

Following my visit to South America further responsibilities were placed upon me as Chairman of the Shipping Board. The authorities in Washington had introduced an elaborate system of priorities for available shipping space. The Canadian Shipping Board was given the responsibility of working out the priorities for Canadian exports in relation to their importance to the war effort. We had numerous meetings to determine our general policy and the submission we should make to the authorities in Washington. MacCallum and I paid a visit to that city to discuss matters and found that our opposite numbers in the United States were mostly former officials of the United Fruit Company, so we dubbed them "the Banana Boys." They were a difficult lot with whom to negotiate, but I was able to leave most of the talking to MacCallum, who was familiar with the language of the shipping fraternity.

The manifold nature of my activities and the long hours I was working were beginning to put a great strain upon me, when the prospect of a new line of activity arose. This was the possibility of my being appointed Canadian Minister to the Soviet Union. I knew from a number of signs that I was being considered for the position and could not make up my mind whether or not I wanted it. I was happy in the position of Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce and did not want to relinquish it after only a short period in the office. On the other hand, Russia was the country to which I had devoted the early part of my career and it had always had a great fascination for me. It was the country in which I had spent a large part of the First World War, and it seemed a repetition of fate that I should be destined to spend the latter part of the Second World War there.

I spent my summer holiday in 1942 with my wife in a small hotel at Murray Bay on the St. Lawrence River below Quebec. Every morning I read the newspaper on the veranda of the hotel. I was following the sweep of the German armies towards Stalingrad and beginning to link the fate of that Russian city with my own. If Stalingrad fell the chances of the appointment of a Canadian minister to the Soviet Union were slim. If Stalingrad held they were good. [122]

This deduction proved to be correct. One morning in October Norman Robertson telephoned and asked me if I was having lunch as usual at the cafeteria in the Chateau Laurier Hotel. I told him I was and he asked me to meet him outside of the East Block, where External Affairs had offices. As soon as we had greeted one another he told me that Mr. King had asked him to inform me that he wished to offer me the appointment as first Canadian Minister to be assigned to the Soviet Union. I replied that I would be pleased to accept. Apart from my own appointment, however, nothing else had been decided. Immediately I began to feel that I was giving up an assured, established position for a leap into the unknown. The prospect began to frighten me. [123]

Back to Russia

On November first, 1942, I relinquished the position of Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce, and Oliver Master, the Assistant Deputy Minister, took over, pending a definite appointment. I transferred my activities to a room in the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings, which had been placed temporarily at my disposal. I borrowed the services of Miss Powell, who had been my stenographer in the Department of Trade and Commerce. I had been subjecting her to great strain and was glad to be able to assign less onerous duties to her. She had proved to be a magnificent secretary. I always found that the letters I dictated came back

faultlessly typed with never a need for corrections. It is seldom realized how much senior executives in the civil service owe to the self-effacing but conscientious assistance of their secretaries.

There was a great deal to do in organizing the first Canadian diplomatic mission to the Soviet Union. First of all the supply of food had to be arranged. Inquiries in Washington had produced the name and address of a firm in New York that specialized in the supply of foodstuffs to diplomatic missions abroad. I obtained a copy of its catalogue and prepared a list of essential supplies. Then there was the question of the allowances to be paid to the individual members of the mission. Miss McCloskey, our efficient accountant, was in charge of such details, but she had had no experience with a mission being sent to such a country as the Soviet Union. There were many consultations with her, Norman Robertson and Hume Wrong, who had recently come up from Washington to assist in the administration of the Department of External Affairs. Wrong was most helpful, being an excellent administrator who knew how to cut corners and get things done. [124]

Last but not least was the important question of whom I should take with me. We were going to be established in Kuibyshev, the temporary capital, where we knew living conditions would be difficult. At the same time it seemed that for prestige reasons we should have a fairly large staff. This later proved to be the great mistake we made. It seemed to me essential that one of the secretaries of the legation should be able to speak Russian. I tracked down various possible ones but none seemed to fit the requirements. It was mandatory to have someone who was not rigidly committed either for or against the Communist regime and this requirement ruled out most former Russians who had become Canadian citizens. Eventually we heard that Captain McCordick of the Canadian Army had turned up in Washington. He had been on his way back from service in Iran when his ship was torpedoed off the coast of Africa. He had been rescued by the Germans and handed over to the French authorities in North Africa. He had been in prison camp in Morocco when the Allies landed. When liberated he had made his way to Washington, where hereported to the Canadian Legation. He was a very good linguist and spoke Russian in addition to French and German. He seemed to be just the man we were looking for. After he had come to Ottawa and been interviewed by us we took him on, with instructions to follow me to Kuibyshev after he had finished his home-leave in Toronto.

There was a requirement for a senior official who was acquainted fully with the routine of the Department. I was anxious to secure the services of Robert Ford, whom I had met in Brazil, but he had a physical disability and Jean Desy, the Ambassador at Rio, strongly advised against sending him to Russia. Eventually, we agreed on Ronald Macdonnell, a first secretary at the Canadian Embassy in Washington. He had had several years' experience in the service and knew fully the requirements of a legation abroad.

The other addition to our diplomatic staff came about quite fortuitously. Saul Rae, Robertson's executive assistant, told us about Arnold Smith, who was then with the British Ministry of Information at its Cairo office. He wished to join the Canadian service and seemed to be just the kind of man we required. It was arranged that he should join us when we passed through Cairo. [125]

We were going to a country whose energy was being devoted to the prosecution of the war and it seemed logical to me that we should show appreciation of this fact by having a military

attaché on our legation staff. Eventually the Department of National Defence produced two officers. One was Brigadier Lefebvre, a veteran of two world wars, who was becoming too old for active service at the front, and the other was Captain George Okulich, a Canadian of Russian descent. His family's nationality was contrary to our policy, but we decided to make an exception because of obvious trouble taken by the military authorities to find the two best possible men.

The final and most difficult problem was to find suitable clerical assistance. The department promised to arrange this for me by applying to the armed services for male assistance, the sending of female employees to Kuibyshev being out of the question.

Everything was arranged so I was able to leave early in 1943 for Miami, where I was to await transport by air to Cairo with the United States military air services. I had been warned that I might have to wait in Miami for some time, but I did not take this too seriously. I did not know it at the time but the Casablanca Conference was then on and all transport of deferrable passengers was being held up until President Roosevelt could return to the United States. I spent a month in Miami with nothing to do except read Russian books and walk about the streets. All the hotels in Miami Beach had been requisitioned by the military authorities so that there was a complete absence of the usual tourists. The sheer monotony of having nothing to do was maddening.

Eventually the reservation came through. In the meantime McCordick, having finished the leave due him, had joined me in Miami. Together we departed in a United States aircraft, the other passengers all being service personnel. We flew first to Georgetown, British Guiana, and from there to Natal, Brazil, spending a night in each place in United States military barracks. Then followed a flight across the ocean to Ascension Island where we stayed in quarters on the airfield, located on the lava bed of an extinct volcano. It would be difficult to imagine a more desolate spot. A contingent of the United States Army was stationed there and the officers were bemoaning [126] the fate that kept them from what they called "the combat zone." From Ascension Island we flew to Accra in the Gold Coast. This was the transfer point for passengers proceeding north to Morocco or Algeria and for those proceeding east. We were told to report each morning for possible reservations. We did this for four days. Each afternoon we went into town along the coastal road. The tropical vegetation and the crowds of black people made a powerful impression on me. It was my first African journey.

Finally, word came that we would be leaving early the next morning. We flew first to Lagos in Nigeria, then to Kano. The airfield there was located just outside the walled town and it was interesting to witness the constant stream of black people issuing out of the gate. After Kano our next stop was a town in Chad on the border of the Sahara Desert. There the United States Air Transport Service had established a staging post. We were given a wonderful dinner as they prided themselves on serving the best meals in Africa, all the supplies for which were flown in. The next day we came down at several places before reaching Khartoum, where we spent the night, sleeping under the stars on the roof of a military building. Finally came the last leg of the journey, on which we followed the Nile down to Cairo, with a stop at Luxor. This ended my travels with the United States military air services, the efficiency of which impressed me greatly. We went to Shepperd's Hotel in Cairo where we found Macdonnell awaiting us. He had been there more than a month, having got through before the hold-up occasioned by the Casablanca Conference.

In Cairo we purchased kitchen utensils, chinaware and other supplies for the legation in Kuibyshev and arranged for them to be shipped in by the route through Iran. Richard Grev, the

Trade Commissioner at Cairo, and his charming wife were of great assistance and helped us to see the sights.

From Cairo we flew to Teheran on a British aircraft, spending a night at Habbaniya in Iraq on the way. We were put up at the British Legation in Teheran for several days. Macdonnell and I were the first of our party to fly out of Teheran; Arnold Smith had joined us at Cairo. We flew to Baku, where we spent the night at the Intourist Hotel. I was thankful to have reached Russia at last, to be able to speak Russian and [127] to partake of Russian food. We were made aware of the nearness of the front by the presence of large numbers of soldiers in Baku, and I noted that women were being used to guard some of the military installations. The flight from Baku to Kuibyshev was something of a nightmare. At first we flew very high as the Germans were not far away. Then we came down very low, flying only a few hundred feet above the Volga River.

At Kuibyshev I was welcomed by the Assistant Chief of Protocol and by Mr. Bagguley, the minister at the British Embassy in charge of the establishment at Kuibyshev. The ambassador spent all his time in Moscow. Bagguley invited me to stay with him. He lived in a comfortable house that had been chosen for Sir Stafford Cripps when he had been Ambassador to the Soviet Union. We were looked after by two Volga German servants and my first weeks in Kuibyshev were most pleasant.

The other members of our staff were housed in a British Embassy building, where they were rather crowded. For this reason we were anxious to move into the house that had been allotted to us but we had no furniture and no kitchen utensils.

After we had been in Kuibyshev for a few weeks a crisis arose in relations between the Soviet Union and Poland. The result was that the Polish representatives were asked to leave Kuibyshev. The Australians, who had arrived two months ahead of us, assumed charge of Polish affairs. They had already installed themselves in two flats downtown, so they had no use for the Polish furniture and agreed to loan it to us for safekeeping. This solved one problem.

Shortly after my arrival in Kuibyshev I had journeyed by train to Moscow with Macdonnell to present my credentials to Mr. Kalinin, President of the Supreme Soviet. After four days of painfully slow travel by train we had arrived in Moscow at three in the morning and had been surprised to find the chief of protocol at the station to greet us. I stayed at the National Hotel, in the same suite that Lord Beaverbrook had occupied on his visit to Moscow in 1941, two years previously. At the time the front was only some sixty miles to the west of Moscow and the city had all the appearances of war-time austerity. The Bolshoi Theatre was closed as both the opera [128] company and the ballet had moved temporarily to Kuibyshev. After presenting my credentials and calling upon V.M. Molotov, the Foreign Minister, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, the British Ambassador, and Admiral Stanley, the American Ambassador. I returned to Kuibyshev.

The foreign diplomats in Kuibyshev had very little to do. V. M. Molotov and most of the vice-ministers had remained in Moscow. The ministry in Kuibyshev was in the charge of Lozovsky, a vice-minister. He had under him most of the regular staff of the ministry and they dealt with all the routine questions. Any matter of importance, however, had to be taken up in Moscow. For this reason the British, American, Turkish and Japanese ambassadors had remained in Moscow, leaving their establishments in Kuibyshev under the supervision of a senior official in each case.

The diplomats in Kuibyshev would spend the morning walking up and down the main street, greeting one another. In the evening they would attend the opera or ballet at the very fine theatre that had become the temporary home of the Bolshoi Theatre. To relieve the boredom they would

entertain one another lavishly and never have I partaken of such sumptuous repasts, at a time when Russia was short of foodstuffs and many people were not getting enough to eat.

I got to know my colleagues very well. One of my best friends was Assarsson, the Swedish minister. His position as a neutral enabled him to pick up interesting bits of information from the Japanese and Bulgarian representatives, with whom we naturally had no contacts.

One group, including Fierlinger of Czechoslovakia and Simich of Yugoslavia, was in close touch with the Soviet authorities. The wisest of my colleagues was Fu Peng Hseung, the Chinese Ambassador, with whom I used to have long talks. I always found these to be interesting and productive of new insights into the Russian situation. Two of our most glamorous colleagues were Politis of Greece and Louis Quintanilla of Mexico. Both were great talkers and the two often monopolized the conversation at parties when they got into debates about what the Russians were trying to do.

Time passed pleasantly enough and I found that I was obtaining plenty of material for interesting despatches to Ottawa [129] – more than could be used, because of the shortage of stenographic assistance. George Power, who had been a writer in the Canadian navy, had joined our staff and he had the unenviable task of typing letters for me and the three secretaries, as well as coding and decoding telegrams. The two military attaches had a young man from the air force, who caused us problems by falling in love with Russian girls with whom he was unable to converse.

We had not been long in Kuibyshev when a Swedish secretary came around to see me with a proposition for legation premises in Moscow. The Swedes had been left in charge of the Danish Legation when the Danes had been compelled to leave following the German occupation of their country. The Danish minister had some valuable furniture, the care of which had been worrying the Swedes. The Swedish minister concluded that it would be safer if the premises were occupied and suggested that we do so. I went on an expedition to Moscow, taking Arnold Smith with me. A caretaker showed us over the Danish premises and we were delighted with them. The Soviet foreign office had no objection to our renting the buildings, provided the Swedes, as protectors of Danish interests, agreed. Since I had despaired of finding suitable quarters I fell in with this arrangement, though it was to prove a source of trouble when the war ended.

One of the features of our social life in Kuibyshev was the celebration of national days. When the Canadian July first holiday came around I decided against giving a party in our house, which was hardly large enough. Instead I decided to take advantage of the favourable time of the year and chartered a small river steamer. On this we cruised for nearly three hours, as far as the gap where the Volga River breaks through between a range of low, rocky, heavily wooded hills. The weather was warm and sunny; it proved to be a delightful excursion and was much enjoyed by our guests. I felt that we had celebrated Canada's national day in a fitting manner.

In the meantime the news from the Eastern front continued to be good. The Germans, after making an attempt to break through in the Kursk salient, had been beaten back. It appeared that Russian artillery had found the answer to mass [130] attacks by German tanks. A general withdrawal to the West by German forces had begun and no longer were they threatening Moscow. We all began to talk about an early return of the diplomatic corps to Moscow. The decision was finally reached in August and the whole corps was transported by train. The operation, like an excursion from Kuibyshev to Moscow, was carried out with that efficiency of which the Russians were capable when they made up their minds to do something out of the ordinary.

Back in Moscow we camped in our new legation premises. They consisted of two buildings, the main one and a smaller house in the courtyard. It took us some time to organize ourselves, but eventually we were all sorted out and settled down to a steady routine. I occupied the premises on the second floor of the main building. George Power was allotted a room at the end of the apartment. I felt lost in such spacious quarters, all by myself.

This was a new sort of life. It was more difficult to see one's colleagues than it had been in Kuibyshev and all appointments had to be arranged in advance by telephone. A large part of our time was occupied with housekeeping duties. McCordick was chiefly responsible for executing these, but he proved to be too impatient to get along with the procrastinating Russians.

I had been looking for a chauffeur, when one day George Costaki, a Greek, turned up to apply for the position. He wanted to know if, in addition to salary, he could receive food rations. When I told him this was impossible, since we had only enough food for ourselves, he proposed that he work for us during regular office hours instead, and offered to find us a suitable chauffeur. I was impressed by his frankness and transparent honesty; I also knew that his brother worked as majordomo for the British Embassy. I decided to give him a trial and took him on. Immediately our troubles were over. When any difficulty arose, Costaki would be advised and somehow or other he always found the solution.

Practically all the diplomatic missions in Moscow had some sort of major-domo for relations with the Russians on housekeeping matters. The tradition had arisen that men of only three nationalities were suitable for this purpose: Armenians, [131] Jews or Greeks. Of these three the Greeks were probably most effective because they were the least aggressive and knew how to get around weaknesses in the Russian character.

The American Embassy had a Jew, by the name of Morris, who made a name for himself when Wendell Willkie visited Kuibyshev. Willkie was attending a ballet at the theatre when he turned to Eddy Page, an embassy secretary, and asked him to get some flowers that he could present to the ballerina at the next intermission. Page passed on the request to Morris, who was standing at the end of the box, and asked him to get them, having no idea himself where they could be obtained. Morris went out and hastened to the hotel where they had attended a banquet before the opera. He snatched a bouquet of the dining table and told the head-waiter he would return it within an hour. He then hurried to the theatre, arriving in time to allow Willkie to present the flowers before the final curtain. Morris then went around to the stage door and persuaded the ballerina to give him back the bouquet so he could return it to the hotel.

With Costaki on the job most of our troubles vanished and McCordick could devote more of his time to the regular duties of a legation secretary. We were becoming properly organized and my thoughts began to turn to the prospect of having my wife and eight-year-old daughter, Diana, join me. They had remained behind in Ottawa. Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr had been talking of bringing his wife to Moscow; she had been staying in New York. We heard that Mrs. Litvinov, wife of the Russian Ambassador in Washington, was planning to return to Moscow by the air route across Siberia. Together Sir Archibald and I approached the Soviet Foreign Office and they promised to see what they could do.

One day I received a message to the effect that my wife and daughter should be in Nome, Alaska, by a certain date. They were to be provided with transport from there to Moscow. I did not know it at the time but when my wife received the message she was left with only five days to rent our house, pack up, receive inoculations and leave on a journey by air over Siberia. The RCAF got them to Alaska in time and from there they hopped from airfield to airfield, flying only during daylight, until they finally reached Moscow. [132]

It was a great thrill when the aircraft drew up and I saw my wife and daughter Diana standing in the open door. «You see, Daddy, I am not afraid» my daughter called out to me and I then realized the magnitude of the sacrifice I had asked of them in having them join me in Moscow.

With my wife to take charge of the housekeeping duties, my whole situation changed markedly for the better. No longer did I have to endure long lonely periods. My wife soon made friends with the staff running the diplomatic store on the main shopping thoroughfare of the city. They would let her know when new supplies had been received and she came to enjoy these contacts.

Besides the inevitable round of diplomatic parties our chief relaxation was found in visits to the theatres. We were more fortunate than most of the diplomats. Besides having the opera and ballet we, knowing Russian, could enjoy the dramas playing at about a dozen theatres. Both the acting and the staging were of the highest class. The Maly Theatre, next to the Bolshoi, specialized in traditional drama of the nineteenth century and the company had a formal style of acting. We enjoyed much more the naturalistic style that characterized the Moscow-Art Theatre. Eventually we saw all of its repertoire and must have seen Chekov's *Three Sisters* at least six times. It was our favourite. Some of the modern plays produced at other theatres were interesting, especially those written by Korneichuk, the Polish writer. Without the diversion of the theatres a winter in Moscow would have been depressing.

We were kept busy enough preparing despatches on various subjects for submission to Ottawa. From time to time we would be instructed to take up matters with the Soviet Foreign Office. On most of these questions our point of contact was Novikov, the officer in charge of the division dealing with Western Europe and the British Commonwealth. He was a competent official, but did not encourage speculative conversation about the world situation. On more important questions I would deal with one of the vice-ministers, such as Andrei Vyshinsky or Dekanosov. I never had anything of sufficient importance to take up with V. M. Molotov. He was very busy; in addition to his regular duties he was in charge of the tank-building programme. [133]

It was remarkable how much time the senior Soviet officials put in on their work. Mr. Mikoyan, Minister of Foreign Trade, told me he only had four hours sleep each night. Vyshinsky said he had to deal with six hundred pieces of paper during the course of a day. There was no doubt that the top Soviet officials put in an enormous amount of work.

In October of 1943 the Conference of Foreign Ministers had taken place in Moscow. V.M. Molotov had been elected chairman and the best possible atmosphere prevailed. Sir Anthony Eden attended for Great Britain and Cordell Hull for the United States. Sir Anthony Eden had just come from the first Quebec Conference and was full of praise for the arrangements made by the Canadian government.

Some months later Sir Winston Churchill came on an official visit to Moscow. His purpose was mainly to talk over the problem of which government was to represent the Poles. This conflict had become acute. He did not succeed in changing the attitude of the Soviet government, but it agreed to receive Mr. Mikolaichik, head of the Polish government in exile at London and Prime Minister designate. I saw him when he came to Moscow, but I could see that his mission was foredoomed, because the Russians were committed to a completely Communist regime in Poland.

Sir Winston Churchill's visit called for one of those huge Kremlin banquets, and there was the usual round of toasts. Instead of falling in with the Russian custom and simply proposing

another toast in return, Churchill delivered an impressive speech that was translated into Russian. It evoked great enthusiasm, partly because the Russians were unaccustomed to after-dinner orations. He was confident, he said that Great Britain and Russia would carry over into the peace the close collaboration which had been forged in war.

After Churchill had spoken Stalin proposed toasts one after the other to the generals, who had been responsible for the favourable turn in the war. He not only knew each by name but also where he was sitting at the long table. The generals would come up to Stalin to clink glasses with him, showing obvious gratification at being thus honoured. The evening was a clear demonstration to me that Stalin was in complete control of the Soviet war effort. I think it was significant that after [134] numerous toasts he spoke across the table to Molotov and I heard him ask if he had forgotten anyone. "You forgot the Soviet Navy," Molotov replied, and Stalin immediately rectified this oversight.

Of all the parties I attended one of the most notable was that given in Molotov's guest house called the Spiridonovka, on November seventh, 1943, the anniversary of the Revolution. The Russians had three good reasons for celebrating. The Moscow Foreign Ministers' Conference had just been a success, the important city of Kiev had just been recaptured, and the foreign office officials had just received their new uniforms with plenty of gold braid.

Molotov sat at a small table with the British and American ambassadors and they consumed numerous glasses of vodka. The newspaper correspondents had been invited and took turns looking in on Molotov's table to see how his guests were faring. As he was leaving Molotov got into an argument with Assarsson, the Swedish minister, whom I heard shouting. "Never, never!" I did not learn what the argument was about, but a few weeks later the Soviet government asked the Swedish administration to recall Assarsson.

With interesting interludes of this kind and constant exchanges of views with my colleagues, my war-time experience in Moscow left a deep impression on me. I could see clearly that relations between the Soviet Union and other western countries would become the key problem after the war was over.

The requirements of foreigners in Moscow were looked after by an organization known as Burobin – an abbreviation for the Russian words meaning "Office for the Service to Foreigners." Mr. Grishin, head of this organization, was a long-suffering official who always endeavoured to show that he was doing his best to cope with the many demands upon his resources.

After my wife and daughter had arrived I had secured the services of an elderly woman, Vera Andreievna, as governess for my daughter Diana. She and a still more elderly aunt were the only remaining members of the Sukhomlinov family, one of whom had been Tsarist Minister of War and another the Governor-General at Omsk when I had arrived there in 1916. [135]

She spoke English well and gave instruction to my daughter until she had learned enough Russian to go to school.

I then managed to get Diana into the ballet school attached to the Bolshoi Theatre. I believe she was the first daughter of a diplomat to have this privilege. George F. Kennan's daughter entered the school a year later. The girls had both dancing and regular school instruction and it was undoubtedly the best school in Moscow. The head of the general instruction department was Bakhmetiev, a member of an old Moscow family. He spoke English fluently and before the Revolution had belonged to a guards regiment, the officers of which, by choice, spoke English to one another.

The building, however, could not be properly heated and after attending the school for a year our daughter contracted pneumonia. Prior to that, fortunately, we had given her a birthday party

to which we had invited all of her class. I shall never forget the look of delight that came over the faces of the girls when they saw our large drawing-room with its handsome furniture.

From the summer of 1943 on there were frequent celebrations of victor)- at the front, particularly as one important city after another was recaptured from the enemy. These were usually fireworks displays, clearly visible from our courtyard.

In 1944, after the Germans had lifted the siege of Leningrad. we paid a visit to that city and saw the heroic resistance put up by the Russians, who had to endure bombardment by German artillery from emplacements a few miles outside the city.

One evening in Moscow we were invited to the opera and found ourselves alone in a box with Mr. and Mrs. Zaroubin. That very day I had received an official request for Canadian government agreement to his appointment as Ambassador to Canada in place of Gusev, who was being transferred to London. I had met Zaroubin before but didn't know him well. He had, however, been in the division of the Foreign Office dealing with affairs pertaining to the United States and the Americans had spoken highly of him. Consequently I was able to cable a favourable report on him. when notifying Ottawa of the official request I had received.

Early in 1945 Leon Mayrand arrived in Moscow to be the [136] counsellor of the embassy. He had come by the Siberian route. What was almost as important, he had brought with him two Canadian stenographers. I felt that our staffing problems were over.

I had been twenty-five months in the Soviet Union without a break, a longer period than is generally considered desirable for Western diplomats, when instructions came for me to attend the conference convening in San Francisco towards the end of April, 1945, for purpose of establishing the United Nations. My wife, my daughter and I flew first to Omsk, but to my regret no opportunity was provided for me to inspect the city in which I had lived for two years during the First World War. It was on the other side of the river from the airport. The next night we spent in Krasnoyarsk. From there we flew over endless forests to a place just north of the Stanovoi Mountains, which was reputed to have one of the heaviest snowfalls in the Soviet Union. Since there were weather predictions of a thaw that might hold us up for days, the pilot of the aircraft decided to move on and we were rooted out of our beds at three in the morning.

We flew to Yakutsk, where the military commander at the airport insisted on giving us the inevitable large repast with the still more inevitable vodka. This proved to be the Siberian variety—eighty per cent proof. The remainder of the day I was feeling very uncomfortable and this spoiled my pleasure in inspecting Yakutsk. We flew east over the high mountains of northeastern Siberia, coming down twice to spend the night. At each of these stops we saw numerous fighter aircraft being flown by stages across Siberia, after the Russians had taken delivery of them in Alaska. Eventually we reached Welkal on the Bering Strait, across from the tip of Alaska. There we received wonderful food as supplies were being brought in by sea from Seattle.

From Welkal we flew across to Fairbanks, Alaska, and said farewell to our Russian pilot, who had brought us all the way from Moscow. We were most comfortably accommodated in the nurses' quarters at Fairbanks and it was good to be able to enjoy once more the amenities of American civilization. A Canadian aircraft brought us from Fairbanks to Edmonton, when we boarded the train for Ottawa.[137]