

## **Oliver Wright (CMG 1964; KCMG 1974; DSC)**

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## BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

### Interview with Sir Oliver Wright on 18th September 1996.

*Sir Oliver, your career shows that you have been at the centre of government even in the middle of your career and then to some extent again when you were at the very top of the tree, so there are big events and big issues that we should get onto but could I ask you how or why you went into the diplomatic career after what must have been a very young MA at Cambridge and then war service in the Navy?*

OW: I think it all went back to school really and two things at school: one is that I seemed to have a gift for languages and so that made me interested in foreign parts, in particular France and especially Germany. I remember before the war I used to accompany my parents on holiday around Germany and observed at first hand what was happening to Germany under the Nazis. And a curious contrast presented itself to my young eyes as a schoolboy. One was the very civilised nature of much of German culture: Goethe, Schiller and all those philosophers, and on the other hand the very uncivilised behaviour of the Nazis. And this dichotomy stayed with me throughout the whole of my working life and remains with me still. Then I went into the navy and found myself fighting the Germans and then after the war I was very lucky. In fact much of my career has been built on luck. I managed to get release on whatever it was, class B, to go back to Cambridge and at the same time, because I hadn't finished my studies when I went into the navy, I took the first Foreign Office exam after the war. There'd been no recruitment to the Foreign Office for six years and so they were absolutely desperate for hired help and I'm sure that's one of the reasons I got in. So I passed the exam much to the amazement of myself, my family and friends and I passed in the first batch after the end of the war and so that launched me on. And subsequently I had a fair amount to do with Germany, both in Germany (two postings in Germany) and I was Ambassador there. But, of course, much of the in-between time dealing with Germany through all the East/West conflicts and European conflict.

*Yes, I see. It is difficult after you joined to see much of a pattern in your postings. Would it be correct to describe them as random or do you think the Office had a plan?*

OW: I'm absolutely certain the Office had no plan whatever and it was just that my first job

was to New York City as Vice Consul. They just needed a young man in New York City and that was me. Totally random. I wouldn't have missed this for anything because it really was the greatest introduction to our friendly superpower. It gave me an introduction into the workings of the American constitution. And I realised what a very great man Harry Truman who was the President of the United States was and whose reputation I think continues. I saw during that time in New York Harry Truman put in place the infrastructure of the post-war world in which, until Communism collapsed, we've all been living in peace and prosperity ever since. A very great man. It was interesting going across to New York and then arriving there. American policy at the time was 'bring the boys home' exactly as it had been in World War I. 'Let the Europeans get on with it themselves'. But within twelve months Harry Truman had reversed that policy. We landed Greece and Turkey on his desk and so the Truman Doctrine aimed at Greece and Turkey was established and, of course, we were all biting our nails until Congress actually passed all necessary legislation and money in March 1947. And then, of course, the launching of the Marshall Plan in June 1947 beginning with Marshall's commencement address at Harvard University. Here the greatness of Truman comes out. He knew, or he guessed, that if it was called the 'Truman Plan' it was likely to become highly politicised and turned down. But General Marshall held such a position in the hearts of his countrymen that the scheme was more likely to go through if it was called the Marshall Plan. It's not very often that politicians are so selfless as this because they crave immortality like the rest of us, don't they? So it was an entirely random posting.

My next posting was even more random because after a time they called me back from New York and when I left New York I was due to go to Belgrade. And I reported to the Foreign Office and I said, "I hear you want me to go to Belgrade"? and they said, "Oh, didn't we tell you? No, we want you to go to Bucharest." How random can you get? But there was a need for a young lad in Bucharest. But again it was a marvellous experience, in a satellite of the adversary superpower. And I happened to be in Bucharest at a very nail-biting time in the late 1940's when Prague was being taken over by the Communists. Yugoslavia was being expelled from the Cominform and the Berlin blockade was started and defeated.

Domestically inside Romania the class struggle, class warfare was underway and class warfare is, of course, the key to the communisation of anything: nationalisation of industry, collectivisation of agriculture, the show trials and so on. So really within four years of joining the diplomatic service while I was still in my late twenties I had experienced first-

hand both the friendly superpower and the adversary superpower and that really kept me going throughout the whole of my working life.

*Yes, I see how with hindsight it was not only very absorbing at the time but very useful as a stock of mental knowledge. But random.*

OW: The next point was Singapore. What could be more random? There again everything was for the best because we went to Singapore by a P&O liner, *The Corfu*, and it took twenty six days. We were about twenty three days out of London and three days before arriving in Singapore when the Korean War broke out. That was absolutely fascinating because at round about that time the Chinese Communists took over in China and there was still a school of thought both in our embassy in Peking and back at the Foreign Office that said these weren't real Communists, these were sort of agrarian reformers. And I was fresh out of Bucharest and I would say to my seniors, "Oh no they're not, they're absolutely up and coming Communists" because they were doing in China exactly what I had observed the Soviets doing to Romania and all the other satellites. In fact there was one celebrated occasion when reporting from Singapore (we were sort of HQ for Asia and South East Asia) when I drafted a telegram about China which went absolutely contrary to everything that was reported and this wasn't very well received. But I managed to stand my ground and quote chapter and verse as to why I had said it but I thought it probably didn't do me any good with my superiors. But randomness. How could it be more random? But it turned out all right.

*And, indeed, after a spell in the Foreign Office, which may have been a case of coming up for air or not, I don't know, you then did find yourself in Germany albeit a special part of it, Berlin.*

OW: Yes, before we actually get to Berlin I'd like to mention just one thing about my spell at the Foreign Office because I was very lucky there too. I took part, if only as a dogs-body, in what I regard as a classic diplomatic negotiation; namely Trieste. I was in the Western and Southern Department at the Trieste and Yugoslav desk. The British in 1954 still occupied Trieste because the Italians and the Yugoslavs couldn't make up their minds whether to go to war over it or smoke the pipe of peace. There were riots in the streets of Trieste. Three to four people got killed. Now here I think is the first lesson. Up until that moment both the Italians and the Yugoslavs had conceived it as being in their national interest not to come to

an agreement. But once those people had been killed in the streets (and by modern standards there were very few people being killed in the streets) both sides came to the conclusion that this was a bad thing and, therefore, that it was in their national interests to settle. And so having decided that it was in their national interests to settle they settled down to negotiate. It was a fascinating negotiation. It was to decide geographically how much of the city should remain Italian and how much (if any) of the suburbs should go back to Yugoslavia. But throughout the whole of the negotiation the Italians and the Yugoslavs never spoke to each other once. Negotiations took place in London. On the Western side were the British and Americans, Tommy Thompson for the Americans and Geoffrey Harrison for us, with me as our dogs body. And we would go and talk to the Yugoslavs, then go and talk to the Italians and we did this for twelve months gradually drawing the map of Trieste, gradually giving concessions to the Yugoslavs because they were not going to get the City. And finally the Americans came in with a bag of gold to clinch the deal and the first time the Italian and the Yugoslav Ambassadors, who were the negotiators in London, met was to sign the agreement. And none of it got out. In those days the press were not very interested, of course, but there was discretion, confidentiality and we pulled it off. And it was an absolute classic of what nowadays is, I'm afraid, old-fashioned diplomacy. But not only was the form a classic negotiation but one learned the first thing about a successful negotiation is that the people concerned must want a deal. Just because a problem exists doesn't mean that there is a solution to it. Very often the problem exists simply because there is no solution to it because people find it suits them better not to settle. Take, for example, Northern Ireland. That has been the case for very nearly thirty years since I've been observing it since I was sent there in August 1969. The moment the Protestants and the Catholics decide that they want to settle then they will settle. It will be a terrible negotiation but it'll be alright on the night. But as long as it suits them better not to settle they won't because at the moment it seems that it is the problem which gives each community its sense of identity and sense of worth rather than a solution to it. So, I interrupted, I'm sorry but there you are. That was before I went to Berlin.

*Yes. Berlin, please.*

OW: Well, Berlin was fascinating for totally different reasons. Berlin was a four-power city and occupied by Americans, French, Russians and ourselves. And we were sovereign in our part of Berlin and I was sent there by an excellent organisation which is now defunct called

the Information Research Department. It was originally founded, I think, in 1947 because a need was perceived to educate not only the Service itself but also the British public about the nature of Communism, really to study it in depth and make people realise what those lads in Moscow were really up to. A sort of subsidiary of IRD, of course, I ran a little section which observed the GDR, the Soviet Zone, which, of course, was very interesting because previously I'd been in a Russian satellite, Bucharest. Now I was in Berlin observing from afar what was going on in one of the most advanced satellites. And it was also German. And also for the first time I was able to use both my knowledge of German and my knowledge of Communism and that was absolutely fascinating. I had a lovely time. I used to take my family on holiday to the GDR. We had a most marvelous organisation called BRIXMIS who were licensed ... spies would be the wrong word ... but it was a mission to Soviet Commander in Chief which enabled us and the Americans, because they had their mission there too, to observe the Soviet configuration of forces in Germany and ascertain whether they had any aggressive intent or whether they were all happily in their barracks and that sort of thing. But enormously valuable to have these sort of people on the ground. Twenty years, thirty years later I went back to Germany, and Berlin was once again part of my responsibilities as Ambassador. So then I think my career became slightly less random because I think in part I was sent to Berlin because I spoke German and secondly because I had some knowledge of Communism at that time. So perhaps this was my fifth appointment but the first that was non-random.

*But that doesn't explain your next posting to Pretoria?*

OW: Of course not, that was totally random but for a different random reason. It was thought a good thing for there to be cross postings between the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service and the Commonwealth Office and the Civil Service. And so they looked around for likely lads for them to cross post and they found me. So they sent me to Pretoria. Then again it was enormous fun and because one was there during a very interesting time in South Africa because the madman Verwoerd became Prime Minister. I'm quite sure that apartheid really went wrong under Verwoerd in the sense that there had always been separate development in South Africa but it was more of a social thing rather than a legal thing. Verwoerd, with his sort of strong and logical mind, decided that he had to turn the social customs of South Africa into law. Social customs can evolve and develop but

once you cast them in the concrete of law they take a very great deal of trouble to change as we discovered. It wasn't until 1990 that Mandela was let out. It was while I was there that he was put away. It was many, many years, twenty eight years before he came out. But it's a wonderful country South Africa in many ways. 'Every prospect pleases but only man is vile' as it were, particularly the elites were vile in the treatment of their fellow countrymen and women. But a marvellous country - not only with great beauty but rich in gold and diamonds, wines. So there is immense potential. We'll just have to see although I think Mandela is doing an absolutely super job there. But, of course, he is 78 and he can't go on forever, but we shall have to wait and see. It would be an absolute miracle if South Africa's potential is released peacefully. So far the miracle has held.

*Well, one would hardly call it an enviable posting for a year to what was the Imperial Defence College. Was it chosen with an eye to what happened the following year when you went to the Private Office?*

OW: Absolutely not. I would have said it was just as random as anything and the Foreign Office had a quota of chaps to send to the Imperial Defence College and luck again, lady luck, was looking after me and sent me there. It was the most wonderful year working stockbrokers' hours and university terms, a minimum of work and the maximum of interest. Lots of the most distinguished people in the land and foreigners too talked to you and discussed things with you and I wouldn't have missed them at all. But what happened afterwards was sheer luck again. Harold Macmillan decided to appoint a peer as Foreign Secretary and to appoint a second cabinet minister in the Foreign Office to look after House of Commons business. So the Foreign Office set itself the task of setting up an extra office for Mr Edward Heath. And so what they did was to take Mr Michael Wilford and make him Ted Heath's private secretary. I think there was a little bit of planning there because while I was in South Africa one of the jobs I was given was to compose speeches for my High Commissioner and maybe in his report on me the High Commissioner said that I was a dab-hand with speeches. And the number two in the Private Office was responsible for speeches, not drafting them but making sure they were drafted. And I did draft them myself if I felt so inclined. So this was pure luck, the fact that Mr Macmillan had decided to appoint a peer, Lord Home, as Foreign Secretary and there was a sudden need for a dogs-body in the Private Office and there I was. Even more luck when later on that peer decided to disclaim his peerage and become Prime Minister and to ask me to go over to Number 10 with him to look

after his Foreign Affairs/Defence portfolio which, of course, I'm glad he did.

*So you were in succession technically an assistant or number two Private Secretary in the Private Office and the Foreign Office and then you were a Private Secretary to the Prime Minister?*

OW: I was promoted within the Office up to Principal Private Secretary.

*So you spent a total of what, five years in the private offices either side of Downing Street?*

OW: Yes, six years in fact almost to the day. Yes, I was the longest toothed Private Secretary in the business having succeeded at Number 10 an even longer toothed Private Secretary, namely Philip de Zulueta. I think Charles Powell has subsequently beaten both our records but, yes, this was the experience of experiences. I thought that Alec Home was the nearest thing to a Saint in politics as is possible. I never heard him say an unkind thing about anybody despite all the unkind things that were said about him. Now whether he thought unkind things I don't know but he certainly never expressed them. Just occasionally a cloud would pass across his eyes when someone had been particularly beastly - when his appointment was said to be the worst appointment since Caligula made his horse a consul. You needed to have the hide of a rhinoceros to put up with that. In fact he was a superb Foreign Secretary. He had a great knowledge of the world. He'd been Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary for three or four years previously. He knew everybody in the great outside world. I suppose his greatest quality was judgement. He had the most wonderful judgement of people and of the substance of a problem. He was also a great public servant. He didn't have to be in politics. He had very nice houses in Scotland, very nice estates. He was a countryman to his fingertips. He loved shooting and he loved fishing and he had an alternative life to politics that politicians these days do not have. But his judgement was impeccable. He also had (and I've never known it to happen since but it may have done) he would always, when we had office meetings on a problem, when it was dicey and there was a lot of political controversy about it in the House of Commons or the House of Lords or whatever, at office meetings he would always first decide the policy on the merits and then if it was politically controversial he would say, "Now if the officials would kindly leave us, ministers will now decide how we're going to handle this politically." It was never as someone else once said, "My policies are what keep the Labour Party together." He



was a marvellous public servant - a real old-fashioned servant of the state. It showed itself again when he was defeated. He came within a whisker of winning again - he only lost by four seats. He came from so far behind as was beyond belief but people loved him, particularly the Conservative Party, wherever he went. And, of course, he lost and stood down and Ted Heath became Leader of the Party and subsequently Prime Minister and Alec Home served under Ted Heath and did so with great skill for another four years.

*And you saw some of that when you yourself were Deputy Under Secretary of State. I don't want to jump there right now but we will come back to that. Perhaps I could ask what were the most important events that were dealt with firstly when you were at the hub of foreign policy and then at the hub of government during those six years?*

OW: I think that while I was at the Foreign Office, while Macmillan was at Number 10, some of the most momentous events in the post-war world happened particularly in East/West relations, but not only in East/West relations. I'm thinking, for example, of the Berlin crisis leading to the Wall, the Cuban missile crisis. For us there was the Polaris thing, the Bahamas, Skybolt fell out of the sky. Then there was de Gaulle's veto on our application to join the Common Market followed within days by the Franco-German treaty of eternal friendship. And I think there what one would say straight away is that de Gaulle may have used the Polaris agreement at the Bahamas as the occasion of his veto but it was certainly not the cause. The cause goes back to Suez, goes back probably to the humiliation of France in 1940 when de Gaulle had to take sanctuary in Britain. I think he never forgave us that. He never forgave us for not sharing the humiliation of France. He never forgave us for having to play such a weak hand while we gave him sanctuary and I think the veto was his way of getting revenge. Take Suez. I wasn't at the Foreign Office during Suez. In fact, I was in Berlin and in Berlin too during the Hungarian uprising. And from our point of view in Berlin one of the sad things about the Suez operation was that it was taking everybody's attention away from what the Russians were doing in Hungary. But everybody was much more interested in the mess we were making of Suez than in the terrible things that the Russians were doing in Hungary. France and Britain both felt after Suez let down by the Americans, no doubt about that, but we took a different view. Macmillan's first priority when he became Prime Minister when Eden had to resign was to re-establish relations with the Americans, with Eisenhower whom he had known during the war years and subsequently with Kennedy. France's priority, on the contrary, was to establish itself in Europe and so we

were not there in Messina when they were doing the Treaty of Rome. And, I think, Eden's Prime Ministership was probably the single most disastrous period for British foreign policy. Suez and not being at Messina all within the space of three to four years at the end of the fifties. How concentratedly disastrous can you be? Of course, we have benefited from Macmillan's relationship with Eisenhower, continuing with Kennedy and, of course, Mrs Thatcher with Ronald Reagan was a subsequent beneficiary. The underside was that not being at Messina, being vetoed in 1963, we have never had and still do not have a comfy relationship with Europe because the French and the Germans at Messina invented a Europe that took no account of our interest at all and created the sort of Europe which we could not be comfortable with, but which the Germans were prepared to be comfortable with to assuage their guilt and that continues to this day. We talk about Franco-German reconciliation and it's a very wonderful thing but it's fundamentally based on France's visceral fear of Germany and Germany's double fear of itself and its fear of France's fear. Unfortunately we have no fear of ourselves nor of Germany because we've never been occupied. So it's fascinating how continuous life is. We're taught as children that actions have consequences and the consequences of our action or inaction continue for decades.

*Yes, I wonder if I can ask you one question there relating to both the transatlantic relationship and the European Community as it was. It's been said very recently by our former very sensible American Ambassador to London that the United Kingdom is more important to the United States because it is a member of the European Community than if it were not. He was not saying the special relationship did not exist but 'don't depend on that special relationship so much if you are not also a part of the main European body'.*

OW: Yes, Mr Raymond Seitz has made this point many times. I have several comments on that. Mr Seitz, whom I greatly respect and was an enormously successful Ambassador here, is right up to a point. Someone once said that the four most important words in the English language were 'up to a point'. The first point I would make (and it came very much home to me when I was in Washington) is that one shouldn't assume that the State Department are necessarily our friends. Yes, they can be, but over the Falklands, for example, the State Department were not our friends and I think Mr Seitz was expressing a State Department-accented view. What is important about the special relationship - and the trouble is that so many left-leaning intellectuals want to denigrate Britain by denigrating the special relationship - the worst thing about the special relationship is the phrase, the special

relationship. In a sense we have a special relationship with Ireland. The Americans certainly have a special relationship with Israel. What we do have with the Americans is I think a unique relationship in the sense that they have a relationship with us and we with them that we do not share with any other nation. I'll give you two examples. The first one is our nuclear relationship and particularly our naval nuclear relationship. The second is our intelligence relationship. Now you may say (and perhaps with some justification) that both these relationships obviously were of central importance during the Cold War and may have subsequently lessened as a result of the end of the Cold War. What is, I think, true and is equally true despite what Mr Seitz has said is that the Americans know, because they've experienced it, that Britain is their most reliable ally. Who was with them in the Gulf? Who was not only with them in the Gulf but with them effectively in the Gulf? Who was with them in Korea? They know that when push comes to shove it's the Brits they can rely on and it's that which makes the special relationship. Take, for example, Kennedy's relationship with Macmillan. Macmillan had managed to build up such a relationship with Kennedy that during the Cuban Missile Crisis Kennedy would be on the phone to Macmillan every evening to discuss the events of the day and to keep Macmillan in the picture. Alastair Horne with his excellent two volume biography of Macmillan says that it was "less than consultation but more than information". What Kennedy wanted was therapy if you like; to have a chat about the events of the day with an older man he trusted and whose discretion he trusted when there was no one else to talk to. Yes, his brother Bobby, obviously, was a most important confidant there but he was right in the centre of the problem. And it was enormously important to Kennedy to talk to Harold Macmillan to get an outside observer's view of things. Now Kennedy didn't have to do that. It wasn't Harold Macmillan constantly on the blower to Kennedy. It was Kennedy taking the initiative to telephone Harold Macmillan. Well, if that's not a special relationship? But what worries me is that I was talking to some modern historians and one brash young thirty year old called this a kind of 'international samaritanism'. Well, it's a terrible thing when people's gift for phrase-making is not matched by knowledge or judgement. I don't know how we got here. We were talking about the special relationship weren't we?

*And the European Community and so on.*

OW: But you see there is a direct line of descent or ascent, but genealogically a line of descent from Churchill and Roosevelt to Macmillan and Eisenhower and Kennedy to

Margaret Thatcher and Reagan. I had four years with Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister during my time in Washington and there was no doubt at all that there was a special relationship there. Reagan thought the world of her. Take the Falklands for example; would the Americans have done for anybody else what they did for us over the Falklands? Of course they wouldn't. And who tried to stop them? The State Department, or rather, in particular, Mrs Kirkpatrick. But the State Department at the beginning of the Falklands crisis was trying to maintain a balance between an aggressive dictatorship and a democratic ally, Britain. And it was the White House that decided the issue and this is why I say 'up to a point'. In American affairs what matters is the White House.

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You see their cabinet ministers are not like our cabinet ministers. Our cabinet ministers are elected by the electorate; they are subordinate to the Prime Minister but they have political power in their own right. Not so in the United States. The Secretary of State, Defence, Commerce, are sort of political supra-permanent under-secretaries, but what the White House says goes. We were lucky in the Falklands not only to have a President who was so friendly but, of course, as Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger who was a total Anglophile and gave us everything we wanted. He wouldn't have done it for anybody else. So there's no doubt at all in my mind as a practitioner that a unique relationship exists between Britain and America. Another example of this is that both President Bush and President Clinton have invited Germany to be partners in leadership. Now, the interesting thing is that Germany has turned it down - turned it down for President Bush and President Clinton. And the reasons are quite obvious. Germany was embarrassed by the offer because they place overwhelming value on their relationship with France and didn't want to muddy these waters by having a partnership in leadership with the United States. The Germans are getting better but are still ill-at-ease with military matters and particularly military matters outside NATO. They're starting to be more realistic about things and that is wholly to be welcomed but that France occupies the central position in their foreign relationships there is no doubt at all.

*We are still on your time at the private offices.*

OW: Yes, it was a very momentous time because of the East/West relations and the Berlin wall, the Cuban missile crisis and transatlantic relations. There was the question of Polaris

which we got at the Bahamas and, of course, following on from the Cuban missile crisis Harold Macmillan had the vision to see that we ought nonetheless, however unpromising things were, to try and cut some sort of deal with the Soviet Union to bring the whole nuclear business under some control. And such were his relationships with Kennedy that Kennedy agreed that we should go for a Partial Test Ban Treaty. And, indeed, in August 1963, the last thing before Harold Macmillan was forced through illness to resign, the Test Ban Treaty was signed in Moscow by Lord Home for us. And that, in fact, was the first of the series of nuclear treaties which helped, of course, to make the world a very much safer place. And it's interesting that domestically CND were vociferous but after the Test Ban Treaty was signed they were really quite silent. I think the fundamental believers continued to fundamentally believe but they'd got no public support. It was seen that these terrible weapons were at least being addressed by politicians and partially being brought under control. So there were a lot of interesting things going on. Then, of course, Mr Heath, down the corridor, was embarked upon his negotiations in Brussels which started, I think, in 1961. It's difficult to know in hindsight but eventually when the negotiations had been taken as far as the negotiations could go de Gaulle, on January 31st 1963, said "non" and a few days later the Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who also did not care for Britain, went to Paris and signed the Treaty of Friendship with the French. We were always hoping and naturally a person like Ted Heath, who was responsible for the negotiations, was optimistic because you can't succeed in negotiations unless you believe they're going to succeed. Well, I'm afraid that we hoped that the five would be able to prevail over de Gaulle but even if all five had wanted to, de Gaulle would not have been prevailed upon. But clearly the Germans would not use any pressure on France to do any of this because Adenauer didn't want it either. And so by not being at Messina we allowed the French to invent a European Community that we could not be at ease with, firstly because of the strange financial arrangements they came to. It was quite simple. The idea was that the Germans should pay and every month the other five should go to the bank and cash the cheques. And then there was the CAP from which we are still suffering. And, in fact, forty years on, although some reform has been made in the direction of fairness in financial matters, some progress has been made in the reform of the CAP, fundamentally they are still out of balance. And as we see with every day that passes Britain is uncomfortable. Certainly since Maastricht I think probably we are comfortable now with everything up to and including the single market and are prepared to pay through the nose for the benefits of the single market. But essentially we all think the Maastricht Treaty was the wrong treaty in the wrong place, a treaty too far. There were other more

important things to build following the collapse of Communism than economic and monetary union and a single currency which seems to drive everybody out of work. It would have been much better if our partners had taken up our idea of a common currency: the hard ecu. But, of course, they didn't want to know. A case of "not invented here", here being Brussels.

*Can I ask if there is anything else you'd like to tell about your time as private secretary, especially to the Prime Minister, when you must have dealt with the whole ambit of government, before we move on.*

OW: Well, there again this is where lady luck has been on my side. Not only would I not have been appointed private secretary at the Foreign Office if Harold Macmillan had not appointed a peer as Foreign Secretary, I would not then have become private secretary to the Prime Minister had that Foreign Secretary not disclaimed his peerage and taken me to Number 10 Downing Street. The experience of Number 10 Downing Street for any official is quite unique. There you are at the centre of government seeing all the pressures that are put on Prime Ministers (and by Jove there aren't half a lot.) People seem to forget, particularly when you're looking back on what happened and what might have happened, that you didn't have a lot of time to think about what to do. You have some, but for Prime Ministers problems are coming at them like darts approaching a dartboard. And he's got to take account of all the domestic pressures, all the foreign policies, the rivalries in the cabinet and that sort of thing. We don't have to be too sorry for them, of course; they are, after all, volunteers doing what they wanted to do. Nonetheless, when you are actually in the Cabinet Room at Number 10 Downing Street the problems coming at you from all angles cannot be dealt with in the calm of a study or a university. So it's absolutely fascinating to see the interaction of the domestic on the foreign, on Parliament, in the Departments of State, of public opinion working both on the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It's amazing that a way is found to conduct policy with some form of cohesion - but it's a most marvellous experience, no question at all.

The two men, of course, Home and Wilson "the 14th Earl of Home and the 14th Mr Wilson" as Lord Home once described him, were totally different men. I've said that Lord Home was as near as is possible to a Saint in politics but his best friend would not have described Harold Wilson as a Saint in politics. Here was a man who was a political animal to his fingertips and, of course, the difference between the Labour Party and the Conservative Party

is not merely a difference of policy. They are different animals altogether. Whether Mr Blair is trying to turn the Labour Party into a party like the Conservative Party but with different policies time alone will tell. But, you see, although the Labour Party is supposed to be a party of socialists and cooperators they are the most intense individualists and would rather die than not speak their minds even if it meant that the prosecution of business was not taken very much forward. And so Wilson had a totally different problem in managing the sort of party that the Labour Party was from Alec Home or Harold Macmillan in managing the Conservative Party. All parties are difficult to manage but the Labour Party's difficulty is in spades.

I suppose the main problems we had at Number 10 ongoing were Rhodesia and Vietnam, lesser order problems than East-West relations or European problems, problems of the second order. However demanding the politics of Rhodesia were it has to be seen in perspective as a second order problem. But it caused a lot of problems and a lot of them time-consuming. What was encouraging about it was that while Lord Home was trying to deal with the problem of Ian Smith at 10 Downing Street he was very concerned to keep the Labour Party on board so that it would be a national policy toward Rhodesia and not merely a Conservative one. Harold Wilson, when he took over at Number 10, continued this very much and tried to run Rhodesia keeping the Conservative party on board. He failed, of course, in the sense that Rhodesia did ultimately declare UDI but it wasn't for the want of trying. Ian Smith was quite clearly not the sort of person to come to terms with Britain. We were quite simply anxious to support the 1961 agreement and, in particular, to ensure not majority rule immediately but unimpeded progress. The only time I ever saw Harold Wilson lose his temper was one evening in Government House when he was going to see both Nkomo and another African leader - I think it was Sitole. And he learned that those two African leaders had been put under canvas in the grounds of Government House virtually without refreshment the whole day. He took out his wallet and said, "Go and buy them some sandwiches, go and buy them a bottle of beer." And he waxed wrath about it; absolutely genuine anger that these African leaders had been treated so disgracefully, particularly in the grounds of Government House. But the Rhodesian government just didn't want to know. At the time we were going through the famous five principles and we thought that there might be a majority rule: that is to say an African majority in the House of Parliament in what was then Salisbury, now Harare, in probably three or four Parliaments, that's to say about twelve to fifteen years or thereabouts. And we said we thought it would be difficult but that they

could get majority rule peacefully in sometime between ten to fifteen years. Failing that we said we thought it was probable that the Africans would take power by force and so it proved. After about fifteen years they took over by force. So there, you can't win 'em all.

The other thing was Vietnam which was, of course, an American failure. The policy of the British government was certainly not to respond to what the Americans wanted for us, to put a token British force on the ground in Vietnam. We knew that the policy was quite disastrous. I see today in the Telegraph that there is an obituary of McGeorge Bundy who was National Security Advisor to both Kennedy and Johnson at the beginning of the Vietnam War. And I remember being sent over by Harold Wilson to talk to Mac' Bundy at the beginning before they got too deeply in, to say 'I suppose you know what you're doing'. There was no question of saying 'don't do that'. They were grown up men. But the problem was to maintain a public stance of reasonable solidarity with the Americans which Michael Stewart did in his famous speech in Oxford magnificently. But certainly not to give the Americans what they really wanted which was to have a British force on the ground. We knew it was a disastrous policy. One of the unknown things about the Vietnam war was: would Kennedy, who understood the world we live in, have realised that this was a mistaken policy and found some way of withdrawing from it before they got too deeply in. But of course, he was assassinated before that question could be answered. Johnson was a different kettle of fish altogether. He was a consummate politician as far as domestic politics was concerned but really didn't understand foreign affairs at all. I remember going and visiting him with Alec Home and afterwards Alec saying, "that man does not make sense on foreign affairs." But, of course, once they were in, returning was as tedious as go o'er and we had to wait for the next President, Nixon, to get them out of the mess they'd gotten themselves into.

*Yes, thank you. I remember my own time in Vietnam and having similar feelings. After the private offices you found yourself as Ambassador in Copenhagen which must have been a change of pace even if not promotion.*

OW: Well, it certainly was a change of pace and it very nearly wasn't promotion because when the time came for me to lead a respectable professional life again, those who were responsible for my life thought it was the right thing after six years as a private secretary to take me down a peg or two and said, "What about Deputy High Commissioner in Lusaka?" Well, when this proposition was put to the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson reacted in much



the way I would have wanted him to react, without any prompting from myself I might add. And so the Permanent Under-Secretary was sent away with a flea in his ear and told to think again, that I had to be promoted and I had to have an Embassy of my own. So they eventually came up with Copenhagen which was absolute bliss. If you've got to learn how to be an Ambassador there is no nicer place than Copenhagen to do one's apprenticeship; a country of the right sort of size, full of the most delightful people. The Danes, in sense of humour, I think are the closest to the English - they have the most delightful sense of humour. That was three years of absolute bliss, except, of course, that there were a few difficulties. Once again we had to devalue in 1967 and, of course, as Ambassador it fell to me to ask to see the Prime Minister of Denmark and give him the news before it appeared on the tapes and television. So that wasn't very pleasant. But it all comes up with the rations. We had three very happy years there and didn't want to leave at all but then a summons came.

*And you found yourself doing something very different.*

OW: Yes, I was summoned back to the Foreign Office in order to take over the post of Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. But before I could, I was on leave and was up a ladder in this very room wiping the orgies of my tenants off the walls when the telephone went and a familiar voice on the other end of the telephone said, "Is that you, Oliver?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm up a ladder with a bucket of Flash." And he said, "Well have you read the newspapers, there's trouble in Northern Ireland." And I said, "Oh is there? I haven't been and collected my newspaper this morning. What of it?" And he said, "Well, we want you to go." I said, "When?" He said, "Tomorrow." I said, "Look, I can't go tomorrow. It's my wife's birthday and I'm taking her to the theatre but I'll go the day after." And I did. I never knew why I was selected for the job - the only two essential qualifications I had for it were, one: I was on leave and therefore available and, two: I knew nothing about the problem at all and, therefore, could be held to be unbiased. I got there and did a bit of a John the Baptist to Jim Callaghan. But one had to have a pretty steep learning curve. What was interesting was working for the Home Office instead of working for the Foreign Office. Now, at a ministerial meeting in the Foreign Office you have a lot of quite thrusting young diplomats sitting around the Secretary of State all full of ideas as to what to do in the present circumstances. At the Home Office Mr Callaghan was surrounded by a group of officials from Permanent Under-Secretary

downwards and we sat in total silence for what seemed to be a very long time. Point number one was that the officials had no idea at all what to do. Point number two was that I don't think Mr Callaghan had yet made up his mind on what should be done.

Anyway I toddled off to Belfast almost on my own with one young official from the Home Office to keep me on the Home Office rails and a secretary volunteer from the Foreign Office to prepare the way in two weeks for Jim Callaghan when he should come over. And I remember the arrival of Mr Callaghan at Aldergrove Airport and all the world's press and television were there and Mr Callaghan had to give a press conference. Well, I knew to my certain knowledge that he hadn't got a policy. But either he knew all the time what he was going to do or he made it up as a politician's sort of spontaneous reaction to circumstances. And he said, "I haven't come here with a solution to tell you what to do. I've come here to help you find a solution to your problem." And everybody said, "Genius. Absolute genius." Mr Callaghan, who was an instinctual politician, got it right at the very beginning and that is still the problem: how to persuade the two communities to take responsibility for their own futures by coming to some sort of compromise about how they can live together. No outsider can impose a solution on them - neither the British government nor the American government although there is an American dimension to the problem and an Irish dimension to the problem. We can all help but we can only help the people who live there to come to a solution to their problems and that is what ultimately democracy is about. So far, they haven't been willing to do so and I sometimes actually feel that they need the problem more than they need a solution to it. You often find in problems that problems exist because there isn't any solution, that instead people want the problem. It's the problem which gives meaning to their lives, it's the problem which gives them a sense of identity. What would their sense of identity be if indeed they solved the problem?

Anyway, we were sent over there and at that time it was still a civil rights problem. Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann were campaigning for civil rights, justifiably, for the Catholic community. Civil rights were very popular all over the world in the sixties from Berlin to Berkeley, California. And it so happened that is how this particular phase of the Irish 'problem', I suppose, broke out in the way it did. But in my time there it was still a civil rights problem. My task was to draw up a list of legitimate Catholic grievances and we set about alleviating these grievances one by one and by the time I left when I was summoned back to the Foreign Office after about eight or nine months there ... Incidentally in my

telephone call at the beginning I'd said, "Well how long do you want me to go for?" They'd said, "Oh, a couple of months? Two, three months? Oh, you'll be back before Christmas so don't take Marjory with you - not worth doing that." (There are so many things which happen in August that are meant to be over by Christmas but, of course, never are). But in my time it was simply a civil rights movement. By the time I left we'd gone a very long way towards redressing the grievances but, of course, it wasn't to be because in June 1970 two things happened. One is that at an IRA conference just outside Dublin in February the IRA split and the Provisionals decided to carry on the armed struggle and so starting about June 1970 the IRA made a comeback. At the same time on the mainland the Conservative Party came to power. Reginald Maudling became Home Secretary. Whereas Mr Callaghan came from a slightly Celtic background and had a sort of empathy for the Northern Irish problem, not in a sense of having a solution to it but in having an understanding of the events leading up to it, I'm afraid Mr Maudling did not. He was a strictly 'south of Watford' man and couldn't begin to understand what these people were up to. It seemed so irrational. And I'm afraid that the combination of the IRA and the change of government here led to a rapid deterioration in the whole situation which became an armed struggle. So much so that a few years later in 1972 we had to take over government there. But this is to be said of government from Westminster: that it is the least unacceptable form of government to the two communities. They would much rather be governed by Westminster than any other form of government that has yet been devised. But it was a marvellous experience.

Afterwards, when I came back, I was having my farewell call on the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office and I put the question, "Look, why me?" Or, "Why anybody from the diplomatic service to be sent to Northern Ireland? You've got perfectly good officials at the Home Office dealing with this problem." And he thought for a moment and said, "Well, you chaps are used to this sort of thing." The fact is that the diplomatic service is unlike the Home Office in that there is a total obligation to go where you're sent. In the Home Civil Service you have to volunteer for these things and you can't be sent anywhere if you don't want to go. And so they sent me. I wouldn't have missed it for anything and it was very valuable later on. But we'll come to that later, perhaps, when I was in Washington. The last thing I did in Washington was to negotiate and sign a supplementary extradition treaty whereby IRA criminals who had committed murder, mayhem, manslaughter, couldn't take refuge in the United States and not be extradited because their crime was political. But that's for later on.

*I can't resist asking, although perhaps I shouldn't, is there anything in Simon Jenkin's often-repeated view that we should let the two communities get together from the ground up - from local government where they apparently cohere relatively happily sometimes, leave them alone and let it grow from there? The trouble seems to be at the top of the tree in his sketch. He keeps writing articles saying this is the way to do it. Don't try to do it from the top?*

OW: But we're not trying to do it from the top. The fact is that these local communities do exist, there are elections at all levels in Ireland. It's a democratic society, it is part of the United Kingdom, there are local government elections. We're now trying to get provincial elections but meanwhile the people of Northern Ireland are represented at Westminster. One of the facets of being governed by Westminster is that Northern Ireland now sends more MPs (namely seventeen) to Westminster than they did when they had their own-provincial government when they had only twelve. But this is the problem. How do you get two communities to work together? I don't know. Obviously Simon Jenkins thinks it can be done. Perhaps he thinks that nothing should be done? But I'm afraid that is to misjudge the whole essence of politics which is not to stand there but do something. There is no alternative, it seems to me, for the British government but to continue in the most unpropitious circumstances to try. You can't not try.

*Thank you for that excursus into our home affairs and our most difficult problem in home affairs.*

OW: Scottish devolution?

*Let's return to your diplomatic career. You became Chief Clerk of the Diplomatic Service for a couple of years or so and then Deputy Under-Secretary of State for, I gather, European Relations, relations with the rest of Europe. I don't know if you wanted to say anything about the administration of the service and your time as Chief Clerk?*

OW: Well, perhaps a little. It's not the most popular job in the Service and one of the first thoughts I had when I was pulled out of Copenhagen and returned to become DUS Economics was, 'thank God I'm not going to be Chief Clerk'. But one knows what the

contract is and one does what one is told. What I do think is absolutely right is that the Service should administer itself. The people far-flung all over the world should know that it's their own kind who are responsible for administering their affairs and to know too that they too might one day be called into the administration. My pet ambition (which I didn't succeed in doing) was to try to ensure that at some stage in their career everybody did a job in administration, so that they could see just how difficult it is. Because one's colleagues, when you are dealing with the substance of policy, are marvellous. They are rational, sensible, intelligent, and keen. But when it comes to their personal affairs they are a little bit different. I remember one guy in particular, who shall be nameless. We looked round and decided that we needed someone to go to Indonesia and we thought for one of these up and coming countries we needed someone very good for it. So I asked him to call and said, "I want you to go to Jakarta." Absolute fury broke out: "I don't know what the Service is coming to. Here am I, the best French-speaker in the Service. I have two teenage daughters who need to be near home so that their mother can keep an eye on them and you send me to Indonesia?" And he stormed out. He left an impression on me because about eighteen months after there was a job going in Geneva and I thought, 'Ah, fluent French speaker, near home ...' So I sent out a telegram and said to him, "Go to Geneva." He came into my office full of scorn and fury and said, "I don't know what the Administration's doing. I'm just coming to the end of my second year in Jakarta. I thought I was doing a good job there. I was certainly enjoying it." And I said to him, "My dear chap when we last spoke you said that you wanted to be nearer home and you said that you were the best French speaker in the Service and I have tried to give you a job near to home where your French would be invaluable. You say you were enjoying yourself in Jakarta? Well, you never wrote and told me so." As Chief Clerk you see that your colleagues are very human beings. They are very agreeable to be with in official matters in what I think is the best diplomatic service in the world (only the French, for totally different reasons, comes anywhere near ours) but in their own personal affairs they react just as normal human beings.

I found the first year fascinating, learning the job. I found the second year quite interesting but by the end of the third year I was totally exhausted. It is as if people tip their bile on top of you. And I'd invented Wright's 20/1 rule. The 20/1 rule was that you can do the job provided that the feedback of pleasure and the feedback of displeasure about even out. And I

reckon that you have to get about twenty appointments right to make up for the one appointment you got wrong. It was a very valuable experience but not one that I would wish to repeat. Some people are good at it and like it and jolly good luck to them too.

*Well, perhaps then we should pass on to the next job which was Deputy Under Secretary for Europe which must have been a cartload of monkeys of a different sort.*

OW: It was very interesting because I took over this job on the 1st December 1972 at the moment of our entry into the Community. Lord Home was Foreign Secretary yet again and although we were not due to become members until 1st January 1973 we were invited to attend ministerial meetings in December. And so I accompanied Lord Home, although I think he was Sir Alec Douglas Home by this time. I remember that his wife Elizabeth used to say that in the course of her life she had changed her name five times while being married to the same man. So I went over and it was a chastening experience. Continentals do conduct their business very differently from the islanders. The French not only invented a community to suit themselves and arranged that the Germans would pay for but actually organised it that so it was run in the same way that France was run. What this meant in practice was that ministers had to get involved in the minutiae of the various files and dossiers quite unlike the British idea where ministers take broad policy decisions and this is left to the civil servants to work out in detail within the guidelines given by ministers. Not in the Community. Not at Brussels.

I remember one particular occasion when, in order to sort this out, there was a very small dinner party with the Foreign Ministers: the French Foreign Minister Maurice Schuman, the German Foreign Minister, Schuman and Walter Scheel with Sir Alec Douglas Home. And each of them had one adviser. And during the course of the dinner Alec said to his colleagues, "I'm rather worried about the way we conduct business here. We all get immersed in far too great a detail. Shouldn't we, the ministers, be taking the policy decisions and letting our civil servants get on with it?" And I'll always remember that Schuman said, "I'm very sorry if our British colleague does not like the way we conduct our business here in Brussels but I can assure him that we have always conducted our business in this way and if our colleague does not like it then perhaps he must draw his own conclusions." So it is a

different animal - what de Gaulle called "unelected areopagitica". But Brussels business is conducted in a very unique way. It's quite alien to the British tradition of conducting policy and it is quite different to the conduct of diplomacy where you negotiate with the other guy and eventually you reach a compromise. But, yes, you have to reach compromises in Brussels but it is infinitely more complex and the more members of the Community there are the more complex it becomes. The end result must suit everybody and nothing once done can be unravelled because once you unravel anything the whole thing would unravel like a sweater and that is why it is so difficult to change things in the Community.

Anyway, in 1974, with a change of government, the Labour Party decided that for reasons of domestic party unity it had to re-negotiate the terms of entry. Well that was a very enterprising thing. Fortunately we had some very intelligent people about like Pat Nairne of the Cabinet Office, like Michael Butler at the Foreign Office and by the time Jim Callaghan, who was by now Foreign Secretary, was ready to deal with the subject we had a negotiating brief ready for him. One of the first things he said to the Permanent Under-Secretary Tom Brimelow when he took possession of the Foreign Office was, "I want no Euro-fanaticism." So this was duly passed down the line. Okay, we won't have any Euro-fanaticism. But what we did have was an intelligent look at the Labour Party manifesto and we drew up to the best of our ability a negotiating brief which we couldn't guarantee would succeed but which we thought would succeed. And so the re-negotiations started. That was again a very laborious process where everything had to be gone over with a toothcomb but eventually we succeeded. The re-negotiation was declared a success. I've often thought that it was only a success because of the sheer amount of human intelligence and energy put into it by people like Michael Butler. But those who had drawn up the Labour Party manifesto had forgotten about fish. There was nothing in the manifesto that said we had to re-negotiate the terms about fish. Why, I don't know. But they had forgotten and at the end of the negotiations when some people complained that we hadn't re-negotiated about the fish we thumbed through the manifesto and said, "Look there's nothing in the manifesto about fish." My own belief is that had there been anything in the manifesto about fish we would have failed to have got it sufficiently re-negotiated to be able to declare the renegotiations a success.

Anyway, we did and at the Foreign Office we had to prepare in collaboration with our

colleagues in the rest of the departments in Whitehall for the referendum and that was interesting too. We had a sweepstake at the Foreign Office as to what the result of the referendum would be and I won it. But I had to share my prize with one of our secretaries and so I asked her to come and see me and I said, "Congratulations, but I hear we've got to share the prize." The winner had to guess the nearest number to the majority in favour of staying with the Community which was about 9 million and I worked it out this way. I said that about two thirds of those entitled to vote would vote and two thirds of those who voted would vote for. And I said, "How did you get to 9 million?" and she said, "Oh, nine's my lucky number." The referendum was over and my time at the Foreign Office was over and I went as I expected at the time to my last post, to Germany again for which I had prepared my mind over the preceding thirty years.

*Indeed, I wonder whether, when you had settled in at Bonn, EEC affairs continued to be a major input into your activities or whether they took a back seat? I have told various people at various times that in the short term the Community makes a lot more diplomatic work for us and the members and not less, although there could, in theory, be economies in the longer term. But I don't know whether it dominated your work in Bonn or not?*

OW: It was always a very important part of the role and you're absolutely right. Before a decision is taken in Brussels a decision has to be taken in every capital. And the British government wants to know what does the German government think about tomatoes or something like that? And also the other governments. So there is a feverish round of activities in all the capitals trying to put together some sort of paper that can be dealt with in Brussels and decided upon. Yes, the work in the capitals, although it is only a small segment, is absolutely crucial in getting the desired result. Of course, the most important single development in the Community during my time in Bonn was the establishment of the European monetary system and the exchange rate mechanism. And I remember that I was at a summit meeting in Bremen and I remember the consternation it caused in the British camp. I think Roy Jenkins has accepted a certain amount of kudos in having dreamed this up and sold it to Giscard and Helmut Schmidt but, of course, he didn't sell it to James Callaghan. So there again was a case of us not being ready at the time. In fact, I've often thought the patron saint of British European Policy was Ethelred the Unready. At key moments we've always



been unready, including the first key moment. We have always been unready to take decisions from which we would have derived maximum advantage instead of which so far, like Johnny come lately, we've had to run and catch up and accept what the others have already decided and in a sense got very little advantage from it. But, if you adopt a permanent policy of Ethelred the Unready you've only got yourself to blame, haven't you?

I don't think that we've really only got ourselves to blame because increasingly our partners have ridden roughshod over our interests, particularly since the collapse of Communism and the signature of the Maastricht treaty. At Bremen we were simply not ready to enter the exchange rate mechanism. Once more we were unready. But yes, embassies always have much greater role than outside observers are prepared to give them. They seem to think that because heads of government do talk on the telephone to each other from time to time, they do meet at summits, that therefore there is no role for embassies and no role for ambassadors. This could hardly be more false. No heads of government can keep up with the ongoing nature of diplomatic life. So, if a head of government wants to talk to a head of government or if they want to get together at a summit these summits have to be prepared and they are prepared by the various embassies. And let it be added after the summits the embassies have to pick up the pieces because very often there are a lot of pieces to pick up. Given the complexity of modern life, particularly the complexity of modern international life, there is no way even that a Foreign Secretary can keep all the strands in his head; he's only got one brain. Alec Home used to say in the olden days when political co-operation and community matters were kept rigidly separate (and I remember one day we had a meeting of political cooperation in the morning in Copenhagen and then we all, all nine delegations, piled into nine airplanes and then came to Brussels for a meeting in the Community - that was the sort of lengths of ridiculousness that one would go to) but to go back to my original point Alec Home used to say 'I may wear two hats but I've only got one head'. But they all need embassies because the embassies are the only places that are in permanent daily contact with the foreign ministers, economic ministers, chancellors of the other parties in the Community. And it makes for more work not less.

*Any other highlights of your time in Bonn?*

OW: The other highlights were more ceremonial. My first Queen's visit. She came on a state visit to Bonn and Berlin, Hamburg, Kiel and to Mainz. Altogether she had a five day visit and it was wonderful. These visits are meticulously prepared and I really don't know a more efficient organisation than Buckingham Palace. It is quite astonishing. Those private secretaries are not only a pleasure to work with because they're nice people but because they know what they're doing, they know what they want. The other aspect is that, unless you've been on the receiving end of it and seen the Queen at work, you don't begin to understand what an enormous asset we have as a nation in the Queen and members of the Royal Family. They produce a charisma and an impact that politicians do not have. It's the mystique of monarchy. And the Queen is meticulous in getting briefed. If she has decided upon anything then she does it. It was a tremendous experience.

The other thing was the 25th anniversary of the Queen's reign which happened while I was in Bonn. The Queen inspected her navy off Portsmouth, she inspected the air force somewhere in the air but the British army was in Germany so she had to come to Sennelager to inspect the army and that was really some occasion. The armed services have a terrific flair for theatre and at one given moment all the tanks on parade (which was virtually all the tanks in the British army) started up at the same moment and rumbled past. That was a never-to-be-forgotten moment. All these things are very carefully rehearsed beforehand. We had a rehearsal of the Queen's arrival including a rehearsal of the meal that she would have with her officers afterwards. Now, since I was going to be there anyway I had the same menu as the Queen was going to have when she arrived and so did all the other principal players. But a number of people were assigned to impersonate the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the private staff and all that sort of thing but they only got sausage and mash. But it was wonderful. To go back to the state visit one of the happier ideas I had was to fill a gap in the programme. The *Britannia* was to pass through the Kehl canal and then on to Bremerhaven to the next stage of the visit in Bremerhaven and Bremen. But there was a gap there at sea so I said, "Why not let's invite the top twenty-four Generals and Admirals in the German armed forces and invite them to lunch with the Queen aboard *Britannia* and we can also invite the Commander in Chief of the Rhine army, Commander in Chief RAF Germany and so forth"; and that was decided upon. And I believe that those few officers who took part in that had a memorable day in their lives and it would have done a great deal to cement relationships at armed services level between British armed services and German armed services which, of course, still remain. We've fallen out of love with each other over Europe but there are a

multitude of things that we still share and do well. I'm thinking in particular of NATO, which for both of us retains supreme importance and the relations between the British army and the German army and the British navy and the German navy are very, very close indeed; and we are close too in such things as trade, investment and so on.

But, I suppose, the Bremen summit at which Ethelred was still unready to join the EMS, the Queen's state visit and the Queen's inspection of her army were the most important things apart from, on a personal level, that I became a Wagnerian. I hadn't been a great fan of Wagner before I went to Germany but it was the custom of the Lord Mayor of Bayreuth to invite the American, French and British Ambassadors and their ladies to the first night of Bayreuth. And I thought if I'm going to be here for five years and I'm going to Bayreuth for five years I might as well do my best to learn to love Wagner. And this was the start of the centenary of the Ring Cycle with Boulez conducting and Chereau producing so we bought the complete Ring and studied it meticulously and suddenly on the second playing of Valkyries at the end when Wotan kisses Brünnhilde to sleep suddenly something went click and I understood it and I've been a Wagnerian ever since. I think it's OK for a Brit to be a Wagnerian but I'm not sure it's so good for the Germans. In fact, a member of Schmidt's staff whom I happened to meet shortly after a visit to Bayreuth ... and I said, "Are you a Wagnerian?" and he said, "No, I don't trust myself to be." I think it is stirring music of a particular form. It appeals to the irrational and, therefore, dangerous. But it was a happy time and I thoroughly enjoyed it because I think the Germans are enormously gifted and enormously complex people. How to reconcile someone like Hitler with the wealth of German literature, Beethoven, the wealth of German philosophy and poetry. I'm very fond of German lyric poetry and the wife of the former German Ambassador here in London and I used to quote German lyric poetry to each other. Beautiful stuff. They say they are a nation of 'Denker und Dichter', poets and thinkers. If they have a fault it is perhaps that they think too much. But they are the most complex people in the world and that is why I have enjoyed spending eight years of my official life in Germany and I loved every minute of it.

At the end when I was retiring one of the nicest things that happened was that the navy sent a couple of ships to take me home. The Commander in Chief of the Rhine army sent the Coldstream Guards to the Seebrücke in Hamburg as a guard of honour and the Commander in Chief of the RAF sent the band of the RAF over to play us down the Elbe. So we left Germany from Hamburg in the Navy. As I started my adult life in the Navy things had gone

beautifully full circle coming back home in the Navy. We landed at Portsmouth and the Admiral very kindly came out in his barge to meet us and very kindly took us to Nelson House and gave us a drink. Then we piled into my son's Mini to go home and I think that was nice. The privileges you have are not privileges you have as a person but privileges that go with the job. When the job's ended the privileges end. And all very right too. Don't get ideas above your station. And so that was, I thought, the end of my official life and so I came home.

When I was about to retire I had a conversation with a senior retired citizen, the former President Scheel in Germany, and I said to Scheel, "Do you have any advice to give to one about to retire?" and he said, "Yes, when you retire you will have various offers as to what you should do. Don't accept any of them immediately. Instead, put them in three piles - yes, no, and maybe. Give yourself three months to decide what you would like to do in your retirement." And so I waited three months and nothing happened. So, I thought this was a very good idea indeed so I thought let's give it six months. Then between three to six months various suggestions came including one from my old college at Cambridge asking would I like to be Master? And I said, "Yes, very much thank you." So, I put my name down to be elected Master. I had an opponent, of course. I didn't know who he was but I thought it might be nice to spend the evening of my days in the Master's Lodge at Christ's. They went to some considerable trouble to elect me. But they did elect me eventually and within three weeks someone was on the telephone again. He said, "I gather you're to be Master of Christ's? Are you looking forward to that?" And I said "Yes". And he said, "I'll come to the point. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have asked whether you would like to go to Washington?" So I groaned inwardly and said, "Why didn't you tell me three weeks ago, three months ago? How long can you give me to make up my mind?" This was Friday night. He said they wanted to know by Monday. So I had the only sleepless night I've ever had in my whole life. I was very conscious of my duty to the Crown. And very conscious of my obligation to the College and didn't know quite how to reconcile them. So, as soon as the daylight came I rang my predecessor whose name was Jack and said, "Jack, I'm in a terrible hole - they want me to go to Washington and I'm full of conflict, conflict in my duty to the Crown and duty to the College." And quick as a flash he said, "Your duty to the Crown overrides your duty to the College." And so I said, "thank you very much" and sent in my resignation. They took it well, too well really. I thought I'd better go up and see the fellows and sort of present myself so I put on my flak jacket and went. They were very calm about

it. I think they thought they'd made a desperate mistake and here was an opportunity to rectify it because they then elected the man they should have elected in the first place, Sir Hans Kornberg, who was the most distinguished scholar of the College - fellow of the Royal Society, Professor of biochemistry at Cambridge, crème de la crème of academia which I certainly was not with my war-time degree. So all was for the best. The College got the best Master it could have wished for and I went to Washington.

*Well, I hope he was as good an all-round administrator as you were to be.*

OW: The college was very successful and happy.

*And were you successful in Washington? I hope you were happy.*

OW: Well, I don't know that I was successful or not - success is a curious thing in the diplomatic service. There are moments when you can say 'that is a success'. For example, I think without question David Ormsby-Gore, Lord Harlech, who was Ambassador when Kennedy was President without question was a success. He was there in the National Security Council during the Cuban Missile Crisis as part of the American team almost. Nico Henderson, my predecessor in Washington, was a great success. He was there at the Falklands time and the way he handled things then with the media and the State Department was quite phenomenal. But it comes to very few of us to be at the right place at the right time to be called a 'success'. Happy you can certainly be. Diplomatic life is continuous. When you arrive at a post you tidy up the stuff that your predecessor was unable to complete. When you leave a post you leave a lot of stuff that your successor has to take over. In fact, the only complete bit of work I did in Washington, in the sense that the embassy started and finished it, was Northern Ireland - the supplemental extradition treaty. And there my experience in Northern Ireland was of great help. This was an extradition treaty for people who had murdered or whatever taking refuge in the US and claiming that what they had done was for political reasons and, therefore, not a crime so they couldn't be extradited. But the Administration very much wanted to tidy this up so that it would be possible for us to extradite and so the negotiation of the treaty itself was really quite simple. In three months we had signed it. But then, of course, it had to go for the advice and consent of Senate. Now, there was a Republic majority in the Senate and the Senate remitted it to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where again the Republicans were in the majority but there

was a substantial Democratic minority. As luck would have it most of the Democrats on the SFR Committee represented states which had a high Irish component. Now, we could at any time have a simple majority but we didn't want a simple majority. We wanted at least some cross-party support and we were very lucky because the Senator from Missouri, Senator Eagleton, was not standing for election next time round. He was also interested in the extradition treaty as a lawyer and, therefore, he had a particular interest in it. So we got our Democratic swing vote in the SFR Committee and then, when it went to the full Senate, it got about 90:10 or something of that order of magnitude. And then almost the next day I left. But I think that's the only time I've ever started, continued and completed anything in my whole life.

*The Trieste Agreement?*

OW: Oh, yes. The Trieste Agreement. But I was a dogs-body so to speak.

*Any other highlights of your time in Washington? You have spoken about the affinity between Reagan and Thatcher and the imbalance between the State Department and the White House on the Falklands.*

OW: I arrived in Washington in September 1982 when the Falklands war was over but the prestige of Britain could hardly have been higher. Not only did the effort of our armed forces mightily impress the Administration and Congress but also ordinary Americans too. And also the U.S armed forces could not get enough information about it. The trouble about armed services is that they can't practice realistically and so, when someone has had a little war, they are avid for information. How did you do it? How did the weapons systems actually work? It's one thing on a test-firing range, quite another thing in a howling gale in the roaring forties. So we had a constant stream of senior officers coming across to tell them like it was and, of course, for a new British Ambassador he was in clover. You have this precious thing called access and the Americans had been enormously helpful to us over the Falklands: logistically, satellites and Cap Weinberger who was an Anglophile and, of course, Mrs Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were basically soul-mates. They both thought that government was the problem, not the solution to the problem, they both believed in low taxation, they both believed that self-help was better than state-help. And so they got on like a house on fire. I went round to all the Chiefs of Staff, all four of them, before I went out

and said, "What did you learn from the Falklands?" And all of them in different words said the same two things. One was that our success was due to firm political direction of policy on the war from 10 Downing Street. They were all lost in wonder, love and praise for the Prime Minister. And the second one was that we didn't learn anything new but we re-learned a lot of old things that we had forgotten, in particular the primacy of men. Weapons systems are all very important but unless you've got first class people actually on them it's no good.

The next thing of real significance was March 23rd 1983 - it's in poker-work on my brain - when Ronald Reagan announced the SDI. Now this was greatly derided on this side of the Atlantic, wrongly in my view, but I managed to persuade Mrs Thatcher to take it seriously. Ronald Reagan said to his advisors, "OK, we've got Mutual Assured Destruction, we've got the deterrent but surely there must be a better way of protecting ourselves? Go and see if there's a way in which we can do this better." And they came up with SDI - a space based initiative of lasers and whatnot. And he announced it to an astonished world and everybody derided it and people omitted one thing which he constantly said and which his own advisors didn't awfully care about and it was that if he succeeded in finding a defence mechanism he would share it with the Russians. And he was never given enough credit for that. Now, the importance of it was not that they might have a Star Wars thing but that the Russians feared that they might and the Russians knew in 1983-4 that up to that time they had been able to match the Americans weapon-system for weapon system at a phenomenal cost to the civil economy which we have only later learned about. They knew that there was nothing more to squeeze from the civil economy so they could not match the Americans. So, effectively, Reagan made them 'cry Uncle' as the American phrase goes. Of course, Reagan didn't do it all by himself. At more or less the same time in 1984 Gorbachev came on the scene. Brezhnev had died a few years previously and George Bush went to his funeral, then Andropov came along and died and George went to his funeral and then Chernenko came along and died and George Bush went to his funeral, which gave rise to the phrase in Washington, "You die, I fly." But Gorbachev took over and here you had the first university-educated Secretary General of the Party - a man who knew or suspected (I don't think that even he knew) the extent of the degradation of the Soviet economy. He came to Britain as the leader of a Parliamentary delegation and saw Margaret Thatcher who said, "I can do business with this man." And she told Ron. So she was in great demand, particularly when Gorbachev became Secretary General; the President wanted to know why she'd formed this opinion that we could do business with this chap. She was right and eventually Ron

used his first term to build up the strength of the United States and used the second term 1985-88 to negotiate from strength. And, in fact, in the end he rode off into the sunset with Nancy having got the first nuclear weapons abolition treaty under his belt: the INF treaty. Ron is often remembered for the phrase "the evil Empire" but it was an evil Empire. He spoke the truth about it which the intelligentsia don't much care for. But his relationship with Margaret Thatcher was of great benefit to any Ambassador and certainly it was to me.

(END OF SIDE THREE)

One also saw the reality of the special relationship. Once again it depends a great deal on the chemistry between the President and the Prime Minister. The bureaucracies, particularly in Washington, aren't keen on it because they want a better balance but the plain fact is that when push comes to shove the Americans know who their reliable friends are and those who are less reliable. It's that plus the chemistry that makes the special relationship. We had another State Visit to the West Coast. By this time I was experienced in state visits so knew all about them. *Britannia* arrived from her visit to Mexico in San Diego and went all the way up the West Coast to Seattle. I remember it as one of the wettest state visits. As *Britannia* pulled up alongside in San Diego it started to drizzle and by the time the *Britannia* went to Canada from Seattle it was absolutely pouring and the only time it stopped raining was when the Royal Party were in Yosemite National Park and then the sun did come out from behind the clouds. One interesting part of that visit was that on the Sunday morning the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh went to church but in the afternoon it was arranged that a Ranger should take the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh around the Park. Well, they had been driving for some time and the Ranger was silent. So the Duke of Edinburgh said, "Aren't you going to tell us a little bit about this?" and the Ranger said, "I've been told not to speak unless spoken to."

The Reagans dined in *Britannia* in San Francisco on the 31st anniversary of their wedding. Ron had a marvellous way with words. He said in his speech that he'd promised Nancy a lot of things thirty one years ago but he never promised her this. He was a great President, he really was. He's greatly underestimated over here simply because he was a B-movie actor and the people of the left-leaning intelligentsia don't believe that a B-movie actor can make a great President. But he had a few simple ideas. One was that taxation was a bad thing and he wanted as little of it as possible. The other was that America must be strong and he succeeded in doing that. But more than that he was such a likeable person. Americans felt



comfortable with him at the White House. After Carter saying that there was a malaise in America Reagan told them "it's morning in America" and they loved it. And that was the leadership quality of the man. And so he did a great deal to make Americans feel good about themselves again. I was very lucky. The two times when I was in America, as Vice Consul in New York City in 1946 and Ambassador to Washington in 1982, I was happy to be able to be present at the time of the two greatest post-war Presidents, in my view: Harry Truman and Ronald Reagan. And I think that just as Harry Truman's reputation has risen over the years so will Ronald Reagan's. But then, after the supplemental extradition treaty, it was time to come home after four extraordinarily happy years. I came back by Concorde and a lot of flummery and once again piled into my eldest son's car to go into retirement for the second time and down to earth for good.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)