UN INTERVIEW
Pauline Frederick
June 20, 1986
Interviewer: Norman Ho

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Interview with Pauline Frederick

Conducted by Norman Ho,

20 June, 1986

HO: This is the second interview for the United Nations Oral History Programme to which you have generously contributed your time, memories and your abundant records of the Organization's activities and personalities from its very earliest years. In our first interview you told us about how you began your own career which served to open new career opportunities for other women in network radio and television. You also gave us a broad overview of the United Nations, as you had known it so well, over its first three decades. Today we shall focus our attention on one individual, Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN's second Secretary-General, who stands out on the service of the World Organization for which he ultimately gave his life. You eventually came to know Dag Hammarskjöld very well, but can you remember when you first heard of him and how he came to be appointed the UN Secretary-General?

FREDERICK: Thank you very much Norman, I didn't really know him very well, as a matter of fact, very few people did, even his closest friends. Nevertheless, he was a unique personality and came to be well known at the United Nations. Now, as to when I first heard the name Dag Hammarskjöld, that's difficult for me to recall, but I don't believe that I heard it at all until the name was mentioned in connection with the Office of Secretary-General. And that, of course, was something that was pretty unusual for everyone, anyone to learn about because he was not a well-known figure. He had been rather a quiet personality in the Foreign Office in Sweden and . . . when his name surfaced

at the United Nations, it was because it was discovered that both the United States and the Soviet Union would agree to his being Secretary-General. Neither would oppose it, and that was the primary factor in finding a man to hold this important post. The fact that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would oppose Dag Hammarskjöld for this important post meant that they assumed, as everybody else did, that he would not make waves as Secretary-General Trygve Lie had done. In other words, he would not involve himself in political issues that either of them would be opposed to, and so as a consequence, there was not much controversy, not any as a matter of fact, when his name surfaced, considering him for the post of Secretary-General, because most people assumed that from that time on, after Trygve Lie's experience, as a result of the Korean War and siding with the United States, that the next Secretary-General would not be so forward as to inject himself into a major political issue, especially where the two Big Powers were on opposing sides.

HO: What were you early impressions of Dag Hammarskjöld when he first came on the scene?

FREDERICK: Norman, it was very difficult to get a very strong impression of the man, because he was sort of a quiet, withdrawn-like personality. He was diffident . . . and did not make an effort to place himself in front. As a matter of fact, he said when he first came to the United Nations, "In my new official capacity, the private man should disappear and the international civil servant take his place." Dag Hammarskjöld adhered to that creed during the entire time of his official tenure at the United Nations. He was always the private man, and never sought publicity or never sought to be in the forefront when any major operation was underway. He was always the

private individual from whom it was difficult to get any kind of a news story, because he retained his own views very much of the time.

HO: Later on, despite Hammarskjöld's reputation for being somewhat shy and remote, how did you get to know him as well as you did?

FREDERICK: It was an unusual opportunity presented to me, wholly unexpected. I was elected President of the United Nations Correspondents Association. As such, this gave me an opportunity to ask the first question at a news conference and close off the news conference very much as is done at the White House press meetings. At the same time, I became the Pool Correspondent, so to speak, for any public gatherings for which one reporter was allowed to be present but no more. So, as a consequence, when such unusual occasions were held, such as the Secretary-General holding a black tie, a white tie . . . such as the Secretary-General having a formal dinner for a visiting dignitary, such as the President of State or a king, or other official, I was the one correspondent who could be present. And as a consequence, other correspondents depended on me to give them a report on the situation, and give them a report on the occasion. And, I was consequently looked to by all the members of the UN as the one representative of the press, and radio and television who would be present at these gatherings. Consequently, this opportunity gave me more of a chance to be present with Dag Hammarskjöld than I would have had otherwise.

HO: The new Secretary-General made himself famous early in his first term, when he travelled to Peking, where he succeeded in negotiating the release of fifteen United States flyers imprisoned by the People's Republic of China which then, as you know, did not yet represent China in the United Nations.

The scripts of your daily coverage of this major news story are still exciting to read. Could you give us a brief synopsis of what happened?

FREDERICK: Much to the surprise of most people at the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, soon after he came there, revealed that he was not going to be just an administrative officer. He was going to involve himself in some of the political issues of the day. And one of the most controversial, for the United States in particular, was the representation of China. The Chinese had captured fifteen American flyers during the Korean War, and were holding them, and the United States felt that it could not contact the Chinese, because it did not have representation with them, so therefore, there was no negotiation between the United States and China for the release of the flyers. Finally, President Eisenhower decided that the UN should do something about it. It was interesting, and on a number of occasions, that such a military man should look to the United Nations for some kind of resolution of some of the issues that were facing the world in those days. Anyhow, President Eisenhower suggested that the UN do something about the situation. The General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on the Secretary-General to do what he could to try to gain the release of the flyers. And after a Security Council meeting, the Secretary-General announced, much to the surprise of many people, that he would go to China himself, personally, and try to talk to Chou En-Lai , then the Foreign Minister, to gain release of the flyers.

It's interesting, how small things can be of great importance. I'm thinking particularly of the exchange of cables between Dag Hammarskjöld and Chou En-Lai. The exchange meant to many people that, first of all, the United Nations recognized the People's Republic of China. And, the fact that Chou En-Lai cabled back, meant that the People's Republic of China recognized the United Nations. So, in spite of all the efforts of the United States to keep

the lid clamped on any recognition of China, the cables had made possible this minor recognition, which, of course, eventually became something more important. Dag Hammarskjöld went to China, and had his conversations with Chou En-Lai, and Chou offered, through Dag Hammarskjöld, to permit the families of the flyers to come to China to visit them. This meant to many people, the possibility that the flyers might be released to their families at that particular time.

However, when the invitation was disclosed by Peking and the United Nations, the State Department immediately said it could not encourage Americans to go into an area where normal protection of American passports could not be offered. Of course, this was the Dulles anti-Chinese, anti-communist policy.

It was not until May 1955 that the first four flyers were released, and the final eleven were let go in August. Thus, ended the first example of Dag Hammarskjöld's successful quiet diplomacy.

HQ: Early in the following year, 1956, Hammarskjöld turned his attention to the long-standing problems of the Middle East, travelling to the capitals of the Member States involved, and conferring personally with their top leaders, in an effort to restore observation of the UN-negotiated Armistice Agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbors, and to relieve tensions which had arisen as a result of violations of these agreements. By the end of April, his efforts to do this were widely reported in the media to be successful. Hammarskjöld himself, however, was more guarded about the outcome of his efforts. What prompted Hammarskjöld to undertake this difficult diplomatic mission in the first place?

FREDERICK: The Security Council was aware of the growing tension in the

Middle East, and since Hammarskjöld had indicated that he had some success in private diplomacy, because of the China question he had negotiated, it was decided that Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General, should be asked by the Security Council to do what he could to try to ease some of the tension in the Middle East. That meant, of course, trying to reinforce the Armistice Agreements that had already been entered into, and to stop the incursions back and forth across the Armistice lines.

HO: On his return to UN Headquarters in May, Hammarskjöld submitted a report to the Security Council. What did it reveal about his mission as a whole?

FREDERICK: The Secretary-General reported establishment of the cease-fire between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and some agreement for withdrawal of opposing forces from the tense borders, erection of barriers on these demarcation lines, and allowing the UN observers a freer movement in the area, and . . . efforts by local commanders to try to prevent the border clashes which had caused so much tension. The Secretary-General frankly admitted in his report, that this is only a necessary first step, all these efforts he has outlined. They do even attempt to deal with the complicated . . . unorderly issues. But he said that in the area, there is a will to peace, and it is up to Israel and the Arab States to try to work out solutions to their problems without interference from the outside.

HO: In any case, the Secretary-General's diplomatic efforts that spring of 1956, in the capitals of the Middle East, would be overshadowed later in the same year, by the Suez and the Hungarian Crises. For Suez, the General Assembly authorized Hammarskjöld, in agreement with the Governments concerned, to set up the United Nations Emergency Force, known as UNEF. Can you explain

why this Force is considered to be the first genuine United Nations peace-keeping operation, as compared with, say, the Unified Command in Korea?

FREDERICK: . . . Dag Hammarskjöld's belief that there was a will to peace in the Middle East was not exactly borne out in the . . . short time after that. It was only in July that an angry President Nasser decided that he was going to take some action of his own, because the United States, through Secretary of State Dulles, had refused to help him finance the Aswan Dam. This was his dreamed-of monument. So, Nasser decided, President Nasser of Egypt decided that in retaliation, he would seize the Suez Canal, and that the tolls from the passing ships through the Canal would (sentence cut off) . . . This angered particularly the British and the French, whose nationals had built the Canal, and whose nationals also had major financial interests in the Canal.

The British and the French concentrated their military forces on Cyprus, with presumably the thought of moving into Egypt, to take away the Suez Canal from Nasser. But before that, calmer counsels prevailed. Secretary of State Dulles tried to repair some of the damage by going to the Canal Users Conference in London, trying to get them to calm down, but he didn't succeed. When he came back to the United States, it was decided to bring the matter before the UN Security Council. When it was brought there, much to the shock of many nations . . . Britain and France vetoed any action by the UN to intervene in that particular crisis. So at this point, Yugoslavia, presumably acting with the approval of the United States, decided to invoke the Uniting For Peace Resolution, which meant that an issue that was deadlocked in the Security Council because of veto, could be referred to the General Assembly. And that's how the Suez Crisis came to the General Assembly, and the question arose as to how to get United Nations Force in there to enforce it.

In order to carry out this Resolution, Dag Hammarskjöld and Canadian

delegate Lester Pearson worked all night to set up what was to become the first United Nations Emergency Force, to enforce the efforts of the General Assembly to bring peace to the Middle East, to restore peace to the Middle East. This was a very different operation from the Unified Cammand that had been set up for Korea, because in that case, it was at the request of the United States and was operated by the United States. Whereas, this was to be a wholly UN Force. It was to be made up of military representatives from nations which did not belong to either of the two Big Power groups, in order to reduce as much as possible any political intrusion into the situation.

HO: Ten days later, on the evening of 14 November, 1956, Hammarskjöld left New York by air for Rome, en route to Egypt, to accompany one of the first UNEF contingents to go to Suez, from a staging area near Naples. I understand that you found yourself in a seat next to the Secretary-General on that flight to Italy. How did you manage that, and what did the two of you talk about?

FREDERICK: Well, I didn't immediately find myself next to the Secretary-General, because he was in the portion where the berths were in the back part of the plane, and I was forward. But there was a short period when he did come forward, and we talked. He expressed regret that he couldn't be more communicative than he ever had been any place else, including the United Nations. But, he said that we should have a chance to talk a little bit, on the plane, and we did. We talked about things in general, and about the fact that he was undertaking an unusual step in launching UNEF into Egypt. . . . When we reached Rome, he was transferred to an Italian Air Force plane to take him down to the staging area for UNEF at Naples, or just below Naples. And. there were many correspondents waiting, hoping to get aboard that plane. But, I had a friend who knew the Secretary-General quite well, and he came up and

asked me if I'd like to be on that plane, and I said, "Oh yes, very much so." He said, "Well come with me." So he scuttered around behind the plane so nobody would see us, and put me aboard. So I was on the plane with the Secretary-General from Rome to Naples. And we chatted a bit then. He said that that time, that he knew that in getting out in front, it was possible that he would become a target. But he said, if you don't attempt something, you never get anything done. And so, he was going ahead, regardless. He told me also that he couldn't take me beyond the staging area at Naples because too many correspondents were waiting there to go across, and only the Swiss were making it possible to transport the UNEF men in the white Swiss planes, and he couldn't possibly take someone aboard who was not a member of UNEF.

HO: Actually, during the more than eight years Dag Hammarskjöld was UN Secretary-General, you were one of the correspondents who came to know him best. You have written, broadcast and lectured about him so much over the years, that you came to be regarded by the general public as an expert on Dag Hammarskjöld. He was known to be deeply dedicated, intellectually brillant, and completely honest. How do you remember Hammarskjöld, the man, and how would you characterize him?

FREDERICK: The more I knew Dag Hammarskjöld, and the more I saw him in operation, and heard what he thought and said, the more I became impressed by the fact that this man was really dedicated to what the United Nations was meant to be: a place for harmonizing actions to bring about resolution of difficulties so there wouldn't be another war. As a consequence, I was very impressed with him. And, I was, one day, was talking with his close advisor and friend, Andrew Cordier, who was then the Chef de Cabinet. And I asked Cordier what he thought of Dag Hammarskjöld, and he said, "It's interesting to

know that he came into this Office just a short time ago, and said to me . . . that the one thing that everyone who has written about him has missed, is the fact that he is a very religious person. He has deep religious roots." So form that time forward, I began looking into this possibility in his wiritings and his speeches, and I could find it, frequently, there. There was a great religious strain through it all. And of course, this came out in his Markings, which was left after his death.

It is interesting that he was a man who believed in fairness to all parties, and at one time or another, offended one of the Big Powers, which were responsible for his being in office. For example, at the time of the . . . Chinese situation, when he went to China to free the flyers, he brought back an invitation from Chou En-Lai to have the families come over to see their men, but John Foster Dulles refused to grant them passports for that particular purpose. Of course, he was on the outs, to a great extent, with Charles de Gaulle over Algeria, to the extent that de Gaulle was the only major leader of a world Power not to send condolences to the United Nations at the time of his death.

And, of course, he was very much on the outs with the Soviet Union over the Congo and everything from that time on, to the point where the Soviet Union was doing its best to try to oust him, as they had succeeded in ousting Trygve Lie. And of course, in the case of Britain and France, both of them were annoyed with him for a time, certainly, because of the Suez crisis.

In this connection, he was able to make an arrangement with President Nasser of Egypt to permit the UNEF Forces to be deployed on that side of the border, when, at that particular time, he was not able to get any agreement from the Israelis to permit the UNEF Forces to be deployed on the Israeli side.

HO: It was Hammarskjöld who had the Meditation Room created at UN Headquarters, in the General Assembly Building. What was his motivation for doing so?

FREDERICK: When you know something about the spiritual interests of Dag Hammarskjöld, it's not unusual to know that he was instrumental in creating what he called the Meditation Room. He said that "This House"--which he referred to the UN frequently, he referred to the UN as "this House"--"This House must have one room dedicated to silence, in the outward sense, and stillness, in the inner sense." And to this end, he created one very simple symbol: a block of iron ore in the center of the room, with a single light focused on it. This light, striking on stone, shimmerimg like ice a shaft of light from above, represented to him a meeting of the light of the sky, and of the Earth. I remember very distinctly one night, when I heard that he had been working most of the night, and about two o'clock in the morning, he called some of his aides in, and they assumed that there had been some bad news from one of the fronts where the United Naitons Emergency Forces were then located, but he said, "I want to go down to the Meditation Room." And he took them down to the Meditation Room, and it was about, as I said, two o'clock in the morning, and there he spent considerable time directing the painters to put just the precise coat of paint on the walls of that Meditation Room, so the light would be just as he wanted it. So he had a very close feeling about the spiritual. And he felt that it should be the center of the United Nations. He had a special crew of painters working on the Meditation Room that evening. He said, "We want to bring back, in this room, the stillness which we have lost in our streets, and in in our conference rooms, and to bring it back in a setting in which no noise would impinge on our imagination.

HO: On a lighter note, Hammarskjöld also held some positive views on the subject of holding concerts in the halls of the United Nations. Could you explain?

FREDERICK: Yes. Dag Hammarskjöld believed that international understanding had to be dealt on a much broader base than just political accord. It needed mutual appreciation of the cultures, the art, the literature and music of the world. As a consequence, he introduced concerts in the General Assembly Hall for special occasions. Concerts by the leading orchestras of the world, and the leading soloists. And, he once told me that when he decided to introduce concerts into the UN, someone said . . . that Trygve Lie had remarked that this was "profaning the parliament of man." Hammarskjöld responded, I'm told, that if this was profanity, he was prepared to make the most of it.

HO: In 1960, the United Nations embarked on its largest peace-keeping operation, in the former Belgian Congo, during the course of which Dag Hammarskjöld was to lose his life. You have already dealt in part, in our earlier interview, with the trouble between Hammarskjöld and the USSR over the Congo Operation. Could you tell us in brief outline, some of the events that led Hammarskjöld to fly to the Congo in September 1961, and what happened as a result?

FREDERICK: To begin with, on the July night in 1960, when the Democratic National Convention was nominating John F. Kennedy as its presidential candidate in Los Angeles, the UN Security Council was meeting in crisis

session here in New York. For the first time, a Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, had invoked Article Ninety-Nine of the UN Charter. This authorizes the Secretary-General to call the Council's attention to any matter he decides threatens international peace. Otherwise, of course, Council sessions are usually requested by Governments. Dag Hammarskjöld had asked for UN military assistance for the new Republic of the Congo, because Belgium had sent troops back into its former African colony, and bloodshed was mounting. The political roll call in Los Angeles was interrupted from time to time that night by the radio and television networks, for reports on the Council proceedings. . . . Before dawn, the Secretary-General was authorized by the Council, to create the UN's largest peace-keeping force, to be recruited from small nations outside the Cold-Warring camps of the Big Powers. This was largely because of the fact that the Big Powers were competing for influence in the Congo. The contingent eventually--that went to the Congo--numbered over twenty-three thousand men, cost three hundred and sixty million dollars, lasted three and a half years, and Dag Hammarskjöld was among the casualties.

The climax approached in the fall of 1961, just before the meeting of the General Assembly. Dag Hammarskjöld decided to fly back to the Congo, three days before the Assembly opened in 1961, in the hope that once more, he could persuade Tshombe, who was then holding on to the rich Katanga province of the Congo, to bring Katanga back into the Congo, and thus help to reunite the country.

HO: The news of Hammarskjöld's death in Rhodesia began to reach New York in the early hours of Sunday, 17 September, 1961. What do you remember of that terrible day?

FREDERICK: That was two days before the opening of the General Assembly, and

NBC put on a special broadcast on television that night, about the issues that were coming up in the coming Assembly. As a matter of fact, I said, in that broadcast, that Dag Hammarskjöld would be destroyed. I meant, of course, that he would not be permitted by the Soviet Union to have another term of Office. But little did I know that, probably, about that moment, his plane was being downed, whether by accident or by intent, it's still not clear. Nevertheless, the next morning, about six o'clock, I was called by NBC to get to the UN because Dag Hammarskjöld's plane was missing. That morning, I was at the UN before Andy Cordier or many of the other UN people. And then came hours of waiting and waiting and waiting for some word, as to the plane, and as to the fate of Dag Hammarskjöld. About noon, there was no longer any opportunity to wait, because the news came in that he was dead. The plane had been . . . brought down. And then followed investigations to determine how it had been--how the accident had occured, whether it was an accident, or by intent, and . . . nothing has ever been definite as far as the investigations are concerned.

(beginning of sentence cut off) . . . as memorial services were held, and everyone was wondering what going to happen next, with Dag Hammarskjöld gone. The atmosphere at the United Nations was very gloomy, as everyone wondered what was going to happen to the UN itself, with Dag Hammarskjöld gone.

HO: That Sunday evening, you wound up your full day of broadcasting with an eloquent personal statement, obviously from the heart. It is a memorable bit of televsion commentary and history, and I would be most grateful if you would first read it for us, and then make any comments you might have, twenty-five years later.

FREDERICK: (Reads) "Secretary-General Hammarskjöld is said to have had one

regret about the Big Power Crisis. The Soviet Union's break in relations with him had denied him any opportunity to do something. Hammarskjöld is a hostage of the Cold War. So is the United Nations. This is the time of year when delegates of ninety-nine nations pay lip service to a guilty conscience. In the midst of the greatest war preparation in history, the annual pilgrimmage here is under way, in remembrance of a pledge once taken to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. While rocket plants hum, and armies, navies and air forces play their games, men will be going to the rostrum in the Assembly Hall below this booth, to repeat the old clichés about ending man's inhumanity to man. But it appears to be easier to build a rocket and explore space, than to explore the minds of men for the common ground on which to try to cultivate understanding that might prevent the final incineration. The United Nations is only one idea: that the conference table should be substituted for the battlefield. It becomes reality only if the Members so choose. Instead, they have chosen to make it banner under which to fight Cold Wars, big and little. Defeating a political enemy has been more important that defeating the common enemy: war. Saving face has interfered with trying to save succeeding generations. Hammarskjöld's greatest fault is his dedication to finding the answer to what he believes is man's greatest prayer, which asks not for victory, but for peace. In a day when victory is still the goal, even though there can be no victory, this peacemaker will be sacrificed. And so will the United Nations, on the altar of military might, until there is acceptance by all that salvation in the nuclear age lies on the conference table, not on the battlefield; that this is the first resort of men of reason, not the last, as it now is; that in conciliation, mediation and arbitration there is common strength, not individual weakness. Perhaps the trouble with the United Nations is that the people have deserted this ideal, which is too important to leave to the diplomats. The Charter is a covenant

entered into by peoples, not Governments."

END OF INTERVIEW