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Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Interview with Everett E. Collin, Session 3

Session 3
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R We finished our second session talking about the early expansion of the Spacemobile Program overseas. And you mentioned that President Kennedy also became involved personally in this. What was his involvement and what brought it about?

E President Kennedy was hosting the President of Venezuela. And while they were discussing different situations, the President of Venezuela expressed an interest in the space program and Kennedy was thinking of something to give the President of Venezuela so he could provide more information for his people about the space program. So the idea came up, through Kennedy's Press Secretary, that the Spacemobile Program might be a good program to send.

R Kennedy's Press Secretary, Pierre Salinger?

E Yes, Pierre Salinger. He and Bill Lloyd were good friends. Bill Lloyd was our Public Relations Director for NASA. Pierre Salinger called Bill Lloyd to come over and they discussed it. And in turn, Bill Lloyd requested someone from the Educational Programs Office to come over concerning the Spacemobile. So I was the one that went over with Bill to meet with Pierre Salinger and Kennedy in the Oval Office.

R Was there anyone else with you?

E No. Kennedy wanted to know more about the Spacemobile Program. And I explained the essentials of the Spacemobile Program, the vehicle and the artifacts that we had and how we tied space science into the educational process and that the educators should be involved. The President of Venezuela was very interested.

R Was he at the meeting with you?

E Yes, Kennedy and the President of Venezuela. And Bill Lloyd and Pierre Salinger and me. We spent about 10 minutes going over the program, what

was needed and what had to be done. And Kennedy said, "Go do it." And he gave the word to NASA Administrator Jim Webb, the State Department and to the U.S. Information Agency that we were to expedite whatever needed to be done. As a result, within six weeks we had ordered a 4-wheel drive vehicle because of the rugged terrain of the country. The roads are less than satisfactory. We ordered a 4-wheel drive, a General Motors truck, or van, I should say, and outfitted it with all the artifacts and science demonstrations and equipment. We then sent who we considered to be our top Spacemobile lecturer at that time, John Nesbitt, who worked out of Headquarters. We sent him over to conduct programs in the country under some very difficult situations. Now along with that, although he did know Spanish, we requested that a translator go with him in order to clarify any areas that students or teachers would be asking about. Nesbitt was over there for several weeks and they were very satisfied with the program. Later, Ellwood Johnson used this unit to conduct programs in other parts of Venezuela and several other South American countries. From there, we went into Central American countries. All of these were on request.

R How did you get the word out to the international community about the availability of the Spacemobile Program? What was that process, so they knew how to go about making a request?

E That was done through the USIA and the State Department. They sent out information about the availability of the space education program to the U.S. embassies in all the countries. The embassies, in turn, worked with the local officials to see if there was interest in the program. As a result of that, we ended up providing the Spacemobile Program to over 50 countries around the world. I have mentioned many already; others included Israel and Pakistan. And we had one country that was behind the Iron Curtain, Yugoslavia. We received that request through President Tito, evidently after he was informed by the embassy of the program. We didn't have an embassy as such there. But we had what you'd call a consulate. And as a result, they requested the program, so we had a space program in Yugoslavia.

R Since you said most of the lecturers were actually hired from within their own country, how did you go in and monitor?

E We worked through the embassy with the U.S. equivalent of the state science supervisor in that country's Department of Education. And we would ask them to send one of their teachers over so we would train them. In some instances where they were unable to, we sent lecturers over to the country to train them over there.

R Why might they be unable to send someone over, so you would have to send somebody there instead?

E Well, they may have had financial problems or other problems that we weren't aware of. For instance, we sent a lecturer to England, because they requested specifically that we send a lecturer over there. And we sent France and Germany lecturers to assist over there to begin with. But coming back to the monitoring of the program, after the lecture, our people left. Or, if we didn't have any lecturers there conducting a program, we left it up to the embassy to monitor the programs. We provided them with the information and forms and publications necessary to use for the program being conducted in those countries overseas. The State Department and the USIA

had to provide all the documents for transporting and maintaining our equipment overseas and monitoring and bringing it back. So it was a close working relationship with the State Department and the USIA.

R So you didn't go over and monitor any overseas programs or have any of your people monitor, NASA people, monitor, or did you?

E Yes, we did, in some instances. For instance, in Australia we provided a lecturer for three months and then he went to New Zealand with the unit. So in that case, we provided a full-time lecturer to cover the outbacks and the cities in Australia and New Zealand.

R But monitoring -- did you ever go over or did you have anyone go over and sit down and watch the program?

E I had people go over and do the monitoring.

R Because you mentioned you would send the embassy forms to fill out for monitoring, but if these people weren't science-trained, how would they know how to monitor a program, how would they know how to assess the quality of the lecture?

E When they came to the State Department in Washington, we met with them. Because embassy personnel are recalled to the State Department from time to time, no matter where they are. They're recalled to the State Department from time to time for briefings and for debriefings. And when they would be back, then we would arrange with the State Department and the USIA to meet with those people. In those cases, either John Sims or I, in most cases it was me, would go over the monitoring situation with them.

R Okay. When you were in the training process with the presenters, when you brought these people in from overseas, when the country's government said, "We'll send one of our own folks over," how long a process was that? Where'd you train them? What was involved?

E We trained them at Headquarters and we would occasionally send them out in the field for a week or so. We also worked very closely with Goddard (Ed. note: The NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland).

R Did they have to know English? Was that a requirement to send them over here for training?

E Yes. They had to know English. We worked closely with Goddard because it was near the schools that the presenters undergoing training were working with in Maryland and Delaware. The one that we sent Central America, they sent up one lecturer.

R Did you ever have a situation where a government said, "Get out!"

E No. Never did. All governments, if they didn't outright express appreciation to us for the program, they did through the USIA and the State Department. We never had any requests, as far as censoring goes, either.

R No one ever accused you of stirring up the people or being too pro-American?

E No, because we were talking about the space program, period.

R Getting back for a moment to your meeting with Kennedy and the President of Venezuela. Do you remember what the date or the month or year would have been?

E Well, the date was 1963; I think it's in the records. That we have.

R Do you remember the time of year? That's something we could check later, but just off the top of your head?

E We can check on that later because I don't remember the exact time of the year. But it was in 1963. It seems to me, I'm not sure, but it seems to me that it was in the spring of the year when he was there, 1963.

R And you said President Kennedy got behind this personally. Did you find that having him behind that made a big difference in terms of getting results?

E Oh, yes! We never had any problems, we couldn't have.

R Typically, what would it have taken to get all that set up if Kennedy hadn't been involved?

E Well, in the early days, we didn't have too many problems. In other words, we were able to say, "We need this many Spacemobiles, this many units and we need this many artifacts manufactured." And we were able to get it done. But it would generally take a period of three months or more. But because President Kennedy passed the word to all the agencies involved, including the GSA (General Services Administration), we were able to work directly with the manufacturers and get the job done in six weeks. We had a unit completely built, this 4-wheel unit that we sent to Venezuela and was used in other countries in South America, as I mentioned previously. And the artifacts, everything was put together very quickly. And of course our lecturer, John Nesbitt, was ready at any time. It was all put together in six weeks, which was unheard of prior to that.

R Did Kennedy do any follow up after that? After that initial meeting you had with him?

E No, everything was then done through the State Department. Evidently, though, he stayed behind it, because we never had any problems.

R Just a side bar to all this -- your meeting was about 10 minutes or so with him?

E Yes.

R What was your impression of him as a person?

E Well, he was a real friendly person. It was just like sitting here talking at the table. There was nothing pretentious about him at all. He was easy to talk to and he talked to you in a manner just like we're talking today.

