Interview with Isabel Cumming

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ISABEL CUMMING

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Isabel Cumming at her home in Lakeland, Florida on the 15th of January, 1990, the beginning of the new decade.At the beginning of this interview, Isabel, I am going to ask you to say a few words about your background, where you came from, what your education was. Then finally, if you had a pre-information program career, what were you doing there; and whether or not you did — what was it that attracted you into the information program in the first place.After that, we'll take your career in sequence of your assignments and we'll discuss various activities that occurred during your incumbency in each of these posts.So will you start out by giving us your background, and education, and what it was that brought you into the USIA - or whatever the predecessor organization was, service of the government?

Personal Background and Recruitment Into USIA

CUMMING: I was raised in Boston, Massachusetts and went to Los Angeles. The Agency came out recruiting. I, at that time, was working for Security First National Bank in the Press and Cultural — excuse me, not Press and Cultural, that's Agency — in the Public Affairs Office. A friend of mine heard that the Agency was recruiting and said she thought

that this would be something I would be interested in.I went down to see the interviewers, was interviewed, and before I knew it, I was in the Agency. I joined in 1957.My background for this is I graduated from secretarial school in Boston. I attended banking courses in Los Angeles as I worked for the bank, and also courses at UCLA. I did not graduate from UCLA though. I went into the Agency as a secretary, and my first assignment was in Tehran.

1957: First Overseas Post: Tehran

Q: Which year was it that you went into Tehran?

CUMMING: In 1957, in May — actually May 1, 1957.

Q: This was about two years after the Shah had been reinstated basically at the courtesy of the US government.What was the main thrust of the US Information Agency program — USIS program in Tehran at that time? Can you give us some idea of what was going on, what we were trying to do, and how successful, from your viewpoint, you thought we were?

CUMMING: We did a lot in the information business. By that, I mean USIA — USIS in Tehran was a very large post. We had two motion picture officers. We had, I believe, three cultural affairs officers. We had an Iran- America Society director.Motion pictures was a big program because we had a production officer who made a film — a newsreel actually like the old RKO newsreel, and actually it was the RKO because he had a rooster crowing to start with.So we had a newsreel. We did a lot of distribution of American films. films that the Agency was making of course. Culturally, we had exchange programs with — I don't believe we had — we didn't have students, I don't believe, in those days. But we did — oh, we had cultural programs come in.I remember one thing we had was that the Air Force band came down and played. The Iranian Air Force band leader was invited, the Iranian Air Force — the whole band was invited to come, but the leader got up and led the Americans in the Colonel Bogie March, which the Iranians loved.I remember when the

Shah had divorced and married Farah Diba, she came to an opening when we had Red Nickels and the Five Pennies, and that was one of the cultural events we had.But we were doing a lot to build the country with our newspapers. The Iran-America Society was very busy in teaching English and just giving the Iranians a little bit of Americana.

Q: Were you in any way - you say supporting the Shah - were you trying to do an information program which would more or less sell the Shah and his government to the Iranian people? Was there any aspect of that in the program that you were undertaking?

CUMMING: Yes, I think so. The Shah was trying to get the country back - get the women out of purdah, and get the country back to modernity— he was giving back to the people a lot of his land that his father had taken away from the Iranian people.I remember when I first went there, we had a field media trip on the Iranian railroad for the Americans, and we went all the way down to Khorramshahr.I was invited to go on this trip. There was the PAO, the motion picture production officer, the information officer. We had a radio officer also, because we did a lot with radio, and our librarian.We stopped on the way down to Khorramshahr into these different towns to see what was happening in the country. We took pictures of them, and wrote stories that we could send back so that people could see what the Shah was doing for the people in the countryside.

Q: Was any effort made to justify or to publicize his land return program?The reason I ask this is that I gather later on in the Shah's incumbency, toward the end when he was on the verge of being ousted, that he had not only returned some of the former lands that his father had taken over for the crown, but he also had broken up a lot of the landed estates and had returned some of that land to the people. That, of course, had gained him a large number of enemies among the elite class. I gather he hadn't done anything like that at the time you were there.

CUMMING: To my knowledge, I can't say that he did. No.

Q: But were you publicizing his land reform efforts, or was much being done about that?

CUMMING: I can't honestly say because I can't remember, really.

Q: The motion picture program that you spoke of - you said that these films were being shown, both those that were produced in-country and those that were being sent out by the agency. How was this done? Did you have a field program, or are these things taken off to various field posts or —

CUMMING: They went right into the - we were able to put them right into the movie houses.

Q: Oh, I see.

CUMMING: The movie houses themselves. Then, of course, we did send them out to the branches because we had branches in Tabriz, Meshed, Khorramshahr and Isfahan, as I remember it.

Q: But you didn't have the equivalent of a mobile unit program that —

CUMMING: We very well might have. I think we did. It seems to me we did, but I can't say for sure that. I think we did, though, at that time. That's back in time — '57 to '60.

Q: Yes, I know. What was the utilization of the - what did they call it? What is the official name of the binational center out there, which is —

CUMMING: The Iran-America Society.

Q: Yes. What kind of clientele among the Iranians did — except for the English-teaching program — did you have at that time? Was it ever used?

CUMMING: It was the upper-upper people who came. Yes. I remember the English teaching because I taught English myself there.One thing we also did, which I forgot to mention — it is just coming to me now. We had a building, a very small building and it was like a storefront, but it was maybe three or four stories high across from the university. We had a marvelous exhibit officer who would put exhibits in the storefront. This building was used for the students to study because in those days they didn't have study rooms or study halls, as we know them in our colleges, and you'd see the kids just walking around the street with their books.We opened this building for them. This was used as a study hall, study rooms for the students. It was open all day and up to a certain hour at night, I don't remember the hours now. It was manned by an Iranian. Q: Was it pretty heavily used?

CUMMING: Yes. It was, very much so. We had wonderful exhibits in the window which caused people to stop — a lot of people to stop and see.I remember one distinctly was when Hawaii became our 50th state, and our exhibits officer had made a book the pages of which turned by using his tape recorder— and which was playing music very softly so you could hear it as you went by — Hawaiian music. But he used all his own equipment, because in those days we didn't have the sort of equipment they have today to do that kind of thing. They were things that he and his exhibit section made.

Q: I ask this question about the America- Iran Society and the utilization of the library in the main building because Gordon Winkler, who was the PAO there many years after you and Burnie Anderson were there, said that whenever he went into the library he never saw more than maybe a half a dozen people at any one time, and that most of the people who came to any kind of a cultural exhibit or cultural program seldom came to the center to see it.They came to the Cultural Exhibits that were put on in the Iranian performing arts areas and, he had great reservations as to whether or not the center was worth the money that was being expended upon it. I was just curious to know what kind of utilization it enjoyed when you were there.

CUMMING: This is the Iran-America Society itself. Well, then it was downtown — they built a new one just about the time that I was leaving, and I never did see that one finished. But the one downtown was used very much when I was there. It might have been in the time when people were interested in learning English because I was there '57 to '60, and I think Gordon was there later.

Q: He was there much later.

CUMMING: Yes.

Q: I think that was his last post.

CUMMING: Because the people were just — English was just becoming sort of a second language when I was there. It was French before that and, of course, the people would go back and forth to France all the time. But the English — American English, not English English, was becoming the second language, and I believe they were teaching it in the schools.

Q: Gordon was there in the last part of the "70s. I have forgotten whether it was '75 to '77 or '78 or whether it — I think it was '75 to '76 or '77. Something like that.

CUMMING: The new America Iranian Society was further up the hill. Up toward Shimeran, I think it was called in those days. But in my time it was downtown.The USIS was really right down in the heart of Iran when I first was there and the Iran-America Society was not very far from us. But then we had moved our office up closer to the Embassy and to the university — in my time.

Q: The one and only trip I made to the post out there was in 1971. You were pretty close to the embassy at that time.

CUMMING: Yes, at that time we were. Right.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to say about the Iranian period before we move on to your next assignment?

CUMMING: It was an exciting assignment. It was my first, and of course I guess, my true love of all my tours.

Q: Where did you go from Iran then?

1960: Seoul, Korea —In Time to be Present During Syngman Rhee's Ouster

CUMMING: I went to Seoul, Korea. Of course, that was in '60 or '62, which was not too long after the Korean War. So it was time to build the country back up again, and the American military was much in the foreground.

Q: I have forgotten exactly when Syngman Rhee was ousted.

CUMMING: It was right after I got there because the student revolution occurred just before I got there. I was in California when I saw the revolution on television and wondered what I was getting into when the students had revolted.I was there when Syngman Rhee left because it was my first — I was only there a matter of a couple of days and I was invited out to dinner. I went out with our information officer and his wife, Irv Sabloski, whom I think quite a few of you know, and a couple of other couples. All of a sudden the officers had to leave. When they came back they told us that Syngman Rhee had gone that night.

Q: Who succeeded him at that time? Was it Park?

CUMMING: No, it was a man by the name of John Chung — John Chang — who came for just a very, very short time. I think he was only there for a matter of just maybe a few months. Then Park Chung He came in.

Q: Park came in.

CUMMING: Yes.

Q: What was the nature of your program in Korea at that time and who was your PAO?

CUMMING: The PAO was Hunt Damon. We were doing a tremendous number of things with students. We had a big student program. We had a big Fulbright program, a lot of Fulbright teachers, professors.

Q: Who was working with the students primarily at that time?

CUMMING: Bernie Lavin, he was the center director. Bernie Lavin was really the coordinator of the students' program. He later became the cultural affairs officer and then the PAO. But there was a lot going on in the country because we had so much press. I remember we had so much press around us all the time.

Q: As far as you know, was there an effort — well, let me go back a minute.I know that during the early days of the program in Korea, USIS was actually acting almost as a public affairs section of the Korean government in that it was trying to build up Syngman Rhee. I don't know whether anything like that was taking place when Park —

CUMMING: No, because it was entirely different. You know, for a while there, we were under martial law. After Syngman Rhee went out, it was an entirely different group of people that came in.It was almost dictatorish. I remember coming to the office. We came with a bus, but we had the military out in front of our Embassy— the front of the Embassy was secured and we had to go in the back door.

Q: Was this the Korean military?

CUMMING: No, the American military.

Q: The American military.

CUMMING: Because we didn't know who was in charge of the government.The people who lived over at the Nasia Apartment which was, in those days owned by the — well, I'm not sure — now it's a military barracks, or billet. A lot of the Americans lived there. They couldn't even get to the office because there were wires on the street.So it was a different government that took over. Although we were trying to get in and find out naturally what we had, what we were working with, we weren't running it by any matter or means.

Q: I gather that USIS had great access to the press then at that time.

CUMMING: Oh, yes, we did. We had press from all over come to our office because the DCM was giving press conferences and the PAO was giving press conferences all the time because they were coming from all over the Orient. All the Americans coming in — they wanted to know what was going on in Korea.

Q: What about the Korean press? Where you dealing with them?

CUMMING: Oh yes, very closely. Very closely.

Q: Now, when Park — I don't know how soon he started to do so, but before very long he was pretty much dictating what the press could say.

CUMMING: I can't remember whether I — I was there from '60 to '62, and I think Park got to be more of a — well, of course, he was pretty much a dictator while I was there. But I think he became more so after I left. Because, you see, I went back many years later for another tour, for my last tour, and now I am thinking of both of these and I'm getting them mixed.But I think our information part was pretty well just dealing with Americans in the '60 to '62 — or foreigners, with the exception of the Japanese because the Japanese were not welcome in Korea in those times.

Q: But you don't think they were doing a great deal with the Korean press at that time?

CUMMING: We were trying, but how successful we were, I just can't say.

Q: Now, from your viewpoint, was Bernie Lavin being pretty successful in his dealing with the students?

CUMMING: Oh, yes. Yes. Bernie had a fantastic rapport and when I went back for my last tour — he was the PAO and he had people coming to him then who had been his students in the "60s. Yes, Bernie was probably one of the most popular Americans ever in Korea — all through Korea, not only in Seoul.

Q: The students at that time had been largely instrumental in the downfall of Syngman Rhee —

CUMMING: Oh yes. Absolutely. There was a picture in those days that was hanging in the Embassy, or in the USIS — we were in the Embassy in those days — of the Ambassador's car going through with Ambassador McConaughy and Tom Shoesmith, who was then the DCM and is now an Ambassador, going through, and the students breaking open for our American car to go through.

Q: What would you say was the attitude of the students toward the Americans at that time?

CUMMING: Oh, they were very friendly toward us, very friendly. Oh, yes, we all had friends with the students -

Q: How about the antipathy that prevails today?

CUMMING: Oh, no. Not a bit. Not a bit.

Q: So Bernie didn't have to contend with a very anti-American feeling in those days among the students?

CUMMING: No. Not at all. No, the students were - they were eager. They all wanted to learn English. They wanted to learn things about America. You would invite them to your home, they were more than willing to come. Anything Americana. It's entirely different today.

Q: Did you have a motion picture program too at that time?

CUMMING: The production part of this work was done in Sangnam. A man by the name of Lorin Reeder worked down there and was in charge of that operation. He was an old China (Far East) hand and knew the Ambassador personally from those days. As I said, he married a Korean and the reception was at the Ambassador's residence.Niels Bonnesen (and another officer) were stationed in Seoul and were in charge of distribution and the rest of the motion picture end of the program. They had offices in the Seoul Center.

Q: Well, are there any other observations that you want to make about your first Korean tour before we go on to other assignments?

CUMMING: It was very military. We had Eisenhower come to visit us — I mean he was only originally coming for four hours, but when he couldn't get into Japan he came to Korea, and had to spend the night in Korea. The military, of course, wanted to take care of the ex-general but the ex- general, who was then the President, was coming as —

Q: As a civilian.

CUMMING: As a civilian. (Laughter.)

So we had to work with the military very closely. But we had to anyway because the military felt that they were running Korea, and they were not. They did forget that there was an Ambassador there.

Q: What was the attitude of the general populace toward Eisenhower at that time?

CUMMING: Oh, my heavens. They adored him. Absolutely adored him. They had a motorcade that came from 8th Army, I guess that's where his plane landed. His car was secured there. He came and by the time he got to the main square where the Embassy was, the motorcade broke down because of the press of people. You have never seen anything like it.I have a picture here somewhere of the mass of humanity that broke down the motorcade. They just had to almost lop hands to break arms because everybody wanted to touch Eisenhower.

Q: A tremendous contrast to the attitude in Japan at the time.

CUMMING: Oh, yes, because Japan — he couldn't even get in. When Hagerty went in there for arrangements, they almost stoned Hagerty.

Q: I know. Hank Gosho was the one that was in charge of Hagerty's visit there.

CUMMING: That's right.

Q: I interviewed Hank last year just about this time. He put on tape his experiences on the day that the Hagerty party arrived.

CUMMING: Oh, that was sad.

Q: A big riot at the airport.

CUMMING: Well, it was entirely different in Seoul. The picture was so marvelous. We finally went out and we were standing up on top of our center building so we could see some of the crowd. Of course, the women all got dressed in their beautiful Korean dresses — and the colors. You could hardly see the cars. It was a nightmare for the Secret Service. They told us they just didn't know what to do because, of course, he was in an

open car.Here, these people, they just wanted to touch this magnificent man. No, it was a scene that I don't think we will ever see again.

Q: I am afraid we won't ever see again that kind of adoration in any country.

CUMMING: That's right.

Q: It is an entirely different picture today.

CUMMING: No, it was a magnificent scene.

Q: So, generally, you felt then that at that time, the Korean people did not blame the Americans very much for the manner in which Syngman Rhee ultimately governed the country? In other words, it was not an explosion in which the antipathy was equally toward the government and toward the Americans, but primarily, or almost entirely, against the Rhee regime.

CUMMING: Against the government. Yes. Certainly I did not get the feeling it was toward us at all. Not a bit.

Q: Even at the time you left, when Park had become the head and hadn't been there long enough for them to develop an anti-American feeling by virtue of the fact that we were supporting Park?

CUMMING: No. The only time anything — the only thing that I can remember now is a Korean saying to me, I don't understand how you people can now go for this man with the way he came into power. But I did not have the feeling they were against us at all.Oh, no. In those days, I felt that Koreans just thought we were the greatest thing that ever happened.

Q: Just as a matter of curiosity, was the “Great Dane,” Niels Bonnesen there?

CUMMING: Yes, he was, indeed. He was indeed. That's motion picture, of course. Of course, we had motion picture. Oh, yes, and then we had that — we did have motion picture, of course, because way down in a town outside Seoul we had —

Q: Yeah. Ridgeway was —

CUMMING: We had a man who was down there who produced motion pictures. (Reeder).

Q: That's right.

CUMMING: That's right. Of course we had —

Q: It may have been — Bill Ridgeway may have left Korea by that time. I have forgotten —

CUMMING: That wasn't his name. It was another man and he married a Korean.

Q: Well, Bill Ridgeway had married a Korean.

CUMMING: No, it wasn't Bill Ridgeway. This man married and had his reception at the Ambassador's house because he was married in Seoul and the reception was at the Ambassador's residence because McConaughy and this man, whose name escapes me, had served together somewhere in China. That's right, of course. That's been a long time ago you know.

Q: Well, is there anything further now that you feel that you would like to say about this particular time in Korea?I would like to ask you one more question, because the last time I was in Korea, until I went back in 1971, was when I went over there from Tokyo for two weeks in March of 1956. Of course the city was still in ruins at that time. Had it rebuilt fairly well by the time you got there?

CUMMING: Yes, it had. Mostly by shacks because — and even the countryside — there was very, very little war left. People would point out hills to you and say this was such and

such a hill during the war. But in the city itself, there wasn't any showing of bombing or war per se, but there were a tremendous amount of shacks just put up everywhere.There was one hotel which was the Bando Hotel which was across the street from the Embassy that was the only hotel and that was what we used for the press room when Eisenhower came. Oh, and the Chosen Hotel, which was a field grade officers billet at that time. The compound, too, was exactly the same where the Americans lived. It was the same when I went back in 1984.

Q: It hadn't changed any?

CUMMING: A few different houses— but the apartments were the same.

Q: Well, when I went back in '71 it was a completely different city. It had torn down most of what had been built prior to that time after the Korean War and reconstructed in a much more modern fashion. They were just starting the subway then.

CUMMING: Well, it was almost completed in 1986. It was fun to ride. It was brand new. We would just hop on it all the time. It was just wonderful because driving is horrendous.

Q: You had left — in fact, I guess you had retired before the Olympics hadn't you?

CUMMING: Yes, just. But I have a tape that they gave me of the Olympic Village that they were building. I was invited to go out and see the grounds.While we were there, they showed a tape of the many changes to Seoul and the Han River to build this city for the Olympics. In this film they also showed the many cultural programs available — opera, symphony, art exhibits, historic places, et cetera, and as I had attended the symphony they filmed and was actually in the “shot,” they presented me with a copy of this video before I left Korea.But the whole thing was — the building of the Olympic site, which was very thrilling to me because it was on the other side of the Han River, and what they had done to the Han River. Having seen the Han River 25 years ago which was our escape if we had to be evacuated. The only bridge over the Han River was out most of the time and

we would go down through the river and then up over to Inchon.Well, this is not the Han River today. They have bridges, they probably have twelve or fourteen bridges over the Han River now.

Q: Well, we can go into that a lot more when we come to your last tour which I gather was the Korean —

CUMMING: Korea.

1964: Assignment to Sweden

Q: Then where did you go from Korea?

CUMMING: I went to Stockholm, Sweden.

Q: And who was your PAO there?

CUMMING: Earl Dennis.

Q: Oh, yes.

CUMMING: He was a former dean of — was it Georgetown or George Washington?

Q: I think it was GW, but I'm not sure.

CUMMING: George Washington. George Washington. Yes. It was my least desirable post of all.

Q: From what standpoint, and why was that the case?

CUMMING: I don't really think you can tell the Swedes much.

Q: Well, I have gotten that impression but I have never been to Sweden. (Laughter)

CUMMING: We had a very small office. There was one cultural affairs officer, an information officer, a PAO and myself. I think we might have had ten nationals working for us.

Q: Did you have a center?

CUMMING: Yes, we did. Now where was our center? Let me — yes, we did. We had three women. It was a library. It was downtown — downtown being down near the shopping center, and it was up on the third floor, or something like that in a building. It was not —

Q: It was not at street level?

CUMMING: — not at street level. So you would have to know where the library was to go. We had a very small section of the embassy. We were in the back of the embassy.

Q: Was the library utilized to any extent at that time?

CUMMING: I personally was only in it about four or five times myself and when I was there I would say there would be a handful of people there. But apparently there was enough to keep three senior — and I mean senior women — they had been with us for many years — busy, and they were all librarian trained and educated, maybe with the exception of one. But certainly the two top women were, and they apparently had enough to keep themselves busy.I am not sure whether the cultural affairs officer or the cultural section used that. We had a big Fulbright program and we had two people — at least two working in the Fulbright program.

Q: You say you can't tell the Swedes anything. I gather you don't think that, not through any fault of the US Information Service, but just because of the nature of your audience that —

CUMMING: No, just the audience. We did a lot with the press because we had a young man — well, he was our senior national — was a very active man. We also had a motion picture woman. They seemed to be very busy giving out films and doing things with the press.But I, personally — to me it was a waste of my time being in Sweden, and that may be the wrong thing to say. But I just felt that I didn't have enough to do to keep me busy. We had the Vice President come. Of course, I was there when Kennedy was assassinated, which was a very sad time in our life. The Swedes were very, very supportive at that time. Oh, my.We had a candle march on the embassy that was one of the most stirring things I think I have ever seen in my life. It almost looked like miles of people walking toward the embassy with candles and just laying them down in front of the embassy and then walking away very silently. You know they didn't want anything said. Then at the service we had for Kennedy — the King and Queen were there. They made room for all us from the embassy to get in and then all the dignitaries and Swedes that could get in were there. But there were just hundreds of people outside standing.

Q: Well, a year later, the Agency made and distributed this picture called “Years of Lightning, Day of Drums.”

CUMMING: Light and Drums. Yes.

Q: Was that shown there while you were there?

CUMMING: I did not see that. As a matter of fact, I had to ask to see that film and I think I saw it in Washington. I had never seen it overseas. It came out, but it was never at a post where I was at the time. I had finally requested to see the film somewhere, and I think I saw it in Washington — when I was in Washington.

Q: That's funny. I thought it was distributed quite widely among the posts.

CUMMING: It might have come to Sweden, but after I left. I went to Washington after that — I did not see it at a post, and I don't remember why now. But, I think I saw it in Washington.

1966: Washington — The Television Service

Because I had worked when I was in Washington — maybe it was when — because I went back to Washington after Sweden, and I worked in television (Old Post Office building) at that time because I was working with Alan Carter.

Q: Who was the head in TV at that time?

CUMMING: Alan Carter was the head of it.

Q: Oh, he was?

CUMMING: Then. Then, after Alan left it was — Oh, who came in? It was somebody that came in under the Kennedy clan.

Q: What year was it?

CUMMING: No, this would be in — I went back to Washington in '64 to '66. There was a young motion — Bob Spears, who is now the Democrat — you know, you see him on television — I worked for Bob Spears.

Q: Oh, Bruce Herschensohn?

CUMMING: No. It was — Bruce was there but it was —

Q: Bruce became the head of that outfit from '70 to '72 —

CUMMING: Yes, but that was after. But there was a young — I think it's the young man who made the film.

Q: Well, Bruce made the film.

CUMMING: Of Days of —

Q: Yes. At the time there was a contract.

CUMMING: No. But this was — anyway I can't remember. But Bob Spears came in and I worked for Bob Spears. Alan Carter was the head of the television office at that time.

Q: Bruce Herschensohn made the film. At the time that he made it he was a contractor and I think George Stephens, Jr. was the one that ordered it.

CUMMING: That's the name I'm trying to think of. George Stephens, Jr. Right.

Q: Bruce made it.

CUMMING: Yes.

Q: Which is rather interesting because Bruce is the rightest - about as far right as you can get politically and here he was making a film of Kennedy who was the consummate Democrat.

CUMMING: Yeah. Right.

Q: — personally.

CUMMING: Right. Right. Exactly.

Q: Well, so then you came back to Washington and spent two years in Washington?

CUMMING: Not quite two years. About a year and a half. I worked in the Television Department.At that time I was able to go to California and recruit secretaries to the Foreign Service to California, which was very exciting for me because I had been recruited myself in California. And I got a lot of publicity for the Agency because many people that I knew who were in radio and the newspapers remembered me or I called them and said who I was; they gave us a tremendous amount of publicity.They were using me to show what could happen to somebody if they joined the Service. We got some terrific gals.Then the second year I went back out again, or they sent me back out. That was fun for me because I recruited, and at that time, I was 100 percent for people going into the foreign service. I was very happy doing it. So we did get some good people.

Q: About how many people do you think you recruited in total in the two years?

CUMMING: Oh well, the problem is, you know, you can - we recruited - let me put it this way, we recommended probably in the two years - I would say we recommended probably about 50. But, by the time the Agency got around to bringing the girls on board, some of them had gone on to other things, or they had changed their minds because the Agency took so long in calling them up or saying, you know we are interested in you —

Q: And the security —

CUMMING: And the security, of course. But there were just fantastic gals. Because the one thing about going to a place like California is that so many of the women have already broken away from home. So they've made that initial break so that you know if you get them in the service, they are not going to get there and then think, what did I do, or you know — they get lonesome — or they can't cope — mainly can't cope because they have already made the break away from their home.So we did. We got some wonderful people and they came in. The sad thing was some of the ones we got were sent right away to Saigon. Saigon was at its worst — or best at the time.

Q: A vacuum cleaner that was picking everybody up at that time.

CUMMING: It was unfortunate because, of course, we lost quite a few of the gals that would have been terrific because after a tour in Saigon, the Agency was not what they wanted, which was sad.Because I myself, personally, would not go to Saigon. I was very much against the whole thing. I was then, by that time, being assigned to Poland.

1966: Warsaw, Poland

I'd go down to Personnel and I'd say, “Zorthian is after me again, please don't let me go.

Q: I know that you were probably pretty lucky because most people who refused to go to Saigon when they were asked to take an assignment there were told they had to resign from the Agency.

CUMMING: From the Agency. Exactly. Exactly. Because Barry — this is what Barry said to me. He told me, he said what Barry wants, Lyndon gets. I said Lyndon doesn't get this gal. So I would just walk away from him. When I'd see, I'd avoid him because he was in Washington all the time recruiting or doing things.But I had met too many people who had gone and they would tell some of the stories of Saigon and the tales — and thank you very much. I didn't want that. I didn't need it. Neither did my family. But, anyway, I went to Warsaw.

Q: Probably the fact that you were going to a post which most people didn't consider a very desirable one, helped you stay — (Laughter.)

CUMMING: Helped me stay because when I was in Warsaw, one of Barry's men came to Warsaw as one of our inspectors. He was an old German hand then, and he is now retired and living in Naples — not in Naples — in Napa Valley in California.

Q: Gerry Gert?

CUMMING: Yes, Gerry Gert. The first thing he said was, “I haven't seen you ladies in Saigon.” I said, “Please forget it.”

Q: I interviewed Gerry just about a year ago.

CUMMING: Oh, did you?

Q: So then you went to Poland. Who did you say was your Ambassador?

CUMMING: Well, Gronouski was the Ambassador. Ambassador Gronouski. That was Lyndon's — he was the former Postmaster General.After that, of course, Walter Stoessel, who had been in Moscow. But I only served with Ambassador Stoessel for about three — possibly three months. I later served with him in Bonn. But it was Gronouski most of the time I was there.My PAO was Bob Haney for the first of my tour, and then Wilson Dizard for the second part of my tour.

Q: What kind of a program did you have in Poland? It must have been pretty restricted.

CUMMING: A lot with the press. John Trattner was our press officer, who later went on to be the spokesmen in the State Department. John did a lot with the press.But we were quite limited, although we had a big student program and we sort of beat the woodwork and found that there were a lot of students in — there was a Fulbright program — and then we found American students in other programs.So we brought them into the Embassy to try and — our cultural affairs officer — to try and get all the students together and so we could, you know, know who was there because some of them —

Q: These were American students?

CUMMING: American students. (End of tape)

Q: When we ended the last tape you were cut off in mid-sentence so you can pick up from there. You had said that you had a lot of American students who were there on their own

and that you, more or less, wanted to keep track of who they were and what they were doing.

CUMMING: And what they were doing. Some of them were afraid to come into the embassy because, of course, there were guards at the embassy and they kept track of everyone who came in and wanted to know what you were doing.So, some of the students didn't want to be connected with us — us meaning the embassy or USIS, although we were the Press and Culture there. We were not USIS per se. So they would just as soon not come. But a Cultural Affairs Officer tried to keep track of them. When we had programs, we would always invite them to come so that they would be in.The program, as you say, was limited. I remember I was in an automobile accident there and I spent three weeks in a Polish hospital. I wanted to do something for the hospital and the staff. So I asked the PAO if there wasn't something I personally could do that would not handicap anybody. We had a group of books in the library — medical books — and I was able to present this to the hospital from the USIS. Of course, they were thrilled to death.The head of the hospital was a man who knew our former PAO, who was “Pic” Littell, our area director at the time. They had been very good friends at the time he was there.But we were quite restricted in Poland as to the — the senior officers, of course, had “friends” and they would see them socially more than anything else. You could go to their office of course. But they had to be careful. You had to be careful. So it was a very hard situation.We were followed wherever we went. When we went to the Poznan Fair, which was a big thing of the year, the road was open all the way and you could follow the map directly, but any other time you went up there you had to be diverted because they wouldn't let you go through certain parts of their country.Certainly, you couldn't go through anything that was military. You couldn't be near anything military.So we were allowed to Krakow all the time, which was wonderful because the whole embassy, or a group of us, would go down there where we could ski. But it was a hard post.

Q: Did the USIS have any contact with the Polish students or was that just too difficult under the circumstances?

CUMMING: Unless it was through the American students that had — I am sure our young assistant cultural affairs officer, whose name is Dave Fischer — he is now an Ambassador, I believe, he was a State Department officer working for us — I am sure he did. His Polish and his wife's Polish were flawless, and they were young enough so that I am sure that they had contact with the young students.But we did not; we were advised not to have anything to do with the Polish people at all. I was friendly with one of our nationals — she and her husband — and one day her son came in and wanted to see his mother and his mother wasn't there. We said we hadn't seen her. We never did see her again.

Q: The police picked her up?

CUMMING: That was it. One of the officers — and I think it was our agricultural officer — told me that he saw her working in another agency, but in a Polish Agency. And she wouldn't even look at him when she saw him, because she was afraid.

Q: I have often wondered what kind of a program you could carry on in that kind of a country?

CUMMING: We had exhibits. We had a wall in the front of the Embassy and we had boxes out there and we were allowed to put exhibits out there. But I don't think we were allowed to put exhibits anywhere else. You know as far as in the city or in — or whether we could do it in the schools or not.You know, as I said, we had Fulbright professors. We would get their mail for them at the embassy and they would come in and pick up their mail at the embassy. This is arranged through the State Department — we were allowed to get mail.Then when they all left, we mailed their books for them through the APO. This was a

program we had for them. So they could get their things out of the country. Otherwise they couldn't.

Q: I suppose you didn't have much contact with — the USIS didn't have much contact with the Polish press then either.

CUMMING: John did. John Trattner did, yes. And probably, probably the PAO.I don't know that I ever saw a press man in our embassy. I think our officers would probably have to meet them somewhere, because every single person that came in the embassy was noted — there was a lot of coffee consumed in those days. You would meet people at coffee bars; they wouldn't come into the embassy because they would be stopped by the MOs out there.

Q: And if they were, they would be tagged and later persecuted.

Incident in Warsaw

CUMMING: Well, we had an experience while I was there. I don't know if this is of any interest, but one of our USIS officers who was in London at the time was married to a Polish woman; I think he had met her in Poland. I met him before I went to Poland. They were working in Washington. She had two daughters, I believe, by her former marriage.They came back to Poland on a visit. He came into the embassy as an American just to tell us that he was in town, but he was visiting his in-laws. His mother-in-law and father-in- law had one of the best bakeries in Poland, not too far from the Embassy. I had met her. Of course she was Pole by birth, but an American citizen. I saw them occasionally.She came into the embassy one day and it was when the officers were all up at a meeting and she wanted to talk to the PAO and she was very hysterical. So I locked up and went upstairs and went into the conference room and asked if I could talk to Mr. Dizard. He came out and I told him that she was downstairs and needed help.What had happened was that the husband and the daughters had left town. The Poles knew this and so they went after this woman, who is now an American citizen married to an American,

and started asking her questions about what her husband was doing.There was something that had been going on in London. I can't remember the story now — this had hit the press of course — they wanted all kinds of things from her, and they were going to do this — and they were going to destroy her parents' bakery.So we had to get her out of that country that night. They used me to do this. They came down and asked me to take her out for a cup of coffee. So we left the embassy and I said, “Where are we going for a cup of coffee?” She said, “No, you are to take me home to the house; I have to get my passport. They want to get me out of Poland tonight.” So I took her home.

Q: You weren't followed? CUMMING: Yes, indeed I was. The minute I went outside of the embassy — my car happened to be in the back of the embassy — no, my car was where I normally parked it but I brought it down into the back of the embassy to pick her up. That was it.When I went out, I saw the Mercedes — the black Mercedes. You could always tell because there was always a blanket in the back seat and there were two people in the front seat.So I asked her — I said, “What is this? We're being followed.” She said, “I'm sorry to get you into this. Yes, we will be followed,” and she told me the story at the time. She said, “We have to get my passport and I have — they want me to leave the country tonight.”

I drove her home and I went up to the house; of course I did not have diplomatic immunity. Nobody except the officers had diplomatic passports in those days. There I was with a Corvair, which was the only Corvair in town, so my car was very well-known, and when I came out to my car — she stayed in the house, because she was going to be picked up later and I had her passport in my pocket.When I got to my car, this man came up and said “wadny samahod,” which means beautiful car. I thanked him and all the time I'm getting into my car praying that these men weren't going to stop me, that nothing was going to happen. I rolled my window down so I wouldn't be impolite and I said, “Do you want to buy it? I'm leaving town pretty soon and I'll be glad to sell it,” just to make conversation.They followed me to the embassy where the PanAm man was waiting to pick up her passport, get her tickets and make arrangements to get her out of the country that night. Then I went

home — they told me to go home, that I wasn't needed any longer. I was followed all the way to my house.I was going out that evening to a farewell for somebody in the embassy and when I got to the party, which was at the admin officer's home, I said, “I'm sorry, but I am being followed, and there are cars out in front of your house. I hope you don't object.” When they went out and saw the amount of cars that were out there — I mean nobody could believe it.But in the meantime, they got this woman out. This is the sort of thing we went through in Poland in those days.So it was a very — it was not a post that we could do much and, I mean, look what is happening today. I am sure Steve Debrow is having a ball.

Q: I'm sure it is a fascinating place to be today all right. What years were these?

CUMMING: '66 to '68. We were not allowed to go to the Baltic. We were not allowed to go to - a lot of places were off limits to us. So we went out of the country every time we got an opportunity.

Q: I guess I was in Thailand at that time. So, then, where did you go from Warsaw?

1968: To Rome

CUMMING: I went to Rome for four and a half years.

Q: That's quite a change.

CUMMING: I think they felt I needed a break. I think the Agency was being kind to me.Of course, we had a lot going on in Rome. I worked for Alex Klieforth, and Alex Klieforth was the right-hand man of the Ambassador. So we were very, very involved.

Q: You say he was the right-hand man. What was Alex doing that was so substantial for the Ambassador? What was it that the Ambassador wanted to —

CUMMING: Well, anything having to do with the cultural program or, of course, the information program. The Ambassador relied on Alex and the Ambassador would have

Alex do a lot of things that probably some of the embassy people should have been doing. But he thought so much of Alex that he asked him to do —

Q: Do you think in addition to trusting Alex then that, maybe Alex's reputation rubbed off on the post? He was also greatly trusted in the US Information Service.

CUMMING: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. The Ambassador was not very happy with one of our officers, but Alex could handle that and so he would go to Alex. He thought the world of us and it was — he used us all the time for — and I mean use. I say use in a very nice way. I don't mean — I think you know what I mean —

Q: Utilize your services —

CUMMING: Utilize the services of the program and the officers. We had a big library there, a very active library. We had a lot of programs at night in the library.We had a very active cultural program and, of course, our information section was very active. It was big post for senators and visitors, as you can well imagine, including our President Nixon. He was there was at least twice, if not three times; he was there at the time Nasser died and that was quite a thing in Rome at that time.

Q: You mentioned that there were some things you thought the Ambassador had USIA do that were really the duties other officers in the Embassy should have done. Do you have any particular examples in mind that you can think of?

CUMMING: Well, I can think of one. When the DCM was gone, Alex Klieforth would act as DCM and usually an Ambassador doesn't call on a USIS officer to do that even though Alex was probably one of the highest ranking officers, if not the highest ranking officer outside of the DCM, at that time.Alex was very politically savvy as well as culturally and informationally which I think the Ambassador recognized and utilized him for that.

Library of Congress

Q: At an earlier time, USIS had opened a library over in the labor section of Rome. This was back about '61 or '63 — I guess it was '63 when Ed Shector was there as the deputy PAO. Later I know they had to close it. Do you know whether it was open at the time you were there or not?

CUMMING: I don't think so. The library was just across the street on the Via Veneto.

Q: Well, I know about that one, too.

CUMMING: Yes.

Q: But the one in the labor residential area was specifically designated too attract and influence the labor population.

CUMMING: The laborers?

Q: USIS was trying to make this special contact with the labor population.

CUMMING: It sort of rings a bell in the back of my head that there was something at the time. But whether it was still there or not. I don't know. I don't think so.Maggie Hayferd was our librarian and I think she would be the type who would want to have everything in her control.

Q: And who was Alex's deputy?

CUMMING: Don Shea for part of the time and then — Don Shea most of the time and — oh gosh — I have forgotten who the man who came in after Don Shea — because Don Shea went back to the States and I can't remember. I think it was at the time when Don was getting that illness — Parkinson's disease.

Q: He died last year.

CUMMING: Yes. Yes, I wrote to Johnnie.

Q: Yes. He deteriorated quite rapidly in the last couple of years.

CUMMING: That's what I heard.

Q: Do you have anything else you want to say about Rome? Anything you think is significant? Do you think we were carrying on a very successful program there then?

CUMMING: Oh, yes, I think so. We had a very good program.That's the time when they shut down a lot of the offices. But that was due to the BALPA, or whatever it was called in those days. We lost the post in Sicily and we had the one in Naples.The young man from Sicily came up to Naples and I can't remember — I think they had closed some others, but I don't remember if it was at that time or before, but we did — and then when Jack Shirley went in they opened them again.

Q: That may have been at the time when they lost the one over in the labor sector of Rome too. I don't know if that was the case.

CUMMING: It might have been. Yes, because they closed the offices. Of course, in some of the offices — like I understand, we had a national running the Trieste office, and then of course an American went in later on and we didn't — the offices, they were much smaller in the days that I was there. But they were very effective. We had fantastic national employees. They were as good as any American.

Q: I suppose you had pretty extensive utilization by the Italians of your branches and your —

CUMMING: Oh. yes. Yes. Absolutely.

Q: Where did you go after that? Was that when you —

Tokyo: 1974

CUMMING: I went to Tokyo after — I went to Tokyo and I worked for Alan Carter in Tokyo.

Q: I want to ask you a question, and I don't know whether you want to answer it. What Alan did, of course, was largely to dismember the old list of our contacts and the library programs and install this — what was it he called it — it was a forerunner of the computer operations.

CUMMING: Oh, yes. Computer. What was it called? What was it called?

Q: Anyway, anyone wishing to obtain information had to bring it up t on the monitors —

CUMMING: On the monitor — right. I give Alan his due. On the first staff meeting I ever attended he had a group of young men in that establishment in Tokyo and I'll tell you they were a scruffy looking bunch of people. I had just come out of Rome where people wore ties and shirts and coats.

Q: I am surprised to hear that because everybody in Japan in my day wore suits and coats and ties —

CUMMING: Well they were there in — I tell you — I never saw — I can't believe some of the outfits that some of these young men were wearing. Alan himself was sitting in shirt sleeves.But they were a solid group of young men. They were really sharp. Paul Blackburn was one of them. At that time, Blackburn was the Tokyo Center Director.

Q: He was a JOT in Thailand at the time I was there.

CUMMING: I give Alan — he really had some young men — and he let them talk. He gave them an opportunity to really discuss. He didn't always say we can do it or I agree, but he

did give his staff the opportunity to throw out ideas and if he felt they were good, we would work on them.

Q: What did you think was the attitude of the Japanese staff to Alan's renovation or changes in the USIA program — USIS program — and did you have any feedback as to what the Japanese public thought about it?

CUMMING: Well, the staff was mixed. They either liked him or they hated him — loved him or hated him, let me put it that way, because Alan was the kind of person that did not like a cluttered desk. He didn't like papers on his desk and there was just, you know, you put it here and it went out there, and as soon as it was “there” it was supposed to be gone.He would walk through the office and he would just — if there was too much, he would just go like that (indicating with an arm swipe), and wipe all your papers and all your books on the floor. He just couldn't stand it. So, they either liked him or they disliked him.Alan was liked in the community. I saw both him and his wife socially quite a bit and they had wide variety of Japanese friends; he seemed to be very popular and very well-liked.Alan is a different type of person, as people know, and he is not a bashful man. I had worked for him before so I had known what to expect. I mean, he goes right in there. They did not object.Of course, the Japanese — we all sort of towered over them because they are a smaller race of people, although that's not true anymore because they're getting taller and taller. I think they are eating our type of food. So we always felt that we towered over them. But I think they admired Alan. He traveled a lot so that he went out into the boonies and he saw what was going on in the post and he seemed to care.He called on his people a lot in the post, he also went visiting so that he knew what was going on. He had his finger on the whole program. He had a wonderful information staff.Harlan Rosacker — I don't know whether you know him from —

Q: I know him slightly. He is now a personnel officer for the Agency.

CUMMING: He is now a personnel officer in the Agency. He was our information officer and he had a wonderful rapport with the embassy, with the Ambassador, as did Alan. They relied on Harlan and our office greatly for the information.

Q: Who was the Ambassador at that time?

CUMMING: There were two political men.

Q: Mansfield, did Mansfield come during your term?

CUMMING: No. No. Mansfield was not there. The last one was a TWA — the man who had been with TWA and he was being criticized when they were having that thing about TWA — I think he was from Hawaii originally. I can't remember their names.But he never — I remember meeting some TWA people and I said, Oh our Ambassador — and they said, “We would never know it because he never comes to the TWA office.” He divorced himself entirely from his job, because there was — his previous job — and just was the Ambassador to the country.

Q: This was again in what years?

CUMMING: It was '75 to '77, somewhere like that, in the late "70s.

Q: Because Alan was in —

CUMMING: Alan left and went to Saigon because there was another man who came who has since retired — Bill Miller — Bill Miller. He was my PAO also.

Q: I interviewed Bill last year too.

CUMMING: But, yes, because Alan went to Saigon. Right. Right. He got the word from Washington that he was going to Saigon.

Q: The reason I asked if he was there that late in the program is because he was in Tokyo the last time I made a trip out there officially, which was in December 1971. So I guess he was still there later because there was a Japanese local who had been on my staff when I was in Tokyo in the early "50s and who had been transferred to Nagoya; her office mate in Tokyo was the woman who is now my wife — a Japanese woman.So when she was brought to this country as a local employee trainee, we invited her to stay with us. The staff in the Nagoya office had very little use for Alan Carter and she said whenever the word was out that Alan was coming down, everybody spent the afternoon before picking up all the papers off their desks. locking them in the safe, leaving the desks clean; then when Alan left, they brought them all out again to work.

CUMMING: Well, I can believe that because this is the way he operated. He did not like — he would come, and if he saw papers on the desk, he wanted to know what they were doing.

Q: Yeah.

CUMMING: He didn't care whether you were a Japanese national or whether you were an American. I mean he just would not — that, to him, was just — of course, the building was rather weird — I thought it was kind of fun except for the downstairs. But you got sort of used to it the way he painted it. But we also had an exhibits officer who was very modernistic and, of course, he would do all this too. It was all changed when Bill Miller came because Bill came and revamped the whole thing.But I think it was — because I was in Rome I think until '74 — and then I went to Tokyo and I was there just two years and then I went to Belgrade after that.

Q: Was John Clyne in Tokyo when you were there? He would have been the executive officer.

CUMMING: No, but John Clyne was in Washington. John Clyne was the deputy personnel officer. Wasn't he deputy to -

Q: I think he was head of Personnel's East Asia section.

CUMMING: Yes, okay. I met him in Washington at that time. He had been in Bonn and when I was going to Bonn he then gave me some information on Bonn.Then John went back to — but John Clyne had been — no. I'll tell you — Fred Hawkins was my —

Q: Oh, Fred Hawkins.

CUMMING: Yes. You know him from the USIA.

Q: Yeah, very well. John had been to Germany as Deputy PAO before he went to Tokyo. Then he went to Tokyo for a second tour where he was executive officer again. Then he came back to Washington and was put in the personnel assignment which he thoroughly disliked —

CUMMING: Yes. He hated it.

Q: Finally they said, well, you can go back to Germany if you want to but you will have to go back as executive officer.

CUMMING: Yes.

Q: He said, well, I would rather do that than stay here, so he went back to Germany. That is where he was when they diagnosed him with his cancer.

CUMMING: Yes, exactly. But I met him in Washington when he was working with Angie.

Q: I'll go off the record here momentarily. (Off the record.)

While we were talking about Tokyo before we temporarily went off the tape, do you have anything further that you want to refer to as taking place in the Tokyo program while you were there? I know we had a big Fulbright program.

CUMMING: You know my mind is blank. I can't even think who our cultural affairs officer was. I can't even think in my mind where they sat. I've got the whole information section, but I can't even — and the exhibit section. Isn't that strange.I'm sure we had Fulbright. I'm sure we had a student program. But my mind is — sorry. I can't tell you, but I am sure Alan Carter would be working with students and we would have had a program because he was very youth-oriented. I'll tell you.

Q: Yes. He got that from the Bobby Kennedy/Ted Sorensen connection.

CUMMING: Yes because he was very much for young people and for youth. So, I am sure we did. My mind is — I am sorry it is a total blank now.

Q: Do you have anything further that you want to say about Tokyo?

CUMMING: No, I don't think so.

Q: Then you went to where? To Belgrade from there?

1976: Belgrade

CUMMING: I went to Belgrade. Worked for Terry Catherman and Eagleburger was the Ambassador for part of that time. There was a man (Silberman) before that whose name escapes me and he was not very popular with the Yugoslavs so —

Q: Was he a political appointee?

CUMMING: A political appointee, and he is now a judge in Washington. He went to Washington and went back to a law firm. I think that's where he came from. A friend of

mine works in the law firm. She was his secretary. But he is now a judge so he is no longer there. I can't remember his name at all, but he was a very — you know, a dynamic man.Well, as a matter of fact, he is the man who wrote that letter which Anderson picked up, which said, if you'll excuse my expression, “kiss my ass,” and the man sent the letter to Jack Anderson. I remember Terry Catherman getting a call from Washington and wanting to know if this was true.You know, it's kind of a low blow when you get something like that from Jack Anderson's office. But he was an interesting man, there's no question about it. But then Larry Eagleburger came.The relationship between the embassy and USIS when I first went there was very, very bad.

Q: That was when those political appointees were —

CUMMING: When the political appointee was there. He had fired the DCM. The USIS had a very bad inspection trip and it was a ghastly, ghastly thing.

Q: Who was the PAO when the bad inspection reported?

CUMMING: Well, Terry Catherman was the PAO for my whole time and he was new at the time the inspection came out. But it was something he fell into. But it was like the embassy and USIS were “we and they” or “us and you” — you know, there was no cooperation.But it finally changed when Eagleburger came out because he said, “I want absolutely none of this. We are all we.” So then we started working with each other. I did not feel that we, being USIS, was not working with the Embassy, but it was the Embassy who was not working with USIS.We were not in the Embassy per se. The building was divided so that we were on the corner, the Consular section was in the center, and then the Embassy. We were not allowed to keep anything secured in our office. We had to run back and forth with this all the time and lock it up in an office we had in the Embassy.So that we were sort of the orphans on the outside. But then when Larry Eagleburger came out, it was entirely changed. Of course, Eagleburger had been in Yugoslavia at the time that Yugoslavia needed — they always felt that he was the “godfather” of their country because

he was there at an economic time that was very important to them and he was the former economic officer.So he was very well loved by the Yugoslavs, which did not hurt the American Embassy one bit.

Q: I think from what you said when we were off tape that Eagleburger had a great deal of respect for Terry and —

CUMMING: Absolutely. Absolutely, and Terry Catherman and I sat in the DCM's office when his DCM was gone. He had Terry come up to act as DCM and as a matter of fact, in the interim (between Silberman and Eagleburger) they wanted Terry to come up there, but the State Department would not have it. They said that USIS officers did act as DCMs, and I think this was in between Larry and the previous Ambassador.So they took in the economic officer. But when Larry Eagleburger was there and Larry Eagleburger wanted a man to sit in the DCM's office it was Terry Catherman. Both of us sat in that office for a week.

Q: Did he work pretty extensively -

Eagleburger work with USIA —

CUMMING: Absolutely. He relied on us considerably. Terry went with him to the — when he was calling on the cultural people or calling on anything pertaining to USIS he always took Terry with him and he was on phone or Terry was in that office.

Q: How many years were you there when Eagleburger was there?

CUMMING: I was there for three years and I think Eagleburger was there probably about two years. Just probably — a year and a half to two years. Something like that — right.

Q: Who was the Ambassador after that then for the rest of your tour?

CUMMING: One of our — well, Eagleburger was there when I left. But incoming was — oh dear, what's his name? He was a man I knew. He had been in our Eastern European office.

Q: You mean the USIA —

CUMMING: Well, he was a State Department officer and he had come over to work in our Eastern European office.

Q: Davies?

CUMMING: No.

Q: Not Dick Davies? CUMMING: No. Davies was my area director when I was in Poland. Then he went to Poland as the Ambassador and he — oh, there was a picture of him not very long ago riding in a little Yugo car.No. I knew him very well. He came out to Yugoslavia when I was there and I laughingly said, “Are you going to be the next Ambassador?” and all he did was wink, you know. It was not to be known at that time — and then I met him in Washington. I think he was being held up for some reason, but he was constantly having his physicals to keep up and he did go.

Q: Would have been held up politically by somebody like —

CUMMING: Politically. Politically, yes. Politically, but he — oh, dear, I know you know him. He was our area officer. Shoot, I believe he was a State Department officer. He came to work in the Agency. But Eagleburger was still there when I was there and I think then he went back to Washington and then —

Q: Well, of course — although Yugoslavia was a Communist country it was the one that was mostly broke long ago with the Kremlin, and in my few visits there, I found it a much more liberal society than any of the other East European countries. How did you find it?

CUMMING: I had no problem in Yugoslavia at all. The only time I ever felt that I was being followed — of course, having served in Poland, I was conscious of this, is when I went down to Sarajevo — drove down to Sarajevo to a wedding. Our young branch PAO was married and we went down.Coming back I was being followed by the MOs and I always said, well, they are just going to make sure I'm not getting lost. They didn't do anything. They just followed but I was very close to a military grounds and I think that they just wanted to make sure that I didn't go on them.I never felt when I was in Yugoslavia that I was in “Communist” country. I traveled greatly. I think I did more traveling in Yugoslavia than any other country and I never once, with that exception, felt I was being followed. We had embassy plates on the car so they knew exactly who we were and —

Q: What about the association of USIS officers and the staff with the Yugoslav people? Did they have pretty free access?

CUMMING: Absolutely. No problem. No problem at all.Terry Catherman had lots of contacts; his wife is an artist and she was into the art scene and they knew, I think, every artist in Yugoslavia and were invited to all the arty programs, all the arts shows.The art people were very — of course, you know the art people can be the sort of troublemakers of a country, but they were very friendly to the Cathermans and the Cathermans to them. But Terry had a wide range of contacts and friends and his language ability in Serbo-Croatian was so good that he just could go anywhere at all. He had no problem.

Q: Was this true of not necessarily the language but more on the contacts — was this true of other officers like the press attach# and —

CUMMING: Our press attach#'s Serbo-Croatian was also very good and he had a string of friends and many contacts.So, USIS was very, very well thought of in that country. We worked as the US Information Agency. We were not known as the press and cultural office and the Ambassador used us all the time. If he needed one of the officers to go with him, he would always call on a USIS officer, unless it was a political situation and

then of course he would take his political officer.Because Mark Palmer, who is now an Ambassador, was our political officer and his language was also flawless. He and Terry were very, very good friends and so Terry was very much into the political situation.

Q: How about the cultural attach#? He must have felt a little bit overshadowed if Terry and his wife had such an extensive contacts among the arts community —

CUMMING: Well, the cultural attach# was not — he had a lot of arty art friends, of course, but he was more the cultural representative and — I can't remember — his name just escapes me, but you would know him. He is a marvelous man.He has a British wife — an English wife — and he was more into the music scene than the art scene. But he knew all these people also. I think it was due to Dottie's painting because she, herself, is an artist, that put the Cathermans into the arts community.I now remember, Ed McBride was our cultural affairs Officer (Mary Rose Brandtt was our ACAO). I don't want it to sound like Dottie and Terry Catherman did all the cultural work, particularly in the arts. Ed was very much into the scene and ran the show; Dottie, being an artist, was very involved in the art scene but as a painter and artist. We had a Center, which Ed ran — plus all the regular cultural affairs work that goes on in a country.

Q: Do you have any other comments about Yugoslavia now?

CUMMING: It was a good assignment. I liked it.

Q: Yugoslavia is a beautiful country.

CUMMING: It is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. And people don't realize — there is a lot of beautiful, beautiful scenery in that country.

Q: The Dalmatia coast is just unbelievable.

CUMMING: Oh, its gorgeous. It's beautiful.

Q: If you have any interest in archeology, it's a treasure chest also.

CUMMING: But it has some of the most interesting churches anywhere in the world, gorgeous mosaics that have been gouged by the Turks. You know, history — just history — history.

Q: Oh, I know. Of course, there is one city there that still looks pretty much like a Turkish town — Mostar, up north of Dubrovnik. I served in Turkey for a couple of years and I almost thought I was back in Turkey —

CUMMING: Turkey, when you went there. Right.

1979: Back to Washington

Q: Well, shall we go on now and — where did you go from there? To Germany?

CUMMING: No. I went to Washington. I had another Washington assignment.In Washington, I worked in the foreign service personnel office, and I was there for a year and a half until the Bonn assignment. I worked for the foreign service personnel officer. I was a special assistant to him.

Q: So it was to the man who was in charge of the foreign service personnel part —

CUMMING: Personnel officer. Right.

Q: Who was that at that time?

CUMMING: Gosh. He went to Africa as an assignment, the first one and the Deputy was Garcia — not Garcia — he had a Spanish name. I think that both of them have retired or left the Agency. I don't remember, but they were both foreign service officers.

1980: Bonn, Germany

Well, anyway, I was there for about a year and a half and then an assignment came up to Bonn; Tom Tuch was in — I think he was VOA at that time and he was going to Bonn as the PAO. He was the deputy director of VOA and so I had asked for the assignment and then talked to him so I went out to Bonn and I was there for three years.

Q: Was Tom there all the time?

CUMMING: All the time. No. Alex Klieforth was there when I first got there. Of course, I had worked for Alex before, but I think it was about six weeks — eight weeks maybe at the very most when Alex was there.Then Tom came and he was there when I left. Of course, Tom Tuch was a fantastic officer and Walter Stoessel was the Ambassador for the first part of my time.I don't remember how long Stoessel was there but I had known him from Poland. I think after he looked his staff over, he decided that Tom Tuch was just about one of his number one men and so from then on Tom worked very closely with the Ambassador.If he didn't write all his speeches, he certainly wrote three-fourths of them and many, many times he would have another officer write a speech if it was on economics or a subject that was not Tom's bailiwick per se. But Tom always got it to look it over. We worked very, very closely with the Ambassador's office.

Q: Did that also rub off on the rest of the staff too?

CUMMING: Yes. Yes, it did. The information section our press attach# — Walter Kohl and Harry Radday — was probably a lot busier than what he cared to be and, of course, we — our office — our library would do a lot of research work for the Ambassador also for his — he traveled a great deal, but he was into that country like you couldn't believe. He knew just everything about that country.

Q: What were our press contacts with the German press? Was it —

CUMMING: Oh, yes. Absolutely marvelous. Well, of course, you know Tom is German-born (and Walter Kohl and Harry Radday speak German)...

Q: Yes, I know he is.

CUMMING: He worked in Germany and he knew so many people in Germany and his language was, of course — that was his number one language. Also, our press attach#'s German was quite good and — yes, we were very close with the press and the press was — relied on us a great deal. Of course, we got into Worldnet — what was it —

Q: Mr. Wick originated the Worldnet program.

CUMMING: — the program and so we got into that while I was there. That is where it started as far as I am concerned and we did a lot with that.

Q: You did?

CUMMING: A lot.

Q: That is very interesting because, of course, that innovation has come under extensive criticism on the Hill. In fact they have cut out the money for it for this year on the grounds that it isn't being used anywhere.

CUMMING: Well, we have had a lot of programs going and we got into it very deeply in Germany. I don't think we did anything on my last assignment. I don't remember. Maybe we did. I think we did. Yes, but in Germany — yes, that was were Worldnet became —

Q: Did any of the German television stations use any of the Worldnet programs?

CUMMING: I'm sure they did. Yes. Yes, I am sure they did because we got involved in that quite heavily. Wick, of course, came out a number of times to visit us and —Q: He was a great traveler.

CUMMING: Yes, he was with his four security officers and his bullet proof vest.

Q: And his bullet-proof raincoat?

CUMMING: Well, maybe he had a bullet-proof raincoat too, but he sure — when he was wearing a suit you could tell he was wearing something underneath it.

Q: He had a bullet-proof raincoat which Maurie Lee tells me he insisted on wearing when he was in Israel and the temperature was about 120 degrees —

CUMMING: That was so heavy nobody could pick it up.

Q: What else do you want to say about the German operation?

CUMMING: It was a very active operation of course. We had a big, big student program there. We had a very active cultural office and our information office. We had a beautiful library, but it was moved from the second floor up to the floor that we were on — up to the fourth floor, and how many people came into the Embassy to use our library I am sure not very many.But in those days, toward — we were so security conscious and by that time — we were so security conscious, you couldn't get into the embassy.I remember coming to that embassy as a visitor and they wouldn't let me in. The Marines just slammed that sliding door in my face. By that time security got to be a real problem, so I don't think our library was the most accessible thing except for probably research and anything that we would get in writing or we could do for them.

Q: You did have a few Amerika Hauser at that time didn't you?

CUMMING: Yes, we did. We had an office in Stuttgart — oh gee, I am trying to think of all the places we had —

Q: I know you had one in Berlin.

CUMMING: In Berlin. Oh, yes, we had a big office in Berlin because we had our PAO conference up there. And Frankfurt, and there was another one, but I can't remember — I am thinking of — trying to get all my cities straight. Stuttgart, Frankfurt, and there was one down in Bavaria.

Q: It might have been Munich.

CUMMING: Yeah, Munich, of course. Of course. And Berlin and Hamburg — we had a big office in Hamburg. So we had quite a few and they were all very active branches.

Q: At one time Germany had about 40 Amerika Hauser.

CUMMING: Yes. I think this was all we had and we had Americans in all of them. It wasn't like in Italy where we didn't have Americans in all our places. We had Americans in every single one of them and very, very active posts. Almost small mini-head offices.

Q: I know we had — I don't know where — I can't remember were it was, but Al Hemsing, after he had retired from the government, was offered a job as a contract employer to go back and run one of the Amerika Hauser which had been turned into a German-American binational center.

CUMMING: Oh, yeah. I was there when Hemsing came back. It was down — where was it?

Q: I can't recall. He was there for about three or four years.

CUMMING: Yes, he was. He was and I can't remember — but, yes, he was. He came back and he was on his own, but he did come up to see us at the Embassy and one of the officers would have to tell you. I don't remember where — I can't remember where it was, but yes he did indeed come back.

Q: Because Al was German-born, too, and he spoke bilingual German.

CUMMING: Yes. Yes.

Q: German was his native language.

CUMMING: Yes.

Korea: 1984 - Final Tour

Q: Well, shall we go on to your next post now, which was what? Was that Korea?

CUMMING: That's Korea. That was Seoul. I went back to Seoul. I had planned on retiring after Germany and I decided to take another assignment and I went back to Seoul. I'll tell you after 25 years, it was quite a shock.They say you never can go back, but I went back to a country I didn't even know, because all the shacks that I had talked about or mentioned previously were now beautiful skyscrapers. The Bando Hotel, which was a very little six story thing, probably the highest one, is now no longer, but there is the Lotte Hotel, which is 15 or 20 stories high.The Chosen Hotel is eight times the size of what it was. It's fantastic. The Embassy was in a building that we had built when I was there. USOM had built two buildings up near the capital: USOM was in one side and the other was for the Korean government.The USIS is in the old Embassy building and we are in the whole building instead of just one floor. We have a marvelous library which is on one floor. It's on the second floor and it was used very, very extensively. Of course, now the libraries have grown so that you can listen to tapes, you can listen to records.

1985: Korean Student Takeover of USIA Library

They have all kinds of things that you can do in the libraries today. Of course, I was there when the students took the library over and stayed in there for a whole month — I mean —

excuse me, a whole weekend, which was quite an experience and one I didn't need in my last tour in the foreign service.

Q: What year was that?

CUMMING: I left the service in '86, in May, and it was in '85. It was just before I left. The —

Q: That was when they were protesting the Chun government and American support for that government.

CUMMING: Kwangju. Yes. USA being down in Kwangju and what we had done down there. They came in at noon. Duane Davidson, who was the deputy PAO, and I were the only two in the office. Our information officer was there, but he was on the other side of the building. I got a call from the librarian who said, “I have 60 revolting students down here. What will I do?”I didn't quite comprehend what he was saying. I said, “I'm sorry Mr. Kim” — I think his name was — everybody is Kim — and I said, “I don't understand you.” He said, “I'm not kidding you. I have got 60 revolting students.” So I repeated it and Duane heard me.So I said here, you talk to him, and so in the meantime I went and locked doors because I thought if this is true, let's not have them come upstairs. But they weren't interested in doing that. They were too busy locking the doors downstairs and moving the shelves around so that nobody could come in and get them.They were already in the office and all they wanted to do was stay where they were. They were going to camp in the office and our library because they had a wonderful place. Because they had all the paper they wanted with our mimeograph paper down there and they could put all the signs they wanted to put up on the window. They had the best propaganda outfit going you would want to believe.I called Bernie immediately and the security officer; the Marines came down, the security officer came down and, of course, the police were notified. Bernie and our political officer came over and they tried to get to the students. We had a way of getting into the elevator — well, we could only do it from — the elevator would not stop on the library floor so that people could not use the elevator. But we could stop it on the

second floor.So anyway we got a way to talk to the students and tried to get them out, but they were only interested in getting the Americans to apologize for what they had done in Kwangju. Of course, Bernie and the political officer spent most of the time talking to the students and trying to explain to them that, you know, we hadn't done what they said we did. But they would not move and finally they wanted to talk to the Ambassador. We told them they could talk to the Ambassador if they would come out of the library, that the Ambassador would talk to them.This was on Friday afternoon and we finally got them out on Monday. So we all worked around the clock and just stayed there and tried to keep Washington informed and the Korean government and make sure that the Koreans didn't trash our embassy — our building because that wasn't what we wanted.We wanted the students to leave quietly. Well, they said they would leave and finally when they left, they, by that time, had made headbands for their heads with sayings on them. Our papers, our crayons and paints were being used and they snake danced out rather than coming out quietly as they said they would. But they went out to waiting buses that took them away.

Q: But they didn't tear up the center —

CUMMING: Yes, they did.

Q: Oh, they did?

CUMMING: They didn't tear it up per se. They pulled — one of the radiators was broken and — but they really didn't — we thought they would do a lot worse. The rugs either had to be — either replaced or — I think cleaning them was too much. I think we had to replace the rugs because they were — we were sending food into them and we had coffee going into them because we were trying to be kind to them to show them that we were trying to get them out. But they didn't really do the damage — they didn't tear it up — they didn't damage a book.

Q: They didn't hurt the books?

CUMMING: Not a book. Not a book was broken. As a matter of fact, they put all the books back on the shelves. But the librarian had to close the library because the students didn't put them back in the right shelves as you can well imagine. They weren't in order — but they did put them all back on the shelves. No damage. They weren't destructive.

Q: So they were in there then from —

CUMMING: From Friday noon to Monday. Yeah, it was a pretty hectic weekend.

Q: There was one occasion in Korea during which a student demonstration trashed the library.

CUMMING: Down in — I believe that was down in Pusan. It was one of our provinces. I think it was Pusan, but it might have been another office that they got in and trashed it, but they did not in Seoul.From then on we knew that things became a bit downhill with the students. We didn't have the — there was a lot of tear gas around. The students were protesting but not to the extent that they are doing now. They certainly didn't come to the embassy or to the USIS office to the extent that they did before.

Q: I understand that the students now are just completely rewriting history and blaming the Americans for everything —

CUMMING: For everything. Yes, we are to blame for everything. They did quiet down during the Olympics. I was not there for the Olympics; I had left. But that — they are now entirely different. But you wonder what they are after because they have everything in that country now.

Q: Well, I don't know what they are after. They are highly left wing-oriented now which is an interesting situation at a time when the USSR — the center of Communism — is experimenting with perestroika —

CUMMING: Is breaking —

Q: But the South Korean students have been highly influenced by the philosophy of the North Koreans —

CUMMING: The North Koreans — of the North Koreans, and of course they want to go up to North Korea and we have — we did have some infiltration from the North Koreans across the Han River.One evening I was going home and on this day I was driving all the traffic was stopped because they were looking up at the sky. I looked up and saw a plane. Well, you never see a plane flying over Seoul and that was the time that a North Korean plane came down and, of course, you say they looked after them and they were following that plane until they got him landed.So it was that North Korean pilot —

Q: Wasn't that North Korean pilot a defector?

CUMMING: It was a North Korean defector that came down.

Q: Oh, I see.

CUMMING: Yes, it was.

Q: That occurred, I remember the event — it seems like it was only two years ago, but it may have been earlier.

CUMMING: Well, it happened when I was there. But Korea has grown — they are very anti-American. They are very anti-American military.Our military is very well — I mean there is no question that we have got lots of military there because you see them if you go shopping — and the Americans, of course, pay everything in dollars today. When I was there before we couldn't spend a dollar. You had to use the currency of the country. Now everything is dollars.

Q: Even on the local market?

CUMMING: Even on the local market. You can buy anything you want with the dollar and they want your dollars. Before they wouldn't take it but now they will. They want it. They don't want Korean money.As I was — felt that I should be working in the currency of the country and they would take it but they would tell you next time — like your maids, they didn't want anything but American money because they —

Q: The embassy has no objection to your using it?

CUMMING: Apparently not. No, because I questioned it — as a matter of fact, some of the people in the Embassy — which I object to very strongly — were paying their maids not only the money but also with coffee every month and with sugar and with things that Koreans couldn't get from the economy. This was commissary stuff. I don't believe in that at all.I object to it and I had a hard time getting a maid because they would say to me well you don't pay in coffee. But I said no I don't. I just didn't think it was right that we would do that.But this a new era. It's a very well-developed country. It's a beautiful country now. When I was there 25 years ago there wasn't a tree in the place. Under Park Chung Hee they had Arbor Day and they planted a tree every year — every family went out and planted a tree and now the place is just gorgeous with trees.

Q: Well, of course, the Japanese denuded the forests completely during World War II.

CUMMING: Yes. Yes, they did.

Q: The first time I went to Korea shortly after the war - early 1950 — I know there were no trees or no forests anywhere.

MS . CUMMING: You would see the little men going up with their A-frames picking up anything they could find that would look like a branch. Well, it's not that way anymore. It is gorgeous with the trees.

Q: I would like to go back. As I said, the last time I was there was '71; that's nineteen years ago.

CUMMING: Well, I think you will find every American businessman, every American business company is there. Of course, all the big Polo shirts, the Liz Claiborne, you name it. They are all there because they can get the people to work and do good work and that is where everything comes from.

Q: I'm sorry to see the Koreans having gone down the drain as far their attitude towards us is concerned.

CUMMING: Well, I don't know what caused this except that I think they have been infiltrated because the - certainly the American Embassy and USIS certainly have worked hard but they have really taken an anti - anti-attitude; they just dislike us intensely.

Q: A friend of mine who is now PAO there says its rough. They can't do anything to dismiss the dislike.

CUMMING: Who is the PAO?

Q: John Reid.

CUMMING: Oh, yes. That's the man - I was trying to think of John Reid. Yes.

Q: Was he there - did he come before you left?

CUMMING: He was there six weeks - just about six weeks before I left. He had asked permission from the Agency and the Agency gave him permission to study Korean before assuming PAO duties. The Ambassador didn't like the idea of him coming and learning the language in Seoul.

Q: The Ambassador took him out of it (language training) before he completed his studies.

CUMMING: He wanted to live on the economy, but that was a no-no as far as the Ambassador was concerned. But they did let him come and he worked - he lived in the compound - Compound 2 — not in Compound 1, but in the Compound were we all lived. He then lived in Compound 2 where the PAO's home was and then he didn't finish his training per se. But his Korean when I left was absolutely wonderful. The Koreans said he spoke flawlessly at that time.

Q: John was a real -

CUMMING: He was a real linguist. Yes.

Q: He was a real linguist. He learned Thai. He learned Vietnamese. He learned Chinese and he said the only language that ever stymied him and he just couldn't make sense of it was Arabic. He was PAO in Beirut. He was there when they bombed the Embassy.

CUMMING: That's right. I remember now because of the pictures of him. Yes, I did.

Q: His face was covered with a huge bandage.

CUMMING: We talked about that. Oh, yes, I worked for him for about six weeks and I corresponded with him after I retired.

Q: Well, John now is having some physical difficulties. I believe he is considering retirement after Korea.

CUMMING: I am sorry to hear that, because it would be the loss of a fine man.

End of interview