

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN F. MELBY

U.S. Foreign Service Officer, 1937-55, with assignments in Juarez, Mexico, 1937; Caracas, 1939-41; Moscow, 1943-45; Chungking and Nanking, 1945-48; and office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, 1949-55.

Ontario, Canada
November 7, November 14, November 21, & November 28, 1986
by Robert Accinelli, University of Toronto

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
October, 1988

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN F. MELBY

Ontario, Canada
November 7, 1986
by Robert Accinelli, University of Toronto

[1]

ACCINELLI: Professor Melby, I wonder if you could begin by telling me something about your personal background before entering the Foreign Service?

MELBY: Yes. I was born in Portland, Oregon. My father was there and he was with the YMCA. I have really, oddly enough, no recollection of our living in Portland, or subsequently, when we moved to Columbus, Ohio. I remember almost nothing about that; by that time I was seven or eight years old. But there is this one little item that I think in retrospect has had a good deal to do with my total absence of memory of those years. When I was five years old I was in a very bad

automobile accident in which I was thrown through the windshield of the car and fell back in it, and the facial nerve of my face was

[2]

cut. My face was very badly deformed during those early years and there still is some effect of it even at this late date. So I think that actually during those early years I was consciously trying to block out any memory of anything in those days. I have noticed this in recent years that I don't show up in any of the family photo albums or anything like that. Obviously I was censored out of it, because there was just one photo that gave me a clue to what had happened. There was one picture, a snapshot that escaped the censor, in which my face looked like an orange that had just been crumpled.

And so I have no recollection of going to school in Oregon, and I have no recollection of going to school in Ohio either. Many things happened there, but I think I must have been just sort of a queer outcast in those years. So, really, my memory as a child picks up only when we moved to Brazil. My father joined the International Committee of the YMCA.

ACCINELLI: How old were you when you went to Brazil?

MELBY: It was 1920, so I was seven years old. I was born in 1913, and that's when my memory begins to pick up. We lived in Rio [de Janeiro] for five years; I remember

[3]

a great deal about Brazil and so on. It was kind of a glamorous life. Not only did we know a great many people there, members of the diplomatic corps, and Americans living there and so on, but Rio itself was a pretty exotic kind of place.

I particularly remember the man who was the Egyptian charge d'affaires, or minister, I guess he was. He was an old bachelor that used to come around for dinner at the house once in a while, and many years later when I was in the [Foreign] Service myself, I actually saw him in Cairo. He was then retired from the Egyptian service and was managing a cigarette factory, of all things.

The other thing that made Rio kind of interesting to me was that the American school in Rio closed the day we arrived, and there wasn't anyplace else for kids to go to school with the American closure. But there was a Methodist mission school there, Colegio Bennett, which was a girls' school, and because of the closure of the American school, they took a half-dozen foreign boys in the school with this horde of Brazilian girls. All the instruction was in Portuguese. In retrospect I think it may have been the best school I ever went to, not even excluding the University of Chicago, which

[4]

was a first-rate school. I think I realized very early in the game in that school, that with that horde of women around, my choices were two: I could either be submerged by the girls or I could organize them. So I decided to organize them, and that I think is when I became a politician. I've been at politics ever since.

ACCINELLI: Well, how did you organize them?

MELBY: Well, I was a monitor in various classes, and I was in charge of them. I kept grade books and so on and it was made pretty clear that I was in charge. I think the experiment of having foreign boys in the school is something that after my time was not repeated. We were considered to be, I think, too much of a disruptive influence, but I am one of the few surviving living males who actually graduated from a girls' school.

ACCINELLI: When did you graduate?

MELBY: 1927.

ACCINELLI: So you completed your high school, the equivalent of a high school?

MELBY: No, grade school.

[5]

ACCINELLI: And, of course, by then you were fluent in Portuguese.

MELBY: Oh, yes, I was fluent in Portuguese at the end of six weeks. That's when children learn languages that way. We came back in 1927 at the time when the Y was beginning to retrench in its operations abroad, cutting back on its foreign staff, its American staff abroad. So we came back to central Illinois. My father became general secretary of the Y in Bloomington, Illinois, the job that he held until he retired some 25 years later. By that time he had been a Y secretary, I guess, longer than any man alive. So, in a sense, central Illinois was a bit of a let-down. But I think I've always been pretty flexible and took it in stride. It was the Depression, the bottom of the Depression, which incidentally didn't personally touch me or my family although it was many years later only that I learned the sacrifices my father had to make to make sure that we were not touched by it. It was all around us. This was the corn belt area in central Illinois, and even in those days corn was selling for only twelve cents a bushel. So, we were very conscious of the Depression.

[6]

I graduated from high school in 1930, from Bloomington High, which was in those days one of the best high schools in the United States. When I think of it, it's the only public school -- in the American sense, a public school -- I ever went to.

Then I went to college at Illinois Wesleyan University which also in its day was a very good small university. It had the kind of caliber and quality of faculty that it has never been able to have since. So many people were available in the Depression days that Wesleyan could get its pick pretty much, those whom it wanted.

ACCINELLI: Did you specialize in any particular subject or subjects while you were there?

MALBY: At Wesleyan my main interests were mainly in the arts really; in college I majored in French literature, and I had a minor in classical Greek, having had four years of Latin in high

school. When I got out of college, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I played with the idea of going to law school but there wasn't much money around at the time, so for one year after I got out of college, I read law in a law firm, one of the prominent law firms in Bloomington.

[7]

It was out of that experience of reading law, though I would not have traded it for anything, that I realized the law wasn't for me. You have to remember that in those days there was no such thing as public interest law. If you were a lawyer you went to work for the corporation, the utilities and so on and so forth, and that I couldn't stomach. My father was sort of a socialist by training and upbringing and I guess that is what I still am. At least, the farthest right I've ever gotten is leftwing in the Democratic Party. I've never really basically changed that particular orientation. But I still remember one day in May when I was sitting there reading law, and I just asked myself, "Do you want to do this for the rest of your life?" Well, the answer was "No."

Well, with an international background, an interest in politics having been just a way of life in our family -- it was something we talked about at the dinner table all the time -- I wanted something as far away from the law, as I saw it then, as I could get. That's when I went to the University of Chicago. I had made up my mind I was going to study and get my degree in international relations, and I was going into the Foreign Service. Oddly enough, I made it. I took the exams in 1937 for the [Foreign]

[8]

Service, at a time when there were about 5,000 people taking them, of whom 37 of us passed the exam.

ACCINELLI: I wondered.

MELBY: There hadn't been any exams given for a number of years, during the Depression; they had just cancelled them. I was in the first class after the Depression. So, I not only wanted international relations and so on, but I really gave up my interest in the arts and so on, I mean as a practicing matter. I went into what was then a new discipline at Chicago, namely the social sciences. The world having cracked up around us, and everything we'd ever been brought up to believe and so on being no longer valid, I wanted to find out what the social sciences could tell us about what had happened. I went to Chicago at a time when they had a remarkable faculty. Then, as now, the University was limited to 7,500 students, and it's never really gone much beyond that, with a student-faculty ratio of about one to four students, one faculty member for four students, so that you got to know people who were preeminent in their fields in the social sciences in a way that today would just

[9]

be impossible. I mean, it was Charles Merriam who was the chairman of political science then, and the sort of thing would happen where I'd come out and he'd say, "John, I haven't seen you for several days, let's go have a cup of coffee." We'd sit and talk politics and...

ACCINELLI: Were there any other professors with whom you struck up a relationship or who made strong impressions on you?

MELBY: Quincy Wright.

ACCINELLI: Oh, yes.

MELBY: Fred Schumann. I had been on a study Harold Gosnell was doing on the precinct captain in Chicago. In one sense, that one year may have been the best job I ever had in my life. It was interesting, and it made me a convert to machine politics, because it worked in Chicago, and Chicago was the last place to lose it. Which I think is a pity.

ACCINELLI: Why is that?

MELBY: Because the precinct captain is given blocks of 200

[10]

people for whom he is responsible, and he's got to produce for them or he loses his job as a precinct captain. He is the average citizen to whom City Hall is a place out there that doesn't exist really. He is the average citizen's contact man for City Hall. He's the man who can get the garbage picked up, the streets cleaned, lights turned on or off, whatever it may be. And I think we've lost that quality of a personal sense of involvement in government in the states. We used to have the machine politics the ward organization gave you. The Nash-Kelly machine in Chicago was a beautiful organization, and it had little more corruption involved in it than one would expect. And it made Chicago function. In an odd sort of way, Richard Daly, who in a way is the last of the big city bosses, also made Chicago function, and did it on the same basis. I've regretted ever since the break-up of the big city machines.

ACCINELLI: Well, the rate of political participation among citizens also was greater at that time. The machine really had to get out the vote. And we've seen in the most recent election how many voters are turned off on politics.

[11]

MELBY: If the precinct captain didn't get the vote out he lost his job. And he was a patronage appointment. Therefore, it was up to him to see that he did perform and function and so on. He did give the average citizen the sense that he had something to say about his own life.

ACCINELLI: What part did you play in helping...

MELBY: I went out interviewing precinct captains, and I interviewed them all over Chicago, all the way from the stockyards district up to the Gold Coast. And I never had a difficult experience with any of them except in Little Sicily, which is just north of the river in Chicago. I went three times trying to interview captains there, and I never even got in. Finally, somebody came up, because there were three-generation Italians living there, who didn't speak a word of English, and finally one of the local bosses in Little Sicily came out and said, "Sonny, if you know what's good for you, you'll go away and don't come back." And I knew he meant it. So, we never did cover Little Sicily.

By the time I finished that in 1937, I passed the exams for the Foreign Service, and was appointed to the Foreign Service in August of '37.

[12]

ACCINELLI: You said that your father was connected with the YMCA. Was he a clergyman, or...

MELBY: No. No, actually he and my mother both came from St. Paul, Minnesota and they were married in 1911 and he at that time was working for the telephone company in St. Paul. Actually, his father had been a Norwegian Baptist preacher, it's true. But he never went into the ministry. He apparently was threatened at one time with tuberculosis in the days when that was the kiss of death. He had started at the University of Minnesota but had to drop out, so he never went to college. He and my mother went out to Portland on their honeymoon, and after the Minnesota winters, I guess, they were so entranced with Portland that they just decided to stay there. My father went out and got himself a job, and he first started out as the Portland Y's business manager. It was there that he made the connection with the Y which would lead eventually to his involvement with the international committee, because it was a rather remarkable group of men there. Ivan Rhodes was there and Cooper Meehan and Harry Stone and Albert Greeley, all men who became top men in the national YMCA. Ivan Rhodes had left Portland

[13]

about six months before we did. He went as general secretary for Ohio, and he finally asked pappy to go with him, come with him. That's the way we went to Columbus, and in Ohio my father was in charge of college and university liaison work, which meant that during all those two years that he was there, he was traveling most of the time.

Generally it was probably pretty hard on my mother but if that's what father wanted to do, that was what pappy was going to do. But he had always had in mind that somehow he wanted to get into the foreign field. I guess at one point there was a possibility of his going to China, Jinan, in Shantung Province, but that didn't come off for some reason or other. Then the job opened up in Rio, and in the five years we were there he was boys' work secretary really for South America. It was the boys' work angle of the Y work that interested him most all during his life; even though he became a general secretary, it was boys' work that he cared for. The Y today, of course, bears very little resemblance to what it was in those days. Now it's become a poor man's country club.

ACCINELLI: Exactly. Yes, health and fitness.

[14]

MELBY: Yes, and that's fine. I mean society's changed, too, but he would have been very unhappy in the Y under these circumstances. He was at heart a social worker.

ACCINELLI: How did he come to his political convictions, or orientation? Would you describe him as a socialist as well in his views?

MELBY: Oh yes, sure, very definitely. For many years, he had known Norman Thomas, had connections with the Socialist Party, and of course, in Minnesota too, you know, with the labor tradition.

ACCINELLI: Yes.

MELBY: And that goes back a long, long way in Minnesota. So it was a natural involvement with him.

ACCINELLI: Was the household a religious one?

MELBY: No. I never belonged to a church in my life really. I don't know what we did before Columbus; I think we belonged to a community church. In Rio we belonged to the American Church, which was nondenominational. My father had been brought up a Baptist. What he did in Bloomington was, he looked around to see where his

[15]

secretaries in the Y were members, and nobody was a member of the Presbyterian Church so he joined that. He became an elder in the church too, of all things. But I remember going to the Presbyterian Church in Bloomington a couple of times and the minister there was an old cornhusker out of Nebraska whose idea of preaching was to bellow. He was a real fundamentalist, and after a couple of times of going there, I said, "I'm not going back." I haven't been to church since then. Mother never went to church either anymore. She couldn't take the Bible Belt atmosphere, and the cornbelt, and actually in the end my father just stopped going to church too. He was a Christian in a sense; he believed in the teachings of Jesus and so on, and he practiced them, which cost him a good deal over the years in a sense because that's not a popular thing to do, particularly in organized Christianity. But none of us, certainly from Rio on, went to church at all.

ACCINELLI: Did the family encourage a sense of service? Your father was obviously involved in an occupation that involved a service. Was it simply assumed that you would move into something of that sort or was it actively encouraged, or was it in the air?

[16]

MELBY: I think it was just sort of assumed we would do it. I mean we who had so much -- it was a sense of "noblesse oblige" -- there was an obligation to return something to society. Making money or anything like that is nothing that has ever interested any of us. None of us have ever made any either. But even my mother, who was a little more straight-laced, a little more victorian than the rest of us, wasn't terribly interested in that sort of thing either. It was a religious family in a sense, but outside of organized Christianity. I guess my brother has, in recent years, become more of a converted Presbyterian than any of the rest of us. I think my sister and I have become metaphysicians more than anything else.

ACCINELLI: What about your political views before you entered the Foreign Service? This was the New Deal era and the era of the "popular front." Were you at all involved in politics? What

were your political views before you entered the Foreign Service? You described yourself as a Socialist; where would that have put you?

MELBY: We were staunch New Dealers always, no question about that. We went down the line with Franklin Roosevelt from beginning to end. Prior to that, my father had been a

[17]

great admirer of Woodrow Wilson, and if anything, we were brought up in the tradition, as we saw it, of Wilsonian idealism. The years since have tarnished the reputation a little bit of Wilson, but we didn't see that at that time at all. Certainly we were very much a part of the Wilsonian idealism, traditionally.

ACCINELLI: Domestically and internationally.

MELBY: Yes, sure. And we were all staunch proponents of the League of Nations. We were internationalists completely.

ACCINELLI: Was that strengthened, or modified in any way, by your experiences at the University of Chicago? I assume that teachers like Quincy Wright would be very much in that tradition, would they not, the internationalist tradition?

MELBY: I think it was strengthened if anything, because it was almost a joke at Chicago in those days that half the faculty consulted in Washington one week and then they'd come back to Chicago, and the other half of the faculty would go to consult the next week. So they were all very much involved in the New Deal, both internationally and domestically, very much so. Merriam

[18]

himself was a member of the Chicago City Council. Fred Schuman ran for City Council and lost on the Communist ticket, which got him into trouble with old Charlie Walgreen, who accused him once of having preached free love to his niece, who was a student at Chicago. Finally, Walgreen had to apologize for that one and part of his apology was to endow a chair at Chicago. I don't think he ever gave up his reactionary views, basically, but he did have a good deal of money, of course. No, Chicago, if anything, strengthened many of my natural inclinations.

ACCINELLI: How was the subject of international relations taught at that time? What kind of topics, or subjects or approaches were used? Was it very much in the tradition of learning about international law, international institutions, principles of international society?

MELBY: Yes, I think so. I didn't take very many courses at Chicago in those days. You didn't have to take any courses if you didn't want to. You needed one year residence for the doctorate. All you had to do was pass your comprehensives in five fields. I worked most

[19]

of them up on my own. One was international law and organization, in which I had Quincy Wright. I really did take those courses; I could not have done that on my own. I took diplomacy

with Fred Schuman because he was such a hypnotic lecturer. My other fields, let's see -- I had law, and diplomacy. One of my fields was the Middle East. I never had a course on the Middle East, although Quincy, who I continued to know all the years until he died, and I became very good friends. He gave me one question on the comprehensive: who were the Djebel Druse? I had never heard of them. But I figured it out, Djebel and Druse and so on, and devil and Druse, the Druse mountains, and so on; then Lebanon and so on. By golly, I passed that question.

Then I took another field of international economics, but I had to do that on my own. The introductory course in international economics was taught by -- oh God, he was a Dutchman, he later became president of Brooklyn College -- and he was devoted to the idea that the answer to all the problems in the world was to stay on the gold standard. I challenged that in class the first day and he asked me to leave the class. So I could never take the

[20]

introductory international economics course. I tried to take advance economics with Eugene Staley, who was there at the same time, and he said, "I'm sorry, my hands are tied on this; there is a prerequisite on it." I said, "Well, I'll just have to do it on my own."

Then, of course, my fifth course, fifth area, was Latin America, with Fred Rippy.

ACCINELLI: Oh, Fred Rippy, marvelous.

MELBY: I knew Fred very well. Actually I wrote my dissertation under him. I wrote it on the rubber boom period in the Amazon.

ACCINELLI: So that there was a certain amount of historical training there as well.

MELBY: Well, of course, international relations at Chicago then, and I guess still is, was always an interdisciplinary program. We were administratively attached to political science, but only for administrative purposes. We ranged around any place we wanted to go.

ACCINELLI: Did you go to Brazil to do the research for that, or were you able to find materials you needed in Chicago?

[21]

MELBY: I had not finished my thesis by the time I got into the Foreign Service. I had done most of the research on it. Chicago had a very good library on Latin America. I did a lot of research on it there. A little later when I was in the Foreign Service School, I completed the research at the Library of Congress in Washington. I had done some research, oddly enough, in the public library in El Paso, which had a pretty good Latino collection. So I did it entirely from secondary sources.

ACCINELLI: Was the choice of topics your own?

MELBY: Yes. Of course, you know how you do with a dissertation; I was going to write an economic history of Brazil. That became ridiculous, I learned quickly, and it ended up a history of the rubber boom period in the Amazon, which was 1880 to 1912, and even that ran 500 pages.

ACCINELLI: It didn't persuade you to consider an academic career?

MELBY: No. I was bound and determined I was going into the Foreign Service.

ACCINELLI: You were bound and determined to enter the

[22]

Foreign Service and then go to Latin America? Was that in your mind at all?

MELBY: Not particularly. No, my first few assignments were in Latin America, naturally; and then with my Latino background I studied Spanish. I, of course, was fluent in Portuguese at the time. But if I had any place in particular that I wanted to go in the Foreign Service, at that time, I wanted to try out Moscow. But that we'll come to when we get into the Moscow period. I wanted to see it for myself. I guess like anybody with any kind of self-respect coming out of the Depression days, one was without really knowing much about it, a Marxist of sorts. Well, I think I was too. Sympathetic, and interested in the Soviet Union, yes. Soviet propaganda in the United States between the wars, you know, was very clever. They were very persuasive in selling the idea of the land of the happy peasants and workers and so on. And we listened. When *New York Times* correspondents like Walter Durante would file the kind of story that they were filing in the 1930s and so on, we read those too.

You had the anti-Soviet group, which in a sense was its own worse enemy. I mean Elizabeth Dilling for

[23]

example on the Red Network, which you probably never heard of, but she went to very great extremes accusing Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt of being a Communist agent, and accusing Harry Emerson Fosdick, who was my great hero in the church and so on, of being a stooge of the Kremlin. This was just all so ridiculous that that group discredited itself. The anti-Soviet group really had a great deal more to be said for it, as we now know, than we gave it credit for at the time. Of course, they were very bitter about the purge trials, and they were even putting out a lot of material on, say, the famine and so on, in the Ukraine, which we, as did Walter Durante, just dismissed as anti-Russian propaganda. So, I mean that group really did itself a great disservice [when it went to the extreme exemplified by Elizabeth Dilling].

ACCINELLI: Yes, I was about to say that by the latter part of the 1930s you do have the purges; you do have news coming out of Russia that cast real doubt about the genuineness of Marxist ideals and so forth. Among some in the United States who were sympathetic to the Soviet experiment, there was a process of disillusionment and disenchantment that, of course, culminates in the Nazi-Soviet pact.

[24]

MELBY: That was a pretty hard one to swallow because all of us were bitterly anti-Nazi. And the war against Fascism, the need for...

ACCINELLI: Was the State Department aware of all of your political views before you entered the Foreign Service, or did it matter at that time?

MELBY: I don't think it really mattered at that time. There was an attitude: if they considered you were reliable and honorable and so on, it was assumed that whatever your views were, you held them honestly and honorably and the Department might disagree, but, okay, once policy had been set, you carried it out. There was none of this McCarthyite business at all.

Interestingly enough, and this is anticipating later on, but Stanley Hornbeck, for example, was on my examining board for orals for the Foreign Service, and Stanley is an old China Lobby type.

ACCINELLI: Yes.

MELBY: But Stanley Hornbeck, even when I got into trouble in the Department, never turned against me. He always assumed that John Melby is an honorable man and he holds

[25]

views that I disagree with, but those are his views, and I do not question his integrity.

ACCINELLI: I use the phrase "an old-fashioned view." It is old-fashioned?

MELBY: Yes, it is.

ACCINELLI: It assumes that men of honor act honorably.

MELBY: That's right.

And this was true in the Foreign Service really until Vietnam. Vietnam destroyed a lot more than I think most people realize. It destroyed the integrity of the Foreign Service, among other things. When I was head of the military mission in Southeast Asia, I was beginning -- out of my China experience -- I was beginning to question what we were doing in Vietnam. I was so informing the Department saying, "Our policy is wrong," and I was putting it in writing and cables and so on, and Don Heath, who disagreed with me, sent my cables on without any question. He always answered them to the Department, but he always showed me what his answer was; he let me clear his answers. It never occurred to Don to do anything else. Honorable officers do that; they

[26]

disagree openly.

ACCINELLI: Well, tell me a little bit about the training you underwent.

MELBY: It was pretty haphazard in those days. You were given your first assignment as a probationary assignment and mine was Juarez. I was in Juarez from August '37 until January '39,

so I was there for a year and a half, as a student officer. I became a really number two man in Juarez, but then we went back to the Foreign Service School. You came back for a four-month period.

ACCINELLI: This was in Washington?

MELBY: In Washington. We had four months, four or five months, of lectures and quizzes and so on, on passports, and immigration. It was the routine, mostly consular functions and so on, interspersed with lectures on political subjects by officers assigned to the Department at the time. That was about it. Then you went out on your first regular assignment. You started out as "Unclassified C," of all of the humiliating designations. Then having passed the Foreign Service School -- it wasn't a question of

[27]

flunking or not flunking, it was just part of the training -- you were then automatically promoted to "Unclassified B." If you were lucky, in 18 months you became "Unclassified A." Then, suitably, you became "Class 8," and you went up the ladder to Class 1.

ACCINELLI: Were there any individuals in your particular class with whom you kept up a relationship or a friend-ship?

MELBY: Yes. Well, particularly Ray Thurston. He and I were the first two Ph.D.s in the Foreign Service. Of course, there are a lot of them now, but that was pretty unusual in those days. He got his at Wisconsin; he studied under John Gaus, who, of course, was a great New Dealer and so on. Ray always remained very much of the New Deal persuasion. Later on, he, like me, had his assignment in Moscow, which did not endear the Russians to him at all.

ACCINELLI: When did he go?

MELBY: Well, he was there in the 1950s. He came somewhat under the influence of Loy Henderson at that time, too,

[28]

who was bitterly anti-Soviet. But other members of my class there whom I knew well -- no, really I didn't. Roy Melbourne kept track of some of them, and some of them I've never heard of since. I guess, the one I knew best, and really he was in the class, too, was Freddie Reinhart. Later he was Minister to Vietnam and then Ambassador to Egypt. Finally, Dean Rusk made him Ambassador to Italy. Freddie is now dead. He had served in Juarez, too, and that was my connection with him there, originally. I knew Charlie Thayer, who did have a Moscow background. Those are about the only two I really kept up with at all -- three, but really only two.

ACCINELLI: It has been said that the State Department at that time was still pretty much like a gentlemen's club.

MELBY: There were 721 officers.

ACCINELLI: Elitist?

MELBY: 721 officers and you knew to speak to everybody in the Service. Now, hell there are 5,000 and God knows all the fringe, and so on -- CIA and Commerce people and so on. It was an elite; let's face it. Sure it was.

[29]

ACCINELLI: What was your first assignment after leaving the Foreign Service Training School?

MELBY: I was assigned to Caracas. I was assigned there in the spring of '39, but I didn't go for several months because I had gotten married in El Paso. Our first child was due in June, and so I asked the Department to postpone my going to Venezuela until the young man had been born. Once he had been born, we did go.

So, I was in Caracas for -- well, until the spring of '41, almost two years, and I didn't really have much of a job, didn't do much of anything there. We were a little overstaffed for one thing, and I was the junior man on the totem pole. The only thing I did do though in Caracas, and this I've always been grateful to the Service for...

ACCINELLI: Well, you went to Latin America at a very interesting time, did you not?

MELBY: Yes. And I didn't really do very much in Caracas, except that right after Pearl Harbor some clown in the White House got a bright idea that one Foreign Service officer had to be assigned to keep track of every German

[30]

ship in the world. There happened to be one in Puerto Cabello, which is the port just west of LaGuaira. I, as low man on the totem pole in Caracas, drew the assignment to go down and watch that damn German ship, the *Sesostris*. That was a footling assignment, because the machinery had been taken out by the Venezuelans; the ship couldn't move from the inner harbor anyway, even if it had wanted to. But it took six months to get that order countermanded from the White House. So I just packed up all my papers and notes and so on and my dissertation and I took it all down. I was staying in a hotel down there, which looked right out over the inner harbor where I could sit there and actually write up my material for my dissertation while watching the ship. And so that is the way I finished my dissertation. And then I went back the following June and got my degree from Chicago.

The only other thing was that the Germans had pursued a very interesting and devastating policy in Latin America. Germany was sending its young men out all over Latin America, and I guess they did it pretty much around the world, too. They sent young men out, bachelors, to get into business and establish themselves, marry into local families, and so on, so that all business

[31]

in Venezuela was practically under the control of German-controlled firms. Our main objective at that point was to have these Germans interned. The Venezuelan government was dragging its

feet on the thing, so Washington decided on a show of force. One evening I got a call from Dr. Corrigan who was the Ambassador in Caracas saying, "There will be a flotilla of 12 American destroyers that will appear suddenly without notice off the coast of Venezuela tomorrow morning. You go out and take charge of them."

So I was up bright and early and there were these 12 destroyers all anchored off the coast of Venezuela. I went across to the Venezuelan naval base and said, "I've got to get out to that ship -- those ships out there." It was kind of a fun period.

ACCINELLI: Did that show of force get the job done?

MELBY: It sure did. I took Commander Swenson back to Caracas with me to meet the Ambassador, and the Venezuelans got the point very quickly.

ACCINELLI: So there was a fairly large German population then in Venezuela? I know there was in Brazil and Argentina.

[32]

MELBY: Yes.

Well, of course, the one in Venezuela wasn't anything compared to the one in Brazil, because all of the three southern states in Brazil were completely German. But that was our contribution there to getting the Venezuelans in line, and after that we never had any trouble with the Venezuelans at all. Then, it wasn't long after that that I was transferred back to Washington. I decided the way to promotion and pay in the Foreign Service was to alternate assignments abroad and in Washington. I managed to get myself assigned to the office of American Republic Affairs, and that is when I was assigned finally to the Peru-Ecuador desk.

This is really the first big job I did in the Foreign Service, because I will always remember the day it happened. I had an apartment in Washington. My family hadn't come back from El Paso yet. My wife had gone ahead of me with the children, and I happened to turn the radio on in my apartment on the evening of July 4. I had been out to dinner someplace. I got the first announcement that the Peruvian Air Force had bombed, and pretty much destroyed the southern Ecuadorian province of El Oro. I knew that

[33]

this was going to mean I was going to be busy for a while, and I was up bright and early into the Department.

The phone in my office was ringing as I arrived. It was Sumner Welles. He said, "John, you've heard the news?" I said, "Yes, I have, sir." "Well, stop that war," and then he slammed the phone down. And that's what I did for the next 18 months. We stopped the war.

ACCINELLI: That was a boundary dispute, was it not?

MELBY: That's right.

And the conflict did not end finally until the Rio Conference. I guess it was December '42 when [Sumner] Welles went to Rio and he saw the President of Ecuador, whom I had known, and known quite well. You see, what Peru was doing, it was using the war as a piece of blackmail to force Ecuador to give up half its territory. Peru was being joined by Brazil and Argentina on this one, and it would not enter the war against the Axis. Sumner just finally hauled in the President of Ecuador and said, "Look, I've got to ask you to make the great sacrifice and that is to give up half your territory to Peru in the larger interest." He said, "Mr. Welles, you know, you're asking me to commit political suicide."

[34]

"Yes, I know that." Finally the President said, "Okay." He did. They gave it up.

ACCINELLI: Was this a recommendation you were happy with, that you supported?

MELBY: I wasn't happy with it, but I didn't see any alternative.

ACCINELLI: Well, I can understand why Washington would want as many Latin American nations on board, so to speak.

MELBY: You've got to remember our situation then. We had nothing; I mean Pearl Harbor had wiped us out. The Navy was gone. We had no Army; it was still nothing. The Air Corps had been wiped out. Colombia was in the same situation that Venezuela was in, except that Avianca, the Colombian airline, was entirely flown by German pilots.

ACCINELLI: That's right.

MELBY: There was nothing to keep Avianca from going in and dropping bombs on the Panama Canal. The nightmare we lived with then was that if they did that, we'd still be fighting Germany. And who's perfect in his judgment

[35]

as to what will happen, and so on.

Of course, that didn't get any publicity in those days. The war was so much larger, but in Latin America it was touch and go whether the Latinos would go along with us and what would happen. We could see ourselves fighting Germans on the Mexican border. It took some pretty drastic action. Peru got away with it.

ACCINELLI: Of course, by Pearl Harbor the Good Neighbor Policy had already had a dramatic effect on Latin American opinion, had it not?

MELBY: Oh yes.

ACCINELLI: And you had a series of conferences at Buenos Aires and Panama and so forth, so that even before Pearl Harbor, Washington had done a good deal to line up Latin America ideologically and even some ways militarily.

MELBY: The thing Nelson Rockefeller set up...

ACCINELLI: That's right.

MELBY: ...the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, which in its own bungling way was doing a very effective job. Oh, the Good Neighbor Policy saved us who knows what.

[36]

ACCINELLI: But there was still resistance in Peru, specifically.

MELBY: Well, Manuel Prado was President of Peru, you know, and he was a little bastard weasel. Vargas was not at all sure which way he was going. He came from Rio Grande do Sul which was the state of Brazil that was mostly completely German. It is, even to this day. You still have to speak German there because the population is so German. He didn't really know which way he was going, the dictator that he was. He'd go into virtual seclusion, retirement, and make up his mind. He finally did come out on our side, and then committed suicide later on. But what we got out of it militarily was, well, kind of ironic. The Brazilians sent a full division to Italy, finally, where it distinguished itself greatly.

Well, of course, the Italian caper was the training ground for all those generals who later took up in Brazil and established the dictatorship there. Mexico sent a full Air Force squadron to the Pacific where it also did very well. Otherwise Latin America did nothing militarily.

ACCINELLI: Peru made no direct contribution?

MELBY: No. There was a very large colony of Japanese who dug in their truck gardens all around the big Peruvian airport

[37]

at Lima-Tambo, which is the airport for Lima. They were there where they could monitor things. We finally sent John Emmerson, who was a Japanese language officer, to the Embassy in Lima where his job was to persuade the Peruvian government to intern all those Japanese for the duration. He succeeded, and they did. Then he, of course, would be one of those who would be of the Yen'an group crucified later on. He had nothing to do with China at all. His connection was with the Japanese Communist Party.

ACCINELLI: Specifically what was your role during this 18-month dispute? Did you go to Ecuador and Peru?

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: What were your responsibilities; what were you doing?

MELBY: Well, I was in charge of our relations with both countries. I had pretty much of a free hand on things. The first thing we had to do was to get what was then considered a very large 20 million dollar loan from the Export-Import Bank -- not a loan, a grant -- to give the Ecuadoran government to rebuild the province of El Oro.

[38]

The Bank granted it, and I went down and signed the contract with the President. We did rebuild the province. We built highways also in Ecuador, as part of the Pan American Highway. In Peru it was more in a sense a holding operation to keep the Peruvians from trying any more capers against Ecuador. In that capacity I got to know pretty much everybody that was anybody in both countries. Particularly, I knew the Embassies in Washington, and all of us, in a sense, became very good personal friends.

ACCINELLI: Did you work closely with Sumner Welles during that period?

MELBY: Oh yes, because he was very much involved in the whole thing. Of course, I worked for him on this. He was in charge of the whole thing. Sure, to me Sumner Welles was the great American diplomat. If I ever had a case of hero worship, it was Sumner Welles.

ACCINELLI: What did you admire about him?

MELBY: His diplomatic skills, his knowledge of Latinos, his ability to get along with them, and the way he handled them and the way they responded to him. He was almost

[39]

the prototype of the perfect American diplomat.

ACCINELLI: Did you have any sense at that time of the conflict, the tension between him and Cordell Hull? Was that well known in the State Department?

MELBY: Oh, yes, that was one of those open secrets, sure.

ACCINELLI: And did you have any relations with Hull himself?

MELBY: Not really. The only time I ever had anything to do with the good judge was at one point the Peruvian government, through its Air Attaché in Washington, Armando Revoredo, had bought 20 of what were considered surplus North American trainers from the Norwegian government in exile, from the crown Princess Martha. And they had shipped those trainers from Ottawa, or Trenton, or someplace up around here, to New York and then loaded them on a Peruvian freighter, the *Maranon*. I didn't hear of it until the *Maranon* had cast off from New York bound for Lima. I called the Secretary, Mr. Hull, and told him what had happened. He was furious. He had a temper, you know, and he picked up the phone and he called the head of the Coast Guard in New York and issued an order to him, "Stop that freighter and

[40]

impound the cargo. Bring it back to New York. We're not going to sell any kind of arms or equipment to the Peruvians." The Coast Guard said, "Yes, sir," and did it.

Now, of course, it was really a strictly illegal action on our part. I mean they had been legally bought. Armando paid a million dollars for those things. Our justification for doing it was that they were needed by the American Air Force for training. Nobody would fly them anymore; they were so outdated and so on. Revoredo knew his way around the American Air Force; he was a very charming, personable guy, and I knew that sooner or later he was going to see those trainers someplace. My job was to make sure that he didn't see them.

Now, how was I going to do that? Well, I had somehow made contact with people over in the Pentagon, our War Department it was; I'm not sure the Pentagon had been built by that time. Anyway, it was the War Department, and I told this man the story. I said, "We've got to get rid of those planes, and we've got to do it fast." He had a bright idea in that he'd discovered an abandoned old coal mine shaft in West Virginia. So he shipped those

[41]

20 trainers to West Virginia, and dropped them down that shaft and then poured slag in on top of them, and they disappeared forever. Poor Armando kept making the rounds of American air bases and he never did find those trainers. He knew damn well what I had done, or that I had done something with them.

ACCINELLI: And he was out a million dollars as well.

MELBY: Well, he couldn't be you see, because we were wrong.

ACCINELLI: I see.

MELBY: So I had to go back to the Secretary and say, "Look, we've got to pay for these things some way; we cannot ask Peru to do it. I mean they bought them in good faith." Cordell Hull was mad as hell at me. He said, "What kind of position have you put me in?" He said, "You know I can't go to Congress and ask them to appropriate a million dollars for some action like this. You know what they're going to say; they'll tear us to pieces." I said, "I don't know what you're going to do." But what he did finally was -- as all Secretaries have, he had his own confidential fund -- and he took a

[42]

million dollars out of that and he said, "Here's your million dollars, and I don't want to hear any more about Peru, ever."

ACCINELLI: What was your impression of Hull? What was his reputation among Foreign Service officers that you knew?

MELBY: In the great days of the Trade Agreements Act, there was no question but that it was his creation, and we, all of us, were in favor of it. And he did a superb job on it. But after that, he was kept on. Oh he was Secretary, I guess, since God was a boy. There came a point, and this is

where the friction with Sumner came, where he was just too old, and he was out-of-date, and out of touch, and he wasn't very effective. Yet, Roosevelt couldn't fire him, because his prestige was such on the Hill that Roosevelt didn't dare do it. He knew he had to keep him on. In the end, of course, Cordell Hull lasted longer than Sumner did. The last time I saw Cordell Hull was in Moscow in 1942 when he came over to the Moscow Conference. This really had everybody in an uproar and I was living at Spaso [House] where he stayed. I was living with Harriman then. In fact, I was running Spaso so I did see a bit of him there, but he was clearly

[43]

beyond his prime and so on.

ACCINELLI: Did Welles ever speak to you about his relationship with Hull?

MELBY: No. He didn't do that.

ACCINELLI: Wasn't that kind of man?

MELBY: No. After all I was a junior officer, and as far as he was concerned, it was none of my business, which it wasn't. And he knew his politics too well for that; he wouldn't have done that.

ACCINELLI: Can you give me an example of Welles' skills as a diplomat, any incidents that may have impressed you?

MELBY: Well, at the Rio Conference, which we completely dominated, I thought at the time it seemed like a good idea, but he was largely responsible, personally responsible, for the emergence of Batista in Cuba.

ACCINELLI: Yes.

MELBY: He made Batista President of Cuba.

ACCINELLI: Yes, but that's early on isn't it?

[44]

MELBY: Oh, that was before the war.

ACCINELLI: Yes, about '33, '34 I believe.

MELBY: I guess he was stationed; I don't remember now whether he was actually a Minister in...

ACCINELLI: I think he was sent to Havana as a troubleshooter by Roosevelt...

MELBY: That's right.

ACCINELLI: ...because there were problems there, and Welles got the Cubans into line. That was before the Good Neighbor Policy really had coalesced, and while Roosevelt didn't employ a big stick diplomacy, that is, did not use, or threaten to use, military force, certainly Welles flexed American muscles.

MELBY: Well, he was really, in a sense, the author of the Good Neighbor Policy. His book, you know, on the Dominican Republic, *Naboth's Vineyard*, was the real origin of the Good Neighbor Policy. It was his idea, and Roosevelt picked it up.

ACCINELLI: Did he have a special sympathy for, or feeling for, Latin Americans?

[45]

MELBY: Yes. He had a very cold, austere exterior, frosty appearance. But, I don't know, somehow the Latinos didn't mind that in him, which was a curious thing. The chief of the American Republics Division at that time was Philip Bonsal, who also had had a long Cuban background himself. He had been with AT&T there before he entered the Foreign Service. Phil Bonsal was the exact opposite; he was a great big man, but kind of sloppy around, kind of loose-jointed and so on. He was noisy and he went around slapping Latinos on the back, the real Rotarian approach to life, and the Latinos loved him for that. He got along very well with the Latinos. He got along just as well as Sumner did. They were two completely opposite types. You never knew about Latinos. I think it is a question really, as much as anything, about whether they honestly believe that you like them, and you are simpatico. And if they get that feeling about you, then the rest doesn't matter. I think that was the case with both Sumner and Phil.

ACCINELLI: Yes, he was willing to treat them with respect and dignity, rather than condescend to them.

MELBY: That's what it was.

[46]

ACCINELLI: That was really important, was it not, given the long history of U.S. intervention and so forth in Latin America?

Earlier on, you made a passing reference to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and Nelson Rockefeller. Did you have anything to do with that office, or with Rockefeller himself?

MELBY: Yes. Well, not so much with Rockefeller himself, but I did with his staff. I knew everybody on his staff. John Dickey was with him, who later became president of Dartmouth, and there was Arthur Compton -- young Arthur Compton -- whose father was one of the fathers of the atom bomb. In fact, it was young Arthur Compton who told me something in 1945 that he shouldn't have known, and he certainly shouldn't have told me. That was that he had learned when the first atomic explosion was going to take place in New Mexico. I remember it to this day; we sat at the bar in the old Roger Smith Hotel having a drink, and he told me. He told me a date. John Dreyer worked for Rockefeller then, too, and let's see, there was someone else who

just became a Congressman, his father -- Bingham. He worked for Nelson Rockefeller then; I knew him then.

No, I knew all that staff pretty well, but Arthur was the one who I knew best.

ACCINELLI: That office represented a fairly new departure in American diplomacy generally, and certainly in Latin America, with the notion of nourishing and encouraging cultural relations. I suppose that crudely put, it was propagandistic, but it was more than that, was it not?

MELBY: Maybe it was more than that, but it was an awful lot of propaganda as well. A lot of goofs were made. The ones I remember particularly that got quite a bit of publicity included one in which Rockefeller was subsidizing a series of newspapers in Latin America. He was in the business and it was later discovered that most of them were German-owned. Another one involved a sanitation program he had in Guatamala. The whole program was designed to provide the Guatamalan Indians with a lot of concrete-pit privies; it was going to clean up all their dysentery and so on. So we built all these hundreds of concrete-pit privies in Guatamala, and then they sent down an inspector to see how they were being used, and discovered what? The Indians thought that they were just great, but not for pit privies; they were wonderful

[48]

to store corn in. The corn didn't mildew in there, or anything, in the Guatamalan tropics. And there were things like that that happened. I mean that was sort of inevitable, a lot of it. He did a great deal in cultural relations and moving people back and forth, and it was the original cultural relations program. Wilma Fairbank was very much involved in that.

ACCINELLI: Oh, was she?

MELBY: She was on the staff there. I didn't know her at the time; I knew her in China later on when she worked for me. She was one of the founders of the Cultural Relations program on Latin America. Hal Hanson was on Rockefeller's staff then. He got together quite a distinguished group of young people.

ACCINELLI: He was a dynamic man, who of course had connections with Latin America through his family. Was there any...

MELBY: I think it was more a little bit of jealousy, and then Rockefeller had access to a great deal more money than we did. But I think there was also recognition that he was doing a job that needed to be done and maybe

[49]

he was doing things that wouldn't be proper for the diplomatic service to be involved in, which indeed was the case. Traditional diplomats don't get involved in things like that, although God knows now we do. Of course, this is a whole other new world, but...

ACCINELLI: After you completed your stint in Ecuador and Peru you were assigned then, I take it, to Moscow.

MELBY: Yes. The job was finished with Peru and Ecuador really, and there being a war on, I was beginning to feel uncomfortable that I was sitting there and not really doing very much. I wanted to get military leave and join the Marine Corps, since it wouldn't inconvenience my family financially at all. But I talked to Howland Shaw about it, who was then Assistant Secretary for Personnel, and he gave me a proper bawling out saying, "You have to remember what happened to the British service in '14 to '18. Not only was it decimated, but the British Foreign Service has never recovered properly. There was plenty of work for everybody to do." I said, "All right, that's fine, but let's send me abroad then." And he agreed. He said okay, that was fine.

[50]

I was assigned to Lisbon, which was kind of a hotbed for intrigue and espionage and so on in Western Europe at that time. I wouldn't have minded living in Lisbon as such, but I still wanted to go to Moscow, which a lot of other people did too. But I wanted to go more than most people did, and I managed to talk myself into it. It took me a month to get there, going through the Caribbean, and across the Atlantic, and around Africa, and so on, on a White House pass. Litvinov had just been recalled as Ambassador for consultation in Moscow. He left very suddenly, with not even farewells, and nobody knew what he was up to, or why he was being recalled. So I had, as I say, this White House pass and by the time I got to Ghana I realized that he wasn't going to be talking to anybody. I just gave up at that point and he went on. I spent the next ten days sitting on the beaches of Ghana recovering from the fatigue of having broken up the house and moving so fast, and so on. I arrived finally in Kuibyshev, having gone by way of Cairo and the Persian Gulf and Teheran and then up over the Elburz Mountains into Kuibyshev, where the remnants of the Embassy were still located.

[51]

ACCINELLI: Well, for part of that trip you had a companion.

MELBY: That was L.G. Michael, who was the Agricultural Attaché, who had been going to Russia every year since the mid-20s, and estimating what the Russian wheat crop would be for that year. He had incredible success in accuracy, simply by wandering around the countryside. He didn't speak much Russian, never managed to learn very much, but nonetheless he was accurate with it. It was his first plane trip, and he had always looked at the world from the ground, and he found that the whole world looked very different from a plane. You couldn't pry him loose from that window, just watching the world go by underneath us. It changed his whole outlook, his whole vision of what the world was all about. He was a very interesting guy, and we became very good friends.

I arrived in Kuibyshev, and the remnants of the Embassy by this time consisted of Warwick Perkins, who would later be the Administrative Officer in Moscow, the secretary; and I think there was an additional vice-consul there. I finally arrived in Moscow where Admiral [William H.] Standley was the Ambassador and kind of disgruntled about life and missing his wife and

[52]

the fact that mail took weeks to reach us and sometimes it didn't get there at all. His greeting to me was a kind of grumpy one because he thought I was going to act as a courier to bring in mail. Well, there wasn't any to bring in. So, for my sins in not having brought mail with me, he assigned me in the beginning to be sort of house manager in Spaso, which was his residence where half the Embassy staff lived anyway. That was a job that incidentally I kept as long as I was in Moscow. I kept it on when Harriman came; he just kept me on doing that.

Well, Standley himself didn't have very much to do, and he would leave by mid-summer anyway. He was called back because most of what the Embassy might have been doing was being done by the military mission and General [Philip] Faymonville, a very charming guy -- very pro-Russian, ideologically pro-Russian. To him the Russians could do no wrong, even saying no to them, never. Anything they wanted was fine with him.

ACCINELLI: That was pretty consistent though with Washington's policy at that time, wasn't it, carte blanche, blank check; give them as much as they want and as quickly as we can get it to them?

[53]

Well, yes, but you didn't have to go as far as he did. After all, we didn't have unlimited supplies; we were involved in a war, and we had our own needs and so on. And the Russians could be pretty demanding. Not only could be, but they were. Anyway, the Moscow Conference was in October of that year, and Cordell Hull was our principle representative at it, and Harriman came in with him, and he actually stayed on as the new Ambassador. He cleaned out the whole military mission, and that's when Major General [John R.] Deane came in, who had been Secretary of the Joint Chiefs, a job he wanted to get out of. He wanted a field command, but Roosevelt wouldn't let him have it; he said that Moscow was more important and we all have to give up some of our dreams in this war going on, and part of your price is you're going to go to Moscow. Well, Russ was a good soldier, and so he said, "Yes, Sir," and there he was.

ACCINELLI: Just as Stilwell was stuck in China.

MELBY: Yes, and he did a very good job on it. He, of course, was not about to say yes to everything the Russians wanted, but he got along quite well with them. He wrote up his experiences, as head of the mission later on, in

[54]

a book *Strange Alliance*, which I think is a very dispassionate account of what life was like and what problems he had and so on.

During the summer, until Harriman came, I really didn't have anything to do. The Embassy was grossly overstaffed. We had too many officers there. Nobody knew when the Germans were going to be able to break out of Stalingrad and in that case, who knew when we would get anybody else in, or what the demands on the Embassy would be. So, there I was with not much to do. I really didn't have anything to do except fool around with files, codes, clerks and so on, until Harriman arrived. He brought with him one Samuel Spewack, the playwright. Sam was Russian by origin himself; in fact, his mother had come from the Ukraine and he had wanted to

go there, but the minute he was there, he knew he didn't want to be there. Sam lasted only six weeks. Most of that time he spent in bed writing a new novel about Spaso and sitting under an umbrella since the roof over his room leaked. Sam and I became very good friends, and remained that until the day he died. But at the end of six weeks he decided he had to go back to Washington for consultation with OWI [Office of War Information], because that was what he was working for.

[55]

Well, we all had a pretty good idea he'd never return, which in fact he did not. At this point Averell named me as the Acting Director of OWI for Moscow. I spent the next year doing that until Joe Phillips, who had been editor of *Newsweek*, in which Averell had a financial interest incidentally, and Joe had been Eisenhower's PRO [public relations officer] in North Africa and later on in London, arrived to take over the Moscow job. So I was out of that job. But that year with OWI was a fascinating one because it was a time when the Russians were more open, when you could travel, and you could know Russians in a way that you couldn't before and you haven't been able to know them since. You had access to officials, and we mounted a pretty complete OWI information program in Moscow, obviously within the limitations of a certain amount of Russian censorship, the usual news releases and commentary and so on. But the main thing we did was to start publishing a very glossy, superior type magazine called *America*. It would have put *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* to shame.

ACCINELLI: And it was actually all done in Moscow, or was it?

[56]

MELBY: No.

ACCINELLI: It wasn't?

MELBY: This was a very complicated process.

ACCINELLI: I wondered.

MELBY: The text for it was entirely written in Washington. It was translated into Russian, and as it turned out, it was kind of pre-Bolshevik Russian which was cabled out to us. We reedited the stuff, and cabled the corrections back to Washington, which was then accepted or turned down. Mostly it was accepted, and it was printed in the States and shipped out. We had literally tens of thousands of copies, which were really quite freely distributed throughout the Soviet Union.

ACCINELLI: How often did you publish?

MELBY: Every month.

ACCINELLI: Every month?

MELBY: And this went on for two or three years I think. It was an enormous success in Russia. The copies would be gone before they would even arrive. Everybody wanted

[57]

to see them. It was even more popular than a copy of the Sears Roebuck catalog. It was a high-quality job and so considered and valued by the Russians. Their interest in things American was pretty obvious even then.

ACCINELLI: What kinds of things would the censors want to keep out of the magazine, do you recall?

MELBY: Well, there was no censorship of the magazine at all.

ACCINELLI: None at all.

MELBY: No, this was only on some news items, but by the magazine, no. I handled all this through the press section of the Foreign Office. The head of the press section of the Foreign Office became a very good friend along with his staff. He turned up later. Finally, I left Russia and after I arrived in Chungking, who should be the new Russian Ambassador in Chungking but the man who had been head of the press section.

ACCINELLI: And that was a coincidence.

MELBY: Oh yes, entirely.

So, the Russian Embassy in Chungking and I got along fabulously. I mean I knew them all, sort of

[58]

arms-around friends -- old "home week." This was before the cold war, of course. So the job I had to do in Chungking turned out to be nothing, but I say again that's another part of the story. I said that with these Russian officials and so on, we got along fabulously. We were doing something that was in everybody's mutual interest, very oddly enough. Really, in the history of Russian-American relations, if we could concentrate more on the things that are of mutual advantage, we'll find the Russians are very cooperative. Instead of that, we always pick out things and look for things in there causing trouble and so on. So my time with the Russian officials there, those two years, was really a very friendly, pleasant time.

ACCINELLI: Did they at all talk about Stalinism? Were they aware of things like the Gulag, or was that part of the Stalinist regime known and discussed?

MELBY: If they did, they didn't talk about it. Stalin had given up on Marxism. The whole tenor of Russian propaganda with the Russian people at this time was, this is a war to defend the "Holy Mother Russia," defense

[59]

of the motherland. They even brought back ranks in the Army and so on, even such things as we used to ridicule a little bit. Signs would go up saying, "Henceforth, officers will not hang onto the side of buses when they are moving," transportation being terrible of course. It was as though Communism, or Marxism, had never happened. Now, obviously when the war was over all this changed, but by that time I was gone.

ACCINELLI: That kind of message did you try to get across through the office of War Information activities, particularly this glossy magazine that you put out.

MELBY: What life was like in the States. Just tried a straight-forward picture of American life, some of which the Russians believed and some they didn't. I mean, for example, one issue we had showing the parking lot of the Ford River Rouge plant -- those hundreds of automobiles, and they didn't believe that. They said, "You must have staged that; workers have automobiles? No, no impossible. How can workers have automobiles in the land of Capitalism, and Capitalism is folding and we all know it. After all, think about the Negro problem in the South;" that is always a standard fallback

[60]

argument with the Russians. No matter what kind of a corner you put them in, the answer is, "Yeah, but what about the Negro problem in the South?"

ACCINELLI: How did you deal with that kind of a comment or criticism?

MELBY: You just got where you didn't pay any attention to it. What was the point? And God knows the Negro problem in the South was bad in those days, very different from what it is now.

It was still Jim Crow time. There was no point in denying it.

But we had a good time there and Averell was a good kind of Ambassador to work for and with. When he finally had to inform me that I wasn't going to be head of OWI anymore, he said, "Well, Joe's coming in tomorrow. Why don't you go with Doc Michael; he's going up to Murmansk. You go up with him for a couple of weeks and have a look at the Arctic." So I went up to the Arctic with Michael. And we had a very interesting time up there, because that's where all their convoys were...

ACCINELLI: The lend-lease material.

MELBY: Everything was coming in there; that was the big

[61]

port, and it was an ice-free port. The only episode that happened -- you had to take all your own food on the trip. It took three days to get there, and not too much heat on the train. But you had to take all your own food with you, and there was one point when Mike was opening a bottle of sweet pickles and his hand slipped, and it emptied out in the inside of my suitcase that was open. Well, at that point I was ready to strangle him.

It was interesting. You see we were up there until we left Murmansk on November 8, right after Revolution Day. We had gone to a big party the night before with some big burly Russian generals. We were all dancing with each other; it was quite a spectacle.

ACCINELLI: Was the vodka flowing freely?

MELBY: Oh, yes, there was lots of that. In fact, there was one little episode on the train going north. This Russian GI had himself pretty well tanked up; he got a little obstreperous. The train stopped, and another soldier took the drunk Russian soldier off the train and threw him over an embankment. Justice can be very swift in the Soviet Union.

[62]

ACCINELLI: Can you tell me something about Harriman? Had you known Harriman before he came to Moscow?

MELBY: No. I didn't know really much about him beyond the obvious that everyone did. He came in fired up very much with the zeal that A. [Adolph] A. Berle had spoken of to me, saying, "I don't want to hear any criticism of the Russians out of anybody in this Embassy. We've got to get along with them." That sounded fine to me.

ACCINELLI: That was before you went to Moscow?

MELBY: No, no, this was after he came to Moscow.

ACCINELLI: Oh, after.

MELBY: This is what he announced when he became Ambassador. Presenting his credential was a little bit delayed because as a very young man back in the twenties, he, and I don't know who -- Brown Brothers and Harriman or who -- anyway, this little group in New York had had rather large investments in manganese mines in the Caucasus, and the final repayment on the loans that were involved in that were due just about the time he became Ambassador. And Molotov had suggested to him, "Let's not have you present

[63]

your credentials until the final payment has been made so there clearly is no conflict of interest involved, and that's wiped out." So he didn't really present his credential until sometime in December. The Russians paid off, every cent of it.

I think he came into Moscow thinking or convinced that his relationship with Stalin was going to be the same as the one he had with Churchill. I mean sort of a first name, palsy-walsy, buddy-buddy, and weekends at Chequers and that sort of thing, and so forth. Of course, nothing of the sort happened. He didn't see Stalin any more frequently than Russ Deane did, finally, and then it was only strictly on particular occasions and usually after midnight, because Stalin didn't go to work until midnight. But there was business to be done, and otherwise Stalin was busy running his own war. He had no place in the running of that war for a mere American Ambassador. Averell took it pretty hard. In fact, there was one period that first winter when he took to bed

with a sinus infection and didn't get out of bed for six weeks. He was obviously suffering some kind of psychosomatic trauma with it. He was a very tough guy obviously, to have lived as long as he did. Finally, he made his

[64]

peace with the fact of what his relationship would be and he came out of it all right.

He very seldom went to the chancery itself; he worked out of his bedroom, which was a very large room on the second floor of Spaso. It was only very occasionally that he did go to the chancery, and most things that he was concerned with were brought to him.

Well, by this time, most of the Embassy staff was out of Spaso. The only ones who were left were Eddie Page, who acted as his interpreter -- he was a Russian language officer and a very good one -- along with his secretary, Bob Meiklejohn, who was in naval uniform, but only by courtesy, just to get him free passage on Navy planes and so on. He was a darned good secretary. There was Kathleen. His wife didn't come with him, and Kathleen came as his hostess. And there was myself. When Mike was there in the fall he would always stay there, and when Ed Flynn came back from Yalta with Roosevelt, he stayed there. I mean there were some transients. Bill Donovan of OSS was there; he even moved into my room and I had to move out. People like that would stay at Spaso, but the only ones who were really permanent in the place were Meiklejohn, Kathleen,

[65]

Eddie Page and myself. So, in that sense I got to know Averell, I guess, much better than most people did. You'd see him on a day-to-day basis and see him grouchy in the morning, or see him grouchy at night, or happy in the morning, or happy at night, or whatever it might be. Or he might be playing "bezique" at night with Kathleen, a card game you played with 12 decks I think. When I got back from Murmansk one of the first guests who was there was Lillian Hellman; that was where I first met her. As long as she was there, she stayed with us too. So, it was that sort of population apart from those who were permanent.

ACCINELLI: So you saw almost everyone who came through Moscow.

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: Did Harriman talk to you about what was happening in Soviet-American relations? I assume you established a fairly frank relationship. Did he confide in you or use you as a sounding board?

MELBY: Yes. I mean there were topics that were avoided. I mean generally he would talk; he and Eddie and I would talk about things, yes. He seldom if ever talked very

[66]

much about military matters, which was strictly out of my competence anyway. You have one question in the questionnaire there -- what was my attitude toward Yalta?

Well, I never knew anything about Yalta. He went to Yalta, but it was only a couple of months before I left. I had to learn about Yalta after I got back to Washington. I knew he had been there, of course, and Kathleen went with him. As a matter of fact, I took them down to the train because they went to Yalta by train. I saw them off. At that point, I didn't even know where they were going. They didn't tell me; they shouldn't have. So when he came back, he did tell me where they had been and what had happened, obviously, because it was in the world press by then. But as to what had actually happened at Yalta, what the agreements were, they were never publicized in the press at all, so he didn't talk about those to me either.

ACCINELLI: Was he generally pleased when he came back? What was his mood? Could you sense any kind of reaction to the events there?

MELBY: I think he was pleased, yes. I think he thought we'd

[67]

done what had to be done. Here I'm using hindsight a little bit -- I think he came back from Yalta thinking we had agreements of a sort that they should have known better, that they were not possible. The Polish Agreements -- which of course were the ones that got all of the publicity later on -- to Stalin those agreements were, in effect, to give the Russians a free hand to do as they pleased in the "Cordon Sanitaire." The Russian attitude was, "Now twice in two generations we have been invaded by Germany across Poland. It's not going to happen again, and we're going to make sure it doesn't." So when Stalin talked about democratic elections in Poland, he meant Russian-style democratic elections imposed by the Red Army. We should have known that, and even Chip [Charles] Bohlen should have known that, but I don't think that Chip at this point really had it through his head. Maybe he was under a little bit of the euphoria at Yalta in seeing the President there and so on. That got to him, but he didn't keep that illusion very long. As for the agreements on the Far East, I think it was just assumed at Yalta that what Roosevelt quote, unquote, "gave away" was to simply restore to the Russians what they had lost to the

[68]

Japanese in 1905. This is exactly what happened, and there wasn't anything in the world anybody could have done to have stopped them anyway. They were going to enter the war, and, in fact, the Russians never did go beyond what they had in 1905, even though they were in a position to have done a lot more. They never did; they adhered to that understanding. But trying to tell people that these days...

ACCINELLI: Well, in return Roosevelt also got a commitment for Russian entry into the Pacific war, which he very much wanted, at a time when the atomic bomb was still in the future and an uncertainty.

MELBY: Even General Marshall said our best intelligence estimate -- he would tell me this later in China -- our best intelligence estimates at the time were that we had to have the Russians in that war against Japan or we might find ourselves fighting the Japanese Kwangtung Army in Manchuria. We thought it was a full-fledged army, but our intelligence was all wrong; there was no army there left. The Japanese had squandered it all in the islands. But we didn't know that. I mean, of course, this was part of Melby's education on intelligence, that most

[69]

decisions are made on the basis either of an inaccurate or inadequate information in this world. That goes for human, personal relations as well as affairs of state. We simply make decisions because we have to make decisions and we make them on the basis of inaccurate information.

ACCINELLI: It's also true, isn't it, that part of that Far Eastern agreement at Yalta involved the negotiation of a treaty between China and the Soviet Union?

MELBY: That is true.

ACCINELLI: Which would commit Stalin to Chiang.

MELBY: That's right, and Harriman objected. T.V. Soong went to Moscow to negotiate that treaty, and Harriman told him you aren't going farther than Yalta says you have to go. You're giving more to the Russians than you have to give. And of course, China would turn around and throw that back in our faces, but that's another story.

ACCINELLI: So that at the time of Yalta, you really weren't aware of the specifics of the agreement.

MELBY: No, I didn't know. I didn't know the actual signed

[70]

Soviet treaty was published in August 1945. I was back on Long Island with Lillian at that time, anyway, and I read it in the *New York Times*. No, I didn't know anything about it.

ACCINELLI: Well, even before Yalta, from what I've read, Harriman had grown, let's say, a bit more realistic about relations with the Russians. Did you sense that he was in fact changing his views of the Soviet Union?

MELBY: Yes. There was some evidence for it, too, and some justification in a sense. For example, there had been an allied agreement on the value of the Austrian schilling once the Russians moved in there. But the minute the Russian troops moved in they broke the agreement, and put in their own currency. Now that was an out-and-out violation of an agreement.

After I stopped being director of OWI, I was given the job of writing up the Hungarian armistice, from our files. I never got to finish it, but there was the question of the Hungarian armistice which was a pretty dirty story in a sense, in that Russian troops had moved into Budapest at some point. I can't give you exact dates anymore. The Hungarians had invited them to come in and discuss

[71]

terms. The Russians went in and the Hungarians immediately shot all the Russian negotiators; they drove them out. The Russians again attacked across the plains; again the Hungarians asked for an armistice, and again they sent in a team to negotiate and again the Hungarians did the

same damn thing. Never again would they ever forgive the Hungarians for a double betrayal. In 1956 they made them pay for it with a vengeance. Now this is a story you won't hear.

ACCINELLI: No, in fact I've never heard of it.

MELBY: This can be documented.

ACCINELLI: And you were aware in Moscow that this...

MELBY: This was the documentation; I was working on it. We never published it. Now of course the Hungarians are great freedom fighters, along with the contras and other people. Everybody is a freedom fighter who is against a Commie.

So you see, other people in the Embassy I didn't get to know as well as I might have simply because I was really tied down with the Ambassador. I'm not objecting to it at all. George Kennan was there as Minister

[72]

Counselor; George and I were never soul mates, then or now. I think he thought I was kind of a newspaper dilettante. I had some talents that were worth keeping for the Foreign Service, but that didn't make me a proper Foreign Service Officer. And I've always had reservations about George, too, and his peculiar attitudes toward the Russians.

ACCINELLI: In what way?

MELBY: I think he was very sentimental about the Russians.

ACCINELLI: About the people and the culture, as opposed to the system.

MELBY: Yes. He loves the Russians for what they are, for their strength and so on, and yet he also in a sense, I think, hates the Russians because what he sees as their strengths, he sees as weaknesses in himself. He finds that hard to rationalize in any way.

ACCINELLI: What kind of weaknesses in himself?

MELBY: Oh, well, he had chronic stomach ulcers, which makes him a very depressed person. He's not a very forceful man; he's not a strong personality. I've always had a

[73]

feeling about George and his scholarship, and so on. There's more style than there is substance. He's a brilliant stylist; he writes extremely well. But I think he sometimes gets so mesmerized by the style that you wonder, what is this man really saying, if anything. I think in a sense, he's in the great 19th century tradition of an historian; and a very good one.

ACCINELLI: Yes, very much so. Did you and he see eye-to-eye on relations with the Soviet Union at that time, or did you discuss that subject at all?

MELBY: Yes, we did some. He was in one of his really anti-Soviet periods. Officially, he thought the Russians could do nothing right, or there was nothing good about them. They were an aggressive people, and he was really "anti-official Russia."

ACCINELLI: Did that represent the general viewpoint of the Russian experts in the Department?

MELBY: In the Department, oh yes. They were a lot more irrational about it than George was. George at least was as emotional about it as the others. Chip Bohlen never was emotional about it. Chip was very hard-headed

[74]

about it. Tommy [Llewellyn] Thompson, who was not a Russian language officer but who later negotiated the Austrian treaty, probably had the most sensible approach to it of anyone. But some of the older men, such as Loy Henderson, I mean just mention the Russians and they just foam at the mouth. Or Elbridge Durbrow. I mean he's a real little shit if there ever was one. Partly, I suppose my feeling on that is I suspect that he did some informing on me, which I didn't appreciate. He's still connected with this institute out in Virginia, one of the enterprise institutes, or something.

ACCINELLI: Oh, is he? I didn't know he was still alive.

MELBY: Oh, very much so. He's a compulsive talker for one thing. He's not a Russian language officer either, but he served a lot there.

ACCINELLI: I know that Kennan was much disturbed while he was in Moscow that Roosevelt's policy of cooperation seemed to be beyond criticism. From what I understand Kennan was suggesting that it was necessary to be more realistic about the possibilities, or the probabilities, of good relations with the Russians after the war and so forth

[75]

and so on, very much in that vein. Of course, that message came into vogue in, I guess, late 1945 or early 1946. Was it known at the time that in fact this was Kennan's view?

MELBY: Oh, yes, I think so. He never concealed it. I don't know if you've seen this issue of *American Heritage*.* It has a very interesting article here on George Kennan vs. Paul Nitze, and the change in their attitudes over the years toward the Russians. This, I think, will tell you as well as anything I could say how George has shifted. I happen to agree with George's position right now on the Russians; we've got to learn to live with them. But he hasn't always felt that. If you would like to borrow that.

ACCINELLI: I very much would.

MELBY: It's a long article. Paul Nitze, with whom I always disagreed...

ACCINELLI: Well, Nitze's always been a hardliner.

*Greg Herkin, "The Great Foreign Policy Fight." *American Heritage* (April-May 1986):66-79.

[76]

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: He hasn't changed his views at all.

MELBY: That's right. He's always believed as he does now. But George has vacillated so much. I mean George's attitude on foreign policy is "what a pity it is those poor peasants, the American voters, have to know anything about foreign policy. Why can't they leave it to those of us who understand such things, and they can just go about raising their tomatoes and potatoes and so on, whatever, and leave it to us." We know better, after all.

ACCINELLI: Oh, yes, he's very much an elitist in that sense. In fact, it was rather ironic during the Vietnam war, when he emerged as a critic, that in fact he gained an audience among Americans who were antiwar. He became a popular figure in that sense, but it's a role that I think really didn't suit him. He's very much in a tradition, I think, of 19th century diplomacy, cabinet diplomacy, where elites talked to one another and settled problems.

MELBY: Have you seen this new book *The Wise Men*?*

*Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York, 1986)

[77]

ACCINELLI: No, I read a review of it. I'm really eager to pick it up.

MELBY: I had a note from Kathleen Harriman a few weeks ago; she had the galley on it.

ACCINELLI: What does she think of it?

MELBY: She didn't say. She just said it brought back so many memories.

ACCINELLI: I bet.

What about General Deane? Did you have much to do with him?

MELBY: Not really; more socially than anything else, nothing businesswise. I would just see him because he was in and out with the Ambassador all the time, every day, practically. He was always very affable, and friendly. We didn't talk any business, but he would stop in the office, or when Kathleen and I were running OWI, he'd come in and see what we were up to and so on. That sort of thing. But obviously we didn't get into military matters at all.

ACCINELLI: Even before Yalta -- if I can come back to Harriman

[78]

for a moment -- he had come to the conclusion that if relations with the Russians were going to be put on a realistic basis there had to be more reciprocity, the quid pro quo approach, as it's been called by some historians. That is, the United States should simply not give; it might ask for something in return as well. Were you aware that this was his viewpoint? Did you discuss that at all? Were you at all sympathetic to that view?

MELBY: Oh yes, sure. Interestingly enough -- and here again I get a little personal about it -- when Lillian was there, he never baited her; he was always rather sympathetic with her views on the Russians. Of course, she was living at Spaso, so she could speak more freely there than she would with others outside. So he understood more of her feelings on it. The idea that she was pro-Communist or anything like that, he just took with a grain of salt. I mean she was what he called a "fellow wanderer."

ACCINELLI: A fellow wanderer?

MELBY: Yes. He at one time had wanted her to come back to Moscow as cultural affairs officer. She wouldn't do it. She said, "Living here this way now, being here all these weeks, I know that if I stayed here for any

[79]

length of time, I'd get to be like the rest of you. I couldn't take it." But George Kennan had no such sympathy with her. There was one big party he gave and Lillian and I went to, and at one point in the evening George got up and said, "Now, let's go over and let's bait Lillian." He didn't know Lillian, didn't know her at all. I thought it not only was tactless but ungentlemanly, if I may use that phrase.

ACCINELLI: It sounds uncharacteristic as well. It's a rather forward kind of statement for him to make.

MELBY: No, I've heard George like that. No. I think Averell knew a good deal more about what was going on in China. You see, John Davies came there in February of '45. At the suggestion more or less of Loy Henderson, it was about the time that these naive characters in China be given an opportunity to learn what communism was all about and so on. Therefore, Davies was the first candidate. The treatment that he was supposed to get out of Moscow didn't work. Particularly, it didn't work with Pat, his wife, who thought the Russians were wonderful. She had her first child in the Kremlin hospital, which she thought was wonderful, too. Since then they've had five

[80]

more daughters, and finally got a son. But John would talk very frankly about China with Averell, and I think Averell learned a lot about China.

ACCINELLI: By that time had Davies already become disenchanted with the Nationalists?

MELBY: Oh, he had for years.

ACCINELLI: And he thought that cooperation with the Communists was a way of salvaging the situation?

MELBY: Certainly. It wasn't a question that you're pro-Communist. Actually this is one of the things on which they hung him eventually, because he put into a telegram to the Department, "Let's face it, the future of China belongs to the Communists, not to the Nationalists, and we've got to learn to live with it. No question of liking it or disliking it, they are a fact."

ACCINELLI: He also saw -- and this wasn't credited enough at the time, perhaps wasn't even acknowledged -- he also saw that by building that kind of relationship, you established a counterweight against the Soviet Union. He wasn't at all pro-Soviet. In fact, he was very prophetic wasn't he?

[81]

MELBY: All of us saw the possibility of the Communists becoming another Tito. That wasn't give any weight back in Washington in those days, and yet that is exactly what happened.

ACCINELLI: Well, perhaps you can tell me something about daily life in wartime Moscow, what it was like to be an American Foreign Service Officer there.

MELBY: Well, mine wasn't a particularly typical one because I lived according to Embassy hours, Averell's hours more, but the rest of the Embassy lived pretty much the way officers do anyplace.

ACCINELLI: There was no shortage of supplies?

MELBY: Oh, no, not in my time. It wasn't much of a diet. There was an awful lot of Spam and that sort of stuff, except for one Christmas when Averell managed to con London out of 1,000 cases of Scotch, which arrived all at once and resulted in one of the most massive drunken orgies that's ever been seen on the face of this earth.

[82]

Second Oral History Interview with John F. Melby, November 14, 1986, Ontario, Canada. By Robert Accinelli, University of Toronto.

ACCINELLI: Professor Melby, can you tell me a little bit more about the day-to-day routine, or your daily life in Moscow?

MELBY: Well, I think the daily routine for most officers in the Embassy was pretty much what it is anyplace else, kind of a 9 to 5 routine and so on. My own schedule tended to be a little more erratic than that since I was living in Spaso with the Ambassador. His schedule was somewhat attuned to that of Stalin at that time, and Stalin, of course, was famous for not going to work before midnight. So Harriman could be called out at any point, mostly at night, on things, and those of us who were living with him in Spaso had to tailor our lives a little bit according to what

he had to do too. But otherwise, it was, I say, pretty much the usual kind of life, a 9 to 5 kind of existence, in which unfortunately almost nobody in the Embassy really had enough to do. The Embassy had been grossly overstaffed, as I have mentioned, in anticipation of a possible German breakthrough at Stalingrad, in which case there was no

[83]

guarantee we could ever get more officers in, for who knows how long. So, we did sort of have an awful lot of time on our hands.

During my time there, food was never a problem. We had plenty of heat in the Embassy; we were comfortable enough, and the Russians saw to it that we had a lot more vodka available to us than really was good for us. So life, as I say, tended after 5 o'clock to sort of degenerate into kind of a long evening's brawl a little bit, which didn't do many people much good the next morning.

On the other hand, that was the way it was, and also you learn quickly enough that relationships tended to get pretty tense around there, despite a fairly steady parade of distinguished or interesting visitors coming through the Embassy. Really, for the most part we were pretty much on our own, and even though we still could see more Russians than was usually the case, still we were thrown back on ourselves and upon the rest of the diplomatic corps, which was generally fairly reduced in size at that time. The whole business became a little bit incestuous.

[84]

In terms of food and that sort of thing, I say we didn't suffer at all, although mostly it was imported stuff. We had our own commissary there. Harriman insisted that since we could get supplies sent in from abroad, that we make every effort not to use Russian supplies which, after all, were pretty much on a starvation level at this time, and would stay that way throughout the war. So, we ate an awful lot of Spam and that sort of stuff. We got where you could face it and it was all right, but otherwise, I say boredom really was pretty much the norm of life there, and all the attendant evils that go along with that.

ACCINELLI: What impression did you have of the ordinary life of Russians in Moscow at that time? The hardship was apparent, I take it.

MELBY: Yes, it was a tough life for them. It was almost a cliché that practically every Russian whom you knew, or would run into in any capacity, would tend to be the only survivor of an entire family. Everybody else had been killed off out in battle along the Russian fronts, or in the Ukraine where the Germans had wreaked their greatest havoc and so on. This was the tragic part of life there. Being able to know the Russians, you knew what they were suffering and you

[85]

knew that the casualties were pretty appalling. As to what they did, mostly, those who were still alive did about what Russians had always done; they did their jobs, and that was it.

ACCINELLI: Was the Embassy under surveillance? Did you have to take care in what you said in public, or who you made contact with?

MELBY: Oh, yes. We knew the NKVD -- as it was known then, that was the Secret Police at that time -- that they had their men stationed right outside the gates of the Embassy, the Chancery, and the Embassy itself. I say I was sort of the mess manager for Harriman. We had 35 Russian servants working in the Embassy for all of us, taking care of all of us, and far more than really we needed. But we didn't do anything about the actual number. We knew that we did pay them in Rubles, but to the Russians the advantage of the job was they knew they'd be fed. As part of my job, I used to buy potatoes and carrots and onions, and so on, and buy them by the ton. It makes one kind of bilious these days to think that much in terms of foodstuffs, but it took that much to

[86]

feed all those people. We could buy our supplies locally, that sort of thing, under control prices so there was no great expense involved. Actually, most of us had our hardship post allowances and so on, and we all, including the Ambassador, pretty much lived on our allowances. We didn't spend our salaries at all for anything; there wasn't anything to spend any money on.

Well, we knew that on the question of surveillance that undoubtedly -- we just took it for granted -- that all of the servants sooner or later were reporting to the NKVD, what was going on in the Embassy. So, yes, sure, you watched what you said, and our techniques of trying to detect surveillance devices, and so on, were pretty primitive in those days. So we weren't sure how much was bugged or where it was bugged. We just took it for granted that everything was. And if you had anything that you wanted to say that you really wanted the Russians not to know, you went outside to say it, or you didn't say it.

On the other hand, surveillance I suppose was a little less than it had been before I arrived there, or than it would be afterwards, mostly because of lack of

[87]

manpower. So many people had been killed, able-bodied people had been killed, that even the NKVD really was a little strapped for people to use to follow people around.

On the other hand, anytime we left the Embassy, or left the Chancery or went anyplace, an NKVD car with a load of agents would follow up wherever we went. And where we went, they'd park wherever we did. We got where we just didn't pay much attention to it. In fact, since automobile maintenance was something of a premium in those days, it was kind of useful to have them along in case some car broke down. You always knew you had somebody who, at least, if nothing else, could get out and push. So it wasn't all one-sided by any means, particularly in the wintertime. It was nice to know that you weren't going to be abandoned anyplace out in those steppes.

ACCINELLI: Is there anything that you want to say about some of the interesting or distinguished visitors who came through Spaso House?

MELBY: Well, the one person in particular, who turned out to be of great interest and concern to me, was Ed Flynn. Flynn had gone to Yalta with President Roosevelt.

[88]

After Yalta [conference], Edward Stettinius, who was then Secretary of State, and Alger Hiss, and party, all came to Moscow for two or three days, and Flynn came along with them. Now the Stettinius group that came up really just wanted to see the Kremlin and do a little sightseeing and check in with a few Russian officials. Incidentally, years later, I would get visits from the FBI asking me what Alger Hiss had been up to, and had he gone secretly to see so and so and so and so, in the Kremlin. All I'd say was, "As far as I know, he didn't do anything differently from anybody else in the party." If he did see anybody, I was not aware of it, and actually Alger was staying at Spaso with us along with Stettinius and others. If he did see anybody, which I've always doubted very seriously, I didn't know anything about it. So after a while the FBI got tired of coming and seeing me on that old chestnut.

ACCINELLI: This was still while you were in the Foreign Service? Was it while Hiss was being tried?

MELBY: Oh, no, no, this was before San Francisco. He at this time was in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs.

[89]

ACCINELLI: But when did the FBI question you about his activities?

MELBY: Oh, long after. It was after the trial and after he had been convicted.

ACCINELLI: Oh, really?

MELBY: They didn't come see me about him really before the trial or anything like that, no. But at this time he was in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs and, I guess, it didn't occur to me at the time, but I guess that he probably had gone along as an advisor in connection with the Yalta agreements on the Far East. He was just another one of the members of the President's party.

They all left, with the exception of Ed Flynn who stayed on. Harriman at that point asked me if I would take on, as an additional chore, just keeping an eye on Flynn. He, as you know, had been political boss of the Bronx and he was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He had been refused confirmation as Ambassador, or Minister to Australia, which was something Roosevelt wanted him to have to improve his image with the public. But Flynn also had a reputation for being a very heavy

[90]

drinker, and a man who liked the ladies very, very much. Although at this time he was on the wagon, as far as I know, and never fell off it, still one didn't know. So Averell asked me to keep an eye on him and see if he was drinking or not. The question of the ladies was a little bit out of the question, because there weren't any ladies around. Flynn knew perfectly well what I was doing, and he was vastly amused by it all. But out of it all, we became very good friends. He was a man of enormous charm. Finally, he told me why he had stayed on; namely, one of Roosevelt's little pet ideas had been eventually to get some kind of Kremlin-Vatican concordat, to end the feud between those two great power bases. Flynn, who was a very prominent Catholic layman,

had been asked by the President to stay behind and go have a talk with Molotov about it. Well, it was kind of interesting. (Molotov has just died after all these years, age 96.)

Molotov was very much interested in the idea, and said he didn't see why something couldn't be worked out." He said, "After all, the Vatican and the Kremlin -- time doesn't mean anything to either of us; we've got all history ahead of us. Something can be worked out." He was intrigued by the idea, but he said, "I think you're going to have a little more trouble with the Vatican. You go ahead and talk to the Pope and see how he feels about it."

[91]

I suspect that Flynn had dropped some hints about this to the Pope already, because he seemed pretty confident that the Pope would, if not enthusiastically, still go along with the idea. In any event, Flynn finally said that he was pretty sure that something was going to be able to be worked out, and that Mr. Roosevelt would ask him to go back to Rome to be resident there to handle the negotiations on this whole deal. Flynn asked me if I would like to go with him as his assistant. I was certainly willing to do it. He said, "Now, I have to tell you, you cannot tell the State Department about this, because neither Stettinius, nor anybody else in the State Department knows anything about it. This is a straight White House operation." He said, "Of course, Harriman will know, but nobody else will."

So, I was in kind of an awkward position when I couldn't tell my own Department what I had in mind. Flynn finally left, and he did go see the Pope, who was interested. I say he was not as enthusiastic as Molotov, but he still told Flynn, "Go ahead and see what you can do. See what we can work out." Flynn then came back to New York, and shortly after that the President was dead. But Flynn still sent word that he thought he

[92]

was pretty sure that Mr. Truman, once he got used to the idea of being President and got caught up on his homework, was going to tell him to go ahead and do it, carry through with it. So he said, "What I suggested to you is still on."

Now, this was also the time when the opportunity to go to the U.N. Conference at San Francisco presented itself and that was fine with me too. Flynn said, "Get yourself an assignment someplace. I think something is going to work out within six months and when that happens, wherever you are, I'll send for you." That was the way matters were left then. Actually, I did keep in touch with him; actually I saw him in July after the San Francisco Conference. I saw him in New York and we went and had lunch, and he was still very confident that the thing was going on. By this time the idea of my going to China had come up and he asked me, "Have you ever been to China?" I said, "No, and I don't know anything about it." He said, "Well, why don't you go out and have a look at it. I can get you back from Chungking just as easily as I can from anyplace else. You don't know anything about Asia. You might just as well add that to your list of experiences too." So, I agreed to do that.

[93]

In the meantime, before he left Moscow, he and I had gone on a trip to Leningrad, where the siege had just been lifted. It was a terrible sight to see what had happened to that city. It was still

wintry, but it was an interesting trip. Then he finally came back and, of course, as I say, Roosevelt was dead shortly but that didn't seem to bother Flynn at the time. However, within a year Flynn himself was dead.

In the meantime, there I was in China and not in any position at that point to say to Washington, "I want out of China," or "I want to go someplace else." I couldn't tell them why. I had been there less than a year, and it wouldn't look very good when the first thing you do is ask for a transfer, particularly when you cannot tell them the reason why you want it. It was very shortly after that that I really started getting interested in China as such. I guess all I knew about China when I arrived there was it was a big country, and a lot of people lived there. China got to me as it did to everybody else, and I've been at it ever since. The vagaries of the Foreign Service.

ACCINELLI: Was it, then, Flynn who arranged for you to be

[94]

sent to China, or was that already an opportunity that had been presented to you, that he recommended that you take?

MELBY: He didn't recommend China. Harriman had had this idea. This was even before I left Moscow. I left Moscow the night Roosevelt died. But before that, Harriman had been working on an idea that Foreign Service officers with some Russian experience, or background, who knew a little bit about the Soviet Union should be stationed in obvious key spots around the world. His first suggestion to me was, how would I like to go to Budapest. I don't remember why, particularly, but I didn't cotton to that idea very much. Then out of conversation, Chungking came up, was mentioned, and I said, "That sounds more interesting to me." He said, "Okay, I'll see what I can do." In the meantime, I discovered later, actually I had been transferred, as I was leaving Moscow, to Argentina. This was at a time when the Department was undergoing one of its perennial reorganizations and my orders transferring me to Buenos Aires were still in a typewriter when whoever was typing them out was being reorganized into something else. They sat there for I don't know how long, but

[95]

eventually Harriman either vetoed the thing, or changed, and I was sent to Chungking.

ACCINELLI: Did Harriman advise you that you had to be careful when you went to Chungking? It was obvious [by late 1945] that there were divisions between Hurley and some of the Foreign Service officers in China. Did he advise you to watch your step or tether your reporting?

MELBY: He did at one point. I saw him in San Francisco at the Conference and he did make a sort of a rather blunt suggestion that it would be a good idea if I would report what I thought the Department wanted to hear and not put my own ideas into it too much, which I did not like at all. In fact, when I saw him again a couple days later, he apologized for having said that, and he said he didn't really mean it that way. It sounded a little bit more brusque and abrupt and dictatorial than he really had in mind, and the kind of thing that he could do on occasion. I don't think he really meant it.

ACCINELLI: What would he have wanted you to report? What was the line that was in favor in the State Department at that time, do you recall?

[96]

MELBY: Oh, officially we were supporting the Nationalists, sure.

ACCINELLI: Now before you went to China, you spent some time in San Francisco, did you not, at the United Nations Conference?

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: How did you come to get that assignment?

MELBY: Well, I never really knew particularly. I was one of a group of junior officers who were known as special assistants on delegation liaison, which is about as meaningless a title as you can think of. The man that was in charge of us -- in charge of the group of officers -- was Newbold Walmsley, who had been on the Brazilian desk, whom I knew. Well, I had known him when I was in my Latin-American days; I knew him quite well. I guess I just assumed at the time that he was putting together a staff, after all. Somebody has got to put them together, and he was named to be in charge of the special assistants. It was his idea.

He looked over the list of who was in Moscow and he remembered me from my Latino days. "Aha, Melby, I

[97]

know him, good man," and so on and so on. "Let him be liaison officer with the" -- as it turned out -- "three Russian delegations." That had been one of the sticking points. Was the British commonwealth going to have all of these votes? After all, Canada, South Africa, all of the dominions -- all will have separate votes and the Russians the same. But after all, the Soviet Union is a federation of federated republics. Aren't we entitled to more than just one vote, which, of course, Washington was resisting. But in the end Mr. Roosevelt felt he had to make some compromise. So, he agreed that there would be the Soviet delegation; there would also be a delegation from the Ukraine and one from Byelorussia. There were three Russian delegations.

Well, I was the liaison officer with all three; actually there wasn't any job. What all of us were expected to do was sort of be waterboy, empty the wastebaskets, arrange social events, take the ladies on shopping tours. I mean just general factotum. Most of these delegations didn't know San Francisco or anything about it, or how to get around, and they needed somebody to whom they could go, an American, for advice on where to buy

[98]

California neckties or what have you. Was it all right to pay this much for that and so on. And it could be a very pleasant job. It could also be unpleasant, depending upon the nature of the delegation. Some of them were very demanding. Middle Easterners were outrageous as a rule; the Latin Americans, the officers who were liaison with them, had a wonderful time, a wonderful social time the whole time. They enjoyed it thoroughly. The Europeans sort of just considered

them as office boys. So the experiences differed a great deal. But me, I didn't have anything to do because the Russians didn't want anyone to help.

Before we left for San Francisco, Molotov came to our Embassy. His coming turned out to be a consequence of Roosevelt's death. Harriman was giving a farewell party that night for General Deane and me. He was coming back to Washington, and I was too. So, Averell and Kathleen were giving a farewell party for the two of us when we got word around midnight that the President was dead; whereupon he immediately went to the phone and called Molotov. He said he had some news for him, and wanted to come over and see him right away. Well,

[99]

Molotov had already heard, so he said, "No, no, no, no, you stay where you are. I'm coming over to see you." So he showed up in a very few minutes at the Embassy and he spent the rest of the night there wandering up and down the halls, just like a wild man. "What does this thing mean? Who is this man Truman? Roosevelt we knew we could get along with. Sure, he thought he was going to con us, charm us and so on, and he was right, he could do it. We knew what we were dealing with," and so on. But, "Who is this man Truman? We've never heard of him," and so on. "What can we do?" Now, Averell picked that one up right away and he said, "Well, the first thing you can do is to go to San Francisco." Molotov had so far refused to do so. Molotov said, "I will leave tomorrow morning." And he did.

ACCINELLI: Was this unlike Molotov to be so expressive?

MELBY: Yes, very unlike him. He was obviously beside himself. They were used to Roosevelt and knew that they could deal with him. They thought that he could deal with them. He was a known quantity.

ACCINELLI: I suppose also some of the deals that they struck

[100]

at Yalta depended, or seemed to depend, very much on Roosevelt's continuing in office.

MELBY: Of course.

ACCINELLI: So Molotov went off to San Francisco, just about the same time that you did then.

MELBY: Yes. I left very early that next morning, Russ and I. We spent the night in Naples and then to Algeria. Molotov left that same evening, and I don't know what his route was. But when he arrived in San Francisco he took over one whole floor on the St. Francis Hotel. He posted his NKVD guards there, and nobody got in or out of that floor unless you were escorted. The only person I was ever permitted to go and see on that floor was the secretary of the delegation, a very nice guy. He spoke good English. I would go see him occasionally. Well, it was not very often, because he didn't want anything. They didn't want to be entertained; they didn't want any social life. They had their own communications ship sitting out there inside the Golden Gate.

ACCINELLI: In the Bay.

[101]

MELBY: In the Bay, and none of their communications were handled through American or international facilities. They had their own transmitters and so on. Of course, everybody in northern California wanted to get on that ship. That's the only thing I had to do, really, to tell them "no," they couldn't. Eventually, on toward the end of the Conference, [I met] Manuilsky who was the head of the Ukrainian delegation, who was a very different kind of guy. He had been educated in France and spoke good French and very good English too. His delegation was there and they were much more European-oriented; they even dressed differently and so on. The only concession that they made on that ship was that on toward the end of the conference, they agreed that a very charming young lady, who had been sort of designated as San Francisco's hostess for them, and I could go out there and have lunch on the ship as guests of the captain. The secretary of the Ukrainian delegation also went along with us. It was one of those Russian experiences; they were out to get us both drunk, and on such occasions, there's only one thing to do and that's get drunk fast and pass out. You might just as well do it and relax. That's sad.

[102]

ACCINELLI: Was it information that they wanted?

MELBY: No. No, just to have a lark.

ACCINELLI: Just sociability?

MELBY: Oh sure, just Russian. I remember it used to be done on November 7th, the big bash they'd give. One year I remember they decided that "Archie" Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador was the one earmarked to get drunk, and he knew it was his time. Yes, special guests were always taken into a separate room with the higher ranking Russians. And Archie proceeded to get drunk, which turned out to be really not so funny, because as he passed out he fell into the punch bowl, his face forward, and it broke. His face was pretty badly cut. It was very interesting because his young secretaries who had been following what was going on -- they moved into that room so fast, and they had Archie out of that house in what couldn't have been more than about 20 seconds. Then the next year it was Averell's turn to get drunk. Well, San Francisco was my turn.

ACCINELLI: And you did your duty.

[103]

MELBY: And I did my duty.

ACCINELLI: You managed to get taken back to San Francisco. Do you have any memory of that?

MELBY: Oh, sure, the secretary of the Ukrainian delegation got me back all right, and I was very much embarrassed about it, and about the young lady particularly. She was, as I say, a very nice young lady, and so I sent her some flowers. She called me up the next day and said, "I appreciate the flowers, but did they have to be salmon-colored glads?"

Manuilsky is the one man in any of the Russian delegations I got to know at all. I mean he and I became pretty good friends. I took him out to the airport when he left at the end of the Conference. His plane was delayed and we walked up and down the tarmac waiting for it. He got to reminiscing about his days in Paris, and about early American diplomacy and so on, and the caliber of American diplomats like Franklin, and the Adamses and so on. "Why is it," he said, "that revolutionary periods produce such great diplomats?" Then he asked me if I could get him a copy of Carl Van Doren's biography of Franklin, which I

[104]

did and I sent it to him. I didn't know if he would ever receive it, but he did, and I got in return a whole shelf full of Ukrainian books he sent me. That ended that association.

ACCINELLI: Did you have any sense that the Russian delegation was isolating itself in part because of a growing anti-Russian mood on the Western side? Did you sense that there was an anti-Russian mood or trend, for example, in the American delegation or among the Latin American delegations?

MELBY: I don't think there really was. I think that, because the whole group of American Foreign Service officers who were so anti-Soviet were not involved in San Francisco at all. Only those were there who were inclined to be more understanding. Mind you, this was after all, May and June of 1945, and Mrs. Roosevelt had pretty well purged the Department of the entire Russian element. I mean she hadn't really purged them, but I mean they were neutralized.

ACCINELLI: How had she done that?

[105]

MELBY: Oh, she just had them transferred to other jobs where they had nothing to do with the Russians. The time it happened, I wasn't involved in Russian affairs, so I didn't particularly know much about it. Chip Bohlen, you see, was the President's translator and interpreter. The only one of that group whom I ever saw in Moscow was Elbridge Durbrow, who was as nasty a piece of business as I ever ran across. But the others were just not in the picture at all. It was still the great days of the Russian War Relief and so on.

I don't think the real anti-Russian feeling had cropped up at all. I remember, for example, that one of the members of the American delegation was Harold Stassen, of all people. He was still in Naval uniform. He was our representative on the new, or impending, trusteeship council. He came up with a suggestion -- well, today it would be a great horror around the world -- but his suggestion at that time was that the former Italian colonies in Africa, named Libya and Somaliland, not Ethiopia, of course, but Libya and Somaliland, should be given to the Russians. In other words, bring them into the Mediterranean. They were entitled to it; weren't they our allies and so on?

[106]

And good, honest Harold; he really believed this. In a funny kind of sense, I think he still does.

ACCINELLI: I think...

MELBY: Harold is a very interesting man.

ACCINELLI: Yes.

MELBY: I remember, a very good friend of mine in Philadelphia, a lady, who knew him better than I did. This was after he had been fired by John Foster Dulles. He had been one of Dulles' representatives at disarmament talks in Europe, and he had gone against his instructions, which he shouldn't have done, but he did. He said, "I believed in what I was saying; I believed in cutting arms." He said, "In fact, of all the jobs I ever had in my life, the one that I loved the most, was to be a disarmament negotiator." He said, "I really believed in that, and I still do." A funny man.

ACCINELLI: Well, he's become a bit of a political eccentric now, hasn't he?

MELBY: He ran for Congress again last week.

[107]

ACCINELLI: That's right.

MELBY: Although it's kind of a joke.

ACCINELLI: If I'm not mistaken, he was also in the ECA in the early 1950s; this was still during the Truman administration. So he had a good run at Government service, but after he left our Government he seemed to have taken a kind of odd-ball turn...

MELBY: He started running for office, started out running for President, and began working his way down.

ACCINELLI: That's right.

MELBY: He was a terrible president of the University of Pennsylvania, which is before my time at Pennsylvania. And he still has his law office in Philadelphia, or he did anyway.

ACCINELLI: Did you mingle with any of the other members of the American delegation? Vandenberg was there, I think, and John Foster Dulles. Did you have any contact with them at all?

MELBY: Not with that group, no. Well, my job or what should

[108]

have been my job, didn't call for anything like that. No, I didn't. I just had a good time in San Francisco. San Francisco did the incredible. We had two months in which temperatures stayed between 60 and 80 day and night and not a cloud in the sky, the whole two months.

ACCINELLI: Gorgeous.

MELBY: San Francisco really laid itself out.

I was put on various committees; I was a member of Roger Lapham's hospitality committee, and a few jobs like that, but I didn't really do anything serious there.

ACCINELLI: So this was kind of a respite, wasn't it?

MELBY: It certainly was. It certainly was.

ACCINELLI: Was it considered a kind of a payoff for hardship duty in Moscow?

MELBY: No, it was just not considered that. Walmsley referred to my delegations as "Melby's peculiar delegations."

ACCINELLI: Now, you spent some additional time in the States before going off to China, did you not?

[109]

MELBY: Yes, I didn't leave for China until October. It was mainly because of transportation. See, the atomic bomb wasn't dropped until August, and the Pacific was in chaos, and there wasn't any way of getting across the Pacific for people going to Chungking. Incidentally, there was a telegram announcing that I was coming, being assigned there. Bob Smyth who was then Charge in Chungking -- [Patrick J.] Hurley had left -- had noted that the telegram said, "to arrive as soon as convenient," and Bob Smyth made a notation there saying, "Means probably never arriving."

ACCINELLI: When did you arrive in Chungking?

MELBY: The end of October of '45. I ended up not going across the Pacific, and I didn't have very much notice. Of course, the war was over in the Pacific but it was still pretty chaotic out in that area. When the Department finally got me a reservation to go by way of Europe, which I did, I stopped off a few days in Rome. My brother had spent the war years in Switzerland, and I hadn't seen him for almost ten years, I guess, so he came down from Switzerland and we had about a week in Rome. From Rome,

[110]

I went to Karachi, Pakistan; and Calcutta, where again I was held up for several days because of transportation. By this time the American Army in China had not been demobilized; it had just simply fallen to pieces. It was really kind of a shocking thing to see. One thing that had happened that I didn't know about at the time, and learned about later, was that there had been actual mutinies among American troops in the Philippines. Everybody wanted to get out, get back home. And what happened was that American troops in China, particularly, were just fed up with China. They were just getting up from wherever they were sitting, and starting to move westward. They were like a flood of lemmings across India, taking any transportation they could

find. I know the man who later came back to China for the CIA; he actually was stationed with the Embassy, and he was in the political section, but...

ACCINELLI: Who was this?

MELBY: Fred Schultheis. He had been with the Army in Chungking, and he, above all else, wanted to get back home. He told me once he just locked the drawer in his

[111]

desk and went out to the airport and waited to find any way he could to get out of China and back home. He was a brilliant language officer, too. Of course, there was this whole flood of GIs crossing India -- they got as far as Karachi and the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea, and found the troop ships were on strike. So they just backed up in India. The troop ships were on strike for weeks I think.

So it took me a little time to get out of Calcutta and over the Hump to Kunming. It was right at the tail end of the great Bengal famine, which was a pretty horrible thing to see. I finally did get to Kunming; then I had to wait several days to get from Kunming to Chungking. It was the weather. So it took me pretty close to a month to get there.

ACCINELLI: What was it like flying over the Hump?

MELBY: Beautiful day the day I did it. No problem.

ACCINELLI: Hurley was still Ambassador was he not, when you arrived?

MELBY: He was still Ambassador, but he had come back to Washington. I didn't see him in Chungking.

[112]

ACCINELLI: You didn't see him in Chungking?

MELBY: I had known him before, but I was just as happy not to tangle with him again.

ACCINELLI: Had you tangled with him before?

MELBY: No. He arrived in Moscow with some fool mission just as I was leaving there, and I had my own safe in Spaso. For some reason or other he managed to get the combination to this safe and lost it, which he was always doing. Incidentally, he had been in Teheran too where he managed to lose the original agreement, the Teheran Agreement, and they never did find it. Of course, I had known him originally when I was still in college. I was a delegate from the Sigma Chi fraternity to the national convention in New Orleans one year, my senior year in college, and he was the national president of Sigma Chi that year. That was my first meeting with him. Little did I know what the future would hold.

ACCINELLI: Was he as vain, as self-important then as he was...

MELBY: He was. He sat there and he pouted. He was a

[113]

terrible man. He had already left to come back. He was fed up with China himself, because he had this delusion that he was going to solve the Kuomintang-Communist problem, and he would do it on his own. He quickly found out that he wasn't going to do anything of the kind, although he had started out very pro-Communist. One of the first things he did when he arrived on that special mission, before he was Ambassador, was to go to Yen-an where he proceeded to draft an agreement that he was sure that Chiang Kai-shek was going to buy. The Communists had drafted an agreement, and he said it wasn't good enough; he wanted to amend it. So he amended it to include the Bill of Rights from the American Constitution, very much to the astonishment of Mao [Tse-tung] and Chou En-lai, who didn't believe it either. But they said, "Well, if this guy thinks he can sell it to Chiang, okay, what's to be lost?" Well, he took it back to Chungking with him, and Chiang proceeded to throw a tantrum.

From then on out he became increasingly and rabidly pro-Nationalist. Well, part of the time was spent supporting the Nationalists and the other part of the time was brawling with Albert Wedemeyer who was then

[114]

commanding American troops there, having replaced Stilwell. They were fighting over who was going to have the good bed in a certain part of the dormitory we were all living in, there. Hurley by this time was Ambassador, and he had shipped to him an automobile in Chungking of all places, where he had no possible use for an automobile. I think one has to say, in extenuation of his behavior, that Hurley was beginning to have moments of senility. One of the evidences I had of this -- although I wasn't present, I didn't see it -- was a story that was current there. Annalee Jacoby was there as a *Time* correspondent, and he asked her at some party to be his hostess, or something. She now is Mrs. Clifton Fadiman. When she came into his office, he got up and started chasing her around the room. He kept at it and she kept backing away and so on, and so forth. Finally, he stopped and he sat down at his desk, and he put his head in his hands and started to cry. "I hope you can forgive me," he said, "but when you walked into that room, I could have sworn it was my wife, and I couldn't understand why you were running away from me. Please forgive me, I just don't know what happened." And I saw Annalee in

[115]

Scottsdale and I asked her if this was a true story, and she said, "Yes, it was; he did it."

ACCINELLI: What kind of a relationship did he have with Madame Chiang?

MELBY: I don't think he liked her. I hadn't really heard anything about that particularly.

ACCINELLI: Was he at all jealous of the close relationship that Wedemeyer had with Madame Chiang?

MELBY: I never heard that. This was before my time and I never heard that. No, I think he was more concerned with Chiang.

ACCINELLI: And they did hit it off?

MELBY: Oh yes.

ACCINELLI: Well, when you arrived in Chungking, you stepped right into a hornet's nest, did you not?

MELBY: Unbelievable. Everybody in that Embassy wanted to seek me out right away and give me his version of the horrors that were going on in that Embassy. Walter Robertson was Minister Counselor then; he would be head

[116]

of the Executive Headquarters in Peking later on, and was then and has remained most of the rest of his life very pro-Chiang. But it was sort of Walter against the field. Everybody had turned against Hurley; everybody had turned against Chiang; everybody had turned against the Nationalists, which, of course, would later be exploited as saying that the Embassy was all pro-Communist and so on. That simply wasn't so. It was simply the contrast between the visible corruption and venality of the Nationalists which was beyond description, and -- what the few of those who had been up to Yen'an and had either seen it or had heard of it -- of the incorruptability of the Communists. [These were seen as] men who believed in something, or were dedicated to an idea, an ideal, and still not having gotten power, they were seen as a very attractive group. Nobody really ever put any credence in this idea that, "Oh, they're just a bunch of agrarian reformers; they're not real Communists." Everybody in the Embassy knew they were Communist; they said so. Chou En-lai used to get very annoyed with people who would say, "Oh, they're just agrarian reformers." He said, "We're nothing of the kind; we're Marxist; we believe it; we behave that way."

[117]

Years later, somebody tried to discover the origin of this term "agrarian reformers" as applied to the Communists, and discovered that the first man who used it, believe it or not -- and this was before the war -- was Stanley Hornbeck, of all people. Of course, he would deny it later on. But there it was in writing. He'd not only said it, he had written it: "The Communists are really just a bunch of agrarian reformers."

ACCINELLI: Who was in the Embassy when you arrived?

MELBY: Well, one of them, the man I knew the best, was Sol Adler, who was the Treasury attaché there. There was Bob Smyth who was an FSO; Phil Sprouse -- Phil was in Kunming, he was Consul in Kunming. Ralph Clough was there as a language officer. George Atcheson, of course, had just been transferred to Japan with MacArthur. I said Ralph Clough was there; he was a young language officer, and a very good one.

ACCINELLI: Had Raymond Ludden been transferred?

MELBY: Ray Ludden. Ray Ludden had not arrived; he would arrive not long after I got there. Knight Biggerstaff

[118]

was Chinese Secretary, from Cornell. Walter Robertson, of course, was Charge David Barrett was Military Attaché, or Assistant Military Attaché. Bill Kenney was Naval Attaché. The Embassy in Chungking was going through the sort of a period that the American Army was. Everybody was being transferred out who had been there at all during the war. Ellis Briggs, who was a Latin Americanist, had served time.

Then, also, Wilma Fairbank was there as Cultural Attaché; her husband, John Fairbank, was head of USIS. James O'Sullivan was there, although he would shortly be transferred to Hanoi to take over that office. Harold Gelwickes, who was a China-language officer, was one of the military attachés. I say it was a period when people were coming and going.

ACCINELLI: Who was running the Embassy in Hurley's absence? Who was the man in charge?

MELBY: Well, the man who was really the ranking officer -- well, there were two -- Bob Smyth, who was a career officer, and, I guess, Walter Robertson. Of course, they were at odds on China completely.

[119]

ACCINELLI: What were your duties when you arrived?

MELBY: My first duties when I was sent there to China was to see what the Russians were up to. And as it turned out, the Embassy, the Russian Embassy, had a whole new staff and they all turned out to be mostly people I had known in the Press Section of the Foreign Office in Moscow. The Ambassador A. A. Petrov, a very nice guy, was a good friend of mine. He had a very competent Chinese language staff, especially Nicolai Federenko who could be nasty even when trying to be nice. His military attaché, who would later be Ambassador, was a very amiable guy. I quickly found out that I was supposed to keep track of all the devilment the Russians were up to, and I found they weren't up to anything. They were behaving more correctly than any Embassy in town, and they would continue to do so right up until the bitter end. Anything that they may have been doing, or up to, was being done not by the Embassy staff; it was being done by other people elsewhere. In fact, actually the Russians never really did very much in China during my time.

There was, we now know, a group of Tass men in Yenan, but they were held very much at arm's length by Mao and

[120]

Chou En-lai and the other Communists. They didn't know what was going on because Stalin had decided the Communists had no future. He made the famous remark that the Chinese Communists were radish Communists, red outside and white inside. And after all, he had decided to sign the Soviet treaty in which he recognized Chiang Kai-shek as the sole legitimate

Government of China, very much to the bitterness of the Chinese Communists. It really wasn't until the end of the civil war that the Russians decided, well, that the Communists did have a future.

Remember that part of the deal at Yalta was that the Russians were coming in against Japan, on the basis of what our intelligence information was at the time. Which they did, finally, right after the atomic bomb had been dropped. They sent in a series of armies that had been mostly recruited from Central Asia. They had been in combat for three years without leave or anything. They proceeded to take Manchuria to pieces, and they had no opposition to it. We believed, as did the Russians, that the Japanese Army was a good army and still in being, and we were going, in the end, to have to fight the Japanese in Manchuria. Well, there wasn't any army left to speak

[121]

of or anything. So the Russians proceeded to dismantle Manchuria and they took the great Mukden Arsenal, and all the industrial establishment. Most of Chinese industry was located in Manchuria at the time. They shipped it all to Siberia, again very much to the bitter reaction of the Communists who thought they had been betrayed, which they had been. When the Russians moved out, which would have been in February or March of '46, all they did was to abandon the collected weapons of the Kwantung Army and they shipped the remnants of the Kwantung Army into Siberia, too. They've never been heard of since. All the help they ever gave to the Chinese Communists was the materiel that was left by the Kwantung Army.

ACCINELLI: At the same time, there was apprehension, certainly in the State Department, that a Communist Chinese victory might somehow increase the influence of Moscow in China. Wasn't there always a fear in spite of the lack of hard evidence, that Moscow was calling the shots or providing assistance, that a victory for the Communist Chinese would also be a victory for Moscow?

MELBY: I don't think any of us in the Embassy believed that,

[122]

and I don't think anybody in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs believed it either. We had seen too much of Communist independence. We all believed that in the end there was going to be sort of a Tito-arrangement developed. Despite how this came out eventually in the Letter of Transmittal to the China White Paper, which is another story, the Communists were not going to be subservient to the Russians. In fact, in one of the last conversations that Chou En-Lai had with General Marshall, he said, "We would like to be friends with you. It's true we are Marxists; we are Communists, and of course, we're going to have an affinity of sorts with the Russians, with the Kremlin. But that doesn't mean we can't be friends with you. However, how far we lean toward the Russians is going to depend in no small measure on how hard you push us. If you push us hard enough, we're not going to have any choice except to lean on the Russians. We've got to have friends someplace. If you won't be friends, then who else is there?" I think that Chou En-lai meant it, and I think Marshall believed it too.

Marshall used to say the one Chinese he ever met who never lied to him, who always gave it to him straight, was Chou En-lai.

[123]

ACCINELLI: You had at least one meeting with Chou En-lai yourself.

MELBY: I knew him quite well. He was the first Chinese I met.

ACCINELLI: Really.

MELBY: I was taken to have lunch with him the first day I was in Chungking. I was impressed. I knew nothing about China at that time; I had everything to learn. It was a luncheon that had been arranged by a German Communist, Anna Wang, who was married to Wang Bing-nan at the time. She and Bing-nan are now divorced, and she is living in Germany again. She had arranged the luncheon. I was really astonished at how much Chou En-lai knew that was going on in Europe -- and around the world. He knew. There wasn't anything going on that I could tell him, and I was from that outside world. There was really nothing I could tell him that he didn't know. It was incredible.

ACCINELLI: Where would this information have been coming from? He was in Chungking and there were other Embassies there, I suppose, where he would pick up information, in

[124]

that way, but otherwise...

MELBY: I think the Communists, now we know, had sources of information all over the world. Yen-an knew exactly what was going on everywhere.

ACCINELLI: So they weren't as isolated as one would think?

MELBY: Not as isolated as we thought at the time, no; they certainly were not. Nor were they as isolated internally either. That, I think, is one thing that comes out very clearly when the Communists took over the country. I think we thought they were going to have enormous problems and they did have them, and they had a country that was in ruins. But it was incredible how fast they put it together. I don't think anybody knew this at the time, but at the beginning with the Long March, they had been infiltrating their people all through the Kuomintang, in the Government. We'll never know how much of this Chiang Kai-shek himself knew. I cannot help but think that he had a pretty good idea, but I will never be able to prove it. The way they managed to put that country back on its feet -- and really it had just ceased to exist; in 18 months they had a going concern again. It was incredible.

[125]

I remember when I got back from the mission to Southeast Asia, which was October 1950. After all, the Communists hadn't been in power very long. I went to a meeting of the Policy Planning Staff. Paul Nitze by this time was chairman of it. I was asked to come in to give a briefing on what I'd found in Vietnam, and so on and so forth. But I stayed on through the rest of the meeting, and the rest of the meeting was devoted to the first rumors that were coming in of the Chinese volunteers crossing the Yalu. The Chinese language officers were just poo-pooing it.

They said, "There is not the slightest chance that they can become involved in Korea; their problems are so enormous that it's not possible that they can do it for years." And yet they did it. Our own people, who should have known better, just didn't believe it. I don't think anybody in the American Government believed that the Chinese could pull themselves together that way.

Well, in looking back in retrospect, certainly I didn't know at the time what was happening. I think that they were able to do it because they had infiltrated people all throughout the Nationalist Government, who

[126]

suddenly emerged and took over. They must have been of incalculable help to them. We used to say, "Communists have never occupied a major city." On the board so it looked. Kalgan was the biggest city they had ever occupied until the final takeover. In another sense, they had had every city in China occupied for years.

ACCINELLI: With their infiltration.

MELBY: Yes. We might have avoided an awful lot of mistakes. I was arguing at the time in Washington, that the stories we were getting by way of Krishna Menon, the Indian Ambassador in Peking -- who was just automatically not believed about anything in Washington -- I was arguing you've got to pay attention to this man, no matter what you think of him. He's got good Chinese connections, and if he says, "Watch out for the Chinese. If you cross the parallel, the Chinese are going to intervene," you'd better be careful because that's what they'll do. And that is exactly what they did.

ACCINELLI: MacArthur was reluctant to believe it even after the initial intervention.

If I can get back to Chou En-lai for just a minute. He's a fascinating character; he impressed men such as

[127]

Henry Kissinger, with his charm and his knowledge, and so forth. What impressions did you have of the man? Obviously, he was very knowledgeable.

MELBY: Very knowledgeable, very worldly, very sophisticated. One thing I didn't know about him was that he was a Mandarin. He wasn't any ordinary peasant boy by any means. He didn't have to learn; he was born knowing these things. He had never been in the States, it's true. He never did get to the States, to his great regret, but he knew the world. He had been in France, and he had organized Communist brigades there. He knew European affairs, and he was very much a man of the world.

ACCINELLI: Was there a possibility, do you think, at this time, let's say to the end of the Marshall mission, that the Communists would have come to an agreement with the Nationalists, assuming that terms were acceptable to both sides.

MELBY: I think they would if you put in a very big if in there.

ACCINELLI: Yes, of course.

MELBY: You see, Marshall got his cease-fire very quickly,

[128]

which gave everybody kind of irrational hopes. He even got a political settlement going, although this was not within his terms of reference by any means. He got everything settled except for one item, that is, the composition of the State Council. It was to govern China until a new constitution had been drafted and ratified. I don't think Marshall realized the importance of it at the time; the composition of this State Council was that the Gimo (Generalissimo) was insisting that he have 51 percent of the vote on that Council. The Communists said, "No way, because with that 51 percent he can destroy us, and we're not going to put ourselves in a position of being destroyed. We will accept 50 percent;" and by 50 percent they meant themselves and the Democratic League. They were willing to compromise that far. But 51 percent, no. You say, "If the terms had been acceptable;" if they had been able to get that settlement on the State Council, yes, they would have made peace. I think that they would, then -- we know now historically -- they would have been in a very good position politically to take over.

ACCINELLI: Using that route rather than continuing with the civil war.

[129]

MELBY: Yes. Well they would have preferred to do it that way, of course.

ACCINELLI: Chiang realized that of course.

MELBY: Of course he did.

ACCINELLI: He was no fool.

MELBY: Oh no; he was a master politician himself. I don't think that Chiang really ever intended to make concessions which would put him in a position where he could lose.

ACCINELLI: Did Marshall realize that, when he first arrived, or did he come to realize it as apart of his experiences in trying to get these two sides together?

MELBY: I don't think he realized it when he arrived, no. Marshall didn't have much sense of history. His idea of history was the Indian wars out in the 1880s. I don't think it was until the end; his farewell statement to China was "a plague on both your houses. You're both doublecrossing me." Whether he ever to the end of his days understood the nuances of Chinese politics, I greatly doubt.

[130]

ACCINELLI: Did he rely at all for advice, or assistance, on the Embassy?

MELBY: No. He listened, but after the initial briefings we gave him, no, we had very little contact with him.

ACCINELLI: I take it he was fairly close-mouthed as well about his doings.

MELBY: Yes. We never knew really what he was reporting back to the President.

ACCINELLI: Do you recall what your own impressions were, at the time, of his chances of bringing off a deal between the two sides?

MELBY: Oh, I guess like everyone else, when he pulled off the cease fire which nobody really thought he could do, we suddenly had this kind of wild hope that maybe the great man can do it. Then when he made the progress he did, which was done in an incredibly short period of time, toward a political settlement, again, it was, "maybe he'll do it, maybe he really will." But when he decided to come back to the States to report to the President in March of '46, we all had a sense, the minute

[131]

he left, that this thing was going to blow up.

Even when he did come back -- oddly enough the Pentagon had advised him not to come back -- he never thought he could pull it off. We used to go over to see movies he had every night and eat ice cream, which he dearly loved, and listen to his lectures on smoking, which we paid no attention to. He'd given up smoking by this time. He once said to me, "This thing has blown up; it's probably my fault. But," he said, "I'm just now too old and too tired to go at it again. I cannot go through this again. I'll stick around for a while because the Generalissimo wants me to but I have no confidence in it." Actually, he stayed longer than he had planned.

ACCINELLI: There wasn't any thought on his part, was there, of dumping Chiang. Chiang was indispensable. I mean in the end if there was no agreement, the United States would stand by Chiang, perhaps not give everything by way of economic or military assistance that Chiang had demanded, but still not abandon him.

MELBY: You mean on Marshall's part?

[132]

ACCINELLI: Yes, on Marshall's part.

MELBY: I think Marshall, if given his druthers, would have, yes.

ACCINELLI: You think so?

MELBY: But I think he also was beginning to recognize the power of the China Lobby and realize that politically it was impossible at home. Why, I think he would have. I think he thought, "What's the idea of flogging a dead horse?"

ACCINELLI: He was never taken with the idea put forward by John Paten Davies, John Stuart Service and so forth, that the United States should work with the Communists, that the Nationalists had no future, that the future belonged to the Communists, and that the United States should recognize that and adjust its policy accordingly.

MELBY: You know I'm not even sure that he knew this. I doubt if he ever even heard of John Service or John Davies. I had never thought of it.

ACCINELLI: Was there anyone in the Embassy at that time who supported that viewpoint and who might have had Marshall's

[133]

ear? Or had those people all been, what's the phrase, "Hurleyed out of China" by then?

MELBY: I hadn't heard that expression before.

Well, they were all pretty well gone. Of course, Ray Ludden was there. Ludden never hesitated to speak his mind to Marshall. I don't know that Marshall heard him; I don't know that he listened. I don't think that Ludden thought that he listened very well, or understood what he was hearing. But one of the things, incidentally, that took up an awful lot of my time was on this business of everybody being transferred out all of a sudden. Not only was it the American Embassy, but it was every other Embassy, too, as replacements came in. By the time we had been in Nanking -- well, by early summer of '46 -- I was the only one left in the Embassy who had actually served in Chungking. Well, I hadn't been in Chungking all that long, but still I was the only voice who had been there. Everybody had to see me; they wanted to know what life was like in Chungking. It took an awful lot of my time.

ACCINELLI: What were you telling them about life in Chungking?

[134]

MELBY: Telling them what I thought, which was pretty well-known anyway by that time.

ACCINELLI: By the mid-part of 1946, you were disenchanted with Chiang; in fact your disenchantment began not long after you arrived in Chungking. It grew progressively worse. Did you make this public? I mean was it known through the Embassy that you felt this way, or did...

MELBY: Oh, sure.

ACCINELLI: So you had no fear then that expressing this viewpoint might get you "Hurleyed out of China."

MELBY: No. All those in the Foreign Service, who had trouble, were those who had been there during the Stilwell period. It was none of us who came after Stilwell, oddly enough. Most people think that my problems with security and so on were concerned with China, and that really isn't so because that never came up. It was the malign influence of General Hurley that did it. All, or

most of us, were known as being anti-Nationalist and so on; still you were not painted with that brush for some reason.

[135]

ACCINELLI: Well, your duties when you first arrived, called for you to keep track of what the Russians were doing, and the Russians were not doing very much. Did your duties change?

MELBY: They sure did. I was assigned to the political section, doing political reporting. I very quickly became the Embassy Press Officer. I was also liaison with cultural relations, which meant liaison with Wilma Fairbank, and what she was doing. After John Fairbank left, which would have been mid-'46, I became liaison with the USIA. Brad Connors came out. He was always the acting director; he was never made full director. I was liaison with USIA, and also I negotiated the first Fulbright treaty. I negotiated it and it was put into effect. It was the first Fulbright program the United States had, and I was the first director of the Fulbright Foundation. So, I was really doing at least three jobs. Of course, very quickly I became, along with Ray Ludden, principal political officer.

ACCINELLI: What kind of sources did you have for your political reporting? For example, on whom did you depend for information on what was happening in the Kuomintang?

[136]

MELBY: Well, my contacts were primarily, in a sense, with the Democratic League. I did not speak Chinese. They all had been educated in the West; they were all American-educated mostly. So that was a very good source of information.

Eventually, through negotiating the Fulbright Treaty, I got to know people in the education field. Wilma Fairbank knew everybody in China too. I got to know those people; the people she knew I knew. My principal contact in the [Chinese] Foreign Service was George Yeh, who was a very savvy guy. I used to think that in the end he was going to defect to the Communists, but he never did. I was wrong about George.

ACCINELLI: Did he ever hint that that might be a possibility?

MELBY: No, just my wrong intuition about him. I knew the other Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs. I knew them too. Wang Shih-Chieh was Foreign Minister; I knew him. Really, the inner workings of the Kuomintang, we never did know. We thought we knew a great deal more than actually we did know. At the end of '46 Fred Schultheis came, and he was assigned to the Political Section; it was no secret that he was CIA. They didn't have this fool

[137]

business that we have now. He had his own contacts and Fred could sit down and read Chinese vernacular and novels and that sort of thing; he was that good at Chinese. He and Dave Barrett used to go out and just sit around the marketplace and listen to what people were talking about and so on. They used to say it was kind of an exercise in futility, because 80 percent of what the Chinese peasants were talking about was money. But still it kept their ears going. Fred always shared everything with us. He didn't run his operations separately from ours at all.

So, we probably knew as much of what was going on as anybody did, any group of foreigners. Then, of course, when [John] Leighton Stuart became Ambassador, he too, really did know them all. You never knew whether the old gentleman was telling you everything he knew, but he was telling us a good deal of what he knew.

ACCINELLI: Was there any support in the Embassy for reform of the Kuomintang as a way of increasing the chances for Chiang's survival? Any support, for example, for the "third force" option?

MELBY: No. Because we all knew that any group, I mean the

[138]

Democratic League, for example, wasn't going anywhere without an army. Nobody without an army was going anywhere in China. So, I mean, sure he gave lip service to it, and Marshall used to talk about building up the Democratic League as a viable alternative. It really wasn't; couldn't have been. Nor was there any slightest hope that the "Gimo" was going to listen to anybody who wasn't under his military control. No. We were really allied with sort of a hopeless situation.

ACCINELLI: Well, perhaps you can tell me something about Chiang. Did we have any contact with him at all?

MELBY: Not personally, no. I used to see him around; I didn't really...

ACCINELLI: What about Madame Chiang?

MELBY: I met her; didn't really have much to do with her, no.

ACCINELLI: You mentioned George Yeh?

MELBY: Well, I saw George a lot, you know. I had a good deal to do with him.

[139]

ACCINELLI: I take it you thought he was a very capable individual.

MELBY: He was. By the time he finally died, which was not really so long ago, he was senior advisor to the Nationalists on Taiwan.

ACCINELLI: Was he open, candid, about difficulties within the Kuomintang, about the weaknesses or deficiencies of Chiang's leadership?

MELBY: Well, he didn't talk about it. I think he assumed we knew; therefore, why talk about it. He didn't think it was his role to talk about it. After all, he was Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. He did not participate much in Kuomintang affairs; I'm not even sure he was a member.

ACCINELLI: Did you know T.V. Soong at all?

MELBY: I used to see him occasionally, yes. T.V.'s principal contact was Walt Butterworth, who took him over. I used to see T.V. socially, occasionally, but in business terms, Walt considered that his field. And Walt, too, was quite open with us about what he knew. He didn't know much about China really, but...

[140]

ACCINELLI: Butterworth is a man you admired.

MELBY: Yes. I think he was miscast in China.

ACCINELLI: Well, he later went on to become Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, was he not?

MELBY: Yes, and there was a bitter fight over his confirmation. He was personally insulted by it. I don't think he wanted the job, but he wanted the confirmation once he had been named for it, and because Marshall wanted him on the job. But I think that once he had an opportunity of getting out, he got out, and he became Minister to Sweden.

ACCINELLI: Did he share Marshall's "a plague on both your houses?"

MELBY: I think the Communists probably may have made a mistake with Marshall. I don't think he blamed Chou En-lai for this. After Marshall came back from his trip to Washington, they started attacking him personally, and he didn't like that worth a damn. It was a mistake on their part. On the other hand, I guess in a way I can understand why they were doing it. We were continuing to

[141]

help the Nationalists, and we were not helping the Communists. After the summer of '46 when Chou En-lai left Nanking, we had no direct connections with them, beyond what Dr. Stuart had. That's one reason that Marshall named him as Ambassador, because he knew that Stuart not only had the connections, he had most of them as his students at Yenching University. There was, he felt, still that strong student-teacher relationship that he thought that maybe Stuart could make something out of, and Stuart thought so too. He never really gave up his hope on that, not to the very end. Stuart still hoped that somehow, some way, he could get through to them.

ACCINELLI: Apparently, there was a suggestion on the part of, I think, Chou En-lai in 1949 -- I'm not sure of the exact date -- that they met. The Communists at that time apparently were looking forward to talks about the normalization of relationships, and it was vetoed in Washington.

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: Who ran the Embassy? Was Stuart running the Embassy? Who was in charge?

[142]

MELBY: That's one of those weird, weird stories. Walt Butterworth was running the Embassy. Dr. Stuart never left his residence; he never left the Embassy. I don't think I saw him in the Chancery a half dozen times the whole time he was there. He saw the telegrams. Butterworth would take them over to him, and leave them with him, really up until early in '47 when Walt discovered that Dr. Stuart was just turning those telegrams over to Philip Fugh, his Chinese secretary. And the minute Philip saw the telegrams, he'd call for a car and he'd beetle over and turn them over to the Gimo. It was the perfect setup.

The way we discovered that he was doing that was that by this time Dr. Stuart's secretary, Hilda Hordern, had been Butterworth's secretary in Madrid. She saw what was going on, but she had made up her mind that she was going to get along with Philip. Still, she was a career secretary in the Foreign Service. She'd been with Walt in Madrid, and he had brought her with him to China. Finally, she got where she just said, "I cannot let this go on;" so she told Walt about it. She said, "This is the world's worst security leak anyplace." I'm sure Marshall knew that this was going on. After that, Walt would take

[143]

the telegrams over to Dr. Stuart and let him look at them, and then he'd take them back to the Embassy so Philip couldn't have them. Well, it was a hell of a way to run an Embassy.

This has puzzled so-called scholars of the period, and so on, because they don't understand what the initials mean on telegrams, as to who really wrote them, and whose views they really represent. You had to have been there to know that the "JLS" didn't necessarily mean that Stuart had ever had anything to do with them. Maybe he had never seen the outgoing telegram, and maybe he had, or maybe he'd sent it and sent it on his own and nobody else knew about it. I say, this has confused a lot of scholars, to know just what the hell was going on in that Embassy. That's a good question. Even up until the end Marshall said, "Just let it alone; what difference does it make really. Chiang knows what we're doing anyhow, and so if the old gentleman makes him happy, maybe he can pull something off. And so we don't want to make a change in Ambassadors now, and so on; just let it go."

ACCINELLI: After Marshall leaves, is policy in effect being

[144]

set in Washington? Does the Embassy have such influence at all, whether it's Butterworth or Stuart? Marshall becomes Secretary of State after all.

MELBY: It's set in Washington, I'm sure.

Then once Walt leaves, he goes back to be head of the Bureau. Then Lewis Clark became Minister Counselor. He was also originally a China-language officer, but a somewhat handicapped one. He had gotten a very bad case of trachoma in the days before you knew what to do about it. So he was almost blind. But on the other hand, he was a pretty shrewd operator about China. I never particularly liked him, but he was an honorable man.

ACCINELLI: Were there any officers or members of the Embassy with whom you had a fairly close relationship or friendships?

MELBY: Oh, I had Ray Ludden. Ray Ludden and I were old pals. Fred Schultheis. Well, both Fred and Ludden are both dead, but I kept up with both of them. Certainly Brad Connors, although he died many years ago. He died in his early 40s with cancer. He had come back as head of information for the Far East, and then finally went to

[145]

London, to the Embassy there, as head of information. He died very shortly after that with cancer, lung cancer. I never saw Brad without a cigarette in his mouth. I always suspected that he probably slept with a cigarette in his mouth. He must have smoked five or six packages a day, easily.

ACCINELLI: These were American cigarettes that were brought into China I take it.

Why is it that you stayed on in China for so long? Was that your choice? Did you ever make an effort to have yourself transferred?

MELBY: Well, yes. At one point I wanted to go to the National War College. I was turned down on that because they said I was too young; you had to be 35, and I wasn't quite 35. So that fell through. I remember there was some talk of my going back to Latin America, but what I have discovered since then was that Dr. Stuart intervened in that. He sent word back to Marshall, I guess, "Don't transfer Melby out of here. He's so valuable here, the Embassy can't run without him. He knows more about China than all the rest of us put together." I was

[146]

not transferred until November 1948, when the orders came out, and we were beginning to evacuate people out. Part of that evacuation order said that anybody who could be considered in any sense by the Communists as having been involved in clandestine activities has got to leave. And that got me. I was prepared to stay on and be occupied by the Communists, but Washington said no.

In the final job I had actually in Nanking, in the fall of 1948, there was awful arguing going on as to when we would evacuate, when should we give orders for Americans to leave, when should the Embassy staff leave, when should dependents go, and so on. This is an old story in China, you know, of getting the missionaries out and so on, and they're always objecting to going, and the minute they get captured by some warlord or somebody, they start screaming at the Embassy to save them and so on.

We set up a special committee in the Embassy to make those decisions. The committee was a rigged committee because it consisted of Lewis Clark, who was all in favor of getting all the Americans out like last month. He had been through the rape of Nanking. He had been an officer and he'd seen the horrors of that, and never

[147]

again did he want to see anything like that. So he was all devoted to getting people out. The second member was Fred Schultheis, who couldn't stand the idea of being separated from his wife and children. He had a real psychological block on it. He just started going to pieces on the thing, so he was always voting stay, stay, stay. And me, I was the chairman. I had no family there. Incidentally, I was married later to Hilda Hordern, the Ambassador's secretary, but we were not married then. I was presumed to be the impartial one, which meant that I had to make the decision on when we were going to evacuate.

We were under all kinds of pressures of missionaries who didn't want to leave until the last minute and of Army personnel who wanted to go now. There was Chiang Kai-shek who begged us, "Don't go. Don't abandon me because it's going to look bad with the Communists," and so on. There were business people that wanted this, that, or the other. It was a real nightmare fall. In the end, as I say, I had to make all the decisions on it.

The Army finally just decided on its own. General [Major General David] Barr, who was then commanding the

[148]

military, the MAAG, Military Advisory Group there, finally made the decision on letting out 800 officers and dependents there in Nanking who weren't doing a damn thing. One afternoon he made the decision that they were going to evacuate today, and the next morning the Military Advisory compound was deserted, and it was really a ghoulis experience.

ACCINELLI: He had the transportation to get them out?

MELBY: He had the transportation. He put them all on LSTs and floated them all down to Shanghai. We'd already issued the orders to the missionaries and the civilians to get out; some of them did and some of them didn't. You couldn't make them. But Embassy dependents -- I finally decided they've got to go. I made arrangements to have them all suddenly transported to the Philippines, to the old Japanese concentration camp at Baguio. They all left in October. They didn't like going but still...

I saw the group when I left. I knew I was going back to the Philippine Desk in the Department, so I stopped off in Manila on my way back. Then I went out to see my refugees there. And the one who was unhappiest

[149]

with it all was Mary Lou Clough, Ralph Clough's wife, who said she just couldn't stand it any longer to be separated from old Ralphie. The day after I left -- I don't know how she did it -- but she engineered something and she showed up back in Shanghai. Three days later she was dead with meningitis, leaving three little children for Ralphie to take care of. She was dead and of course since then Ralph has married again. But that was our one real tragedy, out of that particular evacuation. Meningitis was then epidemic in China; well, it still is. It still is, that and encephalitis and so on; I don't know quite why.

ACCINELLI: You were saying that you came out of the Marshall mission with a great admiration for Marshall.

MELBY: He's a man of such integrity. I had never met him before the China mission. My initial impression was a little startling in that when I first met him, he got out of a jeep down at the foot of the hill outside the Embassy, and he was a lot shorter than I thought he was. The second thing was -- we shook hands with him and it was a flabby handshake. Well, I happen to have a very strong

[150]

handshake, and I was a little startled. I didn't know quite what to make of that. It put me off a little bit, initially, but as I saw the man work and operate -- and I worked a little bit with him -- I came to have great admiration for him. I can't say that I was ever any great intimate of his although I think I knew him fairly well. He was known not to talk very much, but in China he opened up and talked in ways and about things that he never had before as Chief of Staff.

I remember just little items -- well not such little items at that. He said some things about the dropping of the atomic bomb. He said, "It isn't known generally" -- and I'm not sure that it's known even to this day -- "that at the time we dropped the first and second atomic bombs on Japan, that's all we had. If those hadn't worked," he said, "I don't know what we would have done. The Japanese would have caught us, in a sense, in a bluff, which we were. And," he said, "it took some time to make more in those days, so it had to work or else."

And he used to talk about Donald Nelson who had been head of the War Production Board. He said what a big blowhard that man was; he'd just walk around the Pentagon with his mouth wide open and anybody could have pushed

[151]

anything down it, and how he would come and regurgitate it or not. He said he was a hopeless character. You just couldn't tell about him. He sometimes would be reminiscing about Generals and he said, "If there is anything I hate in the Army, it's generals. Generals, in my experience, never know the enemy force or the enemy strength." He said, "Seldom enough do they even know what their own strength is, where their own armies are." He said, "We can be much better off without them."

Well, this was the kind of thing that he would talk about. He was feeling a let-down. After all, he had been pulled out of retirement after having been retired for a week, and Mr. Truman asked him to go to China and he, being a good soldier, said, "Yes sir, when do you want me to go?" And the President said, "Yesterday." He wrote his own instructions too; they were not written for him by anybody in the Department. He wrote his own. The President approved them on that basis.

ACCINELLI: Was he sent, do you think, in part at least, to offset the brouhaha that Hurley had caused?

MELBY: Well, absolutely. Absolutely. Furthermore, Mr.

[152]

Truman was a great hero worshipper, and to him Marshall was the greatest man alive. He figured here was this country going into civil war; obviously, that's the way it's going. If anybody can stop it, General Marshall can. He gave Marshall really a complete carte blanche to do anything he wanted to do, despite his instructions limiting him to good offices. He wasn't even a mediator. Well, he became a mediator on his own initiative and the President said, "General, if that's what you want to do, go right ahead and do it; just keep me informed." Well, Marshall knew enough to do that, because he was quite aware of the trouble that Jimmy Byrnes had gotten into as Secretary of State. Byrnes was trying to be Secretary of State and not tell Mr. Truman what he was doing. Mr. Truman didn't claim to know anything or everything, but he did want to be kept informed. Marshall knew that was very important to the President so he did keep him informed, and he kept him informed in detail. To Mr. Truman, that was another mark of confidence.

He stayed on, I think, as long as he did more out of some kind of sympathy for the predicament that Chiang was in. It got to be kind of a joke around the Embassy that the minute Chiang would go to the field

[153]

to take command of an operation, we knew there was another Kuomintang disaster in the making. Marshall knew that Chiang was no soldier, no General, and Chiang didn't know it. But Marshall also had enormous respect for the Communists. He once said, "The Communist general staff" -- and that began with Mao, and Chou En-lai, and Chu Teh, and all the rest -- "they would have been ornaments on any general staff in history." He said, "I don't care what it is; they would have been ornaments on it. They really knew what they were doing, and knew how to do it." But it was when they started to -- and I've already mentioned it -- to attack his integrity that he didn't like it. I think he even had a kind of sympathy for the Madame [Chiang Kai-shek]. I think he kind of liked her; she was a pretty woman, and Marshall was not insensitive to that sort of thing. But he said, "This woman is in an impossible situation. The Chinese don't trust her because she's too Westernized. The Westerners don't trust her because she's too much Chinese." But he said, "She does, in a funny kind of way, exercise a certain amount of restraint on Chiang. She keeps him from making more of a fool of himself than by inclination he would be." And for that he gave her a good deal of credit.

[154]

ACCINELLI: They maintained a friendship after he returned to Washington.

MELBY: Yes, unlike the Roosevelts who came to dislike her intensely, and for considerable reason. We all were delighted when he left and was immediately named Secretary of State. We thought this was great. And it was the end of the line for the Nationalists. There we were, of course, living in China where we were cut off from everything going on anywhere else; China was so absorbing in itself. And we pretty much lost touch with the political realities at home. We didn't fully appreciate that Marshall was going to find out pretty fast what those realities were. That, I think, accounts largely for the small amount of continuing aid that we gave.

ACCINELLI: Pressure from the China bloc primarily?

MELBY: That's right.

ACCINELLI: Was this recognized in the Embassy at that time, or is this a retrospective judgment? Were you aware at that time that the Department and the White House were under pressure?

[155]

MELBY: Oh yes, I think so, sure. Well, Marshall, for example, in his testimony early in '48 on the small China aid bill testified against the aid. He said, "Now, if in your judgment you're going to pass this bill, and you instruct me to administer it, of course, that's what I will do. But I want you to know now in advance that I'm telling you it's going to fail. Nothing can save this administration in China." They passed it, and he administered it, and it failed, and that was that.

ACCINELLI: I believe it was in July 1947 that Wedemeyer came to China.

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: What was your own reaction to that? After all, you knew Wedemeyer; you knew his views.

MELBY: We thought that it was kind of a sop to the China Lobby, to keep them quiet. People like Walter Judd had been yelling for a new appraisal of the situation. I think Marshall's reaction was, "Well, dammit, Wedemeyer can't do any harm, any damage. Let him go and have a look." Which he did. He came and we all briefed him.

[156]

All of us said some things that we were later sorry we had said.

ACCINELLI: Oh, really? Do you remember what you said?

MELBY: Oh, I think we were catering a little bit too much to what we thought were his anti-Communist views. We should have been ashamed of ourselves for doing it, because when finally he left, he had become as anti-Kuomintang as anybody. Of course, the minute he got back to Washington and got himself with another backdrop, he changed right back to what he had believed originally. But he was simply appalled at what he found. The reason that the famous so-called Wedemeyer Report on China was suppressed, for as long as it was, was that in it he recommended that China north of the Yangtze be made a U.N. trusteeship, as of course had been previously recommended for Korea. Marshall realized that this was going to infuriate Chiang, so he informed Chiang of his reasons for keeping the report secret. Chiang never objected to that. He never said a word. Of course, he was right; Chiang would have been furious with the whole thing. It was not until we came to the China White Paper that Walt Butterworth said, "Look, we're going to

[157]

document China. Let's put the Wedemeyer report in too and stop all the gossip about it."

ACCINELLI: You really couldn't leave it out, could you without subverting the credibility of the document?

MELBY: That's right. In any event, recommendations that Wedemeyer made apart from the trusteeship one were pretty much what everybody had been making over the years. There was nothing new or startling about it at all, really. It attracted no attention anyway.

ACCINELLI: He very much wanted Chiang to reform, didn't he? Wasn't that part of his approach to China, that somehow Chiang could be convinced to reform the Kuomintang, change his ways, and turn in a new direction?

MELBY: Well, I suppose. There was never the slightest chance of anything like that happening.

ACCINELLI: Did he let Chiang know, while he was in China how appalled he was by the conditions that he found?

MELBY: Yes, he did. He gave a so-called secret speech to the State Council, which was even stronger in his condemnation than what they put into his public

[158]

pronouncement when he left, yes. They were under no illusions. He later regretted having made that public statement, and he probably should not have made it. He could have put across his point in that speech to the State Council, and let them do with it as they pleased, because it was a secret report in the State Council and there was Chinese face involved. What did you think the Chinese were going to do when you came out publicly and say it? Of course, they're going to react against it; anybody would have, not just Chinese.

ACCINELLI: I wonder if Wedemeyer did not realize that only if he could convince Chiang to begin reforms was there any hope Washington would buy proposals for large-scale economic and military assistance.

MELBY: Well, I guess he thought that if he could persuade the Gimo to reform, or seem to reform, that his chances would be better of getting more help, but I don't know. He should have known that there was no chance really to get the Gimo to do that. Chiang always said yes, and then he was accused of having promised something and not carrying through with it. I think this is a little bit unfair to Chiang himself. I think Chiang's problem was simply

[159]

that he didn't understand what he was being asked to agree to. He had such a Confucian-feudal mentality that he was incapable of thinking beyond what he did understand, mainly manipulating or maneuvering around with warlord cliques. This he understood to the full, and he was very good at it. Beyond that his mind didn't go. He had lost all touch with the people of China. The man was constitutionally incapable of the kind of reform we had in mind.

ACCINELLI: Do you think that he believed down to near the end that the United States would come to his rescue? That the United States could not afford to have his regime collapse?

MELBY: Sure. He believed that our anti-Communism was so strong that in the end we were going to fight the Russians in World War III, and he would come back on the American coattails. That is what had happened with Japan. He always believed that.

I think his own anti-Communism was an article of faith with him; it was something he really believed. He would never say it publicly, but we've since been

[160]

able to document it, that he always believed that the great menace in China was communism. As he said once, "The real cancer in the Chinese soul is Communism. Japan is simply a skin disease. Let us get rid of the cancer and the skin disease will take care of itself." Well, it was "Cloud-Cocoo land," really, but this is what he believed.

ACCINELLI: I would like to turn to your own views of the Chinese Communists. When you first came to Chungking I take it that you were impressed with the Chinese Communists. You've spoken about the general belief in the Embassy, with a few exceptions, that these were progressive men, vital and efficient in a way that the Nationalists obviously were not. Your view changed, did it not? By 1947, 1948, is it fair to say that you were much more anti-Communist, in a general sense, and also in the specific sense of anti-Chinese Communists?

MELBY: No, not that early. I think I did not really begin to change basically, or fundamentally change my views on the Chinese Communists, really until after the cultural revolution. This change became a part of the problem that I have been wrestling with ever since; namely, why is it that all revolutionaries seem so much more

[161]

attractive before they come to power than they do once they achieve power? Why is it that once coming to power they turn around and behave very much the way those whom they have displaced behaved.

I think that you can document for almost every revolution in the 20th century. I am old enough now that I have so far lived through, as observer or in some small way a participant, every revolution in the 20th century. Who knows what the next 15 years will bring?

They've all failed; all political beliefs that we've believed in all along have become suddenly irrelevant in the world we live in today. All the way from Communism to Socialism, to Libertarianism -- none of them seem to have the answers to the problems that confront the world today. What is it that's gone wrong? Where have we gone astray with this? What is it that happens to the revolutionary?

Well, I have partial answers on some of this. Revolutionaries inevitably -- this is true -- the longer they are struggling for power, inevitably they have to be secretive, they have to be distrustful. Somebody's got to betray them, and therefore they develop a conspiratorial

[162]

frame of mind. And once they've come to power, and I think we're seeing this right now in Nicaragua, they carry over this conspiratorial frame of mind into when they are in power. I can't say really that the Sandinistas are worse than Somoza. That's not saying that no progress has ever been made; that's hardly true. But they behave just about as badly as those they've dispossessed, and because they continue with this conspiratorial frame of mind, they sort of then force the opposition into a polarized situation where we have to react against them. We have to see the devil in them even more than we did, because they don't follow the usual norms that we would like to see them follow. In the case of Nicaragua, the longer this goes on with the Sandinistas the worse the blow-up is going to become -- the more polarized we and they become. A little more difficult it's going to be to find a solution, at least a solution short of another military upheaval. It's a hell of a way to end a lifetime, but...

ACCINELLI: Well, revolutionaries, often after they come to power, confront external enemies as well, which of course, reinforces this sense of encirclement, of threat. That

[163]

was the case with the Soviet revolution, the Chinese Communists, and so on down the line. They did have real enemies. The Nicaraguans certainly do today.

MELBY: But I think that had we not taken under Reagan -- or maybe this even goes back to the last days of the Carter Administration because he was beginning to turn against them -- if we had just left the Sandinista revolution alone, I don't think that the Russians ever would have paid the slightest bit of attention to them, and probably not the Cubans either, because the Russians are over-extended. They wish they could get out of this sort of thing, just as I'm sure they wish they could get out of Cuba. But we don't give them the opportunity to do it. The longer it goes on the way it is, the more difficult it becomes for them to disengage. If we would just let it alone, let them handle it their own way, let Central Americans fight it out there, not get "Big Brother" involved in domineering the way he does.

ACCINELLI: It's very difficult for the United States to stand apart from that kind of situation, for any number of reasons, including domestic politics.

If I can refer back to the China experience, I take

[164]

it that that was in fact your viewpoint as you left China. The country was about to fall to the Communists and it was best that the United States wash its hands.

MELBY: That's right. Absolutely. Well, I think that when the final complete take-over took place -- and Dean Acheson by that time was Secretary of State -- when he was asked what American policy was during the new regime, he said, "Let's wait and see what happens when the dust is settled." But he was prepared at that time, as were a lot of other people, including some of our Allies, the British primarily to recognize [the new regime]. This has been denied pretty consistently these days, but the fact is that at that time we were prepared to recognize and take a chance on it.

ACCINELLI: And what dust had to settle?

MELBY: Well, the dust that had to settle was that we thought it was only a matter of time before Formosa was going to be taken. Here, I think, the Communists themselves made a basic mistake, understandably so, but still they made a mistake. They had a choice; they had no experience in amphibious warfare. Their choice was that when once the

[165]

armies had crossed the Yangtze and taken Shanghai and so on, and they were driving down to Canton, they could either divert those armies westward, subdue the West China warlords, or they could call a halt on that and mount an amphibious operation against Taiwan. They could have done that and could have taken Formosa at that time with a corporal's guard and a band, because Chiang's forces were so disorganized at that time. Had they done that there never would have been a Formosa problem.

As it turned out, the West China warlords fell all over themselves making their accommodations with Peking. There was no problem about the West China warlords at all. At all. The only thing the Communists had to do was to see how long it took them to walk to Chengtu and Kunming. The warlords were out there, cap in hand, waiting for them. By that time, of course, Chiang was reconsolidating his forces on Taiwan. Also, let's face it, the Korean war was beginning to loom. Then, of course, with Korea, that was all over. We got the twenty-year freeze. But the tragedy of our China policy [is that] a lot of it could have been avoided if, as Acheson said, "Let the dust fall; Formosa is gone, and the Communists are in power. Now we've got to learn to live with them." Which he was prepared to do.

[166]

ACCINELLI: The Chinese Communists made it difficult for the United States to be accommodating in other ways. Well, [there was] the treatment for example, of Angus Ward, and the treatment of the American businessmen who had remained. Other foreigners were, in fact, also mistreated. There was a general pattern there of ethnocentrism, chauvinism, anti-foreignism, which is understandable, but still made it difficult for the United States to be more receptive.

MELBY: Well, none of that helped at all.

ACCINELLI: What about the Sino-Soviet treaty? Did that alter perceptions at all in the State Department about the relationship between Moscow and Peking?

MELBY: Oh, yes, there for a while it persuaded those who wanted to believe that, that China was simply a Russian dependency. That they, as Acheson said, in that unfortunate Letter of Transmittal, they were doing things that were not Chinese, that in time they would learn better and throw off the shackles of the Kremlin and so on. Sure, that doesn't help at all. But then the Chinese didn't have anyplace else to turn.

[167]

ACCINELLI: Do you think Acheson believed that?

MELBY: No, he didn't. He didn't believe a word of that Letter of Transmittal. The Letter of Transmittal was one of those products of a committee. The drafting, and the production of the China White Paper, which was turned out in about six months, had been kept really very secret, not only from the American public, but it had been kept pretty secret within the Department itself. At the time that I had just about finished it, word began to get around that something like this was in the works. Actually, I did the first draft on the letter of transmittal, at which point it was taken away from me and turned over to everybody in the Department who wanted to get in his nickel's worth of what it should look like. It came out looking like the usual report from a committee, which was nothing. It had all the inflammatory and stupid remarks in it that were immediately picked up by everybody in the United States. I mean everybody that was interested, and most people in the States didn't even know where China was even then.

Still, the letter of transmittal was all anybody ever read, and Acheson had signed it thinking that it

[168]

didn't make any difference. Who's going to read it anyhow? That was his mistake, because it was what people latched on to. The document came out. I'd still stand by it; I think it's still essentially correct.

ACCINELLI: Can you tell me what instructions Truman gave you regarding the preparation of the White Paper?

MELBY: Write the record and write it straight, no matter who is hurt; tell the truth. That's the best way to set the American public straight on this thing. We all believed this would call off the dogs, but of course it did nothing of the kind.

The genesis of the White Paper incidentally came out of conversations that John Davies and I had. He was then a member of the Policy Planning Staff. We originally had an idea of doing a "Mr. X" article on China, which actually I wrote. Having written it, I realized that China was much too big and difficult a subject for a mere article. It was out of this that the idea of a White Paper came. Kennan, who was then head of the Policy Planning Staff, approved. Butterworth was very skeptical; he didn't believe in publishing anything. Acheson liked the idea and took it to the President, who liked it. We put

[169]

together a staff that worked on it and turned it out, as I say, in six months. It was a mammoth undertaking.

Ironically enough, it came under attack in the [United] States by everybody, but even Mao Tse-tung took the trouble to read it apparently, because he wrote a series of articles on it attacking it as proving American imperialist intentions and so on. The payoff on the thing finally was that when it was all over, I bundled up all the final drafts of the thing and had them packaged up and sealed. Phil Jessup had done a final editorial review of the thing, in which he didn't change anything at all, really. We marked on them that these papers were to be opened only by Jessup or myself, and then we put them in the Archives of the Department.

Then, of course, came that unfortunate Eisenhower election, and Senator [William] Knowland ran across these documents in the Department and thought, "Ah, ha." He was determined to prove that the White Paper was a "con job." So he set up a special task force on the Foreign Relations Committee to do a rewrite on the White Paper. The only reason I ever put them together that way was that I thought that someday it might make an interesting dissertation topic for some ambitious graduate

[170]

student to study how a White Paper is put together; what you have to go through and what's involved. It was no more sinister than that. But this special group in the Foreign Relations Committee worked for four years on a rewrite of the White Paper and gave it up. They said, "There is nothing we can find that changes it in substance at all."

ACCINELLI: It didn't change Knowland's views at all, did it?

MELBY: Oh, no. Nothing could do that.

ACCINELLI: Well, you seemed to have been given an assignment which from one perspective was contradictory. You were to be as objective as possible, tell the story straight. Yet, in a sense, you're telling the story in order to justify the policy followed. I take it you didn't see any contradiction.

MELBY: No, because I believed that the policy that had been followed was the correct one. It was the only thing we could have done, yes.

ACCINELLI: So, you didn't see any mistakes, or blunders?

MELBY: Oh sure, there were plenty, and they are all in the

[171]

White Paper. Sure, we didn't conceal anything, the mistakes we made, no.

ACCINELLI: But nothing that would have in the end changed the outcome?

MELBY: That's right. The idea that we had no policy toward China in those days is something I don't buy. Maybe it's a policy that a lot of people disagree with, but to say there was no policy toward China -- unfortunately, there was a policy. Even in the pre-Dulles period there was a policy of sorts. The policy itself may have been a little contradictory in terms of divisions within the American Government. Those of us who know anything about China had one view toward China, and the great unwashed had another, and that includes the China Lobby. But that was a domestic difference of opinion. It didn't do the policy any good, but...

ACCINELLI: You used State Department materials exclusively. Was there any thought given to using materials from other departments or agencies of Government?

MELBY: Yes. And we did use others. I mean, what was published was largely from Department files, it's true.

[172]

But before we cleared the thing finally, Phil Sprouse, who had written the Marshall report -- a two-volume job -- went over to the Pentagon and we checked what he had written against Marshall's files, and Pentagon files. He came back and said, "There is no contradiction."

ACCINELLI: Did you do any of the writing of the White Paper yourself?

MELBY: Yes, I wrote several chapters of it. I wrote the historical background, and I think Phil Sprouse wrote the Marshall mission. Wally Stuart wrote the Hurley [mission]; Ben Bock wrote the Yalta chapter. I wrote the Leighton Stuart chapter. Somebody, whose name I forget now, did the one on economics. Somebody else did the military chapter. But I did the background historical part mostly. I edited the whole thing. It made a certain consistency in style to the extent possible in that short time.

ACCINELLI: Was there any resistance within the Department? I mean, after all you were publishing confidential documents, expressing personal views, relatively soon after the event. Was there any fear that this might impede

[173]

members of the Department in the future? Might they be hesitant to express their views candidly, for fear that they would in time be publicized?

MELBY: I don't think so, no. The only thing of that sort that I knew to happen -- this was when the McCarthy period was beginning. Phil Sprouse, who had been a tower of strength for everyone in trouble, was also a very cautious citizen. He had gone through all the files that he had drafted and cut his own initials off, which didn't save him from going through an investigation either. But, no, the only one really who expressed, as I recall, any opposition to the whole idea was Walt Butterworth, who just didn't believe in doing that sort of thing as a matter of principle. But Acheson thought it was a great idea. As a matter of fact, Dean was very helpful on it. On several Saturdays, Walt and I would truck the whole thing out to Acheson. He had a farm out in Maryland, when it was still farmland, and he also had a woodworking shop out there where he used to relax and try to keep from going crazy from the pressures that were on him. We'd take it all out, and Acheson would go over the whole thing himself and

[174]

make changes and suggestions and so on. He was very helpful with it; he got very much interested in it, and came to believe in it. He had believed in it before, but the more he saw it, the better he liked it.

ACCINELLI: Do you think that Truman ever read through the entire document?

MELBY: Oh, I have no idea. I kind of doubt it.

ACCINELLI: I doubt it as well.

MELBY: I mean, he can't read everything.

ACCINELLI: No, no. But I assume that Acheson showed him the document before it was published and briefed him on it.

MELBY: Oh, absolutely yes. He too believed that Mr. Truman should be kept fully informed on everything.

ACCINELLI: Was there any thought given to the effect that revelations in the White Paper would have on the Nationalist Government?

MELBY: Yes, of course, we thought a great deal about it,

[175]

and decided that they were finished anyway. Why let them hang around if this was going to hurt them; well that was just too bad. Get the thing over with.

ACCINELLI: What about the affect on the Communist Government? You said that Mao apparently read it in translation and it seemed to confirm his view that the United States had been up to no good. Yet, this was at a time when you've said Acheson was looking forward to an eventual accommodation with the Communist Chinese.

MELBY: I don't think we thought the Communists were going to react to it as they did. There were a lot of miscalculations on the whole thing all the way around. Might as well face it.

ACCINELLI: But you don't regret that it was published?

MELBY: No. I think historically it was the right thing to do. Yes. I don't know whether you know Robert Newman, from the University of Pittsburg.

ACCINELLI: Yes, you have mentioned his name to me.

MELBY: He has written a long article on the White Paper which was published, not in *Diplomatic History*, but in *Prologue**.

*Robert P. Newman, "The Self-Inflicted Wound: The China White Paper of 1949." *Prologue* 14 (Fall, 1982): 141-156.

[176]

ACCINELLI: Oh yes.

MELBY: In which he claimed out and out that it was a mistake; it never should have been written. Well, Bob and I don't agree on that.

ACCINELLI: What reasons did he give?

MELBY: It didn't achieve its objective.

ACCINELLI: And may have made matters worse in some respects.

MELBY: Yes. I don't see how it could have made anything worse than it was.

ACCINELLI: Well, this is it.

MELBY: He, of all people, should know because he's been interested in the Witch Hunt; his interest is not China as such, it's McCarthyism. Well, because of his being in China and so on, he got interested in me and Lillian, and he's got the second draft on a book about the two of us and what happened in the McCarthy period. But his interest is not China. A year or so ago, he was in China. A friend of his, a Chinese friend of his at Pittsburgh, had it set up that he could have an

[177]

interview with Huang Hua, who was then, I guess, Foreign Minister. So Bob went to Peking, and as it turned out he never did see Huang Hua who hasn't been well for a long time. He did a little traveling around China, and what he saw he didn't like, and he didn't like Chinese food, and he didn't much like traveling anyway. The only thing he really wants to do in traveling is that he'd like to go back to Britain once again where he got his D. Phil at Oxford. He would like to see Oxford again, but beyond that, I don't think he cares whether he ever sees anything outside of Western Pennsylvania again.

ACCINELLI: I'd like to take a step backward if I can, back to China before you were reassigned to Washington. Is there anything more that you can add to your experiences?

MELBY: Well, I think the only thing I can say is that in a sense it was the highlight of my Foreign Service career. In a way those were terrible days and yet I cannot really regret having been an observer of, and in some small measure a participant in, a great transition period in not only Chinese history but world history too, because the Chinese revolution is perhaps the great

[178]

revolution of modern times. And to sit there and in some small measure have some participation in watching a whole civilization of two, three thousand years collapse, disintegrate, and a new one be born -- whatever shape it is beginning to take now -- I consider it a great privilege. I have no regrets for having [been there] whatever the price may have been on the thing. There were a lot of prices one paid for that in those days, and since. And also, [there was] my role in the Embassy. I went there as a relatively junior and certainly a very young officer, and I think that by the time I left some three years later, I pretty much, in terms of advice and whether anybody took it or not, I was pretty much of a key figure in the American participation and role and behavior in China. And I think I probably had a good deal of influence on it. That's always a satisfaction, even if it can be a kind of a negative one, in the sense of China being a negative experience in a sense. So, in a way I was a little sorry not to be there during the transition in Nanking over to

Communist takeover, but I mean that's a small thing. Nothing would have happened, although there were those who were fearful that something might.

[179]

That was understandable. At a fairly early age, chronologically and so on, I was in a position, I think, to make a certain contribution.

ACCINELLI: During the period in which you did have influence, was your voice heard? Did you feel that the advice that you were offering was being heard within the Embassy and in Washington?

MELBY: Within the Embassy certainly. And once Walt Butterworth got back to Washington, certainly in Washington it was. That's not saying that it changed American policy at all. Of course, it didn't, because nothing was going to change that. That's another topic altogether. But certainly we were given a very free hand to report whatever we saw and whatever we felt. American policy was captive to the China Lobby. Nothing was going to change that. So, I think it was a very valuable experience and I think I measured up to what my responsibilities were there.

ACCINELLI: If you had been in a position to make American foreign policy, what course would you have followed in China?

[180]

MELBY: I think now, and maybe this is partly hindsight, I don't know, but I think I would have been inclined to the view that we ought to keep our hands off. [We should] maintain the kind of role and position that the Russians Embassy did, of letting the Chinese themselves settle it. The idea that we sold China down the river, that the State Department did -- well we never had China; that's ridiculous. Nobody ever has China except the Chinese. If we had, at the end of the war, let it be known that we were going to maintain strictly correct formal diplomatic relations, period, and let it go at that, and it was up to the Chinese to settle their own internal problems in their own fashion, it couldn't have been any worse than it has been. A hands-off policy. You know, for a major power, the saying that doing nothing is no policy at all isn't true, because sometimes doing nothing is just as much policy for a major power as doing something.

ACCINELLI: But exercising that kind of self-restraint is enormously difficult for a major power, is it not?

MELBY: It is, but it is a sign of maturity I think. That we did not have at the time. I'm sure that we don't have it right now today. But, yes.

ACCINELLI: Is that lesson, the lesson of China, one that you

[181]

carried with you back to the State Department after you left China?

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: And how did it affect your later views of American policy, not just in China, but elsewhere, Southeast Asia for example?

MELBY: Very definitely it did on Southeast Asia. When I came back I was transferred back to Washington at my request. Walt knew I wanted a tour of duty in Washington. The China Desk was already filled; both Phil Sprouse and Tony Freeman were all that was called for there. So I was brought back on the Philippine desk, in charge of Philippine affairs. I was on that desk really only for a couple of weeks when the whole China White Paper thing came up, because when I got back I had a leave and so on, and so I didn't take over for a couple of months. It wasn't until September that actually I moved in and took charge of Philippine affairs. I had the one very definite and very specific instruction -- mission to accomplish with the Philippines, and that was that the Hukbalahap Rebellion in the Philippines had reached a stage where our best estimate at that time was that the Huks, although they didn't know it, had a military capability of overthrowing the Quirino government

[182]

and taking power. The Huks liked to think of themselves as kind of a Marxist regime. I mean they didn't really know much about what Marxism was all about, unlike the current Philippine Communist Party. But [our mission] was to do what had to be done to save the Philippines from its own follies. The Quirino government had run that country right into the ground and bankrupted the place. I was responsible for whatever had to be done there, and I was given carte blanche by the Secretary to do whatever had to be done. Mr. Acheson wanted to be kept informed. Like Mr. Truman he said, "Let me know what you're doing from time to time, but you go ahead and do it and don't bother me with too many details. I've got other things to do." NATO was coming on and so on and so forth.

So, I really did have a very free hand in what I was doing there. At this point, the Office of Philippine Affairs was reorganized out of existence. Dick Ely, who had been head of it, was really an employee of the Interior Department, which had been responsible for the Philippines until independence. It wasn't until he retired and the office was reorganized out of existence, or incorporated into the new Office of Philippine and

[183]

Southeast Asian Affairs, that I became Deputy Director of that office, with added responsibilities for the Islands. I mean Indonesia and Malaya. But I continued really, until the winter of 1950, concentrating largely on Philippine affairs. The Indonesian desk people knew perfectly well what they were doing; they had long experience there. Jim O'Sullivan, incidentally, was back on the Indonesian desk. He had gone from Hanoi to Jakarta. Wymberly Descours was also on that desk, so there wasn't anything much for me to do. They were quite capable of doing it. It wasn't until the idea of a Southeast Asia mission came up that I actually became involved more in mainland affairs. Out of the Philippine business, what Myron Cowen and I developed was the belief that the only salvation for the Philippines was going to be to get rid of Quirino. We selected [Ramon] Magsaysay as a logical successor. He had been one of the great guerrilla fighters, an incorruptible man, a man of enormous energy. He needed to be given an opportunity to take it over. Our job was, well -- how shall I say it -- not to assert American influence overtly over the

Philippines but [to provide] a quiet reassertion of American influence in helping to create a situation in which Filipinos -- which at this

[184]

point oddly enough consisted largely of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Manila, which was composed of younger, very active, politically conscious, able young men -- of putting them in a position of helping them to establish the climate in which they could challenge Quirino and get away with it. We had a certain amount of very useful assistance from Ed Lansdale. He was with the CIA. He was an Air Force officer, who was attached to Magsaysay's staff, and it was quite clear what the job was. What Magsaysay had to do was to clean out the corruption in the Philippine Army, to get the troops out of the barracks, out into the field to establish the credibility of the Philippine armed services, which they had always had before the war. [It was] to make the Army, in a sense, again the protectors of the people instead of the oppressors of the people as they had been. [We were] to help him with whatever kind of economic reform measures he needed in central Luzon, which is where the economic trouble was, in the rice-growing areas, and see that he got the help that he needed for that.

ACCINELLI: Did Quirino realize what was happening?

MELBY: He knew damn well what was happening. I think about

[185]

the last conversation I had with him, when I had to go because Myron was scared of telling him personally, was that he had to name Magsaysay as his Secretary of Defense. He looked at me and he said, "You know, you're asking me to commit political suicide." I said, "Yes, Mr. President, I know that." He shrugged. Well, at that point, what I didn't know at the time was that Quirino was mortally ill, and in two years he would be dead.

ACCINELLI: That's right. He had come to Washington, had he not, in the early part of 1950, as I recall?

MELBY: He came to Johns Hopkins.

ACCINELLI: For medical treatment.

MELBY: And he died at Johns Hopkins. I don't know whether he actually died there or whether he went back. In any event, he was a very ill man. The fight had gone out of him.

ACCINELLI: How did you come to choose Magsaysay?

MELBY: Remember, he was a Senator, and he was chairman of the [Philippine] Senate Committee on Internal Security or something of the sort, and he had made such a record

[186]

for himself, both in terms of energy and of ideas of what had to be done, that we picked him out as the obvious rising star. And he was more than willing to do it.

ACCINELLI: He had also been a guerrilla fighter, had he not?

MELBY: He had been the one guerrilla fighter who was not recognized by MacArthur at the end of the war either.

ACCINELLI: Really.

MELBY: MacArthur for some reason had taken a great dislike to him. So he held no brief for MacArthur.

ACCINELLI: And Magsaysay also came, as I recall, from a fairly ordinary background. He wasn't a member of the Filipino elite by any means, which I suppose worked to his advantage since he was trying to appeal to the peasantry.

MELBY: And then when he did become Secretary of Defense, he did get the troops out of the barracks, and he started holding arrests around the country, and somebody would be arrested for corruption or oppression

[187]

of the peasants and so on. He'd fly out to wherever it was, and he'd hold a drumhead courtmartial and execute the man on the spot.

Well, in the Philippines, word of that sort of thing gets around pretty fast.

ACCINELLI: Oh yes, yes, the famous, or infamous Colonel Lansdale.

MELBY: Yes, he did really a great job in the Philippines. And then the CIA later on transferred him to Vietnam, where he tried to do in Vietnam what he had done so well in the Philippines. It did not work in Vietnam. Ed should have known better. He was savvy enough he should have known you don't translate Philippine cultural experience to Vietnamese, which is China after all. He just made an awful mess out of Vietnam.

ACCINELLI: That's interesting. What were the differences do you think? Why was Magsaysay able to control the Huks, suppress them in fact, in a relatively short period of time?

MELBY: Because the Huks are Malays, of a strong Spanish background. In my day the most educated of the

[188]

Philippines for example still spoke as much Spanish as they did English. To this had been added 50 years of American tutelage, if you want to call it that. Well, it was tutelage, which had been really a very beneficent influence in the Philippines. Manuel Quezon once said to me in Washington, before I knew anything about the Filipinos, he said, "The trouble with you Americans in the Philippines is you don't brutalize us enough." By which he meant that an awful lot of Filipinos didn't want to be independent, that our rule had been on the whole, as colonial

rule goes, pretty good. Even [Carlos] Romulo himself would say at one point to me -- I knew Rommy very well, he was one of my closest friends -- he said, "No, John, as a Filipino I have to say I would rather be badly ruled by a Filipino than well ruled by an American. And therefore, I've got to support them here, even though it's not for our own good, sometimes, in immediate terms. We've got to learn to stand on our own feet, and the only way to do that is to do it out of our own experience."

Well, Ed knew how to handle that. He tried to translate that into Vietnamese terms. It's very hard to differentiate the Vietnamese from the Chinese.

[189]

Southeast Asia, or Indochina, is divided between Laos and Cambodia, which come very definitely out of the Hindu tradition, the Indian tradition, and Vietnam which is right out of the Chinese tradition. They have spent 2,000 years fighting off the Chinese but fighting it off in Chinese terms. Ed never understood the Chinese mentality. He never understood the subtleties of that. The Filipinos, are anything but subtle, you know, and the Chinese are anything but obvious. The two just didn't go together.

ACCINELLI: Of course, the Huks were also isolated in the sense that there was no possibility of them getting external assistance.

MELBY: They never had a nickel's worth of help from anybody. Magsaysay represented the synthesis of all those three traditions: Malays, Spanish, and American. But he was also a peasant; he was a strong man, active, vigorous and so on. He could take action and take it quickly, which most Filipinos don't understand. They expect people to temporize around them, and he impressed the Filipinos with his decisiveness. They appreciated it,

[190]

and the great tragedy was his death. He died in a plane crash three years after he became President.

I'll always remember the first time I went back with a military mission there. The usual thing as head of the mission is that you have to spend half of your time reviewing troops. It gets to be an awful chore, and when I review troops I really review them. Magsaysay was tagging along after me on the thing and huffing and puffing, and he turned to Myron [Cowen] who was having trouble keeping up, because I, as I say, I really march along, and he said, "Myron, this guy Melby, doesn't he ever slow down? I can't keep up with him." But he was and remained always very much a man of the people. Malacanang was open to anybody who wanted to come and complain about anything. Maybe he did a little bit too much of that for his own good because you can't see everyone of 20 million people. But he did make a thing of that, and his house, Malacanang, was open to all of the Philippine people. It belonged to them all and he wanted to hear from them all.

As I say, fortunately, there was never any slightest suggestion of sabotage or anything like that, with his

[191]

death. It was just pure accident, running into that cloud with a hard-core mountain in it. And if I needed any evidence on the thing, it is that Romulo's son, Carlos, Jr., who was the apple of Rommy's eye was on that plane too. You can be sure that if there had been any suggestion of any foul play, and so on, Rommy would have torn the Philippines to pieces. But he was just devastated and he never got over it. He adored that boy.

ACCINELLI: You and Romulo, as you have just said, were close friends.

MELBY: Yes. Off and on he was Ambassador in Washington when I was there. Then when he went back, he was Foreign Minister off and on, and at one point he was President of the University of the Philippines. He was an old, old man when he died, but he was still Foreign Minister. In '73 I was out on the ship and I went down and had lunch with him one day. He was active and vigorous then; he must have been 80 at the time, early eighties, but you would never have known it.

ACCINELLI: Did you or Cowen, or both of you, have anything

[192]

to do with his appointment in 1950, to the position of Foreign Minister?

MELBY: No.

ACCINELLI: That was Quirino's doing then?

MELBY: He wasn't Foreign Minister in 1950; he was Ambassador to Washington.

ACCINELLI: Oh, I'm sorry.

MELBY: In '73 he was Foreign Minister. In a way it was kind of a sad conversation. It was just six months after [Ferdinand] Marcos had declared martial law, which was very popular at that time, because Marcos called for all Filipinos to turn in their arms. You would have thought the Philippine Islands was just one layer of American equipment that had been abandoned there because the Philippines was a staging area, the first staging area, for the invasion of Okinawa. And then Okinawa was a staging base for "Olympic" for the invasion of Kyushu.

Well, there had been a mutiny of American troops in Manila, which was kept entirely out of the press at the

[193]

time. I never saw a reference to it in an American paper. But all the weapons that were accumulated, the Filipinos had buried or dug down or whatever, so everybody was armed. Filipinos used to go around the streets of Manila, carrying arms -- revolvers and the muskets and so on. Marcos, to his initial credit, demanded they all be turned in. And most of them were; millions of them were turned in. After that he began to get delusions of grandeur, but at the time one of Marcos' platforms had been real agrarian reform. Rommy told me at this luncheon; he

said, "I have made it clear to the President that I will stay on as Foreign Minister as long as he actually puts through agrarian reforms, without which nothing is going to happen in this country to improve anything." He said, "He has assured me that he will do it and I will stay on then." Well, of course, Marcos never did it. Rommy stayed on probably longer than he should have. Well, of course, he would have been pushing 90 by that time. Also, he got married again, believe it or not.

ACCINELLI: How old was he when he was married a second time?

MELBY: In his late eighties. He married an American newspaperwoman.

[194]

I've just seen a reference in the last *New York Times Book Review* section, last Sunday. She has written a book of memoirs about him.

ACCINELLI: Yes, I saw that. I clipped that out in fact.

MELBY: I never met her. He didn't get married for a long time. Virginia Romulo had died many years before. She was an incredibly beautiful woman. She was also a very smart real estate operator. Rommy who had never had two dimes to rub together in his life, liked it that she was making so much money in real estate that he got to the place where he wasn't a wealthy man, but he didn't have to have a job. That was her legacy to him. She was a Malay herself; she was a real Malay beauty.

ACCINELLI: In 1950-51 was Romulo aware of what you were trying to accomplish in the Philippines? Did he recognize that Quirino was a problem?

MELBY: Oh sure, sure. Romulo was a very shrewd little guy. Oh, yes.

ACCINELLI: And did you work together with him at all?

MELBY: Oh yes, sure, very closely. It was the first time

[195]

he was Foreign Minister, and I was still stationed in Washington. On toward the end of the day he would call me, late in the afternoon, telephone me. They were great telephoners and great see-ers-off at the airport. But it never occurred to him that 4 o'clock in the afternoon in Manila was 4 o'clock in the morning in Washington; so he'd get me out of bed then and sit there in his office, in the Foreign Office, and talk to me for an hour. He just wanted to talk. It was that kind of relationship, gossip and so on. It didn't do much for my sleep, but I was a lot younger then than I am now and it was okay.

ACCINELLI: Well, tell me something about Filipino politics.

MELBY: Oh, God. I wouldn't know where to start.

ACCINELLI: Well, obviously there was a problem of corruption, which I gather was endemic.

MELBY: Oh, yes, it was then, in Quirino's time. Oh, for example, it was the kind of thing where anybody could get an import license for anything. There was one ship that came in that had nothing on it but bird cages. Now, of all the damn fool things that the

[196]

Filipinos didn't need it was a shipload of bird cages. Also, there were more Cadillacs in Manila than there were in Manhattan in those days. Anybody could get a license for anything, and did, so that Philippine foreign exchange was just being depleted; it disappeared.

Well, even worse than that, really, were two things. One was the real grievance of the Huks, which was absentee landlords. A lot of that Luzon rice country was owned by men or families or women or whomever, who had never set foot on it. The absentee landlords' share of the crop could run as high as 70 percent per crop. Well, this is usury in the worse kind of sense. The other great drain on the Philippine economy was the sugar centrals, sugar being the great export crop. That is where we had made a mistake. The Japanese had destroyed all the sugar centrals, and we financed the rebuilding of them. But we not only financed them, we returned them to the original owners. Whoever owns the central, controls the Philippine sugar crop, and there were not more than 200 families or individuals who had an absolute strangle-hold on sugar. That was a terrible mistake on our part. They probably should have been nationalized or something of the sort.

[197]

On top of that -- and this is what made Philippine politics such fun in a way -- I was going to say there was freedom of the press. But it wasn't freedom of the press, it was license of the press. I mean the things that Philippine newspapers used to publish were really scandalous. It didn't matter whether they were true or not; nobody believed any of it anyway. But it made awfully good reading. As I say, they didn't hesitate to publish anything. There was a story about Quirino. Under the Japanese, he had been chief justice of the Philippine Supreme Court. One of the last actions of the Japanese when they were pulling out of Manila was that they dragged his wife and his six children into the public square and executed all seven of them, and they made Quirino watch it happen. He, after this, didn't give a damn about anything, and he never remarried.

ACCINELLI: Oh, I could see how that could just simply destroy a man.

MELBY: Oh, sure. But at this time he was sort of playing footsie with a very decorative and attractive nightclub singer. He had created a certain amount of scandal

[198]

by buying for his own use, at Malacanang, what was then considered a very expensive bed. He paid \$5,000 for it in the days when \$5,000 was a pretty fancy price. The comment of the editorial writer was, "We don't understand why he insists on having this bed to bring his girlfriend to, but his pudgy little fingers will do the job for him just as well." Well, everybody loved it, but nobody did anything about it. Well, this is the kind of thing that the press was publishing and even Quirino thought it was funny.

ACCINELLI: He was a very emotional man, was he not?

MELBY: He could be; normally he was rather impassive.

ACCINELLI: Was he? I've read that on occasion he would break down and cry.

MELBY: Oh yes, yes.

ACCINELLI: Which is not normal behavior for the President of a country.

MELBY: No. His great pal was Ruperto Kangleon, who was a Moro. He was the head of the Philippine constabulary.

[199]

Now, the Philippine constabulary in its day had been elite troops, absolutely above suspicion, beautifully disciplined. They were the forces that Americans relied on mostly to keep law and order in the Philippines. But under Quirino and under Kangleon, they had been allowed to disintegrate so they became holy terrors. I mean when the constabulary showed up, the peasants disappeared into the countryside. They wanted no part of them. One of Magsaysay's jobs was to put them back under discipline, and execute a few of them.

ACCINELLI: Which he did?

MELBY: Which he did.

ACCINELLI: Did you, and/or Cowen, intend that Magsaysay eventually would become President?

MELBY: That is absolutely true.

ACCINELLI: You had this in the back of your minds.

MELBY: Oh, not in the back of our mind.

ACCINELLI: That was the plan.

MELBY: It was definitely the plan. There was a first step

[200]

involved in the thing, which was the mid-term elections in 1951, and the Senate was up for grabs. I had rigged up an excuse to be there for the elections. My excuse was I had got myself named political advisor to the 7th session of the South Pacific Commission in New Caledonia. Then, of course, I just dropped into the Philippines on my way back to Washington, you know. Which, of course, didn't fool one single living Filipino newspaperman, who knew exactly what I was doing there. A horde of them were all there at the plane waiting for me when I arrived, and I just smiled and laughed, "Oh no, I'm just here to have a look at your elections on my way back to

Washington. I don't care what happens." I mean, they went, "Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, big joke Mr. Melby, big joke." "Yeah, big joke."

I arrived there about 6 o'clock that evening and Quirino was throwing one of his great pre-election bashes to which he had invited 5,000 of his most intimate friends for a sit-down black tie dinner in which the Manila Symphony Orchestra would play. I had been flying, by that time, for about 18 hours from Noumea because I had to go to Australia first and then up to Darwin, and so

[201]

on. I was exhausted, and I said to Myron, "I cannot go to that dinner." He said, "But the President insists that you must come." And I said, "Well, orders is orders; I guess I'll go," which I did. It was a pleasant enough evening; it didn't go on forever. But there was an unfortunate incident, and I guess I can only chalk it up to my own fatigue. I was talking, standing talking just before we broke up with Joe Yulo who was the Vice President. Joe said, "I take it you think you're going to look at the elections tomorrow." I said, "Sure, why not?" He said, "Well, I would advise you not to go, there could be trouble. If you get out on the streets there's no telling what will happen." And me, in my fatigue, I said, "Joe, no Filipino is going to tell me what to do." I knew the minute I said it that it was 1,000 percent the wrong thing to say. But he just laughed, and passed it off. The next morning I was up bright and early hung over and everything else, ready to go out and watch the election.

By this time Myron had lost his nerve. He was convinced that Quirino was going to rig those elections and that there was going to be trouble. Myron had arranged that he was going to leave at 4 o'clock that

[202]

afternoon. He wasn't going to stick around. And he said, "John, you're going to come with me." I said, "No, I'm not. I'm going to stay here and see these elections through." He said, "You've got to come," and I said, "No, I don't, and I'm not going to." He said, "Well, I'm not going to go out and look at the election with you." I said, "Well, that's up to you."

But he was up at 9 o'clock and we drove around, and he had the flag flying on the car. I said, "Myron, cover that flag. These are Filipino elections." He did; he knew better. We drove around from one polling place to another, and I'd get out and, absolute quiet, there was no trouble. I'd go up to whoever was running the particular election thing and I'd say, "I've come to vote; everybody can vote here." They'd laugh at me, "Ha, ha, no, no señor, you are Americano; you can't vote here." I'd say, "I can't?" He'd say, "No, no, just Filipinos." I'd say, "That's good, I'm glad to hear, that," and laughed and went on. Myron took off; he left on that 4 o'clock plane. By this time I was just exhausted, really exhausted and went into his office and sat down and pulled the curtains and there was no air-conditioning in those days. But it was

[203]

cool in there, and one of the Senators, Gil Puyat, who was up for election called me. He was full of despair; "We're going to lose if the President's going to steal everything and so on." I said, "Come on, you're not going to do anything of that kind. Come on over; let's talk about it," which he did. We sat there and we talked for a couple of hours. He left and finally I said, "Don't worry."

The next morning when it was all over, every Quirino nominee had lost overwhelmingly, and my friend topped the list in everything.

ACCINELLI: How much had the United States had to do with that?

MELBY: We had financed the Junior Chamber of Commerce. We got them out doing electioneering and campaigning; gave them the money. The next day when I walked down the center of town, walked around, you could feel a difference. They knew they'd won. The results were all in, and they knew they'd won, and their whole attitude had changed. They had proven themselves. They could run an honest election, and they hadn't allowed Quirino to get away with anything. They'd swept in, and they paid no more attention to me than if I'd been a shadow on the

[204]

wall. And that was great; that was what I wanted. I wanted them to ignore me, and so I went back and went to bed and the next day thought about getting a plane to Washington. Then, of course, the presidential elections wouldn't come up for another two years, by which time, of course, I was off the Philippines desk. Conservatives with Magsaysay swept into the election and won it hands down. I think he got something like 70 or 80 percent of the vote. Three wonderful years, but...

ACCINELLI: Tell me something about your relationship with Myron Cowen. I take it you became very close friends.

MELBY: Very close friends. Really, intimate friends in a way. I liked him with all his foibles, and all the things that were wrong with him. He liked me, I guess with all the things that were wrong with me.

ACCINELLI: Can you tell me a little bit about his foibles?

MELBY: You talk about an emotional man; there was really an emotional man. His temper was famous. He could fly off the handle and dress people down, savage them, and then he could turn right around and be the most charming man in the world. He had driving energy; he

[205]

never stopped working. He had originally come from a small farming community in Iowa. I've forgotten where he went to college, but he went to law school in North Carolina. As a very young lawyer, he had had some grandiose ideas about trying to corner the wheat market in the United States. According to him, he damn near succeeded in it, but of course, it didn't work. He said, "Then I spent the next two years plying back the debts on that, and eating peanut butter sandwiches."

He practiced law for a number of years and was active in politics. I don't know whether it was during the Roosevelt or the first Truman administration, but he was judge of the Court of Customs, something of the sort, which eventually led to his appointment to Manila. He was also a man with beautiful aesthetic tastes. This was in the days before the great boom of Georgetown restoration. He would buy an old house and he'd restore it and furnish it and then sell it. He'd

furnish it in original style, Federalist style. He had beautiful things himself. He made a fair amount of money that way. Then, of course, he finally got married and married quite a wealthy woman, Dorothy, who was one of the heirs of the

[206]

Strouck Woolen Mills. She had the aesthetic tastes of a billy goat. She was quite a handsome woman, and had a lot of energy herself. But Myron would have these beautiful old 400 year-old Chinese chow tables in his living room and Myron would scream; she didn't even know what her feet were up on. Oddly enough, they sort of got along pretty well together. She always was after him to get out and make some money. She had a son by a previous marriage who had made a great deal of money with oil leases out in Wyoming or Montana someplace. She used to taunt Myron about that, saying, "My Charlie makes more money on oil leases in one day than you make in a year. Why can't you get out and make some money?" Well, Myron wasn't interested in making money, oddly enough.

ACCINELLI: Was his appointment as Ambassador a political appointment?

MELBY: Oh yes.

ACCINELLI: So, he had been active then in the Democratic Party, in a position as Judge of Customs. It sounds as if it was a political plum as well.

[207]

MELBY: After Manila he was named Ambassador to Belgium. He was there for a couple of years. He came back to Washington and they bought two top floor apartments of a building on Massachusetts [Avenue], which he threw into one. He decorated it with beautiful Japanese things he had acquired. He became kind of a pal with Admiral Radford, who was then chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and this was a relationship that really didn't work out. He and "Radie" as we called him, came to blows over some joint investments that they had made, and each man accused the other of swindling him. There were lawsuits, and I don't know whatever happened to it. Finally, Myron developed a brain tumor and died.

ACCINELLI: When was this?

MELBY: Oh, 1960 some time.

ACCINELLI: You and he developed an informal method of communication through personal letters outside of State Department channels, did you not? Was there a purpose for that?

MELBY: Yes, he wanted to write things to me and he wanted me to write things to him that wouldn't be appropriate

[208]

in an official dispatch, personal things. Also he was involved in a variety of shenanigans with Filipino politicians that he wanted me to know about, but if he put those in official dispatches they would have rapped his knuckles.

ACCINELLI: So your superiors weren't aware of this at all; this was something between you and him?

MELBY: Yes. And Myron on occasion wasn't above a certain amount of skullduggery of one kind or another. Drew Pearson once got after him, accusing him of some kind of swindle involving liquor licenses. I never really knew what it was about. Myron was so upset about this that he seriously considered resigning; actually he decided to resign. I talked him out of it. I said, "Look, you never know whether he knows what he's talking about or not. Sometimes he has half the truth and the other half is pure invention on his part, and this would be forgotten pretty soon. You're doing too good a job here to do anything like resigning."

I once ran into Pearson on the elevator in the Department and he had some other stories, not involving Myron, but something else. I said, "Mr. Pearson,

[209]

that was a pretty interesting story you had yesterday in your column." And he said, "Yeah, you know, there turned out to be a surprising amount of truth in it too." This was Drew Pearson for you.

ACCINELLI: Even his half truths were always interesting.

MELBY: They sure were.

ACCINELLI: The Bell Mission. Were you at all responsible for that?

MELBY: I was totally responsible for it.

ACCINELLI: You were totally responsible for it.

MELBY: I didn't want to do it, and Danny [Daniel W.] Bell didn't want to do it. He said, "I could write that Bell mission report now sitting here at my desk as president of the Liberty National Bank, without ever going out there," I said, "I know that, and you know that, but the Filipinos think it would be a good idea. It would make them feel better, and it will make me feel better as an officer in charge of Philippine affairs if you'll agree to go out and do it."

[210]

Well, so he did. He went out and he made his report. He said exactly what he said he was going to say, and everything that I knew he was going to say, and the Filipinos felt better about it. But it was straight boondoggle, to keep them happy; and nothing changed, as things very seldom change from missions like that anyway.

ACCINELLI: Well, wasn't there an agreement between [William C.] Foster and ECA, and Quirino for economic reform in the Philippines? I thought that that was an off-shoot of the Bell Mission and the Bell Report; that the Filipinos were going to clean house, going to accept certain conditions for economic assistance from the United States.

MELBY: It may have been. It meant no more than a reform agreement with Chiang Kai-shek; nothing happened. I knew nothing would happen. Quirino wasn't capable of reform.

Well, I got some very good friends out of the Bell Mission anyway. [These included] two of my closest friends. One was Jameson Parker who was Information Officer. He later entered the Foreign Service; he was killed unfortunately in an automobile accident. He was probably the

[211]

closest friend I had in the Foreign Service. Michael Deutch, a petroleum engineer -- he was Jewish -- escaped out of Belgium when the Nazis came in. He has done very well in Washington. He went out as the consulting engineer on the mission, and Mike and I have remained very close friends ever since. Mike went out to Vietnam. He gave up his very lucrative practice because he thought that as a naturalized citizen he should return something to the country which took him in, saved his life and the life of his family. He thought, "I owe you something, and I'll go out to Vietnam on my own." that was one of the unfortunate things, but his intentions were good. So, I got something out of the Bell Mission.

ACCINELLI: You went to Vietnam yourself, which brings me to the Melby-Erskine Mission, I think it's called. Did you know what you were going to find there? Was this a repetition of the Bell Mission?

MELBY: Oh, no.

ACCINELLI: Very different.

MELBY: This was a military mission. The Bell Mission was

[212]

economic entirely. The mission I was on to Southeast Asia arose out of a piece of blackmail that the French had pulled on us on Vietnam, as early as February of 1950, which involved a fight between the Far East and Europe, in which the European boys bought the French argument. Without American military help in Vietnam the Communists were going to win the next election in France, and it would require France to pull out of NATO. Of course, all the Far East was adamantly opposed to any such thing, but as usual in those days, Europe won. And therefore, Mr. Truman, in February, had issued an NSC document (68) saying the United States would help and fight against communism wherever it was expanding, and that therefore, the United States would help the French to contain the Communists in Indochina. The NSC document was just as vague as that.

Incidentally, I got to be head of the mission partly because nobody who outranked me wanted the job. [Secondly], somebody thought that maybe my China experience would be useful in Vietnam, and indeed it was, but not quite what they expected. My instructions were very simple; to go out and make recommendations as to how the President's decision to help the French should be implemented. It

[213]

was as narrow as that. And the third thing, the third reason why I was head of the mission, was that Acheson, whose relationships with the Congress were never very good, had been complaining that military missions which had a good deal of diplomatic content in them were being sent out by the Pentagon without any State Department participation in them. He was complaining about this, and finally some Congressman got fed up with it and said, "All right, Mr. Secretary, henceforth every military mission to go out will have a State Department officer as chief of the mission." And that's the way I got the first one, which kind of nonplussed Bobby [Graves B.] Erskine no end, because he was at that time a lieutenant general in the Marines and I was all of about 36 years old. But Bobby and I worked it out, and we got to be great friends and remained that. The scope of the mission was expanded into all Southeast Asia, although the real focus was Indochina or Vietnam specifically. But we were going to include all of Southeast Asia in it.

ACCINELLI: Was there a reason for that?

MELBY: Including those, yes; to make it look better.

[214]

ACCINELLI: It was more cosmetic.

MELBY: Yes, sure. We thought it was going to be a leisurely kind of thing. But then came June 25, 6 a.m., and North Korean troops crossed into the South, and suddenly it became a matter of the greatest urgency. That mission was put together in a very great hurry, and we were told to get going and get going fast, and to come back fast. Well, we didn't come back fast because we were gone for four months. But we did cover all of Southeast Asia except Burma, which wouldn't let us in. The Burmese weren't letting anybody in in those days...

ACCINELLI: U Nu, yes.

MELBY: The only person I had that they did let in was a Coast Guard captain. They said, "Well, he can come in because we do need some riverboats." He went in and I guess had a good time; I forget whether we ever sold them riverboats or not. But otherwise, we did cover every part of Southeast Asia.

ACCINELLI: How much time did you actually spend in Indochina?

MELBY: Well, in Vietnam itself we spent most of the summer

[215]

there. We really covered the country pretty thoroughly. Cambodia, I went there with a reduced mission just for a few days. Cambodians were so unaware of what was going on that their military requirements were [this]: full equipment for one division and a helicopter for His Majesty. All of this was in French, and I was the only one along who spoke any French. I've never been able to speak French since. Then I went up with Don Heath, who was presenting his credentials in Laos. We didn't do any military business there. The Laotians didn't want any

military business. We did spend most of our time in Vietnam, and quite a bit of time, too much time as it turned out, in Thailand. We spent a week in Malaya, at Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, and a couple of weeks in Jakarta, and Bali. I wanted to see Bali; not that there was anything military going on, I just wanted to see Bali. Then we came back by way of Europe. I had my own plane from the Air Force so I could do as I pleased with it. We came back by way of India and stopped off to see Loy Henderson, who was then Ambassador there. We went to Greece to see my brother, who was stationed there at the time; then went on to Paris and London, and Portugal, and back. We got back the

[216]

end of October. We'd been out four months.

ACCINELLI: How large of an entourage did you have?

MELBY: Eighteen officers, including three from the State Department and one man from ECA; the rest were military.

ACCINELLI: Yes. What were your impressions in Vietnam? What conclusions did you come away with?

MELBY: Well, I didn't have to be in Vietnam for very long before realizing that we were making a terrible mistake. There was not one single [Foreign Service] Officer in that Embassy who spoke a word of Vietnamese. Don Heath, I must say, was taking lessons and trying to learn, but nobody else did. To me it was China all over again; change names, dates and places, and you were right back in China. It was the first step toward intervention and we'd been through all of that in China. I felt there was no turning back from intervention.

In the first step we'd say we're just going to provide a certain amount of military equipment, whatever it may be, whatever we decide on, and that's it. Well, it doesn't work that way. There is no turning back; you've got to take the second step, and if that doesn't work, then

[217]

you've got to take that third, and pretty soon, you're involved in it. We had absolutely no expertise in this year of grace, 1950, about Vietnam. There was nobody in an American university who spoke any Vietnamese, let alone the American Government. What are we talking about? What do we know about Vietnam? Nothing. Now, I have to admit I did not foresee the magnitude of the disaster that Vietnam would turn into, but I was sure it was going to be a disaster one way or another.

After hours upon hours of arguing within the Embassy and with Don Heath who was inclined to go along with the French, I finally drafted my telegram to Washington saying, "Please take this up with the President again. Ask him to review his decision to help the French; it is not going to work. We are making this terrible mistake for all these reasons...." I mean it's long, long; it was a long ten-page single-spaced telegram. I must say, in those days, this was still the way things worked. Don Heath sent the telegram off and he drafted his reply to it, his objections to it, which

he showed to me for my clearance. As it would turn out -- I would discover later -- obviously in the Department nobody paid much attention to it. Korea was preempting everybody's

[218]

attention really. It was easier just to go along with what the President had said. [They would] take my recommendations, because we did make our recommendations and they were mammoth recommendations, and very detailed because the working stiffs on the mission had gotten along very well with the French, who showed them everything they wanted to see, told them everything they wanted to know. There was no problem there; the problem was only at the top with me, and the High Commissioner, and the commanding general, and Don Heath, and Erskine. We just didn't see eye-to-eye on anything.

In the Department as I say, nobody paid any attention except a few people who had read the telegrams and they would then thereafter label me as a person who was soft on communism, which would be the beginning of my problems. There was another thing that was unfortunate. Dean Rusk by this time was Assistant Secretary for the Far East. He had asked me to do my own strictly confidential appraisal of the quality and caliber of our intelligence operations in Southeast Asia, which I did. I had marked my telegram "Eyes Only Bill Lacy" who was chief of the Division, and "Eyes Only Rusk," and some clown in the code room distributed that telegram all over

[219]

the Department. Unfortunately, Walter Bedell Smith got a copy too, and he was outraged because I had damned the quality of our intelligence. I had even labeled it -- I said, "The performance is so bad that it approaches misfeasance." After I got back, Acheson called me in one day and said, "Bedell Smith is livid with you. You had better go over to the CIA and make your peace with him." I went over but I didn't make much peace with him. His final sally to me - with Allan Dulles sitting in the corner, and who would succeed him as head of the CIA listening in -- was, "Young man, you are destined either for a brilliant career in the Foreign Service or you are going to be fired." And that ended that conversation.

ACCINELLI: Prophetic words.

MELBY: Yes, wasn't it.

ACCINELLI: I suppose that he wasn't especially enchanted to have the State Department butting its nose in the CIA's business as well.

MELBY: What he was afraid of, I'm pretty sure, is that the telegram was going to fall into the hands of a by-this-time

[220]

hostile Congress, which was out to get the CIA anyway. There would be all hell to pay for that. He didn't want that. And he had a phone call while I was there from some major general, who was head of G-2, who was saying, "We've got to do something about this guy." Bedell Smith was

[saying], "We'll take care of that." And this I think is when they started looking into my record to see what they could find. What they found was Miss Hellman.

ACCINELLI: Did you at all in your telegram to the State Department from Vietnam question what I guess was the common assumption at that time, that the Vietminh were the instruments of Moscow. Or am I wrong? Was this a common assumption?

MELBY: No, it was not.

ACCINELLI: It wasn't.

MELBY: No. Well, my line of argument in the Department was that [regardless of] whatever political persuasion they are, all Vietnamese so hate the French that they will follow anyone who gives any sign of ability to throw them out, to throw the French out. That man quite clearly,

[221]

as they all admit, even reactionary Vietnamese admit, is Ho Chi Minh. Therefore, in the end we are going to be tainted with that same thing. We are after all white, and if we get involved too much in this, we are going to be put in the same category with the French, who are, as I say, despised. There is only one salvation for us here, and that is going to be an ironclad guarantee, hopefully supervised by the United Nations, guaranteed by the United Nations, on an agreed-upon time schedule for French withdrawal from Vietnam over a period of years. It doesn't really make an awful lot of difference how long it takes, so long as there is no question, and the Vietnamese believe it, that the French will leave. Otherwise, we have no business being here. It's just going to end up a disaster for us too.

ACCINELLI: Well, of course, the French found themselves much in the same predicament that the United States would later. They had intervened and once in it, found it very difficult to pull out.

MELBY: The only way they'd pull out would be what Mendes France did at Geneva -- just a catalytic wrenching, surgery, which almost destroyed France. By this time, of course,

[222]

Mendes France wasn't around. Vietnam by now, you see, was costing France. See, France has always had a system of traditional military families, ever since the days of Napoleon. More young French officers were being killed in Vietnam; they were commanding colonial troops, mostly Algerians. More young French officers were being killed than the total output of all French military academies, and the economic costs were greater than the total of American contributions to France under the Marshall Plan. Vietnam was bleeding France to death, and Mendes France said, "This has got to stop. No matter what we have to do, it can't go on." It was the same sort of decision that DeGaulle had to make on Algeria; "no matter what," DeGaulle said, "We've got to cut our losses."

ACCINELLI: In 1950, however, the French were even reluctant to accept, what was it called, the Bao Dai solution?

MELBY: Bao Dai spent most of his time on the Riviera, fat bastard that he was; he was hopeless.

ACCINELLI: I take it it was recognized in the Department at that time that this was a facade, that this was cosmetic.

[223]

MELBY: Oh, yes.

ACCINELLI: When you came back to Washington, from Southeast Asia, in your report to the State Department, you did recommend military assistance did you not?

MELBY: Oh, sure, that's why we went over there. I've forgotten what we recommended; I don't think I ever really knew. I mean all the technical stuff: so much transportation, so much artillery, so much in the way of Naval equipment and so on and so forth. That was something that just sort of went right over to the Pentagon. I wouldn't have recognized it anyway, even if I had read it. I am a very unmilitary sort of person.

ACCINELLI: Did you have anything more to do with Vietnam after the end of that mission?

MELBY: No. There really wasn't much time. By this time Myron was coming back. He had been transferred to Brussels. By this time, you see, I had my first interrogatory. He wanted me to go with him to Brussels. But it didn't seem like the appropriate time to suggest it, although my four years in the Department were up.

[224]

You are limited to four years on a Washington assignment. [It didn't seem appropriate] to broach the subject until the security thing had been played out. See, this was getting into the winter of 1950-51. I had had my first interrogatory which came just before I went out to see the Philippine elections in 1951. Then I got the second one, which was narrowed down really to Lillian, right after the first of the year. In the meantime, I had been taken out of Southeast Asia and assigned to Harriman's staff in NDAP as liaison between the Department and Harriman on the Marshall Plan bit, and for a particular reason.

ACCINELLI: And you were saying for a particular reason.

MELBY: There had been a good deal of friction between the Department and Harriman's staff on the Marshall Plan. Acheson asked me to be the liaison between the Department and Harriman, because he knew that I had been in Moscow with Averell and he and I got along. His idea was that if I said something in Harriman's staff meetings, that Harriman would listen to me, which indeed he did. If I said, "Well, the Secretary feels thus and so," Averell's reaction always was, "Well, if John says this

[225]

is what the Secretary wants, that's it; that does it; that's what we'll do." But this didn't last for more than really a couple of weeks, because, as I say, a second interrogatory came along. So I just sort of faded out of the picture there until we saw how that was going to work out.

ACCINELLI: Well, before we talk about your resignation from the Department, I think we should probably get back and talk a little more about the Philippine issues that we haven't discussed. One of them is the signing of a mutual defense treaty with the Philippines. You had a hand in that, did you not? Do you recall what your role was, and what the reasons were for this treaty?

MELBY: Yes. It came about as an off-shoot of the Japanese peace treaty where [John Foster] Dulles had negotiated the peace treaty with the Japanese entirely on his own and not as a member of the Department. He had been asked to do it and he did it on his own, I say, without any help from anybody. But in the process of doing it, he had made a lot of shady deals. He wanted that treaty so badly. As far as the Philippines were concerned, the Filipinos who had been pretty completely destroyed by the

[226]

Japanese very much wanted an enormous amount of reparations. They wanted something written into the treaty about that, and the Japanese didn't want to agree to it. Dulles so much wanted the treaty, he agreed with the Japanese reluctance. So he told the Filipinos; he told Romulo, "Look, don't worry about the fact that it's not in the treaty. I will see to it that you get your reparations." He told the Japanese, "Don't worry about it; I will see to it that you don't have to pay them anything." I mean word of this sort of thing got around. As a matter of fact, in actual practice, the Filipinos never got anything out of the Japanese, except the Japanese did clean out Manila Harbor, which is a very big harbor you know. It was littered with Japanese shipping that had been sunk. But the payoff was an alliance with the Philippines and the United States which was to reassure the Filipinos that we would protect them against aggression.

ACCINELLI: Was there any military need for this alliance, in a military sense?

MELBY: Not really. Psychological for the Philippines. I mean we meant it; we undoubtedly would have defended the Philippines if there had been trouble there, in our

[227]

own self-interest if nothing else. But they felt better having the alliance.

ACCINELLI: Weren't they confident that the United States would protect them in the event of an attack?

MELBY: They felt better if it was in writing.

ACCINELLI: Did the fact that the United States was about to sign a mutual defense treaty with New Zealand and Australia have any bearing on the Filipinos' desire to have a mutual defense treaty of their own?

MELBY: Yes, that was part of it, sure. It all worked together.

ACCINELLI: How did you and other American officials perceive Filipino nationalism?

MELBY: It's the sort of thing we wanted to encourage. We've always been trying to wean the Filipinos away from their dependence on us. They ought to be an Asian power. Sometimes we felt they were more Latin-American than they were Asian. Sometimes they felt that way themselves. But anytime there was any sign of Philippine nationalism, we thought it was a good idea. Sometimes it took on

[228]

anti-American overtones. So what, everybody doesn't have to love us all the time. We know there's enough residue of goodwill toward the United States in the Philippines that Philippine nationalism is never in the predictable future going to be any threat to the United States. How can it? Mrs. Aquino talks about when the bases' agreement expires and is up for renewal -- what is it, 1990 or something like that -- and they'll have to reconsider the matter. Well, she knows damn well that those base agreements are going to be renewed. They're going to probably try to get more money for them. Why shouldn't they? We pay for everything else; why shouldn't we pay for the bases? There will be a certain amount of hassle about it at the time, but we'll keep those bases. I cannot conceive that there is going to be real trouble with that one.

ACCINELLI: Well, if Mrs. Aquino plays her cards right she'll extract a price.

MELBY: Sure, why shouldn't she?

ACCINELLI: Well, she should; that's right. Why shouldn't she? She wouldn't be doing her job if she did not.

[229]

MELBY: Well, of course.

ACCINELLI: Did you know Jose Laurel and Recto?

MELBY: I have met Recto. He was so bitter about the U.S. that I never got to know him very well. I knew Laurel. Yes, I knew young Laurel, sure. They were not among my 5,000 most intimate friends, but yes, I knew them. I knew almost everybody in the Philippines in those days.

ACCINELLI: So they were not perceived as a threat. What about a nuisance; were they a nuisance?

MELBY: I don't think so. No, I never thought so.

ACCINELLI: Well, the word neo-colonialism is bandied about by some, with respect to the Philippines and some other areas in which the United States has been involved. Would you describe the relationship that the United States had with the Philippines, during that period, as

neo-colonial? The Philippines really had not yet broken away, truly; and they were still very much economically, psychologically and militarily dependent on the United States?

[230]

MELBY: Well, that had been my theory that they really needed a lot of help. The War Claims Commission, and so on, still had a lot of money to spend. Frank Murphy, who was head of that commission, did a superb job with it. The Filipinos from time to time used to hand us bills. They said every Filipino who was killed is worth \$2,000 Well, two million people killed; that's four billion dollars you owe us and so on. Well, nobody took that seriously. But we really built all the infrastructure of the Philippines: bridges and roads, power plants, and sugar mills. We rebuilt that country. And why shouldn't we? They had nothing to go on, and we had responsibility for them for 50 years and we had an obligation to them. I think the Congress recognized it too. We never had much trouble with the Congress getting money for Philippine reparations or rebuilding, rehabilitation and so on. The Philippines at one time had the best public health service in Asia, entirely built by American Public Health officers. We rebuilt that, one result being the Philippine population has tripled since my time there, but it has happened in other places too.

ACCINELLI: Myron Cowen once referred to the Filipinos as

[231]

"Precocious children," a phrase that I mentioned to you over lunch. Would you agree with that?

MELBY: Oh, I think this is Myron being a little bit patronizing, which he could be at times. No. They were precocious, yes; children, no. I think they were pretty sophisticated. I think they still are. I don't think they were children at all.

[232]

Third Oral History Interview with John Melby, November 21, 1986, Ontario, Canada. By Robert Accinelli, University of Toronto.

ACCINELLI: Professor Melby, can you tell me something about Dean Rusk, with whom you worked?

MELBY: Well, I first knew Rusk when he was named Assistant Secretary for the Far East. He replaced Walt Butterworth, who had the job when it was an office and not a Bureau. Walt had had a lot of trouble getting confirmed in the Senate, which offended him personally, so that he was determined he was going to get his confirmation. But he never liked the job. He didn't know anything about the Far East anyway. He stuck it out until he had a chance to become Minister to Sweden; then he left. At that point, that was when Rusk was brought in.

Well, Rusk never had any particular Far Eastern background, or East Asian background at all to speak of. He had worked on CBI when he was in the Army. There was one story that he was the man who literally had drawn the final parallel between North and South Korea, and did it just in a sort of haphazard fashion. It looked like the easiest place to defend; of course, it turned out to be the worst. Then later on when he was Assistant

[233]

Secretary, he had to live with the consequences of that decision, which was kind of ironic.

What he was doing in the Department before he became FE was [that] he had worked on the establishment of Israel as an independent state. It was obviously a very sensitive matter in the Truman Administration, and presumably, so the story went, all the files on how that was handled and why Acheson did what he did in deciding to recognize Israel and support its admission to the U.N., are all in the Rusk files. They presumably were kept in a safe that never anybody else, at that time, anyway, had admission to. What has happened to those files since then I have no idea. But he had done a good enough job on Israel, and the whole Middle East business, that the President, for reasons of his own, decided that he wanted Rusk to come in and take over the FE job. Of course, I got to know Dean very well in those days.

His reputation in the Department -- and this was prior to his becoming Secretary of State much later -- was [that] he was known as the man who never stood up and voted for anything or anyone. He was never on anybody's side; he kept his own counsel. You never knew what he was thinking. He was obviously a man of impeccable integrity, and nobody

[234]

ever questioned that. But he was not a man who voted. In fact, it was a reputation that followed him when, after he had been president of the Rockefeller Foundation in the Eisenhower Administration, Kennedy brought him back as Secretary of State. Well, his reputation still continued to be that of a man who never voted. It was not until the Johnson Administration that you began to know what he really thought about anything and that was when he came out completely in support of American policy on Vietnam, and he never deviated from that, to the shock of most of us.

I think we probably misjudged him in his pre-Vietnam days. As he once said himself, "I am a Southerner; I come from Georgia. In domestic matters I am a liberal. I'm all for civil rights, but when it comes to foreign policy, basically I am a conservative." And this is what he turned out to be. He also, as it turned out later, was one of those who was obsessed with the so-called Munich syndrome. You have got to stop aggression wherever it happens, or later on the cost of stopping it is going to be even greater. I think this accounts for a great deal of his attitude in the Korean war, where he certainly was on the side of American involvement in

[235]

stopping what was believed to be then, and probably was, North Korean aggression. This is where he had to live with the consequences, with his -- I forget what the number of the parallel is.

ACCINELLI: 38th.

MELBY: 38th Parallel decision. I think he as much as anyone had influence with the President in what the President decided to do in committing American power to stopping North Korean aggression. I think Acheson also belonged to his tradition as it turned out: "You've got to stop it

wherever it is." And Acheson was one of those to whom China was simply kind of a nuisance. His mind was entirely fixed on NATO and Europe and all that, but it would be in the end, Korea, that would in a sense do him in. I think that Acheson basically went along with American policy on Korea.

Now, as to my relationship and my involvement with Rusk -- he wasn't involved in the White Paper at all. That was Butterworth. But he was involved with Philippine matters, when I, having finished the White Paper, went back on the Philippine desk. He stopped by my office one day and quoted to me a remark that Cowen had made to him

[236]

about the Philippines. He was obviously very disturbed by it; namely, Cowen had said something to the effect, on some problem, and I forget what it was, "Don't worry about it with the Filipinos, I can always handle these monkeys." This to Dean indicated, well, sort of a racial attitude that he was disturbed about and he wanted to know what my reaction was. By this time, I was beginning to get to know Myron pretty well, and so I said; "I don't think you need to worry about this; this is just his way of speaking things and I don't think this really reflects his attitude." As I got to know him better and better with the passage of time, I never found that it really did. But it was an unfortunate remark to have made. They were anything but monkeys.

Now, also since the problems with Korea were going to be preeminent and all powerful, and I was finally in charge of Philippine affairs, Dean called me in one day and said, "Look, we've got an awful lot of things we have to do. I'm going to turn the running of Philippine affairs over to you; let you decide what has to be done." This was at a time when our analysis of the situation in the Philippines was that the Huks had -- although

[237]

they didn't know it then and perhaps never did know it -- they literally had the military capability of taking over the Government. Our problem was, what do we do about it? How do we deny this to them?

Well, as Myron and I developed our ideas, it seemed to us that the number one problem was going to be Quirino. [It was] that he was just beyond hope, that he was in the clutches of those who were involved in all the corruption in the Philippines and it, was pretty bad at that time, that somehow he had to be replaced. At this time, Magsaysay, who was by now a Senator, was chairman of the Senate Committee on Internal Subversion, or Military Affairs or something, I've forgotten what, and he was showing all the evidence of being the kind of dynamic leader we were looking for. We decided that the time had come to build him up, put him in a place and position where he could in effect, through the electoral process, challenge Quirino and take over the Presidency. This is where we called in for some help from the CIA, who turned out to be one Ed Landsdale, who did a very excellent job on the thing. Also, since we didn't want to seem to be reasserting American control, or even influence, we were working with the Junior Chamber of Commerce. [The Chamber of Commerce]

[238]

in Manila was a group of young, dynamic men, terribly concerned about the situation in which the country found itself, but lacking in resources and lacking in even a certain amount of expertise.

So we decided to work through this group and provide them with whatever money they needed, and such advice as they might want. In the end, it was a group that managed to mobilize enough public sentiment and feeling that in the end they were able to win, first, the 1951 midterm election, in which the conservatives had a clean sweep of the Senate, and two years later, make Magsaysay -- who had switched parties -- President. As I say, this was pretty much left up to me, and to Myron, to do as we thought. Dean said, "For heaven's sake, let us know what's going on, and what you're deciding. The Secretary wants to be kept informed and so does the President." The President doesn't like to be kept in the dark on such matters, and obviously we knew it was a thing with him. Out of this came the Bell Mission, which had no economic justification, but it was for psychological and political and morale purposes, even though Danny Bell, who was the head of it, said he could write that report before he ever went out, if he decided to go. I said, "I know

[239]

you can, I know what's going to be in it, but go ahead anyway."

ACCINELLI: Had a decision already been made to grant to the Philippine Government large-scale economic assistance?

MELBY: No, not under Quirino.

ACCINELLI: Not under Quirino.

MELBY: No. Not at all. In fact, even the military aid we were giving was greatly curtailed. There was a point at which I had to go and talk to Quirino about Magsaysay and tell him that we would like to see Magsaysay named the Secretary of Defense. Quirino said, "Well, you know, of course, you're asking me to commit political suicide." I said, "Yes, I know that, but unless you do it there's no more American military aid forthcoming." You see, I could do that in the sense that I was on the desk in Washington. I wasn't involved in the kind of hassle that the Embassy was always involved in politically, Filipino politics being what they were. So I had kind of detached authority which in most situations even Myron didn't have.

Of course, what I think I mentioned before, what I

[240]

didn't know at the time, was that Quirino was by now a mortally ill man. He would be dead within a couple of years. He had obviously given up. He didn't care.

ACCINELLI: How closely did you work with Landsdale and the CIA? Did he keep you abreast of what he was doing?

MELBY: In very general terms, yes. What he was doing was giving advice to Magsaysay on getting the troops out of the barracks and out into the field, and restoring the credibility of the Philippine armed forces as the protectors of the people, and not their oppressors. This, he did a very good job on.

ACCINELLI: Was he involved in providing financial assistance to the Philippine Chamber of Commerce? Was the CIA assisting the Chamber of Commerce in its activities in any way?

MELBY: Well, I don't remember now whether he was doing that or whether Myron was doing it, or both of them.

ACCINELLI: So there would have been money in the State Department itself for that kind of activity?

[241]

MELBY: Not in the Department, but there would have been out of the CIA funds.

ACCINELLI: So it could have been channeled from CIA to Cowen directly?

MELBY: Yes. There was some of those things, details like that, that I just didn't want to know. It was better that I not be in a position of having to deny something that I knew.

ACCINELLI: Was it known at higher levels, with Rusk for example, or even higher, with Acheson or perhaps even Truman?

MELBY: Oh, yes. Sure.

ACCINELLI: Well, getting back to the Korean war, we haven't talked at all about your own reaction to the outbreak of the war, and then later to the move north of the 38th parallel, and the Chinese intervention.

MELBY: Well, I think I agreed with the general view held at the time that it was North Korean aggression, and that it probably had to be stopped. On the Chinese intervention, as I may have mentioned before, we were getting

[242]

reports in the fall of 1950 that the Chinese were beginning to infiltrate. I remember I was just back from Southeast Asia and I had been invited to a meeting of the Policy Planning Staff at which I was to present a report on Vietnam, Southeast Asia, which I did. They listened politely, and thank you, but I stayed on for the rest of the meeting which was devoted to the Chinese and Korea.

Our Chinese people from the China Desk were saying, "There can't be anything to this. The Chinese have so many problems, they simply are in no position to get involved in a war with the United States or with American troops at this point." I remember thinking at the time, "This somehow doesn't seem right to me; it doesn't feel right." I didn't have the evidence one way or

the other. But after all, I had come out of China, and I just simply could not believe that whatever the cost, that if the Chinese felt that they were being threatened with the crossing of the Yalu, that they weren't going to do something about it. We had been warned by the Indian Ambassador in Peking that the Chinese were going to react to that, and we chose to ignore that. Well, of course, the Chinese did react to it, and they did cross the parallel. They did pin us down by the

[243]

38th parallel, and there we sat.

By this time I was no longer in a position, since my own problems were beginning to surface, to know the inner workings of why we let MacArthur go ahead and do what he did. I mean I just had to rely on secondary sources on that, on other people's account of it. My own suspicion in the matter is that MacArthur somehow had the kind of mystique with the Joint Chiefs, that anything he wanted to do, nobody dared say nay. Although the Chiefs were opposed to our involvement in a land war in Asia, and always had been, certainly up to that point, though they didn't believe in what MacArthur was doing, I'd say they just didn't have the guts to tell him, "Stop it!" I mean, you obviously can argue that in two areas; one, you shouldn't interfere with the field commander, which is a lesson that we didn't learn in Vietnam, or that they were just so bedazzled by the man's reputation.

ACCINELLI: Well, especially after the Inchon landing, which was such a spectacular success.

MELBY: That's right. You mean it was a spectacular fluke, and it worked. There was no stopping MacArthur after

[244]

that. I mean, after all, he was all prepared to go ahead and destroy China as such. But this was one of his big goofs.

ACCINELLI: I think it was about in the mid part of 1951 that Rusk gave a speech in which he used that famous phrase, "China has become a Slavic Manchukuo. China is subservient to the Soviet Union." Is it your impression that he really believed that or that that was the view within the Department?

MELBY: Oh, I don't remember particularly any of that speech. Of course, I do remember Acheson's speech when he said, "Korea is not within the American defense perimeter," and the letter of transmittal on the White Paper that spoke of China as Communist China, as not being an independent country any longer. I think, yes, I think Rusk probably believed it. I say I don't think he really knew. He had worked in CBI, as I say, but until he took over FE he had no China background. There was no reason to think that his judgment on China was any better than that of anyone else. I don't think it was the feeling of say, the China officers on the China Desk, but by this time, of course, they were being weeded out one after

[245]

another, and you are getting other people coming in, who also didn't know anything about China. Sure, the Washington attitude generally was [that] China is just another Russian satellite, you know.

ACCINELLI: What about the Huks? Were they thought to be subservient to Moscow, or to Peking? Is that the way they were regarded, or were they looked upon as an indigenous Communist movement?

MELBY: There was never any evidence that I ever saw that suggested that the Huks were beholden to anyone. They were so isolated there in Central Luzon; they thought they were Marxists and so, in a kind of a way, they were. But they had no contacts with Communist groups outside the Philippines and no way of having any. It was an indigenous radical movement in the Philippines, which came out of the rice situation in Luzon. This is one thing that made it so easy in a sense for Magsaysay to simply go out and destroy them, not militarily really, as to take away their power base. They were guerrillas and guerrillas live on, as Mao knew, live on the peasantry. Without an ability to live with the peasants for food, support, shelter, protection, intelligence and so on,

[246]

the guerrilla is lost. Magsaysay, by demonstrating that the Army was going to protect the peasants, deprived the Huks of their only source of power. And they simply faded away. Finally, Luis Taruc himself surrendered to Magsaysay. As I recall, he was sentenced to prison. At some point, after I sort of lost really intimate contact with Philippine affairs, he was finally pardoned. I don't know what's happened to him since. It really was an agrarian rebellion -- if you want to call it -- with Marxist overtones, sure. Most agrarian rebellions do have that.

ACCINELLI: For a time you worked with William Lacy, in the office of Philippine Affairs.

MELBY: He was my immediate superior. The only thing you can say about him is he was a character. He was entirely Europe-oriented. He was not a Foreign Service officer; he was a civil servant. He was a very flamboyant kind of character. He decided to simplify his life so he always dressed in black. He had flaming red hair. He had a guard's mustache that he curled. He was a great poseur. He must have been at one time a pretty good

[247]

actor. He fancied himself as sort of a pseudo-Virginia gentleman. He never forgave his father for having been Lieutenant Governor of Colorado at a time when William was born, so that William technically wasn't even a Virginian. He was a Coloradan, and that was a great humiliation to him. He was not a conservative; he wasn't even a reactionary. He was sort of a Louis XIV reactionary type. He desperately wanted to find for himself some sort of connection with British nobility, which he never succeeded in doing.

At one point I remember my then-wife, Hilda Hordern, who had been Dr. Stuart's secretary; her father was an English remittance man. So she had inherited from him Burke's *Gentry*, a very big book about the size of Burke's *Peerage*. William learned that she had it, and he very much wanted to borrow it. She was glad to loan it to him, and he kept it for weeks. He was trying to find some connection that would make him British gentry. There was something in the name Lacy that intrigued him; there had to be a Lacy someplace that was British gentry. But I'm afraid he never did find it. He kept that book on the radiator in his office. I don't know how many

[248]

hours he spent pouring over that, trying to look for some genealogical connection for himself.

He was fascinated with a man like Marshal De Lattre de Tassigny, when he was commanding in Vietnam. De Lattre came to Washington at one point, speaking the usual atrocious English that Frenchmen like to put on, because Americans so love that accent. Actually, he spoke very good English. William's name, incidentally, was William Sterling Byrd Lacy. He never tried to find any Byrd connection. He knew better than that because there are Byrds all over the lot in Virginia. And De Lattre turned to him and said something like, "Well, you'll have to ask my red-headed Norman friend here." William literally had tears in his eyes -- "my red-headed Norman friend." Here was a real Frenchman in Normandy who would think he was a Norman.

He also had poor health. He'd had three-fourths of his stomach removed, and he lived for years after that, God knows how, because he ate anything and everything and drank everything that was in sight. He complained once that he had been to the French Embassy and he said, "What did they serve? Fish and white wine. Me,"

[249]

he said, "I'm a beef and burgundy wine man," that kind of chitter-chatter. Well, William was very entertaining, let's face it.

ACCINELLI: How did he become involved in Philippine and Southeast Asian affairs?

MELBY: We used to get some strange people on that desk. William was given that job; I don't know how it happened, frankly. I've forgotten now; I guess I did know at one time. His so-called Vietnam desk people all had French backgrounds. Bill Gibson was in charge of it. His father had been a well-known Parisian Boulevardier back in the old days. Bill had never been in the Far East. A couple of other people had been with the OSS in France. Their interests were not Vietnamese at all in any sense. When Lacy finally managed to get out of that job, he was succeeded in it by Philip Bonsal, who was a Latin American hand. This was after I was out. Phil Bonsal was of Latino background. He had been chief of the old Latin American Division at one point. Before that he had been with AT&T in Cuba for many years. He was very well thought of by Latinos. I have no idea why he got the job, because as I say,

[250]

he knew nothing about it, nothing about the area. What happened after Phil Bonsal, I don't know. Of course, Phil eventually would go back to Cuba as Ambassador. He was the first Ambassador to go back after Castro took over, and attempted to make peace with Castro, and find a working arrangement for him which, in the end, would end his career.

There were others in the Department, or in the Congress, who thought this was appeasement of communism. If there was one thing in this world that Phil Bonsal was not, it was pro-Communist, believe me, far from it. It was just, here is this man who has taken over; he has the support of the Cuban people. Are we going to fight him, or are we going to try to get along with him? As far as I know, Phil still may be alive. His father was Stephen Bonsal, a well-known Far

Eastern correspondent around the world back in the days when foreign correspondents wore trench coats. Back in Spanish-American War days, he'd covered that as a young man. He covered the Philippines; he covered Dewey at Manila Bay. He had been there at that time too. So Phil had a lot of general credentials, certainly.

[251]

ACCINELLI: Did you have much to do with Vietnam, apart from the Erskine-Melby mission?

MELBY: No.

ACCINELLI: That was pretty much outside your territory.

MELBY: I was in charge of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Well, of course, there were the pro-French people on the Vietnam desk; Ken Landon had Thailand and there was his wife, Margaret Landon, who was "The King and I." She had published the original Anna Lowenthal's diary, and she was the first one to cash in on that. That was made into the musical eventually. But Ken and Margaret had been missionaries in Thailand as very young people. They were always Thai people. I mean Ken knew everything that there was to know about Thailand. So, obviously nobody was going to challenge him on anything there. I forget who was on the Burmese desk at the time. It just comes in as a part of the British satrapy, and attached to India anyway.

ACCINELLI: Was it easy to work with Lacy? Did your views more or less coincide? Can you remember whether there were any clashes?

[252]

MELBY: No. It was so understood that I was running Philippine affairs that he never attempted to learn anything about it. He wasn't interested; he didn't want to know. The people that I had on Indonesia knew a lot more about Indonesia than I did, so he didn't bother them at all, although he had been marginally involved in getting Indonesian independence. But that was merely a matter of bringing pressure to bear on the Dutch to get out. He didn't bother me on Singapore either.

When it comes to the mission, well, it wasn't so much a clash of views, because I went out as head of the mission without any preconceived notions of what I was going to get into. I had my instructions generally to implement, to recommend implementation of, the President's decision to help the French. My divergent views on this would come later on, which I reported back. Usually I reported to Rusk and Lacy "Eyes Only" on things I was changing views. When I got back, it wasn't really that there was a clash of views; William by now was thinking more of other things and getting out himself. We recognized that we didn't agree on what I was recommending, but he respected my opinion. In fact, he

[253]

had very high regard for it. He just disagreed. Well, in those days we just did that.

I think he wanted terribly much to be an Ambassador, but he mostly wanted to be Ambassador to Norway. He had had some contact with the King of Norway: His wife, his current wife, was

Norwegian too, which was part of it. He never did get that, but he was sent out finally as Minister-Counselor to South Korea, where he proceeded at once to tangle with Syngman Rhee. His attitude toward Syngman Rhee was -- he was the one who really believed in the monkey theory about that. He so antagonized Syngman Rhee, which of course, was not really hard to do, but so antagonized him that Syngman Rhee finally declared him persona non grata and threw him out of the country.

The last I saw him after he just got back from that particular caper, and he was telling me in his rather lecherous way, that he had had a hard time because he had come back through Europe. He said, "You know, I was out there in Asia and I wanted a woman in the worst kind of way, but," he said, "all those niggers out there, you just couldn't put your prick in one of those. I had to wait until I got to London so I could get me a proper whore." I guess he must have had a hard time waiting.

[254]

ACCINELLI: He must have. How long was he out there?

MELBY: He wasn't there very long.

ACCINELLI: I wonder whether that contributed to his ill temper.

MELBY: It didn't help matters any I'm sure.

The only other really direct indication I had of his political and social views was when he said to me at one point, "You just wait, John, there is going to come a time when we're really going to get after all these old Commies." Mind you, he was very supportive of me in my hearings. He couldn't have been better on that. He just didn't believe any of this; he thought it was a frame-up, as far as I was concerned. They were railroading me and there wasn't any excuse for it. So I had no quarrel with William on any of that, but he once said to me, "There will come a time when we are going to get all these Commies; we're going to get them all out." Shades of Ronald Reagan, which of course, I didn't anticipate in those days. But, he said, "Once we've done that, then by God, we're going to have to go after the goddamn liberals."

[255]

ACCINELLI: Was he serious?

MELBY: He was just as serious as anybody could have been. That was why, as I say, he was really pre-Louis XIV in his political and social views.

William never bothered me or tangled with me, and I enjoyed his company. I decided since we didn't conflict, I was just going to get along with him, which I did.

Well, eventually his second, third, or fourth stepmother -- he had a series of stepmothers, most of whom he loathed -- but there was one whom he adored. His own mother had died in childbirth, so he never knew his mother. But the one stepmother he adored was Lucy Lind, who was a cousin of one Colonel McCormick of *Chicago Tribune* infamy. They got along fabulously. He

adored her. Lucy finally died, but then his father married, again, a woman he did not like. His father then having died, she was living on his father's piece of property in Leesburg, Virginia. He finally quit the Service when she died. He inherited the family place in Leesburg and he told me in his inimitable fashion about the coroner or somebody who came out there to see him one

[256]

day who said, "I regret" -- and William is very good as a mimic -- "I regret this imposition upon you in the moment of your serious distress." William said, "of course, all I wanted to do was to go out there on that grave and dance on it." He lived there. Finally, he divorced Kristen who was his Norwegian wife. I think he married again, but I'm not sure, and eventually he died. He died out there, living his last few years as his version of a Virginia gentleman.

ACCINELLI: A marvelous character.

MELBY: I'm sure he would have been enchanted with LaRouche.

ACCINELLI: Yes, no doubt.

MELBY: They would have been soulmates. LaRouche lives in Leesburg too; he's got his headquarters there.

ACCINELLI: Does he? I didn't know that.

MELBY: Leesburg is quite a hang-out for people who want to overthrow the Government -- nuts and kooks. You hear about them occasionally. My ex-wife's cousin, Nancy Hatch, she and her husband, have a dairy farm out there. I

[257]

don't know what Nancy thinks of it all, because she's a very liberal lady, even though her husband was in naval intelligence.

ACCINELLI: We haven't spoken much at all about Dean Acheson. Now, I don't know whether you had much contact with him in the course of your work.

MELBY: Well, not much contact, no. There wasn't any need for it. Well, I can almost name the number of times and the incidents involved. I thought he was the great Secretary of State really of the 20th Century. I used to see him occasionally when we were working on the White Paper. We would go out to his farm in Maryland, and he would work with us on it there.

I remember one other incident, when I had brought to his attention the dirty deals that one John Foster Dulles was making about the Japanese peace treaty. You see, Mr. Truman had given Dulles this job to do on his own. He was not under the control and the direction of the Secretary at all, or of the Department. He was doing it on behalf of the President, and that's the way he operated it. But he had made these various

[258]

deals which were getting complaints from everybody, from the British, from the Australians, from the Filipinos, even from the Japanese. The one that came to my attention came from Romulo, who was outraged that Dulles had made some arrangement with the Japanese, saying to the Japanese, "Don't worry, there's no mention of reparations in the treaty. On reparations, I'll take care of it so you don't have to pay any." Then he turned around to the Filipinos and said, "I know there's no mention of it here in the treaty, but I'll see to it that you get reparations."

ACCINELLI: How was he going to manage that? Do you know?

MELBY: He never said. He had no intention of doing any of these things. The Filipinos were furious. The aftermath of this a little bit, I think, has been partly involved, in Mrs. Aquino's recent trip to Japan, trying to soften things down because there were years when no Japanese really dared set foot in the Philippines. I brought this to Acheson's attention once. He said, "Well, let's call Foster down from New York and ask him." And he said, "When he comes in, you come in and you and I'll talk to him about this."

[259]

Dulles came down, and Acheson confronted him with it, and Dulles just sat there and didn't say anything. He was doodling; he was always doodling anyway. Finally, just having said, "No, no," kind of grumping and grouching around, and giving out no information at all, finally he just looked at his watch and said, "Well, I've got to get the next shuttle back to New York." He got up and left. Acheson just sort of laughed and said, "Well, so much for that." Dulles had left his doodles on the desk, there on the table, and Acheson handed them to me and said, "Keep that in your file. Someday, see what they are." I don't know where they are. I still have them someplace. I think they must be in Independence in my papers.

After the Southeast Asian mission, he was getting complaints from Bedell Smith about my report on the quality of intelligence, which unhappily had been circulated all over the lot. Smith was furious. So Acheson called me in one day and said, "You better go over and talk to Bedell and make your peace with him, quiet him down. You're not all this serious about it." So I did and that was the time when Bedell ended the

[260]

conversation, with Allan Dulles sitting in the corner, saying, "Young man, you'll either grow up to be either a brilliant success or you will be fired."

ACCINELLI: I take it, Acheson wasn't directly involved in your Loyalty Board hearings? We're going to get into that.

MELBY: Yes, he was. Actually when the Board found against me, Acheson sent word to me through Brad Connors, who was then Public Affairs officer in FE, saying, "Don't worry about it. You take it on appeal to the Appeal Board, and I'll reverse it."

Well, of course, then there was an election and he was no longer Secretary of State, so nothing ever came of that one. He knew about it, but otherwise, I mean I hadn't called on him as a

witness or anything like that. Working for him, in a sense, you don't call on the boss man to give you that sort of thing.

ACCINELLI: Otherwise there were no words of support, or encouragement?

MELBY: No. Well, Dean Rusk did. He came down. He was

[261]

president of the Rockefeller Foundation at that time. I went to New York to see him, and he said, "Sure, I'll come down any time you want me to." And he did, and it was a waste of time, because the Board wasn't even listening. But Dean was very good about it; everybody was except the Board.

[262]

Fourth Oral History Interview with John Melby, November 28, 1986, Ontario, Canada. By Robert Accinelli, University of Toronto.

ACCINELLI: Professor Melby, when did you leave the Foreign Service?

MELBY: Well, formally I was terminated, as I recall, on May 23, 1951. That was the final action in a security proceeding against me, which had been initiated by the Loyalty and Security Board. The whole of it is called the Loyalty and Security Board; the question of loyalty never arose in my case. It was from the very beginning, a question of security, and therefore, of my reliability as a Foreign Service officer.

It was a proceeding that started back in the summer, spring -- let's see, I've got to think now. I want to make sure of my dates here now. Well, I was terminated, I think, on May 23, 1953, very early in the Eisenhower Presidency. This was an action which had been a result of action taken against me by the Department's Loyalty and Security Board. In my case, despite that name Loyalty and Security, there was never any question of my loyalty raised even from the very beginning; it was a question of security, and therefore how reliable was I? It

[263]

started with an interrogatory that I received in the spring of 1950-51, I suppose partly as a result of changes that President Truman had made in the guidelines for the Government loyalty and security procedures, in which he tightened up the whole business.

The original interrogatory contained, as I recall, perhaps a dozen questions on it really, most of them of the nature of going back to my original entry into the Service. Why had I named Fred Schumann as one of my references when I was applying for the Foreign Service? I had been observed at one point when I was a student vice counsel in El Paso of reading a copy of the *Daily Worker*. How did I explain that? Things of that nature. Virtually nothing in it really had anything to do with China, and I had thought that my time in China might be a principal focus of the investigation. The questions ended up with a series involving my relationship with Lillian Hellman, which were pretty general in nature. Did I know her, what was the nature of our

relationship, how often had I seen her, spell out the detail all of the times that you've seen her. What is your relationship now?

[264]

My answer to that first interrogatory, I decided to do myself, although I did take the thing around to Myron Cowen, who was back in Washington at the time. He sent me to New York to see a lawyer friend of his, just to get his general advice on how I should handle the matter. And said lawyer on Wall Street was inclined to believe, "Well, just there's no point in detailing every time you ever saw Miss Hellman; just give them a number of dates and references to give the general impression of how well you've known her and the relative frequency of seeing her." These were the questions that mainly he was concerned about.

The answers to all those pre-Hellman questions were just too easy to answer really. I mean they were things that I could do without too much trouble. The only one China was that it was reported that I had friends in the Democratic League in China. What was that all about, and why did I have these friends? Well, even that one was pretty easy to answer. I mean, Fred Schumann had been one of my professors at the University of Chicago and so on. The *Daily Worker*, of course I read it; you were expected to read everything and know what was going on and that was certainly one source of

[265]

information. As to the Democratic League, well, the Ambassador divided up contacts in China between those of us in the Political Section, and I drew the Democratic League because most of its members, certainly all its top officers, were mostly American educated. They all spoke English; I didn't speak Chinese. It was perfectly natural. Ray Ludden, who was a China-language officer, was assigned the Communists because he did speak Chinese, and very few of them spoke any English. So I mean that was a perfectly natural division.

My answers on the Hellman questions, I really did pretty much what the lawyer in New York suggested I do. That was I gave him a sampling of times. I told him I had met her in Moscow when she came out as a distinguished visiting cultural person at the invitation of the Soviet Government and had lived with us at the Ambassador's residence. That's where I got to know her. And then I sort of proceeded to forget the whole matter.

ACCINELLI: Did you reveal the personal relationship that you had had with her, the affair that you had had with her, or did you think that that was necessary?

[266]

MELBY: No. No, I did not. I just said that we had been very good, close friends. I didn't go into more details than that.

I got my second interrogatory in September of 1951, just before I was leaving to go out on the trip to the Far East, ostensibly to a meeting of the South Pacific Commission, but actually stopping off on my way back to be present for the Philippine elections. I checked with the security people as to whether there was any objection to my going abroad, having gotten the second interrogatory. They said, "No, none whatsoever, go right ahead." So I did.

The second interrogatory, however, was a very different kettle of fish. There it became quite apparent what it was that was bothering the security people, namely one Lillian Hellman, because there were only really two or three questions on that and they all concerned her. And there the whole tone was very different. They said, "It is alleged that you have maintained a relationship with one Lillian Hellman, who is alleged to be a Communist Party member." In the second one, which did kind of throw me for a loop, they said, "The Department has

[267]

information that you spent a weekend with her at her farm in Westchester County, which you did not mention in your answer to the first interrogatory. Is that true, and if so, what were the circumstances?"

Well, it was true. I had. I had really not been in touch with her after I got back from China in 1949 at all, except for a couple of casual phone calls. I had not seen her in 1949 at all. But in the meantime, I had gone out to the Philippines in the fall of 1949 on a military mission, just to the Philippines alone. I was only there for a couple of weeks. But coming back from Manila, I had written her a note saying I felt a little guilty that I hadn't seen her or been in touch with her, and we ought to do something about it. I forget whether it was a phone call or a note from her, when I got back to Washington, saying, "Well, come on up and see me some time. I'm usually at the farm on weekends anyway, and let's get caught up," and so on. So I had gone out there. No, rather I had gone to New York. I had been to New York on business and seen her once there. It was after that that she said, "Come on up sometime and we'll go out to the farm and we can have a pleasant weekend out there."

[268]

I did go out, which I had not mentioned in the interrogatory, the first one. The curious thing about it was, how did the Department know about this, because we saw nobody that weekend. She was living there alone. The servants, if she had any -- I've forgotten now if she did -- at least were not there. Her farmer was away; we didn't see him. It was just Lillian and myself there for a couple of days. The only thing that I could think of was that while we were there, one of my secretaries in China had come down with a case of tuberculosis and was in the Marine Corps hospital on Long Island. So I had called her from Lillian's to see if I could speak with her, see how she was, and was told no, she was not in any condition to answer the phone. Did I want to leave a message? I said, "Yes, just tell her that John Melby has called, and I will write her and be in touch with her." The only thing I could think of was that there had been a phone tap, because [Dashiell] Hammett had been living there off and on from time to time.

This is jumping ahead: having gotten my own FBI files finally from the Freedom of Information Act, there is only one piece of paper in that whole file, and it's a big file, that has any reference to Lillian. That

[269]

is an unnamed informant who says that he does not wish to testify, but that he is in a position to know that I had been out there that weekend. And he had the facts pretty straight. But I mean, who it was, who he was, why, why he was reporting this, that's all crossed out.

ACCINELLI: You have no idea who it might have been.

MELBY: I have never had any idea who it might have been, to this day.

I then did answer the second interrogatory. Well, in the meantime I decided, "Well, I have to have a lawyer now; I mean I can't go ahead this way. My guts told me I'd had it really, but I wasn't going to quit. I mean there is this intuitive feeling one has on things; still I was going to fight it out. I had several suggestions on whom to get as a lawyer; I didn't have any experience in this sort of thing. One friend of mine suggested that I get the well-known civil rights lawyer, particularly a man in Philadelphia. But others suggested, "No, what you really should do on something like this" -- and mind you this is very early in the McCarthy hearing days, and nobody had any experience with it, so you can't really blame anybody on it -- "What you need is to get a Washington

[270]

lawyer, the most conservative man you can find, and do exactly what he tells you to do. Then, once the thing is over and you win, because you'll be cleared that way, then you can go ahead and do as you please."

Well, the man who was recommended to me was Arthur Scharfeld, who was a very well-known lawyer in Washington, who practiced before the Federal Communications Commission. He had absolutely no experience in what we have come to call a "new branch of law, administrative law." It wasn't a court case or anything like that. [He had] absolutely none at all; he had no clues as to what he was doing. But I went to see him, and he agreed to take the case. Most of the work he turned over to his young associate, a young man named Ted Baron, who was a little more knowledgeable than Arthur was. But still he had no real experience in the business. So we worked up the case. Well, when I finally got charges -- have I mentioned that?

ACCINELLI: No.

MELBY: Oh, well, it was when I got the charges that I decided that I needed a lawyer. Finally in April,

[271]

around April I think, or the early spring, I got formal charges which contained only one charge against me, "That you have maintained an association with one Lillian Hellman who is known to be a Communist." That was it. That's when I got the lawyer. The hearing dates were set for early July.

In the meantime, it had become a little more confused than that, because Lillian herself had a subpoena from the House Committee, the House Committee on Un-American Activities, to appear in May. She was obviously very upset about this. She called me, and said she wanted to talk to me sometime about it. What was bothering her particularly on this, her subpoena from HUAC did not have any charges connected with it, and therefore she had no idea what they might have in mind. But what she was afraid of was that perhaps they might know something

about me and her, that this would come up, and how should she handle that. She was also fearful that they might bring up the question of Averell Harriman. After all, she had been his house guest when he was Ambassador in Moscow and he was at this point busily engaged in running for the Presidency. One can imagine

[272]

this would make a nice juicy headline, you know, "American Ambassador, Presidential candidate and so on, subverted by Communist agent who was his house guest," that sort of thing.

ACCINELLI: There was nothing other than that; she was simply a house guest?'

MELBY: Oh yes, that's all. He had insisted that she be a house guest; she had not been particularly anxious to do it. He had known her before and Kathleen, his daughter, had known her in New York also. And distinguished guests in Moscow normally stayed in Spaso. We had lots of room there, so there was nothing particularly unusual about that. But with the McCarthy fever building up, you never knew who was going to drag out what and to what end. She wondered if I could come to New York to see her and talk about it. Well, it happened to be at a time when I was terribly busy with a lot of things. It didn't seem particularly convenient at that time, but I had in the meantime accepted an invitation to go to Philadelphia to speak a couple of times at one of the regular meetings -- conferences, not meetings -- conferences

[273]

being put on by the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, talking about China. So I suggested that perhaps she could come to Philadelphia and we could meet there and talk because I would have some time there.

Well, she wanted an excuse to go to Philadelphia. She had friends there anyway -- other friends. So we did meet in Philadelphia. We just talked about this question of what she should do and so on, without reaching any real conclusions about it, because she really was just beginning to shake down with her lawyer in Washington. He was Joe Rauh, who was a very experienced man in the whole field of civil rights. So I was with her the better part of a couple of days. She was staying at the Barclay Hotel and I was at the Bellevue Stratford, which has since gone through its apotheosis, you know, with veterans.

ACCINELLI: Oh, that was the Legionnaires' disease wasn't it?

MELBY: Legionnaires disease at the Bellevue Stratford that ended that ancient hostelry; that of course came later.

In the meantime, Arthur Scharfeld had been drawing up the brief that we were going to submit to the Security Board before we went into actual hearings. It included a list of all of the times, as far as I could remember them, that she and I had ever met. By now it was pretty clear, even without being so stated explicitly that it had been an affair, and there was no need to go into details about that. He had drawn up this list for the Board just before I had gone to Philadelphia. I knew that he had the list but it didn't occur to me that I had not put in meetings in Philadelphia into that, and consequently, it went to the Board without the Philadelphia meetings. It didn't take the Board

very long to get around to saying, "Mr. Melby, are you sure that the list you have given us is complete, as far as you can remember?" I said, "Yes, I am, those are the only times," and just at that moment it hit me, "My God, it is not complete. I have not put in the Philadelphia meetings."

So I had to make a very fast decision on my own, because Scharfeld by this time was totally baffled in the hearing as to what this thing was all about because he had discovered we could not produce witnesses. We could not find out who had made charges, who knew what, so on. We had to accept the Board's word that thus and

[275]

so was true, which of course, is not what American law is all about. You are entitled to confront and rebut, if you can, charges made against you by someone. It would take many court cases later on to straighten that one out. But at this time, this was part of then administrative law as it was practiced. As I say, Scharfeld was just totally baffled by these restrictions on him as a lawyer, and on me as a defendant in the thing. So he wasn't being at all helpful, and in any event, I didn't have time. I couldn't even turn to him and ask him and say, "What should I say?" I had to make up my mind. I decided at that point, snap judgment, to say, "I'm sorry; I have left out something." I told them about the Philadelphia meeting. It was a calculated gamble on my part, that if they had been so insistent on this that they would know that I was not telling the truth, they had some information, and in those days, the paranoia was such you never knew who knew what. Of course, if I had stuck by saying that is complete, and so on, and they had evidence that I was not telling the truth, I would be just flat open to perjury and that would end everything, clearly. So I said, "I'm sorry, I cannot

[276]

explain this, how I forgot it, but I did." Somehow they never really believed anything I said after that.

ACCINELLI: Even though you had, in fact, told the whole truth.

MELBY: Yes. They thought, "Well, if he had forgotten that, what else did he forget?" And this they kept after me, after me, after me, in hearing after hearing. They went on; there were a number of sessions.

ACCINELLI: Did they question you about Lillian Hellman's views?

MELBY: No.

ACCINELLI: Did they try to use you to discover more about her?

MELBY: Their assumption was that she was a Communist, period. I had to accept that, period, and I was not permitted to challenge that at all. They said, "We're not interested; she is. You must accept it or else." No, they were not interested in what I thought. I had to accept that and I should have known it, according to them. They had the evidence on her, they said. But

[277]

they were not about to tell me or anybody else what that evidence was. They never did, and they never have. It just went on and on this way. They had obviously by this time made up their minds that I was not really reliable. We went through, oh, any number of hearings; it lasted over several days in early July and then it was reopened again in August with more evidence and other witnesses. I had certainly marshaled a list of "character witnesses," I suppose you'd call them, which perhaps were not quite as spectacularly good as those Alger Hiss had, but they didn't do me any more good in the end than Alger Hiss' did him. It was all discounted; nobody believed anything. It was I who was the one that was guilty; I had been guilty of concealing things and what else was I concealing?

ACCINELLI: Who testified on your behalf?

MELBY: Well, Lacy, Livy [Livingston] Merchant, Lewis Clark. Dr. Stuart testified the Ambassador. Walt Butterworth [testified]. Dean Rusk came down. He was now out of the Department; he came down from the Rockefeller Foundation. He testified. They were not at all interested in his

[278]

testimony. After all, he said, "If he had been unreliable would I have agreed to his going out to Southeast Asia on this mission?"

Myron Cowen -- I wasn't present for his testimony -- but he came back from Belgium at his own expense to testify. In retrospect, I think he handled it very badly, because what he did was to storm in and say, "What is all this thing about Melby?" and so on. "After all, he was the most confidential man I know; he even had access to top secret atomic energy information. I had never any question about his reliability on this. How can I say he isn't reliable?" Really, what he should have done, was just saunter in and say, "Now, what's all this foolishness about? Melby's worked with me for years and I know he's a reliable guy. Sure, he went to bed with a woman, but so what, who doesn't. Now, come on fellows, let's stop kidding around about it."

But Myron's testimony just had the opposite effect, of course. You could just see them tense up, "My God, this man has access to atomic energy intelligence, and we know he's been sleeping with this Communist. What kind of a leak do we have on our hands here?" So it just went from bad to worse on this one.

[279]

You have to remember, if you can envision it -- you're a little bit too young really to remember this in the way that some of the rest of us can -- what the atmosphere was like. [There was the] downright fear that was so pervasive throughout Washington at the time.

One thing they did throw at me, that I've never been able to figure out, was -- they said, "The Department has information that Miss Hellman gave a dinner party the night that he escaped from the United States, Gerhardt Eisler." I don't know whether you remember the Eisler case.

ACCINELLI: No, I don't recall.

MELBY: He was a German Communist who had been convicted and was being deported formally, so one night he had made arrangements to be spirited out of New York on a Polish ship, *The Batory*. He went back and he lived for a number of years in East Germany, and then he finally died. Well, it was a headline case at the time. He had made monkeys out of the FBI; he slipped out of their hands. Here was this man they were going to deport, and he was just laughing at them. He had escaped his due punishment

[280]

at the hands of American justice. Howard Donovan was the one who brought out the charge; he was the chairman of my Board. He said, "Miss Hellman gave this dinner party that night that Eisler escaped from the FBI. Were you invited to the dinner party?" "No." "Well, did you know anything about it?" "Why didn't you know?" "I can't answer that; I don't know why I didn't know, because I never heard of it. I know nothing about it." Howard kept coming back to this dinner party, not only at this one hearing but at subsequent ones. Finally, in the last hearing in which he brought the matter up, he said, "Well, Mr. Melby, tell us, if Miss Hellman had been a friend of Eisler, would it have been in character for her to have given a dinner party for him that night?"

I said, "Well, that's a hypothetical question, but I have to say if you are assuming that she was a friend, of course it would have been in character with her to have given a dinner party for a friend." Howard lost his temper then and he just slammed his paper, and he said, "Well, goddamn it, the dinner party was a fact."

Well, in the meantime, I had told him that I had been in touch with Lillian. I asked her if she had ever

[281]

given such a dinner party. She claimed that she had never even met the guy. She said she might have at some large cocktail party met him in passing, but certainly she had never met him to know him, or know anything about him. No, she'd checked through her records, she'd asked her secretary and so on, and there was no record of her ever having given a dinner party for him. Well, this was left as a mystery, as to what the heck this was all about, and how did they ever know anything about this. Well, what did they think they had in the file.

I told Bob Newman this story, and so help me, he discovered that Eisler was dead, but that his widow was living in East Berlin. She had taken over the editorship of the newspaper that he had been editor of, and she was still living. So he wrote her, and I have a copy of her reply. Mrs. Eisler said, "I am sorry to say that neither Gerhardt nor I ever had the privilege of meeting Miss Hellman. We both were very sorry that we never did know her, but I'm afraid this is more FBI garbage because there never was any such thing that happened."

ACCINELLI: Where on earth they got the information, how they came to believe that such a dinner party occurred, is a

[282]

real mystery, isn't it?

MELBY: It is. But there were little tidbits like that. Unfortunately what has happened -- when finally I did get access to my files through Freedom of Information -- I discovered a few years ago that my transcript of the hearings and so on had been destroyed by the Department several years ago. That included the Board's rationale for its final action deciding that my continued employment was no longer clearly in the national interest. But the Department had gone to some trouble to instruct various people involved in handling Freedom of Information material, to get busy and reconstruct the file. They found a copy of the hearings over in the Civil Service Commission.

I got further confirmation that this really had happened when, in the fall of 1980 -- and I was just about to be reinstated -- the administrative officer in the [American] Embassy in Ottawa called me and asked me could I come to Toronto for an interview. This was to bring up to date my file really with whatever might have happened since with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police]. It was largely a pro forma matter to clear things. He told me that he had been the man who was in the Department at

[283]

the time, handling my case of reconstructing my file. He said, "It's true, we had instructions to do everything we could to rebuild that file as completely as possible." He said, "I was the one who got those transcripts from the Civil Service Commission. But," he said, "unfortunately, in the destruction of your file, the only copy left of the Board rationale, the Board's rationale for this action in recommending your dismissal, was destroyed and there is nowhere a copy of that."

And here is one very kind of sad thing. The secretary, a lawyer, a young lawyer named John Sipes, who had been pretty tough, but he was not unfriendly in a way, had left the Department and Bob Newman was trying to find him. He could not find him anyplace, in any legal record, or in any legal dictionary or anything like that. He did not know what had happened to Sipes. Joe Volpe would later be my lawyer when I decided to get rid of Scharfeld and get someone who had more experience in the business. Joe Volpe had been general counsel for the Atomic Energy Commission, so he had handled a lot of these cases, and he was one of the elder statesmen in this whole business. So he knew what he was doing and he did a superb job. But he didn't know what had happened to

[284]

Sipes either. Only about six months ago did Newman run across, someplace, and I don't know where he found it, but he found an obituary for John Sipes. He had been living in Arlington and we had never found him. This was our last hope really of seeing if he who had undoubtedly written the summary of the Board's findings -- did he remember what was in the Board's rationale. So we missed it by just months.

I pursued the matter through hearings; I appealed it, or Joe Volpe appealed it, and did a superb job on the thing. But it was quite clear by this time that it didn't matter what he did or what he said; they weren't going to believe anything. We spoke to Acheson on this matter. In the fall of 1952 Acheson, who of course knew of the case, had sent word to me through Brad Connors, who was the Public Affairs officer in the Far East, that I was to take the matter [further]. He said,

"The Board is going to find against you; you take it on appeal to the Appeal Board and I'll reverse the Appeal Board."

ACCINELLI: He had that authority did he?

MELBY: Except that of course Eisenhower was elected President.

[285]

He did have the authority had he been Secretary, yes. He could have, sure, because it was an administrative matter. Everything that happened was at the discretion of the Secretary. Yes, he could have done it. But there it was, and I did finally get the word from one of the underlings to the Under Secretary for Administration, which simply said, "The Secretary has determined that your continued employment is no longer clearly in the national interest," period. "Please clean out your desk." This came, I say, in May, 1953.

Then the problem became what do we do about it. Where do we go from here? It was, God knows, no time or place to look for a job or anything like that. By this time anybody who was connected with the State Department was persona non grata every place and any place. In talking around, it took me a couple of years before I finally found a job; that's when I went to Yale.

But one thing had happened. I had talked to Father McGuire, who was then with the National Catholic Welfare. He was a friend of mine, whom I had known in China. McGuire was pretty appalled by the whole thing. The National Catholic Welfare itself was pretty split in those days between those who were out to kill Commies

[286]

wherever they could find them, and those who were of more liberal persuasion of whom McGuire was one. McGuire said he was going to talk to Scott McLeod, who was then Security Director in the Department. McLeod gave him a very interesting answer. He said, "Look" -- McLeod being himself a good Scott Catholic -- "Look," he said, "my advice to you is to forget this matter. If you want to pursue it, we're going to turn it over to Senator McCarthy, who doesn't know anything about it. Now if you want that to happen, you go right ahead. If not, then forget it."

Well, McGuire left it up to me. He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I don't want McCarthy to have it, good God, no. There's no percentage in that sort of thing." But it would continue to be on the record forever.

When Dean Rusk became Secretary of State I thought, "Well, we've had eight years of Eisenhower; you certainly couldn't do anything or get anywhere [with them]. Maybe Rusk, who after all, did testify for me, maybe he can get me reinstated." I went to see him, and he said, "Certainly, I'm going to take care of it. Just forget it, and I'll see what we can do about it." Nothing happened. I saw him a couple of times after that, and still nothing happened. Finally, I went to see Roger Jones who was

[287]

at this point the Under Secretary for Administration, who had himself once been chairman of the Civil Service Commission. Jones was very frank; he said, "I don't give a damn, because I'm probably going to be fired from this job pretty soon. But the last thing I did while I was still chairman of the Civil Service Commission was to order all files, all Loyalty and Security files in the Commission that were more than 10 years old, to be destroyed." He said, "They're going to get me for that one, and I know it." But he said, "So I don't care, but I'll tell you what has happened, and why you didn't hear anything from Rusk. That is that Senator Eastland, who is chairman of the Senate Committee, has served notice on Rusk to the effect that, 'If you dare promote anybody on our list, or if you try to bring back anybody who is out of the Department, also on our list, you are going to have real trouble with Department appropriations. It's up to you; if you want to have trouble with that, go ahead'." Well, Rusk was not about to get himself involved with that, but he wouldn't tell me that. Jones did and then, of course, I had some pretty real problems there where I had to make some pretty hard decisions as to what I would or not do. I guess I'm stubborn, and I

[288]

was still determined, and I remained determined that I was going to get back one day or another. I did not think that in my case I had done anything that was wrong, that I thought was wrong.

I had a couple of options. I could have gone to court, as Jack Service did. He finally won his case in the Supreme Court, and was actually reinstated. I decided not to do that, although Joe Rauh has since told me a couple of times that he thinks although it would have been very expensive, that I could probably have won my case, because he didn't think that Lillian was a Communist. He thought we could so prove it.

But I had a number of other factors that I had to take into account. Well, in the first place, Lillian was quite prepared to have me file suit on the thing, and was prepared to testify. But I was not prepared to ask her to testify. See, I don't think she really realized what it would have involved, that it would have been an open hearing, and as American law was then and still is, that would have involved a public hearing of a lot of private lives and private dealings that I was not about to put anybody through. I was particularly not prepared to put her through it, because basically, you see, what I

[289]

was fired on was they believed she was a Communist; I did not. What they wanted me to do, what they pushed me on, is what Bob Newman has come to call a degradation ceremony. Namely, I would swear that I would never again see her, have anything to do with her, I'm sorry that it happened, it was a weakness on my part, I will be strong now, and I will never have anything to do with her. I could not bring myself to do that. I will do a lot of things for a career, but there are some things I won't do. It was on that basis, I'm sure, that I was actually fired. But I was not prepared to put her through it, no matter, and I think if we had actually started something like that, she would have had reservations about what it would have meant when she started thinking about it, too.

It would have involved my children, too. I have two sons, both of whom had trouble because of me. Both of them had served the usual term in the military; both had their commissions in the

Army held up for months because of me. I just could not really have seen putting them through that either, or my ex-wife, from whom I was then divorced, but still who had been a good sport about

[290]

it all, if you can call that sort of thing being a good sport. I couldn't see myself pillaring her too. And so in the end I just decided I wasn't going to go to court on this thing.

Those are basically the reasons why I decided I wasn't going to take legal action. You couldn't have ruined me any more financially in a legal action than I was ruined anyway, financially. I could have found a lawyer or someone who would take the case on speculation, and do as Jack Service did, and probably have won the case. But another thing, I had never had any publicity on it. I was on very good relations with the press, and I know that the Washington press knew what was happening, or knew something was wrong. But only one man, who was the AP man in Washington, whom I had known before in Manila, once asked me, "Are you in any kind of trouble?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Would you like a story about it?" I said, "No, please; I don't want anything." He said, "Okay, if you don't want anything, the rest of us won't write anything about it." And never was there any publicity on the thing, and that's the way I decided I wanted it.

ACCINELLI: That's really remarkable, considering the atmosphere.

[291]

MELBY: And considering I was the highest ranking officer in the Foreign Service to be fired. I can only explain it in terms of the general McCarthy approach to the thing, which was kind of a buckshot approach to life; you know, you fire off and somebody gets hit and you go after him. There was never anything very systematic in what McCarthy did, or much of anybody else, but once they did latch onto something, and if it looked as though there would be something, they went after it. I think also partly it was that Lillian and I at no point ever had any publicity either as having had an affair or being in an affair or anything. There was never any publicity on that either, although we made no attempt to make it secret. I mean we used to go around in New York and elsewhere in Washington, and see people and friends of hers and friends of mine. There was kind of an assumption, "So what? What kind of a story is there here?" So that never got any attention either.

ACCINELLI: She was not questioned about your relationship with her at the HUAC meeting?

MELBY: It never was mentioned; there was never anything raised. In fact, the hearing didn't last very long.

[292]

Her hearing lasted only an hour and seven minutes, I think she once wrote. Really, she had written the chairman of the committee and said, "I am prepared to talk about myself. Anything you want to know about me, or my activities, I will gladly tell you, but I will not name names. If you force me to do that, then I'm going to have to take the Fifth Amendment. I will not be a tattle-tale."

Early on in the hearing, they attempted to get her to name names and she wouldn't do it. She took the Fifth Amendment then, and got a standing ovation out of the crowd that was there. She was never again bothered openly about it. She thought there was always the possibility that the Senate Committee might call her. Shortly after that she went off to Europe to get out of the limelight a bit. My case has become one of those that one way or another pretty much everybody knows about, but nobody talks about. It's going to have the kind of publicity here that it hasn't had, this son of a gun in the...

ACCINELLI: In William Wright's biography of Lillian Hellman.*

*William Wright, *Lillian Hellman*: (New York, 1986)

[293]

MELBY: I'm sure there's something in it.

ACCINELLI: There you are [among the photographs in the biography]. Yes, indeed, it's a passport photo. Did you provide him with that?

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: Well, once Bob Newman's book is published as well...

MELBY: Oh, well, I'll have to leave town after that. He doesn't have a publisher yet either. No, I really will have to leave town after that.

That's basically why I did or did not do certain things, but the shadow has continued. It's so long gone now. I think for one thing there's almost nobody left in the Department who knows anything about it; they're all dead or retired of course. But it's surprising; every so often I run across somebody who knows about it. Jerome Chen up at York [University, Toronto], he knows all about it. I don't know where he got it. But it has been -- at least certainly until I came here, which was twenty years ago -- it was a shadow over

[294]

everything I tried to do. Nobody would give me a job while the McCarthy thing was still very hot. There was a point at which I was just about to get an appointment on the faculty of the Naval War College.

ACCINELLI: When was this?

MELBY: This was back in the late 1950s. Then, the Naval War College civilian faculty staff was provided by George Washington University. You got on the Naval War College faculty through George Washington University. Well, at this point, the acting president of George Washington was a retired admiral. When it came for his final approval for me to go to Newport, it just faded away. Nothing ever happened. And that happened on a great many things. It happened at one time when I was being seriously considered, and thought I had a job on the

administrative staff of UNESCO. Just suddenly that faded away, because the State Department has a veto on all Americans who are appointed to the UNESCO staff.

What finally broke the pattern -- well, the pattern continued -- but finally I went to Yale.

[295]

ACCINELLI: When was that?

MELBY: I went to Yale in 1955 on the Southeast Asia program. Yale took me just on my say-so, and in the Southeast Asia program; it was only for one year because after that they ran out of money. After that, I then went to Philadelphia where a friend of mine and I set up the National Council on Asian Affairs, doing education at a secondary level on Asia. We operated that for about three years and then finally just gave up because we never succeeded in getting the money for it. The final coup de grace on that one really came from John D. Rockefeller III, who gave us money, incidentally. But as he handed me a check one day he said, "I just want to tell you I'm giving you this check, but I think that the only way we are going to break this McCarthy pattern on China, on Asia, is that all of you who have been involved in China, one way or another, just go away and do something else." The next day he announced the Asia Society, which was in direct competition with us. Well, that effectively killed us, but he gave us a very nice little sum of money just to sort of wind things up I guess.

[296]

Then I became Director of Foreign Students at the University of Pennsylvania. The way I got that job was that the lady I was running the Council on Asian Affairs with in Philadelphia, her father-in-law was a member of the Board of Trustees at Penn. He asked Elinor [K. Wolf] one day; he said, "We are thinking of hiring Melby. Is there anything wrong with him?" She said, "No, he's all right." He said, "All right, that's all I wanted to know. I don't want to know any details. If you say he's all right, he's all right." So that's the way I was hired there.

ACCINELLI: How long did you stay on there?

MELBY: I was at Penn for six years. I was Director of Foreign Students, and we built a very good program there, one of the best in the country. I finally in the end, there, ran a cropper of the vice president for student affairs who couldn't stand having any competition. He succeeded in firing everybody who worked for him, namely the Dean of Women and the Dean of Men, who happened to be his brother-in-law. And then [he fired] the Dean of Students, and he finally got me too.

[297]

But that had nothing to do with security or anything like that. It was just that Gene Gisburne couldn't stand having people who were better than he was on the job. Actually, he had inherited a very good staff there. Althea Hottel, who was Dean of Women, was one of the great Deans of Women in the United States, but he finally got her too.

ACCINELLI: Did you come to Guelph after that?

MELBY: No, I taught for a year at Penn, fulltime. I had been on the faculty teaching part-time all the time I was Director of Foreign Students. I taught fulltime. Then I went back to Washington briefly and worked more on *Mandate of Heaven*. Then I was asked to take a job as Deputy Director of the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia, which was kind of ironic, considering that that's where some of my troubles had started, which they didn't know. I had been on that job only about three or four months when Guelph came up, through John Holmes. I had come to Toronto to see Roxana, whom I since have married, at Christmas. I had lunch one day with John Holmes -- I had known John before -- and he asked

[298]

me if I ever had thought of a Canadian university. I told him, "No, I haven't, but make me an offer." I went back to Washington, and about ten days later I had a letter from Archie McIntyre, who was head of the social sciences here, asking me would I come back to Guelph and talk about a possibility of a job. I discovered that John Holmes was quietly recruiting for Guelph. He didn't tell me that was what he was doing. John wouldn't.

I got that letter from Archie, and the minute I got it I knew this is it. It sounded good; I liked it. So I quit the job in Philadelphia, and I came here and I expected to be here for, I say, about ten years maybe and then go back. But it didn't work out quite that way.

In the meantime, I have continued one way or another pushing the whole business of getting clearance again. Senator Joe Clark of Pennsylvania worked pretty hard on it, and he got nowhere. This was during the Kennedy Administration. There wasn't any point in trying to do anything when Nixon was President, obviously. But when Jimmy Carter became President, I thought, "Well, this is really the last chance." This is when I went

[299]

back to Averell, who said, "By God, we're going to do something about it now." He spent the next three years working on it. Richard Holbrook was a friend of his and Holbrook had never heard of me either, but he took Averell's word for it and then started pushing the thing. Ben Reed by this time was back in the Department. He had been head of the Secretariat in the Kennedy Administration. But he was back as Under Secretary for something or other, and he vaguely remembered me, but not particularly. It just sort of dragged on and on and on, and finally I could see we were coming up toward the end of the administration and something had to be done soon, or it wasn't ever going to be done. So, I went again to see Averell; he just blew his top. He said, "Well, we're going to get this thing and get it finished and done once and for all." He called Ben Reed, who was a friend of his. He said, "I want something done on this, and I want it done and done fast." That's when Ben told me, "You know the problem is that nobody here remembers Melby; doesn't know anything about him, and there's no files on him. We don't know what it is. The lawyers don't know how to handle it, or what to

[300]

do about it." He said, "I just don't know. Well, I'll tell you what I'll do though." Who's the executive director of the American Historical Association? Is it Sam...

ACCINELLI: I don't know.

MELBY: Well, he was the Ambassador to Mauritius, and of course, with Reagan coming in, he was out. He has become Executive Secretary of the Historical Association. Well, he was sitting around waiting for a new appointment; he was finished in Mauritius. This was in 1980. So Ben said, "You take this on and do something about it."

So Sam called me and he said, "Look, the lawyers here don't know what to do about it. Do you have a file on yourself?" I said, "Sure, I've got a very complete file, from Freedom of Information. I've got transcripts and correspondence with Clark and all sorts of things." He said, "Would you just send me the whole file?" Which I did.

In about two and a half weeks, clearance came through. I got a very nice letter from Edmund Muskie welcoming me back; the redress of a great injustice that

[301]

has been done. He hoped he understood that if I was offered a job in the Department, he hoped I would take it. Of course, I couldn't go back in the regular Foreign Service because I was over-age for that by then. But I went back as a consultant. I was back for about three months.

ACCINELLI: At the tailend of the Carter Administration.

MELBY: Yes. I was working on the Sino-Vietnamese war, trying to figure out what we did about that. Then, of course, Reagan came in, and he did something that needed to be done in a way. But he did it without thinking really what he was doing; maybe he did know what he was doing, I don't know. But anyway he fired all consultants in the Government across the board. Now there were not very many of us in the Department; there were only half a dozen or so of us in the Department. But there were some agencies like the Department of Energy where 80 percent of the work of the Department was being done by consultants. This was just completely out of line and out of control. So I mean they needed to be cleaned up, but everybody got caught in it. So I was fired again. That didn't do anything about my clearance;

[302]

that still stood.

Actually, in the spring or early summer of 1981 I went back and talked to Volpe about it again as to whether I could sue the Department for back pay. Joe's reaction was, "Why in the hell do you want to be bothered with this sort of thing anymore?" He said, "When you look back on it, the whole business with you and Hellman, it all seems so silly now, doesn't it?" I said, "Man, it may seem silly to you, but it doesn't seem silly to me." "Well," he said, "I've been going over that file again, and considering the tone and tenor of this administration, I would be afraid if you did." He said, "If you want to file suit, I'll go along with it, but I would be afraid that they would try to draw up charges of perjury on you, and I think this group could make them stick." And he said, "Do you want to do that?" I said, "No, I don't want to do that."

There were technicalities there in that hearing under Scharfeld. Volpe took over, you see, after I had been originally fired, and he took over the appeals part. He thought he had pretty well cleared up misunderstandings, but he said, "Technically, it's still going

[303]

to stand as perjury if somebody wants to make something of it." Of course, perjury is the one great crime in American law. You can be caught bugging the butler, but don't be caught lying about it.

Well, in a sense I don't mind having been fired by Reagan, because I couldn't in good conscience work for that foreign policy, good heavens. That's the greatest humiliation of all, to work with foreign policy with that crew now.

ACCINELLI: Can you talk at all about your work on the problem of the Sino-Vietnamese war?

MELBY: Not really, because I didn't get into it enough really to know about it. Furthermore, I think that some of the things I was suggesting, or recommending were probably being kind of stymied. The man, a young man, who was the actual desk officer for Cambodia, whose name I now do not remember, would show up very shortly after Reagan took office as the new Ambassador to Honduras, which makes him the great expert on how do we kill Sandinistas. He was a man whom I just really met, I had only one conversation with. But the fact of what

[304]

he has been doing these years is a pretty good indication of where his basic sympathies lie. So there really isn't anything to talk about on that one at all.

ACCINELLI: Going back to your security file, was there anything in there other than what you've already spoken about, which surprised you? Any revelations, information?

MELBY: In the security files?

ACCINELLI: In the security files which you received through Freedom of Information.

MELBY: Well, not only did I get my security file, you've got to understand, I got my whole file. There were some things that kind of amused me. One thing that startled me a little bit was that -- on the security end, no. On the security end, except for the one piece of paper on Lillian, it makes me God's original Eagle Scout. Except for somebody who made a crack when I was applying for the Foreign Service, who said, "He's a little bit conceited, but I guess he's all right." If you don't have anything any worse than that; and at that point I probably was.

[305]

I think I have some great reservations out of having seen my file about the way this whole Freedom of Information business is handled. For example, I got copies of all my efficiency reports. Now frankly, I don't think I have any business seeing those. George Kennan -- and I say it now, and it's kind of amusing to think back on it -- but I would not have liked it at the time, George Kennan was very patronizing about me. "He's a nice guy, he's intelligent, and he's a good

officer. He isn't really proper Foreign Service material. He's more of a newspaperman than he is anything else, but I think he has enough else to offer the Service it's not worth getting rid of him."

One of my early efficiency reports out of Juarez, George Shaw had written in there. This is at a time when I was courting and about to marry my first wife, the lady in El Paso. But George knew that I had been keeping company with a gal in Chicago, and George wasn't particularly amused about this. He was my boss in El Paso. So on one of his trips to Washington, he stopped off in Chicago to see her, which I thought was a bloody outrage. He liked her too. But he also liked

[306]

Florence; he and Florence were good friends. There's some things I don't think one should see. I don't think that one is entitled really to see all letters of reference, because if you know that you have access to all letters of reference written on you, you know darn well the person who is writing those letters is not going to be telling the truth, sometimes. There are some things that should be kept confidential. I think this business of having to know everything that's around can be carried too far. Now, I don't know what the answer is, or how you handle it, but...

ACCINELLI: Just where the line is between what should be revealed and what should not be.

MELBY: Yes.

ACCINELLI: In the end you were fired. You decided not to resign.

MELBY: Yes, I was fired.

ACCINELLI: A resignation I suppose would have been the easier way out. Why did you decide not to?

MELBY: Because I had not been guilty of anything. So I

[307]

decided, "Well, I haven't done anything wrong. I'm not going to take the easy way out and just resign."

ACCINELLI: Did that affect the terms of your termination from the Department, in terms of pay or anything else?

MELBY: Not particularly in my case, because I had not been in long enough. Maybe if I had been eligible for retirement, I might have had second thoughts. But I had only been in the Foreign Service for 16 years. In order to get any kind of retirement pay, you had to have been in for 20 years, and be 50 years old. I couldn't qualify under either. I was only 40, and I had only been in 16 years. If you leave earlier, or are fired or whatever it is, earlier, what you get back is your contributions to the retirement fund, which I did manage to get back. I'm sorry to say that circumstances under which I got them back was that we had had a terrible accounting mess out in Nanking in the Embassy. It was so bad that finally the Department sent out one of its top

accountants to straighten things out. It took him about 18 months to do it; it was so bad. Sy Levinson, when he got back to Washington finally, or after he had been back for a while, he heard what was happening to me. There was a

[308]

period there when those who were under charges, if you'd lost your case in the Department, you were not going to be eligible to get your contributions back. Well, Sy got wind of this, and he quickly put the papers through, and I got my contributions back just in time not to have them frozen or disappear, for which he was demoted three grades.

ACCINELLI: Oh, boy!

MELBY: So I've always been very fond of Sy Levinson, and he never said anything to me about it. It was a damn decent thing to have done because he knew the chances he was running on the thing. At least, they didn't fire him anyway. He was too good an accountant for that.

ACCINELLI: From the time that you received your first interrogatory to the time that you were fired, did you speak about your experiences, or your problems, with the Loyalty Board with any other member of the Department who was himself facing a similar problem? Clubb, for example, in Chinese Affairs?

MELBY: Oh, sure. Edmund Clubb, sure. Edmund knew what I

[309]

was going through, because when he was going through this ordeal -- dear Edmund, who could be a very difficult character -- had decided that he was not going to have a lawyer. He went through all the hearings and he wasn't going to have a lawyer. But what he did was to ask me if I would sit in with him, as a friend of the court, or what have you, just to be there, because he knew that I wasn't involved in any of his period in China. I sat there, and, of course, Edmund being Edmund, had decided that he was going to take anything and everything he had ever written to the Department and read it into the record. [There is] what John Davies has called "Oliver Edmund Clubb's thirty years war with the English language." Edmund doesn't say anything in 100 words if 700 will do.

ACCINELLI: I've read his memoranda in the State Department.

MELBY: Oh well, okay. He would summarize a dispatch for the Secretary and his summary would be twice as long as what he was summarizing.

So, the Board pleaded with him, "Just give us the material and we promise you we will read every word of it." No, sir, Edmund wasn't going to have it that

[310]

way. So we sat there and we droned on day after day after day with that. Then Edmund, of course, made his cardinal mistake. One of the charges against him was that when he came back in 1932 on leave, he had brought back a message from Anna Louise Strong from Hankow to

Whittaker Chambers who was then Managing Editor of the *Daily Worker*. Edmund swore that he had absolutely no recollection of that. He said, "I'm sure. I've never been in New York. Certainly I've never been in the office of the *Daily Worker*. I never heard of Whittaker Chambers."

He said, "Whittaker Chambers said I came in there, but he's got to be wrong, because I never met the man." He said, "Now, I'll tell you: I can prove this, that I'm right." He said, "I've got all my diaries," and of course, it turns out that Edmund keeps diaries. Everything he's ever thought or heard, or anything, goes into his diaries. He said, "I left them in Peking when I was evacuated out of Peking and Manchuria when the Communists took over. I left them with the British Chargé de Affairs. I didn't want to take a chance on their being picked up by the Communists." And he said, "If you will get in touch

[311]

with the British Foreign Office, they can write to the Chargé de Affairs and he will send them to you. Those diaries will show you that I was never in New York and I never met Whittaker Chambers." He said, "Of course, I knew Anna Louise Strong; everybody did in Hankow in those days. But I never met Whittaker Chambers."

The Department, so help me God, did just that. They got the diaries and they opened them up, and there it was. He had been in New York. They asked him to explain that and he said, "I have no recollection of that." Well, this was bad enough. But, of course, his diaries contained all sorts of details about his love life and this, that, and the other things. Somehow those diaries got into the hands of a committee on the Hill, and somebody leaked them, and they became dinner table gossip all over Washington.

Edmund just should have stood in bed. If he had stuck by that story that he had never met Whittaker Chambers, it never would have occurred to anybody to get the diaries.

ACCINELLI: He obviously wasn't lying. He thought .he was telling the truth.

[312]

MELBY: He thought he was telling the truth. But he was lying.

ACCINELLI: What about John Paton Davies, John Stewart Service? They were undergoing the same ordeal about the same time, were they not?

MELBY: Oh yes. Jack Service, his troubles had started back in the summer of 1945 when he was arrested in connection with the Amerasia case. His went on until God knows when. I guess it was in the late 1960s before he was finally cleared. No, it had to be in the Kennedy Administration. I don't know. He was ordered reinstated by the Supreme Court, and was sent as Consul to Liverpool. He sweated that out for a year and then he retired. He got a very handsome settlement out of the Department, not only back pay and compensation; I think he got \$180,000 from the Department, of which the lawyers took half. Well, Ed Rhetts had handled his case for 15 years and hadn't been paid a cent for the whole time. He took it on speculation, so he didn't make any money on it really.

ACCINELLI: Cheap at the price I would say.

[313]

MELBY: Where Ed Rhetts made his money was that he had taken a patent infringement case from the SKF Ball Bearing Company in Sweden, which SKF had given up on. They thought they'd never get anything out of the American Government on this for patent infringement. Ed said, "Well, no; just let me keep working on it." So he kept after it, and at the end of 10 or 15 years, so help me God, he got it. He got a judgment. His fee on the thing was \$2,000,000. So Ed Rhetts was one lawyer whose speculation worked out well. Then, unhappily he drank himself to death as Ambassador to Liberia and then Tanzania. He really did literally drink himself to death; very sad, a brilliant lawyer.

John Davies -- he never went to court or anything like that. He was finally fired when he was stationed in Lima in Peru. He stayed there in Lima.

ACCINELLI: Yes, he did; ran a furniture store as I recall.

MELBY: Furniture manufacturing business.

ACCINELLI: Oh, was it?

MELBY: He won several international awards. He was very

[314]

artistic, anyway. Took several international awards and then one day he discovered that his bookkeeper had embezzled the whole business. He was bankrupt. So he quit then and there. John's had a hard time since then I think. His wife, I think, had a little money. Patricia found one little gimmick finally in the law -- a wrinkle in the law. John was finally fired on a technicality, where you're fired for incompetence, and she discovered a wrinkle on the rules that said if you're fired for incompetence you're entitled to half pension. And he finally got half pension.

ACCINELLI: On the assumption that you couldn't have been completely incompetent.

MELBY: That's right. They went to Spain where they lived for a number of years on the Costa del Sol. They spent a year in England at Sussex. He was working with this historian, Christopher Thorne, on -- I've forgotten the name of the book. It is a very good book on British-American relations in China. Then Patricia inherited a house in Asheville, North Carolina, and that's where they're living now. Her father was, you know, Grandpa

[315]

[Henry F.] Grady, who was professor of economics at Berkeley and president of the American President Lines for a while, and Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. Her mother, is one of the original Spanish families of San Francisco, Leticia. Patricia's father was also Ambassador to Greece at one point, I think. But I don't think he ever made any money. Patricia does newspaper work; she has been correspondent for a paper in Rome, an American paper in

Rome, for some years. She worked for the *Times-Herald* in Washington at one time. She's quite a lady.

ACCINELLI: Could you tell me something about the effect that these Loyalty Board hearings had on morale within the Department?

MELBY: In effect they completely destroyed morale. It took years for that to be rebuilt. In fact, in a sense, it never has been entirely rebuilt. At the time, because of the nature of the whole McCarthy period, it got to the place where officers were simply not reporting anything that they thought the Department might not want to hear, if they reported anything at all. Also, it destroyed trust between officers. There was a time

[316]

when officers might disagree strongly, or even violently on very important matters, but there was never a question that you challenged a man's integrity. You took that for granted. You simply went on record, "I don't agree with this, for the following reasons," and you told him so. You told the Department both sides of the story. With the McCarthy period, that ended. People no longer trusted anybody, because you never knew who was spying on anybody, who was reporting what on anybody.

One consequence was that recruitment for the Foreign Service just dropped off to nothing. There was one year -- I can't tell you exactly what year it was, it was shortly after I got out -- when literally nobody applied for the Foreign Service. Nobody wanted anything to do with it. It took quite some time to rebuild that. When they did start getting to the point where they could get people to apply again, the standards became much more conservative. The kind of officer you started getting in was basically a much more conservative type of officer. That shows up even now. People not only didn't trust each other, they didn't speak to each other. If you thought somebody was in trouble, you crossed the other

[317]

side of the street rather than run into him. Some people you knew were in trouble, and you went around the block rather than to have to speak to him.

There was one kind of foolish incident that happened to me, at some point during one of my hearings. Somebody said, "It's been reported that you have been seen spending a good deal of time in hotel lobbies in Washington. While this is going on, do you think it is proper for you to be seen in public?" I just had no answer, no reply to a thing like that.

In the old days, all the messengers in the Department used to be old Negro retainers. I remember the Secretary's principal messenger -- this was in Cordell Hull's day or sometime thereafter -- stopped me on the street. It was a man whom I knew fairly well, and he said, "Mr. Melby, I'm just going to tell you we know about your trouble. We're awfully sorry we can't do anything about it, but all us messengers are awfully sorry it's happened to you."

ACCINELLI: Very generous gesture was it not?

MELBY: Yes.

[318]

ACCINELLI: Did these Loyalty Board hearings -- and I suppose the answer is obvious, but perhaps you can provide me with some examples -- have an effect on policymaking? For example, on policy towards China or Southeast Asia?

MELBY: Oh, of course, it strengthened the pro-China Lobby group in the Department. All those who knew anything about China by the time I finally left -- there was nobody left in the Foreign Service who had any experience in China prior to 1949. You had a lot of other people being brought in, the Walter Robertsons of this world, who were just out and out pro-Chiang Kai--hek. Sure, this contributed enormously to the freezing of American policy. Of course, Southeast Asia didn't figure very much in policy in those days. It was not until the 1960s when we started getting involved in the war in Vietnam more that -- oh, whether it was liberal or not -- among the top echelon anyway, it was the old Munich syndrome, "You've got to fight communism wherever it shows up." That's what the war in Vietnam was really all about.

[319]

This did not, however, filter down to the working level, the desk officers. So they were not consulted at all on what happened, and one by one a lot of those people just dropped out. Young people like Paul Katzenbach who was in the Philippines and Vietnam -- he just quit finally in disgust over his disagreement with policy in thinking that what we were doing in Indochina was wrong. A lot of the younger officers did that finally. I mean even a man like Bill Moyers, although he never said anything publicly about it, quit in disgust with what he perceived with President Johnson's lying about things. He just couldn't take it anymore. So any kind of liberalism at all was just frozen out entirely.

ACCINELLI: Of course, the memory of what happened during the McCarthy period lingered on and probably contributed to Johnson's determination to stay the course in Vietnam. He wouldn't have wanted to pull out and to be subject to the same kinds of accusations that Truman and Acheson were about "losing" China, for instance.

MELBY: No, of course not. He didn't know anything about foreign policy. He just didn't want to go through

[320]

that. Of course, the advice he was getting from people like Dean Rusk, who was a prime example of the Munich syndrome, I think, was that we had to fight communism wherever it was. Well, to them it had become a moral question. There was never any real discussion as to what was the morality involved in the whole thing.

ACCINELLI: I would like to turn now to *The Mandate of Heaven*. When did you start writing that book, and why did you decide to write it?

MELBY: Well, I started actually writing on the thing shortly after I was fired. I decided at that point that I had lived through what seemed to me a very important period in history, not only of

China, but also of American relations with China, and there should be a record kept of it somehow, published. I had an awful lot of the raw material, of course. I got out the letters that I wrote to Lillian, so I adapted that and worked at it. I tried selling it, getting it published in the States, all through the 1960s. But in that period, literally nothing could be published in the States that was not the official John Foster Dulles line. It is amazing

[321]

how little did come out in that period that wasn't that line. People were not writing about it. Anybody that knew anything about it couldn't get it published, so why write it. So it's a period on which there isn't very much. A lot more is being done now, of course, but at that time, no.

ACCINELLI: So you submitted the book to publishers in the States.

MELBY: They just turned it down; that was all. It wasn't until I came here that finally I made the contact with the University of Toronto Press. Roxana knew the then editor of the Press, who showed an interest in it, and encouraged me to go ahead and do it. She assigned an editor to work with me, Jan Shriver, who turned out to be a superb editor. He really made the book, I think, his suggestions and so on. It finally came out in the fall of 1968.

One classic example, I think, of what could or could not be published was that you may remember Henri Cartier-Bresson had done a superb photographic album, a book on art treasures in the Kremlin, and Russian treasures. It was really a great collection, and

[322]

sold very well indeed. Well, he did a comparable book on China in the 1960s, and was told that there wasn't any point. He probably better not try to publish it, because there wouldn't be any market for it. You don't do that with China. Well, he insisted on going ahead with it, and he got a publisher. The story I heard was they sold exactly five copies.

His photographs on China, some of them, are in *Mandate*. They're not used in the paperback because they were too expensive. They charged us \$5,000 per photograph.

ACCINELLI: Were you pleased with the reception that *The Mandate of Heaven* got?

MELBY: Oh, yes. I think Toronto badly botched the promotion on the thing. Hillary Marshall, the business manager, decided to try to make a trade book out of it. But Hillary, who was an expatriate Englishman, didn't have a clue as to what the North American market was. So it didn't sell nearly as many copies as it should have. It did very well considering the circumstances, but Hillary never got a review of the book in the *New York Times*, for example. I arranged that.
Harrison Salisbury

[323]

I happened to run across one day in New York, and I asked him when they were going to review it. He said, "Well, I thought it had been." I said, "No, it hasn't." And he said, "Well, I'll see that it's done right away," which he did. It got very good response. I later asked Hillary, why didn't you get it reviewed in the *Washington Post* instead of putting it in the *Washington Times-Herald*.

After all, nobody who reads the *Times-Herald* has been known to read a book. He said, "Oh, I never heard of the *Washington Post*."

So that was the very unfortunate kind of thing that happened on it. I think every newspaper in Canada reviewed the thing, and it sold very well. The British edition sold well. Cheatham Windus put it out there, and the whole first edition was sold out before it even went on display.

ACCINELLI: -Did you write it at all with Vietnam in mind?

MELBY: Oh sure. The last page is in direct reference to Vietnam, sure.

ACCINELLI: -Did the reviewers pick up on that?

[324]

MELBY: No, because I don't think most reviewers ever get to the last page of a book, you know. No, my theme in the book, which is really stated in the last page is, "It doesn't matter what pressure you bring to bear on a country to do something, if they are determined they are not going to do it, there is no way that you can force them to do it, if they're prepared to pay the price for not doing it." I don't remember now really whether I mentioned Vietnam or not, but clearly North Vietnam was prepared to fight to extinction if necessary. There was no way we could do it without extinguishing them. Not even the most rabid believers in the Munich syndrome were prepared to face up to the use of atomic energy against North Vietnam. They knew they couldn't get away with it, and furthermore the price would be one that we wouldn't care to pay.

ACCINELLI: Exactly.

[325]

[INDEX]

Acheson, Dean:

and China, 164, 167, 168, 173-174

and Japanese peace treaty, 257-260

and Korea, 235

and Melby, John F., 258, 260

and White Paper on China, 168, 173-174

Aquino, Corey, 228

Barr, David (Major General), 147-148

Batista, Fulgencio, 43-44

Bell, Daniel W., 209

Bell mission to Philippines, 209-211

Bohlen, Charles, 67, 73

Bonsal, Philip, 45, 249--250

Brazil, in 1920s, 2-4

Burma, 214

Butterworth, Walter, 139-140, 142-143, 232

and White Paper on China, 173

Cartier-Bresson, Henri, 321-322

Chambers, Whittaker, 310, 311

Chiang Kai-shek, 131, 133, 147, 153, 157-160

Chiang Kai-shek, Madame, 153

China:

Communist takeover of, 124, 125-126

Soviet Union, relations with, 122, 166

U.S. aid to, 155 White Paper on, 167-176, 181

China lobby, 179, 318

Chinese Communists, as "agrarian reformers," 116-117

Chinese Communists, and warlords, 165

Chou En-lai, 116, 122, 127, 141

Clark, Joseph, 298

Clark, Lewis, 144, 146

Clough, Mary Lou, 149

Clough, Ralph, 117, 149

Clubb, Edmund, and loyalty hearings, 308-312

Colegio Bennett (school), 3-4

Compton, Arthur, 46

Connors, Brad, 144-145

Cowen, Myron, 183, 184, 190, 201-202, 204-208, 230, 231, 236, 238, 240, 241, 264
and Melby, John F., testimony regarding, 278

Davies, John Paton, 79-80, 168, 313-315

Davies, Patricia, 314-315

Deane, John R., 53-54, 77

Democratic League (China), 138, 265

Deutch, Michael, 211

Dilling, Elizabeth, 22-23

Dulles, John Foster, and Japanese peace treaty, 257-259

Durbrow, Elbridge, 105

Eisler, Gerhart, and Hellman, Lillian, 279-281

Emmerson, John, 37

Erskine, Graves B., 213

Fairbanks, Wilma, 135, 136

Flynn, Edward J., 87-94

Fugh, Philip, 142-143

Gisburne, Gene, 297

Gosnell, Harold, 9

Harriman, Kathleen, 64-65, 77

Harriman, W. Averell;
 and China, U.S. policy towards, 80, 95-96
 and Melby, John F., 299
 and Soviet Union, Ambassador to, 53, 60, 62, 65, 66-67, 69, 70, 77-78, 81
 and Stalin, Joseph, 63-64
 and Yalta Conference, 66-67, 69
Heath, Donald, 215, 216, 217
Hellman, Lillian:
 and Melby, John F., 65, 78-79, 263-274, 278-281, 288-289, 291-293
 hearing before House Un-American Activities Committee, 291-292
Henderson, Loy, 74
Hiss, Alger, in Moscow, 88-89
Ho Chi Minh, 221
Holbrook, Richard, 299
Holmes, John, 297
Hordern, Hilda, 142, 147, 247
Hornbeck, Stanley, 24-25
Hull, Cordell, 42-43
Hungary, and Soviet occupation of, 70-71
Hurley, Patrick, and China, 111-115, 133, 134

Illinois Wesleyan University, 6
Indo-China, 211-225

Jacoby, Annalee, 114-115
Japan, peace treaty, and Philippines, 225-226
Johnson, Lyndon B., and Vietnamese policy, 319-320
Jones, Roger, 287

Katzenbach, Paul, 319
Kennan, George, 71-73, 74-76, 79
 and Melby, John F., 305
Kerr, Clark, 102
Knowland, William, 169, 170
Korean war, Chinese intervention in, 125, 126, 241
Kuibyshev (USSR), 50

Lacy, William, 246-249, 252-255
Landon, Margaret, 251
Lansdale, Ed, 184, 187, 188-189, 240
Latin America, U.S. policy toward, in World War II, 34-49
Laurel, Jose, 229
Levinson, Sy, 307-308
Lind, Lucy, 255
Ludden, Raymond, 117, 133, 135, 144

MacArthur, Douglas, 243
Magsaysay, Ramon, 183, 185-191, 199, 246
Mandate of Heaven (book), 297, 320-324
Mao Tse-Tung, 169
Marcos, Ferdinand, 192-193
Marshall, George C., 149-154
 and Chou En-lai, 122, 127-133, 140-141, 151-153, 156-158
Marshall, Hillary, 322, 323
Marshall mission to China, 122, 127--133, 140-141, 151-153, 156-158
McGuire, Father, 285-286
McLeod, Scott, 286
Meiklejohn, Robert, 64
Melby, John F.:
 career after dismissal from State Department, 294-324
 and China, assignment to, 92-94, 109-110
 and Chou En-lai, 123
 China, departure from, 145-148
 efficiency reports on, 305-306
 Foreign Service, dismissal from, 262, 288-290
 and Harriman, W. Averell, 224-225, 299
 investigation of, 262-285
 security clearance restored to, 300
 at United Nations Charter Conference, 96-97, 100-104, 107-108
 United States Embassy in Chungking, duties in, 119
 and U.S. policy toward China, evaluation of, 178-180
Melby -Erskine mission to Southeast Asia, 211-219, 252, 259-260
Menon, Krishna, 126
Merriam, Charles, 9
Michael, L. G., 51, 60-61
Molotov, Vyacheslav, and President Roosevelt's death, reaction to, 99-100
 and United Nations Charter Conference, decision to attend, 98-99
 and Vatican, 90
Munich. syndrome, 318
Murmansk, USSR, 60-61
Muskie, Edmund, 300

National Council on Asian Affairs, 295, 296
Nelson, Donald, 150-151
Newman, Robert, 175-177, 281, 283
Nicaragua, and Sandanistas, 162-163
Nitze, Paul, 75-76, 125

Office of Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, 46-49

Page, Ed, 64
Parker, Jameson, 210

Pearson, Drew, 208-209
Peru, and Ecuador, conflict between, 32-34
Peru, U.S. policy toward, 39-42
Petrov, A.A., 119
Philippines, 148
 and absentee landlords, 196
 elections in, 200-204
 Huk rebellion, 181-182, 187, 196, 245
 Japanese treaty, reaction to, 225-226
 nationalism in, 227-229
 U.S. policy toward, 181-205, 210-211, 237-241
 and War Claims Commission, 230
Phillips, Joe, 55
Prado, Manuel, 36
"Perimeter speech." of Acheson, 244
Precinct captains, role of, 9-11

Quezon, Manuel, 188
Quirino, Elpidio, 182, 184, 197-198, 200, 203, 237, 239

Radford, Arthur, and Cowen, Myron, 207
Rauh, Joseph, 273, 288
Reed, Ben, 299, 300
Reinhart, Fred, 28
Rhetts, Ed, 313
Rhodes, Ivan, 12-13
Rippy, Fred, 20
Robertson, Walter, 115-116, 318
Rockefeller, Nelson, 46-49
Romulo, Carlos, 188, 191-195
Rusk, Dean, 218, 232-236, 238
 and Melby, John F., 260-261, 286-287, 288
Russian-American relations. *See* Soviet Union; and Harriman, W. Averell

Salisbury, Harrison, 322-323
Scharfeld, Arthur, 270, 273-274
Schultheis, Fred, 110-111, 136-137, 144, 147
Schuman, Fred, 9, 18, 19
Service, John Stewart, 288, 312
Shaw, George, 305
Sipes, John, 283-284
Smith, Walter Bedell, 219-220
Smyth, Robert, 109
Soong, T. V., 139
Soviet Union:
 and Chiang Kai-shek, 69

China, relations with, in 1945-46, 119-121
and Far East, 67-68
and occupation of Manchuria, 120-121
and Poland, 67
and surveillance of U.S. Embassy, 85-87
and the Vatican, 90-91
and war against Japan, 68
in World War II, 84-85
Spaso House (in Moscow), 42, 52, 64-65
Spewack, Samuel, 54
Sprouse, Phil, 172, 173
Standley, William H., 51-52
Stassen, Harold, 105-107
Stettinius, Edward, in Moscow, 88
Stuart, John Leighton, 137, 141-143, 145

Thayer, Charles, 28
Thompson, Llewellyn, 74
Thorne, Christopher, 314
Thurston, Ray, 27
Truman, Harry S., and China, White Paper on, 174

United Nations Charter Conference, and Soviet Union, 96-97, 100-104
United States Embassy in Chungking, personnel of, 117-118
United States Embassy in Moscow, World War II, 81-84, 85-88
United States, and Soviet Union, 50 ff.
United States State Department, and loyalty hearings, effects of, 315-319
University of Chicago, 7, 17-20

Venezuela, and World War II, 29-32
Vietnam, and France, 221-222
Vietnam, Melby-Erskine Mission to, 211-212, 216-225
Vietnam war, and U.S. Foreign Service, 25
Volpe, Joseph, 283-284, 302-303

Walgreen, Charles, 18
Walmsley, Newbold, 96-97
Wedemeyer, Albert, 113-114, 155-157
Welles, Sumner, 33-34, 38, 43-45
Windus, Cheathame, 323
Wold, Elinor K., 296
Wright, Quincy, 9, 19

Yalta agreements, 67-69
Yeh, George, 136, 138