

Oral History Interview
with
AMBASSADOR DAVID K. E. BRUCE

During the Truman Administration Ambassador David Bruce served as Assistant Secretary of Commerce, 1947-48; Chief of the Economic Cooperation Administration to France, May 1948-49; United States Ambassador to France, 1949-52; and Under Secretary of State, 1952-53.

Washington, D. C.
March 1, 1972
by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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NOTICE

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HESS: Mr. Ambassador, to begin and for the record, would you relate a little of your personal background?

BRUCE: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland on February 12, 1898. I attended a primary school in Baltimore, was at Princeton University for a year and a half and left to join the Army. Then some years later, I spent one year at the University of Virginia Law School and the next year at

the University of Maryland Law School. Afterwards I was admitted to the Maryland Bar. I practiced law in Baltimore from 1921 to 1925. Following that I went to Rome as a Vice Consul in the Foreign Service. I remained there a year, then spent another year in the State Department, resigning in 1928 and entering business. I was engaged in business and farming from 1928 to 1940. I became Chief Representative in Great Britain for the American Red Cross in 1940, then moved to the Office of

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Strategic Services in 1941, where I remained for four years. During that period I was eventually Director of the European Theater of Operations of the Office of Strategic Services. My first entry into the Government, other than having worked for the State Department previously, was as Assistant Secretary of Commerce from 1947 to 1948. I went directly from the Department of Commerce to Paris to become Chief of the European Cooperation Administration to France. This lasted a year. At the end of it I was appointed Ambassador to France where I served for three years. I left Paris as Ambassador to become Under Secretary of State from 1952 to 1953.

In 1953, President Eisenhower appointed me Special United States Observer at the Interim Committee of the European Defense Community. I was also Special American Representative to the European High Authority for Coal and Steel. These appointments continued from 1953 to 1954.

In 1957 I went for a three-year tour of duty as United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany. I was appointed United States Ambassador to Great Britain by President Kennedy in 1961, and continued in office by President Johnson, staying altogether in England in that position from 1961 until 1969.

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As Chief of the United States delegation to the Paris Peace Conference on Vietnam, I lived in Paris from 1970 to 1971, in all, a period of slightly over twelve months.

At various times I was in the United States Army: During the First World War from 1917 to 1920; during the Second World War from 1942 until 1945.

My only political occupation, if I can put it that way, as far as election to public office was concerned, was as a member of the Maryland House of Delegates from 1924 to 1926, and later a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1939 until 1942.

HESS: What led to your interest in foreign affairs and in the foreign service?

BRUCE: I think my interest in that respect was due to a curiosity about foreign countries stemming, perhaps in considerable part when I was young, from having been at the conclusion of the First World War, sent as an Army officer in what was then the Courier Service; and the Courier Service consisted of taking documents and various papers connected with the Peace

Conference in Paris for delivery to American posts in countries throughout Europe. My own run was chiefly in the Balkans, and

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it was at that time my curiosity about foreign affairs became stimulated.

HESS: What are your earliest recollections of Mr. Truman?

BRUCE: I never knew Mr. Truman until he became President. I knew of him, of course, because he was a well-known member of the United States Senate, and also as Vice President, but I had not attended the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1944, and it was only after he became President and after my return from Paris as Under Secretary of State that I had anything other than a most casual acquaintanceship with him.

HESS: As he was not a very well known individual in 1944, what was your reaction when he was selected as the vice-presidential nominee that year?

BRUCE: I had none because I was still in the Army and was serving in Europe.

HESS: When did you come back from Europe?

BRUCE: I came back in the beginning of 1945.

HESS: The beginning of 1945?

BRUCE: Yes.

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HESS: Mr. Roosevelt, of course, was inaugurated on January 20, 1945, leaving soon thereafter for Yalta. Then when he came back from Yalta it was not too long until April 12th of 1945 and his death. Thinking back to that time when you came back from the war, what was your impression of President Roosevelt and the state of his health at this time, from photographs and from news pictures?

BRUCE: When I came back I continued to be in the Army, and also in the Office of Strategic Services in Washington. Also during that year I made one or more trips abroad in connection with the business of that office. My knowledge of the state of President Roosevelt's health was derived entirely from conversations, from newspaper articles and from photographs. I think it was evident to anyone who was close to him, and it was a matter of common knowledge in Washington certainly, that his health had distinctly failed. That's all I knew of it.

HESS: Where were you when you heard of the death of President Roosevelt and just what were your thoughts and impressions?

BRUCE: I was either in Paris or Germany at the time of his death, and there was a great deal of regret and mourning, of course, everywhere.

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HESS: Had you gone back to Europe at that time?

BRUCE: Yes, on a trip. There was general consternation, if one can put it that way, especially amongst those people who knew little of Vice President Truman, about the new President Truman. From what I had heard of President Truman, I wasn't unduly disturbed because I thought that President Roosevelt's health had already failed so seriously, that it was simply a matter of time before there would be such a succession.

HESS: Did you have any impressions at that time of what kind of a job you thought Mr. Truman would do, or did you know that much about the man?

BRUCE: I didn't know enough about him to have any judgment on it.

HESS: Do you recall your first meeting with President Truman?

BRUCE: Yes, I don't recall meeting him, unless it happened to have been during an appearance before a Senate committee, which I did quite frequently when I was Assistant Secretary of Commerce, until after I came home to become Under Secretary of State.

HESS: I see. Since you were in Europe at the end of the war,

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and then you had taken a trip back, just what were your impressions of the physical and economic conditions in continental Europe at the end of the war?

BRUCE: Well, as a general remark, I would say that I was discouraged by the physical and economic conditions in continental Europe after the war. I think, like many others, I realized that only the massive introduction of American support in one form or another, could possibly bring about a rehabilitation of the economies of those countries within a reasonable time.

HESS: As a general opinion, what courses were available to American foreign policy makers following World War II, and perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, should we have followed different courses?

BRUCE: Personally I believe that the courses we followed for some years after World War II were enlightened, surprisingly imaginative and extremely effective.

HESS: You say "surprisingly imaginative." Is it surprising for the United States to come up with good foreign policy?

BRUCE: No, it's not what I meant. I would have thought by imaginative I was thinking chiefly of the Marshall plan,

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its conception and its execution, because although it was soundly conceived, it required imagination to do so, and it certainly required great efficiency to carry it out successfully.

HESS: Mr. Ambassador, what do you recall about the conception of the Marshall plan?

BRUCE: I heard about it when I was Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Domestic and Foreign Affairs. Mr. Harriman, then Secretary of Commerce, was very active in connection with the proceedings that took place after the announcement of the Marshall plan by General Marshall, and some of the members of his staff were also deeply engaged when the planning commenced.

HESS: Who was instrumental in the conception of the Marshall plan, whose idea was it?

BRUCE: I have been told, although I cannot verify this, that those who were most publicly active about it at that period who were in Government, were, aside from the President and General Marshall, Dean Acheson and Mr. Will Clayton. Later, younger men were attached to them, and I have no doubt are entitled to a great deal of credit for the formulation of the Marshall plan proceedings.

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HESS: Just in your opinion, how involved were President Truman and Secretary Marshall in the early formulation of the plan?

BRUCE: That I can't answer. I don't know. That's been pretty well documented, however.

HESS: Moving on, did you feel that the Soviets intended to live up to whatever agreements they may have entered into following World War II?

BRUCE: I thought that in general we in the United States were too optimistic in believing that the Soviets might alter what had been for a long time, as a matter of fact for centuries, fundamental Russian policies in respect to the rest of the world. I did not believe, myself, that they intended to live up to whatever agreements they may have made at Yalta or elsewhere.

HESS: In the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Mr. George Kennan published an article entitled, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." In that article he expressed his ideas on containment. Do you recall if Mr. Kennan's ideas or his writings had any influence on your thinking during that period of time?

BRUCE: Well, everything that Mr. Kennan wrote, of course,

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was followed with considerable attention, because not only was he an expert on the Soviet Union, including its historical background, its culture, its politics, its economy, its agriculture, but Mr. Kennan expressed himself with such facility and so gracefully that one was almost forced to read whatever he wrote. His ideas on the policy of containment were interesting. I didn't wholly agree with them, but it would take a long time to explain why one agreed or disagreed, but in general, I think it was a most interesting thesis.

HESS: He, of course, was the first director of the Policy Planning Staff. Now when you were Under Secretary -- this is jumping ahead just a bit -- but when you were Under Secretary, Mr. Paul Nitze was director of the Policy Planning Staff, is that correct?

BRUCE: I believe he was.

HESS: Did you work closely with him?

BRUCE: Oh yes, I not only worked closely with him, but he was a good friend of mine. A most accomplished fellow.

HESS: I know comparisons are an odious thing, but who do you think was the most effective in that position: George Kennan or Paul Nitze?

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BRUCE: I wouldn't want to draw a comparison. They're both intellectually superior men.

HESS: At different times in our history of the country, we have had periods of isolationism. Just how great were the pressures for a return to isolationism and "America first" after World War II?

BRUCE: I think they were small compared with what they had been at any time previously. The country, in effect, had embarked after its venture into World War II on a course of foreign conduct entirely unprecedented in our history. I think the decision had been reached that we could never again afford to be, nor wish to be, isolationists in the extreme sense.

HESS: A "fortress America" type of thinking.

BRUCE: I would have thought it would be difficult ever to return to it.

HESS: In 1947 you became Assistant Secretary of Commerce. Why were you chosen for that position?

BRUCE: Well, first of all, I think because Mr. Harriman, who was Secretary of Commerce, had known me for many years, and he thought perhaps it would be a position that would not only interest me, but in which I might be able

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to perform the duties satisfactorily.

HESS: Mr. Harriman served as Secretary from October 7, 1946 until April 22, 1948. He was replaced by Mr. Charles Sawyer. Were you there wholly during the administration of Mr. Harriman?

BRUCE: I was there entirely and during the administration of Mr. Harriman. Mr. Sawyer was a friend of mine. He lived next door to me here in Georgetown, but I never served with him.

HESS: What kind of a man is Mr. Harriman? He is well known for his views on foreign affairs and for his benefit to the Government, but just in your opinion, how would you characterize Averell Harriman?

BRUCE: I think Averell Harriman is in the true sense of the word an extraordinary man. He has an infallible memory, a ceaseless curiosity, a vitality which even today at the age of eighty is superior to that of many men, probably most men half his age; and he has always occupied a front row seat at the great events, international political events, of our time. I think in that respect his record is unique.

HESS: What were your principal duties as Assistant Secretary

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of Commerce? Just what occupied most of your time?

BRUCE: Well, as you know, the Department of Commerce has a great many bureaus: The Weather Bureau, the Census Bureau, and when you take on the foreign affairs aspects as well as the domestic aspects of work in the Department of Commerce, your interests become multifarious and your duties equally so. A great deal of my time was taken up, of course, with testimony before the Senate or the House committees which dealt with the questions of the granting of licenses. Some materials, goods, were in short supply in our country, such as pipe for oil lines and a good many other steel products of that character, and the licensing was a delicate subject.

HESS: Did you feel that too much of your time was spent testifying before congressional committees?

BRUCE: I did indeed. I'd say I spent waiting to testify down at the Capitol and in testimony much more time overall than I spent in the building of the Department of Commerce, if you eliminate the necessity as a result of these meetings at the Capitol of going to the Department of Commerce practically every night and doing the kind of work that it's primarily engaged in.

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HESS: Did you ever express these views to any of the Congressmen, that if, "You people would not bother me so much I could spend more time on my own job."

BRUCE: You would find that one did not express such views at my level in Government.

HESS: In May, I believe, of 1948, you became Chief of the European Cooperation Administration in France. Why were you selected for that position?

BRUCE: I think because Mr. Harriman and Mr. Paul Hoffman thought that I might be suitable for such an appointment, and I was glad to take it.

HESS: Any you stayed for one year. Was it from May to May, do you recall?

BRUCE: I think it was May to April.

HESS: What were the major problems that arose during that period of time and just how did you handle them?

BRUCE: Well, the major problems, of course, were those connected with the rehabilitation of the French economy, both in industry, agriculture and also in finance. The granting of American aid was only a step

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in the process. The contribution then made by the natives of France and from their own resources were much greater than the American aid that was extended during that entire period. It was, however, the American contribution that served as the pump primer for the whole operation. If an automobile runs out of gasoline, you put a little gasoline in the automobile and manage to restart it and then it gets underway, and afterwards can be conducted on its own. Don't forget the French are highly trained and intelligent people, and what they had lost was their transport, their communications, their roadways, bridges, buildings, everything which conduced to making life normal.

HESS: What were the conditions that you found in France? What were your impressions when you arrived there?

BRUCE: Well, I was slightly discouraged by the physical appearance of the country. The road system, of course, was gutted, and many of the factories seemed to be beyond repair, houses had been destroyed by the hundreds of thousands; but the competence of the people and their ability, given time and sufficient outside assistance to remedy these conditions, which had been brought about by long period of warfare, was, from the beginning,

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very encouraging.

Then there were remarkable men in France, like M. Jean Monnet, who ran what was called the Monnet plan. He had evolved it, invented it, and the application of the Monnet plan, to the difficulties which confronted France at that time, was a chancy thing in the eyes of many people; but actually it worked out wonderfully well, and the revival of France, I think, is one of the economic miracles of our generation.

HESS: Did you meet with Mr. Monnet often?

BRUCE: Often, yes, almost daily.

HESS: The pronouncement of the Truman doctrine for aid to Greece and Turkey was on March 12, 1947. General Marshall's speech at Harvard inviting European suggestions for recovery was on June 5. Do you think that the Marshall proposal could have succeeded in obtaining support and passage without the announcement and acceptance of the Truman doctrine four months earlier?

BRUCE: I have no opinion on that subject. It seems to me that the aid to Greece and Turkey in March of 1947 was the beginning of a sequence of events of which the Marshall

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plan was only one, followed later on, as you remember, by the formation of the NATO Alliance and other steps that were taken. Whether the Marshall proposal would have obtained support and passage without the pronouncement of the Truman doctrine for aid to Greece and Turkey I don't think is especially important; I don't recall being aware that there was a direct connection between the two, except what I spoke of as part of a sequence.

HESS: Why in your opinion was Mr. Paul Hoffman chosen to head ECA?

BRUCE: I think because it was considered that as a civilian who was not connected with Government, he seemed to possess the confidence of so many elements in the population, not only the Congress and the administration, which was a Democratic one while he was a Republican himself, and fairly generally throughout the country. He was an evangelist, he was a man of splendid character and great ability.

HESS: Would you evaluate the degree of support that you received from the ECA organization in the United States and also from Mr. Harriman in Paris?

BRUCE: Complete in respect to both of them.

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HESS: Mr. William C. Foster was the Deputy Special Representative, is that correct?

BRUCE: Yes, he had previously been Under Secretary of Commerce under Mr. Harriman.

HESS: Did you also work closely with him?

BRUCE: Closely, and this made it much easier for me.

HESS: In mid-summer of 1948 the Soviets began the Berlin blockade which lasted until May of 1949. Did that affect you in your job in any way? Did you have any involvement in that matter?

BRUCE: No, I did not. That was handled outside of the Paris Embassy.

HESS: Speaking of Berlin, what is your opinion of the fact that Berlin had been placed within the Soviet sector of Germany and no adequate provisions had been made to insure access?

BRUCE: I think that the creation of this enclave of Berlin, surrounded by hostile territory, was the greatest mistake made by the allies and especially by the United States during the postwar period.

HESS: Who was responsible for that? Was that action seriously

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discussed, was it recognized that Berlin was being placed in such a position?

BRUCE: I suppose it was recognized. It never came within my sphere of responsibility, nor was I ever able to ascertain exactly how that decision was arrived at.

I know that President Eisenhower, then General Eisenhower, was called in for military advice, as he declared after he had finished his two terms as President, and he said that from a military standpoint, as I recall his statement, this was an untenable way to settle the occupancy of a sector of Germany, but that he had not felt that he should express himself on the political aspects of it. And in searching, while I was Ambassador in Germany, the sources, or whatever sources were available, I was never able -- and I think that's been the experience of almost everyone who became interested in this subject -- I was never able to ascertain exactly how that decision was arrived at or by whom. I do not know anybody who has investigated the papers in the Franklin Roosevelt Library which may throw some light on the situation.

HESS: What's your general opinion of the degree of success or failure of the Marshall plan?

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BRUCE: In my estimation it's the most successful operation that the American Government has ever conducted in the foreign field.

HESS: During that year that you were there in 1948, an interesting political event took place back in the United States, the election of 1948. What do you recall -- of course, you were out of the country during this period of time -- but what do you recall of the political events of 1948?

BRUCE: I don't recall anything about them at all, because I was out of the country during the entire period. I did not attend the Democratic Convention. I did not hear any of the President's public addresses, and I was really unfamiliar with what was going on in domestic politics, except as I read about it in the newspapers abroad.

HESS: There was one event that had some connection with Paris at that time, and that was when President Truman decided to send Chief Justice Fred Vinson to Moscow. He then came under some pressure from Secretary of State Marshall to rescind those plans and Marshall was in Paris at that time. Do you recall anything of that episode?

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BRUCE: I recall nothing about it, except what I heard indirectly and later was confirmed by the newspapers. Secretary Marshall was not a man who was given to discussing his decisions with people who had no immediate responsibility to him for advice in making them.

HESS: The Democratic National Committee that year had a good deal of trouble getting someone to take over the fundraising campaign and finally settled on, or finally got, Louis Johnson to agree to take over that task. Do you recall anything about the difficulty that Louis Johnson had?

BRUCE: I didn't even know who had taken over the job of raising money. I did not know Mr. Louis Johnson, except casually. I know nothing whatever about what difficulties he may have encountered. I don't recall ever having been approached by him for a contribution.

HESS: Did you try to keep yourself divorced from politics?

BRUCE: I didn't try to keep myself divorced from it; I just wasn't involved in national politics.

HESS: Did you think Mr. Truman was going to win the election?

BRUCE: I had no views on the subject. I judged from the polls

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and the reports of the people whom I saw in Paris who had come from home, that the probability of his doing so was poor.

HESS: What was the attitude of the people in France, both the Americans serving with ECA at that time, and the French people?

BRUCE: Well, both with the men and women who served in ECA and the French people, Mr. Truman was popular. I think the chief cause of his popularity was his sponsorship of the Marshall plan.

HESS: In 1949 you were selected as Ambassador to France. Why were you selected for that high position?

BRUCE: I assume because I was on the spot in France, having been there for a year because of the Marshall plan, and the then Ambassador, Mr. [Jefferson] Caffery had served a good many years there, and I suppose that when they thought of a replacement for him, it might have seemed natural for my name to be suggested, since the oncoming problems in France were likely to be largely of an economic nature, as well as political, of course.

HESS: Why I mentioned Mr. Louis Johnson, it is often felt, as you probably know, that higher ambassadorial positions and other high government posts are often purchased by people through political contributions. What is your view on that?

BRUCE: I think it's a great mistake to give embassies to people because of political contributions. I don't believe at that time that I made any contribution to any candidate, Democratic or Republican, for the Presidency in the course of my life.

HESS: A man should be chosen for what he knows and for what good he can be to the country.

BRUCE: Theoretically he should be chosen for that.

HESS: How often does it appear to be otherwise, what percent of the time do you think an ambassadorial position is purchased?

BRUCE: I have no idea. One would have to ascertain what percentage of all the appointees to embassies were foreign service officers, how many were non-career men, and then try to strike a balance amongst the non-career men, between those who had contributed to campaigns heavily and those who had not. I would have thought the percentage was extremely small...

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HESS: In Secretary Acheson's book, *Present at the Creation*, on page 294, he has the following:

It is no exaggeration to say that not since Benjamin Franklin had anyone been closer to or more understanding of the French situation than David Bruce. After 1953 he went on to a diplomatic career very probably unique in American history, adding to his service in Washington and Paris the representation of his country in Bonn and London.

What's your general opinion of Mr. Acheson's statement, and tell me a little bit about French-American relations at that time?

BRUCE: Well, Mr. Acheson's statement, of course, is much too flattering to me. I was deeply interested in my duties in France. My general evaluation of the relationship that existed between France and the United States from the end of World War II until the present time, is that the difficulties between our two countries have been greatly over-exaggerated. General de Gaulle

was not an easy man with whom to deal. He had many notions which were antipathetic, and policies that were antipathetic, to what we considered our national interests. But he was certainly a most remarkable man, and deserving of, taking him all in all, the esteem in which he was held, the honor in which he was held, by the French people.

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But as far as the general relationship between the two countries has been and is concerned, I would think that that's been on a perfectly satisfactory basis almost throughout our national history. Of course, it goes back to the sympathy that was great here in the United States by the assistance given us at the time of our Revolution, by the French government without which I believe our struggle for independence would have been unavailing. Now, there's been a persistent legend and a lot of slogans, and the formation of societies for the fostering of Franco-American friendship, which have had some effect, but there is a strong admiration in this country for the culture of France, and generally speaking I think the French find the Americans have been stout supporters of them in many of their periods of distress.

HESS: In the period that you were in France, Robert Schuman was the French Foreign Minister. Is that correct?

BRUCE: Yes.

HESS: What kind of a man was he to work with?

BRUCE: I knew him well. I think he was one of the finest men I've ever met in politics in any country. Aside from his political achievements, he was a great

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bibliophile. He has consulted on rare books not only by the libraries in France, but also, as I recall, to the public library in New York City, and to the British Museum in London. He's a very remarkable, austere, thoughtful, philosophical, political figure.

HESS: At the time that you were in France, France was involved in the conflict in Southeast Asia, a conflict which is still going on. Was there any move that the French could have taken during that time, twenty years ago, that might have settled events then?

BRUCE: A good many Frenchmen have said -- I'm in no position to pass on the verity of it -- that Ho Chi-Minh made offers of the settlement of that dispute in -- could it have been 1946 or 1947 -- that should have been acceptable to the French government at that time. I don't know what the situation was in that respect, but my general recollection is that the French might have had a chance to incorporate the whole of French Indochina in the French so-called empire of that period. Maybe later complete independence would have evolved from that action, but I can't speak on this with any authority.

HESS: If there is such a thing, what would be the typical day in the life of an ambassador in a major diplomatic

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post?

BRUCE: Oh my goodness, that would depend on what the day was. There's always a great deal of business to be transacted in one's office. There are always visitors it seems to me, an unending stream of them, who come with letters of recommendation, or come actually on substantive business. Many of them, of course, represent the interests of various governmental departments in the United States. Then the traffic, paper and oral, in any ambassadorial office is immense.

The real duties of an ambassador are to enter into or follow negotiations between his own government and that of the country to which he is accredited. I would think a minor portion, on the whole, of an ambassador's time at present, is spent in attending to what I would call the strictly substantive, negotiating side of his affairs. Of course, on top of that, you have all sorts of social impositions, or some people consider them pleasures.

HESS: Did you consider them pleasures? Did you enjoy being an ambassador?

BRUCE: I enjoyed it, yes. I think it's a challenging but also a taxing position. Those that believe that an American ambassador simply has a good time...

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HESS: The tea and cookies type of thing.

BRUCE: ...and goes from party to party makes a terrible mistake. It's one of the most exacting -- so far as the absence of leisure is concerned in most posts -- one of the most exacting jobs in the world. I've been engaged in law and business and other pursuits but I know nothing that is more, let's say, engrossing, as is the life of a foreign service officer, and that applies, of course, also to an ambassador.

HESS: In 1952 you were called back to Washington to serve as Under Secretary of State. Why were you selected for that position?

BRUCE: I assume because Secretary of State Acheson wanted to have me there. Jim Webb, my predecessor, had resigned. There was a vacancy. It was only a year before there would be a new President, and Mr. Acheson badly needed somebody to fill this vacancy.

HESS: How would you characterize Secretary Acheson? What kind of a man was he?

BRUCE: One of the, again, if I can use the word superior, one of the most superior men I've ever met. Intellectually fascinating, learned, knowledgeable, witty,

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compassionate, and yet -- although he was excellent company, a marvelous storyteller -- he could be severe against anyone whom he distrusted, or even whom he disliked. He didn't suffer fools lightly.

HESS: How would you characterize the relations that existed between Secretary Acheson and President Truman?

BRUCE: I should think from what I saw of them, they were on a basis of personal confidence, indeed of affection, that was wholly unusual.

HESS: Just as a personal opinion, but the two men did come from widely dissimilar backgrounds: Is it or is it not unusual that men from such dissimilar backgrounds could get along as well as they did?

BRUCE: I suppose if you reach for comparisons, that it's not unusual. The background of men such as, say, President Lincoln and Secretary [William Henry] Seward, and John Hay, so many of the people around Lincoln. You go back to the time of Washington; the background of those in Washington's Cabinet, was probably more nearly akin to what we were speaking of than in any other period in our history; but the reason for it was that there was a restricted suffrage at that time, the number of educated

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people was not great, the colonies were small, they had a habit of meeting each other at congressional conventions, and so forth, and there was a much closer knit band, so to speak, from which you could draw personnel for service in Government than exists today.

HESS: What is your estimation or opinion of Mr. Truman's handling of the State Department?

BRUCE: I think it was excellent. He handled the State Department primarily through Secretary Acheson, and he was greatly respected in the State Department.

HESS: Could you compare his handling with other Presidents that you may have known? Roosevelt, for instance, it has been said, tried to be his own Secretary of State. Other people have pointed out that President Eisenhower perhaps delegated more authority than most Presidents through John Foster Dulles.

BRUCE: I would think the consultation that took place between Secretary Acheson and President Truman was as frequent as, and probably as effective as, that that took place between John Foster Dulles and President Eisenhower. I do not know about the conduct of affairs in the State Department during President Roosevelt's

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period, but undoubtedly Harry Hopkins was more influential with the President in respect to foreign policy than was anybody in the State Department.

HESS: In your opinion, what was the degree of understanding of foreign affairs on the part of President Truman and some of the men who served at high levels on the staff. I have in mind: Clark Clifford, Charles Murphy, perhaps George Elsey, Dave Bell and Richard Neustadt. But to begin that question, what was the level of Mr. Truman's understanding of foreign affairs, in your opinion?

BRUCE: I would have thought he was a great reader. He was interested in foreign affairs; he was thoroughly briefed on all aspects of it. I remember well on occasions when Secretary Acheson was away, the searching manner in which the President asked for explanations, sometimes it seemed to me of relatively unimportant matters in the State Department, or relatively unimportant in the whole field of foreign affairs. He was intensely interested in them. Secretary Acheson was exacting in demanding of anybody who replaced him temporarily, that nothing done by him when he was abroad, should reach any conclusion until the President had personally been consulted on it.

HESS: What is your opinion on the understanding of foreign

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affairs of some of the men in the White House, take Clark Clifford for instance?

BRUCE: Although I knew Clark at that time, and had a high opinion of his ability -- I was not familiar with what influence he exercised there in the field of foreign affairs.

HESS: Any opinion of Charles Murphy, who was the other Special Counsel?

BRUCE: No, I have not, because I don't know.

HESS: Approximately how often did you meet with President Truman or see President Truman at the time that you were Under Secretary?

BRUCE: Well, it depended on when Secretary Acheson was in Washington. I think he was away from Washington about one third of the time. Upon those occasions, I was Acting Secretary of State because there was only one Under Secretary, myself, so I represented Secretary Acheson, as I say, at the White House whenever he was away. For that reason, I saw President Truman, I should think, at least once a week, and often on a daily basis depending on what was on hand, what he wanted to inquire into, what he wished to be informed about.

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HESS: Do you recall anything that you may have discussed with President Truman that might characterize the man, something that would illustrate Mr. Truman's personality?

BRUCE: No, he was sympathetic to talk to; he was swift in arriving at decisions; he was tolerant and courteous and considerate in connection with any personnel matters we had in the State Department, for instance, and I found it rather delightful to deal with him, especially because one didn't waste any time.

HESS: At the time you were Under Secretary, your Science Adviser was Joseph B. Koepfli. Was he helpful to you?

BRUCE: Very. That was a beginning of a movement to have science advisers placed in some of the embassies abroad, and Joe was in charge of the home office, so to speak, in that regard.

HESS: Of setting up science advisers as are economic advisers and positions like that in foreign embassies.

BRUCE: That's right.

HESS: Your Special Assistant to the Under Secretary on International Fisheries Affairs, was William C. Herrington. Correct?

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BRUCE: Yes. I don't remember much about Fisheries Affairs.

HESS: Why did that fall under the office of the Under Secretary?

BRUCE: Well, everything in the State Department fell under the Office of the Secretary, so by delegation, everything fell under the Office of the Under Secretary. Why the fisheries happened to be in the State instead of Commerce, I don't remember.

HESS: I was wondering why those particular men were placed under your name in the *Official Register*.

BRUCE: I don't know why they should have been under my name. I suppose a lot of those bureaus are responsible to the Office of the Under Secretary, and actually I would have thought the chain of command would make them responsible to the Office of the Secretary, but the difference is not great, because it's a delegation of authority from one office to another.

HESS: Just as a general opinion, what was Mr. Truman's attitude toward some of the countries that you may be more familiar with having served there as Ambassador? You were Ambassador to France, later to West Germany and then to Great Britain. What seemed to be Mr. Truman's

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attitude, his outlook, toward those three countries?

BRUCE: I never noticed any partiality on President Truman's part for any foreign country. He was not intolerant, nor did I ever heard him critical of any, although I'm sure that he was, at times, incensed over actions taken by the Russians or the Soviet Union, and possibly other points of our policy. But I think that as regards our allies, he had no particular partiality for any of them. I'm not sure of that.

HESS: Some revisionist historians in the last few years have been attempting to find in the Truman years all the roots of today's ills and disasters. Mr. Nixon's trip to China may be pointed out by some as an attempt to right old wrongs that went back to the Truman days. Do you think it is valid to find the roots of the cold war in the Truman administration?

BRUCE: No, I think the roots of the cold war were there in the ground long before the Truman days. As soon as the Soviet policy toward the postwar world became somewhat clearer than it had been during the war itself, a good many people decided that the Roosevelt philosophy of tolerant accommodation for the Communist world would not

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be viewed by the Communists in the same blithe spirit that Mr. Roosevelt viewed it; it was unrealistic. I wouldn't say that Mr. Truman reversed the policy. I think he was a realist after meeting with examples, or viewing examples of what Soviet policy seemed determined to accomplish in the West, and at the expense of the West, that he was let's say, not cynical necessarily, but was at least realistic about what its implications were.

Mr. Nixon's trip to China will be pointed to by many as an attempt to correct old wrongs. I think it was a wrong policy myself, to have ignored the existence of the government of Mainland China for a period of twenty years, because you can't disregard the presence on the earth of eight hundred million people, except at one's own cost. Whether that policy was justified in the beginning is an entirely different thing. I believe myself that the time had long since passed when recognition of some sort should have been accorded, or a contact should have been established.

HESS: What is your opinion of how matters were handled in the Korean situation? Should we have become involved in the situation in Korea?

BRUCE: Yes, I think distinctly, because we did it on the

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basis of having the assistance of, the assent of, many of the members of the United Nations, some of whom contributed forces, although our military element was by far the greatest. I think as of that time, if we had, you know, permitted the North Koreans simply to take possession of the whole of the State of Korea it would have been a great mistake. Don't forget, we were not doing it alone.

HESS: Do you think if we could not have obtained the help of the United Nations in going into Korea, that we would have gone in unilaterally?

BRUCE: I have no idea about that. I have never heard it discussed. The whole thing happened so rapidly, we had the consent of the United Nations almost immediately.

HESS: The problem did not arise.

BRUCE: The problem did not really arise. It must have arisen in certain people's minds before the United Nations were involved.

HESS: Should General MacArthur have been dismissed?

BRUCE: I believe he should have been dismissed, that there's no question he should have been. Brilliant as he was as a

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General, he was being, it seems to me, both disloyal and disobedient to the Commander in Chief of the American Armed Forces, the President of the United States.

HESS: Do you think President Truman could have settled the situation in Korea on the same terms as President Eisenhower later did?

BRUCE: No, I don't think so. To begin with, he was on his way out of office, and President Eisenhower, especially in the military field, had such great prestige and such great popularity in this country, he was much better suited to settle it than President Truman would have been.

HESS: Moving along, sir, to the political events of 1952. When did you first become aware that President Truman did not intend to run for re-election that year?

BRUCE: Only when he made the statement.

HESS: At the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner at the National Guard Armory. Were you there that evening?

BRUCE: No.

HESS: After he took himself out of the race who did you think would be the best nominee for the Democratic Party?

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BRUCE: I had no opinion on the subject.

HESS: Did you try to keep yourself separated from politics?

BRUCE: Yes, I did. I'm a Democrat, but I've never taken any part in national politics.

HESS: Is that a wise course to follow for people in the diplomatic field?

BRUCE: Yes, I think so.

HESS: So you did not go to the convention?

BRUCE: I did go to the convention.

HESS: Did you?

BRUCE: Yes, I went there as a spectator and found it an interesting performance. I hadn't been to a convention since the one in Baltimore, which is my native city, when Woodrow Wilson was nominated.

HESS: You hadn't been to one in all those years.

BRUCE: No.

HESS: What did you think of the convention in Chicago? What were your thoughts?

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BRUCE: I'm not favorably impressed by the atmosphere of a political convention. I think it's not the biggest show on earth. I don't think it should be like a Barnum and Bailey or Ringling Brothers Circus.

HESS: Even though they try to make it that way.

BRUCE: It's a necessary process, of course, but there's an awful lot of tomfoolery connected with it, and the deals made in the backrooms are what usually determine the outcome, and then the party platforms, which there is such a struggle over, are discarded within a fairly short period of time, in many respects, by whoever gets elected.

HESS: What was your opinion of the gentleman that was selected by that convention, Mr. Adlai Stevenson?

BRUCE: Adlai Stevenson was a most engaging, brilliant man. I never thought that he could beat President Eisenhower.

HESS: Was there anything that the Democrats could have done that year to have won?

BRUCE: I don't think so. I think President Eisenhower's personal popularity was too great for anyone to have successfully challenged it.

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HESS: Do you have an opinion on the relationship between President Truman and Governor Stevenson that year?

BRUCE: None whatever. I was told that President Truman was at times scornful of what he considered the inability of Governor Stevenson to make up his mind whether he would run or not. That's gossip as far as I'm concerned.

HESS: Then we come to the transition from the Truman administration to the Eisenhower administration. What do you recall of the events of that time?

BRUCE: Well, Dean Acheson asked me to take over, as far as the State Department was concerned, the liaison between the incoming and the outgoing administrations, which I did, and I found it an agreeable and I hope a constructive task, because in the past, the abrupt transition from one management to another, has always seemed to me to be a bad way to conduct our business, the country's business. As far as the incoming administration was concerned, they had, of course, Foster Dulles as their chief representative, Cabot Lodge was involved in it, and I think the State Department personnel behaved admirably in making privy to whatever might have been important to them, all those papers, documents, and other information which an incoming administration should have at its disposition before it

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actually takes office. It was an easy transition.

HESS: How did the transition affect your job? Did you make out any reports for the Republicans to read, or did you make documents available to them?

BRUCE: We did both. All sorts of studies were made, and I remained on until the inauguration of the President, in the office I had occupied. Dean Acheson was also there, but he wasn't as engaged in sort of day-to-day transactions of that kind as I was. So they had all the facilities the State Department could put at their disposal.

HESS: How would you evaluate the handling of the transition between Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, not just the State Department, but overall?

BRUCE: Well, I thought that General Eisenhower, when he went out of office, from everything that I've been told, followed more or less the same line of cooperation with his successor that Truman had with Eisenhower.

HESS: Did you ever see Mr. Sherman Adams around during the transition?

BRUCE: I never met Mr. Sherman Adams.

HESS: I understand that he was in charge of the transition

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for the executive offices, and not necessarily for the departments themselves, but I didn't know if he concerned himself with matters affecting the State Department.

BRUCE: No, I never had any occasion to see him.

HESS: Approximately how many times did you personally meet with President Truman?

BRUCE: Well, very often in the absence of Secretary Acheson.

HESS: At the time you were Under Secretary.

BRUCE: When I was Under Secretary is the only time that I ever met him. But when I was Under Secretary I saw him always during Dean Acheson's absence, at least once a week and frequently more often.

HESS: Would you attend the Cabinet meetings when Mr. Acheson was out of town?

BRUCE: Yes.

HESS: Do you recall any interesting episodes that might not be well known?

BRUCE: No, I don't. I was thinking as you asked that question of what had occurred that might be outside of the field of public knowledge. None comes to mind.

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HESS: In your opinion, what was the effect of McCarthyism on the atmosphere in Washington and on the efficiency of Government?

BRUCE: Totally bad on both counts.

HESS: Was it particularly bad at the State Department, since he seemed to be zeroing in on the State Department?

BRUCE: Yes, I think it was. I think it was bad for morale, it was bad for the pride of the devoted officers and personnel generally in the Department. They felt they were being persecuted unjustly, and I share their opinion of that, and that this was an evil man drumming up for his own selfish ends, shortsighted ones also, an animosity which could do nothing but harm the public employees.

HESS: I have a question that we have fairly well covered, about the rating of the Presidents, from Roosevelt to the present, in terms of effectiveness and administrative ability and intellectual ability. But just for a few minutes, how would you rate Mr. Truman's administrative ability as compared with some of the other Presidents?

BRUCE: I would think that in his handling of the postwar foreign policy Truman would rate very high. The circumstances were such that the courageous actions and I

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think far-sighted policies that he adopted, will have a lasting influence. I was there at the time when the Marshall plan was inaugurated, when NATO came into being, the Berlin blockade and all that, so I think in the field of foreign policy his accomplishments will be enduring.

HESS: Was he as good an administrator as, say Roosevelt?

BRUCE: I've heard a great many flattering things about Roosevelt, but never that he was notable for his skill in administration.

HESS: How about General Eisenhower?

BRUCE: General Eisenhower was very orderly.

HESS: He liked staff work, did he not?

BRUCE: Yes.

HESS: Which is natural for a general high in the ranks of the Army to appreciate good staff work.

BRUCE: I think it's a mistake to disregard staff work, it can become dry, it can become binding; but I think a certain amount of orderly staff work, to use that word again, is necessary in the operations of Government, just as it is in the operations of private corporations.

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HESS: How would you rate Mr. Truman on intellectual ability with some of the other Presidents that you have known, John Kennedy, President Johnson, General Eisenhower?

BRUCE: I couldn't. I don't know enough about their intellectual ability, the intellectual ability of any of them, to make comparative ratings.

HESS: What in your opinion were Mr. Truman's major accomplishments, and what were his major failings?

BRUCE: His major accomplishments were in the field of foreign policy.

HESS: What were his major failings?

BRUCE: I don't know that he had major failings. He had impulsiveness, of such a minor type, which he used to laugh at himself, like these fiery letters he'd write people that commented adversely on the beauty of his daughter...

HESS: The Paul Hume letter.

BRUCE: ...yes, and then he'd tear them up the next day.

HESS: All except the Paul Hume letter. He mailed that one.

BRUCE: I don't know if he had any failings. Possibly, and that's a necessity maybe, in order to be President and to run the administration, he had strong partisan feelings until he came to foreign policy. I had nothing to do with the domestic field and gathered that his partisan feelings sometimes got the better of his charitableness.

HESS: What is your estimation of Mr. Truman's place in history?

BRUCE: I think he may be regarded as a great President. The use of the word "great" is so frequently applied to numbers of Presidents that I myself, having once written a series of, I think, extremely poor essays, I regret to say, on the first sixteen Presidents of the United States, I wouldn't try in my own mind to try to fix the place in history of any President until he had been dead for at least fifty years.

HESS: That's exactly the length of time that Mr. Truman has said you should wait before rating someone.

BRUCE: Did he really? I didn't know that.

HESS: Yes. What's your favorite memory of Mr. Truman? Just looking back and thinking of the subject of Mr. Truman, what's your favorite thought, your favorite

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memory?

BRUCE: I think probably on the whole the unvarying courtesy -- one always thinks of these things in personal terms -- he always extended to me, in connection with any matter which I took up, and that was frequently in the almost a year, that I spent in the State Department, in my visits to him in the White House. He was a courteous man. He dispatched business swiftly, but always, you know considerately.

HESS : It's been pointed out that he did not have difficulty making a decision. As he said, "If you make a decision and you find out it was wrong, okay, make another decision." Did you find that to be true, was he an easy man to get a decision from?

BRUCE: I thought him easy to get a decision from, yes.

HESS: All right, Mr. Ambassador, do you have anything else to add on any of the positions that you may have held, or anything that we should add on Mr. Truman or Mr. Truman's views?

BRUCE: No, I can't think of anything else. I think Mr. Truman has had an extraordinarily successful career. When you think of, as he said himself, his lack of

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preparation for the Presidency, what he considered his deficiencies in measuring up to its responsibilities, I think by sheer force of character, personality and ability, he was, as I said, an uncommonly good President, perhaps a great President.

HESS: Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much.

BRUCE: Well, thank you. I've enjoyed it.

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