WORKING ABROAD:
a discussion of psychological attitudes and adaptation in new situations

formulated by
the committee on international relations

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FOREWORD

This report has been written partly for the use of psychiatrists and other related professional groups, and also for administrators and personnel officers responsible for the selection, training and effectiveness of personnel abroad.

The report consists of an investigation of the special psychological problems of persons working in foreign lands, together with recommendations as to how these problems may be met. Although this study is based chiefly on the experiences of U.S. citizens abroad, its observations may be equally applicable to citizens of other nations working or studying in foreign countries.

WORKING ABROAD:
A DISCUSSION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDES AND ADAPTATION IN NEW SITUATIONS

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

A. Numbers and Distribution

This report was undertaken because of the tremendous increase within the last twenty years of the numbers of United States citizens working abroad, because of the importance of their work to the welfare of this country and to the world, and because of the special adjustments in living which have to be made by persons who work in foreign, intercultural settings.

In 1938, there were only 1,218 Americans in the Foreign Service of the United States and another 1,079 working abroad for all other federal agencies. By May, 1956, there were 34,052 Americans working abroad for U.S. Government agencies other than military—about fifteen times the 1938 total.

This rapid growth has not been due solely to the expansion of federal establishments overseas. Our government has increasingly followed the practice, especially since World War II, of contracting for the services of so-called "voluntary" (private, nongovernmental) agencies to perform specific tasks abroad on its behalf, e.g. agencies specializing in relief and rehabilitation, construction, engineering or economic consultation, child-care or edu-

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cation. It now has contracts with some 75 American colleges and universities to help staff and develop educational institutions abroad.

American personnel also bulks large in the secretariats, research and technical assistance programs of the United Nations and its specialized agencies (World Health Organization, UNESCO, FAO, World Bank, etc.). Over 2,000 Americans are now employed regularly by these organizations, and many others work for them on temporary assignments.

There are also scores of civilian groups—business, banking, labor, educational, religious and philanthropic—which carry on programs similar to those of the national or international public agencies. Some of the industrial companies have undertaken ambitious programs of technical assistance and training, economic and community development, both to improve their local staffs and to create favorable environments for their industrial operations. Labor organizations have established extensive representation overseas. There has been a new surge of practical service projects in agriculture, education, child-care, health and community development on the part of almost all the religious denominations, as well as by various foundations.

In all, "there were more than 100,000 American civilians working abroad on a full-time basis for international organizations in 1956, approximately divided as follows:

United States Government and Government Contracts............. 37,000
Religious Missionary Organizations................................ 28,000
American Business Enterprises...................................... 24,000
Students ..................................................................... 10,000
Teachers and Scholars.................................................... 1,500
International Organizations and Agencies......................... 3,000
Voluntary Agencies and Philanthropic Foundations............. 1,000

In addition there were probably another 30,000 United States citizens who went abroad on short-term private or government business. To these figures might be added the unknown number of Americans who work directly for a foreign government or foreign business or who are self-employed in foreign countries. For the purpose of emphasizing the problem of education and training for civilians in service overseas, the one million American troops stationed outside the continental limits of the United States have not even been listed. And none of the figures includes the wives or dependents of personnel at work abroad."

It is most important that Americans overseas carry out their jobs successfully. The premise underlying these many assignments is that the United States has committed itself to a policy of international responsibilities, designed not only to promote the welfare of the United States or United States concerns (as in former days) but to promote education, economic growth, political advancement and social progress, which it hopes will be conducive to world peace through international cooperation. Probably these assignments abroad will increase in numbers and scope in the years to come, and much larger numbers of Americans will be preparing themselves for and making their careers in foreign settings.

The mental health of the individual working abroad appears to be of even more critical importance than it is at home, because of its effect upon the vital program the man is responsible for carrying out. In many countries around the world, our contacts with their citizens are not limited to the few traditional ones, i.e., contacts with higher officers in governmental positions, for which there is protocol. Contacts have been extended to many persons at all levels—civil servants, technicians and educators, village headmen, farmers, doctors, nurses and social workers, businessmen, and labor leaders—who now meet on many human levels and not only as officials. Customarily these contacts have the purpose of bringing about profound changes in established technical and social patterns, through the exchange of information and concepts. These results depend upon the ability of both parties to establish mutual trust and satisfactory interpersonal relationships—often a delicate and difficult matter.

Therefore the mental health of the U. S. citizen working abroad has special significance. His individual state of well-being and the quality of his social relationships are most important. He must have a capacity for successful communication and collaboration with persons from widely differing cultures, as well as a capacity to maintain his own emotional well-being for prolonged periods in conditions quite alien to him.

* See Bibliography, Reference 22
B. Motives and Expectations

A large proportion of U. S. citizens who take jobs abroad, either in governmental, industrial or “voluntary agency” positions are apparently well-adjusted, well-oriented persons. Whatever their motives for leaving home, these do not seem to interfere with their effectiveness abroad; they seek such jobs or are asked to take them because they have specific educational preparation for the work, genuine convictions about the need for the work, positive interest in it and in the persons with whom they are going to work and live. Such persons are usually able to work effectively with the people of other countries, to carry out their assignments well, and to deal with the various impacts and conditions of their work abroad. Because of their attitudes toward people, toward themselves and toward their work, they usually take the foreign conditions and cultural differences in their stride.

There are other Americans working abroad, fortunately few in number, who fail in greater or lesser degree to adjust to life and work there. The more serious failures are relatively few. The absence of readily available facilities for dealing with them may make the few failures more noticeable, as well as also making it far more difficult to give such individuals the help or treatment which they need. There is a small number whose difficulties may result in psychosomatic illness, alcoholism, “nervous breakdown” or suicide. The primary concern in this report is not with this small group, but with the larger group of persons who though frequently very competent in their special fields of work cannot function well in the special situations which arise when they live outside their accustomed environment. It is among this group that one may find the commoner symptoms that are evidence of poor adjustment — such as desire to leave the job before completion, frequent requests for transfer, widespread dissatisfaction or indifference, high incidence of quarreling, frank disregard of regulations, increased sickness or accident rate, work of poor quality, absenteeism and alcoholism.

The foreign situation in itself causes some of the difficulties, although certainly not all. There are often conflicts with values, ideas and customs of the peoples or the co-workers in foreign countries. There often are gross inequalities of privilege and opportunities. Personal relationships with one’s own fellow countrymen abroad may be more limited or difficult than similar relationships at home. There are stresses in certain climatic and geographical locations, and in certain cultures, particularly, the greater their differences from Western cultures. The special stress, however, is often to be found in the particular personal or social position in which the U. S. citizen finds himself, or in his reaction to the specific frustrations in his work.

These difficulties are not necessarily an inherent part of the situation; when they are present, training which provides understanding and ways of dealing with the situation, may considerably ease them. Organizations themselves can sometimes bring about changes in the work situation — changes which may be able to lessen an individual’s difficulties in living or working abroad.

The psychological challenge of living and working with nationals of other lands is a universal one, and certainly not limited to U. S. citizens. When any person lives within his own country, he does not ordinarily need to be consciously aware of his own culture and of its profound differences from others. He may even believe that “all human beings are fundamentally alike and therefore it should be easy to get along with one another.” However, nearly every human being learns his own cultural patterns without much conscious thought about them. When he travels abroad, he is likely to assume naively that his own ways of living are “the natural ones” and would be taken for granted by anyone he meets. He may not even have thought enough about his own culture to be able to describe or explain it, or to compare it usefully with other cultures. He will probably not be prepared to see another culture as a natural variation among the many systems that different groups of people establish as their own accepted way of life.

Fortunately there is more general recognition now that the causes of difficulty in adjustment to overseas living may lie within the individual himself. Emotional difficulties may have troubled him to a certain degree at home, but abroad they may become accentuated and also harder to cope with. Often, unrealistic expectations prior to going abroad lead to excessive disappointments, and consequent disturbances in mental health. The presence of personal problems is often hard to detect; whether an individual will have more or less difficulty abroad is not easy to predict, especially since
conditions that are trying to one person may not be to another — indeed may be sources of satisfaction.

The emphasis in this report will not be upon the usual factors considered for promoting and maintaining mental health in the home situation. Instead it will concentrate upon the special problems affecting the mental health of U.S. citizens when they work and live abroad. It will deal with the possibilities of prevention (e.g., through personnel selection, pre-departure education for life abroad, and special orientation in understanding and communicating with the people among whom the U.S. citizen will work), and the possibilities of assistance to the individual, assistance to the group, and education of those in positions of responsible leadership, in the foreign situation.

II. SATISFACTION AND STRESS IN WORKING OVERSEAS

The psychological rewards for the individual who decides to take an overseas assignment are many. At first sight, the work may represent mainly an opportunity for personal advancement, escape or variety. But no matter what the immediate motivation, the chance to live and work outside one’s own country over a period of time often satisfies a deep human need to have personal experience of the world beyond one’s horizon.

There is of course the satisfaction of the particular work accomplished. Then there are additional satisfactions for the man with specific interest in foreign affairs, cultural studies, political science, economics, or language studies. There is a reward for the person interested in world-wide cooperation in specific areas of business or science. There can be special pleasure for those who love to teach or to be taught. There are others who derive their satisfaction from patriotic motivations, as well as those who particularly seek rewards in the form of honor, status or prestige. Some derive much-needed financial security in the form of higher salaries and pensions, as well as others who go abroad at considerable personal self-sacrifice for a specific humanitarian reason. The motivations are many and varied; the rewards may be great or small, depending upon the individual himself and upon circumstances he cannot foresee or control.

In general it may be said, however, since the majority of persons (except those in governmental or military service) go abroad of their own free choice to live and work, that the rewards of working overseas are obvious and real to those who choose to go. Nevertheless, even for them, there are psychological stresses, which are not either apparent or anticipated.

A. Environmental Changes and “Culture Shock”.

When an individual moves from his home to any new and unfamiliar place, it involves certain basic changes in his habits,
relationships and sources of satisfaction, and produces a different pattern of stresses from the ones to which he had become accustomed. When the change is the still larger one of moving to a different country and culture, the adaptation required assumes even greater significance. Inherent in such a move, of course, is the opportunity to leave behind, if only temporarily, one set of relationships and life-patterns, and to enrich one’s life by establishing new ones, with new satisfactions. Nevertheless, even the well-integrated person sent overseas is likely, especially at first, to have a sense of geographical dislocation or isolation, a feeling of “being out of things”; he often finds an intensified need for communication with home, a sense of frustration over the inevitable slowness of establishing the feeling, of “belonging” locally, and a feeling of boredom brought about by the monotony and limitations of social life.

“The overseas employee and his family are required to adjust to the foreign situation with its frequently more difficult climate, poor sanitation, lack of formal entertainment, inadequate housing, circumscribed social activity; they are expected to work effectively with people who have a different temperament, language, religion, culture . . . different ways of doing things, different values . . . different concepts of time, etc. The most difficult jobs are those which require the employee to work extensively or exclusively with the indigenous people with minimal supervision or support.”

Primarily, the success or failure of the adjustment to the overseas situation depends upon the individual’s personality, temperament and capacity for adaptation. (This is not meant to exclude group and social factors which will be considered later.) Generally it has been found to hold true that if a man has been able to live and function happily and effectively at home, he is likely to be successful in his transition to overseas life. When there are unsettled psychological or emotional difficulties, these are usually transferred to the new situation. Occasionally, the new environment may be favorable for the individual and his particular emotional difficulty, but far more frequently the difficulty becomes aggravated. This likelihood emphasizes the importance and value of careful screening with special reference to the nature of his work and the country to which he will be sent.

Surveys show that those who have worked well and happily abroad generally have the following qualities: flexibility, personal stability, social maturity and “social inventiveness”. They either have fewer prejudices or a greater awareness of them and the ability to tolerate the objects of their prejudice.

An important psychological factor relating to emotional stress abroad is the degree of reality in the individual’s expectations. Some persons’ anticipations are quite unrealistic, even grandiose. For instance, some people with adolescent phantasies take overseas jobs hoping to “save the world.” They have irrational concepts of “self”, of others, and of the amount of time required for changes in attitudes and habits. For the person whose expectations of himself or of his job are excessive, the frustrations may be so great that he will find it hard to concentrate on the work to be done, or to see his role in it in proper perspective.

If an individual is unable to relate his new experiences to his old ones, to see the foreign situation in terms of his own country’s past development, to see the needs of another country through its own eyes, or to reach desired objectives through new or still-to-be-discovered methods, he may become disappointed, frustrated and discouraged. Such feelings are then often expressed in the form of bitter criticism and hostility toward the foreign country, and are not recognized as the result of his excessive optimism, or his lack of realistic understanding of the problems, or of himself.

B. The Role of the Family

Marital situations may also cause either special psychological distress or satisfaction overseas. Ordinarily the man who goes abroad with his family finds that he is thrown into a more intense relationship with them than he had at home. For some Americans, this greater proximity results in greater intimacy and understanding than had been the case at home. For others, basic difficulties within a family relationship become accentuated in the closer living with fewer opportunities for diverse activities or substitute outlets.

Many men who go overseas find a continuity in their work, which makes a bond between their life at home and the life abroad; some even feel a greater sense of usefulness overseas than at home. Certainly many men find their new job very challenging and their

* See Bibliography, Reference 4
time fully occupied. But some wives, particularly those who may have given up jobs or careers in order to accompany the family, experience a greater change of living habits than their husbands. Most wives find housekeeping radically different abroad with entirely new problems to cope with, e.g., having either much more or much less free time than they had at home, or completely new relationships with servants. Problems of schooling, shopping, transportation, can defeat even the most devoted and resourceful wife. And there are such matters as face-saving and "squeeze"—i.e., being obliged to pay higher prices due to lack of knowledge of local language and resources and being dependent on certain local persons—which she must be prepared to meet. Often when she calls on her husband for help, he may not know what to do any more than she does and he may take refuge in his own work and his more pressing problems.

For these reasons, agencies which send employees abroad tend nowadays to consider the prospective applicant and his family as a unit, and try to determine not only the man’s but the wife’s and the family’s readiness for life and work overseas. In the words of one Foreign Service officer, “The adjustment and training for overseas for wives is as important as the adjustment and training of the men. I have seen men overseas, doing well at their jobs, become unhappy and dissatisfied because their wives became dissatisfied.”

Still another source of psychological reward or distress for the individual may arise from the living arrangements and customs of the group with whom the American employee is to associate. While technical assistance and voluntary agency personnel often live separately because of the nature of their work, the majority of Americans working abroad tend to live within American groups. When, for example, the employing organization provides organized housing, many Americans overseas derive considerable security from being able to live in circumstances of physical comfort and safety not too different from those at home, in a small community of fellow-Americans to which they can “really belong.” Often, however, such “colonies” or “compounds” interfere with any real contact with the native population, and may involve social ostracism of individuals who have the interest or desire to make such contact. The U.S. citizen who derives sufficient satisfaction from his work, his family relationships, and the limited community, may feel quite content. On the other hand, the individual who was inclined to go abroad in the first place because of his interest in or curiosity about other cultures, or out of a sense of adventure, may find himself seriously limited and frustrated.

In considering the psychological rewards and stresses for anyone going overseas to work, one should not make the mistake of emphasizing only rewards and stresses as the determining factors in the ultimate state of mental health for any individual. They are probably only of somewhat greater significance overseas than at home. In the overseas situation, the primary factors in an individual’s mental health are his already existent personality, his degree of satisfaction or adaptation in his family, his work, his social contacts, his recreational situation, and the particular dynamic balance between them.

C. Varying Patterns in Overseas Services

Adaptation to the overseas situation may be conveniently divided into early adjustments to the general foreign way of life and later adjustment to the specific features of a given job and a particular country. The early short-term adaptation problems are probably universal, and the speed with which they are met depends largely upon the individual’s ability to assess his new environment quickly and accurately, his possession of the necessary social aptitude for such a situation, and the degree and kind of training for the assignment that he brings with him. The later long-term adjustment depends more upon the length of time of the assignment, the individual’s goals and motives for accepting the overseas work, the place it occupies in his life-plan, the degree of or significance to him of changes which take place, and the successful or unsuccessful outcome of his work. In this respect, differences in types of overseas service present varying challenges. For example, in brief overseas assignments the individual’s way is often made smooth for him and his adaptation problems may be minimal, while in the career service or in assignments lasting a number of years, the adaptations required may be major and continuing. For the career service man, in general, the adaptation problems tend to diminish with each succeeding assignment.

However, a man’s desire to remain in overseas service does
not necessarily stay constant. It may waver or decrease, due to many factors. While good selection of personnel may be counted upon to meet a part of the problem of maintenance of interest, it is more and more realized now that the attitudes of the administrator and the policies of the organization have a very strong bearing on the long-range mental health of the overseas employee. Recent conferences and research studies consistently emphasize the vital effects of satisfactions and dissatisfactions within the work situation.

That these satisfactions or dissatisfactions are primarily psychological and social in nature, and not necessarily financial, is given recognition in the phrases "psychic income" and "psychic deficit" which have recently come to be used in administrative circles. For example, a recent United Nations report* listed four points under the heading of "psychic income": a sense of belonging, the opportunity to do constructive work, the recognition of good work, and a reasonable sense of security.

In order to give the reader an idea of the different kinds of conditions and factors affecting "psychic income" abroad, several different types of overseas work will now be briefly described. This review is not intended to be complete, but rather to point out some common characteristics of overseas services.

1. The Career Employee

For a long time, the career officer in the U. S. Foreign Service had what was regarded as the best conditions of any U. S. citizen employed abroad. Social status as a diplomat was high; there was economic security even though the salary was not especially large. There was a sense of genuine belonging to a diplomatic corps, which had integrity and the loyalty of its members. To a large degree, there was a sense of personal identification with the diplomatic mission and its importance.

Personal satisfaction within the Foreign Service naturally varies according to the type of assignment and also according to a man's position within the diplomatic hierarchy. The chief of mission may understandably derive greater pleasure, from his intimate knowledge of affairs and from his status, than the file clerk. In most missions, the subordinates are largely dependent upon the chief or

his senior staff for their satisfactions in the work situation. Consequently, the personality and habits of the chief become critically important.

For example, the chief of mission in one of the Asian countries, himself a gifted diplomat who received recognition both from the State Department and ambassadors of other countries, carried out diplomatic negotiations himself but also saw to it that his entire staff could participate with him. He set up regular conferences with them, shared the information he received, and invited them to take part in making decisions. His staff acquired an intimate understanding of policies and felt that they had roles of responsibility in the mission's accomplishments. In his mission, there were requests for extensions of assignment rather than resignations or requests for transfer, which are reliable indices of the state of satisfaction within an organization. By way of contrast, the staff working under another chief of mission, who was equally successful in diplomatic negotiations but remarkably poor in relation to his staff, showed a number of personal and professional difficulties; these were directly traceable to the unfavorable attitudes of the mission chief.

A frequent factor leading to special emotional hardship is the rigid structure of communications within the State Department. People in foreign posts usually lack opportunities for informal channels of communication. They are often irked by long delays in replies to official requests, and by occasional failure to obtain recognition or approval from Washington for local programs which they wish to undertake on their own initiative and which they consider vital. A system currently in use, in which inspectors come to the post from the United States, and then send written reports back to Washington, has been a source of friction. This type of friction has been offset to some extent by the practice of having inspectors discuss their reports with the mission staff before leaving the post. Such discussions with the staff, and joint working out of the problems, have proven to be of great help. In some cases, the staff has been able to correct reports in which the inspector has unintentionally misconstrued a situation. In others, the inspector has worked out with the staff new procedures to improve the situation. In such cases, fear of the contents of the report is reduced, and the problems reported are solved before the report reaches Washington.

* See Bibliography, Reference 16
Sudden changes in government policy work special hardships on men who have become personally committed or publicly identified with previous policy. For example, some U.S. consuls in Germany had helped prospective emigrants make plans for leaving, and then had to reverse their own previous instructions when U.S. immigration laws suddenly changed. In other situations, conflict over having to enforce laws at variance with one’s own personal feelings, can create great strain in some individuals.

Security investigations had a profound effect upon some members of the Foreign Service. It is hard to work under the shadow of suspicion, or while feeling constantly vulnerable due to changes in administration policy. The withdrawal of support from the very authority that had been counted upon, was in many cases a serious blow to the mental health of the individual.

2. The Technical Assistance Expert

The technical expert has many sources of pride and pleasure in his work. He usually has a specific project and knows that his particular field of competence is needed for the completion of a definite program. He works “in the field” and has the satisfactions that come from direct contact with people and program, in contrast to the relatively removed and routine work of the administrators. He is more likely to see the fruits of his labor, and he receives more direct recognition, usually both from his colleagues and local populations. Though his protocol position in the mission is lower than that of a diplomat, and his fringe benefits (housing privileges, pensions and the like) are fewer, he enjoys great prestige.

On the other hand, since he is often employed to meet temporary needs or to help in specific programs, his assignments are usually for only one or two years. He has neither the security of job continuity nor of job advancement. This temporary aspect of the work prevents some technical experts from experiencing the satisfaction which can come from seeing one’s project through to the end. It may place other experts in the position of having to continue another man’s project without adequate background information.

The contact with the local population may be extremely frustrating and irritating as well as satisfying. Often the technical expert must work with a local counterpart whose skills and knowledge are considerably different from his own. Usually, programs which a man might carry out at home in a short time, take far longer than he expects abroad. For this reason and others, the technical expert has little opportunity to develop his set task creatively. In terms of his social relations, he is rarely in one area long enough to make a real place for himself in the community. Despite the fact that he is welcome, he remains essentially a newcomer or an outsider.

3. Civilians Working for Voluntary Agencies*

The staffs of the voluntary agencies are largely composed of civilians from different professional disciplines (social work, education, medicine, etc.). They also usually include nationals of the foreign country whose participation in the work is part of their training process. U.S. civilians in voluntary agencies do not come as officials or representatives of any government, although they sometimes get partial government financial support for their programs. Often they are invited abroad by a non-governmental group in the foreign country. Even when carrying out a program under government contract, they do not receive all the privileges given to government employees.

Civilians with voluntary agencies have a greater degree of independence than most other U.S. workers overseas. They can often determine their own programs and can be most flexible in their procedures. They associate freely with the local population, and because of the nature of their work they usually do not live on the higher standards provided at most governmental and industrial installations. Although they are usually provided by the U.S. Government with adequate medical facilities and certain supplies, their standard of living is closer to that of the local group with whom they are working. This is not ordinarily a cause for any emotional problems, since the staffs of voluntary agencies usually take overseas assignments with the motives of service and usefulness and the understanding that they will work together with the people of the country. Their purpose, in general, is to understand the local problems in terms of the local culture and personalities,

*The term “voluntary agency” is usually given to private, non-governmental, and often non-profit organizations whose work is primarily educational. It includes religious and relief organizations as well.
to help develop local initiative and leaders who will ultimately work out solutions to local problems in ways that are feasible and acceptable to their own populations.

One can see that a well-integrated and successful civilian working in a voluntary agency might obtain deep satisfactions from his work and life abroad. The desired relationship, however, with the local population is not easy to attain, and is highly complicated at best. Though the individual U. S. civilian may be eager to function as an equal, non-directing partner, the local group may still view him in terms of its own national stereotype. Also, a man's very capacity to identify with the local population can create a gulf between him and his own compatriot group.

Not infrequently the local group opposes and frustrates the voluntary agency worker, whom they have themselves invited, for unexplained reasons which it may take months to ferret out. Sometimes the difficulty is resolved; if not, the worker may have to be recalled and another sent in his place. The sense of isolation and frustration can be very great. Nevertheless, on the whole the voluntary agency worker because of his special attitude of service, his training to work with people, and his convictions about values, tends to be capable of coping with his emotional problems.

Industrial employees fall into two categories, as do the government employees. Some of the long-established, large overseas industrial operations are staffed by career employees who spend their lives abroad in the overseas posts of their company. The psychological aspects of the work of these employees are similar to those in the U. S. Foreign Service and international civil service.

A much larger group of Americans in industry abroad are on a temporary basis. Their motivations, goals and expectations are quite different. Many of them expect to live in a state of physical and social deprivation and do so for the money which is offered. The personnel policies of industry frequently require the man to leave his family in the U. S. for the duration of his overseas assignment. Although a higher salary will recruit personnel willing to undergo this kind of arrangement, such personnel living in a state of deprivation reflect this in their human relations with the local people and adversely affect the morale of the American community where they are stationed.

While there are other large categories of U. S. citizens working overseas, such as employees of the U. S. Government both in and outside of the Department of Defense, employees of the U. N. and its agencies, and exchange students, it is unnecessary to deal with each group separately, since the conditions and stresses more or less resemble and overlap the descriptions already sketched.
III. PROBLEMS OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ABROAD

It is now axiomatic that good working and social relationships are important to a satisfactory frame of mind—to good mental health. Developing a sound working relationship with members of the local population is a basic part of the overseas worker's job. Social relationships abroad are necessarily complicated, not only because of the barrier of the foreign language and the deep gullfs between cultures and unexpected changes in social status. The degree of difficulty which any individual encounters abroad can vary with the degree to which he lives among his own compatriots or among foreign nationals. The Western European cultures probably seem most familiar to the U.S. citizen; the Slavonic, African and Asian cultures are increasingly strange and difficult to feel at home in.

Lastly, the individual's mental health is likely to depend to a considerable extent upon the type of relationships he desires or finally achieves: whether he has a need to be wholly accepted by the foreign culture and to become part of it; whether he rejects it or is rejected by it; whether he is able to develop and sustain the unique relationship imposed by the overseas work situation. Much will depend on whether, as an outsider, he can succeed in establishing good relationships with the local population, without developing serious feelings of isolation or experiencing threats to his own sense of identity.

A. Natural Difficulties

The U.S. citizen brings with him his American cultural attitudes and ideals, e.g., belief in a relatively classless society, willingness to meet all kinds of people at their own level, a generally pragmatic way of thinking, an emphasis upon individual initiative, "team-work", and so on. Sometimes these attitudes are helpful in his social relationships; sometimes they are not. United States attitudes concerning the desirability of change, concepts of time, national and racial stereotypes have often caused friction. Certainly those individuals who have acquired a degree of awareness of their own cultural background and habits, some information about the culture in which they are going to live, together with an appreciation of the meanings of cultural differences, seem to fare much better than those who did not get such preparation.

The foreign nationals who receive the U.S. citizen overseas suffer, of course, from similar limitations. They have equally strong and usually unconscious convictions about their own way of life, and equally preconceived images about foreigners in general and about Americans in particular. Such popularly held images or stereotypes about one another tend to increase the natural confusion when the U.S. citizen and the foreign national meet. Unnecessary resentments may develop merely from this confusion, as well as from specific misconceptions. When a foreign tongue is added to other cultural differences, communication can become even more difficult.

Only one example among many will be given here of the interaction between U.S. citizens and different cultures, since it illustrates the general principle of such interactions: an American arriving in Japan, eager to proffer friendliness in his accustomed way, may be puzzled by a general attitude of reserve in response to his outgoing heartiness. He may be pleased with Japanese politeness but not know what to make of smiling which comes at moments when he would not expect it. When he is most eager to speak directly of a point, he may be irked by what he regards as indirectness or evasion. On the other hand, the Japanese who meets the U.S. citizen for the first time may have been expecting him to behave in an overbearing or militaristic way corresponding to the anticipated stereotype. He may find himself pleasantly surprised that the American is friendly and treats him as his equal; yet by Japanese standards he may consider the American oddly garrulous and insensitive. Not infrequently, each person generalizes from his contact with perhaps the one individual from the other culture that he has chanced to meet. He may conclude that "all Americans are friendly but insensitive" or that "all Japanese are polite but evasive". To learn the meaning of his culture to the man who lives in it, to learn about its expectations, its values and its consistencies, and in turn to explain one's own culture to that man, is necessarily
a slow process. But it is well worth the time and effort, though not one for which everyone is equally gifted or prepared.

B. Distortions and Prejudices

The reactions of U.S. citizens to the encounter with foreign persons, referred to as "culture shock", vary enormously. A few Americans feel so uncomfortably isolated that they go to the extreme of trying to merge with the foreign culture, dressing and living in all ways like the local population, giving up as far as possible their own previous identity. Sometimes this is not due to a sense of isolation in the foreign land, but results from an emotional conflict within the individual about belonging to his own family or his own social group at home. Such a flight into the foreign culture may also take place as a result of naive over-enthusiasm.

In contrast to this reaction, there is a second group of U.S. citizens with an equally unhealthy attitude: they reject the local population and culture, and may even become actively hostile toward it. Their distrust or disdain is often due to prejudice carried over from early life at home, and not—as they often suppose—due to an objective evaluation of the culture or people among whom they find themselves. Often it is prejudice against certain religions or colors, sometimes simply a bias against anything foreign. It can seriously undermine peoples' emotional well-being, as well as do damage to their country's relations with the host nation.

Another group of U.S. citizens earnestly tries to learn a little of the local language, to understand, respect and participate in local customs, and yet possesses a comfortable sense of differences, and has good human relationships despite the differences.

It is among the first and second groups that the larger number of mental health disturbances may occur. The individuals whose unresolved family problems and prejudice lead them to over-identification with or rejection of the local population, might better have been discovered and eliminated in selection procedures, or given psychological assistance prior to going overseas. Others who feel rejected by the local population and in turn reject it, or who(587,262),(879,337) never are able to establish any kind of rewarding relationship with it, should either be eliminated before going overseas or else should be given special assistance or counselling in the field abroad. This is not only for their own welfare, but because of the pronounced effects such people usually have on those around them.

It seems apparent that the ways in which the important work is done overseas and the quality of personal relationships developed by the people doing it, are bound to affect public relations between the United States and the host country. Ordinarily, patient exploration on both sides and mutual forebearance are required for good cross-cultural social relations. Gradually the image each has of the other may become realistic instead of pre-formed and biased; gradually the personal experience may outweigh the stereotyped preconception, and mutually satisfying friendships may emerge.
IV. FACTORS IN ADAPTATION TO OVERSEAS SERVICE

The following are excerpts from letters of a technical consultant from the United States who was recently sent to assist an Asian country in the development of its public health program. These excerpts may provide a useful background for a discussion of personal qualities necessary to the mastery of stress and a satisfactory adjustment abroad:

May 7th: As I look out of the office window here and see the oleanders and honeysuckles in bloom, I think about the difference in temperature at home. It's 90° now, but they say it will soon be really hot here. We are still not settled in a house; I was glad we got a furnished apartment while house-hunting. I find myself getting very anxious at times, which I attribute possibly to failing to meet unreasonable expectations of myself. Things do move more slowly than at home and everything is tremendously complicated. There are the difficulties of language and concepts, of course, but also the physical difficulties of transportation and communication; I also find the idea of scheduling is something strange to the ————s. I have planned with the Minister for a conference between his staff and ours; hopefully we will be able to agree on common objectives and learn how to break some of the program bottlenecks.

May 23: We are not used to living in such an atmosphere of distrust, and it is frustrating to wait all day and have people not show up. There is a problem of keys too. Everyone locks everything up; we often find someone else, or the guard, has the key. There are only two keys to the gate. Once I had left, the guard locked the gate with his, and my wife could not get out. You have to watch the car carefully too. To take all precautions advisable to protect your property, slows mobility considerably. . . . It is common practice to have three scales of prices, one for the ————s, one for the ————*, and one for the Americans.

The practice has become so institutionalized, that the ————s will not accept the regular price from Americans; if they are persuaded to do so, they feel cheated. The practice is equally intolerable to the Americans, who even though they can afford it, feel that they are being made "the sucker," which is an affront to the ego. It sometimes results in hostility to the natives, who engage in sly practices in return. . . . There should be training in how to introduce technical changes, in terms of the human relations element involved. Everything we suggest is in some way an implied criticism, hence learning to deal with relationships in introducing change is of critical importance. I still don't know how I am doing. One change I've made is to deal directly with the Minister on all matters; heretofore our staff had been seeing any one they thought might be sympathetic, as a result by-passing the Minister, who remained ignorant of our operations. I have been gradually mastering the intricacies; but while learning pathways of getting things done here, I felt trapped since I couldn't fulfill the high expectations I had. Recognizing this, I was able to struggle on and gradually move forward. Hopefully, something will take hold in the program. I do wish the Minister would come to me with matters that he would like help with. But I doubt that one can expect it for a long time. In the meantime, I keep dropping suggestions which he can think over and take up if he likes; otherwise they will wait.

July 20: Periodically I get a compulsion to inactivity, a kind of withdrawal of energy from anything that requires initiative. The misunderstanding and mistakes that arise in our work are very real events, not just theoretical. So are the doubts and suspicions on both sides of the cultural division lines. I try to evaluate all the factors involved in each frustrated effort, and ask myself questions to confirm or refute my impressions. It's awfully difficult to understand what the ————s think about our proposals; it's very difficult to get the simplest data on their operations. It's like walking around in a strange museum at night; you jump into something, get an impression, and then start feeling to determine what it is. You feel it is marble, make out some features, think it may be a statue, but on feeling further you discover it is on a very wide base. Is it a sarcophagus, or what? You discover any number of objects, and can't tell what they are or what they are used for. You find someone to explain, but what he says does not seem to make sense. You suspect he is telling you what he thinks you would like to hear. It is a wonder, with all of the reasons why nothing can happen, that nevertheless they do happen. Out of a welter of confusion, a new water supply system is established, candidates appear for training (a week after being advised that no candidates could be found). It's very difficult! Occasion-
ally we get a small indication of interest in something; then we work hard on that until I sense that it has gone far enough.

Sept. 13: I became interested in malaria last week because we are going to assist in the eradication program. At the moment I feel well informed about it. Something has happened in my relations with the Minister. He has suddenly become most cooperative, insisting on immediate action on my suggestions, where before there was procrastination or even no response, which I ignored but inwardly felt as a signal that every detail was going to be a long drawn-out process with little to show for the effort. Now his speed is almost as much worry to me, because he gives orders to his staff based on my recommendations without giving much thought as to how they are going to be carried out. But overall, I feel much more optimistic than I did a few months ago. I am beginning to like ——— as a place to live; the little annoyances and inconveniences don’t bother me as much as before, as I take them into account in my activities. I have just been doing some reading I have wanted to do. This life appeals to me very much.

From the feelings expressed in these letters, it becomes apparent immediately that a deep interest in and dedication to one’s work plays an important role in a person’s sense of well-being overseas. This is of course also true for U.S. citizens at home, but is more intensified abroad. It is not merely “work for work’s sake”, nor work to gain fame or money, but a direct sense of satisfaction and pleasure from performing the work assigned. None of the accessory pleasures can compensate for basic dissatisfaction in one’s work, but as illustrated above, satisfaction in work may compensate to a large degree for some of the inevitable irritations.

A second factor of major importance is the quality of response to the challenge of the new and the unknown. An attitude of healthy curiosity, of willingness to try to learn and understand, of patience when answers are not forthcoming or are very difficult to obtain, and lack of fear in facing the answers, is obviously valuable. Flexibility and adaptability to the unknown and unforeseeable are very much needed. Even so, frustration and discouragement are almost inevitably to be met, and the man who can bear them well is clearly better equipped for his overseas assignment.

A third factor might be called “social imagination” — the capacity not only to see oneself in proper perspective, but also to sense the situation of the other person as he himself might see it.

It is worthwhile in all human relationships, but especially so in the overseas situation, to be able to estimate the degree of readiness of the nationals with whom one works, and to visualize the next step that they will be ready to take and accept.

A sense of isolation can have a most harmful effect on an individual’s sense of well-being overseas. It is not always easy to find a person with whom to share and compare one’s experiences and questions, or from whom one can obtain necessary explanations. The stability of many a man has been maintained through the companionship of a wife, a friend, or an experienced counsellor. For a number of Americans working abroad, their well-being has depended to a considerable extent on the closeness and communication they have been able to establish with another member of the staff or team, with one of the local population with whom they have been working, or with the links to home through correspondence.

For numerous Americans, the inevitable criticism leveled at them, either personally or as a group, or failure to achieve cooperation or acceptance and understanding of their program and efforts, may become a source of difficulty. With still others, the disparity between their own government and that of the host government, may form major psychological hurdles. Some suffer from the fact that they live on a higher scale than others in the population, some may feel too much personal responsibility for undesirable social conditions that they encounter.
V. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Assuming that the number of U.S. citizens working abroad will continue to grow larger in years to come, it is a matter of practical importance to review existing administrative procedures with special regard to their implications for mental health, and to formulate new or additional policies and procedures in the light of further experience. For purposes of discussion, the usual administrative areas may be roughly grouped into three main categories: (A) selection, (B) orientation and training, and (C) mental health measures overseas.

A. Selection

The process of selection of applicants for specific work situations is generally based on three findings. The first is an evaluation of a man’s technical or professional qualifications; the second is an evaluation of his physical health; the third is an evaluation of his personal qualifications. An evaluation of the spouse should be included whenever possible, since the successful adjustment of the family as a whole is so important.

Unlike selection at home, where there may be many more candidates available than there are jobs to fill, there are frequently only a very few people to choose among for overseas positions. This is especially true when the overseas position requires highly specialized skill and training together with working knowledge of a foreign language. A number of organizations report that they spend most of their time finding even one person with the necessary technical competence, and consequently have little or no opportunity for selection on the basis of personality. But fortunately, in the majority of overseas jobs, it is possible to exercise some selectivity; then the psychological evaluation of the individual can be given more significance. In general, technical specifications for overseas jobs have in the past been given more importance than personal qualifications, and more was expected from the overseas employee with reference to his craft than with reference to his personal relationships. Recent experience suggests that sending the right kind of person is so vitally important, that it is worthwhile to lower the technical requirements on occasions, even better at times not to fill the job at all, than to send someone well-trained who is likely to fail on a personal basis or who may cause embarrassment in his public relations.

Methods of selecting men along lines of technical and professional competence for work abroad do not differ essentially from selection in the domestic situations. Only the most progressive selection methods used in the U.S. seem adequate for the foreign situation. These procedures should certainly include the careful appraisal of the training and experience of the candidate, finding men with previous experience in work abroad, special efforts to determine their reactions to re-location, and interviews by more than one psychologically trained interviewer.

The second consideration in selection is a man’s physical health. Both routine and special duties must often be carried out under strange, trying and shifting conditions. The physicians examining candidates for the Foreign Service have been instructed to reject persons who do not enjoy “more than average health”. The health of a man’s family of course also calls for the most careful attention. Adjustment to new conditions usually entails physical strain and medical facilities are limited in many parts of the world. Worry over health matters can assume greater proportions overseas. Chronic ill health, even though minor, has been known to give rise to increased psychological strains abroad, which in turn may affect an individual’s general health adversely. Persons with histories of psychosomatic illnesses have been repeatedly found to do poorly in difficult foreign climates. It has been the experience of a number of agencies and industries that persons given medical waivers and allowed to proceed overseas to work, have shown poor efficiency in their work, have had to return to the United States for medical reasons more often than other employees. In addition, they have returned to the United States for non-medical reasons prior to completion of service more often than other employees. The cost to the agency which has to send a man or his family home is very high, not to mention the cost in worry to the administrators and the man himself.

* INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINING PHYSICIANS, April 15, 1949, Department of State, Foreign Service.
The third consideration, and the most important, is the psychological evaluation for work abroad, which has to differ considerably from selection for work at home.* When men have failed overseas, it has rarely been found to be due to deficiency in their professional work. It is nearly always due to a personal difficulty, such as lack of ability to adapt to local conditions or inability to deal with the complicated interpersonal relationships in the foreign situation. Consequently, greater demands have been made upon the psychological selection process for the foreign situation, and these are not easy to fulfill.

First of all, it is harder to define the specific psychological conditions and personal requirements in an overseas job than in a comparable one at home, although a more careful analysis of the job to be filled is helpful. It is still difficult to make predictions with accuracy about individuals' abilities to maintain good mental health overseas. There are many imponderables. Sometimes the existence of strong, sound enthusiasm for the overseas assignment has been found to be a reliable indicator of probable success. Certainly one would want to learn about a man's previous record of exposure to situations involving national and racial differences and prejudice, and to know about his capacity to cope with it with a minimum of strain or friction. Obviously, overt cases of mental illness would be rejected for overseas duty. However, the non-acute and the mild or subtle emotional and mental disturbances can be extremely difficult to detect, even for the trained observer, unless the candidates cooperate in revealing them, or unless a long period of observation and acquaintance with the candidate is possible. Such periods have usually not been possible in most practical situations. Degrees of dependence, degrees of states of fearfulness, sense of helplessness, sense of despair, are not easy to measure in brief interviews. Consequently, although it is gradually becoming possible to make more reliable predictions concerning probable success or failure abroad, a great deal more research is needed in this regard. It is still far from easy to evaluate human beings in terms of their future reactions. There is much to indicate that a person who has successfully done a technical or professional job at home will not necessarily be able to do a similar good job at the same work in a different cultural situation.

Frequently people are asked to do something they have not done before, either to perform similar jobs under entirely different interpersonal and social conditions, or to act as consultant when previously they have been primarily carrying out the work themselves. To help others to do a job by themselves is quite a different psychological role from doing the job oneself. This is a change which is hard for many otherwise competent people to tolerate. It requires being able to communicate one's technical knowledge to others in an acceptable way, and is likely to be found in those who have a bent for teaching and talent for leadership in group situations. It may give certain consultants less satisfaction than they receive when they do the entire job alone; frequently, the consultant has less opportunity to develop his individual job than do the local personnel with whom he is working.

In many instances, in working with a local counterpart, he has to learn to adjust to his counterpart's strengths and weaknesses as well as his own. Sometimes consultants cover up their own inadequacies by placing the blame for failure on the counterpart, and by such a scapegoat method they prolong the job in the field for a longer time than a job would last at home; this is highly undesirable. Special problems are therefore presented in trying to predict a person's potential skill as a consultant.

Another way to regard selection, and perhaps one with the greatest promise, is to use selection as a way of determining not only existing qualities in a man, but to attempt to measure his potentialities for growth in the new job and situation. This emphasizes the point that it is important and beneficial in the long run to choose men and women with psychological flexibility and adaptability even though they have less technical skill than would be immediately needed. It is desirable that they not be too rigid and that their work history demonstrates an ability to face difficulties successfully. Certainly, a previous history of successful coping with separation from home and accustomed environment, and a history of good working relations with colleagues would be good indications, since under overseas conditions, the official working
team has to operate under far closer, and therefore, often far more trying conditions of competition and rivalry.

The principal methods of carrying out selection have been the personal interview (including the panel interview), questionnaires, letters of reference, records of previous experience and adjustment both in work and personal life, and trial and error. More lately, selection methods have included psychological testing, assessments, observations and evaluation of an individual during his training or probationary period, i.e. after he has been employed but while he is still in the United States. Some industrial companies use their appraisal of a prospective overseas employee during this training or probationary period as a final stage in their selection process.

Psychological tests can give valuable information concerning flexibility and rigidity of character, social adaptability, tolerance for frustration and other kinds of endurance, inner resources, levels of aspiration and the quality of drive toward achievement, and strength of motivation. Tests in combination with personal interviews, have been found to be more helpful than tests alone.

There are a number of ways to increase the reliability and validity of predictions as to success or failure in an overseas job. The background appraisal includes a review of as many facts as possible about the person’s psychological maturity. It is better when it includes the opinions of subordinates and peers as well as supervisors. The employment interview, or preferably several interviews, should be conducted by competent persons who have been carefully trained to use the insights of psychiatry, and who periodically add to their training through follow-up studies of the selections they have previously made. Such interviewers can then better integrate the material found in the background appraisal and in the psychological tests, with considerations of the individual and his particular place and type of assignment. In addition, it helps a great deal if the interviewer is personally familiar with the setting and conditions in the country for which he is selecting a prospective employee.

The candidate can be a useful partner in the selection process. Most Americans, if given full information about the nature of the job and the living conditions, can assist in assessing their capacity to cope with the situation. Since most of the candidates are successful in their present jobs, they will probably refuse to take the proffered job if they feel it is beyond their capabilities.

Sometimes a naive or overzealous recruiter in order to obtain a candidate for a post which is difficult to fill, will glamorize and distort the description of the assignment. Although this may result in finding some one to fill the job, the possibility of this person failing is much greater. A candidate recruited through subterfuge is denied the opportunity of accurately assessing his own ability to handle the job and adjusting to the local conditions. He is usually quite resentful and dissatisfied when he discovers that he has been given false and misleading information.

B. Orientation and Training

1. Orientation

Nearly every organization, governmental or non-governmental, that sends personnel abroad to work, attempts to provide some sort of “briefing” before departure. This in itself indicates the widespread recognition of the need for pre-departure orientation. The word “briefing” reveals how regrettably little attention and time are usually given to this phase of going to work abroad—a phase with critical importance for a new overseas worker’s eventual adaptations.

In most briefing, the emphasis is usually primarily placed upon necessary factual information (travel requirements, vaccinations, housing, baggage, money, and the like.) Usually descriptions of the country and the people in the new country are given, and a sketch of the organization or agency and its overseas purpose. Until the present time, the difficult human relations involved in work abroad have been neglected. Either it has been assumed that most human beings will be able to communicate and relate to their new neighbors without assistance, or else the difficulties inherent in the new relationships were underestimated. Perhaps the need for satisfactory interpersonal relationships as part of good international political, social and economic relationships, was not sufficiently understood. More likely, ignorance of the process of teaching people how to adapt to new cultures caused most briefing instructors to avoid this area of orientation and training. In any case, the absence of consideration of human relations in orientation constitutes a grave weakness in any such program.
It is unfortunate that, in preparing personnel for work abroad, orientation programs are not making more use of modern psychiatric knowledge concerning the nature of anxiety, the ways of recognizing it in oneself and in others, the ways in which it disables people, and the ways of coping with it or reducing it.

Painful or faulty communication between people abroad is due to more than the language barrier. Interpersonal difficulties, both at home and abroad, are often due to attitudes either caused by or characterized by increased anxiety which, even when unconscious, is nevertheless real and potent. The overseas employee, while in training, could receive some understanding of the nature of anxiety and how it can affect his relations and communications with others, which he could profitably apply in difficult situations abroad.

Factual information is one effective means of reducing a man’s or a family’s anxiety and insecurity in the new situation; therefore adequate knowledge of the host country’s history, religion, economics, political and traditional culture is of basic importance. Equally important is a man’s knowledge, his expectations of himself, of the expectations that others will have of him, together with his probable ways of reacting. But the imparting of such knowledge ought not to be attempted only through lectures or reading of books and pamphlets. It would be most desirable to supplement these by giving the man an opportunity to ask questions relating to his specific areas of inadequacy and self-doubt, to get answers from people who have already worked abroad and have had foreign experience — preferably in the very area to which the new employee is going. It would be most helpful to hear how others fared and how they eventually mastered their own situation overseas.

Such opportunities before departure to learn about the personal side of the new experiences, have rarely been given. In one country the following list of pointers was prepared as a means of stimulating prospective employees to examine their attitudes, guide themselves in the overseas situation, and thereby have a more meaningful and profitable encounter with the host population:

1. Expect some hardship at first, because of the shock of coming into the new culture. You will be under some strain, and so will the people who are receiving you.

2. Learn about the people by letting them tell you about them- selves. Although you have read something about them, you know less than you think you do. Don’t be afraid to ask them questions; they will appreciate your interest. Expect that they will ask you lots of questions too. It may be uncomfortable to answer some of them.

3. Be prepared to appreciate and admire what they already are and do, as well as being prepared to give something worthwhile to them. Participate in unfamiliar customs, if you can. It is natural to be prejudiced against some of them, just as it is natural for them to be prejudiced against some of your customs. You may find your prejudices decreasing, and theirs too.

4. Expect criticism. It will come from them, just as you will find yourself being critical after a while. But take it, think about it; it may be worth something to you.

5. Try to discover how they see you, in what social position, how they expect you to behave, what it will mean to them if you do not. Try to decide how you can strike a balance for yourself between what you are used to doing and what they will expect from you. Try to find a person in the community who can help you solve conflicts of this kind; there usually is at least one. Try to put into words what puzzles you about the new community, and share your concerns with him. He may be of great help.

6. Examine your own motives towards these people. How strong is your desire to ‘change’ them? How would you feel if an outsider came in with the avowed purpose of ‘changing’ you? What had results might you fear if ‘change’ were successfully brought about? Under what conditions might you accept an outsider’s help? What conditions or limitations would you want to set for him? How would you want him to work along with you? You personally and your work will get on much better as long as you try to see things from the local population’s point of view as well as your own.*

In line with the emphasis given throughout this report on the desirability of regarding the overseas employee, his wife and his family as a unit, rather than the employee alone, it is important to give complete orientation whenever possible to the man’s wife, and to their children if they are able to participate. Furthermore, it is desirable that ample time, much longer than usual, be given for the absorption and digestion of this information. In the case of the technical expert who is ordinarily sent overseas for a few

* See reference 24.
weeks or months only, there is little time for such extensive orientation. When persons go abroad for long periods, however, orientation before departure might well begin four to six months in advance, with greater stress on all matters pertaining to personal adaptation and interpersonal relations.

2. A Foreign Service Training Center?

The need for different kinds of methods and for new knowledge has made many people hope for the establishment of some kind of over-all foreign service training center. Such a center could provide a setting for training, consultation, and research. It is not the purpose of this report to define or solve the complicated problems involved in establishing and administering such a center. The obvious need for such an institution may emerge clearly from a description of what a hypothetical center could offer.

Much of the work now being done abroad, is studied by a variety of different organizations. Separate research projects are carried on under the auspices of various governmental agencies, universities, and colleges, industries, foundations, religious and other private organizations. At present there is no systematic center for integrating and coordinating the results; for research, evaluation and consultation; for conducting concerted pilot training programs and follow-up studies, for systematic supervision and correlation between preparations at home and success or failure abroad. Such a contemplated center would not, of course, duplicate or replace any existing facilities, but would provide links between them and means of coordination, which do not yet exist in this field. Preferably such a center should be accessible to all governmental, industrial, public and private personnel, including foreign personnel working in the United States. It could serve as a clearing-house, enabling all the individuals working in this field to profit from each other’s experiences, instead of, as has often happened, doing overlapping jobs and duplicating studies without knowledge of each other. It could reinforce studies being made at universities, and in turn serve as a feed-back to them, enabling them to strengthen their curricula.

By means of its coordinating functions, it could make possible more consistent policies for training and preparing personnel for going overseas, and for their management and for such remedial measures as are undertaken. It could begin to accumulate information from many different parts of the world, and make this available in a systematic way to new organizations and new persons going overseas. It could also serve as a directory of expert consultants; every agency knows from bitter experience how difficult and time-consuming it is to try to locate the special person needed for a particular situation. A staff of consultants, able to travel when they are needed, might be available for special services such as evaluation, supervision, consultation and research in overseas installations. Such a center might conceivably function not only in the service of U.S. citizens going to work abroad, but also in the service of foreigners coming to study or work or teach in the United States. It might provide them with guidance and assistance, and also make use of their services in teaching U.S. nationals better methods in international situations. It would naturally be necessary to have interprofessional cooperation, making use of today’s psychiatric insights.

Such a center could perform a special service by introducing into the entire range of overseas activities, concepts bearing upon individual and social psychology. It could teach the principles of mental health, both theoretical and applied, and cover such matters of agency policy as selection, pre-departure orientation, life overseas, and the employee’s return home. Indeed it could make an ideal place for the widespread introduction of mental health considerations, and also for further research into the nature and causes of poor human functioning abroad, which in turn could be useful to persons responsible for selection.

Further research could be carried out on a continuing basis about life, work, missions abroad, social problems and the solutions they require, and especially into new ways of helping people who will be going abroad develop their capacities. Such an institute or center might also help to establish a tradition of “international-mindedness”—a valuable attitude acquired in many United Nations agencies, and of long-standing in some Old World countries—but still new for many younger ones.

3. Mental Health Measures Overseas

In the adaptation of U.S. workers overseas, two chief factors call for consideration: first, the environment and the strains it
produces; second, the personality of the individual with its inherent stresses and susceptibility to stress. Emotional difficulties with consequent loss of productivity and satisfaction result primarily from the interaction of these two factors. Remedial measures may therefore be divided for practical purposes into (a) management of environmental factors, (b) assistance to the individual in his efforts to function in his milieu, or (c) removal from the situation.

The environmental stresses previously enumerated in some detail may be summarized as separation from familiar people and routines of living, and confrontation by strange and unknown people, customs, ideals and material facilities. Some degree of anxiety and insecurity inevitably occur, with an accompanying increased need for emotional support. Administrative procedures designed to alter the environment and thereby lessen such "separation-anxiety" and "culture-shock", have usually been similar to procedures used at home in industrial and military establishments. In this category are measures like increasing "fringe-benefits", better housing and recreational facilities, more "creature comforts" and luxuries, and so on. Such procedures may diminish stress to some degree.

In the overseas situation, however, there is the complicating factor that the creation of a so-called "Little America"* may increase the psychological distance between U.S. employees and their local contacts. Such distance deprives the U.S. worker and his family of close meaningful relationships which might otherwise be formed. This in turn creates another type of isolation, with diminished satisfaction, resulting in poorer general performance. Anxiety is thus brought about. Furthermore, disparity of living standards can lead to a sense of guilt and embarrassment on the part of some U.S. workers, or resentful withdrawal by the local population; this again results in anxiety and tension. With these considerations in mind the administrator can readily see the limitations in merely improving living standards; he must not expect to solve all adjustment problems in that way. He may, in fact, be able to avoid his own frustration which would naturally follow if his efforts to improve environmental factors actually caused greater troubles.

There are other administrative procedures which can directly decrease basic anxiety: improved efficiency in mail service, which will maintain the comforting attachment to home; the creation of easy, accepting, intra-organizational communication, thereby establishing new groups of personal relationships on a friendly basis; further development and deepening of the early "briefing" about the new area and its culture. Encouraging curiosity and facilitating learning about the new region can be quite helpful in relieving anxiety about the unknown; besides it may produce the added advantage of increased job efficiency.

Individuals in overseas situations tend to develop two main anxieties of a very specific nature: "separation-anxiety" (anxiety about separation from home and the familiar) and anxiety about the unknown. These are usually most acute at the time of arrival in the new area, but may be revived at any later time when work becomes unsatisfactory, when new environmental stress appears, or when valued personal relationships are disrupted. People vary in the degree to which they develop such anxiety and in their ability to function well despite its presence. These variations are usually related to the individual's previous experiences of separation, desertion, death, loss of close relationships, sudden changes to new homes, new surroundings, and new people. Some people have had little trouble in the past in shifting to new groups of playmates, leaving home for school, leaving school for jobs, changing to married life, etc.; others have made such separations and relocations with great anxiety and have needed extra emotional support. It is obvious that the needs of individuals and the remedial measures required, will vary in kind and degree.

Sometimes when anxiety is high enough to interfere with a man's functioning, it may be lessened by firm understanding and direction from his superior officer, in much the same way that a youngster's uneasiness can be relieved by a strong supportive parent. Close understanding between administrator and individual, can be extremely effective in relieving anxiety and enhancing job performance. Some individuals without previous experience of uprooting and relocation may sustain a double threat, if they develop separation-anxiety, and are then frightened because they do not

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*The phrase "Little America" has been used to describe the circumscribed compound type of community, inside which houses and living arrangements are like those in the U.S.A. and not like those of the host country.
know quite what has happened to them and do not realize that this is a natural and a manageable occurrence. A chance to air these feelings and to receive friendly reassurance may be all that is needed for rapid adjustment to the "normal", non-incapacitating degree of feelings of separation.

Some persons attempt to assuage anxieties in other specific ways: some try to obtain special recognition and interest from superiors and colleagues, quite unaware of why they need the preferential position. Behavior of this sort can be bewildering, irritating and troubling, not only to fellow-workers but to the person himself. Investigation often reveals that the source of the behavior is the common situation of rivalry in which children feel they must vie with each other for parental affection and recognition. Loss of security in a foreign area may easily revive this old pattern of long-forgotten, adaptive behavior. It is usually impracticable and unwise to meet the special demands which the individual makes at such times; friendly discussion of the problem may help a great deal, especially when the administrator gives adequate time for adjustment to overseas life and tries to treat all personnel with fairness and impartiality.

Another stimulus to anxiety is the loss of familiar patterns in authority relationships, both as to people and as to relative position in the hierarchy, plus the sudden necessity of facing new people and positions. It is often essential in speeding the process of adjustment, to provide further on-the-job orientation, with administrative clarification of duties, responsibilities and "chain of command". Also valuable is the availability of some higher authority for frank, non-judgmental discussion of personality clashes which occur.

The degree of help required by an individual depends too on the newness or stability of the situation. This is comparable to the military situations where it has been found valuable to provide extra emotional support for troops prior to their entering combat the first time — support which could later be reduced after troops had become seasoned. In other words, neither the workers themselves nor administrative personnel need have cause for concern over the extra personal support needed soon after arrival. After the natural, early burst of separation-anxiety and fear of the un-

known have been overcome, the normal emotional patterns take over and extra help is usually no longer needed.

Although the types of anxiety and conflict mentioned above are common, they serve only as samples of the basically emotional nature of mental health problems in overseas adjustment, and do not cover the infinite range of human personality problems which occur both at home and abroad.

When separation anxiety and other emotional problems are so great that ordinary environmental support and understanding human contacts are insufficient, it becomes necessary to seek other sources of help. Then it is desirable to have a competent psychiatrist clarify the problem for both individual and administrator, and to determine methods of treatment, to decide whether an emergency exists, whether the worker can stay on the job, should be hospitalized or returned home, etc. Unfortunately it is not always possible to have the services of a psychiatrist readily available. Relatively few psychiatrists as yet have had special training and experience with problems of public mental health or intimate experience with foreign service, that are needed abroad. Except in large cities and military installations there are usually few psychiatrists available overseas. Even in the best managed post, psychiatric emergencies arise which require prompt removal to adequate treatment facilities. It is useful to have routines thought through and established before emergencies arise, e.g. the necessary administrative steps, funds to pay for psychiatric consultations, nurses, etc. Simple procedures should be established beforehand; at the time of an actual emergency, the administrative personnel are often too involved emotionally and therefore unable to evaluate the situation properly or make sound plans. This is especially true in the case of a very disturbed psychotic patient, or one with suicidal or homicidal tendencies.

Even when a psychiatrist is available, it does not mean that his services are always asked for. He is rarely consulted on community mental health problems, to which he could make a contribution. Sometimes it is hard for persons in higher positions to bring themselves to seek psychiatric help. Therefore it has many times been found advantageous to have a specialist in internal medicine who has a good grasp of mental health and a background
in psychiatry.* On the other hand, in situations where the psychiatrist is frequently consulted, the company or organization may expect too much from him, asking for recommendations and decisions beyond his competence. At times a psychiatrist employed by an organization may be faced with conflicts between his therapeutic and his administrative roles. For example, how much, if any, of what he learns about an individual should he be required to report? Where does his loyalty lie, with the patient or with the organization? The organizational psychiatrist is frequently expected to place the welfare of the community above that of any individual in it; this is not easy to do. Obviously, such situations require a high degree of tactfulness and judgment. In some organizations — e.g., the United Nations Secretariat — the newer policy is to separate the medical and administrative functions, leaving the psychiatrist free to function therapeutically.

How then can the psychiatrist’s best contribution be made to the mental health of the overseas employee? Apart from the obvious service that he can render in appropriate treatment situations, (such as hospitals, private practice, and child guidance clinics in the larger posts), it would appear that psychiatrists can be of special value when they are brought into situations for consultation, bringing to them their own special kind of awareness of human relations and mental health factors, which other responsible persons in the situation are not able to observe or to evaluate. By conferring with various people, trying to understand and interpret interactions and reactions, by helping to bring these factors into the open and facilitating constructive discussion of them, a psychiatrist may make a far more useful contribution than if he were to be placed in an administrative position. Clarification of the real human issues, identifying the processes at work and the questions that need to be asked, and indication of possible ways to resolve difficulties, can be the special contribution of the psychiatrist. It is implicit that the value of a psychiatrist’s awareness and questioning may be increased when he works in combination with trained persons from other disciplines, who also observe and question in the light of their own specialties.

A special function for the psychiatrist that unfortunately has not yet been widely used, is the care of the overseas employee who has failed at his job — who has been discharged and has returned to the United States. Such a person usually needs better understanding of the reasons why he failed, and would greatly benefit from therapy. Many such persons require emotional preparation for the return to the United States as well as for the difficulties they will encounter in trying to re-establish themselves.

Very often, especially in smaller or more isolated foreign installations, psychiatric help is unavailable, even on a travelling consultant basis. In such instances, aid of some degree may be obtained from other persons. Physicians, general practitioners and other specialists, especially when psychiatrically oriented, have been able to give much valuable help. Social workers, particularly if they have had experience in psychiatric social work, clinical psychologists, sociologists and cultural anthropologists are sources of useful ideas, suggestions and support. With increasing frequency clergymen with training in pastoral psychology have developed skill in understanding emotional problems. In larger overseas posts where a sense of community responsibility has developed, groups of people working with trained leaders have been able to work out many problems through the group process, with great benefit to the mental health of the participants.

In summary, a certain degree of separation-anxiety and fear of the unknown is a natural, expectable occurrence in persons going into overseas work. It presents an emotional problem which can cause much trouble if not understood or well handled; it can be reduced through appropriate measures and correct evaluation, and through certain environmental changes and psychological support. Invaluable in this area are non-judgmental understanding and ease of communication between all persons concerned. This does not imply coddling, but rather applying correct remedial measures in specific situations. Improvement and maintenance of sound mental health is necessary if the overseas worker is to do efficiently the job for which he was selected because of his special skills.

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