

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk BBBB: Part 2 of 3

Dean Rusk interviewed by Richard Rusk, Thomas J. Schoenbaum, and William Tapley Bennett
1985 June

The complete interview also includes Rusk AAAA: Part 1; Rusk CCCC: Part 3.

RICHARD RUSK: We are talking with Ambassador Tapley Bennett.

BENNETT: Well, I was describing the situation of the country in early 1964. I would say it was like a three-legged stool, which was very shaky because there were three elements in the situation there. One was the lack of any accepted government. You had this triumvirate but it was made up of inexperienced people; while they meant well, they had no final power. The military had the real power, and the military were all still [Rafael Leonidas] Trujillo's men, because this was one of our problems as we worked toward a solution afterwards. None of the military leaders had enough time in service to be retired. They hadn't had twenty years of service, or whatever it took. And so you had a military establishment which was completely out of the Trujillo period, with a few conspicuous exceptions. The military was enormously corrupt. And this is another thing: the Dominican Republic being an island, it's ideal for smuggling. The military was very much involved in bringing in goods by air force planes and then selling them on the local market. That kind of petty corruption drains a country. So, you had this antediluvian military to deal with. They were--I think I described them once as a saurian group, just like alligators: you know, on a ledge somewhere and you never knew when they were going to snap. The third leg of the stool was the economy, which rested on sugar. The Dominican Republic was, and I believe still is, the country most dependent on sugar after Cuba. Even though they have diversified in recent years to a degree, still sugar is very important. And that winter of '65-'65, when sugar went below three cents a pound between Christmas Day and New Year's, I wrote in my diary that the test is well-nigh on us. If we've gone below three cents a pound, nothing could be done. It's one of the sad aspects of our democracy, because if we would only open up our market to that small, in our terms, production of sugar, and let them get the full price here, they'd make their own way. We wouldn't have to send aid and all that. But our sugar lobby, cane sugar from this part of the country: Florida, Louisiana, and the beet sugar people in the west. You know, that's one of the worst cases of protectionism in this country and it plays havoc with our foreign policy in places like the Dominican Republic.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting.

BENNETT: So, all that spring of 1965, we knew that something was going to happen soon. I had come up to Washington earlier. That was another factor in the situation. President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson had had about eight or nine of us Latin American Ambassadors come up in, I think it was June of '64. Anyway, I'd only been there a few months. We sat around the cabinet table in the White House, and the President heard a little review from each one of us. When came my turn I said, "Well, Mr. President, the Dominicans have not yet had any bloodshed, or bloodbath over the departure of Trujillo from the scene. They may yet have one, because there's

enough revenge and enough unsettled scores to be settled that this may boil over one day." And that stood me in good stead nine months later when it did break out, because he remembered that.

RICHARD RUSK: This was something that was clearly seen.

BENNETT: Well, there was this idea, you know, [that] there was a lot of unfinished business after thirty years of a harsh rule, and on both sides, because the Trujillo supporters were still trying to hold their place, and the other people were trying to move them. All this was against the background of an inept non-constitutional government, a corrupt and rapacious military, and a declining economic situation. I can tell you, tropical nights are beautiful but when you've got that kind of situation, there was a deadly menace every night. You never knew what was going to happen before dawn. We had a constant parade of little things. One of the triumvirates resigned and that almost led to the military stepping back in. The triumvirate became a duumvirate, with just two, one of them being completely a silent partner; Donny [Donald J. Cabral] Reid was the leader. Now Donny was an interesting person. He was an auto salesman so he had no real experience in government, but he was the son of a Scottish man who had come out to work in one of the Canadian banks and married into one of the very prominent Dominican families with a long political tradition. And so his son Donny felt himself a politician although he wasn't one personally, but he had it in his blood. He wanted to do the right thing, but he was inexperienced and he was feisty. He stood up to the military as well as anyone could, but sometimes he didn't know how to play it. Of course, I was immediately accused of being too close to the government. That's standard for any American Ambassador in that kind of country.

RICHARD RUSK: You and he were on fairly close terms?

BENNETT: Very close. As I have said in response to charges that I was too close to him, it was all I could do to keep him from coming over and sitting on the American Ambassador's lap every day. They wanted help from us, of course, and wanted the association with the United States to be seen as close. That was a protection for him. You stood it off as best you could, and I made it a point to see other opposition people, but there were none of them worthy of the name, really. It was a vacuum you were dealing with. So then when the economy went out, why you knew things were about to blow. Before that, there was one night--this was fairly soon in my Dominican experience. It was the night before I was to leave for that June visit to the States in '65. Off our upstairs bedroom was a big screened porch. I was standing in the door between the porch and the bedroom, getting packed for the Washington trip, leaving the next day. Suddenly there was an enormous explosion and I was literally rocked back. I didn't lose my footing, but I was pushed back. Well, I had heard just before a putt-putt going along the street, and I assumed that somebody had thrown a grenade in and it had landed in the bushes by the house and this was the explosion. It wasn't that at all, it was three miles away across the river. It was the whole arsenal. Somebody had set off an explosion, and it spread from warehouse to warehouse. We had "doop, doop, BOOM, doop, doop, doop, BOOM!" small ammunition, big stuff, mortars, everything as the fire spread. It was never solved; to this day nobody knows who did that. I went down. I was called immediately of course by the military attaché who said this explosion had taken place, which I had heard. I didn't know what it was. We went downtown about two in the morning, took a cruise around the town. Every plate glass window on the north side of the streets, in other

words opposite the blast, had been shattered. The streets were full of glass, and the police were already out to keep looting from happening. The windows on the other side weren't damaged, but just the shock wave which had hit me that far away, had of course broken everything downtown. Of course we were on the far side of the old town.

RICHARD RUSK: Despite the fact that Reid and his regime did not get into office by constitutional means, were they seen as reasonably sympathetic to American interests?

BENNETT: Oh, they were--

RICHARD RUSK: Did they get our support in various ways?

BENNETT: Yes, we tried. Yes. And this you'd have to check the records on: We did resume American aid a short time after I went there. That was a part of the process, so it would have been probably by May of '64 we began getting back into the aid business there. And of course, we had a military mission there for training, and so we began a full involvement again with the Dominican Republic and they--But the aspirations, or the expectations of Reid were way up in the stratosphere as to the kind of millions we were going to pour into the place. I had to demolish that balloon, and I did that one evening in a speech before the American Chamber of Commerce. When I said, "Talk of enormous amounts of aid is being floated around; and this is just not going to happen, there just isn't that kind of money," well, that was very much a deflator. But, you had to do it. So, we struggled along, going from hand to mouth and from week to week, and crisis to crisis of one kind or another. And then, as I say, at Christmas time, sugar went below three cents. Why then it was just a matter of time before a major crisis would break.

SCHOENBAUM: Christmas '64?

BENNETT: Sixty-four. Then we had constant rumors of plots and this and that. I'd have to check my diary on that, because I do have a lot of dates on those things for the months ahead.

SCHOENBAUM: What kind of a man was [Elias] Wessin y Wessin? Did you see him much?

BENNETT: Yes, I saw him a fair amount, in the early days. He was separate, he was not Chief of Staff. He had the tank brigade. That was a separate military unit, and there was constant rivalry between the army and the air force. The navy wasn't big enough to count. And so Wessin was a very key man, because whichever force he sided with would have the advantage. He kept his tanks across the Ozama river from the main part of the city. [The river became very important in the revolution: crossing of the one bridge and all that.] And I had long worried that he might be a paper tiger. As long as he had his force in being, why he was somebody to be reckoned with. And this is what happened in the fighting: When the day came and he ventured across the river with his tanks, the mob shot him up and he retreated.

SCHOENBAUM: He couldn't get across the river?

BENNETT: He didn't know how to do it, and so that finished him. He was, by the standards of the Dominican military, a rather reasonable, decent man. I suspect he had his hand in the till to

some degree, but he wasn't bad about it and he lived modestly. And he talked very well about his hopes for a decent transition to a democratic government and all that.

RICHARD RUSK: Any involvements with my dad that you recall during this period prior to the outbreak of the crisis?

BENNETT: Not a great deal. Because as we were talking earlier, this was just one small country and he had a whole plateful of problems. I would see him when I came to Washington. I came up in June. I must have come again maybe in the fall, and then--

SCHOENBAUM: Was he present for this?

BENNETT: I remember his saying to me once--and this I guess was when I first went out. He said, "Now, you know you're not too far away, and if you have a problem, why just get on a plane and come up here and we'll talk about it. That's a lot easier than trying to do it through telegrams." So there were several of those occasions. But normally I didn't have direct contact with him, because it was through the Assistant Secretary.

SCHOENBAUM: Was he present for this meeting with LBJ in June of '64?

BENNETT: To my recollection he was. I'd have to check my picture, frankly, because I have pictures of that.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you talk over with him the possibility that there might be violence in the making?

BENNETT: Oh yeah. Of course my telegrams were saying that. And I sent a telegram, I guess it must have been about March, about a month before, which has been quoted quite a lot. And it ended, "The wine is bitter. And I meant the harvest. Well, it was a literary allusion to the grapes, the sour grapes that will make bitter wine or something like that. And that again was, I guess, a useful thing in the light of the record that there had been a prediction that this was about to happen. As I say, I came to Washington that week having told Washington this is about the last safe time to come because the tensions were building noticeably. Another matter, that spring there was a bad drought, and Santo Domingo as a town was one of these enormous, sprawling places with lots of slums and with one water spigot serving sixty, seventy houses, you know, that kind of thing. We had had reports that there was brawling and fighting in the barrios, these poor sections, night after night. Just the strain and tension of all these economic shambles coming to roost, and no water on top of it. The big water main broke under the river, and so what little water was there was washed away. It was just--everything that could go wrong went wrong. It was just one of those kind of situations.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you recall going to my dad for any advice during this period.

BENNETT: Not particularly, because I would be doing that through the structure of the Assistant Secretary.

BENNETT: Your father always received you very affably and very pleasantly. He didn't give much of himself. You talked and you made your case, and he'd say, "Well, I'll have to sit down and think about that." And then, if he approved what you'd recommended, there'd be a telegram saying go ahead and do this or that; if not, you got a courteous letter saying why he had decided not to do this, I think it's better to do something else.

RICHARD RUSK: But either way, you'd get a response?

BENNETT: There was always a response, but not directly at the time, which was very sensible.

RICHARD RUSK: Hmm. Interesting. His former colleagues have complained that it was very difficult to get any response from him.

BENNETT: Well, he didn't give of himself very much, as I say, but I never worried about that. Well, I didn't bother him with a lot. After all, he was Secretary of State for the whole world, and I was just handling one little corner, which was not on the front burner.

RICHARD RUSK: That's why you were down there, to try to make decisions.

BENNETT: While people knew in the ARA [American Republics Area] Bureau that it was a serious situation, we didn't have any high priority on staffing of personnel. I went for months without a secretary and just finally had gotten a girl assigned. She was pulled off the day before she was to arrive and sent to Vietnam instead, and so we were low on the totem pole on that. Some of my staff was not first class and had to be removed. And one of the things that has been charged is quite true. There was some exaggerated reporting out of that Embassy, and I found later that a political officer was wandering around the hotel corridors spouting excited opinions to the press. He didn't mean wrongly, but he just wasn't really up to the job, particularly after the crisis came.

SCHOENBAUM: Can you be specific about that?

BENNETT: Opinions, opinions. You know, statements that all these people are communists, and that kind of thing.

SCHOENBAUM: Oh, I see, he was mouthing opinions.

BENNETT: He was mouthing opinions, and then was writing some very exaggerated things. Well, I couldn't see everything that went out of there, although it went out under my name and I've always taken full responsibility for anything that went out under my name. There was another staff member who was doing a good job; he was inexperienced but he was doing a good job. Then the old *New York Tribune*, *Herald Tribune* had a waspish man on the job there, and he went after this young man. I called him in, and I said, "You just stop going after Briesky because I'm the chief here and if it's gone out under my name, you blame me, don't blame him." Yes, there were some exaggerated reports that got out; I would freely acknowledge that and I would say so.

RICHARD RUSK: This one is a bit unusual in a sense that Lyndon Johnson personally became involved in the operational decision making. He personally would be placing the calls.

BENNETT: Yes, he called me a number of times. Another interesting thing was that the lights went out. We had a generator so we could run the office, but we didn't have lights in the house or anything. Water was a problem, but we had a well and pump so we got along with the water. The telephone never went out, it functioned completely, but the central was in the hands of the rebels. They heard everything that was said, and when President Johnson would call me you knew they were listening.

RICHARD RUSK: You routed through the switchboard, the rebels had control of the switchboard?

BENNETT: I still go on the theory that downtown central, you see--that was before you had these satellite communications and all this kind of thing. And I still believe the theory that ships of state leak more from the top. And there was one night there during the [McGeorge] Bundy, [Thomas C.] Mann, [Cyrus Roberts] Vance mission there were about seven or nine of us sitting around in my office, and the phone rang and it was the President. And he said "I understand y'all are having a meeting tonight." I said, "We're sitting here right now, Mr. President, just going over what we ought to do next." "Well," he said, "I'd like to hear from each one of you." And we went down and each one. The President polled each one in the room, and you knew that downtown they were listening to the whole thing.

SCHOENBAUM: How did you happen to--How could you risk that?

BENNETT: You're talking to the President of the United States, you warned him that we didn't control the telephones, but--And then I remember another night he called. This was after the OAS [Organization of American States] commission had arrived and this was [Ellsworth] Bunker, the Brazilian Ambassador, and the Salvadoran Ambassador, the three of them. They were all fine men. Bunker, of course, was clearly the dominant member and he became the chairman. I was going over to meet with them. Well, they had set up shop on the top in the penthouse of the Ambassador Hotel, which was twelfth, thirteenth floor. Well, the elevators were out, and the lights were out; there was a candle on each landing. I trudged my way up to the top, and just as I got to the top they said, "The President's calling you, the President's calling you," because the office had said I was over at the hotel. Well, the only telephone was in the hallway. Just at that moment the elevator started running again, and so I was standing there in the hall, talking to the President of the United States, with the elevator clanging up and down. His first word was, "How many did you get out today?" He was referring to the evacuation. I didn't yet have the figures for that day, but I gave a number, figuring that by the time they checked up on it I'd get a correction. I wasn't going to say I didn't know to the President. So I said 140 or 150 or something to that effect in a range I knew would be accurate. Overseas telephones were very poor in those days, and with all the outside noise I was shouting, and so everything I said could be heard by everybody around.

RICHARD RUSK: This is interesting, the background for all of this. This is what you don't find in the memoirs and histories.

BENNETT: Well, if I had one word that I would use to describe the Dominican situation at that time, it would be feckless. Nothing went right. We had many troubles even in our simple administration at the Embassy. Everything you tried to do went wrong; then again, it was right at the end of the long dry season. The rains come in May, and this was April 27, 28. Every day the air gets heavier and heavier, and it wears on your nerves, on people in general. It's a clammy heat. And so all of this was in my opinion a factor in the way things developed.

RICHARD RUSK: Interesting.

BENNETT: Because this thing broke out before the plotters had meant it to. It came out later that they were planning this revolution for about two months later.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh really?

BENNETT: And they stumbled into it.

RICHARD RUSK: Broke early?

BENNETT: Typical Dominican fecklessness: somebody did it wrong and there they were in the streets.

SCHOENBAUM: Can you be specific about what the chain of events were? Weren't these colonels who were plotting?

BENNETT: Yeah, they were colonels.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you know them beforehand, or have any indication--

BENNETT: Some of them I knew, yes. And Colonel [Francisco] Caamano [Deno], who was sort of the head man, was a dumb, big, heavy fellow, you know, the kind of man who would be good in the barracks: a hail fellow well met, but very much the tool of other people. He then very quickly became the tool of we thought at the time the extreme left. There were many evidences of that. Then he was shipped off to England as military attaché by the provisional government to get him out of the country. The British knew how to treat him with deprecating courtesy. Then he disappeared and, so far as I know, has never been found since. Our intelligence authorities were convinced that he went to Cuba.

RICHARD RUSK: These colonels were sympathetic to [Juan] Bosch, for the most part?

BENNETT: No, they were sympathetic to themselves. They didn't care. They paid a certain lip service to Bosch, and they would have brought him back, but the estimate at the time was that by then, as your father said, in this second phase of the uprising, the extreme left was clearly already dominating the street mobs. They were the strategists behind this flotsam and jetsam, including the bands of young hoodlums. These young guys called themselves tigras, tigers, and they were the ones running around with machetes and looting.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you have any evidence that Cuba was involved in this? I mean did you have any--well, Cuba must have been involved in some way, but did you have any evidence that-

BENNETT: Not directly in the beginning. I think they probably saw an opportunity. No, and I never alleged that at the time. We never said--And we never said Bosch was communist.

RICHARD RUSK: He was a fellow who would not take concerted action to get communist sympathizers out of his administration.

BENNETT: I think they would have installed him as President, and within three to six months he'd have been pushed aside as you've seen in so many other countries where the communists take over. He was a useful symbol to them; he had been the constitutional President, so he had big support among all the liberal circles and in Puerto Rico which, being close by, is important to the Dominican Republic. And a lot of the lead in this country was being fed through Puerto Rico, by his sympathizers there such as Jaime Benites, the chancellor of the university.

SCHOENBAUM: Was Bosch in Puerto Rico at this time?

BENNETT: Yes, he was. He'd been there in exile, you see, and was pulling the strings. He was a great one for doing that kind of thing, pulling strings and using people. I used to say Bosch was half-crazy and it was too bad he wasn't all the way, because he was fiendishly clever in his rational side. As I said, John [Bartlow] Martin's book is good on Bosch's period as president and is graphic on how he botched things up. Martin gets very mushy and emotional toward the end of the book, and has trouble facing up to the hard decisions that had to be made. He is quite weak there.

RICHARD RUSK: Had Lyndon Johnson not personally taken charge of that policy, but had Dean Rusk more or less called a lot of the key shots or at least been the principal figure in dealing with the situation, how might it have turned out differently? Would the policy have been any different at all, do you think?

BENNETT: No, I don't think so, I think his own pragmatism would have asserted itself, and he knew the facts. I remember he defended our action early on when they said there was exaggeration of communism and that the rebels were just people striving to be free. He said, "Don't be so sure about that. I remember when twelve men in a cellar in Munich began a revolution that took over a whole country." He made the point that it doesn't take many if you know what you want. And that's where you were in the Dominican Republic. Later on, in that Georgetown University study of the Dominican case, there is included a publication from Czechoslovakia in, I think, 1966 which makes clear the communists thought they'd suffered a great defeat in our Dominican reaction. Then, we had trouble later, and this was again part of the general confusion there. But we made the mistake of putting out one or two lists of known communists involved in the disorder. The lists were quickly challenged and there were two or three errors, as would not be surprising in something like that done in haste. But I think, in

hindsight, that was a mistake to get down on that line of argument that yes, there was this exact number of communists. They were shadowy figures in the background.

RICHARD RUSK: Where did the impetus for that particular order come from, as far as drawing up a list of suspected communists?

BENNETT: I don't remember now whether Washington instructed us to give some names, or whether we were trying to defend ourselves and did it. But at any rate I think it was a mistake, because immediately your credibility was challenged after they had been able to prove that two or three on the list were either dead or not there or whatever.

SCHOENBAUM: But there was never any one dominant communist leader that was involved?

BENNETT: No, there were some names the CIA brought out. I never was, you know, very deeply into that aspect of analysis, but they may have sorted out two or three. I don't remember at this stage.

RICHARD RUSK: I have a question about just the nature of being an Ambassador in a country like that where there's an enormous American presence, not necessarily right there within the Embassy walls. You've got various missions and agencies scattered around the country?

BENNETT: Oh, yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: And yet, as Ambassador, you're more or less the key man responsible for the overall conduct of the policy. To what extent do you think there were people out there--military attaches, CIA operatives, whomever, perhaps American business representatives--doing things, getting involved in this kind of situation in the Dominican Republic which you had either no knowledge or no control over? Was there that kind of thing going on, do you think?

BENNETT: There was a certain amount of it, a certain amount of it. There were some Americans, private Americans, who had their lines into our military. And they brought in information, and they'd be contemptuous of the State Department, you know, the old business of not being tough enough on the local situation. There was one man; he ran a grocery store; his name was Wimpy, and it was Wimpy's Store. He'd always played it very close with the military, I think, more than the CIA. He'd been involved in this same thing I mentioned this morning: bringing in guns which were furnished to the plotters against Trujillo. Whether they came out of the CIA or some other place, I wouldn't know.

SCHOENBAUM: Do you remember your critic, from your end, that message you sent on the 28th? You sent that directly to the President? Was there an emergency code?

BENNETT: Oh, there was a special procedure. I think it took, what, seven minutes to come; it was very quick. Nowadays I think things are much more instant than they were then, but usually it took several hours even for a fast message to come through, and so the critic was the thing that overrode every thing else. You were only supposed to use that for a declaration of war or

something like this, and so that's exactly what I used it for: "The time has come to land the Marines." I forget the exact wording of the cable. It was very brief, and it--

RICHARD RUSK: That was it? "The time has come"?

BENNETT: I think that's what I said.

RICHARD RUSK: The time has come to land the Marines.

BENNETT: Did it? Well, it's quoted somewhere.

SCHOENBAUM: And again, the critical fact or facts that changed your mind from the night before, again? Was there any, was it the firing over the heads?

BENNETT: Well, that had happened the morning of the 27th. You see, there was a complete change when I arrived at about a little after noon, say two o'clock, on the afternoon of the 27th, back from Washington by way of Puerto Rico and the aircraft carrier, and so on. Within an hour the rebel group sent a delegation in to me, and Caamano was one of them. And they said, "We realize that we've lost this thing. This thing's gone. Please save us." The whole t approach was for me to get in and save their position. Well, I wasn't about to do that because they were the ones who had caused the trouble and started the fighting. I said, "I'm not here to mediate, it's not my place to mediate." Later I was much criticized in the press and elsewhere for not agreeing to mediate, but I was in line with policy of the Department, and certainly I would not have undertaken mediation without instructions from the Department. I was never criticized by the Department for my action. As to the visiting group, I required them to divest themselves of their firearms and such paraphernalia before they came in to my office.

RICHARD RUSK: Well, that's certainly an element of common sense there.

BENNETT: Yeah, check your weapons at the door type thing. They were really a dejected group at that stage.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, things were apparently running against them.

BENNETT: I said, "No, you've got to make peace with the other side yourselves. You started this, no go and settle it."

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

BENNETT: The group went back downtown, and it has never been clear exactly what happened. If I remember correctly, the Ecuadoran, who was one of the more capable

Ambassadors there, he either came to see me or called me and said, "Well, it's all over. Things have calmed down. It looks like the uprising has been put down and now we can put the place together again." However, somebody got at Caamano and called him a coward. I think it was his brother or somebody who said, "What are you doing giving up now?" Well, something spurred them that night after dark and they counterattacked, if that's the right word in this kind of thing. And by the next morning they were menacing and threatening again. Then they overran a police station. This was really a major turning point; it was one of the sub-police stations. They overran the station and got the arras. They already had arms. The rebels had already opened up the various armories around the country and were handing out arms to eight, twelve-year-olds. It was really something. And so, when this downtown police station was overrun, then--

RICHARD RUSK: That changed it.

BENNETT: That really was a decisive point. You had waited and kept hoping against hope. You waited a little while to see whether the government was going to be able to reorganize itself. I'm sorry my memory is poor on all this.

RICHARD RUSK: You're doing fine.

SCHOENBAUM: Great.

BENNETT: But there was one other military commander, who was out in the west of town. We got in touch with him and said, "You'd better get active if you're going to prevent this thing from falling apart." Well, he didn't. I think he had 150, 200 men. Well, he didn't move. And Wessin, by that time, had fallen apart. I suppose that was the morning Wessin had made his sally forth and been thrown back.

SCHOENBAUM: He was on the other side of the bridge.

BENNETT: And the reports were that about twelve hundred people were killed around that bridge. The Red Cross estimate was very high.

RICHARD RUSK: So there was some significant fighting?

BENNETT: Oh, there was around the bridge that morning. As I say, I've got pictures to prove all this. They were taken by the rector of the church.

RICHARD RUSK: Perhaps I can get you to speak into the tape on the actual degree of danger to American civilians in the Dominican Republic. Of course, the hotel is where a large group of Americans were held hostage.

BENNETT: Well, that was the most dramatic case. We had calls from people marooned in the old town, downtown, who were frightened for their lives. Now whether they were exaggerating is hard to say, but these were people who felt themselves in peril. And certainly it was a dangerous time, because you had all these, as I say, young men with machetes running around

slashing at people, and breaking into buildings and looting, and setting things on fire, I have pictures of that in this collection.

RICHARD RUSK: What happened at the hotel? I don't think we have that on tape.

BENNETT: Oh we didn't?

RICHARD RUSK: We were reminiscing--

BENNETT: Well, this was the morning of the 27th, if my memory is correct. They had organized an evacuation party of Americans. They had gone on the radio and requested Americans to assemble at the hotel at such and such a time. There were a good many people there: I don't know, 125, maybe more; I don't really know. But suddenly, while they were there waiting for transportation to go to the beach seven miles away to go out to the ships, in burst this group of tigers. As I say, this was no army, no organized group. It was just a crowd of young hoodlums with sub-machine guns. They'd probably gotten them from the armories. And now whether they were acting for themselves or acting for somebody else--anyway they called themselves rebels. They separated the men from the women and children. And I've got pictures of people under tables, the furniture turned over in the hotel sitting room. And they took the men outside and lined them up against the hotel, and then shot above their heads. Well, that didn't inspire confidence as to what the next shot might be. And this was one of the things that was symptomatic of the complete breakdown of order.

SCHOENBAUM: That's the interesting thing that I didn't realize, that the situation was just-- There was no--

BENNETT: It was just chaotic.

SCHOENBAUM: There was no one group in control. Nobody.

BENNETT: We had snipers all around the Embassy. The Embassy office and residence were one big property of several acres, and it had a stucco type wall, oh, about five feet tall. And it's easy to climb over, it was just a garden wall. Eight snipers were dispatched on that fence during these two or three days.

RICHARD RUSK: Charged to fire at the Embassy.

BENNETT: Yeah.

SCHOENBAUM: And after the Marines came, they took care of the snipers?

BENNETT: Yeah, that's where--

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah.

RICHARD RUSK: I know there were approximately twenty U.S. servicemen killed overall in this affair.

BENNETT: Twenty-seven, I believe.

RICHARD RUSK: Any American civilians lose their lives in this thing?

BENNETT: Not that I'm aware of--which some of the press held against us. They said, "Well you've exaggerated, obviously, people should have been killed if you were going to have anything of this size." But the evacuation went on as scheduled and, as I mentioned this morning, we took out people from, I believe, forty-four countries. It's amazing how many different nationalities were represented there.

RICHARD RUSK: Fascinating story.

BENNETT: And one of the biggest groups were the Chinese.

RICHARD RUSK: Really!

BENNETT: Chinese were there in large numbers. There were over a thousand Chinese, and they were small merchants.

RICHARD RUSK: People's Republic Chinese?

BENNETT: No, not People's Republic. Taiwan: or Republic of China, as it was then. The Republic of China had an aid program there. They were teaching rice growing, and it was very efficient because they knew how to get down to the peasant level and give him a little wheelbarrow and a few seed and go. We, of course, brought in enormous equipment, experts from Texas A&M and all that, but they were also getting things done. These Chinese residents had been established there all through this century. And, as with small merchants everywhere, the local poor people didn't like them. Their shops were immediately looted and raided when the uprising broke out in the upper town, which was the poor section. Those Chinese hotfooted it to the hotel to get out of there, and I believe there were more than a thousand who wanted to leave permanently. That became a problem with us and our visa regulations. At that time we were less generous on eastern immigration.

SCHOENBAUM: They wanted to go to the United States?

BENNETT: Yes. And as you remember, there had been a very large Chinese colony in Cuba. I don't know if there are still so many or not, but these were all old Chinese from pre-People's Republic days. Pre-World War.

SCHOENBAUM: At one point there was a so-called secret mission by Abe Fortas. What was that all about? Was that after the--

BENNETT: That was one I was never brought in on. Instead I learned of it afterwards.

SCHOENBAUM: Oh.

RICHARD RUSK: I remember a reference to it. I don't--

BENNETT: That was White House.

RICHARD RUSK: Whatever it was it didn't go anywhere.

BENNETT: Well that was it. He and Bundy both tried very hard to put together some formula that would enable a constitutional thread from Bosch to whoever took his place. And it just wasn't on. All you had to do was work with it for an hour, and that just wasn't going to happen.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah. And so it was not until Bunker came that--

BENNETT: Well, we were holding the line with the military. During the night of the 27th-28th, after things went bad with the police and the Dominican military saw they were about to get beat, then they were hard pressed to find a way to rationalize themselves and Caamano, who was one of them but on the rebel side. Without any guidance from the United States or from any of our military, they came forth and chose a man, Colonel [Pedro Bartolome] Benoit as leader. He was of Haitian extraction, an honorable man; and so he became the leader of this junta, and he was the one who telephoned and actually asked for intervention. I guess it was Tom Mann over the phone who instructed me to get it in writing. I sent word back to Benoit and he sent me a message. But by the time the message arrived in those chaotic conditions, through the streets and so forth, it had already passed over midnight to the 28th. The decision to land the Marines was taken before I received the written message. The credibility of that was much challenged, with charges that we'd planned this and gone ahead and then got a letter afterwards. That was not the case. It was simply that written communication was so slow in chaotic conditions.

RICHARD RUSK: I think you received some criticism from the point of view that the administration landed the Marines, and then went to the OAS, either the same day or very shortly thereafter.

BENNETT: Well, that's true. That was the Washington end of it. But it is true we went ahead and then informed them. I think the U.S. Congress was informed only a half hour before we acted, or maybe it was a half hour after, I'm not sure.

RICHARD RUSK: Could that have been handled differently, at least to the extent that it would have perhaps dampened some of the domestic criticism that you received?

BENNETT: Maybe. I just couldn't comment on that. I wasn't in Washington; I don't know the pressures on the timing and so forth.

SCHOENBAUM: Were you surprised?

BENNETT: And then of course, Johnson had a very poor opinion of the OAS. He didn't think they had much ability to organize anything. Of course, he had great respect for Bunker. Well, the OAS pulled themselves together, although of course we had opposition from the Mexicans who have a habit of opposing American initiatives. The Chileans opposed it too, so you had some discord within the community. Well, landing American troops is not popular in Latin America.

RICHARD RUSK: Especially the Marines.

BENNETT: And as I said, none of us wanted to do it. It just became necessary that day.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah it was.

BENNETT: Because we were saving American lives, that's what we thought we were doing. Then, after we had landed--You see, the Marines landed and they just formed a cordon around the old town. I guess it was twenty blocks square or something like that. It wasn't a huge area, but it was the old colonial part of town. That left the interior of the town to fester. That's when it began getting worse and, as your father was saying, the second phase of this was against leftist influence. Because, while it was a small area, they had their lines out and telephones and so forth all over the country. And we had quite a problem of their smuggling arms out to the countryside. The Marines finally began to search cars. After they found one or two weapons had been secreted between the door and the upholstery, then they would rip the doors open and all that. And there was the one situation at one of the checkpoints where the Miami Herald man was shot. He was not killed, but he's been a cripple ever after.

RICHARD RUSK: By a Marine.

BENNETT: Yes, but it wasn't the Marine's fault. It was the confusion of the situation. The order was given to stop and the driver either didn't understand or he started up again; and people were trigger happy. He was one of the better reporters, and it was too bad. Al Burt his name was. He was a fine man.

RICHARD RUSK: Let me ask you a general question. Given hindsight and given a perspective of twenty years now to look back, could the thing have been handled differently, in a way where we still would have a successful outcome for American policy interests? My dad is going through this with the Vietnam War, and every camera crew that comes in here is continually bringing this up.

BENNETT: Well, I know, it's never over. It's still a controversy.

RICHARD RUSK: Looking back, could the thing have been handled differently at all that would not have required landing the U.S. Marines?

BENNETT: Well, if we'd had a better economic policy from the beginning, then perhaps the sharpness of that situation wouldn't have caused the kind of pressures--and oh, I didn't mention earlier: the IMF was in the picture.

RICHARD RUSK: International Monetary Fund?

BENNETT: Yeah, the World Bank, Monetary Fund. As they do, they put on screws. They look at things from the financial, not from the political, standpoint. We warned that they were imposing conditions that could very easily, likely, bring an explosion. Well, they've done it in other countries since, and I guess that's their business to be financial, not political. Yet sometimes they impose intolerable strains on a weak structure. After all, if these places were good, functioning democracies, you wouldn't have this kind of a problem. But you're dealing with areas which are sometimes not viable or only marginally viable economically and have no political stability.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you receive a lot of pressure from American business interests in the Dominican Republic, whose businesses would perhaps be threatened by any change of government?

BENNETT: You mean, to do this?

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, to get in there with U.S. intervention and be sure we restore order to that island.

BENNETT: No, I don't recall that kind of pressure. But we had full support from the business group after we acted. They thought we had done the right thing. I remember particularly that Alcoa Aluminum was one of the biggest American interests there. The sugar interests used to be all American owned, but that's been less and less over the years. Now, I don't know what may have been done in Washington or in New York headquarters, but I didn't have that kind of pressure.

SCHOENBAUM: You probably saw this article in the *New York Times* retrospective.

BENNETT: No, I didn't, as a matter of fact. That's just this year.

SCHOENBAUM: That, I think, shows that the *New York Times*, at least, has not changed their view.

BENNETT: No, they never have. They're generally wrong on Latin America by and large because they have a bleeding heart approach to Latin America. The area needs compassion. But it needs realistic appraisals, it doesn't need just hand-wringing.

[break in recording]

BENNETT: Well, I was saying that you can't expect the leaders of a Latin American country to admit publicly that they couldn't manage affairs and therefore the United States had to come in and help out. They will tell you privately that you did the right thing. Venezuela told us at the time. So did Costa Rica, and so on. But that's different from getting out in front and saying, "Oh yeah, we believe in American intervention." I'll never forget one opposition leader [Dominican] who called me two or three nights after the landing and proposed a meeting. This was all very

secret and I had to meet him on a dark street at the curb at such-and-such a time, and no one must see either one of us approaching, and so on. Well, I went and met him. I knew him. He was the brother of a newspaper publisher. And he gripped me by the hand and exclaimed, "You've saved our lives." And then he added, "But, of course, I'll have to denounce you for it." And he did. That's a true story. That's the way the game is played. And unfortunately, our press never looks beyond the spoken word to see what the rationale behind it is.

RICHARD RUSK: Go ahead and read that article.

[tape interruption]

BENNETT: Virtually no visible anti-Americanism here.

RICHARD RUSK: We just had Ambassador Bennett read an article published in the Wednesday, May 1 edition of the *New York Times*, 1985, story by Joseph B. Treaster called "In Dominican Republic, Wounds of War Linger." It begins on page four. Go ahead with your reaction.

BENNETT: Well, I consider this article superficial, as so many of these things are. And it doesn't take account of reality. I mean, no foreign leader can admit that his country got in such a bad state that you had to bring in foreign forces to restore order and to establish conditions under which you can have a reasonable election and a chance to go on. But one of them says, "It opened the road to democracy." Mr. [Joaquin] Balaguer considers the intervention a unilateral action. "Nevertheless," he said, "it opened the road to democracy." Well, that's exactly what it did as a result of the provisional government and the elections which were held and which were observed by both American and European groups and individuals and universally conceded to be fair, honest elections. That's the way you get to democracy. And happily the country has continued on that path. They have now had their longest period of elected government in more than four hundred years of history: five hundred the next decade, almost five hundred years. [tape interruption] I remember at the time of the intervention we were told by the press that this was going to make the country anti-American forever after, and they all disliked the Americans, etc. But we had before us the results of a Princeton survey which had been done at Princeton by one of these groups. I don't think it was Gallup, but anyway it was one of the opinion groups. It which had been done shortly after Trujillo's assassination, and the country was overwhelmingly pro-American. Anybody who could send his children to the U.S. school; anybody who could get a visa to come to this country did. Ours was one of the largest visa operations in the entire world, and I think our Consulate there was the fourth largest in the world after places like London and Mexico City because people wanted to come here. Well, another survey was done a year after the intervention. The percentages were just practically the same as to the overwhelming pro-United States attitude. Because, when you get down to the average run-of-the-mill person who is not in politics, he wants a stable life where he can make something for his family and get to a better standard of living. Our interventions in the Dominican Republic, and there have been several, unfortunately, in the last century have been beneficent, by and large. Now, I'm not arguing that you must have an intervention every five years like a spring tonic, but unfortunately, the Dominican Republic has a checkered history of running its own affairs. When we have gone in,

we have come out afterward leaving something that they didn't have before we went there. The average man knows that, but you can't expect to get a politician to admit that.

RICHARD RUSK: Have you been back to the Dominican Republic since you left?

BENNETT: Yes, I went back once ten years after, and I was absolutely over whelmed at the prosperity. There had been so much building that I was quite disoriented. That isn't necessarily indicative of the basic health of the country, but at any rate the place looked so much better, and things were obviously getting along well. Now that was when they were in a period of good sugar prices and the economy was booming along. In the last year or so they have had serious economic problems, much of which, as I say, could be corrected by our just letting their sugar come in here. It's not a very big amount compared to our market, and it would make all the difference to them.

RICHARD RUSK: That's interesting. Go ahead, read some more. [Donald J.] Reid Cabral was seeking personal protection from you at the height of all this?

BENNETT: Well, I was amused here to see that Reid Cabral says that the intervention was overreaction. Well, he was the one who wanted it most of all at the time because he was being thrown out. And then he says the results were positive. Well, what better result could you want of anything that you do than to have it positive? And he admits it was positive. Certainly at the time he needed help. In fact, his life was in danger and he asked for asylum in the Embassy. American policy is very strict about asylum; the man really has to be in imminent danger of his life: in other words, being pursued by gunmen, that sort of thing before we're allowed to take them in. So, I sent up a telegram saying, "The ousted President wants asylum. Shall I take him in?" And I immediately had a telephone call saying, "Don't ask us. Act." So, I did.

RICHARD RUSK: Did that go through my dad, by any chance?

BENNETT: Well, the telegram probably had his name on the bottom. I don't know that he would have seen it, but it was official. No, no, they called. I didn't get a telegraphic answer. You see, that was it; they never answered it. Had they answered it, they would have had to say no, no asylum.

RICHARD RUSK: Oh, I see.

SCHOENBAUM: Who called, was that Thomas [C.] Mann?

BENNETT: I think it was Tom Mann. He would have been able to call and say, "Don't ask us or you'll get the wrong answer." And so I took Reid and his principal colleague and their two wives, and they stayed upstairs in my house for two nights. That, curiously enough, didn't come out for years. I think it has now come out publicly that they were there.

RICHARD RUSK: That's interesting.

SCHOENBAUM: Yeah, I've never seen that.

BENNETT: No, none of the people who were so busy writing about the affair, even knew about that--

[break in recording]

RICHARD RUSK: Talking about Dean Rusk's role in this whole affair.

BENNETT: Well, as I say, I'm sure that he was involved in the major consultations on it. But after all, he was Secretary of State for the whole world, and this was one small island. He didn't have time to spend all his time on this because the State Department is so structured that there would have been other people who had been handling the day-to-day stuff. And then, Johnson-- The President's activism was such that once it got to that stage, he jumped into it whole-footedly. That doesn't mean that the Secretary of State was left out of it. I would be confident the major moves were discussed with him.

RICHARD RUSK: Do you think my dad concurred with the President's decisions?

BENNETT: I've never had any grounds to believe that he had reservations. He certainly defended the basic thrust of the policy and the theory of it and why we did it.

SCHOENBAUM: He was kind of the man holding the bag along with the President. He had to go before Congress; he testified in open sessions and also in secret sessions. Were you aware of that?

BENNETT: Yes.

SCHOENBAUM: Did you give him information?

BENNETT: I would send up things, you know, to make up the case, as you do every time. If you are preparing for testimony on the Hill, you get information from wherever it needs to come from. The first person that literally sent me a telegram or spoke up in my behalf after the attacks on me was Secretary [Robert Strange] McNamara, who, at one of his press conferences said, "I think the Ambassador has done a splendid job." It meant a lot to me at the time.

RICHARD RUSK: I'm sure it did. I'm sure it did.

BENNETT: After all, I was a rookie Ambassador. It was my first post as Ambassador.

RICHARD RUSK: Boy, you really stepped into one didn't you?

BENNETT: I could have been thrown overboard and nobody would have even looked back.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah.

BENNETT: It's the right and prerogative of a President to dump those who have gotten him into embarrassing situations. Now, Johnson was always completely supportive until his death. I was one of the two State Department people that I know of who was invited to the dedication of his Presidential Library. There was to be a big Texas barbecue, and my wife said, "I've never been to a Texas barbecue. I want to go" When the former President saw me in the crowd, he came across, loping along in his big way, and called out, "Hey, Tap, I'm glad to see you here," that kind of thing. He was always extremely warm. This is, again, personal and involves the time I was in Portugal as Ambassador. I came home to Washington twice and had an appointment to see him each time. Ambassadors usually didn't see the President unless it was some special situation. Portugal was reasonably quiet at the time, and there was no particular reason for me to see him. But I asked each time, and each time I was put on his schedule. The first time was during the '67 Arab-Israeli war, and that very morning the Israelis had sunk one of our ships. Washington was in a high state of excitement. I kept waiting all morning for my noon appointment to be cancelled. I didn't dream it would hold, but nothing happened, I went right in. This was the quiet eye of the storm. The President couldn't have been more considerate or interested in what was going on in Portugal. The next year, '68, I came back, had an appointment. The evening before, [Robert Francis] Bobby Kennedy was shot. You remember how Washington was torn up over that. The body was coming down on the train from New York, and there was all the Kennedy emotion that gets into these situations. Again, I went in on schedule. And that day he was really quite shaken. At one point he put his head in his hands, bent down over the desk and said, "To think that this could happen in our country." And you remember, Bobby Kennedy was no favorite of Lyndon Johnson, and with reason.

SCHOENBAUM: Is that right?

BENNETT: So I have always had a great admiration for Johnson as a man who cared about people.

RICHARD RUSK: Yeah, ray dad was home at the time that he got word of it. I was upstairs on the third floor in the bedroom where they stuck me, I can remember him hollering up the stairs. He said, "Rich, Robert Kennedy has been shot." And my dad couldn't stand Bobby Kennedy, and the feeling was very mutual. But, my dad was really torn up over that.

BENNETT: Well, exactly.

RICHARD RUSK: What a horrible thing--

BENNETT: And the Kennedys had acted very badly toward both Johnson and Rusk in my opinion.

RICHARD RUSK: Tom, do you have any more questions on the Dominican Republic? [tape interruption]

BENNETT: [reading from a *New York Times* article] "After only seven months in office, Mr. Juan Bosch, a left of center Democrat, had been ousted in a military coup. His strident nationalism and unwillingness to persecute avowed communists had antagonized most of the

Dominican establishment as well as United States officials." Well, that implies that we were glad to see him go because he didn't persecute communists. That may have been a factor, that he was very loth to move on people who were obviously a threat to his regime and to democracy, but that was not the principal thing. It was his fecklessness as a governor, the fact that he simply made a mash of things. He brought on his own downfall. We had nothing to do with it. In fact, the last thing we would have wanted to see was a coup in a place which had had a free election. We were hopeful of moving it toward democracy. So, that's another error in this account which I find superficial.

SCHOENBAUM: I wanted to ask you about something at the end of George [Wildman] Ball's memoirs. As I mentioned, he called the twenty-five thousand troops overkill. And he says that nobody objected to it, but mentions that at one point Jack Hood Vaughn had a shouting match with LBJ in a meeting later on over the twenty-five thousand Marines. Did you--

BENNETT: I know nothing about that. No. No, I know that at the time--I think the true figure is twenty-two thousand something rather than twenty-five. Anyway, yes it sounds excessive for what was required and for the action. But, again, when you consider that you had a whole country that was just on the teetering edge, then maybe it wasn't too many.

SCHOENBAUM: Better too many than too few, right?

BENNETT: I was going to say I'd rather have too many, too soon, than too little too late.

SCHOENBAUM: Absolutely.

RICHARD RUSK: What was the extent of the U.S. involvement, if any, with Wessin moving against these pro-Bosch rebels? Did he more or less do that on his own, or did he get some support and encouragement from the United States?

BENNETT: None that I know of. No, I'm not aware of any. This was their own internal struggle and he, I guess, decided it was time to move. He saw his whole structure crumbling. And then of course when he wasn't successful, when he didn't prove to be a good field commander, why his goose was cooked. But there was no American involvement. That was Dominicans fighting among themselves.

END OF SIDE 2