

HAVEN N. WEBB

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Webb]

Q: Today is September 16, 2002. This is an interview with Haven N. Webb. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy, and this is being done on behalf of Association for Diplomatic Studies. You go by Haven don't you?

WEBB: Yes.

Q: Haven, to let people know sort of who you are and where you are coming from, let's sort of go back. Could you tell me when and where you were born and a bit about your family?

WEBB: Yes, I was born in Memphis, Tennessee on, believe it or not, Christmas Day 1932. My middle name meant Christmas, Noel. I thought I was born in a southern family frankly, although it turns out that a number of my relatives were actually Yankees. My mother's family were ministers from Gerald, Indiana that came south in the Civil War. I think my great grandfather was the only one who didn't go back. My father's grandfather who was the president of Mississippi College which I think was possibly the first college in the state of Mississippi and actually a major school. It is really a university now. I certainly thought he was a good southern gentleman. It turned out he was from upstate New York and was the first member of the family to marry a lady from Boston, as I did. My grandmother's folks were from somewhere in middle Tennessee. My great grandfather who died on VJ night in 1945, actually barely remembered Yankee troops bivouacking on their farms southeast of Nashville. They were the last members of the farming community that I ever knew. Like most Americans, if you go far back enough in this country you will find a farmer.

Q: Tennessee has been in the middle of things. In the Civil War, it was not quite in and not quite out of the Confederacy or the Union. How did the family align at that time? Were you brought up sort of in the southern tradition would you say?

WEBB: No, absolutely opposite of Margaret Mitchell. I grew up with no family comment about the Civil War, virtually no knowledge. The family was not interested in genealogy, although I have friends that are always trying to bribe me to get interested in it. I don't really know. My people were really very apolitical to a very considerable degree, you know. Certainly my parents who I suppose you would call lower middle class in any town, they were derived from people of larger expectations. They always voted the straight Democratic ticket. My father had never understood this, and I never asked him about it, but in Memphis which John Gunther wrote his series of Inside USA and all of that stuff, claimed that Memphis had the only big city boss, DH Crump who actually in many ways was beneficial. The one time he was up on corruption charges, after the most intense study of all the financial books of the city, they finally concluded as best I remember they owed Mr. Crump about 95 cents or something. My father told a story once when for some obscure reason he was mad at Mr. Crump, that he went into his secret booth and voted the opposition, whatever that was. When he came out one of the Crump officers looked at him and said, "You ought to be ashamed." But nothing ever happened, and he kept his old job at the best bank in town which meant since, as he always told it, during the depression, the bottom of the depression when I was born, the bank cut salaries ten percent, but the cost of living dropped 50%. So until WWI and inflation got a hold of us, we were living very well during the depression.

Q: Well now in the family, your father was a banker. What was your mother's background?

WEBB: My mother was born on the farm. For some reason, I am not quite sure why, Grandma was living there at that time. She was a fairly young woman of 25 at the time. I think my grandmother moved back with her husband to Terre Haute. The story that we heard was that living in Yankee land reduced her to constant weeping, and so they returned, actually went to Nashville. Grandfather worked for an uncle somebody in the pharmacy business. He later moved to Memphis where my mother was born almost in the same months as FDR in 1882. He was able to get a job in a pharmacy business. He died of a heart attack in 1933, ten months after I was born. It was in the depth of the depression. My grandmother, believe it or not, had a six year old daughter, her last pregnancy, which she was so ashamed about and came when she was 45. She absolutely refused to attend my parents' wedding eight months pregnant, so they had to move the wedding up to July, the absolute Godawfullest month in Memphis as anybody knows who has ever been there. One of her brothers lived in Tulsa, and he would come to town when it was 85 degrees at Union Station at night or something. He got off the train and said, "When I left Oklahoma it was 115, and I get off the train and you say it is 85. It is twice as hot here." They didn't have the humidity, and we had it in spades.

Q: Did your mother go to college or university or have any college?

WEBB: My mother, oddly enough, went to a brand new high school called Southside where one of her classmates was a 14 year old kid who ended up on the Supreme Court, Abe Fortas. He was the genius of the local community. She went to, I think it was called, West Tennessee Teacher's College. I guess just for two years. She was only 19 when she got married. That became Memphis State University which I think now is pretentiously called the University of Memphis.

Q: How about your father? Did he go to college?

WEBB: His grandfather as I said was the president of Mississippi College. One of his daughters married a professor of Latin who became really a president. They produced two sons, one of whom became, I think his name was either Murray Latimer, or Webb Murray Latimer. Apparently he was always called Webb in the family. The old boy went to the University of Chicago and places like that and got excellent degrees in classical Greek and all of that sort of thing. Murray ended up as one of FDR's original brain trust. He was often called, so I am told, the father of social security. I believe there is a federal building named for him in Baltimore. Another son ended up at George Washington where he was a teacher and a professor and assistant dean or I don't know what. But my father's father was a medical doctor. I don't think medical doctors were held in quite as high esteem back at the turn of the century as they are today. The best I can ever tell, I think he was an alcoholic and ended up dying of something, which according to the 1920 census, or something I read, was TB which may be related. I really don't know. But my father claimed that he wasn't able to go to college because his father had died when he was 15 or 17, still in high school. He just did what most people did. He got the first job he could get working at the local bank. I always thought my father was probably intelligent and would have done well, but I am not sure. It is strange because he came from sort of an academic background. They almost fell out of the professional class, but his three sons in one form or another all did very well academically. But Dad was really interested in gardening. The day he retired at 65 after whatever it was, I have forgotten, 37 or 47 years at the bank, I think it was the happiest day of his life. He lived to be 90 and all but the last five years he puttered around in the backyard and was just blissfully happy. If his brain hadn't, I think he had hardening of the arteries, I think he would have lived forever but for that. My mother, on the other hand had a little more pretension, particularly in music, and always played the piano. All of us kids took piano until they got to me. My older siblings, and by older siblings I mean my aunt who was only five years older. They raised such a howl that mother never made me take piano. After they showed the movie A Song to Remember, the life of Frederic Chopin, in high school, an aside to that which I thought was marvelous, my grandmother who had to go to work too, and all of the widows in our family ended up running high school and junior high school cafeterias. Grandma ended up at Southside, the same school my mother had gone to when it was brand new. It was in a rough tough neighborhood very comparable to Humes High on the north side which is where Elvis Presley went. These schools are not noted for academic excellence. By a long shot. This wonderful movie was played during school auditorium when we used to have movies. It was nothing but classical music, and it reawakened an interest. My brother used to play the Polonaise Militaire over and over. I eventually could pick it out with one hand, but I made the mistake of always playing with my cheek on the piano keys or at least right above. I could never play sitting up straight. According to my grandmother, after this movie was shown at Southside which you would think would have completely turned off these ruffians and all, the two of the toughest boys in the school started taking classical piano lessons, which I doubt lasted more than a week, but at least they wanted to, which I thought was the gift of classical music.

Q: What are your recollections of how the family worked? Did the family sit around the dinner table and chat about things, politics or what was happening in the world or things like that?

WEBB: In a way we had a very strange family, which of course like all children thought was perfectly normal. We thought we just had a wonderful family set up. We were really proud of 1867 Cowden Avenue, because when my grandfather died in 1933, he left his wife, his 20 year old daughter who was unmarried and therefore naturally living at home, and his five year old daughter really up a creek. They were really scattered out and parceled out to different members of the extended family. But they came together, and we sold the old house my parents lived in on North Garland Street which they paid \$5,000 for, and which isn't worth anything now. They were lucky enough to be able to give the house back to the mortgage company or whomever, and didn't have to keep paying on that, which was fairly unusual in the depression. My grandmother had one asset which was a \$500 insurance policy on the life of her husband. They used that to make a down payment on a much larger house that I grew up in, in the new section of town, which of course today is so far downtown that it is almost unthinkable. The house cost them \$5,000, and they lived there for 57 years and sold it for about \$93,000 about 1990. So we kept on moving in together. In a way it was sort of an uncomfortable house, really. It had big ceilings downstairs and all. It was good for entertaining. It had a grand piano that my mother played. Upstairs there was a small bedroom that my aunt Kate, who was 20, got. Later when her first marriage got into trouble, she came back from Tulsa with a newborn baby and all three of them lived there for awhile. The second room was my grandmother's. She always had this little girl who was my aunt and got married in that house. The two of them were there. My mother and dad lived in the master bedroom, if you can call it that. Of course there was only one bathroom. My older brother and I lived on what we called the sleeping porch, which at one time had been an outside porch on the second story. It was a strange looking oblong room. Even though we were not dirt poor, but we kind of came close to that, of course we always had a Negro maid, which was very interesting. A wonderful woman, as black as you could possibly find in West Africa today I am sure, an absolute pure breed, absolute wonderful woman. She and another lady who spelled her at times really sort of raised me in all of this more or less. I find it very interesting because my grandmother was a superb cook and a professional nutritionist of a sort. We had a professional maid, as they were called. We had just great menus. At times during the war we had as many as I think nine people living in the house. We ate at six, and nobody ever thought not to be on time when you ate. We sat around a great big table. We always had leftovers. We had it seems like to me dozens of choices in every category of food. Really an extended family can be just a marvelous invention. I know my mother-in-law who died at 96 a few years ago and lived with us the last 12 years of her life in a small little room in a small house. Both of my children got to really know her, and what we never did at 1867 Calvin Avenue, we even got oral history from her about growing up in Boston and her father who had virtually invented the sheet music business before the Civil War, I guess, and had become quite rich doing so. I think it was her grandfather. At one time, there was an inventor of sorts working in the back room of his business. The fellow was always way behind in the rent, and at one point tried to get Mr. Howe to accept stock in some newfangled invention which my wife's grandfather, great grandfather, whatever, said, "Look young man, I have been through this too many times, and it never worked out. I have to have cash," and he got it. That young man was named Alexander Graham Bell. They used to say that the telephone patent which took him 30 years I think to get free and clear, was the most valuable patent that ever existed. I don't know what that stock might have been worth, but they survived.

Q: Where did you go to school? Let's start with elementary school.

WEBB: I went to Idlewild Elementary School which was, like any good elementary school, within walking distance. We didn't have crime that we knew of, very little. I think we were warned not to talk to strangers, but I don't know that it took any more than it does with any young child. I tried to commit suicide a few times by doing stupid things like jumping over a big pile of dirt and bricks and whatever in the middle of the sidewalk never thinking that there might be a hole on the other side. I almost cut my leg off, but thanks to a very excellent physician I never had a limp or had any trouble getting into the Naval Academy or anything else. I must say that my first example that I can remember of adult injustice took place in grammar school. It is just about the only thing I remember about grammar school except one of my early teachers was named Miss Crook. But I was on crutches for months, and like any young boy eight or ten or whatever I was, I wanted to move on those crutches as fast as the kids who had two legs. Also, of course, crutches made a wonderful machine gun, so I would point one of my crutches at somebody and go bang, bang, bang. We had a wonderful time. Our principal who I don't know if she was hard of seeing or what, but she called me in one time at recess and said, "I see you are hitting other boys with your crutches." I said, "Oh no ma'am, no Miss Stanton. I didn't hit any; I just pointed them and played machine gun." After that I couldn't go out to recess until I got rid of my crutches. My mother had to work for this woman for several years as an assistant kindergarten teacher. I won't say the word that she described to us, but I do remember many years later when my daughter was having trouble one time with a female supervisor. I think she had trouble with a previous female supervisor, and she was bawling over the phone to my mother. My mother said, "Don't worry, every female I ever worked for was a bitch." Which is a very common saying by women back then that I remember, not that they would use that word precisely. I held no memory of elementary school other than I think I got ones and maybe a few twos, but nobody made anything about it, and nobody called me a genius or anything like that. My older brother if I remember correctly, supposedly on IQ tested 136. He skipped, he went from the sixth grade into the eighth grade in junior high school which he always regretted. He was big; he fit in physically, but he didn't fit in emotionally. He went to a very poor, easy junior high school. Then when he got to the big time which was Central High School, which we certainly believed was the best public high school in the south if not the country. I am not sure but I think Life Magazine at one point listed it as one of the ten best public high schools in the country or something of that nature. As he always said, he discovered fraternities, sororities, booze, cigarettes, girls, and night clubs the first week he hit Central High School, and never cracked a book for the next three years. So all of his native genius didn't go for very much, whereas for absolutely trivial reasons I didn't go to that junior high school, even though I was slightly within their border, mainly because my brother's high school fraternity played a pickup basketball game against the junior high school varsity, and, I thought, beat them, but the people keeping score just constantly cheated, and I wasn't going to go to a school of cheaters. So I went to Bellevue Junior High, and, contrary to what they told my daughter when she started Hollins College, at Bellevue they emphasized that it had all been easy up until now, but junior high school is really tough and you had a different teacher every hour. You really had to study, and you had homework. I was scared silly. I got my first report card, every six weeks, and to my amazement I got all "As" and was on the honor roll. That is the first time academic excellence, if you could call it that, ever entered my mind to the best of my knowledge. But for some reason I thought that was the greatest thing I had ever seen, and I thought I have just got to get on the honor roll from here on, and I did for the next six years through junior high and senior high school. Though I did once get a teacher to change a grade from a C to a B. But since it was shop, and I was no good at making anything with my hands, I pointed out to him that his C was the only thing that was keeping me off of the honor roll, and after all, shop was not an academic subject. So he changed it to a B which may or may not have been changed officially, but that was good enough for me. I enjoyed very much my years in junior high school, my three years. I really became sort of a nerd, and my best friends were all sort of nerdy types.

Q: What sort of subjects were you particularly interested in? What were you reading?

WEBB: I was always a reader. My earliest memories, we had a branch library over on Cooper Street, and we could take out four books on a library card that was good for four weeks. I used to get all the library cards in my family, and ride over and pick out 16 books and take them all home. I just read everything. I picked up a book once on clothing or dress or something, and I got about a third through it and I thought this is the most boring book I ever read and why should I finish it. For the first time in my life, I didn't finish a book. After that I got a little more selective. But the funny thing is, I had no memory at all of what I read at the library. This was during the war. I was very much into boys books. I never read any Mark Twain until I was long an adult. I read the 20 volume Bomba the Jungle Boy. I read something that was just marvelous called Jerry Todd which apparently came out in the '20s and was apparently so popular that they actually had a write in section and they would print letters from the readership in these hard back books. I suspect during the war they just sold everything that was back in the storehouses. So I used to get Bomba the Jungle Boy, Dave Dawson, and Freddy Farmer at Dunkirk, 16 and 17 year old boys who supposedly were flying P-51 spitfires against German aces, and of course beating them handily. One was American and one was British, Freddy Farmer. I read those books religiously. As I do with everything I worked out a system by which I would read two chapters in my library book, two chapters in my own book, and just alternate. I never used bookmarks. I always remembered where I was, and did that really almost until I left high school. I don't know when I stopped exactly. But I don't think outside of a few school assignments, I have no memory of reading anything of real value. That came at the Naval Academy. I am completely self educated. I spent my four years at the Naval Academy reading everything. Everything in literature, gradually getting more and more into non fiction.

Q: That was the library in Mahan Hall.

WEBB: Yes, and I am probably the only person in the history of the world that got interested in Tolstoy because he had been a mentor to Mohandas Gandhi who if I remember correctly was born October 2, 1869 in Porbandar, India and became the famous Mahatma. Then I read Tolstoy's War and Peace because I was interested in what else the author of the Kingdom of God Is Within You had to say about things. I read it in an old schoolboy's edition that was in four volumes, 2063 pages, and they didn't even translate the French. I took Spanish, and thought it the most boring book I ever read for the first 100 pages. Then I couldn't put it down. Unfortunately I listened recently to a library unabridged edition of somebody reading War and Peace. I got that and the second part and the fourth and final part. I was horribly disappointed. When I read it originally I can only think about that old cliché; ½, this isn't about life; this is life itself. When I read Anna Karenina which I have read several times, since I memorized parts of War and Peace, but I never reread it. I have had a project of trying to keep my languages going by memorizing it in Finnish, Swedish, two different forms of German, Spanish and of course the original Russian and French translated apparently by Tolstoy into Russian. I thoroughly enjoyed that, but I was terribly disappointed when I reheard this. I have been reading a little bit on it. So far it just doesn't grab me. I just got through reading something that was terribly interesting, letters by Theodore Roosevelt who, in my opinion, probably is the most tragic figure of the 20th century, not because of his early demise and the fact that he was not president in place of Woodrow Wilson who I think, probably wrecked the 20th century. Of course you can't prove this sort of thing. I ran into some private letters I think he was writing to his sister Anna, the Bambi or something, the hunchback sister who was supposedly so brainy. He was reading War and Peace. I thought I agree with him 100% today, not 50 years ago but today. He said, "Tolstoy's comments about Napoleon and the generals were just absolutely ludicrous, but that his portrayal of Prince Andrew Bolkonsky and Pierre Buzekhov, were just absolutely incredible." Of course the famous Natasha Rostov who I always thought was the most appealing female in all literature, at least until I read Pride and Prejudice for about the fourth time and eventually learned to agree with Jane Austin that her Elizabeth was in a class all by herself. Teddy Roosevelt was appalled at Natasha's fickleness and said he didn't know how Pierre Buzekhov could have left her for six months at a time when she surely would have run off with some other man. But of course, Teddy Roosevelt was in a class all by himself. He wrote a letter from the Dakotas, perhaps Medora, to Anna I forget what, absolutely irate that somebody said he was going to marry Edith Carew, his childhood playmate whom he had broken up with some years before. He just denounced this ferociously. I know what he had to say, but of course it is true and he went on to say that what I have done is totally immoral. The very idea of a second marriage after the death of his first wife was abominable, and no man of decency could do this. Don't blame Edith; this is not her fault. I wondered could Jack Kennedy or Bill Clinton ever comprehend such a man? Actually going back to my own childhood, my adolescence, junior high school is where I got the reputation. I was voted smartest boy, I think because starting Latin I was making 100s and 99s on all the tests, which of course doesn't mean much at the beginning of a language because all it is is memorizing grammar and vocabulary. You don't have to have any gift for speaking the language, which as it turned out I had very little. That was really my opening wedge away from being a nerd, and also the fact that I was the only nerd, if you can use that language, who was always trying to get the boys to play tackle football during lunch hour. I was always the star running back. Later even my senior high school had something we called the commode bowl, where we played in street clothes, and because we were friends, nobody ever got hurt. I actually wrote one of the games up in which I scored six grand touchdowns, and the opposition had seven boys who scored each a touchdown, and we lost. But I remember in junior high school running to Latin class where Miss Frenn had the girls on the left and the boys on the right, and I was in the center. I was so stinking hot from playing tackle football that I took off my outer shirt. Miss Frenn came in and said, "Haven't you think you should be sitting here in class in your underwear?" Somehow, a stroke of genius really, I instantly spoke up and said, "No, Miss Frenn, this isn't my underwear, this is a T shirt." All the boys said it is a T shirt. She said, "All right," but she was a little dubious, and I eventually put on the shirt.

Q: In high school, did you get involved in glee club, dramatics?

WEBB: This is a strange thing. My life went through four years of absolute luck and strangeness. It all started my senior in junior high school. I was a very shy child. Because I made good grades and because I was nice looking I suppose, though I had no interest at that point in girls, I was terrified I was going to be nominated for student government, or even worse maybe, to give a nominating speech recommending somebody for student government. At the end of the eighth grade when the elections were held, I was just blissfully happy that my name wasn't called. But the next semester, a boy who was best friend to one of my wealthy friends who really became a lifelong friend from then on until his death ten years ago, who was a very lively type, was made traffic chief, which meant he was responsible for hall room monitors and for dismissing each school auditorium. Unfortunately he got a D in Latin on the first report period, and I showed up at school the next day I guess, and everybody came running to me and said, "Did you know Johnny Bailey got a D in Latin and they have appointed you to take his place." Which meant that I had to get up at the end of every auditorium and dismiss everybody, which was rather stupid because what else are they going to do but walk out. I was so terrified that I memorized five words or something, "Please stand and go out the nearest exit." But after a few months of that, I got a little more relaxed. Then I was asked to give a speech, I guess as smartest boy or something, I don't know. I sat down with this teacher who I do not remember at all, and she would say, "Well what do you want to say?" I would say, "Well I don't know." She would say, "Well, would you like to say this?" and she would write down something. I thought that sounded good. She eventually wrote out a speech and then she had me practice it week after week or so it seemed. Everything was how I looked, did I look up, my intonation, everything was delivery like she was a drama teacher which maybe she was. Then one day she said, "Don't look at your paper. I said, "I didn't memorize it." She said, "You already have." I gave the speech, the only speech I ever gave that I memorized, a la Charles de Gaulle I guess. I gave it with absolutely no fear. I think I had a copy, but I never thought about using it. All I was concerned about was delivery. That was a marvelous. I never stuttered or anything, but that got me over that terror.

Then I went to senior high school, and by a series of accidents, namely I think I was the only Bellevue boy that went to Central that year who had been a member of the student government, all because Johnny Bailey got a D in Latin, I was nominated for president of the freshman class. Normally it wouldn't have been worth very much because Snowden Junior High School was the top feeder for Central which was the academic high school. But they nominated a girl to run against me for president. She was not the normal girl that you would expect to be running for student government. She was a very bosomy, very nice girl but she had more of a Marilyn Monroe image than the image of someone who was going to be freshman class president. I actually had girls from her school come up to me and say we love Martha Lee but we are voting for you because we think it is terrible that a girl should be president of the freshman class. Because of that accident I was nominated for something else my freshman year against an older boy, which I lost, but that was actually in my favor. I wasn't supposed to win. I was nominated again midway through my junior year, and I won an election. I was nominated again. The people I ran against always had strikes against them, and I always won, except for that one election which I had completely forgotten, and ended up as president of student government. Which was a very strange thing.

My predecessor was Bill Leftwich who went to the Naval Academy who was a six striper, roomed at least his first year with Ross Perot, and between them they garnered all the military awards. Bill was always supposed to be the next commandant of the Marine Corps when he became of sufficient rank, and actually did become a target of Time Magazine reporting as one of the outstanding middle officers to get killed in Vietnam. He ended up getting a destroyer named for himself, and also the welcoming center at Annapolis. The only reason I went to Annapolis was my father knew his father and he recommended me.

But the institution that affected my life more than any other was Central High School. To be perfectly frank, it is the only institution, government or whatever you want to call it, anything else, that I absolutely adored. Long before I got there, I attended every football game by myself throughout junior high school, not the junior high school games, but the senior high school games. I remember the night they announced in a southern segregated city that Joe Louis had been knocked down by some nobody in the seventh round or something or other. The entire audience had just a gasp. When I ran home that night, the first thing I said when I ran into my home was "Mother, did you hear that Joe Louis got knocked down?" She said, "What do you care about that Negro." I assumed she said Negro. But I was absolutely stunned, because we had never heard any sort of racial language in my home. Anything beyond that was certainly forbidden, but nobody made an issue of it.

Q: The class at Central High in those days was completely white?

WEBB: We had a very peculiar situation when I think back on it. Memphis was a segregated city, of course, right on the Mississippi state line. It was a delta city, but we were up on the bluff, so we didn't have cotton farmers in town, but they were across the river in Arkansas and down the river in Mississippi. I don't know what Memphis was, I suspect 30 or 40% black at that time. Everything was perfectly segregated. Most of us were raised by black women to a considerable extent. They were family in almost every sense. I remember later, I think in high school, where we had a black minister come to our church and give the Sunday school lesson to one group. The kid I grew up with who was of Yankee origin - in my opinion they always tended to be the most bigoted people in the south. I remember him saying, "You are not going to shake his hand are you?" I said, "well of course I am." It never dawned on me not to shake his hand, but I think that was the first black professional I ever met in my life. There was two blacks that saved my life, or at least my foot when I nearly cut it off, because a black trucker stopped and gave me a lift home, and Totsy, our maid, had the genius to send me right to the hospital. So there was a minimum delay, and they sewed me back together. We had intimate relations with blacks at the home level, but then we had no relations whatsoever to my memory with professional blacks. I went to a public high school, which was almost unique maybe. We had fraternities and sororities. The fraternities were Christian, and they were fairly equally divided, fraternities and sororities between Catholics and Protestants, at least ours was. There was never the slightest problem. They kidded us; we kidded them. They were fish eaters. I can't remember what they called us. There were two Catholic schools. They were part of the social system. Central High School and then later East High which was a brand new school, and I guess eventually took over from Central, with marble staircases and eventually Cybill Shepherd, who I don't think added much to the excellence of the school academically.

Q: She was a movie actress.

WEBB: Yes, the movie actress whom I never knew, but I did meet a classmate of hers. We had the only academic school in Memphis. I don't know what the blacks said, but of the seven public high schools, I would say we got 90% of all the scholarship money. We had more scholarship money every year than all of the other six put together. We also spoke a different language. I didn't realize how people from the other schools spoke until I met a girl from Mesick, I think it was, I have forgotten, Humes, or Mesick. Darn, her family just couldn't speak proper English, which I had never run into before. But the fraternity-sorority system was absolutely marvelous. It kept us busy. We, for a quarter a week and twenty or thirty dollars a year, you had parties, formals?

But for a minimum price we had parties, we had outings, we had formals. You always had parents as observers, chaperons which nobody ever thought was anything disagreeable. There was no drinking. Occasionally you would hear of a football player was out in the parking lot with a bottle of beer or something. The parents would go and shoo him off and say we are going to call the police if you don't get the heck out of here. Never had any problems. We had love; we had romance. We didn't have sex, at least none that I ever knew about until much later, so I never participated in it. We had respect between the sexes. It was an absolutely marvelous time. If anybody went around saying girls weren't good at math or something like that, I never heard it and never thought about it. Certainly most of the girls who were getting "A's" like I was in math and science, which was one of my better subjects, probably outnumbered the boys in those subjects that were getting the better grades. Because we were the academic high school, we had rich boys who had never attended a public school in their lives. When they got to the tenth grade, they transferred to Central High School because they had the brains. They couldn't get a better education, at least not in the south probably than a free education. I have always said if the Readers Digest ever asked me to do one of those The Most Memorable Character You have Ever Known, it would certainly be Miss Laura Ellen Mosine, who we all called Laura, except to her face. We called her Miss Mosine to her face. Of course there were no dress codes or anything like that, but I am sure if any girl had ever showed up, well anybody wearing jeans, would have been sent home. Any girl wearing pants would have been sent home. Anybody wearing shorts would have been sent home, but nobody ever had to be sent home.

Q: Laura, what was her subject?

WEBB: Laura Mosine was a natural genius of sorts. My father had Miss Mosine but it turned out it was her mother, Mrs. Mosine. She was an ancient woman who I guess was about 50, because she was still there when my brother went to central and he was 12 year my junior. She taught math, and what she had was 10th grade geometry. She was the only teacher I ever knew that rewrote the textbook. She was always complaining that she could do a theorem in eight steps that the book took ten. She showed you how to do it her way. If you did a test exactly according to the book, and got every answer right, but you didn't use her method, she would write on your paper "MM" and take off two or three points because you didn't use the Mosine method. I didn't take math my senior year, and she didn't teach it anyway, but she sought me out. She said, "Haven I want to see you after school." I showed up and she said, "You know, I do review classes for everybody going to West Point and Annapolis. None of my pupils have ever failed the math part of the exam. I don't care what you do in the rest of it." She said, "When do you want to come to my home for classes. Monday-Wednesday or Tuesday-Thursday?" Being a smart kid, I made a choice. She said, "Do you want to come at six to eight or seven to nine?" Being a smart kid, I made my choice. Thank God I did because I had forgotten quite a lot actually. My mother started getting worried that we hadn't paid Miss Mosine, and we were flat broke. The summer of '45 she had had an unexpected child, a caesarian. She had almost died of peritonitis. I think the hospital was in a state of collapse at the end of the war, and it was only that penicillin was introduced to the civilian market at that precise moment that saved her life. My mother was getting worried because we were terribly in debt. We didn't even have a car until my brother came back from the Marine Corps in '48. She said, "You have got to ask Miss Mosine what she is charging us." I was president of student government, but I was scared as heck of Miss Mosine. I said, "My mother is bothering me that we haven't paid you anything." That little tiny woman got up on complete indignation. "Do you think I do this for the money? What do you think it would do to my reputation if one of my students failed the math portion of the service exam. I wouldn't take you if you were not my ex-student. Don't ever speak to me of money." Well we gave her a nice present, but I am sure she could have charged a lot more. I think of those teachers that every paper, every test that was ever given, every exam was returned by the next session graded. Everything was graded. The math professors would knock off points for English grammar if you made a grammatical mistake assuming that was possible in a math test. I remember my son's math papers and other history papers where teachers would simply use a big red crayon and draw a question mark beside something or make a mark like grammar or something but not leave the kids any hint as to what the mistake was or how to correct it. But that is the penalty we pay for a different world we live in today, which is not all bad.

Q: Well what attracted you to the academy?

WEBB: Nothing attracted me to the Naval Academy. My only ambition in high school was to marry the perfect girl and have the perfect family and live in a cottage and have a nice job. I never dreamed for a moment that I would be anything less than totally successful at all of that. I certainly had no intellectual interest or ambitions that I can remember, though like I say, I was always a reader, and I did have good grades. Between the 11th and the 12th grade, I was president of the student body elect. Bill Leftwich had gone to the Naval Academy as a plebe. My father knew everybody in Memphis downtown, even though he was a lowly clerk, and these young men he had gone to work with in the 20's right out of high school were presidents of banks and all kinds of things. Mr. Leftwich was certainly a very prominent lawyer or whatever he was. He had just come back from taking Bill to Annapolis. He spoke the magic words that decided my life, which were that not only is the Naval Academy free, but they pay you to go to class, \$900 a month. You get these wonderful luxury cruises every summer to Europe, which was half true. My father said, "How would you like to go to Annapolis?"

I hadn't made up my mind about much of anything at that point. The president of the bank got Senator Kenneth McKellar who was president pro tem of the Senate at the time, the most senior member, to allow me to take his exam, his personal exam, which is a very rigorous test of two days, or six hours or three hours or whatever it was. I took it and completely forgot about it. I started going steady with a young lady the next September, never mentioned once any thought of going to the Naval Academy, until early February. I had gone downtown Saturday morning back when people still worked half days on Saturday, to interview a man about Harvard or Yale. I think Yale, but frankly I don't think the name meant a great deal to me. All I remember is him saying you are bound to get a full scholarship. I walked into the bank to see how my dad was and maybe get a ride home, except I don't think he had a car even by that late date. My father handed me a telegram saying, "Congratulations. You have the principal appointment to Annapolis. Kenneth McKellar." The only time in my life my knees buckled and I found myself sitting, fortunately a chair was behind me, and for a few seconds I had no idea whatsoever what the man was talking about. I had applied for a scholarship to Vanderbilt, and was more or less assured of a full scholarship when I got this. I begged off from Vanderbilt, and they thanked me and gave me a \$600 scholarship which was probably half of a full scholarship. I thought it over and said, "Well I didn't know what else I would do." The only professional military interest I ever had was I was absolutely ga-ga in WWII over aviation, more as an intellectual interest in aviation. I knew every thing about the P-51, the P-51D25 when they switched from the old fashioned canopy to the bubble canopy and all succeeding variants, including the B17F, which was the last before they put the chin to it in the B-17G, and just soaked up information. I don't think I had ever really thought of being a pilot, but that really settled my hash, and since I didn't have a better idea, and frankly I was about 50 when I finally figured out what I should have done, but by then it was a little late, because I didn't know that Professor Adam Bruno Ulam was going to be the head of the Russian studies, Soviet studies whatever it was called, at Harvard. You go there and stay there and work with him and get a Ph.D. Who knows, it might have worked out; it might not have. But I had no better ideas at that time.

I knew I didn't want to go to the Naval Academy because very frankly I didn't want to give up my wonderful social life. I absolutely adored high school, and to some degree I guess it adored me in turn. It was the only institution that I was ever involved with that I adored unreservedly. That was before I had any success, so it was not because I was successful, it was part of the reason why I was successful. Frankly I was a little bit shocked at the Naval Academy that they didn't realize what a fine clean cut upstanding young man I was. But we were graded on "grease," is what they called it which was military aptitude, by your own classmates. Frankly you don't mark somebody for high military aptitude who makes it clear that he doesn't much care for military training at the Naval Academy. I always respected the Naval Academy and even more the Navy which is more than I can say for some other institutions. I certainly didn't like it there, and I was certainly glad to leave, though when I came back to teach electrical engineering some years later, found it much more agreeable, as you might surmise.

Q: Well you were in the class of '54?

WEBB: I was class of '54 at the Naval academy, yes.

Q: How did you find the education you were getting when you got there?

WEBB: I thought it was very poor. I am sure we didn't compare to Boston Latin or any of those super elite public schools in the northeast, but I didn't know any better. I thought the Naval Academy was a rerun of high school except I thought that Central High School was a better high school than USNA. I don't know if that was fair. The Naval Academy never made any bones about it back then. Naval officers were taught to tell the truth, and they very flatly said if you learned anything at the Naval Academy that was useful in any other profession other than the military as a combat officer, well that was gratis, but they didn't intend it that way. They were really there to train combat officers, and the same with West Point. If you lost your eyesight after the first year as so many did at that age, and can no longer pass a 20/20 exam, then you ended up supply corps. If you grew to be 7'1", I don't know if that was possible back then, but David Robinson proved that he could get a commission. Actually we did. My class was the only class the Naval Academy ever had that sent people directly into the Navy, directly into the Marine Corps, directly into the Air Force, and one fellow who grew too tall for any of those went directly into the Army, right out of the Naval Academy. I don't know what happened to him.

Q: Well about the Naval Academy, how did you find the military discipline side of things?

WEBB: You know I read Eisenhower going to the Naval Academy at age 21. I mean West Point. He was too old for the Naval Academy. West Point took him. He roomed with a kid who was a high school grad the way I was, and all but one of my roommates through the years. This kid was from some small town in the middle west probably. He had been given a parade down to the train station. According to Eisenhower, he cried his way through beast barracks all summer and resigned and went back in disgrace. I was there, a kid. The idea that hazing was going to bother me never entered my mind. I knew that 99% of everyone, well 90% of everybody before me, had survived. They weren't likely to kill me. They weren't likely to do any great physical damage as they certainly almost did to MacArthur at West Point and George Marshall at VMI (Virginia Military Institute). We didn't have physical hazing; it was all mental, the type that reduces the young ladies there to tears, but I never saw anybody cry, and I never got very upset. I don't remember being very upset at all, but I hated standing in formation. After plebe year when they rang the bell for formation, plebes are already supposed to be in formation and at attention. The upperclassmen including the third class had three minutes to get there. When the bell rang after my plebe year, I checked the second hand on my watch, and I would simply stroll to formation, and I would step into formation about 10 to 20 seconds before the final bell would ring. As a lesson in mob behavior, somebody would panic and start running, and then everybody else would start running except me. I would stroll into formation, click my heels, and then the bell would ring and the company officer would tell me that I was being reported down in military aptitude because I showed that I wasn't prepared, that I wasn't prompt. I tried to argue that it proved just the opposite, that I wasn't wasting my time standing at attention when there was no requirement to do so. He agreed with me but he said, "Start getting there a little early so you won't get these bad reports." That was the end of that. But I hated parades where you sweated in the midday sun. I was a good enough athlete I never had any trouble with any physical qualifications. The first swimming test was swim 100 yards as I remember across a narrow pool sideways. I asked the instructor was it all right to swim as much as I could underwater. He said, "I don't care how you swim it, just swim 100 yards." When I came up at 80 yards or whatever it was, to my utter amazement I discovered one-third of our class was drowning. I discovered when we had basketball instruction that approximately one-third of these naval academy plebes, whatever we were at that age, had never played basketball or football. I mean all I knew was basketball and football. I never played anything else, but I couldn't imagine kids growing up not being able to swim or playing basketball or football.

Q: They sort of have a six foot pool or something, so you couldn't go down too far.

WEBB: We had a test, and if you will pardon me for saying so, I think this is exactly what is wrong with the military today. I mean it is one of the many things wrong with the United States of America today. You had to simulate jumping off the deck of a burning ship into the water 30 feet below, aflame with oil. You had to swim underwater, come up amidst the burning oil which you had to splash away and take a breath, go back down and swim to the side of the pool. Now in point of fact, what you really had to do was jump off of a ten foot diving board, pretend that you were coming up in burning oil and swish it away to take a breath, and then coming up at the side, which for me was absolute duck soup. I hated jumping. I always dove because I hated getting water up my nose. A few years ago, there was a black female at the Naval Academy who could not force herself to jump off of a ten foot diving board. I suspect that when there were nothing but men there, this occasionally happened, his classmates just threw him off, and that was the end of that. She refused. The Naval Academy said we won't graduate you or commission you if you don't, and eventually the Secretary of the Navy intervened and let her graduate. Now that seems trivial, but we are talking about military officers. Someone who doesn't have enough command over their emotions that they can't force themselves to do something as trivial as jumping ten feet into a swimming pool, you know, at Harvard or Yale or Georgia Tech, who cares. At a military academy, I would never let that woman graduate. You know, maybe she could spend her life at a desk doing things that have nothing to do with commanding people in combat or anything else, but there is something wrong when an individual who is supposed to be a military officer, which is a different thing from being a civilian, a professor at Harvard or Yale or Podunk U. I think that was a tragic decision as trivial as it may seem. I have no idea whatever happened to her.

Q: Well at the Naval Academy at that time, were you, did you get a degree in any particular subject?

WEBB: When I was at the Naval Academy, everything was different as compared to today. Everyone took exactly the same subjects for four years. We all had the same tests the same day or the next or previous day which could have amounted to a lot of cheating. As far as I know I never saw anybody, but one fellow ever cheat academically. Since we were not at West Point and did not have to turn in cheaters I didn't and nor did anybody else. He was eventually expelled for cheating but not for academic cheating. He was a cheat. He was also an artist who designed our class ring. Ours was considered the best design of any class until that time. I have never worn it because I can't stand rings.

I was bored silly at the Naval Academy, and I spent most of my time reading. I just read everything.

Then in June of '51, my life changed forever. I was looking for something to read, and the ship's library of the USS Albany a heavy cruiser from WWII which was very top-heavy because they had to put all this heavy radar equipment high up. We rolled one time 48 degrees which is more than halfway. I found myself walking on the side of the bulkhead. You could see my wet footprints. But I picked up a book by Louis Fischer, a biography of Mohandas Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi, whom I vaguely knew a little bit about, not very much. I read it and I was just mesmerized. Oh, I never became a pacifist. I never did foolish things, but I did ponder everything. I even found some juvenile essays I wrote for myself, even getting into something like "if war is so good, and noble, why is it the chaplains are forbidden to shoot people?" It was pretty childish stuff, but we didn't have Peter Jennings and Walter Cronkite and Ted Koppel to encourage that sort of thing back then. I was always a truth seeker, and I was trying to find out what I thought was important and what I thought I was going to do with my life, but I was mesmerized, and I read a lot of pacifist literature.

I don't think I ever read any Thoreau. I don't think I could quite stomach him. That started my education really. I read everything. I read Hemmingway whom I never could stand, and Fitzgerald, Jane Austin. I didn't remember I had read Sense and Sensibility until I found my library list many years later. But I just read and read and read. I got very much interested in Indian history.

My senior year theses that we were required to write, the only academic thing we ever did in four years really, was to write a senior thesis, a real research paper though obviously taken from secondary sources on something related to war. Everybody wrote about mines in WWI and God knows what. I certainly could have written about aviation in WWII, but I knew exactly what I wanted to write about, which was the so-called massacre at Amritsar at the Jallianwala Bagh. April 13, 1919, when Brigadier General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer marched in his 20 Gurhkas on the right and his 20 Punjabis on the left or whatever it was. The first command he gave in this crowded wasteland enclosed by high walls or low walls filled with at least 20,000 or 30,000 men, women, and children, was "Fire." The British and the Sepoys fired until they ran out of ammunition and killed, according to Indians about 3,600, according to the British about 1,200. Most people today believe the British were probably closer to the truth. That ended the rioting and whatever local rebellion that caused the problem. I read since that two Sikh organizations, I don't know whether they were in India or perhaps in Britain, actually gave General Dyer awards for saving the Sikhs from massacre by the Hindus, which may or may not have been true. Of course I was 100% on the side of Indian outrage. I did my thesis on the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. I think because nobody at the Naval Academy knew what the hell I was talking about, I got a 4-0 for research, which was perfect, and a 3-6 for writing it which was about right. So I came out with a 3-8. My genius roommate who came out about 4th or 5th in the class, and became an admiral at the height of 5'5" which was an inch below requirements, but he and two others were smuggled into the Naval Academy plebe year after I think being thoroughly stretched because their fathers were both vice admirals or whatever. He made Vice Admiral himself.

Q: What was his name?

WEBB: Cleaver Sanders Masterson, otherwise known as Skip, and one of the nicest men you will ever meet, Probably someone like Ronald Reagan, someone you could live with for four years, and I lived with him for a year, and you would never get to know him. But the last year I roomed with the three of them all supposedly from the Middle West, and two of them never stopped razzing me about how poor SEC football was compared to the Big Ten. If Tennessee or Alabama ever dared to play Ohio State or Michigan, they would absolutely be tromped, which was probably true. A few years ago when Tennessee trounced Ohio State in some bowl, I nearly called up my old friend Dick Anderson, in Columbus, Ohio. He just saw the Ohio State game yesterday against Washington State or something. But Skip never, he was just a total professional. He was absolutely amazing.

He did not bother to even start his senior thesis until a week before it was due. I had started six months earlier, and had written it a couple of times very leisurely and had spent the last month after Christmas leave simply finishing it off as best I can remember, and handed it in with absolute ease. Skip was wrestling and doing ten thousand other things and didn't start his thesis. He didn't sleep for a week. After lights out, he would sneak off to the head and work there or the volks closet as we called them. He didn't crack a book for a week. Since he and myself and Dick Ganthis in our room were very good students and all graduated in the top 54 or better, he would work on his thesis in each study hour and simply ask us in the last five minutes, what formula did he need for today's lesson, or if it was history or something like that, what did he need to know, and we would brief him. He would go to class. Towards the end of the week he was falling asleep in every class. The last class I had with him was a standup class of marine engineering where you looked at gunnery machinery and everybody went to sleep. Skip was just dead on his feet. He turned his thesis in. He also got a 3-8 just as I had done. He made it under the most appalling conditions I have ever seen in my life. When I asked him about it later he said, "Oh, I always do things that way. I am always best when I am under pressure." I would have died if I ever tried to do something like that. He was truly amazing.

Q: In '54 coming out, could you choose where you wanted to go? If you were ranking fairly high up, you probably had more of a chance to get what you wanted.

WEBB: If I remember correctly, West Point lets you choose according to class ranking. The Naval Academy either never did or it stopped doing that, because the best people all wanted the same thing I guess. It was all done by lottery, and it is the only lottery I ever won in my life, or rather lost. Because in a class of 861, and I ended up graduating 54th although we didn't graduate 861, I got 860 which traditionally was a garbage scow out of Nome, Alaska. But a few months before graduation we were told that Navy Air for some strange reason was opened up, maybe because of the Korean War, which had actually concluded by then. Any of us could apply for that. I did, and then it turned out Air Force opened up which in a lot of ways would have made a lot more sense for me. But I am ashamed to say that as much as anything I think my decision was made on the fact that I had bought an officer's raincoat for 30 or 40 dollars which I couldn't use if I went to the Air Force. I don't remember, it probably didn't make much difference.

As I said, I really got my education at the Naval Academy but pretty much by ignoring the Naval Academy. I just read and read. I never got an East Coast girl friend, so I had nothing really to distract me. But this was all really developing out of my fascination with Gandhi and India and Bengali and all. I gradually shifted through the years. I just kept reading.

I eventually went to New York and met Louis Fischer who was a wonderful old man, looked exactly like a Russian peasant, a mujik, though in fact he was a Jewish Philadelphia school teacher who at the end of WWI, I guess he was a little bit too young for WWI. He went to Russia to see what was going on because he thought Lenin and Trotsky were the only people that seemed to know what they were doing, which of course turned out to be complete fantasy. But he got hooked and stayed there for 20 years. He started off as a complete apologist. He was very close to the first foreign minister, Chicherin, who was a member of the nobility, hereditary nobility, like Lenin himself. His grandfather was a serf which shows you how open Czarist society was even at that late date. He stayed there until the Stalinist horrors of the '30s. It took Eleanor Roosevelt's personal intervention to get him out of Russia with his Russian wife and his two American-Russian boys, one of which ended up in Fairbanks, Alaska as an engineer and the other one somewhere else. I don't think either one of them ever knew their Russian backgrounds to my knowledge. Then he discovered Gandhi, he was the last paymaster general of the Spanish Republic, the only official position he ever had, and the last thing he ever did for Stalin. He saw how Stalin used the Spanish Republic as a means of killing Trotskyites and anybody else in the socialist, communist movement that might ever give him trouble. You were better off a conservative than a fellow communist during the Stalinist era in certain circumstances. He was always very anti-British imperialism, and during the war tried to get into Europe. Sumner Welles the assistant secretary of state said, "I can't get you to Europe, but I can get you to India. Why don't you go and see this guy Gandhi. He sounds interesting." That started off a new career. He was known as the American biographer of Gandhi. Like everything he did, he just went into it with absolute enthusiasm.

Q: I want to move you away from this into what did you do when you got out, when you graduated.

WEBB: The Naval Academy. I went to flight training. I went to Pensacola. I did quite well. I never had a down until we got into very advanced training and some very tricky navigation with side winds about 70 knots, some little town, Wichita Falls, Texas or something. It was the only down I ever got. I had very little trouble in flight training. From there I went to a squadron. For whatever reason I had chosen multi-engine which is probably a great mistake. If I had flown single engines, maybe I would have stayed in the Navy, but multi-engines turned out to be a great big bore except for landings and take-offs, and there weren't many of those particularly as a junior officer for a number of years. I was assigned to airborne early warning squadrons, new in the making at Patuxent River, Maryland. We flew the biggest planes the Navy had ever had practically up until then, Willy Victor Twos, a radar equipped plane with six million dollars worth of radar gear and therefore by far the most expensive plane the military owned, I suppose up, until then, which is nothing but a military version of a Lockheed Constellation.

Q: A beautiful ship.

WEBB: A beautiful plane. I remember when we put a 15-20 foot turban on top and a 30 foot bathtub underneath it was sort of ungainly looking.

Q: I remember seeing that version, not very attractive.

WEBB: We used to fly those out of Argentia, Newfoundland on a 7450 foot runway as I remember right heading towards a small mountain carrying 143,000 pounds, which doesn't sound like much today, but the airlines didn't fly anything that big at that time. Their version of the plane with the same motors the same basic fuselage, I don't think they ever took off at more than 135, and we had the same engines and we had a lot of drag they didn't have. I thought it may be boring but it is safe. I hate to say how many planes we lost including one entire crew of 26 that disappeared over the North Atlantic. It was never seen or heard from again to this day. I always wondered if the Soviets tried a submarine launch of a new anti aircraft submarine missile to see if it will take out a low flying airplane that you couldn't possibly miss. Nobody will ever know, but who knows. It was probably just an accident. We haven't heard about it to my knowledge from the Soviets since they ceased to be Soviets.

Q: How long were you doing this?

WEBB: Three and a half years I was in the squadron. I got married the last year which meant I extended for a year. Like all accidents, my life probably changed. At the end of my assignment at three years, I would have gone to Pensacola to teach flying. The way to learn to fly is to teach it. I don't know, I might have been so hooked on flying I might have stayed with it and maybe, if I had been smart, became an attaché and got language training and have the advantage of the big bucks and flight training and all the rest. But I was in married officer quarters, brand new quarters. The rule was you had to occupy them a full year, so instead of leaving at mid term, I left at the end of the academic year, so instead of Pensacola they sent me to Annapolis. There I was assigned to teach electrical engineering, a very similar course to what I had taken seven years earlier, and probably had my best grades. I always had my best grades in math and science, but I really just wasn't that interested. My interest was always more history, which we at the Naval Academy called the bull courses, English, history and government. By the time I left the Navy I think I really had the equivalent of a bachelor of arts at some fairly decent college, but it was very spotty like any self taught person. I really learned only the things I was interested in and ignored the things I wasn't interested in which was certainly more than enough to get me into the foreign service. But there was an accident involved even there.

My last year, the year we spent as a married couple in Newfoundland, one of my squadron mates who was a good friend was a graduate of Yale. He was there in ROTC I suppose or some such. He was very hot to get into the foreign service. Well I knew there were diplomats. I don't think I had ever heard the term foreign service, but he had the forms and he had extra forms, and just for the heck of it, I sent mine in. The funny thing was he failed the exam and went back to Yale. I passed and eventually took a year but was picked up by the foreign service and joined up at the overripe age of 29, which was already a year from the cutoff. My reasoning was not that I wanted to be a diplomat or go into the foreign service particularly but unfortunately I didn't want to teach. I still had that insane idea that there are those that do and those that teach. Frankly from what I saw at the State Department, except for the top 10 or 15 officers in the State Department and except for a few accidents like George Kennan's miracle telegram in '47 or '46 when he was DCM in Moscow, I think the average high school teacher, the average college teacher who is good and teaches history and subjects like that, has more influence on the world than the average foreign service officer who is mainly devoted to doing ritualistic padding of the written record, which the State Department is always, or at least in those days, telling us is excessive. Practically 90% of it is read by nobody and goes into files. But I had a wife to think of and I really didn't quite know what else to do, so I joined up.

Q: Do you recall the oral examination at all?

WEBB: Yes, that was my last superfine moment for many years because I think I utterly dazzled them in a way. They more or less told me that. I didn't come with very good recommendations. I had a bachelor of science unspecified from the Naval Academy which was exactly what everybody got in those days from the Naval Academy. I certainly had no academic background which was appropriate for the State Department. But for the previous eleven years all I had been doing practically, not knowingly, was preparing myself for the foreign service exam and the oral exam.

All I remember of the oral exam was a couple of things. One that they asked me to name all the countries of South America, or at least go around the coast and name what each was principally noted for or something like that. That was duck soup. Then because I was from the Naval Academy, they started asking me very pointed questions about all the drinking that went on in Newfoundland. I assured them that there was plenty of drinking and all kinds of wild behavior. They finally asked me very gingerly if I had ever participated in anything like that. I assured them that I was a teetotaler and didn't drink at all. Then they were even more worried that I was some sort of fanatic. I assured them that I just didn't like the taste. My wife who is as nice a human being as ever existed, grew up in a society that was the exact opposite of mine. I never knew anybody growing up that did drink; she never knew anybody that didn't drink. Drinking was no big deal. She and her mother used to have a cocktail every evening. I never saw her drunk, nor did anybody else or worse for wear. She will probably outlive me 20 or 30 years because of the good effects of a small amount. But anyway, they were reassured. Then they asked me a question that I think absolutely cinched it. No doubt today if I dared say what I said, I would be eased out of consideration. After all these were older men. Believe it or not they were all white Caucasian men, which is what 95% of the State Department was until these days, I suppose. They asked me what I thought the Boers should do in South Africa. I had given that a lot of thought, and I think I answered them just about the way one of our greatest Secretary of States, Dean Acheson would have answered them, who was very candid. I didn't believe anybody, any society ever deliberately committed suicide. I certainly didn't know why anybody would think that the Boers with all of their unattractive policies still had brought?

Q: This is tape two, side one with Haven Webb.

WEBB: Well my oral exam coming into the foreign Service, I was asked about what the Boers should have done in South Africa. I said, "I don't see anybody who thinks that one vote," well this came later, "one man, one vote one time," which has been the sad story overall of African liberation as you recall. We see this played out today in the sad state of Rhodesia's Zimbabwe. But I said, "I felt the Boers, the South Africans were awfully stupid the way they handled things. Certainly the black tribes in South Africa did not want to return to the old ways of Shaka Zulu empire, one of the most evil empires of all human history comparable only to the Aztec and maybe Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong. But the Boers had assets. One they were a 60-40 majority over the English speaking whites and therefore I understand they had actually limited European immigration." I never saw there was any problem in South Africa that 35 million white Europeans wouldn't solve. But the Boers were actually afraid of European immigration because everybody but perhaps the Dutch ended up the way everybody who went to Quebec including the Italians and the Spanish, speaking English and not French, and everybody but probably the Dutch ended up speaking English and not Afrikaans. I said, "They had the coloreds which were perhaps a million people back then who were the only people who spoke Afrikaans except for themselves or their descendants." They were all very closely related and people were always passing back and forth. I thought they should bring the Indians; they should bring the coloreds; they should get everybody into Africa through immigration that wasn't a black African of Negroid descent. They should try to build up as much as they could the support among the minor tribes. They should try to negotiate reasonable accommodations using that incredible British genius for coming up with solutions where there are no solutions, which unfortunately the Boers never learned under British rule, except a minority, and hope for the best. Of course at that time, they had plenty of time on their side. There was no armed rebellion that I can remember. Who knows. People like Mandela might if they had welcomed in. You look at South America where states that are 90% Indian had at least until the present day always had presidents and the ruling class that were still basically Caucasian and Spanish. Why couldn't they do to some degree what the Rhodesians actually did, and that is every civilized man, to use the Portuguese idea, should be granted full citizenship. Take all the young black radicals and bribe them with scholarships. Bring them in, try to create what is today called a multi-ethnic society. Don't destroy everything. Maybe that is the way it will end up, but I think the odds are 100 to 1 against it. What South Africa's future is, I hope it will be better than Zimbabwe's.

Q: This is what you are telling the board.

WEBB: Well the board ate it up. These were sensible men. Nobody had ever heard of affirmative action. Nobody had ever heard such an insane slogan as our greatest strength is our diversity. Go to the Balkans. Are they strong because they hate each other? They are all different religions and ethnic backgrounds and so forth. I think very frankly these were among the last totally sane years in American society.

Q: Ok, well I think this is probably a good time to stop this session. Let me put at the end here. So we pick this up and what year when you came into the Foreign Service?

WEBB: Oh 1961. Two days, I was not employed by the United States government. Two days only.

Q: Good, we will pick it up in 1961 and your entry into the Foreign Service.

Today is September 30, 2002. Haven, you came into the Foreign Service in 1961. What was your entry class? When did you come in?

WEBB: I came in I think it was May of '61. The same class as your boss, Ken Brown. Like I said, I had been out for about two months. It took them about a year to find a place for me. At that time I guess we were a normal class. Basically we were all white males. I don't know what the religions were, presumably we were all Catholic and Protestant. I don't know, there may have been a Jew or two in there. I don't remember ever focusing on such things. That, of course was considered perfectly normal. Nobody had ever decided that diversity in certain respects was so all important. As I always did, I did what the teachers told me to do, which was why I was probably a very good student through high school and the Naval Academy. I don't know if I had much originality. All my original thinking occurred later or occurred outside the curriculum, but I remember I finished number one in the orientation class, which I daresay meant absolutely nothing to anybody else there. I certainly didn't knock myself out, but I did review all the material before we finished up. Just as I had done previously in the Pensacola preflight class, I finished number one there. I was the only one who actually made an effort to review all the material.

As a reward, and I have really forgotten this and something reminded me just recently, I was selected as the only State Department representative to go to Williamsburg. I think it was a Rockefeller Foundation thing. I don't know what they called it. I don't know if they still do anything like that. But you had a meeting of foreign graduate students who had been studying for a year or so in the United States. They had one great meeting to discuss what they had learned and all this sort of thing. The State Department always sent one representative from the orientation class. Still under my Indian fever, about all I remember of any of this was I steered clear of all the Europeans and latched on to the Pakistanis and the Indians and the girl from Sri Lanka which is about all I remember of any of that.

My first request was for Hindi language training, and I got Spanish language training where I went from a noble 1-2 in Spanish and graduated with a glorious 2-3. As I remember the language aptitude test they gave us - I always did better on tests as many boys do, as opposed to girls, I always did better on tests than regular grades - but, for once, I misread some instructions and had to completely re-do a column or something. That had something to do with it, but I must have gotten a really abysmal language aptitude grade. I suppose I could have squawked and taken it over. I don't know, probably not. I never thought of doing that, which is remarkable in a way because I agree, I certainly have no basic language aptitude, probably less than the average foreign service officer. Yet before I was through I suspect I had more language training in more different languages than just about anybody who wasn't a language major in Chinese, Japanese, maybe Russian, a few other things. Eventually I learned, I always thought I was the type of person who ought to be teaching language at the FSI, at least be an advisor, because I eventually worked up my own system for learning languages which is to learn what you need and not learn the entire language, which you cannot do in 16 weeks or ten months or two years abroad. It is just foolish.

Q: Well, what did you put in for to do when you got out of that course in '61?

WEBB: Well like I said, I knew I put in for Hindi language training. That was in place of Spanish. Since I didn't have any language credit it was sort of insane. But maybe it did imply that I was eager. I may have won some points there that I didn't recognize. I suppose I applied for South Asia. I really don't remember much of anything, and certainly like everybody back then, I applied for political work. Since of course, we didn't have, what do they call them, career cones back then. Typically just about everybody started out in protection and welfare or consular affairs. But oddly enough, I don't know how, maybe because I had such sterling marks in the orientation class, my first assignment was in Mexico City political work. I always wondered what might have happened had I taken it. But long before I got anywhere near being sent abroad, that was changed to consular work in Tijuana which I thought would have been very interesting, if for no other reason than in those days you lived in San Ysidro and just like everybody I wanted to see the west coast, and see California. I don't know about Baja. Then finally it was changed to consular work in Guadalajara, Mexico. The most authentic city, and as everybody tells you within a week of arrival, the city with the second best climate in the world, after Shimla, in the Himalayas, the old British summer capital. I don't know how many people from Guadalajara ever went to Shimla, India, but they all seemed to know that. It was very fine. You didn't have to have heating. In July it got to the point at noon, you were a little bit warm, and in January it got to the point that my wife and mother-in-law visited at different times, used to live in the kitchen because the oven was going.

But actually, to my surprise, I found it rather boring. I found four seasons is much more enjoyable. Europeans don't have a summer, and eventually as a son of the south, you learn to hate heat. I still would think in north Norway if it ever hit 70 Fahrenheit, everybody takes their clothes off and heads for the sun and the warm. Eventually it got to the point where I just wanted one or two days of just good strong sun.

Q: Well you were in Guadalajara form '61 to when?

WEBB: Actually '62 to '64.

Q: '62 to '64.

WEBB: Yeah, and that was a very strange first post. We had a principal officer who frankly in many ways was rather weird. In some ways, I always thought he was probably a plus from the standpoint of the interests of the United States. He was a German, raised in Cuba. He was absolutely bilingual. But he totally preferred Latino culture, and he insisted on giving speeches on the drop of a hat. He would ward you off in this very flowery Spanish that just sounded wonderful, and then you would translate into English, but he would translate it literally. An English speaker would cringe to hear these flowery expressions that came across so well in Spanish, but nobody would translate literally who was serious about language. We had extremely strange hours of operation. I think there was eight in the morning to three thirty in the afternoon with no time off for lunch. Then, once a week you had to stay until six. Apparently this was all done for the convenience of the local employees, the Mexican employees. The Americans hated it, not that it was so inconvenient for us, but because at 3:30, all the Mexicans who had the duty shift, they left. Nobody who was an American left at 3:30. If you left at 4:00, he would notice and comment. If you left at 4:30, he would notice and comment. After 5:00 you might be able to sneak out without any dire results, but he always said he didn't mind working late, and he always stayed until 6:00 or so. You won plaudits if you stayed a little bit later. I don't think any more work was ever done. He said, "If we ever change our hours, all the Mexicans would quit." And when Mr. Limfiken came, who was a very sane and solid American business type, though he was a Foreign Service officer, he immediately changed the hours. There was a lot of grumbling, but nobody quit. He was a very strange man. He got along great with the local Mexicans. They certainly saw him I am sure, as a friend. He was on their side if you want to look at it that way. Which I always thought was a real problem in ARA. The people in ARA from my observation tend to be afflicted greatly with localitis, and they all seem to see themselves as representing their own country and their own region to the United States. I remember a senior American secretary who had spent her entire life in Latin America just happy as a rose when Argentina grabbed the Falklands. When I tried to explain to her that you know, I didn't think we really approved of that, and that it was perhaps likely that Maggie Thatcher was going to take it back by force, she was just up in arms. I don't think she had any idea what American interests were. I can say that to a degree because I only served in Mexico and Panama, but it is somewhat true in all the countries, maybe less so in Chile and a few others. But the press is constantly drumming at you about the evils of Uncle Sam and he is always meddling in our affairs. Psychologically I think it can be very difficult. I got very worn out in Panama, particularly with the Americans there who any time the Canal Zone was mentioned in a staff meeting, I swear there were hisses. People just automatically assumed this was an evil institution. From what I have heard since then, the whole area has just utterly collapsed.

Q: Well going back to Guadalajara, what type of work were you doing?

WEBB: My first job was protection and welfare. I worked for a guy, Ken Skoug, who was just a little bit older than I was, and we even looked a little bit alike. He was a very difficult person in some ways, but I have a lot of respect for Ken in that he was one of the two hardest working FSOs I have ever ran into. It just amazed me, the infinite care. I remember once, we had to go see an American who was in jail for being drunk or something and disorderly. The fellow made no bones that the charges were correct and all. We didn't think to say much about it. Some months later, we discovered him dead in Puerto Vallarta. That meant that since we had no connections except by air at that point, we used to send our resident embalmer, undertaker, over there to fetch the bodies. Of course, to my knowledge, no American who has ever died in Mexico or perhaps any Latin American country, who was alone, who had any valuables on him including rings that were ever returned to the family. At that time at least, you could make one telephone call or send one telegram. We got the name of the mother I think it was, and we called her, and explained the situation. They had to send money and we would send the body, that sort of thing. The next thing we knew, we had Congressmen, I think it was all from Florida, Congressmen, Senators, very influential family. Apparently mother and father were divorced. We didn't know that. They were outraged that we had told one member of the family and not the other. How were we supposed to know. The cause of death was listed I think, as alcoholism or something, just absolutely outraged that their son had gone on the wagon years before. They had no doubt whatsoever he couldn't have died, have been drinking at this time. Ken just amazed me. He just stayed absolutely delicate in the way he answered the Congressman and the Senator. I would have just told the truth. I don't think he ever told them that we had seen this fellow picked up right after I arrived, apparently drunk in Guadalajara. But he was trying to prevent a mess and I suppose keep the State Department out of trouble and keep himself clear. I guess it eventually worked out, but the amount of effort that went into that. I could do that and occasionally did where I thought there were serious things involved, but something like that I must say I didn't have that kind of energy. He amazed me.

Q: Now there is a huge American community there of retirees. At this time, '62-'64, what was Guadalajara like?

WEBB: We were just getting a community. The first year I was there we had 100 American deaths in our consular district, but they were all practically Guadalajara, Lake Chapala, the WWII retirement group. We had a lot of veterans who had full pensions with all kinds of disabilities. I remember one fellow particularly explaining that for the amount of money that he was guaranteed I guess for life from the U.S. Treasury, he could live in his home town in a small apartment. He had his wife and a couple of kids and his mother-in-law and himself to take care of. In Guadalajara, he could live in a four bedroom estate. He could have three or four personal assistants to help him with everything imaginable. They lived like kings. It was a marvelous situation for everybody concerned including the Mexicans. They certainly appreciated it.

Q: How did you find with this kind of thing the goose that was laying the golden egg? Were the Mexicans treating these people delicately and well?

WEBB: It was my experience, and I did protection and welfare for almost a year, that about 90% of the Americans who came to Mexico, visitors, and I assume it was pretty much the same for Lake Chapala, the retirement crowd and all, that we really didn't have normal retirees. Well we had some but not as I gather we have today. Most people, 80-90%, thought Mexico was wonderful. They loved the prices. Everybody was friendly. Unless you had something to do with the police, unless you had something to do with crime, unless you got your car picked up for some reason, in which case you could pretty well say goodbye to that car because the Mexican police would be driving it around as one of their cars. I remember one fellow who was so outraged that he ended up getting on talk shows trying to convince every American never go to Mexico. I think he was on Jack Paar. I suppose that was before Johnny Carson. Most people just thought Mexico was wonderful. Like I said, if you had to deal with officialdom, of course Americans didn't know how to deal with even bribery. In fact a very strange thing I thought. We had a certain amount of Mexican-Americans come in, mostly Californians, well and Texas. We were closer to Texas of course. Many of these people could hardly speak English, and they seemed to be Mexican in almost every respect. But if they had any sort of trouble with the police, they would start talking about those Mexicans, and all of a sudden it became we Americans. It seemed that Mexican Americans were sort of caught on the fence. They learned in the United States that you weren't supposed to bribe people, police. I am sure it happens, particularly in some areas. Then they would go to Mexico and they were never quite sure of themselves when to lay out a bribe and when not to. Our rule dealing with tourists and other Americans was don't ever get involved in bribery. You don't know how to handle it; you don't know how to do it. We had a list of lawyers and we would just hand them the list and say these people can handle English. They can represent you. We can't recommend anybody. Do your best. The lawyers I am sure got healthy considerations. They did what was necessary. In fact I think I made a young man, probably set him on the road to becoming a very rich lawyer. It was a young fellow that came to see me for some reason, I don't remember now. I got him on the list, and he was a young lawyer who spoke, I swear, better English than I did, just beautiful English. Actually, I never could figure out how. He had had a few years on the border, where I think he had gone to a gringo kindergarten or something, and I think he had a year at LSU in sort of graduate studies. He was handsome. As soon as the ladies met him, he was their lawyer.

He was very idealistic. At times he would tell me how he just hated the system. I remember one time, "What have you been doing today?" He had spent all day trying to get in to see some official. The problem was he didn't have enough money to buy his way in. I said, "What if you had," whatever the figure was, "100 pesos instead of five?" He said, "I would have been in and out in five minutes." It just drove him crazy.

The other thing is don't ever get in a Mexican jail, at least not 40 years ago. The one thing about protection and welfare of course, is, in my case, I saw my first dead bodies within a day or two of my arrival. I really met my first drunks, you could almost say. I met the first crazy people. One fellow particularly who seemed very sane. I have forgotten why he came in, nothing very important, but a lot of Americans would just come in to talk. That is what it amounted to. I finally asked him what was he doing in Mexico after 20 minutes that didn't seem to be getting anywhere. He said that President Lopez Mateos had brought him in to set up technical training schools, but his real reason was that he had invented something that was more powerful than the atomic bomb, called dry implosion or something like that. Up until then I hadn't a clue that there was anything strange about him. Well, he eventually got arrested because he was always buying things. He might not have had much credit, but somehow he was always buying things. Eventually the creditors would complain, and he got thrown into jail. He was there about a year before we could get him out. He was a rather large man when he went in. By the time we got him out, you know one meal of frijoles every day, his belt would just about go twice around him. Some days he would be perfectly sane. My lawyer friend and I went out to see him once. He said, "What is wrong with you? That man is as normal as I am or you are." But then he went back another day and it was totally different.

Q: Well you did protection and welfare for about a year. Then did you go into visas or something political?

WEBB: I did protection and welfare, which meant about once or twice a week I had to speak Spanish usually over the telephone with an official about somebody in trouble and in a difficult situation. My Spanish was totally inadequate, two, two plus at the time in speaking. It was just hopeless. We had an old fellow who had served I think in every consulate in Mexico at one time or another, including four or five that no longer existed. As far as I could tell, all he had going for him was he was a native speaker of Spanish. He was very unhispanic looking and acting, but he did speak the language as a native. One time I was having a very difficult conversation with some official about some poor American who was in trouble. He came walking by and with the most ingratiating smile I could muster I said, Mr. whatever his name was, "Could you talk to this man and find out whatever it is that he wants. I just can't understand." He looked at the phone and looked at me and said, "I am sure you will do all right without me," and walked off.

Actually I passed the written Spanish language test my first year in Mexico, which I attribute only to the fact that when you are living in a country and you see the language everywhere you go, and you hear it, if you have a basis you are bound to pick up something, but I certainly couldn't speak the language. It was only when I got into visas, which was the best thing that ever happened to me, it totally cured my fear of languages. I have been a fool about them ever since, speaking languages with people that I have never even studied, or trying to at least, and totally without any fear of making a fool of myself, which I think is the most important attribute in learning a language. Certainly I was very guilty of that. So I got into visas, and it was a perfect situation because basically I dealt with campesinos all day long. I interviewed as many as 180 in a single day. I eventually got my standard interview down to I think it was like 35 or 40 seconds. Half of the time before they could sit down, I had given back the form that they handed to me, explaining that the young lady over there who was a native would explain what had happened, which was 99% of the time a rejection because these were people who were typically making 10 pesos a day working on somebody else's farm with eight or nine kids, age 29 or 30. They wanted to go visit relatives in Whittier, California, I remember on one occasion.

Early in the game I made the mistake of saying, "Who is going to pay your expenses." Some young fellow pulled out a wad of bills, dollars I think, I don't remember now. It would choke a horse. Thinking I had no choice, he could prove he had enough money, I gave him a visa. I gave about 20 visas that day, I think, tourist visas. The next day the INS on the border said, "Who is this guy, Webb, and what does he think he is doing!" So I learned my lesson there. But I did have one fellow who wanted to go to Whittier, California, and stay for three months. I wouldn't look at his money. They would also try to bribe you; they always knew what it would cost to bribe an American official. I would usually look away and act like I had not seen the money, but then I would tell them that anybody trying to bribe an American official would be forever prohibited from applying for any kind of a visa and certainly an immigration visa. This fellow wanted to go to Whittier, which is very unusual. They would usually say LA or something that made a little sense. He had to go to Whittier. I said, "Why Whittier?" He certainly never heard of Richard Nixon. He just said that he heard it was a nice place, and he had worked hard all his life and he wanted to go to the U.S. for three months. I must say I was awfully tempted to give him a visa, but I didn't.

Q: Well after this period, how did you like foreign service work?

WEBB: Oh that is a hard one. I went into the foreign service not very differently than I went into the Naval Academy. It wasn't something like my room mate whose greatest desire in life was to be a naval officer and second greatest desire was to graduate from the Naval Academy. He was a native of Virginia, and he never changed his mind until he died of Lou Gehrig's disease a few years ago. I went because I thought at the time it was the best thing I should do in both cases. In the case of the foreign service, I was married, I had no children, but I was obsessed with foreign affairs. I was obsessed with politics. I was obsessed with history, and very foolishly I didn't want to become a teacher and didn't want to go and get a graduate degree or Ph.D. in history or something, which was very stupid on my part. But at that time it was offered to me, as I think I explained earlier, a friend from Yale had the forms and all I had to do was fill them out. I got in, and in those days I was very good at talking to older people, and convincing them that I was exactly what they wanted. I am sure, I was right at the age, I was 29 when I came in, and because of my age and my experience and my previous earning power, they wanted to do the best for me, but under the regulations all they could do was put me in the last slot, as an FSO-8, which is an ensign with a lot of seniority.

Q: Did you get any feel after you left Mexico about Mexican politics and all as sort of a country?

WEBB: Well I went down there, and I think Time Magazine had a big feature cover article on Mexico. It was all this palaver that Mexico was really a democracy. It was a one party democracy, sort of like Norway where the Labour Party held the prime minister's office for 40 years. Because the PRI, the Parti de Revolution Institutionale supposedly welcomed contributions from all four sectors of the society, the teachers, the laborers, the military, and the intellectuals and something else. This sort of made it a democracy. It was all just absolute nonsense. But it certainly wasn't a totalitarian dictatorship. People were very free to talk privately, very openly about most anything. In a public restaurant they might sort of lower their voices, but it was certainly not Stalin's Russia. Let me just give an example there. I knew a fellow, Harry Hudson, whose wife had all of the languages I ever tried to study. Ingrid was a Baltic Swede whose family had lived in St. Petersburg for decades. I assumed they were fluent in German, Russian, and Swedish. They left at the revolution, and she grew up in Helsinki and became fluent in Finnish. She met her husband when she was working at the embassy in Paris, and was no doubt very good in French. She had never studied Spanish, but she spoke much better Spanish than I did in Guadalajara. She told a story once of the difference between a totalitarian state. She was not an intellectual type and would not put it in these terms. But Harry was an admin officer in Moscow the year before to the year after Stalin's death. She, with her native Russian, said that once she was in a line, a queue, with a bunch of Russian peasant women more or less who were all talking excitedly among each other. Somebody looked down and saw her shoes, which at that time was a dead giveaway of a foreigner. Instantly the woman froze in mid-sentence and turned away with terror written across her face as did the other women and never said another word to her. A year later that wouldn't have happened.

In Mexico it was nothing like that. But you didn't want to get in trouble. I ran into something in our files that I thought was just devastating. It was a case that was several years old, and was labeled secret. I don't know if anybody else at the Consulate General knew about it. But it was a case where a young man working at Sears had seen a middle aged woman shoplifting. Doing his duty he had run over and grabbed her, and accused her of shoplifting. The woman just began to sputter in rage and said, "Don't you know who I am?" The manager came running up. It turned out that she was General Cárdenas' wife. This was the General Cárdenas, if I remember correctly, who was the ex-president of Mexico, that Cárdenas whose son was recently mayor of Mexico City, I think. Once the young man realized what he had done, he fled in terror. Now I thought of it at the same time as when the Kennedy family was being deified in America, certainly after the assassination. If that had happened to a Kennedy wife, I think the Kennedys would have put pressure to keep it quiet, but I don't think the young man catching a Kennedy woman shoplifting would have been in any danger of his life. It might have been bribery; it might have been all kinds of things like we saw with Mary Jo Kopechne, but you know, there is a vast difference between Mexico at that time. I frankly have a hard time believing it has totally changed by now. But it was that sort of situation. The police, the military were laws in themselves. There was a road rage case where a Mexican general felt that somebody had just dissed him on the roadway and chased the man down for a couple of miles in his car and shot him dead. Of course there were no repercussions. It never got in the newspapers, and it was only by word of mouth that we ever heard of it.

The junior officers there were assigned to a Mexican state in our district, and I had the state of Colima, which was 140,000 people, 90% I would say were illiterate from a practical standpoint. You could just about get to know everybody who had any influence in the world if you got down there two or three times a year probably. I read the Colima three newspapers as well as the three newspapers of Guadalajara. Never saw anything of any interest. Once a year the governor of Colima would announce that some foreign company was going to invest billions of dollars, marks, francs, something in some sort of a iron mining project or something like that. A year later the newspapers would headline exactly the same story.

Nothing ever happened, with one exception. One day I discovered something that was shocking. That was one of my three Colima papers all of a sudden said that the mayor of Colima was an absolute bastard and a renegade and a crook and a scoundrel. As best I could tell the rule is very simple. You never criticize the mayor of a city you lived in. You never criticized the governor of the state in which you lived. And you never criticized the President of Mexico whatsoever. Almost anybody else was fair game to some degree including even cabinet ministers. This really mystified me. Then this went on for several days or maybe a week or two, and then all of a sudden with no explanation the mayor was a fine fellow. There was never any explanation of what this outburst was all about. Well I got down there on one of my infrequent visits, and I asked one of the rival newspapers. They looked at me and said, "Ah, they were just arguing over what the annual subsidy was going to be." I don't know if that classifies as a bribe or just an official subsidy. As best I could tell the newspapers were even more worthless than the Soviet newspapers. You had to be a Kremlinologist to get anything out of newspapers.

Q: Well then after two years, '64, whither?

WEBB: By then I had gotten interested in NATO, and above all I had gotten interested in Finland. I had served in Newfoundland, and Newfoundland has a very strange history. It is the only part of Canada that never wanted to be part of Canada. During the depression Newfoundland was so broke that they absolutely gave up government and turned to the British and were ruled by a commission government. Parliament, I guess, was abolished. Then after the war in '48 or '49, they were supposed to vote on whether to continue with commission government or go back to having, what do they call it, representative government I guess, under the British crown. A fellow named Joey Smallwood, a small time politician from the outback suddenly appeared out of nowhere and said, "We want to go with Canada, because Canada has a baby bonus." Newfoundland was and maybe still is the poorest white English speaking colony on the face of the earth, with the exception then probably of Ireland, which was no longer a colony, except that Newfoundland was not Catholic, maybe a third Catholic, the rest Protestant. He was able to force Canada onto the ballot. Canada came in second. They had a runoff, and Canada won the runoff. Joey Smallwood became a politician for life or so it seemed. I got to thinking if something like that could happen in Finland for this reason. I saw the difference between Alaska and Finland.

Q: Alaska? You were talking about Newfoundland.

WEBB: Well there is a bit of a jump here. Alaska was 500,000 square miles and only 200-300,000 people. Yet, Alaskans had no fear whatsoever of their next door neighbor, the Soviet Union. Finland had four to five million people and sat next to the Soviet Union, and yet, after the war, all of their politics were based on the idea that we must get along with the Russians, the Soviets, with Stalin and his successors. That meant letting them interfere with domestic politics and everything else. I thought the obvious reason is that Alaska is part of the United States. The Soviets know when they talk with Alaska, they are dealing with Uncle Sam and all of its might. Finland at that time certainly was completely on its own and had no illusions that anybody would come. I started thinking in terms of an idea what I call politics fiction, but I never got too far with it. The idea was I would conjure up a Finnish Joey Smallwood who would react to some provocation by seeking protection under the American flag and NATO. That would lead to all kinds of unforeseeable consequences.

Finland with four million people stood up to Russia when Russia and Nazi Germany were allies, and nobody was going to help Finland, even though the population gap was 50 to 1. Whereas Czechoslovakia with the strongest military defenses in Europe practically, with a strong military, 13 million people to 80 million Germans, yet they knuckle under, and would again twice more. After the war with the pro Soviet coup and then again. I just got very interested in Finland and "Seisu" as they called it which a lot of Americans understood that word in 1944 and probably nobody remembers it now. It means guts or brazen courage, courage without consequences of the result. So by then I was really interested in Finland and northern Europe.

Of course I wanted political work and I wanted Finland and next to that Scandinavia and next to that northern Europe. Well I got Germany; I got Hamburg; I got consular affairs, and when I asked my career advisor, what about my wanting to do political work. He said, "Well you wanted northern Europe, and that is the best we could do." I had not said the only thing that counted was where I worked. Though to tell you the truth in many ways I enjoyed consular work. You talk to people. Not only was it marvelous for my language, my linguistic opportunities, but I really, to tell you the truth, found consular work more intellectually interesting than a lot of political work.

Q: Well that is good. I am a professional consular officer. You have problems; you are dealing with people rather than writing term papers.

WEBB: Well that, of course, and it turned out I did not like to write. During the years that I finally got into political, the political cone, basically by blackmail, there was no question about it. I was behind the eight ball when I started. But back then it seemed to me, the inspector general, somebody, was constantly saying, "Please. Washington is flooded with unnecessary political reporting. Reporting about everything under the sun and 90% of it is never read by more than the desk officer probably." One job I had I used to read everything that came in overnight from Western Europe which is no doubt more than from any other part of the world. To be perfectly frank, I do not remember reading a single report that really impressed me. In fact the only report I ever read that impressed me was George Kennan's X-telegram as chargé d'affaires from Moscow in '47 or something like that. But then of course, he was a genius in literature and history and a few other things, before he went bad.

Q: Well you were assigned where? Did you go to Hamburg?

WEBB: I took German language training, and I must say I am very proud of myself, because in those days, it was in Arlington Towers. Arlington Towers was a commercial building. We got an efficiency in Arlington Towers. We left our 40 pound wolf up in Vermont to chase the deer while we settled in Arlington Towers. I was like 55 seconds from my door to the classroom and about the same to the language labs. For the first time, I really hit those tapes, and I worked and I was letter perfect on the tapes. When we started German I was a star student. Plus there was an older fellow there, and he was equally good, I would say. We both obviously worked hard. The other three or four were lazy bums who never knew the tapes. But then towards the end of the 16 weeks they kept getting better; they kept gaining on me. Maybe they just had natural ability that I didn't have. By the time we left I was still 1 or 2 I suppose, but I no longer had the lead I started out with. It was very useful and I learned that the Foreign Service Institute knew what it was talking about, because of course that is the system that at least the Army developed in WWII, which was immersion. We are into biculturalism, and bilingualism, which originally was under the excuse that the only way Mexican immigrants were ever going to learn English was to teach them all their courses in Spanish, which is utterly insane. I am the living proof of that. Of course if you could have FSI language training in the country you would be much better.

Q: Yeah, we are working on it. You have some language instruction but haven't mastered it.

WEBB: Immersion was in France I know. Nice, I think, had it.

Q: Nice had it. Then did you go off to Hamburg?

WEBB: Yes, we served two years in Hamburg, '64 to '66.

Q: What were you doing there?

WEBB: I started out doing visas and ended up the last year heading up our protection-welfare unit. That was very interesting. Again linguistically, I had come out of Guadalajara, I don't know three plus, four I suppose, something like that. In visa Spanish I think I was almost native fluent, but once you got away from visas my efficiency dropped off tremendously. Yet, one day we had some Spanish seamen in for a visa question, wanting a visa. I was the only one who spoke Spanish so I got them. I couldn't say anything although I could understand everything. After about 20 minutes a lot of the Spanish started coming back.

Q: The visa load, was this basically just Germans? Was there much of a problem with Germans?

WEBB: Actually something that in a way was more pertinent to Mexico. After the War of course, I guess all European posts were just swamped with people who were trying to get to the United States. And with DPs (Displaced Persons) they were all mixed up. Somebody came up with an idea, very clever I suppose at the time, since you couldn't expect Americans to know 20 different European languages, that you would simply hand the guy a card and on one side you would have English, and the other side you would have Hungarian, Slovak, whatever. It would say stand up, turn around, tell me your name, and pat your head three times and sit down or something like that.

When I was in Mexico I made the discovery that there were no campesinos who were literate, and yet the visa laws said that you had to be literate in some language. You had to be able to read a language. I found the immigrants swore that this four page form that they just filled out theoretically, in which they were asked questions about are you a homosexual, are you a member of the communist party. The first thing they did is say, "Yes, I understand everything that I have sworn to and I told the truth." One day I just asked somebody what about question 12 and showed him the paper in Spanish. He hadn't the faintest idea what it was all about. Eventually I would just walk away and take a break for 10 minutes. I would come back in 10 or 15 minutes to find that the answer was always the same. If they were sophisticated, they would say, when I go to the United States I promise to obey the laws. That is all it meant to them. The unsophisticated, "When I go to the United States I promise to be good." We were giving these people visas. A Mexican local would hand the applicant some officialese, probably the same form that I was using, and say can you read this. They would look at it and say, "Si senorita." And that was the test. Occasionally you would get an older fellow who had never spent a day in school and didn't know the alphabet. He would say, "No senorita, no posso." She would say, "Well you have to learn to read before you come back." He would learn the alphabet and come back. They only learned the alphabet. If you gave them one of these "decreed forms" it would take them 15 minutes, but eventually by sounding out the words, they would stand up and do everything that the little card required you to do, looking at you like you don't really mean this do you. I went to my boss, Otto Wagner, who was out of INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service).

Q: He was in immigration. I know Otto. I worked with him.

WEBB: He said, "No, the courts have decreed if they can figure out those cards." But this is not reading. To this day I am thoroughly ashamed of myself. I should have gone on strike and refused to sign one of those things on the basis that it was a fraud. Nobody could possibly not say that the intent of Congress was that every immigrant, with a few exceptions for close relatives, had to be able to read, as far as I know it is still true, had to be able to read some sort of language. That was an absolutely fraudulent test. But I was new and I thought who am I to say what the courts have decreed. And I suppose they would have just tossed me out on my ear if I stuck to it.

Q: When you got to Hamburg, was this a problem?

WEBB: By the time we got there, Germany was wealthy. The German economic miracle had long been booming. Actually it was interesting because I had in my second job there, citizenship. I had a very able assistant, a local employee who in fact was a German countess, who had lost everything in East Prussia and was presumably penniless. She was very lucky to get a job with the American Consulate General in Hamburg. She was a marvel, other than the fact she was very bossy. They had no need for me to be there really except to sign papers. I did what I always did. I always told the truth when it came to evaluation reports, which if you will pardon my saying so I seemed to be one of the very few people in the foreign service who really did that. With her report I praised her highly. I said that she was marvelous, but I also said she could be rude. I had the woman crying. I didn't think she was the crying type. But my experience was with one very drastic exception in Norway, the local employees that I dealt with tended to be very good, at least the head of the section or whatever it was. I never had much contact with any American secretary that I thought was very competent, with a couple of exceptions.

Q: Did you have any particular problem with citizenship cases in Germany in Hamburg?

WEBB: This was a very unique situation. I supposed it has changed with the immigration law. We had a consular district of six million Germans I think it was. Half of all our citizenship cases pertained to one tiny island off of Schleswig-Holstein, one of the north Frisian Islands. I can't remember the name now. Somehow a century and a half ago before this, a pattern had been set up by which all the young men of the island would emigrate to the United States, stay there for 20 years, make their fortunes. When their parents were ready to retire, they would come back to the island and take over the farm. They had American citizenship. This had gone on for decades. There was also an absolutely unique situation in that on the west side of the island Fij ½hr they spoke Frisian, which is the nearest thing there is supposedly to English, even more so than Dutch. You could just see how the language changed from Friesian all the way up to the Swiss border where it became something completely different. On the west coast they spoke Frisian, on the east coast they spoke Plattdeutsch. Everybody went to German language school and learned Hochdeutsch, and apparently everyone from Fij ½hr knew English anyway. Half of our business was with these people. I have never heard of anybody remarking about this. It is one tiny island, but other than that, it was just the usual embassy situations, the usual citizenship problems.

This struck me very strangely in a way, but a very attractive young woman came in, and she had an eight year old boy which seemed a little incongruous, and she was from St Louis, and was divorced or separated and had come to Europe and was penniless and wanted to go home. Well eventually it became clear that she had emotional and mental problems. I think we eventually got her back. What surprised me, I was 31 at the time, I saw her passport and she was 30. I was absolutely horrified. I couldn't believe that a 30 year old woman could be so good looking.

That very night, I was giving a ride to a very attractive German woman who worked upstairs from us for a Britisher named Neville Hostelry. I told her the story, and she looked at me very strange and said, "How old do you think I am?" I said, "I don't know, 23 or 24." She said, "I am 32."

But basically protection and welfare was a very routine exercise in many ways. Like I said, it was very enjoyable in many respects. I never rushed things. I used to discuss things with people, and I learned a lot about Germans. I know the one thing that surprised me when I went to Germany was all the Slavic names. One day, I think it was a German immigrant applicant, I said, "Now what about your Slavic or Polish ancestry?" He looked at me like that guy must be crazy. I thought he was going to slug me at first. I said, "But your name is obviously Slavic. He eventually understood that I wasn't trying to insult him. It amazed me. Apparently the Nazis made no attempt, that I am aware of, to force people to Germanicize their names, which they did with the language, and particularly with the grammar. They bowdlerized much of the German language which created an abysmal chasm between elementary school kids who joined the working class who didn't know what [inaudible] was and who only heard of [inaudible] or something like that, activity word which is the Nazi version of the German version of Das Verb or whatever one would call it. I also saw something of German arrogance. I was utterly amazed. The British did their job too well almost. Of course they had Hamburg and everything except Bremen and Bremerhaven, I guess, which we kept because they were used for ports. They had totally convinced everybody that Oxford English or BBC English was the only proper English. Germans are the only people I have ever known who would correct my English at the drop of a hat.

Q: So by '66 you are off again. Whither?

WEBB: Yes. I had been promoted out of Guadalajara I guess. I think your first promotion was like the Navy, from ensign to Lt. Junior grade; it was pretty much automatic. Then I got a second promotion coming out of Hamburg I guess. That is when I started going bad. I don't even remember. I think I had convinced myself that I was about ready to take off for Finland. I was going to go native and write a book which would start this new politics fiction. I had all kinds of ideas. I think at that point I was given an assignment. I had two consular assignments. I always applied for a political assignment, and I got the strange assignment to be something, I think they called it science attaché 1/2. Now obviously they were looking at my record. My record was one of a BS, Naval Academy, science and math. It made perfect sense except that wasn't my interest any more. Who knows if I had done that, maybe I would have made admiral or whatever. If not ambassador, maybe I would have gotten a few more promotions. But I was sick and fed up with the way I had been handled. I went to our Consul General.

Q: Who was that?

WEBB: He was very much a gentleman of the old school. He was a little forbidding. As far as I know he spoke German and did excellent work. Of course, being a junior officer in Hamburg, a city of two million meant that you didn't meet anybody and you were nobody, and you didn't go to any really official functions except those at the Embassy. Whereas in Guadalajara you met the governor, the mayor. I almost gave English language instruction to the daughter of the governor. Whereas in Hamburg it was a big city. It had 109 official consulates. You are an absolute nobody. This gentleman whose name I forget, seemed to be somewhat stiff, but he seemed to be an honest fellow, and presumably competent, although I really have nothing to go on there. His wife was a little strange to be a senior foreign service officer's wife. She had a phobia about shaking hands. She wouldn't shake hands with anybody. And of course what Mexico and Germany have in common is that when two Mexicans or two Germans meet on the street they shake hands. After a couple of minutes they shake hands again.

Q: I used to think that German couples when they woke up in the morning would reach across and shake each other's hand.

WEBB: Well I was raised in the south, and I had never shaken a woman's hand in my life that I can remember. Even in high school when we were introduced to somebody you had never met before, if it was a male you shook his hand at that time and never again. If it was a female you sort of nodded politely and all, but you never shook a female hand. After two years in Mexico I came back. My mother had a party with all of these elderly women who were personal friends. Before I could stop myself I grabbed one of their hands and started shaking it vigorously. She must have thought I was crazy, but I got out of that quickly enough. But in Germany and in Mexico you shook hands every time you met somebody, before you left, as you were leaving. It was a great shaking hands culture. I don't remember so much about Norwegians or Finns shaking hands, but maybe I was used to it by then.

I just didn't drink. Ken Skoug when he learned that said, "You have no business in the foreign service," particularly when he knew I was going to Germany. He said, "You will not be able to conduct business if you don't drink in Germany." I found it was absolutely no problem in Germany, particularly because they had all these wonderful substitutes. They look like wine and God knows what else but they were non-alcoholic. I remember something, I almost got addicted to it. I can't remember the name of it. It is a marvelous substitute because the one thing about fruit juices and Coca Cola and things of that sort, eventually you do get tired of them. I thought my problem was solved when I got to Helsinki. All they had was Pepsi Cola. Coca Cola I don't think was in Finland at that time, and the same in Norway. But in Germany there was no problem at all. I never found it a problem. In Helsinki I met with my Soviet counterpart supposedly once a week, really about once a month. We were supposed to alternate between Russian, which I didn't speak, and English, which he spoke badly, at least he presumably spoke it badly. The first meeting he ordered something alcoholic, and I ordered Pepsi Cola. He immediately changed to a soft drink. I explained that I didn't drink. So by then Nehru had done his work and apparently even the Soviets offered fruit juices at their functions.

Q: Well back to when you left Hamburg what did you do?

WEBB: Anyway I went to the consul general and I said I wanted to go to Finland. I was just tired of playing games. I wanted to do political work. God knows why. He said, "I agree with you completely. I look up to you in effect for standing up. I think people like you should get out of the Foreign Service and do what you want to do." My wife had gone back. She was staying with family in Massachusetts. I don't know how, I was never very handy at breaking up homesteads, but I was prepared to go. Then that fateful day a few days later, he called me up and said, "Maybe you don't have to resign after all." There was an admin officer in Frankfurt who said, "Oh, he doesn't have to resign. Just tell Washington you are going to go to Finland, and they are just going to have to accommodate you and stick to your guns and refuse to cross the Atlantic until they agree," which I thought was a little crazy. But by that time I thought the foreign service was not quite the organization that we knew, that very publicly said with a wife you get two for one. We send you where we need you. We try to meet your requests, but the good of the service is what determines where you go, period. Which is exactly what we understood in the navy, which is the only way, I think, you can run such a diplomatic service or anything else like that in the government.

I did, and Washington said, "Come back and we will discuss it." I said, "Oh, think of all the money it will cost you shipping all my effects across the Atlantic. Then you are going to have to ship it right back." Lo and behold, I wrote a letter requesting a special detachment to go to the University of Helsinki. I was going to do original research on Soviet relations or something. I already studied Finnish and I could say [inaudible] which is the first thing I ever learned in Finnish which I think means steamship leaves Hamburg for Helsinki or something. Which is about all I knew after two years of once a week Finnish, Swedish, and Russian, taught in German. Lo and behold they said, "Come back and we will put you in FSI and give you the full Finnish language course, and then you will go back and be head of the consular section." Apparently they pulled my predecessor out a year ahead and instead of three years or whatever he thought he was going to get, he got two. I replaced him and I got two instead.

Q: How did you find Finnish as a language? It has a reputation of being very difficult.

WEBB: Finnish is I think the easiest language possibly there is to be a non-Indo-European language. It looks impossible. It is an agglutinative language whereas English is almost pure analytical, Chinese being the best example of an analytical language which, if I remember the definition, means in Chinese every word simply consists of a core word. There are no declensions. There are no conjugations. You simply use adverbs and adjectives to make your meaning clear. Whereas in Finnish, a little bit like Russian, you have incredible long verb forms that say things that in English you would only say in a participle phrase. That is true sometimes, but even a secondary clause or something. Of course it is famous because it has 16 cases whereas English has three, more or less, and Spanish two or so. German four, and Russian eight. Finnish has 16, but Finnish doesn't have prepositions. It has a couple of postpositions but no prepositions. Basically where we use prepositions, they use case endings to nouns. That is pretty much the same with Hungarian, which proves that they are related because there is not much in vocabulary that proves it. It is _____ in Finnish to say if you are sitting in a car it is "altos." If you are going to the car it is probably "alto ray." If you are getting into the car it is perhaps "aldoran." If you want to say into my car it is "altonuri". If you want to say sitting in my car "alpossri" and so on. It is really simple. It is also a language that for 800 years was overshadowed by Swedish, and it obviously absorbed a lot of Swedish and Germanic grammar, Latin grammar. Therefore it seems once you get over the basic hurdles, it is not as foreign as you first thought. Plus there are a heck of a lot of loan words in Finnish, though they do come under strange rules because a Finnish word can never begin with one consonant. So "Stroan," which in German or Swedish means beach, I think, becomes "rwanta," which makes perfectly good sense to a Finn, and Stockholm becomes "Tukholm." There are a lot of words like that. Then like German and Russian to a large degree, the international words are simply the same. They are simply translations of the international words. Where we say as do the French and most of the Latin, we say international in some form or another, the Germans say it and even write it in develt, but they are not supposed to say it. The Russians maybe under Stalin, they came up with _____ which means exactly the same thing.

Q: Interpeople.

WEBB: The Finns have the same thing. I can't even remember what that is Consalite or something. You could learn and sort of translate, and plus the Finns know the international words too, particularly the educated Finns.

Q: Well you were there in '67 I guess.

WEBB: I was there two years, '67 to '69 with a year in the States learning Finnish. This was a situation that rather disturbed me. No I guess it wasn't Finnish. I guess it was Norwegian. The situation of personality that always amazed me.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you got there?

WEBB: Tyler Thompson, who was I think the same class as George Kennan. I don't know, I have never heard of him dying. He could not be less than 95 or 100 by now. The last I heard, he was sailing his boat with Ruth, his sailboat up and down the Maine coast. As nice a person as you will ever find. I don't want to select him but I was shocked. I think he had been there five years as ambassador, but maybe only three and five by the time I left. Well he was replaced before I left. [ed note. Thompson served in Finland July 1964 to June 1969] Once steaming around one of Finland's 10,000 lakes, we were just chatting. I always like to come up with theory, and since I had read everything I could possibly find in English on Finland and to some degree on Scandinavia, I had lots of theories. My main theory, which I thought was rather unique, was that Finland had always hated and feared and distrusted the Russians, but that it was actually non-Russians that always let the Finns down. It was Napoleon that sold or gave Finland to Russia in whatever it was, 1809, because Sweden had backed the anti-Napoleonic coalition. It was Hitler that sold out the Finns in 1939 and '40 because of the deal with Stalin. They had been utterly sure the French would never allow Russia to occupy Finland or that Germany would never allow the Soviet Union to occupy.

I was making the point of how the war had started September 1, 1939. The invasion of Finland was November 30. He said, "Oh no that is wrong. Stalin invaded Finland before WWII started," It made absolutely no sense because until you had the Stalin-Hitler pact of late August of '39, they were theoretically more or less enemies. I found this over and over. I never got much feeling that people read very much. They were usually pretty good about reading up on their new assignment, but they never seemed to read much thereafter. I was always just absorbed in reading everything.

Q: Well what was the situation in this '67 to '69 period? What was sort of the political economic situation in Finland?

WEBB: Finland was doing very well. They certainly were not in the top ten or whatever they are like today. But Finland was progressing very rapidly. I think a lot of Finns back then probably would have said that the Russian connection by which they sold 2/3 of their exports or even more to the Russians, and imported vast amounts, mostly raw materials. They were forced to buy two Soviet nuclear reactors. I don't know if these were Chernobyl types, probably were, but they had the good sense to put container domes over them and all kinds of western safety features. As far as I know those two nuclear power facilities are pretty much as safe as anything in the West. I used to always feel they were just too quick, they anticipated Russian objections and would go out of their way to meet Russian demands before they became demands. The Social Democratic party that had always been the rock, solid rock opposition to the Soviet occupation had become to me almost like a Quisling party. But who can say; it all worked out very well. Almost like Willy Brandt who was on his knees to the Poles who recognized East Germany. I had very grave doubts about that, and I am the first to say, in the long run, our recognition of East Germany doesn't seem to have done any harm. Not because of anything that the Germans did or didn't do, but because the Soviet Union under Gorbachev changed and committed suicide.

Q: What were you doing there in Finland?

WEBB: I was the head of the Consular Section. It was a one man section. I had three or four local assistants. We did, of course, everything. We had a case where a German woman had married an American, lived in Texas, gotten divorced and nine months later produced a child. I was trying to explain very delicately to her that we didn't care if she was legally married to her husband when she had the child or whether she was legally married to her husband when the child was conceived. All we cared about was who was the genetic father of that child. I really had no way to avoid pressing the question. She blushed a little bit and said, they didn't have any money and after they broke up and she was waiting to go back to Germany she had no place to stay so she continued to live in the house with him, and she blushed again, and said, "We weren't always fighting." I wrote it all up and the State Department eventually came back and we gave that kid American citizenship. We certainly kept people busy. Most of it I suppose was visa work. The first year I was there it was under the old system. Finland had a quota of, I have forgotten, a couple of hundred, which we never filled, and which was 90% filled by young women who were going to "au pair" or something. But of course with a visa, an immigrant visa, they could do anything. We never knew but we estimated probably half of them stayed and half of them came back. I have always thought the Finns made as good immigrants as anybody. The next year the law changed. Finland had no more quota. At least while I was there I think we pretty much continued to issue about the same number of visas.

I had a citizenship case that really amazed me. It was a young girl who had gone over, I really can't remember, maybe under the "au pair" program, not an immigrant. She had met a young man; they had gotten married. She got pregnant. She wanted to have the baby with her mother in attendance. She came back to Finland. He wrote her. She started to get on an airplane. They told her, "You have to have documentation. You don't have anything." She went to the American Embassy. She wrote the young man. She didn't get very many replies. He apparently had lost interest, and eventually she heard nothing more from him. There she was with what seemed to be an American baby. She was going to stay in Finland. At least at that time all the Europeans in my experience always wanted American citizenship because they would say they knew what it was like in the '40s and '39 when everybody was going to get to America. They wanted their kid to have every opportunity. Eventually going on a few pictures, she didn't know the names of his relatives; she had no addresses. I think she was telling the truth and all. She gave me a few pictures of him in an Air Force uniform and eventually the State Department accepted the citizenship appeal. But it just amazed me how casual people can be with their lives.

Q: Did Germany pose protection and welfare problems, Americans getting in trouble and all this?

WEBB: The biggest thing, it wasn't Americans getting in trouble. The biggest thing we had was Americans demanding visas to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union as best I can remember had a policy that nobody got in on a tourist visa. They always wanted to go to St. Petersburg or Leningrad. Well it used to be the Finnish border was in the Leningrad suburbs. Now it has been pushed back 50 miles or 100 miles. They always wanted to go for a weekend, and they just couldn't understand. You know, I would try to explain you have to go to the Soviets. It is their business.

My Russian counterpart was a KGB agent. He was very friendly. As I said, we used to meet for lunch occasionally, and I would send people over to him, and I would call him up, and he would say, "Send them over." I never saw these people again so I assumed they got their visas or they got shanghaied. Until, now I never knew why he was doing this. Was it to butter me up? I don't know what reason, but we had a senior official, our DCM, Harry Shuloff, who was the second DCM there. He was of the old school, and he was very nervous about my contact with this Soviet official. He used to say things like, "What's going to happen in a few years when you are up for your confirmation as ambassador to some country and somebody asks why did you used to meet this KGB agent month to month. Doesn't that bother you?" thinking of the McCarthy era. Well it didn't bother me or anybody my age. We always thought McCarthyism was a big joke. I never knew anybody who took it seriously in the Navy or the State Department.

I said, "I made out the written report just like we are supposed to do every time I met him." Now these reports were nothing more than we talked about the weather in Russian. The only thing that ever got very controversial was the time I was supposedly speaking Russian and I said a word. He said, "No, no, Haven, that is wrong. That is not the word you mean." He kept trying to define the word because he didn't know English. I said, "Oh you mean traitor." The only sentence I could think of in Russian that I could say was, "Do you think Trotsky was a traitor?" Obviously they used to tell me how the Russians felt so bad over our problems in Vietnam. When I pulled the Trotsky thing on him he would only say, "That was a long time ago." We don't know exactly who did what to whom back then. But the secret thing was that when you were all set up, your Soviet counterpart and your KGB agent were supposed to ask you to pick mushrooms out in the country. Then you would have a big picnic and they would drug you and you would wake up in bad with God knows whom, and then they would blackmail you. That was supposedly the pattern.

But a funny thing happened in '68. The Russians invaded Czechoslovakia. That year, we always had what we called America Day every year I think, or every five years, I don't know. We only did it once I think. It just so happened that the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. George Kennan, believe it or not, was our speaker. This happened the night before. He just threw away his speech and talked extemporaneously about his heartbreaking terrible thing that had happened. We were supposed to refuse invitations to the Soviet Embassy, not to give any, to snub the Soviets. The very day after the invasion I think it was, an irate American came in and said, "You can get me into the Soviet Union for the weekend. I know you just call the Soviet embassy and they do anything you want. I have heard that." I flatly refused. I said, "We have no contact with the Soviets right now. You realize what happened. They just invaded Czechoslovakia. Do you think I am going to ask them on the behalf of the United States government for a favor?" "I don't care what happened in Czechoslovakia. I want to go to the Soviet Union." I reported this at a staff meeting thinking that everybody would say good work, Webb. The same DCM said, "I don't know why you didn't call up your counterpart." I did eventually run into him somewhere, and believe it or not, the last thing that I can remember that he ever said to me was, "Why don't we go mushroom picking in the countryside?" I was so disgusted I never reported that. I never saw him again.

Q: How did you find contact with the Finns you and your wife?

WEBB: We loved Finland; we loved the Finns. I think you probably heard people say that Russians are more like Americans in many ways than any other Europeans, you know sort of the open frontier spirit or something like that. I think it is even more so with the Finns. The Finns have such a terrible history. After all, they fought the Russians twice in WWII and the Germans once. They had a greater percentage of their population killed in WWII than any other country except Poland and Russia and maybe Germany. They had no illusions. During the Vietnam debacle while we were there, the Finnish reaction was far less. It didn't begin to compare to the "Hate Americanism" that Sweden and the Olaf Palmes were engendering. Even the Norwegians and the Danes were going along with that. Though I do remember one thing that really shocked me, Helsinki Sanomat which is the way I learned my Finnish memorizing tutorials. The New York Times of Finland and the writing at that time and sort of the stuffy Germanicized non oral type of Finnish, did a weekend supplement that the entire nation awaited with bated breath. It was an article about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam by a very famous Finnish philosopher. He was not a political scientist or historian or anything relevant, but he was a great man supposedly. All I could get out of his article was that we were in Vietnam because of their resources, their oil wealth, things of that nature. What did we spend three four, five hundred billion dollars, trillions by today's money solely because Vietnam had these wonderful mineral resources that nobody has ever seen to this very day? I was just dumbfounded. But the Finnish press treated his comments you know, almost as if God, Umalah which is the Allah to the Finn, Umalah himself, God had spoken those words. But it didn't have a big influence on anything we did. There may have been some minor protests, but the protests at the Soviet Embassy after the Czech invasion were much greater than anything we ever experienced, if we experienced any at all. I don't really remember.

The Finns were very pro American. They had a very high immigration. Also they had the most left wing emigration. Finns voted Communist in the United States to a greater degree and longer than any other ethnic group, or so I have read. It was only WWII that finally healed the wounds, and the communists who supported the Soviet Union and Stalin almost to the day the war broke out were treated by Mannerheim and the Finnish army as loyal citizens and to almost a man they proved to have been so in combat. To their great heroism.

Q: I think of the Finns ending up in Minnesota and Wisconsin, the Dakotas and all that. Did you run into reflections of that in your work?

WEBB: Yes, we did in the attaché½s. Of course we had a full ensemble of attaché½s. In our experience the military attaches were either hopeless in learning Finnish and using Finnish, or they were third and fourth generation and knew a little Finnish, and loved the opportunity. At one time both our senior naval attaché½ and his assistant had a Finnish background. That fellow whose name I forget, with a pretty young wife, told me one time how he had been invited by distant relatives to stay with them out in the country somewhere. Of course he was using all the Finnish he could possibly muster; his wife didn't speak Finnish, and he asked at one point where the bathroom was. Everybody just laughed and laughed, because what he had said is where is the outhouse? Because when the Finns left Finland in 1900, there were no bathrooms, not for 99% of them I suspect. But of course, all of that changed and the vocabulary changed accordingly.

We loved Finland, and it was a marvelous experience to be there for two years. We had a very active Finnish-American society. We used to do things, sports events and things. I had done a little bit of skiing in Vermont to the point where I almost could handle parallel skiing, but I had never done cross country. I was doing a little bit in Finland right out of our back door in what was called Westend which is over by Copial on the west side of town. On one of these visits we had a three kilometer run where you went up on in the hills on your cross-countries. You ended up on a vertical abyss down to the lakeshore. And then you had to go to where they had a hole in the ice where you would later go swimming.

I think the Canadian ambassador had lost his skis and was trouncing through the snow. I would never have gone down this incredibly steep slope except I had to. All these 60 year olds - our ambassador did it, and he was 60 at least by then. I did it, and my skis clattered like nothing I have ever heard before, but I stayed on them until I hit the ice, and then I went splat, but I didn't break anything and got up. Then later three times we went out wearing nothing from the sauna. My experience is that when your ears hurt so much they feel like they are going to burn off, then you leave the sauna, you run through the snow. It just feels wonderful. You strategically drop your towel on a ladder stuck in the ice. You jump in, and it feels wonderful for five seconds, and then you start freezing, and you get out. I assure you if you forgot your towel on the way out, you would never go back to retrieve it. Everybody is standing there watching you. The third time I did it, I don't know why I didn't have a heart attack, the ambassador's wife stopped me for a little conversation. I am standing there in my towel in about a foot of snow barefoot. I was about to die, but I excused myself and ran. But none of the women went except for a couple of them, well one Scandinavian. She was married to our political officer, which was strange because he was an American raised in Sweden, and she was a Swede raised in America. They had married. I was in the hot room, the sauna. He came in and said, "Anything going on?" and I just looked out to see his wife who frankly was very flat-chested, running up I guess carrying a towel that was somewhat strategically located. I said nothing, and he went out and took a peek and I left.

The rumor was that the Swedo-Finns, the tiny percent of the population that used to be 15% and would undoubtedly be 90% except for Napoleon, just like Wales and Scotland and Ireland were Celtic speaking 200 years ago and now almost completely English speaking except for the Welsh for some reason, I know not why. I think it is down to five or six percent, and they are a very definite minority. But supposedly we are told that among young Swedes, they went to the sauna, they did not divide. They went by age group and not by sex, which is the way they did it traditionally in the country. The serving wenches had to beat the master of the farm with the birch branches or whatever it was. What you got in a hotel, the women had to be I think at least 30, and I think had to be rather plain to have that job. But they were very thorough.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop this, Haven. In '69, whither?

WEBB: I left Finland, let's see, I had complained to every inspector. Every time we were inspected I always complained that I always asked for political and never got it. He said, "Oh the heck with it. Let him have political." So I got my first political assignment which was to INR, Bureau of Intelligence and research where I was to be for the first year an early morning briefer for all of western Europe with a specialty, one country my own specialty was Finland. With the second year I got rid of the early morning brief and had all five Nordic countries. So I never learned to read Icelandic, but if you know Norwegian, you can pretty well pick out Swedish and Danish, at least the written language.

Q: So we will pick this up next time in 1969 when you are off to INR doing Nordic stuff.

Today is October 29, 2002. Haven, you were in INR from '69 to when about?

WEBB: Two years. '69 to '71.

Q: How did INR the early morning briefing work at that time?

WEBB: Well I got up at 4:00 and I was in the Department by 5:30, and went to the area we had reserved where all the incoming traffic from western Europe was piling up. You went through it all, and we used to mark things we thought were of interest FYI with comments. Then you were expected more or less to write up a little report on say two or three things. I used to get the Italian political crisis of the day about once a month. So I was always combining six or seven reports from Italy and then writing up something on Italy which was probably the country I knew least about. Fortunately we had a fellow in INR who was Italian, who had been doing Italy for 30 years.

Q: I think his name was DeShigilo.

WEBB: DeShigilo, right. I am glad you remembered. Then you would race to put it all together, and then at 8:15 the five of you if I remember correctly, would assemble with the director of INR, probably nobody else at that hour. He would brief him, and then he would decide what he wanted to do. Then he would take it up to the seventh floor, maybe we were on the seventh floor, I don't remember, and he would brief the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary and whoever else. So there were times as a very junior officer you were really just one pace removed from the Secretary of State. Secretary of State, who was that now?

Q: '69 that would have been William Rogers.

WEBB: I guess it was Rogers. He came around once, he came around to INR and met the directors. Then as a concession to the staff he met the briefers. He asked me what was the thing I liked most about early morning brief, and I told him very frankly, nobody corrected your work. What you wrote went in.

I know on one occasion I got some raised eyebrows, typically it was Italian, and being briefed by DeShigilo. Every time something came up I was beginning to develop some ideas, mostly of course reflecting his opinions. I really didn't have anything to begin with. But there was a poll put out, which I thought was absolutely spurious, in which somebody asked Italians, who were as always in some sort of economic or political crisis or so they thought, if a Mussolini type figure offered himself to take over the country and set things right and have complete power for a limited time, would you approve? Of course, everybody in Italy said "yes." There were people in the State Department, or maybe it was more the media at the time, that just got really upset about that. I very undiplomatically, as I was often accused of being, really scorched that in very harsh language. It was a funny premise. Who wouldn't ask a strong man to come in, set everything right, and then disappear. The problem is you can't get them to disappear. I mean Hitler came to power purely and simply because of the depression, and he pulled off an economic miracle. In 14 months or something like that, Germany was outproducing Germany in 1928. For some reason none of the other leaders, including FDR, paid attention. If Hitler died at that precise moment, he would have gone down as a great leader. You know, outside of killing people, which I am sure they did from the first day on.

Q: They got Hitler slowly.

WEBB: But of course having gotten power, he was not about to give it up. Eventually the Germans were in a situation that I cannot believe that one in a thousand ever anticipated and one in a million would have welcomed.

Q: How did you like work in INR at this point?

WEBB: Well it was nice in the sense that for the first time I was dealing with politics. The idea was we were an independent voice with absolutely no operational responsibilities. So when something would happen, which typically for Scandinavia would be an election, we would immediately have to write up a very quick report. The first time I did Finland - having read everything I could find for five years about Finland - I was ready to go. I started out I think with 1918 and Finnish independence if not the 19th century. I was just masterfully laying it out. Of course, all of it got shredded.

My boss said, "The Secretary and his people don't have time to go back into ancient history. Just tell him what happened and what it means for today." My first reaction was absolutely absurd because I tried to boil it down into what really was telegraphese. I just didn't want to give up any of my great major points. But that got rewritten and eventually I learned to conform. You would write it up in clear language in a fairly decent style. Most of the people there were professionals. They were absolutely - this was before word processors and the like - they were absolutely brilliant at being able to take out things that somebody might object to, clearing it with the desk or somebody else, then putting in substitute language that would conform to the exact space we had. They were just brilliant at that; they were wonderful editors. In that sense it was very enjoyable. You didn't have contact with people. After having complained for three tours and six years abroad about doing consular work, I must say I rather missed the people and the contacts you made and the opportunities to talk with people informally. Then you learned a lot about their countries.

Q: You must have been dealing a good bit with a particularly Swedish opposition towards our being in Vietnam. I think this was the period as I recall it, when we had Nixon-Kissinger time. Kissinger was national security advisor, but Sweden had been put into Coventry or the equivalent thereof. I mean Olaf Palme was the prime minister and was marching against our participation in the Vietnam War and all. Were you getting some feel for this?

WEBB: Yes, and I might go back to something that happened in Finland to this regard. Ambassador Tyler Thompson was a contemporary of George Kennan. He always had a certain amount of envy for Kennan's record and his fame and particular position he had in the public mind. He was so far as I know, the first foreign service officer that ever became internationally famous in his own right.

We had once a year, a meeting, sauna, of men at the embassy for student politicians, mainly Social Democrats, but other parties included in it. This by now would probably be '68 or '69 when we were in the depths of the Vietnam debate. At one point, I got one of the more moderate students aside and we were talking. Somehow we did get into Vietnam. He was saying how this was terrible what we were doing and we should pull out. His idea seemed to be that we had no right to interfere in a civil war. I started making analogies with Germany and saying well, what if West Germany were sending in troops and assassins into East Germany and was conducting a terror campaign? I kept backing him up and backing him up. Finally he lowered his voice very significantly and said to me, "I know it is the same thing, but I can't say that," or words to that effect.

I remember once when I had the INR job, I used to work with my counterpart in the CIA fairly often. In fact he had been a junior officer in Helsinki just before I got there. Our DCM, who was the only person in the foreign service who sort of intimidated me, a fellow named George Ingram. He had gone to Vanderbilt, a southern gentleman and all of that, but he didn't strike you as being very southern. I found myself coughing before I would say something to him without even realizing I was doing it until I noticed that one day. Apparently he didn't like this fellow. He was sort of an odd character in a way, his looks and mannerisms.

Q: The CIA guy?

WEBB: The guy who became CIA. And since he was on his first tour in the foreign service, it was relatively easy to get him out. He was a white Christian and he didn't fall into any minority category, assuming that was terribly relevant back then. Then he popped up at the CIA where he was on the open side and doing research. I dealt with him. He and I were presumably doing about the same thing. He was following Sweden, except they seemed to have an unlimited budget. I think he had computer backups or whatever. He could let me know anything I wanted to know about a past election or percentages on a moment's notice. I got really dependant on calling him and using his resources. Once I actually lunched at the CIA with him and some others. But another time some people at the Swedish embassy, a couple of Foreign Service Officers had me to lunch. I think they assumed that because of my position, if not my age, that I would reflect the new thinking in the State Department that was becoming very evident. The younger crew that were coming in at this time, and many of them had worked in the CORDS program. As I understood it, it was almost a bribe. If you would go and work in poor old Vietnam in some capacity with USIA or whatever, you would be looked upon favorably as being admitted in to the Foreign Service afterwards. A lot of these people came in. The only one I can remember certainly reflected the disenchantment of what became the new left at that time. I gather that many others were in the same boat. At this particular luncheon, I think the Swedes were just absolutely astounded that I defended our policy, not our tactics but certainly the principle behind our being in Vietnam. I remember at some point reading that Dr. Spock, who became such an anti Vietnam activist...

Q: Benjamin Spock.

WEBB: Benjamin Spock, the baby doctor, had said he thought we were still absolutely right to intervene in Korea and prevent the north from conquering the south. Except for the difference in terrain and climate and difficulty of operation, I have never seen the slightest difference morally. They were exactly the same issue. How anybody could say otherwise has always been a mystery to me.

But I had it out with the Swedes for 20 or 30 minutes. I think at some point they decided I was obviously a hopeless case and not somebody they would find useful, so they abandoned me and went their own way. But it was a very melancholy time. I know in Finland, if I haven't already mentioned this. Helsinki Sanomat, the Finnish equivalent of the New York Times, about our second year there did a big thing for their Sunday supplement of consulting one of Finland's most noted philosophers. He was certainly not a foreign affairs expert. He was going to give the definitive word on the Vietnam affair. When it came out, the man said, that we were just there for all the mineral wealth that Vietnam, to my knowledge, has never produced. But it was quite a letdown, and certainly an intellectual farce. Vietnam is where the media started going off on its own tack and from then, on it seems to me, we have certainly lacked in this country, clear discussions of the issues. There is almost always a politically correct view to take on virtually everything that is controversial, and to a very large degree you are simply not permitted to have any other view, or at least your view is labeled extremely conservative or extreme right wing or something along those lines.

Q: Did you get any feel while you were doing this about Sweden being by the State Department being pushed to one side and saying OK we know where you are. You really don't amount to anything, and screw you and let's go on? But in a way even more that we were almost taking a certain amount of satisfaction in sticking it to the Swedes because they were so vehement on Vietnam, or not?

WEBB: I don't know. I really didn't see too much. I was angered enough myself that things that many Foreign Service Officers would have thought undiplomatic in our approach to Sweden at the time I would have thought as far too soft. I never had any great illusions that Sweden mattered very much. You know, the fact that they were willing to host this farce of Bertrand Russell's senility a war crimes trial. Things of that nature I found a complete absurdity. In INR, we had one fellow who had been in Vietnam in the CORDS program and I guess a one tour FSO by now, maybe a second tour, I can't remember. I can remember with him and with several others getting into discussions. I remember one time - maybe it was about Italy - I referred to the communists as "commies," not really meaning very much by it. One of these fellows really brought me up sharp and said, "How can you refer to other human beings with such a term like commies?" I really let him have it. I mean this is the most evil political movement of all human history of which I am aware, responsible for the murders of tens of millions of people certainly, and directly and indirectly responsible for WWII. I don't know how you can hurt the feelings of somebody that doesn't hear you. I got it very much along the lines of somebody objecting when Churchill, who certainly knew better, called the Germans "Nazis" just sort of to express his contempt. I think he did that publicly in speeches at times. I thought of exactly the same thing as Reagan spoke of the evil empire and the ferocious reaction, I assume, in the State Department. I think I was probably out by then, but certainly in the American press, it always angered me once the new left took control, neither the Washington Post nor the New York Times or for that matter ABC, NBC, PBS or CBS, every referred to the Soviet empire as an empire. Yet as soon as it crashed, they always referred to it as an empire. They have always used that sort of terminology. I suspect the same thing was probably true in the 30's before WWII referring to the Germans. You simply were not permitted to label evil as it is. Of course we have the same thing today with Iraq above all in the present debates.

Q: Well then in '71 your two year tour in INR was over. Then what did you do?

WEBB: I was given a political military slot in the bureau of American republics, ARA. I came in with a somewhat elderly colonel, and then the second year they brought in a newly minted colonel in the Army I think. It was actually a classmate of mine except that he went to West Point, and I went to Annapolis. There was a tremendous discrepancy in careers at this point. He was a basketball player about 6'6" by the name of Williams. A very friendly fellow who apparently had some feeling of service solidarity. I think he was determined to almost single handedly to get me promoted, and kept writing up these Nelson, Horatio Hornblower types of reports on me, which certainly made me eligible for higher office. I don't imagine that the State Department took these things with a great deal of respect. I think they were used to that sort of thing.

It was during a second job at ARA for the first time I started running into the problems of bureaucracy in personnel matters. It seemed to me just an absolutely scandalous state of affairs. We had a middle aged woman, I think she was about ten years my senior, as the sole secretary, and two men in the political-military office in ARA. Apparently not too long before I got there, it had been a three man office with two secretaries. The powers-that-be had cut the staffing back. This lady never stopped complaining that she was being worked to the bone. Before there had been two secretaries for three officers, now there was one secretary for two officers. Which did not prevent her from coming in in the morning, patting me on the head, and telling me how sweet I looked. Nobody ever used the term of sexual harassment at that point. It seemed absurd. It was all very innocuous, but she could be oh-so-friendly. Then at 4:30 or 5:00, 4:30 let's say, if I had some paper that just had to be typed up immediately, I would run out there, and find Susan doing her nails, not that she seemed to have done very much the whole day before. I would say, "Sue, we have got to get his out." She said, "Well I can't do it. You will just have to get the staff secretary." By then the rules had changed. The rules as far as I knew when I came in was you stay there until you got the work done, and that included not only officers, it included secretaries. But she was very quick to complain about how she was so overworked. One day she didn't come back from lunch, and we got a call. A medical doctor called and said that she was in sick bay. I have been so long gone I don't remember the terminology for either the navy or the State Department.

Q: The health unit.

WEBB: The health unit. That she had turned herself in, that she had a complete nervous breakdown, that she was so overworked that she could no longer work and that she was going to apply for immediate medical retirement. That is what she did. I was the one that was directed to give her her last fitness report, annual evaluation. Before I did, she came in with one she had written herself. This was filled with language that she was the most overworked human being that had ever lived. I went in to see the personnel lady about Susan's record in the past. This woman told me almost angrily: this isn't very typical. This comes up every now and then. When we look in the record with somebody who has had a nervous breakdown, says they can't continue, we find there is not a hint of any problems in the previous record, that they have an absolutely perfect record, that they were just great.

So I just wrote it up the way it was, which didn't make everybody happy, but it was an honest report. I explained that she had done her job to a certain amount, to a certain degree, but she wasn't the greatest secretary that anybody ever had by a long shot. I couldn't see she was terribly overworked, but I suppose she got her retirement and probably everybody was better off for it. She was not an impossible person or someone I ever had any great difficulties with. We would see more of this sort of thing later in another tour in the Department of State which was infinitely worse from every standpoint. This was only my introduction. I had dealt only with overseas secretaries, and by and large, most of them were pretty good.

Q: Yeah, and they?

WEBB: Some of them were extremely so in Germany and in Finland. Incidentally I might bring this up. Political correctness had reared its ugly head by this time. When I was in Finland we were already receiving the message that secretaries were there only to do secretarial work and not to get you coffee and not to do this and not to do that, which was something that never meant very much to me because I never drank coffee or anything else in the office. My understanding is that someone who is an officer has a secretary so that she could do things that would simply burn up his time to be doing. If that included making coffee, I see absolutely no objection to it or anything else as long as it is not demeaning and humiliating.

In any case, these were the rules. Among other things, it was never require a secretary to handle any of your personal affairs. Well when you got into overseas assignments this got very tricky. In Finland we had an absolutely marvelous woman named Enid Lindquist. She was a Swedo-Finn who had been there since the day one, and by now was probably in her 50's. She could handle anything. She could be a little rough. I don't think she was ever rude, but she was not always as diplomatic as she might have been, but she was extremely competent.

When I left I had various bills to pay that I hadn't received. The normal thing was that you left money with someone. I assume in most cases it would have been with your secretary. Certainly if I didn't do that, I would have done that in Germany where we had an equally competent woman who in fact was a countess who had lost everything in East Prussia when the Russians took over. This is a very similar situation, but not wishing to go against regulations, I asked a fellow foreign service officer who I had done a great favor for. By this time Finland had joined some sort of wildlife free area with other Scandinavian countries, and consequently you could no longer bring dogs into Finland without putting them into I think it was a four month quarantine, almost as rigid as Great Britain. Since we had a place with a backyard that was fenced in, my wife was able to persuade the pleasant young man who was responsible for this to just let us keep our dog in the back yard and not let it have contact on our personal oath for four months or whatever it was. It worked out fine, and when the next couple came in we did the same for their dog and avoided a considerable amount of money for that matter as we found out when we went to Norway some years later. So I asked this fellow if he would handle this for me, and he assured me that was fine, and he would do it. I never heard anything more about him, and about ten years later I ran into him at a private party. I think he handed me a shoe box in which there were some old bills that I couldn't even recognize. He said, "Oh I paid them all, so everything is fine." It was about this time Enid Lindquist came to Washington, and we had her over. Somehow this came up, and she expressed diplomatically the fact that she had been very hurt. I had been the only foreign service officer that had not entrusted her with taking care of these things which she, of course, was eminently suited to doing, much more so than any American FSO. I think you have just got to read into these regulations and new commands, where so much of political correctness is involved. You have just got to have a certain amount of common sense. My first secretary in Norway was a woman whose idea of heaven was making coffee every morning and having a little coffee klatch before the daily work started. She was the last person in the world who would have ever complained.

Q: Well now going back to this time where you were political military for Latin American affairs, what were the issues? As far as I can gather what we were trying to do was keep high tech weapons out of Latin America.

WEBB: Yes, this was very disturbing. We had a policy as I understand it after the war of supplying Latin American countries with modern weaponry. This mean right after the war they got our surplus P-51's and P-47's, different modern aircraft that was considerably updated from what they had been flying, but we didn't give them any jets, and didn't want to. Then I think we eventually gave them what was it, the T-30, the first the T-33, the training version of the F-80 shooting star, our first operational, very obsolete jet fighter. Because we had Pol-Mil attached to every embassy it worked out marvelously well. We controlled the military potential in effect, of every Latin American country. Since no Latin American country faced any external threat except the constant feuding among themselves, none of which was terribly serious, I think it worked out very well for everybody. They were happy to know that big brother was not going to let some Bolivian, God knows what, Paraguayan, Ecuadorian feud get out of hand. We would not let one country leapfrog over the other. But this started coming apart with supersonic jets. Some of the countries wanted to begin to go into supersonic jets. We had a perfect candidate. Remember, it was the Northrop F-5 which was a trans sonic very limited capacity jet.

Q: Called the freedom fighter.

WEBB: Called the freedom fighter. As I remember we were hawking that all over Latin America and had some success with it. But eventually came the day that the oil wealth of Venezuela and their constant feud with Colombia got to the point where they wanted more. The choice was always going to be is it going to be something American, which is what the military in these countries always wanted, because anything we sold them, even if it might be very expensive at first, they knew our political military people would take care of. We would make sure the planes would be flyable if we had to maintain them ourselves I think. Whereas with the French, who were our main competitor and some of the others, this was always very questionable. I remember particularly the most frustrating experience of my entire career. I got a letter one day from an irate medical doctor. He was just fuming about the newspaper reports that we were going to sell, I can't remember was it F-16s or something, something more modern, a true mach 2 fighter.

Q: Probably F-4s.

WEBB: I don't remember, it may have been F-4s. I don't remember what else it could have been, A-40s or something. Anyway, he just lambasted away. I sat down and wrote back a letter. Of course we were always told in INR and elsewhere, any letter you write to the public, judge it on the criterion would you like to see it in the New York Times the following week. I wrote what I thought was a very diplomatic letter, and I made several points. I said contrary to what he implied, and I would preface all this with the idea that medical doctors, if they are good medical doctors, are not renowned for their astuteness in foreign affairs. Any medical doctor who is worth his salt spends so much time reading the literature in his field, I don't think he has time to be an expert in much of anything else. But this fellow had asked for an honest answer, and I tried to give it to him. I pointed out the levels of armaments in Latin America were very low as compared to eastern Europe, which was an area of the world which was somewhat similar in population. The countries were somewhat similar in development. Yet the Soviet Union had loaded these countries up with just ten times the firepower that we had ever allowed into Latin America. This was a very good thing, and we ought to continue with the policies. I made the point that tiny Cuba with less than ten million people, a member of the Soviet Bloc at that time of course, had a greater air force than I think any country in Latin America except Brazil which had ten times its population. The only choice in the case that he was addressing was simply were we going to sell either Colombia or Venezuela or both a moderate increase in capability, but nothing that would get out of hand, or were we going to let the Soviets or the French or somebody else step in with considerably greater capacities that we would have absolutely no control over. I threw in some language. I also pointed out, which I am absolutely sure is true, that to my knowledge no war has ever been started per se by the level of armaments. Frankly I put that line in as a throwaway thinking that somebody would want to take it out, but that might leave some of the rest of it in. I first approved it with the very senior officer on our ARA staff who dealt with communist affairs. He read it over and came to me and said, "Where did you get this? This is just marvelous." Apparently the idea that I might have written it myself never entered his mind. He approved it. Then I went to the desk officers, and the Colombian desk officer said, "This is just great, of course you will have to take out any reference to Colombia." I went to the Venezuelan desk officer, and he said, "This is just wonderful, but take out any reference to Venezuela." It went sort of like that. As I remember nobody in eastern Europe had any objections whatsoever which rather staggered me. Then I went to a very senior fellow that I knew. I can't remember his name anymore, in ACDA. I have always thought that was a tragic development because as the people, the left wingers always wanted us to have such an agency, all knew that once it becomes part of the bureaucracy, you have an advocate for disarmament per se that will just raise holy hell within the bureaucracy. This is what happened. He not only looked at my one liner about my levels of armaments not causing wars, which he immediately identified very astutely as having eliminated the *raison d'etre* for his entire organization, but he just said rather than argue with me, rather than take things out, he just said, "I can't accept any of this. I'll write something." Which he did. I got it later. He just simply lifted parts of the Secretary's speech to the UN or some such and part of the President's speech to somebody, threw it together in a package, and that was sent to this medicine man. It had absolutely nothing to do with the questions. I can just imagine the man receiving the letter and just going right through the ceiling saying that these diplomats, they are just incapable of rational thought. They are incapable of answering a simple question. He just got approved boiler plate back. I suppose my letter, who knows, if it had gotten in the New York Times, I am not quite sure what harm it would have done.

Q: Probably not a damn thing.

WEBB: But anyway that was the thinking. It was very interesting in INR. Everything I did in INR was classified either secret, there may have been a few things that were confidential, but pretty much everything was secret. Again not because anything I was saying, anything INR was saying was so important, but just that this was an official position internally of the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. government. I could always buy that. That didn't bother me. I have always been one who does believe that you should classify things for the time being. But then we had a directive from the Congress that every year we had to produce a booklet which would give the state of affairs of every communist party in the world. I had to do five of these my second year. I worked with, I don't remember the names, but really top communist party Comintern experts in the Department of State which I had a lot in common with because I had read just about everything that was current in the subject, Bertram David Wolf, people like that, ex-communists. My original mentor, to the degree I ever had one, was Louis Fischer who had been in Moscow during these early formative years during the 20's and 30's. We had almost a private conspiracy among ourselves to sneak in little things into this booklet. I had never had any problems. I still have the only examples of any work that I ever did that I have copies at home because it was done unclassified and sold openly. The truth was what we said in those books was almost identical with what we were saying in classified secret material. Those booklets would never have been released in a million years with that information except that the Congress said we had to do it.

Q: Haven, while you were there, were you all pushing to introduce a little better airplane into Latin America? I mean was there a conflict between say the Department of Defense and the State Department over more high tech airplanes?

WEBB: Well I think everybody was agreed that the lowest level that we could get away with, that was politically acceptable in the region, is what everybody wanted. The differences came in just as a matter of emphasis that the Department of Defense that was dealing with the military in these various Latin American countries, knew how their counterparts felt. They were absolutely convinced, and I think the record proves them right, that if we did not meet these demands, and we could do it by slowly raising the level of the capabilities of the combat aircraft they wanted, they would buy elsewhere. As best I remember that is exactly what happened. I think Venezuela and Colombia bought Mirages from the French. Peru and somebody ended up buying Soviet. The State Department, in my view, was unrealistic in not meeting DOD's demands or requests. Or perhaps it was more the Congress that made it impossible. It may have been the latter.

Background material that I was reading just a few weeks ago, how the civil rights people, the human rights people in the Carter administration were so adamant that we not help Somalia. Oh, I know what it was about. It was the horn of Africa. We were trying to keep a link with Somalia since the Soviets had reversed the two countries they were backing, and now they were backing the big power, Ethiopia, against Somalia. But because Somalia still had portions of the Ogaden which was the disputed territory which I guess we saw as Ethiopian, Carter and his people decided that they could not help Somalia in any way. They couldn't keep any military contact. The net result was just pure disaster. Somalia has been a disaster ever since. That is oversimplifying, but it was the view of the old line State Department people that the proper position for diplomacy is keep access to both sides, don't go out on these high horses because of something like civil rights. I mean all we have to look at is that utter disaster known as Iran, and in the name of civil rights, we destroyed the only moderate regime, certainly the only one that had any respect for women's rights. It was the radical feminists who were the most vehement in destroying the Shah's regime, and knowing or should have known what the alternative was.

Q: Well by this time we are moving up probably to '73 aren't we? Whither?

WEBB: I was getting very difficult by this time. My entire career I was on the verge of resigning and going somewhere else. In effect, as long as I was thinking very strongly of resigning, not that I was broadcasting it, the State Department always bribed me with irresistible things, usually interesting countries with interesting language capabilities. The one thing for somebody who is supposedly so poor in language is very proud about, I never served in an English speaking country, and always had foreign language capabilities involved. But about this time, and this was almost farcical, this was of course, a time when the Panama Canal was up for grabs. I, of course, had very strong feelings about this. My feelings were not just that it would be tragic to turn over the canal to Panama. I wouldn't have hesitated a minute if Panama had been Switzerland or Denmark or some capable small country that no doubt would have done a brilliant job in running the canal. It wasn't that it had to be American exactly; it was just that knowing a little bit about Latin America, and I was to serve two years in Panama, the idea that something as important as this inter-ocean connection should be turned over to a country of absolute corruption would never in the long run, we shall see, be able to keep the canal going. Certainly there would be no more improvements. There would be no more doubling and tripling capacity without adding any locks, simply through the genius of American know how of changing the maintenance rescheduling.

One particular day I got into a very fierce discussion with John Blackman. I don't remember, he may have already been connected to the Panama desk at that time. John was one of the two hardest working officers I ever knew. He was an old African hand who had always been on the side of black Africans and seizures of power regardless of their results. Though I really never discussed that with him. But we did get into a full blown discussion one time on the Panama Canal. I blamed the whole mess on Teddy Roosevelt, otherwise one of my great heroes, and the man that might have saved the 20th century. I always felt that Roosevelt took the easy way out when he did not annex and give statehood to Panama. Even a little bit to my surprise John agreed that had we done in Panama what we did in Puerto Rico, probably today there would be two million gringos in Panama. It would be 50-50. There would be no more chance of the Panamanians trying to kick us out as a state in the American commonwealth or whatever position they might have. We might already have built a sea level canal, but we didn't. Now we had this terrible situation. We disagreed very strongly. The people in the State Department were always throwing up the only alternative to turning over the canal was to have snipers in the jungle firing at ships, maybe sea mines blowing holes in ships, all kinds of things. I could not see any American government having the courage to take a revolutionary situation like that and actually deal with it effectively. So I might well if, I had been president, ended up going along with the Panama Canal treaty, but I certainly could see nothing but disaster. Shortly after that conversation I found that I was assigned to be the number three political officer in Panama, and John was going to be the head of the political section. I laughed about it, and it didn't seem to bother him too much. I ended up going along with it and served two years down there.

Q: So this would be '73 to '75.

WEBB: Yes.

Q: What was the situation in Panama when you went out there in '73?

WEBB: Well this was a side of the State Department that I really found reprehensible. Essentially John admitted as much to me on a couple of occasions. Our Embassy in Panama was not operating like an American Embassy in a foreign country. We were involved in a propaganda game allied to the foreign ministry of Panama in sending propaganda reports back to Washington all based on the idea that you have got to get rid of the canal. You have got to turn it over to Mr. Trujillo, the dictator at that time. John, as I said one of the two hardest working officers I ever saw, would come back from meetings, interviews, luncheons, and would take a secretary and disappear for a couple of hours. He would produce these tremendous long propagandistic reports back to Washington all designed to make a very smelly situation look much better. I really thought that embassies, Foreign Service Officers ought to be telling the truth to Washington, giving the unvarnished truth and letting Washington decide, letting the Secretary of State, the higher ups decide what our proper policy should be. But I had nothing to do with that except for going to Club Dadora where these negotiations eventually took place, and flying out to deliver classified material on a couple of occasions. I even got to fly the airplane for about 20 minutes which was the last time I ever flew an airplane, which is fine. I was dealing with labor affairs, something called the Confederacion Travadores de la Republica de Panama, CTRP. That was sort of a sad thing. Basically these were canal zone workers. They were basically blacks. They were basically men of Jamaican, Trinidadian, and Caribbean descent. They were basically English speaking, and frankly they had been betrayed by Uncle Sam during the Eisenhower administration when segregation was no longer permissible. Up until then, they had lived a very separate life in the zone. They had gone to their own schools, taught in English, their native language. Ten percent of the Panamanian population at that time was English speaking. With desegregation it was decided that rather than confront the issue of race, we would simply nationalize the schools and they would instantly become Spanish language. We had forced the Panamanians to give citizenship to these people. From now on they would find their loyalties with Panama. Gradually they were doing so. They were gradually becoming Spanish speaking, and I guess the next generation wholly Spanish speaking. Eventually they built up a lot of resentment against Uncle Sam. It was expressed normally in the appropriate Panamanian nationalist view, but I got to know enough of these fellows fairly intimately. It would come out quietly on the QT, that they just felt betrayed. They had never wanted to be anything but Americans, and they thought that we would be there forever as most everybody did up until 30 or 40 years ago. And I supposed they had been shunted aside and their jobs probably had been taken by people who had clout with the president of whatever Panamanian government there exists.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

WEBB: The first ambassador was Robert Sayre. He had been an ARA assistant secretary. That was my reading of one act of his administration. I think it is hilarious, and I think it probably does happen. But as I understood it, a lot of offices were moved around physically in the Department of State and ARA at Mr. Sayre's direction. It seemed to me he got some sort of an award for increasing efficiency because of it. This was all done in the name of efficiency and who people dealt with, and putting people that dealt with each other closer to each other. After he left, when I came along there was tremendous opposition and people complaining that everything was more difficult because of this. Eventually a new Assistant Secretary came in and re-sited exactly the way it had been before. That is the way I was told, and he got an award for increasing efficiency. But Sayre, I will say one thing. He was the only other member of the Foreign Service I can think of that I ever knew who did not drink. I remember once telling him somewhat frivolously exactly how to make a perfect frozen Pepsi Cola. There were 20 steps which he seemed to find amusing at some cocktail party. Most of my memories are to some degree bureaucratic ones. We were missing an ambassador for quite some time. The DCM was absent for a time, and consequently the economics officer served as chargé d'affaires at various times. One of the things, and again I saw this to some degree in the military, though I was such a low level that I couldn't speak with any authority about it. But it seems to me it is one of the most outrageous aspects of bureaucracy today is just the absolute dishonesty. I am talking about 20 years ago. I don't imagine it has improved, but I have no direct knowledge of what has happened since. People simply lie about personnel reports, that sort of thing.

An excellent example of this was the GSO, the General Services Officer. We had a fellow in Panama who was notoriously a drunkard, not very good. On one occasion I ran into the chargé d'affaires coming up the stairs in the Embassy just cursing a blue streak about we are going to run this guy out of the Foreign Service. He was probably worthless. Well a few months later I happened to be chosen to be on a reviewing board to review all of the efficiency reports of the year. When we got to this guy's report I was just amazed because the Admin Officer built him up as a paragon of virtue. This is really the same chargé d'affaires who was off to Saudi Arabia and was unable to defend himself, had written an even more golden report. I later learned that the reason supposedly was that this was the man's last assignment. They wanted to get him whatever it is you do when you retire, an extra promotion or something, but it was just so utterly dishonest. I absolutely refused to approve the report.

To my amazement the others went along with me. We ended up attaching a note, a reviewing statement that we thought the reporting officer, the evaluation officer and the reviewing officer were a bit lenient which I took to be in the eyes of the Department of State and anybody that read this a blazing red flag that was anything but a little bit lenient. But I don't know. I heard Alison Palmer, the great radical feminist who got herself into Time Magazine, trying to get some ambassadors in Africa reprimanded because they had changed her assignment to Kenya from political to admin or something like that. I overheard her talking right outside somebody's door. She had a big booming voice. You couldn't help but overhear her talking to one of the civil servants, one of the top lights in IO, about how she had never said anything negative about anybody in an annual evaluation report. He agreed absolutely that is exactly my policy, and the reasoning was very simplistic. If you are the only one who says anything negative about anybody then those people are absolutely done, which may be true.

I can remember many times when the Director General of the foreign service or people in high position would complain bitterly that they weren't getting honest reports, but to my knowledge nobody ever got reprimanded for issuing this sort of simplistic nonsense, and nobody ever got promoted or ever got acclaim for telling the truth. In fact there used to be a saying which I dare say is true that to get rid of a bad underling just about cost an evaluation officer a year's work. He may then get so far behind on his own work that he may end up being reprimanded. I got into a situation like that at a later date, although I had the complete backing of the two directors of my little office in IO at the time. But I think it is just a terrible thing and it is so easily preventable. You simply have to start reprimanding people who obviously lie. Particularly when you get people who come down with dereliction of duty. You look in their record and it is perfectly documented that they are totally incompetent or whatever the case may be. You look in their record and you find that for 20 years they had nothing but unblemished reports. It is just utterly despicable.

Q: Well we are talking about 1977 or so when you left Panama.

WEBB: Yes. I even put this in my annual request for reassignment whatever you call those things. I was so sick of hearing every time we had a staff meeting at the Embassy in Panama, if someone even mentioned the Canal Zone, you would all but hear the hissing of the FSO's. It just boggled my mind that they could be so politically out of tune. They were so antagonistic at what had been one of the most heroic endeavors and certainly one of the greatest examples of state socialism in world history. An endeavor, the Canal Zone that had just been a marvel of efficiency. To my knowledge, I know the railroad that had been built by Americans in the 1850's, I think after Ulysses S. Grant had forced his way across the isthmus on mule back, the railroad which we greatly improved after we took over the Canal Zone. That has been wrecked by the Panamanians since they got it back, since they got it. It no longer runs I have heard. You just don't see any reporting. Our media just doesn't care. But I heard that every military base, and I saw them all almost the last year that they were almost in pristine condition, that they were turned over and within a week everything including the toilets and all the electric wiring, anything with copper in it, were just stripped bare. These billion dollar facilities were just wrecked. I will be amazed if the canal doesn't grind to a halt at some time or another in the next five or ten years. We or the Japanese or the Chinese will come in and spend a few billion to get it running again, turn it back. Not that they are not capable of running the canal, not that they will ever improve it. They are certainly capable of running it, but they will never be capable of handling the finances because the canal, contrary to what Panamanian nationalists have always believed, that the American government has somehow made billions of dollars. It has always been a net loss to Uncle Sam, but we have the discipline and we are such a wealthy country that we can absorb minor things like the canal zone. We never raided the fund that you have to have to keep the canal zone going. I have no idea what has happened financially in Panama since we turned it over, but if not this regime, some regime I imagine very soon will find it expedient to raid the canal of its financial backing. They will get into trouble. Maintenance will fall off. You will start having problems. Sooner or later we or somebody else will have to go in and dig it out again or whatever is necessary to put it right.

Q: Again going back, about '77, whither?

WEBB: I put this in my report. By that time I hardly gave a damn and said I was tired of working with Americans who seemed to hate everything good in our country. I would like to, because I knew I was going back to Washington, I would like a job that had some travel in it. I don't remember much else I said. I got the Bureau of International Organizations in a small three man office led by an absolute master bureaucrat. Three officers and two secretaries, called IRTOC which was telecommunications and transportation. We had the ITU, the International Telecommunication Union no less, UPU, the Universal Postal Union. All of these I got. My agencies were run out of EB, Econ and Business. The big one was ITU. I was assigned basically to look at the personnel problems in the ITU.

Q: This is tape four, side one with Haven Webb. You were saying?

WEBB: Yes, EB had professional people led by a very competent guy, John J. O'Neill, if I remember his name correctly. Several subordinates dealt with technical aspects of all kinds. They had been doing it for years and seemed to know the material backwards and forwards. They never had the slightest clue as to the relevancy of what we were doing. I even asked my first boss what was the point of it. The answer was that we were there to contribute that unique perspective. Well about all I can remember about it at this point was reviewing questions of personnel which was the only thing that EB would let me get involved with. We did try to take a position on these proposals that would be going to the annual conference in Geneva.

I found this the most excruciating, boring piece of work I had ever done. At times I could disappear for an hour in the library and find some wonderful books on Marxism or whatever. To show you what bores one person perhaps energizes somebody else, I was told my predecessor just loved this work and just doted on the intricacies and the details of it. I can remember sitting in and falling asleep at every page. I would have brought my book on Marx and Marxism, which most people would find very dull, and read a few lines and be all wide awake. I would go back to this other business, and I would go right back to sleep. But it was frightful work. I did go to Geneva. I could have just as well been left behind. I really had nothing to do. EB had all the work. My trip was just a waste of State Department money. I did in fact make a difference to the UPU, the hemispheric union. I can't remember what we called it under the UN, although it predated the union by many years. It included Canada which was very unusual for a hemispheric organization. I went as the sole State Department representative on a mission with the postal people, which had its own foreign affairs section.

Q: IEU or something like that.

WEBB: Yes. This was a very interesting thing because they had a director of this organization who was really almost a crazy man. He was sort of the wild man of Borneo. He also had, as best I could tell, a very inflated view of his own importance. He was always talking about how the perfect retirement, the last job, the last service he could do for the American government would be for him and Margaret, his wife, to be assigned to be the ambassador to Switzerland. As far as I know he really had no such claim. He was always getting involved. I will say one thing for our first director at TRC. This man got involved in some way, and I don't really remember too well because this was in Washington. But in some way he got involved with Soviet affairs. My boss, Carl Gripp, I guess I told him about it and briefed him on it. I was present when he called this fellow up, and I have never heard anybody get a tongue lashing which ended with, "If you ever do this again, I am going to bring this right up to the Secretary of State." That did calm things down again, but when we got to Lima, he was in charge of the delegation. I was the sole State Department person on board. The embassy approved our telegrams but never got involved with anything we did. Basically we had only one problem, and that was Cuba was a representative delegation in good standing of this organization. Oddly enough although I think it was founded back in the 20's perhaps, the organization had never had a meeting in Washington, exactly the opposite of what you would expect. The membership was dying to go to Washington. The head of, this man whose name I unfortunately forget, of the foreign affairs side of the our post department was absolutely determined he was not going to be involved in all of the odious details of hosting one of these conferences in Washington. But the other side of that was I don't think they ever had a meeting in Havana. Castro apparently very much wanted to bring the entire delegation to Havana. Well we could have easily prevented the matter by simply offering to host it ourselves. Everybody would have been very happy about that except, I suppose, Cuba. But we had a very tight frame, a very iffy sort of situation by which we were trying to finesse the situation and get somebody to offer to host it again and not send it to Havana, but, above all, not bring it to Washington. Also we were under instructions to have a hands off attitude towards Cuba, not to play footsie with them, not to recognize them, to simply be cordial. Immediately the leader of the delegation went marching right over to the Cubans slapping backs and in every way trying to ingratiate us. I think he had some ideas that he was going to solve the cold war personally or something along those lines. I got involved behind the scenes because I was the guy who had to write the telegrams, send them to Washington, get them approved by everybody at my end which meant the Ambassador as well as the head of delegation. This worked out to be a very arduous thing. I basically stayed up all night or virtually all night. I can't remember how many nights, because every time I had to draft a telegram there would always be very long detailed question, very nuanced. I wanted to make sure that everything was covered, and I did. I got them approved, but to my amazement, our delegation had approved it. It all worked out beautifully. Somebody finally volunteered; I don't remember which country, and it didn't go to Havana and didn't come to Washington and it all worked out. That was about the hardest I think I ever worked in the State Department because it was something specific; it was a goal that was understandable. It was not writing boiler plate for the sake of writing boiler plate, which was my objection by and large to the political cone. In a way it is just so ludicrous because back then we were constantly being told at the Washington level that there was for too much reportage pouring into Washington, but then as soon as you got overseas everything was on the basis of how many reports have you written, how fast can you spew them out. I never saw much idea of respect for content as much as simple volume. I don't know. It is a problem I suppose that will always be there particularly as we become such a tremendous overstaffed bureaucracy.

Coming back to Washington I ran into the most ridiculous personnel problem that I ever saw. This was just absolutely ludicrous. We had a three-man office with two secretaries. The number two man in our office was Mike Hoyt who was an African specialist who had been in Uganda, no Burundi, in Burundi at the time of the massacre of the Hutus by the Tutsis, if I remember right. In Rwanda and the Hutus had massacred the minority Tutsis and sent the bodies down the river. The Tutsis took advantage of prior warning and massacred the Hutus in Burundi before they could get a chance to do them. According to Mike, the Tutsis ended up murdering every male up to the age of 50. Mike, as DCM or chargé^{1/2}, supposedly somehow shamed the department of State into putting Rwanda and Burundi on the list of countries with human rights problems.

Well, as soon as I arrived, I was told that my secretary would be the senior black woman, who turned out to be also from Tennessee, which seemed rather odd because we had a young white girl who was serving as the boss' secretary. I could type though with almost unlimited errors per page. I could type up something very roughly, correct it, and hand it into the secretary and let them type it up. The first time this happened with Betty I handed her several pages of something I was doing. She gave it back 20 minutes later all typed up. Eventually I would discover, on a good day, Betty would make maybe 10-15 mistakes per page. On a bad day she could make 20 or 30 mistakes a page. Eventually I would take the copy I got back, ditto off multiple copies, mark with pens and colored pencils exactly what mistakes had to be corrected, take them back and explain it very carefully to Betty. Invariably she would accept it without comment. Invariably I would get it back and a third of the mistakes I pointed out she corrected, a third she ignored, and a third she made new mistakes where she had a different mistake previously. To give you an example of how utterly absurd this was, the Congress gave us one of these assignments which I can only assume, but somebody up on the Hill thought that this would be a good exercise. How many thousands of man hours were devoted to carrying out this assignment I shall never know. It must have been considerable. We had to write detailed reports and answer like 90 questions about every international organization. We spent weeks doing that. I just ignored it as long as I could, but eventually it became clear that we were going to have to do it, and I eventually did turn in the reports. I remember Monday morning giving Betty one of these packets to be typed up. She gave it back to me a couple of hours later all typed up. I went through the corrections and gave it back to her. By Friday evening having done absolutely nothing all week but work on this report, I finally handed it in. It was the messiest looking thing you have ever seen, but you could make a Xerox of it and it would be passable. The next week, I had the same thing. Betty was not there. By then I had a white secretary and we had a young black girl in. She had learned there had been a lot of racist rowing between Betty and the white secretary. The white secretary did all the work. Betty just sat there all day smoking cigarettes and talking on the telephone and staring right ahead at the white secretary. Eventually there would be accusations. Betty accused everybody of racism. Then we got a black secretary that took the position of one of the two white girls who we had previously. She told me later she had been very much on Betty's side, but when she found herself doing all the work, race turned out to have nothing to do with it. She became as embittered toward Betty as the white secretaries had ever been. But in this particular case, I gave her the paper. I knew she had hated to do this. I said, "Look I am sorry. Betty is not here. It is three months overdue. I have got to get it in." She said, "OK." She typed it all. She gave it to me an hour or maybe two hours later. I went through as I had learned to do checking everything. After two or three pages, I just gave up and said obviously this gal is competent. She made no mistakes. I read it briefly and turned it in, and that was the end of it.

We used to have IO wide staff meetings every morning. Someone was always begging for a secretary because none of these units but ours had more than one secretary. When we offered Betty they would laugh. Nobody would ever take her. By this time we had gotten our second director in. I had three in three years I guess, two and a half years - this was Julius Walker. Oh, once we realized what the situation was with Betty, Mike and I had gone in to see the personnel lady for IO and complained very bitterly that we had to have a new secretary. She just laughed in our face and said, "You people are the most gutless wonders, you Foreign Service Officers because every time we transfer Betty to another department, and this is about the eighth time she has been transferred in eight years, after a week or so you people come running in and demand that she be changed. I always say to you write up a report telling me of her deficiencies. Give her an unsatisfactory report and I have something to go on." Nobody would apparently ever do this. In fact, I don't know if I can still be prosecuted, but at one time I was looking up the safes and discovered that Betty had left some papers on top of one of the safes. I looked at it, and apparently it was her previous fitness report, but it was from a previous office which happened to be next to ours. I looked through this thing, and, to my horror and disbelief, this woman was running the office. She was absolutely competent. As I said she was a senior secretary. I went into that office. There were two middle aged white women who had been there for years. I asked them, they said, "Ha." The first thing that officer had anything to do with Betty, he never asked her again to do a lick of work. He would wait until she was out of the office. He would come to us and say, "Betty is not here. Would you do this. It is very important and has to be done."

Well Julius Walker thank God, to his great credit said, "We will not do this." We will tell the truth and let the ball fall," whatever you say. Let it fall where it may fall. I was assigned as the guy who had to collect the evidence. The personnel lady explained to me that it wasn't good enough to bring in evidence of incompetence, because at a trial or hearing or whatever she would get, the union would simply say, "Well this was a bad day. That is not representative." You had to keep a record of everything the woman did for a year. Just absurd. I did. Then I wrote up a report which was like ten pages, I don't remember. Outside of a little speculation of what her problem was, because literally this woman did no work. The only thing she did was answer the phone and take messages, and you could not read the messages half the time, and she couldn't read them either. If she did any filing, God help if you tried to go back and look for the file. She is the only person I ever knew that took two hour lunches, that went to her bank twice a day. She would pick up the mail and probably do a little Xeroxing, but you didn't want to look at what the results were. Basically she was just left alone by and large, and yet nobody had ever told the truth about this. Yet everybody in IO who had been there more than six months was aware of the situation. I even asked Mike Hoyt why did we have two secretaries. He said, "Well I am sure Carl thought it was empire building which was better to be the supervisor for two officers and two secretaries than for two officers and one secretary." Maybe that is true, I don't know. But I handed in my report.

I told the truth, and except for some speculation about what her problem was, which I was instructed could not be included on an official report, you can only talk about what she did and didn't do. It was not accepted, because I had been told I had to give her the warning six months early or three months early or whatever it was, and I had done so. But now I was told it had to be in writing which I hadn't been told the first time. So the solution according to the personnel lady was give her a minimum "SAT" this time, save all the material for next year and give her the "UNSAT" next year. Well I could just imagine how that would go across. I absolutely refused. I ended up sending it in, and went to Geneva. By then we had gone from Julius Walker to Walker Diamante, and thank god for Walker Diamante, a P-47 WWII pilot with guts. If anything, he wrote a stronger supervising condemnation than anything I had ever written. That was put through. All that meant was she couldn't be transferred. I mean the personnel restrictions are just insane. The most amazing thing was, and I still can't really explain any of this, Walker Diamante recommended that the lady be sent for secretarial typing instruction, and she was. We got back a telephone call I guess from FSI saying what is this, a joke? The woman typed 60 words a minute with two mistakes or something like that. I came back for a very short visit before I left on my next assignment for Geneva I guess. The last two things I did in the office after all this had taken place was to give Betty two, two-page reports. She did them letter perfect. Now there were two mistakes in there which I had made, which any competent secretary probably would have caught. One was the ITU had a total, what is the term, not enrollment, but its total employment was 125 people. Anybody who knew anything knew there was 1250 or something like that, a decimal place. I don't remember the other. She didn't catch them, but she made no additional mistakes. Now how you can explain that, I will never know. But why we put up with her and what happened afterwards I do not know. I am not sure I want to know.

Q: Well then, I think this is probably a good place to stop. Where did you go next after you left there?

WEBB: Well by then I was getting very difficult. I was given the assignment to Montreal. I would have loved to go to Montreal. The only language I have never studied that I would have loved to have studied at State Department expense was French. But this was a KL job. I know obviously why they wanted an ex-pilot. I was ex-military. To some degree I had fought that before, but this was a deadly dull job. I had handled enough KL matters when others were not there to do it that I wanted no part of it. I just put on a sit down strike, at which time the famous Alison Palmer came to my rescue in fact. We were there together late one evening. I went in to see her. I had talked to her politically on at least one other occasion so she knew she and I were absolute opposites politically speaking, particularly on Vietnam where we tangled at a party given by somebody from the embassy in Finland some years earlier. She said she was too busy to help me. I said something and then I said very melodiously, "I really may not be around tomorrow," not knowing what the State Department could do to me, refusing an assignment under the circumstances. So she just dropped everything and all of her instincts as mother hen took over. She advised me quite properly I guess, not understanding very much about these things. She said, "Just don't do anything." That is what I did. They ordered me to Montreal, and I didn't go. Eventually it was resolved by a fellow, Bob Davison I think was his name. I had known him from my orientation class, who was, what was he, the FSO assignments officer, personnel manager. He called me up one day. I had written that I was sick and tired of bureaucracy and embassies. The only job I could think of overseas that even appealed to me outside of Soviet Bloc, where I always felt that people living behind the iron curtain could not afford to have political correctness. They were always driven by the realities of living in a terror state. I said something about one of the few jobs that really appealed to me, not thinking anybody would ever give it to me, was the one man listening post in Tromso, Norway. Bob said, "Well you have got all of the qualifications. You have got languages, German. I had messed around with Russian. I had certainly done well in Finnish. I had worked on my Swedish here and there when I could. In many ways I was perfectly qualified. What I didn't realize I suppose was the State Department had so little use for that position by that time. They didn't care who went there. They were perfectly willing to have me go. I think it worked out beautifully, three years in Norway. I think if an honest man had gone to Norway after me, to north Norway and talked to the people that I worked with up there, I think they would have gotten glowing reports. I think they would have thought the United States government had a very excellent representative, the first time someone with some maturity, not a brand new FSO-7. Well not the first time, but the first time someone had taken it seriously. Unfortunately by the time I got there, the job had become in a way, a joke. My predecessor plus one told me frankly that he only went up there because he looked at it as a place he could rest and think about his career and decide what he wanted to do next. The next thing I knew his wife was dancing with the chief minister or whatever he was called, the prime minister in effect of Communist China in Beijing. He was head of the political section so it served him well, but I don't think he did a lot of work in his two years in Tromso. My predecessor was a gal who should never have been in the Foreign Service. She had the capacity to irritate and upset more people than anybody I ever ran into, and I only overlapped with her for a three day period. So almost everything I know is by hearsay. When you inherit a secretary who has been abused by your predecessor and resents it terribly, you hear everything.

Q: Well why don't we stop at this point, and we will pick it up next time.

Today is January 16, 2003. Haven, you are in Tromso from when to when?

WEBB: From June of '78 until, I don't even remember, June, July, August of '81, three years. Up until then it had only been a two year assignment. Charlie Sylvester, one of my predecessors, and one of the guys I came into the foreign service with, said, "You spend a year traveling and meeting everybody, and then you spend the next year traveling and saying goodbye to the same people." It seemed so absurd, but it also worked out that a three year assignment would have left, I have forgotten, I think it was a year and a half until I was eligible to retire which also seemed to have advantages. So at an early point I tried to get them to make it a three year assignment and actually succeeded. The fellow that replaced me was also a married man with family, at least his wife. As far as I know they served three years, and at some point they must have closed the place. I had retired by then. I don't know how it survived that long. It originally started apparently because the Soviets had always had a great deal of interest up there. Finnmark in north Norway is 1000 miles from the embassy, no other resident Americans, These are the only Europeans that were ever occupied by the Russians, by Stalin who had graded memories of the occupation because apparently Stalin at the end of WWII, with a lingering respect for the Royal Navy, had no intention whatsoever of trying to grab pieces of north Norway. The people he sent up there must have been under a sentence of death if anybody got raped or mishandled. When you compare what they were doing in Poland and Germany and the other parts of liberated Europe, Norway was exactly the opposite. People, of course, they only remember what happens to them. The entire history of the 20th century seems to be people never noticing what happens in other countries. In South Vietnam the people that fought for the communists somehow believed all this rhetoric about liberation and were just amazed that South Vietnam under the communists turned out to be just another communist slave state. I always thought, why could you think otherwise?

Q: Let's go back to Norway.

WEBB: In Norway, very friendly memories, and the Soviets sent a lot of people up there. I don't think they had established any sort of a permanent mission, but we did. We had an information office there at some point which was locally run, and according to my secretary who was in her early 30's by then. When they were in high school they would go by the information office and look into American records. I don't know that it solved all of our political problems, but it was popular. At some point as I understand, one fellow at the embassy was very close to, I don't remember her name, one of the first female ambassadors

Q: Was it, I am thinking of Walton, but that is not right.

WEBB: I don't know, Margaret something maybe.

Q: Margaret Tibbetts, Margaret Joy Tibbetts.

WEBB: It may have been, yeah. He convinced her that he should have a permanent presence up here which of course, he thought, would be a real coup for him. We went up there, and apparently we had a three man operation, a local Norwegian man who was knowledgeable, did a lot of traveling, an American officer who nominally supervised things, and Mallat who was hired to be a receptionist and answer the telephone. She loved the job. After, I don't know how long, somebody decided they could save money by eliminating the Norwegian man, have the American do everything, and letting Mallat do all of the secretarial work, which she was not suited for at all. That is what I inherited. In many ways it was as I said in my last annual report not very diplomatically, it is about the only job that I could ever think of overseas that I might want to take. It just so happened that a fellow named Davis, I think, was my assignments officer at the time. He was also in my original orientation class, and by God he swung it for me which always rather surprised me, because I felt by then I was so persona non grata in the Department that to put me up there on my own was the last thing anybody would have allowed.

Q: Well I mean you were also isolated.

WEBB: Well, I was but the other side of it, as I told, who was it, the Secretary of State under Carter I guess it was, the best thing about my old briefing job in INR was that you got the right to decide what was appropriate in the morning, and there was nobody to revise it. There was nobody to say, "Oh you can't say that." That is not politically correct. Certainly I was very free to talk to anybody I wanted to basically. At one point we had a visiting journalist who had been up there a few years earlier, Cook from the LA Times. He got me to set him up in the summer which is very difficult, with the top people in town, the rector of the university, the editors of the biggest newspapers, which for a town of 50,000 is amazing that they had more than one newspaper. That's Norway for you. Afterwards he wanted to interview me which I didn't think too much about at the time. So as it turned out the only use that I know of from all of my work was this one interview, which really focused on me and my family and not Tromso and the people and a little bit about the people in town. It was a very informal interview and he pretty well quoted me verbatim, the best I could remember. Some of what I said wasn't too politic from the standpoint I suppose of the embassy namely, I was pretty well free to do the job that I thought best. Nobody was apparently interested in what I was doing down south. I went around and visited every town in the north, gave impromptu lectures at all the high schools and junior colleges. Frankly I thought it was a great asset. It is the only job outside of the consular work I did that I thought the U.S. government really got their money's worth. Because in many ways, this just perfectly fit my background. I mean I had studied Swedish. I was in Finland. I learned Finnish up to about a 3-3 level. I eventually came out of Norway with a 4-4 level. I had German at a 3-3 and had even studied Russian on my own. I was certainly well versed in the area since I had been reading and studying about northern Europe and WWII and all the rest for a very long time. I felt very comfortable with the area. My impression was people appreciated having somebody who was not just a junior officer. It was easier I suspect than to deal with major generals. Since I wasn't that far from their age group, and of course I had been to the Naval Academy, I was about the same age group that they were representing.

In many ways it was a very fine job. I certainly enjoyed much of it. They kept adding to the job description and adding things that had never been part of the job description before. In some cases these were things that my secretary was supposed to do which she never could, so I always ended up doing them. But the first year was extremely pleasant. I was told by the administrative people that the ambassador and myself were the only two people at the embassy that had an unlimited travel budget. But when the new regime came in the second year, that all changed. From then on I was not able to do anything like the traveling the job really called for. The idea originally had been that everybody should make a sweep north and to the east up to the Soviet border and then west and to the south all the way down to the Stavanger district which was out of my jurisdiction, and do that both in the spring and the fall. You can't travel in the summer in Norway because nobody is in their offices. You supposedly do this in the fall and the spring, and in the winter time. I think it was very well worth the effort. I used to always over schedule myself in the sense that I worked out a pattern which as far as I know was basically or uniquely mine. We would send out letters in Norwegian that I would pretty much draft, but leave her to translate them. I would make sure that they seemed to be appropriate. We would write to the mayor, director of gymnasiums, junior high schools, editors of newspapers, businessmen. Apparently my predecessor would spend two or three hours visiting people and then she would abscond to the next town. I always over scheduled. Originally I was scheduled for half hour meetings. People always wanted to drink coffee, and always had more to say. I would always be dashing to, eventually I would go on an hour schedule, and even that was insufficient. Whenever I would get to the little town, I would just simply call them up because I had not made appointments, I just simply told people I was coming, and I would sit there in my hotel room eating a cold breakfast on the phone when people would open their offices and make a schedule for that day. Invariably I got canceled out. People weren't available or out of town, I would usually fill in with visits to the high school and lectures there, and invariably, I would go right to 4:30 and 5:00 when everybody was quitting and then drive in the dark to the next town. I would go a week, ten days sometimes all without speaking hardly a word of English, which was certainly something I had never experienced before in my career.

Q: Well, now who were the Kola Peninsula watchers? Was somebody sitting up there with binoculars or was that part of what you did?

WEBB: If there were CIA agents in north Norway, I certainly never knew of them. If we had people up there in Norway proper, nobody ever told me about it, and certainly that would have been best. Of course the locals were inclined to believe that I was a CIA officer, and at least one novel had been written from that standpoint. I always believed we never acknowledged if a warship were carrying nuclear weapons, you don't have to say you are not a CIA officer, I would simply point out, why would the State Department send a CIA officer to sit in Tromso with everybody and his brother knowing exactly what he was doing. I mean this made no sense. I certainly didn't argue the point, but undoubtedly there were people that thought that.

Q: Was there a military dimension to what you were doing?

WEBB: Well, the invasion route from the Soviet Union goes through northern Finland, through the arm of Finland that sticks almost to the nearest Norwegian fjord. That is where you have most of the military installations in north Norway. And of course, I visited these installations. Eventually I was asked to lecture in Norwegian, the only time I deliberately lectured in Norwegian at a girls school in Lapland. I lectured in Norwegian because the girls didn't speak anything but Samisk or Lapp and a little Norwegian. That is the only language we had in common, but I didn't know I was going to do that until I arrived, whereas at some of these military installations I would of course, know ahead of time I was giving the lecture. It was a lot of fun because I would write down ideas, and as much as I could I would jot down notes to myself and sort of an outline, mostly in Norwegian, but in no sense trying to memorize anything. Occasionally if I wasn't sure of a vocabulary word I would ask the audience. How do you say that in Norwegian. It always seemed to work out well. It worked out well enough that when we really ran out of money, and I couldn't do any traveling legally, or at least officially, I even worked out itineraries in the general area of Tromso where I would lecture at the nearest army base, and they would put me up overnight, and the mayor of the little community, we had gotten very close, and he would set me up at his house. My family one time had gone cod fish fishing with him and his family. We did things like that where I was just paid for my gas and myself and stayed with people, mostly Norwegians including a Finnish couple, she was German actually, he was Finnish, but we had met in Tromso. They put me up on this tour, so I was getting mileage out of my job although it was a shame that I couldn't do as much the last two years as I had done the first two. As I said, I added things when I was there. Expanded travel, I think, was the one of them. We put out a weekly digest of the Norwegian media, which my secretary was supposed to be able to do, but that really just never worked out. I always did it basically. I thought that was pretty useful. There was also a weekly letter in which I would pretty much write up everything I could possibly get in as unclassified and send that off as a letter to my boss, the DCM back in Oslo. Then I would also cut it up, and anything that pertained to the economic section I would send them a copy of the part that might be of interest to them. It was not a reporting job, and had not been to my predecessor. She has pointed this out in a letter that is part of the record, which was fine with me because frankly I had not done much reporting in Panama which was the only official posting I had overseas where I was to do reporting. I had done some in my first job in Guadalajara, but the state of Calen only which was not very adequate because I had no means of getting down there once a year at the most in a two year assignment. Frankly, my opinion of State Department reporting was not very high to begin with. I had read everything that came out of western Europe for almost a year, and I never read anything that would ever get anybody nominated for the Pulitzer Prize except what George Kennan had written in Prague back in '48 and some of his reporting out of Moscow in '48-'52. It always seemed to me sort of strange that you are under so much pressure to just fill up pages and report and report and report, whether it was needed or not. At the same time Washington was always saying that we get too much reporting and 90% of it is of no use and goes into a file and is never looked at. Everything that I saw, either I reported verbally if it was classified. I was able to do so on what was supposed to have been quarterly visits back to Oslo. When the money ran out it became less than quarterly. What I could sneak into these mailed letters, we had no diplomatic pouch of course. It was not a heck of a lot of very formal reporting. When the new regime came in with the new DCM, this was apparently a man who believed very strongly in reporting. I think he ended up the ambassador to East Germany. He was fine in his rights, but he certainly took off after me for the lack of reporting which rather surprised me, at first initially because I had been told in writing and formally that they didn't want dispatches or whatever they used in those days, airgrams. Then he decided we want this for the future, to which I had no reason to object. Frankly it bored me completely. I ended up selling him on the idea of making it a three year assignment, a year extension for myself and my family. It was predicated on the basis of, well, give us a report. So I did, I don't remember the terminology, an airgram dispatch on the fishing industry. My God, I spent a whole month on that idiot thing. I thought it was a little masterpiece of sorts, but was it really worth the time and all - I doubt it very much. It was six, eight, ten pages with a one page summary which he announced as exactly what he wanted, and I got my extension. Then a year later, when he was out to get me, he said it was terrible. It was too long and so forth and so on, which I always thought you don't have to read any more than the one page summary if you don't want to. By that point we were at a parting-of-ways. I never did any other formal reporting. I thought about it. I wanted to.

I was going to do the oil industry which operated in the north out of Harstad which was a good day's journey for us, four or five hours drive. Unfortunately it only operated in the summer. Every time I would get over there, all I would find would be people telling me, "Well you better talk to the Norwegian state conglomerate" that was in charge of drilling up north, which was the big thing while I was there. They were just beginning drilling. But everybody said you have to go down to Oslo to find out about it. I never did come through.

When the admin report came out I think he thought I deliberately sabotaged, that I deliberately thought I could get away with that without doing any formal reporting. I mean I was doing personal bios and things. Again he got me once. It was a very proper thing. I was doing a bio on a personal friend. He was a radical leader of the intellectual Saami uprising, that is the Lapp minority first nation movement in Norway. Of course like all of these things in Canada and Alaska, these were people that purported to be outraged at how they had been treated. Frankly I think the Lapps in the northern country had been treated very well. Certainly their relatives on the Soviet side of the border would attest to that. But what was never said was that my friend was actually a very integrated Norwegian who was married to a Norwegian and had Norwegian children. None of them spoke Lappish, but that is what he taught at the university. But they did have their Saami uniform, their native costume. I had to pass through Kautokeino, Norwegian Lapland. I had run into an American at the hotel who was married to a Lapland lady, and by God he had his Lapland costume, he and his wife. He insisted on going home and coming back with his wife. They were all decked up in their costumes, very colorful people. Anyway, I did a bio, and at the end of it, I had pointed out that this fellow had sent his daughter to the United States on one of these exchange programs. She had been very upset by her treatment. I don't even know much about it now, but I had included this in remarks, and I got slapped for that a year later in my annual report as trivia and unnecessary. But again, I thought you could say anything you thought was relevant in a report as long as you had a summary that allowed people to read a page or half a page and not having to go beyond that.

I definitely had a handicap. I didn't enjoy reporting. The reporting I did was the type I got no credit for. We had visiting family in Tromsø. We had Rhodes scholars at the university coming through. I attended their lectures. I found they were new left barbarians almost to a T. They were preaching about the evils of American imperialism. They couldn't substantiate what they were saying. I reported one of them talked about the '50s when I was a young man, and frankly the last honest decent period in American history when we had a decent society in the early 60's. He wrote it off which is exactly the story you get at the university level today and high schools, I assume, as a decadent period of conformity and mistrust and McCarthyism. Then came the glorious 60's, and people like Jane Fonda led us to a brilliant period of openness. I know they wouldn't believe anything I said, so I literally gave in three or four or five pages a brief summary of what this man said. And I reported all this and labeled it. I don't know what I had labeled it, LOU or whatever we were allowed to use, and sent it to the Embassy. On one occasion the worst of these, this particular one, I saw a month or so later that our cultural attaché had sent a communication to USIA about this man's lectures at the University of Oslo and Bergen. He had not attended any of these lectures himself, but he had asked his Norwegian colleagues how they were. "Oh it was great." Well this of course is exactly what Norwegians believe. This is what they want to believe. We were there for three years. You get very hungry for your own language in three years. We stole everything in English, everything about the United States whether it was in English, Norwegian, German or Russian. I kid you not; we never saw in three years a program about the United States, culture, politics, presidents, that wasn't hostile, uniformly hostile. It seemed so ridiculous. Norway has always been one of the most loyal NATO members, loyal to the alliance. Of course the deal supposedly with Stalin with Denmark and Norway coming in to NATO would be there would never be any NATO bases per se, permanent NATO bases in these countries. Of course, we stuck to that, but in every other way they had been loyal members. Every poll I ever saw indicated that 85% of the Norwegian people were very happy to be members of NATO, had a very positive opinion about the United States, but just as in the United States, they took it for granted apparently, that their media would always be hostile, would always be critical of the United States, just as our media is, ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS, with the possible exception of Fox, the only exception that I have ever known, although I have never watched cable. I have never had cable. But it got to the point that I really got fed up with the situation, and, knowing that the embassy would never back me up, I did something on my own that I suppose would have gotten me into trouble. My last year I wrote a letter to the director for Naraco, television and radio in north Norway. This was a man who had been a guest in our home. He was an older man, a middle aged man, seemed to be sensible. I wrote him a letter and I said, "You know this seems to be so strange that a country we have such good relations with and a country in which the people have good positive feelings as best I could ever determine and certainly according to all the polls I ever saw. Yet the media, which to some degree was run by the government, was uniformly negative on the United States and NATO for that matter." I went on to list absurd things, one of which was a program about Puerto Rico that was advertised in every Norwegian newspaper, that the truth about Puerto Rico, and in one case it said everybody in Puerto Rico is divided into two factions, those that demand statehood, and those that demand independence. That was a complete lie. The commonwealth position was first voted on in 1952 or so. I think it was commonwealth won 52-48 over the independistas. Ever since after that, the independistas lost to the point where they don't even get five percent of the ballot. The ballot has always been divided between those in favor of commonwealth, American citizenship, and those that want statehood and elimination of all the special privileges that Puerto Rico gets. Yet you would never know that by seeing these advertisements. I watched the program. It was just absurd. It was a Spanish language program with Norwegian subtitles in which there was a lot of singing which seemed to be authentic as best I could tell, a Puerto Rican song, followed by a lot of hate America, independista commentary that would make me think if you watched the program that everybody in Puerto Rico hates the United States and is living as slaves to American imperialism. I pointed this out. I pointed out the facts, mentioned the polling specific, and some other things of this nature. I sent them a copy. I did not send the Embassy a copy. I didn't tell them; I didn't ask their permission. I knew I wouldn't get it. I sent copies to people I thought, political people here and there just FYI copies with a covering letter saying you may be interested in reading my views. I never heard from anybody else, but the director did call me up and said, "I have a feeling that this is not officially approved by the Embassy." I said, "No, it is not." I suspect I would get in a lot of trouble if they knew I had sent it out. Though why anybody should I will never know. It was certainly factually absolutely true. I certainly said nothing but the obvious other than it just seemed to be very strange that a friendly government would allow or set up its television and radio programming as to always be very hostile to its closest ally. It seems to me to this day to be an absurdity. He didn't deny anything. All he said, "Well the young Turks coming out of journalism school just as in the United States, they believe that their purpose is to fault, criticize, and to always be hostile to the status quo." I also pointed out this is not true with the Soviets, and that at least in one case we saw the Soviet propaganda films telling the world that rural life in the Soviet Union was just about paradise. Anybody that knows anything about rural life in the Soviet Union knows that it was just about absolute hell. There was no commentary, no attempt to correct the record. I said a lot of things on my own initiative of this nature, which not only did I not get any credit, I am sure I was criticized. As in my last job at State, I did in fact get rid in Norway of our local secretary who was a very pleasant person, but absolutely incompetent. At one point, the admin officer came up to see what the hell was going on there. I was raising so much fuss with the ladies. I gave him the entire story. I put it all down, I didn't think it was fair to ask her to type up something that was very critical of herself, so I wrote it up in longhand and wasn't about to spend any more time typing it, and took it all down to the Embassy explaining exactly why this woman was simply incapable of doing her job, which she herself was first to admit. But up until then like everything else in the Foreign Service she had apparently never received anything but glowing reviews. That was because she was lovely and pretty, but she was very incompetent to do the job. The last two years I was there, we had a younger woman, a married woman who got dumped by her husband while she was there, which is typical of Norway. Infidelity is the rule; it certainly is not the exception. She was very competent. She could take dictation. Her English was impeccable. I think she even did the newspaper review on occasion, though I still liked to put it in the final form I thought was acceptable for the Embassy. But she was far superior although I think she resigned shortly after I left. But at least they had somebody there that was competent and presumably had a chance to bring in more people. I can not understand why no one in the United States government, the State Department, the Foreign Service ever gets criticized for writing glowing reports about people that their superiors know are incompetent or telling ball faced lies about the achievements of people that anybody with any local knowledge knows is untrue. But if you are critical and try to tell the truth about people, you are never praised for doing it. Back in the State Department, I had not one but two succeeding bosses, Julius Walker followed by Walker Diamante who backed me up completely. In fact it was their idea that we not lie about this black middle aged woman who had not done a lick of work in six or eight or ten years and that we tell exactly what the truth is. The fact that she had nothing but apparently glowing reports up until then wasn't going to come into it. We would simply tell the truth. I am sure nobody got a promotion for telling the truth.

Q: Well then you were there, when did you leave?WEBB: I left in '81. That was the end of the three year assignment. I suppose by then if I ever had a career it was long gone. Before I got the assignment, from my first assignment on, I was always on the verge even when they were trying to keep me, on the verge of resigning. There were all these bribes and these irresistible assignments and language training and northern Europe. Only when I finally decided with only five years to go, it was just not worth throwing away who knows how many hundreds of thousands of thousands of dollars in retirement. I finally gave up and decided to stick it out. The moment I made that decision, not that I told anybody, they stuck it to me. From then on I could no longer blackmail anybody into giving me any sort of assignment that I liked.

Q: Well did you retire after Tromso then?

WEBB: I still had a year and a half to go. I even in my last personal report, my annual report out of Tromso, I said I wanted to go back. I thought political-military would be just fine because I had done that sort of work once before. It turned out very congenial dealing with my classmates in the Pentagon and people like that, and I certainly had a lot of knowledge. I had come into the Navy with a heck of a lot of knowledge on aviation even before I became a pilot. I was rather put down to find that the Political-Military bureau wasn't about to let me get in because they saw me as loser, a person at the bottom of the fitness reports, which by then I certainly was. My assets as far as they were concerned only made themselves look suspicious to the rest of the State Department. So I was vetoed from that. The one assignment I would consider, even though it was not convenient, was in the Soviet Union pointing out that I was the only person in the history of the human race, probably, that had memorized the first chapter of War and Peace. Tolstoy's youngest daughter had known before her death that there was a crazy young American Foreign Service Officer in Washington who had memorized the first chapter of her father's most famous work. But that qualification did not impress the State Department very much. So we went back. I was assigned to the OAS to be the personal assistant to the Ambassador, who in view of the Foreign Service was a right wing Goldwaterite who I think was on the cover of Time Magazine, or at least was given a page biography in '64 because he was one of four young Turks that supposedly engineered Goldwater's coup of taking over the Republican Party in '64. The Reagan people weren't about to give him Secretary of the Treasury or anything like that, which he wanted, because he had a reputation of being something of an oddball. Which in many ways he was. He had been ambassador to the Netherlands before that. Now he was Ambassador to the OAS with a resident Embassy of course, in the State Department in Washington. Since he came in late and stayed until all hours he had driven all of the secretaries crazy. They wouldn't stay. I was happy to stick around and do his telephoning between art galleries all over Europe, because he really made his money buying and selling medieval art. This was J. William Middendorf, John William Middendorf, who was old money of Rhode Island. He had been a banker but at some point had gotten into, as I understand it, really making his millions buying and selling art. Because he had entrée to art dealers all over the world, he would get advice from anybody, and we would be there until midnight or even one time 1:00 in the morning. He might be calling political types about something. He would do art business during State Department hours, but he would be doing State Department work or business at 10:00 at night. Frankly I didn't give a damn. My wife would come in and pick me up whenever I was ready to go home, and that is all that mattered.

Q: Well you actually retired in what, '83 or '82?

WEBB: They got rid of me as soon as they could which was on my 50th birthday, not my 50th birthday but soon after that, because I did make rather a stink because it did make me very angry because I thought in a way the Department lost ideals. Before Tromso, I had even gone to the assistant secretary for personnel, I guess is what he was, and made an offer. I said, "Since I came into the foreign service, we knew, as in the military, you were either promoted or you were kicked out. There was a lot of pressure to promote people who were overlong at a particular rank. A lot of people got promoted who might not have been otherwise, because they were indulging people. I may have been difficult, but frankly I always thought I was in many ways a valuable asset. I think it is valuable to have a few people around who are not just obsessed with personal advantage and advancement. Most people in the Foreign Service were there because they like the life style. People told me many times they liked living abroad. It really didn't mean they give a damn about the policy. I was always ranting about policy, if I had just bitten my tongue many times, particularly towards the end when Jimmy Carter was our president, and was setting up the Middle East with the terrorism that we know so dearly today. I had gone to the assistant secretary and I said, "Look, when I came in the deal was if you don't promote me, then you dismiss me and you give me a year's pay or whatever it was." Then some idiot who didn't get promoted, the guy who applied for 80 different jobs and was turned down for all of them, committed suicide.

Q: Yeah, John Thomas

WEBB: And his wife went into hysterics, so they changed the law; they changed the rules. From then on, apparently nobody ever got dismissed, but there was never any pressure from then on to promote anybody. And at one point a friend of mine was an ambassador's son and was the desk officer for Brazil and served in half of the posts in Brazil, was fluent in Brazilian Portuguese, and he lived to be an ambassador. He followed this sort of thing which I never could force myself to. I remember him telling me, and this was many years ago, that every white male that was promoted that year, promotions just having come out, was either from an overseas assignment, or they were Kissinger boys. Nobody was getting promoted with just ordinary assignments. But every woman who was up, was promoted. Every black was promoted, every American Indian was. I only met one American Indian. I never knew him personally, but I followed him somewhere once, and he was always getting promoted. I always thought that was really unfair. I even made an offer, if they would just give me a year's salary, I would depart. He said, "Well we can't bend the rules for one person." I think I must have been insane. I didn't have that much time, six, eight years at that point, but the eight years I thought was more important than the retirement. God knows for 20, 30, 40,000 dollars, the federal government would have saved a lot of money. But anyway, it was not to be. Thank God for that. I came back, and I was given a special job in which, I suppose, I rather sabotaged myself in a way, as I normally did. I was working for a guy which at least I had some respect for, and by God, I had frankly very little respect for the common herd in the State Department. Before I revealed myself, I remember the administrative officer at the OAS mission telling me how his ambassador, this Middendorf, in effect was a right wing nut, but we are civilizing him and we are teaching him. There is a lot of truth to that. They handled him with kid gloves and they kept me as far from substance as one could possibly be. He didn't make any conservative waves while he was there that I know of. It tickled me because they had just assumed that I was a loyal, politically correct, a new foreign service officer which by then was pretty much the case. The officer had asked me to give him something in writing about my resume. I just got out all the documents, letters I had written to the New York Times, about the lunacy of calling communist, socialist countries, democratic states, capitalist states and things of that nature, and covering letters of my famous Taiwan 26 page double-spaced letter that I did for the dissent channel which I never gave them because I kept sending it to people I respected in the outer world. I knew that if I ever gave it to the dissent people, they would immediately stamp it top secret. I could never even keep a copy, and I just never got around to using it. Actually, that last year in Tromso I had written something to the effect that I was really sort of disgusted with so much I saw. I hardly saw a job in the State Department I thought I was good for. The assignment officer came right back and said, "Why don't you apply for the," what do you call it, I don't even remember.

Q: The open forum officer.

WEBB: The open forum officer. In these letters, I had condemned them as left wingers who were mainly interested in scoring points by writing long, terribly nuanced criticism of American foreign policy, that in effect said nothing. But they somehow sort of gave you the idea that the fellow writing this was brave and outspoken, even though there really was nothing brave or outspoken about anything he wrote. Particularly the fellow I knew from Hamburg. I think he ended up as one of our ambassadors to Germany or East Germany or both. I don't remember. At one point I think he had the German desk or East Germany, I don't remember. I have never read such malarkey. It was like a lot of the academic dissertations that went on and on and on, seemed to be scoring lots of points, but for the life of me I don't think Stanislaw Andreski would have found any type of merit in it. My Polish intellectual is good at peeking through academic intellectual shrouds.

Q: We are sticking kind of through the last year. What was your impression of the OAS?

WEBB: As I said, I really got very little involved in substance. I really figured the ambassador's secretary was an hysterical woman. They couldn't get along. He used to deliberately avoid her and wait until she was out of the office and then ask me to do something for him. I didn't type, but I did practically everything else. I really took care of him personally. I got very little involved in OAS. I was very disturbed with ARA in general because as best I could see, whether this is still the case I don't know, but ARA seemed to be staffed by, if you will pardon my saying so, second rate people who spent their careers in ARA, who rarely went to other parts of the world. In two assignments in ARA overseas, I saw that it is much easier to represent the home country to the United States than represent the United States to the home government and the home people. I saw this to a shocking degree during the Falklands war, which happened while I was at OAS. I will never forget. We had a senior secretary who that served all over Latin America, and in particular in Argentina. When the Argentines grabbed the Falklands/Malvinas and Thatcher suddenly woke up and decided to fight for it, after she had virtually encouraged them to invade, probably pretty much the way Bush senior encouraged Iraq to think we didn't care about what happened to Kuwait, or at least his Ambassador, April Glaspie. She was just outraged. I took it for granted that we were going to help the Brits. She thought that was just unthinkable that we would go against our most loyal allies in Latin America. I think it is just an absurd attitude. You know, we live and breathe for NATO compared to any other alliance. It is the only alliance that amounts to anything. It is the most successful alliance in the history of the human race that I am aware of.

Q: Particularly the Argentine government was odious.

WEBB: Well, if I remember, and I am certainly not an Argentine historian. I have never been that interested, but my understanding was the left wing started murdering people in Argentina. And they started killing army officers and God knows what, cutting off their heads. And making what happened in Uruguay earlier with the whatever you call it Tupamaros or what happened in Chile to some degree. The military went in and stomped them out, and gave the message that we didn't particularly like, but they were certainly effective. I would come down on the side of the Argentine military.

Q: This probably is a pretty good place to stop since we are covering this. You got out in 1981 and lived happily ever after

WEBB: Not really, no. I got out, I had been putting in all three years, I never knew exactly what I was going to do. But I got out thinking that I was just going to make as much of a stink as I could. And how far it would go and how I would do it didn't really matter. I thought I would start by lecturing. I might end up in universities and colleges or wherever I could get in and debate. As long as I thought I was serving some useful purpose I intended to do it. I had arranged my affairs that way, little imagining what was going to happen. I can't explain it to this day.

I left OAS after a year. I was put into the retirement seminar where you are given training and all this sort of thing. I had mentioned that I wanted to lecture, and all of a sudden a gentleman, a former minister to Lisbon I think he was, who ran this program came up with an idea. It turned out that a previous Foreign Service Officer had started something through Prince George's Community College where he used to run sort of a happy hour program for the elderly, which in Maryland was heavily subsidized. Through Prince George's Community College, the State of Maryland paid for programs to entertain elderly people. Among other things, this gentleman started doing one of these embassy see-it-all things. Apparently he would simply show up for a two hour program at the college. Some local, in many cases Jewish community centers were very popular. He would just sort of talk off the top of his head about various assignments he had had. I don't think it was very academic or rigorous or anything of that light. He would arrange visits to embassies which people just loved. I said I would do something along those lines if they would let me make it much more rigorous, and also let me introduce an entirely original course of my own making in 20th century world history. I did that on and off for two or three years. The way I ran the course was very different from what my predecessor had done, not probably to the complete pleasure of all of the retirees that came to these things. We had very faithful community, particularly when we got involved in the Jewish communities where I did 30 or 40 of my lectures. I would pick a country.

One I still remember was Ceylon which turned out to be one of my better examples. I remember because I didn't know anything about Ceylon. One week we would have a representative from the Embassy of Ceylon or Sri Lanka coming to us for a two hour session. The following week I would give them an introductory to Sri Lanka. Very interesting history. Then I would arrange that somebody would come and lecture for two hours the following week. Then a week after that, the third week, first hour, I would wrap up Sri Lanka. With some of the third world countries particularly, I would simply try to collect some of the propaganda that they had been hearing or bring up other things. Then I would devote the second hour to the next country. I devoted an enormous amount of time and resources. At one point I think I had 180 sets of books checked out of the Kennedy Library, because I was always two or three sessions ahead. I found just an enormous wealth of information, all of course, secondary sources. I gave really a completely original lecture on world history. I don't think, I have never heard of anything like it. I remember one of my more intellectual listeners, I hesitate to call him student, but he asked me, "Where are you getting all of this?" The statistics and all. I handed out a bibliography each week, books I was using. I really rather enjoyed it, and I thought it was rather useful.

The audiences were people who were at the end of their lives or probably not going to use it for very much. It was free, and you had a complete diversity of people. You had housewives. We did Turkey, and one fellow turned out to have been in Iran before and during and after the Khomeini revolution, so we ended up talking mostly about Iran and what had happened. One little old lady said, "Now where is Iran? Is that near Guatemala?" The gentleman, the guy who had asked me that question that I had just mentioned, he was asking about the Tudeh communist party of Iran and what had happened to them.

At the beginning I lectured for two hours. Finally that was just an hour too long for some of them. They just had to take breaks. I allowed a break, and you cannot take a ten minute break with elderly people. By the time you get moving again you have lost 25 minutes practically. Every time I said ten minutes and please be back, it always ran late. Finally I had to give it up because I wasn't getting my classes done, which was the last thing on the face of the earth I ever believed would have happened.

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

End of interview