



The FBI Oral History Project

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Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI William T. Baker (1935-1962) Interviewed by Brian Hollstein On August 26, 2004

Edited for repetitions, spelling, etc. by Sandra Robinette on March 23, 2005. Edited for Mr. Baker's corrections by Sandra Robinette on May 21, 2005.

Brian Hollstein: Bill, just a couple quick things at the front to identify the tape and what have you, and then we can start in talking.

William T. Baker: All right.

Hollstein: My name is Brian Hollstein. Today's date is the 26th of August, 2004. I'm speaking to William T. Baker on the telephone and he is in Sun City, Arizona.

Bill, what was your date of birth?

Baker: I was born May 5, 1912. On a farm near Mexico, Missouri.

Hollstein: Okay. You were destined then for Latin American work, huh?

Baker: May I throw in a couple of things here real quick?

Hollstein: Sure.

Baker: It was very lucky for me to a certain extent, because May 5th is the same as July 4th in Mexico.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: So during the eleven years there, I had a holiday on my birthday every year.

Hollstein: That's the best of all. Good.

Baker: The worst part about it was, when I started leaving and going out of the United States, passports, of course, whether they were special or diplomatic, still showed my birth as being in Mexico, MO, Mexico, Missouri.

Hollstein: Right.

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Baker: The old passports, the impression that said U.S. State Department went over a portion of it, so it just looked like I was born in Mexico. And I had all kinds of trouble lots of times getting back into the United States.

Hollstein: I'll bet.

Well good. You've sent me the copyright release form and the only thing I would mention with that is that this doesn't prevent you from talking to other people certainly about your experiences in the SIS. And it only refers to the actual conversation that we're having here today.

Baker: Very good. I've always been rather closed-mouth about everything that happened with SIS, and I still am inclined to be that way, but I'll try to give you a reasonable resume as you go along with your questions.

Hollstein: Okay, great. The only thing we ask is that you not mention the names of informants and no cover companies. No mention of cover companies that might have been used.

And then one of the other things that we have an agreement with the Bureau on is that we would not talk about current information in cases that are ongoing.

So that's pretty easy.

Baker: Since all the people that I've dealt with are dead.

Hollstein: Well, well, it is a while ago now.

Baker: You bet ya.

Hollstein: When did you come on duty with the FBI?

Baker: I came on duty with the Bureau in 1935 as a night clerk in St. Louis, Missouri. I had graduated from college, and I was in St. Louis at the time.

I had taught school for a while after getting out of college, but then came the big Depression, so I decided I better have something else to do.

So I returned to St. Louis, Missouri, where my parents were and looked over the newspaper, just trying to find something to do. I saw an advertisement in the St. Louis paper by a placement firm which was looking for a rapid typist who would be willing to work at any hour of the day. And I applied and when I got to the placement bureau, I found out it was the FBI that was looking for typists.

Hollstein: What do you know?

Baker: I became a night clerk typist in 1935. Later on, in St. Louis, I was made chief clerk.

I started going to law school, as soon as I started working at night. I went to law school in St. Louis, graduated from law school, then became an agent in 1940.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. 1940. Uh-huh. Okay.

Baker: Actually I forget what, what month it was, but it was 1940.

Hollstein: You entered on duty and went down for training.

Baker: Yes, went to Quantico, of course.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And I think I was, I forget now, I think they called it Quantico number "one." They started numbering them again. It was way down low in the numbers at Quantico.

They cut down due to the world situation and shortened the number of weeks that training was required.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

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Baker: And ours was not exactly synopsisized, but it was at least cut down by two or three weeks.

But anyway, when I got through there, my first office was Oklahoma City, OK.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And I was there for a few months. Later on, I was sent to Houston, Texas. And by that time, the world situation was getting a little bit rugged.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: With World War II coming on in '41. So we were married, my wife and I were married in December of 1940.

And then in February of '41, we were shipped to Puerto Rico. And I say shipped. But on a freighter. By the way, we paid our own way then.

Hollstein: Yeah, those were tough times in those days. They required all of these moves to be paid by the agent, didn't they?

Baker: We even had to make up our own berths on the freighter that took us to Puerto Rico. It was a passenger ship, old Liberty Lines.

The top deck was loaded with lumber. There was a big safe onboard and it contained caps and the entire hold was full of dynamite.

Hollstein: Oh, my goodness.

Baker: A very lovely trip. On top of all that, there was a strike going on in New Orleans when we got the ship. When we boarded, they gave us pillows and some pillowcases and sheets and a blanket or so forth, so we had to make our own beds. That was our beginning of life.

We arrived in Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: As you know what happened in December of '41. I just happened to be on duty on Sunday, when I got a call from the Bureau saying we were at war.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. What was San Juan like at that time?

Baker: Well, San Juan was a friendly place. My wife would sit out on the beach, where we had our little house. You could walk down to the oceanside and see American ships being bombarded by German submarines. We were that close.

Hollstein: Wow. Were you out in the Condado area there somewhere?

Baker: No. It was right on the main island itself.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Right, right in San Juan proper.

So, later on, we lived in Santurce, if you know San Juan, know anything about Puerto Rico.

Hollstein: Yeah, I lived there five years.

Baker: Oh, you were?

Hollstein: And worked there.

Baker: Our office at the time was in the Banco Popular building.

Hollstein: Right, downtown there.

Baker: So we were pretty close to that place.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

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Baker: And most of my work there was a little bit of criminal, but it was mainly investigations of sabotage. I guess the thing that I remember that I spent the most time was interning the Italian ships.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And writing up their condition and so forth, because they were all sabotaged in the port there and taking the people into custody and this sort of thing.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: So that was the main thing that happened in Puerto Rico.

Hollstein: So when you rode on this freighter full of dynamite, it was just before the war?

Baker: Yes. They were building up their resources in Puerto Rico.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Baker: Especially the U.S. was.

Hollstein: What, now just as a matter of curiosity for me, what was old San Juan like at that time?

Baker: Old San Juan at that time, it was an interesting place. The hotel that we stayed at was practically across the street from the Banco Popular.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: And things were not dreadfully expensive. People were friendly. Do you know Spanish?

Hollstein: Yes, I do.

Baker: You do. Well, it so happened that the first morning after we got there, I heard somebody saying loud, real loud, "chinos, chinos, cinquenta centavos." (Spanish for 50 cents.) And I thought my goodness. Are they selling Chinese girls? So what happened, I looked down and there was somebody selling oranges.

Hollstein: That's right. Yeah.

Baker: There are certain words down there that aren't the same in other places.

Hollstein: That's right.

Baker: But that's neither here nor there.
I remember my wife was a little bit concerned when they took us to the hotel from the ship. In fact, they had to unload the ship before they unloaded us because of the nature of the cargo. But the captain was very kind, decided to have a birthday party for Marjorie on that day because it was her birthday. It was February the 21st.

And they had fruit punch and the cook made a cake, and it was very, very nice.

The only other passengers on there, besides myself and Marjorie, were ten Jesuit priests. And after a while, some of the priests were wondering just exactly what all was in that fruit punch that had been fixed up, but they just had some pretty strong stuff.

Meals, if you ate out, were quite reasonable. They would usually, instead of water at the table, when you first sat down, have something else that was stronger.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: As a compliment of the house. Things weren't too expensive.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But I thought there would be a little bit of resentment and that sort of thing with American law enforcement in Puerto Rico, but there wasn't.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: That's what I noticed at that time.

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Hollstein: Yeah, well, when I was down there in '62 to '65, old San Juan was kind of rundown.

Baker: Yes.

Hollstein: We were stationed there at Fort Brook.

Baker: We finally got a little apartment out in Santurce. Right across from the air base. But it worked out. My wife had to come home before I did. They brought her home, I think it was at the end of 1941.

And I know after she came home, I was there for another year before they took me back to the States.

Hollstein: How come they sent your wife home, just because of wartime?

Baker: Yes. Things got pretty rugged. Things got pretty rough.

Hollstein: In San Juan, in Puerto Rico?

Baker: See I'm talking wartime, the biggest trouble that San Juan had, it depended on the water for everything.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And the German submarines, they took out, I don't think you remember or knew of the different ships that came out of New York, but there was a U.S., NY line, "Borinquen" ships and a number of others sunk.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Passenger liners that had been going between New York and Puerto Rico for years and years and years. And the German subs wiped them all out.

Hollstein: Oh, boy.

Baker: So this was sort of the beginning of what might have been the end.

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Hollstein: Yeah, yeah, and who knew what the finish was going to be for sure.

Baker: It certainly was up for grabs.

Hollstein: So you were in San Juan then for a couple years.

Baker: Yes.

Hollstein: And what happened?

Baker: And then they sent me back to the United States. We hadn't been back in the States, oh, for I guess less than a month and they sent me to Washington.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And they said they wanted to send me to Spanish school. And I thought well this ought to be nice. So we were transferred to Washington, and I went to Spanish school.

And I was trying to think the other day, the name of the instructor, but I just can't do it.

Hollstein: Joe Santoiana.

Baker: Joe Santoiana, you're right. I don't know how long he stayed there, but he was our instructor.

Hollstein: Most everybody went through with him. Later on, he was my SAC in Tampa.

Baker: Oh, he was?

Hollstein: Yeah. Nice guy.

Baker: So anyway, let's see, where were we?

Hollstein: Well, you were going to school there with Santoiana.

Baker: Well, I thought it was going to be a nice four or five weeks, but after a couple of weeks, Santoiana kicked me out. He said you don't need to go to Spanish school. I had taken Spanish in high school. And had had quite a bit of language work in college. And after being in Puerto Rico and so forth, he said you're out of here.

Then I was taken onto SIS in an undercover capacity for the first time.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: So that gets us up to about 1942, I guess.

Hollstein: Okay. And where did you go with the SIS?

Baker: First I went to Honduras.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: I really don't think I accomplished anything in Honduras. I was only there three or four months, as I recall. And it was more of a learning process than anything else.

Learning how to and practicing what we had gone through with in training for the job, from the standpoint of appropriate communication, how to communicate, and a few things like that.

Hollstein: What kind of training did you actually get for the SIS?

Baker: Well, here's where I want to be pretty general.

Hollstein: Okay, well there's codes and ciphers?

Baker: There was one thing, of course, being able to write a letter in code. That in general was one thing.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: How to decipher things that would come back. Means and ways of doing it. And et cetera, et cetera. But that was the main thing.

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Hollstein: Okay. Was there any specific training in intelligence collection?

Baker: At that time, no, that is, I wouldn't say so. The instructions when we left were not too specific. Pick up whatever you hear and let us know. Was more or less what it was.

Hollstein: I see.

Baker: Once we got a request to check up on something on an island nearby. And the only way to get there was in a skiff, as you might say. It had a sail on it and it wasn't any bigger than a big canoe, but it took all night to get there.

Hollstein: Wow.

Baker: And there was just one guy operating the sailboat and yours truly. And over we went. But we did get to find out what the answer to the problem was over there. We got back and got that information back. But that was the most, that's the most experience I had or the things that really stand out of anything that happened there.

I was only there a few months.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And some of the first few offices that SIS sent people out on, it was more to get, as best to get your feet on the ground and sort of get oriented than it was anything else. And I could see that.

Hollstein: Well, this island you went to, was it like Roatan or one of those in the bay?

Baker: To the best of my recollection, it was a small village on one of the Islas de la Bahia (Bay Island) but it was not Roatan.

Hollstein: Just in general, what was the job over there?

Baker: It was to determine whether someone had been living at a certain place in Honduras during certain years.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

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Baker: And they were interested in the individual's travel.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Okay. After Honduras, then you were reassigned.

Baker: Well, I was back on home ground for a short while. Then in '43...I have jotted these dates down. I kept all this background information until we moved from our big house in Sun City and I got rid of it all at that time. But my wife and I have tried to come up with dates and these dates are as general as we can remember them.

And the first one was to Colombia.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: That is in the open.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And was there for, oh, I guess, almost a year.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Where was that in Colombia?

Baker: Worked at the embassy at Bogotá. Yes. Most of my work was in the office. And it had to do with the translation of reports that came in from informants.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And others who were assigned there. It was for the purpose of getting as much information on the German espionage system as possible. The Germans were trying to finance a whole lot of their espionage activities in Latin America through the sale of emeralds.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Which Colombia is famous for. And I would say that the bulk of the work that I had during the time I was there was keeping tab on that business and tracing funds and this sort of thing.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

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Baker: In their handling and how they were trying to export them out of the country and this sort of thing.

Hollstein: So you must be a bit of an expert then on emeralds.

Baker: No, but the only thing that ended up was my wife said if I worked so much on emeralds, I could just bring her one.

Hollstein: Well, it's a fascinating product there.

Baker: It was really an investigation of the means whereby the German espionage agents were trying to get funds for their espionage.

Hollstein: Did you deal any platinum?

Baker: No. No. I did not.

Hollstein: There was a lot of platinum smuggling.

Baker: Oh, yes.

Hollstein: But it was going I guess from the woods there, back in the bush, out to Ecuador, I gather.

Baker: Yes, I heard about that.

Hollstein: Yeah, but you hadn't had any dealings with it?

Baker: No, our work was mainly in the field of German espionage involving transportation and transactions in this particular trade.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Were there any actions taken to interdict the trade, to stop them?

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Baker: Well, not by the United States, but through liaison with the local authorities.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And that was the only way we could work under the circumstances.

Hollstein: Okay. Now that would mean having to pay for services, I assume?

Baker: Beg your pardon?

Hollstein: You had to pay for services with the police, I assume?

Baker: No. No, bits and pieces of information that came in, no the Colombian authorities at that time, thank God, it wasn't an opium den or a drug place. The relations between the United States and Colombia were very good.

Hollstein: Oh, I see.

Baker: And so the immigration people there were cooperative.

Hollstein: Okay, good. And you were there for, how long was that did you say?

Baker: Oh, it could have been a year.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Almost a year, I think, because later on, I came back and was assigned to Dallas, Texas.

And I was really sent to Fort Worth and my wife and I got a little house full of furniture and our first apartment that we were able to settle down in for a little while.

And then the next thing I knew, they sent me to Argentina.

Hollstein: Oh, boy.

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Baker: And I think that was in '44.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: There I got my feet wet in the handling and starting the handling of informants.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: German informants. And I learned a big lesson. Don't ever trust one.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But it was an interesting experience. I think, was it Reagan that said trust, but verify. And no truth was better ever spoken.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Because there was a lot of Germans in Argentina.

Hollstein: Oh, sure.

Baker: Finally, in 1945, was the first time that my wife was able to join me. She got down a year later. Because after the San Francisco conference, Victor "Vic" Keay, I guess you knew who he was, I don't know.

Hollstein: Vic Keay?

Baker: Vic Keay, yes. He was in charge of SIS when I was there.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: "Vic" called Marjorie and told her that, now that the San Francisco conference was over, she could get ready to go. They sent the documents and so forth and so she joined me in Argentina. And that was quite a day.

Hollstein: Oh, sure.

Baker: Argentina has the rules in driving on the streets, just like they have in London, you know, you drive on the left side of the street instead of the right-hand side of the street.

Hollstein: Oh, I didn't know that.

Baker: And they drive the same way in Argentina. So help me God, the day she got there was the "cambio de mano" day, which means change over to the right-hand side of the road.

And I think she was scared to death before we got to our apartment, when trying to get there from the airport. Even the taxi driver was a little bit confused, wondering what was going on.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: But it was a great experience.

Hollstein: Wow, I used to travel down there and go over to Montevideo and at the time I was going down there, you could buy these old cars that were in use from the '30s and the '40s.

Baker: Uh-huh.

Hollstein: And they all had, now that I think of it, they all had right-hand drive.

Baker: You can imagine the person with a right-hand drive, driving on the right-hand street.

Hollstein: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's a problem. Well, what happened with this informant that you learned the lesson from?

Baker: Well, he was utilized and so forth, but, I mean, information that you get, of course, informants feel like, at least the experience that I had with informants, that is most of them. Mexico, it was entirely different. But there, in Argentina, they thought that the biggest story they could provide you, even though they had a basis of some little information and so forth, they'd try to enlarge upon it.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: You just never could believe the whole story and you just had to, well, you just had to go back and dig and dig and dig and find out what the truth was.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: It wasn't an easy task.

Interesting thing, one informant that we had there, his girlfriend was a showgirl. His girlfriend was a very good friend of Eva Peron. And Colonel Juan Peron became President while we were there. So that turned out to be an interesting situation, contact wise.

Hollstein: Sure.

Baker: We lived in an apartment right downtown and the headquarters for Peron was in the same immediate area and so it was cordoned off to the general public.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And we always had to show our diplomatic carnet (diplomatic ID card) to cross the boundary to get to our own apartment and to go to work. But it worked out. It worked out to a certain extent anyway.

Argentina, I think, was our favorite spot, very cosmopolitan.

Hollstein: Yeah, it's a beautiful place, and those were good times too.

Baker: Oh, yes, they were excellent times, and you couldn't beat the food.

Hollstein: Yeah, yeah. If you like steak for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Baker: Yes!

Hollstein: You had no problem at all.

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Baker: Just go in these huge refrigerators, they had walk-in refrigerators in restaurants, you know. And you just point out the side or half of the beef that you wanted your steak taken from.

Hollstein: Well, now, there's a famous story about one of our SIS people having a dance with Eva Peron. You're not the guy, are you?

Baker: I certainly am not. I'm the worst dancer in the world.

Hollstein: Okay.

Baker: So, but she had a very interesting background.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: Which we'd better not discuss, you know.

Hollstein: Well that's a well-known background. Did you have any actual contact with Peron?

Baker: No. None whatsoever.

Hollstein: Now at this point, you were in the embassy...

Baker: I was in embassies all the time after I left Colombia. I mean, beginning in Bogotá, Colombia.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Yes.

Hollstein: Okay. And then you did have undercover people though out in the out in the field there and what have you, yeah.

Baker: Right.

Hollstein: How many SIS people were there at the time in the embassy?

Baker: Are you talking about Argentina?

Hollstein: Yeah, uh-huh.

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Baker: I don't know. It seemed like to me there couldn't have been more than ten or twelve and that included stenos, and the legal attaché, and all the rest of us.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: I don't think that there was more than a dozen. If that many.

Hollstein: So it's a pretty tight crowd then.

Baker: Oh, you bet ya.

Hollstein: Yeah. And how long were you in the embassy there?

Baker: I was there, I guess, it was closer to two years than anything else, but I know I went there and I was there a year when Marjorie came down and I don't know what year. You know it was the year Franklin Roosevelt died – 1945. I attended his memorial Mass in Buenos Aires. And I was alone at that time. I mean, Marjorie really hadn't gotten down there yet.

And I know that that took place while we were there. I was surprised to see so many people there. The cathedral was full. They were outside. They were all over the neighborhood. It was rather an interesting, interesting sidelight.

Hollstein: Oh, yeah, yeah. You know, considering that they had been sort of reluctant members of the allied forces. Certainly, it took them a while to decide to go on our side.

Baker: Yes. I think they were pretty pro-German.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. There was a large German population there.

Baker: Not only that, there was a large Italian population down there.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: That's what made it, I guess, a cosmopolitan place.

Hollstein: Oh, sure, and the Brits were there too.

Baker: Oh, yes. The Brits I think ran a much tighter ship in the intelligence field than we did.

Hollstein: Is that right? Did you have much contact with them?

Baker: Never. Never. No. Nor with CIA.

Hollstein: I see. Well, I'm just thinking now, do you remember how the electricity was set up in Buenos Aires? I remember at one time there were sectors of the city and, and each had power that was generated by the British, Italians and Germans. Just an odd little sidelight anyway.

So you were where then during the windup of the war?

Baker: Yes, I was there and the San Francisco conference was in 1945, wasn't it? It was in 1945, because it was in 1945 that Marjorie was able to join me there. And we were there for a while thereafter.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Because I didn't get to my next assignment, which was directly to Nicaragua, when we left Argentina, and I'm pretty sure we were there in 1946, but I can't be for sure.

Hollstein: At that time then, were you turning over the SIS operations to CIA?

Baker: In 1947, I did that. I think that was the main reason they sent me to Nicaragua as legal attaché.

Hollstein: Oh, okay. So, it wasn't in Buenos Aires then?

Baker: No. It was in Nicaragua.

Hollstein: Okay. And anything else we should know about in Buenos Aires?

Baker: Well, no, not that comes off of the top of my head. I don't guess I'm giving you very much information.

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Hollstein: Well, I'm just thinking now. You weren't there during the Graff Spee incident? That was considerably before you were there?

Baker: Yes. We had one of our people arrested while I was there.

Hollstein: Oh, really.

Baker: Incarcerated a while.

Hollstein: How did that come about?

Baker: Well, I think he was turned in. I don't know. I really do not know. Not much information was ever put out about it.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But he was not incarcerated very long. He had gotten right into the middle of something that was quite important to the German spy organization which the Argentine police were carefully watching. And I think they tipped off somebody, who in turn tipped off the authorities at the beginning and that's what led to his arrest, but it was pretty well taken care of. There wasn't any publicity about it.

Hollstein: That's good.

Baker: That was that.

Hollstein: Do you know what the nature of the operation was? That he was arrested on?

Baker: No, I do not.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: You know, while I was SIS, you didn't know too much about what the people in the next office was doing.

Hollstein: Right.

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Baker: There wasn't a great deal of intermingling of knowledge about different cases. There were no particular procedures or instructions were ever given to the contrary or anything like that. Or to bring such a thing about, but it just so happened.

Hollstein: Sure.

Baker: As the people just kind of kept their mouth shut about what they were doing.

Hollstein: Yeah. Now, what was the nature of your work now? Were you interested in German espionage?

Baker: In Argentina?

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: That was my entire job while I was there. The handling of informants who had contact with the German community.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. And had there been much real activity on their part, the German community, while you were there?

Baker: Mainly, I think most of it was before I got there.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But I think that we put a dent in some of it, but I don't know how much, but at least some of it.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: As things turned out.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Were you around at the time when some of the SIS people were identified and, and were made persona non grata?

Baker: In Argentina?

Hollstein: Yeah.

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Baker: No, sir.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Okay. At one point, I guess, a bunch of them were deported or left hurriedly, let's put it that way, due to some sort of a breach in security.

Baker: Well, I don't want to compare Argentina to Pakistan, but, you know, there were, I think a lot of, even now, I think as we look at it, now I think in their intelligence service or services, there are those that are pro-western and those that are very pro-Islamic.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: And I think we had the same type of a thing, only under different circumstances in Argentina.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: There were some law enforcement people who were on one side and there were certain law enforcement people that, even in the same organizations, that were on the other side.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: And I think that continued a good ways along the line until during the close of the war. I guess they saw how the chips were going to fall and the entire government decided they would be best to side with the allies.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And so I think that is what happened, but I do not know.

Hollstein: Sure, sure. Okay, so you left Argentina.

Baker: I was transferred immediately to Nicaragua. And Nicaragua was a rather quiet place to be. But the main thing I did was, I guess about the only real job I had there, was to close up shop and turn the safe and operations over to representatives of CIA.

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Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: That happened in 1947, if I recall correctly.

Hollstein: Uh-huh, and what kind of people were they?

Baker: Well, they weren't very talkative.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. At that time, they were CIA?

Baker: Yes, sir.

Hollstein: Yeah, at, because there was an, an interim...

Baker: Just like they are, just like they are now.

Hollstein: Yeah. No, there, no, there was an interim group there, I think. Well, it was, I guess, it was just a transition from OSS.

Baker: Actually, there was only one person that I dealt with.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: There were two there before I left, but I think there was only one, one person that I actually dealt with, as I recall.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: It was back a good long while ago.

Hollstein: Yeah. What was Managua like at that time?

Baker: Well, they say, you know, you remember the old song, Managua's a beautiful spot.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: Forget it.

Hollstein: That was written by Nicaraguans.

Baker: Must have been. A can of peaches, a dollar seventy-five cents. Food was very meager. Imports were almost out of reach. There were not many things that were served.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: It was kind of a rough life, for both on my wife and myself, but mainly on my wife.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: In the bathroom at our house, we had these tinajas (tanks). I don't know if you ever heard of a tinajas or not, but they are big things that are on top of your house, you fill them up with water during the daytime, or at night, and hope that you'll have enough water left there when the day is over. And half the time, we didn't.

Somoza was the president there, the president of Nicaragua. And his two sons were running the country, as you might say. I think they were in West Point, when we first went there.

Hollstein: Yeah, they, at least one of them went through West Point, yeah.

Baker: I think one of them did anyway.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: But we attended quite a few diplomatic social affairs naturally while we were there. I was on very good terms with the chief of staff of the place, that turned out quite nicely.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But anyway, we went to a birthday party for the president, at his invitation. Marjorie danced with the sons and so forth and I tried to get around, but my dancing is not too hot. So, anyway, be that as it may.

Hollstein: The Bureau didn't hire you to dance, right?

Baker: Right, but sometime during there, the president came up and, and Marjorie introduced herself and so forth. And he made the mistake of asking her how she liked Nicaragua.

And she says, well, it would be all right if I'd ever have enough water.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: She said we are right at the bottom of the hill and the presidential palace is up there on top of the hill. She says I imagine you have plenty of water up there, but we sure don't down below.

Oh, he says, you don't. She said, no. Do you suppose you could let some of it loose once in a while so our tinaja can fill up?

It was all in good spirit and so forth and he laughed, but so help me God, I tell you one thing, our tinaja was never empty after that.

Hollstein: Isn't that something. Well, you want something done, you go to the top, right. That's right. That's terrific. So how long were you in, in Managua then?

Baker: I was there I would say, I don't think I was there more than a year all total.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Okay.

Baker: And then back to my favorite office, Phoenix.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: At the end, I know that we got there, it was in '47.

Came back in '47. And we were there less than, oh, I don't know, nine months or so. And we got notification to go to Washington, D.C.

And they sent me on a police school to Mexico. And that took about, I don't know, six to nine months, I guess, on that one.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: I'll tell you what, it was an interesting assignment, but I knew then, as much as well as I know now, that it's going to take a whole lot more than words and training and everything else, to ever change the mentality of the Mexican police officers.

They'd been getting their "mordita"...you know what that is? (Mordita is a "bite," slang for a bribe.

Hollstein: Yeah, little bites.

Baker: ...for so long, that it's going to take a real shakeup, or there's never going to be a change in the general corrupt practices of their police. In spite of what they say.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: Now I'm talking about the run of the mill police there in that area.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: Distrito Federal – that is. Mexico City is in the Distrito Federal, usually written D.F. (Federal Distrito).

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: Be that as it may, but it's the truth anyways.

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We made many friends in Mexico and amongst those people, the worst, I think the worst thing I had to do there was to make a long commencement address in Spanish to the graduating students. I don't mind talking one on one, but talking from a stage with two or three hundred people out there, you're wondering whether you're getting across or not, of course.

Hollstein: Oh, sure.

Baker: So that was that.

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Hollstein: Oh, yeah, but they appreciate it though when you speak their own language and even with funny pronunciation.

Baker: That was harder work than grinding it out in the States.

After the police school was over, they let us come back to the States again and we came back to Phoenix again. And we were there just long enough to get a house and get it furnished right, then the next thing you know, we were sent to Washington, D.C., when I was a supervisor there, on the espionage desk.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And we were there until, I believe it was the next year, and they sent us to Mexico City, as the assistant legal attaché. And we were in Mexico City then roughly from 1950 to 1957.

Hollstein: Okay.

Baker: We left Mexico and came back to Phoenix in 1957. We loved Mexico City, enjoyed it very, very much.

Hollstein: What was the nature of the work down there at that time?

Baker: Well, it was a real combination. Everybody had different assignments. And one agent just almost entirely worked on car thefts and con men.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: I had under my bailiwick criminal work as well as security. And I had the job of running two informants, an older man and his son. The best informant they ever had, throughout Mexico, looking for U.S. Army deserters.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: They had quite a story about an insurance company they worked for that they were able to get information and get out of town. But I bet you they located fifty to seventy-five maybe, maybe more deserters.

Baker: Deserters that had come back to Mexico, but who were of Mexican descent and lived in the United States legally and illegally, but that was one thing that kept us busy.

We had also the Socialist Party of Mexico, their communist party.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And we had a mighty good informants in their organization. In fact, he was a member of the police. He furnished monthly reports as to activities and ambitions and so forth of that organization and that was one thing that I rode herd on while I was there.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: One of the biggest things, I guess, that happened while my wife and I were there, I think everybody took part of it, took part in it, including the wives. That is Gus Hall, you remember who he was? Gus Hall was Secretary General of the Communist Party-USA. He was captured in Mexico by local authorities and the Legat staff. The biggest event while I was in there.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Of course, it was done through the local police, but with our running interference from our office, of course, with communication and everything else. And he was picked up in Mexico City and through the cooperation with the Mexican immigration authorities, got him back to the States. That was one of the biggest things that happened while I was there.

Hollstein: Huh! That's pretty big.

Baker: That made the papers.

By the way, really, the other thing I had was. I had a couple of informants who were very, very interesting people. We won't say how they got there or anything.

Baker: It was a man and wife. They weren't leftists, they weren't even on the fringe, but boy, oh boy, they really found out things.

And the reasons they came there and were sent there was the fact ... do you remember the so-called Hollywood Seven?

Hollstein: No, to tell you the truth.

Baker: Albert, Albert Maltz and some of the other Hollywood bigwigs were very pro-communist in leaning and activities and helped the communist party.

Hollstein: Okay.

Baker: And they start after them in the states and most of them came to Mexico. And so this couple was able to really infiltrate their little group while they were here and that turned out to be an interesting assignment as well.

Hollstein: Yeah. Had they been, the Hollywood Seven, had they been plotting or anything like that or just hiding out more or less?

Baker: This is correct. They were, I mean, I think they really went down there more or less as refugees.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: To keep from finding themselves in the pokey in the United States.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: And they still tried to carry on some of their activities after they got down there. And that's where our couple was very beneficial in letting us know what they were trying to do, what they were trying to do in the States.

Hollstein: Uh-huh, sure.

Baker: And what they were trying to do in Mexico and so forth.

Hollstein: Right, right.

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Baker: They were pretty quiet in Mexico.

Hollstein: Yeah. How did that all end up?

Baker: Well, some of them, you know, were sent back to the United States at the end of the war.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Some of them went to jail and some didn't.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: I don't know what they got them on, some type of subversive activities or what. But, you know, there were a lot of communist sympathizers that never did really get prosecuted for anything.

Hollstein: Right.

Baker: They were just watched to see what they were doing.

Hollstein: Sure.

Baker: And I think that was the main thing that was going on with this particular group.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Now, Mexico City has traditionally been a place for...

Baker: Well, you know, only God knows how many people down there have been various artists, who have been very influential in the communist party.

Hollstein: Sure. Diego Rivera.

Baker: They were the first ones that the members of the Hollywood Seven were contacting after they got there.

Incidentally, we also had, while there, another chap was shipped out of the United States as an informant, and he took lessons from some of the people you are talking about.

Hollstein: Oh, is that right?

Baker: As an artist.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And as a result of a contact with him, he was an artist himself. He was really a good painter. As a result of his friendship with us, he got Marjorie to go up one day on the top of the roof of our apartment and so he painted her portrait. We still have it in our front room.

Hollstein: Oh, wonderful. Wow, what a nice memento.

Baker: Yeah. Marjorie says she doesn't like it, her hands are too big. Well, I know, you know, this has been a loss of time for you but it's been interesting.

Hollstein: Well, it's great for me. No, this is really worthwhile.

Baker: I have other things to tell you, but, I mean, there's no use in bothering with giving the rest of them.

Hollstein: Well. You know, we never know what would be of interest to historians in the future.

Baker: Well, you know, my wife and I almost had a more interesting life after we came back to the States and retired.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Doesn't sound right, does it?

Incidentally, traveling around in Latin American countries in those years, knowing that all your furniture is going to be boxed up, you know, in crates.

Our one thing that happened after we left Nicaragua. In fact, we never did get our own furniture in Nicaragua. It never did get there from Buenos Aires.

Baker: But anyway, it finally some of it got to the States and got to us. I don't know how long it was, maybe a year, two years, something. After we got home, my father in St. Louis, got a call from a shipping company. He was asked whether he knew a person by the name of William T. Baker. And Dad said, "Yes, I just happen to." And they said, "Well we got a dresser that's been sitting down here on the docks for so long." And he said, "The only thing we can find is sort of a name that says Baker on it and St. Louis." And he says, "Do you know anything about it?" And he says, "Well, I know their dresser has been missing for over six months and so it could be theirs."

Well, it was sent on and we finally got it. But after we got it, we found out where they had put it in the wooden crates, they hadn't been too careful about the boards that were on top of it, so they just nailed right on down into it. And we still have that old dresser, but, of course, it has been refinished. But it's somewhat of an heirloom.

Hollstein: Well, a real memento.

Baker: Absolutely. The other memento was a whole barrel of pitchers that my wife had collected in all these countries and she had quite a few before we left the States. And they were beautiful glass pitchers.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: So we had a whole barrel of them. Of course, we shouldn't have been moving them around.

Well, when that barrel of pitchers got back to the United States, there was not one pitcher that wasn't broken. So outside of that, everything turned out well.

Hollstein: Yeah. Well, you can sure get beat up. We lived very frugally ourselves. The first ten years we were married, we moved nine times.

Baker: Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you.

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Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: That's the only reason I was able to get married. Back in 1940. I was able to make thirty-two hundred dollars, no, thirty-six hundred dollars, I guess it was, or was it thirty-two, thirty-two or thirty-six hundred dollars in 1940 when I became an agent.

Hollstein: Good money.

Baker: Well, sort of. And I felt like we were making enough to get married, so that's how we happened to get married.

Hollstein: Yeah, they were never overly generous with the pay.

Baker: No, I should say not.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: I guess they were a little bit more so later on in life.

Hollstein: Yeah. It's gotten much better now and, you know, the guys are living pretty decent.

Baker: However, I retired in 1962 and so I haven't exactly been on a gravy train. But I've been retired over 30 years, so I'm not unhappy at all.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah. And you're enjoying it out there?

Baker: Oh, yes, very, very much. Are you interested in anything after leaving the Bureau?

Hollstein: Well, what happened to you, yeah?

Baker: I retired in 1962 in August and in September 1962, went with the Boeing Company in Seattle.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: As a staff officer in their corporate security office. And later on, I was sent to Wichita as manager of security in Wichita. And was with the Boeing Company from '62 to 1974. So in 1974, I retired again.

Hollstein: Not bad, two retirements.

Baker: And then we came on back to Arizona and we behaved ourselves for about a year.

And in 1976, we were contacted by IESC. You know what that is?

Hollstein: No.

Baker: International Executive Service Corps. They were actually operated out of Washington, D.C. And they were sending consultants and individuals from the United States abroad to various countries, who had certain expertise in certain fields, to assist developing countries. And it was a part of the State Department operations and it was part of the AID program. It was a volunteer program.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: But all expenses were paid.

Hollstein: Not bad.

Baker: I mean full expenses, food, lodging, everything was paid. And you weren't out a cent.

And we had four different assignments with them. From 1976 until 1983. All these assignments were approximately four months.

Hollstein: Okay.

Baker: Actually, they were a little bit more than that.

Hollstein: Mainly training and, and consulting, huh?

Baker: Yes. And it was in the security field, of course, mine was. And I was sort of lucky. I had had the industrial security side, through the Bureau, that type of security and then I had physical security through Boeing. As a result, it was not too bad.

Hollstein: You're a double threat on that then.

Baker: Double threat, yeah. And we were sent first to the Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa, Port Authority.

They were just bombarded with theft. There were just thieves all over the place, and so they were looking for some help in trying to come up with procedures to improve their security. So we were there for a while.

And you know, this is sort of interesting. I watched sometimes in the vicinity of stevedores, working at the Port. And let's say a sack of rice dropped or something from one of the winches that were lifting it up and would fall on the ground or fall on the deck of the ship...

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: These peons would stop and grab as much of the rice as they could and put it in their pockets. Those people were hungry.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: Of course, I indicated to the authorities at the Port that they were going to have a revolution on their hands sometime if they didn't do something about it. And, of course, they didn't think anything would ever happen, because Liberia at that time was still run by the successor to Tutman. His successor, and he was in, in control and so forth. And these were all really descendants of ex-slaves from the U.S.

Hollstein: U.S., yeah, that's right.

Baker: Who were running the government.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: Well, they were at odds with all the tribal people who lived there. And you know what happened to Liberia later.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: So it was quite an interesting assignment.

Hollstein: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Baker: The next assignment was in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. A company that had developed a whole lot of procedures in the handling of different types of semiprecious metals, titanium, magnesium, et cetera, they were trying to protect all of their information that they had gathered. They wanted some sort of a system set up, a charge-out system or something set up, so that they could try to keep control of it. They didn't think they had very good control of it at that time.

Baker: They were building a new factory way out north of Belo Horizonte in a place called Montes Carlos, Brazil. And that's where we were stationed, way in the middle of Brazil. It was a long ways from nowhere.

Hollstein: It's a pretty area though.

Baker: Oh, yes. Brand new factory and they wanted to set up security procedures for the factory and also how to set up a guard force, which we worked on.

And they wanted to set up a factory, where it could be divided in two sections and where the employees in one section would never know what was going on in the other section.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. To compartmentalize it, yeah.

Baker: Yes. So that there would be an absolute separation, which is something I hadn't run into before. So that took care of that in Brazil.

And then the next year we were sent to Adana, Turkey, another four months that we enjoyed quite a lot.

Hollstein: Talk about a variety. My goodness.

Baker: And this time it was a textile factory. Turkey at that time was trying to wean itself away from the security apparatus that was directed just about everywhere by the Turkish Army.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Baker: And they were trying to set up personal security organizations. This huge consortium, textile factory, was the first to take the bull by the horns and try to do it. I tried to help out a little bit.

Then to Medellin, Colombia and that was the time after the drug lords had come in.

Hollstein: Yeah, that's a tough town.

Baker: A private security company wanted some assistance to beef up its operations. They were operating not only in Bogotá, but all over the country and wanted to improve communications and operations throughout the country. This in spite of existing drug lords and terrorist groups.

Every day, whenever they came to pick me up and took me work and so forth, they took a different route. It was something.

Hollstein: We had a lot of trouble there when I was at Xerox.

Baker: Oh, you did, really?

Hollstein: Yeah, yeah, with the drug lords and what have you.

Baker: There were other individuals, such as the paramilitary or so they say, and who knows what or who's on whose side.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Baker: But that ended that. I finally retired from IESC, Marjorie says. I was engaged with the Red Cross activities from there on here in Sun City, and I retired from there. And now here I am talking to you.

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Hollstein: Well, this is a lot of retirements.

Baker: You bet ya. I'm sorry. I think you got a hold of the wrong guy to talk to about what's gone on in the past.

Hollstein: No, I think I did very well on this interview. Thank you. Yeah, I've been out to Sun City a while ago. My son worked in Phoenix for a while.

Baker: Oh, he did? Does he work here now?

Hollstein: No, no. He's in San Diego now. He liked it out there. It was warm. That was the main thing.

Baker: Warm, it's not warm here. It's hot.

Hollstein: Well, he needed some heat, when he was in the Army, he was up in Alaska for three and a half years and then he came back to the States and went to college in Wisconsin. Then he came back here to Connecticut and worked here for awhile.

Baker: How long were you with Xerox?

Hollstein: Me, eighteen years.

Baker: Oh, really.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah. A good long time.

Baker: We had a very, very good friend. You were mentioning that you had trouble in Colombia.

We had some wonderful friends in Bogotá, Colombia. One was Jerry Schneider who represented a cosmetic firm. He barely escaped being kidnapped on three occasions. He was there during the time when they were grabbing people and holding them for ransom, kidnapping and so forth.

Hollstein: Oh, yeah.

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Baker: And he really had a time there. He was there, oh, several years. His company had the same problem there that you stated you had when you were there.

Hollstein: Oh, yeah. We never had, well at least in Colombia anyway, we never had a successful kidnap, but it was a constant worry throughout.

Baker: It was an annoyance to say the least.

Hollstein: It could end up with some really serious problems too, but, thank goodness, we made it through.

Look, I'll run along. Thank you very much, Bill. This has been terrific.

What I'm going to do now is we'll have copies of this made. We will give it to a person, a Bureau person to transcribe, a former Bureau steno. She will get it transcribed. I'll send it out to you to look at. And, you know, sometimes these things when you look at it in written form, you'll say, oh gee, I wish I had mentioned this or that or whatever, you know.

Baker: I wish I hadn't said that.

Hollstein: Well that too. That's a reasonable thing.

And we'll have you look at it, so you can see how it goes. Very often there's some spelling problems, you know, what have you with people not familiar with the Spanish.

And then after that, we take it to the Bureau and we'll go through the pre-publication review, and then away it goes.

Baker: What area handles that at the Bureau?

Hollstein: In fact, I have a letter right here from the guy. He's Government Response and Pre-Publication Review Unit, Records Management Division. Those are the guys that do it. In fact, I was just down there last week and we submitted our first one for the review.

Hollstein: And then off to a university library. We have just finished discussions with Georgetown University and University of Virginia, both of whom are interested.

And now we're going to have to make some decisions as to what we do with the archives. And then it will be available.

Baker: How many interviews have you had, Brian?

Hollstein: Oh, we're pushing fifty now. Of which maybe more than twenty are SIS people, so we've done very well.

Baker: Anybody over ninety-two years of age?

Hollstein: Only one that I know of now. He's ninety-five.

Baker: And who was that?

Hollstein: Emmett McNamara. In the New York Metro area.

Baker: Where did he go over?

Hollstein: He worked up in Maine. And then back in the New York Office in the '30s.

Baker: Uh-huh. Boy, he was before my time.

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