

Excerpt: Truman at Potsdam: His Secret Diary. Barton J. Bernstein.

Source: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/38.pdf>

[...]

July 17'45

Just spent a couple of hours with Stalin. Joe Davies [former American ambassador to Russia] called on [Ivan] Maisky [Assistant Foreign Minister] and made the date last night for noon today. Promptly a few minutes before twelve I looked up from the desk and there stood Stalin in the doorway. I got to my feet and advanced to meet him. He put out his hand and smiled. I did the same [and] we shook. I greeted Molotov and the interpreter and we sat down. After the usual polite remarks we got down to business. I told Stalin that I am no diplomat but usually said yes or no to questions after hearing all the argument. It pleased him. I asked him if he had the agenda for the meeting. He said he had and that he had some more questions to present. I told him to fire away. He did and it is dynamite-but I have some dynamite too which I am not exploding now. He wants to fire Franco [Spain's dictator], to which I wouldn't object and divide up the Italian colonies and other mandates, some no doubt that the British have. Then he got on the Chinese situation [and] told us what agreements had been reached and what was in abeyance. Most of the big points are settled. He'll be in the Jap War on August 15th. Fini Japs when that comes about. We had lunch[,] talked socially[,] put on a real show drinking toasts to everyone[,] then had pictures made in the backyard. I can deal with Stalin. He is honest - but smart as hell.

July 18 [19]45

Ate breakfast with nephew Harry, a sergeant in the Field Artillery. He is a good soldier and a nice boy. They took him off *Queen Elizabeth* at Glasco [Glasgow Harbor] and flew him here: Sending him home Friday. Went to lunch with P.M. [Prime Minister Churchill] at 1 :30 [and] walked around to British Hqrs. Met at the gate by Mr. Churchill. Guard of honor drawn up. Fine body of men Scottish guards. Band played Star Spangled Banner. Inspected Guard and went in for lunch. P.M. & I ate alone. Discussed Manhattan [A-bomb] (it is a success). Decided to tell Stalin about it. Stalin had told P.M. of telegram from Jap Emperor [actually from the Foreign Secretary] asking for peace. Stalin also read his answer to me. It was satisfactory. Believe Japs will fold before Russia comes in.

I am sure they will when Manhattan [A-bomb] appears over their homeland. I shall inform Stalin about it at opportune time. Stalin's luncheon was a most satisfactory meeting. I invited him to come to the U.S. Told him I'd send the Battleship *Missouri* for him if he'd come. He said he wanted to cooperate with the U.S. in peace as we had cooperated in war but it would be harder. Said he was grossly misunderstood in U.S. and I was misunderstood in Russia. I told him that we each could help to remedy that situation in our home countries and that I intended to try with all I had to do my part at home. He gave me a most cordial smile and, said he would do as much in Russia. [...]

July 25 1945

We met at 11 A.M. today. That is Stalin, Churchill and the U.S. president. But I had a most 'important session with Lord [Louis M.] Mountbatten and General [George C.] Marshall [army chief of staff] before that. We have discovered the most terrible bomb [the A-bomb] in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley

Era, after Noah and his fabulous Ark.

Anyway we think we have found the way to cause a disintegration of the atom. An experiment in the New Mexican desert [at Alamogordo on July 16th] was startling – to put it mildly. Thirteen pounds of the explosive caused the complete disintegration of a steel tower 60 feet high, created a crater 6 feet deep and 1200 feet in diameter, knocked over a steel tower ½ mile away and knocked down men 10,000 yards away. The explosion was visible for more than 200 miles and audible for 40 miles and more.

The weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. I have told the Sec. of War Mr. [Henry L.] Stimson to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children. Even if the Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this terrible bomb on the old Capital [Kyoto] or the new [Tokyo].

He & I are in accord. The target will be a purely military one and we will issue a warning statement [the Potsdam Declaration on the 26th] asking the Japs to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful. [...]

July 26, 1945

[...] Talked to [Jefferson] McCaffery [American ambassador to France] about France. He is scared stiff of Communism, the Russian variety which isn't communism at all but just police, government pure and simple. A few top hands just take clubs, pistols and concentration camps and rule the people on the lower levels.

The Communist Party in Moscow is no different in its methods and actions' toward the common man than were the Czar and the Russian Noblemen (so called: they were anything but noble.) Nazis and Fascists were worse. It seems that Sweden, Norway, Denmark and perhaps Switzerland have the only real peoples government on the Continent of Europe. But the rest are a bad lot from the standpoint of the people who do not believe in tyrann[y]. [...]

July 30, 1945

[...] If Stalin should suddenly cash in it would be the end of the original Big Three, First Roosevelt by death, then Churchill, by political failure and then Stalin. I am wondering what would happen to Russia and central Europe if Joe suddenly passed out. If some demagogue on horseback gained control of the efficient Russian military machine, he could play havoc with European peace for a while. I also wonder if there is a man with the necessary strength and following to step into Stalin's place and maintain peace and solidarity at home.

It isn't customary for dictators to train leaders to follow them in power. I've seen no one at this Conference in the Russian line up who can do the job. Molotov is not able to do it. He lacks sincerity. Vishinsky same thing and Maisky is short on honesty. Well we shall see what we shall see. Uncle Joe's pretty tough mentally and physically but there is an end to every man and we can't help but speculate. [...]