

**Charles Allan Stewart Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 10/23/1967**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Charles Allan Stewart (1907-1973) served as United States Ambassador to Venezuela between 1962 and 1964. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy (JFK)'s efforts to strengthen American ties with Latin America, the communist threat in Venezuela, and the relationship between JFK and President Betancourt, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Charles Allan Stewart

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Charles Allan Stewart—JFK #1  
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Oral History Interview

With

C. ALLAN STEWART

October 23, 1967  
Washington, D.C.

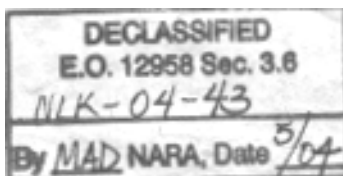
By Larry J. Hackman

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HACKMAN: Mr. Stewart, do you recall what the state of relations were between the governments of Venezuela and the United States in August of 1960, I believe, when you went there? What were the main problems or the points of conflict, if any, that stand out in your mind?

STEWART: Well, at that particular time, it was only a short time after President Betancourt [Romulo Betancourt] had been inaugurated and the Venezuelans were still getting over the feeling, that had been very popular at the time of Perez Jimenez's [Marcos Perez Jimenez] overthrow, that we had supported that government. President Betancourt was thoroughly convinced that he was being supported by the United States, and was making every effort to be cooperative and friendly, but during that, or in that period when I first arrived there was still a lingering doubt, and in many quarters of the *Accion Demoratica Party*, that the United States maybe had not changed its attitude entirely. The development of good relations during that period had been increasing all the time and I came at a period before they finally had reached the point where the Venezuelans were completely confident that we were 100 percent behind the new democratic government.

HACKMAN: I believe at that time Ambassador Sparks [Edward J. Sparks] was in Venezuela. How did he fit into this? How effective was he in his relationship with President Betancourt?



STEWART: Ambassador Sparks by his personality was rather reserved and he and President Betancourt saw each other very often, as often as was necessary. And the relationships were completely correct but I don't think there was any great warmth between them.

Ambassador Sparks reported to the department on the Venezuela situation, at least at the time when I arrived, with complete accuracy and objectivity. He knew what was going on and he knew that because he had access to the president and other high officials of the Venezuelan government. But I didn't detect any great warmth between the two people, between President Betancourt and Ambassador Sparks. It was not present.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections of what President Betancourt's feeling was toward the approaching election in the United States and if he hoped there would be a change of administrations or if he hoped some changes would be made?

STEWART: This was the 1960 election?

HACKMAN: Right.

STEWART: I wasn't in Venezuela when that election took place, I don't believe. Wait a minute, was it...

HACKMAN: I had thought you had gone in August of '60, and if so...

STEWART: I was there in August of '60. And this was...

HACKMAN: In November.

STEWART: Oh, that's true. Yes. That was...

HACKMAN: Kennedy against Nixon [Richard M. Nixon].

STEWART: The Kennedy.... Well, there was no doubt in the minds of most Venezuelans; they were hopeful for a Kennedy victory. And, of course, this is somewhat reflected in their animosity toward the former secretary of state, who had gone to that conference in Caracas at one time and had ridden up the hill with Pedro Astrada, the chief of the Security Police, and this was something that always rankled them considerably. But there was no question in the minds of most Venezuelans that they were desirous of seeing President Kennedy win.

HACKMAN: Did President Betancourt probably have anything specifically in his mind that he wanted changed? You mentioned oil earlier when we were talking...

STEWART: President Betancourt's biggest problem was obtaining loans. As a

background for that, when Perez Jimenez was overthrown there was some

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seven hundred million dollars in unpaid bills which had never even been set up in the Venezuelan budget. The provisional government which took over and prepared the elections, at which Betancourt was the winner, paid a lot of these bills in cash. So that when Betancourt went into office the treasury was rather bare of cash. It would be like a man who was land poor, he had plenty of assets but he didn't have any ready cash. It was very necessary for Betancourt to acquire cash immediately. This was done through a bank loan which occurred before I went to Venezuela. It was made with some New York banks and this helped tide him over. But in the early months of his, early years of his administration, Betancourt was very anxious to get long term, low interest loans and as much of it as he could. So this was one of his big problems that he had to surmount with the Kennedy administration, in which we helped him out a great deal, but the president, President Betancourt, became very annoyed because of such a long delay in the loan agreements going through. That was his big problem. That was a continuous and still continuing problem of oil, which is simply that the Venezuelans publicly state that their sovereignty is discriminated against because there is an oil quota against them while there is none against the border countries of Mexico and Canada. Therefore, they say, while they appreciate the fact that they practically have a monopoly on the fuel oil market on the east coast of the United States, they are not being...

HACKMAN: Want me to shut this off?

STEWART: Yeah. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: ...and Canada.

STEWART: Discrimination that the Venezuelans felt was being imposed upon them. It was a feeling that Venezuelan oil came by import quotas into the states and was restricted, and the Canadian and Mexican oil crossed the frontiers freely. That is not exactly true because the Mexican and Canadian oil doesn't cross the frontiers freely but the principle is there. And it is one that creates a great deal of trouble for a government in power in that the opposition can say, "You're getting a raw deal from the United States. You're being discriminated against. It's going against the sovereignty of Venezuela. Therefore, you're not governing well. You're not protecting the interests of your country." So that has been the problem and still is.

This came to a head when the Department of Interior issued a new proclamation regarding imports of petroleum into the United States. And I can't remember the exact year but the president had to send Irving Feldman from the White House staff...

HACKMAN: Myer Feldman.

STEWART: Myer Feldman to Caracas posthaste because President Betancourt became very incensed that this action was taken by the United States without

formally consulting with the Venezuelan government.

As a result of Mr. Feldman's trip to Caracas it was agreed that further consultations would be held on this proclamation that had been issued, and thereafter any further changes that were to be made would be discussed with the Venezuelans

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beforehand, so that the Venezuelan government would be in a position to set forth its views and give its arguments for or against a particular action to be taken. This was one of the very positive accomplishments of the Kennedy regime vis-à-vis oil. It was the first time that this had ever been done seriously and this resulted from the Feldman visit. And the president immediately saw the point and ordered that in the future this policy be followed. Matter of fact, the archives of the State Department show that this was agreed upon many times before but had been disregarded. But President Kennedy considered putting himself in the... The president put himself in President Betancourt's shoes and said, "Well, naturally, you can't stand for this so we'll have to accommodate him on this point."

As a result a memorandum was signed in Washington during President Betancourt's visit to the United States and it's still observed. It has been the basis for attempts to settle this oil problem, unsuccessfully so far, but nevertheless the spirit of discussion and of prior consultation has prevented the thing from becoming very explosive. It's a situation that, unfortunately, can't be resolved because of political considerations that the administration, any administration, has with the independent oil dealers in the US, and a question which the Venezuelans chose to say is sovereignty that they have. So we're living with it.

HACKMAN: When this directive from the Department of Interior was developing, were you aware of that at that time? Was there anything you could do to try to stop this mistake or was it something that was a surprise?

STEWART: It was a *fait accompli* when we knew about it. We'd heard vaguely that the proclamation was being discussed but what was decided upon--we were told about it after it had been done. Really was not too much consultation on it and, as I recall, this was during, I believe, Ambassador Moscoso's [Teodoro Moscoso] period. We had warned the department of the Venezuelan touchiness on this. I think that what happened in Washington is what happens many times, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Things suddenly get underway and get beyond control and then it's a *fait accompli* up here and nothing can be done about it. But, fortunately, Betancourt's strong reaction plus the visit of a White House representative down here to look at the situation firsthand made a strong enough impression so that it's been honored ever since, the commitment for prior consultation which is a good way of staying out of trouble although you're not settling anything really.

HACKMAN: On this question of oil, did you ever discuss this personally with President Kennedy in any of your talks with him?



STEWART: No. I didn't discuss it with him. When I made my visits on the president, it was during a period when all of this had been decided. We weren't in any crises. As a matter of fact, we weren't in any crises during my time down there on oil because of this memorandum that was signed in Washington, or by President Betancourt and President Kennedy.

HACKMAN: Getting back then to the election of '60, which we were discussing earlier,

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do you remember what your own political feelings were at that time as to what you hoped a new administration, either Republican or Democratic, might do? Was there anything you felt outstanding that should be done?

STEWART: My background is completely Latin American. I hadn't had the experience in other parts of the world. And, of course, my feelings were that something had to be done about helping Latin America. And I thought that the Bogotá conference, which was really started under the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] administration, was a good beginning and that from there probably something could be done which would help the Latin countries. I was quite convinced that President Kennedy would do this. And so I was ready.... I thought that we needed a new administration, with a new tack, so I voted for President Kennedy in that election. And it turned out that he did have the imagination. And it was really amazing the electrifying effect his inaugural address had throughout the hemisphere, at least in Venezuela. This was a new wind blowing: it was a new voice being heard. And people's hopes rose right away.

HACKMAN: Do you have any recollections of what the impressions were of some of the other people in Venezuela representing the United States government at that time toward the election? Were most of the people at the embassy in favor of a new administration or did most of them object to some of the things that Kennedy was talking about, either in the campaign or in the inaugural address?

STEWART: I don't recall anybody that was violently opposed to the principles espoused by Kennedy and his campaign. I don't know anybody who might have been, unless it had been some of the military's officers but I didn't really, I reflect, recall anybody being violently against the Kennedy program because anybody who has served in Latin America realizes immediately the problems we face and what has to be done and our deficiencies in the past in supplying the needs of these less developed countries. So I, as I recall, I don't. There probably were a number.

I do remember that the Chamber of Commerce, American Chamber of Commerce, had a poll of its members and it was overwhelmingly for Nixon.

HACKMAN: Do you mean in Venezuela or...?

STEWART: In Caracas, yeah.

HACKMAN: I wondered what their thoughts were at that time.

STEWART: And it was quite a large percentage in favor of Nixon's election.

HACKMAN: Had the American, let's say, business community in Venezuela.... What was their feeling about Betancourt at this point?

STEWART: A large number of the American businessmen were very skeptical of--let's face it--distrustful of Betancourt. And this was brought about, to some

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extent and maybe to a large extent, by the views of their Venezuelan counterparts in business. During the five year term of Betancourt, it wasn't until the Puerto Cabello naval uprising that the business community of Venezuela really gave any support to Betancourt. The feeling was that he was still a communist, and, in fact, this was reflected in the thinking of a lot of American businessmen. However, they came around to the belief that Betancourt was democratically inclined and was trying to give his country a decent government and do something for the people much faster than the Venezuelan business community did. I may have had something to do with it, but the point is they got off the kick that Betancourt was a communist fairly fast.

HACKMAN: When you say you may have had something to do with this you mean during the period when you were ambassador? Were you frequently talking to the American business group there?

STEWART: Yes, it was.... I had a very close relationship with the business community either through the American Chamber of Commerce or by individual contacts with them. And I made it a point as ambassador to always keep in touch with the business community, because after all, if you don't protect your rear guard you're liable to get in trouble, and I thought sincerely that American business was worthy of being assisted as much as possible, especially in a country where they began to be the targets of terrorism. And during all of this period our contacts with American business community were close. And I made a point, my wife and I always went to the parties of the American businessmen when their bosses came down. It was humanly impossible to go to every party, but I always did when their bosses were there to make a showing at their receptions and things. But this was a very good thing for the United States, and it was a good thing for the embassy, because we maintained very cordial relations with the American colony as a result. It might be interesting because when the terrorism began in '62 and they began to burn American warehouses and blow up oil lines and everything, I put the relationship between the American community and the embassy in the hands of the consul general, which is the proper thing to do. My role was to maintain a close contact between the ministers of the interior and defense to see that we got the proper troop protection for the businesses. And this was done very fast when it became evident that there was this campaign on to burn American businesses. The Venezuelans

responded very quickly and with great cooperation made their best forces available to the American, no, the National Guard. Now this cost the American companies. They had to support these troops; that is, buy their food and quarter them. This did cost quite a bit of money but nevertheless there weren't any more burnings of warehouses like the Sears. The terrorists really lost their punch after they put in these security measures. In addition to having the Venezuelan government work closely with American businesses in acquiring proper protection, we also brought down a team from the Pentagon which had had great experience in the Far East in sabotage...

HACKMAN: Special Forces?

STEWART: It was not a Special Forces. It was a very high level committee working under.... Who's this general in Vietnam now? The special assistant to

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Bunker [Ellsworth Bunker]? Well.... But it was a group that was working on special types of equipment for detecting terrorist activities. And they came down and gave the oil companies, in particular, some very valuable advice how to improve their security. And they were available any time American business wanted them to come back. They were ready to do so. So this contact of providing, without being prodded assistance, for American business down there was a great help to the embassy and I think quite effective. And it really helped in dulling this terrorist thrust that was being made.

HACKMAN: Were the Venezuelan military leaders anxious to get this kind of help?

STEWART: This particular assistance I am speaking about was done for the American business community. Now, on the question of military assistance, this is something that was very well done by both sides. Shortly after I became ambassador, it became quite evident that the communist plans for terrorism were beginning to be carried out. Our intelligence had shown that this had been considered over a year before and that they were gearing up for it. [Interruption] Knowing that this was going to happen, we began to urge the Venezuelans to start getting counterinsurgency training.

The minister of defense acquiesced in this and long before the terrorists were out in the hills making a lot of trouble we had some of the Green Beret boys in there in training. There was no secret about it. And there weren't many of them. The first team of five. But they all spoke--all with the exception of one spoke Spanish and they'd been out in the Far East. They'd had active experience and they were excellent. So the Venezuelans understood, as we did, the seriousness of the guerrilla threat and began to get training ahead of time. This was one of the plusses that we did in the military field.

They were not buying a great deal of equipment. What they needed, though, was basic material, such as rifles, ordinary machine guns, but not any fancy artillery or planes or anything, because they didn't have the money. And as you know, Venezuela does not receive military assistance. It buys everything it gets from us. So we were doing our very best to supply them with the basic equipment needed and that included a great deal of

communications equipment, trucks, and, as I said, rifles and pistols and very basic materials. We did this, I think, quite well.

And then we had the missions of the Army, Air Force, and Navy there that were there to counsel the Venezuelans. And the missions operate at exactly the ration of support they get from the armed forces. If the armed forces want assistance and advice, these people work very hard. If they don't, they just sit around, because it's a question of building up credence. You know what you're talking about and you're doing a job they ask you to do and nothing more, not trying to get into their affairs. And the relationship among the Venezuelan military and our missions during that period was excellent. Fortunately, we had sent some very fine mission chiefs down there and they worked very well.

HACKMAN: Did these.... Go ahead.

STEWART: One of the, of course.... Missions justify themselves if they can teach what these people need to know about modern warfare--and in Latin

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America modern warfare really it means internal security--and if they have enough acquaintanceship with the officers and the noncoms so that they can influence them to come to the United States, to take courses, to see the US way of life, and become generally democratically inclined. This wasn't so very necessary in Venezuela after the fall of Perez Jimenez because the Venezuelan military was rather ashamed of its participation in that regime and actually had helped overthrow it. And because of the great skill of President Betancourt in dealing with his military, he had the overwhelming support of the military back up, so that our people were supplementing the work that had already been done by Betancourt and his people and this worked out very well.

Our missions enjoyed considerable prestige and were doing a very fine job. Unfortunately, our missions, I'm afraid, have lost a great deal of their appeal because of a new system that has been put in whereby they are respondent to the Canal Zone Command, whereas the Venezuelans, technically speaking, are supposed to pay their salaries and their expenses and these people are working for them. Now, they're doing so much work for the CINCUSSOUTH, US Command South, that they don't have time to do the jobs the Venezuelans want them to do. In order to do so, they would have to increase their missions to a much larger size and this is unpopular with any foreigners to have too many military personnel.

It seemed to be a very unfortunate development that they tried to amalgamate all the missions under one head, make it a sort of heterogeneous group, especially in Venezuela where the military hierarchy there is broken down very sharply into the Army, Air Force, and Navy, with the National Guard being a part of the Army. They jealously consider the Army mission, for instance, as being only working for the Army and the National Guard. The naval mission, just for the Navy: Air Force for the Air Force. They are simply just--simply do not like this idea of amalgamating.

HACKMAN: This has happened since you left?

STEWART: Yes. The big fight was going on while I was ambassador, but after I left active work as ambassador in April, the policy was decided upon, and I understand it was Secretary McNamara's [Robert S. McNamara] final decision. Of course, I have to be very parochial in my feelings about it because I'm speaking only of Venezuela, but in Venezuela I have heard many officers, and not too far back either, just recently, complain about this. I don't think we are in danger of losing our missions down there, but we might some day and this, I don't think, would be good.

HACKMAN: Were you making your feelings known as this thing developed?

STEWART: Yes, indeed. And I had probably a great deal to do with deterring it. At least as far as Venezuela was concerned we were holding the line.

HACKMAN: Was there ever any problem within the relationship between President Betancourt and his military people in his supporting what those people felt they needed?

STEWART: There was a very clear understanding between Betancourt and his military

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people that the military at this point would not make any unreasonable requests: that is, the Air Force not going to put in any orders for a plane; the Army wasn't going to ask for a lot of tanks; or the Navy for a lot of destroyers, because of the financial condition of the government. They were very cooperative in that respect. Every reasonable request they made that could be handled out of the budget, the president backed his military very strongly, and we supported the president by obtaining these articles for them.

But I always reported to the department that here was the armed forces of Venezuela, which have always been a very doubtful element in their history about supporting a democratic government, but here they were supporting the president strongly, going without, let's say, their play things and being quite cooperative. I said, "The day will come when Venezuela will want some more sophisticated equipment, and we should be prepared to give it to them because the armed forces have been loyal to the president, but you can't ask people who are proud professionals to be operating with World War II equipment. This just won't work."

And so this was well understood in Washington, but nothing was done about it until just about a week ago when finally we reversed our policy or, I don't think we reversed it; the State Department finally got guts enough to face up to Morse [Wayne Lyman Morse] and that bunch up on the Hill and take a decision, but it's too late now. But I clearly warned them beforehand that the day would come when Venezuela would need it. And we did offer Venezuela some planes recently, but I guess it was too late. My feeling is very strong about this; you are not going to wish away the military forces of Latin America. They're here and the capability of the military to terminate a democratic government any minute it wants to is always present and will be for a few more years to

come. And for us to be making judgments up here about what their military want is stupid. I agree in principle that developing countries shouldn't spend money for military equipment. I think the principle is beautiful, but practically speaking, you simply can't make it stick and we were stupid not to have realized this sooner. We have now alienated many governments and many military groups and we have placed ourselves in a very bad situation where, when we do make an offer it's turned down, whereas before if we had made the offer, it would have been eagerly accepted. They would have gotten subsonic equipment instead of fancy hardware which now has got to be the standard for Latin America.

HACKMAN: And more expensive.

STEWART: And this is silly. Well. But in Venezuela, the Venezuelan military cooperated very well with Betancourt and Betancourt clearly told them, "When the money is available and if what you want is reasonable, naturally you'll get it." And this policy was followed through by President Leoni [Raul Leoni], but they couldn't get the stuff they wanted from the States. And they had a request in for a second submarine that never was approved by Congress. We would have given it to them, State and Defense would have, but Congress held it up. And so they're operating their submarine.... They don't have enough submarines. You can't operate economically or strategically unless you have a certain number of submarines, because one's going to be out of commission every once in awhile. I don't know what has

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happened to that one. But the military in Venezuela has changed a great deal and I think they're reasonably satisfied with the type of government that they have had since 1959.

HACKMAN: Were you frequently talking to these military leaders and assuring them of our backing for the Betancourt government or was this necessary?

STEWART: No. I knew the military people very well because I traveled around the country a great deal, and I was a very good friend of General Briceno Linares [Antonio Briceno-Linares], the minister of defense. There was no problem. As you know, the embassy is run by a group called the country team which is really like a board of directors. The country team makes decision by majority vote, if no agreement can be reached it's always the ambassador who can make the final decisions. Well, if they don't agree with the ambassador, he makes the final decisions if he wants to. So the line was very clearly set out in the country team, agreed upon by everybody, that our unchangeable line was, if anybody asked us, military or civilian, that we supported the Betancourt government, it was a constitutionally elected regime, that any attempts to overthrow that government would not be looked upon in a friendly manner by the United States, and it wouldn't be a good idea to do it. That line was right from ambassador right down to any technical sergeant in a mission. And as far as I know it was never changed, because it was clearly understood if anybody deviated from that line he was on his way

out in twenty-four hours or less. So this was our line. It was not necessary for anybody to talk to us.

Although I must say that sometimes, especially where your officers got together at social gatherings and they got a couple of drinks, some guy would begin to sound off at Venezuelans. It wouldn't be an outright statement, "Well, we're going to knock over the government," or anything, but they would pose a hypothetical question. And our people would always say, "Look, this is our view," and that was enough. And we weren't consulted, of course, when they tried to overthrow the Venezuelan government at Carupano and Puerto Cabello. But the policy that was followed by the embassy and the country team was so consistent that the word got around pretty fast where the United States stood so that it didn't present any problem.

HACKMAN: I want to go back. We've gone ahead some. But back to the period in the early days of the Kennedy Administration; do you recall what your impressions were of the appointments the Kennedy Administration began to make in the field of intra-American affairs in the State Department and of ambassadors.

STEWART: Well, I think the.... Let's see what the hell's going on now. [Interruption]

HACKMAN: I had asked you about your opinion, what your recollections are about the appointments of the Kennedy administration in the area of inter-American affairs and ambassadors in Latin America. Do you recall anything about these or what your impressions were?

STEWART: I thought that the setting up of a task force by Kennedy with Adolf Berle--

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Adolf Berle [Adolf Augustus Berle, Jr.]...?

HACKMAN: Right.

STEWART: ...was a good idea. I'm afraid that events had caught up and passed Mr. Berle, but I think quite a bit of good was done as a result of that task force. Of course, appointments in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs were in pretty much disarray. And it was unfortunate that the president didn't have somebody that could have taken that job and stayed with it all through the first part of his administration. I think one of the influences there that probably didn't help very much was that relationship that Richard Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] had over in the White House with the president and the effect it had on the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs in the department. Here again, I'm speaking from hearsay, but I don't think it was helpful. It wasn't until Ed Martin [Edwin M. Martin] came in as assistant secretary that that really got straightened out. I do not think that Goodwin knew that much about Latin America, although as a phrase maker and writer there aren't very many people any better than he, I just marveled when he was preparing the president's speeches during the president's visit

to Venezuela prior to that. A few ideas that you would suggest being incorporated into the president's remarks would be woven into this beautiful, lofty language. But this didn't help the situation in the early days of the Kennedy Administration, although I don't think it probably hurt very much because the president had launched the Alliance for Progress and this was a great, hopeful project as far as Latin America was concerned, and it couldn't get started right away anyway. It had to have legislation through Congress and things like that. As far as the ambassadorial appointments are concerned, they were all very good, looked fine on paper and probably most of them turned out well.

HACKMAN: There was a lot of talk at the time that some of his appointments of non-career people.... I'd better reverse this.

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

HACKMAN: ...some of the people in the career service. Do you remember that being a factor?

STEWART: Not particularly, no, because the percentage stays pretty constant. Around 65 to 70 percent of your ambassadors are career. I didn't discern from Venezuela any great alarm on the part of the career people when Kennedy's appointments were made.

HACKMAN: Could you tell, because you had been in Latin America in the Eisenhower period, that the Kennedy appointments were of any great change from those made in the Eisenhower period?

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STEWART: Yes, considerable. Kennedy, for the most part, in Latin America named liberals, and during the Eisenhower Administration there were generally American businessmen, and American businessmen with precious little knowledge of Latin American politics; for instance, Jim Loeb [James I. Loeb] in Peru, a liberal who certainly had studied Latin America long enough and got caught in the bind down there when that overthrow occurred; Martin [John Bartlow Martin] who went to the Dominican Republic; and Teodoro Moscoso who went to Venezuela. That is an appointment I know something about and it might be well to mention it.

HACKMAN: Why don't you.

STEWART: There was a great deal of opposition on the part of Venezuelans and they were influential Venezuelans, not in the government entirely either, that



the United States should not name a Puerto Rican as ambassador, because the Venezuelans have had an antipathy towards the Puerto Ricans, at least spoken out about but probably, as events turned out, not as strong as they like to give the impression of having. And the president readily assented to Moscoso's nomination. His agreement was granted verbally. The first time the president was asked, he instructed his foreign minister, "Okay, approve it. We grant the agreement. We'd be delighted to have him."

But the public reaction in Venezuela was quite strong, and some of the opposition political parties made it a point to come to the embassy and say that they thought this was a mistake on our part. And the communists, who have always used Puerto Rico as a whipping boy for their propaganda, thought, "Here's a beautiful time to capitalize and use the anti-Puerto Rican thing to hurt the United States," and they came out with announcements that they were going to prevent Moscoso arriving in Caracas.

So the government reacted very correctly, the Venezuelan government acted very correctly in making damn certain he did get to Caracas. It was quite a little show of force, and Moscoso reached the residence without mishap. It was kind of hairy, but he got there. Parenthetically, the governor of the Federal District met him at the airport in an armored car, Perez Jimenez's old armored car, and the route was guarded by troops. We made it from Maiquetia airport to the ambassador's residence in twenty-three minutes, which is ordinarily a forty minute ride, you see. That juggernaut, that armored car that weighed so much, when it started rolling, we couldn't have stopped within three blocks if we'd have wanted to, but nothing got in our way, thank God. But demonstrations against Moscoso were fairly limited except the painting of "Fuera Moscoso" on all the walls.

He was very articulate, brilliant, and he did a great deal toward breaking down this communist myth of Puerto Rico being a colony. By sheer brilliance he convinced the Venezuelans. And the day that he gave a press interview after he had been inaugurated, or had been received by the president was absolutely brilliant. The newspaper, *El Nacional*, which has the biggest circulation in Venezuela, of all things sent a pro-communist, a Chilean, to the interview, but the *Nacional's* editorial policy was scrupulous fairness and objectivity. And this guy, I guess, to save his job and as a protection, took a tape recorder with him. His story ran eight columns, the whole page, and it was practically taken from the tape recording. There was no inaccuracy in it. And it read so well that we managed to get tear sheets of that thing spread all over the place, all over Latin America, because here

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was such a brilliant argument that you couldn't defeat it. And on top of that it was headlined by a guy the commies all knew was on their side. It was quite interesting.

HACKMAN: When you were talking about the people who opposed this appointment, were these political leaders who were members of Betancourt's coalition or were they parties outside of this democratic...?

STEWART: Both in the coalition and out. Both ADECO [*Accion Democratica*], Copeiano [*Partido Social Cristiana*], the URD [*Union Republican Democratica*], principally the principal parties, and others. Ambassador Moscoso was there only a brief period, about six months, but if there was any one thing

he did, he destroyed the myth in Venezuela, for that matter. You don't hear much about that anymore. On top of that, Moscoso with his vast experience in the operation Boot-Straps, Bootstrap, knew where to call on in Puerto Rico for technicians that were badly needed in the Venezuelan government administration. And the Venezuelans received these Puerto Ricans with a great deal of warmth and appreciation, these very Puerto Ricans that heretofore the Venezuelans had said, "The only good Puerto Rican is one who walked with Venezuela." This completely changed and the Puerto Rican technicians helped them a great deal and are still helping them.

And I think throughout the hemisphere he sort of dulled that campaign of the communists against Puerto Rico. It doesn't catch on anymore. Maybe time's taken care of it, but at least Moscoso's been in South America, on the continent there, as the United States ambassador and his arguments, I think, had a great deal to do with destroying part of this myth. And when Moscoso left, he was genuinely liked by most Venezuelans. Here was a man who was brilliant, who was simpatico with them, was doing his very best to help them and wasn't the ogre that they liked to have people think Puerto Ricans are, that any Puerto Rican is. But, anyway, it worked out well.

The incident at Central University was an imprudence on Moscoso's part. He didn't consult with the president before going. And I, as Deputy Chief of Mission, was quite concerned about his visit and I asked the cultural attaché to accompany him, which sounds rather strange, but our cultural attaché used to be a bouncer in a sailors' union and he's a husky guy. And I said, "Well, you better go with the ambassador up there." And he went to see an exhibit in one of the buildings in the School of Architecture. He would have gotten away with it, except after he viewed the exhibition he was walking out and had gotten almost to his car when the faculty and the dean heard he was in the building, and they sent a delegation down in a hurry and asked him to come back so they could receive him up in the upper stories of the building and properly recognize him. Well, he went back.

Meantime, in the two dormitories on the campus, called Stalingrad I and II, the word had spread that the American ambassador was on the campus, and they got a whirlwind group collected out of those dorms. Then that was it. They moved in and there wasn't any.... The campus policemen were powerless. There were radio patrol cars who followed the ambassador's car, and it took off, naturally, for good reasons. And this mob just took over. Fortunately, Moscoso was upstairs in the building when the mob descended, and so they couldn't get at him, but they burned the Cadillac and stole his

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briefcase, not to mention the generator and the batteries and a couple of other things in the car. They weren't above that.

Again, the Betacourt government acted with considerable firmness without violating the autonomy of the University. Again, the governor of the federal district rode in there in a car. They said before him, "He's coming in to get Ambassador Moscoso. Don't try anything." And he did. He went in and escorted Ambassador Moscoso to his car and brought him up to the residence.

After that the president just practically laid down an order. He said, "Don't go on the University campus." He said, "I can't go. Therefore, I don't see why the American

ambassador should go.” And when I became ambassador, he told me in no uncertain terms, “Stay off the campus,” which I did. However, I went back about a month or two ago.

But Moscoso had done something quite good before he left; that was to break down this feeling about the Puerto Ricans. And I don't know that it would be a good idea to have another ambassador from Puerto Rico right away, but it can be done in the years ahead without any problem anymore, I think.

HACKMAN: In this same early period, we'd been talking about some of the problems in the State Department and Goodwin and Berle and these people, do you have any recollections of that trip that Berle made down to see Betancourt in February of '61?

STEWART: No. It doesn't bring to mind anything outstanding.

HACKMAN: He had made a tip to a number of Latin American countries, Columbia, and he stopped off, then, in Venezuela, in Caracas, for a day or two of talks with Betancourt.

STEWART: I think I would have remembered that. Probably, I wasn't there.

HACKMAN: Could you go in a little more detail into what you know about these problems in the early period, or what problems were presented when Tom Mann [Thomas Clifton Mann] went out as assistant secretary and there was no assistant secretary appointed for quite a period? Woodward [Robert Forbes Woodward] was finally appointed, I believe, in May or June.

STEWART: Yes.

HACKMAN: And Berle's role was very unclear in the State Department. There were a lot of people upset at that time about that.

STEWART: This didn't present very many problems for Venezuela. Our policy was more or less set on assistance to Venezuela. It wasn't in the office of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs and the substantive end particularly where we had any problems; it was on the aid part and the question of getting loans approved and, once approved, getting the money available to the Venezuelans. The

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president, Betancourt, became very annoyed, and I had some very uncomfortable time with him when he would get so frustrated, then he'd get mad about these delays. And this was our big problem. Other than that, I don't think that all of this, the uncertainty of things in Washington itself, made much difference in Venezuela.

One of the things that's quite interesting about this time when Moscoso was ambassador and when I was an ambassador: The country team in Venezuela made the

decision, and we informed the department of what we planned to do and said, "If there are any objections, we want to hear about them before we put them into effect." I don't recall of a single time they said to change our policy. So we really ran the show down there.

Then, of course, as time went on and we got into '62, when terrorism was rampant, there was a great backup for us in the CI [Counterinsurgency] group in the department, which was headed by Ambassador Harriman [W. Averell Harriman], and the attorney general, Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], was a member, which was a very powerful group and had certain countries under its wing, among them Venezuela. They understood the situation perfectly. And they had a great.... They had a very.... Well, they were strong enough so that if they wanted to break any log jams, the log jams are broken and fast. And this was helpful for us in being able to supply the Venezuelans with equipment they needed quickly and with any other kind of support. It was mostly material stuff they needed. They couldn't hurry the loans along. They undoubtedly prodded and helped maybe a little bit. But the main thing was in getting the physical and material support that that administration needed urgently, and they were very good. And, of course, they watched our telegrams every day very closely, and if they thought something was particularly urgent or that looked greatly alarming, why they would then put that on their calendar: "This is a twenty-four hour watch on this one. This one we have to keep an eye on." They were very helpful and it was a very good group, helped the ambassadors tremendously down there.

HACKMAN: Talking about these delays on aid projects, was this true in the beginning of the Alliance for Progress, period, or did this continue all the way through?

STEWART: It's always been. There's a considerable amount of red tape in getting these applications through, an awful lot of questions to answer, and once they're answered, then other questions come up. Most of them have to do with safeguarding the loans and making certain that conditions have been met. Sometimes the conditions offend the countries and the benefit of the loan is decreased greatly because everybody's sore at you, especially the delay. But it isn't all the fault of AID [Agency for International Development] because the restrictions placed by Congress are such that the AID people sometimes believe—and I think maybe they go overboard sometimes, but they certainly don't go overboard always—that the intent of Congress is that they are really responsible for every cent of US money that goes out and that they've got to justify this. Well, there's many who feel that they go overboard and they make a real operation, a bureaucratic operation, out of something that doesn't quite need it. But this was our problem with Betancourt more than anything else. We were getting along

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fine otherwise except he got very annoyed because we couldn't give him this economic assistance he thought he needed right away, and I guess he did.

HACKMAN: Could you tell that the change over from ICA [International Cooperation

Administration] to AID made any difference?

STEWART: Very little. It's been about the same.

HACKMAN: Following along the same line, then, was there any difference between--let's see, Fowler Hamilton [Milo Fowler Hamilton] was the first director and then Dave Bell [David E. Bell] replaced him. Did things change any because of that?

STEWART: Yes. I think that Dave Bell was probably one of the best administrators they ever had. But it's not the top where you have the problems; it's in the lower levels, the layers of bureaucracy that can slow down a project going through those layers until it gets up to the top. In order to lick this, you've got to simplify the machinery and face up to Congress that: if you want to accelerate the Alliance for Progress, then we must move a little faster: we can't leave millions in the pipeline that can't be allocated by loans or project agreements just because everybody says, "Well, Congress is going to ask about this, is going to ask about that." You have to make the step. All right, Congress then may say we have misappropriated funds, but our reply will be, "Look the Alliance has to go forward. We simply cannot permit this delay to continue where loans are held up for months and months and months and months, project agreements are not signed because of nit picking and little technicalities. We have to go forward." My feeling has always been--and it's very nice to be outside of AID and give advice--but my feeling has always been that our friends in Congress would rather enjoy defending us on a little speed and we would have to risk the criticism of the enemies of the Alliance who are going to criticize anyway. But I think our friends on the Hill get a little exasperated because of the cumbersome machinery we have, although it's justified by saying that this is the intent of Congress.

HACKMAN: When one of these delays came up, what type of action could you take? Did you go to Moscoso or was there anyone at the White House you could go to? Did Moscoso have sufficient stature in this or weight to break any of this up? I've heard some people comment on that.

STEWART: Well, Moscoso really grabbed the tiger by the tail when he went in as deputy administrator, because he went in impatient with bureaucracy and he had experienced the frustrations in Caracas and he had also received some of Betancourt's shafts which were very colorful and strong at times. So he went in and he immediately bucked up against the bureaucracy. And I've been told, I haven't heard anybody say it, but they referred to him as "that Puerto Rican." So he was up against a tough deal. And Betancourt [Moscoso?] is a brilliant man, but I don't think he's the greatest administrator in the world. He's an idea man. And he did have a fine man in Graham Martin, who was his deputy there, but this was a tough deal to buck up against.

And really, what we did--I don't know that we hastened things along or not. The loans, eventually, were granted, but you had to go through all the motions to get them; that is, if a request came back for something that you thought, in the field, was kind of silly, you still answered it and sent it back to Washington. And so I don't know, I don't know whether we hastened things a great deal or not in getting the applications through.

On principle, yes, we had signal victories. And that was that Venezuela, being a wealthy nation, there was a great deal of opinion within AID that: why should we put out a million dollars a year for technical assistance when Venezuela could very well pay for it itself. And this we successfully countered by saying it gave us an inordinate amount of influence in Venezuelan administrative procedures, in policy in that country. This was something that couldn't be understood in Washington, but I could understand it because I was a newspaperman in Venezuela from '43 to '56, and I saw, during that point, when we sent technical assistance to Venezuela, you might as well have thrown the money out the window. It wasn't asked for, and therefore they didn't use it.

So when Betancourt came into office and the new administration took over the cumbersome machinery of the Venezuelan government--and let's face it, a billion dollar budget to administer a small country--and found he didn't have trained people, that they were really starting almost from scratch. Betancourt, who had lived in Puerto Rico and had seen Operation Bootstrap, said, "We'd better get some technicos in here, technicians, but fast." So he asked for assistance, and it was given to him very rapidly.

The operation of our USOM [United States Operations Mission] in Venezuela, the operations mission, and the AID was much different than in many other countries. We didn't even have a director down there; we didn't have the full title. And it was a small office where we kept a very few resident Americans in Caracas, and they were top notch but few. And when we needed technical assistants, they were sent in on TD, you know, temporary, daily, *per diem* payment. They stayed three months, two weeks, six months, whatever they were needed, and out they went. They didn't bring their families; we didn't clutter up the place with a lot of dependents. It was fast, very intensive, and worked because the Venezuelans wanted technical assistance. Betancourt requested it and he gave instructions that it damn well better be used. But they were ready to use it. They had found that they didn't know as much as they thought they knew. And many of the Adecos, who had been in exile for years and had a little experience in seeing governments operated efficiently, they were able to understand that maybe they were a little behind. So they made wide use of this technical assistance.

And our feeling down there was that if you had a government that's anxious and needs technical assistance, we should be in a position to provide it right away and help them out to that extent and give them as many loans as the country reasonably should expect, given its financial condition. And this is all we have to do. So our budget ran very low down there and it was a very mobile, flexible mission. And the man who took it over and was there most of my period as ambassador was Pat Morris [Patrick F. Morris], who was one of the young, brilliant AID people who had come up from the ranks. He and I thoroughly on how it should be run. That it shouldn't become a big cumbersome mission with a lot of people on it, it would be small and we'd bring in the people we needed. This worked very well and I don't think it's a bad idea for many of our places.

As a matter of fact, Venezuela's still receiving over a million dollars a year for technical assistance, but this has now changed, the emphasis has changed. At the time we

were there, a great deal of our assistance went in the field of education. Betancourt built five thousand schools during his five years, and all of a sudden the primary schools began to turn out kids that were ready for the secondary schools, and the secondary school system just broke down and couldn't handle it. They had no technical schools or anything like that. This was the number one problem, and so our AID mission worked very much on that and helped in the field of administration. And that was primarily our work.

Then, as the Venezuelans developed a community project, a building operation plan, then we went into the construction field, and this was assisted through loans. Then came the problem of building up their police forces. And I think today that about seven of our staff or fifteen or twenty down there are public safety officials and helping them perfect their police system. These all were very valuable to Venezuela, and it's just paying off the dividends so greatly that I think the opposition to using a million dollars a year for Venezuela has disappeared because of the benefits we're receiving from it.

One of the things that I thought would happen and I thought was one of my most powerful arguments in continued AID assistance, technical assistance, to Venezuela was that we would develop highly trained Venezuelans who, in turn, would help other Latin American countries. And it exactly has turned out that way. There are literally scores of Venezuelans scattered all over Latin America now who are giving assistance in housing. They're helping countries to draw up their long range planning. I don't know whether they have any police experts, but I do know that police come from all over Latin America to attend schools in Venezuela, of the Venezuelan government, in communications and other fields where the Venezuelans clearly excel other countries. This is pure gravy. This is where we don't have to send our people out with the language barrier. It's being done by Latins themselves.

This is psychologically very important because a Latino can come to the United States and he gets discouraged immediately, because we are so advanced and so technically perfect that he says, "We'll never reach that level." Yet if a Latin goes to their country, they'll say, "Well, he's just a Venezuelan. If he can do it we can do it." And it's a different mental attitude completely. Well, that is the dividend we're getting right now from our very minor assistance to Venezuela. And it's something that as long as we provide technical assistance--and let's face it, it's only a percentage, a smaller percentage of the total cost of technical assistance, which is borne by the Venezuelans mostly--then we have a certain influence in the way their reforms go and all of that. And while we don't push that--if we tried to push it, it would be self defeating immediately--nevertheless the fact that we're participating is helpful and they still take our advice.

HACKMAN: Were there any AID proposals, that you can recall, that you felt would be particularly valuable that were turned down?

STEWART: No, there weren't any turned down. We got everything we wanted. As I say, the only problem.... The problem was the delay. We weren't turned down on any request. And we were reasonable in our requests.

HACKMAN: Something I wanted to skip back and talk about that we bypassed, and this is the problem of, or the question of what problems come up with a change

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in administrations at the embassy level? For instance, the changeover from the Eisenhower period to the Kennedy period, in this interim period, are things sort of let slide, or did this present any problem at all in Venezuela? Did Ambassador Sparks stay until Moscoso came?

STEWART: Well, he'd gone a short while before which is the practice. He was assigned as ambassador to Uruguay. I was charged so many times I can't recall, but there wasn't much of an interim.

HACKMAN: Right. You had mentioned that the policy was pretty level?

STEWART: Yes, the point was that by the time Moscoso arrived, our policy was pretty fixed of strong support for Betancourt, and we were proceeding along that line. The problem what was faced was in accelerating the assistance. Ambassador Moscoso was very helpful in that because he did have the ear of Washington and the president and knew what was needed right away. And he could help himself by drafting Puerto Ricans quickly to come and do the jobs that were needed.

HACKMAN: Since he wasn't a career diplomat, did he work through Goodwin at that point at the White House or did he usually use the regular channels?

STEWART: He used regular channels. No, he was.... He understood that quite well.

HACKMAN: Moving on to something else, one of the things that happened, I believe, before Moscoso came was the Bay of Pigs. What type of problem did this create in relations with Venezuela?

STEWART: Well, it evoked the usual reaction from the business community, which criticized us for not going through with the job--and I mean the Venezuelan; I suppose the Americans to some extent too--to the liberal, over the leftist side of strong condemnation for getting involved in it and the part that we played. But, amazingly enough, it didn't last very long. What most people don't understand in the United States is that in Latin America they're much more politically sophisticated than we are here in the States. "All right," they say, "this was a good try." Maybe they should have knocked off that government, but they were kind of foolish when they started it, they didn't finish it, because they looked kind of silly." And this a Latin American country would understand. And so, "All right." They're such a big country they can get away with these stupidities, but if they were going to do it, why didn't they do it right?" So that's all. "That's too bad; they didn't do it." The leftists say, "Well, we can make a lot of capital of this." Well, they made capital for a while, but not too much. They made a great deal more when we successfully went into the Dominican



Republic. But, again, our recovery on that one was 100 percent complete because we had successful elections which were fair, and we got the troops out of there in a hurry. This wasn't expected by most people, although we had been telling them for months this was what we were going to do. But it was a great success. There are still lingering animosities about going in there unilaterally, as they claimed we did, but that's been forgotten in the

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general success. And in the Bay of Pigs we didn't have a success and we tried to forget it as fast as possible. Our friend said, "Gee, let's forget that one." And the communists couldn't really make much of it. So you got the usual reaction.

You got the same reaction all over the hemisphere. One of the secret documents, the only secret document, that was found in Ambassador Moscoso's briefcase was a paper from our Intelligence and Research section, "Hemisphere Reaction to the Bay of Pigs." My God, it should have been unclassified anyway. The other document which is interesting was a document that had been prepared by Jack Cates [John M. Cates, Jr.], who was head of the political section, and our labor attaché, Irv Tragen [Irving G. Tragen], both brilliant men, on a policy to be followed with the Venezuelans in our relationships with them. It was a long memo and it was the lowest classification of the classified; I think it was "Official Use Only."

HACKMAN: This is the one Guevara [Ernesto "Che" Guevara Serna] brought up at the...

STEWART: And Guevara read it. It helped us because the entire text of that memo was printed in one of the Caracas newspapers. And you'd be amazed at the number of telephone calls the embassy received from Venezuelans who said, "My God, you understand the situation perfectly in Venezuela. We didn't know you were that smart." But let's face it; the minute that was stolen, we hot-footed it over to President Betancourt and said, "This thing has disappeared, and this is what was said." So he knew what it was.

HACKMAN: So there was no problem on that.

STEWART: And this was very helpful because if we hadn't have done that he could have gotten sore at a couple of points. But actually it was a pretty brilliant memo and it didn't hurt us a darn bit because it at least showed we were on the ball and knew what the problem was, what we had to face up to, what the problem was of the Venezuelan government, what they were facing up to. So we didn't get hurt on it really.

HACKMAN: You had mentioned earlier the problem might have been more serious in relation to the Dominican Republic than in relation to the Bay of Pigs thing. Were you talking about the period in the Kennedy Administration with Bosch [Juan Emilio Bosch Gavino] or this last thing in '65?

STEWART: No, no, no, no. The '65 one. No, there was nothing that President Kennedy could do about the Dominican situation. Bosch defeated himself. Bosch permitted the openings which made his overthrow imminent. In fact, he predicted it in Mexico a few days before. It was incompetence on the part of Bosch's government and Bosch himself and not dealing with a situation realistically. It almost appears as though he asked to be overthrown.

HACKMAN: Were there any problems with President Betancourt on this since he was a

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friend of Bosch's, from what I can gather?

STEWART: This is an interesting development in that respect. The first two months Bosch was in office he used to converse by telephone with Betancourt quite a bit, asking for advice. After that he hardly had any contact whatsoever with Betancourt. In fact, he was quoted as saying that, "I'm not going to make the same mistake Betancourt made. I'm going to let the communists come back into the country. I can handle them." Well, the communists coming back into the country was the peg on which the military overthrew him, which was unjustified but nevertheless provided a peg and which prepared American public opinion for the overthrow of a constitutionally elected president--let's face it. So actually Betancourt was hurt that Bosch wasn't asking him for advice. And as things went from bad to worse, of course, the president commented to me many time about this which I don't think would be proper for me to say what Betancourt said, but the fact was he was very concerned that things were going as they were. And there were many meetings of the Latin American ex-presidents of the liberal stripe who even got together and just asked, "What can we do to help this man?" But he didn't want any help; he didn't ask for it; and it was inevitable what happened. Too bad.

HACKMAN: What about in the period just preceding that, after Trujillo [Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina] had been overthrown and assassinated and we were trying to uphold, what, the Balaguer [Joaquin Antonio Balaguer Ricardo] government there for awhile, before the election of Bosch took place? Was Betancourt satisfied with what we were trying to do in that situation?

STEWART: No, not satisfied. But he was enough of a realist to know that there wasn't a hell of a lot we could do otherwise. But the public reaction in Venezuela was very strong against us. This was reflected in the *Accion Democratica* daily paper, especially, and was very bitter. But the president didn't comment too much on it, because, I think, he realized we were in a bind on that one, because he was one who, before the overthrow of Bosch, thought it was inevitable, that this fellow mishandled his affairs and really was going to be overthrown. And so his reaction after the overthrow was, "Well, what can be done anyway under this situation, in this situation?"

HACKMAN: We're just about out of tape. I think I might as well...

[END TAPE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2]

HACKMAN: Mr. Stewart, in May of 1961, as you recall, a directive went out from President Kennedy, I believe, concerning the role of the ambassador as a

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leader of a country team. Would you comment on how this developed in Venezuela, what effect it had?

STEWART: Yes, and with great pleasure because it was the first instruction that had gone to an ambassador, in my experience in the Foreign Service, where the rules were laid down very specifically and the responsibilities placed squarely on the shoulders of the ambassador that he was responsible for every US government operation in a given country, in the country where he was accredited.

But I'll go back a little because I had a part in building up this concept, which turned out very well for us since during my time as ambassador the Venezuelan country team was considered the best in the world, the best operation there was. It was used as an example. We were used as an example after two or three committees came down and looked us over and seemed to be fairly convinced that here was an outfit that really worked well. And so when I became deputy chief of mission in August of 1960 I was there three days when the deputy chief of mission left to become ambassador in Honduras. Four days later the ambassador took off to be on the selection boards in the department. So after about a week in Venezuela, I became chargé d'affaires. During that period there were two attempts to overthrow the government. It was a real good start.

HACKMAN: Real baptism.

STEWART: But for me it wasn't too difficult because, as I mentioned, I'd been chief of bureau of the Associated Press in Caracas for three and a half years before, from 1943 to '46, so I really knew a lot of Venezuelans and knew something about the country. And moreover during the years that the democratic elements in the Venezuelan life were in exile, I had been very friendly with them in the countries in which I had served and I'd helped a lot of them, getting visas to the States and through a lot of their difficulties. And so it wasn't entirely a new country that I was going back to, and that was very helpful in that period because things got kind of sticky.

One of the things I did immediately after becoming charge was to bring the military missions and the attaches into the life of the embassy. The feeling had been beforehand that they did not share with the embassy the problems we had. They were strictly on their own and they were a little resentful about it, not to mention confused. So

I made it a point every Monday to have the chiefs of the military missions and the attaches meet with me, and I'd go over our policy problems the week before and what instructions we had received from the department on what our policy was and what we were doing so that they were brought up to date on everything that was going on. And then, when I began my missionary work about the one line we had in our attitude towards any Venezuelan who thought maybe there should be a change of government, I received much more enthusiastic cooperation from these people after they knew what we were up to, what was going on, and all of that. So this had really then--at that period we had begun to bring all the elements which later became the country team all together.

When Moscoso became ambassador, the directive had arrived from President Kennedy, which was very specific, and by that time we had set up a country team and it was operating. Before the letter from the president arrived, Under Secretary Bowles [Chester Bowles] had sent out a letter in which he asked for comments and things on how

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better to operate the embassy and we had come to the conclusion at that point that it was very necessary that the ambassador have--the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission needed a sort of chief of staff, which we call the special assistant, to ride herd on all country team matters, see that they were carried out. And this was our recommendation back, and we were given a special assistant without any delay. And it's become a sort of a practice, I believe. We were among the first to put this in. It was particularly fortuitous in view of the Kennedy letter of instruction which placed the responsibility right on the back of the ambassador. He couldn't get out of it; there was no way of getting away.

So, when the letter came in, we were geared for this and clearly understood that the ambassador made the final decision but after consultation with the country team. And during the time that Moscoso was ambassador and I was ambassador, I do not recall a single time when I had to make the final decision unilaterally. I made my comments felt in the country team meeting, but they were incorporated into the general thinking and the consensus--usually practically unanimous--was this the policy, this is what we should do, this is the way we will do it. Then we would notify the department what we were going to do, and they said, "These guys seem to know what their talking about. Let them go on their way." And this is what happened. So that the country team used to meet every other week, and this involved all of the heads of section in the embassy, the military mission chiefs, the AID chief, and the....

HACKMAN: Information Service?

STEWART: The USIA and even the mapping service...

HACKMAN: Geodetic...

STEWART: Coast and Geodetic Survey representative. And every time anybody in a section or one of these agencies had a special problem he would bring in his specialists who could give the expertise on a problem. And we would benefit from his knowledge, although the ambassador and deputy chief of mission were

always kept informed beforehand of these problems, but in the country team meeting it was very desirable to have these experts who could answer questions after expounding all they knew about the subject.

So, this was the way we operated. Then there was a full discussion, and we would reach a decision. The minutes were kept of the meeting. The minutes were sent to Washington as a matter of form so that at least the Venezuelan des officer knew what the country team meeting had discussed, what the final decision was. But, more important, the special assistant to the ambassador was charged to see that these recommendations were carried out, and if he ran into any kind of trouble, then the ambassador or the deputy chief of mission took over because of their rank to see that things went along. But very seldom we ever had to do it.

The Venezuelan country team was made up of a group of very solid people, some of them brilliant, some run of the mill, but all smart and all new their job. And all were convinced of the general line that I had set down. They agreed with it and we followed this through. But the most important thing of the country team concept which worked in Venezuela was that if one had a certain problem, the other parts of the US government, of

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the agencies, would volunteer, "Well, I can help you in this way by doing this and this and this." "Oh, I can do.... I can help you out on this one too." "We can do this, this, and this." Then, we would coordinate all of that in the country team meeting. "All right, the USIA can help the chief of the military mission by sending pamphlets to the officers' school or pamphlets to be distributed among the draftees on the problem of communism." Let us say the troop commanders had reported in that they were having a little problem, and so we helped. And this was done all up and down the line with the greatest of cooperation. There wasn't anybody holding back at all, so that we got the full benefit of all of our forces there concentrated on one problem.

And this, of course, is your big problem in US government, is one guy doesn't know what the other guy is doing. And President Kennedy, one of the great things he did was to set up these federal commissions in regional capitals in the United States where US agencies meet every week or so, and they do exactly what a country team does. They help each other out in their problems. And I was amazed. I went out to make speeches on the Dominican situation to these groups and I saw how they operated. And, my goodness, it saved the taxpayers millions of dollars and increased the efficiency of the government a great deal because, if one organization has a great need for assistance, stenographic help, for instance, in a rush period, some other agency said, "Well, we don't.... We're not busy now. We'll loan you a bunch of secretaries. We'll loan some of our people." And this way everything moved along much more smoothly. That's a great thing that President Kennedy did which I doubt anybody has ever mentioned in this series. It's not known generally. But anyway, it operated the same way on our country team so that we brought to bear every resource we had on a particular problem.

This was particularly true on the youth problem, which we considered one of our greatest problems in Venezuela, because of the leftist trend of the students there. And we achieved great things, as far as we could go, in Venezuela with the youth. And it's had its effect in helping the government, and the political parties especially--more than the

government, the political parties. But, anyway, this was the concept of the country team in Caracas, and it worked beautifully, and so that we were getting results. We were making our recommendations--when you put at the bottom of a telegram to the department, "The country team concurs," they knew up there that here was a country team that was working closely together, was reasonably intelligent, and knew what it was up to, knew a hell of a lot more about what was going on in Venezuela than the State Department: therefore they just gave us carte blanche, really, to operate. And so the word got around that this was a real operation.

It was very fortunate that we had that operation during this period because of the concentrated attempt by the communists and Castro [Fidel Castro] to overthrow Betancourt. Castro made no bones about Venezuela being his number one target, and he brought to bear all the pressure he could. And so that everybody knew this, and when Betancourt staged the elections in December of '63, with 92 percent of the people going to the polls, this became a resounding defeat for the communists and probably influenced Castro policies throughout the hemisphere. This was the beginning of his going downhill.

So the fact that we were operating as a team and were assisting the Venezuelans in every way possible--the minute they asked for something they got it--we can take a certain amount of credit for the success of the Betancourt administration. There's no doubt about that. And that isn't taking any of the credit away from the Venezuelans, but

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Betancourt did have almost insurmountable problems at times that we helped him a great deal in. And so I thought that in this particular era of relations and history in Venezuela, to have a strong country team was very fortunate for the United States.

HACKMAN: Did your relationship with the other American consuls in Venezuela change as a result of this, in other cities?

STEWART: You mean American consuls?

HACKMAN: Yes.

STEWART: Oh, they operated completely in accordance with the embassy policy. And we kept them briefed through the Consul General, and we brought them in Caracas every once in awhile, but the policy line was followed throughout the country. There was no.... The consulates really don't have that much power, but, of course, they do represent the voice of the embassy in the particular consular district, so they do have a certain amount of importance. The overwhelming power of the American ambassador abroad is not generally understood in the United States. The ambassador of a country as large as the United States with its enormous influence, if used right, it can be a very determining factor in the course a country takes. It's just, just.... It's just enormous. An American ambassador in Washington, just enormous. An American ambassador in Washington, just another Joe but when he's in another country, and even after he's left the ambassadorship, still has an enormous amount of influence in a country if he's been liked

there. So that, as far as the consul is concerned, the consuls and their staffs followed the line exactly as set forth by the country team.

HACKMAN: While we're talking about ambassadors, what about the Venezuelan ambassadors to the United States? Did these people do a pretty good job in this period from your point of view?

STEWART: Excellent, but they were carrying out the policies of President Betancourt. Betancourt was firmly pro-US and they reflected his policies. If they hadn't reflected them, they wouldn't be there very long. The problems that we had, with Venezuela. As I say, the economic problem was oil; the political problem was recognition of de facto governments. Betancourt had strongly propounded this theory that member of the OAS [Organization of American States] should determine together beforehand whether a government should be recognized or not. And we said, "Yes, we will consult and get the attitude of the other governments, but that doesn't mean that we will be guided by a majority vote, let us say, of the OAS because we're a sovereign country, and our national interests sometimes are served better by recognizing a government than by using a rule, a very strict rule of them judgment whether or not to recognize."

So this was a policy difference but it didn't really affect our relations too much, because Betancourt was enough of a realist to say, "Yes, we can't be quixotic--the United States can't be quixotic about these things. We can because we're a small country but we understand your problem. We know that there are certain considerations as a world power

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that you have to take into consideration that we don't have to. We can be Don Quixotes if we want to but you can't and I understand that." But this didn't prevent Betancourt from sometimes getting me on the carpet and giving me a chewing out, the like of which you have never heard, when we would recognize a regime. Once he'd gotten it out of his system, then that was forgotten. As I say, he recognized we had to recognized from a different viewpoint than a country like Venezuela.

HACKMAN: Did these recognitions by us, in some cases, create serious political problems for Betancourt?

STEWART: No, not particularly, because Betancourt had a fairly good understanding with his military and the problem was with the military. He kept them pretty well briefed on everything. It did have the potential of problems when of course, every time there was an overthrow of a democratic government by a military group and we recognized the junta or whatever military government was set up. It could have given the dissident elements in the Venezuelan armed forces some encouragement, maybe, to try to knock over the Betancourt regime, but as it turned out, there was never any misunderstanding among the Venezuelan officers where we stood and that was helpful.

But even more important was that Betancourt's relationship with the military was very good. Betancourt had to learn while he was president of the provisional or the revolutionary junta from '56 to '65--no, wait a minute, from '35 to '48--how to get along with the military because the revolutionary junta was made up of civilians and military officers; so that when he became president, or even before he took office, he assiduously cultivated the military. Every Thursday Betancourt devoted his afternoons to meetings with any military officer or noncom who wanted to come to see him at Miraflores Palace with whatever problem in the world he had, whether personal or whether he was concerned about policies. And he very patiently went through the policy things, told them why he was doing this, what the reasons were. Or if the guy had a personal problem, he saw that the personal problem was attended to. So that the Venezuelan officers knew that they could be received on that day and the president would hear them out, even if they were against his policies, he would hear them out and then patiently explain why he was doing it the way he was. He had only one rule, that there should be no disrespect to the commander-in-chief; so if any officer or non-com showed disrespect, then he would be arrested and prosecuted, no bones about that.

And when Betancourt left Caracas to make trips, which he did frequently, wherever there was a military garrison, Betancourt devoted about three hours of his visit there. He would take over the military commander's office, and all officers and noncoms knew that they could go to see him. And he heard their problems, most of their problems, you know. But, in this way he built up a great loyalty in the armed forces, not to mention the fact that he knew the good officers and people that supported him and had them in charge of the key military establishments and key posts. So that his relationship with the military was unique and something that other presidents should consider because it really saved his neck.

I don't know whether he was even close to ever being overthrown. There were seventeen serious attempts to overthrow him, but aside from the Puerto Cabello and

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Carupano attempts, not really serious. The Castro-Leon thing occurred before I arrived in Venezuela but it was pretty easily put down. So therefore Betancourt would blow his stack about our recognition of a de facto government, but he was enough of a realist to understand that we didn't have much alternative. But we were going against this principle that was trying to espouse and Venezuela's still trying to espouse the Betancourt theory of recognition.

HACKMAN: Could you talk about your relationship with other political leaders in Venezuela; for instance, the leadership of the--is it the URD?

STEWART: Yes.

HACKMAN: As Betancourt had more and more trouble holding his political coalition together, what was your relationship with some of these other political...?

STEWART: Well, it was an interesting relationship which was greatly aided by the fact



that I'd been in Venezuela before not as a diplomat, as a newspaperman, I knew a lot of these people. In fact, I knew them all, the political leaders, with the exception of Larrazabal [Wolfgang Larrazabal], whom I'd never met. They knew that my reputation as a journalist had been one of friendliness toward Venezuela but a pretty honest person. So the word was out, "Well, Stewart is in *Accion Democratica's* hip pocket. He's a friend of Betancourt's, they've been friends for years, therefore, he's favoring *Accion Democratica*." Yet, they all.... I had a very friendly relationship with all of them. I saw them frequently; our political section was in permanent contact with their leaders; so that there was never any occasion when we were cut off from the opposition. The opposition, in other words, said, "Well, Stewart is helping AD which is the party in power, but he's honest and we can talk with him and tell him what our objections are, what our problems are." So this relationship was never impaired. So that whenever.... It never could be said that the American embassy was not in constant communication with all the political sectors, except the communists, naturally.

We didn't deal with the communists for the simple reason that it didn't do much good. And you always had the problem of certain of the ultra-rightists; if we'd been talking to the communists then they would spread the word around that we were making a deal with them or something. It just wasn't convenient, not that we were afraid of them. It just isn't smart to deal with Communist party people, although the communists got messages to us. But there were never any direct contacts. I think that this was very helpful, and this was carrying on a belief that I always had, that you should never disregard the opposition. I would never have been ambassador of Venezuela if I had not maintained a very close friendship with Betancourt all the time he was in exile and when he was not well received in Washington. When he would come to the Department of State he would be greeted by a country desk officer or by the Office of West Coast Affairs or something, but never much higher. But I always saw him and I entertained him in my house, which caused a lot of raised eyebrows. But the point was, I had helped these people out when they were down and out, so they were properly grateful when they got into power. The same thing would have been true if Betancourt's party had been defeated

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in the elections. I could have lived with Caldera [Rafael Caldera Rodriguez] or with Jovito Villalba or Larrazabal because I knew them and they knew that we would support a constitutionally elected government. The relationship was good and this was very helpful.

As a matter of fact, this is something that never happened in the history of Venezuela, that when the presidential elections, the election campaign was held in 1963, that the United States was never an issue among any candidate, any of the candidates. They didn't bring the US into the act, and that's quite unusual, especially in a country such as Venezuela where the American influence is so strong, where we have four billion dollars in investments. But the US was not an issue in that election, and this is almost unheard of. The reason was that they couldn't really say that the embassy was favoring anybody other than that we were supporting the constitutional government. We had maintained contacts with all the elements.

And it's very interesting that during the political campaign we very carefully set forth the ground rules for the embassy in which we said, "No embassy officer gets involved in politics, naturally, and we're staying absolutely neutral." But I said, "Look, I want a report to the Department of State on how the campaign is going and what the probabilities of the winner," because, after all, this is important. So I said, "We're going to run the political section just like I would run a newspaper. I want your political officers to go out and observe the crowds in the provinces and in Caracas. I want you to go there. I don't want you to be getting yourself into the political affairs, but if a political leader recognized you--and I am going to tell all the political leaders that we are sending embassy officers out--and he wants to talk to you, you don't start running. You listen, but you keep your mouth shut."

So this is what we did. We sent junior officers out. We sent senior officers out. They went around and they observed how these campaigns were going; what kind of crowds they drew; estimated the numbers of a crowd; and then take the figure that the political party said, the number of people that attended, and made a comparison, to see whether they're trying to give us a snow job; and get the current of feeling of the people.

When the elections came off, we pretty well predicted how the outcome would be. And it was done without anybody, either the government, the party in power, or the opposition candidates, none of them could say we'd gotten into the campaign. And we were very clear in saying, "Well, look, we're going to take a look at you because we have to report to Washington." They said, "Perfectly all right with us." And so this came off without the US being an issue in the elections, and this is never heard of before. But it was an indication that the relationships between the US and Venezuela at that point probably were never better. They had improved to the point where no political opponent considered it practical to make the US an issue, because there wasn't any issue there.

HACKMAN: As that election approached and as terrorist activity became more widespread, how much of a problem was it to get Betancourt to take action to protect American business properties and just to take action against the communist and Castro groups, because a lot of his political opposition was accusing him, at that point, of subverting the constitution and taking these unconstitutional moves?

STEWART: By the time the election campaign was underway, the plan that had been

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worked out with the National Guard to protect American businesses was in full operation; it was not a problem. In fact, the only recurrent thing was the occasional dynamiting of an oil pipeline, which really meant nothing; they lost fifteen thousand barrels of oil before they got the pipeline cut off. It was nothing, so this was no problem. Nobody had to prod Betancourt into taking action against the communists. He was very conscious during the campaign that he could not suspend any constitutional guarantees during that campaign; neither could he use the armed forces to maintain order, because then an opposition candidate could say he had been *atropellador*, as they say in Spanish, had been set upon. So this was a ground rule that Betancourt understood and scrupulously observed.

The only real break, really the break that Betancourt got, was when the terrorists killed the five National Guardsmen on that excursion train because this was such an excess, because this was directed against the working class and some women and children were wounded on that train. This was such an excess that it gave the president the opportunity to cancel the inviolability of the congressmen, the communist congressmen. And he could take this action then with impunity because Venezuelan opinion was so outraged that nobody could really say--the candidate of the opposition could not make an issue if it. He took this very strong action and it really fortified his regime in the critical period. This was one of the policies that Betancourt followed fairly carefully throughout his administration. Politically it was impossible to take the autonomy away from the University; this would have been disastrous for his administration. He recognized that and he lived with it. Yet the communists went to excesses. Every time they took some stupid move, Betancourt moved in on them and circumscribed them a little tighter. For instance, his removal of the political power of the Communist party, not permitting it to have candidates and everything, arose from a stupidity that they did. And having been a communist, knowing their tactics, and being a very intelligent man he knew that sooner or later they'd overstep the bounds. Whenever you go into violence, you go to excesses. And all he did was patiently wait until they committed an excess and move in on them and went as far as he could do safely and then waited for the next excess and the communist obliged, very happily for him. When Betancourt, when you ask the question whether he needed any prodding, it wasn't a question of any prodding at all, it was helping him out in his problems of getting capable civilian police force set up so that the military wouldn't have to go in, and giving him the loans he needed so he could develop the social reform program and the technical assistance he needed to perfect the government. As far as fighting the commies, he set the ground rules in his inaugural speech when he said he wouldn't take any communists into the government. That was when the communists who had, because they had participated in the overthrow of Perez Jimenez, thought they might get some cabinet posts, or they might get a little--although in the campaign Betancourt very clearly said he wanted no part of the communists. When it was confirmed, after he became president, the communists weren't going to get into the government, then they began to lay plans for opposition, violent opposition, and the Venezuelans had evidence from the penetrations of the Communist party that they had decided that they were going to do it. It took them awhile to get geared up but in the meantime we had been told by the Venezuelans what was going on, so we said, "All right, you better get ready, too, with your counter-guerrilla operation," and we provided that assistance.

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HACKMAN: Was there ever any problem in convincing Washington, particularly the White House and President Kennedy, of the seriousness of the communist, particularly Cuban, influence in Venezuela? Because a lot of people have said that he always tended to see these problems in terms of social and economic causes and sometimes downgraded the activities of the communists, particularly the Cubans.

STEWART: No, there was no problem with any department in Washington on that because we had such conclusive proof in our reports out of there that we were being.... Venezuela being on of the targets, we had all kinds of proof immediately: that Cubans were bringing Venezuelans to Havana for training; that they were providing money; that the money was being brought back by deputies, congressional deputies who had immunity from search, all kinds of proof. So this wasn't anything that we were dreaming up, we had concrete proof. The problem was very clear to all of Washington, plus the seriousness of it because of our investments and the rich plum that would drop into Castro's lap if he ever got Venezuela with the hundreds of millions of dollars he would have had to subvert the rest of South America. So there was no problem. They understood the problem perfectly well, that's why we got so much support.

HACKMAN: Moving back to something else again, your appointment as ambassador. Had you been considered, as far as you know, as a possible ambassador at the very beginning of the administration, before Moscoso was appointed?

STEWART: All I know is that Adolf Berle once said my name had been brought up.

HACKMAN: Right. I've heard that.

STEWART: But it wasn't a very serious proposition, because Moscoso's name came up immediately and that was considered to be a very fine appointment.

HACKMAN: At the time you were appointed, when Moscoso left, was this much of a surprise to you? I remember the remarks at the time made that this was an unprecedented action, somebody being raised to ambassador at a post like that. Do you recall that?

STEWART: Well, there was a story that came out in the *New York Times*, a Tad Szulc story, that I was going to get a battlefield promotion or something which was.... Tad Szulc assures me that he was told, "This is on the rails. It's already been decided and so it's permissible to publish the story." But it didn't work out that way. I was immediately informed by my friends in the Department not to take this story too seriously. As a matter of fact, when President Kennedy visited Caracas on December 16th, I had asked for an agreement for another ambassador at that point; the Department had told me to get the agreement for somebody else. So there wasn't anything to this Tad Szulc story, and if it was, it had been reversed quickly, maybe as a

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result of the story. I don't know. Because I don't look into these things too deeply after they've happened. Its better, "All right, it's happened, and that's that."

After the visit of Kennedy to Venezuela, which was a success--and it occurred while I was charge, which is a difficult job, to be a charge and buck the White House people that are down there making the arrangements, plus the Secret Service. Happily, it

all worked out well that we got the arrangements mad, and the liaison with the Venezuelan military and police was quite good, and the White House. The Secret Service was a person and that was the determining influence. It was all arranged so the visit came off successfully and I became ambassador.

HACKMAN: What type of problems did that visit create for you and these White House and Secret Service people?

STEWART: It's a matter of arrangements. Of course, they are working directly for the president, therefore they are very insistent that everything be done just exactly the way they want it because they think they interpret the president's needs. And they go overboard to make damn sure that they're carried out. Sometimes these things are not practical. Then, you demure and say, "Well, look, it's not done that way here. Maybe it could be done better this way. Maybe it could be done better this other way." But then they say, "Well, look, it's going to be done our way or not at all. So that's that," you know. There wasn't anything very serious, but the poor embassy staff people who were in charge of the detailed arrangements got kind of harassed toward the end, let's fact it. But then it worked out quite well.

HACKMAN: Do you recall who was representing, who were the forward men for the White house on that trip, anybody of close association with the president?

STEWART: I can't remember his name now, but there was one fellow there that was the one that was most insistent on having these things done particularly well. I don't think he's there anymore. The Secret Service man in charge was [John Champion], who turned out to be a very practical man, very easy to work with. He had certain criteria that had to be met or the visit wouldn't be made. He could have made the decision ten minutes before the plane arrived for the president not to come; he had that power. And he was realistic, good and the Venezuelans cooperated with him perfectly. And they set up a security organization that met his standards, and as it turned out, quite adequate. But this is nothing new, you know. If you talk to any ambassador in the world about a presidential visit, they blanch because, believe me, there are headaches. But I suppose these guys are perfectionists, or they wouldn't be holding those jobs, or they wouldn't hold them very long; so they insist on the ground rules and I suppose they're right.

HACKMAN: Did you participate in the discussions between President Kennedy and President Betancourt at that time?

STEWART: Yes, I was present at all of them.

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HACKMAN: What do you recall about, well, what decisions, if any, were made and how effective President Kennedy was in his relationship?

STEWART: The president was very well briefed. He knew all the problems and again with oil and loans and things like that. The question of security didn't come up, that thing had been taken care of. They were general economic discussions, mostly, mostly on economics. And the conversations were very frank. Nothing particularly new was added to them or anything, but the fact that the two presidents were able to sit down and talk it out was very helpful. And it was very helpful for President Kennedy to meet Dr. Caldera, the head of the Christian Democrats, for the simple reason that the president wasn't aware of the Christian Democrat...

[END SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

STEWART: ...in Latin America, and it was an opportunity for him to become suddenly aware that here is a force in Latin America. And he got on that one right away.

HACKMAN: Were there other people, some of Betancourt's ministers, for instance, who Kennedy was particularly impressed with, do you recall?

STEWART: The most impressive of all the ministers was Andreas Germain Otero, the minister of finance, who was brilliant. He destroyed a number of United States contentions and this was on the balance of payment and things like that. So that his figures were better than the American government's. And they were made up here; they weren't made in Caracas. I'll defend my embassy on that one.

HACKMAN: Did the frequent strong endorsements that came out of Washington, at the White House level particularly, in support of the Betancourt government create any problem for you in your relationship. Did President Betancourt ever feel that he was so popular, so well liked at the White House level that it was difficult...

STEWART: No, because we didn't go too much overboard. And when statements were made in Washington it was at the embassy's suggestion after discussion with the president. I think we kept them fairly restrained, but one of the things that we always made a great point of saying, is that we support this constitutional government, and we will continue to support it. And at times when the going got kind of sticky, this was helpful to Betancourt, to hear that we weren't flagging in our interest in supporting his government. It was only occasionally that we used those statements, but when we did, it was at our suggestion and after telling the president what we were going

to say, "Well, look, we're going to come out with this statement in support of you, again. It'll say this." He's say, "It's all right."

HACKMAN: In the meetings between the two--Kennedy's trip and then Betancourt's trip to the United States--did Kennedy's empathy for Betancourt and his government ever lead him to make commitments that were difficult to meet, either in AID or otherwise, that presented any problems at all?

STEWART: No, because the president and the department and all the sections of the US government were guided by the embassy down there, and we kept them very well informed. Whatever we defended down there strongly, or supported strongly, wasn't anything out of line. We weren't asking for the moon for Venezuela, but what we thought would be helpful to him, what he needed, we strongly supported and got eventually. But we didn't.... The president didn't go overboard. On the question, again, of oil, which was a big problem that had to be discussed up here, the president had made up his mind after the Feldman visit that, "Look, this is a sovereign country. You've got to deal with it as a sovereign country, and therefore it's no more than fair we should do it this way." We agreed with that thoroughly, and even Interior had to agree with that. I mean they weren't really.... They were doing their very best to work out a formula. They always have, along with the fuels division of the department and the economic area, but there are some things that are political realities in these States that can't be overcome, and Venezuelans understand that.

HACKMAN: Do you recall anything specific that you haven't talked about, about your visits to the White House? There was that one in July of '62. Was this just a regular trip back to the United States?

STEWART: Yes. I didn't come to the States very often, but this was one of my visits and it's customary for the ambassador to go talk to the president. The president was mainly interested in the personality of Betancourt, how he was doing, how he was, because Kennedy had a great affection for Betancourt. He admired his guts, and he admired the way he was going at it, and so he took a very keen interest in how he was doing. My report to the president was on how Betancourt was doing, his attitude toward the United States, and I reiterated President Betancourt's admiration for Kennedy, which was unbounded. That was the type of thing. We didn't get to the real nuts and bolts of the operations because they'd all been taken care of. The oil problem was a recurring one and there's no use to talk a hell of a lot about it.

HACKMAN: Was there anyone at the White House level specifically that you had other dealings with? Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] sometimes got involved.

STEWART: I always Ralph Dungan. Dungan and I are very good friends. It was very easy to talk with him and we had no differences on policies whatsoever. But he was about the only fellow in the White House that I talked to other than the president. It really wasn't necessary because, as I say, the country team operated down there very well, we were ahead on everything, our policies were accepted up there,

we were going ahead with the plans, and so really we didn't come into much problem. As I mentioned earlier to you, before this transcription, I did make a recommendation to the president on the Peruvian thing, in which I was influenced by my being ambassador in Venezuela, that I thought that our initial attitude toward the overthrow of Prado [Manuel Prado Ugarteche] was a right reaction, but we backed off from it. The president didn't agree with me, so that took care of that. But I did express my opinion on it, and I was expressing Betancourt's opinion too. But other than that, my visits with Kennedy were very friendly visits. He was always curious about how Betancourt was getting along, and always said, "Well, things are going very well down there," and complimented me. In general, we didn't have any serious problems to discuss, and I didn't take up much of his time.

HACKMAN: You mentioned earlier, and I don't know if you were talking specifically about the Kennedy period, that you did some work on the Hill. Would you do this type thing when you came back on a visit?

STEWART: I always did, yes. I appeared before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. I never did appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, even for confirmation. I was named ambassador in the field, which was unprecedented. They were going to swear me in down in Caracas, and I said, "Well, I think it'd be more proper if I came up to Washington to be sworn in." So I came up and the word was passed over to the Hill, "Well, he's here. You want to question him?" although I had already been confirmed. They said, "No. He's doing all right. Leave him alone." I did go before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and gave a report on progress in Venezuela, and I always went to see my senators and congressmen from Arizona, my home state. But I was always available, and they knew it because the word was passed up through the congressional liaison people that I was here. The fact that we weren't having great problems in Venezuela or the problems were being taken care of meant that you weren't going to be questioned very much on the Hill. It's when things start going sour is when they begin to ask you to appear.

HACKMAN: Would you make efforts when you came back to the States on behalf of particular AID projects that might have been tied up.

STEWART: Oh, indeed I did.

HACKMAN: How would you go about that?

STEWART: They were handled with Mr. Bell personally. I must say that we had some very interesting sessions, but they finally bought our thesis. I found Bell very intelligent. His arguments were well founded, but I thought my arguments were just as well founded, and we had it out in a very friendly way. Eventually, the policy was adopted that we should continue to give Venezuela technical assistance.



And I had no argument with AID in their later policy that Venezuela, having recovered economically from this period of shortage of cash, and their economy was

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moving along, that the time had come when we shouldn't give them too many of these low interest, long term, longtime repayment loans because they were a "have" country and they could get along. But when they were hard up, yes, I said, "Listen, we've got to make this government go: therefore, we better help them now. They need the help." And the Venezuelans got the necessary assistance. They're still getting it, but they're getting it from the regular lending institutions.

HACKMAN: Would the assistant secretary, or let's say the deputy assistant secretary, get involved in this in an effort to get these things out of AID that you wanted?

STEWART: Yes, they supported us. They all supported us. We had to convince Theodore Moscoso. He, having been ambassador there, was sympathetic to Venezuela, but on the other hand, being the deputy administrator, there was a line that had been set up and this was cutting across the line. There had to be an exception made. He eventually bought it, but he argued too.

HACKMAN: Going back to this whole question of terrorists attacks in Venezuela, what type of problems did this create for you in terms of just the functioning of the embassy because there were some attacks on homes of United States representative? A military attaché was kidnapped at that time.

STEWART: Well, this was a problem; there was a real physical danger involved. The kidnapping of Colonel Chenault [James K. Chenault] was a very well executed maneuver and came at a time when the Venezuela intelligence simply couldn't cope with it. They never did know who did that. The fact that Colonel Chenault was released came about because the terrorists figured they'd gotten their propaganda mileage out of it and they let him go. There was no intention to kill him ever. But he was guarded by the most fanatical young communist you ever saw. And if he had attempted to escape he would have been killed; there's no question about it. He knew that.

I wasn't there when the second kidnapping occurred, but at that time the Venezuelan intelligence was good enough so that they broke the ring. They had closed in on the kidnapers to the point where they prematurely released the colonel they had kidnapped, and they let him go unharmed. And was smart enough to put the finger on them. That really helped wrap this case up, but by that time Venezuelan intelligence was good enough that they had penetrated the FALN [*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional*] and did pick up the people that had done it. But when I saw there, they didn't have the remotest idea who did it.

During that period, we never had the feeling that they wanted to assassinate embassy officers. What they wanted to do was kidnap them and then call the Associated

Press and United Press, and the world suddenly found out that somebody had been kidnapped, or that political consular's house had been invaded and his wife tied up and they painted FALN signs all over the walls; departed. This was done to show that Betancourt couldn't control his own country, to embarrass the Betancourt government.

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There was practically a permanent conspiracy to kidnap me. Therefore, I had the police inspector who sat in the front seat of the Cadillac with a submachine gun and two radio patrol cars that followed me any place I went, day or night. I had that permanent guard. It got a little tiresome, but we had enough firepower back of me that it was too risky for them to pull anything. Of course, if I had not had this protection, it would have been very easy for them to put a road block on one of those narrow streets going to the residence and snatch me. Then they'd call the wire services and say, "We have just kidnapped the American ambassador." And this would have been horrible. But because of my radio patrol cars back of me, it was too risky for them. But there was no question that they had entertained the idea many times of trying it. Well, it didn't work.

But it didn't make my job any easier because, while I sort of laughed this off, being sincerely of the feeling that they weren't trying to assassinate me, what they wanted was to kidnap me, you were under a certain amount of tension, although you didn't think so. When I'd go out to play golf, for instance, the foursome was a five-some; the inspector went around with, followed us around with the submachine gun in a brief case, broken down in a briefcase. And two members of the radio patrol group, one on each side of the fairway preceded me and my group all round the golf course. Of course, the guys I played golf with couldn't have cared less. They said, "This probably bothers the ambassador more than it bothers us. We aren't concerned." And it did because I lost a hell of a lot of money playing golf when I... [Laughter] The point was that this was understood, that was this deal trying to get at me, and the measures were taken which made it impossible to do. There were several attempts on embassy houses, officers', that were unsuccessful and aren't generally known. They were foiled by the fact that we had better vigilance and some quick thinking on the part of servants, et cetera, et cetera.

The thing was that we were under the gun, and it was a real tribute to our staff down there that nobody cracked up. This is something that most people don't realize: everybody in the American colony--and there are seven or eight thousand of them in Caracas--watched us very closely, and we sort of had to lead the way. If we would have shown any signs of panic, then the panic would have been on there, and they'd have been pulling kids out of school and sending them to the states and all kinds of things like that. But we held pretty firm and the American colony appreciated it.

They were under great pressure all the time because the communists had a little trick of calling up their homes and saying they were going to kidnap the children coming home from school, and tricks like that. When Colonel Chenault was kidnapped we'd get these anonymous calls that, "You'll find his body out on kilometer nineteen of the road below [Inaudible]," and things like that. Or we were getting bomb threats all the time. They did carry through on one bomb threat and blew the hell out of the seventh floor where my office was. But our people didn't panic. The day that happened, I made all my social engagements, including a couple of American parties, as if nothing had happened.

The point was you simply had to lead the way down there, and it just so happens that we just had one hell of a good staff and they didn't get spooked. This had a great deal to do with the conduct of the American colony.

HACKMAN: You were talking about these people making these kidnaps just for publicity sake, and then they would run to the press, the AP. How

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effective were American correspondents? Does anyone particularly stand out in your mind that you had a good relationship with, or that were particularly accurate in the stories they were writing? Like Richard Eder [Richard Gray Eder] was writing for the *Times* [*New York Times*] and you mentioned Tad....

STEWART: Tad came down only a few times. The problem with the American press was quite serious because the press generally painted a very despairing picture of Venezuela. The wire service correspondents who lived in Caracas were fairly objective and accurate because they were there all the time, but the visiting firemen who came in sometimes became a big problem. We made it a point in the embassy--and I had a very good public affairs officer in Dick Cushing [Richard Golle Cushing] with whom I'd worked on the AP in San Francisco years and years ago. He was a seasoned newspaperman. Our point was that when a visiting American journalist came in, we gave him a very thorough briefing on the way we saw the situation, and it was clearly understood this was not for attribution; it was for background, and they were to go out and verify whether we were lying or whether we had pretty well assessed the situation. Well, in their great desire to be objective, the correspondents would talk to the opposition, and they'd go see the Communists, and they'd see everybody. And the opposition of the ultra-right that considered Bentancourt a Communist, they'd always manage to see these correspondents at the hotel bar or something and unload on them. In their desire to be objective, they'd paint both pictures, with the result that the picture was distorted. I mean, in the final conclusion they tried to take everything into consideration; and they didn't weigh the evidence very accurately, I thought. And their stories made it look as though Venezuela was going down the drain any day. We didn't have very many people that came through that were objective. A fellow by the name of Ryan [William L. Ryan] of the AP was quite objective--writes a daily column for the AP opinion. *Christian Science Monitor* people were quite good. But, as I say, we had streams of correspondents coming through who were on one or two day stands and they were experts after that. They weighed everything and threw it all into a conglomeration and then came out with their conclusions which sometimes weighed against the actual facts.

A lot of this was the fault of the Venezuelan government which didn't have very good public relations. They were very inarticulate in getting their viewpoint over unless a person got to see the president. The president was plenty articulate, or the Minister of Interior but then they would say, "Well, he's naturally prejudice, it's his own government. We've got to take into consideration what these other characters are saying," much of which was completely untrue and inaccurate

The result was that when the December elections were held in 1963, the electrifying effect it had of being a successful election with such an enormous turnout of voters caught the world by surprise, and this is part of the reaction of sort of, "My God, here is a country we thought going down the drain and it's given the Communists a horrible defeat." It had the effect of making that election much more significant than people knowledgeable would have thought possible, you see. So it helped in the final analysis.

HACKMAN: And Betancourt's statements that this was exactly what he expected of the Venezuelan people was pretty straight shooting on his part. This was....

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STEWART: Sure. And we told the visiting firemen this, we said, "Look, the odds are all in favor of this." But they chose to say, "Well, these other guys are saying, "No," and it turned out that.... Well, many analogies can be made of a situation after you've been in a position of ambassador where you know so much more than anybody else. What you give them are very straightforward versions based on a hell of a lot of factors that they don't know anything about, and then they will say—they are skeptical because, well, "We're getting a sort of a snow job," you see. Well, I can understand that having been a newspaperman myself, but I thought they weighed the other factors too strongly because, as it turned out, they were completely wrong. But I can see the same thing happening in Vietnam. I'm quite sure the president knows so much more than anybody else, yet he's having a hell of a time getting his story over. And I can understand the skepticisms there again, that he's maybe giving the American people a snow job. As a matter of fact, he probably knows so much more and is operating on the basis of knowledge nobody else is in possession of, and he can't get that story over because he can't tell everything. What the heck. So I can sympathize with his dilemma.

But, in general, the fact that the elections turned out well and surprised the world so much was favorable in the long run to Venezuela because all of a sudden the people say, "Well here's a country that's made it." And the developments since that election have borne it out for Venezuela is one of the countries now that's on the takeoff. It's made it.

HACKMAN: Another group that was coming in and may have presented some problems would have been congressmen and their staff members. Could you talk about that?

STEWART: We didn't have too many visits. The terrorism kind of slowed down our congressional visits, although we did have McClellan [John L. McClellan], Senator McClellan came in with a committee and we gave them a briefing, and they left very reasonably satisfied. Somebody threw a rock at the car that Senator and Mrs. McClellan were in with me: it hit and put a little dent in the fender. Some senator leaked the story when he got back to the States. We had all agreed that, what the heck, it was nothing. Then there was a three or four day sensation that congressmen's, senators' cars are stoned, et cetera, et cetera. Well, that you live with.

They are two or three day sensations; then they're over. But we didn't get too very many visiting delegations. We didn't get individual congressmen visiting down there very much.

HACKMAN: I wondered if Southern Senator Ellender [Allen J. Ellender] dropped in on you. I think he's visited everybody else.

STEWART: Ellender came, but it was either when I wasn't in Caracas or before I arrived there. But I've been in other missions when Senator Ellender visited. I was public affairs officer in Chile when he made a visit down there--and he is not the greatest admirer in the world for the USIA--so I know about his visits. Probably they're beneficial; after all, you've got to have opposition. And he could

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be convinced if you gave him a good argument. He doesn't have a closed mind, except he just starts from the premise that maybe this outfit isn't operating as well as it ought to and maybe it's spending too much money and it's my duty to see that they don't. But he's not at all a person that you can't argue with.

HACKMAN: Moving on to something else I wanted to talk about for a minute, the Peace Corps. How did this relationship work out in the period you were ambassador and was it generally successful in Venezuela?

STEWART: Well, the Peace Corps came in there in small numbers, and their effect was just exactly what they had been set up to create: that is, an absolute new type of American that the foreigners had never seen. Here were young people who, once they convinced the people that they were there to help them, were received with open arms. The effect was enormously good for the United States. Here was a new American that they'd never seen, actually. The Venezuelan or any foreigner, his general impression is of the American businessman and, let's face it, a lot of the aren't the greatest missionaries in the world; et here was the cream of the United States, the young people, who have dedicated themselves to try to help the people who aren't as well advanced as we are. They made an enormous impression even when they were not successful, they still were good because we got the bad apples out of there in a hurry. They may not have been the most competent people, but they were giving it the old college try and were doing some good.

People now tell me that our Peace Corps is too big in Venezuela, we're not over flooding the place, that they're not as effective. And I think probably this is true because when we had some eighty-five in Venezuela, the individual impact of each one of those men who operated, alone usually, in an area, was enormous. When you get in three or four, then they're beginning to saturate the area, and the people shun them a little bit, with the result that they're playing pinochle among themselves instead of out doing work. And I think that anything that's wrong with the Peace Corps now is it's becoming bureaucratic all of a sudden with an enormous bureau to sustain it and they're over

flooding the field. At least in Venezuela I think that's true. But the initial Peace Corps group did a tremendous job. It was very helpful to us.

HACKMAN: One other thing, did the passage of the Trade Agreements Act in 1962 create any friction between the two governments? This may have been less so far Venezuela than some other since the relationship was primarily on oil.

STEWART: No effect whatsoever. You see, we operated with a trade agreement in which the Venezuelans changed the ground rules on it and we went along with it because we had a clash of policies there. The Venezuelans had a 15 percent unemployment problem with an enormous number of young people coming into the labor market every year. In order for them to absorb the unemployment and therefore lower social unrest, they had to industrialize. Well, what's the easiest way to industrialize? The products that they import, canned goods and things like that, it's easy to produce that in their own country. They can even import the raw materials for canning,

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but it creates unemployment. Therefore our list number one, the important list of imports that we were permitted to bring in without restrictions, were limited for the simple reason the Venezuelans were setting up factories in their own country to provide these very products. So they did violate the trade agreement by putting in the quota system. But on the other hand, they were protecting their problem of unemployment. We couldn't argue too much about that, so we sort of looked the other way.

But, as the Venezuelan economy improved, our imports didn't diminish. In fact, they increased because we were importing different kinds of materials into the country, highly technical materials and stuff that they couldn't manufacture down there that they bought from us. But canned goods, flour mills and things like that which they put up, they really violated our trade agreement by making quotas to protect those factories.

On the other hand--and this is something that I'm very proud of an ambassador--the American companies which had the know-how and the money to put in those factories, used to come to the embassy and say, "Well, we want to invest in this country. We see the handwriting on the wall that we're not going to be able to export to Venezuela our products any more because they're determined to process these things in their own country." So they'd say, "What is your opinion?" And I said, "Well, my opinion is that Betancourt is going to make it. My recommendation is that you make the investment and get in on the ground floor. At the same time you're helping the administration by setting up employment sources for the Venezuelan government; you probably will get a lot of mileage out of it." And, in general, American companies did go in there, The British, the Europeans did not.

The result is that our companies there have a privileged status right now, because the Latins don't forget people that help them out when they're in dire straits, and we were very helpful at that particular time by coming in with investments. So they have a good status. They're in on the ground floor. They're reaping the benefits of it now. The

Europeans simply were afraid; they were too cynical about this thing. We were just dumb enough to think that they could get away with it, and they did.

HACKMAN: What was Betancourt's feeling about these investments? Was he anxious at that point to get these...?

STEWART: Oh, very much so, yes. And this helped him a great deal. It didn't lower unemployment as much as a big, basic steel mill or something like that because these canning factories and processing plants had highly automated machinery which they had to put in in Venezuela to be competitive because of the high wage scale. Nevertheless, every little bit helped. And, of course, once industries come in, there are offshoots which spring up. For instance, the agricultural industry was immensely aided by these canning factories. They started growing a lot of tomatoes and stuff like that. So the farmers were provided a market for increased agricultural production and things like that.

As a matter of fact, it's quite interesting that during Betancourt's regime, agricultural production went up 10 percent despite agrarian reform, which, in general, in these countries means the breaking up of large productive estates into small units which don't produce as much. In Venezuela this was not done. The Venezuelans bought haciendas from people that wanted to sell them if they voluntarily offered them; but they

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took fringe areas from highly productive places where the owners didn't want to sell, but had excess land that they weren't using. So what Betancourt's agrarian reform didn't do was destroy the large producer, yet at the same time, he put a hundred thousand people on the land in fringe areas and in unused land. So that this is one of the marks of an agrarian reform, whether your agriculture production increased during the period of the reform, and Venezuela, I think, is about the only country where it's happened in Latin America.

HACKMAN: The only other thing I can think we might talk about is you had mentioned earlier the Bay of Pigs and the fact that it didn't create serious or lasting problems. Was there anything else on Cuba--either the meeting in '62 at Punta del Este where the whole question of Latin American attitude toward, other Latin American countries' attitude toward Cuba was discussed, or at the Cuban Missile Crisis--that you can think of that you'd want to talk about?

STEWART: Well, it might be interesting to point out that Venezuela's attitude or Betancourt's attitude, which was Venezuela's attitude, toward Cuba crystallized; I believe it was in November of nineteen hundred and sixty.

HACKMAN: When he severed relations.

STEWART: When he made a speech in the plaza in El Silencio in which he first publicly came out and said that Venezuela would conduct its own destiny;

it didn't want any advice from anybody else, especially not from Moscow, Peiping or Havana; and that he was unalterably opposed to Castro because he was mixing up in Venezuelan affairs. That then was the clear break and after that is when Castro really made Venezuela his number one target. Then, we didn't have to give Betancourt any pep talks. He knew what to do. As a matter of fact, Betancourt's policy toward Fidelismos and toward Communism is one that every Latin president ought to study because a lot of them haven't faced up to the problem, never made that tough decision. Betancourt made it and he won going away, but that is neither here nor there. It's something that each country's internal political situation determines. But after that Cuba was finished and in Venezuela in that they didn't have any more problems other than that of a constant plot to overthrow him which never really jelled and wasn't any good. In the '62 missile crisis we received very, very strong support from Venezuela in the form of naval units and any other kind of support we had needed. We didn't have any more problem there.

HACKMAN: One thing I had seen mentioned in another interview and I hadn't written down but it comes to my mind: someone mentioned that President Kennedy at one time was frustrated, I believe, when--I don't know whether it was Cubans or Venezuelan Communists or terrorists captured a Venezuelan ship, and I believe President Kennedy was frustrated at our inability to help the Venezuelan government.

STEWART: Well, it wasn't a very good exhibition. This was the taking over of the Anzoategui [SS Anzoategui], a freighter, by Venezuelans, and it escaped

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down to Brazil. I guess it was Brazil; yes, because I get it mixed up with that Portuguese passenger liner. I believe it also went that way, and I don't think we ever did sight it. And I think the President got a little sore that our naval forces couldn't find it.

HACKMAN: I think that was it. Yeah.

STEWART: They did finally locate them, but it was too late, couldn't get at them. This came at a very interesting time. This occurred while I was outside of Venezuela because I'd come up to be present at the briefings for Betancourt's visit. He was just about ready to come up to the United States then. There was a lot of feeling that Betancourt would have to cancel his trip to the United States because of the crisis and everything. The fact that there was a great hullabaloo about the piracy on the high seas and all of that, and conjectures in the press that Betancourt couldn't make it--and he couldn't have cared less; he came up. It helped his visit to some extent because here was Betancourt saying, "Well, look, all right, these crackpots took this freighter, but it's not going to cause the overthrow of my government. I can leave the country with perfect ease." So in a way it helped.

HACKMAN: I see. That's all I have, unless you can think of anything else you want to



put on or any conclusions you would want to draw about this period of President Kennedy.

STEWART: Well, one of the things that was most impressive--and it wasn't anything, it wasn't strange, but occurred in Venezuela--was at the time of the President's assassination the just absolute hopelessness that the people felt in Venezuela. "Here was our great champion, cut down by an assassin's bullet. What will the future bring? This is just horrible." And the expressions of sympathy which reflected in the thousands of people that came to the residence to pay their respects, and also the Te Deum mass in the church, and all kinds of expressions, and just a genuine feeling of just desolation that this could have happened. The people felt that they had lost a champion. And I believe this was a... I saw it in Venezuela, and I think it happened throughout the world, that in the short period that Kennedy was President, he reestablished our faith among the common people of the world, that here was a man who was for them. That made his loss particularly great. It made the job of his successor particularly hard because it was a great role to have to fill in world opinion. And there's no doubt in my mind that Kennedy did a great deal to establish our reputation abroad again.

I happened to be in Caracas when President Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] died. Of course, the mourning at that time was tremendous because here was another champion who had passed from the scene, but the reaction to the death of Kennedy was much stronger than that of Roosevelt because Roosevelt had been in office for a long time. Many things... Roosevelt talked a very good game, but he didn't help Latin America very much; but Kennedy was helping through the Alliance. And this was considered a great loss. It was a great tragedy, and it still is a tragedy for Venezuelans that Kennedy was killed. He had built credence, he built credence among the people and here was a man that was trying to help them.

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HACKMAN: Okay? Well, we just about came out right. I'm just about out of tape.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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