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THE INSIDE STORY OF

my meeting with Stalin

The President's right-hand man sat face to face with the mysterious Iron Man of Russia —and talked cold turkey. In Stalin's tense body and piercing eyes he saw red, implacable hatred for Hitler. In the dictator's swift, rasping words Mr. Hopkins heard in detail what Stalin wants from the United States to crush the man he loathes . . . Here's Mr. Hopkins's first personal account of his spectacular flight to Russia

by **HARRY HOPKINS**

NOT once did he repeat himself. He talked as he knew his troops were shooting—straight and hard. He welcomed me with a few, swift Russian words. He shook my hand briefly, firmly, courteously. He smiled warmly. There was no waste of word, gesture, nor mannerism. It was like talking to a perfectly co-ordinated machine, an intelligent machine. Joseph Stalin knew what he wanted, knew what Russia wanted, and he assumed that you knew. We talked for almost four hours on this second visit. The questions he asked were clear, concise, direct. Tired as I was, I found myself replying as tersely. His answers were ready, unequivocal, spoken as if the man had had them on his tongue for years.

Only once while we talked did his telephone ring. He apologized for the interruption, telling me he was making plans for his supper at 12:30 that night. Not once did a secretary enter with dispatches or memoranda. And when we said good-by we shook hands again with the same finality. He said good-by once, just as only once he said hello. And that was that. Perhaps I merely imagined that his smile was more friendly, a bit warmer. Perhaps it was so because, to his word of farewell, he had added his respects to the President of the United States.

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The President and his right-hand man

No man could forget the picture of the dictator of Russia as he stood watching me leave—an austere, rugged, determined figure in boots that shone like mirrors, stout baggy trousers, and snug-fitting blouse. He wore no ornament, military or civilian. He's built close to the ground, like a football coach's dream of a tackle. He's about five feet six, about a hundred and ninety pounds. His hands are huge, as hard as his mind. His voice is harsh but ever under control. What he says is all the accent and inflection his words need.

I won't try to quote him directly. When he spoke of Hitler his manner was more eloquent than his words. It was only when he mentioned Hitler that he discarded his suave assurance. Then his body grew tense. He didn't raise his voice; rather it went as cold as his eyes, and the mellow harshness of it became grating. Of Hitler he spoke slowly, not measuring his words nor considering his phrasing, but as if he wanted the interpreter they had assigned to me to convey to me every syllable in its implication and direct meaning.

For Hitler he had more than the anger he would necessarily have for a man who had double-crossed him; it was a personal hatred that I have seldom heard expressed by anyone in authority. I don't want to overdramatize the scene; I'm not at all sure that I can. But the cold, implacable hatred he has for the German Fuehrer was clearly evident. Stalin's huge hands half clenched. I think that Joseph Stalin would have liked nothing better at that moment than to have had Hitler sitting where I sat. Germany would have needed a new chancellor. On every other subject he was a steady, gracious, schooled diplomat.

If he is always as I heard him, he never wastes a syllable. If he wants to soften an abrupt answer or a sudden question he does it with that quick, managed smile—a smile that can be cold but friendly, austere but warm. He curries no favor with you. He seems to have no doubts. He assures you that Russia will stand against the onslaughts of the German army. He takes it for granted that you have no doubts, either.

You understand, of course, that I can't tell you in (Continued on page 114) detail what Joseph Stalin said to me. Neither may I quote to you the instructions

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I received from the President. I was at Chequers, the country seat of the Prime Minister of England, when I got my orders. Forty-eight hours later I left for Russia. All I can do is to tell you that I went to Moscow to ask some questions of Stalin, to observe the Soviet Union under fierce attack, and to report back to the President, when he met with Winston Churchill in the Atlantic, what I had seen and heard.

A cable came from the President late at night. You stay up late at the Churchills'—in fact, the conversation never really gets going till midnight. Incidentally, the conversation in that household is as good as you can hear anywhere. Britain had been at war too long to make her fight the only topic. But now Russia had been invaded, and this was something to ponder. The whole strategy of the war had changed, and vital, fundamental decisions were being made. In both England and Russia there had been distrust of each other. You may think what you please, but the fact is that no one in England knew for sure why Hitler had suddenly torn up his pact with Russia, just why he had smashed across her western borders. Russian oil? Food? Russia's mines and factories? We were discussing all these at Chequers when my orders came. The first message was short enough: Go to Moscow; see Stalin.

WHEN Hitler invaded Russia he did so without a word to Stalin, not a hint. In Moscow, in the Kremlin, it aroused a hatred of Hitler that nothing but the death of the German Chancellor could lessen. As Stalin made clear to me, this was not a hatred of the German people nor of the German General Staff. The invasion was regarded in Moscow as the treachery of a partner who had suddenly revealed himself as a rabid dog.

Certain changes had been made in Stalin's Cabinet. Max Litvinov had given way as Stalin's second in command to Molotov. A trade and peace pact had been negotiated between the two countries, and, whatever your personal feelings about the U.S.S.R. may be, it is to Russia's credit that she has observed her commitments and treaties to the letter. Stalin told me that he had no intention of doing anything but be straightforward in his dealing with Germany. But now the pact had been destroyed—not by Germany, not by the German General Staff (perhaps in spite of it), and not by the Reich as a body politic. Hitler had torn it up without a word from nor to anyone. He gave neither reason nor hint of warning—the act of a madman obeying a swift, murderous passion.

But in Britain the invasion of Russia was a serious political problem. As in the United States, there is no love for Communism, rather a distrust or even a fear. Perhaps you remember Churchill's bitter broadcast to the world a few hours after the invasion started. With the courage that is Churchill's, he pledged Britain to Russia's cause. And he did it boldly, without consulting anybody, without stopping to consider any possible political consequences. At Chequers he told me of it. There was one man to defeat, one philosophy of government to destroy. Russia was now fighting that man and that philosophy. England was already doing so. Any enemy of Hitler's was to be England's ally.

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SEE Stalin? Of course, one would have to see Stalin if one wanted to know what Russia was going to do, what she had to do it with, how she proposed to go about it. Stalin is Russia. His would be the only word of authority. Before my three days in Moscow ended, the difference between democracy and dictatorship were clearer to me than any words of philosopher, historian, or journalist could make it. I'm making that observation and letting the subject rest.

Anyway, I was to talk to Stalin, face to face, and report to the President. I had been tired up to the moment of the arrival of the message. I'd been working on a radio broadcast for the following Sunday night. I had gone over it a couple of times. I forget what I did with that script. Early the next morning I got a second radiogram from Washington telling me in detail just what I was expected to do. I wasn't tired any more. I had never been in Russia. If I had any immediate concern it was to get to Moscow as fast as possible and let the gods who had been so good to me thus far take care of the rest. After all, I was going to see a man whose word was the law of a hundred and seventy million, who to millions inside and outside of Russia was an almost legendary figure. And heaven knows what would come of it—particularly if I fumbled.

The Prime Minister asked me to join him in his bedroom—early. I told him that the next move was his—that he'd have to figure how I was going to get to Moscow. He picked up the telephone. There was the matter of speed to be considered. It had already been arranged that the President and Churchill were to meet in the Atlantic. The approximate date had been set. Only a few minor details were to be cleared up. But the date of the meeting was close enough to make it clear that I'd have no time to waste getting to Moscow and back.

Churchill arranged everything by telephone—just another incident in his busy life. Obviously, it was important to him that someone directly representing the President see Stalin. And clearly, too, it were better all around that someone have the significance of a special agent, commissioned solely to consult with the government of the U.S.S.R. in the particular crisis of the moment. Moreover, it was important that he be an American closely identified with the President. Something less than undying friendship had existed between England and the Kremlin. It was wholly probable that the Kremlin might have certain doubts concerning America's attitude toward Russia and Communism, even though Russia were now fighting the man whom the United States had called its enemy and whose defeat was devoutly wished for in America.

Churchill telephoned Sir Charles Portal, Britain's Air Chief Marshal, and by his manner rather than what he said made it clear that I was going to Moscow without delay. He was still in bed when the reply came from London that I was to fly the next day from Scotland.

Something characteristic of the whole adventure was happening—or failing to happen. No one except Churchill discussed my mission with me. Actually, no one but Churchill, Ambassador Winant, and perhaps one or two others had the remotest idea what I was about to do. Others present at Chequers, as later in Scotland, gave no hint of knowing or of being interested. Here was British reserve at its peak. As far as I knew,

nobody but the Prime Minister and I had a hint of my mission. If anyone did, they gave me no intimation.

It was that way all the way. Just as we had before my unexpected assignment arrived, we discussed the war in generalities. We discussed books, plays, personalities, policies. In fact, we might have been a week-end group on someone's country place in America unloading our personal opinions about Japan, China, Turkey, the war in the Near East, the progress of American defense. You know. You've done it yourself. If you'll merely add to that the knowledge that your host was arranging to have you flown to Moscow, to talk face to face with Joseph Stalin, and that apparently no one but you and your host knew anything about it, you'll appreciate the emotion that was churning within me. It didn't give me the slightest feeling of importance, but rather responsibility. I had executed a number of assignments for the President. None had impressed me more.

I called Ambassador Winant in London—who, by the way, is doing, I believe, one of the greatest jobs that any American is doing in the world today. Toward noon he, with Mrs. Winant, came out, and Gil and I talked over at great length the problems of our country in the world today.

He would get my appointments canceled on some excuse or other, cancel my hotel room (for I knew I was not to get back to London on this trip). And he'd let the President know when I left England.

Averell Harriman came over late in the afternoon with his daughter, and I told him of my Russian trip because he was leaving at once for the United States. Now, as I write this in Washington, Mr. Harriman is in Moscow, living in the same house and visiting the same people that I saw nearly two months ago.

AFTERWARD I walked out on the lawn —for it was still daylight in England—and talked long and earnestly with the Prime Minister.

He told me in the minutest detail of the efforts Britain was making to aid Russia, now her ally against Hitler. It was a fascinating story, revealing as nothing else might the undying determination of Britain to destroy the Hitler menace—a menace compared to which all other political and economic threats were puny. It told me more than that. It told me that Churchill, this man whom I had grown to admire and respect, had put everything else behind him, was prepared calmly and fearlessly to die if only by doing so he might destroy Hitler.

When he had finished I said that while I was conveying the word of the President of the United States to the Kremlin, doubtless Stalin would ask me too about England—what Russia might expect from England, what aid, what co-operation.

"Tell him, tell him . . ." said Churchill swiftly . . . "tell him that Britain has but one ambition today, but one desire—to crush Hitler. You can depend upon us. . . . Good-by. God bless you, Harry."

He looked at me hard. His deep-set eyes were very grave. Usually they twinkle, even when they should be too tired to be anything but glazed with fatigue. His cigar, held loosely in his lips (in the center of his lips), had gone out. He struck a match as if to light it. He changed his mind, threw

match and cigar away. He seemed about to say something else. But he merely put his hand on my arm for a moment and then went off into the house. That I might need courage and fortitude to make the trip now ahead of me hadn't occurred to me particularly. But suddenly I knew that I had it.

I SAID good-by all around and, with Harriman and his daughter Kathleen, drove to the station, where a special train waited to take me to the airport. By the time we got to the station it was pitch-dark and the black-out, even though I have seen a good deal of it, still is a pretty eerie business. By the dim light I could just pick people from the embassy who had come to see me off, bring me clean shirts, a visa for Russia. Winant had had a terrible time getting the visa, because the Russian ambassador was out in the country. However, nobody asked me for my passport anywhere in Russia.

Detailed to make the flight with me were Brigadier General Joseph McNarney, United States Army Air Corps, and First Lieutenant John R. Alison, United States Army pilot. Both McNarney and Alison were attached to our military mission in England. The three of us rumbled out of the station, to awake the next morning in Scotland. No sooner had we stepped off the train than we were notified that the plane would probably be delayed by bad weather. While we waited for the skies to break we drove into the Scottish moors—something else I'd never seen.

On the moors the war seemed remote. They're quiet, peaceful, sometimes befogged and treacherous and, after nightfall, eerie. The heather is unspeakably lovely. Out there, London seemed as far away as Moscow, and as foreign to all I was looking at.

We had tea at a shop—a Mrs. Simpson's shop. Perhaps you've had a Scottish tea. If so you'll know that it's no insignificant affair. There was a war going on, and below, in England, in the Scottish towns and cities, there was food rationing. But not at Mrs. Simpson's. We had bread and butter, heather honey, tea that you wouldn't get at the best London hotels. Mrs. Simpson's was empty, for no one has gasoline these days in England for drives to country tea houses. There is just about enough for one round trip to town a week. So we had the benefit of Mrs. Simpson's ministrations to ourselves.

From Mrs. Simpson's we went to a cocktail party at a small hotel. Except for the uniforms and occasional satirical compliments to Hitler, there was no evidence of war. I had been invited to go to dinner with the R.A.F. and meet a group of Americans in training. It seems to me now that there must have been moments when I wished that somebody up there at the top of Scotland would ask me, "What are you doing up here?" But no one did. Actually, it's not an unpleasant sensation. It gives you a much needed perspective on yourself.

And then suddenly I was told that London had instructed the ship to leave at once. That dinner was canceled in a hurry. The plane looked awfully familiar out there in the harbor. It should have been. I had flown several times in its sister ships. It was an American P.B.Y. made by Consolidated in San Diego. The British call it the Catalina. Well, here I was, on my own, on my way. I knew where I was going. Churchill

knew. The captain of the flying boat and Winant knew. But my family, my children didn't know. I wired them that I would be delayed a few days. Before I left Chequers and London, someone had packed my bag with enough clothes for a week but no formals. There was nothing social about this trip.

That plane had returned from a reconnaissance job only a few hours before I stepped into it. Here in America they'd have laid her up after a tough job for a couple of days, overhauling her, making readjustments, and so on. But Britain can't afford that. She hasn't the time nor the planes. This ship was hardly cool from its latest assignment and she was off again. This time she was off to the northeast, up the coast of Norway, into the pale light of the Arctic skies, to skirt the narrow top of Finland and the isthmuses of Karelia and Kola. Then down above the White Sea.

We couldn't use our radio—too many Nazis listening. It was never dark on that twenty-one-hour flight to Archangel. It was cold, even through the flying suit they had given me. The plane was stripped of all passenger comforts. I can't sleep anyway in planes; and reading in them makes me a little sick. The captain and the R.A.F. lads in the crew—they're used to all this. They sleep. They've got to. These scout planes are often out thirty hours. No matter how tough they are, how accustomed they are to hardship, the crew members can stand the strain just about fifteen hours at a stretch. And they've got to get some sleep—they've got to.

HAD we opened up our radio and with it connected with Archangel we wouldn't have got lost over the White Sea. But we hadn't and we did. I didn't know it. You'd never know from watching the crew. And, incidentally, those R.A.F. lads, like everyone else I'd met, seemed utterly unconcerned with me, with what I was about. Certainly they must have given it some thought, being human; but there were no evidences of curiosity.

They talked to me, of course. They talked of families, parties they'd been to, school, the weather and—what else? Well, more things like that. But not a word about the war, about my mission, about me, about the United States—nothing. But that we were lost over the White Sea seemed to interest them about as much as the pennant fight between the Dodgers and the Cardinals, a subject they'd never heard of. I'm sure they'd have been interested in that, though, had they known about it. They'd have made it sound much more important than the war. They're fine, decent eighteen- and nineteen-year-old boys.

We got our bearings by shooting the sun. We could take no chances with the radio. Somewhere in the same skies there might be German planes. We'd have been a good target for a fighter. They'd have been glad to take a few shots at us.

After the desolation we had glimpsed along the Arctic shores, Archangel was beautiful. As we leveled off, I wondered where the war was. Archangel looked like a peaceful American seaside city. The temperature was about eighty degrees. Archangel's broad beaches and the mild surf were crowded with bathers. The harbor was packed with ships, most of them cargo carriers. The Russian navy was in evidence.

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We made a perfect landing in the harbor. I was tired but not weary. After seeing those R.A.F. kids at work in the plane, utterly unconcerned, healthily snatching a nap now and then, then snapping back to their duties wide awake, alert, competent, I had caught something of their gift. I'd get to Moscow. Everything would be all right. Not a doubt of it. And neither had the Russians any doubt. They told us that they'd sent planes out to meet us but they'd missed us. That's when we had lost our way.

THE reception committee was impressive—representatives of the American and British embassies, Russian army, navy, and air-force officers, local commissars and the inevitable OGPU, the latter looking neither more nor less obvious than the average American plain-clothes man. I was never to lose the OGPU nor they me every minute I was in Russia. There was an attractive woman who spoke to me in English with a nice American accent. She had never been in the States but she spoke our language.

"I'm your interpreter," she said.

I was told that we couldn't go to Moscow that night—no planes were permitted in after dark. The admiral asked us to be his guests aboard his yacht. And again, now in Russia, I met that same show of discreet uninterest in what I was doing, what my mission was. Perhaps the Russian is somewhat more transparent than the Englishman, and of course he's more emotional. But here in Archangel, too, they talked of almost everything but the war. They asked me no questions. And yet it was clearer than they knew that I was going to see Stalin. In Russia, if you're going to see Stalin, or particularly if you've seen him, the place is yours. In London I was 'Arry 'Opkins, 'Arry the 'Op, and presently 'Urry 'Upkins. What I was to the Russian civilian I don't know—and my interpreter didn't tell me. I should have asked. But she, like all the rest of them, was utterly impersonal, asking me nothing, volunteering nothing.

Dinner on the admiral's yacht was monumental. It lasted almost four hours. There was an Iowa flavor to it, what with the fresh vegetables, the butter, cream, greens. For some reason the cucumbers and radishes surprised me. They were grown on the farms that hem in the city. Anyway, the dinner was enormous, course after course. There was the inescapable cold fish, caviar, and vodka. Vodka has authority. It is nothing for the amateur to trifle with. Drink it as an American or an Englishman takes whisky neat and it will tear you apart. The thing to do is to spread a chunk of bread (and good bread it was) with caviar, and, while you're swallowing that, bolt your vodka. Don't play with the stuff. Eat while you're drinking it—something that will act as a shock absorber for it.

Talk? The talk was uninterrupted—but no one talked war. They discussed books, art, American authors, the Philadelphia and the Boston symphony orchestras. Some of the Russians had been in the States. Some of these had worked in the Ford plant at Dearborn or at River Rouge. They wanted to know what Ford was doing. What General Motors and the other motorcar plants were turning out.

There were no women at the dinner except my interpreter. But we were waited on by women. There are almost no men waiters now in Russia. Between the diners, what-

ever their military or political rank, and the waitresses there was no sign of class distinction. Nor did I notice that any emphasis was put on that absence. The camaraderie seemed to be taken for granted, needing no proof. I didn't hear the word *tovarish* spoken. I merely saw it demonstrated.

The Russians seemed fully as determined as the British to see this fight through. They seemed quite as certain that Hitler would be licked and all that he represents erased. But where the Englishman assures of that by his manner, his cool indifference to incidental setbacks and difficulties, the Russian is apt to go poetical. A young Russian flier replied to my comment about the effect the approaching winter would have on the war: "There is autumn coming in nature but there is spring in our hearts." He was saying merely what the kids of the R.A.F. had told me with their easy smiles and calm eyes, their tongues mute.

As far as I recall, we were on our twentieth course at dinner when I was told that I'd leave for Moscow at four in the morning. I was probably eating a cucumber at the moment—Russian style. Seeing a Russian consume a cucumber is catching. There's not much visible nonsense about it. You pick up the cucumber, salt it well, and go to work on it. No matter how large it is, you pick it up in your fingers and eat it.

TWO hours' sleep, and we were at the airport in Archangel. They put me in a big Douglas—an American transport plane. But this one had all the comforts. I was glad, too, although I'd got some sleep after dinner. We got away after they'd given me the salute which, they said, was the portion of all distinguished visitors. The plane takes off, flying very low, only a few feet off the ground. Then it cuts the grass—dipping first one wing and then the other. It may be quite an honor, even lots of fun, in Russia. My own thoughts were that I had reached the end of my journey, that in another second or two Roosevelt's emissary to Stalin would be in eternity with nothing to report. Later I spoke to them about it, saying that if they didn't mind I would prefer not to be a distinguished visitor nor be saluted as one. The finish of the salute is particularly un-American. After dipping its wings, the plane seems to spring vertically upward, then bounce.

We made the six hundred miles to Moscow in four hours. We flew low enough to see the country that Hitler must master before getting to the Russian capital. For two hundred miles south there was nothing but dense forest. East and west there seemed no end to it. No tank columns could smash through. You might blast this wilderness with bombs for months and make no headway. To skirt it would mean detours of hundreds of miles, constantly harassed and flanked from the forest by the only troops that know it—the Russians.

And then suddenly the blackness of the trees stopped and we flew over the collectivized farms—3,000 acres and more to each one, with small villages in their centers. We flew low over the Volga, solid with barges. We circled the factory towns belching their black smoke and yellow flames at us. The towns became more frequent, larger; and then there was huge Moscow, looking very much like London. It had been raided by the Luftwaffe, but nothing like London. The enormous airport we landed on had been hit,

but it was still entirely usable. Anyway, I was in Moscow at last. The excitement that had buoyed me since Scotland suddenly died and I was very weary. The important part of my assignment was ahead of me. I needed sleep before going at it—sleep in something that didn't bounce, closed in from crowds.

IN RUSSIA I shook hands as I have never shaken hands before. Several times I grinned at myself, asking myself whether I were running for office. However, I kissed no babies. There must have been hundreds of handshakes—firm, solemn ones. I shook hands with all the reception committee in Archangel, with all the diners that night, with all the waitresses. I shook hands all over again when I departed. I'm not complaining. I have never known a more cordial, hospitable people, nor a more genuine. And here again at Moscow I was shaking hands with a crowd—from the Foreign Office, from the British Embassy, our Embassy, with other officials whom I can't now identify. The OGPU was there. The OGPU was always there—and an efficient lot they are. The photographers were there, particularly the movie men. But there were no reporters. Later, at our Embassy, before the American Ambassador, Laurence A. Steinhardt, forced me to go to bed, I saw the American newspapermen. I knew some of them. But I told them nothing of importance. They knew I couldn't. They had got used to that.

"Harry," said one of them, "for God's sake be human. Tell us something. We can't get the news here. What the hell's going on in Washington and London? How are things going?"

They told me their story—about the high cost of living, their inability to get the news, the deadly waiting for something more than government propaganda and official war communiqués. I think that they believed me when I told them that I knew almost as little as they did. I knew only what the President had bidden me to do. What would happen when I saw Stalin was still to be learned. I saw Stalin that night, with Molotov and Steinhardt. I would see him again the next night—alone. It was necessary that I see him alone. That was part of my instructions. He understood that, too.

The Germans took a hand in welcoming me to Moscow, but I didn't shake hands with them. They sent their bombers. When Moscow or any other Russian city blacks out, it blacks out. You don't merely pull the curtains. The chances are that you won't have curtains in Russia. But, curtains or not, you turn out the lights. In London, if the police or an air warden sees a glimmer in your window, he taps on the door and reminds you that there's a raid on and that you haven't closed your curtains tightly. In Russia (and I suppose it's like that in Berlin), he taps on your door, but not to tell you that he can see a light from below. He's more apt to take you to jail.

There's that, among other differences between life in a democracy and under a dictatorship. Moreover, in Moscow you take to an air-raid shelter when the enemy bombers come over—or else. And you stay there until the police tell you that you may come out. That night, in the shelter in the basement of the American Embassy, the most exciting talk was about some detective novel that had just arrived from London. The story started out well enough but had a poor ending. They were pretty well wrought up

about it. I was a stranger in Moscow and managed to entertain myself with comparing the uproar of a raid on London with what I was sitting out now. Moscow's ring of anti-aircraft defenses and guns makes London's puny. Even if they'd let you, you wouldn't watch a raid on Moscow from the roof—not more than once. The downpour of shrapnel from Moscow's ack-acks would mince you.

In Moscow there is no problem of evacuating children and the aged and the sick. They're evacuated. In Moscow every able-bodied man, woman, and youth has a specific job to do. And they do it and like it. It's somewhat different in London. I imagine it would be different in New York, too. Stalin speaks, and that's the Russian law. I have never dreamed of such a concentration of energy as I saw in the Russian capital.

STALIN prefers to see the few foreigners he meets, in Molotov's office. It is seldom that one gets into Stalin's own room. But I rated that honor, being the personal representative of the President. His office is spacious—nothing like the grand ballroom poor Mussolini calls his office. And probably a mere cubbyhole compared with Hitler's. Stalin's office is perhaps fifty feet by thirty. It's almost as austere as the man himself. In his room there are two pictures—one of Lenin and one of Stalin. That's all the art there is. My appointment with him that evening was for six o'clock. It wasn't necessary that I arrange my time in order to be there on time. That was all arranged for me. At a certain time, the embassy car took me to the palace that once housed the Czar.

Apparently, time and distance had been co-ordinated down to the inch and second. No traffic interference would delay us. The OGPU was seeing to that. Traffic wasn't detoured for me. The thousands of trucks that are forever, night and day, racing through Moscow's streets, poured on in their ceaseless race to and from the front. We merely traveled streets that the trucks didn't, the OGPU in front of us and the OGPU behind us. It was exactly six o'clock when, after many corridors and many turns, through a dozen offices and doors, I was ushered into Stalin's presence.

I've tried to describe him for you. I've read it again and find it inadequate. Cordial—almost gentle—he's as hard as the name he chose for himself: Stalin, or Steel. He bowed almost imperceptibly. He offered me one of his cigarettes and he took one of mine. He's a chain smoker, probably accounting for the harshness of his carefully controlled voice. He laughs often enough, but it's a short laugh, somewhat sardonic, perhaps. There is no small talk in him. His humor is keen, penetrating. He speaks no English, but as he shot rapid Russian at me he ignored the interpreter, looking straight into my eyes as though I understood every word that he uttered.

I said that there were no interruptions in our interview. There were—two or three. But not by the telephone nor an unbidden secretary. Two or three times I asked him questions which, after a split second of consideration, he couldn't answer to his own satisfaction. He touched a button. Instantly, as if he'd been standing alertly at the door, a secretary appeared, stood at attention. Stalin repeated my question. The answer came like a shot. The secretary disappeared just like that.

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In the States and in London such missions as mine might be stretched out into what the State Department and Foreign Office call conversations. I had no conversations in Moscow—just six hours of conversation. After that there was no more to be said. It was all cleaned up at two sittings.

Except when Stalin spoke of Hitler or when the name of Hitler was mentioned, he was at ease, relaxed. He made it all very clear to me. Stalin doesn't want our Army nor our Navy. Russia wants to fight her war herself. Her man-power reserves are huge, the protection that nature has given Moscow is all but impenetrable from land and water. But Stalin also told me frankly what Russia needs, that her men and women may give all their strength to the cause which is ours as well as hers. Stalin asked for tanks, for planes, for big guns, antiaircraft guns, antitank guns, for ammunition, the superb high-octane gasoline that America produces and is shipping to England. Stalin asked for huge quantities of barbed wire, too.

You're wondering, perhaps, why Russia, with all her great oil fields, should want gasoline of us. That's easily explained. High-octane gas is American. America alone produces the best. Planes powered by high-octane have enormous advantage in speed over those using low-octane. Before I left Stalin's office many such questions were answered for me.

Put your prejudices aside. Ask yourself whom you want on the west shore of that fifty miles of sea which separates Asiatic Russia from Alaska. Whom do you want—Stalin or Hitler? Whom would you choose—the Axis powers or Russia? Yet choosing is not inevitably up to you.

"We Russians shall win this war," said Stalin, leaning forward, his hands flat upon his desk. "The battle front will remain west of Moscow. Russia will not fail. Russia is huge. She is inexorable. Russia is fighting—for Russia. She will not again be enslaved. Once we trusted this man—"

Hitler again. I hope never to be hated as Stalin hates Hitler. His great figure seemed to grow larger. His hands seemed to feel for something. We sat in silence until he relaxed again.

AND suddenly it occurred to me that I had finished my errand. Skillfully he had let me terminate the visit. Like that, I relaxed. I shook hands from Stalin's office to the doors where my car was. A sense of letdown came over me.

That night I went to dinner with Steinhardt at the Caucasus Restaurant and ate a vast quantity of Georgian food—lamb in skewers, vodka, caviar, lamb on skewers, and then lamb. It was delicious.

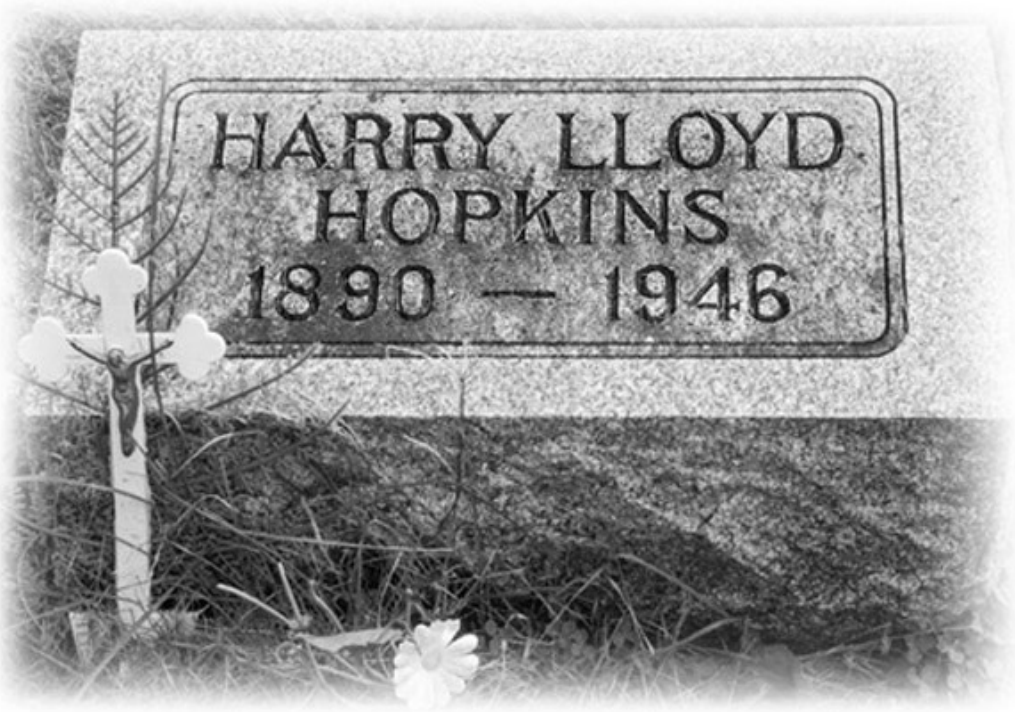
I notified the President that I had finished, that I was returning to Scotland. I would see him soon—somewhere in the Atlantic.

My plane started back for Archangel the next day at two. There were no salutes for distinguished visitors. Now that I was done, I don't think I'd have cared. When we reached Archangel I found that I'd left my medicine in Moscow. They sent army fliers back for it. Those Russians can fly. And then we were off, over the White Sea, the way we had come. The weather was bad, the going rocky. I can't sleep in planes, but this time I did. Four hours out I was asleep—the best sleep I'd had since leaving

Chequers. From below, some ship took a pot shot at us. The shot probably came from a British destroyer which couldn't identify us because of the clouds and was taking no chances.

Not that I cared. I'd done my job. I was at ease. I was drowsing while the shell groped for us. When it stopped, and I have only a hazy recollection of the stopping, I fell asleep. I slept for seven hours. A nasty head wind tossed us. Our ship bucked, sideslipped. It was okay. My tension was over. In spite of the storm, the flight back was swift. We landed at a Scottish port and there I boarded a battleship. Winant was there, too. I had a lot to tell Winant, but I still wanted to sleep. Winant said he'd listen in the morning. When I woke up it was five o'clock the next afternoon. Winant had gone.

Soon after that I was under way again. This time it was on a British battleship with Churchill. We were on our way to meet the President in the Atlantic.



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