The Second World War

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THE Hinge of Fate

Winston S. Churchill

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Moscow

The First Meeting

My Journey to Moscow — Mr. Harriman Comes with Me — Over the Mountains to Teheran — The Shah's Summer Palace — Conference about the Trans-Persian Railway — Teheran to Moscow — The Caspian and the Volga — Arrival in Moscow — State Villa Number Seven — Meeting with Stalin in the Kremlin — A Bleak Opening — "No Second Front in 1942" — Hard Words — A Dark Background Created — I Unfold the "Torch" Plan — I Draw My Crocodile — Stalin's Masterly Comprehension — "May God Prosper this Undertaking" — The End of a Long Day.

DURING MY STAY in Cairo preparations had gone forward for the journey to Moscow.

On August 4 I had telegraphed to Stalin:

Prime Minister to Premier Stalin 4 Aug. 42

We plan to leave here one day, arriving Moscow the next with intermediate stop at Teheran.

Details will have to be arranged in part by our R.A.F. authorities in Teheran in consultation with yours. I hope you may instruct latter to give the benefit of their assistance in every way.

I cannot yet give any indication regarding dates beyond what I have already suggested to you.

I was also anxious that the Americans should play a close part in the coming talks.

Former Naval Person to President Roosevelt 5 Aug. 42

I should greatly like to have your aid and countenance in my talks with Joe. Would you be able to let Averell come with me? I feel that things would be easier if we all seemed to be together. I have a somewhat raw job. Kindly duplicate your reply to London. Am keeping my immediate movements vague.

President Roosevelt to Former Naval Person (Cairo) 5 Aug. 42

I am asking Harriman to leave at earliest possible moment for Moscow. I think your idea is sound, and I am telling Stalin Harriman will be at his and your disposal to help in any way.

Harriman joined me in Cairo in time to come with us.

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Late on the night of August 10, after a dinner of notables at the genial Cairo Embassy, we started for Moscow. My party, which filled three planes, now included the C.I.G.S., General Wavell, who spoke Russian, Air Marshal Tedder, and Sir Alexander Cadogan. Averell Harriman and I travelled together. By dawn we were approaching the mountains of Kurdistan. The weather was good and Vanderkloot in high spirits. As we drew near to these serrated uplands I asked him at what height he intended to fly them. He said nine thousand feet would do. However, looking at the map I found several peaks of eleven and twelve thousand feet, and there seemed one big one of eighteen or twenty thousand, though that was farther off. So long as you are not suddenly encompassed by clouds, you can wind your way through mountains with safety. Still, I asked for twelve thousand feet, and we began sucking our oxygen tubes. As we descended about 8.30 A.M. on the Teheran airfield and were already close to the ground I noticed the altimeter registered four thousand five hundred feet, and ignorantly remarked, "You had better get that adjusted before we take off again." But Vanderkloot said, "The Teheran airfield is over four thousand feet above sea-level."

Sir Reader Bullard, His Majesty's Minister in Teheran, met

me on arrival. He was a tough Briton, with long experience of Persia and no illusions.

We were too late to leap the northern range of the Elburz Mountains before dark, and I found myself graciously bidden to lunch with the Shah in a palace with a lovely swimming-pool amid great trees on an abrupt spur of the mountains. The mighty peak I had noticed in the morning gleamed brilliant pink and orange. In the afternoon, in the garden of the British Legation, there was a long conference with Averell Harriman and various high British and American railway authorities, and it was decided that the United States should take over the whole Trans-Persian railway from the Gulf to the Caspian. This railway, newly completed by a British firm, was a remarkable engineering achievement. There were 390 major bridges on its track through the mountain gorges. Harriman said the President was willing to undertake the entire responsibility for working it to full capacity, and could provide locomotives, rolling-stock, and skilled men in military units to an extent impossible for us. I therefore agreed to this transfer, subject to stipulations about priority for our essential military requirements. On account of the heat and noise of Teheran, where every Persian seems to have a motorcar and blows his horn continually, I slept amid tall trees at the summer residence of the British Legation about a thousand feet above the city.

At 6.30 next morning, Wednesday, August 12, we started, gaining height as we flew through the great valley which led to Tabriz, and then turned northward to Enzeli, on the Caspian. We passed this second range of mountains at about eleven thousand feet, avoiding both clouds and peaks. Two Russian officers were now in the plane, and the Soviet Government assumed responsibility for our course and safe arrival. The snow-clad giant gleamed to the eastward. I noticed that we were flying alone, and a wireless message explained that our second plane, with the C.I.G.S., Wavell, Cadogan, and others, had had to turn back over Teheran because of engine trouble. In two hours the waters of the Caspian Sea shone ahead.

Beneath was Enzeli. I had never seen the Caspian, but I remembered how a quarter of a century before I had, as Secretary of State for War, inherited a fleet upon it which for nearly a year ruled its pale, placid waters. We now came down to a height where oxygen was no longer needed. On the western shore, which we could dimly see, lay Baku and its oilfields. The German armies were now so near the Caspian that our course was set for Kuibyshev, keeping well away from Stalingrad and the battle area. This took us near the delta of the Volga. As far as the eye could reach, spread vast expanses of Russia, brown and flat and with hardly a sign of human habitation. Here and there sharp rectilineal patches of ploughed land revealed an occasional State farm. For a long way the mighty Volga gleamed in curves and stretches as it flowed between its wide, dark margins of marsh. Sometimes a road, straight as a ruler, ran from one wide horizon to the other. After an hour or so of this I clambered back along the bomb bay to the cabin and slept.

I pondered on my mission to this sullen, sinister Bolshevik State I had once tried so hard to strangle at its birth, and which, until Hitler appeared, I had regarded as the mortal foe of civilised freedom. What was it my duty to say to them now? General Wavell, who had literary inclinations, summed it all up in a poem which he had shown me the night before. There were several verses, and the last line of each was, "No Second Front in nineteen forty-two." It was like carrying a large lump of ice to the North Pole. Still, I was sure it was my duty to tell them the facts personally and have it all out face to face with Stalin, rather than trust to telegrams and intermediaries. At least it showed that one cared for their fortunes and understood what their struggle meant to the general war. We had always hated their wicked régime, and, till the German flail beat upon them, they would have watched us being swept out of existence with indifference and gleefully divided with Hitler our Empire in the East.

The weather being clear, the wind favourable, and my need to get to Moscow urgent, it was arranged to cut the corner of

Kuibyshev and go on straight to the capital. I fear a splendid banquet and welcome in true Russian hospitality was thus left on one side. At about five o'clock the spires and domes of Moscow came in sight. We circled around the city by carefully prescribed courses along which all the batteries had been warned, and landed on this airfield which I was to revisit during the struggle.

Here was Molotov at the head of a concourse of Russian generals and the entire Diplomatic Corps, with the very large outfit of photographers and reporters customary on these occasions. A strong guard of honour faultless in attire and military punctilio was inspected, and marched past after the band had played the national anthems of the three Great Powers whose unity spelt Hitler's doom. I was taken to the microphone and made a short speech. Averell Harriman spoke on behalf of the United States. He was to stay at the American Embassy. M. Molotov drove me in his car to my appointed residence, eight miles out of Moscow, "State Villa No. 7." While going through the streets of Moscow, which seemed very empty, I lowered the window for a little more air, and to my surprise felt that the glass was over two inches thick. This surpassed all records in my experience. "The Minister says it is 'more prudent,' " said Interpreter Pavlov. In a little more than half an hour we reached the villa.

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Everything was prepared with totalitarian lavishness. There was placed at my disposal, as aide-de-camp, an enormous, splendid-looking officer (I believe of a princely family under the Czarist régime), who also acted as our host and was a model of courtesy and attention. A number of veteran servants in white jackets and beaming smiles waited on every wish or movement of the guests. A long table in the dining-room and various sideboards were laden with every delicacy and stimulant that supreme power can command. I was conducted through a spacious reception room to a bedroom and bathroom of almost equal size. Blazing, almost dazzling, electric lights displayed

the spotless cleanliness. The hot and cold water gushed. I longed for a hot bath after the length and the heat of the journey. All was instantly prepared. I noticed that the basins were not fed by separate hot and cold water taps and that they had no plugs. Hot and cold turned on at once through a single spout, mingled to exactly the temperature one desired. Moreover, one did not wash one's hands in the basins, but under the flowing current of the taps. In a modest way I have adopted this system at home. If there is no scarcity of water it is far the best.

After all necessary immersions and ablutions we were regaled in the dining-room with every form of choice food and liquor, including of course caviare and vodka, but with many other dishes and wines from France and Germany, far beyond our mood or consuming powers. Besides, we had but little time before starting for Moscow. I had told Molotov that I should be ready to see Stalin that night, and he proposed seven o'clock.

I reached the Kremlin, and met for the first time the great Revolutionary Chief and profound Russian statesman and warrior with whom for the next three years I was to be in intimate, rigorous, but always exciting, and at times even genial, association. Our Conference lasted nearly four hours. As our second airplane had not arrived with Brooke, Wavell, and Cadogan, there were present only Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, myself, Harriman, and our Ambassador, with interpreters. I have based this account upon the record which we kept, subject to my own memory, and to the telegrams I sent home at the time.

The first two hours were bleak and sombre. I began at once with the question of the Second Front, saying that I wished to speak frankly and would like to invite complete frankness from Stalin. I would not have come to Moscow unless he had felt sure that he would be able to discuss realities. When M. Molotov had come to London I had told him that we were trying to make plans for a diversion in France. I had also made it clear to M. Molotov that I could make no promises about 1942, and had given M. Molotov a memorandum to this

effect. Since then an exhaustive Anglo-American examination of the problem had been carried out. The British and American Governments did not feel themselves able to undertake a major operation in September, which was the latest month in which the weather was to be counted upon. But, as M. Stalin knew, they were preparing for a very great operation in 1943. For this purpose a million American troops were now scheduled to reach the United Kingdom at their point of assembly in the spring of 1943, making an expeditionary force of twenty-seven divisions, to which the British Government were prepared to add twenty-one divisions. Nearly half of this force would be armoured. So far only two and a half American divisions had reached the United Kingdom, but the big transportation would take place in October, November, and December.

I told Stalin that I was well aware that this plan offered no help to Russia in 1942, but thought it possible that when the 1943 plan was ready it might well be that the Germans would have a stronger army in the West than they now had. At this point Stalin's face crumpled up into a frown, but he did not interrupt. I then said I had good reasons against an attack on the French coast in 1942. We had only enough landing-craft for an assault landing on a fortified coast — enough to throw ashore six divisions and maintain them. If it were successful, more divisions might be sent, but the limiting factor was landing-craft, which were now being built in very large numbers in the United Kingdom, and especially in the United States. For one division which could be carried this year it would be possible next year to carry eight or ten times as many.

Stalin, who had begun to look very glum, seemed unconvinced by my argument, and asked if it was impossible to attack any part of the French coast. I showed him a map which indicated the difficulties of making an air umbrella anywhere except actually across the Straits. He did not seem to understand, and asked some questions about the range of fighter planes. Could they not, for instance, come and go all the time? I explained that they could indeed come and go, but at this range they would have no time to fight, and I added that an air umbrella

to be of any use had to be kept open. He then said that there was not a single German division in France of any value, a statement which I contested. There were in France twenty-five German divisions, nine of which were of the first line. He shook his head. I said that I had brought the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and General Sir Archibald Wavell with me in order that such points might be examined in detail with the Russian General Staff. There was a point beyond which statesmen could not carry discussions of this kind.

Stalin, whose glumness had by now much increased, said that, as he understood it, we were unable to create a second front with any large force and unwilling even to land six divisions. I said that this was so. We could land six divisions, but the landing of them would be more harmful than helpful, for it would greatly injure the big operation planned for next year. War was war but not folly, and it would be folly to invite a disaster which would help nobody. I said I feared the news I brought was not good news. If by throwing in 150,000 to 200,000 men we could render him aid by drawing away from the Russian front appreciable German forces, we would not shrink from this course on the grounds of loss. But if it drew no men away and spoiled the prospects for 1943 it would be a great error.

Stalin, who had become restless, said that his view about war was different. A man who was not prepared to take risks could not win a war. Why were we so afraid of the Germans? He could not understand. His experience showed that troops must be blooded in battle. If you did not blood your troops you had no idea what their value was. I inquired whether he had ever asked himself why Hitler did not come to England in 1940, when he was at the height of his power and we had only 20,000 trained troops, 200 guns, and 50 tanks. He did not come. The fact was that Hitler was afraid of the operation. It is not so easy to cross the Channel. Stalin replied that this was no analogy. The landing of Hitler in England would have been resisted by the people, whereas in the case of a British landing in France the people would be on the side of the British. I

pointed out that it was all the more important therefore not to expose the people of France, by a withdrawal, to the vengeance of Hitler and to waste them when they would be needed in the big operation in 1943.

There was an oppressive silence. Stalin, at length said that if we could not make a landing in France this year he was not entitled to demand it or to insist upon it, but he was bound to say that he did not agree with my arguments.

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I then unfolded a map of Southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. What was "A Second Front"? Was it only a landing on a fortified coast opposite England? Or could it take the form of some other great enterprise which might be useful to the common cause? I thought it better to bring him southward by steps. If, for instance, we could hold the enemy in the Pas de Calais by our concentration in Britain, and at the same time attack elsewhere — for instance, in the Loire, the Gironde, or alternatively the Scheldt — this was full of promise. There indeed was a general picture of next year's big operation. Stalin feared that it was not practicable. I said that it would indeed be difficult to land a million men, but that we should have to persevere and try.

We then passed on to the bombing of Germany, which gave general satisfaction. M. Stalin emphasised the importance of striking at the morale of the German population. He said he attached the greatest importance to bombing, and that he knew our raids were having a tremendous effect in Germany.

After this interlude which relieved the tension, Stalin observed that from our long talk, it seemed that all we were going to do was no "Sledgehammer," no "Round-up," and pay our way by bombing Germany. I decided to get the worst over first and to create a suitable background for the project I had come to unfold. I did not therefore try at once to relieve the gloom. Indeed I asked specially that there should be the plainest speaking between friends and comrades in peril. However. courtesy and dignity prevailed.

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The moment had now come to bring "Torch" into action. I said that I wanted to revert to the question of a second front in 1942, which was what I had come for. I did not think France was the only place for such an operation. There were other places, and we and the Americans had decided upon another plan, which I was authorised by the American President to impart to Stalin secretly. I would now proceed to do so. I emphasised the vital need of secrecy. At this Stalin sat up and grinned and said that he hoped that nothing about it would appear in the British press.

I then explained precisely Operation "Torch."

As I told the whole story Stalin became intensely interested. His first question was what would happen in Spain and Vichy France. A little later on he remarked that the operation was militarily right, but he had political doubts about the effect on France. He asked particularly the timing, and I said not later than October 30, but the President and all of us were trying to pull it forward to October 7. This seemed a great relief to the three Russians.

I then described the military advantages of freeing the Mediterranean, whence still another front could be opened. In September we must win in Egypt, and in October in North Africa, all the time holding the enemy in Northern France. If we could end the year in possession of North Africa we could threaten the belly of Hitler's Europe, and this operation should be considered in conjunction with the 1943 operation. That was what we and the Americans had decided to do.

To illustrate my point I had meanwhile drawn a picture of a crocodile, and explained to Stalin with the help of this picture how it was our intention to attack the soft belly of the crocodile as we attacked his hard snout. And Stalin, whose interest was now at high pitch, said: "May God prosper this undertaking."

I emphasised that we wanted to take the strain off the Russians. If we attempted that in Northern France we should meet with a rebuff. If we tried in North Africa we had a good chance of victory, and then we could help in Europe. If we

could gain North Africa Hitler would have to bring his Air Force back, or otherwise we would destroy his allies, even, for instance, Italy, and make a landing. The operation would have an important influence on Turkey and on the whole of Southern Europe, and all I was afraid of was that we might be forestalled. If North Africa were won this year we could make a deadly attack upon Hitler next year. This marked the turning-point in our conversation.

Stalin then began to present various political difficulties. Would not an Anglo-American seizure of "Torch" regions be misunderstood in France? What were we doing about de Gaulle? I said that at this stage we did not wish him to intervene in the operation. The [Vichy] French were likely to fire on de Gaullists but unlikely to fire on Americans. Harriman backed this very strongly by referring to reports, on which the President relied, by American agents all over "Torch" territories and also to Admiral Leahy's opinion.

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At this point Stalin seemed suddenly to grasp the strategic advantages of "Torch." He recounted four main reasons for it.

First, it would hit Rommel in the back;

Second, it would overawe Spain;

Third, it would produce fighting between Germans and Frenchmen in France; and,

Fourth, it would expose Italy to the whole brunt of the war.

I was deeply impressed with this remarkable statement. It showed the Russian Dictator's swift and complete mastery of a problem hitherto novel to him. Very few people alive could have comprehended in so few minutes the reasons which we had all so busily been wrestling with for months. He saw it all in a flash.

I mentioned a fifth reason, namely, the shortening of the sea route through the Mediterranean. Stalin was concerned to know whether we were able to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar. I said, it would be all right. I also told him about the changes of command in Egypt, and of our determination to fight a decisive battle there in late August or September. Finally, it was clear that they all liked "Torch," though Molotov asked whether it could not be in September.

I then added: "France is down and we want to cheer her up." France had understood Madagascar and Syria. The arrival of the Americans would send the French nation over to our side. It would intimidate Franco. The Germans might well say at once to the French, "Give us your fleet and Toulon." This would stir anew the antagonisms between Vichy and Hitler.

I then opened the prospect of our placing an Anglo-American Air Force on the southern flank of the Russian armies in order to defend the Caspian and the Caucasian mountains and generally to fight in this theatre. I did not however go into details, as of course we had to win our battle in Egypt first, and I had not the President's plans for the American contribution. If Stalin liked the idea we would set to work in detail upon it. He replied that they would be most grateful for this aid, but that the details of location, etc., would require study. I was very keen on this project, because it would bring about more hard fighting between the Anglo-American air-power and the Germans, all of which aided the gaining of mastery in the air under more fertile conditions than looking for trouble over the Pas de Calais.

We then gathered round a large globe, and I explained to Stalin the immense advantages of clearing the enemy out of the Mediterranean. I told Stalin I should be available should he wish to see me again. He replied that the Russian custom was that the visitor should state his wishes and that he was ready to receive me at any time. He now knew the worst and yet we parted in an atmosphere of good will.

The meeting had now lasted nearly four hours. It took half an hour or more to reach State Villa No. 7. Tired as I was, I dictated my telegram to the War Cabinet and President Roosevelt after midnight, and then, with the feeling that at least the ice was broken and a human contact established, I slept soundly and long.

5

Moscow

A Relationship Established

A Talk with Molotov — Amenities of the State Villa — Second Meeting with Stalin in the Kremlin — His Complaints about Supplies — He Demands Higher Sacrifices from the Allies — My Rejoinder — Painful Passages — The Problem of the Caucasus — Stalin's Aide-Mémoire — My Reply of August 14 — Banquet at the Kremlin, August 14 — A Friendly Interlude — We Stir Old Quarrels — "The Past Belongs to God" — Abortive Meeting of the Military Staffs — General Brooke's Misgivings about the Caucasus — I Go to Say Good-bye to Stalin, August 15 — His Confidence about the Caucasus — He Invites Me to an Improvised Dinner — Molotov Joins Us — Six Hours of Talk — Stalin on the Collective Farm Policy — The Joint Anglo-Soviet Communiqué — Arrival at Teheran — My Report to the War Cabinet and to President Roosevelt — A Sense of Encouragement.

LATE THE NEXT MORNING I awoke in my luxurious quarters. It was Thursday, August 13 — to me always "Blenheim Day." I had arranged to visit Molotov in the Kremlin at noon in order to explain to him more clearly and fully the character of the various operations we had in mind. I pointed out how injurious to the common cause it would be if owing to recriminations about dropping "Sledgehammer" we were forced to argue publicly against such enterprises. I also explained in more detail the political setting of "Torch." He listened affably, but contributed nothing. I proposed to him that I should see Stalin at 10 that night, and later in the day

got word that eleven o'clock would be more convenient, and that, as the subjects to be dealt with would be the same as those of the night before, would I wish to bring Harriman? I said "Yes," and also Cadogan, Brooke, Wavell, and Tedder, who had meanwhile arrived safely from Teheran in a Russian plane. They might have had a very dangerous fire in their Liberator.

Before leaving this urbane, rigid diplomatist's room I turned to him and said, "Stalin will make a great mistake to treat us roughly when we have come so far. Such things are not done often on both sides at once." For the first time Molotov unbent. "Stalin," he said, "is a very wise man. You may be sure that, however he argues, he understands all. I will tell him what you say."

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I returned in time for luncheon to State Villa Number Seven.

Out of doors the weather was beautiful. It was just like what we love most in England — when we get it. I thought we would explore the domain. State Villa Number Seven was a fine, large, brand-new country house standing in its own extensive lawns and gardens in a fir wood of about twenty acres. There were agreeable walks, and it was pleasant in the beautiful August weather to lie on the grass or pine-needles. There were several fountains, and a large glass tank filled with many kinds of goldfish, which were all so tame that they would eat out of your hand. I made a point of feeding them every day. Around the whole was a stockade, perhaps fifteen feet high, guarded on both sides by police and soldiers in considerable numbers. About a hundred yards from the house was an air-raid shelter. At the first opportunity we were conducted over it. It was of the latest and most luxurious type. Lifts at either end took you down eighty or ninety feet into the ground. Here were eight or ten large rooms inside a concrete box of massive thickness. The rooms were divided from each other by heavy sliding doors. The lights were brilliant. The furniture was stylish "Utility," sumptuous and brightly coloured. I was more attracted by the goldfish.

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We all repaired to the Kremlin at 11 P.M., and were received only by Stalin and Molotov, with their interpreter. Then began a most unpleasant discussion. Stalin handed me a document. When it was translated I said I would answer it in writing, and that he must understand we had made up our minds upon the course to be pursued and that reproaches were vain. Thereafter we argued for about two hours, during which he said a great many disagreeable things, especially about our being too much afraid of fighting the Germans, and if we tried it like the Russians we should find it not so bad; that we had broken our promise about "Sledgehammer"; that we had failed in delivering the supplies promised to Russia and only sent remnants after we had taken all we needed for ourselves. Apparently these complaints were addressed as much to the United States as to Britain.

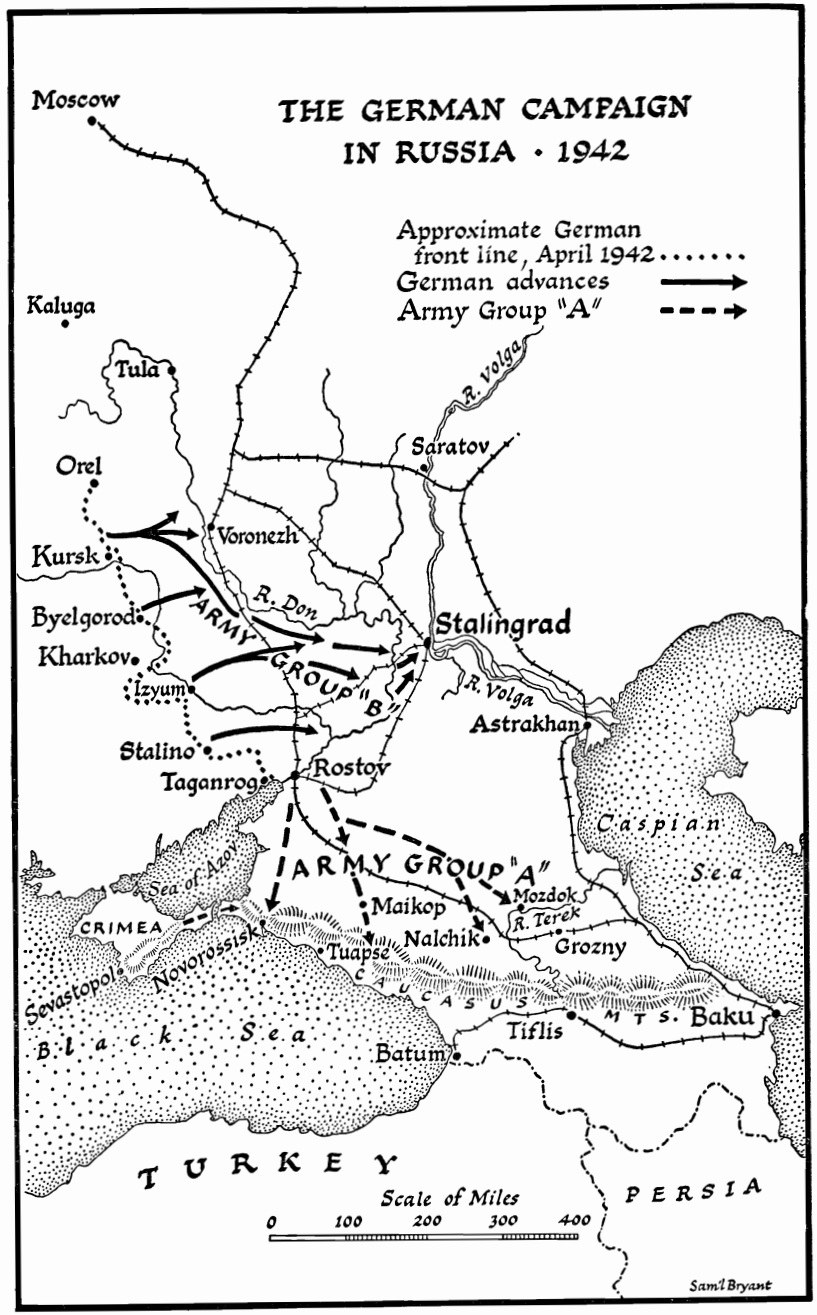
I repulsed all his contentions squarely, but without taunts of any kind. I suppose he is not used to being contradicted repeatedly, but he did not become at all angry, or even animated. He reiterated his view that it should be possible for the British and Americans to land six or eight divisions on the Cherbourg peninsula, since they had domination of the air. He felt that if the British Army had been fighting the Germans as much as the Russian Army it would not be so frightened of them. The Russians, and indeed the R.A.F., had shown that it was possible to beat the Germans. The British infantry could do the same provided they acted at the same time as the Russians.

I interposed that I pardoned the remarks which Stalin had made on account of the bravery of the Russian Army. The proposal for a landing in Cherbourg overlooked the existence of the Channel. Finally Stalin said we could carry it no further. He must accept our decision. He then abruptly invited us to dinner at eight o'clock the next night.

Accepting the invitation, I said I would leave by plane at dawn the following morning — i.e., 15th. Joe seemed somewhat concerned at this, and asked could I not stay longer. I said certainly, if there was any good to be done, and that I would wait one more day anyhow. I then exclaimed there was no ring of comradeship in his attitude. I had travelled far to establish good working relations. We had done our utmost to help Russia, and would continue to do so. We had been left entirely alone for a year against Germany and Italy. Now that the three great nations were allied, victory was certain, provided we did not fall apart, and so forth. I was somewhat animated in this passage, and before it could be translated he made the remark that he liked the tone of my utterance. Thereafter the talk began in a somewhat less tense atmosphere.

He plunged into a long discussion of two Russian trench mortars firing rockets, which he declared were devastating in their effects, and which he offered to demonstrate to our experts if they could wait. He said he would let us have all information about them, but should there not be something in return? Should there not be an agreement to exchange information about inventions? I said that we would give them everything without any bargaining, except only those devices which, if carried in aeroplanes over the enemy lines and shot down, would make our bombing of Germany more difficult. He accepted this. He also agreed that his military authorities should meet our generals, and this was arranged for three o'clock in the afternoon. I said they would require at least four hours to go fully into the various technical questions involved in "Sledgehammer," "Round-up," and "Torch." He observed at one moment that "Torch" was "militarily correct," but that the political side required more delicacy — i.e., more careful handling. From time to time he returned to "Sledgehammer," grumbling about it. When he said our promise had not been kept I replied, "I repudiate that statement. Every promise has been kept," and I pointed to the *aide-mémoire* I gave Molotov. He made a sort of apology, saying that he was expressing his sincere and honest opinions, that there was no mistrust between us, but only a difference of view.

Finally I asked about the Caucasus. Was he going to defend the mountain chain, and with how many divisions? At this he sent for a relief model. and, with apparent frankness and evi-



dent knowledge, explained the strength of this barrier, for which he said twenty-five divisions were available. He pointed to the various passes and said they would be defended. I asked were they fortified, and he said, "Yes, certainly." The Russian front line, which the enemy had not yet reached, was north of the main range. He said they would have to hold out for two months, when the snow would make the mountains impassable. He declared himself quite confident of their ability to do this, and also recounted in detail the strength of the Black Sea Fleet, which was gathered at Batum.

All this part of the talk was easier, but when Harriman asked about the plans for bringing American aircraft across Siberia, to which the Russians had only recently consented after long American pressing, he replied, curtly, "Wars are not won with plans." Harriman backed me up throughout, and we neither of us yielded an inch nor spoke a bitter word.

Stalin made his salute and held out his hand to me on leaving, and I took it.

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I reported to the War Cabinet on August 14:

We asked ourselves what was the explanation of this performance and transformation from the good ground we had reached the night before. I think the most probable is that his Council of Commissars did not take the news I brought as well as he did. They may have more power than we suppose, and less knowledge. Perhaps he was putting himself on the record for future purposes and for their benefit, and also letting off steam for his own. Cadogan says a similar hardening up followed the opening of the Eden interview at Christmas, and Harriman says that this technique was also used at the beginning of the Beaverbrook mission.

It is my considered opinion that in his heart, so far as he has one, Stalin knows we are right, and that six divisions on "Sledgehammer" would do him no good this year. Moreover, I am certain that his surefooted and quick military judgment makes him a strong supporter of "Torch." I think it not impossible that he will make amends. In that hope I persevere. Anyhow, I am sure it was better to have it out this way than any other. There was never at any

time the slightest suggestion of their not fighting on, and I think myself that Stalin has good confidence that he will win.

When I thanked Stalin for the forty Boston aircraft he made a half-disdainful gesture, saying, "They are American planes. When I give you Russian planes then you may thank me." By this he did not mean to disparage the American planes, but said that he counted on his own strength.

I make great allowances for the stresses through which they are passing. Finally, I think they want full publicity for the visit.

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The following was the *aide-mémoire* which Stalin had handed me:

13 Aug. 42

As the result of an exchange of views in Moscow which took place on August 12 of this year, I ascertained that the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Churchill, considered the organisation of a second front in Europe in 1942 to be impossible. As is well known, the organisation of a second front in Europe in 1942 was pre-decided during the sojourn of Molotov in London, and it found expression in the agreed Anglo-Soviet communiqué published on June 12 last. It is also known that the organisation of a second front in Europe has as its object the withdrawal of German forces from the Eastern Front to the West and the creation in the West of a serious base of resistance to the German-Fascist forces, and the affording of relief by this means to the situation of the Soviet forces on the Soviet-German front in 1942. It is easy to grasp that the refusal of the Government of Great Britain to create a second front in 1942 in Europe inflicts a mortal blow to the whole of Soviet public opinion, which calculates on the creation of a second front, and that it complicates the situation of the Red Army at the front and prejudices the plan of the Soviet command. I am not referring to the fact that the difficulties arising for the Red Army as a result of the refusal to create a second front in 1942 will undoubtedly be detrimental to the military situation of England and all the remaining Allies. It appears to me *and my colleagues* [1] that the most favourable conditions exist in 1942 for the creation of a second front in Europe, inasmuch as almost all the forces of the

[1] My italics — Author.

German Army, and the best forces to boot, have been withdrawn to the Eastern Front, leaving in Europe an inconsiderable amount of forces, and these of inferior quality. It is unknown whether the year of 1943 will offer conditions for the creation of a second front as favourable as 1942.

We are of opinion therefore that it is particularly in 1942 that the creation of a second front in Europe is possible and should be effective. I was however unfortunately unsuccessful in convincing Mr. Prime Minister of Great Britain thereof, while Mr. Harriman, the representative of the President of the United States, fully supported Mr. Prime Minister in the negotiations held in Moscow.

The next morning, August 14, having rested well, I prepared, with the aid of the C.I.G.S. and Cadogan, the following reply, which seemed to me suitable and conclusive:

The best second front in 1942 and the only large-scale operation possible from the Atlantic is "Torch." If this can be effected in October it will give more aid to Russia than any other plan. It also prepares the way for 1943, and has the four advantages mentioned by Premier Stalin in the conversation of August 12. The British and United States Governments have made up their minds about this, and all preparations are proceeding with the utmost speed.

2. Compared with "Torch," the attack with six or eight Anglo-American divisions on the Cherbourg peninsula and the Channel Islands would be a hazardous and futile operation. The Germans have enough troops in the West to block us in this narrow peninsula with fortified lines, and would concentrate all their air forces in the West upon us. In the opinion of all the British naval, military, and air authorities, the operation could only end in disaster. Even if the lodgment were made it would not bring a single division back from Russia. It would also be far more a running sore for us than for the enemy, and would use up wastefully and wantonly the key men and the landing-craft required for real action in 1943. This is our settled view. The C.I.G.S. will go into details with the Russian commanders to any extent that may be desired.

3. No promise has been broken by Great Britain or the United States. I point to paragraph 5 of my *aide-mémoire* given to Mr.

Molotov on June 10, 1942, which distinctly says, "We can therefore give no promise." This *aide-mémoire* followed upon lengthy conversations, in which the very small chance of such a plan being adopted was made abundantly clear. Several of these conversations are on record.

4. However, all the talk about an Anglo-American invasion of France this year has misled the enemy, and has held large air forces and considerable military forces on the French Channel coast. It would be injurious to all common interests, especially Russian interests, if any public controversy arose in which it would be necessary for the British Government to unfold to the nation the crushing arguments which they conceive themselves to possess against "Sledgehammer." Widespread discouragement would be caused to the Russian armies, who have been buoyed up on this subject, and the enemy would be free to withdraw further forces from the West. The wisest course is to use "Sledgehammer" as a blind for "Torch," and proclaim "Torch" when it begins as the second front. This is what we ourselves mean to do.

5. We cannot admit that the conversations with M. Molotov about the second front, safeguarded as they were by reservations both oral and written, formed any ground for altering the strategic plans of the Russian High Command.

6. We reaffirm our resolve to aid our Russian Allies by every practicable means.

* * * * *

That evening we attended the official dinner at the Kremlin, where about forty people, including several of the military commanders, members of Politburo, and other high officials were present. Stalin and Molotov did the honours in cordial fashion. These dinners were lengthy, and from the beginning many toasts were proposed and responded to in very short speeches. Silly tales have been told of how these Soviet dinners became drinking-bouts. There is no truth whatever in this. The Marshal and his colleagues invariably drank their toasts from tiny glasses, taking only a sip on each occasion. I had been well brought up.

During the dinner Stalin talked to me in lively fashion through the interpreter Pavlov. "Some years ago," he said,

"we had a visit from Mr. George Bernard Shaw and Lady Astor." Lady Astor suggested that Mr. Lloyd George should be invited to visit Moscow, to which Stalin had replied, "Why should we ask him? He was the head of the intervention." On this Lady Astor said, "That is not true. It was Churchill who misled him." "Anyhow," said Stalin, "Lloyd George was head of the Government and belonged to the Left. He was responsible, and we like a downright enemy better than a pretending friend." "Well, Churchill is finished finally," said Lady Astor. "I am not so sure," Stalin had answered. "If a great crisis comes, the English people might turn to the old war-horse." At this point I interrupted, saying, "There is much in what she said. I was very active in the intervention, and I do not wish you to think otherwise." He smiled amicably, so I said, "Have you forgiven me?" "Premier Stalin, he say," said Interpreter Pavlov, "all that is in the past, and the past belongs to God."

* * * * *

In the course of one of my later talks with Stalin I said, "Lord Beaverbrook has told me that when he was on his mission to Moscow in October, 1941, you asked him, 'What did Churchill mean by saying in Parliament that he had given me warnings of the impending German attack?' I was of course," said I, "referring to the telegram I sent you in April '41," and I produced the telegram which Sir Stafford Cripps had tardily delivered. When it was read and translated to him Stalin shrugged his shoulders. "I remember it. I did not need any warnings. I knew war would come, but I thought I might gain another six months or so." In the common cause I refrained from asking what would have happened to us all if we had gone down for ever while he was giving Hitler so much valuable material, time, and aid.

* * * * *

As soon as I could I gave a more formal account of the banquet to Mr. Attlee and the President.

Former Naval Person to Deputy Prime Minister and President Roosevelt 17 Aug. 42

The dinner passed off in a very friendly atmosphere and the usual Russian ceremonies. Wavell made an excellent speech in Russian. I proposed Stalin's health, and Alexander Cadogan proposed death and damnation to the Nazis. Though I sat on Stalin's right I got no opportunity of talking about serious things. Stalin and I were photographed together, also with Harriman. Stalin made quite a long speech proposing the "Intelligence Service," in the course of which he made a curious reference to the Dardanelles in 1915, saying that the British had won and the Germans and Turks were already retreating, but we did not know because the intelligence was faulty. This picture, though inaccurate, was evidently meant to be complimentary to me.

2. I left about 1.30 A.M., as I was afraid we should be drawn into a lengthy film and was fatigued. When I said good-bye to Stalin he said that any differences that existed were only of method. I said we would try to remove even those differences by deeds. After a cordial handshake I then took my departure, and got some way down the crowded room, but he hurried after me and accompanied me an immense distance through corridors and staircases to the front door, where we again shook hands.

3. Perhaps in my account to you of the Thursday night meeting I took too gloomy a view. I feel I must make full allowance for the really grievous disappointment which they feel here that we can do nothing more to help them in their immense struggle. In the upshot they have swallowed this bitter pill. Everything for us now turns on hastening "Torch" and defeating Rommel.

* * * * *

It had been agreed between Stalin and me that there should also be meetings between the high military authorities on both sides. Two conferences were held on August 15.

I reported the results to Mr. Attlee and President Roosevelt as follows:

At a conference in Moscow on Saturday [August 15], Voroshilov and Shaposhnikov [2] met Brooke, Wavell, and Tedder, who offered detailed reasons about no "Sledgehammer." No impression was made,

[2] The Russian Chief of Staff.

as the Russians, though entirely good-humoured, were acting under strict instructions. They did not even attempt to argue the matter in serious detail. After some time C.I.G.S. asked for details about the Caucasus position, to which Voroshilov replied he had no authority to speak on this point, but would ask for it. Accordingly, in the afternoon a second meeting was held, at which the Russians repeated what Stalin had said to us, to the effect that twenty-five divisions would be assigned to the defence of the Caucasus mountain line and the passages at either end, and that they believed they could hold both Batum and Baku and the Caucasus range until the winter snows greatly improved their position. However, C.I.G.S. is by no means reassured. For instance, Voroshilov stated that all the passes were fortified, but when C.I.G.S. had flown at 150 feet all up the west bank of the Caspian he only saw the northern line of defence being begun with anti-tank obstacles, pill-boxes, etc. In my private conversation with Stalin he revealed to me other solid reasons for his confidence, including a counter-offensive on a great scale, but as he asked me to keep this specially secret I will not refer to it further here. My own feeling is that it is an even chance they will hold, but C.I.G.S. will not go so far as this.

* * * * *

I had been offended by many things which had been said at our conferences. I made every allowance for the strain under which the Soviet leaders lay, with their vast front flaming and bleeding along nearly two thousand miles, and the Germans but fifty miles from Moscow and advancing towards the Caspian Sea. The technical military discussions had not gone well. Our generals had asked all sorts of questions to which their Soviet colleagues were not authorised to give answers. The only Soviet demand was for "A Second Front *now*." In the end Brooke was rather blunt, and the military conference came to a somewhat abrupt conclusion.

We were to start at dawn on the 16th. On the evening before, I went at seven o'clock to say good-bye to Stalin. We had a useful and important talk. I asked particularly whether he would be able to hold the Caucasus mountain passes, and also prevent the Germans reaching the Caspian, taking the oilfields

round Baku, with all that meant, and then driving southward through Turkey or Persia. He spread out the map, and then said with quiet confidence, "We shall stop them. They will not cross the mountains." He added, "There are rumours that the Turks will attack us in Turkestan. If they do I shall be able to deal with them as well." I said there was no danger of this. The Turks meant to keep out, and would certainly not quarrel with England.

Our hour's conversation drew to its close, and I got up to say good-bye. Stalin seemed suddenly embarrassed, and said in a more cordial tone than he had yet used with me, "You are leaving at daybreak. Why should we not go to my house and have some drinks?" I said that I was in principle always in favour of such a policy. So he led the way through many passages and rooms till we came out into a still roadway within the Kremlin, and in a couple of hundred yards gained the apartment where he lived. He showed me his own rooms, which were of moderate size, simple, dignified, and four in number — a dining-room, working-room, bedroom, and a large bathroom. Presently there appeared, first a very aged housekeeper and later a handsome red-haired girl, who kissed her father dutifully. He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, as if, so I thought, to convey, "You see, even we Bolsheviks have family life." Stalin's daughter started laying the table, and in a short time the housekeeper appeared with a few dishes. Meanwhile Stalin had been uncorking various bottles, which began to make an imposing array. Then he said, "Why should we not have Molotov? He is worrying about the communiqué. We could settle it here. There is one thing about Molotov — he can drink." I then realised that there was to be a dinner. I had planned to dine at State Villa No. 7, where General Anders, the Polish commander, was awaiting me, but I told my new and excellent interpreter, Major Birse, to telephone that I should not be back till after midnight. Presently Molotov arrived. We sat down, and, with the two interpreters, were five in number. Major Birse had lived twenty years in Moscow, and got on very well with the Marshal, with whom he for some

time kept up a running conversation, in which I could not share.

We actually sat at this table from 8.30 till 2.30 the next morning, which, with my previous interview, made a total of more than seven hours. The dinner was evidently improvised on the spur of the moment, but gradually more and more food arrived. We pecked and picked, as seemed to be the Russian fashion, at a long succession of choice dishes, and sipped a variety of excellent wines. Molotov assumed his most affable manner, and Stalin, to make things go, chaffed him unmercifully.

Presently we talked about the convoys to Russia. This led him to make a rough and rude remark about the almost total destruction of the Arctic convoy in June. I have recounted this incident in its place. I did not know so much about it then as I do now.

"Mr. Stalin asks," said Pavlov, with some hesitation, "has the British Navy no sense of glory?" I answered, "You must take it from me that what was done was right. I really do know a lot about the Navy and sea war." "Meaning," said Stalin, "that I know nothing." "Russia is a land animal," I said; "the British are sea animals." He fell silent and recovered his good-humour. I turned the talk on to Molotov. "Was the Marshal aware that his Foreign Secretary on his recent visit to Washington had said he was determined to pay a visit to New York entirely by himself, and that the delay in his return was not due to any defect in the aeroplane, but because he was off on his own?"

Although almost anything can be said in fun at a Russian dinner, Molotov looked rather serious at this. But Stalin's face lit with merriment as he said:

"It was not to New York he went. He went to Chicago, where the other gangsters live."

Relations having thus been entirely restored, the talk ran on. I opened the question of a British landing in Norway with Russian support, and explained how, if we could take the North Cape in the winter and destroy the Germans there,

the path of the convoys would henceforth be open. This idea was always, as has been seen, one of my favourite plans. Stalin seemed much attracted by it, and, after talking of ways and means, we agreed we must do it if possible.

* * * * *

It was now past midnight, and Cadogan had not appeared with the draft of the communiqué.

"Tell me," I asked, "have the stresses of this war been as bad to you personally as carrying through the policy of the Collective Farms?"

This subject immediately aroused the Marshal.

"Oh, no," he said, "the Collective Farm policy was a terrible struggle."

"I thought you would have found it bad," said I, "because you were not dealing with a few score thousands of aristocrats or big landowners, but with millions of small men."

"Ten millions," he said, holding up his hands. "It was fearful. Four years it lasted. It was absolutely necessary for Russia, if we were to avoid periodic famines, to plough the land with tractors. We must mechanise our agriculture. When we gave tractors to the peasants they were all spoiled in a few months. Only Collective Farms with workshops could handle tractors. We took the greatest trouble to explain it to the peasants. It was no use arguing with them. After you have said all you can to a peasant he says he must go home and consult his wife, and he must consult his herder." This last was a new expression to me in this connection.

"After he has talked it over with them he always answers that he does not want the Collective Farm and he would rather do without the tractors."

"These were what you call Kulaks?"

"Yes," he said, but he did not repeat the word. After a pause, "It was all very bad and difficult — but necessary."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, well," he said, "many of them agreed to come in with us. Some of them were given land of their own to cultivate in

the province of Tomsk or the province of Irkutsk or farther north, but the great bulk were very unpopular and were wiped out by their labourers."

There was a considerable pause. Then, "Not only have we vastly increased the food supply, but we have improved the quality of the grain beyond all measure. All kinds of grain used to be grown. Now no one is allowed to sow any but the standard Soviet grain from one end of our country to the other. If they do they are severely dealt with. This means another large increase in the food supply."

I record as they come back to me these memories, and the strong impression I sustained at the moment of millions of men and women being blotted out or displaced for ever. A generation would no doubt come to whom their miseries were unknown, but it would be sure of having more to eat and bless Stalin's name. I did not repeat Burke's dictum, "If I cannot have reform without injustice, I will not have reform." With the World War going on all round us it seemed vain to moralise aloud.

About 1 A.M. Cadogan arrived with the draft, and we set to work to put it into final form. A considerable sucking-pig was brought to the table. Hitherto Stalin had only tasted the dishes, but now it was half-past one in the morning and around his usual dinner hour. He invited Cadogan to join him in the conflict, and when my friend excused himself, our host fell upon the victim single-handed. After this had been achieved he went abruptly into the next room to receive the reports from all sectors of the front, which were delivered to him from 2 A.M. onwards. It was about twenty minutes before he returned, and by that time we had the communiqué agreed. Finally, at 2.30 A.M. I said I must go. I had half an hour to drive to the villa, and as long to drive back to the airport. I had a splitting headache, which for me was very unusual. I still had General Anders to see. I begged Molotov not to come and see me off at dawn, for he was clearly tired out. He looked at me reproachfully as if to say, "Do you really think I would fail to be there?"

The following was the published text of the communiqué.

Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Winston Churchill, with the President of the Council of the People's Commissars of U.S.S.R., J. V. Stalin.

Negotiations have taken place in Moscow between President of the Council of the People's Commissars of U.S.S.R., J. V. Stalin, and Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Winston Churchill, in which Mr. Harriman, representing the President of the United States of America, participated. There took part in the discussions the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, V. M. Molotov, Marshal K. E. Voroshilov, from the Soviet side; the British Ambassador, Sir A. Clark Kerr, C.I.G.S. Sir A. Brooke, and other responsible representatives of the British armed forces, and the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir A. Cadogan, from the British side.

A number of decisions were reached covering the field of the war against Hitlerite Germany and her associates in Europe. This just war of liberation both Governments are determined to carry on with all their power and energy until the complete destruction of Hitlerism and any similar tyranny has been achieved. The discussions, which were carried on in an atmosphere of cordiality and complete sincerity, provided an opportunity of reaffirming the existence of the close friendships and understanding between the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States of America, in entire accordance with the Allied relationships existing between them.

* * * * *

We took off at 5.30 A.M. I was very glad to sleep in the plane, and I remember nothing of the landscape or journey till we reached the foot of the Caspian and began to climb over the Elburz Mountains. At Teheran I did not go to the Legation, but to the cool, quiet glades of the summer residence, high above the city. Here a great press of telegrams awaited me. I had planned a conference for the next day at Baghdad with most of our high authorities in Persia and Iraq, but I did not feel I could face the heat of Baghdad in the August noonday, and it was quite easy to change the venue to Cairo. I dined

with the Legation party that night in the agreeable woodland, and was content to forget all cares till morning.

From Teheran I sent a message to Stalin:

Prime Minister to Premier Stalin 16 Aug. 42

On arriving at Teheran after a swift and smooth flight I take occasion to thank you for your comradeship and hospitality. I am very glad I came to Moscow: firstly, because it was my duty to tell the tale; and, secondly, because I feel sure our contacts will play a helpful part in furthering our cause. Give my regards to Molotov.

I also reported as usual to the War Cabinet and President Roosevelt.

16 Aug. 42

I went to wind up with M. Stalin at 7 P.M. yesterday, and we had an agreeable conversation, in the course of which he gave me a full account of the Russian position, which seemed very encouraging. He certainly speaks with great confidence of being able to hold out until the winter. At 8.30 P.M., when I got up to leave, he asked when was the next time he was going to see me. I said that I was leaving at dawn. He then said, "Why do not you come over to my apartment in the Kremlin and have some drinks?" I went, and stayed to dinner, to which M. Molotov was also summoned. M. Stalin introduced me to his daughter, a nice girl, who kissed him shyly, but was not allowed to dine. The dinner and the communiqué lasted till 3 this morning. I had a very good interpreter and was able to talk much more easily. The greatest good will prevailed, and for the first time we got on to easy and friendly terms. I feel that I have established a personal relationship which will be helpful. We talked a great deal about "Jupiter," which he thinks essential in November or December. Without it I really do not see how we are going to be able to get through the supplies which will be needed to keep this tremendous fighting army equipped. The Trans-Persian route is only working at half what we hoped. What he requires most of all are lorries. He would rather have lorries than tanks, of which he is making two thousand a month. Also he wants aluminium.

"On the whole," I ended, "I am definitely encouraged by my visit to Moscow. I am sure that the disappointing news I brought could not have been imparted except by me personally without leading to really serious drifting apart. It was my duty to go. Now they know the worst, and having made their protest are entirely friendly; this in spite of the fact that this is their most anxious and agonising time. Moreover, M. Stalin is entirely convinced of the great advantages of 'Torch,' and I do trust that it is being driven forward with superhuman energy on both sides of the ocean."

6

Return to Cairo

A Message from the King — Operation "Pedestal" to Save Malta — Admiral Syfret's Fleet — A Fierce Battle — A Hard-Bought but Decisive Victory — Malta Recovers Dominance in the Central Mediterranean — Gort Comes to Cairo — Crisis in India — Decision to Arrest Gandhi and Others — Chiang Kai-shek's Intrusion — Correspondence with President Roosevelt — Order Easily Maintained — The Attack on Dieppe — Heroic Efforts and Heavy Losses — Question of Responsibility — A Reconnaissance in Force — Valuable Lessons — Air Support for the Soviet Southern Flank — The Transference of the Persian Railway to United States Management — Gift to Australia to Replace the "Canberra" — Another Visit to the Desert Front, August 19 *— Alexander and Montgomery in Command — Impending Attack by Rommel — Importance of Preserving the Eighth Army's Manoeuvring Independence — A Survey of the Prospective Battlefield — At Bernard Freyberg's New Zealand Division Headquarters — My Report to the War Cabinet of August* 21 *— Final Days in Cairo — Stern Measures to Defend the Line of the Nile — Home by Air.*

ON MY RETURN to Cairo I received congratulations from the King.

His Majesty the King to Prime Minister 17 Aug. 42

I am delighted that your talks with Stalin ended on such a friendly note. As a bearer of unwelcome news your task was a very disagreeable one, but I congratulate you heartily on the skill