Subject: The ordinary and the unusual risks of the Foreign Service career.

To many a young man and woman the life in the Foreign Service presents glamorous and adventurous aspects. Scattered as our some 400 Foreign Service posts, Embassies, Legations, Consulates, General Consulates, Vice Consulates and Consular agencies in every part of the world, the Foreign Service offers to a young man and woman not only a life of usefulness to our government and to our people, but a life filled with varied interests and an opportunity for all the initiative that any of us may have. Too little, however, has been said and written about the inconveniences of the career. The problems of a Foreign Service officer with a family, not only to bring up but to educate offers many problems, and even in our day when much more thought and consideration is being given under the possibilities of the law and practice to make this problem easier, any young man or woman who is interested in raising a good sized family must not think of the Foreign Service. Unless an officer has considerable private income, and this should not be a requisite for admission, he will find that the raising of any considerable family will create so many problems, including the financial one, that he will find himself seriously handicapped in the carrying on of his duties as he should, burdened with the care of a considerable family.

Nor must any young man or woman who has any leanings towards the Foreign Service career think of it if he has really a desire to make a large salary or to accumulate a sum on which he can live in modest comfort after he retires. When I entered the Foreign Service in 1911 my salary at the age of 30 when I entered the service was $2,000 a year. My earning capacity even in those days when the teaching profession was probably the poorest paid in our country was lower than what I had been earning and was just about to be able to earn in public school work. This $2,000 in 1914 which I received as a Consul of Class 9, then the lowest grade in the Foreign Service of a full Consular officer was without any allowances of any kind whatsoever. During the course of the years the salary level
has been brought up gradually and painfully to more reasonable levels. Rent allowances which may not cover the full cost of housing appropriate to the officer and at the particular post are available. In certain special cases where cost of living at a post may be unusually high, living allowances are granted to supplement the salary. Increasingly it is possible for the Department under existing legislation to say and appropriations to give representation allowances, which I regret are still much lower than they are in most of the Foreign Services of other countries. In 1914 when I went to my first post my travel expenses were paid but those of my wife were not, and it is only in recent years that the travel costs of an officer and his family proceeding to or returning from a post are paid. For many years after 1914 when an officer took a holiday, whether he was stationed as close to home as some posts in Canada or in the Far East or Near East or remote parts of Africa, he had to pay not only the cost of his own travel but that of his family.

During the many years that I was in the service and especially during the period immediately before I was stationed in the Department as an Assistant Secretary of State from 1937 to 1940 and in the years following, there were some of those in the service who endeavored to bring these problems to the attention of the Congress and of public opinion in our country. It was a slow task but one of the satisfactions which I have in retirement is that we were able to bring about these improvements in the compensation and in the allowances of Foreign Service Officers which have made the career one that is open to young men and young women in our country who really have aptitude for it and a capacity for service and who will not be too much handicapped by the lack of any private personal resources.

In our day when living and sanitary conditions and housing conditions have improved so much in even remote countries and where the Foreign Service buildings program is increasingly providing homes not only for our chiefs of mission and officers in remote places, but even on an increasing scale throughout the world, the dangers from disease, climatic conditions and exposures to all sorts of risks are
not comparable to what they were years ago. I see constantly some of my old colleagues in the service and men who entered it decades after I did who are suffering from the effects of disease which they acquired through service for our government in remote places and of which our law and practice still do not take any proper regard.

The foregoing thoughts have been prompted by the circumstance that during the last few days I have been thinking of the more extraordinary risks to which our officers from time to time are exposed. Many of them have lost their lives through the acts of fanatics and during special circumstances which arose at the post they were serving. While this actual risk of losing life as an incident to Foreign Service in times of peace is rather remote, in thinking of my own career I find that it isn't really as remote as one would think. In that respect my many years of service were rather uneventful. It may be interesting to note a few of the times when without any doubt my life was really in danger.

When I was stationed in Curaçao from 1916 to 1918 inclusive already before we were in the war the little island was infested with German and Italian agents. My own duties with respect to the control of fueling facilities for ships and the movement of goods and the control over so-called enemy firms on our black list, and perhaps the zealous way in which I carried through these duties made me naturally a bit of a marked man. One day there appeared on the island, arriving on one of the Spanish ships, a short, heavy set individual who called himself the Count de Montforte. He had plenty of money to spend and one soon saw him in the clubs and in the houses of all kinds of people. Shortly after I arrived I learned that he was an Italian agent. Once we had identified his activities, it was easy to practically nullify them. His incapacity to do anything seemed to arouse him to quiet fury and I was told through our own people of whom we had a few on the island, that he was making threats against me, that is threats against my life. I paid really no attention to these threats because I considered him a rather ridiculous character. The more frustrated he became in his purposes, the more obvious it became to everyone what the
real purpose of his stay on the island was.

One afternoon late, as I was returning to our home on foot, I saw Montforte standing on a little bridge which I had to cross. When I started to cross the little bridge Montforte came over to me and said, "You are becoming much too inconvenient for me. You are making life too difficult for me. You are making life too difficult for a lot of people. I am going to end it here and now." With that his right arm went under his linen coat and he drew out a knife. As he was lifting the knife I pointed my arm the direction of two young women who had just come out of a door in the high wall of the garden surrounding their house. They were looking straight at us. As I lifted my arm Montforte turned the direction I was pointing and he saw these young women, who were not more than several hundred feet away, and as they were the daughters of a well known man on the island whom he knew, he shrugged his shoulders, put the knife under his coat and walked away. Instead of going to my home I returned to the office and within an hour had made the arrangements that Montforte was to be put on board a British steamer leaving that evening for Trinidad, which being a British possession was in the war and it was there possible to put him in a detention camp.

It was in Antwerp that I had a much narrower escape. In the early 20's a middle aged man from Massachusetts who had been brought into the service during the non-career war in a clerical capacity and who had been given the rank of Vice Consul was assigned to the Consulate General in Antwerp. Shortly after he arrived I made a trip with Mrs. Messersmith to the United States. It was very shortly after I returned from this trip that I was leaving the office one day towards noon for lunch. As I was just about to pass through the barrier from the outer office into the hall, I found my hat being pulled backward off my head and I heard a sort of swishing sound. I swerved and found quite a commotion behind me. This middle-aged Vice Consul with a shillelagh in his hand was being held back by one of the Consular officers and one of the clerks. It couldn't have been more than by an inch that he had missed crowning
me and if the heavy shillelagh had really hit me it would without any doubt have finished me off.

I found that this man was suffering from the mania of persecution and had been for some years. He had not been very physically fit when he was actually given this post as Vice Consul. He had probably been shell shocked or suffered from some wounds during the war. My excited associates in the office told me that they must now tell me the whole story. It appears that when he learned that my wife and I were about to take one of the Red Line boats from New York for Antwerp to return to our home and post, he was muttering around the office all the time during the voyage that he hoped this ship would sink. He had got the mania that it was I who was preventing his promotion in the service and from being the great and important man that he considered himself to be. We made arrangements for his return to the United States and on his arrival he was let out of the service. I learned afterwards that for several months he haunted the docks of the Red Line in New York and tried to ship as a seaman or get on one of the boats as a stowaway, as this mania of persecution persisted and he was trying to get back to Antwerp to finish an uncompleted job. The poor fellow ended in a mental home. Had it not been for the vigilance of the officers of the staff in the Consulate General at Antwerp on my return from the United States who watched my comings and goings, and kept the man under almost constant surveillance, his desperate attack on me in the office would have had an unhappy fatal end for me.

The so-called Sacco-Vanzetti Case I suppose is almost forgotten. These two men, arrested and condemned and finally executed for a brutal murder, were the subject of perhaps as much international press comment and agitation as any similar incident of its kind in the last century. Various types of organizations all over the world made passionate publicity over the various trials and the final execution of these two men. Although the crime was a common and a dastardly one and the evidence of guilt was overwhelming, the judicial practices of the United States were
violeously attacked in practically every part of the world. It became necessary to protect public officials in many parts of the United States whose life was really seriously threatened by members of secret organizations of aliens, principally Italians in the United States who were determined to take wholesale revenge for the execution of these two men. Not only was it necessary to protect public officials in the United States in many cases and places, but abroad the lives of some of our diplomatic and consular officers were definitely threatened. That these threats were real was obvious from the costly police protection which was given by many governments, particularly in Europe, to our officials. In Antwerp, a peaceful and quiet trading city, my home and the Consulate General were for months under constant guard by the police. It was a great inconvenience, for practically everywhere I went there were several of these plainclothes policemen who were on my heels. When I suggested to the authorities that I doubted the necessity of this protection, much as I appreciated the precautions of the authorities, they told me that they could not relax the precautions as long as they had the very definite information that the threat was a very real one. By the time that I left Antwerp for Buenos Aires in 1928 the matter seemed to have died down not only in Antwerp but in other parts of Europe.

To my surprise when I arrived in Buenos Aires I found that there this agitation was very active still. A very considerable part of the immigration to the Argentine has been always from Italy. Buenos Aires has a very large Italian population, and the city of Rosario which in 1928 had a population of about a million was made up almost entirely of Italians born in Italy, or of the first generation born in the Argentine. I found that the police were giving very active protection to the officers of the Consulate General in the Bank of Boston Building soon after my arrival. The First National Bank of Boston had built one of the first large and fine office buildings in the center of the city of Buenos Aires. Our offices occupy two or three floors of this building. There were policemen stationed at the office
entrance of the building who examined everyone entering the building for arms and all packages, valises and briefcases were given a once-over by the police. In the entrance hall of the offices of the Consulate General on the various floors occupied by us, there were further guards and principally on the floor where I had my office. As it was a very large office building for those days and as there were hundreds of people entering the building every hour, this control was not only costly to the city but annoying for the many people who had to frequent the building and the offices of the Consulate General. This police protection became such a matter of course that I really forgot the threat that lay behind it.

I have had the unfortunate practice both for myself and for my colleagues and associates in the various establishments where I served to arrive rather early in the morning and too punctually. In this respect I was so much a creature of habit that one could almost set his watch by the time I reached my office in the morning. On account of my frequent absences from Buenos Aires on inspection trips to which I have made reference elsewhere, and the considerable amount of work I had to do, it was usually necessary for me to go to the office of the Consulate General on Sunday morning and it was known that I arrived there always at 9 o'clock on Sunday morning. One morning as I got out of the car in front of the offices of the Consulate General, I spoke as usual to the two uniformed policemen who were stationed on the sidewalk immediately in front of the office entrance of the building. As I went through the big door I noticed standing on the sidewalk immediately next to the wall a smallish suit-case and I was wondering how and why it had got there and noticed as I went through the door one of the policemen walking towards it. As I was going up in the elevator I heard an explosion. One of the policemen stationed in front of the building was killed. The valise had contained a time bomb which was obviously timed for exactly 9 o'clock. I had arrived that morning a few minutes before 9. Had I arrived with my usual promptness or rather exactitude, I would probably have gone up with the policeman. The death of this
member of the police force of Buenos Aires, most unhappy in its consequences for
him and his family, had one good effect. The police began to clean up all of these
organizations which were known to be making agitation. In a relatively short time
the agitation completely ceased and the police control over the building became
completely unnecessary.

It was many years later and after my retirement from the Foreign Service
in 1917 when I returned to Mexico to live as Chairman of the Board and Chief Execu-
tive Officer of the Mexican Light and Power Company, that I again had to be sub-
jected for several months and on several occasions to such close police protection.
Since about 1934 a very active, unscrupulous but in many ways intelligent and ex-
ceedingly ambitious man had succeeded in making himself the head of the union of
the company's employees. Almost single handedly he controlled this union and its
some five thousand members -- employees of the company -- as few labor leaders in
any country have been able to control a union. The workers of the company became
more and more restive under this arbitrary, self-imposed control of this leader,
and began to take measures among themselves and within the union in order to get
rid of this leader and replace him by someone really of their choice. As the per-
petuation of power to this leader and his principal associates meant so much to
them, principally a life of ease and the possible satisfaction of certain political
ambitions, they imputed to the company, and of course principally to me, the insti-
gating of these efforts of the workers to get rid of the whole undesirable crew.
I was informed by my associates and by loyal employees of the company that I had
to subject myself to this police control and protection. On previous occasions
during the negotiation of a labor contract my home and the offices of the company
and principally my office had been guarded by the police. On this particular occa-
sion when the matter was coming to a head I was informed by the police that in
addition to this control at the house and at the office, two plainclothes men would
have to accompany me in the automobile to and from the office. To me it seemed to
be an unnecessary, annoying and really unnecessary degree of protection, but however much I disliked it, I had to submit to it. A former high executive of the company years before had been shot at his desk and killed by a worker who was mentally unbalanced. I was very happy when as a result of elections in the syndicate the old leadership which had imposed itself for so long over the workers was voted out.

I have always had a great deal of sympathy with the police officials and authorities of other governments in matters of this kind involving the protection of foreigners in their country. It means a heavy expenditure to carry through such protection. I have found that in every country where I have been stationed the local government took adequate precautions towards such protection when the information in their possession was such as to point to the necessity thereof. I myself never asked for such protection and when in the opinion of the authorities it seemed necessary I submitted to it with I hope good grace. So far as a fatal incident might be concerned, I was always more afraid of losing my life in an automobile or being maimed than from any attack by a fanatic or by an agent of an enemy or unfriendly country.