“It is an experience which never lacks interest”: John Paton Davies’ Letters from Postwar Moscow

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Abstract
This article presents the personal letters of John Paton Davies, an American diplomat and First Secretary of the US Embassy in the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1947, which were discovered by the author in the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. Although they are of great interest as one of the few accounts of life in post-war Moscow written by a foreigner, they have never been published. What makes these letters particularly valuable is their personal nature. Davies’ letters are remarkable because he tries to paint for his parents a picture of life in the closed world of diplomatic staff of Western embassies in the Soviet Union, describing in detail everyday life, supplies, living conditions, and even his wife giving birth in the best hospital of the Soviet Union. The letters are preceded by a short commentary giving an insight into the personality of John Davies.

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Kristina V. Minkova

John Paton Davies Jr. was born in China in 1908 into a family of American Baptist missionaries. Throughout his life he had the warmest relationship with his parents. Davies received his education in the United States and China, graduated from Columbia University in 1931 and immediately entered the diplomatic careers. In 1933, after a short-time service as a Vice-Consul in Windsor, Ontario, he was sent to China and remained there until 1940. In August 1942, John Davies married Patricia Louise Grady (1920–2000), daughter of American diplomat Henry F. Grady (1882–1957),[1] for love. Patricia played a significant part in Davies' work and was known as a well-educated, keenly observant, and broad-minded person. From early 1942 until the end of 1944, Davies served in the China-Burma-India Theater under Generals J. Stilwell, A. Wedemeyer, and P. Hurley. He was a member of the Dixie Mission, a group of American officers and diplomats (United States Army Observation Group) tasked with establishing official US diplomatic and military ties with the Chinese Communists. Davies considered the group's task to minimize the influence of the USSR on the Chinese communist movement, but at the same time believed that the government of Chiang Kai-shek was hopeless and the future of China lay with the communists. As a result of his conflict with General Hurley, the personal representative of President Franklin D. Roosevelt under Chiang Kai-shek, the latter secured Davis's transfer to Moscow as second (and then first) secretary of the US Embassy.

John Davies and Patricia lived in Moscow from March 1945 to April 1947. Upon returning from Moscow, John Davies worked in the Policy Planning Staff, the US Department of State, until 1952. Then he directed the Office of Political Affairs, served as a U.S. High Commissioner for Germany and ended up as a Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Peru. However, after Senator McCarthy and his followers started a wide anti-communist campaign which affected many Soviet studies specialists and respective Department of State officials in the USA, Davies

1. In 1941, Grady was elected president of the shipowner American President Lines, and in October 1945, he was appointed personal representative of President Truman on the Allied Election Supervision Commission in Greece. Subsequently, Grady was involved in solving the Palestine problem ("Morrison-Grady Plan"), was the first US Ambassador to India (1947–1948), then Ambassador to Nepal (1948), Greece (1948–1950) and Iran (1950–1951).

was accused of having contributed to the American loss of China. In 1954, after Davies refused to resign voluntarily under this pressure, he was fired by CIA Chief Allen Dulles as a person bearing risk to the security of the United States. After his dismissal, Davies went into business in Peru. In 1969, all charges against him were lifted. Davies died in 1999 at the age of 91. He authored two memoirs, *Foreign and Other Affairs* (1964) and *Dragon By the Tail* (1972).

Returning directly to Davies's Moscow activities, we can learn that his personal letter dated January 26, 1945, reveals his utmost interest in receiving an assignment to Moscow:

"My plans for the future are uncertain. Jack returned with the story that I was going to Moscow, but George Merrell[2] came back day before yesterday with the statement that Paul Meyer,[3] in John Carter's[4] absence, did not know where I would be sent. So I sit and wait and bide my time. If I am to go to Moscow, I shall be pleased."[5]

For the US Embassy in the USSR, he was also quite a valuable acquisition, since, while still in China, he prepared reports on the interests of the Soviet government in the Far East.[6] On May 13, 1945, General Wedemeyer, under whom Davies served in China, wrote to the US Ambassador in Moscow Averell Harriman: "Dear Averell! Recently one of my best political advisers, John Davis, was assigned to Moscow. Here he aroused universal admiration and respect and showed himself to be a very capable analyst and tireless worker. Our loss is, of course, your gain, and his knowledge of the situation in China will be especially useful to you now, when everyone's attention is focused on this part of the world."[7]

John and Patricia Davies arrived in Moscow on March 25, 1945. At first, they were sheltered by Ambassador Harriman in Spaso-house, his residence in Moscow. While staying there, the Davies went to work at the Embassy office located on Mokhovaya str. 13. Later on, they got an apartment there on one of the top floors – with a stunningly beautiful view of the Kremlin and Red Square.[8]

John and Patricia Davies' letters, which had never been printed before, were discovered by the author in John Davies Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives. It seems that John was quite a diligent correspondent, so

2. George Robert Merrell Jr. (1898 – 1962) was an American diplomat. During the WWII, he first served as the US consul in Calcutta, then was promoted to consul general and served simultaneously in Calcutta and Kabul. In early 1945, Merrell was appointed by President Roosevelt to serve as the United States Minister to India. Hence, in January 1945, he was in Washington, waiting for his assignment.

3. Paul Meyer served in the Division for Cultural Relations, US Department of State.

4. Davies supposedly means John Carter Vincent (1900–1972) – American diplomat and one of the "China Hands."

5. Adressee not stated. January 26, 1945. The Truman Library. John Paton Davies Papers. Box 11.

6. For example, *China and the Kremlin*. January 4, 1945 // The Truman Library. John Davies Paton Papers. Box 11.

7. Wedemeyer to Harriman. May 13, 1945 // The Truman Library. John Paton Davies Papers. Box 11. APO 855.

8. J.P. Davies, *Dragon By the Tail; American, British, Japanese, and Russian Encounters with China and One Another* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972).

initially there should have been more letters. The existing ones were probably donated to the Archive by the family. Some letters might have been lost because John's parents were moving to China and back. Why is this correspondence important and thought to be worth sharing with wider audience?

First of all, the two dozen letters that survived prove to be a really valuable source of information about the diplomats' everyday life in immediate postwar Soviet Union, their supplies and their impressions of surviving behind the "Iron Curtain." Indeed, we have little relatively independent evidence to assess life in Moscow in the early postwar months. Such sources include the diaries and memoirs of George F. Kennan, Davies's immediate superior in Moscow, and the memoirs of the first Canadian envoy (and later ambassador) to the USSR, L. Dana Wilgress. Both sources are of great historical importance, but not without a degree of subjectivity, as both authors had previously been to Soviet Russia, spoke Russian, and were generally much more immersed in Russian history and culture. In a sense, Davies's letters are a perfect complement to the books by American journalists William White *Report on the Russians* and Ella Winter *I Saw the Russian People*, as they describe the top Soviet party officials and the private lives of diplomats – such areas of Moscow life to which journalists did not always have access. Special attention goes to Davies' vocabulary which brings us eighty years back into the personal encounters of educated mid-class Americans. We cite these letters here as fully as possible omitting only very private details concerning family members.

When we read Davies's very personal letters addressed to his family, we must take into account the fact that although they were sent by diplomatic bag, they could potentially fall into the wrong hands. It seems that these considerations, especially since early 1946, when relations between the USSR and the USA began to rapidly deteriorate, may have led Davies to be rather restrained in describing the realities of Soviet life and stick mainly to general topics and presentation of family news. Strangely enough, it did not prevent him from describing some Soviet political leaders in a very ironic and uncomplimentary style.

Letter 1 (June 27, 1945)

Dear family (separate copies: Parents, Flossie, Marty, Don[9])

A letter from father and one from mother came this past week. The one from mother addressed directly to this office and not addressed to the Department and marked "Forward by Moscow pouch" took 3 months to get here. Father's came by the Dept and took 3 weeks. I don't think there is much difference between the APO address and the Department. The latter is probably slower, due to censorship at the Department, which is notoriously dilatory. <…>

In the mean time we have had Poles making a Government and Poles being

9. Rebecca Florence Davies (Flossie, 1890–1981) was John's aunt. She was also a notable person – a woman editor of the *Detroit News*. Marty and Don are John's sister and brother.

tried, we have had visiting scientists (including Henry Field,[10] Marty), we have had and still have a Reparations Commission, and finally on Sunday we had a Victory Parade reviewed by Marshals Zukov and Rokossovsky on white horses. Ivan the Terrible's head-chopping-off block on Red Square was built upward to form a fountain which played with beauty and redundance during the heavy rain which lasted throughout the parade. It was like the May Day parade, massed men, massed horses, massed artillery, massed katoushkas,[11] massed motorcycles, massed tanks and massed Soviet WACs. From our Embassy we watched the enormous spectacle form and flow into and across the Red Square half a mile away. Entrance to Red Square and the big square on which our Embassy faces was by frequently checked tickets. Only the Ambassador, his daughter Kathleen, his First Secretary interpreter and our top military and naval people got in. As for the populace of Moscow, they could only see the parade as it formed away from our square or broke up after leaving Red Square. It was like May Day a more or less private parade.

Patricia and I usually go to work in the morning by subway where we rub shoulders with the Muscovite. It is an experience which never lacks interest – everyone shabbily dressed, no gay faces, most people pasty-faced, no animated chatter, and always a feeling of primitive force despite malnutrition and crushing burdens. The women are the amazing people of Russia. "We were saved by our women", a Russian told Patricia and me. They are seemingly as tough and husky as the men. Not big (for neither are the men) but husky in the sense of amazing endurance. Even the gnarled, wizened little old women.

Our love to you all,

John

Letter 2 (September 3, 1945)

Hi y'a,

Now it's me, Patricia, to add my badly-typed but very earnest thanks for the largess that has descended upon us. We are now a capitalistic world in the communistic universe. The wonders of our world are not, however, on those of purer and less material thought around us. As a matter of fact, we're practically an American showcase. Your welcome contributions make good propaganda – and, more important to me, at least – living very pleasant.

The dozens of little things that we received are the difference between existing and the "gracious living" that one reads about in Good Housekeeping. Thank you, thank you, one and all for your many contributions in time, energy and thoughtfulness. We are more grateful than you can know.

10. Henry Field (1902–1986) was an American anthropologist and archaeologist. In 1941, President Roosevelt made Field the "Anthropologist to the President" and a member of the Special Intelligence Unit of the White House to direct a top-secret migration project.

11. John means "Katyusha" – Soviet multiple rocket launcher invented during the WWII. These launchers could deliver explosives to a target area more intensively than conventional artillery. It is believed that this invention added greatly to the Soviet victory.

Last night we stood in Red Square with most of the rest of Moscow and watched the salute for the end of the Japanese war. Anti-climaticness was the keynote of the atmosphere. Flags, rockets, guns, myriad colored searchlights notwithstanding, the feeling was on of fatigue, not victory. A sensationless celebration for a sensationless war.

And now that the war is over, what happens to all of you? Will Don take off his sailor suit, will Marty go to Waikiki? Will the Davies continue to be scattered over the face of the earth? Perhaps if we tune in again in a few weeks, we will find out what is happening to our heroes and heroines. We hope to be kept informed.

This branch of the family is a pretty well set for another six months. If it proves to be as interesting as the first six months has been, we could not ask for more. I don't think we will have cause to be disappointed.

This postscript must come to an end. And this seems a logical place for it. A kiss to each of you and oceans of love and gratitude.

Devotedly,

Pat

Letter 3 (September 30, 1945)

Dear family,

Did I tell you that all of our boxes have arrived? Yes, I guess I did. The stuff which you all sent came in fine shape, very little breakage. The little knick-knacks which you so painstakingly got together, mother and Flossie, are proving invaluable. And the material for curtains and chair coverings are superb. The maids' uniforms are being revised somewhat downward as our maids turn out to be about the size of Pinky Carroll[12] rather than the gargantuan proportions which I indicated. Fortunately, Maia the cook is a good seamstress and so is making the changes herself. Poor Flossie, we have certainly pulled a lot of revised plans on you.

The calcium tablets in the airmail letters have arrived, father and mother, and how ingeniously you did them up. We chew them dutifully but with wry faces and hope that our bones and teeth benefit. The mending wool also came and is filling holes in sox. Colors are fine. <>

You ask, father, how you in the USA are to get a true picture of life in the USSR. It is perhaps a more difficult thing to do than to convey a true picture of China. I shan't attempt it here. I will say, however, that having been in the Orient I think it is easier to understand the USSR than if I had come from the USA or western Europe. I think it was Lenin who said something about swinging from uncontrolled violence to the most delicate deceit.

And so – love to you all,

John

12. Georgia "Pinky" Carroll was a wife and artistic muse of John Carroll, an American artist famous for his "delicate gazelle-eyed girls who look as if they were made of whipped cream and moonlight" as *Life* put it in an article dated November 13, 1940.

Letter 4 (October 12, 1945)

Dear scattered family,

The news of Don's new job is exciting and gratifying. And it is wonderful that Marty is going to be able to follow you, Don. Patricia and I agree that all in all it is a fine deal. It eases the transition from your former job to whatever you may want to do later on. For that matter, speaking as rank outsiders and uninitiates, we don't see what is so bad about a naval career. It is certainly no worse than a foreign service one. But you know what you want. And as you have time to look around you can make a sound decision.

So, you are thinking of going back to your adopted home, father and mother. It doesn't surprise me, I imagine that you will really be happier there than Pittsburg for next few years. After a few years I imagine that wex shall shake down enough to know pretty well where we are all going to be – or not be. And make plans accordingly.

We are still finding life here exciting. It's a pretty grim place in a lot of ways, but is mentally so exciting that the latter phase of life here is more than adequate compensation. I like the Russian people. They are robust, simple and emotional. The Government (which includes Party in ordinary definition) is beyond belief. It is a composite of the Inquisition, Ghengis Khan, and high-powered public relations. It plays all angles: labor, the Orthodox Church, racial "nationalities" such as the Armenians, and all with the utmost cynicism and pretty consistent success. The outsider has no conception of how ramified and secretive the system is. What this country needs is an Admiral Peary[13] to open it up.

The thing that drives me wild is to see them grabbing our slogans and programs and turning them against us. Democracy, for example. Their democracy, as is now becoming evident to outside world, is totally different from what we mean by the word. And what the Chinese mean by the word, perhaps including the Chinese communists. And so it goes through the whole range of political philosophy. Definition in terms is the only thing which will clarify their program. Semantics. The meaning of meaning. So under the colors of democracy they grab and run with the ball. All we seem to be doing is figuring out line defense forming up for defense while the ball is loose and we might pick it up and run with it. You don't block off an ideology with force – not for long. They recognize a crying demand for reform, for change, revolution – not in their own area, of course, but in the areas which they intend to penetrate. Nobody else has a constructive program adequate to meet the demand. So they come in with a phoney wrapped up in the guise of the real thing [and] enjoy some success. And the irony of the situation is that the guise is usually something entirely acceptable as something which we might put forward with all sincerity.

But it is not as bad as all that. The people on whom this gag is worked soon catch on and most of them turn – as has already happened in the Balkans. But unfortunately, people don't count for much against a machine of the sort these

13. Robert Edwin Peary Sr. (1856–1920) was an American explorer and Navy officer. He made several important expeditions to the Arctic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In April 1909, he became the first to have reached the geographic North Pole.

boys start going. We shall see.

Flossie, we are sending you for the storage of hanging in your house a couple of souvenirs of yesteryear. Would you keep them for us? Thank you for doing so.

Love,

John

Letter 5 (October 19, 1945)

My sweet thoughtful parents,

The calcium tablets are lots of fun. Particularly their method of arrival – in very welcome pretty handkerchiefs, in a warm and wonderful pair of stockings. What a lot of trouble you have taken to send them. And they came as quickly as letters. I'm afraid we are a great deal of bother to you. That's what comes of living in a commercial vacuum like Moscow.

We woke this morning to a full-fledged blizzard. Five inches of snow had fallen during the early morning hours and continues on its misty crystal way. People hurrying across beaten paths in front of the Embassy look as if they were finding their way through a great snow covered field. Because the streets in the Kremlin area are so fantastically wide, under snow this section looks little like a city. The Kremlin looks mellow and strong under its white blanket with its newly-gilded onion domes glistening frostily like trimmings on an extravagant Paris hat. This is Moscow as I imagined it to look… cold, silent and austerely beautiful.

Fleece-lined boots and fur hats have suddenly blossomed forth. John, to date has resolutely refused to don his exotic fur chapeau. He seems to feel there is something inappropriate about wearing such a bonnet in October. But this snow should force the issue. We are now beginning to realize the advantages of leaving and working in the same building. As the blizzards rage outside we have only to walk up or down a few flights of stairs to get from our place of living to our place of toil. It more than makes up for the disadvantages of being close enough to the office to be always on call.

We have been able to make little progress on our redecorating scheme. Our bright new dining room curtains are made and up, but the massive project of our enormous studio window has yet to be started. We are awaiting the second installment of curtain material from Flossie. It should be here soon. Our upholstering plans are slow to mature, also, because the Embassy shares the services of one upholsterer and although we have been on the list for some time, we have not reached the top of the list. However, soon, we hope. The manana spirit is not confined to Latin America though it goes by the name of "zavtra" or "si chass."[14]

The theatrical and musical season is hitting its full stride now. We have been very lax in taking advantage of the countless performances to see and hear. Theater-going requires a fair amount of forward planning and we, very lazily, forget to do anything about tickets until too late. Still we have attended a fair cross-section of the goings on and with few exceptions have thoroughly enjoyed them

14. "Tomorrow" and "now" in Russian.

all. The music and ballet are particularly wonderful. We seem to be perpetually busy so the problem of filling in spare time has yet to arise.

Last week I went with Kathleen Harriman and a nice WAC aide of General Eisenhower's to the Ballet School. It is justly famous. The beginning classes (9 years old) are especially appealing. We watched the second year class at their exercises and they are amazingly proficient. The best ones in even the very young classes dance in some of the ballets at the big Moscow theaters. It is a demanding life with nine years of schooling, plus experience in the theaters at night, then graduated into a full-time life of more training and more appearances. After a visit to the school it is quite obvious to even the untutored eye why Russia stands at the peak of ballet proficiency. <…>

As you know, our own plans continue to be vague. John is doing a splendid job here (I am not alone in that opinion) and is learning a great deal. Both of us feel that a year here is not long enough to get the flavor of Russia. We are hoping that we will be able to stay about a year and one half. But that lies in the laps of the Department. Meanwhile we absorb as much as we can and struggle with the dreadful language. The latter is a discouraging prospect but hope springs eternal. <…>

So, for the nonce, my warmest love,
Patricia

Letter 6 (October 22, 1945)

Dear family,

A shipment of Christmas packages arrived the other day in excellent time, everything considered. They came the APO route. My itchy fingers opened them – just to make sure that they were Christmas packages. But Patricia sternly forbade me to pry further. I cannot guarantee, however, to hold my curiosity in check. Thank you for them in advance as you thought of us in advance.

Speaking of Christmas, Patricia and I are tentatively planning to spend it in Athens. We heard yesterday noon, while at the Ambassador's for lunch, that Dr. Grady is heading some commission to supervise the Greek elections. It came in over a BBC broadcast. Poor man, it is going to be a difficult and thankless job.<…>

We have been having what virtually amounts to a blizzard during the past three days. So the heat has been turned on in the building. And although it is not as warm as an American apartment house, we manage to keep warm, providing that we wear sweaters. You ask about our food, mother. We do all right what with

our purchases from the Russian food stores and from our commissary.[15] Our little commissary is a miniature American grocery and toiletries shop. It is supposed to round out what isn't available from Soviet sources – and does so well enough. What we lack, of course, is fresh fruits and vegetables and milk. But we see what the average Russian eats and are profoundly grateful. Many people live on little more than sour black bread and little cabbage. And this summer has been so rainy and sunless that the vegetable crop has been a failure. And by vegetables I mean potatoes – which is tough. Life is unbelievably hard for most Russians. We know people who have lived through several winters without any heat in their rooms, with no hot water and with just enough gas to have maybe one or two hot meals a day. But if you have nothing to cook but black bread, what need have you of cooking. Of course, they aren't happy about it. They bear it because of their terrific animal vitality – and some because of their faith.

You were very cute, mother, about that nightgown for Patricia. I don't recall it and probably bought it for just such a contingency as this. I showed your letter to Patricia who was delighted with it and said, "Your mother is wonderful." I agree.

With love,
John

Letter 7 (January 5, 1946)

Dear family,

Outside the window in the early evening darkness a tall Christmas tree is sparkling in red, orange and green lights. It stands in the center of a little bazar built in the midst of the great square in front of the Embassy. I have just come back from the bazar, tiny booths erected on the caked snow and selling green oranges, shoddy dolls, vodka, cold buns and copies of the Stalin Constitution. The empty-lived people of Moscow wander around, buy little and listen to the loud speakers mooing Russian folk songs. A few children, bundled so that only their noses show, are hopping about in unsteady dances. It's fundamentally a pretty dreary spectacle.

The other evening Patricia and I listened to 96 recordings of various Russian songs. The overall impression was one of alternate melancholy and vitality. As George Kennan said, "You'd be melancholy, too, if you had to live your life through a cycle of mud and sow with a mostly grey sky overhead and the steppes never-ending all around." So when you break out of the melancholy you burst forth with abandon.

15. See Olga N Barkova, "Osobennosti organizacii v SSSR sistemy prodovol'stvennogo snabzhenija inostrannyh diplomatov i chlenov ih semej v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny 1941-1945 gg." [Special Features of the Food Supply Organization for Foreign Diplomats and their Families in the USSR During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945]. *Proceedings of III International Symposium " Tradicionnaja kul'tura v sovremennom mire. Istorija edy i tradicii pitanija narodov mira"* [Traditional culture in the modern world. History of food and food traditions of the peoples of the world]. October 27–29, 2017. Vol. III. Moscow, 2017. P. 169–180.

Christmas Eve, I have not yet told you, I went with the Secretary's party to a dinner given by Stalin in the Kremlin.[16] Up the long, long marble stairs of the Tsars' palace, stairs covered with red carpet, to a large anteroom dominated by an enormous painting of the Tsar Alexander II visiting one of his villages. The through several corridors past ramrod-stiff NKVD guards at every few yards, through the banquet hall to a gilt and plush reception room where some of the lesser luminaries were waiting. After standing around with our hands in our pockets for about 15 minutes someone whispered, "Here he comes." A little grey man in a soldier suit padded through the banquet hall toward us, followed by a retinue of the other big names – Molotov, Beriya (head of the NKVD), Malenkov (party boss) and others. He passed down the line of foreigners, a quick shake of the hand, a look in the eye, a pleasant greeting – an Asiatic peasant grandpappy. The rest of the gang shook a few hands then stopped, obviously finding the whole performance rather distasteful and a waste of time.

We went into a typically Slavic groaning board – caviar to cream puffs. I was, of course, at one of the ends of the table of about fifty and because of my lowly position was able to concentrate on watching and listening rather than conversing and proposing toasts. Byrnes was genially full of Irish-Southern charm, Stalin always down to earth and easily the bests of the toast makers, Bevin blunt and – in the setting – inappropriately outspoken about the struggles and hopes of the common man. Molotov was the toastmaster and was surprisingly animated.

The men around Stalin are an extraordinary group of human beings. They look as if they have never been exposed to sunlight – pallid and fat. That's the political boys – the marshals are ruddy and fat. Mikoyan, with whom I sampled cordials after dinner, is an exception. He is a swarthy Armenian with a broken hooked nose on whose head the British had put a price after the last war (a bit embarrassing today). I rather liked Mikoyan. Like Stalin and Marshal Bulganin he seemed normal.

After coffee and liquors, we went into view a movie in the palace projection room. An NKVD general stood as guard near Stalin throughout the show. It was a comfortable little movie house with tables in front of the seats. The tables were laden with fruit and champagne. Throughout the show waiters poured coffee and brought around titbits. It was a documentary film of the USSR's part in the war against Japan. I can safely say that it would be unsuitable for showing to the Marines.

Then we went home, back through the corridors, past the guards in their blue-topped caps, past the enormous painting, under cascade after cascade of chandeliers and down the long, long red carpeted marble staircase.

We went back to an American Christmas Eve party at Spaso with a loaded buffet and a Soviet dance orchestra made up of unhappy Finns and Czechs who had under a mis-apprehension fled to this workers paradise. It was a good party,

16. Davies is referring to the December 1945 visit of the American delegation led by Secretary of State J. Byrnes to the USSR to participate in the Moscow session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the USSR, USA and Great Britain.

everybody was happy, and Patricia looked very pretty with a little red sequined hat on her head.

I was able to crash sessions of the conference and was, of course, delighted to be able to see how diplomatic jinks operate. You have presumably seen the pictures which my anthropoid friend Reynolds took, so I needn't describe the setting. Other light commentary I shall have to save until I see you.

Dear me. I've almost forgotten the purpose of this letter. To thank Flossie, mother and father for the goodies (which Patricia has acknowledged with more eloquence than I) and the ties and handkerchiefs. And to thank Don and Marty for the fine sweater which I am at this moment wearing. Because of your thoughtfulness it was a very merry Christmas. <…>

Love to you all

John

Letter 8 (January 26, 1946)

Dear family,

Two nice letters from mother arrived with the couriers today telling of Christmas with Flossie. <…>

Our Ambassador left two or three days ago, returning by way of China, Japan and Korea. I nearly went along – he said that he wanted to take me along on the basis of fun, but that I had better take a vacation tour through the Near East – Tehran, Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Ankara, Istanbul, Athens and Sofia. He said that such a trip would serve to widen my experience. And besides, this way, Patricia can go with me and we can see her father in Athens. From the professional point of view it is better that I make this junket – and as far as Patricia is concerned, she is enchanted: she doesn't have to stay on here alone, she has a sunny vacation and she sees her pappy. But I am talking as if the trip is all laid on. It isn't yet. The Ambassador has asked for permission, but we haven't yet heard from the Dept. I think it will come through alright. If and when it does, we plan to leave early in February and to be gone something over a month.

Don't worry about Patricia's traveling in her present condition. Thank heavens she is no hypochondriac. She is healthy as they come, in good spirits and prettier than ever. I can now understand why some of the early Italian painters presented their loveliest ladies with the slight distentions of five months.

Which reminds me, mother, Patricia and I were chuckling today over your advice that we must remember to forgive, apologize make-up. We chuckled because we don't quarrel. We are appallingly congenial. Patricia has the temperament of an easy-going cheery cherub. You remember me as a stubborn adolescent, mother. And I was. I am still stubborn, but not in my domestic life – that is, not very often. And when I am, Patricia just plays the indulgent role.

She went to a Soviet doctor today, her first check-up, you will be distressed to hear. He is a very good doctor. He pronounced her hearty and hale and was pleased with the way everything was progressing. She was accompanied by a very

nice Englishwoman who has just had twins here and therefore knows all the ropes. It was quite an interview. I shall let her tell you about it.

Love to all,
John

Letter 9 (February 10, 1946)

Dear family,

Patricia and I were sorry to hear of your bronchitis and cold, father and mother. We hope that you are by now both fully recovered. Patricia had a suspicion of one coming on two days ago and sensibly went to bed where she is now – the victor of the bout. I had a nip of flu last week-end which was quickly and drastically knocked out by sulfa. The bad season is on us – weeks of accumulated living indoors and no sunshine. When there is a glimpse of sun occasionally at noon, Patricia and I take a quick walk into the little park across the square along the foot of the Kremlin walls.

Today is election day. We suspect that it is going to be another landslide for you know who. Everybody votes. They are handled two ballots on which are printed the names and biographies of the two candidates to the two Soviets. They can't mark anything on the ballots, to do so is to invalidate them. Then they drop the ballots in either or both of two urns. The two urns apparently give one a choice. Last time I understand it was only one urn. Not as democratic as two urns, obviously.

We still haven't heard whether we are going to be allowed to go on our vacation trip. Don't know what is holding it up. If we hear this week, we shall probably get away next week. Patricia's father is due in Greece early in March, so there is still ample time. Patricia needs the change – sun and out of this claustrophobia. Life in the USSR is really quite an extraordinary experience. I don't readily see how Russians stand it. But then, like canaries and goldfish, when you're born to it, it all seems not unnatural.<…>

We have gotten off our first order to Macy's for a perambulator, folding bath, mountains of diapers and a long list of other appliances. Patricia takes it all in her stride but I'm battening down hatches.

Love to you all
John

Letter 10 (April 28, 1946)

Dear family,

We've been home two weeks now and I am still in a stew of activity trying to catch up on back work and keep my head above water with incoming material. The tide is rising because tomorrow our paragon of a Minister Counsellor, George Kennan, is returning to the States for a new assignment and the Ambassador is off to the Paris Peace Conference for several days.

I haven't told you about the last part of our trip, from Naples on. We flew

across the pleasant Italian plains and hills, across the Adriatic to the surly little city of Tirana, capital of Albania. It was back under the iron curtain; we were not allowed to leave the airfield. Then over a range of rugged snow-covered mountains to Sofia – badly damaged by American and British bombing and consequent fires. Sofia and its inhabitants looked worse off than Athens or Naples and the atmosphere was noticeably more that of a police state. Our Representative there has, in addition to a handsome town house a small villa in the country looking out on a great snow-capped mountain. His farm has flower gardens, orchards and fields with grazing sheep – balm in Gilead. After a week's stay in a run-down luxury hotel, we enplaned for Moscow, with stops at Bucharest, Odessa and Kiev.

It was good to get back to our little apartment and our two Volga German jewels.[17] Maria and Hilda flung their arms around Patricia and we settled back into the familiar Moscow regime.

I suppose that Patricia has told you that she went again to see great old bear of a doctor and that he pronounced her to be in excellent condition. She now has her slip of paper permitting her to enter the hospital. This morning she said we have to think of a name for the infant. If it's a girl, it's to be Helen Florence. If a boy, we haven't decided, excepting negatively. Being opposed to dynasties, I won't have him named John Paton Davies III. So it will be decided on a basis of euphony rather than sentiment. Patricia says that she has a name picked out, but won't tell me until I make a choice.

Father and mother, we are glad for your sake that you have gotten off to what you want to do.[18] We only hope that chaos and strife will not impinge too closely on you. The baby things and my birthday presents arrived. Thank you, thank you, thank you. <…>

Love,
John

Letter 11 (May 17, 1946)

Dear family,

I have left Patricia stretched out on the sofa in the apartment reading a detective story to come down here into the office to write a letter. I should have written you last week, but life here has been rather hectic. The new Ambassador[19]

17. Davies means that their service staff (apparently the maid and cook) were representatives of the Volga Germans. The Germans have lived beyond the Volga since the time of Empress Catherine II, i.e. from the second half of the 18th century until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. From 1918 to 1941, the Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans existed as part of the RSFSR. On August 28, 1941, by decree of Stalin, the Volga Germans were deported to remote regions of Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. At the same time, they were significantly affected in their civil rights. Thus, the work of Volga German women in the American embassy in Moscow is very atypical and could be explained either by significant family ties or cooperation with the NKVD/MGB.

18. In early 1946, John's parents left for China again to resume their missionary activity.

19. Averell Harriman was succeeded by Walter Bedell Smith.

and our superb Minister-Counselor left respectively for the Paris Conference and the USA. The result was that we who remained behind found ourselves carrying a heavy load.

The new Ambassador is quite a man, direct, hard-boiled and quick as a flash. He has us all on our mettle. While he is sizing us up we are all a little tense. His wife is a friendly, motherly person. So we are pleased with our new set-up, because of both of them.

Patricia continues her even way. She is now going to the maternity hospital for check-ups. Her doctor is a little old lady professor who is said by our Russian teacher to be the best obstetrician in the Soviet Union. Patricia is much taken with her for she is apparently quite a personality – the dictator of the hospital before whom male doctors and all of the internes quail. Some of Patricia's stories are most entertaining. Whenever she returns from her weekly visit I stop all other conversation until she tells me what the little doctor had said. Despite her tyrannical attitude toward all of the Russians who work for her and are her patients, she seems to have taken quite a shine to Patricia and has given Patricia her night telephone number with strict injunctions that whenever the baby begins to make its debut Patricia is to call her – which is an extraordinary gesture. Ordinarily the hospital doctors would handle the case. So we now feel that everything is all set. And all we are doing is awaiting the day. Which the professor says is about two weeks off.

The pile of baby clothes is growing. Added to your contribution, mother, are additional supplies from the other grandparents. So we are by now well stocked. The carriage and bath from Macy's should be in any day. We are almost decided on the name if the infant is a boy. Patricia chose it – Mark MacNeill. Only trouble is that I can't remember whether MacNeill is spelled with one or two l's. <…>

Love to you all,

John

Letter 12 (June 14, 1946)

Dear Grandfather, grandmother, grandaunty, uncle and aunty,

I suppose that this letter will be only about the new arrival, whom I haven't even seen yet. Incidentally, I hope you know what I am talking about from the cables I sent yesterday.

Night before last Patricia began to have her first pains at about 11:30. She was up with them all night and thought that they were indigestion from some cocacola she'd had. They were 3 to 5 minutes apart at the outset, not the conventional 20 minutes or so. But I had my doubts. And so did she by 6 a.m. So at 8 I whisked her off to the hospital. The Russians are casual about these things so it took her about an hour and a half to get received. Her clothing, bag, watch, and even her wedding ring were brought out to me by an old nannie, I received them, signed a receipt and left her to the hospital in the same condition it presented Sandra to her. She was taken into a labor room with five nursing women and about ten women in labor. She was the center of course of nurse and doctor attention – all curious

and all abounding with primitive Slavic warmth, and I might add, the nichevo[20] spirit. A cylinder of laughing gas was wheeled over for the pangs. After inhaling without effect and inquiring several times why no effect she observed that the dial indicated the cylinder to be empty. The Russians don't go much for anesthesia, the cylinder was for psychological effect – so she had her pains in the old fashioned way. After several hours with the nursing mothers and the labor ladies, she was whisked off to the delivery room, another collective establishment where with two doctors pressing on her midriff and midwife taking delivery she produced your granddaughter–grandniece–niece at 2 p.m. She said it wasn't bad, but then she is hardy and buoyant type. Characteristic of the atmosphere of the place was the old nannie in the labor room who kept saying to Patricia, "You are having such beautiful pains, such beautiful big pains." Look," to the wailing Russian women, "what beautiful big pains she is having."

This morning by special arrangement with the little dumpling "Professor", who is the autocrat of the hospital and reputedly the best obstetrician in the USSR, I was sneaked in to see Patricia. She has the luxury of a semi-private room which she shares with the wife of a Czech diplomat. She was in excellent spirits, was enjoying the experience and waiting to see the baby, whom she had not seen since the moment after the bottom was slapped, its umbilical cord snipped and it was waved before her eyes; I might add, her astonished eyes. The Russian don't bring the infants back to their mothers until the third day and then swaddled like a Chinese baby with only the eyes, mouth and nose showing. Tomorrow I visit Patricia again and maybe day after tomorrow I shall see my daughter.

Sandra, Patricia and I send our love,

John

Letter 13 (July 13, 1946)

Dear family,

Today being the little Tartar's first month birthday, I am celebrating by writing grandparents, grandaunt and uncle and aunt a letter. We got her birth certificate from Bolshevik authorities the other day. It starts off: "Workers of the World Unite: CITIZEN Sandra Elenya Dzhonovna (that means she's my daughter) Davies." It took me some days to get around to registering her here as an American citizen. The servants kept coming to Patricia in anxious tones and saying, when are you going to get her American documents?" Like the yardmen and charwomen inquiring of our American administrative man with anxiety and perplexity at the time Patricia had just about reached her maximum dimensions, "When is Mrs. Davies going to go back to America to have her baby?" "She isn't going back, she's going to have it here." "But it will be a Soviet citizen!" "Oh no, it will be an American citizen because its parents are American." "Ah then," with nodding heads, "that will be all right."

She follows people with her eyes now. A little falteringly, to be sure, and

20. This word has a multiple meaning – from "nothing" to "easy, easy." In this case it should be interpreted as "no matter."

Hilda the maid is convinced that she takes great interest in the pink and blue rattle-doll that mother sent. It is hung on the side of the crib. She has a voracious appetite and a powerful pair of jaws – to her mother's distress. Patricia nurses her, but it's rather like getting caught in a wringer. So we're sneaking a bottle in on Sandra.

We are in the process of being examined by an Inspector. With the Eastern European boys who are supposed to run this show for the Ambassador having left or about to come, I'm the guy that's holding the bag. Fortunately, the Inspector is a very understanding man and is being very helpful. His probing and delving, however, is just that much more work at a time at which I thought we had long past the back-breaking point.

The Ambassador is pleasant to work with and is getting used to our strange Foreign Service ways. He is a very keen and hard-headed man. I have great respect for his abilities.

Patricia's father sent me a cable a few days ago telling me that I had been promoted to Class IV – compensation, I suppose, for having lost out on the double promotions last year thanks to Choctaw Patrick.[21] Nothing official has come in from Washington yet, so he may have picked up only a rumor. I'll see. I'm pretty fatalistic about the whole thing.<…>

Love to you all,

John

Letter 14 (September 8, 1946)

Dear family,

This is not only happy birthday for Don – and many more of them – but also Tank Day for the Red Army – many less of them. All day it has been tanks. They lined up in front of us at dawn this morning, sat there throughout the day and at 5 p.m. began to roll up through Red Square. I should guess that there were about 500 of them. And now we have had our salute, our rockets, our searchlights and our loud-speaker music. It's all rather tiresome on the heels of Red Army Day, Artillery Day, Navy Day, Air Force Day, V-J Day – all with salutes and pyrotechnic display. Now we shall, I hope, have a little normalcy until November 7 which, oddly enough, is the anniversary of the October Revolution. Something went wrong with the calendars, like Chinese New Year.

The other evening [Sept 4, written by pencil – *K.M.*] we went to a dinner given for a visiting American scientist and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Mudd of Haverford Penn[sylvania]. He teaches micro-biology at U[niversity] of Penn[sylvania].

21. John supposedly refers to general Patrick J. Hurley, his former chef in China.

In his field he is a great man.[22] But in the field of international relations he is perilously close to being a simpleton. Which is true of so many of our visiting firemen. He is so horrified about the atomic Frankenstein he and his fellows have created that he throws the scientific approach overboard in his panicky approach to the problem of maintaining peace with this phenomenal country. It is all like a little upsetting to see this distinguished gentleman making an ass of himself in a field about which he is apparently as ignorant as I am of the fundamentals of micro-biology. But I have strayed far from the dinner. It is at carefully arranged dinners like this that we have our rare chances to meet real Russians – not just servants, Embassy employees and spies. At this meeting Patricia met The Man Who Embalmed Lenin.[23] It is now her favorite after-dinner story. The M-W-E-L was on the strength on that unique achievement made an Academician and granted a great cerise ribbon and gold medal which he proudly wore. In the course of the conversation (Patricia's Russian is now quite good) it developed that M-W-E-L does not seem to be burdened with work, in fact, he seems to be pretty much a man of leisure. Which leads Patricia to conclude he is waiting around between jobs. There are several other entertaining little sidelights which I shall let Patricia tell you when she sees you.

I am glad to report that Sandra-Sasha-Sashinka-Sashulinka[24] has completely recovered from a slight tummy attack and now tips the scales at something over 13 pounds. But I'll leave descriptive details to her proud mother.

John

Letter 15 (September 20, 1946)

Dear family,

It is six thirty in the morning, the charwoman has just woken me up and I am sticking around while she cleans up. It has been my turn to sleep-in in a certain section of our offices. Fortunately it happens only once a month and it means only coming downstairs a few floors from our apartment.

A pouch came in yesterday but no personal mail. So we haven't heard from you all for weeks now.<…>

Sashulinka is now quite a babbler. It's still something of an effort and many

22. Stuart Mudd (1893–1975) was an American physician and professor of microbiology. In 1945, he was appointed the president of the American Society for Microbiology. Prof. Mudd did research on a wide variety of topics, including streptococci, bacterial filtration, and electron microscopy of bacteria. During WW II, he worked out a method for freeze-drying of blood plasma which enabled an effective treatment for blood loss in wounded soldiers.

23. Lenin was first embalmed by Prof. Aleksey I. Abrikosov (1875–1955), who was a Soviet pathologist and a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Patricia's conclusion was quite close to reality: although Abrikosov supervised the autopsies of a number of other major Soviet party leaders, he did not manage to embalm anyone else. Stalin was embalmed by another specialist: apparently, by the time of his death, Abrikosov was already too old for such work.

24. These are Russian pet names for Alexandra.

of the sounds which come out surprise her parents as much as they do herself. <…>

Our friend Dr. Mudd and company have returned to the USA. Men like him make my gorge rise. There is a type of American who comes here, who is taken in by the caviar and champagne treatment bestowed on him both literally and figuratively, and who thereupon sees nothing but good in the USSR and proceeds like a flagellant to belittle the achievements of his own country. And when he returns to the US he emits a flood of untruths about the USSR, has dabs of whitewash on the mighty sepulcher. When we try in conversation with him to correct the distortions, we are prejudiced and unwilling to see any good in the Great Experiment. Fortunately, it seems from a reading of the excerpts we see of the American press, the American people cannot be fooled all of the time. So the Dr. Mudds don't upset me as much as they might.

Love to you all,

John

Letter 16 (September 28, 1946)

Dear family,

A stack of letters came in from all of you in the last pouch. So now we are all caught up on the news. <…> You ask, father, how we decided on the name Sandra. <…> Somehow we struck on Sandra as the first name, just because we, or perhaps I, liked its sound. Fortunately it is also a Russian name, diminutive of Alexandra.<…>

Big Lena calls Sandra, because of her cooing and gurgling, Lasinka (emphasis on the La) which is a diminutive of a diminutive for a nightingale or swallow or simply a peasant term of endearment. The word isn't in the dictionary. The nearest thing to it which we could find in the dictionary was – to our horror – a weasel. Big Lena (this is the last story for this letter) told Patricia the other day, "You know, Lasinka is like a diplomat – she talks and talks and never says anything." Time to stop.

John

Letter 17 (October 11, 1946)

Dear family,

Some day I am going to get so well organized that I shall start writing my letters two or three days before the pouch closes rather than two or three hours before the time. <…>

Last night the Chinese Embassy threw a big celebration in honor of the Double Tenth[25]. It was typical diplomatic national day brawl in Moscow. The dreary diplomatic corps – every face so well known – the regular team of Foreign Service officials permitted to mingle with foreigners at official shows

25. Double Tenth (after October 10) is the National Day of the Republic of China, now held annually as National Day in Taiwan.

and a miscellaneous collection of timid intellectuals in their shine serge suits and evening dresses made out of lampshades or silk drapes "liberated" from German families carefully selected for having the worst taste in Central Europe. Everyone mills uncomfortably around and then makes an off tackle rush for the buffet tables. The practiced Muscovite places himself solidly against the edge of the table so as to avoid being jostled aside by others eager to get at the smoked salmon. Then he begins loading his plate with caviar, herring, cucumbers, sour cream, ham, chicken, pasty potato salad, black bread, white bread and pours himself a goblet of sticky sweet or flattish Caucasian wine. Thus supplied, he proceeds to devour his victuals at the board, feet spread apart to brace himself against the clawing onslaught of others seeking a snack. I have pretty much given up the thought of eating at such occasions. I have dinner before and then stand indolently about watching the agonized proceedings. <…>

Old Sash, as Patricia and I sometimes call her, is now an exceptionally pretty pink and white baby. That's not just my opinion, which is definitely prejudiced, but that of everyone. I only hope that she stays that way and that her paternal characteristics are completely recessive.

Love,
John

Letter 18 (November 4, 1946)

Dear family,

Rush, rush, rush. It's that all day. And now it's rush to get a letter off to you in today's pouch which has technically already closed. Every once and a while I think wistfully of going to a nice sleepy little consulate in a banana republic and being a beachcombing consul, waiting once a month for the trading ship to come into port. But then I'd probably rush to get a last minute letter onto that.

We're in for a hard winter. Not us personally. Because all of Russia could starve before the Kremlin would let it appear to foreigners that things were tough. I don't know why there should have to be such acute privation here more than a year after the war. I can understand why it might be so in devastated areas. But not in Moscow and the untouched part of the country. Much of the suffering is man-made or man-permitted. On Patricia's, Sandra's and my ration cards and with what we get out of our Embassy commissary we figure that we are feeding wholly or partly about seven or eight people. Poor little Hilda, the maid, has three small children and a drunken, no-good veteran husband.<…>

Last evening Patricia and I began speculating on our trip home and our vacation. We shall try to come through the Mediterranean because the North Atlantic in March will be grim. Then vacation. And after that consultation at the Department. Because we so miss sunshine (none for weeks) we are thinking of trying to spend the first month of vacation perhaps in Southern California with anyone who will visit us and then move to Detroit with the sun for May. Of course this, like all of our plans, will probably be revised.

Love to you all,
John

Letter 19 (December 29, 1946)

Dear family,

Just about this time a week ago we arrived back from our week's visit to Stockholm. The Swedish plane took us in American-style to Helsinki where the Soviet plane was grounded. So after a good deal of argument, which convinced us that we were once more behind the curtain, and inefficiency, which confirmed the same, we got places on the train to Leningrad, where Intourist[26] lost one of our bags, and so home to a fatter Sashulia.

The stay in Stockholm was hectic because I was seeing a dentist and Patricia an oculist and in between times we were shopping for ourselves and, it seemed, everyone else in Moscow. So it was no relaxation. But it was a change. A change to a clean, kept up city, to crowds which were well-dressed, well-fed and placid. To hotels with clean linen, good service – and wonderful food: oranges, fresh milk, lettuce. We reveled in it all. And the masses of things to buy. We kept exclaiming how unbelieving any Russian would be to find himself in the big Stockholm Department store surrounded by stacks of things to buy.<…>

Don, thank you for the letter passing on your conversation with John Carter. I have written him and told him that I am not interested in returning during the next year or two to the old field, not for reasons of personalities but simply because I have a bad taste in my mouth. I think that I can manage some sort of a deal by the time I return home – after the Foreign Ministers' Conference here. The Ambassador wants me to stay on for that. I am definitely not interested in the other American republics, being too old to learn Spanish. <…>

As you see, we shan't be home before May and perhaps not June. So instead of a winter resort together it will be a summer resort.<…>

See you all then,

John

Letter 20 (January 16, 1947)

Dear family,

We are recovering from the excitement of Field Marshal Montgomery's visit – not that we got into it excepting for one evening. But the general impact was somewhat more than ordinary. The one evening we were caught up into the whirl was particularly distinguished by the role which Patricia played in it. The Ambassador gave a dinner for the F[ield] M[arshal] at which were present a fair number of dignitaries – and us. As there was no wife of suitable rank in the Embassy fluent in Russian, Patricia was placed next to Marshal Konev, the ranking Soviet guest. She was in that position pressed into service as an interpreter between the Marshal, and Montgomery, and the Ambassador and Mrs Smith, on whose left the Marshal sat. The situation was not without its humor – war reminiscences by the warriors of the three Great Allies interpreted with Patricia's

26. Intourist (short for "International tourist") was a Soviet state agency responsible for all foreign visits.

lisping maternity Russian. The high point was, of course, the Ambassador's toast to the heroes of Alamein and Stalingrad (a slight historical inaccuracy) which Patricia translated in a whisper to Konev. She had a hard time with the Russian word for machine gun, the idea of which she got across by pointing a finger at the Marshal's corpulent midgriff and making a brrrrring noise. Old Konev seemed to enjoy the whole situation and drank innumerable toasts to that well known Muscovite character – Sashulinka. <…>

We are awaiting the arrival of the new Secretary in March with great interest. It promises to be a hectic show. And an interesting one. Worth staying over for.

We send all our love to you – and an especially big hug from Sandra Helen to grandfather and grandmother.

John

Letter 21 (January 29, 1947)

Dear family,

This is written with Old Sash sitting on my lap so if you see any strange letters popping up you will xj f – oops – know who is responsible for my bad typing. <…>

Our very nice Counselor has gone home on consultation leaving me carrying his and my loads. So I am more busy than my usual busy. I usually take work home in the evening, so poor Patricia is regularly confronted of an evening with the typical comic strip harassed husband with nose buried in papers ignoring her attempts to be amiable. She also finds that come 10:30 at parties, the old man is signaling her that it's time to go home – even though no other guests will be leaving until after midnight. Fortunately, Mama has now discovered that she too is a somnolent type; so I am usually able to get her away without much difficulty.

We were glad to hear about Don's venture into radio and the progress you have made in it. Do tell us how it progresses. Don't, however, try to get an assignment as a commentator at Moscow! At present the Russians are not letting any foreigners broadcast, but if in future they do it will be a baffling and frustrating business as Dick Hottelet[27] could tell you. <…>

Love to all of you from all of us.

Letter 22 (February 12, 1947)

Dear family,

<…> Patricia is off in Minsk with Drew Middleton's wife[28] visiting the UNRRA Mission and seeing ravaged Belorussia. It's a pretty grim place, so I imagine that her aesthetic senses are not being gratified. She should be back at the end of this week.

27. Richard Curt Hottelet (1917–2014) was an American broadcast journalist for the latter half of the XXth century. He was one of the "Murrow Boys," a WWII-era team of war correspondents recruited by Edward Murrow at CBS.

28. Drew Middleton (1913–1990) was a *New York Times* correspondent covering the WWII and Eastern Europe events. Later he became a producer for several documentaries.

My old buddie with whom I entered the Service, Foy Kohler, has arrived with wife and cat. (With Sashinka on my knee I am glad I have no cat). <…> Foy will take over my job between now and the time I leave. He is good to have here, he is so solid and sensible.

The press has asked for seventy something correspondents to come here from the US for the conference. The Ruskies[29] have said they will take 20. Which raises the fundamental question – is Moscow a place in which international conferences can be held. The answer might seem to be no. What really scares the Soviet authorities is the swarm of newshawks poking around and when they get home writing, not about the conference, but about what exists behind the iron curtain. Even 20 can do a lot of damage.

<…> Where do you plan to settle when you return? We want to hear all about your plans.

Love,
John

Letter 23 (March 7, 1947)

Dear family,

<…> The conference of Foreign Ministers has begun to roll in on us. The first wave has hit the Moscow beach and eight planes are due today. The pandemonium is already awesome to behold. I refuse to think of the future. With the arrival of Foy, I am unloading as rapidly as possible onto him. Thus I hope that during the conference I shall have time to devote to clearing up tag ends and getting ready to leave. We still do not know of course, when we shall be leaving. I should guess anytime after April 15. Patricia's daddy had reserved us a cabin on one of the President Lines freighters from Genoa, so we could have a trip through the Mediterranean and south Atlantic. But we think we presser a big ship with stewardesses and a doctor in case Sashy gets an upset. So we are thinking of a North Atlantic liner. It's all typically vague. So you'll see us when you see us.

It now seems that after our leave, I may be detailed temporarily to the Dept until the National War College opens in October. And then I may be one of the Foreign Service men assigned to the 3 months course at the college. So there is a possibility that I shall be in Washington until December.[30] It's not certain, of course, for nothing is in this racket. <…>

Love,
John

Letter 24 (March 28, 1947)

Dear family,

The conference proceeds, yet is not very much a part of our lives. I go to

29. The Russians.

30. It is known that upon returning to the United States John Davies got a position in the Planning Board of the Department of State.

meetings once in a while – and nearly pass out from boredom. On my last visit I got smart and took a copy of Newsweek with me which helped out. The delegation is self-contained, has its own full staff and works in its won offices at the Hotel Moskva and at Spaso House. So during office hours we continue the even tenor of our bureaucratic ways. Out of office hours we congregate over luncheon or dinner tables to swap gossip. The press, of course, is all over the place – as is the custom of the press. We have quite fallen for Dot Avery's husband, Flossie. We have had him up for drinks, for lunch and yesterday we went to the hotel for lunch with him. He is such a nice solid intelligent citizen.

An entertaining little incident occurred the other day, the anniversary of Greek independence. The silly little Greek Ambassador invited all of the diplomatic corps and delegates to a formal evening reception. Curiously enough, shortly after the invitations were issued, Molotov invited the three visiting Ministers, the delegations and the heads of all diplomatic missions to a gala performance of Romeo and Juliet. Had usual habits been followed, this would have torpedoed the Greek reception. We handled the impasse, as you have doubtless red in the press, by most of our staff declining the ballet and going to the Greeks. The Secretary, his entourage and a few of our staff went, however, to both. Patricia and I were in the latter category. The ballet was new to Patricia and me, first time we had seen it. It is primarily a spectacle, the ballet is only incidental. It represents the peak in a development of successively more stupendous and garish pageants. It's a curious thing about Soviet aesthetics – at one moment Soviet art is supremely good taste, and at the next (a far longer moment) is extravagant vulgarity. <…>

We have cabled the Embassy at London asking for a sailing from a Channel port early in May. We haven't heard yet. I imagine that the Embassy will have some difficulty as passages are supposed to be booked for months in advance. We plan to leave here on the 15th of April and look around Paris and London a bit before moving on. As we may stay in Washington at least until December, we have made a bid for Mrs Durbrow's apartment – she is coming here with two small children to join her husband.[31] We haven't yet heard from her. If you know of anything, Don, cable us.

Love,
John

Conclusion:

The letters you have just finished reading take us deep into the private life of the family of an American diplomat who found himself in one of the most closed and difficult places in the post-war world. Ella Winter's book mentioned in the

31. Elbridge Durbrow (1903–1997) – was a US Foreign Service officer and diplomat who served as the Counselor of Embassy and Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow in the late 1940s succeeding George Kennan. In 1944, he was appointed as the chief of the Eastern European Division of the State Department, promoted from his former position of the assistant chief of this unit. Throughout the 1940s, Durbrow was a proponent of more tight approach to the relations with the Soviet Union.

introduction tells us how difficult it was for an American journalist to adjust to her life in Moscow – despite the fact that she could move more freely around the city, visit shops and markets, and interact with a wider range of people from different social groups. Here we are presented with a scrupulously reconstructed life of the "elite." By American standards of the time, Davies' life was full of hardship: the lack of such common household items as socks or curtains, the inability to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, etc. is described with great humor. But in the eyes of the Soviet people, Davies' life was, however, incredibly comfortable and prosperous: a large apartment, servants, access to goods from the embassy shop and, finally, the possibility of receiving parcels from abroad and ordering from American stores must have been seen by an average person as something beyond reality. An unconscious comparison of the two worlds provided by Davies illustrates well the difference between life and perceptions of life in the post-war USSR and the United States. It adds another small piece to the incredibly complex puzzle of the Cold War origins that scholars around the world are still piecing together.

About the author:
Having graduated from St Petersburg State University, Russia, **Kristina Minkova** is currently a Doctor of Science in History (Habitation) and Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies of her Alma Mater. She has been engaged in exploring the economic roots of the Cold War. Her other research interests include International Trade, Canadian Studies and Expansion of Orthodoxy in North America.