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## **Yale-UN Oral History Project**

William Mashler  
James S. Sutterlin, Interviewer  
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Larchmont, New York

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YUN TAPE  
WILLIAM MASHLER  
MAY 16, 1991  
LARCHMONT, NY  
INTERVIEWER, SUTTERLIN

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## Table of Contents

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### I. The Founding of Israel

Organization of Secretariat	1 - 8
Functioning of the Mediator	8 - 11
(including communications facilities)	
Functioning of Truce Observers	11 - 18; 19 - 25
Utilization of UN Guards	18 - 19
Murder of Count Bernadotte	24
Armistice Negotiations	26 - 45
Conciliation Commission	45; 48 - 51
Refugee Problem	46 - 48
Competence of Security Council and General Assembly	48 - 52
Role of Sir Robert Jackson	53 - 54
Soviet Involvement	54 - 55

### II. Ralph Bunche

Role and Character	56 - 64
--------------------	---------

718

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JSS        So, Mr. Mashler, I want first to express appreciation for your participation in this Yale Oral History Project on the United Nations. I would like to talk this morning about the various events connected with the establishment of Israel, the United Nations actions in that connection, and in particular also, the arrangements made to bring hostilities to an end between the Israeli and Arab states. Just to begin, could I ask you to indicate what your position was in the United Nations when these events occurred?

WM        I was in 1947, starting at the beginning of 1947, a junior political officer in the Department of Trusteeship and information on Non-Self-Governing Territories in which Ralph Bunche was top-ranking director, and in the number two position, the number one position having been held by Dr. Victor Hoo of China, as Assistant Secretary-General for that Department.

JSS        And how did that Department get involved in the Arab-Israeli question?

JSS

To the best of my knowledge it was coincidental and fortuitous - coincidental only in the sense that Palestine, under the mandate system, just as all the other mandates, was expected to be placed under trusteeship under Chapters 11 and 12 of the Charter. Because the Department of Trusteeship Non-Governing Territories was responsible for territories to be placed under trusteeship and for finalizing the negotiation together with the Fourth Committee and in the General Assembly of the trusteeship agreements, it was placed in the position of having formal responsibility for Palestine and Southwest Africa. Southwest Africa didn't come in for obvious reasons (we need not cover that). Palestine was already in an advanced state of political involvement in the whole issue of Jewish immigration and by the time 1947 came around, there was every indication that the British would be forced into a position where the trusteeship issue would not eventuate and, as a result, the issue was going to be a political one to be dealt with at different levels, including the Security Council and the General Assembly, although this was not very clear at the time. In that sense it was very muddled. The reason the issue came to Trusteeship was because formally it was a matter which was of primary concern to the Department of Trusteeship and Non-Self Governing Territories, and not Security Council affairs.

JSS This is how Hoo got involved, Ralph Bunche got involved.  
And how did it first come up so to speak, how did the  
issue surface in this framework?

WM You mean, in terms of the assignment of the issue? (JSS,  
yes) I cannot be entirely certain but I think in the  
senior staff meetings when the issue came up - and at the  
time you may recall that Arkady Sobolev (USSR) was the  
Assistant Secretary-General for Security Affairs and  
"Dragon" Protitch (Yugoslavia) was the top-ranking  
director. I think there must have been some discussion  
in these meetings and it was agreed that essentially the  
matter would first be assigned to us. Whether there was  
really any formal assignment, I doubt. I think most  
likely what happened was that like so many of these  
things, they were not assigned by design but by default.  
But I may be wrong on this because I was not privy to the  
discussions. I was a very junior officer, I might say,  
at the time, and was not privy to some of the decisions  
that were taken, and why they were taken. But looking  
back now through some long experience, I would say that,  
as in so many other cases, the issue was in all  
likelihood one of practicality. Sobolev was, considering  
everything - considering that he came out of the Stalin  
era - an amazingly decent and open man. I wouldn't say  
he was entirely open, but relatively speaking, he was a  
fairly reasonable man to deal with, and he was personally

a very nice man.

JSS And this was at a time when the Soviet Union took a very positive position on the Israel issue.

WM Partly because it was a colonialist issue and I think on colonial issues, the US and the USSR were for entirely different reasons on the same wicket.

JSS Now, there were quite a few negotiations and even differences between the United States and the United Kingdom with regard to Palestine and in particular, the question of Jewish immigration, before the British actually dropped the mandate and turned the matter over to the United Nations. Was the Trusteeship Department involved at all with this aspect of what was then the Palestinian question, that is, before the resolution on partition was adopted in the General Assembly?

WM Not really, not directly.

JSS So its role began with GA resolution 181?

WM That's right, I would say the involvement of the Department of Trusteeship was rather through personalities than through a formal process. In other words, the personalities of Victor Hoo who was regarded as an old-time diplomat, longtime diplomat, who was skillful and experienced who had already demonstrated these considerable skills in the negotiation of the Charter in San Francisco, and even before - and who was a very strong personality, where people were drawn into

the consultative process rather than drawn in as officials of a department that had nominally responsibility for mandates and trusteeships.

JSS We'll go ahead a little bit in history with the appointment of the Mediator. Ralph Bunche was appointed as Deputy Mediator from the beginning, isn't that correct?

WM No, he was principal secretary.

JSS Principal secretary. My question here is - did the staff support for the Mediator come from the Trusteeship Department, is that the way you became involved, or was it simply selected at random from the Secretariat?

WM Let's go through the several stages. One was the selection of Bernadotte. The Bernadotte choice was based (we needn't go into detail) on his record in the closing days of the war, his ability to negotiate difficult issues and the fact that he was a sivedo. One expected a great deal of Bernadotte, and he provided his own good name. Also he was head of the Swedish Red Cross and that in itself provided a certain measure of neutrality (whether real or imagined is not important) which made him an ideal candidate for the position, ideal, quote, end of quote. As it turned out, Bernadotte was a man of great integrity but, I would not say endowed with the largest degree of intelligence. But he was a man who was willing to go out and do battle. And I'd also like to

say here that, contrary to opinions elsewhere, my own distant and immediate relationship (and it was more distant than direct because I was also involved in all sorts of other things) but from my own recollections, and recounting the accounts of Bunche who often talked about him, he was not a man who could be taken in so easily. He listened, whether the judgment that he finally made was right, that's another story, but he was not a man who could be bought. I think his integrity was beyond question and I think he was also reasonably detached from the process so as not to be prejudiced one way or the other. He truly tried to get a balance into the process which ultimately, hopefully according to him, would lead to a reconciliation of views. That it didn't happen was due to a number of issues, largely due to his premature death. Bunche of course played a major role in helping Dag Hammarskjöld reach his goals. Now coming to the subsequent question which was essentially - your point was...

JSS

The support that Bernadotte had and subsequently...

WM

The support staff was almost entirely picked by the Secretary-General. Bernadotte brought in his secretary, Miss Barbro Wessel, and his adviser who had been with the Swedish Red Corp, Mr. Paul Mohn he also had a number of Swedish Military Aides. The principal players in the selection were Andrew Cordier - he was then executive secretary to the Secretary-General and did not hold

Assistant Secretary-General rank, he had the same rank as Bunche, he was also a top-ranking director, so they had equal rank and had known each other in the State Department so these people were picked by these two. There was also an executive officer in the Secretary-General's office and that was Leo Malania. Leo Malania was an interesting man. He was a Canadian, had not been born in Canada (although you wouldn't have known it - he came here as a child), was of Armenian origin, and he ended up as an Episcopalian minister, when he eventually left the United Nations. He was a very devoted man but his judgment was, I would say, not always of the most judicious kind and he made some real bloopers. However, he held a fairly powerful position, there being a very small Secretariat at the time - only a few hundred people in the Secretariat - and therefore, anybody who was in the Secretary-General's office exerted a good deal of influence on processes that were being evolved. Brian Urquhart, incidentally, at the time was not at all involved in the Palestine issue, not at all. He was assistant to the Secretary-General.

Anyway, so there were these three and Malania's role in the selection process was rather an executive one - he took the steps of making sure that the administrative arrangements were made so they were integrated into the process, were signed, and so on, all the bureaucratic

steps, he was very good at bureaucracy. From the point of view of the victims that he dealt with, he was terribly bad because nothing ever went right. But his heart was in the right place.

JSS

At that stage the Secretary-General was Trygve Lie and according to his memoirs, he took a very strong position in the belief that essentially that the Arab attacks had to be answered, otherwise the United Nations would fail as an organization. Were you aware of this, were you aware of the Secretary-General's attitude at the beginning of the war between the Arabs and Israelis?

WM

Only by indirection. The Secretary-General held himself rather aloof, as most Secretary-General's did, from the remainder of the staff, not even with that part of the staff that was intimately associated with his trusted entourage, of which Bunche, Cordier, and others were a part. So whatever information we received we got largely indirectly - occasionally we did have an opportunity to be present when the Secretary-General met with some of our principals but I don't recall that he offered any remarks in this direction. I think much of the information that you refer to comes from the Secretary-General himself and that I would say is authoritative, whether valid or not is another matter and I have no reason to question it. But it is a subjective judgment. Bunche never mentioned it, neither did Cordier - and I

might say, they mentioned very little regarding opinions offered, they were extremely discreet men. These were people who came out of a system which no longer exists today, where discretion was part of the trade.

JSS

That's a subject I want to get to, the importance of Bunche's status as an international civil servant in the work that he did. But before I get to that, I'd like to ask you to give any indication you can as to just how the mediator functioned, that is, when it was Bernadotte but also subsequently when Ralph Bunche took over. How did this work, the relationship with the Secretary-General's office, the relationship in the field?

WM

Well here I, again, I have to go back in time. When you really look at the communications as we know them today, we were so to speak, living in the Middle Ages. There wasn't even a telex. The main communication was by cable and cables were delayed considerably because - all this took place immediately after the war - many of the cables had to be relayed to and from the Middle East. To have cable communication meant that you had to go in stages through central stations that were just being established. There was one in Morocco that came into being in '49 or sometime like that. Communications were absolutely abominable. To make a telephone call was something you did rarely, partly because it was a very costly affair and then in those days, one didn't just

pick up the phone as one does today. Overseas telephone communications were partly by way of radio. So in a sense we were in a rather primitive age as far as communications were concerned. Much of the traffic that went through was by cable, partly by radio, we even used ham radios for relays. That was another story, we'll come to this a little later. Therefore a great deal of the responsibility rested on the people in the field and one did make on attempts to get through to consult on major issues, and one did - with great difficulty. It certainly wasn't an easy way of communicating.

JSS

Were code cables available at that point?

WM

Yes, Oh, this is a great story. This is where Malania outdid himself. When the staff of the mediator (apart from Bunche and Doreen Daughton who later became my wife) were selected, Bunche picked the first observers from among the secretariat. These included Bill Stoneman, Jaroslav Cebek-Habersky, Paul Cremona, myself, several others. And we all went out there as observers, to be assigned to various locations in the Middle East - Cairo, Suez, Haifa, Jerusalem, and so on, including Syria, Lebanon, Iraq.

JSS

The observers were connected to the mediator, or not?

WM

They worked directly under the mediator, under the mediator. Communications either did not exist or were poor where they did,. It was chaotic, and we were simply

brought there, dropped there and left to our own devices - that's a whole story in its own right. Malania then decided that we did need some kind of a code to protect confidentiality of communications. What he did was, he had purchased a couple of dozen Spanish-English-Spanish dictionaries. Now this brilliance is hardly to be exceeded - because if anybody, particularly the Israelis, saw a Spanish-English dictionary in the possession of anybody who didn't speak a word of Spanish, the first suspicion would be, what the hell are they doing with a Spanish dictionary? They knew of course when the first observer arrived that the dictionaries were coding "Devices". And the way it worked was, we used the words in numerical order on the page on which they appeared, so that if the word "intelligence" was the sixth word that was on the page, it was 6, and then the number of the page. And then we went on to the next word and so on and so forth, and the Israelis adopted the same method to decode everything that we sent while we were spending futile hours, trying to get a short message together and get it off. This is one of the unsung stupidities that were committed. Ultimately they did purchase - and that came substantially later - small coding machines, which anybody could purchase also. But you could feed in some kind of a code definition...

JSS

Right, which changed?

WM Which changed regularly. But everybody was wise to that and anybody who had a more advanced coding system simply put it in there and broke it within a matter of minutes. The U.S. Navy decoded our messages faster than we could with these miserable machines. But in a way, it did help us to keep a lot of information from the press.

JSS Where were you sent as an observer and how did this work?

WM I was sent, together with all the others, in May - in my case, to Haifa. I arrived in Haifa with nine military observers. These were American observers all of whom were officers in the armed forces of the US, including the Navy. The team head was Captain Eddy who was US Navy, Marine officers, Air Force officers, Army, and that was it.

JSS Now they were military observers?

WM Yes, military observers. Now we got to Haifa ...

JSS But there was still, just to be clear on this, there was still no organization in Jerusalem, no Truce Supervision Organization.

WM Oh, there was nothing, we were simply all sent on and they said "do what you have to do and figure out how you want to do it". We had no communications with Cairo where Bernadotte had his temporary headquarters. We had an American consul in Haifa with whom I made contact who also had great difficulty communicating with anybody because his equipment was out half the time. And the

only ones who were equipped in any way to help us were the British who were still there. They had a substantial military contingent out there which didn't evacuate until two weeks later. And when I went up to contact the British I didn't get exactly a welcome reception. However, they did on two occasions manage to get messages through to Cairo for me, I'll say that. But I really had no choice...

JSS And Count Bernadotte, just to be clear, was in Cairo at that time?

WM Was in Cairo, the temporary headquarters was in Cairo.

JSS So, just to pursue this a minute, Bernadotte being in Cairo was to a certain extent dependent on you and others in the field of Palestine to tell him what was going on in terms of military engagements?

WM Yes, yes. We did have a number of other people in Palestine who had come a little earlier because we had sent some people out in advance. One was Stavropoulos who was sitting in Jerusalem, and then there was John R. Reedman and Bill Iversen. They had been there earlier. There was also a Norwegian colonel, whose name I forget but we can get that later, who turned out later to be an agent of the Soviet Union. But this has very little bearing on the issue. The interesting thing is that we arrived (and this is an interesting story that you may want to have recorded). There was the press at the

airport and we were met by Harry Beylin who was the liaison officer of the Israeli government, had been a consular official in San Francisco briefly, and was of British origin. He was a rather nice man and he managed to help us out - get us to a hotel, get us set up. I remember the press asked us the question, how we were selected, and I was facetious enough to tell them that we were selected for our tact and diplomacy which was, of course, a lot of nonsense - we were picked because we were trusted and, as in so many cases, you pick people that you knew and that you knew would, in all likelihood, respond to the needs of the situation, and so on.

Now, one of the big problems was that we were supposed to go out on the line to observe the truce. What had happened was that, in their infinite wisdom, we had each been issued \$900 in American Express travelers checks. You know, when you start an operation of this kind even getting up to the lines, such as they were - there weren't really any military lines in the accepted sense, there were sort ...combat areas are strong points. .... In other words, there were areas in which combat took place, but it was not really a continuous line as there never is in combat anyway, except perhaps in World War I. So one went out and one had to visit, one needed transportation, one needed all kinds of other things, For which we needed money. So what I did was, I said to

WM

these nine observers, "hand over your money" - between us we had \$9,000. And I opened up a bank account in the Bank Leumi and used that money to defray costs. We hired taxis, and all kinds of other things - we had no administrative offices. We did have a secretary, Katy Seem was her name, a rather voluptuous lady who was very good and what I remember about her was the same as what I remember about Captain Eddy - that she drank huge amounts of whiskey and coffee. And I hardly ever saw either of them eat. Anyway, we used that money then to set up some kind of a means of administrative as well as transport system to get us where we supposed to go. We had no way, once we had sent someone out, to communicate with that person.

JSS Let me just be clear on this - this was after the so-called "second truce", is that right?

WM No, this was the first truce. We got in there a couple of days after it had started.

JSS I see, because it was to last I think only four weeks.

Wm It lasted exactly four weeks. We did had some liaison with the Israeli army. They were, I would say, not unhelpful but certainly did not volunteer to cooperate and we were distrusted because we were working on both sides of the line so it was quite obvious they weren't going to give us much information, or any more information than they had to. So the relationship

between the observer staff, including myself, and the Israelis was correct but certainly not close despite the fact that (this is something that is not commonly known) I was the first Secretariat member assigned to the area who was a Jew himself. I was well known as not being very sympathetic to Zionist causes - and that in itself caused me some problems later on.

JSS

Now, to continue a minute on the Arab side, with whom did you get in touch when you crossed the line so to speak to observe the situation? Were there officers on the Arab side who served as liaison officers, how did that work?

WM

Well, the line obviously was - there was an Israeli side and an Arab side and the Arab side, of course, varied on where you were - Jordanians, Egyptians, - there were some Iraqis there too on the Jordanian side. And on the Lebanese side there were no Lebanese troops but the irregulars, Palestine irregulars. We confined ourselves strictly to the Israeli line. In other words, the observer who would go, would go up to the Israelis, because the complaints would come from there that there had been an attack. And if by chance the Arabs had called in an observer to the same place they might just conceivably see each other, but it wasn't easy, particularly since we had no way of communicating with each other. There was no radio, there was no telephone,

there was nothing, and we couldn't even get through to Cairo. So we were entirely on our own.

Now about two weeks after we arrived, arrangements had been made prior to their arrival for the dispatch of additional observers and the assistance of the U. S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. This had been done through Bunche, Cordier, the US mission and the US, France and Belgium. Senator Austin was then ambassador to the United Nations. Before that there arrived a general who was in the Department of Public Information to set up communications. But that equipment for all of that came one sweet day when a naval captain appeared in our hotel in Haifa, announcing that he was a commander of the fleet that had been put at the disposal of the United Nations and would I please sign for ships, equipment and an assortment of us Marines. And he came with a bill of particulars, which included the auxiliary aircraft Palau, three destroyers and a French Corvette. He also provided 50 marines, in addition to which we received jeeps, trucks, equipment, and for the first time, communications equipment. Most of the marines that we got were essentially technical personnel who were either maintenance personnel, drivers and telegraphic communications people.

JSS And they set up shop there in Haifa.

WM We set up shop in Haifa and we set it up elsewhere. Well

I said to the captain, "I'm willing to sign for the equipment but I'm not going to sign for the bodies". That went somewhat against the grain. And shortly after, I think it was shortly after, there arrived from Cairo I think something like 50 United Nations guards to augment the observer force. These guards were as they stepped off the plane, I knew a good number of them, they were very nice fellows - were carrying pistols which Malania had obtained from the New York Police Department. The first thing I did was to confiscate all the pistols. I said, "My God, what are you going to do with all these pistols? We're not out here to shoot people, and if you do, that's the surest way to get shot." So I immediately took the pistols and all ammunition and locked them away. And then came of course the question of what do we do about deploying these "forces"? But then by that time, there was plenty of personnel from the military and we gradually got things organized. Captain Eddy who was in charge of the original observer group of nine, took hold of the situation and gradually got the whole thing spread out from Lebanon, Syria, both sides of the Palestinian line, and in the Gaza area.

JSS

I wanted to ask about the guards. Two things really: first, in the way of background, I believe that the Secretary-General at that point had the idea of establishing a constabulary to give some kind of security

in Palestine but this was not accepted. Instead these guards were mobilized. Now was this the beginning of the Field Service.

WM Field Service already existed because they had already been involved in the Greek border issue which preceded it. There was a field service - you see the Field Service served quite a number of other purposes because there were other missions in the field elsewhere. It expanded substantially. The head of it was a very able person, George Lansky who retired some few years ago but who really managed to put that show together admirably.

JSS He was already involved at that point?

WM Yes, he was one of the very early Secretariat members. He had many good qualifications. He had a very good personality, kept calm, had a good sense of humor, was a lawyer and an accountant at the same time, so he had all the right credentials. But he was a very good person for that job. He did it, I think, admirably over the many years that he had the job. And was the confidant of anyone because, without him, there was no peacekeeping force, if you can call any of these forces peacekeeping forces. Nor would there have been any other missions. He just did his job superbly.

JSS What did these guards do? You say they were deployed outward throughout the area, but what exactly did they guard?

WM We disposed of them fairly quickly and sent them back after a while because they were - they did, we did maintain the guards for administrative purposes and for things of that kind, but not really military observer purposes because we eventually had about 200-300 military observers provided by the Belgians, the French, and the US. There was still, while Bernadotte was still alive, a small hard core of staff officers from the Swedish armed forces, but they were really not part of the observer force as such. They were staff officers who "coordinated".

JSS So these observers really predated then the armistice agreements?

WM Oh yes, without them we couldn't have functioned. So we had the military observers in the field and they were put out in particular stations where they were sending back reports by any means they could. Of course we had transportation by that time. We did have some larger stations. The largest one was in Jerusalem. We could communicate in a net which we had established, based on Haifa. That was run by the US marines.

JSS Now were there similar headquarters on the Arab side in Damascus, for example?

WM Yes, yes there was.

JSS So that if there was a complaint from the Arab side they would call in the observers who had...

WM

One could do that, and that was done by radio telecommunications, by radio voice communication. I really don't recall but Morse code was used in most instances. It was easier on the Israeli side because we communicated from Haifa to Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. I'm not sure whether we used Morse code for the others because I don't think we had the wires up.

JSS

What was the security situation? And in that connection let me ask here - there was still no armistice agreements and therefore the truce was simply the line where the two sides had stopped fighting, right? So you had no borders so to speak to delineate, or did you? How did that work?

WM

We had established in Haifa the armistice headquarters, as we called it. That was maintained in the Haifa City Hall which had been made available to us. There we had a fair number of military observers who under Colonel Henderson and General William E. Riley had in the meantime been appointed to take charge of military truce supervision and played a major role in the armistice negotiations subsequently. We then set up a monitoring system with maps showing the truce line. We tried to define these lines as best we could, and believe you me, these were pretty motley armies - Desert Storm, or for that matter, were they remotely comparable to anything in World War II even at the most disorganized level. On the Lebanese side you had the irregulars, we didn't even know

who they were until they started shooting. So the lines were approximations but they were at least an indication of where you had to look. As time went by the definition of the lines became clearer but they were never definitive lines, never. And the violations - I have a file upstairs of the violations - but those exist also in the United Nations archives. There were hundreds, literally. They were cited and we signed the condemnations and we said "get back". But try to enforce it because what could never really be established was whether a violation had taken place, and by whom. These are allegations and I would say for the most part, few people were hurt in the process. There were occasions when some people were killed, some people were wounded, but I must say that the marksmanship of these gents on either side was pretty bloody awful and I think more people got shot by accident than by design.

JSS What kind of identification did you have - were there blue helmets?

WM No, we didn't have blue helmets then, we had blue armbands which said "United Nations" and we were issued passes, these were paper passes, in English, Arabic, and Hebrew signed by the mediator, requesting access and identifying us as part of the mediation staff. I still have mine.

JSS Now, what you did then was to send reports of alleged

violations of the truce to the mediator. Did this include any recommendations as to the ultimate line which might be desirable between the two sides?

WM

No, not really. First of all, the first truce only lasted four weeks. The second truce lasted longer after a fashion, so to speak. There were major violations, there were these big flareups - one was along the line in Lebanon, there was the Gaza flareup, that was in October, which was a big blowup. What one did in these two truces was, to the best of the abilities of the observer corps, to contain the situation and not let it get out of hand. One negotiated these things by bringing the two commanders of the two sides involved in that particular area and try to talk them into a sense of reasonableness. And eventually, as things calmed down this was achieved to a lesser or greater extent, I emphasize lesser. But there wasn't much movement. The main thing was not to let the situation get out of hand particularly when you had a conflagration of the larger kind. And that was fairly well handled. And these people became rather skillful in negotiating. As a matter of fact I should say here that the French were particularly useful in this area. I by no means wish to say that the Americans and the Belgians were less so but many of the French had served in North Africa and a number of them spoke Arabic. That was very helpful.

JSS Was the border with Lebanon clearly delineated at that point?

WM Yes.

JSS Because there was some indications that at times, the Hagannah - the Israeli forces - went into southern Lebanon already then. Was that part of the violations of the truce?

WM Strictly speaking, yes, but we didn't have anybody to negotiate with because the Lebanese army was not involved. The Lebanese army I think consisted, if I recall - and again my memory is faulty - I think they had at most one or two battalions of armed forces. And I would say that the relationship between Israel and (such as it was in the very early days) Lebanon was not a bad one. I can tell you, we did watch very carefully the Israelis got their Chrysler and GM cars on big barges which would get right down to the border where the Lebanese tug boat could be detached and the Israeli one would be attached. And they pulled the barges down the coast where they were then unloaded in Haifa or Jaffa/Tel Aviv. And also of course, the fact that the fiction had been maintained that the majority of the Lebanese were Christians. It was different, it was not - I often wondered, and this is my own speculation, whether the Arab issue was as important as the Muslim one.

JSS Count Bernadotte submitted one report to the General

Assembly which was relatively optimistic in terms of the possibilities of a settlement. In the field, as you were observing and reporting, did you have a sense of optimism that ultimately a settlement could be reached between the Israelis and Arabs at that time?

WM No. I wrote to my parents, I think my mother before she died had occasion to mention and remind me of - and I said, "By the time I'm an old man this issue will be as alive as it is today, only more so." I think I have the letter here someplace.

JSS What was then the reaction among the whole staff at the time of the murder of Count Bernadotte?

WM Oh it was a very great shock, as with so many other things, with so many other areas of human experiences. Whether it is death in the family or an assassination, one always feels that this happens to somebody else only. When it strikes close to home, it hurts - and it hurts hard. You would never never have expected anything of the sort in the case of a man who was obviously a man who you might say was considered to be a man of peace. You know, Bernadotte was a very nice man, an amiable man, a gentle man and people liked him. Of course many of them had never seen him but those of us who saw him from time to time had a great deal of affection for the man. He tried the best of his ability - whether he was good at it or not is not important. He was a man who was certainly,

and of whom it could be said, that he was dedicated. That he had convictions, that he tried to stand up in Hungary against the Germans as he did elsewhere, wherever he was called upon. His wife we knew very well, she was American, she was a Manville, she was with him. Now it was a great shock, and the manner in which it happened well - this has been described, I don't think I need to go into it, but it was largely and accidentally due to my wife that Bunche was spared. (JSS: Really?) Yes, because my wife was English and she was travelling on a British passport and the Israelis of course had no use for the Brits. And Bunche - this was a couple of days before the General Assembly was to start - Bunche came in from Lebanon, flew in to Haifa. On that very date the military crew at Haifa airport which also checked the passports, had been changed, they didn't know who she was and they didn't know much about Bunche himself. And they wouldn't let her in and there was a long delay and Bunche raised all kinds of hell and it took a while to get the issue resolved. And he was to meet Bernadotte in Jerusalem but because of the delay Bunche had to stay in Haifa because he also had to talk to some of us. By which time Bernadotte who had an appointment, proceeded with Colonel Serot, General Lundstrom, and Frank Begley, who was the security man to Government House and on the way there he and Serot got shot and killed. By the time

Bunche arrived in Jerusalem Bernadotte was dead and Bunche was the acting mediator. But had Bunche not been delayed in Haifa, he would not have been alive and things would probably have turned out quite differently.

JSS So in effect Bunche was held up in Haifa, then?

WM He was held up in Haifa.

JSS Going ahead to the next stage, and that is the stage of the truce, of the armistice negotiations, how did this get started in your recollection and what then became the relationship between the observers in the field and the negotiations which ultimately took place in Rhodes?

WM The process by which the negotiations were started was one which did not take place in the area itself. This was done through the United Nations in which Bunche kept going back and forth. It was a touch and go situation and I need not go into it because I was not privy to the actual steps that led finally to it. But there were a number of occasions where they were virtually at a point where they said, "well, let's forget about it, this isn't going to come off." And at the last minute, it did come off. There was also a good deal of - I think you will find that in Urquhart's book - you will also find it in other records - there was a good deal of antagonism between Bunche and Sir Robert Jackson who usurped a lot of power in the office he held at the time...

JSS That was as special assistant to the Secretary-General?

WM

Yes. He was not all that he was cracked up to be. He had certain sterling qualities, but when it came to political issues I would say he was not probably "not at the top of the class". He certainly "exercised" his power in those days. Trygve Lie I would say was a man who certainly by that time had acquired a surfeit of jealousy because one of his underlings was getting more publicity than he was getting. Yet, Bunche was the epitome of correctness. He maintained a very correct stance toward the Secretary-General and the issue of bringing the parties together was his main concern and a very difficult one. When they finally did agree to negotiate, it started in Rhodes in early January and it was the Israelis and the Egyptians...

JSS

The Egyptians were the first, right?

WM

Were the first. Trans-Jordan, as it was then known (and Abdullah was the king at the time) was the second. Then came Lebanon and finally the last was Syria. Now only the Jordanian and Egyptian agreements were negotiated by the Israelis in Rhodes. The others were negotiated in the field and in fact, Bunche did not negotiate the Lebanese-Israeli nor the Syrian-Israeli agreements, these were negotiated by General Riley on behalf of the mediator. By that time Bunche had returned to New York and supervised the work in the field from there.

WM

But the first ones with Egypt were done in Rhodes?

JSS They were done in Rhodes and there we had one might say great help from the Americans because we had a destroyer right in the harbor and they did all the relaying of all the information to the Secretary-General, to various parties. They even relayed to the Israelis and to the Egyptians as I recall because the communications in Rhodes, because of the war, were non-existent.

JSS And were you transferred to Rhodes at that point?

WM Yes, I came to Rhodes in January 1949.

JSS What actually was your function there?

WM I was assistant the Bunche, I was a sort of general factotum (JSS: For Bunche?) For Bunche. In fact we all were. You know, in those early days in the UN if you talked to anybody about job descriptions they would think you're crazy. You did what needed to be done. Of course there were people like Oscar Schachter, Schreiber and Stavropoulos who were in the UN Legal Department and their roles were to give advice on the legal framework which needed to be developed within which all these things would take place. But they went far beyond that. Their opinions on the political issues were sought as well as on any number of other issues.

JSS Not Oscar Schachter?

WM He wasn't there because he only dealt with other matters. Oscar Schachter was not at all involved. Neither Schachter nor Schreiber were involved, the only one who

was involved was Stavropoulos.

JSS He was there as a legal advisor...

WM Yes, and he was a very political animal himself. You know, having been in the Greek government in exile and all that, he was pretty savvy in the art of politics. Whether he was as objective as he might have been is another story but he was very good, very loyal, extremely loyal - whatever his thoughts, one way or the other, he was extremely loyal. And that was incidentally one enormously important issue in the negotiations. Bunche was not only a very skillful negotiator but he was a man who attracted the loyalty of each and every person who worked for him. They all adored him. I think the people that he negotiated with instinctively liked him. Now I wouldn't say that they necessarily trusted him, I don't think the Israelis trusted anybody, and for that matter neither did the Arabs. But if there was any one particular person whom they trusted to do the right thing and whom they could latch onto because he exuded a personality that was intelligent and likable, it was Bunche.

JSS How did the actual negotiating process work as you saw it?

WM At that point I coined the phrase, "this was the only nuthouse run by its inmates". This was, how should I describe it best, it was shuttle diplomacy between rooms,

between wings of buildings. We had put the Egyptians in one wing, the Israelis in another wing and we were in the center part of the building. And essentially one got one side and tried out a proposal, and then one got the other side and tried it as if we had never talked to the other one and then one could gradually determine how these things fitted together. Let me say this about the negotiations. Of all the books that have been written - or will be written - one thing I would say characterized these negotiations. Most of it had to do with commas, periods and semicolons. In the end the agreements didn't differ substantially from the drafts that were first put before them and like everything else in the Middle East (and I suspect this was true even at the time of the Carter negotiations for the release of the hostages) nothing in the Middle East is ever negotiated quickly. It is like dealing in a bazaar and bargaining over a carpet. I think this is a hell of an analogy but it is a correct one.

JSS

Now you said the drafts that were put performed them - were these drafts then prepared by Bunche and his staff?

WM

Yes, they had been prepared by them and mind you, there was no precedent for that. Basically what these drafts - and you've seen them - what these drafts essentially contained was a freezing of the lines as they were at the time we finally signed the agreement, because until then

they kept being adjusted. They took into account some of the sensitivities of the two parties - such as the Al Faluja pocket issue was to be resolved in terms of withdrawal of Egyptian troops, and so on and so forth. These were all issues on which enormous amounts of time was spent because ultimately, and this is where Bunche was so good, I've watched him in a number of situations, he managed to give the impression that it was their (the parties') idea.

JSS Yes, that's what I wanted to ask you because in a good bit of the literature it indicates that one of Bunche's strong points was that he did not try to insert his own ideas.

WM Exactly, that was a major element in his success, this is why people liked him so much. See, there were two people I worked for in the United Nations who had similar characteristics although there were very different people. One was Ralph Bunche the other was Paul Hoffman. When you walked into their office or into their home and they talked to you, you had the impression that you were the only person in the world that mattered and any person who has the ability to create that kind of an impression has many strikes in his favor.

JSS But just to clarify this point then - in fact the armistice agreements that were reached, basically they originated with the mediator or with the United Nations

side?

WM

They originated with the United Nations side and there was a great deal of input of course from the observer corps, from the legal people - there was wide consultation. I mean, look, let's face it - people like Henri Vigier who was a very skillful individual and had a long history with the League of Nations and the United Nations was a first class professional. And, of course, there were the inputs from the parties concerned.

JSS

Was he in Jerusalem at this point?

WM

Oh, no. He came afterwards, Vigier came from New York as part of the Mediator's staff.

JSS

He was part of the team...

WM

Part of the team. Part of the team were Henri Vigier, John Reedman, Constantine Stavropoulos, Taylor Shore, Doreen Daughton, and myself. There were a number of others - there was administrative staff, Victor Mills, and several others who were replaced from time to time. But it was a tight, relatively small staff in Rhodes. One wanted to keep it small because you didn't need all that much staff. But you did need people who were able to draft and he did need people with whom let us say he could try on ideas and you know, have advocates at the same time - devil's advocates - to see what you accepted, what you didn't accept, the issues that you could raise and issues that you shouldn't raise. You know, this also

became clear, as you learned the idiosyncracies of the personalities of the two negotiating teams. That was a very difficult thing because there were some very complex people, with deep suspicions. The Israeli suspicions were twofold: there were the suspicions that are a part of the nature of the Middle East, so to speak, and there were people who had gone recently through the process of gaining independence the hardest way, having to fight not only the Arabs but primarily the British and convincing the world opinion of the efficacy of the state. So they had been through a whole series of events which made them extremely suspicious about anybody. In short, in the Middle East, suspicion is part of life.

JSS

And Bunche had to find the way to overcome that?

WM

And we did this by some very interesting means. First of all, one of the things we did was to deformatize the process of negotiation, at least in the social relationships. There were three activities which led to deformatization - one was swimming, because we were at the beach and you had to get out of this mess once in a while. We were in there with them 18 hours a day, And Bunche in particular - you know, you really stop functioning properly. Bunche always functioned, how he did it, I don't know. Probably the excitement - a bit of ego, a bit of everything and his personality. But he always worked like that, even in New York, he was always

a man who would spend more time in the office than anywhere else. So it was the beach, but the two most important tools were the billiard table and the pingpong table and this is where we got these guys to play billiards and play pingpong. And suddenly they started talking to each other and they talked about things that had little to do with the armistice. Most of them were military men anyway and they talked about experiences. And suddenly discovered that they all washed with water and despite their differences were still human. Now this may be oversimplifying it, but I don't think it is. People are basically simple when it comes down to the essentials of life. And that helped and that was part of the process that finally defused somewhat the tension that was there.

JSS

Now you said that you had the Egyptians in another wing, but it is frequently said that actually one of the important achievements of Rhodes was to get them to the same table. Did this happen, and how did it happen?

WM

Well, the table was more fictitious, like King Arthur's Round Table - I wonder if it was round, I wonder if it was a table, there probably was more ale than table there. But the table was rather fictitious in the sense that we got them into the same hotel but you can't say we were shackled up together. The table came really last - it came first and it came last, there was very little

table talk in between. There were a few consultations where they sat together and where discussions did take place at the table. Most of the negotiation was done with one delegation at a time, and then with another delegation in Bunche's office in the hotel, and then eventually as the issues were narrowed down they were adjusted in terms of redrafting of articles, etc. which didn't involve a great deal. But when you have a situation like that, every word becomes important, even when it seems to be totally unimportant. By the time you read it now - I've forgotten what and why certain things were recommended - but when you read it now you come to the conclusion it doesn't really look very different from the beginning. You're agreed on where you're going to be and what you're going to move and what you're going to adjust. Yet the agreements held for a long time, it held from '49 to '67. That's a hell of a long time - 18 years, that was a remarkable thing. So it was a military agreement in a political context ...

JSS It was really between the two military forces?

WM Well it was and it wasn't because you had people there from the Foreign Office ..

JSS On both sides..

WM On both sides. It was a - yes it was a military thing, and no it wasn't a military thing. It was a melange of things. It was an agreement between the government of

Egypt and the government of Israel, the government of Trans-Jordan and the government of Israel, and so on down the line, who agreed on an armistice agreement. The fact that the military signed it in no way detracted from the fact that these were international agreements which had a lasting effect. In a sense they implicitly gave recognition to Israel. The fact that they signed for the first time established that four Arab governments recognized the existence of Israel, de facto, like it or not. Whether they recognized it diplomatically didn't matter but there was no longer any question that they were there. That was the great achievement after all of that period and so much emerged from that.

JSS

In that connection one, in fact the overriding, objective as I understand it of the armistice negotiations and the agreements was to facilitate a transition from the truce that existed to permanent peace. Was this objective of permanent peace, was this in the forefront of people's minds as they sought to negotiate the armistice itself?

WM

Looking back I would say no, certainly not. I would say, at that time after you've been through this tedious and really debilitating process of negotiating over minutiae in order to get an agreement, there came a time when you wished to hell it was over and you got out of there. After that, let somebody else worry about it and I think Bunche felt the same way about it. We never talked about

it but I think all of us were getting pretty testy at the end of the day. And when it came to meeting the Jordanians and the Israelis the only novelty was that you dealt with different personalities again because you dealt with those dealing with that particular area. But basically, it came down to the same kind of argumentation.

JSS Was there a difference in the atmosphere in negotiations that took place with the Egyptians and with the Jordanians, for example?

WM No, no, the atmosphere was pretty good.

JSS But it was essentially the same?

WM Essentially the same. Completely different personalities but I would say things went on in a very civilized manner. There was very little acrimony. There were the usual accusations, you know, they weren't negotiating in good faith. I mean, there were always some accusations made. But by and large people behaved very well.

JSS Now when the negotiations were under the direction of General Riley rather than Bunche - that is, directly - was the support staff the same, in other words, but did you move ....

WM Some, Vigier was a superb thinker and negotiator. There were also some of the military people who had been present in Rhodes from the observer staff, some of the senior officers and they went out with Riley, and of

course Riley had been there all the time.

JSS Riley had been in Rhodes all the time?

WM All the time, he was privy to all the discussions because it was a military matter so Riley was there. There was quite a number of officers whom I didn't mention but these I really won't go into this because they're ...

JSS They're part of the record. But I did want to ask a question in this connection because, again, it's often said that Bunche's success was in part due to his status as a completely neutral, objective international civil servant rather than a representative of any particular country. When General Riley took the leading role in the subsequent negotiations, did that change - I mean, was there really any problem? Riley was obviously American...

WM I'll be very candid. I wasn't there. I wasn't at the negotiations conducted by Riley with the Syrians and the Lebanese. But Riley was a, by definition of Irish extraction, he was a smooth character but he had a vicious temper. My God, could he blow up, he could really blow up. But one thing that man learned, how to control his temper. We noticed that - it was quite a remarkable thing. He really kept himself under control partly because he knew (a) he respected Bunche, (b) he made a career, he was ultimately promoted in stages from brigadier general to lieutenant general in the marines.

Not bad, considering he didn't hold command during that whole period. But he did it because, he got it because he made a very major contribution and he learned well how to handle and control himself. Funnily enough, I would have expected that he might have given vent to his anger occasionally but from what we heard, he kept going along without ruffling his Irish temper. Of course Vigier was with him and Vigier was a very formal French diplomat. Now he was of the old school, "they don't make them like that any more." And there was no fooling around with him. Vigier rarely cracked a smile. He had a sense of humor but he kept it well disguised.

JSS

And Vigier around then was with Riley?

WM

Yes, Riley. And since he had the full confidence of Bunche, Riley I think implicitly knew he couldn't fool around. And also, he had at that point the realization of having responsibility for making the negotiations to be successful. There were two precedents for successful signatures.

JSS

Just one technical question here. I'm not sure it comes out in the record any place. Was General Riley's status - in the course of these negotiations at Rhodes and subsequently - the status of a United Nations official, seconded from the US marines, or not?

WM

He was, strictly speaking he was.

JSS

He was?

WM Strictly speaking, he was. He came entirely under the authority of the United Nations. Yes, it's a point that if you were to talk to Schachter and some of these people they may argue over it on legal grounds. But in effect a secondment.

JSS Now you mentioned the importance of the observers. How did their information - in what sense did they feed into this process?

WM They sent reports.

JSS I asked that because ultimately the mediator submitted a report after the completion of the armistice agreements in which recommendations were made with regard to some changes in the territorial lines, including I think the switch of the Negev from the Israeli side to an Arab side. On what was that based as far as you know? Was that based on reports from the field? What figured into Bunche's conclusions?

WM You mean in the original armistice negotiations?

JSS Subsequently there was final report submitted after the negotiations were completed in which he made certain recommendations on territorial changes.

WM Yes, you're right, I'm really not quite sure. I'm really not quite sure at this time. I would suspect that, as in all these lines that have been drawn, one didn't deal with teams of surveyors, and there were no trenches or anything of that sort. I suppose that as time went by -

and observers were there all the time, that is UNTSO, which still exists - nothing ever goes out of existence in the UN.

JSS I think it existed but it wasn't active at this point.

WM I think there was subsequent information that came in requiring some minor adjustments but I don't think that was of great consequence. And it was mentioned in the reports. Things happened also over which you have very little control. You have changes in personnel, changes in staff, military staff. If you ask me what specifically it was based on, I don't recall, I just don't recall.

JSS There's one other general question I have about the negotiations, again, that this relates to an image rather than a fact. It's often suggested that the Israelis outsmarted the Arabs in the course of the Rhodes negotiations. Not ultimately, perhaps, to their benefit. What was your impression on that, then and even now in retrospect?

WM I would say - the Israelis had more at stake than the Arabs. I would say, again, one has to transpose oneself back in time - they had fought a war without benefit of much military equipment against superior equipment of the Arab forces. For them it had been what one might describe as an improved bow and arrow type of a war. I've never seen so damn many different types of rifles

they had. How they managed to supply themselves with ammunition is something in itself. I don't know how they managed to do all that, how they dealt with their logistics. They got equipment from wherever they could get it. They had no tanks, the only tanks they got they stole from the British. There were two tanks that they swiped on the day the British left. They drove them down the main road from Haifa to Tel Aviv and the British were looking everywhere for them except on that road because they didn't believe they would take them down on it. They were the only tanks that they had. They had homemade armored vehicles which they manufactured by welding steel plates in front and around trucks. Artillery pieces they hardly had. They had a lot of machine guns, they had mortars, but the first four artillery pieces that they got - and they got them probably from the Czech's, I don't know who gave them to them - they were deployed at Mishma Hayarden up on the Syrian border. The first shot they fired blew up the Syrian headquarters which was pure luck. So there wasn't much - they were desperate, but they had brains, determination and organization. And I'm not suggesting that the Arabs didn't have the brains but they sure as hell didn't have any organization. And they had, the Israelis had, at least a very tightly knit organization that had been in existence in the form of the Jewish

Legion during the war. A lot of people who were in there helped them, there a number of British Jewish officers there were a number of American officers including Colonel Marcus who was later killed. These were people who had substantial military experience and who were able to organize. The Arabs were a shambles for the most part, except for the Jordanians and even the Jordanians weren't really all that well led. You would have thought that Glubb Pasha was a good leader. Evidence of what happened on that front does not suggest that he was, but maybe that had to do with Colonel Lash who was the most significant field commander, he was a British officer. He was good. But basically the leadership of the Arab legion wasn't all that hot although they were probably the best organized.

JSS But in the negotiations themselves was there any sense that the Israelis were getting the better of the negotiations?

WM Oh yes, they were fine, they never missed a trick. But then they had been against the wall for so long, they had learned how not to miss a trick.

JSS But in a sense then it was an achievement then of Bunche in order to prevent this from destroying the prospects of agreement?

WM Oh yes, certainly. And again I would say that Bunche combined these rare qualities of diplomatic skill,

persistence in the face of all odds being against him, and charm. And he played that skill to the hilt. And from him I think I've learned one lesson and that is one that I repeat to anyone who is willing to listen. Be an optimist, it costs nothing - he never said it, I said it, but this is the conclusion I reached from his efforts.

JSS

As a result of the armistice agreements the mixed armistice commissions were established. Can you say anything about the background, how did they begin to function, how were they made up?

WM

They were made up - this was provided for in the agreements - of designated officers from both sides and under the chairmanship of Riley (then) and his designated officers. And they would meet regularly. They developed procedures for meeting. They certainly met when there were major violations of the armistice lines. And generally speaking, that mechanism worked very well. I think it was that mechanism which, apart from other issues, was a powerful element which in large measure militated in favor of the success of the long peaceful period along the lines - from '49 to '67. Not entirely, but in large measure.

JSS

Now the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization already existed in Jerusalem at that point.

WM

Yes, well that was merely a headquarters. Of course it was not merely a headquarters but it provided the

framework within which all this was being organized. But the period from May '48 to the conclusion of the Rhodes agreements, because the other two were not completed until July - Syria, I think, signed I think in July, that was really the crucial period. After that it was strictly maintenance.

JSS July, you're right, Syria was July.

WM It was strictly maintenance after that, maintenance of the mechanism that had been set up. Until that time it was really formulating the means by which the mechanism could function and continue to have credibility.

JSS Right. And actually at that point then the functions of the mediator were terminated and transferred to the Conciliation Commission.

WM Conciliation Commission, which was envisaged to basically to achieve a more permanent peace, and that was done under Azcarate, a former Spanish diplomat. There were other mechanisms that were also in place and this was under Reedman. There was the office for the disposal of Palestinian property, and all that sort of thing, in fact a number of things. But these were not part of the armistice issue, they were part of the broader picture of the Palestine problem.

JSS Yes, and just to clarify one point there. The refugee question became very important in terms of the Conciliation Commission's activities. That question did

WM

not figure in the armistice talks, did it?

Well no, it certainly didn't figure in the armistice talks but there was an interesting event. It was, this is to my best of my recollection, it took place a day or so after Bernadotte was killed. And the Bernadotte report was being finalized, it was virtually complete, and it had been drafted by Bunche together with Vigier and a number of others. One of the issues that came up was what to do with the refugees because there were refugees on both sides. There were the Jews who were living in Arab states and who were coming under increasing pressure because of the growing antagonism to them and were eager to get out. There were the Palestinians, who had been dislocated - by whose fault, that's an issue that's an open question. And here I would like to say - even though I always felt, despite the fact that I'm Jewish, I had no strong feelings one way or the other about the guilt or the responsibility. I have come to the conclusion that despite all that has been said in Britain - I was there - there was as much fault on the Palestinian side, their leaving, as there was pressure from the Israelis to make them leave. And I think they were as scared as anybody else would be were they in that position of what might happen but it's not proven that it would have happened. And a lot of them left before they had to leave. I'm not at all convinced

that the Israelis are entirely guilty in having scared them out of the country. That they sure as hell didn't make them too welcome, that is true, but I am not at all convinced there wasn't an overwhelming fear on the part of the inhabitants to leave as there was a good deal of help to exploit that by the Israelis who have never been known to be shy about things of that kind. So.... but there was this issue that came up and there was a meeting that took place in the evening. Stavropoulos was there and Vigier was there and Reedman, myself and some of the others. The issue was raised by Stavropoulos who proposed an exchange of populations. This was a discussion that went on for hours and everybody that finally fell asleep. The only three that were awake were Stavropoulos, Bunche and myself. The issue for Bunche was, "Over my dead body is there going to be an exchange of populations without the consent of those to be exchanged." And being very junior, I only intervened that once, and it was not a very polite thing to do. But I did remind Stavropoulos who was a Greek what had happened after World War I in exchange of populations in his part of the world and the disastrous effects it had had. And Bunche finally prevailed. He said, "I will not go for that. If the issue has to be faced it will have to be faced as a humanitarian issue which we will have to deal with. But not as a deal "I'll take yours and you'll

take ours." And I think that was the right decision. The other one may have been more practical at the time, I doubt very much that had it been adopted, that the situation would be any different and the PLO would have existed anyway because I don't think that the Arabs would have ever accepted any deal to exchange populations.

JSS In any event, it didn't figure in the armistice.

WM It didn't figure but it was part of the mediation effort from which the armistice negotiations were the only successful element, the main successful element, that emerged.

JSS And it became part of the problem when the Conciliation Commission took over. I want to ask in that connection, what was then the relationship between Bunche and his staff as he stepped out of the role of mediator, and the Conciliation Commission as it supposedly took over some of the same functions?

WM Oh, he was always available, he was of course - he continued to be involved until practically the day he died in the Palestine issue. I think Bunche had one abiding hope, that the whole damn thing would blow away because I think he was eager to do other things. You know, there comes a point that when you regurgitate the same thing and basically in the Middle East you regurgitate the same thing, like the camel does - unless you have the patience of Job (and he almost did, but not

quite) - he had other things in mind that needed doing. And he saw the hopelessness of the frozen position that one faced.

JSS

But the Conciliation Commission, did it have the advantage of any of the same support from the Secretariat?

WM

Well yes, they had plenty of support but let it be said, success depends on the individual and a personality and Azcarate just didn't have the personality nor the charisma. The thing is, Jim, that there were a number of notable successes in the United Nations which had to do with personalities. I think Azcarate - I in no way wish to impugn his abilities, his personality, or anything of that sort, was a perfectly honorable and able man. But he was an old-line diplomat of Spanish nationality, a traditionalist, which tells you a great deal, and extremely formal. The great success that Ralph Bunche achieved was in some considerable measure due to the personality that he had which was one that had a formal sense of informality, if you will. He was an American who appeared on the scene from nowhere and who had all the right qualities to get people to talk to each other. He lacked the stuffiness of the traditional diplomat. And he had the good fortune to have had the brains and the tenacity to be successful in that process. Not everybody has it. He was lucky and he always said so.

Much of it of course had to do with plain luck, if you will. But much of it of course had to do with this combination of characteristics that he had.

JSS

Coming back to the Conciliation Commission, in fact, there was no such outstanding personality here, quite apart from the fact that a more difficult stage had perhaps been reached?

WM

It was in effect far more difficult because when you talk about conciliation you talk about permanence and an armistice is by definition a temporary process. It turned out that the temporary process was more permanent than the conciliation part because the conciliation effort collapsed almost at the beginning because 1) everybody was so exhausted from and pleased with achieving the armistice that they figured - I don't know if they figured - that a lot of the energy and the novelty had gone out of the activity. And 2) it coincided with a whole lot of other things that had been happening in India and Pakistan. Pretty soon Korea came on the scene in 1950 and by that time the armistice had achieved its own permanence in a sense. These things one can of course only speculate on but given the perspective of time - and we're talking here about almost half a century - I think would bear out the judgment that conciliation at that time was something that one kept in hopeful anticipation but in reality, it just wasn't on.

JSS Now I want again to return to the position of Trygve Lie....

WM Also, may I say, with regard to conciliation that we're not talking about a formal process here. We're talking about the very changes that had taken place in the Middle East as the direct result of the existence of Israel. Farouk had fallen, Abdullah was dying, Syria and Lebanon were sharpening the differences between themselves. Iraq was changing, the king had fallen. Now these things just didn't happen. They were parts of the leftover of the colonial system, they were partly the result of changes that had been introduced into the region and changes that had taken place in the world as a whole after World War II. So these things all have to be taken together, they need to be reflected in the assessment of the kind of issues that had to be faced in subsequent years. I think that this was never fully appreciated.

JSS In terms of the work of the Conciliation Commission. Now want to ask again about the role of the Secretary-General, Trygve Lie. His name doesn't appear very much in connection with the armistice negotiations or even with the Conciliation Commission. Was there direct contact, was there any direction to the field from Trygve Lie during the armistice negotiations? How was that handled?

WM Well that was a very peculiar thing, it's a good thing

you asked. It's one thing I was going to mention before. The interesting thing was that I think it was the only time in the history - no, it's not the only time, it has happened on one other occasion in the case of Zimbabwe in Bernard Chidzero - this is the only time where Bunche, by an accident of history as a staff member of the United Nations Secretariat was appointed by the Security Council as Acting Mediator. As such he had a dual capacity. He was responsible as a politically appointed acting mediator by the Security Council to report to the Security Council. At the same time he was the Secretariat member responsible to the Secretary-General. That had never happened before so - talking about schizophrenia - he handled this very well. And therefore Trygve Lie was not really, for purposes of the negotiations, the primary reporting official, it was the Security Council. And Bunche didn't have to clear much with the Secretary-General. I will say that Bunche, being the kind of man he was, was a very correct man who always told the Secretary-General what he was doing. But strictly speaking, his responsibility was to the Security Council.

JSS

That's an interesting point. There had been some difficulty, constitutional questions, as to the relative power of the General Assembly and the Security Council in dealing with the Palestinian problem. But it was clear

in the negotiations that Bunche then was in fact the man of the Security Council and not the General Assembly.

WM That's right. Well, of the General Assembly too because everything that came from the Security Council also went to the General Assembly and on occasion he did report to the General Assembly. But there was a lot of confusion because the mediator had originally been appointed by the General Assembly.

JSS That's right, under a General Assembly recommendation.

WM He was responsible to the Security Council for the maintenance of peace and security. You know, when it comes to the formality of these things they were loosely handled, and I would say, opportunistically handled. But it didn't matter, as long as it worked.

JSS But Trygve Lie did not seek to interfere then...

WM No. The only time somebody interfered, it was [Sir Robert Jackson] who asserted his power and once instructed Bunche to come back on behalf of the Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General didn't even know about this. There was a hell of a row over this. Jacko could be a menace.

JSS Sir Robert Jackson..

WM Sir Robert Jackson could be a menace. He was certainly in those days.

JSS Now actually the Secretary-General hadn't utilized him earlier to deal directly with the British government in

connection with the first resolution on partition. I assume from what you're saying then that Sir Robert Jackson (he was not "Sir" then at that time) but Commander Jackson....

WM Commander Jackson..

JSS Commander Jackson at that time continued an interest from the Secretary-General's office in the Middle East and in the negotiations.

WM Jackson appeared in Rhodes one day and Bunche in no uncertain terms told him to buzz off. (JSS: Really?) Yes. He didn't need any advice on how to run his operation. Jackson was there for a few days and was never seen again. No one really knew why he had come.

JSS But he would have come there representing the Secretary-General?

WM Strictly speaking, yes. Bunche to the very end had very little use for Robert Jackson. Bunche was one of these people - you crossed him once and, forget it. He was a man who could cope with anybody without much problem, but there were 3 or 4 people who never made it again with him. Once crossed, that was it.

JSS Now there's one element we haven't mentioned here and that is the Russian element. The Department of Security Council Affairs in the Secretariat was not involved at all in the support or otherwise in connection with the armistice negotiations. Was there any - you mentioned

earlier Sobolev who was in fact the Soviet Assistant Secretary-General at this time - but was there any indication of a Soviet desire to have more information than was available? These talks were in secret, I believe, in Rhodes.

WM

Yes, well let me put it this way. Certainly they were not in secret by design. They were only kept insulated against outside interference. One reason we went to Rhodes was because the damned place was isolated, it was an island by definition, with virtually no communications, the press was kept at arms length, there were few people from the press there. They were given information and they were not encouraged to ask for too much. And they didn't get much because people that were involved weren't eager to talk - neither the Mediator's staff, nor the Israelis nor the Arabs. They weren't very eager because they knew the more one talked the less chance one had of achieving your ends. Interestingly, we had little access and newspapers, so we didn't even know what was reported back. Communications just were poor - in a way it was great, no newspaper. The radios most of the time didn't work because there was a lot of interference, this was not the era of high tech. You were there alone, it was wonderful. The only communication you had was via that destroyer that was lying in the harbor.

JSS And the reports that went back to headquarters -

WM There was no secrecy ... These were not secret talks. They were kept, as I said before, confidential in the sense that you didn't want to have reportage on them. If any press conference was going to be held, it was going to be held by Bunche and by the others when the time was ripe.

JSS And would the members for the Security Council, since Bunche was appointed by the Council, did the reports go back to the Council so that the Council members were aware of the progress of the negotiations?

WM Yes, there were some but minute. You can check those. I don't recall details now. Again, here's one where I have a lapse of memory. I do recall that reports were sent to the Security Council. At what frequency I do not recall nor do I recall the contents of these reports. Now if you had asked me before I might have looked it up but this is easily ascertainable.

JSS I want now as we come to the end of this interview to ask if there are particular points that stick in your mind from this period that you feel are of interest to be included in this record. I'm speaking now particularly of the period when you served as an observer and then going onto the actual armistice negotiations.

WM There are few points that I'd like to mention. One is a general point covering the period. When I look back on

my very long career in the United Nations system, mostly in the United Nations Development Program, if there was a very major lesson I learned it was in that period. It was what I learned from Bunche, as an individual of extraordinary abilities and character, but I also learned that opportunities are not given, they are taken. That period falls into that category. Because the United Nations was new, it had no established procedures, it was not encumbered and handicapped by bureaucratic constraints which are now the order of the day. You did things because there was no precedent, there were no rules and regulations, and you did it because you had to do them. Bunche was a pastmaster of the art of taking opportunities and making the most of them and I learned a great deal from that. One also learned that even when regulations exist they usually are constraining those who want to do something and he demonstrated, and I learned with great alacrity, how you ignore regulations that were usually written by not too intelligent people for not too intelligent users. This was one great period. I think I attribute Bunche's success to his total inability to conform to bureaucratic instructions. He saw the opportunity, he grabbed it, he ran with it. He was a good football player and he only saw one thing and that was the goal. I learned, and in later years was able, to project that kind of experience into other activities

that I had which required - particularly in the humanitarian field and in the field of technical assistance that kind of approach because you could always say, "well the regulations prohibit me from doing that". The issue was always, "what don't they prohibit and how do you get around them?" That was the great thing.

The other thing was that, I think the fact that Bunche was black gave him an edge. I don't say this in any sense of making a racist remark here, nor do I suggest that he used the fact that he was the first black American who had reached this high position, to exploit it - not at all. But I think the very success, the very person, plus the very personality that he had (to which I alluded before) combined in the eyes of the world that looked upon this process to recognize someone who had come up when he would normally not have come up and recognized that he, as a black man, was as good as any white man. And even better, because he brought to the process a degree of compassion, although that does not come out in the records.

JSS To be a little more specific on that, and this may seem a strange question, but did the fact that he was black lessen the problem that might otherwise have arisen from his American citizenship?

WM No, no I don't think so.

JSS I ask that because if you look at the negotiating team in

Rhodes, it was quite American, Bunche, Riley and back in headquarters, Cordier...

WM

It was because of a predominance of American leadership in World War II that propelled us into the development of the United Nations. I think in that sense the Americans predominated for a good long time. Also remember, the U.S. at that time paid, I think fifty percent of the UN assessed. If you look at the United Nations today you find very few Americans in positions of leading responsibility and those who are in there are not, I would say, of the greatest stature. Again, not that I'm denigrating them. They are not people who catch the public eye. It was almost inevitable that the Americans would play a major role in those early years. But Bunche was very conscious of the international element, that was a marvelous thing because when you look at this immediate team of immediate advisors, Riley came in because the Americans, the French and the Belgians were asked to provide the military observers, that was a decision taken by the United Nations. So obviously, the Americans having the largest contingent, provided a brigadier general and so he obviously was the man to command. But he was not initially of his team. He became part of the team subsequently. His team was a totally international one and I'm very pleased to say that most of the observers, that most of the people he had plus the

initial political observers that were sent out were a very mixed bag - there were not many Americans. There was Vigier who was French, Reedman who was British/ South African, Stavropoulos was a Greek, I was American - I was very junior, I didn't even count, I was just a very young flunky who was to be seen and not to be heard - that was how it was in those days. The bulk of the team out there, except for the administrative people, was very mixed. There was Jaroslav Cebe-Habersky who was a Czech, there was Paul Cremona who was a Maltese, there was Bill Stoneman and he was an American. Then there was this Norwegian. Attention was being paid to that. Making the operation international in character as well as in looks.

JSS

I interrupted you, now go on back to what you were saying about the points that you wanted to make.

WM

So this was one very important point. Bunche was the first black who in the international arena came into high prominence, ultimately he got the Nobel Prize, the first for a black.

One thing about Bunche also was - and I think this needs to be recorded here - he was a very close friend, I think I was very close to him, although I've never made much of it and we were close together till the very end. He confided and the family was close to me, really. That was also partly because of my wife who was his personal assistant. Bunche was a man who never forgot where he

came from. He was somebody who knew he came from very humble beginnings, had been very poor, had worked his way up and never forgot his people. I have always somewhat resented Martin Luther King, who was a Johnny-come-lately, who had many sterling qualities and I think he did great things for black people in the US. But Ralph Bunche fought the good fight in the NAACP, with Walter White\*, at a time when the good fight was very hard to fight. When the black was to be seen and not heard, to provide the janitorships and the cleaning ladies. And he did it in spite of the fact that he was a member of the United Nations, assistant to the Secretary-General in the political arena, and he fought for it and he spoke out for it. He has to some extent been pictured by the Martin Luther King faction as the pariah, as the Uncle Tom who sold out. Well that wasn't so and I think this is something that needs to be recorded here for posterity. He was a man of sterling character, he was the best that America has ever produced. And I tell you, it is a matter of tremendous pride to have known such a man, to have worked with such a man, because he was an American and he was a black man at a time when it was very difficult to be one. He spoke out on the issues and probably helped more to bring about the point and the stage from which Martin Luther King could deliver the

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\*Then President of the NAACP.

final blow when it was virtually a foregone conclusion that segregation could no longer be sustained. So I think this is very important to remember. I think the very fact that he came into prominence as a black man is an issue which I don't think anybody has written much about. What impact this may have had on the gradual progression to the stage that was reached in the 50's and the 60's with much greater facility than he had to do it with. And you know, it's very interesting to recall that when he worked in the State Department as a senior official, he could not, as a black man even go into the cafeteria. Dean Rusk took him by the arm and he said, "You're going in there" and Dean Rusk broke the color barrier in the State Department cafeteria. So I think this is a very important element in this whole thing which very few people have written about, or thought about, but which I think about and I think great credit goes to him for his courage and decisiveness.

The other thing I often think about is that Ralph perhaps received the Nobel Prize for the wrong achievement. I think that Ralph's contribution to the liquidation of the colonial system is a much greater one and I think the greatest single contribution that the United Nations has made in my opinion has been the liquidation of the colonial system. Now the United Nations didn't do that alone, far from it, but the United

Nations provided the forum within which a number of us - not a large number of us, it was actually a small number of us - were able to liquidate which was and should have been to every civilized human being appalling. That was the institutionalization of what one might call a benign form of slavery in the form of the colonial system. That was liquidated because Chapters 11, 12, and 13 which were part of Bunche's handiwork, not entirely his but a good part of it, led to a situation which enabled the United Nations to become the escape valve for the buildup of the steam in the machinery that enabled the machinery to liquidate the system. With a few notable exceptions such as the Congo and it was almost inevitable that there would be a few others such as Namibia, the Portuguese colonies - the process by and large worked very well.

JSS Yes, and a peaceful process.

WM It was a peaceful process, by and large.

JSS And you think Ralph Bunche really had a major role?

WM Oh, I think it so and I think that, again, it was an American initiative because the Americans were never at one with the British and the French and the other Allies during the war about the preservation of the colonial system. I think basically every American is born with the principles of the motherhood, apple pie and being an anti-colonialist. I'm not talking about bigotry, that's something else, but anti-colonialism is part of the

lifeblood of America. So I think this was one big issue.

The other thing was of course the way we operated the system out there, if you can call it a system. I think all of us were under the control of the Mediator, or the Mediator's group, but basically we were very independent. Again, our contact with the group - at least when we were out in the field - was minimal but for some miraculous reason we all did what was right. Very few gaffes were pulled. There was a real sense of unity of purpose in those days. The United Nations was small, most of us had been in the war, many of us had fought, many of us had been wounded and bore the scars. All of us had this strange sense of wanting to succeed, not to make a career because we were far too young to think of getting up there faster because we didn't even know how long it was going to last. But all of us were, in one way or another, motivated by this strange feeling - it was a feeling, not so much an intellectual thing - that somehow we had to make it work, there had been too much blood spilled. You know, we lost a few people out there. Some of us cried over that, it was just going back to the years before. That is something that was lost over the years. And I don't say this as a criticism - how could it not be lost, that could only be with those who were there at the beginning. Times have changed, demands have changed, and on and on, so the United Nations is a

totally different kind of organization from what it started out to be. And perhaps it hasn't changed enough to meet the realities of the 21st century which we have almost reached. The age of high technology, the deteriorating standards of ethics - which were very high in those days because Secretary-Generals did speak out on moral issues, something which I haven't heard in 20 years.

These are all things that come to mind when we were part of that particular period, or that particular effort, and the kind of people that were involved. And I don't say this in the sense that I'm a raving idealist, nothing of the sort, nor am I a cynic. People ask me "what are you?" I say, "I'm an idealist without illusions". But one thing that period also taught us - it is worthwhile having illusions. Without illusions you're never going to get anywhere. You've got have at least a notion of a goal. Whether you can achieve it or not is another matter. But if you don't have it, if you just do it because something needs to be done at a certain time, in a certain place, you're not going to get very far. That's why we succeeded, I think. And I think there's something leftover. In a very real sense, some of the young people who come in to the United Nations today who, of course, couldn't know anything about that period, still come in with a great deal of illusion,

which is great. I just hope the hell they're not disillusioned too soon. Of course one could cover a huge number of details which are very interesting, but that would take hours and hours, and, perhaps, one day, if I have the time I might just take a machine like this and talk into it and add to it, - a supplement.

JSS

That would be good? Because there's not too much on the record about such details, as a matter of fact. I think we have covered some very interesting and perhaps the most important points. But the others would be of value. Thank you very much.

WM

Well you're most welcome.



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# INDEX OF NAMES

Abdullah, King	27, 51
Austin, Senator Warren	16
Azcarate	45, 49
Begley, Frank	26
Bernadotte, Count Folke	5, 6, 8, 12, 19, 24-26, 45
Beylin, Harry	13
Bunche, Ralph J.	1, 2, 4-6, 8-10, 16, 25-31, 33, 34, 37-40, 43, 46-49, 51-60, 62, 63
Chidzero, Bernard	51
Cordier, Andrew W.	6, 8, 16, 58
Cremona, Paul	10
Daughton, Doreen M.	10, 32
Eddy, Captain	11, 14, 18
Eytan, Walter	60
Farouk, King	51
Henderson, Colonel	21
Hoo, Victor	1, 2, 4
Iversen, Wilhem (Bill)	13
Jackson, Sir Robert	27, 53, 54
King, Martin Luther	27, 34, 51, 60, 61
Lansky, George	18
Lash, Brigadier Norman	43
Lie, Trygve	7, 27, 50-53

Lundström, General Age	26
Malania, Leo	6, 7, 10, 17
Mills, Victor	32
Protitch, Dragoslav	3
Reedman, John,	13, 32, 45, 47, 59
Riley, Brigadier-General William E.	21, 28, 37-39, 44, 58, 59
Rusk, Dean	61, 62
Schachter, Oscar	28, 29, 40
Schreiber, Marc	29
Seem, Katy	14, 58
Serot, Colonel André	26
Shore, Taylor C.	32
Sobolev, Arkady	3, 54
Stavropoulos, Konstantine	13, 28, 29, 32, 47, 59
Stoneman, William	10, 59
Urquhart, Brian	7, 27
Vigier, Henri	32, 37, 39, 46, 47, 59



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