

Oral History Interview

with

JACOB W. BEAM

During the Truman administration, Ambassador Beam was a political officer in Headquarters, U.S. Forces in Germany, 1945-47; Chief, Central European Division, State Department, 1947-49; Consul General, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1950; Counselor of Embassy, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1951-52; and Counselor, U.S. Embassy in Moscow, USSR, 1952-53.

Washington, D. C.

June 20, 1989

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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Summary Description: Topics discussed by Ambassador Beam include the Potsdam Conference, the currency problem in postwar Germany, the Berlin blockade, the Indonesian insurrection in the Netherlands East Indies, U.S. aid to Yugoslavia, the death of Stalin, the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, U.S. talks with Chinese representatives in Warsaw, and the suppression by the Soviet Union of the Czechoslovak uprising in 1968.

Names mentioned include John Dyneley Prince, Robert Murphy, Lucius Clay, Bedell Smith, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Donald Heath, Harry S. Truman, Edwin Pauley, Joseph Stalin, Sukarno, Tito, Robert Bowie, Paul Nitze, George Kennan, John Foster Dulles, Robert Cutler, Charles D. Jackson, Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty, Alexander Dubcek, Charles Bohlen, and Leonid Brezhnev.

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JOHNSON: I'm going to begin, Ambassador Beam, by asking you where you were born, when you were born, and what your parents' names were.

BEAM: I'm Jacob D. Beam, born March 24, 1908.

JOHNSON: And whereabouts?

BEAM: Princeton, New Jersey. My father was a professor there.

JOHNSON: And what were your parents' names?

BEAM: Jacob and Mary.

JOHNSON: Your father's name you say was Jacob. And he was a professor there?

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BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Of history?

BEAM: Well, actually of languages. It was a long, long time. He quit just after the war.

JOHNSON: I see. Was it your father's influence that got you interested in foreign service?

BEAM: No, not a bit. Actually when I came in, it was the only job I could get.

JOHNSON: Well, let's catch up on your education then. Where were you educated?

BEAM: At Princeton.

JOHNSON: Were you in the public school?

BEAM: In the public school, and then in Kent School, yes.

JOHNSON: And then you went to the university there at Princeton?

BEAM: Yes, I did, yes. I had free admission, which was all right.

JOHNSON: Yes, free tuition. And so you got your bachelors; what was your major?

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BEAM: It was history.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was a history major.

BEAM: Which was very useful.

JOHNSON: You got your bachelors at Princeton; then what did you do?

BEAM: I went over to England for one year, to Cambridge. When I came back I couldn't get a job then either. My uncle was in the Diplomatic Service and he said, "Well, the State Department is holding an examination in about two or three months; why don't you go after this thing, study up for it?" I did, and I got in.

JOHNSON: What was your uncle's name?

BEAM: Prince; John Dyneley Prince.

JOHNSON: A prince of a fellow, no doubt.

BEAM: Yes. He taught Russian actually at Columbia. He was the head of the Department.

JOHNSON: So your uncle is the one who...

BEAM: He just suggested it. He was a politician, actually. He was Deputy Governor in New Jersey, and he knew all these languages, particularly the Russian language.

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And that helped him a great deal because he went around New Jersey getting votes for Harding.

JOHNSON: For Harding?

BEAM: For Harding yes. And Harding gave him a job as Minister to Denmark.

JOHNSON: Was this in the 1920s?

BEAM: Yes, 1924.

JOHNSON: Well, when did you take the exam and get into the Foreign Service?

BEAM: Well, I took the examination at the end of 1930, and I came into the Service in February 1931.

JOHNSON: This was in the Foreign Service.

BEAM: Yes, I have had 42 years of service.

JOHNSON: So, you have a bachelors from Princeton -- or do you have a masters now? You went to Cambridge.

BEAM: I have a bachelors, and then an honorary degree.

JOHNSON: From where?

BEAM: From Princeton, when I went to Moscow.

JOHNSON: So in '31 you are in the Foreign Service. What

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was your first assignment?

BEAM: The first assignment was to Geneva, in the Consulate there.

JOHNSON: You were right near the League of Nations then?

BEAM: Well, you see, we were sort of semi-attached to the League of Nations because we had an office which followed all the work of the League of Nations, which was very useful to us. We weren't a member of the League of Nations.

JOHNSON: Did you attend some of the sessions there though?

BEAM: Yes, we did. It was our job to do it.

JOHNSON: How long did you do that? How long were you stationed there?

BEAM: Well, I guess about three years.

JOHNSON: So we're up to '34 now. What did you do then?

BEAM: And then I went to Germany as 3rd Secretary [in the American Embassy].

JOHNSON: As 3rd Secretary in Germany.

BEAM: In Berlin, yes.

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JOHNSON: How long were you in Berlin?

BEAM: I was there five years.

JOHNSON: To '39.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Charles Thayer?

BEAM: Oh, I knew him very well, yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, you were in Berlin to '39. You're checking up on the Nazi movement there?

BEAM: Just reporting on what was going on.

JOHNSON: So from '34 to '39, what were you telling the State Department? What kind of information were you giving them? What were you saying about Hitler...

BEAM: Everything. Reporting the bad things they were doing, and the successes they were having, building up an army, and things like that. We just...

JOHNSON: You warned the State Department that...

BEAM: Well, everybody was warning them.

JOHNSON: That this was a growing threat. Wasn't it Kennedy, Joseph Kennedy, in England who got into hot

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water by reporting things a little differently, saying that the United States should stay out of the conflict, that Germany was going to take them over anyway?

BEAM: Yes. Yes, he was very unwelcome. I think he had to leave London because of that.

JOHNSON: Were you there when Charles Lindbergh came to Germany? You know, when he met with Goering, and saw the German airforce build-up?

BEAM: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you meet him?

BEAM: Yes indeed. Yes. He was a very impressive man.

JOHNSON: How about his thinking? What did you think of his ideas?

BEAM: He was realistic. He said the British are terribly weak. The chances are you may get beaten.

JOHNSON: Were you there when the war started in September of '39, when they invaded Poland, or had you left by that time?

BEAM: I left in 1939, just after the invasion of Poland. Then I went back to the State Department for a while

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and then I went to England, in 1941.

JOHNSON: You were in England then during the war?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: You were in on the blitz?

BEAM: No, not very much because that had stopped.

JOHNSON: You were there at the Embassy in London, in the Whitehall area?

BEAM: Well, yes it is.

JOHNSON: On D-Day, the invasion of Normandy, were you there then?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Eisenhower?

BEAM: No, not in those days.

JOHNSON: Then what did you do?

BEAM: Let's see. I was there when peace was declared, and then I was picked up by Bob Murphy. He was a traveling man after the war, traveled all over Europe.

JOHNSON: Were you in London on V-E Day, May 8, 1945?

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BEAM: No, I was in Germany then. I was following Bob Murphy around.(1)

JOHNSON: You and other civilian authorities were coordinating with the military?

BEAM: Yes we were.

JOHNSON: With [Lucius] Clay for instance?

BEAM: Oh yes, very close to Clay.

JOHNSON: Who were some of the other generals that you were in contact with?

BEAM: Well, Bedell Smith.

JOHNSON: In fact,...

BEAM: He had a terrible temper.

JOHNSON: Bedell did?

BEAM: Oh, yes. I got on the good side of him.

JOHNSON: He was Ambassador to the Soviet Union there for a while after the war.

BEAM: Yes, he was. Yes.

1. Robert Murphy was appointed in September 1944 as political adviser on German affairs in Supreme Headquarters, A.E.F.

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JOHNSON: And he was in London much of the time during the war wasn't he?

BEAM: Yes, he was; he was deputy.

JOHNSON: Deputy to Eisenhower, was he?

BEAM: Yes, he would have been deputy to Eisenhower, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Patton, George Patton?

BEAM: Well, yes, I heard him speak. He wasn't very popular.

JOHNSON: Not very diplomatic?

BEAM: No, he wasn't. The British didn't like him.

JOHNSON: They saw his pearl-handled revolvers, I suppose.

BEAM: He was a good soldier though. He was terrific.

JOHNSON: So in 1945 you are with Bob Murphy, as a kind of a deputy to Bob Murphy, who is a political adviser to General Clay, the U.S. Military Governor in Germany.

BEAM: Well, yes, I was his secretary and everything; took care of everything.

JOHNSON: Was he kind of a roving Ambassador? Do you know what his title was?

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BEAM: Well, he was a civil representative of the U.S. Government.

JOHNSON: Okay, the State Department.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, that had to be interesting.

BEAM: Actually, people were above me, but I was his right-hand man.

JOHNSON: Who were some of those that worked with you there when you were with Bob Murphy?

BEAM: Don Heath, Donald Heath, he was there. He was the deputy.

JOHNSON: Well, I guess they had agreed on the occupation zones at Yalta.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Were you at the Yalta Conference?

BEAM: No, I wasn't at Yalta.

JOHNSON: Did you know Truman, or had you any special interest or knowledge of Truman, before he became President?

BEAM: No. I didn't, but Murphy did.

JOHNSON: Well, what did you think when Truman came in as President? Do you remember your reactions at the time, your impressions?

BEAM: Yes, I do. We were traveling around Germany when we got the news of the death of Roosevelt.

JOHNSON: I suppose that you expected Truman just to carry on his policies, Roosevelt policies.

BEAM: Which he did pretty much. Things had changed, of course.

JOHNSON: Of course, Truman did come over to Germany for the Potsdam Conference in July of 1945. Where were you then?

BEAM: I was at the conference.

JOHNSON: Is that when you first saw Truman, at Potsdam?

BEAM: He wasn't very impressive, unfortunately.

JOHNSON: Who was that?

BEAM: Truman.

JOHNSON: You don't think he was impressive at that

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conference.

BEAM: He was awfully green, too. But he was damn good when it came to really common sense.

JOHNSON: Yes. Well, did you think that the terms of that conference were adequate, or were good, or do you think...

BEAM: We came out pretty well. The man who was really the best was an oil man; I forget his name.

JOHNSON: Was it Pauley, Edwin Pauley.

BEAM: Edwin Pauley, yes. Oh, he was superb, utterly superb. He did all the speaking for us.

JOHNSON: At Potsdam?

BEAM: Yes, knew his subject pretty well. And he was rough with the Russians. Stalin was there, and I was very much impressed with Stalin, really.

JOHNSON: You were very impressed with Stalin.

BEAM: Oh yes, terrific. I got it mostly by translation, things like that, but it really came through; there was an historic man.

JOHNSON: Truman, you know, said that Stalin reminded him of

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Boss Pendergast in Kansas City. Well, you said that Truman wasn't all that impressive, but did you get the feeling that he had a firm position?

BEAM: Oh, sure. Yes, indeed, no doubt about it, yes.

JOHNSON: Many of these decisions had already been established at Yalta, as far as the division of Germany was concerned.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Now they're talking about demilitarizing, denazifying, dismantling their armaments industry, and democratizing. I guess there's something like four d's there.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That became part of your job, to help carry this out, to carry this policy out toward Germany, to carry out American policy?

BEAM: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: You became a political officer in the headquarters of U.S. Forces in Germany...

BEAM: Yes, that's right.

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JOHNSON: ...1945 to '47.

BEAM: In Berlin, yes.

JOHNSON: In Berlin. So after the Potsdam conference you were stationed in Berlin?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well then you were with Clay's headquarters?

BEAM: Yes. Murphy was his representative; Clay was the boss, and Murphy was the political man. He was second man there. I was on his staff. We got along very well.

JOHNSON: What were your impressions of Lucius Clay?

BEAM: Clay was pretty damn good at managing.

JOHNSON: Well, did Murphy stay in Berlin or did he come back to Washington?

BEAM: He stayed in Berlin.

JOHNSON: While you were there, '45 to '47.

BEAM: I had a damn good job there, but...

JOHNSON: What were your chief duties as political officer, what were your main duties?

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BEAM: Oh, just political reports and things like that.

JOHNSON: I notice that in 1947 you were appointed chief of the Division of Central European Affairs in the Department.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And so you were involved with the new currency plan, in Germany.

BEAM: Right up to the neck, with Treasury.

JOHNSON: The way I understand it, the Soviets wanted political unification before economic unification of Germany. We wanted economic unification before political unification.

BEAM: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: What was the purpose of the new currency? What was...

BEAM: Well, it was because it was good, it was valuable. I mean the currency in the Russian zone was no damn good; it really wasn't.

JOHNSON: Was it circulating in our zone, the Russia currency?

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BEAM: It was for a short time; then after that we blockaded it. We wouldn't take it.

JOHNSON: So we had our own mark, our own currency, in our occupation zone.

BEAM: Yes, and in the British and French zones too.

JOHNSON: Okay, so we had two currencies now for Germany; we had a Soviet zone mark and a Western mark?

BEAM: Yes, but the Soviet mark was not recognized; it was no good.

JOHNSON: In Berlin, I think there was a mark B; I think they called it a mark B. Do you remember that term, mark B?

BEAM: I guess there was, yes.

JOHNSON: Murphy, for instance, met with Stalin.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: I think it was in August 1948; this was after the first restrictions on access to Berlin. Murphy met with Stalin. Do you recall that American policy was that we would accept the Soviet zone mark in West Berlin if we had control over how much was issued there

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and over credit facilities? Do you remember?

BEAM: I really don't remember, no.

JOHNSON: Okay, on the currency problem, are you saying then that the currency problem is the problem that led to the blockade?

BEAM: Yes, it was.

JOHNSON: Were you in a position to recommend a course of action when these restrictions started? For instance, Clay wanted to send an armed convoy.

BEAM: And Murphy did too.

JOHNSON: Murphy wanted to send an armed convoy?

BEAM: Yes he did.

JOHNSON: But they were overruled.

BEAM: Yes they were; they were overruled.

JOHNSON: Do you remember whether you favored that?

BEAM: Well, you couldn't favor it. I went to a meeting with all the top people here, and with the President over there in the War Department, and he said, "This thing doesn't make any damn sense at all. How far are you going to get in? They will just stop you?" They'd

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use force to keep you out.

JOHNSON: Well, they could just, what, raise one of the drawbridges?

BEAM: Sure.

JOHNSON: Or put something on the tracks. Was that the argument?

BEAM: Certainly, yes.

JOHNSON: And you agreed with that?

BEAM: Oh, certainly.

JOHNSON: Well, why didn't Murphy and Clay see it that way?

BEAM: They had to pipe down because the President wouldn't go for it.

JOHNSON: The President was saying that Clay and Murphy were wrong on this issue.

BEAM: Yes. Well, the Air Force, I mean using that operation was fantastic.

JOHNSON: Did you favor that?

BEAM: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: You said this was the best approach?

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BEAM: Yes, sure.

JOHNSON: How come we did not have firm agreements on access into Berlin, or did we have firm agreements? There was an argument about who was responsible for the fact that we didn't seem to have some firm agreements on access.

BEAM: Well, we had free access, I mean, for airplanes. They didn't have to get permission to go through by air. As I say, they never shot down any of our planes or harassed them in any way.

JOHNSON: Well, there was one collision; apparently a Yak fighter collided with a British plane.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Are you saying that Lucius Clay took the hard line?

BEAM: Yes, he did.

JOHNSON: A military-type solution, of using military force?

BEAM: Yes, it was. Well, Bedell Smith, he's a soldier, and he was an Ambassador up there; he helped smooth the whole thing over.

JOHNSON: Did he favor an armed convoy, or did he feel that

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was foolish too?

BEAM: He thought it was crazy.

JOHNSON: Okay, so Bedell Smith and Clay didn't see eye-to-eye on it.

BEAM: No, they didn't. They never did on anything.

JOHNSON: Oh, they didn't?

BEAM: No.

JOHNSON: In fact, when we were negotiating with Stalin on accepting the Soviet zone mark in West Berlin, Clay objected because he said it denied the quadripartite character of the city, that it was a four-power occupation and it was not part of the Soviet zone. Do you remember that being an issue?

BEAM: I don't know how, but they bridged it some way or another. Nobody would accept the damn Russian currency.

JOHNSON: While the blockade was going on, were you reassigned in '48 and '49?

BEAM: I saw the whole thing out.

JOHNSON: The whole thing.

BEAM: Yes, in the Department.

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JOHNSON: Okay, we adopted a policy of "a strong propaganda line." There was a lot of Soviet propaganda trying to blame the Western powers for this.

BEAM: That's right.

JOHNSON: We started emphasizing Soviet expansionist aims, that term came...

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: ...began to appear quite often didn't it, "expansionist aims."

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you feel that the Soviets were doing their best to try to get all of Germany under their control, and maybe Western Europe as well?

BEAM: Oh yes. Sure.

JOHNSON: They wanted unification; that was part of the Potsdam agreement. They wanted unification and they wanted a neutral Germany, right?

BEAM: That's right.

JOHNSON: That's what Potsdam the agreements provided for.

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BEAM: Yes, it did, yes.

JOHNSON: But at some point, we rejected that idea didn't we? We rejected the idea that Germany could be unified and neutral.

BEAM: Yes, we just said it was impossible.

JOHNSON: In one of your memos, June 28, 1948, you reported on a meeting on June 25 in which Truman, Forrestal and Secretary Royall said that General Clay would be advised, "not to make statements referring to the possibility of war over Berlin. Mr. Royall emphasized that if war were inevitable it should not take place over the question of two separate currencies in Berlin."

BEAM: Yes, I think I was there. The President was there.

JOHNSON: Do you recall what our plan would have been if the Soviets had actually, you know, stopped our airlift, or if they actually invaded Berlin, to take it over?

BEAM: Well, there would have been war, yes.

JOHNSON: You think that we were ready to go to war over West Berlin?

BEAM: Yes. You bet. Yes.

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JOHNSON: But our conventional military forces were much smaller than the Soviets. In other words, the atomic bomb was the trump card, but do you think that we would have really...

BEAM: Yes, I think we would.

JOHNSON: According to what I have been reading there was no serious thought of using the atomic bomb to save West Berlin. What was your impression at that time about our willingness to use the atomic bomb to save West Berlin?

BEAM: I think we would have done it. Let's see, in the various airfields around Germany, we moved in some of these B-29s with the signal that they were, you know...

JOHNSON: They carried atomic bombs.

BEAM: They carried it, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you think that this was effective in intimidating the Soviet Union?

BEAM: Oh, yes, certainly, no question about it. Yes, sure. They didn't fly over. They did not fly over it; they were on our fields.

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JOHNSON: Do you think that the Soviet Union took...

BEAM: Oh, they got it all right.

JOHNSON: They got the message.

BEAM: Sure.

JOHNSON: They felt that we might use the atomic bomb.

BEAM: Sure. The thing that resolved the thing in the end was that we offered them a conference. See, they looked rather bad, but the French and ourselves offered them a conference, which was held in Paris, and then they solved everything.

JOHNSON: A Paris conference?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That ended the airlift?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And acknowledged the status quo, so to speak?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Now there were two currencies, and there were two Germanys. That was an acknowledgement that we have two Germanys, politically and economically? There no

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longer was this idea of a neutral and unified Germany?

BEAM: Yes, that's right. Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you recall a controversy over Truman's statement that he might send Chief Justice [Fred] Vinson to Moscow? This was during the campaign of '48; at one point there was a suggestion that he might send Chief Justice Vinson to Moscow to talk to Stalin, to reduce tensions. Do you recall anything about that?

BEAM: Yes, they were trying to float that, but it didn't go very far.

JOHNSON: Do you think American public opinion was very anti-Soviet, anti-Russian by this time?

BEAM: Yes, I think that was some electoral ploy that didn't get very far.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any planning or any suggestions put forth for a summit meeting between Truman and Stalin?

BEAM: Well, I think there was, but it didn't get very far.

JOHNSON: Was there a feeling that Stalin would have to change, that the Soviet Union's policies would have to change before a summit meeting could take place?

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BEAM: Well, they thought it was enough, I mean to have meetings of the Secretaries or Foreign Ministers.

JOHNSON: There's a new book out on the Berlin blockade by the Tusas, husband and wife team, and they say that in July 1948, this would be right after the blockade started, that Western commanders in Germany had standing orders that in event of an attack by the USSR, they were to withdraw rapidly to the Rhine and fight a defensive battle.(2) Does that sound factual to you?

BEAM: No, I never heard of it.

JOHNSON: You never heard of that plan for them to withdraw to the Rhine and fight a defensive battle?

BEAM: Well, I think there are always theoretical things for contingencies, and it's very likely that this did come to view.

JOHNSON: And so from the German desk in 1949 you went to what?

BEAM: Indonesia.

JOHNSON: Indonesia. Was that when Sukarno was in power

2. Ann and John Tusa, *The Berlin Airlift* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), 174.

[28]

there?

BEAM: No, he wasn't in power. We were trying to get him in power. The Dutch were pretty damn mean, you know.

JOHNSON: Oh, the Dutch were still...

BEAM: They were still there, yes.

JOHNSON: They were still in control.

BEAM: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: When you got there.

JOHNSON: What was the American position on independence for Indonesia?

BEAM: Oh, very, very much for it. The Dutch were so damn mean, my God they...

JOHNSON: They were very stubborn?

BEAM: Cruel.

JOHNSON: And cruel.

BEAM: They dominated these poor Indonesians for generations and generations, and they just cowered.

JOHNSON: You were in the American Embassy there in Jakarta?

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BEAM: Well, they didn't have an Embassy there until the end of the year.

JOHNSON: Originally, you were part of an American mission?

BEAM: No, I was Consul General.

JOHNSON: Consul General in Jakarta.

BEAM: Yes. Then when the Indonesians finally got a government, we sent an Ambassador out.

JOHNSON: When the Ambassador came, what was your position? What was your job?

BEAM: I was just there for a few weeks and worked under him and then I went to Yugoslavia.(3)

JOHNSON: Was Stalin threatening an invasion of Yugoslavia when you got there?

BEAM: I know there was some danger and they sent me out there because I was a bachelor. They didn't want any...

JOHNSON: They didn't want any widows and orphans?

3. In his book, *Multiple Exposure: An American Ambassador's Unique Perspective on East-West Issues* (W.W. Norton and Co., 1978 p. 50), Mr. Beam says he served as counselor of embassy in Belgrade from April 1951 to November 1952.

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BEAM: I stayed there for about two years, I guess.

JOHNSON: What was your title in Yugoslavia?

BEAM: No, I was counselor; second in command.

JOHNSON: What kind of advice were you giving?

BEAM: We got along very well with him.

JOHNSON: With Tito?

BEAM: Oh, yes, terrifically. We'd give him weapons and guns and so forth.

JOHNSON: Okay, you helped arrange the economic aid?

BEAM: Yes we did.

JOHNSON: And military aid to Yugoslavia?

BEAM: Yes we did.

JOHNSON: A communist state. Was that always popular with Americans?

BEAM: No. It has been that way, and it worked for them. It [communism] doesn't work for us.

JOHNSON: They had a little different style communism too. Didn't they have local ownership of factories, for

[31]

instance, worker-owned factories?

BEAM: It doesn't work. It doesn't work at all.

JOHNSON: But it was not totalitarian in the sense that Stalinist Russia was.

BEAM: No.

JOHNSON: Is that the way we viewed it, that there was more democracy and more local government there and that we could tolerate this?

BEAM: Sure. It was none of our business and if it worked for them...

JOHNSON: Especially if they were at odds with Stalin. In other words, was our policy to divide the Soviet empire as much as we could?

BEAM: Well, to make them free is the way it was.

JOHNSON: Independent of the Soviet Union, but not necessarily make them capitalists?

BEAM: No, no.

JOHNSON: We weren't so much concerned about them being a free enterprise economy as we were about them being independent of Moscow?

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BEAM: That's right.

JOHNSON: From Yugoslavia you went to Moscow.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you went to the Embassy when Kennan left.

BEAM: I was over there about four months as top man.

JOHNSON: Oh, you were four months in Moscow as top man and that was in what year?

BEAM: It was '52.

JOHNSON: You were there into early '53.

BEAM: From the end of '52, that's right. And then they sent out [Charles] Bohlen in May.

JOHNSON: Stalin died in March of '53.

BEAM: Yes, that's it, and I represented us [the United States].

JOHNSON: You were top man there during that period, the last months of Stalin's life?

BEAM: I buried him, yes indeed.

JOHNSON: Well, what kind of reports were you sending in?

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BEAM: It's mentioned there; you can read it in there in my book.(4)

JOHNSON: Right. Are there any gaps to fill in?

BEAM: No, I don't think so.

JOHNSON: Did you think Stalin was losing his mind, or did you think he was still sane?

BEAM: Well, you see, he was crazy when he was killing people.

JOHNSON: But the peasants of Russia, did they feel that way? You know they were still a big part of the population. Did they tend to be pro-Stalin, and were they the conservatives? And how about the bureaucrats?

BEAM: They were pretty closely watched. They had aides all over the place. I mean everybody was very happy when Stalin died.

JOHNSON: What was the atmosphere? Did you feel like you were being watched, and you were being bugged?

BEAM: Oh, we knew that, yes.

JOHNSON: You knew the Embassy was bugged?

4. Cited in footnote 3.

[34]

BEAM: Yes, but after Stalin died, the leaders came and said we want to really see more of you, and things like that.

JOHNSON: Okay they wanted to open up toward the West.

BEAM: Yes, they did.

JOHNSON: Well, how long were you in Moscow then?

BEAM: Let's see, I was there when Bohlen came. I came back; came here.

JOHNSON: In '53.

BEAM: In 1953, yes.

JOHNSON: Were you on the Policy Planning Staff?

BEAM: Yes, I was.

JOHNSON: When were you made deputy director of the Policy Planning Staff?

BEAM: Well, I guess it was in the summer.

JOHNSON: Of '53?

BEAM: Of '53, yes.

JOHNSON: Who was director?

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BEAM: Bob Bowie; Robert Bowie was.

JOHNSON: Robert Bowie was chief of the Policy Planning Staff. Of course, by this time Eisenhower had become resident.

BEAM: Yes. I must say it was completely useless, the most useless two years I had.

JOHNSON: You mean while you were on the Policy Planning Staff?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And those years were useless?

BEAM: Completely. And then I took over the Eastern European desk [as deputy assistant Secretary of State in charge of Soviet and East European Affairs].

JOHNSON: Then you got on the Eastern European desk in '55?

BEAM: Yes, I think that's it.

JOHNSON: Well, why was it useless. Why was the Policy Planning Staff rather useless?

BEAM: It was the wrong man; that's all.

JOHNSON: You mean Bowie was the wrong man?

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BEAM: I shouldn't say that. His staff was very unhappy.

JOHNSON: With him.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was he Eisenhower's pick? Did Eisenhower pick him? Was he somehow a friend, or was he picked out by the Eisenhower...

BEAM: No, I don't think so.

JOHNSON: What was your opinion of [Paul] Nitze?

BEAM: He was a good man.

JOHNSON: In other words, it could have been useful if Nitze would have stayed on as director?

BEAM: Yes. George Kennan was the first Director.

JOHNSON: Do you think under George Kennan it did good work?

BEAM: Yes, I think he did a good job.

JOHNSON: Nitze had much to do with NSC-68, you know, this rather controversial National Security Council paper 68 prepared in early '50, even before Korea was invaded. Of course, it was secret at the time, but it said that we must rearm, we must build up the military, we must

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realize the Soviet Union is trying to communize the world, and they expect inevitable war with the West. Was that the sort of feeling that you had at that time, that they were carrying out a Leninist policy of world conquest for communism? Did you really feel that there was a danger that...

BEAM: Oh, I think [John Foster] Dulles did.

JOHNSON: But you didn't necessarily subscribe to this feeling that the Soviet Union was really going to be taking a lot of risks in order to communize the whole world?

BEAM: Well, I think that was the feeling of Dulles.

JOHNSON: But how about you; what was your feeling since you had been in Moscow? Did you feel that they were more restrained than that or that they really did have a plan to communize the world and even go to war with capitalism eventually if that's what it took?

BEAM: Well, I know that the President didn't feel that way.

JOHNSON: You mean Truman?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about Eisenhower? Was his approach different

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from Truman's, or could you detect any difference in policy? Of course, Stalin was not longer in the picture so obviously, the situation had changed.

BEAM: Well, Eisenhower, he had a lot of sense. He had a guy on the Planning Staff; he was a friend of Eisenhower, and...

JOHNSON: Do you remember his name?

BEAM: Cutler.

JOHNSON: Oh, [Robert] Cutler.(5)

BEAM: Colonel Cutler.

JOHNSON: And you say he was an effective man?

BEAM: Oh, he was terrific. He used to bawl out these damn colonels and generals, even generals; he was firm with them.

JOHNSON: Well, was he really the most effective man during that two year period you were on the staff?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, after the Policy Planning Staff in 1955, you

5. Cutler actually was chairman of the National Security Council's Planning Board from 1953 to 1955.

[39]
go to...

BEAM: I went to the Eastern European division.

JOHNSON: This comes about the time of the Geneva Conference and the spirit of Geneva, the lessening of tensions and all that sort of thing. So you felt a little more relaxed. Did that make you more relaxed about East-West relations?

BEAM: Yes, because Eisenhower, of course, had a summit you remember.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BEAM: It did a lot of good.

JOHNSON: You favored that, thought that it accomplished...

BEAM: Yes indeed.

JOHNSON: Then came the Geneva Conference on Vietnam.

BEAM: It became rougher then.

JOHNSON: I noticed that there's a [Charles D.] Jackson too who was one of Eisenhower's men. Do you remember Jackson?

BEAM: Sure, very well. He's dead now.

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JOHNSON: Was he effective?

BEAM: Oh, yes, he was very good.

JOHNSON: Well, we'll just summarize the rest of your career, if you'll go ahead and do that.

BEAM: In '57 I go to Poland.

JOHNSON: In '57 you go to Poland, as American Ambassador.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Is that where Alexis Johnson was carrying talks with Communist China?

BEAM: Yes. And I took those over.

JOHNSON: You took over from Johnson.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: What kind of talks were you having with the Chinese?

BEAM: Just to keep in line with them, and just in touch with them. We didn't get anywhere at all.

JOHNSON: You didn't get anywhere?

BEAM: Didn't get anywhere at all. But we didn't want to

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break the contact.

JOHNSON: So they did some good in the sense that each side knew a little bit what the other side was thinking?

BEAM: Yes, that's in my book.

JOHNSON: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was apparently favoring this. I mean was this part of his policy?

BEAM: Yes, it was. Yes.

JOHNSON: But he wanted to roll back the iron curtain too, and liberate Eastern Europe. Remember that liberation doctrine, the rollback doctrine? Weren't you supposed to help carry that out?

BEAM: Well, you'll find it in my book. That really was not his position.

JOHNSON: You mean this was for public consumption, but realistically...Well, during the Hungarian revolt, in 1956, you were on the East European desk, right?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was your recommendation?

BEAM: Well, I let [Jozsef Cardinal] Mindszenty in [to the

[42]

American legation]. They [the Soviets] were in hot pursuit you see.

JOHNSON: He was in our Embassy there for what, ten, 15 years.

BEAM: Fifteen years, yes.

JOHNSON: You never expected that, did you?

BEAM: No, I didn't. The interesting part of it is that Eisenhower was angry because Mindszenty wrote him a letter every week.

JOHNSON: Well, did you feel there was any chance the United States could help the rebels in Hungary, the "freedom fighters?"

BEAM: No, we couldn't do it.

JOHNSON: There was no way of doing it.

BEAM: Well, if you tried to do it, they'd have to march through Austria and that would have been the end of Austria.

JOHNSON: Were you involved in the Austria Peace Treaty then?

BEAM: No.

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JOHNSON: Oh, you didn't get involved in the negotiations for neutralization of Austria?

BEAM: No, that was done without me, in one day.

JOHNSON: But that was kind of a pleasant surprise wasn't it, that the Soviets left Austria?

BEAM: Yes, I know.

JOHNSON: We never thought they'd leave a place where they were already occupying, right?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That was the first time that that had happened, that they left a place where they were occupying.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: And part of the Geneva spirit I suppose.

BEAM: Yes, it was.

JOHNSON: You were in Poland from 1957 to '61, and then from there you went to the Arms Control Disarmament agency?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: So during the Kennedy administration and also in the Johnson years, you were with arms control?

[44]

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you have something to do with that 1963 treaty, atmospheric test treaty, to prohibit testing of H-bombs in the atmosphere in '63?

BEAM: I didn't have much...

JOHNSON: Didn't have much to do with that?

BEAM: No.

JOHNSON: And then you were Ambassador to Czechoslovakia from '66 to '69.

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: That's when the Russians invaded, or came in?

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you foresee that happening?

BEAM: Yes. We warned them too.

JOHNSON: Were you in touch with [Alexander] Dubcek?

BEAM: No, I never met him. I met a guy who was much more effective, but anyway they went too damn far. It was stupid.

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We warned Dubcek, not me personally, but he got the message...

JOHNSON: But they were inviting Soviet intervention?

BEAM: And also Llewellyn Thompson. He sent messages too.

JOHNSON: Warning that this was going to happen?

BEAM: Going too far.

JOHNSON: And then you became Ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1969.

BEAM: Right.

JOHNSON: How did it compare with '53 when you were there? Did you notice quite a difference when you came in '69 as compared to...

BEAM: Yes. You know old Brezhnev, he wasn't very bright.

JOHNSON: But did you see progress being made at the time, to ease tensions? Did you see the end of the Leninist idea of inevitable war? I mean did you feel that the peaceful coexistence, that they were sincere, that the Soviet leadership was sincere in this policy announced by Khrushchev way back in what, '55? Bulganin, I guess, was part of that, too, in announcing peaceful coexistence.

[46]

BEAM: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you feel that they really were sincere now that they no longer held to the Leninist doctrine of inevitable war, with capitalism?

BEAM: Well, they wanted to keep it up, keep up pressure.

JOHNSON: Well, okay. I thank you very much for your time.

BEAM: Here's my book; I hope you will read it and I hope you will enjoy it.

JOHNSON: Well, sure, I appreciate having this book.

I've been presented a book written by Ambassador Beam called *A Multiple Exposure: An American Ambassador's Unique Perspective on East-West Issues*, and published several years ago. Thanks very much.

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