

In one of its most important activities, the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, an independent nonprofit organization located at the Foreign Service Institute, records and preserves the insights and experiences of U.S. diplomats through its Diplomatic Oral History Program.

The program, which I created and direct, involves interviewing former Department officials, including Foreign Service officers, Civil Service employees and political appointees. The interviewees' experiences range from the 1920s to the present, and the interviews cover all aspects of their subjects' career and background.

ADST, which supports FSI's training and advances knowledge of American diplomacy, disseminates transcripts of the interviews through the Library of Congress Web site, which has 1,500 interviews already and another 162 being prepared for posting. A sister collection, the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, is on the Web site of Churchill College at Cambridge University.

Firsthand Accounts

These collections aid active-duty Department personnel and others in the field of foreign affairs, since they contain firsthand accounts by professionals of their work and the issues and conditions they confronted. The interviews also include stories of the Department's conflicts, internally and with other departments such as the Department of Defense.

The interviews show how personalities often play important roles in how policies are made and implemented and give readers an unvarnished, though not always impartial, look at such roles and the sometimes messy business of diplomacy.

The unclassified transcripts help the Department document lessons learned in the conduct of foreign affairs and are increasingly used by scholars and journalists. Information from the collection features prominently in such books as *Nixon and Mao* by Margaret MacMillan, *China Confidential* by Nancy Tucker, *The Legacy of Ashes* by Tim Weiner and *The Atlantic Century* by Kenneth Weisbrode.



Transcript readers can learn about former Ambassador James Lilley's childhood in China, Douglas MacArthur III's negotiating

of a landmark treaty with Japan and the effects of the Mariel boatlift, the latter told by David D. Newsom. They can reflect on the

Oral History

Former Department officials talk history // By Charles Stuart Kennedy



Charles Stuart Kennedy, director of the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, interviews Ambassador Mattie Sharpless, a retired senior Foreign Agricultural Service officer who was ambassador to the Central African Republic from 2001 to 2002.

Talk, Talk, Talk— The Interviewer Tells All

By Charles Stuart Kennedy

It has now been a quarter-century since I started interviewing for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program. I started when I retired in 1985 and have since been cornering my fellow Department retirees, quizzing them about their early lives and careers sometimes in a series of sessions running for more than 10 hours.

The resulting Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of ADST can be found by running a Web search on the phrase “frontline diplomacy.”

Recently, I switched from using a \$35 recorder to a \$130 digital one that has better tone and lets the recorded speech be transferred to a CD.

In my 30 years as an FSO, I was a consular officer in such cities as Frankfurt and Dhahran, but I had little to do with other parts of the Department. My interviews opened a whole new world. A theme I saw was the changes in the structure of the Foreign Service and the openings made for minorities, women and spouses. The transcripts tell of growing up African American in the South, Jewish in New York and of life in a small town. I found that a significant number of prominent FSOs studied in one-room schoolhouses.

The interviews reflect the panorama of American diplomacy, from World War II, the Marshall Plan and the Cold War to Central American unrest, U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the decolonization of Africa and the terrorist bombings of U.S. embassies in Lebanon, Kenya and Tanzania and much more.

plight of Richard Dwyer, American deputy chief of mission in Guyana, as gunmen who carried out the Jonestown massacre hovered over him, and learn from General Anthony Zinni the perspective of the U.S. Central Command before Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

There are also accounts of serving under Henry Kissinger, helping open the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City, suffering as hostages in Tehran, surviving the burning of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and arriving in Iraq in the chaos after the fall of Baghdad.

Interviews Underway

New interviews are conducted daily, and coming interviewees include Tom Pickering, former under secretary for Political Affairs and six-time ambassador; Jerry Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad; Chet Crocker, the assistant secretary for Africa who spurred the process toward Namibian independence; diplomatic activist John Gunther Dean, survivor of an assassination attempt in Lebanon; Prudence Bushnell, U.S. ambassador in Nairobi when the embassy was bombed; and Under Secretary Nicholas

Burns, who strived for a nuclear agreement with India.

Anyone interested in being interviewed or conducting interviews should contact ADST.

Founded in 1986, ADST is funded through membership dues and contributions from the private sector and facilitates the publication of books, memoirs and papers. Its Web site, www.usdiplomacy.org, provides information about American diplomacy.

More on ADST is at www.adst.org. ■

The author is director of the Diplomatic Oral History Program.