

WARD THOMPSON

Interviewed by: Thomas Dunnigan

Initial interview date: February 4, 1999

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Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan, and the date is February 4, 1999. I am about to interview Ward Thompson, who spent more than 25 years as a Foreign Service officer and served in various parts of the world, principally perhaps in Scandinavia. Ward, I'd like to begin by asking you how you prepared for a Foreign Service career. Had you known when you went to college that you were interested in the service, or did this just come as you studied?

THOMPSON: Well, when I started college, I was a major in American civilization, probably as far from the Foreign Service as I could get, but after my sophomore year, I had a chance to go as an exchange student to Finland and came back and changed my major to international relations and also got oriented toward areas.

Q: After you left college, you joined the Marine Corps.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: What did you do in the Marines?

THOMPSON: Well, I was commissioned on graduation, and incidentally, I had passed the Foreign Service Exam.

Q: Oh, by that time.

THOMPSON: At the beginning of my senior year, but since I had a prior military obligation, I was put in suspense, and in the Marines I was made an intelligence officer in an observation unit.

Q: In this country?

THOMPSON: Initially in California, and then Okinawa and finally Vietnam, where the observation mission melded with the medevac because that unit had picked up duty helicopters, so I spent a year in Vietnam as a ground officer in a low-level air squadron, somewhat of an anomaly, but taking a good chance of intercultural activities, and then came back and went to the Fletcher School.

Q: And I notice you were sworn into State as a Foreign Service officer in June of 1966.

THOMPSON: That's correct, which was, in fact, before I got out of the Marine Corps. And I was finishing up my last tour, which was at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and I said that I wanted to go to grad school because I had already been accepted to Fletcher. And the Department said, "Well, fine, but why don't you go on leave without pay?" So it was paperwork sleight of hand, I guess, and so-

Q: So that's where the LWOP comes in.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: You took the A-100 course, the beginning course, after the end of your leave without pay?

THOMPSON: Yes, I was at the Fletcher School with several people who came into my class eventually, some in the same situation, one who didn't come into the Foreign Service, that was Bob Hormats.

Q: Oh, yes. He's done well. He's done very well.

THOMPSON: In and out of the State Department, but never in the Foreign Service. And he and I were both debating whether to take an appointment, and the two of us went together to State when we visited Washington with the Fletcher class that year, and we had the same conversation, I believe, and he went one way and I went the other.

Q: Well, fortunately, with good fortune for both of you, I would say.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: After the A-100 course were you given any language training?

THOMPSON: Yes. This is always something that plays for laughs. My first assignment, as you know, was to Copenhagen, and at that time we had to have a world language to get off language probation, which was also curious, because when I took the Foreign Service Exam in 1962, it contained a language portion, and if one passed that then one had satisfied the language requirement. Well, the time I came in, which was five years later, the rules had changed, and world languages were important. So I was sent to German language training for an assignment to Copenhagen, and this, of course, was exposed soon enough after the occupation that German wasn't a tremendous help.

Q: Wasn't that popular, was it?

THOMPSON: No.

Q: But you'd already qualified in a language when you took the written exam.

THOMPSON: Well, I had no argument with the wisdom of the system because the language I qualified in was French, and I will never speak French no matter how much I study it.

Q: You've joined very many of your fellow Americans in that. Had you expressed an interest in going to Copenhagen, or was that just an assignment that was handed to you?

THOMPSON: No, I had expressed an interest in going to Helsinki. I thought, why not take a stab at it, and of course, you were in the position then of apportioning the assignments, and because it was 1967, I think virtually all of the other bachelors in my A-100 class were sent to Vietnam.

Q: Where you had already been.

THOMPSON: Where I had already been. And you explained that there were no vacancies in Helsinki, that there seldom are, but then I was very pleased when I was sent to Copenhagen with one other officer in my A-100 class. And that was Harry Cobb, who went on to have a brilliant career and left the Foreign Service relatively soon.

Q: Now you began there as a junior consular officer, I understand, in Copenhagen.

THOMPSON: Yes, Harry went there as a rotational officer, and I went there as a consular officer proper, and I spent two years there. The first year was as a visa officer, and the second year was in the other part of the consulate.

Q: What were your principal problems that you saw in the work?

THOMPSON: There were no problems. Indeed, we had a very small unit. There were three Americans, so we operated as a committee. And the principal problem at that time, in the late '60's, involved Americans who had fled the military either before they were inducted or after they were in the military, and had gone to Sweden. And occasionally they would drift over to Copenhagen and we had to devise ways to take care of them so that we could satisfy both their requirements and the requirements of the US Government. There were many sensitive cases where we recognized that these were troubled young men, not all of them on drugs. The ones on drugs, I think, we had less sympathy for. But many decided that they wanted to go home, and the FSOs in the consular section had to negotiate to a extent with the folks in the defense attaché's office. You couldn't go snatching people off the streets of Denmark, even though, I think, the Danish police were certainly willing to do that. This Vietnam problem was, of course, larger than the individual American. This was a major policy problem that the embassy was seized with. And again, since it was a small staff, as you know, since you've served there, the country team was pretty much a committee of the whole. I remember once when Angier Biddle Duke, who was used to loftier positions, came up to Copenhagen and held his first staff meeting, he said, "Now I want you all to go back and tell your junior officers..." and we looked around, and of course all of the officers in the embassy were in the room.

But the Vietnam issue was the issue overhanging everything that we did in the embassy, and as I've described it, it certainly reached into the Consular Section. And in some ways it reached into visa work because, as you know, we had a lot of restrictions on who could apply for visas and whether they were going to overthrow the U.S. government and whether they had been Communists. And the Vietnam War was causing a lot of the Danish leftists to join organizations that, frankly, we regarded as proscribed.

Q: Well, I know when I came to Copenhagen roughly seven, eight years later, the Vietnam problem was still with us, of course, and we had political differences with the Danish Government to the extent that we would not send an ambassador there for about one year, mainly because we were annoyed at some of the things the Danes were doing and saying.

THOMPSON: Well, there was another problem, which began just a few days after I arrived in Denmark and which was there when you were there and was, again, still there when I went back, and that was the B-52 bomber that crashed on Greenland, which crashed in early 1968. And this, again, reached into all sections of the embassy. It was a major problem, of course, ultimately compounding our relationship because of the Vietnam War and so forth. And the issue, as you know, was we had Thule Air Base, and we were not allowed to have nuclear weapons on Danish soil, including Greenland, and the plane crashed up there and it had four H-bombs on it, and there was a lot of, of course, ongoing relations with the Danes over this, which when I was back as political counselor had reached sort of another peak in a long history. But an interesting thing, I thought at the time, was our ambassador, who was Katharine Elkus White, of course had Washington's attention and vice versa. And her communication with Washington was through the Communications Section, where they had an almost instantaneous exchange by cable. There were no secure phones in those days, certainly not in Copenhagen, and this was a very sensitive subject. So I was struck by the fact that the ambassador had to take herself - she was a very dignified woman - into the inner reaches of the Communications Section and personally dial the call.

Q: Roll up her sleeves and get to work. But she was still highly respected when I got there.

THOMPSON: She was very good for our relationship. This is so important. I think that the form and the style are so important in a country like Denmark when you contrast it with the environment of the Vietnam. We would have six or seven thousand demonstrators going by the embassy, and yet the official relationship and the personal regard that the ambassador was held in were never affected.

Q: Did you have problems with the Americans who were in that radical commune in Copenhagen?

THOMPSON: Christiania.

Q: Christiania?

THOMPSON: Yes. We occasionally had individual problems, but they were consular problems. I remember one very young woman, a girl, actually, who came in one day to register a birth, and she announced that "I had a baby, and that's it." And she pointed to a basket on the floor. And so we, of course, acknowledged that it was an American citizen. The problem was that it didn't have a name, and she hadn't a clue as to what she was going to call it.

I mentioned the drugs, of course. I think my first consular case was when I was a duty officer, which I was half the time, of course, for the consular section. I had to go out to the Airport, Kastrup, where the Danes had a passenger whom they wouldn't let into the country and who was an American citizen. And they eventually let him in, but they put him in jail, at Vestre Faengsel, which was where a lot of the Americans were kept. And I caught up with him there, and he had recorded his entire arrival in Denmark, and this was more detail than we need here, but he had announced that he was Jesus Christ, and he had interviewed the customs and immigration officials on his way in, and he was very clever, but ultimately a no-goodnik, and just very typical of the Americans. The Danes didn't want them. They hated to let them into the country. They were obliged to in many cases because in those days, of course, there were not that many direct flights and people landed, often to change planes.

Q: How did the Danes react to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which came in '68 there?

THOMPSON: That was very interesting. I recall that vividly. There was a demonstration, this time, I think, about 10,000 people, and as you know, the Soviet embassy in Copenhagen is around the corner, half a corner, from the American embassy. And in fairness to these leftist organizations, virtually all of them turned out to condemn the Soviet invasion, and then for good measure, they continued up the street and protested Vietnam. And I think the sign I saw that was most critical of the Soviets said "Soviets = Americans."

Q: That's the worst thing you could say about them, wasn't it?

THOMPSON: I think that politically Prague was a turning point, that a lot of these leftists were intellectuals, and they had to come to terms with this, and as you know, the original Communist Party had never been able to withstand the Hungarian Revolution or the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and as a result there were spin-offs, and the SF, the Socialist People's Party, which became very important-still a very leftist party-was a result of the falling out of the chairman with Moscow. The fact that they prided themselves on independence from Moscow did not make them friends with the United States at all, so instead of having one Communist Party to deal with we ended up with three.

Q: Did you have a chance to do any reporting outside the consular field while you were in Copenhagen, or were most of your reports limited to visas and citizenship?

THOMPSON: I did a couple of reports, and they were related to consular work. Unlike my colleague Harry Cobb, I never did rotate around the sections. I did a longer report on the issue of the American turncoats and how they were treated in Denmark, which the Political Section submitted as a political report. And of course, again, as a small embassy, I got involved in protocol work. Any time there was a visitor, a CODEL or something, we were pulled in and we became other than consular officers. I remember, for example, when Senator Ted Kennedy came. I ended up going with him to medical places because he was there in his capacity on some committee that dealt with international health issues.

Q: Did you have any opportunity to work with the ambassadors who were there while you were there, Duke and Katharine White?

THOMPSON: I would say that there was probably more distance between the ambassador and the Consular Section. And when I was dealing with overseas citizen services my office was literally at the far reach of the embassy, further from the ambassador's office than anybody else could be. We had fairly constant contact, but I think that-I told about Duke-I think that ambassadors there were a little self-conscious of the fact that they had rather small empires in those days. I know that Duke, of course, came as an afterthought.

Q: He'd been in Spain before.

THOMPSON: He'd been in Spain, and of course something was made of the fact that while he was in Spain they dropped a bomb.

Q: Right.

THOMPSON: But he'd been chief of protocol, and he was appointed to Denmark by Lyndon Johnson after Hubert Humphrey lost the election, and it was said that he hoped maybe he could go in and stay, but that was not the case. The Republicans didn't want him, so he was only there for a very few months. And then he was replaced by Guilford Dudley, who was unfortunately a prototype political appointee.

Q: Yes, from Tennessee, I believe.

THOMPSON: Yes. But later, to jump ahead, of course, Terry Todman, who was ambassador, had been assistant secretary of state, and he really wanted the trappings of a VIP Foreign Service officer. He was a very good ambassador.

Q: What was the Korean reaction to President Nixon's visit to China in 1972?

THOMPSON: The Koreans were always very nervous when we approached the Chinese. Of course, they were also nervous if we approached the Japanese, and most nervous if we approached the Vietnamese. So we would have to reassure them. We did that by having visitors come and so forth. You have to remember that the Vietnam War was also a context there.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask you also about their reaction to the Vietnam War.

THOMPSON: The Koreans had a division or more in Vietnam, and others have addressed that. The Korean commitment was pretty solid at first, I understand, and then sort of relaxed a bit and they had their own agenda down there. But I do think they appreciated that everything we did in Asia was in the context of the Vietnam War, including to some degree our opening to China. And they realized ultimately as we pulled out of Vietnam that this would hurt them more than whatever we did in managing the relationship with others.

It was interesting when Park Chung Hee declared martial law.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask you. Why did he do that?

THOMPSON: Well, he did it because nobody was expecting it. He was very savvy, and I think he probably got up in the morning and figured, you know, what can I do today, but as a shrewd politician. He was never reacting; he was always taking the initiative, and he declared martial law. It gave him a chance to mix up his government a little bit, shuffle it, and so forth. In opening it probably tightened his control. We were given about 24 hours notice, perhaps less. And I recall that because I was detailed to spend the night in the embassy cut off from my office. It was very, very peaceful. Some tanks; otherwise it wasn't very much to look at. I mean, of course, Park had no real love for America. He ignored Ambassador Habib because of Habib's earlier activities in Korea. And so he was very wary of what we might do, and he tried to neutralize us by asking us to be neutral. Well, it happened that Habib had instructions to go see him. The instructions had to do with something that was going on in Vietnam, with the forces there, and with our need to beef up the hardware, not only in Vietnam but also in Korea, perhaps to transfer some of that. This was vital from the American perspective. It had nothing to do with Korean domestic politics, but naturally Park assumed that the ambassador was coming to see him about the martial law. And so it was almost impossible to get the word to Park in a credible fashion that the ambassador was going to come up with the news media, the international press watching him, and hours after the declaration of martial law, and then he was not going to mention martial law to the president. These are the things that go on behind the scenes that people just couldn't believe.

Q: How did martial law affect the embassy's activities and yours specifically, if they did at all?

THOMPSON: I would say they didn't at all. The difference when that was imposed was not that perceptible because you already had a situation where there was a curfew at night. There were barricades that you went past. Of course, ordinary citizens couldn't do that. There was press censorship and other restrictions, and these were tightened somewhat by that. Martial law was preemptive. As I said, it wasn't a reaction to anything. It was just a good move in terms of laying the groundwork for suspending political activity and making sure that Parliament did not become uppity, and that was one impact: the political structure was reconstituted. There was a new constitution put into effect which had an ingenious system in it providing that parliament was freely elected but I think only two-thirds of it, and one-third was appointed. Now this on paper would give the opposition a chance to control things. But each district would send two members to the parliament, and in most districts, in all districts, the Government Party only had one candidate for two seats. So it sacrificed half of the mandates at the start, but in return, of course, they got these candidates elected.

Q: Their man was elected.

THOMPSON: So you had one-third of the elected legislature, 100 per cent of the one-third that they had appointed, so it was really quite ingenious.

Q: Now Secretary Kissinger came to Korea, I believe, while you were there in November of '73. Did you have any role in his visit, or not?

THOMPSON: No, it was a very quick visit. I did not have a role except probably to carry papers and things, but he did come and talk to the staff in the embassy cafeteria. I remember that. Of course, Ambassador Habib was there, and Kissinger told an anecdote about visiting Habib when Kissinger was a Harvard professor and Habib was at the embassy in Saigon. Kissinger was on a fact-finding mission and wanted to interview Habib. Kissinger said that Habib said to him, "You think you know something about Vietnam? You're going to waste my time coming here? Go out, travel around the country for two weeks and learn something about this country and then I'll talk to you." And Kissinger said, "You know, he was right. And I did spend some time in Vietnam, and I learned a lot and I went back and then Phil Habib talked to me and I got a lot more out of it because of the advice." And he paused, and then he said, "But I'd like to see him try that today."

Q: Yes, that was when Habib was political counselor, I recall, in Saigon. I presume, since you were following events in North Korea, you worked closely with the CIA station and the Agency people there. Did you have any relations with the Korean CIA?

THOMPSON: No, we assumed that they were everywhere, and I mentioned my relations with the Red Cross, for example. Even in the ministry, you couldn't be sure, we, the State officers couldn't be sure who was actually pulling the strings. But basically, especially under Habib, the jurisdictional lines were very clearly drawn, and I know once that he had read something that the CIA had generated involving one of our contacts, and he called in the station chief and said, "Oh, this is a Political Section contact, and this isn't the way we operate."

Q: Were people in the Political Section in touch with the opposition in Korea, or was that too dangerous?

THOMPSON: They were in touch, and they liked to be in touch with what the embassy stood up for in the early '70's. And even I would get involved. I would go out and cover election campaign events, even though everybody knew that the result would not be an independent parliament. Events were good because you could see the interaction. As I mentioned, there were a limited number of language officers.

Again, I would like to talk about language. I suppose they lecture at FSI to the language group try to motivate them to do well in their language classes. I think Korean was another good example. I never got up to intellectual fluency, but my wife and I both had good conversational fluency. A lot of times we used the language, and we also were able to talk with the officers in the Foreign Ministry. Only some of them did speak English. In many cases the wives did not as well, and also on these trips that I mentioned. Invariably mayors of the small towns didn't speak English. It was always an interpreter and there was always interesting chit-chat and you did pick up a lot about the fabric of the country.

Q: How did we assess the strength of the student demonstrations, which were increasing in those years?

THOMPSON: Well, I mentioned that we had two officers in the section who were assigned to internal events, and they had good contacts with the students and the opposition parties dealing with Kim, who was the ranking Roman Catholic and was leaning to the side of dissent. He was in a very awkward position. And our labor attaché^{1/2}-I mentioned our labor attaché^{1/2}-he didn't speak, but he had good contact in the labor movement, which I think the AFL-CIO regarded as nascent, at best, but nonetheless it existed, and there were people out there working hard. I know that one of our colleagues in his oral history mentioned it. These ties to the labor movement were particularly important because that was more untainted. As I said, to be a politician, you had to play according to the rules that were passed down. But in the Korean context, which was the rules were different anyway, and I think he helped all of us political officers as well as others in the embassy. And we had some good language officers in the consular section. It helped us to go out and just engage people because you get to know their rules. It's one thing for us to go down to the market and bargain, to our great gratification with people, but to see how Korean natives go out and deal with other Koreans is instructive when it comes to dealing with Koreans on policy issues ourselves.

Q: What was our reaction to President Park's increasingly strongman rule? Did we ever tackle him on this?

THOMPSON: I would say that we nibbled around the edges. There again, in the Korean context, except for a very brief blossoming of democracy, there had only been strongman rule. The North Korean threat was very real. It was obvious that you could not have the country bickering among itself. You had to have some kind of strong if not authoritarian rule. I think probably if Park Chung Hee had been friends with the embassy, he would have gotten away with what he did with less objection from us. That's not to say that we condone a dictatorship, but we would have been able to nudge . . . we certainly couldn't nudge Park Chung Hee. Instead, we tried to develop our ties to the businesses, the Korean military. He came out of the Korean military. He knew exactly how we maintained ties with the Korean military. In fact, it was our Korean military that he overthrew in order to become president. So he knew how that worked.

Q: What was the Korean reaction to President Nixon's resignation in '73, '74?

THOMPSON: I really can't say authoritatively. I think that they accepted that because it was so gradual. And initially they regarded Nixon as a great friend. Of course, he was. But they could see what was happening. We had a very large CODEL that came out earlier, and there were people on it such as John Anderson and others who were very critical of Richard Nixon. You know, Anderson was a Republican and later ran as an independent, but I think they were making it clear that Nixon was losing his basic support, so his resignation was no surprise. As an aside, I can say that the Vice-President had resigned, Agnew, and he had visited Korea at some point before I was there, and we got a visit from the inspector general of the FBI or somebody that they wanted to go through all of our files and look at everything pertaining to the Agnew visit.

Q: Interesting. Well, it was about this time that President Park's wife was assassinated.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: And did the embassy have to take extra security precautions as a result of that?

THOMPSON: I don't know whether we did, but we certainly didn't have to. I mentioned the anti-Japanese movement as a result of that. This was something that was somewhat bilateral, but it was mostly domestic. But it certainly didn't involve the United States. And I know that Dick Erickson, who was chargé d'affaires at the time, was in a position of offering his good offices. I know from the other oral histories that this was not necessarily supported by the Department of State, but of course I was observing him close up, and he was going back and forth constantly between the Japanese embassy and the Foreign Ministry. This, again, I think was part of the show, an effort that culminated with the prime minister coming to Korea and apologizing for the fact that the assassins had come from Japan.

Q: And the assassin was Japanese or North Korean or-

THOMPSON: He was a Japanese-Korean man, but he had been so long over there. Of course, the Korean community was very close-knit, but I don't recall the details of where his marching orders came from, but certainly the Japanese didn't control him. I just wanted to say that there was another aspect to the domestic reaction to the assassination besides the anti-Japanese, which. . . . The anti-Japanese movement was partly orchestrated and partly just the same vestige of the long occupation and colonization by Japan. Ultimately, of course, Korea had to come to terms with that, and this assassination was a catalyst for letting off some steam. At the same time, Park lost his best domestic ambassador. His wife was very well loved, a gracious woman, very attractive, never appeared harsh or domineering or anything.

Q: A foil for the old man.

THOMPSON: Well, yes, generally loved. There was no orchestrating the funeral. They had too many people turn out to mourn for her, and even Park revealed a soft side to himself because everything was on television. And as my colleagues have described him, he became more withdrawn after she died. Ultimately, of course, he was assassinated. Koreans were very pleased about the economic miracle that was already evident at the time she was assassinated.

Q: Now in 1974, in the latter part of the year, President Ford visited Korea.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: That was probably his first foreign visit, or one of them.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: Did you have any part in that visit?

THOMPSON: Yes, I did. I got involved with a few others preparing for it. I got to go to the Blue House, which is the counterpart of the White House. It was a good visit. I think it was about 24 hours. The Koreans were very happy, that Americans cared. They made a lot of the fact that it was his first overseas trip. I think he went on to Vladivostok.

Q: Yes, and then to Vladivostok to meet Brezhnev or someone there.

THOMPSON: He went there, and that counted for a lot. And then the fact that it was snowing as he left was considered a good omen.

Q: Ah, a very good omen, very good omen. And then there was an incident where Korean riot police raided our embassy. Do you recall that?

THOMPSON: Yes, vividly. This was part of an ongoing area of political dissent which involved a group of mothers, and these were mothers of students who had been incarcerated or persecuted as a result of their own anti-government activities, and the mothers tried a lot of different things. They finally came into the embassy compound. In those days, of course, you could just drive in or walk in. There were gates, but they were open all the time. And they came in and they sat down, and the Korean police came and removed them.

Q: Uninvited by the embassy.

THOMPSON: Uninvited, and Dick Sneider was ambassador, and he was literally livid. He was running around jumping up and down on the top floor, really an excellent view, of course. He kept sending people down. "Go down and stop them." Meanwhile, he had people calling the Foreign Ministry and the Blue House, and all that to no avail. Obviously, nobody was going to respond until they'd gotten those women out of there because they were on diplomatic territory. I know that Don Gregg, who was station chief and later was ambassador to Korea, had his picture taken. I think it appeared on the front page of The New York Times. He was down there with all these women around him and the riot police taking people out, and Dick Sneider did set us up, because there was nothing we could do. And I was a little over-dramatic. When it was my turn to go down there, they had already put the women on buses, and they had pulled up about probably three or four city buses and threw the women on there, and I stood in front of the bus. And of course, the driver certainly wasn't going to pay any attention to me, and so he drove, and as he left, of course, I glided off to the street side of the bus, but to the people watching from the embassy, it looked as if I had fallen under the bus. It was an optical trick.

Q: You were quite a hero, or - a fool, I don't know which.

THOMPSON: Well, I think probably we all were very foolish. And the Koreans didn't make any points with the embassy that day. But every time they would pull something like this, of course, they would always apologize, you know. By being consistent we'd earn the respect of a lot of lower-ranking Koreans. They were highly educated, understood our culture, our political and diplomatic culture, probably better than many of us professionals ourselves. They were very savvy in their relationships.

Q: What was the reaction in Korea to the collapse in Vietnam in the spring of '75?

THOMPSON: I was not personally dealing with the Koreans on that one. Again, I think that the Korean people took it in stride.

Q: Which happens a little before this.

THOMPSON: -because I think the Koreans were perhaps the most overeducated people in the world. By then, I think, literacy had reached 100 per cent. Everybody was well read; they knew what was going on. And the Middle East situation had come on somewhere on their radar screen, and that was more important at that point than Vietnam, in my opinion. Now on a direct personal level, there had been a number of Koreans in Vietnam, and they of course were concerned with getting them out. Now our military had arranged to get whatever vestige of their military was still there. I believe they were there after we pulled out, so that they were there in early '75, perhaps just some kind of advisory unit, but I do recall that one issue was that when they came out, they just loaded up a ship with Mercedes-Benzes and like that. There were some Korean diplomats who were stuck and I did have contacts with the Ministry, which was quite concerned about it. And in those few frantic days, in April or May, I'm not quite sure what was happening. The main concern was that they would be handed over to the North Vietnamese. So I was working in the embassy. We had no contacts with Vietnam. The embassy had been abandoned. And then eventually the Foreign Ministry said that, well, they had been in touch. And I said, "How?" And they said, "Well, we picked up the phone and called." Because the Vietcong had not severed communications. And then they got a fax - well, it wouldn't have been a fax; it was a teletype - eventually they made their way out. I think they went south and got a boat or something. They were very resourceful. So they got out. That was the main concern of the Foreign Ministry was the safety of these people.

Q: The great concern about the Middle East, was it the oil boycott that was bothering your embassy?

THOMPSON: Yes, as it did the Westernized countries.

Q: Oh, yes.

THOMPSON: And Koreans right away could see that it would be a big problem.

Q: There was no oil in Korea.

THOMPSON: No oil in Korea, and the Koreans need energy but it also happened, and this is another digression. . . . It also happened that they had decided to get into the supertanker-building business. And the timing was atrocious. They had correctly figured out how they could build supertankers and undersell the Japanese. And by the way, they brought Danes in. I remember that. They brought the vice-president of the local shipyard down to a place called Ulsan, where Hyundai, which now sells cars here in this country, built this shipyard where there was nothing. It was sandy beach. The Koreans built this steel mill which was just up the coast, and they had an over-capacity of steel. They figured that what could they do? Well, they could build supertankers. They had no experience in large shipbuilding, but in typically methodical fashion, they went ahead and they obtained the design of the Japanese. I don't know where they bought it and how, but they got it. And they got a contract with one of the Greek shipping companies for 10 supertankers even though they had never built them because the price was low. And they put together this shipyard with thousands of people building it, and the Danes provided the expertise, and they started building. And then, of course, the oil crisis came along, and the market just fell out of supertankers, and the yard continued. They rallied and prospered. They started building these pressurized ships for liquid petroleum gas and built all kinds of things. But this was just one of the incidental blows struck by the Middle Eastern crisis. To maintain their energy supply, they did a couple of things which were very innovative and an example of how they could move quickly internationally to cover their interests. First of all, they discovered that there had been an Arab explorer who had landed on the shores of Korea in antiquity and that traditions had been handed down, and there was even a mosque there once to cater to those of Islamic faith in the area. They brought in the representatives of Saudi Arabia or some other Arab country and they showed them that this is an Islamic country we're in. And then, of course, later, without losing too many beats, they developed a relationship with the Saudis in the construction business, and so then it was Korean companies who did a lot of the modernizing that the Saudis could afford after the oil prices went up. And this was part of the deal to ensure their supply. They told the Arabs that they could provide this state-of-the-art construction feasibility and they would be very glad to do that. The price, of course, would be very reasonable.

Q: Much cheaper than, say, the Japanese could do it.

THOMPSON: Oh, yes. And in fact this is what happened.

Q: Now you served under two career ambassadors, both strong-minded, Phil Habib and Dick Sneider. Can you contrast them as to their effectiveness in the job?

THOMPSON: Well, I would say that Habib knew Korea very well. He had very good contacts. Sneider was more of a newcomer to Korea, not to Asia.

Q: Yes, Japan was his beat.

THOMPSON: He had one credential which was very impressive. During that brief period when the UN forces controlled Pyongyang, he had gotten hold of the archives, and he had studied with them, from the Communists, and Sneider was involved in that study from Washington, so that gave him some credibility, which he used. I think it was a question of style. Habib, for example, the Koreans were very big on the trappings of military rule, lots of motorcades. Habib always prohibited motorcades, for himself or for visiting Americans. Sneider, on the other hand, liked the motorcades. So that was a great difference in style.

Q: Well, now at the end of your tour in Korea in '75, mid-'75, you were assigned to Finnish language training, which I gather you'd wanted after what you said before.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: How long was that training?

THOMPSON: That, again, was 44 weeks.

Q: That was an effective course, too?

THOMPSON: Yes. That was something that I had been hoping for, and I had bid on jobs in Scandinavia, and it was very hard to get the assignment, and as it turned out I don't think there was any competition. The inspectors came out to post in early '75 and I told them my situation, and I think they went back and did something about it because on April 25, I got my assignment for transfer in July. And then I found out, when I came back, that the only job available in Helsinki was the labor-political job. And this was controlled by the labor force. And my predecessor, who now in retirement works full-time in the Labor Office in Washington, was a very good labor officer, and to be a good labor officer in Finland in the '70's, you had to deal with Communist unions. You had to deal with social democratic unions which had Communists on their boards. And there were some right-wingers back in Washington in the AFL-CIO and the Department of State who thought that this guy didn't really understand the real world, and so they were very reluctant to send a young person like me out there. Then of course they had the problem that there was an FSO position and you did have to learn the language. Now that's why it took so long to get that assignment. They had been reluctant. They just thought that I would somehow give the United States of America to the Communists. Anyway, I did get the assignment. I did enjoy the language training. My wife and I had adopted a couple of kids in Korea, so she couldn't do the training with me as she had taken Korean. I was with several other officers, including my coming boss, who was Ford Cooper, and his wife, Magda. There was an Agency officer. There was a USIA officer, whose position was cut about three months into the program, so he was pulled.

I mentioned Ford Cooper and his wife because Ford has just published a book in Finnish in which he mentions the language-training.

Q: It's in Finnish? Not translated?

THOMPSON: It's published in Finland, in Finnish. I've just done a little blurb for the Foreign Service Journal, which will not allow a review, because it's not in English. But it's a good example of how an FSO can do two things. First of all, it's a part of the ongoing dialogue with the Finns, and this is relevant to my experience there, of not really revisionist history but how and why things were done during the Cold War, what the American embassy's role was then. And secondly, it's an interesting twist on oral history, because what Ford did was go to Finland, two years ago, and interview a couple of dozen of the key players from the '70's. Many of them were in important positions. One of them, for example, is the prime minister. He went and he saw them all across the board. He tracked down the head of the Communist party at a terminal care facility somewhere and talked to others, and then, of course, he had access to his own reporting which has been declassified, and just his general recollections. It's a pretty good book, and he's looking for an English language publisher.

Q: It will eventually be translated, will it?

THOMPSON: Yes. Translation's no problem, because he wrote it in English first. He would like to use more of the interviews. The publisher didn't see the sense because everybody in Finland is writing memoirs these days. But the foreword is very relevant. He later went back as DCM. But in our time together he was political counselor and I was the labor-political officer. We were the only two Americans in the Political section, and then when he left, I replaced him as political counselor.

And we went in. It was an interesting time because, as you know, Vietnam had ended in 1975. That same year the Helsinki Conference took place, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Now we got there in '76, but we had that basis, that this long ghost of Vietnam, which had plagued us in Copenhagen and Stockholm and many other capitals, that was gone. And then the Finns, who had been in a very tenuous position in the Cold War, with their special relationship with the Soviets, had finally had a little room to maneuver because of the Helsinki Conference, not least because they were the hosts, but also because of the results of the conference. So this was a great time to go, especially as political officers. As usual, a small country like Finland did not get day-to-day attention from Washington. But there were a lot of things that we could do there.

Q: Yes.

THOMPSON: The Finns had some room to maneuver. We tried to get them to maneuver a little closer to shared positions with us, which was difficult. It was awkward for them. But we were always trying to keep them honest. We were trying to outmaneuver the Soviets, a very large presence there. There was one minority party. So basically, there were 200 members of parliament, I would say that we were on a return-your-phone-call basis with 190 of them at least.

Q: That's amazing, you know, in a country that size with that size parliament. Digressing a bit, were you surprised when Finland eventually joined the European Union, after their long years of in-between?

THOMPSON: No, and of course this gets into an area that I do lecture on today. What Finland did and said in the Cold War period was not necessarily what Finland wanted to do or say or what Finland believed. And a running challenge is that to straighten out in retrospect exactly what was Finland, and there is an ongoing debate, as I say. Keep in mind that there were five million people there. It's large geographically. And you look at their achievements in terms of political flexibility of being active in all of the NATO activities except for actually joining NATO, marketing Nokia telephones, other products which are not well known but are Finnish. I'd say the per capita achievement in this country is as good as any other country in the world. And who knows where it's going to lead, because they couldn't really assert themselves until 1990, and they joined the EU, and they had to make the decision because the Swedes decided to join. The Finns couldn't be isolated.

Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan, and I'm speaking on February 15, 1999. I'm renewing my interview with Ward Thompson about his more than 25 years in the Foreign Service. Ward, when last we talked we were discussing the period when you were in Helsinki as labor officer and then as political counselor.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: We discussed the Communist influence in the government, which you said was fairly evident in those days. Was there much Soviet influence. Did the Soviet embassy take a prominent role in trying to manipulate the government?

THOMPSON: Yes, I think everybody considered that the Soviet embassy was very important. In some respects the Soviets were regarded as proconsuls. I'm not sure we could ever figure out the relationship between a resident of the KGB or the Soviet ambassador-it didn't really matter. The proximity of Finland to the Soviet border, of course, meant that modalities of communication were less important than the fact that the Soviets always had access to Finns and the relationship between the two was always a very careful dance. Now there's been a lot of revisionist history since the archives have opened and especially since Finland is no longer constrained by a relationship with the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union, of course, having fallen by the wayside, Finland is technically the only survivor of the successor countries of the Russian empire. Yes, of course, books have been written about this relationship. From the Soviets point of view, we always wondered where the policy was made, and I think, with the benefit of hindsight, we now conclude that there were probably only a few Soviets who had the time and the inclination to worry about Finland, and once in a while one of the top leaders like Ustinov, would concern himself, and this was not necessarily good for either of those two countries. But basically, you had really good experts in Finland, and of course one of the arguments now is whether their experts were better than our experts. As one of our experts, I yield to no one, but they had a number of language officers, a far greater number of Finnish language officers than we did. They always had an ambassador who was very well plugged in, often a Karelian or somebody with other geographic ties to Finland, and they had the benefit of this open access. I think the Finns would always return their phone calls. Nonetheless, from the Finnish point of view, I think the Soviets were less dominant than they would like to have been. The Finns were very careful. It was almost an industry to try to manage their relationship with their "eastern neighbor," as they would usually refer to the Soviet Union. So we found ourselves in a competition, quite often, where the ground rules were fair. A couple of examples. Our military attaché, of course, would like to travel, as they do in all countries, and quite often the Finns would tell him that certain installations were off-limits. And then they would tell him that the reason they were off limits is they didn't want the Soviets to plead for equal time. By telling the Americans they couldn't go, then they'd have a place to stand on with the Soviets.

In terms of policy, of course, the Soviet-Finnish relationship was at its most focused, but I'm not sure that the country as a whole paid that much attention. There was a distinction between the Soviets as so-called friends of Finland and the Soviet Union as a player in an international relationship that affected Finland. In policy terms, quite often the Foreign Ministry was perhaps more cautious than other Finns that we dealt with in discussing the Soviets. For our part, we tried to be sure that Finland was the neutral that it wanted to be in practice, and this meant quite often keeping the Finns honest. In that aspect, if I could just jump ahead temporarily to 1980, when Rozanne Ridgway was ambassador, we had decided, after many years and a lot of observing the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union, that the Finns perhaps were creating an impression that wasn't necessary, that they were too eager to accommodate Soviet wishes, even though none of us really knew what the Soviet wishes were. So Rozanne Ridgway got herself an invitation to speak to a major establishment group, and her talk has been detailed in a lot of published works. I won't go into it.

Q: Speaking English or-

THOMPSON: She spoke in English, and we have a very competent Foreign Service national at the embassy, somebody whom I hired and who's still there-I saw her in December when I went back. She was tasked with being the interpreter, and the problem is, of course, that she was gifted in many respects but not an experienced interpreter. So the actual presentation of the speech was in English, but the Finns were given transcripts, so the actual presentation in Finnish was rather superfluous and it was probably good that it was.

Q: I didn't want to interrupt you on substance, but I was curious about that point.

THOMPSON: However, the Finnish text which was issued had been excruciatingly worked over by us in the embassy. Ambassador Ridgway and I worked on the substance, but she assigned two translations, which were worked out independently, one I believe by a USIS translator and another one by our Political Section people. And then we compared the two translations, and we melded them so that there was no ambiguity in the Finnish text.

Q: One agreed-on translation.

THOMPSON: And you understand, as in Danish, it's very difficult to get some of those concepts which are near and dear to us but which have arisen from jargon and given rise to jargon into the everyday language of Finnish. For example, the word commitment: America is always talking about honoring our commitments, and it's very difficult to translate that into any Nordic language and have it mean exactly what we mean. So we had to be very precise in giving the meaning, and a literal translation wasn't that good in that case. So we got this, and why was this important, and why was the word commitment one of five or six that were key to the presentation? Well, because we wanted to lay out for the Finnish audience exactly what America's goals and objectives were in Europe, and no words-obviously this was well known to any educated Finn-we wanted this to play against both the stated goals in a gesture to the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union's claims about what our goals and objectives were. And this was all by way of background to making some friendly subtle suggestions to the Finnish audience as to how all of these played off against each other. And the basic message was-as I indicated-that we certainly appreciated and supported Finland's position in the world and Finland's efforts to manage its relationship in that very sensitive geographical part of the world. On the other hand, we thought that maybe Finland could better serve its own goals by looking at the context from the American as well as the Soviet perspective. The point was simple, and I think it was clearly made. The interesting thing is, you asked about the language. The text, as we had worked it out, was delivered in advance to President Kekkonen's office, not for him to censor it by any means, but as a courtesy. And the courtesy was because he would occasionally attend meetings of this group. So he had seen the speech. It was, in a sense, an au revoir talk because these were the sorts of things that we didn't normally raise in polite society.

Q: Had this been cleared with Washington?

THOMPSON: In general, yes. And it was nothing more than an iteration of our policy. You could read these things in what the USIA was putting out. It's just that this was going to be to a blue-ribbon audience. In fact, having seen the text, the president did arrive, and he sat in a place of honor, which is always a little bit in front of the crowd, and he listened attentively, and my recollection is that he applauded with the others and then he got up and shook her hand and said, "Thank you very much." He did not stay for the discussion, as he never would anyway. So that was a very important signal. And that, again, I leapt ahead to that because I think it encapsulates our trilateral dance in Helsinki, as it were.

Q: Going back to that speech, did this group invite other ambassadors such as the Soviet ambassador?

THOMPSON: I believe that the practice was to invite the key members of the diplomatic community. I'm not totally certain of that, but anyway, the society is still going strong, they get important speakers.

Q: Still on the subject of Finland's relations with the Soviet Union, tell me about the social acceptance of the Soviets by the individual Finns.

THOMPSON: Well, I wanted to get back to what was essentially the mid-'70's when I first got there. I went ahead to discuss the formal policy relationship, and I indicated that it was a little bit different for the Finns. There again, there are probably two lines. One is what we would regard as the PR side of things, and the other is what the individual Finns were actually thinking. Our idea was hopefully to influence the thinking of the public person. What we had to work with was a society that was very small, of course, five million people, very homogeneous, perhaps the most homogeneous society in Western Europe at the time, and one with an unparalleled recent history of battling the Russians and Soviets. There was no mistaking the ordinary Finn's attitude toward the Russians. They were looked down upon. There was slang in the Finnish language with regard to the Russians. There were jokes told about the Russians. And of course, Finland was part of Russia up until the Russian Revolution. At the time of the revolution, Finland got its independence. Finland had been well treated. The Finns had been well treated under much of the Czarist rule in that they were enabled to break free of the Swedish language cultural elitist domination of the Finnish majority, so in that sense, Finland got all kinds of opportunities in its relationship with the Soviets, and indeed now much is made of the fact that Lenin agreed to let the Finns have their independence. Finland had its own civil war, which the Finnish patriots refer to as the Independence War, but there was a conflict between the Communists, and the non-Marxists on the other side, and it happened that the Whites eventually won against the Reds. The Finnish Whites did not participate in the Civil War in the Soviet Union, but the experience had left a cleavage in Finnish society, but then in 1939 the Soviets attacked Finland in the Winter War. Then after suing for peace Finland found itself in the continuation war, which was World War II, as a party with the Germans against the Russians. The outcome of both of those wars, in the second case permanently, was that Finland lost about 10 per cent of its territory. The people of Karelia were resettled in the rest of Finland in a very professional and methodical way.

Q: The Finns welcomed them in.

THOMPSON: Well, they had to. And Finnish landowners had to give up part of their lands so that these agrarian Karelians could come in and settle.

Q: By the way, I've forgotten. Did Finland declare war on the United States in the Second World War.

THOMPSON: No, and neither did the United States declare war on Finland. We broke diplomatic relations. And the British declared war on Finland so that they could be at the table in the peace settlement, which might have helped a little bit, but still it was a peace between Finland and the Soviet Union, and the Soviets had their demands on the Finns, which are all documented and which shaped Finland, that is recorded. And it was this treaty relationship and the experience that every little hamlet and town had lost boys in the war, and that circumstance, even though there was a very strong Communist Party and a strong element of the Social Democratic Party that was pro-Communist in many respects, individual Finns had no allegiance to Moscow. And this always colored the attitude of the leftist parties, except for the extreme Trotskyite faction. But basically there was no love for the Soviet Union in Finland, and this was manifested in many, many ways. For example, there were Soviet-Finnish friendship societies in every community in Finland, and quite often, we know, the local Conservative businesspeople and other members of the Conservative Party were encouraged to be the chairs of these associations so that they could keep them under control. The Finnish military had conscription, universal military conscription for all males within the confines of the treaty with the Soviet Union, which restricted this military to a very small number, fewer than 50,000 under arms. The Finns were able to juggle these figures so that every male would come in for six or seven months and then stay in the reserves. This was good for the mobilization concept, but it also provided a sort of leavening of society, just as any military does. But it was said that the Finns were very careful not to allow any Communists into the officer corps. And they'd had experience with a possible coup in 1948, which might have been along the Czechoslovak model. One really never knows because certain key Finns, including the key Communists in the cabinet, didn't take the action that had been taken in Prague.

So the Finns took the situation as it was. They had to accept it, but they worked within it very effectively, and it was only, I think, because of this long period under Kekkonen, when there was no reinvigoration of the ruling elite, that our concerns culminated in this speech that Ambassador Ridgway gave.

I think, although we didn't call it public diplomacy in those days, quite a lot of the embassy's activities in a country like Finland, where policy positions were pretty much predictable, because of the Cold War situation, we were trying to influence the Finns so that they would influence their lawmakers and policymakers, and there were limits as to what we could hope for. But we had two important breaks in 1975. First of all, the Vietnam War ended, and Vietnam had been the major thorn in our public diplomacy attempts.

Q: Throughout Scandinavia.

THOMPSON: Yes, indeed. And particularly in Finland because of this delicate neutrality that they aspired to. The other thing that happened was the Helsinki Conference. And although this occurred before I arrived in Finland, it changed the complexion of relationships that the Finns were involved in because it gave a certain legitimacy to Finnish neutrality and also to the foreign policy that Finland was following and would follow. So in this context, we were often sometimes in a light vein and sometimes not. We were jostling with the Soviets for public affairs points. For example, there's a race every year called the Finlandia Race. It's a ski race of 80 kilometers. And from time to time we've had embassy officials ski in it. And at one time the Soviet ambassador told the press that he was going to participate, and he didn't, of course, so he lost a lot of points there because the press had picked that up. And then later when the media focused on Americans who had actually skied and completed the race, that looked good for us. I mentioned these Finnish-Soviet friendship societies. There were corresponding societies that leaned more toward us, and there was one town in Finland where one of the several sports clubs in town got the idea that it would be good to have the Americans come and have a ski competition, and so for two years we went to this town, which was Kolbola.

Q: So you were a skier there, eh?

THOMPSON: Yes, cross-country skiing. And the Finns had rigged it because they knew they were better than Americans. They had done something called precision skiing, where you ski a course which is five kilometers, and you time yourself, at any pace you want to set. And then you turn in your watches, and you go back to the starting line, and you tell the person in charge exactly how many minutes and how many seconds you're going to take to complete that five-kilometer course. And then the scores are kept according to how close each person finishes to their predicted score. Which actually enabled us to win one year because it didn't matter how fast we were; it was just how well we could judge.

Q: How accurate, yes.

THOMPSON: Yes. And then there was publicity in the local newspaper. Something different other than the ambassador coming and having coffee with the mayor. He had a bunch of Americans in ski outfits standing in this picture with the mayor. This was a sort of competition that was carried out on the lighter side. On the more serious side, the first ambassador that I worked for in Helsinki was Mark Evans Austad, who had been known in American radio circles as Mark Evans and was a rather well-known broadcaster. He was sent as ambassador, a political appointee, by Gerald Ford. He had handled Ford's inaugural ball and therefore was rewarded. Austad had been in Norway as a Mormon missionary, and he knew Scandinavia pretty well. He arrived in Finland at a very good time for somebody who was a professional public relations person because of the two things I mentioned, the end of the Vietnam War and the Helsinki Conference. It was a time when Finns were taking stock of their relationships. And the electronic media were largely influenced by leftists. This was not necessarily a bad thing for the country, but he thought it was a bad thing for the American image.

Q: Very common in Europe.

THOMPSON: Yes. Austad somehow got into a conversation with a representative of this leftist establishment in the commercial television. There were two channels, one commercial and one national. Anyway, the outcome was that a contest was arranged. Austad would go on national television, on this commercial channel, and debate with the representative of the media. And this, again, happened before I arrived, just before I arrived, and I think that the embassy had some trepidation about this. I'm sure that USIS did. But Austad was fond of saying that he understood that the embassy officers wouldn't support him on certain initiatives and that we had to worry about our jobs, but he didn't care about his job, so he was going to go ahead and do it anyway. As it turned out, this was a very good initiative on his part. He won the debate. He just apparently skated circles around the representative of the Finns, and the debate was very well received by the Finnish public. In fact, years later you would still have people come up to you and say, "I remember Mark Austad, and such a good job he did on television." This was something that the Russians just couldn't match us on. They didn't have the latitude, and they didn't have the aptitude. So these were some of the examples of how we were engaged in this triple dance with the Soviets and the Finns.

Q: May I refer back to some of your comments about the military? I notice that in 1977 General George Brown of our joint chiefs came to Helsinki, I believe the highest ranking American military man who visited there. Did that cause any waves or not, this neutrality policy?

THOMPSON: I don't believe it caused any serious waves. I don't remember precisely very much about that visit. I do remember at the time that that was of concern. We were always trying to push for visits like that. I think it had to be taken in the overall context of what was happening. You recall that at the same time the Finns were pushing a Nordic nuclear weapons free zone for all of the Nordic countries. They were very unhappy that the Norwegians were allowing German troops for the first time to engage in exercises on Norwegian soil. So in that context, it was disturbing to the Finns, I think, that we would want to have such a visitor at that time. On the other hand, despite what I've said about public appearances, the Finns, I think, were always hoping that we would take these initiatives, from Brown's visit to Ridgway's talk. They were pulling for us, but they couldn't encourage us, and quite often they would have to tell us that this was going to cause problems.

Q: I'm sure the Soviets would match general Brown's visit with one of their own-

THOMPSON: Well, of course, we would never be able to compete, and in fact cannot compete today with Moscow in terms of visits, because it's so close by. Of course, underlying any concerns was the fact that according to the friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance pact that the Finns had to sign with the Soviets, again in the Czech context, 1948, was a clause calling for consultations if it appeared that there was a danger that Germany or any countries allied with Germany, which included most of us, were threatening the Soviet Union via Finland. And the Soviets never really invoked this clause. They threatened to a couple of times, but that was always a legal basis for concern because they could have invoked the clause.

Q: The Finns always knew it was there.

THOMPSON: Oh, yes, and the Soviets could always remind them it was there.

Q: Did the Finnish military undertake joint maneuvers with the Soviet military? Were they that close, or-

THOMPSON: No. There were visits. And of course, one has to keep in mind that the Finns were buying hardware from a variety of sources, including MIG aircraft, just as you cannot have American aircraft without an American military presence, you can't have a Soviet aircraft without a Soviet technical military presence. The Soviets loved to send delegations, both military and civilian, so there were always delegations trooping through Finland.

Q: President Kekkonen made a visit to East Germany, a state visit, in '77. Did we try to persuade him not to go, because we certainly were not trying to upgrade the East Germans in any way?

THOMPSON: I believe that Finland was the country that scuttled the Holstein Doctrine, and the Finns, as in many of the things they did, they had their reasons for doing it, and there wasn't much that we could do at that point to discourage them. We were always laying out for them what we saw as the logical approach to foreign affairs.

Q: On the political front, there were elections in '79 in which the Conservatives made some serious gains. Why was this, because Finland had been very much under the, let's say, left-of-center influence for a number of years?

THOMPSON: Well, I think the fate of the Conservative Party of Finland is something which has to be analyzed outside of the normal context of political parties. The Conservatives had been in the government. They left the government when Kekkonen was president, and frankly, he wouldn't let them back into the government. And occasionally the reason cited by him and others was that the Conservatives had not kept up their credentials with the Soviets. But we felt, and I think history bears out the conclusion, that the Soviets probably were not vetoing the Conservatives being in the Finnish Government, but as a result of being frozen out, the party started garnering a lot of support.

Q: As the opposition.

THOMPSON: -as an opposition party, and ultimately it had to come back into the government, and of course it did so while the Soviets were in power, and it didn't cause any problems.

Q: Now in 1980, you had a visit from Vice-President Mondale. Were you still there then?

THOMPSON: Yes, I was.

Q: How did that work out? Was he successful?

THOMPSON: It worked out very well. The Finns were very glad, as any Nordics, to get either a presidential or a vice-presidential visit from the United States. And I would say that regardless of what the political and intentional situation would be at the time, that they would always welcome such a visit. Now, again, I have to mention some context here. In 1977, Finland celebrated its 60th anniversary of independence, and it had a very big celebration. It invited leaders of other countries to come, primarily the leaders of the other Nordics and the other neighbor, which was the Soviet Union. And it was Kosygin at the time, who came to represent the Soviet Union. And we inquired, and I think we were told, that an American delegation would be welcome, that countries were primarily going to be represented by their ambassadors or whatever, and we decided, back in '77, that we would try to get somebody important to head the American delegation. Well, interestingly, the person chosen by Washington was Mrs. Mondale, Joan Mondale, and there was some discussion because she had no official position within the government, but obviously if she was appointed to head a delegation she had an official recognition. There was this discussion on the part of the Finns and the Americans, too, frankly. But this turned out to be a fantastic public relations success. For one thing, since she wasn't in the chain of command, you couldn't compare our apples with their oranges. You had Kosygin, you had the head of the royal houses of the Scandinavian countries, you had Joan Mondale. You had a few other delegations headed by people from their capitals. She was accompanied by another woman, and our ambassador was a woman, Rozanne Ridgway, by that point. So you had three women heading up the American delegation. You had these gray suits on the Soviet side and the stuffy royalty on the Nordics'; and President Kekkonen was really taken with Joan Mondale, which earlier, by the way, on his visit to the United States, he'd been really taken with Shirley Temple Black, or I think with the idea of Shirley Temple, as chief of protocol, escorting him around.

Q: Aha! A good eye.

THOMPSON: We had another issue in 1977, in that we didn't have any money for important expensive gifts to countries who were celebrating their 50th anniversary of independence. And the Soviets came, you know, with some crystal vase or something, and the others brought important things. Mrs. Mondale arrived with a box of Christmas decorations which had been handmade by American Indian school children. I don't really remember it, but it had a monetary value of very, very little; and again, just as she was unique among the delegates, our gift was unique and was something that the president said, in English, "Oh, let's look." And so here he was taking these things out and looking them over, and I think also because of her gender, Mrs. Mondale was placed next to the president at the state banquet, and Kosygin was across as the guest of honor. And I still recall this newspaper picture of the head table, and Kosygin is bending down to get his napkin-very undignified-and the president is enjoying eye contact with Mrs. Mondale. So I say that because in 1980, you couldn't take Vice President Mondale's visit out of that contact. The Mondales are very fondly remembered in Finland, so he was not just the American Vice President, but also-

Q: Joan Mondale's husband.

THOMPSON: Yes, exactly.

Q: All right, you mentioned a moment ago the Nordics' sending their royalty. Could you comment on Finland's relations with the other Nordics, principally with Sweden, but how did they fit in the picture, and did they regard themselves in the same category?

THOMPSON: Yes. First of all, the Finns were very anxious to be regarded as Nordics, because this helped them establish their Western credentials, so in terms of international politics, the Nordic connection was very important. The relationship with Sweden was not as strong as a love-hate relationship, but it was an ambiguous relationship because Sweden had been the dominant power. The Swedish culture was important as a Western culture, but it was also in some competition with the home-grown culture, and there were vestiges of this that still were quite strong. And then in terms of what the Nordics refer to as the "Nordic balance," where you had three NATO countries and two neutrals, just as the NATO countries varied in their degree of commitment to NATO, you had two degrees of neutrality. The Swedes were the purer neutrals with the long-established history of neutrality, and the Finns were the aspiring neutrals, so it was very important to the Finns that the Swedes be as neutral as possible because otherwise they'd give a bad name to neutrality. Sweden, for this particular time, was of course the wealthy big brother, and that didn't necessarily sit well with the Finns, but there wasn't much they could do about it. Sweden is a larger country, a wealthier country, long established in the world in those very areas where Finns sought some room for maneuver, such as UN peacekeeping, social welfare, and so forth. The Swedes were ahead on every count. Lately, I think, the Finns have used this to energize their own efforts. As soon as Sweden applied to join the European Union, the Finns put in their application and became much more committed and enthusiastic defenders of the EU today. The end of the Cold War and those constraints let the Finns assert themselves so that recently within the EU there's been an initiative called the "Nordic Dimension," and this is something the Finns have pushed. They want the EU to focus on its northern areas, its relationship with Russia, the Arctic, the environment, and so forth-which is good, and it's logical. It bothers the Swedes because the Finns went ahead without consulting with the other Nordics, particularly Sweden and Denmark, who were also in the EU. This is the flip of the coin from the relationship in the '60's and '70's and '80's.

Q: All right, you mentioned Europe there, and during this period, of course, Europe was coalescing. Was there a pull toward Europe from the Finnish side? Were the Finns attracted by this, or not, or did they feel that they had to maintain their neutrality and that this wasn't for them?

THOMPSON: Yes, the Finns were always reluctant up until the end of the Soviet Union, until 1990, and very cautious about participating in European organizations. For a while the Soviets would not let Finland join the United Nations, and then when Finland joined the United Nations, it was also able to become a participant in the Nordic Council, in the EFTA, but again, with some restrictions, some self-imposed, some imposed by the organization. They were never full-fledged in their participation in the European organizations. They were late to join the Council of Europe for that same reason. And they just ruled out any possibility of joining the Common Market or the EC. At the same time, the Finns were balancing procurement so that they would have, for example, from . . . they got some Hawker-Sidley aircraft from the British. They had Drakens from Sweden. And similarly their tanks and their guns and so forth were procured in different countries, and there was a certain balance between East and West. And the Finns have acknowledged this now, in the '90's, when they have purchased the FA-18 from the United States, which is their main aircraft and makes them a dominant air power in the north. But every little area of technical cooperation, military purchase, whatever, I think was carefully weighed on the part of the Finns, and they wanted to develop their ties to Europe, but not in an institutional sense that would alarm the Soviets, of course.

Q: Finally, my last question relates to your position as political counselor. How were your relations with the Agency there, the Central Intelligence Agency? Were they close? They must have had a fairly large station?

THOMPSON: Yes, they were integrated to an extent in that they belonged to the Political Section. I think we had defined our relations on a domestic side. In many ways, they had the better reasons to deal, not with the Communists but with the questions of the Communist Party and so forth. I mentioned the other day that we had very good personal ties with virtually all 200 members of the Finnish parliament. I mean, that's the way that the embassy approached its tasks. I think the Political Section focused more on the Social Democrats and the parties to the right of that party. If you go back in history, I understand that even the Social Democrats were very wary of dealing with the declared diplomatic-list officers of the American embassy, but basically, we regarded what the station did as related to the international arena, watching the Soviets and so forth. If there was anything that was purely domestic, then the ambassador wanted us to continue to deal with them. And yet I think because of the assertive, outgoing approach of the embassy economic and political officers and the military attaché's that we covered Finland pretty well, and very little on the domestic side was left to the CIA

The Agency chief would occasionally have contacts with leading Finns, and I think it was to the Finns' credit and to our credit that everybody saw this in the context of the relations with the Soviets and how so often the Soviet resident would be entertaining Finns at the highest levels at the Soviet embassy, and so I think the Finns would seek out the American counterparts just so that they would keep this balance.

The area of domestic politics that was of greatest concern to all agencies of the U.S. Government was of course the leftist side of the domestic escutcheon, and since I had been there as labor attaché, I was the embassy person, as were my predecessors, who had the greatest entrée to labor unions, the labor central federations (of which there were four), and the labor parties, the Social Democrats and to some extent the Communist Party. I was very fortunate to have Finnish language training before I went to Finland, and my Finnish was quite fluent. I had some contacts based on my earlier time as an exchange student. One of these turned out to be head of a labor union, and he was talking to me once, and I said, you know, "I like visiting local chapters," or whatever. He arranged for me to go on a tour with two of his officials, and they were visiting local chapters all throughout Finland, and I went along for several days. Now the interesting thing was that perhaps in countries where there are no formal relations, even among our friends, this wouldn't have been possible, but the Finns always took you at face value, and there was one man and one woman and I, and we traveled north in Finland. We visited local chapters in such places as one of the iron mines down underground in Lapland. We visited the factory that makes the Finnish knives-the Martini factory. We visited other industrial sites, and everywhere, you know, the meetings were held with the workers and with their union people, everything in Finnish and everybody understood that I was an American diplomat, and nobody raised any questions. And it was really good, and then there was the socializing afterwards, of course, because you'd have a meeting with coffee and so forth, but then in the evening there'd be dinners or saunas or whatever.

Q: And plenty of vodka and other things.

THOMPSON: And this wasn't a unique experience. I was doing this sort of thing throughout my time in Finland. And other embassy officers were too. I remember once when one of the party leaders, this time from the Center Party, called me up when I was political counselor and asked if we had any Finnish speaker who liked to ski. And I said, Oh, yes, and he invited us to a facility-and every organization has facilities there, summer places or winter places, depending on the season. I took along Mike Coverley, who's presently DCM in Helsinki, who was a junior economic officer, and two other officers, and we went off to this lodge, which was run by the . . . I think it's the . . . well, underlying it, I think, is the tuberculosis association, but it's the organization which maintains the lottery machines throughout Finland. You put money in the machine and contribute to charity that way. And this itself is a big bureaucracy, and they have their own lodge. And we went out, and we spent the day, and we skied across the sea and had a sauna and so forth, and this person was also head of . . . Well, he was an official of that group, but he was also secretary of the Center Party. And this was just an example of the access and entrée, so that I could draw on this experience, and it wasn't just personal. It was the way the embassy operated. And so our relationships, I think, in State and Commerce and other sides of the embassy were pretty well developed.

Q: There are few countries in which you can get as close to the situation as you must have been in Finland.

THOMPSON: Well, I agree, because I did serve in Sweden and Denmark, and I got spoiled in Finland, for example, in attending party congresses. Now then, because of the Soviet-American competition, the Finnish parties, except for the Communist Parties, were very anxious to have diplomats attend their party congresses. And this wasn't something they did because they had to do it to be polite. They would actively invite us and hope that we would go. And I attended congresses of the Social Democrats and the Center Party and the Conservative Party. I went to one party congress in Oulu, which is quite far north in Finland-this was the Center Party-this was the congress at which the long-time head of the party, Johannes Vilallainen, who had been prime minister and foreign minister, was defeated by Paavo Vayrynen, who became foreign minister and for a long time was the presidential aspirant of the Center Party. So there was a lot of interest. There were a lot of diplomats who attended as well as media. And I went to the hotel, and the party was taking care of our rooms and everything, and I went to the hotel, and they assigned me my room and told me that I was rooming with the third secretary of the embassy of the German Democratic Republic.

Q: Ho! A diplomatic imbroglio immediately.

THOMPSON: Well, I was a little nervous, but this was a very nice guy, and he was out most of the time, and he showed me pictures of his young child and his wife. He was fine, and of course, he probably is still a diplomat for Germany, as far as I know.

Q: Either that or he disappeared for snuggling up to a capitalist. Well, your interesting years in Finland came to an end in 1980 when you were assigned back to the Department, where you became, as I understand it, Desk officer for Austria and Switzerland.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: How did this come about? Did you request that assignment, or-

THOMPSON: Yes, I think we were by that time in the stage where you could bid on jobs, and it was rudimentary, as I recall, but I did bid on that job and was accepted for it.

Q: Who was your superior in that position?

THOMPSON: Well, that was the Office of Central European Affairs, which was the German directorate. And when I arrived there, Tom Niles, who was later assistant secretary for European affairs, was the director. He moved up eventually during my tour to become deputy assistant secretary, and he was replaced by John Kornblum, who was another of the well-known German hands, a brilliant guy. The Swiss-Austrian Desk was an anomaly, of course, in that directorate. Everybody else was working on Germany, and I was working on these two countries which were not of that great concern either to the country director or to the government as a whole in Washington. I think this complemented very well my experience in the Nordic countries, because I was dealing with small countries, again with two neutrals.

Q: Yes, I wanted to ask you to contrast the neutrality of Austria and Switzerland and Central Europe as compared with the Nordic brand of neutrality.

THOMPSON: Well, of course, Switzerland is unique among neutrals and remains so to this day. It's uninvolved in principle, but the Swiss, perhaps unlike the Finns, who never said that they were neutral in terms of attitudes, Switzerland is a Western country, but it's neutral militarily to the extent that it will not participate in the United Nations or the European Union or very much of anything else. Austria was under an imposed neutrality, again as a result of World War II and the Austrian State Treaty. Contrasting those two countries is very easy. They are very different, and very briefly, I think from the perspective of the Desk, the relationship between Switzerland and the United States takes place in Washington. You have a very competent, very well-staffed Swiss embassy here, which cultivates its relationship among the military, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, wherever there is interaction on the policy side in Switzerland. The Austrian relationship is conducted primarily in Vienna. You have an embassy here which is not very well staffed, doesn't have that much authority. That said, I do need to acknowledge that one of the ambassadors of Austria when I was here was Thomas Klestil, who is now the president of that country, but I think he himself probably was frustrated.

[interruption]

I was contrasting Switzerland and Austria. In terms of neutrality, I think that Austria in many senses was hiding behind its State Treaty relationship, probably like some of the Nordics, added to the fact that certain areas of foreign policy were beyond its control. Switzerland could always point to the fact that its voters would not allow it to participate, but basically, I think the Swiss are very well plugged in to what they're doing. One issue that came up during my watch was the proper relationship of the United States with Switzerland. I found out as desk officer that one thing that desk officers do is draft the efficiency reports of the ambassadors, and looking in the file, I saw that our ambassador to Switzerland when I arrived was a career officer, Dick Vine. I looked at the report that have been done earlier on him, and it said that he had very well maintained the American policy of-I don't recall the exact words, but in effect-"keeping a low profile," respecting Switzerland's neutrality and so forth. And this struck me as kind of odd. And then the Reagan Administration came in, a political appointee was named, who was not a contributor but a political activist, Faith Whittlesey, and at the same time the Reagan head of the Securities and Exchange Commission announced that the SEC was going to be very aggressive against insider trading. Well, suddenly this was an issue which involved Switzerland. And we had to decide whether to keep the gloves on or go after the Swiss. And we decided to go after the Swiss, and I think this was the beginning of the end of bank secrecy and a lot of things that the Swiss had maintained simply because nobody challenged them. At the same time, we had this development in NATO affecting Theater Nuclear Forces (TNF), and we were trying to drum up support in Western Europe for our position. And Ambassador Whittlesey didn't really understand the issues, but she learned. And she wanted to get out there and make the point that ambassadors were making to the host country audiences, and again, there didn't seem to be any real reason not to do this. And interestingly, she was approached at her hearing, before it was called to order, by one of the Swiss diplomats, and he told her that he expected that this would be an important issue. I was with her. It was at that point that she decided she'd better learn quite a lot about it. I visited her twice in Switzerland, and one time, I traveled with her around Switzerland, and she was making speeches which were Reaganesque, talked about the free enterprise system and things like that, and some of these could have been construed as rocking the boat. But the Swiss welcomed them, and I think that she was very well received. Now after my watch, she went back again. She had come to the White House, didn't like working with the Washington environment, and resumed her post after John Lodge had been out there. And I really don't know how she did then.

Q: Oh, so it went Whittlesey, Lodge, Whittlesey.

THOMPSON: Right.

Q: I see.

THOMPSON: I don't really know how she did the second time, but the first time, I think it was a breath of fresh air. Dick Vine obviously was a competent professional, but I think the contrast was helpful in our relationship with Switzerland.

You asked about how the Central European neutrals compared with the northern European neutrals. I think in both cases, as I indicated, the Central Europeans, one by choice and one by no choice, were locked into their neutral personas, whereas the Nordics were, by comparison, more flexible. And the CSCE process, I think, brought out the contrast, because the four of them—the Swedes, the Finns, the Swiss, and the Austrians—were in this neutral nations group in the middle of the East-West constellation. There was a bloc called the "N plus N," which was the neutrals plus Nonaligned. The Nonaligned included a lot of the mini-states in Europe and Yugoslavia, in the middle of this CSCE, but it was the four neutrals which carried the water, and the Swiss, with the Swedes, had been members of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Committee in Korea, so they had that in common, both as an experience and as a credential. But I think the Finns and the Swedes were using Neutrality in a more dynamic way. They saw the CSCE as something that would enable them to assert themselves and carve out an area in the East-West relationship. The East-West confrontation was more of a threat to the Nordics than it was to the Swiss, certainly, and probably to the Austrians. So in that sense, they regarded their neutrality differently. Now today, of course, Austria has joined Finland and Sweden in the EU, but at that time neutrality meant something to the Austrians.

Q: But today the only true neutral is Switzerland, in a sense.

THOMPSON: In a sense, yes, as a non-participant.

Q: Well, one of the services that the Swiss provide is to represent us in areas where we can't be represented ourselves. On your watch, one of the most important of those was in Iran, in Teheran. Can you tell us anything about that and whether that caused any problem?

THOMPSON: Well, I can't tell you anything about the Swiss functions there. Now you mentioned hostages. Of course, the negotiations for the release of our colleagues who were being held hostage were going on, and the Swiss were dealing directly with the Middle Eastern Bureau, NEA, but I think the fact that the Swiss had that role was important in their general relationship, and certainly it gave them a lot of access generally to the US Government, which helped this activist role that I talked about, and it gave them certain credentials internationally. I think that in a way it was too bad that they were out of bounds. Naturally the most important thing was that they were doing what they were doing, but in terms of support for sanctions and isolating the government of Iran, they were not a player, because they had that special relationship, and so we didn't get to deal with them there.

I might mention that I was on the desk when Jimmy Carter was president, and then we had the change in administrations, and much has been made of the fact that Jimmy Carter micromanaged a lot, particularly in the area of nuclear weapons, because he was by training a nuclear scientist and so forth. And I was impressed that an issue came up which had to do with controlled materials, and we had to do the paperwork and send it to the White House and get the okay for the Swiss to deal with certain nuclear materials, and this little briefing memo that I had written came back with Jimmy Carter's initials on it. I never saw that again.

Q: A Thompson-to-Carter sort of thing.

THOMPSON: Yes, but actually, I think the relationship of the Desk with small countries whose importance can be left to others, but the fact that they're smaller than other countries means that we don't have the resources in Washington to devote to them that we do to other countries. And the relationship of the Desk is a very worthwhile one and a very interesting one because on a day-to-day basis, there is nobody else in the US Government up the chain of command dealing with those countries, and there are people who are responsible for knowing about these countries, but again, they have to leave the daily contact to the Desk. And so my routine was to call the DCM or receive a call from the DCM in each of these two capitals virtually every day to discuss the issues. Usually, the deputy assistant secretary or the assistant secretary wouldn't necessarily be available for a phone call from the ambassador, so this was the connection. And in terms of staffing the issues, we would of course have to get the Secretary of State or the National Security Council to agree to something, but a Desk officer could write a position paper and have it go virtually untouched up to whoever the decision-maker was, and then it would come back, again untouched, with either a yes or a no. This was sometimes an advantage and sometimes not so because to the extent that a desk gets involved in policy, it was a very small team, indeed, working on these issues. But I think, having been on the other end-you know, working as political counselor in Finland and Denmark-I realized that there were very few people back in Washington that you can turn to when you have a problem. But It's very good for the desk officer, and I think it led to my working very closely with the two embassies here in Washington, which is something that I know wasn't happening to my colleagues on the German Desk, simply because there were so many of them, and the Germans had the attention of many people higher up in the government.

Q: Fast forward to present day. Many of our problems with Switzerland in the last several years have resulted from the reaction to World War II, the Holocaust victims, the money that was put in Swiss banks. Was any of that foreshadowed in your day? Could you see the problem coming, or not?

THOMPSON: No, I don't think so. I think that was in the day when those countries who had been able to provide a haven for individuals under the occupation of the Nazis were generally highly regarded because they had provided that haven, and you didn't look too closely at what some of the trade-offs had been.

Q: Now, in 1981 we sold to the Austrians some F-16 airplanes, and that was reputed to be the first sale of high-performance planes to a neutral country. Was it difficult getting that decision reached, because you probably had to deal with a number of agencies getting there?

THOMPSON: Well, I don't really think it was difficult getting approval to sell the aircraft. What was difficult, particularly for the Desk officer, was finding enough time to devote to the companies that were trying to sell. This sale depended on extensive negotiations, because the Austrians, like most Europeans, are used to offset arrangements, and a national industry such as the French Mirage, can come in and provide all kinds of offsets so that every amount of money that is spent on the aircraft will come back to the country buying the aircraft. And we can do this, but it's very difficult because usually you have to get a conglomerate or coalition of companies to negotiate the offset at the same time that they're competing with each other. For example, you had both GE and General Dynamics competing to sell the aircraft engines for the F-16, so they were dealing both in a sense together and in a sense separately with the same Austrian Government officials who were reviewing offers made by other countries like the Swedes and the French, particularly. All right, but I think that we needed to sell the F-16 to as many countries as possible to help our own industry as well as our security relationships in Europe. We were looking at the question of NATO compatibility and so forth, and this was an important consideration, even involving the neutrals.

Q: All right, I noticed that in 1981, Theodore Cummings was named our ambassador. What was his background?

THOMPSON: Well, Ted Cummings was a Republican supporter from California, and he apparently had been a member of the so-called "Kitchen Cabinet" of Governor Reagan. His function specifically was as a fundraiser within the Jewish community, and Cummings had been a successful grocer. He was a multimillionaire based on a food chain that he had built up in California, and the other relevant thing about his bio is that he had been born in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

You know, President Reagan appointed a lot of ambassadors back to countries of their birth, and I think basically that this was better than appointing them somewhere else, if you're going to have political appointees. In Cummings' case, I think that where he was born is now a part of Hungary, but he also was old, and he could recall when his mother took him to the funeral of, I guess, Emperor Franz Josef, when he was a teenager, and this was a background that very few FSO's could offer.

Q: 1916-I would say it was that.

THOMPSON: But I got to see the inner workings of some of the political process, and this is something that, I guess, is inevitable for a desk officer-not so much an eye-opener as an important lesson in political science in this country. Cummings, as I said, was a fundraiser among the Jewish supporters of the party, and this was a frank niche that he filled, and as a result, he made the rounds in Washington of the fellow Republican Jews among the political appointees, and he took me with him. We had some very nice meetings. We also went up and met with the two senators from California, Senator Hayakawa and Senator Cranston. And these were courtesy calls. And I recall Senator Cranston revealing that he had been a college student working as a stringer in Europe, and he went to cover the Dollfuss trial and was the only American journalist accredited to it. So you never know what these contacts are going to lead to.

Q: Interesting point. 1933. That was some time ago.

THOMPSON: So Cummings-I think it's worth noting that he was a very decent person and a very conscientious appointee. I had prepared the normal briefing book for him. He had his wife with him in Washington, but he also had a staffer from California, and he spent long hours in his hotel room with the staffer going over this briefing book. And I tried to tell him that I thought the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would be friendly, but he said he did not want to embarrass President Reagan, and he was going to learn absolutely everything.

Q: Excellent.

THOMPSON: And I had put into the briefing book many, many things, of course, everything that he could possibly want, and one of them was the fact that in 1980, at some point, the United States had had to point out to the Austrians that a shipment of sniper rifles had been transshipped, instead of going to Austria had gone to the PLO. And this, at the time, was an issue where we cautioned the Austrians that we would take them off the list of countries that could receive this particular weapon if they didn't behave themselves. And this was in there. And Cummings fielded a question from this very friendly panel on something that was totally innocuous, and he thought that he would bring this matter in, too, and he did, and that was all right, and then I was besieged by the press afterwards. They said, "What is this?" and I said, "Well, if you'll go to your files and look at the press releases from the US Department of State from about six months ago, you'll have all your answers. And of course they don't do that research.

Well, Cummings got appointed, and he went out to post, and he was there for three months, and then he left post. And he didn't tell the US Government, but was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and so it was my sad duty one day to call up Sol Polansky, who was our chargé d'affaires and tell him that his ambassador had died. This was totally without any warning. So Sol ended up as chargé d'affaires there for a long, long time, interspersed with Felix Bloch, and we didn't get an ambassador out there again while I was on the Desk. Cummings had developed a good initial relationship with Bruno Kreisky, who was the chancellor, and it looked like because of his ties and his age that, as political appointments go, this was a pretty good one.

Q: Well, it's a sad story. Well, your career on the Desk ended in 1982 when you moved sideways in the Department into the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). There, I believe, you were in charge of Canadian, British, and Irish affairs, all three countries having major constituencies and interests in this country. Had you requested this move, or was this part of the career pattern? How did it come about?

THOMPSON: Well, as I recall, I wanted to stay in Washington. There were not very many attractive jobs at the time, and I thought that maybe I should go to a job that was interesting if not attractive. And I had dealt a lot with INR because the German Desk has a very strong relationship with its counterparts in INR, so I knew INR pretty well. And this one position was open, and it looked like something that would be a change of pace from the Desk. I went over for an interview, and was told that I was overqualified for the position. Fortunately, somebody clued me that that meant that the bureau wanted to protect that position for somebody else. And since I was overqualified, then I was a good competitor and got the job. It was an interesting assignment because, as you rightly point out, there are a lot of constituencies here. Also, it's not the sort of constellation of countries where we, strictly speaking, have intelligence. We do research. My predecessor, who went on to a successful career, told me that he had written some things about the UK, and since he had not said that these things should get the notation-what we call, as you know-"no foreign," which means no foreign dissemination, that somehow the British ended up with it, and so he got a luncheon invitation from two officials of the embassy here and had a very nice conversation as to what on earth he was doing and why he was doing it and that sort of thing.

Q: They didn't poison him or anything.

THOMPSON: Oh, no, no. But they liked his article, which was on the Trident submarine, as I recall.

Q: Oh, they did.

THOMPSON: In fact, as you know, INR is under a lot of pressure to produce high-quality writing. And the intelligence or open-source information is nothing over which we have much control, but what we do with it in INR is something that not only do we have control over but it's scrutinized at the highest levels. In order for INR to continue writing summaries that are read by the Secretary or the President, they have to be high quality. I had a lot of pressure, because I was dealing in the case of the UK with the country which was on the front page of the Washington Post, as likely as not, every day, and I had to get something that would get to the Secretary of State at the same time. I enjoyed this challenge. My sources, in addition to the embassy, were five or six British newspapers that I subscribed to, so I could sit in my office and read the newspaper all day as long as I was doing something that was competitive.

Up in Canada you had the opposite problem. Not only was there never anything in the Washington Post, but there was very little interest in seeing anything in the morning intelligence summary. At the time, as I recall, we had a Canadian ambassador here who didn't like this state of affairs and was lobbying, very effectively. He got the name of the bureau changed from the Bureau of European Affairs to the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs. He got another deputy assistant secretary created just to follow Canada, and in INR we followed suit and changed the name from Western Europe to Western Europe and Canada, in INR. I think probably the most relevant work I did was following Ireland. At the same time, because of my Nordic background, I consulted closely with Herbert Caps, who was the longtime analyst. And this tied in with the end of my career. When it was time for me to leave the Department, when I hadn't actually left the Department, I went over to INR because I was without an assignment, and Cappie, as he was called, invited me to share his office. Unfortunately, we'd only been collaborating for a couple of weeks when he died, and so I remained then as the INR analyst for the Nordics and kept that position even after I retired, for a few years.

Q: Well, now, back to your Canada-UK-Ireland experience. Who was your supervisor?

THOMPSON: Well, the office director of the Office of Western European Analysis was Alan Luthers.

Q: Right, and you were there, I believe, during the Falkland Crisis, were you not?

THOMPSON: No, I think not. That was-

Q: That was '80 to '83.

THOMPSON: Was it '83?

Q: Yes, because I happened to be in London on mission at that time, and it was white hot, in June of '83. So it must not have registered highly on your scale.

THOMPSON: Well, I certainly wrote a lot about it, and I had many meetings. Let's see, when did Thatcher take over? '83-she was prime minister at that time.

Q: Yes, I thought she'd taken over in '79, but-

THOMPSON: Oh, yes, of course she did. When I was in Finland she took over. Yes, I think probably what I wrote mostly on was domestic politics. The tantalizing question of when the Tories would lose power, and I think we saw them-from my point of view, because obviously I wasn't writing on military issues-the domestic implications of the Falklands War were what I was concerned with, and of course, she never did lose power in that decade.

Q: She came out with cream on her lips, I think, as a result of the Falklands Crisis, yes. When President Reagan visited the UK, did that cause a lot of work for you, preparing papers and so forth?

THOMPSON: Well, I contributed to the briefing papers. It was primarily the Desk, of course, that was doing the papers. I do recall that Reagan, I think at that time he launched the National Democratic Institute, or whatever it is.

Q: Yes, that isn't quite the name, but I know what you're talking about.

THOMPSON: He launched that in London, as I recall, where he made a speech.

Q: He spoke to Parliament.

THOMPSON: No, again, the nature of INR is to support the policy center of the Department and provide it with information, and on presidential visits, INR doesn't do that much original writing.

Q: Presumably a lot of bio writing.

THOMPSON: Bio writing, yes, absolutely, and of course we outsourced that. And then in terms of the fast-breaking news involving a country with which we have such an intimate relationship, there's not much that INR would contribute in following the Falklands War or things. We're doing more background pieces on what the implications might be, in competing with American media. I think that probably the most real work I did was involved with Ireland, because then, of course, you had the . . . I was analyst for Ireland, but also part of my UK work was Northern Ireland, and that was an area where INR could contribute and did so a lot. For one thing, even though there was a big constituency here, there's not very much literate coverage of the finer points of what goes on in Northern Ireland, perhaps more today than there was then.

Q: Yes. Did you get to visit Ireland?

THOMPSON: Yes. I went to visit my countries-that is, the UK and Ireland on one visit, and then I went to Canada on various occasions-in both cases linked to elections.

I visited Ireland, both Dublin and Belfast, and Belfast, of course, was always interesting to visit. And we had a consul there who pointed out that although he had an armored car and of course everything was very secure, that Americans weren't really in any danger. The last thing either side would want to do would be to conduct a terrorist action against Americans. And the local authorities were very happy to discuss the situation with me. I can't say that I changed my mind on anything or changed my writing, but it was good to visit.

Q: Good background, of course. One minor-perhaps not so minor-item that came up during this period was that the British found a spy, Geoffrey Pyne, in their intelligence listening area of Chelton. Did that cause any flurry here in our intelligence community, in INR and the quote CIA? Because they must have been compromised a good deal in that regard.

THOMPSON: Well, this, again, didn't fall within the activities of my office, and as you know we had liaison people and counter-terrorist people. I don't want to undersell what the Office of Western European Analysis does, but I don't want to overstate it either. Our job is primarily political and economic, doing the academic sorts of study.

Q: Less intelligence, pure intelligence.

THOMPSON: Exactly.

Q: Now in 1983, in October, the United States carried out an invasion of Grenada, which did not please the British, particularly Mrs. Thatcher. Can you say anything about that?

THOMPSON: No, there again, I think my function was primarily to engage domestically. I had a pretty good relationship with our Desk, and of course the UK Desk is one that was very much involved in that issue, so I can't really contribute very much on the policy side of things.

Q: In regard to Canada, did we foresee that Mr. Mulroney was going to win a victory there?

THOMPSON: I guess it would be interesting to go back and read my reports. I do recall that...
[Tape 3, Side A]

...Canadian Politics, it's very hard to make predictions, but I think it was clear to us that Mulroney had a great opportunity because of the bankruptcy of his competitors in Canada. Today it would be much more difficult, because, of course, whole parties have become disintegrated.

Q: Yes, the conservatives are no longer a major force there.

THOMPSON: I think the key thing, and perhaps we read too much into it, was the role of Quebec. I think we rather expected that Quebec would gradually drop its resistance to becoming absorbed as a regular province of Canada, and the fact that Mulroney was from Quebec I think both encouraged that thinking and led us to believe that he would be successful in becoming premier.

Q: Looking at the UK, did we regard the Labor party's Neil Kinnock as a threat? Because he was coming out against, what, the removal of our bases in the UK and all sorts of denuclearization, which would have hurt us badly and the British, too.

THOMPSON: Yes, I think, Michael Foote was regarded as somebody who was a little bit too much to the left, and Neil Kinnock came out of one of those groups that was supporting this leftist tendency. I think, again, at the time, we spent a lot of energy looking at the third alternative, because the Liberals and then the Social Democrats were winning by-elections, and many polls indicated that Labor would be number three if an election were held. So I think analytically you had to accept that Labor was going to win the second-largest number of seats. But perhaps, again as in Canada, there was a trend there that didn't actually exist, but there was a lot of talk about changing the electoral system so that third parties would have an option. The European parliament was using a different system, which would enable third parties to compete.

Q: Speaking of British politics, did you or the office predict Mrs. Thatcher's large victory in the '83 elections.

THOMPSON: Well, again, I think we had to go with the opinion polls. It was quite clear that this was in the cards, and the question, rather, was how big would be the victory, and what would be the consequences? I did visit London right after that election, and I met with some of the Tories. And at the time, I don't recall, but I think that she had a hundred seats she could play with or something, and there was some concern that there were too many Conservatives in the parliament and that not only were most of them back-benchers but many of them couldn't even get a voice in party councils because it was so big.

Q: Probably couldn't be even seated on the Conservative benches.

THOMPSON: No. Of course, this concern was a luxury, and nobody wanted it different, but I think probably because of the pendulum effect in British politics they felt that the seeds of her ultimate decline were sown in this great victory.

And also you had asked about Neil Kinnock. Well, the Labor Party was casting around for a position. I think Thatcher occupying not only the right but the center, the Labor Party probably felt it had no choice but to play to the radical fringe, and gradually, of course, both parties came back toward the center, and the parties of the center didn't amount to very much. But at the time, that was the constellation.

Q: Well, in 1984, after several years in INR, you again moved laterally in the Department, this time to the Bureau of Human Rights, and there you became an office director.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: Describe that organization and what you did there.

THOMPSON: Well, the Bureau of Human Rights was established by mandate of Congress as a result of developments in the '70's. Some people say that it was as a result of Jimmy Carter. I don't think this is technically correct. You know, human rights is something, of course, the United States has been concerned with going back to well before the Cold War, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was something we had a lead in. Interestingly, it was during the Ford administration when the United States served notice on the ILO that we would withdraw from that organization, and one of the reasons cited by Secretary of State Kissinger was respect for human rights, or lack of respect for human rights, in some of the decisions of the ILO. So this was prior to the Carter Administration. And in fact, it was Congress that passed the law that directed the Secretary of State to pay attention to human rights and to have an office, later requiring us to have a bureau, dealing with human rights. So it was a rather young outfit, and it started out with literally a Congressional mandate to do some reporting. And of course, Pat Darien, who was Jimmy Carter's assistant secretary for human rights, was an activist, and I think she tried to take on the whole world of human rights violators at once. And it's basically good that she stirred things up, but I don't think there was much direction in a policy sense. I'd like to mention-because the history of the bureau was so short at the time I moved into it that it's all sort of one part of the fabric-you know that when Reagan took office, the nominee for Secretary of State, Al Haig, told the Senate something to the effect that the human rights of the Reagan Administration would have to do with the Soviet Union. I think Reagan coined the term "evil empire" somewhere along there. Reagan's appointee for assistant secretary for human rights was Ernest Lefever, and he was not confirmed. He had said things that were regarded as embarrassing and so forth. Actually, I went to call on him with a Swiss visitor when I was the Desk officer for Switzerland, and I thought that Lefever laid out very well the rationale which definitely was taken by the Bureau of Human Rights, and that is that you had to go after the Soviet Union because it was the leading offender of human rights. And, well, he had some good arguments there, and I just went away from that meeting with that impression. Of course, Lefever had been sitting in the office, but he wasn't confirmed, and so he left, and Eliot Abrams became the assistant secretary, and I went to work in the bureau when Eliot Abrams was assistant secretary. Abrams was a Democrat, appointed by a Republican, and had some very definite views on human rights. He was criticized, Abrams was, for protecting certain countries, particularly in Central America, Latin America, who were egregious human rights violators; at the same time, the Reagan Administration developed a body of policy rationale which did target the Soviet Union, target the Communist countries. I think, though, if you look at the Human Rights Reports, you will see pretty much an evenhanded approach. And this is something that I had a very important hand in. I went there to become director of the office that dealt with policy formulation and had for the annual Country Reports on Human Rights, which is a volume of well over a thousand pages which is done annually and involves the whole Foreign Service.

Q: Oh, I recall well from my posts in The Hague and in previous.

THOMPSON: Eventually, the bureau was downsized to an extent that another office, the Office of Multilateral Affairs and Programs, or whatever it was called, was done away with, and I took over that as well, so that I was then director of the Office of Human Rights Policy and Programs. It was a small staff in HA, as it was known. Basically, there were two other functions. One was bilateral. The Office of Human Rights itself was dealing with countries just the way the rest of the department was. It was divided up into five geographic areas. Some countries, of course, concerned us over human rights, and some did not, but we had these five officers who were dealing with the rest of the world, with the bureaus, on these issues. And the other part of the Human Rights Office was dealing with asylum cases, and this was just part of the US activities which had been taken over by the Bureau of Human Rights, working with the INS to make adjudications on requests for asylum.

Q: So many of those must have been Central American in those days.

THOMPSON: Many were, yes. Now my area of responsibility, as I said, included policy. When I came in, there was a deputy assistant secretary for policy, and I essentially was an appendage of him with a small staff. But his office was eliminated. The individual was Charles Fairbanks, who was an academic and a thinker on human rights and who shaped Reagan policy, which was, as I said, criticized in many quarters.

Q: Later he became an ambassador, did he not?

THOMPSON: I don't think he did.

Q: The name was familiar, but that's neither here nor there.

THOMPSON: I think there was another Fairbanks, but I may be wrong. But I saw there was a lot of logic, and I really think that a Democratic Administration would have come down in the same place on human rights. I mentioned in the Finland chapter the CSCE process, and of course one of the main achievements of the CSCE process was in the area of human rights.

Q: Basket Three.

THOMPSON: Yes. And I'll get into this a little bit because it comes out later when I was on the delegation to a human rights meeting that was headed by Ambassador Shifter who later became the assistant secretary I worked for. But the Soviets initially were pushing for the CSCE conference. They wanted to legitimize, validate, the postwar boundaries in Europe, and the United States was reluctant to go along with this, even though the United States was one of the initiators of the idea way back in the late '60's. By the time of Helsinki, we had discovered that we could get something out of the CSCE, which was in the area primarily of human rights, codifying a relationship among states. There was an economic basket which had some promise, but I don't think we put too much weight on that. So essentially, human rights was what the Soviets had to give us in order to get the legitimization of the borders that they wanted, particularly the Polish-German border.

Q: Exactly.

THOMPSON: So you really couldn't ignore that when you set up the Human Rights Bureau, that the Soviets had yielded this. Obviously you had to pursue this opening, and you shouldn't neglect the Chiles and the Nicaraguas and so forth, but you had to go after the big part of the world that was the Warsaw Pact and the Sino-Soviet Bloc area, and I'm pretty sure that a Democratic administration would have come down the same way. As it happened, the Republicans were in control, and it was Eliot Abrams and Charles Fairbanks and later Dick Shifter. Anyway, I took over this function. The philosophy was pretty much set then at that point, in 1984. I had a lot to do with public outreach. There was a natural ready constituency through the Human Rights Bureau. I don't know who took care of that before we had a bureau of human rights, but Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and Europe Watch and all of these NGO's gravitated toward human rights.

Q: Many of which had sprung up in the last 30 years anyhow.

THOMPSON: Yes. And that of course is one reason that Congress created the human rights reporting. Now we were the bureau they loved to hate, because their agenda really in most cases-there were some exceptions Some of the Jewish organizations were only interested in the Soviet Union, but most of the groups were interested in Latin America and in other countries where we weren't pushing to get ahead in bashing those countries on human rights. So I did a lot of outreach. I participated in panels in different parts of the country. I spoke to college groups. I met with these NGO's. And obviously, I was influenced officially, so we incorporated their views and their concerns. The other important part of what I was doing was the Human Rights Reports. Now in 1984, when I took over, we had an established process, and that is that the criteria for the reports were set by Congress. We would task our embassies, including you and others around the world, to report on those criteria.

Q: You would have won no popularity contests with the Foreign Service out there.

THOMPSON: Right. So anyway. . . and then the reports would come back in. Now what would you do with them? Well, the Human Rights Bureau would somehow draw them all together and pull things out and publish a report that went up to the Hill. And then the Hill would have the GPO publish it in a nice blue-covered book. And it was a popular item in all of these NGO's, and people wanted it. But the system was not very professional, and everybody involved would admit that, because there was a matter of money-or the lack of it. So what happened on my watch, in part because of recommendations made by my predecessor, was that we got a guarantee from the Department-and Human Rights was so small that it belonged to the M bureau, the Bureau of Management; it didn't have its own administration or budget or anything else-and M said that we could have \$100,000 or something to hire a staff. And also we had to get space, because the Human Rights Bureau literally did not have room to do these reports. So I was the beneficiary of this decision, and I was there for two years. The first year, we cast about for space, and we found some space in that building on K Street, I guess 21st and K, which is the Federal Mediation Service. And we were given a floor in that building, and we went in and the Department got us some furniture. I was able to hire five retired colleagues on a contract basis, and the Department gave us a secretary, and these guys came and, as it turned out, they stayed in this job for several years. I think the last one has now left, but approximately eight years later, when I left the Foreign Service, the whole team was intact, and I think that's a record.

Q: It is, I certainly think it is.

THOMPSON: It was an ideal solution to this problem of how to collate this information. The other part of the problem was, you know, the organizational part of the substance. And so I took the congressional requirements, and these were spelled out. You had to report on arbitrary killings; you had to report on the freedom to have elections; and that sort of thing. And we had developed this. And I applied a standard, the same standard to every report, so that when you're reporting on the UK or Switzerland, you had to say whether they had open and free elections, just as you had to do that for Uganda or Saudi Arabia. And when you had to say whether, you know, women were kept as chattel, that had to apply to all countries. And obviously, it could be a check-off for most. And this was important - it did irritate you and your colleagues, but it made it much easier to sell our human rights reporting to the worst violators of human rights. We could go to a country like Chile or the Soviet Union, and we could say, "Look, here's the book. We are reporting on Canada and New Zealand and on you the same way. We don't change the ground rules?" And this was important, because the universality of human rights was something that we were trying to establish. And I mentioned the CSCE. This was very important to the success of CSCE. Now I worked with the neutral countries, and with our good friends the Danes, you know, they said, "Well, we'd better take it easy on the Soviet Union because we can't change anything there, and why irritate things?"

Q: Why irritate things?

THOMPSON: Exactly. And the big breakthrough in CSCE was when our friends, the neutrals and even some of our NATO allies, said, yes, why not? Let's try that. And when we applied the same standards to the Soviets, then we could turn around and apply the same standards to El Salvador and not do it in the opposite direction.

Well, nothing is perfect, and no outcome is totally satisfactory, but this was part of the package, and the fact that we were tasking our colleagues in The Hague with reporting on things that were obvious to everybody was part of this approach. And I think it succeeded. It may not have succeeded in our bilateral relationship with the Dutch, but certainly succeeded.

Q: No, I want to interrupt you there, because I think you're wrong. I think it did succeed, and I think most of the embassy officers later came to realize that this could be of some importance, for instance, in reporting from the Netherlands. We began to uncover some things we never thought about—that is, Dutch treatment of Indonesians living in Holland. Why were they second-class citizens? Why weren't there enough schools for them, and so forth? Also, the way they were treated in prison—many of these things had never been looked at before, and we had to dig into them and find them. The Dutch were very reluctant at first to admit some of this, but in the long run it helped.

THOMPSON: It helped, and I think also it helped in that the Dutch became more serious where they had influence in pursuing our common agenda. For example, in 1985, when we did the first Human Rights Reports, when they actually saw the light of day, I went to Europe, and I literally took the books with me to Geneva and gave them to our delegation because the Human Rights Commission was meeting at that time. Then I went to The Hague. Now my agenda there was a little bit different because one of the other things that I did in the Bureau of Human Rights was pay attention to child pornography. And this is a comic aside, I think. I don't see any levity in the issue of child pornography, but bureaucratically, there was a certain senator and a certain Reagan appointee as head of the customs service who were really concerned about the prevalence of child pornography in this country, and they realized that it wasn't coming from the United States, and they wanted to hit the sources. And it turned out that they were able to identify three countries. One was the Netherlands, one was Denmark, and one was Sweden. And there was a massive task force here which had Justice on it and Customs and the Postal Service and State, and in State, since these three countries belonged to Europe, the task force should have been staffed by the Bureau of European Affairs. I think John Kelley was assistant secretary at the time, and he was clever enough to avoid this.

Q: Didn't want to touch that one, did he?

THOMPSON: So it went to the Bureau of Human Rights. And of course it's quite related to human rights. Exploitation of children is something that we're concerned with in the human rights area. Anyway, that was why I went to the Netherlands.

Q: How were you received by the Dutch?

THOMPSON: The Dutch were quite serious. They had sent some of their people over to the United States, and I had met them in New York. We had gone to the postal facility in New York together so we could see what happened to mail when it came in from the Netherlands, and this was amazing. I mean, this was an eye-opener to me, that all this international air mail comes to a facility at JFK, and anything from Denmark, the Netherlands, or Sweden was put into this gigantic basket on wheels, and there were as many as needed, and your mail from England or France would get delivered to you, and this other mail was in a holding place, and there were literally four little old ladies who would sit there and they'd pass every piece in front of them. And I talked to one of them, and she was quite serious and not unreasonable, and once in a while she'd throw a piece off to be examined. And she said she'd gotten very good-and she had some things she'd discovered, I would say soft porn, not child pornography, and if it was just soft porn and it involved adults, then it would get delivered to its recipient. But I had wondered at the time because I had Danish relatives, why the mail was taking longer to get to me from Denmark than the mail from Germany. And that was the answer. But anyway, there were Dutch police. I think they had to do with. . . . I don't know anything about the government of the Netherlands, but they were the ones responsible for cracking down on child pornography. And of course all three of these countries had said that it was ridiculous, of course they would not condone child pornography in their countries, and they had laws and all that. Well, the Postal Service was able to demonstrate that it had come from those countries, and they'd been produced there, and they cooperated fully, all three countries.

Q: If there's one thing the Dutch don't want it's to be embarrassed.

THOMPSON: So I was very well received. Jerry Bremer was ambassador, and he had a dinner for me at his residence with a couple of the Dutch parliamentarians who were concerned with this. And I went to the ministry, and I did get a few minutes to talk about human rights reporting. But I think the focus there, because of the Dutch priorities, was on child pornography. But I went to Stockholm, and there I had more of a human rights agenda, and the Swedes. . . . A Swede here, at the embassy, who had at his initiative come to the Human Rights Bureau for a briefing, had let slip to me that the Swedes also did human rights reporting. He's now in parliament, as a Conservative. I went to Stockholm, and they said, "Well, this is actually classified," and they didn't want to share it with us. So we had a meeting and I explained what we did and why we did it, and subsequently they provided our embassy with their own taskers that go out to all of their embassies asking some of the same questions and requiring their embassies to report.

Q: Are Negroes still beaten in the United States?

THOMPSON: Yes. Well, I must say that I'd like to talk a few minutes about the human rights experts' meeting, but obviously the United States has to accept these prominent questions from other countries, and we knew that. So the goal of the human rights reports in the Netherlands and in Sweden isn't really to get them to clean up their acts but to get them to start asking their embassies to make inquiries in places where they have influence, as I've already said.

the team did very well that first year. Now the second year, we went through the same procedure. I was able to assemble the same team. I had the money, which kept going in subsequent years. This time the space that I got from the different places offered to me was on the top floor of the Federal Trade Commission, I believe. It was in the Commerce building down on Constitution Avenue, and some agency had just moved out of there. And this got me a very big suite. This time I not only had my regular staff, including another secretary that the Department gave me, but I had, I think, another part-time secretary and I had three interns.

Q: You were growing in true Washington tradition.

THOMPSON: Yes, but you know-I think this is of interest-the Department has interns every year, and most during the summer, and for them to come and work in the Department they first have to get a security clearance, and for some this takes a long time, and especially if our security people have other priorities. So that there are some students who come late or who have complicated backgrounds who don't get their clearances. And there were three students, two from one program and one independent, who had wanted to come and work for the Soviet Desk, and they didn't get clearances. And I became aware of them, and I got in touch with them, and I guess I was asked if they could work for me pending their clearance. Well, I think it was obvious they wouldn't get their clearance in time of the summer, and so I made a deal. Two of them were doing this for credit with their universities, and so I made them a deal. I said, "You come work for me, not in the building-you don't have to have any clearance whatsoever-and I'll certify that you've done that." And so I got three very good workers, and at the end of the year I used Department stationery and I signed my title and I said, you know, they'd come and they'd worked and they did thus and so and they did a good job. And so they got credit, even though the State Department never heard of them.

Q: Very good for both sides, for you and for them, I'd say.

THOMPSON: Yes, I think I got that personnel approach during my Marine time in Vietnam, where you had to scrounge people and property and everything else. But as a result, by that second year, we had a really professional product, and we had, I would say, by then we had narrowed down the number of reports that were considered unacceptable by the constituency, the human rights groups, to probably four or five. They no longer worried about our report on South Africa. I think Chile was okay. Israel, we started criticizing Israel. So we made some gains there.

Q: Now there's one country that hasn't fallen from your lips in this discussion, and that's China. Now that's on the front pages, of course, in 1999, with regard to human rights. How was it then, when you were-

THOMPSON: It wasn't really a problem then, and of course, I followed the discussion of China, and there was always the question regarding many questions of which comes first, influence so that you can make some progress on human rights, or getting them to change their human rights scene so that you can have relations with them and gain influence?

Q: The carrot and the stick.

THOMPSON: Yes, and I think the situation is different today because, from what I have seen through the media, the Chinese are not nearly as oppressed as they were at any time in the past. Now I mentioned when we were talking about Korea how Koreans had certain rights circumscribed but they were totally free in many other areas. And they were certainly free to talk among themselves, and they were free to engage in business activities and so forth, and some of these rights were not enjoyed by people in other countries. I was hoping for both political rights and rights of movement and so forth, but basically you want to get the topic on the agenda, get the country concerned to concede that it's a legitimate point of discussion, and then you want to look at leverage. Now leverage is important. We were criticized because we didn't stop our aid to Chile, because Chile was abusing human rights. We weren't giving any aid to Chile. We weren't selling Chile any military things. There was very little leverage over Chile at the time that we were criticized for not cracking down on their human rights violations.

Obviously you always have to balance your different policy goals. The Soviet Union is a great example. You cannot invade Russia, obviously, as you could invade Uganda to get rid of a dictator. I think probably our approach to the Soviet Union had a connection to what ultimately happened in the Soviet Union. We tried to raise the level of discussion of human rights among the people concerned and to get the government to concede that there are some things as universal standards. Regarding China, the classic question was the same as it is today. We would have people go there. They probably wouldn't raise human rights because it seemed ludicrous. If two foreign ministers are sitting down, each one knows exactly what the other one has on his agenda. If somebody said human rights, then it's been mentioned, and they'll take that exchange at face value, and if he doesn't mention it, it's as good as mentioned. I think generally, in dealing with countries like China, we're dealing with public diplomacy to the extent that we have leverage, and we have a lot with China. Especially in those days, there were licensing restrictions: there was technology, and things. And the Chinese knew that quietly they could agree to certain things without losing face, and they would probably do it. But again, in looking at universality, we weren't concerned with one specific country to the point where human rights would be all consuming. And I think that we made a lot of progress there supporting the United Nations, for example. I mentioned the ILO. We thought that the ILO approach to human rights was one-sided and was discriminating against the United States and our interests and our friends. And the ILO changed, so we went back into the ILO.

Q: Were you subject to a lot of second-guessing, kibitzing, from the Hill in regard to human rights, because after all, as you've pointed out, Congress was the father of the Human Rights Bureau? Did staffers and senators and congressmen themselves take any interest in this?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes. We had a lot of contact. Occasionally the assistant secretary was called up for formal testimony. Occasionally there would be non-formal—they weren't really hearings, but they were sessions that were held on the Hill, sponsored by one or members of Congress, and you'd get your NGO representatives up there, and I participated in some of those. Always we were targets, but we participated, and we had good will on both sides, as a rule. I'll mention a couple of things.

Congress passed another law when I was in Human Rights, and it had to do with worker rights reporting. And this law was sponsored by Congressman Peeves of Ohio, and he did it because he had a very strong labor presence in his district, and the AFL-CIO was very concerned about the number of jobs that were being lost because we were using foreign manufacturers more and more, and they thought that this was horribly unfair because a lot of the countries where goods were being produced cheaply were producing them cheaply because the workers had no protections and were working for low wages and they had no right to organize and bargain collectively. The motivation, I think, was quite frankly to stop the drain of jobs to these countries. But if this legislation succeeded, the jobs would still be drained but the workers would be better off in those countries, but that wasn't probably the first concern of the legislation. Anyway, the law said, once again, that the United States should make decisions to curtail imports from countries. Now to certify countries that violated worker rights, and in order to reach this decision, the United States would have to be reporting on worker rights. The Labor Department made a grab for this function. They wanted to do the labor rights reporting. They wanted our people. They wanted Foreign Service types to go out. And this was considered a threat, obviously, bureaucratically, but also logically it made sense to incorporate worker rights reporting in to our bureau. This was fine with the congressman. They wanted to know what we were going to do, so I went up, and I sat down with him, and I told him how I had organized the other reporting and how we proposed to take care of human rights, and he was thoroughly satisfied, and told me so, and I never heard from him again or his staff. We were serious.

There were five worker rights delineated in the legislation. We incorporated those. We tasked our colleagues in the field to report on those as well. And there, of course, is where you get into areas where no country - the Netherlands, the United States, or anybody - is perfectly clean because, you know, it has to do with union rights and wages-

Q: Sweatshops.

THOMPSON: Sweatshops, but also, you know, if you have kids and you want them to get a job, who says they can have a paper route if you're only 12 years old? That sort of thing. So it gets into a very sophisticated area of rights and the state's role in guaranteeing those rights. But that was a case where Congress was directly involved, and I was the one they were directly involving.

Also I mentioned outreach efforts. One example, I went to an all-day conference that was organized by Amnesty International up in Vermont. I was on the podium with Congressman Jeffers, who's now Senator Jeffers, and the head of Amnesty International USA and a couple of people like that, academics. And obviously the audience was basically not friendly to the Reagan Administration. And we talked about a lot of things, and then they asked me a question about the lack of rights for the workers at Park Air Force Base in the Philippines. And Congressman Jeffers, a Republican, took the microphone, and started explaining how the Philippines fits into the scheme of our security arrangements in the Pacific and what the different considerations are, and he did a fantastic job of articulating this need to prioritize where human rights fits into the general scheme of things. And so I would say that he was fairly typical, that Congress was enlightened not only on human rights but on the realities of how you can pursue the human rights agenda, so that basically we were talking well with the floor on this issue.

Q: Of course the Bureau of Human Rights is somewhat different from most of the traditional diplomatic bureaus. Was there difficulty in recruiting staff to serve in the bureau, or not?

THOMPSON: Well, there were not that many positions, and I would say probably they weren't the most attractive positions, but we got good staff. I mentioned there were five substantive officers-that's not very many-on the bilateral side. I think probably the asylum side generally tended to be non-Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, I would think.

THOMPSON: And there were only four or five others of us in the whole bureau who were Foreign Service officers. We had a politically appointed deputy assistant secretary as well as the assistant secretary and some civil service people. But of those five officers, each one had the opportunity to work with the geographic area that she was interested in and familiar with, and could work with the entire bureau, whether it was Latin America or EUR or whatever. So I think there was a certain attraction there. And for profile and accessibility, it's one of those jobs, like public affairs, where you can deal with anybody around the Department, and they're happy to have you doing the work so they'll always have time for you.

Q: Did these five people dealing with the geographic bureaus find themselves always welcome, or were they resented?

THOMPSON: No, I think they were welcomed. As I said, I think the desks probably regarded that they were doing the dirty work. Most of our desk officers are terribly overworked, and if there's an issue, it's not created by the Human Rights Bureau; it's filtered through the Human Rights Bureau, but that issue was going to come up anyway. I remember before the Human Rights Bureau existed and I was the Austrian Desk officer, I had to spend a lot of time on the issue of the Slovenian minority... [Tape 3, Side B]

The other thing I wanted to mention was the Human Rights Experts Meeting. It was a CSCE meeting that took place in Ottawa in 1985. The CSCE, as we've discussed, included human rights as part of its operations, and the Madrid Conference called for a number of meetings on different subjects, and one of them was a meeting of human rights experts. The location, the timing, was all dictated by the Madrid Agreement. It was to be six weeks in Ottawa in the spring of '85. The head of the US delegation was Ambassador Richard Schifter, who's in the present administration and later, after the conference, came to Human Rights as the assistant secretary of state. At the time he was a private lawyer who had served as head of our delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights, which meets once a year in Geneva, and is a very knowledgeable human rights expert. It was a little bit frustrating, I think, for the Americans in Ottawa, because the Soviets were not inclined to agree with us on anything. The Human Rights Bureau had one or two people on the delegation, and we staggered ourselves so that somebody was doing the work back in Washington. I went up for the last two weeks of the session, which was an enlightening couple of weeks. We had discussed a thorough agenda among the 35 members of the CSCE, going right down through the Helsinki Agreement on Human Rights, and we were on the verge of preparing a final document when I arrived. So I was in on that, which involved a number of negotiations among ourselves in the Western group and then with the neutrals in the center. And they were also talking with the Eastern European group. Dr. Klaus Turnud, from Finland, was chairing this operation, and we found common ground in a lot of areas, of course, the innocuous areas where we could start getting language that the other side would agree to, but ultimately we failed to get their agreement.

Now a couple of interesting points. While I was there and before I was there, the Soviets, who all along had contended that you could have agreed standards of human rights but you could not comment on the human rights performance of another country, started taking the initiative to discuss a couple of cases from the United States. One, you will recall, involved the efforts of the City of Philadelphia bombing the ghetto up there and burning several homes. The other one involved a native American prisoner who was regarded in some circles as a political prisoner, even though he had gunned down two FBI agents in cold blood. And he claimed that not only was he being persecuted but that he was being denied basic rights in prison. He wasn't allowed to have the accoutrements necessary to practice his religion, for example-one of which was a-

Q: -smoking pot.

THOMPSON: Yes, and another one was a tomahawk, I think. Anyway, the Soviets, of course, very emphatically took this position, which was interesting because this was a discussion of our internal human rights record, so they conceded a very important point, perhaps inadvertently, but they did it for all time. So that was something significant that came out of the Ottawa Conference.

Q: Excuse me, this was during the Gorbachev period already, was it?

THOMPSON: I believe so, in '85, yes. The other thing was the fact that the Soviets would not agree to a final document was not a surprise to me when I discussed this with the head of my delegation, who agreed that I had a point, and that was a rather simple point, in that the Ottawa meeting had come about only as part of a package in which, again, the Soviets got what they wanted, which was certain discussions on the political and even on the economic side, and we had gotten human rights. And I said, "There's no way they can agree to a final document which would have to address this meeting, except as part of a package." And this, of course, turned out to be the case. I think perhaps I, coming from the outside, was able to point out the obvious. Anyway, I was assigned to draft the statement of the American delegation by pointing out to people how we won, even though there was not a "final" agreement.

Q: Even though you hadn't really won.

THOMPSON: And I take a great deal of pride in what I wrote, because I think it did marshal some very good arguments, which are borne out by what happened subsequently in the CSCE. I later attended the Human Rights Experts Meeting in Copenhagen, which was similar except there was a greater meeting of the minds between East and West.

So we didn't get agreement on the document. We were required by the Madrid Agreement to end the conference at the close of business on a certain Friday, and when that didn't happen, when we couldn't get agreement, we stopped the clock, which is a device that we often use, and so the clock stayed at Friday afternoon, or whatever it was, right through the weekend, and we met. We still had hopes of getting a document, although it certainly wouldn't be one that said anything. And finally on Sunday evening, I think, everybody came together-maybe it was Monday morning-and we decided that we would all give up. And then the clock was restarted, and when it reached 5 o'clock, or whatever, we declared the conference over.

Q: Well, you seem to have had an interesting tour in Human Rights, which not all FSO's regard as their goal, but for you it was worthwhile, and you learned a lot, I presume.

THOMPSON: Yes, and I feel that was one area where I could contribute something to the historic record that represented progress in the evolution of policy and the application. And although many people dispute that the Soviet Union fell because of the scrutiny of its human rights record, I think it was part of the mosaic.

Q: Very true. Well, in 1986, then, you took a short period of Swedish language training.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: How did that come about?

THOMPSON: Well, I had early in my human rights tour found out what my next assignment would be, which would be as principal officer in Gothenburg, Sweden. And the reason for the long time lapse was that this was a language-designated position, and so you have to assign people with a long enough time to take the language. But I was already fluent in Danish, and so they realized that I wouldn't need the language, so I got to spend another year in HA before I went of FSI. And the Foreign Service Institute was about to put together a conversion course in five weeks, similar to what they do for Portuguese speakers learning Spanish and vice versa. And it worked out well. It got one-on-one attention from two or three teachers, and it happened that the other people going out to post had been in Swedish language training for several weeks, and I got to know them at the same time, so that we were all well acquainted, which was important because when I got to post, of course, I was on one side of Sweden, and they were all on the other side. And so in terms of language, I would say that that five weeks enabled me to convert so that I was essentially fluent in Swedish when I arrived in Gothenburg. But it was just as important getting to know people, because otherwise I would only have known the end of a telephone.

Q: No, that's very helpful. How large was Gothenburg when you got there, as a post?

THOMPSON: It was very small. I had two Foreign Service nationals and two contract policemen.

Q: Was there a USIA presence there?

THOMPSON: No. There was no other agency presence at all.

Q: So you were the lone American officer.

THOMPSON: Yes, there had been a commercial FSN doing trade reports, but Commerce had cut him out.

Q: That's where Volvos are made.

THOMPSON: Technically, Gothenburg is the industrial center of Sweden. It is also the largest port in Scandinavia, the largest port of Denmark, the largest port of Norway, and Finland also. Now those figures are a little bit inflated because of the oil traffic that goes through there, but it's definitely a very important center. It has the MIT of Sweden, the Chalmers University, in a part of the world where technology is a very important export commodity. And so a lot of the innovation takes place there. And you know, as I listen to the radio these days, the classical stations, it seems every other piece is directed by Neemi Järvi, who is director of the Gothenburg, among other things. I'm actually the one who gave him his first American passport.

Q: Well, he has a passport?

THOMPSON: Yes, he is Estonian, and had lived in Sweden for many, many years, but aspired to be an American citizen. He is obviously one of these cosmopolitan jet-setters because he's always directing in different cities. I don't know how he acquired his citizenship, but I do know when he acquired it. He went through a court in New Jersey, I believe, but he didn't have time to complete his naturalization.

Q: He came to you?

THOMPSON: Yes, and of course, I wasn't in the business of issuing passports. The passport found its way to me, and he found his way to my office so he could take the oath. A very nice gentleman.

Q: Oh, good. I'll think of you when I hear him. Did you get a lot of direction from the embassy in Stockholm as to what to do or what not to do?

THOMPSON: Well, I got very good cooperation from Stockholm. I must say that the DCM, I think he and I saw eye-to-eye on virtually everything.

The post in Gothenburg had been closed twice.

Q: I remember that

THOMPSON: It had been reopened the final time about two years before, at the insistence of Congress, which acted at the insistence of what turned to be a one-person campaign in Sweden by. . . . I think Congress was obliged to open it because it was on a list of posts that had to be opened as a quid pro quo for us opening posts in China, and there were a number of small European posts. Gothenburg made the list because a women of some years in Gothenburg had a fixation, an obsession, about America, and I met with her later. It turned out that she was in love with America because when she was a teenager or something, after the war, living in rural Sweden, a very large car came down, probably the only car that passed that way that day, and there was a very wealthy American in the car, and he asked these two girls for some information or something, and they gave it to him. And apparently he went his way, and then they heard from him again - he sent them some money or tickets or something, I don't remember - but anyway, she always loved America as a result of that. And she thought it was terrible that the post had closed, and she started a petition and got over 100,000 signatures. And she made several trips to Washington, and she met with four or five members of Congress, and she presented herself as representative of the people of Western Sweden, and they bought it.

Q: I always heard that it was Hubert Humphrey that kept it open.

THOMPSON: At an earlier time, yes, oh, yes, but you see, he was no longer with us.

Q: No longer available then.

THOMPSON: There was one particular congressman from Minnesota who got his name behind us, but I think it was primarily her doing, and this was obvious to me. There was no groundswell trying to keep us there. Everybody was happy with us, but at a time when most things can be handled out of Stockholm, people felt the post was not needed.

Q: Did you get to Stockholm often?

THOMPSON: I did. I need to say that before I arrived, our ambassador, who was Gregory Newell, a political appointee, had made the decision that the post would be closed, and in Washington he had been assistant secretary for international organizations. And I had met with him, and we had talked about the tenuousness of the post, and he had assured me that he wouldn't make his decision until I got out there. Now for whatever reasons, he volunteered to close it. So this I discovered when I'd arrived. So my job was not only to do the normal things but to prepare quietly to close the post down, at the same time not letting the Swedes know that we had reached this decision. In fact, the logic for closing it was very good, because the other agencies had abandoned the place. USIA didn't do much. I mentioned the symphony orchestra there, which is the Swedish orchestra that comes to mind in discussing music. Chalmers University, of course, is probably one that's got more to do with other universities. The art museum, the opera, Gothenburg is a city of not quite the size of Oslo or Helsinki but almost, with at least as vibrant a cultural and academic life, but nonetheless USIA could not cover its employees. Commerce, it turned out that the commercial attaché^{1/2} told me that he did not have the money to travel to Gothenburg, let alone have an officer down there.

Q: You know, that was the industrial heart of Sweden.

THOMPSON: Oh, he was very sorry about this, because he understood why he should be down there. So it was similar. I will say that the agricultural attaché^{1/2} was able to travel, did come and put on a wine tasting, so he was doing his job very well. But without this support from the other agencies, it became rather absurd for us to have a post there. Although what was left to me. . . . Well, I'll mention the consular work because this was before we had granted the visa waiver, and of course it made a lot of sense to grant visa waivers to Swedes, after which point you didn't need to have a consulate. But I think I issued about 8,000 non-immigrant visas in my 12 months there.

Q: You did a lot of signing, then.

THOMPSON: I did a lot of signing. I had a lot of contact. We would have up to 200 applicants a day in our waiting room, not realizing that they could do it by mail, that they could even apply to Stockholm by mail. But a lot of people like to come in. They like that as part of the process of visiting America. And we had a lot of non-Swedes who would come in. Now, of course, they would have to go to Stockholm. And I had some protection and welfare, Americans who needed help.

Q: I wanted to ask you, were there still any American deserters in the area?

THOMPSON: Not that we had anything to do with. There were some Americans who obviously had been around there a long time. There was quite a large business community of Americans. They weren't necessarily working for American firms, but they were in most cases American men who had married Swedish women or vice versa, and they had jobs there. And they kept to themselves. They would invite me to visit with them. Nothing that really required a presence. It's always good to have a presence, and of course in addition to the consular work what I was doing was public diplomacy and representation. Now it happened that when Congress reestablished Gothenburg, it gave the post its own budget, so that this was not controlled by the embassy in Stockholm, so that I had the means. I had a rather large jurisdiction, which went all down the coast, down to and including Heisenberg and Malmö^{1/2}, this whole area, and the University of Lund, which is another leading Swedish university.

Q: I see, yes.

THOMPSON: And so I would travel. I would speak, go to political party conferences if they were in my district. There was plenty to do. Some of the political establishment in Stockholm comes from western Sweden. Again, not more than from other areas, but they are of some importance in the country.

Q: Well, apparently, being by yourself, you couldn't send in any classified material.

THOMPSON: No, and it was an awkward time, because it was before e-mail, and I had a teletype that was my main contact with Stockholm and vice versa, so we'd be on the telephone a lot, of course, but nobody would teletype me. I could receive classified information by courier. I could store it to some extent, if it was low level, but basically I would shred it, and I did have a time when my shredder jammed, and I was able to unjam it.

Q: Otherwise your pockets would have been bulging.

THOMPSON: Well, we had this unfortunate budget thing that I mentioned, which was unfortunately that I had money that I just couldn't spend. And so one thing I spent it on was another shredder, so that I had a backup shredder. Things were a little skewed in Sweden then. The prime minister, Olaf Palme, had been assassinated in early '86.

Q: I had wanted to ask you about that, what the reverberations in Gothenburg were.

THOMPSON: Well, nothing. But the problem was that the Americans became very security-aware after the prime minister was assassinated. Earlier, of course, much earlier, they had had a terrorist attack against the West German embassy in Stockholm, which was located in back of our embassy, and I suppose that added to ratcheting up our security concerns. Nobody knows who shot Palme or why, but chances are no more likely that it was a terrorist than anything else. There was never any indication that Americans were being targeted. Nonetheless, it was decided that the American ambassador would have a follow-on detail and an armed escort in his own car so that every. . . . You know, the Residence is just down the street from the embassy, so he would drive back and forth in a two-car cavalcade.

Q: When he always could have walked.

THOMPSON: Oh, yes, he could have, but he's not allowed to walk. And this spilled over to Gothenburg. I think psychologically both my predecessor and I-

Q: Well, you had no marines.

THOMPSON: No marines, no. If there were these precautions, then it must be for a reason, and so my residence, which was very, very nice, was outfitted with all kinds of security devices. I spent most of my time worrying that I would trip them by mistake. I mentioned that I had two contract policemen. These were to provide security for us on an in-house basis. In other words, they worked for me. They were on the US Government payroll. And I was able to use them to screen people coming in, and they became very good at screening visa applicants. We couldn't have survived without these two gentlemen, because the official Swedish security system, which is a contract system providing security for embassies, provided us with a Swedish security guard inside our area as well. So our-

[interruption]

So I think we were very well covered in security terms, and that was the main impact of the Palme assassination. It's not that the threat was increased, as far as I know, or there was a security risk. And this became obvious to me because one of my first functions there was to attend an all-Scandinavian meeting of social democrats, and many of them were in power at the time, including Ingvar Karlsson, who was prime minister of Sweden. And I recall going to this conference downtown in Gothenburg, and after the lunch, there was going to be a plenary session, and people were literally mobbing the doors to get in. And there were Karlsson and I elbowing each other to get through the door first, and he had no security whatsoever. And as it turned out, Bo Harlan Botman, who was head of the Norwegian labor party, was supposed to address the conference, and the doors shut on her because she didn't get there fast enough. So I saw that for the Swedes very little had changed. It was the Americans were thinking quite seriously of the dangers of living and working in Sweden.

Q: You were there, then, when the post was officially closed.

THOMPSON: No, I was told, as I said, that it was going to close, and that was in July of '86, and in early '87 I was given the go-ahead to tell the Swedes to the extent I had to. And the reason for this was that we had a long-term lease of our floor in the building, and the obligation for that would have cost us more if we'd been held to it in closing the post than it would have cost us to keep the post open, so I went downstairs to the owner of the building, along with the GSO from Stockholm, and we sat and discussed it, and he didn't really flinch. And he said, of course, that he'd have no trouble finding another tenant. But that was how we told the Swedes that we were leaving.

But I then was back in Washington and visited the Desk, the office, and Ford Cooper, who was the director, told me that the Department wanted me to go down to Copenhagen and replace the political counselor there. As it turned out, the post was not closed for another year, but the Department wished that I be of use somewhere else. So we just left it empty, as it were. I think one of the FSN's left, and the other one came in and punched a time clock.

Q: Oh, we didn't send an officer in?

THOMPSON: No. And the embassy went about closing it, and the remaining FSN was offered a position in Stockholm.

Q: Well, it's sad when one of these posts that had a long history has to be finally closed. It was done at a number of places.

THOMPSON: Yes, well, I think one shouldn't get too sentimental. On one of my many introductory calls, I went to the afternoon tabloid, the biggest circulation newspaper in western Sweden. The editor was a very savvy individual, speaks impeccable English and all that, and I called on him, and he said, "Now before you tell me about your wireless file, come on in the back room." And he turned on the television, and he had Worldnet, which was USIA's own international program, and also CNN, and he said, "Look, anything I want to know, I've got it already on. I wish you well. I look forward to seeing you in town, but there's nothing you can tell me." I know, and that I think is why we needed to close posts like that.

Q: Well, I was glad that I was able to leave the Netherlands before we closed Rotterdam, although we were speculating how long it could stay open.

THOMPSON: I did have a number of consular cases where I was able to do things which would have been hard to cover from Stockholm because they would have required travel. And fortunately we had no disasters, no train wrecks or anything while I was there. But when you forfeit a post and you have something like that in a country with hundreds of thousands of Americans traveling all the time, I think that's a consideration. I did have one court case right after I arrived where the son of a fairly prominent American athlete had been using his sister's credit card to pay for his hotel bill, had been arrested, and was being tried; and I had succeeded in getting money from his mother, and so I went to the courtroom, and that was the first time I used my Swedish officially, and the judge said that she understood that there was somebody from the American embassy. The whole thing was taking place through translation for the benefit of the accused, who didn't speak Swedish. And she asked me if I had anything that I could offer that was mitigating, so I just dispensed with an interpreter and I announced that yes, I had money, and that we would be able to guarantee that he would leave Sweden, at which point she concluded the trial and that was that.

Q: And she was happy to hear it in Swedish, I'm sure.

THOMPSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Well, then you went to Copenhagen in 1987 as political counselor. How large a staff did you have there?

THOMPSON: Well, we still had that traditional line-up of political counselor and then a labor-political guy, a woman, as the case was at the time, and then a junior officer. And we had, I guess, two FSN's at that point, a full-time secretary.

Q: Was the ambassador interested in internal Danish politics or mainly in foreign affairs? Or was he interested in both, or neither?

THOMPSON: This will be immediately clear to our readers when I tell you that the American ambassador was Terry Todman, one of the most successful Foreign Service officers, obviously interested in every sparrow that fell.

Q: So he took an interest in everything. Were you at the embassy surprised when Paul Schröder was sent back in a general election?

THOMPSON: Well, this is the election of '87.

Q: Yes.

THOMPSON: That was when I got there. I don't think we were surprised. There was a tendency in Denmark, as you know, of throwing the rascals out, and Schlueter had been phenomenally successful, and obviously in Denmark, if you're successful, you get punished, one way or the other. But what Schlueter was punished for was an ill-advised statement when he called the elections, and in that system the prime minister can call elections. He called them and announced that they would be that September, so he could get them over with. And this was seen as extremely arrogant, with the implication that he was going to win, he just had to get this technicality out of the way. But, no, I think the result of the election was not a surprise.

Q: Then they had another election in '88-

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: -that had to do with nuclear weapons.

THOMPSON: Yes. This was perhaps the most interesting aspect of my time there. The Danes had, of course, been members of NATO from the time that NATO was founded, at which point it became obvious that there couldn't be a Nordic alternative or any other alternative to NATO. And Denmark always had reservations and restrictions on their extent of involvement. For example, they could not permit American bases nor could there be nuclear weapons.

Q: No NATO bases except in Greenland, right?

THOMPSON: Greenland was an exception, but on Danish soil proper there were foreign troops. The question of nuclear weapons became politically blurred when it applied to warships because the Brits and the Americans had a policy of not declaring whether they had nuclear weapons on board, so you had this charade for many years where Danish policy was no nuclear weapons on its soil or in its ports, and the assumption of the Danish Government was we complied with this policy. But they also knew that the policy of the allies was not to declare so that if they had come to us or to the UK, or France, for that matter, and said, "This is our policy. Do you have any nuclear weapons on board?" we would have said, "Well, we can't tell you." But there was no point in asking. As long as there was a majority of the big parties there was no problem. But during the '80's, you had a disaffection on the part of the Social Democrats on a lot of the security arrangements. And this was primarily for domestic reasons because there was always this pressure from the left so that they lost the automatic majority for Danish NATO participation. regardless of whether it was a government of the left headed by the Social Democrats or a government of the right headed by the Conservatives, the answer would always be, "Hey, we've got it under control. Don't worry about it." But then as the '80's proceeded, there were some problems having to do with what was called the two-track approach to nuclear disarmament in Europe, and NATO decided that they would negotiate reduction of their nuclear weapons and intermediate nuclear weapons and at the same time it would build up its missiles if, and until, the other side agreed. And of course the other side didn't agree. The Danes didn't buy this. And it culminated in 1988 because somebody got the idea that the Danish Government should start being sure that there weren't any nuclear weapons on these visiting warships. Now because of this strange security alignment in Parliament, you had what was called the security policy alternate majority, and that meant that Poul Schlueter had a center right government which had absolute power over most questions including the question of whether it could continue in office, but there was no longer any power over security questions. Then there was an alternate which included the Social Democrats and the Radical Liberals, and how could this function in the parliamentary system? It functioned because they would never bring to a head whether the government had the confidence of the parliament. It was something that the Americans had a very hard time understanding. And finally the crunch came because parliament did pass this resolution which said that the government would have to ask whether our ships had nuclear weapons on them. Well, we'd been quite clear to the government, no surprise, that we couldn't go along with this, and the government tried to come up with compromise wording. We said, "No, there is no compromise wording." So Poul Schlueter, once again, called an election. Now there was a lot of scurrying around. Ambassador Todman and I met several times privately with the head of the Social Democratic Party and with the architects of the Social Democratic security policy, who were left-wing politicians. And they just couldn't understand why there could be no compromise on this. Meanwhile, the press, because Todman also was meeting with Schlueter, the press concluded that it was Todman, the American ambassador, who had called the elections. There was absolutely no basis for that. I think Todman or I or anybody would have told anybody who'd listen that the government could not continue in that policy, and from Washington they were hearing things like Denmark would be another New Zealand, because New Zealand was cut out of the ANZUS cooperation after a similar piece of legislation.

So the election was held, and unlike most elections in Denmark, this one was held on a foreign policy issue, which had to do with Denmark's overall relationship with NATO. And the issues were debated in a healthy fashion, and there were a lot of subplots and undercurrents and so forth between the Social Democrats under the leadership of Sven Alpen, who did not look very good. But the voters went to the polls. They returned almost an identical parliamentary constellation, but we had done something significant during the campaign. We had gotten Washington to agree that our approach to the Danes in general and to the Radical Liberals in particular should be "This is not the time to even talk about it. This is a time when you've had an actual agreement on reduction of nuclear weapons in Europe for the first time. Why upset the apple cart? Are you in favor of reducing the number of nuclear weapons in Europe? Because if you pursue this issue, then they won't get reduced. It's not a threat. It's a statement of fact."

The British minister of defense made quite clear that the Danish defense policy rests on NATO being integrated. In order to reinforce you have to hold exercises.

Q: And mainly from Britain, as I recall.

THOMPSON: Mainly from Britain, also from Canada. You have to hold exercises or it would be hopeless. And you can't exercise if the ships can't come into port. So the British prime minister knew that. So that not only would there be no progress in NATO, Denmark would remain a member of NATO, but it wouldn't have any more reinforcements, at which point NATO membership for Denmark would be meaningless. So with this message, the Social Liberals, the Radical Liberals, switched sides. And so the alternate security policy majority ceased to exist, and the majority government also had a majority on the security policy. And as an interesting sidelight, eventually the head of the radical liberal party became Foreign Ministry and is, in fact, prime minister today.

Q: By the way, I wanted to ask you a question perhaps a little off to the side. Did this Danish disease spread to its sister Nordic, Norway? Did they have the same problem with regard to ships coming into port and nuclear weapons?

THOMPSON: I don't ever recall reading that. There was a similar problem. It happened earlier and it was resolved. It was resolved without dramatics. Interestingly, or course, Sweden had the same policy, and when I was in Gothenburg, there was a big blow-up over the visit of the British minesweeper to the port because the Brits would not say whether it had nuclear weapons on board.

Q: Normally they're not nuclear weapons carriers, but never mind.

THOMPSON: In fact, there was only one weapon on board, and that was a .50 caliber machine gun, and it was made by Bofors, which is a Swedish company.

I think what happened when I was in Gothenburg was typical of the Nordics, in that the local city boycotted the visit, but because there's also a province with its own structure and bureaucracy and the province was headed by a moderate, a Conservative, it was the province which hosted the visit. And I think that the Nordics have always been very flexible in finding a way to do what they wanted to do, and the leftists got their way about the ship visits, and ultimately in Norway as in Denmark, the government prevailed in favor of business as usual. Usually it was something that helped us in our agenda; sometimes it hurt us and was very vexing. Basically this pragmatic approach is completely Nordic and nice to deal with.

Q: I've always had the feeling that both Norway and Denmark, particularly, would do almost anything to remain under the NATO umbrella, and despite all their internal blather that one sometimes had, they did not want to lose their NATO membership.

THOMPSON: Well, it's always a question of marketing this to the public, and of course Denmark, having so many parties, having a low threshold for admission to the parliament, is constantly taking its own pulse, and the government always has to keep an eye on the voters, and the embassy keeps their eye on the left-wing press.

Q: Well, now, you happened to be there in Copenhagen at a time of quite considerable ferment in Central and Eastern Europe, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and with the rumblings of change in the Soviet Union, Poland, and other Eastern European countries. What was the atmosphere in Denmark at that time, particularly vis-à-vis the Soviet satellites?

THOMPSON: Well, I think that the Danish left focused on Denmark's relationship with NATO, looking at NATO as a problem and NATO as the enemy at worst. And the changes happening in Eastern Europe came somewhat by surprise. They sort of cut the argument out from under the left. On the right, I think there was more concern. Basically, the Nordics like the status quo, whatever it is, and they like to fine-tune their own domestic welfare states, and they don't like too much rocking of the boat one way or the other internationally. That's how they survive. I remember when unification came in Germany. The Wall had fallen, and Prime Minister Schlueter had commented that it probably wouldn't be a good idea for the two Germanies to get back together. I remember that General Walters, the ambassador to Germany, had been chastised from Washington because he suggested the opposite, I think, that things were going to happen fairly quickly. Well, how soon we learn. It became obvious that unification was a good thing, and that Schlueter was not in step. But I'm talking about the West, and not about the East, because the Danes are looking at the countries closest to them. You mentioned the Danish relationship with NATO and how Denmark wanted the NATO umbrella and all that. I think it's important to remember also that one of the important reasons for NATO from the Danes' point of view was controlling Germany. If Germany had to be rearmed, it was to be as a NATO force. If Germany had to become important and powerful again, then the relationship must be managed, and there had to be a large organization like NATO to do it. And this rationale, which is well documented and subscribed to by the Social Democrats, is one that doesn't depend on the Soviet Union for a threat to peace. And this is something that I think the Americans failed to understand at certain times, and I think perhaps the late '80's, the early '90's were one of those times, that, yes, it was very nice that the countries of the East were getting their freedom and whatever, but uncertainties about Germany were something that had to be taken into account. The biggest impact of those changes was that Denmark became a much more solid supporter of NATO. Hartman, to this day, is one of the strongest supporters of NATO. And as it's still debated in this city whether there's enough of a threat to keep NATO going, one must not lose sight of the fact that the virtue of NATO is that it helps the relationship of large countries like Germany with small countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and so forth. On the eastern side of the equation, the Danes never wanted to antagonize the Soviet Union. They were fortunately far enough removed so that they could subscribe to whatever the NATO policy was on the Soviet Union, but the upheavals in the Baltics changed that equation a little bit, because Denmark had historical ties to the Baltic countries, if you go back far enough, as you know, Denmark owned the Baltic countries. The Danish flag, the Dannebrog, supposedly came down from heaven on a battlefield in the Baltic countries, and this is generally known to the Danes, so that when there was this movement for independence, the Danes and the other Nordics responded quite strongly, and they provided contacts. They provided forums. At one point the Nordic Council was available for these Baltics to be given the floor. There were environmental organizations that encompassed the Baltic riparian states, and these were used to give some support for the independence of the peoples.

The Danes, I think, took the lead in developing a relationship with the Soviets on the question of . . . it's hard to define, but they would have public debates. I went to a number of events in Copenhagen where they had Soviets present. There was one radio program, which by agreement was broadcast simultaneously in Denmark in the Soviet Union, in which lawmakers from both sides were on a panel, and they discuss, essentially, human rights. But they also discussed disarmament questions, and it was an interesting give or take that would have, of course, been impossible a few years before that. So the Danes saw themselves as being part of this process of Baltic independence and of general Soviet glasnost. And I think they did play quite a role, which has continued. When independence came and developed the relationship, I think particularly with Latvia, you mentioned the leftist press, and of course the Communist newspaper no longer exists, and its printer was quite literally packaged and given, I think, away, because the Danes were providing these fledgling democracies with the tools of survival.

Q: As long as they didn't give the philosophy.

THOMPSON: Oh, no. No, the Danes are very good at promoting this sort of contact, and I think that they are among countries who are trying to nudge NATO in certain directions. For one thing, of course, the Danes are in favor of dramatic expansion of both NATO and the EU. The Danes prefer broadening to deepening. Their Soviet policy became their Russian policy, and that was one of engagement. *Digtente* was definitely something that the Danes favored. They did not like our confrontational approach. But always keep in mind the fact that NATO for them was not just a one-issue organization. These are the changes. And just as they're more secure now with NATO, I think probably they're a little more leery of deepening of the EU because they don't want constraints on the EU.

Q: Well, any other comments about the tour in Copenhagen? Any other subjects we should discuss?

THOMPSON: Well, yes. There's an important subject which had to do with Greenland. Greenland, of course, is still part of Denmark. It was granted home rule by the Danes in the '70's, I guess.

Q: Yes.

THOMPSON: Late '70's. Now at the time Greenland and Denmark joined the EC together, I think in 1973, but when Greenland was granted home rule, it held a referendum and left this, the only country to leave the EC, the EU. And that was just an example of how it does have many areas where it's sort of independent. In fact, now, the only role that Denmark has is in foreign policy and defense. Greenland has taken over the medical health and the police and the justice functions. But Greenland exists with a large Danish subsidy like a block grant, which keeps going the policy of extending to every citizen of Greenland the same benefits of every citizen of Denmark. No matter where you live, you have education, health, and that sort of thing. Greenland in the '80's still had the defense and security relationship with the United States, and this was established in the '50's, and that is a series of early warning stations across the ice cap and two large air force bases, Sondre Stromfjord and Thule. Our Defense Department considered all but Thule obsolete by the mid '80's and was interested in divesting themselves of it. So one thing I was involved in was negotiating the demise of these. Now the "eye sites," as they were called, these stations across the ice cap, had no intrinsic value to anybody else, and so they had to be closed. Two of them were on solid ground, but rather isolated. They're fantastic. I don't know if you ever visited one-

Q: I never visited.

THOMPSON: But it's like a hotel or something. It's like a womb. It's very much like a naval ship, you know, everything on board. You don't have to leave the facility, several stories high, with game rooms and commissary and cafeteria. The one thing that you couldn't get, you'd have to go down to the village for, and some of the guys did that. But the ones on the ice cap had nothing. There was no village, and I heard that there were some pretty strange people there. One fellow had been there for 15 years, and there was no way they could get him to leave.

Q: Good heavens.

THOMPSON: Anyway, negotiating their dismantling was not that much of a problem. Oh, technically, of course, we had to get rid of them. We couldn't leave them on the ice cap. And I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation the question of the bombers. There was, unfortunately, that precedent, that we had to take care of our garbage up there. Now as an aside, literally, we haven't taken care of all of our garbage. There were a number of American sites, going back to World War II, where there is still garbage. There are derelict bases. Some of this property has been put to use by the Greenlanders. There was a base on the east coast, I mean further north of the only town, Ammassalik, and the officers' club is now down in Ammassalik as a community club. I've been there. So they used the building, but the case of Sondre Stromfjord was completely different because that was the only major international airport in Greenland.

Now Greenland is an island, and you can say "on Greenland," but we never say "on Greenland" because Greenland is a country. We say "in Greenland," and it's very offensive not to say "in Greenland." In typing these notes, we will have to say "in Greenland."

It's possible for shorter-range jet aircraft to land at one or two facilities in the south, but the only place where a 747 or a DC-10 could fly is this airport. And we were, in effect, providing the international club for the Greenlanders. And we were paying for it. Our taxpayers were paying for it. So naturally we couldn't just walk away. We had a trilateral negotiation, with the Greenlanders and the Danes, over how we were going to downsize this and eventually leave. Well, we did. I mean, they had no choice. So we did leave, and it's theirs today. We provided certain things and undertook to clean up certain things, but basically it was a question of getting an attitude adjustment on the part of the Danes, because-

Q: Have they kept that airport open?

THOMPSON: The airport is open, yes, and it's being run by the Greenlanders, and I'm sure it's the Danish money that's there. And last I heard, the person from NORAD who had been one of the key people resigned as a colonel and went to work out there at the base.

I visited Greenland three times in 1989. The first time was for orientation, and the embassy economic officer and I, both Danish language experts, went off there and visited Nuuk, the capital, and then Ammassalik and another town in Greenland as well as one of the die sites and Sondrestrom. And in Nuuk, we met with the government. It's not very difficult to do in such small population. And the prime minister, then as now, is Jonathan Motzfeldt, and we had a good session with him. He told us about his, at that time, recent visit to the Vatican to meet with the Pope. He said that the Pope had prepared himself very well by doing his homework, and he said, "Mr. Motzfeldt, I understand you're from Greenland and that Greenland is the largest island in the world and that it is seven-eighths covered with ice." And Motzfeldt said, "Well, yes, Holy Father, Greenland is the largest Island in the world, and it is seven-eighths covered with ice, but you should realize that the one-eighth that is not covered with ice is larger than Norway."

Q: Touchi½.

THOMPSON: Yes. Yes, it's a large expanse and a society of slightly over 40,000 Inuit. It is small, but certainly viable. They have a problem in that there's only one export commodity now, and that's shrimp. The cod have disappeared. The few minerals they were extracting are no longer viable. So they're in a down period.

Q: Is there anything above secondary education there, or is there even secondary education?

THOMPSON: Yes, there is. There's full secondary education, and there's even a technical school at the university level. Many still come to Denmark.

Q: Yes, I remember in my time that many Greenlanders were there.

THOMPSON: But the other thing that they have that is contact with the world is the US base at Thule. And this has been the subject of a lot of the talks. I visited Thule twice. I went there first as part of the negotiations with the Danes, and so the Danes, Greenlanders, and Americans all met there and then went to Sondrestrom. And then the Danes and the Americans continued to the Pentagon. That was an exciting week, flying all over the Globe.

Q: I can imagine, yes.

THOMPSON: But the last time I went back was later in that year, and the Danish Parliamentary Defense Committee was making an inspection tour, and this was like an American CODEL, of course. They get together and get themselves an airplane and toddle off. And since they were visiting American bases, it was agreed that I would join them for the visits to the two bases. So I was in the States on personal business, and I flew up from McGuire Air Force Base to Thule and got there just before they arrived. And then we had our meetings in Thule, and we went and visited the site where the Greenlanders had been dislodged in order to build the base in the first place, and so on. And then the next day, they invited me to ride on their C-130 down to Sondrestrom. And that was very interesting. I knew most of the members, and there were several very important people on board-of course, the defense minister, but also the current defense minister, who then was in opposition, and others who are now in the Government who were very young people at the time. And it was a great view of the ice cap. There was mention made that perhaps it wasn't quite proper to fly so low over the ice, but somebody said, "Well, ultimately who's in charge?" And they said, "Well, the minister of defense, and he's on the plane." So the pilots-

Q: The pilots were good.

THOMPSON: Yes, they skimmed over the ice cap, and they skimmed alongside the icebergs in the ocean. It was a quite memorable trip.

Q: You really got a view of it.

THOMPSON: And then we got to Sondrestrom, and I had been there in April, and of course, it was bitter cold. This time it was in the '70's, and I and the parliamentarians went out and took a hike on very hot and dusty roads, and they have hot hills. It's quite unusual. Anyway, the upshot of these talks was that the Greenlanders got a little more access to northern Greenland via Thule, but this resolution came much after I left. The only relevant thing that was going on when I was there had to do, again, with the B-52 crash from 1968. So here it was 1989 and 1990. They finally did pretty much resolve it after I left the post, but it took over 20 years.

Q: It was a hangnail, I know, when I was there, too.

THOMPSON: And of course, it was just symptomatic of the artificial relationship among the three players, between the Greenlanders, the American, and the Danes. Were it not for the Cold War, that real estate would have held no interest. There were probably twenty of us, because most of the Greenlanders lived on the south of the Island.

Q: There is agriculture in southern Greenland, isn't there?

THOMPSON: There is. I mean, Greenland is, for example, self-sufficient in potatoes. There is a herd of sheep around Thule. They can grow vegetables; they can grow hay. It's a tiny place, relatively, but since it's such a large island, there's a lot of acreage. And I think if we are into a period of global warming, that this will quickly transform the Greenlanders' economy. When the Vikings settled there, around 900 or so, it was green. It was lush, and they farmed there. Eventually, after three or four centuries, the waters froze so that resupply from Norway was impossible, and they died out. There are artifacts. There's a stone building and other artifacts, so there's no doubt that they were there. The sagas give the record of it. And if it was warm 1200 years ago, it can be warm again, just like the wheat line in Canada moving north.

Q: We'll maybe see the grapes growing in Greenland again, who knows?

THOMPSON: That's right.

Q: Well, then in 1990, you came back again to the Department-

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: -and you were in INR, as you explained this morning, as Nordic analyst.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: Who was the director of INR at that time?

THOMPSON: Well, by then it was Bill Miller, Dr. Bowman Miller, who in 1980 was a German analyst and worked his way up, a very gifted person, academic civil servant, a fantastic operator in the bureaucracy of the State Department, understands very well the Foreign Service, a very good man for that job.

Q: Great. What were the major issues you had to wrestle with there?

THOMPSON: Well, quite simply it was the EU. That was the consuming issue for all five of the Nordics of the '90's. You had the applications by Sweden and Finland and then you had the Maastricht Treaty. Some countries felt that they should have referendums on the Maastricht Treaty in addition to the non-members who were having referendums on whether to join. Denmark had a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty and it was defeated, and of course that gave us plenty to do because then there was all this scrambling around. Actually, the French came quite close to defeating it, but they didn't. But the Danes did, and then the question was what do you do with the Danes.

Q: I was in Denmark when we voted to join the EU.

THOMPSON: That's right. Well, it was a very close vote, and the Danes, I think, were determined from the start to have another referendum, which is not really fair. Once you vote, that's it. You can't keep going until you get what you want. But they negotiated some understandings and got the so-called "Four Reservations."

Q: More footnotes.

THOMPSON: Yes. Denmark has opted out of many things and cannot participate in those aspects without another referendum. And right now we've paralyzed them with that very issue. So that gave us a headache, but that was resolved because by the next year the Danes did have a referendum, and they agreed on the four opt-outs, and so they stayed in the EC and, more important, participated in the EU. Meanwhile, there were referendums in the other three Nordic countries. Iceland never got to the point where it could even agree on considering applying. And the Norwegians defeated membership again in their referendum. When they did that, the Icelanders didn't even have to discuss it. And of course another important related aspect of this was the issue of aid in the European economic area, which was conceived to bridge the memberships of EFTA and the EC. And what it amounted to, since EFTA dwindled, since most of its members joined the EU, it amounted to Norway and Iceland, and they had joined. Switzerland didn't. But because of the EEA, which was agreed in Norway and Iceland, these countries abide by and benefit from the economic decisions of the EU, but they don't have a voice.

The Finns and the Swedes voted in referendums to go ahead on the membership and eventually joined the EU. But this was the number one thing that we were fighting about in those days. Another thing which I've already mentioned was the purchase of airplanes by the Finns. This was significant, but there were so many significant things happening involving Finland that any one of them is overwhelmed by any selection of the others. If you consider the postwar history of Finland as a quiet neutral trying to accommodate the Soviet Union, and then beginning already with the Gulf War with the Nordics, Desert Shield, the lead-up to the war and sanctions and all the Nordics got on board. During the initial troubles in the Balkans, the Nordics were much more supportive. And remember there was a coup against Gorbachev. At that time, all five Nordic countries were able to sign a statement for the first time commenting on a foreign relations issue. Then, of course, the Americans and some others thought that it was a very wimpish statement because all it did was express regret of developments. It didn't even mention the word coup. But one has to keep in mind that the Finns signed this, and it was about an internal development in the Soviet Union. So that was remarkable. Then when NATO formed the NACC, the North American [sic] Cooperation Council, which was with advice to allow the newly independent Eastern European countries to come to the NATO table, what country showed up but Finland-unbidden, though, but ready to participate. And then when you had these other NATO developments, Partnership for Peace, most principally, the Finns signed right on. So against this background, deciding to purchase American fighter aircraft was logical, was no big surprise. It was good economically for us. I'm sure that it was done politically. I think most Finns would acknowledge that.

Q: It was about this time, wasn't it, that President Bush made a trip to Helsinki? And did anything result from that, or did that cause you a great deal of work or extra work?

THOMPSON: No, that didn't cause extra work. I think President Bush, because he had this fantastic international relations background, having been ambassador and representative to the UN and so forth, understood these issues. I think he understood what he could say involving Finland and do it the right way. I would like to mention that I did get involved in another visit, and that was when Vice-President Quayle visited Helsinki in conjunction with opening our embassies in the Balkan capitals. And he went to Finland. I forget the sequence, but he would go a Baltic capital and cut a ribbon, and then he would go back to Finland and spend the night. Mrs. Quayle asked that we go over and brief her, and so a couple of Baltic experts and I, representing both the Desk and INR, went over and spent quite a lot of time with Mrs. Quayle and briefed her. I gave her a long briefing and all that, and she was very eager to know. She took a lot of notes and asked me questions, presumably passed it on to the man who is today running for President.

Q: Yes. Well, anything else of note from your tour in INR?

THOMPSON: No, I think that pretty well summed it up, and it gave me a chance to use the knowledge that I had gained about the Nordics.

Q: It would seem to me to be an ideal assignment for you in many ways. Well, that was followed by retirement in '91, I believe.

THOMPSON: Yes.

Q: And getting a little more philosophical, what was your view of the Foreign Service at that time? Would you recommend it as a career to young people?

THOMPSON: Yes, I think I would always recommend it as a career. I guess I'm as advised as many are that that's not the approach to the Department that young people take. And I think, speaking as somebody who works for AFSA, that it's very hard to reconcile the non-career approach to the Foreign Service culture, which I think even now presumes that people are in it for the duration, and that's something that has to be fixed, or the Department of State is not going to be well served by the Foreign Service. I think that I have advised a lot of people-every day I advise people-to consider a foreign affairs career. I think one of the virtues is that you can make the decision along the way, and by being able to pre-decide whether to stay in I think you have the freedom to see if you will stay in.

Q: Well, any final thoughts?

THOMPSON: No, I think I've pretty well summarized my experiences.

Q: I want to thank you, Ward, for your comments, which were extremely interesting. This is Tom Dunnigan talking on February 15th, 1999.

End of interview