UN INTERVIEW
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Interviewer: William Powell

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POWELL: We are expressing our appreciation for your taking time but of your visit to New York to come here and participate in our oral history program. You are the first person that we have interviewed who has had a particular experience in thew field of public information public relations, and we want to talk to you about your experience.

Now you have had a career in the British Foreign Office and I believe your early contacts with the UN in San Francisco and so on were in the field of public information.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: Was that what you were doing in the Foreign Office when you were assigned these jobs?

MACKENZIE: Well, I was a member of Lord Halifax's staff here in Washington and I was actually doing other work. I was assistant to Isiah Berlin on political reporting work and I was ... to work on these early conferences. For example, Hot Springs Conference and then the Dumbarton Oaks Conference and Atlantic City and then of course San Francisco. But specially, on the press spokeman's side because it was felt that I had, I suppose, some background on American affairs and contacts with the American press and that was useful.

POWELL: Now you mentioned Hot Springs.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: Let's talk about that a little bit. Now what was the nature of that conference and what was the public interest in it?

MACKENZIE: Well, the public interest was considerable but it was rebuffed by the fact that we were put in this hotel, the Homestead down in Hot Springs, and surrounded by the American Army and shielded from the pres. And there was only one press conference allowed, as I remember, when they all came in and at that very moment there was a thunderstorm and all the lights in the hotel went out. So the press conference was very abortive, as I remember. But the war was still on at that stage, it was '43 or early '44, I guess, and of course it did the early work on what became FAO.

Then when we went to Dumbarton Oaks near the end of the war, the press interest, I suppose, was still considerable, but again we were sheltered from the press and surrounded in Dumbarton Oaks by American military. We had a very nice existence inside the walls. But the contacts with the press were very limited. That didn't prevent people like Scotty Reston from getting scoops on the documents that were on the inside of the wall, for

which he got the Pulitzer Prize, of course. And people like Flora Lewis who is still writing for The New York Times was there and covering it with great intelligence and assiduity. So although there was no, or very little, formal press contact, there was a lot of informal, inevitably a lot of informal contact.

POWELL: Now at Dumbartn Oaks, the titular head of the delegation I believe was Sir Alexander Cadogan.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: He was Permanent Undersecretary in the Foreign Office.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: Do you recall at Dumbarton Oaks when you arrived, did the Americans, for example, have sort of a draft laid out, or did you hammer it out on the spot? How did that work?

MACKENZIE: Oh, no. There had been an exchange of papers before Dumbarton Oaks and there were many papers already on the table, British papers, American papers, Russian papers. There had been a lot of diplomatic contact even in 1943, all looking forward to what eventually became the United Nations. So there were documents on the table.

POWELL: And then you had to sets of conversations as I recall.

MACKENZIE: Because the Russians wouldn't sit down with the Chinese. That's right. So we repeated the whole thing a second time with the Chinese and with the Russians absent.

POWELL: Now tell me this, when you were at San Francisco, one person that always fascinated me of the British delegation at the first General Assembly was Professor Sir Charles Webster. Was he at Dumbarton Oaks as well?

MACKENZIE: Yes, he was.

POWELL: He was sort of one of the brains behind it, wasn't he?

MACKENZIE: Yes, he was, because he gave the historical perspective to it all and was an advisor to the Foreign Office and had done a lot of the background work, as had Gladwyn Jebb in the middle of the war. And of course, Cadogan had been at the League of Nations. So he brought that perspective.

POWELL: Yes, it was a very, very high-powered team.

MACKENZIE: Yes, it was. It was a very influential team. And then at San Francisco, of course, we had a much bigger team. Well, Sir William Malkin was even at Dumbarton Oaks. He was the chief legal advisor to

the Foreign Office and was also very influential in drafting the Charter, and then at the end of Dumbarton Oaks we had that great tragedy when he and a number of others on the British delegation were lost on an airplane that disappeared into the Atlantic on the way back. It was a great loss for us.

POWELL: I can imagine. Now at San Francisco, the titular head of the delegation at least was Anthony Eden.

MACKENZIE: Yes, at the start.

POWELL: It was my recollection or reading that he really didn't spend a lot of time in San Francisco. Is that correct?

MACKENZIE: Well, he left early, but then most of the British politicians -- Atlee was there, too -- they left early because suddenly it was announced that there was going to be a British general election. So they dashed home at that point. There were quite a number of them. There was Wilkinson, there was Tomlinson, there was Attlee, there was Dingle Foot. So halfway through San Francisco they mostly disappeared because of the election coming up in Britain.

POWELL: Well, then who effectively took over?

MACKENZIE: Well, then Lord Halifax and Lord Cranborne took over.

POWELL: Cranborne was the --

MACKENZIE: He was Colonial Affairs. And Halifax signed the Charter for us at the end of the conference. San Francisco was really an extraordinary conference, unlike any other I've ever been at. The optimism was quite extraordinary. I think it was a mixture of all these delegates, hundreds of them coming from countries that were still under war conditions with blackouts and food rationing, and they suddenly found themselves in San Francisco with all the American generosity and the Californian sunshine and the fact that the war was very obviously coming to an end, and it generated tremendous euphoria. Plus the fact that the San Franciscos treated us all like film stars. It was a great novelty. The Russians were regarded as men from outer space.

So it was an extraordinary conference. Probably we were too optimistic. We didn't face all the facts because even then it was while we were in San Francisco that the Polish crisis blew up and other Eastern Europe troubles. And Churchill wrote that letter to Truman which we didn't know about in San Francisco, but saying, "I'm afraid there's an iron curtain coming down in Europe." Whereas in San Francisco we were living in a mood of tremendous optimism.

POWELL: Well, I heard only recently that when Molotov was on his way to San Francisco he stopped in Washington.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: He saw Truman, who really tore into him over the Polish situation.

MACKENZIE: Yes, he did.

POWELL: And Molotov was livid. He said, "I've never been talked to this way in my life."

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: And Stettinius called through -- I think it was Alger Hiss in San Francisco -- and said, "I don't know what's going to happen to the conference. Molotov may not turn up." Was there any sense of tension about the Polish situation as far as you can recall in San Francisco?

MACKENZIE: Oh, yes, there was because we couldn't agree on who should occupy the Polish seats. Would it be the non-Communist Poles who operated from London or the Lublin Poles who were allied with Moscow? And there was that Russian ship that suddenly appeared in the bay in San Francisco and all the wags at the conference said it was full of vodka or caviar, but the sinister people said it's full of Lublin Poles who will

jump out and take the seats as soon as Molotov gets his way. Well, they never did of course.

But it was also at San Francisco that Molotov finally revealed what had happened to these 17 non-Communist Poles who had gone to Moscow by agreement for a consultation after Yalta and they disappeared completely, and we and the British and the Americans were trying to find out what happened to them and they disappeared.

And in one night in San Francisco just before dinner, Molotov turned to Stettinius and he said, "Oh, these Poles you've been asking about, we've arrested the lot." And I remember Averill Harriman then called an off-the-record press briefing for the senior American correspondents to explain the kind of difficulties that were beginning to arise, and some of them walked out. They said, "We won't listen to any criticisms of our great Russian ally."

So this optimism, it prevented us from facing some facts at that time. And yet, in order to get the United Nations into existence, we had to build on the assumption of the wartime cooperation between the great powers. I don't think there was any other basis. But, looking back, the flaws in that assumption were already

becoming clear at San Francisco and the United Nations has suffered ever since from these difficulties.

POWELL: ... the Charter in San Francisco was based on a geopolitical poll.

MACKENZIE: That is right. But I really don't think there was any other basis at that time on which you could have got a world organization.

POWELL: Yes. I know exactly what you mean. Now tell me, there was of course an enormous press interest in San Francisco. Was there a good representation of the British press there?

MACKENZIE: Yes. It was still wartime so they couldn't get so many over here as I suppose would at later conferences and summits, but they were all high caliber people. Alistair Cooke was there from the Manchester Guardian. Everith McDonald was there from the Times. There was high level British representation.

POWELL: Did you do as the Americans did, did you do special briefings for the British press?

MACKENZIE: Yes, we did.

POWELL: That was your job.

MACKENZIE: That was my job, yes, along with Francis Williams who became Lord Francis Williams when Attlee became Prime Minister.

POWELL: He became Minister of Information, didn't he?

MACKENZIE: Not minister, but government spokesman from No. 10 Downing Street. He had been editor of the Daily Herald, the Labor Party paper.

POWELL: That's right. I remember ... really wanted to get him as the first Assistant Secretary General for Public Information here but Attlee said no.

MACKENZIE: He needed him, yes. Well, Francis Williams and I did that daily, night and day in fact, because of the time differential with Britain. The British correspondents always wanted to file at different times from the Americans. So it was a very busy time, but fruitful.

POWELL: How was your relationship, say, with the American delegation? Good?

MACKENZIE: Oh, yes, good. I think they had a very big problem. They had a huge delegation and they had a huge non-governmental tail. All the pressure groups in the world were there en masse and the Americans I think at times got swamped and they did have to reorganize their public relations, and that was when Adlai Stevenson was brought in to do the press briefings to parallel what we were doing on the British side.

POWELL: Did the Russians have any sense of public relations at all?

MACKENZIE: Well, Molotov made himself quite accessible to the press. I don't know if they did press briefings, I can't remember. But in San Francisco he was out to capture headlines.

POWELL: Now was that part of your first contact with Gromyko or had you known him before?

MACKENZIE: No. He was at Dumbarton Oaks. I got to know him there, yes.

POWELL: And he was of course Ambassador in Washington.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: He's practically immortal.

MACKENZIE: He is. Everytime I see him these days on television I think the Soviet Union must have some very strong hair preservers and hair color restorers because, as you say, he goes on. No change.

POWELL: Well, tell me about the working methods of the British delegation. You had Eden there and you had Lord Halifax. You had a very high level delegation. Was there much that had to be referred back to London?

MACKENZIE: Oh, there was a lot of reporting back, but no big issues, really. Churchill and all of

them were much more concerned at that stage with the ending of the war and all the consequences of that, and having Eden there for the first half and other cabinet members -- Cranborne was in the cabinet -- did make it much easier. But on things like the veto and on the future of non-self-governing territories which was a very sensitive issue for the British, there were issues that had to be referred back to London on these points.

POWELL: Now on the veto, I believe it was Evatt, among others, who sort of led the revolt against the Big Four. Did that really constitute in your view a threat to the conference?

MACKENZIE: I don't think it ever did, really, because it was so clear that the great powers -- and that meant not only Russia but equally the United States -- would not accept any charter without that veto right, and most of the small powers recognized that deep down. So it was a case of trying to explain the situation to them and to get a definition of the Charter that would at least permit free discussion without a veto in the Security Council. And there was a crisis at San Francisco when Molotov for a time even tried to block that and retain the veto right over any kind of discussion, not just decision making.

POWELL: Harriman had to take it up with Stalin.

MACKENZIE: Harriman and Harry Hopkins had to make that dash to take it up with Stalin, that's right. And Stalin did reverse the position, to that extent, of his own Molotov. But I always think that for STalin, the United Nations was always an expendable issue. He was always ready to make certain concessions in relation to the UN, the coming into existence of the Charter and so on, which he felt that the Western powers wanted so much in return for getting a free hand in Eastern Europe.

POWELL: Well, tell me about some of the ot her personalities at San Francisco that you remember. MacKenzie King, Romulo.

MACKENZIE: Romulo, I knew very well, and he was undoubtedly one of the great personalities because he was so articulate, and he became the spokesman for what we would call the Third World today on the issues of non-self-governing territories. So there were frequent clashes between Romulo and the British delegation. But in the end, I must pay my respects to Romulo.

His final key speech was so different in tone -- because we had really tried to make friends with him -- was so different in tone from what we had been expecting,

that Lord Cranborne had to change the text of his speech on the floor of the Assembly in order to match the new tone in Romulo's speech, and it was on that basis that the crisis over non-self-governing territories was resolved. And I remember Alistair Cooke sending back a dispatch saying, "The mystery in the San Francisco conference is the sudden outbreak of friendship between the British and the Philippine delegations." That was really the result of the background work, you might say, of Moral Rearmament, because they were there very actively in San Francisco at that time and had a big influence on General Romulo.

POWELL: Tell me about the Canadians. Did you know MacKenzie King?

MACKENZIE: No, I didn't. I knew Lester Pearson. MacKenzie King did not figure prominently, as I remember. Really, Lester Pearson was the key figure for Canada.

POWELL: And what about Field Marshal Smuts?

MACKENZIE: He of course was a father figure and influential, but he didn't take part in the day-to-day committee work so much. At least I wasn't aware of him. But at certain key moments in drafting the preamble of the Charter and other things, his influence was considerable, yes.

POWELL: And did the delegations have a great deal of contact with the Conference Secretariat, the people that the State Department had sent down as the host government to run the show?

MACKENZIE: Oh, yes, they did. I mean, there was a total volte face compared with Dumbarton Oaks and Hot Springs. Instead of being guarded by the American Army in San Francisco, it was a goldfish bowl. Everything was wide open. So there was quite a lot of contact that way.

POWELL: For example, Alger Hiss was Secretary General of the Conference. Did you get to know him?

MACKENZIE: Yes, I did.

POWELL: I have always been impressed by the fact that the final decision on the date and location of the Conference was not made until Yalta. It was an enormous job to get a conference of that size together and on the road in the few weeks he had.

MACKENZIE: Yes. No, I think the Americans did a very good job in organizing it because there were no precedents. They were building from scratch.

POWELL: Did you bring over a lot of the Washington staff to help the delegation?

MACKENZIE: There were several of us. Lord Gore Booth, Paul Gore Booth whose son is in the British mission now here, and myself. Charlie Campbell was also working with us on the press side. There weren't many, though from Washington, as I remember. There were more from London. It was a London team, basically.

POWELL: How did you travel out? Because I think most people went out by train, didn't they?

MACKENZIE: I think they did. I flew out early to help prepare the ground for the arrival of the British delegation.

POWELL: Now I presume that on June 25th, June 26th, there was this great euphoria.

MACKENZIE: Yes, there was.

POWELL: And the Charter had been completed and everbody was signing it and congratulating everybody. Did you have any reservations at that time?

MACKENZIE: You mean me personally?

POWELL: Yes.

MACKENZIE: Well, I had been concerned about this Polish situation. I thought that was a cloud on the horizon. But everyone felt at that stage that we had accomplished a big job. We had probably exaggerated hopes of it.

Looking back, I often think of the speech that Cadogan made at the opening of Dumbarton Oaks, the first day where he said that on the basis of experience at the League of Nations he felt that the most perfect charter that we could now construct would not work without a new spirit of goodwill to make it work, and that even an imperfect charter would work satisfactorily if we could generate that goodwill. And that was the $64 question and still is today. How do you generate the necessary goodwill and the spirit of trust to make the agreements on paper real?

POWELL: What you are saying in effect, Mr. MacKenzie, I gather, is that the defects are not so much in the Charter as in the willingness and preparedness of member governments to make it work.

MACKENZIE: That is right. Absolutely. So the desperate efforts to change the Charter don't really seem to me to be too fruitful. There are the technical difficulties of changing it because a veto operates there and the chances of getting around that veto are very slim. But in addition, the root problem is not the clauses in the Charter. The root problem is in the spirit in governments and in people, whether they are going to be loyal to the Charter.

POWELL: Now a decision was taken at San Francisco that the Preparatory Commission should meet in London and that the first part of the first session of the General Assembly was going to be in London. That was at the invitation of the British government. When was the decision taken in London and why?

MACKENZIE: I don't remember the details on that because after San Francisco, I went back to my job in Washington and was there until I was called over to London in October to help with the Preparatory Commission work there.

I can't remember the details, but of course at that stage, Britain's influence in the shaping of this new organization was very great, and I guess because the Conference itself had been in the United States, the British government thought that it would be a good basis to recognize Britain's role by having the Preparatory Commission and the first Assembly in London. And of course the Europeans were also keen on that. And there was then in London the great debate as where the permanent headquarters would be, would it be in Europe or in America?

POWELL: I remember Noel Beckle was a strong advocate of taking it back to Geneva and the Russians wouldn't hear the word. It was dirty.

MACKENZIE: That's right. I used to draft his speeches explaining all the reasons why we should stay in Europe. But there was the compromise in the end that the headquarters would be here, and I think it was the right decision, but that the Economic and Social Council would go every year to Europe. That was the kind of sop to the Europeans.

POWELL: I think it's one of the ironies that it was the vote of the Eastern Europeans that swung the balance and took the headquarters to New York.

MACKENZIE: That's right. It is.

POWELL: And ever since then they've tried to everything away from here. It was an absolutely enormous effort for a country that had just concluded World War II to have the first General Assembly in London. And I think it was Gladwyn Jebb and David Owen that really organized it. Did you get to know both of them quite well?

MACKENZIE: Oh, very well, yes. I was working very closely with them. But I was on the British government side, not on the International Secretariat side.

POWELL: Because they were a remarkable team. I worked in the Preparatory Commission then in the General Assembly and Owen was a very able administrator.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: Did you know him in the Foreign Office?

MACKENZIE: Yes, I did. Yes. And the did have to improvise like mad because the facilities, the physical facilities in London at that stage were as you remember still rather primitive with the war damage everywhere. I remember that great banquet you were perhaps at in the Painted Hall in Greenwich and the windows had all been blasted by the bombing and they just had plastic covering. And I sat at the dinner beside Senator Vandenberg and it was so cold he went out and got a coat with an enormous fur collar, I remember, and sat enjoying the dinner as best he could in this fur coat.

POWELL: Of course you had a different cast in the first General Assembly on the British delegation because of the change in government. You had Ernie Bevin as the Foreign Secretary, and he was quite active, I believe, because I remember seeing him personally attend Security Council meetings.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: He was there and so was Georges Bideaux and Vishinsky. It was a stellar cast.

MACKENZIE: Yes. Because the Security Council started with a bang, you might say, with issues arising from the war.

POWELL: The Iranian complaint.

MACKENZIE: The Iranian complaint. The Indonesian tangle.

POWELL: The Lebanese complaint.

MACKENZIE: Lebanese. Greece. So yes, at that stage, the Security Council did get high level participation and high level attention.

POWELL: Were you acting still as the delegation spokesman?

MACKENZIE: Yes, I was.

POWELL: And of course again, there was enormous press interest.

MACKENZIE: Yes, there was. The British press, I mean the United Nations was front page all that time, and even when we came back to Lake Success, the British papers, despite all the restrictions from the war that were still affecting them, sent over permanent correspondents here who filed stories every day that were very often front page.

POWELL: Oh, I know, the Times, the Mail, the Telegraph, the News, Chronicle, they all had their correspondents.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: Unlike today.

MACKENZIE: I'm afraid so.

POWELL: But yes, I do recall on one famous occasion, Sid Bruson who was the New York Times correspondent apparently scooped everybody by going into the typing pool and getting carbons of documents. And Gladlwyn Jebb found out about it and called him in and said, "If this ever happens again, you're going to be banned from this building." I mean, Jebb wouldn't put up with that nonsense at all.

MACKENZIE: This was in London?

POWELL: In London.

MACKENZIE: Is that so? I don't remember that.

POWELL: During the General Assembly, yes. He was no respecter of the New York Times. What was your impression of that first session? I know it was largely organizational.

MACKENZIE: Yes. There was the great debate about who the Secretary General would be, of course. That was a very important thing that was decided then.

POWELL: But there had been a lot of consultation among the Big Pour and Big Five on the candidacy, wasn't there, before?

MACKENZIE: Yes. But that was decided then, then there were the early debates with the Russians. They were already looming up at that stage.

POWELL: And Vishinsky of course cast the first veto.

MACKENZIE: That is right.

POWELL: What was the British reaction to that? Do you recall? Were they expecting a veto that early on, or did it take them by surprise? I was there that night. It was a Saturday night in February.

MACKENZIE: Really? I had forgotten. I don't remember the details of that. But of course we had been justifying the veto at San Francisco and everywhere else by saying it was a reserve power that would be used very rarely. And then when the Russians began to use it two or three times a week, it was a very disillusioning factor.

POWELL: Then you came back to the States.

MACKENZIE: I came back for Hunter College and Lake Success until 1949.

POWELL: So you saw all of that formative period and the beginning of the Cold War in the UN.

MACKENZIE: Very much so.

POWELL: What was your impression then of Trygve Lie as a Secretary General?

MACKENZIE: That he did a good job. He was a very human character and tried to create a spirit of

camaraderie as best he could. But I think sometimes he found himself out of his depth or facing quite unexpected crises because of the rapid breakdown in the cooperation between the great powers. Whereas the was head of an organization which was based on the ... assumption of their continued cooperation. So it did place him in a very, very difficult position and has placed every succeeding Secretary General in a difficult position.

POWELL: Yes. And of course when he broke with the Russians over Korea that was the end of it.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: Tell me, exactly what did you do with the delegation at Hunter College and at Lake Success?

MACKENZIE: You mean what did I do personally?

POWELL: Yes.

MACKENZIE: I was still press spokesman for Cadogan.

POWELL: Cadogan was then the --

MACKENZIE: He was our first permanent representative until Gladwyn Jebb came in 1950, '51.

POWELL: Just in time for the Korean War and became a television star.

MACKENZIE: That's right.

POWELL: At Hunter College I recall there was a continuation of a number of the debates that went on in the Security Council.

MACKENZIE: Yes.

POWELL: But my most vivid memory of Hunter College was that first meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission and Bernard Baruch's speech. Do you remember that?

MACKENZIE: Yes, I do. And I think it was also at Hunter College that Gromyko staged his first walk-out.

POWELL: Was it?

MACKENZIE: I think it was. But at that stage, apart from these dramas, we were very busy also drafting all the rules of procedure for the United Nations under the Charter. That was quite an active and intricate job that was done during the Hunter College days, the rules of procedure that we are still using today.

POWELL: Yes. I always think ... the Security Council still operates under provisional rules of procedure after 30 years. And so you stayed in effect with the delegation until '49.

MACKENZIE: Till '49, yes. I left -- I remember the day, I think it was September the 23rd because it happened to be the day on which it was announced that Russia had exploded its first atomic bomb, and I left.

POWELL: And you left. Yes, I recall when we interviewed Romulo. I think he was President of the General Assembly that year.

MACKENZIE: Probably.

POWELL: And he was saying that was one of the most memorable events of his term in office when they suddenly announced that they had exploded the bomb.

MACKENZIE: Yes. Well, I'm glad he is still alive. I gather he was at the Bangkok reunion recently.

POWELL: That's right. And he comes here once a year still even though he is no longer Foreign Minister.

MACKENZIE: Does he?

POWELL: Yes.

MACKENZIE: He will probably turn out for the 40th anniversary.

POWELL: Oh, I'm sure. Do you have to go?

MACKENZIE: I think, if you will excuse me.

POWELL: We enormously appreciate your coming and I think you have given us some very, very valuable material indeed, Mr. MacKenzie.

MACKENZIE: Thank you. Glad to be here.