

Interview with Emerson M. Brown

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

EMERSON M. BROWN

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Q: Could you give us a little bit about your background, where you come from?

BROWN: I was born and raised in a little town up in Michigan, Reed City, county seat. At that time it was potato country, dairy country that had been forest. There was still some woodworking. In fact the big industry in town was a flooring mill. Light industry.

Went to the public school, graduated in 1936. Stayed out of school for a year. Went off to a little college in southern Michigan, Olivet College which at that time was running an Oxford tutorial system, which suited me beautifully, although I didn't fully appreciate it at the time. Got a teacher's certificate.

My first job out of college was driving a truck. Then I went to work in the oil field, a little oil development near my home. By that time I had been deferred by my draft board because of my eyes and a trick knee. And I went off and taught school for a year. That was an experience. It may be the hardest work I ever did in my life.

In summer 1942 I was rejected at the Army induction center and I went back home. I'd not renewed my teaching contract because I thought I was going to be drafted. Went home, ended up working for a few months at a radio station up in Travers City.

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Then I was recruited to come down to Washington to work at cryptanalysis. They'd gotten my name from the college because I had both French and German on my record. In the meantime, by the way, I had taken a civil service exam and I thought I had gotten the job because of that. It turned out that I hadn't. When I raised that with the Civil Service Commission, they hired me at once. I worked for a few months as a so-called recruiting representative. Then I found out about a job with the Office of Foreign Relief, as a clerk stenographer. They wanted people who could speak French and type. Went to Algiers, spent about six months there, then went to a refugee camp in Morocco, where I worked. Went from there to Addis Ababa, with UNRRA, (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) survey mission.

Then from there up to the Middle East where I became a refugee repatriation officer taking refugees back to Yugoslavia. Then I went down to East Africa and fetched Greek refugees up to the Middle East where they were staged and then sent on home. Then I became director of the refugee camp where these refugees were staged and I had that job for about fourteen months.

Q: Where was that?

BROWN: El Shatt, in the Sinai Desert, about ten miles up the Suez Canal from Suez.

Q: Good God. Why did they have it in such a horrible place?

BROWN: Well, this had been a British army camp that was going to be one of the camps to return to. But the Brits won El Alamein and so they used the camp for refugees. The Yugoslav refugees had escaped across to Italy and they were brought down in empty troop ships. At one time there were more than 50,000 of them in Egypt.

Q: Good heavens. When did you get there?

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BROWN: This was '46, '47. I took three shiploads back. Two groups of 2,000 and one group of 1,300.

Q: We're looking at foreign affairs, and this is foreign affairs. By this time Tito was obviously in control ...

BROWN: That was the problem.

Q: We were under a great deal of pressure because of our forced repatriation of Russians, and all. Going back into the maws of the Stalin regime. How about with the Yugoslavs.

BROWN: Well, the UNRRA charter allowed only repatriation and of the well over 50,000 Yugoslavs in Egypt all but about 1,000 went home. There was no forced repatriation by UNRRA. Most of them went home voluntarily.

Q: Was there concern? Were representatives sent from Tito's regime to come and talk with them?

BROWN: They didn't need to, the camp leaders were all partisans. They were under strict partisan discipline. It was pretty effective, actually. It was interesting to see how these Yugoslavs would organize themselves, get up to the boat, then up to Split, which was the port in Yugoslavia where they were disembarked. Little boats came up which took them right out to the islands or the coastal villages where they wanted to end up.

We ended up with about a thousand, I suppose you could call them dissidents, but they weren't really romantic dissidents, they were drunkards, ne'er-do-wells, petty criminals. A typical case was where a man didn't want to go back to his wife, or a wife didn't want to go back to her husband. In the meantime they'd had a couple of common children in the camp. So they ended up being resettled mainly in Australia. A few to Canada, a few to the United States. It was interesting. With an average camp population of a thousand during the fourteen months that I was there, we had a baby a week!!

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Q: Good heavens.

BROWN: Just goes to show what the welfare state will do for procreation.

Well, I came home after that. I'd always had the idea of the foreign service. Two people from my hometown had gone into the foreign service. One of them had been my father's best friend and another was a sort of local hero.

I took the exam and passed it. In those days you waited a long time for an appointment. Finally got appointed in—well, went over to Germany in 1950, and my appointment came through in June of 1950 after a 1947 examination.

Q: What were you doing in Germany?

BROWN: I started out as a resident officer, Kreis Resident Officer, KRO.

Q: Essentially at the county level.

BROWN: We were the last local vestige of military government. We still had a few regulatory duties. We signed interzonal passes, we could supervise hunting—of all things. Essentially it was a public affairs job by the time I got there.

Q: As I understand it the foreign service put those in to replace military officers to prepare the way. It was a sort of political ploy within our own government because if the military were there it would be harder to get them out.

BROWN: I think there might be more structure to what you say than I at least discerned.

It seemed to me that somebody at State finally wised up. Here was a way to appoint some of the people who were on the foreign service register. There were 27 of us. Our average age was a little over 30. One funny thing was, only three or four of us had German, but we all took intensive German before going over.

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But it was essentially to be replacements for the military government officers, the Kreis resident officers who were mainly army officers who hadn't wanted to go home and who in many cases had hooked up with a local woman. (Many of them later married.) So there was a kind of attrition in the High Commission, after McCloy took over, and sort of cleaned up its act. Some of them wanted to go home anyhow, some of them were encouraged to go home. I think a few of them might even have been fired. We were the replacements. But we were only out there for a year or so at the Kreis level.

Then I went down to HICOG ...

Q: HICOG means the High Commissioner for Germany.

BROWN: That's right. In those days it was at the IG Farbeu Building in Frankfurt. McCloy was the High Commissioner, Benjamin Battenwieser, the Deputy High Commissioner. High powered people, really. Wonderful staff. I worked in east-west trade for three or four years.

Q: What were the issues in east-west trade that you dealt with?

BROWN: This was the Cold War. It was 1951—I left in '54.

Berlin was a standing problem, access to Berlin was a problem. It was cold war time. The West German government was just getting going, and though the Allied High Commission had formal jurisdiction over foreign trade, we were in no position to exercise it in detail. The idea in our particular case was to ensure that the Germans installed an effective system of strategic export controls. And they did pretty well. The Germans are awfully good administrators, of course.

Q: What were you doing?

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BROWN: I was an interzonal trade officer. The two Germanies—east and west Germany—had trade agreements. We were supposed to supervise these trade agreements and in a formal sense the High Commission had to approve them. We had the brief, but I don't think there was any real question that the agreements would be upset. But during negotiations, if any difficulties would come up, they'd check with us. Two or three things I didn't know at the time. I didn't realize at the time that the West Germans were ransoming East Germans with their interzonal trade accounts. We were always concerned that there was such a big surplus on the West German side; it turned out that they were using it to ransom refugees, in effect.

There was one specific episode when there was an arrangement to trade junk steam locomotives from the west to the east in return for some damaged electric locomotives that the East Germans, the Reichsbahn had, and which they couldn't keep in repair. They didn't have parts and couldn't make parts. The specific deal came up and we approved it and I got really slapped on the wrist because somebody back in Washington held that steam locomotives are much more strategic than electric locomotives because they can go anywhere, they don't have to have a power source.

Q: Oh, God.

BROWN: Isn't that wonderful. About a year later, when I was in Bombay, I noticed a change in the list. I called it to Washington's attention and they had reversed themselves.

Q: But while you were in Germany—you were an economist—how did you view the German economy. Where did you think Germany was going?

BROWN: That was so easy, that was so easy. When we got to Germany in March of 1950, the currency reform was less than a year old. Cigarettes were about DM 15 a carton, and army wives were doing a brisk business in buying Hummels and God knows what with cigarettes at DM 15 a carton, which cost a dollar at the PX.

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We did our orientation, our running in. In our early days we did a lot of travel around Germany, by rail—sleepers—breakfast in the morning, in the dining car, where there would be Germans. The Germans would have for breakfast a koffee complet—a roll and some jam and coffee—and all of the Americans and Brits—every now and then you'd see a Frenchman—would have bacon and eggs. When we left in 1954, it was exactly reversed. The people who were having the koffee complet were the occupation personnel and the people who were having the big breakfasts were Germans.

Every day you could see it. They went from bicycles to mopeds (as they were called), little motorized bicycles. Then they went from mopeds to proper motorcycles. And they went from motorcycles to little three-wheel cars.

Q: Messerschmitts.

BROWN: Yes. Messerschmitts. But before that there was a tandem Messerschmitt. Then there was a contraption, the Lloyd I guess, where they sat side by side, a tricycle. Then of course, the Volkswagen bug took over and literally every day you could see the progress.

It was simple. Hard currency, an energetic and competent population. They worked women to replace the men killed during the war. Those women went to work. Sound economic policies, the Marshall Plan, that's a little bureaucratic triumph there, you know.

In Germany, we had so-called program aid—the Marshall Plan Aid was doled out for specific programs and projects which the Germans had to work up and then bring to us for approval. In Britain they had what was called budgetary aid, we just gave the money to the Brits. And at the end of the Marshall Plan the German mark was hard, the German economy was going like this. The Brits had dissipated much of theirs on welfare, which is not to be sneered at, but it doesn't provide for the future as the program aid did in Germany.

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Foreign service people tell how difficult it is to get servants. During the time we were there, we started with having wonderful ones—an older woman who'd lost her husband during the war and who doted on our children—and we ended up having the oddest assortment of demented women and, one, apparently, a prostitute between engagements. It was the damndest thing.

Q: I have you going to Bombay from 1955 to 1957. What were you doing there?

BROWN: I started off as the second economic officer and in the middle third of the tour, for eight months, I was the consular officer, I ended up as the senior economic officer.

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

BROWN: Oh, Bombay, well it was wonderful, really. India was just beginning the second five year plan—I think that's the case. And they were full of socialist beans and development beans. The Reserve Bank of India headquarters is at Bombay, and the senior staff had organized an economic discussion group. At that time, every big name in the business came to India to look at the five year plan. I met Galbraith, Nicholas Kaldor, Joan Robinson, and other names that don't register so well now— for example, Rosenstein-Rodan, a leading development poling economist. Fantastic!

The Indians of course are bright—talk your head off. The women are beautiful. In India you had everything from utter opulence to people living in the street.

Q: How did you view the Indian economy at that time?

BROWN: Well, in Bombay, you are an optimist. And it was justified.

Q: Then in Calcutta, you're a pessimist.

BROWN: I guess. I never saw Calcutta but I would guess that would be the case. But Bombay—the PL 480 program got going in a big way while we were there. This was

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surplus wheat, and Bombay was a big port for it. I had good relations with the Bombay port labor leaders in particular. I knew the shipping guys. Real pirates!!

An example. Do you know what a T-2 tanker is? It was a Federal Maritime Commission tanker built before the war. It had steam turbines, and dynamos, which delivered electricity to electric motors. Wonderful ship, about 15,000 tons, which at that time was big. And this particular outfit, I think they were headquartered in Baltimore, had gotten hold of some T-2s and started shipping wheat in them. They had portable blowers that they could use to unload wheat at Bombay. They loaded wheat in Washington, up the river.

Q: This is the state of Washington?

BROWN: Yes. Up the Columbia River. Loaded 300 tons more than the insurance allowed, because they had virtually empty bunkers. Then at the mouth of the river they bunkered, and until they burned that 300 tons of fuel, they were an illegal ship. So about the first two weeks out across the Pacific, they were illegal.

The Suez Canal had at this time been blocked by Nasser. These T-2s went around Singapore, came up to Bombay, unloaded the wheat. They went empty up to the Persian Gulf, loaded crude. They went around the Cape of Good Hope to the east coast of the United States, unloaded the crude, loaded product, went down through the Panama Canal and unloaded the product in Los Angeles or San Francisco and went up and got another load of wheat.

The ship was empty only from Bombay to the Persian Gulf, and from California to Washington. They paid for the ship on every voyage. Really wonderful.

Bombay was really active in those days. Local industry was beginning to take off. Lots of political ferment because the Marathas wanted a separate state, a state of Greater Marathas, whereas Bombay at that time had incorporated both the Marathas and the other big ethnic group, the Gujarati. There were riots while we were there. Burned buses. People

Library of Congress

killed. But I guess we were never in any serious danger. It was a great tour. I met my first real consul general. An old Rogers Act guy who was proud that he had been a consular officer before the Foreign Service Act.

Q: That was in 1924, was it not?

BROWN: Yes. His name was William T. Turner. This is another way of saying he gave me a good efficiency rating, but I found him just great.

Q: Did you find the Indian authorities... Could you work easily with them?

BROWN: I had no trouble with them at all. But of course this was back in the days when we had all the chips. We took a certain amount of criticism because of the Krishna Menon —John Foster Dulles confrontation in those days. John Foster Dulles, the lawyer as well as Secretary of State, said that “Well, technically Goa is part of Portugal.” That took a little walking-the-cat-back-home, as one used to say. But personally, we had wonderful relations with the Indian officials. The chief minister at that time it was Morarji Desai, a good guy, particularly from our point of view. He was very effective, if a bit nutty (he drank his urine every day). A strict Gujarati, he wouldn't be vaccinated. This was a problem, because you always want to get the chief minister off to the States on an International Visitor Program. We finally had to get a waiver on the smallpox vaccination to get him to go.

Q: You then came back to Washington and you worked in the economic bureau from '57 to '61.

BROWN: Yes, I was in trade policy all of that time.

Q: What does that mean?

BROWN: These were the adolescent days of the GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. We had an annual meeting and that time the essential problem for us was to

Library of Congress

get other countries to get rid of quantitative import restrictions faster than they wanted to. There is a justification in GATT, a balance of payments and justification for quotas. Our argument was “look, your balance of payment situation is better than you pretend, better than you think. You ought to get rid of these quotas.” But, of course, the quotas were giving protection to a lot of domestic interests. So it was a little like pulling teeth. That was the main thrust—as we used to say—of our trade policy in those days. Dismantling the quantitative import restriction regime that really was everywhere in the world except for the United States.

Q: Were there any particular countries that caused particular concern to you?

BROWN: I was global, but the big problem in those days was Germany. Germany was doing so well economically, but they had politics too. They wanted to keep their import restrictions longer than we thought they should. So we kept hammering the Germans. Japan hadn't really emerged at that time, it was still sort of getting its house in order. So as far as particular countries were concerned, Germany was our main focus.

It was an interesting time. The leadership was very good. John Leddy was Douglas Dillon's personal assistant. Have you heard of John Leddy?

Q: Yes.

BROWN: Another one of the great men of the Department of State.

Q: Were we using trade in this latter part of the Eisenhower period as a weapon anywhere? Or was it just to keep things moving in a more orderly fashion. How did you feel?

BROWN: Well, this was trade policy as distinct from trade control. Nor was it east-west trade policy—I was no longer in that part of the game—which was a bit of a problem for us. But mainly what we were doing was just trying to get countries to agree to live up to the

Library of Congress

rules of the GATT, which was non-discriminatory multilateral trade with a minimum of trade barriers, if necessary tariffs, and we didn't like quotas. But of course, we ourselves had import quotas, on agricultural products. It took a certain amount of sense and negotiation.

I remember a GATT Conference at Geneva. We were going after the Germans because they were continuing their quotas on grains. The Canadians and the Australians were cooperating with us because they are big exporters, too. I can still see the look on the goddam Australian, who just completely bowed out of the exercise. And we later found that the Germans had given them a special quota of 50,000 tons. The bastards, they gave up the fight. That was how it was in those days.

Q: I was talking to someone the other day and they were saying that they got into one of these arguments with an Australian. The Australian fixed his eye on him and said, "Do you understand what you are doing" and then started ticking off all sorts of quotas which are really hurting the Australians.

BROWN: Well, yes. That was the litany, of course, by then. But it was a great club. We had so called Section 8 import restrictions which were absolute. And then of course, we had the hoof and mouth disease quarantine, too. So we had to be prepared to fend off their arguments too.

Q: Well, then you were there and then you went to the

BROWN: Then I did the senior seminar.

Q: That's the State Department's War College type of thing.

BROWN: Yes. Then I went back to Bonn. This time as the second man in the economic section.

Q: Now this is '62 to '66. What was the situation then?

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BROWN: Well, it was interesting. This was the transition from Adenauer. But of course, the Germans were going great guns economically and politically they were doing all right too. You know were the German constitution—it is called a basic law—which they adopted with tutelage from the Americans, particularly; it incorporates the ingenious idea of a constructive vote of non-confidence. You can't upset the West German government simply by voting it down. You have to come up with an alternative government to take its place. That and other factors have given the German parliamentary system a stability that for example Italy sadly lacks.

Again everything was really going very well, economically and politically. Adenauer was a giant.

Q: Then of course, Erhard took over.

BROWN: Then Erhard took over; you can't say it was a disaster but it was clear that he was an economist and that he just didn't have the required guile. Well, nobody had Adenauer's guile, but Erhard didn't even come close. And then it was Kissinger who took over after that. Walter Dowling was our ambassador—very low profile, vis-a-vis the Germans. He was succeeded by George McGhee, who was very high profile vis-a-vis everybody. He was the ambassador when I left.

Q: What were some of the major problems when you were working with the Germans?

BROWN: By this time it had become a kind of case work. I remember a little scandal on diversion of PL 480 grain. I made a trip up to Hamburg to find out what happened. A little scandal there.

In the big picture, the main thing we wanted from Germany was financial cooperation. We had a very good treasury attach#, and he would do the technical work but we had to be

Library of Congress

informed about it. Dillon would come over when he was Secretary of the Treasury. There's another man who gave the country its money's worth.

I can still remember a dinner by Ambassador McGhee where Dillon got up and gave a 5 minute after-dinner speech. At the time I said, "Well, that's worth a quarter of a billion dollars on the balance of payments"—back in the days when a quarter of a billion dollars was a lot of money. And of course in those days with fixed exchange rates, reserves were the things you worried about. There was an awful lot of cooperation required in order to protect our reserves.

Q: Were there any agricultural products problems?

BROWN: I was a foot soldier in the chicken war.

Q: Can you explain what the chicken war was?

BROWN: Yes. In one of the German waiver negotiations, back in the GATT days when the Germans were continuing to maintain quotas, we required them to get a waiver, which brought them on a par with us, because we had a waiver for our import restrictions. But we had to report and justify them each year. So we got the Germans to get a waiver so that we could tackle them each year on the review. And in hammering them one year we got two little concessions. One of them was on chickens. The idea that chickens would be sent over to Germany seemed ludicrous. We got another concession on hay. Nobody in his right mind would think that hay would ever cross the Atlantic Ocean.

Q: Nobody sends hay anywhere that I know of.

BROWN: Well, the catch is that a few years later they learned how to pelletize alfalfa—rabbit pellets. Those were just like shipping grain. And technically the trade argued, successfully for a while, that that was hay. So it came in floods, and in such quantities that the Germans had to shut off the imports.

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Q: As feed, I suppose.

BROWN: Oh yes, rabbit pellets. Wonderful feed.

Well, on chickens. The American chicken factories started turning out chickens for 16 cents a pound; they were frozen and you could ship them anywhere in the world. They started turning up in Germany at a prodigious rate. Business soared and the German farmers hollered. And so all sorts of tricks started being employed to restrict our chicken exports—and by this time the Common Market was going and so the Germans were able to use the Common Market as a kind of shield, too. It was really chaotic. A group from Delmarva, in Virginia visited the White House. Somehow they got into the White House and dear—Jack Kennedy you know, he wanted to show he was on top of everything—and he said, well, do you have any problems and they said yes. So the chicken war had presidential attention. So the poor old Department of State and Department of Agriculture were under the gun. They were sending telegrams to us all of the time. I can remember handling aide memoirs—a memoire to the German who was catching the train to go to Brussels to consult on chickens. I handed it to him as he was going down the hall to catch the train. It was very hectic and very undiplomatic and stupid.

You heard the Adenauer remark, “I met the president of the United States and all he wanted to do was talk about chickens. What is he a president, or a chicken farmer?”

One interesting sidelight on that. I went over and talked with a fellow in the German Department of Agriculture, their top man, name of Schlebitz. He picked out a letter to the German Ambassador in Washington from an American farmer who had been put out of business by these big chicken factories. He wrote, “don't let them do it to the German farmer.” It was interesting to see that. Those were interesting times. But that was typical. You'd get a specific problem and you'd hammer the Germans about it.

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Financial matters. One of the litanies was we wanted the Germans to reduce their interest rates. Now of course, every time a top economic guy would talk to the top German guy, part of the brief would be, "Oh, we want you to lower your interest rates." Ha. Ha. Now it's completely reversed.

Q: Then I have you go from one rough place to another. To The Hague. You were there from 1966 to 1970 as economic counselor. What was the situation there?

BROWN: About all you can say about The Hague is that it's a wonderfully pleasant place except for the weather. The rain comes down sideways and it rains about 2 days out of 3. After you've said that you've said all that's bad about the place.

I was the economic guy. We had two problems. KLM wanted landing rights to Chicago. This was back in the days when we had a very restrictive civil air policy and quite simply, from our point of view, their existing landing rights already more than compensated the Dutch for the traffic that they generated. But they kept hammering at it. They also said—this was not in the economic end of it—they wanted a nuclear sub—which was madness. But they would talk about it I guess just as a matter of principle.

Typical of the Dutch, in those days, the latter '60s we were beginning to have our serious balance of payments problems. The Dutch, without any real prompting, paid off the balance of their Marshall Plan debt settlement years, if not decades, in advance.

Q: How did the KLM landing ...

BROWN: That one was easily solved. Ambassador William Royal Tyler left and was replaced by J. William Middendorf, who had been a prodigious fund raiser for Richard Milhous Nixon and was given his recompense, which he decided ought to be ambassador to the Netherlands. By the way, Tyler did not pick the Netherlands without thinking.

Q: Yes, I did an interview with him. He said he was due for a rest.

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BROWN: About the only bad thing I could say about Tyler was that he may have kept The Hague open longer than he should have, so it would still be available.

I once raised that at a lunch with him and he gave a wonderful story about how it came about. But that's neither here nor there.

Q: You were saying that Middendorf took care of the KLM problem?

BROWN: Middendorf got his assignment, his reward for his great work for the Nixon campaign. And in going down to Washington to get briefed he learned that the only thing that the Dutch really wanted that was practical was landing rights to Chicago.

Q: No nuclear sub.

BROWN: So he said look, I've got to have something when I go over there and—the word is that Nixon told State or the CAB “hey, give our ambassador something to play with.” So Middendorf goes to The Hague and within a matter of months KLM got landing rights to Chicago and Middendorf could do no wrong.

Tyler was just a career man. He told me that he tried, did everything he could but Middendorf, with his political clout, just did something that couldn't be done by a career Ambassador.

Q: This is one of the examples of what can be done with a political ambassador. Then in 1970 you moved to Ottawa as economic counselor. You were there from '70 - '73. How did this assignment come about.

BROWN: How did it come about? It came about because Chuck Wootton, who had been the economic counselor, was posted believe, to Bonn. So that opened Ottawa. And as I understand, what I am about to say I have had to piece together and I couldn't swear that that this is what happened. But it seems to me that this is what happened.

Library of Congress

Len Weiss had been involved in GATT negotiations to get rid of so called non-tariff barriers, the new term for quantitative import restrictions, but more comprehensive. He had been led to believe that he was going to go to Geneva as an ambassador work on—non-tariff barriers—and he was very sensitive to the possibility of being an ambassador. Oh dear, there's a little more to it than this, because Weiss had been economic minister at Bonn and wanted to be DCM. The ambassador was very happy with Russ Fessenden as his DCM and asked Washington to do something about it; this resulted in Weiss being brought back to Washington and Wootton going to Bonn. Anyway, there was Weiss without an assignment, under the impression that he had a brief to go to Geneva as an ambassador. But for personnel purposes, they had transferred him to Ottawa to take Wootton's job. That's how he was getting paid. Both the DCM and the ambassador at Ottawa did the usual phoning around and finding out, and it was pretty clear that Ottawa would be attractive to Weiss, only if he were DCM or was assured of becoming DCM. That was not on. So then they had to find a place for him and this ambassadorship was held out to him and so Ottawa opened suddenly. (Weiss was later done in, the job in Geneva didn't work out and he ended up doing something else. I guess he went into INR, as I did later).

Anyhow, Ottawa came open on short notice. I was at the end of my third year of what was supposed to be a four or five year tour at The Hague. I knew that this couldn't go on forever, even though it was a wonderfully pleasant and interesting assignment. I had learned Dutch and it was great fun. Suddenly I was asked if I would be interested. Our two older children were just getting ready for college so Ottawa seemed too much to hope for. I thought that they would send us to Lower Slobovia or God knows where. The idea of getting to Ottawa was just too good to be true and I jumped at it.

Q: You went as economic counselor. The ambassador to begin with was Adolph Schmidt and then William Porter. How did Adolph Schmidt work?

BROWN: Adolph Schmidt, the ambassador. You couldn't design a nicer person and he had, we thought, a virtual Neanderthal political position, which was a joke around the

Library of Congress

embassy. This man was a real conservative—for example, one of the jokes was that his idea of current events was the Punic Wars!

There might have been some grounds for this. He was asked to speak to the English-speaking union on a subject of current interest and I think he did suggest the Punic Wars. Charming, a really fine man who probably thought that Canada should be a state of the union but who realized that that was not on and that the best thing to do was to have the best relations with Canada that one could. Above all you shouldn't throw your weight around in Ottawa. You couldn't if you wanted to, though some of our ambassadors tried, I guess. That's not personal knowledge on my part. I do know that Butterworth had a plane that he flew around in and he literally had a red carpet rolled out for him.

Anyway Schmidt was low profile, low key and relied on Rufus Smith for counsel. But Schmidt was a wonderful man, a fine man. His wife was utterly charming and down to earth. She used to drive an airplane!

Q: Economically it was a time of almost war with Canada.

BROWN: Oh it was. Trudeau had been in office for quite some time by then and the Liberals were very nationalistic and economically nationalistic, with sort of a mad dog fringe. Some of them were utterly charming. You'd go to a party and meet some absolutely charming person and they would say, you know I was brought up to hate Americans. It was so funny.

The Automobile Agreement was the bone of contention when I went up there. We had negotiated a North American Auto Agreement which in effect made a free trade area in automobiles and parts between Canada and the United States. And at that time, because automobile plants come into production in fairly large “lumps”... anyway the trade had gone very drastically in Canada's favor during the first few years of the agreement. So nobody in Washington could remember whose idea it had been, whereas in Ottawa everybody was

Library of Congress

prepared to take credit for it. That was a nasty one. It naturally was highly politicized and that was my introduction to Canada.

I got there in early July and in September I took part in a meeting where Phil Trezise came up from Washington and said look, we're just getting crucified in the House of Representatives and what we need is a statement on the floor of Parliament. It seemed a pretty innocuous statement to me. If I had been a Canadian, I would have said that it could not possibly do you any good, but instead the Canadians said, no, we can't do it. You've no idea what pressure we're under. Then you know what that one worthy said? He said, when are you Americans going to exercise some leadership? That was Jake Warren, at that time he was deputy minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. He later ended up being an ambassador here!

You know, all they had to do was to make a fairly innocuous statement on the floor of Parliament and it would have met our needs. Or at least we argued that it would have met our needs. "No, we can't do it and when are you going to exercise leadership?"

Q: How did the automobile thing play out?

BROWN: Well, first of all, the trade began to fluctuate. The trade does fluctuate. There were consultations, during the last year that I was up there, there was an NSC study memorandum on Canada. There was going to be an inter agency study on how to bring those Canadians to their knees. I took part in a meeting, actually as an observer, the embassy representative, where every agency, the Department of Labor was against the Canadians, Agriculture was against the Canadians, Treasury hated the Canadians. and poor old State was in its usual position of saying well, but, well, but. But then, God love Helen Junz, who was at that time a staff economist at the Federal Reserve Board. She started asking questions and, you know, a lot of wild assertions were being made and she said, "Well you know the figures don't support that. As a matter of fact, it's more like this..." She faced them all down. Anyway the study ran into the sand and never was concluded.

Library of Congress

The different agencies would get excited about some Canadian delinquency and would start saying, it's time we put those Canadians in their place. Whereas actually, things were going very well.

Q: Were the different agencies in the government in Canada also reacting this way?

BROWN: It's inevitable. If we say let's do the Canadians, the Canadians say let's do the Americans. But that's just the nature of the relationship. It's big business. In economic terms, Canada should be a few states of the union when you come right down to it. You know for railroad inter company purposes, Canada is two or three districts? There's a very complicated system for getting the rail cars back home, so they're assigned to districts and the North American railroad system doesn't recognize the border at all.

Here's another one for you on Canada. Mac Johnson, when he was the Canadian country director, commissioned a research paper by a professor local at American University. This guy did a survey, he and his students, and found that there were over 5,000 individual intergovernmental agreements between governmental entities in the United States and in Canada. Not many of those were at the national level. It's the damndest thing.

Take for example adoption. A Canadian couple moves to Texas and they adopted a child and the adoption regulations in Canada require six month reports. Well they don't want to go back every six months. So they checked in with the local social services. They got the local social services to get in touch with the Canadian social services and they worked out an arrangement. That kind of thing is all over the place.

Q: Pollution of the Great Lakes, wheat sales to the Soviet Union, access to Canadian oil, surtax dumping, eggs, tires, beef. Which ones of these really caused some problems?

BROWN: Well, the auto agreement was the big issue. Agriculture was a standing issue, of course, because those poor Canadians decided to have their country north of ours and you get all kinds of problems. A typical problem would be the Canadians barring the import

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of strawberries late in the season. Ours would be in full production, whereas theirs would be just coming in and they didn't want the market swamped with American fruit. So they would put up a temporary ban and we would come up and holler about it and demand compensation and call them dirty names. I remember one of these sessions—I think it was strawberries or raspberries. Whenever Americans come up to Ottawa they're treated very well in a material sense. There's always a nice luncheon at the Chateau Laurier. All of that thing is done very well, there'll even be cocktail parties and so on. But when it comes to negotiations, they're hard as nails. In this particular case, we'd been talking all morning and stopped for lunch. At the end of the lunch, I was just at the point of telling the Canadian leader that I wanted to congratulate him, because this had been the first time I'd ever been at one of these sessions where the Canadian side didn't come up with the line, "if you really understood what we've been proposing you'd realize it's good for you." Whereupon the Canadian said, "you know, if you really understood this proposal, you'd know it was in your interest too."

Every bilateral issue is about ten times more important to the Canadians than it is to us.

Q: Because of the 10 to 1 population.

BROWN: So they prepare. On a little thing they'll have a big brief and they'll put their big guns in. And we'll send up some guy who probably reads the briefing book on the plane.

Q: How about the difference between Schmidt and William J. Porter?

BROWN: I was the Canadian director for the time Porter was up there and I only met him two or three times.

Q: Was there a difference?

BROWN: It was night and day, night and day. I heard that one of the stories that was told about Porter had to do with the Quebec political movement.

Library of Congress

When we went to Canada in 1970, a Brit was being held hostage. They killed a Quebec labor minister. A building was bombed in Ottawa just a few days after we got there. Nobody was killed. So it was tense. Out in Rockcliffe, which was where most of the diplomats lived, and the cabinet ministers, they had Mounties on guard. We lived in a different part of town and we were put out that we didn't get that kind of protection. We probably were safer simply because of location.

So there were tense times on those days. Security measures were justified. I'm told that when Porter got up there he started having drills. Officers were sent out to man the stairwells. The damndest thing.

Q: Porter was coming from the Vietnam experience, wasn't he?

BROWN: Well Porter, was booted out by Kissinger because Kissinger wanted Sisco as Under Secretary. I guess they gave Porter his choice of what was open, and since he was a couple of years from retirement he picked Ottawa. It was funny. Virtually everything I heard about him up there was personal rather than business. One thing, however—to point out the essential ridiculousness we sometimes display—the tradition is for the American ambassador to give his first speech to a joint meeting of two clubs in Ottawa, I've forgotten their names. Well, Porter did that and at the time we were having an awful time on oil. Porter held up a little bottle of shale oil and said, “See, we don't depend on you for oil, we're going to develop all this shale. We've got enough shale to last us two millennia!!” Well we've got it but its pretty expensive. Anybody who really knew the situation must have thought, my god, what is this man trying to sell?

Porter was very peculiar in his Ottawa incarnation. He left Ottawa to go off to Saudi Arabia where he was back in his element, after Kissinger fired Aikens.

Library of Congress

Two things about Porter when he was being briefed. I used to have to pick him up at his office and take him through the halls to wherever his appointment was. He either wouldn't go alone or couldn't go alone. I found that a little strange.

The other thing about him I learned one time I was in Ottawa consulting. We had lunch at the Rideau Club. Porter was a great ham radio operator and he said, "You know, these Canadians, they say they go off ice-fishing, but I talk with them by radio and they don't any fishing at all. All they do is go out and drink." He was right about that.

Q: Going back to the period when you were with Schmidt up in Canada, did you ever feel that the US was trying to economically punish the Canadians for differing with us on the whole Vietnam War issue? Trudeau, after all, was giving us a very hard time.

BROWN: There certainly was bad blood in the White House. You know that from the Nixon transcripts. At that time oil was a problem. It happened that in 1971 the Canadians, for the first time, were not adding to their petroleum reserves. That prompted them to take a completely new look at oil exports to the United States, which incensed Washington. The Nixon people didn't like Trudeau. Trudeau was righter than not on these issues. For example, the way he handled things when the Nixon tapes came out. When Nixon called him an asshole, Trudeau simply remarked that he had been called worse things by worse people. He just let it roll off.

Q: Then as economic counselor, you were not under any constraints to find ways of punishing the Canadians economically.

BROWN: On almost any important economic issue, intergovernmental, the thing is so important that it is handled by the departments directly concerned. They'd just have the embassy, the State Department, along as observers. In the old days, the personal relations at the departmental level were so good that these guys got on the phone and settled matters. They kept a lot of problems from getting too far.

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Q: So there wasn't any feeling that you got that the White House was trying to use economic force to bring the Canadians around.

BROWN: Well, I think there probably was. That's latent, it's there all the time. Everybody who has ever dealt with Canada thinks that the relationship is so large and important that obviously if we managed it better, it could do great things for us.

But if you talk to a Canadian about it he would say, what are you hollering about, you own 80% of our factories. You find that when you understand the facts that things are the way they are for pretty good reasons. But as far as being upset, how do you think Phil Trezise felt when Jake Warren told him, we can't do that, we can't do that.

Most people who dealt with the Canadians consider them very difficult to deal with because they're always under the gun. It's the Harvard-Yale game every time, as far as they're concerned.

Well, little things. The New Year's reception at the Houses of Parliament. The protocol guy from External Affairs, gets up and announces the order in which you will go in to shake hands with the Governor General. And he says, "Yeah, we jiggered the alphabet so you would be at the end."

Q: You mean "Les Etats Units"

BROWN: It was funny, really. But he got a certain amount of real satisfaction in doing it.

On specific issues, if they really are hard ones, they are hard to deal with. But things work out pretty well. Take that issue out on George's Bank, with the fishermen, now.

By the way, you know the fisheries treaty with Canada, not with Canada but with Great Britain, I think its our first treaty ever.

Library of Congress

Q: And its been a problem ever since.

BROWN: As long as you have fish, you have a fisheries problem.

Q: Did you get much involved or was this pretty much resolved at a different level?

BROWN: Fisheries, well there was always a guy coming out from Interior and there again is a good example of how things work out.

This was a nasty problem. It was Fraser River salmon, a difficult one to handle technically. They talked and came to a kind of arrangement and then the delegation had a meeting in my office. Interior had brought along Washington State representatives, I think Oregon, too. Anyhow the Interior official talked with these guys. He said he thought there would be a problem policing the agreement. And the guy from Washington said, "Well I know so and so on the Canadian side and he's a skookum fellow and I think that we can probably work it out all right." This is the only time I've ever heard skookum used.

Q: People are used to working out solutions.

BROWN: People know we need solutions, and we know we aren't going to go to war over it. Although these damned New England fisherman are beginning to shoot. By the way, there have been gun shots across the border up in North Dakota on water and trade issues.

Q: Coming back, did you spend most of your time on Canadian matters?

BROWN: I was the Canadian country director for two years.

Q: Then you went to INR?

BROWN: Yes.

Library of Congress

Q: That's Intelligence and Research from 1975 to 80. What was your prime concern.

BROWN: I was in a little unit called Coordination, actually a little part of INR that liaises with the intelligence community, mainly CIA but also NSA, DIA.

Q: NSA that's

BROWN: That's the National Security Agency, that's encrypting and listening to radio. They also develop our encrypting devices. Defense Intelligence Agency, which is military intelligence.

One of the interesting parts of the job was coordination with the Joint Reconnaissance Center which probably still maintains aerial Reconnaissance of the Soviet periphery. All of their missions are cleared with the Department of State.

Q: Part of that came out of the U-2 business.

BROWN: Yes, that had been coordinated, of course. Yes, U-2 was one of operations that we coordinated. For example in the Middle East there was an unclassified operation called Ollie Harvest, which may no longer be operating; it came about after the Israeli-Egyptian war. They would run a photo mission every two weeks which would take pictures of the military situation on the Israeli border. And then both sides would be briefed to ensure there had been no diversions from what had been agreed.

Q: Were there any particular bones of contention between any of these agencies and State?

BROWN: Here is one thing that happened, after Welch was killed (Welch was the station chief in Athens in 1974). He was killed by some Greek group. He was known to be the CIA man in Athens, because he lived in a very pretentious house, I gather.

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Q: Well, not really. I was in Athens as consul general and I left about six months before he was killed.

BROWN: Really. Anyway the way I understand it, is that it was a very nice house in a very nice section. It was generally known that it was occupied by the CIA station chief and that's why he was killed.

The consequence of this was a global reassessment of cover. It became a real production. It was a continuing problem with CIA. As far as CIA was concerned, they want the best cover in the world for their operations but at the same time the wife wants to be on the diplomatic list and the CIA guys want to have diplomatic status. And have to have it in some cases. That is a real continuing problem.

A simple problem. Defense attach#s. We handle their accreditation. We are even consulted in their selection. The military does that a couple of years in advance and then they send these guys off to school. But it doesn't always work out. They'll go off their rocker, or get drunk or have an affair; we were the people who would have to jump in on those.

By the way, while I was there, the FBI guy in London got in trouble. The Brits noticed that he was frequenting one of those big gambling places in the company of a very shady lady. They got word to the embassy and the embassy got word to—I'm not sure if it was Hoover—but that guy was out, if not the next day, damned near. That kind of thing.

Q: Did you get involved with disputes of analysis?

BROWN: Not in a substantive way.

In 1977 when Carter was inaugurated, one of the first things his administration did was to order an intelligence mission review. That went on for close to a year. I worked on that as the State Department guy. You'd have to come back to State and get in touch with the

Library of Congress

parts of the Department that were directly involved and come up with a position. It was much more interesting than I thought it was going to be, partly because when I got in there it was the time of the Church Committee and the Pike Committee reviewing the bad things that had happened. It was an interesting time.

Q: Did you find that the CIA resent State?

BROWN: Generally there was cooperation. But basically they resented our trying to keep a kind of eye on them. They liked to meet directly with the bureaus without our being there. But when that happens little misunderstandings occur, and generally it is recognized that it is good to have a State Department guy who isn't in the bureau to provide institutional memory and a little knowledge of what's going on here and what's going on there.

I think we had fairly good personal relations at that time. I knew the guys in DDO, the directorate of operations. Most of them are awfully good. They have a problem in that Americans aren't very good at maintaining cover. In the trade it's recognized that they can't maintain cover for more than a few years. Then what do you do with them?

Q: Looking back on your career, what gave you the feeling of greatest satisfaction?

BROWN: You know what. In concrete terms, the best thing I did in the Foreign Service was when I was the consular officer in Bombay. We got a telegram saying that a Navy tanker was coming in with a medical emergency. I think I remember the guys' name—Hans Peterson—he was bleeding from the mouth and the anus and he required immediate medical attention. I sent my only NIACT message that really deserved the priority to the Department. I went out to the ship. The Indian Navy cooperated. We took off Peterson and another guy who had hepatitis. Took them to Breech Candy Hospital, where they found he had a perforated ulcer. I had the medical record from the Department by return NIACT and gave it to the doctor. I went in before Peterson went into the operating room because his chances were about 1 in 20 and what I wanted to find out was, what shall I do with your body, but I couldn't bring myself to ask and so we just talked and he went into the

Library of Congress

operation. Anyhow, these Indian doctors went in, found the hemorrhage, tied it off and they said his condition improved so quickly that they proceeded to cut out the ulcerated part of his stomach and sewed him back together.

Anyway, he survived. I visited him daily in the early days. I fainted once because they had him hooked up to all kinds of tubes and it was just too much. Three weeks after we took him off the ship we put him on the plane for New York.

Of all the things I did, that's the thing I feel best about.

The second best thing I feel best about was also as a consular officer. There was a story in the paper of a woman dying on the street and she was the Burmese wife of an American citizen. She was buried in Potter's Field. I looked into it, even though it had never come to my official attention. It turned out that the widower had worked for US missionaries in Burma, had escaped to India when the Japanese came in, and was found living with his wife in a cemetery in Madras. The American Men's Club in Bombay picked them up and brought them to Bombay and supported them at the Salvation Army hostel. After she died, the Club continued his support. He was well in his seventies at this time. I visited him and only a few months after she died, he died, and he also was buried in Potter's Field. I went to the funeral; it happened that his wife's grave and his were adjoining, head to foot. ...

So I went over to the hostel; there was nothing there except clothing and some studs. You know in India they don't use buttons because of the way they do laundry, beating the clothes on the rocks. So they just have button holes that are held together by studs. I think there were only three or four studs and that was the only thing of any value at all. The rest I just turned it over to the Salvation Army people. Then I mailed the studs to the man's daughter who lived in Liverpool. I sent them through the pouch so I wouldn't have to go through any customs routine. I was able to tell her that we had been in touch with her father and that her father and mother were buried in adjoining graves. I felt pretty good about that.

Library of Congress

Q: I'm an old consular officer myself and so I know what you're talking about. I want to thank you very much.

End of interview