



SAMUEL H. BEER, PhD, SMA '28



(1911 – 2009)

Samuel Beer entered Staunton Military Academy (SMA) in September 1927. He was a member of the boxing team and graduated as a private first class in May 1928. Following SMA, Samuel attended the University of Michigan.

The following article from the 18 April 2009 New York Times by obituary writer William Grimes tells the story of Samuel Beer's life and death:

“Samuel H. Beer, a leading American expert on British government and politics who was a longtime professor of government at Harvard and who led the liberal organization Americans for Democratic Action from 1959 to 1962, died April 7 at his home in Washington. He was 97 and lived in Washington and Cambridge, Mass.

“The death was confirmed by his wife, Jane K. Brooks.

“For 30 years, Mr. Beer taught ‘Western Thought and Institutions,’ a legendary course that combined history, political theory and comparative government, to generations of Harvard undergraduates. In the wider world, he was known for several books on politics and government in Britain and the United States noteworthy for their timeliness and the elegance of their arguments.

“In his first book, ‘The City of Reason’ (1949), he articulated a liberal political philosophy based on the ideas of Alfred North Whitehead. It was followed by ‘Treasury Control’ (1956), a study of how the British government coordinates financial and economic policy, and the highly regarded

‘British Politics in the Collectivist Age’ (1965), an inquiry into the conflict between conservative and radical impulses in postwar Britain.

“In 1982, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s government gathered steam, he published ‘Britain Against Itself: The Political Contradictions of Collectivism.’ He later turned his attention to American political theory in ‘To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism’ (1993).

“Samuel Hutchison Beer was born in Bucyrus, Ohio, and attended Staunton Military Academy in Staunton, Va., where he played football with Barry Goldwater. After graduating from the University of Michigan in 1932, he attended Balliol College, Oxford, as a Rhodes scholar, earning a first-class degree in history.

“In 1935 he married his college sweetheart from Michigan, Roberta Reed, who died in 1987. In addition to his second wife, he is survived by two daughters, Katherine Swingly Beer of Cambridge and Frances Fitzgerald Beer of Toronto; two stepdaughters, Alison Brooks of Washington and Camilla Brooks of Brooklyn; six grandchildren; three step-grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

“Mr. Beer was a staff member of the Democratic National Committee and an occasional speech writer for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935 and 1936. He then worked as a police reporter for The New York Post and a writer for Fortune before returning to Harvard, where he earned a doctorate in political science in 1943.

“After serving with an Army artillery unit in World War II and earning a bronze star at Normandy, Mr. Beer, who rose to the rank of captain, was stationed in Germany as part of the allied military government. He began teaching at Harvard in 1946 and retired in 1982.

“After retiring, Mr. Beer taught at Boston College and Dartmouth and was a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

“A liberal in the old-fashioned sense, he opposed the student rebellion of the late 1960s while at Harvard, arguing that it politicized the classroom, and later testified before the House of Representatives in opposition to the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, which he regarded as a politicizing of the process.

“As national chairman of Americans for Democratic Action, Mr. Beer applauded what he called ‘the big thaw in the Ike Age,’ strongly supported the policies of John F. Kennedy (a friend), and excoriated the alliance of Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats, or Dixiecrats. Its members were, he said, ‘determined to misuse the machinery of government to thwart progress in every important area of American life.’

“His liberalism came wrapped around a contrarian core. For years, Mr. Beer had no bank account, no telephone, no car and no radio. When a columnist for The New York Post asked him to explain the bank policy, he said, ‘I didn’t want them to make a dime out of me, so I put my \$5 a week in postal savings.’

Further tributes from his Harvard colleagues emphasize his personal qualities.

“His famous course Social Sciences 2 excited and nourished many thousands of minds,” says Stanley Hoffmann, the Bottenwieser University Professor at Harvard.

“His teaching was memorable for the virtue he conveyed in it, and he was as manly a man as a professor can be,” added Harvey Mansfield, Beer’s former student and the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard.

“A person of great moral as well as physical courage, Sam Beer displayed a greatness of spirit that made him larger than life,” said Peter Hall, Beer’s former student and the Krupp Foundation Professor of European Studies at Harvard.

Photo Credit: “Samuel H. Beer in 1998”. Paul Hosefros/The New York Times

Sources: www.nytimes.com/2009/04/19/us/19beer.html Samuel H. Beer, *Authority on British Government, Dies at 97* By William Grimes, April 18, 2009 and <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/04/samuel-h-beer-harvard-scholar-dies-at-97/>

Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA '59