

Sir Howard Beale, Oral History Interview – 4/16/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Sir Howard Beale
Interviewer: Elspeth Davies Rostow
Date of Interview: April 16, 1964
Place of Interview: Australian Embassy
Length: 22 pages

Biographical Note

Beale, Australian ambassador to the U.S. from 1958 to 1964, discusses his contacts with and impressions of John F. Kennedy (JFK) before he became president and after he took office, JFK's foreign policy, and Beale's friendship with JFK, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed January 28, 1965, title to these materials has been assigned to the United States Government.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Sir Howard Beale, recorded interview by Elspeth Davies Rostow, April 16, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Gift of Personal Statement

By Sir Howard Beale

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with the provisions of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 as amended (63 Stat. 377) and regulations issued thereunder, I, Howard Beale, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a transcript of a personal statement approved by me on May 11, 1964, and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this document is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

3. A revision of the above stipulation governing access to the aforesaid document may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States or his designee if it appears desirable to revise the conditions herein stipulated.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed

Howard Beale

Date

Oct 8, 1964

Accepted

W. Samuel Groves
Archivist of the United States

Date

January 28, 1965

Sir Howard Beale

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1, 3	Impressions of John F. Kennedy (JFK) before he became president
2	1960 Democratic National Convention
4	Early impressions of the Kennedy administrations
5	Meetings with JFK
7	Australian dinner in Newport, RI
8	JFK's knowledge of Australia
9	Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis
10	Two-term limit and the "lame duck" effect
11	Relations between the U.S. and the British Commonwealth
12	Ballistic missiles
13	JFK on domestic issues
14	JFK's foreign policy
18	JFK's assassination
19	Lessons of JFK's presidency
21	U.S.-Australian relations

Oral History Interview

With

Sir Howard Beale

April 16, 1964
Australian Embassy

By Elspeth Davies Rostow

For the John F. Kennedy Library

ROSTOW: Sir Howard, you came to Washington in 1958. Do you recall your first impression of then Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

BEALE: I came in March, 1958, which, of course, was during the last two years of the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] regime. Naturally, as an Ambassador, I was concerned with existing Administration and therefore my interest and concentration was in the first place on them. For that reason, I do not have many vivid impressions of Senator Kennedy. I remember one of his speeches he made and I had an impression of an high order of intelligence, but I cannot say that he made a great impact on me. In fact, I don't think he would. Because in those days, if I may put it this way, he really didn't know very much about the matters that I was concerned with. In other words, he was only on the fringe of foreign policy matters, he wasn't on the inside and therefore he wouldn't have said, I think, many things to attract to my notice.

ROSTOW: Do you remember when you began to take any real interest in him as a potential candidate?

BEALE: Well, his name was mentioned from time to time, sometimes in a hostile way, of course, by his political opponents. I was seeing a lot of

Republicans in those days of course. As you know, it was a Republican Administration, but it began to get through to me I think sometime early in 1960 that this was an unusual personality. I didn't think that he was going to win. I didn't think he would win the nomination, but nevertheless here was a man to be noted and reckoned with and my ear became cocked a little bit for the things he was saying. I think by early 1960 I was conscious of him as an important international person.

ROSTOW: When he was nominated--you said a moment ago you didn't think he would get the nomination--when he was nominated were you at all startled? Did it seem to you as though perhaps we were moving into the kindergarten?

[-1-]

BEALE: No, I was just fascinated, because I did a rather undiplomatic thing. I went out to the Los Angeles Convention. Having a number of Democrat friends, they introduced me to the whole circus and I sat there hour after hour and night after night. Most of the days were reversed you see, most of the work was done at night and one slept all day and then went back to the convention and to the lobbies and the smoke-filled rooms, so to speak. During that week I sat and watched it develop, and toward the end it became likely that he would be able to catch the nomination. This was a most dramatic and--well--ridiculous experience really--because I was an outsider--and a real circus, but it is part of the American system and part of your American mores, so to speak. I enjoyed every minute of it--it nearly killed me, but I loved it.

ROSTOW: Someone said the other day that you learned more about a convention by watching it on television than by being there. I gather you don't agree?

BEALE: Well, I think that's right. You get a better picture because it is cleverly done on television. But I saw it in the raw, so to speak. I was even beguiled into going down on the floor in one of those absurd exhibitions where people were stamping around, wagging banners up and down. I prayed to heaven that nobody would recognize my face, otherwise I might have gotten myself recalled! I want to say, by the way, that I also made sure I went to the Republican Convention later on, but that wasn't nearly as exciting.

ROSTOW: When the conventions were over and the campaign under way, did you detect any greater seriousness or interest in foreign policy on the part of the Democratic candidate?

BEALE: Oh yes, he was obviously going punch home on foreign policy, and even before the nomination it became obvious he knew more about it and was more interested in it than I thought he had been. So I listened then more carefully. I got a bit alarmed sometimes. You know between the two of them, between Kennedy and Nixon [Richard Milhous Nixon], the one had us going to war with Cuba and

the other had us going to war over the Off-Shore Islands! I've been in politics for a long time, and I know what political campaigns are--things get exaggerated--your black is very black, your white is very white, and there are no shades in-between. The candidates feel they can't afford to qualify their remarks too much or they get misunderstood; but all the same, it became evident that this was a very thoughtful young man.

[-2-]

ROSTOW: You didn't actually see Senator Kennedy during the campaign.

BEALE: I saw him on television a great deal. I met him in Los Angeles, just briefly, and I had met him at the Senate before, when he was a Senator, thought he was pleasant and engaging, but didn't think he was likely to be a Presidential candidate at the time--indeed I didn't think he had it in him, if I may be quite frank about it. I had had a social glimpse of a pleasant and an engaging young man but it was a superficial contact. But during the campaign, as a result of one or two physical contacts with him and all the television, he began to grow in stature in my eyes anyhow. From Mr. Kennedy's point of view the television debates were very important. I could never understand why Mr. Nixon ever consented to have them, it seemed to me the height of folly. I remember sending a letter to my Prime Minister [Robert Gordon Menzies]. I said I have seen a man commit political suicide. Because here was Vice President Nixon, who had been very much in the public eye, consenting to debate with a relatively unknown man, giving free publicity before 60 or 70 million people, and I thought that this might be the turning point. Indeed I think--not everybody agrees with me--I think it was. I'm sorry, I interrupted you.

ROSTOW: I was just wondering whether it might not be the most fun to report on America during a Presidential campaign. In a sense you are relieved of some of the more serious issues that come up in-between.

BEALE: Oh yes, of course, yes. It is. I sent a lot of dispatches at this time. I did them of course as a man coming out of a long--fairly long political life and from the point of view of a different system. We have a parliamentary system similar to the British--you have this separation of powers system. There is all the difference in the world. And everything therefore struck me by way of wide contrast and that was the way I reported it.

ROSTOW: Were you in Washington at the time of the election?

BEALE: Yes, I was here and I held my breath and watched it all. I was out for dinner somewhere and I think at one o'clock in the morning we went home. It still wasn't certain, although some twist in the voting had to take place to insure that Mr. Nixon overtook Kennedy's lead. But nevertheless by early in the morning, it was pretty obvious that he was likely to win, although, as we know, the margin of victory was extraordinarily narrow. It was an exciting evening.

[-3-]

ROSTOW: It was for a good many people. Your contact then both with the Senator and the candidate was not very great?

BEALE: Relatively.... compared with other people, relatively slight.

ROSTOW: Yes, but once the candidate had won and once the new Administration got under way, what were your impressions of the incoming Administration? Did you know many members of the Cabinet, or were they unfamiliar to you?

BEALE: Most of them were unfamiliar. Some I knew. Well, I found it all very interesting. Of course, the new men who came in were almost invariably much younger than I; this was a new generation. I was old enough to be the father of a great many of them, and therefore I was very conscious of the wave of the young minds coming in. But I hadn't become encrusted enough by age not to be excited about it. I was. This was something that was very exciting. Because here were new and eager--sometimes over-eager, if I may say so, new eager people almost always well trained and very intelligent who were coming in to what they didn't know about. I think most of them had no idea of the complexities of government, except those who had been in before. But I'm sure most of them didn't realize the complexities of government. But they were coming in and this was a good thing. Sometimes it is necessary for a nation to pause and take a breath, and perhaps part of the Eisenhower regime's function was for America to take a breath. Now having taken a breath, it was necessary for America to go forward again, and this new young man and these young men round about him were just the men to do it. And so I found it exciting. And I rapidly got to know them. Made it my business to. Found them extraordinarily easy to get on with and have ever since.

ROSTOW: In one sense, the early months of the Kennedy Administration break down into the period between January 20th, 1961 and the Bay of Pigs in April. During that first euphoric period, did you see much of the President?

BEALE: Not much. Yes, I met him before he was inaugurated. I met him at parties—he was going around at parties freely, and I met him. He happened to be a great admirer of my Prime Minister--they'd met at Harvard and elsewhere--and this was a point of contact.

[-4-]

He also seemed to have a great fondness for Australia. He'd never actually been in Australia, but he'd been in the Pacific, and, as we all know, he was rescued by an Australian, and he apparently had met a lot of Australians; so, whenever we met on these special occasions, he was very friendly indeed. But I had my doubts about President Kennedy, you know. I liked

him, but I wondered about him. I wondered, in particular, whether there was a certain impetuosity which might get us all into trouble. This was a real mental reservation I had about him as President. You know, he was vigorous, he was eager, he was saying a lot of things, some of which I think he would have withdrawn later on; you know, as a candidate challenging and trying to get in, he was naturally putting his case boldly and perhaps with over-emphasis about the things that ought to be done, and I wondered whether this might get us into trouble, and therefore I had my mental reservations. And perhaps the Bay of Pigs is an illustration of what could happen. But I am bound to say that after that, from that moment on, there was no evidence of lack of judgment or impetuosity on his part. In fact, the feeling I have, the impression I carry with me of him from then on was of a *careful* man.

ROSTOW: It is interesting; certainly the educational value of the Bay of Pigs was demonstrated. From April 1961 on, what were the major issues that involved your country that brought you in contact with the President?

BEALE: Well, I don't know how it happened, but he was--I found him—extraordinarily approachable. And there were other Ambassadors, I am sure, who had closer contacts with him than I--but not many I think. For the representative of a small country, I had a good deal of contact with him, and whenever I wished to see him he was very prompt and very relaxed and friendly. Naturally enough, on political matters I had to see him--sometimes I had to see him about social matters and on other matters--but on political matters, when I had to see him, they concerned the Far East mostly, not exclusively, but mostly Far East, Southeast Asia where my country is situated. I suppose West New Guinea and Southeast Asia generally would represent most of the discussions or subjects of discussion we had on political matters.

ROSTOW: Did you find him easy to talk to? Would you regard him as a good listener?

[-5-]

BEALE: Oh, he had a quality which I greatly admire. It happens to be a quality that some of my own countrymen have. He had a slightly sardonic, slightly mocking, detached attitude--there was nothing gushing about him, nothing over-emphasizing. He would sit back in a rather relaxed, slightly mocking way, self-mocking, too, I mean--not mocking other people; and there was a detachment about him, an understanding that there were two sides to a question. And I found in my conversations with him that he would talk freely, give and take. He would never agree with you if he didn't agree with you. There was none of this flattery; he was an extremely courteous man, but he was never courteous just for the sake of being courteous. He was a well-brought-up young man, and that's the feeling I had about him. But he would talk freely and--I don't know whether I'm answering your question very well--but I just found him very engaging.

ROSTOW: Did you ever have any real disagreements?

BEALE: Yes, we had some--not disagreements that ever clouded our relationship; I don't mean that. First of all, it is the business of Ambassador not to let that happen; and secondly, he wasn't that sort of person either. We sometimes didn't agree about policies in Southeast Asia and I said so. He would give his point of view. Mostly, you see, I would have talked to the Secretary of State [Dean Rusk] first of all, and this would have to come up to him as the person to decide, and, then we didn't always agree. He might not think my country's attitude was quite right and so we'd talk it over. All of our problems came out right in the end, for up to the time of his death I can't recollect any occasion in which it could be said that any difference between Australia and the United States was not bridged. Nothing of the sort. We had very good relations and a very wide measure of agreement. Understand, a little country cannot expect to get its own way all the time. I think, if I may say so without immodesty, that we had our share of getting our own way. But you can't--if you don't carry the great burden of responsibility, you can't expect the other fellow to do it your way all the time. But we almost always got a course of action which satisfied both of us.

ROSTOW: On a less substantive plane, did you feel that state visits were handled effectively during the Kennedy period?

BEALE: Well, I think he had great--a touch of elegance. Great style. And, of course, Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] was a great help, too.

[-6-]

Yes, you saw it when the Inauguration came along, he had a sense of history, and he put on his top hat and striped pants and did it all in style. He wasn't ashamed of all the ceremony and what-have-you; in fact, I think he rather liked it. Yes, I thought it was done with considerable good taste. There were no state visits connected with my country--the Queen of England is also the Queen of Australia, and she did not come in my time--but when my Prime Minister came over, things were always done very well. He liked Menzies and entertained him, saw a lot of him.

ROSTOW: Well, perhaps we're approaching a more difficult question on the Newport races. Would you care to comment on that Australian-American encounter? (Chuckles from each.)

BEALE: Well, this was a great moment. There are shining moments every now and then, and as a social event this was, I think, the highlight of my time here. When Australia decided to challenge--I thought that we ought to do this thing in style ourselves, and I suggested to the government that a big dinner should be given. I went to see the President. He was a yachtsman and I am a yachtsman, and he agreed that he would come and be our guest of honor at this dinner. We organized it somewhat carefully with Australian food, Australian wines, Australian wild flowers and a good many Australian guests, and he and Mrs. Kennedy came. It was a most glamorous affair and lighthearted. He

lent me one of the admirals' houses and I transferred my embassy temporarily, servants and all, just for a week or so. He was living at Mrs. Auchincloss's [Janet Lee Bouvier Auchincloss] next door. They came along for this evening at the old Vanderbilt mansion, "The Breakers." He was in witty form, made a charming speech, and altogether, if anything can be said to have cemented Australian-American relations, it was this irrelevant social event. That's my only comment, except that I don't think you can ignore the value of a contact of that sort--a sort of climate and atmosphere. He never stopped talking about it, and that's a good thing if it reminded him of my country. But I fell in love with her. She was great company, bubbly and just nicely irreverent. And, as I've said, he was first-rate.

ROSTOW: After Newport, did you see more of the Kennedys than you had--?

[-7-]

BEALE: Yes, I suppose so. I suppose so, not perhaps because of Newport, because we'd been seeing a bit of one another before then. I don't think I can be said to have seen a lot of him really. There are Ambassadors here who see a president when they come to present their credentials and then never see him again except at some official reception until they say goodbye. So compared with those, I was in and out of the White House a good deal, but I wouldn't have been there more than once every two months or so. I might also meet him at some other function. For most Ambassadors that's a fair bit. I saw him a little more after that--not because of Newport, but because of events which were moving in the world which made it necessary for me to see him. Also, my Prime Minister would come over, and the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, and then I would seek an interview and bring them along. So the nature--the frequency of our association did increase a bit.

ROSTOW: Did President Kennedy show any knowledge of internal Australian politics at such a time?

BEALE: He was very careful about that. He was aware, I think, of Australian politics--you know, the battle is fought fairly sharply there: it was Winston Churchill who said about Australian politics--"Ah, Australia, they conduct their politics with a certain 18th Century robustness." And we do. And we do; the tussle between opposition government goes on fairly strongly. Therefore, I think he was careful not to indicate any preferences, but naturally, he was concerned with the government in power and he was also an admirer of the Prime Minister. I think that's about the limit. Except this: he became aware, I think, of one or two policies which had been enunciated by the Labor opposition which troubled him. There was, for instance their talk about a nuclear-free zone south of the Equator. The Labor Party had passed a resolution to that effect, and I don't think he liked it very much because that had implications for the United States. If, in the future, Australia got into trouble with Communist China and the United States had to come to our assistance under A. N. Z. U. S.--that resolution could mean that America might be handicapped in deploying atomic weapons South of the Equator, and he didn't like that much. But subject to that, I think he was more concerned with the government in power.

ROSTOW: Aside from the person himself at this time, you said earlier that you'd grown to know the members of his cabinet and, of course, you obviously saw a good deal of the Secretary of State. How soon did you feel that this new team grasped the tasks before them in Washington?

[-8-]

BEALE: I think Dean Rusk settled down pretty quickly because he'd been an Assistant Secretary of State--he'd been in Government for some time. He also, in my book, was a very able man indeed, so I think he settled down, although he probably had his difficulties of adjustment with the President. Rusk is a quiet man, not exactly self-effacing but certainly not a man who seeks to dominate the scene. On the other hand, here was a vigorous young president who had come in fresh from triumph and who perhaps had a tendency to want to be his own Secretary of State. I don't know. But nevertheless I thought Rusk settled down pretty early. Of course, Douglas Dillon [C. Douglas Dillon] had been in the Administration before, and he slipped into the Treasury just like a glove. All of the others were new. I didn't know most of them. I knew that McNamara [Robert S. McNamara] was virtually unknown to Kennedy before he was appointed--McNamara seemed to me to fit in; certainly, after six months, it became obvious he was going to be a man about the place and take charge of his department. Others I couldn't say. I thought a few of them were in a bit of trouble once or twice--you know, early on, but that's natural enough with new men, for some of them had had no experience at government at all. I've been in this position--a new government coming to power, flushed with success and with all the election promises to keep; you know--you've got to do this, you've got to do that--well, then you find that things are not quite as easy as they seem to be on the hustings, if you know what I mean. And I thought a few of them took a while to settle down. But I can't think of anybody there now who hasn't adjusted.

ROSTOW: I was thinking about the contrast between the way the Kennedy Administration appeared at the time of the Bay of Pigs and the way it appeared during the missile crisis of October in the following year.

BEALE: Yes, there is a great dramatic difference. You see, I think the--well, the Bay of Pigs was a wretched business. I'm not in a position to comment much--(a) because I oughtn't to and (b) because I can't even now say how much the President was told, how much he was misled, how much he did himself--what really was the cause of that quite disastrous episode. All I know is, like the child who has put his hand on a hot stove--the President learned very quickly. So the difference between that and the approach to the Cuban crisis was quite dramatic. The difference between the new Administration and the latter years of the Eisenhower Administration was quite noticeable, too.

[-9-]

I have great respect for President Eisenhower because he was a man of obvious integrity, but he was a lame duck toward the end of his years, because under the Senate amendment he couldn't succeed himself, and this always reflects itself in a sort of dying away of the energy and initiative of the Administration. Of course, the death of Mr. Dulles [John Foster Dulles] in the foreign affairs field had its effect too. So you had a sort of feeling of running down. Then, in comes the new young man, who makes his mistakes (the Bay of Pigs was the classic illustration) but then he begins to climb the hill again and by the time you get to the Cuban crisis, the contrast between the old days of Eisenhower, the dying days of Eisenhower, and the Cuban crisis was really quite remarkable.

ROSTOW: To go back to your point about the Constitutional amendment. Do you think this would be true in any second term, that the prohibition against running again would, in effect, cripple the chief executive?

BEALE: I think it does, particularly in the last year. He doesn't carry the authority he used to. Mind you, this is a dangerous sea for me to start sailing upon, because after all, I'm not an expert on American politics. But I have the feeling that there's a tendency perhaps to lose something of his authority--not anything in his personality, but people don't feel, nor does he feel, quite the same because he knows in a few months it's all going to be over and somebody else has got to take charge. I'm a retiring Ambassador now, getting ready to leave this country. And I'm getting the feeling now, in the last few weeks, that somebody else ought to deal with this problem. And I think that does perhaps inhibit initiative a little bit. I may be wrong--this is just an observation.

ROSTOW: There's rather a lively debate here at the present time. Some political scientists argue that being freed of the chance of a third-term election, the second term president can take more risks.

BEALE: Well, that's true, too, but I don't think it was true in President Eisenhower's case, which may lead you to conclude that there may have been other factors present as well. I don't know. But I've attributed what I have detected as a fading of effort toward the end of the term there as partly due to the fact that he was a lame duck president. I'm not using that in any derogatory sense. That's the phrase you use in this country. But mind you, he'd had the terrible set-back of the U-2

[-10-]

and the collapse of the Summit Conference and this had its psychological effect, too. Anyway, the new man came in and bang! there was a sense of something new going to happen.

ROSTOW: The contrast, then, was a contrast of mode, a contrast of age--

BEALE: --and personality.

ROSTOW: What other contrast can you cite between the two years of Republican Administration and the two of Democrat that you mentioned—

BEALE: This is difficult sort of stuff for me to state. The President—President Kennedy had gathered 'round about him an extraordinarily able group of young people. Academically distinguished, most of them were, for a start. Now, academic distinction can be a bit dangerous in government. You have the phrase—“eggheads.” It's a phrase of contempt, and I don't hold with it--but it is true that things that you learn in the university and lecture about, as a professor in a university, are not necessarily simple or applicable when you get out into the cold hard world of politics, where you find that the theory and the practice don't match up. Therefore, I would say that sometimes the New Frontier has perhaps been a little too theoretical. But nevertheless, on balance, it was very refreshing to find these trained minds coming in. Now President Eisenhower didn't have so many of those--he had so many able men but they were mostly business men. A good many of them were business men--industrialists and others. It was a great contrast in my mind.

ROSTOW: In terms of the Commonwealth generally, did you find that there was an interest on the part of the Kennedy Administration in the problems of the Commonwealth?

BEALE: I had a special feeling about that. You know, Mr. Kennedy was the son of an ambassador who hadn't been very popular with us during the war. My country, as part of the Commonwealth, had declared war on the 3rd of September 1939 when Britain declared war, so we were involved in the struggle for survival in '39, '40 and '41, and were deeply concerned with Britain's survival which, at that stage, was ours. And therefore we didn't find Ambassador Joseph Kennedy's [Joseph P. Kennedy]

[-11-]

philosophy and attitude towards Britain about this time, very encouraging, and some of us wondered whether the son of Joseph Kennedy shared his father's views or not. And so we wondered. But it rapidly became clear to me that that anxiety wasn't justified, that President Kennedy seemed to have a good regard for the British, a good deal of admiration for what they had achieved and were trying to do, and an understanding of their difficulties now that their role has so dramatically changed. Although this didn't directly concern a country like Australia, nevertheless it did indirectly, because we ourselves are part of this family of nations and particularly those of British origin like Australia, New Zealand and partly Canada. In the talks I had with him, I found both with him and with Dean Rusk, a sort of feeling for the Commonwealth and its importance which surprised me a little, and I think perhaps was over done. I think both those men had a genuine feeling for the Commonwealth as an organization--not a third force, as a power for peace and good thinking and good will in the world.

ROSTOW: Is there anything that you would care to say about the Skybolt episode?

BEALE: Well, I was in England when the Skybolt affair took place. I had just been on leave in Australia and I was in England when the bolt fell, so to speak. I thought the decision to abandon Skybolt that was made with Mr. Macmillan [M. Howard Macmillan], wasn't it, down near Bermuda? was a sensible decision. I happen to have been involved in all this in earlier years and I was Minister of Supply in the Australian government. One of the functions I had was the testing of guided missiles for the British at our Woomera Rocket Range. Indeed, as Minister years ago, I initiated the Australian end of the Blue Streak project. Australia contributed the range and many millions of pounds, and the British were developing the missile. I forget the technicalities of it now, but we had got a fair way and when I left to come here, Blue Streak was still a "goer". Then, soon after I left, the British informed us of the difficulties they were having with Blue Streak, and which was to lead on to Discoverer. This lead to adopting your Skybolt instead. Then came this decision to scrap it, which seemed to me the right one. It involved Britain in political difficulties undoubtedly, because publicly the Conservative government had been earlier saying that this was a great project. Anyhow, awkward although it was, I thought the decision that Britain should have the Polaris instead was a wise decision. Unhappily this decision coincided with a speech which Dean Acheson [Dean G. Acheson] made, and this was

[-12-]

trouble, real trouble. In his speech Acheson said quite rightly that Britain had lost her old role and was seeking a new one, but in that inimitable way he sometimes uses in expressing words, he had given an impression, quite unwittingly, which deeply hurt the feelings of the British people. He admires them and he didn't mean it that way. I spent the next few days in England defending him and when I came back, I took him to task and asked him why I should have to defend him! He told me it was one of those inadvertent things; he had thought the words he used were all right, some of his people had read the speech and saw nothing wrong--it occurred to nobody that it could be interpreted in any wrong way. I'm afraid I've given you a long answer for this. I had no objection to the decision about Skybolt. I thought it was the right one.

ROSTOW: On a slightly different issue; Keynes [John Maynard Keynes] went in to see Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] during the thirties and emerged quite shattered because he said he had expected to find the President economically more literate. Did you find President Kennedy interested at all in economic issues?

BEALE: Well, he knew--he knew the jargon, you know--he could talk readily about things of that sort, but I don't--I may be wrong, I'm no authority, but I never got the impression that he was really very interested in economics as such. Now I could be quite wrong. Certainly his talk with me was not ever on those lines. He was intensely interested in people, he had a real feeling for history, but I didn't think that he was a man that really regarded himself as an expert in economics. I ought to ask you that question, not you ask me!

ROSTOW: Did he ever discuss with you internal affairs or, for example, the whole question of civil rights.

BEALE: No. No, as an Ambassador, I early came to the conclusion in this country that this was something I shouldn't talk about. That's all. It was a terrible and painful problem; it was a problem that this generation hadn't created; it was a problem that my country would not necessarily have done any better with, if it had had it; and anyhow, it was a painful thing, and I thought it would be an impertinence for an outsider like myself to start canvassing views or

[-13-]

even to welcome discussion on it. Sometimes you do get involved in it because Americans want to talk about it--it's a thing with them and they do want to speak about it, but I never wanted to myself. I'm sad about it too, and too conscious also that a lot of people are trying to do a lot about it. So I never brought it up at those discussions--nor did he. I think once or twice he might have been going to--just a phrase, usually in a saddened note about the problem, but not ever a discussion.

ROSTOW: You mentioned a moment ago that President Kennedy had a lively interest in history. Do you think that it's possible to detect any achievements of his Administration that may stand in history or is it too early even to guess?

BEALE: I shocked a member of the Administration soon after his death. Everybody was very racked and shattered by all this--but in a conversation with a senior member of the cabinet and a friend, I did say--just in passing--I think it's too early to say whether he would have been a great President or how great a President he would have been. And the man's face, who was listening to me, fell straight away, and I realized that what I was trying to say didn't get through. I still believe it is too early to say whether or not he would have been a great President. After all, he'd been there only a short time. But the thing that caught us all was the liveliness, the style, the integrity, and the good will; the promise rather than the actual performance. I'm not qualified on the domestic scene; no, I'm not able to point to any great historic events which would mark him as an epoch-breaking President. I think that Cuba was a great event, the most outstanding one.

ROSTOW: Somebody referred to it as the Gettysburg of the Cold War.

BEALE: I think that might be true. Yes, there's been a great change since then, but the Cold War is not over--nor did Gettysburg close the Civil War, which is what you're really saying. Yes. Cuba was a sort of watershed, and it will go down in history. I think his meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev]--his first meeting with Khrushchev was historic, too. This is not by something he did, but when President Kennedy went to meet Khrushchev in Vienna he came for the first time up

against some of the tough facts of international life. He found Chairman Khrushchev lively and humorous some of the time, but so

[-14-]

unyielding, you know, so unyielding, and so much the ruthless ironhanded head of the communist world that I think this gave the President reason to think hard; and he probably came back a much soberer and much more thoughtful man than when he went. It was an historic event in its way, and it probably caused him to adjust his policies. I know this either from what he told me or what Rusk and others have said--I can't be sure which. It concerns American vital interests. From then on they would emphasize that America, like any other country, must conduct its affairs according to its own vital interests. There are some areas of the world in which her vital interests are so much involved that she would fight World War III about them, if necessary--Berlin would be one, Latin America, Viet Nam, and China would be others; but there are some places that are not--West New Guinea for instance. I remember somebody told me something that Mr. Khrushchev had said to him--"Mr. President, America can't be the gendarme of the world. You may try, but you can't do it, you will fail." I think all this must have impressed him very deeply. Now I might have been irrelevant, because this isn't an answer to your question.

ROSTOW: Yes, yes it is. Did you find any increase in expertise in two years and ten months?

BEALE: Yes, I used to get a little impatient at first--that's too strong a word--but I had a sense that perhaps the problems of our part of the world were being approached in too theoretical a way. Later on, however, I had the impression that those in charge were learning quickly. South Viet Nam is a good case. America has faced up to this one. But there are other areas in which we are even more vitally involved, if that's possible. It is very natural for America to say--we've got problems all around the world, let's not buy into another one if we can avoid it. In consequence there is a temptation to sweep a problem under the rug, or postpone it, or get any sort of settlement or compromise which will get the problem out of the way for the time being. And this, I understand--it is part of the business of being an Ambassador to understand the point of view of the government to which he is accredited--it's very necessary to do that. It's also very necessary not to let your government think that you understand *too* well, or they'll think you've "gone native", as the phrase is. Nevertheless,

[-15-]

I think an Ambassador who is worth his salt has got to understand the point of view of the government, and I can understand yours. At the same time, one always has had to keep bringing the Administration back to the importance of Southeast Asia; to point out--that Europe isn't the only pebble on the beach, Latin America isn't the only place of importance, that maybe what is done about China and the preservation of the other countries of the area is--in terms of what the world's going to be like twenty years hence--more important still

than, say, what's happening in Europe. This sort of thing was one of the frequent matters of discussion between us--between the President and myself sometimes, but more often, with the State Department.

ROSTOW: As you traveled around the country, would you say that there remains much head of steam in isolationism in America in the 1960's?

BEALE: Not much, although I think it's capable of flaring up again in given circumstances. You know more about this than I do, but George Washington warned long ago against foreign entanglements. He was promoting a very sound philosophy for his day, and it's bitten deep into the heart of the American people because George Washington said it. It's irrelevant in 1960 what he said in 1793 or whenever it was, nevertheless he said it, and it's all in your history books and so forth. And then, of course, you had the big German and other migrations from the Continent settling in the Middle West and elsewhere. Many of these had come out to avoid political difficulties there, and they wanted to shake the dust of Europe off their feet and have no more to do with it. And so I can well understand why (except for a few imperialistic adventures in Mexico and elsewhere around your continent)--Americans just wanted to be let alone, didn't want to trouble anybody else or be troubled. This, as I understand it, is how isolationism grew here. But, of course, World War II made nonsense of it, and the intercontinental missile more so, and I don't really think isolationism has any real future in America. I don't believe Americans would have tolerated the hundred and something billion dollars of foreign aid which has been extracted from their pockets if there had been any grave isolationism sentiment. But I do believe it can be whipped up and, therefore, I think that governments and men of good will have got to keep the pressure up.

ROSTOW: Someone said President Kennedy helped make concern with foreign policy respectable. In short, he gave it distinction, status, and this is an anti-isolationist impulse.

[-16-]

BEALE: Yes, he did. He did. He was always moderate, this care not to use the exaggerated phrase which is so terribly difficult for a politician to do, you know, the exciting flamboyant phrase which catches the headlines. Of course, it's a disease politicians are subject to, and you've got to hold yourself in check. And as time went on, after the original anxiety I had about him, I came more and more to appreciate and respect the restraint with which he approached foreign policy questions. You saw it in his press conferences, which were little masterpieces in their way. He occasionally made mistakes, of course, as we all do; but nevertheless, despite pressmen jumping up asking questions, some of them idiotic questions, affording a great opportunity, a great temptation to overstate things, he rarely did so. In one sense he was most un-American in his understatement. I might put it that way, but of course that's not so. You can go right up and down New England and you find people who live by understatement the same as others of us

do; nevertheless, by and large in this country, there's a tendency certainly not, to understate things, and he was a man of understatement.

ROSTOW: Do you think that this in any way explains his popularity abroad that he seemed to a great many people outside, that he seemed less characteristically American and therefore they could identify more readily with him?

BEALE: Well, that's difficult. I don't know "less characteristically American" because that involves perhaps a criticism of the American character and personality that I don't—

ROSTOW: That was intentioned.

BEALE: I won't be in it! But I think his—I think among the English. It's an extraordinary thing among the British how popular he was. This was partly due to his youth, and partly due to the way he spoke, this moderation—they recognized it as their kind of speaking. Yes, I think this is so, certainly in Australia his popularity was extraordinary too, perhaps because we're—we tend to perhaps—we have a slightly ironic, sardonic streak in our national temperament, and we don't believe in overstatement or flattery. In fact, a fellow is suspected right away if he congratulates you or flatters you. I had to get used to

[-17-]

it in this country when I'd make a speech—it might be good, bad or indifferent, but everybody would swarm up to the dais afterwards and say, "Mr. Ambassador, that was a wonderful speech." It was a wonderful this, wonderful that. In my country, all of my audience—it might be a damned good speech but they'd drop dead before they came up and said so, you see. Well, this care about words I think really endeared him to a lot of people outside his own country.

ROSTOW: When we came to the end of his Administration, which was obviously as much a shock to you as it was for any of us, do you recall your first impressions when you heard he had been killed?

BEALE: My wife and I had just been to Chile on a state visit, and we were at luncheon given to us in our honor at the Chilean Embassy. It was a large formal luncheon, and at about a quarter past one we sat down to lunch and then a little while later there was a bustling outside and a messenger came and whispered to Senator Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] who is the Majority Whip. He said, "Oh, my God!" and then shot up and rushed away from the table. Then a little later he came in and told us the news, and you could feel the sense of complete disaster and grief at this table with all sorts of people there—foreigners, Americans, social people and political people—the stunned feeling of grief was really quite shattering for us. And that's how my wife and I

learned about it. And--well, it just grew and grew. I never expected to be so overwhelmed by something outside my own country and family. I think this was partly due to the fact of the assassination of a head of state, but very largely it had to do with him--you know, this sudden obliteration of this young man, this man with such great promise was--well, it hurt us because it was a deprivation for all of us, not merely in America or Australia but right throughout the world, the whole of mankind. I'm sure Russia felt it--the Russians felt it, too. It was so wrong, such a denial of life and hope that this could happen to a young, promising man in a seat of such great eminence. And, of course, it was rendered, all the more painful for us, by the intense publicity which it received. We've never had that sort of an event in history before, before we had television. Now with television it brought it all--the whole terrible business, you know, repeated over and over again and culminating in this awful business of the murder of the assassin. It just simply squeezed the emotions dry. I think I've never quite felt the same since, and I'm sure that many Americans haven't recovered.

[-18-]

ROSTOW: You say it's early to assess the Kennedy Administration except to say that it had promise that was unfulfilled. Were there any lessons that can be drawn from this period or anything that you would care to say about either President Kennedy's nearly three years or your time here in Washington that we haven't covered?

BEALE: Well, I think I've been trying to say that the--I've been trying to say that this young man had style, and there is a lesson to be learned about that, that the American people like style: that literacy, being literate, being able to handle words in the English language (which is a marvelous language when all's said and done) to get your meaning across instead of just grinding out stuff on paper in just about literate English. This way he handled words was the same lesson you learned from Churchill, the way he handled words was half the picture in 1940-41, and President Kennedy had some of that same gift. I would wish that we have more persons--in all our countries, more political leaders who can handle words. I think that's terribly important. You can't have leadership without that. At least you have better leadership when you have it. That's one question. I think more youth--we've had a taste of youth and well, as long as you have knowledge and restraint with it, then let's have more of it--that's another lesson.

ROSTOW: Do you think, too, that the appeal of President Kennedy to the young people was appreciably greater than they feel of many others? The British Ambassador has said that he felt that this was the first American--the first person who could speak to the under-20 generation with any—

BEALE: Politics, traditionally, has been the business of old men or middle-aged men, and by and large it has to be so, for, of course, first of all, men don't usually get into politics unless they've made a success of their life somewhere else and that takes time; and secondly, handling the affairs of a nation needs wisdom and experience and that takes time which you don't get until you're middle-aged as a

rule--and learning about people, tempering the wind to the shorn lamb, you know, governing people, and knowing in the crisis how much they can take and how far you must press them, you know, because they've got their own hopes and dreams and fears and personal tragedies, and therefore you must--you must in governing them adjust yourself to what they can stand. All of this sort of wisdom is usually only acquired by years, and so in

[-20-]

the past it's mostly been men well on in years. Now, we had a young man--just had a young man who didn't have the years but somehow he had learned most of that. I think part of it he had learned because he had been a politician which is a great way to learn. Perhaps I'm an interested party here but it's a great way to learn about tempering the wind to the shorn lamb when you've got 60,000 of these lambs as your electors who will throw you out of office if you don't know about them. I think that part of his gift was the fact that he'd been a Congressman and Senator and knew about people, knew how to win elections. I don't think I've answered your question. Tell me again.

ROSTOW: No; no, I was just trying to see if there were any final comments that should be made about this man as you saw more about this Administration. What about the relations between Australia and the United States? Is there anything in the Kennedy Administration that bears on this either as compared over the past couple of years or for the future? Could we know more about Australia productively?

BEALE: Well, I've been laboring in the vineyard for six years trying to see that you do. No, we've got a good relationship which derives from many sources I suppose, you know, language and a common heritage--comradeship in a couple of wars, a good deal of trading and financial intercourse between us, the fact that we're fresh and young like you makes us attractive. We're a little country and therefore you need have no prickly feelings about us, that you might have about some of the other countries of Europe--makes you feel easier with us. All of this helps and from my own country's point of view, in the great crises and pinches of history in recent times, Australians have always been there when the time came in a couple of wars and Korea. Americans are people who respond very much to that and they've got a great sense of gratitude and understanding that--so, they're pretty well disposed to us. Yes, our relations are good. Kennedy understood this, knew enough about it to talk about it. But I would say this--that a community of interest in all these things is not enough really. You've got to keep working at it all the time. That's what Ambassadors are for, of course. And if you take anybody for granted--if we take you for granted, if you take us for granted--then difficulties crop up because no two countries have identity of interests on everything and inevitably their interests will diverge, and therefore, I think we've all got to keep working very hard at it. This is what you have to do with us as you have to do with every

[-21-]

other country in the world, which is one of the reasons why you've got such a big State Department!

ROSTOW: Thank you very much. It seems to me that this illustrates that two federal structures can understand one another very well and not only that, but that we do have the common interests that you suggest.

BEALE: Well, thank you very much. I think so. I'm leaving this country now after more than six years quite confident that there is a great deal of good will between us. May I also say that I am very grateful for all the kindness that we've had since we've been here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-22-]

Sir Howard Beale Oral History Transcript
Name Index

A

Acheson, Dean G., 12, 13
Auchincloss, Janet Lee Bouvier, 7

C

Churchill, Winston, 8, 19

D

Dillon, C. Douglas, 9
Dulles, John Foster, 10

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 1, 4, 9, 10, 11

K

Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 6, 7
Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12,
13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21
Kennedy, Joseph P., 11, 12
Keynes, John Maynard, 13
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich, 14, 15

M

Macmillan, M. Howard, 12
McNamara, Robert S., 9
Menzies, Robert Gordon, 3, 4, 7, 8

N

Nixon, Richard Milhous, 2, 3

R

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 13
Rusk, Dean, 6, 8, 9, 12, 15

W

Washington, George, 16