THE CAUCASUS TRIP

being an account of a journey
made in May 1949 across the R.S.F.S.R.
and through the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic
Dagestan, Azerbaijan and Georgia

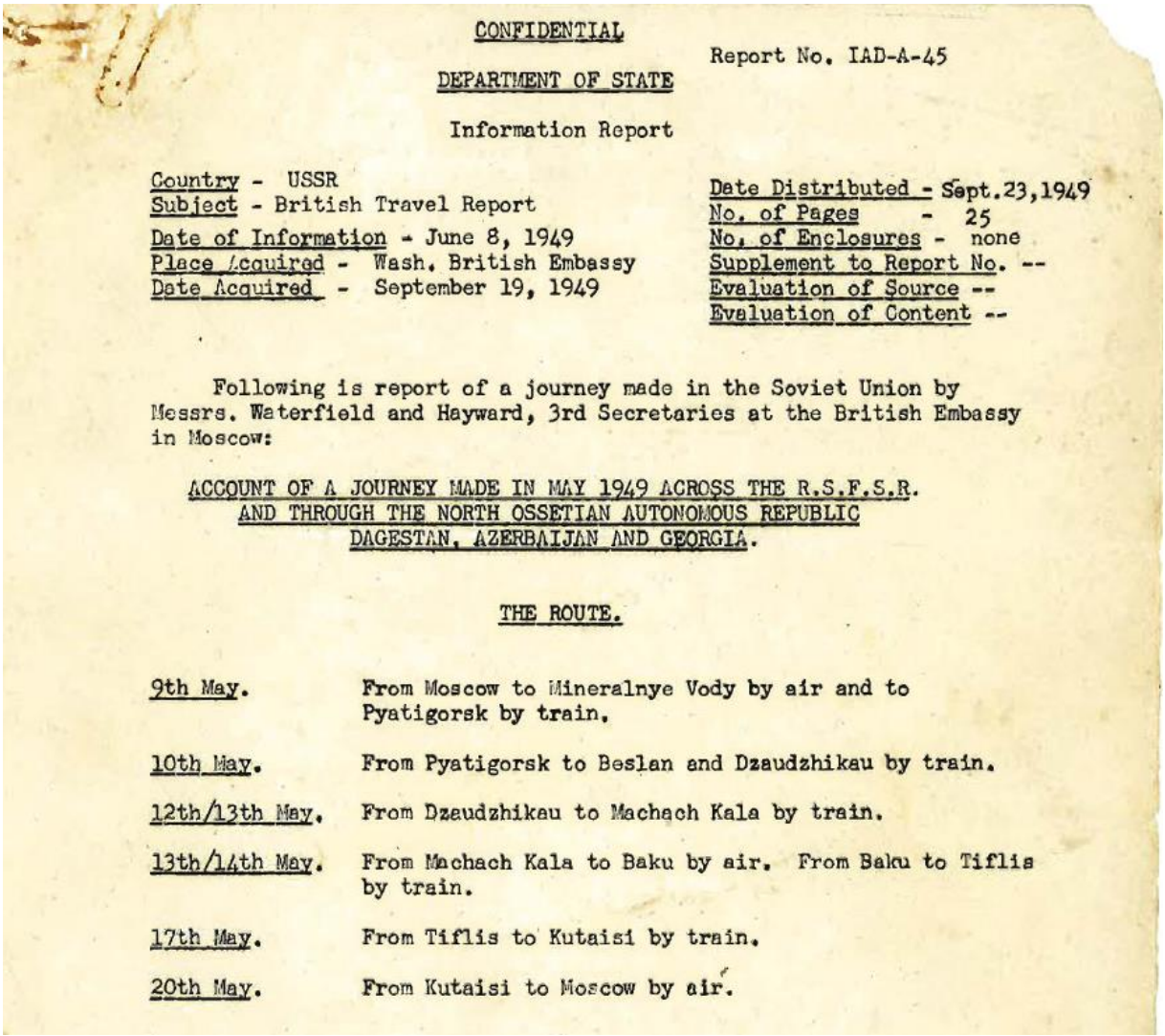
Introduction

Source

The following document was found in my father's archives at Somerton, Somerset, on his death in 2002. It exists in two copies; one, a faint carbon on foolscap (exactly 13" x 8"), without header, I take it is 'his' office copy; the other is also typed but on American 'letter' sized paper, and preceded by a brief executive summary (as set out below). Both versions contain occasional manuscript corrections but those made on the carbon flimsy (which evidence two editors or periods of editing) have been incorporated in the typing of the American one, from which one may infer that that version is later.

Outline

The executive summary for the American version, which provides a pretty good outline of the text, looks like this:



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Following is report of a journey made in the Soviet Union by Messrs. Waterfield and Hayward, 3rd Secretaries at the British Embassy in Moscow:

ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY MADE IN MAY 1949 ACROSS THE R.S.F.S.R. AND THROUGH THE NORTH OSSETIAN AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC DAGESTAN, AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA.

THE ROUTE.

9th May.	From Moscow to Mineralnye Vody by air and to Pyatigorsk by train.
10th May.	From Pyatigorsk to Beslan and Dzaudzhikau by train.
12th/13th May.	From Dzaudzhikau to Machach Kala by train.
13th/14th May.	From Machach Kala to Baku by air. From Baku to Tiflis by train.
17th May.	From Tiflis to Kutaisi by train.
20th May.	From Kutaisi to Moscow by air.

Text

The transcription that follows replicates the carbon flimsy, both because of its merit as the original and because the document itself is deteriorating beyond usability, with damage to the edges (as may be seen at the foot of page 2 of the narrative, where part of the follow-on word has been lost) and many pages of the type faint. The clearer State Department version was used to decipher many of the unfamiliar foreign words and names, which otherwise risked mis-reading. The changes introduced by the American version are not noted, as insignificant

and contributing neither to the sense nor to a sense of editorial history. However, the manuscript amendments of the original have been simulated approximately in this copy, which also retains the (few) typographical errors, such as words run together. The copy also preserves line- and page-lengths[1] of the original, and simulates the font and typographical conventions (for example, the generous three spaces between full-stop and the next sentence; full-stops oddly placed with respect to closing brackets and speech marks). Period spellings have been retained exactly as of interest to chroniclers of the evolution of English; mis-spellings too (such as of the unfortunate Dzaudzhikau, with its uncertain terminator - 'u' or 'n'[2]? - and twice shown with a 'j' after the 'z', whose history of renaming - see page 6 - makes the errors mildly ironic though no doubt the problem here is really one of transliteration between alphabets) have also been replicated.

As far as is possible, then, the copy that follows preserves the visual impact of the original.

Context

It is a working document; literally, a report, for the dissemination of information about this previously closed off area of the Soviet Union. As such it is deliberately objective, impersonal, and restrained.

My father (and Max Hastings) was a 'third secretary', the lowest permanent rung in an embassy, on what was his first proper posting in the Foreign Office, and the trip was an unusual venture; in some respects - information gathering in hostile territory - it was tantamount to spying.

The circumstances of my father's life between the end of the War and his posting in the Moscow office are recounted with much more personal colour in his later memoirs. The relevant section is copied as an appendix to this document; it contributes considerably to the sense of occasion, and fleshes out one incident in particular (at the same time explicitly admitting that some details were omitted from the 'official' version). It also hints at the interest generated by the account and its accompanying photographs (not mentioned really in the document, except that a camera is packed on 9 May); this interest may also be inferred from the copy made and distributed by the Americans.

Author

It is largely conjectural, but the text would appear to be mainly by JPW and his possession of a copy would seem to confirm this. I would guess that Max Hayward's primary contribution was to linguistics, in day to day terms of course[3] and, for example, the exceptional etymological comment on 'nalevo', "literally 'on the left' or 'on the side'" (p17). The manuscript corrections are so few that they offer little clue. One or two word choices seemed characteristically 'Waterfield', eg "finicky elaboration"; comments on the scenic mountains and views (surely irrelevant to the political aim) also seem characteristic.

Reception

The objectivity with which the report is couched contributes (no doubt inadvertently) to the sense of alienation that the travellers obviously felt. They are wandering around behind invisible barriers, permitted only to do limited things, but the limits are unspecified and may be redefined by the faceless and opaque Authorities at any time.

And yet despite these official difficulties, what shines through are the individuals' stories; the way they adapt to their circumstances, eke out their lives in the best way they can, and are welcoming and happy to share on a personal level. These fragments of biography are the most suggestive and charming aspect of the text.

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[1] despite thereby introducing probable problems with printing this document. Sorry.

[2] it is fairly consistently typed with a 'u' but on page b this has been twice corrected in manuscript to a clear 'n'; the Ossetian (transliterated) is *Dzæwdžyqæw*.

[3] JPW was proud of his Russian but I doubt that even the intensive courses provided by the Foreign Office prior to postings would have enabled him to keep up with the 'brilliant linguist' with whom he travelled.

The sense of political oppression by the Authorities predates and in many ways validates presentations of totalitarian states in the second half of the twentieth century: the omnipresence and omnipotence of Big Brother in *1984*, the sense of fear in Smiley's world, much science fiction in the 1950s and 1960s, and the standard trope of the individual versus the corrupt faceless organisation.

The parallels between the society described, and the disaffected electorate of western societies today are striking. The narrative describes all too well a state that one can recognise: although not technically disenfranchised, we share the same sense of helpless inability to call the politically or financially powerful to account; the same hapless shrugging of shoulders, avoidance of attention, and defence of little niches of survival; even when better choices may seem obvious to an external observer.

> We felt that he was typical... friendly, curious and frank, but withal politically inactive, regarding the state as an inevitable evil which must be endured and content to pursue his work... without any inclination to alter his fate or circumstances.

The material shortcomings commented on, even during the period of post-war rationing in the west, convey some degree of shock despite the veneer of objectivity. Sleeping and washing facilities ("indescribably foul") are condemned in particular. The limbless are noted; and the lack of money, generally. Food seems less of a problem, even if the standards, such as the availability of 'white bread', seem dated to the modern reader. Similarly dated might the slighting comments to the lateness of trains and airplanes seem.

Some aspects of this fact-finding mission seem quaint in the days of satellite imagery, GPS and modern telephony, where the smallest devices are packed with video and still cameras, and presumed internet access. They packed the most limited cartography:

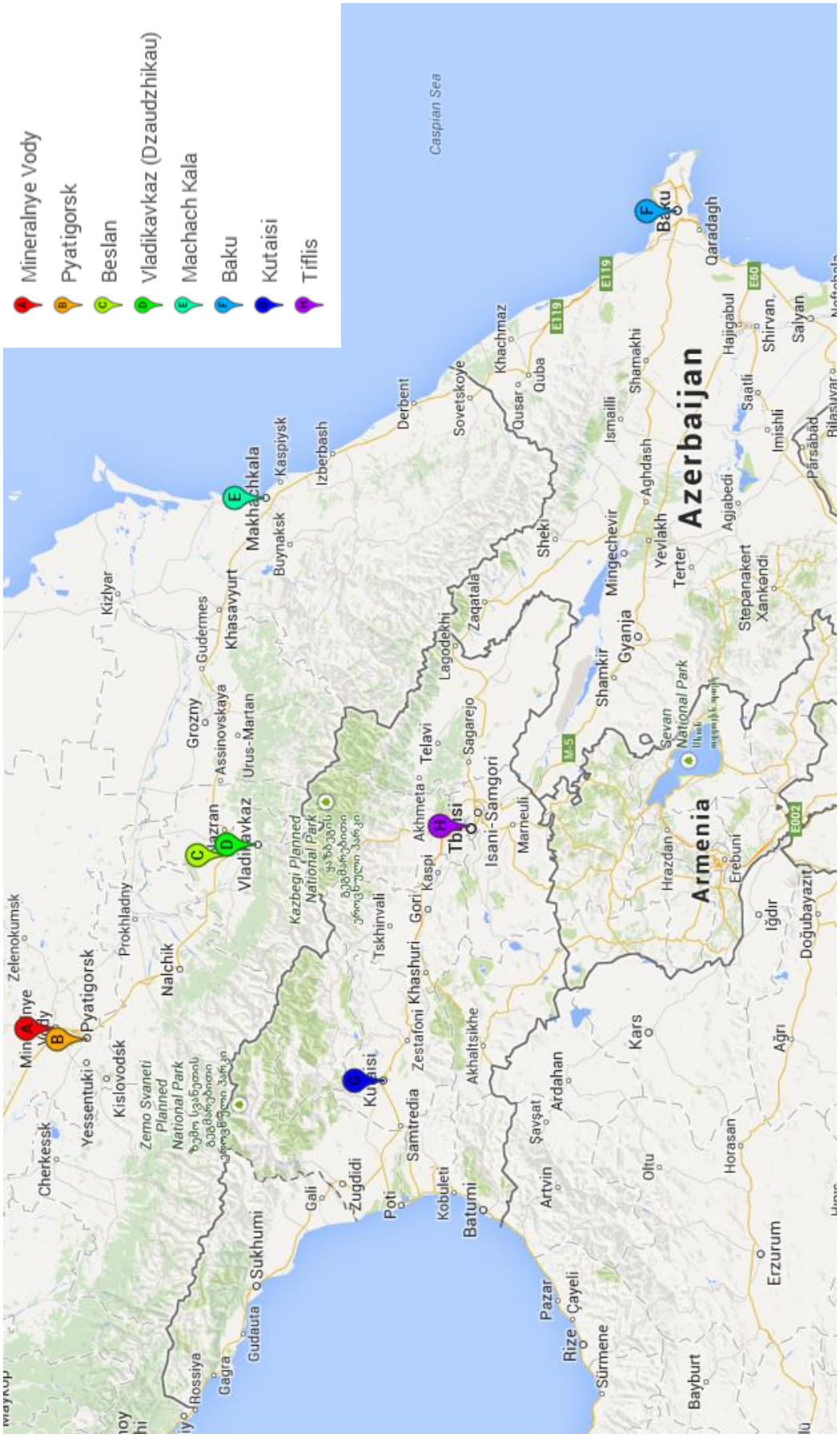
> the only two maps we could obtain, one, of 1928, [covered] our whole route on a very small scale, and the other, [covered] the Caucasus, [was] prepared by the War Office General Staff in 1915.

Even with our modern advantages, however, the area travelled may still not be particularly familiar to be the contemporary reader (and indeed Google streetview is only available for the very largest streets in Mineralnye Vody, and hasn't reached Kutaisi at all, it seems), so a map is provided on the next page showing the main locations mentioned.

Historical and other significance

The nature of life in the post-war Soviet state is well-known. However, the vividness of the personal details recorded, the relatively provincial (and unvisited) area described, and the fact that this report dates to very soon after the War, all contribute to the value of the record. The grip of the State on its people's lives, and on what it promulgates as truth, is chilling, as is the inability to do anything about it ("we have suffered much from our Government and will probably suffer from it in future"). The West's counter-propaganda - the oft-asked-after 'British Ally', BBC and Voice of America - is surprising. The parallels with modern alienation between governments and people are striking. The friendliness of most individuals to foreigners might be reassuring to those who ponder sociological structures. And, as a record of individual endeavour and experience, the text offers at least a footnote to the biographies of both JPW and Max Hayward.

JTW
July - August 2014



A modern map of the Caucasus showing the main places mentioned

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS.

In the twelve days of our journey we travelled more than three thousand miles across the Soviet Union. We talked to many Soviet citizens, mostly Russians, of different types and occupations. But although we journeyed apparently without surveillance as far as Machach Kala and were able till then to talk to anyone we met, thereafter the hand of Soviet officialdom closed down on us with increasing severity and, in the end, at Kutaisi, we were to all intents and purposes put in quarantine.

2. It would be dangerous to make dogmatic generalizations from observations made over such vast distances and in so short a space of time. Moreover the feeling of being under continual observation is bound to influence the genuineness as well as limit the scope of a traveller's impressions. We therefore feel that the facts of our narrative should speak for themselves and our general conclusions should be taken with reserve.

3. On the material side we were struck by the contrast between the persistently low average standard of living of the Soviet people and the ambitious extent of the country 's capital investment programme. Though plant and buildings were going up wherever we went, it was plain that the Soviet worker hasstill got a very long way to go before he can enjoy the material fruits of his Government's insistence on long-term projects. We also noted that even at this stage priority was regularly being given to "cultural" projects (such as a second large theatre at Kutaisi) rather than to work which might elsewhere be considered of more urgent importance, such as housing construction and the maintenance of the country's inadequate road and railway system. We also felt that it was justifiable to wonder whether the Soviet Union is not placing too great a strain on her economy in concentrating, for rigid political and ideological reasons, so much of her efforts on long-term investment and on "cultural" superfluities, rather than on the much-needed repair of equipments and amenities in current use and on the elimination of the expense, waste and bottle-necks which seemed to us so conspicuous in every branch of Soviet activity. We saw, for example, many industrial sites which were located out in open country with no visible means of approach except a single pot-holed track. Much of the work on such sites was, we noticed, being done by German prisoners or Soviet convicts. Tarmac roads were a rarity and both the permanent way and rolling-stock were in obvious need of renewal. Passenger coaches everywhere, except for the smart new coaches (made in Riga) on the electric suburban lines at Tiflis and Pyatigorsk, were of pre-revolutionary manufacture. The trains generally ran very late. A typical example of wasteful expenditure (for the sake of "culture") was seen in the hotels, where the accommodation was everywhere in need of repair but where, none-the-less, orchestras played nightly to almost empty restaurants.

4. On the other hand we noticed (judging by Moscow standards of a year ago) a marked increase in the amount of consumer goods in the shops, including some of Eastern

European/

European manufacture, and, by the same standards, the quality of dress is steadily improving. Wherever we went food supplies were in general plentiful but we learned that sugar, butter and white bread were in short supply in the south. Money, however, is scarce and people of every class (except the highly privileged whom we did not meet) are finding it hard to make ends meet and to afford the prices of the new luxuries. A side-light on expense may be given by the fact that at the official rate of exchange (22 roubles = £1) travel tickets, food and accommodation for the two of us only, cost £300, though we travelled throughout by the ordinary public transport, fed simply, and had no special trips or luxuries to pay for.

5. It seemed to us that, in general, the range of goods in the shops of Dzandzikan, Tiflis and Kutaisi was the same as in the Moscow shops. General urban amenities were, however, definitely lower in the provinces, (there was, for example, scarcely any motor traffic in Dzandzikan) and certainly a widespread feeling prevailed that provincial towns are backwaters and that Moscow is the heart and centre of all Soviet material and cultural life.

6. We were impressed by the complete ignorance on the part of the Soviet citizen of the outside world and, in the absence of any comparative standards, his inevitable acceptance of what he is told by Soviet publicity. We would judge, however, that, among some classes, and especially the older "intelligentsia" there exists a deep curiosity about things foreign and an uneasy awareness that the Soviet government does not tell the people the whole truth. We would add that in spite of the continued attacks in the Soviet press on Anglo-American imperialism, we, as avowed representatives of the West, were treated by non-official citizens with unaffected friendliness.

7. Ordinary Russians seemed to us to combine intense patriotism with a fundamentally un-political attitude to life despite official attempts to arouse political consciousness in their minds. Hence, in our conversations, mention of "politics" usual meant only one thing, the "threat of another war". All those with whom we spoke were full of forebodings about another war and some thought it was inevitable. Many genuinely believed that the capitalists were preparing aggressive war against the Soviet Union. But nowhere did we find any hint of a desire for the expansion of Soviet power by force of arms nor did we find anything to suggest material or moral preparation for any type of hostilities in the near future.

8. We found little evidence of active interest in British Ally and Western broadcasts. We failed to obtain a single copy of British Ally throughout our journey nor did we meet anyone who listened regularly to Western broadcasts, though we were told several times that "other comrades" listened in. We heard nothing definite, though we asked, about the effect of the recent Soviet jamming.

9. We formed the impression that all efforts which can be made by publicity or personal contact to show the Soviet people the truth about the West and to explain our views about tolerance and freedom, though they may involve difficulties and risks and may only amount to a drop in a vast ocean, are, nevertheless, worth while. At the same time we felt that

the position of the Soviet state is at the moment secure. Though we met some individuals who were discontented with various aspects of life, the people seemed to be generally loyal to the régime. Such criticisms as we heard by no means implied disaffection or a desire to change the established order.

Narrative /.

NARRATIVE

9th May

We drove out in the early morning to Bykovo airport, about 25 miles to the South-East of Moscow, in a Russian "Pobeda" type taxi hired from Burobin.

We travelled light, in old clothes, and with a rucksack each, so as to be as untrammelled as possible. We took with us some copies of English and American picture magazines, "Illustrated" and "Life", a camera, English cigarettes, an "Intourist" Russian guidebook dated 1928, and the only two maps we could obtain, one, of 1928, covering our whole route on a very small scale, and the other, covering the Caucasus, prepared by the War Office General Staff in 1915.

At the airport we registered our tickets, paid a small surcharge for our rucksacks and after some delay took off in a Dakota at 10.25 a.m. There was a strong head wind and we did not land at Voronezh, about 300 miles South of Moscow till 1.0 p.m. Here we all got out and walked over to the control buildings where we obtained some tea and sausage. We shared a table with a little working man, a fellow passenger, who told us he had come from Minsk and was going for a month's cure at the Pyatigorsk sulphur springs for his rheumatism. The cost of his whole trip was a little under 1,000 roubles of which he had to pay only one third, the State Insurance (to which he, of course, contributed) paying the rest. We did not talk to any other passengers who mostly appeared to be kurortniki, that is to say, that they were going to take health cures. The Dakota was categorized as "hard" which meant that it was unpainted inside and the bucket seats, covered with white cotton cloths, were not adjustable. For "softness", on both train and aeroplane, one has to pay a large amount extra, sometimes almost double the "hard" fare. It was strange to hear a number of our passengers in this "hard" aeroplane, all dressed in their best, complaining loudly about specks of grease on the seat covers. It is typical of Soviet citizens nowadays to seize on such minor details to emphasize their "culture" though they cheerfully accept washing and other living conditions which few Western Europeans can endure.

We flew on from Voronezh at 1.45, heading South-East for Stalingrad, another 300 miles away. By now we were over the tall grass steppe and we noticed as we passed over the Don, which flows in a big curve 50 miles to the West of Stalingrad, what appeared to be vast tracts of yellow sandy wastes, where perhaps the hot winds had blown the top soil away. We saw no sign of shipping activity at this point on the Don and, on the vast blue stretches of the Volga past Stalingrad and away to the South-East we only saw one tug towing a group of barges. We took off from Stalingrad at 4.55 and headed South over the great Kalmuck steppe, the grey-green treeless wastes of which seemed to stretch for ever. We passed over occasional herds of sheep and goats and mud walled villages lacking any apparent communication with the outside world. We were able to identify a chain of shallow-looking lakes at the Manych Canal but at the point where we crossed them they appeared unfit for any form of navigation.

/About 7.0 o'clock

About 7.0 o'clock,as the sun went down,the plain's monotony became varied by dark green rolling downs and a few trees and we suddenly caught sight of a sharper line of low hills to the South. Finally, after the last lap of a further 300 miles, we landed at 7.25 p.m. in the dusk, on the Mineralnye Vody airfield which lies to the West of the town. We all piled into a bus and were driven to the station. It was pleasing to see whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs with tidy fences round the blossoming fruit trees, all of which gave the place an agreeable appearance of spick and span neatness. No one took any notice of us so we decided, as Mineralnye Vody is little more than a junction for the neighbouring Kurorts, to try our luck for the night in Pyatigorsk. We got tickets without difficulty and went up into the hills in an electric suburban train. The coaches were dimly lighted and were full of workers and children going home. We obtained discouraging information about an hotel but when we reached Pyatigorsk after an hour's journey we got hopefully into a tram and were set down in the centre of the town. We were directed to a "gostinitsa" (hotel) up a side street. It seemed to be like any other dwelling house, of stone with wooden floors and dimly lit. At first the old lady behind the small guichet refused to allow us in, saying that all the rooms were occupied by "delegates". We were about to depart in despair and apply to the Town Soviet for help when the old woman, for no apparent reason, changed her mind, and told us to go and have a meal while she prepared beds for us. We left our rucksacks in the hotel and found what was obviously the chief restaurant in the town. It was clean enough but, like all restaurants we saw, almost empty. There was a band playing old American and German tunes in bouncing Russian style and a blowsy looking female "vocalist". When we had almost finished our meal, two waiters, whom we discovered were Armenians, came up and said they had had a bet with the violinist about our nationality. They for their part believed we were from the Baltic States of Czechoslovakia, while the violinist thought we were American.

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that during our whole journey we were taken for Germans, citizens of the Baltic States, Poles or other Eastern Europeans, and Americans, in that order of frequency. By far the commonest guess, however, was that we were Germans.

We told the Armenians we were English, whereupon we were immediately joined at the table by a drunken young Soviet Army officer (his badges of rank were missing) who had overheardus. The Armenian waiters immediately asked the officer to leave our table. This request provoked the officer to a fit of temper. Disregarding the Soviet law which forbids manifestations of racial hostility he turned on the waiters and called them "Armenian dogs", "prostitutes" and even "Turks". After some useless pleading the Armenians retreated. The officer thereupon explained to us that his outburst of fury was directed not against the Armenians in general but against those "sly Armenian dogs" who serve as waiters in North Caucasian restaurants and "get above themselves". He then enquired what sort of people we were. Were we Communists, Komsomols or Democrats and what were we doing in Pyatigorsk? To this question, the first of many similar ones, we gave what was to become our standard answer, namely that we were members of the British Embassy spending ten days' leave on an excursion round the Caucasus. At this

/the offi

the officer said "I would willingly help you and show you round Pyatigorsk but I am suspicious of you". "Why", we asked, "are you suspicious of us?" "Because", he replied, "we have suffered too much from foreigners. We have been invaded by Tartars, Germans, Frenchmen, Poles, Swedes and Englishmen". This was the frankest expression of suspicion we encountered on our journey but we have little doubt that it represents a widespread mood.

We returned to our "hotel" which, as we subsequently learned, was actually the "Peasants' House", the plainest form of public accommodation in any Soviet town. There was no other hotel in Pyatigorsk as the Germans had destroyed them all in the war. The manageress met us with kindliness and led us through a dark dormitory full of sleeping shapes to a little bare room on the ground floor where we each had a bed and a blanket. The wash-house, upstairs, was as usual indescribably foul but our room had obviously been hastily cleaned out specially for us.

10th May.

We got up at 6.0 a.m. in order to look at the town before catching the 8.o'clock train back to Mineralnye Vody. We paid our room bill, 16 roubles each, and at the suggestion of the manageress climbed up towards the top of the town through a pleasant green park, stopping to drink a cup of sulphur water which was handed out free at a kiosk straight from a bubbling spring. Most of the passers-by, who seemed all to be local inhabitants, were doing the same thing on their way to work. We gathered that the "season" for the flow of visitors to the sanatoriums had not yet properly started and the town was indeed fairly empty. From the top of some stone steps at the end of the park we had a fine view of the town, the stony, sharp-featured hills which surrounded it, the plain to the North and the snow-covered mountains to the South. The houses of the town were all solidly built of stone or brick and most were roofed with red tiles. The architecture was reminiscent of some German-Swiss towns in its finicky elaboration. Pyatigorsk seemed just a pleasant, quiet sunny spa to our cursory view but we had no time to find out more about it. We returned to the station in the tram (built in 1910!) and travelled back in the electric train to Mineralnye Vody. On the way we fell in conversation with the conductor of our carriage, a cheerful young man who took us for Estonians. Having learned our real nationality he showered us with questions betraying an ignorance of the outside world which it was quite beyond out power to enlighten. "Why", he asked, for example, "don't the English people realize that the Russians and not the Americans are their best friends?" We explained patiently that we were anxious to have good relations with the Russian people and to get to know them better despite the obstacles put in the way of full and free contact by the Soviet Government. His reply to this was that we should have a revolution and then relations would improve. He was quite unimpressed by a brief sketch of the English parliamentary system and evidently regarded our non-violent methods of social reform as childish. His parting advice was that we should see the Soviet film "Meeting on the Elbe". This would show us which system was the better!

Despite/

Despite sharp differences of opinion our conversation with the conductor was entirely friendly and without rancour.

We had a poor breakfast at the station buffet at Mineralnye Vody and, indeed, it was our general experience in the South to find we could not get white bread, butter or eggs in station restaurants. In other public restaurants the type of bread supplied varied from place to place but, in answer to our enquiries, we were everywhere assured that there was, in general, no shortage of food. At the ticket-office we found a small but unruly queue waiting to buy tickets for the Baku train. As foreigners, however, we were given priority and we had no difficulty in buying tickets and "soft" reservations to Beslan, the junction for Dzaudzhikau. The train (which came from Moscow) was over an hour late and we had some talk with porters and railway militia-men on the station. One of the guards was at pains to emphasize that this was a "poor country" and had suffered much damage from the Germans. The truth of this statement was all too evident. There were many maimed people around the station, some of them begging; the standard of clothing was distinctly lower than in Moscow or Tiflis and one of the porters voiced the universal complaint of lack of money. The militia-man told us of his soldiering experiences in Germany but neither he nor any other ex-servicemen whom we met ever expressed the slightest desire to see the West again. We were told that although the spring was a month late throughout the South the harvest was likely to be good. It was admitted that snow cover early in the winter had been bad but that falls later on had remedied the position. We ourselves do not remember seeing more than two tractors, either at rest or at work, during our whole journey, but at least on the plains the spring ploughing was complete and the vast areas ploughed up could only have been worked by tractors. Several of the porters asked us anxiously about the possibility of war; all were friendly and interested in anything we said though, like almost all Russians we met, they were completely ignorant of any ideas or facts about the world beyond those fed to them in the Soviet press. We tried and failed to buy a copy of "British Ally" on Mineralnye Vody station and the paper seller would not admit that he ever received the paper.

We boarded the train at 12.35 in company with a well-dressed, talkative Russian building engineer with whom we had already had some conversation. Neither he nor a railway engineer from Rostov with whom we also talked showed any fear about mixing with foreigners.

The rail journey all day across the North Ossetian plain was uneventful. No military or air activity was noticed and on the railway itself we saw only two goods trains, mostly composed of oil tanker wagons, during the whole day. At 6.0 p.m. we arrived at Beslan, a large Ossetian junction village, of no great character. We had to wait for almost two hours for our local train to Dzaudzhikau. During this time we chatted with an Ossetian who had accosted us to enquire about our nationality. Speaking bad Russian he gave us a rather incoherent lecture on Byron and boasted of his own great abilities as a poet and painter. Only lack of money, he said, and his shabby clothes (they were, indeed, shabby) prevented him from studying at an Institute and making a name for himself. As we left him he rubbed his thumb and forefinger together and winked at us, plainly expecting us to give him money. Our two Russian engineers were rather contemptuous of the Ossetians who, they said, were a poor, backward people. Many of the Ossetian peasants we saw at the small

stations where we stopped certainly looked poverty-stricken and dirty.

The train up to Dzaudzhikau, a journey of about 15 miles, took us almost an hour. There were no lights in the bare wooden-seated coaches. Our friend the building engineer was also making his first visit to the town and so we all set off together by tram in search of the Intourist Hotel. We soon found it, on the main street, and were warmly welcomed by the Armenian manager, who had been informed of our arrival by telegram from Intourist in Moscow. We dined with our engineer in the restaurant which was on the usual pattern, equipped with a band but almost deserted.

11th May.

We were early awakened by the loud blaring of the public radio loudspeaker in the main street outside our window. We soon learned that it broadcast continually day and night from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m., half the time in Ossetian and half in Russian. Sometimes it seemed to be relaying Moscow Radio and sometimes the local station, whose tall mast we could see at the Northern end of the town. Our engineer eagerly suggested that we should walk out and see the sights. We went into the park by the side of the river Terek and had our first view of the giant snowface of Mount Kazbek which was visible directly to the South, over 16,000 feet in height, and dominating the passes through which the Georgian Military Highway climbs to Tiflis. After an encounter with a gypsy woman, who told our fortunes for 3 roubles, we parted from our friendly engineer. We took his photograph, and exchanged addresses. He had talked almost unceasingly all the time we had been with him but in such airy, typically Russian generalizations that, in the event, few points worthy of record emerged. He was a geologist by profession, had been born and educated in Leningrad (his parents had a dacha in Finland, of which he spoke wistfully) and had spent much of his life prospecting in Central Asia. The war years he had spent in Tashkent, the population of which, he said, had at that time swelled to one million owing to the influx of evacuees from the West. He now lived in Kislovodsk, with his wife and small daughter, and was engaged in the building of new hotels for "Intourist" at Kislovodsk, Pyatigorsk and Kalchik. He had come up to Dzjaudzikau for one day only to discuss the "project" for these hotels with district officials. The hotels at Pyatigorsk and Kislovodsk would, he said, be finished this year while that at Nalchik would not be ready before 1950. In the pass~~x~~ beyond Nalchik, he told us, there was a geo-physical laboratory of the Academy of Sciences. Shcheredin was an intelligent and sensitive man and although we did not discuss politics at length with him it was plain that like many other such members of the Soviet "intelligentsia" he was aware that many things were being concealed from the Russian people by their Government. We felt that he was typical of his kind, friendly, curious and frank, but withal politically inactive, regarding the state as an inevitable evil which must be endured and content to pursue his work in Russian without any inclination to alter his fate or circumstances. He accepted us without questioning our motives and was proud to show us his country. After leaving him we walked along the river to the South of the town, past an evidently new hydro-electric power station, which seemed to be already working, though, from an article in the local paper, we later learned that work on "the new power station" (presumably this one which we saw) was not yet completed. We went across the valley, past orchards and over cultivated land, and climbed up through thick scrub to the top of a hill dominating the town. Coming

back/

back we passed three platoons of young soldiers doing tactical training. (We saw a lot of young soldiers training in the town during our stay but no sign of special military activity and no armoured vehicles). We spent much of the rest of the day (and the following two days) walking about the town, looking at the shops and industrial quarter and talking to anyone we could. As far as we know we were not followed and no one attempted to hinder our coming and going.

Dzaudzhikau, formerly called Ordzjonikidze, and before that Vladikavkz[4], is the capital of the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic. We were told by an elderly Jewish doctor sitting on a bench in the main boulevard that the town's population was now 150,000 (according to the guidebook it was 72,000 in 1928). It gave us the impression of being an intimate and rather casual provincial town where all sections of the population spent much of their time sitting in the sun. The industrial quarter where the chief industry is zinc smelting lay to the North of the town by the railway station. ~~Our detailed observations on the town's industry are given in the Annex~~. There was hardly any wheeled motor traffic in the town and militiamen were an equally rare sight. Public transport consisted of a tramway system which served the town in two loops forming a figure of eight. Beggars, young and old, were much in evidence as indeed they were throughout our journey. We were also struck, as we were in every other town we visited, by the large number of limbless men (presumably for the most part war-victims) and the rarity with which they were fitted with artificial limbs.

During the day a Russian-Polish engineer who was staying in the hotel introduced himself to us. He started by asking if we were Poles. He was uneasy at being seen with us in public and said so, but kept on sidling into our room and we felt, though he never got to the point, that he was anxious to communicate something to us. He had never been in Poland himself but had lived all his life in Russia. He worked in the Sadovsky zinc-silver-lead mines and had come up to Dzaudzhikau to the "plant" on a "Komandirovka" or duty-mission. He complained bitterly that the manual workers got more money than the professional and scientific technicians. He himself, a trained engineer, got a basic wage of 1,500 roubles per month and never received more than 2,500 roubles on the progressive scale (which rose if the factory overfulfilled its norm) whereas the ordinary "borers" made a minimum of 3,500 and a maximum of 5,000 roubles per month.

In the evening we went to the local theatre to see a current Soviet piece called "Great Power", by Romashev, about a Soviet scientist who betrayed national secrets to a foreign state. The theatre was half empty and the seats were terribly cramped and uncomfortable but the players did well with what was to us, an indescribably dull and lifeless piece of propaganda. Overcome by discomfort and boredom, we left the theatre after the third act and returned to the hotel where we sat down in the restaurant. At an adjoining table were two girls who began to show some interest in us. They soon provided a pretext for us to join them and we launched on an interesting and animated conversation which lasted until well after midnight that evening.

The girls had taken us for Finns and were surprised to learn that we were English. This revelation, however, did

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[4] From 1954 to 1990 *Ordzhonikidze* and from 1990 *Vladikavkaz* - Wikipedia

not lessen but rather increased their friendliness, and our conversation proceeded in such an entirely normal atmosphere that we had a feeling (brutally corrected by a later experience in Transcaucasia) that the apprehensions we had felt hitherto about "compromising" Soviet friends were perhaps unfounded. During the course of that evening and the following afternoon and evening when we met them again we learned much about these two girls and as we believe them to be fairly typical, what they told us is worth description.

One of them, aged 24, Ira by name, was a factory "norm-setter" and her friend, Anna, aged 27, a reporter on the local paper "Socialist Ossetia". They were both war-widows and the younger has a small son. They explained that the restaurant was empty because few people could afford to eat out since the currency reform in 1947 but said that they had come in to escape from their boy friends with whom they had quarrelled. They at least did not seem to mind expense and ate a large meal with a glass of wine, complaining at the same time that there was no champagne. To our acute embarrassment they insisted on our eating (though we had dined), drinking with them, and then on paying themselves. One of them, in fact, went out and paid the bill before we could get hold of it. They were terribly anxious that we should carry away a good impression of their local hospitality and civilized manners. They said they were thoroughly bored with life in Dzaudzhikau, which they described as a gorodishche ("wretched little town") and longed to see Moscow. Even Tiflis, they said, was "Europe" compared with this place. Both of them had been evacuated to Dzaudzhikau, one from Archangel, the other from Moscow, at the beginning of the war. Ira said she was unable to go back because of the housing shortage in Moscow and the difficulties of registration with the militia. When, in reply to their specific questions, we told them that English workers had an eight-hour day, that the sons of workers could and did go to Universities, and that Communists were not in fact thrown into torture-chambers the younger girl exclaimed: "The things they tell us in our newspapers!" This prompted us to enquire whether they heard Western broadcasts or ever saw "British Ally". Both said they did not possess short-wave sets and could not, therefore, listen but that "many comrades" in the town did listen in to the Voice of America and the B.B.C. In a further conversation the next day Ira said that she had heard an account of Kasenkina's broadcast over the VOA from friends. Anna said that "British Ally" was received in the town and that she herself had read with interest one number containing an account of the latest fashions in women's clothes but that otherwise she was "indifferent" to the paper. Neither of them had heard anything about the jamming of Western broadcasts.

The next day we spent a couple of hours talking with Ira, in the town park. The conversation turned to politics and Ira said she thought all the trouble between England and Russia was due to the governments of the two countries. "We do not know", she said, "how our Government represents us abroad. We have suffered much from our Government and will probably suffer from it in future." Then shesaid quietly and in a matter of fact way that her father, an engineer, had been arrested in 1938 "for counter-revolutionary activities", and that she had never seen him since. At the time she had been too young to realize fully what had happened but as she grew older, she became full of bitterness against the authorities for taking her father away. She had never learned what her father's crime was; all she knew was that he had been convicted "on the basis of article 52" *[*of the Criminal Codex*]* and, as she had learned

in a round about way, sent to a camp in the Komi A.S.S.R. In 1942 she was informed by the N.K.V.D, in answer to a written enquiry about his fate, that her father was dead.

12th May.

We had, according to the Soviet regulations, notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Intourist of our intention to cross over the mountains from Dzaudzhikau to Tiflis by the Georgian Military Highway. The hotel authorities were prepared to arrange for us to do this by bus but we soon found out that owing to the late thaw the highway was not yet open. *[*We see from Isvestiya of May 24th that the Highway has only now been opened for traffic.*]* At one point it was suggested that we should walk for 9 kilometres over the top of the Kazbek pass and catch another 'bus at the other side but our hopes were finally dashed when we heard that another avalanche had fallen, that the pass was dangerous and that the "natchalnik", chief of the highway, who lived in the Hotel, had gone off early to make a reconnaissance at the top, fifty miles away, and no one knew when he would be back. We asked if we could fly but the answer was that 'planes from Dzjaudzikau only flew in the direction of Armavir and Rostov. In view of the general uncertainty we decided to take the risk of asking for rail tickets to Baku, (thus circling the mountain range by way of the Caspian coast) although we were well aware that Baku was a "forbidden area." The hotel officials made no objection to our request and from this and subsequent conversations with Intourist at Baku and Tiflis we came to the conclusion that Intourist (and probably other Soviet authorities) have only been informed about "forbidden areas" in their own local district, and the ordinary Soviet citizen has not the faintest idea that foreigners have been excluded from visiting vast territoriesof his country.

We left the hotel, having ordered our tickets, and walked again out of the town to the South up the river bank and towards the power-station. We were within a few hundred yards of the power-station when an M.V.D. uniformed officer suddenly appeared from behind the buildings and hailed us. He asked for our documents and we showed our diplomatic cards. He merely glanced at one of them, exclaimed "Oh, diplomats" and then quite civilly told us that the area was out of bounds. We asked if we could not walk up the neighbouring hills where in fact we had been the day before and he replied with a wide but vague sweep of the arm that the whole district rayon was forbidden unless one had a special permit from the Council of Ministers of the N.Ossetian A.S.S.R. We accordingly withdrew, relieved that this, our first, encounter with the M.V.D. had led to no unpleasantness.

We wandered back to the town and passed through the park where we noticed that Voznesensky's portrait was missing from a collection of portraits of members of the Politbureau. Later we were surprised to see Voznesensky's portrait still exhibited in the main bookshop of Tiflis. We noticed that the goods in the shops were little different from those available in Moscow shops. There were bicycles, "Bata" shoes, sewing machines marked in Roman lettering "Veritas" (1260 rbls)

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and a good variety of silk and cotton materials. In the outskirts of the town water was drawn from tap-stands in the street but electric light was everywhere installed and supplied by overhead wires. The sewage-system, as usual, served only the centre of the town.

We had dinner with the girls we had met the day before and afterwards they came out in pouring rain to see us off. There was one through coach to Baku leaving at 9.0 p.m. and joining the main line express at Beslan. It was a "hard" coach, that is to say, it contained 49 hard wooden bunks, arranged in three layered tiers. The interior was dimly lit, partly by candle, and it was too dark to read. We endured the stifling atmosphere up to Beslan and then got onto the step and talked to the coach conductor. (Whatever the type of train in Russia every coach has one and sometimes two male or female conductors who talk of themselves as working in "brigades" or teams.) Our old conductor was, we learned, an Armenian. He received 500 roubles a month in wages and, in addition, a pension of 150 roubles a month, to which he was entitled as he was already over 60, the retiring age. He could not, however, afford to retire on this small pension as his wife was an invalid and, of his six children, in respect of whom he got no allowance, one was also an invalid and two were still at school. He had been born in Turkey but had fled from the Turks during the "First Imperialist War". He blamed his personal hardships on the "international situation". He thought we were Jews and on being asked if he liked Jews said quickly and with genuine conviction: "In the Soviet Union all races are equal". He told us that railway-workers received 15 days paid leave a year with five days extra for every five years of good service. In addition they got two free railway warrants a year, one to anywhere they liked and one on the local Ordzonikidze line. The administrative staff, he said, got a month's holiday a year. Our Armenian conductor also told us that his brother had been in America before the First World War and was continually praising America and the fine life he led there. At Beslan we managed to get places in a "Soft" wagon and changed to a coach in which four persons slept on bunks in each compartment. The atmosphere was still thick and for some reason we could get no blankets but we slept fitfully till morning.

13th May.

The train arrived at Machach Kala (the capital of the Dagestan Autonomous S.S.S.R.) at 8 a.m. three hours late. We had decided to leave the train and try to fly to Baku. It was raining hard but we kept to our decision and got out at the second, and largest, of the town's two stations. After a meal in the station buffet (which was next door to a large waiting room marked "for tuberculosis patients") we climbed the steps up into the town and fortunately came straight into the Aeroflot booking office. The one-legged clerk issued us with tickets without hesitation, but he recorded our names, nationality and standing (which we gave as "Embassy workers") in a ledger. He told us that we should come back in two hours' time when a car would take us to the airfield and indicated where we would find the town hotel for a wash and shave.

Machach Kala is built on terraces above the port but is obviously spreading rapidly inland over the hill and across the plain beyond. There were many wild-looking Dagestani tribesmen in the streets but the centre of the town bore the standard Soviet stamp and was dominated by a huge hotel "The Dagestan",(built in 1937) and "Univermag" and a theatre. Opposite the hotel and close

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to the shore, we passed a group of German prisoners working on a building site under armed guard and small boys shouted cheekily at us in German as we went by. We were unable to see the port very clearly but there were several oil tankers in the harbour and a large number of oil storage wagons in the railway sidings.

The "Dagestan" hotel was sited facing the sea and designed on a spacious scale. We came to the general conclusion that the Soviet hotels (such as those at Machach Kala, Baku and Kutaisi),built in the thirties,had been well designed and equipped on a scale which compared with many Western European hotels but that since then they had received no priority for repairs and both their fabric and internal conditions had steadily deteriorated. There were bathrooms but water did not run, lighting was inadequate and kept breaking down, lavatories had been smashed and plumbing repairs ignored. It was rather pathetic to see the enthusiastic attempts made for us by the staff to clean out the wash-room in the "Dagestan Hotel". There was little they could do, in all that imposing looking building, to improve on the slopping, dirty drainage pipe, the cracked and stained basin (without plug) and the single cold tap which presumably served all the rooms on the floor. We noticed that in one of the bedrooms (and this is common practice) the beds were jammed in side-by-side, as many as could be fitting in without regard for floor space.

After washing we returned to the Aeroflot office and, while waiting for transport, engaged in friendly conversation with the employees and hangers-on. Someone drew our attention excitedly to a report in the local paper that a hunter had recently shot a female leopard and her cubs in the hills; it was apparently a very rare event to find leopards these days.

We were driven by a woman-chauffeur over the hill in a small, shaky car, accompanied by two friendly airport workers. One of them enthusiastically described the countryside, pointing out that in the hills some of the tribesmen "had still never seen a motor car", but emphasising that the younger generation were now being educated and "civilized". At the airfield we boarded an I.L.12 "soft" aeroplane which had just flown in from Moscow. There were a number of well-dressed Russian passengers, including one drunken Red Army major, whose luggage was marked for Ashkhabad. We later heard that although only the central Tass reports of the earthquake in Ashkhabad had been published in Baku, it was generally known that the town had been almost completely destroyed but that the authorities were busily re-building it.

The weather cleared as we flew down the coast to Baku but we saw no sign of shipping in the Caspian. Baku civil airfield, is about twenty-five miles to the North of the town and we were advised to hitch-hike to the centre as the airport bus would not move without a full load. Up to this point no official had raised any question about our presence in Baku and indeed we were asked by one official at the airport if we were going on in the aeroplane to Ashkhabad.

We were waiting in the sun on the main tarmac road by the airport entrance, trying to "thumb" a lift" from passing lorries, when a "Pobeda" drove up to us and its occupants

introduced themselves as the director of the Baku Intourist Hotel and his interpreter who gave his name as Josef. They had heard about our arrival, they said, by telegram from Dzandzikau and by telephone from Machach Kala. From this and later observations we deduced that Soviet Hotels and, perhaps, ticket-offices, have a standing order to inform the next Intourist Hotel on the route of all foreign travellers when they leave.

In the car the Intourist Director asked if our passports were marked for Baku. We explained the reason why we had been forced to come by this route, the only possible round about way to Tiflis, and the director immediately looked anxious and said that there would be a "scandal".

The Intourist Hotel at Baku is a fine building and we were given a comfortable room with a private bathroom. Our window faced onto the bay and the harbour. After lunch we were summoned by the "Service Director" who looked troubled. Our passports and diplomatic cards, which we had surrendered to the interpreter before lunch, were lying on the desk before him. Why, he asked, had we come to Baku without special permits in our passports? We told him our story and explained the travelling regulations applied to foreigners by the Soviet Government, pointing out that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only required us to inform them of our proposed route and was not in the habit of giving foreigners written authority to pass through forbidden zones in transit. At this the "service director" told us that we must leave Baku for Tiflis that same evening and that, in the meantime, we must remain within the confines of the hotel. We then asked whether he would permit us to sit in the park on the sea-front before the hotel. To this he agreed on condition that we were accompanied by Josef the interpreter who was present at this interview.

As wewere leaving the hotel to and sit in the park, Josef, whose English was correct and fluent, remarked "I like the English very much and I hate to see them treated in this manner. I have never had to play this rôle before". During the long conversation in English we had while sitting in the park he aired some of his grievances and eagerly asked us for information about the outside world. His main grievance was his almost complete insulation from Western, particularly English, culture and the fact that, owing to Baku being a forbidden zone, he was not able to meet foreigners and practise his English. English books were very hard to come by in Baku and the town library contained only books published before 1918. He had, however, managed to collect a few English books from the stray foreigners who had passed through Baku since the end of the war and in this way he had become acquainted with novels by James Hilton and Somerset Maugham and even with the contents of Kravchenko's book as summarized in an American "Digest" which a passing American had lent him. He asked us what had happened to "British Ally" which he had not been able to obtain for some time and wondered whether it had been "wound up". Asked about Western broadcasts and the jamming he said that some people in Baku listened to the B.B.C. and the Voice of America (which, he said, was generally disliked). Jamming had interfered with reception as one stage, but the broadcasts were now coming through clearly again. Josef's testimony on this point was not, unfortunately, very precise and he did not seem very willing to discuss the matter.

We asked Josef why he did not move to Moscow or Leningrad where his talents as a linguist might be more usefully employed. His reply was a characteristic one, namely that the great scarcity of accommodation in Moscow made it impossible for

him to think of taking his family there. He also described the housing situation in Baku as bad. Josef, like so many other people we met, complained bitterly of lack of money. With a wage of 1200 roubles a month (400 of which he had to pay back in taxes and various dues) he found it hard to make both ends meet and had to do spare time work to eke out his salary. He found this shortage of money particularly galling now that supplies of clothing and consumer goods were more plentiful. He further informed us that the director of the hotel and the "service director" (whose chief function seemed to be the arrangement of onward transport for hotel guests) earned 1800 and 2500 respectively. The real plutocrats on the hotel staff, however, he considered to be the waiters who, although they had a basic monthly salary of only 300, made large additional sums from tips.

Back at the hotel we were told that our train tickets had been obtained and, after being refused permission to go to the theatre, we sat in our rooms until 9.30 when we were driven out to the station accompanied by Josef and the hotel-director. The latter took leave of us in the station waiting-room, saying that he regretted our stay in Baku had been so short but that, as we no doubt realised, it was not his fault. Josef escorted us to our seats on the train and asked whether we would like him to send a telegram to the Intourist Hotel in Tiflis. Mistakenly supposing that Moscow would already have informed Tiflis of our impending arrival there we told him not to bother. The result of this was that in Tiflis we were not met at the station and the officials of the Intourist hotel there had no knowledge of us whatsoever.

14th May.

There was little of general interest to record about the long journey across Azerbaijan and Georgia to Tiflis, which we reached at 4.45 p.m. Both before and after Kirovobad (formerly Gandzha) station we saw large military airfields and there was considerable flying activity. At all the stations where we halted we saw large numbers of Azerbaijani peasants, many of them evidently very poor, selling eggs and live chickens. Near some stations we saw "zemlyanki", dwelling-places consisting of dug-outs roughly covered in sacking, mud and turf, but the villages and settlements we passed compared favourably in their general appearance with the villages of Russia proper. Near one station, when we were already in Georgia, we saw a group of wretched bare-footed women repairing the permanent way. They were guarded by an M.V.D. man armed with a rifle. This group was typical of many similar ones we saw, particularly in Kutaisi. In Georgia we frequently caught sight of small forced labour camps, often adjacent to building sites or factories and distinguished by barbed-wire fences and raised sentry-boxes at each corner. Numbers of ragged men and boys rode free from station to station on the steps and buffers of the train. This is an accepted practice and an economical one because there is not enough room on Soviet trains for all the local passenger traffic. The conductors and station guards make no attempt to remove such people.

At Tiflis we boarded a tram and asked the conductress to direct us to the Intourist hotel. She kindly provided us with a guide, her old uncle, who happened to be riding on the tram. As we walked up the street this old Georgian, after asking if we were Germans, and on learning we were English suddenly burst out with a surprising vehemence into a condemnation of the Soviet regime. "They", he said, "have

spoiled everything in Tiflis - they are a bunch of Fascists". He told us he had been in America in 1910 and wished he had never returned to Russia. "They" had taken everything away from him and reduced him to beggary.

Tiflis has been described by several foreign travellers recently and we are, therefore, only recording events which, we think, may throw some new light on conditions in Georgia. We escaped the attentions of the Intourist guides from the hotel but although this at first gave us a certain amount of freedom, we were in the end effectively hemmed in, as will be seen, by the M.V.D.

On our first evening we went up in the funicular which carried us to the fine restaurant and park built on a hilltop above the town. We dined at the open air terrace from which we looked down on the lights of all Tiflis. Among these a huge representation of Stalin in flashing red neon lights was conspicuous. We had been warned by a woman school-teacher who showed us the way to the funicular that we should not walk down the hill as there were many "hooligans". We certainly noticed the independent, boisterous, rough and ready behaviour of the Georgians and their habit of standing in gangs on street corners, sparring with each other and shouting in their gutteral language. They seemed to have little respect for the militia and once we saw a gang provoking and mocking a militiaman who appeared hesitant to take action against them. We prudently went down in the funicular and engaged in friendly conversation with a well-dressed Georgian and his wife but were vehemently interrupted by a Russian Army officer who, sitting beside us with his girl, had overheard us say we were English. "Tell them in England" he said "that the Soviet people do not want war; we know the British Government is preparing war". Under pressure he admitted that perhaps the British people did not want war, but affirmed that without doubt Mr. Churchill did. We found throughout our journey that the Russian people were obsessed by the bogey of Mr. Churchill. The effects which Soviet propaganda had built up about him since the war much be comparable to the fear once inspired by Napoleon in the minds of the common British people.

15th May.

After sending a telegram to London in English from the Central Tiflis Telegraph office, we again went up the funicular for lunch. We noticed a number of Germans waiting to buy tickets and managed to get into conversation with two of them in the park at the top of the hill. These two Germans, and the other fifty odd whom we saw that day, were suntanned and looked healthy. They wore cloth caps or German army forage caps and motley but quite smart and clean clothes which, we judged, had been made in German style by a tailor among their fellow prisoners. It was clear that they had dressed up for "walking out" in their best and on the whole they were as well turned out as any Russian we saw.

At first the two prisoners refused to believe we were English and, somewhat ironically, alleged as a reason for their suspicions, that we were too ill-dressed to be Englishmen! Later they admitted that they had taken us for M.V.D. spies but said their suspicions had been dispelled by the sight of our English matches and cigarettes. When we had at last gained their confidence and begun to ask a few questions one of them alarmed us considerably by saying "I see the English Secret Service works as well as ever". We hastily assured them that we had no connection with any such organization but as they had pointed out their uniformed M.V.D. supervisor on the terrace below and as

we ourselves could not rely upon their discretion we finally suggested that it would be safer for their sakes if they left us. They agreed and we did not see them again.

The gist of their information was as follows. One, a butcher from Heidelberg, had been captured at Melitopel (in the Southern Ukraine) in 1943. The other came from Berlin and had been taken prisoner in Bessarabia some time later. They put the number of German prisoners in Tiflis at 2,000 and said that some were occupied in manual labour on a new "Ministry Building" and others worked at the flour combine. At Rustavi, on the Tiflis-Baku railway line to the South-East of Tiflis, there were 5,000 Germans. These were, except for 300 men, all S.S. officers of field rank. Men who misbehaved in Tiflis were sent as a punishment to Rustavi and this they all dreaded as conditions there were bad. Those in Tiflis lived in barracks, which they pointed out to us, near the river in the Western part of the town. Conditions in their barracks, owing to over-crowding, dirt and lice, were very bad but food was now better than in 1945-1947 when many of the prisoners had died of starvation. In their barracks they lived 200 men to a room. The prisoners were paid for their work but the pay was very small. We later obtained confirmatory evidence that there were a good many German specialists all over Georgia. The ex-butcher said that he spent most of his time in "speculation", by sneaking away from work into the town and buying food which he sold at a profit to his fellow prisoners. The prisoners were forbidden to consort with Russian or other local women and were severely punished if caught doing so. We gathered that few took the risk. They were, however, allowed to write home. Letters from Germany took at best a month to reach them but often arrived in delayed batches. A transport train of 1400 prisoners had left Tiflis for Germany on the 15th April. Those remaining had no information about the possibility of being repatriated and our informants gave us the impression that after 6 years in captivity they had become hardened and cynical and now accepted whatever happened to them with fatalistic acquiescence. They alleged that the German prisoners still detained in Russia were mostly those considered to be "politically suspect", but this does not, presumably refer to the specialists. About 90% of the Camp's inmates hated the Soviet regime, they told us, but there were some spies among them who reported to their M.V.D. guards. The prisoners were being told by the Russians that the Anglo-Americans designed to take away the Ruhr from Germany, but, said our informant, this had little effect on them and they all remembered Germany's loss of her eastern territories. Our informant thought and hoped there would be another war. He said that if America had not intervened Germany would have beaten Russia. The Russian people still lived in misery and manual labourers received only 300 roubles a month while the "bosses" lived on the fat of the land. One final point of information was that former members of General Vlasov's army had all been sentenced to 10 years forced labour.

After the Germans had left us we walked through the park up to the crest of the hill behind the restaurant. There was no one else visible on this green hillside as we started off and militiamen who were standing at the bottom of the hill on the edge of the park by a hut made no attempt to stop us. We were just starting to settle for a rest on the grass at the top of the hill when a girl came out of one of several "zemlyanki" which we now noticed for the first time were dotted about the crest of the hill. This girl called to us and told us in Russian to go away as the area was Forbidden. Not wishing to

take any risks we went back down the hill and sat in the bushes beside the track. Suddenly the deserted hillside seemed to become alive with men. Several came bounding down the hill, and two we could see flitting about the bushes. Although not certain we judged from their behaviour and similar experiences in Moscow that they were shadowing us and that the commotion had been caused because they had temporarily lost sight of us. We subsequently confirmed that these men were, in fact, following us and from that moment till we left Kutaisi five days later we were never free of shadowers whenever we left our hotel, though as will be seen their tactics varied. This inevitably limited our freedom of conversation with Russians and gave us, to say the least, a feeling of uneasiness.

In the evening we went to a variety concert which we had been misled to believe was of Georgian dancing and singing. It turned out to be a series of recitations, monologues, conjuring tricks and so forth conducted in Russian and as many of the jokes were offensively directed against England or America we did not find it amusing. It was pathetic to see how each performer invariably introduced into his or her set some adulatory references to Stalin or Beriya (also a Georgian). One nauseating example was when a female child-impersonator mimicked a child who wanted to give a present to Stalin and finally decided to give his teddy-bear, his most precious possession.

After the concert we went to a beer-bar and talked to the Georgian bar-tender who, on the favourite subject of war, said confidently that the Georgians would fight any future invader as they had fought the Germans. When mentioning the Germans he drew his hand across his throat with an ugly gesture and spat. In general we felt that hostility towards the Germans still prevailed among the ferocious Georgians in strong contrast to the indifference with which most Russians we met seemed to view them.

16th May.

We planned an expedition to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia, which is situated in the hills about 16 miles to the north-west of Tiflis. We learned at the station that a train left at 1.30 p.m. and decided to pass the intervening time by going for a walk on the hills past the railway station to the north of the town. We soon became aware of our "followers", three young Georgians, who behaved like children playing Red Indians in their attempts to keep themselves concealed in the bushes behind us. We sat down in the sun amidst low scrub on the hillside and the "followers" sat down nearby, peeping at us from time to time. They had by that time got hold of two young women whose presence, they apparently believed, gave them the appearance of idle picnickers. We saw a militiaman with a rifle talking to our "followers" but thought little of it. We attempted to make some contact with the "followers" and shouted at them but they made off whenever we approached them. After a while the same militiaman came up to us and said bluntly that we were in a forbidden area and that we must remove ourselves. As we were sitting away from all buildings and were surrounded by weed and scrub we argued with him but in the face of his stubborn insistence we said we would leave on condition that he would remove our "followers"

also. There then ensured a ridiculous farce. We went down the hill by stages, pursued by our "followers" with their girls to whom they whistled and called out directions. The militiaman meandered about the hillside blowing his whistle aimlessly and going through the motions of turning off all and sundry. We stopped towards the edge of the weeds and protested vigorously to the militiaman. He muttered that he would write out a "protocol" of the events (though he refused to say to whom he would send it) and that he would arrest the Georgians if they continued to trail us. Needless to say he did not and they continued after us down the hill.

We returned to the railway station and bought tickets for Mtskheta at the booking office. As we approached the train, which was already at the platform, we saw that one of our "followers" was running along the coaches and addressing each conductor, as well as the railway militia officers, with emphatic gestures. We guessed what he was about and our guess was confirmed when we tried to board the train. Each conductor invented some ridiculous excuse to prevent us. All appeals were useless. Our tickets were "wrongly numbered", they said, "There was no room" - "We should try further along" - "The train was not going to Mtskheta" - or "not going at all"! We ran along the coaches and reached the front just as the train started. We showed our tickets and, to our joy, the conductor had not been briefed. "Get on" he said and we mounted. Seeing this, one of our pursuers pushed himself up in front of us and as we went up the steps of the moving train shouted "Get off". As far as we were concerned he was merely an offensive civilian without official status so we brushed past him and entered the coach. We had no further trouble but the unfortunate conductor, who looked sick with worry, and may well have suffered unpleasant consequences for letting us onto the train, told us we must not enter the next carriage and when we reached Mtskheta he led us out onto the platform.

The ancient capital city of Mtskheta is now no more than a village. It lies at the junction of the Aragve and Kura rivers and is also the point of exit of the Georgian Military highway. We visited the 11th century church which was opened of us by an old priest while our pursuers, who had by now given up all pretence of concealment, waited outside in the walled churchyard. We gathered that services of the Georgian Independent Church were held regularly but the priest spoke no Russian and we could not confirm this. Inside the church we looked at the memorial tablets, in Russian and Georgian, to numerous princes of the Bagration family and at the fading frescoes.

We should mention here one point of interest which, we believe, may not have been recorded by other travellers, namely that there seem to be a fair number of Kurds resident in Tiflis. We at first believed them to be Gypsies, which they closely resemble.

17th May.

The Intourist authorities in Tiflis had told us that, as they had no notification of our journey, they would have to ask the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs if we could proceed to Kutaisi. But the Ministry had no objection and we accordingly asked Intourist to get us tickets on the 1.30 p.m. train.

Before we left Tiflis we asked about "British Ally". The girl selling papers in the hotel kiosk said that the last issue she had received was on 17th April. She did not say how many copies she received but implied that at least some were sold. She had none when we asked her and we saw none on view elsewhere in the town.

We called for a taxi to take us to the station as we were late. The hall-porter ran out and, in a minute, returned to say there was one at the door. It was a broken-down old machine and appeared

to start with difficulty, but we piled in, grateful for any form of transport quicker than the tram. As soon as we started the young driver turned to us and said urgently that if we were stopped by an "Inspector" we were to say that a Major of the M.V.D. had just put us in the car! It turned out that he was driving "Nalevo" (literally "on the left", or "on the side"). He was actually chauffeur to the M.V.D. Major who was head of a local forced labour camp. The driver's wages were 500 - 600 roubles a month and he made what extra he could be acting as an unofficial taxi. He told us that there were only four official taxis in the whole of Tiflis. He complained of living expenses and said that one might live well enough on 3000 roubles a month. He asked for his exorbitant fee before we got to the station and when we arrived, jumped out and made a great show of wringing our hands as if he were seeing off some old friends.

We travelled "soft" and had the whole coach to ourselves. People could not afford the money to travel "soft", said the conductor, at any rate by day. Later, at one of the stops, a hugely fat Lieutenant-General of the M.VD. joined the coach, but though we had some casual conversation with him, he said nothing of significance. We saw him subsequently being driven in a jeep round Kutaisi. We arrived at Kutaisi one hour late at 9.30 p.m. and after enquiring the way walked through dimly lit streets to the "Hotel Kutaisi" where we were greeted by the director, a gnome-like Georgian, and shown to our room. The "Hotel Kutaisi" (built in 1938) had been well designed but even our quarters, described as "Luxury" were now by European standards squalid. Judging by some articles of clothing lying around and later collected by the maid, the room had been hastily evacuated just before our arrival. The bed-linen and blankets were of inferior quality and not very clean; we had a private bathroom but the hot water system did not work and there was no plug in the wash-basin; the lights failed at regular intervals, the ceiling leaked violently and the lavatory seat had disappeared. But though we have recorded these deficiencies we must emphasize that every possible effort had been made to provide for our comfort and, by Soviet standards, the accommodation was, indeed, the height of luxury.

After dinner, in the director's poky little office, we completed the regular Soviet hotel registration forms which we had been excused from doing at the Intourist hotels of Tiflis, Baku and Dzaudzikau. These forms required us to give details of our birth, passport numbers, occupations, authority for staying at the hotel, party membership and so forth. When we had done we talked to the director and the "accountant" who told us he was a Georgian Jew. There were, he said, 5,000 Jews in Kutaisi, and 3 synagogues with a Rabbi and priests who conducted regular services in ancient Hebrew. The only other item of information gained during this conversation was that the total population of Kutaisi is now roughly 110,000 (compared with 46,000 in 1928 according to the figure in our guide-book).

18th May.

We had asked the hotel director if he would arrange for us to see a school and also, perhaps, make an excursion into the country by car. The director said that hehimself would be responsible for making such arrangements and that there would be no difficulty in doing so.

On our first morning we left the director to do what he could for us and walked up onto one of the hills which surround the town. We soon found our way up a stony track and came out

onto the open hillside. On the lower slopes we passed orchards and vineyards, but the top-soil soon thinned out and the protruding rocks and stones made cultivation impossible. To the north the hills stretched away to the snow-covered central range. Nearer the town the tracks were made of loose stones which scarcely provided foothold against the thick dark-red mud, only just drying out in the spring sunshine.

We sat on a hill-top and looked down on Kutaisi stretched out on both sides of the river Rion. To the west we could see the two airfields on the plain and a large plant beyond. To the north just outside the town we identified a large dam across the river which, from later observation, we decided was only concerned with providing the town's water-supply.

We had a good view behind us and began to hope that we were free from pursuit, though we had already had evidence to make us suspicious at the beginning of our walk. Before long, however, we were able to pick out two men on a hillside behind us and we had no doubt we were being followed. Our suspicions were confirmed by an old peasant who told us, quite gratuitously, that we were being watched. By this time a militiaman had also appeared on the hill-side and began walking in our direction. Knowing that if he caught up with us we should have to give a wearisome explanation of our presence in Kutaisi and that we should almost certainly be told we were in a forbidden zone and moved on, we walked off rapidly up another hill and came out onto a good road which ran along the right bank of the Rion river. Looking over our shoulder as we retreated over the brow of the hill we caught a glimpse of the militiaman in the valley below. He had taken off his boots in order to cross a stream and was still coming steadily after us. We were now able to identify all our pursuers and their faces were all too familiar to us by the time we left Kutaisi.

After lunch we were taken by the director to visit a "Middle School" (the Classical Gymnasium before the Revolution) in the centre of the town. We were introduced to the director, a Georgian, who told us with pride that Tchaikovsky and Mayakovsky had been educated in that same school. The school was for Georgian children only. Boys and girls were, according to universal Soviet practice, always taught in separate classes. The school, which had 800 pupils, worked in two shifts (the first being from 7.30 a.m. - 1.0 p.m.) and the classes numbered 35 - 40. The director observed that there were several other schools in the town including a Russian school at the automobile factory. The subjects taught included Georgian and Russian language and history, the "constitution", Biology, physics and mathematics. The only foreign language taught was German and the director said that generally different schools taught one of either German, English or French, according to the availability of teachers. We were shown round the building which (apart from the wash-house) was fairly clean and adequately, if sparsely furnished. The big hall upstairs was placarded with slogans in Georgian and had large portraits of all the Politburo except Voznesensky. There seemed to be a good deal of equipment in the physics and biology laboratories and portraits of Michurin and Lysonko were hung in the latter. We looked in at some classes in progress but could not stay to listen. The hotel director again promised us a car-trip to the south on the following day, to include a visit to a wine sovkhoz. He spoke about it enthusiastically and said he would come with us. Meantime, we told him we would amuse ourselves.

We walked out again on the left bank of the river to the north of the town and made our way up to an old church on

the hill-side. An old caretaker said that the church was closed at present but that services (of the Independent Georgian Church) were regularly held and often attended by Orthodox Russians. Sadly he told us that things used to be much better, and that the church now had to pay 17,000 roubles a year tax. This huge sum can only come from the generosity of the congregation so it is not surprising that the churches are gradually decaying in Georgia.

, We also found and visited one of the town's three synagogues which was in good condition and in use.

In the centre of the town we looked at an exhibition of photographs illustrating the town's industry. Those of the automobile works were entitled "the construction of the automobile factory" but several pictures showed elaborate machine-tool shops in an apparently complete condition. We found difficulty in locating the automobile plant and the hotel director was evasive when we brought the subject up. On the other hand in general talk with strangers the presence of the factory in the town was openly mentioned and we were even asked by a young Georgian at a shooting range in the park whether we were "German specialists working at the automobile plant". However we were unable to obtain any direct evidence about the plant's production.

We noticed several gangs of Germans working under armed guard on buildings and roads and their presence was openly referred to by people we met. Among other tasks they were building a new town theatre, a huge building in the central square. Such a task seemed unnecessary as the town already has a substantial theatre, much better equipped than the one at Dzandzikau. It is perhaps worth recording that in three instances we saw militiamen with revolvers in their hands, marching groups of ragged men and women through the town. We were told by the hotel director who was with us on one of these occasions that they were "criminals".

19th May.

Our last full day at Kutaisi was one of continual frustration. Evidence accumulated as the day passed that we were to be denied freedom of movement and association with the inhabitants and it became plain that the "competent authorities" wished to see the back of us as soon as possible.

At breakfast, which we ate in a small restaurant down the street, we were joined by a raggedly dressed but fine-looking man of about forty-five who addressed us in broken English and fluent, though disjointed, German and French. He told us a strange story the gist of which was as follows. His name was Elidelachvili and he had been born in Kutaisi where his father was once a rich property owner. Thefather had evacuated his whole family, thirty seven persons, to Constantinople before the arrival of the Bolsheviks in 1920. Our informant had then spent his youth travelling round the world, living luxuriously on his father's money. In the last war he had fought with the French partisans, being captured by the Germans and "liberated" by the Russians who had brought him back to the Soviet Union. He had spent a long time in Russian camps while, he said, the Soviet authorities had checked up, with the utmost thoroughness, on all his doings between the wars. Finally he was sent back to Kutaisi where he had lived for the past two years. Although the man had obviously suffered and was now somewhat unbalanced we supposed his story to be true. He said his mother was occasionally able to send him money from Paris and that he had

obtained the M.G.B's permission to correspond with her. He was acquiescent about his change in circumstances and careful not to criticize the Soviet régime, emphasizing that he was "not political". He was called away during our talk by someone who said the hotel director wished to see him and we did not see him again. We had no doubt that it was thought that he had talked to us quite enough. When we later asked the director about the man he confirmed the outline of his story, said he was not quite right in the head and changed the subject.

For the rest of the day we were kept hanging about while the director produced different excuses for the absence of the car which he had promised would take us into the country. It became obvious that obstruction was being put in our way but the director, who, we believe, was probably doing his best, kept raising our hopes by saying that the car would turn up in one hour's time. The intervals we spent walking about the town, closely followed all the time. On one such walk we crossed the river the west, walked down past some military Barracks, which were full of troops, and halted again on our way back to the town to look at the view on the main bridge over the river, close to the barracks. We saw an officer talking to our "followers" and wondered what was happening. Soon afterwards this officer approached us from the west side of the bridge, while another whom we had seen going past us, came up from the east side. They asked us for our documents and treated us to a series of suspicious questions. One of them said that it was strange that we showed such interest in the town. The other asked if we had a camera to which one of us replied in the negative. Finally they allowed us to go though we were at pains to ask them if they were perfectly reassured about us, to which they answered affirmatively.

In the evening we returned for the last time to the hotel. The director was nowhere to be found. We went out onto the balcony of our room and looked out onto the central square and park. On the next balcony were two Russian girls and one of these asked us if we could give her anything to read. We asked her in and showed her our magazines. She was from Siberia, had been trained as a pilot in the war and was now on her way to a holiday camp. She had lived in Odessa and said that she was not a countrywoman but had lived in towns and knew therefore that it was "inconvenient" to have contact with foreigners. Some of her girl friends in Odessa she said, had been "persecuted" for associating with British and American sailors there. She herself was embarrassingly "obsequious towards things foreign", and stated repeatedly how much finer were the clothes and other things illustrated in our magazines than their equivalents in the Soviet Union. The pictures of women particularly impressed her and she commented bitterly that in the Soviet Union women were treated like men and rapidly become "deformed by hard work". After about ten minutes there was a sharp knock on the door and the female floor-attendant came in. "Is there a woman here?" she said - "it is not allowed." We accordingly asked the woman to leave and she went out of the room saying that she would like to see us again. After dinner we went out into the park and sat on a bench. The same Russian girl came up to us again and joined us. She had with her two little girls, her nieces. She told us that the floor-attendant had said to her: "These people are English, you must not go into their room". Though we warned her we were being watched she persisted in talking to us and began telling us how her handbag had been slit open on the train from Tiflis to Kutaisi and all her money and papers stolen. At this moment, as we sat talking in full public view, a militiaman came up. Ignoring us he said sharply to the woman "Get up".

She obeyed and walked off with the militiaman out of the park with the two little girls running beside her. We were profoundly shocked and went back to the hotel feeling depressed and guilty. We can only hope that the girl got off lightly with a warning.

20th May.

We left the hotel early and walked to the Aeroflot Booking Office. The director did not appear to see us off but sent us messages of farewell - we imagined that he was too embarrassed to put in an appearance. After an hour's delay we drove out in an American jeep to the airport, where we boarded the 'plane at 10.30 a.m. While waiting for our aeroplane we saw considerable flying activity from the adjoining military airfield.

We flew back by way of ~~Rostov~~ Sukhumi and ~~Sukhumi~~ Rostov and arrived in Moscow at 4.15 p.m. after an uneventful journey of 1000 miles.

From

Memories of 1945-50
Christ Church,
Northern Department in the Foreign Office,
Poland and Moscow[5]

In addition to the Chancery in Moscow there was another important part of the Embassy's resources, the Russian Secretariat. Their offices were located, also on the ground floor, at the side off the entrance hall opposite the Chancery. The Russian Secretariat was staffed by scholars and linguists, some established in the Foreign Service and some temporarily seconded to work in Moscow from the academic world; their London base was in the Foreign Office Research Department and they did not normally expect a general career in the Administrative Branch though some did in fact move on to the administrative ladder. In my time, for example, the Russian Secretariat was headed by a quiet voiced, kind and shrewd Russian scholar called Bill Barker who later became Ambassador in Czechoslovakia and an Under Secretary of State in the Office with a K.C.M.G, and, in retirement, Professor of Russian at Liverpool University. Under him in Moscow worked several brilliant linguists of whom I remember Max Hayward, Hugh Lunghi and Ted Orchard in particular. All three distinguished themselves later. Ted Orchard, full bearded, continued in the Foreign Service and himself became Head of the Secretariat in Moscow in due course. Hugh Lunghi became well known as a journalist and B.B.C pundit on Eastern European affairs. Max Hayward, with whom I formed a close friendship, probably had the greatest and most profound feel for the Russian language of them all. On leaving Moscow he became a Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, where I stayed with him several times, and, from a visiting professorship at Harvard, he stayed with us several times in New York between 1957 and 1960. He became known to a wide public for his translation for English publication with Manya Harari, of Paternak's famous novel Dr Zhivago. He died sadly young, and I collaborated with the American author of a memoir about his life. She sought me out in London and I felt able to give her, as the security experts had by then evaporated, the report I wrote on the adventurous journey Max and I made together in 1949 to Pyatigorsk, in the North Caucasus (once called Mineralyni Vodi – Mineral Waters) – and also to Vladikavkaz – Ruler of the Caucasus, on to the Caspian Sea through Daghestan, to Machachkala, and then to Baku, Tiflis and Kutaisi. We were the first British officials to venture successfully into such parts of the Soviet Union since, I think, Fitzroy Maclean before the War. Adam Watson had also made a similar journey at an early stage in the War, I believe. Our report was printed for circulation by the Foreign Office and also distributed by the State Department. As nothing at the time was known at first hand about conditions in the Caucasus, every little piece of descriptive material, though entirely subjective, was eagerly fastened on by Western Intelligence.

[5] This account was written in 2000-2002, "entirely from memory, without reference to any official history or papers"; the full document may be found on-line at tamburlane.co.uk.

We had some exciting adventures. In Baku, after an overnight train journey to Machackkala on straw palliasses ('hard' class), and flight onwards, we were invited by the stewardess to go on to Aschabad, in Central Asia. There had been recently a severe earthquake there, and the authorities were very secretive about damage and casualties. We had at that stage evaded Intourist and could easily have gone onwards. But I had a vision of never getting back, tempting though the opportunity was, and we funked it. Then Intourist and the K.G.B caught up with us on the tarmac (we were never free of them after that) and we were arrested. We were confined to our hotel room in Baku, the window looking out on the port and the oil fields, with an armed guard at the door, and, although we eventually managed to get to Tiflis (full still of German PoWs), Kutaisi and Mtsketa, we were finally defeated when a Soviet girl, with two little daughters, to whom we were talking on a bench in the park in Mtsketa, was arrested and taken away, holding her two small nieces' hands, by an uniformed militiaman with the unforgettable words 'Stand up; come with me. Don't you know you are talking to foreigners and spies?' We decided then that although we had evaded the system pretty well, and managed to meet and talk to a wide variety of people, of the Soviet Union's various nationalities, we were now being hopelessly constrained by our K.G.B followers, and any contacts we made were only bringing trouble for innocent people. So we went back to the hotel, a dump, and asked the desk for flights back to Moscow. In contrast to the previous refusals or indefinite delays when we had tried to get tickets, by air or rail, elsewhere, our request was immediately acceded to – they were glad to be rid of us – and we flew back to Moscow, with glorious views of the Black Sea's Crimean coast, of Rostov on Don and the endless Russian plains, the same afternoon. It was, in fact, a relief, though we were happy with what we had achieved.

Our unease about continuing had been heightened by an episode on the previous day. We went for a long walk up the bare mountains from where we had a good view of Kutaisi airfield below on the plane. Colonel Pete Urban, in the American Embassy, had specially asked me to do what I could to photograph this. It looked like any other airfield to me! We had far outdistanced our followers in plain clothes but we could see a uniformed militiaman struggling after us up the lower slopes. I took a picture with my antique Kodak, and we then felt we had better get out, and made off down the hill to where we thought we would find the road back to town. We strode back, relieved, until suddenly we were confronted by an Army platoon, with fixed bayonets, occupying the road. In front was a short, young officer, with a pistol. I remember saying to Max, 'just keep walking, and do not stop'. I must have been thoroughly frightened, but somehow the brashness of youth kept me calm. The officer said, as we reached him: 'Halt. U vas apparat?' (Have you got a camera?). I remember his words with perfect clarity; my Kodak was in my tweed coat pocket. I said 'Nyet', and kept walking through the ranks, Max alongside. Noone made a move to touch us, and we did not look back. We were soon at the hotel. I do not remember being too alarmed, but it was an unpleasant confrontation. Pete Urban, on our return, seemed disproportionately excited by my dull photograph.

The account of our journey which I still have is in fact a State Department circulated copy which someone must have given to me. I think it is too long to reproduce here in its entirety. I omitted from it, for obvious reasons, the story of my photography.