.

For starters, out went the cowboy pictures, to be replaced by an eye-popping collection of French art, including Monet's, Manet's and other famous French impressionists and post-impressionists. It seems that before their arrival, Mrs. Hartman had persuaded American museums to loan them to the Embassy for display in the residence. When the French Foreign Minister arrived for their first glittering reception on rue St. Honorï¿½ he was clearly blown away: "My goodness, Mrs. Hartman," I heard him say, "you have a Monet!" Mrs. Hartman replied with little smile, "Ah, but you see, Mr. Minister, that's only the first! The rest are coming later."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: In short the Hartman's, both fluent in French, made a terrific impression and from the outset greatly improved the quality of our relationship.

Q: Hartman, I believe, went to Moscow after Carter sent him to Paris and was very well thought of there too.

JAEGER: That's right. From our perspective in the Political Section, life also became less stressful. Out went the immensely time-consuming briefing books, because Art Hartman was a pro who knew what to do. Instead Art welcomed new thinking, appreciated good reporting and creative recommendations. I always thought of this tall, aquiline, fast-moving but graceful man as our Jewish Prince.

d. Coping with French!

Q: You yourself had to learn French to manage this assignment. How did you make out?

JAEGER: That recalls a funny story. One of my very first calls at the Quai d'Orsay was on Ives Omnes, the Director of Soviet and Eastern European Affairs, who was to be one of my main contacts for my work on Soviet and satellite issues.

Needless to say, my French was still pretty wobbly and I was, understandably, somewhat nervous. Omnes greeted me warmly in French and, after I sat down at his desk, explained that he had been concerned that Washington may not completely understand all the nuances of the then French policy toward the satellites and the USSR and proposed a series of five meetings, in which he would set out and explain French East-West policy.

When he saw that I was ready to take notes, he began his first disquisition, talked for almost an hour and then sent me off. Together these five initial meetings produced a really remarkable series of telegrams, because the French had never before, to my knowledge, so systematically laid out their Soviet and east-west thinking for us. Even so, writing them was a nightmare, since, with my still rather limited French, I was continually worried that Omnes might have said something that I had misunderstood or that I had missed something important, and so sent Washington off in the wrong direction.

The surprise came when we met for the last of this series and Omnes looked at me with a kindly smile and said in perfect Oxford English: "Well, George, I think you've now worked hard enough, and you've made some progress. Why don't we do this one in English!"

Q: Laughter.

JAEGER: I had evidently passed the test, and, as it turned out, the telegrams all this produced were all right as well! In time my French got pretty good and became a major asset.

Q: I was going to ask you earlier, how you managed the language issue in the Geneva negotiations.

JAEGER: We had simultaneous translation into all the key languages, linguists in little booths which were set up in each conference room, with wires running all over the place. We could both listen to others and speak in English...

Q: ...with radio headsets.

JAEGER: Yes. It really worked very efficiently. But living and working in France was quite another matter. The French are often ridiculed for their insistence on the use of French. Its partly a matter of survival, since they don't want to be submerged linguistically, and partly a matter of cultural self respect. I suspect we would do the same thing if the tables were reversed.

e. The web of globe-spanning issues

Q: So your initial job was to cover France's east-west relations?

JAEGER: Yes. Reporting on and analyzing French east-west relations was the core job. This had all sorts of ramifications beyond Paris' bilateral relations with Moscow, including the evolving SALT and other arms control developments, CSCE issues, Berlin, GDR and FRG policy, as well as France's often rather special relations with Poland and the other Soviet satellites.

Given France's tendency to play at the margins of Western policy toward Moscow and its satellites as a way of enhancing its own role, some of this was fairly tricky, since Paris sometimes went to some lengths to keep us in the dark. Given Moscow's involvement in the French Communist party, which was then still quite influential, my work also involved some aspects of French domestic issues.

Later, as I think I mentioned, I was also asked to take on French Mediterranean policy, including Portugal's precarious transition to a left-leaning democracy under Mario Soares and Cyprus. In 1977 I was made Deputy Political Counselor, a new position created for me, with responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Political Section and was asked to add French Western European relations to my portfolio. To round things out we had intensely energy and time consuming visits by Jimmy Carter, French elections, a visit by Brezhnev, not to mention the world's highest rate of Congressional visits.

f. A working Day in Paris

Q: Maybe we could get a sense how you managed all this if you were to describe an average working day.

JAEGER: Well, it was nothing like the popular idea people have of the relaxed life of striped-pants diplomats. Virtually every evening there was either a national day reception or some other social function followed by a dinner offered by another Embassy, French friends or someone on our staff. Frequently we ourselves would entertain, a big job for Pat, since we didn't have help and she put on the whole show by herself. Her peak performance was a sit-down Thanksgiving dinner for twenty-two, a memorable occasion at which the distinguished French lady at my right skeptically held up something on her fork for my inspection and asked me "exactly what it was?" It, I explained, is a "sweet potato" - which she then made plain was clearly not part of Paris' culinary repertoire! But then cultural relations are never easy!

Q: So all this socializing was important?

JAEGER: Of course. It was one way of meeting all sorts of people, across the spectrum of government and the diplomatic corps, in French intellectual circles, journalism and other key professions. To understand a country and its policies you have to get inside its skin, and that means knowing, and being on warm terms with, lots of different, well-positioned people. When an unexpected situation arises and you have to scratch around at the last minute to see who can provide background and perspective its usually too late.

Q. Who were your closest friends in Paris?

JAEGER: My warmest and most interesting recollections were of the lovely evenings offered by Dominique and John Riggs, he a leading American lawyer at the Paris office of White and Case, she the daughter of legendary French Ambassador, Francis Lacoste, former Governor General of Djibouti and Morocco, Minister in Peking, Ambassador in Ottawa and Brussels: A classic diplomat of the old school, who had the special distinction of having been fired by de Gaulle for being too pro-American! It was one of the joys of this period that he became my friend and mentor, and remained so until he died, long after we had left Paris,. Together, the Riggs knew everybody in Paris and an evening there was invariably an introduction to new sets of fascinating, often important people in diplomacy, politics and the arts. We have all remained good friends, although they are, alas, no longer married.

So, to get back to the main point, evenings usually meant brilliant food and drink, but were often more work than entertainment.

Q: Bit hard on the constitution as a regular routine?

JAEGER: Especially when you had to get up at six or six-thirty the next morning, get on the subway or fight your way through heavy traffic to the office by car. There, waiting for you, would be a good two and one-half inch stack of telegrams which had come in overnight from all over the world. The thing about a place like Paris is that you can't really say, "Indonesia doesn't interest me, so I won't read that." Countries like France have relationships in all parts of the world, with special interests in Africa and parts of the second and third world. So any of these reports might be or might become important, and at least had to be scanned.

Q: Were these telegrams between another Embassy and the Department that were copied to you, or messages sent especially to you?

JAEGER: Mostly the former, since telegrams were routinely repeated for information; but also the latter, when someone wanted to comment or supplement one of our reports. Or they might involve a new issue another Embassy wanted to bring to our attention.

Having hurriedly digested all those messages, as well as in-house memos, announcements and what-have-you, it was off to the nine-thirty staff meeting to discuss the issues of the day and agree on next steps as to who would do what, when and why.

Then there would be a bit of time to draft telegrams, review and sign out memos and messages others had prepared, or go to meetings called by the Ambassador, the DCM or elsewhere in the Embassy. By eleven or so, I would again be off to see someone, perhaps at the Quai, the Elysee, or at another Embassy; or I would meet a key journalist like Michel Tatu, the famous Soviet expert at Le Monde, or even a major intellectual like Raymond Aron (a shrewd realist who was passionately interested in the evolution of the Cold War). Particularly after first contacts had been made, these meetings, more often than not, took place a bit later over lunch.

Q: Why always lunch?

JAEGER: Its what's expected. Just calling on people usually produced little of value. Real relationships in France are established over a good meal and a bottle of wine.

Q: Isn't there a cultural difference between Americans and French in this respect?

JAEGER: Very much so. It was invariably instructive to watch American government or business people fly in from the States and expect to get their job done in a brisk, efficient meeting. In France it didn't work that way, or at least not well. If you wanted to get to the heart of issues, you had to make real human contact over bread and wine.

Q: So this happened almost every day?

JAEGER: Yes. What's more, the whole point was not to be hurried. As a result, I usually I didn't get back to the office until two-thirty or three, full of good Burgundy...

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: ... and information that should be promptly reported. The trouble was that my secretary, who had had a less splendid lunch in the cafeteria, had been impatiently waiting for me all this time and would make clear that she was leaving at five-thirty no matter what, and warn that if I had something to write, I had better do it quickly!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: So afternoon drafting was usually stressful. Things progressively got worse toward the evening as new piles of telegrams arrived, other colleagues brought their work for clearance or review, and there were unexpected calls to front-office meetings, flaps or visitors.

By five-thirty or six you are pretty drained. You have had no exercise all day, you have eaten too well and are still processing that half bottle of Burgundy. Then its back home for a bit of time with Christina and Pat, before being off again to the evening's social event. And so the week would go by, until we could escape two or three times a month for weekends in our fresh-air retreats in Normandy or Burgundy

Q: It sounds like a pretty demanding life.

JAEGER: It was demanding, but also exhilarating and rewarding. Demanding, because that's what it took to produce the high volume of first-class reporting and analysis required to keep Washington abreast of France's complex interactions and to offer sound recommendations. And rewarding because our collective work often did succeed in pulling important rabbits out of the hat.

g. French Soviet and Satellite relations.

Q: Let's now turn to the work you did on French Soviet and Soviet Bloc relations.

JAEGER: When I arrived in Paris in '75, detente had probably peaked with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, since - for reasons which are still debated - Moscow's line hardened after that. The 'Brezhnev Doctrine', which had emerged after the Soviet military suppression of the 'Prague spring', hung ominously over the eastern European satellites, which, led by Romania, were increasingly restless and chafing at Moscow's control. At the same time, Moscow's renewed heavy-handedness further disillusioned the Western Communist parties, including the still powerful French CP, who increasingly trended toward 'Euro-Communism' - a new, less rigidly Moscow-controlled, ideological position.

The ideological and political Cold War also continued and in some areas sharpened in the second and third worlds. Moscow's renewed offensive posture was reflected in their military aid to Angola's 'Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola', and the astonishing appearance there of Cuban troops; in their parallel efforts in Mozambique and the Horn of Africa; as well as in Moscow's push for increased influence in Afghanistan, which culminated in its ill-fated Soviet invasion in 1978. The contest also went on in the Middle East, where Moscow continued to support Syria and the Palestinians. All together, the US and its allies were frustrated by their seeming inability to stem these renewed pressures.

The picture was further complicated by contradictory developments in the strategic arms race. On the one hand the late seventies saw the deployments in the USSR of the first of what would eventually become over 400 SS-20s, a new MIRVed triple warhead mobile intermediate range ballistic missile aimed at Western Europe. The purpose of this huge new investment, turned out to be Moscow's last, desperate try to 'decouple' Western Europe from the US by raising doubts about the reliability of the American deterrent. The question it meant to raise in Western European minds was, whether we would really launch our ICBM's if Europe were attacked, and so risk Chicago for some European city? And whether they, particularly the Germans, would not be wiser to go neutral.

By 1977 German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt was concerned enough to raise this issue privately in Washington and in major speeches, an effort which eventually led to NATO's 'dual track' response: First, the counter-deployment of US IRBMs in Western Europe which - after huge public debates in Europe - was begun in '83, and, secondly, the beginning of negotiations to limit medium-range systems. Interestingly, negotiations toward a second SALT agreement continued during the same period, suggesting a certain ambivalence in Moscow's posture.

Q: That's a fair summary. But how about the French part?

JAEGER: France, unlike Germany, was clearly a player but its frustration as usual was that, in spite of its major roles in the French-German relationship, in the European framework and on the political side of NATO, it was not in the driver seat. I think its fair to say that the French were dependable allies, although, then as later, there was a consistent tendency to try to be a bit ahead of the US through their efforts to have 'special' relations in Moscow, Warsaw and elsewhere, to enhance their importance in the east-west game.

Q: So your job was to follow all these issues and developments and analyze things as seen from Paris?

JAEGER: Yes. One part of the job was sharing and coordinating analyses of all these ongoing east-west developments and making sure the French government correctly understood and, hopefully, supported what we were thinking. Obviously, things that are now pretty clear in retrospect were much less so as these developments occurred, and all of us were groping to make sense of them. The second part was finding out what the French were up to in Moscow and elsewhere behind the Curtain and, when possible, getting the story from both sides.

Q: So your task was not only to find out what the French were thinking and doing, but what the Soviets and Eastern Europeans were thinking as well?

JAEGER: That's right. An example might be a visit by the French Foreign Minister to Moscow. To find out what really happened, I would of course call at the Quai and report what they told me. But to get the whole story, it was usually useful to check further with German and British colleagues, with well-informed journalists who followed Soviet and French policy, like Michel Tatu at Le Monde, and to talk to the Soviets and some of the satellite Embassies. As often as not they would, inadvertently or intentionally, drop a small nugget which could be measured against other information. The result would be a much more nuanced account, with useful clues as to what the French were thinking and trying to accomplish. Over time, I developed and sustained a fairly wide set of relationships with people in the Soviet and Satellite Embassies, which occasionally produced very interesting and sometimes very useful information.

Things were sometimes more difficult, for example when French President Giscard d'Estaing made one of his periodic trips to Poland to go hunting - he had a special affinity for Poland - and would sometimes remain incommunicado for several days at the Polish Prime Minister's hunting lodge without informing the Quai what was being discussed or what he was doing. People were sometimes seriously worried by this, because he would be literally out of touch and unreachable behind the Iron Curtain.

Q: Well, the Poles have always had a traditional affinity for the French since the time of Napoleon.

JAEGER: Giscard clearly tried to build on this, partly to gain leverage in Eastern Europe and soften Polish positions, partly because he enjoyed the adventure of escaping from his Presidential cocoon in Paris. What's more, he would commit quite a bit of money to Polish projects on these trips , expenditures the Quai complained were frivolous and produced few result.

h. Working with the Station

Q: Did your contact work with the Soviet bloc people in Paris upset the Embassy or the station?

JAEGER: On the contrary. In contrast to my experience in Bonn, where relations with the Station were sometimes fractious, the Paris Station Chief came to my office shortly after my arrival to stress that he wanted ours to be a cooperative effort and promised never to undercut me or use me in any way I did not fully understand.

Q: All right.

JAEGER: And he kept his word. The problem in dealing with Soviet and Eastern European personnel in a cosmopolitan setting like Paris is that all sides are afraid of each other. Nobody is quite sure whom they're dealing with or what their motives are. So the business of making useful contacts was delicate and took patience. I tried to call on and often lunched with many of many counterparts in the Soviet and satellite Embassies. Most of these contacts proved useless or worse. It was sometimes only after six months or a year, after one got to know someone fairly well, that they might began to talk more seriously about actual issues rather than repeating party propaganda.

I remember a Polish colleague, a pleasant, highly educated man with whom I had many meetings during this period. One day over a particularly pleasant lunch, he said, "Well, George, I think I know you well enough now so we can stop talking poetry!" I said, "We are going to talk about the real world?" He said, "Yes! You're not from the CIA, and I like and trust you. So let's talk reality." From then on, we had a highly productive relationship, which almost led to his defection, although he decided not to in the end.

Q: Did any of your contacts actually defect?

JAEGER: Yes. A senior East German diplomat, very bright, informed and disciplined. After months of meeting him occasionally, he said out of the blue one day over lunch: "You know, you're pretty dense. Haven't you figured out that I've invested all this time in you because I want to get out? I have got to a point where I can't wait any longer." When I got over my surprise I explained that I was the wrong person to talk to. He said, "Yes, I know, but they're a bunch of klutzes, and I don't trust them." So I said, "I'm going to talk to some people about this, but, in the end, you are still going to have to bite the bullet and deal with them, because I am a diplomat and I can't do this."

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: Well, he told me to do what I had to and promised to comply. After I had gone over all this with the Station, it was arranged that he and I would have dinner at a famous hotel in Paris, at the end of which I would accompany him for a couple of blocks. He would then have to cross the street on his own and meet someone at a cafï¿½. That was the end of the story.

Q: That was the defection?

JAEGER: That was the defection. It worked, but not without some cliffhangers, since, all during dinner he was extremely nervous and twice said he couldn't go through with it, and twice changed his mind. Needless to say, the hotel and the neighborhood through which we walked was swarming with our people to make sure he wasn't kidnapped by his service at the last minute. As it turned out nothing happened, and he presumably made it to a new life in the United States.

Q: How did they know he wasn't a mole or a double agent?

JAEGER: That, of course, was the big question. But that was their and certainly not my business. I should add that I never found out what happened to him and what, in the end, he turned out to be.

Q: Did you have any useful contacts at the Soviet Embassy in Paris?

JAEGER: Yes. We knew a number of people there, but I came to have a special friend whom I saw often over the years. After we had gone through the usual feeling-out process, he would welcome going for long walks (no listening devices) during which he discussed the petrified state the USSR under its current gerontocracy and his passionate hope as a Russian patriot that a renewal could be brought about. He made it quite clear that he wasn't interested in defecting or of compromising me with his people, but simply wanted a serious US interlocutor, so that people in Washington would know how things really were and understand that there were many who wanted change. I often asked him if he was not likely to get in trouble. He thought not, because he submitted, I assume, sanitized reports of our conversations to his security people, and had permission to continue to see me.

Q: Weren't our security types worried that you might get in trouble?

JAEGER: Actually, both my superiors and the Station warmly encouraged me to continue what gradually turned into a real friendship. He and his wife and child came to one of our Thanksgiving dinners and had an absolutely marvelous time. He even invited Pat and myself to visit them once at the Soviet Embassy compound where they all lived and worked, which, as far as was known, no one from our side had ever entered before. We were warmly welcomed in their tiny apartment where a dozen or so of his friends and neighbors in the compound brought cakes and served us tea, and made it clear how pleased they were that we had come! It was all as if a 'Moscow Spring" had just broken out!

Q: But did he give you real, valuable in formation?

JAEGER: Washington and the Agency certainly thought so. The relationship developed to the point that we began to get very clear readings on problems in Moscow, its views on the French Communist party, evolving relations with Paris etc.. Of course, all this raised questions whether he was a KGB guy assigned to work on me, or a legitimate diplomat and "Russian patriot' as he claimed.

Q: Do you think this was really a back channel way to communicate what someone in their government wanted our government to know, without taking responsibility for it? Or was he also passing disinformation?

JAEGER: Perhaps it was the former. All I can say is that none of the many telegrams our talks produced were ever challenged by anyone in Washington. On the contrary they again and again received high commendations. That would not have been the case, if some of it had sounded dubious.

i. Brezhnev's visit to Paris

Q: Can you cite an example?

JAEGER: One might be Brezhnev's three day visit to Paris in June 1977 which the French hoped would be a significant success and Washington was keenly interested in. As usual we had all sorts of official briefings from the Quai, talked to various direct and indirect participants and studied Le Monde's and other accounts of what turned out to be a rather unproductive but turbulent visit. To set the tone, Brezhnev broke protocol and summoned some French Ministers to Rambouillet before meeting with President Giscard, didn't like a car the French gave him and met with Paris Mayor Chirac, even though the latter had pointedly been excluded from the schedule.

Conversely he did not meet with French CP chief George Marchais, who publicly wanted to deemphasize his Moscow ties, being now committed to the "Programme Commun" with Francois Mitterrand's Socialists, through which the French left had just decisively won the municipal elections.

In the end Brezhnev made some meandering public statements saying, inter alia, that US-Soviet relations were in a 'difficult phase" and signed two documents: One on non-proliferation and another on detente, in which Brezhnev accepted, what he had already committed himself to in the Helsinki Final Act, that respect for human rights should be one of the bases for improving French-Soviet relations.

What I learned from my Soviet friend on an almost real-time basis during the visit was how very poor Brezhnev's health actually was; that he was much more feeble and sick than had generally been realized in the West; was not able to concentrate, drank too much, had to be primed and propped up for every event and helped in and out of buildings, cars and airplanes. We even learned what he had for lunch.

Q: We've seen that pattern again in more recent times with the Russian leadership in Yeltsin's time..

JAEGER: We have, except in Brezhnev's case people knew he was not well, but I think they were not certain how debilitated he really was. We received warm commendations for these reports which the Department said had changed Washington's appreciation of Brezhnev's health and therefore had significant implications for US policy.

Q: Which leaves open the question why your friend was so helpful.

JAEGER: It is possible that he helped us because, as he said again and again, he was a Russian patriot and wanted us to see clearly what was happening in the Soviet Union. Conversely, it is also conceivable that some faction in Moscow wanted us to know, which would help explain why he seemed to be able to operate with relative impunity. In the end we will probably never know.

Q: Who, by the way, was the Soviet Ambassador in Paris at the time? Did you ever meet him?

JAEGER: Stepan Chervonenko, the hard liner who had presided over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, whom I met once. It happened when Art Hartman phoned me one afternoon to ask if Pat and I would join him and Donna at a dinner at the Soviet Ambassador's where they had been invited. The last time the Hartmans had been there, he said, the ratio was a dozen Soviets to two Americans. That was heavy lifting. Art thought if four of us went we should be able to handle them. He was prescient.

Although obviously interesting, it turned out to be the gloomiest evening we had spent in Paris, beginning with the Soviet hatcheck girl, who made it clear that she was being watched and that even a word of small talk was unwelcome; to the cavernous reception room where a solemn Chervonenko dourly welcomed us and promptly engaged Ambassador Hartman in earnest conversation - with the predicted dozen Soviet staffers clustering around to hear what was being said; and finally to truly ghastly sturgeon dinner, served in solemn Victorian fashion - so bad, that Pat said afterwards that the sturgeon must have walked all the way from Vladivostok. As for substance, we went through the catalogue of standard exchanges before and during dinner, toasted each other several times with the obligatory vodka, and finally went home having survived but learned little.

j. The French Communist Party

Q: You earlier mentioned George Marchais. What about the French Communist Party in those years?

JAEGER: The whole question of the French Left, both the massive Communist party and, to a lesser extent, the Socialists, had been at the center of American concern since World War II. In my time in Paris the French Communist Party was still an extremely disciplined, centrally managed, quite powerful force in French politics, able to attract over 20% of the popular vote.

Q: And slavishly pro-Soviet?

JAEGER: That was less clear since the formation of the 'Programme Commun' with the Socialists in 1972 and the growing influence of 'Euro-Communism'. Successive shocks and revelations, from Khrushchev's secret speech, the Czech invasion and particularly the publication of Solzhenitsyn's sensational 'Gulag Archipelago' in '73, had had a huge impact and shaken the European Communist parties - especially the Italians. Although the French CP had rejected 'Euro-communism' for longer than anyone , even they had to bend to the wind at their party Congress in '76, at which they dropped the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and moved somewhat closer to Euro-communist positions. Even so, this was a qualified shift motivated by fear of losing voter appeal rather than changing convictions, since, only three years later, the French CP loyally approved the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan - as they had supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia some years earlier.

That said, understanding the French Communist Party, and its relationships with Moscow remained one of the most difficult and important issues for us. While not a vital threat, as they had been after World War II, they could still turn out massive numbers of people to demonstrate in Paris and across France and were obviously a crucial factor in France's electoral equation. The frustrating thing was that we were able to get only fragmentary insights into what was going on inside the party or about its Moscow relationship.

Q: Can you try to sum it up for us?

JAEGER: On the one hand, it was clear that the French party chafed under Moscow's control and tried to conceal the directives it received dictating their behavior. What's more it did show some independence, as when Marchais avoided meeting Brezhnev during his visit when their lines increasingly diverged.

Even so, I remember being at the Soviet Embassy on their National Day around this time and seeing a totally relaxed and jovial George Marchais being received as a most honored guest, clearly enjoying himself and looking very much 'at home'. Indeed the leading French CP people were continually seen at the Soviet Embassy which had a full-time officer assigned to liaise with them. It is more than likely that the Soviets themselves may have pragmatically accepted the necessity of a little public disloyalty for electoral and political reasons, while trying to preserve the essential relationship behind the scenes, which remained one of their major assets on the French and European scenes.

Q: Were you able to follow any of this in detail?

JAEGER: Let's say, we managed to get a certain degree of insight for a period of time. Part of this came from John Dobrin's high-level contacts with the Socialists, part from mine and part from other sources. Since Washington was intensely concerned that a possible 'Programme Commun' government would necessarily include French Communist ministers, it was important to understand to what degree Moscow would gain influence and so obtain a window into the Western alliance.

Q: What was the CP pushing at the time?

JAEGER: One of their projects was for a Soviet-French friendship treaty, a theme which also had a certain limited appeal to extreme Gaullists opposed to NATO and some others frightened by the continuing 'balance of terror'. Even so, it was clearly a non-starter.

Q: But that would have been consistent with de Gaulle's signing of a war-time Friendship treaty with the Soviets in 1944?

JAEGER: Yes, but in Giscard d'Estaing's world in the late seventies it was out of the question. I also learned early on that the Soviets were unsuccessfully pressing for separate and far reaching French-Soviet disarmament agreements. While Giscard wanted a prominent French role in the Western alliance, breaking ranks altogether in any of these ways was not in the cards.

France under Giscard, was in the vanguard of detente, with annual summits with the USSR, but he sought detente in the context of a strengthening French role in the European context and improvements in French-US relations.

k. Lunch with Mitterrand

Q: Why don't we turn for a moment to Mitterrand and the 'Programme Commun". Could you set the stage?

JAEGER: The 'Programme Commun', roughly translatable as the 'Common Program', was signed by the Socialists, the French PC and the Left Radicals in 1972 to regain momentum in view of the continued predominance of the Gaullists after the political crisis of 1958. That this sharp turn to the left was a winning strategy became evident in the presidential elections of '74 when Mitterrand's 'Union of the Left' lost only narrowly to Giscard; and even more so when it won the mid-term municipal elections in 1977, mentioned earlier, which were seen as the run-up for legislative elections to be held in '78.

Given this increasing success, there was growing concern in Washington that the 'Union of the Left' might then gain control of the French National Assembly and form a government - raising the specter of Communist Ministers in power in a Mitterrand cabinet able to influence French foreign and security policy and get access to sensitive military and intelligence information. How to deal with this and the possibility that the 'Union of the Left' might, worse still, gain the Presidency in 1981, became a major Washington concern.

Q: How did the Embassy deal with this?

JAEGER: One obvious first step, was to get to know Mitterrand a little better. John Dobrin, the Political Section's gifted 'enfant terrible' had come to know him informally as leader of the Socialist Party, and he and Hank Cohen conveyed some of these concerns, of which Mitterrand was, of course, aware. His response was an informal commitment that Communist Ministers in any future government of the left would not be given access to this kind of sensitive information. So far so good.

Q: That's nice, but...

JAEGER: Right. We then evolved the notion that maybe we should invite Mitterrand to lunch with Ambassador Rush to emphasize our concerns more formally and create a closer relationship; Mitterrand and others on the left having long been in the Embassy's and Washington's official deep freeze, with official contact largely limited to Dobrin's Second Secretary level.

Q: Did Mitterrand accept?

JAEGER: With alacrity, but one, on the face of it, quite reasonable condition. "If", Mitterrand replied, "I am going to be head of a government or President of France, I need to be read into the real strategic situation." In short, his price for coming to lunch was a comprehensive, highly classified briefing on the state of the nuclear and strategic east-west situation. That, of course created an immediate problem.

Q: How much you are going to tell Mitterrand ...

JAEGER: Precisely. At the same time, Mitterrand, and his people reiterated that a government of the 'Union of the Left' would share power and information with the Communists only on French domestic issues, and that the Communists would be hermetically sealed off from foreign and security affairs. We had his word that he would protect Allied interests and clearly understood the problems posed for America and France's NATO and European allies by the French Communists' relationship with Moscow.

Q: So how was this resolved?

JAEGER: The issue precipitated telegraphic exchanges with Washington over nine months, an endless back and forth which only underscored Washington's distrust Mitterrand. At the same time, everyone was aware of the other horn of dilemma, that the US might soon be dealing with him as head of government or even President of France, and that rebuffing him would be a bad start for this relationship.

In the end Washington waffled. An elegant little outdoor lunch was arranged on the terrace of the Ambassador's residence with beautiful food and great French wines. Mitterrand came, said little and was very polite. After lunch a lowly Lieutenant Colonel (!) gave a 'secret' half hour briefing on the strategic situation, with the usual maps and paraphernalia, which was in fact just a standard, unclassified rundown. Mitterrand might as well have read the New York Times!

Although he left with the unfortunate impression that he was still not trusted, the lunch was not a total loss. For it was Mitterrand's first-ever visit to the Embassy and so symbolically important in itself. Moreover, it gave him the opportunity to tell Ambassador Rush on the record how, if elected, he would conduct his government and to stress again that America had nothing to fear.

My own feeling, then and later, was that by delaying this meeting for nine months, and then serving him lukewarm gruel, we failed to seize an opportunity. As it turned out, when Mitterrand was finally elected President in 1981, albeit without Communist participation, he turned out to be a pillar of continuity in foreign affairs and was rather tough on Moscow, even though his domestic policies of nationalization of industries roiled French and other waters.

I. Elysee Relations

Q: Another piece of the Paris puzzle is the Elysee. How were the Embassy's relations with the Presidency during your time in Paris?

JAEGER: I am glad you asked. I began to realize early in my assignment that our relations with the ï¿½lysï¿½e were very, very thin. Ambassador Rush had virtually no substantive contact with Giscard. Hank Cohen did occasionally see the head of Giscard's tiny, but very influential foreign affairs staff of six or seven - a pleasant man, given to sport coats and country house manners, who invariably gave him a polite half hour but, as Hank kept saying, produced little that was worth reporting. This was a real problem, since the Elysee often kept the Quai in the dark as well, leaving us only partially informed and with little influence at highest level.

Q: So what did you do?

JAEGER: Well, time went by and eventually Hank Cohen and I decided that I should have a go at the 'working level' of that staff. After thinking about this for some time, I settled on the youngest member of the Elysee staff, Jean-David Levitt. At thirty he was a rising star among France's junior diplomats and, although very junior, reportedly had Giscard's confidence.

The next problem was how to make effective contact. I found out that one of his minor duties was to follow Andorra issues...

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: .. because the President France, together with the Catalan Bishop of Urgell, is one of the 'two co-princes' of Andorra - an odd arrangement which goes back to the 13th century.

Q: That's right.

JAEGER: So, on September 8, 1977, Pat and I decided to help celebrate Andorra National Day and, as expected, found Jean-David Levitt in attendance, standing in for Co-Prince Giscard. We met, hit it off, and agreed to an early lunch, at which I deplored the rather spotty relationship between the Embassy and the Elysee. Levitt fully agreed, but then said, "If we work together, can you deliver?"

I knew exactly what he meant. If we established an informal channel to Giscard, would Washington respond with equal seriousness at the highest levels? I took an enormous chance and said "Yes, I can." Levitt said, "Fine. Now what would you like to know?" Well, I said, "I have five questions," and asked for the Elysee's view on five top-flight issues of the day.

He said, "I'll be in touch."

By 3:30PM that afternoon my phone rang, and there was Levitt: "The answers to your questions are ...." and rattled off succinct replies to my five questions. When he had finished he proposed that we have lunch again next week "when I will ask you several questions."

Q: So you had your channel?

JAEGER: Yes. Levitt had evidently seen Giscard after our lunch, and phoned me his answers to my questions! So far so good!

The next problem was, of course, to get Washington to respond appropriately. Well, I prepared a highly classified and very restricted message 'for the Secretary and the White House only', explaining that we had succeeded in establishing a backchannel to Giscard; reporting his responses to our initial questions, some of which had far-reaching implications, and making clear that this arrangement would work only as long as we were able to respond to their questions promptly and with equally authoritative highest-level answers.

Q: Big time stuff!

JAEGER: Well, yes. I took my draft telegram to Sam Gammon, the able Deputy Chief of Mission who was then Chargï¿½, who had not heard of any of this before and was clearly taken aback: "You know, if this isn't for real, its not just your job but also mine! You really want me to sign this? How do we know this guy is responsible?" I said, "Sam, you don't know, but, I think, it's the best source you're ever going to get. My recommendation is that you sign it, and let's see what happens." To his great credit he did. After some high level back and forth with Washington, our new channel worked effectively until I left Paris and resolved some important misunderstandings between Washington and Paris.

Q: That must have quite a coup!

JAEGER: Well, it undoubtedly helped with my promotion to FSO-2 and the Senior Foreign Service after I got back to Washington. But I recount this, not in self-praise, but because it's an important case study of how, finding the right person at the right level, making real human contact and then playing it absolutely straight, can overcome major systemic roadblocks and open the way to genuine communication - the critical prerequisite to effective diplomacy.

Too often people think you have to rely on cloak and dagger stuff, when its all there to be had with a little imagination, drive and that indefinable quality necessary to make genuine human contacts - even between adversaries.

Q: As it did with some of your Russian contacts. In this case the highest level in France realized that they had a channel they could use to get some points across without the rigidity of formal highest-level meetings.

JAEGER: Precisely. It was an official unofficial channel. The footnote to this story is of course that Jean-David Levitt had a legendary career, was France's Ambassador to the US during George W. Bush's Presidency, then served as French Ambassador to the UN and, as I edit this account, has returned to his old haunts in the Elysee - this time as the Foreign Policy Advisor to President Sarkozy.

m.A grab bag of other issues

Q: Paris being a major diplomatic hub, there must have been many other issues you became involved in. What were some of the main ones?

i. Portugal

JAEGER: My bit-part in the Portuguese drama of the seventies began one day in 1976, when I received a call from the Portuguese Ambassador to France, Antonio Coimbra Martins, asking if he could come to see me. I demurred and suggested he might want to see Ambassador Rush. Martins said he had, and repeated that he wanted to meet with me. It was the beginning of a wonderful personal and political relationship.

Martins - a brilliant Romance literature scholar and close friend of Prime Minister Mario Soares whose Socialist party had just prevailed in the April elections of that year - came promptly, sat on the hard chair next to my scuffed desk and explained that he needed a friend in the Embassy who would help support Soares' and Ambassador Frank Carlucci's struggle to stabilize his country by persuading the French government to be more supportive. He had tried to explain this to our Ambassador, who had not seemed deeply interested and had suggested he meet with me!

Q: Amazing! Sketch in the background of what was happening in Portugal to set the stage, OK?

JAEGER: The background was dramatic. After the collapse of the Portuguese colonies and the fall of Portugal's authoritarian regime a left-leaning military coup failed to contain the deepening crisis and the Moscow-guided Portuguese Communist Party remained a powerful destabilizing influence and threatened to make Portugal the first Communist country in Western Europe. By '76, Mario Soares and his moderate-left Socialists had managed to win legislative elections and form a weak government but were endangered by Portugal's profound poverty and discontent. To visualize the situation you have to keep in mind that the average Portuguese standard of living in those days was at the level of an African country!

Kissinger had at first written Soares off as the 'Kerensky' of Portugal, the guy who would just be the front-runner for the Moscow-controlled Communists when he failed. Carlucci eventually persuaded Henry to be supportive, enabling him to undergird Soares' government with aid, loans, new military programs and strong public support. Carlucci's compelling point, which was the main theme of the gusher of telegrams from Lisbon, was that there was no alternative to Soares. So he worked like a tiger to assure Soares' survival and success.

Q: But what did the Portuguese Ambassador want you to do?

JAEGER: In brief, to help persuade the French to be more generous and to untie French assistance from the usual conditions that any resulting business had to go to French firms. Moreover, France, then as now, had a special relationship with Spain and Portugal, both being Mediterranean countries and neighbors. It was specially important, therefore, that effective support for Soares come, and be seen as coming, not only from the US but also from Portugal's European neighbors, particularly France. Soares saw this as Martins' principal task.

Q: Actually, if I remember correctly, the Germans were more supportive of the Portuguese socialists than the French.

JAEGER: That's right. In France, the Giscard government, indeed the whole right wing of the French political spectrum, was not at all happy about the socialist direction of events in Portugal, and were therefore holding back. For Soares and Martins it was critical to reassure the French and show them how much worse things could get if they didn't help.

Q: Were you able to help?

JAEGER: In the end yes. The Portuguese desk officer at the Quai was an austere, rather difficult woman who seemed like an impenetrable wall. I took up the cause and made many trips to the Quai, cajoling and pleading Soares' cause at various levels, making it clear that this was a major American priority. In the end, after months of effort, we made headway and were able to report to Carlucci and the Department that the French had untied and increased some of their aid and were being generally more helpful. Even so it remained hard for the French government to help ideological opponents in Lisbon who were friends of Mitterrand. It was a tough, uphill fight.

Q: That's fascinating. I don't think I told you about my own acquaintance with Portugal in those days. Because of my interest in the comparative history of revolution, we went there in June of '75. By that time, as you have described, the revolution was going through the characteristic phase of being radicalized, with radical officers in the military, who had come out of Africa, becoming the dominant political force. They were backed, at a certain distance by the Russians and the Communist Party. Thanks to the Embassy we got passes to the opening session of the newly elected constituent assembly.

I was, of course, comparing this with the constituent assembly that met in Russia in January 1918 and was dispersed by Lenin. Well, in this case, it was not. Following the session, when the delegates left the building, which was surrounded by armored cars for security purposes, I saw Soares talking with a group of people and went up and introduced myself and explained that I was an American historian interested in revolutions, and could we meet? He said, "Tomorrow." So my wife and I went to his office in the Parliament building. At the time he was a minister without portfolio in the military government. And, of course, it was touch and go as to whether he would be thrown out or become prime minister. In our meeting he also recounted his meeting with Kissinger at which Kissinger told him, as you said, that, "maybe you're going to be the Kerensky of the Portuguese revolution. "Well", Soares said he replied. " Kerensky didn't do so badly. He became a college professor in the United States!" I thought he was a very honorable man, who was desperately trying to steer between the forces of right and left that were threatening Portugal at the time.

JAEGER: That's right. And it was Carlucci's great merit that he clearly understood the importance of this and mobilized all possible resources to help, of which my efforts in Paris were a minor part.

Q: Yes. We happened to encounter Soares again the following year. By that time the psychological atmosphere had changed completely. There was a distinct thermidorian reaction. Exactly the same thing George Orwell described in his book on 'Catalonia' after the anarchists were crushed in Barcelona. Well, in Portugal there had been this ultra-left uprising in Lisbon in November of '75, the collapse. The Communists distanced themselves from it. Soares then made his tremendous comeback and won the parliamentary election in '76! Glad you were able to help a bit after that!

ii. Berlin, Svalbard, Cyprus etc.

Q: What other issues came up in Paris?

JAEGER: The Political Section, when in my last year or so I was Deputy Counselor and floor manager, had to deal with an almost endless list of issues in Europe and across the globe: Arms control and Helsinki follow-up, French-German relations and European community developments. There was the endless fuss between Greece and Turkey, various problems in the Middle East, Morocco and Algeria as well as former French Africa which the French were very neuralgic about. My colleague Mark Pratt presided over the Far Eastern issues, Japan, Taiwan, China and Indonesia, but particularly Cambodia and Vietnam. There was no end of work.

Q: So Paris really had some of the most complex tasks of any of our embassies?

JAEGER: Well, much like all the great embassies, London, Paris, Tokyo, Moscow, now Berlin, where all the hubs come together.

Q: Let's talk a bit more of some of the off beat problems which you worked on personally.

JAEGER: I remember spending considerable time on problems involving Svalbard, the island archipelago north of Norway, governed by Norway under the terms of the 1920 Svalbard treaty, where suspicious Soviet activities near their mining town were raising red flags in Washington, Oslo and NATO.

The there was Cyprus, and the never-ceasing Greek-Turkish problems, which became a particularly persistent theme in the aftermath of the '74 invasion. I worked closely with the British Embassy on peace initiatives then underway and often shared reports and analyses. One of the things which struck me at the time was that, although their political staff was a third the size of ours, they managed somehow to handle the same range of issues as our much larger staff.

Q: Isn't that rather characteristic of American efforts compared with some Europeans who often do almost as well with a lot fewer people?

JAEGER: Yes, although there are distinctions. The Brits tend to produce people who write concisely and do things with an economy of means, perhaps as a result of their tutorial system in Universities. I saw this again when I was heading the Political Department at NATO, where my British colleague was as productive as most of the rest of the staff put together.

Q: Don't the French do this too?

JAEGER: The French view things through a logical prism, the Cartesian method taught in the 'Grands Ecoles'. The Brits tend to begin with concise perceptions of reality and then think their way through to policy conclusions, as we do, except we tend to need more paper and more words.

Q: Was Berlin still on the front burner when you were in Paris?

JAEGER: Berlin too continued to take much time, since France was one of the four occupying powers. My interlocutor at the Quai was Francois Plaisant, the Director of Berlin affairs, a smallish man whose bangs stretched across his forehead concealed a very bright and somewhat stubborn mind.

I remember frequent meetings with Plaisant in which we tried to coordinate Allied positions, which could be difficult. One rather technical Berlin issue comes to mind, on which Plaisant had taken a hard position which our people in Berlin and the Department badly wanted to change. I met with Plaisant at least four times and presented our arguments as persuasively as I could. When I gave it one more try and had again gone over the whole thing, he smiled a little and said, Ok, if its that important I'll meet you half way, not because you have persuaded us but because you are a friend and you really want this - which again illustrates the importance of genuine human contact.

Q: Was he able to make decisions for the French Government?

JAEGER: On most of these issues yes. Plaisant was Mr. Berlin at the Quai. The Director for Europe, Jacques Andrï¿½ani was no doubt kept informed and consulted.

Q: One thinks of the French as so bureaucratic and centralized that what you say surprises me.

JAEGER: Yes, but Office Directors at the Quai, at least in my time, were powerful people who almost always became ambassadors on their next foreign assignment, like my friend Yves Omnes, the Director for Soviet and Eastern European Affairs, who became French Ambassador in Egypt. They no doubt cleared their decisions, but were very influential.

iii. Henry in Paris

Q: Now I am sure you had one or more visits by Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary until Carter came in in January '77.

JAEGER: He came to Paris frequently, sometimes on Vietnam matters, sometimes to see Giscard d'Estaing and whoever was Foreign Minister at the time.

Q: Did you see him on these visits? I remember you had known him at Harvard.

JAEGER: Only once - since he never came to the Chancery - although that proved to be rather memorable. I was the senior Embassy duty officer, which meant being available at the Ambassador's residence at rue Saint Honorï¿½ where Henry always stayed to help with whatever issues might come up, i.e. late-night contact with someone in the French government etc..

The scene was the residence's vast lobby, where duplicate arrays of copying machines, multiple typewriters and desks had been set up in somewhat surrealistic readiness for the arrival of "the aircraft", expected about ten PM, but then delayed. At nearly midnight the doors burst open with a crack, and Henry, followed by a phalanx of assistants and staffers, burst in. Ambassador Rush stood in the middle of the hall to welcome Henry and offered him a drink. Henry, didn't even break his stride, perfunctorily shook Rush's hand and was off to his and Nancy's rooms. Poor Rush mumbled something like , "Well, welcome to Paris," and disappeared as well, while Henry's platoon of assistants, who had all brought along whatever they had been working on on the aircraft, set to typing away furiously on important papers.

I was at my little desk awaiting developments, when the very bright-looking young woman with blonde bangs and sharp blue eyes who was Henry's secretary, picked up her phone, took a message, looked at me, and said, "He wants the paper."

I said, "Today is Sunday, and there isn't a paper. There's just a weekend edition of the Herald Tribune, which was published early yesterday morning." Goldilocks, as I nicknamed her in retrospect, was unamused: "Don't be stupid! He wants the paper! Get the paper!"

So I called the Chief Housekeeper, a wonderfully kind and competent lady, and asked if there was a copy of the weekend Herald Tribune. She called back a moment later in some considerable distress and said, "The Ambassador has gone to bed, and is, I think, doing the crossword puzzle."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I said, "Mr. Kissinger's Assistant here says that he wants the paper." She said, "Well, if its really necessary, I'll try to talk to the Ambassador." After a few minutes the Chief Housekeeper appeared in person, looking very distressed, and said, "The Ambassador hasn't finished with the crossword puzzle yet, ...

Q: (Laughter)

JAEGER: .... and wonders if Mr. Kissinger could wait for 20 minutes?"

Q: I can't believe it!

JAEGER: I turned to 'Goldilocks' and explained the situation. She looked at me while continuing to type at an alarming rate, and said, "When Henry wants a paper, Henry gets a paper. GET IT!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: So a few minutes later, out comes this crumpled Herald Tribune with a half-done crossword puzzle that had been taken away from the American Ambassador in Paris so that Henry could read the paper.

Things turned out quite differently on another occasion when I was asked to help with Brzezinski's arrival at Orly airport. On the way into Paris, there was a loud pop emanating from Zbig's newly armored car followed by several others, at which point his limousine seemed to sink into the ground as it came to a stop. It seems our admin people had forgotten to put heavier tires on the car to compensate for its additional weight! Zbig was, of course, quickly and safely transferred to one of the other cars and sped into town.

Stories like these about high-level visitors and the endless Congressional delegations who turned up in Paris, and required much time and effort, could fill volumes.

iv. Carter Visit - Stolen rugs and Security Threats

Q: What about President Carter? Did he visit France during your time?

JAEGER: Yes, in January 1978, part of a swing which began in Poland, and then took the President through Iran, India, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. I was asked to help our Minister, Sam Gammon, to coordinate the visit.

Q: Were the preparations as intense and time consuming as one hears?

JAEGER: If anything more so. There were, of course, endless planning meetings in the Embassy and with the French, as well as major challenges - such as arranging housing for the 200-some official support staff and all the journalists traveling with the President in one place. I remember startling the General Manager of the Meridian Hotel when I told him that I needed to rent his whole 500 room hotel for Carter's visit, and succeeded only after the Elysee kindly supported my request.

Weeks before the visit a Secret Service detail had, of course, appeared, followed by a huge Advance Group from the White House which virtually took over the Embassy. Between them they looked at every aspect of the visit in painstaking detail, including the routes Carter would travel, the prevailing security situation and, of course, the apartment the Carters would occupy at Giscard's official country retreat, the Chateau of Fontainebleau.

It was this apartment which gave rise to the first major incident. Our counterpart at the Elysee phoned me a few days before Carter's arrival in great agitation to say that the Americans were stealing President Giscard's rugs and adamantly refused to return them! He had not yet told President Giscard but very much hoped I could promptly get this straightened out!

Q: Incredible!

JAEGER: I sent a rocket to our White House liaison officer who established that the Secret Service team casing Fontainebleau thought the rugs in the apartment the Carters would be staying in were not as nice as others they seen in a nearby suite, and claimed not to have understood the loud complaints emanating from Giscard's staff - since they were speaking French! I made it clear that the rugs were to be returned instantly, and asked our Minister to convey the US Government's profound apologies. The French were kind enough to make sure that the story did not get to the press, which would have destroyed the visit.

Q: You said this was the first major incident. What else happened?

JAEGER: Well, a few days before Carter's arrival the operator rang me to say there was someone on the line who wanted to report a death threat to the President. When I picked up, a man speaking French explained that he knew of an assassination plot and wanted to warn us, but then refused to explain anything further on the phone.

Q: You had a major problem.

JAEGER: I told him it was terribly important that we meet either at the Embassy or elsewhere, that he could trust me and that we would do everything in our power to protect the President. The caller would only agree to think about it before he hung up without providing contact information. He then called back two or three times, which was reassuring, and after more conversation, finally agreed to come to the Embassy the following day. He insisted, however, that he only wanted to meet me since he said he didn't trust anybody else.

I reported all this to the Secret Service, who thought that I was in no way qualified to deal with the situation and informed me that they would now take it over. I said, "Well, this guy said he will only deal with me. What's more, none of you speak French. If we switch signals on him and he refuses to talk, it will be your responsibility if things go wrong."

They thought about this and said. "Okay, we'll put a listening device in your desk because we do want to know word for word what he says, and want a recording." So they installed an expensive looking tape recorder in my desk drawer and attached a red button under the edge of my desk. My instructions were that as soon as he started to talk I was to press the red button which would start the recording.

Sure enough, the man came, a small rather innocuous-looking person, and was shown to my office. When he was about to sit down and start talking, I pressed the red button - and guess what happened?

Q: What?

JAEGER: There was a big BANG and a cloud of smoke shot up over my desk!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: They had installed a US specs recorder not realizing that in France the voltage is 220!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: While I was still trying to collect my wits, my little friend was out the door like a shot, down the stairs and out of the building before anybody could get hold of him! As a result, we never found out whether there was a threat or not, which left everyone rather nervous and then greatly relieved when the visit unfolded without incident!

Q: Wow! Clearly a nut-case, but you couldn't have known that at the time. Tell us now about the actual visit.

v. Carter at Versailles

JAEGER: Giscard d'Estaing wanted Carter's visit to be a special occasion and had decided to use the just restored Palais de Versailles for the official reception, a first since the Revolution! Because he thought of Carter as a populist he had invited 500 people drawn from all social classes and professions from all over France, besides the usual government ministers, the diplomatic corps and other notables.

When the guests arrived at the great courtyard of Versailles, illuminated only by flickering torches, they were ushered through a dramatic defile of 'Garde Republicaines', sitting their horses with sabers drawn in salute, the torchlight glittering on breastplates and helmets. The only quixotic touch in this tableau was the lone guardsman urgently running around behind the ranks of horses with a pooper- scooper ...

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: ... to make sure that the occasion would not be marred by an equestrian mishap!

Once inside, we saw Versailles at its historic best - the Hall of Mirrors and all the subsequent reception rooms sparkling in candle light, were decorated with vast flower arrangements skillfully matching the mood and colors of each room. There were small clusters of musicians here and there in period costumes softly playing flutes, harps or violins. And there were 'oyster trees' and other opulent and ingenious displays of food and drink for the eventual delectation of France's guests.

To provide structure, the 500 public representatives Giscard had invited were all gathered in the hall of Mirrors. The rest of us were variously led to other reception rooms, the ambassadors to one, the ministers to another, those of us of less exalted rank to a third, and less easily definable invitees were ushered to a fourth. It was all like a great fairy tale, extravagant, shimmering, and, for Pat and myself, somewhat overwhelming.

After some time had passed, more and more people commented on the fact that the two Presidents had not yet arrived, and were clearly late. What's more protocol demanded that no one could eat or drink until the two Presidents had walked through the reception rooms and greeted everybody, at which point the party could officially begin.

Alas, more time went by, everyone was increasingly hungry, feet began to hurt because no seating was provided and the question became more urgent: Where were the two Presidents? Had anything happened?

Finally, well after eleven PM, Carter and Giscard arrived, jovially passed through the salons shaking hands, stopping here and there for a word or two, clearly enjoying each other's company and savoring the event. We later found out what had happened. President Carter had arrived on schedule, but, as he was being taken for a quick drive around the gardens and illuminated fountains of Versailles, the two Presidents became totally engrossed in a long private conversation - we never found out what it was about - while their limousine just continued to drive around the gardens - for almost two hours!

The evening was nevertheless a great success, even though none of us had a drink or even a tiny canapï¿½ until it was almost time to return home, again passing through the ranks of glittering horsemen who were still solemnly on guard in the courtyard when we left.

n. A last visit to Vienna.

Q: Any other events which should be recorded?

JAEGER: Yes, I do want to say a word about my father's rather remarkable good-bye to Vienna. Since my mother's death he had been living alone in Kansas City, was increasingly frail but surrounded by a circle of friends who admired him and his paintings, appreciated his willingness to give art lessons to their youngsters, and helped him in all kinds of ways. One day, I think it was in my second year in Paris, I received a letter from him saying that he wanted to make one last visit to Vienna to "forgive these people"! Would I therefore take a ten day leave and come with him, since he was too weak to go alone.

So we did. We flew to Vienna and had a wonderful time together visiting all his old haunts, going to concerts, the theater and even to Grinzing, the famous village in the hilly vineyards above the city where we spent a typical Viennese evening over a happy dinner and a few glasses of white wine. He returned to America at peace, having made this remarkable gesture of reconciling himself with a people who had so enthusiastically welcomed Hitler, cheered, or at least remained silent over the expulsion and death of many thousands of their Jewish fellow citizens, and who had so disrupted his own life. As he said in the end, it was the Christian thing to do. He lived on in Kansas City, cared for largely by his many friends, until he too died on January 11, 1980.

There was a personal revelation during this trip for me as well. Among the places we visited was my old grade school, the 'Volkschule' where I had learned to read and write. When we explained that I had been a student there for four years, until 1936, the teacher who had admitted us went white as a sheet. "That's impossible", he said, "they are all dead. That whole class died at Stalingrad! They were all drafted and thrown into that battle when they were 16 and 17. "

He was amazed and glad to learn that I was the only exception, having been saved by my two Jewish grand parents and my emigration to England and America from the disaster which awaited my Aryan schoolmates in the Hitler youth.

Life is sometimes very strange, and I was again and again very very lucky!

o. Leaving Paris

Q: What a story! And what a tour in Paris. Were you sorry to leave?

JAEGER: In a way yes, since it had been the richest and most rewarding assignment so far. We had worked hard, had made many friends and felt that we had succeeded, both in providing high-quality political reporting and in leaving the Political Section in much better shape than it was when I arrived. The icing on the cake was that Art Hartman had warmly recommended me for a 'Superior Honor Award' for my service in France, a distinction which in those days was still something special.

The evening before we left, the two Lyonnais owners of our favorite small restaurant, the 'Bellecour' on the rue Surcouf, where I had had so many of my business lunches and Pat and I had often gone to mark family events, offered us a truly magnificent good-bye dinner - a splendid, happy seven course affair with all sorts of wonderful Burgundies to match. On our way back to our pre-departure quarters at the Intercontinental Pat and I danced across the footbridge over the Seine, with moonlit Paris shimmering romantically in the waves. It was the perfect ending of a richly rewarding adventure in our lives.

Part VIII. Via Czech training to Quebec and Ottawa!

1. Memorizing the Czech pinball machine

Q: Paris must have been hard to top. What was the next chapter to be?

JAEGER: After some back and forth - there was discussion of a small African Embassy which never materialized - I was assigned to be Deputy Chief of Mission in Prague under Ambassador Thomas R. Byrne, a Ford appointee and longtime labor negotiator close to the CIO's George Meany, who had served as Labor Attachï¿½ in London and been Ambassador to Norway.

As personnel explained it, the Department wanted somebody with more substantial east-west relations experience to backstop Byrne in Prague since Czech relations with the West seemed to be entering a more active phase after being in deep freeze for the previous ten years, since the Soviet invasion in 1968. Czech President Husï¿½k had made his first-ever visit to a foreign country, to Germany, they had begun to negotiate some foreign loans and there was increased possibility of resumption of Czech-US negotiations over outstanding issues, like the return of Czech gold held at Fort Know since World War II and US claims for property seized by the Communists. Hopes also existed that cultural and scientific exchanges might become possible, as they had with all other satellite countries. There was also a feeling that staff morale in Prague was poor and that management at this tough iron curtain post, where life was grey and restricted by Czech secret police pressure, clearly needed a boost.

Q: I assume that meant you had to learn Czech and spend another nine months at FSI?

JAEGER: That's right, since my Serbo-Croatian was of no help. So we moved back to Washington, rented a nice house in Bethesda and began the Czech language course in late August 1978 - where I quickly discovered that Czech really is a very hard language. Unlike other Slavic languages Czech was never properly codified, I believe because the bible was not translated early on into a rationalized version of Czech, as it had been into other eastern European languages. As a result, the localized mediaeval peasant versions persisted and modern Czech became a language in which the endings of nouns, adjectives, adverbs etc. continue to be all over the place. From a student's point of view it's like memorizing a pinball machine!

Q: I know, I've tried.

JAEGER: Nothing matches. It's simply ghastly memory work. Additional pressure arose from the fact that the other six students in the class were, of course, going to be on my staff when we got to Prague. So I had to put on a respectable show, which took a lot of very hard work, while beginning the job of bonding and shaping a team.

As it turned out that was the easy part, since we all understood that Prague was going to be a tough assignment, that the Czech intelligence service was going to be aggressive and nasty, and that living conditions in this gloomy city under the shadow of the Soviet '68 invasion would not be ideal. Within weeks we had formed genuine human relationships and had become a team.

Pat too wanted to play her part in Prague as DCM's wife and so decided to study Czech as well, doing a part-time course at FSI. Since Christina was starting 2nd grade at the French Lycï¿½e on Bradley Boulevard, which capitalized on her by now excellent French and made her transition to the States easier, this meant twice daily shuttling between Bethesda, Arlington and the Beltway, a very energy and time consuming process which didn't help her frustrations with Czech's impossible grammar. It was a stressful time for all of us.

Q: But, I take it you never got to Prague?

JAEGER: In mid-February '79, six months into our course, I was called out of class one day for a phone call. It was Personnel to say that they were terribly sorry to have to tell me that my assignment had been broken and that I was not going to Prague after all! Needless to say I was shocked, angry and very disappointed, as were my class mates who had become my friends.

Q: Did you find out what happened?

JAEGER: More or less. As far as Ambassador Byrne is concerned, the prevalent rumor, and I must stress it was only a rumor, was that he had been having an affair with a woman agent of the Czech secret police - an incredibly dumb thing to do, if true. What brought things to a head was that he reportedly gave her some official papers of very low classification which were then used to blackmail him; at which point he is finally said to have informed the Department of the mess he was in.

Whatever happened, the fact was that he was pulled out on very short, I heard twenty-four hours, notice and that Frank Meehan, a recognized Eastern European expert, who had been Chief of the Eastern Affairs Section in Berlin at the same time I had my less than euphonious experience with Jim Carson, his Political Section counterpart, was named to replace him. Meehan was clearly a very good professional choice. My misfortune was -

Q: ...That Meehan didn't need a DCM who would be as experienced as you?

JAEGER: I wouldn't put it quite that way. Ambassadors traditionally have an absolute right to choose their DCMs and have, over their careers, collected people they are like or are obliged to and who fit their comfort zone. These may all have been factors in his decision to drop me. Whatever the reason, Meehan picked someone else and I was out.

2.Foreign Service Inspector

Q: Well, that was the end of that. What happened next?

JAEGER: They had to park me somewhere, so I was asked to be a Foreign Service Inspector, a temporary gig which turned out to be quite interesting.

As you know, State Department Inspectors visit Embassies, Consulates, all parts of the Department and individual Foreign Service officers assigned elsewhere, to assess the quality of their posts' or offices' management and individual officers' work and working conditions, and to uncover problems that might need attention. During my two and a half months stint as an Inspector (April - June 1979), I was asked to inspect a number of the Foreign Service officers on assignments to agencies in and around Washington. For example, I went out to the Army War College near Gettysburg-

Q: Up in Carlisle?

JAEGER: Yes, ...and visited a Foreign Service Officer who was teaching there. I spent a day or two with him, met his superiors and then wrote an assessment of how well he was doing, the kind of environment in which he worked, and made a couple of recommendations as to how things might be improved. I also inspected a few of our FSOs at the Environmental Protection Agency where some of them were doing more or less important work.

The most interesting period were the weeks I spent in USIA as part of a Team inspecting a group of State Department Foreign Service Officers assigned there. It was not a happy situation. Many of these people had no clear direction as to what they were supposed to do. The lines of command were vague, the mission was frequently unclear and many felt that they were not taken seriously because they were not permanently in the USIA's career chain.

Q: Who was the director of USIA at that point?

JAEGER: John Reinhardt, a Carter appointee, who had been Ambassador to Nigeria and became USIA's first Afro-American Director. He was, incidentally, born in Vermont and did a stint teaching at the University of Vermont after his retirement.

Q: Did you meet him as an Inspector?

JAEGER: No, but our Inspection Team did have an extensive meeting with his Deputy, Charles Bray, a Senior Foreign Service Officer who had been Secretary Rogers' press spokesman and who, to his great credit, had resigned over the wiretapping of three FSO's when Kissinger came in. After his stint at USIA, Reagan picked him as Ambassador to Senegal. He subsequently presided over a budget-cutting exercise at State before retiring.

Although Bray spoke to us in glowing terms about the wonderful work all the State Department FSOs were doing in USIA, the more my colleagues and I got into it, the more we found a very demoralized, unhappy and disoriented group of officers. There was a clearly serious disconnect between the front office story and the working level reality which suggested management neglect. At the end of our inspection we drafted a rather critical report which put much of the responsibility on Charles Bray. It promptly ran into stone walls, since Bray clearly had friends in very high places, and its recommendations were never implemented. On the contrary, Bray got his next Embassy and FSOs continued to be assigned to USIA without needed reforms whenever Personnel somehow didn't know what else to do with them.

My stint as an Inspector was a fascinating learning experience, although clearly not very satisfying professionally.

3.Trying hard not to go to Quebec

Q: What did they dream up next for you to do?

JAEGER: Well, Personnel called one day and said that I had been chosen to be Consul General in Quebec. Rene Levesque was going to have a referendum and they wanted me to go up there to look after our interests.

Q: In effect, to be the American pointman to Quebec?

JAEGER: That was how, in a way, it actually worked out, although initially the idea did not appeal to me at all. I tried to explain that I was a Europeanist, that I really knew nothing about Canada and certainly didn't want to preside over a lot of visas getting issued. In any case, what had just been done to me entitled me to a better choice. All to no avail. They insisted and said that I would have to go.

Well, I was very upset, and literally went on strike, refused to go to the Department and spent a month walking the towpath along the Potomac River to make clear that I was seriously unhappy and close to quitting. When personnel would phone up to ask that I come in to see them, my wife just said, "Well, he's walking the towpath, and he's still very angry."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: After some weeks Bob Barry, my old friend from Zagreb who was one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries, called and said, "Look, George, you've made your point and we are all aware of it. We're all sorry about what happened. But its now time to get over it. Come in and see Dick Vine (the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe then responsible for Canada). He wants to talk to you." So, I went in to see Dick Vine, who was very nice but said, "You know, the trouble with you is that you're ignorant."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: "You don't know a damn thing about Quebec, and you haven't thought through how important this job is to the US and how challenging it's going to be! Here is this-"

Q: Yes, just the point I was making.

JAEGER: "Here is this huge country north of the United States thinking about breaking up into bits and pieces, and you're going to be our man up there. Unlike Czechoslovakia, which we all know a lot about and where nothing is going to change in the immediate future, this is the place where you can actually play a role!"

Q: Here in Vermont we were acutely aware of the tension between French and English Canada and the possibility of separation, and were even expecting an influx of refugees. We thought Burlington might even become the Miami of the North.

JAEGER: Well, you're lucky it didn't. To cut a long story short, I told Dick that I'd made my point and would do my best in Quebec in face of these challenges. I then asked, "But what do I need to know?" Dick said, "Oh, you're bright. You go up there, and you'll find out!" I said, "OK, but what are my instructions?" He said, "You'll figure that out too. Go up there and see that things go right."

Q: So you pretty much had carte blanche!

JAEGER: That's how it turned out, since he then shifted the discussion to ornithology and we spent the next half hour discussing the implications of bones in wing structures, of flight patterns, and oddities of bird behavior! With that I left and prepared to go to Quebec.

Before arriving at post, I did, of course, call on the Ambassador in Ottawa, Ken Curtis, a delightful former Governor of Maine with whom I developed a warm relationship; and on our highly competent and consistently supportive DCM, Richard Smith. Both offered helpful background and advice but also left things essentially in my hands. I also met my very perceptive predecessor, Terry McNamara - famous for his heroic rescue of many Vietnamese, in spite of orders to the contrary. He drove them on a liberated ship down the Mekong to the open sea, where they were all eventually picked up.

4. Consul General in Quebec

Q: When did you actually take over in Quebec?

JAEGER: Pat, Christina and I arrived on a lovely fall day in September '79, having, for the first time ever, driven(!) to a new post in our car. We were welcomed by Eric Boswell, a tall, able young officer with good French, who was to be my number two, and began to establish ourselves in our quarters on the second floor of the spectacularly sited Consulate building next to the Chateau Frontenac, whose large reception and dining rooms have dramatic, sweeping views of the Chateau, the harbor and the St. Lawrence River. It was a setup ideal for entertaining. The living quarters proved more modest, but were supplemented by a nice garret apartment on the third floor, well-suited for guests. The only obvious problem was the tiny, under-equipped kitchen, which became an ongoing challenge.

The surroundings too were fabulous: In front, the famous flag-bedecked 'Terasse' along the wide St. Lawrence, thronging with people in clement weather while during the long, cold winter months its famous toboggan run and skating rink were centers of attraction. On the side of our building I found a tranquil little park also facing the river, whose monument to Wolfe and Montcalm commemorates the famous contestants of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Once a farm, this vast battlefield in time also became a lovely park extending far beyond the battlements of Quebec's citadel, which dominate the town.

We were also delighted with Christina's new school, the famous 'Ecole des Ursulines', the first girls' school in North America, founded by Sr. Marie de l'Incarnation in 1639. Although still run on rather old-fashioned Catholic lines, the Ursulines were excellent and caring educators, and Christina was, by and large, happy there. So far so good.

Q: So what were your first impressions of the atmospherics in Quebec?

JAEGER: Puzzling and complex. Even though 95% Francophone, Quebec, for all its splendid hotels and restaurants, quaint streets, and historic sites, was different from any comparably-sized provincial capital we knew in France. One immediately sensed the ambivalence in a place where KFC fast-food outlets and other clearly North American establishments competed with the Norman architecture of the older houses and the reminders of Quebec's 'Anglo' past, such as the white Episcopal Cathedral in the very center of town and the former 'Anglo' stronghold, the Chateau Frontenac, one of the great railway hotels built in the 19th century to tie the new Canada together. Its this complexity which, as I came to understand, reflects Quebec's tangled history - first French, then taken over and governed by the English and finally, and not always happily, Canadian.

That these contradictions, and the grievances they had caused, had come to a head and that passions were now running high, was also obvious. As I arrived, the towns and villages were saturated with PQ (Parti Quebecois) posters demanding Quebec's separation from Canada. PQ rallies, dominated by oceans of blue Quebec flags bearing the fleur-de-lis, were of an intensity which was astonishing. The PQ's pervasive theme song was the haunting melody of Gilles Vigneault's 'L'hiver c'est mon pays', his moving, sentimental hymn which somehow summed up the French nationalists' determination to achieve their mythic fatherland.

Opposing the separatists in this visual and spiritual battle were red Canadian flags which flew defiantly over Quebec city's citadel, the 'Terasse' and all federal institutions throughout the province, as well as the many red maple-leaf banners and posters on houses, barns and businesses, notably not only in the English-speaking parts of the province, but throughout the French part as well, reflecting the critical division on the issue among the French themselves. Canada and Quebec were clearly approaching what most thought would be a fundamental showdown in the 1980 referendum which would determine their future.

a. Love goes through the stomach!

Q: Given these first impressions, what, as you saw it, were the main challenges you faced ?

JAEGER: The first and most obvious was how, given our miniscule staff of four Americans, eight or so locals and a tiny entertainment budget, I could reach out to the conflicted leaders of this roiled society of four million Francophones and two million Anglophones and allophones, who had a provincial government larger than many medium-sized countries.

To give you a sense of scale, Quebec's "foreign office" alone, the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, had at least five hundred officials! More importantly, there were dozens of major players on Quebec's political stage with whom I needed to establish working and personal relationships, ranging from Premier Rene Levesque, his entourage and key Ministers and Claude Ryan, the Liberal opposition leader and his party, to Quebec's Mayor, Jean Pelletier, key journalists, academics and business people, as well as influential, remnants of old 'Anglo' society.

Q: All with a tiny staff and a shoe-string budget? That was quite a challenge!

JAEGER: Well, it was Pat who came up with the brilliant idea. She reasoned that if the Quebecois were anything like the French, their affections would run through their stomachs, since, as we had learned in Paris, French people worship good food. So the answer was to get a first rate chef! To help, Pat offered to give up an as yet unfilled domestic position and make do with a part-time cleaning lady!

No sooner said than done, I called up the housekeeper in the Ambassador's residence in Paris whom I had come to know and asked if one of the three first-rate young sous-chefs in the Ambassador's world-class kitchen might be interested in a year's adventure in Quebec. We could offer free transportation (at our expense), free living quarters and an admittedly small salary.

Lo and behold, three weeks later, John-Claude arrived, a superlative young chef trained in two and three star Paris restaurants. Within another week or so we were able to give our first major reception at which Jean-Claude's offerings simply knocked people's socks off. From then on, as we gave dinners, lunches and many more receptions, our residence became one of the very few places in Quebec where its deeply divided politicians and others, from all sides of the argument, genuinely liked to come and, as importantly, could talk to each other on neutral ground. We had, in short, turned the American Consulate General into a political salon at the center of the storm!

Q: Well, you're illustrating the crucial importance of good diplomatic entertaining which the American public thinks is such a waste of taxpayer dollars! Your point also reinforces the contrast you described earlier of French reactions to the contrasting styles of those two American Ambassadors in Paris (Rush and Hartman). What, by the way happened after Jean-Claude's year was up?

JAEGER: He was succeeded first by Dominique, who subsequently became the Aga Khan's chef in Chantilly, and finally by Frederique, who liked Quebec, or at least its girls, so much that he decided to stay there. They all did well, but were very different personalities. When we were not entertaining, they ate with us as part of the family, something unheard of in France at the time. On some of those long winter evenings when the St. Lawrence was frozen solid I even taught John-Claude how to play chess in front of the fire.

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Years later we visited Dominique in his country house in France, and have remained good friends.

b. Coming to understand why everyone was so upset.

Q: What were some the other challenges as you were getting started?

JAEGER: The second, and even more important, was to try to understand what I was dealing with. When I arrived I only had the vaguest grasp of the historic background of Quebec's crisis and of the events which had produced this Parti Quebecois which so passionately wanted to break up Canada. Nor was it clear to me what the implications would be if Levesque did win his referendum, whether and how the outcome would affect American interests, hence to what extent I should lean in one direction or the other.

Q: But wasn't there a clear American policy on Quebec separatism?

JAEGER: Yes and no. The standard policy sentence, then and now, was that "the United States prefers a united Canada, but that it is up to the Canadians, themselves, to decide." It dates back to a Department paper of the late seventies, the basis of a National Security Council document, neither of which, as I said, I had ever seen. The difficulty with that sentence, particularly if you were the fellow on the ground, was that it didn't tell you how strongly to emphasize US preference for a united Canada, or, for that matter, Quebec's democratic right to push the other way - precisely because it was designed to straddle the issue. The distinction, as we will see, shortly became critical. And as Dick Vine's 'briefing' had suggested, he apparently understood that and wanted me to feel my way.

Q: I see the problem.

i. Meeting the Players in the PQ

JAEGER: So I set off to call on all the key players in this feverish struggle, who, besides becoming my principal contacts, helped me to understand Quebec.

Q: I suppose Rene Levesque was high one that list.

JAEGER: That was the first order of business- after I had made contact with officials on his staff. Among them was the well-intentioned, but invariably unctuous Protocol Chief Jacques Joli-Coeur and the people on the Quebec 'Foreign Ministry's' large 'American desk', who, I quickly learned, had little independent influence, peddled the party line and did not look very useful.

A bit later, I met the heavyweights: Louis Bernard, Levesque's powerful, wise and generous Chief of Staff, who again and again helped me greatly in maintaining perspective; Richard Pouliot, a warm, highly educated Assistant Minister in charge of managing their American operations, with whom I was to have many productive talks; Robert Normand, the intensely competent and influential Deputy Minister, whose military bearing and natty dress gave the misleading impression of a corporate executive who had somehow strayed into the wrong camp, rather than the key policy figure in Levesque's intra-Canadian, constitutional and foreign strategizing he actually was; and, last but not least, Louise Beaudoin, the boyish, seductive powerhouse, whom I called the 'Passionaria' in my telegrams because of her deeply emotional commitment to the PQ's cause.

She served as Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Claude Morin's Executive Assistant, where she was often the fearless counter-weight to her cautious boss and a major, often explosive personality in Parti Quebecois councils in her own right. For added poignancy, the Quebec rumor mill had her romantically linked with a whole series of PQ luminaries, including for a while Morin, and some years later, when the PQ was in decline and she was working for Air Canada in Paris, with the French Socialist Michel Rocard before he became Prime Minister. Her retiring husband was rarely seen and was reportedly much more radical she.

This, by and large, was the core group in the PQ 'Bunker', as Levesque's and Morin's rather jarring cement office block was called - symbolically situated along the 'Grand Allee' across from Quebec's 'Assemblee Nationale' and below the Citadel, the Canadian home of Quebec's all-French Royal 22nd Regiment, the famous Francophone 'Vingt-Douze'.

Q: Then there was Claude Morin, himself.

JAEGER: Yes. A tweedy, pipe-smoking reflective man, completely accessible, but not transparent. He had an MA from Columbia, had taught Social Services at Laval and become a PQ member of the 'Assemblee Nationale' in 1976 when the PQ's victory swept him and Levesque to power. He was, if not the, at least one of the grand strategists of Quebec's constitutional tactics with respect to the rest of Canada, would be the main drafter of the critically important wording of the 'Referendum Question', and was in charge of the global promotion of Quebec's cause as its 'Foreign Minister'. It was therefore a special shock when it was reported in the press some years later that Morin had, all along, been a paid agent for the RCMP (the Canadian Mounted Police), in short Ottawa's man at the heart of the PQ, a charge he vigorously refuted in a book called 'L'Affair Morin'.

Q: Well, that made him a complex and mysterious figure. You said he had a substantial staff of over 500?

JAEGER: Many of which were staffing Quebec Delegations all over the world. In the PQ's heydays they tried to behave like Quebec embassies to the extent they were allowed, propagating the Quebec cause and fighting at every turn for as independent a role from Ottawa's as they could get.

Needless to say that almost always set up an awkward dynamic with the local Canadian Embassies, with which Quebec's Delegations were in constant competition. This tug of war was worst in Paris, which quite overtly sympathized with Levesque's cause, and where the Quebec Delegate General was often treated a good deal better than the Canadian Ambassador. But the dynamic also applied at Quebec's many other delegations in Latin America, Europe, Africa and elsewhere, where Levesque's emissaries promoted their cause, encouraged separate political, economic and cultural relations and tenaciously vied for recognition.

ii. The first tussle: PQ reps in Washington?

Q: How were they represented in the US?

JAEGER: Their main operation was in New York, with Delegations in Boston, Chicago and, I believe, Los Angeles.

Q: Why New York and not Washington?

JAEGER: Well that goes to the heart of one my early tussles. I think Quebec's representation was set up in New York in earlier times to promote commercial relations.

Since the PQ came to power, and we are now jumping a bit ahead of my story, its overriding objective became political, to persuade America that an independent Quebec would pose no threat to the United States. At my predecessor Terry McNamara's urging, they had even dropped their earlier neutralist stance and had committed themselves, somewhat reluctantly, to join NATO and NORAD once independence was achieved - to reassure Washington in those late Cold War days that an independent Quebec would be a good friend and ally, even though its actual contributions would be very small.

The PQ leadership was, of course, fully aware of Washington's nuanced policy on Quebec independence which we just discussed. Even so, their ongoing nightmare scenario was that Washington might panic and, at the end of the day tilt actively against Quebec if it began to look like the PQ might actually win its referendum. Given the finely balanced Quebec electorate, some of it very attuned to the possible price it might have to pay for this adventure, active US opposition could then make a PQ victory virtually impossible.

Keeping Washington reassured and, as one PQ policy wonk put it, "as sound asleep as possible", therefore became critically important and led them to launch a multi-pronged PR operation in the States; somewhat handicapped, they felt, by the fact that they had no operational base in Washington. Getting US agreement to opening a small Quebec office in DC therefore became a major Ministry objective. The issue was raised with me insistently by Robert Normand and others shortly after my arrival and confronted me with my first substantive challenge.

Looking into it, I concluded that the status quo was not as great an inconvenience for them as it might seem, since the State Department had interposed no objections to their officials in New York calling on people in Washington, including State Department people who occasionally met with them outside the building; but had repeatedly made clear that US diplomatic relations were with Ottawa and not with any of the Canadian provinces.

Q: Did you get any clear instructions when you reported this?

JAEGER: Strange as it may sound, no. On this and most other issues, the response, when there was one, left me leeway: They would prefer things to remain as they were, but implied they could live with a minimal Quebec presence in Washington as well, as long as it did not claim to be a 'diplomatic' post.

Well, the more I thought about it, the less this seemed to me a good idea. Making this move some months before the referendum scheduled for May 1980, would be seen from Ottawa's and the Canadian medias' perspective, as a worrying US gesture favoring the PQ cause; would provide the Pequistes an improved propaganda platform in the US capital; and, once the initial small office grew larger, as it inevitably would, would set up the same genre of tensions with the Canadian Embassy in Washington which was so deleteriously played out in Paris and elsewhere. All this would unnecessarily complicate the situation, and could, in any case be reconsidered if and when Levesque won his referendum and an independent Quebec became an international reality.

Q: So what did you do?

JAEGER: Well, with our Embassy's support I simply maintained the line that we could not agree - a big disappointment for Normand and the American desk at the Ministry. Although I suspect the Department would not have made a big fuss had Quebec simply opened a small Washington office without further ado, Morin's Ministry grudgingly accepted the decision - partly, I suspect, because, in the then hothouse atmosphere, they had a wildly exaggerated notion of the interest in Quebec issues in Washington, and so assumed, as I learned in due course, that my instructions came from 'the highest levels'. While I did nothing to foster this illusion, my real problem was, quite the contrary, maintaining sufficient interest in Quebec developments in Washington. As we will shortly see, the Quebec issue would not be on the administration's front burner till a month or so before the referendum.

Normand, later the editor of Quebec City's most important newspaper 'Le Soleil', still spoke of this decision somewhat bitterly many years later, when, as Diplomat-in-Residence at Middlebury College, I took a group of students on a study trip to Quebec City. As far as I know Quebec still does not have a Delegation in Washington and, now that the prospect of independence has receded, may in fact find it more useful to have its main office in New York.

iii. Parizeau, Trudeau and Levesque.

Q: Did that incident crimp your relations with Levesque? How did you get along with him?

JAEGER: I was granted my first meeting with him shortly after my arrival and liked him immediately. Unlike the rest of his crew who were largely earnest types, Levesque was self-deprecating, wry and often very funny - a bit of a Charlie Chaplin type in his invariably unpressed suits or his incongruous safari outfit. I always had the feeling that he was both the principal actor and amused observer of the PQ drama, whose risks and limitations he understood as well as anyone.

One of the first things he told me was how much he liked Americans, a predilection he acquired as a 'Stars ands Stripes' correspondent during World War II, when he was first stationed in London and then followed Allied troops across Europe. He clearly felt comfortable in the US and with Americans, in contrast to English Canada, which he saw as unwelcoming to francophones and uptight.

Levesque's post-war career did not really take off until the late 'fifties when he became beloved and famous for his CBC French service television show, in which he explained politics, the world and all sorts of more mundane subjects to his francophone Quebec audience, making cracks and scrawling on his blackboard. His program was a critical factor in the French Quebeckers' awakening, greatly broadening their horizons.

As a result, when the Quiet Revolution hit Quebec in 1960 and marked the end of Conservative Premier Maurice Duplessis' long, reactionary rule, Levesque's great popularity and quixotic magnetism helped make him a major political figure; powerful enough, in time, to draw most of the separatist, marxist, reformist, nihilist and violent revolutionary factions which had sprung up, into the overall moderating framework of his new separatist Parti Quebecois.

Q: But that didn't happen till the late sixties, right?

JAEGER: That's right. The Quiet Revolution only led to the 1960 victory of Jean Lesage's Liberals, which promised ingoing reform, and Levesque's first election to Quebec's parliament, the Assemblee Nationale. He was made Public Works and then Natural Resources Minister, nationalized Quebec's existing hydro-electric resources and so became the father of its vast new hydro-electric facility on James Bay, Hydro-Quebec. Levesque understood from the outset that only modern industrial development could draw Quebec's largely rural and still very parochial French population into the 20th century and that the key was the availability of ample power. It is this fundamental contribution, more than his ultimately unsuccessful role as a separatist leader, which has made him the father of modern Quebec.

Q: So how did Levesque then become leader of the PQ?

JAEGER: The crisis came when the Liberal Party convention in October 1967 refused to consider Quebec independence. Levesque walked out, formed his own 'Sovereignty-Association' Party, and later merged with other independentist factions to form the Parti Quebecois in 1968.

Even then, however, time was not yet on his side. Quebec remained nervous about taking the leap toward independence, fear which was accentuated by the Montreal crisis in October 1970, when the small but violent FLQ, the Quebec Liberation Front, kidnapped a British diplomat in Montreal and seized and executed a Quebec Labor Minister, leading the Quebec Government to ask Prime Minister Trudeau in Ottawa to invoke the War Powers Act and to bring in the Army to assure security and order. Fear of extremism, socialism and dangerous radicalism, which most anglophones and many francophones associated with the PQ independentists, lingered, and the Liberals, led by Robert Bourassa, remained in power. It was only in 1976 that, to Levesque's own intense surprise, the PQ was swept into power and Rene Levesque became Prime Minister.

Q: Well, that helps set the stage. How did your relations with Levesque evolve?

JAEGER: I think he liked me from the beginning and was surprisingly frank during our meetings in his office, over the occasional dinners at our place which he clearly enjoyed, and during many casual encounters at other functions. I think he understood that his subordinates and colleagues would often provide me with filtered or overly emotional information, and clearly wanted Washington to have balanced accounts of his actual views and intentions - which were generally more perceptive and moderate than the party line.

The result was a long series of detailed telegrams in which I was able to report his concerns and assessments: About his intention to nationalize Asbestos Corporation, which had a particularly bad reputation in Quebec, about the struggles over the referendum question, the PQ's electoral successes and failures, relations with Ottawa and even some intra-party fights: Accounts which became specially critical before the Referendum and during the constitutional discussions in 1981. When, as we will see a bit later, many of these telegrams were prematurely declassified by the Department at the request of a Canadian journalist, there were shocked reactions from high-level Pequistes as to how much 'secret' information Levesque had revealed to the Americans!

Q: You mentioned Asbestos. Wasn't that one of Jacques Parizeau's great projects?

JAEGER: That's right. Parizeau was Levesque's formidable Finance Minister, arguably the second most important man and by far the most brilliant and incongruous of Levesque's cabinet.

A round and florid man in three piece suits with gold chains, he loved good food and serious wines, and looked and acted every bit the Victorian English lord, rather than the passionate separatist and defender of the (French) people he was. It was Parizeau who created the 'Caisse de Depot', the Quebec Savings bank, and the 'Societe Generale du Quebec' to foster investment in key Quebec industries, both of which came to play major economic roles in and beyond Quebec, and who played a key role in bringing Quebec's unions onside. He could have been a finance minister in a country of any size and done extremely well. At the same time he was a much harder-line independentist than Levesque, and eventually broke with him over this issue in 1984.

Q: Did you ever find out how he came to this position to the left of Levesque? It seems almost out of character.

JAEGER: I saw him frequently in his office and over lunches at the Chateau Frontenac, during which he talked among other things about his political evolution. He was the son of a very comfortable Montreal family, was educated at St. Stanislas, an old-fashioned but excellent Jesuit school in Montreal, studied in Paris and got his PhD at the London School of Economics. He was at the time a conventional Canadian federalist, destined for a prosperous career, until, one day - he said it happened on a train to Ottawa - he was struck by the profound injustice and incongruity of Quebec's position and resolved then and there to become an independentist.

Interestingly, he sometimes reminisced, almost all the people who later became prime movers in the Quebec drama, Levesque, Trudeau and Parizeau himself, had gone to the same Jesuit school, were close friends, sometimes shared the same digs and even girlfriends and talked endlessly about the issues thrown up by the Quiet Revolution. Yet, at the end of the day, they went in quite different directions. As he told the story, one night, after a good drinking party and a final emotional discussion, they simply split. Trudeau went off to become a Canadian nationalist, arguing that you can't just break up Canada. Parizeau remained firmly on the separatist side, while Levesque, somewhat less radical, argued that independence could be a process achieved in stages. So the drama which shook Canada throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties, had a very personal side which may have made the fight more poignant and even sharper.

Parizeau also stood apart from his PQ colleagues. A man with a large head, a powerful, highly educated brain, a witty tongue, an Oxford accent with just a little French tinge, a passion for women, and charmingly old fashioned courtesy and grace, he was both intensely professorial and a snob. When I asked him one day what he thought of a fellow Minister, Bernard Landry, he said, "You know, just because one shares the same politics, doesn't mean one has to lunch with people!" Even so, as long as he was on Levesque's team he was always loyal, even when he disagreed and would have preferred a harder line.

In the end, it was his unyielding separatism and sharp tongue which brought about his downfall when, many years later, it was his turn to be Prime Minister. As the press reported it, he told a group of diplomats during the 1995 referendum that despite the guarantee of an offer of partnership with the rest of Canada before declaring sovereignty following a "Yes" vote, what mattered most was to get a majority vote from Quebec citizens for secession from Canada, because with that, Quebecers would be trapped like "lobsters thrown into boiling water". Even worse, when the PQ lost that referendum by only a few thousands of votes, Parizeau blamed the defeat in his concession speech on "money and the ethnic vote". It was typical Parizeau, but he did not recover.

Q: I remember hearing of that uproar. Did you have any major issues which involved him directly?

JAEGER: Apart from the 1980 referendum and its aftermath, the only major issue, toward the end of my tour, involved the sharp dispute with Canada and with Quebec over what we considered unfair subsidies of soft-wood lumber. My instructions were to put pressure on the Quebec government to stop this. Parizeau's amused response was, "What subsidies?" and challenged me to document our claim. He had made sure that they were so well hidden that they would be very difficult to prove! Since I left shortly afterwards, I don't know how this was resolved.

iv. Claude Ryan, Pettigrew and the Quebec Liberals

Q: Let's turn to the Quebec federalists, the provincial Liberal party who opposed the PQ and wanted Canada to remain united. They were obviously a formidable force, since they succeeded in blocking the PQ. Who were they?

JAEGER: There were in the first place all the anglophones and other non-French Quebeckers in and around Montreal and the Eastern townships, a bloc of give or take 2 Million people who for language and cultural reasons did not want Quebec to become a separate Francophone entity in which they would a permanent minority. So to offset this and win a majority in the 1980 and all subsequent referenda, the PQ had to get the support of a very substantial majority of the 4 Million francophones in the province. And, counter-intuitively, this wasn't as easy as it may sound.

For French Quebec is far from homogeneous. Much of the francophone business community and its middle class and wealthier members were and, I am sure remain, conscious of the economic importance of Quebec's links with the rest of Canada and concerned about the uncertainty which a separation process would inevitably entail, including its effect on the US.

Beyond that many worried that an independent Quebec would not, in the end, be able to hack it if they cut themselves off from the rest of Canada. Where, for instance would all the social subsidies come from, or the money for all the other trappings of an independent state? There were still others who were simply francophone Canadian patriots, i.e. people who had served in the Canadian army; and those who, while concerned about Quebec's grievances, thought they could be redressed by continuing negotiation within Canada.

So whatever they may think of Quebec's ties and problems with English Canada, for many of the Francophones the language issue was not the only or even the primary concern.

Q: Politically these people rallied around Quebec's Liberal party?

JAEGER: That's right. And together they constituted a formidable conservative force, which advocated resolution of problems through ongoing negotiation within the Canadian framework.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the Liberal party's leadership. I assume you worked closely with them as well.

JAEGER: The head of the party and Levesque's protagonist was Claude Ryan, a craggy man who looked like he could have been a brother of Abraham Lincoln - who, by the way, was his great role model and hero. Ryan had been the highly respected editor of the prestigious French language paper 'Le Devoir', had incurred Trudeau's enmity over the federal government's intervention during the October crisis in 1970, but, like many other francophone Quebeckers, was not at all satisfied with the state of Quebec's relations with Ottawa. His fierce quarrel with the PQ was primarily over his conviction that these issues could be dealt with by means short of separation, which he thought would be disastrous for both Quebec and Canada. He was indefatigable in his opposition and particularly in the winter before the referendum crisscrossed the province in ice and snow, with his galoshes and trademark umbrella, urging francophones not to jump ship.

Curiously, for all his passion and commitment, Ryan was not a great speaker and was even difficult to talk to since he tended to mumble rapidly and was superficially aloof. What shone through was his deep commitment and the intellectual power of his arguments, always meticulously developed and researched. Although he was usually overscheduled, since, unlike the PQ, he did not dispose of a large staff to back him up, Ryan was always kind to me and took time to receive me graciously from time to time.

When I asked him one day if there was anything I could do for him, he allowed that the thing that would give him the greatest pleasure was a set of Lincoln's writings which had just been published! I was able to present this three volume set to him on behalf of the US government a few weeks later and am sure he worked through it in detail.

Q: A rather strange personality for a successful politician. Ryan is also an odd name for a francophone. But I remember there were others like Daniel Johnson...

JAEGER: ..the Liberal leader in the 60's before Lesage. This happened often, usually as a result of Scottish or Irish immigrant families who intermarried and became francophone.

I should add a word about Ryan's famous young assistant, Pierre Pettigrew, who was constantly at his side, wrote many of his speeches, advised on tactics, in short was Ryan's indispensable amanuensis.

I still vividly remember seeing Pierre for the first time languidly reclining in the members gallery in the 'Assemblee Nationale', a tall, Byronic, strikingly handsome young man, who stood in stark contrast to his somber surroundings in his brilliantly white suit, vest and gold chain, while Ryan was giving a major speech on the floor. I came to know him well and found him not only intellectually interesting - he had studied at Oxford and in his late twenties been Political Director of the NATO Assembly, an alliance think tank - but a valuable source for understanding the Quebec Liberals' assessments of the rapidly evolving situation, a cause to which he was passionately devoted. Although just starting his political career, Pierre was already intensely ambitious and, inter alia, introduced us to the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, the Crown's representative, whose daughter he was dating - an affair which ended unhappily.

Clearly a rising star, Pierre joined Trudeau's staff after the referendum, became a Vice president of Deloitte & Touche, and eventually fulfilled his real ambition by becoming a Minister in Chretien's cabinet and then Foreign Minister under Paul Martin. Whether he was a sufficient heavy-weight to cope with the world of George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice has been widely questioned. Following some incidents of a personal nature, he ultimately lost both his job and his seat in parliament in 2006.

Q: Yes, I remember reading about that. In this line-up of players, was the Church still a factor?

v. Cardinal Roy

JAEGER: Only indirectly because of the respect enjoyed by then Cardinal Maurice Roy, who had become beloved for his dedication and valor as a military chaplain in World War II. Roy had lived with the troops instead of in some comfortable billet in the rear and had often risked his life in the thick of combat to give last rites to dying soldiers.

Q: Did you see him from time to time?

JAEGER: He was among the first I called on. He always received me in a plain black cassock and talked very frankly about the dramatic turn Quebec had taken away from the Church. His message to his priests, serving half-empty churches, was above all to be modest and repentant of the Church's past excesses and to focus on being good shepherds. Even so, the Church in Quebec had been so discredited that he was never a major player in the independence fight. Even so, people like Parizeau and Levesque, who certainly didn't go to church, treated the Cardinal with courtesy and serious respect.

I am tempted to record two short exchanges which characterize the man. At one of our receptions I asked him whether his frequent trips to Rome, where he was on a Committee of Cardinals which supervised a revision of Canon Law, were interesting and productive. He looked rather dubious and said, you know, the discussions are always about the same thing, sex, sex and more sex! On another occasion, Pat and I were seeing him to the door. He stopped, looked at us and said: "You two are a nice couple. Keep it that way!"

Q: In a way he was reflecting the Vatican of John the Twenty-Third.

JAEGER: That's right, although after the Quiet Revolution the Quebec church faced very special problems which it has still not overcome.

vi. What brought about the crisis.

Q: Maybe this is the right point to step back and discuss how you came to understand Quebec and the crisis which led the independentists to want to break up Canada?

JAEGER: Quite obviously the answer flowed from Quebec's unusual history, a point driven home to me by all sides.

Q: Just look at the license plates - "Je me souviens"!

JAEGER: That's right. The starting point to understanding Quebec nationalist feelings was that the French were there first: Not only because Jacques Cartier discovered the place, but because early French settlers under Samuel de Champlain, who arrived in 1608, and their little band of successors, mostly from Normandy and Brittany, built up this French outpost in the New World against tremendous odds.

We don't have the time to go over the next century and half in detail, except to stress that it was a very hard struggle. It took a man a year to clear and plant an acre of land in rocky virgin terrain where winters were cold and long. For hundreds of years Quebec remained a place whose French rural population remained physically isolated, poor and dominated by an ultramontane Catholic church - which had not gone through any of the European reform movements and had missed the French revolution...

Q: ..and on account of that, lost much of its potential for modernizing cultural contact with France-

JAEGER: Precisely. It was the church which, through these centuries, constituted not only French Quebec's moral and religious authority, but provided virtually all the social services in its many little villages and towns, which were almost inaccessible in the winter and hard to reach at any time, where people often lived under conditions of great hardship and where new ideas and modernizing influences rarely seeped through. It was the local priest, and some nuns perhaps, as well as the local monasteries, on whom people depended for advice, judicial services, old age help, medical assistance and what-have-you and who at the same time told them how to live.

Moreover, because of the peculiar arrangements Louis XIV imposed at Quebec's founding, which gave the church vast land grants and its bishops a co-role in governing, the province's two cardinals, one in Quebec City and one in Montreal, remained highly conservative potentates to whom Quebec's prime ministers and other senior people usually deferred - until their hold on people suddenly collapsed in the Quiet Revolution of 1960. The extent of this stifling ecclesiastical power is still reflected in the silver-steepled churches, and in the vast, now empty, monasteries and seminaries which dot Quebec's landscape to this day.

Q: Essentially the medieval role of the church.

JAEGER: That's right. So when you visualize an eighteenth and nineteenth century, even an early twentieth century French village up on the St. Lawrence or in the hinterland, it was a very closed community, with few comforts, lots of backbreaking work, considerable drinking, frequent death, childbirth often still on the kitchen table, particularly in the winter, and, at the center of it all, the village priest, who kept them all deferential and on the straight and narrow.

Q: But then the British defeated France on the Plains of Abraham, I think it was 1759.

JAEGER: And that's when the English fact was added to the equation. New France became an English Province. And, after the Loyalists came pouring north after the American Revolution, English power came to prevail not only in Quebec but in the areas west of it, todays Ontario and beyond, leading to the division of the country under the Constitutional Act of 1791 into Upper and Lower Canada.

British dominance brought large investment, control of the fur trade and much land, and, inevitably set in motion the bitter conflict between the poorer and often less well educated French and their new English rulers. This played out in the first part of the 19th century in the battles between British Governors and the French dominated legislature, until Lord Durham in his famous or infamous report, depending which side one was one, advised Whitehall in 1839 that the gradual amalgamation of the 'inferior' and backward French into a larger English whole, a united Province of Canada, was the only viable long-term solution.

Canada was accordingly created in 1840, but the problem was not solved.

Q: They achieved political and economic control but not amalgamation.

JAEGER: That's right. In Quebec the English dominated the economic scene, especially in Montreal and to a somewhat lesser extent in Quebec City, the key cities in which the French population became the more or less docile working class and the attendant inferior social and economic status. Huge fur trading and related operations were launched through the new Hudson Bay company and almost every part of Quebec's economic life brought under English control. The church accommodated itself by preaching "let the English get rich, we'll go to heaven." Indeed I have read accounts that Cardinals of Montreal actually made deals with the powers that be in which they promised to keep the French Catholic workers pliant in return for commitments of no interference with the Church's interests.

Q: And all this assured that English was the dominant language, even in Quebec.

JAEGER: The English language was certainly the dominant language in business dealings and also became a means of control. For example I learned that insurance contracts and all sorts of other business documents were usually produced only in English, so that francophones had to get someone to translate or sign without understanding what they were agreeing.

This kind of insult led to a pervasive feeling that, while the French were the majority in Quebec province, they were, by definition, second class citizens in their own home, under what, in effect, was a de facto colonial regime. This put the French in many of these relationships in a position rather analogous to that of American blacks before ...

Q: ...the Civil Rights movement in..

JAEGER: ... in this country. Unequal relationships were also replicated in the social realm, where there was no doubt who the top dogs were. The Garrison Club in Quebec City, and many similar exclusive institutions in Montreal were clearly English in atmosphere and membership, with a handful of upper-class French token members to disprove the rule.

Q: Still, Quebec was allowed to retain its parliament and Catholic religion, and the French language clearly was not eradicated as Lord Durham recommended.

JAEGER: That's right. It was all a grand compromise, which broke down only from time to time, i.e. in the World War I and II conscription crises, but otherwise simmered just below the surface.

Throughout most of this time the English-speaking upper classes dominated but wisely allowed some French Quebeckers to occupy fairly important positions and to make good careers, like Pierre Trudeau's father, who was rather well to do. The disparity was nevertheless underscored in Montreal, to cite the most important example, by the fact that the English upper crust lived in their richer, more fashionable world in Westmount, while the better-off French, who were seen by some as Uncle Toms, lived in Outrement below.

As for the large underprivileged, less educated French working class, life was less pleasant. They struggled under sometimes appalling living and working conditions as English-dominated industries sprang up. While long-suffering, they often felt humiliated and were sustained mostly by their close community ties, their shared sense of French identity and the spiritual support and control of dominant Mother Church.

It was from this background of real and sometimes imagined grievances that Quebec's license plate theme "Je me souviens" (I remember) derives its poignancy.

vii. The Quiet Revolution

Q: So how did all this finally come to a head?

JAEGER: Things went on pretty much like this until after World War II. Then all kinds of things began happening simultaneously. Although the French Quebeckers had resisted military service in anglophone units, they nevertheless fought valiantly once overseas and came back to their towns and villages with a different, expanded world view. Radio, followed by telephones and television made a huge impact. Roads began to be built and paved throughout the province, making cars and busses more ubiquitous. The effect was the creation of new levels of connectedness never seen before. And, with them came new ideas and a gradual awareness that the rigid, profoundly conservative, backward world of French Quebec could in the fact be changed. It all came together in a sort of snowballing effect which reached its peak in 1960 in, what has come to be called the "Quiet Revolution."

Whatever it was, it was spontaneous, simultaneous, and immensely powerful. In the beginning of the year, the churches were full. By the end they were empty and the power of the hierarchy was broken. With this came the end of conservative Uncle Tom governments, like the autocratic and corrupt Duplessis regime, and of the old order in Quebec society, replaced, almost overnight, by a bubbling cocktail of surging new forces. There was a sudden flowering in the francophone arts, in music, literature, theater and movies, all of which rejected traditional conventions and reached in new directions to express the excitement of this new Quebec. There was an equally sudden flowering of more or less radical new political groupings, which ranged from extreme Marxists, nihilists and anarchists, to an array of Quebec nationalist factions, all pulling in different directions but united in a general sense that the old order had to go, that English dominance had to go, and that Quebec needed to find a new identity.

It was a critical turning point and an intensely exciting period, albeit a potentially dangerous mix, since it was directionless and there were all kinds of competing personalities who wanted to lead Quebec in quite different directions.

Q: Until Levesque sort of pulled it all together?

JAEGER: Well, as he himself recounts in his Memoirs, it was not a straight line process. Duplessis, as we have said, was in the first instance replaced by the Liberal Lesage government, which started major reforms: It secularized education, passed new labor legislation which made forming unions easier, encouraged investment, nationalized key resource sectors, such as the Province's power companies, and under Levesque's guidance as Minister for Resources, launched Hydro-Quebec, whose power resources were to transform Quebec's economy.

Had Lesage's Liberals been willing to consider separatism Levesque might have remained a Liberal. As it was he quit their convention in 1967 and, in a major act of political courage, founded the Sovereignty Association Movement, which later merged with other independentist groups into Levesque's new Parti Quebecois, which from the outset was committed to achieving Quebec independence.

Q: Well, the idea was certainly in the air.

JAEGER: It certainly was. At the extremes, the FLQ terrorists had been bomb throwing all through the 60's, culminating in the crisis of 1970. Rejection of English Canada's dominance had been and was the dominant theme of the Quiet Revolution. And de Gaulle had just made his historic call of "Vive le Quebec Libre" in Montreal.

Even so, as we discussed earlier, the PQ did not actually come to power until it swept the Province in 1976 and Levesque became Prime Minister. The rest was history.

viii: Pulling it all together

Q: So there you were, only months before the Referendum which could potentially break up Canada. You had seen all these key people and, I would think, had read a lot. What conclusions did you reach after coming to understand the situation?

JAEGER: The more I delved into Quebec history, the more sympathetic I became to the francophones' complaints, hyped as they were for political effect. But the issue was not whether French Quebec had just grievances - even the Quebec Liberals called for major reforms, internally and in Quebec's relations with the rest of Canada. The core issue was whether Canada should therefore be broken up.

And there the answer was simpler. When I looked at the map of Canada and visualized this vast country broken into two, and eventually even more parts - since both the Maritimes and some of the Western Provinces would probably also want to splinter off in time - it became clear that, with the Cold War still raging, a disintegrating northern neighbor could not be in the US interest.

I thought of the additional Soviet and Iron Curtain Embassies this would create to our north, of Canada's diminished strength and stature as an ally, and of the new alignments an independent Quebec might enter into as a potential French surrogate in North America. Our policy formula therefore struck the right tone: We don't interfere, its up to the Canadians to decide, although we don't conceal the fact that we prefer Canada to remain united. The rest was a matter of emphasis.

This was soon to be resolved in a down-to-earth way. From the moment of my arrival, the Chief of Protocol and others had inundated me with invitations to government or PQ functions and gatherings of various kinds. I usually found myself near the center of the table next to a Minister, sometimes beside Levesque, and soon came to realize that I was put there to be photographed for the press or seen in television clips. The idea was to create the impression on TV, radio and the provincial press, that here was the Consul General of the United States, sitting happily next to the PQ potentates, being chummy with them and having a good dinner...

Q: ...all to convey the impression that the US was backing them, which in effect we were not?

JAEGER: That's it. Once I realized that I was being used as a media prop I made my counter move. I told the Chief of Protocol that I would be delighted to participate in whatever functions they wanted to invite me to, but on condition that I too would be asked to say a few words. Since my brief remarks invariably ended with a low key repetition of our position, with its famous sentence, that its up to Canadians to decide, but that we prefer Canada to remain united...

Q: Reminding them of the basic American policy...

JAEGER: ...my official invitations dropped off considerably!

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: Even so, my occasional toasts and brief statements on public occasions helped make our position clear across Quebec. In the end this probably cost the PQ some points in the Referendum, since there was a significant number of francophones, particularly middle class and business people, who wanted some kind of separation from Canada but only if it would not cause trouble with the US.

ix. The French and other Consulates.

Q: You mentioned the French. What was their role in Quebec?

JAEGER: The French had built a major presence in Quebec, which assumed additional importance since de Gaulle's 'Vive le Quï¿½bec libre!' - a statement which, in retrospect, turns out to have been intended more as a poke in the eye for Washington, rather than a French commitment to Quebec independence.

Q: Do you remember the Canadian response-Vive le Bretagne Libre! (Live free Brittany)? Laughter.

JAEGER: Yes. Neither one is 'libre' at this point, so it goes to show.

Be that as it may, de Gaulle did build up the French Consulate General in Quebec City into a quasi-Embassy with a staff of around fifty, over ten times larger than ours. They had all kinds of exchange and media programs and were into everything. There were even rumors of French money was flowing under the table to PQ political operations, media and what have you. The whole thing was not entirely transparent.

My courtesy call on the French Consul General shortly after my arrival was not a success. He kept me cooling my heels for 20 or 25 minutes, presumably to establish the terms of our relationship. When, at that point, I informed a staffer that I would come back another time, my distinguished colleague emerged from his office and welcomed me in French with a rather condescending "Dear colleague, how are you, I am certain we will get along well together."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: We didn't hit it off. He was stiff, hyper-protective of his perceived role, and clearly suspicious of Americans. Mercifully he was soon replaced by Henri Rethore, a much more sensitive, intelligent and open man, with whom I formed a genuine personal friendship and had long interesting and very realistic conversations about Quebec developments, even though French policy hewed much closer to the PQ. Long retired, Henry is still a friend.

Q: Were there other foreign representations in Quebec City?

JAEGER: The Brits closed their small Consulate just after my arrival and consolidated in Montreal. The only other diplomat was a lone, largely invisible Haitian Consul General, who appeared only occasionally at official functions.

Q: But I assume there were many more in Montreal.

JAEGER: That's right. Besides the large American Consulate General, which did the bulk of the consular work in the province and followed business and economic issues, the Soviets had a big post in Montreal, with a major KGB component focused partly, I have heard, on the US. There were many others, mostly interested in business and consular relations.

The Intergovernmental Affairs Ministry convened them all from time to time for lavish Consular Conferences in Quebec City, at which Levesque would speak to them and they were served excellent lunches or dinners. But I think only the French and we, and possibly the Soviets, followed the PQ's independence campaign in detail.

Q: Is it unusual to have two Consulate Generals in one Province? How did that work out?

JAEGER: There are often several Consulate Generals in large countries, although in Quebec is the only Canadian province to have two. The reason is that the political center is in Quebec City, where we first sent a Consul during the Civil War to keep tabs on British naval activities, while Montreal has long been a major economic hub. The American Consul General in Montreal is therefore a significant figure in Montreal's context, particularly if he or she is a strong and active personality. In my time it was Mike Reeves, an elegant and very competent Far Eastern expert who, besides the economic and commercial reporting, occasionally contributed political reports. We usually worked well together with minimal overlap.

Q: Was this the usual division of labor between these two posts?

JAEGER: Historically, this has changed from time to time. Quebec City has usually been a minor consular post, until separatism made it advisable to send experienced political officers - McNamara, myself and then Lionel Rosenblatt. Since then, wise or not, consular people have again been assigned there as the independence issue has receded.

c. The run-up to the Referendum

Q: Let's get back to the main issues. What happened in the run-up to the Referendum and how did you see it?

JAEGER: First, it was important to understand the pressure the PQ was under. They had been in power since 1976 and were in the fourth year of their five year mandate. Levesque had used the preceding years for a wide range of economic and social reforms, including the passage of the famous (or infamous, depending on one's perspective) law 101 defining French as the official language of Quebec and the law governing the financing of political parties.

Time was beginning to run short and the PQ's foot soldiers were getting restless for action on the central issue of separatism, the PQ's raison d'etre. It was essential therefore, from Levesque's perspective, that the Referendum be held no later than the spring of 1980.

Q: You described how passionate and heated the atmosphere was when you arrived. Did that translate into optimism that they would actually win?

JAEGER: Curiously not. While many francophones wanted to separate from Canada, others remained unconvinced. Moreover, the mere prospect of Quebec independence galvanized anglophones and other non-French people into passionate opposition. To understand how passionate, one has to think back on the psychological and practical impact of the new language laws, which led many major corporations to leave Montreal for Toronto and elsewhere and had other damaging effects, particularly for the many people who wanted their children raised in English, not in French.

In fact things were so unsettled that the Levesque government lost six by-elections in a row, three in close succession during that fall of 1979. I remember reporting to Washington that Levesque was depressed, hectored his staff and blamed the left wing extremists in the PQ for his political setbacks.

Had the Referendum been held then, my assessment was that the 'Yes' vote would have lost badly, getting, I estimated at best 44%.

Q: How did you arrive at figures like this?

JAEGER: There were all sorts of polls in the press and people from both sides shared their impressions. I had the further good fortune of getting help from Professor Maurice Pinard of McGill University, a distinguished Quebec sociologist who was the foremost pollster and interpreter of polls in Quebec, with who I had regular lunches in Montreal. So in addition to my conversations with Ryan's people, with Gilles Lamontagne, the Liberal minority leader in the 'Assemblee Nationale', who had his finger on the pulse, as well as with my many contacts on the PQ side and elsewhere, I probably had as precise a reading of evolving Quebec opinion over these weeks and months as anyone. Good political analysis is a matter of putting lots of bits and pieces together in a mosaic until they make sense.

Q: Did anything happen which affected your initial assessment?

JAEGER: Off course. The most important were the publication of the actual Referendum question just before Christmas and the return of Pierre Trudeau to power in February 1980.

Q: You mean the PQ hadn't decided on what it was going to ask in the Referendum until then?

JAEGER: That's right, and for several reasons. One was the ongoing internal struggle between the moderate and the more extreme separatists. The latter wanted a more or less straight up or down vote on Quebec independence, whereas the former, headed by Claude Morin and Levesque himself, had a much clearer understanding of the complexity of the knot that would have to be unraveled: Since Quebec and the rest of Canada are linked by all sorts of ties, a shared, currency and central bank, complex tax and subsidy arrangements, defense and foreign policy etc.

Its for these reasons that Levesque had, from the outset, made 'Sovereignty-Association' the battle cry of the PQ, a new sovereignty in key domains, tempered by ongoing association arrangements with Canada which would have to be negotiated.

What's more there was the not unimportant questions of what the voters might actually accept, since there was no use holding a Referendum on a too extreme a question to please hard liners if it was clear from the outset that it would fail.

So the precise wording of the question was critically important, both as to its substance and the likelihood of its success.

Q: What did they come up with in the end?

JAEGER: Well, Claude Morin, Louis Bernard and Daniel Latouche, a young political advisor, struggled with the conundrum, drove Parizeau and others who wanted a straightforward 'yes or no' question up the wall, and, with Levesque making the final changes and decisions, came up, not with a simple question, but a two-stage process:

First they would only ask the voters in the upcoming referendum, for a mandate to negotiate an agreement with the rest of Canada, "based on the equality of nations.." to ".. enable Quebec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish its relations abroad" - in other words sovereignty - "and at the same time to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency".

No change in political status would be effected until the results of these negotiations had been approved in a second step by a further referendum.

Q: Sounds, a bit cumbersome to fire up the faithful?

JAEGER: Long and cumbersome it was, and disappointing to those who wanted a more direct question - although Parizeau and the rest of the more radical Pequistes went along loyally once the decision had been made.

Levesque then launched a massive PR campaign in the National Assembly, across the Province and at all levels of society. For the next months Quebec was aflame in campaign rhetoric, flags, posters, rallies and gatherings of all sorts; a fierce contest in which the less frequently seen Canadian flags seemed as outgunned as taciturn Claude Ryan - who, although deeply committed and indefatigable, seemed no match for the avalanche of passionate PQ speeches in advocating the "OUI" for sovereignty-association.

Q: Did that publication of the question and the PQ's PR campaign affect polls significantly?

JAEGER: The polls went up, but, as far as I could gather not quite enough to put the "Yes" vote over the top. The softening of the question and the introduction of a second referendum, I reported to the Department at the time, had reduced anxiety over voting "yes" by making the vote seem less final. Trudeau's election, in a perverse sense, had also been reassuring, since many borderline voters now felt he would not let Quebec go off the deep end. As a result there had been an atmospheric transformation which put the two sides almost neck-and-neck. I estimated that the situation remained volatile, but that the most probable outcome was a narrow defeat of the Levesque forces with the 'Yes" getting between 43 and 47 percent.

For all his public exhortations, Levesque himself was still uncertain of the outcome at that time. He told me at a dinner at our place in late March that he thought they had a chance to win, but spent more time on the implications of outcomes under a 50% majority than on outright victory. If the result was over 45%, he said, he might call a snap election to press home his advantage. If it fell below that he was afraid he would not even be able to claim a moral victory. In his "Memoirs" Levesque cites an internal poll from that same period, which he may have had in mind, in which the "Oui" came in at only 46%, and was supported by only 55% of francophones, clearly below what was needed to put the PQ over the top.

And that was probably the high point. Toward the end of March Lise Payette, Minister for the Status of Women, called Claude Ryan's wife an 'Yvette', the pejorative nickname for the perfect little pre-feminist housewife. This set off a firestorm of protest, since Madame Ryan was a widely respected woman, and lost the PQ some of the women's vote.

Then came Trudeau's intense federal counter campaign to impress on Quebeckers the high cost they would incur if they went through with this. Finally, early in May, Trudeau himself appeared in Montreal and Quebec City and made three passionate speeches which had a powerful effect.

Trudeau was not unmindful of Quebec's grievances and issues of cultural identity, having been the main promoter of biculturalism - which meant, inter alia, that as a result of his initiatives all English-Canadian officials had to learn French and many groaned for years trying to memorize French phrases.

At the same time Trudeau was an unbending federalist. His performances rallying Quebeckers for the 'No" were brilliant and electrifying, and offered them a new constitutional deal of they rejected sovereignty-association and painting a grim picture of their future if they did not.

Q: Were you able to hear any of his speeches?

JAEGER: The one in Quebec - which involved an awkward and, in retrospect, rather funny incident. Having asked for a reserved seat, I presented myself at the auditorium where he was to speak. After some confusion a young usher took my down some corridors, opened a grey door and said, "In here."

10 feet from me stood Pierre Trudeau concentrating intensely on the historic speech he was about to give. At a respectful distance, another 10 feet or so behind him, stood his cabinet and other Liberal leaders in equally total silence. Trudeau looked at me and for several seconds said absolutely nothing. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally thought, well, I've got to do something. So I said, "I'm George Jaeger, the American Consul General in Quebec." There was another awful pause. Finally he said glacially, "I am Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada!"

Q: Laughter.

JAEGER: I managed to mumble some excuse and beat a hasty retreat, swearing all the way.

Minutes later Trudeau gave an absolutely rousing speech, which had a considerable impact.

d. Unexpected crisis: Secretary Vance visits Ottawa

JAEGER: Throughout the run-up to the Referendum one of Claude Morin's major objectives, as we discussed earlier, was to keep the US as unconcerned as possible to avoid any last-minute Washington reactions which might frighten fence-sitters to vote "No". Morin, as Jean-Francois Lisï¿½e wrote in his hyped, PQ-slanted book " In the Eye of the Eagle" on Washington-Quebec relations, was therefore delighted with the continuing "strategic lassitude" of the Americans who did not even seem to envisage the possibility that the "Yes" might win.

Actually, our reporting did not exclude it, but projected a narrow "No" victory as much more probable. Regardless, I again counseled in a now declassified, then secret telegram of April 14 against being drawn into the Quebec-Ottawa contest, even though, I expected, there would undoubtedly be pressures on us to do so. This was all the more important, since the situation remained volatile and the separatism issue would probably re-emerge in the next Quebec election.

Almost inevitably, the catalyst which brought the issue to the fore was Cyrus Vance's visit to Ottawa on April 23, a month before the Referendum on May 20. A couple of days before his visit one of my colleagues at the Embassy, I think it was Dwight Mason, the Political Counselor, phoned to say that the Trudeau people were urging that Vance make a statement in Ottawa emphasizing our preference that Canada remain united; that it was unclear what Vance would actually do; and suggested that I discreetly warn the Levesque government of this possibility, so that, if he did, it would not come as a complete shock and lead to accusations that we had stabbed the PQ in the back.

Q: Well, that would have put the cat among the pigeons!

JAEGER: That's right. I couldn't think of anything worse than for the US to suddenly get in the middle of this fight and get blamed for the outcome, particularly since it seemed so likely that the 'No" side would win in any case. I therefore used a lunch with Richard Pouliot to pass on a low-key warning, stressing that I had consistently urged that Washington not get involved, but that it was obviously up to the Secretary to decide how to deal with these alleged Canadian pressures.

This apparently rang all the bells, since within hours I was called to a meeting with a visibly agitated Claude Morin, who saw his worst fears of a last-minute US intervention realized. As my recently declassified telegram reported, Morin "earnestly" hoped that the Secretary would finesse the Quebec question during his Ottawa visit, since anything else would produce a wave of anti-Americanism in Quebec, particularly if it was felt that the US had tipped a close Referendum to the 'No'. I made clear that these were precisely the reasons we had decided to alert him and assured him that we would reiterate our longstanding recommendation that the less the Secretary managed to say about the Referendum in Ottawa the better - which I did.

The next day, April 22nd, Morin called me in again and reiterated his and Levesque's "deep concern" over reports that Secretary Vance planned to make a "strong statement" on Quebec during his Canadian visit, which he said they had now confirmed from their own sources in Ottawa.

Levesque wanted us to know that, if he were to win the Referendum, his real intention, which he had so far not shared with others in the PQ, was to proceed gently, not to provoke any avoidable confrontation with Ottawa, but to carry the technical talks only to the point where Levesque could claim that Quebec had achieved a "special status". He would even settle for some kind of joint representation in foreign affairs, a far cry from what the independentists expected. Once "special status" could be claimed Levesque would then call his promised second referendum to ratify agreements reached and the "Quebec problem would be solved". Conversely a 'No' victory would lead to a permanent psychological stalemate, and francophone backlash against anglophones. If Vance made the rumored statement it would be the "first major foreign intervention", broadly resented, particularly if the 'No' side wins.

In short - and this is a direct quote from the Secret Night Action telegram I sent to Assistant Secretary George Vest, declassified on April 3, 2001, "Levesque wants us to know in strict confidence that he accepts the fact that he will have to take the half loaf he may be able to get, rather than none, and that Quebec's future should therefore not be a cause for US alarm".

At the end of this rather dramatic revelation, I told Morin that I understood and reiterated that I would again advise that we avoid getting involved. As I put it in my telegram, " we continue to feel that the US will be best served by referring to our standard position clearly but by indirection since... nothing is to be gained by our becoming a party to this emotion laden issue ourselves...", a recommendation in which the Embassy again concurred.

Since the Secretary's party was already on its way to Ottawa by the time this was drafted and typed into our antediluvian code machine, I asked in a caption, which the declassifiers subsequently removed, that it be passed to the Secretary on his plane.

Q: So what actually happened?

JAEGER: As it turned out Vance did not raise Quebec in his prepared statement and then deflected a reporter's question about American recognition of an independent Quebec, saying this was "a speculative question on which I do not wish to comment. I have already stated that this is a question for the people of Canada to decide. That is all I wish to say."

Either the rumors picked up by our Embassy and by Morin that a much stronger statement was being urged by Trudeau's people were groundless, which I doubt, or our interventions had been effective. In either case, Morin and company should clearly have been pleased.

e. Lisï¿½e's "psycho-drama"

Q: Weren't they?

JAEGER: Apparently not. Lisï¿½e's book, which appeared in French and English editions in 1990, argues at length that I must have dreamed up this "psycho-drama" and created this "bizarre incident" to make myself locally important, since Ottawa never intended to seek a strong Vance statement and Vance wasn't really interested in Quebec.

Q: But that doesn't square with your report of Morin's statement that they had confirmed these Ottawa pressures from their own sources, and therefore doesn't explain the high level of Levesque's concern. Moreover you sent in these urgent high-level telegrams and no one denied their relevance. What happened?

JAEGER: Exactly. In preparing his book Lisï¿½e had persuaded the State Department to declassify almost all my reporting telegrams from Quebec, virtually the whole kit and caboodle, even though the information was only ten or eleven years old and many of the people who had shared confidences were still active and alive. I was at no point consulted in this process, and remained unaware of it until his book came out.

Q: Let's get back to that in a moment. You said that they declassified "almost all" your reporting telegrams.

JAEGER: Almost all. Lisï¿½e didn't get, and was apparently unaware that he didn't get several key messages which were highly classified or marked for very limited distribution, including the two referred to above, reporting my April 21 and 22 conversations with Morin.

As a result he only had a partial impression of what had happened, and no evidence that I had in fact made an exceptional effort to assure that the US did not make a last-minute intervention which could have affected the outcome and got us blamed for the result.

I should add, in this connection, that the late Professor Jeanne Kissner of SUNY Plattsburgh's Center for Canadian Studies, whose students I had often briefed, vividly recalled that I had once told her this story, and therefore arranged for Lisï¿½e and myself to debate the issue before a meeting of the Canadian Studies Association after the French version of his book came out. She subsequently told me that, after hearing my account, Lisï¿½e' said to her on his way out, "My God, I think this guy is really telling the truth!" However he only toned down and did not correct the subsequent English edition.

Q: How did these key messages eventually get declassified?

JAEGER: Dwight Mason, who had been Political Counselor in Ottawa and was equally outraged by the unfairness of Lisï¿½e's book, succeeded on appeal in getting these messages declassified in 2001. Although George Vest is quoted as telling Lisï¿½e ten years after the fact that he didn't remember this incident, the record clearly confirms the reality of this potential crisis and my efforts to avoid it.

Q: Did Lisï¿½e try to interview you directly at any point?

JAEGER: He phoned me in Vermont after I had retired, I think in 1989, and said he was doing a book on the US role in Quebec. I declined, telling him that the issues were still too sensitive and that my reports on all this were still classified. I wasn't aware of the fact that he already had most of them!

Q: Was his book embarrassing to some people?

JAEGER: Apart from caricaturing me, what I found most deplorable and mean spirited was that Lisï¿½e castigated Renee Levesque, who had died in 1987, three years before the book was published, for the extent to which he took me into his confidence.

Levesque certainly liked me. But his frankness, which went beyond beyond what hardline staffers may have thought appropriate, reflected the importance he attached to keeping Washington correctly informed of his assessments and intentions. Lisï¿½e, like Parizeau, whose referendum advisor he became in the mid-nineties, was a more radical separatist than Levesque and used this book to castigate Levesque's moderation - perhaps to promote his own career. After the loss of the '95 Referendum and Parizeau's resignation, Lisï¿½e stayed on as a senior advisor to Lucien Bouchard but left him, reportedly over disagreements over sovereignty strategy. He has also written other derogatory books about Liberal Premier Robert Bourassa, a rather nice man who happened to be a federalist.

Q: One last question on this. Beyond this immediate issue what was the effect of declassifying so much of your reporting?

JAEGER: Actually it proved to be quite positive. Even Lisï¿½e's book admitted that we were surprisingly well informed and on the mark. In her April 21, 1990 review of the book for the 'Globe and Mail', Lise Bissonette, the dean of francophone journalists whom I knew well, went further: " Central to Mr. Lisï¿½e's discoveries are the numerous well informed analyses produced by a string of [American] diplomats...who outdistanced most public comment with their clear and exact views on the issue. .. If Washington never cared to give a helping hand to the 'No' forces in 1980, it was because the need was never felt. ....Quebec's US strategy was dismal....".

Even so, I thought it important to publish a rebuttal of my own in Quebec City's 'Le Soleil', then under the leadership of Morin's former deputy Robert Normand. It appeared that June, albeit in severely pared down form.

f. Levesque's finest hour?

Q: When were you sure how the Referendum would come out?

JAEGER: It became clear about a month before the May 20 Referendum that the PQ would lose, not by a hair but by a substantial margin. This raised concerns in Washington that so great a disappointment in the overexcited, passionate atmosphere prevailing in Quebec could lead to now outbreaks of violence reminiscent of the FLQ (Front de libï¿½ration du Quï¿½bec or Quebec Liberation Front) crises of the '70's, when Montreal was plagued by mailbox bombs, James Cross, a British Trade Commissioner was kidnapped and Pierre Laporte, the then Quebec Minister of Labor and Vice Premier, was murdered.

The Department therefore instructed me to ask for a private meeting with Levesque to discuss these concerns.

Q: That was a bit tricky, wasn't it?

JAEGER: It was. After the Protocol people had left, I tiptoed into the issue by explaining that I had been asked to see him since we had the impression that he wasn't going to win. He said, very candidly, that that was his impression too - although, publicly he was still campaigning hard. I then conveyed Washington's concerns and said that the United States very much hoped that he would do what he could to make sure that things ended peacefully. Levesque said that he too had been thinking about this and asked me to assure Washington that, while he was committed to sovereignty-association, his whole effort as the PQ's leader had been that change had to be brought about by constitutional and democratic means and not by violence. Tell them, he said, that I will do my best.

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: As we now know, the Referendum was lost by about 40% 'Yes" to 60% "No", leaving it unclear whether the "Yes" had even carried a simple majority of francophone votes...

Q: . . unlike the '95 Referendum when they had a strong majority of the francophone population, but still lost by a whisker because the anglophones and others were united behind the 'No'.

JAEGER: That's right. In 1980 the francophones remained deeply divided, so that Levesque couldn't even claim that a decisive francophone 'Yes' gave him a mandate to some limited "restoration work in the old federal homestead", as he wrote in his Memoirs. Fear had prevailed, fear of the unknown, of failure, of outside retribution. "We hadn't dared", he wrote sadly, "hadn't been numerous enough to cast off our moorings." It was a bitter pill.

Q: Yes.

JAEGER: Even so, the PQ convened a huge rally in the Sauve Arena in Montreal that night where Levesque made his perhaps most famous speech. He walked on stage before this vast crowd, a modest, self-deprecating man in baggy pants, as they were cheering, singing and waving a sea of Quebec banners in an immensely moving demonstration which, as everyone knew, marked not victory but the end of an era.

When things settled a bit Levesque began to speak sadly but calmly, to the theme that Quebec had pursued, but had not been able to achieve its aspirations. But Quebec was a democracy. Quebecers therefore had the duty to respect the will of the majority. This they should do peacefully and well, until the issue could be raised again. He ended, with tears running down his face, waving to the crowd, by telling them, "A la prochaine" (Till the next time).

Q: Well, that was certainly a demonstration of statesmanlike quality, a lot more so than that of his successors (A reference to Parizeau's outbursts after the Referendum of 1995.)

JAEGER: That's right. It was very moving. The amazing result was that they all went home peacefully. That night at most one or two windows were broken and some gangs roamed the streets yelling and waving flags. But nobody was hurt. Levesque and his deep belief in peaceful democratic change had prevailed, even when he lost.

There was a sequel. A couple of weeks later I saw Levesque in a receiving line. After I greeted him he said with his little wry smile, "Well, George, does your government think I did okay?"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I said very sincerely, "Mr. Prime Minister, we're very grateful!" He said, "So am I."

So that was the end of the first referendum.

The post-mortems. confirmed that the PQ had failed to reassure a substantial percentage of francophone Quebecers, some of whom feared the economic consequences of separation from the rest of Canada, while others remained torn between their loyalty to Canada and the PQ cause.

All this, of course, produced the predictable morning-after recriminations, ranging from moderates who blamed Levesque's too complicated and unclear question, to the hard liners, like Parizeau, who still argued rather irrationally, that he should have called for outright separation. For all of them it was a huge emotional set-back in a nationalist struggle which had, in one way or another, been underway for twenty years.

Symbolic of this time of mourning was Louise Beaudoin's appearance for lunch at the Consulate a day or so after the Referendum.

Q: She was Morin's assistant, whom you earlier referred to as the 'Passionaria'?

JAEGER: That's right, a thin, intense, amazingly attractive woman, whose green eyes mesmerized a long series of men.

She turned up in a startlingly revealing T-shirt, with little or nothing underneath, announcing:" Monsieur le Consul General, Je m'en vais a la monastere!" (Consul General, I am going to a nunnery!)

My cook, who had gone to open the door, was so rattled he dropped his tray of hors d'oeuvres!

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Well, she didn't go into a nunnery. She actually went to work for Air Canada in Paris, then served as a Quebec Minister for implementation of French language Laws, which she did with gusto, and as Quebec's Intergovernmental Affairs Minister. But her depression was symptomatic of the time.

g. Reelection and the Constitutional crisis.

JAEGER: The next chapters were intertwined and continued to pose major reporting challenges. Almost immediately after the Referendum Trudeau, who wanted to capitalize on Levesque's loss of the Referendum and 'solve' the Quebec problem for good, launched his great constitutional project to "repatriate" the constitution from Westminster: Including his pet project, an American-style Bill of Rights for all Canadians, which would have had the effect of weakening provincial powers in critical areas like, education, culture and over the language issue. Levesque and several other provincial Prime Ministers opposed this perceived infringement of provincial powers from the outset, formed the famous "Gang of Eight" and battled Trudeau for eighteen months.

I will spare this record a detailed constitutional discussion of the ins and outs of this prolonged and complicated contest which went through several phases:

The rejection of Trudeau's repatriation proposal by the Newfoundland Supreme Court and its referral to the Canadian Supreme Court.

The negotiation of the Vancouver formula by the "Gang of Eight Provincial Premiers', which would have provided that any amendment of the Constitution would require approval by the federal parliament as well as by seven provincial legislatures representing 50% of the population; a provision sufficient to protect Quebec and others, in return for abandonment of unilateral provincial 'vetoes' - ahuge concession by Levesque.

The argument as to whether to 'opt' out, a Province would have to have a two thirds majority in its legislature as against a plain majority, as Levesque insisted.

The Supreme Court's somewhat Delphic decision, which said that Trudeau's project was legal, albeit not in accord with convention.

Trudeau's last-minute proposal that, if there was no agreement he would settle for repatriation and provide two years to negotiate the Charter of Rights and the amending formula; and, if this failed, a nation-wide referendum would be held, subject, however, to the unlikely prior approval of all the Provinces a tempting proposal which undermined the provinces' common front.

The denouement came on November 5, 1981, when Levesque, Morin and Louis Bernard discovered that all the other provinces had, during the night, agreed to a watered-down deal with Trudeau while Levesque was at his hotel in Hull, a Quebec town across the river from Ottawa. The critical point for Levesque was not only that they had agreed to eliminate financial compensation for opting out of a provision, a point of make or break importance for Quebec, but that the deal had been struck behind his back. Trudeau abetted by a number of other provinces had, in effect, surreptitiously engineered a situation in which the final provisions of the repatriation of the constitution from Westminster was agreed without Quebec's presence and over its objections.

Levesque stormed out of the meeting, leaving behind a trail of four letter words directed at Trudeau and the other Prime Ministers of Canada and raged for weeks thereafter. The National Assembly and the PQ Press resonated with accusations of stabs in the back, betrayal and so on. It was a critical turning point. From then until Levesque's departure as Premier he was a bitter man. What had been a politically challenging and demanding game for most of the period before the referendum had turned into a sour, vindictive discourse with Trudeau.

Q: Did Quebec ever approve the new Canadian Constitution?

JAEGER: No. When Queen Elizabeth II came to Canada on April 17, 1982 to proclaim Canada's new Constitution, it was the crowning moment for Trudeau. But Quebec was absent, and the Quebec government under neither party has approved it since.

Q: You said this and other issues were intertwined?

JAEGER: Yes, most importantly the elections which Levesque had called for April 1981, unaware that this would also be a critical week in the ongoing constitutional saga.

Briefly put, Levesque had assumed that, after losing the Referendum, his dispirited PQ would be trounced in the elections as well. As it turned out, our reporting picked up on the fact that Quebec voters made a clear distinction between their views on separatism and their feelings about the PQ as a competent governing party. There may also have been a sympathy vote by francophones who had voted "No" but wanted the PQ to stay in power to push their interests.

For all these reasons, Ryan's efforts to capitalize on his referendum victory collapsed and the PQ not only won but increased its seats in the National Assembly by 12%, allowing Levesque to stay in power until 1985. In contrast to the Referendum, when the PQ lost 60% - 40%, they won the election with a popular vote of 49.5% against the Liberals' 46%. Even so, the joy was short-lived in view of the brewing constitutional crisis and looming new problems with Quebec's economy.

It all made for fascinating but heavy reporting, which earned all sorts of commendations. If I remember we sent out something on the order of 170 telegrams a year, a huge number considering Irma Scott, my wonderfully competent and patient Secretary and Communications Officer, had to code them all by hand on a rattling World War II vintage code machine.

h. Other things that occupied our time

Q: Well, that was certainly a tense and demanding time. What about some of the other issues that you were concerned about?

i. Social Security, acid rain and electric power

JAEGER: There were all sorts of them. A persistent one, then and during my brief follow-on assignment in Ottawa, was acid rain which adversely affected Quebec's and Canada's forests and lakes. I also helped an expert from Washington negotiate a Social Security Agreement with Quebec, a complex negotiation somewhat inconsistent with our position that we only dealt state-to-state with Ottawa, but necessary due to Quebec's separate social welfare arrangements.

Another major theme was electricity, since Vermont and the New England electricity people were negotiating a major new long-term contract with Hydro-Quebec. The general feeling was that long term electricity export arrangements between Quebec and the United States were in everyone's interest since we needed the power and the Quebec government was interested in making the most of the surpluses Hydro-Quï¿½bec was able to produce, although there were differences between them for a while as to how much power it would be prudent to export.

My role was mainly to make sure that the Commerce Department and other federal agencies in Washington, including the State Department, were carefully kept abreast of these discussions. A side benefit was that I came to know Claude Decoteaux, a thoughtful and kindly young Deputy Minister of Energy, who has remained a lifelong friend. I also had several opportunities to fly up to James Bay to see Hydro-Quebec's installations half way to the Arctic, where existence gets so tough that hundred-year-old trees only achieve a diameter of a few inches. The dams and turbine plants are vast, exploit water reservoirs backed up over hundreds of square miles, and can still be expanded further. Its strange to realize how much of our energy comes from so far away and barren a place and how badly we will all need these clean energy resources in the future.

Q: The feeling now is that Vermont paid too much, since electricity prices declined for a number of years.

JAEGER: I have heard that said, but everyone at the time thought they had negotiated a reasonable long-term deal. Obviously its hard to foresee how prices will trend over a twenty or thirty year period.

Q: Did you ever meet Governor Dick Snelling who negotiated this deal for Vermont?

JAEGER: Of course. Snelling was in Quebec city frequently and we became good friends. He was a wonderful bear of a man, broadly informed, pragmatic, articulate and respected. I made a point of being advised by the Protocol people when he was coming and had several delightful lunches and dinners for him and his wife Barbara. I met him again, as we'll see further on, when I was at NATO, and, then when we came to Vermont for my last assignment as Diplomat in Residence at Middlebury College, when he and Barbara had us for a family dinner which he cooked himself!

Q: Did the PQ try to influence him on the independence question?

JAEGER: Morin's Ministry no doubt wanted to, and sometimes tried to entertain important American visitors without giving them a chance of getting more balanced briefings at the Consulate. But we reached an understanding early on that it was only appropriate that the US representative in Quebec should be made aware of important American visitors.

Partly as a result, we had constant briefings for visitors, ranging from War College classes, University groups, members of Congress, Governors of New England and other States, journalists, business people and even plain tourists. Although time-consuming, these many visits were also useful pegs for inviting Quebec contacts for receptions, lunches or small gatherings. We even had a California wine tasting once, which was a great success, although the Quebec alcohol monopoly remained unpersuaded and committed to buying primarily French wines.

Q: Your reference to Governor Snelling raises the question of any relationship you had with the organization of New England Governors and Northeastern Canadian provincial premiers which met regularly every year.

JAEGER: I went to several of these meetings. They met, and still meet, each year in a different places to discuss regional issues like transport, commerce, communications, electricity, fishing - whatever needs cross-border communication.

Q: I know, I came to one at Sugar Bush in Vermont.

JAEGER: I was at one in Nova Scotia and then again at Basin Harbor, on Lake Champlain. Besides the fact that the Levesques had a rather loud family argument which kept us awake that night in an adjoining cabin ...

Q: Laughter]

JAEGER: ... that meeting helped mitigate a longstanding, bitter argument between Quebec and Newfoundland over the price Quebec paid for power produced at Newfoundland's Churchill Falls dam and power station.

Q: What was that all about?

JAEGER: When this installation was first built, Newfoundland had to get Quebec's permission to move this electricity across Quebec to the US market. Quebec drove a hard bargain with Newfoundland's Premier Joseph Smallwood, the father and driving force behind Churchill Falls, resulting in a 75-year deal that Newfoundlanders long considered to be utterly unfair because of the low and unchangeable rate that Newfoundland and Labrador receives for the substantial amounts of electricity bought by Hydro-Quebec.

So, to get back to the Basin Harbor meeting, all of a sudden a Vermont State Police boat appeared. The premier of Newfoundland, Brian Peckford and Rene Levesque came out, jumped into the boat, and roared off across lake together. Excitement mounted as they stayed out for a couple of hours. As it turned out, it was during this boat ride that the foundation was laid for reconsidering these arrangements and creating a more harmonious relationship between the two provinces.

ii. Wooing the French elsewhere and in the US.

Q: Another subject. What were the PQ's relations with the 'Francophonie" and with francophone and other linguistic minorities elsewhere?

JAEGER: The Morin Ministry attached great importance to this and had major programs to strengthen relations and encourage cooperation with other francophone groups, including those in the US, in Maine and Louisiana. Obviously the main emphasis was on their "diplomatic" relations with France and members of the French-sponsored 'francophonoi', which occasionally produced issues with the Canadian foreign office and Canadian Embassies. In addition, I discovered they assisted and encouraged other irredentist movements around the world by giving them how-to-do-it advice.

Q: Just as the French were advising Quebec City, Quebec City was going to advise others?

JAEGER: Yes. I ran across this one day when I walked into the Chateau Frontenac and found to my amazement that it was full of Walloons, Basques and irredentists from the Val d'Aosta in northern Italy and elsewhere. People from Morin's Ministry were giving talks as to how far to push on various issues without getting in serious trouble with their government, how to run effective propaganda operations etc., in effect offering them an irredentist training program. It wasn't a covert effort, but clearly unpublicized.

Q: Did it get into anything you might call abetting terrorism?

JAEGER: I would doubt that, given Levesque's strong commitment to achieving independence democratically and within the law. This and related programs did show, however, that there was a broader dimension to PQ separatism, which placed it in the context of mutually supportive independentist or nationalist movements elsewhere. Indeed one of the concepts occasionally discussed during those years was that even the US might, in time, resolve itself into several linguistic entities, predominantly French, English, Spanish etc. which they thought would be helpful to Francophone Quebec.

Q: That's fascinating. Did you have any other indications of this sort?

JAEGER: Yes. Among our periodic visitors were groups of French-speaking fellow citizens from Louisiana, who made subsidized visits to Quebec and were given talks, not only about the PQ's cause but their own French identity and how they could strengthen it through education, cultural activities etc. to gain greater influence. I always gave a reception for them and found them a very pleasant and lovely group of Americans.

Nevertheless, the more ideologically vigorous Independentists in the Ministry somehow kept thinking that if they could just ran more effective programs in Louisiana or in Maine that they might, in time, gain the kind of American domestic constituency for their cause that Israel had gained through parts of the Jewish community in the United States.

Q: Was there any contact between Quebec City and French cultural groups in Vermont, similar to Louisiana, that you know of?

JAEGER: Yes, there were, but not on the scale of their efforts in Maine or Louisiana, where they ran quite substantial programs.

Maine's response to all this was very clever. Joe Brennan, the Governor of Maine at the time, appointed a Special Representative to Quebec, a francophone who came up regularly, called on everyone and facilitated a good deal of Maine's business in the Province. In addition he arranged for large convoys of buses to bring French Maniacs to Quebec Winter Carnival each year and encouraged the Quebec government to put on a good entertainment program for them, so that they would all have a good time. Maine, in effect, joined the party and, while diluting the PQ's political and propaganda, got some of its own business done.

Q: How about US academia and the media? Were they too propaganda targets?

JAEGER: Of course. I first became aware of this when a well-respected Professor of Canadian Studies told me that the Ministry had offered his Institute regular subsidies in return for sympathetic treatment of the separatist cause. I gradually realized that this was not an isolated case, but was part of a systematic program to get friendly treatment from academics and journalists in the Canadian field. I even had a case where an academic had been told that his payments would be reduced, because the Ministry officials involved were displeased with his performance! When asked for advice, which I sometimes was, I would urge them not to take influence money in the first place, although I would not have been surprised if Ottawa had not been doing the same thing on behalf of their cause.

Q: Well, isn't this done by countries all over the world? The Japanese have been particularly prominent in funding Japanese studies and journalistic coverage.

JAEGER: Of course. The point at the time was that Quebec was not a sovereign country but a province in the process of trying to break up Canada, an outcome the US did not favor. While I reported these and other Ministry operations in the US, they were never very effective - even though Morin's people pursued them vigorously as part of their rather grandiloquent effort to 'neutralize' the US.

iii. American films in Quebec and Canada

JAEGER: Another, more pesky issue involved American films. Both Ottawa and the Levesque Cultural Ministry were pressing for a severe cutback of American films. Quebec not only wanted to reduce our linguistic footprint, even though English-language films were usually sub-titled, but wanted to reduce competition for their small but growing French-language movie industry.

Q: Well this is part of the whole Canadian resentment of American cultural imperialism and of the inundation of the Canadian media with American content.

JAEGER: I understood this and personally sympathized to some extent. The trouble was that, as a result of heavy pressure in Washington by our film industry, I had very firm instructions. I was to go around, and rattle doors and try to persuade them to be more reasonable.

Being a good soldier I did, and in this case, overplayed my hand. I know I annoyed the then Culture Minister and others by repeatedly making our case. After several months of unproductive back and forth I was flying with Levesque to an electricity meeting in the States one day. He looked at me and said, "Look George. We've got your point about films. No Way. Tell your government, and stop yakking about it."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I had obviously got under everybody's skin and told Washington that I had done my best. Even so we succeeded in averting de facto expropriation of our film industry in Quebec and contributed to an emerging compromise.

iv. The 'Landry' incident: No 'triangular' trade

JAEGER: Then there was the Landry incident. After his devastating constitutional setbacks in '81, Levesque decided that the PQ should make one more determined independence try, which eventually foundered. Even so one of its tactical themes - of encouraging the impression of some kind of new triangular Quebec-US-Ottawa relationships, which would imply a special status for Quebec -produced a minor crisis. As my notes from this period record, I thought I had neutralized this idea in meetings with Morin, Levesque, Parizeau and others. It was further discouraged in a moderately worded Department statement which we prepared and placed in the 'Globe and Mail'. It nevertheless came to head as a result of a public statement by Commerce Minister Bernard Landry early in 1983, suggesting the creation of a Quebec-US-Canada "common market".

Q: He was a bit ahead of his time, before NAFTA.

JAEGER: What Landry promoted was not a Canada - U.S. free trade agreement in which the Province of Quebec would play its part, but a triangular arrangement between Quebec, the US and Canada, as between equals. As such it reflected Quebec's interest in replacing its constricting Canadian trade arrangements with full and unhampered access to the US market; a breakthrough which, as Parizeau once said to me, would give it 'de facto' independence.

Q: I see. so what happened?

JAEGER: Well, as soon as I read Landry's statement I realized that if the US did not respond we would be seen as having passively acquiesced, an acquiescence Landry and others would then exploit further.

Q: Which would have made a major step towards separatism?

JAEGER: Precisely. I made this point in urgent messages to the Department and Ottawa asking for permission to issue a rather sharp statement, in which the United States repudiated any such idea and reemphasized the traditional policy that we have our relations with Canada, which we hoped would stay strong and united, and not with individual provinces.

My draft was promptly approved, issued as a press release and made headlines across Quebec and Canada. That the United States should publicly intervene came as a considerable shock to the PQ, and particularly to Landry, who responded by denying that he had ever said what we thought he had said, or at least that he didn't mean it in the way we had interpreted it.

Q: So he retracted?

JAEGER: In a confused sort of way, yes. Certainly it put an end to that idea, and did not overly damage my own relations with the Levesque government, since, I gathered, even Landry's cabinet colleagues thought he was grandstanding and considered that keeping the peace with Washington was more important than grabbing headlines over hypothetical issues.

Q: Did that hurt his career?

JAEGER: May be in the short run. He was certainly very angry with me personally. However, in spite of his reputation as an ambitious, sometimes abrasive eager beaver he was talented and persistent. He became the undisputed number two in Bouchard's government and succeeded him as a not very successful and controversial Premier of Quebec in 2001.

i. Ambassador Robinson's visit and Embassy relations.

Q: Did the Ambassador ever show up in Quebec during this difficult period?

JAEGER: My first Ambassador, former Maine Governor Ken Curtis, came at least twice after my arrival...

Q: ...I remember Curtis. I met him in the '60s when he was a very close friend of Phil Hoff, the then Governor of Vermont.

JAEGER: Yes, he was a very dear man. It was probably because of Curtis's confidence in me that I was able to play the role in Quebec that I played during this time. He could have reined me in and made me clear everything I did. Instead he and Dick Smith, his highly competent Deputy Chief of Mission, gave me wide latitude throughout that period, which Smith continued when Paul Robinson became Ambassador in June 1981.

Q: More than is usual for a Consul General?

JAEGER: Much more. My understanding is that recent incumbents were told by the Embassy when and what to report, which is, of course, totally counterproductive and inhibiting. Good reporting and analysis, and the development of sound recommendations, are creative acts, tied to one's perception and understanding of the evolution of events...

Q: Particularly in Quebec which is such a distinctive cultural and political community. Ottawa people aren't going to have a very fine sense about it...

JAEGER: I think that's often the case, since the political people assigned there usually don't speak French or have the time or inclination to follow Quebec affairs in any detail.

Q: Has this been a problem all along, the lack of French language capability in the American Embassy in Ottawa?

JAEGER: I shouldn't speak for the present, because I don't know. But traditionally Ottawa has often been used as a place to assign people who, for one reason or another, need to be close to the US, rather than for their language skills. What's more, Embassies usually reflect the atmospherics of the places they are in, in this case Canada's predominantly English culture.

Q: Is there a certain analogy with the Consulate in Zagreb, when you served there years earlier, since the Croatians had their own ethnic identity vis-a-vis the Belgrade Serbs?

JAEGER: Joe Godson in Zagreb also played a fairly strong role in my time there. On the other hand, Tito was in firm national control and Croatia, at that point, was not trying to break away. Moreover, all the substantive officers in Belgrade and Zagreb had Serbo-Croatian language training, so the situation is not really analogous.

Q: Can you think of any others which are?

JAEGER: There are lots of situations where we have strong Consulates General, although each is unique and much depends on the context and the personalities of the Ambassador and the Consul General. For instance, as things calmed down in Quebec there was less need to give the post special status. This is reflected, and there's no disrespect intended, by the fact that most recent Principal Officers assigned there have been career consular officers.

Q: How did things develop after Paul Robinson's arrival?

JAEGER: Well, it was a new ball game. Robinson, was a big bluff man with a strong personality, given to wearing boots and leather belts with silver buckles. He had a been a naval officer in the Korean war, proud of his work at the time with the Canadian navy. After the war he had founded a large and successful insurance brokerage firm and more recently been Ronald Reagan's Republican finance chairman in Chicago. He often stressed his Loyalist Canadian ancestry, loved English Canada, was a passionate and vocal anti-communist, considered the PQ subversive and often felt compelled to give unsolicited advice to the Canadians - not only in diplomatic circles, but, to the Embassy's distress, on radio, television and what have you. He was also noted for his capacity to drink good whiskey and had a rather nice wife with a somewhat '50ish beehive hairdo. Many Canadians, including many in government, thought he was simply off the wall, although, in spite of his frequent bluster and indiscretions, he produced a sort of love-hate relationship, since people somehow recognized that he really cared about Canada, which was endearing and more than could be said for certain of his predecessors. From the Embassy's and my perspective he was of course a challenge.

Q: Well, this raises a question I've had in the back of my mind from some of my own observations at meetings in anglophone Canada, that it is hard for Americans to keep in mind that they're in a foreign country.

JAEGER: Precisely, and particularly Americans who are not trained to international sensitivities. Robinson was a self-made man in a muscular business and, as Illinois Finance Chairman, had major Republican credentials. He was one of the few people who could pick up the phone and ask to speak to Ronald Reagan. That gives you a lot of moxie. Sometimes after they had talked on the phone, he would come into Embassy staff meetings and say, "Well, I talked to the President last night, and we both agreed that I should make it clear to the Canadians..." The next thing you knew he was on television making whatever it was clear to the Canadians, leaving the rest of us all over Canada picking up the pieces and dealing with the fallout.

Q: You must have worried what he would say in Quebec during these very agitated periods?

JAEGER: I worried a great deal, and did what I could to delay his visit, arguing that the time wasn't right for this or that reason. My procrastinations, as well as distractions in Ottawa worked for a considerable time with Dick Smith's delicate and important help. Then, in the spring of '82, history took the matter out of my hands when Robinson got himself an invitation to go to sea with the Canadian navy, which he loved. He went off to Halifax, had a wonderful time over several days on the bridge of a Canadian frigate, had himself conveyed to another ship on a breeches buoy in heaving seas, almost fell in, and, with the huzzahs of his naval hosts still reverberating, arrived happily and excited in Quebec.

I had organized what you might describe as a minor state dinner in his honor, which Levesque mercifully declined, but which did include some of the least ideological or combative PQ Ministers. I studded the rest of the table with polite opposition leaders and other interesting people, like Quebec's Mayor Jean Pelletier, who couldn't possibly give offense, in the hopes that we could somehow get through this dinner mellifluously and without incident. It all went well for a while. Our dining room was resplendent in candle light. The food was superb. And all seemed serene until the very moderate, civilized and pro-American Social Affairs Minister, Pierre-Marc Johnson (who briefly succeeded Levesque following his resignation in 1985) said something about Quebec social policy of which Robinson disapproved and led him to boom across the table, "It's Commies like you who are the reason why the United States is opposed to Quebec independence!"

Q: Good Lord! There goes all your diplomacy.

JAEGER: Well, not really, because most of them understood this wasn't to be taken seriously and pretended nothing had happened. As for the Ambassador, he enjoyed the dinner thoroughly, and after the guests had left stayed on for what turned out to be some serious drinking.

For me this became the crucial moment, since he had sent word just before going to sea with the Canadians, that, as part of Ronald Reagan's budget cutting drive, he had decided to close down my Consulate General! "This bunch of Commies," as he put it to me that evening over his third Scotch, didn't deserve a fine officer like me! My task that night was to somehow persuade him otherwise on the grounds that the United States would need this listening post at the heart of francophone Quebec for decades to come and that closing us down, as the British had closed their Consulate, would be a huge tactical mistake.

Q: Now the British were there when you arrived, but they closed down?

JAEGER: Yes, also for budget reasons. They concentrated their work in Montreal, which is what he had in mind.

Q: Well, I am all tenterhooks. You apparently succeeded?

JAEGER: What followed was one of those wonderful, unforgettable scenes, with the two of us sitting on opposing sofas getting sloshed together. I made my case as best I could until well after midnight, when, with both of us pretty far gone in our drinking, I noticed that he had fallen sound asleep. It was a bit awkward, since I could hardly go to bed and leave the Ambassador sitting there with his big toe protruding from a hole in his sock.

All of sudden he roused himself, looked at me a little blearily and said, "Okay George, you can keep your goddamn Consulate. I guess we do need you here. You're doing a great job. Keep it up. Keep those Commies in line." With that he fell asleep again until I put him to bed.

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: And that's how we saved the American Consulate General in Quebec which is still going strong. Somehow, even though there had been that outburst at dinner, he got the point that having our people there was in fact important for the United States in the long-term. I am sure Dick Smith and others at the Embassy had helped as well.

The remarkable thing was that Ambassador Robinson seems to have respected me for the hard fight I had put up, which a year or so later led him to invite me to come to the Embassy as his Political Counselor. Of that, more later.

j. Rebuilding the Consulate and learning to manage

Q: We haven't talked of the management side of things. Was that a challenge?

JAEGER: One of the first things which struck me when I arrived was the condition of our offices. The building itself is as an architectural gem, wonderfully sited across a little park from the Chateau Frontenac and fronting on the boardwalk of the St. Lawrence River. Its shell goes back to the 18th century but was extensively modified, expanded and restored in the late '30s or early '40s to suit the needs of a small consular outpost of that time. Nothing much had ben changed to the time I arrived. The Consular office was still a rather small space, dominated by the long green linoleum counter which confronted you as you came in from the park side, then the building's only entrance; behind which our four local employees performed their consular tasks, totally unprotected. On one side was a little office for the consul and the vice-consul. On the other, a low swinging double door like in a bar, led into a larger room, the equally unprotected inner sanctum of the Consul General.

There were other problems besides lack of security and privacy for people being interviewed. In the winter, and often in the spring and fall as well, our floors were a sea of slippery slush or mud, since everyone came in with dripping boots and overcoats; and, since there was no adequate waiting space, the place was often overcrowded and so smelled to high heaven. In short the consulate was hardly representational, was inefficiently arranged and left all of us without protection against any troublemaker.

Q: Were there ever any incidents?

JAEGER: One very close call when a Quebec film company was making a movie, 'The Plouffes', a spoof about the lives of a very typical Quebec family. We had agreed to let them put up an antenna on our roof, which they needed for some technical reasons for shooting some scenes on the boardwalk outside. I had forgotten all about this, when one day a tough-looking guy in a black turtleneck sweater, black trousers and black shoes burst into my office and without further explanation shouted, "Take me up to the roof! Take me up to the roof!"

I had a tear gas spray can in my right hand drawer, my only security device. I reached for it, having no idea what this was about, and almost knocked this guy out, until it dawned on me that he was talking about the film antenna on the roof. I said, "Are you from the film company?"

He said, "Yes, of course. Hurry up! Hurry up! It's not working, and they're filming!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I said, "Buddy, you are very lucky that I realized this in time!" In an age when there were real risks of terrorism, particularly in Quebec's then hyper-charged atmosphere, the incident underscored that we were hardly secure.

So, for all the above reasons I worked up a plan to turn our offices into an attractive, secure and efficient space. The key was to make use of our extensive unused basement, which was a warren of storage rooms, full of newspapers and files going back to World War II, when the Consulate General had played a key role because of the critical importance of the St. Lawrence for US naval and submarine units fighting in the Atlantic. We found all sorts of records, newspaper files, photos and clippings - which I hope have been preserved - of American and Canadian naval officers and, of course, of social events surrounding the Quebec Conference itself, with Roosevelt and Churchill.

Once we had cleared this space, the plan was to convert this lower floor into the new Consular office, by giving the building a second public entrance on 'Terasse Dufferin' on the river side of our steeply sloping building. I will spare you the details of this process, except to say that in the end we pretty much did the design work ourselves and used an architect primarily for technical issues like plumbing, wiring and so forth.

To get there proved to be a long process. Obtaining the half million dollars we needed from Washington, working out all the security wrinkles, i.e. the number of bullet proof glass doors with high security locks we would need, having everyone agree to our plan, hiring contractors and getting the actual work done all took considerable time.

When, I think it was in 1982, it was finally finished, the upstairs had became a quiet, modern, airy and secure work and reception area, while all the consular work took place in the wholly redesigned, modern and efficient space on the floor below, which now had its own secure door for the public. I was especially pleased with some of the minor touches, which added elegance: The grey stone wall in the otherwise modernistic consular section evoked the material used in many of the buildings of Old Quebec. And the original National Geographic photographs of great American scenes which the Society generously, and exceptionally, donated, made our now elegant first floor waiting and conference space outside the Consul's and Consul General's offices particularly attractive. In sum, it all came out better than we had hoped.

We had a block party for the formal opening on Terasse Dufferin and invited everyone on our guest lists, as well as Dick Smith the DCM in Ottawa.

It was a huge success, there was Quebecois music, lots to eat, everyone had fun and liked our new offices. For some reason which I don't remember, Jacques-Yvan Morin, Claude Morin's rather fussy successor, was the only one who refused to come because he was momentarily offended about something the US had said or done. Our DCM, Dick Smith, said to me on leaving, "You know, I knew this was a tough post, but I didn't realize how tough it was until today!" I appreciated that.

Q: That was certainly a major accomplishment. How about staff morale? Was that ever a problem?

JAEGER: Only occasionally. Quebec's long, very cold winters are hard and confining. And we all worked very hard. But we had TGIF's (thank God it's Friday), the American staff often participated in and contributed substantively to the post's entertainment or joined Pat and myself at drinks or family dinners. Eric Boswell, my number two when I arrived, spoke good French, which was important, and had developed a wide social circle in Quebec where he and his wife were quite at home. His successor, was I think the least happy, feeling that hers was a largely consular job, which she did well, but she never really lived her way into the charms and complexities of francophone Quebec.

Betsy Anderson, the last of my three Consuls, was the most successful and outgoing of the three. She took a lively interest in Quebec issues and politics, was not shy about speaking and improving her French, related easily to people and often told me the latest joke, or gave me an earful, when she thought I was becoming too involved. She particularly distinguished herself one blustery winter night when a Greenpeace crew was arrested and jailed for allegedly interfering with a seal hunt somewhere far out on the St. Lawrence. She insisted, with my very reluctant consent, on flying out there that night in a small plane, in spite of a pending snow storm, because, as she put it, helping Americans in distress "is my job". What's more she sprung them!

She also earned my gratitude for her sensitive and effective management of the consular staff and for setting a fine example to two successive Vice Consuls, one of whom, Frank Urbancic, a genial young man, went on to Arabic training and a Baghdad assignment after Quebec. Another, was also nice but less successful, having, for one thing, never mastered the skill of writing a coherent page.

The heart of the post, as always, were our five local employees who uncomplainingly managed the brunt of the consular work and almost never failed us. My hero of the lot, however, was Mr. Cote, my good hearted old driver and the post's jack-of-all trades who knew how to fix everything, opened and closed the doors, raised the flag and had the gift of getting our rattly car going even at twenty below zero.

k. Kudos

Q: Did you ever get recognition for your work in Quebec?

JAEGER: I was on the promotion list to FSO-2 in 1980 and, after the Senior Foreign Service was created was reappointed in '81 to the new rank of Counselor (FE-OC). The Embassy also nominated me for the Director General's Award for Reporting, and before I left Canada I was awarded another Superior Honor Award for my work in Quebec. In addition Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Chester Crocker twice nominated me for Ambassadorships, once for Dakar and then for Niger, which I much appreciated even though they did not materialize.

I. To the North Pole with the Governor General.

JAEGER: The Canadian government too had apparently been aware of my work in Quebec, perhaps through some less-than visible local listening post. Be that as it may, somebody from the Prime Minister's office called me up out of the blue one day, I think in '82, and said that they had been admiring my work and wondered if I would accept a Canadian decoration for my service before I went on to a new job. Needless to say, I was amazed, partly because I had had no inkling that Ottawa was following what I was doing and partly because I thought I had been as even-handed as possible within the framework of US policy and the evolving situation.

I explained that I was, of course, very appreciative but that American diplomats have not accepted foreign decorations since the time of Thomas Jefferson. My caller then asked if there was anything else Canada could do to express its appreciation for the work I had done, because Prime Minister Trudeau "really would like to do something for you." Well, I replied, if one of your military aircraft going up to the high arctic ever had an empty bucket seat I would certainly enjoy riding along; and thought no more about it.

Months later I got a call from an aide-de-camp in the Governor General's office, who, to my total amazement, said that Mr. Schreyer the Governor General of Canada, wanted me to join him on a ten day trip to the High Arctic, beyond Baffin Island to a landing near the North Pole! Would I be able to accept and be at an airport in Manitoba on Thursday of that week at eight in the morning?

I explained that, if the Department gave me permission to leave my post - which it did - I would, of course, be delighted and, within a few days, set off on this absolutely incredible trip on the Governor Generals' well-appointed plane. Governor General Schreyer, an urbane man of many interests, including a passion for the plight of the Inuits whose champion he became, welcomed me amiably, explained what we were going to do and introduced me to the others. Besides Mr. Schreyer, who was a former International Relations Professor, leader of the New Democratic party and Premier of Manitoba, and his lovely wife Lily, our small party consisted of several of personal relatives and friends and one other 'official guest'.

Our first stop was Resolute Bay, the 'cross-roads' of the Arctic, a functional, rather bare settlement which, as our trip progressed came to seem larger and more comfortable the farther north we went. We spent the night at a surprisingly cozy arctic 'Inn' in a small Inuit village about ten miles outside of town, which consisted of a couple of comfortably furnished connected Quonset huts, and was run, of all things, by a young Mauritian engineer married to an anglophone Canadian. Together they had created this well-equipped jumping-off place for arctic tourist expeditions they organized, ranging from dog-sled outings of a few days to two weeks favored by German tourists, to adventure flights to the North Pole - whose exact location - since you had to know where to pop the champagne - was always marked by a barber pole .... which I found leaning outside the door.

From there we visited the haunting sites on nearby Beechey Island, where Sir John Franklin's expedition perished in its winter encampment in 1851, as well as the world's then most northern (Cominco) nickel mine (now closed), whose modernistic office and housing buildings seemed utterly incongruous on the vast frozen landscape of Little Cornwallis Island, where polar bears frequently looked in through the heated swimming pool windows!

Then it was on to Pond Inlet and other Inuit villages on the West coast of Baffin Island, where Mr. Schreyer, a longtime critic of Ottawa's discouragingly unsuccessful Inuit policies, spent time in village meetings to see how things were going.

In all of them we encountered the same tales of resistance to modern lifestyles, underemployment, alcoholism etc. and were welcomed and feted with Inuit songs and local delicacies, particularly the blubber women scraped for us from seal skins - a remarkable learning experience in stark contrast to the extraordinary cuisine on the CG's plane, where a chef prepared brilliant meals and offered some remarkable wines to match.

The next stop, the American missile warning base at Thule in northern Greenland, couldn't have presented a greater contrast with its vast radar arrays and comfortable, high-tech military installations. We had the VIP tour, were given a splendid steak dinner by the Commanding Officer but, most of all, enjoyed the hot showers in our billets.

We then flew back to northern Baffin Island for a visit to the Nanisivik zinc and lead mine (it too now closed), an outpost 750 km north of the Arctic Circle where hundreds of Canadians and others lived and worked in igloo-like structures in a cold northern moonscape, and kept their morale up by watching American football on their TV sets and eating to their hearts content in a vast dining hall open 24 hours a day!

I remember walking to the south end of the camp after dinner - it was a glacially cold and star-filled night - and looking out at the white emptiness beyond. A miner, whom I hadn't noticed at first, said out of the dark, "You know there isn't another human that way for 600 miles!" The arctic, in its emptiness and vastness, is a metaphysical experience, which is not for everyone. We also made a short visit to a nearby Inuit village where an elder, who sadly deplored the passing of the old ways and took us out to show us how seal fishing is traditionally done by patiently waiting with your harpoon at a hole in the ice. I recall that my feet got desperately cold!

The last leg was a three hour flight still further north, along the massive length of beautiful, mountainous and glacier-covered Ellesmere island, to Alert, the northernmost permanently inhabited place on earth, and the site of a huge Canadian signals intelligence base; so highly secure that I was even accompanied to the bathroom by an armed guard. The name of the game was to detect Soviet, and probably also American submarines playing games under the Polar Ice cap. The weather there is often so severe that there are ropes between all the buildings to help guide people to safety if they are caught outside in storms and large signs requiring them to stay wherever they are, for days if necessary, when storms do sweep across the base.

At Alert we left the Governor General's aircraft for the last leg north on a rattling pontoon-equipped Twin Otter and landed on an ice floe some 200 km from the magnetic North pole. We jolted to a rough stop near the camp site of a Canadian expedition which was trying to prove that a spur of globular mineral deposits on the seabed eight or ten thousand feet below the ice was made of the same stuff as one emanating in that direction from the nearest land. If so, Canada hoped it could claim sovereignty over that part of the polar sea under provisions of international law which, at this writing, are again in play as the Russians and the other arctic powers are trying to stake similar claims to the mineral resources under the currently fast-melting polar ice cap. As it turned out the results were anti-climactic from a Canadian point of view, since the deposits being winched up through a large hole in the ice proved definitively that the deposits below were different.

Even so, it was an exceptional experience to see the expedition at work under these very tough conditions. Their entire camp had been blown down by a storm three weeks earlier and had had to be reconstructed. Even now that their sleeping and dining tents were operational again, life was hardly a picnic in the bitter-cold polar vastness. Even going to the bathroom behind a snowdrift was a continual endurance test, while life and work inside the crowded tents was hot, muggy and often raucous. At one point I found someone tugging at my sleeve. It turned out to be an American girl from somewhere in Florida who asked: "Please sir, can you tell me what in hell I'm doing here? I want to go home!"

Before climbing back on our Twin Otter the Governor General congratulated this crew of scientists, cooks, handymen and admin people for their courage and good work in a short speech recorded by the National Geographic photographer covering the expedition.

Back on the GG's plane in Alert we began the long flight back to Manitoba with a particularly brilliant meal served with vintage Bordeaux. It had been an extraordinary trip.

m.Leaving Quebec

Q: That all sounds like a great adventure. And then you left Quebec for Ottawa?

JAEGER: Yes in August 1983. Ambassador Robinson , with whom I had fought so hard to keep Quebec in business, had clearly come to like and respect me and asked me to be his Political Counselor in Ottawa for a year. I agreed, albeit with some reluctance.

Q: Leaving Quebec must have been an ambivalent experience.

JAEGER: It was, although after four years it was clearly time to move on. The great issues of sovereignty-association and the constitution had been settled, at least for the time being, and it was time for someone new to take up the post. My successor, Lionel Rosenblatt, had distinguished himself in resettling over a hundred thousand Vietnamese refugees, and had made major humanitarian contributions to Khmer refugee resettlement. He became a nationally known figure after he left the Foreign Service in 1990 as President of Refugees International which helped large numbers of refugees in Bosnia, Rwanda and many other global trouble spots.

Still, there were good-byes to be said to the many we had worked with and some who had become close personal friends: Like Mayor Jean Pelletier, who, with extraordinary skill had navigated Quebec City's fortunes through the clashing political forces of the time and actually managed to make the place flourish with support from both Ottawa and Rene Levesque. Quebec City's attractive new port and waterfront are among his accomplishments. Pat and I often saw Jean and his thoughtful and wise wife Helene, and have continued our friendship over the years since he was, and then retired as, the powerful Cabinet Director to his friend Prime Minister Jean Chretien. When I left Quebec, he said, "George, a friendship is a conversation which can be interrupted for years and then taken up again exactly where it left off". We have often resumed.

There was James DePreist, the now famous African-American conductor, who in later years was to raise the Oregon Symphony to world status. At the time he was Music Director of the then rather anemic Quebec Symphony Orchestra, struggling with inadequate budgets and latent prejudice because he was not a francophone, although he had mastered the language in short order and even written a small book in French! The nephew of Marian Anderson, and a protï¿½gï¿½ of Leonard Bernstein, he had contracted polio on a USIA tour to Thailand, which left both his legs useless and forced him to conduct perched on a thin metal chair. He was a huge capacious man, warm, passionate and intensely perceptive. He and his lovely Quebecois wife Ginette became and remained lifelong friends. I will never forget his struggle to perform Mahler's 8th Symphony in Quebec, a vast work requiring many more performers than his Board would sanction. So he went out to high schools and colleges, collected a pick-up crew of promising young musicians, rehearsed them intensively for three months, and then put on an overwhelmingly powerful performance which left his audience cheering! He was by far our best Ambassador!

There were others who had become part of our lives, including General Francois Richard and his wife Marie, the first-rate commander of Vallecartiers, the Canadian Army base outside Quebec City, who had taken me out on winter maneuvers and helped me understand Quebec from the perspective of francophones who are also passionate Canadians. We were to meet again shortly when he, as a two star, became Canada's representative on NATO's Military Committee.

Lastly, there was, of course, Rene Levesque, whom I had probably cost a percent or two in the referendum and sometimes differed with on other issues. He received me late one afternoon in his office for my good-bye call, to my surprise surrounded by his wife, Corinne, and a dozen or so other PQ heavyweights, dressed in his favorite safari jacket, with a bottle of Scotch before him on his desk.

After I had thanked him for his many kindnesses to me, he looked at me with a little grin and said, "You know, George, you are a son of a bitch, but you are my favorite son of a bitch!" We had an odd but real friendship, and knowing him, not as the 'bete noir' he was to so many English Canadians, but as a three-dimensional Quebec nationalist who passionately saw to it that his movement remained constitutional and democratic, had been a revelation.

The Levesque I remember was a warm, caring, vulnerable man of enormous talent and many human failings, who had a pretty clear vision of the world, just wanted to right the wrongs that had been done to French Quebec, but ran into forces he could not democratically overcome. When I am in Montreal these days and cross Avenue Rene Levesque I still see him clearly, a charming, self-deprecating, vulnerable and indomitable leader, a clown, laughing or sad, gesticulating with his endless cigarettes, and inspiring his people when he spoke to them from the heart in language that moved and which they could understand.

5. Counselor in Ottawa

Q: So then you were off to your new job in Ottawa?

JAEGER: Oddly enough, once again by car! We found a lovely old brick house on Prince Street in Rockcliffe, the 'nicest' suburb of Ottawa, Christina was happily enrolled in nearby Elmwood School and so settled quickly into Ottawa's comparatively serene routine. As Political Counselor I now had much greater scope than I had had in Quebec, since I was now responsible for all the issues which affected Canadian political relations with the United States, Canadian domestic politics and following Canadian issues globally. Since we were in substantial agreement on many of them, and some of the more difficult issues were handled by the Department and the Canadian Embassy in Washington, the workload was large but manageable.

Even so, I was limited by the fact that I was a one man band, having at most one junior officer to help on a sporadic basis. There was also awkwardness from the outset in my relations with John Rouse, the new DCM who had succeeded my friend and mentor Dick Smith, a nice precise man with sharp pencils and polished eyeglasses who, as Pat said perceptively, was a 'beige' personality. Although a veteran of Canadian affairs, he somehow lacked 'grandezza del animo' and tended to do things impeccably but by the book.

My relationship with the Ambassador, on the other hand, was more productive, since, in spite of our diametrically different world and political views, he clearly liked me and trusted my advice. I would see him frequently, often using his backdoor, which bypassed the front office, for a private chat; and was on several occasions able to talk him out of explosive statements he wanted to make which would again have rocked the Canadian scene. Part of this perilous balancing act involved invitations to the Residence, either for official occasions or for more private evenings with a few other key people. The image which sticks in my mind is of this big, bluff man wearing a train conductor's cap, delivering his guests' drinks with a hoot and a clang of the bell of his super-sized toy railway which coiled through every room on the Residence's second floor! It was the talk of Ottawa!

Q: He sounds like the model political appointee! On a different note, did people in Ottawa seem interested in your experience in Quebec?

JAEGER: I am glad you asked. Tony Price and his wife, who were among the remaining 'anglo' aristocracy in Quebec City, had given us a farewell party at their lovely place on the Isle d'Orleans, at which they asked if we knew anyone in Ottawa and kindly offered to drop a line to introduce us to some of their friends. As a result, we had a number of very elegant and high-level invitations shortly after our arrival.

What became apparent at all of them was that most of the anglo-Canadian elite didn't really understand or, for that matter, like Quebec. I particularly remember a sparkling dinner party with several Deputy Ministers and other 'Mandarins' at which our rather famous host turned to me and said, "Well, Mr. Jaeger, you have just spent some time in Quebec, tell us about it" - as if Quebec were a subsection of Baluchistan! I couldn't help my probably impolite reply, " But Minister, this is your country. I should ask you that question!"

To be fair, there were many Canadians who followed the issue fairly and with real interest. Even so, Ottawa confirmed the adage that Canada consists, or at least consisted, of 'Two Solitudes'.

Q: That's sort of what I expected, What was the Foreign Office like?

JAEGER: That was also a bit of a shock, since we were not received with the kind of warmth you would have expected, given the general friendship between Canadians and Americans.

The Canadians certainly are our closest allies and biggest trading partners and share our longest open border. Even so, official contacts were generally cautious, since the Foreign Office people consistently tended see us as the big elephant - we were at the time 250 to their 25 million people - which, when it coughs, can give them pneumonia. So no matter what the issue was, they wanted to make quite sure that they would not be perceived as knuckling under and that we dealt with them as equals. I gradually learned to expect that chip on the shoulder, but it took some getting used to. By contrast, once you were with people outside of the Foreign Office realm, relations could not have been warmer and more friendly.

Q: What were the major issues?

JAEGER: Acid rain, fisheries and our joint projects in the Great Lakes, somewhat in that order.

Q: Acid rain certainly was a major concern in that period, here in Vermont as well. How did it play out in Ottawa?

JAEGER: There were endless, sometimes animated and even angry high-level meetings with senior EPA officials and Deputy Assistant Secretaries, like Tom Niles, who came up from Washington. Much of the talk was technical, but nothing much was resolved, partly I suspect because the Reagan administration wasn't really willing to take on the American polluters and was stalling. The Canadians did, in time, establish an acid rain regime in their country which has helped. But it was not till 2002 that we were to conclude a US-Canadian Air Quality agreement which, together with other initiatives, has helped to mitigate this problem to some extent.

Q: Were the other issues as frustrating?

JAEGER: Pretty much. The complaints and recriminations of the salmon fisheries on both sides of the Pacific border precipitated ongoing discussions without, in my time at least, achieving major breakthroughs. We also had to deal with large and small Great Lakes issues, which laid the groundwork for negotiations in the binational Great Lakes Commission, a slow process which occasionally produced significant results

As to the ongoing battle over cultural relations, i.e. the controversial issue American film and magazine exports to Canada, this proved not to be as demanding as in Quebec since much of it of it was handled by the USIA.

Q: How about the big east-west issues like arms control, which was a major theme in the 1980s?

JAEGER: We were only tangentially involved. Occasionally Washington would ask us to talk to the Canadians about some aspect of the arms control negotiations or the coordination of some position in NATO, the UN or in some other international forum. A highlight was Paul Nitze's visit to brief the Canadians on his INF (Intermediate Nuclear Force) discussions with the Soviets, one of my heroes whom I had come to know first as an intern and later when I was Staff Director of the McCloy Committee. He spoke brilliantly for almost two hours without notes and gave all of us an object lesson of what excellence in this business is all about.

Q: What about the issue of Canadian dealing with Cuba?

JAEGER: It's interesting you should ask that, although I can't recall that we did much finger wagging. I think their enthusiasm for Cuba had waned a bit by then.

Q: This was also a time of great change on the domestic front in Canada.

JAEGER: That was our main focus, since we witnessed the decline of Trudeau and rise of Brian Mulroney, who was elected Prime Minister in September '94 with the largest majority in Canadian history. A powerful rising star, this anglophone Quebecker had defeated accident-prone, pigeon-chested Joe Clark, to become leader of the Conservative Party in June of '83, to the delight of and with, some thought, quite excessive public support of Ambassador Robinson and the Reagan administration in Washington. Be that as it may, these months were largely consumed with reporting of the evolving trends, while Robinson was unabashedly beating the drums in and outside the Embassy for the conservatives.

Q: Did the Consulates General across Canada play a big role in this?

JAEGER: Very much so. There was a steady stream of reporting from Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, Quebec and Halifax, as well as much discussion at the annual Principal Officers' Conference, held that year in the Hotel Montebello outside Ottawa, where we could all get together and exchange impressions. The one that stood out that year was our Consul General in Halifax, usually a backwater staffed by lesser lights.

Q: In Halifax?

JAEGER: Yes. Our colleague in Halifax, whose name I am very embarrassed to say I can neither recall nor locate, had just arrived there. He was virtually blind, had a related nervous disorder and was a beneficiary of new legislation prohibiting discrimination against physically handicapped people. The Department provided him with an optical reader, which enlarged letters to a huge size and gave him an additional staff member to read things aloud to him. We were all dubious whether, even with this support, he would be able to manage during a politically very active time. In fact, as I said, he turned out to be the best Consul General of the lot!

Q: Really!

JAEGER: What's more, he had, in his second marriage, married a woman who was also blind! In the weeks after his arrival he went out and visited every Premier in the Maritimes, got to know lots of the cabinet members, business and ordinary people throughout the Provinces and did a voluminous amount of excellent, insightful reporting - in great contrast to his physically splendid, but otherwise lazy predecessor. What's more his blind wife gave skiing instructions (!) to the blind and handicapped, and was equally involved. They were both a great success in the Maritimes and to us an inspiration!

Q: Did you want to extend your assignment in Ottawa?

JAEGER: Not really. I had been in Canada since 1979 and it was time to move on. Various assignments were dangled before me, none of which had much appeal until I was asked if I would like to compete for the job of Deputy Assistant Secretary General of NATO for Political Affairs, working on the staff of Lord Carrington who had just been made Secretary General. I got the job after a two-hour interview in Brussels chaired by my boss-to-be Fredo Dannenbring, a senior German diplomat, the then Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs.

Chapter IX - Deputy Assistant Secretary General at NATO and Diplomat -in-Residence at Middlebury College

1. On Carrington's staff at NATO

Q: Well, that sounds like an exciting turning point in your career. When did you take up your new job in Brussels?

JAEGER: Pat, Christina, by now a young lady of thirteen, and I arrived in Brussels in April '84 and were assigned a lovely large house on Val de la Futaie, off Avenue Franklin Roosevelt near the Bois de la Cambre, a quiet charming little square where we only gradually met our somewhat retiring well-off Belgian neighbors. Christina was enrolled in St. John's International School, one more challenging change, and dealt with it by rapidly exchanging her Quebecois for a Bruxellois accent and making new friends.

The NATO building where I was to work, was the same vast former military barracks, converted to accommodate the then sixteen NATO delegations and the Secretary General's large headquarters staff, to which NATO transferred after de Gaulle asked it to leave France. Its nondescript appearance did not adequately convey that this was the nerve center of the great alliance which fought and was shortly to win the Cold War.

Q: Tell us a bit about your new job.

JAEGER: The Deputy Assistant Secretary General's (DASG) job in the NATO Secretariat's Political Division has traditionally been an American position, its role and importance depending a great deal on the incumbent, the effectiveness of his boss, the Assistant Secretary general (ASG), and the extent to which Secretaries General wanted to make use of these resources.

Q: Maybe we should first take a quick overall look at how NATO is organized, to get this right?

JAEGER: OK. NATO has, from the outset, had a Secretary General who chairs and leads Council Meetings at the Ministerial and Foreign Ministers levels and is generally responsible for the management and operations of the alliance. To this end he has a Secretariat, which, in my time, consisted of the Deputy Secretary General, their small, powerful shared front office assistants, known as the 'Private Office' and, below them, a number of major functional Divisions: The Political Division - my new niche, a Division for Defense Planning and Policy, another for Defense Support, a Nuclear Planning Directorate a Division of Infrastructure, Logistics and Civil Emergency Planning, a Scientific Division, an Administrative Division and an Executive Secretariat, all headed by ASGs or equivalent.

The purpose of these Divisions was to backstop the Secretary General with briefing papers, suggested talking points etc., to represent him in chairing regular and ad hoc meetings, to help coordinate and resolve pending issues within the alliance and to carry out a variety of critical operational functions, i.e. the alliance's public relations, the coordination of NATO's military and nuclear planning, NATO security, as well as the administration of this whole large enterprise. The organization has, of course, undergone several major changes since my time, so that some of the things I will be describing may no longer be the same.

Q: Well, so how did it look then from your vantage point?

JAEGER: The Political Division in my time had three parts, the Political and Economic Directorates and a large Public Affairs Office headed by a German diplomat. Although I was nominally the across-the board DASG, my boss, ASG Fredo Dannenbring was particularly interested in Public Affairs, since he and his German colleague had a close relationship.

Q: So what did you actually do?

JAEGER: My political and economic staffs and I provided Lord Carrington, the Secretary General and his Deputy, with constant flows of briefing papers, talking points or recommendations on all the major issues before NATO to help him deal with all these complexities in chairing NATO Councils, making public statements, receiving high-level visitors, visiting NATO countries, etc..

To do all this my Political and Economic Divisions had six and five officers respectively, all seconded by NATO's member countries; a large enough staff in theory, but of very uneven quality, as is often the case in international organizations where some unqualified people get plum jobs because of their connections.

By far the best was my British political staffer, David Miller, a modest man of great ability, who could turn out polished memoranda on complex subjects at amazing speed. Also excellent was my French economist Jean-Claude Renaud, and the invariably reliable and good-natured German diplomat Guenther Seibert, There were others who were much less effective and some downright disastrous, like my otherwise charming Turkish friend who shall remain nameless, who spent his time smoking and looking at girlie magazines and produced virtually nothing. There were two even more serious staff problems, of which more later.

Q: You also chaired NATO's Political Committee, no?

JAEGER: That's right, that was the other half of my brief. The DASG traditionally chaired NATO's Political Committee, technically on behalf of the ASG, although in my time neither Ambassador Dannenbring, nor his successor Henning Wegener chose to do so. I was therefore de facto chairman, responsible for the Committee's effective operation.

Q: Who were the members and at what level?

JAEGER: Each of the then16 NATO member nations - whose delegations, actually quasi-Embassies, were all housed in the NATO Headquarter building - had a representative at the Political Counselor level. We met regularly twice a week for two or three hours and discussed a wide range of issues, some which we'll get into later.

Hierarchically, the Political Committee and the higher-ranking Military Committee were subsets of the NATO Council, which usually met weekly at the Ambassadorial level under the Secretary General's Chairmanship, and from time to time at the level of Heads of State or Foreign Ministers. The chairmen of the Political, Military Committees and other NATO organizations transmitted reports and studies prepared collectively through the Secretary General to the Council to indicate our collective judgments on a wide range of issues. In the case of NATO's Political Committee these ranged from the then rapidly evolving state of affairs in the Soviet Union, to various disarmament questions, the overall economic situation in the Soviet Bloc etc. The Political Committee also addressed, and when possible resolved alliance differences on a range of narrower issues, some of which were referred to us by the Council.

Q: What was your relationship, as an American diplomat, to the US Mission to NATO? Did that pose difficulties, since you could obviously be accused of bias?

JAEGER: I followed in the tradition of having a very limited relationship with the US Mission, since this strengthened my credibility as an independent international official. I therefore did not even read (and wasn't invited to read) the American cable traffic, except when they felt that it was important that I be informally shown some message or document, lest I misunderstand what they were about. By contrast, other senior people in the Secretariat were constantly spending time at their Missions reading traffic and being briefed. This included my boss, Ambassador Dannenbring, who would often spend half his mornings at the German Mission, and sometimes tried to nudge NATO papers and positions in directions favored by the Germans. Even so, I think my effort to be as independent as possible, was appreciated and occasionally paid real dividends.

Q: I have been wondering, why this DASG job, if I am right, is the highest traditionally American position in the NATO Secretariat?

JAEGER: This dates back to the decision that an American should be NATO's Supreme Allied Commander. Given the importance of this job, the US made major concessions on the civilian side. Apart from an influential but otherwise junior staffer in the Private Office, Marc Grossman during Lord Carrington's tenure, the DASG job is therefore the highest position at NATO Headquarters which Americans traditionally occupy.

Q: Does that weaken the American role in NATO?

JAEGER: I don't think so. The real power lies with the member nations and their Missions, among which the American Mission to NATO is clearly the first among equals.

Q: Who headed up the US Mission at that time?

JAEGER: David Abshire, a distinguished Reagan political appointee, who had founded the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and then returned to it after his tour at NATO. He was thoroughly equipped for the job and had a firm grasp of the full range of East-West, disarmament, as well as European and alliance questions, all of which were critical to NATO at that time.

a. The senior players

Q: Let's stay on this theme a bit and talk about some of the senior people you worked with, Dannenbring, Wegner, and, of course, Carrington and his team. What were they like and how was it working with them?

JAEGER: Fredo Dannenbring, a German career diplomat who had been Minister at their Embassy in Washington, was a friendly, but very careful and adaptable senior bureaucrat, who was easy to work with, but hardly inspiring. He was invariably polite and kind, gave me lots of scope and wrote enthusiastic efficiency reports. At the same time, he stayed closer to the German Mission where he kept his bureaucratic lifelines in good repair, which undoubtedly helped in obtaining other international jobs after his retirement. While his caution - he almost always wanted to know which way the wind was blowing before making major commitments - kept him out of trouble, he also paid a price. Carrington and his immediate staff, Brian Fall and Marc Grossman, saw him as a bit of a fuddy-duddy and made no secret of the fact that they wished for someone more energetic and courageous who would move more imaginatively on organizational and substantive issues.

In his successor, Henning Wegener, another German Ambassador, who arrived in October 1986 they got their wish. A brilliant, fast worker, Henning had studied in the United States, spoke English almost like a native, knew virtually everything about everything and if not would find out, had an extraordinary amount of energy and was determined to lead and push issues to solutions.

At the same time he was utterly Germanic, showed his frustrations and instinctively barked at people when he wanted to get things done. Being a multi-tasker, one of his less agreeable habits was to read papers, talk on the phone and carry on a conversation at the same time. Indeed that was the scene when I first met him in his office. Juggling his phone, he said, "You can start", continuing to read and talk to someone else. I decided we had to get this straight right away and told him, "Ambassador, I'm an American diplomat and your Deputy. I think it would be better if we spoke after you have finished reading and talking on the telephone." He looked startled, and then said, "Hah! So you have guts! I like that!"

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: Two days later he was just moving into his office and hung up some water color sketches. When I went in to talk to him about something (we had adjoining offices), he said, "George, come and look at my grandfather's water colors!" I looked at them, and was absolutely appalled. They were sketches of German submarines unmistakably sinking American tankers in World War I. I said, "Henning! These are German World War I paintings in which Americans have been killed, and you put this up in your office at NATO? The American Ambassador will be outraged when he comes here. Henning looked surprised and said: "Oh! Do you really think he'll be thin-skinned about that? It's so long ago!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: The next day they were gone.

Even so, after a few critical moments, we gradually built a close relationship based on sincere mutual respect and together got a great deal done. Everybody in the building came to respect Henning's drive and determination, but, since he didn't suffer fools or routine bureaucrats gladly, he also began offending people. After watching this for a while, I went in to see him one day, closed the door and said: "Henning. I must tell you, as your loyal deputy, that you are offending too many people and developing a reputation. How do you expect to get your next German Ambassadorship if you make so many enemies in so short a time?" He actually took this in good grace, looked at me and said, "Well, George, I can't help being a German and I know I behave like a German. But I have an idea. You sit next to me at these meetings, and when you think I am about to misbehave, kick me under the table and I will shut up."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: This Wegener-Jaeger coordinating system produced a distinct improvement, although I think his shins showed a certain amount of wear and tear as a result of our relationship!

Even so, we parted friends, to the extent that, when I was Diplomat-in-Residence at Middlebury College in my next assignment, I invited him to give a lecture. He produced one of his characteristically brilliant ad lib performances to a packed house of faculty and students, awed by his spectacular understanding of East-West affairs.

Q: I am sorry I missed that. How about Carrington, what was he like to work for?

JAEGER: He was an absolutely delightful, brilliant but somewhat short tempered man, full of energy and enormous wit, a quintessential representative of the British upper class, who conveyed the sense that running the world was a very normal thing for a fellow like him to do. Although he had had to resign as Foreign Secretary over the Falklands war, he was quite unbowed and vigorously, often impatiently led the NATO alliances through its many challenges.

Q: The old imperial tradition. What was he like to work for?

JAEGER: He set very high standards, was appreciative of good work but loved upstaging us. We were continually preparing memos or lengthy briefing books, sometimes covering fifteen or twenty major fast-moving issues for any one NATO meeting or trip, often with very short lead times. Normally, when he was pleased we would get little notes back thanking us. But there were exceptions. I particularly remember one 'briefing book meeting' in his office which he opened, with his briefing book firmly closed, saying, "Actually, I've just talked to Helmut Schmidt about this and he tells me so and so. Have you heard?", a somewhat rhetorical question since none of us could call up Helmut Schmidt and ask him what he thought about something. In short, he was very well informed and constantly kept in touch with all the major players.

Q: He was playing the game at all levels....

JAEGER: .. and letting us know it. Even so, he knew he had to be prepared for a constant stream of demanding events and relied on us to do the staff work in coordinating alliance views and providing the huge stream of paper necessary to keep him prepared and on track.

In this connection either the ASG or I would often attend his morning meetings, where he and his staff rapidly went over upcoming issues and events. He insisted on absolute confidentiality, although I always wondered how secure a setting he was working in, for all the superb 'Victoria and Albert' paintings on loan from the Museum on his walls. NATO Headquarters with sixteen in-house Missions was a porous place.

Q: You said the Secretary General had a staff of his own?

JAEGER: He had an absolutely first-rate, senior officer, Brian Fall seconded from the Foreign Office, who was the Director of the Private Office. Brian was Carrington's most immediate advisor, his eyes and ears, speechwriter and for practical purposes the supervisor of the international staff, although Carrington kept a close eye on it and made final staff and management decisions himself.

Urbane, fashionable, amusing and invariably poised, Brian was, at the same time, extraordinarily productive. To cite just one example, he awed me one evening when he produced a flawless ten-page speech for Carrington on two hours notice. He was, of course, on top of NATO's multiplicity of issues and often surprised me with the extent to which he followed them in detail. It was probably this ability to match wits with all comers and to keep NATO's many tigers sitting on their stools which made him less than popular, Ambassadors and other senior potentates often being thin-skinned creatures. Even so, he succeeded brilliantly in his first priority of serving Carrington effectively.

Q: Did you ever have any trouble with him?

JAEGER: Because of his barely concealed impatience with Fredo Dannenbring, he, at one point, tried to reorganize the Political Division which would have put it in effect under his direct control. We had a bit of a tussle over this, since I did not think this would work in the longer run. There was also some fuss over his initiative to have Murray Feshbach, the famous Georgetown Soviet and Russian health expert, appointed as Carrington's own Sovietologist-in-Residence. This caused some organizational confusion since the members of the Political Committee, which he attended, took their direction on these issues from their governments. Eventually, however, we worked it out, particularly after Wegener became ASG and robustly represented our interests. As I expected, Brian, now Sir Brian Fall, has gone on to a brilliant career, first as British High Commissioner in Canada and then as British Ambassador in Moscow.

Q: You mentioned a second more junior officer in the Private Office?

JAEGER: Yes, Marc Grossman, then a mid-level American Foreign Service officer, who later became Director General of the Foreign Service, and Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the Bush II administration. He was bright, flexible, manipulative and highly effective and, I thought, amused Carrington, because, as a personality, he was everything Carrington was not.

Q: Did you sometimes have a chance to work directly with Carrington?

JAEGER: Occasionally, when either Dannenbring or Wegener were unavailable, I would be asked to sit to the left of Carrington at NATO Councils, in the seat traditionally assigned to the ASG for Political Affairs. The idea was to be available if the Secretary General needed information, advice or some document. Although sometimes very important, these meetings were often less sexy than one might imagine, with Ambassadors "rabbiting on" endlessly, as Carrington would say, while he would be solemnly writing notes. As often as not, he would actually be composing limericks, which he would then pass to the ASGs to his right and left, making it look to the mystified Ambassadors as if he were soliciting comments on some critical question. While the "Ambos", as he called them, were trying not to watch too intently, one could, if one had the courage, write a counter limerick and pass it back to him, something along the lines "There was an Ambo from Greece, whose speeches would never cease, ..."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: ....that sort of thing.

I particularly remember one occasion when I was sitting next to him at a Council and the Greek Ambassador was again droning on about the latest Greek-Turkish incident, which we all knew about in detail. Carrington, who was a very kind and generous man, handed me a little note, which simply said, "George, I have just been thinking. It must be absolutely awful to have had to start at the bottom like you. I started as a Minister."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: I think I wrote back something less than brilliant like, "I am afraid that's right."

Q: Laughter. What was he like when things when wrong?

JAEGER: Carrington was almost invariably controlled and courteous, but could be sharp and demanding, and even loose his temper under pressure. I particularly remember a press conference at which he was to comment on a Ministerial Council Communiquï¿½, I think it was the Brussels Communiquï¿½ of December 1986. Because of some glitch, copies of the communiquï¿½ were not ready for distribution when Carrington appeared on the podium before a hundred or so journalists. When he realized that he was commenting on a text no one had seen or read, he had what these days might be called a public meltdown. He ended on the note that this would never happen again, which it didn't.

Q: Sounds like the sort of thing Henry would do.

JAEGER: Not really, because it happened rarely, and then only when he felt seriously let down. Carrington, unlike some very senior people I have met, was a genuinely big man. He understood the world at the highest levels, understood how to handle his peers and himself, knew what he wanted and was, at the same time, generous, thoughtful and kind. He helped me several times in difficult situations, which he could have delegated to his Deputy or staff, after we had discussed them in private. He and Lady Carrington frequently included Pat and myself and others on the international staff at elegant lunches at their residence and were invariably warm and gracious. To put it simply, it was an honor to serve under him.

b. The issues we worked on

Q: I know its hard to summarize the political work of the alliance over several years, but give us a sense of the issues you all were working on.

JAEGER: I think one could break this down into two parts, the many wide-ranging short-term projects I became involved in and the underlying issue, which the Political Committee and ultimately the whole alliance, worked on during this entire period, to whit: What was Gorbachev all about? Was he for real? And what did all this mean for NATO and the West?

Q: Let's start with a sampling of the more specific projects, OK?

JAEGER: To give a sense of the variety and range, when I arrived the NATO nations' positions on the CDE's (Conference on Disarmament in Europe) efforts to agree to Europe-wide confidence-building measures, were all over the place and badly bogged down in a Committee. I won't go into all the technical details and differences involved, but one of the first things I was asked to do was to try to get these differences resolved so that the NATO Council could send an agreed NATO guidance to the NATO reps who were urgently waiting for this in Stockholm. I am glad to say that after a few weeks of energetic work we succeeded.

Q: How did you actually do this?

JAEGER: Obviously international staff can't change national positions. I could, however, impart a sense of urgency, convene frequent meetings, reiterate Carrington's wish that we get this done pronto, and occasionally, when we had reached an impasse, suggest and, in side conversations with delegations, sell compromise language. It was invariably an untidy but necessary process.

I was soon in a similar position at NATO's Lisbon Ministerial in June 1985 when, in Dannenbring's unexpected absence, I found myself chairing the alliance's communiquï¿½ drafting committee, where after some tough bargaining, particularly on the paragraphs concerning INF deployment (Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces), from which Greece and Denmark abstained, agreement was hammered out. I always found it puzzling, particularly after negotiating texts like these, that the media were rarely inquisitive enough to find out where the fault lines had been and who, in the end, had yielded to whom.

The Brussels Ministerial in December 1986 involved another tense and difficult Communiquï¿½ negotiation, particularly with the French, at which I assisted the ASG and then took over for the final hours, when he was called away, and helped hammer out the agreement.

In retrospect, these communiquï¿½ drafting and major negotiating exercises were perhaps the most exciting part of this assignment. Meetings often started at 10 in the morning in the pious hope that agreement would be reached quickly. When by eight o'clock in the evening only partial progress had been made over minor differences, usually between the French on the one side and the British and the Americans on the other, and the rest splitting in various ways between, one might well ask what the ASG or I could do to bring the parties together.

Well, we had some important weapons. One was time itself. They all knew that sooner or later, they would have to agree to a text since failure to do so could not be concealed, and would be perceived as a crisis in the alliance. Many delegations, therefore, actually hoped that, at the critical point, which usually happened very late at night when people were exhausted and tempers frayed, we would suggest alternative language which could bridge the differences and become the basis for agreement. The test for us was whether we had sensed the limits of the conflicting positions carefully enough to be able to draft just the right few sentences which would produce consensus. It was tricky, and exciting, even though the end product, to the outsider, invariably sounded bland.

Q: This was a time when a whole gamut of east-west arms control negotiations were in play, and we had countered the Soviet SS-20 intermediate threat to Europe with our Pershings. How was this all dealt with in the Political Committee?

JAEGER: Incrementally, because, and this is important to stress, neither we nor the governments involved had the benefit of hindsight. So the process, by definition, was not like an academic seminar, but a constant groping, based on fragmentary information and developments, of trying to correctly understand.

One of Carrington's constant interests, in this connection, was to get people thinking and not to let the humdrum routine of big organization set the pace. So, besides our bi-weekly general discussions, in which delegations brought up and commented on current developments, I constantly pushed for and often got agreement to collectively prepare what turned out to be a longish series of papers; for example on the state and prospects for CSCE, on successive developments in the Warsaw Pact, which was showing strain, on the then on-going UN discussion on non-use of force and, again and again, on various aspects of the great changes which seemed to be underway in Moscow and their implications for the ongoing arms control talks, like MBFR, INF, etc.

The limiting factor, of course was, that this was not a free-wheeling discussion of intellectuals. Rather, each of the Political Committee's members spoke on instruction from his government, reported back what others had said and then, at the next meeting, hopefully took the process a step further.

So writing even fairly short substantive papers really meant coordinating the resources and views of sixteen governments, to the extent they were willing to share - a sometimes a tedious, frustrating process. I tried hard to stimulate the discussions, but was sometimes curtly reminded by my French representative, that the role of the Secretariat was to facilitate, not to express views or positions.

Q: What was the quality of the reps on the Political committee?

JAEGER: Well, it ranged from the outstanding to the mediocre and, in one case, the almost hopeless. Another limiting factor which may surprise you, is that governments did not always share their own best intelligence and analyses but often contributed bland and uninspired national drafts, which I then had to craft into a, hopefully, more incisive composite text. This was then circulated, commented on further tweaked and, sometimes after a whole series of meetings, finally approved.

Q: Why didn't NATO always get member countries' best political analyses?

JAEGER: I suspect because some Foreign offices were afraid of leaks and no one really wanted NATO's Political Committee, or even the NATO Council to become the intellectual nerve center of the alliance. Even so, Lord Carrington and many others again and again expressed their appreciation, privately and at the NATO Council, of the quality of work we were able to produce.

c. Is Gorby for real?

Q: The central question through this whole period, as you said, was the significance of what was happening in the Soviet Union and among its Eastern European satellites. Did the Political Committee or anyone in the NATO alliance get it right?

JAEGER: The issue came to the fore as soon as Gorbachev succeeded Chernenko, the last of the USSR's petrified dictators, in March 1985. Almost from the outset he launched tantalizing but fragmentary reforms. He began with vague proposals for economic reform, which became more programmatic as his efforts intensified to overcome the stagnation of the Brezhnev era; as well as startlingly new concepts like 'glasnost' and 'perestroika'. He bravely tackled the USSR's massive alcohol problem, with economically calamitous results and, to everyone's surprise, replaced Gromyko, who had been a nay-saying fixture on the world scene for twenty eight years, with the diplomatically inexperienced but more open minded Shevardnadze.

By February '86, glasnost' and 'perestroika' were, as you know, among the various reform ideas legitimized by the 27th Party Congress. The real bomb shell was the Chernobyl disaster, during which the Soviet hard-liners had blocked the flow of accurate information, which would have been so useful to minimize the health risks for the millions in eastern and western Europe who were likely to be affected by its radio-active cloud. Gorbachev publicly demanded 'glasnost' and so gave further credibility to his efforts at reform. By December of '86 , in another symbolically highly significant event, Andrei Sakharov was invited back to Moscow from his exile somewhere in Siberia. And by January '87 Gorbachev's program of major political reforms was adopted by a Central Committee plenum, including startling proposals like multi-candidate elections and the appointment of non-party members to government jobs.

At the same time the tension between Gorbachev and the old Stalinist hardliners, as well as with Boris Yeltsin, increased visibly, while Gorbachev rehabilitated some anti-Stalinists. It was not till November, a few months after I had left NATO, that he published his pathbreaking book 'Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World' which in a way put it all together.

Q: That's a fair summary of some of the key events on the domestic side. Can you also sketch out the foreign policy sequence to help set the other side of the stage.

JAEGER: The first thing everyone noticed was the change of style. Instead of the often bellicose negativity of previous Soviet rulers, Gorbachev tried to reduce tensions and improve relations with the West and managed to form good personal relationships with people like the Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl and even President Reagan. He took a major concrete step toward detente in April '86 when he suspended SS-20 deployment, (the massive mobile intermediate range missile deployment begun in the late '70's) to begin to resolve the intermediate-range nuclear weapons (INF) issues; and some months later proposed that both the US and USSR cut their nuclear armaments in half. He made his first trip abroad to France in October and then met President Reagan at the Geneva Summit in November. In January '87 he again astonished the international community when he proposed the complete elimination of INF systems in Europe and of all nuclear weapons by 2000. This led to the surprise agreement in principle at the Reykjavik summit with President Reagan in October to remove INF systems from Europe and to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 1996! Quick agreement foundered on Reagan's insistence on Star Wars (SDI), but the INF Treaty, with the most comprehensive verification and on-sight inspection system, was signed in the fall of '87.

Q: So that was the background. How did you all interpret it?

JAEGER: Looking at it in hindsight, when we know how the story actually came out, we missed by a mile. No one, neither governments nor any of the experts foresaw that Gorbachev would bring about the imminent demise and disintegration of the Soviet Union. The key would have been to ask whether, when push came to shove, Gorbachev would use force to preserve the Soviet system. since without coercion the unity of the Warsaw Pact and of the various components of the Soviet Union would simply and abruptly evaporate.

But that was not obvious or foreseeable as the Gorbachev story and its attended events in the satellites unfolded in a long series of discrete events. So, when you visualize the reps of NATO's sixteen governments sitting around a table twice a week, you have to take into account that they were trying to digest and integrate successive developments as they were occurring and could not foresee with any confidence how it was all going to play out. What's more, perceptions were complicated by the fact that Stalinist resistance to Gorbachev was not extinct and that Soviet negotiators in various fora were still putting forward positions which were a mixture of forward looking and traditional hardline Soviet positions, particularly their initial foot dragging on serious verification ....

Q: Which could to some extent reflect the three way political divisions in Moscow between Gorbachev, the hardliners and the radical, impatient reformers.

JAEGER: That's right. Moreover, one has to emphasize that at the time, and even today perhaps, we were not really sure as to the extent to which these were divisions between Gorbachev and others, or reflected conflicts within Gorbachev's own mind...

Q: ...that debate is still going on among Sovietologists as to the real answer to just these problems.

JAEGER: So, conventional opinion, that we were all stupid not to foresee the collapse of the USSR overlooks the context in which we were all working.

What's more military intelligence throughout much of this time was reporting continuing expansion of some Soviet military programs which complicated analysis. In retrospect these, of course, turned out to be the death rattles of the Soviet system, but at the time nobody could be quite sure. What's more, the SDI initiative, Reagan's Star Wars, complicated the picture, since the Soviets saw American missile defense then, as now, as a threat to their deterrent capabilities. Although that scuttled the idea of nuclear disarmament at Reykjavik, it had little bearing on the basic question, "Is Gorbachev for real?"

Q: Paradoxically it may have been President Reagan who first came to the conclusion that Gorbachev was for real, well before his immediate advisors and the foreign policy establishment were ready to accept that fact.

JAEGER: I think that's possible, and culminated in the extraordinary events at Reykjavik, where he was willing to go to the point of offering to agree to abolish all nuclear weapons, which sent the military of the entire alliance into total shock and was then promptly reversed.

Q: Reversed only because Gorbachev insisted on the U.S. giving up the SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) project, and Reagan packed up his briefcase and walked out of the meeting room at that.

JAEGER: To sum this, up, the Political Committee carefully followed and endlessly discussed the many twists and turns of the Gorbachev saga during these years. Draft conclusions were vigorously discussed, sent back to capitals, then rediscussed, a time consuming and emotionally wearing process of trying to integrate various governments' nuanced positions on these ongoing developments in the USSR without depriving our conclusions of all consistency.

As a result our reports were sometimes almost overtaken by the time we were able to reach agreement and send a text to the NATO Council. They were also often rather watered down, although, from time to time, we were able to produce texts that were received with appreciation by the NATO community. Even so, by the summer of '87 when I left, we had not wrung our way through to a clear appreciation of Gorbachev's historic significance and no one foresaw or was willing to predict that the Soviet Union was about to fall apart.

Q: Well, no one knew that, not even the Soviets! Getting back to the main issue, how did your thinking stack up against the popular argument that Ronald Reagan won the cold war simply by outspending the Russians on hardware and arms?

JAEGER: I think that greatly oversimplifies the fact in the end, as Kennan had expected, it was forty long years of containment, against which Moscow pushed and struggled, which eventually exhausted them, overstretched their system and led to their collapse.

The immediate cause of this denouement was their massive deployment of SS-20s, beginning in the late '70s, whose 1200 independently targetable nuclear warheads were meant to neutralize our ability to offset the USSR's massive conventional advantage in Europe by targeting our nuclear deterrent systems in Europe. The idea was to weaken European confidence in American reliability as strategic partners by raising the question in the European minds whether in a crisis we would really use our strategic nuclear missiles and bombers to defend Europe and so put America at risk. So the ultimate aim of the huge SS-20 deployment was to 'decouple' Europe politically and psychologically from the United States.

We regained the psychological advantage and won this great confrontation by persuading European parliaments, in the face of massive, ultimately in large part Communist-triggered demonstrations to permit American counter-deployments of Pershings and Tomahawks. As Gromyko is reported to have said, "the SS-20 was our last card." His debilitated and weary Soviet system had been stretched to the limit. They had no more resources left for another try. In retrospect it was the collapse of their SS-20 campaign, which in the end enabled Gorbachev to preach detente, as the only remaining viable alternative.

So rather than giving all the credit to President Reagan's big military budgets, important as they may have been, the real credit goes to George Kennan, all those who built the alliance system which contained the USSR and those who followed them.

d. Reaction to the Reykjavik summit.

Q: What was the reaction at NATO headquarters after the Reykjavik summit in the fall of '86 where there was almost an agreement on nuclear disarmament?

JAEGER: I think Carrington's opening statement to the December Ministerial Council, which I had drafted, summarizes the range of reactions at the time. "I suspect you will be concerned," he said, "about all the talk about the consequences of Reykjavik, public reactions that range from initial disappointment that no agreements have been signed, through excitement over the business which we're all about to open up, to a somewhat cautious reaction from some sectors of opinion which after years of clamoring for progress in arms control appear to be frightened by the prospects now that there is a chance of real hope."

Carrington then went on with his own reflections on this situation. "I think we should take care not to be too negative about the developments of Reykjavik even though in reality we may suspect that they would take much more time to refine, develop, and negotiate. Few of us had expected anything very substantial to emerge from this meeting, which after all was billed only as a summit to discuss a summit. That so many elements in a possibly far reaching .... negotiating package had emerged from President Reagan's conversation with General Secretary Gorbachev was, I think, a quite remarkable accomplishment. For after years of frustration, they opened up a broad new vision of arms control in which substantial reductions of strategic nuclear systems have become a real possibility."

"The vision", Carrington continued" was only a first step. The ideas developed at Reykjavik would evolve under expert study at Geneva and in allied consultations. More obviously still, much would depend in the final analysis on the Soviet Union's willingness to accept a degree of verification," and this was the heart of the matter, "which will be necessary to establish confidence."

Q: That being a problem in arms control from the very beginning.

JAEGER: That's right. Carrington then went to suggest that were the Soviets also to drop linking an INF (Intermediate-range nuclear force) agreement to SDI, Reagan's Star Wars project, the linkage which had led to the breakup at Reykjavik, a "satisfactory INF agreement might well be negotiated..." .

He even thought that it should not be "impossible to agree to a fifty percent reduction in strategic arms if the necessary modalities of their implication can be agreed," a rather daring statement given the resistance the Reykjavik discussion had generated in some US and allied quarters.

The Ministerial communiquï¿½ issued at the end of that meeting echoed many of these points, although it made no specific reference to Star Wars which clearly was not universally accepted in the alliance at the time.

Q: So NATO was on the whole sympathetic to drastic reductions?

JAEGER: In principle yes, although verifiable INF, MBFR and other arms control agreements were more immediate objectives. In the end, the key was the achievement of enduring stability and security in Europe.

Q: How did the media react to major statements like that and to NATO communiquï¿½s? Was there sophisticated coverage?

JAEGER: Neither the media nor the public was aware of the intensity of the negotiations which often went into the hammering out of communiquï¿½ texts. Opinions ranged from the French who were generally closest to the Russian side, to the Scandinavians, particularly the Danes, who wanted to see and hear no evil and usually pushed for conciliatory language, to the more sturdy allies, like the UK and Germany, who were more attuned to the strategic realities and tended more often to be on the US side; although as particular issues arose in many of these very complicated negotiations each nation, particularly Germany, which was on the front lines, reacted in accordance with how they thought they would be affected.

Delegations also split in other ways, for instance when anything Mediterranean was involved, you could expect the French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italians to work as a bloc. Turkey, whose military made a huge contribution on the southern flank, was usually helpful, except of course when Greece and Cyprus were concerned. It was a complex scene.

Q: Did the media seem to understand these differences?

JAEGER: Rarely. It was always a source of puzzlement to me how consistently the mobs of reporters who turned up at Ministerial Communiquï¿½ press conferences missed the issues which had involved the most difficult intra-NATO negotiations. Communiquï¿½s by definition make dull reading. The first reaction usually was, "Well, there's nothing new in this," when, in fact, there always was something new, particularly if you understood the issues and had followed them over time.

Q: One last question on this theme. Was George Shultz at this or other Ministerials you attended? What was he like?

JAEGER: Yes, several times. He was somebody I respected and admired greatly, a person of great directness, great honesty, who understood the importance of words, did not use them lightly, and who, throughout, had the respect of his professional partners in the diplomatic world.

At the Brussels Foreign Ministers meeting we just discussed he arrived visibly exhausted after an overnight flight. The Council was debating one of the major arms control issues, and, while Shultz was dozing off, Foreign Ministers were giving lengthy speeches suggesting lack of unanimity. When Carrington thought they had talked enough he turned to the Secretary of State and said: "Well George, what do you think?" Shultz bolted upright and with a strong voice simply said: "The United States of America is for this text." And that was the end of that, and they all fell in line.

Q: Well, Shultz was by profession a labor negotiator. It's a form of diplomacy.

JAEGER: It certainly showed.

e. The French at NATO

Q: You have talked about the French several times. De Gaulle had pulled them out of the military aspects of the Alliance but they remained on the NATO Council and continued to participate on the political side of the Alliance. How did they behave?

JAEGER: My years in Paris had not really prepared me for the frequent intractability and occasionally shocking rudeness of the French at NATO. The issue went far beyond their insistence that everything written and spoken had to be simultaneously available in French, an, in principle, reasonable demand; even though it would, at times, paralyze my Political Committee, when for some reason the French version of a text was temporarily unavailable - even though the personally very cultivated and polite French representative spoke almost perfect English. I gradually came to understand, that, the core objective of French policy was to assure that France be taken seriously as a major player, that they would not be perceived to buckle under Anglo-American pressure and really saw American influence at NATO as the obstacle to their assuming their rightful place as 'chairman' of the European world.

So this battle for French influence was carried on constantly, daily at many levels, although it was, in the first instance, a language question.

Q: I was going to ask you whether French and English were the languages in all NATO proceedings and how this actually worked?

JAEGER: All documents were issued in French and English. At Council and other meetings there was simultaneous translation, so that the French did not have to hear English and the English did not have to hear French. You have to visualize the NATO translation staff, inundated and sometimes overwhelmed by endless papers, doing its best to issue them on time in both languages. Inevitably there were mistakes, slip-ups and delays. So , if a Political Committee text was not issued simultaneously in French and English, or if there were French mistakes, or if something had been left out of the French version and didn't precisely match the English version, you could count on the French delegate spending ten minutes or more complaining how the French are again being discriminated against and, in more serious cases, threatening bureaucratic reprisals at higher levels. Needless to say there was also intense haggling and negotiation on the precise translation of certain phrases which were important substantively.

Q: How was all this reflected on the substantive level?

JAEGER: Substantively, French policy usually hewed a shade closer to Moscow than the rest, which Paris thought improved their leverage on both sides. The practical effect was that the French would often work to water down positions which they considered too harsh on the Soviet Union and its allies, sometimes with tough tactics in the political Committee and the Council. There was a degree of bitterness in the French delegation's attitude and behavior...

Q: Was this tactical or genuine?

JAEGER: Probably a mixture, but bitterness bordering on hostility nevertheless, which drove them to be competitive and difficult, particularly with the Americans. You get this determination that France must, at some point, get on top again, and that the Americans and their European partners were the obstacle.

All that said they never drove things to a critical rupture, although there were some very tough and nasty moments.

Q: Were any of these people whom you had known in Paris in the mid '70s?

JAEGER: It's interesting you should ask that. One of the young stars on the Quai d'Orsay's Policy Staff in Paris at that time, who had been one of Warren Zimmermann's interlocutors, was Benoit d'Aboville; a brilliant, powerful, enormously energetic young officer, a sort of junior Henry VIII type, clearly destined to become a star. By the mid-eighties d'Aboville had risen like a rocket and become the Quai's Deputy Undersecretary for Political Affairs, and so the boss of the French NATO delegation, among others. In that capacity he would show up at NATO Council meetings, and even at Communiquï¿½ negotiating sessions, when issues of special importance to Paris were in play.

His tactic, when faced with NATO majorities, as he usually was, was to become harsher and harsher, to the point of throwing absolutely inexcusable tantrums. I particularly remember one Council meeting, when d'Aboville strode into the room halfway through the meeting, got the French Ambassador out of his chair with a gesture which implied, "if you were doing your job I wouldn't have to come down here to do it for you," and berated the Council in angry and impolite terms. When he failed to move anyone, D'Aboville, stormed out, slammed the door behind him, and left all of us, including Lord Carrington, shocked and open-mouthed at this inexcusable behavior.

Q: Rather strange allies!

JAEGER: Well, he made enemies, and never made it to the top of French diplomacy. We met again in 1990 when he was French Consul General in New York - a plush but certainly not a very influential position - where he received me with open arms. We had a drink together and joked about the vigorous old days at NATO. Now all he was seeing was New York millionaires who liked to drink French wine.

Q: Did the French position at NATO draw any sympathy for other NATO members?

JAEGER: Yes, depending on the issue. The Spanish and Italian delegations often supported them, although they were sometimes ready to compromise after making their obeisance to Paris as a result of allied pressures applied elsewhere. You have to keep in mind that exchanges on the whole range of alliance issues were not only going on at NATO but also bilaterally across Europe and with us in Washington. So that, for example, an issue, blocked by whoever, might also be discussed bilaterally in Bonn and the Germans might then ask their people in relevant NATO countries to further push for compromise. When you visualize that this sort of thing was going on continually across the whole range of major and sometimes minor Embassies, you get a sense of the complexity and scope of alliance discussions, which ultimately reduced themselves to concrete decisions.

Q: Can you give me an example of how this might work, let's say, if one were the Political Counselor at the American NATO Mission?

JAEGER: Well, one would attend meetings and talk to people in the corridors and over lunch, until one had a pretty good fix on where the various countries stood on some particular issue, how much flexibility there was by whom and on what terms. One would then write a telegram to Washington, copied to all our Embassies in NATO countries....

Q: ....and they would then comment on that from their perspective...

JAEGER: Precisely. Depending on the question, still other Embassies, like Moscow, Geneva or Tokyo might be copied and contribute. As a result all our people in our major embassies would be as 'au courant' of almost everything that occurred at NATO as we were and be part of the discussion.

Q: Did Lord Carrington sometimes discuss specially sensitive matters with individual Ambassadors or more restricted groups than the NATO Council?

JAEGER: Frequently, since the Secretary General can't really serve as an intermediary or negotiator or discuss certain particularly sensitive or neuralgic issues when he is on the record as the impartial Chairman in the NATO Council.

f. The Greeks and Turks

Q: I would think that the ongoing quarrels of the Greeks and Turks, both NATO allies, would be one such subject requiring frequent handholding and intervention?

JAEGER: Exactly. That was even true for me as Chairman of the Political Committee. You would think that Gorbachev and disarmament would have taken up the majority of my time and effort. Not so. The most time consuming and frustrating issue continually plaguing us during these years was the Greek-Turkish conflict, which had crystallized over Cyprus but found practical expression in constant recriminations in our Committee and at the NATO Council over alleged air space or naval violations by one side or the other, or all sorts of other slights, real or imagined.

Obviously this took up a great deal of Committee and Council time, since protests were constantly registered by one side or the other, then rebutted at length, leading to long, emotional exchanges. Our main interest was that this bilateral bickering not become so ferocious as to sour the whole atmosphere or interfere with the main business of the alliance. So we would try to get the Greeks and the Turks to come in and register their grievances to us in private, rather than carrying on endlessly in the official NATO bodies.

To an extent that worked, although not without cost. I still remember the many, exhausting meetings with our passionate and inflexible Greek representative, followed by the resigned, sad looking Turk, each delivering or reinforcing protests and telling me diametrically different tales about the latest outrage committed by one side or the other. Even though we tried to provide sounding boards and to conciliate, the issue still bubbled up constantly in the NATO Council, and sometimes even at the Ministerial level, when NATO's Foreign Ministers convened.

Often, when the back and forth over some alleged incident went on too long, Carrington would call in the Greek and Turkish Ambassadors successively and ever so diplomatically suggest that they had made their points, and that NATO had to get on with its agenda. Even this didn't always work, since, when things got to a real boil, there were passionate long speeches in Council by the Greek Ambassador, and the otherwise kind and wise Turkish Ambassador would rise to remind the alliance that they were providing sixty divisions on the USSR's southern flank, and on one occasion, that there were Turkic speaking people all across Western and Central Asia who would someday make us all sorry that we were not taking the Turks and their concerns more seriously.

Q: Did the Kurdish and Armenian questions come up in your dealings with the Turks?

JAEGER: While these are important, they are not directly relevant to NATO's work and would just have added to the list of combustible inter-allied issues. Obviously everyone was aware of them as part of the background.

g. Halifax Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Q: Did you ever go the Foreign Ministers meetings when they were held elsewhere? Any interesting anecdotes?

JAEGER: Yes, to your first question, in Lisbon in '85 and in Halifax in May '86. At the Halifax Ministerial I was asked to be in charge of the advance team which makes sure that all the arrangements are in place.

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: We got there a few days before the meeting, checked into a huge barn of a hotel right on the harbor (now demolished), which had great views and lots of atmosphere and went about our preparations. All went well, until one of the NATO security people came to me and said, "Did you know that there is a Soviet merchant ship docked within a few hundred feet from this hotel, with quite a few antennas." I had somehow overlooked the dreary-looking, rusting hull, but now realized that it was indeed sprouting a remarkable number of antennas. So I phoned the Operations Center at the State Department, was patched through to the Pentagon's expert on Soviet intelligence ships and, bingo, had confirmation that our neighbor was a very powerful and well known member of that fraternity, clearly sent specially to Halifax to record our meeting. I was assured that they would easily be able to listen in to everything within, I think I remember, a half mile distance.

Q: Well, that was exciting and a challenge!

JAEGER: Oh yes! The question then was what to do. I first tried to get the Canadians to move the ship, to have the harbor master tell them to anchor 10 miles down the river or wherever. To my amazement the Canadians did not want to risk an incident, and worried over the possibility that they might have to use force if the Russians refused to move, which they were not prepared to do.

So I got word to George Shultz, who was underway to Halifax, outlined the situation and suggested that we only had two options, pressure the Canadians to move the ship or move the NATO Ministerial, unless we wanted to give a verbatim record of all the proceedings to the Russians on a silver platter. He chose the second option, and we moved the Ministerial on something like six hours notice to Government House, a safe distance away. I always wondered what the KGB folks on the ship thought when they realized they had made the trip to Canada for nothing.

h. NATO at war: Winter exercises

Q: We haven't yet discussed the military and their role at NATO?

JAEGER: The operational command, as you know, was and still is in Mons, some way outside of Brussels, the headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR), by tradition always an American four star general. Overall military policy questions are decided in NATO's Military Committee, chaired by a three star, whose members are normally two star officers. The Military Committee, like the Political Committee reports to the NATO Council and so is part of the Secretary General's domain.

Although the Political and Military Committees had a liaison mechanism our work tended to be discrete. I was occasionally invited to Mons for briefings and had good personal relations with a number of key people on the military side, notably Admiral Jonathan Howe, the Deputy Chairman of the Military Committee, later Chief, Allied Forces Southern Europe and Deputy Assistant to President George HW Bush for National Security Affairs; as well as with my old friend from Quebec, General Francois Richard, the Canadian Military Representative at NATO, who, a soldiers' soldier, found the high-level bureaucracy trying, in spite of all the perks.

The most gripping military exposure came in the annual Top Secret WINTEX exercises, an annual NATO wide war game, played as a paper exercise at NATO headquarters, but involving many real exercises by NATO units in the field. The scenario always began with a growing number of incidents suggesting that something unusual was afoot, building up to a crescendo that there was a possibility of Soviet attack. It was at that point that the actual exercise would start.

Q: Who were the players at the top level?

JAEGER: Everyone, first meeting separately in their respective committees, then jointly under Carrington's chairmanship in a specially equipped large conference room where new developments were displayed on a large screen. As it became clear that the Soviet armies were on the move, there were increasingly realistic discussions as to how the alliance should respond, since we theoretically had the whole gamut of western resources at our disposal. Real time mock decisions would be made involving military movements, preparedness, civil defense etc, and mock communiquï¿½s of increasing urgency and seriousness were drafted, agreed and issued, warning the Soviets to desist or face serious, in the end nuclear consequences. So over the three week period of the exercise, tension would gradually rise to a climax, until, after more and more serious incidents, the scenario would have Soviet armies actually cross into NATO territory.

At was at this point that the alliance was , of course, faced with the issue of nuclear use, since it was understood that our conventional forces were not sufficient to repel them or even to hold them at the Rhine. This meant that targets and the numbers and sizes of nuclear strikes had to picked, a wildly eerie exercise which brought home the utter seriousness of what we were facing and about to do. Even though everybody knew this was an exercise, we had all, by this time, been living in this imaginary scenario for over two weeks and, in this large room full of generals, admirals and diplomats, the crisis had become intensely real.

I had always naively assumed that the political people just give the go ahead, and that the military would do the rest. Actually, it makes a huge difference whether you, for example, decide on one minimal nuclear strike as a signal to the other side that we are serious, or whether we go blasting off with all barrels, precipitating global nuclear war.

Since the point was to get the Soviets to go home, the calibration of the responses at this stage were therefore crucial - what targets, how many kilotons, by what delivery means and for what reasons.

Q: Incidentally, I assume that the French were not involved in these exercises?

JAEGER: Besides their diplomatic representatives, the French always had a military observer, a French two star general, who sat on the Military Committee. So they were in effect participants whose views counted and observers at the same time.

Q: Oh, I see.

JAEGER: So these really chilling decisions had to be made, and made very rapidly, since the scenario would continue to show massive Soviet forward movement, accompanied by increasingly damaging sabotage operations across West Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Proposals would be made for a few low-kiloton strikes on air fields and other non-civilian targets, let's say, in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland, preceded by "final" warning messages to the Warsaw Pact.

What was riveting was that the ensuing rapid discussion did not only focus on the likely military effectiveness of this response, but on member countries' interest in and relations with the targeted countries. Thus the Germans would press vigorously for eliminating or reducing East German targets to a minimum, even though that's where the bulk of the Warsaw Pact forces were, and preferred strikes elsewhere among the Soviet satellites. The French diplomats wanted to go easy on the Poles, and so forth. But time pressure forced conclusions, since the Generals and Lord Carrington would force a decision lest we be too late. The exercise ended when, after further escalations and warnings, nuclear strikes were actually 'ordered' and the scenario, rather unrealistically, concluded that this had persuaded Moscow and its Allies to withdraw. It was hip hip, hurrah, and NATO wins again!

And so we would leave this confined world of nuclear horrors into the daylight of the 'real' world, blinking at the bright lights like the prisoners in Fidelio emerging from their prison, much more keenly aware of what a real showdown would involve if mutual deterrence failed.

One of the many unanswered questions was, whether in case of a real attack, governments would actually wait for NATO to have its meetings in a flimsy headquarters building susceptible to easy sabotage or attack.

i. Warsaw Pact espionage and other personnel problems

Q: Obviously war games like this would expose NATO's most secret nuclear capabilities and plans. Were people afraid of Soviet and Warsaw Pact espionage?

JAEGER: That's a fascinating question. Since a military alliance of, at the time, 16 nations involved thousands of people who to varying degrees were privy to security matters, the issue of espionage and Soviet or Warsaw Pact penetration was obviously on people's minds; although, psychologically, the normalcy of headquarters life tended to dull one's instincts.

NATO did have a security division under an American security expert, who presumably liaised with the alliance's security and intelligence services. Since he reported only to the Secretary General in private, it was hard to know how effective this was and what was going on. There were rumors from time to time that someone had been dismissed for security reasons, but that could have been for anything from alcoholism to more serious indiscretions. Most of the time they dealt with routine things like documents being left out at night, safes or doors being left unlocked, risky personal behavior, this kind of thing.

Q: Did people think that NATO was penetrated?

JAEGER: That, of course, was the real question, since KGB and other Warsaw pact agents had, very occasionally, been uncovered in the past. While this was the continuing worry, there was an interesting counter-theory that this might actually not be a bad thing. The message their spies would take back to Moscow would be that, yes, NATO really was committed to using its nuclear deterrent if attacked, thus reinforcing the deterrent message, but had no plans for its part to attack the Warsaw Pact, as Soviet propaganda had long claimed in describing NATO as an aggressive alliance.

Q: Were any Warsaw pact agents uncovered during your time there?

JAEGER: No, but some years after I had left NATO I learned to my amazement that Rainer Rupp, one of the people in the economic section of my Political Directorate had ben arrested and tried in Germany as the Warsaw pacts arguably most successful spy at NATO. I knew Rainer quite well. He was nondescript, retiring, did solid, but far from brilliant work, punctually handed in all his assignments, never drew attention to himself and volunteered to go on occasional trips to give speeches about the alliance or to attend conferences as our representative. I remember approving several of these trips, including an unusual one to Tokyo. Rainer had persuaded me on the grounds that NATO officials don't often get to Japan, and that it might be good thing for them to hear something about NATO. What none of us knew was that all this was simply the cover for his real work as a highly gifted and productive East German agent, who, I heard, also directed a network of other agents at NATO, including his wife who for a time worked as an assistant or a secretary for our Security Chief!

Q: How did they find out that he was a mole?

JAEGER: I don't know beyond the accounts I have found in researching this recently, one of which, from Wikipedia, is excerpted as follows:

" Born in East Germany, Rupp grew up in West Germany with strong leftist political leanings. In 1968, as a student in Mainz, work as a spy for the GDR was suggested to him, and he agreed out of conviction. He continued his studies in Brussels, was trained as a spy in East Berlin and was hired by NATO in 1977. He rose quickly in the ranks and provided photographs of some 10,000 pages to his bosses, including the precise location plans for the deployment of cruise missiles and Pershing II rockets in Western Europe, as well as the central MC 161 document (Cosmic Top Secret) which summarized the NATO strategy as well as NATO's analysis of the Warsaw pact and its intentions. These documents were promptly transferred to the KGB."

"He would photograph documents in his office, or take them home and photograph them in his wine cellar. He met contact persons all over Europe and received instructions via number stations, radio programs broadcasting messages encrypted as number sequences. His British wife knew about his activities and tried to persuade him to stop. He later said "At the time I did it, I believed it to be my moral duty."

"NATO did not have any knowledge of the existence of Topaz until GDR officer Heinz Busch defected in 1990. Busch however did not know the identity of Topaz. Several meetings of the secret services of a number of countries ensued with the aim of identifying Topaz, who took part in some of those meetings. With the help of GDR files that had fallen into the hands of the CIA after the dissolution of the GDR, Rupp was caught in 1993, while on vacation in Germany. He confessed and received a prison sentence of 12 years in 1994. He was released early in July 2000."

"In an interview for the Channel 4 programme '1983: The Brink of Apocalypse', about exercise Able Archer 83, broadcast in the UK on 5th January 2008, he said that he had transmitted the message that NATO was not launching a surprise nuclear attack against the USSR during the exercise to his KGB controllers. He did this by way of encoding a message on a device disguised as a calculator which then turned the message into a short electronic burst which could be transmitted to a set telephone number. He viewed this as vital to preventing a Soviet pre-emptive strike against NATO forces. It was also stated that he chose the code name TOPAZ himself. More can be learned about Rupp's shadowy history from www.rickhyatt.freeservers.com, where photos and other evidence is presented that he actually was "Turned" by the CIA in 1977. The net effect is that he was kicked upstairs to NATO economist so as to pass over false information to the KGB. Thereby, he got much less jail time than he would have otherwise."

In retrospect, our theory that credible Soviet awareness that NATO was not planning a first strike was actually useful to us, was borne out. Even so, its a strange experience to have had a top Warsaw Pact agent in your own office. As to the veracity of the claim on the cited web site that Rupp may have been a turned US agent, I have no idea.

Q: Did you ever run into any other spies in your career?

JAEGER: The only other one was the alleged spy Felix Bloch, the Vienna-born Foreign Service officer reportedly caught by the French in Paris passing a leather bag to a known Soviet agent. Pat and I had known him and his wife in Washington, where I had carpooled with him for a number of months. Stiff, punctiliously dressed and a bit haughty in bearing, Felix was highly competent but never much fun or a good sport.

Strangely, I almost became his successor as Deputy Chief of Mission In Vienna after my NATO assignment, where Felix had served under both Reagan's former Assistant Helene van Damm and Ronald Lauder. I went there for an interview and had dinner with Felix and his wife at their house in Doebling. He was friendly and reasonably outgoing as always and raised my antennas only by his almost manic pride in his vintage silver Mercedes, which stood spotlessly polished and gleaming in his garage.

As it turned out, Lauder and I didn't hit it off, since he seemed to be looking more for a PR man than a DCM.

Q: I remember the case well. Bloch was reported to have been into kinky sex, is that how he was entrapped?

JAEGER: That's the story. The most prevalent hypothesis is that he was blackmailed by the STASI, the East German Intelligence Service, over his sexual proclivities during an earlier tour in East Berlin, since, being an aristocratic type, he clearly detested communism and the Soviet system and would not have worked for them for ideological reasons. At any rate, the FBI never managed to make a case against him, since they couldn't prove what was in the leather bag. When last heard from he was driving a school bus in Georgia.

Curiously, in neither the Rupp nor the Bloch cases was I ever contacted by the FBI, although I obviously knew both well.

Q: What other memorable types cropped up during this assignment?

JAEGER: Although in no way related to espionage, my most difficult personnel problem at NATO involved an Italian diplomat, a tall, sad-looking, elegantly attired man, who was for a time head of my economic section. Although of a famous family, highly cultivated and well read, he embodied the challenges international staffing poses in organizations like NATO and the UN.

In brief, he arrived, each day, attended my staff meetings, passed on the assignments, closed his office door and often did nothing further until he left in the evening. When I gave him direct personal assignments, the product was almost always pedantically detailed and for all purposes useless. After some months his small staff rebelled and asked me to intervene, since they felt they were unfairly carrying his part of their sometimes heavy workload. When repeated efforts to motivate him failed to produce results, I took the fateful step of asking the NATO personnel system to transfer him to another job.

Then things got sticky. Within days the Italian Ambassador to NATO invited me to lunch at his residence, and after an elegant meal and expressions of admirations for America and myself, made it clear over coffee and cordials that, on this little matter of my Italian staffer, I needed to understand that his wife was related to the Foreign Minister, that he came from a distinguished family and was a very nice man, none of which I disputed. He then explained rather less subtly that I needed to reverse course, since otherwise my own career might suffer. The Mafia couldn't have done better.

What's more, when I didn't budge, he took the matter to Lord Carrington, and to the American Ambassador. Both called me in, and Carrington, in particular, listened very carefully. Shortly thereafter my Economic Section chief left NATO. What followed was, to me, the most incredible part of the story. He was given a major promotion and made Deputy Chief of the Italian Mission to the European Communities! If I am correctly informed he eventually rose to be an Italian Ambassador in two important Mediterranean countries. I hope, for their sake, that he made up in charm and diplomatic grace what he so sadly lacked in drive and motivation.

It all drove home the difficulties of international organizations whose staffs are seconded by governments. Although some are excellent, the whole is diluted by nepotism, as in this case, and by the tendency by others to slough of weaker people. Still, we somehow managed.

j. Speaking for NATO: Iceland, Istanbul and elsewhere

Q: On still another front, did you job involve much public relations work, since this was, if I remember correctly, part of the Political ASG's domain?

JAEGER: Yes, a great deal. Since there were only a few of us at the higher political levels in the NATO structure, I was continually being asked by our information people to give briefings to academic groups, members of Congress, media types and miscellaneous groups of students, interested organizations etc. There were often requests as well for speeches in other NATO countries, which offered opportunities for travel. It was a very enjoyable part of the work.

Q: Which ones stand out in your memory?

JAEGER: One was my trip to speak on NATO issues at Marmara University in Istanbul. Before me in the auditorium sat several solemn rows of Turkish generals, officials and professors, behind which were a crowd of journalists and students. I gave my talk and all went well until, toward the end of the question period, a student got up and asked how NATO managed to keep its 16 nations coordinated, working in lockstep.

I didn't think of the implications and gave him a very dumb answer: "Well," I said, "running NATO is a bit like it must have been running a Turkish harem,..."

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: "... obviously quite the wrong thing to say!

Q: And the Turks don't have a sense of humor, at least about harems.

JAEGER: That's right. But it seemed to have passed off all right and everybody said I gave a pretty good speech. So I went back to my hotel feeling generally pleased. However when I was leaving the next morning, the concierge said, "Oh sir, I think you should know there's a demonstration against you outside! Perhaps you would like to leave by another door? "

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: When I peaked through a curtain I saw Turkish ladies marching around before the entrance carrying large signs saying, "NATO opposed to women's liberation!" and various journalist and photographers recording the scene! Needless to say, I used the hotel's rear door!

When I got back to Brussels and attended the Secretary General's staff meeting the next meeting, Lord Carrington gave me a searching look and said, "I hear, George, that you had quite a good time in Istanbul!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: Which was as close to a reprimand as I ever got.

Q: Well you survived that scrape. Were there any others?

JAEGER: There was a NATO tradition that about once every 10 years one of the senior people would visit Iceland, the smallest member of the alliance, to call on people and give some talks. It being about time, and partly at the instigation of my very effective Icelandic staffer, Gunnar Palsson, I promoted the idea that I should make a 10-day trip to Iceland.

Q: Was Iceland a military member of NATO?

JAEGER: Its a bit of an anomaly. Iceland is a Charter member of the alliance, but has no military of its own, and, by agreement, is under US military protection.

Q: And we had the important naval listening post at Keflavik...

JAEGER: .. which enabled us to detect Soviet fleet movements into the Atlantic.

Q: So you made a NATO trip to Iceland?

JAEGER: I did and was received most warmly on my arrival. I made, not just the front page, but virtually the whole front page of the main newspaper with my first speech!

Q: Like in the Magdalene Islands in Quebec?

JAEGER: That's right. I was wined and dined and gave talks all around the island , including one at the very northern end of Iceland in a pleasant arctic port called Akureyri, the second city of Iceland, where there is a famous bird sanctuary nearby.

Q: How did your speeches go?

JAEGER: Well, I would give whatever the standard NATO briefing speech was, which went well, but found that the same question always popped up afterwards: "If there were war with the Soviet Union," they would ask, "would the NATO navies use nuclear weapons which would kill all of our fish?"

Nobody had prepared me for this! I had no idea how many fish an underwater nuclear blast would kill and in what radius. Moreover, if I gave the impression that the price of being a good ally would be the loss of their main industry, NATO in Iceland would be in serious trouble. So I had to think fast on my feet.

I assured them, making it up out of whole cloth, that while the nuclear weapons were deadly against Soviet naval vessels, they had a very limited effect on under water fish! Even in case of war the Icelandic fishery industry would therefore be perfectly all right. I promised, that I would of course tell the Secretary General of their concern and that we would do our best, in case of nuclear war, to make sure that not too many fish got killed!

In retrospect it was the only occasions in my career when I lied deliberately to avoid what might have been a significant NATO crisis. I apologize to Iceland!

k. Social Life in Embassy Central

Q: Before we move on, what was it like to live in Brussels?

JAEGER: Brussels was a delight. Although a large city, it has huge gardens and parks, and competes favorably with Paris as a culinary nirvana. What's more its close to Bruges, Ghent and other more or less preserved mediaeval towns and villages, is not far from the channel coast and near the great battlefields of Flanders where so much blood was spilled in the world wars.

I often went there and drove around among the myriad war cemeteries, which offer powerful lessons why statecraft must, above all else, creatively preserve the peace. I was specially moved by the famous battlefield at Vimy Ridge, where something like 200,000 men lost their lives in the course of World War I and 10000 Canadian casualties were incurred in a few days in their famous offensive in April 1917. I had represented the US on a number of drizzly Armistice Days in Quebec City when their memory was honored at the memorial below the Citadel.

On a lighter note, official entertaining in Brussels was intense, since so many countries have not one but two or three Embassies there, one accredited to Belgium, and others, as applicable, to NATO and the European Community. So, adding all the other invitations one tended to get in the higher levels at NATO from military colleagues and local contacts and friends, the amount of entertaining was sometimes overwhelming, since one tended to be on everybody's guest lists.

Q: Too much of a good thing.

JAEGER: Since waiters tended to come from only a few catering establishments, it got to the point where they would greet you at the door of whichever Embassy you happened to be invited to and say things like: " Messr. Jaeger, the Martini as usual, with just a little Vermouth?"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: So if one wasn't involved in the endless bickering between the Walloons and the Flemish, it was an atmosphere of delightful corruption!

I. Leaving Brussels

Q: All in all, it sounds like another rich and fascinating tour. When did you leave and what happened next?

JAEGER: My tour ended in the late spring of '87 and after a certain amount of back and forth with Senior Personnel I accepted an assignment as Diplomat-in-Residence at Middlebury College in Vermont. There had again been talk of a small African Embassy, but Christina, now a young adolescent lady, needed a bit of stability. So we thought it wisest not to go overseas again, but to do a state-side assignment and Middlebury clearly filled the bill.

We had a lovely send-off. Lord and Lady Carrington graciously gave us a splendid goodbye lunch at his manorial residence and Marcello Guidi, the kind, gentle, and rather unhappy Deputy Secretary General, who had become a friend, offered a large reception. It was a good feeling for Pat and myself that, despite occasional ups and downs, our work really had been appreciated. In the meantime I had also received a further promotion to Minister Counselor in the Senior Foreign Service. So it was with a sense of accomplishment that we headed home for, what turned out to be our last assignment in the Foreign Service.

2. Diplomat in Residence

Q: Before we talk about your life at Middlebury, tell us just a bit about the Department's Diplomat-in-Residence program and what it was meant to accomplish?

JAEGER: The idea of sending twenty or so senior American diplomats to colleges, universities, think tanks and a few similar institutions each year was not to propagandize current policy, but to show them that we are rational, and professionally highly competent people; and that it's wrong and simplistic to write us off as a bunch of flacks or cookie pushers or whatever other epithets people had for us. Put another way, it was an effort to establish credibility in the intellectual and academic worlds, which tends to be condescending toward the Foreign Service, even though my experience was that many of them avidly called on us at overseas posts and appreciated - and then used - the information and analysis we offered.

Although its a freebee for the institutions involved, the Diplomat in Residence program is prestigious since we, after all, are the practitioners who can offer courses and seminars based not only on theory but on experience.

Q: So how did make out at Middlebury?

JAEGER: After a day of meetings with at least a dozen professors, a not-too camouflaged way of finding out whether I 'would do', I was told by President Olin Robison that I had 'passed' with flying colors and, on in response to my question as to what he would like me to do, was told that could do or teach whatever I wanted.

So I organized several new courses and seminars, including an Introductory International Relations course, and brought a series of notable practitioners to campus, including my recent chief, Ambassador Henning Wegener. Olin Robison was surprised when I wanted to put Wegener into a 400 seat auditorium, and thought only a handful would show up for a German diplomat. I organized a dozen undergraduates to put up posters and hand bills in every dormitory, and when the evening came filled the place to overflowing. I should add that Henning gave a thoroughly rousing lecture, brought the house down, and was the talk of the campus for several days. In the course I gave on NATO, I used the same technique of leavening our political, organizational and strategic readings and discussion with a series of high-level guests from State, the Joint Chief's Staff and NATO Embassies in Washington. The result was a lively mix of theory, analysis and contact with top-flight people who were directly involved, to which the students responded enthusiastically.

In the course of my first year I noticed that, even though Middlebury was only a couple hours drive from the Canadian border, nobody had the slightest interest in Canada. So I went to Olin Robison and said, "Olin, I'd like to give a course about Quebec and Canada." He laughed and said "Be my guest, whatever you want to do! But nobody's going to come!"

Well, when it was announced as a seminar for the following winter term, the course was substantially oversubscribed and I had to turn people away. We did three weeks of intensive reading and daily seminar discussions, and concluded the course with an eight-day trip to Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City which I had prepared to show them the huge contrasts in perceptions in these three very different Canadian cities. They met everyone from the then Governor General of Canada, government Ministers, key journalists and our Embassy people in Ottawa; Jacques Parizeau, then teaching at the University of Montreal; CEOs of ALCAN (Canadian Aluminum) and other companies in Montreal; and leading Liberal and Parti Quï¿½bï¿½cois personalities in Quebec City. Our students' hard work paid off. They asked very intelligent questions and came away with a sharp new awareness of the nationalist passions they encountered, particularly in the Quebec part of the visit - an impression softened but not erased by the Quebec Carnival celebration which was the grand finale, at twenty five below zero! In short the course was a great success.

Q: Did you develop any ideas how students can be taught to think in policy terms, rather than just regurgitating facts?

JAEGER: Actually yes. In my second year (Olin had asked that I stay a second year) I required my seminar students to write option papers rather than the term papers they were accustomed to, following the format used in the Department. They called for a concise statement of the problem, a tight background summary and then a list of the actions that might be taken to deal with it, each with notations of probable benefits and costs. In real life the Secretary or other policy maker could then choose among them or ask for more ideas. The best students thrived on this. The rest, I am afraid, had a hard time. But then good policy makers are rare in colleges as they are in real life.

Q: That sounds like an interesting technique, which could usefully be adopted in various courses. Did you want to go on to another assignment after Middlebury?

JAEGER: The Department asked me if would be interested in becoming Director of Egyptian Affairs, which, given the situation in the Middle East, would have been a very challenging assignment, although one for which I felt genuinely unqualified. I pointed out that I was neither an Arabist nor had I ever served in the Middle East and so would have to begin at the bottom of the learning curve. Inflicting such a neophyte on the Ambassador and his staff in Cairo as their Washington interlocutor seemed unfair.

Moreover, after thirty four years in the Foreign Service, going off on new adventures would have meant more sacrifices for our family. Christina, now in her teens, loved her life at Kent School in Connecticut. And both Pat, who had for so long been such an enormous help and support, and I felt that it was time to begin to think a bit of ourselves. So after some reflection we decided that this was a good time to thank the Foreign Service for a wonderful career and very rich life, to build a house in Vermont and to live there happily ever after - which we have done.

Q: Well, that I think wraps up a fascinating career.

Part X. Reflections and Ruminations

1. Why a career Foreign Service?

Q: We talked about doing some general reflections about the Service, the Department and policy. Why don't we begin with the basic question why we should have a career Foreign Service?

JAEGER: Almost all states now have professional diplomatic services which evolved from the small aristocratic in-groups who advised rulers on external affairs and served as envoys to other states. The advantage is that a professional diplomatic service attracts bright and ambitious people, concentrates expertise about the foreign realm and nurtures policy-making and negotiating skills. Its disadvantage is that it can get ossified, rigid and traditional in its thinking, and, as is still the case in some counties, a reserve for otherwise unemployable offspring of important families. In the US, with its Presidential system, there is the additional problem that people around the White House and the National Security Council often reach different conclusions than the professionals and sideline the Service to have their way.

Q: Are there alternatives?

JAEGER: The New York Times a few years ago suggested the Service be replaced by an open market organization of the best and the brightest, competing for higher salaries, who would be more creative than the Foreign Service. I think that's a non-starter since a world-wide diplomatic service must have discipline to function and these hyper-competitive folks, while presumably brilliant and ambitious, would tend to cater to power to advance and would not necessarily have either the depth of background or judgment which is so important to make American foreign policy work.

Another, more conventional idea, is to simply fold the Foreign Service into the civil service system.

Q: How did the Foreign Service differ from the civil service model in your time?

JAEGER: Oh, it differs in important respects. First of all, it is much more selective. Getting into the Foreign Service, as you know, requires first a written exam which eliminates the majority of applicants, and then, at least in my time, a very demanding oral examination. So entrance requirements have traditionally been much steeper than those imposed on the civil service. While the exams have been greatly changed in recent years, and this has by many accounts reduced the selectivity of the process, the bar certainly does remain higher than is the case with average civil service appointees.

There are others difference. Foreign Service officers bind themselves to a discipline not required of civil service officers. If you're in the civil service and you're offered a job somewhere else, you are free to accept it or reject it. In the Foreign Service you can express your interest in positions when you're ready for transfer. Ultimately, however, the system can hold you to the commitment that, when they say, "Okay, the talking is over. You are going to such and such a place to do such and such a job," you are required to go, whether its overseas service at hardship posts or whatever.

The reason this is so important derives from the need to staff large numbers of Embassies and Consulates all over the world, as well as the State Department, out of a pool, in my time, of about 5,000 people. As in any game of blind man's buff, somebody will not get exactly what they wanted. But the needs of the service require some people some of the time to gracefully accept assignments they would not otherwise have chosen.

You could never do that with an all-civil service system, which, as a result, could not reliably staff all our overseas posts, particularly those where there are trying living conditions and physical risks. The Department's recent insistence that some FSOs go to Iraq to do local development work illustrates the point, even though there is validity, in this particular case, to the counter argument many raised that service under combat conditions was not part of their commitment and so should not be required of diplomats.

Q: Well, in this respect, the Foreign Service rather resembles the military?

JAEGER: Yes. Foreign Service discipline, at least as I experienced it, is somewhere between that of the civil and military service.

2. Preparation and Training.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the background and training which you would look for in a good Foreign Service officer.

JAEGER: This gets to the qualities we look for in first-rate FSO's. Many of the jobs in the Foreign Service necessarily require extensive language and area knowledge, sensitivity to other peoples and cultures, negotiating and administrative skills and that indefinable personal quality called judgment - which you build up by accretions of successive experiences and insights, by learning from mistakes made by yourself or others, by reading history, studying philosophy and perhaps religion, and which gradually coalesces into something that's hard to put your finger on, but which professionals very often are able to recognize quickly: The ability to synthesize very complex human, political, country or global situations and come up with perceptive assessments, not only of the news flash variety, but assessments and recommendations that will stand the test of time.

Q: In this respect, the Foreign Service must be distinct among all forms of government service.

JAEGER: I think so. I think one of the reasons for the wisdom of a career system which is fairly disciplined, rigorous, hard to get into, and makes considerable demands on people both intellectually, character-wise, and in terms of their willingness to serve, is that it provides the nation with a pool of not only highly knowledgeable, versatile, flexible and effective people, but also of people who have wisdom and strength of character to deal even with the most difficult situations.

Q: To what extent did the Foreign Service, in your experience, approach that ideal?

JAEGER: You know, when you look at Embassies you can always come up with horror stories. The Foreign Service as a group is not only composed of saints and exceptional people. All of us have feelings, ambition. We have ego. We are jealous of each other and sometimes resentful in a very competitive system. Administrative arrangements can go horribly wrong. Young officers who need development and training don't always respond the way one would have hoped they would. You see too many people bending to the prevailing winds, making lousy decisions and then you see the predictable consequences, usually involving suffering by others.

Even so, most of the time the Foreign Service serves the country well, at least to the extent its masters permit. I think the fact that it is rigorously selected, that it accepts the discipline of functioning in a hierarchy, of the assignment process and the up and out promotion system produces a quite exceptional group, whose quality is further enhanced by peer pressure and shared experience. We've had senior business executives on Foreign Service promotion boards - people who came to this with a bit of a chip on their shoulders, saying, "Well, you know, we come from industry where we have real people, and now we're going to take a look at these cookie pushers," - who have come away deeply impressed, saying they wished they had people of this quality in the industries they work in.

My conclusion is that, as has been the practice the last couple hundred years, nations are well served by having elite career diplomatic services: Elite, not in the sense of all of them coming from Harvard, Yale or Princeton - although they should not be excluded since they often produce very good people - but elite in the sense that they are carefully and demandingly screened; broadly educated; focused on developing their knowledge and character; and, most importantly, that they be people of great integrity and the ability to make soundly balanced, rather than ideologically motivated, judgments about very complex situations.

There is one last factor. Good judgement can only try to select the best among, what is usually, an array of poor or costly choices. There are journalists, academics, and others who look back on situations and say, "Well, they shouldn't have done it that way." The diplomat has to make his decisions at 9:25 in the morning at staff meeting or whenever he's asked by his Ambassador, the Under Secretary or whoever: "So what do we do about this?" At that point you have to function with the amount of knowledge that you have that day, that minute, the amount of strength you have in your soul, and the articulateness you can muster at the time.

The world is a fast-changing kaleidoscope, where the impingement of multiple factors on each other can produce outcomes which even the best of minds don't necessarily foresee. Paradoxically, good diplomats therefore also need to be able to absolve regret over situations where 'sound' judgments did not turn out as intended or expected. You learn over time that you and others can only do their utmost, but that even that is not always good enough in steering the boat through usually tricky and roiled waters.

3. Formal training.

Q: Right. Let's now turn to the formal training the Department provided in your time. How did they do?

JAEGER: Haphazardly. There were training courses, like the mid-career course, which provided some brief time for reading and reflection. Language training also offered limited country and area background study. And, the National War College, as we discussed, was an exceptional opportunity to fill in gaps - although here again much time was wasted on organizational briefings and rather too basic presentations. That said, some parts of it, and particularly the overseas trip at the end of the year were very valuable.

Still, when I think about it all in retrospect I am amazed how sketchily prepared I was for each of my assignments, and to what extent one was expected to 'hit the ground running' and to learn as one went along. One did, of course, meet with the country desks before going out and to read up on recent cable traffic. But the rest was left to ourselves. I went to Liberia without a clue as to the issues the US and the West were facing in Africa as the colonial period was coming to an end and no opportunity to reflect on the huge development issues which were facing us and our aid programs. I did of course, learn fast and remember reading and collecting a small library on African history and issues. But these were personal initiatives.

The same thing happened again and again, in all my overseas assignments. The Department largely relied on the fact that most of us were bright and highly motivated, and expected us to pick up fast enough to do a good job. Many did.

Q: In practical terms, how did this affect the quality of work?

JAEGER: The day-to-day work very little, since there is a causal continuity in the evolution of ongoing issues which one learns quickly. The real trouble can arise when long-term perspective is needed. Its there where the people with deeper understanding of history and culture are needed to avoid major mistakes. For instance, if our key people in Monrovia had had a more ingoing understanding of African tribal society the disasters caused by our road building projects and other inept AID and military initiatives might not have occurred. We have currently seen the implications of superficial historic and country knowledge in Iraq.

Q: Has this improved?

JAEGER: I think the new Foreign Service Institute does a better job, at least at the junior and middle levels. The real problems arise at senior levels, when people are promoted beyond their depth or when political appointees project their US-derived 'beliefs' and 'convictions' on foreign situations. The mistakes and bloodshed caused by the neo-cons and others at highest levels in the current Bush II administration starkly illustrate the point. Its at these top levels that lack of historic knowledge and sensitivity to the complexities of societies can do the most harm. As de Tocqueville said, our democracy is the best possible system except in the foreign policy domain, where wise answers are not necessarily provided by counting noses or by the people the process produces.

As a result, Presidents and their immediate advisors tend to look suspiciously at the Foreign Service, because its a knowledge and experience bank which doesn't always tow the party line.

4. Generalists versus Specialists

Q: There is a current trend in academia that you don't have to know much about a country in order to generalize about it and compare it with other countries that you don't know very much about either. It's the generalist driving out the specialist.

JAEGER: We, of course, do have specialists In the Foreign Service as well, people whose careers focus on consular work or administration, or who become political or economic or political-military experts on parts of the world like Europe, China, Russia or the Middle East. They will typically know the relevant languages and have served several times in assignments in their area of special experience abroad or in Washington. Even so, the 'pure' specialists, as they appear in the academic world, are rare, except for the civil servants who spend long periods on particular countries or issues as analysts in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. But even they are disappearing and often being replaced by more generalist Foreign Service officers.

So, while many of us do become specialists to a greater or lesser degree - in my case on the whole range of east-west issues during the Cold War - the system also tries hard to bring us along as generalists and managers. Most of us, in the course of our careers, were deliberately assigned to a wide range of functions and places with the idea that, when we reached more senior positions, the accumulation of experiences across countries, issues and cultures would hopefully produce a person of adequate breadth and depth to function wisely and effectively at that level.

Q: This seems to run counter to much contemporary American culture, which looks to instant expertise in public affairs, business etc.. It's this accumulation of wisdom, if you want to call it that, which the public doesn't fully appreciate.

JAEGER: That's right, and something Administrations over the last decades have not always appreciated.

5. Political Appointees

Q: In that connection, how does the practice of appointing political ambassadors square with everything you've been talking about?

JAEGER: That's a mixed bag. There are some political Ambassadors, like Rohatyn, Dillon or Admiral Crowe, who would be outstanding in any context. But problems frequently arise with non-career Ambassadors who are appointed to pay off political debts. That's how you get Finance Chairmen of Republican or Democratic Party committees and folks who made major financial contributions to campaigns. There has even been some sort of informal pay scale, if you give $200,000 you get this kind of an Embassy but for $400,000 you get a better one. For example, in Austria and Switzerland, even in Belgium and Holland and other second level European countries - not to mention Barbados...

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: ... and places like that - you tend to get successions of extremely forgettable people. They are usually not appreciated by the country where they are serving, since everybody knows how they got the job, and, in many cases, are often a cross for the Foreign Service staff who work under them.

All this impairs their effectiveness. An American Ambassador in Holland should not only be able to charm the Dutch but has to represent us on a vast range of difficult issues, from political-military matters on NATO's agenda, to European and east-west problems, tariffs and other economic controversies and the whole world-wide range of developments and crises which constantly arise. Political Ambassadors who don't have the necessary background or real interest in all this are clearly a handicap. My own experience, particularly in Canada and France, illustrates the point.

Q: Do other countries have this practice of appointing large numbers of political Ambassadorships?

JAEGER: Very few. It's creeping in to some extent in some services, but it's not viewed as a useful practice for the reasons we have discussed.

Q: Is there much entry into diplomatic positions below the ambassadorial level from outside the service?

JAEGER: In my time, Foreign Service positions were rather sacrosanct. While there was a significant number of political Ambassadorial appointments, the system as such remained protected. We now have interlopers at all levels of the Department. One way to do this is to work on a campaign, attract attention and end up with a job at the National Security Council or in one of the other cabinet level operations. You then get yourself moved to State on a temporary basis and eventually try to get a lateral appointment in the Foreign Service. Sometimes it works and sometimes not.

More insidious is the practice, recently more prevalent, of deliberately appointing some of these ideologically vetted people to secondary and middle-level jobs presumably to keep an eye on things and make sure the White House line is being followed. I even heard of a case of a very unprofessional Consul in one of the former Soviet Republics who was that sort of political appointee.

5. Promotions, assignments and the 'up-and-out system.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the Foreign Service promotion system. How does it work and how well?

JAEGER: The State Department has a class system, rather like the military. Currently it goes from Class Six to Class One, one being the highest. Then there is a bar, which, if you make it across, leads to the Senior Foreign Service, whose four further classes are, roughly speaking, comparable to the general officer ranks in the military. I got as far as Minister Counselor, which would correspond to two stars in the military.

People are promoted by selection boards who read everybody's annual efficiency reports in the class they are reviewing, efficiency reports having first been reviewed by each rater's immediate superior and then by a local committee of peers. So every effort is made to make them as fair as possible. The promotion boards then discuss and collegially 'rank order' people from the best to the last guy in the class, which determines who will be promoted first, second, third, fourth, and so on. State's administrative people then say, "Well, we can promote 63 people this year in this class." So the first 63 get promoted, and the guy who was 64th doesn't get promoted.

Q: Does failure to get promoted in a given year mean you never will be or you're tops for the next go around?

JAEGER: No, it has to be earned again. You're not tops automatically next time around, because the next board might look at you differently, and your next efficiency report might say you got worse or you got better, and so on.

In principle the system is quite fair. Where it's problems arise are as follows: First, the situations and tasks are very different in different places. How do you rate an officer who is number two in some minor African Consulate and does very well under the very difficult conditions there, which, however, may not require very broad issue knowledge or negotiating skills, as against somebody who is the Staff Assistant to the Undersecretary of State dealing only with the most important questions the country faces? Its obviously very difficult to make this kind of judgment in comparing officers, particularly when you are only reading written reports.

Secondly, there is a huge amount of verbal inflation.

Q: Has it got worse recently?

JAEGER: Perhaps. When I first entered the Service there was still a confidential section in efficiency reports which was not shown to the person being rated. So a superior could write you a very nice sounding efficiency report and then deflate it in the secret portion, This duplicitous system was changed in the late '50s or early '60s. Now an officer has the right to see and comment on his entire report.

This has, of course, created the new difficulty that it takes more character to write a blunt but honest report, i.e. "This officer is mediocre and is probably in the wrong job!"

Q: Laughter

JAEGER: How do you sustain an effective working relationship with somebody once resentment and insecurity is high, and everybody deals at arms length? So people tend to write inflated reports in which almost everybody gets a 'good' efficiency report. But the goats are then separated from the sheep by subtle gradations in language and innuendo. So promotion boards have to be very skilled at reading between the lines.

Q: Can you give an example?

JAEGER: Let's say if you write a report that says, "Joe is a very competent officer who's done a very good job. He has shown initiative several times and made significant progress in handling difficult situations...." the promotion board knows that they're not supposed to promote this guy. On the other hand, if you say, "This officer has culminated several years of brilliant performance with a series of feats which surpass expectations, he is long overdue for promotion and we strongly urge that he be promoted by this board," they also get the message.

Q: This must become particularly difficult when decisions are involved of separating marginal officers in the up-or-out system, no?

JAEGER: No doubt. I can't speak to how this is done currently. In my time people who were ranked in the bottom 5% of the Service three years in a row were subject to selection out. As a result of the case of an officer who committed suicide on being selected out before the age of fifty, because he and his family would have received no pension, the rule was amended to allow people to serve to the time of their pension eligibility. The more usual result of average performance is that officers are simply not promoted into the Senior Foreign Service, and then given a few more years to retirement.

Q: That sounds reasonable. How about assignments?

JAEGER: That's the most difficult area, since so much depends on current personnel needs, the corridor impression of the officer being assigned, personalities in the Bureau to which he or she is being assigned, and the extent to which string pulling is involved and effective. The formal system looks fair on the surface. There is now a 'bidding' process for jobs, before assignment decisions are made. In practice I, for one, never understood why I was given one assignment rather than another.

6. Reporting and the policymaking process

Q: A related question that has always intrigued me is, how well and how far the upper echelons of the foreign policy system respond to people who are reporting from the trenches, as you did throughout much or your career?

JAEGER: It differs. As a rule of thumb the less people at the highest levels are interested in the areas or issues one is working on the more likely it is that one can have considerable, sometimes unchallenged influence. Certainly desk officers and country directors, even Assistant Secretaries will oversee. But if suggestions from the field are reasonable and well argued and not too far out of the mainstream, there is a good likelihood they will prevail. Problems arise when one whistles into prevailing winds, particularly the jet streams blowing at high altitudes. For instance, remember my account of the Iranian desk's reaction when I expressed deep concern over what I had seen in Iran on my War College trip. He completely agreed, but was unable to prevent the crisis because Nixon and his staff were committed to a policy of excessive support for the Shah.

So, yes. All the thousands of telegrams which pour into Washington daily from posts around the world do have effect and many are followed up on and implemented. But its a complex, obstacle-studded process, in which the fate of issues depends on the political configuration surrounding each one in the foreign policy bureaucracy. A highly respected or politically powerful Ambassador can help, although only so often, since they too cannot outrun their credit with their patrons.

Q: Can you try to describe how it works in somewhat greater detail?

JAEGER: As we said, the less important the issue, the easier it all works, while issues which are at the center of public, White House, or '7th floor' interest, usually bring the entire system into play. For example, on important East-West issues, major arms control questions etc., the full foreign and security machinery would jump into action and feed into a central decision-making process.

Q: You mean all the other agencies as well as the State Department?

JAEGER: All the relevant agencies and all interested parts and levels of the Department. For example, if our Mutual Balanced Force Reduction Mission in Vienna sent in recommendations for the next phase of the talks you would get Pentagon reactions. You would have the arms control experts in ACDA feeding in analyses and recommendations. There might be Policy Planning staff comments, and people in State, as well as NSC concerned with arms control and in East-West relations would all feed into the process.

The inputs would then be digested into options papers, considered and perhaps revised at Department and interdepartmental meetings, and then shaped into final recommendations and options for decision by the Secretary or perhaps the President.

Q: Might it be debated in the National Security Council?

JAEGER: Certainly by the NSC staffs and their interdepartmental committee system. The National Security Council still meets occasionally, but decisions are now usually made in NSC working groups and, when appropriate, ratified by the NSC. As a practical matter, more and more power has in recent decades drifted to the NSC staff under the National Security Advisor, as well as to the Secretaries of Defense and State.

Q: OK. But now back to my original question: How well are the views of the diplomatic people in the field absorbed and incorporated, even into the State Department's positions?

JAEGER: Embassy reporting is automatically distributed to all interested offices and agencies at all appropriate levels. So everybody gets it. The problem is not distribution, which works well, but excessive volume. Certainly, desk officers follow Embassy reporting very carefully and incorporate Embassy views in recommendations to their superiors. But even they, responsible for only one country, set of issues or region, often declare themselves overwhelmed by the volume of traffic and find it hard to keep up with the details.

Q: Desk officers have usually served in the countries they deal with, no?

JAEGER: Usually, but not always, as my proposed assignment to run the Egyptian desk illustrates. Normally they know their country or area well. They also know the people who are reporting from their Mission, their predilections, strengths and weaknesses. So they have a feeling for what makes sense and what not. On the other hand, they do reflect the Washington perspective and understand the attitudes in the building on various issues. As a result, if an Embassy swims against the tide, the desk officer sometimes tries to head them off and inflects reporting. Embassies, on the other hand, inevitably tend to take on the coloration of the country to which they are accredited to some extent.

Q: Localitis, I think its called.

JAEGER: That's right, and its a necessary part of the dialogue, since the Embassy has the more intense local exposure.

Q: So, apart from the complexity of the coordinating mechanisms, what is the biggest impediment to good communication?

JAEGER: The vast volume of reporting, particularly at the Department's higher levels, where only the most important messages are read in full and a few of the next most important included in daily summaries. As a result, a great deal of the nuance is lost, which is often critical. Attempts are made again and again to limit reporting. But as long as efficiency reports place emphasis on officers' reporting performance, and our code rooms can receive and transmit almost unlimited amounts of coded paper, reporting volume is not likely to shrink. So it's a bit of a dilemma.

7. Relations with other agencies

Q: Let's go to the question of people from other Departments working in Embassies. We now have a raft of attachï¿½s representing all the different parts of the US government which have some interest in foreign affairs. How effective is the cooperation?

JAEGER: State relations are no longer confined to political and military questions, if they ever were. So Embassies have increasingly become miniature replicas of the parts of governments who have foreign interests or responsibilities. The trick is how make them all sing from the same page.

By Presidential directives the Ambassador is, of course, the conductor, the centralizing authority who is supposed to supervise and be privy to everything they do. In practice this presents problems since many of them have their own secure communications, or, if not, can get directives from their agency in Washington by phone or mail. In any case, Embassies have become so large, that neither the Ambassador nor even the Deputy Chief of Mission can always stay abreast of everything. The problems tend to get worse when there is a weak Ambassador, or one who doesn't have much clout in Washington.

Normally, the public relations people, formerly USIA, the commercial attachï¿½s who deal with the foreign business community, the agricultural attachï¿½s who report on crops and issues affecting agricultural tariffs etc., the Treasury attachï¿½s who coordinate monetary policies, present few problems beyond the exigencies of coordination, which usually happens routinely and effectively at staff meetings.

The military and intelligence agencies can be a challenge, and have been known to do end runs or go off on uncoordinated operations of their own. This has been specially troublesome in recent years, when Special Forces or intelligence teams with a charter to go after 'terrorists' have been known to run covert ops without Embassy knowledge or approval. This. I believe, was rare in my time, since both Station Chiefs and Military Attachï¿½s were normally careful to keep the Ambassador informed if there is risk of some operation going wrong.

Q: Are the Military attachï¿½s sometimes telling the Pentagon more than they tell their own Ambassador?

JAEGER: To what extent people with separate communications systems and separate clienteles in Washington, in fact, share all their knowledge is debatable. Certainly these channels are often used to get their agencies to push for action in Washington when they can't persuade the Ambassador or his staffs on the ground. Although in most Embassies the relations between the various components are good and sometimes excellent, there are situations where this was not the case and produced an atmosphere of distrust.

Indeed there have been periodic crises in which Ambassadors and the State Department have gone to the President and tried to get reaffirmation in writing that the Ambassador is the President's representative and therefore entitled to have full knowledge of what happens in the framework of his embassy.

Q: How well were the non-diplomatic attachï¿½s generally prepared to deal in the given foreign culture?

JAEGER: That too varied widely. There were many attachï¿½s I knew who were superb,. There were others who nobody should have ever thought of sending to an Embassy. The CIA is hardest to judge in this respect. They have their own culture, their own very difficult tasks to perform, sometimes very dangerous tasks. By and large, the Chiefs of Station I knew, like Ray Cline in Bonn, were outstanding people, who were highly cooperative, highly experienced, and all-around major assets. But this is not universally the case.

8. The Foreign Service's standing with the public and the political establishment

Q: Another key issue which affects policy is the standing of the Foreign Service and the Department in the eyes of the political establishment and the American public.

JAEGER: There is a strange ambivalence. On the one hand, average people are respectful and sincerely interested when they learn that one is or was a member of the Foreign Service. On the other, this usually does not translate into effective political clout - even less so today than in the early Cold War years, when the Service was still dominated by then highly respected members of the east coast establishment. People like Kennan, Bohlen, David Bruce, Butterworth, McCloy and others of that caliber were very influential.

In more recent decades successive administrations have increasingly turned the Service into an implementing agency, rather than a primary source of foreign policy advice. Politicians who win high office and have strong views don't want to be told by Foreign Service experts that they are off the mark and need to redirect their shot.

There has also been a price paid as a result of the steadily increasing efforts to 'democratize" the Foreign Service - implied quotas for woman and people from various minorities - as well as the upgrading to 'Foreign Service' status of vast numbers of bureaucrats in AID, USIA and other agencies. I don't argue against the principle that the Foreign Service should be open to all without prejudice, assuming high standards are maintained. Nor do I question that all who work in foreign affairs, at home and abroad, should have appropriate status. That said, its also true that these leveling trends have tended to leave the impression that the Foreign Service is just another group of government employees and so has weakened rather then enhanced its already limited domestic prestige and influence. What used to be perceived as the diplomatic service of the United States has become a crowd of people doing all sorts of things in foreign affairs.

Add to that that the Foreign Service has never been good ad promoting and advertising itself, and you get a situation where most Americans have a much higher regard for our military, which they generally admire and trust, than our 'cookie-pushing', 'striped pants' Foreign Service, assuming even that they have the vaguest idea of what it is and does. The proof of the pudding is the relative ease with which vast Pentagon budgets are passed by Congress as compared to the frequently uphill fights for necessary minor increases at State.

Q: Has the rise of the military as a major foreign policy player contributed to this?

JAEGER: Unquestionably. We tend to be impatient with ambiguity and complex long-term policies. Diplomacy is associated by many with pussy-footing and fudging. Military action, by contrast, is direct and simple to understand. Moreover, as Chris Hedges has written so eloquently (in his book "War is the Force which gives us Meaning", an essay on the Bosnian conflicts, and in Salon.com and elsewhere on Iraq), people tend to idealize war before and in the early phases of conflicts. The full horror and disillusionment only sets in afterwards.

9. National policy making and its problems.

Q: The Secretary of State used to be the President's principal advisor on foreign policy issues. To what extent has the greatly increased size and role of the National Security Council contributed to lessening the role of State and the Foreign Service?

JAEGER: A great deal. When I think back to the situation under Truman and Acheson, the NSC was a cabinet committee of those Department heads involved in foreign affairs, whose secretariat - as I learned when I almost went to work there - consisted of only a handful of people.

Today the NSC is an organization of hundreds, coordinating and overseeing State, Defense, the intelligence world etc. As a result most of the really influential jobs are there rather than in the Department. Although State makes inputs at all levels and the Secretary can, to an extent, still dominate the situation, most 'policy' these days is produced in the complex interdepartmental process which the NSC oversees.

Besides producing compromises which may or may not be the best policies to address actual challenges the country faces, it increases the voice of Defense and others to a much greater extent than in the past. Rumsfeld's ability to dominate the system during his time as Secretary of Defense illustrates the point.

10. Ideas for Foreign Policy Reform

Q: Isn't that inevitable, given the scope and complexity of America's vastly expanded foreign and security responsibilities?

JAEGER: Yes and no. Certainly coordinating the nitty-gritty of policy implementation across the foreign affairs and military agencies requires a committee system at the White House level. However, the definition of sound underlying policies has to be based on a much more detached assessment of America's and the world's long-term interests and a prudent choice of means to achieve these ends - means which do not exceed our financial, physical and moral capacities.

Both Louis Halle and Charles Burton Marshall, of Acheson's Policy Planning Staff, wrote brilliantly about this most fundamental aspect of sound policy making in their books on 'Civilization and Foreign Policy' and 'The Limits of Foreign Policy' respectively.

Q: So you would argue for basic reform of our policy making process?

JAEGER: Yes, very much so. They key is to sanitize the process as much as possible from the huge bureaucratic pressures the various foreign affairs and security agencies exert to protect their turfs and perceived interests. Making national policy the common denominator of what all these major players can agree on, as we do now in most areas, has produced and is bound to continue to produce, results which are often misaligned and out of sync with evolving world realities.

Q: What could be done about this?

JAEGER: I think the various recent studies on State Department reorganization make some valid points, that there's a need for more security, need for modernization, need for better communication, need for better technology, bigger budgets, and what have you.

I, myself, think that a much more radical reorganization of foreign affairs and policy making in this country is necessary.

The key is to find a way to focus the country's efforts on the right, rather than on illusory or misleading ends, and then select appropriate means to get there. This is extremely hard to do in a democracy. Even so it has become vital that we stop chasing the wrong rabbits and achieve some accuracy in focusing our efforts. My preference would be a return to something like the Acheson Policy Planning Staff of a dozen or so, otherwise disinterested people, selected for their wisdom, breadth of experience and historic understanding. Their task would be to look at the world situation dispassionately and to define the most critical challenges facing us, challenges whose management and solution would then, if the President approved, become the ends of policy. Vague formulations like the 'war on terror' or the spreading of 'democracy' obviously wouldn't make the cut.

Once agreed - the list would be reviewed periodically - the next step would be the hammering out of effective long-term means which neither exceeded our material or moral resources. This is clearly a tall order. Even so, the one time it was tried in the early post-World War II years, it produced much better long-term results than we have had more recently.

Q: Seat of the pants question: What do you think such a list of national ends might look like in this year 2008, around which national foreign and security policy might be built?

JAEGER: I would guess they would come up with a list of overriding national interests, which would prioritize the ends of policy, along lines like these:

- Ameliorating the dangerous disparities between rich and poor nations, whichlead to regional instability and terrorism.

Q: Well, that sounds sensible. Where would such a policy staff be located, in the Department or the White House?

JAEGER: I think the ideal, but probably unrealistic approach, would be to give it a special status which would insure its independence of judgement, like the Federal Reserve. In real life they would probably have to be part of the White House, although it would be critically important to insulate them as much as possible from political and departmental pressures. Even State's Policy Planning Staff could serve the purpose under the right leadership, assuming a willingness by Presidents and Secretaries of State to use them wisely.

As a practical matter it is, of course, quite unlikely that any of this will come to pass.

Q: How would implementation be organized?

JAEGER: Eisenhower created the Operations Coordinating Board to implement NSC decisions. A separate interdepartmental mechanism to coordinate implementation of policy along these lines would clearly be necessary. The National Security Advisor's role, heading a much reduced, high-quality NSC staff, might be to make sure that that the pace and quality of implementation met policy needs. In short, he or she would be the bridge between our definition of national ends and how we get there.

Q: Well, that's a creative set of ideas. How would all this affect State and the Foreign Service?

JAEGER: I think it would simplify the process. Nothing dramatic would change on the reporting side, although I think making reporting more concise and quantitatively reduced would help a lot. State would be, as it is to a large extent already, the diplomatic implementing agency. It would translate national policy goals into more specific objectives aimed at regions and countries, and make sure that progress is made.

The great difference from the situation prevailing today would be that our national interests and the ends of policy would to a much greater degree correspond to the realities facing us, rather than distorting the picture by giving overriding priority to ideologically or politically determined ends, or focusing on one problem, i.e. the Middle East, at the expense of the rest.

Q: So there are better ways to do foreign policy than following popular predilections?

JAEGER: That's what de Tocqueville argued, and I think he was right. I have always thought that the methodology developed by some members of the Acheson Policy Planning staff was the key for not straying off the road. The notion of starting with the definition of national ends and then examining the appropriateness of means is, I think, the only sound way of hewing realistically to the challenges which are really out there. Much, of course, depends on the capacity, scope and wisdom of the planners and of the willingness of their masters to listen to their advice. In this regard the Truman-Acheson relationship too sets the example, though it was not always perfect.

Q: So what you are really saying is that there is a major correlation between how we organize foreign policy-making and our ability to deal with the whole range of challenges facing us?

JAEGER: Exactly. The current system is haphazard and flawed. It neither defines our national problems dispassionately, nor correlates implementation accordingly, as reflected in the disproportionate role currently played by our military. In a dramatically changed world facing enormous new collective problems, we need ingoing reform.

11. Summing up: The key is Education!

Q: At the end of this long and fascinating discussion let me ask this: Looking back on your career was it worth while, would you do it over again and what do you think is needed most to provide this country with first-rate people managing our foreign affairs?

JAEGER: On the first two questions an unqualified 'yes'. It was an enormously rewarding experience to play a small part in our successful operation of containing the Soviet Union. We really were the 'city on the hill' confronting a deeply flawed, dictatorial system whose destructive ideology, if imposed in Europe and elsewhere, would have made for a very somber world.

Revisionists argue that we could have reached a modus vivendi with the USSR. We certainly did make major progress on arms control. Even so, it was a system held together by fear, fear of military force, torture and deportation, which only collapsed when Gorbachev refused to use force to continue to hold it together, as had been done in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in earlier times. Containment took forty-some years to bring Moscow to this point. It was an enormous success, not only because we won, but because we won without using major force and wide-spread war and destruction.

As to what we need to do to provide America with "a sufficiency of men (or women) to meet the problems of the day", as Burt Marshall was apt to say, the answer, I think is much better and much deeper education.

I sometimes told students in recent years that diplomacy is so terribly important because it's about blood, it's about human blood. You make little decisions in meetings, you give advice in memoranda and in telegrams, you give or deny a visa. If the decisions are wrong, somebody pays for it with their property, their freedom or, in some cases, their lives. Of course, you walk away and go to lunch. In the short term you are untouchable. But the moral responsibility of dealing unsoundly with major and even minor international issues, is very large.

To get it right, our schools, at every level, need to teach history, not just the flag-waving kind, but the starker reality: That nations and civilizations rise and fail, usually because of their own short-sighted behavior; that failure isn't pretty; and that carrying on at others' expense, as we did during slavery and the extermination of our Indians, is really worse. We are still doing it today, for instance, by keeping agricultural prices up and disadvantaging cheaper producers in some of the poorest countries of the world.

So our students need to learn from the past, a discipline our schools have watered down almost to extinction.

They must also regain a moral compass by reflecting on philosophy and religion and the whole meaning of life; since the unjustified use of force, most recently in Iraq, abuse and resort to torture, or our broad indifference to the suffering of the world's poor and underprivileged, can only be put in correct perspective if students are taught to recognize the value and dignity of all human life - an idea which was still central to our founding fathers when they asserted that "..all men were created equal..".

Lastly, there is a lack of rigor, almost an epidemic of frequent sloppy thinking. We are moving into harder times, where global warming and its related crises will require us to tighten belts and be much sturdier than has been necessary recently. Whether this and future generations will meet that test remains to be seen, but will determine whether we and the rest of the world will succeed or fail. The stakes are very high.

Q: I think that appropriately ends this interview. Warm thanks.

End of interview