

## **“Doesn’t Malta Sound Great in November?”**

**Interviewee:** Timothy J. McBride

**Interviewer:** Russell Riley

**Interview Date:** November 5, 2010

**Project:** George H. W. Bush Oral History Project

The Malta Summit, on December 2, 1989, was the first meeting between George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev since Bush’s inauguration as president. They were set to discuss major issues including arms control and German reunification at the end of the Cold War. As personal aide to the president at that time, Timothy J. McBride describes the stormy setting of these high-stakes talks.

**Timothy J. McBride:** There was the “Seasick Summit” in Malta.

**Riley:** Yes, I was going to get to that eventually. Why don’t you talk about it?

**McBride:** My perspective on Malta was—I saw it from a different standpoint in terms of how we picked Malta—I think [Brent] Scowcroft is still wondering how we picked Malta. I think it had to do with the fact that Sally Novetzke was our Ambassador there. She had been a campaign chair in Iowa and, “Doesn’t Malta sound great in November?” Well, it turns out that Malta in November is not that great. It’s not the best weather for November—cold, windy, terrible seas—so all the planning that went into the summit with [Mikhail] Gorbachev there was a bit undone.

**Riley:** There’s a theme here. You put all this effort into an inaugural that didn’t happen, now there’s a summit that—

**McBride:** I had nothing to do with it. I was just along for the ride. That was a funny one, by some accounts a real mess, but they figured it out. The teams figured it out. Again, I was just along for the ride. They met on the cruise ship that was docked onshore. Meetings went well by all accounts. Then he stayed on board the naval ship. The challenge, you may recall, or you may have seen the photos—It was very difficult landing the launch back on the ship. [James A.] Jim Baker [III] probably talked about getting completely soaked. The ladder was underwater. It was a real mess. George [H. W.] Bush thought it was fantastic. Everything about it was great.

*End of excerpt.*

Interview with Timothy J. McBride, November 5, 2010, George H. W. Bush Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/timothy-j-mcbride-oral-history>