

Interview with William Lloyd Stearman

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DR. WILLIAM LLOYD STEARMAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: This is April 15, 1992 and income tax day. This is an interview with William Lloyd Stearman which is being done for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I wonder if you would give me a bit about your background—where you were born and grew up and educated, etc.

US Foreign Service 1950-1978 National Security Council Staff 1971-76, 1981-1993

STEARMAN: I was born in Wichita, Kansas because my father made airplanes. You may have heard of the Stearman trainer in which most of our WWII pilots learned to fly. My father was also the first president of Lockheed Aircraft.

Q: You were born when?

STEARMAN: I was born on June 22, 1922. So, as I said, we built airplanes in Wichita, Kansas which was then the aviation capital of the world, and still is for small aircraft. My father started a company in Northern California so I went to high school in Burlingame graduating in 1940. I started out to be a geophysics engineer going to the Colorado School of Mines. After Pearl Harbor, it was difficult to concentrate at such a demanding college; so I dropped out and tried to get into the Navy Air Corps, but failed the physical because

Library of Congress

of an ear problem and then went into the V-12 program. This was a program for people who were in college. The Navy wanted to keep them there until they finished. I was at Berkeley at the time and finished up there in an accelerated program in the fall of 1943, as a math major and history minor. I transferred to Berkeley because it was a lot easier than the Colorado School of Mines. It was a piece of cake by comparison.

Early in 1944 I was commissioned an ensign having attended midshipmen school at Columbia University and was assigned to amphibious training at Little Creek, Virginia and went out on the USS LSM 67 to the Southwest Pacific where I was in the first wave of seven assault landings.

Q: Where were they?

STEARMAN: The Philippines in 1944 and 1945 and Borneo in 1945—I was with the Australian Ninth Division in Borneo. We would take tanks in with the first assault waves. We were also operating in New Guinea, but made no assault landings there. We were under General MacArthur, of course, at that time. We were to be in the first wave of the first landing on Kyushu, November 1, 1945...

Q: That was Operation Olympic.

STEARMAN: As the ship's communications (and gunnery) officer, I picked up the operations plan and when I looked at the intelligence report I got sick to my stomach because they (the Japanese) had, among other things, 5,000 Kamikaze planes with which to attack us. We were going in with the first wave and there was no way we could have survived it. In reality they had 7,500 Kamikaze planes. We got our orders in the middle of July, 1945 and we were all convinced that we weren't going to survive it. When off-duty, we were drunk as much of the time as we could possibly be. Then the A bombs were dropped in August and the war ended, it was like being on death row and then given a reprieve.

Library of Congress

Q: Many people forget how an awful lot of people felt about those atomic bombs. It really did save a lot of lives, both Japanese and American.

STEARMAN: Oh, hundreds of thousands of lives. There would have been hundreds of thousands killed on both sides. The Japanese lost according to UN figures 105,000 in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Of course many times more Japanese would have been killed if we had landed in Kyushu and fought all the way through the mainland. And God only knows how many Americans would have died. It would have been the worst slaughter, I think, in military history.

As I say, we were the sacrificial lambs. We knew what Kamikaze could do. Two of the six ships in our group were sunk by two Kamikazes off West of Leyte in December, 1944. There would have been several Kamikaze per ship going in the first day. There was just no way that we could have survived it. Eventually when they had used up the Kamikazes, we would have started getting in, but the first wave would have been mostly wiped out.

Our ship stayed out in the Philippines after the war moving Philippine constabulary forces around to various islands to cope with the budding Huk insurgency.

Q: The Huks were?

STEARMAN: The Huks were communist insurgents. At the time I hadn't heard of them, but later they became a well known problem in the Philippines.

We got back to the States in January 1946, and I had to take command of the ship because all the officers above me had enough "points" to get out of the Navy. I may have been the youngest ship captain in the Navy. I was 23 and had command of a 1,000 ton ship with five officers and 55 men.

Q: What kind of a ship was it?

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STEARMAN: It was a landing ship designed to carry tanks with the first assault waves. It was a regular seagoing ship and about the size of the old four stack destroyers which we had in World War I (like the Caine in the "Caine Mutiny"). So I had to take over that ship in the midst of the great demobilization, which was a hair raising experience. I won't burden you with all the details, but I almost lost it at sea, it almost sank. We couldn't get any repairs. My best trained people were constantly being pulled off, as they had enough points to get out of the service. I had to take the ship through the Panama Canal without a pilot, probably the only time it has ever been done, because the pilot wouldn't accept responsibility for it. I knocked down a pier in Jacksonville, Florida because the engines wouldn't reverse. I finally got rid of the LSM 67 in Charleston, South Carolina. By then I was a broken old man smoking up to five packs of cigarettes a day. Everything has been a piece of cake since then.

Then I went to Geneva to graduate school taking international studies.

Q: What spurred you to do that?

STEARMAN: I wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I had started out at the beginning of the war wanting to be an engineer but then the war got me interested in world affairs. In fact, I had always been inordinately interested in world affairs. I decided foreign affairs had got me into this war and I wanted to know how they worked and how I could play a role. I was going to take the Foreign Service exam and went to Old State, now the old Executive Office Building, and discussed it with them. But I had very little background, having taken only math, science and engineering, and I didn't really know enough to pass the exam. There were no graduate programs in foreign affairs in this area in those days, and Geneva's Graduate School of International Studies was highly recommended to me.

Q: Also there was the GI Bill which had a certain attraction for getting out and away.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: It was an ideal set up, and we could live all right on the GI Bill. In fact, in Geneva we used various legal, currency manipulations to supplement our income.

Q: I remember talking to people who played a game running from one bank to another.

STEARMAN: We had only to go from one window to another. Swiss accounts were blocked because they were intertwined with some German accounts (which the U.S. had frozen), so in order to get access to dollar instruments a bank would sell you a traveler's checks for 3 Francs 50 centimes and you could take them to the next window and sell them for 4 Francs 50 centimes. We were making up to \$300 a month that way which was a lot of money in those days. It was twice the salary of a second lieutenant.

It was a fascinating time. We had students from East and West Europe, because Geneva was an international meeting place. The Institute was an eyeopener. For example, early on there was a seminar on Yugoslavia and there, sitting around the table, were former Ustashi, Partisani and Czechniks, who had been trying to kill each other a year and a half before. It almost developed into another war. In fact, the professor who was leading the seminar had to threaten to call in the police to break it up. But that was fascinating for somebody who had very little knowledge of that part of the world. I learned a great deal from my fellow students there.

Q: Particularly the currents that were going on, particularly in Eastern Europe, that one is blithely unaware of until all of a sudden they hit the headlines, as they have in the last year or two. Most Americans just aren't aware of these enmities.

STEARMAN: That is right. Even to this day, but especially right after the war, if you weren't in that theater. One read very little about events there.

One of my classmates, for example, was the daughter of the state secretary of finance in Hungary who later had to flee. It was just an extremely interesting time to be in Europe, right after the war, and being able to travel around a good bit and see what was going

Library of Congress

on. One got a feeling, which is hard to recapture, of great uncertainty about what was going to happen, because the Soviets were in the ascendancy at that time, and Europe was in extremely bad shape. There were very large, militant communist parties in Italy and France. As a graduate student in Europe, as you know, you more or less set your own program, so after about a year as a student, I started out as a correspondent for Mutual Broadcasting Systems just doing spots covering the UN in Geneva and some work for the New York Times. Then, when I finished my masters and started working on my doctorate, I also started covering Eastern Europe for MBS. I only had to come back to Geneva for seminars, having gotten straight A's in my masters exams which exempted me from most additional class work, except for seminars for which I mostly presented parts of my dissertation. So I started covering Eastern Europe for Mutual (1945-1950) and it was fascinating. I saw it go down the tubes.

Q: What was your initial impression as a young lieutenant out of the Pacific about the Soviet forces and conditions? How did this change for you the more you saw during this period from 1946-50?

STEARMAN: Well you were immediately aware of the threat the Soviets posed. It was not hypothetical. You were there. You knew people who were suffering because of it. I worked out of Vienna at that time and, of course, after 1949, all foreign correspondents were kicked out of Eastern Europe and had to work out of Vienna.

My favorite city was Prague before the communists took over. I had a girl friend there and other friends. When the communists took over in February, 1948, I had difficulty getting back in, but finally did some months later and found Prague transformed. There was an unbelievable change. You had to have experienced it to believe it. Previously, people had felt fairly free, although the communists already had a good bit of power behind the scenes, more than the people realized. But you could buy any publication you wanted, and people weren't guarded in their speech; moreover, they had no problem with associating with Americans. When I went back, it was a totally changed situation. It wasn't safe for my

Library of Congress

friends to associate with me. I had to break off with my girlfriend to keep her and her family out of trouble. It was a terribly depressing thing. People I knew were arrested and put in solitary confinement.

I started courting a young Austrian aristocrat, whom I subsequently married, and who lived outside of Vienna in the Soviet Zone. I had to go down there disguised as a Swiss correspondent because Americans weren't allowed to go there. That was usually a hair raising experience. Also people were being snatched off the streets of Vienna, even in the American Sector, by the Russians.

All of this really gave me quite an insight as to what communism was all about.

Q: How receptive was Mutual Broadcasting System to this? The United States is somewhat slow, in general...we had been the great ally of the Soviets and it took quite a few shocks to change it. Did you have trouble sending reports with them saying, "Oh, this is more of the same thing?"

STEARMAN: Not really. I really didn't have much problem getting on the air.

I did a weekly column for several small papers in California in order to keep up my writing skills. I didn't intend to make a career of being a correspondent, my goal was always to go into the Foreign Service. I joined the Foreign Service, actually, in Vienna, at our Legation there in 1950. Truman was President. So I have served under almost a quarter of all the Presidents we have ever had in our whole history.

Q: You were in Austria from 1950-53. What were you doing there?

STEARMAN: Actually I spent a lot of time in Austria from 1948 on. I was transferred to Berlin in 1955. I had a fascinating job in Vienna. I was in the political section and represented the U.S. in a subcommittee of the Political Directorate dealing and negotiating with the Soviets. I did that for four and a half years. I also started something which became

Library of Congress

quite an operation, to help both our people and correspondents to report on Eastern Europe. I set up my own sort of peripheral reporting operation. There was a classified and an unclassified part. The unclassified part I made available to the press. I would say at one time that little office, with a very small staff, was, at any given time, the source of about a third of everything that appeared in the non-communist press in the world on Eastern Europe.

Q: How did that operate? Where did you get your information?

STEARMAN: I set up a little FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) operation. We got newspapers from our various legations and embassies behind the Iron Curtain. I had a small staff of people who translated interesting press items. We also did some radio monitoring. In addition, we had an unbelievable source of intelligence and information. Because of a Four Power arrangement, there was agreement that all communications going outside of Austria to any foreign country would be monitored by all four powers who got transcripts of everything, letters, telephone conversations, and telegrams. So we got copies of all of this coming out of Eastern Europe. Then we had many refugee interrogation reports. I would take these items and sanitize them. I would delete the names of all the parties on both ends or anything that would identify them. But the information was still there and now being unclassified, could be used by correspondents or anyone else.

Then I set up an unclassified archive. This was useful not only to the media, but also to government agencies like VOA, etc. For example, there was a mine accident in Hungary, the AP wanted to report on it, so they sent over a messenger, and I gave him a file on mining in Hungary, most of it from Hungarian sources. With all this material they could do an in-depth story, after which the file was returned.

Every single day of the year, Reuters' worldwide service carried at least one piece from us on events in Eastern Europe. It was a shoestring operation, cost the USG practically nothing and was remarkably successful.

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Q: Did you think what you were doing was appreciated by the powers-to-be in Austria and back in Washington? Did they understand how useful this was?

STEARMAN: Not fully, because it was so unorthodox. The main reason I did this was because correspondents were trying to cover Eastern Europe from Vienna, and I realized that if they could be helped, it could substantially increase the coverage and knowledge of Eastern Europe. But bureaucrats have little appreciation for unorthodox procedures and operations—I am sure you have found that out a long time ago—this operation was well known in Vienna, and it was widely called the “Stearman Service” by unhappy authorities in Eastern Europe. It was giving them problems.

Q: Speaking of the Soviets, you worked for four and a half years dealing with them in trying to settle issues. What kind of issues were you working on and how did you find one dealt with this group of officials?

STEARMAN: That is a very good question. You learn a lot in that length of time about how to deal with the Soviets. I came up with what I call an original Stearmanism: You had to be precise, patient, perseverant and powerful to deal with the Soviets. This required an enormous amount of patience. I remember once arguing for six hours on whether there should be a comma or hyphen between two words which would substantially change the whole meaning of the sentence. But you have to slug it out with them and be persistent. I would come in with a couple of bottles of soda water...I was a pipe smoker then and would also pull out three or four pipes, and they knew I was settled in for the day. They would try to wear you down. But you have to persevere and also be precise. Most of the problems we had dealing with Soviets were the result of imprecision in agreements that we concluded with them. They were not bad about observing the exact letter of agreements, I will say that, but we were very sloppy in the way in which we formulated a lot of agreements.

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I never realized what our problem was until at one point I was going to buy a house here in Georgetown and I looked at the contract as if I were dealing with Russians. I rewrote the whole thing because I thought there were a lot of loopholes in the contract, even though it was written by lawyers. As a result, I lost the house. I later asked a lawyer how the real estate lawyers could draft a contract with so many loopholes in it. He replied, "Well, we have a concept in English common law called equity. These things are resolved through the concept of equity. We don't have to dot all the i's and cross all the t's." I then realized where we had gone wrong. The people who draft these treaties and agreements are our friends from L for the most part.

Q: "L" being the Legal Division of the Department of State.

STEARMAN: They are lawyers trained in the American concept of English common law with its principle of equity. So, I believe, they didn't think they had to dot all the i's and cross all the t's, but dealing with the Soviets, you had to; so it was finally revealed to me much later what our problem had probably been all along.

Here are specific examples of how precision can work for us and imprecision against us. Our access to Berlin was never spelled out in great detail because it was assumed that, if we were going to have a sector of occupation in Berlin, obviously we would have a right of access to it. This was thinking in American legal terms. This imprecision, however, made it easier for the Soviets to impose a blockade in 1948 because technically they weren't violating any written agreement. We did, however, have an agreement on air access, for reasons I never fully understood, which was a detailed, good agreement. This may be one of the reasons the Soviets didn't try to block air access to Berlin in 1948. General Clay's people dealt with that situation in Berlin. Clay thought detailed agreements on Berlin would be too restrictive.

But as far as Vienna was concerned we took the opposite approach. We had one of the brightest general officers in the US Army, Alfred Gruenther.

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Q: He was later chief of NATO.

STEARMAN: Exactly. He took the opposite approach. He really crossed the t's and dotted the i's as far as access to Vienna was concerned. This may well be why we didn't really have the access and other problems with the Soviets we had in Berlin. We did have a few minor problems with the Soviets trying to interfere with access, but we could always nail them because we had such a tight access agreement.

At one point early on, they were stopping and boarding our train...the Mozart Express which ran between Vienna and Salzburg in the American Zone. In early 1946, the American High Commissioner told the Soviet High Commissioner that they must cease and desist from doing this. Once, in January, 1946, when the train had to stop in the Soviet Zone to take on water, a party of Soviet troops boarded headed by a senior lieutenant and two enlisted men. That car was guarded by Tech Sergeant Shirley B. Dixon of Toledo, Ohio, who ordered them to get off the train and stay off. One of the officers made the mistake of reaching for his revolver and Dixon beat him to the draw and shot and killed him, badly wounded another soldier and the other Soviets ran away. That was the last time they tried to board a U.S. train in Austria.

We had also some early interference with air access to Vienna because that was not spelled out in as great detail as it was with Berlin. Our High Commissioner said that if there was any further interference with U.S. flights, we were going to escort all our planes with fighter aircraft ordered to shoot down interfering aircraft. Soviet air interference immediately ceased.

Now, this all demonstrated how to deal with the Soviets. We had many tests of will. One had to be tough. You have to have at least the willpower, if not actually military power, which, in our case, was evaporating rapidly as you know. By 1947, the West didn't have one single combat ready infantry division in Western Europe. We had only constabulary forces. By 1947, all the Red Army needed to reach the English Channel were shoes, as

Library of Congress

the wags were wont to say. All of this is germane to what we were discussing because that was the atmosphere which was one of the overweening Soviet military strength in Europe. We did not have the feeling that the atom bomb gave us that much of an advantage. I learned many years later that we had no atom bombs at that time, and I believe the Soviets knew that.

Q: I think we were all a little overconfident, but we really didn't have any.

STEARMAN: From Nagasaki to rather late 1947, we had no atom bombs at all. We assembled two for tests on Bikini Atoll in 1946, but apart from that, we had no assembled atom bombs in our inventory. The United States in 1947 did not have one combat ready infantry division, nor one combat ready Air Force wing. We had gone from 13 million in uniform in 1945 to 1.7 million in twenty months. So we unilaterally disarmed. This weakness was felt in Europe and was, I believe, one of the factors that encouraged the communists to take over Czechoslovakia.

Q: What was the atmosphere at the embassy? What did people think of Soviet intentions?

STEARMAN: We didn't think that their intentions were very benign as far as we and the rest of the West was concerned. There was considerable worry. When the Marshall Plan was announced and agreed to, the Soviets waged war against it by forming the Cominform in 1947 and by fomenting strikes, riots and disturbances in France and Italy through the local communist parties. That was a very, very disturbing time.

Q: Were you looking towards the elections in Italy in 1948?

STEARMAN: That was a turning point and was extremely important. Many of us went down for that. The Christian Democrats won, but the Communist Party was extremely strong. The Communists, in a way, had blotted their copy book, by so obviously acting as Soviet catpaws and by trying, principally for political reasons, to carry out actions mainly aimed at overthrowing the government. The concept of the Marshall Plan was a popular

Library of Congress

one because these countries were in such terrible shape. The Communists in France and Italy didn't cover themselves with glory and their putsch attempts had largely fizzled by the end of January, 1948. Then the Soviet offensive against Western Europe had failed. The Soviets then began to be concerned about holding on to that over which they had already established hegemony. The events of 1948 can be read as a process of consolidation. This began in February, 1948 with the Prague coup, which was engineered in large measure behind the scenes by the Soviets. The Czechs had initially accepted the Marshall Plan. I happened to be in Prague in June, 1947 when the Czechs were told that they had to withdraw from it. That was the first time most Czechs realized how much influence the Soviets still had. Stalin was no doubt convinced that he had to get Czechoslovakia under tighter control. Then you had Soviet pressure on Tito to allow the infiltration of his institutions by the NKVD and also to set up joint stock companies as had been done in Romania. At that time, Tito was actually the most militant communist leader in Europe, was very loyal to Moscow and the one who was giving us the most problems...

Q: Shooting down our planes.

STEARMAN: You are right. A couple of our planes were shot down near Trieste, two unarmed transport planes. His troops went into Austria, and we and the Brits were about to do battle with them when Stalin told him to pull the troops out of Austria. He was the idol of the young left throughout Western Europe. Left-oriented students, especially young women, even built little altars to Tito. He had this international railroad and all these kids...

Q: They were working on the railroad and the road there too.

STEARMAN: Yes, it was the international youth railroad to Sarajevo. A fellow student, who was the daughter of the President of the Chase Manhattan Bank, got pneumonia there from sleeping in unheated box-cars.

Q: Well, a Foreign Service officer, Owen Roberts, worked on it.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Tito had great appeal. He was a real activist, aggressive and, in a way, more Stalinist than Stalin. Then, as you know, he was thrown out of the Cominform in June, 1948.

I was on the Orient Express going to Vienna and in the compartment next to me was Jacques Duclos, who was head of the French Communist Party and was going to the conference in Bucharest that excommunicated Tito. Try as I would, I couldn't get in to see him. He had a six foot three body guard who kept us all away from him.

I was in Prague just after Tito's excommunication and there he was a big hero. The Yugoslav student brigades which had been in Czechoslovakia, were marching around and everywhere were greeted with flowers and cheers. This was one way the Czechs could defy Moscow.

Then there was also Soviet pressure on Finland in February, 1948. About the time of the excommunication of Tito the Soviets began the full imposition of the Berlin blockade, which had started piecemeal six months earlier.

There is an interesting little sidelight to this. As you know, there has been a long standing debate as to whether the blockade could have been broken with ground forces. Clay wanted to go in with tanks before we resorted to an airlift. Truman ruled this out; however, Clay may have been proven right by an interesting little incident that occurred in 1948 on the border between the British and Soviet Zones of Austria. Just before the Berlin blockade, the Soviets began imposing new restrictions on British troop transit from their zone in southern Austria to Vienna. The Soviets insisted on IDs with photographs, which apparently the British didn't have. So they started to prevent the British from going up to Vienna. I believe, they were going to see if the Brits could be intimidated, and if so, they would later try it with the Americans. Anyway, that is my conjecture.

Library of Congress

The first time they were challenged by the Soviets, the British turned back. The second time, however, they came up with a long convoy of troops in battle dress and tin hats, to the Soviet barrier with the British captain in charge in the cab of the lead truck. Again the Soviets raised the identification issue and refused to let them through. The captain then came out to the side of the column and commanded, "Fix bayonets!" and all up and down the line there was the click, click of bayonets being fixed to rifles. Then he walked up to the Soviet barrier, lifted it and the convoy went through without further incident. That was the last time the Soviets tried to block a British convoy.

This incident tends to lead one to believe that if we had tried that on the ground in Germany, we probably could have gotten away with it. One has to bear in mind that we did not know, in 1948, how weak the Soviets were or the extent to which they had been bled white in the war. We did not yet know the extent of the vast destruction in the USSR. We had, for example, only a very vague idea of how many people in the Soviet Union were killed because at that time the official Soviet figure was something between 6 and 8 million. The latest figure is now 28 million killed.

Q: When you think of it, they could have marched to the Channel but couldn't have done anything.

STEARMAN: They, having suffered so much in the war, didn't want to risk war with anybody. I once asked Tommy Thompson, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, one of our most famous Sovietologists, why the Soviets didn't try harder to make a satellite out of Finland? He said he thought Stalin was convinced the Finns would go to war with them a third time. Remember the winter war in 1939-40 when Finland, then with a population of less than 4 million, inflicted such heavy losses on the Red Army?

Q: They barely won.

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STEARMAN: The Soviets barely won and took tremendous casualties. In 1940, they didn't even want to take a chance of fighting Finland. Of course, this also might have made Sweden drop its neutrality and side with the West. Mostly, the Soviets just didn't want to fight anybody. They could have marched to the Channel but that would have gotten them into some kind of hostility with us, the British and the French. They would have won, granted, but they would have been in a major war again. We just had no idea how reluctant they were to get into any war. Had we known in 1948 how badly the Soviets had been bled in World War II, and had we somewhat more troops at our disposal, I think history might have been quite different.

All of this was going on in 1948 and, of course, so was the Berlin airlift which I and nearly everybody else thought wouldn't work. Feed 2,250,000 Berliners by air? You have to be kidding? We had only those C-47 "gooniebirds" in those days.

Q: Well, they were using C-54s.

STEARMAN: They started bringing those in later but we started off with the C-47s. The Air Force was very reluctant to get involved in an airlift because they didn't want to tie up most of their transport aircraft which also had to have fighter escorts available in case anything happened. It was to everyone's amazement that it worked. That set the Soviets back quite a bit in terms of prestige. After the blockade ended in May 1949, they then went over to a kind of detente policy.

Q: Most of the time you were there the Cold War was in full sway. There was no doubt what our goal was, it was to stop the Soviets. Is that correct?

STEARMAN: Always. And the closer you were to it, the larger loomed the threat. In Vienna we were 100 miles behind the Iron Curtain and surrounded by Soviet forces who were active in all sorts of nefarious ways throughout Vienna, even in the American Sector...One

Library of Congress

event that really had enormous impact in Europe, I think more than most people now appreciate, was outbreak of the Korean War.

Q: Starting June 25, 1950.

STEARMAN: Many people thought that the attack on South Korea was a gambit in a worldwide Soviet offensive and that they were going to do something in Europe. Europe would come next. We had people in the Legation in Vienna who sent their wives and children to France, Spain, etc. to get them into Western Europe and out of Vienna. I sent most of my possessions back to my parents in the U.S. There was a great feeling of uncertainty. We didn't realize that Korea was an aberration. I have long believed that the Korean attack probably wasn't primarily Stalin's idea, that he gave the green light to Kim Il Sung thinking that taking South Korea would be a piece of cake, that we wouldn't do anything about it and that it would be over within a short time. That is, I believe, how the Soviets calculated that we had pretty much written off South Korea in several ways. MacArthur in March, 1949 left it outside of our defense perimeter and Acheson in 1950 did the same thing. Moreover, by June 1949, we had pulled out all our troops, except for an assistance group.

Q: Dulles, I think, also made a statement when he was Special Assistant.

STEARMAN: And we almost cut off economic assistance too. When you look at all these things, the Soviets had to think the Americans didn't really care about South Korea; therefore, when Kim Il Sung asked if the Soviets would back an attack, Stalin probably said something like, "Be my guest."

Q: Did you feel it in Vienna?

STEARMAN: Oh, yes. There was a great feeling of uncertainty and feeling that the Soviets might strike there next. An attack may be imminent.

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Q: What about when the United States went in, how was that received by our Legation?

STEARMAN: From a psychological point of view it would have been infinitely worse if we had not, and South Korea had been taken rapidly. As it was, we almost lost anyway, even though we went in very soon after the attack, as you recall.

Q: Are we going to do it or not?

STEARMAN: So we acted fairly rapidly. That was enormously important for the Western Europeans, to a degree which I think is still very little appreciated in the U.S. Had we not intervened then, the Europeans could well have concluded that they couldn't rely on the Americans, and that the Russians can go in anywhere and the Americans won't lift a finger. So it was very important from the European's point of view, what we did.

Q: Did the mission that you were part of change while you were there? Was it first military and then became more diplomatic?

STEARMAN: Yes. Initially it was a military high commission. The legation was really an integral part of the US High Commissioner's organization. He was High Commissioner for all of Austria. The legation was sort of a political component of the US High Commission. It was commanded by a general at that time. By General Keyes at that time, and previously by General Clark. Then in 1952 or '53, we became an embassy. The High Commissioner then became a civilian, Walter J. Donnelly, who became Ambassador.

Q: Did that change your method of operation?

STEARMAN: Somewhat. The military has different ways of doing things, and I think there was somewhat more political sophistication in our approach to things. But you also have to bear in mind a very important thing that happened shortly thereafter. I have incidentally written a book about Soviet policy towards Austria, which is in the Georgetown University library.

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Q: What is the name of the book?

STEARMAN: "The Soviet Union and the Occupation of Austria" which is still being quoted thirty years later. It was originally my Ph.D. dissertation which I turned into a book.

Shortly, thereafter, Stalin died. He died on March 5, 1953, and things started to change. Fairly soon interesting things started to happen. They embarked then on their second detente campaign as a reaction to our Korean buildup.

Q: And NATO was finally organized.

STEARMAN: As a result of Korea, NATO became a military organization, prior to that it was a political organization and didn't have any military structure. As a result of the Korean War, our defense budget went from \$12.7 billion in a year to \$50 billion. Then we deployed several divisions of combat troops to Europe. We set up a NATO High Command, with Eisenhower the first Supreme Allied Commander, and it became a military organization for the first time. And then, of course, there were efforts to bring the Germans in somehow, and all of that story.

Work kind of changed, and we were making somewhat more progress with the Soviets because they became somewhat more reasonable in this detente period. Things happened that never happened before. Agreement was reached with them on various issues that had been difficult or impossible to resolve before. Ultimately, and this was a keystone of that whole detente operation, they agreed to sign a state treaty for Austria on terms much better for Austria than they were willing to accept a year before. That treaty was signed May 14, 1955 and the following...no wait, it was on May 15, because on May 14, the day before, they formed the Warsaw Pact to give them a legitimate reason to maintain troops in Hungary and Romanian. They are very legalistic and they felt if they hadn't done that why they wouldn't have had any legal reason to maintain troops in

Library of Congress

Romania and Hungary. (The Soviets had previously justified keeping troops in these two countries as “line of communication” units supporting Soviet forces in Austria.)

That was really the high point of the detente which was soon to have quite an impact on the cohesion of NATO. The Soviets did a number of other things: a rapprochement with Tito; giving up their naval base at Porkkala in Finland, and Dairen and Port Arthur in China, and the Khrushchev-Bulganin goodwill tours. The Soviet image was changing radically and this was having an effect in the West. One of the early effects was having the Icelandic parliament “in view of the changed situation”, ask us to remove our forces and bases from Iceland. There were also other evidences of the breakdown of the NATO cohesion. And then the whole detente which was working so beautifully went down the tubes as a result of the Hungarian Revolution.

Q: October, 1956.

STEARMAN: October, 1956. I got involved in that.

Q: Before we move to that I want to go back a little. What were our concerns when the Soviets began to loosen up? Did you feel that the communist movement sponsored by the Soviets had taken like a vaccination in the Soviet Zone, or was it pretty well assumed that once they left they were out of it? Were they going to be leaving cadres behind in order to have popular support?

STEARMAN: They had zero popular support. They actually agreed to free elections in November, 1945 and got only five percent of the vote to their utter astonishment. They had set up a provisional government, too, in which they had a lot of control...control of the police as well as the ministry of interior. They had no idea in the world that they were going to get wiped out to the extent they did. The same thing happened about the same time in Hungary. They had free elections and got 15 percent of the vote—the combined communist and socialist vote. The Small Holders party got 75 percent of the vote. They were anti-communist. The Soviets finally took care of them by arresting the secretary

Library of Congress

general of the party in February, 1947 and the party fell apart. Austria posed a more difficult case, since it was under Four Power control, and the people were totally opposed to the communists who never got more than five percent in an election.

Q: While you were there we were still going through the Denazification period in Austria. Did we follow through on that or let up after the war?

STEARMAN: We carried out Denazification there just about to the extent that we did in Germany. It was remarkable considering we always regarded Austria the "first victim of Nazi aggression." But the percentage of Austrians in the Nazi party was about as great as in Germany. It was annexed at that time. I will say this, I think a point ought to be made that the Nazis never got more than 16 percent of the vote in any free election in Austria. I don't think they would have ever got more than 20 percent under any circumstances. Also, probably not more than a third would ever have voted for an Anschluss. Schuschnigg was putting that to a vote in March, 1938 which prompted Hitler to march in to prevent that vote. Then he had his own final vote after the country had been occupied. Then it was all over.

Many people welcomed Hitler when he came into Vienna, filling the (Helden platz) square where he made a speech. That probably accounted for about 150,000 people. Greater Vienna then had a population of over 2 million. I know the situation fairly well because I married into an Austrian family. They were anti-Nazi as were most of the aristocrats. To them the Nazi's strength was in the worse part of the population, called the "black coated proletariat." As it turned out my father-in-law, and I didn't know this until after I had been married, saved a number of Jews because he was the director of a plant that had branches in Hungary, Slovakia and Austria. He could move people around and save them. But he never mentioned this. He had been a naval officer in the old Imperial Navy and hated people who went around saying how they had helped the Jews, etc., often such people had been notorious Nazis. So I had to find this out from other people. He risked his

Library of Congress

life. I had never thought of him before as a person who had much civil courage. You can never tell about people.

It was a very mixed picture in Austria, and some of the worst Nazis were Austrians. My wife told me stories of the “Kristallnacht” of November, 1938. For example, there was a Jewish couple who ran a little shoe store in Modling, a small suburb where my wife's family lived, and the Nazis made the couple sit in the window of their store while people broke the windows and stole shoes out of the store, a lot of “respectable” burghers grabbed shoes out of the window and store. She said there were a lot of really nasty episodes like that.

Q: What about our dealings with the French and the British while you were there? How did the joint occupation work?

STEARMAN: That's a very good question. Most of the time we would work out an Allied position. We tried to keep our positions coordinated and present as much of a solid front as possible. Earlier on, the French were not too keen about working with us and tried to maintain a certain amount of independence. They were much more tolerant of some of the things the Soviets were trying to get away with. The Brits, generally speaking, were very solidly on our side. In fact, when I was stationed in other places in Europe, the Brits were always very close allies. This broke down during the Suez War in the fall of 1956. That was a major rupture of the Alliance and close ties we had with the Brits. Normally I worked very closely with them. I was often personal friends with my British colleagues. But I also worked fairly harmoniously with my French colleagues. I spoke fairly decent French in those days and that always helps with the French. I would say that generally it was three to one, but with the French more apt to opt out and do their own thing.

Q: Did you become part of USIA while you were in Austria?

STEARMAN: That is a very sore point. It is a long and boring story. I came in as an FSSO political officer in the State Department. I was told that really what I should do was to go back to the Department and get a higher level GS grade and then come back as a higher

Library of Congress

ranking FSSO or FSR, or whatever, until I got up to a certain level and then “lateral in” as an FSO. You probably never heard of FSSOs.

Q: They were generally specialists.

STEARMAN: Foreign Service Staff Officers is what they were. Well, you had to take almost the same exam including a language exam. It was not much different from the Foreign Service exam. As it turned out, I made one of the bigger mistakes in my life. I was going to outwit the system as a number of people had succeeded in doing, but I wound up being host with my own petard.

Well, what happened is that when USIA was created in 1953, I was part of the political section, as I told you, but then I had set up this operation which was servicing the press, our information people, and a number of substantive people as well. That operation was, alas, given to USIA and me along with it. At the time I said, “What the hell, this will all blow over and is temporary.” Well, every time that I would try to move back to State and lateral in, something would happen. There were several nearly successful efforts. At one time, the papers had all gone in and were just about to be signed by whoever made the final decision when there was a freeze. I won't bore you with this, but suffice it to say that I never spent a single day in USIA ever. I had some assignments that were kind of quasi USIA, but I never had a typical USIA assignment. So I was in a strange, indeed unique, situation.

Finally I again had everything all set up. I was then in SOV and had orders to go to Hamburg as deputy principal officer under Coburn Kidd, who was going to retire, and I thought I had a fair chance of taking over a consulate general bigger than most of our embassies. It was a 35-officer post. I knew a lot of people in Hamburg and was bilingual in German. The papers were going ahead for my lateral entry and everything was right on track. I was thinking that I was finally getting free of USIA which, to be perfectly honest, I always held in rather low regard. I think it was a big mistake to have created it in the first

Library of Congress

place. What ruined the Information Service was losing the FSO political officers. They left, of course, some after it was created. I was a holdover because I wasn't an FSO. So I always had wanted to get out of it and felt it should have been abolished as an agency of the government, and still think so.

But anyway I was all set and I was then asked to go to Saigon to work for JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office) which was directed by a USIA officer. Well, again, I wound up in a billet which had little to do with normal USIS work.

Q: This was in 1965.

STEARMAN: I was in charge of psychological operations against North Vietnamese forces there. I worked more with the political section than I did with JUSPAO. I did not have a very high regard for JUSPAO, to be perfectly honest.

Q: JUSPAO was basically in charge of the USIA operation, mainly the press liaison office in Vietnam.

STEARMAN: Well, I didn't have anything to do with that, of course. I became a specialist on North Vietnam, a substantive specialist because I was charged...

Q: Well, let's go back and pick this up later on.

STEARMAN: Okay, but that was a sore point because I never spent a day in USIA and don't care for the organization. I always worked in the State Department or the White House back here.

Q: You left Austria just about at the time the Peace Treaty was signed.

STEARMAN: I left just before it was signed and went up to Berlin as a political officer for RIAS, which was a position that was created after the Berlin uprising in 1953. RIAS played a large and important role in spreading the uprising in East Germany in 1953 which

Library of Congress

had started in East Berlin. RIAS, only by simply describing what was going on, in large measure helped spread it.

Q: RIAS standing for?

STEARMAN: For Radio in American Sector. It was an American station broadcasting to East Germany in German, of course. That was a fascinating job. I went up there in February, 1955, at a time when most of us in the political section in our embassy in Vienna were anticipating that the Soviets would partition Austria. The line that they were taking led us to believe that they were going to partition Austria. Well, that was psychological warfare that they were conducting and then not long after that they made the concessions that made the agreement possible. That all happened afterwards.

Then I went up to become the political program officer at RIAS, which was an incredibly interesting job. At RIAS one got to know an incredible amount about East Germany because we had daily contacts with people from all over East Germany who would come in and tell us what was going on.

Q: What was the staffing of RIAS like? Where was its funding, direction and staffing coming from?

STEARMAN: It was funded entirely by the U.S. at that time, now it is entirely funded by Germany. It is still in existence. There were four U.S. officers in the Foreign Service who were all from USIA at that time. Then you had a very good German staff, a crackerjack German staff. Of course, we had the political broadcasts of which I was in charge of vetting to make sure they didn't counteract our policy objectives. But you also had things like the school program. We completely duplicated the whole East German curriculum on social studies. On the day they would, for example, be studying a certain period in their secondary schools on, say, the Weimar Republic, RIAS would cover the exact same subject that evening from a non-Marxist-Leninist point of view.

Library of Congress

Q: You paralleled the East German?

STEARMAN: We paralleled the East German education all the way from the first grade up to, and including, the university. Of course, for the universities you had to take a different route because they didn't have a standard daily curriculum. But we got the daily school plans for all levels of public school from first grade up to what would be the first two years of university in our system, so we could duplicate what they were doing. We didn't bother with natural science, math or other non-political subjects. We covered only politicized subjects.

We had special programs for farmers warning them how to avoid traps that would lead to their farms being collectivized. We advised what to do when the secret police came around to arrest people and what steps to take if you were about to be arrested. A whole host of things; basically how to cope in general with the system.

We gave the communists a lot of heartburn. They were always seeking ways to get rid of RIAS. It was an exceptionally effective operation. I really think it had much to do with sustaining a frame of mind which ultimately led to the overthrow of the communist regime.

Q: Now, you had these riots in Berlin in 1953. I recall this vividly because I was an airman in the cadre first to serve down in Darmstadt. We were kept within the barracks because we weren't quite sure what was going to happen that time. But there was no move into East Germany at that time. Were you sort of under instructions as you were monitoring not to make promises that we couldn't keep?

STEARMAN: I don't think that RIAS was ever charged with that, but we had to be exceedingly careful about how we covered anything that might become a repetition of the Stalin Allee strike on June 17, 1953, which sparked the whole uprising. We were very careful not to do anything that might incite riots. The charge was levied against RFE, especially, of being responsible for the Hungarian uprising, or to a lesser extent, VOA...

Library of Congress

Q: This was in 1956.

STEARMAN: ...which brings me back to how I got involved with the Hungarian revolution. When it started I was asked to come back to the embassy in Vienna because they were short on people who had the expertise, background and knowledge of Eastern Europe. So I came back on TDY to help the mission. When I got there I discovered that the USG didn't know what was going on in Hungary because we had no communication with our legation in Budapest. Tommy Thompson was our Ambassador to Austria at the time and leaned over backwards not to get us involved in any way. He gave orders for all U.S. personnel to stay away from the border, including CIA, etc. This was generally adhered to by everybody, so they had to go down to the refugee camps to interrogate refugees. Of course, information from these refugees was usually two, three, four days old.

I sized up this situation and "didn't get the word" (about Thompson's order), not being part of the mission. I just checked out an embassy car and went down and poked around to find an area that was still controlled by the Freedom Fighters. I interrogated dozens and dozens of people who had just come out of Budapest and various other places in Hungary. I would phone in reports of what I had learned from them to a friend in the political section in the embassy. Nobody knew that he covered for me, in fact, nobody else knew what I was doing. But I believe I can safely say that for two or three days and nights, I was probably the only source of firsthand information that the U.S. government had of what was going on in Hungary.

I was in and out of Hungary and saw the Soviets put down one of the last pockets of resistance by accompanying Austrian custom officials and border guards into Austrian enclaves, which were in Hungary and which I didn't know existed. So we were actually going into Hungary to observe the Soviet operations. I watched two armored regiments put down a resistance which consisted of young mine workers from the Brennbergbanya coal mines and university students from Sopron University. It was a very disheartening affair

Library of Congress

which depressed me for a long time afterwards. When the Soviets got complete control of that part of the border, I checked out.

The point I want to make before it slips my mind is that I asked many, many refugees if they had been encouraged to revolt by Western broadcasts, and they nearly all answered the same way; "We never heard any broadcasts that urged us to do what we did, but the very fact that you had been broadcasting to us for a couple of years led us to believe that if we did this you would come to our assistance." The one thing that almost everyone recited was the (1952) campaign promise that Dulles had specifically made to roll back the Iron Curtain, and they literally expected Eisenhower to ride into Budapest on a white horse as Admiral Horthy had done back in the early twenties. Of course, afterwards the Germans made an exhaustive study of RFE broadcasts to Hungary and they couldn't come up with any evidence that we encouraged an uprising. It was an extremely depressing time, mostly due to extreme stress, at the time. I got hepatitis from which I have never fully recovered.

Q: Obviously this was a very difficult time. Again, I was a young vice consul in Frankfurt at the time and I remember we were wondering if we were going to get involved. It was really a very disheartening time, I think, for most of us for the American presence, because of standing by and watching this thing that we had all sort of been expecting and hoping for and then doing nothing.

STEARMAN: One of the problems was that we knew so little about what was going on. Of course, don't forget the Alliance had been ruptured through the British, French and Israelis going into Suez after the revolution started. We were outraged at that, I must say. And then, of course, we were kept at arms length distance by all three of them before and for some time afterwards. Then we had to pull their chestnuts out of the fire when the Russians threatened to rocket London and Paris if they didn't pull their troops out of Egypt. So the Alliance got back on track.

Library of Congress

But also, it was hard for the U.S. government to handle two major crises at once; moreover, I don't think we showed much imagination. I am convinced there were things that we could have done. We couldn't have gone in with forces, obviously. In the first place, we couldn't get there. We would have had to go through either Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia or violate Austria's new neutrality, just one year after we had agreed to guarantee it. So we couldn't get into Hungary.

We should have encouraged the UN's Secretary General to go in with a large team and scatter all over and try to secure the airport and inhibit the Soviets. It might not have worked, but I think we could have done something. It was an extremely depressing thing to have seen these young kids up against tanks. Tanks as far as you could see came in there, I haven't seen so many tanks in my life, roaring in from Budapest. It was like about 50 B-52s coming in on the deck, a deafening roar. They even dropped leaflets on us to try to get us to surrender. At night they tried to cut us off when we worked our way from the enclaves of Austria. The Austrians were only equipped with World War I carbines so Soviet patrols with their AK-47s had us badly outgunned, but the Austrians were from that area, having grown up there, and knew how to get safely back to Austria from these enclaves. The border wasn't defined because the Hungarians had literally torn down the Iron Curtain in May, 1956. Few realized that they had done that. This sort of emboldened the Hungarians too and enabled the Austrians to render non-military assistance. Austria did everything but go to war with the Soviet Union over its suppression of the revolution. Austria was in the very forefront of helping the Hungarians, while the rest of us just followed along. I was surprised how many Austrians knew Hungarian, especially the aristocrats. Even many young aristocrats seemed to know Hungarian. Austria did everything it could to help, except provide arms. Austria openly sided with the Hungarian revolutionaries to an extent that even we didn't do; although it had only an army of 30,000 recruits which they kept at least 3 kilometers from the border in order to avoid clashes with the Soviets. Some Russians did come across the border, and the Austrians shot them with

Library of Congress

their World War I carbines. It was a very much dicier situation than most people realized. It was also terribly depressing.

Q: What was the feeling toward Ambassador Thompson at that time by the younger officers?

STEARMAN: I think they probably felt he was being super careful and super conservative; however, I could understand his problem. You get a lot of Americans down there who don't know what they are doing and that could be extremely embarrassing as well as damaging to our interests. I knew the area so well and was bilingual in the language, however, I didn't go anywhere without an Austrian official with me. By that I mean an Austrian gendarme, officer or non-com, or an Austrian customs official. The Austrians organized all the interrogations for me. I never did a thing on my own. It was always with the fullest cooperation of some Austrian official. Others might not have done that and instead would have gone off on their own and caused real problems. So I defied Thompson in a way that...in the old Austro-Hungarian army the highest decoration, the Order of Maria Theresa was only given to an officer who carried out a successful operation in defiance of orders. You had to have been ordered not to do something, but you did it anyway and succeeded to get the highest decoration. Well, Tommy Thompson went to his grave without my ever telling him what I had done. When we were both retired from the Foreign Service, I used to run into him once in a while, but I never had the heart to tell him that I had defied his orders, although by then it wouldn't have made any difference. But I believe what I did was necessary because otherwise we would have known nothing at all. But I also think he was right because he couldn't very easily, just select certain individuals and say, "You do it" and then keep everybody else away.

Q: Well then you were sent to Bonn where you served for about six years.

STEARMAN: I was the press attach# in Bonn, which if you are a political officer, which I always considered myself to be, is the most interesting job you could have because you

Library of Congress

could legitimately get involved in everything, and I became involved in a fair amount of substance in that job.

Q: You were there from 1956-62.

STEARMAN: I was extended because I was the only American-born officer who was bilingual in German. I had many contacts in the Foreign Ministry as well as in the press. I went to all of the meetings: the NATO meetings, the Ministerial meetings, the Geneva Conference in 1959, the 1960 Paris Summit and 1961 Vienna Summit as sort of informal liaison with the German delegation.[change of tape]

It (being press attach#) was the most interesting position that a substantive officer could possibly have, because one has a license to steal. You could get involved in everything, and I did. At one time, we had a "finance officer" from Treasury, and when he would be out of Bonn I would handle everything dealing with vested German assets, which was a very, very sticky problem.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, going back to being a press officer in the earlier period, what was your impression of the German press? What were they after, how did they operate and how did you operate with them?

STEARMAN: In the first place, I got to know many of the key ones fairly well. I always made a point of never lying to them and I always tried to be as informed as possible on the issues I knew they were interested in. The main issues were security issues. Can the United States be relied on to protect German interests and security? There were other extraneous issues, which were quite important to them, like the vested German assets issue, for example. It was a very, very touchy thing and involved a lot of high powered people and interests. Assets of all kinds that we had vested because of the involvement of the Nazi government, etc. It was a long standing, very complicated, very troublesome problem. About the things they were interested in I tried to keep as well informed as possible. This is what got me deep into the substance of many issues. One doesn't

Library of Congress

have to give away any secrets to inform the press. The secret of dealing with the press successfully is to give them an enormous amount of useful, but unclassified material on a subject. You satisfy media people by both knowing the subject and by giving them a lot of information. Most useful information wasn't classified anyway. The most difficult period in dealing with the press and Foreign Office types was during the Geneva conference where we really were selling them out because we believed in the missile gap.

Q: The Geneva Conference was when?

STEARMAN: May-July, 1959. We believed in the missile gap and that gave the Soviets an enormous leverage over us. We felt that we needed five years to close the gap, which, in the end, turned out to be non-existent, but at the time we really believed in it. That was the first time I understood what strategic weapons were all about. They are diplomatic blue chips. When we felt strategically inferior, we were knuckling under to a disastrous degree. It was just our great fortune that, through a misunderstanding, Khrushchev was invited to Camp David. Eisenhower was really ticked off, but it was too late to do anything about it. That saved us, because if the Soviets had accepted our last proposal on Berlin, which would have seriously undermined all of the existing Four Power arrangements, and which was limited to five years, because we thought it would take five years to close the missile gap, it would have been the beginning of the end of Berlin. Our proposal amounted to a sellout, a most disgraceful sellout. I was extremely unhappy; although I said nothing. One can keep things quiet only so long before they get out. I believe that even those who knew about our awful last proposal didn't realize how detrimental it was to German interests, so I had to be very careful in handling this. It was a very trying period.

The German media had some extremely good people. Bonn was always a correspondent's paradise because there were so few secrets. The German government simply was not good at keeping secrets; so things were fairly open.

Library of Congress

Q: Did you find the German correspondent was a different type than say the French correspondent or some of the others?

STEARMAN: I would say they were less politicized at that time. They later became more politicized. Most of them were pro-American. Remember, we are talking 1956-62, a really trying period in which Germans were subjected to a lot of strain, particularly after the Soviet ultimatum on Berlin of November 27, 1958. That forced us into the summit meeting in Geneva in order to defuse this threat which was putting a lot of pressure on the Germans. They were really dependent on us; they needed us badly and I think that was reflected throughout much of the press.

Q: Wasn't the main question that the Germans were always asking, "Are you with us?" Both Kennedy and Eisenhower got a little tired of Adenauer's looking at them and saying, "Are you going to be there when the chips are down?"

STEARMAN: They had to be reassured constantly and I must say, at times, they had some reason to question our staunch support; however, by and large I believe our record was pretty credible there and stands up well under retrospect.

Q: Did you have a hard time during the U-2 crisis?

STEARMAN: The U-2 was shot down May 1, 1960. That is an interesting event. I would like to dwell a little bit on that because this is another thing I got involved in.

Q: You might explain what it was.

STEARMAN: I will back up a little bit and pick up things at the end of the Geneva Conference which ended with us on the verge of selling out. We had Khrushchev coming over in September, 1959 and meeting with Eisenhower at Camp David. Eisenhower was taking a very soft position on Berlin because he apparently also believed in the missile gap. You remember the old question the French were asking in 1939: "Mourir

Library of Congress

pour Danzig?" We don't want to die for Danzig. Well, this was "Mourir pour Berlin," we don't want to die for Berliners. At that time we thought the USSR could blow us away with intercontinental ballistic missiles, which, as it turned out, they actually didn't have.

Anyway, Eisenhower took a very weak position on Berlin, best demonstrated at a press conference held in Washington after the Camp David meeting in which he would make no guarantees at all that the United States would protect Berlin. He also said that the situation in Berlin was "abnormal," which is what Khrushchev had been calling it all along. It was very disheartening.

Well, what happened is this: our U-2 flights, which, starting in 1956, began covering the Soviet Union, couldn't detect any ICBMs. The Soviets, as it turned out, didn't like their first generation ICBM which was the SS6 Sapperwood. Although they had the capability of building a large number of them, they decided instead to build an improved next generation of ICBMs.

I believe we got some human and other intelligence in January, 1960 which finally led us to conclude that we didn't have a serious strategic problem. The Soviets had a few more ICBMs than we, but we had the overall strategic advantage, if anything. At worst it was a standoff. At this point, our public position on Berlin started to change and harden, first in speeches by Vice President Nixon and Chris Herter, who was our Secretary of State, and finally, by Douglas Dillon, then Under Secretary of State who, on March 25, 1960, made a very tough statement on Berlin—totally different from what Eisenhower had told Khrushchev. On April 27, when Eisenhower was asked about Berlin and he said that Douglas Dillon had completely covered his administration's position.

The summit meeting was due to take place on May 18, 1960 in Paris. Khrushchev knew that he wasn't going to achieve anything there, since our position on Berlin had changed almost 180 degrees. He knew he was going to come out of that meeting empty handed. When the U-2 was shot down on May 1, it was a godsend to Khrushchev. That gave

Library of Congress

him the perfect excuse to really torpedo the meeting which he did by insisting that all responsible for the U-2 flights be punished. This, of course, would have to include the Commander-in-Chief, Eisenhower, although Khrushchev didn't go that far.

Well, I was with our delegation at that meeting—going to all of these meetings was the great part of my job. We had one preliminary meeting with Khrushchev in which he blustered all of his demands. That was the only meeting we had. The summit was in effect, then called off. I liked this development—partly because we had done all these nice briefing papers for Eisenhower, but it was rumored that while flying up from Delhi, he had been reading westerns instead of our papers. You could only give Eisenhower one page on anything, he wouldn't read much more. He would, however, sit through hours of dog and pony show briefings, but he just wouldn't read much. I feared he might not be too well prepared for the summit.

Anyway that whole conference broke up, and Khrushchev gave one of the biggest press conferences in history. Remember the old Palais Chaillot with a kind of temporary huge conference hall? There must have been 3000 correspondents sitting in that hall. Khrushchev was up on the podium with his Defense Minister, Malinovsky wearing a chest full of medals. I was sitting in the hall with the German contingent of about 40, ten or so of whom were from the Foreign Office. Finally some of the German correspondents started to heckle Khrushchev. We were sitting more than a third back from the front of this huge hall. Suddenly Khrushchev stopped and pointed down at us. He said, "We buried you at Stalingrad and we will bury you again." Silence, no more heckling. The Germans were frozen. At any rate, Khrushchev got himself off the hook at Paris. He was in a very tough position as far as the rest of the Politburo was concerned. I think this was one of several things, including the Cuban mess up, that eventually got him eased out.

Q: Why don't we just finish up the German thing and then end this session. You were there with three different ambassadors, James B. Conant (1955-57), David Bruce (1957-59),

Library of Congress

and then back to your former Austrian colleague, Walter C. Dowling, (1959-1963). Could you describe from your perspective how they operated and their effectiveness?

STEARMAN: They were totally different people. Conant being the great academic, president of Harvard. First, it was a very large operation, a High Commission when he took over. The whole complex, built to house the operation at that time down in Bad Godesberg, which was right on the Rhine, was so big that it now houses not only our chancery but two German ministries. It was an enormous complex which gradually got smaller and smaller. The nature of the mission was changing from the end of the occupation by the handing over more and more power to the Germans and returning to more of an embassy operation. It was never like any other embassy because of the unique position and role in Germany.

I wasn't there very long under Conant. We had David K. E. Bruce who was the only role model that I ever owned up to having. He was a remarkable man. Extremely effective, with a wonderful command of the English language. The telegrams which he sent back to the Department were priceless. I got along with him particularly well because I used to go shooting and fishing with him. He was great at both. The best wing shot I have ever seen in my life, and a great fly fisherman. That impressed me. But also, he knew everybody you could think of. We would be out having a drink at the tailgate of a station wagon after one of our outings and he would talk casually about everybody you had ever heard of. He was in substance very, very good. As you know he was not really a career professional. He had been a Foreign Service officer, a consular officer, I believe, when he was younger; however, he was one of the most skillful professionals I ever worked for. He certainly held all the jobs. He was Ambassador to France, to England, China, the Marshall Plan, etc. You name it and he has done it.

Q: Did you get any feel how he felt about the Eisenhower administration and how they were dealing with things?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Sometimes he didn't take things seriously. This brings up a little anecdote. At one point an instruction went out to all the missions that ambassadors were not to get new Cadillacs but, instead, ones used by cabinet officers. Bruce sent back this great telegram which said, "In days of yore ambassador's were made to do with cast off courtesans and I guess now they have to make do with cast off Cadillacs. If that be the case, then I want Engine Charlie's cast-off."

Q: Engine Charlie was the Secretary of Defense who had come from General Motors, hence the nickname.

STEARMAN: This is typical of the kind of telegrams he would send back. Ludwig Erhard, the German Economic Minister, was due to eventually succeed Adenauer, but was kept in his place by Adenauer until then. At one time Bruce sent back a telegram saying, "Adenauer apparently is not satisfied just to make Erhard eat crow, he wants to make crow his permanent diet." That is typical of the many great telegrams he would send back. Colorful but skilled. He was very sophisticated.

You know, Red Dowling, who was DCM when I was down in Vienna, was a reasonably competent officer, but not in Bruce's league. Bruce was in a class all by himself. He was simply outstanding. I was always flattered that he used to drop in to see me when he was in the Department. I greatly admired him and I don't admire very many people after all these years. I really can not find a major flaw in the man; even though everyone is flawed to some extent. He once gave a talk to the Embassy Women's Club in Bad Godesberg about diplomacy. He said, "They say diplomats are sent abroad to lie for their country, but that is a mistake. A diplomat should never, never be caught in a lie. That ruins your credibility and effectiveness. I am not, however, talking about all the little lies that we have to tell every day; after all you have to lie to live." And he was absolutely right in that sense, and I have never forgotten, "you have to lie to live."

Library of Congress

Q: Well, why don't we stop here and pick up another time when you went back to deal with the Soviets.

STEARMAN: I was down at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk before I went back to the Department where I was assigned to EUR/SOV (on the Soviet desk).

Q: Why don't we do that then.

STEARMAN: Okay.

Q: Today is October 5, 1992 and this is a continuation of an interview with William Lloyd Stearman. Bill, we now come to the 1962-65 period when you were the press officer for Soviet Affairs.

STEARMAN: Public Affairs Advisor.

Q: What does that mean?

STEARMAN: All the Bureaus had bureaus of public affairs then, I don't know if they do now or not. They were mostly manned by Foreign Service political officers, FSOs. They would advise the offices or the Bureau, itself, on the public affairs aspect of current foreign policy towards a given country or area. Among other things, they prepare press briefings for the Secretary and President. The whole Department would put together a briefing book for press conferences. Public affairs officers were the ones who put together the sections on their particular bureau or office within a Bureau. It was most fun under Kennedy because Kennedy would read so much. You could tab in a lot of material for him because you knew he would read it. However, briefing notes for Eisenhower generally were not to be longer than one page. Being a military man, he was used to dog and pony shows, oral briefings with charts, etc., and rarely liked to read more than one page as far as briefing things went, therefore, after Eisenhower it was a delight for many of us to

Library of Congress

be able to put in as much material as we felt the President ought to know. And Kennedy would read it.

His penchant to read telegrams and all sorts of things really saved the career of one of my colleagues who opened up our post in Kigali (Rwanda). He wrote a classic telegram, Kigali 14, to the Department in which he described the primitive living conditions that he had to put up with and the general state of affairs in this new country. It was hilariously funny. But Soapy Williams, Mennen Williams who was then the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, and who was very solicitous of his Africans, thought that my friend was making fun of some of his Africans. He was furious and was determined to do damage to my friend's career. Then Soapy got a call from the President who said, "Soapy, have you read Kigali 14? If you haven't you have to read it. It is a great telegram. The drafting officer ought to be commended, if not promoted." And that saved my friend's career. That is illustrative of the kind of reading Kennedy did.

Now, getting back to your original question about what a public affairs advisor does. If there is anything that you anticipate is going to create a public affairs problems, you flag the problem in a memo for the appropriate assistant secretary of State and for the Secretary, himself. The great thing about that job was that one could get involved in everything.

I started out as the Foreign Affairs Advisor for Soviet Affairs, replacing Dick Davies, who went on to become our Ambassador to Poland. There was another public affairs advisor for East European Affairs. In the interest of economy, those two were merged and I became the first Public Affairs Advisor for Soviet and East European Affairs. This was fascinating because I became involved in everything that those two offices did. I sat in on all staff meetings and was considered a senior member of the staff of both offices involved. The range of problems that I worked on at that time went all the way from the crab pot confrontations off of Alaska...the Soviets were putting their crab pots in our fishing waters and we had quite a problem. It seems like a petty thing, but...

Library of Congress

Q: A lot of American foreign policy, particularly before the Cold War, revolved around fish and it still crops up.

STEARMAN: That caused me a lot of problems.

Q: How did that one get resolved?

STEARMAN: Well, finally it was worked out, I don't recall the details. Then we had the Cuban missile crisis. That posed a lot of problems, obviously. That gives you an idea of the gamut of problems I dealt with, from crab pots to the Cuban missile crisis.

Q: Were you there when the Berlin Wall went up?

STEARMAN: I am glad you asked. I never tire of telling anyone who will listen that I was probably the only person in the U.S. government to predict the Berlin Wall. To understand why the Wall went up, you have to go back to the Vienna Summit meeting, which was disastrous.

Q: This was between Kennedy and Khrushchev and Kennedy's first meeting with Khrushchev.

STEARMAN: This was in Vienna in 1961 on the 3rd and 4th of June. For a long time I was, and probably still am, one of the few people privy to virtually everything that went on in those discussions. The notetaker, Marty Hillenbrand, an old friend of mine, used to confide in me twice a day after each session. So I knew more than the Secretary knew and more than almost anybody else in our delegation knew. It was a principals only meeting. Of course, Kennedy is dead and others involved have also passed on, so there were only a few of us left who knew what was going on. I think an unofficial transcript has finally been released through the Freedom of Information.

Library of Congress

Basically what appalled me about it was the kind of naive approach that Kennedy was taking towards Khrushchev, an apologetic approach. Of course I have to back up a little bit to explain the origins of the meeting. When Kennedy came into office, one of the first things he wanted to do was to meet with Khrushchev. He sent a message through Foy Kohler, our ambassador in Moscow, in February 1961 that he wanted a meeting. Well, it took Foy quite a while to track down Khrushchev because he traveled most of the time. One of the things that led to Khrushchev's down fall was that he spent most of his time outside of Moscow. Instead of tending the store, he was out traveling. Anyway, Foy Kohler finally tracked him down somewhere in Siberia and delivered the message. This was still February. He didn't hear a word from Khrushchev until after the April 17 Bay of Pigs disaster. Then Khrushchev decided that Kennedy was now his pigeon and replied shortly thereafter saying that he would meet. So Kennedy went to that meeting with egg all over his vest. One, he was inexperienced and two, he had destroyed the national security decision making process by eliminating the NSC, for all practical purposes. So he had lost his confidence, and he didn't have an adequate backup staff to support him. He also really didn't understand what kind of type Khrushchev was. I always characterize that meeting to my students when we discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis in courses I have taught, as "Little Boy Blue meets Al Capone." That really is not far off the mark.

Khrushchev was a tough, hard and ruthless individual, although I must say, to some extent, he helped move things in the right direction as far as US-Soviet relations were concerned, through some concessions he made. Kennedy was apologetic and defensive and which was the worse possible stance that he could have taken. As it went on, it was a two day meeting, I was quite concerned about what was going on. At the end of the second meeting Khrushchev delivered an ultimatum to Kennedy essentially repeating the November 27, 1958 ultimatum on Berlin that he was going to hand over control of access to Berlin to the East Germans and to end the Soviet responsibility for access stipulated in Four Power agreements. This created a very serious crisis; indeed it was a repeat of the

Library of Congress

November, 1958 crisis which led us to the near disastrous Foreign Ministers Conference, which I described before.

Kennedy was ashen faced when he came out of that last meeting. He told somebody, I can't remember who it was, that it would be a long cold winter. Then the Soviets released the text of that ultimatum on June 10. When the ultimatum became known to the East Germans, many said they felt this was the last chance they were going to have to escape. Up to that point they could get into West Berlin by just taking a train or bus to East Berlin and then walking into West Berlin and hence to a refugee camp. Then you were flown out. It was easy to get out of East Germany at that point. Those who were now deciding to get out were mostly the professional class, the scientists, engineers, teachers, physicians, people that they could ill afford to lose. As one explained while riding next to me on a plane to Frankfurt he did it mostly for the sake of his children. He was actually quite well off in the system, but he did not want to see his children have to grow up in East Germany. So you had a deluge of refugees coming into West Berlin. It finally reached a point when one county (Bezirk) no longer had an obstetrician. The whole country would have collapsed had that brain drain been allowed to go on. East Germany was obviously going to have to do something radical to stem this hemorrhage.

The conventional wisdom, both in the Department and our Embassy in Bonn, was that all of Berlin would be sealed off from East Germany. I kept insisting at all of our weekly meetings of the political section that Berlin was going to be divided right in two for simple, logical reasons. One, if they separated all of Berlin from East Germany, as everybody expected the capital of East Germany would have been separated from East Germany, itself. That is illogical and politically impossible. Furthermore, this would have left one and a quarter million East Berliners still free to flee to West Berlin, and these included key people, such as their whole government and many institutions and enterprises. So I kept insisting that it was most logical to divide the city in two. Everyone else would say, "Well, it can't be done technically. It is an enormous city, spread out all over the place." But I would then explain how, in fact, back in 1950 I saw the British seal off the whole central

Library of Congress

part of Vienna during a communist coup attempt. The communists foolishly attempted this coup when the British were in the Allied Council chair and therefore in control of the central part of Vienna, which rotated according to the Chairmanship of the Allied Council. The British sealed off this whole area in a very short time using concertina wire. They just simply brought in trucks of concertina wire and sealed the whole thing off before you could say, "Boo." I wrote this all out so there should be a written record of it somewhere. I said that they were going to come in the middle of the night with truck loads of concertina wire and seal off the whole city and everybody will wake up and find it is done. Everybody in the Embassy pooh-poohed it. I went to a Foreign Ministers' meeting in Paris the first week of August and collared the Assistant Secretary for Eastern European Affairs, a desk officer, anybody I could get hold of, both in our own delegation and the British delegation, and made my pitch. They all pooh-poohed it saying that it was not going to happen. "You are dreaming."

Well, on August 13, that was exactly what did happen, precisely as I had been predicting for weeks. As far as I know nobody else in the USG had it right, which is curious if you think about it. I cannot claim to be a genius. Simple logic and nothing else dictated my position on this. People get fixed ideas about how things ought to be and neglect logic; that's a problem with human nature I suppose. It has certainly plagued us in the field of foreign affairs. Incidentally, not one person ever acknowledged my having called this one right. The unpardonable sin is to be right when everybody is wrong.

Q: Well, let's move back to when you were dealing with Soviet Affairs in Washington. How about before the missile crisis, were there any problems?

STEARMAN: The Soviets, of course, and the Cubans tried to keep the thing very quiet. It was only just discovered through aerial reconnaissance, as you know. No, we had no forewarning that they were going to do this sort of thing. There was no unusual increase in tension or anything like that. The Cuban Missile Crisis was probably related to the Berlin issue, because Khrushchev felt the whole d#tente he had started in the fifties had failed,

Library of Congress

so he shifted to a more aggressive, intimidating policy. This has happened about five times since the end of the war. He felt that he needed more strategic leverage because Kennedy had embarked on a very ambitious military buildup, so that by 1961 we were much stronger than most people realized. Much of this buildup was initiated by the time Kennedy came into office, but he accelerated it and made clear that he was going to further increase America's military strength.

By the fall of 1962 we had about a 10-1 strategic superiority over the Soviets, which was incredible. There was only one way that Khrushchev could quickly rectify this imbalance and that was to place missiles in Cuba. This has been verified by both Khrushchev's memoirs and by what has been pouring out of the former Soviet Union, on the missile crisis. The Soviets had a plethora of medium range ballistic missiles and intermediate range ballistic missiles which could cover a large part of the United States from Cuba. He actually took a chapter out of our book. This is exactly what we had done back in the fifties when we thought the Soviets had strategic superiority and far more ICBMs than we had. What did we do to rectify the imbalance? We started placing IRBMs in Italy, the UK and Turkey. Now the situation was reversed, and the Soviets were doing what we had done. They had a surplus of these shorter range rockets and decided that if they could load up Cuba with these, by the time we found out it would be too late to do anything about it and that would change the strategic balance.

Q: I want to come back and focus on your view at the time, to concentrate on the micro picture rather than the mega picture. In the first place, the missile crisis as it initially developed was very closely held, wasn't it? Were you, in the Soviet Office, aware of this before Kennedy made his announcement?

STEARMAN: He made his address on October 22, a Monday evening. I think we were briefed Monday morning. Of course, there were people higher up the chain of command who were briefed as soon as we got the first reconnaissance photos.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, here you were right in the heart of people dealing with Soviet matters. When you heard about this, what was the reaction from the Soviet experts at your level?

STEARMAN: We were a little scared because you never know where something like this could end. The one thing that most of us were not aware of, I wasn't aware of, and I think most of us weren't, was the tremendous strategic superiority that we then had. You know this was something which was never once mentioned during any session of the Executive Committee which managed that crisis. Never once was it raised. This was confirmed by a friend of mine who attended every single EXCOM meeting. I personally find this incredible. It only goes to demonstrate our lack of appreciation of military power in such situations. If I had known how much stronger we were than the Soviets, I would have been far less concerned. As far as I then knew, these missiles would give the Soviets a very distinct advantage over us and it then appeared they were willing to risk a nuclear war. We know now that they were not willing to risk nuclear war over this.

It was a gamble on Khrushchev's part. There was a United Nations concert in the West Auditorium of the State Department that evening just after the President had made his announcement. I remember sitting there and wondering how people could enjoy this music when we could all be blown away at any time. That was how I felt, and I am sure many other people also felt the same way.

Q: What were you and your colleagues doing after the announcement and the quarantine went on?

STEARMAN: We were mostly trying to explain what we thought the Soviets were up to and the rationale for what we were doing. Of course, we castigated the Soviets for lying and deceptions. Dobrynin lied to the people in the State Department and Gromyko lied up at the UN. We focused a good deal on this duplicity. It was an exceedingly tense time. Most of us felt the crisis had been resolved fairly well. One can criticize some of the things that were done with the benefit of hindsight, but if anyone caught up in the atmosphere of the

Library of Congress

time and feeling how hairy a situation this was, has more understanding for some of the concessions that were made which, with the benefit of hindsight, we really didn't need to make.

The promise to withdraw the missiles from Turkey is an example. We had approached—remember this is all taking place in October, 1962—the Turks in May, 1962 telling them that we wanted to remove those missiles because they were obsolete and weren't needed anymore; however, they belonged to the Turks. We supplied the nuclear warheads, but the Turks owned the missiles. So there was a fairly long process of negotiations, which you can understand, because these things take time. The President ordered them out in May, 1962. Well, it wasn't as simple as the President thought it was going to be. That is one thing that Presidents have to learn, you can give an order to the bureaucracy and it may not be carried out at all, or carried out more slowly than desired because there are complications. When the Soviets raised these missiles in Turkey, Kennedy was so livid with rage that he went out and walked around the Rose Garden to calm down. In fact, a friend of mine was there and saw him. He then demanded to know why the missiles hadn't already been removed, as he had ordered. Later, Bob Kennedy made a sort of under the table agreement with the Soviets that we would quietly remove them. With this, we laid ourselves open to potential blackmail. Relations with our NATO allies could have been ruined had this concession become general knowledge. Khrushchev had us by the “short and curlies,” as the British would say, but he stuck to his word to keep this quiet. That was one of the concessions.

It has never been exactly clear what commitment we actually made to the Soviets and Cubans. For example, we never made a clear commitment not to invade Cuba, but the Soviets went away with this idea. Our commitments not to invade Cuba were contingent upon their having carried out a number of conditions including the removal of all potentially offensive aircraft and missiles, which they didn't do. So every time there has been some sort of a crisis with Cuba, people have wanted to know what commitments were made to end the Cuban Missile Crisis. I have personally gone through this exercise about three

Library of Congress

times now. First you have to explain that it is a very complex issue. That usually doesn't satisfy them; so they send somebody over to look at the files. There are, I would say, about six file cabinets in the Department full of documents on this issue. Even after you have gone through all of them, you still are not clear what the commitments were. The public and most interested writers seem to believe we promised not to attack Cuba, and that there were other clear cut commitments made. After you have looked at the whole record, you cannot help coming away confused.

Q: It is like any negotiation. Both sides are backing away and you leave it a little bit ambivalent because this is how you disengage.

STEARMAN: That is a good explanation. Exactly.

So that is what happened there. Again, this was a public affairs problem...how was this resolved and how do you explain it. As the journalists used to say in the old days, "You want to write it so that a Kansas City milkman could understand it." How you explain something as enormously complex as this in a way that a Kansas City milkman, or even a Kansas City professor, could understand it, was the problem.

Q: You came on board just a few months before the Crisis didn't you?

STEARMAN: Yes, I came on board in August, 1962 having just graduated from the Armed Forces Staff College.

Q: And you were there until 1965. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, how did you see relations? What was the situation with the relations with the Soviets that you were involved in?

STEARMAN: Well, things got better because Khrushchev, seeing the Cuban ploy fail, shifted again to a policy of détente. This was the third post-war Soviet détente campaign and began in the spring of 1963. (The first détente campaign was in 1949-1950 and the

Library of Congress

second one 1953-56.) In order to give momentum to this third d#tente, the Soviets stopped jamming the Voice of America, they permitted us to distribute Ameryka in the USSR. We also had made an agreement with them in the UN on the peaceful use of space, and we signed a limited test ban agreement with them. The whole atmosphere—I was in Moscow in the summer of 1963—had improved markedly. Both sides wanted a relaxation of tensions.

Q: And then there was Kennedy's American University speech which stated that we both had to live together on this planet.

STEARMAN: That was a very important speech indicating our readiness to respond to the Soviet d#tente campaign.

Q: From your point of view had the Kennedy-American University speech been staffed out in Soviet Affairs?

STEARMAN: Oh, yes.

Q: How did that play in the Soviet Union?

STEARMAN: I think it went over quite well. That is another thing that the public affairs advisors do; they look over speeches that involve their area in any way. They are always staffed out and sent around for Bureau “chops” or clearances. So we got involved in that process to that extent. Yes, that was really well received and led to a period of d#tente which lasted through Khrushchev's regime. He was ousted in October, 1964. I would say that d#tente began in early June 1963 with the President's speech; however, we had other indications before the speech that the Soviets were willing to turnover a new leaf and be a little bit friendlier and a little more forthcoming. The speech encouraged them. When the new crowd, Kosygin and Brezhnev, came in they started to change policy to some extent.

Library of Congress

The d#tente continued with a certain momentum into 1965, but started to go down the tubes when we bombed North Vietnam. We bombed North Vietnam the first time in February, 1965 when Kosygin was in the country. You see, Khrushchev provided a certain level of assistance to the North Vietnamese, but publicly kept a hands off attitude. When he was ousted, the new regime got much more involved in supporting North Vietnam. Early on they sent in Soviet anti-aircraft crews. Their large-scale involvement has been described by Moscow media in the last few years. This is germane to what we are talking about, because it became one of the issues I became deeply involved in.

One of the debates that I had with SOV colleagues concerned bombing Soviet missile sites in North Vietnam. Most of my colleagues insisted we were going to have grave problems with the USSR by killing Soviet missile troops. I kept saying, "I don't think we will hear a word from the Russians." I said this not because I was brilliant, because I wasn't, but I was convinced that in dealing with the Soviets, you have to go back into history to see how they have reacted in similar situations. We fought a full-scale air war with the Soviets in Korea.

Q: I was a part of that.

STEARMAN: You were in Korea?

Q: I was a Russian language expert and sat and listened to the fighter network and directed our planes against the Soviets.

STEARMAN: You could hear the Russians?

Q: Oh yes. It was a full-scale air war.

STEARMAN: I thought that was the extent of it, but it turns out, according to a retired Soviet General, they had devoted 64,000 troops to air defense of North Korea. But we

Library of Congress

never heard a word from the Russians even though we shot down God knows how many of their planes and pilots.

Q: Ten to one.

STEARMAN: Was it that much? Well, the Russians never protested, they kept it quiet. I said, "Go back and look at our experience in Korea. The Russians don't want the world to know they were protecting North Vietnam. They are not going to say a word." And they didn't. They never admitted they were in Korea until ten or twelve years ago and it was only a few years ago that they finally admitted they were in Vietnam.

Q: Again we are going back to the time when you were in the Soviet, Eastern European Affairs Office. What was the attitude towards the Soviet Bloc? Did we feel that there were differences within that bloc or did we think it was a monolithic thing as far as dealing with them was concerned?

STEARMAN: It was considered a pretty monolithic bloc. There were fissures, of course, that were very well known and which became apparent in early 1953. So we knew there was a lot of disquiet, a lot of potential opposition in Eastern Europe. That was clear. But we thought the Soviet lock on Eastern Europe was sufficiently strong that I didn't think that in my lifetime I would see Soviet control over Eastern Europe end. And it would still be there today, if Gorbachev had not decided to avoid the mistake that Khrushchev had made in putting down the Hungarian revolution. That ended a very successful Soviet *d#tente*. Gorbachev introduced the last *d#tente* in March, 1965 when he came in. He sort of masterminded it and it was beginning to pay off. That *d#tente* was principally to kill SDI.

Q: Strategic Defense Initiative.

STEARMAN: The Soviets were very concerned about that program. One of their principal objectives was to thwart SDI and also to get us to throttle back on the substantial military buildup that Reagan had introduced when he came into office.

Library of Congress

Q: But, going back to this time, what did we see as the Soviet threat? Did you see the Soviets poised to launch a full-scale attack on Western Europe?

STEARMAN: They were poised to launch a full scale attack on Western Europe and poised to blow us off the map with strategic systems. They were, in 1965, expanding their efforts overseas. They stepped up their involvement in North Vietnam, and became involved in Angola, Nicaragua and later Afghanistan. They were taking a more aggressive stance and expanding their influence. This helped to end the d#tente policy.

Q: Okay, one last thing. When Khrushchev was ousted in October, 1964, did we see this as a good or bad thing?

STEARMAN: We had had our problems with Khrushchev, but at least we knew him. Our main impression was one of total surprise. Nobody that I know predicted that this was going to happen. Then, after it happened we sat down and did a post mortem. INR (State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research) did a very interesting study for us. They had hit upon something which had never occurred to any of us and which I mentioned earlier; Khrushchev was out of Moscow most of the time and out of the country a good deal of the time. In the seven years that he was in power, he spent over 60 percent of the time out of Moscow. He simply wasn't attending the store. So there was utter surprise and then uncertainty as to what these new guys would do.

Q: We really didn't have a fix on them.

STEARMAN: No we didn't have a good fix. We were totally unprepared.

Q: Next time we will move to when you were dealing in Saigon with the North Vietnamese.

STEARMAN: Fine.

Library of Congress

Q: Today is February 15, 1994 and this is a continuing interview with William Stearman. Bill, we got you out of Soviet Affairs and going to 1965-67 when you were in Saigon. How did you get that assignment?

STEARMAN: I got assigned to Saigon because somebody knew that I had good French and was a Soviet specialist. They wanted somebody to work on North Vietnamese affairs and to direct psychological operations against North Vietnam. I was rather chagrined when I got this assignment because I was already assigned to Hamburg as deputy principal officer, and Hamburg was bigger than most of our embassies. Coburn Kidd, the Consul General, was going to retire and I thought I might be able to replace him. I was on my way and then this came up, so I went out there. At the time, I considered it a derailment of my career.

Q: What was the situation? Did one stand up and salute when one was ordered to Vietnam?

STEARMAN: Well, you had a simple option. If you were assigned to Vietnam and didn't take it, you resigned your commission and left the Service. It was as simple as that. David Bruce, who happened to be in town when this assignment broke, weighed in personally with everyone he knew on my behalf, and he had a fair amount of clout. He knew how well I knew the Hamburg scene, because I had interpreted for him every time he went to Hamburg and he knew that I knew a lot of people there. So he thought it was insane to break the Hamburg assignment. But he couldn't budge it. So I just saluted and went. As it turned out, it almost cost me my life, but it was a very interesting assignment.

Q: In a way, many of us got to see the elephant there.

STEARMAN: That is right.

Q: What was the situation in Vietnam when you arrived in 1965?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: It was late in 1965 and the situation was quite bad. Our side had some severe military setbacks. The embassy had been bombed a couple of months before I got out there. A number of our people were seriously injured and I believe some embassy people were actually killed. The VC were in Saigon and all around it. You couldn't go a kilometer out of town without the chance of getting shot at. And you heard battle sounds around the clock....artillery fire, machine gun fire, etc. It looked pretty grim at the time because the other side seemed to be everywhere and winning.

Q: Where did you stay when you got there?

STEARMAN: I stayed in Saigon, in an old house that the embassy had had for a long time, with Tom Corcoran, who was the deputy head of the political section there. A wonderful person who is still around. He is very active here in DACOR and had an encyclopedic knowledge of Southeast Asia and was an extremely good officer. (Tom died several months after this interview.)

Q: He closed our consulate in Hanoi.

STEARMAN: You have a good memory, he did exactly that. He was up in Hue in 1966 at the time of the Buddhists riots and showed an enormous amount of cool and courage in a very difficult situation. He was a very impressive person who had always hid his light under a bushel. He had a couple of embassies in Africa, but I always thought he should have had an embassy in Southeast Asia. But we have all seen it happen with mediocre people getting to the top and the good people not.

Q: What was your job when you went out there?

STEARMAN: I was the head of the North Vietnamese division of what they called JUSPAO, which had people from all parts of the Foreign Service and the military service engaged in psychological and propaganda operations. I was charged with psychological

Library of Congress

operations against North Vietnam and the North Vietnamese army wherever it might be in Indochina.

Q: To get inside the psyche of the North Vietnamese soldier you are not going to get it coming from Soviet affairs, or was the feeling that somehow these were just little Soviets or something like that?

STEARMAN: Well, as it turned out, and I hate to admit this, my assignment made sense because knowledge of Soviet affairs was fairly transferable to this situation; although there were obvious cultural differences. I found that our people who were Southeast Asia experts, really didn't understand anything at all about the other side. They were seriously deficient in almost every respect. Whereas I certainly had deficiencies, I felt quite comfortable in my new role and fairly well understood what motivated the North Vietnamese and how they organized. Their whole political system was patterned after the Soviet Union. Ho Chi Minh, was, after all, trained by the Soviets, he was a Soviet agent for many years. The official North Vietnamese communist history admitted that he was a Comintern agent. A Hanoi publication listed about a dozen aliases that Ho used, and we have identified about twenty.

I didn't have Vietnamese, which would have been a great help, but I had an excellent Vietnamese assistant. Most of my Vietnamese counterparts in the government and elsewhere spoke French so I could converse easily. So it really worked out pretty well. When I got there I found our psychological warfare operations against the other side woefully inadequate because we had little understanding of the target audience. We were dropping leaflets and broadcasting messages that sometimes were counterproductive and often of little use. For example, we had been emphasizing the animosity the North Vietnamese supposedly felt against the Chinese, a theme mostly inspired by North Vietnamese who fled to South Vietnam in the mid-fifties.

Q: Many Catholics.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Yes, there were a large number of them, close to a million, and there would have been two or three million if the Hanoi regime hadn't cut off the flow. These refugees all thought that they knew the North, but their knowledge was dated since they hadn't lived very long under the communists who were just taking over when they left. Since they had grown up being anti-Chinese, China being Vietnam's historical enemy for centuries, they thought the anti-Chinese theme would be a good one. But most of the young Vietnamese were looking upon China as a friend and ally because China, among other things, was instrumental in helping them defeat the French at Dien Bien Phu. They couldn't have done it without massive Chinese assistance. And China was providing a large part of their consumer goods and a large part of their weaponry. Also, they were indoctrinated to believe that China was a friend and ally, as was the Soviet Union. So the anti-Chinese theme was going nowhere.

Our people never tried the obvious which was to actually interrogate some defectors and deserters and to see how they reacted to our proposed messages. So we started that process. I tried to get to the prisoners as soon as I could, which is why I spent a good bit of time in the field, to size up enemy vulnerabilities and ascertain what was bothering them. I believe we came up with a better target information and better themes and messages, however, I am sure you have heard, they were not very vulnerable to this kind of thing, particularly the regular North Vietnamese.

The best thing that I found we could do was to give them instructions as to how to surrender. We dropped a lot of safe conduct passes.

Q: Had the Chieu Hoi program been started?

STEARMAN: The Chieu Hoi program had been started and was enormously successful, more successful than most people realize. About a quarter of a million people on the other side came over to our side mostly as a result of the Chieu Hoi program. Most of the people from the regular forces who came over had been born in the South. We didn't get very

Library of Congress

many regular army defectors. We did, however, get an extremely interesting defector from the North Vietnamese army, Colonel Tuyuan, who was a regimental commander and had also been a head of training for COSVN which was the communist headquarters in South Vietnam, actually located most of the time over in Cambodia. He defected because he had been passed over for promotion to division commander, which he felt he deserved. And secondly, he had made the mistake of getting a local girl pregnant which was a big no-no. So he was in, what we used to say, deep kimchi. He decided to come over to us and was a fascinating person. He was very intelligent and spoke good French. We used to sit up hour upon hour over cigars and good French brandy talking about all the things we were doing wrong.

He gave me an idea how we could have won the war, had we so chosen. He said the communist forces were extremely vulnerable to ambush and to ground raids on their own facilities, which we never carried out. He said he couldn't understand why we never set any ambushes, ever. The only time their lines of communications were ever threatened was by accident when we were running the search and destroy missions which happened to go through them and block them. But, he said, their side set ambushes all the time and were constantly attacking our installations, but we didn't do that to them. He thought that some of the people who had defected to our side, including some of the people he had trained as guerrillas and sappers, could be very effective in being turned back against the other side. Well, I thought this was a great idea. We had tried it on a limited scale. We had the armed propaganda teams (of defectors) which were used to some extent by the Vietnamese army; although they were seldom used the way they should have been, they worked out reasonably well. The Marines have what they call the Kit Carson Scouts, there are about 5,000 of them. They were better employed, mostly for scouting and setting occasional ambushes, but they were not used to the extent that I think they should have been.

When I finally got into the NSC and I had some clout and influence, in that I could communicate directly with generals, I tried to get both the Vietnamese generals and our

Library of Congress

own generals interested in forming teams of former guerrillas and sappers to be used against the enemy. They would be inserted into enemy territory so that they could ambush and attack the enemy troops and installations. I was sure defectors would be willing to do this, because when they were used defectors did a splendid job, they were very dedicated. The concept reminded me of our use of Indian scouts during the Indian wars. Those Indian scouts were very effective. I felt we could have done the same thing in Vietnam.

But I could never get the Vietnamese interested. I talked to their chief of staff and others and they, in effect, said, "Well, they were communists and how can you trust them?" I said, "You don't have to trust them, you are not having them guard anything, you are inserting them into enemy territory. If they redefect which, in fact, never happened, what have you lost? You have lost captured weapons, a radio that we gave them, two weeks rations, all of which adds up to nothing." But they were too limited in their vision. Our own people weren't interested in it because...I had to sound cynical about this, but I am inclined to believe part of it was that the whole program could have been run by a colonel and would have cost next to nothing. But we were spending about \$2 billion a month when I was out there and we are talking 1965-66-67 dollars. This kind of operation would have cost nothing and I am convinced would have been highly effective and would have tied up enemy forces to such an extent that they would have difficulties to mounting offensive operations. As Colonel Tuyuan said, who was very savvy, "We are vulnerable as hell." Well, that was one of my great frustrations in the whole Vietnam experience. I thought when I got to the White House that I would be able to convince somebody that this was the way to go. And I am still convinced to this day that it would have turned the tide dramatically. But there was no high tech involved and no careers could have been made out of this. We were oriented to high tech, wedded to high tech solutions, which to some extent weren't the answer in that environment. My greatest regret is that I did not press my case harder. I guess I was too much the disciplined Foreign Service officer to do so.

Another low tech system that we should have had over there was a couple of battleships on station off North Vietnam. Had we done so, we would have lost just a tiny fraction of

Library of Congress

the planes we lost. Eighty percent of all targets we struck by air in North Vietnam, at great cost to us, could have been taken out with 16 inch guns. The notorious Thanh-hoa Bridge on Route 1 could have been taken out with one salvo from a 16-inch gun. Instead we lost God knows how many aircraft and air crews in the attempt. Also, we would have had far fewer prisoners of war if we had had a couple of battleships there. We did have one battleship, the New Jersey, over there for a relatively short time which did a fantastic job and everybody raved about it. The North Vietnamese were terrified of it. I suspect the aircraft carrier boys agitated against it. In any case, it was withdrawn after a short time..

Also, I read that the North Vietnamese considered this such a threat that they insisted it jeopardized negotiations. This may well have been the main reason we withdrew the New Jersey. This was a factor which I hadn't considered at the time.

So those were two fundamental mistakes that we made. One thing I learned from this experience, I think this is an original Stearmanism, if you have too many resources, you are no longer resourceful. We had seemingly limitless resources and poured an enormous amount of everything in there. We had over half a million men there but never had more than 80,000 in maneuver battalions actually fighting. So we had a Pizza Hut in Cam Ranh Bay. We had PXs in Saigon, the electronics section would have made Radio Shack look like a dime store. It was grotesque the way we were going about this war. Our whole emphasis should have been on training the Vietnamese. Instead there was a universal attitude of "stand aside you little slopes," as we called them, "and let us Americans do the job." Another was short tours. One year was ridiculous. The civilian tours were a year and a half, also ridiculous. They should have been at least two. So you had a limited amount of time in which to do your job and rather than muck around with training the Vietnamese, which complicated things, you just went out and did it yourself. This was wrong!

Most people do not realize that in the end the South Vietnamese themselves, despite the emphasis that we had placed on our own efforts and on high tech, damn near won it on the ground. In fact, by mid-September, 1972, the South Vietnamese, with our air, naval

Library of Congress

and logistics support, were winning the war hands down on the ground. I was interested that Bill Colby, retired Director of CIA, who has since become very dovish on almost any national security issue, wrote a book a few years ago called "Lost Victory," in which he said exactly what I am telling you now. That we, in effect, snatched defeat from the jaws of victory back in 1972 because the North Vietnamese were on the ropes. They had just about had it, and had run out of steam. The offensive they launched at the beginning of April, 1972 cost them about 100,000 men killed in action, and they had to scrape the bottom of their manpower barrel to launch it in the first place.

Q: Was that the Easter offensive?

STEARMAN: Yes. In fact, I predicted that offensive in November, 1971 simply from reading Hanoi press accounts of how they were starting to induct people that they had never inducted before, people who had always been excepted from induction. So I knew they were getting ready for a big offensive that would probably start in the spring.

This is a bit of a digression, but it is also germane. I think I talked about the problems within the intelligence community or have I?

Q: I am not sure.

STEARMAN: Well, anyway when I came back from Vietnam I wound up in INR as sort of their Hanoiologist and became part of the "intelligence community." At times I went up to Langley to work on NIEs, National Intelligence Estimates. I became quite disillusioned with the process. I found that the Defense Intelligence Agency often skewed intelligence to put a conservative twist, if you will, on it. Whereas the CIA analysts tended to put a liberal twist on things. So finally when I went over to the NSC, I formed my own intelligence group. (I discuss this in detail at the end of this interview.)

Q: Let's go back to Saigon. Did you have any contact with the CIA there?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Well, I didn't think they knew that much about my area. I think there were people in the political section who did know a lot; therefore, I had to start being my own expert. One of the very best sources of intelligence, I have always maintained, is FBIS, the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which puts out translations of broadcasts and articles (which are available to anyone for a fee). I got a lot of good intelligence out of that. And then the British had a consulate in Hanoi and every time the British Consul General came down to Saigon, he or she, one of the best ones was a woman, I would spend several hours with them debriefing them. They would also bring down the latest Hanoi newspapers that we hadn't been able to get through any other source.

We also captured an enormous number of documents from the other side, millions of pages of documents. We had countless interrogation reports from people who surrendered, were captured or defected, etc. To give you an idea of how much we had, Stuart, at the end of the war, DIA in an installation over in Arlington had 8 miles of microfilmed captured documents and interrogations. Can you imagine? You know how many pages you can get on an inch. I don't think there has ever been a war in history where one side had as much raw intelligence on the other side as we did and had made so little use of it. We were simply overwhelmed with it.

So I used an awful lot of this intelligence. I felt that to be any good at this job, I had to really know the other side. Much was close to what I had been working on for years. The terminology was certainly familiar; so I understood what they were saying, whereas the average person who hadn't spent a long time going through communist publications, would not. I found it fairly easy, and this is how I got into the whole business (of North Vietnamese affairs).

Q: Who was running JUSPAO?

STEARMAN: Barry Zorthian was.

Library of Congress

Q: From your perspective, how did he operate?

STEARMAN: I was critical of the way that whole operation was run. In the first place, there was much more emphasis on how you do something than why you do it. At JUSPAO staff meetings almost the entire time would be spent on discussing technicalities or administrative problems. For example, they bought an enlarger that would blow a photo up to about 20 by 20 feet, and that sort of thing. They had the best printing plant in Southeast Asia, etc. This was one of our weaknesses. We were big on the technical side, but there was little discussion of why we were doing anything. What are the vulnerabilities? Or, is this program working? If not, why isn't it working? It was all how to do and the administrative problems related to it.

There were, however, some good people in JUSPAO. Take a chap by the name of Don Rochlen, for example. He would have been out of place in most normal organizations, but he had a real genius for psychological operations, somewhat eccentric, but extremely effective. There were some characters like that who were very good, but most of them, I am afraid, took more of a bureaucratic view of things. It wasn't the program it could have and should have been.

Q: On your side I would have thought there would have been fairly close liaison with the military? Was there or not?

STEARMAN: They had to do all of the delivery for me. I couldn't have done anything without them. Most of the messages I was trying to get across were on drop leaflets. They were dropped on the enemy forces in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Then we dropped millions of leaflets on North Vietnam. Initially, before I got there, the leaflets that were dropped warned civilians to stay away from military targets. That was a good and necessary program, but beyond, the target audience was a tougher nut to crack; therefore, I had to find out what was going on in North Vietnam, to see what vulnerabilities they had. One of the most effective leaflets was so inadvertent. In order to induce people to pick

Library of Congress

up these leaflets and read them, I had them printed with about 3/4ths of each side taken up with a very, very good copy of the one dong note, their unit of currency. The people were clipping off the message and passing these leaflets as currency. It was driving the other side crazy. Their media complained that we were trying to foul up their currency by dropping all this counterfeit money. Then I got to thinking: why don't we really drop counterfeit money. I was going to print up some very good higher denomination notes and drop them all over North Vietnam to screw up their economy. Treasury hit the ceiling when they heard about this. They went absolutely ballistic. They said no way is the United States Government going to get involved in any kind of counterfeiting, even if that is what it takes to win the war. So that was the end of that maneuver; however, everybody thought it was a great idea.

Q: Well, the Germans got into this. That was how Cicero got paid off and all that. I think it was all dumped into a lake in Switzerland, or something like that, but you had these beautiful pound notes.

STEARMAN: I think that was when the British started putting a silver thread in the pound, wasn't it?

Q: Yes, I think so.

STEARMAN: Leaflets generally have an effect only when tied into military operations. If they are not followed by military action, their effect is marginal. So, some of the things that we did were effective, and some were marginal. Some of the leaflets when we tried them out on ex-enemies were even counterproductive.

Sometime in 1966, I went up to visit one of the squadrons which dropped the leaflets on the Ho Chi Minh Trail from these old C-47s to give a pep talk to the pilots who were dropping these things. The day before, one of their C-47s was shot down on a leaflet mission and only one person was rescued. We never knew what happened to the others. They were missing in action. So after I had given my pep talk about what a great program

Library of Congress

this was, one of the pilots stepped up to me and said, "You really believe in this program don't you?" "Indeed I do, you are doing a great job," I replied. He then said, "How about flying a mission with us tomorrow?" What could I do? It was 2:00 in the afternoon and I was all ready to go back to Saigon, but felt obliged to say, "Okay." So I spent the rest of the day being instructed in escape and evasion tactics in case we were shot down. The next morning before dawn they start suiting me up. First I put on a flak jacket, then a survival kit, a parachute, the biggest damn revolver I have ever seen, and like the knights of old, I had to be practically hoisted into the plane. I got into the old C-47 and walked up to the cockpit to introduce myself. On the way I saw a spec plate on the bulkhead which said, "US Army Air Corps," which didn't do my morale much good. This meant it was built about 1940 or 1941. It became US Air Force in about 1942!.

Q: No in 1948, US Air Force.

STEARMAN: But, I mean US Army Air Force that was in 1942, but this was US Army Air Corps. Well, that was bad enough but then I started talking to the pilot. I found out he had been a pilot in World War II and was still just a captain! This was not a good sign. Also, I expected we would fly way up high out of anti-aircraft range and drop these things, but no, we were flying low. You could look straight out both sides and see mountains, and people were shooting at us. You could see these little flashes. We were shoveling the leaflets out the chutes and I started reading some of them and said, "My God, I had these withdrawn a month ago." They weren't worth a damn and here we were all risking our lives dropping things which should have been withdrawn. The cargo doors were left open because there was a loud speaker mounted in their place. In order to go to the head you had to hold on sort of to the ribbing with your fingers, edging along with your butt hanging out over the space because the head door opened out, and when you are nervous, as I was, you have to go to the head more often. Each time was a hair raising experience. Anyway, we dropped all the leaflets and made it back. The first thing the pilot did was to get out and see where, if at all, we had been hit. We hadn't been.

Library of Congress

This was the sort of situation you can get yourself into. I believe Foreign Service officers, on the whole, probably saw more action than most troops over there. Many of them were out in the “boonies” with the Vietnamese. As you know, since World War II, more ambassadors have been killed in action than admirals and generals. I had an FSO working for me at the NSC who led a group of militia, the popular forces, in holding off a very sizeable North Vietnamese attack all night long. He was in command of the troops. He got a medal for it. This was Al (Alvin) Adams, who was our last Ambassador in Haiti, and now is going down to Peru as Ambassador. When you join the Foreign Service, you don't count on getting into combat.

Q: No you don't at all.

STEARMAN: My ears are still ringing from having been on the receiving end of a lot of heavy Soviet ordnance during the 1972 spring offensive. Part of the time I was with my old friend, Chris Squire, who was an FSO and the senior province rep (for Pleiku Province) at the time. He was a P-40 pilot in World War II. We were heavily shelled the whole time I was up there (in II Corps), and my ears have been ringing ever since from the concussions. Here again was an FSO who was not only in the front line, but was way in front of the front line. Chris, alas, recently died of cancer.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy and how it was going about its business?

STEARMAN: There were some good people there, some very good people, particularly on the political side, for example, Martin Herz, who was the great intellectual of the Foreign Service. He wrote one of the very best things on Vietnam, a monograph entitled “The Vietnam War in Retrospect,” which he produced when he was dying. It is 80 pages long and if you read that, you will have a better understanding of the Vietnam War than anything else you could read. It is brilliant. He was, I think, either the head or deputy chief of the political section. Maybe Phil Habib was the head of the political section at the time. I am trying to remember.

Library of Congress

Q: When I was there, 1969-70, Herz was the head of the political section, but he may have been the deputy prior to that.

STEARMAN: Tom Corcoran was extremely good. Most of the officers I knew there were first rate. There were some very good junior officers who went on to become very successful, for example, John Negroponete, who just came back as our Ambassador to Mexico, as well as Frank Wisner and Dick Holbrooke who now is our Ambassador to Germany. So we had an extremely good bunch of young officers at that time. I was much impressed.

Q: Was Cabot Lodge the Ambassador?

STEARMAN: Cabot Lodge was there. I was somewhat less impressed by Cabot Lodge, than I was by Ellsworth Bunker who came towards the end of my stay. Bunker was impressive. Cabot Lodge was okay, and was reasonably knowledgeable. I wasn't negatively impressed by him, just sort of unimpressed, I suppose.

Q: What emanations were you getting from the people who knew about the Vietnamese government? Was Thieu in?

STEARMAN: No, it was Ky initially.

Q: There had been a whole series of leaders since 1963 and the killing of Diem. What was the feeling about the Vietnamese government when you were there?

STEARMAN: I think there was always the feeling that it might be overthrown by another coup. Most people felt that it was not all that stable. There was a fair amount of incompetence and corruption that everybody knew and talked about. As it turned out, most people didn't realize that there was far more corruption and incompetence in North Vietnam, but that was never published. It was more obvious and visible in the open South than in the closed North.

Library of Congress

I blame us for that instability. Whether or not you liked Ngo Dinh Diem, he was succeeding fairly well. He might not have been the Thomas Jefferson of Southeast Asia, but he had done remarkably well in pulling the country together and leading it. When we publicly pulled the rug out from under him—I am convinced, however, that we did not order his assassination, and did not know it was coming—we destabilized the government (and the country), and it stayed destabilized until Thieu took over. It was pretty stable after that.

After Diem was killed, the whole thing landed on our shoulders. All the generals who made the coup then turned to us and said, “What do we do now, coach?” From then on it became our responsibility. This was the first fundamental mistake we made. That emboldened Hanoi to start launching major attacks and to begin inserting regular forces into the South. Hanoi knew the situation was shaky. Diem had built a pretty good structure in the countryside which became unraveled after the coup. So we were still feeling the reverberations of that when I got out there in 1965. In 1966 it got better and the government became somewhat more accepted by the people. You, Stu, were out there in the salad days (1969-1970).

Q: Yes, things seemed to be coming along rather nicely, thank you, at that time.

STEARMAN: When you were out there they had a bicycle race all the way from Hue down to Ca-Mau, the whole length of the country.

I was dating a young French woman who taught at the French Lycee in Da Lat, and she would drive down to see me on Fridays. She had to go through two or three VC roadblocks before she got to Saigon. She spoke French, so they let her through. I sweated out every Friday night to see if she was going to make it. The last roadblock wouldn't have been too far outside of Saigon.

The whole situation, by this time, had gone to hell in a hand basket. I think initially we had to send in troops to stabilize the situation. That was essential. After that, our mission

Library of Congress

should have been to train the Vietnamese to take it from there. The Vietnamese are very impressive people. We could train a Vietnamese, who spoke English, to fly as quickly as we could train an American. The modern French nuclear-armed air force was once commanded by a Vietnamese. And in France, some of the leading engineers, scientists and physicians are Vietnamese. They are an extremely gifted people. They had the gray matter and many of them had the guts. They mainly needed the right kind of leadership and training. As I pointed out earlier, in 1972 they were waxing the North Vietnamese. They drove them out of Quang Tri where they were only 20 miles from North Vietnam, with Route 1 the best LOC (line of communication) they could have possibly had, and with their strongest and best equipped forces. They couldn't even hold that position. That no doubt convinced them that they couldn't hold anything else. They were losing. This was later confirmed by a North Vietnamese general (Tran Van Tra) who wrote that they were on the ropes and losing. That is the tragedy of the whole war: our side literally snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Q: Well, you left there in 1967. What did you do?

STEARMAN: I went back to the Department and was working with the Vietnam Task group. I filled in part time to help the Voice of America broadcast to Vietnam, mostly using my knowledge of the North Vietnamese. Then I became INR's "Hanoiologist" in the Asia section of INR, replacing Dick Smyser who went to the NSC. Then I had a falling out with the head of the Asian section, Bill Gleysteen, who didn't see eye-to-eye with me. He was generally negative about my judgments and was somewhat dovish on Vietnam, which I was not. He finally gave me the sack, and I wound up, to his surprise and chagrin, in The White House on the NSC staff.

Q: While you were with INR and later with the NSC, did you find anybody of knowledge that had been focusing for a long time within the United States on Hanoi? I am talking about the academic community or anywhere else. Was there anything?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Not much. That was one of our problems. I felt that those people who were, lacked objectivity. They tended to skew things one way or the other, either conservative or liberal.

But, I will tell you what most shocked me, Stu. When I finally realized that I was going out there to work on North Vietnam—I was then in SOV in the Department—I chased around the Department trying to get myself briefed on my new area...this was the beginning of November, 1965. We had been de facto at war with North Vietnam since February of that year, but still we did not have one person in the Department working full time on North Vietnam. We had one very competent woman who worked on North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and part of the China account. That was it. We had Uganda almost covered better than we had the country with which we were at war. It was grotesque. That I think was one of our main problems. The people we had covering the enemy side were Asia area specialists. It has been my experience that when it comes to understanding indigenous communist movements, area specialists are usually woefully inadequate. I, myself, might well be woefully inadequate in assessing the non-communist side of developments in certain areas. I have seen it in ARA and AF and certainly in East Asia. The people in EA had little understanding of what was going on. There were a number of people in EA, for example, who actually thought the Viet Cong were an independent group, that they had a good deal of autonomy and were only allied with Hanoi, not completely under Hanoi's control. That was subsequently disproved beyond a shadow of a doubt, principally by Hanoi, itself. Even during the war if you read carefully what the other side was putting out, it was clear that the VC had no independence. Of all the millions of pages of documents that we captured, we never captured one single NLF document which contained anything that was not essentially just propaganda. Not one contained military directives, orders or anything of substance.

Q: NLF being what we call the Viet Cong.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: And anyone who has worked a long time on communist affairs knows how these front organizations work. They have been doing it ever since the Comintern decided at its 7th Congress in 1935 that this was the route they were going to take, “popular front” movements. The communists in Vietnam used about four different fronts, and the NLF (or VC) was the only most recent front of those they had created. I simply could not understand how serious people could believe that these were anything but the fronts, but many did. That is just one example of where we were going wrong. It is just like those in ARA who thought the Sandinistas were not really communists, until they finally came out and said they were. The regional problem is widespread.

That, I'm afraid, was a roundabout answer to your original question. I would say that the short answer is that we had inadequate knowledge of the enemy, particularly in the government. I also didn't find that many academics who impressed me much either, one way or the other. Those people were generally too subjective. I have always thought that one of the advantages that I had over many of my colleagues is that I trained to be a geophysics engineer and my theory is that anyone with that kind of a background uses inductive reasoning as opposed to deducting reasoning in problem solving. I just say; give me the facts. I try as best I can to base my opinions on facts. I think that makes a difference. I found that most people, including many colleagues, were using a deductive approach, that is, making up their minds then trying to find the facts to support their view. This was true of both conservatives and liberals.

Q: How did they use you in the NSC? You were there from 1971-76, and came back in 1981, for a while.

STEARMAN: I came back in 1981 in a different capacity.

Q: Well, let's talk about the 1971-76 period.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: In 1971 I went over to The White House as Kissinger's Hanoiologist, the specialist on the enemy. At that time John Holdridge was the head of the East Asian branch of the NSC and I was under him. At the beginning of 1973, I became the head of the Indochina section of the NSC, which, by NSC standards, was a fairly large operation. We had about five officers and four secretaries, and occupied a whole corridor of one floor in the Old Executive Office Building. Many others in the NSC were also supporting us. So a large part of the NSC was engaged in some aspect of the Vietnam War.

Q: What were you trying to do? Most of this time was peace talk, wasn't it?

STEARMAN: A lot of it was peace talk, of course. The serious peace negotiations began in October, 1972. I was backstopping the operation talks here, while John Negroponte was over in France with Kissinger negotiating with the North Vietnamese. I was very skeptical of engaging in negotiations at that time, I didn't think it was the right time. I wrote at least one memo to this effect, but didn't push it. Kissinger felt, and would say to this day, that because of Watergate public support for the war and for the Nixon administration was fast eroding, necessitating our reaching a negotiated end of the war. Kissinger simply felt that we had lost our leverage in large measure because of Watergate. So negotiations took up most of our time.

The agreement, the unfortunate Paris Accords, went into effect in January, 1973, and that was when I took charge of all of Indochina in the NSC. Then we were faced with trying to get the North Vietnamese to live up to the agreement. The ink on the document had literally not dried when they began violating virtually every article of it. I am not saying that our side didn't violate any of it, because initially belligerents before a cease-fire try to improve their position through last minute attacks. Both sides were doing that. There was a certain amount of combat inertia left over when the cease-fire started. I am not saying that all of the South Vietnamese troops immediately stopped fighting, they didn't. And neither did the North Vietnamese; so there were some violations on both sides. The violations by the North Vietnamese were massive. Being the kind of country we are, with every

Library of Congress

little thing we did exposed to the media, we felt compelled to live up to the agreement, indeed to an absurd degree, right up to the very end. When you look back on it it is hard to believe the degree to which we really did live up to the agreement: however, we lost all our leverage in enforcing the peace terms when the Congress lost interest in the war. As soon as it became known, on October 5, 1972, that an agreement was about to be signed, the Congress concluded that was the end of the war and time to forget Vietnam.

We felt we must do something to stop all these violations; so we all went out to San Clemente, that was the Western White House, and met with the President in March, 1973. The President decided that we would start bombing the North again, but before we did that, we would call for another set of negotiations to see if we could do something to plug the loopholes in the Accords and stop all these violations; so we called for a meeting with the North Vietnamese to begin in May, 1974, thinking we would have, by then, already hit them hard and would have softened them up so they would be ready to be good boys and live up to the agreement. Unfortunately, Nixon lost his nerve and decided that it was politically difficult, if not impossible, to do this; so we went into those meetings without having carried out any military operations. Naturally we got nowhere in Paris. We had a brief recess and started again in early June. We met outside of Paris in the villa of the famous French artist Fernand Leger, who had been a Communist. I believe the PCF owned it.

I will never forget Henry said, "You know, if these violations don't stop we are going to have to start military operations against you." Le Duc Tho and the other North Vietnamese just sat back and laughed and said, "Dr. Kissinger, you don't read the newspapers. You don't seem to know what is going on in your own Congress." (On June 4, the Senate had approved the Case-Church amendment mandating the cessation of all military operations in Indochina.) That was the only time that I ever saw Henry totally nonplused. He could only say, "This is of no concern to you, this is a domestic issue." At that point I knew it was all over, that we had had it. This was, indeed, the beginning of the end. The North Vietnamese knew they could do anything they wanted with total impunity, and did, and

Library of Congress

later even bragged about it. General Van Tien Dung, who was chief of staff of the North Vietnamese army, wrote a series of articles published in July, 1976, in the Party daily Nhan Dan, in which he described in great detail how they had violated the agreement. After they had conquered the South, it didn't matter anymore; so they could let it all hang out, literally.

I was mostly caught up in all this during the last part of the war, 1973-75. I was having a dreadful time at it because everything was going down the tubes on my watch. After the Accords, I was trying to get as much support as I could for the South Vietnamese, but it was exceedingly difficult. I became very quickly involved in the missing-in-action problem which soon became a major issue. Although we had gotten all our prisoners back, many of our military were still unaccounted for (as is the case after any war). Hanoi was singularly uncooperative and still remain so, to some extent.

My task was made extremely difficult mainly because Congressional restraints had made it next to impossible for the South Vietnamese forces to hold their own. They had been accustomed to large-scale logistic support from us and had been trained to fight with this kind of support. The North, on the other hand, continued to be well equipped by their allies. As a matter of fact, in the last year of hostilities, the year preceding the fall of Saigon in April, 1975, the Chinese provided twice as much military assistance to the North as did the Soviet Union; so they were getting everything they needed from their allies, while the South Vietnamese were being cut off from our help. This led to a feeling of abandonment which demoralized the South and made it vulnerable to the final attack in 1975. In meeting this attack, President Thieu made some very unfortunate moves, especially when he ordered his forces to fall back and consolidate, instead of staying put and defending their positions. Retreats turned into routs, and forces disintegrated and were defeated. It reminded me very much of the fall of France. Remember those newsreels of refugees flooding the roads. When you are trying to move troops through hordes of refugees you lose unit integrity. The troops get all mixed up with the civilians, and that is what happened to the South Vietnamese. The Vietnamese were very good at defending positions, but

Library of Congress

when caught up in that kind of disorderly ill-thought-out retreat, they lost unit integrity and were defeated. There were, of course, other things which led to this unraveling. The rest is history. The genesis of the South's defeat was its being abandoned by us, and we should never forget it.

Q: How did you feel about that when you were with the NSC at that point?

STEARMAN: I was heart broken about what was happening. I was doing the best I could trying to get equipment out to them. Also, to be honest, DOD kind of lost interest. Their attitude was, "Our troops are out of there and we are going on to other things." I had even trouble getting DOD to let go of some critical equipment. They especially didn't want to let go of any TOW (antitank) weapons, for example. We ran into the same thing during the 1973 Yom Kippur war. DOD also didn't really want to give the Israelis many TOWs, because we didn't have that many in our inventory; however, in the case of Indochina, they didn't want to deliver old weapons. Let me give you an example. Before anything had fallen, we were having trouble moving supply convoys up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh, because they were getting ambushed by communist forces on the banks. I had the idea of putting quad 50 caliber machine guns on some of the barges that were going up there because I had seen their devastating effect when I was in the Pacific during World War II. I felt if we had opened up with these guns on those ambush sites, they would have been blown away and our problem would have been solved. But the military was very reluctant to get them out there. We had them around in surplus, but it was like pulling teeth to have them delivered. I had to cajole, threaten, everything else, just to pry loose some old quad 50s to send out there. Finally, after a totally unnecessary delay, they were sent out and only half of them were operative. They didn't even take the trouble to put them in operating condition. That is one example of many that made my job so frustrating.

Q: I would like to stop here, but next time I want to ask about the atmosphere with Kissinger, the NSC and about the fall of Vietnam and anything you have to say about Watergate.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: I'll be very happy to do that.

Q: Today is June 17, 1994. Bill, how did you see Kissinger at this particular time?

STEARMAN: My own view of Kissinger is that he is an exceptionally articulate person, extremely intelligent, a person one could never best in any argument. Whenever I would raise an issue with which I felt he would disagree, I never tried to discuss it with him, but put it in a memo because I knew that even if I were 100 percent right, and he a 100 percent wrong, he would prevail, not just because he was my boss, but because he was far more articulate and could reduce me to feeling like the village idiot; so I fairly early on reached the point where I rarely would discuss anything with him at all personally, and found it better to put things in writing. (Also, to be honest, he usually didn't have much time for face-to-face discussions.)

Q: You honed your thoughts. But, also, did you find that if you presented something orally, would it just be sort of the love of the argument by which he would knock it down, whereas if you put it in a memo it would go there and percolate?

STEARMAN: I sometimes had that impression. I hate to say anything negative about people for whom I have worked, but on the other hand, that can be interesting. I had a high regard for his intellect, although I didn't always agree with the way he called the shots. I thought he was wrong on some very substantial issues, but that is another story all together. He tended to be overbearing. I will never forget early on when he first came into The White House, in January or February, 1969, he had a relatively small office down in the semi-basement of the west wing of The White House. One of his colleagues was a Foreign Service Officer, Larry Eagleburger, who is now well-known. Kissinger upbraided Larry one day about something in front of two or three other colleagues. Larry then followed him into his office and shut the door and said, "Henry, if you ever do that to me again, I am going to knee you right in the groin." After that they got on famously. Larry is the only one who had the chutzpah to do something like that. The rest of us Foreign

Library of Congress

Service officers, as you can appreciate, were a disciplined lot and not used to crossing or vexing our superiors; so we more or less saluted and scooted, as they say in the military. That was certainly my attitude towards him. I will say that Eagleburger was a notable exception, and he got on better with him than anybody else, which tells you something right there.

Q: You were dealing with what at that time?

STEARMAN: I was dealing with Indochina. I came into The White House in January 1971. Initially I was Kissinger's Hanoiologist and expert on the enemy side. I had had that job in the State Department as the head of the North Vietnam section in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

Q: Now Kissinger had a reputation of looking at things in sort of East-West conflict terms. Often it comes up in our interviews that he saw things in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East in terms of the Soviets, which really weren't there. From your particular perspective as the Hanoiologist, how did Kissinger view the influences of the Soviet Union and Communist China?

STEARMAN: Well, he thought the Soviets had a great deal of influence in Hanoi, at least he hoped they did. I think he thought the Soviets had more influence than China. The Soviets did have considerable influence, but the problem was that you never knew to what extent. They certainly didn't do much to help us either, because they were either unable or unwilling, I think a little bit of both frankly. He was disappointed, because he expected the Soviets to weigh in and help bail us out in Vietnam. In the first place, they had no incentive to do that, and if I were sitting in Moscow, I certainly wouldn't have wanted to bail the Americans out. They always considered us their principal adversary, and the main reason they were in Vietnam was because they were, indeed, an adversary of the United States.

Library of Congress

That was what Kissinger was most interested in. He thought that by having established a relationship of *détente* with the Soviets, that would spill over into other fields. He was repeatedly disappointed.

Q: What were you telling him about this Soviet relationship?

STEARMAN: I thought that they had a pretty close relationship with the Soviets, closer than with the Chinese, although there were some people in the Hanoi regime who were reputed to be closer to the Chinese. Ho Chi Minh, let's remember, was a Soviet agent for years and years. By Soviet agent, I mean a Comintern agent. And it was the Soviets who instructed him to go to Hong Kong in February 1930 to form the Indochinese Communist Party. An official North Vietnamese party history, indeed, states that the Comintern sent Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc (one of Ho's aliases), to Hong Kong to found the Indochinese Communist Party; so he had close ties with the Soviets. He was actually somewhat more of a Stalinist than other leaders who survived Stalin. Contrary to popular belief and myth, he was absolutely opposed to national communism. In fact, he abhorred national communism. He railed against Tito back in 1948 when Tito was thrown out of the Cominform and led the pack in criticizing Tito and national communism. Right up to his death, Ho was pleading with China and the Soviet Union to patch things up. He steadfastly believed in and called for the unity of the so-called Communist Camp under the "vanguard" party of the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1965 the Soviets gave them a great deal of military assistance. Initially, of course, they got most of their supplies from the Chinese for the war against the French. The victory at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 wouldn't have been possible without massive aid from the Chinese, including many troops. The Soviets moved closer to Hanoi and became more involved after Khrushchev was ousted in October 1964. Brezhnev and Kosygin were decidedly more interested in helping North Vietnam.

Recently Soviet documents have come out which imply that the Soviets had their problems with Hanoi, but basically I think Hanoi cooperated pretty well with the Soviets. The Soviets got what they most wanted, a major naval and air base at Cam Ranh Bay, once the South

Library of Congress

fell in April, 1975. This was something I had long predicted and written memos about. Cam Ranh Bay is strategically very important in that part of the world. When I was a naval officer in the Pacific, U.S. forces were attacked by Japanese naval vessels based in Cam Ranh Bay; so, to me, that was a significant military base, and that is one reason I predicted the Soviets would get it. Of course, those who opposed the war ridiculed this prediction.

Soviet ties and influence were certainly strong enough good enough, so they could get what they wanted.

Q: Let's talk about the fall of Vietnam in April, 1975.

STEARMAN: Among other things, the South Vietnamese got so short of supplies that the infantry troops would go into battle with maybe one or two hand grenades instead of a half a dozen. Artillery batteries could fire off only one round and then had to get permission before firing off more. They were being short changed by us across the board. Bear in mind they had been trained to use an unlimited amount of supplies by us and had become over reliant on fire power and it had to be cut back radically. The North Vietnamese did not have that problem. In fact, as I have noted, they got tremendous amount of supplies from the Soviets and the Chinese.

Q: From your perspective, were we able to monitor the supplies that were coming in from China and the Soviet Union?

STEARMAN: We had very good intelligence through satellite photography, human intelligence and other sources. We knew what was going on. One of the things that sent us all up the wall was this agreement with them signed in January, 1973, which prohibited the reinforcement of the troops and the introduction of new equipment. They massively violated every article of that agreement from the very beginning and made no bones about it. For example, they turned the Ho Chi Minh trail into a superhighway. They totally ignored

Library of Congress

the entire agreement because we could do nothing about it, once the Case-Church amendment went into effect forbidding any U.S. military action whatsoever in Indochina.

So South Vietnam was deprived of military support while the other side had almost unlimited amount of support from their friends and allies. When the North Vietnamese launched their offensive in very early spring of 1975, they didn't expect it to succeed immediately. In fact, they planned it to be an initial push and with another final offensive the following year; however, once they started and had a couple of successes in the Highlands, Thieu made a very bad mistake, understandable, perhaps, but disastrous. He thought it would be best to pull in and kind of consolidate his forces so there would be less territory to defend. He then began a withdrawal of forces from the Highlands, and from the northern part of the country towards the south. The South Vietnamese were quite good at holding and defending positions, and if he had left them in place, it would have been much more difficult for the North Vietnamese to have overcome them; however, once they had pulled out of their positions and started to withdraw, their families started coming down with them and were joined by many civilian refugees. It reminded me of the pictures we saw of France in the 1940s where all the roads were clogged with refugees intermingled with retreating French troops. Once you get a mess like this on a road, the military units lost what they call unit integrity so it was hard for them to function; moreover, each enemy attack created more confusion and chaos. Thieu also kept telling the troops first to hold and then would order them to withdraw and then hold and then withdraw again. It was a classic example of the old adage: "order, counter order, disorder."

Q: How was this playing by this time in the NSC? Were you just watching it and wringing your hands?

STEARMAN: We tried to advise the South Vietnamese the best we could, but we had no American military advisors there, all the American forces had been pulled out by March 1973. Ambassador Graham Martin was there, who was kind of a testy character. He thought we should have been sending over more aircraft and more help, and we got

Library of Congress

pleading telegrams from him to do more. Meanwhile, we saw how badly things were going and thought it would be best to evacuate some of the aircraft to prevent their capture. When Martin later found out that this had happened, every time I ran into him in the halls of the State Department, he would upbraid me personally and ask why the aircraft were pulled out rather than sending more in. He kind of went to his grave really believing that maybe something could have been pulled out of the hat at the last minute. We didn't think so.

We had a (CIA) Station Chief out there by the name of Polgar, who was Hungarian, and he had the naive idea that he had some special rapport with the Hungarian element of ICCS (the International Commission on Control and Supervision), which was the international body set up by the agreement to supervise the implementation of the Paris Accords. So you had Hungarians, Poles as well as Canadians (who later dropped out to be replaced by Indonesians). Anyway, there were Hungarians there all the time. Polgar thought being a Hungarian that he could somehow persuade his fellow Hungarians in the ICCS to have the North Vietnamese stop their attacks in order to work out some sort of provisional interim government and conclude the hostilities through diplomacy; moreover, the military situation, at the time, made this totally unreal. What possible incentive would the other side have for negotiating on the eve of total victory? A few people out there were living in a kind of dream world, like Graham Martin and Polgar, but no one in the NSC. Soon our main concern was evacuating our own people and those Vietnamese who had worked for us.

There was one thing that bothered me a great deal. At one time there were two large merchant ships tied up in Saigon, and my feeling was that we could and should have used these ships to evacuate Vietnamese who worked for us and others who were in greatest danger. We could have gotten thousands on those ships at night and shipped them out. Graham felt that once you start doing this, you create a panic and everyone would want to get out. In a way he had a point, but on the other hand this was the last best chance of safely, quietly, quickly getting an awful lot of people out of there. That opportunity was overlooked. Then we had to do some very quick air evacuations which became very

Library of Congress

difficult after the airport came under fire. Of course, everyone is very familiar with the final evacuation by chopper of people on the roof of our embassy.

My feeling is that Graham Martin turned out not the right choice for that job at that critical time. He was handpicked by Kissinger. He was sort of a testy character and Kissinger was kind of impressed by that, and by the need to have a tough, tenacious ambassador like Martin at the helm. In that he was right at the time Martin was sent out there.

Q: I want to go back and get your observation...here you are and telegrams are coming in from Martin...Kissinger by this time was Secretary of State but also still National Security Advisor wasn't he?

STEARMAN: Yes, Scowcroft was the top NSC man physically in The White House at that time. The Ford administration was in office at that time. Scowcroft eventually took over as National Security Advisor.

Q: How about these telegrams that were coming in from Graham Martin? Was it the general impression of the NSC and all that this was Graham Martin who was wrong?

STEARMAN: I felt he was wrong. I don't know, but I imagine that Kissinger felt the same way. I think the feeling was that he had an unrealistic view of the chances of the South Vietnamese really pulling something out of a hat. They made a couple of good heroic stands, but it looked like the fall was inevitable to me. I didn't know how the Communist forces could be stopped once so many good South Vietnamese units were pulling back. So there was kind of an air of unreality about those who still had hope. You know from your own experience, a lot of times when you are right on the spot, things don't seem to be as threatening as when you are reading about them thousands of miles away. But maybe the person thousands of miles away has a more realistic appraisal of what is going on than you do. You go about your daily routine of life. Maybe the gunfire is getting a little closer, but that is not unusual in that part of the world. I think it was just a little hard for Graham

Library of Congress

to come to grips with the reality of the situation. He was not helped by Polgar, his Station Chief.

There was another thing that bothered me. I was told that he discouraged preparations for evacuation of our personnel because, again, he thought this would be demoralizing; so you had the Province Reps, who were mostly Foreign Service officers, in some places like Da Nang and Can Tho, who had to wing it. They had to put together their own improvised plans for evacuating and rescuing their Vietnamese, etc., because the Embassy would not come to grips with an overall plan to do this. And that is something I kind of faulted the Embassy for, but, on the other hand, we also took the position that Graham Martin was the man on the ground and was representing the President; therefore, we shouldn't try to second guess him too much.

Q: If you see the inevitable there are two things that are going to happen. One is that you have to get your Americans out. I remember I was in the Senior Seminar watching this. It was obvious from newspaper reports that this thing was going to fall apart. Were you in the NSC precluded from saying, "Okay we have these two problems. One is the immediate one of getting the Americans out and the other is the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilian Vietnamese who are so closely tied to us that we have a morale obligation to do something. We should be laying groundwork for this."

STEARMAN: We were extremely concerned about this, but again we deferred to Graham Martin as our man-on-the-spot who was supposed to know better and was paid to make those decisions. I think that was a large part of the problem right there. We should have, in retrospect, issued him instructions from the President to come up with evacuation plans encompassing all American personnel as well as the Vietnamese. There were an awful lot of Vietnamese who were vulnerable. Thousands of them worked for us. Many who couldn't get out ended up in concentration camps for years or drowned trying to escape.

Q: Were you aware of our military moving ships closer, getting ready?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Absolutely, that was what we could do. We did order the deployment of ships, particularly carriers so the helicopters could fly onto them. Yes, that was something that we did organize from here. It was not always requested, but it was something we felt we could take the initiative in doing.

Q: Was anybody on the NSC given the task of thinking about what to do about the refugees?

STEARMAN: Yes, we addressed that. It became an increasing problem. I was in charge of Indochina at that time, the whole ball of wax. I stayed in that job until January 1976 and by the time I left, a very big part of the job was the refugee situation.

Q: Well, let's take the period of a month or so before the fall. From what I gather there were big fights with the Immigration Service and nobody was facing up to the enormity of the problem until all of a sudden all these people descended on them and then decisions that to be made.

STEARMAN: Mentioning Immigration. The only time in my entire professional career that I used a four letter word was in a meeting to an official from the Immigration Service. He was giving us problems along these lines. But I think it was rather later in the game that we started to make the preparations for refugees. My memory fails me now and I can't remember at exactly what point, but it certainly loomed increasingly large on the radar screen. When we began actually evacuating people, it was an immediate problem. But to the extent we had planned, I don't think there was a lot of planning.

Q: It sounds to me that a lot of it was ad hoc.

STEARMAN: Exactly, pretty much. That is the impression I have. I don't know everything that went on.

Library of Congress

Q: This is centered on your recollections and all, not an overview of everything. You had up to 1976 Indochina. Now these things were starting to fall apart and fell apart. During this time we had stated many, many times that the United States had a vital interest in Indochina, there was the domino theory and theories kept changing. But either right during or after the fall of Indochina did you in the NSC do a reappraisal about what happens next?

STEARMAN: There are a couple of things you have to bear in mind. Two dominoes did fall with Vietnam, there were Laos and Cambodia, but Hanoi always viewed all three as one political entity, which is why the Party was called the Indochina Communist Party, not the Vietnamese Communist Party. We were a little concerned what might happen to Thailand. Then, of course, we had the Mayaguez incident.

Q: That was where a ship was taken.

STEARMAN: Just after the fall of Vietnam and after the Cambodian communists had taken over Cambodia, we had this containership, the Mayaguez, seized off the coast of Cambodia by communist forces. We put together an operation to rescue it. I was the crisis management officer for this incident at the time. That was in May, 1975. There were some real problems with it. We mixed Marines and Air Force helicopters and they had had no experience working together. There were problems in actually assaulting the island where we thought the ship's crew were held. When we captured the ship, it turned out those aboard had all been removed to the mainland. We then started bombing the airport at what we used to call Sihanoukville, changed to Kompong Som. Eventually we worked out some arrangement for the release. I don't know exactly what really compelled the other side to let the crew go, but they all came chugging out in boats. We lost a number of Marines in this operation and I think part of it was caused by firing organized a bit too haphazardly. The mix of forces didn't work too well. On the other hand, we didn't really have any other ready option.

Library of Congress

I remember once we were trying to make some sort of contact with the communist forces, everything being in great confusion in Cambodia at the time. I suggested coming up on the broadcast frequencies the communists were using to get in touch with them that way. Kissinger thought this was a great idea. NSA (National Security Agency) was appalled, considering our knowledge of their frequencies to be classified. It turned out, I think, that Associated Press, or some other wire service, managed to act as an intermediary in some way. In the end, it worked out remarkably well.

After we got our people back, we still kept carrying out the air strikes in Cambodia. I told Kissinger, "Henry, we got our people back, we got the ship back, why don't we call off the air strikes. Suppose one of our guys gets shot down and we have another prisoner or worse yet somebody gets killed. So, why don't we knock it off?" He said, "We are not going to lose any aircraft." I realized later the reason he was doing this had nothing to do with Cambodia. It was aimed at North Korea. At that time, we had a lot of intelligence that North Korea was planning to launch a strike against South Korea because they thought we had been so demoralized by the fall of Indochina, that now would be a good time to attack. So Henry was sending a message to Kim Il Sung by continuing the bombing. In retrospect, I think he was right. As a matter of fact, I was quite concerned myself about a possible North Korean attack at that time. Many of us were. There was a lot of intelligence that indicated they were seriously thinking about it.

Now, back to your question. The fall of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia did concern us very much. One thing you have to bear in mind, which was in the back of my mind, was that the war bled North Vietnam white. They had pretty well shot their bolt, by the time they took the South, and were not in a position to do much else, assuming that they wanted to go any farther. The only place that one could be sure that the North Vietnamese forces wanted to go was northeastern Thailand, because there were quite a few Vietnamese there. There was always a very real threat that they might go in there, because there was a strong communist party organization in the area run from Hanoi.

Library of Congress

As far as going anywhere else beyond Indochina, that was not in the books. In fact, the communists had taken tremendous losses in the April 1972 offensive, losing about 100,000 killed in action and countless wounded after they had scraped the bottom of their manpower barrel to get that offensive started; so they were really in extremely bad shape for quite a long time. They eventually recovered enough to conquer the South but that was because the South Vietnamese simply fell apart. So, for a very long time, the North Vietnamese were foredoomed to licking their wounds and consolidating what they had taken over. What we accomplished in Vietnam, and I think most people in Southeast Asia believed this, was that we bought a long breathing period for those countries to get their own houses in order. I found that the only people who didn't believe in the domino theory were anti-war people in this country and some others in the U.S., but virtually everybody in Southeast Asia believed in it, the communists believed in it, Hanoi believed in it as did Moscow and Peking. While still in INR, I did a section of NSSM (National Security Study Memorandum), one that Kissinger ordered prepared on Vietnam in 1969. I dug up a number of quotes which indicated there was a strong belief on both sides out there in the domino theory.

Q: So we are really talking about Thailand, Indonesia, the whole Southeast Asia.

STEARMAN: In September, 1965 there was an attempted coup against Sukarno which was principally supported by the PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party, and a few courageous Indonesian generals managed to thwart that. Of course after their defeat, there was somewhat of a blood bath for the Communists. Many were executed. Both Malik and Suharto later told us privately that had we not taken a firm stand in Vietnam at that time—we sent our first troops into Vietnam in the spring of 1965—the moral support they needed to resist Sukarno and the PKI probably wouldn't have existed. They never said this publicly for their own political reasons. Malik was no great friend of the United States, as you know.

Library of Congress

Had the PKI gotten into power in Indonesia the conflict most likely would have spilled over into the Philippines. A communist victory on a large and important country like Indonesia would have made supporting “wars of national liberation” the thing to do, both in Peking and Moscow. So I think that in itself was quite an accomplishment. After the war, Bob Novak, the columnist, went down and interviewed Malik and Suharto and they both confirmed what they had told us off the record.

So, as far as the domino theory is concerned, I don't feel the North Vietnamese forces really would have gone anyway except possibly northeast Thailand, but they would have given a great deal of support to communist insurgencies in the Thai peninsula, Malaysia and elsewhere. Communism would have appeared to be the wave of the future, which incidentally, is the title of a book by Anne Murrow Lindbergh written just before World War II in which she said Nazism and Communist were the “wave of the future,” and capitalism is finished. Anyway, if it looked like communism was to be the wave of the future, winning this would have a serious ripple effect. This is really what the domino theory was all about more than the Vietnamese forces capturing Indochina, Thailand, etc. I don't think that was ever in the cards.

Q: And, of course, the big one might have been India.

STEARMAN: We never really thought about India, but you are right.

Q: You stayed on the NSC doing this type of work until 1976.

STEARMAN: I left under the Ford Administration and went over to ACDA, the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Q: Well, then, one more question on the NSC, backing up a little bit. We are talking about 1974. Did Watergate play at all on what you were doing?

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Oh, heavens, yes. I am glad you mentioned that. I guess we didn't get into that the last time. It had an enormous effect on Kissinger's Vietnam decisions because he felt the Presidency had been so weakened by Watergate that the American public, and certainly the Congress, would not continue our support for the Vietnamese forces much longer. And that is why he was so anxious to cut the kind of deal he did in October, 1972, which I felt at the time and feel now was very unfortunate and a big mistake; nevertheless, he felt that because of Watergate, and he told me this personally, he just didn't have any other choice. Now bear in mind that Watergate hadn't really come to the fore in late 1972. The whole concern was then overblown, because Nixon was a shoo-in against McGovern. Nobody was really that worried about Nixon's losing the election. You had these juvenile lower level characters, acting without high level instructions, who thought they could discover some Democratic secrets by breaking into the Democratic Headquarters at the Watergate. The whole Watergate scandal did eventually have great impact on our policy. The more that came out, the weaker the Presidency became. We all felt that. This was particularly true in 1973. Another thing one should bear in mind; is that for the last sixteen months of Nixon's incumbency, actually Al Haig was the President of the United States. He was a de facto President running the day-to-day operations, while Nixon would make some of the major decisions; however, Nixon was so totally wrapped up in Watergate that he was a part-time President at best. Haig never told me this, but everybody more or less assumed this was the case. I knew Haig quite well and could see that he was making the day-to-day decisions.

The absolute nadir came when Nixon resigned. We knew about a week ahead of time that he was going to leave office. I then expected The White House to substantially lose authority. This was in 1974. I was still trying my best to get equipment sent to Cambodia and to the Vietnamese and was meeting increasing resistance from the Pentagon and others, who were no longer interested in what went on in Southeast Asia, despite everything that was happening there. I expected that with Nixon's downfall I would get zero cooperation from my colleagues in the bureaucracy, but quite the opposite happened.

Library of Congress

I had never found them to be more cooperative. I think those people were shaken by the fact that we had a vacuum at the top and felt that those of us who were trying to hold things together at the top deserved support. Now this is just one man's view, but at least, my own subjective impression at that time was that people were all behind us to a remarkable degree, far more than had been the case before.

Then we had to experience the sad episode of Nixon's embarrassing, maudlin speech that he gave just before he departed—we were all forgathered in the East Wing of the White House for this farewell. The poor man sort of rambled on and on. I had never seen him wear glasses before, but he would put them on and take them off. He had notes on some sheets of yellow pad paper in his inside coat pocket, which kept shifting into view across his tie. The whole thing was terminally pathetic. Everybody was there. I looked toward Kissinger, and saw he was seated with the Cabinet. There were also Members of Congress and others present. We from the White House staff were sort of scattered around. Just about everybody was crying. I was happy to see him go, in a way, but the thing was so pathetic that you felt sorry for all involved, particularly for his poor family bravely standing up there. Then, we walked out to the south lawn, and waved goodbye as Nixon got into his helicopter and flew off “into the sunset.” We walked back through the West Wing, where there were still pictures of Nixon and his family on the walls and then back to the EOB.

Later, my assistant, an FSO who was a rather forward Irishman by the name of Kenneth Quinn said, “Why don't we see if we can go down and see Jerry Ford's swearing in?” I replied, “We are not invited to that. That is only for the top leadership, the Supreme Court, the Cabinet, Members of Congress. Only the select, the most senior people in The White House can go to that.” “Well,” he said, “Let's try anyway.” We got in the elevator on the third floor of the EOB and it stopped on the second floor. When the doors opened, there was Jerry Ford and two Secret Service men. We said, “Oh, Mr. Vice President, we will get out for you,” whereupon Ford said, “That's okay there is room for all of us.” So we all went down and marched to the West Wing together. Everyone assumed that Ken and I

Library of Congress

were part of his entourage so in we went, unhindered. So I was back again in the same room I had been a couple of hours before watching Nixon's pathetic farewell. Now it was a different world. Everybody was upbeat and smiling. I saw the same Cabinet members all sitting in the same places they had been, but now all were wreathed in smiles. Jerry Ford was sworn in and we walked back through the West Wing. Now there were already pictures of Jerry and Betty Ford all over the place. It was fast work on the part of those responsible for such things. It was "The King is dead, long live the King!"

Q: In 1976 you moved over to the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

STEARMAN: Yes. I was the Deputy Assistant Director for International Affairs. I had responsibility for all multilateral arms control negotiations. That was under Ford. That position was equivalent to a deputy assistant Secretary of State. When Carter came to office, the Director left, Freddy Ikl#, and the Deputy Director, John Lehman, became Director. He later became Secretary of the Navy under the Reagan Administration. With the change everybody was advanced up one notch; so I was advanced to Assistant Director and had my own bureau. It wasn't quite as big as bureaus in the Department of State, but it was my very own bureau. I held that position for several months because Paul Warnke, who was coming in to be Director, was having difficulty with his Senate confirmation because he was fairly far to the left. Finally, after my having had the pleasures and problems of being an acting assistant director, Warnke came in and installed his own people. I was replaced by someone who Freddy Ikl# had brought in, John Newhouse who was fairly liberal and always had been. This didn't seem to bother the Nixon crowd too much.

Q: So you were there for how long?

STEARMAN: I was in ACDA from January, 1976 until October, 1977. I was a career Foreign Service officer but having served so long in The White House under Republican Presidents, I suppose I had become labeled a Republican when, in fact, for most of my

Library of Congress

career I had been a registered Democrat, indeed, well-known as a registered Democrat. But still I was not on Warnke's political wavelength. The new crowd would ensure that I did not get a senior position in the Carter Administration, so I went to Fort McNair, to the National Defense University, as a Senior Research Fellow.

Q: Well, during your time with ACDA, what were your major concerns?

STEARMAN: I worked on MBFR...Multilateral Balance Force Reduction in Europe. Also I was responsible for our negotiations in Geneva in the Committee on Disarmament which handled a host of issues. We were involved in all kinds of multilateral issues. Our bilateral dealings were almost entirely with the Soviets. SALT, for example, was considered a bilateral issue. Any negotiation which involved more than one country was the responsibility of the bureau which I eventually headed. I am trying to think of all the various and sundry issues we addressed. There were a multitude of them.

Q: What was your attitude and those around you towards these multilateral things? Did they seem to be promising or was it just something to keep alive?

STEARMAN: We had hopes that something would come out from them. There were some accomplishments. You can't say they were all exercises in futility, although some were. All of these things proceeded at glacial pace. Some of the agreements we reached, when really you got right down to it, didn't accomplish all that much, but they did accomplish a little bit. In any case, we thought the process was a good thing to keep going, and I think we were probably right in that belief.

A little footnote here: One of the things that Carter wanted to do, and remains germane today, was to withdraw the US Second Infantry Division from South Korea. That really alarmed many of us because this is exactly how we got into the Korean War in the first place. It wasn't because Acheson defined Korea outside of the defense perimeter, it was primarily because we had withdrawn all of our forces from Korea in 1949 that encouraged

Library of Congress

the North to attack in 1950. Carter was about to make the same mistake and I was thinking that this was a good way to get into another war in Korea.

Q: I might add one thing. I was Consul General in Seoul and this thing was just appalling because it was almost an open invitation for an invasion by the North.

STEARMAN: That is exactly how many of us felt, especially in the Pentagon. I have been at both ends of such internal conflict. I have had to fight bureaucratic conspiracy when I was in The White House, and now I was in the bureaucracy conspiring against the President to thwart this insane move on his part.

It is interesting that my immediate superior, Leon Schloss, and I prepared for Warnke an arms control case against the withdrawal, and we got him on our side, even though he had always been a super dove. Warnke's natural inclination had always been to pull out our forces everywhere, however, our arms control case really convinced Warnke we had reasoned that a withdrawal would make Japan feel compelled to increase its military forces and maybe even go nuclear, as could South Korea. When you create such regional insecurity, you greatly encourage an arms race in the region. Although I rarely agreed with him about anything, Paul Warnke was no fool. He was, indeed, very intelligent. He was bright enough so that you didn't have to draw pictures for him.

We had Warnke on board and Brzezinski was rapidly coming around. I remember going to a meeting on Korea over at The White House which featured a briefing by the Director of CIA. The CIA and DIA had come up with a new order of battle for the North Korean forces which showed their strength of about 50 percent over our previous estimate. That, of course, greatly strengthened our case. In the end, Carter only succeeded in withdrawing something like a battalion.

Q: I think a battalion of hawk missiles which were going to go anyway. I think they went out one door and returned via another one, or something like that.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: It all came to a screeching halt, which demonstrates the potential power of the bureaucracy. This is a case study of how a determined bureaucracy can conspire to thwart one of the President's favorite goals.

Q: The idea behind it, I think, was that we were not going to commit any more ground troops in Asia at all. A reaction against the Vietnam.

STEARMAN: Precisely.

Q: But there were none of us, particularly those of us who were 30 miles from the North Koreans, who thought this was a very good idea.

STEARMAN: I will never forget a meeting at State on Korea which included the woman who headed State's Policy and Planning staff, and now has a senior position in the Clinton Administration. At this meeting she said, "Well, what is everybody worried about? We will never fight another ground war in Asia." I said, "When did I first hear this? I believe it was in 1945, and then again in 1953. Famous last words."

Q: We are now talking in 1994 and it is a very hot situation with North Korea making noises. As of today it is not inconceivable that we could have another war and the Second Division is playing a major role by sitting there. So, if you attack South Korea, you attack the United States.

STEARMAN: Exactly, and with all that implies. So our forces are more than just a tethered goat to trigger a response. It was a very substantial U.S. commitment, just like as our forces in Berlin could have been overwhelmed, but not without going to war with us, the British and the French. So a serious military presence can be a very important thing.

Well, that was one issue where I consider that we in ACDA helped to achieve a major accomplishment. There were many other issues, but none comes to mind at this moment. I got back into arms control in the Bush Administration.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, you were at the National Defense University for how long?

STEARMAN: About a year, I think. They wanted me to put together a large-scale case study program patterned after the Harvard Business School approach. It was kind of a place where you go to and hunker down and wait for a new administration or retirement. I hadn't decided what I was going to do after that. Then, in October, 1978, an opportunity, with a one month window of eligibility, suddenly came along allowing retirement based on a high one year of earnings rather than the usual average of your highest three years. There were about 70 of us who decided to take advantage of this and jumped through that window while we could. The Department tried to renege on it but we hired a lawyer and won.

Q: What did you do after you retired before returning to the NSC?

STEARMAN: I went to Georgetown University. I had been an adjunct professor there since January, 1977 and now came back full time. I was a career counselor and taught more courses; so was pretty much working full time until I went back to the NSC in January, 1981. During that period, I became Director of Georgetown's Russian Study Program, which is a graduate program. That kept me very busy. When I went back to The White House there was mutual agreement that this program should be taken over by somebody who could devote full time to it.

I had worked on Reagan's campaign. I was approached by Fred Ikl#, my old ACDA boss, who asked me if I would become one of Reagan's foreign policy advisors. I said, "Well, you know I am a Democrat?" I was told that didn't matter, and it turned out that there were several Democrats on that team who later got senior positions...Richard Perle, Richard Pipes and Jeane Kirkpatrick, for example. We were what one used to call "Scoop" Jackson Democrats.

Q: Explain what you mean.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Those of us who were realistic, others would say conservative, as far as foreign and defense policies were concerned, but were more on the liberal side as far as the domestic issues were concerned. I especially happen to be an ardent environmentalist and also believe we should have a national health program and national pension program, but I have always had what I would call a realistic, hard nosed, no allusions approach to foreign policy. That, I think, is a fair characterization of a “Scoop” Jackson Democrat.

Q: He was the Senator from Washington State.

STEARMAN: A lot of us thought of him as our role model for a long time.

Q: One has the feeling that Ronald Reagan and the people around him were pretty unsophisticated regarding the realistic world of foreign affairs. Did you find that so?

STEARMAN: There weren't very many of what I would call professionals among his advisers, and that characterized the NSC. I really had no intentions of coming back into the government in 1981; since I was very happy at Georgetown teaching, running the graduate program, etc. I was asked only at the very last minute if I would come back to the NSC. I said, “Only on my terms. I want to have some time for teaching. I will give you more than 40 hours a week, but I need a little flexibility and don't want to be responsible for too many actions.” So I was paired with Richard Pipes, who had been a professor at Harvard, and is still very prominent in the field of Russian history.

I was the only Foreign Service officer on the NSC staff; although I was retired at that time. When I was on Kissinger's NSC staff, it was a very, very good staff by the time I got there, comprised almost entirely of professionals, principally from the Foreign Service but also from CIA, and the military services. It was a highly professional and very capable group of officers. The NSC reached its zenith, I would say, under Kissinger.

Library of Congress

Q: You had Kissinger, Larry Eagleburger and Al Haig, all three who became Secretaries of State.

STEARMAN: Well, there you are. Think of that. And all others who became ambassadors. Even chaps who worked for me have mostly become ambassadors. A very, very good, gifted group of people we had. Very professional.

It was not that way at all under Reagan, initially. His first National Security Advisor was Dick Allen, who had an aversion to the Department and to Foreign Service officers. He considered all Foreign Service officers to be super liberal and not to be trusted. Somehow, they always made an exception in my case. The NSC mostly had people from think tanks and academia, including Pipes, for example. Now, the problem with that is that people from academia are mostly interested in the big picture, policy issues. Pipes, for example, wanted to devote all of his time to writing the definitive policy document on our relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In fact, he actually toyed with the idea of going back up to the Harvard Library, which he knew so well, and working there. Pipes and others thought you made policy by drafting definitive policy statements. You then send them around to the bureaucracy, and they will all salute and follow this policy. Well, this was the dream. We know that this is not the way policy is made at all. Policy is actually mostly made through hundreds, if not thousands, of incremental, little decisions, made by middle level and an accumulation of sometimes even junior bureaucrats.

Q: Often it is set by the news in the Washington Post and the New York Times in the morning. You have to react to that.

STEARMAN: Well, there you are, but who drafts the reaction? You may have drafted it when you were an FSO-5. I have done it when I wasn't much higher than that, but this is often how policy is done. How you answer the mail. Speeches are far and away the most important mechanism for setting and enunciating policy. Now, this is not the same as a policy document. Many people become involved in speeches. Speeches can be extremely

Library of Congress

important. Much of our fundamental policy has been established through speeches. For example, the Marshall Plan and Star Wars. Speeches get worked on by a lot of the Indians and then finally by the chiefs. But, day-to-day policy is set by how you answer the mail and by lots of small decisions.

This is what I did. We had the NSC team of Stearman and Pipes in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. I answered the mail. Pipes wasn't too interested in details, for which I couldn't blame him. Few of the academics were very interested in the nitty-gritty of answering mail, but you have to do this because if you don't you know who will, State, Defense, etc., then you lose control of influencing the process.

Q: The mail is mostly from Congressmen isn't it?

STEARMAN: The most important mail is Congressional mail, but we got a lot of other mail. We got letters from other governments, and we had to draft replies.

I will never forget the first staff meeting of the Reagan NSC; this is symptomatic of how things were run there initially—at this meeting I asked Dick Allen, the new National Security Advisor, “Dick, have we made arrangements to get all the telegraphic traffic from State, CIA and DIA, etc.? Have we assured that we will get all of the traffic we are going to need?” He looked at me and said, “Why do we need all that? Why do we have to read all these telegrams?” I replied, “Dick, if you don't, we are going to soon be behind the power curve because we won't know what everybody else knows. You are concerned about State running things, but if we don't know everything they know, we have had it.” He a bit grudgingly agreed, “Well, okay, we'll take care of it.” As you know, information in this business is knowledge and knowledge is power as anybody can tell you, but Dick had not focused on one of the most fundamental requirements of the NSC staff.

We had staffers who were not answering their mail and as a result were getting blind-sided. This creates a bureaucratic vacuum which inevitably gets filled by somebody. A good example was my ARA (Latin America) colleague. You probably have read some of

Library of Congress

his things. He is a very bright academic, writes well and knew much about the subject. But he would not answer the mail. He was only interested in big picture issues. An FSO was finally brought over as his deputy. He answered the mail and ended up with the job, and rightly so.

It was difficult to get anybody from the Department for the NSC. When Pipes had to go back to Harvard, because his leave of absence was up, there was a need to replace him. I agitated for FSO Jack Matlock, then Charg# in Moscow, and did all the spade work; although the Department was reluctant to let him go, we finally got him. He was the first active duty FSO in the Reagan NSC. Others came along later when it was demonstrated that they could do the work and were basically apolitical.

Still there remained what they never really got, namely, that you must answer the mail. There are always these bureaucrats who come up with ideas, get them floated and accepted. Establishing policy is often a nibbling process, rather than of spectacular moves, except in the case of major policy speeches.

I have seen numerous policy papers get written, only to be sent around then filed away and forgotten, eventually ending up in archives where researchers later find them and wrongly assume they actually influenced policy when, in reality, they may have had zero influence. That was in large measure the case with the magnus opus Pipes was working on. It was an excellent piece of work, but it went into files where it was largely ignored. That is the fate of most policy papers, they get written and then are ignored. (A major exception to this, of course, was George Kennan's famous "long telegram" in 1946 which was instrumental in formulating our containment policy.)

Q: It is what you do today that counts.

STEARMAN: Exactly. We live in a fluid situation. Life itself is a fluid situation. Individual human beings have to make decisions all the time because it is difficult to predict what is going to happen, especially in foreign affairs. Using experience, knowledge and common

Library of Congress

sense one has to make a lot of decisions on the spot. You have, of course, certain objectives in foreign policy, which are well established and have been for a long time, containment, for example. George Kennan's famous long telegram which was embellished upon, but he focused everybody on the goal of containment.

Q: What he did was to articulate what everybody was thinking. It wasn't as though he really changed minds. But it focused it. Everybody knew it, but nobody was talking that way. All of a sudden he was saying what everybody was agreed upon, but didn't know they were agreed upon.

STEARMAN: Well, he (Kennan) was a very articulate person. He wrote beautiful English. In those days, we used to write despatches in long hand on yellow pads, starting with, "Sir, I have the honor to report..." On reading those reports today one is struck by the high quality of his despatches. Compared with the later political reporting from overseas, there is a day and night difference. Kennan was of the old school, and that telegram was beautifully written and well-reasoned. And it has had a profound impact. I think you put it well, Stu, that he articulated and focused what a lot of people had in mind. He made a very rational case for, and he was right. That telegram is prescient like no other document I have ever read. He described exactly what ultimately was going to cause the downfall of the Soviet Union. He predicted what, in fact, precisely happened.

Q: You came into the Reagan White House where the Soviet Union was referred to as the "Evil Empire." Did you try to get the Reagan group to understand changes were going on in the Soviet Union and what they were?

STEARMAN: Well, I explained why the changes were coming about. Whenever you leave the White House, and I left on January 19, 1993, you go through your files and pack up your unclassified stuff and ship it off for the presidential library. This is an insane way of doing business because the people who come in don't have any past files for references. Even when a Republican replaces a Republican, that is done. It is a nutty system.

Library of Congress

In packing up my files, I came across a memo I wrote in December 1984 to Bud McFarlane, who was then National Security Advisor. In it I said that the fifth Soviet d#tente had begun and the purpose of it was to derail the Strategic Defense Initiative, "Star Wars." Until Gorbachev came to power in March, 1985, this d#tente was slow in getting off the ground because Soviet leaders were ailing and on the verge of dying. Three died right off the bat. But Gorbachev, who was young and vigorous, took the ball in March, 1985 and really did many things to promote this d#tente and a more liberal atmosphere in the Soviet Union. His role model was Khrushchev. People usually fail to realize the amount of liberalization that took place under Khrushchev. Actually Solzhenitsyn was able to publish some of his books under Khrushchev, but not under Gorbachev until the very end. So, in some ways, Khrushchev was more liberal internally than even Gorbachev.

He was a role model in both a positive and a negative sense. Positive in that Gorbachev admired a lot of things he had done, especially his role in deStalinization. As you know, Khrushchev's February 20, 1956 revolutionary secret speech dethroned Stalin and inspired Gorbachev's generation. Khrushchev became a hero and a role model. Gorbachev, however, knew and understood the mistakes of Khrushchev. One basic mistake was that he neglected tending the store. This is a little historical footnote: I was on the Soviet Desk (SOV) when Khrushchev was kicked out in October 1964. We were all taken totally by surprise. We then did a post mortem on this, and one of the surprising things we came up with is that he had spent most of his time out of Moscow and out of the country. He wasn't minding the store. The mice were playing while the cat was away.

So Gorbachev was not going to spend that much time out of Moscow. Another thing...Khrushchev had a very successful d#tente going in the mid-fifties. That was in reaction to our military buildup in the wake of the Korean War.

Q: NATO and the whole thing.

Library of Congress

STEARMAN: Yes. That was really the second d#tente. The first d#tente wasn't much of a one. It came in 1949 with the end of the Berlin Blockade. The second one was after Stalin's death, which started before Khrushchev came into power, but he caught the ball and carried it quite far. There were a number of things he did which convinced our allies and us that we didn't have to worry about a Soviet attack and could throttle back our defense expenditures. Iceland, for example, asked us to remove our forces, and NATO was becoming slowly unglued. D#tente was working swimmingly for Khrushchev until the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, when he was faced with a terrible dilemma. He knew that if he crushed the revolution it would probably be the end of this very successful d#tente; however, if he didn't he might lose all of Eastern Europe. He crushed it and this was the end of that d#tente. Our whole attitude towards the Soviet Union changed radically.

Gorbachev's d#tente was mainly directed towards convincing the Congress that they shouldn't support SDI. One thing you have to bear in mind about SDI, which is very important, was that, although it was pooh-poohed in this country by many and not even taken that seriously by some in the NSC, it was taken very seriously in the Soviet Union. The Soviets had been working on this problem for 30 years, and they were convinced that with our technology and engineering skills that we could do it. If we could come up with a SDI, which was only 50 percent effective, that would radically change the strategic balance in our favor. In fact, we learned that some of their top military leaders believed it could be as much as 65 percent effective. So from Gorbachev on down, they all believed that we could eventually deploy a strategic defense that would absolutely turn things upside down. One must always bear in mind that military power to the Soviet Union was essentially a political instrument. This seems to be awfully hard for us Americans to understand. They looked upon it as a political and diplomatic tool. I do not believe they ever seriously considered attacking the United States; they certainly never wanted war with us, but they built up their military power in order to gain political and diplomatic leverage. So they felt that if we gained an enormous strategic advantage over them, they would lose most of

Library of Congress

the political and diplomatic leverage that their very costly military power had bought them, which was the only thing that made them a super power.

Anyway, they thought SDI was enormously important. I have subsequently found out that everybody from Gorbachev on down believed it could work. Several years ago, I was sitting next to a Soviet Lt. General at a dinner party and I said, "General, do you people think SDI can work?" He looked at me as if I had asked him if the sun will come up tomorrow. He said, "Of course." That was a given.

Q: Reagan really came out with this SDI out of the blue, slipping it into a speech. What was your initial reaction and did you see it having an effect on the Soviet Union or weren't we catching the importance of this?

STEARMAN: I felt it was smart to develop it (SDI) because the Soviets had, in any case, been working on it. I never believed in "mutual assured destruction" and neither did the Soviets. We knew that. I thought it was infinitely preferable to have something that would make our deterrent more credible. This would have contributed greatly to world peace and stability. I was a firm believer without knowing much about the technicalities, but I knew our capabilities and those of the Soviets; so I was confident we could do something. The problem was that people in this country thought that Reagan had said that we could deploy a leakproof umbrella which would protect us from all missiles. Reagan never really meant that, but, unfortunately, he never said clearly enough that this was not what he had in mind and that 100 percent protection was impossible. It was never explained the way it should have been, I think. So I partly blame Reagan and others in the White House for the widespread skepticism and opposition to SDI.

In a very revealing and generally overlooked interview published in Time magazine in early September, 1985, Gorbachev called upon Congress to withhold SDI funding in order to confine it permanently to the laboratory. I couldn't believe that nobody picked up on this. I did, however, in a memo which went to the President. Nobody else seemed to appreciate

Library of Congress

the incredible candor of this man. It was of enormous importance to him to continue this d#tente. It wasn't just entirely, of course, just to encourage us not to fund SDI. He also wanted to modernize the Soviet Union and bring it into the later part of the 20th century. There were multiple reasons for his d#tente and liberalization programs both in foreign policy and domestic policy, but the main objective was killing SDI. I got this indirectly from Gorbachev himself and certainly from a number of other top Soviet leaders who said that SDI was overwhelmingly the factor that led Gorbachev to do what he did...what he felt compelled to do. He felt compelled to avoid what happened to Khrushchev in 1956. So in the summer of 1989, he clearly stated to the Eastern European countries that the Soviet Union would not use force to correct any "mistakes" they made. Referring to Sinatra's song..."Doing it my way," is how the Soviet spokesman explained it at the time.

Q: Frank Sinatra being, for the future historian, a popular singer over the last 30-40 years and this was his theme song.

STEARMAN: This is what led the Eastern Europeans to start "doing it their way." One thing led to another; they kept getting increasingly independent and then a number of things started happening in 1989. In November, 1989 the Berlin Wall came down and things were becoming unraveled in Eastern Europe. This spread to the Baltic States and then to the Ukraine. This was what really eventually brought down the Soviet Union.

Q: With all our intelligence gathering organizations, why didn't we know that the Soviet Union was as weak as it was and about to blow?

STEARMAN: Well, there are two things, Stu. One, it really was unexpected. I always thought I had a fairly good batting average in anticipating what was going to happen. As I mentioned before, I was the only person in the U.S. government to predict the Berlin Wall. By the same token, about three or four weeks before the Wall came down, I wrote a memo to Scowcroft saying that the Russians are not going to allow the Wall to come down. And I also made a few other pretty bad calls at the time.

Library of Congress

Another thing, and this sounds incredible, at least Jim Baker, and I think there were other people, didn't want the Soviet Union to come apart. They wanted it to stay together for fear of what might happen if it disintegrated. They wanted it liberalized and democratized, etc., but kept together. And this is why Baker opposed our supporting the independence of Croatia, and Slovenia. This is a genesis of the Bosnian thing. My own feeling about Yugoslavia is that we and our allies should have massively supported Croatia and Slovenia as soon as they declared independence to head off what the Serbs were going to do. This was an idea I got from Austrian diplomats. The Austrians insisted that a break up was inevitable and I believed them because Austrians know this part of Europe best of all West Europeans. This region belonged to them until 1918. You go in with all of the European allies and massively support and you will head off the trouble. But Baker didn't want to see Yugoslavia come apart because that would encourage the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I believe it was a bad call all around, but there you are. There was also a bit of not really believing the Soviet Union could break up after all these years. We were impressed by the power of the Soviet State and didn't fully grasp how fast it was eroding.

Q: Was there an inflation factor on everything about the Soviet Union looking back on things? We thought it was stronger than it was. We thought it was more cohesive than it was.

STEARMAN: Yes and no. We knew that it was basically held together through force, the military and police force. Of course, that is the main problem with liberalization; you have to curb these instruments of persuasion and compulsion which in turn, weaken control. According to the de Tocqueville theory of revolution, which is one of the few consistently reliable political maxims, when an intolerable situation begins improving, the danger of revolution is the greatest, not when things are getting worse.

If Gorbachev had maintained a tighter rein and not tried to liberalize, then things could have gone on for some time without changing; however, his concessions, to the Eastern European countries ended the Brezhnev Doctrine and led to the demise of the Soviet

Library of Congress

Union. Anything that is held together by force tends to come apart when that force is removed.

Q: It depends on the will at the center and that is very difficult to protect, isn't it?

STEARMAN: Exactly. They themselves weren't very good at predicting, Gorbachev was certainly surprised. I am convinced he didn't think things would get this much out of control. He thought that he would be able to liberalize and still maintain control. He would do it a little smarter than Khrushchev did, but, of course, he was wrong.

Q: Did you find the White House responsive to things?

STEARMAN: I think we were all usually behind the curve of what was going on and were by and large, more of observers, since there wasn't much we could then have done to influence things one way or the other.

Q: How about the State Department and the CIA? Was everybody on the same "behind the curve" wavelength more or less?

STEARMAN: Yes, I would say none of us were very good at predicting what was going to happen. I was not overly impressed with the CIA's ability to predict things. I represented the NSC at the monthly "warning meetings" that we had at Langley, with representatives from State, Defense, etc. The idea was to try to come up with things to look out for...warnings or heads up that you gave to decision makers as to what may happen. I was singularly unimpressed with much that came out of these meetings and I often felt frustrated trying to get some of my ideas across to them.

When the Baltic States went, particularly Lithuania, I felt that the Ukraine was going to go next, but I didn't find them to be very receptive on that score. There were a number of times when I felt they were taking a doctrinaire approach. I believe I have a different approach to problem solving because I studied to be an engineer and use more objective

Library of Congress

inductive reasoning as opposed to somewhat subjective deductive reasoning. I always try to amass all the facts and then draw my conclusions. I found most of the others, who had different academic backgrounds, made up their minds and then sought facts to fit their theories. That is a problem I ran into over and over again with them.

So I was not too impressed with the intelligence analysts.

Q: You were there during the Bush Administration too. Did you find a difference in the NSC?

STEARMAN: The NSC changed in the Reagan administration due to having a number of different directors. At first we had Dick Allen who got himself into some trouble, not really his fault, and was replaced by Judge William Clark. Clark was almost like a son to Reagan. He was a lawyer from California, a rancher who would come to work in a suit and cowboy boots. From my point of view, he was the best National Security Advisor of the eight that I have worked for, in that he didn't know very much about national security affairs, so he depended more on his staff than anybody else who has ever had the job. I thought that was great. Nearly every memo I ever wrote to him went right to the President.

Q: A bureaucrat's dream.

STEARMAN: Exactly. He would never go into a meeting with the President on anything, except very personal and delicate matters, without bringing one of us in. That was the opposite of Kissinger. He would almost never take one of us in when he went to see the President. He always tried to keep us isolated from the President. The only time I ever saw the President to talk to was in San Clemente where there was an informal atmosphere and where everybody was sort of laid back, there you could talk to the President. Otherwise, Kissinger kept us from the President. In all fairness to Henry, I believe that was how Nixon wanted it. He was a very private man who wanted to deal with only a few subordinates, e.g. Kissinger, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Library of Congress

Anyhow, Judge Clark was just the opposite. He had a great deal of influence with the President, more than any subsequent National Security Advisor. This was also a big help to us. He was very secure in his position. For example, in previous administrations, the National Security Advisor had one of the best offices up in the West Wing, the large spacious northwest corner office. The whole position of National Security Advisor was sort of downgraded initially under the Reagan Administration and Allen had an office about half the size of his predecessors down in the semi-basement of the West Wing. These things are important to most people, the size of office and proximity to the President, etc. Well, when Judge Clark came in, he could have had any office he wanted in the whole White House, except, of course, the Oval Office; however, he stayed in that basement office. He didn't give himself airs. He was relaxed, a gentleman of the old school, a great guy to work for. He was not a genius, but had good common sense and knew what the President wanted and how to make full use of his staff.

Unfortunately, he was a little too hardline for Nancy Reagan; so she and Deavers conspired against poor Judge Clark and finally got him out. He then moved to Interior. I think this was hard on the President and hard on Clark, because he was closer to Reagan than was his actual son. They had a very, very close relationship. This did not endear me to Nancy Reagan. She was unwittingly responsible for my not becoming Ambassador to Austria. Presidential Personnel picked me out for that job, but Nancy's friend Estee Lauder had a son; Ronald, who wanted to go to Vienna and he was pushed by Nancy Reagan. He set back our relations with Austria about ten years, more or less.

Clark was replaced by Bud McFarlane who had worked for him over at State when Clark was at State. Bud was really not up to the job. I like him personally, but he is sort of an enigmatic individual of limited ability. Then came the Iran-Contra thing and he was replaced by Admiral John Poindexter. He was okay, but again not really the ideal man for the job. He was replaced by Frank Carlucci, who was a very capable Foreign Service officer, but still he was not the man I would have picked because he was, I believed, more

Library of Congress

for Carlucci than anything else. He is a very gifted and bright man, but also a bit of a wheeler and dealer and operator (not uncommon in Washington). Not the sort of person who could be totally loyal to any particular President. He was simply a good professional, and maybe what was needed at the time.

Carlucci was replaced by Colin Powell, who was not a genius in national security affairs, but was the best organized person I have ever worked for in my entire life. I will give you an example of what I mean. By the time Colin Powell got into office, I no longer did any actions and hadn't done so for a number of years by my own choice. I didn't want to become burdened with actions, but do studies, memorandum on things that I thought were important. This, of course, reduced my influence, but I was still teaching at Georgetown and didn't want the long hours required by being an action officer. Moreover, I was working pro bono because I had retired at the top of the pay scale in the Foreign Service after 32 years of service, so had a pretty substantial pension; therefore, the amount they could have paid me was trivial, and I exchanged that for almost total freedom. This was probably also one of the reasons that I was able to stay on since at the end they weren't paying me at all, and this made it easy to justify sacking me. I think they benefited from the arrangement, because I was independent and not beholden to them. Even with these arrangements, I was working at least 8 hours a day.

I did information memorandums, and normally those don't have the highest priority; action memorandums did. Information memorandum had a tendency to keep settling down to the bottom of the in-box. Scowcroft would sometimes take two or three weeks to read some of my information memorandums. Colin Powell, on the other hand, routinely would have them back in 48 hours and sometimes within 24 hours. He read them carefully, too. You knew he read them because he would underline things and make marginal notes. I couldn't believe this. I had never known anybody in all of the years that I had been in government who could move paper this fast and I have served under almost a quarter of all the Presidents this country has ever had. Powell was a great guy to work for. He had common sense and looked out for his troops. From a personal point of view, I would rate

Library of Congress

Judge Clark first and next Colin Powell. Of the eight National Security Advisors I have worked for, in terms of competence, the best qualified intellectually was Brent Scowcroft, even better in this regard, than Kissinger. He knew more and had a greater depth of knowledge about national security affairs than did Kissinger, but Scowcroft had difficulty moving paper, except for urgent cases. He was probably the slowest in that regard. Kissinger was the most articulate, was extremely intelligent and was the most powerful operator, I would say.

Q: You said under Judge Clark you would go up from time to time to see the President. How did you find President Reagan as somebody focusing on foreign affairs?

STEARMAN: Well, much depended on whether or not he was interested in the issue. He was very good with people and was always gracious and congenial. Some people criticized Reagan because he wasn't interested in a lot of things. Reagan basically focused on some big concepts, such as SDI and the military build up, in general. He focused on a few big things and wasn't all that interested in many other things, which to some was very frustrating. One of my colleagues used to say that there is no President, after he had come back from an NSC meeting, and the President would have fallen asleep when my colleague's favorite issue was being discussed. In retrospect, I think Reagan was justified in falling asleep at some of these meetings.

Another thing, Reagan was very people oriented and was impressed by encounters with individuals. This is why, when we had the hostage crisis in Lebanon, some of us felt that it was imperative that the President not, under any circumstances, meet with the families of the hostages. Unfortunately, Bud McFarlane agreed to let these families meet with the President, and that was the genesis of Iran-Contra. Ollie North, who, incidentally, was the best man at my wedding ten years ago, knew that the President was mainly interested in two things at that time: getting the hostages out and getting the Contras supplied in Nicaragua. So being an extremely intelligent, active, imaginative guy, Ollie put it all together in one package which became known as "Iran-Contra"—get the

Library of Congress

hostages back and, at the same time, finance the Contras. All of this required a bit more than smoke and mirrors, it required cutting some corners and doing some things which the Congress subsequently found illegal. Some would argue, as would I, that this was essentially a Constitutional dispute over Congressional versus Executive Branch power and jurisdiction in the conduct of foreign affairs. Ollie would be the first to admit that he made some serious mistakes in putting this highly imaginative package all together. In the final analysis, this all resulted from Reagan's mentality, personality and how he operated.

Q: How did you find the George Bush White House?

STEARMAN: Bush was not one to focus on a few main things as did Reagan. Under Bush more professional people were brought in for the NSC staff. He brought Scowcroft in as his National Security Advisor, who was so knowledgeable himself, that I don't think he felt he needed an awful lot of advice and help from the staff. Of course, he needed the staff to cope with the large amount of paper work that had to be done. There is simply no getting around this. You can't operate without a staff. They have so many things to prepare, but as far as really taking advice from the staff, I don't think he felt the need. Occasionally I would have some impact, but some of the issues I worked on were not of particular interest to him. I was very keen on retaining at least one active battleship...I was, in large measure, responsible for bringing the battleships back into commission in the first place, and I thought we really should have kept them in commission. I never really got anywhere and after the Gulf War, the last two battleships were decommissioned, a big mistake.

There was one area, at least, where I did have some impact, because it was largely unfamiliar to Scowcroft, the ANC, and I was able to affect the way in which Nelson Mandela was received at the White House in 1991. I had become interested in the African National Congress because one of the things I most focused on in the Bush and Reagan Administrations were Soviet operations in third world countries. The African National Congress was almost wholly subsidized, financed, armed and trained by the Soviet Union. That is how I got interested in the African National Congress as well as in the Sandinistas

Library of Congress

and other third world movements that the Soviets were subsidizing. I did a lot of research and reached the indisputable conclusion that the African National Congress had, for at least fifty years, been a front organization for the South African Communist Party. When the new government was just announced on May 11, 1994, it was for me a sort of quod erat demonstrandum, since all the key positions in the new government were given to Communists. That memo I did on Mandela and the ANC was used to brief the President with the result that he did not welcome Mandela with open arms as had State, the CIA and others had been urging him to do. I just stated the facts. In the first place, Mandela did not become the head of the ANC until after the Party had kept him on probation for a year and a half after being released from prison. When Mandela started negotiating with de Klerk back in May, 1990, the Party sent four senior members to proctor him, including its General Secretary, Joe Slovo. After a year and a half they decided he was reliable enough to be "elected" president of the ANC.

There is a great deal about Mandela which never gets into the press. I had a great deal from classified intelligence on the ANC, but, as is often the case, most of the best stuff were the FBIS reports from South Africa media. Many of the media were sympathetic with the ANC. There was a fundamental contradiction in South Africa. They were keeping down the black population through apartheid, but you still had a basically democratic country. It was sort of like areas in the United States where the blacks were segregated and disenfranchised; although there was still a basically democratic system in place. So, you had a very free press in South Africa and still have, and many in the media were sympathetic to Mandela and the ANC. So that provided a gold mine of information. In fact, one of the best open sources of intelligence about the Soviet Union, even before liberalization, were their publications. Of all of our intelligence analysts, the one who was most successful in correctly assessing Soviet defense expenditures, for example, and many other things in the Soviet Union, was a DIA analyst by the name of Bill Lee, a real character. He doesn't even suffer intelligent people gladly. He is a kind of a country boy from central Missouri, but an absolute genius. His analyses were based almost 80 percent

Library of Congress

on open source statistics. I once asked him why he used these statistics since everybody knows that Soviet statistics are unreliable. He replied, "Look, they need statistics for their own planning. They are not going to go about fooling themselves anymore than they can help it. So if you get the right kind of statistics, they tell you a lot." His estimates were disputed by the CIA for over 25 years, but in the end he turned out to be absolutely right and the CIA had been wrong all those years.

I cite this because he often complained, and rightly so, that the intelligence community disdains open source material.

Q: That is because they don't pay for it.

STEARMAN: Yes, and anybody can acquire it; although the FBIS (run by the CIA) does cost quite a bit. He said that the only way to get the intelligence community to take open source material seriously is to spread it out on a football field, take a satellite photo of it, give it a top secret clearance, and restricted access, then they will read it and take it seriously.

I have long felt the same way. Often the best stuff I have got was from open sources. I had a detached retina a few years ago due to boxing in my youth, a stupid thing. Young men should not play football or box if they want to avoid all of these middle age ailments that hit you. Before then, I was going through about a thousand classified telegrams and reports every morning but then I had to decide what to cut out, make a decision because I couldn't read all that much. I had to either cut out the classified stuff or the FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service), material which is actually funded by the CIA.

Q: FBIS is open to the public, anyone can subscribe to it.

STEARMAN: Yes, it is entirely open, except for a few things that are copyrighted and therefore restricted. It is in most college libraries. The best overall source of intelligence there is. So that was what I decided mostly to use. I did read a few key telegrams and the

Library of Congress

NID, the National Intelligence Daily, which is prepared for the President and top decision makers. The NID is extremely sensitive and has a restricted readership. I missed a few things by not reading the classified stuff, but the best and most important things I would get from the NID and a few other classified sources. I had to make a choice and the unclassified stuff basically served me better. The average citizen could probably do a better job of intelligence than many in the intelligence community by reading open sources. There are people in the academia and press who sometimes call the shots better than the intelligence community does. This doesn't mean we don't need it, but the trouble with the intelligence community, as I found out, is that although people always think of the CIA as being a super conservative organization, this is not the case. You have a deputy director for operations (DDO) and a deputy director for intelligence (DDI). The people under the deputy director for intelligence are mostly analysts and they readily admit they work for the CIA. Under operations, none of them admit they work for CIA, but use various covers and primarily work overseas. These people, the DDO people, are generally fairly conservative. The people who work only in Washington are generally on the liberal side and tend to put a liberal spin on their intelligence, which bothers me. And then you have the Defense Intelligence Agency which, on the other hand, at times would put a conservative spin on assessments. This also bothered me because I don't think intelligence people should put any spin on what they write.

I ran into an example of this, and there are many other examples, when I entered the intelligence community as a Foreign Service office assigned to the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, about half of the staff were Foreign Service officers there on an assignment basis. That was my introduction to the world of intelligence from the inside. When you are in INR you are considered part of the "intelligence community," which is a euphemism for the CIA, NSA, DIA, and INR; so I started going to meetings over at the CIA on NIEs (National Intelligence Estimates) and SNIEs (Special National Intelligence Estimates). I went over to work on a SNIE on the supply of the North Vietnamese forces in Vietnam through Cambodia. This was back in January, 1970 or late

Library of Congress

1969. We were discussing to what extent they were being supplied through Sihanoukville, which was the port, and then up through Cambodia to communist headquarters and logistic bases which were in Cambodia out of reach from us. The CIA was insisting that they were getting nothing through Sihanoukville, nothing through Cambodia, while the DIA was insisting they were getting enormous amounts of supplies through there. The DIA wanted intelligence to provide a rationale for going into Cambodia; whereas the CIA opposed this and tried to show there was no rationale. I began to wonder what was going on. What were the facts. Some poor junior CIA analyst who was sitting against the wall and must have been very, very new, got up and said, after a senior CIA official stated they were getting nothing, "Sir, we have a lot of intelligence that stuff is coming through Sihanoukville for the North Vietnamese." All the senior CIA people turned around and glared at this unfortunate guy. He sort of slunk down and would have gotten under his chair if he could have. I never saw him at another meeting. I didn't know his name so don't know what happened to him. But he was finished. And then, as it turned out, the DIA, not because of any hard intelligence, but because they were putting a conservative spin on it, were very close to being entirely right when we finally went in there in the spring of 1970 and actually saw what had been brought in through the port.

There was another interesting thing that happened along the above lines. One of the problems that decision makers have is that really difficult and delicate decisions have to be very closely held. That means that top policy makers get advice from their most senior people; so the lower ranking people who have the most detailed knowledge cannot easily be brought into the decision making process. Here is a prime example. On April 30, 1970, Nixon went on the air and said that U.S. troops were going into Cambodia and that, inter alia, we were going to capture COSVN, an acronym for Central Office of South Vietnam, the communist political and military headquarters for South Vietnam, which happened to be located most of the time just over the border in Cambodia. When I heard that, by the time I had stopped laughing, I almost felt like crying. I then wondered who in the hell had briefed the President on this. COSVN was a floating crap game. There was simply no way

Library of Congress

you were going to be able to go in and capture COSVN. What, I wondered, did he think COSVN was all about anyway? COSVN mostly consisted of a bunch of huts and some files which could be moved quickly.

At this time I was in INR and what should wind up in my office one day but a whole stack of large mounted photographs obviously used for briefing some senior person. Here were pictures of a big rubber plantation with large drying sheds and a lot of buildings all around. I looked at the bottom of each photo and a caption said, "COSVN Headquarters." Obviously what had happened is that somebody in DOD or elsewhere who had briefed the Secretary of State and probably Nixon told them that this was COSVN Headquarters and that it was something that we could go in capture. It was a rubber plantation! Nearly all of COSVN was long gone when we went in.

Here was a prime example of not getting detailed expertise. I, and anybody else who worked the problem in INR could have told them that there was no way you were going to capture COSVN. In the end it made Nixon look like a kind of fool. They didn't capture it, and they couldn't capture it.

After the disillusionment that I suffered by being exposed to the intelligence community from the inside, I made up my mind that whenever I got into a position of importance, I was going to do it differently. When I finally wound up at the White House, which surprised everybody, I established my own little intelligence team consisting of about a half a dozen working analysts I got to know as colleagues from the CIA, DIA, NSA and State. I got one excellent analyst from the Rand Corporation who had all the clearances. We would meet on an ad hoc basis during the noon hour. Nobody knew our group existed. They were all anonymous and autonomous. We turned out intelligence which was about 200 percent better than what the gigantic intelligence community with all its assets was producing because all my people were working level analysis who wouldn't put a policy spin on anything. They gave me only the facts, which was all I was interested in. Our group

Library of Congress

worked incredibly well, and nobody ever knew about it. If it had become known, that would have been the end of it.

One example of what we accomplished: Before the largest North Vietnamese offensive was launched in the beginning of April, 1972, I got my little group together, my having been convinced back in November, 1971 that Hanoi was going to launch an offensive in the spring because of Hanoi press accounts reporting that people were being inducted who had never been inducted before, which meant they were scraping the bottom of the barrel. This they would do it only in order to launch a major offensive, logically in the spring. A number of weeks before the attack began, my little team had figured out the entire attack scenario, what specific units were going to be involved and where and the exact day the attack would start. The intelligence community was saying that there may be an offensive some time this spring, and it could be this or it could be that or on the other hand, etc. But we laid it all out in great detail and predicted exactly what happened. It kicked off the very day we predicted and involved the units we said would be used. It bogged down quicker than we had expected because we did not predict the supply problems that they would have. I handed this over to Al Haig, who was then Deputy National Security Advisor, seven days before the attack, so we had complete foreknowledge. I do not, however, know what use we made of our prediction. That is always a problem. I believe we should have been taken more seriously than we were since we had it really nailed. Our group did this kind of work over and over again.

I wish something like this could be institutionalized, but I don't see how it can be. But that is really the way to do intelligence. Some of my group were so junior that they were just barely above the bottom of the totem pole. We had a country boy from Kansas who had an encyclopedic knowledge of the enemy order of battle. I had another quite junior NSA officer who made a specialty of analyzing changes in the enemy's communication procedures in preparation for the attack. He is the one who gave us the exact day on which the attack would come because of a predictable change in patterns, etc. Everybody

Library of Congress

had his own specialty and was only interested in producing pure intelligence, not in influencing policy, as so many of their seniors were.

I have a few other comments to make on intelligence. I passed a lot of them to Gates when he went over as director of Central Intelligence, none of which, I believe, were implemented. For one thing, we should keep people in place for a long time as the Brits do. I was impressed by how the Brits operated in Germany. When I was in our Embassy in Bonn in the mid-fifties they had people there from MI-6 who had been there since the end of the war. They knew everybody and everything. The Brits keep people as sleepers sometimes for years before they ever use them. One of their people in Bonn at that time, later became known as John LeCarre, who wrote "The Spy Who Came in Out of the Cold," among other Cold War novels. The Brits could run circles around our intelligence people simply by having been there so long and having made so many contacts. I proposed that we have kind of a Lone Ranger Corps of people who voluntarily stay at a post for a long time, but such suggestions fall on deaf ears. Bureaucratic considerations always get in the way.

This is a digression, but is still germane.

Q: No, I like having this in this record.

STEARMAN: So there are many things I have learned over the years which I would like to pass on to posterity. That is one advantage of getting older, you do learn things through experience and, unless you are really dumb, you acquire a certain amount of wisdom, if not wisdom, at least knowledge of how things should and should not be done. That is why I think projects like this are so valuable, and I hope this one is put to the proper use it deserves.

Q: I hope so too. Well, should we stop at this point?

STEARMAN: That is fine with me.

Library of Congress

Q: *Well, I want to thank you.*

End of interview