

ADDRESS OF LT. COLONEL WM. McCHESNEY MARTIN, JR. AT A DINNER MEETING OF THE  
AMERICAN RUSSIAN INSTITUTE DEDICATED TO AMERICAN-SOVIET POSTWAR RELATIONS -  
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It is a real pleasure to be here and to share in your meeting tonight. This is particularly true because of my sincere interest in the welfare of American Soviet relations, both currently and in the postwar period ahead.

At the outset, however, I want to make one thing clear. I am not an expert on Russia or Russians. Much to my regret I do not speak any more of the language than to say "da" or when hard pressed "da da".

My only qualifications, then, for presuming to address you are that I accompanied Major General James H. Burns on a trip to Russia during April, May, and June of 1943, and I have served as a member of the staff of the Munitions Assignments Board in Washington for more than two years. This Board, established by the President and the Prime Minister, acting under strategic directives and priorities from the Combined Chiefs of Staff, assigns munitions of war between the United States and Great Britain and the other members of the United Nations. From the very beginning the U.S.S.R. has participated in our munitions resources through a special supply program which is now known to all of you as the Russian Protocol.

It was during the negotiation of the Third Protocol (1943-44) that I accompanied General Burns to Russia. (In passing, I would like to pay tribute to General Burns by stating that, in my judgment, he has done as much as any single man to promote lasting understanding between Americans and Russians.) Through this trip and my present work in assisting General York, who has succeeded General Burns since the latter's health forced his retirement, I have worked pleasantly with a number of Russians and have gained some small insight into their point of view and problems. Accordingly, I want to tell you very informally something of my impressions and observations.

First a brief comment on current relations; then a little travelogue based on my trip; and finally my personal view as to the type of foundation required if we propose to build permanently good American-Soviet relations.

What is the status of current relations between the military officers and enlisted men of our two countries? The answer is clear. They are good; not perfect; but the spirit of good will on both sides is such that all disagreements as to methods and details are quickly resolved in our common purpose, namely, the crushing defeat of Hitlerite Germany.

Passing on then to my trip. We all enjoy talking about our travels. I am no exception and hence you must pardon my enthusiasm, although I realize many of you have made at least a part of this same journey.

The route has now become so familiar that it is almost like calling the names of the stations between New York and Washington. Leaving this country via the Southern route, we followed the regular Air Transport Command course which is familiar to many of you - Puerto Rico, British Guiana, Natal, Ascension Island, Accra, Kano, Khartoum, Cairo, and Teheran. We visited General Connolly and his Persian Gulf Service Command for several days, travelled to Kazvin, the truck transfer depot en route to the U.S.S.R., and got an insight into this marvellous achievement of transportation against the almost insuperable obstacles of heat and mountain. Taking off from Teheran on a sunny morning, we crossed the snow-clad mountains and in the late afternoon reached Kuibyshev where we spent the night.

We took off the next morning and flying very low over fir and birch trees watched the countryside become more luxuriant and well groomed the nearer we came to Moscow. Flying diagonally across the city within view of the Kremlin we were all quite excited. Sergeant Foley, our steward, had never travelled much until joining the Air Transport Command and now was in his element. His eyes shining with excitement he kept running up and down the aisle of the plane yelling "Gee, it looks just like the Bronx, doesn't it?" And indeed from the air it did. People are not much different anywhere and the way they live is not too different once the mystery of new surroundings is cleared away. One of my Russian friends made almost the same remark to me about Washington after he had visited here awhile several months ago.

Stories of Russian spirit have become so numerous that they are assuming a legendary character. And in the next six weeks we were to have ample confirmation of their veracity and thus get some little insight into the unshatterable qualities of the rock against which Hitler was to drive his legions in vain.

On a bright April Sunday afternoon we took a long drive out of Moscow to the North of the city. Deep in the country we picked up two of the most charming little boys I have ever seen anyplace, enthusiastic, boisterous, and yet politely shy. One was nine and the other ten. Once their curiosity as to whether we were really Americans or not was satisfied the smaller of the two looked hard at General Burns' insignia and remarked "Gee, he must be some man." The other couldn't let this pass and nonchalantly informed us his uncle was also a General - and in the Red Army too. They had been out on an all-night assignment with an anti-aircraft defense unit and after ten days in the field were returning home. One was particularly proud of the fact that his three older brothers were killed at the front and one of them had been a hero of the Soviet Union. The other little boy had lost his father, mother, two brothers, and one sister and yet his little face lit up with intense excitement as he mentioned that he too hoped to join the Red Army shortly. We drove them more than 15 miles which they would have walked otherwise. Such spirit is what changes the course of history and those of us familiar with the struggle of Russia for solidarity and unity from the revolution through the five year plans recognize here, in the enthusiasm of this little boy, the foundation on which the new Russia has been built.

On another evening we attended the circus which, like our Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey, is something of an institution in the Russian entertainment field. It is an all-year-around affair in Moscow. There is an outstanding figure who seems to be known almost as well as some of the high government officials. His name is Keho, and he is a clown whose antics caused the crowd to rock and roar with laughter, and, whenever, he tried to leave, they would cry "Bis, Bis" for all they were worth. The piece de resistance of the evening consisted in a series of take-offs of Hitler, Mussolini, Goering, Goebbels, and Himmler. The crowd roared with delight as each one of these would be mimicked, then derided, and finally ruthlessly slaughtered by the Russians. They particularly enjoyed Hitler sitting in a coach with Mussolini as coachman and every now and then Hitler would lean out and strike Mussolini with a long curling whip. Sitting right behind me were two Red Army soldiers, one with an arm gone and the other minus a leg. Their enthusiasm at this performance was inspiring and I thought to myself no need to worry about Hitler conquering these people.

Through a succession of visits to factories, office buildings, ballets, concerts, museums, schools, shrines, the theatre, attendance at a motorcycle race, a football game, a swimming meet, a boxing match, a military parade, and talks with many people which included meeting Marshal Stalin, Molotoff, Mikoyan, Voroshilov and other officials we got a kaleidoscopic view of Russian life during war time. Defense of the homeland and destruction of the enemy were the controlling factors in everything. The government was doing a complete job in furthering this objective and one realized the power of Stalins' regime both now and in the influence it will exert on the world of tomorrow.

No one who completes the trip to Russia by coming back through Siberia retains any doubt of the job Stalin has done in creating the New Russia.

Flying from Moscow in bright clear weather directly over Kazan, the old capitol of the Tartars, we had a marvellous view of the entire Russian countryside up to and through the Urals. As we traversed the 2,000 miles and watched below we felt the centuries moving as we came into Novosibirsk. Reaching the bridge which spans the OB, we got a good view of the river and found it to be about a mile wide with a strong current. Novosibirsk had grown in the span of 20 years from a small town of a few thousand to one in the hundreds of thousands. It was a wilderness achievement representing triumph over extremes of heat and cold and with the atmosphere of one of our western mining communities. Back at the airport the next morning, our plane was stalled at the take off as one of the motors went out with a broken magneto. First reports as always in such a situation, indicated at least two weeks wait until a new motor could be flown in from Alaska. At this point we started to call our pilot, who was named Corrigan, "half way Corrigan" as we figured we were just half way around the world from home. However, the Russians were not to be downed and they started in to repair the plane with unparalleled enthusiasm. One man would work frantically for 15 or 20 minutes and then a siren would screech and a special car would arrive with another mechanic who would jump out importantly, take off his coat, survey the entire motor and immediately go to work. Poor Corrigan thought they would put the plane permanently out of commission. I must confess few of us had any confidence in their efforts. We were all wrong, however, and in the dusk of evening the motor suddenly began to hum. We were off again. As too often we have done, we underestimated our Russian friends.

Krasnoyarsk, on the Yenisei, was our next stop. Then Yakutsk on the Lena the following day where we saw once again the wilderness being conquered and a live town growing. Leaving Yakutsk we set our course for Alaska. We travelled all night with the sun appearing to set and rise at almost the same time so that as we traversed the mountains beneath we had a constant ball of red fire shining through the clouds and illuminating the whole horizon like the dying embers of a fire. It was a bleak 2,300 mile stretch and when we reached water and found ourselves over the Bering Sea and coasting gently into Nome, I found myself just a little relieved about it all. It is all one world, to be sure, but it certainly is nice to be home just the same.

I like practically all the Russians I have met. Most Americans do and I think they like us. On the whole we click. And it is because of this and my interest in the objectives of your organization that I want to close with a word of caution.

Much as we love America and the United States, those of us who look things squarely in the face, know there are many things of which we are not too proud and that we have many shortcomings. This situation is precisely the same in Russia. In the program of this meeting there is a quotation from Eric Johnston that "the destiny of the world, in large measure, will depend upon the understanding and cooperation that will exist between Russia and the United States." But this is so merely because of our size and natural resources, not because either Americans or Russians have any more God-given right to superiority than have the Nazis in Germany.

It is vitally important then that we square up honestly to each other on all questions. Personally, I try to avoid use of the words Americanism and Communism because I cannot satisfactorily define either. But at the same time we are heading for trouble when we do not recognize that there are real differences between our two nations. The attitude toward private property, enterprise, profits, the church, the home, and the State in its relation to all these, is quite different in our two countries.

Everything is by no means perfect in America. The same is true in Russia. We must, therefore, stop classifying people as pro-Russian or anti-Russian merely because they discuss Russia freely. The Russians like their way of life, and we have no right to interfere in it; but likewise we Americans like our way of life and the reverse is true.

Now it is possible for two people with completely opposing temperaments, ideas, and convictions to be very good friends so long as each knows where the other stands. Mutual liking and respect can assure this. Witness the case of many husbands and wives. As long as the cards are placed on the table face up, disparities in point of view may actually tend to broaden and enrich life, but once one or the other keeps some of the cards under the table, it leads to distrust and inevitable dislike, and relations may be seriously jeopardized. A true policy of the good neighbor and sincere friend is the only foundation on which postwar American-Soviet relations can prosper.

The sum and substance of my remarks is this: Under the stress of war, two nations with differing ideologies have been brought together in the common objective of victory over a common enemy. The United States and Russia have worked together successfully in this war because it has been to our mutual interest to destroy Germany. Let us then bend our best efforts toward continuing this spirit of unity engendered in the heat of battle so that we may merge in the common objective of benefitting all mankind. The peoples of both countries recognize that what serves to benefit one at the expense of another ultimately serves neither. This is part of the culture of both nations and provides the only sure and firm basis for permanent understanding.