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THE YEAR OF STALINGRAD

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THE YEAR OF STALINGRAD

AN HISTORICAL RECORD
AND A STUDY OF
RUSSIAN MENTALITY, METHODS
AND POLICIES

BY

ALEXANDER WERTH



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PREFACE

THE time has come when it is possible to look at the War in perspective; not, indeed, at the whole of it, but at some of its earlier phases. This is a book by a correspondent; but it is not—to use that scornful present-day phrase—"just another of those *impressionistic* books about the war." For one thing, it was written over a period of two or three years, not two or three weeks!

It is an earnest attempt to analyse, and to examine from as many angles as possible, one of the most critical periods of the War in Russia—critical not only to Russia herself, but to the whole world. The period in question is roughly defined by the title—*The Year of Stalingrad.* It was the year in which the Soviet Union, still insufficiently helped by her Allies, fought her Battle for Survival, and won it.

Psychologically, it was, in my four years' experience in war-time Russia, the most interesting and most remarkable of the four years. Seldom, either before or since, could the inner workings of the Russian mind be so clearly observed as during the Year of Stalingrad. Those who, to-day, find it so hard to "understand the Russians," may find this book of some assistance.

I took particular care to examine, during the period under review, the official Soviet attitude, and also that of the rank-and-file citizen, to the newly acquired Western Allies. For reasons which will be discussed here, it was not always gracious.

This volume, though more than a "correspondent's book," does not claim the august title of History. But it *is* a study, as well as a story, and in these capacities it may be of some use even to the "future historian"—not that I have very much faith in the existence of this somewhat nebulous character. An "authentic" history of the War in Russia, or elsewhere for that matter, but especially in Russia, is unlikely to be written for many years to come, if at all. To write a truly authentic history, one would require access to stenographic reports of, say, the Politburo, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and of the most important of the military conferences, at which the vital decisions of military, internal and foreign policy were taken. Such reports are unlikely ever to be available; the most one can hope for, in a foreseeable future, is a candid account by Mr. Churchill of his visit to Moscow in August 1942.

One is, therefore, largely reduced to dealing with the material and psychological consequences of these decisions, rather than with the decisions themselves. To take an example. This book will show, among other things, how "something"—and something very far-reaching—happened during the few days that followed the fall of Rostov. I am not

concerned, and have, indeed, no means of being concerned, with the exact nature of the discussions that marked the beginning of a whole series of reforms inside the Red Army; but I am able to analyse these reforms, and their effect on the discipline and morale of the Army, and on the mentality of the Russian people. Here was a radical change, the full importance of which is much clearer to-day than it was at the time.

But to understand a country, one has to mix with its "ordinary" people; and this I did on every possible occasion. Yet in Russia, more than in other countries, the ordinary citizen does not only react to events spontaneously, but is also, in varying degrees, and with varying success, "conditioned" to react in this or that way. Therefore the problem of political education and what may be called Propaganda (without any offensive meaning being put into the word) are given a great deal of attention in these pages. Some chapters constitute, in fact, an analysis of the propaganda lines and, parallel with it, an examination of the ordinary human reactions.

Both are important in any attempt to understand why and how the Russian people won their Battle for Survival.

In writing this book, I did not hesitate (though it may displease some readers) to employ different media for presenting this cross-section of Russia at War during the most critical year. I carefully went through the newspapers of the time, to see not only how the propaganda lines were being handled—and the changing pattern of propaganda with "Soviet" predominating one day, and "Mother Russia" the next, was particularly curious in 1942—but also to see how the actual war news was presented to the Russian people. Also, how were the drives handled for better discipline in the army, and for higher production in the factories? Further, I gave some attention to books, art, and the cinema, for the part they played, both in expressing and in building up the peculiar mentality of 1942. I also examined the problem of the Church—an important one during the year when "absolute unity" among all types and classes of people was the avowed policy of the Government. But the *rapprochement* with the Church, like the reforms in the Red Army, was not something limited to the emergency situation of 1942, but was part of a long-term policy. Much, indeed, that was decided in 1942, is still of vital importance to-day.

And then—what were the everyday life and the thoughts of the ordinary man? How was *he* reacting to the war? The attempt to answer this question is my chief excuse for the perhaps unconventional appearance of this book. Whole chapters are devoted to plain narrative writing. There is a chapter on the six-day journey from Murmansk to Moscow in June 1942. It shows how Russians lived, ate, and above all, *talked* in those anxious days. There are, towards the end of the book, two long narrative chapters,

one on the country between the Don and the Volga at the time of the German encirclement at Stalingrad, and the other on Stalingrad itself.

Here the reader will meet ordinary Russian soldiers, and many ordinary civilians. I talked with them personally, eye to eye, without interpreters, was careful not to over-simplify, conventionalise or "stylise" them, and tried to describe them just as they were; and since nearly all human beings are complex, I refrained from making sweeping generalisations about the "ordinary Russian," a deplorable and incurable habit of all the "Russia-in-Six-Weeks" visitors.

Other chapters partly or largely consist of diary entries; but in each case I ventured to use these only when they seemed in any way significant of the period under review. They describe Moscow—its good, like its bad sides. Here the reader will meet more people, ranging from "Western-minded" intellectuals to some specimens of that admirable, but in some ways disturbingly "insular," young Soviet generation which bore the brunt of the war effort. Inevitably, throughout the book, there are many references to the dark days of 1941 and to the Battle of Moscow. Both these memories greatly contributed to shaping the Russian mentality of 1942.

I can scarcely claim to be a military expert; but if a certain proportion of this book is concerned with purely military matters, it is because of the supremely important place the Battle of Stalingrad held in the progress of the war, in propaganda, and in the minds of the people. Secondly, I made a serious attempt to explain the Battle of Stalingrad in retrospect, on the basis of much new material not available to the general public and unknown outside Russia. I am particularly indebted to Colonel Zamiatin for his analysis of the main phases of the battle—an analysis published "for officers only"; and to Major-General Talensky, for the many illuminating statements he made to me personally in the course of several conversations.

Even more informal than this mixture of political and military analysis, diary material and narrative writing, is the inclusion in this book on Russia of the first three chapters concerned with the Arctic Convoy to Murmansk. This story deals, indeed, much more with Englishmen, and even Negroes, than with Russians. Yet the grim sea route to Murmansk was part of the War in Russia—though not as important, alas, as both we and the Russians would have liked it to be, and as it deserved to be for the human endeavour it involved. I believe, however, that its inclusion in this book is justifiable. For one thing, it is, as far as I know, the first full account of its kind of one of the *really bad* convoys to Russia.

This volume will, in due course, be followed by another, dealing with the years in which the Germans were finally driven out of the Soviet Union.

This second period presents a variety of other problems, military, economic, and psychological; and a much larger place is held during this

period, than in 1942, by international affairs. For after Stalingrad, the Soviet Union became the Great Power whose armies were constantly moving West—towards Rumania, Poland, and Germany, and towards the link-up with the Western Allies on the Elbe.

Yet the victorious years of 1943, '44, and '45 can scarcely be understood without a clear knowledge of what happened in the Soviet Union in 1942. This was, for Russia, a supremely important character-shaping and policy-shaping year.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Lord Kemsley and the *Sunday Times* for the invaluable opportunity they gave me to be in Russia throughout the War; and also my numerous Russian friends for all their help, kindness, and sincerity.

A. W.

London, *January* 1946

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THE YEAR OF STALINGRAD

BOOK I

LONDON TO MOSCOW

CHAPTER I

P.Q. 16

IT had been a miserable winter in London. The winter of Hongkong, Malaya and Singapore, of Java and Burma. The winter when the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* were sunk and the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* sailed through the Channel under our very noses. England was disgruntled. For the first time since the war began she was disgruntled even with Churchill. For a few brief days after his broadcast on his return from Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps rose to sudden national fame. But when Cripps went to India, and no miracle happened, he faded out of people's minds, and things went back to where they had been—minus Hongkong, Burma, Singapore, and the rest, and with Russia as the only bright spot. Sub-editors in Fleet Street said: "Thank God for Russia; there's no good news from anywhere else to put on the front page." The Battle of Moscow continued to be front-page news long after the Russian advance had stopped. Impulsive John Gordon, "staking his reputation on it," prophesied Germany's defeat in the East in 1942. Others were more cautious. But throughout the winter, Russia remained perhaps the only real enthusiasm of most people in England. If there was still a good chance of winning the war, people thought, it was thanks to the Russians. If London was not being blitzed, it was thanks to the Russians, too. Some of this indiscriminate adulation of Russia could even become a little tiresome at times.

London was not a happy place during that winter. I lectured in a few army camps. All the officers and men—I particularly remember those of a tank battalion in Essex—were keen, intelligent, eager for action, longing for action. They were 100 per cent efficient, they knew they were good soldiers; they were tired of cracks about "pongoes"; but how could they prove they were as good as the Navy, as good as the R.A.F.? Nothing very cheering was happening in Africa either, that winter. And after Pearl Harbour, America still seemed very far away from Europe. Would she not, people anxiously asked, concentrate on Japan, rather than on Germany?

During the blitz winter the London air had been full of human greatness. Now the war was far away. Many mothers and children had returned;

many nice people with tender nerves had crawled back to London out of their funkholes in Devon and Cornwall, and Berks and Bucks. The A.F.S. were at a loose end. The *camaraderie* of the blitz had gone; Mayfair was Mayfair again, and Clapham Common, Clapham Common. Strangers in the street no longer spoke to each other with the same ease and readiness. A few homeless or neurotic people still slept in the Tube. There were swarms of people—home and Empire troops mostly, and women in all sorts of uniforms, and a good many tarts in Piccadilly Circus at night, and all afternoon and evening thousands swarmed to see Disney's *Dumbo*, or whatever else was showing in the cinemas of Regent Street and Coventry Street. Further down Piccadilly, there was a higher proportion of Allied uniforms—Polish and Dutch and Free French—a babel of tongues, and in the Coquille and the Coq d'Or allied diplomats and functionaries lunched on unrationed *poulardes*, paying through the nose for the last remnants of indifferent burgundy. At night you could see Professor Joad and Mr. Agate and a hundred other major and minor celebrities at the Café Royal.

What did one talk about? Russia—always Russia. And then Europe. And the United States and Japan as a bad third. Mr. Maisky, now an honorary member of the Athenaeum, was warning the world that if there was no Second Front in 1942 the Germans might invade the Caucasus, and the old club dugout, when asked what was his contribution to the war, said he was doing his best to think well of the Russians.

The Fleet Street pubs had become dreary—so unlike the Fleet Street pubs of the blitz winter, when everything around was blazing, but journalists and firemen, all meeting together, were exhilarated. The down-at-heel fiddler and guitarist would still sing: "It's a hap-hap-happy day," which didn't meet with much response, or "Plaisir d'Amour," for which people weren't in much of a mood either; in the end they'd earn a few drinks and sixpences by playing the "Internationale," now reduced to the status of an Allied national anthem. Most of the best among the younger people in Fleet Street had gone into the army or overseas, and there were now rather too many old men about, and also a few professional careerists with an eye on good jobs after the war, and on the Assistant Editor's duodenal ulcer. In the Fleet Street pubs they also praised the Russians, and ran down Churchill, but always adding "the trouble is there's nobody else." The devastation caused by the blitz was only a few yards away; in the Temple and up Shoe Lane, and for miles around St. Paul's; but it now seemed distant and unreal, like something that had happened years ago. There was much inertia, much theorising about post-war reconstruction; there was little passion and very little hatred, very little of that hatred which had existed in London during the blitz. "I hope the whole bloody lot of them are drowned," the old Cockney woman selling *Standards*

outside the Temple gate said to me the day the *Bismarck* was sunk. Now, instead, when Mr. Eden described the bayoneting of British soldiers at Hongkong, a moth-eaten Scot said in a Fleet Street pub: "Ach away, it's jist propaganda. Folks dinna do sich things." And Molotov's Note on the German atrocities made no impression at all. It also was "jist propaganda."

But the sea is far from the Coq d'Or, and the war factories are far from the Fleet Street pubs. The London in which I had spent over five months since my return from Russia, was a more disgruntled and unpleasant place than I have known it either before or since. And I left again for Russia without much regret.

I was now in the first-class railway-carriage, steaming out of King's Cross. The last job in London was to get a taxi early on Sunday morning. It wasn't easy. I had got one by chance halfway up Kingsway, and had to take him back to Fleet Street to collect all my suitcases, the dogcoat, and the parcels of Ministry of Information food. Now all the bother of going off to Russia was over. The cases, with three suits, winter underwear, and whatnot, were packed; books, letters, cuttings, even the carbon paper and a few reams of typewriting paper were in packages sealed by the M. of I. censorship. These parcels could not be opened until I went on board. The supplies of food given me by the M. of I. were plentiful, calculated for at least a fortnight's intensive feeding. They said that, for all they knew, I might take three weeks or more to travel from Archangel to Kuibyshev. All this baggage, cryptically labelled S.85, was distributed between the compartment and the guard's van. There was no hint of the port of embarkation. This information, had anybody wanted it, was, however, freely supplied by the labels the King's Cross porter stuck on!

One of the great advantages of going to Russia by sea is that you can take any amount of luggage. In 1941, flying by Catalina, I was allowed only fifty pounds of luggage, including typewriter, with the result that I was short of everything in Moscow. This time, I knew, it would be much harder than last year to buy anything in Russia.

Mr. Brendan Bracken, when I last saw him, had told me that the convoys to Russia were now going to be very powerfully escorted, by cruisers, and possibly an aircraft-carrier, and lots of destroyers, and submarines against surface craft. Some of my naval friends had told me not to be so sure about it. So I hadn't the vaguest idea what I was in for, except that it would probably be a very long voyage.

At good speed the train travelled northward, under a grey sky, through

the green English countryside. "Careless talk costs lives," said the usual poster in the compartment. The carriage was nearly empty. Only a major sat opposite, and he probably took the careless talk warning seriously, because during the whole journey we did not exchange a word. At last we reached York. York had been bombed only a few days before. The railway-station was burned out; workers were busy on the railway-track, clearing away wreckage. Nothing was left of the part of the station with "Refreshments" written on it except a brick skeleton. Fresh emergency notice-boards had been put up. All around the station there was much bomb damage. Many roofs had been blown off, many houses burned out, but in the distance, York Minster stood, apparently unscathed. Late in the afternoon I reached my port of embarkation.[1]

Apparently the authorities knew all about my arrival; not so many people go to Russia by convoy. I was met at the station by the R.T.O., a jovial podgy little Manchester man, and in a camouflaged army car, he took me to the Customs Office. With us also came a pale, rather sad-looking little man, a Russian scientist, who was going home. He was carrying large cases of instruments, and enormous charts or maps, rolled up in canvas. He was extremely shy, and heavy going at first, but later I got to know him well. His name was Pushkov; he was Director of the Institute for Terrestrial Magnetism at Leningrad, and he had come to England for a short time with some Russian military and naval men. Now he was going home by himself. Some of his companions had, only a few days before, been killed in an air-crash in England, and it seemed to have depressed him greatly. It was almost the first thing he mentioned to me. He was wearing a felt hat and a new raincoat, and when I remarked on the inadequacy of his clothes for this Arctic trip, he said: "It'll be all right. I gave my winter clothes to the Red Army, when I left the Soviet Union by the south last March."

The customs examination in a small building by the docks, was a long and finicky affair; luggage and papers were examined in great detail by a pair of very pernickety officials. However, when it was over, three or four naval officers and our jovial R.T.O. went for supper to the local hotel near the docks. Meantime somebody was looking after the luggage and was going to take it aboard.

We went aboard ourselves at nightfall, after driving in the camouflaged army car through the labyrinth of dockland, with warehouses, railway-tracks, and lorries loaded with packing-cases marked "Murmansk." If there was a German spy in the port, he would soon have found out what was what.

She was a ten-thousand-ton cargo vessel called the *Empire Baffin*, a war-

[1] Actually Middlesbrough.

time convoy ship, rather "mass-produced," strong, well-built, but built with the utmost economy and a certain austerity. Her hull was painted dark grey, almost black. On board, the maximum space was allotted to the cargo, and very little room left for anything else. The crew's quarters were highly compressed, the officers' cabins very small, but the smoke-room and dining-saloon under the fo'c'sle alone looked almost peacetime, with imitation mahogany panelling, somewhat rough-hewn leather chairs, but still leather chairs. In the dining-saloon were large coloured photographs of the King and Queen. That night the loading of the ship was almost completed. The for'ard deck was already crowded with medium tanks, attached to the iron railing with heavy ropes; these were the overflow from the hold. What was down there besides tanks, was to remain a mystery, though a few ominous allusions, especially during the later stages of the voyage, were to be made.

Sulky, monosyllabic Pushkov and I were lucky; Captain Dykes gave us an airy four-berth cabin on deck. It was originally meant as the sick bay, but with neither surgeon nor patients on board, it seemed to be considered a superfluous luxury. Perhaps, Captain Dykes said, we might later have to be shifted, but we could have it just now. Captain Dykes, with a red chubby face and white hair, was an exuberant Welshman. He was about fifty, and had been at sea all his life. His tunic and trousers were wonderfully pressed, and his chin shone like a mirror. This was his third trip to Russia in only a few months—few, if any, of the other ships had done this voyage more than twice. It was considered one of the toughest in the world, perhaps the toughest, except the convoys to Malta.

"Last time we went to Russia," he said, "Mr. Garreau, the French Minister, occupied this cabin; it was cold and nasty then; the deck was covered with thick ice. But you're going to have grand weather—*that* I can promise you," he laughed. "That's fine," I said, preferring not to dwell on the other aspects of the voyage. It was no use prejudicing the Captain with nervous-passenger talk.

It was a dark night, with the balloons dimly dotting the low rainclouds. But for the faint splashes of water surging against the hull, all was silent in the port. The dark shapes of blacked-out ships and warehouses could only be dimly seen; only now and then the small light from a chuffing motor-launch would travel across the water.

It was my last night in England; what all would happen in the world, I wondered, before I returned to an English port again? Britain, at any rate, I felt, was safe, at least for the present.

The boilers were working up steam, and when we awoke the next morning, we were turning slowly northward, having sailed out of the estuary. In the distance, sharply outlined against the grey sky, stood out the cranes, like crocodile gods.

I was to live for four weeks on the *Empire Baffin*, and I shall always remember the men on that convoy ship—Captain Dykes, and Lucky Billie the steward, and the cook, who would have warmed the heart of Herman Melville with his stories of the Antarctic whaling-stations; and pimply McGhee, and Geordie, and the others who manned the Oerlikon guns, and Mr. Chilvers, formerly of the International Brigade, and the Flight-Lieutenant with his ten R.A.F. boys and his Gremlins, and Alfred Adolphus Clark, the nigger boy from British Guiana, and so many others of the eighty-nine men on board the *Empire Baffin*. In every sense, we were in the same boat.

And then there was Pushkov, so shy and dry and awkward at first, but whose true personality and human qualities blossomed forth in that warm human company after only a few days. It was strange to find so much human warmth in this Soviet scientist, the bricklayer's son from Orel, in this Party member, in this little pale-faced man with a poor physique inherited from his hungry boyhood in the days of the Civil War, and now with a wife and two children, alive or dead, in hungry Leningrad.

And so we sailed. It was an uneventful voyage—at first. For a day we anchored in the Firth of Forth, where our Captain, in spick and span blue-serge suit and a new light-grey felt hat, went ashore to confer with the other captains of the convoy. On Wednesday, we followed the east coast of Scotland, clear and green on the port side. Several more ships had joined the convoy in the Firth of Forth, and now about twenty were sailing north, with their balloons up in the sky. Among them was a flak ship with odd white and black camouflage, looking like the Rialto Bridge, which made it hard to see where the ship began and ended; the others were mostly old tramp steamers, and a few larger and more modern cargoes like ours. Next to us was our sister ship, the ill-fated *Empire Lawrence*, with a catapult Hurricane on board. And some distance away, a little destroyer, painted in delicate blues and greens. It had rained that day, but the evening was beautiful, with large rosy clouds in the sky. Suddenly the first mate came along and said we had better put on our life-jackets, or at least carry them around, as an enemy plane had been spotted fifteen miles away. It was growing dark, but the east coast of Scotland could be clearly seen. I could see two Spitfires tearing into the rosy clouds on the port side. On the bridge the gunners were standing by. The R.A.F. boys had put on their tin hats with their green netting.

Later the steward said that Jerry had been after the south-bound convoy. "Did they have a crack at it?" "Don't think so," he said, "we must have had fighters up all the time." The next day an unidentified aircraft was reported; later it turned out to be one of ours. The steward said there were "a few little twerps in the R.A.F." who liked to scare merchantmen; one day one such "little twerp" proceeded to dive over a convoy, "so we

brought him down. God, didn't he look silly when we fished him out!" And Lucky Billie roared with laughter. Generally speaking, Lucky Billie divided the world into a vast twerp majority, and a tiny minority of seamen and fishermen. Among the biggest twerps were the Germans, the Jews, the Old School Ties, and every kind of Naval Control people. These were all, to Lucky Billie, so many "little 'Itlers." Their one aim in life was to prevent the crews of merchant ships from getting shore leave.

Lucky Billie was forty-four. He was round and chubby, and had a most infectious loud boyish laugh. He would roar with laughter, throwing his mouth wide open, and the absence of one of his front teeth made him look even more like a ten-year-old. He wore a very grubby tunic, and the long hair on his chest would stick out through his half-unbuttoned shirt. Sometimes, in the evening, as we sat in the smoke-room round a bottle of rum, he would tell in his own way some of the stories of W. W. Jacobs's *Many Cargoes*, and enjoy himself like a schoolboy. The story he loved best was the first one, about the first mate's unfailing methods in curing real or imaginary illnesses on board. Billie, who, among all his other jobs, also performed the job of ship's doctor, liked telling how he administered to the crew ruthless doses of castor oil against every conceivable internal complaint. He also claimed to be able to pull teeth, using half a tumbler of rum as an anæsthetic, nor did the idea of cutting off a man's arm or leg frighten him, though one could never quite make out whether he had actually performed amputations—probably not. He was, however, quite categorical about having shot down three German planes, and, even more so, about having sunk a U-boat. "Did you not get a decoration?" I asked. "You don't know anything about the Merchant Navy," he said. "Me—get a decoration—a medal? No bloody fear. The skipper might be lying unconscious for days in his cabin, and I could sink fifty submarines —the medal would still go to him. The Admiralty sent me a bit of paper, expressing appreciation—fat lot of good that'll do me!"

Another evening he told us about his adventures with a Swedish seaman who had gone raving mad. "Kept him locked up in the cabin for three days. Then we landed at Melbourne. Think that was the end of our troubles? No bloody fear. They've got their own naval control chaps in Australia—little 'Itlers they are. 'You can't bring an alien ashore in Australia,' they said, 'don't you know that?' I said I knew, but the bloke was stark raving mad—a dangerous lunatic. 'Oh no,' said the twerps, 'we've got our immigration laws in Australia, and he can't come ashore.' " I forget all the ins and outs of the story, but with a lot of wangling, Billie succeeded in getting the lunatic ashore. "He'd scared the hell out of everybody on the ship; he kept swearing that he'd knife the skipper, so I had to take charge of him. 'Now there's a good chap, Billie, you deal with

him.' Never knew a skipper so bloody polite to anybody. I think he would have gone down on his knees if I'd said no. He wasn't a bad chap, the Swede, and he and I got on all right. I took him in a taxi to the asylum. Once or twice he wanted to jump out, but I kept him back. He was really a good fellow, the Swede. Only he had melancholia—wanted to commit suicide, or kill somebody, never could quite make out which. So we arrived at the asylum, and there the damn fools, not knowing which of us was cuckoo, just shoved us both in; and it was no use arguing that the other bloke was off his chump and that I was all right; they just said: 'That's what they all say, and you'll have to stay here till you're examined.' I swore my head off, and that made them even more suspicious. I was bundled off into a solitary cell; they nearly put me in a strait-jacket, and the next day in the asylum yard, they made me do drill with the other loonies. There I was, like a bloody fool, marching up and down at the tail of the column. Meantime our skipper had got worried; must have thought the Swede had murdered me, and so the mistake was cleared up. I said good-bye to the Swede; he seemed quite happy, and he would have been all right, but two days later we heard he had committed suicide."

To me Billie was invaluable. He was the perfect steward. He gave me half a tin of shoe-polish; like a conjuror, he would produce wicks and flints, and matches and cigarettes, and once he even concocted for me an altogether loathsome cough mixture—the recipe for which he must have got from W. W. Jacobs. Quinine, castor oil and bilge-water were, at a rough guess, its main ingredients. And at night, he would produce a bottle of rum and some lime juice and sugar, and hot water, and mix a good hot toddy, and he would give us bits of autobiography, and political views; and Cook would talk about the whaling-stations in the Antarctic, and the Flight-Lieutenant would tell us of the Gremlins in the Battle of Britain. Drinking hot rum, we would sit up in the smoke-room, without any lights on, till the semi-darkness of midnight would send us to our cabins.

Billie had strong political views; he was healthily boodthirsty about the Germans, and tender-hearted when he spoke of his own folks in North Shields. Politicians, like most other people to him, were "twerps." "There's only one man," he once said, "who went into Parliament with honest intentions, and that was Guy Fawkes." And he'd laugh gaily. He would rage about the Old School Tie, and one of his pet aversions was some "public school twerp" of a man who was given some job to do in the Port of Liverpool. I don't know what it was all about, but Billie gave an outrageous impersonation of the "twerp" who, according to Billie, kept on saying: "Shall we put it heah? Oh, you say we can't put it heah? Ah you suah we can't put it heah? All right, shall we try to put it theah?" "And that's the sort of twerp who was drawing a big salary—seven hundred and fifty a year," Billie said indignantly.

According to Billie, a lot of things were wrong about this war. Owing to the little 'Itlers of the naval control, crews were for weeks in port and never got ashore. In the last war, he had already lost two brothers, and now his remaining brother had been in the Middle East for four years, and had been wounded twice, and had never been allowed to come home on leave. If so many ships were sunk, it was because of the port authorities.

Like most of the men at sea, Billie hated the Huns. At one of our landing-stages we had received from somewhere a three-day-old *Glasgow Bulletin*. Billie was indignant. "Look at this muck," he said. There was a story of how the Moderator of the Church of Scotland had protested to the B.B.C. against its "hate talks" in the Forces Programme, as something that was "unworthy of us as Christians, who must not lower ourselves to the Nazi level." "Tripe," said the steward. "There's a bloody totalitarian war on. I've seen chaps boiling in the burning oil round a tanker they'd sunk. I've seen them machine-gun fellows in the water. The Huns ought to be given their own medicine. Too bloody soft, that's what we are, and the damned Huns know it. You must have heard about the Jerry airman who baled out over England: 'We've got nothing to risk,' he said, 'if we win we are on top of the world, if we lose the British will give us a square deal.' We were bloody soft with these twerps," Billie said. "I know what they did to our fisherfolk off North Shields. Machine-gunning defenceless fishing-boats was their favourite pastime. But we were still soft. In the end we had to arm every fishing-boat. One of my pals was telling me the story. The bloody Germans thought they'd get away with it this time, too. Rat-tat-tat they went with their machine-gun. But the trawler on which my pal was had a big machine-gun too, and they brought the bastard down. Two of them got drowned, but one was fished out. And then the usual British namby-pamby stuff started. Somebody gave the twerp a cigarette. He just grabbed it, threw it on the ground and trampled on it. 'So that's the way you feel,' said the skipper, and they chucked the bastard overboard." Billie laughed, and went on: "All very well for them to sterilise Polish women and Russian women and French women. What *right* have they to do it, I ask you? I'd machine-gun the whole bloody lot as they'd do to us, if they had a chance. Now wouldn't they?" And he talked of more German machine-gunnings of men on rafts and of men in the water. "I've seen the bloody thing with my own eyes."

Billie had lost many pals in this war. "Two hundred pals of mine in the Merchant Navy have gone to the bottom," he said. Perhaps he was exaggerating—if by "pal" he meant a close friend. But he liked to talk about the seamen and fisherfolk of North Shields. "They've had a hell of a time," he said. "But that's the kind of people they are. They've got the sea in their blood, and that's all there is to it, and everybody is taking advantage of them. The dock workers—they get week-ends off, and they

work regular hours, and make money hand over fist these days. What have they to complain of, compared with us? And then you get a twerp of a judge saying about a borstal lad: 'He's only fit to be sent to sea.' England is not a sea-conscious nation; it's all nonsense. The Merchant Fleet and the chaps in the Navy are the only people who know anything about the sea. The rest of the British people are just a lot of bloody Con-ti-nent-als!" Billie was in an outrageous mood. But sometimes he would grow soft, and almost maudlin. He would speak of the terrible time the seamen had had between 1931 and 1939, of the trade depression, of the hundreds of ships that were being used up as scrap, of the shipyards that were closing down one by one—some, he said, hadn't been reopened yet—and that seamen on land were not only miserable because they were on land, but they were like despised paupers into the bargain. "Do you think a seaman likes to go on the dole?" he cried. "And there were *millions* of us in that position."

"It's in the blood all right," he said. "My old father, who's eighty-four now, hung on till he was seventy-four, when he just couldn't go on with it. And what life has he on shore anyway? There they are, in their little cottage in North Shields, my old father and my old mother, living on their old-age pension—a quid a week. Now under the new Government scheme there are going to be better retiring conditions for old seamen, but so far, there's only the old-age pension." He himself was making £23 a month, and that included war bonus, and extra war-risk bonus. He had been at sea for twenty-five years; there was hardly a place in the world where he hadn't been. He knew China and Malaya and Australia particularly well. And then he would talk again of his wife whom he saw so seldom, of his two boys, and about his old father of eighty-four and his old mother, and one night, after a few glasses of hot toddy, he grew maudlin, and spoke again of the two hundred pals he had lost, and of all the twerps in this world who didn't know what war was like, and then he said: "Our fisherfolk of North Shields, it's they who call me Lucky Billie. I've been torpedoed twelve times. *You* don't know the fisherfolks of North Shields. I don't want millions from anybody; all I want is the fishermen folk to remain my friends. They'll never let you down, they'll never let you die of want. Their friendship," he said with drunken emotion, "it's worth more than all the millions in the world. You can keep your bloody millions," he said with a sweeping gesture, not addressed to anybody in particular, but probably to the twerps of the world in general.

When we woke on Thursday morning we had already rounded John o' Groats, and were sailing, with the rest of the convoy, through the Pentland Firth. It was a gloriously sunny day, and the sea, though choppy, was bright blue. Some of the R.A.F. boys were seasick. We encountered a cruiser bound for Scapa Flow, and we waved gaily at each other. I spent

the day reading Balzac. As I was reading Balzac, the idea that France could be *vernichtet*, and by whom?—by Hitler!—seemed more nightmarish than ever. Seagulls were diving over the ship, and a gentle breeze was blowing from the Atlantic; the sun was glittering on the blue sea, and the rocks of Cape Wrath, with the white lighthouse, high on the cliffs, looked desolate and peaceful. The world, with all its joy and beauty, was going on as before, it seemed—and it had found room for a Hitler. . . .

All the next day we stayed anchored in Loch Ewe—my last close-up glimpse of Scotland. Many years before I had spent a dull rainy week in August here, staying at the little hotel. I had spent most of the time walking rather aimlessly about the water-logged moors, listening to sermons in Gaelic at the kirk, and playing Corinthian bagatelle with a nine-year-old youngster, and arguing with an old hen from Stirling who had objected to my playing bagatelle on the Sabbath. It was still there, the little highland hotel, and the kirk, and the grocer's shop, and the three or four crofters' cottages of which this godforsaken place was composed. It did not look so bad now, in the bright sunshine, and with the large convoy crowding the loch, with their barrage balloons dotting the sky. Several more ships had by now joined the convoy—ships flying the Stars and Stripes and the Panama flag. Somebody on board said they were very poorly armed. From this ship bound for Murmansk or Archangel—we still didn't know which—it was odd to watch an occasional lorry drive past the highland hotel and the kirk, and round the hill to Gareloch and to Auchensheen and Inverness. . . . And later, in the evening as we steamed out of the loch, we saw one of the most superb panoramas of the Highlands, their highest peaks still covered with snow, pale pink in the sunset.

And then I remember the evening when we last saw the coast of Scotland. The sun did not set for hours. There was a glorious sunset that evening, a strange patriotic sunset of three broad streaks of red, white and blue. To the south-west one could see the dim outline of the mountains of Skye and more land to the north-west, a fainter and flatter coastline—the Outer Hebrides. Slowly, the red disc of the sun disappeared behind it. The seagulls were crying overhead. The Flight-Lieutenant remarked on the beauty of the seagulls' wings. "What ease!" he said enviously. "There they are, looking down and laughing like drains at us, down below." Street was his name; he was a curious, rather unaccountable person. He was twenty-three but tried to sound ten years older. He had a large mop of unruly dark hair, and a little moustache which he never ceased to pluck and twist—he must have been proud of it. He spoke with an accent which just missed being public-school, he ran down Mayfair, and what he called the Mayfair influence in the army, was venomous about the "pongoes," and was a trifle muddled in his geography. Allied troops had landed in Madagascar that week, but Street kept on referring to it as "Martinique,"

adding that the whole trouble with us was that we were "too damn scared of killing too many Frenchmen." Street had fought in the Battle of Britain as a fighter-pilot; he had been brought down and had baled out. He liked to talk about the Battle of Britain, but regarded it, to all appearances, as a routine job, not as anything to tell one's grandchildren about. Often Street sulked, and one couldn't drag a word out of him. At other times he was deliberately rude. He gave himself tough airs, though when we heard one day that Exeter had been bombed, he immediately told one of his R.A.F. boys, an Exeter lad, to ask the Captain to send a wireless message to inquire about his family. Some of the R.A.F. lads were over thirty but Street was paternal to them, and allowed them to eat in the officers' dining-saloon.

That night Street was in a communicative mood. After watching the red ball of the sun go down, we adjourned to the smoke-room, and there he talked for a whole hour about the Gremlins. He spoke like a poet, with a sort of inner conviction; he made the Gremlins live. He genuinely seemed to believe in them. He spoke with the earnestness with which I had once heard a Polish peasant girl speak of the village witch and the devil. He talked of the Gibraltar Gremlins, who lived on a cloud above the rock, of how they came swooping down on a plane and weighed it down till it crashed. They were small and hairy, the Gremlins, Street said, and had pointed ears. There was a Chiefy Gremlin, but nothing above the rank of sergeant. "They are very good at camouflage," Street said. "Really, they are. They can camouflage a Junkers 88 to make it look exactly like a Blenheim. . . . Or else they play this sort of trick on you: a Gremlin perched on your shoulder, whispers in your ear: 'Look round, a 109, a 109,' and then, when you try to look round, the Gremlin puts a piece of black cardboard in front of your eyes, and you see nothing. . . . Or else, when you are very high up, the Gremlin creeps up your back, and slips long, cold fingers down your neck. . . . In the coastal areas the tiny Gremlins get on to the back of a seagull, and they drive the seagull into the propeller—it is very bad when your propeller gets choked up with a seagull, for it may cause a forced landing. . . . What the Gremlins also do is to pull up your under-carriage just as you are about to land—it's one of their worst tricks. . . ." Street told many more weird stories of the Gremlins. Pushkov, the Soviet scientist, looked on amused and a trifle puzzled. He must have thought the British allies very singular people.

"Well," I said, "are there no superstitions in the Russian Air Force?" "No," he said, "certainly not." "Are you sure?" "Well," he agreed reluctantly, "I suppose there are, especially among those who have heard about such things from their parents. And in the Navy, there are some superstitions—about lighting the third cigarette with one match, for instance—but that, of course, is only among the older sailors."

Smiling a little sceptically, he asked Street: "Then does it mean that the Gremlins are anti-British?" "Oh no," said Street earnestly. "They are not anti-British. They do it for fun, and because, generally, they think that planes have no business to be in the skies." "Then, are they pro-German? Or do the Germans have Gremlins, too?" "Oh no," said Street, "the Germans wouldn't be honoured by the attention of the Gremlins. No, really, they are not wicked, the Gremlins. They were written up in one of the R.A.F. magazines, and they did not object to the publicity, for they played no tricks on us to punish us for it. But the Gremlins have to be humoured, do you see?" "Then," I said, "are there no antidotes against the Gremlins' tricks?" "Antidotes is hardly the word," said Street. "But each of us has a mascot; I have a little woollen doll, and then"—he lowered his voice almost to a whisper—"there's my guardian angel. I have never seen her; but I know she has white wings, and she looks like Hedy Lamarr." This was rather an anti-climax. "What are your relations like with your guardian angel—formal, or rather familiar?" "No," said Street solemnly, "they are more in the nature of worship."

Pushkov was more and more puzzled. Later he said to me: "Very curious, these stories about the Gremlins. Quite crazy, really. Do you think Street believes all this, or was he pulling our legs?" "No," I said, "I think he really believes it—to some extent." "Interesting as folklore, anyway," said Pushkov. "Very interesting. But it's very odd about the mascots. Our fighter ace Safonov, who I believe must still be at Murmansk, shot down twenty-two Germans. He hasn't a mascot, but a mascot was found on every one of the twenty-two German planes. . . ." "I think you had better not tell Street," I said. "All right," he smiled. And yet, when I think of this conversation now, I wonder whether Pushkov would not have done well to "touch wood" when he spoke of Safonov; for the very day we landed at Murmansk, Safonov was shot down in a dog-fight above our convoy, and killed.

Pushkov was a distinguished Russian scientist who had come on a visit to England with a number of Russian military men. He was the head of a special institute at Leningrad devoted to that difficult and only half-explored subject, terrestrial magnetism, an essential part of meteorology. He was painfully shy and awkward at first, but in a few days he got used to our company and opened up. One somehow felt that on this cargo vessel he had found something of the England he had hoped to find. About his visit to England, and his impressions of London, he was rather vague; he seemed to have rather mixed feelings about it. He had met many scientists, and many government officials, some of whom he had found rather sticky. Some of the scientists he greatly admired, but he thought science was not as thoroughly organised in

England as it might be. There wasn't enough "planning" in the organisation of science; too many people practised science as a part-time job; too many scientific organisations were living on a commercial basis, depending on grants from private persons, and even on jobs they were doing for private firms or for the Government. When he and two of his colleagues proposed to the Soviet Government an institute for terrestrial magnetism, they received an adequate grant after less than three months, and were allowed to take on thirty-two research assistants. "One would have thought," he once said, "that oceanography would be a favourite subject with the British; but actually much more research has been done on it by Germany and America. There are only two chairs of oceanography in Britain; one has only two students, and the other ten or twelve, but nearly all these are from the Dominions." He admitted that the general standard of living was very much higher than in the Soviet Union, and that housing in particular was infinitely better; but these deficiencies in Russia were due to the peculiar requirements of the last twenty-five years; Russia was obliged to concentrate on other things. He was a Party member, and genuinely admired Stalin. "It is wrong to consider Stalin as merely a man of action," he said. "Stalin is also a thinker—and a very good one. And do you know," he said, "that Stalin is also something of a scientist? For three years, from 1898 to 1901, Stalin worked in the Observatory at Tiflis. It's a point that is often overlooked by his biographers—and it is an important point."

Pushkov and I used to have long arguments, sitting on the coils of rope on deck. He had read my book on Russia, and approved of it on the whole; but he thought I was wrong to suggest that the Stalin Constitution had not yet been fully applied. He strongly defended the machinery of the Supreme Soviet, and thought it a much more efficient parliamentary system than ours. The election machinery, he said, provided that the best and ablest and most energetic people in the country were elected to the Supreme Soviet. "Our best engineers, scientists, artists, actors, are members of the Supreme Soviet; we have no dud and useless M.P.'s as you have in the House of Commons." Every decision was freely discussed by the various committees, where there was full freedom of criticism; and every decision was carefully weighed. Nobody wanted an "Opposition" to the Government, in the British sense. Pushkov argued that the freedom of the Press was, in fact, in force in the sense in which it had been defined by the Stalin Constitution: this did *not* provide for the freedom of a press challenging the régime itself; and such a press would not be allowed. He argued that Soviet Russia was a genuine democracy, more genuine in some ways than Britain—a point on which I found it hard to agree with him. But his definition of democracy was just different from mine. Most difficult for me to accept were his views on *habeas corpus*, though I could see the

necessity of certain ruthless measures in wartime or in a period of national emergency. "Just look at it this way," he said. "Under your type of democracy we would have concentrated on housing and less on armaments; with your *habeas corpus* we could not have wiped out our fifth column as we did. And after all," he would say, "you have to judge by results—and look what a show the Soviet Union is putting up! I can tell you one thing," he continued, "and that is that there isn't another nation in the world that would have stood what our people have stood. Invasion —and what an invasion! Any other country would have cracked up long ago. . . ."

He would sit on deck for hours, reading the *Jeeves Omnibus*. While reading *Jeeves* he occasionally frowned, but never smiled. "I suppose all this is greatly exaggerated," he once remarked, "for I find it hard to believe that English society is *quite* as degenerate and decadent as this."

Nikolai Vassilievich Pushkov was the son of a bricklayer at Orel, and so a descendant of Turgeniev's little Orel *mujiks*. He looked rather like a little *mujik* himself, now dressed up in an English raincoat and a pair of absurdly new brown shoes on thick crepe soles. But his little pale face was lively, and his large grey eyes full of intelligence and a certain irony. And, at the same time, one felt that there was much warmth and human kindness in this Bolshevik, and a bitter sense of pity for his people. And what a strange, typically Soviet life he had had! The bricklayer's son was now an eminent scientist, and he felt that he would perhaps never have been anything but a bricklayer but for the Soviets who gave him opportunities he would not have had before. But these twenty-five years had been for him a hard uphill fight. He was at school at Novorossisk when the Revolution began, and though only fifteen or sixteen, he and many of his schoolmates worked clandestinely for the Bolsheviks during the White régime at Novorossisk. "Yes," he said, "I saw the Intervention—British, French, even Italian officers at Novorossisk. But for the foreign interventionists, Denikin could not have held out for a week." Pushkov was one of the men who had not forgotten about it. When the Whites took Novorossisk, they shot six thousand men—and Pushkov had not forgotten that either. But he no longer felt bitter about the Whites. "The Whites represented something," he admitted, "as long as they were a purely volunteer movement; one could not help respecting some of Kornilov's men. But once they started conscription, it no longer made any sense. Their soldiers were ready to desert at any moment. And the corruption in the White rear was something quite fantastic. But we look at it in quite a detached way now," he said. "The histories of the Civil War we have published in the Soviet Union in recent years, are remarkably objective. You should have a look at them."

Pushkov had known terrible want and hunger during those years. In 1921 he went to Leningrad, hoping to enter the university or a technical college. His first thought on arriving there was to obtain a ration card. When with some trouble he obtained it, he was able to enter the university. During those days he lived on three-quarters of a pound of bread a day, and hot water—and absolutely nothing else. "No wonder," he said, looking out on the sea, "people can live on rafts for six weeks; after what I went through at Leningrad in 1921, I believe that the human body can endure much more than is commonly supposed." Then, one day, he learned that his mother was seriously ill, and he decided to go south to see her. Actually, when he arrived there, she was already dead. "But I shall always remember that journey. The famine in Leningrad was at its worst—almost a dead city. I can still see myself, weak at the knees, walking to the railway-station along the deserted Nevsky Prospect, carrying a pound of bread and 400 grams of salt herring—it was all I had to take with me on the long journey ahead. And then, I remember, I felt so faint and hungry, I ate it all, there and then—my six days' ration. Yet, I went on to the station, and there, fortunately, I met some comrades who were going on the same train, and they fed me as best they could out of their own meagre rations." Later, when I looked at his stooping back, and his pale face, I often imagined him as a starving lad of eighteen wolfing his six days' rations that day in the deserted Nevsky Prospect.

Yet, through persistence combined with ability, he made his career as a scientist, had published many articles in scientific magazines, not only in Russia, but in Germany and America, and had made a name for himself. The Academy of Science had encouraged him, the Government had been generous to him in his work, and he was grateful. No doubt, even as head of a scientific institute, he had suffered from various shortages even before the war: the five of them had only two rooms to live in—he and his wife, and the two little boys, and the wife's mother. But engrossed in his work, he must have been a happy man.

And then the war came, and he was to see the war in all its horror.

"There's no doubt about it," he said one day, "that we were overwhelmed by the war at first. It went contrary to all sorts of things we had expected. The German advance did not tally with our idea that the war would be fought *not* on Soviet soil.

"There was fearful confusion during the first part of the campaign, especially during the retreat to Leningrad. The Germans used paratroops very effectively. They would drop 300 or 400, armed to the teeth with tommy-guns and machine-guns behind the Russian lines; it was hell let loose. The Russians at that time were mostly armed with rifles only. Once our people surrounded 2,000 paratroops and made mincemeat of them with their artillery, but more often than not the paratroops were a fearful

thing. There was also much confusion in Latvia and Estonia. They had been left their own national uniforms, and many of our officers did not know it; they were rather like British uniforms. Some of their officers were fifth columnists; and even some of the men tended to think in 'national' terms; once Estonia had been overrun, they saw no point in going on with the war against Germany. Also, many Latvian and Estonian soldiers didn't understand Russian—it was just a frightful mess. And then, what made matters worse still, was the psychology of our people. They were over-confident. They couldn't take in that we had been invaded; it must be just a temporary setback, they thought. When the Germans took Pskov, people in Leningrad said: 'That can only be temporary, they'll be pushed back to Germany—it just makes no sense.' It was bad psychologically. It largely explains why at first nobody bothered to organise any sort of defence in depth—in fact any kind of defence south of Leningrad."

And when the great drama of Leningrad was about to begin, Pushkov received instructions to evacuate the children of one of the Leningrad schools. He took them beyond the Volkhov River. It was an ordeal; the railways were being continually bombed and machine-gunned. The Germans had complete air control in those days. So much so that every plane was assumed to be a German plane; when, some time later, Russian planes and a few British-made planes appeared at Leningrad, people still assumed at first they were German. "One of my worst experiences," Pushkov said, "was to see a German bomb hit a train packed with children. Two carriages were completely wrecked—all that was left of them was heaps of twisted metal with piles of raw meat."

During that period there was an incredible state of affairs at the railway-stations, and especially at railway-junctions. "I saw Cheliabinsk, the great Urals railway-junction, in October 1941. Trains, trains, trains were coming in from everywhere stacked with machinery, with entire factories from the Ukraine and Moscow, and bringing tens of thousands of refugees and evacuated factory workers. Four hundred grams of bread a day was all that could be given to these people. Cheliabinsk was probably the biggest sorting-out job the world had ever seen. You can't imagine what the Russian people went through, especially during those autumn months of 1941. The food situation was acute. There isn't another nation that could have stood it. In any other country in the world, a month of such a life would have made people squeal for peace."

So here, on the way to Iceland, I was getting first-hand information of some of the things that had been happening in Russia—things which one only vaguely guessed in Moscow in 1941—the fearful retreat to Leningrad, the confusion, the massacre, and then these mass evacuations of people and machines to the Urals.

Pushkov had become used to our ship. In spite of his shyness and

awkwardness, he had got to like the people, and had become communicative, and, being a man of energy, he decided to *do* things during the voyage. The R.A.F boys, with Flight-Lieutenant Street, were going to Russia. I suggested to Pushkov that we keep the lads busy by organising a daily lesson of Russian. He liked the idea. So at 11 every morning the R.A.F. lads assembled in the smoke-room for their Russian lesson. Pushkov's English was not good, but that did not discourage him. With the persistence so typical of him he would spend two or three hours preparing each lesson. He started with a lesson of phonetics, and must have given them ten or twelve more—till events put an end to the course.

There were ten R.A.F. lads, including a sergeant and a corporal, both barely twenty. Two of the men were hardly "lads." They were well over thirty and married. One was a "wee mon" from Glasgow, with false teeth, a little yellow moustache, and with a little face obviously designed for a bowler hat; the other—Mr. Adcock was his name—had had a good job with Boots in Nottingham. He was intelligent, and, I think, Pushkov's best pupil. There was a lad from Stafford, with curly fair hair, and the face of a good-natured dog; there was a dour and humourless lad from Aberdeen, two tidy, good-looking boys from the South of England, a well-educated young man from Bournemouth, and pimply little "Taffy" from Cardiff, who always sang or whistled when he wasn't seasick. Taffy was the dumbest of Pushkov's pupils, and this failing he shared with the Flight-Lieutenant, who, for that reason perhaps, often liked to make excuses for cancelling the Russian lesson, but in the face of Pushkov's persistence he seldom got away with it. . . .

We had sat up late listening to Street's stories of the Gremlins, and when we rose the next morning we were on the high seas, with no land to be seen. It was farewell to Britain—for a long time. The calm sea and the sky were blue, and it was warm on deck. At 10, ginger-haired little Harry brought us the usual mug of tea with the usual digestive biscuit. Harry, like most of the crew, came from Tyneside; he was pale and freckled, and his long nose was dotted with blackheads. Though small and only fifteen, Harry had been on several voyages already, and had been torpedoed once. Of his three brothers one was in the Navy and two others in the merchant fleet. A thing I found surprising on the *Empire Baffin*, as distinct from the Navy, was the high proportion of people with very bad skins, and blotchy, pimply faces. It wasn't due to the sea air, but no doubt to eating the wrong kind of food. The steward said he had to hand out castor oil every day; constipation, he said, was the curse of the Merchant Navy.

We sailed north all day, without any important event, except that in the evening we passed a floating mine, a large black ball bobbing up and down in the water, and looking very harmless. But a few minutes before, the

pale-blue and pale-green destroyer had gone down the convoy giving warning through a megaphone. The sea was so smooth that the mine was bound to be spotted; in a rough sea or on a dark night it might have been different. The convoy, now composed of over thirty ships, sailed on. The destroyer stayed behind till she had exploded the mine. Somebody said it sometimes took half an hour or even an hour to do it. Some time later, looking back, we saw a pillar of water go up in the distance, but hardly heard a sound.

The *Empire Baffin* had a motley crew all right. As they all said, it was because seamen were now no longer attached to any particular vessel, but signed on for one voyage at a time only, with the result that many of the men had never met before. I don't think our Captain liked this system, because it is always a bit of a gamble, while Billie said one got with this system "a lot of twerps" on board. Billie, though, I think, a good fellow at heart, could be rough with the deck-hands, and used to become quite ferocious when the negroes, or any other "twerp," tried to get an extra tin of condensed milk from him on what he called false pretences. "You've had your share of milk," he once bawled at Alfred Adolphus, "and if you want more you'd better go home for it to British Guinea!" What he meant was British Guiana—but what did it matter? Alfred Adolphus—of whom more later—was one of the negro firemen.

Although they were a motley crew, I think they got on well together. Comradeship at sea, especially in wartime, is not created by years of acquaintance. The deck-hands, it is true, complained that there was still too much of a "class distinction" between the fo'c'sle and the rest of the ship, but it used to be much worse in the old days. The steward and the cook, they said, were always despised in the merchant fleet; it was nonsense—but there it was. Most of the members of the crew were "Geordies"; they came from Middlesbrough and North and South Shields; others came from Tyneside, a few from Lancashire. Several of them had been to Russia before; a jovial little ginger-haired fellow talked about a girl he had met at Murmansk, and from whom he had learned the word *dushka*; another, a dark wiry seaman, who wore a navy-blue beret, had pinned on it a little brooch of a Red Flag with the hammer and sickle. This did not mean anything very political in his case; but he was proud of having already been twice in Russia since the war. On the whole, the seamen did this job of taking tanks to Russia as they would have done any other job; they did not attach any dramatic significance to it. Others considered it a nuisance and grumbled, just as they would have grumbled about any similar job. Some said—whether they meant it or not—they wished they had never gone to sea at all. One of these was "Jumbo" McGhee. I liked Jumbo. He was nineteen, with a long spotty face, an

enormous sloppy mouth with large teeth going in all directions, and the grubbiest old clothes of any man. But he loved talking and laughing, and he talked about anything under the sun, but above all about jazz. He had been to New York once, and it had gone to his head; he would settle in America after the war and learn to play the saxophone. On his large clumsy legs, clad in a patched pair of pants, he would saunter along the deck, singing "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," and beat time with his big muscular arms. There was tremendous vitality and exquisite rhythm in Jumbo's clumsy and unwieldy body. The curious thing about Jumbo was that he let himself go singing and dancing only when he thought nobody was watching. One day, when I asked him to sing the Choo-Choo song, he grew quite coy and embarrassed, and slunk away. I also remember among the deck-hands a seaman everybody used to call "Geordie." He was a much older man, with a long pale face, a gentle quiet manner, and the most obviously false teeth I had ever seen, with bright-orange rubber gums. Geordie was a deck-hand, but like so many of the others, he used to take his turn at the Oerlikon guns up on the gun-turrets. Among the "professional" gunners, supplied by the Navy, was a bearded young man, with a genuine Oxford accent, who said he had been a bank clerk in private life.

Then there was Mr. Chilvers. I don't know why they called him Mr. when they never called anybody else Mr. There was something about him that inspired special respect. In civilian life he had been a docker. He had fought in the International Brigade in Spain—perhaps it was that which made him something out of the ordinary in the eyes of his fellow seamen. I think Chilvers genuinely liked excitement and danger, and he also had strong political views, though I don't think he was officially a Communist. "Don't say too much about my having been to Spain to the Captain, if you ever mention me," he once said; "you know these people are prejudiced." He was about thirty-five, with a strong intelligent face, a firm, well-shaved chin, and a Roman profile crowned with a greasy black cap, at least two sizes too small for him. He wore it at the back of his head, perhaps to hide his bald patch. "I like this life," said Chilvers. "When the convoys started going to Russia, I threw up my job and decided to go back to sea. I feel it's all part of the same show as what we had in Spain. My missus was very angry—but what the hell!" Mr. Chilvers was taking two letters to Russia, and showed them to me. One was from a parson, somewhere in the North of England, addressed on its envelope "To the Church Authorities of Murmansk," in which the worthy man expressed his deep admiration for the Glorious Russian Army, and said that he and his congregation prayed for them every Sunday, and for their great country. It was rather touching; the only trouble was, as I said to Chilvers, that there were probably no "Church Authorities" at Murmansk. The other letter was from a schoolmaster, an old friend of Chilvers's.

He had instructed Chilvers to give it to the first man he met on landing in the Soviet Union. The letter was an apology. It said that the British people were all heart and soul with Russia, and if it only depended on them, they would have opened the Second Front by now, but would the Russians remember that Britain was ruled by a class government essentially hostile to the Soviet Union. However, public opinion, "bitterly ashamed of its Government," would make its will prevail. "I, for my own part, like every true friend of the glorious Soviet Union," etc., etc. I suggested to Mr. Chilvers that, although the Russians who saw this letter would much appreciate the writer's noble anger, they could not fail to be depressed by the comments made in it on the British Government. Chilvers agreed that it probably would have a depressing effect, and he tore it up. He put the bits of paper in his pocket. "You are not allowed to throw paper overboard," he said, "it's apt to help the U-boats."

And then there were the negroes—the firemen and the deck-hands, who used to tar the deck in the mornings. One of them, a very greasy garrulous negro—he must have been over forty—who wore a green celluloid shade above his eyes, said that he had bought it in New York, that he was a journalist himself, and that it was a great pleasure for him to meet me, "a spectacular privilege, sah," he said, flashing his gold teeth at me. "Like you, I am a journalist, sah," he said. "After the war I shall write in a newspaper published on the Gold Coast. I am following this correspondence course, sah," he said, pulling a bunch of soiled papers out of his pocket, "a correspondence course in journalism." He was enjoying the long words. He had been in Moscow once, in 1923, and had joined the Lenin Institute. "But they expelled me, sah," he said remorsefully, "I got into bad company; you see, —wine, women and song. You're an educated man, sah, you know what wine, women and song means." So that was the end of his career as a black pillar of the Comintern. Later he kept coming to my cabin, bringing me fresh articles he had just written—laboriously, in pencil on grubby bits of grey paper, for eventual publication —he hoped—in the *Gold Coast Gazette*. They were florid, almost and sometimes entirely incomprehensible gibberish; however, whenever I suggested a simpler version of what I guessed he meant—for instance, "I see" for "I contemplate with my spectacular faculties"—he readily and even gratefully agreed.

Mr. Burton—I think that was his name—was quite a different type. He had white hair, a good, laughing face, and a broad brown muscular chest, always half-bare. He had lived for twenty-three years in Aberdeen, was married to a Scotswoman, and spoke with a Scots accent. Originally, he came from Jamaica, I think. Scotland, he said, was the finest place in the world; and the Scots were warm-hearted lovable people. "They have no

colour prejudices," he said, "they are Christians in the true sense of the word, real Christians. Now I am what you'd call a black man; am I different, I ask you? Have I not two hands and two legs, and eyes and ears, and if I cut my head, it hurts as it would hurt a white man." He went on philosophising in the manner of Shylock. Then he would say: "And Hitler—I sometimes wonder how God can allow such a man to live. Do you remember in the Book of Revelations . . . " and he would go off into an apocalyptic discussion. Twenty-three years of Scotland had not been in vain. He loved Scotland, and he loved the sea; and he loved the Psalm: "They that go down to the sea in ships. . . ."

The third negro I got to know was eighteen. I could watch him, on the stern, doing a variety of jobs, or talking to Geordie and Jumbo McGhee. Jumbo was inclined to pull his leg, while Geordie, with the false teeth and rubber gums, was kindly and paternal to him. I could not help being fascinated by this strange figure. He was six-foot tall and very slim, and he stalked about the deck with the sinuous grace of a panther. He had a head of very short crinkly hair, and a perfect, purely African face, with slightly slanting, yellowish eyes, a flat nose with very wide nostrils, and beautiful white teeth and fresh pink gums, like an animal's, between his thick but well-shaped lips. He often laughed or giggled, a trifle self-consciously, wondering whether he wasn't at times laughing at himself. He was only eighteen, and had little self-assurance. But he had ambitions, and a good deal of vanity. Sometimes, I would watch this long graceful creature tarring the deck; he wore an olive-green knitted cap, which made a beautiful contrast with his dark chocolate skin, perfect in texture, without gloss, like fine leather. The first time I went up to talk to him, he was showing round his passport—a British passport, looking, in its blue cover, very like any other British passport. Alfred Adolphus Clark was his name, and he was born in Georgetown, British Guiana, in 1924. That day he was wearing a dandy bright-blue suit, with red stripes. It was cheap stuff, but well pressed and colourful. I soon discovered that clothes were a passion with Alfred Adolphus Clark. He had bought two new suits in London, and even on this convoy he liked, from time to time, to show them off. He had gone to sea because he wanted to make money, to buy clothes and have a good time, but, above all, to buy clothes. He was making over £20 a month, and he couldn't make half that much in British Guiana. "Was he saving up to get married?" I asked. "Not me, boss, I want the money to spend on myself," he said with childlike candour. He spoke a drawly but moderately good English, better certainly than that of my friend, the Gold Coast journalist, and former pillar of the Comintern.

Lucre, Europe, vanity, had pushed Alfred Adolphus into the Merchant Navy. He said he could have stayed at home, with his mother and brother, and lived on bananas—it cost practically nothing to live in British Guiana,

there was so much food there, you only had to pick it off a tree, but Alfred Adolphus Clark wanted to be a man of the world, and Jumbo McGhee told me that young Alfred Adolphus's secret ambition was to become a negro dancer or to play in a jazz band. I suspect that Jumbo McGhee and Alfred Adolphus had done a little day-dreaming together. I also think Alfred Adolphus may yet make a great hit in that line—if he's alive. He had a childlike charm and a peculiar animal grace and beauty that are assets in a negro dancer—if he can dance. But now he was on the *Empire Baffin*, in the North Atlantic, heading for Russia. Some days he worked in the engine-room, other days on deck. When on deck, he would often sweep past me with a "Hullo, boss" which was friendly, a trifle reserved, but in no way servile. He was very independent, servile to nobody, and when anyone told him off, he'd shrug his slim shoulders and laugh, as much as to say: "No use arguing with these people—they're crazy."

There were so many other people on board the *Empire Baffin* I got to know and like, that it would be idle to try to enumerate them all. But I remember the Chief Engineer, a stooping little man, who seemed busy every moment of the day, and even night. He wore a very shabby little tunic, smiled a friendly good morning, but seldom spoke. His face was drawn and sad. The very day we sailed he had heard that his only son, who was in the R.A.F., had been shot down over Trondhjem. . . .

We reached Iceland three, or it may be four, days after last seeing land. Until we actually reached Iceland, we had had perfect weather. Apart from the floating mine, there had been no adventures; once more there was an unidentified aircraft around, but it turned out to be British, and once a number of depth charges were dropped by one of the destroyers; now in addition to the original destroyer, we had been joined by two more and a couple of corvettes—I don't know where they came from. When sailing in a convoy, one never has the impression of being far out at sea; wherever you look, there is scenery to be seen—the scenery of ships. And with the frequent regroupings that take place in a convoy, the scenery changes, together with the weather, and each day seems a little different from the other.

My second contact with Iceland was more disappointing than my first one, six months before. Then the weather was good, and I was allowed to go ashore. Now it was raining, and the clouds seemed to be lying almost on top of the sea; one could see the tops of volcanoes above the low clouds, but little of the coastline. This appeared dim and blurred, as did also Reykjavik when we sailed past it, only a couple of miles from the shore—a dim agglomeration of houses and something that looked like a reddish-brown square church tower. In the afternoon, when the rain had turned into a thin drizzle, we anchored with the rest of the convoy in a large fjord, and here we were to stay for over a week.

Some days it rained and was very cold, and then Iceland was as unpleasant as the "depression off Iceland" reports suggest. But there were warm sunny days, when the high snow-capped peak at the end of the fjord was dazzlingly white under a perfect blue sky, and the grass at the foot of the high crags on the sides of the fjord was a bright juicy green. There were few signs of human habitation all round; only, to the left, was a white-washed Icelandic cottage, where nobody seemed to live—this must have become a reserved naval zone—and on the other side of the fjord were some reddish-brown army huts like bits of tubing stopped at both ends, and almost invisible against the background of the rocks of nearly the same colour. A road wound its way along the side of the hill, and army lorries frequently arrived along this road from Reykjavik. But there was plenty of life in the fjord itself. American planes patrolled it all the time, others practised dive-bombing stunts and other aerobatics, and the air was filled with the sound of engines.

One sunny day—it was a few days before we sailed—a British and an American battleship, half a dozen cruisers, a whole flotilla of destroyers, and, to crown it all, a large aircraft-carrier sailed through the convoy into the depth of the fjord. It was a superb sight. We all stood on deck, watching and waving. "You at once know the difference between a British warship and a Yank warship," said little Harry with the blackheads on his nose, "they've got the grub piled up even on the deck." Speculation was rife on board the *Empire Baffin*. The super-optimists thought that all these ships had been brought to Iceland to escort us to Russia. The optimists were sure that the aircraft-carrier, at any rate, and several of the other warships would come with us. The more sophisticated said: "There's more to it than meets the eye. A great naval operation off Norway, no doubt." To which the pessimists added: "Indeed—with our convoy being used as bait for the *Tirpitz*?" To which the realists replied: "No, our convoy is much too valuable to be used as bait. It is more important to deliver it to Russia than to sink the *Tirpitz*." Others still put forward the view that all this was preliminary to an invasion of Norway—to the opening of the Second Front. Several of the crew said knowingly that there had been much talk in their ports that "things were now on the move." When I heard such talk, I wondered whether I wasn't crazy to be going off to Russia at a time like this. . . .

I was anxious to see Reykjavik, but was foiled in my plan. Foiled, as Captain Dykes said, by "one of the naval chaps who hates the very guts of the Press since—that was before America entered the war—some enterprising American reporter had visited Iceland and had written up the aerodromes with every possible detail." I was rather annoyed, but the steward merely laughed: "Weeks in port and no shore leave—ha ha, now *you* know what it means!"

So we stayed in that Icelandic fjord for over a week, living the same life as before, but without that slight feeling that "something might happen at any moment." Supply vessels would come up from the shore from time to time; I remember the quarter-master, a quiet little Cockney, with pince-nez, and in battledress, who had been an elementary school teacher in civilian life. He brought me some cigarettes from Reykjavik, and five pounds of Canadian milk chocolate, and even a pair of rough but useful American shoes. The shops in Reykjavik, he said, were among the best-stocked in the world. He and the others who had come from the shore agreed that the Icelanders were better off to-day than they'd ever been; Reykjavik was crowded; from all over Iceland people had come to make money. But they all agreed that the Icelanders were difficult people, and were receiving the windfall that had come to their wretched country with very poor grace; that there were, or at least had been, a great many Nazis among them; that British motor-cyclists had at first been attacked on the roads by fifth columnists and thrown down the cliffs. There was even a story that when the British first landed, the Mayor of Reykjavik, perhaps mistaking the British for Germans, had saluted them with a "Heil Hitler." "We were much too soft, in our usual British way," the little school-master said, more in sorrow than in anger, "the Americans are much tougher; they just bumped off some of the more obstreperous ones, and it's done a lot of good." He and the others thought that the best thing the British Government had ever done was to take Iceland, and by heaven, we were going to keep it as a naval base after the war.

No doubt, one could see the Icelanders' point of view. Their country had, after all, been invaded, and the more reasonable among them knew that if they hadn't been invaded by the Allies, they would have been invaded by the Germans. Instead of growing rich, they would have become wretchedly poor. But though a lesser evil, the British invasion was still an evil, and it was more tangible than the hypothetical major evil. Apart from a few contacts with Norwegians they had nothing even approaching a first-hand idea of a German occupation.

Those nine or ten days in the fjord were like a holiday on a tiny island. There was nothing to do, except eat and drink and talk to the occasional visitors and read Dickens. And, of course, we went on with our Russian lessons and lectures to the R.A.F. boys. In the evenings, I would go and play pontoon with False Teeth Geordie and spotty Jumbo McGhee and the little R.A.F. sergeant, and invariably lose half a crown, or visit the R.A.F. boys in their quarters aft—dark, dingy cabins, without portholes, and with girls' snapshots stuck into the side of the mirror, and with a grubby bath that wouldn't work.

Or on other evenings, we'd sit in the smoke-room, and the cook would join us. Cook was a merry soul. He had a pale lively face with that flab-

biness that cooks have, but handsome for all that, and raw podgy hands, and he wore a pale-blue jersey and bedroom slippers of scarlet leather. Hamburg had been his favourite port before the war, and he spoke with a warm playful twinkle of the taverns of Sankt Pauli. But I liked him best when he spoke of the whaling-stations in the Antarctic, where he had spent several seasons. "A great big industry it is," he would say. "Unilevers own it. We got all our glycerine from whales in the last war, and most of the margarine. The whole place stinks like hell—for miles around you can smell the fish. There were only two Englishmen on my ship; all the rest were Norwegians. Wild fellows. One of them made £5,000 in eight months—oh, there's money in it, I can tell you—but he blued every penny of it when he got back to Durban. They're nearly all like that. Good fellows, but wild." And Cook would tell strange and pathetic tales of how they had killed a mother whale, and dragged the carcase along, and the baby whale followed the ship. Or he would tell of the islands off the Tierra del Fuego, inhabited by colonies of seals, and how they followed the ship barking like so many dogs, and he said it was brutal how these seals were clubbed to death. And nothing, he said, was so beautiful as the icebergs in the Antarctic: some shaped like skyscrapers and cathedrals and factories, and brighter than emerald, a bright blue-green. He would tell more of the whaling-stations, of how whales were skinned and cut up, and how even the bones were used as fertilisers, and how only unborn whales were used for food. When the war broke out in 1939 his ship was in the Straits of Magellan, so they sailed round Cape Horn for fear of U-boats, and went to the Falkland Islands where they got a gun. And in the Caribbean, on the homeward journey, they fished eighteen men out of the shark-infested sea; the rest of the crew—twenty-four of them—had been eaten by sharks, or died of thirst on the rafts. Cook had had much experience with crews of every kind; he thought the negroes were, on the whole, better than the Arabs, though sometimes they were apt to panic. It happened once, during a U-boat attack on a convoy, and Cook said he had to chase them down to the engine-room by force, and when they reached Halifax, three were put in jail, after which the rest just ate out of his hand. . . .

One day, we did lifeboat drill on the choppy water of the fjord, and it all seemed rather a joke. The engine wouldn't work, and pimply little Taffy of the R.A.F., who shared my oar, had never rowed in his life; there were nineteen of us in the lifeboat, and we all joked and laughed, and sang "Over the Sea to Skye." After bobbing on the water for an hour, we climbed up the rope ladders again, and nobody thought any more about it, except Alfred Adolphus Clark, who thought he couldn't live more than two days in a rotten wooden lifeboat like that. And the water and the dry

biscuits and other iron rations wouldn't last more than a few days, anyway, he thought. And he told me again about his mother in British Guiana, and how she wanted him to become a schoolmaster, and how he had preferred to go to sea because of the good money.

One evening—it was a day or two before we sailed—Mr. Chilvers came into our cabin and talked about Spain and the International Brigade. Then, after some persuading, he brought his guitar, and in a fine strong voice he sang Spanish songs, and then a song written by a Glasgow lad —Alec McDade, I think, was his name—who was killed at Brunete on July 6, 1938, and whom Chilvers had known in those days, for he also had fought at Brunete. It had a wailful, nostalgic tune, flamenco-like, and went:

There's a valley in Spain called Jarama,
It's a place that we all know so well,
It is there that we gave of our manhood,
And most of our brave comrades fell.
We are proud of the British battalion,
Of the stand for Madrid that we made,
For they fought like the true sons of freedom,
As part of the Fifteenth Brigade.
With the rest of the International Column,
In the stand for the freedom of Spain,
We swore in that valley of Jarama
That Fascism never will reign. . . .

The wailful tune, sung in a melodious voice, to the strains of the guitar, was odd to listen to in the middle of an Icelandic fjord, with British and American ships around, and yet, had not Jarama been part of the same show, as Chilvers had already remarked the first day, and Brunete, where the nineteen-year-old Glasgow lad had "died for the freedom of Spain"? The steward joined us for his nightly glass of hot rum. He listened a little disapprovingly to Chilvers's songs, and muttered "twerp" under his breath.

At last, on the evening of May 20, we sailed. It was a little unpleasant the way the people who had come aboard from Reykjavik during the last few days used to say: "I'm afraid you are *sure* to be attacked." The little Cockney quartermaster with the pince-nez and the battledress, who had brought me the shoes and the milk chocolate, had shaken me by the hand with a warm sympathy that surprised me. "I fervently hope," he said, "that you have a safe voyage." And he added: "God bless you." The *Edinburgh* had been sunk off Murmansk only a few days before, and now, in the smoke-room, we heard the B.B.C. announce that, according to a Stockholm report, the Germans had completed their U-boat bases along the coast of Norway. It had rained that day, but as we were sailing out of the fjord, the sun broke through the black clouds resting heavily

on the hills, and a glorious rainbow appeared above the grey choppy sea. I felt a strange elation at the good omen. One becomes superstitious among seamen. Many others in our convoy must have welcomed the rainbow—and among them some of those who were never to see land again.

CHAPTER II

"NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE!"

THAT north coast of Iceland had a desolate pre-historic grandeur. It was like a dead city of enormous skyscrapers, huge, perfectly symmetrical flat-roofed rocks, of the colour of milk chocolate, rising from the bright blue sea, and equally symmetrical fjords, like enormous avenues between them —the whole like a windowless city of skyscrapers abandoned by some unknown race of giants. Now there was no sign of human life or human activity anywhere, and no animal life, except seagulls. It would have been surprising to see men on these geometrical crags; dinosaurs would have been more in place there. For a whole day our convoy, with its two destroyers and three little bright-coloured corvettes, sailed along this fantastic coast. A piercingly cold wind was blowing from the north, and the North Pole seemed very near. Yet it was not as near as one was apt to imagine, and the convoy went on climbing, climbing up the globe trying to get as near the Pole as possible, and as far away as possible from the German bases in Norway. Alas, the North Cape, the northern tip of Europe, is several degrees further north than Iceland. There was a heavy swell the night we sailed from our fjord, and several of the R.A.F. boys were seasick. Now the sea was bright blue, and almost calm, and it felt like a glorious holiday cruise. "I'll give you 6 to 4," said Geordie with the false teeth and the rubber gums, "we shan't meet anything; and I am not an optimist."

DIARY

Saturday, May 23

This is our third day's sailing. It is sunny now, though the sea is very choppy and a cold wind is again blowing from the North. The convoy looks like a large harbour filled with ships; one has not the feeling of being alone in the open spaces of the Atlantic, somewhere not very far from Jan Mayen. But there is no land to be seen anywhere.

All day yesterday it was foggy. The fog-horns were blowing all the time, and one could only see the shadowy shapes of the ships close to ours, but none of the others. Mr. Chilvers said he wished for such weather for a fortnight. "Their planes won't have a ghost of a chance of finding us, nor will it be easy for the U-boats. It's true," he added, "that it's impossible to spot the periscope when there's a fog." In the morning, while it was still fairly clear, a plane circled over the convoy—it must have come from Iceland, or from the aircraft-carrier which was supposed to be somewhere around. Last night we had to black-out, because lights show in the fog; but on ordinary nights we never need any light, because it no longer gets dark.

Sunday, May 24

This being Sunday—Whit-Sunday, in fact—we had eggs and bacon for breakfast. It was very foggy and cold, and there were only very brief bright intervals. This morning, about 11.30, while Pushkov was giving his Russian lesson to the R.A.F. boys, and I was in the cabin reading an interesting book by an American Colonel called Kernan, in which he advocates the invasion of Italy, I heard a plane overhead, but took no notice of it. Later, after dinner —and Cook had made a special effort for this Sunday dinner—one of the destroyers went down the convoy and announced by megaphone that at 11.45 a.m. a German aircraft had been over the convoy. One of the deck-hands remarked: "He must have gone back to look for his mates." In the fog, during the night, we had lost seven out of the thirty-four ships, and then ten more, that is, half the convoy; however, in the afternoon, we were all together again. Pushkov was very philosophical; he said it was usual to be spotted on the third or fourth day of sailing; for my own part I had thought we were much too far from the German bases. Geordie said cheerfully that the plane could not possibly have seen us in the fog, but he might have heard the fog-horns, which were blaring continuously. I find this hard to believe, because he cannot have flown very low; the noise of his engine was only very faint.

Now, at 4 p.m. many of the crew are already wearing lifejackets. On the *Empire Lawrence*, our sister ship, which is sailing next to us, there's a catapult plane. The R.A.F. boys think it's no good, and mostly ends in a complete waste of £5,000; the pilot usually bales out before achieving anything much, and it's a job to pick him up, especially in a heavy sea. Somebody else remarked that the flak ship wasn't much good either, and he was surprised to see one in our convoy; he thought the idea had been abandoned, after last year's disappointing experience. Aircraft-carriers, everybody agreed, were the only really useful thing; it was a pity we hadn't built lots of small aircraft-carriers, instead of concentrating on enormous carriers which were very costly, very vulnerable and long to build. The Americans were now converting a lot of 10,000-tonners into carriers, and it was a good idea.

Whit-Monday, May 25

I don't know when exactly the little bastard joined us, but he's been circling round and round the convoy all day. He is keeping well outside the range of the guns on the destroyers, and sometimes he disappears, but before long he, or his relay, turns up again. He's a Fokke-Wulf, and the crew, who are irritated by his presence, refer to him as "George." At 5 this morning the first alarm went, and I dressed in under three minutes, but nothing happened. Then, at dinner-time, the alarm bell rang again, and the destroyer fired several rounds at our German "escort," but he was out of range, and for the rest of the afternoon he gave us no more trouble, except by being *there*. The crew looked longingly at the catapult Hurricane on the *Empire Lawrence*, but apparently it was decided not to waste the Hurricane on chasing George, especially as there was much cloud, and he would probably have escaped had the Hurricane been sent after him. At 6.30 the alarm went again—and this time it was the real stuff.

They appeared in the distance, on the starboard side, low above the water: three—four—five, then three more, then four or five after that, further to the right. We were all on deck—the R.A.F. boys, with their tin hats, and the deck-hands, the cabin boys—and we counted and watched. Eleven, twelve, thirteen. . . . Something was already happening ahead of us. The gunners had rushed up to the gun-turrets. The two cruisers which had suddenly joined us

earlier in the day, and the destroyers on the edge of the convoy, were firing like mad. It was a beautiful bright day, the sea calm and blue like the Mediterranean, and the sky was now dotted with specks of smoke from the flak shells. They went in a half-circle round the front of the convoy, then, after a few seconds of suspense, they came right out of the sun. They swooped over us, two or three in succession, and from their yellow bellies the yellow eggs dropped, slowly, obscenely. They were after the cruisers, in the middle of the convoy. The tracer-bullets from our Oerlikons were rushing at the yellow belly of the Junkers 88 as he swooped over us. A loud squeal, growing louder and louder, and then the explosion, as a stick of bombs landed between us and the destroyer, on the port side. Three pillars of water went high up in the air, and the ship shook. As he dived, almost to the water level, our tracer-bullets followed him, but he got out of their way, and on the bridge Captain Dykes, wearing a wide navy-blue beret, was waving and shouting frantically: "Don't fire so low! You're hitting the next ship!" Then after a few minutes they came again, out of the sun—three of them. This time they seemed to make a dead set at the cruisers. On the upper deck, on the fo'c'sle, the Flight-Lieutenant was looking on, his long hair waving in the wind. He had his life-jacket on, with a drawing of naked "Loulou." The R.A.F. boys and I and ginger-haired Harry with the blackheads, stood amidships, watching the battle. Suddenly something happened. The cruiser, which had put up a very impressive barrage, had got one. He began to reel and swoop down, on our port side, then he staggered over us. It was like a football match. Harry and the R.A.F. boys were shouting: "He's on fire! He's on fire! That's it! That's it! He's *down*!" Harry jumped about with joy, frantically. He *was* down. Something brown and large and soft detached itself from the plane, and the plane itself slid into the water, without much of a splash. The barrage was still going full blast, but a destroyer sailed up to the brown parachute or whatever it was, and proceeded to pick them up. Meantime the catapult Hurricane on the *Empire Lawrence* had leaped swiftly into the air, in pursuit of the dive-bombers. Swiftly it went in a wide circle round the convoy, ready to pounce on one of them; but here something unfortunate happened; one of the American cargoes, no doubt mistaking the Hurricane for a German plane, fired what gun or machine-gun it had at him, and the next thing we saw was the pilot baling out by parachute, with nothing to show for his exploit, and with the Hurricane nothing to show for its £5,000. Again the destroyer, which had just picked up the Huns, came to the rescue, and picked him up, wet, swearing, but uninjured—so we were later told. After about three-quarters of an hour the attack ceased, and in groups of twos or threes, the Germans gradually disappeared. They had lost one plane for certain, and another was said to have been seen staggering away, its engine on fire. Bombs had burst and pillars of water had gone up all over the place, but after their first dead set at the cruisers, they seemed to have been unnerved by the terrific barrage the convoy put up, the two cruisers and the destroyers and the corvettes and most of the convoy ships firing like mad, with everything they had, and they did not come near the cruisers—and, therefore, near us—again.

I am trying to remember how I reacted to the whole thing. My first feeling when the deafening barrage went up from the whole convoy, dominated by the great bangs of the naval guns, and the planes swooped over us, and the blue sky was dotted with hundreds of little circular black and white clouds—my first feeling was one of surprise—the surprise of being right in the midst of a naval battle. After that, the dominating feeling was not fear, but excitement; it was the same football match excitement that had sent little ginger-haired Harry

into his dancing antics, when the German plane plunged into the water. It was all sensationally *new*. . . .

The planes disappeared, and at first everybody was triumphant. They had lost two planes, and had been driven away, and we had suffered no losses—*that* would teach them. But half an hour later, the alarm bell went again. Again they appeared low above the water—five, six, seven, eight—but nothing happened. Heavy grey clouds were covering up the sky, and the cruisers fired a few shells at the planes, which flew away and did not come back. It was later said that one more had been hit. Foiled again! But then, when we looked back, we saw the dark shape of a ship which was growing smaller and smaller, and beside her, a little white corvette, standing by her like a little nurse. What was happening? Were the crew being taken off? The steward said that her engines had been put out of action—the steam-pipes had been smashed by the concussion caused by a near miss, and one man had been killed. Was she going to be towed back to Iceland? Or would the ship be abandoned, and her valuable cargo sunk? It's the same damn business—no air cover. . . .

The clouds covered up the sky completely, and an icy wind was blowing from the East, and the sea was covered with white specks—icefloes. "That's the worst of it," said Captain Dykes, "we can't go far north at this time of year, with the ice drifting down to the south. Wish I could go right up to Spitzbergen, but with all this ice about we can't even go as far north as Bear Island. It'll be easier for the next convoy." Then we passed a large iceberg, bright blue-green in the grey dusk. . . . We went to bed, but, with all the day's excitement I couldn't sleep at first, and then when I fell asleep, I was wakened at midnight by a loud thud that shook the whole ship.

"Get up, quick," Pushkov said. Was it a U-boat attack? No, merely a depth charge. We went out on deck. It was crowded with the R.A.F. boys, most of them in their leather jackets and with their tin hats. The little sergeant was standing near the Lewis gun. It was foggy and almost dark—so that was the "Midnight sun"! We went back to bed, but again the alarm went, and submarines were said to be around, and one of the destroyers gave six little toots —which was said to indicate the presence of U-boats. Fully dressed, we went to the smoke-room, and went to sleep there. . . .

Tuesday, May 26

Six or seven more depth charges were dropped during the night, but I didn't hear a thing. The steward this morning was very indignant about that Hurricane—"Five thousand quid just gone for nothing," he said. "It's a bloody useless arrangement—I've never known it to work. All this catapult business merely interferes with the loading of the ship. But then, some public-school twerp had a brainwave—and there you are. They'll go on having the damn thing, though it's a complete bloody waste."

After breakfast I ran into Alfred Adolphus. "Hullo, Alfred Adolphus," I said. He did not answer with his usual, rather casual, "Hullo, boss." Instead, he came up to me and poured out his little nigger soul. "I cried all night," he said, "and my heart beat like mad. All I want is to get back to England —*will* I ever get back? When I get there, I'll book my passage home, and I'll *never* go to sea again." And with a touch of indignation he said: "Did you *see* those planes coming over—did you see it?" There was a look of childlike anguish in his yellowish eyes. It was as if he had been dragged away from his banana trees at home, and taken on this horrible trip on false pretences, and his yellowish eyes were saying, "It isn't fair, it isn't fair."

It was cloudy in the morning but it cleared up, and clearly we were in for it again. The cruisers had disappeared. Instead, two submarines, sailing at the tail of the convoy, had turned up from somewhere—to protect us against the *Tirpitz*, no doubt. There doesn't seem to be quite enough ammunition on the Oerlikons; I heard the first mate say something about it; and the R.A.F. sergeant said that of the four Lewis guns—which aren't much good anyway—two were always getting jammed. "I would give a month's pay—or yesterday, at any rate, I would have given it—for the presence of an aircraft-carrier," said the Exeter boy.

Everybody was yawning this morning, with something of a hangover. There was a feeling of torpor and indifference on the ship. At dinner the Flight-Lieutenant said it was a pity one had to take the trouble of picking up German airmen, but it was necessary for the information one might get out of them. "When in the Middle East German prisoners get stubborn and refuse to answer questions, we call in a Polish officer, and as soon as they see him, they open up at once. I think the Huns the destroyer picked up yesterday ought to be told they are going to be handed over to the Russians. . . ." Somebody said that the destroyer which had picked up the Germans was manned by Poles, and this caused great satisfaction. . . .

At 4 p.m. there was another alarm. There were low clouds over us, with only a few gaps in them. They came unexpectedly. The moment the alarm bell went, I could already see a Junkers swooping down on to one of the submarines. He dropped a whole stick of bombs, which threw vast volumes of water into the sky, but he missed her. Then he and the others flew into the clouds, and there they stayed. Our gunners were helpless. From a big height they dropped two bombs which fell on either side of a ship fairly close to ours. The bombs exploded and shook our ship, and water spouted. Ships aren't big targets and are hard to hit from a great height—at least with the imperfect German bomb-sight—and yesterday's experience must have discouraged them against dive-bombing. Then we sailed into a blizzard and lost sight of the planes, and also of George; but when the weather cleared again, George was there, as usual, circling round and round the convoy. The cruisers have gone, ammunition is short, and altogether the convoy is about as helpless as you can make it. This morning I saw the aircraft-carrier, but it was only an optical illusion; in the mist she seemed a long way away, but she was quite close, and she was merely one of the destroyers. . . . The destroyers are doing their best, but how much can they do? Another of the R.A.F. boys said this evening: "We'd all give a month's pay for a fighter squadron." I wonder what's happened to our two cruisers and to the big stuff we saw in Iceland? . . . Since we've been under Hun observation for three days now, I wonder why they aren't doing their big stuff all the time—raiding us morning, noon and night? The weather wasn't bad to-day from their point of view, except in the morning, and during that brief blizzard. . . . I wonder if the German idea isn't to wear down the morale and the efficiency of the crew through lack of sleep during five or six days, and then have their big crack at us? I wonder whether the steward isn't right that England isn't really a seafaring nation; for how many people at home really know what the merchant fleet and the Navy have to put up with? . . . To-day I start when a door bangs, which is damned annoying, but the others feel much the same. . . . This evening the dog-faced boy from Stafford said, as he lay down in the smoke-room: "If nobody wakens me, I could sleep for a week." That's how most of them feel, and it's only the second day of the real tension. . . .

Wednesday, May 27

I am not likely ever to forget this day, and yet its exact sequence is hard to restore in one's mind, and what I remember, above all, is moments. I had had a good sleep; we had not been disturbed by anything all night, and one of the moments I remember is sitting on deck after breakfast, reading *Our Mutual Friend*, and feeling wonderfully contented. Life on the *Empire Baffin* seemed to have returned to normal. Pushkov was again giving his Russian lesson to the R.A.F. boys in the smoke-room, and, after yesterday's feeble attempts, the Luftwaffe was clearly not as terrifying as people were apt to imagine. But then, at 10.30 the alarm bell went. From the gun-turret somebody shouted: "Here they come!" Again people rushed on deck—counting: three—three more, that's six—ten—twelve—fifteen. Now they came from all directions. Gun flashes and clouds of smoke came from the destroyers; then the barrage of the flak ship and the convoy ships went up; like a vulture pouncing on its prey, a dive-bomber swept down on to the submarine, right down to the water level, but she crash-dived, and the three pillars of water went high up in the air. For forty long minutes they attacked, usually in twos and threes, usually coming straight out of the sun, some diving low, others dropping their bombs from two hundred feet. From their yellow shark-like bellies, one could see the obscene yellow eggs dropping, and after a moment of suspense, one saw with relief the pillars of water leaping up. They were concentrating in that first attack on the forward part of the convoy, and we were, apparently, reserved for later. And then we saw the first casualty. The pale-blue and pale-green destroyer was smoking furiously, and signalling, signalling, signalling. What were those flashes saying? Was it the destroyer that had picked up those Huns on Monday? Somebody on board said: "They are all right. They are not going to abandon her." That didn't seem so bad. She was still smoking, but they seemed to have got the fire under control. Soon they put it out. The planes disappeared; the attack was over. That wasn't so bad, people said; and then we realised that it *was* bad. Not very far away from us was a Russian ship—I had realised for the first time that we had two or three Russian ships in the convoy—and her foredeck was enveloped in clouds of smoke, and flames were bursting out of the hold. "They're going to abandon her," somebody said. Were they? Yes, they were lowering their life-boats. But no. She was still keeping up steam, still keeping up with the other ships, but the clouds of smoke rising from her were growing larger and larger, her whole fo'c'sle was in a cloud of black smoke—but she still went on, and through the cloud of smoke, one saw dim shapes of people running and doing something. I saw Alfred Adolphus rushing past me; he was streaming with sweat, and there was a look of panic in his yellowish eyes. "Hullo, Alfred Adolphus!" I said. "I think I'll go mad! I think I'll go mad!" he cried.

So the destroyer had been hit, and the Russian ship had been hit, and both were fighting with the flames. And somebody said two more ships had been hit.

They came again in less than an hour. This was a short, sharp attack. They concentrated on the other end of the convoy. They dropped their bombs and disappeared. As we sailed on, I saw a ship, that had stayed behind, with a corvette by her side, blazing furiously. We were already a mile or two away from her. And somebody said that another ship had received a direct hit, and had blown up.

Then there was a lull. Dinner was served punctually at noon; Cook wasn't a minute late. Everybody was there, as usual, the lanky first mate, and the young second mate, and the long skinny engineer's mate, with the fuzzy hair and the Hapsburg jaw, and our Flight-Lieutenant and the R.A.F. boys.

Everybody gulped tea, but appetites were at a low level, and few words were exchanged. In their frames, the King and Queen were very calm. Like most of them, I drank a lot of tea, but the food seemed to stick to the palate. Pushkov, with a wan smile, said the lesson could, he hoped, be resumed to-morrow. I went out on deck. The Russian ship was still enveloped in smoke, though perhaps a little less than before. They had not abandoned ship. I saw Alfred Adolphus sauntering along the deck, now wearing his bright-blue suit with the red stripes, and a new light-grey felt hat. "I'm through with it," he said defiantly. "I have refused to go down to the engine-room." "Why did you dress up like this?" "I want to save my clothes if we are torpedoed," he said. He was much calmer than in the morning. "It wouldn't matter," he suddenly cried, "but it's the *cargo*, the *cargo*!" With this remark, he slunk away. So that's what it is, I said to myself—T.N.T.? I had already heard somebody refer to it, but had taken no notice. The burning ship in the distance had now disappeared. Then the alarm bell went again. I forget what exactly happened at the beginning of that third attack, but this time they concentrated on our end of the convoy. The obscene yellow bellies were over us, and they dropped their eggs all round us. The bearded bank clerk with the Oxford accent was on one of the Oerlikons, and the man with the beret and the Soviet badge on another, and Steward was working a machine-gun, and the Flight-Lieutenant, his hair waving in the wind, was, I think, on an Oerlikon, and aft, the little R.A.F. sergeant was on one of the two Lewis guns. And then something happened which I shall never forget. I was standing amidships with the R.A.F. boys and Pushkov and several others, and we realised that something had happened to our sister ship, the *Empire Lawrence*, now without her Hurricane on board. She was no longer steering a straight course. Her bows were pointing towards us—was she moving at all? She was showing a slight list. . . . And we realised that she was being abandoned. Already two of her lifeboats were bobbing on the water, and beside her was a little corvette, taking more men off. As we watched her, we heard all our guns fire like mad. Then one of the yellow bellies swept over us, but perhaps unnerved by our fire, it dropped the bombs into the water, some distance away, but immediately after, two more of the yellow bellies swept over us with roaring engines, almost touching our topmast, and —I could feel the ghoulish joy of the Nazis—they made a dead set at the helpless, dying ship. And suddenly from the yellow belly the five bombs detached themselves and went right into her. I don't think there was even a moment of suspense; there was an explosion that did not sound very loud, and a flash which, in the sun, was not very bright, and like a vomiting volcano a huge pillar of fire, smoke and wreckage shot two hundred feet into the air—and then, slowly, terribly slowly, it went down to the sea. The *Empire Lawrence* was gone. The surface of the water was littered with wreckage—planks, pieces of wood, and then, perhaps five seconds later, the black triangle of the bows, detached from the rest of the ship, came to the surface for a second, and sank for ever again. The little white corvette was still there, seemingly intact, and perhaps looking for improbable survivors. What happened to the two lifeboats that had been near the *Empire Lawrence* only a few minutes before, I don't know. Nobody on board said anything at first. Faces were pale. I felt the blood pressing hard on my eardrums; it was horrible—and fascinating. Poor *Empire Lawrence*, our sister ship! It was strange to think of it. They had that Hurricane pilot on board, they also had their Captain, and their steward, and perhaps another Geordie, and another Jumbo McGhee, and another Alfred Adolphus, and a smoke-room like ours, and cigarettes, and bottles of

rum, and pictures of the King and Queen, and tea-cups and saucers, and lavatories, and a great big deep engine-room like ours, and a refrigerator with a lot of cheese and ham. And now it was all smashed, at the bottom of the sea, or some of it still floating about—and it was horrible to think of parts of human bodies floating about the ocean in life-jackets. "Chock full of T.N.T., so what d'you expect," said little Harry with the blackheads. "Same here, isn't it?" I remarked. "You'd like to kn-aw, wouldn't ye?" he said, and winked his right eye. "Why don't you squeeze out those blackheads, Harry," I said, trying to say something quite different. "Oh, no," he almost squealed at the suggestion. "It 'u-u-urts; I can only do it after a 'ot bath!" "What I'd like to do," said Harry, "is to kill a few of these Jerries. Leave them in the water, let them swim about and pop at them from a gun; don't hit 'em at once, but go nearer and nearer and nearer, in a circle, and then do them in, after a while. But I'll tell you, I wouldn't like to be one of the Jerries on the destroyer that was hit this morning—Lord, no! I know what I'd like to do if I had some Jerry prisoners here. . . ."

That day there were four or five more attacks, always by twelve or fifteen planes, and not one of them did we, or any of the other ships, bring down. We were having tea in the afternoon when another alarm went. And this time the alarm was late in coming. No sooner had the bell sounded than there was a loud explosion and everything seemed to turn topsy-turvy, the crockery came down with a crash in the pantry, and a flood of water came rushing from the deck into the smoke-room. "She's hit," one of the R.A.F. boys said. The ship was tossing furiously. Several of us made for the lifeboats on the upper deck, wading ankle deep in water along the lower deck. When we reached the lifeboat, we saw the Captain with his wide navy-blue beret waving frantically at us, and shouting, "It's all right!" So she hadn't been hit; the big bomb had landed only a few yards away, and like a great tidal wave, the pillar of water had swept over the ship. I saw the sad little engineer go past: "She's all right," he said, "the engines are working, that's the main thing. In the engine-room they got a bit of a shock, but they are all right now. The nigger firemen are fine—keeping up steam. Only one of them refused to go down."

But it had been a near miss all right. One of the lifeboats on the lower deck, on the starboard, had been smashed, and what was left of it was dangling down, suspended from a rope. The windlass had been smashed, and the railings on the foredeck, where the tanks were, were broken and twisted. A young lad, who had been on one of the machine-guns, nearest the spot where the bomb exploded, was violently thrown against a railing, and came staggering to the smoke-room which was, theoretically, the first-aid post. His forearm was badly bruised, but he suffered chiefly from shock. He had tears in his eyes, and he shivered, and uttered faint moans, but after we had put a cold poultice on his arm and given him some aspirins and hot tea, he recovered, and was back on his gun in less than an hour. But it just made me wonder what a helpless nightmare that smoke-room of ours would have been had a bomb really hit the ship. There was no surgeon on board, nothing even approaching a surgeon. One of the R.A.F. boys had a vague smattering of first-aid—and that was about all.

A near miss has an exhilarating effect, and we were all surprisingly cheerful. It's unpleasant to be on a ship during a bombing—for you know that if you are hit, you are really hit. The idea that there is no *shelter* is an unpleasant one. But, on the other hand, you know that if it's a miss, it really is a miss; the bomb goes into the water, and there are no splinters and no flying glass which,

on land, might hit you in the eye even if the bomb dropped two hundred yards away. On land, our last "near miss" just wouldn't have been a miss at all.

There was a lull after our moment of great excitement, and Adcock of the R.A.F. (formerly of Boots, Nottingham), and Lucky Billie, the steward, came into our cabin, and we played a game of bridge, till the next alarm bell went. I don't remember what exactly happened during that raid. I know it was a short one, and all I remember is sitting in the cabin, with the door wide open on to the deck; and there was the bo'sun, an elderly man with a round, very red face. I heard a plane zooming down, and I heard the loud crescendo scream of the bomb, and I saw the bo'sun's red round face suddenly turn white. I rushed on to the deck: it was another near miss—and what a miss! On the starboard was an enormous patch of oil on the water, through which we were now sailing: the huge incendiary oil bomb had just missed us. . . .

"This is the worst day I've had in all my life," said the bo'sun.

And the ginger-haired fellow, who had learned the word "Dushka" from a girl at Murmansk, said: "We might as well have tried to sail through the Kiel Canal. And do you know," he added, "what one of the chaps who went through Dunkirk said to me to-day? He said: 'Dunkirk wasn't a patch on this.' "

And they all spoke bitterly of the shortage of ammunition. "The naval people give us what they think fit; and it's no damn use trying to argue with them." That evening our skipper asked the flak ship for some extra ammunition for the Oerlikons, but the reply that came back was: "We're short of ammunition ourselves." Somebody said: "120 rounds is all we've got left."

Then again there was a lull, and Lucky Billie, who had been on the machine-gun again, came back to our cabin. He wiped the sweat off his face, and said, trying to laugh: "Nearer, my God, to Thee. . . ." His laugh didn't come off. It was the nearest he got to a joke that day. . . . "Bad business," he said, "bad business." And we were not in a mood for resuming our game of bridge. The convoy was sailing on, thinner than it was, but still fairly impressive. On the Russian ship they had now put out the fire, but something was now burning on the Commodore's ship in the middle of the convoy, and another ship showed a large black gash on her stern—the result of a near miss. A destroyer sailed past us, and its decks were crowded with survivors, and inside were the wounded, in God knows what condition. "What happened to those cruisers?" I said to Lucky Billie. "What happened to those cruisers?" he roared. "What happened to them? They buggered off. Oh no, you don't risk a cruiser in a show like this; the loss of a cruiser has to be reported, and it has a depressing effect on the public; but is the B.B.C. going to tell that the *Empire Baffin* has been sunk, and that 'The Admiralty regrets to announce . . .' No, no, that first show on Monday was quite enough for the cruisers, they weren't going to stay on—not they. . . ."[1]

"Have you ever been in a show like this before?" I said to the steward. Now he was his real self. "Dozens of times," he said glibly. "When I last was in the Mediterranean, it was much worse than this."

And then came another attack. This time they weren't merely dive-bombers, but torpedo-carriers as well. Again, as at the beginning of the first attack, I saw one of the dive-bombers pounce on the submarine, and amid large pillars of water, she disappeared below the surface. Had she been hit? The next thing happened like a flash; I caught a glimpse of it darting along up and down the

[1] Billie was irritated. It wasn't true that they had "b——d off." They were somewhere around, protecting us against surface craft.

waves, and I felt our ship suddenly giving a sharp turn, and—the torpedo just missed our stern. Instead, it went right into the next ship. There was a not very loud explosion, and I saw her smoking at her stern, with a large gash just above the waterline, and in less than a minute, I saw them taking to the lifeboats. She now stood at a right angle to the convoy; her engines had been knocked out. I knew some of the R.A.F. boys on board that ship; they had visited us when we were in Iceland. A corvette went up to her, to pick up the survivors; one felt they would be all right, provided the Germans did not strike at her, now that she was helpless, as they had struck at the *Empire Lawrence*. "Once she can't keep up speed with the convoy, the only thing is to abandon her," somebody said, "at least you've a chance of saving the crew." And somebody else remarked: "Our skipper has decided that we must abandon ship as soon as we are hit; there's no other way after what happened to the *Empire Lawrence*." And the bo'sun said to me: "It was horrible, horrible." He shuddered. "It's had a very depressing effect on our crew."

The ship that had received the torpedo that was meant for us, and which we would have got but for Captain Dykes's extraordinary quickness, was left behind, with a heavy list. The destroyer was going to sink her, just in case the Germans took it into their heads to tow her, with all her tanks and other precious armaments, to Norway.

And then, as we looked back, we realised that this attack had perhaps been the deadliest of all. Far away, two of our ships were blazing, and some small vessel was picking up the survivors.

It was 8 o'clock, and welcome clouds were beginning to gather in the sky. But the visibility was still perfect, and for a long time we could watch the two bonfires burning far away on the grey sea. I think everybody felt that this was about as much as any human being could stand in one day. . . . They did not come again that evening.

"I've never known anything like it," the bo'sun repeated. The crew were grim, tired, subdued; they were depressed by the *Empire Lawrence*; the bearded bank clerk with the Oxford accent was very calm, but the other man on the Oerlikon gun—the one with the beret and the Soviet badge—had a pinched look on his face, and long stubble on his chin, and red smarting eyes; he said he had not slept for seventy-five hours. Somebody said there had been only four survivors off the *Empire Lawrence*; others said that two lifeboats had got away, and that there must therefore have been many more survivors, except that the lifeboats had been machine-gunned; but nobody seemed to know anything definite. On the destroyer—the one that was hit in the first attack—twenty people were said to have been killed.

"What about a spot of grub now?" said the steward. We went to the smoke-room, which the R.A.F. boys had by now turned into their dormitory; they did not want to go down again to their dingy cabins without portholes, and sleep "on the top of the T.N.T.," and the Flight-Lieutenant had supported them, much against the steward's wishes; for the steward "did not think this right." Cook produced tea and some cheese sandwiches; but we did not touch rum, since the Monday we had cut out alcohol completely. In the London blitz I used to like a double scotch; here I didn't want it. Nobody else was having it, and a very clear head seemed an asset.

Pushkov had been very subdued all day. During the last attack, as we were watching one ship go down, and three burning in the distance, I heard him say: "Slaughter of the Innocents. . . ." He was unhappy; he was thinking of his wife and children in Leningrad, but he was outwardly calm, though at supper I

noticed how his hand trembled as he passed me a plate. And he was even more pale than usual. The steward swore that several planes had been brought down during the day, and that he had certainly hit one, "right on the nozzle," and that it had reeled away with one engine on fire. . . . It was strange to be back in the smoke-room, and to think of the other smoke-rooms now at the bottom of the sea. I confess we all enjoyed the peace of that supper hour, at the end of that dreadful day. Suddenly the steward, who had gone out for something, came rushing in: "Come out, quick! Do you want to see an Arctic Jewboy?" Good God, was this another kind of German plane? I thought for a moment. "What do you mean?" "Mr. Iceberg," the steward said, laughing like a ten-year-old. It was his first joke of the day. "Nearer, my God, to Thee," in the middle of the last great attack, hadn't quite come off. This time we all laughed.

For a long time after the last attack had ended, I still felt the blood trying to break through my ears—it was the physical sensation that had lasted all day. And now, after supper, and after we had had our little laugh, and had admired the beautiful "Mr. Iceberg" under the grey leaden Arctic sky, the haunting question arose: And what now?

It was clear that if the attacks continued on the same scale—and what was to stop them?—we were almost sure to be sunk. As I walked up and down the deck that evening, watching the convoy, and feeling that there was anguish at that moment in a thousand hearts, I wondered how many ships would be left afloat by to-morrow night—two-thirds of them, or one-third, or only a few perhaps? Or perhaps all would be unchanged—but that eventuality was the hardest of all to visualise. At the back of my mind I had a deep conviction that I'd get through, and that even the *Empire Baffin* probably would, though when I tried to rationalise it, on the basis of the day's experience, the chances seemed no better than two to one against getting through safely. The two other chances were: (*a*) being blown to pieces like the people on the *Empire Lawrence*, and (*b*) being torpedoed and picked up. The prospect of being badly wounded and lying in some gory inferno of a sickbay on one of the corvettes or destroyers was the most unpleasant of all, but I did not think of it. I tried to work out whether there would be any logic in my being killed just at this point, and came to the conclusion that it was not logical, and that it was, therefore, less likely to happen than if it were. Still, whatever was in store, the chances were that something pretty unpleasant would happen the next day. I wandered up to the Captain's bridge. I found the second mate there, a good-looking, open-faced little officer of about twenty-five. "What do you think our chances are?" I said, as casually as possible. He gave a faint smile. "Bad," he said. "But I'm sure we'll get through. You see, I'm psychic in these matters, and I just feel these things. However, I may be wrong; but I've got my own ideas—and I think we'll be all right." "What, Russian fighters?" "No, I don't think so. We are too far away. We've still nearly four days' sailing, and it'll be at least another twenty-four hours before the Russian fighters can get near us." Through the second mate's telescope I watched the icebergs in the distance; under the leaden sky, the air was transparent and in the Arctic twilight—it was about midnight now—the ships and all other objects had the precise outline of a line drawing. The sky and the calm sea and the ships were nearly all the same greenish-grey colour. The Fokke-Wulf was flying round and round as usual. "How's the Captain?" I asked. "He's very tired," said the second mate, "he has turned in for a couple of hours. He's to be wakened at two—or if anything happens." With the same

faint smile he said: "Good night," as I went down to the lower deck towards my cabin. And behind me, I suddenly heard heavy footsteps, and a clear rhythmical voice singing something about "A'm gonna take the choo-choo home." Spotty Jumbo McGhee, carrying a bucket in one hand, and beating time with the other, sauntered past jazzily on his clumsy muscular legs, and his enormous mouth, with the teeth pointing in all directions, and his spotty face were grinning gaily through the opening of the blue balaclava, with its pointed cat's ears. "Hullo, Jumbo, how're you feeling?" "Not bad," he grinned, "but a bloody day, wasn't it?" "What's the name of that song you were singing." "Oh, that's nothing." He became all coy and self-conscious. "I didn't know you were about," he said.

I found Pushkov in the cabin, reading, or trying to read, a book. His face was grey and he was depressed and said little, and it was no use beginning to speculate. "I think we had better go to bed," he said, "we mayn't have long to sleep."

Thursday, May 28

"*Tuman! Tuman!*" I was wakened by Pushkov's joyful voice. "Get up, come and look! *Tuman!* Fog!!!" I had never seen him so exuberant. I understood. With his scientific, totally unsuperstitious and non-psychic mind, he had probably worked it out very carefully, and probably come to the conclusion that bad weather alone could save us. "*Tuman,*" he repeated, throwing open the cabin door. It was indeed, very foggy outside. I looked at my watch. It was 6 o'clock. There was no need to waken me, but I could understand his desire to share his joy—the joy at this reprieve—with the only other person on board with whom he could talk freely. But it was only 6 o'clock, and a long day was ahead. However, the day had started well. I tried to sleep again, but I now felt as elated as Pushkov. It was still foggy when we went to breakfast at 8, though less than it had been at 6. By 10 it might be as sunny as yesterday. But the hours passed, and though the fog had gradually lifted, the solid grey ceiling of cloud remained. Everybody was more cheerful, perhaps because everybody had had at least a couple of hours' sleep. But suddenly there was an explosion of anger, somewhere on the ship, and the anger spread through the whole crew. Somebody had turned on the wireless, and had heard: "Our convoys bound for Russia are so effectively protected by Spitfires and Hurricanes that the German bombers do not dare attack them." Streams of foul language were showered on the B.B.C., the Admiralty and the Ministry of Information. "Bloody" was much too mild; the vocabulary went many stages further. It was all about twerps—no, it was worse than twerps this time, sitting in London on their —— ——, a picture which, if taken literally, would be difficult to visualise, even in surrealist terms. They were angry, even the mildest and most good-natured, like the sad little Chief Engineer, whose son had been killed at Trondhjem trying to bomb the *Tirpitz*, and gentle horse-faced Geordie, with the false teeth and the rubber gums. They had been thinking of the *Empire Lawrence*—and then—this glib stuff from London. The Flight-Lieutenant snorted. He had been superb all yesterday on his little machine-gun, and with Loulou and her *nichons* drawn on his lifejacket, but now he said: "To tell you the truth, I didn't think we'd survive." But he thought the torpedo the Germans had fired at us was a very amateurish job: "I saw it crawling along like a dying slug," he said.

Other commentaries on Black Wednesday: Lucky Billie: "I shot one of them down. . . . I'd like to draw the booggers' teeth. . . ." Geordie: "I never

blame a chap for losing his nerve. Sometimes I'm on the guns, and I don't care what drops, but sometimes my knees just shake like hell."

It was 11 o'clock, the sea and sky were still grey. "George," the Fokke-Wulf, was circling around as before—what a dull job it must be, I thought—but we had had no trouble. And then what I had heard an hour before suddenly came true: three tiny dots appeared on the horizon—Russian ships! There was joy on all faces. "Three destroyers," somebody said. Pushkov was sceptical, and wondered if it wasn't German surface craft. But everybody now said they were Russian destroyers. We waited. They were not firing at the destroyer that had gone out to meet them. Instead, they were now signalling with a blue light. They came nearer, and we could see them now, clearly. They had short and enormously wide funnels, leaning backwards, quite pre-last-war, I thought. Like something I had seen in picture books about the Russo-Japanese war. However, apart from the shape of the funnel, it was hard to judge what kind of destroyers they really were. They did not increase our defensive strength against planes to any very great extent, but the appearance of these three little destroyers had a tremendous effect on the crew. A psychological effect; the feeling that if three ships could come to our help soon after all hope of getting safely through had almost vanished, something else might turn up. "They'll be a help against U-boats, anyway," said Geordie. "Last year I went in a convoy from Ireland to Halifax without escort. For three days we were attacked by U-boats; fourteen were left out of thirty-two, until the destroyers arrived; they accounted for six U-boats." Cook, who had been so punctual with his meals yesterday, was, naturally, equally so to-day, though he complained of the difficulties arising from all the broken crockery. Outside, the sea was grey and completely flat, and the black-and-white drawing of the ships was as clear again as last night on the bridge. . . .

4 p.m.

We were now in the Barents Sea; the surface of the water looked oily, with an oily pattern of blue, yellow and purple reflections. I saw a herring whale turning somersaults, then I saw a few little seals swimming between two large icebergs. One of the blue-green icebergs, with an arch between body and tail, was shaped like a fighter plane—an ironical thought. The oily water was teeming with bird and animal life; Pushkov said it was because this was the Gulf Stream, with its attractive warmth, and he thought we would have fog again to-night. The Fokke-Wulf was still flying around, or maybe his relief; these maddening planes were being relayed every six hours. Occasionally the destroyers would have a crack at him. In the north the sky remained an impenetrable grey, but the south was now presenting a curious pattern of blue and yellow, with an intermediate patch of purple, and the blue was of four different shades—bright blue in the gaps between the purple clouds, then pale blue, then a pale greenish-blue, and then, on the horizon, a strip of dark-greenish blue, suggesting a coast covered with fir-tree forests. . . . The weather continued cloudy till 4.30, but by 6 the sun was shining as brightly on the dazzlingly blue sea, as it did all yesterday during the massacre of ships. Something must have gone wrong with the Huns' timetable, for two planes did not come over till later, when clouds had again begun to form. They went high up into the rosy clouds. The Russian destroyers and, I think, some of the other ships, had a crack at them. But they disappeared. Then the Fokke-Wulf tried to provoke the destroyers by coming within range, or almost within range, and while the destroyers were firing at him, and everybody was watching their performance,

one of the planes which had been quietly hiding in the clouds suddenly came diving down. The gunners rushed to their guns. A good barrage, with the Russian destroyers doing their best, went up to meet him. He dropped his two bombs from a good height, but they only raised two big spouts of water not far away, and our ship shook, as it shakes when a depth charge is dropped. And then—this was new—our ship fired a rocket, and the steward swore that he had fired it, and that he had hit the boogger right on the nose. Later, indeed, it was said that, according to the flakship's radiolocation, he had been brought down. Jumbo McGhee, jazzing along the deck, as on the previous night, said one of the destroyers had gone to pick up the Jerry. We spent the rest of the evening in our cabin. So more than twenty-four hours had passed since the last great attack—and all was still the same. Chilvers came along, and borrowed *Our Mutual Friend*, and made no comment on the two days' events. His attitude suggested that with one muddle and another, you couldn't expect anything else. He shrugged his shoulders when I mentioned the ammunition. I went to bed in my clothes and lifejacket, feeling curiously elated, feeling that life, with all its *imprévu*, was rather a thrilling gamble. Were not those bombs, dropping out of the yellow bellies of the Junkers like so many *boules de roulette*, dropping into your number, or missing it?

Friday, May 29

"Quick, get up!" Pushkov cried. It was half-past three in the morning. The sea was grey and stormy, and the ship was rolling. The weather looked quite unfavourable for an attack. I thought at first it was simply the Fokke-Wulf's relay, and feeling terribly sleepy, wanted to go back to bed. But then, suddenly, I saw them—seven of them, two of them flying suspiciously low. We were now on the extreme side of the convoy, with the open sea on our starboard, and only a corvette some distance away. "In luck again!" the Flight-Lieutenant shouted from the bridge. "Why?" I asked, looking up. "Didn't you see them? Two torpedoes, and just missed us!" Then the sea grew rougher, and it grew foggy, and a cold heavy rain battered the deck. The planes disappeared, and for several hours we could not even see the Fokke-Wulf. Had he *lost* us? But no, he turned up again. There was a feeling of helpless rage at George among our men. "If only," somebody said, "the Russians would send over *one* fighter, nobody here would mourn *his* death!" Somebody else said: "Well, we've still got ammunition for one or two small raids, but if they'd kept up Wednesday's show, that would have been that." The rumour now was that the Russian fighters would meet us at 12 noon. Where were we now? It was cold, stormy, foggy—it was almost like the Arctic I had seen in October '41. Were we nearing the mouth of the White Sea? Would we, before long, see in the south-east the northern point of Kanin Peninsula? The second mate laughed, and said my geography was all wrong; we weren't as far from the German bases as I was imagining. Pushkov said that the Russians had an aerodrome at Mezen, near the bottleneck of the White Sea, and that they might send some fighters from there, once we got a little nearer. But where were we really? Nothing much happened all day. It was cloudy and it rained, and we had our regular meals, and played bridge with Mr. Adcock, and it was not until late in the evening that things again began to happen. The Captain announced that we were not going to Archangel, after all, but that the convoy would split up into two parts, and that our part would go to Murmansk instead, "and early to-morrow afternoon we shall be there." I confess I received the news with mixed feelings. I wanted to see Murmansk, whereas I

had already seen Archangel, and I wanted to make that railway journey from Murmansk; it was also pleasant to think that we might be safe in port in a little over twelve hours. But, on the other hand, the bottleneck of the White Sea, so close to Russian fighter aerodromes, looked so comforting on the map, while, by turning west again, we were again approaching those infernal Norwegian bases.

That evening the weather cleared. In a glorious sunset of red and golden clouds, the convoy split in two. The flakship and eight or nine cargoes and three of the destroyers turned south. But while the two small convoys were now regrouping, the German planes suddenly came out of the red golden clouds. They must have lain there in wait for some time; now they took advantage of our moment of reorganisation. But they did not come low. They dropped the bombs from a great height, and then disappeared; I don't know how many they were—perhaps three or four. And now began what was, to me, the worst part of the voyage. The planes had gone, but the weather had cleared completely, and over us was a bright-blue midnight sky. The sun had barely touched the horizon, and was rising again. I felt convinced they would be back very soon. They were bound to come in this weather, and this time come in force. In a few hours, the Russian fighters would come to our protection; for the Germans it was now or never. They would be mad to miss an opportunity like this. I lay wide awake on my bunk, waiting. An hour passed; then another hour. It was past 2 o'clock. Dazzlingly the sun was now shining through the wire-netting of the door. Three o'clock. Four o'clock. Still nothing. But it was axiomatic that they would come. Never, during that Wednesday, had I felt any panic. I had a strange sensation in my ears, but I was calm and completely self-possessed; and on the Wednesday night I had faced the prospect of a not improbable death with a serenity that surprised me, and I was interested in the new sensation. But now, the suspense of those hours in the sunlit cabin was intolerable, and I was beginning to panic. I *wanted* the attack to come. I felt myself seized by a kind of irrational terror when any attempt to calculate one's chances became meaningless. That was too much. Pushkov was sleeping. I got up and went on deck. I needed human company. Geordie, surprised at my no doubt dishevelled appearance, gave me a friendly smile, and asked why I wasn't sleeping. I said I couldn't. He offered to make me a cup of tea. I followed him into his little pantry near the stern. We sat down and had tea out of large mugs. It was calm and kind and gentle, that long pale horsey face, with the false teeth and the rubber gums. We talked about nothing in particular. What sort of place was Murmansk? Where was Geordie's home? How many children had he? He poured me out another mug of tea, and I took it back to the cabin. Then, a few minutes later, he came in and said: "Here, I've buttered you a slice of toast." The butter was slightly rancid, and I could not have eaten the toast anyway, but I felt grateful to Geordie. He did not know how grateful. I dozed off into a restless slumber.

Saturday, May 30

I was wakened by shouting outside, and by the furious ringing of the alarm bell. It was 8 o'clock. Overhead I heard the zooming of planes. I saw one of the gunners running like mad up to the turret. For a fraction of a minute they had been mistaken for Russian fighters. Now they were down upon us. Before the gunners had reached their turrets a stick of bombs came whizzing down from perhaps one thousand feet. Again the ship shook as the pillars of water leaped up.

They came again and again, but that morning they dropped their bombs only from a considerable height. It was child's play compared with Wednesday's arrogant dive-bombing; from this height they had one chance in fifty of hitting anything. There seemed no explanation, except that some of them had less guts than others; our barrage now was much weaker than on Wednesday. Our Oerlikons scarcely fired a shot; the Junkers were much too high up. And then, about 10.30, just as the last Germans had gone, three pairs of planes began to fly in a large circle round the convoy—Hurricanes! They had come from Murmansk. Far on the horizon, on the far edge of the sparkling blue sea, appeared the dim outline of the Russian coast. Now everybody began to relax—and to let off steam. The steward attributed all our troubles to the bloody Old School Tie; he quoted the case of some "public-school twerp" who, at Bristol some time ago, said that "the convoy *must* sail," though he had been warned that the Germans had dropped mines in the Bristol Channel. "Each ship for itself," he had said. "And the first bloody day," said the steward, "ten bloody ships were sunk, and the bloody public school twerp was 'severely reprimanded' and given another bloody job." And then he talked angrily about the dockers, who sometimes were making four quid a day on piece-work, "while the bloody people on this bloody ship have to risk their bloody lives for ten bloody bob a day." The sad little engineer had now come on deck, and was taking a little rest as he sat in the sun. "We are brave people," he said in a soft but reproachful voice, "but we aren't daft. Never again. They've got to give us air support."

And then we noticed that one of the American ships that had come alongside us was flying her flag at half-mast; and somebody said: "She was hit this morning, and they've only just put out the fire, and there are some dead on board."

I was tired and went to sleep, and when I awoke in the afternoon, we were only a mile away from the Russian coast, from the entrance to Kola Bay. It was a coast of low cushion-shaped black rocks, with large patches of snow on them, and under the grey sky it all looked like a lino cut, black-and-white and unreal. Not a tree, not a patch of green anywhere. Slowly, in single file, we steamed up the fjord, patrolled by the Hurricanes. It was a grey cloudy afternoon, and the Germans did not come again. Here and there on the bleak black rocks were signs of life, or rather of military activity: a wireless mast, or an anti-aircraft gun. I went up to see Captain Dykes. He was rosy and spruce, and his tunic and trousers were perfectly pressed. But he also was angry. "I'm not going to go back without air support," he said. And then he talked about his family down in Cardiff, I think, and of his "old woman." "You should meet my old woman," he said, "next time you are home. D'you know what my old woman says? She says I'm like Jaysus Christ—and, by God, I think she believes it!" And he laughed happily. In the distance, on the east side of the fjord, we could now see Poliarnaya, quite a large town. A motor-launch came up to the *Empire Baffin*, and brought two Russian naval officers on board. "You'd better help me with my Russian, and not go away," said Captain Dykes. But the two Russians had a slight smattering of English naval terms, and Captain Dykes, speaking volubly, but gesticulating so expressively, and using a few Russian words from time to time, made himself perfectly understood. It was a sort of seamen's esperanto which worked admirably. The Russian naval officers were sympathetic towards our past troubles, but did not seem much surprised. One of them soon went away, but the other saw us right into Murmansk and stayed on board all evening, and sat up with us till 4 a.m.

CHAPTER III

MURMANSK IN MAY

ONE—two—three—four—five. We counted five ships between Poliarnaya and Murmansk which had been hit by bombs and were now half-submerged or down by the stern. British ships, all of them. There was some bomb damage in the shores of the fjord, but not much. We passed Poliarnaya, the northernmost Russian naval base, with many stone buildings, and some distance beyond, a large stone building standing alone on the edge of the fjord. Pushkov said it was the Institute of Meteorology. Cutters and motor-launches sailed past, and on board a small ship which came alongside us there were many girls, and when our seamen tried to talk to them, the girls giggled coyly. We reached Murmansk about 7 in the evening, under a low rainy sky. The Russian naval men had told Captain Dykes that the best thing to do was to drop anchor on the far side of the fjord, opposite Murmansk, where the ship would, to some extent, be protected by the steep rocky banks; but in his seamen's esperanto Captain Dykes said that the windlass had been badly damaged by that near miss, so it was decided that we would at once be moored along the quayside at Murmansk. It was bad luck: it just so happened that he received the worst possible place: at the very point where the quay, with its warehouses, juts farthest into the fjord, forming a right angle there. The very first thing the Germans would see, flying at Murmansk from across the fjord, would be the *Empire Baffin*! It couldn't be helped, and anyway, there wasn't much to worry about that night, under cover of the low rainclouds. The harbour itself was not impressive; the buildings around were wooden and shabby, one of the warehouses had been bombed, the quay itself was made of flimsy-looking wooden boards, and what cranes I saw that night were small. It was too late to go ashore; we were told that the customs and passport people would not come on board until the next morning, and, anyway, there was nowhere to sleep at Murmansk—the Arctic Hotel was absolutely packed with survivors from the *Edinburgh*, and dozens of other ships. The dockers, however, were wasting no time; they came on board—big burly fellows with enormous muscles, who worked with great gusto, and swore vigorously the classic Russian "mother" oath. I think they started by taking away the high explosive, and in a few hours everything was unloaded, except the tanks. They were too busy to say much, but when they had a moment they asked for a cigarette. I don't know what it's like in other ports, but these Mur-

mansk dockers were totally unlike the half-dying, half-starved, chain-gang wretches one sometimes hears about.

I went to the smoke-room. Pushkov was there, and the second mate, and the steward and the cook, and the Flight-Lieutenant. And, now, for the first time in a week, the steward triumphantly brought in two bottles of rum, and a bottle of lime juice and glasses and hot water, and we drank and were merry. "Didn't I tell you," said the second mate, "my second sight is infallible!" Having completed his business with the skipper, the Russian lieutenant came down and joined us for a drink. At midnight, he looked at his watch, and said: "It's only the children's hour," but suggested that it wasn't done in Russia to drink without eating, whereupon Lucky Billie, who was in one of his happiest moods, produced a mountain of ham and cheese sandwiches. "Now that's more like it," said the lieutenant.

His name was Gurov, I think. He was twenty-six or twenty-seven, tall, fair, with laughing eyes, a loud laugh, large mouth and large white teeth, and a pugnacious jaw. "A good komsomol type," Pushkov remarked in the course of the evening. He talked about anything and everything. German raiders? "We brought down four yesterday. . . . Anyway, they hardly ever hit anything; all their bombs drop on the rocks or into the water." He pulled the second mate's leg about not being married. "What's wrong with being married?" he cried. "You get out of port, and the moment you are past the *myss*—what's *myss* in English? Where's a map—yes, cape, promontory, the moment you're past the *myss* you slip your wedding-ring in your pocket. But we believe in marriage—we certainly do. Lots of kids is what we want. A Russian girl who doesn't get married and hasn't three children hasn't done her duty to the country. That's the way we look at it nowadays! And we all get married young. I've got three children," and he produced a photograph of his family. He then argued what to do with the Germans after the war. "Educate them," he shouted. "Educate the sons of bitches. We'll educate them according to our White Sea canal principles—make decent members of society of them. The gangsters, of course, must be shot, but the *rank-and-file scoundrels* should be made to build roads and canals for a few years."

He was dissatisfied with the British war effort. "Why doesn't your Churchill commit himself to anything?" he said. "Why won't they lift the ban on the *Daily Worker*?"

I asked where he had come from. "Tula," he said. "Tula," I said, "right in the heart of Russia, a thousand miles from the nearest sea—what has made you come to Murmansk?" "I've been here for seven years," he said. "When we are young, we Soviet lads like to do, not the easiest, but the hardest jobs—and settling in the Arctic was the hardest job." But then he became romantic, and talked of Papanin, and the Chelyuskin,

and Safonov, the Murmansk air ace, and about the thrill in developing these scarcely inhabited parts of the Soviet Union, and of the great new town of Kirovsk, right in the middle of the Kola Peninsula. "When I am old, I shall go and live a comfortable old age somewhere near Tula, where it's warm, and there are lots of trees." Pushkov added a footnote: "Of course, there's also this: young men were specially encouraged to settle in the north; anyone living inside the Arctic circle received considerably higher pay than elsewhere, and there were extra food privileges." "Good Komsomol type," Pushkov repeated, and when the argument about the *Daily Worker* and similar subjects became heated, Pushkov said: "You won't find it easy to derail him from his ideas." The lieutenant, in short, thought that Britain was essentially a capitalist country, and not very sympathetic to the Soviet Union, though the seamen and the sailors he had met were all grand fellows, he said. We had a lot more rum, and every time the steward wanted to break up the party, the Russian lieutenant said: "No, no, no, it's still the children's hour"; and so we went on till 4 o'clock. It was quite light when we returned to our cabin, but it was raining heavily, and had, indeed, rained nearly all night. We had the soundest four hours' sleep in a week.

Breakfast at 8, as usual. It was Sunday, and Cook produced the traditional bacon and eggs. All along the quayside ships were being unloaded, with the cranes groaning, and chains clanging, and the burly dockers shouting their "mother" oath. They were now swearing at one of the cranes which was too weak to lift the 30-tons tanks, and because they would have to wait till the afternoon before a bigger crane was available. "This one is only good for 8 tons,—— its mother!" On deck there were several bags of potatoes and carrots, but the potatoes were now sprouting and, like the carrots, they were almost completely rotten. Hundreds of flies were now infesting the rotting vegetables. "Damn shame," said a burly docker. "People in Murmansk would have liked some carrots, but they're not even worth sorting out." He took a shovel and chucked the lot overboard. "*Net-li zakurit?*" he turned to me, asking for another cigarette. I confess I was beginning to grudge giving away English cigarettes—how many would I get in Kuibyshev?

The passport and customs officials came on board, but it was a mere formality. The customs man scarcely looked at the luggage and only had one case opened. The other man gave me my landing ticket.

The sun had now come out, and it was hot on deck. We were just going to have dinner when the all-too-familiar alarm bell went, and I saw the Junkers 87 swooping across the bay and making straight for us. Already the bearded bank clerk with the Oxford accent and Geordie were on the Oerlikons, and firing like mad. Other guns were firing from the land. Perhaps all this firing unnerved the Hun. He swooped right over us, but

did not unload until he was a good hundred yards away, on the shore. A cloud of dust went up with a bang. It was over. Fighters appeared in the sky. "That's the worst of it," somebody said, "they haven't got enough petrol at Murmansk to keep a continuous fighter patrol over the port. But they really should, with the convoy newly come in." We went and had dinner.

On the quay, a young frontier guard, with his green N.K.V.D. cap over his bandaged forehead, was stationed, with bayonet, at the foot of our gangway. He gave a friendly informal nod when Pushkov and I went ashore to explore the possibilities at Murmansk. We were far inside the Arctic Circle, but I had seldom known London as hot as was Murmansk on that beautiful summer day. After passing through the dock gates, and past many shattered wooden sheds, we proceeded to climb up the side of the hill, along the dusty winding road. Higher up the hill, on the right, was a stone building with an observatory-like tower; that was the research institute where Pushkov was going to report his arrival. To the left, for a couple of miles along the side of the hill, overlooking the blue waters of the fjord, with the rocky, treeless, still snow-studded coast on the other side, was Murmansk, with its clusters of wooden huts, and surprisingly large stone and concrete buildings. Many Hurricanes were patrolling the harbour now. Pushkov offered to take me to the Arctic Hotel, the centre of allied life and activity at Murmansk. It was a long walk, first along the dusty road up the hill, between shapeless masses of wooden huts, many of them shattered by blast, others completely wrecked by direct hits. We couldn't find out where exactly that morning's bomb had fallen. But there were signs of life in this dockland of Murmansk. Here and there, a woman or some youngsters would be digging something, and washing was hanging on a clothes-line. Looking back, we could see our *Empire Baffin* —and now we noticed a bright patch of red above her stern: now that she was in port, a new Red Ensign had been hoisted, in place of the grimy, almost black flag, tattered by bullets from the Lewis guns. . . . In another part of the harbour were two ships, bombed *here*, one of them well down by the stern. At last we reached Stalin Avenue, the main street of Murmansk, running parallel to the coastline; a wide and potentially impressive street, with numerous blocks of flats, six and seven storeys high, on either side. In between there were short stretches of wooden huts—the veterans of Murmansk. It was odd to think that Murmansk, which had been less than a fishing village in 1915, had been built during the first world war, to receive British supplies for the Russian Army, and that, just before this war, it had a population of 130,000, and was rapidly developing into a big city. But, at the very beginning of the war, about the time when the Germans were already claiming the capture of Murmansk, a large part of the population had been evacuated, mostly by sea, and thousands, Pushkov

told me, had been massacred by the German dive-bombers. It was a hideous business.

Even so, Murmansk still looked a real town—a town in the making, oddly reminiscent of half-built towns in the Far West, or in Alaska, with everybody looking active and excited about something. The naval officer had told me the night before: "Bit nervous, of course, our people at Murmansk, but bearing up pretty well, all the same." The people in Stalin Avenue weren't looking bad, really. Many soldiers and sailors about, with girls, all in something approaching summer clothes, and with a little rouge and lipstick. In the centre of the town, halfway down Stalin Avenue, was a large cinema, with crowds of people outside. Here was a meagre garden of sorts, but outside it the street was flooded, and we had to step carefully over two large planks thrown across the inundation caused by a burst water-main. Pasted on houses, theatrical bills announced that *Les Cloches de Corneville* and *Rose Marie* had been performed at Murmansk only a week before. Outside the garden was a notice-board, with many people around, reading a newly arrived copy of *Pravda*, three days old. Cars and lorries, many of them British army lorries, were racing down Stalin Avenue. The blocks of flats looked well-built and up-to-date. Then we came to the Arctic Hotel, a large modern concrete building. Opposite was a small garden overlooking the fjord, with a few meagre little trees, and a bandstand in the middle. There were many cars outside the Arctic, and crowds of people, and youngsters were scrounging cigarettes from the British and the Americans. Inside, the Arctic was crowded. Kit and luggage were piled in the porter's lodge; in the dark passages, with their moribund palm-trees, British sailors and soldiers were sitting about aimlessly on chairs and sofas. One part of the large dining-room was crowded with long tables at which survivors were eating; they were, it seemed, divided into nationalities; at one table there were nothing but Chinese seamen; at another table were the British, and at another yet, the Americans. Captain Pole, in khaki, whom I found at the Arctic, was very helpful, and promised to give me a car in which to take my belongings off the ship as soon as I had found accommodation, or rather, had got a seat on the train for Moscow. There was, he regretted to say, no accommodation at Murmansk; there were 3,000 survivors at the Arctic, and the best I could do would be to stay on the ship. Meantime, he suggested I go to see Intourist, whose offices were in the Arctic Hotel. There were several air-raid warnings that afternoon, but nothing much happened, except that the Hurricanes were all the time in the air. There were few shelters at Murmansk, and nobody went to shelters, but people had been ordered to "keep under cover"; so when I looked out of the Arctic during one of the alerts, I saw numerous people packed together under the bandstand; technically, they were "under cover." In the small Intourist office I was received, fairly

cordially, by a skinny dark lady, who said I hadn't come at a very good time: "You see what's happening in the air to-day," she said, reproachfully, as if it was partly my fault. This was Sunday, and she couldn't fix up my exit permit till to-morrow; she had no one to send to the N.K.V.D. But there was a train with a through-carriage for Moscow leaving to-night, and, if I did not wish to be stranded in Murmansk for perhaps a whole week, I should go to the N.K.V.D. myself, and try to get my permit to-day. In the war atmosphere of Murmansk, I found people generally very helpful; this was even true of the militia. I found the headquarters in a large block of flats in Stalin Avenue, and was taken straight in to the N.K.V.D. Chief, a good-looking young man, with long hair brushed back, very military in his appearance. He sat at a large desk, under a large map of Europe; there we were—almost at its extreme northern tip. He was amiable, and said that Intourist were very naughty to have put me to all this trouble; he ordered a permit to be written out at once, and while this was being done, asked about the convoy voyage, and took my dramatic story as something banal, as something he had already heard many a time before. After an exchange of cigarettes and other courtesies, I went back to the Arctic, with my permit to travel to Kuibyshev "via Moscow." The "via Moscow" was quite essential, because I now definitely knew that the British Press had been moved back to Moscow; only my London visa said nothing about Moscow, and stated Kuibyshev to be my destination.

They looked cheerful enough, all those seamen and sailors at the Arctic Hotel—the hundreds of them one saw in the passages, and in the big dining-room. Three thousand survivors at Murmansk—at least half of them at the Arctic. There were 700 from the *Edinburgh* alone; and some of these felt grim and bitter at what had happened to their ship. They talked much less than the merchant seamen. I had three hours to wait till Captain P's lorry would come for me. I went to the main dining-room, an enormous, crowded place. Here at a table I saw my friends the R.A.F. boys from the *Empire Baffin*, drinking pink lemonade. Yes, they were cheerful enough, the survivors, especially the two Canadian lads who asked me to join them, and who insisted on paying for my meal and the vodka and the lemonade.

But they were really making the best of a bad job. They were in a nasty spot. The numbers of survivors were piling up at Murmansk, and heaven only knew when they could all be taken home—and what a voyage home! Some said they wouldn't get away for one or two or three months. "However, it's not as bad as it looks," one of the Canadian lads said. "You come down with us to our club to-night." It was some kind of dancing place. The other Canadian lad praised the theatres and cinemas of Murmansk, the Russian film, *A Fellow from Our Town*, and the operetta, *Rose Marie*, which he said was *lovely*. We were joined by many other

seamen, British, American, Canadian, each of whom had his story to tell of how and when he was sunk or torpedoed. There was also a young Russian who joined us. He had a round swarthy face, Douglas Fairbanks teeth, dark, well-pomaded hair, and an exuberant manner. Comrade Krylov was his name, and he declared his great delight at meeting a journalist straight from England, and he urged me to stay for some time at Murmansk which, he said, I would find most interesting. He was there as an interpreter, had recently graduated from the Moscow Institute for Modern Languages, and was very proud of his good English. And he said how he had acted *King Lear* at the school theatricals, and then he proceeded to recite the whole first scene of *King Lear* with wonderful fluency. He knew all the parts, not only that of King Lear.

"*Cordelia:* What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent." Comrade Krylov uttered a well-imitated sob. He went on for another good ten minutes. The Canadian boys chuckled admiringly. From the port, below the hill, came the sound of firing; another raid was on. I was worried about the *Empire Baffin.* "O vassal! Miscreant!" Comrade Krylov shouted.

Many people from our convoy were there. There were two elderly Russian seamen from the *Stary Bolshevik*, the ship which had been burning for hours, but which did not give up. "We had to fight the fire for many hours," one of them said. "Our fellows were grand. And so were the girls. We were hit by a bomb. Five people were killed; the deck was a mess—all that was left of them was a bloody mess—and a head. Many others were injured. On another trip something similar happened. One of the women of our crew went insane and is in hospital now." He was an elderly Russian seaman, and he shook his head. "It's a bad business," he said. "I've been a seaman for years; I have never known anything like this."

Many horrible things could be heard at the Arctic that evening. I saw there a man who had been on one of the corvettes escorting our convoy. He had spent three days looking after six severely wounded men, with their legs blown off. They had all died, and he had buried them himself. It was said that 160 men had been killed or drowned in this convoy—chiefly on the Wednesday—and many others had been severely injured, and were now at Murmansk hospital.

I asked if it was far to the hospital. "No," somebody said, "it isn't far. But it's too pitiful. I hope, for your sake, you don't go." Those six dying men on the corvette, with their legs blown off, the "bloody mess" and the head on the deck of the burning *Stary Bolshevik*—here were some of the things that were going on around us, while a shattered lifeboat was the only casualty *we* had suffered. . . .

"Our skipper," I said, "says he won't go back unless he gets air protection." One of the seamen laughed. "That's what they all say. But after

a week or two at Murmansk they all long for the open sea. Bloody glad to get away from here, I can tell you." We sat about for another hour or so. The food, served by morose, ill-tempered and terribly slow old waiters, was fair, and there was plenty of it. Most of it was Russian, brought from further south, but the bread was white, made of Canadian flour. Everybody at Murmansk was eating white bread, and the Russians were longing for their native black variety.

About 9 o'clock the lorry, with a Scots sergeant and two English corporals, came for me. Everything had been admirably arranged by the energetic Captain Pole. We drove down to the port, down to the *Empire Baffin*. And now came what was, for me, a heart-breaking moment; the moment to say good-bye to these men with whom I had lived for a month, and who had become like old friends. With all their grumbling, with all their bad language, these men had human greatness, and English greatness.

As we drove off, I kept looking back and waving. High on the deck, above the large black hull, were the small waving figures of Lucky Billie and Cook in his dandy pale-blue shirt, and ginger-haired Harry, and the second mate with the second sight, and Geordie, and many others. They had reached port, but that port did not mean safety; and after that, there was still the long homeward journey. What had been an exceptional adventure to me was to them their daily bread.

It was 11.30 when we arrived at the railway-station with a small crowd outside waiting to be admitted on to the Moscow train with its green "hard" carriages. Overhead was the blue sky with bright rosy clouds. All was still. But twenty or thirty miles away, over there, beyond the fjord, the German bombers were lying in wait.

The sergeant and the corporals helped me on to the train, and gave me fifty Players as a souvenir. There was absolutely no reason for it; but war is full of such irrational little acts of human kindness.

Some weeks later, in Moscow, I learned that the *Empire Baffin* had returned home safely, and I cabled congratulations to Captain Dykes and to Lucky Billie.

Many months after that I received a little note, by ordinary post, from Billie saying that the return journey had been much less troublesome, and wishing me good luck. . . . I don't know what happened after that to the *Empire Baffin*. I think she came to Russia once more, though under a different Captain. Much later, there were rumours that she had been sunk in the Atlantic on her way from America, but I never learned anything definite.

In Moscow I met a naval officer who had been on the *Empire Lawrence* until a fraction of a second before she blew up. When he saw the planes coming he jumped overboard. A few minutes before he was speaking on

the telephone with the wireless operators above, and he heard their voices when the first bomb hit the ship; after which he heard their voices no more. They were dead. He said one of the lifeboats had got away; there were twenty survivors in all out of fifty-seven. She had had no T.N.T. on board; but the five bombs were more than enough to blow her up.

Compared with the next convoy, we were lucky. That next convoy's losses were terrible, more terrible perhaps than those of any other convoy in this war.

After that, things began to improve. This sort of thing could not go on. "We are brave people, but we aren't daft," the sad little Chief Engineer had said that last morning we were at sea. He was right.

After the disaster of July adequate escort vessels and even an aircraft-carrier were found for the next convoy. Some losses were suffered, but fifty or sixty German planes were brought down. Most of the convoy reached Russia safely.

The *Stary Bolshevik* and several of her crew received the Order of Lenin, and other decorations were given to other male and female members of the crew. I don't know if any of the British and American seamen who were on that convoy received any acknowledgment from their governments. I hope they did; and I hope the same is true of the men of the escort vessels, who had a harder and grimmer task than the rest of us perhaps realised at the time.

Such is the story of that voyage of the P.Q.16. Much later I talked about it to an Admiralty man. "You were damned lucky," he said. "How do you mean?" "Well, you lost less than thirty per cent of the ships, and we were budgeting for a fifty per cent loss. On the other hand, the next convoy, the P.Q.17 was much worse than we had expected. We had also budgeted for a fifty per cent loss—and she lost over eighty per cent. That's just how it was in the summer of 1942," he concluded philosophically. "The Russians were screaming for the stuff. We had to deliver it at any price—and there was no other route. There was no time to sail round the Cape to the Persian Gulf. And Iran wasn't ready for it, anyway. And at first we hadn't enough escort vessels." "Why was that?" "Well, that's just how it was. We needed them in the Atlantic. There, also, we were passing through the worst phase of the war. We couldn't give the Russian convoys priority—at least not at first." "Wasn't it rather a dreadful waste, though—especially that P.Q.17?" "Yes," he said. "On the whole it was a mistake, and we tried to make up for it later." But what it all really meant was that until the Battle of Stalingrad was already in full swing, lamentably little was reaching Russia by the north during those critical summer months of 1942.

CHAPTER IV

FROM MURMANSK TO MOSCOW IN A "HARD COACH" (JUNE 1942)

To me this will always remain a memorable journey, for during those six days in the "hard" carriage, I saw more of ordinary Russians than I was to see for many weeks afterwards. There was a constant coming and going in that carriage. I must have talked to a hundred people during those six days—soldiers from the Murmansk Front, railwaymen and all sorts of civilians, and I made friends with Tamara, aged nine, who had left the Leningrad area with her mother at the height of the German invasion, had lived somewhere on the White Sea through the winter of 1941–2, and was now on her way to her grandmother, who was living on a *kolkhoz* in the more clement province of Riazan. All these people had something vital to say. Everybody, in the course of conversation, made some remark which was, in its own way, a reflection of how the Russian people felt after the winter of 1941–2, and almost on the eve of the "final" German offensive which was going to sweep the German Army across Southern Russia, and into the Caucasus—until they were stopped and hurled back at Mozdok, and trapped and wiped out at Stalingrad.

But in June 1942, those days of triumph were still in the future. At that time Russia had just passed through the grimmest winter in her history. The food situation was serious. Those early summer months of 1942 were the worst from the standpoint of food, and here in the far north the food shortage was particularly acute. Leningrad, to these people—Leningrad which was so near, not so much in terms of miles as in terms of direct personal association, affected them all very deeply. Almost everybody in this part of Russia had relatives in Leningrad, or had, at one time or another, been there. During the great Leningrad famine, rumours of horrible things happening there had swiftly spread to the north.

The Germans had failed to capture Moscow, and that was a cause of immense relief. Russians knew that if they succeeded in driving the Germans from the gates of Moscow in December 1941, they would probably be able to drive them out of Russia altogether. And yet—people knew only too well all the sacrifices that the Battle of Moscow had entailed. The future was not clear. There was undoubtedly, among many, a feeling of disappointment. The Battle of Moscow had gone well; and yet it had not gone as well as people in the winter had hoped. The Germans were still at Rzhev and Viazma. They might try for Moscow again. And they would certainly try for Rostov again, and for the Caucasus. Heavy fighting

had already been going on for three weeks in the south. They were trying for Rostov already. Kerch had been lost on May 23 and the Russians had been thrown into the sea. Sebastopol was still holding—but for how long?

And the Allies? They were not expecting very much from the Allies on land. But these people in the north were grateful for the supplies that were coming through Murmansk. And it was precisely during that week on the Murmansk–Moscow train that we heard of the first 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne. Britain, during that week, was probably more popular than she had ever been before. Still, the general outlook of the war continued to be uncertain.

On the whole, I might say that while the soldiers were very confident, and their morale was excellent, civilians were feeling doubtful; women looked upset, and old women especially were full of forebodings. One old woman, who must have suffered great hardships during the winter, said that the Germans were too strong; that the Russians would never chase them out, and that the only thing that mattered was to end the war quickly. In this hungry, scurvy-stricken part of Russia—so it had been during the winter, and it was not much better in June—the food shortage had undoubtedly done much to weaken civilian morale. The soldiers, who were well fed, had not been shaken.

To me, it was a memorable week, not only because, in the course of it, I was able, in that crowded third-class carriage, to look at this cross-section of Russian humanity, but because I also saw a great deal of Russia itself—its Arctic north, so austere and yet so beautiful in summertime, and then those hundreds of miles of forest down the Archangel–Vologda line, and of meadows dotted with millions of buttercups. And every time the train stopped, half the passengers would jump off to pick bunches of flowers, with the result that there were enormous bunches of buttercups in every compartment.

With the sun in the sky for nearly twenty-two hours, and a grey luminous twilight during the two hours of "night" all the windows of the train remained open. It was warm outside all the time, and there were no strong draughts, because the train moved only slowly, seldom at more than twenty miles an hour. Everything around was so peaceful after the convoy and after Murmansk; not that the danger was past—far from it. The line from Murmansk to Kandalaksha on the White Sea, and then the new railway running from Kandalaksha south of the White Sea to the point where it joins the Archangel–Vologda line were among the most heavily bombed railways in Russia. This could be seen only too clearly from the terrible bomb damage at all the railway-stations—very few of which were undamaged, and many of which were completely destroyed. Often in the past had trains been attacked by German aircraft, and if our train was left

completely alone, it was only because the Germans were so enormously interested in the convoy that had just come into Murmansk.

DIARY WRITTEN IN THE TRAIN

June 1

It is 7 p.m. now—that is, nearly twenty hours since we left Murmansk. We are only twenty-five miles from Murmansk, and the train has been standing here since 3 a.m. The Kola River, with the railway-line alongside it, is in flood. Further along the line, the railway-track is completely under water. A few hours ago, we saw several goods carriages crowded with workers go past; they are going to sandbag the flooded stretch, so that we may get across it. The soldiers say we may start moving at 8 to-night, but most of the other passengers are sceptical, and somebody said—on what authority, I don't know—that the line is so badly flooded it may take days before we get any further. The river on the left is a great roaring torrent, and is now only about two yards away from the railway-line. Beyond it is a rocky hill, with a few small pine-trees and some dwarf birches growing on it; on the other side of the railway are three log cabins, with soldiers standing on the doorsteps. The log cabins seem to be occupied by the Army. There are three tracks of railway at this point. This torrent, and the rocks, and the little birches and pines—and the sun high in the sky at 7 p.m.—it is what one would expect this northernmost point of Europe to look like. Several times to-day the Hurricanes have been swooping over us. One of the soldiers said that the main Murmansk aerodrome was somewhere round here, and that Murmansk had already had three big air-raids to-day, and that the Hurricanes were being kept busy all day long.

The thought of the *Empire Baffin*, moored at the worst possible point of Murmansk Harbour, makes my heart sink.

Oddly enough, I have enjoyed this day, and don't much care how long we take to get to Moscow. The people in the carriage are good company. I've made friends with an old man—an odd character. He speaks in an almost educated way, with great precision, but wears a miserable black cloth cap and a black tunic; his face is yellow and wrinkled and unhealthy-looking, and his bony chin is covered with grey stubble. All he has with him to eat is some dry bread; and I naturally offered him some tinned tongue, which he ate with relish and with the air of a connoisseur. He took it gladly, and yet with a good deal of protesting, and insisted that I smoke some of his *mahorka*; very Russian that, or rather Soviet-Russian, always to want to give something in return, at least according to one's means. It's a good principle, and eliminates in advance any suggestion of anyone being patronised by anyone else. The *mahorka*, which he poured into my pipe out of a little medicine bottle, was pleasant enough to smoke—especially with all the windows wide open. "This war is tough on the civilians," a young soldier observed, as I was treating the old man to the tinned tongue. So it is. "I am a pedagogue," the old man said, "or rather I am a pedagogue by profession." He obviously liked the word "pedagogue." "Between 1908 and 1917 I taught the Russian language in Finland. They aren't bad people, the Finns, and I had no trouble with them. They are hard-working people. Of course, I had to deal with Finns who were not too unfriendly to us—or they wouldn't have wanted to learn our language. What I gave was an elementary course in Russian—and it was optional. Nobody was compelled to attend my classes. I think it's rather an accident the Finns are in this war; the Germans and Mannerheim dragged them into it."

He was interested in the present state of elementary education in England. "I suppose it's better than what it is here," he said. Altogether, he is a bit of a sceptic where Russia is concerned. "A great deal has been done about education in our country in recent years," he said, "but the trouble with us Russians is that we concentrate on quantity rather than on quality. Education," he said, sententiously, "is progressing quantitatively but not qualitatively." He had abandoned teaching for some years now, and this last year, he said he had been working in Murmansk as a clerk. "But it's no good. I am fifty-seven, and my health can't stand it. I can't live on 250 grams of bread a day, and the lack of vitamins has given me scurvy. So I asked to be released from my work, and now I am going to join my wife and my young boy and girl in a fishing village near Archangel. Fish is said to be very good against scurvy, and they've also grown some vegetables—so I hope to get rid of my scurvy. Anyway, my family is doing plenty for the war effort. I've got three grown-up sons in the army; one of them fought in the Battle of Moscow. Until recently all three were alive."

He thought, however, that it was going to be a long and hard war. "It's no use pretending Hitler and his chaps aren't clever and efficient people—much more efficient than we are. We aren't really as strong as we now pretend to be. Now take, for instance, all that 1939 business. The official version is that we couldn't get any co-operation from Britain and France. That's true enough. We knew that the British and French couldn't help us if we were attacked; but while we had no faith in them, we hadn't much faith in ourselves either. We were really not much better prepared than they were. We should like to have the British for Allies, but I am afraid British Imperialism hasn't nearly as much punch as German or Japanese imperialism has." He was also gloomy about Leningrad, and claimed that the German tanks had actually broken through one day into the Nevsky, but were fortunately destroyed. "Only God knows how many people have died in Leningrad; and how many more have been evacuated. One hundred and fifty grams of bread a day they used to get at one time, and sometimes they only received fifty grams; so perhaps there is no population left in Leningrad at all." A young soldier who was listening, said that he had seen some Leningrad evacuees arrive at Archangel. "They were fearful to look at—all skin and bones." "Well," said the old man, suddenly becoming more cheerful, "all this food business varies quite a lot. A man I know came from a certain big industrial town right in the middle of the Kola Peninsula—forget its name, but it's quite near Kirovsk, and he said that people were quite comfortably off there; large stocks had been laid in before the war, and people still received plenty of butter and cheese and vodka. He told me that to this day you hardly knew when you were there that there was a war on. Altogether," he went on, "I think the worst is over—at least where the food situation is concerned. Of course it was terrible to lose last year's harvest in the Ukraine—the best there's been since the imperialist war, but the Volga and the Don and the Caucasus are still in our hands."

The woman guard, with her beautiful madonna-like, if slightly faded and tired face, with a dark-blue scarf round it, remarked that Murmansk needn't complain. "The Arctic always gets the best of everything—the Arctic and also the big towns like Moscow and Leningrad. In my home town, Vologda, we have always been much less well off than people in Murmansk. Even now Murmansk is very well off, compared with other places." "Nothing extraordinary in that," said the old man, "for they get Canadian wheat now; but they are sick and tired of that white bread; yesterday I asked an officer if he

would give me some black bread in exchange for the white bread. When you eat black bread, at least you feel you've eaten something; the white bread you hardly notice; you can't make a meal of it. And don't you say," he turned sharply to the guard," that conditions in Murmansk are easy. I've lived there through the winter, and I've got the scurvy, trying to live on 250 grams a day. . . ."

The soldier was a bonny boy, rosy-cheeked, and not more than twenty, and contrasted strangely with the tired woman and the scurvy-stricken old man. He had been all winter on the Murmansk Front. "It's the only front that hasn't given way, you know," he said. "In the Ukraine our troops have been pushed back, and on the Central and Leningrad Fronts; but our right flank—that is, the Murmansk Front—has hardly budged since the war began. But," he added, "there's no doubt, the Germans and Finns are damn good at digging in. Their lines here are simply bristling with gun emplacements and machine-gun nests. They are hard to get at. Even Katyusha isn't always successful." "What's Katyusha?" I asked. I had vaguely heard something about Katyusha when I was in London, and wondered if it was the secret weapon to which reference had already been made in Moscow last year. The young soldier said: "It's a thing invented by Kostikov. It moves about like a lorry—quite simple. We captured one German stronghold at this front with the help of Katyusha. I can't tell you how it's made and how it works, because I've never been near one, but I've seen it in action. In that engagement Katyusha wiped out every bloody German for hundreds of yards around. It can fire twelve kilometres, and destroys everything on the way and can melt armour plate." "What, really?" I said. "It does," said the lad, "it's bloody wonderful. And the Germans don't know anything about it. How they would like to know! When it's hit, it explodes at once, and when it's in danger of being captured, the driver simply presses a button and the whole thing blows up into a thousand pieces. Working a Katyusha is a bit of a suicide job, of course. We had several Katyushas here, but we couldn't use them very well; the terrain is too mountainous. We did use it once, though. The Germans shouted from their height: 'You can't take our height any more than we can take yours.' So we showed them. Katyusha melted everything around, and destroyed all the Germans; only a few escaped. But, unfortunately, we couldn't use it against their next line, for the terrain was unsuitable. But it was used with great effect in the Battle of Moscow and at Rostov; it really made all the difference." I don't think the boy really knew very much about Katyusha, but here is clearly one of the great causes of confidence among soldiers. He added: "With Katyusha it'll be much easier to chase them out of the Soviet Union, I think." "May God help us," said the voice of an old woman from the next compartment; she must have been listening to the soldier's talk. And in a weepy voice she added: "Oh God, what is still in store for us this year?"

The rosy-cheeked soldier smiled. "Never mind, *babushka*, it'll turn out all right, I think."

Conversation piece

A young girl in the compartment on the other side was complaining about the terrible difficulties of getting a permit to go by train to Moscow. "And you can't risk travelling without one, though a lot of people do. But if they catch you once, they make you pay a fine of 300 roubles; and the second time you are caught they can put you in jail for anything up to three years. And then there's all the food problem while you travel. I simply can't do without hot food. It's very bad for you to do without hot food."

A soldier: "You haven't been on the train for twenty-four hours yet, and you're already complaining you can't live without hot food. Nonsense! You can do without it for a month—for two months. All you do is to eat tinned meat and drink hot water."

The girl: "But I haven't *got* any tinned meat."

"I was glad to see in the paper," said the old man, "that Cripps had declared there would be a Second Front soon. But then they say that Churchill won't commit himself. I suppose it's true that he very strongly disapproves of our Communist régime. It's a good thing he hates the Nazis even more."

I talked to the old man about the Battle of Britain; he hardly knew anything about it. "We didn't hear much about it in those days," he said.

A young blue-eyed soldier from Moscow, wearing a little cap, a khaki shirt and blue breeches with a red stripe, talked about the advance the Russians had made on the Murmansk Front. They pushed right on to the frontier, but unfortunately they were short of equipment and had to retreat to their old positions. "That's the worst of this part of the front. The trouble is that we didn't build a motor-road to Murmansk, and all the traffic has to depend on this railway." He said he was impressed by the organisation in the German Army; and the S.S. troops he had come across were certainly the most ferocious he had ever seen—they were real *svolochi*. . . .

Two compartments down a soldier was reading out in a loud voice, the *New Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*, and there were roars of laughter from the other soldiers. This present-day "sequel" to the real Schweik is published in *Ogonyok*, the popular weekly, and deals with Schweik's preposterous adventures in the German retreat from Moscow.

Murmansk in winter: A young woman with a sad face was talking about it. Her husband was a railwayman, and he was now evacuating her to somewhere near Vologda. During the winter, her three-months-old baby—her only one—had died of a chill after all the windows had been blown out by blast during one of the raids on Murmansk. And she knew no one in Murmansk who would put them up, so they stayed on in the cold house without windows; and then the baby died. A soldier said, reassuringly: "A young woman like you can have plenty more babies." "Yes," she said plaintively, "I know. But it's such a pity, such a pity about my first baby. It was such a sweet baby."

Soldiers seem to be relying a great deal on new inventions. There was the story about Katyusha; and later to-day, another soldier said that the Junkers dive-bomber was really invented by a Russian (he even gave the engineer's name, but I forget it); but he was a traitor and sold his secret to the Germans. "But now he has repented and has made up for his past crime by producing a devastating new plane for the Red Army. It has already produced remarkable results."

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June 1, later

Strangely enough, we did leave at 8 o'clock, just as the soldiers had said. The train is now passing through extraordinarily beautiful mountainous country, with high rocks and flooded rivers and waterfalls rushing down the rocks, some still with patches of snow, high up. And the barks of the little birch-trees are

white, too, and their leaves a delicate juicy pale green. Those teams of workers we had seen earlier in the day certainly did a good, and considering its size, a quick job. Over a large stretch they had laid stones along the railway-track where it was flooded, and had propped up everything with sandbags, and the train waded slowly through the water. Some time after we had crossed the flooded patch, we passed a large state farm, with a portrait of Kirov on its gate. Apart from that the country around—this is really Russian Lapland—seems quite uninhabited. . . . At sunset, about 11.30, we reached Lake Imandra, and have been following its east bank for some time now. With its rocky mountains on the other side, it is singularly like a Scottish loch, only much larger. What a popular tourist centre this wild and beautiful country could be—if it were more accessible. Perhaps after the war, people from Leningrad will fly up here for their fishin' and shootin'.

June 2

I woke up at 8.30, just as the train was steaming out of Kandalaksha station, or rather what was left of it. The town seemed a large and chaotic conglomeration of wooden structures, large and small, and, apart from the station, there was not much damage to be seen from the carriage window. Interesting that since the *force majeure* stop outside Murmansk, the train has been keeping time. If all goes as well as it has gone so far, we should be in Moscow by Saturday morning. A lot of new people had come on to the train at Kandalaksha. The scenery beyond Kandalaksha, quite close to the White Sea, became rather dull compared with the beauty of Lake Imandra at sunset last night. The train has now been travelling through miles and miles of marshes and fir-tree forests, with some birches and pines here and there. A captain of an A.A. battery, with a red wolf-like face, and about thirty, got into conversation with me. He said the Germans had caused death and untold misery to millions and millions of people. "We must see it never happens again. They are a nation of brutes, and the whole of Germany's youth is Hitlerite. We have destroyed a lot of S.S. troops, but there always seem to be plenty more people to join the S.S." Here, more than on the Murmansk–Kandalaksha stretch, there were continuous bomb craters along the line, and what few villages there were along the line had been bombed. Looking out at the wooded landscape, the captain said: "They have been bombing this line a lot—especially last year. They would also attack passenger trains—they had a knack of hitting the engine; sometimes two or three engines a day were knocked out in this manner. It was a devil of a job keeping the railway going." Then he laughed. "But how like the Germans this is! The Germans, who are interested in the mineral wealth of the Kola Peninsula, keep their troops up there round Murmansk; it also has a dry healthy climate. And the poor bloody Finns—the Germans make them hold the Karelian sector of the front—just over there, some fifty miles away. So the Finns have got to live among the marshes and the mosquitoes—bet you they don't like it!"

There were now quite a number of officers in the next compartment, and the wolf-faced captain asked me if I would join them for a game of dominoes. Apart from him, there was a middle-aged major, with a completely shaved head, a Jewish-looking captain, and a young lieutenant with delicate boyish features. The double-six, I learned, is called Hitler, because, as the major explained, "it's the most frightening of them all." The double-five is called Goebbels. "What a lousy train," said the major. "Ah, to think of the good old

days when the Polar Arrow—the Leningrad–Murmansk express—took you to Murmansk in thirty-six hours! Or the Arrow which travelled from Moscow to Leningrad in less than eight hours! Sleeping-cars and dining-cars, and everything!"

The boyish lieutenant talked about conditions on the Murmansk Front. He said the soldiers were well looked after, and they had lots of books. But the post worked very irregularly. In the past, it took seven days for a letter to reach the front from his home on the Volga; now it took a fortnight, and often more than that, and sometimes letters went astray altogether.

Later we had another game of dominoes. This time we were joined by a tall and handsome Georgian captain, with a large hooked nose, and also by a plump and cuddly blonde who had boarded the train at one of the tiny railway-stations. The station building, like nearly all on this line, had been bombed out of existence. She said that in that little town nearly all the inhabitants had taken to the woods, so ferocious were the bombings at one time; the only people still living at the railway-station were an old man and two little boys; a German plane came over, bombed the station and killed the old man, and then, not content with what he had done, the German pilot chased the two little boys who were running into the forest, and machine-gunned them to death. The Georgian was greatly impressed by the plump blonde girl, and proceeded to pay her florid Oriental compliments, and squeeze her hand, and when she announced about an hour later that she must get off at the next stop, he looked distressed, and kept saying sentimental good-byes to her, and went on waving to her till she disappeared behind the bombed-out station building. The girl was a health officer, and was going from railway-station to railway-station to see about the chlorination of drinking-water.

The Georgian, who was now a captain in an artillery regiment, had been an agricultural expert in peace time. Pointing at the large cartloads of hay standing at one station, he remarked that, further up, round Lake Imandra, there were some fertile valleys among the bleak mountains, and soon, he said, the Karelian Front was going to have its own local supply of hay. "Yes," he said, "there are a few pleasant spots round here—but not many. Ah, but you should see my country now!" he exclaimed. "The Caucasus in summer! It's wonderful, quite wonderful! Soon I'll be getting cases of oranges from home! The Caucasus!" His black eyes glittered at the mention of it. "What wealth, what natural luxury! Oranges! Tangerines! Grapes! No, even if the Germans got there, they wouldn't get very far. The Caucasian terrain is full of pitfalls for any invader. Unless you've studied the terrain for ten years, you'll never get anywhere. In the Caucasus a man who knows the country can successfully fight ten men who don't know it."

The Jewish-looking captain produced from his pocket an army paper, the organ of the Karelian Front, with "Death to the German Invaders" instead of "Workers of the World Unite" as its motto. The communiqué said that the Kharkov operation had fully justified itself, because it had wrecked the German plan for an offensive against Rostov. Ninety thousand Germans had been killed or taken prisoner during that operation; but it admitted—"as against the fantastic German claims"—the loss of 5,000 dead and 70,000 missing. In reading this out, the captain winced. "Still," he said, "that means six German infantry and three German motorised divisions knocked out. The Germans will now take a long time to re-form themselves in readiness for a new offensive in the south. What it all really means is that the German spring offensive has failed to come off." "Hm, yes," said the major with the shaved head,

a little reluctantly. "I don't much like the 70,000 missing." The Jewish-looking captain then said: "In a few weeks, or in a few months—I may be wrong, but I think so—we are going to start a big general offensive. The real difficulty is that in places like Leningrad, Rzhev, Taganrog, and a few others, the Germans have dug in much too well."

The Georgian and another of the officers had a large jar of condensed milk, which they were now mixing with fresh milk. This they had bought at one of the stations.

Further down the line we stopped at a small station, and after we had left again, one of the officers came into the compartment and said somebody at the station had told him an extraordinary piece of news he had heard on the wireless: that the R.A.F. had carried out a 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne; and that forty aircraft were missing. There was general excitement in the train about this, for the news was passed on immediately. One of the officers said he was sure that this was a prelude to the Second Front; Cologne was a very vital railway junction. Besides, there were other signs the Second Front was coming: weren't the Commando raids on St. Nazaire and Bruneval highly significant?

I spent a good part of the evening talking to a little girl of ten who came up and asked if I hadn't a little water to give her. She screwed up her funny little face when I gave her some of the water stinking of disinfectant the sergeants had given me at Murmansk, but greatly enjoyed a large piece of the Canadian milk chocolate I had brought from Iceland. Together with her mother, a woman with a young but lined face, showing signs of undernourishment, she had got on to the train at Soroka, on the White Sea. Having gobbled up her chocolate, she went to tell mother about it, and a few minutes later came back with a little tin box filled with cranberries. "Mother says: 'Thank you for the chocolate'; and says you must eat these." The old "pedagogue" remarked: "Cranberries are very good against scurvy. In this part of the world they are a recognised remedy. At this time of year they are picked from under the snow, which has acted as a natural refrigerator during the winter," he added with a scientific air. The little girl's name was Tamara, and she wanted to be entertained. Children in railway-trains who expect to be entertained can be a nuisance, but Tamara was good fun. She brought along her "Circus game," on exactly the same principle as snakes and ladders, and she had several games with me and one of the soldiers. Then she brought along a number of the books she had used at school: one was a Reader containing folk-tales, "A Boy's Letter to Comrade Marshal Voroshilov," and a "Talk with Comrade Stalin" —all profusely illustrated. Another was a book of stories called *The Tales of Grandmother Arina*. She had a pale little face, with a turned-up nose, but full of vitality. She wore a white beret and a white blouse, both of which were very neat, but over the blouse she wore an old and shabby jacket made of pale-blue velvet—it had clearly once been a smart garment belonging to her mother, but now it was all stained and shiny. She wore short grey socks, and her shoes were badly worn out. This child was an evacuee from the Leningrad area. Her father—or rather her stepfather—was a railwayman, and was still in Leningrad. They had lived at the Volkhov power plant, and father used to travel backwards and forwards between Volkhovstroy and Leningrad. First, after the heavy bombing had begun, she and her mother were evacuated to Petrozavodsk, but with the Finns approaching the capital of the Carelian Republic, they were sent further north still, to Soroka on the White Sea. Now mother

was taking her to grandmother's village near Penza, but was going herself back to Soroka, where she had her job. At Soroka, this back of beyond, Tamara had gone to school throughout the winter; there were thirty in the class, most of them children of the local railwaymen, but also some evacuees from the Leningrad and Petrozavodsk areas. "Were you well fed at school?" I asked. "Yes, not bad," she said. "To-day, for instance, I received my dinner from the school canteen before we left: buckwheat soup, sausage and *kasha*, and tea and sugar—not so bad, really." "And was it very cold in winter?" "No, there are plenty of trees around, and the older boys in school cut the wood, so it was quite warm inside the school and also in the hut where we lived." "And what did they teach you at school this winter?" "They taught us to read, and write, and do sums, and they taught us songs." In a shrill voice which resounded through the carriage, and delighted all the soldiers, she sang:

Hitler sam sebé ne rad,
Vzyat ne mózhet Leningrád
Vídit Nevski i sady,
I ni tudy i ni sudy, etc.

(Hitler is cursing his fate; he can't take Leningrad; He can see the Nevsky and the gardens, But he's stuck. The gangster also had a try at Moscow, but was soon kicked back; All his labours are in vain. He's stuck, he's stuck again.)

This highly optimistic, self-confident school ditty was written to a popular tune from the *Volga-Volga* film.

Apart from that Tamara didn't really know much: in fact, she knew very little for a child of ten. A soldier asked her who the war was against. "Germany and Finland," said Tamara. "And who else?" "Haven't heard of anybody else." "What about our Allies?" "Have we got Allies? Never heard of any." "Ever heard of England?" "No. But I've heard of Africa. Foreigners live there—perhaps Germans?" The soldier explained the real facts—though he also wasn't quite clear about the inhabitants of Africa, except that they were all black. "Who's the head of Finland, Tamara?" he said. "Hitler," said Tamara. "No," said the soldier, "it's Mannerheim." "Never heard of him," said Tamara, adding very rightly, "but isn't Hitler the real boss of Finland? I've heard of Hitler. Hitler will have to be killed. When he is dead, things will go much better." "What's your father's name?" "I am not quite sure. I call him Ivan Petrovitch. He isn't my real father. My real father was killed when I was a baby." "What, in the war?" "No, in an accident at the factory. It was the fault of another worker; but he didn't mean to do it." "Have you been in Leningrad?" "Yes, often," said Tamara. "Ivan Petrovitch, who is an engine-driver, often used to take me and mother to Leningrad, and we used to buy clothes and lots of other things in the big shops in the Nevsky." "What other cities in our Soviet Union have you heard of?" "I've heard of Moscow, from which the Germans were chased away, and I've heard of Rostov, where they were all killed by our Red Army, and I've heard of Kiev, which was the first town the Germans bombed."

The soldiers are well provided with food; the civilians badly, and the railwaymen—several of whom have been travelling in this carriage to-day—do not seem to be much better off than the civilians—at least when they are on a journey. Actually, where their regular rations are concerned, they don't seem to be too badly off. One of the railwaymen, who was on his way to his depot at

Archangel, or somewhere, told me that this was now the usual railwayman's ration:

Bread—800 gr. per day
Cereals—150 gr. per day
Meat—120 gr. per day
Fish—80 gr. per day
Fats—20 or 25 gr. per day
Vegetables (cabbage or potatoes)—300 or 500 gr. per day
Tobacco—20 gr. per day
Sugar—25 gr. per day
Cigarette paper—7 sheets per month
Matches—3 boxes per month
Soap—200 gr. per month
Tea—30 gr. per month

Only, there always seems to be some difficulty for railwaymen (not to mention civilians) to obtain their rations while on a railway journey. In this part of the world, apart from the army supply centres, everything is badly disorganised by bombing.

As we were approaching Kem, the old man said optimistically that we could go out to the buffet there. Actually there was no buffet, but only four taps of hot water, and the passengers all lined up in queues in front of them. But two of the taps were soon exhausted, and there was a bit of a scramble for the remaining two. However, everybody got his kettle or tin filled with hot water in the end, and the train was, for a while, well provided with tea to drink—or hot water, for tea is scarce. At Kem—though it is still in the midst of the wooded, marshy and sparsely inhabited country around the White Sea—I observed the first signs of the "railway-station black market"—a phenomenon that has become pretty well universal throughout the Soviet Union. A number of peasant women were there, and most of the trade was done between them and the soldiers—the soldiers bartering little pieces of soap or tiny packets of tobacco or boxes of matches for eggs and milk. The civilians on the train hadn't much of a look-in, because they hadn't much to offer the peasants. The militia appear to be fairly tolerant about these "barter markets" because they enable the peasants to obtain a bare minimum of essential goods with which the State is no longer able to supply them—it has more important things to worry about. As somebody said, the peasants are, however, unwilling to sell anything for money, first because there is little they can buy with money, and secondly, because they might be charged with speculation if they were found to be charging abnormally high prices—which, with their little regard for money, they would inevitably do.

One of the railwaymen told me long stories of how, throughout the winter, he had been among those in charge of 1,500 men whose job it was to repair the Murmansk line every time it was bombed. It had been a very difficult winter, but most of the team had stuck it, and had, despite the terrible cold and the great dangers involved, shown no signs of moral or physical collapse, except for a considerable number of cases of scurvy. He himself came from a village near Leningrad; the village had been bombed twice, and his father, mother and one of his sisters had been killed. He was a little man with dark sad eyes and a sallow complexion, probably the result of his hard winter's work in the underfed Arctic.

There was another railwayman in the carriage—he was a much more cheerful

soul, perhaps because his family history was so much more cheerful. In fact, he seemed a reckless optimist about his family. His only complaint was about his own food—in the railway canteen where he ate, the meals had been reduced to one a day, with only a glass of tea and a couple of biscuits for supper. He didn't like this part of the world. His home was in the Ukraine—in a village near Kharkov—or rather halfway between Kursk and Kharkov. "Isn't that pretty near the front?" I said. "Yes," he replied cheerfully, "but *they* won't get there; my family is near Belgorod—on the right side of the Donetz river—the Germans will never get there. Food conditions down there are still pretty good. You can buy there a kilo of butter for 150 roubles, and a pood of grain (40 lb.) for 300 roubles. At Kuibyshev, for instance, things are much worse. You pay there 1,000 roubles for a pood of grain; the place is so overcrowded with refugees that prices are bound to have gone sky high. And there's no adequate control—the Government really can't do anything. At least, it doesn't look like it. And up Murmansk way there's just nothing to be got, for either love or money. Only Canadian bread—and it isn't nourishing. Altogether, money has lost all value in most places," he added. "Look at Moscow. You pay 3,000 roubles for a pair of shoes, and 4,000 roubles for a suit—of the worst quality."

We were joined by another railwayman—another Ukrainian with a swarthy face and a heavy build. He had been an engine-driver for fifteen years. His home was in Dniepropetrovsk, and his wife and three children had now been evacuated to the Caucasus. They had to abandon their home in great haste, only taking away the wife's and children's winter clothes. "Now I earn 2,000 roubles a month," he said, "and what good is it to me? I hate this country here. There's nothing I can buy with my money. So I send nearly all of it home; what money I have I spend on tobacco; I have to pay the soldiers 200 roubles for a quarter-pound packet. Our soldiers are nice little profiteers, I can tell you, when they have a chance. And these peasant women at the railway-stations—they're damned profiteers, too. A chap like me gets 800 grams of bread, and at the last station one of the women was ready to take half my day's ration for a miserable boiled fish. And with fish round here as common as dirt! They can get tons of it out of the White Sea; and it just rots away because there's nowhere to transport it to. But no—she'll have her 400 grams of bread for one damned little fish."

The other Ukrainian produced a snapshot of his family in summer dresses in their garden near Belgorod. "It was taken last summer, just at the beginning of the war," he said.

The two Ukrainians then began to reminisce about their native country, and the good time they had had there before the war. "Now, when my wife made *borsch*," said the engine-driver, "it was really *borsch*, full of meat and beetroot, and thick with cream—that's the way one ought to make *borsch*. And what cherries we had, and what melons." "And what water-melons!" the other said. "And now," said the engine-driver, "to think that the Fritzes are enjoying themselves there, feeding their faces. There were some damned fools in another town who thought they'd be better off under the Fritzes, under the Fascist parasites. They'll know better now. And, I swear, we'll get at them when we take Dniepropetrovsk again. Because *I* don't think they'll have another offensive this year; they're pretty well worn out, don't you think?" I said I didn't know. "Anyway, I hope not," he said. "It would be too bad if, after being evacuated to Krasnodar, my family had to be moved still further. There isn't much further to go in the Caucasus."

Most of the day we have been following the brand-new line that links Kem with the Archangel–Vologda line, and runs through this wooded, marshy country along the south side of the White Sea. Parallel to it, across the marshes, runs a motor-road—rather a primitive motor-road, and most uncomfortable, because it is composed of tens of thousands of birch trunks hammered together lying flat on the soft soil. There's certainly no shortage of timber here! One of the soldiers remarked that this road had been built during the Finnish War, and that it had served a useful purpose in giving the northern part of the Finnish Front a new supply line by linking it with the Archangel–Vologda railway. The railway along which we were now travelling wasn't completed till later —after the end of the Finnish War. It was immensely useful, because without it, Murmansk would have been cut off since Petrozavodsk was in German and Finnish hands.

At Onega we crossed the Onega river, and the famous White Sea Canal built by convict labour in recent years. Then we stopped at a tiny station right on the White Sea. Around were little wooden huts and slender birch-trees, their white barks rosy in the sunset; and a gentle breeze was bringing from the White Sea, with its bright, raspberry-red sunset, a mixed, moist scent of the sea and marshes and wild flowers. There are clouds of tiny midges in the air—but no mosquitoes. "In about a fortnight the mosquitoes will make this part of the country unbearable," somebody said. "But the midges are quite harmless."

June 3

This morning we reached the Archangel–Vologda line, and have since been travelling through this beautiful wooded country of Northern Russia—these interminable woods which looked so sinister when I flew over them last October, but are now alive with all the loveliness of the early Russian summer. With the sun in the sky for nearly twenty-four hours, the summer comes with a rush. Only three weeks ago, somebody said, there was still plenty of snow about. And now there are millions of flowers everywhere—buttercups, and dandelions, violets, daisies, and bluebells, forget-me-nots, and white and pink clover, and wild sweet peas, and many others whose names I don't even know. It is pleasant, this leisurely travel through the Russian countryside, with all the windows open, and with the train stopping every half-hour or so, and people jumping off to pick bunches of flowers. Tamara and her mother have given me several bunches—in return, no doubt, for the bits of chocolate and other food Tamara has eaten; but her mother wouldn't take anything, hard as I pressed her, saying she had plenty of everything. To-day, however, she took a piece of cheese, but five minutes later presented me with two hard-boiled eggs; at a small station she had exchanged two ounces of tobacco for twelve eggs; and one of the railwaymen had exchanged three boxes of matches for a bottle of milk.

The old man, with an enormous amount of luggage, left us this morning. One of his last remarks was: "Funny to see the British sailors walking around Murmansk expecting to buy souvenirs in the shops! All they ever manage to buy are red star and red banner badges!" And again he talked with relish of how he would be home in a few hours, and how he would spend the summer fishing; and fish, he added, contained a lot of vitamins, and he would get rid of his scurvy. And he then told some long yarn of how he had shot bears in his young days, and how a bear nearly killed the doctor with whom he was —the doctor hadn't much experience in bear-hunting—and how he had saved the doctor from certain death at the very last moment.

Somebody brought in a copy of yesterday's Archangel paper, with full details of the bombing of Cologne; it's the main subject of conversation, and Britain is very popular for the moment.

Tamara is keeping the carriage amused with her songs and her infinite curiosity.

June 6

The train arrived in Moscow this afternoon, which was twenty-four hours later than was originally planned; it's because at Vologda our carriage failed to catch its connection. Vologda was a typical major railway-junction in wartime. Here were several hospital trains which had just come from the Leningrad Front. I looked into several of the carriages; they looked remarkably well-kept, with beautifully clean linen, and the nurses spick and span. The less severely wounded soldiers were looking out of the windows and talked to people. They said there had been some fairly heavy fighting on the Leningrad Front a week ago. No doubt another Russian attempt to break through the blockade. There seems much disappointment that this was not achieved before the Ladoga ice road melted.

There were several other trains at Vologda, trains filled with women and children, evacuees from Leningrad and other places—those from Leningrad still looking rather underfed, though much less so, somebody said, than they looked a couple of months ago. The carriages in which the evacuees travel are *teplushki*—goods trucks fitted with a few odd benches, and most of the people simply lying on sacks of straw on the floor. *Teplushki* are grim enough in winter, but not too bad now. Along the platforms of Vologda Station were hundreds of other women and children, waiting for their turn to be sent east; many of the women, who had been waiting here for several days, looked worn-out and distressed. I asked one of them if she had nowhere in Vologda—which was a large town—to go to with her children; she said there was a camp of sorts, but she was afraid of missing the train, so she had decided to wait at the station, no matter how long it took; she was able to get her and her children's bread rations at the station, and she had some dried fish to last them a few days longer. But I can imagine what these refugee "jams" must have been like last autumn, when there was a migration, from west to east, of literally millions of people; Pushkov had given me some idea of what Cheliabinsk had looked like in those days; and Vologda cannot have been much better.

Some curious characters joined the train at Vologda, where our carriage had to remain for a whole night and day. (I also was afraid of going into Vologda just in case the carriage suddenly departed; the information on when we would leave was highly conflicting.) One of the characters was an elderly *voentechnik* —a "military technician"—of the second rank with a slightly alcoholic nose and a drooping moustache. He was now being sent to the Military Academy, where he was going to study for the rank of major. He was frankly disgusted about it—disgusted that a man of his age—which was fifty—should be sent back to school, as he put it. He said he was, at the beginning of the war, working on a paper mill on Lake Ladoga; the mill had been taken over from the Finns in 1940. Before long he realised that the Germans and the Finns were advancing along the Viborg–Kexholm road, and that it was high time to clear out. "But the local Communist committee were pigheaded about it, and said they wouldn't hear of it; but the very next day they gave people half an hour in which to get out; and the paper mill was abandoned—left to the Finns completely intact.

It was a shame. So we got out on board a small steamer in the nick of time. We could already hear the shelling quite close by." His family were at that time at Petrozavodsk, in Karelia, and they were sent to Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, because the Germans and Finns were rapidly advancing on Petrozavodsk, on the other side of Lake Ladoga. "They left all their possessions to the army, who gave them a receipt; but I don't know what this receipt is going to be worth. And in any case, all the furniture and bedding have been lost."

His name was Bykov. He had served in the last German war as an instructor in Moscow; then he had fought in the Civil War, and now he had been on the Karelian Front. For some years before the war he was working as a technician attached to the N.K.V.D. who were running the convict settlements on the Baltic–White Sea Canal. "What kind of people did you have there?" "All sorts," he said, "mostly common criminals, but also some convicted under Article 58—that is, political prisoners. While they were with us, they were all right, and worked hard, and were well disciplined. They had a lot to do with foreign ships, but never did any of them try to escape as stowaways. But personally, I don't much believe in this type of education. A lot of them are supposed to have returned to civilian life as respectable citizens, fully 'corrected.' After they've served their term, they are set loose, and they disappear, and they mayn't have been 'corrected' at all, for all one knows."

"All this is disgusting," he remarked, as we watched the barter of bread and eggs and tobacco going on on the platform. "The Government is much too soft. What we ought to have is a Cheka, a Dzerzhinsky, who would stamp out all this speculation." Whereupon he said he would go into Vologda, where, he had been told, it was possible to get a bottle of vodka. And an hour later he came back, in very good form, and with the bottle half empty, and said he had got it for a loaf of black bread. The chief conductor, wearing the badge of an *udarnik* of the "First Stalin Mobilisation of Labour," who was apparently an old pal of Bykov's, brought another bottle of vodka, and some bread and sausage, and we all had a little feast together, and we drank to the Red Army and to the R.A.F. who had flattened out Cologne; and the chief conductor said he would keep away the flood of new passengers from our compartment. "It isn't right," he said, "that representatives of our Allies should travel in discomfort," and he volunteered to cable to Moscow so that they (who "they" were, wasn't quite clear) would be sure to send a car to meet me at the station. Of course, he didn't cable to anybody, and the compartment with its six shelves was more crowded than ever on this last Vologda–Moscow lap; but he had just wanted to be friendly and to show his importance.

There was another curious character in the carriage that day we were standing at Vologda. He was a little man, a junior lieutenant, aged about thirty-five. He was very tight, having finished a whole bottle of vodka he had got from somewhere in Vologda. "Our people are *growing*," he said sententiously, "yes, growing. Look at me! What am I? I am an officer. And now I am going to train at the Academy at Kostroma, and in a few months I am going to be a captain. And what was I before? Nothing. A waif. A *bezprisorny*. I am not joking. I was a *bezprisorny* for nearly two years. When I was eleven, my mother died, and my father deserted me, went off with some other woman. For nearly two years I had no home, and lived the life of a *bezprisorny*. You know what that is? But then I was picked up, and was trained to become a musician. I was sent to the Kiev Conservatoire, where I learned to play the trombone; I became the trombone soloist in the brass band, and then I joined the orchestra of the Kiev

Opera. But one day a disgraceful thing happened," he said apologetically. "That day I was tight; and I had to play the trombone solo in *Rigoletto*; it just didn't come off; and they had to explain to the public that I had had a heart attack! Things were never the same again after that. . . . But from the opera I went straight into the army, and I've been in the army for thirteen years now. I've been fighting on the Karelian Front. I am thirty-six now, and I believe in a great future—I'd believe in it even more if I didn't like *this* so much." He pointed at the empty bottle with a whipped-dog look in his eyes. Then, pulling himself together, he exclaimed: "Yes, and I believe in Socialism! And I hope England goes Socialist. Who wants *property*, I ask you? I was a *bezprisorny*—never had any property then, or since; and am I any the worse for it? Why should the bankers in England run the show? We chased them out in our country; is there anything wrong with the chasing out of bankers?" Thereupon he went to sleep, and when I looked for him a few hours later, he had disappeared—probably into another carriage. Or maybe he had been left behind at some station.

That last night in Vologda the carriage became very crowded; the four shelves of the compartment were put up, and there was a soldier or an officer on every one of them; the next morning—especially as somebody had closed the windows because of the rain—the air was thick with all the odours, pleasant and unpleasant, of a crowded Russian third-class railway-carriage—soldiers' boots and feet, and cabbage fumes and clouds of *makhorka*. As I woke up, I could watch a giant of a soldier, looking like Chaliapin, eating four hard-boiled eggs, one after another. Whence such an appetite? Then I realised he was one of the Leningrad soldiers who had joined the train the night before.

There were three or four naval officers of the Baltic Fleet who had joined the train on the previous night, and one of them had given me my first real insight into the tragedy of Leningrad. He was tall and lanky, with a pale, clearly undernourished face, and as he talked, several people crowded into the compartment, listening intently to what he was saying. Leningrad had for months been haunting the imagination of these people. It was the now familiar grim story of the famine of those winter months when the blockade of Leningrad was complete; when the bread ration was reduced to 125 grams a day, and when thousands died daily of hunger and exhaustion. "There's no doubt about it," he said, "last year the Germans had complete air control in the Leningrad area. The way they bombed Luga and other towns was really terrible; for we had next to nothing to fight them with in the air. They also brought up to Leningrad a stupendous number of tanks; it was really touch and go. . . . But I think one may say now that Leningrad is out of danger. It is a fortress now—and a powerful fortress—which it was not last year. To-day food is no longer the main problem; the food conditions were more than difficult in December, January, and the first half of February; even we in the army and navy were incomparably worse fed than the people at other fronts. Now food reaches Leningrad across Lake Ladoga; I myself came across Lake Ladoga in a motor-launch. Of course, we were attacked from the air; as so many of the transports are, but the greater proportion of ships and barges reaches Leningrad safely. There are also much fewer people in Leningrad now; hundreds of thousands have died, and many more have been evacuated, and the evacuation of children and other civilians is continuing. The real problem now is to stop that shelling. The Germans are still at Ligovo, two miles outside Leningrad. The air-raids have been a failure; in two big air-raids in April the

Germans lost half their planes, and they haven't tried bombing us again. Everything in the way of air defence which was lacking in the autumn is working very well now. But the shelling is another matter. The stillness here in Vologda, with its peaceful provincial calm, seems quite uncanny to us."

"It's a pathetic place, though," the officer went on. "Now after the most frightful winter of famine any great city has ever experienced, there are flowers growing in the public gardens—they have been planted to cheer the people up. The tramcars are running now; they started running again in April; the theatres—one or two of them—are also open; they were closed for only two months; and the cinemas also opened in April."

He talked of much else—of how he had seen several children killed by a shell; of the deserted Neva quays; and again of the famine in December and January, when the whole city seemed dead and frozen, with only an occasional human figure staggering slowly through the snowdrifts. And he said that terrible things used to happen; you would see coffins, or simply dead bodies, being taken off on little hand-drawn sleighs to the graveyards; or dumped like logs by the hundred in the Champ de Mars; and he talked of the familiar practice of keeping dead bodies in the house till the end of the month and using their ration cards, and said that he had even heard of cases of cannibalism, when pieces of flesh were cut off dead bodies in the street and surreptitiously taken home.

That morning we had crossed the Volga, and from now on, stations became more numerous. At each there was a little "black market." One of the soldiers made a good bargain with a filthy sandy-looking piece of grey laundry soap, for which he received ten eggs. At 6 that night the train steamed into the Yaroslav Station in Moscow. It was a grey, cloudy evening. There were porters at the station, but no conveyance, and it required three porters to carry all the stuff to the station exit. As I looked out into the street, with its trolley-buses and army lorries darting across the huge Komsomol Square, with its three or four different railway-stations, Moscow seemed much the same as before. But one realised that something had changed in Moscow, too, when it came to paying the porters. They informed me that, although the official charge was three roubles per piece of luggage, I must remember that bread now cost 150 roubles a kilo; so finally the porters cost me 250 roubles, or five pounds. There were no taxis or intourist cars anywhere, and all attempts to phone for a car failed. After about half an hour's waiting a youngster in a tattered jacket and a cap offered to produce a car if I gave him some cigarettes. It was a rather dilapidated ZIS belonging to some official organisation, and the driver volunteered to drive me to the Metropole for another 150 roubles. It made one thing very clear: money was of very little value, and Moscow was rather or even very hungry.

The Metropole was, however, a little oasis of relative prosperity, and I had a tepid bath, but still a bath—the first since London. Later, in the large dark dingy dining-room on the first floor, I found a number of old friends and acquaintances, and some newcomers who hadn't been in Moscow when I left in October '41—nine or ten correspondents in all; a few others were still at Kuibyshev, and there was no certainty that we would not be sent back to Kuibyshev at any moment.

The press department was occupying a suite of rooms on the first floor of the Metropole, and had not yet moved back into the Foreign Office. Everybody seemed to be waiting to see what the Germans would do next. I

saw John Lawrence, our press attaché, and was able to compare notes with him; his convoy, a month before, hadn't been nearly so bad as mine, but he and his two assistants, George Reavey and Barry Cornwall, had been torpedoed by a U-boat off Bear Island, and later fished out. I think it was then that I first heard the story of how they hastened to inform the captain of the ship that saved them: "We are diplomats," to which the captain replied: "Perhaps you *were* diplomats, but now you're bloody survivors!"

It was June 6, 1942. For me, it was the beginning of that tense Moscow summer which was to lead to the great Stalingrad climax. . . .

BOOK II

THE BLACK SUMMER

CHAPTER I

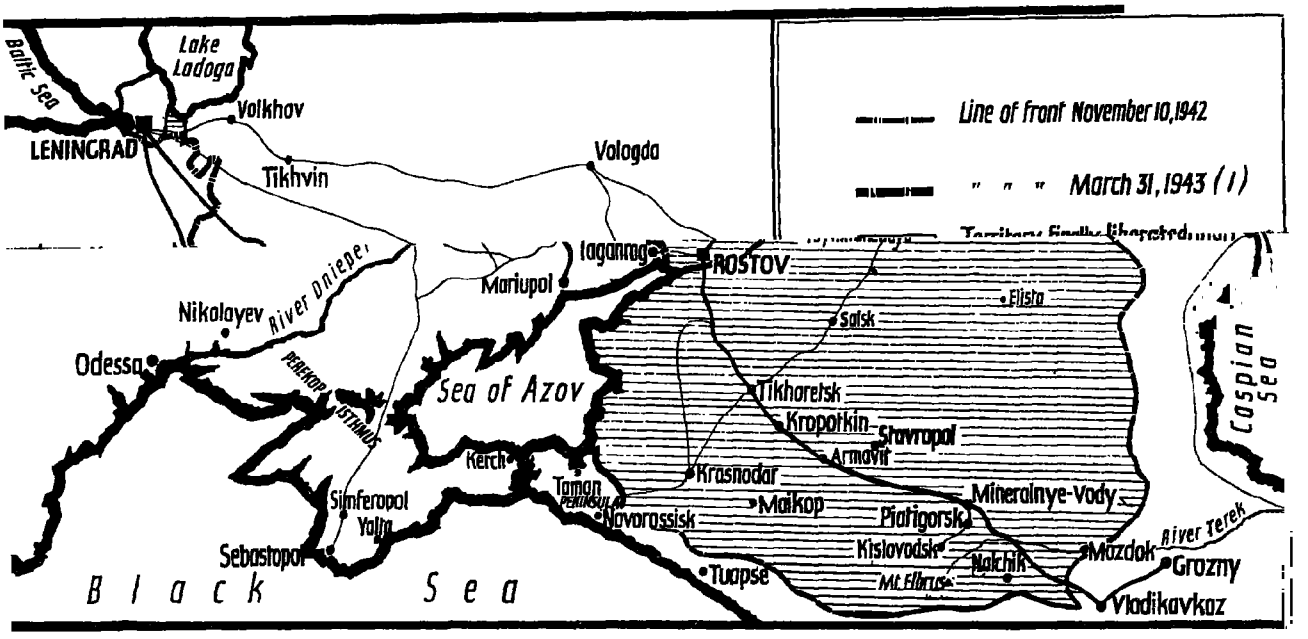
SOME PECULIARITIES OF 1942

IN June 1942 Moscow was still very near the front line. The Germans were firmly entrenched at Gzhatsk, little more than fifty miles away. Nobody could be quite sure that the Germans might not any day attempt another frontal attack on Moscow. The last bombs had been dropped on Moscow in March, and although the anti-aircraft defences were said to be much better even than in the summer of 1941, there was no certainty that air-raids would not begin again.

Moscow had a lean and hungry look. It had lived through a hard and, to many people, terrible winter. It was nothing compared with what Leningrad had suffered, but many individual stories were grim, none the less—stories of undernourishment, of unheated houses, with temperatures just above or even below zero, with waterpipes burst, and lavatories out of action; and in these houses one slept smothered—if one had them—under three overcoats and two blankets. In June, in the open market bread still sold at 150 roubles a kilo. There was almost no cabbage, or other vegetables, and although the bread ration varied from 400 to 800 grams per day, there was little else to eat, and it is hard to thrive on bread alone. Vegetables had not been planted on nearly the same scale as during the following year, and in the early summer months there were no vegetables or potatoes in Moscow. What reserves there had been in the Moscow province had been looted by the Germans, or sent to the front. Sugar, fats, milk and tobacco were all very scarce, and although I never saw this myself I heard of a peculiar form of profiteering which had developed in Moscow during the spring of 1942, when the owner of a cigarette would charge any willing passers-by two roubles for a puff—and there were plenty of buyers.

People in the streets of Moscow looked haggard and pale, and scurvy was fairly common, since the issue of food, other than bread, was very irregular, particularly in the case of Class 2 (employees) and Class 3 (dependants) ration cards. I remember an elderly woman stopping me one day outside the Metropole and offering to exchange an old Polish gold coin for food; she said she was suffering from scurvy. Such attempts at private deals in the street were fairly usual.

Consumer goods were almost unobtainable, except at fantastic prices.



) This approximately was also the line of June, 1942, except for the "Kursk Salient," and all the shaded areas North of Orel, which were then in German hands. On the other hand, the Taman Peninsula, Sebastopol, and small areas in the Donbasin were German "1942" conquests which they still retained by March, 1943.

In the big Mostorg department store strange odds and ends were being sold, such as barometers and curling-tongs, but nothing useful. In the shopping streets, the Kuznetsky Mosst, the Petrovka, and Gorki Street, the shop windows were mostly sandbagged, and where they were not they often displayed cruel cardboard hams, cheeses, and sausages covered with dust.

There were many other deplorable shortages. In dental clinics—with the exception of a few privileged ones—teeth were pulled without an anaesthetic. The drug-stores were about as empty as all other shops.

A large part of the Moscow province had been devastated; numerous villages had been burned down, and in towns like Volokolamsk, Klin and Kalinin life was slowly rising from the wreckage and the rubble.

Moscow itself was still very empty, with nearly half its population still away. Only three or four theatres were functioning in June, among them the Filiale of the Bolshoi Theatre (opera and ballet), and tickets were easy to obtain. There was a good deal of bomb damage here and there. The opera house had been hit by a ton bomb and was now under repair. The beautiful classical building of the University, with its pale-blue stucco façade, was half-wrecked, apparently by a land-mine, whose blast had also severely damaged the outside of the Manège, the old riding-school, now the Kremlin garage, on the other side of the street.

The windows of the University were now all boarded up. People also told how in October 1941 a ton bomb had landed just outside the National Hotel but had failed to explode.

The panic exodus of October 16 had remained a grim and, to many, a shameful memory. Hundreds of thousands who had left then, had not yet returned. Many Government offices were still in the east—at Kazan, Ulianovsk, Saratov, Kuibyshev; many factories had also evacuated much of their equipment and many of their workers, and what had remained in Moscow was working on skeleton staffs, if at all. Even in June the streets had a singularly empty look, and it had been much worse still during the winter. On the other hand, those who had stayed on in Moscow during the two "danger months," between the middle of October and the second week in December, now recalled with some pride how they had stuck it through. Those were heroic weeks, and there was something great and inspiring in the very air of Moscow during that time; all the timid had gone; but the Kremlin had not budged. Stalin had remained in Moscow and with him, all his advisers, and assistants, and the whole Politburo. The Commissariat of Defence had not budged, nor had the Central Party organs, nor had the Moscow Town Council, with Pronin at its head. Through the dark cold autumn nights, and right into the early winter, the guns were booming, not far away. For two months the German onslaught against Moscow had continued; and then the Russian counter-

offensive began, and the Germans were hurled back. But on October 16 it was touch-and-go, and everybody felt it; no one, perhaps not even Stalin, could say with absolute certainty that day that Moscow would not be lost. Yet he stayed—perhaps because he knew; or perhaps because the odds against Moscow's falling were sufficient to warrant the risk. And on the 17th it was announced to the people of Moscow who had stayed behind that the Government had not left, and that Stalin was with them. This had a great moral effect on the people of Moscow, and on the troops fighting their deadly battle on the outskirts of the capital. Many Moscow people later said that, after that announcement of the 17th, they no longer doubted that Moscow would be saved.

An equally deep impression was made on people's minds when at dawn on November 7 Stalin reviewed the troops in the Red Square; it meant that Moscow remained the Capital of the Soviet Union, and that on that Twenty-fourth Anniversary of the Revolution, though the guns could still be heard, the Red Army would march through the Red Square, as usual; the Red Army, and not the German Army, as the German radio had boasted so many times in the last weeks. And the words Stalin spoke were words of good cheer and perfect confidence. Clearly, he knew that Moscow would not fall now. More than that: he foreshadowed the Russian counter-offensive, and promised that the Germans would be driven out of the Soviet Union before long. Perhaps it was necessary, in the circumstances, to be over-optimistic.

Many explanations were later given why exactly Moscow had been saved on October 16 when there seemed to be nothing between Mozhaisk and Moscow; some said that General Rokossovsky had thrown in two divisions in the nick of time; others attributed the German failure to break through to those unfortunate tens of thousands of Moscow *opolchentsy*—or home-guard—who were thrown, with little more than a lot of old rifles, into the gaps. Here they were nearly all slaughtered by the well-armed German infantry and the panzers, but they had held the Germans up sufficiently long to give the Russian tanks time to intervene.

The workers of Moscow had been sent out to the outskirts to dig trenches, as their brethren at Leningrad had done. They also had been bombed and machine-gunned, and many had been killed. Perhaps, among these Moscow workers, many of whom had fewer roots, and a less powerful revolutionary *lutte à outrance* tradition, there had not been the same passion and frenzy as among the workers of Leningrad; Moscow was more provincial, less civic-minded; a large part of the population did not belong to Moscow, and lacked some of the local patriotism of the Leningrad workers; but those who went out to dig trenches—especially the men and women workers of the larger factories—showed something of the same spirit.

Only, the fact that so many had left, that so many had fled, that, according to reports, Gorki was already expecting the Germans to reach the Volga city by November 15—all this had a discouraging effect. Even those who were digging trenches were not sure that "they" would not pass, and had resolved to follow the Red Army to the east, if it came to the worst. On the 17th, many of the larger factories closed down; it was also known to many workers that all preparations had been made for blowing them up. And it was known that various important people—managers and engineers—had been swept off their feet in the panic that had seized Moscow on the 16th. They had beat it, shamefully. It was the same even in some Government departments; for three weeks nobody knew, for instance, what had happened to a certain important person on the Moscow radio; he had just vanished. Later, these cases were considered; in some cases sharp reprisals were taken; but others were forgiven.

Later also, there was some bickering between those who had stayed behind and were charging those who had left with cowardice; and those who had left and were charging those who had stayed behind with defeatism and a readiness, and perhaps even eagerness, to stay under the victorious Germans. No doubt, there were a few such people in Moscow, just as there were in Leningrad; but there were many more who stayed in Moscow simply because they decided to hope for the best, and had nowhere very precise to go. Unless an organisation to which they were attached took charge of them, the prospect of finding food and shelter in some unspecified place in the east, at the height of winter at that, was highly precarious.

As so often happens, the spirit of the soldiers was better than that of the civilians. The part played by the civilians in the defence of Moscow was much smaller than that played by the civilians in the defence of Leningrad. The Battle of Moscow was first and foremost a military victory.

And what a victory! One of the hardest victories ever won. There was a moment when-a few German tanks broke through to Khimki less than ten miles from the Kremlin; but they were surrounded and destroyed by Russian soldiers.

For two months the battle round Moscow ebbed and flowed. Villages only a few miles from Moscow were being looted, and were blazing; and everywhere the Germans were erecting gallows; the army fought with arms that were less good than the arms of the Germans, and with fewer tanks, and often patriotism was not enough, and herosim was needed, and a spirit of suicidal self-sacrifice. Men with grenades tied round their waists threw themselves under German tanks. In a village near Volokolamsk the Komsomol girl, Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, set fire to a German stable, but was caught, tortured and publicly hanged. She became a national heroine,

almost a national saint. Her story was told in all the newspapers and in a million pamphlets; and later, in several poems; she became a necessary, an inspiring symbol. There were others like her, but Zoya Kosmodemianskaya was the name people were made to remember.

But then, in the first week of December, winter came, and the Germans were not in Moscow yet; a hard, grim winter—one of the fiercest in human memory. The Russians struck back; the hour had come for the great offensive that had been prepared in silence behind Moscow during those weeks of anguish. Stalin, who had refused the defenders of Moscow any reinforcements, was using these troops in the counter-offensive.

The German retreat began—a dark, disorderly retreat through the snow, which, on the face of it, seemed pleasingly like the retreat of the *Grande Armée*. Thousands of tanks and guns and vehicles were abandoned on the roads from Moscow; Klin, Kalinin, Mozhaisk, Kaluga were liberated; Tula, almost completely encircled, was relieved; General Konev advanced nearly 400 kilometres, almost to the outskirts of Velikie Luki. The Germans ran, as they had never run in this war before, as they did not imagine they would ever run as long as Hitler's thousand-year Reich existed. The Winter Fritz of popular imagination—who so often closely resembled reality—came into being; a creature with an icicle dripping from the end of his red nose, with watery eyes, frozen hands and feet, and wrapped in stolen peasant blankets, and women's jumpers and feather boas.

But by February it was only too clear that the German rout had not been complete; that Hitler's armies had not disintegrated in the Russian winter as the *Grande Armée* had disintegrated. They had lost Mozhaisk, but they had clung on to Gzhatsk, Viazma and Rzhev; they still controlled a powerful springboard for future operations against Moscow, or at least a springboard from which they could always threaten Moscow as long as they held it, and which required the concentration of large Russian forces to protect Moscow. And Smolensk, which the Russian Command had hoped to recapture, remained far in the enemy rear.

There was a note of disappointment in Stalin's Red Army Day Order on February 23, 1942. It was less sanguine in tone than his speech of November 7.

Even so, the Battle of Moscow had made a deep impression on the Russian mind. The Red Army could beat the Germans, and beat them in a big way. It was this memory of the Battle of Moscow which, in the darkest moments of 1942, helped to maintain Russian morale.

And yet, there were many timid souls who, in those days, wondered whether the Battle of Moscow was not an effort the like of which could perhaps never be repeated again, and whether there was not some truth in the theory put forward by German propaganda that it was something

of a lucky fluke; something that would not have happened but for the exceptionally severe and early winter.

But fortunately, the majority of Russian souls were not timid souls.

They had their doubts nevertheless, and their moments of bitter anxiety.

Propaganda made the most of the Moscow victory; *chastushki* were written about it by the hundred—comic doggerel verses about the Winter Fritz; a highly amusing "sequel" was published in serial form in *Ogonyok*, the popular illustrated weekly, to the *Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*; and in this "sequel" we found the wily Schweik among the motley crew of drunken cowardly Huns, wrapped in female clothes, running away from Moscow as fast as their freezing legs would carry them. The Winter Fritz was the hero of the pantomime in the Moscow circus during that summer of 1942. Thousands of paintings, mostly bad, were produced by Russian artists to celebrate the Moscow victories—great canvases where flaming German tanks are lighting up the snow around and the remnants of burned-out Moscow villages. And the satirical Tass posters found in the German retreat from Moscow an inexhaustible subject of hate propaganda and ridicule propaganda.

And yet, there was in the country a sense of tragedy, a feeling of the pity of it all: there was a deep sense of loss and injury that had been suffered by Russia. Through a superhuman effort, thanks to Stalin and Zhukov, and Konev and Rokossovsky and their men, Moscow had been saved; but there were the burned towns and the bombed towns of Belorussia and the Ukraine; there were bitter memories of the summer and autumn retreat through Belorussia, and the Ukraine, and through the Smolensk province, right to the gates of Moscow; thousands and thousands had been killed, or were missing; the Moscow home-guard had been slaughtered; millions of people were living—how were they living?—under enemy occupation; some of the fairest parts of Russia had gone; and there were concrete symbols in everybody's mind—the Nine who were hanged at Volokolamsk; and Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, and many other heroes and martyrs.

And what else hadn't they done—all this Hitler soldiery swelled with arrogance and pride and a sense of impunity and superior strength? They had defiled Tolstoy's home at Yasnaya Polyana; they had blown up the churches of Novgorod, and were trying to destroy Leningrad; they had looted Tchaikovsky's house at Klin; they had burned down Istra, in their retreat from Moscow—completely obliterated that pleasant little town in whose place there now stood nothing but a forest of chimney stacks; and they had blown up the New Jerusalem Monastery close by. They had robbed and raped, and stolen and looted, and shot and tortured and hanged. The Russians' sense of human and national dignity had been outraged. One could laugh at the Winter Fritz; but Germany was not

really comic; Germany was terrible and bestial and formidable still. And the Russian became acutely aware during that winter of a highly emotional love for his country, with its defiled, insulted countryside.

Why should the German march through Russian villages—what did they mean to him, except a place where some more looting could be done? Russia—what was Russia? To some, Russia meant the Soviet State; to others it was symbolised by simpler and more concrete things: Simonov wrote a lyric in which his love of Russia was symbolised by his love for the three little white birch-trees in his garden: they were Russia more tangibly than the State.

In the poetry written in that winter of 1941–2 one finds a mystical strain, a *credo quia absurdum* strain; what is Simonov's "Wait for me" but a *credo quia absurdum, credo quia impossibile*? And it was precisely Simonov who struck the chord to which nearly every heart in Russia responded. His poetry was not great poetry, but he caught in his verses the emotional mood of Russia. "Wait for me" are the words of a soldier to his wife: "Wait for me, wait very hard; never give up hope; even if they all say I am dead, do not believe it, but wait for me." That is the theme of Simonov's famous lyric. Soldiers copied it into their notebooks. Thousands of women carried it with them, and read it over at night, like a prayer. There was a demand for miracles; and had not Moscow been something of a miracle? And victory—which seemed so far, so infinitely far away, and often so doubtful and improbable—Victory also was saying: "Wait for me, and I will come."

That June in Moscow, almost every woman I met knew her "Wait for me"; many also knew that tragic Simonov poem describing the retreat through the Smolensk province, with its bitter pity for the villages and the peasant women who stayed behind, and with that same touch of Russian mysticism:

> "And it seemed that outside every Russian village
> Our grandfathers had risen from the dead,
> And were shielding us with their outstretched arms,
> And praying for us, their godless grandchildren. . . ."

Stalin's speech of November 7 voiced this feeling of national grievance and injured pride; it was when he spoke of "Russia, the nation of Pushkin and Tolstoy, the nation of Lenin and Plekhanov, of Glinka and Tchaikovsky."

Russia, the old word which, for many years before the war, had dropped out of official, and in the towns, even out of common usage, made its re-entry into the vocabulary of the Press.

In that early summer of 1942 two sets of feelings dominated Russian minds: the feeling of resentment, of injured national pride, the feeling that

Russia—one might almost say Holy Russia—had been soiled by the touch of the unclean Hun; on the other hand there was a feeling, not of pessimism (because the Battle of Moscow was a safeguard against that) but of foreboding at the thought of the trials and hardships and loss of life and territory still in store. Loss of life, certainly; for even if the Germans advanced no further into Russian territory, the immense task of driving them out would be hard and costly. At the same time, the Germans were clearly all set for new advances.

The map was full of ominous possibilities.

Nor was the agricultural and industrial situation easy. A great job had been done in evacuating industries to the east, from the occupied and threatened areas; but the man-in-the-street knew what a terrible effort this had involved; he knew in what fearful conditions these industries had been started again, often at the height of winter, in places where nothing had been prepared in advance to receive either machines or people; and how much could these war factories produce, after only a short time in their new abode, to meet the insatiable appetite of the war machine that was still fighting, almost alone on land, against Hitler's Europe? Stuff was coming in through the North from England and America; but was it not a drop in the bucket, compared with what the Red Army needed? And how immense the difficulties were of bringing the stuff along the precarious bomber- and U-boat-infested sea lanes of the Arctic, many perhaps guessed. The safer, southern route, through Iran, was not yet properly functioning, if at all.

Food also was short. The army was receiving full priority for everything; and the army was well fed; but the civilian population, especially in the towns, suffered grave hardships; the Ukraine had been lost, and who could tell whether the Don and the Kuban would not go too, before the summer was out?

It was, therefore, with understandable passion that every Russian, even regardless of what the Press and the radio said (and they did not fail to make the most of it), seized upon the Allied "promise" of a Second Front in Europe in 1942.

The worse the news became as the summer proceeded, the more urgent and insistent was the outcry for the Second Front. There were times when, to many Russians, it seemed to have become a matter of life and death. Among ordinary people at the time there was no inclination to take the "scientific" Marxist view—so often expounded later—that victory was "scientifically inevitable." Actually the Second Front resentment did not become acute till about the middle of July. In June, there was, on the contrary, a great display of optimism among Russians, especially among soldiers and officials; and confidence, without being very deep, was there. The Russians, it is true, had lost Kerch in May, but this

was largely attributed to accidental causes; for the rest, nothing very serious had happened yet. Timoshenko's "preventive" offensive against Kharkov, though it failed in its objective, and was accompanied by the grave admission that 70,000 men were missing, had nevertheless—so the official story went—served its purpose in forestalling a German drive against Rostov.

The big drama of June was Sebastopol; and while the curtain had not fallen on the last act of this drama, there was reason to suppose that the Germans would not start a full-scale offensive elsewhere. Meantime, the Germans were doing little more than "nibbling"; though, in the second half of June already, this nibbling developed into more serious biting.

Even so, while this biting was already in progress east of Kharkov, there came two events which immensely reassured the Russian people: first, the announcement of the Anglo-Soviet Twenty-Year Alliance, together with the publication of the "Second Front" Declaration. Secondly, on June 22, the Sovinformbureau published its "First Anniversary of the War" statement; and this was couched in highly optimistic terms. Had there been some mistake or miscalculation; or was it decided in high quarters that it was essential to assure the public that 1942 could in no circumstances become a repetition of 1941? Or had German strength really been underestimated on that occasion? In any case, the wave of almost whole-hearted optimism around the middle of June was not to last much longer than a few days, and was scarcely typical of 1942.

Two feelings characterised the literature and propaganda of that summer of 1942; one was the same love of Russia as had characterised the writing about the time of the Battle of Moscow; only a love that had even greater warmth and even greater *tendresse*; the other was Hate. Hate, no longer mingled with ridicule, or scarcely so, went *crescendo* during those summer months till it reached a paroxysm of frenzy during the blackest days of August. "Kill the German" became Russia's Ten Commandments all in one. Sholokhov's story, *The School of Hate*, published in several papers on June 23, the very day after the seemingly complacent Anniversary Statement, and before the German offensive had assumed immense proportions, had a profound effect on every Russian. It was poignant, and truthful; it set the tone of much of the hate propaganda during the weeks that followed. Ehrenburg was an immense factor in the great battle for Russian morale during the summer of 1942; every soldier in the army read Ehrenburg; partisans in the German rear readily swopped any spare tommy-gun they had for a bundle of Ehrenburg clippings.

Ehrenburg showed a genius, during those tragic weeks, for putting into biting, inspiring prose the burning hatred Russia felt for the Germans; this man, with his cosmopolitan background and his French culture, and

who had lived a large part of his life abroad, had grasped by sentiment and intuition what ordinary Russian people really felt. Ideologically, he was unorthodox, but, in the circumstances, it was felt to be tactically correct to give him a free hand. Read later, in book form, his articles no longer make the same impression; but one must imagine oneself in the position of a Russian in the summer of 1942 who was watching on the map one town going after another, one province going after another; one must put oneself in the position of a Russian soldier, retreating to Stalingrad and Nalchik, and saying to himself: how much further are we going to retreat; how much further *can* we retreat; what will the people at home think of this disgraceful show? We are letting them down. We are letting ourselves down. We are admitting to ourselves that the Germans are invincible. And then, the Ehrenburg article helped such a man to pull himself together, and to say: "No," and "No further retreat." It wasn't Ehrenburg only; but Ehrenburg certainly holds the central place in the battle for Red Army and civilian morale in the summer of 1942; but especially for Red Army morale, for his daily articles were printed chiefly in *Red Star*, the army newspaper, and reprinted in hundreds of Front sheets.

Two other writers, apart from Ehrenburg and Sholokhov—on this isolated but important occasion—played a first-class role (there were dozens of others who played minor roles) in the battle for morale. One was Simonov, with his play *Russian People*, that was performed during the summer and autumn of 1942 in nearly every theatre in the Soviet Union; it was written with much *tendresse* for the brave people fighting against terrible odds in a small German-occupied town. And the feeling of hate for the German, already very strong in *Russian People*, grows in intensity in Simonov's poetry written during the summer, and culminating in his famous "Kill Him!" This was written at a time when *The Times* wrote in an alarming editorial, that never had the Allies been in such grave danger since the fall of France as now. . . . The other writer was Alexei Surkov, the "soldier's poet," as distinct from Simonov, more the "officer's poet."

Those were, indeed, dark hours, not only in Russia, but for the Allies generally; though in Russia people were so concerned with their own troubles that they scarcely gave a thought to the menacing outlook in Egypt where the Afrika Corps had reached El Alamein. But it was apparent that for the third time Hitler had victory clearly in sight; the world situation was nearly as black as on the eve of the Battle of Britain, as on the day the Germans almost broke through to Moscow. . . . Still, Russia had not lost heart.

Other important factors enter into what might be called the "psychology of 1942." The *lutte à outrance* not only at the front, but also in the fac-

tories; the fuller "recognition" of the Church, which was part of the National Unity drive; the tightening of army discipline combined with a glorification of the uniform. But although there were many "Holy Russia" motifs both in propaganda and in popular sentiment, it is important not to over-emphasise them (as was done abroad at the time); *for the real backbone of the country was not constructed out of Simonov's three little birch-trees; the real backbone was still the Soviet system. But the German advance had largely reduced the U.S.S.R. to the limits of Russia proper; hence this emphasis on "Russia" as distinct from the "Soviet Union."*

The circumstances were exceptional and warranted a certain number of unconventional propaganda lines.

In the closer analysis of 1942 which follows, the reader will see that in reality the Soviet idea was never quite eclipsed, and that the combination of "Soviet" and "Russia" merely presented, in the danger year of 1942, a different pattern from earlier and later times.

An interesting feature of 1942 was, for example, the considerable popular literature devoted to the builders and centralisers of the Russian State in the past—notably to Ivan III (V. Snegirev's *Ivan III and His Time*) and to Ivan the Terrible (S. Bakhrushin's and R. Wipper's books). These were much less a glorification of "Holy Russia" than panegyrics of the Centralised State, with a rather clear implication that these Muscovite Tsars had already "got the idea." These books and pamphlets were, in their roundabout way, panegyrics of the Soviet State and of its leading nation, the Russians, and Ivan IV was particularly warmly praised for his resistance to "Teutonic Pressure."

The wisecrack by an irreverent Russian friend who snorted: "Ivan the Terrible! What would you say if, in England, they tried to make a great national hero of Richard III?" made one laugh, but was really irrelevant.

On May 24, 1945, a fortnight after final victory, at a great reception given at the Kremlin in honour of the victorious generals—Stalin made retrospectively this refreshingly candid comment on the dark days of 1941–2. He admitted that the Government had made "quite a few mistakes," but if the Soviet Union survived the terrible ordeal of those two years, during a great part of which Russia proper (i.e. the R.S.F.S.R.) bore the brunt of the struggle, and was the only major part of the Soviet Union not, in the main, under German occupation—it was because of the great qualities of the Russian people—their confidence, their patience, their endurance. They were confident in their country, and confident in their government —with a whole-heartedness that was not perhaps equalled by the peoples of any of the other fifteen Soviet Republics—with the possible exception of Belorussia. They were the backbone of all-out resistance; they also

were the backbone of the Soviet régime, and without their particular Russian qualities there would have been no victory.

"Comrades," said Stalin, "I should like to propose a toast to our Soviet people, and in the first place, to the Russian people. I drink in the first place to the Russian people, because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations forming the Soviet Union. I propose this toast to the Russian people because it has won in this war universal recognition as the leading force of the Soviet Union among all the peoples of our country. I propose this toast to the Russian people not only because it is the leading people, but also because it has a clear mind, a staunch character and great patience. Our Government made quite a few errors, we had moments in 1941–2 when the situation was desperate, when our army was retreating, abandoning our own villages and towns in the Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia, the Leningrad province, the Baltic Republics, the Karelian–Finnish Republic—abandoning them because there was no other way. A different people could have said to the Government: 'You have failed to justify our expectations—get out! We shall instal another government which will make peace with Germany and secure for us quiet lives.' The Russian people, however, did not take this path, because it trusted the correctness of the policy of its Government, and it made sacrifices to ensure the rout of Germany. And this confidence of the Russian people in the Soviet Government proved to be that decisive force which ensured the historical victory over the enemy of humanity—Fascism."

This is one of the best and most revealing comments made on the dark days of 1941–2. It helps to explain the "Holy Russia" motifs of the propaganda of those days. It was not in opposition to the Soviet idea, as many outside observers seemed to think at the time; "Holy Russia" was the backbone of the all-out resistance, and also the force that identified itself most completely with the Soviet régime—with the great centralised Russian and Soviet State. Among Russians this *State* was supported and accepted, even by those who did not care for many of its Soviet aspects. Among the *Russian* people, the instinct of historical tradition and continuity was strongest of all.

CHAPTER II

JUNE—THE BRITISH ALLIANCE—SEBASTOPOL

IN the diary I kept during those first weeks in Moscow, I find the following entries of some interest.

June 7

John Lawrence has come here for a few days from Kuibyshev, where he is now making preparations for starting, in a couple of months, the new British weekly (in Russian), the *Britansky Soyuznik*. The Russians had agreed to the publication of 10,000 copies—instead of the 50,000 published by *Soviet War News*, but in view of the paper difficulties our people are not insisting on full reciprocity. Lawrence is full of determination, goodwill, and patience—which is a very important quality in Moscow. As it is, the publication of an English paper, not controlled by the Russians (though there are to be one or two Russians on the staff in an "advisory" capacity), is something quite unprecedented in the annals of the Soviet Union, and a very good sign of improved Anglo-Soviet relations.

To-day there was nothing in the papers: the communiqué merely said: "No change"; but there was an odd message, suggesting great war weariness in Germany, about an alleged riot of soldiers' wives in Breslau, who were clamouring for the demobilisation of their husbands.

The publication of extracts from highly pessimistic diaries written by German soldiers expressing war weariness and fear of heavy casualties was to be a regular feature of the Russian Press at least till about the middle of July. The Diary went on:

To-day's anti-Fascist meeting at the Kolonny Zal (the old Nobility Club where Lenin had lain in state, and where the famous Trials had been held, and which was now decorated with large splashes of red, and with portraits of Lenin and Stalin) was notable in two respects. There were several All-Slav speakers at it—particularly Jugo-Slavs and Czechs, besides a variety of Partisans, including a priest from Belorussia; secondly, the keynote of the meeting was the phrase in Stalin's recent May-day order about "driving the German Fascist invaders out of the Soviet Union in 1942." In the message sent by the meeting to Stalin, it said that the youth of the Soviet Union had sworn to drive the last German invader from Soviet soil in 1942, and a similar message from the Partisan representatives added: "The oath of a Partisan is sacred."

A woman aircraft worker addressed herself to the women aircraft workers of England and America, asking them to work hard, and saying that at her aircraft plant they had completed the May programme by May 25. Greetings were sent to the aircraft workers and the "valiant British airmen." Several references were made, in the course of the meeting, to the British bombings of Essen and Cologne.

During the week that followed I made two trips, both of which were

illuminating. One was to Klin, the other to a German prisoners' camp near Gorki.

Klin, on the main line to Leningrad, had for twenty-two days, beginning November 23, been under German occupation. It was from here that the German attack was launched which brought the Germans nearer to Moscow than any other. Some of their advance tanks had broken, one morning, right through to Khimki, only ten miles from the centre of Moscow, and there they were destroyed. And, as we travelled along that Leningrad high-road, on that sunny June day—and the country around was beautiful, with the meadows dotted with thousands of flowers and the lilac-trees in full bloom (it was a very late summer), we could see clear signs of battle barely fifteen or twenty miles outside Moscow: bombed, burned and shelled houses, a church with half its dome blown away by a shell; bomb-craters by the side of the road. . . . The wrecked church was in a small town called Loshki, twenty-eight miles from Moscow, and this place had been regularly occupied by the Germans, in the dark, cold snowy days of November '41. . . . We drove through the fairly large town of Solnechnogorsk and other places which had figured in the winter communiqués. Solnechnogorsk itself had suffered little damage, and there were many people in the main street. But the fields around were barely cultivated, and there were much fewer vegetable plots than there were going to be in the following year when "digging for victory" was to become, to the whole Moscow province, not only a patriotic duty, but an urgent necessity.

On the whole, however, the destruction in this area to the north of Moscow was less than in other parts.

At Istra, 3 houses had survived out of 1,000, and instead of 16,000 people there were now only 300, mostly living in dug-outs. At Klin, 1,048 houses had been destroyed out of 12,000, or one-fifth of the total "floor space." This, according to later German standards of destruction, could be called almost generous. Out of the total population of 30,000 only 1,500 had remained under the Germans; all the others had scattered, many of the men going into partisan units in the neighbouring woods. Now 15,000 people were back at Klin. But while most of the town had remained standing, the Germans had done a tremendous amount of looting, and the *kolkhozes* of the neighbourhood had suffered particularly, with the Germans driving away 3,000 cows out of the 4,500 belonging to the individual peasants. Before the Germans came, 3,000 cows, belonging to the farms themselves, had been evacuated, and were now being brought back. The looting done by the Germans in the villages around Klin had naturally affected the food situation in Moscow, for this was one of the regular sources of Moscow's food supply.

The Germans were here from November 23 to December 15; on that day their routed army of "winter fritzes" was ignominiously chased out. But before that happened, they had had time to send enormous quantities of loot to Germany, and also burn part of the town, and damage the power-plant and the water supply.

Later, we saw some peasant-women who, together with their children, had hidden in dug-outs and cellars just outside the town. They told stories of how for eight days, in the depth of winter, they had had to live in the freezing cellars, how they had nothing to eat but a few crusts of bread—and snow; and how the Germans had threatened to shoot anyone who came out of the cellars. The Germans took all the people's warm clothes away. The people who had stayed on at Klin had seen part of the Germans' lamentable "Napoleonic"

exodus; but the peasant women were not in a mood for laughing at the Germans clad in women's clothes; because these happened to be *their* clothes. . . . There had been many hangings and shootings in the district. In the village of Voblovo, a woman who had been a member of the local Soviet had been hanged, and her body was left hanging in the middle of the village for five days. In the village of Strigovo—so Mr. Ipatov, the Mayor of Klin, said—a baby was shot by the Germans for annoying them with its crying. But the local people retaliated. In one village, as the Germans were retreating, a boy of twelve threw a hand-grenade into a car with two German officers inside. Now life was returning to something like normal; we saw a children's home, and the tiny tots were clean and tidy and looked well fed; and the three-year-olds sang *Katyusha*. But the glass factory where they were now blowing surgical glass bottles (for blood transfusion, etc.)—blowing them literally with their mouths, as all the machinery had been smashed, presented a sorry sight. Forty-two bombs had hit the building, and it was a shambles. The work was being carried on among the wreckage. Most of the workers were women; they had a hard bitter look on their faces; they swore at the mention of the Germans, and one elderly woman said she would strangle any German with her own hands; others complained of the terrible food shortage, saying that they were receiving only 300 grams of bread a day, and little else, and some were afraid the Germans would come back. They looked unhealthy, overworked and underfed. But they went on grimly with their work, conscious of doing work of national importance; knowing that few things were as much needed as these bottles for storing blood. I was told that there was another factory at Klin which before the war had specialised in making Christmas-tree ornaments. This had been burned down, and the Germans had sent large consignments of the Christmas-tree ornaments home, for their *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*. Later, we also visited Tchaikovsky's pleasant country house at Klin, with its large garden. Now it was all tidied up, though very few exhibits were there now; some had been evacuated, and some had been destroyed, torn up or stolen by the Germans. The desecration of the Tchaikovsky house, like that of Yasnaya Polyana, had received enormous publicity in Russian propaganda both at home and abroad. Among the few exhibits—apart from the photographs showing in what condition the Germans had left the place (using the floor as a latrine had been one of their favourite pastimes)—was Tchaikovsky's *D.Mus.* diploma conferred on him by King's College, Cambridge.

What a contrast that large village near Gorki, on the Oka River, made with Klin! This place was still prosperous, though nearly all its male population had gone. From here the war still seemed very far away. That was one interesting aspect of that trip; the other was the German prisoners' camp. What was the Germans' attitude on the eve of the 1942 summer offensive? I had seen German prisoners in September 1941, just before the offensive against Moscow, and I was to see many more throughout the year 1943, including several shortly before the final German collapse at Stalingrad. But these fellows in the summer of 1942 were the most arrogant gang I had ever seen—fully as arrogant, and as full of confidence of "finishing off the Russians this year" as were those three German airmen who had bombed us out of our beds at Viazma in September 1941, and who were shot down that same day.

JUNE—THE BRITISH ALLIANCE—SEBASTOPOL

Here is what I wrote at the time.

Gorki, June 14, 1942.

I am writing this from Gorki, the old Nizhni Novgorod where the Oka and Volga meet. It is to-day one of the Soviet Union's busiest towns with a population of nearly three-quarters of a million; and since the war the population has been swelled by many more thousands of evacuees and refugees. Overlooking the wide Oka River with its steep banks and beautiful bridge, and with dozens of cargo boats and passenger steamers going down the Volga to Kuibyshev, Saratov and Astrakhan on the far-away Caspian, there still stands the garish brick exhibition building famous for the old Nizhni Novgorod fairs; but the real centre of Gorki's life is now elsewhere—in the armaments works surrounding the old city. The tramcars, even more crowded than in Moscow, rattle along the streets of the town—a typical Soviet mixture of shabby little stucco houses, wooden cottages, mostly derelict churches and clear-lined big Soviet buildings, including a large new hotel in the station square.

Yesterday I spent the day at a German war prisoners' camp some distance from Gorki. I don't like the Germans any better since my numerous talks with them. But the journey was extremely pleasant—along the high, steep leafy banks of the Oka River, almost as beautiful as anything on the Rhine. There is no monotony in the Russian landscape here. Vast stretches of oat and rye fields with windmills on the horizon—and every patch of ground has been thoroughly sown, mostly by women—are succeeded by leafy woods of birches, maples, beeches, lime and oak trees, and rich in wild strawberries and mushrooms, which village kids are waiting to gather shortly. Then there are rich pasture lands with hundreds of cows, sheep and goats. The grass and trees are intensely green after a few days of heavy rain, and the roads are muddy and difficult. However, I got there eventually in a rattly little old bus which was built in Gorki some years ago.

The prison camp is in an old monastery with a large whitewashed onion-domed church, with several buildings where the monks used to live, and a stone wall above the moat—a wall to which has been added a barbed-wire fence. Spruce N.K.V.D. officers with red and blue caps and lapels are in charge. Outside the monastery is a large village with pretty, prosperous-looking cottages on either side of the wide, muddy road rising up the hill. The cottages have chiselled wooden window ornaments and lace curtains. Calves and kids were wandering about the road. Outside the monastery wall a large church bell is still hanging on top of a large tripod with a Russian conical roof. Children were queueing up with pails at the well of clear water. Inside a crust of snow and ice still remained. My hostess was sitting on a bench outside her cottage. My room had lace curtains, a straw mattress covered with clean linen, and smelt of timber, and was decorated with an ikon and a picture of Stalin. Anna Petrovna was a middle-aged woman with a once beautiful face. She welcomed me in a broad, sing-song Nizhni-Novgorod accent. "So you and your friends are English," she said. "Glad to see you. I've heard a lot about our English allies. I just read in the paper about a new agreement with you, but I've never seen anyone English before. I've seen plenty of Poles—they lived in this camp before—and now we've got these Germans. Lazy swine. They come here crawling with lice and have to be washed for hours before they're clean, but after a while, after living here as if it were Paradise, they get all pink and fat and start throwing their weight about, the darlings." She spat. "They're getting better food than our own civilians! Not that we are short of food *here*. There is plenty of bread and milk and butter and cream and honey, and soon there

will be berries and mushrooms and the cucumbers are coming up nicely." I asked if many men from the village had gone to the front. "Oh! we've got *plenty* of men left," she said ironically, pointing to a group of bearded old peasants and a couple of twelve-year-olds. "Just look at them!"

After a meal at the prison governor's cottage—a meal which more than justified my hostess's remarks about no lack of butter and honey and vegetables in this part of the country—we were conducted into the monastery to see the "German scum."

Already in the yard I saw a few of Hitler's soldiers in greenish *feldgrau* scrubbing doorsteps and carrying buckets. But just then a meeting was in progress. A big room was crowded with about five hundred German soldiers. Only very few N.C.O.'s and no officers were present. This meeting was part of the Russian re-education process. The speakers were all Germans who dwelt upon the hopelessness of Hitler's venture and the necessity to realise it and to act before the fearful day of reckoning came. The day of doom, one of the speakers said, was already foreshadowed by the super-bombings of Cologne and Essen. The German people must renounce the deceiver Hitler if after the war they were not to be ashamed to call themselves Germans. Hitler had promised to finish the war in 1939, 1940, 1941, "and now in 1942"—they rubbed it in. The speakers were young soldiers, presumably Communists, and also an elderly grey-haired civilian German who had fought in the last war, and drew parallels between the Kaiser's repeated promises and temporarily dazzling successes and Hitler's. "*Richtig*," came from a few voices here and there—but the majority of the soldiers watched with blank, non-committal faces, most of them with a few days' or weeks' growth of beard. "Difficult people, no doubt," the prison governor later said. "But remember that these are mostly newcomers. It takes time to sow the seeds of doubt in their thick skulls." The governor added that when they first arrive they are terrified and ask the Russian guards: "Aren't we going to be killed and tortured, and our ears cut off as our officers told us?" They remain suspicious for a long time and some are also scared of their own Nazis. The library, largely composed of anti-Hitler literature, the great majority still boycotted, but nearly all went to the film shows, hoping to obtain some news in that way.

In the hospital I saw a wounded corporal of the air force who had been captured in the Kharkov battle. He had been shifted about rapidly to various parts of the front where the fighting was heaviest. No sooner had he finished fighting at Kerch than he was sent to Kharkov, which suggests great mobility of the Luftwaffe, and also somewhat limited resources. He was a handsome, fair-haired Nazi with cold, glassy eyes. He told with a smirk of how he had bombed Warsaw, London and Manchester. The thousand-plane raid on Cologne he dismissed as nonsense, saying that a thousand planes over one city was impossible; the Germans had tried it out over London, but had never managed more than six hundred. He scoffed at the suggestion that the British had evolved a technique of gigantic, concentrated and systematic mass raids. If the Germans had failed, no one could succeed, he said.

Later I spent a couple of hours in the officers' quarters. The officers were all Nazi thugs, though on the surface they were extremely friendly and talkative at the sight of British correspondents. Throughout there was a sneaking suggestion that "you British, of course, are not like these sub-human Poles, Russians and Rumanians; we British and Germans can always understand each other, don't you know." For one thing, as one pear-headed lieutenant of the Luftwaffe said: "It would be very nice if you could have our names pub-

lished in the British Press, or better still broadcast so that people at home might know where we are." I said I thought listening to the B.B.C. was forbidden in Germany, whereupon Pear-head laughed and said: "Everybody likes forbidden fruit."

"Rudolf Hess" illusions, that is, the belief that we do not mean business against Hitler, are still prevalent. Pear-head visualised the progress of the war as follows: "*Of course we'll defeat the Russians this year*, and as for Britain and America," he laughed. "*Man wird sich schon verständigen!*" I said that the British people would never come to any agreement with Hitler. He shrugged his shoulders. "*Ach, das sagt man*," he said. These people's lack of comprehension of England is truly monumental. I spoke of the Second Front whose coming had been announced that day. Pear-head and other airmen and officers were sceptical. "You've got to land in France or wherever it is you propose to land," Pear-head said with cold irony. "And the coastline is mighty well fortified." "Still," I said, "once we get there, the French and Belgians and Dutch will join in." Pear-head said: "Oh, not the French. They only want peace at any price, no war of any kind. I've lived on the Channel for a long time. Quite polite people, the French, and we got excellent food. True, there were a few hostile demonstrations, but only by coal-miners." "How did you deal with such demonstrations?" "We didn't deal with them. That was a job for the Gestapo."

These officers had a fairly comfortable room, but nevertheless, they declared it was scandalous that they should be in the same building and camp as other ranks. Pear-head said that British war prisoners in Germany were much better treated than the Russian prisoners. Of course," he said with a sly wink, "that's policy. However," he added, "I saw Russian prisoners at work on farms in Germany, and we feed them."

There were five Rumanians in the camp, one officer and four privates, all captured near Kharkov, swarthy peasants with kindly bewildered faces. Even in the camp the Germans treated them like mud. These soldiers had been called up this spring. They had been forced into the army. "Rumania is completely helpless and has to carry out Hitler's orders," one of them said. He spoke pitifully of his family in Moldavia, and said: "All this has nothing to do with us. We want peace and we want to go home and would not fight for Transylvania or Bessarabia or anything." He was a dark little peasant and had tears in his eyes as he spoke; a burly, gentle-faced officer in a padded coat—he looked like a peasant himself—interpreted in broken French. Among the prisoners was also an elderly Pole. How had he come into this? He was a poor wretch of about fifty with a wrinkled face, who had been enlisted into the German Army for driving a horse-cart. The Pole spoke of his old wife at Czenstochowa, Poland's sacred city, desecrated by the Germans, and where he said five thousand Poles had been shot. "I keep together with the Rumanians. We've nothing more to do with those swine." Despite his age he had applied to the Polish authorities for permission to join Sikorski's Army in Russia, and said: "Oh, God, if only it could happen!"

I had noticed that in the industrial part of Gorki there was some fairly heavy bomb-damage. Then, as again in the summer of 1943, the Luftwaffe had attacked Gorki on a number of occasions, causing serious but not irreparable damage. In 1943 the tank assembly plant, which received a direct hit, was fully working again three weeks later. That, by

the way, is the worst of bombing; demolition from the ground, as practised by the Germans in the Ukraine in 1943 and 1944, causes much more permanent damage than ordinary bombing.

FROM THE DIARY

June 17

There is great uncertainty among older and non-political people in Moscow, who seldom read the papers and are content to "work things out for themselves." They are called *obyvateli* in Russian, that is, people who merely "exist." One such person is a sly, rather slimy-looking old man working at the hotel. He sweeps the corridor, and has a hungry disgruntled look—which doesn't surprise me. He treated me to a long monologue of gloom this morning. "It's always these damned Germans," he said. "I already fought them in the last war. Always the Germans. Of course, they are not pushing forward now as they did last year; but still, they took Kerch, and I suppose they'll take Sebastopol. But last year, they just went ahead wherever they wanted, and our chaps merely ran. It was just a non-stop drive from Lithuania to Smolensk." "Yes," I said, "and then at Smolensk they were stopped." "That's true enough," he replied; "but you should have seen Moscow on the 16th of October. In a few days the Germans covered 300 kilometres, all the way from Smolensk to Kolomna; our resistance had broken down completely. If they had pressed on for another hour, there mightn't have been any Moscow left! And here, in Moscow, on the 16th, it was bloody chaos. The top people started running away like mad. One of our managers here broke open all the locks, and crammed food into his car, and beat it. All over the place people were chucking up their jobs and bolting." He then talked about his present troubles. "We hand our ration cards to the canteen. And all we get is a dinner—one hot meal. In the evening—nothing. Just a glass of tea without sugar, or anything to eat. It may be all right for an old man like me to get 400 grams of bread a day; but the younger fellows, who could do with a kilo of bread, naturally feel hungry all the time. And, apart from bread, we still haven't received our May rations. . . ."

Saw at the Filiale of the Bolshoi a rather indifferent performance of *Onegin*, with a podgy little man playing the hero. In the buffet they were selling glasses of plain water for three kopeks—and nothing else.

Outside that strange Moscow anomaly, the Gorki Street Cocktail Bar, there was a long queue of nondescript people this afternoon. They get nothing to eat there, but they go there to get sozzled and to forget. . . .

Palgunov, the head of the Press Department, established with his small staff of only two censors and a number of women secretaries in a suite on the second floor of the Metropole, to-day remarked, apropos of the heavy German attacks in the Kharkov sector: "They are feeling their way along the entire front. They are looking for weak spots."

The food situation is one of the Government's chief concerns. Big editorial in *Pravda* of June 11 concerning an increase in the sugar-beet area in Kazakhstan, and the "accrued importance, in present circumstances," of the fish canneries on the Pacific.

JUNE—THE BRITISH ALLIANCE—SEBASTOPOL

During those days things were beginning to develop at the front. The great final attack on Sebastopol had begun. Every day the communiqué spoke of Sebastopol. Thus, on June 11, it said: "There were more enemy attacks in the Sebastopol area. The enemy is not ceasing his air-raids on the city, but is meeting with strong opposition." Already on the 12th the communiqué spoke of "defensive battles with advancing enemy tanks and infantry in the Kharkov sector," on the 13th, in this sector 62 German tanks were claimed, and on the 15th, 180 tanks. After that the German offensive, which was only on a narrow front, died down for a short time. It was during that short interval—and there was a reassuring impression during those days of a major German failure to start their offensive going—that the Supreme Soviet met to ratify the Anglo-Soviet Alliance.

THE ALLIANCE WITH BRITAIN

After his visits to the United States and Britain, Molotov left London for Moscow on June 13.

Before proceeding any further, I cannot resist the temptation of recording two curious little anecdotes I was to hear later about Molotov's visit to London. One relates to his week-end at Chequers where "it was all a bit like a Marx Brothers film." Here Molotov, at dinner, remarked on the extraordinary patriotic fervour the Russian people had displayed in this war—a fervour the depth of which had even surprised the Government. "The Old Adam coming out, what?" Churchill growled.

Molotov took some trouble to explain that it was not simply Russian patriotism, but also Soviet patriotism—which wasn't quite the same thing.

The other anecdote is about Molotov being asked, after his first meeting with Churchill, how the Prime Minister, whom he had never met before, had impressed him. Molotov thought for a few seconds, and then said: "A very strong man—very strong." And then, as an afterthought: "But he'll never make a Communist."

Already two days before Molotov's return, the Russian Press had announced the full text of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, signed in London on May 26, together with the famous "Second Front" communiqué. On the 13th, the Press published the text of the agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States, signed on June 11 by Cordell Hull and Litvinov on the principles of mutual aid to be applied in the war against aggression. The papers that day were, by Russian standards, spectacular. Over the front page of *Pravda* were splashed photographs showing Eden and Molotov signing the Alliance, with a pussy-face Maisky on one side, and a cigar-chewing Churchill on the other; here also were the text of the new American-Soviet Agreement; the text of the warm bread-and-butter cables from Molotov to Churchill, Eden, Roosevelt and Cordell

Hull; of the cable from Roosevelt to Stalin thanking him for having sent Molotov to Washington—"his visit to us was most satisfactory"—and of Stalin's reply agreeing that it was, indeed, highly satisfactory, and thanking Roosevelt for the cordial reception that had been given in the United States to the Foreign Commissar and his companions. In the cables to Churchill and Roosevelt, Molotov specifically referred to the "Second Front in 1942." Page 2 of all the papers prominently announced the decision reached between the U.S.S.R. and Canada to exchange diplomatic representatives.

Such a spectacular display was enough to make any Soviet citizen extremely ally-conscious. The *Pravda* editorial, on the same front page, said, among other things:

" . . . The wide response, from all over the Soviet Union, to these agreements shows that the Soviet people unanimously and unreservedly approve the wise policy of the Soviet Government. At countless meetings throughout the country the workers, *kolkhozniks*, Soviet intellectuals, soldiers, officers, and political workers of the Red Army, are expressing the greatest conviction that the strengthening of these bonds, this comradeship-in-arms between the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States, will hasten final victory over the enemy. . . . This year of 1942 must become the year of the final and complete rout of the Hitlerite hordes. Our Soviet people have reacted with great satisfaction to the news of the complete understanding concerning the urgent tasks for the creation of a Second Front in Europe in 1942."

During the days that followed the Soviet Press printed columns and columns of world reactions to the inter-allied agreements, with special emphasis again on the Second Front in 1942. Nothing was neglected. In addition to lengthy accounts of Press reactions in Britain and America, long quotations were given from papers in South Africa, Mexico, Turkey, etc. And then on the 18th, the foreign correspondents in Moscow were suddenly invited to attend the extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., which was being held that night at the Kremlin.

It was a beautiful summer evening, with a new crescent moon in the sky as we passed through the ancient and meticulously guarded gates of the Kremlin, and walked up the Kremlin slopes, to the building of the Supreme Soviet. Before we reached it our special passes were examined at least six or seven times. Diplomats (some of whom had specially come up from Kuibyshev) and members of the Government were driving up in their cars. I noticed, outside the main entrance of the palace, a car flying a little Japanese flag. . . . The former Throne Room of the main Kremlin Palace, completely rebuilt and refitted since the Revolution, was floodlit and almost dazzlingly white. Above the rostrum Lenin stood in his *niche*; the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet sat to the left of the rostrum, and the members of the Government on the right. On the platform behind the speaker sat members of the Politburo and other leading deputies. On the floor of the hall, there was room for about 1,200 deputies of the two Houses sitting jointly—the Chamber of the Union and the Chamber of Nationalities. The latter, as distinct from the Chamber of the

Union, is not represented in proportion to the population. Each of the sixteen Soviet Republics has the same number of deputies—so that Tadjikistan or Armenia has as many as the R.S.F.S.R. That is why, that night, there was a strikingly large number of colourful, oriental dresses in the front half of the floor. Many of the women wore bright scarves and *sari*-like dresses, and some of the men wore embroidered coloured caps, and many of the faces were Mongol, and others almost Indian-like. They had come to Moscow from the heart of Asia, from beyond the Caspian, from the foot of the High Pamirs. Among the members of both Houses there were soldiers in uniform, some wearing war decorations, but many seats were empty, partly perhaps owing to the difficulty of reaching Moscow at short notice from distant parts of the Soviet Union, but chiefly because many deputies were in the army, and several had already been killed.

We took our seats in the Press gallery near the back of the hall, with its excellent earphone system reminiscent of the League Assembly at Geneva. In a sidebox on the right were numerous diplomats, including the British Ambassador.

When we arrived, the hall was already crowded. Then, suddenly the whole building shook with applause as the Supreme Defence Council, with Stalin inconspicuously among them, took their seats on the platform. For several minutes the delegates stood up and cheered, and shouted out Stalin's name. Stalin and the others on the platform also rose, and Stalin himself clapped his hands—in acknowledgment of the ovation he was receiving. Finally, everybody sat down. Stalin was wearing a well-cut pale-khaki summer tunic—plain, without any decorations. His hair was much greyer, and his build much smaller than I had imagined them to be. I had never seen Stalin before. There was a pleasant casualness about his manner, as, during the course of the meeting, he talked informally to his neighbours—one of them was white-bearded and black-coated Kalinin—or turned round to exchange remarks with people behind him, or as he stood up with the rest and clapped somewhat lazily, when, time after time, his name was being acclaimed by the Assembly.

Andreyev opened the meeting, and the first speaker was Molotov.

The purpose of the meeting was to ratify the alliance with Britain. As I wrote at the time:

What immense importance is attached to the Anglo-Soviet Alliance by the Soviet Government and the Soviet people, can be seen from what happened to-night. For the first time since the beginning of the war has the Supreme Soviet met in plenary session, and the meeting was called specially to ratify the Alliance. The meeting has a great symbolic and moral significance, for technically such a solemn ratification in plenary session was not necessary. Other international agreements have been signed without the whole Supreme Soviet being called in to ratify them. But the Government is anxious to impress upon the people that this is something quite out of the ordinary, and truly epoch-making. This day of June 18, 1942 officially opens, as it were, an entirely new chapter in the Soviet Union's foreign policy.

And yet—what seemed to matter most to all the delegates, and what was foremost in everybody's mind, was not so much Russia's foreign policy as a whole, or even the future of Anglo-Soviet or Anglo-American relations, as that little communiqué about the "Second Front in 1942." And, on the

whole, one could not help noticing a distinctly reserved attitude among both speakers and delegates—an attitude of "so-far-so-good"; an attitude of "let's-judge-by-results." It is true that, cold fish though he is, Molotov spoke with genuine warmth of the reception he had been given by Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt; but, as for the Second Front, he said no more than that he *hoped*. Zhdanov of Leningrad welcomed the agreements particularly *because* of the Second Front communiqué, and others also tended to suggest that the value of the alliance could, in practice, be measured by the extent to which the Second Front communiqué would come into life. And, naturally, everybody was struck by the fact that Stalin himself did not speak; which perhaps meant that he also was not yet absolutely sure of the full and immediate effectiveness of the new twenty-year alliance with Britain. . . .

The speeches, which went on for three and a half hours, all followed much the same pattern. Molotov spoke for nearly an hour, and then the representatives of Moscow, Leningrad, and most of the federal republics followed.

After enumerating the principal episodes in the process of *rapprochement* with Britain and America—the Cripps–Molotov agreement of July 12, 1941, which he described as "the turning-point in Anglo-Soviet relations," and as the beginning of the friendship and the comradeship-in-arms between our two peoples," then the Hopkins, Beaverbrook–Harriman, and Eden visits, Molotov outlined the main points of the agreement now signed in London: the first part which was, in the main, a repetition of the old Cripps agreement, now embodied in a regular treaty; the second part, concerning post-war co-operation, and which was "in agreement with the main theses of the Atlantic Charter to which the Soviet Union, in the past, subscribed." "There can be no doubt," said Molotov, "that such an agreement is of great importance to the whole future development of Europe." He then quoted Stalin in confirmation of his further remark that the Soviet Union had no territorial ambitions anywhere, and referred to the Treaty, which said that Britain and the Soviet Union would strive to "render impossible any future aggression by Germany, or any other State linked with her in the acts of aggression in Europe." (The Russians were then still very careful not to say anything that might conceivably offend the Japanese.)

The Treaty, said Molotov, was for twenty years, and was subject to renewal, and he added: "After what I have said, I cannot but associate myself with the words Mr. Eden spoke at the time of the signing of the Treaty: 'Never in the history of our two countries has our association been so close. Never have our mutual obligations in relation to the future been more perfect.' This is unquestionably a happy omen."

He went on to say that the Treaty had met with the most favourable response in both Britain and the Soviet Union, while in the enemy camp, it had "caused confusion and angry hissing."

As the speech went on, one became aware of a slight feeling of impatience in the hall: "What about the Second Front?" At last Molotov came to that:

"Naturally, serious attention was given to the problems of the Second Front during the talks, both in London and Washington. The results of these talks can be seen from the identical Anglo-Soviet and American–Soviet communiqués. . . . This has a great importance for the peoples of the Soviet Union, because the establishment of a Second Front in Europe would create insuperable difficulties for the Hitlerite armies on our front. Let us hope that our common enemy will soon feel on his own back the results of the ever-growing military co-operation of the three great powers."

"Stormy, lengthy applause," says the official report of the speech.

The results of Molotov's visit to Washington were less definite than those of his visit to London, but he emphasised that the Soviet–American agreement of June 11 on present and future co-operation, was only "preliminary," adding, however, that general problems of war and peace had been lengthily discussed by him and Mr. Roosevelt, and that both the President of the United States and Mr. Churchill had been very kind.

In conclusion, Molotov said: "Our strength is growing, our certainty of victory is stronger than it has ever been. Under the great banner of Lenin and Stalin we shall wage this struggle till complete victory, till the complete triumph of our cause and that of all freedom-loving nations."

Apart from discussing the alliance with Britain, many of the speakers who followed Molotov also took the opportunity, at this first plenary meeting of the Supreme Soviet since the war began, to speak of their own particular constituencies. Scherbakov, representing Moscow, recalled the struggle for Moscow, and said, amid a storm of truly emotional applause: "And now, Comrades Deputies, you see your Capital intact!" The whole tone of his speech was optimistic.

"The Germans thought they could smash the Red Army in one and a half or two months. But June 22, 1941 is the blackest day in the short and foul history of Nazi Germany, the day that marks the beginning of her end. . . . The Nazi cardsharpers have failed. . . . It is a long war and is putting such a strain on Germany that she cannot stand it. She is being bled white, and is advancing towards final disaster. . . . The Germans also thought they could isolate the Soviet Union—but no!"

There was also a touch of emotion in the applause that greeted L. R. Korniets, a leading representative of the almost completely occupied and severely devastated Ukraine, and Zhdanov, the head of Leningrad's defence.

Korniets, with his heavy drooping "Ukrainian" moustache, did not mince his words:

"We hope," he said, "that from agreements and words, the Great Powers will proceed to action."

while Zhdanov, who received an ovation almost as great as that given to Stalin, said:

"The value of the Treaty is unquestionably enhanced by the fact that complete agreement was reached in London and Washington in respect of the urgent

tasks for the creation of a Second Front in Europe in 1942 . . ." Zhdanov then quoted a worker of the Kirov Plant (right in the front line) as saying: "It strengthens our conviction that Hitler and his bloody clique will be crushed in 1942. Let us work with double and treble energy in helping the Red Army to carry out its historic mission."

Y. I. Paletskis, representing Lithuania, after speaking of his country's trials, said he was convinced that there would not be "the slightest delay" in preparing the Second Front in Europe in 1942, as this was in Britain's and America's interest; and the Latvian, Estonian, Georgian, Uzbek, and other representatives all spoke more or less on the same lines.

Then, after three and a half hours of speeches, the Treaty was unanimously ratified.

As we left the Supreme Soviet building, limousines were driving off, and the N.K.V.D. were tinkling their bells to clear the way for the cars. There was a beautiful view from the top of the Kremlin hill that night, with a pale new moon in the sky—the Kremlin with its fir-trees and its turrets and onion domes, and beyond the river, other churches, and the low wooden houses of the Zamoskvorechie, and the enormous blocks of flats near the bridge where so many of the Kremlin dignitaries live. In a narrow lane in the Kremlin, near the Moorish palace, is a small stucco house in which Stalin is supposed to live.

Zaslavsky in *Pravda*, wrote an enthusiastic account of the meeting, and Ehrenburg wrote a heartfelt couple of columns on "The Heart of England," in which he grew lyrical about London, its old stones, and its soot, and its "pastel skies." He paid a warm tribute to the R.A.F., but said that their raids on Cologne and the Ruhr were "only a beginning."

"But soon the smoke will rise from the funnels of the British transport ships and from the captains' short pipes. And already the small children of France, looking across the misty sea, are whispering: 'There's a ship over there.' The name of this ship is the Second Front. Europe is waiting for it as a miner buried underground waits for a breath of fresh air. And we are waiting, as the man in the front line waits for a good comrade. For it is more cheerful to fight together. . . ."[1]

The meeting of the Supreme Soviet of June 18 was followed by a brief—one might say, very brief, Anglo–Russian honeymoon. A few weeks later the sharp bickering over the Second Front began. Among journalists and

[1] Ehrenburg was more outspokenly anti-German than most other Russian writers during the period that followed the fall of France. The public in Moscow were much affected by the London blitz (though the papers toned it down as much as possible), but Ehrenburg wrote poems about it. He recited them at semi-public gatherings, and once refused to read them when he noticed a number of German diplomats in the audience. At that time he was also working on his novel, *The Fall of Paris*, which was personally approved by Stalin—but not till April 1941.

diplomats particularly there was much discussion—and often angry discussion—on whether the Second Front communiqué was in any sense a legally binding document, and, if it wasn't, then why had it been published at all? It was whispered that, on Molotov's insistence, the Americans had agreed to it, and the British had had their hand forced. Some argued that, whether there was to be a Second Front "in 1942" and "in Europe" or not, was uncertain; it was important to keep the Germans guessing, and the communiqué had achieved that. Some of the anti-Russians were very angry and said that the Russians were "blackmailing us" with this communiqué, and were putting more into it than it contained; if things turned out badly for them, they could use us as a scapegoat, and would then—it was ominously prophesied—declare themselves free to "do anything"—meaning, of course, that they would try to secure the best possible terms in a separate peace with Germany.

There continued much suspicion on both sides—right up to the beginning of November, up to Stalin's speech on the 6th, and the landing in North Africa.

Much of the bad humour on the Russian side was spontaneous, though some, during the few weeks before the North Africa landing, may have been calculated to deceive the Germans.

However, as already said, the ratification meeting of the Supreme Soviet was followed by a brief Anglo–Russian honeymoon, when all seemed lovely in the garden.

What also contributed to the general mood of optimism was Sovinformbureau's *Review of the First Year of the War*, published on June 22, 1942.

Many people, of course, took the casualty figures with a grain of salt. These were:

		Germany	*U.S.S.R.*
Killed, wounded and prisoners	about	10,000,000	4,500,000
Guns lost	over	30,500	22,000
Tanks lost	over	24,000	15,000
Planes lost	over	20,000	9,000

So badly had the Red Army shaken the German war machine, said the statement, that the ground had been prepared *for the smashing of the German Army in* 1942. . . . Now the spring had passed, and still there was no decisive German offensive.

"Naturally," the statement went on, "on a front as long as this the German High Command can concentrate here and there a sufficient number of troops, tanks and planes in order to achieve certain successes. That is what happened on the Kerch Peninsula. . . . But it is quite obvious that successes like that on the Kerch Peninsula cannot in any way decide the outcome of the war. The German Army of 1942 is not what it was a year ago. The picked German

troops have, in the main, been destroyed; the officer corps has been partly killed, and partly demoralised through looting and violence against the civilian population. The N.C.O.'s have mostly been killed and are being replaced by mass-produced, untrained soldiers. The German Army cannot carry out offensive operations on a scale similar to last year's."

This last phrase was cautious; but the general tone of the survey suggested that nothing much more serious than Kerch was likely to occur.

And this impression was confirmed by other papers, notably by the *Red Star* (which, being the official Red Army paper, might have chosen its words more cautiously). It said in its editorial on June 21:

"The German Army of 1942 is still stubborn in defence, but has already been deprived of that offensive drive it had before. The Red Army, on the other hand, is stronger, and more highly organised. . . . Even so, the enemy is still strong. But one thing is clear: There can be no question of a German offensive like last summer's. *The question facing the Germans now is not to conquer the Soviet Union, but to hang on, and to last out somehow.* This doesn't mean that in a tactical-operational sense they will adhere to defensive warfare throughout. *But their offensive operations cannot go beyond the framework of limited objectives.*"

And *Pravda* wrote on the 22nd in its editorial: "1942 will be the year of the Germans' final defeat, of our final victory."

In the circumstances, nobody seemed particularly alarmed on the 21st that "in one sector of the Kharkov Front our troops are fighting against advancing German forces." Actually, that was the beginning of the big German summer offensive.

At that time there seemed to be only one very black spot, and that was Sebastopol. But even before the fall of Sebastopol, it had become a heroic legend, and everybody knew that its end was only a matter of days.

The hopelessness of the situation was clearly suggested in the Press. On June 20, *Pravda* wrote:

"Through a vital sector in the north, the enemy is trying to break through to the city. To-day the Germans again threw in here large numbers of heavy tanks. Our valiant soldiers are defending with their bodies every foot of Soviet soil. Heavy fighting continued all day to-day."

And on the following day:

"Sebastopol is in a whirlwind of fire. The thousands of bombs, the thousands of shells falling on Sebastopol have not succeeded in breaking the spirit of its defenders."

On the 21st Sebastopol received a message of good cheer from Malta. But Malta was not as completely isolated as Sebastopol was, and did not have to contend with enemy tanks and land forces.

Much more sinister news was to come the same day of Tobruk having been cut off.

When, before long, Tobruk surrendered, invidious comparison between Tobruk and Sebastopol became inevitable.

But for a few days after the ratification meeting, and despite Tobruk, all still seemed well.

FROM THE DIARY

June 18

The name mentioned most frequently, next to those of Stalin and Molotov, is Zhukov's. Zhukov played a leading part in organising not only the Russian counter-offensive in Moscow, but it was largely he, and perhaps entirely he, who saved Leningrad in the nick of time. Under Voroshilov the troops were going to pieces; Zhukov reorganised everything from top to bottom in a couple of days. Apparently all arrangements had already been made for blowing up all essential buildings, bridges, etc., in Leningrad, for the army, badly mauled, was retreating in disorder. The story, however, goes that this order for the destruction and evacuation of Leningrad was countermanded by Stalin who sent there Zhukov to reorganise the army; moreover a very old Tsarist general was taken out of cold storage; he had made a special study of Leningrad's fortifications since the city's foundation, could give expert advice on various points, and was made great use of.

Somebody to-day remarked that when the well-informed German military attaché was asked, shortly before the war, who was the greatest Russian general, he replied without a moment's hesitation: "Zhukov."

One of the Russians I talked to to-day said that although the winter campaign hurt the Germans a great deal, it also cost the Russians a lot of men, and about the end of February—that is, about the time of Stalin's unenthusiastic Order of the Day—came the unpleasant conviction that the Germans had not, after all, been routed *à la* 1812. He also said that by the middle of February, the shortage of equipment in the Red Army was becoming very serious again.

There have been Red Flags on all the public buildings in Moscow to celebrate the Allied agreements, but no allied flags are to be seen, except on the British and American embassies.

Great prominence is given in the Press to Lloyd George's speech, saying that "if this alliance had been made five years ago, there would have been no war." So much for Mr. Chamberlain.

I notice that the *Red Star* and the *Red Fleet* no longer have as their motto, above the title, "Workers of the world unite!" but "Death to the German invaders."

June 19

Sebastopol is still holding out and on the Kharkov sector the German advance seems very slow. The surprise effect has failed. The Russians have thrown in a lot of stuff and claim the destruction of 180 tanks yesterday alone, with

anti-tank guns, grenades, etc. Quite a different picture from last year, when the Germans swept across the Ukraine at a fantastic speed.

Vera Figner has died. Rather half-hearted obit by Yaroslavsky in *Pravad.* She was nearly ninety; joined the Zemla i Volya organisation in the 'seventies, and took part in the plot to assassinate Alexander II. Then she spent years in Schlusselburg fortress, "but did not understand, with her peasant socialism, the true historic mission of the Working Class." Yaroslavsky says that she was too old to join any party after the Revolution, but "had she been fit, she would have joined the Communists." Lately, she took a strong anti-Fascist and anti-Hitler stand. . . .

The elderly maid on my floor complained of the difficult food situation. She hands all her rations—sugar, cereals, butter—to the canteen, which provides her with one meal a day. She keeps most of the bread, however, and has bread and tea, and a tiny bit of butter at night. "It's not so bad for me," she said, "but it is desperately hard when you are like my sister, with eight kids; the small children get a milk ration of half a litre a day, but kids are *always* hungry. Still, it was much worse in the last German war; in 1917 and 1918 we used to receive a *vosmushka,* that is, one-eighth of a pound of bread per day."

When I said I had seen Stalin yesterday, she said: "He has a funny Georgian way of talking Russian—makes me laugh. And the moment he opens his mouth, there's so much cheering you usually can't hear a word. But he's brave; very brave, not like so many other people. If it hadn't been for him, it would have been good-bye to poor old Moscow. . . ."

I saw Clark Kerr at the Stary Dom. He has come up from Kuibyshev, and says he would much prefer to stay in Moscow. He seems to have liked China far better than Russia; there the Chinese spoke English, and were generally more sociable; here he has no ordinary Russian contacts at all. He seemed bored by last night's meeting of the Supreme Soviet, but didn't think it right to leave before the end, since Stalin was there. I gathered that since Molotov had returned from his trip to London and Washington, he had greatly mellowed. He did not speak English though, except "yes," "no," and "Second Front."

Among many here there is the impression that although Cripps was much more sympathetic to the Russians, Clark Kerr may be much better treated by them; for some strange reason they prefer to deal with people who look like Tories (on the ground, perhaps, that "at least we know where we are with them") than with left-wingers, aristocratic or not.

The Russians are furious over the Ankara verdict giving twenty years' imprisonment to Pavlov and Kornilov in the alleged plot to assassinate Von Papen. The Turks, some feel, wouldn't have done it if the Germans hadn't impressed them with the prospect of great German victories in the near future.

June 21

I spent the evening at the circus. It was only half-filled, though it was a very good show. Baida, the clown, in the usual Chaplin-like rigout, complete with dicky, black tie, and bowler hat, is extremely funny, especially in his skit of the tight-rope dance. He, and the "director" in evening dress, and the attendants in blue gold-braided uniforms and airs of great dignity, have the usual exchange of words. There was also a very good pair of acrobats and a

good couple of musical clowns, but no big animals requiring a lot of food. The second part of the programme was a "pantomime" about the Germans in the Battle of Moscow, with a lot of very funny slapstick by drunken and frozen German soldiers wearing feather boas and other loot or contributions from the Winterhilfe. They gloat over all they are going to eat when they get to Moscow. Then, there is a good slapstick scene in which the faithful German sentry tries to stand the drunken major on his feet. Finally, the major manages to stand up on his hands and feet, with his bum sticking in the air; the major's cap is then hoisted on the bum, and the sentry immediately stands to attention and salutes. Then there is a scene at the German headquarters, in the forest. A Russian peasant boy with bloodstained face is dragged across the arena by a crowd of Huns, and an old woman is savagely beaten; and just as they are about to be shot, a detachment of Russian motor-cyclists come rushing on; they rescue the victims and kill all the Germans, and then, in a grand finale, a tank comes tearing up the slope and crashes right into the German headquarters, demolishing the whole building.

Propaganda points of this show: (*a*) the Germans are ridiculous; (*b*) they are brutes; (*c*) they will be licked. The audience, about half children, half adult, the latter mostly soldiers and officers, and their girls. There was much laughter and applause over the pantomime—though everybody knows that last winter it wasn't quite as funny outside Moscow as all that. . . .

Sebastopol looks bad. Last night's communiqué no longer even claimed that the latest attacks had been repulsed, and the Germans, I hear, claim the capture of the Severnaya Bukhta, the inlet four miles from the centre of Sebastopol.

It is one of those disagreeable paradoxes of Moscow: in spite of all the undernourishment and poverty one sees around, the foreign colony, including the correspondents, are pretty well fed. The cooking at the Metropole is bad and monotonous, and there are no such things as fresh vegetables, or even potatoes (a grey and tasteless kind of rice takes the place of these), but there is plenty of it, and, moreover, we are all entitled to rations from the Gastronome shop in Gorki Street, with a fat manageress called Fanny Nikolaevna. The shop has no display in the windows, thank God. They allow us 1 lb. of caviare per month, 1 lb. of chocolate, 400 cigarettes, 3 litres of vodka, an almost unlimited number of wine bottles, 2 tins of condensed milk, and a bar of evil-smelling laundry soap, as well as a cake of gritty but highly scented toilet soap, and all of it very cheap, except the wine and the vodka, which costs 40 roubles a bottle. In the open market all this would cost a fortune, the cake of laundry soap alone 200 or 300 roubles and the vodka about 600 roubles a half-litre. It isn't anything very much, really, but it makes one feel self-conscious hauling big parcels of wine bottles down Gorki Street.[1] Needless to say, the handful of foreigners in Moscow are not the only people to receive good rations.

The operas played at the Filiale this week make a singularly conservative list: *Onegin*, *Tosca*, *La Traviata*, *Rusalka*, and *The Barber of Seville*. The only

[1] This system persisted right through the war, with variations; the wine became rationed, and the vodka became more expensive still. Free market prices were at their peak in the summer of 1942; by 1944 vodka had gone down to about 200 roubles a half-litre, while bread which cost 150 roubles a kilo in 1942 cost about 15 roubles in 1944, and potatoes went down from 80 roubles in 1942 to 6 or 7 in 1944.

ballet performed is *Swan Lake*. The other night I saw the celebrated Barsova in *Traviata*, with somebody—an "evacuee"—from the Kiev Opera singing "Alfredo" with a Ukrainian accent.

In the *Red Star* to-day Alexei Tolstoy wrote a very confident piece about the war, saying that in their recent offensive operations the Germans had already shown "signs of asthma," and soon their ardour would fizzle out altogether. Some people in Moscow, impressed by all this optimism in the Press, say there may be no summer offensive at all, and the Germans will merely try to wipe out the partisans. A not-quite-full-fledged allied Ambassador remarked yesterday: "*Ce pacte Anglo-Soviétique, quelle fumisterie quand-même!*" He took a particularly poor view of the Second Front communiqué.

June 22

Yesterday (Sunday) I went with Maurice Lovell to the Ermitage Garden, but it rained like hell and there were few people around, except those queueing for that everlasting *Sylva*, the operetta which has been running in Moscow non-stop for ten or fifteen years. The Estradny Theatre inside the garden was deserted, and I remembered, with a touch of regret, the Ermitage in the early days of the war, when there were still thousands of people there, and five theatre or concert shows going all at once, and with sandwiches, and plates of salad, and sugar buns and what-not being sold all over the place. But even under the rain, the garden was pretty, with its hydrangea beds, and near the entrance, there was a great display of posters, mostly pro-allied posters, one of them showing three darts of lightning, one representing the Soviet, the next the British, and the third, the American flag, striking a toad-like Hitler, green with fear.

We then took a tramcar along the "A" ring of boulevards, and, as it was raining, the tramcar was very crowded. Already on the tramcar which we just missed there had been a wild scramble. There was a fearful scramble in our car, too; a hefty soldier in tank uniform was pushing and shoving for all he was worth. "Hey, you tankist," somebody cried, "do you want to break all our ribs? Remember, we aren't Germans!" Not angrily, but with a touch of reproach. The other remarks were in the usual half-angry, half-jolly Moscow tramcar style: "Citizen, please don't stand on my feet!" "Where do you expect me to stand—on your face?" Or, "Don't stick that shoulder of yours into me." "Do you want me to put my shoulder in my pocket?" And the classic remark to the angry old woman: "Why do you ride in a tramcar at all? At your age you should ride in a hearse."

I again noticed how very much fewer young men there were in Moscow now than in 1941—and very few in civilian clothes.

We went to the old Reuter flat, which was now being given up, and I collected a few books I had left there in October 1941. The suit I had left behind had, of course, been appropriated by the chauffeur, or somebody. One couldn't seriously expect stray possessions of any everyday value to survive the winter of 1941. . . .

We went back to the Metropole by Tram 22. As we passed the Ilyinka, I noticed that there was scaffolding all round the Headquarters of the Party's Executive Committee. Lovell said that a ton bomb had hit it last November or December, and that a good many people were killed, among them Alexander Afinogenov, the playwright, who had gone up to Moscow from Kuibyshev for a few days.

Afinogenov was young and brilliant, and personally a great *charmeur*, and I had already heard that he was expected to become a great pro-Western influence in the Party, with a firm belief in the necessity for closer cultural bonds with Britain and America. People who knew him say that his sudden death was a grievous loss both to the Soviet stage, where he was now only beginning to reveal his real calibre as a dramatist, and to inter-allied relations.

If the "mother Russia" propaganda of 1942 was, to some extent, opportunist in a short-term sense, the same could not be said of the idea of a rapprochement with Britain and America. In the long run, as already said, there were likely to arise insoluble contradictions between Communism and Capitalism; but for the sake of Russia's victory in this war, and for the sake of her future reconstruction, which was closely dependent on a peace system that could only be built up on the co-operation of Britain, America, and Russia, it was vitally essential to adopt a long-term policy of co-operation with the West.

To some old-party men the whole process was, on the whole, distasteful, but this distaste was not widespread, and was certainly not shared by the mass of the people. What was, however, shared, in varying degrees, by everybody was a distrust of England and America. Some of this distrust was simply ideological; some of it arose largely from the experience of Chamberlain, Munich, the Finnish war, and the disappointments of Mr. Litvinov as Foreign Commissar; but even those who were willing to consider all this a closed chapter, who were willing to believe that Roosevelt and even that wicked old Interventionist Winston Churchill genuinely desired the alliance with Russia, not only now that she was pulling everybody's chestnuts out of the fire, but for many years after the war—even those who believed all this—and probably most Russians did, including Stalin himself, were worried by the forces inside the capitalist world which would fight such a policy tooth and nail. The existence of such forces was, indeed, much less apparent in 1942 than, say, in 1944, but the Russians were convinced that they existed, and the chief difference between 1942 and 1944 was that while in 1944 such forces could be clearly designated by name—for example, the Polish Government in London, and anyone supporting it—in 1942, the Russians preferred to use symbolic, rather than real figures. One such symbol was "Lady Astor." One of the Russians' most acute attacks of suspiciousness occurred at the end of October, already after the worst was over at the front; I shall come to this later.

One of the small by-products of the rapprochement with Britain and America and of the Anglo–Soviet Alliance, was the approval given by the Soviet authorities to the formation of the "Association of British and

American Correspondents in the U.S.S.R." Before the war, all requests for the approval of such an association in Moscow had been flatly refused. Now the permission to form the association was granted in the same spirit as the permission to publish in Russia the *Britansky Soyuznik*—though the latter was, obviously, a much more daring innovation.

The Association was formed in June 1942; it was only a small body then, of ten or twelve correspondents. Legally-trained Henry Shapiro of the United Press drew up the Constitution, and was elected its first President, with A. T. Cholerton as British Vice-President, and its first public function was a luncheon at the National, with Scherbakov, head of the Sovinformbureau, member of the Politburo, head of the Political Department of the Red Army, etc., etc., as the guest of honour. The Anglo–Soviet honeymoon was in full swing; only five days had passed since the ratification of the Alliance; and it was interesting to observe the contrast between the still very reserved attitude of a great Party chief like Scherbakov, and some of our other guests—Russian writers with strong "Western" sympathies.

That same evening, there was a reception at Voks, where we were to meet some more Soviet writers, notably the great Sholokhov. I quote from my diary entry, dated June 23.

FROM THE DIARY

That lunch at the National to-day was a very sumptuous affair, for, in spite of the food shortage in Moscow, there always seems to be enough of the best possible food whenever there is reason for any kind of big feed, with official persons as guests. For *zakuski* there was the best fresh caviare, and plenty of butter, and smoked salmon; then sturgeon and, after the sturgeon, chicken cutlets *à la Maréchal*, then ice and coffee with brandy and liqueurs; and all down the table there was the usual array of bottles.

One of the waiters serving is an old boy of seventy or more; the other day he told me he had been a waiter since 1889, and had served at several banquets given by the late Tsar. "Altogether," he said, "I have lived under three Tsars—Alexander II and Alexander III and Nicholas II." "And since then," I said, "you've had twenty-five years of the Revolution," to which he replied, with a touch of melancholy: "Oh, that doesn't count." Clearly, the Revolution isn't the Moscow waiter's paradise, compared with the sumptuousness and the extravagant tipping of pre-1917 Moscow. Even the risk of being occasionally beaten up, or having one's face smeared with mustard by a drunken Moscow millionaire must have been worth it. . . . Still, this lunch for Scherbakov was probably as good a feed as any put up since the Revolution, and I noticed the old waiter surveying the table with a look of approval in his eye.

Scherbakov, with his impassive and almost humourless fat Buddha face, with thick horn-rimmed glasses resting on the tiny turned-up button of a nose, was, as usual, wearing only a plain khaki tunic, with a single decoration on it, —the Order of Lenin. When Palgunov introduced me to Scherbakov, Scherbakov said he remembered my article about the London blitz published by *Izvestia* in July 1941. "Comrade Stalin was interested in it," he said. "Nothing that matters ever escapes his attention. And he said to me: 'We had better

inquire into these British methods of putting out incendiaries with sand and a stirrup pump. Maybe our method of using buckets of water isn't right after all.' So our experts inquired, and they decided that our method was right after all, and I now hear that your A.R.P. people have begun to revise *their* methods." At which he laughed, in a loud booming voice, with a touch of malice sparkling behind his thick glasses.

We had invited to the lunch the editors of *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, the *Red Star*, and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*; Havenson, the head of Tass; Alexandrov, the Press chief of the Central Committee of the Party; Palgunov, the head of the Press Department; Kojemiako and Anurov, the two chief censors, and a number of prominent writers, among them Alexei Tolstoy and Ilya Ehrenburg. All the speeches dealt with the two happy events—the agreement with the United States and the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, and all the Russians naturally referred to the necessity of carrying out the Second Front promise ("promise" was the word they all used) without much delay.

Alexei Tolstoy, next to whom I sat, is very much the old *barin* to look at. He had emigrated in the early years of the Revolution, had published abroad a very anti-Bolshic version of the first volume of his *Road Through Hell*; but later, he returned to Russia and was forgiven his past aberrations. And since he realised that Russia was still going strong, and had not perished (which used to be such a widespread grievance against the Bolsheviks), he gladly accepted the Soviet régime. The story current in Moscow about Alexei Tolstoy is that he has a very senile old butler, and that, answering the phone, the old boy is in the habit of saying: "Sorry, sir, but His Grace Count Tolstoy have gone to a meeting of the Central Committee of the Party"—the verb being used in the respectful plural. Tolstoy was elegantly dressed in a smart light-grey summer suit, with a sumptuous white and grey silk tie, with his long hair tidily parted, over the plump aristocratic features, like those of a *fin-de-régime* Roman emperor.

He made an interesting improvised speech, typical of a truly Russian "Western" outlook. It seems that to a Russian with Western ideas, these pacts with Britain and America mean a great deal. Of course, what a man like Tolstoy really loves is France, rather than England or America, but *faute de mieux*, England and America will do. Tolstoy sounded positively humanitarian. Man, he said, must be the master of the world, and not its slave; and did he not by "world" really mean "the State"? And then, turning to me, he said: "The Germans have been Europe's plague for centuries. I hate the Germans, and I have always hated them. I have never met a really decent German." And then he put forward the most extremist programme I had yet heard in Russia for dealing with Germany after the war, suggesting, in fact, that it would be well to destroy Germany as a State, and that all the present discrimination between the Nazi clique and the German people was propaganda and little more. "You ask our soldiers and peasants whether *they* have a grievance only against the Nazi clique and not against the German people—isn't that true, Ehrenburg?" At which Ehrenburg laughed, and put his finger to his mouth.

Tolstoy made some cracks about Gollancz, and his *Shall Our Children Live or Die*, and thought that Gollancz should go on publishing Trotzky, but leave the Soviet Union strictly alone, and at this booming mention of Trotzky there was a scandalised look on many faces. On the other hand, he was delighted with some of Bill Patterson's stories I told him, illustrating the British Merchant Navy's attitude to the Huns.

"Do you know what I'd do with Hitler?" said Tolstoy. "No, I wouldn't have him tortured—that would be quite inadequate. I'd have him taken in a cage round all the big cities of Europe, then round all the fairs in small provincial towns, and then to village fairs—until the day when a woman says to her little boy: 'Now, sonny, come along, and have a look at Hitler,' and the boy replies, 'No, I'm fed up with Hitler. I want to see a rabbit instead.' That's when we can hang him in the Red Square, or impale him—anything you like. Doesn't really matter."

Tolstoy had just come from Tashkent by plane, and he complained that his thin grey summer suit was quite inadequate for this kind of June in Moscow. Tashkent, he said, was almost dying of heat, with fifty degrees centigrade in the shade. "The town is terribly overcrowded with evacuees; there are over a million people in Tashkent now. I flew all the way from there," he said. "The Syr Darya country is extraordinarily beautiful and fertile, and even the deserts on either side of it are potentially remarkably rich. An area of several hundred square miles was irrigated quite recently; they dug there a canal eighty-two kilometres long in two months; that's how our people work these days!"

Just now, he said, he was writing his *Ivan the Terrible* trilogy. "He was a great man, Ivan the Terrible," he said with conviction, "one of our great State builders." "That," I said, "reminds me of the French schoolbook which said: '*Ivan le Terrible, surnommé pour sa cruauté "Vassilievitch."*' " Tolstoy roared with laughter. "Very French that," he said. "They are terribly amateurish where foreign countries are concerned. And yet—what a glorious country! What a glorious civilisation. And to think of all that Russia owes to France! The world would be very empty without France. It's a pity their recent stuff is not what it used to be. Jules Romains, for instance—what a miserably over-rated individual! One simply doesn't write in that flabby way about a place like Verdun! It's indecent. *C'est sans couilles.*"

"Well," I said, "what can you expect from a chap who believed in the great statesmanship of King Leopold and in the goodness of Abetz? Of course, *Verdun* is miserable; give me full-blooded stuff like Sholokhov's *School of Hate* in to-day's *Pravda*."

"Yes," said Tolstoy, "and terribly truthful in every detail. And nothing is more truthful than the 'practical jokes' the S.S. men like to play on starving prisoners, and roar with idiotic laughter. Nothing is more typically and mo e exclusively German than the humorous sadist. It's very true," he added, "what Stalin said: You can't win the war without hating."

"That's quite true," said Ehrenburg. "But no one can make our people hate the Germans more than the Germans themselves. Most of our soldiers know at first-hand what the Germans have done; as for writing the Germans up, it's easy; one only has to describe some of the things they do, report some of the things they say, and quote from their letters and diaries, and from the letters of their bitches at home."

By a curious coincidence we were to meet Sholokhov that same night at a Voks reception—also to celebrate the two Agreements. Young Joseph Utkin was also there.[1]

[1] Utkin was to be killed in an air-crash in November 1944. By an unhappy coincidence, only a fortnight or so before his death, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published a damning review of the new edition of his collected poems, blaming him severely for having included in his new edition poems which were once very popular, but which the paper now found trivial, vulgar, and "erotic in the worst sense."

Utkin is the author of that jolly jingly poem, *Mottele*, about the Jews in Kishenev during the Revolution, and of numerous lyrical and love poems, so popular with Komsomol boys and girls, especially round 1930 or so, and also of one or two very good patriotic poems written during the war. His right hand was in a sort of glove, presenting an unusual shape. Most of his hand had been blown off at the Briansk Front in October 1941.

"The damned Germans always concentrate on an officer when they see one," he said. Utkin has beautiful doll's eyes, long eyelashes and curly hair, and he was wearing his uniform, and his Red Star, and even that glove on his mangled hand, and his arm in the sling with a certain feminine coquettishness. "It's more difficult for an intellectual," he said, "to face the hell of bombing and shelling than it is for a peasant. Different nervous system, you know. And the worst thing of all is mortar fire. Scared the life out of me. With a shell you at least know where it is going to land; with mortar fire you know nothing." And he told how, wounded and half-unconscious, he was rescued by two Russian pals—both privates; they carried him back to the Russian lines under shell fire. "Strange," he said, "how lucky some people can be. One of these fellows recently wrote me a letter. It was simply addressed to 'Poet Utkin, Moscow.' He had been through dozens of battles since October, and never had a scratch."

Sholokhov did not look a Cossack he-man at all. He was a little man in a Regimental Commissar's uniform, with mousy hair, and a very shy reserved manner. And conversation with him was extremely heavy going. The *kolkhozes* on the Don were working at full blast, he said, almost entirely on female labour; and tractor girls were carrying on just as usual, right under German fire. "Up to what age," I said, "have men been called up?" "It varies a lot," said Sholokhov. "On the Don, in parts nearest the front, everybody has been called up. In Siberia, of course, much fewer have been." I could see so clearly the monstrous German war machine crawling slowly towards the Don country —Sholokhov's country. "What do you think will happen?" I asked cautiously. He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, they won't get to the Kuban, anyway, will they?" "I don't know," he said gloomily. "It's not impossible. The Germans are solidly entrenched at Taganrog, and they are certainly going to do something. It isn't cheerful down on the Don just now, though the people keep their heads up. There's an awful lot of bombing on the railways. To go from here to Rostov, it is preferable to go there by way of Stalingrad. The Voronezh–Rostov line is being continuously bombed." There was a hard and sad look in his eyes. "I don't know what exactly will happen. So much depends on what happens elsewhere." "You mean in Western Europe." He nodded. There was, I felt, a terrible depth of hatred and bitterness in this shy little man with the mousy hair—a hatred and bitterness he had poured out with such concentrated passion into that *School of Hate* story which the whole of Russia was reading to-day.

THE OFFENSIVE STARTS

The week between that 23rd of June and the end of the month, was actually the week in which the great German summer offensive began.

Already on the 23rd, the papers said that Soviet forces were now "fighting against advancing German forces in the Kharkov sector," and on the 24th the communiqué said that the Soviet forces had, on this

sector, "withdrawn somewhat to new positions." The night communiqué of the 25th already contained the serious news that the important railway-junction of Kupiansk had been abandoned. This was the beginning of that swift process by which the Germans were, within the next month, to cut every north-to-south railway, west of the Volga, with the exception of the Moscow–Saratov–Stalingrad railway net. This was finally cut only at its southern end at Stalingrad itself. On the 28th the offensive was extended from the Kharkov sector to what was called the Kursk sector. The offensive was both advancing and spreading out dangerously. Already on July 2 the communiqué spoke of the "Belgorod–Volchansk direction," and on the 6th it said that "cruel battles are in progress west of Voronezh and south-west of Stary-Oskol."

The question was: would the Germans go north, or go south? That is, would they succeed in breaking through at Voronezh, and then penetrate right into Central Russia, outflanking Moscow from the east by way of Tambov; or would they be held up at Voronezh, and go south and south-east?

At that time the issue was not perhaps very clear to people in Moscow, and even the Press was not very clear on what the Germans were planning. There were references in the Press to the Germans now "striking at the heart of Russia." What actually happened was that after their break-through from the old line east of Kharkov to Voronezh, between June 23 and July 4, they were successfully held at Voronezh, and their attempt to drive north failed. But for at least a week after July 4, it was still touch and go. Moreover, when they decided to direct their main forces to the south and south-east, instead of persisting in their attempt to break through from Voronezh to the north and north-east, they were so successful in their second alternative that the man-in-the-street was not at all in a mood to heave any sighs of relief. The *patrie-en-danger* cries of alarm were, indeed, uttered in much more piercing tones *after* the failure of the German break-through at Voronezh. For it then looked as though the Red Army were going to be cut in half, and each half hurled beyond the Volga.

What was the attitude of the Press, and the propaganda line during those first critical ten days of the German summer offensive?

On June 23, as already said, the paper still published highly optimistic editorials on the strength of the Sovinformbureau's optimistic Anniversary Survey of the previous day. At the same time the hate propaganda was in full blast, while "victory in 1942" (though conditional upon the Second Front being opened very soon) continued to be one of the chief motifs. That day Sholokhov had published his *School of Hate*, while in *Pravda*, Alexei Tolstoy wrote an article called "Kill the Beast."

The shot that kills the Nazi is the imperative knock on the door of your own freedom [he wrote]. It is your sacred duty to your country and to European civilisation to kill a Nazi. . . . The London Agreement has been signed with the avenging sword of justice; and victory will now come soon. It will come this year.

And he went on:

Comrade, friend, dear man, whether at the front or in the rear; if you ever feel that your hatred is cooling down, or if you have become used to it, stroke, if only in your thoughts, the warm little head of your child, and remember what they have done to other children. . . .

But already by June 30 one was beginning to detect a note of uncertainty in the tone of the Russian Press. *Pravda* that day was still talking of victory in 1942 "which we *must* achieve," but it already reminded the people that

. . . revolutionary vigilance is a condition of victory. Beware of spies and diversionists! The enemy is advancing towards catastrophe, but he has not yet been smashed, and to-day he is still sufficiently strong to concentrate hundreds of planes, thousands of tanks and guns, and many new reserves in order to achieve success at any price at some part of the front.

On July 6, with the Germans already inside Voronezh, though not *beyond* Voronezh (which made a vital difference), the communiqué said: "For seven days now, on land and in the air, battles have been raging on an enormous scale." Already a very alarming editorial was published in *Izvestia* on the 5th, and on the 6th *Pravda* wrote:

In attacking our country the enemy has set himself the task of destroying the Soviet State, and of turning the Soviet peoples into the slaves of Hitlerite imperialism. During the very first days of the war Comrade Stalin warned the Soviet peoples that the question was one of life and death for the Soviet State and the Soviet people. The question was whether the people of the Soviet Union were to be free or were to become slaves. *This threat has not yet been lifted.*

But while Voronezh held there seemed for a moment no cause for profound alarm. On July 8, the tone of the *Pravda* editorial was, if anything, calmer than on the 6th. It wrote:

The tempo of the German Army is not what it used to be. We are better prepared and equipped. We are more experienced. In spite of their fury, the German offensive operations show that the German Army of 1942 is not what it was at the beginning of the war. The Nazi gangs, in trying to break through into the wide operational spaces of the south and south-east, lack both last year's tempo and last year's punch. . . .

But this relative optimism was neither general nor lasting. On the same day as this *Pravda* editorial, Ehrenburg wrote in the *Red Star* in quite a

different vein. "Throw them Back!" was the title of his article, which began:

> We have suffered a serious military setback. The German tanks have broken into the steppes of Central Russia. The black storm-clouds have again gathered over our country. The danger is great. . . . The rich fields of the black earth zone loom before the Germans' eyes. The German soldiery have cheered up: before them is a vast expanse of untrampled fields, of unburned villages, of unlooted towns. Pushed on by hunger and the thirst for loot, the rats are crawling east. The tank crews are carrying with them bags to be filled with loot. . . . Grim days have come again.

"But," said Ehrenburg, "one must not despair."

> Remember Moscow! Remember that the Germans are not what they were. They are now a motley crew, and their army is full of hirelings. Last year the Germans thought only in terms of Sedan, Dunkirk, and Crete, but now the mark of Moscow is upon them.

This article already foreshadowed the style of the articles to be published during the blackest period of that summer—between about July 12 and the beginning of September. I shall come to this period in the next section.

THE END OF SEBASTOPOL

The greater part of June and the first few days of July were affected—if not overshadowed—by the tragedy of Sebastopol. This, like Leningrad, occupied a peculiar place in the Russian war. Like Leningrad during the worst time of the blockade, Sebastopol was completely cut off from the "mainland," more completely, indeed, than Leningrad had ever been. Leningrad could still be easily reached by air. By air or by sea Sebastopol was 200 miles away from the nearest point held by the Russians. German dive-bombers and fighters were constantly in the air to prevent Sebastopol from communicating with Novorossisk. Only at night, and through terrible danger, could occasional ships or planes reach Sebastopol. The only relatively safe means of reaching or leaving Sebastopol during the final stages of the battle, was the submarine, and that was, indeed, how some of the last defenders, including the chief commanding officers, were evacuated.

The Germans and Rumanians had broken into the Crimea in the autumn of 1941. They had forced their way across the Perekop Isthmus, the defences of which had not been properly prepared. The inadequate forces defending it from shallow trenches were crushed under the weight of bombs. The Germans were said to have concentrated 1,000 bombers north of the Crimea, and for days Perekop was pounded by massed air attacks in which 200 or 250 planes took part simultaneously. The Russians had little or nothing in the air to oppose them, and their anti-aircraft

defences were weak. In a short time the whole of the Crimea was overrun, with the exception of Sebastopol. In the winter the Germans and Rumanians tried, on two occasions, to storm Sebastopol, but failed. Sebastopol was well fortified, and had first-class natural defences with a crescent of hills around it. Sebastopol was also a symbol. Its fame was based on its eleven-months defence in the Crimean war, and the whole of Russia expected it again to live up to its reputation. It is true that the situation was now different. In the Crimean war Sebastopol could communicate freely from the north with Simferopol, and thence, with the rest of Russia. In 1941 Sebastopol was completely cut off, and could, as already said, communicate precariously with Russia only by air and by sea. The Germans' failure to take Sebastopol in 1941 gave it, however, a new lease of life: during the winter months Sebastopol was able to strengthen its defences; in spite of great dangers and difficulties, food and munitions were brought to the city by sea, and the manufacture of munitions inside Sebastopol—inside its caves—was organised. Arrangements were made for the whole city to go underground, if necessary.

After the failure of the first two German offensives against Sebastopol, its defence already became something of a legend in the rest of Russia, with stories of glorious deeds by the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet, of its tough marine infantry, of famous airmen and famous snipers like Ludmilla Pavlichenko, of the heroic Five who, with hand-grenades tied to their belts, threw themselves under the advancing German tanks outside Sebastopol. . . . In the spring of 1942, life still seemed strangely normal inside Sebastopol, and the famous documentary "Men of the Black Sea Fleet," shot about that time, showed the cherry-trees of Sebastopol in blossom, and many of its buildings still standing, despite the fearful bombings the city had suffered during the first two German onslaughts. I do not know whether anyone seriously expected Sebastopol to hold out indefinitely. Probably not. But its valour was a good propaganda point, and I remember how in June the Sebastopol documentary was going to be shown, and then this showing was postponed; probably the conclusions were, in the light of what was then happening, considered too optimistic. It would not have done to say: "Sebastopol Will Never Fall"—just when it was about to fall.

Indeed, after the massive German air attack on Sebastopol had begun on June 1, to be followed, on June 7, by the all-out attack on land, little, and then, no hope could be seriously entertained that Sebastopol would survive. The disproportion between the defending and the attacking forces was too great. The fall of Sebastopol was a question of time, but every day that passed added to the glory of the Sebastopol legend. The defence of Sebastopol was also of the greatest military value; there was a well-founded theory that until Sebastopol fell, and the numerous German and

Rumanian divisions tied up there were released for operations elsewhere, the all-out German offensive in the south would not be launched. That there was some truth in this is confirmed by the facts: it was not until Sebastopol could be considered by the Germans to be definitely "in the bag," that the big offensive began on June 23. Even so, Sebastopol, defying unceasing air-raids, and the overwhelming enemy superiority in tanks and men, fought on for another ten days through the fire and smoke and the suffocating stench of unburied corpses—in the last days the stench was such that the soldiers and sailors went on fighting with their gasmasks on—and it was not till July 3 that the official announcement came that the 250 days' defence of Sebastopol had ended. Even then, for ten or eleven days after that, remnants of the Sebastopol troops, who had retired to that Land's End, the Chersonese Peninsula, continued, in small groups, to fight on; most of them were killed, many shot themselves rather than surrender; some got away on rafts and in small fishing-boats to the south coast, and escaped into the mountains where they formed themselves into partisan bands.

In 1944, 30,000 Germans, trapped on the same Chersonese Peninsula, surrendered after five or ten thousand others had been slaughtered by Russian artillery and mortar fire.

As the defence of Sebastopol in the Crimean war was a great Russian legend, so also was its defence in 1942; and so also was the recapture of Sebastopol in 1944; the German attempt to make a German legend of Sebastopol in 1944 was a complete failure. In a few days they surrendered sheepishly. But I shall come to that much later. . . .

While the defence of Sebastopol lasted, and for months and years afterwards—the Russian people were fascinated by its heroism. At Sebastopol the men of the Red Army, and the men of the Black Sea Fleet, fought with their backs to the sea—and a sea that had no ships to take them away. Such battles with the defenders' backs to the sea have a peculiar fascination. If Sebastopol had not been so tragic and grim and unspeakably horrible (I mentioned before that all-pervading stench of corpses in which the men fought on during the last days—the early days of a hot July) it would almost have been romantic. And somehow, the defence of a "land's end" has always stirred people's imagination more than most other battles. Dunkirk is in a different category—for there the sea was teeming with ships. But think of the Polish war—and which episodes are remembered best? Hel and the Westerplatte. And Sebastopol was Westerplatte multiplied twenty or fifty or a hundred times. The very names were memorable—Sebastopol itself, and Malakhov Hill, the Chersonese promontory, and the Chersonese lighthouse. What had also stirred people's imagination throughout Russia was that, as in Leningrad, perhaps even

more than in Leningrad, the soldiers and the civilian population at Sebastopol were one.

The defenders of the Black Sea port had fought against terrible odds since June 7. The intensive bombing had gone on for even longer. Much later, after the liberation of Sebastopol in April 1944, the Mayor told me: "During the last month the bombing was non-stop. We sounded the air-raid warning on June 1, and from then till the bitter end we never sounded the all-clear."

The news of the imminent fall of Sebastopol was broken as gently as possible to the Russian people, but the Russian reader had learned to read between the lines. There are adjectives which tell a story: each adjective is, as it were, a code word which means something quite concrete. Thus in the "code" of the Russian communiqué "fierce fighting" (*ozhestochennyie boi*), "stubborn fighting" (*upornyie boi*), and "heavy fighting" (*tyazhelyie boi*) mean three very different things; "heavy fighting" means that things are going very badly. This phrase was more and more frequently used in the Russian communiqués on Sebastopol during the last fortnight the city held.

On June 25 Sebastopol was "holding out against superior enemy forces."

On June 28 *Pravda* already spoke of "the immortal fame of Sebastopol."

On June 30 the *Red Star* published Ehrenburg's article which said:

Twenty-three days have passed. And Sebastopol is still holding out. I have before me a picture of the ruins. By some miracle Lenin's statue has survived, but everything around is burned down and shattered. . . . The forces were unequal, and military experts foretold: "It's a matter of three days, maybe of one week." The Germans then boasted: "On the 15th we shall drink champagne on the Grafsky Embankment." We knew how many planes they had, and they knew how hard it was to defend a city with all its roads cut. But they forgot one thing: Sebastopol is not merely a city. Sebastopol is the glory of Russia, the pride of the Soviet Union. We have seen the capitulation of towns, of celebrated fortresses, of States. But Sebastopol is not surrendering. Our soldiers do not play at war; they fight a life and death struggle. They do not say: "I surrender" when they see two or three times more enemy men on the chessboard. No, our people go on fighting."

This was clearly a crack at Tobruk, which had surrendered the week before. I may recall in this connection, an unpleasant conversation I had that week with a Russian soldier. It raised, among other things, the vital question of war prisoners, and was typical of the Russian ideas on total war, as they existed in the black days of 1942.

June 26

Sebastopol continues to be in everybody's thoughts. That fearful tragedy is moving to its close. What was it, a Russian asked me to-day, that made Sebastopol different from Tobruk and Singapore? "Isn't it," he said, "because

of the Russian's more intense hatred of the enemy, and the British temptation to surrender when all hope of holding out is lost? And don't you think that the Germans' good treatment of British war prisoners in a war which, over there, they still pretend is a war between civilised nations, is a definite piece of policy, aimed at preventing the British from fighting to the last man and the last cartridge?"

"Do you mean then," I said, "that if the Germans treated Russian prisoners better than they do, Sebastopol would have fallen by now?" "No," he said, rather angrily, "I don't think that at all. Because such calculations don't enter the mind of a Russian soldier, still less of a Russian sailor. These people loathe the guts of every German. Besides, they know that by fighting even this hopeless Battle of Sebastopol to the bitter end, they are tying up very large German and Rumanian forces, and are so helping the rest of the front. It is heroism—but heroism plus definite orders." "But, speaking of war prisoners," I said, "why is Russia against joining the International Red Cross? You would at least have some information on the men taken prisoner, and the Red Cross might save them from their present horrible fate." "I am not so sure about that," he said. "This is not a gentlemen's war. The bloody Germans are going to trick the Red Cross anyway on every conceivable occasion—especially where Russian war prisoners are concerned. We treat the German war prisoners reasonably well—because, in the long run, it is a policy which will pay—not that we like doing it. These swine are better fed than millions of our civilians. It's a galling thought. But, honestly speaking, I don't think we particularly want any kind of prisoners' convention with the Germans. Our troops have gone through hell, and may go through many more hells before we are finished with this war. And in such a hell—I am ready to admit it—the thought that a comfortable bed and breakfast—like what the British prisoners have—*may conceivably be secured by the simple gesture of surrendering to the Germans might be bad for morale.* Not every man in our army has the makings of a hero. So let him die, rather than surrender. Am I shocking you? Listen, this is a terrible war—more terrible than anything you've ever seen." "And the worst of it," I said, "is that the Germans are really ill-treating the Russian war prisoners—just as badly as your propaganda says they are." "That's the worst of it. It's an agonising thought. But, politically, the Germans are really making a quite colossal blunder. If the Germans treated our prisoners well, it would soon be known. It's horrible to say: but by ill-treating and starving our prisoners, the Germans are *helping* us!"

The spectacle of the men of Sebastopol fighting for a just cause against overwhelming odds aroused the classical tragic emotions of "pity and terror." It was a noble example to be set before the whole of the Red Army, the whole of the Soviet people. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* wrote about that time:

Does it not fill with pride the heart of every Soviet citizen to think of the five Black Sea sailors who with grenades tied to their belts threw themselves under the enemy tanks to stop them on their way to their beloved city? Or the deed of the sailor of the Northern Navy who blew himself up with a grenade, rather than become *shamefully* a prisoner! It was his burning love of his country that dictated this letter, with its amazing power and youthful sincerity—this letter written before his death by Black Sea sailor

Kalyuzhny, who, together with his comrades, died in defending a firing-point:

"Russia, my country, my native land! Dear Comrade Stalin! I, a son, a pupil of Lenin's Komsomol, fought as my heart told me to fight. I slew the beasts as long as the heart beat in my breast. Now I am dying, but I know we shall win."

And the article went on to exalt the men of Sebastopol as models for the whole nation to follow.

The end of Sebastopol was near. On June 30 an article appeared in *Red Star* by Divisional Commissar Chukhnov, described by the paper as "one of the principal organisers of the defence of Sebastopol." The article had been sent from Sebastopol but was marked "delayed." Had it really been delayed, or was it felt that the main facts of the tragic ordeal of Sebastopol could now be told—now that, in two or three days, Sebastopol would fall. Chukhnov wrote:

The first storming of Sebastopol was undertaken in November 1941 with 6 infantry divisions, 1 cavalry brigade, 100 tanks and 150 planes. Von Mannstein then lost 10,000 men for nothing, and got hell from Hitler. He was ordered to try again. To his forces around Sebastopol were added: 7 infantry divisions, 3 alpine brigades, 1 cavalry brigade, 150 tanks, 200 bombers and fighters, besides large numbers of siege guns, heavy mortars, etc. Yet in December they failed as they had failed in November. But dozens of Axis divisions remained tied up at Sebastopol.

So we have seen a lot in the past year. But what is happening now greatly exceeds anything that happened before. Now we have against us 14 infantry divisions, 2 tank groups of 400 tanks, 900 planes. Intense air attacks and artillery barrages preceded the general onslaught. On May 20 intense air attacks began to be launched against our shipping and our harbour. Then the big stuff began, especially after June 2. Forty to eighty planes continuously bombed the city. The enemy barbarously destroyed houses, schools, hospitals, cultural institutions. Yet the city continued to live a strained but active war existence. Deep underground, and with treble energy, thousands went on making mortars and mines, hand and anti-tank grenades, and repaired tanks and guns and motor vehicles. In their attempt to terrorise Sebastopol—which was what they had tried to do in the first place—the Germans failed.

The shelling of our front lines also failed, though the density of the fire was exceptional. Thus, on June 2, 4 and 6 they fired against our positions 30,000 shells and 20,000 mortar shells, and dropped on them 15,000 bombs. On one of our ack-ack batteries 20 bombers dropped 150 bombs; but they failed, and our men, without loss to themselves, brought down six planes. The battle grew in intensity. The biggest attack yet was launched on June 7. In thirty minutes, along a two and a half kilometre front they fired 10,000 shells. Then the bombers and the tanks came into action. 30 to 70 planes simultaneously dive-bombed our positions. But our artillery decimated their tanks, which were also attacked with grenades. Though already twice wounded, Grigoriev, the last survivor of his battery, continued to fire till he was killed. That was typical. . . . Engels wrote in 1855: "Sebastopol has no equal in military history—whatever the final outcome of the Crimean War." But then,

in the north, the road to Russia was clear. Now we are completely encircled. But still we are tying up thirty enemy divisions. . . .[1]

On July 1 the end was imminent. The communiqué said: "Hundreds of enemy planes are dropping bombs on the front lines and on the city. They are making more than 1,000 sorties per day. Every defender of Sebastopol is endeavouring to kill as many Germans as possible."

On July 3, it was announced that, after a siege of 250 days, the Soviet troops had abandoned Sebastopol on orders from the High Command.

I wrote in my diary on the 4th:

It's absurd to be here, really, in this perfectly peaceful Moscow, when an indescribable hell is going on at Sebastopol, and a different kind of hell in the Kharkov, Belgorod, Volchansk and Kursk "directions." Apparently the Russians are still rapping the German "fists" well over the knuckles, though their own losses must be pretty terrible all round. Last night the Russians admitted the evacuation of Sebastopol. They have put the enemy dead at 60,000, out of the total enemy casualties of 150,000; and the Russian dead are put at only 11,500. Eight German divisions, they say, have been smashed up. All this strikes me as sedative propaganda, and nothing else. But what a great show all the same!

Sovinformbureau says that the wounded and the officers and soldiers of Sebastopol have been evacuated. How *can* they be?

And so Sebastopol fell. On July 6 Admiral Oktiabrsky—who, together with General Petrov (later of Stalingrad, and later still, of Carpathian fame) and General Krylov (who was later to be General Chuikov's Chief of Staff at Stalingrad) and some others, escaped from Sebastopol by submarine at the very last moment—told in great detail in all the papers the story of the siege. However, like all material published at the time, it suffered from numerous omissions. But it continued the process of turning the military defeat of Sebastopol into a great moral victory.

Admiral Oktiabrsky said that Sebastopol had cost the Germans and Rumanians 300,000 men in killed and wounded, and that in the last twenty-five days alone they had lost 250 tanks, 300 planes and 250 guns. He briefly reviewed the siege of Sebastopol since October 30; and spoke proudly of the great part the coastal guns, which had been turned away from the sea, had played in the siege, and of the equally great part the navy had played in shelling the enemy during the two winter offensives, adding, however, that with the Germans having complete air control during the latter stages of the siege, the navy no longer could play the same part.

He spoke of the fifteen to twenty furious attacks the enemy launched every

[1] It should be added that, of these thirty divisions, at least one-third were Rumanian. And the interesting thing, as several survivors of Sebastopol later said, at least in private, is that, being certain of a fairly easy victory, the Rumanians at first fought very well—better, indeed, than many German units.

day against Sebastopol during the last twenty-five days; and how by June 15 the enemy had already lost half his effectives. In the last month of the continuous storming of Sebastopol, the enemy had dropped on and around the city 25,000 bombs of 100 kilograms or more; the incendiaries were countless. He reckoned that Sebastopol received some 6,000 bombs a day and often as many as 15,000 or 20,000 shells, including many from the 24-inch siege guns. But still the city held.

And he concluded: "The time will come when the Soviet people and its poets will write legends and poems and songs of the immortal deeds of thousands of Sebastopol heroes. . . ."

It was no good, at that time, to speak of the horror of those last days at Sebastopol, of those men who were still struggling in the Chersonese Peninsula, with no ship to take them away, or of those twenty-six thousand wounded—who were left behind in the town and on the beaches. They were left there, because there was no other way.

Dark and fearful stories were later whispered of what happened to the wounded of Sebastopol and to the few thousand other prisoners who fell into German hands.

In 1942 it was best to draw over it the curtain of silence.

CHAPTER III

THE STORM BREAKS (JULY 1942)

BEFORE proceeding with the narrative of those grim military events that marked the second half of July 1942, I must say something about that "peaceful haven" of Moscow where the correspondents then lived. What the capital looked like at the time of Sebastopol and of the beginning of the great German summer offensive may still perhaps be of some interest. During those days I kept my notes much more carefully than during later periods when the war was going well and there was little to worry about.

It must be said that, apart from all the bad news that was coming from the Crimea and Southern Russia, one felt acute anxiety over the situation in Egypt. Tobruk had fallen, and the Afrika Corps was swiftly moving towards Alexandria. We knew little of the real facts, but what one knew sounded highly alarming, and the more nervous already started talking about the danger of losing Egypt, and all that that would mean. And it would mean an infernal lot!

During all those months, almost up to the time of the Stalingrad victory, the allied correspondents in Moscow were not in an enviable position—especially if they fancied themselves war correspondents. The Russian authorities had no particular desire, during that summer, to show allied correspondents the Red Army in full retreat. Much as I deplored this situation, I still felt that, if you kept your eyes and ears wide open, you could pick up a great deal, even during long spells in Moscow.

It was not clear at first what the purpose was of that trip on June 27. We met in the course of it Lieutenant-General Tikhonov, a great artillery expert, very high up in the service, and were shown a 152 mm. howitzer gun which could smash fortified enemy positions and knock out enemy tanks with great precision. It was also the first time that I drove in a jeep—there was a whole caravan of them, and I think the Russians wanted to show us the jeeps in action—they were then still something quite new in the Russian landscape. I also had a talk with Major Stroganov, Hero of the Soviet Union, who was reputed to have been the first man to have broken through the Mannerheim Line in the Finnish War, and who, in the process, had lost an eye, and received a wound which had made him permanently lame. He was now doing an important recruiting and training job.

In the little introductory speech the General made, he spoke of the supreme importance of artillery in this war, emphasised that every gun

in the Red Army was being used now as an anti-tank gun, *and suggested that there were so many guns round Moscow now that the Germans would never dare strike at Moscow again.*

He was generally optimistic, and spoke much in the vein of the Sovinformbureau's Anniversary survey, saying that the Germans had not yet achieved, and were not likely to achieve, any startling success this year; that the Red Army was incomparably stronger now than last year, and that it had enormous reserves. "We shall carry out Comrade Stalin's order," he said, "we shall drive the Germans out of the Soviet Union in 1942." Naturally, he added something about the necessity of opening the Second Front soon.

I wrote at the time:

June 27

There wasn't anything very exciting about that trip to the artillery training unit, but it was pleasant to spend the afternoon in the country. We drove along the Dimitriev Chaussée through country which, unlike the country we saw on the Klin trip, had not been overrun by the Germans. There were very few signs of bomb damage. After the train, the scent of the woods and fields was very pleasant. The grass is unusually high—due, no doubt, to the abnormal rainfall throughout the last two months—and there are millions of flowers. We stopped near the Moscow–Volga canal and there we got into jeeps—newly arrived from the U.S.A. Later I talked to some of the army drivers, and most of them were delighted with them. The jeeps reminded me of the awful agony of driving—or trying to drive—through all that mud on our trip to the Smolensk Front in September 1941, when a whole platoon of infantry had to accompany us, and drag our infernal Z.I.S.'s or Emkas, or whatever they were, out of the mud whenever we got stuck—which happened several times a day. However, not all the drivers thought the jeeps "perfect." One driver said they lacked automatic screen wipers, another said that the engine was unprotected against mud, while another still said that he wished the seats were a little softer. Which made the Hero of the Soviet Union laugh, and say: "I suppose you'll want the Americans to provide you with a girl-friend to sit beside you in the car?"

We were taken round the various camouflaged gun emplacements and observation posts—some of the soldiers wore harlequin green-and-brown overalls, and the observation posts were so well camouflaged that I once nearly walked on the helmet of a man's head sticking a few inches out of the ground and looking into a periscope.

We were then presented to the General, who took us to his Command Post on top of the hill, remarkably camouflaged with, and smelling of, fir branches —for a hundred yards or so we walked along a tunnel made of these branches —and from here we could see the wide plain below—a remarkably peaceful rustic scene, with women wearing red and blue skirts and red scarves, and gathering millet, and with a lot of cows and some remarkably fat and pink pigs some distance away. In the distance was a village with a church. Then we went down again, and saw some gun practice, and talked to the crew of the big howitzer. Among them was a smiling little Uzbek lad. They showed how they could get the gun into marching order in four and a half minutes, and the General complimented them on their performance. Then, after making a few more remarks about the universal use of all guns as anti-tank guns—"even the

non-armour-piercing shells, if correctly fired, knock out the turrets—and high precision is our strong point"—he said: "Well, and this ends our brief acquaintance."

And the entry continued:

Interesting talk with the one-eyed Hero of the Soviet Union. "It's no use denying it: last year we just couldn't stand up to the German tanks. We didn't stop them till they nearly got to Moscow. At first we were really not much better than the French."

Clearly the Russians to-day have still a serious shortage of tanks (how can it be otherwise?) for Stroganov also dwelt on the supreme importance of artillery. "I don't agree with the theory: Only tanks against tanks. We artillerymen have learned how to knock out tanks, and we've got a terrific lot of guns. Of course, a concentration of 1,000 tanks is a hell of a thing to deal with and it is more than many men's nerves can stand." *Regarding the "victory in* 1942" *slogan, he sounded distinctly sceptical. "It won't be easy," he said, "we'll have a devil of a job recapturing Viazma and Rzhev.* The Germans are deeply entrenched there, and have terrific firing power."

Of his recruiting job, he said that the new men were mostly men between thirty-five and forty, or very young boys, chiefly used for scouting. A few new recruits were over forty, but a Russian peasant of forty or even fifty was physically very strong—very different from the flabby middle-aged German. On the whole, of course, recruits from the towns were quicker on the uptake than men from the country.

Stroganov had an attractive personality; I liked his simple, straightforward way of talking, and the apologetic tone in which he spoke of his glass eye and of his inability to do any active fighting. He added, however, that he went out to fight outside Moscow when things were looking really black. . . .

The Russians apparently wanted, during the early part of the summer of 1942, to receive some foreign publicity for their armaments—to suggest to the outer world that they had first-class equipment, and plenty of it, and that the Allies were certainly not backing the losing side. It was also important to show that, despite the evacuation of hundreds of factories to the east—and in what a hurry this sometimes had to be done!—the Russian war factories were producing first-class stuff. There seems little reason otherwise why we should have been taken out to see that howitzer, or, a few days later, a heavy K.V. tank. This 43-ton tank was already being turned out during the Finnish War—so there was no great mystery about it. But at a time when there was so much talk about the Russians "having no tanks," it was useful for the K.V. to receive some publicity. The great joke of it was that when the correspondents were shown this tank, neither the British nor the American military missions had yet seen it!

The third trip of that type during those weeks, was of a somewhat different order: the Anglo-American Press were invited to spend a day with the officers and men of the famous Cossack Dovator Corps. Dovator himself had been killed in the Battle of Moscow, and their new commander

was General Krukov, a chubby round little man, with the cavalryman's bow legs, and not very dashing to look at. It was said that he was a "political appointment," and seemed to be unpopular with some of the other officers. Krukov wore a plain but smart khaki summer tunic, without any decorations; the rest of the officers, on the other hand, were as picturesque a collection of Cossacks as the best circus in the world could produce: they wore the red- and blue-topped sheepskin hats of the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks, coloured hoods, ribbons of cartridges round their chests, plenty of decorations, and enormous long black sheepskin *burkas*, going almost down to their ankles. Most of them were of tremendous physique—among them a number of giants of six-foot-five or six-foot-six. They were rowdy and rough, and tough, undisciplined and hooligan in their own way, and a chap in Moscow I knew, who used to share a circus girl with one of these Cossack officers (the latter did not know about it), told me about the monumental orgies the Cossack officers used to go in for when on leave in Moscow. These men had had their uniforms returned to them by the Soviet Government in 1936, and they were grateful for the fuss that was being made of them now, but perhaps still slightly resentful, and many of them disliked Krukov, with his calm deliberate ways, and his sober, colourless uniform. Later I heard that there was some big row, and that certain units of the Dovator Corps were disbanded altogether.

Dovator himself was a legendary figure, and so was the story of this "phantom corps" which had harassed the Germans on so many occasions during the Battle of Moscow. One night they had raided and smashed the H.Q. of the German Fifth Army, and had missed the Chief of Staff by barely five minutes. They operated at Klin and Solnechnogorsk; later, together with Rokossovsky's shock army—the Sixteenth—they had thrown the Germans back to the line of the Istra lakes. Then, in two nights, they had gone south, covering a distance of 120 kilometres, and operated there, together with the Russian Fifth Army. Mobility was their great virtue, and they were invaluable in surprise attacks, especially at night. During the great German retreat from Istra, they had cut the Germans' line of retreat, and had smashed the entire 78/7th Infantry Division, capturing in four days 920 vehicles.

In winter conditions, especially in non-flying weather, the Dovator Corps had done wonders. On other occasions it had gone into attack, in conjunction with tanks and aircraft. They would ride through forests, in the snow, and appear at a point where they were least expected by the enemy. They could attack infantry in ordinary cavalry charges, or they could fight even tanks, for they were armed with hand-grenades and anti-tank weapons, and when necessary, they got off their horses, and acted as infantry. All this and much else was explained and even demonstrated to us that day at the Dovator Corps Camp, somewhere outside Moscow. We were able to watch the cavalry's anti-tank manœuvres, we were told that every Cossack had two gasmasks —one for himself, the other for his horse—and General Krukov told his own life story—how he had fought in the last Great War, and then in the Civil War,

and the Finnish War, and how later, he had been the Military Governor of Hangö.

Then there was a great display of horsemanship in the field outside the camp, with the usual djighit acrobatics, and the grandstand was decorated with special banners for our benefit—with "Long Live the Comradeship-in-arms of Britain, the Soviet Union, and America." And then, in a large tent, there was a very jolly and drunken banquet where, towards the end, some of the toasts made by the giant Cossacks became distinctly truculent, one of them crying: "Enough hot air, time you chaps got down to some real fighting!" And another one said: "We've told you a lot about all the wonderful things we've done, but you don't realise at what a price! It was a bloody massacre of men and horses! We lost in the Battle of Moscow a good half of our men. All very well 'attacking tanks'—lot of bunk that! We can do first-class surprise attacks, especially at night, but heaven help us if the German planes ever spot us in open country; they go for us first thing, bombing and machine-gunning." And one began to understand their truculence, and their loud joviality which did not always sound quite real, and their gargantuan laughter which sounded a little sad; for these men were living in the shadow of death, and the dice were heavily loaded against them.

Later, when the German Air Force was no longer in control of the air, and when rapid manœuvring in big offensive sweeps across the Ukraine and across Hungary had become possible again, or when, supported by tanks, the Cossacks could be let loose to spread mortal panic among surrounded German infantry regiments, as at Korsun Shevchenkovo, or when it was necessary to ford a river, and seize a bridgehead as Krukov's men did on the Desna at Briansk in the autumn of 1943, the Cossacks came into their own again, as an auxiliary force of shock troops with high speed and manœuvrability. In January 1943, before the final victory of Stalingrad, I heard Malinovsky say that cavalry was "good-looking, but on the whole still pretty useless."

What the Dovator Corps had done during the Battle of Moscow was gallant, and grim and tragic—almost as tragic as the sacrifice of the 80,000 men of Moscow's half-trained home-guard. But that *fête champêtre*, with its *concours hippique* and its superb horses and costumes, and the variety show that followed the banquet—all that was strangely and irritatingly unreal at a time when Sebastopol was in its last agony. . . .

FROM THE DIARY

July 1

Everybody is terribly worried about Egypt. I mean the British and Americans; the ordinary Russian is not very Egypt-conscious, and *Vechorka*,[1] the Moscow evening paper, carefully refrained from giving any news from Egypt. *Toujours la politesse*. God only knows how in hell we are going to reconquer Egypt if it really goes. For if we lose it, then the whole Middle East may go, Palestine, and Syria, and Iraq, and Iran; and Turkey, encircled on all sides, will naturally go over to the Hun, and allow the Italian Navy into the Black Sea.

[1] Short for *Vecherniya Moskva.*

THE STORM BREAKS (JULY 1942)

Already in England, I hear, there are voices saying that, in the light of the present reverses in Egypt, it would be insane to start the Second Front in the near future. The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald*, are among them. . . . However, it's all understandable; we don't want to risk the one thing we've got: our Island Army. But—if we allow the Russians to be smashed, then we are bitched anyway. Without a Second Front this year, it will depend entirely on Russian guts, reserves and organisation, whether or not we lose this war. That the people who have a faith in Russia should be willing to take this risk, I can understand; but that the people and papers who have always prophesied disaster to the Red Army should want to take this risk, beats me. What are *they* hoping for?

July 4

The all-Slav propaganda is continuing in one form or another. All-Slav, I say, not Pan-Slav. When I said to the censor to-day that *pan* in Greek meant *all*, he said: "Does it? But, somehow, Pan-Slav has a connotation All-Slav hasn't got." To-day, for example, I received the first issue of a new magazine called *Slavs*, extremely well printed and produced. It contains a good poem by Sergei Gorodetski: "Wherever the Teuton has passed, a bloody mist hangs over the country . . . " and then goes on to enumerate the sufferings of all the Slav peoples—Slavs on the Sava, Slavs on the Vistula, Slavs at Prague. But they will not surrender. And it ends: "Brother Slavs, we shall together build a world of free labour. We have not been slaves, and shall never be slaves." There are articles in the magazine by General Eremenko on "The Liberating Mission of the Red Army," by Korneichuk on the Ukrainian partisans, by Professor Derzhavin on Alexander Nevsky's victory over the Teutonic Knights in 1242. Also much material on "The Heydrich Terror in Czechoslovakia," etc., etc. The Bulgarian people are called upon to sabotage the evil designs of their rulers, and to join in the struggle against the arch-enemy of the Slav peoples. . . .

The magazine is published by the All-Slav Committee, which has among its members Lieut.-General Gundorov (President), Korneichuk, Professor Nejedly (Czech Communist), Wanda Wassilewska, Colonel Pica (Czech Army), the Belorussian poet Kolas, Nikolai Tikhonov, the Leningrad writer, Dimitri Shostakovich, and Alexander Joczis, described as "a Polish worker."

This All-Slav Committee was founded last year, and had its second large meeting in Moscow on April 4 and 5. A verbatim report of this meeting (100 pages) was recently published in book form.

In the name of All-Slav Unity, a number of "cultural" functions have lately taken place, and the radio devotes a lot of time to Czech and Polish music.

Among the cultural functions was a concert I went to the other day at the Actors' House. This concert actually followed an exhibition in the foyer illustrating how popular Russian plays are, and how they have been produced, in the various Slav countries. The concert audience was not altogether unlike a highbrow London audience, with a lot of old harridans with long dresses and ghastly make-up, and a high proportion of bald and serious-looking heads. On the platform squawky coloraturas were performing Czech, Macedonian and Serb folk songs, then we got some Moniuszko (which was pleasant) and Smetana (which was a bore), then Lisa Gillels played very charmingly some Dvorak Slavonic dances and a bit of Wieniawski's violin concerto; the absurdly overrated Jacob Flier rattled off a Chopin waltz and a Chopin polonaise (with an expression of "there you are, anything to keep the All-Slavs quiet"), and dashed off in a hurry under a drizzle of thin applause, while

Elfrida Pakul, the Latvian "evacuee" prima-donna (as an "honorary Slav," I suppose), who combines a beautiful and well-trained voice with an unfortunate fish-face, sang something in Latvian.

Sunday, July 5.

I somehow wonder whether this is going to be the last peaceful Sunday in Moscow. There is some talk of a new German offensive against Moscow, straight from the west, but I somehow doubt it. . . .

I heard to-day the terribly sad news that Eugene Petrov was killed in a plane crash on his way back from Sebastopol. I saw him only two or three weeks ago. His death is a great loss. He was one of the few really good Russian writers and journalists; as a person he was very human and sensitive, and with a delightful sense of humour, though as a comic writer he was no longer the same since his co-author Ilf died some years ago. Petrov was also a very good "Western" influence and, to all appearances, genuinely enthusiastic about the alliance with Britain and America, and the cultural *rapprochement* which, one hopes, will follow in a big way. But this cultural *rapprochement* has now lost two valuable supporters: first, Afinogenov, and now Eugene Petrov.

Faute de mieux, I went this afternoon to the Park of Rest and Culture. It was a lovely hot summer day, one of the few we have had so far. There were the usual Moscow crowds in their summer clothes in the Metro, and for the first time to-day Moscow struck me as at least outwardly cheerful; it was a little like my first days in Moscow last year. Not that the news to-day is good: far from it. The thrust against Voronezh is beginning to worry people very seriously. Even so, as I walked across the wide bridge, with the domes of the Kremlin peeping over the new buildings of the Moscow River Island, and the Sparrow Hills in the west all green and leafy, and lots of people going over to the Park of Rest and Culture, one felt a holiday mood in the air. Both inside and outside the park there were swarms of kids. I paid one rouble to get into the park. Near the entrance was a large kiosk, a sort of soda fountain, with an enormous painted panel above it displaying giant oranges and apples and pineapples, and in front of it was a large queue—but only for plain soda water—nothing else on sale. A lot of boys were queueing up for what was called the "Panorama of Great Russian Battles of the Past," in reality a peep-show. Although the grumpy old woman at the desk outside the peep-show said, "I wouldn't advise you; quite uninteresting," I still paid my 75 kopeks for the pleasure. The "Panorama" was a series of boxes inside which were lit-up cheap coloured postcards; at these you looked through a large magnifying window: here were Kutuzov, and Suvorov, and Alexander Nevsky with Teutonic Knights around him struggling in the icy water. Then a youngster looking into the box next to mine squealed delightedly to his pal: "Look, oo-h! oo-h! Look at the *yaposhki* (the little Jap bastards)." They were *yaposhki* right enough—duly captured in the Civil War by Siberian partisans. . . . Where, I wondered, had this little Moscow ragamuffin learned to speak of the Japs with such a tone of innate contempt?

In the park the brass band of the Moscow Garrison was playing, rather in competition with the loud-speaker. The *grande roue* and the swings were doing a brisk trade, but the parachute tower was not working. The flower-beds were in excellent condition, with their begonias and dahlias, and nearer the pond, the rose garden with the deck chairs around it was very lovely. Here it was hard to imagine that Moscow had gone through a terrible autumn and winter. On the pond the rowing-boats were in great demand. But the real

centre of attraction, especially to the youngsters, was the great hangar near the river where there were a dozen or so German planes which had been shot down. Scores of little boys were clambering about the planes, playing hide-and-seek inside the cockpits and under the wings, and altogether having a tremendously good time. A badly wrecked Heinkel was their particular joy, for they were tearing the engines and the wiring to pieces, under the tolerant gaze of the militia man, and tearing large strips of fabric off the wings and smashing the mica to pieces. The cafés and restaurants in the park were, of course, all closed, except for an enclosure for small children where they received milk in small paper cups.

This absence of catering is the chief difference between this year and last in the Park of Rest and Culture.

July 7

The Germans claim Voronezh, which, if true, would be terrible. But the Russian Press emphatically denies it.

In the very comfortable projection room of the Cinema Committee, with its soft arm-chairs, I saw last night a pre-view of the *Leningrad in Battle* documentary—the best the war has yet produced. It is an understatement, of course, telling in very much milder terms about the famine what the Baltic Fleet sailor told me that day, on the train from Vologda. . . . There are some altogether astonishing shots in the film—for instance, one of a direct hit on a six-storey house, which crumbles right there, before your eyes. . . .

July 8

The papers are quite definite about Voronezh not having fallen, and say the battle for the Don crossings is continuing.

When I remarked to Tanya, the elderly maid on my floor: "Well, everything is peaceful in Moscow, anyway," she said: "Oh, God only knows; Hitler may come yet," and then, as an afterthought: "Well, no; I suppose we'll save Moscow again."

The old *corridorny*, with the cadaverous face, with its thin drooping moustache, and that sly shifty look in his eyes, asked me to-day if I could get him a bottle of vodka—he'd pay for it—at the "closed shop" price, of course. I said jokingly I didn't like to encourage him in his bad habits. "It's not that!" he said, "I just haven't any grub—that's all; and with half a litre of vodka I can buy five kilos of potatoes. And if we have no food at all, I suppose we'll just die?" he said. Which seemed an obvious conclusion. And then, in a confidential half-whisper, he said: "Do you think we'll have the same system after the war—still the Kolkhozes?" I said I supposed so. He shook his head, and said it was all wrong. His village was much better off before collectivisation; there were twice as many cows and horses then as there were now; "for when the collectivisation started, we killed off most of the cattle, and it's never been the same again. And now there never seems to be enough fodder, and we have never been able to catch up again."

Things are in a mess in many places, but I am sure they would be in a worse mess without collectivisation. As a prepare-for-war measure collectivisation was absolutely essential.

Nearly everybody in Moscow is having a hard time. There is a young maid with a fine long face, dark and rather un-Russian. Her husband is at the Smolensk Front, where "everything, so far, is still quiet, thank God." She has a child of ten, and another of three, and after the privations suffered during

the winter, they continue to be in poor health, with everlasting colds and temperatures. "I can't send them to the *datcha*; it costs money, and this year the Government doesn't seem to have had time to organise any camps for the children of Moscow. All I earn as a regular wage (apart from some occasional laundry and sewing jobs) is 200 roubles a month; of this 80 roubles goes in war loan, taxes, etc., which leaves me with 120 roubles, to which add 100 roubles I receive for my husband: it isn't much, is it? The children live chiefly on bread and tea; the little one receives substitute milk—what can you do?—stuff made of soya beans, without taste and of little nutritive value. With my meat coupons this month I only got a little fish. Sometimes I get a little soup left over at the restaurant—and that's about all. However," she said, "one mustn't complain; it's all part of the war, and a lot of people have suffered much greater hardships than I have."

July 10

The news continues to be bad. The *Red Star* indicates that the situation round Voronezh has become "tense" and "confused." I hear they are bombing Tambov and other railway-junctions like blazes. It all looks pretty bad. To-day I wrote a gloomy piece which, after consulting Palgunov, the censor passed. The eagerness not to play into the hands of German propaganda is outweighed by the consideration that gloomy news from Russia might help to speed up the Second Front a little.

Saw an absurd variety show at the Estradny Theatre in the Ermitage Garden last night. How miserably laboured some of the "patriotic" effects of some of these shows are—for instance that "living tableau" of the three Slavonic knights on horseback, with a golden picture frame round them; or the ghostly creature in the dim twilight made to look with his goatee beard like Tchaikovsky, and playing bits from the Fourth Symphony on the piano!

And then there are sounds of trumpets, playing a fanfare from the same Fourth Symphony; an invisible man recites something or other, the whole of it suggesting that this is like the Day of the Last Judgment, when all the Germans will perish, to the sound of Tchaikovsky's music. And then there is a tableau of Rostov, with a song exalting its southern charm, and this is followed by a recitation to the effect that Lenin loved birch-trees, and scribbled the word birch-tree a hundred times over the pages of a notebook; and then comes another recitation on how "Stalin, like old Taras Bulba," hearing the voice of his son, tortured by the enemy, cries: "Yes, Ostap, I hear you." To conclude "our Varlamov" (looking singularly like Mr. Osuski, the Czech Ambassador in Paris) conducted his jazz band, and a Ginger-Rogers type of dancer—not very good—performed, and this was followed by an exotic-looking young woman who played an accordion and sang *Tipperary* in a mixture of broken Russian and broken English, and the whole show ended (with very little enthusiasm from the audience) in a great display of allied flags, and a grand finale which was meant to be a sort of Anglo-Soviet-American dance. . . .

July 11

I spent last night with my old friend "Dodik," the music critic, who invited me to supper at his house in the Tverskoi Boulevard. He lives on the ground floor of a small new house built inside the courtyard of a much older and rather dilapidated house, with most of its plaster gone. His wife, who works as a producer at the Kamerny Theatre, is still somewhere in the Urals or Siberia, together with the rest of the company, and his son and daughter are out of

Moscow, too—the daughter at the "Labour Front"—so he has all the three rooms to himself. The sitting-room was crammed with books and enormous piles of music, some of it heaped on the old upright piano. Dodik is a Shostakovich enthusiast, and played me straight from the orchestral score the Largo from the Fifth Symphony, which was exquisite, and a fast movement from the Sixth Symphony which, on the old Schröder piano, made little sense, and a few passages from *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* which were as pure and straight as anything Mussorgsky had written—and very like Mussorgsky. But most of the time Dodik raved about Shostakovich's Seventh, and said I must come to the rehearsal at the Conservatoire to-morrow morning, with Rachlin conducting. Dodik belongs to Moscow's "authoritative musical circles," and his ideas have a certain official stamp.

He said that, in 1935, Shostakovich was torn to shreds by *Pravda*, which accused him of "formalism of the worst kind," for his *Lady Macbeth*. "It did him a lot of good," said Dodik, "he would otherwise have gone absurdly experimental and ultra-modernist." "Our papers," he went on, "can be very hard on a man, but usually, if he isn't too thin-skinned, it can do him a world of good. *Pravda* saved Shostakovich from his sillier self." Other specimens of Moscow's musical taste: Mussorgsky and Borodin are "infinitely greater" than Rimsky-Korsakov, especially Mussorgsky. "Rimsky is mechanical, mathematical, *cérébral*: he achieves his famous crescendo effects by a simple mechanical trick—by playing the same thing over and over again in different keys, higher and higher, and louder and louder." Dodik spoke highly of Skriabin, and even more so of Rachmaninov, thus echoing all the pleasant things that are now being said about *émigré* Rachmaninov in the Press. Some prominence had been given to stories that Rachmaninov was now giving concerts in aid of Russia, and that he had, altogether, adopted a highly patriotic attitude since the war began. The papers, it is true, haven't gone so far as to reproduce the stories in the American Press about his wife and daughter "knitting comforts for the Red Army." Of his past error in emigrating from Russia after the Revolution, Dodik spoke more in sorrow than in anger, adding, however, that there were many artists who "couldn't take it"; and it was difficult to blame them. . . . Now, after many years, Rachmaninov had produced a great work, his Third Symphony, and it would soon be played in Moscow, to celebrate the composer's seventieth birthday. Dodik said that Rachmaninov had been invited to return to Russia, but had decided, for health reasons, to postpone his return till after the war. . . . Then, as on the tinny piano, he played a few pages from the Second Piano Concerto, I said: "It's restless, and bitter-sweet music; this concerto is like the swan song of the nineteenth century." Dodik thought this a good definition. "Yes," he said, "but in the Third Symphony this swan song still continues—and it is still a live voice, not an echo like poor old Glière."

"Prokofiev is a great talent, but Shostakovich is the great musical genius of our time," said Dodik. That seems to be the official line at the moment, with stacks of Shostakovich publicity going abroad, and a determined effort to build him up, especially in America. Of the other modern composers, Dodik put Miaskovsky third, and Khachaturian fourth.

He spoke very highly of Liszt as one of the *grands ancêtres* of all modern Russian music, and deplored Russian indifference to Brahms—a lack of enthusiasm which was an absurd but old Russian tradition, the origin of which could be traced back to a scathing remark Tchaikovsky had once made about Brahms.

We then had supper. Triumphantly, he produced a dish of boiled potatoes—the first I had seen in Moscow since my arrival. The Composers' Union, he said, were helping their members as well as they could, even so he had received his first potatoes only a week ago. He also produced a pickled herring, and some goose-grease, in place of butter, all of which, combined with vodka and later, with tea, made a good meal. Dodik had no sugar, but we poured some sweet Georgian or Uzbek port into the tea.

First he talked about British music, and spoke enthusiastically of Purcell, whom he called a great and very original genius. "When my wife first heard Dido's song, it made her cry. . . . But what in heaven has happened to English music since then?" He didn't think very much of modern English music, as far as he knew it, and thought Elgar no more than a "good second-rater," "something like our Glazounov."

And then, as the level in the vodka bottle went down, he developed *vin triste*, and began to talk about the war. "If it goes on like this," he said, "it may end in a terrible disaster. It was touch and go last autumn, and now the black days have come again, and there isn't much room left for further retreats." "If the worst were to happen," I said, perhaps without much conviction, "then Britain and America would have to fight on for ten or fifteen years." "No," he said, "if that happened, it wouldn't last ten years, it would last four hundred years; it would be the Dark Ages all over again. You can't smash up Hitler if we can't. . . . But," as an afterthought, "I don't think it's as bad as all that."

The streets outside were pitch-black, as I waded home through the rain. There are large holes in the pavements of Moscow, until you get to a modern place like Gorki Street, and several times I walked into deep puddles.

The next day I heard the first part of Shostakovich's Seventh for the first time. It was a rehearsal at the Conservatoire, with Rachlin conducting, and Dodik took me there. As I wrote at the time:

July 12

It's a pleasant old building, with a large concert hall, with large oval oil-paintings round the wall of Glinka, and Tchaikovsky, and Schubert, Schumann and Bach, Handel, Gluck, Haydn and Mozart, and a Wagner, glaring at his neighbour Mendelssohn. The place was built in the early 'nineties, when Skriabin and Rachmaninov were students here. There were only four or five people in the audience. I am now convinced that Shostakovich's Seventh isn't a publicity stunt. Of course, its connection with the war is as obvious as though it were a piece of straight programme music. But it is great for all that. The mean little theme, as mean and soulless as any Nazi gangster, swells into an all-embracing war theme, inexorable, and sweeping everything before it. The blitzkrieg becomes a great struggle, and, rising to a pitch of rage and frenzy, it fills with its noise and screams every atom of earth and air. . . . And then comes the Requiem, no longer quite so obvious on a first hearing as the development of the first theme. . . . But I must hear it again—several times. It's a very good rule in Russia that critics are not allowed to comment on a piece of music until they have heard it four times. But even if you have heard it once, you can't doubt that Shostakovich's Seventh is a great work. No work of music was written in such conditions before. Shostakovich apparently wrote this first part in one month, in a creative frenzy during the Leningrad blitz last August.

THE STORM BREAKS (JULY 1942)

In those black days of July 1942 one was certainly carried away by this first movement of Shostakovich's Seventh—just because of its obviousness —as never afterwards. In hearing it in a much more "secure" atmosphere later, one became more aware of its melodramatic qualities; but at that time the melodrama sounded like real drama—as it must have sounded to the composer when he first wrote it. The Russian propaganda abroad "plugged" this movement as hard as it could. No symphony had ever been mobilised for such intensive "war service" as this!

I venture to add the following frivolous entry of the same date:

I took the tramcar outside the Conservatoire, and inside the tram, an old, haggard-looking dame, who must have seen better times, said to me: "You've just come from the Conservatoire, haven't you?" I said I had. "I've got a contact of sorts with the Conservatoire," she went on. "One of the exhibits in their museum they recently bought from *me*. It's a tortoise. You strike its tummy with a stick, and it makes a noise. They wanted me to tell them its history; but at the time I didn't know. Now I've discovered that it's an old Egyptian musical instrument. So I want to tell them. I must say, they were very decent and paid me 100 roubles for it; nobody else would offer me more than 10. But now that I know it's an old Egyptian instrument, I wonder if it isn't worth more than 100 roubles. What do you think?" I said I had no idea. "I thought as much," she said, with a touch of resignation, "you young people don't know much about cultural things."

I wish I could have pursued the conversation, but had to get off. What queer characters one sometimes meets in this "standardised" Moscow!

So much for Moscow during the first ten or eleven days of July; during the month that followed, the atmosphere became much blacker still, as will be seen later; but in that very blackness the first signs of a fresh hope appeared.

I now return to the military events during the rest of July, and to their treatment by the Press. There were frequent "blackouts." Just to quote one example in many of the vagueness of the communiqués at the time when things were going very badly: the Germans were actually inside Voronezh on July 4, and by the 5th they held the greater part of the town; the communiqués continued to talk of fighting "west of Voronezh" and later, "in the area of Voronezh." Actually, neither phrase was untrue, though it was misleading. The truth is that the Germans, though they held the greater part of Voronezh west of the Voronezh River, did not hold its northern outskirts, nor had they crossed the river and taken the industrial suburb, on the other side, which, technically, was part of Voronezh. So if, in a way, the Germans were right to claim the capture of Voronezh, the Russians were equally right to deny it, for in an administrative sense the Germans did *not* hold the whole of Voronezh, and strategically they did not hold Voronezh at all. The strategic value of Voronezh was in the river and in the railway which went north, and these remained in Russian hands.

But in Moscow at the time, the ordinary newspaper reader, and, for that matter, the foreign correspondents (including those who wrote colourful "roundups") had only the haziest idea, if that, of the real situation at Voronezh. Personally, I did not get a clear idea of what happened there until I visited Voronezh in May 1943, four months after its liberation.

In reviewing the Moscow Press during those weeks, I am therefore less concerned with the exact chronology of military events (which it did not always faithfully record), than with the propaganda lines that were followed. Setbacks—just as victories in 1943 and 1944—were sometimes recorded some days later, when they had become a certainty. Very seldom was the loss of a town announced while there was still a chance of recapturing it in the immediate future; and later, the same caution was applied to victories.

But, in the main, it was possible to get a fairly good general idea of what was happening, especially if you knew the peculiar "code" in the vocabulary of the Russian communiqués (to which I referred before), and major and, above all, *final* setbacks and defeats were never concealed for long. This was the case in 1942, not in 1941 when Russian communiqués and war news were much more secretive. Similarly, in 1943, the Germans often tried, for weeks, to conceal some major defeats; for example, in the autumn of 1943, they still talked about "fighting in the Belgorod area," long after the Russians had recaptured Kharkov. But details were often lacking; for a long time it was extremely difficult for a person with no "inside dope" (and there was mighty little of that) to figure out where exactly the fighting was going on inside Stalingrad; or, rather, what parts of Stalingrad exactly were in Russian and German hands. It was through a casual reference in a Russian correspondent's report (later confirmed by a photograph) that one learned that along some not very clearly-defined stretch, the Germans had actually reached the banks of the Volga. Foreign correspondents had to use great ingenuity and, in the case of some, a powerful imagination to piece together anything that looked like a coherent picture. Personally, as in the case of Voronezh, I did not get a completely clear topographical picture of the Stalingrad battle until I had gone to Stalingrad immediately after the German capitulation. However, as the weeks of that amazing battle went slowly past (and how slow every day seemed in 1942!) one acquired an increasingly clear idea of the nature and intensity of the fighting, of the main tactical strategic and supply problems involved, and of the military and human qualities of the men fighting on both sides—and of the reasons for the Russians' superiority....

The propaganda of iron discipline, and hatred of the German, went *crescendo* throughout July, reaching its highest pitch at the end of the month, after the disaster of Rostov.

On July 11, while fighting continued "west of Voronezh" and in the Rossosh area, the *Pravda* editorial published an article entitled "Hatred of the Enemy." It said:

> Our country is living through serious days. The Fascist dogs are frantically trying to break through to the vital centres of our country. Like a lot of dry sticks, they are throwing more and more divisions into the furnace of war. They burn away under the blows of the Red Army; but the Nazi gamblers throw in more and more piles of German, Rumanian and Hungarian cannon-fodder. The wide steppes of the Don are spreading before their eyes, inflamed with greed and fury. Dear comrades at the front! Your own country believes in you. It knows that the same blood flows in your veins as in the veins of the heroes of Sebastopol. Listen! listen to your own people groaning in the areas overrun by the enemy! Behind you are the flourishing fields and villages, still unsoiled by the enemy—a country where your mothers, sisters, and children live. Let us not allow the enemy to insult and defile them! Let us give our lives, but let us not allow the enemy to go any further. May holy hatred become the chief, the only feeling in our Soviet rear. . . . This hatred combines a burning love of your country, anxiety for your families and children, and an unshakable will for victory. May this hatred move mountains, and work miracles at the lathe and in the field. We have every chance to win. The enemy is in a hurry; he wants to achieve results which would cancel the Second Front. But he will not escape this danger. The stubbornness of the Soviet people has cancelled more than one enemy plan up till now.

Already, one could detect a warning in this not to rely too much on the Second Front: not the Allies themselves, but the Soviet people would, by resisting, make the Second Front possible.

Although the greater part of the Press was devoted to military events, there were days when very much space was also devoted to armaments production. Thus, on July 11, very detailed—though by no means comprehensive—reports were published on the Socialist Competition in the Armaments industries in June. Hidden behind all these percentages—for no absolute production figures were published—was the story of the stupendous effort of the Russian rear, which was supplying arms to the army in the field and—as one later realised more fully—was accumulating enormous stocks for the great counter-offensive.

And on July 20 the Press published a "Report from the Workers of the Urals to Comrade Stalin," in which the Urals were referred to as "the industrial fortress of our country." In an article accompanying this report, V. Andrianov, the Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party, spoke of "the sacred oath of the Urals workers."

An eye was also kept on agriculture: on July 12 the *Pravda* editorial was concerned with the coming harvest; and (rather ironical this!) published instructions for the collective farms of the Voronezh area (which was half overrun) and the Kharkov area, now completely in enemy hands.

On July 12, "fierce fighting" had shifted to "the approaches of

Voronezh" and to the areas of Kantemirovka and Lisichansk. In their eastward drive the Germans had captured Rossosh. The same day the Press published an article on the monstrous instructions from some German general called Weigang on the necessity of deporting to Germany millions of young Russians.

Ehrenburg, in *Red Star*, repeating the *Pravda* motif that the Germans were in a hurry, as they wished to forestall the Second Front, went on to suggest that Egypt had been saved, at least for the time being, by the Red Army! "Hitler said that Rommel was already entering Alexandria. But Voronezh upset Rommel's calculations."

And he sounded strongly the all-Germans-are-bad motif:

> When you ask a German prisoner any questions, he always pleads innocent. Invariably he says: "Nichts; I did nothing. The S.S. burned the village." "Who raped the women?" "I don't know. Maybe Goebbels did."

And not only were the Germans bad, but they were, in their own way, sub-human. Apropos of the rape of a young girl of fifteen, Ehrenburg quoted one German prisoner as saying: "Women to me are a daily necessity like a lavatory." As an example of arrogant German stupidity he quoted the diary of a German soldier, with his reflections on Athens: "What's all this fuss about the Parthenon? The railway-station at Stuttgart is much finer." And on the 14th he wrote: "The Country is in Danger," whereupon he repeated the official line that no sector of the Front must remain inactive. "At Gzhatsk you can still fight for Rostov."

The trouble was that, by that time, Rostov already was clearly threatened. Already on the 12th Lisichansk in the north-eastern part of the Donbas was lost, and Kantemirovka, on the main line to Rostov from the north. The Donbas was about to be outflanked from the north-east, and two great German thrusts were moving south towards Rostov, across the unprotected steppe. Simultaneously another big drive to the east, towards Stalingrad, was gaining in momentum. Already on the 15th Boguchar in the area of the German eastern drive, and Millerovo in the area of their southern drive, were abandoned.

On the 13th, G. Alexandrov, one of the leading members of the Central Committee of the Party, addressed a grave warning to the Allies, and used an argument familiar to those who dolefully remembered that French poster of the phony war days: "*Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts.*" His article was called "The decisive conditions of victory," and said that it was not enough to have greater reserves and a greater war potential than the enemy: "The real question is whether each of the allied countries will employ with the greatest discernment, expediency and determination all the strength at its disposal." Such, he said, was the essence of Leninist–Stalinist strategy, and went on to suggest that while Stalin

saw the problem clearly, and in its true perspective, the Allies were causing regrettable and dangerous delays.

How important patriotic propaganda of every kind was considered to be, could be seen from the publication, in *Pravda*, and a number of other papers, of the entire text of Simonov's play, *Russian People*. Rather significantly, it was called *Russian People*, not "Soviet People." This serial publication began on July 13, and already on the next day, even before the serial had been completed, *Pravda* reviewed it in glowing terms.

Other reviews were equally enthusiastic. They dwelt on the unity of the Russian people, as demonstrated in this play, and on the self-sacrifice and bravery of this handful of simple folks, fighting in their almost encircled little town against terrible odds. It was not until very much later, in 1944, that the play was treated rather more critically:

"Simonov's people are, no doubt, heroes, but there is something very amateurish, very partisan-like about their soldiering. There is not a single fully-trained Soviet officer among them."[1]

On the 19th, the great industrial centre of Voroshilovgrad in the Donbas was lost, with probably the largest locomotive works and railway workshops in the Soviet Union. The Germans were now sweeping towards Rostov. A high pitch of emotional patriotism, combined with the hatred motif, was reached by Simonov in his poem "Kill Him," published in *Red Star* that day. Here is its theme:

If your home is dear to you, where your Russian mother nursed you. . . .
If your mother is dear to you, and you cannot bear the thought of the German slapping her wrinkled face;
If your father's memory is dear to you; if you do not want him to turn in his grave;
If you do not want the German to tear down his picture, with the Crosses he earned in the last war, and stamp on it;
If you do not want your old teacher to be hanged outside the old schoolhouse;
If you do not want her, whom for so long you did not even dare kiss, to be stretched out naked on the floor so that, amid hatred, cries and tears, three German curs should take what belongs to your manly love;
If you do not want to give away all that you call your Country, then kill a German, kill a German every time you see one.
And if your brother has killed a German, then he, and not you, is the soldier;
Kill a German, so that he, and not you, should lie in the ground,
Kill him, so that the tears should flow in his home, not in yours;
Let his house burn, not yours; let his wife, and not yours, be a widow;
Let his mother weep, and not yours; let his family and not yours wait in vain.
Kill him, kill him every time you see him.

In *Pravda* on the 19th, there were two hate themes: a Kukriniksy drawing of a dead child shot by the Germans, and a German officer looking on

[1] *Bolshevik*, October 1944.

cynically, with verses by Marshak accompanying it. And this was also the moment chosen for publishing for the first time a photograph of the ruins of Peterhof Palace, with an article by Tikhonov from Leningrad.

The situation was becoming grimmer every day in the south, though Sovinformbureau tried, from time to time, to strike a more reassuring note by dwelling on German losses.

On the 17th it announced that between May 15 and July 15 the Germans (which, presumably included the satellite troops) had lost 900,000 men, including 350,000 killed, and 2,900 tanks, 2,000 guns and 3,000 planes; the Russian losses were put at 399,000 casualties, including killed (two and a half times less than the Germans), 1,905 guns, 940 tanks, and 1,357 planes. The Red Army, it said, was now more highly organised than before; while the Germans were "throwing in all their reserves to achieve success," and were "moving more slowly."

They were moving too fast, for all that. *Pravda*, in its editorial, wrote the same day:

To stop the enemy at any price: such is the imperative and mighty command of the present moment. It is the army's duty, it is every man's duty to stop the German advance and to foil the enemy's plans. A life-and-death struggle is on.

It is true that there was one reassuring feature in the general picture: the Germans had been stopped at Voronezh. In an important editorial in the *Red Star* on July 19, entitled "In the South," it said:

The July offensive has increased the danger to our country. Enormous German forces are concentrated in the south. *It is true that the enemy has been stopped at Voronezh; and so he has failed to solve his main problem.* Now at Voronezh the *Germans have taken up defensive positions.*

This was announced for the first time, and it was an extremely important announcement. But what followed was on the darker side: and already clearly foreshadowed the disasters lying ahead in the south.

Inexorably, the German steam-roller moved on, both to the south and to the east, across the easy open spaces of the Don country. The communiqué of July 22 already announced that there was fighting around Tsymliansk, far inside the Don bend, on the way to Stalingrad (though still on "this" side of the Don), and around the old Cossack capital of Novocherkassk, twenty-five miles north-east of Rostov. . . . And, on the 24th, Rostov was added to these two place-names. "Ferocious fighting," it said, "in the area of Voronezh, as well as in the areas of Tsymliansk, Novocherkassk and Rostov."

The summer campaign was now approaching its first great climax.

It was an ugly situation. The Russians had, since the spring, expected

Rostov to be attacked again from the west, that is, from Taganrog, which the Germans had held since the previous autumn. But they were now coming from the north and the north-east. This side of Rostov had not been sufficiently fortified. There are numerous indications that at Rostov both the population and the command of the troops lost their heads, and that there were cases of serious panic. In short, the defence of Rostov, with the Red Army in full retreat for weeks, had not been properly organised. "Rostov is threatened," wrote a front dispatch of July 23 in the *Red Star*. "Hold tight!"

But it was difficult; desperately difficult. On the 24th *Red Star* wrote:

> Big enemy tank forces are trying to break through to Rostov. Tense and bloody battles are in progress. In one sector the anti-tank gunners shot up thirty-eight enemy tanks. Thousands of German corpses are piling up at the approaches to Rostov. But, regardless of losses, the enemy is throwing in more and more fresh forces.

It was the vocabulary of imminent disaster.

Further east things were going badly, too, though here the Germans were faced with the barrier of the Don. This they were now trying to cross south of Tsymliansk.

> Our Soviet soldiers, said *Red Star*, are fighting a battle of self-sacrifice against superior enemy forces. Their slogan is: "We shall die but not retreat!"

It was a tense moment in the war. Two questions arose: would they cross the Don at Tsymliansk, and would they take Rostov?

In some respects, the most interesting paper during those grim days was the paper of the Young Communists, the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. It was less expert in military matters than *Red Star*, less officially authoritative than *Pravda*; but it was warmer, more human. It stressed, above all, personal achievement in war. A large part of its space was devoted to telling individual heroic exploits. It published on its front page large portraits of young heroes. It had a refreshing truculence *Pravda* lacked. At the same time it was more youthful in tone, and less given to the lamenting intonations of some of Ehrenburg's articles. Significantly, from July 8 to August 15 it published every day (and before and after that only occasionally) an enormous slogan right across its front page:

> "*Fight till the Enemy's Final Destruction!*" (July 18)
> "*Throw the Enemy out of the Soviet South!*" (July 24)
> "*Stand Firm: Your Cause is Good!*" (July 19)
> "*Smash, Burn, Destroy the German Tanks!*" (July 28)
> "*Into Battle, for Our Holy Fatherland!*" (July 30)
> "*More Stubbornness, and Still More Discipline* (August 8)
> "*Love of Country is Stronger than Death!*" (August 7)
> "*Slash Them Harder with Your Sabre, Cossack!*" (August 9)
> "*The Officer's Order is the Soldier's Iron Law!*" (August 13)

The "Holy Fatherland" motif which was particularly strong after the fall of Rostov, at the time of the establishment of the Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky Orders, was not, however, altogether typical of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. It was, on the whole, more "Bolshevik" in tone than say, *Red Star*. The authority of Lenin and memories of the Civil War were invoked more often in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* than in any of the other papers. The paper was addressed to what was in effect an exclusively Soviet generation. Thus, on July 24, Simeon Kirsanov, one of the favourite Komsomol poets, one who might be described as a minor Mayakovsky, published in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* one of his frequent poems. It was called "Stop Them!" It appealed to the Komsomol's pride.

. . . There they are, crawling over our rich fields,
East to the Volga, South to the Terek;
They are breaking into our rear,
So that our planes and our tanks may go cold and silent without petrol.
So that you, Komsomol, with the armlet of shame round your arm,
Should stand before them, defeated and trembling.
See them plucking the ears of our corn,
See them roaming through the Cossack villages!
Are we knocking at the knees?
Are our teeth chattering, and our hands trembling with fear?
Did not Lenin tell us in 1917:
"Forward, the Young!"?
. . . Will you accept the fate
Of cleaning out the Rumanian's latrine?
Will you stand watching the robber-"knight"
Picking and choosing our girls for Germany's brothels?
This scum must not go any further!
Ram your bayonet down the German's throat. . . .

And so on. On the same day, using the Civil War motif, the Revolutionary Tradition motif, the *Komsomolskaya Pravda's* editorial wrote:

Not for the first time is the evil fire of war raging in the south. The defence of Tsaritsyn, Voroshilov's march from Lugansk to Tsaritsyn, the epic of Astrakhan, the glorious battles of the Northern Caucasus will live for all time. They are still alive, some of the veterans who went into battle under the banners of Stalin and Kirov, Voroshilov and Orjonikidze. The blade of their glory has not been blunted. Their glorious traditions are still alive. So let every soldier who in these dark days is holding back the enemy's fierce attacks on the banks of the majestic Don, say to himself: "My grandfather watered this earth with the sweat of his brow. My father generously shed his blood here. So how can I dare give away a single inch of this ground to the despised German?"

And then, already foreshadowing the tone of the post-Rostov period:

The country will not forgive him who retreats even one step without orders, who abandons an inch of that ground where the present bitter battles are now

being fought. It will scorch with hatred and contempt any coward and panicky creature who at a hard time like this loses his head and turns his back to the enemy!

And again, to conclude, the article evoked the example of Tsaritsyn.

We remember how Stalin saved the South in incomparably more difficult conditions than the present ones. "We had no line of retreat left," Voroshilov related, "but Stalin did not worry about that. He was dominated by the one and only thought, which was to smash the enemy, to win at any price. And Stalin's unshakable will was something that spread to his assistants, and although the situation was almost hopeless, nobody doubted victory. And we won. The enemy was smashed and thrown back." *So it was at Tsaritsyn in the* autumn of 1918. So it will be again now. Our army is firmly convinced of it. Our entire people are convinced of it. . . . So let us close our ranks more vigorously, young friends! Let us stop the enemy in the South and smash the hated invaders!

Ehrenburg on the 24th sounded more desperate:

In his article he quoted several letters from German slave-drivers, brutal, inhuman, cynical letters. The article was called "Kill!" and went on:

We are remembering everything. Now we know. The Germans are not human. Now the word "German" has become the most terrible swear-word. Let us not speak. Let us not be indignant. Let us kill. If you don't kill the German, the German will kill you. He will carry away your family, and torture them in his damned Germany. . . . If all is quiet on your sector, kill a German all the same. If you leave a German alive, he will kill a Russian man or defile a Russian woman. If you have killed one German, kill another. *There is nothing jollier than German corpses.* Your old mother asks you: "Kill a German." The whole country is crying: "Kill a German! Don't miss him."

But neither this impassioned hate propaganda, nor the more self-confident pep talks of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* could save Rostov now.

What happened at Rostov? Many dark hints were later dropped in the Press and in private conversations. The gist of it all was that certain units of the Red Army had panicked and fled. Officers and generals had lost their heads under the fierceness of the German onslaught. The Germans had great superiority in tanks and dive-bombers. They broke into Rostov, and swept beyond the Don, into the fertile flourishing plains of the Kuban, ready to gather in a glorious harvest of wheat and vegetables and fruit. A land flowing with milk and honey opened before them. After the fall of Rostov, many were shot and demoted: generals, officers, and ordinary soldiers. A cry of "pull yourselves together" went through the country.

The cry was echoed in the Press. Iron discipline was introduced. The fall of Rostov was openly attributed to the "cowards and panic-stricken creatures" who had failed in their duty to defend the city. The Press hinted that Rostov and Novocherkassk had good defences, as other places had them, but that the cowards and panic-stricken creatures had failed to make full use of them.

Whether the loss of Rostov was chiefly due to the loss of nerve on the part of certain generals and officers; whether it showed up certain deep-seated flaws in the still insufficiently disciplined, unduly easy-going Red Army as a whole, whether it was due both to the one and to the other, important decisions were to be taken during the days that followed. There was a quick purge, and numerous demotions in the army. Drastic measures had to be taken; pessimism was beginning to eat into the country; the régime itself was not immune against criticism—worse, against doubt. The country looked to Stalin for an answer. The answer came—swiftly, within a few days.

Psychologically, the days that followed the fall of Rostov are among the most interesting and significant in the whole war.

It is uncertain whether the Russians could have held Rostov indefinitely. Probably not. Sooner or later the Germans would have crossed the Don, and Rostov would have been encircled. But Rostov might have held up the German sweep into the Kuban by a few weeks, which would have made a considerable difference. Such, at any rate, is the opinion of those who attribute the fall of Rostov primarily to the failure of those on the spot to hold it, and not to more general reasons, such as decisive German superiority at that place and moment. An interesting point is that apart from the brief announcement in the communiqué that Rostov had fallen, the Press said next to nothing about it. But the shock to the country was terrible; it was the greatest shock it had received since the dark days of 1941.

If Rostov had been anything like another Sebastopol, it would have been different. People expected a stand to be taken there. But after a chaotic battle that lasted barely three days, Rostov was abandoned. On the 25th the communiqué admitted a German break-through at Rostov, and already, on the 27th, it was learned that "after stubborn fighting, our troops abandoned Novocherkassk and Rostov."

There was, however, one point which, in the midst of all the gloom created by the fall of Rostov, people were apt to overlook; and that is that the Red Army had avoided the danger of encirclement at Rostov; and that not only the forces at Rostov, but also the forces which were in danger of being trapped in the Donbas, had also pulled out in time. Looking back on it now, Rostov looks like an unfortunate, but not in the long run avoidable episode in a perhaps inevitable retreat. But Rostov was abandoned without orders; and that was the real trouble. To the Germans, it was the crowning achievement of the blitzkrieg of the previous four weeks; and the Russians decided that this had to stop. But whether actually Rostov could have become another Voronezh may be seriously doubted; the geographical position was unfavourable for defence, and the supply problems would probably have been insuperable for a long and

all-out siege. But although in one sense Rostov was only an "episode," and no more than what military writers were later to call "a tactical but not strategic defeat," it was to become a turning-point in a great many things, and a symbol.

During that first "black fortnight" of the summer of 1942, there was a terrible feeling of uneasiness in Moscow; the British and Americans in Moscow felt it particularly keenly; because Russians never missed an opportunity to refer to that unhappy Second Front communiqué, with a look of "what about it" on their faces. At that time there were apparently still strong hopes in Moscow that "prodding" could really help, and it was not until the Churchill visit and the failure of Dieppe that the hope and illusion of a full-scale allied landing in France "not later than ——" (the date varied, but the most cautious of the believers in the Second Front seldom went beyond September 15) was almost finally abandoned.

Of my Moscow diary entries between July 13 and the fall of Rostov, I find that an unusually large proportion of them refer to the Second Front prodding to which many of us were subjected. Whether Stalin and Molotov knew quite definitely, already then, that there would be no Second Front in the near future, I do not know, but official Russians as well as Soviet journalists appeared to think that it was possible or probable; and, in any case, the impression was given to Soviet newspaper readers and the public in general, that it *must* come. As the summer went on, there were more and more frequent references in the Soviet Press to German divisions that had been sent to the Soviet Front from the West; the firm conviction was being built up that if things were going badly on the Soviet–German front, it was very largely through the Allies' failure to fulfil the promise of the Second Front communiqué. In the army, especially, feeling against the Allies often ran very high. When, early in September, correspondents were taken on a one-day trip to the Rzhev Front, the one clear impression they brought back was the bad humour, bordering on rudeness, among the officers of the unit that received them.

FROM THE DIARY (JULY 13 TO 28)

July 13, 1 *a.m.*

Another Sunday gone; and what a change for the worse since last Sunday! The Germans are crashing right ahead, have taken Lisichansk and Kantemirovka, and further east, they have reached the heart of the Don country at Boguchar. They are now on the road to Stalingrad with no more than 150 miles to go. Already they have covered a distance of 200 miles since the offensive began, and now they are advancing on a 200-mile front. All the stuff last month about "local offensives only" seems pretty silly now. However, as Palgunov to-day remarked: "After all, the offensive isn't along a 2,000-mile front, so there is no inconsistency in what we said on June 22." But, with a

touch of bad humour, he added: "The whole Continent, remember, is making tanks for them now; and without much interference from anywhere."

It made one very depressed all day. This being Sunday, however, with little else to do, I went to the Tchaikovsky Hall to a "Shakespeare Concert," a form of show very popular in Russia. With individual actors, rather than whole companies visiting Moscow, this kind of show is particularly convenient to produce these days. The star turn was the famous Armenian tragedian, Papazian, who, for many years, had played in French, in Paris, and is now a People's Artist of the Armenian S.S.R. It was odd to see him, in an ordinary lounge suit, play, together with another man whose name I forget, two of the Othello–Iago scenes, and then the temptation monologue from *Macbeth*. He spoke with an exotic Armenian accent, which was all right in *Othello*, but was highly comic in *Macbeth*, and people smiled. Then there were a couple of pleasant scenes from *As You Like It*, and then the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. This was done to a piano accompaniment of Tchaikovsky's exquisite *Romeo* music; and I felt an emotional stir go through the audience—of mostly soldiers and young women, and there were tears in many eyes. There was a strange quality in this emotion: I think that what everyone felt was that Tchaikovsky and *Romeo*, and this concert hall, and this Moscow, and the beauty of civilised life, were to-day in deadly danger of being destroyed, or of no longer meaning anything; and it somehow made the words and the music even more precious than before, and through some invisible emotional link *Romeo* made one think of dusty, sunlit steppes and German tanks and dead Russian soldiers.

I ventured to say to somebody to-day: "The Americans aren't ready yet for the Second Front; and you mustn't expect too much from Britain; it has only forty-seven million people, plus some twenty million white Dominion people; as for the 300 million or more Indians, you can't expect them to produce immense armies. The Indians, or most of them, aren't made that way." He replied: "Rubbish. People aren't made in any particular way. Look at our Uzbeks; they were the laziest devils in the world—worse than any Hindus before we took them over and drilled them. And now they make quite presentable Red Army soldiers."

I read a remark made by a German soldier: "We shall spend the winter in the Urals." Oh, yeah? Black as things are, I somehow feel that Stalingrad is going to provide something very big.[1] Stalin's own prestige is involved.

July 15

Very much as a matter of form Scherbakov invited the Anglo–American correspondents to a return lunch at the National to-day. Lozovsky, newly from Kuibyshev, was present, looking rather thinner and older than a year ago. The atmosphere was depressing, and Scherbakov left immediately the eating was over. Oumansky, next to whom I sat, remarked: "We are not quite as cheerful as we were last time, eh?" Alexei Tolstoy also looked very fed up. Parker's speech, correct in substance, but rather long-winded, in which he said that there were perhaps Nevinsons and Kiplings among us, and that we ought to be allowed to be proper war correspondents, was very coolly received by the Russians, who thought this a particularly unfortunate moment for such a suggestion. They were in a foul mood altogether. Leland Stowe made

[1] This is exactly as I wrote it at the time.

an emotional speech about the Second Front, which, he said, would come within the next few weeks, he was sure of it; and even specified: between the end of August and September 15; and, copying Vincent Sheean, he said that the Don flowed down Whitehall. "I wish it were true," Oumansky remarked, *sotto voce*. Then he said to me: "I don't want to make a speech full of platitudes; and if I said what I really thought, it wouldn't be nice." Needless to say, what was worrying him was "anti-Russian" influences in Britain and America. I said I didn't think they were strong in England just now. "Don't misunderstand me: the Government is o.k.; but there's the government apparatus," he said.

Ehrenburg took as his theme the French phony-war poster: *Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts*, and warned the Allies against similar complacency. He was roughly following the line of Alexandrov's article. Then he said: "There's a small news item that kept me awake most of the night: the news that a new German division has just arrived at Voronezh—from France."

July 16

I wrote a *Sunday Times* piece, despite a bad cold, neuralgia, and an infernal *cafard*. I made it highly pessimistic—though not quite as bad as the Soviet Press. This is full of screams of alarm: "Your country is in danger." The Germans claim Voroshilovgrad and claim to be ten miles from Rostov.

Cholerton popped in for a drink, rolled off a string of his usual anecdotes about the Trotskyist trials, and the misdeeds of the "Gaypayoo," ending up, jokingly, "Next winter we'll be eating rats at Viatka." On the whole, however, he thought the situation much less serious than in October 1941. And he made the interesting remark: "The Russians are very panicky in talking to the foreign Press, and remarkably reassuring in talking to the British Military Mission." That may be so; but I still don't like this downhearted tone in the *Russian* Press.

On top of it all comes the ghastly news of the P.Q.17, the next convoy after the P.Q.16 on which I came to Murmansk. As if the losses of this had not been bad enough, they seem to have repeated the same mistakes with the next convoy, with the result that it was dive-bombed almost out of existence, thirty-one ships out of thirty-eight, I hear, having been sunk. The loss of life has been terrible. Some of the survivors landed in the end on Novaya Zemlya, and have since been picked up. Unless they send an aircraft-carrier and other decent warships with these Arctic convoys, they may as well stop sending anything more by the north, at least till the winter.

July 17

There was a sudden and inexplicable wave of optimism in the Soviet Press to-day. Perhaps the *patrie en danger* line had been overdone, and had had too depressing an effect on people. Apart from that, the papers are full of hideous stories of murder, massacres, rape, etc.—in the supplement to every communiqué.

To-night, at the Filiale of the Moscow Art Theatre, in the Petrovsky Lane, I saw the première of Simonov's *Russian People*. The theatre looks odd; it is a good modern theatre inside, but, from the outside, you realise that it's a converted church. The theatre was packed. It opened with some musical effects, taken from Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. A good play, on the

whole, with a fine sense of humanity, and the whole thing written with truthfulness, warmth and affection. Heroes are usually unbearable on the stage, but these are touchingly frail human creatures fighting against a terrible inhuman machine, and Simonov has made them very moving. The "all Russians are united" motif is very strong, and is particularly well symbolised in the ex-Tsarist officer, who, fighting together with the Bolsheviks, dies a heroic death; but a heroic death without oratory or excessive pathos. Simonov's own father is an ex-Tsarist officer, and the character is not overdone. The heroine is a Komsomol girl, but she also suggests great physical frailty; then there is the pair of old women: one, completely loyal and ready to take terrible risks, the other fearfully divided in her loyalties to the country and to her quisling husband, a miserable cowardly creature thinking only of his own skin. Simonov *would* choose for his quisling the pock-doctor of the town, thus betraying a certain old-time prejudice against "nasty" professions; the hero, the commander of the little improvised garrison of the encircled town, is a little on the colourless side; but Globa, a rough old peasant, who is sent on a suicide mission, is a good modern version of old Ivan Susanin, and not improbable. The German officers are pure fiends, of course, with their experiments in refined mental cruelty, but not essentially untrue to life. The audience reacted emotionally to the whole thing; it was striking how, after the curtain fell after the third act, I think, there were at least ten seconds of complete silence before the applause began. For the last words before the curtain fell were: "See how Russian people are going to their death."

Needless to say, there was a happy ending; some of the heroes die in the process of the play, but the whole story ends in the recapture of the town by the Red Army. It is like a miniature Sebastopol—but with a happy ending; and it cannot be otherwise these days, for a *Journey's End*, driven to the very end, would be much too depressing.

I forget what the company was (it was not the Moscow Art Theatre), but the heroine was Simonov's wife, Serova. She is perhaps too much of a platinum-blonde charmer in real life to make a convincing partisan girl.

Unusual prominence was given in the papers to-day to the R.A.F. sweeps over France, and the bombing of airfields at Dieppe, Fécamp, and other places on the Norman coast. Do the papers know something, or are they trying to suggest to the people that something is well on the way—whether it is or not?

July 18

This morning I went to the Komsomol publishing house of *Molodaya Gvardia*, and bought a lot of interesting books, among them a book of Simonov poems, a *Guide for Partisans* and an anthology of *Leningrad's Youth*. The last-named would give Gollancz a thousand fits; its main theme is: "Kill, kill, kill the filthy German beasts." I also got a curious anthology, a kind of prose and verse and song medley, specially published for the use of Kolkhozes, and, finally, a small volume of Tvardovsky's poem, *Vasili Terkin*.

The *Partisan's Guide* is of the greatest interest, and gives one a clear insight into the hundreds of problems besetting a partisan's life. Here are precise instructions, often with explanatory drawings, on almost everything one can think of—on the chief tactical rules of partisan warfare, on the use of enemy firearms, on the most effective ways of wrecking trains and motor transport, of killing enemy motor-cyclists by stretching wire across the road; there are dozens of rules to be observed in reconnaissance work; it contains practical

hints of how to measure, for instance, the width of a river; there is a chapter on camping and camouflage. A most interesting and, in some ways, pathetic chapter is on what to do in emergencies; for example, the guide tells what kinds of bark and moss can be eaten when there is nothing else to eat. The chapters of the book are: (1) The elements of Partisan warfare; (2) How the Fascists try to fight the Partisans; (3) How to work with Explosives; (4) Firearms; (5) Learn to use the enemy's firearms; (6) Reconnaissance; (7) Camouflage; (8) How to read maps and find your way about; (9) How to destroy enemy tanks; (10) How to destroy enemy planes; (11) Anti-gas defence; (12) Hand-to-hand fighting; (13) First-Aid; (14) Marching and living rules; (15) Life in the Snow. The supplement contains a list of reproductions of enemy markings and a Russo–German phrase-book. It begins:

"*Halt! Waffen hinlegen! Hände hoch! Ergieb dich! Raus aus dem Wagen! Bei Fluchtversuch wird geschossen!*"

Then, "*Sie lügen!*" "*Wo befinden sich deutsche Truppen?*" "*Wo noch?*" "*Wo sind Minen verlegt?*"

Fifty thousand copies of this handy little book of 430 pages were printed last month.

ON POPULAR LITERATURE IN 1942

The "Kolkhoz Anthology" intended for amateur concerts and public readings, and entitled *The People's War* (*Idët Voina Narodnaya*), was, indeed, a typical 1942 production. In its preface, the editors say:

In moments of leisure, the young people of the *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* will listen to these stories and verses, act these plays, and sing these songs. They will laugh at the humorous pieces. They all deal with the heroic and victorious struggle of the Soviet people against their base and cunning foe; with patriotism and hatred of the enemy; with young Soviet patriots, true sons of their country. . . . The Soviet people are strong and full of good cheer. Even in the grim hours of battle they do not lose their cheerfulness. At the front and in the rear, in moments of leisure, our young people like to sing a gay or soulful song, to listen to a good story or a good poem, to laugh at a funny joke.

Young *Kolkhoz* lads and girls! Pioneers and village schoolchildren! Create amateur theatrical circles! Tell our people of our heroes, of the soldiers and officers of the Red Army, of the men and women partisans! With songs and stories and plays and poems make the youth of the Soviet Union hate the enemy with an even deeper hatred, make them work even harder than before, make them help the front so that our soldiers may finally smash the hated German-Fascist invaders, and free our Soviet country in 1942!

Much of the reading matter, especially in the first part of the book, was in a minor key—a 1941 key. The idea of fighting against a terrible, ruthless enemy, of struggling against fearful odds, with the air filled with the roar of German planes, dominates emotionally much of the literary matter contained in the book. You find it in the solemn, almost biblical "Soldier's Oath," written in prose by the poet Surkov.

It begins:

I am a Russian man, a soldier of the Red Army.

My country has put a rifle in my hand, and has sent me to fight against the black hordes of Hitler that have broken into my country.

Stalin has told me that the battle will be hard and bloody, but that victory will be mine.

I heard Stalin, and I know it will be so. What am I? I am the one hundred and ninety-three millions of free Soviet men. And to all of them Hitler's yoke is more bitter than death.

In the fields of the great battles for my country, I have witnessed all the baseness of the enemy, and the filth of his foul robber deeds.

Mine eyes have beheld thousands of dead bodies of women and children, lying along the railways and the highways.

Their flesh was lacerated with lead and iron.

They were killed by the German vultures.

I passed through the towns and villages of our western lands. I saw with mine eyes the burned remains of homes and factories, of scaffolding raising its charred arms to heaven.

The groans and the lamentations of the innocent are screaming in my ears, growing into a song of hate and revenge. . . .

And then it goes on:

. . . The howling engines of Hitler's vultures are roaring in the sky. They threaten to destroy with thousands of bombs all that you have built in the sweat of your brow. Arise, avenger and defender! Protect with your mighty body your cities, your factories, your dams and palaces!

I hear the voice of the towns and the fields, and my hatred grows larger and stronger.

The tears of women and children boil in my heart. Hitler the murderer, and his hordes, shall pay for these tears with their wolfish blood; for the avenger's hatred knows no mercy.

Hitler the robber, has broken into my home. He has captured my towns and is roaming over my country.

But premature are his shouts of victory.

The hatred of 193 million people: such is the strength of my country. All the German bombs cannot blow it to the winds. The caterpillars of German tanks cannot crush it. The shells of German batteries cannot smash it. The foul gang of spies and diversionists cannot poison it with panic and provocation.

For every inch of my ground the battle will be bloody and destructive. At the front I shall weaken the enemy through the fury of my attacks.

In the rear, my hands shall make the weapons of victory.

I shall meet the enemy with shots from behind every stone and bush. Night and day, he shall have no rest or respite. I shall kill him with the fear and the alarm he will constantly feel for his foul little life.

I hold my rifle firmly in my hands. I know the enemy and I hate him. In my resistance I shall strike harder and harder blows. And my resistance will turn into his annihilation.

I shall drive him on. And there shall be no mercy for him.

Hatred is my strength.

With my hatred I swear this oath to my country, I, a Russian man.

And my oath is stronger than steel.

. . . . .

THE STORM BREAKS (JULY 1942)

This was written in 1941, and the poet's anguish can be felt in every line. It was written at a time when everywhere the Red Army had to fight against superior forces, superior on land, superior in the air; it was a case of resisting as strongly as possible, of inflicting on the enemy as many losses as possible, until enough weapons had been made for the Red Army, and enough experience had been gained to hit back. Much later, in 1944, I saw Surkov, and he recalled our first meeting on the Smolensk Front in September 1941, at the time of the short-lived and costly, but morally important Russian victory at Yelnia; and in 1944 he confessed: "We wanted you correspondents to see some Russian tanks; but we had hardly any to show you."

And it was perhaps significant that this Soldier's Oath, sounding almost like a prayer, and written in the dark days of 1941, should still have been reprinted in the summer of 1942, at the head of this popular anthology.

There follow several other prose pieces and poems much in the same vein, though some already striking a more cheerful note, after the Russian counterblow at Moscow: For example, Simonov's famous poem "Grim Anniversary"—verses addressed to Stalin on November 7, 1941:

Comrade Stalin, can you hear our voice?
We know it—you must hear us.
At this dear hour of our lives,
Our first thought goes, not to our sons, or to our mothers, but to you.

No one, in all his life, has ever known such a grim anniversary,
But a true man's heart grows only stronger in battle.

And as we marched past you in festive ranks,
Not thinking of the sorrows of war,
Who could tell that, on this day,
We should be separated from you?

But, in spite of everything, victory will come, "we know it in our hearts," and the poem ends with a vision of a victory parade through the Red Square:

Like the vision of our happiness, we shall see you again.
Standing above the jubilant throng,
You will stand there, in your plain soldier's greatcoat,
And looking a little older after this bitter struggle.

Then there follow the more confident pieces, written after Moscow had been saved: "Forward!" by Ehrenburg, Surkov's poem: "Moscow is behind us!" and some others. Then there are a number of heroic episodes, told in prose or verse, some genuine, other fictional, by Gorbatov, Surkov, Simonov; then the atrocity *motif* comes out in full force in the "Pobuzh Tragedy," the story of how the whole population of a village was massacred (this was written by the correspondent Tsvetov, who was in the village

soon afterwards). Then two more "Oaths"—both in verse: "The Oath" by Surkov, and "The Partisan's Oath," by Rudnev. A much lighter note is struck by the popular poet Isakovsky, in the humorous poem "The Russian Bathhouse," in which the Partisans catch all the Germans in the bathhouse in the nude. Then comes Lidov's famous reportage called "Tanya," the first report of the death of Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, the Moscow Komsomol girl, who, in the village of Petrishchevo, outside Moscow, was tortured and publicly hanged during the German retreat from Moscow. Lidov's *Pravda* reportage was the first story on the subject which, for a long time, was to take the first place in the martyrology of the war. Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, who was awarded posthumously the title of Hero of the Soviet Union (still very rare in those days), became a symbol, and the subject of numerous later narratives, articles and poems.[1]

The next few pieces are again in the major key: Mikhalkov's poem "Two Letters," from mother to son, and from son to mother, and several pieces by Tvardovsky, the author of *Vasili Terkin*. Finally, in this first section, there is another oath—"The Stakhanovite's Oath," by Lebedev-Kumach; the verses are poor, but the sentiment praiseworthy:

> To throw back our mortal enemy,
> May my mind and my will be harder than steel.
> I swear that, as long as I breathe,
> I shall work so that Stalin may be proud of me.

Vasili Terkin of Tvardovsky's long poem is a character whom Soviet propaganda tried to popularise in the first year of the war: it is doubtful whether it ever succeeded in this. Terkin is "the simple hero," who does not underrate the enemy, or hardships and difficulties, but who keeps on smiling even in retreat, and whose good humour and jokes keep the others' spirits up. He plays the accordion, and continually praises the company's cook; for Terkin is a good eater, and a good sleeper; he can sleep anywhere and in any weather. He is the healthy, uninhibited animal (in all except sex, of course, which he seems to lack completely). And when he performs great deeds of valour, he does it with simple grace, and when he receives no medal for them, he doesn't mind, and says, "Maybe next time." There is something of Terkin in nearly every Russian soldier, but Tvardovsky's hero is (to me, at any rate) an unbearable paragon of all human and soldierly virtues, and the facile doggerel of the poem can scarcely rank as literature at all, though some half-hearted attempts have been made to treat it as such, and even to set it as an example for other writers. Of the small pocket edition (1942) of *Terkin* alone, eighty thousand copies were printed.

But in the *Kolkhoz Anthology*, as in all other anthologies printed about the same time, one invariably finds passages from *Vasili Terkin*, or other Tvar-

[1] Lidov, who had spent months and months at the front, died one of those stupid deaths, in a place where it was least expected. He was killed by a German bomb during the famous raid on the American Flying Fortresses base in July 1944, deep inside the Soviet Union. I saw him only a few days before. He will go down to history as the man who "discovered" Zoya.

dovsky poems, written in the same major key. They never enjoyed anything approaching the immense popularity of the superstitious, almost religious *Wait for Me*, Simonov's poem, which is almost the complete antithesis of the jolly Tvardovsky doggerel. But it also was included in all anthologies and reading books, and, indeed, twenty-eight composers were, in the summer of 1942, competing in writing music for this lyric. One composer went so far as to compose a cantata for male choir, with Simonov's poem as its text.

I referred before to the crude but very amusing slapstick of Slobodsky's *New Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik*, first published in 1942. It was immensely popular in the army, but its republication on a large scale was never encouraged, the reason, I suppose, being that it was mildly "indecent," with its broad jokes about the German colonel's over-sexed wife, the jolly ex-cabaret actress, and the Colonel, totally inadequate for satisfying such an insatiable lioness, above all, as a begetter of the Aryan children Hitler was expecting from all Germany's true sons; or with those episodes where Russian privy seats, as a result of sabotage, give way under the weight of German buttocks. No passages from this book are included in the *Kolkhoz Anthology*, but there is much other more or less amusing material: several one-act plays, which constitute a peculiar *genre* that evolved during the early part of the war; they are really variations on the same theme—the arrogant or drunken German behaving as the lord and master, and gradually being fooled by the villagers, and finally being taken off by the partisans to be shot. The fooling is done in a variety of ways; by a young village lad who plays the half-witted yokel, ready to obey German orders, but in reality a partisan leader who while keeping the German officer busy with his idiot talk, is waiting for the partisans to surround the village (*The Idiot*, by Sukhodolsky, the Ukranian writer); or by a partisan lad, dressed up as a girl who, luring a drunken German officer to her bed, then disarms him and hands him over to the partisans, who arrive at just the right moment. (*A Jolly Conversation*, by I. Nazarov.) Another sketch in the book, by J. Rudin, called *The Grabarmy*, tells of the sad experience of a German corporal who finds that his officer wants a large share of the loot he has been collecting in a Russian town. "I also," says the Colonel, "have a mother-in-law who likes furs," etc., etc.

In the comic sections of the book, the German is always represented as a ludicrous character—in the plays, in the songs, the "new proverbs," in the *chastushki*, these comic Russian doggerel poems so popular in the villages. The German of this popular literature was either the German who was being fooled by partisans, or the German during the retreat from Moscow. Thus, among the "new proverbs" we find: "To the German soldier even a dead cat is bliss." There are in the book jokes and stories about German companies of whom no one is left alive except one officer and one corporal, all the rest having perished in more or less comic circumstances; or L. Lench's story called *A Good Education*. Here a young Nazi is given his education at the zoo by the Stinking Badger, the Wild Boar, and the Wolf; the fatal error made by his parents is in not also engaging the services of the rabbit, who would have taught Fritz to run.

The propagandist basis of this kind of literature is somewhat complicated; every Russian knew, of course, that this was not an accurate portrayal of the German soldier, and some Russian soldiers actually resented such attempts to minimise the dangerous strength of the German soldier; but comic relief was needed, and also the suggestion that the

German was not invincible, that he could be fooled, that he was made to run in his ridiculous "Winter Fritz" rigout from the gates of Moscow, and that he could be made to run again. But in the dark days of 1942 it was difficult propaganda to put across. Only it was necessary as an antidote against gloomy thoughts—thoughts so well reflected in the poetry of Surkov and Simonov, with its proud but emotional, and often last-trench nationalism.

And meantime, far away, in distant Tashkent, there lived an elderly lady, a Leningrad evacuee—Anna Akhmatova, the woman poet, who had been the lioness of the symbolist *salons* of the St. Petersburg of 1912–14–16. She was then the wife of the poet Gumilev, to be shot in 1920 for taking part in an anti-Soviet plot. And Anna Akhmatova, with her pure poetic intuition, wrote what was deep down in the heart of every civilised Russian. She wrote it in those desperate summer months of 1942—eleven lines of verse, that were as deeply felt as those few but laconically poignant little poems she wrote on the siege of her native Leningrad.

This poem was called "Courage" and it went (with apologies for the literal translation):

We know what to-day lies in the scales
And what is happening now.
The hour of courage has struck on the clock
And courage will not desert us.
  It is not frightening to fall dead under enemy bullets,
It is not bitter to remain homeless,
But we shall preserve you, great Russian speech,
You, great Russian word.
  We shall carry you to the end, free and pure,
And give you to our grandchildren, and save you from bondage,
  For ever.

It was the "hour of Courage" true enough, and what was in danger was the very existence of the nation.

Hitler was making his second all-out bid to conquer Russia—European Russia; what was beyond the Urals "*interessiert mich nicht,*" he said about that time.

FROM THE DIARY

July 19

From what I hear, the Russians are accumulating very large reserves for a counter-offensive, but they feel it would be fatal to use them now before the Second Front; for one thing, they are still very short of tanks and planes for an operation of this kind; and the problem of trained manpower is serious. Fifty million Soviet people must now be under German occupation, and in the East all available recruits are being intensively trained. There is, I hear,

some nervousness about Japan, for if things go from bad to worse, the Japs may well be tempted to cash in, and attack the Russians across the Manchurian border. The Russians have to keep there a fully equipped Far-Eastern Army of about 1,500,000 men; if it weren't for the Japs, the Russians would not have nearly as hard a time on this front. People are conscious of it, and there is much ill-feeling against the Japs, though no reference of any kind to Soviet–Japanese relations is allowed by the censorship. I gather that some equipment has had to be moved from the Far East—but very little. The Russians won't do anything that might in the least encourage the Japs to attack.

The news continues to be very depressing; and it is strange how, in spite of it, nothing seems to change in Moscow. On Monday I spent the evening at Sokolniki Park. It was a beautiful evening, and the trunks of the pine-trees were all rosy in the sunset. Above the main alley was a large banner saying: "Do everything to rout the enemy in 1942"—which, these days, sounds a little ironical. The far end of Sokolniki, with its birches and pine-trees, and hardly any paths, is less like a park than a forest. Just before you reach it, you come to the open-air dancing platform, and this was crowded. Around it were flower-beds of nasturtiums. Most of the dancing couples were girls—factory girls in pretty summer dresses. The "band," composed of a pianist and a fiddler, played the "Lambeth Walk" and "Good-night, Sweetheart." There were not enough men to go round. Most of the girls had red-painted finger-nails. Among the few men there was a young fellow, apparently a factory worker in a blue serge suit and a very loud tie, and with a parachute badge, but the real centre of attention was a young man with the golden star of Hero of the Soviet Union. I sat on a bench, and two girls sat down beside me; one of them was a pretty, fair girl, with a sad, pale face and a black dress with white spots; she read to the other girl a letter she had just received from the front. Among other things it said: "My dearest, I am convinced that I shall survive. So don't worry about me. Would you send me some tooth-powder. I kiss you, I kiss you very tenderly." And then, in a P.S. it said: "The fighting is very fierce just now." It was a Monday, that is, a day off for many workers, and that is why there were so many people in the park that evening. The two main centres of attraction were the dancing-platform and the cinema.

Maurice Hindus, who arrived yesterday, was talking about the terribly isolationist and anti-Russian tendencies that still exist in the United States; I had little doubt about it after reading the other day some back numbers of the *Saturday Evening Post*. For instance, as late as November 1941, they were opposing any American aid to Russia: (*a*) on religious grounds, and (*b*) because if Russia wins, it will make her the most powerful country on the Continent. Which, logically, means that it would be much better for Germany to win—and to become the most powerful country on the Continent.

More about Moscow. Yesterday I went to the zoo, which I found a very cheerful place, with its lovely large pond full of swans and other waterfowl, and the whole place teeming with kids and Pioneers with their red neckties—all of them looking very fit—decidedly better than most children looked at the beginning of June—and I saw the giraffes and the polar bear, and the lioness who was born here and brought up by her foster-mother, a Scottish sheepdog, and I saw the elephant (whose food must add up to a regrettable number of dependants', or even workers', rations); and the emus and the tortoises, and

all kinds of foxes, wolves, bears, and Boris the chimpanzee, the favourite of Moscow's children. He is so beautiful that they called him Paris (the Paris of Greek mythology), but the name was promptly russified and became "Boris." The elderly woman keeper said poor Boris was very lonely, since together with many other animals from the Moscow Zoo, his "wife" had been evacuated last autumn to Sverdlovsk. I also saw the old-fashioned aquarium, built in 1892, with a couple of sleepy crocodiles at the bottom of a dirty pool, and an exhibition of posters explaining, in simple language, Darwin and the Darwinian theory.

The giraffes, Jean Champenois tells me, had a strange history. The two of them were brought here by a Frenchman who expected to receive a number of rare Russian animals in return. He had come on behalf of some French zoo. But all he got in return was two or three very ordinary bears. Later he would say: "Well, it was a poor bargain, but, after all, I feel that I have contributed something to the cause of Franco–Soviet cultural relations."

July 20

I spent the evening at an Industrial Reserves School, in the depths of Zamoskvorechie, on the other side of the Moscow River. Boys of about fourteen to seventeen are trained here to be electricians, riveters, and mechanics of all kinds. I had to walk there, and it was an infernally long walk, and to add to my troubles, a terrific hailstorm, complete with torrents of rain, broke as soon as I had crossed the bridge. Everybody ran for shelter; several women ran along the street barefooted, carrying their shoes; and for twenty minutes or more I was trapped in a doorway of a mangey old-fashioned house, together with an old man, an old woman and two lads. Russia is food-conscious: for all four remarked at different times: "This hail will be very bad for the crops."

The school in question had received second place in the Socialist competition for June, and the slogan now was: "We must get first place and win the Red Banner." Of the seven hundred pupils nearly all had received "good" or "excellent" marks, but still, as the director said, in an address to the school —the meeting had already started when I arrived—the proportion of "excellents" was not sufficiently high yet.

"The front," he said to the boys, sitting there in rows, and listening very attentively, "requires more and more arms so that the invaders may be routed, and it will be for you to replace your fathers and brothers in the factories."

At this ceremony the prizes were awarded; the director received a "parchment of honour" and "a valuable gift" (it was not stated what this was); similar prizes were awarded to the Secretary of the Komsomol of the school, to the Senior Master, to two others teachers (skilled mechanics), and Comrade Rezikova, a charwoman. The director was a little man with gold teeth and a pock-marked face, and he spoke emotionally of "our soldiers who are valiantly resisting the enemy at Voronezh, and are closely watching us."

In his speech he avoided every note of pessimism, and merely dwelt on the importance of building up labour reserves in the present war; and he naturally quoted from Stalin's speech on the subject. The boys, most of them with cropped hair, looked keen and intelligent, and very earnest, though many had a strained, overworked look, and some looked thin and poorly fed. Then a woman spoke—I later learned that she was Comrade Mazurova, the Assistant Chief of the Moscow Committee for Labour Reserves. "When you look at the map to-day," she said, "you cannot but feel anger and anxiety. Never in all history has there been such a life-and-death struggle; the Fascist invaders

want us to be their slaves—us, the free and happy family of Soviet peoples. Turn all the hatred of which you are capable against the Germans; put all this hatred, which is a sacred feeling, into your daily work. Your country needs you."

I was then presented to the company and made a short speech on the British war effort, and referred, a little incautiously perhaps, to the Second Front which was, of course, a military secret, but which, I thought, would come soon —which was, obviously, what everybody was expecting me to say, for the boys and everybody else cheered loudly, and then somebody stood up and asked me to convey to British Youth the greetings of Soviet Youth, and said that the men fighting at Voronezh and Leningrad were all looking to England for assistance. We then visited all the various labs and workshops, and electrical repair shops, and had a look at the wall newspaper, with its praise of the good pupils and nasty cracks about the bad ones, and at the table of honour with the names of former pupils who had distinguished themselves in the war, or had been killed. I learned that the training here was largely theoretical, that the boys came to school one day a week, and worked on their problems at home; and from here they went straight into factories and workshops; the course here lasted two years. Then we went through the dining-room where all the boys were eating; the director said that they were well fed, and received milk regularly, and sometimes even strawberries. Not that I was much impressed by the meal we received later in the director's study; it was the same as that served to the boys: a tiny omelet made of egg-powder—which the director called a "disgusting *ersatz*"—and a little cream cheese, followed by a couple of jam pancakes; it was good, but there wasn't much of it to feed a growing lad. A very intelligent Party man called Golovanov, and Mazurova were also there, and we talked about this and that; they were very interested, for instance, in the food-rationing system in Britain; they talked about the effect of the Komsomol on boys' efficiency: although only a relatively small minority in the school were Komsomol boys—they weren't accepted into the Komsomol before the age of fifteen—thirty out of the sixty-four "excellents" last month were Komsomols.

I went back by tramcar with Golovanov and Mazurova, both of whom were most friendly. It was strange to walk out of this Labour Reserves school into the still streets of Zamoskvorechie, and to walk through the empty streets past a beautiful baroque church floodlit by the moon, and past a lot of little houses that must have stood there, just the same, in the days of Ostrovsky. It was 12 o'clock, but Mazurova got off at the Ilyinka, saying she was going back to the Komsomol headquarters to do four or five hours' more work. And brightly she added that, since the war began, she had seldom had more than three or four hours' sleep a night. "However," she said, "never mind, we'll have plenty of time to sleep after the war." She was about thirty, with a pleasant smile and a frank manly handshake, but a slightly strained look on her face. And it made one realise how much intensive work was going on here in Moscow, and all over the Soviet Union, among industrial workers, and Party and Komsomol workers—and how many people here lived on their nerves, and on their reserves of energy.

July 21

Another talk with Maurice Hindus. His book *Hitler Cannot Conquer Russia*, he tells me, came out in England under the title *Russia Fights On*, because the publisher wasn't sure about the accuracy of the original title!

July 23

The news continues to be bad. Fighting is going on at Novocherkassk and Tsymliansk. The question is whether the Russians will be able to hold the interminable Don Line, and if the Russians can make an effective stand at Rostov, without the Germans by-passing it.

Very odd: to-day every paper splashed over four columns the Cripps interview given to *Life*, and reprinted in the *Daily Mail* on March 7 last!

What's the idea of printing an interview in which a whole lot of questions are discussed which were all settled two months later by the Anglo–Soviet Alliance? Is the article intended, at this stage, to raise various doubts in the Russian public's mind about Britain's real attitude to Russia? For, in his interview (given, I repeat, long before the Alliance), Cripps mentions the mutual distrust existing between the two countries, and the worry felt in England for many years past about Bolshevism, etc., the whole indicating that England still has to prove, in spite of the Alliance, that she is a real friend.

It is one of those outwardly illogical, but nevertheless explicable twists in Russian internal propaganda, which baffle foreign observers more than anything else. But such twists and zigzags are never accidental; they are caused by some high-up decision. In this case the decision must have been dictated by doubts about the Second Front, and by a desire to tell the people not to be too sure about it.

July 24

The talk I had to-day with Oumansky was typical of the present nervousness and also of the desire on the part of official Russians to do some propaganda among Allied correspondents.

Oumansky said: "I am afraid resentment against the Allies, against England in particular, is going to rise very rapidly, as things go on deteriorating at our front. And, mind you, the Germans have already started the old stunt they practised so successfully in France. Their leaflets keep saying: 'Russians, where are your Allies?' or else: 'The Hungarians and Rumanians are better Allies to us than the British are to you.' And in these leaflets are contained peace offers to the Russians—in terms you can imagine.

"It has no effect on our troops yet; most of them believe that the Germans are doing it just *because* they are scared of the Second Front, and that they are in a hurry to make peace with us, so as to be able to turn against England. But it may have a very bad effect after a while; it will not create defeatism, but certainly strong anti-British sentiment. For remember, this country has a traditional distrust of England, dating back to the time of Palmerston and Disraeli.

"To-day the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald* are already damning the idea of the Second Front—almost openly; *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* are still fairly good; while Michael Foot in the *Evening Standard* is talking of 'betrayal' and 'sabotage.' Here in Russia we think there must be several reasons for this: and some of them, we are sure, are political."

I: "What was the point of publishing that out-of-date Cripps interview?"

Oumansky: "A very gentle hint not to expect too much. Look here; if we really wanted to stir up anti-British sentiment, we could do it very effectively; but we don't want to. Can you imagine what impression Eden's last speech would produce here, with Egypt, Egypt, and more Egypt, and only a gentle pat on the back for the glorious Russian Allies? But there's more to it than that. By delaying the Second Front, you are encouraging the Japs to stab us

in the back. They have still two months in which they can strike at us, and the temptation to do so while we are fighting in the Caucasus will be enormous. *That* would be a nice 'Second Front!'

"Something *must* happen soon in the West. Soon the battle of the Kuban will be fought. Rostov is pretty well lost. Our troops have been withdrawn from the Donbas—at least I hope so. The Germans have suffered very heavy losses. But still—we will not be able to prevent them from crossing the Don. There will be two great battles that'll decide everything: one in the Kuban, the other at Stalingrad. At Rossosh we are holding the line of the Don, and the Germans there received a very severe licking.

"As for the Caucasus, I am a little worried. Even when a Russian or an Ukrainian is not particularly pro-Soviet, he still remains patriotic; he will fight for a United Russia, or Soviet Union, or whatever you want to call it. But the Tartars in the Crimea are, to a large extent, disloyal. They were economically privileged by the wealthy tourist traffic before the Revolution; and now they have not been so well-off. Moreover, there are religious influences, which the Germans have not failed to exploit. Nor do I particularly trust the mountain tribes of the Caucasus. They are Moslems, and they still remember the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, which ended not so very long ago—in 1863. The only fully pro-Soviet people in the Caucasus, the only truly loyal people are the Armenians. The Georgians are not so hot.

I: "What, even with Stalin a Georgian?"

Oumansky: "Yes, because a lot of Georgians—well you know yourself what kind of people they are. They are southerners, like Italians, a lazy, wine-drinking, pleasure-loving bunch."

July 25

I went this morning round the bookshops in the Kuznetsky Mosst; there is a fair amount of second-hand books about, though all rather expensive. I met there Jean Champenois. He said a terrible tragedy had happened to him. His maid had put his shoes to dry near the stove last night; this morning he was wakened by the maid. Smoke was pouring out of the kitchen. "What's wrong?" he said, "is the house on fire?" "No," she cried, "it's *much* worse; your shoes have got burned." Unless you have an "order," you have to pay to-day anything between 5,000 and 6,000 roubles for a decent pair of men's shoes.

Jean recalled a curious episode relating to 1939, soon after the invasion of Poland. Rumours of German atrocities penetrated to Moscow, and people were very worried and shocked. Anti-German sentiment in Moscow was, indeed, very strong throughout the "Pact" period. Curiously enough, just about the time of these German atrocities, the Soviet Press published several articles debunking the Anglo–French atrocity propaganda of the last war, particularly the stories of German atrocities in Belgium. One wishes that the Russian "atrocity propaganda" were also untrue (not that the Anglo-French propaganda was, in the main, false); but unfortunately it isn't, and nobody has any reason to disbelieve it.

The Reuter car which, last summer, received a monthly petrol ration of 300 litres, now gets only 100 litres—and can consider itself lucky. The petrol situation threatens to become increasingly serious. There is a great tanker fleet on the Caspian, and it normally goes up the Volga to Saratov, Gorki and beyond. Since the ice broke, enormous numbers of tankers have been going

up the Volga, and very big oil reserves appear to have been accumulated in Central and Northern Russia. But the Volga shipping is now being bombed, and the Volga itself is being mined from the air. Moreover, if the Germans reach Stalingrad, the Volga will be completely cut. Then the oil will have to go to Astrakhan or Krasnovodsk, on the other side of the Caspian, and be sent from there, in roundabout ways, by rail. This would be scarcely practicable—especially on a large scale. If, before the spring, the Germans are not driven back from the Don–Volga area (even if they don't reach Baku) there will be a desperately difficult oil situation. For the next eight months Russia will largely have to depend on reserves accumulated in the north.

Meyer Handler, who has just come from Kuibyshev (where the diplomats spend their time bathing in the Volga and rowing, and lying about in the sun, and are generally having a good time, though the local people and especially the evacuees are living in infernally hard conditions), told me about his trip, earlier in the summer, from Teheran to Kuibyshev. He went by way of Baku and Astrakhan, and from there sailed up the Volga to Kuibyshev past Stalingrad and Saratov. It can't be done any more.

I dipped to-day into Boborykin's old-fashioned novel *Kitai-Gorod*, describing Moscow in the early 'nineties of last century. It makes ironical reading, with its descriptions of the pandemonium of horse-carts laden with food, driving to the market, with its mountains of apples and melons and water-melons. Boborykin speaks of "juicy, potbellied Moscow"—how different from the lean, austere Moscow of to-day!

Out of the twenty-seven correspondents of *Red Star*, eleven have already been killed since the beginning of the war.

July 27

Rostov is now clearly lost; and the loss may be announced at any moment. At Tsymliansk the Germans are crossing the Don in force; there's no doubt about it now.

I spent a pleasant evening at Dodik's last night, with a lot of Liszt and some more Shostakovich, and a lot of interesting discussions on the prospects of Soviet music. All of which, I must say, seemed a little incongruous in the light of the damnable news from the south. When Dodik talked about it, he sounded very depressed. He feared there were very hard times yet ahead of us. "If we lose all our highly populated areas and all our industrial areas, we shall lose the war, and if that happens (which I somehow can't imagine), England and America and everybody will be up the spout. I daresay," he added, "people here don't fully realise the enormous *technical* problem of starting a Second Front across the Channel."

July 28

Rostov and Novocherkassk have fallen, and the Germans claim to be at the far end of the Don Bend, and to be well across the Don in the south, round Tsymliansk and Kotelnikovo.

July 29

There is something ominous in the stillness of the nights in Moscow, with the moon shining so peacefully on the domes and towers of the Kremlin, and the sky dotted with high-up barrage balloons, when down in the south all hell

is let loose. Last night's communiqué spoke of heavy fighting some ten miles south-east of Rostov on the Tikhoretskaya railway-line. It's the sweep into the Kuban right enough. The Germans to-day claim to have crossed the Don in the east, quite near Stalingrad. Palgunov this morning said: "The situation is very difficult; but it's no use being panicky about it." Yesterday, apparently, there was quite a bottleneck at the censorship, the censors not quite knowing how to treat the very pessimistic messages after the fall of Rostov. My cable was held up from 12 to 7.30 p.m.—much too late for the morning papers. This morning, somebody said, the B.B.C. had quoted *The Times* editorial as saying that the situation had never been so serious since 1940, and that Russia was in danger of ceasing to be an *offensive* ally.

Jean Nau, Champenois's assistant, arrived to-day from Kuibyshev; his train wasn't bombed, but the train before was, and he saw the wreckage. . . .

The Russian authorities are extremely hard-boiled about rations, and people with higher rations have no feeling of guilt in relation to those with lower rations. What the feelings in the opposite direction are, is another matter; here they vary considerably from acute envy and a sense of grievance to the acceptance of the Soviet rationing system as something eminently, or at any rate, roughly, fair. A man on the radio committee was telling me the other day, with a touch of anger, how his boss cheerfully stuffed himself with a couple of boiled eggs in his presence every morning, sometimes with a slice of ham, while he, being on a lower ration, was in the same room, consuming his own dry bread and tea (without sugar).

Workers are fairly well off in Moscow these days; but the diet of smaller Government employees, including such professions as school teachers, is pitiful. It is they who have that haggard look you see in the street.

With a touch of bad humour Palgunov to-day remarked that Bevin had made a speech in which he discouraged all talk about the Second Front.

The Times editorial was calling to-day for urgent help for Russia. "But what does that mean?" somebody asked—"500 planes?"

In the raid on Hamburg last night thirty-two planes were lost; makes one wonder how the Russians manage to bomb Königsberg night after night without—so they say—losing anything!

This evening I went for a stroll through the Ermitage garden. There were a lot of people about, and no visible sign of concern. It was very warm; I walked about in an open-necked shirt with short sleeves. The scent of the flower-beds was lovely, with their phlox and their tobacco-plants. There was no light reading on sale at the kiosk; I bought a book of poems by some Armenian writer, the *October* magazine of which this January-February issue has only just appeared, and a collection of Lenin and Stalin documents and speeches on Party Problems—eight hundred pages, and good cloth binding, all for ten roubles.

In later days I often remembered the entry in my diary on the following day, July 30. It was one of those days in the summer of 1942 when everything at the front looked very black; yet in Moscow—and perhaps at the front, too—one felt that a *psychological* turning-point had been reached,

and that from now on there was a promise of improvement. In the pages that will shortly follow, analysing the new propaganda lines and the new military reforms, it will perhaps be more clearly realised why. But even the bare fact that, after the fall of Rostov, and with the Red Army, to all appearances, in full retreat, the announcement, splashed over all the papers, should be made of the creation of three new high decorations for officers and generals was, in itself, very significant.

It was clear that the time was near when a strong stand would be taken; it would have been extraordinarily irresponsible to create, with all this solemnity, the Orders of Suvorov, Kutuzov, and Alexander Nevsky, if nothing were in prospect but more and more defeats. The Government could not risk an anti-climax, in which the immense solemnity surrounding the creation of these orders would begin to be treated as a tragic, unworthy joke. It was inconceivable that in May or June 1940 Paul Reynaud should create say, a Croix de Jeanne d'Arc; and if Stalin was creating such orders, it meant that there was a world of difference between France's prospect in 1940 of beating the Germans back, and Russia's prospects in 1942 of doing so. That was one of the reassuring things that happened on July 30; the second one, as far as I was concerned, was a memorable conversation I had that day with the French Minister, M. Roger Garreau, who had obviously just seen somebody "high up" on the Russian side.

FROM THE DIARY

July 30

A more than usually interesting day. The papers to-day announced the creation of three new orders for officers only: Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky. It's getting down to fundamentals. More and more sacrifices are demanded from the army, and these sacrifices must now be made for the things that are truly fundamental: for Russia's survival, for the survival of what *Komsomolskaya Pravda* calls "*sviataya rodina*"—sacred motherland. The Germans are clearly determined not merely to win the war, but to exterminate Russia as a nation; hence, for instance, the destruction of not only Soviet monuments, but also of churches and Tsarist monuments. Peterhof, for example. When I think of those unspeakable cretins among the Russians in Paris who imagined that Hitler wanted to restore a Great Tsarist Russia!

The news continues to be bad, but it is hard to imagine that these orders have been created as an idle gesture.

Feeling against the Allies continues to be quite bad. In a tramcar to-day there was an old woman—fairly well educated, judging by her way of speech—who was saying: "Never trust the English. You young people know nothing about it, but I am old enough to remember how Lord Beaconsfield, otherwise D'Isra-eli (she pronounced the four-syllable name viciously), let us down over Turkey in 1878."

Very interesting tea party at Jean Champenois' this afternoon. General Petit was there, and Garreau with his wife and two sons, one of them a young airman of seventeen, in French uniform, the other, Michel, quite a little boy, but as

bright and sophisticated as only French boys of ten are. Garreau, small and pop-eyed, is on the *mochie* side, but remarkably intelligent. And I hope he is right. He indicated that he had seen some important Russians, and he was convinced they were right: that the situation was "critical, but not serious." "The real point is that the Germans *cannot* destroy the Red Army this year—and that is everything. And as they can't do it, they'll lose the war. If they had broken through at Voronezh, it would have been very serious, because they would then have got into Central Russia, and encircled Moscow, and the moral effect would have been terrible. But they got stuck at Voronezh—the Russian fighting there has been absolutely first-class—and they have improvised a southern campaign instead. It is not very well thought-out. The Russians were extremely good the way they evaded encirclement. After the German break-through at Millerovo, the Russians quickly beat it for the south and got beyond the Don, so avoiding encirclement, first in the Eastern Donbas, and then at Rostov. Behind Voronezh, the Russians had accumulated enormous reserves, and the Germans did not persist. And that is their fatal mistake. Their tanks have now been sent south. If the Germans get a good long way into the Northern Caucasus, there will still be nothing fatal about it; the Russians have vast oil reserves—certainly enough for a year, and the Caucasus army will certainly do its damnedest to save Baku and perhaps even Grozny. What the Germans have captured in two and a half months is really insignificant, compared with what they could do in the past. The Red Army is still largely intact, and reserves have not been thrown in, any more than they were in the Battle of Moscow, even after the Germans had captured Klin."

I also heard from somebody at Jean's party what I had already heard somewhere else: that the Germans had already made a number of peace offers—and quite attractive ones on the face of it—to the Russians via the Japs. The Russians cannot consider them, and the whole psychological basis for any talk with the Germans seems absent, with the tremendous hatred and patriotic uplift in the country; but, as somebody remarked: "One has got to remember that Stalin said the war must end in 1942." This is nonsense; but still—that's the sort of talk one hears in Moscow these days, especially among foreign diplomats; it seems like a little war of nerves that's being conducted from somewhere—nobody quite knows from where. But that the Japs have been playing the honest broker seems, at any rate, highly probable—if only to test for their own information the official Russian reactions to that sort of thing.

Altogether Moscow is buzzing with all sorts of rumours and reports. One report, from the B.B.C., is that at yesterday's secret session of the House of Commons, Maisky spoke "very frankly." One rumour to-day was that Molotov had arrived in London. Another is that, after organising the defences of Voronezh, Stalin has now gone to Stalingrad, to prepare its defence.

Mme Garreau who, together with her two sons, had just come from Egypt, described the appalling panic with which Cairo was seized earlier this month, when the Germans nearly broke through to Alexandria. Some of her stories about the conduct of certain Allied officers and officials were not pretty at all. A wave of panic swept over the golf courses and swimming-pools and tea parties, and Groppi's, and Shepheard's. People, especially Jews, were offering to pay thousands of pounds for a seat on a plane.

When one hears first-hand accounts like this, one realises to what an extent one is really isolated in Moscow from the outside world; the Russian papers certainly played down the seriousness of the situation in Egypt for all they

were worth. We knew it was serious, but did not imagine it was as bad as that. . . .

A not altogether unusual thing happened to Jean Nau. It's a rather typical Moscow evacuee story. With the rest of the foreigners he and his Russian wife were evacuated to Kuibyshev, and in Moscow he left his maid in charge of the flat. From Kuibyshev he kept sending her food parcels, and she forwarded letters to him, and also wrote to him, saying that everything was all right. Actually, in the course of the winter, she had managed to "evacuate" from his flat practically all his possessions, silverware, crockery, bedclothes, and, finally, even the greater part of the furniture; in the end, he became suspicious and got somebody to make inquiries on the spot, only to find that she had left Moscow, and nobody knew anything definite; somebody said she had mentioned Voronezh, but that was all. So there is no redress. I know of many cases of such looting in Moscow, at the evacuees' expense; but in most such cases the looting was done during the critical months, with the mental excuse that it would be unpatriotic to leave the stuff to the Germans.

I spent the evening at the opera, where they were playing Rimsky Korsakov's *Tsar's Bride*. There was an unusually high proportion of women in the audience, mostly young girls; beside me sat a little girl—not more than fifteen—with a delicate, undernourished face, two long fair pigtails, and a large white collar over her humble little black dress. The child was enjoying herself enormously. And it made me wonder what kind of life was ahead of this girl, with her youthful enthusiasm, her love of music, and singing, and gorgeous theatrical scenery. She had obviously lived through one hard winter; and what was in store for her now? Many people in Moscow are already dreading next winter. But at the moment she seemed completely happy. And when I thought of all that was happening in the South, this child's fate somehow became merged in my mind with the fate of the whole of Russia.

One was inclined, during that summer, to be very emotional about Russia, and its future. Nearly the whole of England must have felt like that, too. Mr. Bevin himself declared about that time: "Our children's children will look back, through their history books, with admiration and thanks for the heroism of the great Russian people." The "Russian Commentaries" I began to send to the B.B.C. in July 1942 were, during that period, emotional in tone, and were, the B.B.C. told me, a "tremendous success" right away. I remember writing up, in one broadcast, the little girl at the theatre, together with, if I remember rightly, the few naïvely enthusiastic little platitudes she said to me; and the B.B.C. thought it all "very moving." One can speak and write very coolly about it now, but not only in Russia, but in England, and indeed throughout the world, one felt during those grim summer months of 1942 that your fate, and my fate, and everybody's fate, were in the hands of the Red Army and its leaders; and one felt emotional about Russia, and everything Russian—whether it was Rimsky Korsakov, or the anaemic little girl with the pigtails, or the men who were fighting in the south, with their backs to the Volga—with nothing beyond but the bare waterless steppes that were no longer Europe. . . .

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN ROSTOV AND STALINGRAD

THE period between the fall of Rostov and the beginning of the Battle of Stalingrad proper, was one of the most anxious periods of this war; and historically it is one of the most interesting. But if it was anxious, it was, strangely enough, less anxious than the three weeks that preceded the fall of Rostov; for at that time the blitzkrieg really seemed to have come into its own again. The Germans swept on like an avalanche, and nothing seemed to be able to stop them. In the south, after the fall of Rostov, this German advance across the Kuban continued at the same speed, at even greater speed perhaps. Yet, bitter though the thought was of losing the Kuban, one of the richest and fairest parts of the Soviet Union, its loss was accepted as something inevitable. Clearly, the Germans could not be held in the wide open spaces of the Kuban; the real test of the Caucasus campaign would come when the fighting reached the mountains. Therefore, for a time, the Caucasus Front was given the benefit of the doubt; it seemed fairly obvious that what was happening there was a large strategic retreat to the foothills. A very different picture was presented, after the fall of Rostov, by the German drive to Stalingrad. Here one thing soon became very clear; it was no longer the overwhelming blitzkrieg of the first three weeks of the German drive. The German advance was slowing down; if the Germans wished to reach Stalingrad, they would have to do some extremely hard fighting before reaching it. It may be said that the German armies battling their way to Stalingrad covered between July 27 and August 26 a distance of only 150 miles, which means that on the average they advanced only five miles a day.

At several points, notably at Tsymliansk and especially at Kletskaya, and indeed along the whole length of the Don Bend, the battle raged furiously for a month; and it is remarkable that although the Germans succeeded fairly early on in crossing the Don at Tsymliansk on the south side of the bend, and later also, after very heavy fighting, at the far end of the bend, near Stalingrad itself, they never once succeeded in forcing the Don along the whole north side of the bend; and the Russians actually managed to hold three bridgeheads inside the Don Bend, on its north side—bridgeheads which were to play so vital a part in the Russian counter-offensive in November. The Serafimovitch bridgehead was particularly important. This consolidation of the northern side of the German "Stalingrad salient," which prevented the Germans from pushing north towards Saratov, was one of the most important and far-reaching Russian achievements.

The slowing down of the German offensive towards Stalingrad was not perhaps immediately apparent after the fall of Rostov; but, as already said before, there was a curious psychological improvement, a better psychological "climate" than there had been before.

From the various military measures taken; from the whole tone of the propaganda one could notice that something new was happening.

This period was marked by

(*a*) A ruthless tightening-up of discipline in the army—ruthless to the point of summary executions all down the scale for disobeying orders or displaying cowardice and "nerves."

(*b*) A propaganda drive in which the *patrie-en-danger* theme was played *fortissimo*, and in which hate propaganda reached the highest pitch ever attained.

(*c*) A propaganda drive in which the soldier's and officer's personal honour and feeling of self-respect and respect for his regiment were invoked. One day it was pointed out that even when a regiment received orders to retreat, it was still a blot on the regiment's reputation; every retreat became *ipso facto* shameful and it was impressed upon the soldiers that the country was becoming disgruntled, and disillusioned in its own army, and political commissars were called upon to circulate plaintive and contemptuous letters from towns and villages received from soldiers' relatives.

(*d*) A very strong emphasis in all propaganda on Russian history, on the example of the Great Ancestors. The Great Ancestors had already been mentioned in the dark days of November 1941 by Stalin, when he invoked the memory of Alexander Nevsky who routed the Teutonic Knights in 1242, of Dimitri Donskoi who routed the Tartars in 1380, Minin and Pozharsky who freed Moscow from the Polish invaders in 1612, of Suvorov and Kutuzov. Now very high military orders were created bearing the names of three of the great ancestors. These orders were for officers only, and there developed in the Press and elsewhere a highly critical tone towards officers and generals. This meant a great call for not only bravery, but competence.

(*e*) This emphasis on competence was combined with sharp attacks on sloppy, ignorant leadership. This propaganda drive found its fullest expression in Korneichuk's play *Front*, which began to be serially published on August 26, the day the Germans reached the outskirts of Stalingrad.

Thus, the psychological preparation for Stalingrad was extremely thorough.

Later, during the Stalingrad Battle, the process of tightening up discipline in the army was taken a few steps further. Gold-braided epaulettes became the symbol of the officer's greatly increased authority; and the officer's great authority was heightened through the abolition of the "dual command"; the political commissar disappeared. It was, indeed, a unique phenomenon in history: Stalingrad produced the gold braid and the epaulettes—epaulettes outwardly similar to those which angry soldiers tore off their officers' shoulders in 1917; out of the fire and smoke of Stalingrad the gold-braided officer emerged. In this gold braid the fires of Stalingrad were reflected. It was that which made those gold-braided epaulettes so acceptable and so popular. Their introduction was like a collective reward to the whole officer class of the Soviet Union. The gold braid also emphasised the *professionalism* of the Red Army; it was no longer to be a Revolutionary Army, a glorified army of *sans-culottes*; the time was drawing close when the Red Army would have its word to say

as the greatest national army in Europe, the army that had destroyed at Stalingrad the "invincible" army of the Third Reich; and it was considered only right that not only inwardly, but outwardly, it should be smart.

It was psychologically very sound that the gold braid should have made its appearance during Stalingrad, and not before; fine uniforms look all wrong in retreat.

(*f*) Finally, this period was marked by a heightened tone of exasperation about the Allies, particularly England. The large popular movement in England in favour of the Second Front was very fully reported, and it was not till the Churchill visit that this tone of exasperation was reduced in volume—at least for a time.

Despite this better psychological "climate" that set in after the fall of Rostov, August 1942 will be remembered as one of the most painful months in Russia. There was, as it were, a more concrete promise than there was in July of a change for the better; but, after all, the real test still lay ahead. And when, looking back on it now, one realises how immensely dangerous the situation at Stalingrad was to be on several occasions, especially in the first weeks of the battle, one can only marvel at the relative calm with which people awaited the Stalingrad battle. For some strange instinct suggested to them that here the supreme test would come; and somehow, during that month of August they had ceased to be panicky—as so many were in July, especially on the day Rostov fell. In the interval something had happened; and that "something" was a combination (*a*) of far-reaching decisions by the Government and the High Command; (*b*) of propaganda; and (*c*) of the spontaneous realisation of every Russian soldier, worker, and railwayman—a realisation which was perhaps stronger even than all the propaganda—that this was the "last ditch" and that it was really "Now or Never." But the combination of all three was essential. Stalingrad is the supreme demonstration that the Russian is not an Oriental fatalist; Stalingrad is the outstanding example of the Russian's will-power, of his faith in his own strength. And it was also a supreme example of organisation—military, economic and psychological.

THE GREAT CHANGE AFTER ROSTOV

The news of the fall of Rostov was announced in the Press on July 28. The first reaction of the Soviet Press was, if anything, to play it down —and to blame the Allies for it. The *Pravda* editorial of July 28 wrote:

The Soviet south is in grave danger. But despite difficulties and temporary setbacks, the certainty in final victory has never abandoned the Soviet people. They are not given to panic, bewilderment and uncertainty. The Germans are losing strength; they have had to bring numerous divisions from the West. Only in the last few weeks they have brought from France and Holland, the 71st, 82nd, 305th, 336th, 340th, 346th, 370th, 371st and 377th Infantry Divisions, the 24th and 25th Tank Divisions, etc.

"But we are not scared," the article concluded in effect.

On the 29th Ehrenburg uttered a loud cry of alarm: "Let us forget everything, except one thought, except one passion: to save Russia, to save our country." But the editorials still remained fairly calm. The *Red Star* even gave practical advice for those retreating: "Never retreat except with orders from above; and never retreat without first considering your neighbours, lest your worsen their position."

But something must have happened on that July 29 in high Government, Military and Party quarters, for on the 30th the whole tone of the Press radically changed. No more lamentations and imprecations from Ehrenburg, but orders, harsh, strict, ruthless orders.

The *Pravda* editorial wrote:

> Iron discipline and a steady nerve are the condition of our victory.
>
> "Soviet soldiers! Not a step back!"—such is the call of your country; such is the imperative demand addressed to you by the Soviet people. Our country is living through hard days. Our task is to remove the threat, then to stop, smash, and throw back the enemy, whatever the price. Our Soviet country is large and rich. But there is nothing worse than to imagine that you can, without making the maximum effort, yield even an inch of ground, or that you have a right to abandon this or that town without fighting to the last drop of blood.
>
> The enemy is not as strong as some terrified panic-mongers imagine. Remember Moscow in November 1941.

This was still fairly mild, and not very unlike the July editorials. But what followed was much stronger meat:

> It is necessary that every soldier should be ready to die the death of a hero rather than neglect his duty to his country. That is the pledge of victory.

Four times in this editorial, the phrase "iron discipline" was used. It went on:

> During the Civil War, Lenin used to say: "He who does not help the Red Army wholeheartedly, he who does not fully observe its order and iron discipline, is a traitor. . . ." At the Eighth Congress of the Party, Stalin said: "Either we shall have a strictly disciplined army, or we shall perish." To-day the officer's order is an iron law. . . .

And as an example of what a soldier's conduct should be, *Pravda* quoted the case of the twenty-eight guardsmen in the Battle of Moscow who fought against tanks till they all died, and were each posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The *Red Star* that day was even more explicit. After quoting the same words of Lenin, it added, from the same Lenin speech: "He who does not observe order and discipline is a traitor, *and must be mercilessly destroyed.*" And it went on:

> Now is not the time when a coward or a traitor can rely on mercy. Every officer and political worker has the power given him by the State to see to it

that the very idea of retreating without orders becomes impossible. With the powers given him by the State[1] he can see to it that as long as one single soldier is left alive no German can pass. He who retreats without orders cannot expect mercy. . . . Whatever the sacrifices demanded from us, the task of saving our country and our people justifies them all. In the hour of deadly danger threatening our country we must stand firm. . . . "Not a step back"—such is the country's order; the order of the Commissar of Defence, our leader and general, Comrade Stalin.

Clearly what was aimed at above all, was precise military results, not the somewhat romantic *levée en masse*, dictated by despair and desperation, which Ehrenburg outlined in his article two days before. There he quoted an officer of the name of Kazantsev who had written to him:

> The Russian people must be roused to such a frenzy of hate that they should strike at the Germans with anything they have. Let women, children, old men arm themselves with scythes and pitchforks, hatchets and stones. Our centuries of achievement, all that we and our ancestors have produced for centuries past, may fall into the hands of the enemy. Our generation is responsible for Russia's destiny. Just imagine for a moment that the enemy succeeds in his wicked design of conquering our people; then those who are now five and ten years old would spit in our eyes for having failed in saving the greatest nation in the world—the nation that produced Tolstoy. . . . etc.

No, it wasn't a question of arming women with scythes and children with stones and hatchets to fight the Germans. The Kremlin and the High Command had quite different ideas.

On that memorable 30th of July all the papers announced the creation of the Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky Orders.

Pravda wrote: "In the grim battles for the life, freedom and honour of our country, our soldiers will be inspired by the manly figures of our great ancestors, who proved their valour in battle and their great military skill," and for days afterwards the papers were filled with historical articles about these three great men—Suvorov who was so great in attack, Kutuzov, so great in defence, Alexander Nevsky who routed the Teutonic Knights, and had said: "He who enters our land with the sword, shall perish by the sword." These articles, naturally, omitted the more unpleasant facts about the great ancestors—for example, that Suvorov quelled the Pugachov Rebellion, played a particularly ruthless part in the partition of Poland, and finally fought against the troops of the French Revolution. . . . The important point was that he was a great Russian general.

The past glories of the Russian Army and the weaknesses of the German Army were the subject of many other articles during the following month.

A number of long articles appeared by Professor Yerusalimsky and

[1] That is, the right to shoot, or order summary execution.

others on "Ludendorff's Black Day," and on General Brussilov's victories in Galicia, and on the collapse of the German Army on the Western Front in the last war. Thus, Yerusalimsky, in the *Red Star* of August 8:

> The men-beasts who in 1933 seized power in Germany, consider this the direct continuation of the war of 1914–18. . . . They invented the legend that the "victorious Germany Army" was stabbed in the back by the pacifists and revolutionaries. This is nonsense: the German Army was smashed on the battlefield.

Similarly, on July 30, Zaslavsky wrote a long article in *Pravda*, "The Kaiser and his End," and another article appeared on the following day on "The Russian Front in the last World War"—all of which was intended to arouse enthusiasm for the Russian Army in the past, and dispel exaggerated ideas of German strength.

And, for the benefit of the most orthodox, *Pravda* of August 1 published a four-column article by Mitin, "Lenin and Stalin on German Imperialism."

The military situation was as follows:

> On July 29 there was heavy fighting at Tsymliansk, at Kletskaya inside the Don Bend, and at Bataisk, south-east of Rostov. This meant that the Germans had crossed the Don, after great air battles over the pontoons.
>
> On July 30 fighting continued at Voronezh, Tsymliansk and Kletskaya.

At Kletskaya the Russians were counter-attacking successfully. At Tsymliansk the Germans had succeeded in forcing the Don to the south, and the Russians were trying to liquidate their bridgehead. Altogether, there were indications that German progress was slowing down, and that the Germans were meeting with increasingly stubborn resistance, particularly at Kletskaya.

On August 1 fighting continued ferocious at Kletskaya where 2,000 Germans were killed during counter-attacks, and "several hundred White Finns." At Tsymliansk the attempt to wipe out the German bridgehead on the south side of the Don was, apparently, not succeeding; but the news from Kletskaya was good. On the other hand, in the Kuban the Germans were rapidly advancing: they had spread out from Bataisk to Kushchevskaya and Salsk. Salsk meant a new thrust towards Stalingrad from the south; these forces were later to join with those which had now crossed the Don at Tsymliansk.

The "not a step back" propaganda was growing stronger and harsher daily. If, only a few days before, *Pravda* placed before the soldier the noble example of the twenty-eight guardsmen who died in the Battle of Moscow in their heroic struggle against enemy tanks, *Red Star* on August 1 added a detail which *Pravda* had omitted. It wrote:

> It is high time the retreat stopped. . . . Let us remember the twenty-eight

legendary heroes who, in the Battle of Moscow, took on their death battle against fifty enemy tanks, and how they dealt with one contemptible coward. Without any preliminary discussion all the Panfilov men fired at the same time at the traitor, and in that sacred volley symbolised their determination not to retreat another step, and to fight to the bitter end. . . .

So this was the kind of example that was placed before the Red Army in August 1942; this was the kind of warning that was given them.

There were other, equally eloquent warnings. The same article went on:

When, in February 1918, the German hordes invaded the Ukraine, the Party called upon the workers and peasants to rise in the defence of their country. . . . One of the points in the rules of discipline drawn up by Shchors was: "A soldier who has left the battlefield without officer's orders is shot like a traitor."

And then it added: "Even a regular order to retreat must be considered a blow to the regiment's self-respect," whereupon it quoted at length the famous episode in *War and Peace* where, in the Battle of Schoengraben, Captain Tushin's battery continued to fire, despite heavy losses, at the enemy even after all the Russian troops on either side of it had retreated.

One has a suspicion that such propaganda went even too far, and may have produced excessive results in the army. For, already a week later, on August 9, the same *Red Star* emphasised that one must, after all, discriminate between incorrigible cowards, and men who had momentarily lost their nerve. In this article on "War Commissars" (who had not yet been abolished), it wrote:

"The War Commissar," says the Statute of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, "is the representative of the Party and the Government in the Red Army, and, together with the officer, he bears full responsibility for the performance of military tasks, for stubbornness in battle, and for the determination to fight to the last drop of blood." He must be the soul of his regiment always, and particularly in hard times.

If you see [the article is addressed to the war commissars in general] that you have before you an obvious enemy and defeatist, a coward or panic-monger . . . it is no use wasting any persuasion or propaganda on him. You must deal with a traitor with a hand of iron. But sometimes you come across people who are in need of temporary support; and they will then firmly take themselves in hand. . . . It is a great mistake to imagine, as some Comrades do, that in battle the Political Commisar must act in precisely the same way as the officer, the excuse being that, in the middle of a battle, there is no time to argue; that the only thing to do is to give orders, and to punish if these orders are not obeyed. Naturally, every soldier bears the gravest responsibility for the non-fulfilment of his superior's order on the battlefield. But the Commissar's task is, first and foremost, to eliminate the possibility of such things happening. And his chief weapon is political agitation, the Bolshevik persuasion of men.

This article, incidentally, not only seems to sound the alarm over an excessively ruthless and perhaps irresponsible application of the new

"iron discipline" rules, but it also brings to the surface the chronic conflict that had been brewing for a long time between the Officer and the Commissar. The Commissars, generally harder and more rigid people than officers, had apparently gone "giddy with success" over the iron discipline rules, and had gone to extremes which the officers in many cases resented. The article clearly suggests that meting out punishment is not the Commissar's primary job; it almost suggests that it is not his job at all, but the officer's; his primary job is "agitation and Bolshevik persuasion." This article, in fact, clearly foreshadows the abolition of that dual authority from which the Red Army suffered; this abolition of the Commissar came, indeed, soon afterwards.

But while the Commissar was called upon not to overdo the iron discipline, no reproach was addressed to the officer.

Somehow, however, the ferocious articles during the week that followed the fall of Rostov ceased more or less; there was no more emphasis on traitors and cowards. A salutary shock had been produced in the army, and there is little doubt that the quality of the fighting was already greatly improving—partly thanks to the new disciplinary measures, partly, and perhaps above all, because something had changed in the mentality of the rank-and-file soldier. There was a growing consciousness of the terrible dangers threatening the country, and of the deep *disapproval* with which the bad news from the front was being received in every town and village.

Not that the Red Army alone was to blame. During those first three weeks of August—at least till the end of the Churchill visit to Moscow (this ended on August 19)—the Press was full of Second Front "prodding." This was not done directly, but, as so often happens in the Russian Press, criticism of the Allies, and particularly of the British Government, was made through the medium of carefully selected quotations from the British Press, and of reports of the acute Second Front agitation in Britain and America.

Thus, on August 1, the Press prominently published reports of "Alarm in England, and demands of 'Strike at Hitler Immediately.'"

On the 3rd there was a London report of innumerable resolutions and letters demanding the Second Front, pouring in at 10 Downing Street. *Reynolds' News* and the *Spectator* were quoted in support of the Second Front. Also, several American papers, among them the *New Republic*, were quoted. President Benes was reported to have come out in favour of the "Second Front in 1942." And so it continued for days—though actually the number of papers quoted was already, compared with the earlier part of the summer, a discouragingly small one.

On the 14th there were long reports on the Second Front demonstrations throughout Britain and the United States—but particularly Britain.

"Twenty thousand demonstrate in Glasgow; hundreds of cables are sent to Churchill by South Wales miners."

On the 16th, after Churchill had already arrived in Moscow, these reports continued, and Efimov that day published a cartoon in *Pravda* showing an "Atlantic Wall" built of plywood, and supplied with dummy guns, and an S.S. man playing a gramophone which keeps bawling: "Impregnable fortifications! Impregnable fortifications! You'd better not try."

Throughout that period there was already a very strong suspicion that there was going to be no Second Front—not in the near future, anyway.

The retreat across the Northern Caucasus continued with alarming speed, though, as already said, the real test was expected to come once the mountains were reached. Inside the Don Bend, on the other hand, and later, south of the Don Bend (between Kotelnikovo and Stalingrad), the Germans and their allies were made to fight very stubbornly, were able to advance only very slowly, and were often held up completely for several days, and even weeks, as in the case of Kletskaya, near the far end of the Don Bend.

Up to the 18th of August the progress of the Axis forces was slow; only after that did the situation rather suddenly deteriorate. The tremendous bombing of Stalingrad began with a series of particularly destructive raids, which left practically the whole city in flames, on August 23; and on the 26th, the Battle of Stalingrad proper may be said to have begun.

But to take August day by day:

On August 4, the communiqué spoke of fighting at Kletskaya, Tsymliansk (where the Germans had forced the Don to the south), and, in the Kuban —where the Germans were advancing rapidly—at Belaya Glina and Kushchevskaya. The communiqué emphasised the seriousness of enemy losses in the Kuban, but spoke of "heavy defensive battles against superior enemy forces" at Belaya Glina. This phrase ranked as the very worst of the "code phrases" of the communiqué language.

On the 6th the communiqué spoke of fighting at Kletskaya, at Kotelnikovo and in the Kuban, south of Kushchevskaya and south of Belaya Glina.

The mention of Kotelnikovo meant that the Germans were now in great force across the Don in the south.

Actually, place-names in the communiqué were often mentioned with some delay: Kotelnikovo, as I learned later, had actually been occupied by the Germans as early as August 3.

The Germans and their allies were now on the way to Stalingrad from the south.

On the 8th, the fighting was already "north of Kotelnikovo." In the Kuban the Germans had reached the important railway-junction of Armavir.

On the 9th, they had reached Kropotkin and were now also swiftly spreading west, towards the Black Sea.

On the 11th, fighting had spread to Krasnodar, the capital of the Kuban, and to Maikop, the oil town.

On the 12th, in the south, the Germans had reached Cherkesk, and on the 14th, Mineralnyie Vody. They were approaching the mountains now. On the Don, fighting continued north-east of Kotelnikovo, but Kletskaya gallantly continued to figure in the communiqué.

On the 16th, the direction of the German attack had somewhat shifted to "South-east of Kletskaya" (here the Germans were, indeed, after a few days, to force the Don). Fighting continued north-east of Kotelnikovo, at Mineralnyie Vody and Krasnodar. But Maikop was lost, though (the communiqué added) the oil refineries were smashed by the Russians before they left.

On the 19th, the fighting moved to Piatigorsk, and the Russians abandoned Krasnodar.

On the 21st they lost Piatigorsk, and on the 24th fighting proceeded at Prokhladny. The Germans were swiftly moving towards Grozny and the Caspian, so far still limiting themselves, in the main, to the northern fringe of the Caucasus mountain chain, though, since the fall of Piatigorsk, a certain tendency to push into the mountains could also be observed. About that time they occupied the famous watering-places of Essentuki and Kislovodsk, already in mountainous country, and soon afterwards hoisted the Nazi flag on top of Mount Elbrus: paratroops did it. Similarly, in their drive south of Krasnodar, they were penetrating into the mountains on their way to Novorossisk and the Black Sea coast.

On the 24th, on the Don, the fighting was "south-east of Kletskaya and north-east of Kotelnikovo."

August 25 and 26 are a great landmark. On the 25th Stalingrad (or to be precise, "north-west of Stalingrad") was mentioned in the communiqué for the first time. Fighting still continued at Kletskaya, and this bridgehead on the right bank of the Don the Russians indeed held throughout the Stalingrad Battle, and never lost it; but the Germans had crossed the Don further south, in the area described in the communiqués as "south-east of Kletskaya."

If on the 25th the name of Stalingrad first appeared in the communiqué, a name which deserves to be almost as famous appeared in the communiqué of the 26th. This was Mozdok, in the Caucasus. To the ordinary reader it meant little or nothing; to the pessimist it was just another milestone on the road to Grozny Oilfields, only fifty miles further east. At the rate the Germans were going, they should be in Grozny in four or five days. But in the south, Mozdok was to become what Stalingrad was in the north; the place-name which was not to disappear from the communiqué till the Russian winter offensive began. At Mozdok the Germans were held.

The propaganda line continued during those weeks of the German slow advance on Stalingrad and their rapid advance to Mozdok in much the same vein as before. On the question of discipline, as already said, it became a little less ferocious. The German hate propaganda was more intensive than ever. But, above all, there was a greater tone of confidence than in the last days of July and the first days of August. And Kletskaya helped to instil, for a while, a note of genuine confidence into the propaganda.

For the anti-German motifs a few examples will suffice.

The theme of Marshak's poem, "The Mother," was the vision of a woman breast-feeding her child while on the way to being shot.

Tikhonov quoted a revolting letter from the village of Lütte in Einkernruth, about a German farmer's wife, Frau Anna Lise Rostert, who, since April, had ill-treated her Russian farm-girl so horribly that the girl, "who was always in tears," finally hanged herself in the attic. The writer of the letter, another farmer's wife, described how Frau Anna Lise Rostert came rushing to her to tell what the Russian girl had just done. "She was furious, but we quietened her, saying that for a small price she could get another Russian servant girl."

On August 12 *Red Star* published Surkov's poem, "I Hate."

Beyond the village the grass goes up to your knees.
Between its high banks the Don flows on.
Here enemy corpses lie,
In the foul stench of death.
Was it in Paris, was it in Warsaw
That this ginger-haired Prussian first covered with blood
His dagger's blade?

Here in the plain he shall rot,
Or the crayfish of the Don shall feed on his flesh.
His wife in Berlin may sob;
I do not pity his wife.

Here beside him are two more,
And hundreds, and thousands of other evil dead.
Let their children in Germany wait for them,
I do not pity their children.

My heart is as hard as a stone.
My grievances and memories are countless.
With these hands of mine
I have lifted the corpses of little children. . . .

I hate them deeply,
For those hours of sleepless gloom.
I hate them because in one year
My temples have grown white.

My house has been defiled by the Prussians,
Their drunken laughter dims my reason,
And with these hands of mine
I want to strangle every one of them. . . .

Patrie en danger, the whole of civilisation in danger, and "stand firm"—such continued to be the themes of propaganda and agitation throughout August; they continued to be presented emotionally, though not perhaps with the same undercurrent of acute anxiety as in July. On the role of the Officer (a personality whose inner and outward formation was, at this

stage, a matter of particular interest to the State), *Red Star* wrote on August 11:

In difficult moments like these, the officer[1] must be the calmest, the most stubborn and bravest soldier in the battleline. If he shows any weakness or loses his nerve, his honour is gone for ever. People will say to him: "You are a broken reed, not an officer. You are not worthy of leading Soviet men into battle; the greatest concession you can expect from your country is to send you to the front as a private, so that you may, at the most dangerous spots, wash off your guilt with your own blood." . . . Heavy fighting is continuing on the Don and the Kuban for every inch of Soviet soil. There must be no more retreats; for the enemy has already penetrated far too deeply into our country. Let every Red Army officer who cherishes the honour and freedom of his country know that any further retreat without orders from above is a shame and a disgrace which will never be forgiven. Even in the most desperate conditions a man must find within himself the strength to stand firm and to inspire his men to unexampled deeds.

Thereupon the article invoked the memory of the Great Ancestors—notably Suvorov's Swiss campaign, when the Russians fought on, and broke through the encirclement, even though everything seemed lost.

In a more highly emotional tone (and one which, one knows, made the deepest impression on the Red Army soldier who read these daily articles), Ehrenburg wrote on the 13th:

Every day brings us new ordeals. Russia's heart is bleeding. The enemy is trampling underfoot the rich fields of the Kuban. He can already smell the oil of the Caucasus. He has before him the foothills of the Caucasus. . . . One feeling unites every man and woman of our people: hatred. . . . There are green forests on the map of Russia, blue rivers and brown mountains. Now the map seems to be drenched in blood. The country is crying in its agony: "Cleanse me of the Germans!" One can bear anything: the plague, and hunger, and death. But one cannot bear the Germans. One cannot bear these fish-eyed oafs who are contemptuously snorting at everything Russian, as they come over the Russian land from the Carpathians to the Caucasus. We cannot live as long as these grey-green slugs are alive. . . . To-day there are no books, to-day there are no stars in the sky; to-day there is nothing except this one thought: kill the Germans. Kill them all, and dig them into the earth. Then we can go to sleep. Then we can think again of life, and books, and girls, and happiness. But now we must fight like madmen, live like fanatics. We must not say: "Good morning" or "Good night." In the morning we must say: "Kill the Germans!" and at night we must say: "Kill the Germans!" The German is the screen standing between us and life. We want to live. And, in order to live, we must kill Germans. Otherwise we cannot live. . . . Let us not rely on rivers and mountains. We must rely only on ourselves. Thermopylae

[1] On this occasion the word "commander" (*komandir*) was still used, though, before long, this word, which was the accepted term in the Red Army since 1918, began to give way to the older and newly revived word "officer" (*ofitsér*), which had not been used since the time of the old Tsarist Army. During the early stages of the Revolution it had become almost a term of abuse. In official documents "officer" replaced "commander," while in common usage the two words became synonymous.

did not stop them, nor did the Sea of Crete. Men stopped them; not in the mountains, not on rivers, but in the suburban allotments of Moscow. . . . Everybody knows we shall kill them all. But we must do it quickly; or they will devastate the whole of Russia and torture to death millions more people. Life must be saved. Our children want to live. Our country wants to live.

Then he took up the theme which already appeared before; on every quiet sector of the front—whether in Karelia, or at Leningrad, or at Gzhatsk—every soldier must strive to kill a German as often as possible; it will help the Caucasus and Stalingrad. If the German is dead he cannot go there. The Germans have large factories, but they cannot make new soldiers there; it will take a long time to replace a dead German.

And in an article during the same week, significantly entitled "Russia," Ehrenburg spoke of the numerous nationalities represented in the Red Army, and of their single consciousness of fighting for "Russia," which was like a great tree that grew out of a tiny plant; in this great tree were now embodied all the nations of the mighty country.

Another theme which continued to recur in the Press was "Don't ever surrender. Imprisonment in Germany is worse than death." A. Larionov, in an article in *Pravda* on August 13, quoted numerous letters from Germany, among them one from a German woman called Gertrude Renn, from Nortenhof near Ueffingen, and dated February 2, 1942:

It is very cold, nearly as cold as in Russia. A lot of potatoes this winter got frozen. These are given to the Russians who devour them raw. At Fallinghostell 200 to 300 Russians die every week, partly from hunger, partly from cold. After all, they don't deserve anything else.

And Larionov, after quoting several more on the same lines, concluded:

In their death agony these men are crying out to every Red Army man: "Fight to your last breath, but do not surrender. And, if there is no other choice, then die, and, in doing so, try to kill as many of the Nazi curs as you can."

But, in spite of the emotional, frantic tone of some of the articles that continued to appear, notably Ehrenburg's, something had changed for the better even in August. Russian resistance in the Don country had stiffened and the name of "Kletskaya" was becoming famous. The Press no longer had to quote examples of heroic deeds dating back to Sebastopol or to the Battle of Moscow. Now the steppes round Kletskaya were resounding with new heroic names. The following, from *Red Star* on August 13, is interesting, especially for the manner in which the episode was presented.

VALOUR THAT CONQUERED DEATH

A small hillock in the boundless Don steppe has exalted higher than the greatest mountain the names of our Soviet guardsmen: Belikov, Aleinikov, Bolotov and Samoilov.

Thirty tanks were advancing upon four men with two anti-tank rifles between them. Our guardsmen did not flinch. They trusted their rifles, they had faith in themselves and in victory. A roaring avalanche of steel was hurled at the four guardsmen, but their native soil saved them, as a mother would save her children. The Germans withdrew, intending to surround the hillock in horseshoe formation, and to finish off the brave men on top.

The guardsmen calmly awaited the enemy. Like brothers, they embraced; like men who were now united in life as in death, and on a leaflet bearing the words: "Death to the German invaders" they signed their names. Like a bell this cry was silently ringing in those four hearts. They were not thinking of their own death, they were thinking of inflicting death on the enemy. And when the tanks, spitting fire and steel, crawled up again to the four guardsmen, the guns in their hands struck faster and more accurately than ever.

Fifteen German tanks were blazing in the field of this unequal battle. The others crawled away in the face of such incomparable bravery. Four guardsmen repelled a tank attack, and remained alive.

In war there are the inexorable laws of figures. But who can measure the striking power of two anti-tank rifles, multiplied by the steel of four Russian hearts? The enemy has superiority in tanks, but they will all turn into dead scrap if every Soviet soldier fights as the four men of Kletskaya fought.

After that, the article went on to draw the necessary moral from the story. One of the conclusions was: "If they had run away, they would inevitably have perished."

Other heroic deeds were being performed at Kletskaya. On August 14 one read of a tank raid in the Kletskaya area, a raid led by Captain Tkachenko, who broke through into the enemy rear and destroyed three German garrisons.

On the 15th, the slogan in the papers was "Dig In!"

Not that it was easy, with tank and air superiority being all on the German side. Even so, the tone remained fairly good. It almost looked as though the Germans might, through a superhuman effort, be prevented from reaching Stalingrad.

The tone of confidence grew stronger, and on the 19th, Sovinformbureau published a statement on German and Russian losses between May 15 and August 18. This said:

The Germans and their allies lost 1,250,000 men, including 480,000 killed, 3,390 tanks, 4,000 guns, 4,000 planes.

The Russian casualties were put at 606,000, but no details were given of killed, wounded or prisoners, and the following losses were admitted: guns 3,162, tanks 2,240, planes 2,198.

The statement ridiculed the German claims, with their "1,044,000 prisoners, 10,131 guns, 6,271 tanks, 6,056 planes."

And, on the 19th, while the main fighting was still concentrated round Kletskaya (though, further east, the situation was becoming serious), and the Germans were being more or less held north of Kotelnikovo, *Red Star* gave a singularly reassuring round-up of the situation.

Even on a limited front the Germans have failed to carry out their blitzkrieg. At Voronezh they have come to a standstill for one and a half months now, and in some places they have been pushed back. *The country inside the Don Bend has been turned for the Germans into a bloody meat-mincing machine which is chopping up the German forces on such a scale that it is upsetting all the plans of the German High Command.* The swift though costly German advance is continuing only in the south. . . . *In the whole character of the German offensive one can observe some serious changes. They are no longer able to carry it out methodically, as they did in the beginning of July by constantly increasing the power of their blows from the depth of their front; already, here and there, one observes a shortage of men and equipment. More and more, the German offensive is becoming erratic, working in fits and starts.*

Then, after reiterating that the German casualties were paving the way to the disaster of the German Army, the article continued significantly:

Therefore the legitimate alarm existing among all Soviet people and in the heart of every soldier should not make us lose our sense of perspective, and cannot shake our faith in victory. The Germans are still advancing, and the peril to the country continues to be great, but as Comrade Stalin wrote: "There are moments when tactical successes, no matter how brilliant in their immediate effect, but not corresponding to the strategic possibilities, can create an 'unexpected' situation in which the campaign is lost. Such was the position of General Denikin at the end of 1919, when, during his advance on Moscow, he stretched out his front all the way from the Volga to the Dnieper and so prepared the rout and end of his armies."

And the same, said *Red Star*, was true of the Germans in Moscow last year.

It then added that "North-east of Kotelnikovo [that is on the way to Stalingrad from the south-west] the Germans have had no success for a long time." In conclusion it said:

Every time our State was threatened with grave danger, the Party insistently demanded a tightening of military discipline; and this measure always increased its power tenfold.

In all this there was an undercurrent of that confidence and determination which was to mark the whole spirit of the Battle of Stalingrad proper.

This is not altered by the fact that, just about the same time, through one of their "fits and starts," the German High Command finally succeeded, to the south-east of Kletskaya, in forcing the Don at several points some twenty-five miles north-west of Stalingrad. In the circumstances, there was little object, and, indeed, a serious danger for the Russians, in continuing to hold the line north-east of Kotelnikovo; the important thing now was to defend the immediate southern approaches of Stalingrad against the German forces streaming across the Don.

Tremendous quantities of German armour and aircraft were now

engaged in what was to become the Battle of Stalingrad. On the 23rd a series of fearful air-raids on Stalingrad left the greater part of the city in flames. The civilian population was fleeing across the Volga.

It was in the midst of this chaos of fire and smoke, among exploding bombs and the cries of the wounded, that the defence of Stalingrad was being organised. Under constant air attack, and suffering heavy casualties, the Russian Army withdrew across the Don, except for a few bridgeheads they continued to hold in the north, inside the bend.

But, more remarkable still, north of Stalingrad the Russian lines continued to hold, as well as in the south, with the result that Stalingrad was in reality being attacked at the point of a narrow German salient, and the Russians did everything to prevent the Germans from gaining any elbow-room for manœuvring, either north or south of Stalingrad; and in this they succeeded—though not quite. The tragedy was that already on August 23 the Germans reached the Volga north of Stalingrad, though only on a narrow salient; but it was enough to isolate the Stalingrad troops from the troops on the north side of the Stalingrad salient; and all supplies to Stalingrad had to come from across the Volga, in inhumanly hard conditions. But Stalingrad was to hold in spite of it, even though, inside Stalingrad proper, the Germans were also later to break through to the Volga at several points, and were to capture, at heavy cost, by far the greater part of the city. In many places, the strip of land on the west bank of the Volga, to which the Russians clung, was only a few hundred yards wide.

And so August 23 (or August 26 if one takes the communiqué date) may be considered the day on which the Battle of Stalingrad began. To the whole country, one thing was clear: it would not be another Rostov. But everybody knew that the Germans had great superiority in planes and tanks, and who could tell how long Stalingrad could hold?

FROM THE DIARY, AUGUST 2 TO 26

August 2

The news continues to be bad. In the Kuban they have cut the Stalingrad–Tikhoretskaya railway. But in the Don country, the resistance seems to be pretty good, and the Germans haven't yet made much headway towards Stalingrad.

Had supper with old J.,[1] who had there, as usual, a bunch of people; couple of officers with their floosies, and a man who has just come from Murmansk. He described the air-raids in June, which left mighty little standing in Murmansk. The Arctic Hotel was badly damaged already on June 1, and then on the 18th there was a really terrible raid, and still another on the 30th. For a time, the port had to be closed, and the newer part of the town was practically wiped out. The raids were against the town, not against shipping. The sergeant, who was rather tight, kept producing time and again the same slip of paper in

[1] A minor Embassy employee.

which the Russian authorities at Murmansk had warmly commended the conduct of the British forces during the air-raids there. During these three raids, he said, the streets were littered with dead and wounded, and the British soldiers and sailors had been a great help. There was a British sailor who was killed as he stood on the steps of the monument commemorating the defeat of the Interventionists during the Civil War; the Russians were so impressed by the British behaviour during the raids, and particularly by the death of this sailor who, before he was killed, had been transporting the wounded, that they sent a petition to the town council asking that this "anti-British" memorial be removed; the matter was referred to Moscow, but here it was decided that the monument was of historic interest, and should remain.

The sergeant said that the hospital, with its hundreds of wounded, and the management of the Arctic Hotel had now all been evacuated to Archangel, and that, for the time being, Murmansk could be considered closed. Strangely enough, no ships were lost in the three big air-raids on Murmansk.

J. was very doubtful about the Second Front, and was jovially gloomy, saying that "after being let down as they were, he wouldn't blame the Russians if they made a separate peace with Germany," adding: "We can't win the bloody war on the present basis, with the old school tie and the bloody Jews in England running the show." And he added his favourite phrase: "We'll all be bloody lucky if any of us gets alive out of this country."

The floosies did not take part in this discussion, but discussed the price of fur coats. They said you could get a fairly decent Persian lamb coat for 12,000 roubles[1]—second-hand of course—and a moleskin coat for 3,000 or 4,000 roubles.

To-day I went out with Nares to the Embassy *datcha* at Perlovka, where I hadn't been since last year. Quite a lot of people are living peacefully in the *datchas* around, and I had a pleasant walk along the country road through fields and stretches of forest. Talked to a fifteen-year-old cowherd who was looking after thirty cows. These, he said, did not belong to the *kolkhoz* itself, but to individual peasants. He cracked an enormous whip. "Do it again," I said. "All right," he said, "if you'll give me a cigarette."

He had pale-blue eyes and flaxen hair, and very dirty ears, a tattered shirt and greasy trousers and bare feet. "Why don't you keep your ears clean?" I said. "How can you when you're always with cows?" he said. Last year, he said, there were sixty cows, and now there were only thirty; there wasn't enough fodder for them in winter, and the Red Army had eaten thirty of them. "Do you get any milk yourself?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "two cups of milk a day, and some bread and potatoes; but hardly ever any meat." He looked tougher than most kids in Moscow.

It was pleasant to have an English tea on the balcony, with egg and tomato sandwiches, and English raspberry jam—which the Murmansk convoy must have brought.

One could hear the traffic along the Yaroslav highroad, and fighters were whizzing low over the *datcha*; in one of the *datchas* some distance away somebody was playing a Chopin waltz on a tinny piano, and phlox and tobacco-flowers were growing in the flower-beds, but their scent was only faint, for it was a cool evening. Young couples were walking along the road past the *datcha*, and one could hear their laughter. At the far end of the garden some

[1] £250.

of the sergeants were playing tennis . . . "Fifteen-all, fifteen-thirty, damn! fifteen-forty. . . ." The war, and even Moscow, seemed very far away. . . .

Outside the telegraph office in Gorki Street last night, I saw a woman run over by a military car which was racing along at a mad speed. It dragged her for some distance and her long shape, black and white, did some hideous contortions as it was dragged along; somebody near me screamed; there was a grating screech of the brakes, and then the woman lay in a heap, motionless. People ran up, and packed her into a lorry. There seemed to be no blood, but she was probably dead.

Pedestrians in Moscow are very careless, but the driving in wartime, especially with so many army lorries around, is often quite insane. The militia enjoy very little authority; some of the better militia men have been sent to the front and have been replaced by a lot of ignorant village yokels at whom the public just poke fun. In no city have I known the "policeman" to enjoy so little authority as in Moscow. It is almost useless to ask a militia man for directions, he usually doesn't know. The militia girls are considerably more competent, but most of them are brusque and unpleasant.

August 3

Outwardly, Moscow shows few signs of the Battle of Moscow; but to-day I saw some pathetic remnants of the German occupation: crippled children from the liberated areas. They were living in the Vladimir Children's Hospital at the north end of Moscow, in a quiet backstreet with the charming name, so typical of old Moscow—Matrosskaya Tishina, the "Sailors' Quiet." Dr. Krushkov, the chief surgeon, white-haired and with laughing affectionate eyes, was the old-fashioned type of Russian doctor, like something out of Chekhov. It was an old hospital built, together with a small church, by some rich man, long before the last war, to commemorate a dead child called Vladimir. The hospital had since been extended, and around it was a large garden with vegetable plots and masses of flowers, mostly phlox and dahlias. Dr. Krushkov had a large bunch of flowers on his table, in his sunny study. The vegetable garden was run by an elderly gardener, who described himself as an "agronom." The hospital seemed to be fairly well provided with everything; strawberry, rhubarb, and other fruit juices given to the children came straight from the local garden; all the children received 260 grams of milk a day, and there was a system of "milk donors" for human milk, though the number of these donors was still quite insufficient. It was partly because the birth-rate in Moscow had gone down terribly in the last few months. There was a certain shortage of X-ray plates, surgical instruments, and ether, but in recent months a number of valuable gifts had been received from Britain and America, among them sulphur drugs, and also some sweets from Australia.

Dr. Krushkov, wearing a white cap and overall, talked about the very hard work the hospital had had to do in the last year. First, there were the cripples and the sick and starving children from the Moscow province, at the time of the Battle of Moscow, and especially after the German retreat; then there were the starved, skeleton-like children from Leningrad; these had nearly all been saved, and had been sent to children's homes further east. Now not many "war cases" remained.

But what I was to see was bad enough. I saw a little boy with an amputated arm; he described how the Germans had driven him and other village people over the minefields during the Battle of Moscow. There were other crippled

children there, some too ill to talk. And I particularly remember a little girl called Senya. She was a *gueule cassée*, a little monster, with hollow cheeks, a terribly scarred face, a twisted mouth, and false teeth. She had already undergone two plastic operations: before that she had had hardly any face at all. Yet she smiled happily and pathetically when I gave her a doll, and she looked with affection at the doctor when she heard him say: "Never mind, Senya, we'll make a lovely girl of you yet." Senya, horribly disfigured, had been dragged by a Red Army soldier from out of a pile of corpses in a cellar; the whole family had hidden there, and the Germans had thrown two hand-grenades into the cellar. Senya alone had survived.

I had gone there with Marina Vassilievna, of the Nark. She is a Cossack woman from the Don, and she said that for four months she had had no news from her husband.

She sounded very unemotional, but added, nevertheless: "I just can't bear to read the communiqués these days. I know the Don country too well, and it hurts."

As I write, it is 2 a.m., I can hear a lot of fighters in the sky; are they expecting an attack on Moscow? Last night there was an air-raid warning, which lasted from 10 to 11.45 p.m., but nothing seemed to happen. There wasn't even any gunfire.

An American general—I can't remember his name—received the American correspondents to-day; he was very vague about the Second Front, saying it might happen in 1942, or in 1943, or to-morrow morning, but, on the whole, indicating that there wasn't much prospect of anything happening in the near future. Instead, he talked about the new air-route by Alaska, which would greatly help in supplying aircraft to Russia. The terrifying shipping losses of the last few months, he said, were doing much to key up American opinion, and to create strong anti-German sentiment.

Down in the Kuban, I hear, the Germans have, after a long interval, started using paratroops on a large scale. Perhaps they will try paratroops in the Moscow area too, despite their disastrous experience in 1941 when such troops were all exterminated. What makes me think so is that the Press has suddenly started raising spy scares. It talks of the fifth columnists who, at various times, were very active in Leningrad; mostly people belonging to the "disinherited classes." Although generally, the papers say, paratroops seldom exceed 100 or 150 men armed with tommy-guns, the Germans may try to use them "operationally" now. It does not say where such paratroops are expected to be used, but obviously wants everybody to be on the alert.

There is also a Press campaign for preparing fuel for Moscow for the coming winter, and between 100,000 and 200,000 Moscow people, mostly girls, are now cutting timber and digging peat in various places around the capital. Some have been at it for three months already, with usually three more months to go. In the different camps the conditions vary considerably: some are almost like holiday-camps, others are pretty ghastly from the standpoint of food, working, and living conditions. Even university students had been sent out to the peatbogs.

There is also a "Save Petrol" campaign, and rather ominously, a lot of talk about various real and potential oil resources in Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia. Preparing the public for the worst, what?

August 4

At the Actors' House in Gorki Street, there was a meeting devoted to present-day British and American literature. Miss Lieberson of V.O.K.S. read a paper on modern British and American plays; her conclusion was that there were many more "vital" American than British plays; the British stage, like British literature in general, still suffered a great deal from "escapism," but Priestley, H. G. Wells, and others had attacked this tendency, and she mentioned a few books, notably Greenwood's *Mr. Bunting* (which seems to be about the only British wartime novel known here), which revealed a less escapist tendency.

Ehrenburg then spoke. He was in very bad humour, and said that he had come to the meeting very reluctantly; two months ago he was convinced he would by now be a war correspondent in Western Europe. Nevertheless, he gave an interesting talk on Hemingway, whom he admires immensely. First he talked about *A Farewell to Arms*, which, he said, was typical of the generation that had fought in the last war; to them, it had seemed a senseless, useless war. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* one saw quite a different war—a just, legitimate, inevitable war, against real Evil. "Robert Jordan will never say 'farewell to arms,' for he knows what he is fighting for. . . . Robert Jordan has thousands, millions of Russian brothers and sisters. . . . Those Russians who, with hand-grenades tied round them, threw themselves under German tanks, thought as the dying Jordan thought. . . ." And Ehrenburg ended up emotionally, on a note of terrible gloom:

"And if it is not our fate to see Life triumph, then, at the fateful hour, let us remember that young American, dying on a road in Castile, with his small machine-gun and his great heart. . . ."

What an idea, all the same—to imagine Russia in the position of the Spanish Republic. . . .

I walked back from the meeting with Professor Zvavitch, who said he disagreed with Ehrenburg's excessive admiration for Hemingway. "There must still be at least one hundred people at this very moment in Moscow reading *A Farewell to Arms*, a thoroughly defeatist and bad book," he said.

There is some talk of translating *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but the anti-Communist "Marty episode" will be hard for the Russian censorship to swallow. So Russian readers will probably have to do without the book altogether.

August 6

At Ralph Parker's to-night I met Boris Voitekhov and his beautiful film-star wife, Lucy Tselikovskaya. Boris is dark, and small and wiry like a fox-terrier, and very witty. He has a healthy touch of scepticism in him, and an unstandardised way of thinking—which is not exactly an asset in Soviet journalism. At the height of the purge he had the guts—and it needed some guts—to write *Pavel Grekov*, the play which, having been approved by Stalin, marked the beginning of the end of the Purge. It condemned indiscriminate "purging" in no uncertain terms.

He said he had made nearly a million roubles in stage royalties, but had squandered the money in a few months. He was in Sebastopol for *Pravda* during the last days of the siege; and is now writing a book which Parker is translating into English. "I am one of those," he said, "and I am in a small minority—who think that it is better to take time over the Second Front, and not to risk another Dunkirk. But our people feel very strongly about it; I know, because I am a Party man. I am also among those—and these are

much more numerous—who draw a clear line between the good and the bad British. . . . We all remember Chamberlain, Munich, and all that. . . . You know at once who is good, and who is bad; you don't even have to talk to them; you only have to watch how they behave in Moscow; their general attitude gives them away."

He said there were two cities in the Soviet Union that would never fall: Moscow and Baku.

"According to a Tass message from London," said Voitekhov, "the British Ministry of Information has announced that the only remaining grievance of the German war prisoners in Britain has now been removed; a sufficient number of baths and shower-baths have now been installed in all the camps. So I said to the Tass man who showed it me: 'For God's sake, don't publish this, or all the British will be lynched in the streets of Moscow.' "

August 7

In the Tverskoy Boulevard a book fair has been opened. Part of the garden is roped off because of the barrage balloon, but in the rest of the garden there are plenty of benches where one can spend a pleasant couple of hours reading. Not that there is much actual reading matter to be bought at the fair; only at the kiosk of second-hand books can one pick up a few things; I bought a tattered set of Korolenko for 150 roubles and a set of Kluchevsky's *History of Russia*, for 60 roubles, only to find later that several pages were missing in two of the volumes. For the rest, there were several stands of technical literature of one kind and another—on electrical engineering and automobile construction, etc., for all of which there were a good many buyers, mostly soldiers.

Monday, August 10

There are persistent rumours that Churchill is about to arrive in Moscow; some even say that he has already arrived, but I checked up, and it isn't true. The Germans already claim Piatigorsk—which is terrible.

I went this afternoon on a long trek round Moscow, and landed, in the end, on a bench in the boulevard, off the Trubnaya Square. It was sunny, and the Moscow air was clear and limpid. On the hill above the Trubnaya, the golden onion domes of the church were glittering. I had just passed a flower shop, with "Closed" written on the door, but with a number of luxurious flower-baskets in the window—had they been reserved for prima-donnas or prima-ballerinas? In the boulevard, a lot of small children were playing and making sand-pies. On the bench opposite sat a Moscow mother, with lanky legs and a puce-coloured jersey and matted hair, and she had a snub nose and a tired look, and in one hand she held a toy rifle. This belonged to the chubby little fellow who was making sand-pies. He wore an odd large blue cap with a red visor; with him was another youngster of three or four with blue pants and a white shirt and a coloured Tartar skull-cap. Beside mother sat grannie, with an almost newborn baby in her arms; grannie had a large white scarf over her shoulders, and a long black dress; besides the baby she also held in her arms a large rag doll with red hair; mother and grannie were discussing baby. With them was also another woman, a relation or friend, with an intelligent but long, tired and undernourished face and shadowed eyes. She wore a large red beret, and her clothes were of good quality, but her cotton stockings were darned and her shoes very shabby. She was clearly a minor government employee, living on a Class II ration card, and with no extras. After taking part in the mother-grannie conversation, she unfolded a copy of *Pravda*, and

read it with a dismal look on her face. She looked fifty, but may have been under forty—in Moscow, people's ages are often hard to tell. Many people grow old very fast.

A clean-shaven elderly man with white hair and a sort of black sombrero sat beside me on the bench. He was talkative. "Pleasant evening," he said, as he sat down heavily. "It's my *vykhodnoy* to-night [my night off], and I like coming here to take a breath of fresh air, and to have a look at the kiddies." "I suppose you are a theatrical man?" I said. "You are right," he said, "I play the bassoon in the orchestra." He talked cheerfully about his work, described how he had spent the winter in Kuibyshev—"lived there in a positive rathole, and am glad to be back in dear old Moscow," and then when one of the little boys came up with his rifle and threatened to shoot him, the bassoon player expressed great panic, and ran round a tree with the boy following and squealing loudly. However, mother and grannie did not approve, and the boy was ordered back to his family bench and the sand-pies. The bassoon player came back, and made a few more remarks, adding: "What's wrong with Moscow now is that there's no place to buy a bottle of beer—don't you think?" I said I agreed. It was a pleasant summer evening in Moscow. There were the prints of children's bare feet in the sand, and the tramcars rattled past noisily.

Earlier on, I had walked down the old-fashioned narrow Maroseika; here the tramcars were crowded, with "bunches of grapes" hanging from each platform. It was odd to compare the Maroseika to-day with what it had looked in July 1941 when I first arrived in Moscow. It was then a busy shopping street; now the shop-signs were completely meaningless; what was the meaning to-day of "Honey and Bee-hives"? The only place that was open was a sort of "photomaton," and the photographs in the window were as funny as ever —a father with a stiff starched collar and bushy eyebrows, and, with him, a daughter with exactly the same bushy eyebrows; and the girl dressed up as a gipsy; and the Dreamy Fat Girl, with her head to one side resting on her wrist. Moscow is, on the whole, ugly, half-baked, chaotic, incoherent, and yet, even in its jarring contrasts and discords one begins to feel a peculiar charm. Its very incoherence and shabbiness have a beauty of their own. Moscow has thousands of astonishing little "angles"; if only Moscow had produced a Utrillo, people would soon see its charm. Did anybody, before the impressionists, see any peculiar charm in dilapidated French suburbs, and striped café blinds, and *pissotières* with a colour-splash of Byrrh on their turrets? But nobody has ever seriously taken the trouble to express Moscow on canvas—except the things that hit you in the eye—the churches (while they were still at their best), and the Kremlin. If only there were painters, or even good photographers, who could be persuaded to take an interest in the Maroseika, or in the children and grandmothers and sand-pies in the Boulevard off the Trubnaya Square!

I'd like, after the war, to buy the best available camera, and go round Moscow snapping "angles."

Meantime, heavy fighting is going on at Maikop and Krasnodar, which means that almost the whole of the Northern Caucasus is gone. . . .

August 12

There is something rather grim and ironical about that large exhibition still open at the Red Army House, and devoted to the Battle of Moscow. Somehow, one is not in a mood just now for the great German Rout—of last year,

and for all these pictures of "Winter Fritzes" dead or prisoners, and those thousands of wrecked and abandoned German tanks and lorries. There are also at the exhibition numerous German rifles and machine-guns, and pictures of German atrocities—corpses, corpses and more corpses; and among them, several photographs of Zoya ("Tanya") Kosmodemianskaya. It is not easily forgotten, that lovely young girl's head, with the rope round her neck. But the exhibition is being kept on to remind people of what the Germans have done, and to remind them also of the simple fact that the Germans *can* be beaten. There were very few people at the exhibition, though.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon, and the people preferred to be in the park outside; it is one of the most pleasant parks of Moscow, and there were many men and women about, nearly all in uniform. Phlox and tobacco-plants, both pink and white, were growing in the flower-beds, and a military band was playing military marches. On the tennis-court, a man and a girl, both in white shorts, were practising. Above the main alley a large red banner was stretched, saying: "Stalin Orders: Not Another Step Back." The "Victory in 1942" slogans have disappeared.

Almost daily one comes across somebody whose brother or husband or son is killed or wounded or missing. The casualties have been piling up terribly ever since the first day of the war. I talked to-day to young Nona Sergeievna, one of the clerks at the hotel. Her husband was recently badly wounded and is in hospital somewhere in Transcaucasia. He wrote to her saying he was desperately unhappy, and could she send him something. "But what can I do?" she said. "Last week I already sent him two pounds of butter—and you know what *that* is worth in Moscow." She said she had sold some clothes to buy the butter. And then she talked of her little boy of two; she gives him as much food as she can; "for if he is not properly fed now, he will just die in winter. He nearly died of pneumonia last winter. The temperature in the room used to be two degrees."

A long talk with X this evening. He did not think the Turks would attack, nor the Japs—"especially if they don't do it before September 1."

He said the situation in the Caucasus was very difficult, and the increased German use of paratroops particularly unpleasant. But, even if it came to the worst, it was doubtful that the Germans, after reaching the Caspian, could get beyond Makhach-Kala, or through the well-fortified Derbent Gate which was only a couple of miles wide, between the mountains and the Caspian. The Germans were extremely unlikely to get to Baku. "But," he added, "the Germans have a different scheme up their sleeve, and one can hear German prisoners talk about it a great deal. They think they will more or less have knocked the stuffing out of us by the end of the autumn; that they will be deep inside the Caucasus—though not necessarily at Baku—and that they will be on the Volga. So here they will put up what they call an Ostwall, an 'Eastern Siegfried Line' or 'Eastern Maginot Line'; they will then let us stew in our own juice (and they think we shall not be strong enough to attack their 'East Wall'), and turn their main forces, or at least a large part of them, against England. They'll launch their offensive there in spring, after building up their aircraft, their landing-barges, and their tanks, during the winter; they'll have more oil, and more other reserves than before. That's what the German prisoners are saying."

I daresay there was a certain element of Second Front propaganda in all

this, but it wasn't only that. I can quite imagine the Germans thinking on precisely these lines, and, as usual, underestimating America.

"In the Kuban," said X, "the Cossacks have been very good, and the Germans have failed completely in their plan to exploit past differences between the Cossacks and the Soviet régime. All the Germans claim is, indeed, that the 'older people' in the Cossack villages welcomed them; but I doubt even that. At heart, the Germans must know that, as long as they are dealing with Russian people, there's nothing doing. In the Ukraine—if they were smart—they'd have all sorts of opportunities for sowing disaffection towards Moscow, but they are not smart; they are such arrogant swine with everybody that the Ukrainians have become more pro-Moscow than ever. Only a small handful of Ukrainian 'nationalists' are still willing to play ball with the Germans; but they are just a bunch of mercenaries who will serve anyone who pays them.

"In the Caucasus, we are not so sure of some of the Moslems; they may play ball with the Germans, just as the Tartars in the Crimea did. The Crimean Tartars have been thoroughly disloyal—just as they were, incidentally, during the Crimean War when they served the British and the French and the Turks on every occasion!

"All things considered," said X, "the morale in the Red Army still continues to be extraordinarily good. They retreat, not with a sense of defeat, but with terrible bitterness, and a touch of shame in their hearts. But there is much less pessimism, not only in the army, but in the country as a whole, than there was in October 1941. And that in spite of the terribly hard conditions in which people are living, particularly in the evacuation areas, where both food and housing conditions are dreadful.

"But," he said, "heaven help you if you start judging everything by Moscow. Moscow is an unstable and panicky city. An awful number of people here are newcomers, with no roots. There are not enough politically-conscious people here—not enough workers and intelligentsia. In October 1941 Moscow panicked as Leningrad never did; there was a day when perhaps three-fourths of Moscow were convinced that all hope was lost. But in the army it's all entirely different. Along most of the front to-day everything is 'all quiet,' or there are even local successes. In the army to-day—taking the army as a whole—there is ferocious hatred of the Germans, much irritation against England (much more so than against America), and *a real anger against the southern armies*, who are 'letting the show down.'"

He also remarked on the intense hatred of the Germans everywhere in the army, and showed me a letter from an artilleryman saying: "I hate to shell the Germans; I would much rather stick a bayonet into them or crack their skulls with my rifle-butt." He also had here a letter about a soldier who had surrendered to the Germans. It was a cruel tragic document: the copy of a collective letter sent by the man's comrades to his parents. "Your son," it said, "is a coward and a traitor; and shame on you for having brought up such a creature. We curse him, and may your curses be on him, too." I hope the parents never received it.

To-night somebody came in saying he had just seen Churchill; he had seen him drive down Gorki Street in a car, smoking his cigar; five other cars followed. In the crowd nobody took any notice.

In a special communiqué the Germans to-day claimed the capture of Kalach,

at the far end of the Don Bend—on the Stalingrad side—of 75,000 prisoners and 1,000 tanks.

THE CHURCHILL VISIT, MOSCOW, AUGUST 12–17

Churchill's visit to Moscow in August 1942, with the outlook in Egypt still very uncertain, and with the Germans driving deep into the Caucasus and fighting a ferocious battle on the Don, on their way to Stalingrad, will perhaps some day be fully described "from inside"—possibly by Churchill himself. In Moscow, very little could be learned about the conference, apart from a few externals. But what one did hear made one feel uneasy. The Russians were completely silent about it; and the two other sources of information, or rather, sources of hints, seemed to be unable to agree. The British Embassy kept hinting that Churchill and Stalin were getting on "like a house on fire," and on the last day, the British Ambassador described the meeting as "an epoch-making event."

Mr. Harriman, who had come here as the American "observer," was, however, telling, or rather, suggesting, a very different story—namely, that tempers were not too good on either side, and that if the Russians expected any immediate results from the meeting, they were going to be disappointed. The British said that the Russians were "a little bruised but confident," and that the meeting had been "a very great success" and had "accomplished its purpose." In the light of later events, particularly of the North African landing in November, one can see, more or less, what happened; but, at the time, one was really in the dark. Fourteen British and six Americans had arrived, among them some of the biggest shots, Sir Arthur Tedder, who was then in charge of the R.A.F. in the Middle East, Sir Alan Brooke, and Wavell, and Sir Alexander Cadogan, and some American generals. Churchill had a long meeting with Stalin at the Kremlin the first night (August 12), then, on the following day, another long talk with Molotov, then another talk with Stalin on the night of the 13th. The Generals had several meetings with Shaposhnikov and Voroshilov, and it seems that air bases for allied aircraft were then already asked for in the Caucasus—a proposal the Russians rejected. Then there was a banquet at the Kremlin, at which the whole Sovnarkom and the whole Politburo were present, and later one was told that at this banquet there were "many jocular toasts" and that the atmosphere was "very matey." A significant dialogue is said to have taken place at this banquet between Churchill and Stalin—one which throws light on Stalin's view of the war. When Churchill referred to "the splendid Russian soldiers," Stalin remarked: "Don't exaggerate. They aren't all that hot. In fact, they are pretty bad still. But they are learning and improving every day; and they'll be all right before very long!"

But the public saw nothing of Churchill; there was no ballet show to

which he went, and no embassy reception of any kind, and he even decided not to see the British and American Press, who were seen instead by the British Ambassador who then uttered his famous phrase about the "epoch-making event." However, the newsreel men were kept busy, and on his arrival at the airfield, Churchill's V-sign was interpreted by some Russians who saw it at the time, or later, on the screen, as meaning "Second Front." I might also add my experience in a cinema when a young girl, on hearing the guard of honour play "God Save the King," and on asking her girl friend what tune that was, received the reply: "Don't you know? That's the 'Internationale' in English."

The biggest subject of "small gossip" was Churchill's siren suit which he wore, and in which he had himself photographed, together with Stalin, at the Kremlin banquet. His defiance of "protocol" on that occasion was interpreted by many as a little demonstration of bad temper; if Stalin (who wasn't yet a Marshal of the Soviet Union) could wear nothing better than a plain khaki tunic, he, Churchill, would also wear something equally plain—a boiler suit. Certainly, the Russians took a poor view of this costume. Altogether, in spite of the "matey" atmosphere at the Kremlin banquet, there were signs of truculence and frayed nerves on both sides, especially on the British. In his last message Churchill said that he had "spoken his mind" during his meetings with Stalin. The truth is that Churchill had been very irritated by all the Second Front clamour at home, and held the Russians directly or indirectly responsible for it. This clamour had, indeed, been one of the reasons why Churchill found it necessary to come to Moscow. He wanted the Russians to "lay off"; and at the same time, he wanted to explain to Stalin what exactly Britain would and could do, and what she would not and could not do. Apart from the Ambassador's phrase, "epoch-making event," which created some confusion in many minds—a confusion which became even greater after the abortive Dieppe landing only a few days after Churchill's departure from Moscow—there was a strong suspicion that Churchill had come to plead with Stalin and to "withdraw the Second Front communiqué." The communiqué published at the end of the Stalin–Churchill meeting and the editorials in the Russian Press spoke of the close bonds between Britain and the Soviet Union, but were not very illuminating, and certainly did not suggest any immediate spectacular results. Churchill's refusal to see the Press in Moscow suggested that things had not gone too well; he saw, however, the Press in Cairo a few days later (much to the Moscow Correspondents' annoyance), but there also nothing very clear transpired, apart from a number of more or less apocryphal remarks Churchill was supposed to have made in Cairo. How widely these remarks were circulated may, however, be seen from the fact that, some weeks later, Churchill found it necessary to cable a denial to the British Embassy in Moscow of ever

having, while in Cairo, referred to Stalin as "that monster." Remembering the somewhat strained atmosphere of the Moscow meeting, one could not, at the time, help wondering whether, in an unguarded moment, Churchill had not, in reality, used *some* such phrase.

Pravda and *Izvestia* published polite editorials about the Churchill visit, but the Red Army paper, *Red Star*, significantly failed to publish an editorial of its own, but merely reprinted the *Pravda* article. On the day of Churchill's departure, *Pravda* also published a particularly vicious cartoon by Yefimov ridiculing the German *papier maché* defences on the Channel coast—a theory which Dieppe was, unfortunately, going to disprove only a few days later. And in Moscow, the crowds continued to go to the movies to see the somewhat depressing newsreel of the Churchill visit, in which Stalin and Harriman were doing a "please smile" before the camera, but Churchill could be seen sitting in his siren suit beside them, on the Kremlin sofa, and kicking impatiently because his seat was not comfortable. . . .

The Churchill visit to Moscow had nothing directly to do with the departure, just about that time, of the Polish Army, under General Anders, to Iran, for this question had been settled long before. Even so, the "Polish Problem" was already beginning to cause some friction between Britain and the Soviet Union. There is good reason for saying that just as, at that time, the Allies tried, without success, to secure air bases in the Caucasus, so there were also some who wanted to get the Anders Army out quickly "so that it could be used for defending Transcaucasia and the roads to the Middle East" against the Germans. In all these proposals and half-formulated plans there was the, to the Russians, highly insulting suggestion that their army was considered to be as good as licked, and that British, Polish and heaven knows what other troops would have to assume the task of "defending the Caucasus." The indications are that many of the "inside reports" on the imminent defeat of the Red Army emanated from General Anders and other Poles in the Soviet Union, and that certain Allied military experts were impressed by them.

The whole story of why the Anders Army left Russia is a highly complicated one, and it would be wrong to suggest that the rights were all on one side and the wrongs were all on the other side; and whether Anders took his troops out of Russia in order "to defend the Caucasus," or whether, as was said at the time, he did not want them slaughtered at the Russian Front, and preferred to preserve them as a Praetorian Guard, which would be the backbone of the "Future Poland" of Anders's imagination, the fact remains that the bulk of them left Russia at the time of the Battle of Stalingrad—they left the ship which, they thought, was sinking. That fact, so insulting to Russia, more than the fact that Anders was, in the Russian view, a "Fascist," was, psychologically, a very im-

portant factor in the subsequent Russian break-off of diplomatic relations with the London Government. The belief that Britain had, to some extent, encouraged Anders to take his troops out of Russia, also added to the not inconsiderable anti-British feeling existing in Russia at the time. The indications, however, are that during Churchill's visit, Stalin convinced him that the prospects of the Red Army were not nearly as bad as Anders and other "experts" were making out, and that there would be no need for the Poles to "defend the Caucasus." On the contrary, Stalin appears to have told Churchill something, already then, of the Russian plans for the great Russian counter-offensive. Whether, at the time, Churchill was fully impressed, is hard to say. The news from the front continued to be very bad.

FROM THE DIARY

August 18

Churchill has left, and nobody is feeling too happy about his visit, though at first it roused a good many hopes.

On Saturday I had a very interesting evening at the Workers' Club at the Trekhgorka factory in the Krasnaya Presnya district. In the Socialist Competition for July, this great textile factory—the greatest in Moscow—now, naturally, working almost exclusively for the army—had been awarded the Red Banner, and the girls and lads celebrated this occasion by arranging on Saturday a meeting and a dance. The large hall of the Workers' Club was decorated with flags and festoons, and the meeting opened with the military brass band playing the "Internationale." There were hundreds of girls there, and a lot of soldiers, and also crowds of young kids with white shirts and red Pioneer ties. First some speeches were made about the achievements of the Trekhgorka Factory—one by some Party man, and two more by officers from the front, who said how much the soldiers at the front appreciated the great work that was being done in the factories by the men and women workers. This, one of them said, was one of the oldest and most typical of the Moscow factories, and its name was dear to every Moscow heart. And there were hundreds of thousands of Moscow men in the army, and they had played a great part in saving their city last winter, and had killed thousands and thousands of German scoundrels. (Loud cheers.) The officer concluded by saying that the workers of the Soviet Union must struggle all the time for higher production and better and better organisation, and that they must continue, more than ever, to help the army "to carry out our great Stalin's order—to smash the enemy in 1942."

Then a poet called Osip Kolychev recited a poem in which he spoke of the Guardsmen of the Front and the Guardsmen of Industry. Another poet, a bald old man, recited another poem in which "the white-haired old steelworker kisses reverently the Red Banner of Labour." "This banner," said the poem, "will go from factory to factory; and it will call to you all: destroy all these Fascist beasts who have defiled your land." A pretty pink-cheeked youngster with carefully parted hair and wearing the white shirt and red tie of the Pioneers, then made a little speech. He said he and his Pioneer comrades had not fought the invader, but they had helped the wounded in hospital; and, if necessary, they would, like all others, give their lives for the country. And

then a much smaller girl made a speech in a squeaky voice concluding with the words: "Long live our teacher, and the friend of every child, Comrade Stalin!"

Lebedev-Kumach, in naval uniform and wearing numerous decorations, the author of much patriotic poetry and doggerel, read a couple of pieces of his own, one called: "Two Words: Stalin and Moscow," the other, "The Komsomol Membership Card"—"it is warm with the warmth of a soldier's heart. . . ." Then Maurice Hindus (with whom I had gone to the meeting) spoke: having heard that day the famous remark about the "epoch-making event," he broadly hinted that he knew of a great piece of news, but was not at liberty to disclose it. However, this was enough to bring the house down.

Then a middle-aged Party woman, Comrade Popova, wound up the "serious" part of the meeting. She spoke of Stalin, and of the new slogan: "Not another step back." "To-day," she said, "is a stern day and a joyful day. We are celebrating our victory on the industrial front. Our army's resistance is growing stronger; but even to-day, at some parts of the front, a few miles of country have been lost. This must not be. At the front as in the rear, we must obey our leader's order: Not a step back. . . . And once we start our counter-offensive, then we'll go right on to Berlin. . . ."

Was this remark received with incredulity? Honestly, I don't think so. Here, among these factory workers, there was an infinitely better and more confident tone and mood than among the more weak-kneed people in Moscow. I remembered what somebody had said the other day: "The trouble with Moscow is that there isn't enough of a proletariat here, a proletariat with real working-class *traditions*." And Trekhgorka, the old Prokhorov Cotton Mill, was one of those places in Moscow where such a tradition was present. There were many workers here whose fathers and grandfathers had worked at Trekhgorka. . . .

Olga Sapozhnikova belonged to such a family. I met her that evening, and have seen her since. She was twenty-two or twenty-three, with a round pale face, and large grey eyes, a full, finely-shaped mouth and rather heavy jaw; a generous open face, very Russian. She is one of the leaders of the Trekhgorka Komsomol. That night, she wore a black dress with a white lace collar. We danced to the brass band in the hall decorated with streamers and festoons and banners, and on the end wall was a large picture of Stalin standing in the middle of a meadow, laughing and clapping his hands, in the midst of young dancers in summer dresses and accordion players.

Natasha, with turned-up nose, was younger than Olga, and coy and giggly, and played about coquettishly with a faded rose, and there was a horsy girl with a pimply chin and in a white satin dress, who could hardly dance at all; altogether the standard of dancing was low. At first the brass band played; then a band of local talent, dressed up as blue-and-yellow Pierrots, played dance music on accordions and balalaikas. All the girls danced, but there were rather too many men—nearly all of them soldiers who had come here on leave, and several sat around along the wall—unusual wallflowers—reading magazines and newspapers. The Pierrots played, and Misha, the unusually handsome secretary of the Komsomol, sang comic verses of his own making. "Two of his poems," Olga said proudly, "were published in our local factory paper last week."

Olga talked about all the extra work people were doing now at Trekhgorka; going out on Sunday to cut the hay, and working on the factory's allotments;

and the Komsomol, she said, had also organised a timber camp, and the factory girls went there, for a few months at a time. . . . She was also a regular blood donor, and so was nearly everybody in the factory. She had three brothers in the army, and one was killed and another missing, and two sisters; the older one was an açk-ack gunner outside Moscow, the other one was very young, and still at home. Mother worked at home, too, but father, an old Trekhgorka worker, was an invalid, half-paralysed. The girl was strong and healthy, but overworked; one could see it from those little wrinkles round her eyes.

Although there hadn't been a drop of liquor anywhere, the music grew more and more boisterous, and the dancing faster and more furious as the evening wore on. They were jolly, happy, spontaneous, warm-hearted people. Confetti was scattered over the dancers. A very black-haired sallow-faced sailor with the cap of the Baltic Fleet and a Hitler moustache, the self-appointed master of ceremonies, who, from time to time, shouted out in outrageous French: "Messieurs, mesdames, grand rond!" whirled his giggling partner madly round the hall in an obstreperous waltz, with the sweat rolling down his face. "What a lad," said Olga with a touch of admiration, looking at the wild Baltic sailor. "Are you married?" I asked Olga. "Married?" she smiled, "this isn't a time for thinking of marriage; all the men are at the front." And she added seriously: "The chances of remaining a widow are too great."

At the Actors' House in Gorki Street yesterday, there was a concert of Russian music preceded by an interesting lecture by a professor with the odd name of Gazenpud. He dwelt on the organic connection between Russian and Western-European civilisation, and particularly between Western and Russian music. Liszt naturally ranked among the Great Europeans. He quoted Berlioz's opinion of Glinka, Liszt's high opinion of Tchaikovsky and Borodin, and spoke of the enormous influence of Mussorgsky on Debussy and modern French music. He spoke highly of Skriabin and Rachmaninov—Skriabin who, had he lived, would have got over his theosophist enthusiasm, and taken a great place in Soviet music, and Rachmaninov, "one of the glories of Russian civilisation, who, in these cruel days, felt once again his bond with his native country." He recalled Liszt's remark: "It is Russia's destiny to produce the music of the future, and to lead the peoples of Europe." As against this, there was un-European, and now un-creative Germany. Professor Gazenpud recalled how Borodin had rejected—with a kind of instinctive horror—the *Meistersinger* Overture; it was brutal, inhuman, un-European, Nazi *avant la lettre*. Wagner was inhuman; his Waldweben was a song of nature, not of man; his little men were always dominated and oppressed by Chaos and the Cosmos. Tchaikovsky and Borodin were always profoundly human, so was Rimsky Korsakov, and Mussorgsky had written two musical dramas of Shakespearean grandeur. Russia had her great composers to-day; but what had Nazi Germany to show? Nothing.

This stress on the organic unity between Russian and European (and American) civilisation is very typical of the present time. People are inclined to think of Russian *fundamentals* in these days of danger. Pudovkin, at a congress of film directors at the Architects' House the other day, spoke of the affinities between the American and the Russian film. "Like our early Soviet films, the early American films were rich in action and movement, and were marked by much

the same kind of optimism. Why are the Americans so comprehensible to us?" he said. "Because they are very like us temperamentally. We loved Fairbanks and Tom Mix. But having learned so much from the Americans, we did not copy them blindly, but created our own methods."

Naturally, there was much eulogising of Chaplin, both as an artist, and as an anti-Fascist.

There were many British and Americans at the film congress, and naturally no chance was missed of mentioning the Second Front. Karmen, the documentary director, said that to-day the Soviet documentary film employed over 1,000 cameramen, and it happened only too often for a Soviet cameraman to have to drop his camera and grab the machine-gun. "Our soil is drenched in blood," he said, "that is the price that has been paid so that you should not experience invasion." But the heights of emotion were reached by Dovzhenko, who, like Karmen, was in uniform. "Master and friend, Chaplin," he exclaimed, "your demand for an immediate opening of the Second Front is an expression of the common sense of the British and American people. . . . Do not forget us, artists of the world; and do not turn away squeamishly when we show you the Nazi gallows and our dead."

Then appealingly, in his gentle Ukrainian accent, the grey-haired man with the fine actor's face, said: "Fascism has created incredible wickedness in the world. In these grim terrible days through which we live the cinema has its great task to perform. Do not, my British and American friends, put trivialities on the screen at a time when our whole planet is floating through a bloody fog." And he ended on a note of gloom and foreboding. "What does the winter hold in store for us? Let our hair grow white, but morally we are already the victors, and as such we shall go down in history. And we shall spare nothing for the freedom of our Soviet people and of our Ukrainian nation which has suffered as no other nation has suffered."

August 24

The news from the Don is very disturbing. Even so, life goes on fairly normally in Moscow, though I have heard a theory put forward by some pessimist that when the Germans get Stalingrad—which they may in two or three weeks—they will start an all-out offensive against Moscow.

One can still get, by special arrangement, a mighty good meal at the Aragvi, the Caucasian restaurant in one of the large new blocks off Gorki Street. To do that, you have to be "distinguished" in some way—or be a foreigner inviting some celebrity—or any old diplomat. It usually comes to about 300 roubles per head, drink included. To-night a few of us had a "do" for the great film directors now in Moscow—Pudovkin, working on Simonov's *Russian People*, Eisenstein, who is going back to Alma Ata to-morrow to go on with his work on *Ivan the Terrible*, and the Documentary Directors, Karmen and Kapler. Kapler is now working on a great documentary called *One Day of War*, embracing the whole of the Soviet war effort at the front and in the rear. Kapler talked about the ten days he recently spent among the partisans in the Porkhov area. German-appointed *starostas* had been shot in many of the villages, and the villages had then been burned down. Those who survived remained fanatically loyal. "They go to villages which have not been burned down, and there they are well received; though people know what the penalties are. When there is nowhere left to go, people settle in dugouts in the forests. Heating is the biggest problem because the smoke shows, and they have to do their heating and cooking during the night. The partisans in the Porkhov area

have stoves and plenty of equipment, nearly all of it taken from the Germans, though some essentials are brought to them by plane."

Speaking of Soviet films, I yesterday saw three which were interesting. First Karmen's documentary of the Churchill visit, with good shots of the old man standing at the airfield, with the sun shining through his thin white hair, waving in the wind. But, oh! wasn't he grumpy-looking most of the time. . . . The second film was interesting as hate propaganda—and, what is worse, it was based on fact. In the main battle scene crowds of women and children were pushed before the advancing Germans. People in the audience became restless —one could almost feel the air filled with anger and fury. And then, after the attack, a woman, shot in the back by the Germans, lay in no-man's land, and, beside her, a live baby. At grave risk to himself, a Russian soldier rescues this baby, and is allowed by the C.O. to adopt it. The adoption of war orphans has become a big propaganda subject; especially in the east babies are adopted by the thousand; a lot of war orphans have been adopted by Uzbeks, who love children—and they are going to become Uzbeks—which is perhaps rather tough on a good Russian child. . . . Altogether, babies play an enormous part in Russian films now; perhaps a subconscious reflection of the problem of national survival, present at the back of everybody's mind. Dead children, murdered by the Germans, are, of course, the strongest hate motif of all: the film of Kerch showing a trench full of children murdered by the Germans—fifty of them—has a terrible effect on Moscow audiences. The parents of these children were ordered to bring them to school, and when they did, the whole lot of them were shot. What the exact circumstances of this massacre were, I don't know.

The third of the films I saw was very different: it was a comic film of a boy and girl outwitting the drunken and imbecile Germans in the town, and joining the partisans; it was full of very funny slapstick, reminiscent of Chaplin's *Shoulderarms*, though technically it was as bad as most Russian feature-films to-day; they are nearly all made at Alma Ata, where they haven't got the proper facilities or the technical equipment, and the quality of the film itself is bad. But the episode of the drunken German corporal, scared to death of ghosts, is very funny, and the audience roared with laughter.

One thing the Germans will never do convincingly, and that is make funny films about their enemies: a funny war film must inevitably be more or less Chaplinesque; and that is contrary to German nature.

In the Moscow streets I have often observed old men picking up the most miserable-looking fag-ends; decent-sized fag-ends are never thrown away in Moscow, and in what is left in a discarded cardboard tube there isn't even half a puff. Our ration is 400 Russian cigarettes a month, which is very little; I allow myself, in addition, a daily ration of five English cigarettes, out of the few hundred I have still left. If it comes to the worst, one can still buy very bad Russian cigarettes at fifty roubles a packet, as I did from the cloakroom attendant at the theatre the other night. At the hotel the chauffeurs and other profiteers ruined the market and there are no more cigarettes on sale. Altogether the food has deteriorated, and the "cutlets"—which is the only meat usually served—are made of such bad meat that you eat them because you've got to eat something. The cakes, on the other hand, are almost peace-time standard, but instead of tea they often serve a brew made of dried carrots—which is not too bad, though.

August 26

Yesterday's news was bad enough; to-day's is worse. Fighting is going on north-west of Stalingrad, last night's communiqué said. I hear that twenty German divisions have already got across the Don. The Russians, on the other hand, have started a big offensive at Rzhev. It hasn't achieved its object yet—which is to capture Rzhev; but it has at least tied up twenty-five or thirty German divisions—which, in itself, is an object. If these were thrown against Stalingrad, it would be a poor outlook. Very bad rainy weather has made things even more difficult for the Russians.

August 27

Lunch with Admiral Miles and Geoffrey Palmer. The Admiral was very non-committal on the military situation. He thought it would be a good idea for me to go to Archangel to have a look at Anglo-Russian life there; there is an international Seamen's Club at Archangel now, and the atmosphere, the Admiral said, was "very jolly and matey." I am not so sure about that, considering that the seamen are pretty well marooned at Archangel at least till the winter.

To-night I went with Olga, the Komsomol girl from Trekhgorka, to the theatre; it was again the *Tsar's Bride*. What a hard life these factory girls have these days; in addition to the regular ten or eleven hours in the factory, there is all the Party and Komsomol work to do; Olga is one of the Komsomol officials, and is also preparing for her exam for Party Candidate. Moreover, as she told me the other night, the girls go out of town during their day off to gather in hay, or work on the vegetable gardens. "Natasha and I," she said, "wanted to go into the army, but the factory wouldn't let us; they said they needed us here." She also said how she and Natasha were taking part in the organisation of the woodcutting camps, for which the less essential women workers at the factory are selected, and sent for two or three months at a time. Olga had stayed in Moscow right through the winter, and promised to tell me some other day about the fearful days of October 15 and 16; she had been digging trenches outside Moscow, and she and others had been dive-bombed and machine-gunned; and there were a few moments of terrible uncertainty when she thought she would follow the Red Army out of Moscow, if it came to the worst. "And now," she said, "things are looking black again; but I am more confident now. And if things become very bad again," she added, "we shall all go out to defend Moscow with our bodies, as we did last time. . . ." She said it very simply, without any affectation, and then she laughed: "You know that's what I said the other day to Misha, our Komsomol Secretary—you saw him the other night—and he said: 'Never mind, Olga, with girls like you Russia can't lose the war.' " Before the war, she said, she often went to the theatre, but now there was no time. After the show I saw her to her tram-stop at the corner of Herzen Street. It was a lovely moonlit night. We passed the shattered building of the university with its blind, boarded-up windows; on the other side of the street was the Kremlin, lit up by the moon; and with a touch of child-like sincerity, Olga said quietly: "Our beloved Leader lives there. Think how much work he must have these days!" And then she remembered happier days. "I took part in every one of the May Day parades in the Red Square; we were so happy then. We marched past Stalin, and he saluted us. . . ." She had a pretty white dress with little flowers, and bare legs with little white socks. This girl was proletarian in the best sense of the word; in a

way, she was simple and even naïve, but she was sincere and strong—a descendant of the old Moscow weavers, and a child of the Revolution.

In V. Desnitsky's book of essays on Maxim Gorki—in the chapter on Leonid Andreyev—I came across the following passage which made me chuckle—and wonder. The book was published only two years ago:

> "Perhaps in this unrestrained patriotic enthusiasm with which Andreyev accepted the Imperialist War of 1914, he hoped to find a solution to the contradictions with which he was obsessed. In this unity of 'All,' in this single *élan*, in this concentration of national energy and hatred, he hoped to find a solution to the infernal contradictions of 'Russia 1914.' In stirring up this hatred, and in assuming the role of the prophet of Eternal Peace and Victory, he thought he had found something very satisfactory. . . . During those war years he was a fiery 'patriot,' relentless in his denunciations of 'German atrocities,' and a naïve prophet of that Eternal Peace which would be given to Humanity by the sharks of the Western European and American bourgeoisie, by the leaders of 'democracy' in the civilised states, provided the war could be conducted to its 'victorious end,' to the final defeat of the 'new barbarians'—the Germans. The editorship of *Russkaya Volya*, the organ of the corrupt, speculating bourgeoisie, was a natural reward for this prophet of 'war till final victory,' for this supporter of "eternal democratic peace."

Saturday, August 29

No new developments at the front, except a hitherto unconfirmed report of a new German offensive against Kaluga. *Il ne manquait que ça.* . . . I spent the afternoon on the Khimki bathing beach; it was very pleasant, though the water wasn't too clean, with green slime and bits of rubbish floating about. A crowd of N.K.V.D. troops and some small kids were bathing, but very few other people. The woman in charge of the men's dressing-room, a small, careworn, frail little thing—who said she was only thirty (she looked nearer fifty)—said that very few people had been coming to Khimki this summer. She was living across the street, with two small children, and it was hard, very hard, to keep them in fit condition; food conditions were difficult, and if it weren't for her vegetable plot, she wouldn't know what to do. And there were always kids and plain thieves pinching vegetables. Her husband had gone to the front during the very first week of the war, and she had never heard from him since. "If he had been killed," she said, "they would have let me know; but if he's a prisoner, no one will tell you anything." "Haven't you made any inquiries?" "No, but a neighbour, who is in the same position as myself, made inquiries about her husband, and it just gets you nowhere."

There was an infernal scramble of men and women with babies, and small boys—especially small boys—all trying to get on to the wretched trolleybus running every twenty minutes or so from beyond Khimki into town. Shouts of helpless rage from the irate female conductor, laughter from the boys, primitive bits of repartee between two people treading on each other's toes, and the usual stock joke coming from the good-natured, middle-aged man: "Stop pushing, comrades, the bus isn't made of rubber. . . ."

And in the meantime—there's Stalingrad!

BOOK III

THE DEFENSIVE BATTLE

CHAPTER I

STALINGRAD, THE NODAL POINT

(*a*) SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

DURING five and a half months—from the second half of August 1942 to the beginning of February 1943—that little circle on the map marked "Stalingrad" was to be the centre of the world. To-day, in 1945, one realises more clearly than then that Stalingrad was to become the great turning-point in World War Number Two. What people throughout the world felt then, especially during the first two or three months of the battle, was that if Stalingrad fell, it would mean, if not final disaster, at any rate a dislocation of Russia's full defensive, and especially offensive capacity, a great strengthening of Germany both strategically and economically, with increased possibilities for the German Army to strike at Moscow, at the Near East, and at England.

How, and in what circumstances, the successful defence of Stalingrad would lead to Germany's defeat, the man-in-the-street did not visualise very clearly. But there was a deep faith in Russia, and especially in the Red Army, that if Stalingrad held, the conditions for ultimate victory would be created. The man-in-the-street—as far as one could judge from Moscow—vaguely felt that if Stalingrad held out, and the plans of the German summer and autumn campaign of 1942 failed as a result, new factors unfavourable to the Germans would come into play. Somewhat vaguely, people thought in terms of the Winter, and enormously stretched-out German communications, and remembered the Russian come-back at Moscow during the previous winter; further, there was always present in their minds the Second Front—which *would* come sooner or later. This would relieve the German pressure on Russia, and things would then begin to "happen."

It must, however, be said that for at least three months, the ordinary man in Russia, and with him, the whole world, thought, first and foremost, of Stalingrad as a great defensive battle. In a very short time Stalingrad became a symbol and a legend of Russian courage and valour; the Hell of Stalingrad had a dramatic quality peculiar to itself. It was a bigger Sebastopol—but one which was not necessarily a Losing Battle, as Sebastopol inevitably was. Moreover, much more was at stake at

Stalingrad than at Sebastopol; throughout Russia there was the feeling that this was the Last Ditch, and that not only the ordinary soldier, but that the High Command of the Red Army, the Party, the Government, and Stalin himself, were determined not to lose it. Among the Russian people, and among the Red Army, and especially among the defenders of Stalingrad itself there was this ever-recurring thought that "Beyond the Volga, there is nothing."

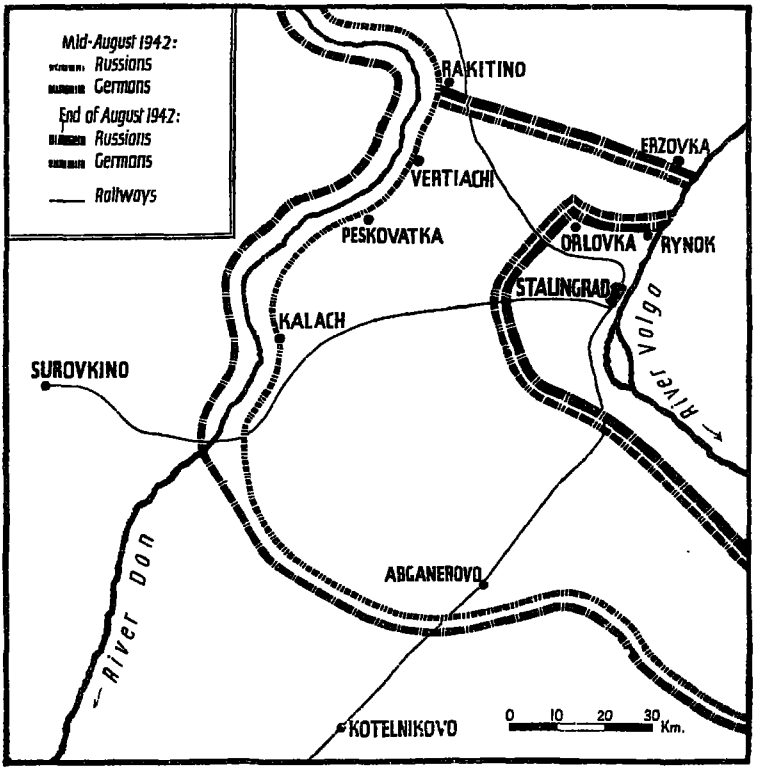
To those soldiers who came to Stalingrad from the east, across the arid waterless steppes on the other side of the Volga—these were like Central Asia, and no longer like Europe—the idea was even more strikingly tangible than to the rest.

If to capture Stalingrad was a matter of prestige for Hitler and the German Generals, to hold it was an even greater matter of prestige to the Red Army command and to the Soviet Government. Naturally it was much more than a question of prestige, but prestige had its importance too.

The defence of Stalingrad was, however, only half the story; and when one looks back on it now, one realises how closely the defence of Stalingrad and the great Russian counter-offensive were interrelated, and how essential it was to hold Stalingrad, not only for those "general reasons" which were present in everybody's mind at the time, but in order to enable the High Command to prepare everything for the November offensive. Nobody outside a very small circle of men—probably including Mr. Churchill, who came to Moscow in August—knew at first what was being prepared; later, in October, the Russian soldiers at Stalingrad were beginning to have an inkling of "something happening," and the Germans naturally had an idea, too, that the Russians were preparing a counter-blow at Stalingrad; but, as usual, they underrated the weight of the coming blow, and seemed confident that it would not radically change the situation.

And so Stalingrad was the nodal point of the whole summer and autumn campaign of 1942. Stalingrad was also to be the starting-point of the great Russian offensive which, ultimately, was to sweep the Germans out of the Soviet Union and lead to the downfall of the Third Reich. If ever there was a clear turning-point in any war, it was Stalingrad in this war. For that reason both phases of the Stalingrad battle deserve the closest consideration—the defensive phase, which lasted till November 19, and the offensive phase which included the encirclement of 330,000 Germans, comprising the German Sixth Army and the Fourth Tank Army, and the beginning of the all-out Russian offensive of November 1942 to March 1943. This offensive produced in a short time the complete liberation of the Caucasus (with the exception of the small German "springboard" of

the Taman Peninsula); the liberation of the Don country, of a large part of Eastern Ukraine, of the Voronezh and Kursk provinces, the capture by the Russians of the German "springboards" west of Moscow, and the breaking of the Leningrad blockade. It produced a radical change in the whole picture of the Soviet–German front, and took the initiative out of Germany's hands for ever—apart from two partly successful but limited



counter-offensives (at Kharkov in March 1943, and at Zhitomir in December 1943), and one all-out offensive in the Kursk–Orel area in July 1943, which was to prove one of the greatest disasters the German Army had ever suffered.

To-day it is possible to outline, with considerably greater precision than before, the main phases and characteristics of the Battle of Stalingrad.

The following pages, as well as the later analysis of the second stage of

the Stalingrad Battle are based on numerous conversations I have had, notably in the first half of 1945, with a number of leading Russian military experts who have specialised in the Stalingrad Battle, notably with Professor Major-General N. Talensky, and with several soldiers who had gone through the Stalingrad Battle from beginning to end, and on writings published in special military periodicals such as *Voyennaya Mysl* (*Military Thought*). Here I found of particular value the very detailed article, in its April 1944 issue, by Colonel N. Zamiatin, "The Stalingrad Battle." I have also made use of Major-General Galaktionov's important series of articles in *Znamia* in 1944 and 1945.

These people are not sentimentalists and romantics; and while they pay tribute to the heroism of the defenders of Stalingrad, they are very emphatic in their view that "heroism is not enough," and that the Stalingrad battle, both in its defensive and offensive stages, was won for some very precise, in many cases technical, military reasons.

There was an American General who visited Russia in the autumn of 1942, and who said that there was only one explanation why the Russians were still holding Stalingrad, and that was Guts. This is strongly denied by Russian military experts to-day.

Thus, when I asked General Talensky what he considered to be the chief reasons why, despite great numerical superiority on the German side, the Russians still managed to hold Stalingrad, he gave six:

(1) The bravery, stamina and skill of our troops—this, in the circumstances, was of absolutely vital importance.

(2) The peculiar conditions of the battle inside a city like Stalingrad. As soon as the troops had adapted themselves to these conditions, the Germans were no longer able to strike a massive blow of the "battering-ram" variety; nor did the Germans have any scope for wide manœuvring with large striking-forces. Their biggest all-out attempt at a break-through was made in October; but even here they achieved only partial successes precisely because they were unable to concentrate a sufficiently large and sufficiently mobile striking-force against our positions in Stalingrad. There was no scope for any outflanking movements as there would have been, with the forces at their disposal, in open country. Their tanks were able to operate only in small groups.

(3) Very elaborate preparations had been made for developing among our troops a highly perfected technique of street fighting; on the initiative of Stalin, special instructions, worked out down to the finest details, were given to our troops.

(4) The presence of large anti-tank forces and anti-tank weapons in Stalingrad, and the establishment of a dense network of well-dug-in firing-points. A large part of the infantry were armed with anti-tank rifles, and they inflicted enormous losses on the Germans who were, in the main, still using the T.4 tank, vulnerable to anti-tank rifle-fire; through sheer digging-in Stalingrad had, largely in the process of the battle, become a fortress.

(5) The Russian artillery on the other side of the Volga where the Germans could not get at it, was very strong indeed. From about the middle of September, if not before, we constantly had there as many as 200 heavy long-

distance guns, besides masses of lighter artillery and the invaluable *Katyusha* mortars. On the average we had 100 guns per kilometre opposite Stalingrad, and these guns pounded the Germans mercilessly.

(6) The admirable organisation—despite appalling difficulties—of a constant flow of supplies to Stalingrad.

All this, of course, sounds rather simple now; at the time—and this is admitted by experts even to-day—the fate of Stalingrad was in the balance during the whole period up to November 19; and it is not in vain that Stalin said in November 1943 that "in October 1942, the danger to our country was even greater than at the time of the Battle of Moscow."

Concerning the summer battles before the Germans reached Stalingrad, the following figures are given by Colonel Zamiatin: the German command concentrated against Russia during that summer 70 per cent of its forces, namely 179 divisions plus 61 divisions of its allies: 22 Rumanian, 14 Finnish, 10 Italian, 13 Hungarian, 1 Slovak, 1 Spanish; thus there were fighting against the Soviet Union, in the summer of 1942, 240 divisions with over three million fighting men; nearly half these forces were concentrated against the south, between Boguchar and Mozdok.

It will be remembered that, after their failure to break through at Voronezh, which was defended by General Vatutin, the Germans sent the greater part of their forces south. The truly critical moment in the second stage of the German offensive—that is, after their failure to break through at Voronezh—was their break-through, about July 20, at Millerovo. Here they cut the Moscow–Rostov railway, thus depriving the Red Army of its last north-to-south main line west of Stalingrad.

Rostov, which followed, was a disaster of a different order. Looking back on it now, Russian military experts no longer attach to it quite the same importance as was attached to it at the time for reasons of army discipline and propaganda.

The Germans were finally stopped in the Mozdok area, and later at Vladikavkaz in the east, and north of Tuapse in the west.

Now, in the view of Russian military experts to-day, the German summer campaign was risky, but was nevertheless intelligently conceived. If the Germans had broken through at Voronezh, they could have achieved a great strategic victory. If they had captured Stalingrad during the early stages of the battle, they could also have achieved spectacular results. In one respect the German calculation was based on a very sound idea. They knew from experience that in the autumn of 1941 the Russian High Command scraped together all it could to save Moscow—at the expense of other fronts. Now they knew that, by striking in the south, the Russians would largely have to depend on their local resources: they

could not afford to weaken their defence of Moscow and Leningrad. For if they did, the results might well have been fatal for this simple reason: communications and, therefore, mobility were far better on the German side in 1942 than on the Russian side. The Russians had lost nearly all their north-south railways; and if they withdrew troops to the south from Moscow and Leningrad, the Germans could have quickly regrouped and thrown forces from the south and elsewhere against Moscow, before the Russians had had time to bring their own forces back. Where the Germans probably made a mistake was in being over-cautious on the Moscow and Leningrad sectors themselves: the hope of taking Moscow was still present in their minds, and when the Russians attacked at Rzhev to tie up thirty German divisions there, the Germans allowed the Russians to tie them up, instead of throwing at least part of them against Stalingrad or the Caucasus, even at the risk of losing the Gzhatsk–Viazma–Rzhev "springboard against Moscow." *This* risk they were not going to take.

It is one of those rare examples in this war when the Germans exercised exaggerated caution—and they did so with disastrous results to themselves. That they could have taken this risk is obvious; for, clearly, the Russians did not have the strength at that time to break through to Poland or East Prussia. But again, the idea of losing the "Moscow springboard" was contrary to Hitler's "prestige considerations," if nothing else.

If, in the matter of the "Moscow springboard," the Germans were over-cautious, they were over-confident in the south. They wanted to capture *both* Stalingrad and Baku, and once they were held up at Stalingrad, and at Mozdok, on the way to Baku, they were in a jam. *They were in a position where, having failed to achieve both their objectives, they could no longer abandon one and concentrate on the other.* It became both or nothing. They could, theoretically, have done one of two things: pulled out of the Caucasus and thrown their Caucasus troops against Stalingrad: but that would have released large Russian forces for the defence of Stalingrad. Or they could have strengthened the Caucasus push at the expense of their strength at Stalingrad; but this was even more dangerous: for this involved the risk of a Russian break-through at Stalingrad or north-west of Stalingrad, with the result that the German forces remaining in the Caucasus might have been cut off by the Russians along the Don, all the way to Rostov.

And again, German prestige considerations played their part: it would never have done to abandon voluntarily either Stalingrad or the Caucasus; it was only when Stalingrad was clearly developing into a colossal disaster that the Germans made up their minds to run from the Caucasus as fast as their legs would carry them. All they succeeded in doing was to hang on to the Taman Peninsula which, after the loss of Rostov, remained their

only escape route—namely, to the Crimea. To keep it was also, for a time, of some strategic value, and of even greater propaganda value.

It remained of some nuisance value in tying up substantial Russian forces south of Rostov and north of Krasnodar during a great part of 1943, and afforded a temporary protection for the German positions in the Crimea; from the German propagandist point of view, it remained the "springboard" from which the Caucasus would be "reconquered."

In this general pattern of the summer and autumn campaign of 1942, Stalingrad held the central place. Although, in 1942 and in early 1943, there was a tendency among the general public to consider the defence of Stalingrad and the encirclement and rout of the German Sixth Army as two separate operations, they have, in the light of subsequent events, and of a closer knowledge of what was happening behind the scenes, come to be regarded as very much part of the same operation. From the very beginning the General Staff and Supreme Command gave Stalingrad their closest attention. Stalin, Zhukov and Vassilevsky, and later Marshal of Artillery Voronov, played the leading part in organising the defence of Stalingrad and in planning the blow of November 19. The man in charge of the defence of Stalingrad proper was General Eremenko, a quiet, sober man, whom nothing could unnerve; in the encirclement, the main blow coming from the north was directed by Vatutin and Rokossovsky, the secondary blow, from the south, by Eremenko. By that time the defence of Stalingrad proper was confined to the Russian Sixty-second Army, under the command of General Chuikov. Later, in the drive to Rostov, Eremenko (who was wounded) was to be replaced by General Malinovsky, later the hero of Rostov, Odessa, Bucharest, Budapest and Bratislava.

There is, however, also this argument: if the Germans attacked both Stalingrad *and* the Caucasus, it was because they had no alternative. Had they attacked the Caucasus only, they would have exposed their left flank on the Don to a Russian attack, towards the Sea of Azov; if they had attacked Stalingrad only, both the left and the right flank of their Stalingrad salient would have been exposed to attack. That this was actually to happen with the southern pincer striking from *across* the Volga, where there were scarcely any communications, was what they least expected.

So geography really compelled them to attack in both directions; it was largely to prevent a Russian flank attack from the Caucasus that they were compelled to attack the Caucasus, as well as Stalingrad. This was a great gamble, and the Russians realised how risky the German game was, for if Stalingrad held out, all the German tactical successes of the summer and early autumn would be completely wasted, and were liable to turn into a great strategic defeat.

(*b*) HOW THE GERMANS REACHED STALINGRAD

To-day it is possible to give a fairly clear idea of what happened at Stalingrad. Those who attempted, soon after the battle, to write a considered account of what happened, were largely groping in the dark. It is not true to say that the Press was inaccurate (except in one or two particular instances) but, while the human element was stressed, there was a virtual black-out surrounding the military operations and the actual position of the front. These were referred to in only the vaguest way. At the time many people had the totally erroneous idea that the Russians were, even in November, holding large parts of Stalingrad.

According to the Russians, the Germans had concentrated against the southern part of the Soviet–German Front, in the summer of 1942, nearly half their available strength in the East. Between Boguchar and Mozdok —by the time the front had become more or less stabilised—the Germans held there over 100 divisions, of whom one-third were Rumanian and Italian.

After their failure at Voronezh, the Germans concentrated their main blow against Stalingrad. This was to have become the point from which the main blow at Moscow was to be struck.

As Colonel Zamiatin says:

> Thanks to their superiority in tanks and aircraft, the Germans broke through our positions on a wide front and swept into the Don Bend, in the areas of Bokovskaya, Morozovsky, Millerovo and Kantemirovka, thus cutting the Voronezh–Rostov railway-line, and gravely endangering Stalingrad. The Supreme Command, foreseeing what was going to happen next, threw fresh forces into the area between Don and Volga and proceeded to set up new defence lines. On July 13 the Stalingrad Front was established. Inside the Don Bend, in the second half of July, the general battle of the summer campaign of 1942 began.

This battle falls into four stages:

(1) The defensive Battle of Stalingrad which continued till November 19.
(2) The Russian offensive north and south of Stalingrad, and the encirclement of the main German Stalingrad group.
(3) The smashing of the German attempt to break through to the Stalingrad group from outside (December 1942).
(4) The liquidation of the encircled Germans (January 1943).

Of the fighting that took place before the Germans reached Stalingrad, Colonel Zamiatin says:

> The troops defending the country inside the Don Bend were obliged to fight in exceptionally hard conditions. The Soviet forces left here were very limited. Through the breach in the Russian front, the Germans threw a powerful group consisting of two armies—the Sixth and the Fourth Tank

Army—comprising 22 infantry divisions, 5 tank divisions, 3 motorised divisions and 4 cavalry divisions, the whole reinforced by large masses of artillery. This group was supported from the air by the Fourth Richthofen Air Fleet comprising over 900 planes. Our troops were in a state of great inferiority, but in delaying the advance of the German forces, they succeeded in gaining some time, which enabled our High Command to strengthen the defence of Stalingrad, and bring there the necessary reserves.

The strength of this enemy group, largely composed of crack divisions, indicates that the German High Command intended to take Stalingrad at one fell swoop. The German plan consisted in striking a concentric blow by two powerful groups against both flanks of our troops defending the approaches to the Don; to encircle these, then cross the Don and march on to Stalingrad without any further hindrance.

This plan failed completely. The advance of the German forces which had broken into the rear of the Russian Sixty-second Army was stopped by July 28, and the main group of the German Sixth Army became involved in long battles on the west bank of the Don.

This stage of the battle is what has been described above as the "Kletskaya phase." The break-through across the Don to the south—towards Kotelnikovo—and then to the north-east up to Stalingrad, is described by Colonel Zamiatin as follows:

It was then that the German Command, spurred on by categorical demands from Hitler that Stalingrad be captured immediately, decided to break through to Stalingrad from the south-west, along the Tikhoretsk–Kotelnikovo–Stalingrad railway.

For this purpose, in the region of Abganerovo, the Germans concentrated, on August 6, a group of 3 infantry divisions, 1 tank division, and 1 motorised division forming part of the Fourth Tank Army. At the same time the German Command instructed the troops of the Sixth Army to capture the whole west bank of the Don in preparation for the subsequent advance on Stalingrad. Between the 7th and 17th of August the Germans succeeded here in pushing our troops to the left bank. [Zamiatin here has in mind the eastern extremity of the Don Bend, and does not mention the "bridgeheads" in the northern sector—like Kletskaya, which the Russians preserved, or Serafimovich, which they actually captured at the end of August.]

But meantime the advance on Stalingrad of the Abganerovo group did not succeed, thanks to the measures taken by our Command for strengthening the defences at the southern approaches of Stalingrad (they brought up reserves, particularly mobile groups with anti-tank weapons, and they manned the defences better than before). Large enemy forces which had broken into our defences were thrown back on August 10. In the circumstances, the Germans, no longer able to achieve a short-cut break-through, decided on a wider operation, with Stalingrad as its aim, and agreed to capture the city and break through to the Volga through two concentric blows—one coming from the tip of the Don Bend (Sixth Army), the other northward, from the Abganerovo–Plodovitoye area (Fourth Tank Army). The northern group was to strike at the village of Vertiachi, thirty-five kilometres north-west of Stalingrad (this northern group consisted of 6 infantry divisions, 2 tank divisions and 2 motorised divisions); the southern group (3 infantry divisions, 2 tank divisions, 1 motorised division) was to break through to the southern outskirts of

Stalingrad. An auxiliary thrust was to be made in the centre, from Kalach, by another group of three divisions. Fifteen more divisions were to advance on other sectors of the front. Very heavy fighting broke out on August 17 on the Don and its tributary, the Myshkova River.

Then came the climax.

The northern German group, strongly supported by masses of aircraft, succeeded, after heavy fighting, in forcing the Don, in breaking through our defences around Vertiachi, *and in breaking through to the Volga*, just north of Stalingrad, near the villages of Rynok and Erzovka. The tactical success the enemy had thus achieved greatly complicated for us the defence of the city; *our troops north of Stalingrad were cut off from our troops inside Stalingrad*, and these could now be supplied only across the Volga, under constant air attack; for the Germans at that time had complete air control.

The German central and southern groups also succeeded in advancing. Under the pressure of superior enemy forces, our troops retreated to the line of Spartakovetz (a point three kilometres south-west of Rynok)—Orlovka—the western bank of the Rassoshka and Chervlenaya Rivers—Gavrilovka–Raigorod (thus forming a crescent west of Stalingrad). On this line very heavy fighting took place. The German group advancing directly on Stalingrad had great superiority in men, artillery and tanks, and complete air control. At the end of August the Germans succeeded in breaking through our front in the direction of Basargino, which compelled our Command to withdraw to Stalingrad's inner line of defences. Meantime the northern sector had stabilised itself.

This dry account of troop movements gives no idea of the horror of those days. On August 23, that is, on the day the Germans broke through to the Volga north of the city, the Germans hurled hundreds of planes against Stalingrad; this attack was repeated during the following days, and the whole city was blazing and reduced to a shambles. Thousands of civilians were killed, and the greater part of the civilian population, which was still in Stalingrad, fled beyond the Volga. They were mercilessly machine-gunned and bombed while crossing the Volga, and beyond the river.

General Talensky, in talking to me about these days, made a number of important points. The outskirts of Stalingrad, he said, were composed chiefly of wooden houses, and once these had burned down, it became impossible for the Red Army to hold these areas, and they retired to the area composed of more substantial brick and stone buildings, or the shells of these. Partly for this reason, and partly as a result of the general confusion, the outer defences of Stalingrad, hastily built during the previous weeks, had not been properly manned, and no serious attempt was, indeed, made to hold them.

"Such lines," Talensky said, "are useful, as experience has so often shown in this war, when the guns and garrisons are in place before the enemy has reached them. Fortified lines are often secret and troops therefore often cannot

use them without orders from fairly high up; and usually the manning of fortifications cannot be improvised, in the midst of a retreat, by the retreating forces themselves.

"Thus, as a result of the non-manning of the outer defences of Stalingrad and the destruction by fire of all the houses in the outskirts of Stalingrad, the space between these outer defences and the city proper was lost by the Red Army very quickly. In the area of the burned-down houses, everything was consumed by the flames, and the troops had nothing to cling to. It was different in the area of the stone and brick houses; although nearly all these had been burned out, their walls and basements and steel skeletons afforded shelter and protection. It was during those critical days—the last ten days of August—that Stalingrad organised its defence in depth—in the midst of all the bombing and shelling. One of the advantages of the stone and brick buildings was that, once they had been burned out, there was little else that could burn. The defence system worked out during those days was the classical system of 'all-round' defence, with firing-points at small intervals."

(c) THE BATTLE INSIDE THE CITY

The situation at Stalingrad remained highly critical until September 15.

Between the end of August and that date, the Germans were held back by only a thin and ever-melting line of Russian troops. The Press reports at the time, without containing any specific facts, give a clear idea of the acute anxiety that must have existed among the troops at Stalingrad, and of the terrible odds against which they were then fighting. But thanks to the organisation of firing-points which by then they had already established, they were not losing as much ground as might have been expected. On September 13,[1] the front still formed an irregular line which, in the north, from the point reached by the Germans on the Volga, presented a Russian salient twelve kilometres deep. In northern Stalingrad the Germans were still seven kilometres from the Volga; at the level of the Barricades and Red October Plants, the depth of the Russian "bridgehead" was still five kilometres, but from there on, to the south, it dwindled to almost nothing; the total length of this irregular line west of Stalingrad was then about forty-five kilometres. With the small number of Russian forces available, the shortening of this front was inevitable—whether this was to be done voluntarily or involuntarily.

The following important facts, which have not been published before, may now be stated: by September 14—which was the most critical day at Stalingrad—the Russians had only the remnants of seven or eight divisions there—all troops which had fought with heavy losses in the last six weeks. Their human endurance was astonishing. But it was obvious that the Germans were now in a highly favourable position to strike a decisive blow at Stalingrad. This happened on the 14th. With three tank divisions, one infantry division and one motorised division in the south, in the area of

[1] See sketch, p. 217.

Elshanka, and with one tank division and two infantry divisions opposite the centre of Stalingrad, the Germans struck out. In the south, they broke through to the Volga south of Elshanka and Kuporosnoye, about ten kilometres downstream from the centre of Stalingrad; the central group, on the other hand, swept forward on a five-kilometre front, *in an endeavour to break through the middle of the Russian Stalingrad forces, and so split them in two.* In this they failed on September 14, but they penetrated right into the city, and very nearly reached the Volga, and, moreover, captured the vitally important height of Mamaiev Hill dominating the whole country and the river crossings, and standing halfway between the centre of the city and the Red October Plant. During that day, along a front of twenty kilometres, the Germans advanced an average of four to five kilometres—which brought them mighty near the Volga—a distance averaging between one and two kilometres. But the Russian Command was not taken unawares, and on that same night an event of the greatest importance occurred: General Rodimtsev's Guards Division, very heavily armed, crossed the Volga under heavy shellfire and bombing and, the very next day, recaptured two vitally important positions where the Germans had not yet had time to dig in properly; they recaptured, in very heavy fighting, Mamaiev Hill, and a great part of the centre of the city. That is, the two points from which the Germans were most likely to continue their attempt to split Stalingrad in two—and in the middle at that.

From now on the real nature of the Stalingrad Battle was going to become increasingly clear: in essence, it had now become a battle for the narrow strip along the Volga. After Rodimtsev's Division, other reinforcements came to this strip of twenty-five kilometres—Gurtiev's, Ludnikov's, and others.

Most of the Russian forces were, rightly, concentrated in the central sector—those twelve kilometres running from the centre of Stalingrad to the Tractor Plant in the north; the important thing was to hold this large built-up area, with its big factories—or rather their ruins—their large stone and brick buildings running in a solid ribbon of masonry parallel to the Volga. Above the Volga itself rose the high cliffs, very suitable for digging-in, and for making invulnerable or almost invulnerable shelters—on the side facing the Volga—for staff headquarters. These cliffs also afforded shelter for the Volga crossings—except when the Germans held Mamaiev Hill, from which they could both survey the Volga and shell it with precision. But, on the other hand, Mamaiev Hill was not quite the great advantage to the Germans, after they had recaptured it, that they imagined it to be; for this "observation post" was an admirable target for the Russian batteries on the other side of the Volga.

The fighting during the second half of September, after the Germans' first serious setback, was principally confined to the so-called Workers'

Settlements—those "garden cities" at the back of the three great Stalingrad factories in the northern half of the nearly twenty-five-kilometre-long city. Here the Germans made some progress during the second half of September, and came, on the average, another kilometre nearer the Volga. In the meantime the centre of Stalingrad was the scene of those fantastic house-to-house and room-to-room battles which have become associated in one's mind with the famous "street fighting" of Stalingrad. This also applied to some other parts of Stalingrad—where there were stone buildings, or their shells, standing.

In October, the Germans launched their most powerful offensive of all; the worst day of all was October 14, when the Russians lost one kilometre in depth. The net result of the fighting in October, especially the middle of October, was that only a fantastically narrow strip of land, now cut in three, was left to the Russians. They lost Mamaiev Hill, they lost nearly the whole centre of the city, and they lost the Tractor Plant.

From then on, the Stalingrad Front fell into three, or rather four, "bridgeheads"—one between Rynok and a point north of the Tractor Plant: this had a beachline of two and a half kilometres and formed a fairly regular semi-circle with a radius (and maximum depth) of about one and a half kilometres; then, after a five-kilometre gap along the Volga which was in German hands and included the Tractor Plant, came the second "bridgehead" situated near the Barricades Plant; this had a beachline of two kilometres, and a depth varying from 200 to 1,000 metres; then came a short German stretch of a little over one kilometre, followed by the vital Stalingrad bridgehead measuring about six and a half kilometres along the Volga and some nine kilometres of actual "front." This beachhead varied in depth from a few hundred metres to nearly a kilometre, the most "inland" point running through the Red October Plant slightly south of Mamaiev Hill. Here the fiercest battles of all were fought throughout October and November. The southern extremity of this beachhead included the northern part of Central Stalingrad; then, after another gap of four kilometres, came the relatively quiet "southern beachhead," about three kilometres long, in the Elshanka–Kuporosnoye area. In October and November numerous references are to be found in the Press to this beachhead "in South Stalingrad," though, oddly enough, it does not figure at all in Galaktionov's map showing the Stalingrad bridgeheads at the beginning of November.

Here the Stalingrad Front proper ended. Beyond that there was another stretch of Volga bank in German hands (this they had captured in the middle of September), and after that, north of Raigorod, the Russian lines, running into the Kalmuck Steppes, began. These lines formed the southern side of the German Stalingrad Salient.

. . . . .

The Russians had against them over twenty German divisions, which, it is true, were rapidly melting, and had to be constantly replenished. Not that these twenty divisions could be said to be constantly engaged against the Russian forces inside Stalingrad; many were tied up north-west of Stalingrad against the forces of the Don Front; but, even so, the proportion between the Russian and German combatants before the defensive Stalingrad Battle and this battle inside Stalingrad, was according to General Talensky as follows:

In July and August in the Don and Stalingrad areas, the Germans and their allies had twice as much infantry as the Russians; two and a half times as much artillery; two and a half to three times as many tanks. Their superiority in the air was overwhelming.

In Stalingrad proper, in September, the situation was even more unfavourable; the Germans had three times as much infantry as the Russians, and nine times as many tanks as the Russians; fortunately, the tank had ceased, in Stalingrad, to be a decisive weapon, for the reasons already explained; in September the Russians continued to be hopelessly outnumbered in the air, but one of the peculiarities of Stalingrad was that the more the Germans bombed the Russian positions, the more obstacles did they add to their own advance. With the accumulation of mountains of rubble, it became more difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the German tanks to move, and, at the same time, this bombing created new "shelters" for the Russian defenders. In September there was, on the Russian side, an improvement in the artillery position alone; the German superiority in artillery was reduced from two and a half to one, to two to one, and the Russians had bigger and better guns. Also, in October, the Germans no longer had the same crushing superiority in the air.

The Russians were very solidly entrenched on the Volga bank at Stalingrad and through the whole depth of their positions. This depth, it is true, varied from a half to two kilometres at the end of September, and by the end of October the four "bridgeheads" were almost unbelievably narrow; while the relatively unimportant bridgeheads were still between a half and one and a half kilometres deep, the essential nine-kilometre-long middle bridgehead, the scene of the most concentrated and ferocious fighting in perhaps the whole war, varied from 200 to 1,000 metres, the usual depth being between 400 and 500 metres between the river and the Russian front line.

The fact that the Germans held three exits to the Volga after the October offensive was not as serious as it would have been earlier during the battle; being exposed to devastating fire from across the river, these isolated German salients on the Volga were, in fact, a doubtful acquisition, once their sides had become stabilised. They were, however, a nuisance to the Russians in their communications between the four bridgeheads.

How many men did the Russians have at Stalingrad? This question has often been asked abroad, and the most divergent guesses have been made.

Now that it is "ancient history," it may be stated—and I state this on the authority of General Talensky—that, at the height of the Stalingrad Battle in October, there were not more than 40,000 to 45,000 men fighting on the Stalingrad bridgeheads.[1]

While it is true that in August and September, the High Command, concerned with accumulating a powerful striking force, neither could nor wished to send many fresh troops to Stalingrad, it later became literally impossible to accommodate more than were actually there; and the main arrivals at Stalingrad between September 15 and the end of the battle were replacements. It is true that the quality of the troops improved. Before September 15, there were, as said before, the remnants of seven or eight divisions, which had suffered very severe casualties in several weeks' fighting—the number of fighting troops was now 35,000 to 40,000 men. This figure, with the arrival, first of the Rodimtsev Guards Division, then of other crack divisions like Ludnikov's and Gurtyev's—these arrived later in September or early in October—was never, however, greatly exceeded, in view of the very heavy casualties, and in November the total number of men actually declined—the reinforcements were not catching up with the casualties. But with the area to be defended becoming smaller nearly all the time, the concentration of Russian manpower and firing-power proportionately increased. One correction should, however, be made here: although the number of troops inside Stalingrad remained much the same, the number of men increased considerably during the second half of September and during October on the other side of the Volga, together with the number of new guns and *katyushas*. Moreover, there were thousands employed in the elaborate and dangerous transport and supply services.

How intense and, one might say, continuous the German onslaught was, may be judged from these figures: during the period from the end of August to November 19, the Germans launched four general attacks, which lasted several days, with as many as ten divisions attacking simultaneously, and with the support of 400 to 500 tanks; over fifty attacks were made by two to three divisions, with 200 tanks; as many by one division with 60 to 70 tanks; over 120 attacks by one regiment, not to mention innumerable smaller attacks (Zamiatin).

During the battle for the city itself, the Germans fired at the Russian positions several tens of thousands of tons of gun and mortar shells, and in more than 100,000 sorties the Luftwaffe dropped on Stalingrad and the river crossings about 100,000 tons of bombs (*ibid.*).

[1] General Talensky emphatically rejected Walter Kerr's guess that there were 20 divisions along the twenty-five kilometres of the Stalingrad Front. He put the figure at the equivalent of 7 to 8 divisions, with about 6,000 fighting men in each, plus auxiliaries.

Zamiatin adds that up to November 19, inside Stalingrad, Russian artillery destroyed about 36,000 enemy soldiers and officers; 420 tanks, 1,000 trucks and 24 batteries. Altogether the German losses in dead alone from September to November in Stalingrad itself amounted, according to Zamiatin, to 59,000; they also lost 525 tanks, 4,071 machine-guns, 282 guns, etc.

These claims appear, indeed, remarkably modest, compared with the spectacular slaughter of Germans that followed the encirclement of Stalingrad. There is strong reason to suppose that the Russian casualties were several times higher during the August to November period, and that they were particularly heavy in August and during the first fortnight in September before the Russians had dug-in properly, notably against air attack; during the German break-through on the 14th and the Russian counter-attacks on the 15th; and also during the stupendous German offensive in October when the Russians fought with unprecedented fury and gallantry—sometimes literally to the last man on the Russian side—notably in and around the Red October Works. Later, during the "liquidation" of the encircled Germans, the proportion of casualties was reversed; as Stalin was to say later, at the end of the Battle of Stalingrad 46,000 dead Russians were picked up and buried, and 147,000 Germans.

What, in the earlier stages, greatly added to the Russian casualties was the intensive German bombing, particularly on the Volga.

To illustrate the fearful intensity and horror of the battle—as it struck the Germans—Zamiatin quotes the following report published in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* in November:

> The struggle of world importance now in progress at Stalingrad has become an enormous, decisive battle. Its participants are able to grasp only some of its horrible details, without being able to realise its significance or foresee its end. . . . Those who, in straining every nerve and muscle, will have survived this battle, will have this inferno impressed upon their minds, as though their consciousness had been branded with a red-hot iron. . . . Only later will all the details of this unprecedented battle, with its street fighting, be properly registered. Never in all the history of wars has there been such a concentration of weapons in such a small space and for such a long time. Never before has a city fought till the collapse of its last wall. Paris and Brussels capitulated; even Warsaw agreed to capitulate; but in this battle, despite our numerical superiority, we are not achieving the necessary result.

Russian counter-attacks, especially during the later phases, when it was particularly important to tie up the German forces inside Stalingrad, were another characteristic of this battle; by the end of October, when the German offensive had in the main failed, it was hard to say who was attacking and who was defending himself (Zamiatin).

Of the role of the Russian artillery, Zamiatin wrote:

> An exceptionally important part in the defence of Stalingrad was played by

our artillery and *katyushas*. The artillery of small and medium calibre was used by our infantry in repelling German tanks and infantry and in destroying German strong-points. But a large part of our artillery was maintained on the other side of the Volga and its organisation was highly centralised. The observation posts were right inside the battle line, and our artillery on the other side of the Volga was thus able to operate with the maximum precision and effectiveness, and to concentrate against decisive sectors the fire of over 100 guns per kilometre of front.

He quoted an intercepted dispatch from a high German officer, who wrote at the end of September:

On the east bank, the Russians have suddenly accumulated enormous quantities of heavy artillery, which are going to delay the final capture of Stalingrad.

At the same time, everybody agrees that Stalingrad remained in danger right up to November 19; the margin of safety was extremely small on the Russian side; it is true that to-day military experts say that any German attempt to capture Stalingrad would probably have been averted in any case; reinforcements would have been rushed in, if absolutely necessary; but at the time it did not seem so simple. In any case, in the middle of September—when no great reinforcements were handy—and again in the middle of October the situation was extremely dangerous.

But the defence of Stalingrad, though it captured people's imaginations, was only part of a much bigger battle. A number of points must be considered in this connection.

The effects of the big preparations for the November offensive were beginning, in a small way, to be felt even inside Stalingrad itself by the end of October. The first discussions on the November counter-offensive took place among the High Command at the beginning of August, actually before the Germans had reached Stalingrad. How immense these preparations were may be judged from the other set of figures, which are eloquent in the extreme when compared with the figures quoted above. On November 19, when the Russian offensive began, the relation of Russian to German and Rumanian forces on the front from Boguchar all the way to south of Stalingrad, was as follows:

Infantry—1 to 1·2 in the Russians' favour;
Artillery—1 to 1·5 in the Russians' favour;
Tanks—1 to 1·5 in the Russians' favour;
Aircraft—1 to 1·5 in the Russians' favour.

Taking the area of the main blow—the blow towards Kalach—Russian superiority was greater still: infantry, 2 to 1; artillery, 2½ or 3 to 1; tanks, 2 to 1; aircraft, 2 to 1. During the break-through, the concentration of Russian artillery (taking the divisional and higher artillery) ranged from

70 guns per kilometre to 160 and 170, and in some special cases to 200 and even 300.

Regarding the Russian tank strength in this battle, General Talensky said:

> We had never used a great tank force of this strength before. If, in the Russian offensive at Moscow in December 1941, we scraped together fifteen tank brigades, that is, about 750 tanks, here, in the Stalingrad Battle, we struck out with five tanks corps—about 1,200 tanks. The Germans had never seen such tank opposition before.
>
> I might also add [he said] that we had anticipated in good time a German come-back, in the form of a German offensive trying to break through the Stalingrad encirclement, and our Second Guards Army—an army of fresh and picked troops, with very good equipment, was specially entrusted to deal with any attempt like that made by Von Mannstein around December 20 in the Kotelnikovo area, and the other attempted break-through coming from inside the Don Bend, further west.

A number of other factors must be considered.

(*a*) The plan for the November offensive played an extremely important part during the first, defensive stage, of the Stalingrad Battle. It was not merely a case of "saving Stalingrad"; it was essential, from the point of view of grand strategy, to have the Germans tied up there. The 62nd Army inside Stalingrad was being given just enough reinforcements to keep the Germans tied up. What was characteristic of the fighting in Stalingrad proper was that, while the Germans launched nearly every day several large attacks, the Russians harassed the Germans continuously—day and night—with innumerable small attacks.

(*b*) The second vitally important factor in the whole Stalingrad situation, right up to November 19, was the role played by what the communiqués called the sector "north-west of Stalingrad." This was actually the whole stretch of the front from the Volga to about Boguchar. It will be remembered that even after the retreat to Stalingrad, the Russians still managed to hold several bridgeheads inside the Don Bend. The Russian attacks and counter-attacks here were continuous. These attacks were made in varying strength—anything from one or two battalions to a couple of divisions. These attacks kept the Germans constantly on the alert, and prevented them from sending troops to Stalingrad from this front; the actual gains made by the Russians were never spectacular, but useful. A number of bridgeheads were enlarged and some new ones gained, notably the very important bridgehead at Serafimovitch which was captured in the second half of August, while the situation was particularly bad at Stalingrad itself. Vatutin and Rokossovsky, who were in command of what came to be known in November as respectively the "South-Western" Front (from the Boguchar area to around Kletskaya) and the

"Don Front" (from Kletskaya to north of Stalingrad), continued these attacks right into November. The Germans naturally had a good idea that the Russians had been concentrating strong forces north and south of Stalingrad, but, by November, they began to assume that these attacks north-west of Stalingrad were a fair sample of what the Russians could do; they expected this "active positional warfare" to continue, possibly throughout the winter, and perhaps growing in intensity, but they did not reckon with the possibility of a great break-through.

(*c*) Thirdly, it was essential to keep a large and active force along this front to prevent the Germans from ever attempting to break through to Tambov or Saratov—not that they were likely to do it while all their attention was concentrated on Stalingrad. It was important that the Germans should believe that this was a very strong defensive front—which it was—but scarcely a front capable of *big* offensive operations.

At the time neither the general public nor even the soldiers inside Stalingrad knew what all this fighting "north-west of Stalingrad" was all about; it seemed to achieve no important results, and seemed a rather pointless waste of energy; inside Stalingrad, it even caused some grumbling; here it was felt that some of the guns and tanks and men used "north-west of Stalingrad" would be more than welcome in Stalingrad itself.

I remember how the ordinary newspaper reader in Moscow was simply bored with the part of the communiqué relating to the fighting "north-west of Stalingrad"; it never seemed to produce anything striking, and never captured the imagination. Nothing in the published reports from that front ever suggested that this front was very important. It was, indeed, important not to attract anyone's—least of all the Germans'—attention to this "uninteresting" front—from which the big blow was to fall.

Even less was said of the south side of the Stalingrad salient which ran through the dreary Kalmuck steppes; here, indeed, there was mostly positional warfare, and the Rumanians were left, more or less, in peace.

Of course, it all looks simple now, and everything can be made to fit perfectly into its place; but actually, at the time, the situation was full of the most formidable risks and dangers.

Ultimately, everything depended on Stalingrad, particularly up to the time when the "new" armies were not yet in full strength; but once these were in full strength, it was almost equally important that the Germans should be tied up at Stalingrad so that the blow could be delivered in the best possible conditions—which was near the point of the Stalingrad salient. The real danger in November was a planned German withdrawal, say to Rostov. Fortunately, German prestige considerations prevented such a wise move, and also the German habit of underrating Russian strength. Even after the encirclement, the Germans still hoped for help

from outside; if the Russian ring had been broken, they would almost certainly have tried to hang on to Stalingrad.

The greatest dangers in October were: (*a*) that Stalingrad would be lost; or (*b*) that the Germans would divert their strength from Stalingrad and try to crash through the Rokossovsky–Vatutin front towards Tambov or Saratov. Fortunately, this second contingency did not arise, because the Germans were determined to have Stalingrad.

If Stalingrad had fallen, then the break-through to the north would have been attempted, probably with partial, and perhaps considerable, success. If Stalingrad had been taken in August or even in September, before the "new" Russian armies had been formed, the consequences might have been catastrophic. But it did not fall.

One more point concerning the fighting inside Stalingrad deserves to be stressed. It is what Talensky called the "professionally-psychological" aspect of the Stalingrad Battle.

Our losses [said General Talensky] were very heavy, especially during the first stages of the Stalingrad Battle; they were then much heavier than the German losses; later, after we had dug in at Stalingrad, the German casualties began to pile up far beyond ours—not to mention the encirclement phase when the German losses became truly fantastic.

But during the first stage our losses were, of course, very heavy indeed. And yet, the people who survived acquired a tremendous experience in the technique of house-to-house fighting. Two or three men of such experience could be worth a whole platoon. They knew every drainpipe, every manhole, every shell-hole and crater in and around their particular building, they knew every brick that could serve as shelter. Among piles of rubble, which no tank could penetrate, a man would sit there, inside his manhole or crater, or hole in the floor, and, looking through his simple periscope, he would turn on his tommy-gun the moment he saw any German within firing distance. Seldom anything short of a direct hit could knock him out; he was very hard to pick out of his hole. And bombing, as I said before, only tended to create new shelters.

In the nightmare of this positional warfare, the nucleus of experienced men survived, in the main; it was the new people who perished most easily.

The people who, since the start, had constituted the nucleus of Stalingrad's defence, survived in most cases; even far more of the Guards divisions who came later, and who bore the brunt of the heaviest fighting, especially in October, survived than could be believed possible. For they also were specially trained men—many of them Siberians, with nerves as hard as steel and all their wits about them. One such man could, not only morally, but technically, be worth ten or twenty ordinary soldiers.

Snipers also played a great part in inflicting heavy losses on the Germans and in harassing them. And then there was the continuous activity—the technique of small counter-attacks—practised by the defenders of Stalingrad; they seldom gave the Germans a moment's peace. In October, and especially in November, it became hard to determine who was actually attacking—we or the Germans. The whole of Stalingrad became a seething cauldron of small attacks. In these small battles we had the initiative; in the big attacks, right

through September and October, the Germans had the initiative; and the middle of October was the most terrifying period of all. From the end of October, though the Germans were showing signs of great weariness, we had a new and very serious cause of worry—the icefloes on the Volga, and the river's reluctance to freeze. It made the supply problem very critical; the Germans knew of our difficulties, and made their last bid to capture Stalingrad. But as soon as a thin layer of ice had formed, our men, crawling on their bellies, pushed the food and the ammunition across the ice in boxes and little sledges. Again Stalingrad was saved—and again it had been touch-and-go. It would have been tragic indeed if, after withstanding the German onslaught for so long, we had lost it simply because the Volga had refused to freeze in time."

The arduous task of supplying Stalingrad across the thin ice had to continue even for some time after November 19.

Such [said General Talensky] are a few general considerations on the Battle of Stalingrad. One might add many more to them; but I shall at this stage mention only one more: and that is that Stalingrad became a tremendously important *school* to those of the Red Army who had survived it, and to those whom they, in turn, could tell about it. The Germans were deprived of that advantage; all their Stalingrad soldiers, except a few lucky ones who happened to be on leave when the ring closed round Stalingrad, were never to fight in this war again; they were either dead or prisoners.

Throughout 1943, 1944 and 1945 one continued to come across famous Stalingrad names in the annals of this war; and the phrase that men had fought all their way from Stalingrad into Germany is not an idle phrase. Many of the men were killed on the way: Gurtiev, the commander of the famous Siberian guards regiment, was buried with military honours in the main square at Orel, on the day after its liberation, in August 1943; but others went to the end of the road. And Stalingrad names almost invariably kept cropping up at the toughest spots; it was troops under the command of Colonel-General Chuikov, the commander of Stalingrad's Sixty-second Army, who fought the one-month Battle of Poznan in January-February 1945, and on February 23, stormed the Citadel of Poznan. In Poznan men fought for a month from house to house and stormed the citadel as other men—and some of the same ones —had once fought in the hell of Stalingrad, under the same general, and had stormed the murderous slopes of Mamaiev Hill. . . . And Chuikov's final triumph in this war was the part he played in the storming of Berlin.

For a full understanding of the soldiers' morale at Stalingrad—that hell which no one with ordinary human nerves could have endured—I think it is important to mention two more points. These were mentioned to me only quite recently by one of the leading Soviet correspondents who had gone through the whole siege of Stalingrad, and since then others have confirmed it.

Although, when speaking of Heroic Stalingrad, it is not customary to mention so unheroic a subject as vodka, the truth is that vodka played an important part in keeping the soldiers properly keyed-up. Everyone knows that both the Germans and the Russians—as well as the soldiers of all other armies—keep their spirits up with alcohol, especially at difficult

moments. Stalingrad was such a hell of fire and noise that few could have endured it without such a stimulant. The regular Russian Army ration is 100 grams a day, or usually 200 grams before an infantry attack. Tank men receive even bigger rations of vodka. Airmen, on the other hand, receive none before a sortie, but receive it only after the day's work. At Stalingrad conditions were such that the vodka supply was almost unlimited; and the daily consumption of a quarter or even half a litre of vodka was very usual. That applied to the privates; officers, and particularly commanding officers, drank brandy, which is a non-soporific. At Stalingrad, and elsewhere—notably during the last Battle of Berlin—high officers and generals are known to have managed, with the help of brandy, to keep awake for six or seven days without a wink of sleep. How important liquor was at Stalingrad may be judged from the fact that the following priorities were in force on the difficult and dangerous Stalingrad supply lines across the Volga: first, arms and ammunition; second, vodka; third, food.

Psychologically, there is another interesting point. At the time of the German break-through to Stalingrad across the Don, the local authorities began, at full speed, to evacuate the equipment from the great Stalingrad industrial plants—the Red October, the Tractor Plant, the Barricades, and the rest. On August 23, the day of the first great bombing of the city, an urgent telephone call came from Stalin personally: "So you've got the evacuation fever, too? Stop this evacuation immediately. Stalingrad must be held at any price, and the soldiers are more likely to fight for a live town than for an empty town. Even if it costs us half a dozen factories, it'll be worth it."

And although they were badly smashed, the factories continued to work in a small way, repairing tanks and doing other odd jobs, and later the workers joined the workers' battalions and army units. All this had a good psychological effect: though in ruins, Stalingrad was not an *evacuated* city, but a live city. And psychologically, it was very important for the troops to know that for several weeks after the Battle of Stalingrad was in progress, the Tractor Plant was not only repairing tanks, but even producing tanks.

Thus, according to M. Vodolagin, Secretary of the Stalingrad Regional Committee of the Communist Party, the Stalingrad Tractor Plant managed, in September, in spite of bombing and shelling, to turn out as many as 150 armoured cars and 200 tanks.[1]

[1] *Istoricheski Journal* (Historical Journal), No. 3–4, 1943, p. 24.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WEEKS OF STALINGRAD

DURING the last week of August, it was extremely hard to make out from the papers what was going on at Stalingrad. There was no mention of the terrible bombings the city had endured on August 23 and during the following days; few people in Moscow, for instance, could tell that the whole of Stalingrad was in flames; nor was any mention made of the grim fact that north of Stalingrad the Germans had already reached the Volga. But one thing was clear: and that was that a tremendous battle was in progress and that Stalingrad had not been lost. But it was also clear that the odds were heavily in the Germans' favour. Apart from that, all was vague. The communiqués, almost up to the end of September, continued to refer to fighting "at the approaches of Stalingrad," or "outside Stalingrad," or "West, North-west, North, or South of" the city. Later this became "in the area of Stalingrad."

On August 31, *Pravda*, in a front report, said:

> For several days now, north-west of Stalingrad, there has been bitter fighting against the enemy who crossed the Don. Our troops have stopped the German tanks and motorised infantry. The Germans are suffering heavy losses. The Germans on this side of the Don are being supplied by air. . . .

The communiqué that night said: "No substantial changes."

It was, however, added that the Germans were also advancing "North-east of Kotelnikovo." Something of the atmosphere of the fighting in the steppes, presumably south of Stalingrad, was rendered in this front report:

> The heat is merciless and terrible. Our soldiers' lips are parched. As heat from a furnace, the hot wind of the steppes blows through our trenches. It is no cooler at night. In dug-outs the candles melt, turning into a liquid mess. . . . Water! The steppe is waterless; the rare steppe rivers have dried up. Old people round here hardly remember such heat. Our soldiers' flasks hold a two days' ration of water. In the steppe, and in the air above the steppe, all the way from the Don, and nearly all the way to the Volga, the battle is in progress. The steppe is burning, set on fire by bombs from the air and by planes that have crashed, by shells and mines. The fire of these steppe conflagrations crawls along the edge of the trenches. The steppe is black like a raven's wing. The smoke of fires, the dust raised by the tanks ploughing up the steppe, are rising to the sky like enormous clouds.

All kinds of troops were taking part in this fighting; among them Russian marines, come from heaven knows where.

The battle, with its attacks and counter-attacks, had raged for three days. The Germans launched against the marines their tanks and their cavalry. In

forty minutes the company, commanded by Lieutenant Tropin, twice counter-attacked. But it was faced with enormous enemy superiority, and few of Lieutenant Tropin's men survived.

When the Germans launched their ninth attack, the Russians met them with a bayonet charge.

And now the Nazis recoiled. Red Fleet man Zayetsky then opened fire on them with his guns; and on the left flank the neighbouring company attacked with bayonets. Like a hurricane the fire of our machine-guns mowed down the Germans in the centre. The ninth wave was thrown back. The Germans did not advance a step.

There was only one well in that part of the steppe, and, as the same article said, "it is hard for both sides without water," and described the battles for water. The Germans at night would send tanks to draw water from the well; but in the process the tank crews were shot up and the tanks destroyed by the Russians.

Then there was a description of a tank battle in the steppe between K.V.'s and German tanks; the whole article suggested that fighting in the steppe was very heavy; that the Russians were putting up very heavy resistance, but that they were, nevertheless, slowly being pushed back to Stalingrad.

The September 1 communiqué spoke of "bitter fighting north-west and south-west of Stalingrad," and of "tense defensive battles" in the latter sector. Here also, there were "heavy enemy tank concentrations which penetrated into our lines." The battle for the destruction of these was continuing. In another sector, "in accordance with the plans of the Command, our troops withdrew to a new defence line."

On September 3, the communiqué spoke of "tense battles against large forces of enemy tanks and infantry which had penetrated into the depth of our defences." "In one sector alone the Germans launched against our troops 150 tanks. Thirty were destroyed, but the rest succeeded in breaking through. Our units withdrew to another line."

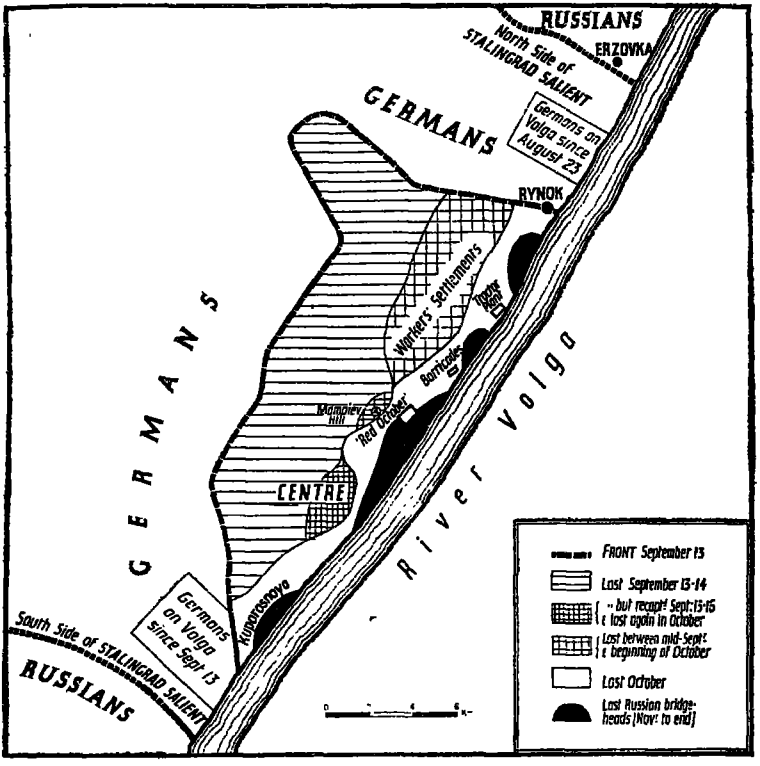
On September 4, the communiqué said that south-west of Stalingrad, the German advance had been "halted," but on the 6th, there was again, south-west of Stalingrad, "heavy German pressure," though north-west of Stalingrad there were some "Russian gains," and in a locality described as "G" the Russian soldiers "destroyed six German tanks." What was stressed was the great air strength the Germans were throwing in everywhere.

On the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th, the communiqués spoke of heavy German attacks in the Stalingrad area, and each day admitted "withdrawals."

During the first fortnight of September the tone of the Press continued to be distinctly nervous in its comments on Stalingrad; it is significant that it was not till about September 20 that it began to speak of "heroic Stalingrad."

On September 8, the *Red Star* editorial wrote:

The Germans are showing enormous determination to achieve their aggressive aims. Without counting their losses, they keep throwing more and more



The "last" Russian bridgeheads, indicated above in black, are drawn after Galaktionov's map, which tends to exaggerate their depth and which altogether omits the Kuporosnoye bridgehead. His map, it is true, refers to the beginning of November, and there were some further slight reductions in the Russian-held territory after that.

divisions to the slaughter. They are determined to break our resolution. They have gone too far to be able to look back. The German Army is like a band of robbers, all united in their crimes and in their fear of punishment. The insolence and the offensive power of the German soldier is the insolence of despair. In criminology there is a term of the "individual capable of anything." The Germans are capable of the most desperate fight, because they have nothing to expect except merciless revenge. They cannot expect anything else; they have caused too much suffering and grief to humanity, and have aroused

among millions of people too much anger and hatred. . . . The German must be bodily exterminated. That is the only remedy.

The idea of a fight against terrible odds is also suggested by Ehrenburg in his article on Stalingrad on September 10:

Stalingrad is a threat to their flank. Stalingrad guards Grozny and Baku. . . . Yesterday, after weeks of dry suffocating heat the first rain fell at Stalingrad. It reminded the Germans of the calendar. . . . The *Deutsche Rundschau* the other day spoke of Stalingrad's fortifications, of the Asiatic fanaticism of the Russians. It said: "Our grey faces are covered with dirt, and under the dirt are the wrinkles, traces of this summer's battles. We are fighting up to the limit of human endurance." No! Stalingrad is no fortress. Stalingrad is merely a city. But a city that is defended by brave men becomes a fortress. It is wrong of the German journalist to speak of human possibilities. The Germans do not want to take Stalingrad through bravery, but through sheer weight in numbers. They have crashed down on Stalingrad with all their weight—theirs and that of their vassals. They are not "people," and they have no "human possibilities"—they have tanks, planes, machines and slaves.

And the *Red Star* editorial on September 11 still sounded alarming:

Bitter fighting is continuing west and south-west of Stalingrad. The city is in danger. . . . Documents we have seized show that Hitler is demanding from his troops that they capture Stalingrad immediately, regardless of losses. In the last few days the Germans have penetrated deep into our positions. All along the Stalingrad Front there is fighting of unprecedented violence. . . . But Stalingrad holds. It is now clear that the German plan was to seize Stalingrad with a *ramming blow*, which would have knocked the defenders of the city senseless. But this did not come off. The Nazi troops crawled up to Stalingrad, out of breath, and must now undertake the even more exhaustive task of besieging the city. But although, here and there, they have been pushed back from the points where they directly threatened the city's lines of defence, their pressure on Stalingrad is as great as ever. They have thrown in even more aircraft than before, *and they are determined to seal the fate of Stalingrad in the immediate future.*

The task of the defenders of the Soviet Verdun[1] is to increase their strength and their determination tenfold, and to stop the German advance. They have no choice, just as the heroic defenders of Tsaritsyn had no choice. Tsaritsyn was then on the brink of disaster; and Stalin then ordered all the vessels for going up or down the Volga, or crossing the Volga, to be sent far to the north. . . . Now the Soviet soldier must, with clenched teeth, forgetting everything except his duty to his country, fight the life-and-death struggle against the enemy.

And, significantly perhaps, a threatening note was still added to this appeal to Stalingrad's defenders:

And woe to him who, in this historic hour, does not find in himself the

[1] Although *Red Star* here uses the phrase "Soviet Verdun" later the Soviet Press strongly denied any resemblance with Verdun. The pressure on Verdun it said, was strongly relieved by the Russian offensive on the Eastern Front, while no such relief came to Stalingrad from the Allies in the west. Moreover, Verdun was a regular fortress. Stalingrad was not. (See also pp. 232 and 233.)

courage to look danger straight in the face, who, trembling for his own skin, is ready to betray his comrades and disgrace his banner. With such wretches one must deal as the defenders of Tsaritsyn dealt with them: there was then an army order which said: "Rapid trial and certain death await every coward and traitor, for it is intolerable that the brave and faithful sons of our Workers' and Peasants' Republic should die like heroes, while others, beside them, should betray our great cause."

And, at this stage of the Stalingrad Battle, an interesting distinction was made by Simonov (*Red Star*, September 11) between the glory of the army and the glory of the individual soldier:

Here in Stalingrad, one must hold out at the cost of life, of death, of anything in the world. To-day we are holding out; but we are not yet winning, and the glory of armies and divisions, and of Russian arms, has not yet been born in these places. But every night, here or there, the Soldier's glory is born.

On the same day, *Pravda* also sounded alarming, as if anticipating new German gains, and possibly a new German offensive; it had not been forgotten that a week before, on September 5, the Germans had attempted a day raid on Moscow with seventy bombers. None had broken through, and eleven had been shot down; but there was some nervousness, not only about Stalingrad, but about the general situation. *Pravda* said that day that the situation at Stalingrad and at Mozdok continued to be "tense," that the battles were particularly bloody in the Stalingrad area, that more than 1,000 planes and many hundreds of tanks had been thrown against Stalingrad.

It was true that the Germans were suffering heavy losses. "Between May 1 and August 31, the Red Army smashed seventy-three German divisions and badly crippled twenty-one. Also winter is near." But, for that very reason, the situation was particularly dangerous.

The Germans are in a hurry. They want their summer campaign to produce very big results. However much they hurry, they will not succeed. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, through the absence of a Second Front, nearly all Germany's forces could be thrown against the Red Army.

Russia's motto must, more than ever, be "fight to the last," and "not a step back." And, as though anticipating the possibility of new German attacks, perhaps in new directions, *Pravda* went on:

In the areas near the front, every town and village must be turned into a fortress. There must be no complacency. It is the complacent people, those local administrators who have failed to call on the Communists and Komsomols in order to harden the defence organisations of the area, who most readily lose their heads when things begin to happen. . . . In March 1922 Lenin said: "There is nothing more dangerous than a panicky retreat." One can, indeed, say with certainty that the enemy would not have penetrated so deep into our country if every one had fought as well as the men at Moscow, Sebastopol, Odessa, Tula, and Leningrad.

Stalingrad was not yet being advanced as a model. There was also, in all this, a note of uncertainty about the immediate future, and a certain fear of unpleasant surprises.

The situation was, indeed, very serious. The Germans had been more or less stopped at Mozdok, but the German advance towards Novorossisk was continuing, and on September 11 the loss of Novorossisk, after fierce fighting, was announced. What was left of the Black Sea Navy had to seek refuge at Batum and other second-class harbours. With Novorossisk Russia had lost her last naval base in the Black Sea.

There was also some nervousness about the loyalty of the Caucasian peoples. In addressing these peoples, the Soviet Press betrayed a certain note of appeal: "anti-Fascist" meetings were being organised in the Caucasus, and much publicity was given to the support these meetings were receiving from all the Caucasian peoples. After the Russians' experience of the Crimean Tartars, they were not very sure of the mountain tribes either. These also were Moslems. Great publicity was therefore given to the great anti-Fascist rally at Vladikavkaz at the end of July.

In enormous letters, *Pravda* of September 1 wrote this appeal:

> Mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus, Cossacks of the Quiet Don, swift Kuban and stormy Terek; peoples of Kalmuckia and Stavropol! Rise for the life-and-death struggle against the German invaders! May the plains of the Northern Caucasus and the Caucasus foothills become the grave of the Hitlerite robbers!"

And again, on September 3, in an article entitled: "The Peoples of the Caucasus and the Stalin Constitution," *Pravda* wrote in these flattering terms:

> In the old days, that jewel among the nations—the Caucasus—shone only dimly. But now it glitters in the constellation of Soviet cultures.

On September 6, in connection with another anti-Fascist meeting, this time in Transcaucasia, *Pravda* wrote:

> Peoples of Transcaucasia! To the Germans you are merely "natives." The German monster wants to cut the Caucasus armies off from the rest of the Red Army, and to cut off the Caucasian nations from the rest of the Soviet family of nations.

The propaganda line during those first weeks of Stalingrad was much the same as before—emphasis on the danger threatening Russia (though not nearly in such vociferous terms as in July and early August), expressions of confidence in ultimate victory, and as strong a tendency as ever to attribute difficulties to the absence of a Second Front. The "Russia" and "Soviet Union" motifs were blended, as before, but perhaps with a

greater stress on the "Soviet" theme, and with numerous references to the defence of Tsaritsyn during the Civil War, under Stalin's personal leadership. On September 2, G. Alexandrov, one of the leading ideologists of the Central Committee, wrote an article on the Third Anniversary of the war in Europe:

> The freedom-loving peoples have all they need to achieve victory. The important thing now is to use these means to the full extent. . . . There is no doubt that the fourth year of the war in Europe will be not only the last year, but also the year in which Hitlerism will be destroyed.

Whether, at heart, he had any doubts on the subject, or not, is another matter; there are occasions when such "prophecies" are essential for their moral effect. Stalin's "in half a year or maybe a year" uttered in November 1941, with the Germans at the gates of Moscow, had no doubt the same purpose.

The nature of Hitlerism, and the idea that this (as Stalin had already said at the very beginning) "is not an ordinary war," also held an important place in propaganda. E. Yaroslavsky, on September 3, produced another of those monstrous quotations from the German "scientific" Press, in this case, the *Zeitschrift für Politik*, which said:

> The existence of some nations, even as slaves, can be dangerous to the Herrenvolk. Historical experience teaches us that the total extermination of a foreign nation and its culture does not contradict the laws of life, if it is carried out really generally.

Throughout, there was also much Second Front propaganda, usually in the form of reports of Second Front meetings in Britain and America, or in the form of quotations from various newspapers, especially in America, for in Britain the Second Front fever seemed to have died down considerably, under Government pressure and persuasion. Some of these collected news items, sometimes running into one or even two columns per day, were published under headings like "The Time has Come to Act."

While the bestiality of the Nazi doctrines, the strength and ferociousness of the German soldiery were not underestimated, the *motif* of the fundamental weakness of the German order in Europe and the "wobbliness" of Germans in certain circumstances, were continually stressed. Ehrenburg, on September 15, spoke about good and bad Germans:

> Of course, there are in this army a few thinking and feeling individuals, but they are alone among millions; they are ladybirds sitting on the back of a mad elephant. We have no time and no desire to bother about ladybirds. We must shoot the mad elephant.

But if the German soldier was still, in the main, "mad" and ferocious, the German in different circumstances was a feeble, weak-kneed, gutless individual: Ehrenburg (while perhaps not too delighted to give too much

credit to the R.A.F., when what he was really clamouring for was the Second Front) nevertheless recorded with relish the effect of the R.A.F. bombings on hysterical and panic-stricken German females—"these females who applauded frantically when they saw on the films the bombings of Rotterdam and Belgrade—they now whine for all they are worth." And somebody called Ewald wrote to a German soldier at the front:

How can I write to you when there are a thousand British bombers overhead? We feel so wretched and depressed. Hans, it is high time you finished in the East, so that at least the Luftwaffe can be sent back. For if the Tommies are allowed to go on bombing us like this, soon there will be nothing left of Western Germany.

And at the front itself, any signs of German worry and fear of the future were recorded. In the supplement to the communiqué of September 6 a German prisoner, Arnold Knöse, was quoted as saying:

We are worried about the winter. Our officers have been promising us that the war will be over before then. Our C.O. has told us that all Germany's strength has been thrown in so that this object may be achieved, and so that there should be no second winter campaign in Russia. Our officers keep making the most extravagant promises. Lieutenant-Colonel Sächerer, of the 56th Infantry Division, has been promising us mountains of gold: three Russian slaves for every German. Many are taken in, but others say: "We'd be glad to get home alive."

As regards the morale of the Russian soldier, everything was done to stimulate his last-ditch consciousness. Everything was done to impress upon him that the whole country, his home town, his family were expecting him to do his duty. Characteristic in this respect was Lidin's article in *Pravda*, entitled: "They Know at Home How You are Fighting."

Whether your home is near or far, doesn't matter. At home they will always learn how you are fighting. If you don't write yourself, your comrades will write, or your political instructor (*politruk*). If the letter does not reach them, they will learn about you from the newspaper. Your mother will read the communiqué, will shake her head and say: "My dear boy, you should do better than this." *You are quite wrong if you imagine that the one thing they want at home is to see you come home alive.* What they want you to do is to drive out the German. They do not want any more shame and terror. If you die while stopping the German from advancing any further, they will honour your memory for ever. Your heroic death will brighten and warm the lives of your children and grandchildren. If you let the German pass, your own mother will curse you.

This was, indeed, typical of the mood of the Russian soldiers at Stalingrad—typical of their consciousness that there was "nothing beyond the Volga." As an example—not a very grim one—of this personal contact between the army and the rear, Lidin quoted the case of a soldier called Ptitsyn, whose wife had heard that he had fallen asleep while on duty.

So she wrote to the Commissar: "Please impress upon my husband," etc.

"Country" and "Revolution" were, as said before, carefully blended. There were frequent reminders (though much less frequent ones than, say, in 1944) of how much Russia owed the Soviet Revolution for her power to resist. The fourth anniversary of the publication of the famous *Short History of the Communist Party* (and this was during one of the most critical moments at Stalingrad) was made the occasion for a three-column article in *Pravda*, on September 9, by M. Mitin, one of the leading Marxist theorists.

> It is from the experience of the Bolshevik Party, from our knowledge of the laws of social development that we derive our confidence in our ultimate victory over the dark forces of Nazi Germany. . . . The *Short History of the Communist Party* shows what great creative strength was brought out in the people, how it was mobilised and set in motion. As Lenin said: "What was the reason for this miracle? The miracle of a weak, enfeebled, backward country defeating the most powerful nations in the world? It was centralisation, discipline, and an incomparable spirit of self-sacrifice. . . ."

He concluded by saying that to-day this spirit of discipline and self-sacrifice, as taught by the "inspiring pages of the *Short History*," was more essential than ever.

Rather more concrete, and indeed encouraging to the soldiers, than these ideological discussions, were the pages and pages devoted in the Press, throughout the Stalingrad period, to the progress of the war industries. The autumn of 1941, when so many industrial areas were overrun, so many factories lost, and the evacuated factories still *en route* for their new, as yet unbuilt homes, was the grimmest period of all. The Red Army was very short of equipment, and that partly explains why the winter offensive was not a greater success.

In the spring, conditions were still difficult, many of the war industries from the Ukraine had started work in the east, but only in a small way, and some of the Leningrad industries, for instance, were only beginning to reach their destination. It had been impossible during the winter to move all the required equipment. It was not till the beginning of the summer of 1942 that production was reaching anything like a satisfactory level. Nor was it till 1943 that allied equipment, particularly jeeps and lorries, became almost universal in the Red Army. In 1942 the Red Army continued to depend almost entirely on the home industry. What the northern convoys brought, before the proper development of the Iranian route, was, comparatively, only a small contribution to the Red Army's strength.

The story of how 18,000 trains, apart from road transport, had in a

few months moved enormous industries and millions of people from west to east, and of how war industries were set up in a minimum of time, and in incredibly difficult conditions in the depths of the Urals and Siberia, and of how these industries, as well as the other war factories, managed to increase production to an enormous extent during 1942, is, above all, a story of incredible human endurance. In most places living conditions were terrible. Food conditions were, in many places, very bad, too. People worked, because they knew it was absolutely necessary—they worked twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen hours a day; they genuinely lived "on their nerves"; they knew that never was their work so urgently needed as now. Many died in the process. There were cases—cases I could mention by name—where people had to walk, at the height of the Siberian winter, to work—often four, five, six and eight miles; then work for twelve hours or more, and walk back again, and so day after day, month after month. A typical example of how new factories were started in the Urals, in the terrible winter of 1941, was provided in a three-column "Letter from the Urals to a Soldier," by V. Ilyenkov, published in *Pravda* on September 18, 1942. It described how, in an empty space outside Sverdlovsk, two enormous buildings, intended to house the equipment brought from a war factory in the Ukraine, were erected in a fortnight.

Among the mountains and pine forests there is spread out the beautiful capital of the Urals, Sverdlovsk. It has many fine buildings, but I want to tell you of the two most remarkable buildings of the whole area. Winter had already come when Sverdlovsk received Comrade Stalin's order to erect the two buildings for the plant evacuated from the south. The trains packed with machinery and people were on the way. In its new home the war factory had to start production, and it had to do so in not more than a fortnight. Fourteen days—not an hour more! It was then that the people of the Urals came to this empty spot with shovels, bars and pickaxes: students, typists, accountants, shop assistants, housewives, artists, teachers. The earth was like stone, frozen hard by our fierce Siberian frost. Axes and pickaxes could not break the stony soil. In the light of arc-lamps people hacked at the earth all night. They blew up the stones and the frozen earth, and they laid the foundations. Comrade Sivach, the grey-bearded decorator from the Sverdlovsk theatre, and his team were leading.

People's hands and feet were swollen with frostbite, but they did not leave work. Over the charts and blueprints, laid out on packing-cases, the blizzard was raging. Hundreds of trucks kept rolling up with building materials.

Rapidly the steel structures rose from the ground. . . . On the twelfth day, into the new buildings with their glass roofs, the machinery, covered with hoar-frost, began to arrive. Braziers were kept alight to unfreeze the machines . . . And two days later, the war factory began production.

It was useful, and inspiring, to recall to the Russian people and to the soldiers how this enormous feat of moving whole industries to the east, in record time, had been achieved. But more important still was to tell them what was happening now.

It was important for morale, and provided an indication for the future —an indication to what extent a big counter-offensive could be expected. It is true that no absolute, or in many cases even relative, figures of production were published; but the vigour of the production drive, and the satisfaction shown at its results, were such that the soldier could not help being impressed and reassured. Besides, he knew that this was not "just propaganda"; contact between the army and the war industries was constant. Army delegations visited the war factories and vice-versa. And he could also see some of the stuff coming in.

It is significant that during the Stalingrad period, often half the space in the Press was devoted to the work of the war factories. It was an everlasting subject of discussion.

In its editorial on September 8, entitled "The Mighty Support for the Army," *Pravda* wrote:

> The Red Army is to-day receiving equipment in ever-growing quantities. Every month shows a large increase in the production of equipment and munitions. In the course of the All-Union Socialist Competition the initiative and working enthusiasm of Soviet patriots has shown new miracles of productive achievement. The urgent wartime production plans, the urgent orders of the front are fulfilled in time, and often long before they are due. The report of the Socialist Competition for August which we publish to-day, shows how great the successes are in our steel, aircraft and tank industries. . . . The front-rank concerns have maintained and exceeded their progress in July, and have again been awarded the Red Banners of the State Committee of Defence. Apart from these a large number of factories which formerly lagged behind have joined the front rank and can rightly claim the Red Banner. The State Committee of Defence has found it necessary to increase the number of Red Banners and other prizes in the Socialist Competition in the aircraft industry. . . . Despite the difficult wartime conditions, our industry is working better and better every day, and the army is receiving more and more equipment.

The article went on to say that it was not only a question of quantity, but also of quality, and recalled the awards that had just been given to "two aircraft constructors of genius," Yakovlev and Ilyushin, who were producing planes exceeding in quality anything the Germans had. "What is also very important is the great increase in the production of aeroplane engines." The article also referred to a great increase in the production of the highest-quality guns and tanks. "The rear will give the army more and more equipment, so that it may be sure of stopping the Germans, of throwing them back from Stalingrad and the Caucasus, of bleeding them white, exhausting them, and smashing them."

On the same day the paper published an impressive interview with A. S. Yakovlev, the famous constructor of the "Yak," on "Yaks against Messerschmitts."

Russian aircraft at Stalingrad might still be hopelessly outnumbered, and stories of desperate self-sacrifice continued to be recorded, such as

the episode of the sixteen Komsomol guardsmen who, for lack of better weapons, threw themselves under the advancing enemy tanks with grenades tied to their bodies. Four of them survived, because some of the tanks turned tail. The story was recorded on September 13. But there were already growing indications—and this was not "just propaganda," as subsequent events were to prove—that Russia was preparing an army with not only more weapons, but better weapons than the Germans.

It seems reasonable to-day that even during the first half of September, such strong notes of optimism should sometimes have been struck. It is much more surprising when one observes this in the light of what was actually happening in Stalingrad at the time. Not that there was any deliberate policy of misrepresenting the real state of affairs; but, whenever the outlook was bad, without being hopeless, the tendency of Sovinformbureau, and, consequently, of the Press generally, was to blow hot and cold, that is, to warn of the gravity of the situation, and then to express confidence on general grounds; and also to be very vague about what was actually happening at the moment.

It will have been seen that neither the communiqués nor the Press reports provided, during that first half of September, an even approximate picture of what was happening; all one could gather was that ground was being lost, that Russian resistance was very stiff, and that the situation, while being serious, was by no means hopeless. But, in the light of subsequent events, it is easier to understand this reticence. If the Press had described the situation as it was at Stalingrad say on September 14, it would have had to paint an extremely gloomy picture; *but this would, though momentarily truthful, have been a false picture nevertheless, because one element—which it was impossible to disclose—would have been lacking:* and that was that, on the evening of September 14, the Rodimtsev Division was already standing on the other side of the Volga, ready to cross during the night. On the face of it, however, the situation, if described as it actually was at Stalingrad on the 14th, would have seemed altogether hopeless—without the knowledge or mention of this most vital fact. The truth is that, on the 14th, the Germans had already occupied a very large part of Stalingrad: they had broken into the centre of the city, and had captured Mamaiev Hill, the height dominating the city, and from which, the Germans thought, they could stop, by shelling, all transport across the Volga.

What happened on the 15th was very important. The Germans, as said before, were thrown out of most of the central part of Stalingrad by one part of the Rodimtsev Division; and that in reality marked the beginning of that famous Stalingrad house-to-house and room-to-room fighting which was to continue almost till the very end.

The second, almost equally important thing the Rodimtsev Division did on September 15 was to recapture Mamaiev Hill. This the Russians managed to hold until the beginning of October; then the Germans recaptured it. Mamaiev Hill was not to be recaptured by the Russians until January.

But the importance of September 15 cannot be overrated; *for while one cannot speak of any real stabilisation of the front in Stalingrad, the German gains ceased, from that moment, to be regular and automatic.* At the rate the Germans had been gaining ground until then, they would have mopped up the rest of Stalingrad very quickly; now all idea of "mopping up" had to be abandoned; it was now a case of fighting an enemy who had hit back very hard, and would continue to hit back, and who had gained some important ground, and, therefore, a better chance to consolidate than if he had been left in the position in which he was on September 14.

What grim episodes had occurred during that first fortnight of September will perhaps never be fully recorded; but I have heard a few eye-witnesses' accounts of those days: they were only fragmentary, but nevertheless revealing. One told of how, in one part of central Stalingrad, one whole Russian division was trapped by the Germans and completely wiped out—a horrible slaughter which many of Stalingrad's defenders must have recalled when in January their turn came to exterminate almost the entire German Sixth Army.

It was consistent with the Soviet system of information to say nothing precise about the events of September 15; since the earlier loss of a large part of the centre of Stalingrad, and of Mamaiev Hill, had not been mentioned, it was no use making a song and dance about their recapture now. But that was not the main reason why the victory of September 15 was not specifically mentioned; though the situation in Stalingrad was now "in hand," it continued to remain extremely difficult (as indeed the next month was going to show) and it was certainly much too early for any public rejoicings.

In one respect only can one say that the communiqués were not only uninstructive, but plainly misleading: and that was in the constant suggestion—which was persisted in till nearly the end of September—that the fighting was still going on somewhere "outside" Stalingrad.

For this "stretching of points" there may have been certain special reasons: for instance, the greatest need, at that time, was not to give the outside world too gloomy a picture of the Stalingrad situation; for the tendency abroad would have been to make it much gloomier still; and this was a particularly ticklish question on which perhaps much more depended than met the eye: Japan, at that time, was carefully turning over in her mind whether to strike or not. The danger of a Japanese attack on Russia was never greater than during September 1942.

Every Russian admission of weakness or expression of confidence fell into the Japanese scales, and was liable to have some effect on Japan's calculations.

It is noteworthy that, on September 16, that is, two days after the arrival in Stalingrad of reinforcements, the Press should for the first time have published anything from Stalingrad that gave at least an approximate idea of what was happening: for the first time there appeared in the Press the suggestion of a "stabilisation."

The news from Stalingrad during the second half of September, was so vague and fragmentary, with its half-claims of local successes and half-admissions of local failures, that it is hardly worth recording. All that was apparent to the outsider was that, although there had been a certain "stabilisation" at Stalingrad since the middle of the month, the battle was still very ferocious; and, in actual practice, the Germans were continuing to make considerable net gains, as the appended sketch of the German gains of territory shows.[1] But two things deserve particular attention where that second half of September is concerned. The peculiar *nature* of the street and house-to-house fighting, and the birth of the Legend.

. On September 22 *Red Star* devoted a whole editorial to the technique of street and house-to-house fighting. It is worth quoting almost in full, because it explains extremely well the nature of the more "romantic" side of the Stalingrad Battle.

> . . . The street fighting goes on in conditions where our troops are often separated from the enemy by only a few dozen metres. Often it happens that while the enemy holds one part of the building, we hold another. It often comes to hand-to-hand fighting, and the success of the engagement is decided by small groups of infantry, with their heavy and light equipment. The hand-grenade, the bottle of incendiary fluid, the bayonet—such are the weapons which are often used in street and house-to-house fighting.
>
> The proper use of effectives and firing-power has been demonstrated in Stalingrad, for instance, by the company commanded by Comrade Lukyanchenko. This company was defending a certain street. All basements from which the flanks can be protected were adapted as firing-points. The whole area of defence and every single position was calculated to provide all-round defence against enemy attacks. The system of flanking fire covers all buildings around, all passages into the buildings and yards. The firing-points of the company were all well camouflaged and fortified. Observation was particularly well organised: wherever the enemy might appear, he would be immediately detected. There was careful patrolling at night. As we know, the German tommy-gunners often dress up as Red Army men at night in an attempt to break into our lines. In Comrade Lukyanchenko's sector not a single such German attempt has succeeded. . . . The experience of this company shows that any well-fortified building, if bravely and ably defended, becomes impregnable. Every strong-point in Stalingrad must have as its nucleus some strong building,

[1] See page 217.

or group of buildings adapted to all-round defence. At the strong-points a coherent system of anti-tank and anti-infantry system is organised, in conjunction with a variety of obstacles. The firing-points must be arranged in such a manner that every street, every building and every open space should be under their fire. In some cases intermediary dug-outs must be built.

Every position of the strong-point must be constructed in such a way that it may be effective even if part of the building should be captured by the enemy. Nobody—neither the unit nor the individual soldier—should be afraid of encirclement. In street fighting, isolation and blockade are common things, which everyone must be ready to face. If conditions demand it, one must even be prepared for a long siege; therefore one must be sure, in advance, of having adequate supplies on the spot of ammunition, food, and water; and one must prepare in advance secret passages to the neighbouring units.

A special role must be played in street fighting by reserve mobile groups. They operate in the intermediary areas not under fire, and also in places where it is unnecessary to have continuous garrisons. Such mobile groups must exist in every company, even in every platoon, if this is given an individual task to do. The C.O. must use these groups for counter-attacks. But counter-attacks must not be confined to these mobile groups. Every unit must be active, and must not allow the enemy to entrench himself in a building he may have captured; there must be immediate counter-attacks to throw him out; and if he has succeeded in entrenching himself there, he must be thrown out by every possible means.

The whole system of defence, and the disposition of firing-points, as well as the equipment and fortification of buildings must be organised in such a way as to create firing-pockets and all kinds of traps for the enemy. The real art of street fighting is to attract the enemy into such a bag, to surround and annihilate him.

Street fighting inevitably falls into several more or less distinct battles. This makes control difficult. Often the C.O. cannot see how the battle is developing in a neighbouring street; but he must be certain that his orders are being carried out exactly. That this may be so, every soldier individually and every unit as a whole must know exactly what the mission is, and all the details of the buildings that they are defending. . . .

If the Germans have succeeded in capturing one floor, they must continue to defend the second floor; if they lose this they must go up to the third floor, and, finally the attic, or continue fighting from the roof—but do everything to achieve victory. In cases where the enemy has succeeded in capturing the whole house, the unit that has lost it must storm the house again and again, till it has recaptured it. If only one man is left alive in the whole unit, he too must go on fighting, for in street fighting, even a single soldier, if he is brave, stubborn and quick-witted, can do much to foil even a whole group of Germans. . . .

Indeed, from the second half of September till the very end such house-to-house fighting continued over an area of several kilometres, notably in the central part of Stalingrad, with its large stone buildings. In some places the "line" of the front was so intricate that no regular map could render it on paper, so closely were Russian and German "pockets" and "islands" interwoven. The life of such a miniature "fortress" inside Stalingrad was to be later described in Simonov's novel, *Days and Nights*.

It failed in rendering the real intensity and much of the horror of this life—it even managed to weave into the main narrative an insipid love story—but, in the main, the stories of how the garrison of the tiny fortress was in a perpetual state of alert, of how it carried out its night sorties against neighbouring buildings held by the Germans, were based on actual fact.

The second half of September was the period in which the Germans attempted to recapture the parts of central Stalingrad they had previously lost; and they made some progress in this, though they failed—until much later, in October—in capturing the very centre of the city—the square which was later to become Von Paulus's last stronghold.

But that, towards the end of September, the Germans made some progress towards the centre of the city was admitted in the Press, though it emphasised that the Russians' method of house-to-house fighting was greatly delaying this costly German advance towards the Volga.

On September 20 *Red Star* wrote: "The Germans are not ceasing their attempts to break through to the centre of the city." In *Pravda* of September 21 Kuprin and Akulshin wrote from Stalingrad:

> The Battle of Stalingrad is gaining daily in intensity and fury. Day and night the guns roar at the outskirts of Stalingrad, shells and mines are exploding, and the earth shakes with the sticks of falling bombs. In this constant roar the clatter of tommy-gun and machine-gun fire is lost, and you can hardly hear the sound of rifle-shots. The neighbourhood of the town is wrapped in clouds of smoke, and the flames of burning houses can be seen at night for miles.
>
> The outskirts are ploughed up with bomb-craters and shell-holes. In the centre, in the squares and streets, everything speaks of the continuous bombing and of the shelling by long-range guns. . . . The roads to Stalingrad are crammed with mountains of scrap metal, remnants of hundreds of smashed vehicles, tanks, guns and mortars. The Germans have no time to bury all their dead or to evacuate their wounded. The enemy is suffering terrible losses here, but still he continues to drive forward more regiments and divisions, and to throw new columns of tanks and lorries, and more swarms of planes into the fray. . . .
>
> The main fighting goes on in a number of places: notably, in the north-west the Germans have captured a number of streets. . . .

At this time the highly irregular "line" of the front (how, indeed, could there be any regular line when several buildings were shared, sometimes horizontally, between Russians and Germans, and when, in other places, the positions were so close to each other that the Germans could no longer bomb the Russians for fear of hitting their own people?)—the line of the front ran some distance north of the central square of Stalingrad. On September 25, Lieutenant-Colonel Daniluk wrote in *Izvestia* from Stalingrad:

> . . . I shall never forget last night. The false dead light of the flares suspended over the city on parachutes and the unusual appearance of the streets made it

all look unreal. What you saw was like brief glimpses at a movie screen, not real life. Quite near, one could hear the loud droning of aeroplane engines, and this drowned all the other noises that fill the city. A hundred yards away a bomb exploded, then a little further away, another one. A sentry was killed. The tractor-drivers unloading shells were going on with their job. How peaceful the hum of the tractors sounded! These tractors must have been made in this very city. . . .

The square of the Fallen Soldiers is in the centre of Stalingrad; here were the Intourist Hotel, the Red Army House, the headquarters of the Regional Committee of the Party, the House of Soviets. Now these buildings are blackened and battered by shell-splinters. Yet the trees in the square are still green; and, strange to behold, two kiosks, one for newspapers, the other for soda water, are still there, intact. . . . We go a little further: here is a barricade across a street, large, strong and reliable, and a little beyond that is the front line. There the fighting goes on in every house and every yard. And often these houses and yards change hands.

Such was the position of the front in the centre of Stalingrad towards the end of September; the "blackened" buildings were, naturally, burned-out buildings. On September 28, Kuprin and Akulshin wrote:

On the banks of the Volga the roar and thunder of the street-fighting resounds like an echo. This ceaseless chaos of earsplitting noises, fire, and smoke, remind one of a gigantic infernal smithy. The fighting for Stalingrad is becoming more bloody and ferocious every day. The whole city shakes with the explosions of shells and mines. The streets are smothered in smoke and in clouds of dust that never seem to have time to settle down before another bomb or shell falls. The outskirts have become the scene of desperate fighting. The enemy has thrown in his crack divisions and is desperate to split up the city in order to disorganise our defence. . . . Last week alone one German division lost 3,300 men; but still the Germans persist and their pressure remains as strong as ever. The situation remains threatening. The defenders of Stalingrad understand this, and they are counter-attacking in several places. A guards division entrusted with the most difficult sector of all is not allowing the enemy to advance one step. The other day a large group of tanks attacked them. They destroyed twenty-eight. . . .

The communiqué of September 28 spoke of "heavy" battles in the Stalingrad area against superior enemy forces, and admitted that, after an attack by two new divisions and 150 tanks, some of the tanks penetrated into the Workers' Settlement in the north-west of Stalingrad. "Two regiments and fifty tanks were destroyed."

This penetration into the Workers' Settlement was, as it were, a prelude to the all-out German attack a fortnight later—the attack directed against the large factories in the north-west part of Stalingrad, which blocked their way to the Volga.

But between September 29 and October 14 there was a slight (though only very slight) reduction in the German pressure; the Germans, though continuing to harrass the Russians, were also preparing for the great

onslaught. During those days they made, first, several fruitless attempts to recapture Mamaiev Hill; but on October 9 they captured it.

The last fortnight of September is particularly notable in one respect: the great Legend of Stalingrad was born.

The Press was no longer as reticent as it had been during the first half of September. "Heroic Stalingrad," "the heroic defenders of Stalingrad" became daily phrases in the Press. Simonov and others proceeded to render the pathos of the Stalingrad drama, and its grim but heroic atmosphere. The human side, the great spiritual nobility of the men of Stalingrad, was described in moving articles by Simonov, Grossman, Krieger, Kudrevatykh, and many others. For instance, on September 18, Simonov described a battle in the steppes outside Stalingrad between Russian infantry and German tanks. They fought this battle on the cliffs above the Volga.

> Down below, behind the first company, was the Volga; in front of them were the German tanks. That was what Lieutenant Bondarenko had in mind when he first pointed in both directions, and then said in a hoarse voice to the men lying beside him (they could not raise their heads because the tanks were firing): "Either we fight, or we die—all of us."

Eventually, artillery came to their rescue and at nightfall the Germans withdrew. But:

> In the morning they buried the dead. The battalion had suffered losses and Captain Tkalenko was gloomy. The number of dead depressed him. True, there was nothing unexpected in that, and the German losses were twice as heavy. And yet. . . . Maybe at the beginning of the war he would have been satisfied with such a result, but now, in the second year of war, after so much suffering and so many misfortunes, he felt that they must pay not one, but four, five, ten for each of our deaths. . . .

And Simonov described an officer who had grown a long moustache and had made a vow not to shave it off till Stalingrad was saved.

He also dwelt on the ordeal of Stalingrad's civilians:

> There are caves in the cliffs above the Volga; and here women and children and old men have sought refuge from their burned-down villages. All around the children were crying, and the women's weary eyes followed us with long appealing looks. "The swine! To think what they have reduced our people to," said Bondarenko, with a look of cold hatred in his eyes.

But not only the pity of Stalingrad, and its pathos, but also its greatness as a military feat was already beginning to be stressed. If, earlier in the month, the Russian Press itself once or twice referred to Stalingrad as a "Soviet Verdun" this parallel was now dismissed as absurd. On September 27, in *Red Star*, Yerusalimsky wrote:

In the foreign Press one often comes across comparisons of Stalingrad and Verdun. The parallel is far-fetched and incorrect. For its scale, for the magnitude of the German losses, for toughness on the Russian side Stalingrad by far exceeds Verdun. Moreover, Verdun was a first-class fortress; Stalingrad is not. Even more important is the fact that the Russian offensive in the East diverted great German forces from Verdun; the Germans could not concentrate on Verdun as much as they would have liked to. In the case of Stalingrad the opposite is true.

Linked with this "Second-Front" argument was Yerusalimsky's remark that the idea put forward by somebody in England was ridiculous —namely, that British troops were already fighting in a dozen or so theatres of war, and that no Second Front was therefore necessary.

But the clamour for the Second Front was still fairly mild at the end of September; Dieppe had been a failure, and this tended to discourage the earlier line that the German "Atlantic Wall" was merely made of cardboard. Among ordinary people there was a tendency to believe that the British really couldn't do it—just yet. Even so, there was disappointment, but it was expressed less through direct disapproval of British policy (which was not very easy so soon after the Churchill visit to Moscow and the Dieppe fiasco) than through the somewhat demonstrative sympathy displayed by the Kremlin for Wendell Willkie, and through the great prominence given in Russia to his statement about "prodding" the generals. Willkie was in Moscow around September 20.

Meantime the "hate propaganda" followed much the same line as before; Ehrenburg's pep articles, though rather less frequent than during the acutely critical days before Stalingrad, were equally violent and trenchant. The insolence of the German Press *during those days of the utmost expansion of the German invasion* certainly provided him with first-class material; not even in 1941 had the Nazis shown their hand as they were showing it now.

On September 18 Ehrenburg wrote:

Gruppenführer Gasse, in the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, says that S.S.-men will colonise "former Russia." Every German colonist will be served by eight to ten Russian families. The most rational scheme would be to create in Ostland so many *Bauernhöfe* for peasants who have gone through the war —armed men capable of keeping in a state of order and obedience, not only those families serving them personally, but also those serving our tradesmen and artisans in the towns. . . . The *Lokalanzeiger* promises a share of our southern territories to the Hungarians, Italians and Rumanians for colonisation, while the *Krakauer Zeitung* has a plan for settling Danes and Dutchmen in Russia.

The effect of all this on every Russian can be well imagined.

He went on:

They want to turn Russia into a colony. Their insolence has exceeded every limit. They have acquired a taste for the gallows. These lousy brewers and sausage-makers have acquired a taste for shouting out orders. They want a great nation to lick their stinking feet. They are throwing chunks of Russian soil to the flea-ridden Rumanians; they are giving Yalta to the Hungarians and Anapa to Antonescu. They promise Sochi to the Wops (*Italyashki*), and Leningrad to the Finns. They are already mobilising their specialists: "You will feel the muscles of Russian workers; you will select the Caucasian girls for Hamburg's brothels; you will castrate Cossacks; you will form Ukrainian army units for the conquest of Brazil." But no; Karl von Dreck will not drink his *schnaps* at Orel or Novgorod. We shall kill him. We shall kill all the Germans who have come here.

Both in their words and in their actions, the Germans had been more cynical and ruthless about Russia than about any other country with which they were at war. In the case of Russia, Germany's ultimate plans were revealed even before they had won the war (they foolishly assumed that winning the war was only a matter of time); in France, Czechoslovakia, Norway, they pursued a different policy; here they had their Pétains, their Hachas, their Quislings. In France, particularly, they tried to play a more subtle game, which almost suggested that what Hitler had said of France in *Mein Kampf* no longer counted. With Russia, they were completely candid, and they were not much better in the Ukraine either. But if the Ukraine was to be primarily colonised, Russia was (and the Germans made no bones about it) to be exterminated in a relatively short time. Soviet war-prisoners were in 1941 and 1942 made to die by scores of thousands, historic cities like Novgorod were deliberately razed to the ground, and in Russia proper a blatant example of the extermination policy was provided by the case of Pogoreloye Gorodishche near Rzhev. As if to illustrate the true significance of the German invasion, the Soviet Press was able to give, at the height of the Stalingrad Battle, some harrowing statistics concerning the ten-months' occupation of this place, which was one of the few localities liberated by the Red Army at heavy cost in the "diversionist" offensive against Rzhev at the end of August. In October 1941 the village had 3,076 inhabitants; during the German occupation 37 were shot, 94 burned alive "for resisting evacuation," 60 were deported, and 1,980 died of hunger and diseases; 905 were still alive when the Russians recaptured the place; in ten months two-thirds of the population had disappeared. The facts on Pogoreloye Gorodishche were prominently published in the Press on September 27; Maurice Hindus and Paul Winterton, who were able to make an independent inquiry on the spot about the same time, found these facts to be substantially true.

Two other developments—each typical in its own way—characterise the

"Stalingrad period": the rapid progress made towards a *modus vivendi* between the Soviet State and the Orthodox Church, and the establishment of a close organic unity between the Army, the Party, and the Nation.

The question of the Church will be dealt with later; it is enough to say just now that it was in September 1942 that that highly symptomatic book was published, *The Truth About Religion in Russia*: this book stressed the loyalty of the Church to the Russian homeland in time of war, and, *ipso facto*, to the Soviet régime. The publication of this book was a big step towards the logical conclusion of a process which had gone on for some time—this conclusion being the re-establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate.

For this there were numerous reasons; but the main psychological reason—which was a particularly strong one in 1942—was to give satisfaction to the religious-minded part of the Russian population. With national unity as the supreme need of the moment, any deep-seated grievances against the Government—which could, moreover, be exploited by the enemy—were particularly undesirable. The establishment of a *modus vivendi* with the Church was not (as some foreign observers thought) a departure from the Government's fundamental principles; nor was it (as others thought) merely a piece of easy political opportunism. It was a compromise, but one which was not opportunist—the decision had been prepared by years of unfortunate experience and was now the basis of a long-term policy.

The temporary and partial abandonment of the great exclusiveness of the Communist Party was brought about by rather more opportunist considerations: in a moment of great national crisis, it was essential to identify the Party more closely with the nation, and especially with the army. In an important editorial on September 19, *Pravda* wrote:

> Great trials have fallen to the lot of our country. The Hitler bandits are threatening the very existence of the Soviet State. In the face of this grave danger the Soviet people have rallied even more closely than before round the Bolshevik Party, their experienced guide. . . . Among the advanced people of our country there had always been a great desire to enter our Party. In the course of this war this desire became even stronger. During the second half of 1940 and the first half of 1941, 233,071 candidates were accepted; from July 1, 1941 to July 1, 1942, 751, 895 entered the Party. The influx into the Party thus increased three times. . . . The desire to enter the Party of Lenin and Stalin is particularly great among the soldiers and officers of the Red Army. During the war, hundreds of thousands of soldiers have demonstrated on the battlefield and in bitter struggles their devotion to the great cause of Lenin and Stalin, and have formally registered this devotion by applying for membership.

After quoting numerous acts of heroism performed by Party members,

and cases where soldiers died with "I died as a Communist" pinned to their uniform, and after regretting that not more has been done to bring into the Party more of those admirable women on whom the war industries depended so much, *Pravda* said:

> The Central Committee of the Party has, while stressing that caution and vigilance must be observed in this matter, authorised the political organs of the army to accept as members of the Party soldiers who have distinguished themselves in battle, after a three-months status as candidates. This decision places upon army Bolsheviks the responsibility of intensifying political work and education in the army. . . .[1]

[1] In 1943 and 1944 this process was to continue and lead to an increase in Party membership from about three to nearly six millions.

CHAPTER III

MOSCOW IN SEPTEMBER

IN Moscow, in September 1942, as also during the months that followed, all thoughts were turned to Stalingrad. Not that there were no worries nearer home. For two months the battle had raged round Rzhev, barely sixty miles away from Moscow; a heart-breaking battle which produced no results, and was very unlikely to produce any, but which was necessary as a diversion which would prevent the Germans from sending large forces from there to Stalingrad or the Caucasus. Hospitals in Moscow were crowded during that summer with soldiers who had come from very near. The Germans also attacked in a few other sectors not far from Moscow—in the Briansk area, and nearer still, in the Kaluga area. These were not large-scale offensives, but they were calculated, like the much heavier Russian offensive against Rzhev, to tie up enemy forces. Once, at the beginning of September, there was one attempt at a serious day-raid on Moscow; but while Stalingrad held, it seemed unlikely that the Germans could launch a serious offensive, either on land or in the air, against Moscow. One knew that the Russian defences between Moscow and the German-held Viazma–Rzhev–Gzhatsk "springboard" were very strong, and that they were fully manned, and that the anti-aircraft defences were even better than they were in the summer of 1941.

Despite the continued nearness of the Front, Moscow lived a peaceful, if somewhat uneasy life. There were very many wounded in Moscow, and the proximity of the Front was apparent also in other respects. Many astonishing characters could be seen in the streets of Moscow, and particularly in and around the Moscow Hotel—usually bearded men in strange clothes—half-peasant, half-soldier. These were partisans who, from the not very distant woods of the Kalinin, Orel and Briansk areas, would find their way to Moscow through the enemy lines, or would be brought here by secret aircraft. They had wild, almost unbelievable stories to tell. Many of these partisan chiefs ruled large areas, and they or their lieutenants would come to Moscow to report and receive instructions.

The role of the partisans was not only great, but of particularly vital importance during that critical summer of 1942.

The country round Moscow, more than Moscow itself, was full of memories of the terrible winter of 1941. On September 1, I went, with several other correspondents, on a two-day trip to what was euphemistic-

ally called "the front." A few days before, the Russians had succeeded, after weeks of heavy fighting, in capturing three small localities some seven or eight miles east of Rzhev. Much nearer Rzhev, the battle was continuing, and from Pogoreloye Gorodishche we could hear the guns booming. We spent very little time at Pogoreloye itself—a miserable village most of whose houses had been smashed in the shelling, while others had been burned down. There were some miserable bewildered people around, who were now being evacuated to the rear; they spoke of hunger more even than of German brutality. They were being fed now, but they had lived through hell, and were too weary even to be joyful.

Only later did one learn the full coherent story of Pogoreloye. Later still, on a much larger scale, one found the application of a similar German policy of extermination-through-hunger to Rzhev and hundreds of other towns and villages all the way from the "Moscow springboard" to Smolensk and beyond. Nearly all the rest of the day we spent some ten miles from the front at a regimental headquarters in a forest. From a hillock we could see something—very little it was—of the Battle of Rzhev, and heard from a colonel a morose account of the Pogoreloye victory (with many elaborate details of how this village was captured after the Germans had been compelled to pull out). He dwelt on German losses, but was very vague as to the prospects of capturing Rzhev. I could feel that there was much irritation and bad temper among the officers who entertained us to supper. One or two very formal toasts were made. By the time the untidy supper was served, it had grown completely dark under the trees, where the table was laid, and in the dark the voices sounded particularly hollow. The black-out rules here were absolute. There was little conversation, except that now and then somebody would allude angrily to the absence of the Second Front, or else speak of the desperately difficult job the Red Army at this front had been given. Later, in cynical moments, I sometimes wondered whether this marked lack of cordiality towards the Allied correspondents—so unlike the usual Red Army hospitality—was not something calculated—as much as to say: "See what the Red Army thinks of you people." But at other times, especially when one had learned so much more of the real nature of the Rzhev Battle, one felt that these men were having a desperately hard time, were suffering terrible losses in men, and—they just couldn't be bothered to be polite.

This experience in the dark forest, east of Rzhev, in September 1942, was, if not pleasant, at any rate revealing.

But, apart from this futile visit to the "front," the journey was interesting. For we had driven to the "front" through villages and towns like Volokolamsk where memories of the Moscow Battle were still only too fresh.

MOSCOW IN SEPTEMBER

In my diary I find a long entry, dated September 2:

Since I last wrote, I have been to the front—if one may say so. We looked at Pogoreloye Gorodishche, the first place captured by the Russians in this Rzhev offensive—not a very lucky offensive by the look of it. The Russians claim that 45,000 Germans have been killed; how many Russians have been killed they don't say. At Pogoreloye itself the fighting cannot have been very heavy by the look of it. The 45,000 must have been killed somewhere else.

We left in a string of cars at 5 a.m. I travelled in the same car as Palgunov. The leaves were turning yellow, after a miserably short summer; and though it was a bright sunny morning, it was cool, with a nip of autumn in the air. Istra made me clench my fists. There is something particularly maddening about Istra—this town, now reduced to a forest of chimney-stacks; as you approach it from Moscow, you see the whole "panorama" of the town from the hill; and beyond the town stand the ruins of the New Jerusalem Monastery, with all its golden domes blown up by the Germans. It was a pleasant little town, where Chekhov used to live; I had passed through it in July 1941, at the beginning of the war; it had a lively main square, with ice cream and lemonade stalls; now there were only chimney-stacks alternating with trees; and in the former square, among the ruins, a solitary traffic sentry stood. Only the shells of a few stone buildings had remained.

Around Istra the whole area has been devastated, and the fields are uncultivated. However, ten miles further along, on the road to Volokolamsk, we passed through a small village which was almost intact; and we talked to some village girls who were carrying baskets of mushrooms they had picked in the woods; they said that the mushrooms this year were plentiful. On the "floors" of burned-out houses weeds were growing; but in the gardens of those where people were still living, there were sunflowers. On the road to Volokolamsk we passed a number of timber camps; Moscow people—mostly girls—were living here under canvas tents. Large piles of logs were being stacked along the road.

The Germans had publicly hanged many people at Volokolamsk, but the town had, in the main, been preserved from destruction, and its historic churches were still standing. The road as far as Volokolamsk was good, but from now on the real trouble started. The rainy summer had played havoc with the road between Volokolamsk and Rzhev; and as this was an important military road, tree-trunks had been laid over nearly its whole surface; to drive over tree-trunks is bumpy and highly uncomfortable; I could imagine how agonising it must be for the wounded in the ambulances to be driven along this road.

For no particular reason Palgunov talked about Kursk, where he had worked from 1926 to 1929 as editor of the *Kursk Pravda*. In those days, he said, it had jolly little blue tramcars with open platforms, quite unsuitable for the Russian climate in winter; but they had been bought by Nizhni Novgorod from the city of Pisa long before the last war; and later Nizhni had sold them to Kursk. Since then a new type of tramcar had replaced these Italian souvenirs.

Kursk used to be a pleasant town, an old "nest of gentlefolk" with a lot of small stucco houses built about a hundred years ago, and owned by the local gentry. Life was easy in Kursk, even in 1926; the girl who delivered the milk at the house every morning also invariably brought a basket of cherries or apples, and she charged only a few kopeks for these. Kursk was famous for its nightingales; it was a country flowing with milk and honey. Now the Germans were there.

After Volokolamsk, we stopped at Lotoshino. This place had also become famous for its German atrocities. Our cars attracted the attention of the inhabitants. First a little man came up, looking singularly like Strube's Little Man in the *Express*. He also had a little moustache, but wore a tattered cap and clothes, and had a bunch of spring onions under his arm. He had been here right through the German occupation. The first day the Germans came, he said, they hanged eight people in the main street, among them a hospital nurse and a teacher. The teacher's body was left hanging there for eight days. "It swayed there in the dark, and was very terrifying," said the little man. "They wouldn't allow it to be taken down." They had called for the people to attend the execution, but few went. The teacher was a Party man. The Germans had stayed in the town for three months, till January 2; a fortnight before that they had begun to burn down the town; but they stayed a fortnight longer than they had expected, and the last houses weren't burned till the eve of their departure. They appointed *starostas* from among the local inhabitants; later, when the Russians caught these *starostas*, they shot them. The little man said that he was, however, more frightened of the Finns than of the Germans; the Finns wanted to eat all day long; they would eat up everything—hens and geese and then pigs and sheep and cows. "Once a Finn broke into my house and demanded milk—so I said: 'I haven't got a cow, so where can I get milk for you?' The Finn was furious, picked up a basket in the corner and threw it at me. I just ran; it's no use trying to argue with such people. But the main thing is," said the little man, "that they shouldn't come back again. We have now some reserves of potatoes and vegetables saved up for the winter; so if they don't come, we'll be all right."

We stood there, talking by the roadside. Close by was a burned-out store-house that had belonged to the local distillery, a hundred yards up the road; this also had been destroyed; before its destruction the Germans had made great use of it during those winter months.

As we stood there, a crowd of village kids gathered. One twelve-year-old boy, with a fine serious face, talked very earnestly like a grown-up, and, like a grown-up, kept asking for cigarettes. He looked healthier than the rest; the rest looked underfed. There was another boy, also bright and with blue eyes and dark eyelashes—he looked almost Irish; and when he appeared the other kids laughed and told him to show us the stump of his right arm, and his half-blown-off left hand; there were also scabs on his chest and a large scab on his forehead. The other kids thought it a great joke, and he also laughed, a little wistfully; his hands had been blown off because he had tried to unscrew a grenade he had picked up a few months ago. Most of them were a crowd of ragamuffins in tattered clothes; but they were very cheerful and full of fun as they talked about the Germans. One or two of them even saw a humorous side to the teacher being strung up.

The boy with the stump and the crippled remaining hand—Slava was his name—was a sort of Tom Sawyer of Lotoshin. With a jolly laugh he told how he once set fire to a German store; "then I ran away and hid on the stove, and I was very scared; but the German came along and dragged me down and kicked me in the arse; but nothing more happened: I suppose they forgave me. 'Kleiner Partisan,' they would call me, and give me another kick in the arse; and when winter came they kept screaming for fires and saying: 'Kalt, kalt, kalt,' or they'd keep shouting 'Scheise,' which means——" I said I knew. "Actually," said Slava, "it's the distillery that saved us. It kept them in good humour. They'd fill themselves up with vodka and then they'd sing German

songs—don't know what the hell they sang; it sounded kind of mournful on winter nights—like dogs howling. They kept saying they would have died but for the vodka. . . . And, of course, they fed their faces; they devoured everything: chickens and geese, and pigs, and ducks. They would chase the ducks and geese and beat them to death with sticks. And then they burned down the village; I avoided them the last days, they were in such a foul temper. And now," he went on, "people here live in dug-outs (for all the houses have been burned down), or on the *kolkhoz* not far away. To-morrow—on September 1—the school will open; it's not our old school, but another one five kilometres away; our old school (he pointed to a patched-up building) was burned down, but has now been patched up as a hospital."

There was a little girl among the children—a tiny creature of four, who seemed mentally defective; she wouldn't speak and seemed terribly scared, or depressed by some past experience. "She's so small," I said, "you should water her with a watering-can to make her grow." The boys laughed: "Oh, that's all right," one of them cried; "she waters herself every night, but it doesn't do much good." And as some grey snot dribbled from the child's nose on to her mangy dress, he cried: "Look at the war medal she's given herself!" and they all laughed. And Strube's little man remarked: "What a lovely little town we had here with its new club, and library, and its distillery, and its hospital and school—and now it's all destroyed. Of course, there were also a lot of old huts, and they weren't anything much to look at; but the new houses were lovely."

Then some women came up, and a bearded old man; he had been a war-prisoner in Germany in the last war. An old woman said: "When is the war going to end? We just can't bear it any longer. Still, it doesn't concern you much!" she added half-enviously, half-disgustedly, "you're not in it." "Oh no," said the old man reproachfully, "how can you say that? England is in it, and also America, and they are fighting the Germans as our allies, just as they did in the last war." The old woman said nothing, but looked glum. "If only we could live through the next winter peacefully," she finally said. "It's a good thing," said Strube's little man, "that the front has been pushed back ten or fifteen kilometres; until recently the front line was only forty-five kilometres away from here; one feels a little better now. But it's heavy, hard fighting," he added, "you could see it here from the ambulances that have been passing along this road; they did until three days ago; now maybe they are taking a different road. And, the other day," said the little man, "nine truckloads of German prisoners drove past; our village women threw stones at them; our people here are very embittered and angry, you see," he added, with a faint note of apology.

We drove on towards the front; this was one of the roads the Germans had followed in their miserable winter retreat from Moscow; at times it had looked like 1812—with freezing Fritzes falling by the roadside, lined with abandoned, snow-covered guns and vehicles; and Dovator's Cossacks had harassed them, too, just as the Cossacks of Ataman Platov had harassed the *Grande Armée*; but in this sector they did not retreat beyond Rzhev. . . . Beyond Lotoshin, some of the villages were still standing, but others had been burned down completely; many of the fields were uncultivated, covered with cornflowers, thistles and marguerites, but others were dotted with sheaves of rye. . . . Here and there, there were a few goats and cows.

On the road we met several closed ambulances with opaque windows, driving towards Moscow. . . .

GERMAN LEAFLETS

The two German leaflets I had picked up at Pogoreloye were idiotic, illiterate rubbish—unbelievably illiterate, both written in a sort of pidgin Russian which must have made the Russian soldiers laugh—if they were in a mood to laugh. Rather like the English of baboo reporters, or the English of the Kobe "Love Store" catalogue. I should have thought the German propaganda services were better organised. The Russian leaflets to the Germans were, at any rate, literate and well-produced. But these two German leaflets were crude multigraphed sheets, very badly printed.

Yet both were significant in their own way: one exploiting the desperately difficult struggle for Rzhev and the enormous Russian casualties, the other harping on the Second Front—so like the German propaganda among the French troops in 1939–40—*Où sont les Anglais?*

The first one said:

"Redarmymen, Officers, Political Workers of the 215th, 111th, 375th, 369th, 78th, 52nd and 2nd (Guards) Motorised Infantry Divisions!

"What has happened to your and other divisions since the day when two months ago you were chased into this offensive? You were to have captured Rzhev and to have broken through to Smolensk, but you didn't even get as far as Rzhev. You can calculate yourselves how much blood each metre of ground has cost you.

"113,000 Redarmymen have bled to death in this battle for Rzhev for the benefit of the Capitalists of England and the U.S.A. Have you counted the Tanks you have lost? In 8 weeks the 30th Army has lost near Rzhev 981 tanks.

"All your divisions will perish in rivers of blood and mountains of corpses.

"On the road from Rzhev to Smolensk your whole Red Army would perish!

"Never has any general sacrificed his soldiers on such a scale!

"Officers and political workers, you know it, but you do not dare tell your soldiers because you fear a bullet in the back of your head from your executioners.

"Your country is hungry. We know what the misery in the country is like.

"Poverty and hunger have driven many to despair. *Who is feeding your old people and your mothers and your fathers? Who is feeding your children?*

"Stalin and his hangmen only take from you, but give you nothing, because they have no pity for Russia. Soon the Cold Weather will come again. Hardships will be even greater. Think of it! Stalin and his hangmen only take!

"*They will also take your lives!*

"But Russia can settle her fate. Do what Sergeant Vasiliev of the 2nd Guards regiment of the 2nd Inf. Division did. Do what political adviser Fedorov of the 707th regiment of the 215th Inf. Division did.

"They could not bear to look any longer on the senseless bloodshed. With disgust they watched their regiments and divisions being driven to the slaughter. During a lull, for which they had waited in hiding, they came over to us, together with their men. They want to work together with us for the restoration of a better and happier Russia. *They have confidence in us. This confidence will be justified.*

"Stalin and his hangmen, who have sold Russia to the Capitalists of England and America, as Nicholas II already did in 1914–17, will disappear, but a great brave Russia, saved by the Socialist armies of Germany, *will live. He who wants to live, come to us!*

"Redarmymen, Officers, Political Workers! Comrades of the 30th Army. "*End the war! Come to us at Rzhev! Come as friends—and you shall live!*

The other one was rather snappier:

"*To all, all, all!* What is the difference between Bloody Nicholas II and Wise and Great Comrade Stalin?

"Once upon a time Tsar Nicholas II made a treaty with capitalist England and capitalist America. He received credits from them and he gave them the living flesh and blood of the Russian people. . . . 15 million Russians perished in the bloodbath of the first '*Great Patriotic War.*'

"*Love of country, patriotism*—such were the slogans of those days.

"*Love of country, patriotism*—such are the words which are being hammered into you now.

"The People to-day are dying, shedding their blood for *wise and great Stalin*, just as, in the past, they died for Nicholas II.

"*Stalin is slaughtering you for the benefit of the British and the Americans just as Nicholas II slaughtered your fathers for their benefit.*

"What has happened to your revolutionary fervour—that fervour which made you put an end to Nicholas II? The Russian people are tired of war. The war has opened your eyes. Has Stalin killed your old revolutionary fervour? *Get rid of the yoke of your tyrants! End the war! Throw down your arms and come to us! We shall help you and support you!*"

To each of these two idiotic documents—which no soldier could take seriously (perhaps some did in 1941, but not in 1942)—a pass was attached "valid till the end of the war," with the stamp of the "Deutsche Wehrmacht"—complete with eagle and swastika.

Another leaflet I saw was very curious for its "revolutionary" *motif.* It accused Stalin of "reinstating the priests." "Do you want your country to be run by Stalin and the Priests?" it said.

Not that the Russian leaflets for the German Army struck one as very effective either. They naturally harped on German casualties, but how effective some of the other themes were at the height of the German offensive, with the Wehrmacht right on the Volga and deep inside the Caucasus, one may doubt. I saw one about that time harping on conditions inside Germany, called *Was Geht in Deutschland Vor?* and dated September 1942, No. 192. "German soldiers," it said, "Hitler has occupied nearly the whole of Europe, but the bread ration in Germany is getting smaller and smaller. Hunger and poverty are knocking at your home." The "lead" was entitled "Bad Harvest in Germany," followed by a couple of paragraphs on the shortage of consumer goods in Germany, and then there was a cartoon showing the fat profiteer eating an enormous meal, with

the waiter in the background bringing still more, and, beside it, a drawing of a couple of half-starved children looking dismally at a small solitary piece of bread on the table before them. And then, to conclude, there was the usual safe-conduct and this "conclusion":

"German Soldiers! Your blood flows in the Russian fields, while your families are hungry. Is it not folly to go on with this, so that a handful of Nazi parasites may grow rich and fat? Think it over!"

September 3

Bad outlook at Stalingrad. Boris to-day said that it was still difficult to say how it would work out.

"Our people," he said, "are suffering terribly; but their spirit is good, especially the spirit of the younger people. Even now, in war-time, there is very little hooliganism anywhere; but a great earnestness: only look at them toiling away, often hungry, and living in dreadful conditions. It is true, in some of the towns in Siberia, very far away from the war, there is much dancing, and an attitude of don't-care-a-damn, but it isn't characteristic. The Komsomols are devoting themselves wonderfully. In Leningrad, for instance, the Komsomols worked hardest of all to restore the normal life of the city, after the terrible winter.

Boris thought the resignation of the Japanese Foreign Minister a bad sign; "nothing good in that," he said. "There are still two months to go in which one can fight in Siberia—September and October. . . ."

At night I went to see Dodik.

We talked about Moscow; he said that a good many mistakes had been made in its recent planning and reconstruction. The worst thing of all had been the destruction of some of the finest churches; he also deplored the neglect of so many remaining churches in Moscow to-day.

After a supper of cabbage and potatoes and a little cheese, he played through Prokofiev's "Zdravitza" ("Ode to Stalin on his Sixtieth Birthday"), with its exquisite introduction, and then the newly produced "Song of the Five Sailors," by Victor Belyi, which, despite its very unworthy words, sounds almost like a "Lament for Sebastopol"—very moving. As for Prokofiev—well, is he quite the man to write Odes to Stalin? Apart from the truly exquisite introduction—one of Prokofiev's best orchestral pieces—the Ode is a sort of *kolkhoznik* chorus, and I wondered whether he hadn't just the tip of his tongue in his cheek as he made the good simple *kolhozniks* sing a plain C-major scale, up and down, up and down, and up and down again. . . . For even at fifty Prokofiev remains something of an *enfant terrible*. . . .

The leading composers are working hard and well just now, particularly Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian and old man Miaskovsky, who has this year written a new symphony and stacks of good piano and chamber music.

Owing to the midnight curfew, I had to stay the night, sleeping rather coldly on the couch. More cabbage for breakfast.

September 4

A cool but sunny morning; lots of soldiers were marching down the Teatralni Proyezd. Shoe-cleaners have reappeared at street-corners; I had a shoe-shine for three roubles.

I was interested to receive to-day from the Moscow Patriarchate a sumptuously bound, admirably printed, and lavishly illustrated volume, called *The*

Truth About Religion in Russia. Of this de-luxe edition, says the flyleaf, fifty thousand copies have been printed. It has numerous plates of portraits of Russian church leaders, each protected by a sheet of tissue paper. The Central Committee of the Party itself hasn't produced such a typographical masterpiece for years; there is a great deal behind all this.

ON RELIGION IN RUSSIA

The publication of this book was, indeed, a landmark in the evolution of the Church situation. Anti-religious propaganda had already been on the decline for a good many years before the war; the (already quite anodyne) *Bezbozhnik*—the "godless" paper—ceased publication on the second week of the war. The Church had long ceased to be a menace to the régime, and was no longer associated with any hostile anti-Soviet movements. Church-going had ceased to be part of the ordinary Russian's life, and most of the younger generation were simply not interested in the Church. On the other hand, there was still a great demand for the Church, especially in the villages, and among older women; and the Government increasingly felt that if these people wanted religion, it did nobody any harm to let them have it; in 1942 it was, indeed, desirable, with 100 per cent national unity as a vital domestic policy, to do away with any grievances against the Government that might still exist on the religious score. In a general way, there had been no "persecution" of religion as such—at least not for years—but there still remained, especially among the Komsomol, a certain traditional disrespect for the Church. During the war, the Church had, in the main, proved its patriotic attitude; many priests had even joined the Partisans. Both internally and internationally, it was important to show that there were no longer any conflicts between Church and State in Russia; but in 1942 the internal reasons for "showing respect" for the Church were much stronger than the international reasons: these were merely incidental, though, naturally, the opportunity was not missed to impress these changes on opinion abroad, particularly in the United States, where much hostile propaganda continued to be conducted on the ground that there was "no freedom of religion" in Russia. The de-luxe book published by the Moscow Patriarchate was, in fact, largely intended for foreign consumption. Apart from America, it was also intended to help the All-Slav committee.

In an article I wrote on September 8, I said:

> Ever since the outbreak of the war the Russian Orthodox Church has identified itself with the patriotic policy of the Soviet Government. Father Sergius, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna, and *locum tenens* of the Patriarchal Throne since the death of the Patriarch Tikhon in 1925, has repeatedly denounced the Nazis for their claim that they were "conducting a crusade for the liberation of the Russian Church from the Bolsheviks." "Patriarch Tikhon," the book recalls, "said 'The Soviet Order means, indeed, the rule

of the people, of the workers and peasants; and is, therefore, firm and unshakable." The book also recalls that the old Patriarch called upon the faithful to pray for the success of the Soviet Order, and that he explicitly condemned the schism in the Orthodox Church, brought about by the Karlovite Sect who for years had waged war against the Metropolitan Evlogi (Eulogius), the head of the "true" Russian Church in France. The Karlovites were *émigré* extremists of a Fascist or Nazi tinge. They were also to be the first to identify themselves, in the early 'thirties, with the teachings of Hitler. The Orthodox Church represented by Sergius is, says the book, the old Russian Church, but deprived of its financial and other earthly privileges which it enjoyed under the Tsar. In the old days the Tsar himself was head of the Church. The separation of Church and State is, in Sergius's opinion, all to the good.

The crack at the "Karlovites" in the book was, in fact—though I did not say so at the time—a crack at Father Vvedensky's New Church—which had created a schism, not among the Russian *émigrés*, but in Russia itself. The New Church had been encouraged by Lunacharsky, in the early years of the Revolution. It was already clear from this attack on "schisms" that the Soviet Government was willing to throw Vvedensky overboard; the New Church had been a mistake and a failure; and if it had any followers, it was, chiefly, *faute de mieux*: people went to a Vvedensky church where there was no "real" church anywhere in the neighbourhood. The New Church was, indeed, to be disbanded, soon after the establishment of the Synod and the Patriarchate about a year later. It went, as it were, into voluntary liquidation, with Vvedensky recanting.

Of the book, I said:

> Much of it is written by Sergius himself. He says that the loss by the Church and the monasteries of land and other property does not denote persecution, but "a return of the church to Apostolic times, when priests did not pursue their task as a worldly and profitable profession, but as something higher, more in accordance with the teachings of Christ." He goes on to say that the separation of the Church and State had a purifying effect, in the sense that only true believers now go to church, and nominal Christians have dropped out. Referring to the Soviet decree of January 1918 on the Status of the Church, Sergius declares it to be perfectly reasonable. No doubt, he admits that anti-religious propaganda is permitted in Russia, and he regrets that Communists should adhere to "the anti-religious standpoint." Nevertheless, it is certain that for several years now anti-God propaganda has been on the decline, and has disappeared completely since the beginning of the war. (The truth is that, in the early years of the Revolution it largely achieved its object. If Communists are discouraged against going to church, it is because religion in a Communist implies, if not double allegiance, at least something of a "split personality.")
>
> Since the beginning of the war, the attitude of the Church has been clearer than ever. It rejects Hitler's "crusade" for its liberation. Although no priests are attached to the Red Army, the Church constantly prays for the Red Army, and also says innumerable prayers for individual soldiers at the request of their families. In their sermons and writings now Russian churchmen constantly refer to the Nazis as the successors of "the foul hounds"—the Teutonic

Knights, whom Saint Alexander Nevsky, the patron Saint of Leningrad, routed on the ice of Peipus Lake in 1242.

Recently the Metropolitan Sergius addressed an epistle to the Orthodox faithful in occupied territories, telling them that they must never forget that they are Russians and that, while under the German yoke, they must do nothing, wittingly or unwittingly, which would be a betrayal of their homeland. Often Russian churchmen to-day liken the German invasion to the Tartar invasion.

The book further says that the Church has proved its patriotic fervour, not only by words, but also deeds. The Church is helping the Red Army, not only with prayers, but also with gifts and collections. Thus, the congregation of the Church of the Trinity at Gorki recently collected a million roubles for the Defence Fund.

From an international standpoint, it is interesting that the book should devote so much space to the "chaos" in the Orthodox Church abroad. Those who see eye to eye with the Russian Church are dismissed or persecuted by the Germans: such, says the book, is the case of Gabriel, Patriarch of Serbia, and Chrysanthos, the Metropolitan of Athens. Stefan, the Bulgarian Metropolitan, "whose sympathy is great for the patriotism of the Russian Orthodox Church, has fallen into German disfavour, and is being frequently attacked by the pro-Nazi Press." Great friendship and sympathy, the book notes, has been shown for the Russian Church, and great admiration for its patriotic attitude, by the Near-East Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, as well as by Benjamin Fedchenkov, Metropolitan of the Aleutians and North America, who represents the Moscow Patriarchate under that picturesque title in the United States. He has, says the book, "worked steadily in favour of American aid to Russia, and that despite the Theophilites, an Orthodox sect who have been engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda, and had been urging President Roosevelt to send an ultimatum to the Soviet Government demanding guarantees of "religious freedom" in Russia after the war.

Further, the book contains a sharp attack on certain "Church quislings," notably in the Ukraine, who, after accepting the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate, are now serving Hitler in fostering Ukrainian "nationalism." The whole matter is discussed at great length in an epistle addressed by Sergius himself to the Ukrainian Faithful. Here it is stated that Bishop Sikorsky officially presented himself to the German authorities with the title of "Archbishop of Luck and Kovel and head of the Orthodox Ukrainian Church," and promised his faithful co-operation to the Germans, whom he addressed as "Liberators of the Ukrainian people." But the true Orthodox Church, says Sergius, is that Church which "is sharing all the sorrows and hardships of the Russian people."

Here already are clearly indicated the main lines of Russian church policy for the next few years. The "sympathetic" Near-Eastern Patriarchs mentioned above are, indeed, those who remained sympathetic to the Moscow Church throughout; they, like the Metropolitan of the Aleutians and North America, were to come to Moscow in 1945, for the Enthronement of the Patriarch Alexis, the successor of Sergius, who died, soon after his own enthronement, at the end of 1943.

Then I went on:

The second part of the book tells of the destruction of numerous valuable churches (notably the New Jerusalem Monastery at Istra and the churches of Novgorod) by the Germans, and of the fearful atrocities committed by the enemy in the occupied areas. Conscious of the sufferings inflicted by the Germans on the Russian people, says the book, the priests nearly everywhere refused to fraternise with the German "liberators." One priest is quoted as telling the curious story of a White-Russian quisling interpreter who admitted his shame at working for Hitler, and who declared: "I would much rather wear a Red Army uniform and fight for my own people than wear this German outfit which circumstances have inflicted upon me. . . ."

For all that, in 1942, the Church was still very down-at-heel, and it was not until later that measures began to be considered for the restoration of many church buildings—buildings "of historic value"—and that the Patriarch and the newly formed Holy Synod were given decent quarters in Moscow. The cathedral choir also improved. All that was after the establishment of a special department for Church affairs at the Sovnarkom, with Mr. Karpov at its head—"Narkombog" or "Narkomop" as he was jokingly referred to: that is, People's Commissar for God, or People's Commissar for Opium (for the people). It is a curious fact that even in the rather hungry Moscow of 1942, the churches should have remained the only centres of organised, professional and completely unashamed begging. In my diary I find the following entry, dated Sunday, September 6, 1942:

I went this morning to the great cathedral, near the Krasnoselsk metro station. On the porch I was assailed by a mob of horribly tattered old women, like the witches from *Macbeth*; they swarmed round me and screamed, as soon as they saw me handing out rouble notes. Some were quite offended and complained wailfully and vociferously at having been left out. What these women can do with rouble notes and ten and twenty kopek pieces, God only knows. The church was crowded, though not nearly as much as I had expected. In the congregation I noticed only two soldiers and one railwayman; most of the others were elderly or old women, and many of the men had grey or greying beards, and looked like old-time Moscow merchants or tradesmen; there were also many women of the servant type, some of them young, and many with children. They kept passing on to the altar slips of paper with the names of those whom they wished to be included in the prayers; then there were collections "for the poor," and "for the restoration of the church"—which it certainly badly needs.

Time has worn off the gilt of the domes; many of the ikons outside have been rubbed out (deliberately?); inside, plaster was scaling off the walls, and the singing of the choir was extremely bad. To be a church cantor in Russia to-day—*ce n'est pas une situation!* The priests' robes were a little on the shabby side, though the robes and crown of the Metropolitan Nicholas looked all right. There also seemed to be a shortage of candles and incense—for there was very little smell. Inside the church, there were more beggars, of a more quiet and pathetic type, many of them blind. I saw a woman slip one of them a small

slice of bread—which produced unusually warm thanks; very unlike the roubles and the kopeks—no wonder!

The singing was poor and uninspired; the whole scene was drab and miserable, and it was disappointing to think that, of all the hundreds of churches that Moscow once had, this very indifferent suburban church should have become "Moscow Cathedral"—an honour justified only by its "floor space."

And I could not help feeling that this was part of a different world, a world with little vitality and little reality, and with only small connection with the things in Russia that really counted.

Even so, I might as well recall here that during Easter 1943—as is usual at Easter—the church attendance, particularly on Easter night, was extraordinarily high. Whole streets adjoining the twenty-five or thirty churches of Moscow were crowded with people for whom there was no room inside. A Party member whom I saw soon after, said: "The Party and the Komsomol have been much impressed by the enormous number of people who went to church this Easter—more even than usual." Easter night is, of course, the night when thousands of people, not otherwise churchgoers, go to church, often for "auld lang syne," in virtue of an old Russian tradition. But if, in 1943, there was a greater church attendance on that night than for many years past, it was partly perhaps because the borderline cases knew that the Church was no longer being frowned upon by the authorities. On the whole, however, the Church still belonged to a different world from the world of the fifteen million Komsomols (even though some Komsomols may, individually, be churchgoers, in virtue of some family tradition); it had no representation in the Red Army; it had little following among the working-class; it appealed primarily to a part of the peasantry, who like at least to be christened, married and buried by a priest, and, in the towns, to the politically "less conscious elements."

If I have dwelt here on this problem of the Church, it is because the establishment of more normal and orderly relations between Church and State began during the Stalingrad period; it forms part of that complicated and very important psychological process that went on in Russia in the critical year of 1942. At the time it was not always clear what was an expedient dictated by the needs of the moment, and what was the beginning, or the continuation of a long-term policy. More often than not, each big measure taken in 1942 had something of both; the "Complete Unity" propaganda was something urgently needed at the time, but it was also something that was required in a modified and mollified form on a much more long-term basis; similarly, if the "recognition" of the Church answered a short-term purpose, it was also part of a long-term policy which was to pursue aims not yet very apparent in 1942; for at that time one could still only dimly perceive in the future a full-fledged

"Balkan policy"—even though one already then had some inkling of it as one watched the activities of the All-Slav Committee.

FROM THE DIARY

September 5

One feels a certain tension in Moscow. The situation at Stalingrad remains obscure; at Rzhev the progress (if any) is slow and extremely costly, and there is much talk of a German offensive against Moscow. No one seriously believes in it, while Stalingrad is holding—and yet, one cannot be quite sure.

To-day we had the first German attempt this summer at a great daylight raid on Moscow. I had returned from the film show at the American Embassy (they started these recently, and very welcome they are, too), and was on my way to the Shostakovich concert at the Conservatoire when the sirens went. The streets were very crowded at the Kremlin end of Gorki Street and round the Moskva and the National. The trams stopped and people were told to get out. The other traffic went on as usual. People kept staring at the sky, ignoring for a time the militia men's and girls' demand that everyone take shelter. A large number of fighter planes, flying north, swept across the sky. Then more crowds started pouring in from various side-streets: they had been turned out of the theatres, where they were at matinee performances. I saw Garreau standing on his balcony at the National; he waved to me, and, sooner than be chased into a shelter, I went up. Soon afterwards Mme Garreau and the two boys appeared, having been driven out of the Stanislavsky Theatre, where they had been seeing the *Gipsy Baron*. For an hour people in the street kept staring at the sky (the militia gave most of them up as a bad job) and then the all-clear went. Nothing happened; later it was announced that seventy bombers had tried to raid Moscow, but that they had been driven away, long before they had reached Moscow, and that eleven had been shot down. Garreau remarked, during the alert: "Frankly, I'd welcome the first snowfall. . . ."

Then I went on to the concert, and found to my relief that it had not started, and that people were being given time to get there now. The early-comers had had the pleasure of spending an hour in the shelter, together with Shostakovich himself and the members of the Beethoven Quartet. Later they played Shostakovich's Quartet in C sharp, then Prokofiev's new quartet, and finally Shostakovich's admirable quintet with himself, looking like a big schoolboy, playing the somewhat primitive piano part.

Tuesday, September 8

Jean Champenois, who was at General Petit's house-warming party to-day, said that a Russian Colonel who was there had sounded very confident. "Stalingrad will be our Verdun," he had said. If they really manage it, it'll be tremendous! Altogether, the Colonel seemed to be cheerful; he said that equipment was now being made on a big scale, and the Red Army was much less short of stuff than it was a few months ago; there was plenty of manpower, and also plenty of food; the only difficulty was transportation. And the Colonel added: "If the Germans were all that strong, do you imagine they wouldn't have attacked Moscow before now?"

Lee Stowe showed me a letter from an old German woman to her son Willi; she said: "The Tommies are not giving us a day's peace"; there was "a terrible

raid on Duisburg—*es ist sehr traurig*"; and Hamburg had had two more nights of it, and that also was "*sehr traurig*"; and Essen had received a packet, which also was "*sehr traurig.*" "But we must take it as it comes to us." And then, "We are saving up cigarettes for you. Your old father and mother are praying for you. May God guard you. . . ." I hope more of them begin to realise how "*traurig*" it all is; and not only doddery, and perhaps nice enough old women —only who weren't perhaps quite so *traurig* when the bombs were dropping on London and Coventry. The letter was found on a dead body near Rzhev.

September 11

I took little Michel Garreau, the twelve-year-old younger son of the French Minister, to the circus. He enjoyed it, in his rather sophisticated French way; he is certainly a young man of the world, having, through the *peripéties* of the war, been all over the place with his parents—Indo-China and Siam, and Egypt, and heaven knows where else. The circus was great fun, as usual, with excellent acrobats, among them the celebrated Koch Sisters, who have the dignity of being "Artists of Merit of the R.S.F.S.R.," and that delightful whimsical little clown Karandache, a great favourite with the Moscow children. Another pair of clowns dressed up as Herr and Frau Germania were pushing a pram, and when the hood was thrown back, there emerged an enormous chimpanzee wearing a Nazi armlet. . . . The grand finale was an acrobatic ballet, with grown-ups and children dressed up as frogs doing their dances and antics in and around a pond of enormous water-lilies. It was pretty, but not funny, and I should have preferred some more Winter-Fritz slapstick like the last time; but then perhaps the Hairy Ape corresponds more closely to the current conception of Germany than the funny down-and-out Hun, with the feather-boa round his neck and the icicle at the end of his nose.

All sorts of stories are going round Moscow; one is that Zhukov is now in command at Stalingrad and that he has been told that if he makes a good show of it, he will be made Marshal of the Soviet Union on November 7.

September 12

The other day Mrs. Victor Blakesley, *alias* Irina Skariatina, formerly of old St. Petersburg, arrived here on a two months' visit for *Collier's*. She is one of the most amusing people I have met for years, and one of the kindest. She showers gifts on the hotel servants. After twenty years in America (apart from a few visits to Russia) she speaks Russian with the funniest American accent, and American with the funniest Russian accent. To-day she managed to hire an Intourist car for a couple of hours, and asked me to accompany her to the New Virgin Monastery where she was going to look for the grave of her grandfather, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky.

A lot of children were swarming about the old monastery, whose buildings were now converted into ordinary flats. The cemetery was partly overgrown, partly used as a vegetable garden, with worm-eaten cabbages surrounding the graves. Most of these had had their crosses knocked off, presumably in the wicked anti-God days. It was a cold but sunny day. The Smolensk Cathedral, the main building of the mohastery, built by Basil III in 1528 was beautiful, and in a good state of repair; but it was closed. Several of the kids came up and talked to us; among them was a pair of twins, a thin, scraggy couple. When I remarked on this, one of the youngsters said: "They don't get enough to eat; nobody does." "Why don't you eat these cabbages?" "They are not much good; they are wormy; before the war they used to put medicine on cabbages to

keep the worms away; but now you can't get the stuff, I suppose." Here, among the cabbages, were several famous graves—of Chekhov, and Rimsky-Korsakov and Pisemsky, and Zagoskin ("the Russian Walter Scott"), and Denis Davydov, the Partisan chief of 1812, and General Brussilov of the last war; some of their crosses had also been broken off.

The tombstones were mostly vulgar and opulent—as bad as the graves in Père Lachaise. In the more modern part of the cemetery, on the other side of the church, most of the graves were of the post-revolution period, only few of them with crosses on the tombstones, and ranging from some quite nondescript people to Party bosses who had died in their beds. Very beautiful was the white marble tombstone—a rectangular pillar with a young woman's head emerging from it—and with "From I. V. Stalin" in gold lettering halfway down. It was the grave of Alliluyeva, Stalin's second wife.

Irina looked for grandpa first among the cabbages, but later she remembered that he was buried in some crypt; so she went down the crypt, but found that it had been turned into an air-raid shelter, with benches built over the tombs. It was very dark in the crypt anyway, and she couldn't identify the tomb; and finally when a crowd of kids invaded the crypt, and proceeded to play hide-and-seek among the benches and tombs, Irina was seized with the giggles, and gave up her search for grandpa, saying: "He'll be all right, anyway."

Colonel XX, who has just come back from England, thinks that seventy per cent of the people to-day love Russia more than their own country; he deplores the fact, but thinks it'll blow over once the Second Front starts; but he doesn't think it'll be this year.

THE STORY OF OLGA

September 19

Olga came to supper to-night; I had not seen her for nearly three weeks, and since then she had had great trouble. Last week her father had died. She did not cry at any moment; but in her quiet, deep voice she told me about it; and the thought of her father brought other memories to her mind. Her father was an old Moscow textile worker; for the last three years he had been an invalid, half-paralysed. He was an old revolutionary, and had taken part in the 1905 revolution. "He was an old Party member," said Olga. "He was engaged in underground work—not at Presnya where the family came to live some years later, but on the other side of the river. He was a good man; a hard worker; it took some doing, through all these years, to bring up a family of six—three boys and three girls. One of my brothers was killed at Voronezh two months ago, the second one has been missing since the beginning of the war; and from the eldest one we have just had another letter. He had again been wounded, and had again been taken to the same hospital; it is somewhere near Stalingrad. And now he says he is being moved to Vologda—which is a bad sign; he must be badly wounded. He is dark, and has taken after mother; the other two brothers are fair and blue-eyed.

Of Olga's two sisters, one was on an anti-aircraft battery near Moscow; the other, only thirteen, was still at home, helping mother.

Of her mother she said that the old woman was very religious; she liked to go to church; but though father, an old Communist, often teased her about it, he was very tolerant.

Then she talked of her father's death. "He had been ill for some days and

was very weak; he lay in his bed, snoring, or else being completely silent. Then he would snore again. Mother and I slept in the other room. At 2 he woke up and said faintly: 'Give me some water.' I gave it to him. He said, 'Thank you,' and went to sleep again. And then, at 7, my young sister came weeping and screaming into our room and said: 'Daddy is dead.' He looked as though he were still asleep, and he was still warm. I dashed into the street, almost without any clothes, and without my shoes on. Silly how one can lose one's head. . . . I ran for the doctor; he came and certified Daddy's death. I went to the factory, and told them what had happened, and they let me take the day off. Then I went to the registry office, where they delivered a death certificate. At the factory they gave me a coffin, and also made arrangements for the hearse, and they gave me forty metres of cloth."

"What for?" "Oh, I don't know; to cover the various funeral expenses, I suppose. For one can sell and barter cloth very profitably these days. Actually, I was going to come here last week to ask you if you could order three bottles of vodka from the hotel; but I got that from the factory, too. The vodka was for the grave-diggers. They are terrible people. The regular fee for digging a grave is seventeen roubles fifty; but unless you give them vodka, they dig up the grave the next day, and bury somebody else in the same grave—just to save themselves trouble. Lazy people they are. In winter it's difficult of course, with the ground frozen. Poor mother feels very lost; they had lived together for thirty-nine years." Olga smiled sadly, and was silent for a while, resting her rather heavy chin on her rough hand with closely clipped fingernails—a real proletarian hand. And yet, there was so much "breed" about this girl; she had poise and balance, and there was a solid strong kind of beauty in that firm pale face, and her large quiet grey eyes, and in that finely shaped full mouth and white teeth with the wide gums showing, and that heavy jaw. Not a single nondescript feature about her; she belonged, even physically, to the proletarian aristocracy; her character, like her body, was produced by a tradition. She was wearing the same black dress with the little lace collar which she wore the first time I had met her, at the club dance at Trekhgorka.

And then Olga remembered the pre-war days when they were all children, and all living together in the old wooden house in Zvenigorod Street; but her most vivid memory which her father's death had now evoked was the most terrible memory of all—the memory of last October. "Those were dreadful days," she said. "It started about the 12th. I was ordered, like most of the girls at the factory, to join the Labour Front. We went some kilometres out of Moscow. There was a crowd of us, and we were told to dig trenches. We were all very calm, but sort of dazed, and couldn't take it in. The very first day we were machine-gunned by a Fritz who swooped right down. Eleven were killed and four wounded." She said this very calmly, without any affectation.

"We went on working all day, and the next day; fortunately no more Fritzes came. But I was very worried about father and mother, with nobody at all to look after them.

"I explained all this to our commissar, and he let me go back to Moscow. They were strange, those nights in Moscow; you heard the cannonade so clearly. On the 16th, when the Germans broke through, I went to the factory; we were put on barrack status (*kazarmennoye polozhenie*). My heart went kind of cold when I saw that the factory had closed down. A lot of the directors had fled; but Dundukov was in charge; a very good man, who never lost his head. They handed out to us large quantities of food: sixty kilos of flour, and eight kilos of butter and a lot of sugar; so that it should not fall into German

hands. For me as a Komsomol—and a well-known Komsomol at that—it was not much use staying in Moscow. The factory people suggested that I could evacuate father and mother to Cheliabinsk. But whatever was done about the old people, there was only one thing I could do: and that was to follow the Red Army. A lot of our people had already left Moscow.

"I went and talked to mother. She wouldn't hear of Cheliabinsk. 'No,' she said, 'God will protect us here, and Moscow will not fall.' That night I went down to the cellar with mother; we took down a small kerosene lamp, and dug a hole in the floor and buried all the sugar and flour and also father's Party ticket. We thought we'd live in the cellar, if the Germans came; for we knew that they couldn't stay in Moscow for long. Perhaps I would have left with the Red Army, but it was hard to leave father and mother alone. That night mother cried, and said: 'The whole family has scattered; and are you going to leave me, too?' There was a feeling that night that the Germans might appear in the street at any moment; yes, it was possible, and Krasnaya Presnya was the part through which they would have come into Moscow. There were no trains any more by which we could leave, and what was father to do? He might have walked two or three kilometres; he could not have walked any farther.

"But they did not come that night. At the factory, the next morning, everything was mined; it was only a case of pressing a button, and the whole factory would have gone up in the air. But then came a telephone message from Pronin, the Chairman of the Mossoviet, saying: 'Absolutely nothing must be blown up.' From the northern outskirts of Moscow, where Natasha lives, people were being evacuated to the centre. And there were no end of air-raid warnings, and there were many bombings, too. But on the 20th, the factory opened again, and we all felt so much better, and we were quite cheerful again after that."

Olga said that she had recently sat for her first Party Candidate examination; one of the two examiners had tried to plough her by asking her involved and awkward questions; she just did not answer, and merely told him off in her quiet way. I asked her what the Party people thought of the whole Second Front controversy. "We all wish," she said, "we had never talked about it at all; or at least not nearly so much. It raised a lot of false and unnecessary hopes."

Olga had been in love, and with the same candour and simplicity she told the story. When she first knew him—that was three years ago—he was a student at one of the technical colleges. "We loved each other very much, and were going to get married. We spent our summer holidays together in the Caucasus —that was in 1940; for days on end, we climbed mountains and went for walks round Kislovodsk; and once we climbed Mount Elbrus. Then we returned to Moscow. But the trouble with him was that he was completely under his mother's thumb. She was a bit of an intellectual, and thought I was much too taken up with the Komsomol, and would not make a good housewife. So he broke it off. He was very upset; for we loved each other very much. I did not want to see him again, though for several months I used to cry very often at night, and it worried mother. But I got over it, and devoted myself more than ever to the Komsomol work; and it may be just as well; he was so much under his mother's influence, I would have had no end of trouble with mother-in-law. But it was beautiful while it lasted, and I have not been in love since. Sasha—

for that was his name—may still be in Moscow; I don't know; or he may be in the army; what does it matter any longer?" But at heart, I think, she still cared.

September 20

Since saying good-bye to Pushkov at Murmansk, after that fantastic voyage on the *Empire Baffin*, I had not heard from him. But last night, without warning, he turned up. He had been in Leningrad for two months; he had flown both ways, but said that the convoys across Lake Ladoga were functioning well, though occasionally they were attacked by German planes. The day before he had seen a high Party boss, who had talked to him of Stalingrad where he had just been. The said boss was fairly confident that Stalingrad would hold out; but he admitted that at the end of August there had been panic and chaos in the city, and that the local authorities had done nothing about A.R.P., and had been caught napping. So when the Germans attacked in force, people lost their heads. The fighter planes could do nothing, because they were much too busy at the front itself. During the air-raids there had been very heavy casualties—it was hell. The greater part of the town, and certainly most of the wooden houses, had been burned down. Now nearly all the civilians had been evacuated. The Volga crossings were working well, despite constant German air attacks. The nearest railway was seventy kilometres away, but communications and supplies had been very well organised in the last three weeks.

Of Leningrad, Pushkov said, among other things, that most of its industrial plant had by now been moved to Siberia and the Urals which, with millions of evacuees and many new industries, would benefit tremendously from the war; many of these industries would stay there for good. His own meteorological institute had been evacuated from Leningrad to Sverdlovsk, but while it was still in Leningrad it had suffered many casualties; several of its members had died of hunger last winter. His own wife and children had been evacuated from Leningrad in February; the children were terribly run down, and had to be sent to hospital for a time; but now they were almost back to normal.

In Gorki Street to-day, I ran into young Liza R. She looked rather tired and had lost much of her former Muscovite plumpness and her hands looked red and raw. We went for a walk, and she told me that she had only just returned to Moscow, after working for three months on a peat-bog, some sixty miles away. She is a first-year student at the literary faculty of Moscow University, and most of the other students had also been sent there—though some, with influential parents or friends, had dodged it. There were also hundreds of other young people from Moscow working there; and a few miles away, there was a timber camp, where about a thousand more were working. She said the professional peat workers looked down on the "amateurs," many of whom were so unaccustomed to hard physical work that they couldn't do more than fifty, forty, or even twenty-five per cent of their daily "norm." But they were kept on, nevertheless, because even twenty-five per cent was "something." It was hard and unpleasant work; you had to spend hours up to your waist in dirty brown water, and though you were given "waterproof" clothes, they stopped being waterproof after about five minutes.

The food was bad, and one had to depend on one's families in Moscow sending one what they could. The young people lived in very rough and damp barracks. There were very few young lads among them, but those who were there were in great demand with the rougher type of girls, and there were big

carry-ons at night. She also indicated that the girls who weren't too particular about their virtue conferred favours on the surveyors, who thereupon rewarded them with cushy "administrative" jobs, not requiring hard physical work.

It was surprising, she said, how well these young people stood up to this hard work; there were very few cases of illness. But accidents did happen, particularly in the timber camp some miles away; here the professionals had a rough way of throwing logs from one to another standing in a chain, and one girl she knew—a first-year student like herself—had had all her front teeth knocked out in the process.

"Was there much grumbling?" I asked. "Not really," she said. "A lot grumbled about the particular conditions in our camp, but no one grumbled against the principle of the thing. Everybody knows it's much tougher still at the front, and that with the Donbas gone and only the measly Moscow Basin coalmines (many of them damaged by the Germans last winter) to fall back on, Moscow *must* have this peat and timber for the coming winter."

"And now," she said, and smiled, "back to *Hamlet* and the text-books!"

YASNAYA POLYANA

September 25

I have just returned to Moscow after a five days' absence. Stalingrad is fighting on.

Over a month has now passed since the fighting at Stalingrad was first mentioned in the Soviet communiqué. Yet the Russians go on fighting in this hell filled with dense clouds of acrid smoke—bombed, shelled, and machine-gunned continuously, but still resisting, and still counter-attacking; sometimes single units have to repel ten tank attacks in a day. The nurses, after picking up the wounded, take them across the Volga in rowing-boats, for there is no building in Stalingrad large enough or safe enough to be used as a hospital. The wreckage of boats and ships, and dead soldiers and civilians, are floating down the Volga.

What a contrast with the bit of Russia where I spent these last few days!

I went with Maurice Hindus to Yasnaya Polyana. Our hostess, Sophia Andreyevna, Tolstoy's granddaughter, who is the curator of all the Tolstoy museums in the Soviet Union, received us with open arms. She said she loved to talk English; here in Yasnaya Polyana, she said, much English used to be spoken in Tolstoy's days—for the old man loved English books, particularly Dickens. She had seen a great deal of Tolstoy in her early childhood; he died when she was seven.

Sophia Andreyevna, who had been married to Essenin during the last months of his wild unruly life, which ended in suicide, is now about forty. Her family likeness to Tolstoy is astonishing: the same deep eye-sockets, the same eyes, the same "duck" nose—if you added a beard, you'd have the real article. The "museum" has been preserved in exactly the state in which it was when Tolstoy lived here—except that some of the things were evacuated before the Germans came, and have not been brought back yet, while others were stolen by the Germans. They had been here from October 30 to December 14; and if Tolstoy's house was not destroyed, it wasn't their fault; they did their best to burn it down. According to the official report:

"On December 14 the retreat of the Germans from Yasnaya Polyana began. As they were leaving, they set fire to the hospital and the dispensary, and to

the large secondary school just outside Yasnaya Polyana. The bandits also tried to burn down L. N. Tolstoy's house. After the German units had cleared out of the country house, there suddenly drove up in a passenger car three staff officers. Each carried a small can of petrol. They broke into the house, and in three rooms—in the library, in L. N. Tolstoy's bedroom, and in his wife's bedroom—they made three bonfires of straw, hay, and various wooden objects, and poured petrol over them. In Tolstoy's bedroom the bonfire was made on the spot where his bed used to stand. Fortunately, all this was done in a great hurry; the Nazis were afraid of being cut off, and, without waiting to see the results of their work, they drove away. As soon as they had gone, the museum workers immediately proceeded to save the house. There was no time to lose. But there was no water. The Germans had destroyed all the anti-fire equipment. With great difficulty the museum workers succeeded in drawing water from an abandoned well."

We drove there along the road from Tula—that Tula which had sustained a nearly two months' siege last winter, with only a narrow bottle-neck in the north connecting it with Moscow. But now the streets of Tula were busy and almost normal again. Crowded tramcars were running past the old Kremlin walls; crowds of children were returning from school with their notebooks; a line of peasant carts, filled with sacks of grain, was standing outside a big flour mill; and there was a pleasant provincial calm in the side-streets, with their small wooden houses, each with a vegetable garden at the back, and pots of geraniums on their window-sills. Smoke was belching from the factory chimneys—successors of those iron foundries of Tula which were almost alone in supplying arms to the Russian Army in 1812. The people of Tula, proverbially tough, humorous, and famous for their craftsmanship—their craftsmanship in guns and firearms and *samovars*—now recalled the grim days of the siege, and had numerous stories of bravery to tell. Comrade Zhavoronkov, the head of Tula's defence, had become one of the legendary figures of this battle; and at Tula the local Komsomols—both lads and girls—had fought with particular distinction.

It occurred to me that Tula, like Leningrad, had a strong all-round local patriotism which Moscow largely lacked. In Moscow there were too many "outsiders."

Now there were still barricades and tank obstacles in the streets of Tula, but because the anti-aircraft defences were so good, or the flying weather so bad, the town had suffered surprisingly little damage, except from shelling. Only on the western outskirts, on the road to Yasnaya Polyana, were there many wrecked and burned-out houses.

Though only 150 miles south of Moscow, there is a feeling of the South in the Tula province. The rolling landscape, with few conifers, and mostly oaks, birches, beeches, willows, ashes, lime-trees, and those maple-trees which have the most beautiful of all autumn tints, has the mellowness of the south of England landscape. Readers of Tolstoy and Turgeniev know this landscape well. Tula itself, and the villages around it, were lucky indeed to have escaped German occupation by the skin of their teeth. It is a different story in those villages which were occupied; here the wounds are now being healed; and many will not be healed for a long time.

Some ten miles beyond Tula, we turned off the main road to the right. Now, to the left of us, we saw the large shell of the burned-out school of Yasnaya Polyana; then, a little way down the road on the right were the two famous white pointed pillars of the gate, and patches of white gleamed through the trees—*there* was Tolstoy's house.

It looked normal—as if nothing had happened here; it looked just like this on the old photographs showing Tolstoy and Chertkov and Andreyev and Aylmer Maude, or any of the other Yasnaya pilgrims, sitting on the bench outside, posing to be photographed in the Master's company. The glass terrace at one side of the house, where the family and guests would have tea in summer, was also the same as ever. Yet in December Yasnaya Polyana had been a scene of devastation; German officers had lived here, and had made a foul mess of everything.

The vaulted room on the ground floor, where *War and Peace* was written, had been turned into a "Casino"; they used to have drunken orgies at night here, and the word "Casino" was written up on the door. Of the twelve cows at the dairy, they had slaughtered nine—slaughtered them in the yard, outside the house. They had also destroyed the apiary, in which Tolstoy had taken such an interest; they had poured hot water into the beehives. But now the Government had sent new cows to Yasnaya Polyana, and neighbouring *kolkhozes* had replaced the old beehives, and Sophia Andreyevna proudly treated us to the produce of a restored Yasnaya Polyana. Only in the three rooms was the floor still half-burned, and many things were missing; but, on the whole, the house was in full order again. We looked at the visitors' book—here were two entries—one by "*Drei erste Deutsche im Feldzuge gegen Russland*" and another—the signatures of two *émigré* quislings attached to the S.S. divisional headquarters stationed for a time at Yasnaya Polyana school—one was (prince) Vassili Svyatopolk Mirsky, the other "Alexander Demidov from the Crimea." We talked to an old lady who had lived in Tolstoy's house while the Germans were here. Her conversation with the German officers consisted of two words—"Museum, museum, museum—nein, nein, nein," and she screamed so loud that it was not entirely without effect. Many of the Germans, she said, did not know who Tolstoy was—one had asked: "What was he—a Communist? A Jew?"

She commented on their incredibly filthy habits; they relieved themselves just outside the house, and when the thaw came, the stench was terrible. And when the weather was very cold they did it on the floor of one of the rooms. (The Tolstoy family made use of a privy in the back garden, and there was no lavatory in the house.)

Half a mile from the house, deep in the beautiful wood, was Tolstoy's lonely grave. So to keep him company, the Germans had buried their own dead around his grave; they did it very deliberately; for the ground, full of the roots of old trees, was least suited for digging. Around Tolstoy's grave were seventy-five crosses marked: "*Für Grossdeutschland gefallen.*" When the Russians returned, they chucked the frozen bodies out, and threw them into bomb-craters in the neighbourhood. There were eighty-three bodies under the seventy-five crosses, and as an old coachman, who had known Tolstoy, said to me: "They swindle even their own dead."

"What was much worse even than the material damage they caused," said Sophia Andreyevna, "was their complete cynicism, and their deliberate policy of insulting our people—take the case of Tolstoy's grave. The mental depression that their presence caused was the worst thing of all. Down in the village, their nauseating physical presence, their idiotic hee-hawing, more even than their looting and their acts of violence, are what the people remember most deeply."

We went down to the village. First we looked at the ruins of the school. It was an enormous building, built in 1928 to commemorate the Tolstoy Cen-

tenary. It had six hundred pupils. Now nothing was left but its shell. The Germans had burned it before leaving. Alone among the rubble there remained standing, on the burned-out staircase, an enormous statue of Tolstoy. Made of plaster, it did not burn. The stern bearded old man was looking down on all this devastation, wondering perhaps what all this "non-resistance to evil" really meant. Outside the school stood two smaller statues, of a pioneer boy and a pioneer girl; both had their arms broken off, no doubt as a last good-bye from the S.S. men who had lived in this school for six weeks.

In the village we went to one of the cottages, where we saw a young woman with a sad face; her husband had been hanged here, in the village. The Germans had suspected him of having punctured the tyre of one of their bicycles. They had hanged him along with another man, whom nobody in the village knew. On a bed, in the dark corner of the room, a child was sleeping. The woman told how she had gone away to another village to visit her sister a few days before her husband was hanged. And she told the wild tormented story of her homecoming that day, when she had heard the news. Twice the Germans had stopped her on the way, and ordered her to peel potatoes for them. As she spoke the child woke up, and as we sat in the dark hut, her story was being interrupted by the child's pranks and laughter; she was a little girl of three.

Then the hanged man's mother arrived. She was a stronger character than the wife; she had seen it all happen, and now she told coherently and firmly how it happened. She told how the Russian troops retreated, and then how the German tanks came into the village. And soon after, there was a knock on the door of this hut, and a German with a torch said: "Six men will live here." "They came and lived here," she said. "They were rough and coarse, but the Finns—for two of them were Finns and four were Germans—were even worse. The moment after they took him away, one of the Finns, with a leer, told me they were going to hang him. I pushed him aside, and tried to run after my son whom they were taking away; but he knocked me down, pushed me into the small store room and locked the door. Later a German came and unlocked the door and said: 'Your Kolya's *kaput*.' He and the other man remained hanging there for three days, and they would not let me go near them, and I could see them, out of this very window, swaying in the wind. It was a Finn who hanged them; the Germans used him as their chief executioner. Only three days later did the Commandant allow the bodies to be taken down. They were brought into this room, and laid down, right here, where you now sit. I untied their stiff creaking arms, and as they began to thaw, I washed the sweat and the dirt off their poor faces. And so we buried them."

Sitting there in the dark hut, with only a small oil-lamp burning under Stalin's picture torn out of some magazine, the old woman now wept softly. She said she had four other sons, all at the front, and showed us the letter of one of them, and kissed it piously; and said that one of the sons "was not writing any more." And in the dark corner of the hut the younger woman wept, and kissed and slapped, and then again kissed the hanged man's unruly laughing child.

WENDELL WILLKIE IN MOSCOW

In September Wendell Willkie visited Russia among so many other countries, during his trip round the world as President Roosevelt's personal representative. He was received by the Russians with great cordiality, and

made a fuss of. Photographs of him in the company of Stalin and Molotov appeared in every newspaper, and political capital was made both of his visit and of the statement he issued at the end of his stay in Moscow. His visit and his remarks, and especially his more or less apocryphal remarks, caused a great deal of annoyance in London, and also in some American quarters—not least at the American Embassy in Moscow, where Admiral Standley resented not so much Willkie's general attitude, as the eclipse he (the Ambassador) was continuing to suffer as a result of all these visits from super-ambassadors. Harriman had come with Churchill in August, and now Willkie had come as another representative of the President.

Personally, I found Willkie very refreshing. At the first Press conference he gave, he made a number of points:

He had visited a number of Russian war factories, accompanied by American interpreters only; he had talked to all sorts of people and had asked all kinds of questions—even "What kind of régime do you want after the war?" He had found that there was no discouragement in Russia, no defeatism, no desire to pack up (which was what some Americans thought). The arms factories he had seen were, he said, as good as anything in Detroit. It was high time, he added, that the Americans developed a proper respect for the Russians—not only for their fighting qualities, but also for their organisational qualities.

He dwelt on our terrible shipping losses, which were now only a little less than in June, and had tried to explain to the Russians what our difficulties were.

On the situation in Egypt Willkie took a fairly optimistic view. General Montgomery had taken him round and had *repeatedly* assured him that Egypt had been saved; the last German offensive was genuine, and the Germans had got pushed back, losing 100 tanks and much else. Montgomery had said to him that if Rommel did not retire to the desert he would be annihilated.

Willkie suggested on several occasions that President Roosevelt was all in favour of the Second Front this year, but that the British generals were against it—and also Churchill himself. That was the real explanation of the "Second Front communiqué" problem. Such remarks, and some worse ones, were, of course, duly reported to London, and caused a great deal of feeling in Whitehall against Willkie. The remarks he was to make after visiting India annoyed Churchill even more.

Willkie, who had here as his assistant Joe Barnes of the *New York Herald-Tribune*—a man with a very good understanding of Russia, and a great deal of sympathy—lived in great luxury at the Soviet Government's guest house in Ostrovsky Lane. He had a very full programme every day, and began his conversations at breakfast.

He asked me to breakfast at 8 o'clock on September 26, just after his return from his front trip in the Rzhev area. He came down to breakfast wearing a smart blue silk dressing-gown, with white spots, and was the picture of health and vigour. He looked like a man who would live to the age of ninety. How great his personal charm was everybody knows. The

Russians were certainly doing him proud: for breakfast he (and his guests) had *caviare* and ham, and grapes (the first I had seen in Moscow that year), and real good coffee (also the first I had seen).

"It's a tricky problem I am up against," said Willkie. "How is one to explain to the American public that the Russians are in a very grave situation, but that their morale is first-rate for all that, and that they are determined to go on with it?" He agreed that the Russians were suffering terrible losses, that the country was full of appalling personal tragedies, but at the same time, he said: "If I were to repeat the wild talk I heard yesterday at dinner from Simonov, Ehrenburg and Voitekhov, with all their abuse of the Allies, I think it would make a very bad impression in the States. After all," said Willkie, "I am deriving a good deal of satisfaction at the thought that things are not quite as bad as one imagined they might be by now. Egypt is okay; the Russians are holding out, and even Stalingrad is still in their hands. I don't mind telling you that when I was leaving Washington five weeks ago, the President told me: 'I've got a very great regard for you, even though we have differed politically in the past. I think you are Private Citizen Number One. And I just want to warn you. I know you've got guts, but remember, you may get to Cairo just as Cairo is falling, and you may get to Russia at the time of a Russian collapse.' " I suggested that the President was not perhaps being as competently informed from Moscow as he might be; to which Willkie nodded. Speaking of the Second Front, he again suggested that it was the British who had insisted on its postponement; he could appreciate the arguments on both sides; but still he thought it was taking a terrible risk to postpone it till 1943; for what if Russia's offensive capacity were to be reduced to nothing? (Which, incidentally, suggests that the big secret of the Russian counter-offensive at Stalingrad was not whispered in Willkie's ear—though it probably was in Churchill's fully a month earlier; it was no use spoiling Willkie's Second Front fervour!)

That same afternoon the Anglo-American correspondents gave a cocktail party in Willkie's honour; it was here that he produced his celebrated statement.

After saying all that he had seen in the Soviet Union—and he had seen it all as freely "as though he had been making a similar trip through the United States"—Willkie went on:

"Here in Russia you realise the real meaning of the phrase. 'This is a people's war.' It is the Russian people . . . who are resolved to destroy Hitlerism. What they have been through and what they face in the months ahead cannot help but stir any American.

"Five million Russians have been killed, wounded, or are missing. At least sixty million Russians . . . are now slaves in territory controlled by Hitler. . . . Food in Russia this winter will be scarce, perhaps worse than scarce. Many of the Russian coalfields have been conquered. Fuel will be little known this

winter in millions of Russian homes. Clothing, except for the army and essential war workers, is nearly gone. Many vital medical supplies just don't exist."

After a tribute to the work of Russian women, the statement went on:

"Such is Russia to-day, with a bitterly long winter just ahead. *Yet no Russian talks of quitting.* . . . He knows what has happened in Nazi-conquered countries. The Russian people have chosen victory or death. They talk only of victory. . . . I have kept asking myself. 'What is the most effective way we can help to win the war by helping these heroic allies?"

"Personally, I am now convinced that *we can help them by establishing a real Second Front in Europe with Great Britain at the earliest possible moment our military leaders will approve. And perhaps some of them will need some public prodding.*"

"Public prodding"—that phrase started a great deal of trouble—for Willkie. The Russians took him at his word, and the "prodding" in the Soviet Press became much more outspoken even than before. British "stick-in-the-mud" Blimps, exactly modelled on Low, made their first appearance in Soviet cartoons.

Churchill was very angry with Willkie.

The Willkie statement continued:

"It is easy to sit in comfort in America and read about Russians dying by the thousands to hold Stalingrad. But I found it difficult to explain to one Russian soldier, for example, at the front, why England and America are not ready now to fight in Europe in direct attack on Germany. He wasn't impressed with the risks our experts had pointed out to me."

(He certainly must have received some "prodding" himself during that visit to the Rzhev Front; after our experience at Pogoreloye it was easy to visualise!)

In conclusion, Willkie said that "we also need to do other things"; send more armaments to Russia; "build a bridge of supplies to Russia"; send more food and medical supplies; and, last, but not least:

"We can help by going all-out immediately with giant bombing raids on Nazi cities. Russian intelligence reports show that our few raids to date have had a devastating, demoralizing effect on the German people. Russia wants 1,000-plane raids on Germany from England every night. . . . If we do all this . . . we shall still be in debt to the Russian people for what they have done and are doing to stamp out Hitlerism. The Russian people are turning impatiently to America to-day for hope and aid. We must not fail them. If the Russian front is our front and the British front, as surely it is, every Nazi killed to-night at Stalingrad is one less Nazi trained to kill one of us in some other sector of this global war."

Willkie had great personal charm, and he went down extremely well in Russia; he was also a great showman. I had seen him at the performance of Shostakovich's Seventh one night; and I wanted to put his showmanship to the test on that occasion. "What do you think of it, Mr. Willkie?"

His reply was superb. Rather than say any short or long platitude, he said nothing. He merely raised his eyes and arms to heaven in a gesture of ecstasy.

MORE ABOUT OLGA

September 28

Stalingrad is still holding out, and the impression is gaining ground that it may well hold. The Germans, it seems, are no longer even trying to capture it at one swoop, but simply to slice it up like a sausage—and that will take some doing. A lot of people in Moscow think that if Stalingrad holds for another six weeks, the Germans may have to pull out of the Caucasus.

Very pleasant afternoon yesterday; the weather was extraordinarily warm and sunny for this time of year. I met Olga and Natasha in the park outside the Bolshoi Theatre, and walked up with them to the Ermitage. Both were nicely dressed in summer clothes, and had specially gone home to change before coming out. They had been up since 6 a.m., this being a *voskresnik*—a working Sunday without pay. They and other Komsomols had spent the day unloading timber barges for the factory. The factory had supplied lorries for the timber (which was rather better than the experience of one person I know who, to get her timber ration of thirty-two cubic centimetres delivered to her house, had to pay a little man with a wheelbarrow 60 roubles for the job). The girls were very proud of their day's work, especially giggly Natasha, who said she had exceeded her norm by 170 per cent. We sat about in the Ermitage garden which, despite the lovely weather, was almost deserted. Olga talked about her family, either dispersed or dead, except for her mother; her kid sister, still at home, was training to be an ack-ack observer outside Moscow. Of her two dead brothers she spoke very calmly. The third brother, still in hospital, had, until recently, sent his mother 800 or 900 roubles a month; and the old woman also received an allowance of 290 roubles for her four children in the army. "And, of course," said Olga, "I also contribute 600 or 700 roubles a month to the home budget. So one can live, considering that I get most of my food at the factory."

"We get three meals at the factory every day," said Olga, "and the chief meal isn't bad at all: usually cabbage soup, then a meat dish, and then some stewed fruit or a glass of milk." Both Olga and Natasha were blood donors; for giving 450 grams of blood a month, they received an extra ration of butter and chocolate, and 275 roubles in cash.

I inquired about Tanya, the dark sulky girl with the pimply chin I had met at the factory dance. "We don't see her any more," said Natasha. "She was no good at her work on the Komsomol Committee; and I was asked to write a report on her work; I couldn't very well say it was good when it was really rotten, could I? She's just lazy. She was severely told off, and she cried a lot, and we haven't seen her since. Tanya is very lazy, and also very narrow-minded, and is nuts about what she calls 'good manners' and on 'how to behave in society.' "

"Do you believe in God, Natasha?" I said, as we were passing the dilapidated old church in the Petrovka on our way back. "No," she said emphatically. "If there were a God, would he allow the Germans to do what they are doing?"

Olga then talked about her recent acceptance as Candidate of the Party. She had sent in an application beginning with the words: "In these days of

the Great Patriotic War, I, the undersigned, a Member of Lenin's Komsomol since 1937, wish to devote myself to the service of the country, without sparing effort or life. . . ." She had had to be recommended by three Party members who had known her at her work for at least one year. The application, she said, was accompanied by a long questionnaire in which she had to give full details of her career, her social origin, her parents, etc. "I thought," I said, "social origin no longer mattered." "Well," said Olga, "yes and no; it does and it doesn't. Actually, it does. You really haven't much of a chance of entering the Party if your father was a trader or a *burzhui*." "What about churchgoers?" "Oh no," said Olga, rather scandalised at the idea, "that would never do. I know we have no objection to religion; but can you imagine a church-goer applying for membership of the Communist Party?" "He might." "Well then," said Olga, "he would be insincere either as a church-goer or as a Communist." Natasha said she used to go to church when she was a kid; but mostly during the Harvest Festival, for then at the church you got apples for nothing.

The application for becoming a Party candidate, said Olga, went through four stages: the Communists of your particular workshop, then the Communist Factory Committee, then the Committee comprising a whole group of factories, and finally the Raikom (the district Committee). "They ask you a variety of questions," said Olga, "and each of the four may turn you down. But once you have become a candidate, you become a Party member almost automatically after one year—though you've got to work very hard. You have tutorials once a week on political theory, on the history of the Party, on our relations with foreign powers, on internal and international policy, etc. If you do anything seriously wrong during your year as candidate, you may be turned down as a Party member, or even be dismissed as a candidate—but that's very unusual. Great personal discipline is expected from a candidate and a Party member; if you run around with men, you are apt to get into trouble."

The Moscow factories, said Olga, were beginning to have their own clothes shops for their employees; the Trekhgorka hadn't one yet, but it soon would, and then it would be easier; for you'd have coupons and buy things at government prices, without having to be constantly on the lookout as now. She was now receiving 200 coupons every six months, and it took fifty coupons to buy a dress; she had recently bought one at the Mostorg, but shoes were very rare and scarce, and any time a few hundred pairs appeared in the shop, they were snatched up in a few minutes; and you never knew when there would be another consignment. So since the war she hadn't been able to buy a single pair.

We got back to the Metropole and had supper. "What would you girls like to do in later life?" I asked. "I haven't thought of it at all," said Natasha. While Olga said very firmly: "I'd like to get married and have lots of children." "Would you give up your Party work?" "Oh no; the *crêche* would look after the children, and then I'd have them at night." Apart from all their other work, the two girls had been busy these weeks collecting winter clothes for the army, and also money, with which they bought things in the market. Then the factory sends off the clothes. The two of them had collected from various donors: four pullovers, several warm shirts and six pairs of woollen socks; which, they said, wasn't a bad haul, considering the shortage of clothes in Moscow.

After supper, Natasha sang a lot of army songs and various popular

favourites in her clear crystal voice, "*A kto yevo znayet*," and the rest of them. She is gay and bright and giggly; but Olga is more of a person.

September 29.

Even Skriabin, "degenerate," "decadent" Skriabin, has been passed for war service. Says *Pravda* apropos of Sofronitsky's latest piano recital:

"In the works of the great Russian composer (Skriabin), Sofronitsky discovers features which are particularly dear to us these days: a great nobility of thought and feeling, and a restless quest of the ideals of truth and beauty." Sez you. . . .

October 1

October! What will it bring? Hitler yesterday announced that Stalingrad would fall in a few days. . . .

CHAPTER IV

OCTOBER—PROPAGANDA LINES—MORE ARMY REFORMS—HESS—THE LAST WEEKS OF THE DEFENSIVE BATTLE

OCTOBER 1942 was, as Stalin was to say a year later, the month in which the danger to the Soviet Union was even greater than it had been at the time of the Battle of Moscow. October 1942 is particularly notable for two things: the Battle of Stalingrad reached an even greater intensity than before, and the danger of losing it became at times as great as it had been in the first half of September. Secondly, October was marked by an acute deterioration in inter-allied, particularly Anglo-Soviet, relations. The bad temper against Britain rose in a quick *crescendo* from the ill-tempered first Stalin letter to Cassidy, the Associated Press correspondent in Moscow, and the vicious Efimov cartoon against the British "Blimps," and culminated in the *Pravda* editorial, later in the month, on Rudolf Hess, and the "sanctuary for gangsters." What the possible reasons were for this extraordinary campaign will be discussed later.

At the beginning of October General Chuikov's Sixty-second Army continued to cling like grim death to those twenty-five kilometres of land along the Volga which constituted the Stalingrad front proper.

In the course of the month, this strip of land was to be reduced to almost nothing; to four narrow isolated bridgeheads. These held to the end. But in October, especially at the height of the mid-October offensive, it was touch and go, and Stalingrad was in the gravest danger.

How was Stalingrad presented to the Russian public at the beginning of October?—that October 1942 when the danger was "greater than ever."

It was not only in retrospect that it appeared to be so. It is characteristic that on October 1 Yaroslavsky, in a propaganda article in *Pravda*, should have used almost identical words. It is true, the article was entitled "The Certainty of Victory"; but it began with the words:

> The deadly danger hanging over our country in June 1941 has now, in the autumn of 1942, become even greater, with the enemy trying to break through to the oil of Grozny and Baku, threatening to capture our Verdun—Stalingrad, and with the Nazi hangman ruling over the destinies of tens of millions of people in the temporarily occupied territories.

For the rest, Yaroslavsky made out a case that the war would still be won, and gave for this the following reasons:

> Our strength is far greater than it was twenty-three years ago; that has been demonstrated by the results of the pre-October Socialist Competition in

industry and agriculture, and also by the great new increase in our army effectives.

In support of his argument he quoted Lenin's Letter to an American Worker, written in 1918, at the height of the Civil War:

> Our Soviet Republic is invincible because every new blow from the frantic Imperialists . . . rouses to battle more and more layers of peasants and workers. The lesson is taught at a terrible price, but it hardens them and it gives birth to a new *mass heroism*."

Yaroslavsky then took as his theme three of the points on "German weakness" made by Stalin in his November 1941 speech:

> First: Hitler's New Order is essentially unsound: there are the partisans in Jugoslavia, Greece, Norway, Poland and the occupied parts of the Soviet Union; there is sabotage in Czechoslovakia, Austria, France, Belgium, Holland and Denmark. All this is a factor of German weakness.
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> Secondly: Yaroslavsky tried to make the most of Germany's internal weakness, and in doing so, tried to paint a black as picture as possible (much too black on the strength of the available evidence).
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> "The German rear is still holding," he said, "but more and more people in Germany are becoming convinced of the inevitable rout of Hitlerism, of the doom of Hitler's régime. The overwhelming majority of the German letters to and from the front seized by the Red Army, speak of weariness, of a passionate desire to see the war end, of an indifference to "victories," and of the intolerable sufferings of the people, and the ever-growing hunger and poverty. The Nazis have failed not only in improving the food situation in the occupied areas, but also in Germany itself, despite the looting of occupied and satellite territories. The Nazis are feared in Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Finland, *and Germany itself*; in all these countries, wide masses of the people, crushed by hunger and terror, hate them."

This distinction between Nazi and anti-Nazi Germans seems incompatible with the Simonov-Ehrenburg "line" that every German is bad, but then a theorist like Yaroslavsky could not fully abandon the idea that there continued to exist "wide masses" of anti-Nazi Germans.

On this question there were, indeed, many zigzags in Russian short-term propaganda; but ideologically the conception of the anti-Nazi German was never fully abandoned, though even political theorists were naturally affected to some extent by the distressing unanimity shown by the German people in their active or tacit support of Hitler's war, and by the apparently complete absence of any anti-war sabotage by the German working-class.[1] The more short-term, purely "patriotic" propaganda, on

[1] It is significant that even among the Party doctrinaires there should, at that time, have been a strong streak of "Vansittartism." Interesting in this respect was Mitin's pamphlet, *Marx and Engels on Reactionary Prussianism*. After drawing a number of parallels between earlier German history and now, and demonstrating that many of the ideas expounded in the writings of Hitler and Rosenberg were already familiar to Marx, who denounced the "higher race" theory as long ago as 1859, Mitin wrote a truly "Vansit-

the other hand, tended to abandon the idea of the "good" German completely, and to out-Vansittart Vansittart. In the army, then as later, any prisoners' assertions that they were, or had been, "Social-Democrats" or "Communists" were nearly always treated with the utmost contempt and derision.

Thirdly, Yaroslavsky spoke of the strength of the anti-Hitler coalition; of the strength of American industry, now serving the war; of the great masses of American troops that were now being sent to Europe, of the great war reserves and equipment that were now being accumulated in Britain and the United States. "Although the absence of a Second Front," he said, "requires from us an effort two or three times greater for the defeat of the German-Fascist scoundrels, everyone can see how Allied strength is growing."

Other favourable factors were the increased experience of the Red Army, the Partisan movement, and the great expansion of the Soviet war industries. "But," he concluded, "while the conditions of victory are present, that in itself is not enough."

The obvious inference was that the Allies were not pulling their weight.

All this was, in some measure, tied up with Willkie. On October 4, the Press gave long dispatches from New York, the gist of which was that the Willkie statement had "pressingly revived the Second Front issue."

October 6 was marked by two significant events: the publication: (1) of a particularly vicious cartoon "prodding" the British generals, and (2) of Stalin's first letter to Cassidy. Closely copying Low, Efimov (who is himself a great admirer of Low) presented to the Russian public that notorious Low character Colonel—or rather General—Blimp. The picture showed the backs of several bald-headed and walrus-moustached Blimps sitting at a table and facing two dashing young soldiers—the cut of whose uniform seemed to be American rather than British. The Blimps were labelled (I give a rough translation) "General What-if-they-lick-us," "General Why-take-Risks," "General What's-the-Hurry," "General

tartite" passage in discussing Marx's and Engels's article *The Foreign Policy of Germany*.

"Imbued with profound love for the German people, but loathing all that was servile and reactionary in their history, *they wrote a fiery denunciation of the wretched conduct of the German people, who let themselves be used as the blind tools of reactionary ruling circles. They argued that if it had not been for its blindness, its slavish spirit, its fitness and readiness to play the part of lands-knechte and of obedient tools of the lords 'by the grace of God,' the name of the German would not be so hated, so accursed, so despised abroad.*"

Needless to say, there was, among the doctrinaires, as among others, in Russia, a profound disgust with the German *people*, and the German working class who were showing no initiative in resisting Hitler but were, on the contrary, helping him enormously. In comparing, in the course of the article, old-time German atrocities with the present German atrocities, Mitin—writing at the end of 1942—still apparently had no idea of the *real extent of the latter*. He was taking the trouble to show that the Nazis were *fully* as beastly as the soldiers of Frederick the Great.

Let's-Wait," and "General You-Never-Know"; the two young soldiers were labelled "General Guts" and "General Decision."

In his letter to Cassidy, Stalin answered his three questions as follows:

Q.: What place does the possibility of a Second Front occupy in Soviet estimates of the current situation?

A.: A very important place, one might say a place of first-rate importance.

Q.: To what extent is allied aid to the Soviet Union proving effective, and what could be done to amplify this aid?

A.: As compared with the aid which the Soviet Union is giving the Allies by drawing upon itself the main forces of the German-Fascist armies, the aid of the Allies to the Soviet Union has so far been little effective. In order to amplify and improve this aid only one thing is required: that the Allies fulfil their obligations fully and on time.

Q.: What remains of the Soviet capacity for resistance?

A.: I think that the Soviet capacity of resisting the German brigands is in strength not less, if not greater, than the capacity of Fascist Germany, or of any other aggressive power, to secure for itself world domination.

This, on top of the Willkie statement, acted as an incentive to criticise the Allies, and particularly Britain, with renewed vigour. Questions were raised which might have been raised long before, but which it was considered more suitable to raise now. As long ago as January 12, 1942, the Czechoslovak Ambassador, Mr. Fierlinger, and the French diplomatic representative, M. Garreau, had presented to Mr. Molotov a collective note on war crimes, with a request to the Soviet Government to issue an official warning on the subject. The note had been signed on behalf of the governments of Poland, Jugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and the French National Committee. Now, after more than nine months, came a reply in the form of a statement by Molotov. The real sting of the document was in its tail:

The Soviet Government considers it essential that any of the leaders of Nazi Germany who happens to be in the hands of States fighting against Hitler Germany be tried without delay by a special People's Tribunal, with all the rigour of criminal law.

This Note was published in the Press on October 15; on October 19 *Pravda* published a particularly violent editorial on Rudolf Hess.

So it now appears that Rudolf Hess arrived in England dressed as a German airman; that he is, therefore, no longer one of the chief war criminals, but may pass off as a "war prisoner." So it was enough for this notorious war criminal to dress up; for here is his chance of evading any international tribunal, of evading his responsibility for his countless crimes, and of thus *turning England into a sanctuary for gangsters*!"

That was bad enough; what followed was even worse.

One can hardly consider him a prisoner of war, in view of the special circumstances in which he arrived in England; but even if one could, what is there in international law that would prevent this man's trial for his grave

crimes? To take the view that Hess is not liable to be tried in wartime, is to close one's eyes to the crimes of one of the bloodiest of the Nazi criminals, *and to regard Hess not as a criminal, but as the representative of another State—as Hitler's envoy.* What other interpretation is possible? . . . It is not accidental, of course, that Hess's wife should have appealed to certain British representatives to be allowed to join her husband. It would seem from this that Frau Hess does not consider him as a prisoner of war. It is time we found out whether Hess is a criminal . . . *or the plenipotentiary representative of the Nazi Government in England, with all the privileges of immunity.*

Where the story of Hess's wife originated was hard to discover, and never received any confirmation. The article aroused violent resentment in England, and when this was realised in Moscow, the matter was no longer pursued.

But what were the possible reasons for this extraordinary outburst?

There seems little doubt that somebody fairly high up had worked himself into a state of hot or cold fury. The Second Front had not yet come off, and there was a widespread suspicion in Russia that there were strong political reasons for this. A few days after this editorial, Professor Yudin, one of the principal political theorists, gave a public lecture in which he spoke at great length of the "Cliveden Set" and "other pro-Nazi cliques" in England, and blamed them for not only doing their best to delay the Second Front, but for playing with ideas of a separate peace with Germany—at Russia's expense. Mr. Chamberlain and other ghosts of Munich were conjured up—ghosts which had never vanished completely from the Russian consciousness. Although the British Embassy, in all its contacts with the Soviet Government, begged them not to exaggerate the importance of "Lady Astor" (who was a sort of symbol, in the Russian official mind, of all that was wicked and pro-Nazi in England), the idea that "Lady Astor" mattered was very deep-seated.

It is possible that the Hess article was calculated to stir the British public into action; for the Russians knew how profound pro-Russian sentiment was in England at the time; but the article failed to produce any clamour on the Affaire Hess, but had rather the opposite effect; certain phrases in the editorial were strongly resented, and were considered as an undeserved affront to Mr. Churchill. The idea that Hess was a "plenipotentiary representative of the Nazi Government" was, after all, too silly.

One can argue that at that moment Russia was in a very tight corner, and that it was good internal propaganda to trot out "Lady Astor" and other scapegoats; but that seems an insufficient explanation in the light of what happened in January 1944; then, at the height of a successful Russian offensive (the German rout at Leningrad), and only a month after the Teheran Conference, a similar anti-British bombshell was produced in the form of the famous "Cairo rumour" of secret peace talks between "certain British representatives" and Ribbentrop.

It is possible that, in both cases, some rumour had, indeed, been planted on some Soviet representative in one of the neutral capitals, and that th old Munich ghosts leaped out of their hiding-places.

Also, there is reason for saying that as long as the "Lady Astors" are still going strong, or even exist, it is considered advisable, in Party quarters, to remind the Russian people that the Allies must not be trusted one hundred per cent, and that the danger of a double-cross is never entirely excluded. For it should be remembered that the Western Allies were *newly-found* allies, and that the idea of any lasting harmony between the Soviet Union and the West was still thoroughly *unfamiliar* to many high-ranking Party men, including some of the highest, without whose approval this campaign could, obviously, not have started at all. The Second Front delays were strengthening the fundamental dislike for the Western Powers that so many had felt (not without good reason) for the last twenty-five years.

Another reason for the periodic appearance of such violent and usually unjustified outbursts, is that sometimes tempers become frayed in high Party quarters over some irresponsible or mischievous article or Press campaign abroad (especially the systematic anti-Soviet campaigns in part of the American Press), and there is then an understandable desire to let off steam. It would be naïve to suppose that Stalin or Molotov, who are very busy men, are always consulted in advance on such matters—though in this case it was the Molotov Note that started it. But even in high Party quarters there is often an insufficient understanding of the reaction such articles are liable to produce abroad, and an under-estimate of the fact that every article appearing in the Soviet Press tends abroad to be treated as an official Government utterance, and that *Pravda* should not so easily "kick back" because, say, Mr. Hearst was the first to kick. But all this does not strictly apply to the Hess article, which concerned England, and not America; and in England, apart from resistance to the Second Front outcry, the attitude of the Press to Russia was, at that time, almost uniformly "correct," and, in most cases, wildly enthusiastic.

Nevertheless, the Hess article was the most violent outburst of its kind published in Russia during the whole war. There is one theory about it which deserves to be mentioned, though one cannot be certain that it has any solid basis.

It is this. Since the middle of August, and certainly since September, Stalin, if no one else, knew that the Allied landing in North Africa was going to be attempted in November. The vicious attack in *Pravda* on Britain marked, as it were, the climax of the whole Second Front agitation in Russia, which had abated somewhat after the Churchill visit in August, but gained in violence after the Willkie visit at the end of September, but which now, in October, was assuming proportions and a poisonous tone

that had not existed before. Was it not that, perhaps by agreement with the British, the Russians were deliberately giving the Germans the idea that there was nothing to worry about in the West, and that the Second Front, or anything like it, was definitely off, at least till next year? Certainly, the Hess article produced an almost unprecedented chorus of hee-hawing on the German wireless, and this continued right up to the Africa landings. If it was important to send the Germans to sleep while the final preparations for the Africa landings were in progress, then the Hess article certainly helped.

In that case Stalin—if he had anything to do with it—or Molotov must have authorised and encouraged the publication of the article very much with his tongue in his cheek; for, obviously, he was not going to break the secret of the Africa landings to anyone.

On the other hand, there is also this possibility: the bad temper was genuine, because even the one or two Russians who knew may have had doubts about the effectiveness of the North Africa landing and tended to underrate its importance. When all is said and done, it was, even at its best, not what the Russians had hoped for, and was not the "Second Front in Europe" which, at the time of Stalingrad, seemed so vitally essential; on the face of it, it was a poor second best to the Second Front in France. Later, when the landing had fully succeeded, the Russians took a favourable view of it, and became reconciled, for a time, to "Front Number One-and-a-half." But in October, there may have been some nervousness about the whole thing: was this "minor" landing worth all the risk it involved? For if it failed, then it would be a case of saying goodbye to the real Second Front for a very long time. The Big Risk, in other words, was worth taking for the Big Result (a landing in France); was it worth taking for a minor result like the Africa landing? It meant, for one thing, that the Allies were budgeting for a very long war, and that was a distasteful thought.

I have enumerated here all the factors and possible factors that may explain the outburst of bad temper against England in October 1942; what the immediate reason was for raising the Hess Problem can only be a matter of conjecture. My own impression is that it was a combination of suspicions, of a deliberate policy of "don't trust the Allies too much," and of great misgivings about Stalingrad; the Molotov Note and the Hess editorial appeared during the most critical week at Stalingrad. That the whole thing was simply calculated to bluff the Germans is another possibility; but personally I do not much believe in this theory—though it is the most pleasant of all.

STALINGRAD'S HARDEST DAYS

Stalingrad, in the meantime, was living through its most anxious month. I briefly outlined above the situation there at the beginning of October.

Stalingrad had, by that time, already become the great Stalingrad Legend.

On October 1, the *Red Star* editorial was significantly entitled: "The Heroes of Stalingrad," and said:

> It will soon be two months since the Germans have been frantically trying to break through to Stalingrad. Only in the last month have over one hundred general attacks of tanks and infantry been repelled. Not only is the gigantic battle not quieting down, but it is growing fiercer every day. But every day gives birth to new heroes.

The paper then proceeded to "build up" Rodimtsev's division.

> Every day Rodimtsev's men take it upon themselves to repel twelve to fifteen enemy attacks of tanks and infantry, supported by artillery and aircraft. . . . Not only with their brain, but with their heart, do these guardsmen know that no further retreat is possible.
>
> They defend to the last every street and every house, and at suitable moments they counter-attack. In one day alone they destroyed 2,000 Nazis, eighteen tanks, thirty vehicles; on the following day they burned or crippled forty-two tanks. . . ."

After quoting several cases of individual valour, *Red Star* went on:

> In street fighting, one of the most complicated forms of fighting, they know how to find the surest way to success. Small groups of soldiers, having thoroughly studied the action area, filter through to the enemy's flanks and rear, and knock out his gun, machine-gun and tommy-gun points. Thus Senior Sergeant Damylin penetrated into a street occupied by the enemy, climbed up to the attic, and having shot all the Germans manning the machine-guns, brought their two machine-guns back to his unit. . . . In every unit signalling, reconnaissance and constant observation is admirably organised. This enables the command to react very rapidly to the slightest change in the situation. . . .
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> Looking into the faces of these men, through the bloody mist of Stalingrad's fires, through the smoke of explosions and the clouds of earth, the country sees in them all the features that characterise real heroes. Among Soviet men there is no more honourable title than that of being a hero of Stalingrad. The enemy has brought more reinforcements to Stalingrad, and his pressure is increasing daily. *The most decisive stage in the Battle of Stalingrad has been reached.* But our men must hold out till the end; for there is nowhere left to retreat.

Not that the Rodimtsev Division was unique; far from it; but, at *that* time, it had, inside Stalingrad, the most *spectacular* achievements to its credit; and, above all, a *name* which would capture the people's imagination was needed, just as it was in 1941, when Zoya was "built up." But

with so many others distinguishing themselves at Stalingrad, the *special* glorification in the Press of Rodimtsev was not kept up for very long.

The motto at the head of *Red Star* on October 3 was a quotation from Suvorov: "In war, do what the enemy regards as impossible."

It was an apt quotation, on the eve of the biggest of the Stalingrad battles.

On October 5, the Germans continued their attacks against the Workers' Settlements on an intensified scale. On the previous day, the Russians had scored some local successes through counter-attacking, but the communiqué on the 5th said: "The Germans started a new offensive in the Workers' Settlement area with three infantry divisions supported by 100 tanks, and much aircraft."

And on October 6 the *Red Star* correspondent from Stalingrad wrote:

The defenders of Stalingrad have spent the last two days in continuous battles of exceptional violence. They are fighting stubbornly for the city under the most powerful artillery and mortar fire, under the ceaseless howl of air-bombs. The Germans are trying with all their might to break into the streets of the town. Every square metre of ground the Nazis occupy costs them tens of lives. Probably nowhere have the Nazis had to pay such an extravagant price in blood for every inch of ground as here. But the German High Command is refusing to take account of the number of soldiers and officers killed, or the enormous losses in tanks, guns and machine-guns, and is throwing more and more new divisions into Stalingrad.

Over mountains of their own corpses the Germans are pushing on. If they advance at all their advance per day can be measured in tens of metres.

From early morning on October 4, the artillery barrage never ceased. In large groups German aircraft attacked our positions unceasingly. During the day the Germans carried out 1,000 sorties over the industrial part of Stalingrad. After that the Germans started their offensive with large forces of tanks and infantry.

Stubbornly our men fought for every metre of Soviet ground, but the forces were unequal, and towards evening the enemy succeeded at enormous cost in breaking deep into the Workers' Settlement. A dangerous situation arose.

However, the correspondent went on, that very night reinforcements were brought up, and during the night they counter-attacked, without giving the Germans time to consolidate the newly captured positions.

All day yesterday our units continued to attack, and in the end the Nazis were thrown back to their starting-point. Comrade Rodimtsev's Guards Division, so hardened in battle, is fighting with ever-growing stubbornness. Its call to hold Stalingrad at any price has been responded to by the soldiers and officers of the other units. The defenders of Stalingrad are convinced that despite all hardships and ordeals they will rout the German hordes at the gates of the great city.

But these German attacks continued, and it was during the next few days that the Germans recaptured Mamaiev Hill. But after that, there was

something of a lull. It continued three or four days. The Germans were preparing for the greatest attack of all. And this they launched on October 14.

Later, in relating my own visit to Stalingrad, I shall recall what General Chuikov himself said about that day, which, he declared, had been the most terrible of all. Sixty-one officers and men in Chuikov's headquarters were killed that day. The vibration caused by the ceaseless explosions was such that inside dugouts a glass tumbler would break into a thousand pieces with the vibration alone. According to Chuikov the Germans succeeded in advancing during that first day one kilometre—a terrible distance according to Stalingrad standards—but their losses had been so heavy that their advance on the following days was halted, or almost halted.

Without being specific about what was happening in Stalingrad during those days, the Press made no secret of the extreme gravity of the situation, and of the unprecedented fury of the German onslaught against the northern part of Stalingrad.

It specified, in effect, that the "one kilometre" lost was the area of the Workers' Settlements, and that the "front" now ran right through the area of the factories themselves, only a few hundred yards from the Volga. What it did not say is that at two points inside Stalingrad itself, the Germans had broken through to the Volga, and had captured, among other things, the great Tractor Plant.

The communiqué of October 14 made no particular reference to the new German offensive. But the *Red Star* correspondent wrote that day:

> The enemy is again making a desperate effort to capture the northern parts of the city. The bloody battles in this part continue unceasingly. After a lengthy artillery and mortar barrage, the Germans hurled themselves with large forces against the lines which are defended by a certain Guards Division.

The communiqué on October 15 was still fairly reticent:

> Ferocious fighting, with two infantry divisions, 100 tanks and large numbers of aircraft on the German side, is continuing in the Workers' Settlement. Our soldiers are heroically repelling the enemy attacks. At a heavy price the enemy gained some ground in some sectors. Forty-five German tanks were knocked out and 1,500 Germans killed.

But the *Red Star* correspondent was more explicit and on October 16 the communiqué itself sounded highly alarming:

> Our troops are fighting against numerically superior enemy forces. During the day . . . 43 German tanks were destroyed. After heavy fighting our forces abandoned one of the Workers' Settlements,

while a *Red Star* correspondent wrote:

> The Battle of Stalingrad is becoming more and more tense. The enemy is throwing in more and more reserves. He has made it his aim to capture the city

at any price. Not a step back! Every stone must become a fortress against which the onslaught of the bloody Fascists will be smashed!

And on the following day he wrote:

The two-month Battle of Stalingrad has now reached its highest peak. For three days now the enemy has been advancing in the northern part of the city, along the sector where the day before [meaning October 14?] he had penetrated into our lines. Furious battles are continuing in the sector of the Workers' Settlement. Having attained great numerical superiority the Germans are trying here by every means to widen their break-through. All day to-day the Germans bombed and shelled our positions. . . . Our soldiers are stubbornly defending every metre of Stalingrad earth. The danger now suspended over Stalingrad has increased their determination tenfold. The enemy is able to advance only in such places where he has achieved vast numerical superiority.

This was really the peak of the Battle of Stalingrad. For one might say that, while the situation continued to remain critical, by the 19th the very worst was over. For one thing, the weather was getting bad. Thus, the communiqué of October 19 said:

The enemy's principal effort was again directed against the industrial area. At one of the great factories the Germans shelled our positions for three hours, and then attacked with rather large forces. These attacks were repelled with well-co-ordinated fire. Air activity was limited owing to bad weather.

But not for long.

On October 20 a *Red Star* correspondent wrote:

Rain in the last two days has been hampering air activity. Nevertheless, the enemy is making desperate efforts to advance. He is afraid of the coming of autumn and is hurrying. In the last two days the enemy lost sixty tanks. There is again heavy fighting in the factory area. . . . At one point the Germans temporarily broke through to the railway [running parallel to the Volga, only about 200 yards from the river]. They are advancing in the neighbouring Workers' Settlement. Very heavy fighting continues at the walls of one of the factories.

This apparently referred to the Red October Works; and this large plant was indeed to become the real centre of the fighting at Stalingrad during the rest of the siege.

It should be explained here that the Red October Plant, at the foot of Mamaiev Hill, had by now become the main obstacle on the short-cut road to the Volga—the road running through the centre of the biggest of the remaining Russian bridgeheads—and, above all, to the main Russian communication lines across the Volga. If the Red October Plant had been completely lost, the Germans could have concentrated everything against the very last line of defence on top of the cliffs, and against the ravine, "the Gully of Death," running from there to the river bank, only a few hundred yards down. This Red October Plant was, indeed, the "direction

of the main blow." And it was during the critical days in the middle of October that Colonel Gurtiev's division was entrusted with the task of holding the Plant—or rather what was left of it. The Germans had, during their big drive in October, captured the adjoining Workers' Settlement and had broken right into the factory grounds. Colonel Gurtiev's famous Siberian Division, which was to become almost as famous as the Rodimtsev Division, took over in the nick of time.

Although exact dates and place-names are missing, the following reportage by the well-known Soviet writer, Vassili Grossman, the only professional author to have spent the entire Battle of Stalingrad on the spot, attached to Yeremenko's and Chuikov's headquarters, and who learned more of the Stalingrad Battle at first hand than any other writer, is worth quoting at some length. Written right on the spot, it is inevitably on the emotional side, but it is essentially true to life, though the horror of it all is suggested rather than specifically indicated. But to one who, like myself, saw the ruins of the Red October Plant, where every square yard of ground was like a scream of human agony, where earth and steel girders and bricks and human flesh and Russian and German uniforms seemed to be rolled into one monstrous ball, Grossman's story seems almost mild. But it tells of the kind of men who fought there; and it is a truthful story, and one of the few good first-hand accounts written about the men of Stalingrad.

No doubt, there were moments of animal fear and despair which at that time Grossman could not mention; but if such feelings had ever predominated, the results would not have been what they were.

THE LINE OF THE MAIN DRIVE

At night the Siberian regiments of which Colonel Gurtiev was Divisional Commander moved into position. There always had been something grim and severe about the plant, but nowhere in the world could a grimmer sight have been seen than that which met the gaze of the men on that October morning of 1942. The dark towering bulk of the workshops, the wet glistening rails already touched in spots with rust, the chaos of shattered goods trucks, the piles of steel girders scattered in confusion over a yard as spacious as a city square, the heaps of coal and reddish slag, the mighty smoke stacks pierced in many places by German shells—this was what met their gaze. . . .

The Division was ordered to stand fast in front of this plant. Behind it flowed the dark icy waters of the Volga. Colonel Gurtiev assigned two regiments to defend the plant itself and the third—the area abutting on a deep ravine running through the workers' cottages to the Volga. The "Gully of Death" the men and officers of the regiment called it. . . .

The Germans stabilised their efforts in the southern and central sections of the city, levelling the full weight of their countless batteries of mortars, thousands of guns and their air armadas against the northern section of the city, against this very plant situated in the heart of the industrial district. The Germans assumed that human nature could not stand such a strain, that

there were no hearts or nerves but would be subdued and give way in this frenzied inferno of fire and shrieking metal which shook the earth and rent the air like things possessed. Here was concentrated the entire diabolical arsenal of German militarism—super-heavy and flame-throwing tanks, six-barrelled mortars, armadas of dive-bombers fitted with screaming sirens, splinter bombs and demolition bombs. Here tommy-gunners were supplied with explosive bullets, artillerymen and mortar-gunners with thermite shells. Here was concentrated German artillery, anything from small calibre anti-tank semi-automatics to heavy long-range guns. Here night was as light as day from the glare of fires and flares, and day as dark as night from the smoke of burning buildings and German smokescreens.

"The line of the main drive"—no words are more sinister than these to the ear of a military man. In war there are no words more fraught with menace, and it was not for nothing that on that gloomy autumn morning it was Colonel Gurtiev's Siberian Division that was assigned to hold the plant and hold it at all costs. Siberians—they are a sturdy folk, dour, inured to cold and hardship, taciturn, sticklers for order and discipline, and blunt of speech. Siberians—they are a rugged folk, men who can be depended upon. In grim silence they dug into the stony earth with their picks, cut embrasures in the walls of the workshops, fashioned dugouts, bunkers and communicating trenches.

Colonel Gurtiev was a wiry man of fifty. In 1914 he left the St. Petersburg Polytechnical Institute, where he was a second-year student, to fight as a volunteer in the Russo-German War.

The Siberians moved into the great defence line, well prepared. The Division had been thoroughly schooled before it came to the front. Colonel Gurtiev had trained his men assiduously. . . . He had tested the staunchness of his regiments on the Stalingrad steppe. He had tested the endurance of his Siberians during their march to Stalingrad, when in two days they covered two hundred kilometres. Nevertheless, the Colonel peered anxiously into the faces of his men as they took up their position in the major defence zone—in the line of the main drive. Colonel Gurtiev also had confidence in the officers under his command.

Scarcely had the Division dug itself into the rocky Stalingrad soil, scarcely had the telephone wires been laid and the keys of the wireless transmitter connecting the command post with the artillery across the Volga begun to tap, scarcely had night given way to the light of dawn, than the Germans opened fire. For eight hours on end Junkers 87's dived and swooped over the Division's defences; for eight hours on end, without a minute's pause or respite, German aircraft came over wave after wave; for eight hours on end sirens howled, bombs shrieked, the earth quaked and the remains of brick buildings crashed; for eight hours on end the air was filled with clouds of smoke and dust, and shells and bombs whined their death song. Anyone who has heard the shriek of air heated to incandescence by acrid bombs, whoever has lived through a harrowing ten minutes' raid of German aircraft, will have some idea of what eight hours of intense bombing by dive-bombers means.

For eight hours on end the Siberians fired from all arms at German aircraft and, probably, something akin to despair must have seized the Germans when from this burning plant wrapped in a dark pall of dust and smoke, rifle volleys stubbornly continued to crack, machine-guns to rattle, anti-tank rifles to bark and anti-aircraft guns to emit their even roar. The Germans brought their heavy regimental mortars and artillery into action. The plaintive wail of mortar

bombs and the scream of shells added their note to the howl of sirens and roar of bursting aerial bombs. And so it continued until nightfall. In grim, brooding silence the Red Army men buried their dead. That was the first day—the house-warming. Never for a moment throughout the night did the German artillery and mortar batteries fall silent.

All night long the German artillery thundered, and no sooner had the sun risen above the battle-scarred land than forty dive-bombers appeared, and again sirens shrieked, and again a dark pall of dust and smoke rose above the plant, covering the ground, the shops and shattered railway-cars; and even the high factory chimneys were lost in a black cloud. That morning Markelov's regiment did not remain underground. Forestalling the German attack it emerged from its hide-outs, shelters and trenches, quit its stone and concrete bunkers, and assumed the offensive. The battalions moved over mountains of slag, over the ruins of houses, past the granite building of the works office, across the railway-track, and through the park in the city suburbs. And as they pressed forward the German air army released a veritable inferno over their heads. An iron wind struck them in the face and yet they pressed on and, undoubtedly, a superstitious fear must have seized the enemy: "Were they human beings these attacking men, were they mortals?"

Yes, they were mortal men. Markelov's regiment advanced one kilometre, occupied a new position and dug in. Only here, in Stalingrad, do men know what a kilometre means. It means one thousand metres, 100,000 centimetres. That night the regiment was attacked by overwhelming, superior German forces. German battalions, German heavy tanks moved down on the regiment's positions; German machine-guns emitted a hail of lead. Drunken tommy-gunners advanced with the stubbornness of maniacs. The story of how Markelov's regiment held its ground is told by the dead bodies of the Red Army men, by friends who that night and the following day and again the following night heard the rattle of Russian machine-guns and the explosions of Russian grenades. They were mere mortals and only a few of them survived, but they did their duty!

On the third day, the Germans attacked with even greater frenzy, for twelve hours on end.

Our artillery rendered the greatest service in repulsing the repeated German onslaughts. Wireless connected them with their batteries, and scores of powerful long-range guns on the left bank of the Volga breathed in unison with, and shared the anxieties, calamities and joys of the infantry. The artillery performed miracles. . . .

In the course of one month, the Germans launched one hundred and seventeen attacks at the regiments of the Siberian Division. There was one awful day when the German tanks and infantry attacked twenty-three times. And all twenty-three attacks were repulsed. Every day, except three in the course of that month, German aircraft strafed the Division for ten to twelve hours at a stretch. And all this on a front of one and a half to two kilometres long. But—an astonishing thing—the men did not falter, they did not go out of their minds, they did not lose control of their hearts and nerves, but became even sturdier and cooler. These taciturn, rugged Siberians grew even more grim and taciturn; their cheeks caved in; their eyes stared gloomily. Here, in the line of the Germans' main drive, in the brief moments of respite, no light

banter nor song, no music of accordions was heard. Men were labouring under a superhuman strain. There were times when they went without sleep for three or four days on end, and it was with a clutch at his heart that the Divisional Commander, grey-headed Colonel Gurtiev, when talking to his men, heard one soldier say softly: "We've got everything we need, Comrade Colonel: 900 grams of bread and hot meals brought up twice a day without fail in thermoses, but somehow or other I don't feel like eating."

Gurtiev loved and respected his men and he knew that when a soldier says: "I don't feel like eating," it really must be going hard with him. But now, Gurtiev had no misgivings; his men and officers had become steeled by a great and cruel experience. The defences were stronger and more efficient than ever. In front of the workshops a regular maze of engineering works had sprung up—dugouts, communication trenches, rifle pits. Fortifications had been pushed far forward beyond the workshops. The men had also learned to perform swift underground manœuvres—to concentrate or disperse, to pass from the workshops to the trenches and back by the communication trenches, depending on where the enemy aircraft struck its blows or where his tanks and infantry launched their attacks.

Together with experience came moral steeling. The division was transformed into a single organism working with singular perfection. The men themselves were not aware of the psychological changes that had taken place in them during the month they had spent in this inferno, in the forward positions of the great Stalingrad defence lines. It seemed to them that they were just what they had always been. In their rare free moments, they scrubbed themselves in underground bathrooms, they were brought their hot meals in thermoses as usual, and Makarevich and Karnaukhov, their faces lost in beards and looking like peaceful village postmen, continued under enemy fire to bring to the forward position in their leather pouches, newspapers and letters from far-off Omsk, Tiumen, Tobolsk and Krasnoyarsk villages.

Heroism had become part of the life, the style, and manner of this division and its men. Heroism became an everyday affair, a commonplace. There was heroism in everything—not only in the exploits of the combatants, but also in the work of the cooks, and in the work of the Red Cross nurses—high-school girls from Tobolsk, who dressed the wounds and brought water to wounded men in the height of battle. It would be seen in Klava Kopylova—the buxom, red-cheeked Siberian Staff typist who sat down to type the battle order and was buried under wreckage. She was dug out and moved into another bunker to continue her typing, but was buried and dug out for a second time; undismayed, she moved into a third dugout and finished typing the order.

At the end of the third week the Germans launched a decisive attack on the plant. Preparations for this attack were conducted on a scale the world has never witnessed before. For eighty hours aircraft, heavy mortars and artillery pounded the division's defences. Three days and three nights were one long chaos of smoke, fire and thunder. Then suddenly came silence, and German heavy and medium tanks, drunken hordes of tommy-gunners, and infantry regiments launched into the attack. The Germans succeeded in breaking through to the plant's grounds; their tanks roared beneath the walls of the workshops; they split up our defences and cut off the divisional and regimental command posts from the forward position. It would seem that, deprived of direction, the division was bound to lose its capacity for resistance and that

the command post, having come within direct reach of the enemy's blows, must be destroyed.

But astonishing to relate, every trench, every pillbox, every rifle-pit and every ruin turned into a stronghold with its own direction and own system of communications. Sergeants and privates took the place of disabled officers and skilfully and efficiently repulsed the attacks. At this dire and perilous hour, commanders, staff officers, turned their command posts into forts and themselves beat off attacks like ordinary privates. . . .

This battle, unparalleled in its ferocity, lasted for several days. It was fought not for individual buildings, but for every step of a staircase, for a corner in some narrow corridor, for separate machine tools and for the passage-way between them, and for the gas-main. Not a single man in the division yielded an inch of ground in this battle. And if the Germans did succeed in capturing some particular spot, it indicated that not a single Red Army man had survived. All fought like the giant red-headed tank driver, like Kossichenko, the sapper, —who pulled the safety rings from the hand-grenades with his teeth, his left hand having been shattered. It was as if the dead had passed on their strength to the survivors, and there were moments when ten resolute bayonets successfully held an area which had been defended by a whole battalion. Time and again the workshop passed from the Siberians to the Germans, only to be recaptured by the Siberians. In this battle the German attacks attained maximum intensity. Their onslaught in the line of the main drive reached its climax. It was as though having lifted too great a weight, they broke some spring that had brought their battering-ram into action. The curve of the German pressure began to subside. The Siberians had successfully stood this superhuman strain.

This account, from what others who were there have told me, was somewhat sentimentalised and toned down. The blood and horror of it all was greater, and as a test of human endurance it was even more astonishing than Grossman suggested. Even if these men did make it a rule to abstain from vodka, that was not typical of Stalingrad where, on both sides, "mental anæsthetics" like alcohol were used in a big way—naturally without producing the ordinary symptoms of drunkenness. Even so, among all the writing done on the spot, Grossman's account comes nearest to a close-up view of the men of Stalingrad. It was, indeed, natural—especially writing at the time for the Soviet public—for him not to dwell on the more horrible aspects of it all, of the blood and screams of agony, or those dismembered bodies which were still lying frozen around the Red October Plant and Mamaiev Hill when I went there a few days after the fighting had ceased. He dealt with the living, not with the dead.

From October 21 the Germans continued to attack with great violence, but now they attacked more and more in fits and starts, and also on ever-narrowing sectors; chief among these was precisely the Red October Plant.

They had not, however, abandoned hope of capturing Stalingrad even at that late stage, and after the only very limited success of their mid-October all-out offensive. The Russians were far from saying, even at the

end of October, that Stalingrad had definitely been saved; but there was, nevertheless, a strong feeling that if it had held out as long as this, it would hold out to the end; and inside Stalingrad the men had an inkling that "something" was being prepared, and that gave them fresh courage, and a physical and mental capacity to carry on. German morale, on the other hand, was now clearly on the down-grade.

A number of interesting "snapshots" of Stalingrad just at that time are contained in an article by Lidov in *Pravda* of October 21. He started his story with a picture of the southern outskirts of the city, which were singularly unlike the hell of the industrial area in the north—so much more "typical" of Stalingrad.

This is one of the southern areas of the city. It is being defended by one of our Guards divisions. At first sight, all is quiet here. We wandered about the quiet streets. Some of the houses are destroyed; other houses have all their shutters closed or their windows boarded up; their inhabitants have temporarily gone away—beyond the Volga. But some of the houses are inhabited. Children are playing in the streets, and, in the vegetable plots, their mothers are digging potatoes. The "Stalgres" power station, though riddled by shells, is still working, and has cut the current for the parts of the town occupied by the Germans, but is supplying light for some of the parts in our hands, including this southern part of the city. The people here sleep in their own beds, light their stoves and cook their dinner; they hang out their washing in the yard, and receive copies of the *Stalingrad Pravda*. From time to time those killed by a bomb or a shell are buried. But everything is relative in war. The people here are relatively lucky; they do not ask *how* it will end, but *when* it will end.

Lidov went on to say that the Germans in this part of the Stalingrad front were "very depressed and hungry," and he claimed to have seen a letter in which one of the Germans here had written how he had shot a dog but "had found it very skinny." The Russians, on the other hand, "get fish from the Volga fishermen." How different was all this, said Lidin, from the northern part of Stalingrad, where the whole fury of the German war machine had been let loose!

There is smoke over the city. From a distance it looks as if the city were alive, as if the great factories were breathing. But it is not the breath of life, but the breath of death. Since the terrible bombing of August 24 many small fires continue to burn. . . .

And now, at nightfall, you cannot see the smoke any more. You only see flames. In many places Stalingrad is still burning. Let it burn! We shall hold it, and make it rise from its ashes! Flares shoot up from the parts held by the Germans. In autumn it is hard to distinguish a tracer shell from a falling star.

What one wants is an artist who would paint the fairy-tale of Stalingrad at night, with its glow of gunpowder, magnesium and phosphorus; with that sky, a pattern of multi-coloured tracer-bullets; with those flares shining over the Volga. There are flares hanging like chandeliers over the river, while the Junkers attack the crossings. "They"—the Germans are simply "they" in Stalingrad Russian—"they" can see everything from their Junkers—the

barge, and the tug, and the cars assembled at the landing-stage. "They" dive once, twice, three times; the flares shine brightly, and for the barge there is no escape. Who is on the barge? New soldiers about to step on the sacred soil of Stalingrad; or children who are being evacuated from their caves? The sinister explosion of the bombs reverberates for a long time. Has a bomb hit it? The night is great and long. There will be many more ferries and barges, and many more Junkers. . . . And on the other side of the Volga, the next morning, people stop those who have crossed the river and they almost whisper into their ears: "How is it over there, in—Stalingrad?" "Stalingrad—oh, not so bad, you know. Holding out all right."

There were supposed to be twenty-two German divisions at Stalingrad, but they could not all attack at once. Most of them had to hold the flanks, and hold the "quiet" stretches of the Stalingrad Front—in the south, in the centre. In the biggest attack, on October 14, they used seven divisions; usually they did not muster more than three or four. The front was too narrow. When, after the relative lull of October 20 to 23, they started attacking in force again, they attacked with two infantry divisions which had eighty tanks. They attacked the factories, especially the Red October Plant that Gurtiev's Siberians were holding. The weather had improved, and they attacked with heavy air support. But, said the communiqué:

The German losses were heavy, and at nightfall our troops still held their positions. On a number of occasions it had come to hand-to-hand fighting. Only one small enemy group broke through to the fringes of a factory. The German losses were 1,500 dead and 17 tanks.

The situation remained difficult. On October 25:

The enemy again attempted to capture the heart of the city—its industrial part. In one sector, the Germans advanced two hundred to three hundred metres along one street, at very heavy cost to themselves. The battle to restore the situation is in progress.

The battle was not entirely limited to northern Stalingrad. In the centre of the city the house-to-house fighting continued daily; houses were captured, sometimes by local means, sometimes in much more elaborate ways. There was one five-storey house in German hands, and valuable to them as an observation post. From the top part of its shell they could observe the Volga and the Volga crossings.

Men of the Rodimtsev Division were told to capture it—those men who, in Rodimtsev's own phrase, had by now "entered into the rhythm of the battle"—so much so that the deafening roar of explosions had become to them as familiar a noise as the jingle and rattle of a tramcar. This capture of isolated houses was not always a glorified game of hide-and-seek. In this case it was something highly scientific and thorough. As Grossman wrote:

The plan for the storming of this house was highly elaborate, and full of minute details. In the plan of the house every room that had a sniper or a

machine-gun was marked down accordingly. Every detail of the front stair and the back stair was marked. The house was stormed with the help of mortar crews, grenade-throwers, snipers, tommy-gunners, the regimental artillery and the heavy artillery on the other side of the Volga. Everything was closely co-ordinated through signals, rockets, radio and telephone. (*Red Star*, October 27.)

On October 28, the *Red Star* correspondent reported "particularly heavy fighting in the industrial area of Stalingrad."

The enemy is now concentrating his main blows again in this area. Almost without a break, heavy bombs are being dropped on the factories. The enemy is attacking with superior forces. We are obliged to fight in difficult conditions. The enemy has not only superior strength, but holds more advantageous positions. (By that time the Germans held Mamaiev Hill again.) His communications are invisible from the ground. We have to communicate with the rear under the Germans' very noses. Even so, we are standing firm. But it is difficult. In the last twenty-four hours the Germans attacked the factories in even greater strength than before. They have brought up one more tank division and have been advancing with, altogether, four infantry and two tank divisions.

In short, the Germans were throwing in almost as much weight as on October 14—and on a narrower sector at that. There was, however, this minor difference in the Russians' favour: "Their air force," the same report said, "is less active, thanks to our reinforcements in fighter planes which prevent accurate bombing. Our Stormoviks and bombers are also more active than before."

On October 29 there was again heavy fighting, and more German attacks. In one place, the communiqué admitted, the Germans had gained 50 to 100 metres, at the cost of 1,500 killed.

But none of this was really getting the Germans anywhere; and on October 27 *Pravda* published a very curious survey of the German Press.

The extracts quoted certainly showed that the German High Command were becoming seriously embarrassed. Stalingrad was, more than ever, being represented as "the most powerful fortress in the world." The *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* was now saying that it was "nonsense to follow the Battle of Stalingrad by looking at your watch all the time," while the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* was beginning to whine and wail over the hardships of the German soldiers at Stalingrad. "A cruel battle is fought for every inch of ground; our soldiers, worn out, and with hollow cheeks, and their eyes red for lack of sleep, are praying for an end of the battle." And the *Danziger Vorposten* wrote: Stalingrad is a hell. The Bolsheviks are putting up desperately bitter resistance, with nothing to equal it," while one German broadcast said that Stalingrad was "surrounded by a ring of unapproachable forts."

The greatest cause of satisfaction of all was, however, this, and Alexandrov in a propagandist article at the end of October, made it his central theme:

The defence of Stalingrad has held up the Germans for three months. This

means that at Stalingrad the Germans lost *the most precious time which they had this year for offensive operations.* At Stalingrad they were unable to reach any *decisive success,* but they have lost the *decisive summer months of* 1942.

In other words, the terrible danger that the country felt in July and August had *already* been averted, at least (so it then seemed) for six or eight months; and what all might not happen in that period!

Stalingrad had made an enormous impression abroad; in Britain and America it had hit the front page every day for months. The perspicacious Max Werner was already saying that "the outcome of the war is being decided at Stalingrad"—which was too much even for Alexandrov, who said: "Perhaps Werner is exaggerating." The neutrals were becoming increasingly impressed. The Swedish Press was saying: "Stalingrad has ruined all the German plans," and the Turkish *Tan* declared:

> The Germans have lost 175,000 killed at Stalingrad. Even if Stalingrad falls, it will not make all that difference now. The German time-table has been completely upset. (Quoted by *Pravda,* October 31.)

During the first days of November, the Germans continued to attack in the northern part of Stalingrad. Elsewhere in Stalingrad, the Russians had begun to counter-attack in a fairly big way; thus on November 3 the evening communiqué said that the Russians had thrown the Germans "out of a number of fortified buildings." It is now known that, despite fatigue and serious losses and only very grudging reinforcements, the Russian troops at Stalingrad had been ordered to "activise" the front on its quiet sectors, so as to keep as many German troops as possible tied up. But the Germans also were attacking. On November 3 there were four or five attacks during the day, with forty tanks, and 2,000 Germans were declared to have been killed. There were still more attacks on the 4th and 5th. One report said that "the Germans are now losing about 1,000 dead daily in the northern part of Stalingrad." After a few days' lull, the Germans resumed very heavy attacks on November 11.

Reviewing the situation at Stalingrad in *Red Star* on November 3, L. Gatovsky wrote:

> The Germans' numerical superiority in the south enabled them to achieve substantial operational successes. But they failed in achieving their aims. The operational successes did not result in a strategic victory.
>
> They could not capture Stalingrad at one go, as they intended. A month after the opening of their offensive they reached the distant approaches of Stalingrad.
>
> But in the last two and a half months they have advanced only a few kilometres, and in some places only a few hundred metres. Having concentrated their main forces in the south, they could not advance on other sectors. Now, between Stalingrad and Novorossisk, they are attacking on only one-fifth of the entire front. They thought that the more they concentrated in the south,

the sooner would they carry out their plans, and then be able to start their attack on Moscow. But their troops were tied up at Stalingrad, and they could therefore not attack in the centre. *Now the summer is over, and autumn is nearly over, and the main German forces are still tied up in the south. The Germans wanted to gain time; instead, they lost time. Now, without having achieved their objects, they are facing their second winter in the Soviet Union.*

Their losses are great: dozens of their picked divisions have perished in the Stalingrad meat-chopper. One notices a difference already: after every series of big attacks the Germans need a long breathing-space, and since they have to take reinforcements from elsewhere, one sector after another of their front has to go over to the defensive.

Goebbels and Co., after raving about the most vital importance of Stalingrad, and promising its fall any day, have in recent days been saying that their objectives have already been attained, *and that it no longer matters whether Stalingrad is taken or not!*

But it's as clear as daylight how important it is for the Red Army to preserve the Stalingrad bridgehead. . . . The Germans, like desperate gamblers, are throwing in more and more of their troops to get it, and are ready to pay any price for every single house in Stalingrad.

Gatovsky then dwelt on the moral effect in Germany of the Stalingrad Battle; the Germans had hoped for an early end of the war. The importance of the human factor at Stalingrad was enormous.

He quoted, for example, the case of Lieutenant Kalashnikov whose sector, held by one platoon, was attacked by two companies of Germans. They were thrown back by the Russian tommy-gunners. On the following day 500 Germans attacked. Only eleven men of the Russian platoon were left alive. But still they held on. To break their spirit, the Germans sent over them forty bombers. Even then, when over this bomb-riddled piece of land the Germans attacked, they were still met with rifle-fire from a few wounded and dying men. "And now," he concluded, "100 metres cost the Germans more than ten kilometres two months ago."

And he added: "Our country has stood up to the enemy onslaught. Such pressure would have broken the back of Tsarist Russia, or any other country, except our Soviet country."

While the situation at Stalingrad did no longer inspire any very serious alarm, there were unfavourable developments in the Caucasus during that first week of November. The Germans, having failed to break through to Grozny at Mozdok, switched a large part of their forces to Nalchik, in the hope of breaking through to Vladikavkaz (Orjonikidze), and thence to push to Grozny from the south-west, and at the same time to secure a strong foothold at Vladikavkaz, the terminus of the Georgian Military Highway, along which they might, with luck, break through to Transcaucasia—in the spring. After heavy fighting, they captured Nalchik on November 2, and advanced as far as the outskirts of Vladikavkaz; but here the Russians had time to concentrate enormous quantities of artillery

which smashed the German vehicles and armoured columns advancing along a narrow valley; but that was not till November 19. After the fall of Nalchik, there was some anxiety over the Caucasus, and Ehrenburg wrote on November 5 a particularly alarmist article.

Apart from that, Moscow celebrated the 7th of November 1942 in a fairly confident mood. But, before discussing the peculiar background of that 7th of November, two sets of questions relating to October should be briefly mentioned—new army reforms, and the main propaganda line in October.

More army reforms, in addition to those rapidly introduced in August, were being studied, and some were already being introduced.

OFFICERS AND UNIFORMS

The type of the victorious Red Army officer, as he came to be known to the world in 1944–5, was evolving at the time of Stalingrad, the Red Army's greatest test.

Much thought was being given to the whole question. Korneichuk's immensely popularised play, *Front*, first published as a serial in *Pravda* in September, raised the whole question of the officer's character and technical qualifications.

This play, inspired, it is said, by Stalin himself, was an attack on easy-going smugness among officers and generals, and against mental sloppiness and slovenliness. Another matter under consideration in high army quarters was the question of physical slovenliness: the officer was a man whose prestige in the eyes of his subordinates, and of the world in general, had to be increased, not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Out of the flames of Stalingrad smart uniforms and gold braid emerged.

At the beginning of the war, the officer was badly dressed, often very slovenly about his appearance, and thoroughly plebeian, often scarcely distinguishable from a private, and especially an N.C.O. Gold-braided epaulettes and a whole code of manners were introduced in the early months of 1943. But the matter was already under careful consideration several months before. Finally, the officer's personal authority had to be heightened—through the abolition of the Political Commissar. This far-reaching measure was taken at the height of the Stalingrad Battle—on October 9. The dual command had, until then, and especially during the dark days of the retreat, created considerable friction, and in many cases, confusion.

First, about Korneichuk's *Front*.

The main theme of this play is the conflict between General Gorlov, Commander of a front, and his subordinate, Major-General Ognev, in command of one of the armies. Gorlov is an amiable man, brave, full of

guts, with a fine record dating back to the Civil War, but totally unsuitable for the highly elaborate warfare of to-day.

He pokes more or less good-natured fun at the "specialists" and proudly claims: "I've never gone through any of your academies or universities; I'm not one of your theorist chaps, I am an old war horse." Actually, he is not an old man, but his Civil War record has made him complacent; he believes in personal bravery as the real secret of success. "We'll smash any enemy," he says, "not with wireless operators, but with heroism and valour." He is surrounded by toadying nonentities, who flatter him—men with none of Gorlov's fundamental honesty. Among them are Udivitelny, the head of his intelligence service, a completely incompetent man, Tikhi, the editor of the front newspaper, Krikun, a war correspondent, and Khripun, the liaison officer. They are all drawn in a very satirical vein.

The central figure in the opposite camp is Ognev, a thoroughly modern young general, with a mastery of modern warfare. He is supported by Gorlov's brother, a director of a large aircraft factory, and worshipped by Gorlov's own son. The atmosphere in Gorlov's headquarters is thoroughly easy-going, with frequent parties, toasts and smug speeches. Ognev is disgusted, and Miron Gorlov, the front Commander's brother, who has come on a special mission from Moscow (where he discussed aircraft production with Stalin himself) at first shakes his head very doubtfully, and then reports to Moscow on the very unsatisfactory job his brother is doing. The central episode where the two schools of thought come to the test is a military operation which Gorlov completely bungles; then the situation is saved, at heavy cost, by Ognev's much clearer vision of the Germans' intentions; and by his far better organisation.

In the very first scene the following typical conversation occurs:

Gorlov (to Udivitelny, the Intelligence Chief): How many German tanks are there at Kolokol Station?

Udivitelny: Fifty, Comrade Commander.

Gorlov: Not more?

Udivitelny: Maybe they have brought up a few more in the last five days, but I shouldn't think so.

Gorlov: But Ognev here says they've got three hundred.

Udivitelny: How's that possible, Comrade Commander? I don't imagine they've got as many as five hundred along the whole front.

Gorlov (to Ognev): There you are!

Ognev: Then why are they bringing up petrol at such a rate to Kolokol?

Udivitelny: I couldn't say. I suppose they are preparing for the next offensive. They've got stores there, anyway.

Ognev: Who is in command of the Germans here?

Udivitelny: I really don't know. Before, they had that—what d'you call him; can't remember; difficult sort of name: anyway, Major-General Von Something-or-other. He was replaced. Who the present Von is, I couldn't say.

Ognev: What firing power have they got?

Udivitelny: Well, the usual four divisions—with a seventy per cent complement. Couldn't tell you exactly.

Ognev: Have they got any ski regiments?

Udivitelny: I don't suppose so. Maybe a few small groups. Why, the Germans weren't preparing for winter.

Ognev (*yelling*): God damn you! What the hell do I care what *you* think; what I want to know is what the Germans have actually got. Answer me: do you know, or don't you know!

Kolos (*Commander of the cavalry group*): Vòlodya, please. . . .

Gorlov: Why yell like this; this isn't the bazaar.

Ognev: You ask him, why he is lying like a carpet vendor at the bazaar. What the devil does he mean by "Maybe," and "I suppose so," "That's possible," "I don't imagine so." How can you issue any orders when that's all that your reconnaissance produces? What data have you? With the snowstorm raging for five days, what kind of data could you have got from your air reconnaissance? What else do you know? Nothing. And in these five days the Germans might have done any damned thing.

In the end, after a hard victory has finally been won, and disaster averted by Ognev, despite Gorlov's original orders, Gorlov is dismissed from his post. He is bewildered, but he begins to understand, and accepts his removal with good grace. In the course of the action, his son, one of Ognev's most devoted admirers, is killed. Gorlov is not treated viciously in the play; and whoever has seen *Front* at the Moscow Art Theatre will always remember the pathetic, almost Chekhov-like figure Gorlov cuts in the last act when played by the great Moskvin.

"Korneichuk's play calls for intolerance in our struggle against complacency, self-satisfaction, conservatism, boot-licking and flattery," says the preface to the Leningrad (1942) edition of *Front.*

Gorlov, surrounded by parasites and bootlickers, does not tolerate contradiction. Any criticism he takes as a personal affront. Some of his officers are only too glad to applaud his cracks about "military culture." The chief danger is that Gorlov is himself content to be ignorant and that he prefers the men around him to be ignorant. . . . And in the end not only Gorlov but his whole *entourage* disappears. Together with Ognev, new men appear on the scene, men who have been brought to the surface by the war itself, who have been tested by the war, and have learned to wage war according to modern methods. Ognev doesn't think the Germans are all that shrewd, as many of the other officers think. "No," he says, "they haven't invented anything particularly cunning. On the contrary, they don't take nearly as great advantage as they might of our stupidity."

The preface notes that the charge against Gorlov is not that he is old, but that he is ignorant, and that, since the Civil War, he has not taken the trouble to learn anything. . . . And it goes on:

The publication of Korneichuk's play is a sign of the Red Army's immense strength and vitality, for only an army that confidently looks into the future can afford to reveal its own flaws so sharply and directly.

No doubt the play was, to some extent, calculated to explain to a bewildered public the terrible setbacks of the summer of 1942, and to attribute them, at least partly, to "Gorlov" (by whom, however, as the Leningrad preface insists, nobody in particular is meant—"he is," it says, "a collective type, just as his acolytes are"), but it was also intended as a strong propaganda whip; being a somewhat "scandalous" and inconoclastic play (so rare in Russia), it attracted enormous attention. It was all the better—for, along with the "scandal," the listener also absorbed its moral: the play was in essence a dramatic and particularly digestible commentary of Stalin's words:

"All we lack is the ability to use to the best advantage against the enemy that first-class equipment with which the country supplies our army."

But, as I mentioned before, some Generals—and very much of the "Ognev" variety, such as Rokossovsky—were not pleased with the play at all. It used to be discussed at length among soldiers, and tended to produce awkward and disrespectful questions. The Party, however, felt that, on balance, the play was extremely useful. It was performed in practically every theatre of the Soviet Union. It was Russia's campaign against her own brand of Blimps.

An important reform was that contained in the *ukase* of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of October 9, concerning the establishment of complete Single Command and the abolition of the Institution of Political Commissars in the Red Army. Until then, every army unit was under dual control, that of the officer and that of the Political Commissar. In practice, the officer could seldom take any decision without consulting the commissar. The commissar was in charge of the political education of the soldiers, and acted as a sort of chaplain among them. He was consulted on every conceivable question. His function was useful; but in a large number of cases, particularly during the hard weeks of the retreat, it did not contribute to smooth relations inside the unit. The *ukase* explained that there was now no further need for political commissars; they had been originally introduced in the days of the Civil War to keep an eye on the officers, many of whom belonged to the old army, and who "did not believe in the strength of the Soviet régime, and were even alien to it."

In the years that followed there had been an enormous increase in the number of new Soviet-trained officers, and during this war, "an enormous number of new and experienced officers have emerged; they have acquired the greatest experience and have proved their devotion to our country, and have grown in stature both militarily and politically."

On the other hand (the *ukase* continued), the army commissars and political workers have greatly increased their military knowledge, and have acquired

an immense experience of modern warfare; part of them have already been given commanding posts and are successfully commanding the troops under them; others may be employed as officers right away, or after a certain period of military training. . . . In the circumstances, there is no longer any reason for having political commissars in the Red Army. What is more, a further existence of the Institution of Political Commissars may act as a brake in improving the command of the troops, which would, in itself, place the commissars in a false and awkward position. The time has therefore come to establish complete Single Command, and place upon the Officer the sole responsibility for all the work connected with his troops.

Thus, the dual control was abolished; not that this meant the end of political work in the army; far from it. The commander's deputy was his "deputy in the political field": he was also an officer, usually of junior rank, and was in charge (among other things) of questions of political education among his unit, propaganda, etc. But the important thing was that he could no longer interfere with the officer's decisions, least of all with his operational decisions.

One of the great practical advantages of this reform, at the time of Stalingrad, and after the terrible losses suffered since the beginning of the war in the officers' *cadres*, was the enormous increase, in a very short time, in the number of new officers, drawn from the ranks of ex-commissars, who were in most cases greatly experienced in war.

The *ukase* provided for all this, and replaced the institution of army commissars and political instructors (the opposite numbers of the N.C.O.'s) by the institution of "deputy commanders in the political field in army units, staffs, sub-units, military schools, in the central and principal offices of the People's Commissariat for Defence, and in offices of the Red Army."

In the editorial of *Red Star* of October 11 devoted to this question, we read:

Like the officers, the army commissars have not wasted their time during the war; they have gained a rich experience of modern warfare. There are numerous cases when an officer was killed or wounded, and the commissar took over his duties. We have many commissars who have proved their ability to deal with a difficult military situation, and their capacity to solve difficult tactical problems. Many such commissars have already been given officers' posts.

The article emphasised that the latest *ukase* was, in effect, the last phase of a process which had continued for a long time.

The desire to strengthen Single Command in the Red Army inspired all the decisions taken by the Soviet Government, even during the years before this war. The introduction of new army titles, including that of General, the introduction of iron discipline, all tended to increase the officer's rights and authority. . . . The latest *ukase* is the logical end to a whole series of measures taken in recent years. From now on, the Soviet officer, the chief, is endowed

with the fullness of authority, and he alone bears full responsibility for every aspect of his unit's military and political activity. . . .

To demonstrate that this establishment of the Single Command was something that had been aimed at for a very long time, the article referred to a speech by Frunze in the early 'twenties, who said:

"In discussing this question of the military and political education of the Red Army, we must bear in mind that these two lines, the purely military and the political, should merge into one. One of the great flaws in the organisation of the army to-day is that these two lines have not merged, but are running parallel. At the present moment we cannot reach any drastic solution. But this merging of the two lines . . . must be our ultimate aim."

It then referred to Stalin's decree, supplementing the Supreme Soviet's *ukase*, by which the People's Commissar for Defence appointed the commissars as "Deputy Commanders in the political field" in their respective units. The decree added that in the immediate future these ex-commissars and political instructors would be given the regular officer and N.C.O. ranks.

The importance of political work in the army—the importance, for example, of explaining to the soldiers in the fullest possible way "what the war is about" (how important this is from the standpoint of morale may be seen from the example of other armies where this side of the question has often been neglected) was in no way reduced by the reform of October 9. Far from it. As *Red Star* said:

The attribution of officers' titles to the former political commissars must in no way lower the standard of the political work in army units. On the contrary, political agitation, propaganda and education must be more extensive and intensive than ever. The officer's deputies in the political field must continue this propaganda and this Bolshevik education with double and treble energy. They must continue to forge men of iron, capable of the greatest fearlessness, of the greatest spirit of self-sacrifice in this battle against the hated Nazis.

Regarding the transfer of commissars to command posts, the article said that, in accordance with Stalin's order, the Red Army would very shortly be enriched by two hundred new regimental commanders and six hundred battalion commanders drawn from the ranks of the commissars.

NEW PROPAGANDA LINES—AND SOME OLD ONES

October 1942 was a fairly important month for new books, plays and films. Among those which received the widest publicity—for like all such works, they had a propaganda value—were Wanda Wassilewska's novel, *The Rainbow*, a picture of life in a Russian village under German occupation. It was a story of undiluted German bestiality, and of the hard, cruel struggle of Russian patriots against terrible odds. Perhaps it was

slightly overdone, but, if so, not much, and it was, essentially, a true story, and written with Wanda Wassilewska's intense and passionate hatred.

A more subtle and, from a literary standpoint, much more important work to appear that month was Leonid Leonov's play, *The Invasion*, also dealing with the German occupation, and with the reactions to it of a group of Russian civilians. The characters here were not as simple and static as in Wassilewska's novel; the young hero, a former ne'er-do-well, went through a whole psychological process before accepting the idea of an all-out struggle against the Germans; the monstrous German Gestapo chief was so inhumanly horrible that he acquired a certain symbolic grandeur; and there was a quality of pungent Dostoievskian buffoonery in the character of Fayunin, the quisling mayor. The "happy ending" —that is, the liberation of the town—was rather artificially tagged on.[1]

An important film first shown in October was Kapler's *One Day of War*, one of the best documentaries made in wartime. It had been shot by over one hundred and fifty cameramen all over the Soviet Union—both at the front and in the rear, and was an admirable summing-up of the Russian war effort. The parts showing the stupendous work of the great war industries in the east were particularly impressive. It was also very human, and in spots, humorous, and not at all *pompier*.

In Moscow the Malyi Theatre produced that month a stage version of *War and Peace* which was at first hailed by the Press, though, after a while, it was taken off the stage. It was, in effect, a series of patriotic tableaux—the whole rather on the crude side. But the cult of Tolstoy was at its height about that time—of the Tolstoy of *War and Peace*, with its "topical" themes. That also was typical of the Stalingrad period. Other Russian classical writers were also extensively used for topical propaganda purposes; many thousands of copies were printed, for example, of selections from Saltykov, who with devastating, Swift-like satire poked fun at the Germans, and particularly at the Berlin he visited soon after the Franco-Prussian War. What he said of German vulgarity and arrogance, of the German General Staff, and of Berlin itself, "that city whose only *raison d'être* is human slaughter," was all highly topical.

On the whole, the tone of the literary propaganda was rather more quiet than in July and August. It was less emotional. If there was an undercurrent of acute anxiety, almost verging on despair, in some of the things that appeared in the Press in July and August, the same was no longer true.

Significantly, much less poetry was now published in the Press, and

[1] First *The Rainbow* and then *The Invasion* were to be made into films; the latter must be placed among the handful of first-class feature films produced in Russia during the war.

Ehrenburg, though breathing hatred for the Germans, wrote rather less than before, and when he wrote, it was sometimes on other subjects. If, in July and August, "Russia" and "the Russian people" were the central, and almost the only theme of the agitated articles by Ehrenburg and others, the other nationalities of the Soviet Union were now given some special attention. Ehrenburg was apparently commissioned to write a series of articles on the great deeds of Red Army soldiers and officers of non-Russian nationality: Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kazakhs, and Jews. Incidentally, coinciding with this publicity given to the military achievements of non-Russian soldiers in the Red Army, a very interesting table was published about that time, and later included in Yaroslavsky's booklet *Twenty-five Years of the Soviet Régime*, which was printed soon afterwards.

This table, relating to October 5, 1942, showed that since the beginning of the war, 185,113 persons had received military decorations.[1]

The table was headed by Russians, with 128,732, followed by Ukrainians with 33,191, Belorussians with 5,411, Jews with 5,163, Tartars with 2,883, Mordvinians with 1,116, Kazakhs with 1,035, Georgians and Armenians with over 900 each, Latvians, Karelians, Uzbeks, Bashkirs with over 400 each, and Ossetins, Azerbeijans and Chuvashs with over 300 each.[2]

There followed a dust of tiny nationalities of the Caucasus, Siberia and Central Asia—Karachaians, 31; Ostiaks, 1; Yakuts, 17; Kara-Kalpaks, 8; etc.—about fifty more in all. There were also 14 gipsies, 7 Assyrians, and of non-Soviet persons (at least, not by birth), the following were listed—Poles, 230; Greeks, 98; Bulgars, 37; Czechs, 10; Spaniards, 9.

The encouragement given to the non-Russian nationalities sometimes assumed almost extravagant forms. Thus, on October 31 the Russian reader rubbed his eyes as he opened *Pravda*: its whole second page was printed in Uzbek, and opposite was a Russian translation. It was a long missive "From the Uzbek People to the Uzbek Soldiers." Leading

[1] Decorations were to be awarded much more lavishly in the three following years of the war: by the beginning of 1945 the total number of persons decorated was 6,156,381. Even allowing for soldiers who received only the "defence medals" of Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad, etc., this still leaves a total of well over three millions decorated for personal achievement—a big jump from the 185,000 in October 1942. The number of Heroes of the Soviet Union, who were only a handful in 1942, had risen by January 1945 to 6,418. Taken by nationalities, the order in January 1945 was: Russians, 2,373,068; Ukrainians, 482,210; White Russians, 116,043; Tartars, 65,145; Jews, 63,373; Kazakhs, 37,000; Uzbeks and Armenians, 26,000 each; Mordvinians and Georgians, about 20,000 each; Baskhirs and Azerbeijans, about 12,000 each; Ossetins, 5,000; Kirghizes, Turkmen and Tajiks, 4,000 each; Karelians, Latvians, and Estonians, about 3,000 each; Moldavians and Lithuanians, 2,000 each.

[2] The unusually high proportion of Jews in this list, compared with their number (apart from disproving the widespread belief that "Jews are no good as soldiers"), was due to the fact that not being peasants, but townspeople, mostly of some education, they were in most cases officers or N.C.O.'s.

article whose satirical vein almost verged on that full-blooded buffoonery which was so characteristic of Tolstoy's conversation. It was less ferocious but more contemptuous of the Germans—as people—than most of Ehrenburg's articles. It was more or less in the Russian satirical tradition of Saltykov-Shchedrin, who in 1879 wrote (though this was, of course, on a much higher level) that penetrating anti-German satire *The Boy with Pants and the Boy without Pants*—one being German, the other Russian. Alexei Tolstoy differentiated somewhat between "old Germans" and "new Germans."

The houses, the beer cellars, even the streets in Berlin . . . smell of cheap cigars, beer, and boiled peas. That's a German smell. At the front it is replaced by the smell of dirty underwear and dirty bodies, and also the smell of corpses.

The Germans also like brass bands and dirty books, which make them roar with laughter. They like jokes or "Witze," as they call them, which are quite incomprehensible to people of other nationalities, because they are as flat as the pancakes that fall from under the cow's tail.

The Germans also love gadgets. If a German feels the inside of his ear itching, he will immediately pull out of his waistcoat pocket a little suede case and extract from it an ear-pick. Max Knoppke's pockets are full of such gadgets, and the manufacturers of these useful objects rub their hands when they see what an ass the German is: no matter what rubbish you invent, the German will buy it. He will, for instance, be delighted to buy an artificial string of snot, which he can then insert in his nostril while at dinner, and give the ladies a fright.

Let us not [Tolstoy went on] put down to the credit of the Germans that distant past when they had Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Schiller, Kant and Hegel. It is grown over with grass. For more than half a century Germany has been the land of the Spiessbürger, building up his happiness, pfennig after pfennig, with a spiteful glint in his eye. . . . With rare exceptions, the Germans have no inventive genius. Their mind is good at practical application. The great inventions, the real creative work is done by Russians, Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen. . . . But all this applies to the fathers—the forty, fifty, sixty-year-olds.

The young ones are different. However, the old ones have now joined them, too. They also have been converted to Hitlerism. Down with dual personalities —"Heil Hitler!" Fritz Knoppke is rolling back to the primeval condition of the two-legged animal, differing from the orang-utang only through his addiction to tobacco and alcoholic liquor. *The Fritz is now a hopelessly degraded man.*

It would be futile to look for a deep ideological content in this article —even though it was published on the eve of November 7. Alexei Tolstoy, as Russia's foremost writer, was allowed the maximum freedom in whatever he wrote for the Press. But, in a general way, his article fitted well into the propaganda line prevalent in 1942, and the theme of the "hopeless degradation" of all Germans was, from the standpoint of propaganda tactics, as distinct from long-term policy, not in conflict with what Stalin had said on the previous February—"Hitlers come and go, but the

But the bulk of the slogans concerned the war and the war effort; there were numerous appeals to the army and navy and air force to fight to the utmost, to the partisans and to "Brothers and sisters—Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Moldavians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and Karelians, temporarily under the yoke of the German-Fascist scoundrels" —to kindle the flames of a merciless partisan war; to workers and peasants to work with even greater energy. There were greetings to the defenders of Stalingrad, Leningrad and the Caucasus, the Stalingrad slogan reading:

Glorious defenders of Stalingrad! The whole Soviet People is with you. Fight to the last drop of blood. Mercilessly smash, destroy, and throw back the enemy hordes! Long live the heroic defenders of Stalingrad!

The first of the slogans concerning the Red Army was particularly violent:

Soldiers of the Red Army! Mercilessly avenge the crimes of the German-Fascist scoundrels—the looted and destroyed towns and villages of your country, the violence against women and children, the death of Soviet people. *Blood for blood! Death for death!*

There were particularly significant slogans concerning the outside world —warm greetings to the peoples of enslaved Europe (which was typical of the extreme interest the Russian Press was continuing to show in all resistance movements, particularly in Jugoslavia and France), and to the Oppressed Brother Slavs, who were called upon to "rise in a Holy People's war against the Nazi Imperialists, the deadly enemies of Slavdom."

And, after all the trouble about Hess and much other unpleasantness, there was a welcome warm note in the slogan devoted to the Allies:

Long live the fighting alliance of the armed forces of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States of America, and the other freedom-loving countries in their just war of liberation against the predatory imperialism of Germany and Italy!

The British offensive at Alamein had, indeed, just begun—not that the ordinary Russian attached much importance to this at the time. . . .

In the "pre-October" propaganda articles, the country and revolution motifs were well blended. Thus M. Mitin, one of the leading doctrinaires of the Party, in an article in *Pravda* on October 30, stressed the *national* importance of the Revolution. He produced six arguments to show that the Revolution *had* saved Russia.

(1) The Soviet régime, the most solid in the world, had turned Russia into a mighty country based on Socialist Industry and Collective Agriculture; these alone were capable of coping with the present requirements. (2) In 1917 the October Revolution saved Russia from economic catastrophe and

foreign enslavement. (3) It cleared for Russia the way out of her centuries-old backwardness. (4) The Revolution put an end to Russia's military unpreparedness. (5) It solved the difficult nationalities problem, which in the past had been a source of internal weakness. (6) It released the immense creative energies of the peoples of the former Russian Empire.

And the *Pravda* editorial on November 1 proudly declared:

The Germans had hoped to demoralise Russia. They had hoped that the Soviet Union would fall to pieces under their blows. Never has the Soviet Union been as strong as to-day. There are no Quislings, Pétains, or Lavals in our country.

And, on the 3rd, *Pravda* wrote:

Our brothers and sisters, groaning under the Nazi yoke, are waiting for the Red Army; they believe in it; they pray to the Red Army's five-pointed star, as it shines through the bloody mist like a pure celestial body, like the eternal flame of freedom and happiness.

But although there was a feeling in Russia in those days that this prayer would be answered, the fact remained that the Germans were still at Stalingrad and halfway inside the Caucasus; and it was to Stalingrad that all eyes were turned on that eve of the 7th of November. And Stalingrad was expected to say or do something. On November 6, Stalingrad spoke. The words took the form of an "Oath by the Defenders of Stalingrad" addressed to Stalin. It appeared on the front page of every paper, and it said:

. . . In these days of hard trials we, the defenders of Stalingrad, have decided to send this letter and our Red Army men's warm greetings to you, our general, our teacher and friend. We are writing to you at the height of the great battle, in the midst of the din of an unceasing cannonade and the roar of aircraft, and the red glow of fires. We are here, on the steep banks of the Volga, the great Russian river; and we are writing to you to say that our spirit is stronger than ever, that our will is as strong as steel, and that our arms are not tired with striking the enemy. Our decision is to stand firm, stand to the last man at the walls of Stalingrad.

More than two months have passed since Hitler, the accursed fiend, brought from all over Europe to these steppes on the Volga dozens of his best divisions, thousands of tanks and planes, in order to capture Stalingrad and establish himself on the Volga. . . . The enemy's aim was to cut our Volga waterway, and then, by turning south to the Caspian, to cut off our country from its main oil supplies. . . . If the enemy succeeds, he can then turn all his strength against Moscow and Leningrad.

It is interesting that, even at that late stage, Stalingrad should have said: "If he succeeds," not "If he had succeeded." The "oath" continued:

We can see the bony hands of our mothers in the occupied territories stretched out to us, and the skinny little hands of our children, and we can hear the heartbreaking cry of millions of our oppressed brothers calling for

speedy help. Our duty is not only to stop the enemy but to smash him and liberate our country from Fascist tyranny.

After quoting several specific examples of astonishing deeds of heroism, the "oath" went on:

. . . Here, at Stalingrad, we have knocked the arrogance and the stupid self-confidence out of the German. In July they were still boasting that they would capture Stalingrad in three days. More than once since then has Hitler barked, Goering roared, and Goebbels squealed, that on such-and-such a day Stalingrad would fall. But Stalingrad stands firm and every step they advance is now costing the enemy rivers of blood. Small wonder that the German soldiers have come to call the road to Stalingrad the Road of Death. In two months, more than 100,000 Germans, Italians and Rumanians have met with death on the outskirts of Stalingrad. 800 German tanks we have turned into scrap. 1,002 German planes are lying wrecked around Stalingrad. . . .

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich! We have come here, to these Volga Steppes from all the ends of our great country. . . . We are defending Stalingrad because we know how immense the importance of this city is to our country. . . . Here, without enough food and sleep, we reared the first child of the First Five-Year Plan, the pride of our industry—the Stalingrad Tractor Plant. The Germans have destroyed the avenues, and have burned down the factories of Stalingrad; but Stalingrad has remained invincible. Its burned-out houses, its ruins, its very stones are sacred to us.

The "oath" then referred to veterans of the Stalingrad factories, who still remembered the days when, during the Civil War, Stalin himself directed the defence of Tsaritsyn.

And later . . . you organised the defence of our capital, and the enemy was thrown back. *We are firmly convinced that now again, fighting as we are, under your direct guidance . . . we also shall strike a smashing blow at the enemy and drive him far away from Stalingrad.*

The "oath" did not go so far as to say that Stalingrad *would* be held; but the association of the whole battle with the name of Stalin and the authority of Stalin was a clear indication that failure now was, to say the least, unlikely. It was like involving Stalin's personal prestige.

The "oath" continued:

. . . Thousands of letters come to us from all the ends of the Soviet Union, and each contains our People's imperative order: Not to surrender Stalingrad. . . . From all over the world come the voices of our Allies and friends, expressing admiration for our struggle. While appreciating their moral support, we are certain that the time of the Second Front is not far off. That will be not a moral, but a real help for Stalingrad's defenders.

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich! If the Fascist fiends, if these cannibals had not gone to war against us, we should be writing to you to-day from the bright workshops of our factories, from our rich collective farms, from our schools and universities. But to-day we are soldiers. . . . In sending you this letter from the trenches, we swear to you that, to the last drop of blood, to the last breath, to the last heart-beat, we shall defend Stalingrad, and hold

the enemy back from the Volga. . . . We swear that we shall not disgrace the glory of Russian arms, and shall fight to the end.

Under your leadership our fathers won the Battle of Tsaritsyn. Under your leadership we shall win the great Battle of Stalingrad.

The whole tone was very confident, and produced a warm comforting impression in Moscow. If anything, there was now a tendency to underrate the dangers Stalingrad was still facing; for as events of only a week later were to show, the Germans were still going to make one all-out bid to capture Stalingrad—or rather the small strip of the Volga bank that was still in Russian hands. Still, people somehow instinctively felt that the worst was over; and their instinct proved right.

Among the things that contributed to this impression were the letters many people were receiving from Stalingrad. These were not official missives, like the "Oath to Stalin," each word of which had no doubt been carefully vetted by the big political shots on the spot, but private letters; and although Stalingrad continued to be an indescribable hell of fearful mental and bodily strain, of horror and death, Russian soldiers were becoming immensely proud of *being* at Stalingrad.

Just about that time, I talked to two men who had just come to Moscow from Stalingrad, and who had been there throughout the battle. One was Lieutenant Lutsenko, of one of the Guards Divisions fighting at Stalingrad, the other was Petty Officer Kremnev, who had started the war in the Baltic Navy, had fought on land on the Stalingrad Front, had been wounded six times, and who, when the Battle of Stalingrad began, was put in command of an ack-ack gunboat of the Volga flotilla in charge of the life-lines across the river. Both had come to Moscow as delegates to the Anti-Fascist Students' Congress. For three months they had been in the thick of it; and yet physically they looked extraordinarily fit: Lutsenko was rosy-cheeked, and the strain he had undergone was indicated only by little lines at the corners of his boyish mouth. Kremnev was a tougher type—a man from the Volga with a Gorki-like face, and with a hard jeering laugh as he talked of the Germans, and described how he had bayoneted five in his lifetime and strangled one with his own hands. And he gave a satisfied look at his pair of enormous hairy paws. And with his dark, deep-set eyes sparkling with amusement, he told me how, on Lake Ladoga, he was in command of a tug towing a barge with four hundred German prisoners on board. A German dive-bomber came over, and the whole damn lot were sunk, and machine-gunned into the bargain. The men on the rapid little tug cut the rope and beat it. What they told me of Stalingrad was all fairly familiar, and they tended to gloss over the countless tragedies they had witnessed.

But Kremnev described the work of the Volga flotilla:

"Of course," he said, "we are under constant shell-fire. But the German artillery is bad, and we dodge it pretty well. We have also given up using large barges. Usually at night—though the Germans never cease dropping flares over the Volga—we take the wounded across in small craft, often even in rowing-boats. From the other side of the Volga the wounded are taken away in lorries, to the base some forty miles away. These lorries are escorted by our fighters, so the losses aren't very great. On the river, our armoured gunboats are a great help in keeping the German bombers at a respectful height. The stream of munitions and food to Stalingrad has never ceased."

"But haven't you had big casualties on the river?" I asked. "What do you expect?" he said, a trifle impatiently. "But I am telling you: the supplies have never ceased. They have been continuous. Uninterrupted. Of course, they bomb the landing-places, and so what? Sometimes they hit them, but most of the time they drop the stuff in the river—kill the fish." He laughed, and then his face hardened again. "We'll throw them out of Stalingrad. We'll chase these rats into the snowy steppes, so the Don Cossacks can deal with them, and pay off a few scores."

Encirclement—that was even more than Kremnev dreamed of at the time.

But two remarks made that day by Lutsenko struck me as particularly important from the standpoint of morale among the Russian and German troops at Stalingrad—as it was at the beginning of November.

Prisoners have told me that when German soldiers are told they are being sent to Stalingrad, it has a very depressing effect on them. Our people, of course, also know what a tough spot it is. But for a Russian soldier to be sent to Stalingrad has now a hell of a prestige value attached to it.

And there was another very curious thing Lutsenko told me:

All of us have observed one very odd difference between ourselves and the Germans. Nearly every morning we shave; the Germans are all unshaved, untidy, filthy and verminous. In our dugouts, which aren't uncomfortable for the most part, we have odd pieces of soft furniture even, and decent bunks, and musical instruments, and we have books and newspapers, and at the command posts they have electric light, and hot food is carried regularly to the front line, usually two hundred or three hundred metres away; and every week—no matter how heavy the fighting—every soldier goes to the bath-house, and also gets a set of clean underwear. But the Germans—*they don't wash and they don't shave, and it makes a big difference.*

And, as I talked to these two men of Stalingrad, I felt—then, in November 1942—that there was something vitally important in these two facts: *in the German and Russian attitude to being sent to Stalingrad, and in the fact that the Germans—or at least very many of them—had stopped washing and shaving and changing their underwear.*

It is interesting that, on the eve of November 7, Alexei Tolstoy should have written a long article, called "The Russian and the German." It was an

article whose satirical vein almost verged on that full-blooded buffoonery which was so characteristic of Tolstoy's conversation. It was less ferocious but more contemptuous of the Germans—as people—than most of Ehrenburg's articles. It was more or less in the Russian satirical tradition of Saltykov-Shchedrin, who in 1879 wrote (though this was, of course, on a much higher level) that penetrating anti-German satire *The Boy with Pants and the Boy without Pants*—one being German, the other Russian. Alexei Tolstoy differentiated somewhat between "old Germans" and "new Germans."

> The houses, the beer cellars, even the streets in Berlin . . . smell of cheap cigars, beer, and boiled peas. That's a German smell. At the front it is replaced by the smell of dirty underwear and dirty bodies, and also the smell of corpses.
>
> The Germans also like brass bands and dirty books, which make them roar with laughter. They like jokes or "Witze," as they call them, which are quite incomprehensible to people of other nationalities, because they are as flat as the pancakes that fall from under the cow's tail.
>
> The Germans also love gadgets. If a German feels the inside of his ear itching, he will immediately pull out of his waistcoat pocket a little suede case and extract from it an ear-pick. Max Knoppke's pockets are full of such gadgets, and the manufacturers of these useful objects rub their hands when they see what an ass the German is: no matter what rubbish you invent, the German will buy it. He will, for instance, be delighted to buy an artificial string of snot, which he can then insert in his nostril while at dinner, and give the ladies a fright.
>
> Let us not [Tolstoy went on] put down to the credit of the Germans that distant past when they had Bach and Beethoven, Goethe and Schiller, Kant and Hegel. It is grown over with grass. For more than half a century Germany has been the land of the Spiessbürger, building up his happiness, pfennig after pfennig, with a spiteful glint in his eye. . . . With rare exceptions, the Germans have no inventive genius. Their mind is good at practical application. The great inventions, the real creative work is done by Russians, Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen. . . . But all this applies to the fathers—the forty, fifty, sixty-year-olds.
>
> The young ones are different. However, the old ones have now joined them, too. They also have been converted to Hitlerism. Down with dual personalities —"Heil Hitler!" Fritz Knoppke is rolling back to the primeval condition of the two-legged animal, differing from the orang-utang only through his addiction to tobacco and alcoholic liquor. *The Fritz is now a hopelessly degraded man.*

It would be futile to look for a deep ideological content in this article —even though it was published on the eve of November 7. Alexei Tolstoy, as Russia's foremost writer, was allowed the maximum freedom in whatever he wrote for the Press. But, in a general way, his article fitted well into the propaganda line prevalent in 1942, and the theme of the "hopeless degradation" of all Germans was, from the standpoint of propaganda tactics, as distinct from long-term policy, not in conflict with what Stalin had said on the previous February—"Hitlers come and go, but the

German people and the German state remain"—or with his reiteration, in a different form, of the same idea on November 6, 1942.

For, apart from the long-term view, which it was unnecessary and even harmful to reiterate daily, there was the urgent short-term need of arousing the maximum hatred for the German as a soldier, and the maximum contempt for the German as a man. Not that the Germans did not do their best themselves to stir up these feelings; but, in the Russian rear, there was never enough first-hand information to render the hate campaign superfluous. It should be added that, *at that time*, it was more essential than ever; for what the Germans were actually doing and had done in the occupied areas had not yet become common property, as it was to become once the Russian troops had begun to liberate large slices of Soviet territory, and millions of soldiers could see for themselves. *The truth is that factual material on German atrocities was still relatively scarce in* 1942, *and violently worded hate propaganda was obliged, to some extent, to perform the function that Kharkov, Kiev and Majdanek were going to perform in the following two years.*

Only in relatively few places had the Russians had an opportunity of seeing the results of German rule with their own eyes: around Moscow in the winter of 1941—and there the German Army was rather too busy, first crashing ahead, and then running away, to indulge in wholesale extermination—and at Kerch (which was one of the worst examples up till then of German mass-horrors). But, with the Russians not having regained territory until then, except in only a small number of places, and especially places where the Germans had not stayed long—the reporter, the photographer and the cameraman had still relatively little material to work on. Klin, Kalinin, even totally destroyed Istra, and the rest were small stuff, both for destruction and human slaughter, compared with the *still inconceivable* horrors that were going to unfold themselves before the Russian people's eyes in 1943 and 1944.

That was one of the reasons why Tolstoy, Simonov, Surkov, Sholokov (with his *School of Hate*), and especially Ehrenburg, played such an immensely important role in 1941 and 1942 in explaining the Germans to the Russians. What the Russian people were to learn during the following two years not only confirmed but greatly surpassed in horror what in 1942 may still have struck some sceptics, especially abroad, as so much verbal extravagance. In 1942 even Ehrenburg never imagined anything like Majdanek or Auschwitz.

Friedrich Schmidt was a mere neurotic amateur compared with the giants of the S.S. and the Gestapo, who by the thousand operated the barbed-wire whips, the gas chambers and crematoria of the extermination camps.

THE STALIN BROADCAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Stalin's broadcast on the night of November 6, which, for wealth of content, is among his most important historic speeches, came as a pleasant surprise, above all to Allied Moscow residents. After all the unpleasantness over Hess, after the Yudin lecture which dwelt on the alleged "purely political reasons" which had prevented the opening of the Second Front, Stalin's speech was remarkably friendly to the Allies—though he *did* say that, but for the absence of the Second Front, the Germans would by now, instead of fighting at Stalingrad and in the Caucasus, have been driven back to the line of Odessa, Minsk and Pskov.

Needless to say, the friendly tone of Stalin's references to the Allies and his discussion of the lasting and solid bonds which would unite them till final victory and after, could be best explained in the light of what happened two days later: the great allied landing in North Africa; he must have known, when he was making his speech, that the armada was already sailing the Atlantic. It is true that he made no secret of his great disappointment in the British Army, which in Libya, he said, was fighting against "only four German and eleven Italian divisions"; and in his broadcast he uttered the word "four" twice. Further, no specific mention was made of the war at sea, or of the work of the R.A.F. It was another indication, in British eyes, of the chronic Russian tendency to think of this war as essentially a land war.

Secondly, the speech contained an interesting analysis of the Russian military situation. It was, in tone, rather more reserved than the Order of the Day which Stalin was to issue to the Red Army the next day, and in which a great counter-offensive was cautiously foreshadowed, and which ended with the words of the Russian popular saying: "There will be a holiday in our street too," meaning, "It'll be our turn to rejoice."

In reviewing the progress of the country in the past year, Stalin began by saying that the greatest work done in the rear was to shift "the base of our industry, both military and civilian, to the east," and in adapting it to new conditions.

"This was an extremely difficult and large-scale task of organisation for all our economic and administrative government departments, as well as for our railways." But . . . "we succeeded in overcoming the obstacles, and now . . . our factories, collective and state farms are undoubtedly working satisfactorily. . . . Never before has our country had such a strong and well-organised rear. . . ."

Turning to the military events of the year, Stalin first spoke of the Russian winter offensive, in the course of which, despite difficult conditions, the Russians drove back the Germans, in some places, as much as four hundred kilometres.

"It is not by mere chance," Stalin said, "that the German troops, after marching in triumph through all Europe, and at one blow smashing the French troops, which had been regarded as first-class troops, met with effective military resistance only in our country; and not only did they meet with resistance, but they were compelled by the blows of the Red Army to retreat

from their positions over four hundred kilometres, abandoning on their line of retreat an immense quantity of guns, machines and ammunition. This fact cannot be attributed exclusively to the winter conditions of fighting. . . . It showed, firstly, that the Red Army and its competent cadres had become an effective force, capable of not only withstanding the onslaught of the German-Fascist troops, but also of defeating them in open battle and driving them back; it showed also that the German Army suffers from grave organic defects which, given conditions favourable to the Red Army, may lead to the Germans' defeat.

The second period of hostilities was much more unfavourable.

"Taking advantage of the absence of a Second Front in Europe," Stalin said, "the Germans and their Allies transferred all their available forces to the German-Soviet Front, and, striking in the south-westerly direction . . . achieved great superiority and substantial tactical gains. . . . They were still strong enough to organise a serious offensive in some one direction."

Stalin then emphasised that the "drive for oil" was not the main German objective at all; he even indicated that it was something in the nature of a diversion, or at any rate, as he put it, "an auxiliary objective."

The main objective was to outflank Moscow from the east. The purpose of the attack to the south was

not so much to capture the oil districts as to divert our main reserves to the south, and to weaken the Moscow Front, and thereby to facilitate the success of the blow at Moscow. This, indeed, explains why the main German forces are now in the Orel and Stalingrad areas, and not in the south.

He then quoted the famous "time schedule" found on a German officer: Borisoglebsk, July 10; Stalingrad, July 25; Saratov, August 10; Kuibyshev, August 15; Arzamas, September 10; and for the southern prong, Baku, September 25. In short, their main objective was to surround Moscow and end the war this year.

"Their attempt to chase two hares at once—oil and Moscow—landed the German-Fascist strategists in difficulties." The tactical successes of the German summer offensive were not consummated owing to the obvious unfeasibility of their own strategic plans.

Even so [Stalin said] the Germans had achieved considerable successes; and if that was so, it was due to the absence of the Second Front. Assuming that there had been a Second Front, as there had been one in the First World War, and sixty German divisions had been tied up in the West, the position of the Germans in the East would to-day be deplorable; they would be fighting now at Odessa, Zhitomir, Minsk and Pskov.

In other words, Rostov, the Donbas, Kharkov and Kiev; Kursk, Orel, Briansk and Mogilev would have been liberated; and the Leningrad blockade lifted.

Instead, in Africa—the "main" Allied front—four German and eleven Italian divisions had been "tied up," and the Russians were facing 240 German and satellite divisions, and the fighting was still at Stalingrad and in the Caucasus. However, the fourth section of the speech was devoted entirely to praising the fighting alliance of the Big Three. But, before he came to that, Stalin paid this glowing tribute to the Red Army, the Soviet people and the régime: "I think no other country and no other army could have withstood this onslaught . . . and not only are they withstanding it, but they are overpowering it."

Speaking of the alliance of the Big Three, Stalin said:

The Anglo–Soviet–American coalition has, from the standpoint of human and material resources, the unquestionable advantage over the enemy. But . . . obviously, what is needed in addition to resources is the ability to mobilise them and the skill to use them properly. . . . Is there any reason to doubt that the men of this alliance possess this ability and skill?

He said there were no such grounds.

It is said that the Anglo–Soviet–American coalition has every chance of winning, and would certainly win if it did not suffer from an organic defect. . . . This, in the opinion of these people, is that this coalition consists of heterogeneous elements, having different ideologies, and that this will prevent them from organising joint action against the common enemy. I think that this assertion is wrong. . . . The very existence of this threat [of being enslaved] imperatively dictates the necessity of joint action.

As for the question when there would be a Second Front in Europe, if at all, Stalin said:

Yes, there will be, sooner or later. And not only because we need it, but above all because the Allies need it no less than we. They cannot fail to realise that, since France has been put out of action, the absence of a Second Front . . . may end badly for all the freedom-loving nations, including the Allies themselves.

There was also an important passage in Stalin's speech on Germany.

In an interview with a Turkish paper, "that cannibal Hitler" said: "We shall destroy Russia so that she may never rise again." That seems clear enough—though it is rather silly (*Laughter*). *We do not pursue the aim of destroying Germany, for it is impossible to destroy Germany*, just as it is impossible to destroy Russia. But we can and we must destroy the Hitler state. . . . Hitler then went on to say: "We shall continue the war as long as there is an organised military force in Russia." This also is clear enough, though somewhat illiterate (*Laughter*). *Our aim is not to destroy the entire organised military force of Germany for every literate person knows that this is not only impossible as regards Germany*, just as it is in regard to Russia, *but that it is also inadvisable from the victor's point of view*. But we can and must destroy Hitler's army.

After referring to two aspects of Nazi abomination—the atrocities and the "New Order"—and the Soviet Union's firm resolution to punish all war criminals, "whose names are known to tens of thousands of tormented people," Stalin said:

> Comrades, we are fighting a great war of Liberation. We are not fighting it alone, but in conjunction with our Allies. It will end in our victory. . . . Long live the victory of the Anglo–Soviet–American fighting alliance! (*applause*). For the liberation of the nations of Europe from Hitler tyranny! (*applause*). For the freedom and independence of our glorious Soviet country! (*applause*). Death to the German–Fascist invaders, to their state, their army and their "New Order in Europe!" (*applause*).

Then came "Loud applause" for "Glory to our Red Army!" and "Glory to our Navy" and "Glory to our men and women partisans"—the whole ending in "Long and prolonged applause. All rise. Ovation."

The meeting took place "somewhere in Moscow"; members of the Moscow City Council were there and representatives of the various Party and Trade Union organisations. The speech was delivered with great calm and a note of confidence that had the most reassuring effect. The speech betrayed none of the nervous emotion everyone had felt in hearing Stalin's speech on July 3, 1941—his first speech after the German invasion.

Stalin's Order of the Day on November 7 was much on the same lines, and was also very confident in tone. True,

> although the enemy has been checked at Stalingrad . . . the enemy is hurling new divisions into the battle and exerting his last efforts; and the struggle is becoming increasingly intensive. On the outcome of this struggle depend the fate of the Soviet State, the freedom and independence of our country.

But, as distinct from what the Press wrote three months before, there was no longer any suggestion of "mortal danger." The Soviet State, on the contrary, "has proved to be firm and indestructible. . . ."

> The German invaders would plunge into new adventures. But their forces were now undermined and had reached the limit. The enemy had suffered eight million casualties, and "the Hitler army is now diluted with Rumanians, Hungarians, Italians, and Finns, and is much weaker than it was in the summer and autumn of 1941. . . . We can and must clear the Soviet soil of the German scum. . . . The day is not far distant when the enemy will again feel the weight of the Red Army's blows. Our turn will come."

In spite of their confident tone, neither the speech nor the Order of the Day were letting any cats out of any bags. It was no use arousing any German suspicions. The North African cat and the cat of the coming counter-offensive at Stalingrad were kept well inside their respective bags; and while everybody in Russia was reassured, the Germans clearly chose to believe that "there's nothing in it," and that the Russians were

mainly living on vague hopes of the Second Front coming some time—"when it will be too late!"

The 7th of November was not marked by any parade or demonstration in the Red Square. It remained a working day. Red flags were flying on public buildings, the Red Square was decorated with red banners, and the façade of the Bolshoi Theatre with panels of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin (illustrating, as some irreverent foreigner remarked, the Decline of Whiskers); Molotov held a diplomatic reception, and the foreign correspondents were asked to a "tea" by Mr. Palgunov, the head of the Press Department.

The papers had several columns a day filled with greetings and good wishes and expressions of admiration from statesmen, official personages and other more or less important people from all over the world. There were messages from President Roosevelt and Mr. Cordell Hull, and Mr. Eden, and even Count Raczkiewicz, and the Prime Minister of Bolivia (with whom the Soviet Union did not have diplomatic relations), and famous or simply well-known writers the world over, and General de Gaulle, and the Chinese. Churchill alone refrained. Some said he didn't quite approve of the principle of the October Revolution (and, indeed, he remained silent a year later, too, though in November 1944 he finally relented); others thought he had not quite forgiven the Russians that Hess article. Or perhaps he was simply too busy thinking of other things. For the Armada was, indeed, on its way to North Africa. Meantime, also, the Eighth Army was chasing Rommel across the desert to Mersa-Matruh. Maybe "four German divisions" only; but they mattered to Churchill for all that. . . .

The news of the North Africa landing created a very big impression in Moscow. Not that ordinary Russians—or many "extraordinary" Russians, for that matter—were fully aware of the enormous organisational feat that this landing involved, but they were delighted, because things were now clearly "on the move" in the West. It wasn't quite the Second Front; but it was a big beginning. What is more, the Libyan campaign suddenly began to acquire, in Russian eyes, a new significance; to the two operations the papers began to devote two whole columns, complete with maps. The news caused pleasant excitement in the army, too. One man from Stalingrad—one of Kremnev's pals, who also served in the Volga flotilla—who arrived in Moscow about November 12, and had left Stalingrad on the 9th, told me: "The news was flashed to all the army units; there was great excitement; people were very cheerful; we felt that things were beginning to happen in a big way. We, of the Volga flotilla, who know all about ships," he added importantly, "we knew what a great achievement it must have been, and we argued about it for hours on end."

The official Soviet view was to be stated by Stalin in another letter to Cassidy, dated November 13:

"The campaign," he said "represents an outstanding fact of major importance demonstrating the growing might of the armed forces of the Allies, and opening the prospect of the disintegration of the Italo–German coalition in the nearest future." He added that the landing and the occupation of a large part of French North Africa from Casablanca to Bougie refuted once more "the sceptics who affirm that the Anglo–American leaders are not capable of organising a serious war campaign." No one but first-class organisers could have achieved such results, including the smashing of the enemy troops in the Western Desert, which had been effected "with such mastery."

In reply to the question how effective this campaign would be in relieving pressure on the Soviet Union and what further aid the Soviet Union was awaiting, Stalin replied that it was too soon to say to what extent the campaign in Africa had been effective in relieving immediate pressure, but that one could confidently say that the effect would be "no small one," and that a certain relief in pressure on the Soviet Union would result in the nearest future. But that was not all that mattered. What mattered above all was that the initiative had now passed into the hands of the Allies; and this "changes radically the political and war situation in Europe in favour of the Anglo–Soviet–American coalition. The African campaign undermines the prestige of Hitlerite Germany . . . and demoralises Hitler's Allies in Europe. It shakes France out of her state of lethargy, mobilises the anti-Hitler forces in France and provides a basis for building-up an anti-Hitler French Army. It also creates conditions for putting Italy out of action and for isolating Hitlerite Germany. Finally, it creates prerequisites for the establishment of the Second Front in Europe, nearer to Germany's vital centres, which will be of decisive importance for organising victory over Hitlerite tyranny."

To the question what possibility there was of Russian offensive power joining the Allies to hasten final victory, Stalin replied: "There need be no doubt that the Red Army will fulfil its task with honour as it has been fulfilling it throughout the war."

Two points emerge from Stalin's statement: first, that the Africa landing could in no way be regarded as *the* Second Front, or as a substitute for the Second Front; in other words, he was not attaching overwhelming military importance to it, except as a preliminary to something much bigger. But he attached: (*a*) immense moral importance to the Africa landing, and (*b*) first-class political importance to it. The fact that the Allies had taken the initiative in the war and that the West was "on the move" was of the greatest moral importance in Russia, Germany, and the occupied territories; politically, it foreshadowed the early disintegration of the New Order, that is, of the German "forced coalition"; it foreshadowed the early collapse of Italy (perhaps Stalin, like others, expected it, at the time, a little earlier than it actually was to happen); and the revival of France as a military power was something which, characteristically, Stalin particularly emphasised, even at that early stage. The two occupied countries in whose vitality and capacity to contribute

to victory the Russians had had, all along, particular confidence, were France and Jugoslavia. Although, in this particular statement, Stalin did not refer to Jugoslavia, it was felt in Moscow that the liberation of the whole of North Africa by the Allies would, before long, have a favourable effect on the Jugoslav situation, too.

The occupation by Germany of Vichy France that soon followed was, on the whole, welcomed in Moscow as putting an end to the mischievous Vichy anomaly, and the tragic scuttling of the French Navy at Toulon stirred people's imagination in Russia, and the Soviet Press presented it eloquently as the noblest proof that the great spirit of France was alive.

Parallel with this, however, there were some misgivings over what appeared like an American policy of hobnobbing with Darlan and other Vichyites; and a very poor view was taken of the execution of Darlan's assassin. There was not much inclination to make allowances for the peculiar conditions in North Africa which called for at least the temporary use of politically impure expedients.

STALINGRAD HEARS DISTANT GUNFIRE

Between the "oath" of the men of Stalingrad and Stalingrad's "D-Day" —the beginning of the great Russian counter-offensive of November 19— there were only thirteen days to go. But they were difficult days, especially the week beginning November 12.

Before that, there had been a short lull; thus on November 10 the communiqué reported only small-scale enemy attacks in the industrial area, and attempts by small groups of tommy-gunners to filter into the Russian positions. These were repelled with a loss to the enemy of 150 men.

But on the 12th the Germans launched *their last full-scale offensive in Stalingrad.*

As the *Red Star* correspondent wrote:

> Having brought up reserves and regrouped his badly mauled forces, the enemy started to-day an offensive along the entire length of the city's defences. Five infantry divisions and twenty tanks were engaged in this attack. The defenders repelled numerous enemy attacks, and only in one place, at very heavy cost to themselves, did the Germans succeed in making a 200 to 300-metre penetration into our lines. In the northern sector our troops counter-attacked, and threw the enemy 400 metres back.

The November 13 communiqué still reported heavy German attacks, and with no suggestion of any improvement on the previous day. "In a spirit of self-denial our troops are fighting for every inch of Soviet soil." Koroteyev, the *Red Star* correspondent, wrote:

> Yesterday the Germans succeeded in advancing on a narrow sector in the industrial part of the city; to-day they are continuing to attack in the same

direction. To-day the active field of battle is no more than 200 to 300 metres in width. The planes now attack in small groups. . . . In this sector one German attack succeeded another; drunken Nazis fell by the hundred, but others continued to press forward. The battle along this small sector was one of the most bitter in recent weeks. The first enemy attacks were systematically repelled by the fire of our mortars, machine-guns and tommy-guns. By noon, the whole space in front of our lines was piled up with enemy corpses. But the Germans were in a frenzy. They multiplied their attacks, and succeeded in coming quite close, and in one street they pushed us back. A difficult situation arose. Grenades were being thrown from all directions, and there was a hail-storm of machine-gun fire. At this moment our men counter-attacked, and an enormous scuffle of hand-to-hand fighting followed. The outcome of the battle was being decided by the Russian bayonet, the dull thud of the rifle-butt, the pistol shot at point-blank range. Heavy losses were inflicted on the Fascists who had broken forward. Hot fighting in this sector is continuing. . . .

An alarming feature of the situation at Stalingrad during those days was the danger that the defenders of the city might run short of munitions; a thick porridge of icefloes was floating down the Volga. For a few days the supply lines were almost at a standstill.

An important dispatch from Vysokoostrovsky, comparing the October and November offensives, appeared in *Red Star* on the 17th:

On November 12 (he wrote) the enemy renewed his attacks, hoping to capture the industrial part of Stalingrad. . . . The great difference between now and October is this. During the second half of October, the Germans struck their blows along a front of three to five kilometres. One thousand sorties per day were a usual occurrence; sometimes there were 1,800 or 2,000. Prisoners are unanimous in declaring that Hitler ordered Stalingrad to be captured by November 1; then this date was shifted to November 6. But from November 5 to 11 there was a lull. This had been rendered necessary by the collapse of the German offensive in October, and the enormous losses suffered. Having begun their attacks on October 14, the enemy for twenty days continuously attacked the Stalingrad defences and the industrial area. During that period he advanced a few hundred metres: on the average, the Germans advanced less than 50 metres a day, and their losses varied from 1,000 to 4,000 men per day, plus tanks and other equipment. . . . The greatest losses were suffered by the 371st, 295th, 297th and 389th infantry divisions, the 29th motorised division, and the 14th tank division. Some of these were almost wiped out, having lost between sixty and seventy per cent of their strength and man-power. There are mountains of German corpses lying in front of our front line. It was these gigantic losses which compelled the German command, on November 5, to call a pause in active operations.

The lull lasted six days. But there was great activity in the enemy rear, and the Germans also actively bombed our supply lines. On November 12, the new great offensive against the industrial area began: *but this offensive was different from all previous offensives.* If, before, the Nazis attacked at several points simultaneously, now they attacked on a 200 to 400-metre wide front only. If, before, they came up against a serious obstacle, they attacked elsewhere; now they had decided to strike at one point all the time—a point which was, to them, the shortest cut to the Volga.

Sappers were being used in the vanguard of the German troops; they were used as infantry. The idea was to give the others greater confidence. Sappers know more about mines and traps, and now they were advancing, carrying grenades and tommy-guns. Then the ordinary German infantry and the tanks followed. In other parts of Stalingrad conditions are fairly quiet, but here the battle is furious. . . . The enemy is taking advantage of the present state of the river which, with its icefloes, is rendering our supplies difficult. However, these difficulties are being overcome. In six days the Germans have suffered heavy losses—but their gains can be measured in metres. Even so, the battle for Stalingrad is now exceptionally important. The Germans are now trying at any price to enlarge the territory they have seized, and to settle down firmly for the winter. This must not be allowed. To hold the factories means to win the Battle of Stalingrad. This offensive, too, must be repelled at any price.

Now comes the great turning-point. The great Russian offensive north and south of Stalingrad was launched on the morning of the 19th; and one knows with what frantic joy and hope and excitement the men of Stalingrad heard, during the hour of dawn, the sound of the distant but intensive gunfire. This sound first reached their ears between 6 and 7 a.m., that most silent hour of the day in Stalingrad. . . . They knew what that gunfire meant. It meant that they would not have to go on defending Stalingrad indefinitely, through the winter—as the uninitiated soldiers and younger officers thought. . . . Through the darkness, with scarcely a glimmer of light—for it was a dim, damp, foggy dawn—they listened to the distant gunfire as they put their heads out of the dugouts. . . .

For three days after the big offensive had been launched, nothing was announced. But it had already had an effect on Stalingrad itself: on the 21st, the communiqué spoke of "only small German groups" attacking; for the rest, "there were no substantial changes at the fronts during the night of November 20–21." It related a minor episode inside Stalingrad, while, "north-west of Stalingrad, seven automobiles and a few dozen Hitlerites were destroyed." The *Pravda* editorial on November 21 was devoted to "the Session of the Academy of Sciences at Sverdlovsk."

It must, however, be said that the victory of Vladikavkaz, in the Caucasus, was announced in a special communiqué on the 19th.

But it was not until the evening of the 22nd that the great news of the Stalingrad counter-offensive was made public.

Such was the end of the first phase of the Battle of Stalingrad. From now on the world's attention was no longer focused on Stalingrad itself, but on the great Russian counter-offensive, which began north and south of the city. But Stalingrad itself should not be forgotten. For more than two months longer it was to remain a battlefield. Not till January 27 was the main body of Chuikov's troops to join up with the troops of General Rokossovsky, breaking through the German salient in the north.

CHAPTER V

MOSCOW IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

FROM THE DIARY

October 1

Hitler yesterday announced that Stalingrad would fall within a few days. . . . I wonder. The place is being bombed and shelled almost continuously. Curious how one's whole consciousness these days is focused on a place to which one has scarcely given a thought in all one's life.

People in Moscow are very hard up these days: a sure indication of this is the unusually large number of good second-hand books that have lately appeared in the bookshops. I bought the other day a set of the *Apollon* art magazine for 1913 and 1914; and it gave one a strange sensation to look through it at a time like this. . . . What exquisite typography—including the Dobuzhinsky cover and title page! What admirable reproductions of Somov and Serov and Gauguin and Matisse and Picasso! Every page, every phrase has the flavour of a very high standard of culture. Many of the things that we think are "new" to-day already existed then: Tairov had started the Kamerny Theatre in Moscow, and Prokofiev was already "one of our most promising and original young composers." *Apollon* had a whole string of correspondents on art and literature in the great European centres of culture—London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Munich; the "Letter from London" praised Sickert, but thought Augustus John's portraits "slick, but lifeless and vulgar."

It talked of the "cultural life of Kiev"; of concert tours by Kussevitsky, and of Hoffmann and Busoni piano recitals. Here was *real* contact with Western civilisation. Who cares about John or Sickert in Russia to-day? In the 1914 set of *Apollon* there are admirable poems by Gumilev, Akhmatova and Blok —for instance, his poem: "We are the children of Russia's fearful years." Then, a special number full of admirable colour plates—reproductions from the Schukin collection—the nucleus of what has since become the Museum of Western Art—with its Cézannes, Renoirs, Van Goghs, Picassos. . . . Instead, Kostya Simonov—who would have been dismissed as a mere amateur by Bryusov and the other superb Europeans of "decadent" St. Petersburg.

But, except for Gumilev, who was no drawing-room pet, they thought the war of '14 vulgar and distasteful, and did nothing to help. So God bless Simonov, who sticks his nose into Stalingrad and has his whiskers singed in its flames, and writes about Stalingrad—not well, but from the heart. It's more than what Blok did in the last war.

As for culture and "intelligentsia," as they understood it in 1913—well, there just ain't no more. The *Mir Iskusstva*, with its cult of the French, represented a Russian tradition that died in its infancy, and Repin is back on the throne. In music, Prokofiev, the young rebel of 1913, carries on, paradoxically, the cultural traditions of the time. He is a European, essentially. But, on the whole, the bonds with the West are very, very thin, and Russian art and literature are almost in a national vacuum—and that's bad. Still, why worry to-day, when far greater issues are being fought out—down there, at Stalingrad?

. . . True, in "highbrow" poetry, there is still Pasternak, but he is under a cloud, and I haven't recently seen any of his poetry being published anywhere.

In short, Wilde's "All art is quite useless" is the antithesis of the Soviet line which is that art must be *useful*. Only how much good art does one get on that basis? The question is fundamental. (Music, as an abstract art, is, naturally, freer from these limitations than painting and books.)

October 6

It seems that somebody very high up—Stalin himself to be exact—complained to the Americans about the inadequacy of the American shipments of war equipment, etc., to the Soviet Union. Old Admiral Standley had a pretty rough passage when he went to see him at the Kremlin. "No Second Front—and not even the equipment—what the hell!"—or words to that effect. Standley, who received us at Spasa House this afternoon, said he was going off to Washington to find out what the devil was the matter. The aid to Russia was behind schedule; somebody, he said, had somewhere dropped a monkey wrench in the machinery; and it was necessary to remove the obstacles—if they could be found. "It isn't the sinkings only," he said. It was vitally important to increase the American aid to the Soviet Union, and he was going to see the President about it. "These people need a lot of things—equipment, and also food—lots of it." The old gentleman was in a bad mood—angry with the Russians, who were treating him rough; with the Americans, who were letting him down; with the British, who were refusing to give enough information about convoys. Also, the Persian route was still very slow in materialising, and the northern route was desperately hard and costly. Of the Second Front communiqué he merely said that it was agreed upon in Washington by Molotov and Roosevelt. "Not in London?" He hummed and hawed. "Anyway," he said, "agreement means understanding: one has to understand that things sometimes have to be modified under the force of circumstances." He would say no more, and when pressed to do so, he said: "This Second Front business reminds me of the story of the new boy at school. 'What's your name?' 'Don't know.' 'What d'you mean?—who's your father?' 'Now, none of that—we've got quite enough trouble with that question at home.'" And he laughed rather angrily, without his usual good humour and jocularity.

The Russians are very fed-up. They are afraid of two reactions: (*a*) If Stalingrad falls, they think a lot of people abroad will say: "What's the good? It's too late to help them." (*b*) If it doesn't fall, they will say: "Well, the Russians are doing fine; so why worry?"

Boris, who dropped in to-night, thought it would fall, but that Baku wouldn't. But, anyway, he said, the war would now go on a very long time, and the Russians wouldn't cave in. He made some interesting remarks about the Stalin–Trotsky controversy in the old days. When he was a student at Moscow University, the students fought violently over it. He himself was a Stalinite. Lenin, he said, had had a good number of Trotskyite hangers-on; mostly Jews; he despised them, but used them because they were clever. They were internationalists; and to them Russia was merely manure for the world revolution; Stalin was patriotic, and he got rid of them. "But wasn't Lenin a Russian patriot?" "Yes—he loved Russia—in his own way. Think, for example, how fond he was of Tolstoy and Gorki."

What melancholy names the Moscow railway-stations have to-day—Leningrad Station, Kursk Station, Kiev Station, Rzhev Station, Belorussian Station. . . . Stations to Nowhere.

Monday, October 19

This Hess business is becoming more and more unpleasant. I hear that this morning a Polish officer was standing in a queue outside one of the Gastronom shops, and people began to shout remarks at him: "Instead of standing there in a queue for delicacies, hadn't you English better do a little fighting?" When he explained that he was a Pole, they left him alone.

Incidentally, speaking of Poles, there is a great deal of bitter feeling among the Russians about the Polish Army under General Anders having recently left for Iran.

Two explanations are given: "Rats leaving the ship which—*they* think—is sinking." The other, more plausible one is that Anders doesn't want to have his men killed off in Russia, and wants them to arrive in Poland all spick and span, and ready to take over, and run the country. Comment I heard was: "No fear; after this desertion, *they* won't get back to Poland." There are lots of stories about the odd behaviour of Kot, the Polish Ambassador, who is now to be replaced by another man. Kot used to go around saying quite openly: "We Poles have the best intelligence service in Russia." Altogether, a nasty business; no doubt many of the Poles have had a very raw deal (but haven't millions of Russians had a "raw deal" this past year, too, as regards food and housing conditions?); and it may have been hard for the Russians at the moment to feed and supply the Anders army adequately; still, it isn't exactly graceful on the part of the Poles to beat it, at a time like this. . . . As for the Polish deportees in 1939—that, of course, was a pretty raw and ugly business; but there was a certain rough logic in the Russians' desire to remove from places close to their frontier with Germany and the German-occupied parts of Poland those elements whom they regarded as hostile, and as potential fifth-columnists in the event of a German attack on Russia.

Only why was it necessary to do it all in such a messy and disorderly way, and to dump them in the wilds of Kazakhstan and God knows where? There was no real excuse for it in 1939 and 1940, when there was no war on.

But to return to Hess. Boris to-day said: "Now, look; we aren't such fools as you think. Do you imagine we don't know why there is no trial of Hess?" I quoted the familiar arguments against having such a trial before the end of the war. "No," he said, "that's a lot of legalistic jugglery. The truth is that if there is no trial of Hess, it is because at such a trial Hess might spill the beans. *And then there would have to be a purge in England.* And the separate-peace party would then disappear." I tried to assure him that there was really no such thing as a "separate-peace party" in England, and that Churchill was in full control, and Churchill could be trusted one hundred per cent.

And then there was this comic aside to this whole dismal business.

Right on top of the *Pravda* article, with its story that Frau Hess was trying, through her friends in England, to join her husband, Hitler's "unofficial Ambassador," out comes the *Britansky Soyuznik* with a lot of notes on culture in England, and among them a photo of "Madame Hess giving a lunch-time piano recital *at the London Royal Exchange*." It was actually Dame Myra Hess. . . . But what a brick to drop at a time like this, and what glorious fun Boris had with it to-night! Here was the Hess *ménage*, in the midst of its musical and social activities, plotting with British High Finance against the Soviet Union—right there, in the heart of the City of London!

Earlier to-day I had lunch with Squadron-Leader H.M. He, like the others, was furious about that "sanctuary for gangsters" article. I shouldn't be surprised if that was going to be the general reaction in England.

And yet, is there any serious reason why a White Paper should not be published at this belated stage, explaining the exact circumstances of Hess's landing in Britain, and what exactly his proposals were? I can well imagine what they were; and I can also see why the facts were not disclosed at the time: the idea of an "honourable peace" with Hitler in May 1941—at the expense of the Russians—might have found some support among the Munichites and the blitz-weary. Not a serious danger, but still a slight danger of mental confusion in Britain.

October 22

The Hess case hasn't died down yet; prominence was given in the papers to-day to a Labour M.P.'s question whether Hess had been manacled—like the Dieppe Canadians. Simultaneously, the Press published a particularly horrible story of a Russian war prisoners' camp at Velikie-Luki: festering wounds teeming with maggots, gangrene, no medical attention, no food, a horrible stench; then the prisoners beat up a brute of an S.S.-man who had nearly killed a wounded man who was trying to get a potato; this revolt was followed by fearful reprisals.

October 26

The reaction to the Hess campaign has been so unfavourable in Britain that the Russians have dropped the matter—for the present.

What happened last night was an odd Hotel Metropole experience. Olga and Natasha were having supper in my room when a head popped through the half-open door. He was a young airman, and he asked whether he could join us. He was young, dark, good-looking in a slightly Oriental way—later he turned out to be half-Armenian and spoke with a slight Armenian accent. He was slightly tight, but not offensively so. But he soon became maudlin, and seemed, altogether, a somewhat neurotic type—for a Russian airman especially.

"I am very lonely," he said. "My father is in Leningrad, and he doesn't write to me. My three sisters were left behind at Dniepropetrovsk. My father treated my mother badly, and went off with another woman, and my mother went back to her own people at Erivan. She's Armenian, you see." I could see: he also had a large Armenian nose, black eyes and thick black eyebrows, meeting above his nose, and curly black hair. He was rather unshaven and smelt of booze. He seemed a pleasant enough fellow, and sounded very lonely and sorry for himself. On his air force tunic he wore a Guards badge and a parachute badge. "Please forgive me for barging in," he said. "But it's so nice to meet friendly people. I've just come from the National. I met a Free French Air Force sergeant there. We drank a bottle of *livadia*, and then a bottle of *cahors*. He kept saying: 'Boom, boom,' and I kept saying: 'Paff, paff, paff.' That was about all the conversation we managed. He was a gunner, and I am a fighter-pilot, though I have also done some bombing in my lifetime. There was also an English officer at the National, and he asked me to his room for a drink; I said to him: 'All right, and very good, and tank you,' but I couldn't stand it for very long. So I left and came here."

For no particular reason he pulled out a Party membership card—which seemed to be his all right, though I am not sure. We got him another plate, and he had some more vodka. "We fight badly, very badly," he said gloomily, and with a touch of melodrama. "The war is going all wrong." He seemed to be one of those neurotic, demoralised types, who aren't very usual in Russia. Then he talked about his wife. Yes, he had married her when he was twenty-

one; now he was twenty-eight. He didn't like to think of her. "She's a bad memory," he said. "But I have a son by her—he must be six now, but I haven't heard about him for over a year. He was in Leningrad. Perhaps he is dead"—and he buried his head in his hands.

After another drink, he said: "My father has travelled all over Europe, but I haven't been anywhere. I seldom get into cultured company. So you'll excuse me, won't you, if I behave a little clumsily. . . ." Then he became jovial, and was quite good company, really; together with the girls, he bawled the Khrennikov "Song of Moscow," and "Katyusha," and the "Little Blue Scarf," and then he hummed sentimentally something called "Violets in the Shade," and he danced with the girls, and then, suddenly, he grew maudlin again and exclaimed: "Don't you people understand? I am young, young—and I want to live; and here I am—a cripple, shot through both legs by the Fritzes. I baled out. I was lucky to have come down over our territory. The Germans"—he now became philosophical. "What is there, I ask you, that's so peculiar about them? They also have eyes and faces and hands and ears and legs like anybody else. But it's their bad training, their bad mentality. . . . Atrocities—well, yes. But at times we can be pretty bad too. I have seen our soldiers beating up prisoners and knocking them on the head with their rifle-butts. And with these hands of mine"—they were large, rough hands—"I killed two Germans—yes, only two. I see you are looking at my guards badge? I should have been decorated, but you know, decorations are all a matter of luck. But never mind—this guards badge is good enough for me. Yes," he said, looking at his hands again, "two Germans. Or maybe there were more than two. And perhaps not only Germans. With these hands of mine I pulled the bomb release over Kharkov. Perhaps I killed some of our own people. Old men, children. . . . How can a bomber tell? We were ordered to bomb Kharkov during the spring offensive. Kharkov," he repeated with a touch of distaste. "It has worried me ever since I saw our own people being blown up by my bombs. . . ." For a time he went on along these lines. Then he changed the subject, or somebody changed it for him.

"England," he said. "Well, well. It's pretty decent of the English after all. We are the only Socialist country in the world; and we are thankful, *deeply* thankful for the little help you are sending us. *Deeply* thankful," he repeated, with a touch of irony. "In fact, we are thankful you are not *against* us—as you might well have been when Hitler attacked us." "When do you think the war will end?" somebody asked. "Do you think our discussing it here will make any difference? It's all terribly hard on our country." And he exclaimed dramatically: "Our country, our Russia has been crucified! Oh, we people in the army and air force can't complain. They feed us. We get two pounds of bread a day; it's more than I can eat. But these poor devils of civilians! I went to an aircraft factory the other day. There was one old worker who was sitting down on a bench instead of working. 'I can't,' he said, '*zhrat ni huya*; not a damn thing to eat, nothing but bread and nettle soup for three months. How would *you* like to fly on that sort of food?' " Then we had supper. I opened my last can of precious American tongue which had come with me all the way from London, and added it to the rather measly supper one gets at the Metropole nowadays, and we made a feast of it. "I am going back to my unit to-morrow," said Sasha—he now insisted that we all call each other by our Christian names—"but maybe I'll come back next week. I've got no friend—just Styopa. He's a good youngster, a *kolkhoznik* from Archangel; a very keen boy. I'll bring him along next time."

Then again he talked about the Germans. "There's no doubt the Germans are cowards. When we ram them, they get into a panic; altogether, they never like to engage in a dogfight when it looks it may be too hot for them. But they are much better off than we are. A Russian pilot is damn cold; he has nothing but a bottle of vodka beside him. But the German—he sucks rum all the time, through a rubber tube. They are a bit tight all the time while flying; so they fly in comfort; they also have electric suits to keep them warm. We haven't got a damn thing; we just blow on our fingers." All of which sounded a bit silly.

We sang and danced again, and Sasha got amorous, and it was a job for the girls to shake him off. And then again he grew melancholy, and said nobody loved him, and he was in grave trouble; at the National he had his papers and his map stolen by somebody. He couldn't go back to his regiment. Did we think he had better commit suicide? We thought he had better not. The girls went home, and I went to the Foreign Office. I did not see him when I returned at midnight; but the next morning it transpired that he had hung about the hotel all night, breaking into all kinds of rooms, and making a nuisance of himself to several women who claimed that he had actually *unlocked* their doors with a key of his own. Or perhaps he did find a kindred soul in the end?—I don't know. I almost hope he did. Anyway there had been several complaints about him. The militia had been put on his trail. The hotel people even put forward the theory that he wasn't an airman at all, but an impostor. I hope they are wrong; in fact, I am sure they are. And I hope the militia don't get him.

October 28

Paul Winterton and Maurice Hindus have just returned from the Pogoreloye area, near Rzhev, where they spent two days. They found that what the papers wrote about the place is substantially correct. During nine or ten months of the German occupation, fifty per cent of the population died of hunger. Practically all the houses are burned down, and the surviving people are living in dugouts. Paul remarked that for the first time in his experience he had talked to people who had *personally* been beaten up by the Germans.

Maurice commented on the completely senseless destruction which the fanatical young Nazis went in for; they burned down the bathhouse in one village—and then they had nowhere to wash. The most memorable and, in a way, most revolting thing of all, he said, was the story of how a crowd of young Germans made a little girl of nine carry over her shoulders two large pails of water up the hill, and as the weeping child was staggering up the hill, collapsing under the load, the Nazis kept running round her in circles, laughing and jeering. I am convinced there is no nation in the world, except the Germans, who would have thought this funny. Whether you think of British, Russians, Americans, French, Italians, Spaniards—the thing is utterly inconceivable.

Tuapse was to-day mentioned for the first time in the communiqué. The German thrust towards the Black Sea is causing some anxiety; though less anxiety than would a similar thrust to the Caspian; on their way to the Caspian they have been well held up, according to all accounts.

One of the oddest wartime rackets in Moscow is at the Composers' Union. D. tells me it's like a bazaar, with dozens of people arriving every day—representatives of front theatres and choral "ensembles"—in search of new

songs; and all the second, third and fourth-rate composers swarming round them, making deals, or trying to, and usually succeeding; for the demand for new songs is enormous. One second-rater came to Moscow, spent five weeks here and made, with a few wretched songs, enough contracts to yield him a clear profit of 35,000 roubles. The "soldiers' songs" have become a wonderful racket: everybody is writing soldiers' songs; for instance Kruchinin, who used to write fake gipsy songs in the past, and cabaret songs for Plevitskaya, and later—during the N.E.P. period—songs of Moscow down-and-outs, robbed by the Revolution—has now blossomed into a great patriotic song-writer, and is making money hand over fist. However, among all the junk, a few good songs *do* occasionally appear.

This lecture given by Yudin, one of the Party's great ideologists, at the Pillared Hall to-night, was certainly worth going to. The hall was almost packed, half the audience being soldiers. He talked first about the collapse of Hitler's plans, and the breakdown of his 1942 time-table; "Hitler," he said, "is to-day further from victory than he was on the day he attacked the Soviet Union. . . . The Red Army has wrecked every German plan; internationally, this is of paramount importance." To the Hungarian Premier, Hitler said in June: "This summer will see our final victory." Goebbels had said the same thing to a delegation of Turkish journalists. "The Germans," said Yudin, "hoped to smash the Red Army this summer, and to bring in against us Turkey, Bulgaria, Japan, Spain, and even Sweden, and so to force Britain and America to capitulate. . . . Yet the Conference of the European Nations who were going to 'consecrate' the New Order has, significantly, been postponed."

Hitler failed, even though, if one included all the satellite forces he had assembled, the strength of the forces he threw against Russia last June was, in men, tanks, and planes about the same as in June 1941. The main drive was to be an envelopment of Moscow from the south-east; the subsidiary drive was across the Caucasus into the Middle East, Iran, and, before long, India, where the Germans would have linked up with the Japs.

"What is the position now? A pro-German Turkish general recently wrote that if by November 1 the Germans did not get Stalingrad, or Baku, or Moscow, or Leningrad, they would find themselves in a very difficult position. The heroic defence of Stalingrad will perhaps enter the history of this war as the most decisive event of all. I was myself in Stalingrad in August and September, and our men there know full well that if they smash the Germans at Stalingrad, they will, in effect, have smashed the German war machine generally." Yudin then said that the Germans were beginning to show signs of nervousness. They were beginning to flirt with democratic elements in some of the occupied countries: the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was saying that "Some nations are made in such a way that they must have democracy"; and Goebbels was now beginning to say that war was "abnormal." Yet stopping the war no longer depended on Germany, but on Russia's powers of resistance.

(There was a clear hint here of those German peace overtures they had, I gather, recently made to Russia through the Japs—actually offering to abandon all, or nearly all, of Soviet territory.)

At the same time, however (but maybe no longer?), the Germans had been urging the Japs to attack Russia; Yudin, however, took the line that the Japs were no fools: they were satisfied, he said, with what they had grabbed from England and America, and had no desire to see Germany rule the world; a German victory was not in Japan's interests.

He added that the Turks also realised that a German victory would not be in Turkey's interests.

Yudin made the usual complaints about the absence of the Second Front; and if the Anglo–Soviet–American coalition were to remain passive, despite its immense resources, it would be no good. "I think there must, and will be, a Second Front; but we have got to smash the Germans ourselves, whether there is a Second Front or not."

And then he came to the question which seemed to arouse the greatest excitement among the audience. And that was: *why* was there no Second Front?

"We have never denied the Marxist view," he said, "that class interests matter greatly in all governmental decisions. Only in this political way can we explain the delays in the Second Front. The reasons for these delays are *entirely political*. Militarily, Britain and America are, of course, quite ready. Great Britain has four and a half million men under arms, and the United States about as many. At the end of this year the United States will be producing 10,000 planes a month. The Second Front will start the moment it suits the British Government politically to start one; not before."

He then enumerated some of the principal enemies of the Second Front—the "Astor Group," which included "many great capitalists"; and also people like Lord Halifax, and the influential editor of *The Times*. "The programme of these people may be summed up in one word: Munich. In the opinion of these people. every question ought to be settled at Russia's expense." He referred to a book by Lord Lloyd, with a preface by Halifax, in which Lloyd had spoken highly of the Fascist régime in Italy. . . . "These people are essentially Fascists," Yudin said. "When Churchill came to Russia, they started a terrific anti-Soviet campaign and one against what they called the 'Second Front adventure.' Then there were the Catholics, whose organ, the *Catholic Herald*, had recently written: 'Large sections of British opinion, including the Premier, regard our alliance with Russia as an unpleasant necessity.' Many of the trade union leaders were also anti-Soviet. Yet," said Yudin, "the people of Great Britain were overwhelmingly pro-Soviet and pro-Second Front. This had become a great political issue in Great Britain; the *Daily Worker* had really got to the bottom of the problem when it said: 'Throw the Munichites out of the Government.' Apart from the people, there were also many influential industrialists in favour of the Second Front, for instance, Lord Beaverbrook."

He seemed less interested in America: though he said there was a similar situation there; he mentioned Hearst and Chaplin as examples of the two conflicting tendencies.

The impression one had was that Yudin was fairly sure of Roosevelt, but not quite so sure of Churchill, and that the story of the "Munichites in the British Government" and the Hess controversy had been started in the hope that British opinion would react sharply against these "Munichites."

Then some written questions were sent in; and nearly all related to Britain and to the Second Front. The most interesting ones were:

Q. Did the Germans offer us [the Soviet Union] separate peace?

A. I don't know, but some suggestions were put forward through the vassal Press.

Q. What is the British Government's attitude to Hess?

A. I gather that the British Government hasn't given us any answer yet.

Q. Is Japan concentrating troops on our frontiers?

A. That's an old story. We also are sending troops there.

Q. What was the effect in England of Stalin's letter to Cassidy?

A. It made the Second Front a clear-cut issue.

Q. Why have we not destroyed the German invaders in 1942, as Stalin said we would?

A. Sometimes, it is absurd to approach such a matter by saying: "In two months, time will be up." To do that would be an example of cretinism in propaganda. It reminds me of the slogan: "Not another step back." A certain Commissar was so impressed by it that, while his unit was going into attack, somewhere on the Leningrad Front, he continued to shout stupidly: "Not a step back."

(Interesting, this objection to over-literal interpretations: it might apply, even from the Russian standpoint, to "The Second Front in 1942.")

Q. Why is the British Government incapable of breaking all this resistance to the Second Front?

A. There's a big conflict over it in England, and some people would sooner co-operate with Hitler than with us. I don't want to suggest that Churchill *cannot* bréak this resistance, but——. (He shrugged his shoulders.)

There were many more questions on this subject, which seemed foremost in everybody's mind; and also some questions on Dieppe; Yudin was ironical about it. Then:

Q. What is Eden's attitude?

A. He favours co-operation with us, and so is probably for the Second Front. In practice, I don't know where he stands. I haven't come across any recent utterances of his.

What is one to conclude from all this? First, that there is, among the "politically enlightened," an undercurrent of acute suspicion of the British ruling class; that "Munich," that is, the Isolation of Russia, and the Free Hand in the East, remains, in the minds of these people, something that is still very much alive; on the other hand, there is a deliberate attempt to magnify these things in the minds of the Russian people; to minimise—and even to deny—the purely military and naval objections to the Second Front, and to minimise the difference between Churchill and the Munichites, who, after all, belong to the same "class."

November 3

I spent a particularly happy and interesting evening at the Actors' House into which Volodya Poliakov and his "Happy Raiders" brought a real whiff of the front. They all looked tired, worn-out, rather grubby and down-at-heel, in their stained, threadbare uniforms. For five months now they had been entertaining the troops in the Northern Caucasus, first on the Kuban, then in the Tuapse and Novorossisk areas. One could feel that they were over-worked, and that the nervous strain was considerable. And yet they were in high spirits, though there was also something pathetic about them. They are nearly all young actors from good theatres, who got together and formed one of those Russian "Ensa" companies soon after the war began. Some were killed, others took their place. Poliakov, tall, lean, tired, with pathetic dog's eyes, was both compère and the author of most of the sketches. The musical director, who played the piano in the show, was a young man with a long nose and mousy hair called Tabachnikov, who had written the tune—or rather the best of the various tunes—of "*Davai zakurim*" ("Let's Have a Smoke, Pal").

. . . . .

In the show there was a very good comic trio of army cooks, among them a very tall, dark, hook-nosed Tartar or Armenian, who sang with the funniest accent.

Their song went something like this:

We cook you cabbage soup
And nourishing borsch,
With real cows' butter—
Eat to your heart's content,
Eat, eat, eat,
Eat to your heart's content.

In the dressing-room afterwards, one of the young actors said, with a slightly melancholy smile: "But for the war I'd have a job in the Moscow Art Theatre, instead of playing the 'Little Blue Scarf' on the accordion!"

These young people were really part of the front. Later they told me that they carried no scenery with them except the grubby curtain we had seen, and only some banjos and guitars, and an accordion; at first they had had a piano but, during the retreat in August, the Germans had captured it—a good thing, too. It was a rotten old piano, and a nuisance to carry around.

In the mountainous area at Tuapse, where they had been active in the last month, it would have been impossible. They had given a couple of hundred shows in the last five months, going from one point of the front to another. Often they had performed under shell-fire; a few times they had been bombed in the middle of the show; several times they had also been attacked by German aircraft on the roads; latterly they had tried, for that reason, to travel by night, whenever possible.

In the dressing-room, there was a soldier—who had seen them perform in the Caucasus, and who said they were wonderful people for keeping the soldiers happy—particularly those who had survived the tragedy of Kerch in May. He was one of them. It was a little Dunkirk, but far more terrible. The Germans had immense superiority in tanks, and planes, and everything, and the Russians were simply thrown into the sea. Not many escaped. Those who survived got across the three miles of the Straits of Kerch in rowing-boats, the luckier ones in motor-launches, the less lucky ones on rafts or hanging on to the inflated tyres of the lorries which they had had to abandon; many of those clinging on to the rafts and lorry-wheels were swept away by the current into the Black Sea, and were never heard of again; and naturally, the German planes mercilessly machine-gunned those trying to get across the straits. He said the "evacuation" of the Kerch Peninsula was his worst experience in the whole war. Later, remnants of his unit fought in the hills near Maikop, after the German break-through at Rostov; their worst experience there was to live for a whole month on boiled maize, and nothing else, and, above all, without any salt. Later, he said, a small machine turned up somewhere in the neighbourhood which extracted salt from sea-water. That saved them from the scurvy some were already beginning to develop. Munitions also were very short, for they had to come all the way by Baku and Tbilisi.

The show was a curious medley; there were some amusing sketches—one about Goebbels and German Politeness Week; another about the Second Front—in the last scene the Englishman who keeps promising the Second Front has grown a long white beard.

The girls sang songs of a sentimental, nostalgic kind: "I wait for you, I long for you, I know you'll come back; and then I'll kiss you, I'll kiss you, as

I have never kissed you before. . . . I love you, I love you, as I have always loved you. No, it isn't true, I love you far more. . . ." And all this sung with gipsy-like passion to gipsy-like music. The soldiers loved it. There was also an element of hate propaganda in the show: for instance, the Cossack Girl's monologue, who tells of Andrei, her beloved—"they hanged him on the apple-tree; it was below that apple-tree he kissed me for the first time. . . ." "They have trodden on my heart with their boots. . . . Down there, on the Kuban, you have your mother, and your beloved, and now they are trailing along the roads, through the burned villages, begging for bread. . . ." One of the actors told me that, when they heard this monologue, the Cossacks would fire their pistols into the air and go frantic. Memories of the retreat from the Kuban are still fresh, and every Cossack with the army in the Caucasus has his family and his children there. There was also a sketch about a deserter; and one Cossack woman who saw it, came up to an officer present at the show, and told him her own husband was a deserter and was hiding in the village.

The troops in the Caucasus are not down-hearted, but they are having a very hard time. I learned that although Novorossisk itself had been abandoned, the Russians, though almost completely isolated, were holding the famous cement works on the other side of the bay, and were continuing from there to shell the harbour so as to make it unusable by the Germans. They were high up on the hill, and the Germans, hard as they tried, had not been able to get at them. The great problem was to keep them supplied, across the mountains, with food and munitions.

November 5

Boris was making cracks about the campaign in Libya; he called it "Folies Bergère"—with one dancing chorus coming in at one end, and another chorus coming in from the other—Benghazi and back again, what! I said I thought it would be different this time.

Hitler is beginning to realise he can't manage it at Stalingrad, after all; the other day he said, "he didn't want 'another Verdun.'" Colonel Exham, of the British Military Mission, who has been remarkably confident about the situation here—even at the worst moments—says that he was confident ever since July that Stalingrad would hold. He hints that the situation is much more satisfactory than most people realise. The Michelas and Parks, on the American side, are, on the other hand, as busy as ever debunking the Red Army—if only to be different from Faymonville. But they really know nothing.

November 7

Stalin's speech was very confident and generally reassuring. In Allied quarters it produced a sigh of relief. Heaven knows what some expected after all the recent unpleasantness about Hess, etc. It's true, the phrase "absence of a Second Front" occurred seven times in Stalin's speech; even so, he was very pleasant about the Allies generally. The day passed off in a very unspectacular way—there was no parade, or anything, except a diplomatic reception given by Molotov. It suddenly got very cold, with fifteen degrees (Centigrade) of frost, and a lot of snow. The heating in the hotel is still reasonably good.

November 9

There is great excitement about the landing in North Africa. People in factories are asking: "Is this the beginning of the Second Front?" However, at V.O.K.S. where we were given a tremendous feed apropos of nothing in particular, and

with no guests of any great interest, Madame Kislova was still pooh-poohing the whole thing, and still talking about "four divisions."

My first impulse, on hearing of North Africa, was to take the first plane to Casablanca—France had come tangibly to life again! And yet, with all the disadvantages one suffers from as a journalist, Russia is, and is likely to remain, in the general scheme of things, incomparably more important than France. . . . So I shall stay here.

November 13

Churchill's speech was not very pleasant to the Russians; he must still feel very annoyed about all the Second Front agitation, and Hess. He also sharply attacked Willkie, who annoyed him both with his Second Front "prodding" and his remarks on India. Churchill remarked that the Second Front agitation should be completely ignored.

North Africa continues to be getting a good show in the Russian Press but, in private, one still hears a good deal of pooh-poohing, and a lot of talk about the Germans abandoning North Africa but "consolidating" on the Continent of Europe. Stalin's letter to Cassidy to-day will help, however, to put the thing in a better perspective in people's minds. Up till now many people have been saying: "Suppose the German lose North Africa—so what?"

November 15

Olga and Natasha blew in to-day, all covered with snow, and rosy-cheeked. They said they had had a very busy time at the factory in connection with November 7. For one thing, they sent off 1,200 parcels—1,000 to the army, and 200 to hospitals—on behalf of 5,000 workers who had contributed all the stuff (more or less) voluntarily. The parcels contained food, chocolate, knitted gloves and scarves, etc. The various deductions from the workers' wages are pretty stiff, and amount to nearly forty per cent, in the case of a 900-rouble wage.

Although I had a bad cold, and it was very cold outside, I went at night to the Tchaikovsky Hall where Zhuravlev recited patriotic poems and Sofronitsky played Skriabin. Moscow looked very lovely under its thick coat of clean crisp snow. When I got to the Tchaikovsky Hall, I thought there would be the usual scramble at the cloakroom; but the attendant said: "Taking off your overcoat isn't compulsory; in fact I advise you not to."

It was three or four degrees above zero in the hall; everybody sat there with fur caps and overcoats and galoshes; the artists alone were very inadequately dressed; a little electric radiator was put near the piano to keep them from freezing completely. Where in the world would you get an audience to pack a large hall, blowing steam and sitting there huddled up, listening to someone reciting Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* and someone else—even as good as Sofronitsky—playing Skriabin? It was all a little reminiscent of two things: Zoschenko's comic stories about theatres in the early days of the Revolution, and—Leningrad last winter. To add to the discomfort, a lot of people were coughing, especially a soldier on leave who barked most disturbingly right through the *Bronze Horseman*. Sofronitsky played Skriabin exquisitely and very chastely (I don't think the temperature had anything to do with that), without that erotic belly-aching which some think essential in playing Skriabin. Although his last piece, the famous D-sharp minor study, brought the house down, there were no encores; the poor pianist couldn't stand the cold any longer, I suppose.

I met Dodik at the concert. He said he was immensely amused by the

series of articles in the *Britansky Soyuznik* entitled: "Four hundred years of Anglo-Russian Friendship." "If ever there were two countries," he said, "who have consistently trodden on one another's toes, it is surely England and Russia!" And he added: "Even now as allies they haven't quite got rid of the habit."

He remarked that even educated Russians knew extremely little about England and English literature, especially English poetry; they knew Shakespeare, of course; and they knew Byron and Shelley from bad translations; Keats was almost unknown; he and Burns had only just been "discovered" by Marshak; Tennyson and Browning were almost unknown; of the "moderns," people only knew Kipling. "T. S. Eliot?" "Never heard of him." The novelists, from Fielding to H. G. Wells, were, of course, well known in Russia; Galsworthy was considered the last great English novelist. Of modern novelists, Russians knew chiefly Richard Aldington and Priestley, and some of the Americans, notably Hemingway. A few people knew of Joyce and D. H. Lawrence, but both were considered eminently *unsuitable* writers for the masses.

I asked why, at the Opera, they went on playing the same old stuff—*The Barber of Seville* and *Traviata*—why nothing *really* good like Mussorgsky's *Khovanschina*, for instance? "No," he said, "not at a time like this; for we *are* living through very hard times. Both *Boris Godunov*, and especially *Khovanschina*, with its five and six and seven *flats*, and with its religious fanatics burning themselves to death, are much too gloomy. Our people react too directly to art. They are quite depressed enough; it's no use depressing them more. Let them have Rossini instead. It's good for them." He has a—to me—somewhat obscure theory that, regardless of whether it is in the major or the minor, music with *flats* is more depressing than music with *sharps*.

November 16

I visited the large—rather than great—exhibition of Soviet wartime painting, which has just opened at the Tretyakov Gallery.

If you want good painting, it is very disappointing. A few good landscapes and townscapes by Grabar and Yakovlev; a few good statues by Mukhina and Rakitina (the latter's bust of Zoya Kosmodemianskaya is very lovely—though, perhaps, a little reminiscent of Real del Sarte's 10,000 Jeanne d'Arcs); some fair Konchalovsky work, some strong *grafica* from starving Leningrad, and also a few very good small oil-paintings of Leningrad during the blockade, notably by Pakulin, with his deathly pale-blue winter skies; for the rest, it is mostly of documentary and propagandist interest. The portraits are good, but no better than stills from Russian documentary films—all these soldiers' and partisans' and airmen's faces are so good, they cannot help making good portraits.

But the large canvases are simply awful—all these "battle scenes" and "German horror" scenes, all these static tank battles with their plumes of fire and smoke, all these glorified and pretentious *images d'Epinal*, all these yards and yards of the Battle of Moscow, and Sebastopol, and Kerch, and more yards and yards of naval battles—painted probably at Tashkent, without even good photographs for guidance. Let's have good honest-to-god camera work instead!

And may these giant canvases rot away in time in the recesses of the most distant *obkom* or *gorsoviet* of the Union! . . . And how *pompier* all this official art is, all these official portraits by Gerasimov and Co.—Gerasimov, the Painter-Laureate who imagines that by being academic and "realistic" in the

worst sense, a painter can thereby join the august company of Van Dyck and Velasquez. He'll be lucky if history dumps him in the same dustbin as Bonnat and Laszlo!

The idea that every picture must tell a war story was nicely ticked off the other day at the Leningrad Miniature Theatre: first they showed a very flat seascape entitled: "Spot Where Our Heroic Submarines Sank an Enemy Convoy"; a picture of a field and a forest in the background, entitled: "Here Partisans Live"; and more on the same lines.

I come across more and more people in Moscow these days who live in houses where the temperature is only two or three degrees above zero.

November 22

The tremendous news came to-night of a great victory at Stalingrad! All Moscow is excited. For the first time to-night I was able to use a blue pencil to mark on the map the German *retreat*! Painted over the red of the German advance, it made a pretty little *purple patch* at the tip of the Don Bend. I wonder if the northern and southern pincer have already linked up and cut off Stalingrad? I was in Parker's room when the news came; Voitekhov and Poliakov were there; everybody was terribly excited. When the news came Voitekhov exclaimed, "*Nachalos!*"—"it's started." Very big things are expected from this offensive.

November 23

There was such a crush in the tramcar this afternoon, that I got my leg caught between two citizens, and when I pulled it out and finally jumped off the tramcar, I found that one of my galoshes had gone. The tramcar meantime had gone off. That happened on the way to the Stary Dom, and when I told the Ambassador about it, he laughed heartily and thought it a great joke, adding: "I have never been in a Moscow tramcar. Nor in the Metro, for that matter. The Russians won't allow it!"

I gathered that everything was much more cheerful now, and that the Kremlin were now "sending out warm rays."

The other day I got to know, through Ludmilla, an enormously fat girl, tall, red-cheeked, and ginger-haired, called Tanya—with legs like Doric pillars. She seems to be vaguely married to somebody—or divorced; I don't know. Anyway, this formidable fat blonde is said to drive all the Caucasians and Asiatics crazy whenever she visits their countries. She's on a good racket. She translates into smooth Russian verse the works of Azerbeijan, Buriat-Mongol, Yakut and God knows what other poets. She doesn't know any of these languages, of course, but she is given a literal translation, and then concocts a poem with roughly the same idea, and it's then called "Translated from the Buriat-Mongol," etc. It's a well-paid and well-encouraged racket, and she claims that Stalin himself was delighted with her Buriat-Mongol poems. It's done in the name of a closer acquaintance among the peoples of the Soviet Union, and these "translators" are given some wonderful facilities by the Writers' Union. Thus, Tanya has travelled by plane, ship, carriage, reindeer sleigh, railway, and every other means of locomotion all over Western Siberia, and Yakutia, and right up to the Siberian Arctic coast, and all through Central Asia and Mongolia, and also the Caucasus. She is full of good stories about life in Yakutsk, now quite a reasonably large town, and almost a

metropolis in north-Siberian terms, and about all the remarkable adventurous characters one meets there—trappers, and sea captains who sometimes hibernate in the Bear Islands and Wrangel Island. She also tells stories of Buriat-Mongolia—of the secretary of the Obkom who as a youngster became famous for killing the most notorious bandit of the region; he came home one day and threw the bandit's head on the family dinner-table, much to his mother's horror. "He has an extraordinary face," said Tanya, "very thin and pale, a perfect Mongol face, with grey temples and black fiery eyes." He had also led the young people's revolt against the Lamas. When the Buriat-Mongol Communists heard that Stalin had expressed approval of Tanya's translations from the Buriat-Mongol, they ransacked a distant temple and presented her with a whole trunkful of Buddhas. When I went to her flat the other day—she shares the house with some other people—I found that she still had a few Buddhas left; the rest had been looted by her friends, while some had been destroyed in the bombing of Moscow last year when there was a fire in the house where she was then living. One of the Buddhas she carries around everywhere, and seems to be very superstitious about it. She also owns a remarkable brass statue from a Buddhist temple—an unbelievably erotic affair.

Later we went to the Red Army House where there was a show given by a whole series of poets of the same variety as Tanya; they recited translations from the Moldavian, and Estonian, and all sorts of Central Asiatic languages. I found it a bore; but hundreds of soldiers who were there, smelling of black bread and *makhorka*, and damp leather boots, listened patiently, and even appreciatively. Many of the exotic poems were addressed to Stalin.

One man recited a series of Belorussian "laments," and somebody else read, first in Yiddish, and then in a Russian translation, a poem about the twenty-eight heroes of the Battle of Moscow; then a Black Sea sailor recited his own Russian poem about the S.S. men who had poisoned seventy Russian children with cake; and finally there was a recitation, by a number of swarthy Azerbeijans, of their own poems—they sounded like a pleasant melodious jingle—and Tanya recited her translations. "Eagles of the Caucasus, How can I live without you?" was the theme of one of them.

November 25

The B.B.C. has now for three days been leading with Stalingrad.

Colonel Exham, of the British Military Mission, seems to think that the Russian drive at Stalingrad is going to develop into something much bigger still; and he already talks of a big drive *all the way to Kharkov*.

Ivan Spiridonovich, the old waiter downstairs, looked terribly dejected to-day; I asked him what was wrong; with tears in his eyes he said that his only son had been killed at Stalingrad.

Mozshukhin, the lame cleaner, brought back my suit to-day and sounded very perky: "Our fellows have started giving them the works," he said, "looks like it, doesn't it? It'll go pretty quickly now." "Another eighteen months," I suggested. "Come on," he said, "it'll be over by the autumn." He brought with him his little girl, Svetlana, aged six or seven; with the cold weather returning, her hands were all red and raw; last year's frostbite was making itself felt: while Mozshukhin was in Moscow, his wife and child were staying in a village somewhere outside; when they saw the Germans coming they

fled into the forest, and during the whole night they crawled on all fours, till they reached a village where there were no Germans. The child's hands were badly frozen.

Boris Lavrenev's *Old Hag* is a remarkably well-written horror story—but without any horrors; everything is done by suggestion. It tells of a bunch of soldiers stationed in a liberated village; they are served by an old woman: she turns out to be a woman of twenty-five, who has grown old in one year of the German occupation. The concluding words are uttered by one of the soldiers: "We've got an enormous job ahead of us yet, boys. We've got to make all those Fascist bitches howl till they die like dogs on the stinking carcases of their mates."

A house-warming party at Cassidy's to-night. House-warming is the *mot juste*—it's the best-heated house I have been in for weeks. Some of the Free French were there, and were very disturbed about all this Darlan business; they call Darlan a quisling and are shocked by all this American hobnobbing with the ex-Vichyites; the Russians also appear to be very uneasy about it. Two of the Americans were debunking the Stalingrad show as hard as they could go. Colonel Park ("Uncle Dick Knows") was saying: "I'm telling you—that Russian offensive is just phony. The Germans are simply pulling out. Uncle Dick knows." General Michela, on the other hand was saying: "Sure the Germans are encircled at Stalingrad. But I tell you—it's a damn smart move on their part. Those twenty-two German divisions at Stalingrad—they're going to be a hell of an embarrassment to the Russians right through the winter."

I must say I like Exham's forecast much better, and also this Russian comment from Ludmilla. "There will be the right, healthy kind of patriotism in Russia from now on, and after the war. *For now, perhaps for the first time, every Russian has realised that we are a great people.*"

November 27

I spent the afternoon with Edgar Snow, at the famous Vladimir Ilyitch Works, on the south side of Moscow—the former Michelson Works where Lenin was shot at and wounded by Dora Kaplan in 1918. The main production here was shells—thousands and thousands a day, and the labour was mostly on the primitive side. I was surprised to learn that the bulk of the equipment had been evacuated to the East last autumn; that the factory was now working mostly on equipment brought here from the Ukraine, and some new equipment brought from Britain and America. For four or five months after the evacuation the plant had been more or less at a standstill, and hadn't started producing in a big way until a few months ago. Comrade Prigulsky, the director, aged thirty-five, dark, energetic, and full of humour, described how he had spent 1935 and 1936 in America; he had worked at factories in Detroit and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and Cincinnati. "I like the Americans; damn good workers—very keen and good technicians," he said. "When I came back, my pals pestered me to death with questions about America; they wanted to know everything; there's a great interest in America among our people; they wanted to know what the engineers under whom I had worked were like, and even asked whether I had ever got to know a black woman. Now that I think of it, I wish I *had* got married in America—to a white woman, though." As he talked away, the phone rang several times; it was people congratulating

him on his Order of Lenin he had just received. "Yes," he said, "it was difficult at first to start the place going, after all our main equipment had been sent out of Moscow. But, as I said, we got some machine-tools from the Ukraine, and some from abroad, and a few that were made here in Moscow, and we proceeded to mobilise new labour, for most of our old workers had been evacuated together with the plant. We just took what we could get; picked them straight off the street, as it were. We got a lot of housewives together, and even some old grannies, a lot of youngsters and even children —for the simpler jobs. Over seventy per cent of the 5,000 people we now employ are girls and women. They work well, in two shifts of eleven hours each. What do you expect? There's a war on; and we need a devil of a lot of shells. It's too difficult to bring the stuff from the States; we have to ask England and America to send us only the really essential things. We know how difficult it is to bring the stuff, and how many of the ships get lost on the way here.

"A year ago we had a very bad shortage of shells; now things are looking up. For munitions we have now held the Central Committee's banner for first place—for four months running. In five months we have doubled our production. And this plant alone—not counting what our plant produces out East—is now turning out three times the amount it used to turn out in June 1941."

We went through the various workshops and talked to a good many of the people. They were all working on more or less the same jobs—turning out shells. A lot of the women workers looked rather unlike the strong "proletarian" types one used to see on pre-war Soviet documentary films. They were a rather bedraggled collection of humanity, many of them Moscow housewives, whose husbands were at the front, and who wanted to help in the war effort, and also knew that they would get far better food if they worked in a factory. Most of them learned the simple trade in a fortnight; by that time they could already fulfil the ordinary "norm." Various means were used to increase the output continuously: there was the piece-work principle, and Socialist Competition, and double pay for overtime, and free meals for good workers, over and above the rations, and things like the "Stalingrad Decade."[1] in which every worker agreed to increase his last decade's output by fifty per cent; this followed the general excitement over the news of the present Stalingrad offensive (it was no use wasting such a golden opportunity to get more shells out of the workers, the director frankly said); this excitement, moreover, was being stimulated and prolonged by frequent pep talks. Apart from ordinary material advantages that a bigger output produced, there was undoubtedly also a great eagerness to "help the Front"—even here, among these raw labour recruits—these young lads and girls from the villages around Moscow, and all these housewives and grannies. Each one of them had a son, or a brother, or a husband at the front, and they were encouraged to work "for him," as well as "for the country." That they were not politically highly conscious people could be seen from the fact that only fifteen per cent of the young people belonged to the Komsomol, and there were very few Party members among these workers. The Party men had nearly all gone to the front. The Komsomol organisation was, of course, active; it kept in touch with everybody as far as possible; particularly, it tried to keep an eye on the young village girls, so that they should not be lonely or get into bad company. They were encouraged to keep together, and to come to the club. We talked to some old women, among them a grannie of seventy-three, who were doing the simple

[1] A ten-day working period.

job of packing the shells into large cases which the men then loaded on to railway-trucks. The old lady of seventy-three, though very frail, said she was happy to be doing her bit; one of her sons had been killed (she shed a tear), her other son and her two grandsons were fighting; she was very lonely in Moscow; here she had company and she felt that every little help was needed these days. Moreover, her work entitled her to a worker's ration card.

Clearly, many of these people were living on their nerves; and fatigue was considerable, but, so far, it was not affecting output, the Director said. But that fatigue was great, he said, could be seen from the fact that the output was always lowest on Mondays: it meant that one day off was not providing enough rest, and produced a reaction; the best days were Wednesday and Thursday when people again got into their stride. By Friday the fatigue was beginning to make itself felt again. The fact that production was not only being maintained but constantly increased, even in these conditions, the director attributed to constant improvements in the actual methods of production. For young mothers who were working here, there was a *crêche* attached to the factory.

That is how the Rear is working: people are overworked, people are living "on their nerves," but they carry on. And here, in Moscow, conditions are relatively good. In the provincial centres they are often much worse; and still people carry on.

In Moscow, at least, people don't have to walk three, four or five miles to get to their work—which is the case with some of those evacuated factories that have been set up in all sorts of odd places, often miles from anywhere.

"WHAT DO THEY KNOW ABOUT REVOLUTIONARY TACTICS ANYWAY?"

Boris blew in to-night in a more orthodox-party-line, or should one say, a more *enfant terrible* mood than ever. The question arose (as usual) why British and American correspondents weren't allowed to go to the front.

Boris: "Because we don't trust you. We shall trust you only after you have carried out loyally the twenty years' agreement of friendship. I believe every word Churchill says, and yet I see the ghosts of Darlan and Hess hovering round him. Darlan! If we Russians were in your place, we would sooner shed our blood for Dakar, and make it a clear-cut issue, than get Dakar without a shot being fired; for, as a result, you confuse the minds of ten million Frenchmen in France, ready until then to shoot every German. . . . And sometimes—why not say it?—I see behind Churchill the spirit of Lenin, and I hear Lenin saying: 'No, there can never be real peace between Capitalism and Communism.'

"Who says the Revolution is dead?" he went on. "Rubbish! I hate the guts of all these people who dare talk of Stalin as the Man of Thermidor. How do *they* know? What do *they* know of revolutionary tactics? Oh, I know, we have our softies in the Party too, but because we speak with respect of Suvorov, and because the Metropolitan of Moscow and the Chief Mullah and the Grand Rabbi send their greetings to Stalin on November 7, and one of these old duffers referred to him as 'the Anointed of the Lord,' a lot of your people abroad begin to imagine our country isn't really all that different from Tsarist Russia. Tsarist Russia, my foot! Hitler would have gobbled it up in two bites. And none of the 'innate Russian virtues' of the Russian soldier would have helped. I saw an article printed somewhere abroad which was full of all these 'innate Russian virtues.' Punk! You don't win a war with virtues.

These virtues are necessary, but what is equally necessary is guns and organisation. And we Communists are providing both.

"The other day I saw a book by one of your American colleagues. What impudence! He was here for a few weeks, doesn't know a word of Russian except 'vodka'—and he writes a book, if you please! I can just imagine this colleague of yours writing about Sebastopol: fortunately he doesn't; probably he's never heard of it. But if he wrote about it, he'd be sure to say that: (*a*) there were three abortion cases at Sebastopol Hospital during the siege; (*b*) that two gallant captains, after fighting a tremendous naval battle, fell into the Black Sea in a drunken stupor and got drowned; (*c*) that after eight heroic months the Russians lost the Battle of Sebastopol, and finally (*d*) that Admiral Nakhimov was not a product of the Soviet Régime."

Of Soviet reporting, Boris said: "On the whole, I admit, it's very bad. Eugene Petrov was good; and Polyakov was good, but now they are both dead. Krieger and Grossman are good at times. But nearly all the rest are bad. It's because these people haven't learned to follow Stalin's advice. Their writing is still full of all the old naïve clumsy propaganda stunts and *clichés*. I think we are going to evolve a new type of war reporting; some of the younger people in *Izvestia* are beginning to show signs of this new technique; but it isn't much yet. Tikhonov was good at first, but now also he has gone a bit stale."

Later he again mentioned the offending book. "Has any Soviet writer ever had the cheek to write a book like this about England?"

"Sure," I said, "Galina Serebriakova."

Boris (triumphantly): "Yes, and what was she? A Trotskyist! And we deported her to Siberia!"

November 28

At the National, at lunch to-day, I observed at another table old friend Hatanaka and a couple of other Japs. They were only recently allowed to return to Moscow from Kuibyshev. Last winter, in the bad days of Singapore, they were very cocky and noisy; now they look much more subdued. Stalingrad is already having some effect. I hear they are staying at the National, and are as quiet as mice, except that one of them has got hold of a good-looking blonde, who can hardly read or write, but is registered as his secretary.

November 29

To-day all the horrible news of Toulon was in the papers—that crowning catastrophe of the Pétain régime. Why couldn't Darlan have given the order to the Navy to sail for North Africa long ago? It was so clear that the Germans would get at the French Navy somehow. But no! there was a one per cent chance of a quiet life—and Pétain naturally took it. We are told by Ehrenburg that the psychological effect in Europe will be terrific; but will it not be an explosion of bitterness rather than an explosion of optimism and action?

Deep snow in Moscow. At night I saw a real old-fashioned *troika* in the street, but instead of carrying gipsy ladies, it carried logs.

P., who has just returned from Teheran, says that, largely under the influence of the Anders Poles, the British military there are extremely anti-Soviet. He said he was glad to be back in Moscow; Moscow was mentally and politically stimulating; in the Middle East the people (including most of the Europeans) don't *think* at all.

MOSCOW IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

AN EVENING WITH CHEKHOV'S WIDOW

November 30

An unusually pleasant evening. Sophia Andreyevna Tolstoy took me along to the house of the great Knipper-Chekhova, of the Moscow Art Theatre.

And so I spent the evening with Tolstoy's granddaughter and Chekhov's widow. With her gruff voice and sharp aquiline features, she is something of a *terrible dragon*: what has happened to the sweet young actress with whom that gentle soul A. P. Chekhov was in love, and to whom he wrote those silly baby-talk letters? She was wearing an old-fashioned black dress with a lot of lace frills in front and round her wrists, and a large old-fashioned diamond brooch. She lives in a small but comfortable flat in the large block off the Pushkinskaya, mostly reserved for distinguished theatrical people. The furniture was very nondescript, and the place looked rather bare, without any books or souvenirs —all this had been evacuated from Moscow.

Olga Leonardovna said that this was a happy day in her life: it had to-day been definitely decided that the Moscow Art Theatre was to stay on in Moscow and was not to be evacuated again. They were shortly going to produce *Pickwick* and much else.

Knipper-Chekhova is a brilliant talker, and a born humorist. She talked about the bad old days of the Civil War when the Moscow Art Theatre was carried off to Germany on a sort of tidal wave, and of what happened afterwards. "We found ourselves in all sorts of comic situations. I remember the night when we were playing the *Cherry Orchard* at Kharkov—Kachalov and I, and the rest of us. Suddenly there was something of a commotion in the audience, and then somebody cried: 'Curtain!' But a moment later one of the theatre staff announced that the curtain must go up again, and the play continue, adding: 'The Whites have just entered Kharkov.' You really didn't know where you were in those days; all the time, in the south, cities kept changing hands, you just couldn't keep track of it. Kharkov the next day presented an odd spectacle; the bourgeoisie were delighted; they came out into the streets: flowers were thrown at the White troops as they walked down the Sumskaya; chocolates were given them. There were large crowds in the churches; at that time a candle already cost 800 roubles. The actors were, of course, roped into all this enthusiasm, whether they liked it or not; she herself was made to present a bouquet of roses to General Denikin as he sat in the Imperial box. "I began to make a speech, but in the middle of it I just broke down, and with tears running down my face, I cried: 'To Moscow, to Moscow, to Moscow!' Everybody interpreted it the way he liked—it was a ridiculous moment. I must say Denikin didn't behave too badly, and made a point of not trying to exploit our presence in Kharkov for his own political ends. He felt that we were 'above party.' But what tiresome people these White Russians were, filling the streets with drunken shouts of 'Down with the Jews!' and all that. However, what was there to do? It was a dreadful time—really frightening. We couldn't get back to Moscow. So we went to Odessa. The Whites there were in an even worse state of chaos than at Kharkov. Then, for a while, I escaped to the Crimea, and had a quiet pleasant time at Gurzuf, remembering the old days with Anton Pavlovich; but later I joined the company again at Rostov, where we gave a few shows; then we went to Ekaterinodar![1] The morale among the Whites was cracking completely. When the Reds approached

[1] The capital of the Whites; now called Krasnodar.

Ekaterinodar, we were taken to Novorossisk. It was awful. The town was full of typhus cases—people were dying by the thousand. Then there was an appalling panic. You heard them weeping and screaming everywhere in an attempt to get away by sea. We had no money—only just enough to bribe an Italian captain who gave us a lift as far as Poti. Poti was then part of the Independent Georgian Republic, and when they saw our Soviet passports they wouldn't at first allow us to land. However, when they learned who we were, they relented. We had had a terrible voyage; we had been on deck all the time, as sick as dogs, with the waves slashing over us. Poor Kachalov was very ill. The Georgians behaved quite well to us, though. They put us in a first class railway-carriage and took us to Tiflis, and even let us stay for two days in the carriage, till we had found accommodation. We had neither money nor clothes. We were in rags.

"However, we gave a few performances at Tiflis, made some money and bought ourselves some clothes, and the Georgians wanted us to stay all winter. One of our people heard that we might get to Kislovodsk; he approached the Soviet Legation to see if we could get home that way; but when he got back to the house, the Georgians said to him: 'If we see you go in there again, you know what'll happen to you?' It was no good insisting. Later, we were invited to go on a visit to Constantinople; so we went there by sea, via Trebizond. Constantinople was appalling. The Russians there were in a terrible state—utterly demoralised; from there we went on to Bulgaria, where the Little Slav Brothers treated us very well; then we went to Belgrade and Zagreb, and in that lovely town we stayed quite a while; finally, after a visit to Vienna, we landed in Berlin. Here, after a while, we received a visitor from the Soviet Embassy who offered that we go back to Moscow. I must say I received the offer with the greatest joy; I was sick and tired of all these 'abroads.' But only five of us actually returned to Moscow, the rest formed the Prague Company of the Moscow Art Theatre, with Germanova and Pavlov—both very good actors—among them. My niece, Olga Chekhova, the wife of Misha Chekhov, whom she divorced, is still in Berlin. She has become a German subject."

"I know," I said, "and their greatest film star, and the last I heard was that she had struck up a beautiful friendship with Hitler himself."

Olga Leonardovna laughed. "Oh, where Olga is concerned, anything is possible," she said. "And then what happened?" "Then," she said, "we got back to Moscow, and the next morning, in my hotel room, I found a large and beautiful basket of flowers with a card from the Town Council. I admit I heaved a deep sigh of relief: everything was forgiven and forgotten.

"We went abroad again in 1937, at the time of the International Exhibition in Paris. It was all very unpleasant. We were playing *Lubov Yarovaya*, which, as you know, is about the Civil War, and when, in one scene, the flag of the Whites appeared on the stage, there came a storm of applause from the stalls, and a chorus of booing from the gallery. The row went on for a long time, and it nearly came to blows. It was all very unpleasant."

"You should write your memoirs," said Sofia Andreyevna; "you could write a wonderful human story of the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky's book is too academic; Nemirovich's is much too short; you could write a wonderful book on the basis of your long experience."

Olga Leonardovna: "What a long life I have had! Sometimes it depresses me to think that others haven't had one-tenth of my experience and excitement. But memoirs—no. It's all much too personal."

"I'm afraid you must have been asked this question ten thousand times:

but how well do you remember Anton Pavlovich after nearly forty years?" I said.

"Oh," she said, "as well as if he had been here yesterday." And she talked about Istra—now completely burned down by the Germans—and of how she and Chekhov were going to buy a country house at Voskresensk, close to Istra. "Unfortunately our plans came to nothing; for soon afterwards Anton Pavlovich became fatally ill."

We then talked about Chekhov's popularity in Britain and America.

"Yes, it's funny," she said. "When I was in America, in Boston, I was invited to dinner by a millionaire—a typewriter king or something. A very sumptuous place; in his study he pointed to a row of books and said: 'My favourite authors—Chekhov and Dostoievsky.' I thought it funny; for *why* should Chekhov be the favourite author of a Boston typewriter king?" She laughed and said: "I had some other funny experiences in America—for instance, seeing the *Three Sisters* played by three nigger girls! For the Negro Theatre was very hot on Chekhov!"

Later Knipper, her nephew, arrived. Abroad he is known chiefly for his song "Polyushko-Polie" (the one that begins and ends *pianissimo* with horses trotting in the distance), but he is a very able composer and Prokofiev holds him in very high esteem—which is saying a lot, for Prokofiev is very intolerant. He was wearing a khaki tunic, looked athletic, and turned out to be (which I didn't know before) one of Russia's leading mountain climbers and an "alpinist" in the scientific sense. I found him extremely intelligent and "cultured" in the best sense of the word—a man of real taste and discrimination, of great education and wide experience, and a great personal charm.

"Damn this war," he said. "If it weren't for that, I'd be living halfway up Mount Elbrus. I was there in charge of an Alpine station, with tons of food to last me a year, a piano, and stacks of music paper to compose to my heart's content! What a wonderful life! Fifteen degrees of frost—but you go out into the sun, and it bakes; the mountain sun in the cold clear air is very warm. But then the war started and I had to quit. And now the Germans are there; they dropped on top of Mount Elbrus by parachute and hoisted their foul flag on its summit."

"Don't you think the Caucasus may soon be liberated?" "Yes," he said, "it may well be—if the Stalingrad offensive is a complete success." He asked me about the London blitz, and then talked of various bombing experiences in Moscow in 1941. "I must say, I liked Moscow best in November 1941," he said. "There was something splendid and gay about Moscow during those days of danger. It wasn't like October. In November all the nondescript people had beat it. You walked down Gorki Street; you met three or four people all told on the pavement, and saw an occasional car. There were seven or eight air-raids a day; they'd come over Moscow silently, with their engines turned off. In the Kuznetsky Most, one day, I heard two bombs coming down quite near, and the sound of machine-gun fire coming from the Dzerjinsky Square. But we were perfectly cheerful." He then became a trifle paradoxical. "I am tired of Russia, Russia in the abstract. One doesn't love 190 million people really, when you come to think of it. I can love my son, or my wife, and through them, I love my country."

Sophia Andreyevna (much more orthodox): "Oh, but you *can* love 190 millions."

Knipper: "Maybe you can—or you imagine you can. But I can't. You need

something intimate, and personal. Let's have more poems about soldiers loving their wives, not their country in the abstract."

Of the war, Knipper said: "I think we have reached the great turning-point: the Offensive in Africa, the Offensive at Stalingrad, and the Offensive on the Central Front must all produce results. It has all been very cleverly worked out, including Stalin's last speech, which was still calculated to bluff the Germans. . . . And this latest offensive of ours west of Moscow must be something very terrifying for the Germans: 10,000 dead and—400 prisoners! Do you see what *that* means? It is different in the south, where most of the prisoners so far are these wretched Rumanians. But here, where there are only Germans, it's no joke to fall into Russian hands. I know my *mujiks*: and heaven help the Germans once the Russians get into Belorussia and see what the Germans have done *there*. I wouldn't give much for any German's life once our lads, followed by the Poles, have crossed into Germany."

Then we talked about Russian wartime music. Sofia Andreyevna, who expresses the orthodox view in most matters, defended the Lebedev-Kumach—Pokrass—Dunayevsky—Blanter type of war-song. Kumach's verses and the music of the others appealed to the Russian people, she said, and that was a good test.

Knipper: "Yes, but what vulgar rubbish it all is. I know Pasternak is not popular, but he is a great poet for all that."

Sofia Andreyevna: "It's his own fault if he is not popular."

I: "Come, come. This is too much like your grandpa's *What is Art?* But even Tolstoy would hardly have been a Dunayevsky or Lebedev-Kumach fan!"

Knipper: "So because people at the front like Lebedev-Kumach and don't like Pasternak, because they like Blanter and not Shostakovich, Blanter is a great composer and Shostakovich is not?"

Sofia Andreyevna: "No, I wouldn't go quite so far. There is room for both."

Knipper: "No, it makes me ill when I think of all these people, and of Miaskovsky. He may not be an absolute first-rater, but we owe him an infinite debt of gratitude. He has maintained the great Russian tradition in music, and all honour to him. But does he get any credit from the general public? No. Some time ago I was playing a popular chorus I had composed. He came up to me—what a lovely old man he is!—took me by both wrists and said: 'Don't.' 'But that's what's wanted,' I said. 'Only *I* don't want it,' he replied."

Sophia Andreyevna: "I know. But I wish you weren't so down on Lebedev-Kumach. He writes simply and directly."

Knipper: "Trivially, you mean. Pushkin also wrote simply and directly; does that make Lebedev a Pushkin? This idea of producing *simple, popular* art at all costs is very harmful, and lowers the standard terribly."

December 1

I looked in at the great Chess Tournament in the small hall of the House of Soviets. Here, on the platform, sitting at several chessboards, the Candidates, Meisters and Grossmeisters of the U.S.S.R. (as they are called), were playing their games; every move was marked on large boards on the wall. It was all terribly solemn and serious. Chess is considered a very superior intellectual pursuit in Russia. Last winter, during the heavy raids, the Chess Tournament carried on as usual. In workers' clubs and in the army chess is extremely popular.

Later Volodya Polyakov blew in, to say good-bye. He and his company are leaving in two days for the Stalingrad Front. He seemed tired, and anxious,

and a little worried, as if he had premonitions. They were going by train to Tambov, and from there by plane. "I can't make head or tail of the situation," he said. "Clearly the Germans have been encircled at Stalingrad; but it is hard to imagine that such a large force will not be able to break out. But whatever happens, they have lost Stalingrad."

"Moscow!" he then said. "Moscow—it's one of the bloody miracles of this war! Why isn't it bombed? Somebody I know came here from Omsk the other day, and said: 'Why, Moscow—it's just like Omsk!' "

Polyakov also talked about his journey from the Caucasus to Central Asia, and then to Moscow. What happens is this: at Tbilisi you buy a packet of good tea for four roubles; at Tashkent they offer you 120 roubles for it; at railway-stations in Siberia, they offer you two large roast chickens for it. In Bashkiria, for one pound of salt you can buy *anything*!

Here, in the market in Moscow butter still costs 1,000 roubles a kilo, and chocolate 100 roubles a 4-ounce block.

THE SERGEANT LOOKS BACK ON SIXTEEN MONTHS OF WAR

December 4

This was a particularly interesting conversation with a soldier who had been retreating nearly during the whole war. Yet he wasn't discouraged. For he seemed convinced that things could never be as bad as they were in 1941. The soldier was my old friend, Misha J.; I had met him in July 1941, at the very beginning of the war, and he joined up as a volunteer a few days later. He was a sergeant now, wearing a fur-lined jacket, and he looked very tough; sixteen months of war had hardened him both physically and mentally:

He had just come from the Voronezh Front. Life there was very difficult, he said. "You should have seen me there a fortnight ago. My eyes were red and oozing pus; that's what happens when you only get two hours of sleep a day for weeks on end. For fifteen days out of every month I am in the front line. And it's been going on like this for nearly a year and a half. Thank God, we haven't been retreating in the last few months. But, up till then, I had been in one damned retreat after another. It's no fun, I can tell you. Eh! war isn't what one imagines. It's very fearful and horrible. When as a boy I read Barbusse's book, I thought it all rather exciting. You read it in a warm room, after a good dinner, and you thought—what fun all these shells and things, and you somehow didn't take any notice of the dead bodies. But dead bodies do matter—and even more so, the wounded men; that affects you even after a year at the front. . . . Of course I had seen war before, back in 1932. But that wasn't the same thing. There was some trouble then in Outer Mongolia—you may remember. A Lama rising—a little bit of a partisan war; didn't amount to much, really. Later I was an instructor among the Mongol troops in Outer Mongolia for a while. But this war is a different cup of tea. I joined up in August 1941, as you know. And it was just my luck to get to the worst possible place—right into the big retreat to Leningrad. . . . I remember how we captured six German motor-cyclists at Kingisepp. What arrogant bastards they were! They said we could shoot them if we wished, but they wouldn't say anything; anyway, they said, the Germans would be there in two days. And they were right, too. The Germans came crashing ahead, with 400 tanks, and swarms of aircraft. Tallinn had just fallen, and now they were free to go straight for Leningrad. Did we run! I should say we did. Part of them came

through Kingisepp, and the other group of tanks came through Luga, and we were pretty nearly caught between the two."

"What happened to those six prisoners?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. I suppose we shot them; we were retreating all over the place; there was no time to bother with prisoners."

"The Germans," he went on, "were getting damn near us from both sides. They started shelling the road with their mortars. We drove off in our truck. Then one of their shells hit the back of the truck; the truck overturned; fortunately we were thrown clear. The truck was pretty well wrecked, and, what's more, it caught fire, and there were lots of hand-grenades inside the truck, and they kept exploding one after another. The rest of the way to Leningrad we had to go on foot; some of our chaps were slightly wounded; they also walked. It was bloody chaos. We had no planes at all; the Germans could bomb and machine-gun us as much as they liked."

Finally, Misha got to Leningrad, and was then sent to the Karelian Isthmus to fight the Finns; he had another narrow escape, for the Finns by-passed the main Russian defences, and only a narrow escape-route was left via Lake Ladoga. "It was getting very cold, and we had lost a great part of our men; out of the whole division, only 5,000 reached the Lake. There we got on to barges. We left all our trucks on the shore, and set fire to them—a pretty sight they made, all these hundreds of trucks burning, and the flames and smoke reflected in the water. While we were being towed along the lake, we were constantly attacked by Junkers 87's—he's got wheels that look like paws, ready to grab you, as he comes down, with all his sirens howling; he's got so many sirens that every time he drops a bomb, you think there are at least a hundred bombs coming down! However, we had ack-ack guns, and the Junkers didn't come very close; but the bombs fell quite near enough for me, and they shook and shatttered the barges, and the water spouted like fountains through the leaks, and we sat there, stuffing them with our overcoats and padded jackets."

Misha had also taken part in two famous Leningrad raids: in the raid on Beloostrov, the old Russo-Finnish frontier station twenty-six miles north of Leningrad, when he and 700 other tommy-gunners recaptured it. A less successful raid was that on Tsarskoye Selo when a dozen K.V. tanks and a company of tommy-gunners were ordered to raid the Palace of Tsarskoye Selo, just after the Germans had broken in, and rescue the art treasures from the famous Amber Room.

"We were given a dozen K.V. tanks and, riding on top of them, we broke right into the palace gardens. We stayed there for three hours. During those three hours we had numerous fights with the Germans, and suffered pretty heavy casualties ourselves. We had been told to bring the amber and other valuables from the Amber Room, which, we were told, was still intact. In the park, just outside the Palace, fourteen people—civilians—were hanging from the trees. When at last we penetrated into the palace, we found that nothing was left in the Amber Room—everything had been stripped. The Germans had done a quick job. For they had been only twenty-four hours in the place."

Later, he had fought at Tikhvin, and had seen Leningrad during the worst time of the hunger blockade; and last spring he was near Kharkov at the time of the German break-through. "Just my luck again," he said, a little grimly. Again it was the same ugly, disorderly retreat as on the Leningrad Front last year—though not quite so bad; but again the Germans had enormous

superiority in tanks and aircraft, and "by the time our people had got their tank 'fist' ready to counter-attack west of Voronezh, it was too late. However, we stopped them at Voronezh—fortunately!" Now he was opposite Voronezh, on the other side of the river. The town looked all right from a distance, but actually the Germans were methodically burning down large parts of it, and there wouldn't be much left when the Russians recaptured it. They now had a bridgehead both north and south of the city.

"Yes," said Misha, "I have been pretty unlucky. But now that it's started at Stalingrad, everybody thinks our luck will soon change. But last year was the devil—and this last summer, too. One of our generals last year was surrounded by the Germans, and shot himself."

"What we soldiers are interested in above all else," said Misha, "are three things: a wash, food, and sleep. Nothing else matters much. We don't sing songs—only sometimes, usually under compulsion. Perhaps they do in the rear; but we front-liners aren't interested in songs. It isn't what you people in Moscow imagine. We aren't interested in women either—not much. Oh yes, there *are* girls at the front—girls serving in canteens, and typists, and all that. But they won't look at anything below the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel—not they!

"Sometimes we get staff officers arriving at our local headquarters, and when they are offered to sleep on the floor, among the lice, they say, 'Oh no, really; I'll be quite comfortable sitting up in this chair, really quite comfortable!' It makes us snigger every time we see them sitting there, pretending to sleep, and scared stiff of the lice getting into their spick-and-span uniform! Oh, I know, these people also do their job, I suppose it's just the old antagonism between the front and the rear. It's always existed; you can't help it. Take, for instance, our general. Some of us went to see him about an important matter. A young and pretty blonde came out: 'No,' she said, 'you can't go straight in; the General is still resting.' (You never say of a superior he's sleeping; you must always say 'resting.') 'You will have to wait till I announce you.' 'And who are you, miss?' we said. 'I'm the typist,' she said. The General was, of course, sleeping comfortably in a real bed."

"The Germans," said Misha, "fight very ferociously, and I suppose this winter they'll be much better equipped than last winter. They've learned their lesson. Recently, it's true, I watched through a periscope in the front line the fellows on the hill opposite. I could see them putting up their collars, and stamping their feet, and generally looking distinctly cold; but then they were Hungarians, as many of them are at Voronezh; and I don't suppose the Germans will bother much about *their* winter equipment."

"Our one aim now," said Misha, "is to get to Germany, to give them what's coming to them. Last year we still used to give cigarettes to some miserable shivering Fritzes—but not now."

Thus ends this diary entry. I saw Misha again—on May 16, 1945—a week after the end of the war. He had come to Moscow on leave from East Prussia. He had taken part in the storming of Königsberg. He had seen thousands of German civilians flee from Königsberg to Pillau through the narrow corridor their tanks had hacked in the Russian ring; he had seen the Commander of the Königsberg garrison and his officers surrender, "crawling out of a hole in that mountain of rubble to which our bombers

and guns had reduced the city." He had seen a few half-demented civilians in the streets of Königsberg when the Russians broke in. "I almost felt sorry for them," said Misha. He had seen Insterburg, and Allenstein and Elbing. He looked strong and healthy, his face tanned in the sun and wind. He had three decorations—the Moscow Medal, the Leningrad Medal (which he prized above all else), and the Medal for Bravery. "I have seen hundreds around me die in these long months and years," he said, but he himself had escaped almost without a scratch. When I asked him whether he was sorry not to have seen Berlin, he said: "Sorry—not I! Had a chance to come to Moscow; do you think I would have wanted to see Berlin instead? I wouldn't have gone there in a first-class sleeper!"

During December and January there is not much of interest in my diary. In December one was largely absorbed with Stalingrad. I find a description of an evening on the Sparrow Hills under the snow; an entry concerning a very bohemian birthday party with some fairly small literary and theatrical fry—it was noisy, overcrowded, with a good deal of vodka and little to eat: but what there was was highly decorative—for instance the pickled herring with two enormous amber beads for eyes, and a Spanish comb stuck in its back. Then a grim-looking elderly woman proceeded, towards the end of the evening, to strum "Little Blue Scarf" on the tinny piano, and there was a poet there who recited the "Ancient Mariner" in Russian—and it was good, though he had done it from a literal translation without knowing any English. Then I find some remarks on that curious play at the Moscow Art Theatre, a play in some ways typical of 1942 moods: Pogodin's *Kremlin Chimes*. All the grimness and bitterness and hatred among classes during the Revolution are glossed over in this idyll between the Baltic sailor, a hero of the Civil War, and the *burzhui* professor's sweet young daughter who "sees the light"; the Cheka is treated in a light jocular vein, with the professor, prepared for the worst, being taken off by the secret police—not, as he imagines, to be shot, but to be offered a big and responsible post by Lenin himself. The play clearly suggests that if a Russian is sufficiently patriotic, he is bound, sooner or later, to recognise that the Soviet Régime is *the* national régime of Russia, and that if he is ready to serve it loyally, his past aberrations shall be forgiven and forgotten. Lenin, with Stalin by his side, is treated as a gentle and paternal idealist, encouraging the young to love each other with a true undying love, and repudiating the Free Love doctrines of Madame Kollontai.

There are a number of other entries concerning the Christmas and New Year celebrations among the foreign colony in Moscow; the atmosphere was jovial and carefree, after a particularly strenuous year; I also recorded a talk with an elderly priest, who said that the demand for religion had

greatly grown in wartime, and that "even the families of Party men" were no longer afraid to go to church; but who, at the same time, bitterly complained of the high taxes the churches were still expected to pay. On the whole, he failed to take a rosy view of the Church's future.

After that, I spent the first half of January in the Stalingrad area. A separate chapter is devoted to that remarkable experience.

BOOK IV

THE GERMAN ROUT

CHAPTER I

THE RED ARMY HITS BACK

LONG and arduous preparations, north-west of Stalingrad, and on the other side of the Volga, south-east of Stalingrad, had preceded the launching of the great Russian offensive of November 19. In an earlier chapter some figures are quoted demonstrating the great superiority the Russians had managed to attain in men and all weapons in the break-through areas.

In all this an immense human effort on the part of the troops, an immense organisational effort on the part of the Command, were involved. Many factors were highly unfavourable to the Russians from the outset: supply bases were a long distance away; the lines of communication to the Stalingrad area, particularly to its southern sector, extremely difficult and scanty, and the weather was unfavourable—for the winter was late in coming. The motor transport—still almost exclusively Russian-made—was inadequate, and a still abnormal proportion of horses had to be used for so swift and modern an offensive. And yet the offensive fully succeeded, because, at its initial stages, the element of surprise was present; because the Russian soldiers fought with unprecedented drive and determination, and because the whole plan had been worked out very carefully in advance, and had provided against all the likely and even unlikely counter-blows the Germans were going to attempt—notably against the German attempt to break through the Stalingrad ring from the outside.

To explain as authoritatively as possible what happened, I can do no better than quote Colonel Zamiatin's article at some length,.

One of the most remarkable things, he says, is that while our offensive preparations were in full progress, the enemy was not suspecting how great a danger was threatening him. On instructions from Hitler, the Germans were wasting their time on fruitless attacks against Stalingrad. The Germans were extraordinarily confident that the Red Army would not attack in a big way, and that it lacked both reserves and adequate equipment.

Their miscalculation was complete. Already, in the defensive Battle of Stalingrad, we pursued two objects: first, stop the enemy; and secondly, create the most favourable conditions for striking at the eastern salient of the German front. That was why the Soviet High Command was determined to hold Stalingrad, and also to widen its bridgeheads on the right bank of the Don, notably in the areas of Serafimovich and Sirotinskaya. . . .

The active operations of the left flank of the Don Front, north-west of Stalingrad, he continued, were not only greatly helping to reduce pressure on the Russian Sixty-second Army inside Stalingrad, but were also tying up large German forces, thus depriving them of that freedom of manœuvre which might have tended to interfere with the offensive we were preparing. At the same time, the Germans were compelled, in this way, to concentrate in the eastern part of the salient their operational reserves, which created an even more favourable situation for the encirclement we were planning.

Even as late as the beginning of November, the Germans had not abandoned their crazy offensive ambitions. The main German group, consisting of crack divisions, was concentrated in Stalingrad and its close neighbourhood—for the Germans were still hoping to capture Stalingrad, and break through, along the Volga, to Saratov. The Achilles heel in the disposition of the German troops was their flanks, largely consisting of weak Rumanian effectives.

In the Stalingrad area proper the Germans had no substantial operational reserves; they were simply not anticipating anything like a general offensive from the Russian side.

And yet, already in September, while the defence of Stalingrad was only at its early stage, serious preparations were already being made. This defence enabled our High Command to gain time for organising the military operation which was going to lead to the gigantic catastrophe of two of Germany's best armies: the Sixth Army and the Fourth Tank Army.

By the middle of November the preparations had been completed. What was planned was a two-sided concentric blow, a pincer round the Stalingrad group. One pincer was to strike out southward from the Middle Don, the other from the area of the salt lakes south of Stalingrad. The northern group was intended to break through the enemy front south of Serafimovich; the southern group was intended to break through between Stalingrad and Lake Barmantsak; then, having smashed the enemy's flank formations, the two groups were to advance swiftly and join at Kalach, thus effecting the operational encirclement of not only the German troops inside Stalingrad, but also those inside the north-east part of the Don Bend and in the country between the Don and Volga.

The difficulties of these preparations, in the midst of an extremely bitter and hard defensive battle, cannot be overrated. What is more, our lines of communication were extremely poor. The required troop concentrations had to be carried out with the greatest secrecy, and in a country lacking any natural shelters, such as forests.

Three fronts were entrusted with this operation: the newly created South-Western Front (General Vatutin); the Don Front (General Rokossovsky) in the north; and the Stalingrad Front (General Eremenko) in the south.

The concentration, as said before, was particularly difficult owing to the shortage of lines of communication, and the constant air attacks to which these lines were subjected. Particularly great were the difficulties of the Stalingrad Front whose troops had to be brought across the Volga under systematic air-raids and shell-fire. The icefloes on the river greatly slowed down the crossings; instead of the usual forty to fifty minutes the river crossings now took as much as five hours and more. . . . After an intensive artillery barrage, large masses of Russian infantry, supported by aircraft, three tank corps and two cavalry corps, swept down on the 19th toward the Don from the north-west; and then, after crossing the Don on the 23rd, they captured the town of Kalach. The southern group, under Eremenko, consisting of two large mixed

forces, supported by two mechanised and one cavalry corps, did not strike out till the 20th; but by the 23rd it also had broken through to Kalach, having in the process smashed several divisions, mostly Rumanian. The Germans, who were now holding a small bridgehead on the right bank of the Don, in the north-west part of the bend, near Sirotinskaya, hastily withdrew to the other side—towards Stalingrad.

That was typical. German self-confidence and German prestige considerations were such that not until a very late stage were the Germans convinced that Stalingrad was going to be a death-trap. No serious attempt was ever made to break *out* of Stalingrad while there was still time; on the contrary, the German troops, cut off west of Stalingrad, tended to go to Stalingrad—for "safety." That is one of the reasons why such an enormous number of troops were bagged at Stalingrad—at least twice as many as had been fighting the Sixty-second Army inside Stalingrad itself.

Earlier I quoted General Talensky on why the Russians broke through during those days of November 19 to 23. It was not that, taking the area as a whole, they had much larger forces in the field between Boguchar and south of Stalingrad than the Germans and their Allies:[1] but they had, by careful calculation, achieved great superiority in the sectors of the main break-through, at the same time paralysing the enemy's capacity for regrouping. Talensky's figures were: infantry, two to one in the Russians' favour; artillery, two and a half or three to one; tanks, two to one; aircraft, two to one.

Zamiatin then goes on:

> Thus the main operation was carried out in four to five days: in an area of 1,500 square kilometres, twenty-two enemy divisions, mostly Germans, and consisting of 330,000 men, had been trapped.
>
> In the course of the break-through operations, eight Rumanian and three German infantry divisions, one Rumanian and one German tank division, and one Rumanian cavalry division had been smashed. We had destroyed 95,000 and taken prisoner 42,400 enemy soldiers.

Colonel Zamiatin attributes the success of this operation to a number of factors in addition to those already mentioned:

(1) To the correct choice of the "direction of the main blow": "once you have done that," says Stalin, "you have won nine-tenths of the battle."

(2) To the choice of the correct moment. On this point he has some interesting remarks to make on the disagreement that already existed at that time between Hitler and some of his generals. Even in November Hitler was still insisting that the German troops continue their fruitless and costly attempts to capture Stalingrad; *but the generals were beginning to realise the folly of this, and in the first half of November there were signs of the German troops beginning*

[1] Zamiatin claims that there was no general decisive superiority at all; while Talensky puts the superiority in infantry at 20 per cent and the superiority in artillery, tanks and aircraft at 30 to 50 per cent.

to dig in at Stalingrad and beginning to build substantial defences; had the enemy, however, been given time to make much progress in this building of fortifications notably along the flanks of the Stalingrad salient, the Russian offensive would have met with far greater obstacles; therefore, time was precious.

(3) To the element of surprise. "All the preparations were done secretly, despite the appalling difficulties of concentrating such large forces and so much equipment in these areas—difficulties some of which have already been mentioned. Several special precautions were taken: all personal mail from the front was practically suspended, and even among officers, including high officers, a rule was introduced to put on paper as little as possible concerning the coming operations. The most thorough camouflage was observed in any troop movements; during the day all troop movements ceased. During the day the troops hid in villages and at the bottom of the numerous ravines. Despite numerous reconnaissance flights by the Luftwaffe, the German Command was not able to visualise what was coming. Even though it had indirect indications that something was being prepared, it had no idea of the scope of the operations. This is confirmed by what German officers, taken prisoner, have since said; and also by the fact that no counter-measures were taken."

(4) To the fact that the main blow came, not from one, but from several directions. "*If*," says Zamiatin, "*we had struck out from one direction only, the Germans could have, within two days, concentrated against this break-through at least six divisions, including four tank divisions. But as the offensive was being carried out by three fronts simultaneously, and the enemy lines were broken in several places at once, the German High Command was unable from the very start to do much manœuvring, still less to regroup its reserves for a massive counter-blow.* . . . Our penetration was, moreover, in many places, as much as forty kilometres deep on the very first day, with the result that all contact was lost between many of the enemy's army units. . . . There is no doubt that by organising our offensive over a front of more than 400 kilometres, we prevented the enemy's reconnaissance from focusing its attention on any particular sector. That made for secrecy and surprise."

What also characterised the Russian Stalingrad offensive was that the main break-throughs were accompanied by a large number of small encirclements which tended to split up and destroy both the enemy forces at the front itself and the tactical and operational reserves further back. For example, in the Bazkovsky area on the right bank of the Don, the Fourth and Fifth Rumanian Army Corps were encircled and forced to surrender, with the immediate result that forty kilometres of the enemy's front were "torn out."

The Russian striking force in the "direction of the main blow" was very considerable; the artillery and mortar fire ranged between thirty and fifty guns per kilometre of front. Considering the relatively unorganised opposition, this was a very heavy concentration—though it was much less than what it was going to be in some later operations, notably in the Russian break-through to Orel in the summer of 1943.

Summing up this stage of the Stalingrad Battle, Zamiatin says:

The German High Command believed that the Red Army would not be able, in the winter of 1942, to undertake any serious offensive operations. The whole operational structure of the German forces between the Don and the

Volga was based on an assumption that was contrary to the realities of the situation. *The German Command continued to concentrate its main striking force against Stalingrad, without taking much notice of its weak flanks, and not troubling to create strong reserves. And even after the operational encirclement of the main German forces at Stalingrad had been completed, the Nazi Command continued to cling to its erroneous views on the proportionate strength of the two sides. From a variety of documents we seized at the time, it is apparent that the Germans, rather than try to break out of the encirclement, decided to sit tight until—so they thought—they were going to be liberated by strong forces from outside.*

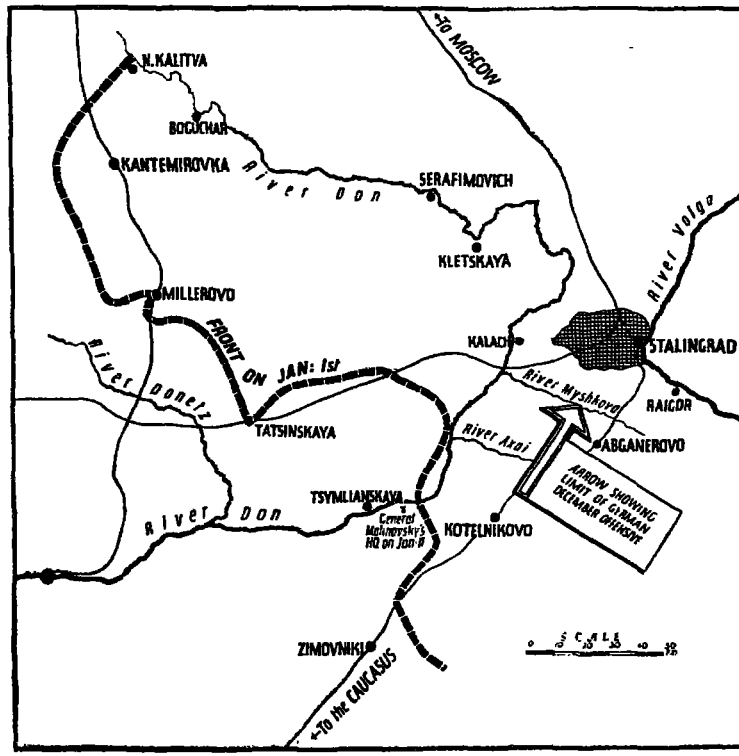
The Russian High Command naturally foresaw that such an attempt would be made, and took its precautions. At the beginning of December, according to Zamiatin, the "ring" round the German troops trapped in the Stalingrad area was between 40 and 140 kilometres thick; by December 12, judging from the map attached to his article, it had acquired a more uniform thickness of about 100 kilometres in the south and nearly 200 kilometres in the north.

At the beginning of December, says Zamiatin, the German Sixth Army and Fourth Tank Army encircled in the Stalingrad area were in a truly catastrophic position. Yet the German Command, having learned nothing, persisted in its idea of clinging to Stalingrad and the area west of it as a springboard for future offensive operations. *The German High Command gave the troops in the Stalingrad area the most emphatic order in no circumstances to attempt to break out* and to hold on tight to the territory they were occupying. It decided, instead, to re-establish contact with the German troops inside Stalingrad by means of a break-through from outside. It concentrated large forces first at Tormosin, 130 kilometres west-south-west of Stalingrad, and another at Kotelnikovo, 155 kilometres south-west of Stalingrad.

What characterises the operations beginning December 12 is that while the Germans were doing the obvious thing, the Russians were doing at first something that was not in the least obvious. The powerful German Kotelnikovo formation, under the command of Field-Marshal von Mannstein, struck out into the Russian "ring," towards Stalingrad, on December 12. It made progress, and continued to make progress. It is now clear that, when it reached the Myshkova River, it had broken nearly halfway through to Stalingrad. But the Russians were not worrying.

They let von Mannstein go ahead, and waste his strength. What they were doing instead in the meantime was this. On December 16, while von Mannstein was trying to "thin" the Stalingrad ring in the south, the Russian troops under Vatutin and Golikov struck out on a wide front to "thicken" it in the north. Their object was to prevent the German forces, in the centre of the Don Bend, from coming to the assistance of von Mannstein by striking a parallel blow, further north, towards Stalingrad. During this offensive into the central part of the Don Bend country, the Russians advanced from 100 to 150 kilometres and smashed the Eighth

Italian Army, the Third Rumanian Army and German divisions constituting the operational reserves of the "Gruppe Süden," thrown in (according to the Russians) from Western Europe. Fifty-nine thousand enemy soldiers were killed and 60,000 taken prisoner. The German



Sketch showing position of Front on January 1, after failure of German attempt in December to break through to Stalingrad. (Stalingrad "pocket" is shaded area on right.) The arrow, south of it, shows the limit of the German advance which was halted on the Myshkova river, 35 to 40 km. from the "pocket."

"shock group" of six to eight divisions at Tormosin, which was to have attacked the Stalingrad "ring" about the same time as the Kotelnikovo group, had to be used, instead, for other purposes: namely, to stop, as best it could, the large gaps torn in the front through the smashing blows of Golikov's and Vatutin's troops.

Von Mannstein had eight divisions, among them three tank divisions—

one brought here from France, one from Briansk, and one from the Northern Caucasus.

He struck out on December 12 from his Kotelnikovo springboard, hoping to make a straight cut to Stalingrad, along the railway-line. It started with a powerful artillery and mortar barrage, and Mannstein also had strong air support.

Then 100 tanks were thrown in and the Russians north of Kotelnikovo were thrown back. Into the break-through von Mannstein threw, on December 13, a group of 200 tanks and much motorised infantry, still keeping to the railway as the line of his main blow. By December 15, the Russians had been thrown some twenty-five kilometres back, and now took up positions on the north bank of the Axai River, a tributary of the Don. Here, for four days, there was very heavy fighting, with the Russians not only defending themselves stubbornly, but also counter-attacking.

At that time, says Zamiatin, we received information that the German troops inside Stalingrad were beginning to concentrate important tank forces in the south-western part of the pocket, preparing to strike at the "ring" from inside —not in order to abandon Stalingrad, but to "make it easier" for von Mannstein. In the circumstances, our Command began to throw in large reserves south-west of Stalingrad. . . . Meantime the bitter fighting on the north bank of the Axai River continued till December 23, and then our troops retreated to the north bank of the Myshkova River, twenty kilometres north of the Axai. An important characteristic of this fighting was that at no time was von Mannstein able to advance on a wide front or penetrate swiftly into the depth of our positions.

Our troops did not retreat on a wide front; but when the enemy succeeded in advancing, our troops merely "bent in" and strengthened the flanks, with the result that the Germans had to spend a great deal of their energy on protecting their own flanks and on dealing with our counter-attacks. Rather than retreat into the rear, our troops tended to retreat to the flanks of the German break-through. In its counter-attacks against the enemy forces that had broken through, our Command principally used mobile reserves—tanks, anti-tank groups and artillery.

All this tended to slow down the German advance considerably, and confined it to a narrow front; the average German progress, during the second phase of their advance, did not exceed three to four kilometres per day. *On the Myshkova River—though only some forty kilometres from the Germans inside the Stalingrad pocket—that is, more than halfway from where the offensive had started—the German advance came to a final standstill.*

For here, while the Germans had suffered heavy losses, the Russians were able to throw in fresh reserves. Moreover, the Russian forces, under Vatutin and Golikov, advancing from the north, were now beginning to threaten von Mannstein's communications. On December 23 these troops

had already reached the line of Millerovo, Tatsinskaya, Morozovskaya. Von Mannstein's troops were preparing, in the circumstances, for a planned withdrawal—for they realised there was little hope left of breaking through to Stalingrad.

But it was then, says Zamiatin, that the Russian reserves—Guards divisions under General Malinovsky, which had completed their concentration on the north bank of the Myshkova River—struck out. That was on December 24. The Germans suffered heavy losses and their pursuit continued till it developed into a new major Russian offensive—which, on February 14, led to the liberation of Rostov.

Kotelnikovo itself was liberated on December 28, and in a later chapter the scene of this battle will be described from first-hand experience.

In these battles between December 12 and 30, von Mannstein's "Kotelnikovo" group lost in killed and prisoners 16,000 men, 346 planes, 300 tanks, and over 300 guns. Compared with other operations, these figures may not be spectacular; but the important thing is that this was the only serious German attempt to break through to Stalingrad; and the failure of von Mannstein ("Conqueror of the Crimea" to whom Hitler had presented the Vorontsov Palace on behalf of "the grateful German nation"—the very palace where Mr. Churchill was to stay at the time of the Yalta Conference) meant the death sentence on the German armies encircled at Stalingrad.

How did these battles in the Don and Stalingrad areas present themselves to the Russian people at the time?

The first official announcement that the great offensive had begun was made in a special communiqué on November 22:

A few days ago, it said, our troops stationed at the approaches of Stalingrad took the offensive against the German-Fascist troops. The offensive began in two directions: from the north-west and from the south. Having broken through the enemy's defence line on a thirty-kilometre front (in the Serafimovich area), and in the south on a twenty-kilometre front, our troops succeeded, in three days' intense fighting, and by overcoming the enemy's resistance, in advancing sixty to seventy kilometres. Our troops occupied the town of Kalach on the eastern bank of the Don, the railway-station of Krivomuzginskaya, and the town and railway-station of Abganerovo. Thus, both railways supplying Stalingrad east of the Don have been cut. Our troops routed six infantry divisions, one tank division, and inflicted heavy losses on seven infantry divisions, two tank divisions and two motorised divisions. In three days our troops captured 13,000 prisoners, 360 guns, etc. The counting of trophies continues. The enemy left 14,000 dead on the battlefield. The following have distinguished themselves in the course of these operations: Lieutenant-General Romanenko, Major-General Chistiakov, Major-General Tolbukhin, Major-General Trufanov, Lieutenant-General Batov.

Such was the brief announcement of the great offensive which was to continue for the next four months, was to lead to the destruction of the German forces at Stalingrad, to the clearing of the Germans out of the Caucasus, the Don country, a large part of the Ukraine, and, indirectly, to the destruction of the German "springboard" west of Moscow, and to a loosening of the stranglehold on Leningrad.

The papers on the 23rd published the pictures of the five generals mentioned in the special communiqué. The *Pravda* editorial was interesting in that it spoke in one breath of the Stalingrad offensive and the Russian success at Vladikavkaz—which, as the near future was to show, was not an isolated German setback, but the beginning of the German expulsion from the Caucasus. The title was the prophetic remark in Stalin's speech a fortnight before: "There'll be a Holiday in our Street, too." The article itself was, above all, a tribute to the men *inside* Stalingrad, who, by holding out, had made this new offensive possible.

The special communiqué on the 23rd said that the offensive was continuing. The number of prisoners was now up to 24,000; the number of enemy dead on the 23rd only was 12,000.

What the communiqué did not state, but what was stated later, was that on that day of November 23 *the junction of the northern and southern pincer was made south of Kalach.*

Already on the 24th the Russians were spreading far into the country inside the Don Bend. The special communiqué stated that the troops had advanced forty kilometres and had captured Surovikino and several other places, and that south-west of Kletskaya they had captured three enemy divisions previously surrounded, complete with their staffs and generals. These were actually Rumanian divisions.

That day also "our troops advancing north of Stalingrad, having occupied three points on the Volga, joined with the forces defending the northern part of Stalingrad."

Stalingrad, it will be remembered, was split into four sectors: the sector between Rynok and the Tractor Plant (which was in German hands), the small "Barricades" bridgehead and then the main bridgehead, and finally a fourth, unimportant bridgehead further south. Thus, the northernmost sector of Stalingrad—though by no means the most important one—was taken out of its isolation; the "blockade" of the main Stalingrad Front—the famous nine kilometres—was actually not to be broken till January 27—nearly at the very end of the whole Stalingrad Battle.

In the south that day, the Russians took Sadovoye, Umantsevo, and other places. The number of enemy dead for that day alone was put at 15,000, the number of prisoners was now up to 36,000. The equipment captured in the first five days of the offensive was put at: guns, 1,164;

tanks, 431; planes, 88; motor vehicles, 3,940; horses, over 5,000; 3,000,000 shells, etc.

Already a special Stalingrad Medal was being established that day, along with Odessa, Leningrad, and Sebastopol Medals—which in itself suggested that Stalingrad was already, in every sense of the word, "in the bag." It was announced that the People's Commissariat of Defence had requested the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet to authorise the issue of such medals.

In this request . . . special mention is made of the armies defending Stalingrad, and special stress is laid on the role played by the Sixty-second Army, which repelled the main German blow against Stalingrad, and by its commander, Lieutenant-General V. I. Chuikov and his principal assistants—Colonel Gorokhov, Major-General Rodimtsev, Major-General Guriev, Colonel Bolvinov, Colonel Gurtiev, Colonel Sarayev, Colonel Skvortsov and others, and also his artillerymen and airmen.

During the next few days nothing very spectacular happened; the main point, namely, that the Germans in Stalingrad had already been encircled, was not yet being announced. What the Russians were chiefly doing now was to consolidate the "ring." On November 25 the special communiqué enumerated several more localities north-west of Stalingrad, in the Don Bend; the prisoners were now up to 51,000; but the fighting was no longer so fierce, and the enemy dead for the day were put at only 6,000.

On the 26th, the Russians were still spreading west, capturing Krasnoye Selo, Generalov, and other places; but in the south the Germans inside Stalingrad were beginning to react, for "in the south, we repelled the counter-attacks of enemy troops trying to break through to the south-west." The number of prisoners was now up to 63,000.

There were indications that the Germans, both at Stalingrad and in Berlin, were getting worried. A Sovinformbureau statement said:

The Germans at first did not wish to admit anything. Then they said they had smashed ten Soviet tank brigades—only the numbers of the tank brigades they quoted have never existed.

They are also trying to reassure their people with stories of new secret weapons: they claim to have at Stalingrad a flamethrowing tank with a range higher than a five-storey house. There is no such thing. Their flamethrowing tanks are exactly the same as last year. They also claim to have a machine-gun firing three thousand rounds per minute. There is no such thing. They will not get far with stories like these. The truth will come out.

On the 27th, there was no special communiqué, and the ordinary communiqué merely said that the offensive was continuing "in the same directions."

On the 29th, the special communiqué showed that the Russians were now busy widening the ring round Stalingrad in places where it was still dangerously narrow.

. . . . . .

The encirclement of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad was only part of a much vaster plan; but this encirclement was the *sine qua non*. Everything hinged on it. If it finally succeeded, the Caucasus would be almost automatically cleared; it was also important to take every precaution so that the Germans did not send too many reinforcements to the south from elsewhere. This, on the face of it, thankless task fell to the lot of the Russian troops of the Central Front; just as in the summer they pressed on with their fruitless offensive against Rzhev, in order to prevent the Germans from taking away any forces to Stalingrad from their Moscow "springboard," so now the troops of the Central Front engaged in an ultimately more fruitful, but still extremely hard and costly offensive against Velikie Luki. Simultaneously, they attacked again in the Rzhev area; they made a thirty-kilometre breach in the German lines east of Velikie-Luki, while west of Rzhev (they no longer attempted the hopeless frontal attack that had failed in the summer) they made three breaches of twenty, seventeen and ten kilometres, advancing twelve to thirty kilometres towards the centre of the Moscow "springboard" (or Gzhatsk–Viazma–Rzhev triangle), and driving wedges north and south of Velikie-Luki. The front had been running just east of Velikie-Luki, the most western Russian salient on the Central Front. There was a particular fierceness about that battle in the heart of Russia, not far from Moscow; the enemy losses, as stated in the special communiqué of November 28 announcing this new offensive, required no comment. It spoke of numerous enemy counter-attacks, *and said that the Germans had lost* 10,000 *dead and* 400 *prisoners*.

Throughout December, one could see the offensive gathering momentum and spreading wider and wider. It is true that, up to the 20th, the main fighting was confined to the Stalingrad area—to consolidating the "ring" and repelling the German all-out attempt to break through it from the south-west. But on the 20th the great new Vatutin–Golikov offensive towards Voronezh and Kharkov began; on the 25th the Russians in the Caucasus recaptured Nalchik, and on January 2, Mozdok, and the spectacular German flight from the Caucasus began. On the Central Front, on the other hand, progress was slow and difficult, and, in terms of the map, not in the least spectacular. Velikie-Luki, after a long and bitter siege, was not captured till January 2. The Rzhev–Viazma–Gzhatsk "springboard" was not liquidated till the middle of March.

What did it all look like, down in the steppes round Stalingrad, during that first week of the offensive? The first important, if scrappy, piece of reportage to appear at the time in the Soviet Press was Grossman's article in *Red Star* on December 1, describing first, the vitally important Volga ferry south of Stalingrad, a ferry which, despite the icefloes, supplied the southern "pincer"—and took back wounded and war prisoners; then the

beginning of the offensive itself; then the trophy dumps at Abganerovo, the railway-station to be seized by the southern pincer during the very first break-through. In the final passage the mood and mentality of the Russian troops is well rendered:

The morale of the troops is beyond compare. The army to a man—from the highest officer to the lowest rank-and-file soldier—is fully cognisant of the grave responsibility, the outstanding significance of what is happening. A spirit of stern, sober efficiency marks the actions of the commanders. The staffs know no rest. All conception of night and day has vanished. The work of the superior command and the chiefs of staff proceeds smoothly, competently, vigorously. Terse orders are given in quiet voices. Staff headquarters work at high pressure. What has been achieved is an outstanding success, an undoubted success, but one thought obsesses every mind—the enemy has been surrounded, he must not be allowed to slip through our fingers, he must be destroyed. And the men on the Stalingrad Front are devoting themselves body and soul to bring this about. There must not be a trace of vainglorious-ness or premature complacency in our ranks. We are confident that the Stalingrad advance will be a worthy counterpart of the great Stalingrad defence.

What Grossman did not make clear was that most of the prisoners he had mentioned in his article were, of course, Rumanians, and not Germans—in that southern sector which he was describing.

The Germans did not surrender easily, and fought stubbornly. Even so, doubts had crept even into some of the thickest German skulls. The Russian Press quoted on December 3 and 4, two intercepted German letters which made an interesting contrast. One was dated October, the other the end of November. The first was from a German soldier, Wilhelm Schusser. He described the terrible plight among the Russian civilians at Stalingrad and the ruins of the city:

It is the greatest misfortune I have ever seen. We must thank God for having spared us this, and made us Germans. But with the Russians, there is no other way. The battle here is coming to a victorious end. Soon there will be a special communiqué announcing the fall of Stalingrad.

The second letter, from one Walz Günther, a soldier of the 305th infantry division, who was captured at Stalingrad, wrote in November:

We have no winter clothes. There are five pairs of *ersatz valenki* per company—great big straw boots on wooden soles. They do not warm the feet and are almost impossible for walking. We have been swindled, and have been condemned to death; we shall die of the war or of frost.

During those first ten days of December, the Russians were continuing, despite frequent German counter-attacks, to widen and consolidate their ring round Stalingrad. But nothing very spectacular was happening. Still, there was this novel feature in the communiqués: *increasingly frequent*

references to German transport planes shot down. The German troops at Stalingrad were being supplied by air. At first the Germans used as many as five hundred plane-flights a day for the purpose; but before long their losses became so heavy that they could not keep it up. On December 8, twenty-nine Junkers 52's were shot down; by December 10 the figure had risen to sixty during the day.

Then, on December 12, von Mannstein, commanding the German troops in the Northern Caucasus, launched his offensive from Kotelnikovo in an attempt to break through the Russian ring round Stalingrad. This attempt failed. But while this great battle—largely a tank battle—was in progress, and its outcome, though probable, was not yet entirely clear, the Russians preferred to say nothing about it. It was not until the end of December that the public learned what had happened.

Instead, what was announced on December 20 was the great new Russian offensive that swept from two directions across the country inside the Don Bend, and after a few days cut the vital Rostov–Voronezh railway.

The troops of the South-West Front under General Vatutin struck out from Bokovskaya, about 150 miles west-north-west of Stalingrad, while the troops of the Voronezh Front under General Golikov struck out from Novaya Kalitva, much further west, just south-east of Rossosh. The important Don towns of Novaya Kalitva, Kantemirovka (on the Voronezh–Rostov railway), Boguchar, Taly, Radchenskoye and Bokovskaya were taken, besides two hundred other localities. In four days 10,000 prisoners, most of them Italians and Hungarians, were captured. On December 25 it was announced that the troops of General Vatutin *had crossed into Ukrainian territory.*

Messages were printed from Stalin and Molotov to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukraine, to the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars, and to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, which foreshadowed that this was the real beginning of the liberation of the Ukraine. No doubt, it must have seemed a long and arduous road to Kiev and Odessa, but there was complete confidence in these messages.

The Vatutin–Golikov offensive continued, and was to produce spectacular results in January and February. On the 26th the failure of von Mannstein's offensive was announced, and on the 29th, the liberation of Kotelnikovo. It was now high time for the Germans to pull out of the Caucasus, for the Rostov gap was beginning to close rapidly.

Then, on January 1, a review was published of the six weeks' fighting, which will be quoted later.

Of the foreign correspondents, the first to visit the Stalingrad Front after the encirclement of the Germans, was Henry Shapiro, of the United

Press. He left Moscow in the last week of November, and returned about December 12, and later he gave me a detailed account of this unique journey. I use this with his kind permission.

With Colonel Tarantsev he travelled, in an officers' carriage attached to a munitions train, to some point about 150 kilometres north-west of Stalingrad, and travelled from there by car to Serafimovich. The line nearer Stalingrad was being constantly bombed; all stations were destroyed, and the local military commandants were operating from dugouts and ruined buildings. All along the railway to Stalingrad, Shapiro said, there was a terrific, continuous flow of armaments: *katyushas*, tanks, guns, ammunition, and men. This traffic continued day and night. It was the same on the roads. During the night, the traffic was particularly intense. "But there was very little British and American equipment; occasionally a jeep, or a few isolated tanks—but, on the whole, I reckon that ninety-nine per cent of the equipment was Russian-made. There was rather more evidence of lend-lease stuff in the case of food: some American lard, sugar, and Spam. The astonishing thing was, when one looks back on it, that in all this tremendous flow of traffic, I did not see any American trucks. What the Russians had received by then was obviously being saved up for later."

Already on the train journey there, he got an idea of the general mood in the Red Army. All the officers on the train were in an enormously optimistic mood, and talked freely about recapturing Rostov in the immediate future and pushing on to the Dnieper. "I must say I was at first very sceptical about it," said Shapiro.

Serafimovich, with its bridgehead on the right bank of the Don, from which the offensive of November 19 had started, had been recaptured by the Russians in the middle of October. "There are many woods in the area, and here, during the weeks before the offensive, the Russians concentrated a lot of stuff. The sector opposite the Russians at Serafimovich was held by the Rumanians. On the 19th, in just a few hours, they smashed all the enemy defences and the Rumanians started surrendering."

After describing the road to Serafimovich, along which, despite the blizzard which often almost obliterated the road, the stream of army traffic continued all the time, Shapiro said that he crossed the Don over a pontoon bridge. All the four days he was there it was non-flying weather, and the bombers did not come near the pontoon. The Don was not yet frozen at this point. "Serafimovich was a completely military town. There were no civilians there, except the *Voentorg* (i.e. commissary) people. Serafimovich had, until a few days before, been Vatutin's headquarters, but now he had moved further west, preparing for the offensive which was going to create the "second ring" round Stalingrad.

"But I saw General Rogov, the Chief of the Operational Department on Vatutin's sector; he showed me the operational map—a terrific secret at that time—and showed how they were tightening the circle round Stalingrad, and how the drive for the 'second ring' was about to start. It was clear from the map that the Germans were completely trapped and couldn't get out. Altogether I found among the officers and soldiers *an air of confidence the like of which I had never seen in the Red Army before*. In the Battle of Moscow there was nothing like it. On the other side of the Don, well behind the Russian lines, there were still thousands of Rumanians just wandering about the steppes, cursing the Germans, and looking desperately for Russian feeding-points.

Here they were as well fed as the Russians themselves. Some straggled along to these feeding-points unescorted; or else you would see a column of two or three hundred Rumanians being escorted by *one* Russian tommy-gunner. All they wanted was to be formally taken over as war prisoners. It is true," said Shapiro, "that there were some exceptions; some small groups of Rumanian Iron Guards would still hide for a time in woods and ravines, and attack small Russian parties on the roads, and Russian staff cars.

"I talked to hundreds of Rumanian prisoners; they all told the same story: it was not their war; they had been forced into it by Antonescu; Russians and Rumanians had never fought against each other; and the Rumanians had no business to be on the Volga.

"A lot of individual stragglers would throw themselves on the mercy of the Russian peasants. I asked some of these peasants why they were feeding them, and they all said: 'They are poor peasants just like us; it isn't their fault. It's Hitler's. Of course, if they were Germans, it would be different. We wouldn't feed *them*.'

"I saw a lot of those manuals that had been given to the Rumanian troops: full of stories about the Nationalisation of Women in Russia, and the total suppression of the Church. The first thing that struck the Rumanians, was that there were churches in nearly all villages, and a very solid family life."

From Serafimovich Shapiro drove south-east, nearer to Stalingrad, and took fully two days to locate General Chistiakov's Thirteenth Army Headquarters. "The closer I moved to Stalingrad, the more numerous were the Germans. Only the Serafimovich sector, where the main break-through had taken place, had been held by Rumanians; but south-east of Serafimovich, there were only Germans.

"The steppe was a fantastic business. The whole goddam steppe was full of dead horses—some were only half-dead, and it was pathetic to see one standing on three frozen legs, and shaking the remaining one. Ten thousand horses had been killed by the Russians in the break-through. The whole steppe was strewn with these dead horses, with gun carriages, wrecked tanks, and guns (some from Skoda, some French, some even English, probably captured at Dunkirk), and no end of corpses—Rumanians and Germans. Every village had its cemetery for the German dead. The civilians were coming back to villages, which were mostly wrecked.

"Kalach was a shambles. Of the whole town only one house was standing; and even it had only three walls. At the headquarters of the local staff, I met the commander, a Colonel, who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Kiev, and we sat up most of the night discussing Kant and Hegel."

Then, some fifty miles south of Kalach, Henry finally located General Chistiakov. "This area was already the front proper. The place was being shelled; there were artillery positions on both sides. I found him there, together with eight other generals. Lieutenant-General Chistiakov, a former peasant lad, was a handsome man, and with a great sense of humour. He and the other generals were in tremendous spirits. At dinner we were served Portuguese sardines, Italian lemons, French champagne, Bulgarian and Rumanian cigarettes; nearly all the stuff we ate and drank was "trophy" stuff. Chistiakov said that early in the campaign the Germans could have fairly easily broken out of Stalingrad, but Hitler had not allowed it, and they were hoping for a repetition of Staraya Russa, where, in the spring of 1942, they *did* finally break out. But Chistiakov was quite confident this would not

happen. They were in the bag all right, and he was certain that Stalingrad would be taken by the end of December."[1]

German transport planes were being brought down by the dozen and starvation had set in inside the pocket. They were eating up their horses.

Chistiakov was already then expecting the German offensive from the south-west; he said the Russians were quite prepared for it and even said: "The more people they throw in, the better we shall like it; for they will all perish." The optimism among the Russians was such that some of the generals even hinted that the Red Army might defeat Germany single-handed, and that they no longer "needed" the Second Front.

The German prisoners Henry saw were nearly all young fellows of nineteen or twenty, and very miserable. He did not see any officers. At that time there was thirty to forty degrees of frost; and they wore ordinary coats and blankets round their necks. They had hardly any winter equipment at all. The Red Army, on the other hand, was very well equipped—with *valenki*, sheepskin coats, gloves, etc. "When I wrote," he said, "that the Russians were better equipped for the winter fighting than the Germans, Hanson Baldwin laughed at me. He would, of course. Morally, the Germans were completely stunned, in addition to being starved and frozen. They did not seem to understand what the devil had happened."

"What kind of car were you travelling in?"

"A German Ford. I had a tough Siberian driver—a great character. He had picked the car from a junk-heap; it had all sorts of parts missing when he first found it, but then he stuck it together, and whenever we passed another junk-heap, he'd go and search for any part that was still lacking. That's how it was in those pre-jeep days."

At Serafimovich, on his return journey, Henry saw Vatutin for a few minutes, in a dilapidated schoolhouse, at 4 a.m. The room had a wooden floor and a stove; and at least it was warm. "Vatutin was terribly tired. He had not had a proper sleep for weeks, kept rubbing his eyes and dozing off; so it is hard to say what kind of person exactly he was. But he looked very tough and determined, and was very optimistic. He showed me the map on which the sweep of the new offensive deep into the Don Bend was clearly marked."

"When I returned to Moscow, I wrote: 'The Germans are Doomed'; and spoke of this battle as being the turning-point in the progress of the war. After talking to the generals, I was completely satisfied that that was the case. The censors were very cautious, and I had a hell of a time with them. Still, I was able to convey a fairly optimistic picture."

His impression was that while the capture of Serafimovich, standing on a steep hill, had cost the Russians very heavy casualties, they had not lost many men during and since the break-through. The Rumanian and German casualties were, however, very heavy. The battlefields south of Serafimovich were still quite fresh when he was there, and there were many enemy but few Russian dead. When the first lot of Rumanian generals were surrounded, with the help of the deep Cossack raids, they asked for the Russian surrender terms. Vatutin sent them envoys. Just as the Russians were about to clinch a deal, a message came from the Germans telling the Rumanians to hold on; so the Rumanian

[1] It was, indeed, to be a slight disappointment to the Russians that the Germans did hold out in Stalingrad three or four weeks longer than originally expected; and it may even be argued that if Stalingrad had fallen sooner, the Russians might have reached the Dnieper towards the end of the winter campaign, and might not have lost Kharkov, as they were to do in March.

generals said: "We had better go on fighting." But immediately after that, message after message started pouring in saying that the Rumanians were surrendering all over the place; and the surrender became unavoidable.

What, in the meantime, had been happening inside Stalingrad? On December 18 Vysokoostrovsky wrote in the *Red Star*:

The whole character of the fighting inside Stalingrad has sharply changed. Having suffered severely on other sectors of the front, the enemy has been obliged, at Stalingrad, to go over to the defensive. Clinging on to the factory buildings, the Germans are still hoping to keep the positions they previously captured, and are defending themselves stubbornly. Through open spaces, through the garden cities of the Workers' Settlements, through the platforms and workshops of the shattered factory buildings, the front-line positions wind their way, forming a curious ribbon. The trenches on the two sides of the front almost touch each other at some points; buildings and the remnants of buildings are wrapped in barbed wire, which also crosses streets and paths. Anyone little acquainted with the set-up would find it difficult to say what's what. The Germans have built here a hard defence line, with substantial depth: here is a solid system of fortifications along the whole length of the front line; here are several rows of barbed wire, pillboxes, wood-and-earth works, mined areas, buildings turned into strong-points.

There are similar fortifications behind the front line, with numerous firing-points for cross and flank fire. But there is no great German activity these days. They are sitting underground, and their fire is thin and sporadic. At night they light up their front lines with flares. Yet the German defences come to life when we attack, and they always try very hard to recapture any position they have lost. The fighting is usually limited to tiny areas, but here the fighting is bloody, and is conducted ferociously with tommy-guns, grenades, light mortars, machine-guns and sometimes bayonets and knives.

Our frequent barrages cause them great losses. If, in the past, the German Command did not worry about losses, they do now, with their forces thinned out. They have built a lot of shelters and warming-points; and often they use smoke-screens.

We also live mostly underground, and secret passages to the German positions are dug by our reconnaissance parties, who then blow up some of these positions from below. Then, over the wreckage thus formed, our infantry break through into the depth of the enemy lines. Hard and persistent work is being done by our storm groups, who thus smash some of the links in the German chain of defences, and dislocate the Germans' well-co-ordinated firing system. The gaps thus formed enable our men to undertake more active operations on a larger scale, and step by step the enemy defences are being broken up.

What was happening is sufficiently clear. The German defences at Stalingrad were formidable. There was little hope of the Russians' breaking through them; or rather, it might have been possible if they were willing to pay the price.

But it was no longer necessary to pay this price. In effect, the Sixty-second Army only had to wait till the ring round the Germans facing them tightened from behind. But it was important to keep the Germans con-

stantly on the alert, nevertheless, so that they should send away from that famous line along the Volga as few of their troops as possible. Towards the end of December, the German line inside Stalingrad was nevertheless being severely shattered, with more and more pill-boxes and dugouts and other firing-points being captured by the Russians; but, in spite of this, the Russians remained, in effect, "encircled" by the Germans almost to the end, while the Germans were, in turn being more and more tightly encircled by the Russians from "outside."

Everywhere the fighting was ferocious and violent and without any serious observance of the old rules of military conduct.

Answer the enemy's ruse with your own ruse, wrote *Red Star* on December 3, answer his deceit with deceit. The Germans are a perfidious enemy who care nothing for any of the rules and traditions of warfare that existed in the past. In innumerable cases they have dressed up in Red Army uniform; and have used Russian markings on their planes and tanks. Sometimes they pretend to surrender, by raising their arms, and when our trusting soldiers approach, they shoot them down. Any means is good for destroying such an enemy. As Ognev says in Korneichuk's play, *Front*: "Very stupid of us to fight honourably against this most dishonourable of foes."

"OFFENSIVE SPIRIT" AND GOLD BRAID

The campaign in the Red Army for strict and severe organisation and discipline and for the "cult of the uniform" continued. Sloppy thinking and amateurish methods incompatible with army discipline were severely reprimanded. Thus, *Red Star* wrote an angry article against the application of the principle of Socialist Competition in certain army units. It quoted a document drawn up in some army unit in which the soldiers had undertaken "to destroy one tank per man and three firing-points per man in the coming battles; to dig trenches in less than the assigned time; to observe military discipline; to carry out carefully the officer's orders; to keep the arms in good condition."

We are surprised, said *Red Star*, that Lieutenant Krasavin and his political deputy Evseyev should not yet have realised that what they are talking about has nothing to do with spontaneous personal obligations, but is part of the soldiers' military duty. It is high time people realised that *there can be no Socialist Competition in the Red Army!*

That sort of thing was perhaps all very well during the Civil War, but this was a different kind of army.

During that final phase of the Battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army continued to undergo those inward and outward improvements which began to be introduced in a big way during the previous summer. More and more attention was being given to the outward symbols of military

authority, honour and tradition. At the same time less and less was left to chance and improvisation. The Red Army was clearly entering the phase of the great offensive operations of this war, and serious attention was being given to the rules of human conduct in this new setting. In *Red Star* of January 6, 1943, one finds a particularly significant article by Major M. Zotov on this question. He begins with the remark, typical for the time, that "defence, even of long duration, can be considered only as something temporary, for without decisive offensive operations the enemy can never be smashed. This must become the keynote in the present education of our Red Army men." He then analyses the detailed instructions by a company commander on what exactly the company is to do in storming a certain enemy position.

(1) Lieutenant Gorokhov, the company commander's assistant, advances with the second platoon; the first platoon is led by his assistant, the party organiser Alifanov. *The aim* of these two is to encourage the soldiers by their personal example, to advance unflinchingly. (2) In the rear of the first platoon I place Communist Red Army man Nikishov; of the second platoon, candidate of the Party, Sergeant Morkovnikov; of the third platoon the platoon's Party organiser, Comrade Olgin. *The aim* is not to allow any soldiers, as they approach the enemy, to lag behind. This plan is to be announced to the company five minutes before the attack. (3) If the enemy is encountered on the way, the above Communists immediately reiterate the officer's cry of "Forward." (4) After the capture of the enemy position a brief meeting shall be held explaining the significance of the operation.

Major Zotov, while approving this plan, calls it incomplete, because several non-party members of the company in question—men who have been decorated for bravery and can be completely relied upon—have not been given as responsible tasks as the Communists, which they should have been.

One can see from this small example the meticulous work done in the Red Army with the object of obtaining the maximum results from every individual. The purely military leadership is helped in this by Communist and other "caretakers of the soldier's morale"; for bravery and enthusiasm, too, must be cultivated, and cannot be always taken for granted. It is in a variety of ways, of which the above is only a small but typical example, that the "offensive spirit" (and it must be remembered that at that time, the Red Army had still little experience of offensive operations) was being built up.

Similarly, a great deal of attention was given in the Red Army to what was called the "Officer's paternal care of his soldiers." Despite this phrase, used by *Red Star* in its editorial of January 14, it was less a matter of humanity and sentiment than one of plain efficiency, for a well-fed soldier is a better man than a badly fed soldier.

Even in the roughest conditions of field life, it is possible to create for the soldiers more or less normal living conditions; to see that they are regularly given a hot meal, that they should, from time to time, be able to sleep in a warm place, and should always have warm clothes and boots. Before an attack the officer should always endeavour to allow his men a short rest or sleep. An officer, conscious of his duty, will not sit down to a meal until he has made sure that his men have been given food. . . . In many units there is a sound rule not to wait for special ambulances to arrive to pick up the wounded, but to put them in cars as soon as any going to the rear are available. . . . The Red Army receives priority in everything, and the Soviet people grudge it nothing. Food is moved to the front in a constant stream. Officers must see to it that every soldier receives his ration to the very last gram. This is a law from which there must not be the slightest departure.

It was, indeed, one of the remarkable achievements of the Soviet war machine that, as distinct from the war of 1914–18, the Russian Army was, on the whole, well fed. There were occasional hitches, due to transport difficulties, especially when a unit was more or less isolated; but, in the main, the army ate better than anybody else in the Soviet Union, even in the very difficult days of 1941 and 1942, when many cities were hungry. In 1943 the situation became even better, with the influx of American supplies.

There also continued to be many changes in the outward appearance of the army.

As I said before, the gold braid of the Red Army emerged from the fires of Stalingrad; it was not cheap tinsel like that of Rumanian uniforms; it represented a collective reward to an army that had shown its worth in battle. Simultaneously, a variety of other regimental traditions was introduced or revived. Thus, on December 21, 1942, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a *ukase* endowing Red Army units with a new type of banner; and the rules concerning these banners were much more solemn and rigid than any that had existed in the Red Army before. The *ukase* laid down the Statute of the new banners.

The *Red Star* editorial of December 23, after stressing the importance of military banners throughout history, said:

The war banner is sacred. Units, in receiving their banner, must conform to a definitely established ritual. . . . After the congratulatory speech by the representative of the People's Commissariat of Defence, the commanding officer, kneeling, together with all his men, himself kisses the banner three times; then, rising to his feet, he reads the oath on behalf of the unit. Then the men also rise. The commanding officer then hands the banner to the banner-bearer. The band then plays the "Internationale." The commanding officer, his assistants, and the banner-bearer, then carry the banner along the length of the lined-up unit. . . . As distinct from old-time wars, the banner does not appear in the thick of the battle, but is kept at the unit's headquarters, within the range of the unit's military operations. The unit which has lost its banner through cowardice is dissolved and thus dies together with its banner.

Much more important still for "smartening up" the army was the introduction of epaulettes—epaulettes with coloured stripes and markings for soldiers and N.C.O.'s; gold and silver-braided epaulettes for officers. The papers on January 7, and especially those of January 17, looked more like fashion magazines; the former printed twenty-eight models of different epaulettes, the latter the new models of uniforms. The *Red Star* editorial wrote on January 7:

> The introduction of epaulettes for the entire personnel of the Red Army is an important event, for it is calculated to increase still further the army's discipline and its martial spirit. Epaulettes with clear markings emphasise the distinction between privates and officers and their respective ranks, and indicate their special work. As Frunze said in the past: "The attention given to the officer's and soldier's bearing and outward appearance cannot be regarded as harmful, unnecessary or non-revolutionary. Anyone who says so is talking nonsense. The soldier's inner discipline must express itself outwardly." One cannot allow the soldier and especially the officer to look slovenly and untidy. He must also know how to salute his superiors. The spruce, well-groomed appearance of an army unit has an excellent moral effect on all its members. . . . The wearing of epaulettes must inspire every soldier and officer with a feeling of pride in belonging to the valiant Red Army—a feeling of pride both for himself and for the army.

Certainly, coming as it did, shortly before the final rout of the Germans at Stalingrad, this reform could not have been better timed.

On the same day A. Krivitsky, himself an old officer of the Tsarist Army, and one who, together with Lieutenant-General Ignatiev and other old men, had played an important part in this "revival of smartness" in the Russian Army, and had given the newer men the benefit of his pre-revolutionary experience in these matters, wrote in *Red Star*:

> The new uniforms of our officers and soldiers have achieved that degree of military smartness which is essential for the perfect outward appearance of an army. The introduction of the traditional soldiers' and officers' epaulettes, now, at the height of the Great Patriotic War, emphasises and symbolises the continuity of the glory of Russian arms throughout the history of Russia right down to our times.

It is true that, later, in 1944 and 1945, there was a tendency to criticise sharply any suggestion that the Red Army was, in any sense, a "continuation" of the Tsarist Army, with all its incompetence and lack of organisation, but the tendency in 1942–3 was rather to overlook these shortcomings, and to stress the valour of the Russian soldier then, as now (even though he had only a very vague idea, in the last war, of "what he was fighting for"), and also to bring out the best examples of generalship in the last war, notably the admirable record of General Brussilov, who won great victories despite the incompetence, corruption and treachery around him. Brussilov, moreover, had the advantage of having remained

on the Soviet side and of not having gone over to the Whites, like so many other generals—including some good generals—of the last war.

In explaining why epaulettes were, in the first place, discarded by the Red Army, Krivitsky wrote:

> After the October Revolution, when the reactionary officer class took up arms against the Soviet Régime, the young Red Army refused to wear the uniform its enemies were wearing. But since then much water has flowed under the bridges. The Red Army has grown and matured. It has brilliant officer cadres; and now the country gives them these tokens of military dignity which adorned the men of 1812, 1854 and 1914. . . . The cult of the uniform is something sacred for every officer. The honour of the uniform represents not only the officer's past and present; it also represents his future. For, exalted by great deeds, this uniform shall live through the centuries.
>
> The introduction of epaulettes will strengthen discipline. While there is complete social equality between officers and men, the officer's epaulettes are calculated to stress, even more than before, the role of every rank of officer, and thus to increase both their authority and their responsibility for the outcome of the battle.

Later even more detailed rules of smartness were published for the benefit of officers; for example, officers were not permitted to carry large parcels through the streets, or to appear in theatres wearing felt boots; while high-ranking officers were not allowed to travel by tramcar or underground.

The importance of all this was not, at first, appreciated abroad. I gathered at the time that the Red Army had asked Britain to send it thirty thousand yards (I could not swear to the exact figure, but it was something like that) of gold and silver braid, but this request was—at least, at first—turned down as though it were something unimportant, frivolous, and almost indecent—"when there's a war on." The point actually was that it was very important precisely *because* there was a war on.

"THANK THE REVOLUTION FOR THIS"

What were the main propaganda lines and themes during the Stalingrad offensive and the final stages of the Stalingrad Battle? At first the propaganda was still rather cautious. Even so, there was an all-pervading feeling that the turning-point in the war had been reached. Already on December 4 Ehrenburg wrote:

> The Germans are having bad luck. First they learned of Rommel's marathon across North Africa. Then they somehow discovered that the Americans had got to Africa, too. Now they have been told of "heavy defensive battles in the Don Bend and at Velikie-Luki." They have stamped out half of Europe with their hobnailed boots. For one thousand days they have gorged themselves on other peoples' bread with impunity, have sozzled themselves on other peoples' wine, and jeered at the sorrows of others. For one thousand days

they have been shooting, and hanging, and torturing, certain of their strength. Now they are looking around, puzzled and dismayed.

Frequent references were made to the fact that this was only the beginning. On Constitution Day, on December 5, *Red Star* wrote:

We lived through the ordeals of the summer of 1941, and in the following winter the enemy paid heavily for them. We have also survived the ordeals of the summer of 1942, and now we have begun to beat the Germans again—to inflict on them one defeat after another. Misfortunes have not broken us; we know that the blows we have struck at Vladikavkaz, Stalingrad, Rzhev and Velikie-Luki are the harbingers of our future victories. To-day, we are like iron, like steel, like a steel spring ready to shoot out and strike the enemy with double or treble force. . . . The Germans did not break us because ours is a Soviet state, etc. . . .

Yet a vast part of the country was still in German hands, and notes of self-pity could occasionally be detected; for example in Simonov's dispatch from the Central Front, where he no doubt witnessed the terrible grimness of the battle, and the fearful casualties for no very appreciable territorial gains. And he also saw the ruin and devastation and the death around him in that "desert zone" into which the Germans were deliberately turning every piece of country in that central part of Russia that they were now being forced to abandon. Travelling along that same log-covered Rzhev road, along which so many ambulances had made their excruciating journey to Moscow ever since the summer, and watching the desolation around him, he could not help exclaiming:

Long-suffering Russian land! How long will it take till your wounds are healed? How many years will the golden hands of masons and carpenters require to build again all that has been destroyed? (*Red Star*, December 5.)

It was not going to be easy—far from it. Although the great Battle of Stalingrad had virtually been won, and Vatutin's troops were sweeping beyond the Donetz into the Ukraine, the articles on and around New Year's day, 1943, were not irresponsibly optimistic.

"Victory will not come easily," wrote *Red Star* on January 2:

The Germans now understand that every step back they take brings nearer the catastrophe of the Nazi State. It is a life-and-death struggle. 1943 will be a grim and hard year, but it will bring us victory. . . .

Perhaps this was not intended to be taken literally.

Yet as the Golikov–Vatutin offensive progressed spectacularly, and as the Germans at Stalingrad were being finished off, notes of immense national, almost racial pride, were struck, notably by Alexei Tolstoy:

The Germans did not realise that Moscow was much more than just an accidental setback that could easily be repaired. But while Moscow in December 1941 did not teach the Germans anything, it taught us a lot. In arrogantly

starting their war against us, the Germans knew all our weak points. They did not want to know about our strong points, and our strongest point—that which proved fatal to the Germans—*is that we are Russians.* After Moscow, the Russian realised that he was stronger, braver, more intelligent, and more cunning than the German. . . .

And then Tolstoy made this prophecy, which was to prove incorrect, perhaps because, while knowing something about the Germans, he had not fathomed the essence of the Nazis; he was confusing Hitler with those more far-sighted generals who were going to throw a bomb at the Führer in July 1944.

It is hard to say when the catastrophe will come: maybe on the Dnieper, or in Poland; but one thing is clear: the German will not want to fight on his own soil. He lacks the mettle for a Patriotic War. This requires different human qualities, a different psychology, and different aims: not the ferocious greed of the bandit, but the fury of our holy Russian anger.

Needless to say, this national or nationalist line of a Tolstoy was not allowed an exclusive monopoly. Just about the same time, the Soviet *motif* was loudly sounded in connection with the nineteenth anniversary of Lenin's death on January 21.

It is true, however, that even here, the national *motif* was given considerable prominence. Thus, Mitin, one of the leading Party doctrinaires, wrote:

While being the leader of the workers of all countries, Lenin was, at the same time, *a great patriot of his own country* (Mitin's italics). He loved his people deeply and passionately, he loved his language, and all that was progressive in the history of Russia. He was full of national pride as he thought of the people who created a great, sound and mighty State, and who succeeded, throughout the centuries, in defending this State against foreign invaders.

Perhaps he was even slightly stretching a point here, with his suggestion that Lenin must, in fact, have greatly admired Ivan the Terrible, for he thereupon quotes Lenin himself as saying something slightly different:

That Russia, which has liberated herself, and which . . . has gone through the birth pangs of the Soviet Revolution—*that* Russia we shall defend to the last drop of blood. . . .

That day there was the usual memorial meeting in Moscow with Stalin and most of the other members of the Politburo present. And it is interesting that even in the memorial speech that Scherbakov delivered—"and if anyone was careful to defend the purity of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, it was Scherbakov," was what the party magazine *Bolshevik* was to say later, at the time of Scherbakov's death—he dwelt much less on the work of Lenin than on the present achievements of the Red Army. The connection between the two was referred to in only very general terms; at the

same time, however, Scherbakov did stress the supreme importance of the part played in achieving what had already been achieved by the Communist Party. He dwelt particularly on the vital importance of the organisation of the rear—which was essentially the work of the Soviet State; "and no other state could have achieved this, any more than any other country could have withstood the German onslaught, as the Soviet Union had done."

Scherbakov began by ridiculing the Nazis. In the Northern Caucasus, he said, the Germans had been pushed back three hundred kilometres; they had alsq been thrown back three hundred kilometres from Stalingrad. Yet on September 30 at the Reichstag, Hitler had said: "We are storming Stalingrad and we shall take it. You can be sure of that. And once we have taken something, we cannot be moved out." "Now," said Scherbakov, "he'd be only too glad to be able to 'move out' of Stalingrad, but that no longer depends on him. . . . Goebbels said some time ago: 'Next winter the Red Army will not be dangerous to us any more.' Yet more recently a German communiqué contained the following statement: 'It has been learned in Berlin that the German troops are shortening the front according to plan by withdrawing from certain advanced strong-points. Heavy fighting is in progress on the Middle Don. The Russian troops have scored a few successes, but this is in accordance with the plans of the German High Command.' " (*Loud laughter.*)

"In publishing this drivel," said Scherbakov, "the German High Command are taking their listeners and readers to be complete idiots. . . ."

Scherbakov's speech on January 21 was, indeed, important as a sort of interim report on the general situation.

In the second part of his speech he dealt with the rear, "that well-organised rear without which, in Lenin's words, there can be no real army." At the time of Stalingrad, the Party leaders were indeed particularly conscious of the Soviet Union's organisational achievements in industry and transport, and conscious of the striking contrast in this respect between this war and the last. It was like the supreme justification of the régime.

For example, the trade and railway schools, which had been set up shortly before the war on Stalin's initiative, had already, during the war, provided industry and transport with one million newly trained workers. Scherbakov also spoke of the results of Socialist Competition, and of the great extension of the sown areas in the east—to compensate partly for the temporary loss of the Ukraine and the Kuban; this also was a feather in the cap of the *kolkhoz* system, "for with small individual farms it could never have been done." He added that the authority of the Party was greater than ever; and in 1942 alone 1,340,000 new members had entered it.

Scherbakov concluded: "Bolsheviks are not liable to panic and depression when things go badly. Nor do Bolsheviks get carried away with success. But there can be no doubt that our people, *who have stood up to the German onslaught as no other people could*, will be able to finish off the German invaders and their Allies. The successes of the Red Army have earned for it the sympathy of all the freedom-loving nations—the sympathy and the greatest respect—for it is the Red Army *which is carrying the entire weight of the war against Nazi Germany and her Allies*. . . . As in all things, the great

Lenin was right when he taught our Party that a people who had tasted of the fruits of freedom, had set up its own government, and was capable of struggling, and willing to fight for its great and noble ideals, would win in any struggle, however hard and complicated, and however fierce and ferocious the enemy."

Scherbakov, who was one of the least "west-conscious" of the Soviet leaders, and who, at heart, perhaps distrusted the capitalist world even more than others, certainly did not go out of his way during the week of the final Stalingrad victory to present any bouquets to the Allies. To Scherbakov, as to many others, Africa was small stuff. And Russians, at the time, liked to say that Stalingrad had been won on Russian equipment; what allied equipment there was, was a mere drop in the bucket.

But if this was partly true, it became much less so with every day of 1943 that passed; and on some sectors of the front it was not true even in January 1943. Even so, at that time there was still relatively little allied equipment in Russia; a few thousand planes, tanks and guns had been received from Britain and America; also some raw materials, but two of the most conspicuous American contributions to Russia's victory were only beginning to appear in appreciable quantities: namely, food and motor transport.

Up to the end of February—and a large part of this came only in the last two or three months, since the perfection of the Iranian route—only 72,000 American trucks and 17,000 jeeps were delivered to Russia; these vehicles, of which several hundred thousand were to be shipped to Russia before the end of the war, and which were to become an inevitable part of the Russian Front scenery, and an immense contribution to the mobility of the Red Army beginning with the summer of 1943, were still extremely rare in 1942. During my January trip to the Stalingrad area I saw very few, if any, American vehicles.

At Voronezh, four months later, I saw hundreds.

But Stalingrad was fought exclusively by Soviet men, and almost exclusively on Soviet equipment; and this was an object of legitimate pride, even if, in a more general way, the Russians tended to underestimate the allied war effort—largely because they were not sea-conscious, and had heard very little of the Battle of the Atlantic and the appalling allied shipping losses throughout 1942. And even when they heard about it all, it did not quite register.

At the same time, it is not surprising that, at the time of Stalingrad, not more appreciation should have been expressed, for instance by Scherbakov, for the allied contribution to the war in Russia—even apart from its relatively small bulk. The Russian people guessed what Stalingrad was costing every day in terms of blood; for that reason Ambassador Standley's outburst, two months later, on the lack of appreciation and acknowledgment allied help was receiving in Russia, shocked and pained many

Russians, who thought it callous and in poor taste. But then, as later, there was never any particular eagerness to stress, still less to exalt, the part played by the Allies in the war—though Scherbakov's phrase, used during the week of the Stalingrad victory, was not going to be used again —"The Red Army is carrying the entire weight of the war against Nazi Germany."

The tone of the Press in relation to the Germans continued to be ferocious. Professor Manuilsky (later Ukrainian Foreign Commissar), though a highly educated Marxist and formerly a leader of the Comintern, wrote, on January 27, an article entitled "Hatred for the Enemy," the vigour of which exceeded almost anything even Ehrenburg had written. Not only did he speak of "this cursed [Nazi] generation of moral monsters stinking of decay, rottenness and death," but he spoke of the success of "Hitler's devilish plan by which eighty million Germans have willingly associated themselves and have shared in the crimes and responsibilities of his gang of murderers."

Then he became almost apocalyptic:

> Old Field Marshal Kutuzov used to say of the French who had broken into Moscow: "I shall yet make them eat rats." The Nazis are going to eat *ersatz* rats! At Stalingrad they are already eating dead cats; they will go on eating them as they are being driven out of our country. And as they run in a mad stampede through the countries they have devastated, not a hand will be raised to give them a crumb of bread; the soot of the towns they have burned will eat into their eyes and parch their throats, and the wind will whip their faces with the nooses of the gallows they have erected. People they meet will spit in their faces and the orphans of those they killed will throw stones after them. Those they have murdered will rise from their graves and stand in their way, and call for vengeance. Everywhere, death will pursue them.
>
> Then they will begin to speak of justice and cry for mercy. And they will not speak, but scream into your ears: "I didn't do it. Hans Müller machine-gunned those children bathing in the river at Gomel." "I didn't strangle that baby which cried and wouldn't let me sleep—it's the other fellow who did it."[1] Finally, they will begin to denounce their infernal Führer, and sniffing through their red noses, they will grumble and say that he has deceived them. Only then will they realise where these crimes have led them to.

For this was the period when German atrocities became, if not more numerous, at any rate much more tangible. It was no longer necessary to search dead Germans' pockets for cynical sadistic diaries and for snapshots of corpses dangling from the gallows, with a couple of grinning Fritzes standing beside them; now the Red Army was advancing: and wherever it went, it saw with its own eyes what Hitler's New Order had done and was doing; and everywhere the story was told of the Germans'

[1] Which, incidentally, is just about what we were to see in 1945.

stupid, nauseating, insulting arrogance, if nothing worse; usually there were many things much worse. The horrors of Kharkov and Orel and Kiev, and the super-horrors of Majdanek and Auschwitz, were still waiting to be seen—hundreds of miles ahead: but already in November 1942 some eloquent, if small, samples of what was lying ahead—all the way from Stalingrad to the German frontier—were provided. Less than a fortnight after the Stalingrad offensive had begun, the Red Army came upon its first complete concentration-camp; it was only a miniature, but complete for all that. Near Vertiachi Farm on the Don, they came upon a snow-covered field with barbed-wire around it: it was littered with the dead bodies of Russian war prisoners; only two out of eighty-nine were still alive. The pitiful photographs published in the Press were accompanied by a statement signed by a Russian medical orderly, Riabov, a Captain Roschin, Captain Kalashnikov and several inhabitants of the nearby farm.

It said that ten bodies had been so mutilated as to lose all human semblance; many had had their eyes put out and their ears and noses cut off. It was established that the Germans compelled the prisoners to work fourteen hours a day, building fortifications; that they were fed on half a litre of hot water, a few spoonfuls of rye and a small piece of decayed horseflesh; that the wounded and sick received no food at all; that nearly all the wounded suffered from dysentery; that a few days before the Russian offensive—that is, about a fortnight before the Russians arrived—all food was stopped altogether. The eighty-seven had died of starvation, or tortures, or plain shooting.

It is curious that at that time Sovinformbureau should still have denounced the Vertiachi Camp as a blatant violation of the Hague Convention of 1907: later, these German crimes revealed themselves on such a scale that any talk of "Hague Conventions" would have simply sounded silly. But it spoke, nevertheless, of the "systematic" extermination of war prisoners, an assertion which was particularly true in 1941 and 1942; in 1943 there was at least a partial change in the German "policy" on Russian war prisoners: though even later it was partly true that "Soviet war prisoners are, in some cases, killed right away, in others made to die a slow death through overwork and ill-treatment." It is also interesting that the official Russian statement on the Vertiachi Camp should have formally accused the German High Command of this crime; as it happened, the principal representative of the German High Command in that area was none other than Colonel-General, later Field Marshal, von Paulus.

Many other German atrocities were committed about the same time, both in the Stalingrad area and in the Caucasus. On January 16 it was learned that, in retreating from the Cossack town of Morozovskoye, the Germans locked up in a house a large number of civilians and burned them alive—a favourite German entertainment. At Kislovodsk the Germans had shot many Russian scientists and other people who would

not collaborate with them, and one night they rounded up two thousand Jews, put them on a train, drove the train into the steppe, and machine-gunned the whole lot—men, women and children. Only later were some of the more fearful German deeds fully investigated and revealed: for instance, the use of the *dushegubka*, the gas wagon, at Krasnodar, during the German occupation between August 1942 and January 1943; slaughters and mass deportations among the Donbas miners during the same period. Much else about that tragic second half of 1942 was learned later.

On December 19, following the joint statement by the Allied Governments on the persecution of the Jews throughout Europe, the Soviet Foreign Office published a long statement on the systematic extermination by gas, machine-guns, and in other ways, of the entire Jewish population of Europe. But it was all so monstrous that even in Russia many felt these things had first to be seen to be believed.

1942, like 1941, produced its heroes and martyrs. Zoya Kosmodemianskaya was the Martyr of Russia's Youth in 1941; the Komsomol's Martyrs of 1942 were Oleg Koshevoi and the other young people who ran the underground organisation, the Young Guard, in the mining town of Krasnodon; in the end they were tracked down and tortured to death by the Gestapo; against terrible odds they had fought the Germans in their own way, while two hundred miles further east the Battle of Stalingrad was raging. Eighteen-year-old Oleg Koshevoi, the leader of the Young Guard, tall and fair, with a slight stutter, who was to die a horrible death—this youth of action and organisation and of personal charm and authority—what an ideal Martyr for the Komsomol to boast of! And—the strange thing is that, after seeing his picture, and hearing his mother tell the whole story of Oleg, I am convinced that he really *was* like that. Later, Fadeyev was to write a novel about him.

But, at the time, one did not know much about these happenings; and Russia's mind was focused on Stalingrad. When the offensive got into its stride, a deep feeling of gratitude and relief swept the country. This expressed itself in all kinds of ways: in extra hours worked in factories "for Stalingrad," and also in that curious movement the origin of which is obscure, and which took the form of large money gifts to the Defence Fund. On December 11 it was learned that the *kolkhozes* of the Tambov province had collected forty million roubles and had sent it to the Defence Fund, at the same time informing Stalin of this gift. The papers published Stalin's letter of thanks, in which he said that their request that the money be used for building a tank column called "The Tambov Kolkhoznik" would be granted. The next day the *kolkhozniks* of Saratov contributed thirty-three million roubles for the purchase of aircraft, and also received a personal letter of thanks from Stalin. Then, on the

19th, the now famous Ferapont Golovaty addressed the following letter to Stalin:

Dear Joseph Vissarionovich. In seeing off my two sons to the front, I gave them this fatherly command: Smash the German invader. In return I promised them to do my utmost for the country. Having read your letter to the Saratov *kolkhozniks*, I decided to give all my savings for the purchase of an aeroplane. The Soviet régime helped me to become a rich *kolkhoznik*, and now that the country is in danger, I decided to help as best I could. I have paid all my honestly earned savings—100,000 roubles—into the Red Army Fund to buy a plane which would add to the defeat of the German invaders. May it sow death among those who have injured and insulted our brothers and sisters. . . . If the *kolkhozniks* got together and paid for hundreds of squadrons, it would greatly help the Red Army to clear the enemy out of our sacred land.

He received a letter of thanks from Stalin—printed at the top of every paper in enormous type—and became famous overnight. The Press played him up.

Golovaty's sons may be proud of their father. . . . Soon there will rise into the skies a plane marked "Ferapont Golovaty." . . . In 1812, the peasants also rose like one man to help our army. . . .

There were, of course, cynics who remarked: "The good old *kolkhozniks* are paying conscience money for all their black-marketeering," and even suggested that Golovaty had no doubt another little pile saved up for a rainy day. Others said that there wasn't much one could do with money these days, while a little personal publicity was always nice. But actually, the enthusiasm Stalingrad had aroused had a good deal to do with it.

Needless to say, for the State, money was no consideration; and Golovaty's "personal" plane would have been built whether he had paid the money for it or not. But the whole process of such donations was useful as propaganda, and it was also useful as a form of deflation; too much idle money had accumulated on the farms during those two years when there was little to buy. For a month or more, sometimes half or nearly half of every newspaper was filled with letters to Stalin and short notes of thanks from Stalin; there was even one personal gift of over one million roubles from a millionaire *kolkhoznik* somewhere in Central Asia. "What a profiteer that chap must be," the cynics said, while the revelation that there were *kolkhoznik* millionaires in the Soviet Union caused quite a stir abroad. Anyway, the State collected in this manner over ten milliard roubles.

The year 1943 began well. On January 1 Sovinformbureau published the results of the first six weeks of the offensive in the Don and Stalingrad areas.

During the *First Stage*, it said, the forces of the South-West, Don, and Stalingrad fronts took the offensive on November 19, and the primary objective—the encirclement of the enemy forces at Stalingrad—was attained. In the course of this offensive eight Rumanian infantry divisions, one Rumanian cavalry division, and one Rumanian tank division; three German infantry divisions and one German tank division were smashed, and heavy losses were inflicted on three other German infantry divisions. The killed were put at 95,000, the prisoners at 72,000. There were 134 planes captured, 1,792 tanks, 2,232 guns, 7,306 trucks; 826 planes destroyed, 548 tanks, 934 guns, 3,190 trucks. The Red Army had advanced 70 to 150 kilometres and liberated 213 localities. The following were encircled inside the Stalingrad ring:

German:—Three tank divisions, three motorised divisions, eleven infantry divisions, remnants of three other infantry divisions;

Rumanian:—One infantry division and one cavalry division;

besides three German artillery regiments, of the German High Command's reserve, four A.A. regiments, one mortar regiment, and four sapper battalions.

The *Second Stage* was the offensive in the Don area between December 16 and 30. The aim was to break through the enemy front southward in the Novaya Kalitva–Monastyrshina area, to penetrate into the rear of the German armies operating in the centre of the Don Bend, and to deprive the encircled troops at Stalingrad of every possibility of breaking out or of being helped out.

The advance was one of 150 to 200 kilometres, and 1,246 localities had been liberated.

One German tank division, five German infantry divisions, six Italian infantry divisions, and one brigade of Blackshirts, and two Rumanian infantry divisions had been smashed. Great losses had been inflicted on four other enemy divisions. The killed were put at 59,000, the prisoners at 60,000.

The Red Army had captured 368 planes, 178 tanks, 1,927 guns, 7,414 trucks; and destroyed 117 planes, 172 tanks, 268 guns, 1,000 trucks.

The *Third Stage* was the German attempt to break into the ring from Kotelnikovo.

Three German tank divisions, one motorised division, two infantry divisions, and two Rumanian cavalry divisions had been smashed. The enemy losses were put at 21,000 killed and 5,200 prisoners.

The following had been captured: 40 planes, 94 tanks, 292 guns, 329 trucks; and the following destroyed: 306 planes, 467 tanks, 257 guns, 945 trucks. The Red Army had advanced 100–150 kilometres and had liberated 130 localities.

Thus a total of 1,589 localities had been liberated since November 19; twenty-two divisions had been surrounded, thirty-six divisions had been smashed, including six tank divisions and seven more divisions had suffered heavy losses.

The total number of killed was put at 175,000, of prisoners at 137,650.

There followed a long list of "trophies"—apart from the 1,249 planes, 1,187 tanks, 1,459 guns, 755 mortars and 5,135 trucks destroyed. The following had been captured: 542 planes, 2,064 tanks, 9,451 guns, 2,734 mortars, 8,161 machine-guns, 15,954 tommy-guns, 3,703 anti-tank rifles, 137,850 rifles, 5 million shells, 50 million cartridges, 2,120 railway-cars, 46 locomotives, 434 stores, 15,049 trucks, 15,783 horses, 3,278 motor-cycles.

These operations took place under the command of Colonel-General Vatutin, Commander of the South-West Front; Colonel-General Eremenko, Commander of the Stalingrad Front; Lieutenant-General Rokossovsky, Commander of the Don Front; Lieutenant-General Golikov, Commander of

the Voronezh Front, and under the general leadership of Army General Zhukov, Colonel-General Vassilevsky, Colonel-General of Artillery Voronov.

These names are sufficiently familiar: most of them—with the notable exception of Vatutin who was to die of wounds early in 1944, soon after his liberation of Kiev—figure among the victors of 1945.

Among the generals who then served under them are two more famous men, future Marshals of the Soviet Union, then Lieutenant-General Malinovsky and Major-General Tolbukhin; many of the others mentioned are also well known to those familiar with the subsequent course of the war in Russia: these are Lieutenant-Generals V. I. Kuznetsov, Batov, Lelushenko, Popov, Romanenko, Kharitonov, Major-Generals Chistiakov, and Trufanov. The tank commanders were Lieutenant-Generals Badanov, Rotmistrov, Major-Generals Russianov, Volsky, Poluboyarov, P. P. Pavlov, Rodin, V. V. Butkov, Tanaschishin, Volkov, Sviridov; the air force commanders, under the general leadership of Lieutenant-General (later Marshal) Novikov and Lieutenant-General Falaleyev, were Lieutenant-General Krasovsky, Major-Generals Khryupkin and L. G. Rudenko.

Looking back on it now, one realises that a high proportion of Russia's most promising younger generals were put to their great test for the first time; their success at Stalingrad determined their future progress. These men had been specially picked for the decisive Stalingrad Battle; the criterion for choosing them had been, in most cases, their good record during the battles of the first fifteen or sixteen months of the war; the advantage at the end of 1942 over 1941 was that the High Command knew what each higher officer was worth; and at Stalingrad they certainly assembled the flower of Soviet generalship—and these men fully justified the great expectations. Vassilevsky and Zhukov were to be made Marshals of the Soviet Union soon afterwards, and three others within the next two years—Rokossovsky, Malinovsky and Tolbukhin.

Among the many results of the Battle of Stalingrad, one must be attributed to this pre-January stage: and that is the collapse of the Rumanian Army; it was actually in December 1942 that, as a fighting force, the Rumanian Army ceased to exist. Hitler was furious with the Rumanians—for it was chiefly at the flank sectors held by the Rumanians that the Red Army first broke through. It was the natural thing to do. They were half-hearted; and their rapid collapse was, if not a demonstration of the unwarlike qualities of the Rumanians, at any rate an admirable example of the unreality of Hitler's New Order; no one, except Germans, had any desire to die for Hitler. When the Rumanians were "conquering" what they called "Transniestria," and even later, at Sebastopol, they fought fairly well (some Russians said better than the Germans), but what were Stalingrad and the desolate Kalmuck Steppes to them?

THE GERMAN ROUT

Within the next two months the Italians also were virtually wiped out, mostly in a series of horrifying slaughters in the Don country; the rest, some forty thousand, were taken prisoner; nor did many Hungarians remain in the field; they were to reappear as fighting units only in 1944, during the battles in Bukovina and the Carpathians, and later, in Hungary.

After Stalingrad—not counting the Finns in the north—Hitler had, from the military point of view, hardly any Allies left. His remedy was one total mobilisation after another, and the drafting of a variety of unreliable non-Germans into the Germany Army.

As a result of the Stalingrad encirclement, a fantastic amount of Russian territory was recovered in January and February. All over Southern Russia enemy armies were in full retreat—many of them, particularly the non-German armies, in a state of complete disorganisation and demoralisation. With the Rostov gap threatening to close very soon, the Germans began to pull out of the Caucasus—but were considerably harassed by Russian troops, notably cavalry, in the process.

THE CAUCASUS CAMPAIGN

Very little was written, either at the time or since, on the German Caucasus campaign. This was partly because it came, before long, to be considered as very much a side-show—the outcome of which hinged on Stalingrad. Not that that was the feeling at the beginning: the fall of Rostov and the German break-through into the Kuban struck Moscow as something which might before long lead to a great disaster.

The moral effect of the map, with the Germans halfway into the Caucasus, quite close to Grozny, and on the way to Baku, was one of the most depressing things in the whole of 1942. The economic consequences of the loss of the immensely rich farmlands of the Kuban were serious; so also was the effect on the peoples of the Caucasus and Transcaucasia—for a short time Russian prestige was in danger of being badly shaken; and in some cases it was; and it is hardly a secret any longer that among some of the minor, particularly Moslem, Caucasian peoples, there was a great deal of disaffection, as there also was among the Crimean Tartars in the west, and the Kalmucks in the east.

The Germans had between thirty-five and forty divisions in the Caucasus, a few of them Rumanian and Italian. After the German break-through at Rostov, their sweep across the Kuban assumed the nature of a *blitzkrieg*, unpleasantly reminiscent of France and of the early weeks of the invasion of Russia. They had three or four tank divisions under von Kleist, highly motorised infantry units, paratroops, and complete air control. They had great mobility, and their tanks and planes terrorised the refugees on the roads in 1940 and 1941 style, and severely harassed the retreating Russian troops.

These put up some resistance when they came to a town, but the danger of being encircled—in view of the extraordinary mobility of the Germans —was so great that they did not persist in holding anything until they had reached the mountains. The swift retreat to the mountains was inevitable, and indeed, necessary; for it was important to preserve as much of the army as possible, so as to stop the Germans from reaching the really vital Caucasian objectives: the Grozny and Baku oil areas and the northern end of the mountain roads into Transcaucasia.

The most important of these ran from the Vladikavkaz area—namely the Ossetia Military Highway and the Georgian Military Highway. In addition to these, there was the vitally important road running along the Black Sea coast from Tuapse to Sukhum and Batum.

Like the Germans, the Russians also had between thirty-five and forty divisions in the Caucasus. The Caucasus Front became, in the main, stabilised about the end of August.

In a month, the Germans had overrun the Kuban, the northern fringes of the Caucasus, with its health resorts of Piatigorsk and Kislovodsk, had planted the swastika flag on top of Mount Elbrus, had penetrated to the Black Sea in the Novorossisk area; had captured the third-most-important Caucasian oil area of Maikop, and were within forty miles of the second-most-important oil area of Grozny, the former producing about three million tons a year, the latter twice that amount. The Germans forced the Terek in the Mozdok area; but here they were held up. For nearly three months heavy fighting continued in the Mozdok area; then the Germans abandoned their attempts, and tried to break through to Grozny by another route—via Nalchik and Vladikavkaz. After heavy fighting, they captured Nalchik, but outside Vladikavkaz their spearhead of tanks was routed by the large concentration of Russian troops and artillery which had been brought there, without the Germans' knowledge. That happened in the middle of November.

It was the beginning of the end of the German conquest of the Caucasus.

In the west, they captured Novorossisk in September, after some extremely heavy fighting, in which some of the Russian survivors of Sebastopol took part. But the south side of the bay of Novorossisk continued to be held by the Russians, and the Germans were unable to use the port. Even so, the loss of Novorossisk put what was left of the Black Sea Fleet in a difficult position: after the loss of Odessa, Kherson, Nikolaev, the Crimea, and Novorossisk, the navy, reduced to the second-class harbours of Batum and Poti—which had never been naval bases—was now almost in the position of a refugee. Had the Germans broken through to Batum, the Black Sea Navy would have had to scuttle itself, or be interned in Turkey. However, by that time, Turkey would almost certainly have come into the war on the German side, to get a share of

the Caucasian spoils. As it is, it was touch-and-go; another big German advance anywhere in the Caucasus—during that grim period of August and September—and Turkey would probably have come in. The Russians were obliged to maintain a substantial force on the Turkish border—not that the Turkish attitude was particularly provocative—but one never could tell. There were certainly substantial Turkish troop concentrations in Transcaucasia at the time.

However, by September, the front became almost stabilised, thanks to the stubborn Russian resistance in the Mozdok area and north of Tuapse. Nowhere had the Germans attained any first-class objectives. The Russians had barred their road (*a*) to the Caspian oil; (*b*) to the mountain passes; (*c*) to the Black Sea coast, south of Novorossisk.

The German forces, according to General Talensky, were distributed as follows. The main German striking force, composed of some twenty divisions, including von Kleist's[1] three panzer divisions, was concentrated in the Mozdok area in the main German oil drive. In the central sector, the Germans had four to five mountain divisions, including some Italian *alpini*; on the right flank, in the Tuapse–Novorossisk area, the Germans had ten to fifteen divisions, also including *alpini*, and some Rumanian troops.

The Russian Caucasus forces were under the general command of Army General Tyulenev, already referred to. The right (Mozdok) flank was under the command of General Maslennikov; the left flank under General Petrov of Sebastopol and—much later—Carpathian fame.

In the Caucasus the Russians were severely handicapped by extremely bad communications. All their main supply lines to the north had been cut. Regroupings in the Caucasus itself were very difficult, too. It was something of a mystery, at the time, how the Caucasus armies were supplied at all. There was much talk of the new railway, running from Astrakhan along the Caspian coast, to Makhach Kala (where it joined the main Baku line, which, further west, was in German hands)—a railway which was not marked on any ordinary maps.

It is true that this "strategic" railway was used to some extent, but the bulk of the Caucasus armies' supplies had to be taken in the long round-about way to Krasnovodsk, on the other side of the Caspian, and thence by sea to Baku and Makhach Kala, and then by truck or railway. The armies in the western Caucasus were even more difficult to supply; most of the supplies had to go by way of Krasnovodsk, Baku, Tbilisi, and thence along the coastal road to Tuapse.

Transcaucasia had no munitions works worth speaking of, but it at least supplied much of the food.

[1] Von Kleist was officially stated by a Russian communiqué in August to have been killed during the Mozdok fighting; but this later turned out to be a mistake.

The Germans withdrew from the Caucasus in much the same way as the Russians had retreated into the Caucasus. The roles were now reversed. Mobility was no longer on the German, but on the Russian side. The Germans had squandered most of their tanks in the fruitless fighting round Mozdok, and had lost many more during their rout outside Vladikavkaz in the middle of November.

The Russians, on the other hand, had received some tanks, and, above all, assembled large forces of cavalry which kept cutting into the German lines of retreat, created numerous small pockets, harassed the German infantry, and hastened the German withdrawal. The losses inflicted on the Germans during this retreat were not enormous, but appreciable, nevertheless, running into tens of thousands. Great devastation was caused by the Germans during their retreat, but it would have been even greater had they not been harassed by the Russian mobile forces, and had they not been in such a hurry to get away. Several important towns such as Piatigorsk, Krasnodar, Nalchik, and others, were partly destroyed, some, like Armavir, completely destroyed. A notable aspect of the Caucasian campaign was the great loyalty shown for the Red Army by the Kuban Cossacks, and their often fanatical struggle against the invaders of *their* country—despite serious past differences between this "Russian Vendée" and Moscow during the Civil War and the collectivisation period. German hopes to exploit these past differences led to nothing.

The Germans' flight from the Caucasus and their pursuit by the Russians began properly at the end of December, after the failure of von Mannstein's attempt to break through to Stalingrad, and when Malinovsky's troops were beginning to push south-west of Kotelnikovo towards the Salsk Steppes and the Kuban.

The Russians recaptured Mozdok on January 3, Nalchik on January 4, Piatigorsk, Kislovodsk and Mineralnye Vody on January 11, Stavropol on January 21, Armavir on the 23rd, Tikhoretsk and Maikop (the latter was taken by Petrov's troops, now also on the move) on January 30, Eisk, on the Sea of Azov and Bataisk, just south of Rostov, on February 6, and Krasnodar on February 12. The Taman Peninsula and Novorossisk were to remain in German hands some months longer as "springboards for the reconquest of the Caucasus," as the more gullible among the Germans still liked to imagine.

THE GERMANS ON THE RUN

Simultaneously, the Russians were advancing in numerous other directions. The Germans and Rumanians were cleared out of their "Caspian" salient south-east of Stalingrad, and the capital of the Kalmuck autonomous republic, Elista, was retaken on January 2. The Germans had actually been about fifty miles from the Caspian in this area,

and some seventy-five miles from the estuary of the Volga and Astrakhan.

With things developing as they were on the Don, there was little point in staying on at Elista!

For, during that week, the country inside the Don Bend that was still in German hands—namely its southern half—was overrun, the Russians recapturing Morozovsky and Tsymlianskaya—the scene of such fierce fighting in July.

Malinovsky meantime was pushing south towards Salsk, in the Northern Caucasus, with the ultimate object of reaching Rostov from the south-east.

On the 18th, two important barriers were forced: the Manych by Malinovsky's forces driving south, and the Northern Donetz by the forces of General Vatutin driving into the Eastern Ukraine.

Parallel to Vatutin's forces, Golikov's forces were also advancing to the west; on January 24, Voronezh was recaptured, and on the 29th, Kastornoye.

Here, at Kastornoye, eight German and Hungarian divisions were encircled and "liquidated" in a manner worthy of Stalingrad; during this drive west of Voronezh nearly 100,000 prisoners were taken, the Italian *alpini* corps finally wiped out; among the prisoners were three Italian generals, Ummerto, Battisti and Paschalini.

By February 4, just after the end of Stalingrad, the Russians in the west reached roughly the line where the German summer offensive had started; Kupiansk was recaptured on February 4, Lisichansk and Barvenkovo on the 7th, and also some areas which had been in German hands since 1941: in the southern sector, on February 7, Kramatorskaya in the Donbas was recaptured; in the northern sector, on February 8, Kursk was taken, and on the 9th, Belgorod; on the 10th, Volchansk and Chuguyev, on the 11th, Lozovaya; on the 14th Malinovsky took Rostov, and Vatutin Voroshilovgrad; on the 15th, Golikov took Kharkov. The armies swept on, despite heavy German resistance; and it looked as though they might reach the Dnieper line, south-west of Kharkov, after the capture, on the 20th, of Pavlograd and Krasnograd. But on the 24th the Germans began to counter-attack at Kramatorsk, and in the next month a large part of the Donbas, which had been recaptured, was lost again, and the Russians also lost Kharkov and were pushed back to the Donetz line; here, fortunately, they held the Germans. Later, it was admitted that the Russians had been a little over-optimistic in trying to reach the Dnieper, and the view was put forward that they would have done better to drive south through the Donbas towards Taganrog, on the Sea of Azov, and leave the more ambitious Kharkov–Dnieper plan till later.

The Russian setback was, however, attributed to two other causes: to the early thaw, as a result of which they had been caught "on the hop"

in their drive to the Dnieper; and partly to the fatigue of the troops, many of whom had fought for several months without a break. But the loss of Kharkov was less important than the fact that the Russians had seized and were now firmly holding the Kursk salient—which was to play such a decisive role in the coming summer offensive.

Even the net result of this winter offensive was immensely impressive, and was largely due to what had happened at Stalingrad. Indirectly, the Russian drive in the south had also made it easier for the Russians to recapture, in March, the German "springboard" west of Moscow—the Gzhatsk–Rzhev–Viazma triangle—after they had already recaptured, on January 1, Velikie-Luki. In January also, the Russians succeeded at heavy cost in breaking a ten-mile gap in the land blockade round Leningrad.

By March, the whole picture of the Russian front had radically changed in the Russians' favour; not only was it infinitely better than in November (since when 480,000 square kilometres had been liberated), but it was very much better than it had been before the German summer offensive of 1942. The pressure on Moscow had been greatly relieved; Leningrad was in a better position than before; the food-growing areas of the Don and Kuban had been liberated—without fatal damage; the Caucasus oil was no longer threatened; and, with the Kursk "springboard" in Russian hands, the stage was set for the liberation of the Ukraine.

While this liberation of the Don country and the Caucasus was in full swing, the final stage of the Battle of Stalingrad was being fought.

It was during this final battle at Stalingrad, during the liberation of the Don country by Golikov and Vatutin, and the drive of Malinovsky's men from the Don to the Northern Caucasus, on their way to Rostov, after the failure of von Mannstein's attempt to break through to Stalingrad from Kotelnikovo, that a number of us spent ten days in this area, south-west of Stalingrad.

The account of this journey was written soon after the event.

To me, who had been in Moscow most of the time until then, this journey "humanised" the whole historic winter battle of 1942–3 as nothing else could. I trust the reader will have the same experience.

CHAPTER II

TRAVELS BETWEEN VOLGA AND DON AT THE TIME OF THE GERMAN ENCIRCLEMENT

(*a*) INTO ASIA AND BACK AGAIN

January 1943

We got away at last on Sunday morning, January 3. Colonel Tarantsev, our conducting officer, said that it was no use waiting any longer for flying weather; we might be held up for days.

It had snowed heavily all Saturday, and Sunday was damp and misty. Kojemiako called for me in his car, and we drove to the Novaya Moskovskaya Hotel on the other side of the river to pick up our Colonel. The river and the quays were deep in snow; there were thick blobs of snow on the domes of St. Basil, and through the winter mist that most colourful church in the world looked colourless and faded. We were to take the Saratov express at the Paveletsky Station. As usual, the station was not particularly crowded; only people with permits, based on real needs, travel by rail in Russia in wartime. Ours was a large party, and the military authorities had reserved a whole carriage for us, one of those pre-revolution wagon-lits carriages, where the candlesticks are still inscribed "Compagnie Internationale des Wagon-Lits," and the washstand has a brass plate beside it, saying, first in pre-revolutionary Russian spelling, and then in French, "Sous le lavabo se trouve un vase." The whole thing was absurdly comfortable for wartime travel, with good bedding, running water, compartments for two persons, and green and brown glass panelling of a design inspired by the *art moderne* of the Paris Exhibition of 1900. . . . And then there was the *provodnik*, an amiable old man, whose job was to make the beds and to keep the samovar hot all day. It would, however, be wrong to imagine that we were getting something unheard-of in the Soviet Union; other people, and not even exceptionally important people, travel daily by wagon-lits coaches—higher officials, "intellectuals" on some special mission, etc.

It was very warm in the carriage, and fairly warm outside. Icicles were dripping outside the carriage windows, and it was foggy and thawing. We passed Kashira, with its burned-out houses, remnants of the German advance on Moscow—grim days which now seemed very far away. One felt that nothing like that would ever happen again.

We were now on our way to the scene of German defeats the very idea of which fourteen months ago would have seemed rank lunacy to Hitler and to many other people, especially outside Russia. . . . After all the rush of the last few days in Moscow, I was enjoying the very slowness of the train.

We were a party of ten or eleven correspondents, plus the Colonel and Kojemiako, the censor.

Sausage, bread, and hard-boiled eggs, with lots of hot tea from the *provodnik's* samovar were the staple diet of our wagon-lits. After all the false starts from Moscow, with their early-morning risings, we all went to sleep early, and when I woke up the next morning, the train was standing at Tambov—

the real geographical centre of European Russia, Tambov, once the byword of Russian provincialism, the scene of Lermontov's humorous poem, *The Treasurer's Wife*, dealing with the great impression made on Tambov society by the arrival of a hussar regiment, and all that followed. The first thing I looked out for was bomb damage. There was a short time in July '42, when the Germans had reached the outskirts of Voronezh, and when Tambov seemed immediately threatened. . . . Voronezh was only eighty miles away to the south-west. If they had broken through, in their attempt to encircle Moscow from the east, Tambov would have been the first to go. I remembered the ominous phrase in one of the Ehrenburg articles in July: "Now that the Fritzes are breaking into Central Russia. . . ."

One had heard at the time of heavy raids on Tambov and other important railway centres. But there was no bomb damage, or very little, and perhaps there is something in the view that, even in the summer of 1942, the Luftwaffe could not really concentrate on anything but immediate objectives. . . . I found that the same was true at Saratov, immensely important though it was as a railway centre, especially during the Battle of Stalingrad.

During the first day we had travelled through mostly wooded country; now we were reaching the steppes. After Tambov the woods became much less frequent, and before long the country became quite flat, and one had the sensation of sailing across a vast white sea, with only an occasional house or tree here and there. This country must be very pleasant in summer, but it was monotonous now. In the afternoon we reached Kirsanov. The station platform was crowded. Just outside the station was a big open-air market. Barter, rather than money was its basis. A kilogram of butter here cost 300 roubles (or about three times less than in Moscow), but you could also buy the same kilogram of butter for a cake of household soap. A tumbler of *makhorka*, the pungent peasant tobacco, cost ten roubles, whereas the Moscow "market" rate was about forty roubles.

There were crowds of young soldiers on the station platform at Kirsanov, some carrying whole bundles of brand-new rifles. Many of them were about eighteen, and seemed to be leaving home for the first time; on the platform were also many elderly and old women, many of them crying, and a few making the sign of the Cross as they kissed the boys goodbye. The lads pretended to be quite unperturbed, and argued vigorously with the woman guard in the "hard" carriage next to ours, who claimed vociferously that the carriage was full up. However, when the lads said they were travelling only a couple of stops, she relented. Along with the soldiers I squeezed my way into the "hard" carriage. I must say it was less pleasant than the "hard" carriage in which I had come from Murmansk in summer, with the windows wide open. The contrast between our wagon-lits and this "hard" carriage was almost embarrassing. The windows were all shut; there was a soldier on every one of the eight bunks in each section of the carriage. It had a blend of all the familiar odours of wartime Russia—sweat, and wet boots, and *valenki*, and *makhorka*, and black bread, and cabbage, which in this hot, concentrated form, made breathing difficult. Moreover, there was nowhere to sit, and scarcely anywhere to stand. So back I went to the *lavabo* and the *vase*.

We reached Saratov at 10 the next morning. The weather had cleared on the previous day; and at Saratov it was sunny and very cold, twenty-five degrees of frost centigrade, and deep snow.

There were three Z.I.S. cars waiting for us at the station, and we drove down

a crowded, long, and quite smart-looking street into the centre of the town. Here a meal had been prepared for us at the Railwaymen's Club—a spacious house decorated with crude copies of famous Russian paintings—Repin's "Volga Boatmen"; and Shishkin's family of bears in some dense old forest of northern Russia; and several more Shishkin forest-scapes. Shishkin, to do him justice, deeply felt the beauty of the Russian landscape, and had the merit of being one of the few major Russian painters of the nineteenth century who did not think it necessary to make "every picture tell a story." A few lessons from Monet would have improved him, though. . . . They gave us a large meal, with vodkas and wines and *zakuski* and hot dishes, and we were made to pay through the nose for it. We then drove back to the station, without seeing anything further of Saratov that day, and when at last our carriage was joined to a goods-train of the familiar brick-red trucks, it had grown dark. There was just enough light to see an immense number of trains of every kind at and around Saratov Station, and to realise its vast importance as a railway-junction in the Battle of Stalingrad.

Yet there was little evidence of bomb damage anywhere. It had become almost completely dark when we crossed the great bridge across the Volga. Now, in the dark, we were travelling through what the maps call "German Volga A.S.S.R." After seeing Saratov Station, it became clearer than ever to me why the Soviet Government did not wish to take any chances with the Volga Germans. They were deported—the whole half-million of them—to Kazakstan in August 1941. There had already by then been some cases of sabotage on the railways in the "autonomous German Volga republic," and I heard of other cases when German airmen who had been brought down there, were given shelter by the local Germans and were never heard of again.

Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. We were sitting comfortably in our wagon-lits when the knocking on the outside door of the carriage began. Somebody was banging hard on the door and at the glass; sometimes it seemed that the window would go to pieces. Then there was a heated argument on the carriage platform, and doors were slammed. It was thirty degrees of frost outside, in the wide spaces of the Trans-Volga steppes. A couple of peasants had jumped on to the footboard of our carriage, without a permit, and finding the weather more than unpleasant, they had started hammering on the door, hoping to be allowed to travel at least on the sheltered platform. Our *provodnik* went to get Kojemiako. Kojemiako took a bureaucratic view of it, and said that nobody had any business to hitch-hike in our carriage, and the *provodnik* wasn't to open the door. . . . The law was on his side. But it was horribly cold outside, and the train went on and on interminably. "The stations here are few and far between," said the *provodnik* dismally. However, after an hour or so, with the knocking growing more and more desperate, we stopped at a station, with a dim light shining from the small station building. Here our two hitch-hikers got off. Judging from their voices they were young fellows. With a rich stream of curses one informed the other he had lost one of his bags while travelling on our infernal footboard. Then they debated the question of how they would continue the journey. "Let's try the goods trucks," was the last thing I heard, as the two voices vanished into the cold night. "One's got to be tough," said the *provodnik*, "for once they get a lift, all their pals will know about it, and next time it'll be an invasion." I think he sympathised with them all the same.

. . . . . .

Wednesday morning. Moscow seemed very far away. All night the train had travelled at good speed, and we were now in the endless waterless steppes of the Trans-Volga. There was little snow; and through it rose tufts of untidy brown grass. Here and there there were a few brown haystacks, but no signs of any village. The map said that the Kirghizes lived here. But to gather their hay into stacks, they had come from villages, twenty, thirty miles away. To the right of the railway, running west, was a track. Along it ran khaki army carts, driven by soldiers and drawn by lively little brown horses. We were standing at a siding, with a train in front, coming the other way. It took past us a number of open trucks piled with heaps of brownish unbleached salt. The siding where we had stopped was just south of the salt lake of Elton. We had just passed several wrecked railway-carriages, and just beside the siding lay the wreckage of another overturned goods-truck, its wheels in the air. It had already gone rusty. Here were some railwaymen. I talked to an elderly railwayman from Tomsk, a dour Siberian with a long greyish moustache and a wrinkled face. "Stalingrad," he said, "it's over there—not so very far away. About a hundred kilometres. Oh, yes, in October we were right in the thick of it. Can't tell you how many times we were bombed—hell of a lot of times, that's all I know. See that?" he said, pointing at the overturned truck. "I drove that train. *They* were lucky that day. Three direct hits on my train. Just went up in the air. The engine and the front carriage rolled on, but all the rest of the train was torn away and wrecked." I looked down the line: here was the wreckage of more goods-trucks, and also of several lorries and armoured cars which must have been part of the train's cargo. It lay there, scattered over the snow-sprinkled steppe, with only the vast horizon beyond. "Were many killed?" "Thirty-five," said the Tomsk man. "Thirty-two railwaymen and three soldiers. Their graves are over there," he said, pointing to the east, "a little way off the line." And it was strange how, in saying it, the tough old Siberian used not "*mogily*" but the tender diminutive "*mogilki*"—little graves.

A young railwayman joined in the conversation. He was fair and blue-eyed, and spoke with a soft southern accent. "I've been working on this line right through the Stalingrad business," he said. "We railwaymen are really the same as soldiers. All the supplies to Stalingrad came along this line, so you can imagine the attention the Fritzes paid it. One just couldn't keep track of them. I've been working on this siding, here, since July. We lived all summer, and are still living in a *teplushka* (a goods-truck used for the transportation of troops). Everything around here has been bombed to blazes, except one small house." I had another look round. Not far from the railway-line were more craters, and piles of twisted metal, but also large numbers of new rails, stacked up. "We've got these spare rails all down the line," he said, "and the railway was never put out of action, except occasionally, for a couple of hours. When you think of the amount of traffic on this line all last summer, they didn't really hit many trains." "No," said the Tomsk man, "that's quite true. But they gave us a lot of trouble dropping their bombs just beside the railway and wrecking the telephone and telegraph wires." The young railwayman smiled. "Well, it's a great comfort to know it wasn't in vain. The Fritzes are running like rabbits now. Yes, there were some fearful moments, but down here we never thought they'd get away with it. We used to see a lot of people straight from Stalingrad, and *they* never lost hope." He was from Bessarabia. He was living in a small village near Kishenev when the Rumanians surrounded it. "I got away by the skin of my teeth. Followed the Red Army right across the Pruth. I know I'll be back in Bessarabia before long, drinking the good Bess-

arabian wine. It's a better country than this, I can tell you," he said, looking at the desolate steppe.

"Bessarabia—that's a long way away. I'll get back to Kupiansk long before you get back to Bessarabia," a third railwayman joined in. "Kupiansk, in the Ukraine, near Kharkov." He was our engine-driver; his face was grimy with coal-dust, but his pink gums and white teeth were bright and moist as he smiled. And he had laughing Ukrainian eyes. I knew Kupiansk only too well. It was the extremely important railway-junction east of Kharkov which the Germans seized in June; it was the first big success in their summer offensive. "A funny thing happened," he said. "We received the order to evacuate the rolling-stock. There was no time to look for my family, who were staying in a village nearby. At all the stations there were crowds of people hoping—often against hope—to be evacuated to the east. And then, would you believe it, at the third stop from Kupiansk—right there, on the station platform, was my wife, with my little girl. I shoved them quickly into one of the goods-trucks, and so we travelled together on the same train! Incredible bit of luck, don't you think?" His wife and child were at Saratov now.

It was much warmer than on the previous day at Saratov. There were small clouds high in the sky and the sun was shining on the boundless milk-chocolate steppe sprinkled with snow. It looked so hard and useless, this grass of the Kirghiz steppes. "The Germans smashed the water-tower at this siding, and it's a constant problem getting sufficient supplies of water. There's very little water round here; what there is of it is mostly salt," one of the railwaymen said. "However, we're getting back to normal. They haven't bombed us for over a month now."

At length the train moved. For a long time we travelled through the steppe, without any sign of human life, except occasional haystacks. Then we passed some low mud huts, the same colour as the earth, oddly shaped, like a very flat L. These were Kirghiz huts. There was a pale-blue sky over this ocean of perfectly flat steppe—it was like the first shots of Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia*. In fact, this *was* Asia, according to the English map I had with me, showing the boundary between Asia and Europe. Twice this railway crosses into Asia, into what is administratively Kazakhstan. How clearly one realised now why the men fighting at Stalingrad felt that, beyond Stalingrad, "there is nothing." Many had travelled to Stalingrad along this line.

Another station with L-shaped mud huts. A train coming the other way had anti-aircraft guns on board, and part of its freight was composed of wrecked Russian planes, and also a long string of oil cisterns coming from where?—Baku or just Astrakhan? There were two large shaggy camels, of the same colour as the earth and the huts, standing at the station. The small wooden station building was almost undamaged, though there were bomb craters all round. Most of the roofs of the mud huts had been blown away; some had been burned out, but there were still signs of human activity in the village. There was a large windmill some distance away, and more camels, and several horses, and at the station was an old Kirghiz woman, a perfect Asiatic, with a long padded coat and a white cloth round her head, below the fur cap with ear-flaps. Her face was wrinkled and dark brown, with narrow eyes. Here also were several soldiers, nearly all Mongols. A young Russian soldier, with weatherbeaten face, and red-eyed, came up to me and asked if I could give him a bit of newspaper—he had nothing to roll his cigarettes with. Was it true, he said, that Tsymliansk and Nalchik had been taken? He had heard

it from somebody, but could I confirm? I said we left Saratov too early last night for the night communiqué. The soldier said he had just come from Stalingrad; he had come by that new railway which runs to Leninsk. He had been in Stalingrad for two months. "Now the Fritzes are trapped like rats," he said. "But they're still cocky. They still shout '*Rus, zdavais*'—Russian, surrender!—Sons of bitches! All is going fine now. They've still got those transport planes to drop them food during the night, but when they try to get there during the day, we shoot every damn one of them down. We've got complete air control at Stalingrad now." Except for the redness of his eyes, due to chronic lack of sleep, the fellow looked none the worse for his two months at Stalingrad.

A young railwayman who joined the group of soldiers commented on the anti-aircraft guns on the train that had just passed. "Last autumn we used to carry anti-aircraft guns on all the trains on this line, but the German planes used to machine-gun the trains first and then bomb them. They weren't so keen on bombing during the day, but on moonlit nights the railway was a pretty terrible place."

After a few more hours we stopped at Shungai. This place was also inside the borders of Asia. All the Kirghiz mud huts here had been destroyed by blast or fire, though they stood wide apart. Hundreds of bombs must have been dropped here. I asked a soldier at the half-wrecked station what the name of this place was. "Shunhui, or Shanghai, I don't know—what's it matter? It isn't much of a place anyway." Off the railway-line lay a large collection of bombs—Russian bombs, some of them enormous brutes of half a ton or a ton. But also some small bombs of ten kilograms. "We're resourceful people, we Russians," said the soldier, pointing to one of them. "These aren't really bombs, they are shells, with wings attached. These shells require no copper, and are much cheaper and easier to make. The splinters of these shells scatter over 150 metres and are very destructive when dropped on enemy columns. They can be dropped by the dozen by small planes like our U-2."

As we travelled through the Kirghiz steppe that day, along the lifeline of Stalingrad, we saw much wreckage off the line—smashed overturned trucks, sometimes even a wrecked armoured car, and occasionally, a wrecked plane, German or Russian. The most spectacular wreck was some distance south of Shungai. It told the story of a direct hit on a munitions train. The boiler of the engine had been flung a long way off the line, while whole parts of carriages and hundreds of pieces of twisted metal lay scattered over a radius of half a mile. . . . "It's a bad business," said Colonel Tarantsev, looking out. "And yet, when you come to think of it, tens of thousands of railway-carriages came down this line during the Stalingrad battle, and how many wrecked carriages have we seen all day?" I agreed we hadn't seen more than fifty, or maybe a hundred—an infinitely smaller proportion of losses than on our Arctic convoys. . . .

We reached Baskunchak at 5.20 in the evening. One had the feeling of being in the south here. The sun in winter sets here much later than in Moscow. We were only a little over a hundred miles from the Caspian. There was almost no snow, and it wasn't cold. Baskunchak is an important railway-junction—the junction for the sideline running north-west to Leninsk, a point almost opposite Stalingrad. It is the centre of the important Caspian salt industry. Cut by several ravines, the town is like an oasis in those desolate steppes. It was growing dark, under the grey winter sky, but I could distinguish the

outline of many large burned-out stone houses. Here also were rows of cottages, or what were once cottages, with gardens attached, with vegetable plots and fruit-trees. Baskunchak was a prosperous town only a few months ago; now everything was smashed and destroyed. But the railway was working. There were hundreds of goods trucks and *teplushki* concentrated here—on the numerous lines round Baskunchak Station. Dark against the skyline, an interminably long goods train was winding its way westward along the edge of the ravine—westwards, towards Stalingrad. An old soldier, probably about fifty, was doing sentry duty at the siding. He was the most morose man I saw that day. He was old and fed-up. "Look at all this destruction—it's that cursed Hitler," he said. "We used to take all the stuff to Stalingrad along this railway. It was hard, but it had to be done. Now all is quiet, but in summer—my God!—we only got a little respite at night." "Did many people get killed here?" I asked. "Of course," he said grimly. And after a pause: "Whole trainloads used to get killed. And at Stalingrad itself—what a lot of people got killed there!" "Well, the Germans are being chased now," I said. "I know," he said, "but at the rate they're being chased, we'll have another two years of it."

I don't know when we reached Leninsk, but when the Colonel knocked on our compartment doors, it was 8 o'clock. "It's no use hanging on here, please get ready quickly; they have a habit of raiding the station at 8.20 in the morning." It was a pure leg-pull; he simply didn't want us to waste valuable time. It was a grey morning; here were numerous railway-lines, with all sorts of trains—goods trains, munitions trains, ambulance trains. On one side there were buildings, on the other the steppe. On the edge of the steppe we saw a large number of aero-sleighs—they were white, and above the sleigh towered a sort of small cockpit, with aeroplane engine and propeller. When I asked how exactly they were used in this war, people were uncommunicative, but one can well imagine their uses in reconnaissance work in the wide open spaces of the steppe; I also heard of aero-sleighs being used for transporting the wounded at great speed. In a rather dilapidated bus we drove down the main street of Leninsk. Its name before the Revolution was Andropol, or something like that, and even now this important railway centre, some thirty miles from Stalingrad, on the other side of the Volga, still had the appearance of an old-time district town. The wide main street was chiefly composed of shabby little brick houses, with a certain official pretentiousness about their architecture; the rest were small wooden houses and cottages. In the side-streets there were nothing but cottages; they all had little gardens at the back, and the most notable thing about them were the very elaborate and often very beautiful wood-carvings above and around the windows. Some of these carvings were real masterpieces of old Russian peasant art. The old-time atmosphere of this provincial backwater contrasted oddly with the terribly modern slogans painted on every wall: "Men of the Red Army, remember at Stalingrad your responsibility to your country"; "Drive the German rats from the walls of Stalingrad"; "Soldiers of the Red Army: remember, you are fighting at Stalingrad for the freedom and independence of your country"; "Glory to the men of Stalingrad." In the small public park stood a statue of Lenin, and on either side were notice-boards with slogans, war-pictures, and a news bulletin. At first we were taken to a large wooden cottage where we were received by a number of army officers. Here also were two of the surgeons of Leninsk Hospital. We had a meal with them; and a number of toasts were

made for Stalingrad, the Allies, and so forth. The whole atmosphere was jovial; no one stressed all that this little corner of Russia had seen and lived through in the last few months. One of the surgeons, small and dapper with a peaky nose, was quite a young man. He had gone through the whole Stalingrad battle at this transit hospital. He spoke with the precision and clarity so typical of good doctors in all countries. "One of the worst features of this war," he said, "is that the proportion of severely wounded is much higher than in any previous war. It's the same on the German side; we know it from German army doctors whom we've taken prisoner. Theoretically the proportion used to be 80–20; eighty per cent light, and twenty per cent severe cases. Now the proportion of severely wounded is thirty-five to forty per cent. The lightly wounded all go back into the army; but only a small proportion of the severely wounded can be sent to the front again. Head injuries are much more numerous than in the last war, owing to mortar-shells and bombs." He said that most of the German and Rumanian prisoners suffered from frostbite. "Frozen feet are very common; they are simply not prepared for this winter weather; they really seem to have imagined they were going to take Stalingrad and end the war. The Rumanians have those high fur-caps, which look very decorative, but they don't protect the lower half of the face, not even the lower half of the ears."

One of the girls who was serving us had a bandage tied round her cheek. I asked if she had been wounded. Next to me sat a pompous stout major. "Ah yes, she was wounded," he said. "Our people are wonderful; when they are lightly wounded they just go on with their work; wouldn't dream of stopping work." "Rubbish," said the older surgeon, "she's got a gumboil, that's all."

And who after that can say that Russia is a standardised country? My heart warmed to the Major. Here was Gogol's immortal blowhard Nozdrev back again—in the Red Army at that, and thirty miles from Stalingrad!

From the canteen we walked through the main street of Leninsk to the hospital, where we were to wait for our bus. The morning mist had lifted and from the pale-blue sky the sun shone brightly, though without warmth, lighting up the snow-sprinkled steppe which one could see at the end of every side-street, and the red banners and flags round the Lenin statue in the public garden. In the street were many army cars and carts, some drawn by camels. The hospital, a fairly large brick building, was right opposite the park. Inside, it smelt of carbolic. We spent an hour in an empty ward, with two young nurses as our hostesses. Magazines, pamphlets and leaflets were stacked on the table, and fresh copies of the local paper, *Leninskaya Pravda*, a tiny sheet, beside a large carafe of highly chlorinated drinking-water. On one of the walls was a picture of Voroshilov. It was pleasant to find a whole ward so near Stalingrad empty—the Russians could not be losing many men now, and those who had been brought to Leninsk must now have been moved further away. However, the beds in the ward were made, ready, no doubt, to receive any sudden arrivals.

The two girls were called Valya and Katya. They talked a lot, and from time to time they put on some badly worn-out record on the portable gramophone. It was odd to hear the gramophone here play *Manon* and *Werther*. When the gramophone played, the girls were silent. "I suppose you like sentimental songs," I said to Katya. "Of course," she said with conviction, "we all do. Don't we, Valya?" Valya nodded. Katya was lively, red-cheeked and flirtatious in a coy way. She was twenty-one and married. "Is your husband in the army?"

"Where do you expect my husband to be?" she said, as if answering a completely silly question. "The very great majority of our people are in the army." Katya was in military uniform, and had joined the army as a nurse, coming straight from the university, where she had been studying bio-chemistry. The other girl had a more interesting face. It was one of those rather full, but very pale Russian girls' faces, with large grey eyes, with perfect large white teeth, and lips that are full without being sensuous.

Her name was Valya. She wore a red woollen dress, which stressed the paleness of her beautiful face. "I am not a nurse," she said, "I am a medical statistician, attached to this hospital base." "*Some* statistics you must have had to do last autumn," I remarked. "Yes," she said, "*some* statistics." Her home was in Stalingrad and her address was 24 Frunze Street. It seemed funny that anyone should have an *address* at Stalingrad! "You should go to Stalingrad after the war," she said with a faint smile. "Not that you'll find my house there any more. It was destroyed like most of the town. What a pity! We had those lovely boulevards, and so many fine new buildings, and public parks, and the new Volga embankment; and on Sundays there were crowds of young people everywhere, and lots of trees and flowers, and all those steamers and sailing-boats and motor-boats on the Volga. It was a gay town. . . . I was in my last year at school when the war started, and I joined up as a medical worker, after a short training." I asked if her family were still in Stalingrad. "No, they are here." "Wasn't the evacuation of Stalingrad a terrible thing?" "I'll tell you," she said earnestly. "All that depended on *our* people was done. Everything that could be done on land and on the Volga was well regulated. What the Germans did from the air we couldn't help." That was all she would say about that August 23. She put on a sentimental Tchaikovsky aria, and she and the other girl fell into silence. I think they played the gramophone for their own pleasure rather than for our entertainment. A copy of Simonov's poems was lying on the table. I asked Valya if she liked Simonov. "Yes, very much; we all do." "What—*Wait for me* . . . ?" "Yes, that, and much else besides." "Dear Simonov," said Katya sentimentally. Valya said: "We'll live a glorious life after the war. Stalingrad will be very beautiful again. We shall go for holidays to the Caucasus, as we did before the war."

It was confirmed that day that Prokhladnaya and Nalchik had been taken by the Russians; the Germans definitely seemed to be pulling out of the Caucasus as fast as their legs would carry them. Valya's day-dreaming of holidays in the Caucasus after the war did not sound so fantastic after all.

It was warm, and thawing, and sunny when we drove in a number of small cars out of Leninsk. In the side-street along which we drove out into the wide spaces of the light-brown steppe sprinkled with snow, I noticed a barber's shop, and the local post-office. On high poles beside the huts with the chiselled window-frames, were the tiny starlings' houses. Further along the street was a space with a few trees, and among them a large mound—a common grave of some Red Army soldiers who had died at Leninsk. Hundreds of crows flew across the road and the trees were black with them. We passed the last house at the outskirts of the town. On its wall was written in large red letters: "Not another step back—Stalingrad must be defended."

We drove along a road, or it might be best described as a path, across the frozen ground of the steppe. The steppe is so flat that one might drive across it almost anywhere in winter, before there is much snow. The road was marked by poles all along its sides, with twigs attached—they looked like so many

broom-sticks. After a short drive we came to the Akhtuba River. Here, on a narrow bridge a tractor had got stuck and a crowd of soldiers, shouting lustily, were pushing and pulling it along. It was no good, though, and in the end the tractor was towed away by a heavy lorry and so the bridge was cleared. It was a narrow wooden bridge, and looked quite new; it seemed that a whole network of roads and bridges had been built here in the last few months, for the special purpose of supplying Stalingrad. The Akhtuba, which is the left branch of the Volga delta, was little more than a narrow stream, now frozen over, and I could not help laughing at the thought of how some of our amateur strategists argued in summer that even if the Germans crossed the Volga, they could still be held up on the Akhtuba. I remembered others who, since October, had been talking of the terrible winter and the deep snow and the blizzards in the steppes around Stalingrad.

It was an odd experience to cross the Akhtuba into the *mezhdurechie*—the country between the rivers, the delta-land. For suddenly the scenery changed completely. There was no more steppe. Willows were growing along the side of the river, and further along, one felt that one was driving through an enormous park. I remembered a photograph I had once taken of Richmond Park after a snowfall; it was just like that: for miles, there was nothing but oak-trees, with wide spaces between them; thousands and thousands of oak-trees. The whole of the *mezhdurechie* seemed one large oak forest. The soil must be damp here in summer, with mosquitoes from the marshes and the rivers; and flooding must be frequent in spring; and though this country looked mellow and very habitable in winter, there were very few signs of life here, except an occasional hamlet. Most of the life here seemed concentrated in the fishing villages on the Volga itself.

And so, through this deserted "Richmond Park," ran many roads to Stalingrad. There was a great deal of traffic that afternoon, mostly army lorries, with an occasional peasant sleigh; and once we passed a sleigh drawn by a camel. On the side of the road lay many dead horses, some half-decayed, but now frozen. The driver was a youngish man, in a civilian fur cap and a *polushubok* (a padded jacket), but he had driven army cars and lorries since the war began. He came from Voronezh, and was at Odessa during the siege; while the encirclement of Odessa was not quite complete, he drove lorry after lorry out of the city in the great evacuation process; later he got away by sea; it was a grim business, as the ships were attacked by dive-bombers all the time; many were sunk.

All along the road through "Richmond Park" there were boards with slogans for the defence of Stalingrad. "This isn't the main road from Leninsk to Stalingrad, is it?" I asked. "No," he said, "the main road to Stalingrad runs the other way. I know it well; I used to drive along it day after day in summer. At every hundred yards there used to be a trench with a notice-board showing where it was. The road was being constantly attacked from the air. Machine-gunning was the Fritzes' favourite sport; they killed quite a few people, but we had fighters in the air, especially after August, and the traffic went on normally—hundreds of lorries got through daily. My worst experience was on the 23rd of August, during the big raid on Stalingrad. You can't imagine what it was like. The whole town was burning like a giant bonfire; and I shall remember the ceaseless crash of masonry. I'd drive along a street between the burning houses, and dozens of planes were in the air; and suddenly a large house would collapse just in front of you, and with all the dust you could hardly see where you were going; and there were a lot of dead people lying around.

But I got away, and my lorry didn't have a scratch. Right over the pontoon bridge, with stuff dropping into the water all round. The bridge didn't last long." He talked about it very calmly, almost casually. And after having seen the "Rotterdam" of Stalingrad, he continued, day after day, taking munitions to Stalingrad, and evacuating the wounded. "It was a difficult time," he summed up, "but it's going to be all right now."

As we drove on, I noticed that along this road, too, there were a few notices saying "trench," and others saying: "Warming station"; off the road were dugouts with a stove, where in winter drivers could stop and warm themselves. Such small things are typical of the high degree of organisation in important war areas like this.

It was growing dark, and the oak-trees were steeped in a lilac evening mist. Such soft tones are unusual in Russia, especially here, on the borders of Asia. I don't know how it happened, but at one point we took a wrong turning, and after driving for some ten miles, we reached a village, and through this village dozens of army cars, with their headlights blazing, were driving past us in the opposite direction. We stopped and made inquiries. A sentry said that five hundred yards further along was the crossing of the Volga, but it wasn't the crossing for Raigorod; we must turn back, and drive back fifteen kilometres and then turn to the left. While this conversation was going on between the drivers and the sentry, I looked around. There was a faint half-circle of light in the sky, and every minute or so one heard a gun firing, fairly loud. "How far is it to Stalingrad?" I asked the sentry. "Ten kilometres," he said. That is the nearest I got to Stalingrad that time.

At last we reached the correct Volga crossing. A few faint lights were flickering in the dark. The thud of sporadic gunfire had grown much fainter. We drove smoothly over a wide wooden pontoon bridge, lying flat on the ice. In the light of the headlights one could see the ice of the river clinging on to the sides of the pontoon. In the sky, on the right, was still that dim glow, that faint halo over Stalingrad. "It used to look different," the driver remarked, "when the whole town was burning, and there were great fires at Stalingrad for weeks. At Leninsk the whole sky used to be lit up at night." The bridge must have been three-quarters of a mile long, though, in the dark, it was hard to say exactly. . . . The bank on the other side was much steeper. We drove through a darkened village, and then, through ten or fifteen miles of steppe, on to Raigorod.

That night we crossed the Volga, so close to Stalingrad, was the night of January 7. We little knew what was in store for the German divisions encircled at Stalingrad. It was the eve of General Rokossovsky's ultimatum. That night, the Huns were perhaps still imagining that, with "all quiet on the Stalingrad Front," except for an occasional shell, they might somehow live through the winter, with the help of their transport planes, and that the Russians would not attack them, for fear of losing too many men. And then, perhaps, in spring, von Mannstein would manage to break through, after all.

Raigorod turned out to be a large village, with wooden huts on either side of the main street, which was, in fact, the only street. Our party was separated into two lots. Five or six of us were taken to a large hut, and here a dormitory had been arranged for us in a large six-window room, with an enormous well-heated Russian stove. A plump Ukrainian girl from Kharkov and a dark oriental-looking person in *valenki*, a tattered *polushubok* and a greasy cap,

and with a hooked purple nose and a little toothbrush moustache—the old boy was about fifty—were in charge of the place. He looked a Caucasian, but turned out to be a sad little Jew. He had been a miner in the Donbas—since the Revolution many Jews had, indeed, given up retail trading and had gone into industry—and with a vague gesture of hopelessness, he said that his wife and children had remained "over there," somewhere on "this side of the Volga." "What, under the Germans?" I said. "I hope not," he replied. "But I've had no news for six months." He had been in the army, but owing to bad health he had been discharged and was being used for various auxiliary supply jobs. "Well, how's Hitler?" he said, in fairly good Russian, "will he be beaten? Yes? There's isn't another nation in the world that could have stood up to him as we Soviet people stood up to him. Ooh! The number of people Hitler lost here! You've no idea! This isn't Holland. This isn't Belgium. This isn't France! And if only England had a real crack at him now, then it would soon be the end of him! You think there'll be a Second Front, you do? Yes, there must be a Second Front, I'm telling you." He went on and on. It was as if he was pleading for his wife and children who were on this—the wrong—side of the Volga, and who had probably been massacred by the Nazis.

Samuel Efimovich would also have made a good hotel manager. He served us a supper of *borsch* and wonderfully cooked mutton. Also plenty of tea and vodka. After supper we received a visit from Major-General Popov, the assistant-chief of the supply service on this sector of the front. He was our first contact with the command of the Stalingrad Front. He had a typical Volga-Russian face, with high cheekbones, lively dark eyes, and a brisk, business-like manner. It was really a courtesy visit, and he hadn't very much to tell us. Yet what he told us, sitting there, in this peasant hut at Raigorod, was interesting enough. He was, after all, one of the men who had organised the transport across the Volga of that force under General Eremenko which, from this very part of the country, had broken through to Kalach. "All the bridges over the Volga," he said, "were built under heavy bombing. These bridges played a great part in our offensive—though not so much at the very beginning; for before the river froze, most of the stuff was taken across in boats. In fact, our *most* difficult problem was to supply Stalingrad itself. We could not do it from here, but had to do it direct from the opposite bank. And from late November till December 20 the river was no longer navigable but not yet properly ice-bound. Hundreds of our soldiers would crawl on their bellies across the thin layer of ice, dragging behind them a slender improvised sledge made out of some iron rods taken from some half-submerged barge; and on to this sledge they'd put one or two cases of cartridges—just about as much as the ice was likely to hold. For three or four weeks, under shell-fire, they would do this work. And most of them got the stuff across. Now the ice on the Volga is thick enough to be used for trucks and horse vehicles, though it is not yet strong enough for tanks. But we've got plenty of bridges now."

General Popov said it took three to five days to build a pontoon bridge. In spite of all their reconnaissance in the past, he said, the Germans had no idea until it was too late that the Russians were massing all these troops round here. "They were scattered into small groups; so the Germans never got any clear idea of what was happening, and most of the real work was done at night."

The Russians, Popov said, had now a few American Dodges and jeeps, but not many; they also used the numerous "trophy" trucks—trucks made in practically every country in Europe. The French Renault trucks were particu-

larly numerous, and he said he hoped that this production of Renault trucks for the German Army had been considerably reduced since the great R.A.F. raid on the Paris works.

He ended on this matter-of-fact note. But that night I could not help thinking of that mile of thin ice, with patches of water, and hundreds of Red Army soldiers, with shells bursting around them, crawling across it on their bellies, dragging behind them or pushing before them the little iron sledges with their two cases of cartridges. . . . Luckily by that time at Stalingrad the Germans no longer had so very many shells to spare.

(*b*) THROUGH THE KALMUCK STEPPES TO KOTELNIKOVO

The next day we travelled in a blizzard across the completely flat and uninhabited Kalmuck Steppes. It was not very cold, but it snowed heavily. We drove through only one small town, in the middle of the steppes, called Plodovitoye, which means "fruitful," and perhaps it is in summer, but in winter it looked the most barren desolate spot in the world. Plodovitoye was a village of Russian houses, made, however, not of logs, but of planks; the timber, obviously, had to be brought here all the way from the railway by road, and the railway was about a hundred miles away. There were still Rumanian sign-posts, which nobody had taken the trouble to take down; the village did not seem to have suffered greatly, from shelling or fire, but there were no inhabitants about in the snowstorm, and we stopped there for only a few minutes. We were no longer travelling in cars. We were now going across the Kalmuck Steppes—where I couldn't see a single Kalmuck—in a large dark-green bus, which had until recently been used as an ambulance for taking the wounded to Leninsk. There were no ambulance markings on it, and I don't expect there ever were, since, with the Luftwaffe's ideas of chivalry, they would have done more harm than good. The two rows of benches, covered with sacks of straw, were fairly comfortable to sit on, except for the hooks, knobs and other metal protuberances, which were needed for attaching the stretchers, and which now merely served the purpose of giving you bumps and bruises if you weren't careful. In the middle of the bus was a *burzhuika*, one of those metal stoves which became famous in the grim days of the Civil War in Moscow and Leningrad; their great advantage was that they gave out much heat—compared with their size—and required but little fuel. The stove had been given ironically the opulent title of *burzhuika*—perhaps by a bourgeoise in circumstances much straitened by the Revolution. Occasionally it smoked ferociously, and the smoke mingled with the fumes of the exhaust pipe, which kept penetrating into the bus through the imperfectly closed back door. The *burzhuika* was being conscientiously stoked with small pieces of wood by a person who went by the name of Gavrila. He was a typical North-Russian *muzhik*. He had an elderly, kindly face, but rough-hewn, and a deep voice which seemed harsh compared with that of our jovial Ukrainian Colonel. Gavrila had a very shabby padded jacket, and a stubbly chin. He looked rather like a good-natured bear. He came from Murom, on the Upper Volga, from a region famous for its vast forests and little wooden churches. At heart he hated the steppe, and longed for his native woods. He was forty-four and had joined the army as an ambulance man. He had two sons in the army and had had no news from one of them almost since the war began. His wife and one small child were at home, and he had not seen them since the beginning of the

war. During the whole Stalingrad battle he had carried stretchers into and from the bus. "Was it not terrible for the wounded to travel in this rattly old bus?" I said. "Of course," he said, "it's no fun. But our men can stand a lot. It's true," he added, "that before being sent off on their journey, they always got a shot of morphine. All the wounded in the bus got the stuff." Before that, he had carried stretchers on various other parts of the front. Last winter he had been at Tula during the siege. "We'd take them by bus to Moscow. It used to be a gamble. We were never quite sure whether the main road from Tula hadn't been cut, and if we wouldn't run into the Germans."

It was about a hundred miles from Raigorod to Abganerovo on the Stalingrad–Tikhoretsk railway, and another sixty or so from Abganerovo to Kotelnikovo. Not very far west of Raigorod was that string of lakes in the Kalmuck Steppes which was the first line of German defences protecting the right flank of the Stalingrad salient. From a distance, through the heavily falling snow, one could see a patch of the black water of one of the salt lakes, and a little further along we stopped to look at an enormous dump of wrecked German tanks and armoured cars. "The tank cemetery," the Russian Colonel, Comrade Ivanov, who followed us in a small car, called it. These tanks had been collected from a fairly large area around the lakes—from the points where the Russian tanks and mechanised infantry had crashed through the lines held by the Rumanians. Thousands of Rumanians had surrendered as a result of that great break-through. There was no sign now of any Rumanians, except a few tin hats half-filled with snow. They had a large "C" in front, and the Royal crown of Rumania, "C" stood for Carol, and Carol was no longer king. But with Hitler as the real boss, it must have been quite unessential whether the initials of the nominal head of the Rumanian State were correct or not.

We drove on through the steppes, and the snow was coming down so heavily that our Colonel wondered whether we'd make it. It was becoming almost impossible to see the road. However, in the afternoon, the weather cleared, and the steppe was dazzling-white in the sun as we approached the Stalingrad railway. I remember a ravine, where a crowd of soldiers were digging the frozen yellow soil, for what purpose I don't know; and at one point we crossed the Axai River. Here also Rumanian helmets were lying about, and a lot of wrecked vehicles, but no German helmets. In their last push the Germans had crossed the Axai not here, but further west. Here the war was already an almost two-months-old memory, and it was not until we reached Zhutovo that the traces of war were quite fresh. The Germans had indeed reached Zhutovo about December 20 when they made their desperate bid to break through from Kotelnikovo into the Stalingrad "bag" where Hitler's 22 divisions were firmly held by the Russians. They reached Zhutovo, on the main railway, and pushed a good bit further north, but a few days later they were driven back by the Russians; and von Paulus's Army was condemned.

Abganerovo had been in the news at the end of November; it was here that the Russians first cut the railway connecting the Germans at Stalingrad with the south. All I remember of Abganerovo is a few shattered houses and a shattered railway-station in the distance, and a lot of railway-trucks on the line, and a solitary engine puffing along. I remember some soldiers, but no other people at Abganerovo. Zhutovo was some ten miles down the line. The road followed the railway-line, where I now saw a number of goods trains steam past. The Russians had already put the line back to the broad Russian gauge.

We reached the outskirts of Zhutovo. It looked a pleasant enough village, with gardens and orchards and small Russian cottages. A crowd of youngsters gathered round us as we got off the bus, glad to have a breath of fresh winter air, after all the carbon-monoxide and *burzhuika* fumes in our lungs. Here were also two young women, with babies in their arms. I had already noticed before how eager people are to talk after they've been freed from the invaders. It is a sort of psychological necessity, almost a physical necessity, to let off steam. The women told the usual story of how they had hidden in cellars and trenches during the last German occupation. "Thank God," one of them said, "they only stayed a few days, and were then chased away; or I and the baby and the others would probably have died of cold and hunger; we only had some dry crusts of bread, and we were too frightened to go out of the cellar; there was firing going on all the time, and the Germans warned us they would shoot anybody without question who came out into the open. Thank God our people came back soon; the Germans left in such a hurry, they hadn't even time to burn our houses." There were two little boys there, aged about ten. One wore an enormous high sheepskin hat which came right down over his ears; the other wore a big pair of black army boots, about six sizes too large for him. "Where did you get all these?" I asked. "Got my hat off a dead Rumanian," said Number One proudly. "And these boots?" "Oh, that's off the dead Fritz, over there in the orchard. Would you like to see him?" I followed the two boys along a narrow path. There, in the snow, among the apple-trees, lay the dead German. I couldn't see his face; it was covered with snow. He was frozen stiff, and his feet, purple, and glossy like those of a wax figure, were bare. He had no overcoat, only an ordinary grey-green tunic, with the eagle and swastika emblem. "Why don't they take him away?" I asked. "The soldiers will take him away sometime, I suppose," said the owner of the boots, "they've other Fritzes to collect all round here. He's no bother in the cold weather."

Was the little fellow callous? I don't know. . . . The Huns had brought war so deeply into his life, had made him live so intimately in the company of death, that no one could blame him. Corpses had become part of his daily routine, and to him there were only good corpses and bad corpses. Some time later I heard a story about a Don village where a crowd of small boys used a frozen dead German as a sledge for sliding down a hill. I don't know if the story is true.

The Germans had been driven out of Zhutovo on Christmas Day; that is, about eleven days before. There had been heavy fighting all round the town, and the town, from which the Russians had driven the Rumanians in November and the Germans on December 25, after these had been here for a week, had suffered great damage. Particularly all along the railway-line, houses had been shelled, and others burned down, and there were shell-holes and bomb craters on the road. Alone, a large red-brick water-tower on the railway-line and a signalling-box seemed completely unscathed. On the walls of a stone building, which looked like a small garage, there were still traces of words painted in German. Alongside the road lay an empty bottle which I picked up. The label said:

Deutscher Weinbrand Verschnitt
Spezialfüllung der Firma Dujardin and Co.,
vorm. Gebrüder Melcher seit 1810,
Weinbrennerei (something—) dingen-am-Rhein.

There was a *gemütlich* design of bunches of grapes all around the label. I could imagine old man Melcher sitting there in his little house on the hill among the vineyards, reciting Goethe and Heine, or treating Schumann and Clara to a *Glaeschen*. Only a terrible, devastating licking could perhaps in time bring that kind of Germany back again. But for the Thirty Years War, there would never have been a Bach, Handel, Gluck, Kant, or Goethe—all products of a weak Germany unobsessed by her own importance and, indeed, anxious to fit into the European cultural commonwealth. But this pet theory of mine has only a slender connection with the town of Zhutovo.

It was growing dark as we drove the remaining thirty miles from Zhutovo to Kotelnikovo. It was the road of the great retreat of von Mannstein's six divisions which had struck out at Stalingrad from Kotelnikovo and had been hurled back. In the growing darkness one could distinguish, from time to time, the shape of some smashed tank or burned-out lorry. But it was too dark to see anything more.

(c) KOTELNIKOVO

In the dark the ambulance stopped, and a lanky corporal conducted me and Edgar Snow to the house where we were billeted. Kotelnikovo did not have a house large enough to hold us all, and we were split up into groups of twos and threes. "Mind your head," said the corporal, as we entered a tiny hut, with a dim light showing through the second door. We had to bend down to get in. The house consisted of two tiny rooms, lit by a small kerosene lamp. The first was the kitchen, the other our bedroom. Between the two was a large Russian stove, and it was very warm. We were greeted with a great display of cordiality by a middle-aged, very exuberant woman, plump, with fat arms, and with two golden front teeth which glittered in the light of the kerosene lamp. "*Pozhalte, pozhalte*," she chattered away, "how nice to see some real friends, Allies, after all we've gone through. Americans? British? You speak wonderfully good Russian, probably lived in our Soviet Union for quite a while, eh? And this is *babushka*," she went on, pointing to a tiny shrivelled creature who sat silently in the corner of the kitchen, near the blacked-out window. We paid our respects to *babushka*. The corporal departed, telling Elena Nikolaevna to take good care of us, and saying he would call again in an hour, to conduct us to our eating-place. Elena Nikolaevna took the kerosene lamp and took us into the other tiny room, leaving *babushka* in the dark. "*Babushka* will be all right," she said, "she is used to peeling potatoes in the dark." Here was a table, and a large bookcase, and two beds, one, a large homely affair with a lot of blankets and pillows, the other a flimsier one on an iron bedstead. "You, the little one," she said to Edgar, "had better sleep on this one. What a life we've had these last five months," she exclaimed, without even being asked any question. "First we had some Rumanians here, and then the Germans—a tank crew of five men. Very rough people; but then, I suppose, it's because they regarded us as enemies; I don't know what they would have been like in peace-time."

A plane was zooming overhead, very low by the sound of it. "That's a German plane," said Elena Nikolaevna, "I know it from the sound." "A German plane wouldn't fly so low," I suggested, and at that moment we heard a stick of bombs go off with a whine, and somewhere, a long distance away, there was the sound of two not very loud explosions. "Makes me a bit nervous when they fly about at night," said Elena Nikolaeva. "It's these transport

planes that take food to the Germans encircled at Stalingrad. They keep flying all the time at night; don't see why they should drop bombs on Kotelnikovo."

Elena Nikolaevna was an elementary school teacher. When the Germans were approaching Kotelnikovo in August, the Secretary of the Raikom said that Kotelnikovo would not be evacuated, but that if it were, the teachers would be warned in time. So the teachers were left behind when it came to the point. One or two even went to the German Commandant to inquire when the school would open again, but they were informed "not yet." So the teachers went on living, without any jobs. The local population was summoned to a general meeting to elect the *starosta*, or mayor of the town; at first one man was elected and then another, but both were invalidated, Elena Nikolaevna wasn't sure why, and then a third one was elected, a railwayman called Paleyev, aged about thirty-eight. He was known to be quite a good man, but later he must have sold himself to the Germans. There were also a number of railwaymen who formed the bulk of the local police; these policemen, Elena Nikolaevna said, used to chase about the local population, especially young girls, who would be forced to carry bricks, and dig, and build fortifications.

"One of the first things the Germans did," she said, "was to open the church. The Rumanians ran it, and the population also used to go, or rather put in an appearance, because there was a fine of 1,000 roubles if you didn't go to church. Gai and I went there once or twice—just looked in." "Who's Gai?" "Oh, you'll see Gai," said Elena Nikolaevna, "Gai is my son, a clever boy, you'll like him. And the choir," she continued, "was composed of very old women of the town. I don't know how the service was conducted; the only two times we went the Rumanian priest was still in charge and I couldn't make head or tail of it, and I don't even know what they were praying for." "Well, but how did you live?" "You can hardly call it living," said Elena Nikolaevna. "We were very short of food. We only received 250 grams of flour per person per day—nothing else. How can you live on that? I used to do a little extra work for the Rumanian officer when he lived here; his orderly once gave me an enormous pile of washing; I spent four days washing his stuff and then the Rumanian orderly gave me half a loaf. It was really a shame, and I couldn't complain. By then, I suppose, the Rumanian orderly hadn't anything else to give me. The Rumanians were a measly bunch, but simple in their behaviour. Some of their soldiers, far from giving us anything, asked us for bread; I would give them a slice; it was better that way, or they might have taken it anyway. The Germans are very proud people, very different from the Rumanians. Occasionally they'd give me something—a tin of fish, or a cigarette—yes, just like one of those English cigarettes you've got." "Will you have one?" "Thanks," said Elena Nikolaevna, putting the Players' between her gold teeth, "you may think it shocking to see a lady smoke, but it's just an old vice with me." She laughed in girlish fashion. "Yes, all the time they were here, they gave me two tins of fish. It wasn't much, was it? I used to wash and scrub for them all day, and they'd send me out for water to the well. It was a slave's life. And Gai and *babushka* and I had to live in the little kitchen, all huddled together, while the five of them lived here, in this room—two on the beds, and three on the floor. They had a lot of drink, and a lot of food, those Germans had, and they seemed very confident at first they would stay here indefinitely. But a day or two before they left, one of them got up in the morning, and shouted as usual: 'Matka!'—they used to call everybody Matka, damn cheek! '*Matka, Wasser zu waschen.*' But I don't

know why, that morning I had a hunch the Russians were coming back, and I just couldn't force myself to take out the pail. So I said 'To hell with you!' and one of them started smashing up the stove with the butt of his pistol, and another fired his pistol into the ceiling, and they gave *babushka* a heart attack —she nearly passed out. Here's the hole in the ceiling, you still see it. But I wouldn't budge, and in the end one of them went out for the water himself."

There were two occasions on which the people of Kotelnikovo thought that the Russians were coming back—in November, and then again, at the end of December. But by the middle of December one of the tank men said to Elena Nikolaevna: "*Russ nicht zurück*—we've chased them back eighty or ninety kilometres." "It's quite true," she said, "the firing had become very distant again. But on December 28 one of the tank men said to me: '*Russ kommt zurück*.' You see, one wants to live, especially when you've got a young boy to look after, so I expressed no joy. And four of them went away that day, without a word, but the fifth one said: '*Auf wiedersehen, Matka*.' They were very gloomy. They weren't so bad, those five Germans, but they thought we were just slaves—only there to work for them. In other houses they behaved much worse. They wouldn't leave the women alone; and the Rumanians were terrible. There was a lot of rape in the town, though I admit I hardly ever saw anybody during the occupation. We just stayed indoors. Only once I went out to my vegetable plot outside the town, and the Germans had stolen all the vegetables, and stamped everything out. I didn't hear of anybody being shot at Kotelnikovo; but thirty or maybe fifty people were taken away by the Germans. Or maybe they followed them voluntarily, people like the priest and the policemen. They were going to mobilise all the young people for work in Germany, and they sent out leaflets, but I don't think they had time to do anything much."

Later, I was to hear more about the rather peculiar behaviour of the Germans at Kotelnikovo. This was Cossack country, and it seems they refrained from large-scale savagery, in the hope that the Cossacks would eventually accept them. They encouraged some people who showed willingness to co-operate. "Yes," said Elena Nikolaevna, "some queer things happened, I can tell you. They used to release some of the Russian war prisoners—if these were willing to work for them, which was very unusual, of course. But there's one woman I heard of, whose mother went to the railway-station, and there, among a crowd of our prisoners, she saw her son-in-law. She flung her arms round him, and went off to the Commandant. I don't know all the ins and outs of this queer business, but all I know is that the man was restored to civilian life, and for some time he was seen in the town mending stoves and windows. I don't really know what sort of régime they were trying to set up here," she continued, "I'm not at all clear about it. But it was very depressing after all the freedom we enjoyed under our dear Soviet régime."

And then she spoke of her last night under German rule. "That last night," she said, "there was much firing going on in the neighbourhood. The three of us, and twenty other people, escaped to the basement of a big stone building not far away. Outside was a German battery. It fired fit to split your eardrums. Then, later, somebody said: 'Just look out.' It was terrifying. It seemed as though the whole town were in flames. Actually, a large part of the town was burning—most of the public buildings. And when we went out to look, it was so strange: there were neither Germans nor Russians in the town. Earlier that night I had seen many of the Germans going away somewhere, with their gun-carriages and a lot of tanks. I did not see any Rumanians, though, they

may have surrendered to our people by then. But I didn't know they were all going away. That night the town was empty. Our people didn't come in till the next morning. It was funny, the Germans and Rumanians didn't get on at all; they didn't live in the same houses; they didn't even live in the same streets. . . ."

In the days that followed, I was to learn much more about life in Kotelnikovo under the Germans, and much more about Elena Nikolaevna, *babuskha*, and young Gai.

So this was the room in which the German tank crew had lived, these were the beds in which two of them had slept. The house was intact—partly, no doubt, because it was hardly worth looting. Here were many family photographs and snapshots on the wall, stuck untidily into large frames, an old calendar with a picture of Lermontov contemplating the Caucasus, lace curtains, a *balalaika* in the corner, a bookshelf with school-texts on physics and chemistry and Russian literature, and, on the table, a copy of the *Wittgensteiner Zeitung* of December 4, with an editorial: "50. Geburtstag Francos: der Erretter Spaniens," and—how awful!—an index of the Paris Metro! Rue Mabillon, avenue MacMahon, rue Madame, Bd. de la Madeleine. . . . Pages and pages of it.

The corporal called for us and we went and had supper with the rest of the crowd. We were told we were to see a general the next day, and would then be shown something of the battlefields round Kotelnikovo. Okay. Through the dark, the corporal showed us home again, and we went to bed. In the morning I found Edgar lying on the floor. "It's these bedbugs," he said, "I've got a complex about bedbugs. Couldn't stand them even in China." Elena Nikolaevna came in, looking very distressed. "I noticed, when I got up at 6 this morning, that your friend was sleeping on the floor. Did he have *bugs*? I looked very closely through the bed, I swear there wasn't a bug to be seen anywhere—only two little ones and I killed them. Do you mean to say there were really *bugs* in your bed?" Snow said they definitely bit him during the night. "But please don't worry," he said. "Worry!" cried Elena Nikolaevna, "I'll worry all day. It's terrible. But," she said, almost with tears in her eyes, "what can you expect if you've had Germans and Rumanians sleeping in your house for *five* months?"

That morning we met Gai, Elena Nikolaevna's only child. He was fifteen, fairly tall, but almost unbelievably thin. Gai was the Cossack name his mother had given him, but no youngster was less sturdy than he. He had a bright, intelligent, slightly monkey-like face, but he had thin skinny little hands, and his wrists and arms were not much thicker than a walking-stick. "Is that what the Germans have reduced you to?" I said. "No, I was always rather thin," said Gai, "but, of course, it was upsetting to live under the Germans; we didn't have enough food, and all that sort of thing has an effect on your nerves, you know," he said with all the earnestness of a grown-up. "But when I went with mother to Stalingrad last year to consult a well-known doctor there, he said there was nothing wrong with me, really—lungs and heart perfectly all right, just slightly anaemic." He spoke beautiful Russian, in a clear, silvery voice. "I'm sorry I wasn't here last night," he said, "but when the Germans were here, I never went out at night, and very seldom during the day—one just didn't feel like it. Now I go out at nights to see my pals—the fellows I used to go to school with. There are some still left at Kotelnikovo." "Yes, it's a blessing," said Elena Nikolaevna, "Gai will now be able to go

back to school. He's a bit skinny, but," she added proudly, "he's the cleverest boy in his form—full marks in every subject. He has read everything—all the classics, but his chief interest is science, and he wants to go into the Navy."

That morning we also had our first proper glimpse of Kotelnikovo—and of our house. It was very like the other houses around—a small cottage with whitewashed outer walls and a touch of blue paint round the windows, and a gabled iron roof. Between the cottages were spaces of some ten or fifteen yards—these were vegetable plots, I suppose, though now all was covered with snow, and there were no fences left to mark the separate gardens—they had been used as firewood during the occupation. Our house was one of many in one of the main streets of Kotelnikovo—Lenin Street. It was really nothing more than a wide, snow-covered road with the same kind of cottages on the other side. Some two hundreds yards towards the centre of the town was a large wooden church painted brown; it was here that the Rumanian priest had conducted his services. The church had lately been damaged by a shell or small bomb, and was closed.

Some military lorries and horse-drawn sleighs drove along Lenin Street. At one corner I noticed a German signpost by which Lenin Street had been given the noncommittal name of Chaussée-Strasse. Our improvised canteen was in a street parallel to ours, and we walked across the snow winding our way among the cottages, trees and privies. On our way we ran into Meyer Handler, who said we must go and have a look at his house. He was living in a larger and more prosperous-looking cottage. In the garden outside something unusual was happening. Here were four Cossack women—one very old and the three rather younger, and a child, and they were standing among a large pile of belongings—bedding, blankets, barrels of salted tomatoes and cucumbers, a map of Europe, a Singer's sewing-machine, and large quantities of old-fashioned crockery and kitchen utensils. A fifth woman, with her head protruding from a large hole in the ground, was passing them more blankets, dishes and eiderdowns. It was a deep, almost bottle-shaped hole, cemented on the sides, and here they had kept their most valued belongings during the occupation.

Here in the garden, beside the people, also stood a cow, and several hens were scuttling about. "How did you manage to keep these?" I asked. One of the younger women—she was one of the old dame's three daughters—said that the Germans liked to have milk, and so the cow was kept for their benefit. As for the hens, she pointed to a small wooden door at the foot of the house. "We managed to keep twenty hens there right through the occupation. At first we were frightened they would cackle, but they never do in the dark. Whenever the Germans were away—and they didn't usually stay here throughout the day, we'd take corn to the chickens: and here they are," she added with a touch of triumph. "These people aren't lacking anything," said Handler, "you should have seen the breakfast they gave me—cabbage pie and tea and sugar and milk and sour cream and preserved fruit—terrific. The husband has a job on the railway, so he is able to keep a cow and a big vegetable plot, and another of the daughters is a big shot on one of the *kolkhozes*, and what they don't grow here they get from the *kolkhoz* in exchange for some of their own produce—they did very well before the occupation, and, having lost very little through sheer foresight and presence of mind, they'll be back to prosperity before long. In fact, they're pretty prosperous already." The Cossack girls were big buxom wenches. I asked how many more sisters or

brothers they had. Their one brother, they said, was in the Red Army, and one little sister, the youngest one, had been an anti-aircraft gunner at Stalingrad, and she had been killed. And suddenly all four, and the old mamma, began to cry. "Weren't they awful brutes, the Germans?" I asked old mamma. "No, I wouldn't say so," she said. "Some were very nasty people, but those we had here—if you were polite to them, they'd be quite polite to you." I imagine the Germans must have treated these *kulaks* fairly well, with the cow as the real basis of their *modus vivendi*. Mamma and her four daughters had clearly been pursuing a policy of waiting. After all, there wasn't much else they could do, and maybe they benefited to some extent from the relative politeness with which, for reasons of their own, the Germans considered it advisable to treat the more prosperous section of the population in this part of the world. First, they had the idea that the Cossacks might be used for political ends, and secondly, the front was so near that it was better not to antagonise the people and drive them into open opposition and desperate sabotage. But the interesting thing is that the Germans had really no consistent policy about the Cossacks. In some cases they used the velvet glove, in others the gallows, the firing squad and the deportee train. And when they thought they would be chased out for ever, they became particularly horrible—witness Krasnodar, the capital of the Kuban Cossacks. At Kotelnikovo, during most of the time, they imagined that the country already belonged to them and until the final introduction of the New Order it was simpler to keep the place more or less as it was. To let the old Cossack woman keep her cow was in the interests of the German Army, as it happened. . . .

We spent much of the morning talking to two German airmen who were brought along to our canteen. It was a particularly interesting moment to see some German prisoners. What did they think, now that they were sure to lose Stalingrad, and that all Hitler's promises and prophecies had proved hot air? The first to be brought in was a lanky individual with mousy hair, a long horsey face, great long nose, and that fishlike expression in his eyes which is so common among Nazis. He was one of Goering's boys all right. He was twenty-nine, and had won the Iron Cross, first and second class, one at Narvik, the other in Crete.

This fellow, Gerhard Schewe, had been brought down the day before. He had tried to fly a Ju.52 in daytime from Salsk to Pitomnik aerodrome, near Stalingrad. His cargo, he said, was medical supplies and six or seven barrels of aviation petrol, 200 litres each. He said he had never flown to Stalingrad before, so he did not know much about it. When he was asked if he was a member of the Nazi Party, he started off on the usual explanation that no man serving with the forces could be a Party member. Like so many other airmen taken prisoner who did not wish to be suspected of any Luftwaffe atrocities, he claimed to have flown only transport planes. Notably, he had flown transport planes with petrol to Rommel from bases in Greece and Italy. The day before he had left Salsk at 11 a.m., but at 11.45 he was brought down by Russian fighters. He said there were thirty planes at Salsk, but he hadn't seen any crews. Our Colonel interrupted and said that this did not agree at all with what the German Air Force officers who had been taken prisoner had stated. Our German shrugged his shoulders and said: "Well, officers have more time to look at these things. I am too small a man." "Do you think," somebody asked, "you can go on supplying your Stalingrad troops indefinitely?" "I have told you," he replied, "I am a small man, and I don't know

about these things. I have heard all sorts of things, but I don't know what the situation in Stalingrad is like, and nobody in Germany knows anything definite." "Do you think Germany still has a chance of winning the war?" Schewe said: "There are few people in Germany who imagine we can lose the war, but some think it may last for four or five years." And the temptation to do a little propaganda for the benefit of our American colleagues was too great. The chap suddenly became eloquent. "Die Stimme der Vernunft," he said, "the voice of Reason will make itself heard in the United States. America," he added gallantly, "is a healthy, sane, great country. Only what has it got to do in Europe? There is no need for Americans to fight in Europe. Europe and America can get on without each other. When the instincts of reason awake in America, and people realise that it is no use going on with this war indefinitely, peace will be made." "What kind of peace?" "The best possible peace in the circumstances," he said. So Germany was beginning to hope for a draw; that's what Stalingrad had already done—Stalingrad *before* the final disaster of the Paulus armies. Schewe saluted stiffly as he was taken away.

The next one was a different type. Siegfried Peck was his name. He was a machine-gunner. He had long wavy fair hair, a good, boyish face, with an almost childlike smile, and he bore his misfortune with good grace. But as he talked one began to realise what the Nazis had done to this youngster.

He also had been brought down the day before, flying a Ju.52 to Stalingrad. He was on his second trip. He had already flown to Pitomnik the day before.

On that occasion the Russians had bombed the aerodrome at Pitomnik, but they did not shell it, though he knew it was within range. He had been at the Russian front since August, and he had flown bread to Stalingrad and spare parts, and yesterday he had taken eight wounded back. He had stayed only half an hour at Pitomnik, and he couldn't say much about it. The people there had told him they would hold out all right. "How many men, do you suppose, are surrounded there?" His answer was surprising. "I am told there is one division there." "Have you not been told that there are twenty-two divisions there?" "No, never heard anything like that."

"What do you think will happen when the Second Front opens?"

"It will help the Russians a lot."

Our Colonel said: "Will you allow me to ask him one question: Why did he not give up when our fighter signalled to him to land?" Peck said: "We believe that if we surrender to the Russians we'll be shot." "Well, have you been shot?" Peck said: "It may come yet. It's a fact," he added, "we really prefer to fly over England. In England we are sure to receive good treatment." "I suppose you treat the Russian prisoners well—never shoot them?" "I have never heard of any Russian prisoners being shot," he said glibly, "I have seen Russian airmen eating in German officers' messes." "You sound a very humane people, Herr Peck," I said, "but how do you account for the presence of millions of slaves in Germany?" With superb ingenuousness he replied: "My father is a bookbinder, and *he can't afford any*." He didn't protest against the word "slaves." "A lot of Russians who are in Germany want to stay there," he added. "They have a grudge against the Soviets." Peck thought that America's entry into the war would prolong it. "But we Germans will all die rather than surrender." "Are you a Nazi?" "I am not a member of the Party, but I belong to the National-Socialist Flying Corps." He was taken away.

"I say, old boy," said Ronnie Matthews, "don't you think he's an awfully good chap? All that's wrong with him is that he's gone to the wrong public school." That was one way of putting it.

That afternoon we went for a drive round Kotelnikovo. Except for a few ravines, the country around is perfectly flat, and almost treeless. There was much snow on the ground, and a cold wind was sweeping across the boundless steppe. There had been some fighting at the outskirts of Kotelnikovo, where the edge of a ravine was honeycombed with German dugouts and firing-points. It was the north side of Kotelnikovo. When the Russians approached Kotelnikovo from the north, the Germans, fearing encirclement, abandoned this line, and a large ammunition dump was left behind—shells, and cartridges, and mines, and a collection of little yellow triangular flags, with a skull and crossbones—to mark minefields. Some of the houses on the edge of the ravine had been smashed by Russian shellfire. Then we drove right across the steppe. On a small hillock off the main road was a German anti-aircraft and anti-tank gun. Good work! The Russians had scored a direct hit on it, smashing its whole lower part. Around still lay the bodies of the gun crew. They were frozen and did not smell. But it was a nasty mess. All their heads had been blown off, except one who lay some distance away, with a peaky nose pointing skywards. Perhaps he had been mortally wounded and had staggered away, and collapsed. But from among this heap of mangled flesh, dressed in dark-green Nazi uniforms, and sprinkled with snow, rose a hand, as though made of wax, with long fingers and finger-nails, that looked polished, like something out of a manicurist's window. On the shield of the gun was a score painted in white. A little plane and beside it, eleven strokes, a little tank, with six strokes, a little steamer with four strokes—four ships of the Volga Flotilla which took supplies to Stalingrad under shell-fire. And a bit of France again—among the corpses lay an empty bottle—*Eau de Vie . . . Maison Faustine*. The Metro guide, and the Renault trucks, and now this *eau de vie*.

Near Kotelnikovo, in the open steppe, was an aerodrome the Germans had hastily abandoned. Here were two Fokke-Wulf 189's, perfectly intact, and a number of other German aircraft. I talked to a little Russian Air Force sergeant. "Yes," he agreed with me, "there's no difficulty about aerodromes here; the whole steppe is an aerodrome; the only trouble is, there are few places with enough water. Some of these planes here got stuck through lack of water." "What can you do with German planes—can you use them?" He screwed up his face, and laughed. "Tricky business. Our anti-aircraft gunners are too sharp for that. When I was at Stalingrad, we got five Me.109's in perfect condition, and thought we'd use them. All five were shot down by our own guns the very first day. Damned if I'd go up in a German plane. Signalling is all very well, but the chap on the ground thinks the Fritz is cheating, and he just won't miss a chance of having a crack at a Messerschmitt. You go and prove afterwards that you weren't a Fritz," he laughed, perhaps remembering the chestnut about the rabbits who were running away across the Russian border into Poland because all camels in Russia were to be castrated. "They'll do it first, and then you can go and prove to them that you're not a camel."

Our bus took us back to Kotelnikovo. Here in the main street were the public buildings burned by the Germans on their last night in the town. Nearby was a square, with a church on one side, and a garden in the middle.

This garden had been turned by the Germans into a military graveyard. Most of the graves were those of men who had been killed during the last offensive which had started from Kotelnikovo on December 12. The graves had no crosses; from the snow protruded little boards with names scribbled on them in copying pencil

Gefr. Wilh. Debie
1–pz. Reg. 11.
Geb. 19.8.24.
Gef. 15.12.42.

A Russian corporal pulled out several boards and gave them a vicious kick. "They've no business to be here. We want no traces of the Germans—anywhere. We've had enough of it." It was quiet all around, a lovely winter evening. The trees in the little garden were white with snow; there was a silvery new moon in the pale-blue evening sky; in the two-storey house beside the church somebody had just lit a candle. Life, without terror, without Germans around, except those lying under the snow, had begun again.

I remembered Berlin, February 1933. Die Taverne, with poor Norman Ebbutt, flushed and worried, with his mug of Munchner before him, presiding over the Stammtisch. There was much excitement that night. Hitler had only a few days before become Chancellor. Nazis, in Storm Troop uniform, or in civvies, had invaded the Taverne, sounding patronisingly cordial as they pushed their way into the foreign journalists' corner. The podgy, pale-faced youth with goggles, who only a week earlier had whispered: "*ich bin sehr linksstehend*," was continuing to play his German foxtrots, and "In Hamburg, an der Elbe." He was probably a Nazi spy. So probably were also that Polish Jew, Herr Lehmann and his Belgian wife who ran the place. Everything about the place was as *louche* as could be. Dr. Halfeld, of the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, bald and jovial, but in reality one of the worst of the Nazi gangsters, had become a nightly—uninvited—guest at the Stammtisch. So was also Putzi, a handsome giant, six-foot-five, who now was wearing S.A. uniform. Like Dr. Halfeld, he was jovial, and like Dr. Halfeld's, his joviality in talking to the British and Americans had a slightly threatening intonation—an undertone which meant:

Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein,
Dann schlag ich dir den Schaedel ein.

That night Putzi Hanfstaengl was in high spirits. He was emotionally enthusiastic. He had spent last evening with *Him*—with Adolf Hitler. "He loves music; he loves me to play to him. The man has an artistic temperament, and a deep emotional strain. A wonderful man—so human," said Putzi. "I played him some Wagner, and," Putzi added modestly, "some of my own compositions. Ah, *he* liked one of my latest songs. It's called 'Verschneete Graeber'—graves under the snow."

So here they were, the "Verschneete Graeber." . . . Something to please artistic, sentimental, emotional Adolf Hitler. *His* "Verschneete Graeber"—no longer Putzi's.

Elene Nikolaevna and Gai were waiting for us. I had given her the butter I had brought from Moscow, and although she and the boy had probably tasted no butter for months, she had insisted on baking little pastries for us, and as the

kettle was boiling, Edgar produced the remains of his coffee and we all had a little feast together. Babushka, with her funny little wrinkled face and equally wrinkled hands, stayed in her corner, but was obviously enjoying her coffee and cookies. "It's wonderful," she said, "having you here, instead of those Germans. I just used to cry and cry all day and all night, ready to die, and leaving my dear ones to all this misery." "Babushka is really very brave," said Elena Nikolaevna, "perhaps it's because she's a bit deaf. Last summer she'd go right across the yard to get water, with firing and bombing going on all over the place. And she'd just toddle along with her pail, taking no notice of anything. I'd shout to her: 'Come back, Babushka,' but she'd just say: 'It's all right, dear, I shan't be long.' " Babushka, who was deaf, and perhaps didn't know what was being said, continued her own train of thought. "Ah yes, I thought I'd die. But now that our own people are back, I think I could live to be a hundred," she said as her little face screwed up in a toothless smile.

"English, American?" she went on, talking almost to herself. "I used to know English and American gentlemen. My husband used to be an *izvostchik*, had a fine phaeton on springs; he used to drive English and American gentlemen across the Don—they were engineers. That was a long time ago, still under the Tsar."

"I'd like to see America some time," said Gai, "I know the names of all the big towns—New York, and Chicago, Washington, and New Orleans and San Francisco."

Elena Nikolaevna proudly flashed her golden teeth. "Gai knows a lot; he is first in all subjects; he's very good at geography, too." Gai was enjoying himself. He was showing off in his fifteen-year-old way. "What papers do you write for?" he said. "Do you know any of our papers?" I asked. "Yes," he said rattling off another list of names. "*The Times*, *Daily Worker*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*. . . ." "Any American ones?" "No, I don't think I know any American papers." Gai talked and talked in his clear silver voice—about everything—about himself, and his future career, and about the Germans, and about the films he had seen. "I like American films," he said. "Here in Kotelnikovo *Song of Love* and the *Great Waltz* were a great success. Before the war we had a very good time, you know. I was a Pioneer myself, and would be in the Komsomol by now, but for the German occupation. All our young people were preparing to be engineers, or doctors, or surgeons, or scientists. But if the Germans had stayed here, there would have been no education for us. The girls would have been expected to wash floors, and the lads to look after the cattle. They didn't regard us as human beings at all." Gai said he was anxious to enter the Naval Academy. "There is room for a lot of specialists in the navy—for electro-technicians, and physicists, and all sorts of skilled people. We had some Black Sea marines at Kotelnikovo last summer. They fought here. They said that although I was a bit sickly, the sea would put me right. I've never seen the sea," said Gai, "but I've read a lot about it. I've read Alexei Tolstoy's *Islands of Tsaritsyn*—that's about the Caspian—and the *Frigate Pallas*, the great Goncharov travel book, and Gorki's stories about the sea. . . ." Elena Nikolaevna said proudly: "Oh, Gai is a great reader."

"Gai, tell us, what was it like under the Germans?" "Well," he said, shrugging his frail shoulders, "they didn't consider us as people at all." "Did they kick you about?" "No, they simply took no notice of me. Sometimes they'd ask: 'What form are you in? Where's your father?' I'd say he was in the Red Army. They would look cross, but say nothing." "Did they ever say

what sort of government they were proposing to establish here?" "Yes, they would say: 'Everybody will work for himself; no more *kolkhozes* and no more communism. We aren't going to stay here; we have only come here to liberate you from the Jews and the Bolsheviks.' They put up pictures of Hitler on the walls; it was called 'Hitler, the Liberator.'" Gai made a wry face. "He hardly looked human. A completely beastly face. Terrifying. Like a native of the Malay Islands. They opened the church; first they had a Rumanian priest, later a Russian. I once went when the Rumanian was still there. Inside were crowds of Rumanian soldiers. At one point they'd all go down plunk on their knees. Then they would carry around a dish, covered with a napkin, and the Rumanians would put money on it—roubles, or marks, or lei.

"It didn't make much difference, all money was pretty useless. The mark was worth ten roubles, but the marks that circulated here were some special kind of occupation marks, without any watermark. The Germans had a passion for destroying things," said Gai, "it was quite absurd some of the things they did. They tore up all the vegetables in our allotment outside the town, and trampled everything to blazes, so that you couldn't grow anything there next year. They burned down the library. They wouldn't even leave my little library alone," said Gai, pointing at the bookcase. "They tore up the Russian magazines, and tore out of the books all the Lenin and Stalin pictures. So silly—don't you think? It was those tank men. Queer chaps. You should have seen them at Christmas. They went all sloppy. They got a lot of parcels from Germany. They sat here, and lit the candles of a tiny paper Christmas tree they had received from home, and they unwrapped enormous cakes, and opened tins, and opened wine bottles, and they got drunk, and sang sentimental songs about something or other." "Where were you at the time?" "Just where we always were," said Gai, "in the kitchen, where the three of us would sleep." "Did they not offer you any cake or wine?" "No, of course not. It wouldn't even occur to them." "Weren't you hungry?" "Of course," said Gai, "but I would have hated to take part in any of their festivities." He produced a lighter from his pocket. "They left it here by mistake; after they'd gone I found it under one of the beds. We haven't any matches, and it's a useful gadget, but I don't like having anything from these people."

I could see the scene so clearly—here they were, singing their "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht," and feeding their faces—and a hungry Russian boy, looking on from the next room, with loathing and contempt. . . .

"Yes," said Gai, "I got thin, even thinner than I was. The bombs got on my nerves, I suppose. And when one no longer feels a human being—for they kept rubbing in that we weren't *people* any longer—it has a bad effect, too, on one's health. But the doctor says I'm quite sound. They had no respect for anybody; they'd dress and undress in front of women; we were just a lot of slaves. . . . And, of course, there was no food. 250 grams of bread a day was all we'd get. They also opened a shop where one could buy some rye flour—9 kilograms a week for the three of us, for 10 roubles 60. But there was no market; nothing came from the *kolkhozes*; we didn't see any fats at all," said Gai, with a scientific air.

"And what a nice little town our Kotelnikovo was," he said, "not like Moscow, of course—I want to go to Moscow to see the Metro and the escalators—but nice in its own small way. The Univermag—the department store—was quite a big one, though even before the Fritzes came, it no longer had anything to sell except a few rubbishy odds and ends—thousands of collar-studs, for instance; and then there were five other big shops, and about twenty

booths, and a summer restaurant, where they sold very good ice-cream and *vatrushki* (cream-cheese pie). And I already told you about the cinemas—one of my favourite films I saw several times was Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*. . . ."

Now he was on the subject of America again, and he became philosophical.

"Now, tell me," he said, "who would you say was the greatest man in America? According to capitalist standards, I should think, the greatest man is either Morgan or Ford, because he is the richest. In our country we go by other standards. I suppose, according to these standards, Stalin would be considered the greatest man." He babbled on and on, till it was time for us to go. Elena Nikolaevna listened admiringly to her boy. "Yes," she said, "he took it much to heart, all this humiliation we suffered from the Germans and Rumanians. They are proud people, the Germans. Only sometimes they would joke, and say: '*Matka*, we think you're a Jewess.' 'Sure I'm a Jewess,' I'd say, and they'd all laugh. The Rumanians were more down at heel. We used to call them 'the Gipsies.' "

That night, and during the subsequent days, I also learned much more about Elena Nikolaevna, and got to like her better than at first. First of all, she told me the story of her two gold teeth. There was nothing wrong with her teeth, but when she and her husband and little Gai, and the inevitable Babushka—"we've taken her around everywhere," she said—lived for some years in Kazakhstan, it was the fashion among Russian and Kazakh women there to have two, or even all the front teeth crowned in gold.

Elena Nikolaevna was not by tradition a Bolshevik. One day, as we came back to the cottage, she was singing a sentimental Essenin song. "Perhaps this is forbidden now," she said, with a shrug, "but it's just a passion with me." She had studied singing at Novocherkassk Musical Academy. She had gone there, as a young girl, soon after the Civil War. She belonged to a Cossack family in one of the big *stanitzas* on the Don. "My father," she said, "was what you might call a little *seredniak*—a small medium-sized farmer. He hadn't much of a business head, and during the Civil War we lost everything. We were literally reduced to starvation, and father, who, poor man, had lost his head, and didn't know how things would work out, sold the farm to a Kulak for ten sacks of flour. We moved to Novocherkassk, where we lived in a small flat. But before we had settled down properly, my father and my brother died in the typhus epidemic of 1921. I was still at school then, finishing my seven-class course. When my father and brother died, there was nothing much to hope for. I entered the Komsomol, and went to the musical academy where they began to teach me singing. I was quite good at it, but I had to look after mother, and my stipend was very very small; so when my future husband met me and asked me to marry him, I agreed. He had a job as a railwayman—which meant a regular job."

To this last survivor of a Cossack family, ruined by the turmoil of the Civil War, her marriage to a railwayman seemed rather a *mésalliance*. "He's a good man, my husband," Elena Nikolaevna would say, "though he hasn't much education.

"Yes," she would add, "he's in the right Bolshevik tradition. He's been a railwayman all his life, and so was his father. His father, who has been a railway conductor for forty years, received an inscribed gold watch from Kaganovich himself." Later, after her marriage, and after settling down at Kotelnikovo in her husband's home, she took a correspondence course in elementary teaching. It was during the days when thousands of schools were

opening throughout the Soviet Union, and Elena Nikolaevna was as good as anybody for this simple job. This coquette of thirty-eight or so, no doubt dreamed of all that she might have been but for the Civil War; she would talk of her youth when she "looked pretty good and *kulturno*, with her hair waved and a pretty summer frock"; and one of the Rumanians had told her that if a Rumanian was fond of a girl called Elena, he called her by the affectionate diminutive of "Enutsa." She giggled in a girlish way, but added: "I told the little swine I wasn't Enutsa to him, thank you."

Elena Nikolaevna was happy she had lived safely through the ordeal of the German occupation, and that Babushka and Gai were safe, too. She had taken Babushka with her everywhere, even to Karaganda in Kazakhstan, where the whole family had gone during the great industrial development there, under the Five-Year plans. They had all had a good time there, and Gai had put on weight for once, drinking *kumyss*, fermented mare's milk. Gai and Babushka were really her life now; and she was grateful to the Soviet régime. "Thanks to our Soviet régime," she once said, "we pay only five roubles rent a month for this little house of ours. And you can say what you like," she added—not that either Edgar or I had said anything—"but it's a good régime. Even Babushka, to whom it was all very new and strange at first, has become very fond of it." As for the husband—they had last heard of him in June 1942. He was on the Voronezh Front then. Now that the postal service was about to be restored at Kotelnikovo, they might hear from him soon. . . . They might; or they might not.

Many weeks later, I received a short letter from Gai. It came by post.

"I have a great piece of news for you. Our school has opened, and to-day is the first day. The post is working well, and we regularly receive newspapers, and even magazines. Please send me your magazine, and also some books, if you can.

"The Fritzes have stopped flying over us.

"Please write to me in detail, and tell me how you are living. How is Mister Snow feeling?

"All is well here. We have already had several film shows, and one concert. Greetings to Mister Snow.

"Write letters.

"Yours,

"Gai."

The letter was written in a good, mature hand.

So life was going back to normal at Kotelnikovo; and there was no longer any need for the Fritzes to fly to Stalingrad to supply von Paulus's troops. They were all dead or in prison camps. But Gai's father, the railwayman—where was he?

That evening we saw three more prisoners, two Germans and one Rumanian. I arrived at our canteen at the same time as the Hun. Already in the dark passage, only lit by a small candle and the blue moonlight from outside, I heard his harsh guttural voice arguing with somebody. "Aber *Nnneinn*, kein vernünftiger Mensch *will* den Krieg. Deutschland *Wollte* doch keinen Krieg..." He was brought in. He had a sort of purple scar under his right eyebrow—a trace of his monocle. So this was Herr Oberleutnant Eduard von Eisenberg, of the Luftwaffe, tall, slim, as though wearing stays. Haughty, in an old

Prussian rather than Nazi way. Colonel Tarantsev remarked: "Oh yes, he's put on his airs now; but you should have seen him ten minutes ago, when he was ordered to come here: he whimpered and whined, and thought his last hour had come." So I said to the German: "Herr Oberleutnant, the Colonel here says you showed some anxiety—*Sie waren etwas nervös*—when you were asked to come to visit us. Were you afraid of anything?" "*Nnneinn*," he said, "I didn't think they would shoot me. But prisoners do disappear. People at home have no contact with prisoners here, as they have with prisoners in England, through the Red Cross at Geneva." His was the usual story. He had flown transport planes to Africa and Crete (there was always the same desire to suggest that he had never flown anything except these innocuous transport planes); now, for the first time he had been ordered to fly six barrels of petrol to the Pitomnik aerodrome outside Stalingrad; he had been warned that the day trip was very dangerous, and he had, indeed, been brought down. He had come down by parachute and had lost one of his boots, and was wearing a *valenok* instead.

In spite of this sartorial defect, Herr Oberleutnant talked with great self-assurance. *Nnnein, nnneinn*, the present retreat was not a big defeat for the Germans. "It was the same last year, and last year we were much less well equipped. *Nnneinn*, it isn't serious at all. Next summer we are going to retake all the area we have lost. You can be sure of one thing: we are going to hold up the Russians at Rostov; *they'll never take Rostov*. And from Rostov, next summer, we'll push them back again." "What about America?" one of our American colleagues asked. "America," said Herr Oberleutnant, "can only prolong the war, but she can't help to win it. *Nnneinn, nnneinn*, America has nothing to do in Europe. What's the big idea? The Americans can't bring enough tanks or planes to Europe. The Second Front is just *impossible*. I tell you—it can't be done. The Continent is *much too powerfully fortified*." "Africa?" Herr Oberleutnant shrugged his shoulders. "Africa doesn't matter. Of course, the British had superiority there, but Rommel has organised his retreat very skilfully, and his position is by no means hopeless." Then somebody recalled Hitler's assurance to the German people that Stalingrad would fall. Herr Oberleutnant had an answer for everything. "Yes," he said, "we underestimated Russian strength; we should have concentrated on Stalingrad and not bothered about the Caucasus this year. It was wrong to try the two things at once." But it didn't matter; the Germans would be back in Stalingrad and in the Caucasus, "and if the Second Front comes, we'll smash it up, too." But perhaps the fellow wasn't as self-confident as he tried to sound. "You are certainly colossally optimistic, Herr Oberleutnant," I said. Here was perhaps his one touch of candour. "Well, one's got to be; or war would just be useless."

Another German. This one was different. Not Luftwaffe, not S.S., nothing exclusive or privileged. An ordinary rank-and-file German soldier. He had a fortnight's growth on his chin, he was black and dirty, and his ordinary field overcoat was shabby and threadbare. He was a Winter Fritz all right. A corporal he was, of an anti-aircraft unit. He spoke with a thick Saxon accent —it's a dialect really, rather than an accent—and he was infernally hard to follow. Dresden was his home town; he was born there in 1917. His name was Reinhard Preusche or Preuschke and he had been in the army since 1938. There was a time when this down-at-heel Winter Fritz was on top of the world. He had marched into Prague in March 1939, and had no doubt thought it perfectly all right. But now he was miserable—not yet genuinely repentant,

but with probably many doubts beginning to worry him. He had had a nasty experience. During the retreat from Kotelnikovo his unit—the 861st A.A. regiment—had been surrounded by Russian tanks; many of the men had been killed, others had been captured by the Russians. He ran away; for two days he wandered across the steppes, his feet had got frostbitten, and then the Russians found him, and he was taken prisoner. The reason why he had not surrendered at once was simply this—it was generally believed in the German Army, he said, that the Russians shot prisoners. Now, he said, he had to confess that he was pleasantly surprised at the treatment the Russians had given him.

"No wonder you are surprised," somebody said, "for how do *your* people treat Russian prisoners?" "Well," he said, "the officers are certainly not very friendly to them"—a pretty piece of understatement—"but our soldiers treat them humanely. But," he added, "I can assure you that our soldiers believe it is better to commit suicide than to fall into Russian hands—so the officers keep on repeating every day, and the soldiers believe it." "Did you believe it?" "Yes." "Then why didn't you commit suicide?" He scratched his head. "I don't know. I was very sick and exhausted when they got me. You have to be in good form to commit suicide." We laughed at this aphorism, and he smiled, a little helplessly.

The fellow was in a defeatist mood, and he tried to make excuses for himself. Before the war he worked in a butcher's shop in Dresden, and his boss, he said, had told him that if he did not join the Hitler Youth, he'd get the sack. In September 1941 he had come to the Eastern Front; his first job as an A.A. gunner was at the aerodrome at Odessa. All went well until a fortnight ago, when at Salsk he was told that his A.A. gun would now have to be used as an anti-tank gun against the Russian advance towards Zimovniki. His was a 20-mm. gun, and it wasn't much use; he had knocked out three light tanks, but against heavy tanks it was just no use at all. Only shortage of German equipment at this front could account for the new job he had been given. "The news of the Russian offensive," he said, "had a devastating effect among our troops, who realised only about a fortnight ago the whole seriousness of the situation. I don't think we have enough men," he said, "we have occupied too many parts of Europe. We did not have enough men for the summer campaign of 1942, though we were convinced at the time we could make it. . . . But now eighty per cent of the men in the German Army are sick and tired of war. It can't go on much longer like this. I don't know how things will develop, but I imagine the British and Americans will break into Europe somewhere. With all the persecution that has been going on throughout Europe, I shouldn't be surprised if there was a real desire to destroy Germany," he said dismally. Was he saying all these things because he thought we would like to hear them? Or was the spirit of the *Götterdämmerung* upon him? Later he talked about the food the German soldiers received—600 grams of bread, 40 grams of butter, 120 grams of sausage or tinned meat, 1 litre of soup; then there was every day a one-course hot dinner (stew); three times a week there was roast meat; coffee every morning, tea with sugar at night, 25 grams of tobacco and 6 cigarettes daily. When they travelled, they took a fifteen-days' iron ration with them.

I asked one of the Russian officers how this compared with the Russian Army rations; he said that the diet was rather different; the Russians received more bread, cereals and meat, but the nutritive value must be about the same.

. . . . .

The next one was a wretched human specimen. A little rat of a man with black stubble on his chin, furtive eyes, and an obsequious grovelling manner. A Rumanian soldier—or rather policeman. He talked exuberantly in broken Russian, rattling off da-da-da-da-da's whenever he thought an affirmative answer was expected. Oh yes, the Germans were very bad people, they travelled about in cars, but he, a poor Rumanian, had marched on foot to Odessa, and then to Krivoi Rog, and then to Pavlograd, and then to Lozovaya, and then to the Donetz River, and then to the Don, and then to Abganerovo—always on foot, never got a lift from the Germans. "And then we went back to Kotelnikovo, and then we retreated to the Don, and then there was a Rumanian counter-offensive and"—cheerfully—"we just got routed, smashed to blazes; and that night the Russian tanks arrived, and our whole division surrendered, the officers alone got away in cars. . . . Oh, the Rumanian officers and the German officers got on well together, but not the soldiers. The German soldiers used to hit us. Oh, it was terrible." But he became singularly muddled when it came to describing his duties as a policeman in the occupied towns. At first he seemed to suggest that he used to give people twenty-five strokes with a big stick, but then he insisted that it wasn't he who was giving the strokes, but receiving them; from whom—oh, from the Germans, of course. Oh, and the Germans lived in the best houses, and they got much better food than the Rumanians, 60 grams of butter a day, and the Rumanians only got 10; the Germans drank Russian vodka, and the Rumanians got damn all; and one day at the railway-station at Rostov, a Rumanian said: "The Germans are great drinkers, but why can a Rumanian never get a drink?" and a German thereupon beat this Rumanian up.

"I think we've had enough of this Antonescu twerp," somebody suggested. We all agreed.

The next day—it was January 10—we went in our old ambulance to Zimovniki, some sixty miles down the Stalingrad–Caucasus line. The Germans had cleared out of Zimovniki only two days before, and the main fighting was now going on somewhere further south, between Zimovniki and Proletarskaya, on the Manych. And beyond the Manych was Salsk, one of the great German air bases for supplying the trapped Stalingrad armies, and 120 miles east of Rostov. The road to Zimovniki ran across the almost completely flat, snow-covered steppe, bright in the sun that day. There were practically no natural defence lines here, no rivers, hardly any ravines, hardly anything worthy of the name of a "height." The Germans, after losing Kotelnikovo, had hurried through this country, particularly inhospitable to a retreating army. At one point, in the middle of the steppe, they had abandoned a huge ammunition dump, covering a good couple of acres. As we approached Zimovniki, there were growing signs of air activity. Russian fighters zoomed almost every minute over us; clearly, not very far away, dogfights were going on, or else the fighters were pursuing the German columns in their further retreat. It was said that beyond Zimovniki the Germans were fighting a stiff rearguard action, and that the remnants of the Seventeenth and Twenty-third tank divisions had recently been reinforced by the S.S. Viking division. The Vikings had been brought up from the Caucasus, where they had fought in vain against the Russians at Mozdok.

At many points the road ran alongside the railway; here were already hundreds of people—men, and women huddled in shawls—working on the line, changing it back to the Russian gauge. The Germans had been here only

a few days before; the Russians were losing no time.[1] The railway, linking Stalingrad with the Caucasus Front, was important.

There were few signs of fighting along the road; here and there an abandoned car or lorry; also one or two smashed German tanks, and one dead Russian soldier.

Zimovniki was an obvious place for making a stand. It stood on an elevation, with the terrain sloping north and west. We reached the outskirts of the town. Here were hundreds of wrecked German cars and lorries, with wheels and tyres taken off, with dynamos removed, and many burned out altogether. And the number plates, with the swastika eagle stamped in red on them, were all marked W.H.—Wehrmacht. In the steppe on the right something was happening. Distant gunfire could be heard, and once a shell landed not far away, a cloud of yellow smoke rising from it. Occasionally, from the distance, came a loud booming noise, followed by a series of explosions. It was too far away to be very exciting, but one of the officers said: "Do you know what that is? That's Katyusha." The town was on the left. Clouds of smoke were still rising from the high building of the grain elevator. A middle-aged woman, with a thin, wrinkled face and very dirty clothes, who was the first civilian we saw, came up to us. "The Germans set fire to the grain; it's been burning for two days now; our people are trying to put it out." Where had she been all the time? I asked. She told the usual story one hears in newly liberated places. For six days, while there was fighting around Zimovniki, and the Russians were shelling the German positions, she and her four small children had lived in a cellar, with hardly any food, and only snow to suck, instead of water. "The Germans must have set fire to the elevator," she added, "but maybe a Russian shell hit it. Can't really make out." We waited around for some time for one of the conducting officers who had gone to make inquiries; when he returned, he said there wasn't really much we could see—except the town itself. He repeated that there were minefields on the western and southern slopes, where there were all those dead Germans, and we had better not go there.

The streets of Zimovniki were deserted now, and there was a fair amount of damage from shelling. It was a pleasant little town, with trees lining the wide streets, many cosy-looking little wooden houses, and a few modern buildings. At the crossing of the two main streets stood the pedestal of Lenin's statue, but, with the exception of one leg, Lenin had been removed. Behind the Lenin statue was the clubhouse, and on the other side of the street a fairly large cinema. The street signs, painted on rough boards, were some in German, others in Rumanian. The clubhouse, a large hall for meetings and entertainments, with a gallery round it, had all its windows blasted. The place had been used as a barracks by the Germans. The whole floor was covered with bundles of straw on which the Germans had slept. The galleries and the rostrum were still decorated with fir-tree branches, and the tables and the heaps of straw were still littered with the remains of what looked like a New Year celebration—dozens of empty wine and brandy bottles, mostly French, empty tins, German cigarette and biscuit cartons. Here, on one of the tables, also lay a pile of German newspapers and magazines. One of them, showing German soldiers basking in deck-chairs on a verandah overlooking the sea—was this Anapa?—had as its main feature a touristy article on "*Der Herrliche*

[1] At that time the Germans had not yet evolved their technique of thoroughly wrecking railway-lines which they began to apply so effectively in the summer of '43. In January '43 they had not yet acquired the *habit of retreat*.

Kaukasus und die Schwarzseeküste." So they had already been making themselves at home in the Caucasus! The magazine was only three weeks old; now they were beating it from the Caucasus as fast as their legs would carry them.... To the right of the rostrum were several school desks, and a piano with its keys no doubt deliberately smashed. The whole place was like a pigsty. Outside there was still a notice beginning with the words: "People of Zimovniki, we have come to liberate you from the yoke and lawlessness of the Bolsheviks. . . ." The rest had been torn away.

While I had been inspecting the clubhouse, some of the others had gone across the street, into the little park at the back of the cinema. Some came back looking rather white. In the park, Russian soldiers were digging a common grave for the Russians who had been killed at Zimovniki. There, in the park, seventy or eighty Russian corpses were placed in rows, in horrible, frozen attitudes, some sitting up, others with their arms wide apart, some with their heads blown off, also some bearded elderly men, and young boys of eighteen or nineteen, with open eyes. How many common graves like this—"brother graves" the Russians call them so well—are dug every day along these two thousand miles of the Russian front?

At Zimovniki a young Russian lieutenant, who had fought for several months at Stalingrad—he was a slim dark-eyed lad, looking remarkably handsome and fit after all he had lived through—talked to me about the leaflets the Germans used to drop over Stalingrad. "They started with leaflets saying: 'Keep your jobs! Don't abandon the factories!' and then, the next day, they'd bomb the factories to blazes. However, we collected the German leaflets—they were printed on good smoking paper. Several times," he continued, "the Germans would announce the day on which there would be 'the absolute annihilation of everything' if we did not surrender. The leaflets made little impression. Dieppe was heavily exploited—all this business about the Second Front having been 'repelled.' I must say the idea cheered up the Germans a lot, and the trouble was that there wasn't much we could say in reply to this particular form of propaganda. It was a tough proposition for our own propaganda services."

Gai and his mother and the other people had given me a good, but still only fragmentary idea of what had been happening at Kotelnikovo during and since the occupation; while the Germans were there, as Elena Nikolaevna had so often remarked, the local people went out of doors as seldom as possible, and few people had a really very clear idea of what was going on. What were the conditions in which the town had been evacuated in the first place, what exactly was the form of the German administration, what was the real damage the Germans had done to life and property during their five months at Kotelnikovo? I put these and other questions to Comrade Terekhov, the Chairman of the Raiispolkom, the District Executive Committee. He was forty-five; with his strong, clean-shaven face he was a good type of the Soviet local official—hard-working, enterprising, authoritative in his manner. He wore a *french*, that plain austere semi-military tunic—the same as Stalin used to wear before he became Marshal. He was from Saratov, where he had started life as a fitter. He had been sent to his present job at Kotelnikovo in April 1942, when his predecessor, a younger man, had been called up to the army. Kotelnikovo, he said, had a population of 14,000, with 4,000 more in the country around the town; it had a mixed Russian and Ukrainian population, and most of the Russians were of Cossack stock. In the town there was a

brick and tile factory, and the only other "industry" was the important railway depot and the marshalling yards. The district grew wheat, barley, rye and mustard, and there were many cows and horses, and some sheep and goats. At the end of July, the Germans were approaching in a great wave. Only forty-eight hours could be allowed for the evacuation of the town and of its most essential wealth. The "material evacuation" comprised that of the railway equipment, the tractors, and the largest possible number of cattle. The first people to be evacuated were the 1,500 refugees who had come from elsewhere during the German advance, the railway workers, and the 400 workers of the brick factory. Together with their families, this represented an evacuation of 5,000 people. Half of them went by rail, the other half by road transport. Everybody who was determined to leave was given the opportunity to do so, though only hand luggage could be allowed. The evacuation was completed on August 1. The working cattle—the horses and the bullocks—were left behind, because the farms continued to work till the end, but the milch cows were taken away. Those who left of their own accord had their cattle evacuated by the authorities, who gave receipts to the owners. All the cattle was taken to a specially reserved area near Astrakhan. The cattle were driven across the steppes, and several times they were attacked from the air; once, when they were already quite near Astrakhan, many of the cattle were killed by bombs; there were, however, no human casualties on that occasion. The poultry and the pigs had to be left behind, because it was too hot to move them. All this evacuation was done in the midst of air-raids, and a certain amount of confusion, and it was therefore not possible to carry out the "scorched earth" policy in every detail. The dynamo at the brick factory was taken to pieces and hidden, but it was not possible to evacuate the power-plant at the railway-station; some of the "scorched earth" policy was, oddly enough, carried out by the Germans themselves—for instance, when on July 29 they bombed and destroyed the large oil-dumps. 4,500 tons of grain had to be left behind, there was so much bombing that it was not possible to destroy it.

Kotelnikovo had remained throughout the German occupation fairly near the front line, which gave the Germans too many other things to worry about; moreover, there was a certain tendency to flirt with the Ukrainians and the Cossacks, and the Germans therefore refrained from committing too many blatant atrocities. But right away they nevertheless shot two workers at the grain stores, and also four peasant women who had been found harbouring a Russian officer. Their poultry and other property were confiscated. These women had been denounced to the Germans by a common criminal who had just been released from jail in another town and whom the Germans had appointed *starosta* of the village. His mother, who had also sold herself to the Germans, had been an accountant at the *kolkhoz*. Both mother and son left with the Germans. About twenty other people from the district left voluntarily when the Germans went, and about 300 were forcibly taken away. There were altogether about thirty people in the district—people with a grudge—who worked willingly for the Germans, mostly as policemen. Some of the railwaymen had been compelled by the Germans to enrol in the police, but they remained loyal to the Soviets, and were deported by the Germans against their will. A number of cases where local inhabitants co-operated with the Germans were now being investigated. This inquiry related only to those who had played some official part, but if cases of excessive matiness between local inhabitants and the Germans came to light, such cases would also be investigated in due course.

Terekhov, who had described the dramatic evacuation of Kotelnikovo in a cool and matter-of-fact way, spoke of the quislings not without a touch of anger. "One day," he said, "the Germans distributed leaflets summoning the population to the 'appointment of the *starosta*'—appointment, mind you, not election. The first two *starostas* to be appointed gave the Germans no satisfaction, and they were sacked almost at once. One of them was a church chorister, a bewildered creature who didn't quite know what was expected of him. But after a while, the Germans called another meeting for the appointment of a third *starosta*. They put forward as their official candidate a railway clerk called Paleyev. The people who had gone to the meeting, however, produced a rival candidate, a man called Lvov. Lvov was immediately thrown into jail and shot the next day. Among the people deported by the Germans were many railway workers, and also many young people born between 1924 and 1926, chiefly young farmhands. They would have deported many more, and had already made plans for doing so, but there was no time.

"It was just as well," he went on, "that they had to leave in a hurry; or probably nothing would be left of Kotelnikovo. They were going to burn the whole town, but they managed only to burn five shops, one of the two cinemas, the Red Army house, the bathhouse, the telegraph and post office and about twenty private houses. The local Soviet authorities returned on December 30, one day after the Army entered the town. Our first official act was to call meetings of the local inhabitants and announce to them the restoration of Soviet rule. We re-established at once thirteen soviets and nineteen collective farms. It will take about three months to put the town in running order; the schools will reopen on January 15, and the power-station almost immediately. We have opened communal kitchens where people can obtain food, but we have not yet issued ration cards. During the occupation people lived on their reserves, and I cannot say that there was an acute food shortage—though there would have been if the Germans had stayed on much longer. On the whole," Comrade Terekhov said, "we have got off more lightly than most places. There were comparatively few executions, and no atrocities such as we have seen elsewhere, though there have been several cases of rape. Until we have properly settled down, we are not bringing back the evacuees."

(*d*) VISIT TO GENERAL MALINOVSKY

The next day was Monday, January 11. The great Russian attack on the encircled Germans at Stalingrad had begun on the previous day; but nothing had yet been officially announced. That day we drove in our old bus north-west of Kotelnikovo, towards the Don. This was much more pleasant. We had at last escaped from the flat interminable steppe. This was rolling country; the high grass was dark brown, and there was very little snow, except in the ravines and high up on the hills. The wind had swept the snow off the hillsides. It was like driving through the moors of Scotland, with the heather brown in winter. There were deep traces of caterpillars on the road, but few other signs of war. At length we reached a village where we stopped. All around there were the brown hills, and only on one side was there open country, with a solitary church, far away, silhouetted against the grey sky. This was a cossack village, with signs of cossack prosperity—even after the Germans had left. They cannot have been very active here; the village was off the beaten track.

The little thatch-roofed cottages, with white walls and blue and green round their windows, looked warm and friendly; there were horses and cows grazing

on the hillside, and among the cottages were many fruit-trees. Several soldiers were busy round a caterpillar-lorry outside a shed; nearby, a young soldier, stripped to the waist, was pouring buckets of icy water over himself. There were some village boys and women about, digging, or carrying pails.

We had stopped outside the fairly large wooden school-building, and were ushered into a classroom crowded with small desks. This was the headquarters of Lieutenant-General Malinovsky, in command of the army which had smashed von Mannstein's six divisions. He was the man who was later to take Rostov.

He was right in the middle of his greatest campaign, and it was indeed a privilege to be received by him in such conditions.

What a fine specimen of military manhood he was! Admirably groomed in his general's uniform, with the four stars on his collar, tall, handsome, with long dark-brown hair brushed back, and with a round sunburned Ukrainian face, he did not show the slightest sign of fatigue after several weeks' continuous campaigning. His eyes sparkled with intelligence, and he looked far less than his forty-four years. And what a singular career! As a soldier of the Russian Expeditionary Corps of twenty thousand men, he had gone to France during the last war; with the rest of the Corps, he had sailed from Vladivostok to Marseilles via Singapore and the Suez Canal; he had fought at Laon and Arras; he had seen New Zealand troops in action, and French *poilus*, and Malgache troops and the Senegalese. At Amiens the Russians had fought side by side with the British; with a significant little smile, he said: "I liked them, these English and Scottish troops; they are slow, but they are reliable. I liked the way they shaved every morning without fail; and the way they went into action smoking their pipes." Later, the Revolution broke out in Russia, and there was some trouble with the Russian troops in France. They did not feel any longer like fighting "for the French"; they were put in a camp at Courtine; here there was more trouble and the French shot three or four hundred of them. However, the bulk of the Russians were sent home in the end; only a small proportion settled in France, usually because of some French woman. . . . When he returned to Russia, he joined the Reds in the Civil War.

We sat at the school-desks listening to Malinovsky, as he explained the latest Russian operations.

After outlining the first stage of the Stalingrad battle, which ended in the encirclement of the German forces at Stalingrad and the Russian westward drive far beyond the Don, Malinovsky said that the second stage of the Russian campaign was to have begun on December 16. But the Russians were forestalled by the von Mannstein offensive which began on the 12th. "Von Mannstein had a powerful army at his command—three infantry divisions and three tank divisions—the Sixth brought from France, the Seventeenth from Orel, and the Twenty-third from the Caucasus. The whole group had about 600 tanks, and was well supported by the Luftwaffe. This tank 'fist' scored a number of initial successes and pushed rather far beyond the Axai River. From the 12th to the 16th we fought a rearguard action; from the 16th to the 24th we fought defensive battles; on the 24th we began a big determined counter-offensive. We aimed at encircling the Germans from the flanks. Our right flank came down from the banks of the Don; our left flank pressed down to the Axai River and towards Kotelnikovo. From the first day our counter-offensive developed successfully. The enemy suffered great tank losses; the desperate German resistance was soon broken and the enemy rapidly with-

drew to Kotelnikovo, hoping to make a stand along the Axai-Kurmoyarsky line running from Kotelnikovo to the Don. That, in fact, had been the starting-point of the German offensive of December 12. But the rapid advance of our flanks ruined this plan. Afraid of being encircled at Kotelnikovo, the Germans proceeded rapidly to withdraw the remnants of their divisions to Dubovniki, Zimovniki and Proletarskaya. . . . Our situation was complicated by the fact that the Germans had created a new group at Tormosin inside the Don Bend. This group constituted a serious threat to our right flank. We had to leave part of our forces behind to deal with his threat; and in three days the Tormosin group was routed and forced to retreat west. Thus we routed two German tank divisions, the 336th German infantry division, one Hungarian and one Rumanian infantry division, besides ground staff and other auxiliary units. Then all our forces could be directed to the south-west. But acutely feeling the threat to Proletarskaya and Rostov, the Germans have been throwing in new divisions to stop our progress south of Zimovniki. These new troops my army is now fighting. We are fully confident that our successes will continue.

"Our long communication lines," Malinovsky said, "present considerable difficulties, but I think I may say we have overcome these difficulties in the main. The German Command is certainly showing signs of bewilderment, because no matter how strongly they counter-attack, it is not doing them any good. No doubt, the results of this operation have not been easily achieved. Our officers and men have had to make an exceptional physical effort, but their morale is superb, and this has helped. Naturally, our men have suffered losses, but much smaller losses than the enemy. They have great confidence in their leaders, notably in the commander of this front, General Eremenko, who has all the shrewdness of an old soldier with a genius for guessing the enemy's intentions.

"There is no doubt," Malinovsky went on, "that the Germans are bewildered. They are throwing about their troops from one place to another—filling in gaps—which shows they have no great reserves at the moment; and they are abandoning masses of equipment. They are moving west in large panicky masses—easy targets for our aircraft. The German officers we have captured all sound extremely disappointed in their High Command and in the Führer himself. These people have none of the self-assurance they had in the summer."

The Red Army, on the other hand, he said, had changed and evolved. More than that—*there had been revolutionary changes in the Red Army in the summer of* 1942. Malinovsky, without dwelling on this point, clearly indicated its enormous importance. "It would not be in our interests to describe the great organisational measures which were carried out by the Soviet High Command last summer—but they have counted for very much," he said. I thought of all the implications of Korneichuk's *Front*, and remembered certain articles which had appeared in the *Red Star* at the time of the fall of Rostov. . . . Secondly, Malinovsky said, there was more drive and punch in the troops themselves; the winter offensive of 1942 was on a much vaster scale than that of 1941; *the men now had far greater experience, and the heart of every officer and man was burning with violent hatred of the Germans. Their skill was great now; the Russian infantry could now face situations which it could not face a year ago*; for example, the onslaught of 150 enemy tanks. Well armed with anti-tank weapons, they had successfully faced such onslaughts during the German December counter-offensive.

A few more of Malinovsky's points:

"At Stalingrad, the position of the Armed Prisoners' Camp"—as he called it—"is hopeless.

"The German losses at Stalingrad are a fundamental factor in this war.

"Nevertheless, in so far as the Germans are able to send fresh troops from the West, we cannot assume that the Germans are weakening their forces in Russia.

"The Germans have still a very great number of tanks.

"We have more fighters and more A.A. guns than before, but the Germans are still strong in the air, especially as regards dive-bombers.

"There is no indication that aircraft are being withdrawn from here to the west, though the Germans are showing an increasing tendency to use their aircraft intensively in the main directions only.

"No allied equipment has been used on this front, with the exception of American trucks.

"We are waiting impatiently for real activity to start in the West. Africa is only a prelude.

"The S.S. are ferocious fighters, and the most formidable of the German troops. The quality of the other German troops varies greatly.

"*Katyusha* is a very unpleasant girl for the Germans, and is being used with very good effect. The German six-barrelled mortar is the nearest thing they have, but it is much less effective. We call it *Vanyusha*, and our men say: 'the German *Vanyusha* is no match for our *Katyusha*.' It is possible that the Germans have captured whole *Katyushas*—but probably without the ammunition."

And when I think of all the picturesque stories one heard and read about the Cossacks, especially last summer, I must record Malinovsky's views on cavalry: "Cavalry is lovely, but if we had had more engines, we would have used less cavalry. It is very ineffective and costly."

And to conclude, this careful forecast for 1943:

"I am convinced that Germany will not be able to stage any offensive on the 1942 scale, but smaller advances, more limited in scope, are perfectly possible. A highly concentrated tank fist can always achieve results, if only temporary results."

On how far he thought the Russians would advance, he preferred not to say anything, except that Rostov would probably be taken. He did not want us to think the Russians were from now on going to have an easy time.

Later, the General treated us to a generous lunch, in the course of which he talked informally and wittily about his experiences in France in the last war. In the toast he addressed to us, he said:

"The sacrifices we are making in this war are unprecedented in history. But in spite of all the difficulties and sacrifices, I want to tell our comrades-in-arms that we shall achieve victory. Only, I want to ask every citizen of the freedom-loving countries to exert himself to the utmost. Victory is the sweetest moment in the life of every soldier, and I am sparing no effort to achieve it. We Soviet people realise the technical difficulties of the Second Front; we are, for the present, fighting without it, but we firmly believe that it will come very soon; our common victory depends on it. Your influence is great; show your people how pure and clear our aims and motives are. We want freedom—and let us not quibble over certain differences in our conception of freedom; these differences are a very secondary matter—and we want victory, so that there may be no war again."

Thus, in January 1943, in a village on the Don, spoke the future victor of Odessa, Bucharest and Budapest. His troops were already then on the road to Budapest, and at heart he knew it.

We were only five miles from the Don, and we went there in the late afternoon. The road, with a few bomb-craters, including one or two quite fresh ones, just off it, wound its way through rich agricultural country, with orchards everywhere. This was the country of Sholokov's *Quiet Flows the Don.* We were not far from Tsymlianskaya. At dusk we drove through a large *stanitsa,* with many people about, and with all the houses outwardly intact, and a mile or two after that we came to the banks of the Don. There was a little snow on the not very steep banks, and under the dark-blue evening sky, the river, three or four hundred yards wide, and inky-blue, ran rapidly to the west. At this point the Don was not quiet; it was rapid, and not frozen over. The mild weather had been a handicap to the Russian advance where the Don was concerned. This was the Don—the river on whose banks Hitler had come to grief. How many of his men, and how many Russians, had died on its banks, all the way from Voronezh to Rostov? But here all was quiet, under the clear evening sky. In the distance, a dog in the Cossack village was barking.

It was dark when we returned to General Malinovsky's headquarters. We were told that the crew o a unkers 88 had been captured only a few hours before. They had been on a reconnaissance flight, and had dropped a few bombs off the very road along which we had just come from the Don. So those were the fresh craters we had just seen. They were brought in—young fellows in smart leather coats; two of them looked rather like wolves in a cage; the third was rather more talkative. They had come from Rostov on a reconnaissance flight, but they always carried bombs; they had lost their bearings after an anti-aircraft shell had smashed one of their engines and put their wireless out of action. Clouds were very low. They unloaded their bombs, but still could not avoid a forced landing. They thought they were somewhere near Kotelnikovo, and walked across the country, hoping to reach the German lines. "But the Germans are a hundred miles from Kotelnikovo now," somebody said. The airman shrugged his shoulders. "One always has to try," he said. The rest was on the usual lines. Although the British had suffered a "terrible defeat at Dieppe," he thought there would be a Second Front in 1943. "The people in France are unfriendly, but they'll just have to get used to us." "The best Russian fighter is the L.A.G.; it's very like the Spitfire." As they were taken away, one of the little wolves in the cage gave a Hitler salute.

We spent the rest of the evening talking to some Russian soldiers of one of the guards units. They had some amazing stories to tell of bold reconnaissance raids in which they had taken part, complete with the capture of "tongues"—that is, of live prisoners who were then made to talk.

The most picturesque story was told by a Tartar who had taken part in ferocious hand-to-hand fighting inside a village, where he and some of his comrades fought nine Germans inside a cellar. Three of the Russians were killed, and all the Germans. Four of these had been knifed by this Tartar lad. He produced the knife he had used, a small dagger, much more harmless than a kitchen knife to look at.

I don't know what there is about such stories; they are exciting to listen to; but they make poor reading. They are essentially personal stories, inseparable somehow from the man who tells them. One has to watch his face and

his gestures as he tells it, one has to listen to his voice. Russian soldiers are picturesque story-tellers; everything is idiomatic; translated into ordinary English, the story loses half its vitality. The same is even truer of the Tartar lad; he spoke with a Tartar accent, and with a certain Asiatic ferociousness which no words can render. There was something strangely medieval in the gory scene in the cellar he described, with his dark narrow eyes flashing angrily. And yet, there was also a fine human touch in his story. "What made me really mad," he said, "was that the Fritzes should have murdered the old woman in the house because they thought she had denounced them to us. A poor old woman, very, very old. There she lay in a pool of blood, with three bullets through her head."

We drove through the moonlit night back to Kotelnikovo. All went well until suddenly the bus gave a sharp jolt and the driver, swearing horribly, announced that he had landed the front wheels in a hole in the ice. We had just begun to cross a narrow stream and the ice had given way. We were ten miles from Kotelnikovo. We all got out of the bus, and pulled and shoved, but it was no good. Around was the bare steppe, and it had now begun to snow heavily. Colonel Tarantsev drove up in his small car. "Come on," he said to me, "let's go to Kotelnikovo; we'll get some cars to bring the people home, and a tractor to pull out the damned bus; all this amateur pulling is a waste of time." So he and I and the lanky sergeant and a comic Bessarabian driver drove back to Kotelnikovo.

But that wasn't the end of our troubles. In the blizzard every house looked like any other. We drove along one street, and then another street, and then we found ourselves in the middle of the steppe again. Then we seemed to go in a circle. Several times we passed a broken-down German tank—always the same one. Each time we passed the tank the Bessarabian driver grew more and more hilarious. The sergeant kept clamouring for the church. "It's a landmark—we can find our way once we've found the church." The driver said he didn't know where to look for the church. The Colonel grumbled because I had sat on the box of German cigars the General had given him. Now and then Colonel and sergeant would jump out and look in vain for somebody. Then they would swear at the driver, who'd answer back: "You don't know the way, and I don't know the way; I haven't been here any longer than you. So why get nervous?" Or else there was this sort of dialogue:

The Colonel and the Sergeant (in chorus): Why are you turning right? Why not left?

Driver: I don't mind. I'll go left if you like.

Colonel: Don't talk like that, you fool! Don't you know where you are going?

Driver: No. Do you?

Colonel: You talk far too much. That's the trouble with you. Why don't you do something?

Driver: You told me to go right—or left? Which?

Colonel: I don't know. Stop! Stop, you fool! (He and Sergeant get out. Blizzard gets worse and worse.)

Driver (to me): Don't you think they are crazy? They keep telling me I am driving them out of town, and we're right in the middle of it.

I: How do you know?

Driver: Looks like it, doesn't it?

I: No, it doesn't.

Colonel and Sergeant, who have had a long talk with driver of an army lorry, return.

Colonel: It's all right now. We've got to take the second on the right.

We drive on.

Colonel: Stop ! Stop! Where the hell are you going? You've driven us right out of town for the third time.

Driver (hilariously): I went where you told me to.

Colonel: You are talking too much. No more of your cheek. There's a sentry. Stop!

Sentry with bayonet: You can't go along this street. It's blocked. Where's your pass?

Colonel: Don't be silly. Where's Lenin Street?

Sentry: Never heard of it.

Colonel (getting desperate): This is awful. There are only newly arrived soldiers in the place, and nobody knows anything. Are there no local inhabitants in this town?

After passing the shadowy outline of the German tank five more times, and presumably crossing Lenin Street four more times, we at last get back to Lenin Street and finally reach our destination after driving for an hour in a circle.

We found that somebody had already sent a lorry to our rescue, and that the rest of the party could be expected back shortly. The Colonel asked me to his room, in a small but comfortable house near our canteen. It was much more prosperous-looking than Elena Nikolaevna's. In the corner stood a large whatnot filled with china teacups and various silver objects, which must have been hidden away during the occupation. The place belonged to an elderly couple, with one small child, presumably a grandchild. There were rugs on the walls and a great display of family photographs, and the room was lit by a large cosy kerosene lamp. The Colonel grumbled: "If that fellow had carried on like that for another five minutes I would have put him under arrest, I swear!" "No, I don't think you would." The Colonel, seeing the comic side of it, laughed. "No, perhaps not," he said.

In the Colonel's room was a tall fair young man, a lieutenant speaking with a soft Ukrainian accent. He was interested in London, in the London blitz, in the Arctic convoys. For the next hour it was my turn to do all the talking.

In the end, inevitably, we got on to the subject of Hess.

The Lieutenant: Why, I ask you, why? *Pravda* said in no uncertain terms what it thought of the Hess affair. Perhaps the Germans are blackmailing you with the British prisoners, and you haven't enough German prisoners—is that it? Anyway, it's all a bit fishy, don't you think?

I tried to convince him that there was nothing fishy about it; I don't know if I fully succeeded.

At last all the others returned, and after supper Edgar and I went home through the thick blizzard.

We were to leave by air the next morning, but with the blizzard thicker than ever, it was out of the question. There was such deep snow on all the roads that it was no use trying to reach Leninsk by road in less than three days. To try to drive at night would be just impossible; one could hardly distinguish the roads in daylight. Nothing much to do, except talk to Gai, and play poker in the Colonel's room, with German tommy-gun bullets as chips. The Colonel had a good hussar manner of gambling.

In the afternoon Edgar said he would like to talk to some more people in

the town. He and I went up to the railway-station, where we saw many smashed-up railway-trucks. On our way there we passed a soldiers' barracks, with several fellows standing outside. Edgar said: "Let's go and talk to these guys." The sentry with bayonet looked at us disapprovingly, as we looked at the field-kitchen, and asked what they were having for supper. So to say something more, I remarked: "Here's an American who wants to talk to you." They looked on non-committally. Edgar said something in pidgin Russian. One of the soldiers grinned, but said nothing. Edgar lost his temper: "Why don't *you* say something?" I said I had, but it wasn't much good. "Oh, hell, then why don't *they* say something? Wouldn't a bunch of American soldiers be pleased if a Russian came up and said 'hullo' to them?" I don't know why I thought that funny, and laughed. "Don't be an ass," said Edgar, as he walked off. However, we got a "story." Opposite the barracks were two modern brick privies, and one of them was marked: "Nur für Offiziere."

My new friend the Ukrainian lieutenant was with us at supper that night, and he and the tall fair girl who was serving us—she could have passed for a society débutante in London any day—sang doleful Ukrainian songs in a beautiful tenor and soprano duet. Then he sang some soldiers' songs, which suited his soft voice less well, and then he started on grand opera which was worse still—the Toreador song, and *Oneghin*, and whatnot. That's the trouble with so many amateur singers in all countries. We persuaded him to sing some more Ukrainian songs; they were sad and nostalgic, and every time he started the girl joined in. I think she was in love with him.

But it had become intolerably hot and stuffy in the small room, and I left before the party broke up. It was no longer snowing. It was a glorious starry night. The snow lay thick on the roofs of the little wooden houses of Kotelnikovo and the moon shone brightly on the deep snow between the little houses, and on the wide white steppe beyond. The onion dome of the church was glittering in the moonlight. All was perfectly peaceful; only a few army lorries were passing, with their headlights full on, and a few German planes, droning high in the starry sky, were still flying to Stalingrad.

(e) SARATOV

The next morning—January 12—we left Kotelnikovo by air. We had said good-bye to Elena Nikolaevna, and Gai, and Babushka, and had promised to write to each other. There was some excitement that morning about a large bomb which was said to have landed at 2 a.m. quite near our canteen, but without going off. There was some speculation on what would have happened if it had. I don't know if anybody actually saw the bomb, though Elena Nikolaevna claimed to have heard it coming down, "whistling like a railway-train." Flying low over Kotelnikovo, we could see the church and the familiar streets, and even identify the little house where we had lived. Three fighters were escorting us. It was infernally cold in the Douglas, which had been turned into a transport plane, and, to increase its carrying capacity by 600 kg., had been stripped not only of its soft seats, but also of its heating apparatus.

The original idea was to fly all the way to Moscow, but it was too late. Instead, we flew to Leninsk, and then to Saratov. No longer escorted by fighters, we flew over the Kirghiz Steppes; there was incomparably more snow now than when we had come down by train. Here and there we flew over some brown mud huts, but most of the time it was like flying over a boundless

frozen sea. After crossing the Volga once more we landed at Saratov aerodrome about 3 p.m. A fierce east wind was blowing across the airfield, making the twenty-eight degrees centigrade almost unbearable. We hurried to the aerodrome waiting-room, with its welcome iron stove in the middle, and waited for some time until Saratov had made arrangements to receive its unexpected visitors.

At dusk we drove in a rickety bus to the comfortable "guest house" belonging to the Saratov Town Council. The outskirts of Saratov were composed of wooden houses, but the centre, with tree-lined avenues, looked very European. The "guest house" was in a fairly large mansion, in one of the main streets of Saratov; it must have been built by one of Saratov's shipping or fishery magnates. It had large comfortable bedrooms, running water, and a real lavatory. We were back in Europe, as somebody remarked.

I don't know why, but again it was the Secretary of the Saratov Railwaymen's Union who was acting as our host, a podgy little man, a real northerner, born on the banks of the Sukhona River, up there in the northern forests, towards Archangel. He felt something of an exile here; he had lived all his life in the north—at Archangel, at Murmansk, at Leningrad; he disliked the steppes. But he spoke highly of Saratov. "Saratov," he said, "was certainly the finest of the Volga cities in peace-time. Life was gay and pleasant here. It's a well-planned city, with fine streets, squares, good buildings, and a lot of gardens. It had lots of restaurants and places of entertainment, and a first-class opera. At night the city used to be brilliantly illuminated—you could see it miles away. . . . They were also going to build a promenade along the Volga—just as they did at Stalingrad, but the war prevented it. A rich city; and it always was a rich city," he said. "The Volga bourgeoisie greatly favoured Saratov, in the old days, much more than Samara—Kuibyshev, I mean—they built lots of fine houses here, all these rich fisheries and shipping people. It is nearer the Caspian than Samara, so they preferred it."

He also talked of the rich agricultural country on the other side of the Volga; that was where the Germans used to live till they were deported at the beginning of the war for their Fifth Column activities. "They were enormously rich, some of these German farmers, and hard-working, no doubt about it, but greedy and grasping. Before the Revolution the Blue Label wheat flour of Saratov was considered the best in Russia. . . ." He also told me that, instead of the normal 600,000 inhabitants, Saratov now had about a million people, that everything was very crowded, and that there were often considerable food difficulties. So many universities and scientific organisations had been evacuated from Leningrad and elsewhere, that the place was now called "Professaratov." A little later, he came along and said that we had all been invited by the Director of the Saratov Opera to to-night's performance of the *Queen of Spades*.

The singing was no more than fair, but the orchestra good, and the production interesting in many details—better in some respects than the over-elaborate Moscow production. During the interval we met Comrade Ganerin, who had been the director of the opera since 1933, and President of the Lower Volga Federation of Art Workers. He was tall, dark, and very enthusiastic and enterprising. He took me into his study, with its old-fashioned mantelpiece ornaments, such as bronze elks, an enormous inkstand, and masses of actors' photographs and portraits, many of them seventy or eighty years old, and framed theatrical bills of 1880 or so.

"This is a famous opera house," he said, "seventy-five years old, the

nursery of many of our operatic geniuses. Chaliapin sang here as a young man. This is one of the four operas on the Volga—the others are at Kazan, Gorki and Kuibyshev. But ours is the most famous." I complimented him on his production of the *Queen of Spades*. "I should *say* it's good," he exclaimed, "it's the production of the Moscow Art Theatre. Old Nemirovich-Danchenko did everything to extend the influence of the M.A.T. to opera and even operetta; that's why he started his own opera in Moscow, as you know. But our singing, of course, is not what it should be. A provincial opera is in just a hopeless position. We've got a wonderful young soprano now; but I'll bet you anything Moscow is going to snatch her up in a month or two. It's been the same with a dozen first-class people we've had. Will you and your friends stay here till to-morrow?" he suddenly said. "If you do, I'll put on a really interesting show, and I'd like you to write about it in the foreign Press. It's Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans*, which we in Saratov have revived after forty years. A great Tchaikovsky work, and quite unknown. First produced in 1879, but long since fallen into oblivion. We tried to revive it a few years ago, but there were religious objections. Now we have been allowed to do it. Music lovers abroad should know about it. I'll change to-morrow's programme if you say yes." I said that we were unfortunately flying off to Moscow in the morning, but I hoped that we might have another chance of meeting him, either here or in Moscow, and that perhaps next time, etc. We little knew. . . .

We flew off the next day, but we did not reach Moscow. It was over thirty degrees centigrade that morning, and inside the plane about twenty-five degrees. I blessed my dogcoat and *valenki* and the great big navy-blue scarf Lucky Billie of North Shields had presented me with, one day off the north coast of Iceland—may the dear old thing who knitted this navy comfort not blame Lucky Billie for having surrendered it into the hands of a landlubber; heaven knows he needed it that day. Others were less adequately clothed; vodka alone kept them alive. Three and a half hours to Moscow. It was so cold inside the plane that the windows did not freeze over. First, the sunlit steppes, and then woods, more and more of them. The villages, which looked half-submerged in snow, grew more numerous too. "Another hour, and we'll be there, thank God," somebody groaned. And then the signal came from Moscow that owing to mist, no planes were accepted at the airfield there, and we must go back to Saratov. Two and a half more hours of this misery—five hours in all. The navy comfort which I had wrapped round my head to protect ears and nose was stiff with ice wherever I had breathed on it. It was good to see Saratov again!

At the club, there was a middle-aged captain, to whom the railwaymen's secretary introduced me. I don't know how we got on to the subject of Poland, perhaps because the Captain had started the war "at Lwow, in the Western Ukraine." "Geography and history," he said, a trifle sententiously, "have determined the Polish character. It isn't their fault, it's just bad luck. But their character is a bad character. All this talk about a Greater Poland is tripe. They are only a small nation, really, so why talk as if they were a Great Power? Their *szlachta* class still considers itself the ruling class of Poland. These people have learned nothing; and it's a pity they are being encouraged by the British and the Americans." "You wouldn't let them have Lwow?" I asked. "No." "But East Prussia—with the Germans kicked out—would you let the Poles have *it*?" "Yes," said the Captain, "there's a lot to be said for that. But if the Poles want our support, they've got to realise that their only hope

is to be on good terms with us. They've got to be friends with somebody. They can't stand alone. Pilsudski, with his tight-rope dance, was an absurd historical freak. You can do a tight-rope dance for a year, or ten years; you can't *live* on a tight-rope." I felt the Captain was much too hard on the Poles, but that there was something in his last remark—in fact, quite a lot.

At the opera they were playing the *Barber of Seville*. Why should any theatrical director ever want to produce the *Barber* when, with practically the same cast, he can produce *Figaro*? When we saw the director, he said: "Oh dear, oh dear, what a pity I didn't know you were coming. I really would have put on the *Maid of Orleans* if I'd known in time."

Saratov, essentially the "high-class evacuee" city on the Volga (Kuibyshev was merely "for foreigners"), was also, in its own way, part of the Russia of 1942–3. Infinitely different from Stalingrad, one hundred miles down the river, or from Kotelnikovo; but still part of the same show—*Barber of Seville* and all!

(*f*) THE COLONEL'S UNSENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

It was decided that evening that we would not wait for flying weather, but go back to Moscow by train that same night. How these things are arranged, I don't know, but when we arrived at the blacked-out station, there was a wagon-lits waiting for us. It was a completely uneventful journey, and the carriage was deliciously warm after our five-hour torture in the air. It was over thirty degrees centigrade outside the next day, and the countryside, deep in snow, and with the trees covered with hoarfrost, and the shadows on the snow dark blue under a bright blue sunny sky, and with clouds of white smoke rising from the village chimneys, had an idyllic fairy-tale beauty. I could stand for hours at the window watching this delicate white and blue landscape of the Russian winter. Now and then I'd see a huddled-up peasant figure in *valenki* wandering along a snowy road—it was like something out of Nekrasov's *Moroz Krasnyi Nos*, that greatest poem of the Russian winter, when Russian nature, in its beautiful but death-like trance, is ruled by Frost, the red-nosed monarch.

One evening I joined Colonel Tarantsev in his compartment. That always lively and cheerful little man now spoke to me with strange earnestness. "Tell me your life-story, Colonel," I had said to him. "Do you really want me to? After all, why not? It'll give you some idea of the hard school through which so many of us Soviet chaps have gone. . . . Well, to begin with, my father was murdered by the Whites in 1919. He was a man with a lot of guts. He was a worker at Kiev, but in 1919, during the Civil War, he commanded a Red partisan detachment in the Ukraine. During Denikin's advance on Kiev in June, he and his detachment went off to a village which, they thought, was not occupied by the Whites. When they arrived there from their headquarters, they found that there were, indeed, no troops in the village. But at night, a detachment of Whites rode into the village and one of the local *kulaks* gave the Reds away. The Whites attacked the houses where they were, massacred part of them, and captured the others, including my father. They kept them locked up till the morning, and in the morning they proceeded to torture them, in order to find out where the partisan headquarters was, and how many Red partisans there were. They would give away nothing. Then the *kulak* pointed at my father, and said that he was the chief. So they concentrated on my father.

With their tortures they reduced him to such a state that he lost consciousness, but he also said nothing. The Whites then took them all outside the village, and standing them along the edge of a ravine, they shot them all. My father was so weak, he could not stand up, so they simply shot him through the head. With a volley of rifle-fire they shot the rest. My father's brother received a bullet through the thigh, and falling down the ravine, he pretended to be dead. When the Whites had gone, he crawled on to the road, where the local peasants picked him up. They hid him in a field, and at night they took him in a cart to the Reds. That same night the Reds raided the village where my father had been murdered. They killed all the Whites—Cossacks and Denikinites—and took away the bodies of the Reds who had been killed. I was then eight years old. I was present at their funeral in our town. My father's body was covered with large semi-circular bruises, and was riddled with bayonet gashes. They were buried in the presence of a large crowd—local inhabitants and soldiers. I still have the shirt in which my father was killed."

"I suppose," I said, "the régime kept changing quite a lot in the Ukraine during those years."

"Yes," said the Colonel, "it was really fantastic, the atmosphere in which I spent my boyhood. We had the Germans and the Hungarians, and later there was a whole succession of 'bands'—Petlurovites, and 'Green' peasant bands, and then more or less regular Whites, and then the Reds, and then the Whites again. At first I went to a parish school; we had a very fat priest there who would rap us over the knuckles with a ruler. This school soon came to an end. Later, when the Civil War was already in full swing, I went to a so-called People's Labour School they had opened in the building of the vodka distillery. Ours was a great sugar-beet district, with many sugar refineries and also this vodka distillery. But by that time the bands had already drunk up all the vodka. The teachers were liberal-minded, were glad that the Tsar had been deposed, and talked about Government by the People, though they seem to have had only a vague idea of what that meant. This is the sort of thing that frequently happened during those years. We'd have our first lesson in the morning; then there'd be some kind of rumpus outside, and we'd be taken downstairs into the cellar, where the teacher would talk to us about the life we would all lead after the war. Then, after a couple of hours of sitting in the cellar, the teacher would go out to make inquiries, and then he'd come back and say that authority in the town had changed hands. 'So now,' he would say, 'you'd better all go home till we find out what's what.'"

"Did you see many atrocities during those years?"

"Any amount. There were eight venerable old Jews living in our little town. Old Jews of the patriarchal kind. When the Petlurovites arrived they murdered them, cut their bellies open, cut off their genitals, and left the bodies lying in the market-place, and warned that anyone who attempted to take them away would be shot. Also, one day when I was seven years old, I saw six men, stripped to the waist, being chased down the street, and beaten with sticks, with barbed wire at the end. With each stroke on the bare back a piece of flesh went. You can understand the effect this sort of thing can have on a child's psychology. We were tough youngsters. One had to be tough. Rifles, revolvers, hand-grenades were our regular playthings. When I was only six I was badly whipped by a Hungarian officer because I had stolen a rifle I needed for our daily games. I remember three things about the Hungarians: how I was flogged by this great big brute of an officer; then, how when they first arrived, they confiscated all the eggs and would gorge themselves on omelettes made of ten

eggs per head. And the third thing I remember is the drink the Hungarian soldiers would make for themselves—half a tumbler of vodka, half a tumbler of vinegar, and sugar added. . . . The Ukraine was in a state of chaos. The Soviet authorities were in control of Kiev, but fifteen miles from Kiev the Tripolye tragedy took place."

"What was that?"

"It was one of the worst things that happened in the Civil War. The regiment of the Kiev Komsomol was sent to Tripolye to liquidate the Green band who were occupying Tripolye. Tripolye was a large *kulak* village on the steep right bank of the Dnieper. When the Komsomol regiment, composed of lads and girls, were approaching Tripolye, the Greens beat it. The Reds entered the village, and all went to sleep. At night the Greens attacked the village, massacred part of the Reds and captured the others. It was not unlike what happened to my father's partisans. In the morning the orgy of tortures began—they cut off the lads' fingers and ears and noses, they raped the girls, then they tied them together with wire in twos or threes and threw them down the steep bank into the river. Some of the tortures went on for nearly two days. Over a thousand Reds were exterminated in this way. Only one man managed to untie himself when with two others he was thrown into the Dnieper. He swam to the other bank and our people picked him up. He was the only survivor of the Tripolye tragedy. I used to hear a lot about it when I was a boy. . . ."

"And how did things settle themselves in the end?"

"With the N.E.P. things settled down. Many of the people from the Green bands disappeared, or else assumed humble and innocuous airs. But sometimes it was learned what they had done in the past, and our justice was ruthless. The sentences that were passed on such bandits were received with great satisfaction by the people."

"And what did *you* do?"

"My mother and I were very poor after father's death, and at fourteen I went to Dniepropetrovsk to start to earn a living. I was interested in engineering and I was taken on as an apprentice at the Karl Liebknecht works. I got on well, and the foremen liked me. But a year later, yearning for the south, I went off to the Crimea, where I worked in the vineyards. I liked to roam around the country, to climb the Crimean mountains. Later I got a job as a messenger boy at the Palace of Labour at Evpatoria, the great seaside resort. One day, while I was on one of my errands, I decided to have a bathe in the sea; and while I was bathing my clothes and all the parcels were stolen. I was sacked in disgrace.

"But I had been studying science—especially physics and algebra, and the Chairman of the Children's Friends helped me—though I had been sacked. He also convinced me that it was high time I started working in earnest. I went home to mother. She was receiving a tiny pension, had a small vegetable plot and two or three chickens. My younger brother was still at school. I was seventeen then. I tried for the entrance examination of the Kiev Polytechnic—the stiffest of all the exams. At first they refused to consider me as a candidate, 'you're a mere infant,' they said. But I passed the exam and received a bursary, and things went well after that. My success created quite a sensation in our little town. In 1929 I developed a keen interest in the army; I served for four months as a private, then I was promoted to company commander; then I went to the Military Academy, where I specialised in aircraft signalling and other things. When the war began I developed an interest in strategic problems generally, I commanded a regiment on the

Central Front, took part in two big attacks, and was once wounded. I also fought in the Ukraine and remained at the front till last November. Then I was appointed to the General Staff, and now I have just wasted a fortnight, taking you people on a trip. I'm going back to my real work now."

Such was the life story of a Russian staff officer—a story not unlike that of Pavel Korchagin, the hero of Nicholas Ostrovsky's famous novel. He was no hothouse plant. He had seen life in the raw; he had been flogged by a Hungarian officer when he was six. He had seen his father's tortured body when he was seven, and hand-grenades had been toys in his nursery. Yet, if you did not know his history, he was just pleasant, jovial "pussyface," who was good fun at a game of poker—with German bullets as chips.

We returned to Moscow on Saturday evening, January 16, and for a fortnight went back to the old routine. Then we went to Stalingrad.

Some weeks later I learned that Colonel Tarantsev had gone back to the front. A few months later he returned to Moscow, badly wounded—I visited him in hospital. He recovered, but was never well enough to return to the front again. After that, occasionally, we used to run into each other in Moscow.

He was still "pussyface," full of good stories and wisecracks, but rather cursing his luck for not being "out there," now that the war was *really* becoming "great fun."

CHAPTER III

STALINGRAD: THE AGONY

THE German troops inside Stalingrad had nothing more to hope for. Their last hope was gone about the time that tank crew in Gai's house were having their Christmas celebration. Not that the troops themselves were yet aware of it. The whole ghastly truth was slow in penetrating into the thick German skulls; the officers kept telling them not to be unduly disturbed by the rapidly diminishing food rations; the Führer would see to it that everything turned out all right, and, in any case, their presence at Stalingrad was continuing to be a great embarrassment to the Russians, and in the general scheme of things, a great service to the Führer and the Fatherland.

The Germans at Stalingrad had been encircled since November 23, and their food and munition stores were running down, and the attempt to maintain them at a reasonably high level by means of transport planes only led to an appalling slaughter of such aircraft, and to no improvement in the food situation. In the middle of December the troops began to eat up what was left of the Rumanian cavalry division's horses.

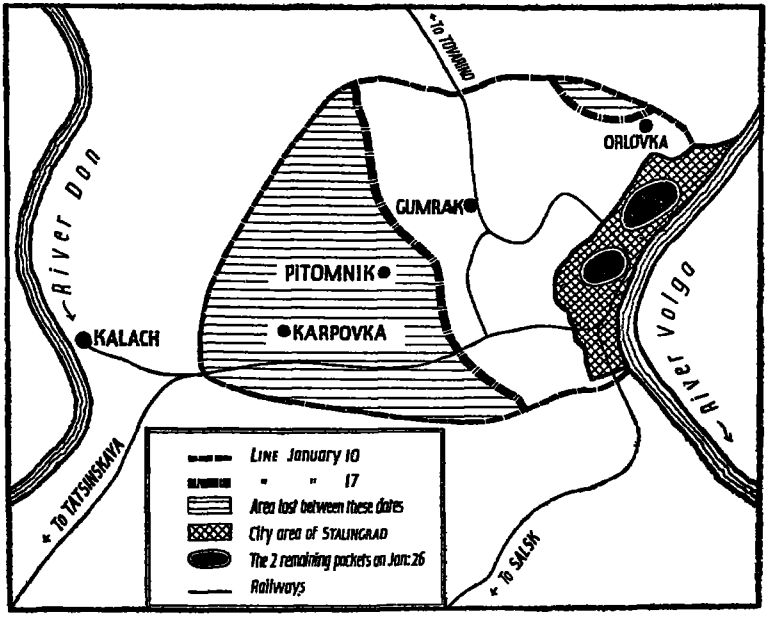
At the end of December Grossman wrote one of his best pen-pictures of Stalingrad, showing how it had changed since the Russian offensive had begun.

The Volga froze on December 16, and the smashed barges are lying there, frozen into the ice. . . . This is a new chapter of the Stalingrad battle. The battle now is one of long lulls and sharp clashes; it is no longer that elemental roar that filled the whole country around the Volga. Shells from guns and mortars are battering German pillboxes, and searching for German machine-gunners hiding deep down in camouflaged dugouts. The Germans have crawled into deep holes and stone cellars; they have crawled into concrete water tanks, into wells and sewage pipes, into underground tunnels. Only a well-aimed explosive or thermite shell can get at them there.

It is morning. The sun is shining on the stone ruins of the factories, on those factory yards which had become battlefields for whole regiments and divisions; it is lighting up the edges of those enormous craters made by one-ton bombs. The bottoms of those pits are dark and frightening, and the sunshine avoids touching them. But it shines through the holes in the factory chimneys and on to the marshalling yards, where cisterns lie like dead horses with their bellies ripped open, and hundreds of goods carriages are piled one on top of the other. . . . It shines on the twisted metal girders of the factories, red with rust, and on the common graves of our soldiers who fell in the area of the main German drive. Now improvised little memorials have been erected on these graves. . . .

This is holy soil. How one longs to remember for ever this new city of triumphant freedom that has risen from the ruins of the other Stalingrad!—

this new city, with its underground dwellings and its chimneys smoking in the sun . . . with its hundreds of people in padded coats, and greatcoats, and fur caps with earflaps, busy with the sleepless work of war, carrying shells under their arms like loaves of bread, peeling potatoes beside a large gun pointed at the enemy; or singing softly, or mildly swearing at each other, or telling of the night skirmish with hand-grenades—these men, so magnificent and yet so routine-like in their heroism. . . . How one wants to remember this wonderful living panorama of the defence of Stalingrad, these living minutes of a great To-day which is about to become the To-morrow of an immortal page of history.



Stalingrad Pocket.

The truth is that the Germans were short of munitions; and this made an enormous difference to the defenders of Stalingrad. It was now almost safe to carry the large thermos dishes of soup to the front-line troops—to carry them walking erect forty yards away from the German lines; it was equally safe—according to Stalingrad standards of safety—for whole convoys of horse-carts to cross the Volga ice in daylight.

Yes (Grossman wrote), our soldiers have conquered the sun, they have conquered the daylight, they have conquered the right to walk erect over Stalingrad soil. For many months past the tiniest moving speck brought upon

itself the heavy fire of German guns. For many months, thousands of men waited for nightfall to emerge for a moment from under the stones and the earth to gulp down a breath of fresh air, and stretch their stiff arms. Everything has changed. . . . And those Germans who in September broke into houses and danced there to the loud music of mouth-organs, and who drove about at night with their headlights full on, and who, in broad daylight, would bring up their shells in lorries—these Germans are now hiding among the stone ruins. . . . Now there is no sun for them. Their daily ration is twenty-five to thirty cartridges a day; and they have been ordered to fire only when attacked. Their food ration is 100 grams of bread and a little horseflesh. There, like savages grown over with wool, they sit in their stone caves, gnawing at a horse's bone—down there, in the muggy darkness, among the ruins of the beautiful city they have destroyed, among the dead workshops of factories, which were once the pride of our Soviet country. . . . Fearful days and nights have now come to them. . . . Here, among the dark, cold ruins, with no water, and only scraps of horseflesh to eat, they will meet with vengeance; they will meet with it under the cruel stars of the Russian winter night.

Such was the outlook inside Stalingrad itself; it was no better in the open steppes, nearer the centre of the "ring," at Gumrak, or that airfield of Pitomnik which so few of the Junkers 52's succeeded in reaching.

The Germans were being driven far away from Stalingrad—into the Salsk Steppes in the south-west, towards the Donetz and beyond in the west, and the German troops at Stalingrad were now hopelessly isolated. During the first ten days of January, the Soviet forces, under General Rokossovsky and General of Artillery Voronov were now preparing, in the steppes between the Don and the Volga, for the final onslaught.

But Voronov and Rokossovsky knew that the Germans still had much equipment inside the Stalingrad ring, and that it might be a hard and costly battle; therefore, on January 8, they sent this ultimatum to von Paulus:

To Colonel-General Paulus, Commander of the German Sixth Army, or his assistant, and to all the officers and men of the German forces surrounded at Stalingrad:

The German Sixth Army, formations of the Fourth Tank Army, and units sent to them as reinforcements have been completely surrounded since November 23, 1942.

The Red Army forces have surrounded this grouping of German troops in a solid ring. All hopes that your troops might be saved by a German offensive from the south and south-west have collapsed; the German troops rushed to your assistance have been routed by the Red Army and their remnants are now retreating towards Rostov.

Owing to the successful, swift advance of the Red Army, the German air transport force which kept you supplied with starvation rations of food, ammunition and fuel, is being frequently compelled to shift its bases and to fly long distances to reach you. Moreover, the German air transport force is suffering tremendous losses in planes and crews at the hands of the Russian Air Force. Its help to the surrounded forces is becoming ineffective.

Your surrounded troops are in a grave position. They are suffering from hunger, disease and cold. The severe Russian winter is only beginning. The hard frosts, cold winds and blizzards are still to come, and your soldiers are not protected by warm uniforms and live in extremely unhygienic conditions.

You, as the commander, and all the officers of the surrounded troops, must fully realise that you have no chance of breaking through the ring that surrounds you. Your position is hopeless and further resistance is useless.

In view of the hopeless position in which you are placed, and in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, we offer you the following terms of capitulation:

All the surrounded German forces under the command of yourself and your staff are to cease hostilities.

All the troops, arms, equipment and war supplies are to be turned over to us in an organised manner and in good condition.

We guarantee life and safety to all officers and soldiers who cease hostilities, and upon termination of the war their return to Germany or to any country to which the prisoners-of-war may choose to go.

All troops who surrender will retain their uniforms, insignia and orders, personal belongings, valuables and, in the case of higher officers, their side-arms.

All officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers who surrender will be provided with normal food.

All wounded, sick and those suffering from frostbite will be given medical treatment.

Your reply is expected by 10 a.m. Moscow time on January 9, 1943, in written form, to be delivered by your personal representative who is to travel by passenger car, flying a white flag, along the road from Konny siding to the station of Kotluban. Your representative will be met by authorised Russian officers in the district of B, half a kilometre south-east of siding 564 at 10 a.m. on January 9, 1943.

Should you reject our proposal for capitulation, we warn you that the Red Army troops and the Red Air Force will be compelled to take steps to wipe out the surrounded German troops, and that you will be responsible for their annihilation.

Colonel-General of Artillery Voronov, representative of the general headquarters of the Supreme Command of the Red Army.
Lieutenant-General Rokossovsky, commander of the troops of the Don Front.

The ultimatum was rejected. But not quite offhand. The German generals must have taken time to consult Berlin and to think it over. For much later, Russian officers who were in Stalingrad told me that after the presentation of the Russian ultimatum, there was an uncanny one-hour truce, when no gun was fired by either side. And not only official Russian envoys but some other Russians (including one staff officer whom I know) ventured right across the no-man's land and actually talked to some Germans, urging them to lay down their arms.

The troops in the Stalingrad pocket were all German, with the exception of one Rumanian infantry and one Rumanian cavalry division. How many were there altogether?

Writing of the operation in retrospect, Colonel Zamiatin gives the following facts and figures:

Of these twenty-two divisions, nineteen were front-line divisions; two of the tank divisions (the Fourteenth and the Twenty-fourth) constituted the general reserve. Apart from the combatant units, there were numerous auxiliary units —those of the Todt Organisation, transport and bridge-building units, etc. In the course of the fighting these units were being gradually dissolved and their men drafted into the ordinary infantry.

At the time of the encirclement, the total number of men in the Stalingrad group was 330,000.[1]

But by January 10—at the time the liquidation began, there were only 250,000 left, about 80,000 officers and men having been killed in the November and December battles, or having died of hunger, frostbite or infectious diseases.

The food situation had become extremely critical. By January 1 all the horses of the First Rumanian cavalry division had been eaten. The soldiers were reduced to eating cats and dogs, and crows and dead horses. The daily ration had been gradually reduced to 150 grams of bread and 30 grams of fats. Later, after January 20, the Rumanians' rations were cancelled altogether.

All the attempts to supply the encircled troops by air had failed; in the Russian air blockade round Stalingrad, the Germans lost in a short time as many as 600 transport planes.

The shortage of munitions compelled the German Command to reduce the use of mortars and field artillery, and German bombers, now based on distant airfields in the Voroshilovgrad, Rostov and Stalino areas, could no longer help. Only small German fighter formations could operate from the Stalingrad airfields.

Such was the position when the Voronov–Rokossovsky ultimatum was presented to von Paulus.

Why did the Germans reject this ultimatum?

The answer to this is that the German generals at Stalingrad had received the categorical order from the German Supreme Command to fight on at any price.

The Russians intercepted this personal order from Hitler, which was issued early in December, but which apparently still held good:

The Battle of Stalingrad has reached its climax. The enemy has broken into the German rear, and is desperately trying to recapture the important fortress on the Volga. Under the leadership of your generals you must hold Stalingrad in all circumstances—that Stalingrad conquered at such heavy cost in blood. That must be your firm resolve. As for myself, I shall do all within my power to support you in your heroic struggle.

[1] In January, before the final victory, some conflicting figures were quoted on the Russian side. This was due to a confusion between the estimated number of Germans surrounded on November 23, and the estimated number of men still alive on January 10—and the death rate among the Germans was high. Further confusion arose through the non-inclusion in some reports of non-combatant personnel (or what had been, before January 10, non-combatant personnel; later, nearly everybody became a "combatant"). Finally, there were also errors in Russian reconnaissance.

Even when all the attempts to break through to the encircled troops had failed, the German High Command continued to demand that they go on resisting at any price. By that time the High Command knew that the encircled troops were doomed in any case, and that the only purpose they could now serve was to tie up at Stalingrad as many Russian troops as possible, and for as long as possible.

Of the morale of the German troops at the time, Colonel Zamiatin wrote:

The morale of these troops was not high. In order to deal with the growing tendency among the German troops to surrender *en masse*, the Stalingrad command scared them with horror stories about "Bolshevik captivity in Siberia." To keep up morale as far as possible, rumours were deliberately circulated of a coming German break-through from outside; and the rout of the Kotelnikovo group or that of the Italian Eighth Army and the Rumanian Third Army were passed over in silence. The German Command also resorted to direct intimidation. "I order by every means at your disposal, including exemplary executions, to prevent any talk of capitulation by either officers or soldiers," General von Daniell, the Commander of the 371st infantry division, wrote. By means of optimistic rumours, intimidation and direct repressions, the German Command succeeded in maintaining the fighting capacity of the encircled troops—and made them, indeed, fight with desperation at the beginning of our final Stalingrad offensive.

This fell into three stages. The main blow, in the first stage, was to be struck from the west, and the purpose of this was the destruction of the western and north-eastern part of the pocket; the second stage provided for the destruction of the "inner circle," comprising Gumrak, Peschanka and Stalingrad itself; the third stage provided for the final mopping-up operations. The initial blows were struck at the south and west parts of the pocket, the heaviest being that struck west at Dimitrievka, in the farthest western extremity of the pocket. Artillery and *katyushas* played a decisive part in these operations; the artillery concentration reaching 170 guns per kilometre in the sector of the main drive. The barrage, which began at 8.05 a.m. on January 10, lasted fifty-five minutes.

Of this stage of the battle, Zamiatin said:

The enemy suffered enormous casualties from our fire. Our infantry swiftly advanced through the enemy's front lines and continued to push on. At every step there were blackened German bodies, wrecked enemy guns and mortars, shattered dugouts and pillboxes. The country, white the day before, was now grey with soot and smoke and dotted with thousands of black shell-holes. In spite of these enormous losses, the enemy continued to resist. The German soldiers, frightened by "Russian atrocity" stories, continued to resist like hounded wolves. This fighting continued till January 13, when our troops captured the whole western part of the pocket and threw the Germans to the east bank of the Rassoshka and Chervlenaya Rivers, which meant a general advance in four days of between three and fifteen—but mostly about seven—kilometres along nearly the whole "ring"—north, west and south.

Sovinformbureau's "interim report" published on January 17th, showed that the advance had continued steadily, that the depth of the Russian penetration had now reached 20 to 35 kilometres, that thirty-two

places, including Pitomnik with its airfield, had been captured, a total area of 565 square kilometres. The number of Germans killed was put at 25,000, but the number of prisoners was still surprisingly low—6,896, which showed that the Germans were still fighting desperately hard.

The enormous difficulties the Russians had to overcome could be gauged from the number of firing-points and other strongholds destroyed: 1,260 pillboxes and fortified dugouts; 75 fortified observation posts; 317 gun and mortar batteries.

Most impressive of all, perhaps, was the booty taken, showing how well-equipped the German Stalingrad armies were: the following were captured (in good or bad condition) or destroyed: over 400 planes, over 600 tanks, over 1,300 guns; 610 mortars, including 50 six-barrel mortars; 2,600 machine-guns, 16,000 rifles, and, perhaps most significant of all, nearly 16,000 trucks, of which 15,551 were "captured," besides many other items. But among the booty there were no horses—these had all been eaten.

This "interim report," curiously enough, said that there were only 70,000 or 80,000 fighting troops left in the pocket—a curious error when one considers that by the end of the Stalingrad Battle more than that number were actually taken prisoner. The truth is that, a fortnight before the end, the Russians had won an even greater victory than they had expected! This report, incidentally, based its estimate on prisoners' statements that 1,500 were dying each day of hunger, diseases, and frostbite, among them 500 of hunger and frostbite alone—for the Germans were again without adequate winter clothes. The figure of 1,500 per day was, apparently, an exaggeration.

By January 17 the Germans were thrown back to the line which had been the former Russian line of the inner circle of Stalingrad's defences; they had now lost half the territory of the pocket. By the 24th the Russians reached the outskirts of Stalingrad, roughly the line they themselves had held on September 13. "The German troops, suffering incredible hardships," says Zamiatin, "now began to realise more fully the complete hopelessness of their position, and began to surrender in groups." On the 27th the advancing troops made their junction with the defenders of Stalingrad; it was a moving and dramatic moment of which much was written in the Press at the time. What was then left of the German forces was split in two groups. The southern group, with Field-Marshal von Paulus among them, was now encircled in the central part of Stalingrad proper; this group surrendered on January 31; the other group, in a small area in the northern part of Stalingrad, surrendered three days later. On February 2 all was over.

In the second "interim report" on January 27 Sovinformbureau said that 1,400 square kilometres had now been captured, and 2,146 strong-points, 115 observation posts, and 537 batteries destroyed since January 10. Sixty fortified localities and 9 railway-stations had been captured.

Over 40,000 Germans, said this interim report, had been killed since January 10, and 28,000 captured.

On February 2 the liquidation of the small southern pocket was announced. "It has now been established," said this official statement, "that on November 23, 330,000 men were encircled, apart from[1] the police and building units, and not 220,000 as previously stated."

"Between November 23 and January 10 the Germans lost through fighting, hunger, and disease, etc., 140,000 men. By January 10, of troops, plus police and Todt Organisation personnel, there were 190,000 men left. General Quartermaster of the Sixth Army, Colonel von Kulowski, stated that there were, on January 10, 195,000 men all told to take care of."

In the light of this figure our victory appears even greater than was expected. Between January 10 and 31 the number of prisoners taken is 46,000, among them the Commander of the Sixth Army and the Fourth Tank Army, General Field-Marshal von Paulus; and his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Schmidt. The statement added the names of the other generals captured, together with von Paulus—Lieutenant-General Schloemmer, Lieutenant-General Seydlitz, Lieutenant-General of Artillery Pfeffer, Lieutenant-General Sanne, Lieutenant-General Leyser, Lieutenant-General Korfes, Major-General Moritz Von Drebber, Lieutenant-General von Daniell; Lieutenant-General Dubois; Major-General Wolf, Major-General Ulrich, General of the Medical Corps Otto Rinaldi, and two Rumanian generals—Brigadier-Generals Dimitriu and Bratescu—sixteen in all—to begin with.[2]

The last pocket, north of Stalingrad, was, however, still holding out. Russian planes showered leaflets on this last group—leaflets showing photographs of von Paulus as a war prisoner. These leaflets had to be quickly made: there was no time and no facilities to manufacture a block; so each leaflet was literally "a real photograph" with a slip of red paper attached.

It was rage and despair that kept these last Germans in the northern pocket going for another three days. The starved, demoralised soldiers surrendered easily, but a handful of officers held on a little longer. After a final Russian onslaught on the morning of February 2, this last group of Germans surrendered, among them several more generals.

To the first list eight more were added: Colonel-General Strecker, and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Hellmuth Rosskurt; Colonel-General Walther Heitz, Lieutenant-General Von Rodenburg, Lieutenant-General Von Arnim, Lieutenant-General Von Lensky, Major-Generals Martin Lattmann, Raske and Magnus.

[1] This is apparently a slip—instead of "apart from," what was intended was "including."

[2] There may be some errors in the spelling of these names—for which I apologise. I chose the most likely variants of those that appeared in various lists published in Russia, and have had no opportunity of consulting any official German list of the "Stalingrad generals,"—if there is such a thing.

Thus, twenty-four generals had been captured and over 2,500 officers; the final number of prisoners, since January 10, was now put at 91,000. Which meant that over 100,000 were dead (and well over 200,000 since the encirclement in November). The booty in this final report mentioned 750 planes, 1,550 tanks, 480 armoured vehicles, 6,700 guns, 1,462 mortars, 8,135 machine-guns, 90,000 rifles, 61,000 trucks, over 7,000 motor-cycles, 3 armoured trains, 320 wireless stations, 56 locomotives, 1,125 railway-carriages, 235 munition dumps, etc.

Through shortage of petrol most of the vehicles had been immobilised since the start.

On February 2, the following dispatch was sent to Stalin:

Carrying out your order, the troops of the Don Front at 4 p.m. on February 2, 1943, completed the rout and destruction of the encircled group of enemy forces at Stalingrad. Twenty-two divisions have been destroyed or taken prisoner.

After an enumeration of the divisions, the dispatch said:

The prisoners number 91,000, including 2,500 officers and 24 generals, among them 1 field-marshal, 2 colonel-generals, the rest lieutenant-generals and major-generals. . . . As a result of this final liquidation of the enemy forces, the military operations in the city and area of Stalingrad have ceased.

Lieutenant-General Rokossovsky, Commander of the Don Front.

Lieutenant-General Malinin, Chief of Staff of the Don Front.

That same day Stalin sent congratulations to Voronov and Rokossovsky.

The papers published the first photographs of the surrender: long black serpents of German war prisoners winding through the snow-covered steppes, and across the ice of the Volga; a picture of von Paulus, with a very strained look, seated at a table in a small room, with only a lamp burning, and being questioned by Generals Rokossovsky and Voronov, with a young man, Major Diatlenko, translating; a picture of a number of captured generals standing on a snowy field; standing to one side and frowning, and almost turning his back on the German generals, stands General Dimitriu, wearing a tall sheepskin hat.

He had obviously a grudge against the Germans—for did they not deprive the Rumanians even of their starvation ration twelve days before?

Later, on November 7, Stalin said that at the end of the Stalingrad Battle, 147,200 Germans and 46,700 Russians were found and buried. These deaths chiefly relate to the last stage of the Battle of Stalingrad.

Russia was not noisily exultant—but happy. Now it was clear that all the hardships and sufferings and loss of life had not been in vain. The psychological effect of Stalingrad was great: now everyone knew that

victory would come—and come perhaps soon. There was a feeling of deep, but not vociferous national pride, a feeling that justice was being done. It was a thousand times right that the Germans should now proclaim their three days of National Mourning; it was a humiliation the German people and the Nazi Government amply deserved.

The Russian people also felt that the Red Army was different from any other army, and that this battle it had fought was the most decisive battle of the war—far more decisive than the Battle of Moscow. Never had Russian prestige attained such heights.

As *Red Star* wrote on February 5:

> . . . Not till February 1 did the Germans admit the coming catastrophe. What was destroyed at Stalingrad was the flower of the German Wehrmacht. This Sixth Army had marched victoriously through Europe. It was led by some of Germany's best generals. Hitler was particularly proud of the Sixth Army, and of its great striking power. Its men were picked men; thus the Seventy-ninth infantry division was composed entirely of highly propagandised Nazis, aged twenty-two to twenty-eight. To every five men in this army there was at least one Nazi party member. The Sixth Army, then under the command of von Reichenau, was the first to invade Belgium. It entered Paris. It took part in the invasion of Jugoslavia and Greece. Before the war it had taken part in the occupation of Czechoslovakia. In 1942 it broke through from Kharkov to Stalingrad.

This was the German Army which had caused Russia all that heartbreak in those fearful summer months of 1942. And von Paulus—that general who had been promoted to the rank of Field-Marshal by Hitler just before the end? He was a German professional soldier if ever there was one. *Red Star* wrote:

> He is fifty-three, and has been thirty-three years in the army. After fighting in the first World War, von Paulus joined, first the War Ministry, and then the General Staff of the Reichswehr; later he was von Reichenau's Chief of Staff in the Polish and French campaigns. In January 1942 he was placed in command of a tank corps. . . . And now, as the German communiqué of February 2 said: "The Sixth Army, under the brilliant leadership of Field-Marshal von Paulus, has been defeated," even though, only three days earlier, Goebbels still screamed: "In German there is no such word as 'capitulation.' "

The Germans had also started the rumour that von Paulus had committed suicide. He had done nothing of the sort. On February 5 we were to see him in the flesh.

CHAPTER IV

VISIT TO STALINGRAD

FOR nearly half a year the word Stalingrad had been on everybody's lips, and in everyone's mind, not only in Russia, but in a large part of the world.

It was a strange sensation actually to go to Stalingrad—a place which was both immensely familiar as a whole, and almost unknown in detail. Early in January, that night when we had lost our way in the dark, in that "Richmond Park" between the Volga and the Akhtuba River, we had seen a red glow in the sky and heard the distant rumble of guns; Stalingrad was only some eight or ten miles away, and it aroused, in spite of all the horror of which one had heard, a romantic enthusiasm in one's mind. Now Stalingrad was no longer what it had been. It was silent—and hundreds of miles away from the nearest front; and yet, only a few days before, the battle had raged here. We had asked in vain to be allowed to go to Stalingrad while the battle was being fought; but to see it even now was far better than nothing.

They took everybody down in two planes on February 4, two days after the last shots had been fired—British, Americans, French, Czechs, Chinese—everybody. I shouldn't be surprised if half-a-million words were written in the world Press as a result of this three-day trip.

Why write the story again? you might ask. Well, for one thing, what does it matter what was hastily written then, *dans ce grand cimetière de l'oubli*—as Sainte-Beuve once called the Press? To-day it is good to write the story again, to write it differently and more calmly—after more than two years, with Berlin in ruins and Goebbels dead, and Hitler living among the witches of the Brocken. But however calmly you may look back on those years, it is places like Stalingrad that still make you remember most clearly what a mighty and evil force Germany was.

I don't know where our two planes landed, except that they landed on a very cold and sunny day in the wide snow-covered steppe, with a fierce wind blowing from the east. There was a village at the edge of the airfield, with a few administrative buildings. There was no bomb damage, and Stalingrad was miles away from here. We were somewhere north-west of Stalingrad, but where exactly, I don't know. Tufts of white smoke were rising from the chimneys of the cottages.

The night before I had listened to the German radio—they were playing lugubrious Wagnerian music all the time—the Siegfried funeral march

from the *Götterdämmerung* over and over again, and "*Ich hatt' ein' Kamaraden.*"

Götterdämmerung—a nice word, which must have been giving Hitler the creeps. "*Ich hatt' ein' Kamaraden, Ich hatt' dreihundertdreissigtausend Kamaraden.*"

"Pussyface" Tarantsev was on the plane. "Well," I said, "how's that? You remember that Oberleutnant at Kotelnikovo who told us they'd be back in Stalingrad yet." "Those days are over now," said Tarantsev. "That's all finished. Of course, speaking to British and Americans these German officers still like to show off—they'll go on doing it till the very end—nothing like a little publicity in the world Press. But they don't talk to *us* that way any longer."

"Von Paulus," he went on, "he's an officer of the Kaiser's Army, and few of these fellows have much real love for Hitler. Do you know that he left the encirclement by plane, *but was ordered back by Hitler?* The German radio was saying that he was going to commit suicide; for he had poison and two revolvers on him. But no; he has surrendered it all, and has no intention of committing suicide."

It was very cold on the airfield, and we were taken to an air-force canteen of sorts. There had been some mistake; they had not been expecting us till the next day; however, a meal of sausage and tinned fish and vodka and cocoa was improvised. There were three Soviet correspondents there in army uniform—Olender of *Red Star*, and Rosovsky of *Izvestia*, and a third man whose name I forget. I find in my notebook some snatches of our conversation. "In one village I talked the other day to an old woman and she said: 'They used to say to me; pity you haven't a dog, a dog would make a very good stew. . . .'" That was about one of the villages in the encircled area. "No, there was no break in the military discipline," Olender said, "except at the very end. They are tough soldiers, you can't deny them that." "Yes," said Rosovsky, "but here they came up against an unusual situation. There's that old general of the Eighth Army Corps —Walter Heinz or Heitz, sixty-four: he'd been in the German Army since 1896! When he was caught in the end, he shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Well, what do you expect? You can't feed an army this size with transport planes which, moreover, get shot down.' He was kind of philosophic about it. 'But let's not discuss the ifs and whys, please,' he also said, 'everyone has a right to reason these things out for himself, but why say anything?' He was fed-up right enough; but no, he wouldn't say a word against Hitler—military discipline, you see, and all that. Of course, the generals have known ever since Mannstein failed that they were hopelessly bitched. But there you are; they'd hardly admit it to each other, and wouldn't say a word to the soldiers. Of course, their one

object now was to tie up our armies here as long as possible, and allow the Germans to send reinforcements to the Dnieper. But in the long run, it will not make much difference to us; this loss of the Sixth Army will make all the difference to *them.*"

These Soviet correspondents had been in Stalingrad off and on. One of them was talking of Gumrak, just west of Stalingrad; here he had witnessed the biggest slaughter of Germans ever. "The place is just littered with thousands of them; we got them well encircled, and our *katyushas* let fly. God, what a massacre! And here are also thousands and thousands of cars and trucks, most of them dumped in the ravines; they hadn't time or the means to destroy them; and also guns—thousands of them—sixty or seventy per cent of both guns and trucks can be repaired and used again. And we actually captured a food dump—just four or five days before the end! How they must have kicked themselves for having lost *that*!"

"They are uncanny and terrifying, some of these surviving villages in the pocket: for some of them did survive. There were a few civilians still there; most of the others had fortunately been driven beyond the Don long before the encirclement. Even in that tiny area there was a brand of partisans. Well, not really partisans, but desperate people who were hiding, and waiting for our troops to come up, and then they'd come out of hiding, and join in the scuffle. There was a half-demented old man who, taking advantage of the general bewilderment among the Germans —that was an hour or so before we came—hid in a hole in the ground and managed to shoot twelve Fritzes. He had a score to settle with them; he was half-insane with this thirst for revenge. Somebody said they had raped his daughter, or something, but I never found out exactly."

Then a gruff captain with a drooping moustache, who had just come in, joined in the conversation, and said he had been at Pitomnik yesterday. "You should go and have a look," he said. "It's not much of a place; you could put the whole village on a five-kopek piece. But when you drive up to it now, it looks like a big town. Thousands and thousands of lorries are accumulated there, and over an area of six square kilometres the Germans had piled up pontoon parts, and you think all this is so many houses when you look from a distance, and it looks as if the town had factory chimneys—with all those ack-ack guns of theirs pointing upwards. Before the war, there was a wonderful fruit-tree nursery at Pitomnik; the highest-grade apple and pear and cherry trees were grown here; but all this has been destroyed. The fight for Pitomnik was a very stiff one; the Germans here had an enormous concentration of firing-points, but in the end, with an intensive artillery and *katyusha* barrage, we smashed them all. The place is now littered with thousands of dead frozen Fritzes. Our guns also smashed nearly all the planes on the Pitomnik airfield; several Ju. 52's among them.

"Close by, we found an open-air concentration camp for Russian prisoners; it was dreadful. They could sleep on rough bunks dug into the slope—the sleeping space was only twelve square metres, and here seventy or eighty men were supposed to sleep. Each of these 'dormitories' had barbed wire round it, and so had the concentration camp as a whole. There were 1,400 men there, whom the Germans forced to work on fortifications. Only 102 survived. You might say that the Germans had nothing themselves to eat; but the starving of the prisoners began even before the encirclement. And it was bad luck: for, finding these unfortunate people lying there, half-dead, among the frozen corpses of the others, our men started, there and then, to feed them on bread and sausage, and many died as a result."

There was a small office next door, with a stove burning, which made it much warmer than the canteen. The Soviet correspondents and a few of us went in there. The red-cheeked Ukrainian canteen waitress joined us, and so did a couple of young soldiers. One of these also was a Ukrainian. He talked of his parents and wife who were in Kiev, and he had had no news from them. "But the way things are going," he said, "we may soon be there," and he grinned. "Yesterday," he said, "I went down to the Volga, hoping to catch some fish through a hole in the ice. And there I saw thousands of German prisoners being taken across the river. God, they looked a mess; dirty; long shaggy beards some of them had, all of them were unshaved, a lot of them had ulcers and boils, and their clothes were terrible. Three of them just collapsed and died of cold, there and then." "We try to feed them and give them what clothes we can spare," said one of the correspondents with a look of distaste, "but many of them are very far gone, and there just *isn't* any hospital accommodation for them in Stalingrad; they have to be marched to a sorting-out camp first." "I wouldn't worry about them," said the Ukrainian. "Think what they've done to our people! How do I know they haven't killed or starved to death *my* wife and *my* father and mother?" The red-cheeked Ukrainian girl was excited about the latest news; she thought the Red Army would soon get to Izyum, and then it would be all right—from there they'd get right on to the Dnieper. "I've got to drive back to Krasnoarmeisk now," she said, "we are going to have quite an *exceptional* supper to-night—it's to celebrate victory!" She was pally with a lot of the men, but not in any "sexy" way. Apologetically, one of the soldiers said: "Overnight, we have suddenly found ourselves here in the distant rear, with the front hundreds of kilometres away. It makes one feel quite embarrassed."

Outside there was an astonishingly perfect tricolour landscape—a bright-red sunset that was almost too like those crudely coloured picture post-cards you used to get in France; and on the other side a spotless blue sky, and all round, as far as the horizon, the boundless white steppe.

Apart from a few sentries there was nobody to be seen; the two planes on the airfield had departed, and there were no other aircraft. The wind had subsided, and all was strangely still on this cold nipping winter evening. "How far is Stalingrad?" I asked one of the soldiers. "About eighty kilometres," he said. Only later did I realise why we had been brought here: it was to see the German generals.

Not that they were exactly round the corner. Owing to some muddle we waited at this airfield till it was nearly nightfall, and then, at last, an old-fashioned dark-blue bus arrived and we all piled in. We drove for three hours, or four hours, or perhaps it was five, along some bumpy snowbound road; the windows were frosted over, and it was hard to make anything out. Around there was nothing but the steppe. Bill Downs and Janet Weaver sang American songs to keep themselves and the rest of the company cheerful. Everybody was wearing *valenki* and numerous layers of clothes. Twice we took the wrong turning, and had to drive back; it was a very long twenty-five kilometres. However, by midnight we reached our destination. We entered a large wooden building.

Our hosts had, I think, got tired of waiting for us, and had started on the supper. Here was a big spread, and with plenty of vodka, and my neighbour was a red-nosed colonel who had already had a good number of drinks. "We've done them in," he cried, "half a million of them! Here, come on, drink to the heroes of Stalingrad—*do dna*, bottoms up!" and he poured me out a good half-tumbler of the stuff. "And yet," he said, "I can tell you now—when we were out there at Stalingrad, there were moments when you felt like putting a bullet through your head; God, it was hard! But we stood it all the same. An encirclement like this," he cried, "there's been no such thing in the whole of human history! Not one! Never! There's a Greek historian—you may have heard of him —Tit Levy or Livy, who said the Romans had done something on the same lines at a place called Cannæ; but that was a very long time ago, and I don't think it was anything half so big. You go and have a look at Pitomnik. Corpses, corpses, corpses, planes, tanks—if anyone's had the sh— knocked out of them, it's these chaps." He beat his chest. "Look," he cried, pointing at his Red Star. "Yesterday I received this from our Great Government! Zhukov—I worship Zhukov. He planned the whole thing, he and our Great Stalin. Halkin Gol, where he routed the Japs—that was just a rehearsal. But Stalingrad, *that* was the real stuff! Hitler's best divisions were destroyed here. And who destroyed them? We Russian people did it! Why is Stalingrad important, I ask you? Because he who won the Battle of Stalingrad has also won the war. That's why. And," he said, becoming slightly confidential, "I think we may say that we shall mark the Twenty-third Anniversary of the Red Army on February 23, with the liberation of Rostov! I know—it's going to be difficult. But wasn't

Stalingrad difficult? A lot of things we've still got to do will be difficult. But our Great Stalin, our Great Rokossovsky know how to deal with the enemy. To throw away one hundred, two hundred, ten thousand lives—what's that? Nothing. That's not the point. The real thing is the greatness of our country, and of our Red Army, to which I have the honour to belong!"

We went on like this till nearly four in the morning. There were many other officers there; some had been in the Stalingrad battle, some hadn't. One old man with a white moustache—he was a medical colonel—said he had been in six wars—in the First Imperialist War (he still used the old terminology), and the Civil War, and Halkin Gol, and Poland and Finland, and now in this one; "and I'll never stop regretting," he said, "I was never inside Stalingrad during the battle." Then he talked about Halkin Gol and Zhukov.

We were here in a large village; we were never told what its name was; the reason for such secrecy was obvious: we were going to see the German generals, and the exact whereabouts of these generals was still a military secret. For what if German paratroops suddenly landed here—in a desperate attempt to rescue them? Not that it seemed in the least likely. At four o'clock, through the snow, we were conducted to our various billets; I was billeted in a large prosperous-looking cottage, with lace curtains and a lot of pillows on the bed, and a pair of large ikons in the corner. A sergeant dumped us there, and I only heard the sleepy grumpy voice of the woman owner, and did not see her till the next morning. The place looked clean, despite the musty unventilated smell. The windows were blacked out, and a small candle was burning, and the ikons were faintly glittering in its dim light. In the morning we saw the landlady, a middle-aged woman with a grumpy male voice. With her was a little boy of five. He said he was a Cossack, and wanted to be a Commissar when he grew up. The woman grumbled, and cursed the Germans, and said life was very dreary; she had not seen "any people for months" except Red Army men, and they always kept asking for things. There was also a younger woman there, with two small children; but she also said very little. These people had their own troubles, and the war had taken their men away, and Stalingrad was just part of their wartime misery and drudgery. They were seeing too many Red Army men around, and they were growing weary of them. I gathered that we were somewhere north of Stalingrad, in an area where the Germans had never been.

We didn't get going till after ten o'clock; and drove through the steppes for another hour or two. It was cold again, though less cold than the day before. The country was covered with snow, and there were still no signs of war. The villages were few and far between. At noon we came to a village of rather flimsy wooden cottages with a few trees, and with no

local inhabitants by the look of it; everywhere, there were soldiers, and no civilians. Had these been sent away? Around there was nothing but the snow-covered steppe.

We split up into groups, and went, first, into one cottage, and then another, and then a third. There they were, half a dozen in each, standing or sitting about in the main room. We were not allowed to enter the room, and had to inspect them from the passage through the door. We could speak only to those who were near the door and were willing to talk. Some were in the background, sitting, or standing, more or less with their backs turned to us. It was rather like being at the zoo, where some animals showed interest in the public, and the others sulked. Some of those in the background looked slovenly and unshaved; there was one man with a beard and spectacles. From time to time, they turned to the door and glared. But those near the door were showing off. The first thing that hit you in the eye was their crosses, orders, medals and whole mantelpiece ornaments pinned to their uniforms. Many were wearing monocles. They were almost too good to be true. Erich von Stroheim was mild in comparison. Some of them were more like the distorted drawings of monocled toad-like creatures the *Matin* used to publish during the last war. Les Boches. They weren't merely Boches; their Boche arrogance was reinforced by a kind of Nazi infallibility. It's true, there were a few exceptions. Some of us saw von Seydlitz, and they said he was rather fun; I didn't see him myself; the only two whom I found fairly human were Dubois, who grinned and seemed to see the funny side of the situation, and said, as if to ask us not to be frightened, that he was an Austrian; and Von Schloemmer, who also grinned and said: "Come on, come on, what do you want to know?" and familiarly patted one of our conducting officers on the shoulder, and pointing to his new epaulettes, said: "*Was —neu?*" with a comic look of surprise, and an almost approving nod, as much as to say: "Well, I suppose you *are* a real army by now."

But the rest? "Lumps of deformity stricken with pride"—I told the B.B.C. at the time. The most unforgettable of them was Lieutenant-General Von Arnim, a cousin of the other Arnim who was to be captured in Tunisia a few months later. He was enormously tall, with a long twisted nose, and a look of fury in his long horse-like face with its popping eyes. He had a stupendous display of crosses and orders and mantelpiece ornaments. He, no more than the others, had any desire to explain why they had allowed themselves to be trapped at Stalingrad, and why they had been licked. When somebody put the question, he snarled and said: "The question is badly put. You should ask how did we hold out so long against such overwhelming numerical superiority?" And one of the sulking ones in the background said something about hunger and cold.

But how they all hated any suggestion that the Red Army was a better army and a better-led army than theirs! When somebody suggested it, Von Arnim snorted and went almost purple with rage.

To make things worse, the interpreter wasn't quite what he should have been. He was nervous and somewhat incoherent; and he was a little Jew into the bargain. He addressed von Arnim respectfully as "Herr General," but had a constant drip suspended from his nose. He had a bad cold and no handkerchief; and he kept sniffing, while the general kept snorting in reply and trying to demolish him with glares. He seemed to exercise a slightly hypnotic effect on the little man. These German generals had, one felt, specially studied the art of glaring and looking fierce.

But von Arnim glared even more than the others, and one felt that here was a maniac capable of anything. He was obviously not going to discuss strategy, so, addressing him in German I simply asked him how he was being treated. He snorted. "The officers," he said reluctantly, "are correct. But the Russian soldiers—*das sind Diebe, das sind Halunken. So eine Schweinerei!*" he fumed, his twisted nose going purple again, and his eyes popping menacingly. "*Unverschämte Diebe!*" he fumed. "Impudent thieves! They stole all my things. *Eine Schweinerei! Vier Koffer!* Four whole suitcases, and they stole them all. The soldiers, I mean," he added as a concession, "not the Russian officers. *Die Offiziere sind ganz korrekt.*"

They had looted the whole of Europe, these people; but what was that compared with his four suitcases!

I couldn't resist it. "I suppose, Herr General, your soldiers have never stolen anything from anybody!" He glared and snorted, and we might have had an interesting discussion if tiny Miss Hu Tsi Pang, looking up at him as if he were the Eiffel Tower, had not at this moment said to the little interpreter: "Ask him what he thinks of the Japanese." The little interpreter sniffed and stuttered nervously: "*Herr General, die Dame wünscht zu wissen: was halten Sie von den Japanern?*" Von Arnim gave him another devastating glare, and then said stiffly, looking down at Miss Hu: "We immensely admire our gallant Japanese Allies for their brilliant victories over the English and the Americans, and we wish them more victories." Miss Hu then asked what all the crosses and medals and mantelpiece ornaments were, and he rattled them off one after another —Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub, and the golden frame with the black spider of a swastika was, he said, the Deutsches Kreuz in Gold, and he said that the Führer himself had designed it. "I would have thought you'd have a slight grudge against the Führer," somebody suggested. He glared and merely said: "The Führer is a very great man, and if you have any doubts, you will soon be able to put them aside."

The man was a maniac. Later I was interested to observe that he was

one of the few generals who had kept completely aloof from the Free German Committee.

One thing astonished me about these generals: they had been captured only a couple of days ago—and they looked healthy, and not in the least undernourished. Clearly, throughout the agony of Stalingrad, when their soldiers were dying of hunger, they were continuing to have more or less regular meals. There could be no other explanation for their normal, or almost normal, weight and appearance.

The only man who looked in poor shape was Paulus himself. We weren't allowed to speak to him; he was only shown to us. (We could then testify that he was alive and had not committed suicide.) He stepped out of a large cottage—it was more like a villa—gave us one look, then stared at the horizon, and stood on the steps for a minute or two, amid a rather awkward silence, together with two other officers; one was General Schmidt, his Chief of Staff, a sinister, Goering-like creature, wearing a strange fur cap made of imitation leopard skin. Paulus looked pale and sick, and had a nervous twitch in his left cheek. He had more natural dignity than any of the others, and wore only one or two decorations.

The cameras clicked, and the Russian officer politely dismissed him, and he went back into the cottage. The others followed, and the door closed behind them.

It was over.

We waited around for a while till the vans were ready to move. We had now been given four small vans, dilapidated old things, like old-fashioned station buses, large enough to hold seven or eight people. The Dodges and Studebakers had not yet arrived in large numbers at the Russian front, and any old thing had to do. I talked to a couple of soldiers who were stationed in the village. They both thought the German generals were being far too well treated—living in decent houses, after all the destruction they had caused, and eating large meals. "And they've still got plenty of cheek," one of the soldiers said. "But I must tell you a funny story. They have a girl barber—a Russian Army girl—to go and shave them every morning. One of them got fresh with her the very first day, and pinched her bottom. She resented it and slapped his face. He got so scared of having his throat cut, he won't shave any more, and is now growing a beard!"

We drove to another village some distance away, and here, in a large schoolhouse, we were received by General Malinin, Rokossovsky's Chief of Staff.

He had a good, strong, typically North-Russian face, with his greying hair brushed back. He was from Yaroslav on the Volga, and was forty-three; he had fought in the Civil War, and gone for two years to the

Military Academy in 1931, later he had fought in Finland, and during this war he had been Assistant Chief of Staff and then Chief of Staff of one of the armies; and had now for eight months been Chief of Staff on the Don Front. He had been with Rokossovsky during the Battle of Moscow.

He was to become Marshal Zhukov's Chief of Staff, and was, in that capacity, to take part in the capture of Berlin.

Now we were seeing him here, in this village lost among the steppes, somewhere between the Volga and the Don, and he seemed a "routine" general, like dozens of others, and one who had received only the Order of Kutuzov, and not the Order of Suvorov, for Stalingrad. Berlin was still so far away that one did not think of it. We were still almost on the borders of Asia.

Malinin said that not one, but two ultimatums had been turned down by von Paulus; and then, on the 10th, the offensive was launched. On the very first day, the "nose" of the pocket was cut off, and became an almost perfect circle; then criss-cross blows began to fall from all four directions, and bit after bit of the pocket was being chopped off.

They resisted stubbornly, he said, but the offensive spirit of the Red Army was very high.

Cannæ had become a catchword with the Red Army all of a sudden. The tipsy Colonel had talked about it the night before; now Malinin talked about it. It seemed almost as odd to hear this former Yaroslav peasant lad talk of Cannæ, here among the Don Steppes, as if he had suddenly started reciting the *Æneid.*

Both learned and popular articles on Cannæ had appeared in the last few days in the Soviet Press. Malinin said that the repetition of Cannæ had been the ambition of every general; but it had never succeeded as perfectly as now. This was a far more perfect Cannæ than Sedan, with its two outlets. In the last war, the Germans had tried in vain to repeat Cannæ. He then paid a tribute to Stalin, under whose direction the operation had been carried out. He also paid a tribute—and here he suddenly warmed up—to the ordinary Russian soldier.

The network of roads and railways at our disposal, he said, *was very weak; but there was never a shortage of food, munitions, or petrol. Every soldier, every driver, every railwayman, understood the tremendous aim before us. The railwaymen ran, in the circumstances, more trains than was humanly conceivable. The lorry driver who, normally, should not work more than ten hours a day in winter, often went on working on our transport columns for twenty-four hours on end.*

He said that, *in the early stages of the encirclement, the Germans could certainly have broken out, but Hitler had ordered them not to budge*; it was a matter of prestige for them to hold Stalingrad, and they were confident—and so was Hitler—that von Mannstein would break through. Once his attempt failed, it was too late to break out of Stalingrad. In fact, they never even tried it. The capitulation offer was rejected, and Paulus actually announced that any Russian negotiators were to be fired at.

Asked whether there was any allied equipment used at Stalingrad, Malinin said there were some Churchill tanks. "They were good, but there were very few, and therefore they did not play a great part." So that was that.

It was about 3 p.m. by the time we set out on our trek for Stalingrad. It was still eighty kilometres away; and our army driver thought we might make it in four or five hours. Actually, it took us nearer thirteen hours.

It was eighty kilometres, because all the travelling we had done so far was in the wrong direction. We had travelled, it seemed, not towards Stalingrad, but towards the north side of the Don Bend. We were north-west of Stalingrad now.

It was a pity not to travel through this battle area during the day, but it couldn't be helped. Even so, I remember that night as one of my strangest experiences during the whole war. For one thing, I had never known such cold before. There were half a dozen of us in that wretched van, without any seats or benches, sitting or half-lying on bags and pieces of luggage. Every hour it became colder and colder. To add to the misery of it, the back door of the bus had no glass in its window; so it was almost as cold as driving in an open car.

In the morning, it had been only twenty degrees centigrade of frost, then it was thirty, and thirty-five, and forty, and somebody even said forty-three. I don't know; but twenty degrees already began to feel like the Riviera. One has to experience forty-three degrees of frost to realise what it means. Your breath catches; if you breathe on your glove, a thin film of ice immediately forms on it. We couldn't eat anything because all the food had been turned into stone: we had brought a few tangerines—the first we had received in Moscow this year, and some bread and hard-boiled eggs—but you could do nothing with them; one of the eggs had got half-squashed, but now it was as fossilised as the rest. By hitting a man hard enough with a tangerine or an egg or a piece of bread, you could have killed him. Even with your *valenki* on you had to move your toes all the time to keep the circulation going; without *valenki* frostbite would have been certain; and the Germans had no *valenki*. To keep your hands in good condition, you had to clap them half the time, or play imaginary scales. Once, I took out a pencil to write down a few words: the first word was quite all right, the second and third were written by a drunk, and the last two were the scrawls of a paralytic; quickly I blew on my purple fingers, and put them back in the fur-lined glove.

And as you sit there in the bus, huddled up, and feeling fairly comfortable, you cannot bear to move, except your fingers and toes, and give your nose an occasional rub; a kind of mental and physical inertia comes over you; you feel almost doped. And yet you have to be on the look-out

all the time; for the frost suddenly bites you where you don't expect it; for instance, I suddenly found the frost nibbling at my knees; it had got the right idea that there must be a vulnerable spot somewhere between where the additional underwear ends and the *valenki* begin. Frost becomes a puckish, malicious creature, with quite a few ideas on strategy and vulnerable points. Your only real ally, apart from clothes, on such occasions is the vodka bottle; that was our experience that night. And bless it, it didn't freeze, and even a small gulp made a big difference. You can now see what it must be like to fight in such conditions. For the last stage of the Battle of Stalingrad was fought in weather only a little milder than it was on that night of the 5th of February. Frostbite caused terrible ravages among the Germans.

The nearer we got to Stalingrad, the more bewildering was the traffic on the snowbound road. Hundreds of lorries, with their headlights full on, were moving west from Stalingrad; soldiers were marching west, and there were streams of army horse-carts. And then—it was about midnight—we ran into a traffic jam. The road was going down a shallow ravine, and up again; at the bottom of the ravine, the snow was two or three feet deep, and lorry after lorry had stuck in the snow. Our driver turned off the road, hoping to by-pass the cluster of trucks, but his front wheels got stuck in a snowdrift, and for the next hour we could not budge. The driver shovelled snow, and we shovelled, and soldiers who were passing lent a hand, but it was a slow, dreary business. Besides, the road in front was still blocked, so there was no hurry. But what a spectacle that road presented! If one may call it a road. For what was the original road and what was part of the surrounding steppe that had been taken in by the traffic, was no longer easy to determine. Between the two streams of traffic, there was now an irregular wall of snow that had been shovelled there by wheels and hoofs. Moslem-like figures were regulating the traffic —soldiers with long white camouflage cloaks and pointed white hoods; horses, horses, still more horses, blowing steam and with ice round their nostrils, were wading through the deep snow, pulling guns and gun-carriages and large covered wagons; everything was lit up by hundreds of headlights from the trucks travelling in both directions; to the side of the road an enormous bonfire was burning, filling the air with clouds of black smoke that ate into your eyes, and shadow-like figures danced round the bonfire, warming themselves; then others would grab a plank and throw it in the bonfire and pull it out and start a little bonfire of their own, till the whole edge of the road was a series of small bonfires. Fire! How happy fire made people on a night like this! Soldiers jumped off their lorries to get a few seconds of warmth, and have the hot black dirty smoke blow in their faces for a few seconds; and then they would run after their lorry and jump on again. It was an endless procession of traffic

coming out of Stalingrad; trucks, and still more trucks, and horse-carts, and guns, and covered wagons, and even camels—several of them stepping sedately through the deep snow as though it were sand. Every conceivable means of transport was being used; the day of the jeep and the Dodge had not yet come. And thousands of soldiers were marching, or rather walking in large irregular crowds to the west, through this cold deadly night. But they were cheerful and strangely happy, and they kept shouting about Stalingrad and about the job they had done. Westward, westward, westward—how many, one wondered, would reach the end of the road? But they knew that the *direction* was the right one. Perhaps they were not thinking of Berlin; but many were thinking of their homes, out west, in the Ukraine. In their *valenki* and padded coats, and fur caps, with the earflaps hanging down, carrying tommy-guns, with watering eyes and hoarfrost on their lips, they were going west. How much better it felt than going east! Yet from the west others were coming; compared with the great westward migration, it was merely a trickle; but these also had their story to tell; these peasants in horse-carts, and horse-sleighs, and all these citizens of Stalingrad walking or driving home through the night—driving home into the ruins. And around all this bustle of cars, trucks, horse-carts, covered wagons, camels, soldiers shouting, and soldiers swearing, and soldiers laughing and dancing joyfully round the bonfires filling the air with black acrid smoke, lay the silent snow-covered steppe; and as the headlights shone on the steppe, and you looked, you saw dead horses in the snow, and dead men, and shattered engines of war. We were now in the "pocket." And ahead of us, the searchlights were spanning the sky—the sky of Stalingrad.

Eventually we reached Stalingrad. It was terribly cold and the night was pitch black, except for a few dim lights here and there. Dazed with cold, we stepped out of our bus. Somebody shouted something a few yards away; somebody else waved a lantern. "Come this way." We staggered along, following the man with the lantern. "Two here, two more further along," he said. He lit up a hole in the ground. "Go down there, and get warm," he said. The hole was little wider than a man's body. Almost lying down on the ice-covered planks, and clutching the slippery side of the tunnel, we slid down into the dugout, a drop of twenty or twenty-five feet. Warmth! How cosy the miserable hole looked! How sweet the fumes of *mahorka* smelled! There were four men with guards regiment badges down there; two of them sleeping on bunks, the other two crouching near the small iron stove. They were both young fellows—one almost a boy, with a little fair down on his never-yet-shaved chin and upper lip. He had blue eyes, a funny turned-up nose and a good friendly smile. The other man, Nikolai, was a tougher soldier, though also scarcely

more than twenty-two or twenty-three. The other two, who had been sleeping, yawned and stretched themselves and sat up, gradually sized up the situation and offered us their bunks, covered with thick dark-grey woollen blankets. But the dugout was overcrowded, so we all sat up through most of the night, taking a few minutes' nap from time to time, leaning back on the bunks or reclining on the floor in the delicious heat of the stove which Nikolai kept stoking with bits of house wreckage. Only the oldest of the men went to sleep again almost at once, though not on the bunk, but in a corner on the floor. The dugout was lit by one of those typical Stalingrad lamps: a shellcase filled with kerosene and flattened on top, sufficiently to catch the wick and hold it in position. Everybody was very tired, and the conversation was not exactly lively. But Nikolai treated us to hot tea out of old cans, and once we had thawed we vaguely began to take things in. These men belonged to one of the guards regiments that had just completed the "liquidation" of the German Sixth Army. And now they were having a few quiet days in this Workers' Settlement, before being sent on to the front. "When it gets light," said Nikolai, "you'll be able to see the Tractor Plant over there; it looks as if it were standing, but it's all gone. There's nothing left of Stalingrad," he said, "not a thing. If I had any say in the matter, I'd rebuild Stalingrad somewhere else; it would save a lot of trouble; and I'd leave the place standing as a museum."

"Yes," said the younger boy, "it's funny to think how quiet it is now. Only three days ago there was still fighting going on. This is a lousy dugout; it's one our people built. The German dugouts are much better. In these last weeks, the Germans hated to come out into the open; they can't stand the cold. . . . Filthy, dirty—you wouldn't believe in what filth they lived there. . . . They like to do their shooting out of their dugouts; they hate coming into the open; they are scared of the cold, and scared of our *katyushas*." The lad shook his head and gave a boyish giggle. "Funny blokes, really. Coming to conquer Stalingrad, wearing patent-leather shoes. Suppose they thought it would be a joy-ride! Some joy-ride! Just go and have a look at them at Pitomnik. Parasites!" he concluded with that favourite Red Army man's word for the Germans—a word coined back in 1941.

"*Katyusha*," said Nikolai, "has done a wonderful job. We got an enormous crowd of them encircled at Gumrak, and they wouldn't surrender; so we got fifty or sixty *katyushas* round them, and let go. My God, you should have seen the result! Or else we gunners would go right up to their strong-points and smash them to blazes at thirty metres. It was really the guns that did the main job in this liquidation; we had complete superiority in artillery. But they can be tough, for all that. They don't like to surrender, not they! On the last day we got to a house where there

were fifty officers; they kept firing and firing. It was only when four of our tanks came right up to the house that they put up their arms. Ah well," he said, sipping the hot tea out of the tin can, "just one more Stalingrad, and they'll be finished; there won't be much left of the German Army!"

"They were in a bad way right enough," said the third man, a dark Armenian with a hooked nose, dark beady eyes and a funny accent. "Down at Karpovka—right inside the 'pocket'—I heard that the Germans were actually eating cats. They were hungry and very cold, and a lot of them died of the cold. The local people there somehow managed to survive; they had hidden chunks of frozen horseflesh, and had to manage on that; but it was better than cats, anyway! At Karpovka, there was an old woman who lived in a dugout; she told me they took her dog away and ate it. Yet the German Commandant kept a cow, and he wouldn't allow it to be slaughtered; it made the Fritzes very angry. In the end, he had to give way, though. There was also an old priest there. The Germans opened the church for him. He used to pray for the victory of the Christ-beloved Hosts—which might have meant anything. The people went to his church services, and it was a great joke when he prayed for us, the Christ-beloved Hosts!"

The soldiers laughed. "You should see those trucks they left behind," said the young boy, "thousands of them, cluttering up every damned ravine! They are fearful bandits, the Germans; I don't deny that they can fight. But why insult and beat up helpless people, as they do?"

"Never mind," said Nikolai, adding another piece of wreckage to the little stove, "it may now soon be over. I am a worker, I am used to working in a factory. When we recapture my home town of Kharkov, they may put me back in my old job. Sitting in trenches for years may be all very well, but it feels a waste of time. I've been in the army since 1940. It's been a long road to Stalingrad when you consider that I started at Lwow. I was stationed there before the war. Queer lot, the Poles. Before the war, we had to deport the more unreliable elements—all sorts of people. But we didn't deport nearly enough. They kept saying: 'We don't want to be either German or Soviet.' One can understand that. But then why, I ask you, when the Germans were coming in at one end of the city, and our people were leaving from the other end, did the Poles—youngsters mostly, boys and even girls of fifteen—keep firing at us from every window? Too damn fond of the Germans, that's what they were! Of course, there are different kinds of Poles; some were very friendly and hospitable; it's a question of *class*, I suppose."

"Anyway, I am glad this Stalingrad business is over," said the young boy, yawning and rubbing his eyes like a baby. "But we had some bad moments. When von Mannstein got going in his drive from Kotelnikovo,

we had a few pretty bad moments; he pushed ahead eighty or ninety kilometres, and I can tell you—it was touch-and-go. It would have been a different story if he'd broken through to Stalingrad as he nearly did."

"No," said Nikolai, "it wasn't all that bad. Our Command had taken all the necessary precautions; there would have been no break-through. But I admit—it was tough going for a couple of days."

So we sat there, in that dugout at Stalingrad from 3 till about 6 in the morning, warming ourselves at the stove, and mingling the smoke of *mahorka* and of English cigarettes, and sipping tea out of old tin cans, and dozing off from time to time. Stalingrad, out there, in the cold, at the cold end of the narrow tunnel, was still unreal. The fourth man, who had been sleeping nearly all the time, at last properly woke up. He was an older man, with a dark stubbly chin—unlike Nikolai and the Armenian, who were spruce and well-shaved. He gave us a long look, said "How's Africa?" and, looking at his watch, said that he and two of the others would have to go out on duty now, and told us to make ourselves at home; Nikolai would stay on to keep the stove going. They put on their fur caps, took their tommy-guns and crawled into the tunnel. So we had a couple of hours' sleep, and then, crawling on all fours up the narrow slippery tunnel, we looked out; and here was Stalingrad.

It wasn't quite what I had expected.

For a moment, we were dazzled by the sun shining on the snow. We were in a garden suburb—one of the Workers' Settlements, which the Russians had lost some time about the end of September. I now realised that we had been staying under a house—a small battered workers' cottage. For several hundred yards around, there were many more such cottages, all more or less battered, and some completely destroyed by shell-fire; and below many of them—they had tall brick foundations—there was a dugout like ours. From several, little clouds of white smoke were rising into the cold sunny winter air. The sky was a cold pale blue. There was a slight mist; to the right I saw in the distance large imposing blocks of five and six-storey buildings: these were the shells of buildings in central Stalingrad; on the left, two or three miles away, there rose a large number of enormously high factory chimneys; one had the impression that there was, over there, a live industrial town: but under the chimneys were only the ruins of the Tractor Plant. Chimneys are among the hardest things to hit, and these were standing, seemingly untouched.

Ahead of us, the flat steppe, with its battered cottages and equally battered apple-trees now covered with hoarfrost, was sloping down towards the Volga hidden behind other battered buildings and a small ridge.

It was still very cold, though a little less so than at night. Around the

battered workers' cottages, with their shattered fruit-trees, there was much wreckage: rubble and iron bedsteads, and school-books and a children's copy-book with French phrases written down in purple ink. *J'ai une table et deux chaises.* Now the *table* and the *chaises* were smashed by shells, or broken up for firewood by the men in the dugouts; and where were the people who had lived here and the child that had written these words?

We found our car where we had left it standing the night before. A number of soldiers with *valenki* and padded jackets and fur caps with earflaps were standing around, and when they saw us, they asked us into a large hut which was more or less undamaged, and was used as a soldiers' kitchen. There was a large stove burning. They gave us tea, and we got the bread and eggs and tangerines out of the car, and gradually thawed them, and had breakfast. The soldiers also offered us some dry sausage.

These soldiers, too, had taken part in the recent battles. A young Ukrainian was saying: "We must finish the war in such a way that there should never be another one," and an elderly soldier, wrinkled but muscular, was saying: "This is my third war—in the first Imperialist war I had to fight the Germans; and then I fought in the Civil War, and now, thanks to that *cholera* Hitler I've got to fight the Germans again. Always these damned Germans! But maybe they'll remember Stalingrad—that'll teach them a lesson."

At length we drove off, down towards the Volga, through the wreckage of the Workers' Settlement and past some smashed warehouses and railway buildings. The wind from the Volga had swept much of the country bare, and the earth was a deadly-frozen sandy-brown with patches of snow here and there, and a pale-blue sky above. A few frozen dead Germans were still lying by the roadside. We crossed the railway-line. Here were railway-carriages and engines piled on top of each other, in an inextricable tangle of metal. Huge cylindrical oil tanks standing alongside the battered railway-line were crumpled up like discarded old cartons and riddled with shell-holes, and some had fallen down completely. Like large dead animals other railway-carriages and engines were lying at the bottom of a ravine, their wheels in the air, the locomotives indecently displaying their entrails. The country on either side of the road was a honeycomb of trenches and dugouts and shell-holes and bomb-craters; and then, beyond the railway, the road made a sharp hairpin bend, and before us was the white icebound Volga, with the misty bare trees of "Richmond Park" on the other side, and beyond it, the white steppes stretching far into Asia. The Volga! Here was the scene of one of the grimmest episodes of this war: the Stalingrad life-line. And the remnants of it were still there: those barges and steamers, most of them smashed, now frozen into the ice. Meantime a thin trickle of traffic was calmly driving across the ice of the Volga: cars and horse-sleighs, and some soldiers

on foot. The Volga was frozen over, but not entirely—not even after the fierce frost of the last few days. Here and there, there were still shining blue patches of water. Women carrying pails were bringing water from there. Here, driving down from the cliffs along the hairpin road, down to the Volga beach, now crowded with hundreds of German trophy cars and trucks, we were on Russian soil untrodden by German feet—except the feet of prisoners. The car stopped, and we went up some steps and then up a slippery slope into a surprisingly comfortable dugout in the side of the cliff. This dugout was not facing the Volga, as many of the others did, but the other side of a ravine sloping down to the river; and on the other side there were more dugouts. This ravine had never been captured by the Germans, though many times they had tried to break through along it to the Volga. How many men had died here in the last six months? The German lines were not far off; perhaps three or four hundred yards away up the ravine.

There were eight bunks in this large dugout, and an old man in uniform was stoking the iron stove for all he was worth. It was uncomfortably hot here. It must have been the dwelling of several high officers during the Battle of Stalingrad. There was a "cultured" atmosphere in the place: it was odd to see among the few things in the dugout a volume of Maikov's and another of Nekrasov's poems. Somebody had been reading them at off-moments during the battle.

I don't know what it had been like before, but now glass had been put in the small window; and on the wall there was a cracked mirror, and a number of caricatures of Goebbels and Hitler, and a comic poster showing Germany's Santa Claus, 1942 model, wearing a Red Army fur-cap with a red star on it, and carrying pistols and hand-grenades. There was a large kitchen clock on the wall, loudly ticking and with its pendulum still swinging; had the clock ticked and the pendulum gone on swinging like this right through the days of the Battle of Stalingrad, marking time as it should be marked, and not as it seemed to those who lived there—to those for whom an hour was like a week, and a day like a year? On the wall there was also a little plywood shelf with intricate designs sawn in it; had somebody made this, too, during the weary days and nights of the battle?

Right above our dugout, on top of the cliff, near the crumpled shell-riddled oil tanks along the railway-line, a group of soldiers was erecting a roughly made provisional war memorial made of planks and pieces of shining sheet-iron. A young soldier was saying: "I've been here all the time. All the time they bombed the Volga. When a ton bomb fell, it shook the banks like an earthquake. They didn't bomb our front line though, for fear of hitting their own chaps. That front line was over there, a bit beyond the railway. This part was always in our hands. Of course, we lost

a lot of people. That's what a war is there for. But now—now, they're just like little pets; they eat out of your hand. They thought they'd push us into the Volga: '*Russ, bull-bull,*' they'd say—meaning we'd be blowing bubbles from under the water." Through the cold still air came the loud report of two mines exploding. "It's all right," said the soldier, "it's our sappers; they're doing it on purpose. When they go mine-hunting, they don't often allow themselves to be blown up. But often blowing up a mine is the only means of getting it out of the way. But they've got to be careful: in our Red Army there's a saying: 'A sapper makes a mistake only once.' "

Straight from the ice on the Volga a U-2 took off and slowly flew south. "Good little machine," said the soldier. "It bothered the Fritzes a lot at night. The pilot would fly very low—so low that no ack-ack gun could get at it—and just chuck a few small bombs overboard with his bare hands. Perhaps it didn't do much damage, but it worried them. And on a dark night it was damn hard to bring down a U-2, especially with their engines cut off. And now," he said, cheerfully, "we are going to liberate Kursk and the Caucasus, and the Ukraine. There is no longer any need for soldiers in Stalingrad; the last ones will have moved out in a few days."

That night we saw General Chuikov, the commander of the Sixty-second Army—a tough, thickset type of Red Army officer, but with a good deal of *bonhomie*, a sense of humour, and a loud laugh. He had a golden smile: all his teeth were crowned in gold, and they glittered in the light of the electric lamps. For there was electric light in the large dugout solidly built into the cliff facing the Volga. This used to be his headquarters during the latter stages of the battle; before that he had had to move his headquarters on three or four occasions. With Chuikov was also General Krylov, his Chief of Staff, who had survived the Siege of Sebastopol. Krylov commented on the very great value that the experience of Sebastopol had been in the defence of Stalingrad.

Chuikov gave us a whole evening; and only later did we learn that he had been in bed for three days with a severe chill, and that on the evening he spent with us his temperature was over 102; but he never said so.

The story told by General Chuikov may seem somewhat fragmentary and disjointed to-day, and there were some aspects of the Stalingrad Battle of which it was still too early to speak publicly. He did not, for example, stress the extraordinary *thinness* of the strips of land held by the Russians since October; but his story, nevertheless, told as it was by the man who had stood at the head of the defence of Stalingrad, is a valuable historic record. He told us much more than had actually been published in the Russian Press until then.

"You have asked me," said Chuikov, "which was the most critical day at Stalingrad? I may tell you that every day was the most critical—every day between September 10 until the end, or at any rate, until November 19. Every one of our soldiers knew that he had no right to abandon Stalingrad; it was not only because such had been the order given by the High Command; the truth is that every man here knew that our country and the whole world were expecting us to hold Stalingrad. As a tank man said to me the other day: 'Why did we hold Stalingrad? Simply because we had to.'"

"Had Stalin ever come to Stalingrad?" Chuikov was asked.

Chuikov said: "No. But Khruschev and Malenkov of the Politburo were here—practically all the time between September 12 and December 20. Stalin, meantime, was working on the gigantic offensive operation of which you now can see the first results."

In spite of this, there has remained a conviction among many people in Russia that Stalin was, at one time or another, at Stalingrad, at the time of the battle.

"Throughout the Battle of Stalingrad," said Chuikov, "political education was maintained at a high level, despite the appalling difficulties. Naturally, no mass meetings were possible, but frequent talks were regularly given to small groups."

Chuikov said that the Sixty-second Army had first made contact with the Germans in July, on the Don. On July 22, to be precise, between Kletskaya and Surovikino.

So that was the secret of the "Kletskaya obstacle" which had delayed by three or four weeks the German break-through to Stalingrad!

"Our first task," said Chuikov, "was to grind down the German spearhead, and to inflict on the Germans as many losses as possible. If, in other conditions, they overran whole countries in two, three, or four weeks, here the Germans were held behind the Don for a period of fifty days, and, though they advanced, they did not manage to do more than two or three kilometres a day on the average. Of course, it was not exclusively the work of the Sixty-second Army which held up the Germans, but the Sixty-second Army's role was decisive. The German plan was to strike simultaneously north and south of Stalingrad; in the north through Morozovskaya and Kalach, in the south through Kotelnikovo. Indeed, on September 10, these two groups united, and after that they could start their general attack on Stalingrad. This general onslaught began, in effect, on September 14. They attacked with numerous tank columns, with artillery, masses of aircraft, and every possible means of destruction. The order we had received from our Supreme Command was not to abandon Stalingrad. In spite of the heavy massive attacks on the not very numerous defenders of Stalingrad, the spirit of these was not broken. The Germans also failed in their attempt on the 14th to cut Stalingrad in half. After the arrival of Rodimtsev's division, the centre of Stalingrad was recaptured, and also Mamaiev Hill, though here, for ten days, the battle continued to sway backwards and forwards. Whoever captured Mamaiev Hill in the end, it would be a Pyrrhic victory; every success there, both on the German side and ours, was a minor Pyrrhic victory: on both sides the losses were very heavy.

"Later, the main weight of the German attacks was thrown against the

north. The Workers' Settlements and the Plants themselves kept changing hands; some of the more solid factory buildings changed hands twenty or twenty-five times.

"Then, on September 30," he continued, "Hitler made a speech in which he promised to capture Stalingrad very shortly; and we knew that the Germans were preparing an all-out attack. We forestalled this all-out German attack by a large-scale attack on the Tractor Plant area between October 9 and 12. It was a fierce battle for 100 metres of land, and was inconclusive, though it cost the Germans many men, and therefore was of some help in the long run."

And then Chuikov came to his story of the 14th of October.

"But on October 14 the Germans struck out; that day will go down as the bloodiest and most ferocious in the whole Battle of Stalingrad. Along a narrow front of four to five kilometres, the Germans threw in five brand-new or newly-reinforced infantry divisions and two tank divisions, supported by masses of artillery and planes. It began in the morning with a terrible artillery and mortar barrage; and during the day there were over 2,000 Luftwaffe sorties. That morning you could not hear the separate shots or explosions: the whole merged into one continuous deafening roar. At five yards you could no longer distinguish anything: so thick were the dust and the smoke. It was astonishing: in a dugout the vibration was such that a tumbler on a table would fly into a thousand bits. That day sixty-one men in my headquarters were killed. After four or five hours of this stunning barrage, the Germans started to attack with tanks and infantry, and they advanced one and a half kilometres, and finally broke through at the Tractor Plant. Our officers and soldiers did not retreat a step here, and if the Germans still advanced, it was over the dead bodies of our men. But the losses the Germans had suffered during that day were so heavy that they could not maintain the power of their blow."

So that was when the Germans broke through to the Volga at the Tractor Plant; and Chuikov's statement that their advance was not maintained at anything like the same rate, meant that they no longer had the strength to *spread out and widen their Volga salient.*

Chuikov then said that since October there had scarcely been any further German gains:

"From then on till the end, the two armies were left gripping each other in a deadly clutch; the front became virtually stabilised. Despite this virtual stabilisation, we were ordered by the High Command in November to *activise* our front. It was essential that the Stalingrad group of divisions keep the Germans busy with constant attacks, and divert their attention from the flanks. The rest of the story is known."

What else did Chuikov say that night, round the dinner-table in his Stalingrad dugout—three days after the last shots had been fired?

"I shouldn't say," he remarked, "that the Germans made any serious tactical mistakes. But our army is more stable, better equipped, and better led. But strategically and politically the Germans made one cardinal mistake after another. It is the fault of their military leaders, and particularly of Hitler himself. As a result of these mistakes, the Germans have lost, in the Battle of

Stalingrad (starting from the fighting on the Don), as many as half a million men."

Of the length of the Volga bank held by the Germans inside Stalingrad, Chuikov said: "two kilometres at the Tractor Plant, and six kilometres in the south." (He mentioned Kuporosnoye, though without specifying that the six kilometres were north of Kuporosnoye, and included the stretch of Volga in the centre of Stalingrad.) He paid a tribute to General Zholudev's division which defended the Tractor Plant—almost to the last man—to Ludnikov's division and to Rodimtsev's division, adding, however, rather pointedly, that although Rodimtsev's division played an enormous part in "saving" Stalingrad, "there was no division of which one could not say that it had, at one moment or another, 'saved' Stalingrad."

He also talked of grenade-fighting, hand-to-hand fighting and night fighting, —usually by groups of six to eight men—all of which had played an important part in the Stalingrad battle, and he spoke of the factories whose workers had continued, under shell-fire, to work on tank repairs, and who, when the factories were completely smashed, formed themselves into anti-tank units.

Of his men, Chuikov spoke with a note of fatherly affection, and there was something singularly human and unferocious about this man (though actually, as many Russian officers later told me, for violent fits of temper, Chuikov was perhaps equalled by no one, except Marshal Zhukov). For all that, he had a great deal of ordinary human simplicity. When somebody suggested: "We hope Berlin may be reduced to ruins as Stalingrad is," Chuikov said, with a touch of irony: "You are talking like a civilian. We soldiers are really not interested in that. All I know is that although the Germans have proclaimed a three days' national mourning for Stalingrad, their blackest day has not started yet; but it will come soon; and the sooner the Second Front comes to help us in this, the better!"

Chuikov was a typical product of the Soviet régime. He was born in Tula in 1900. His father was a peasant, but he himself became an apprentice at the age of twelve in one of the Tula armaments works. Tula—the town of skilful, hard-working craftsmen, the town whose people are known for their solid working qualities, their humour and their zest of life. These Tula qualities were useful in Stalingrad—above all, perhaps, this careful attention that the craftsman gives *to detail.* In 1918 Chuikov joined the Red Army, fought in this very Tsaritsyn area against General Krasnov; later, already in command of a regiment, he fought against Kolchak. He fought in Poland in 1920; and much later, commanded an army in the war against Finland. And he had also been in Spain. But like other Russians who had been in Spain, Chuikov was cagey on the subject. The inference was that Britain and America had been very much on the *other* side, and that it would be indelicate to talk about it, now that we were Allies!

"Are you a Party member?" somebody asked. With his two rows of

gold teeth he laughed. "Does it matter? Well, yes, I am—and I have been one for a *very* long time."

I was not to see Chuikov again till June 1945. He was now one of the conquerors of Berlin. I saw him at the signing ceremony of the Allied declaration on the defeat of Germany. They sat there, round the green table, in the yachting club at Wendenschloss—he and Marshal Zhukov and other Russians; and here also were Eisenhower and Montgomery and Delattre de Tassigny. The prosperous abandoned Nazi villas around, with their rose and jasmine bushes, and the motor-boats on the lake, seemed a million miles away from the dead frozen winter soil of that night at Stalingrad, from that icebound Volga, into which the wreckage of steamers and barges was frozen.

"Yes, it's been a long way and a hard way," said Chuikov that day in Berlin. "But, mind you," he smiled, flashing his golden teeth, "speaking of those barges and steamers; it wasn't really as bad as you think. It was a devil of a job getting the stuff to Stalingrad, but we got ninety per cent of it across for all that!"

To-day, in 1945, one has become hardened to ruins; one has become bored with ruins. Ruins are monotonous. But in 1943 Stalingrad left one with an unforgettable impression. Until then, I had seen Coventry and Portsmouth and the East End of London. But that was bombing, and it was somehow impersonal, as the results of a hurricane would have been. Moreover, it was patchy destruction—not like the later totalitarian destruction of Central Berlin, for instance. But Stalingrad—every inch of Stalingrad—was a battlefield. For five months it had been, to use the gruesome but picturesque Russian phrase, a mincing-machine, a meat-chopper. Walking over the frozen tortured earth of Stalingrad, you felt that you were treading on human flesh and bones. And sometimes it was literally true.

To-day, after more than two years, I no longer remember every detail. But I remember a peaceful morning on top of the cliffs above the Volga; and the ruins of the Red October Plant—the "direction of the main drive"—and the nightmarish slopes of Mamaiev Hill, and the drive through the miles of ruins, to the centre of Stalingrad, to that Univermag department store in whose basement von Paulus surrendered, and, above all, the ruins of the Red Army house, with its dying Germans—dying of hunger and frostbite, in their own filth.

That morning, I again went up to the provisional little war memorial they were putting up on top of the cliff. Below was the frozen Volga, a mile wide, and beyond, in the lilac mist, were the oaks and poplars of the Delta land. Across the ice, numerous horse-carts and lorries were driving,

just as on the previous day. The sky was a cold pale blue, and the snow brilliant in the sun. Down below, on the beach, there were dozens of cars and lorries, mostly German. For a moment one imagined that this was like the promenade of some seaside resort—Brighton or Blackpool—with the pleasure cars parking down there. The whole life of the city seemed concentrated on these frozen beaches. All the people—those who had lived through the battle, and those who had now come back—were living in dugouts in the cliffs, near the wide ice-bound river. Women, and even some children, had lived through it all: the women had been busy washing clothes and doing odd jobs for the Red Army.

On the war memorial, a Russian and two German prisoners were working. As I looked on from a short distance, a small soldier came up to me, and talked. He was a young fellow of twenty, a little Bashkir with a strong humorous Mongol face, with deep laughing slanting black eyes. He spoke in broken Russian, but was communicative. "It was hard going," he said. "Just look at those smashed oil-tanks over there. You should have seen the flames and the smoke when they were burning! I was here. They used to bomb us all day. ['They' always meant one thing—the Germans.] Eighteen to twenty planes would come over all at once. They would score direct hits on our dugouts. They hit the one I was in and killed eighteen people. I was on sentry duty outside at the time. But the battle of the Red October Plant—now, you should have seen that! What a noise the guns made!" It was a nice primitive way of putting it. Then he said: "We killed a lot of them there. You could see them lying there in piles, twenty, thirty, forty at a time." He looked wonderfully cheerful. He pointed at the two Fritzes working there—two Fritzes with the non-committal faces of German war prisoners. One had a growth of black beard, the other of reddish beard. "Can you talk in their language?" said the little Bashkir. "Yes." "Come on then, talk to them." They were digging the frozen earth round the crude little war memorial, made of sheet iron and scraps of copper. As far as the eye could see, every building around was destroyed. They had done it. "*Na, wie gehr's?*" Cheerfully, with a look of surprise, but emphatically, the dark German said: "*Ganz gut.*" "So you haven't been murdered by the Russians, as you were told?" "No," he said, cheerfully again. I translated to the Bashkir. "And what did they do to our people?" he said reproachfully. "I saw it with my own eyes, the Red Star they had cut on the back of a Russian war prisoner, whom they then murdered. There, up at the factory. And here they are, wearing our *valenki*." True enough, both of them were wearing *valenki*. One was wearing a dirty German grey-green overcoat, but below it there were all sorts of odd bits of clothing, and the other wore a Russian *polushubok*, and they both had fur caps of sorts. "Yes," said the German with the black stubble, "the Russians gave us

these *valenki.* They're good, very good, these felt boots." When I translated the story of the Red Star, he winced and said: "Really, I've never seen anything like that." "Bah," said the Bashkir, "they did it with their own hands, and now they know nothing; they're all like that."

They were both from Berlin; I asked if they still considered Hitler the greatest man in the world. They protested vigorously. Red Stubble said he had once been a Young Communist, and Black Stubble said he had been a Social-Democrat. "*Ach,* all the misery that Hitler has brought to the world and to Germany," Red Stubble said sententiously. "Stalingrad —yes, but in Germany it's just like Stalingrad—Cologne and Düsseldorf, and also parts of Berlin, and it's going from bad to worse." They were both on the skinny side, but looked reasonably fit, and said they were getting plenty of food now, and were genuinely surprised at being so well treated. In the distance mines went on exploding from time to time; or at least I thought they were mines. "That's not mines," said the Bashkir, "they are blasting the frozen earth to make *bratskie mogily*—'brotherly graves.' There are lots of corpses all over the place." And then he talked again about the German air attacks, and how the German dive-bombers used to attack the ships on the river, and how one day early on, they hit a ship—one of those Volga holiday cruise steamers—with children who were being taken across the Volga, and how three thousand children were killed or drowned. "But you should have been here a couple of days ago when we celebrated victory! At night we used up thousands of German rockets. There were more rockets in the sky than there had ever been during the battle!"

The Russian sergeant, who was in charge of the two Germans, had been listening to our conversation with them, with a touch of tolerant amusement; and now he called them back to get on with the job. "How are they?" I said to him. "They're all right," he said, "*nichevo.*" These two were Stalingrad Germans—and yet, the whole scene was, in a way, typical of the Russian temperament. It often happens that a Red Army soldier, even after the grimmest of battles, takes charge of one or two German prisoners—just as this one was doing—and proceeds to treat them as though they were a couple of pet monkeys. I have known cases where the "monkey" and the owner became quite attached to each other, if only because the "monkey" could be certain of being protected and well fed by his boss.

What can one say about the Red October Plant—the scene of those incredible battles in October? We walked up the ravine—which had come to be known as the Gully of Death; it was a rather steep road, and we walked about half a mile, and could look back, and see behind us the frozen Volga. Here used to be the main river crossings. In vain the Germans had tried to break through, though occasionally, at night, their tommy-

gunners would penetrate a good long way down the ravine. There had been houses on the sides of the ravine; now there was hardly anything left, but as we passed, a woman with three children came out of a dugout and told some disjointed story of how she had lived through it all with her three children, and how she had washed clothes for the soldiers, and she became slightly hysterical and one of the children began to cry.

Here, in and around the main building of the October Plant, the fighting had gone on for weeks. It had been a hell of shell-fire and mortar-fire, and tank and air attacks, and hand-to-hand fighting; they had fought for a workshop or half a workshop, or for the end of a drainpipe. What the normal relief of the terrain had been no one could tell; you wound your way up and down, up and down; what was a natural slope, or what was the side of a dozen bomb-craters that had merged into one, no one could say. Trenches ran through the factory yards; through the workshops themselves; at the bottom of the trenches there still lay frozen green Germans and frozen grey Russians and frozen fragments of human shapes, and there were tin helmets, German and Russian, lying among the brick debris, and the helmets were half-filled with snow. There was barbed wire here, and half-uncovered mines, and shell cases, and more rubble, and fragments of walls, and tortuous tangles of rusty steel girders; but, strange to say, though riddled with holes, a large red-brick factory chimney was still standing, rising from all this. How anyone could have survived here was hard to imagine; and somebody pointed to a wall, with something written on it, where one of the units had died to the last man. But now everything was silent and dead in this cold fossilised hell, as though a raving lunatic had suddenly died of heart failure. And, without an effort of the imagination, it no longer meant much.

Later we went up the slopes of Mamaiev Hill. Somebody said that they used to grow here the best water-melons, and that the slopes of the hill were a continuous orchard, where, on summer evenings, couples from Stalingrad would come out for walks, to breathe the cool wind blowing across the steppes. There was with us a major who was rattling off dates and figures; this was the "key to Stalingrad," I heard him say, "or anyway, the Germans thought it was," and they had captured it early on in September, and then it had been recaptured by the Russians, on such-and-such a date, and then captured again by the Germans; and he said something about picked German divisions—the 195th infantry division and the 216th rifle regiment.

He also said that the top of the hill had been recaptured by Batyuk's men on January 11, but the Germans still clung on to the water-tower, further along the ridge, and had not been dislodged from there till January 30, the day before von Paulus surrendered. He said something more about tanks that had climbed the slopes, first German tanks, and

later Russian tanks; the German tanks were knocked out by suicide squads armed with hand-grenades and incendiary bottles. Up there, on top of the ridge, there were dugouts which the Germans continued to hold even when the Russians, close by, were already hoisting the Red Flag. You couldn't deny; he said, that the Germans were good soldiers.

Following a narrow path we climbed the hundred yards of the deadly slope; already on top of the hill the Russians had erected a rough wooden obelisk painted bright blue, with a red star on top; they had done this in the last two days. I looked round. Among the fractured stumps of fruit-trees lay more helmets, half-filled with snow, and shell-cases and shell splinters and other metal junk. There were patches of snow on the ploughed-up frozen ground, but there were hardly any dead, except for a solitary large head, completely blackened with time, and its white teeth grinning; had he been a Russian or a German? The major said that the Russians had been buried and that 1,500 Germans were still lying stacked up on the other side of the hill. How many thousands of shells had pierced this ground where only six months ago the water-melons were ripening? A Russian tank was still standing there, halfway up the hill, facing the summit, and burned out. "That must have been on the 11th," said the Major.

From the top of Mamaiev Hill, we could see the whole panorama of Stalingrad; the factory chimneys just below us, and further to the left; and beyond them, the frozen Volga, and, some three miles to the right, the large blocks of Central Stalingrad, and quite near, at the foot of the hill, the singularly intact white shell of a building, still marked Myaso-combinat—Meat Combine. It seemed a macabre joke.

What happened then? I remember, we drove into Stalingrad, down a long, long avenue, with half-shattered trees on either side, running parallel to the Volga. We passed tramcars—many of them, all blasted, smashed and burned out; had they been standing here since the great bombing of the 23rd of August? What houses there were on either side had also been burned out, except for one extraordinary freak: in the middle of all this desolation stood a cosy little wooden izba with a gabled roof, with lace curtains in the windows, and a homely cloud of smoke rising from its chimney. One could see it now: Stalingrad was one of the modern cities of Russia; its entire centre, like its factories, had been built in the last ten or fifteen years; here were large blocks of flats—all burned out, of course (perhaps Gai's "well-known heart specialist" used to receive in one of these?)—and the large central square with the burned-out railway-station at one end, and a fountain with the stone statues of children still dancing around it. One or two of the arms and heads had been shot off, but they continued their dance round the fountain for all that.

With thirty degrees of frost, it was very cold. We got out in the main

station square, beside the fountain with the dancing children. An enormous heap of litter had been dumped in one corner of the square: letters and maps and books, and snapshots and studio photographs: I picked up a large photograph of an extremely unpleasant and self-satisfied thin-lipped young man in sergeant's uniform: a true representative of the Herrenvolk, and snapshots of little children at home in Germany, and a group of middle-aged German women with smirking self-contented faces under ridiculous hats, posing on the embankment of some large river, apparently the Rhine; a map of Europe and Africa all in one, and a green Catholic Prayer book called *Geistige Rüstung für Soldaten*, and a letter from some child called Rudi writing that "now that you have taken '*die grosse Festung Sewastopol*,' the war will soon be ended against '*die verfluchten Bolschewiken, die Erzfeinde Deutschlands*.'"

We walked down the main avenue running south, between enormous blocks of burned-out houses, towards the other square. In the middle of the pavement lay a dead German. He must have been running when a shell hit him. His legs still seemed to be running, though one was now cut off above the ankle by a shell splinter, and with the splintered white bone sticking out of the frozen red flesh, it looked like something harmlessly familiar from a butcher's window. His face was a bloody frozen mess, and beside it was a frozen pool of blood.

We walked on to the square at the other end of the street—which, by the look of it, had been the big shopping and business street of Stalingrad. Nearly all the houses had been large modern blocks, solidly built. The shells of some were still almost complete—others presented fantastic zigzagged silhouettes, usually caused by heavy shelling. Of the corner building, opposite the Univermag, only the fragment of an enormous wall was rising in a sharp peak, ready, one felt, to topple over at any moment. Somehow, this corner reminded me of old pictures of Ypres, just after the last war. But two buildings in the square were standing there, squat and solid, though burned out: one was the Red Army House—of which more later, the other the Univermag Department Store. The streets around were almost deserted, except for a few Red Army men, walking about, wide-eyed. Here, in the basement of the big department store, one of the last scenes—and the most dramatic—of the Stalingrad drama had taken place. Here Field-Marshal von Paulus had surrendered, on January 31, and with him had surrendered 46,000 other Germans in the central part of the city. The others, in the northern pocket, held out for two more days, after photographs were showered on them telling them of von Paulus's surrender; photographs—and also shells.

We walked down into the basement. It was a solidly built basement of a department store, with nothing peculiar about it. To each side of the corridor there were small cubicles that must have served as offices; these

small rooms were the last Stalingrad residence of Paulus and his staff. The window in von Paulus's room was just above the level of the pavement outside, and had been sandbagged; now the sandbags had been thrown aside, and, oddly enough, the glass was whole. There was a bed here, on an iron bedstead, and a couple of chairs in the room. In the corridor, there stood an upright piano.

We saw the man who had captured von Paulus: a youngster with a turned-up nose, fair hair and a laughing face, Lieutenant Fyodor Mikhailovich Elchenko, whom one could not imagine being called anything but "Fedya." He was bubbling over with exuberance as he told his story—he, the lieutenant who had captured the Field-Marshal—and it is hard to restore all the details. But it was something like this.

On that 31st of January—it was the day after the tenth anniversary of the Hitler régime, and the Führer had failed to speak that day—the Russians were closing in on Central Stalingrad from all directions. The Germans were frozen, starving, but still fighting. At first, the whole square outside the Univermag was captured by the Russians, but then, gradually, the Univermag was beginning to be surrounded on all sides. The capture of the square had been preceded by a heavy barrage of gun and mortar fire, and the mortar fire continued, at brief intervals, all day. From time to time flame-throwers also came into action. Elchenko said that, in the course of the day, he had learned from three German officers, taken prisoner, that Paulus was in the Univermag building. "We then began to shell the house," he said, "and just as the shells started hitting the house—my unit was occupying the other side of the street just opposite the side entrance to the Univermag—a representative of Major-General Raske popped out of the door and waved to me. It was taking a big risk, but I crossed the street, and went up to him. The German officer then called for a German interpreter, and he said to me: 'Our big chief wants to talk to your big chief.' So I said to him: 'Look here, our big chief has other things to do. He isn't available. You'll just have to deal with me.' All this was going on while, from the other side of the square, they were still sending shells into the building. I called for some of my men, and they joined me—twelve men, and two other officers. They were all armed, of course, and the German officer said: 'No, our chief asks that only one or two of you come in.' So I said: 'Nuts to that. I am not going by myself.' However, in the end, we agreed on three. So three of us went into the basement. It's empty now, but you should have seen it then. It was packed with soldiers—hundreds of them. You couldn't move a finger in such a crowd. It was worse than any tramcar. They were dirty and hungry and stank. And did they look scared! They had all fled down here, to get away from the mortar fire outside."

What happened then? Elchenko was ushered into the presence of

Major-General Raske and von Paulus's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Schmidt (the one we had seen wearing that leopard-skin cap). Raske said that they were going to negotiate the surrender on Paulus's behalf, but that Paulus "since yesterday, no longer answered for anything." It was all a little mysterious, Elchenko said, adding he couldn't quite figure out himself who was now in charge. Had von Paulus passed his authority on to Raske, or was he simply avoiding a personal surrender, or had there really been some disagreement between Paulus and the others? Probably not; for Raske and Schmidt kept going in and out of von Paulus's room, apparently consulting him on the coming capitulation. Apparently von Paulus was unwilling to negotiate with the little Russian lieutenant direct. However, the latter was, in the end, shown into von Paulus's room. "He was lying on this bed here," said Elchenko, "wearing his uniform. He looked unshaven, and you wouldn't say he felt jolly." "Well, that finishes it," I remarked to him. He gave me a sort of miserable look and nodded. "And then, in the other room—the corridor, mind you, was still packed with soldiers—Raske said: 'There's one request I have to make. You must have him taken away in a decent car, under proper guard, so the Red Army soldiers don't kill him, as though he were some vagabond.' " Elchenko laughed. "I said 'O.K.' von Paulus had a car duly sent for him, and was taken to General Rokossovsky's place. What happened after that I don't know. But for two days afterwards we were gathering in prisoners all over the place. And then the other fellows, on the north side, also surrendered. But even in this part of Stalingrad there was still some fighting for a few hours after von Paulus had been caught; however, when they learned what had happened, they began to surrender without further trouble."

We went out into the street again. Everything around was strangely silent. The dead German with the blown-off leg was still lying some distance away. We crossed the square, and went into the yard of the large burned-out building of the Red Army House. And here one realised more clearly what the last days of Stalingrad had been to so many of the Germans. Here, in the porch, lay the skeleton of a horse, with its skin ripped off and only a few scraps of meat still clinging to its ribs. Then we came into the yard. In the yard lay more horses' skeletons, and to the right there was an enormous, horrible cesspool—fortunately frozen solid. And then suddenly, at the far end of the yard I caught sight of a human figure. He had been crouching over another cesspool, and now, noticing us, he was hastily pulling up his pants, and then he slunk away into the door of a basement.

But as he passed, I caught a glimpse of the wretch's face—with its mixture of suffering and idiot-like incomprehension. For a moment, I wished the whole of Germany were there to see it. The man was perhaps

already dying. In that basement into which he slunk there were still two hundred Germans—dying of hunger and frostbite. "We haven't had time to deal with them yet," one of the Russians said. "They'll be taken away to-morrow, I suppose." And, at the far end of the yard, beside the other cesspool, behind a low stone wall, the yellow corpses of skinny Germans were piled up—men who had died in that basement—about a dozen wax-like dummies. We did not go into the basement itself—what was the good? There was nothing we could do for them.

This scene of filth and suffering in that yard of the Red Army House was my last glimpse of Stalingrad. I remembered the long anxious days of the summer of 1942, and the nights of the London blitz, and the photograph of Hitler, smirking, as he stood there on the steps of the Madeleine, and the weary days of '38 and '39 when a jittery Europe would tune in to Berlin to hear Hitler's yells accompanied by the cannibal roar of the German mob. And there seemed a rough but divine justice in those frozen cesspools with their diarrhoea, and those horses' bones, and those starved yellow corpses in the yard of the Red Army House at Stalingrad.

There is little more to tell. That afternoon we drove across the frozen Volga, and in a large cottage, in the middle of "Richmond Park," we were received by General Rodimtsev, smart, fair, dapper, with cold blue eyes and smiling thin ironical lips.

This was a "rest home" and Rodimtsev was having a rest.

He had some of his fellows there—a celebrated sniper, a Georgian called Taverkaladze, who had shot 162 Germans, and a lot of other men of the famous Rodimtsev Division. Among them were the "musical unit" who, apparently, had done a spot of fighting from time to time, but whose main job was to sing and dance and keep the others cheerful at off-moments. Now they sang funny songs about Hitler and Goebbels, and marching songs, and 'The Dugout,' that melancholy soldier's song with its sad sentimental words of nostalgia and foreboding which, Rodimtsev said, had been the most popular of all songs at Stalingrad. Surkov, the "soldier's poet"—as distinct from Simonov, the "officer's poet"—had written the words.

> The flame flickers in the narrow stove,
> On the log the resin glitters like a tear,
> And the accordion in my dugout
> Sings to me of your eyes and your smile.
> . . . You are now far away, far away,
> Between us are hundreds of miles of snow,
> You are so far, I cannot come to you,
> But death is outside, four paces away.
> Sing, accordion, sing, defying the blizzard.

Call, call again for the happiness that has gone astray.
It is warm in this cold cold dugout,
It is warm with my undying love.

What else did not Rodimtsev talk about?—of his youth as a peasant boy in the dour climate of Chkalov between the Urals and the Caspian, with its baking summers and snowbound winters; of his military training; of how, in 1937, he had volunteered to go to Spain, and had there "carried out the orders of the Soviet Command." He mentioned names that evoked old memories—Madrid and Saragossa; the University City and Guadalajara, but he, too, would not go into details.

He said that all his officers and most of his soldiers were Komsomols and Party men; and the division had originally been a parachute division; his men were picked men, of exceptional physical strength and endurance. We could see that!

Then he spoke of how he and his men, after fighting in the Kursk area, had come to the Volga, and how, on the night of the 14th of September, they crossed the Volga from west to east, at Kamyshino, seventy kilometres north of Stalingrad, and how they then came down the left bank to a point opposite Stalingrad, and crossed during the night, under constant mortar and shell fire. He told how during that first day in Stalingrad part of the division cleared a large part of central Stalingrad of the Germans who had broken in a few days before, and how another part stormed and captured Mamaiev Hill. Later, on September 27, Batyuk's division took over and Mamaiev Hill was lost again in the early days of October; meantime, in the central part of the city, now assigned to them, the Rodimtsev men had repelled attacks and more attacks, some with dozens of enemy tanks involved. Much of the fighting was done in the two ravines, the Dolgy and the Krutoi,[1] through which the Germans were trying to break through to the Volga. But after the great battles in September, the division was ordered, in the main, to take up the defensive. Only this did not exclude street fighting and house-to-house fighting; far from it. Rodimtsev's was among the divisions that had most thoroughly specialised in this. He described some of these strange fights; one kind of battle was called "the sandwich," when the Germans were both on the floor above and the floor below, and holes had to be bored, both in the floor and in the ceiling and flame throwers applied. Somebody asked whether the division's losses were heavy. Rodimtsev waved the question aside, with the remark: "of course there are losses in wartime, but *theirs* were much heavier." Then Rodimtsev made some of the usual remarks about the Russian soldier "fighting to the last man," or as he put it, "fighting to his last life"—which, coming from him, was a phrase full of meaning, and then he made the usual remarks to the effect that the Red Army was "fighting in the vanguard of progressive humanity," and that, in throwing in their full weight, "the progressive nations of the world" would soon win the war, and that—Africa was good, but not enough.

I forget what else he talked about, but throughout supper he was in high spirits, remarking on one occasion that "he'd get at General Franco yet." Then he said that the fighting on the last day at Stalingrad was particularly tough: the Germans in one sector simply refused to surrender: while one part

[1] Meaning literally "The Long" and "The Steep."

of the division, fighting "up there, in the western part of the Barricades Workers' Settlement," managed in the end to capture 1,500 men, another part of the division was obliged literally to exterminate the Germans, and only then would small groups of three and four surrender. "I think it's because they knew we ranked as paratroops, whom they never took prisoner, and they were sure we would kill them all."

"Well," he said, "I don't suppose I shall be here long. We still have a long road ahead of us. But we'll do it. Stalingrad is going to be remembered."

It had grown dark when we took our leave of Rodimtsev. Apart from the wheezy breathing of the rickety old buses, waiting for us, and the creaking of footsteps on the snow, everything outside was still and silent.

Stalingrad was a few miles away. Now there was no gunfire, and no glow in the sky, except for an occasional rocket they were firing for fun.

We drove through the dark to Leninsk, which we reached in about three hours. There some of us spent the night—most of us sleeping on the floor—in the house of a woman whose husband had been killed at the Barricades Plant at Stalingrad. At first she maintained an air of somewhat artificial and strained joviality, and produced a samovar, and a gipsy-like woman who also lived in the house played the guitar and sang sentimental songs. In the next room a little boy, our hostess's child, was sleeping. But as she listened to the singing, she grew melancholy, and suddenly burst into tears. However, she soon regained her composure, and even her gaiety, and asked the woman to sing more, and asked the major who was with us to tell some funny stories. "I can't remember any offhand," said the major, "except this one." And he told the story of a girl who went to a chemist's shop and asked for a remedy against pregnancy. So the chemist gave her a bottle of poison. "Do I take it before, or after?" the girl asked. And the chemist said: "You take it *instead*."

I had a look at some of the things I had picked up at Stalingrad: the German snapshots, and the "real photograph" of von Paulus as a prisoner, which to save time, they had dropped as leaflets on the last surrounded group of Germans; and I looked at the other leaflet: the text, in German, of the Rokossovsky–Voronov ultimatum of January 10, printed, oddly enough, on dark-blue paper, and hard to read, but easy to spot on the snow. And I had a look at the Catholic prayer book I had picked up from the junk heap in the Central Square at Stalingrad, with the stone children—some of them headless—dancing round the frozen fountain.

It was printed in Cologne, on August 13, 1939 (this in anticipation of the invasion of Poland). It had no reference to Hitler, but it had

references to Hindenburg and Mackensen, and on page 30 I came across the following:

> Show thyself as a true German warrior, as a man of nobility. Make no exaggerated demands, defend justice; above all, be a defender to innocent women and children. Share thy bread with the poor. Act as thou wouldst have strange soldiers act in thine own house. Even in enemy land will harshness and cruelty mar thy soldier's honour. Be chivalrous, particularly towards women. Think of thy sister, thy mother, thy bride, or thy wife. How wouldst thou have strange soldiers treat them?

There followed a similar section entitled: "Be chaste," beginning: "Once again, be chivalrous to innocent maidens and women."

De quoi se foutait-on? The book was composed by a priest named Dr. Zillikens, of Cologne. What a sop to his conscience—on the eve of the invasion of Catholic Poland!

We flew straight back to Moscow the next day.

Here ends the story of the year of Stalingrad. Now Russia was entering an entirely new phase of her war. The war of survival was won; the war of liberation was now in progress. And as the Red Army advanced to the West, nearer and nearer to the heart of Europe, so Russia was becoming more and more concerned in international affairs. Up to February 1943 the war had been Russia's full-time job; every thought, every atom of energy were directed towards averting disaster.

After Stalingrad, Russia became a mighty factor in world politics. Her voice grew louder and firmer, and carried more authority and weight than it had ever carried, either since the Revolution or before. The "All-Slav" seeds, sown in 1941 and 1942, began to sprout, and already in April, two months after Stalingrad, and even before the victory of Orel, the Polish Problem emerged, full-size. Russia was becoming Europe-conscious. Moscow, in 1943, became one of the three great world centres of international affairs, and at Teheran the first Big Three meeting was held. A desperately hard war continued to be fought in Russia, complete victory was still far away, but, after Stalingrad, and with the intensification of the war in the West, and the ever-growing flow of Allied equipment into Russia, victory had now become a matter of time. But this time factor remained, at least psychologically, an acute problem. Even so, Russia was becoming more self-confident, and, at least for a time, less distrustful of the Western world with which she must now live together—as one of the three leading powers.

Many of the seeds that were sown in 1942 came to fruition in 1943; much that was still vague and indefinite in 1942 now took much clearer shape, notably the German Problem, which was now to emerge in all its profound and pathological ugliness.

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