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*The Road to Pearl Harbor*

*The China Tangle*

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# Churchill Roosevelt Stalin

The War They Waged  
and the  
Peace They Sought

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61. German Offers to Surrender in Italy; and Startling  
Soviet Mistrust—March—April 1945

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WHILE trouble over Poland was dragging along, a startling episode was occurring in connection with soundings for the surrender of German forces in North Italy. Stalin's mistrust broke out of the thin shell formed by his wartime association. His behavior revealed how far his mind was warped by suspicion, and his language showed what a ruffian was behind his even manner.

Late in February an important Italian industrialist, Baron Luigi Parilli, had informed Gero Von Gaevernitz, a trusted member of the Office of Strategic Services in Switzerland, that several German officials, including General Karl Wolff, ranking SS officer in Italy, wanted to make contact with the Allies, with a view to ending resistance in North Italy.<sup>1</sup> Wolff was said to be ready to arrange to turn over North Italy to the Allies under conditions which would spare useless death and wanton destruction. After investigation, a meeting had been arranged at Lugano with one of Wolff's chief assistants and aides, who had promised to return on March 8th with credentials and definite proposals. This had been reported by Allen Dulles, the head of the OSS, to Washington, London, and Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) at Caserta, with the statement that unless instructed to the contrary, he would listen to what the emissaries had to say on their return. On the 8th Wolff himself turned up in Zurich and informed Dulles in substance that he was convinced of the need for immediate German surrender and would do his best to win over General Kesselring, the German Commander-in-Chief in Italy, to the plan and persuade him to come secretly to Switzerland to meet our military representatives.

An account of this talk had been immediately transmitted to AFHQ at Caserta and to the American and British Chiefs of Staff. In its messages the OSS had emphasized that it had engaged in no negotiations, that it had merely listened to Wolff's story, and advised him that we were interested only in unconditional surrender. It still considered the whole affair subject to test. But General Alexander had decided to act without waiting for definite news of Kesselring's decision. On March 11th he had informed the Combined Chiefs of Staff that he was thinking of sending his American Deputy Chief of Staff, General Lemnitzer,

<sup>1</sup> Karl Wolff was an ex-officer of the Imperial German Army who had joined Himmler's personal staff in 1932 as Sturmbannfuhrer, equivalent to Captain's rank, and had remained one of his most close associates thereafter.

and his British Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), General Airey, to Switzerland to represent the Allies in these talks. These officers were, he explained, being instructed to tell the Germans that they must come to his headquarters at Caserta, after arranging a method of communication with Kesselring; and that the discussions at Caserta would deal with the method of unconditional surrender on a military basis only, not on a governmental or political basis. Care was needed, Alexander had remarked, because Wolff and others in his group had been associated with Himmler.

The Combined Chiefs had authorized Alexander to go ahead and send his representatives to Switzerland at once. They advised him, however, that they thought the Russians ought to be told at once what was afoot; and they stipulated that these representatives from AFHQ should not have any contact with the Germans until so instructed. Harriman and Clark-Kerr had passed Alexander's report on to Molotov by separate letters on March 12th. The Combined Chiefs, they had explained to him, had agreed to the proposal on the condition that Alexander would not send his men to Bern until the Soviet government was informed. Since they were being kept waiting, would the Soviet government be quick in its response? <sup>1a</sup> Molotov had given it before the clock went round. His replies to both letters were in substance the same: that the Soviet government did not object to the continuation of these "negotiations" (as he insisted on calling them); but that it would like representatives of the Soviet High Command to take part in them; and that several senior Soviet officers then in France were being authorized to do so.

Harriman had advised the State Department (on March 13th) that he saw no warrant for the Soviet request, since the Germans were merely proposing to surrender military forces on an Anglo-American front. He did not think that the Soviets would allow American officers to participate in a parallel action on the Eastern Front, and indeed he doubted whether they would even have let us know of soundings for such a surrender. In his opinion, no advantage of any sort would be gained by acceding to the Soviet wish; on the contrary, the Russians would take it as a sign of yielding and make even more unreasonable demands in the future. Further, the Ambassador thought that if Red Army officers did take part in the talks in Switzerland they might make obstructive demands. General Deane had expressed the same view

<sup>1a</sup> The two officers left Alexander's Headquarters by air for Lyons, France, at once—before the Soviet answer to this notice was received. But they did not cross the Swiss frontier until March 15th—after the Soviet answer was known. Wolff did not return to Switzerland until the 19th.

in a concurrent message to General Marshall. From a military point of view he thought that it would be neither necessary, desirable, nor useful to approve the Soviet request.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff had reached the same conclusion. They did not want Soviet officers to figure in these preliminary talks in Switzerland. But in recognition of Soviet interest in the way any surrender would be set and carried out, they were willing to have them present at any substantive talks that might follow in Italy. Accordingly their answer to Molotov's letter (March 15th), as made through the two Ambassadors, had explained that the only purpose of the meeting in Switzerland was to make contact with a view to getting German representatives to Allied Force Headquarters in Italy, where all matters concerning surrender would be discussed; that Alexander was being ordered to keep the Soviet government informed of the results of the first contacts in Switzerland, and to arrange for the presence of Soviet representatives at any subsequent talks in Italy; that "However, as the German proposal is for the surrender of a military force on the U.S.-British Front, Field Marshal Alexander, as Supreme Commander in this theatre, would alone be responsible for conducting the negotiations and for reaching decisions."

While the first notice to Molotov (that of the 12th) could have been taken to mean that the officers whom Alexander was going to send to Switzerland might enter into at least a preliminary understanding about the definite details of surrender, this second one had made firmly clear that this was not so. In effect, it had said that until the meeting in Italy the arrangements for surrender would remain open, subject to the understanding that they would have to be unconditional and would deal only with military matters.

Upon his arrival in Bern (on March 15th) General Lemnitzer had sent a message to Alexander with regard to adding a Russian officer to the group, stating: "I have now had an opportunity to observe the security measures required in getting Airey and me to Bern. Our position is considerably underground since we are in civilian clothes and are using assumed names. The introduction of a Russian officer must obviously be even more underground."

There can be little doubt that the Combined Chiefs hoped by their answer (of the 15th) to Molotov to serve two purposes. They wanted to remain free to act quickly if the German wish to arrange for a military surrender should turn out to be genuine, without having to reckon with possible hindering Soviet conditions or objections. But they also wanted to assure the Soviet government a chance to have its say before anything was settled. Their good faith is indicated by urgent requests

sent by the Combined Chiefs to the American and British Military Attachés in Moscow and to Eisenhower to find out where in France those Soviet officers whom Molotov wished to have take part in the discussions were, and to tell them to be ready to start for Caserta on short notice.

But the Soviet government was not willing merely to stand by while these introductory contacts continued. Molotov's response (of the 16th), made through the two Ambassadors, had been mistrustful and rude. It said that the refusal was ". . . utterly unexpected and incomprehensible from the point of view of Allied relations between our countries." In view of this, the Soviet government could not give its agreement (consent was really meant) to any negotiations with the Germans in Bern. It wished them to be broken off at once. From then on, his letter concluded, any idea of the conduct of separate negotiations with German representatives without the participation of all three Allied powers should be ruled out.

Harriman had surveyed (in a message of the 17th) the conceivable reasons why the Russians were being so challenging. Perhaps, he surmised, they did not believe us; perhaps they thought that the method and terms of surrender would be settled in reality in Switzerland and that the later talks in Italy, to which the Soviet officers were to be admitted, would be merely to place a formal stamp on what had been already decided, and so be too late to allow effective consideration for Soviet views. Or, he had said, they might fear that other German commanders besides those in Northern Italy were planning to surrender to the West before making any similar offer to the East. Or, they might be defending their prestige; the Soviet government had been boasting that Germany was being beaten almost entirely by the Red Army, and since the further advance from the east might be slow because of the spring thaws, it wanted to be sure to appear before the world as a full participant in any major surrender in Italy that might lead to one in the west.

Alexander, before knowing of this Soviet demand that talks with the Germans be broken off, had sent (on the 16th) a message to the heads of the American and British military missions in Moscow asking them to tell the Soviet government that for security reasons he did not think it desirable that the Soviet officers who were to come to his headquarters should do so until he sent word. He had asked that the Soviet government be assured that he would give all possible advance warning so that they could arrive in ample time to participate in the talks; and that they should hold themselves ready to fly to Caserta on twenty-four hours' notice. Although Molotov's peremptory letter was in hand before

this message from Alexander arrived in Moscow, General Deane and Admiral Archer (head of the British Military Mission) had passed it on to General Antonov. They had been promptly called before the Soviet General Staff, and presented by Antonov with a letter addressed to them jointly. This, after referring to Molotov's note, said that the Soviet military officers had been instructed not to go to Caserta.

Actually during this interval the circuit with the Germans had been deranged by a series of mishaps—the full recording of which I must regretfully leave to the writers of adventure tales. The summoning by Hitler of General Kesselring from Italy to take command of the Western Front was only one of them. But despite the risks of exposure, word had been gotten to Wolff that if he was ready to return to Switzerland and had a concrete plan, he would be received, and that the Allies would be in a position to consult quickly on any procedural points. He had not been informed, however, of the arrival of any officers from AFHQ. A meeting had been managed on the 19th at Ascona, a small town near the Italo-Swiss border, the Allied officers traveling in civilian clothes, with fake papers and identities.

There Wolff had reviewed in full the problem and alternative ways of proceeding. Though Generals Lemnitzer and Airey had tried to impress him with the need for hurry, he had clung to the opinion that it would be best for him to talk with Kesselring (in Berlin or France) before approaching Vietinghoff, the new Commander-in-Chief in Italy. This meeting had ended with the understanding that Wolff would set off on this errand, return to Italy, and then, if Vietinghoff could be persuaded, authorized envoys would be sent to Switzerland, and from there they would be taken under Allied auspices to Caserta to work out the military technicalities and sign the instrument of surrender.

In the face of Soviet resentment, the American and British Chiefs of Staff had stuck by their opinion that it was proper that the preliminary passage toward surrender should be conducted by the commander in the field without an outside guardian. They had repeated it firmly in the answer made to Molotov's demand that the talks be ended. This—conveyed in a letter from Harriman on the 21st—had stated that the American government was surprised at the tenor of Molotov's letter. The Soviet government, it remarked, did not seem to grasp that the only purpose of a meeting in Switzerland was to establish contact with a view to getting authorized representatives of the German command to go to Alexander's headquarters in Italy. The staff officers sent by Alexander to Switzerland, it was emphasized, had no authority to do

more. Further, if and as the Germans should come to Caserta, the talks with them there would be limited to the effectuation of an unconditional military surrender on the spot of the German forces in Northern Italy, and would be conducted by Alexander. The reason why Soviet officers were being asked to be present at any such talks was to enable the Soviet government to be sure that this was all that was done. "Wherever," the answer went on, "occasions may arise for the discussion between our three powers of political as distinguished from merely military matters of surrender, it goes without saying that each of the three powers should be fully represented and participate in the discussions." The note had concluded that in view of these explanations it was intended to proceed along the lines already set, and it was hoped that Soviet officers would after all attend any meeting that might take place at Caserta. On the same day, Clark-Kerr, in a parallel letter to Molotov, extended the same reasons and assurances.

The Soviet government had valid reasons for wanting to be sure of the way in which any surrender on the Italian front was managed. They were entitled to be sure that it would not allow the Germans to transfer men or equipment from Italy to the east, or otherwise make it more possible for the Germans to sustain resistance on the Soviet Front. However, the Americans and British were fully aware of these considerations, and had not the slightest intention of allowing any harm to come to the Soviet forces as a result of what might be arranged in Italy. On the other hand, they were afraid that the Russians might, for reasons of tactics or prestige, make conditions that would cause unjustified delay. The Soviet government might actually not want a surrender in Italy to occur before the break came in the east. As commented upon by Eisenhower a few days later with reference to a possible similar development on the Western Front: "He feared that if the Russians were brought into a question of the surrender of Kesselring's forces [in the west], what could be settled by himself in an hour might be prolonged for three or four weeks, with heavy losses to our troops."<sup>2</sup>

But the Soviet government would take nothing on trust. Molotov's next answer (March 22nd) had revealed a blatant suspicion that a secret deal was being made, or had been made. It said, in substance, that the British and American statements were untrue. As the Soviet government viewed the matter, during the previous two weeks, behind the back of the Soviet Union, actual negotiations had been going on with representatives of the German military command. The Soviet government regarded this as completely impermissible and again insisted that the talks be stopped. "In this instance," the note stated, "the Soviet

<sup>2</sup> *Triumph and Tragedy*, page 443.

government sees not a misunderstanding but something worse."

At this juncture Roosevelt had taken heed. In a message to Stalin (sent on the 24th and probably delivered on the 25th) he said that perhaps the facts had not been correctly presented to the Marshal. He therefore went on to review in detail the course of events, reporting that so far the efforts to arrange a meeting with authorized German officers had met with no success but that a chance remained. It was the duty of the American government, he had emphasized, to give every help to all attempts of officers commanding Allied forces in the field who believed there was a possibility of forcing the surrender of enemy troops in their area. He had mentioned as a parallel the possibility that the Germans might send a flag of truce to the Soviet general at Konigsberg or Danzig. "There can be," he had then asserted, "in such a surrender of enemy forces in the field no violation of our agreed principle of unconditional surrender and no political implications whatever." Should any meeting be arranged, he had continued, to discuss the details of surrender by the commander of forces in the field, he would be glad to have the benefit of the experience and advice of any Soviet officers who could be present. But, his message had ended, he could not agree to suspend investigation of the possibility because of Molotov's objection for some reason completely beyond his comprehension.

Stalin's answer (March 29th) had been wholly unbelieving. He had claimed that the Germans had been using the talks in Switzerland as a smoke screen to confuse the Anglo-American Command in Italy; and that while these had been going on the Nazis had moved three divisions from Italy to the Eastern Front. "This circumstance," he had stated, "is irritating to the Soviet Command and creates ground for distrust."<sup>3</sup>

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had been much upset by this slur. Marshall and Leahy had put in careful work on an answer that would give as good as was got. It had been sent as a personal message from Roosevelt to Stalin. Just before this was put on his desk, Harriman, along with Clark-Kerr, had left for the Kremlin on another errand—to deliver an important message direct from Eisenhower to Stalin. This dealt with coordination of advances from the west and east, and plans for the junction of U.S.-British and Soviet armies. Of these, and of the fuss which they stirred up between the American and British governments, more will be told in another place.<sup>4</sup> Here it is enough to note that the

<sup>3</sup> The text of Stalin's answer of March 29th has not yet been located. This short description of its contents is derived from Leahy's book, *I Was There*, page 333. But its main, if not complete, substance is, I think, indicated by Roosevelt's answer, given immediately hereafter.

<sup>4</sup> See Part 63.

plans had greatly pleased Stalin. In reporting to the President about the session with Stalin (on the night of the 31st) centering on the Eisenhower proposals, Harriman wrote, "I regret that I did not receive until after our talk your last message regarding the Berne meeting, which I sent to Marshal Stalin by letter [April 1st]. In the mood he was in at the end of our conversation, I feel that if I had delivered your message to him personally I might have been able to get at the bottom of the Soviets' strange behavior in connection with this incident."

He was sorry, Roosevelt had said in his second communication to Stalin, that although they seemed to be in agreement on the basic principles, the preliminary investigation of willingness of the German forces in Italy to surrender was still causing mistrust. He had again gone over the facts; had again said that the Soviet representatives would be welcome at any actual negotiations for surrender; that this would have to be unconditional; and there was no thought of discussing with the Germans any terms which would allow them to transfer forces from the Italian to any other fighting front. He had denied that the lag in Allied offensive operations in Italy resulted in any way from an anticipated agreement with the Germans; the recent interruption was due mainly to the fact that Allied divisions had been transferred to the French front. Alexander was going to start a new offensive in Italy in about ten days; he would have only seventeen dependable divisions opposing twenty-four German divisions, but still everything possible would be done to prevent Germany from withdrawing any more forces from Italy. Lastly, the President had reminded Stalin that the initiative had come from a German officer reputed to be close to Himmler, and that there was a good chance that his purpose was to create suspicion and mistrust between the Allies. "There is no reason," he had concluded, "why we should permit him to succeed in that aim."

Now there took place a turn in the talks in Switzerland which may conceivably explain Stalin's next and most accusatory answer. Wolff had run into a series of dangerous difficulties in every step of the plan which had been sketched out in the talk at Ascona on the 19th. No news of how he was faring was heard until March 30th. Then the Americans learned that he had managed to get to Kesselring and had returned to Italy, but he was finding it hard to reach Vietinghoff; and that he had been warned by Himmler, and that he and his family were being kept under close watch. A message received from him had stated: "I am ready to come to a final conversation in order to arrange matters. I hope to come with . . . and either Vietinghoff or a staff officer."

April 2nd had been fixed as the day of rendezvous with Wolff, but Parilli alone had appeared at Locarno, explaining that Wolff did not dare move at the moment. But he reported that Wolff had seen Vietinghoff and secured his approval. In the course of this talk, Parilli, having probably agreed with these two German commanders that he would do so, hinted that they might like some arrangement which would allow them to withdraw their troops across the Italian frontier after giving up their arms. He had been told that such action was entirely out of the question and could not be considered. It was made clear again to all concerned that Alexander's representatives were interested only in arranging passage of any emissaries which the Germans wished to send to negotiate surrender with the proper British, Russian, and American authorities. Using the pass-word "Nurnberg," they might make their way directly through Allied lines to Alexander's headquarters at Caserta or go there via Switzerland under Allied escort.

It may be that some report of part or all of this talk was passed on to Stalin by his agents, or those he thought to be his agents, in distorted form. Stalin, as will be seen, did not hide the fact that he had his own secret conduits of information. Or, it might be that he had been checking up on Wolff's movements and had drawn wrong inferences from Wolff's trip to Kesselring's Headquarters on the Western Front and return to Italy, concluding that Wolff was acting as an emissary to surrender Kesselring's new command in the west.

His mind was probably the more open to the belief that a deception was being practiced because of the spectacular progress of various Allied forces in the west during these last days of March and first days of April. Within the circle of the Ruhr some eighty miles in diameter, the bulk of the forces in Central Germany under Field Marshal von Model was trapped.<sup>5</sup> South of the Ruhr, other American forces, meeting only weak resistance, had taken Frankfurt, and turning north were racing toward Kassel and Paderborn, close to the Weser River. The German army in the west was disintegrating; and within the first two weeks of April the western command was to take over half a million German soldiers as prisoners of war.

Whatever the cause, Stalin's suspicions when he wrote his answer to Roosevelt on the 3rd were even more inflamed than before. He asserted that since the President was insisting that there had not been any negotiations up to then, he must be poorly informed. "As regards my military colleagues," he had continued, "they, on the basis of data which they have on hand, do not have any doubts that the negotiations have

<sup>5</sup> General Walter B. Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions*, page 169.

taken place, *and that they have ended in an agreement with the Germans* [my italics], on the basis of which the German commander on the Western Front, Marshal Kesselring, has agreed to open the front and permit the Anglo-American troops to advance to the east, and the Anglo-Americans have promised in return to ease for the Germans the peace terms. I think that my colleagues are close to the truth.”<sup>6</sup> More insultingly still, he had averred that as a result of what had taken place, the Germans on the Western Front had stopped fighting the American-British armies while continuing to fight the Russians. This, he had concluded, could hardly serve to maintain trust between their countries, and could bring only a momentary advantage which would soon fade away.

On the very day, April 3rd, that Stalin was making these charges, Alexander’s staff officers were getting ready to leave Switzerland since there seemed no prospect of the early arrival of a German plenipotentiary.<sup>7</sup> They had left word behind to pass on to Wolff, for transmission to Vietinghoff, that Alexander was always ready to receive authorized representatives who wanted to come to sign the surrender.

Stalin and the Soviet General Staff had been informed of this on the 4th.

Up to then Churchill had not taken a personal part in this unpleasant bout as had Roosevelt—perhaps only because neither Roosevelt nor Stalin had up to that time sent him copies of their personal exchanges; perhaps because of wish to avoid, if it could be done with honor, another clash with Stalin at the very time that they were so sharply at odds over Poland. Or, it may be because the Prime Minister—and the British Foreign Office also—was not sure that the original Soviet request ought to have been rejected. He was, as he has since recounted in *Triumph and Tragedy*, alive to the possibilities that the talks in Switzerland might go beyond arrangements for a meeting at Military Headquarters in Italy, and that discussions of surrender might develop into peace negotiations and “trench upon” political affairs.<sup>8</sup>

But Stalin and his advisers did not know of these British reserved thoughts. In the plot conjured out of their suspicions, they regarded the British as prime movers. Perhaps this influence was the more easily drawn because of known past efforts of Churchill to check Bolshevism; perhaps because Alexander was British; perhaps only because Church-

<sup>6</sup> *Triumph and Tragedy*, page 446.

<sup>7</sup> *The Italian Campaign, 12 December 1944 to 2nd May 1945; A Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Field-Marshal the Viscount Alexander of Tunis*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1951, page 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Triumph and Tragedy*, pages 445-46.

ill was not matching the President’s personal disavowals. His silence may have been misconstrued in Moscow.

Roosevelt had been shocked by the fact that Stalin could believe that his American and British friends were deceiving him. He was irritated, not appeased, by Stalin’s implication that he was being misinformed or fooled by his own trusted associates. General Marshall and Admiral Leahy, at his request, had prepared the next stern but still restrained answer to Stalin’s expansive accusation. This had been delivered the 5th. The President said he was astonished at the allegations made by Stalin. He denied, and gave reasons for denying, any chance that they were true or any cause for believing them. He reaffirmed that Eisenhower was instructed to demand and would demand unconditional surrender of enemy troops that might be defeated on his front; and that the advances in the west were due to military action and not to any secret deal. The two concluding sentences were:

“Finally I would say this, it would be one of the great tragedies of history if at the very moment of the victory now within our grasp, such distrust, such lack of faith, should prejudice the entire undertaking after the colossal losses of life, material, and treasure involved.

“Frankly I cannot avoid a feeling of bitter resentment toward your informers, whoever they are, for such vile misrepresentations of my actions or those of my trusted subordinates.”

Churchill, having been brought up to date by Roosevelt about this correspondence, at once informed him that the British government cordially associated itself with this vigorous rejoinder: “On the whole,” he had observed, “I incline to think it is no more than their natural expression when vexed or jealous. For that very reason I deem it of the highest importance that a firm and blunt stand should be made at this juncture by our two countries in order that the air may be cleared and they realise that there is a point beyond which we will not tolerate insult.”<sup>9</sup>

The Prime Minister had at once sent a correspondingly strong message to Stalin.

But Stalin still would not believe what he was being told. In the separate answers which he had sent to the President and Prime Minister on April 7th, he defended his opinions and charges. He disclaimed doubts of Roosevelt’s or Churchill’s integrity and trustworthiness. He asserted that that was not the real point; actually what was at issue between them, he argued, was the question of how Allies should deal with one another. Whenever, he contended, any one of them asked to participate in any discussion about surrender, it was essential that this

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, page 512.

ally be granted the chance. Thus the Americans and British had been wrong in refusing the Russian request. "I still think," he had said, "the Russian point of view to be the only correct one, as it precludes all possibility of mutual suspicions and makes it impossible for the enemy to sow distrust between us." Then he had showed how hard it was for him to subdue his own mistrust. "It is difficult," he had said, "to admit that the lack of resistance by the Germans on the Western Front is due solely to the fact that they have been defeated." After a brief discussion about the fight being put up by the Germans on the Eastern Front, Stalin had concluded, "You will agree that such behavior on the part of the Germans is more than curious and unintelligible."<sup>10</sup>

As regards the credibility of his informants, Stalin had vouched for them as extremely honest and modest people, agents whose reliability had been put to a practical test. Judge for yourself, he had said: the previous February General Marshall had sent the Soviet staff information about German plans on the Eastern Front; these same secret agents had raised doubts; Marshall's reports turned out to have been wrong and theirs had turned out to have been right; and only thus was the Red Army able to avoid a catastrophe.

Whosoever Stalin's informants were—it may be interjected—they were now misleading him. The course being pursued by the Americans and British was strictly in accord with what he was being told. Wolff, after receiving the Allied messages that had been given to Parilli on April 3rd, had had several further meetings with Vietinghoff. The next report on these had been received when Parilli reappeared on the 9th. He had brought messages from Wolff reaffirming that he considered the continuation of German resistance senseless and was prepared ". . . to draw the consequences which the situation requires." But he—probably speaking for Vietinghoff as well—had sought obscure assurances that might have guarded the effects of surrender and

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, pages 451-452, for the whole message.

The Germans were standing fast on a front running from the Baltic, east of Prague, to the mountainous northern border regions of Czechoslovakia. They were also still fighting hard in Hungary and, by holding the Bratislava Gap, standing in the way of the best route to Vienna.

It is of interest that Churchill had also been puzzled by the German strategic performance, thinking that it might portend that Hitler might be planning to retire to Southern Germany to try to prolong the fight there. In a memo asking General Ismay for the Chiefs of Staff's comment on this, he had written (on March 17th), "The strange resistance he [Hitler] made at Budapest, and is now making at Lake Balaton, and the retention of Kesselring's army in Italy so long, seem in harmony with such an intention." He then had added, however, "But of course he [Hitler] is so foolishly obstinate about everything that there may be no meaning behind these moves." *Ibid.*, page 457.

perhaps made it possible for the Germans to move troops to the east.<sup>11</sup> Parilli also had stated that the German commanders in Italy, on the ground that it would expedite the surrender, had joined in an urgent request that they be given the draft of capitulation which they were expected to sign.

The response made to these suspect propositions had been quite the contrary to that which Stalin was alleging. Parilli's memos and the report on his talks had been sent at once to Caserta. Alexander had been wholly in accord with the OSS Group that the request for an outline of surrender terms looked tricky, and as an attempt to draw the Allies into something akin to negotiations. AFHQ therefore had instructed the OSS to advise Wolff that the draft copy of the capitulation would be handed to the German parliamentarians only after their arrival at the appropriate Allied military headquarters; that any officers who were sent should come with absolute authority to act. This message for Wolff had been given to Parilli on the 10th. Throughout the maze of the further broken and complicated course of contact, there was no departure—not even a slight one—from either this principle or procedure.

So much for the truth of what was going on in the talks about German surrender which aroused Stalin. Churchill had been inclined just to let Stalin stew in his suspicions. Apropos of the last message he had just received from that quarter, which was milder, he had remarked to Roosevelt, "I have a feeling that this is about the best we are going to get out of them, and certainly it is as near as they can get to an apology." But Roosevelt made one last short answer to Stalin, the very last that he was to send to that other Head of State:

"Thank you for your frank explanation of the Soviet point of view of the Berne incident, which now appears to have faded into the past without having accomplished any useful purpose.

"There must not, in any event, be mutual mistrust, and minor misunderstandings of this character should not arise in the future. I feel sure that when our armies make contact in Germany and join in a fully coordinated offensive the Nazi armies will disintegrate."

Harriman, before passing on this message to Stalin, had asked the President whether he would not consider omitting the word "minor."

<sup>11</sup> They asked that in any official negotiations for surrender, two points be guaranteed: (1) withdrawal (*Abzug*) with military honor after the cessation of hostilities; (2) maintenance of a modest contingent of the army group as future instrument of order inside Germany. Parilli had explained that Point 1 meant only eventual return to their homes when the prisoners would be released; and that Point 2 represented a wish. But his auditors felt that the eager intermediary was attempting to explain away clearly untenable propositions.



He had said that he thought it might well be misinterpreted in Moscow and that he must confess to the President that the misunderstanding seemed to him to be "major." Roosevelt had answered that he wanted to leave the word in, as he wished to consider what had happened as a minor incident.

To Churchill, on sending a copy of this message to Stalin, he had said, on the 12th:

"I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day, and most of them straighten out, as in the case of the Berne meeting.

"We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct."<sup>12</sup>



## 62. The Roosevelt-Truman Continuity of Policy



Nothing that Roosevelt ever wrote more clearly marked than this last message to Stalin the determined optimism with which he confronted the business of managing our relations with the Soviet government. He was going to continue to act on the supposition that by patience, proofs of good will and fair purpose, the mistrust of the Soviet authorities could be subdued, and they could be converted into good partners for the benefit of all mankind. To this purpose he held to the last breath. It could not have been easy in the face of the negative answers he had been getting from Stalin on so many questions. Nor, toward the end, could it have been wholly unaffected by the opinions being pressed upon him that the Soviet government was not to be led along the proper path merely by friendship or generosity, but that it had to be opposed, and dealt with on the basis of punishments and rewards. Advice of this sort was put before him by some of his most close associates. Churchill's judgment was now set that way, but this was for the British leader really only a return to the opinion he had kept in suspense for the better conduct of the war—not so of others in the President's own circle who had formerly held with him the sense of imperative need for close relations with the Soviet government for the future after the war.

The reasons seen for changing our way of dealing with the Soviet government were perhaps most clearly set down in two messages which

<sup>12</sup> *Triumph and Tragedy*, page 454.

Harriman had sent from Moscow to Stettinius. The first had been sent on April 4th, the day after Stalin's most accusatory message regarding the talks in Bern, but was offered in comment on American policy in the provisions of relief supplies. It had said in part and in paraphrase:

"In respect to policy, we now have ample proof that the Soviet government views all matters from the standpoint of their own selfish interests. They have publicized to their own political advantage the difficult food situation in areas liberated by our troops such as Italy, Belgium, and France. . . . The Communist Party or its associates everywhere are using economic difficulties in areas under our responsibility to undermine the influence of the Western allies and to promote Soviet concepts and policies. . . . The Soviet Union and the minority governments that the Soviets are forcing on the people of Eastern Europe have an entirely different objective. We must clearly recognize that the Soviet program is the establishment of totalitarianism, ending personal liberty and democracy as we know and respect it."

The second message (sent on the 6th) had gone further in analytical scope. It has been discernible for many months, this had said, that the Soviet government had three concurrent lines of foreign policy; (1) overall collaboration with the United States and Britain in a world security organization; (2) creation of its own security ring through domination of the border states; (3) the penetration of other countries, by abusing democratic processes through local Communist parties and by exploiting economic troubles. It had been hoped that the Soviet government would restrain its disturbing purposes for the sake of lasting collaboration. But plainly it would not; certainly it would do its utmost, regardless of what might be expected from the world peace organization, to create a security ring about the Soviet Union by control of the border states.

In that at least, the Ambassador continued, the Soviet government was now confident it could force us to acquiesce. Thus when we resist, they retaliate, as they did by refusing to send Molotov to the San Francisco Conference, knowing how much importance we attach to its success. There was much evidence that our attitude, which Harriman thought to have been generous and considerate, had been regarded by them as a sign of weakness and of our need for their cooperation. The lesson, as read in Moscow, was that we should give only as we got; that we should maintain positions that would be hard for the Soviet authorities if they maintained positions hard for us; and that we should hurt them if they hurt us. In such a course, it was thought, lay the best chance of getting together with the Soviet Union on acceptable terms. In offering this advice, the Ambassador added, he hoped he would not