When a President of the United States leaves Washington, even on a short trip, many special operations and people are set in motion. But when he travels overseas under wartime conditions, it is a vast undertaking. It is hard to picture all that is involved in getting a President off to a conference such as the one I was about to attend in Potsdam. The fact that this was to be a meeting with heads of other governments called for extraordinary planning of transportation, housing, protection and security, communications, protocol, and staffs.

I had always been in the habit of making my own traveling arrangements—driving my own car, buying my own railroad tickets, carrying my own bags—but as President none of these things was possible. I had to do a great deal of traveling as President, but wherever I went I was accompanied by at least a part of the executive branch of the government. There was never a time when I could not be reached immediately by Washington. To facilitate this, special communications arrangements had to be made, and I always had to have staff assistants with me.

For the Potsdam conference, Cabinet officers, ambassadors, the Chiefs of Staff, the White House staff, the State Department, the Army, Navy, and the Air Force, the Treasury and the Secret Service, all had a share in the working out of arrangements. Many of them had to take part in the work of the conference. The White House, in a sense, had to be moved to Potsdam for the duration of the conference. I wanted to take Fred Vinson with me, but he and I thought it best for him to remain in Washington, for if anything were to happen to Byrnes and me. Vinson, as Secretary of the Treasury, would be the successor to the office of the President.

The President of the United States can never escape being a public figure, and when he travels, Secret Service agents travel ahead of him to inspect the route that he will follow, the vehicles he is to use, and the buildings he intends to enter.

I decided to make the journey aboard a naval vessel, since I felt I would be better able aboard ship to study the many documents that had been assembled for my information. There would be an opportunity as well to consult with my advisers without interference by the usual White House routine. And I needed to have uninterrupted communications with Washington for transacting government business and to keep in touch with London and Moscow. Arrangements had to be closely coordinated with the preparations of the British and the Russians, and exchanges of messages were a continuing process.

During the early stages of preparation I cabled Harriman to inform Stalin that Eisenhower has been directed to make advance arrangements for accommodations and conference space for American members of the forthcoming conference. He has not yet been informed of the names or number of Americans who will be in my party. I intend to take with me my Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of State with his assistants, two or three other officials of high rank, and Secret Service men. As soon as the number and names are known, I will send them for your information.

On the same day Churchill cabled me suggesting that we use the code word TERMINAL for the Potsdam conference. I agreed. In another message Churchill advised me that King George VI would be traveling in France and Germany, inspecting British troops. Churchill said he understood that General Eisenhower hoped the King would visit SHAEF. Since this visit would take place during the progress of the Potsdam conference, it was His Majesty's desire, Churchill said, to come to Berlin for a day, adding that of course the King would not take any part in the discussions. Churchill said it was his idea that the King would arrive in the British sector and, if convenient to Marshal Stalin, would lunch with the Russians. In the evening there would be a dinner in the British sector at which the King and I, as heads of states, and Stalin would meet. The British Prime Minister said he hoped I would visit London immediately after the Potsdam meeting.

In reply I cabled Churchill that “I will be very pleased to agree to any arrangements you may make to accomplish His Majesty's desires during his projected visit in Berlin. It is my intention to visit London en route home from the conference...”

Stalin finally agreed on the housing plans for the conference, which was to take place in the Russian sector. Stalin said, “The delegations will be housed as you propose in your message and as was arranged in the
Crimea. Each delegation will have its own closed territory under a regime regulated at the discretion of the head of the delegation. The area in which the three delegations will be housed is Babelsberg, southeast of Potsdam. There will be a fourth building for the joint session—the Palace of the German Crown Prince in Potsdam.

" Marshal Zhukov will be in Berlin on June 28th. The advance parties of Montgomery and Eisenhower should be sent in about this time to reconnoitre and take over the buildings in Babelsberg. Montgomery's and Eisenhower's advance parties will be able to obtain on the spot all the necessary information and further details about the buildings from General Kruglov, who is known to your people from Yalta."

The Russians were a little slow in permitting our advance detachments to enter Berlin for the necessary preparatory work, but once our advance parties had arrived and inspected the facilities assigned to us, they reported them entirely satisfactory. The local Russian commanders had little authority to act, and time and again questions of detail had to be referred to Moscow before adjustments could be made.

I had an unusually long list of callers on July 6, the day of my departure for Potsdam, including several members of Congress and government officials as well as the French Ambassador, Henri Bonnet. There was a concert by the Army Air Forces band on the south lawn of the White House in the evening, and I walked from the White House to the lawn to attend it.

Members of the Cabinet and other government officials were among the guests, only a few of whom knew that I would be on my way within a few hours. I left the White House by automobile for the Union Station and boarded a train for Newport News, Virginia, where the heavy cruiser U.S.S. Augusta was waiting to take me to Europe.

No public announcement was made of my departure for obvious security reasons. The special train which had been made up for the presidential party of fifty-three assistants, advisers, newsmen, and help arrived at the Augusta's berth in Newport News just before six o'clock in the morning on July 7. I went aboard at once.

At my previous request, nothing more than the customary Navy honors of side boys, guard of the day, and "piping over the side" were rendered. Captain James H. Foskett, commanding officer of the Augusta, was at the quarter-deck to meet me and showed me to the admiral's cabin in "flag country," where I was to live during the cruise.

Within an hour after we arrived at dockside, the Augusta was under way, and with her, as we left Hampton Roads, was the heavy cruiser Philadelphia. These two ships formed Task Force 68, commanded by Rear Admiral Allan R. McCann, who was charged with the mission of transporting the President of the United States and his party to Europe and back. No other escort, either ship or air, was used.

The Philadelphia went ahead of us and made a smooth path in what otherwise would have been a rough sea, so that those of us who were not good sailors did not suffer from seasickness.

As soon as we had passed the swept channel leading through the mine field at the entrance of Chesapeake Bay and reached the open sea, the Augusta held an abandon-ship drill.

I went to my station, the No. 2 motor whaleboat on the portside of the well deck, and took part in the drill. I had always had great respect for the efficiency with which our naval vessels are operated, and as long as I was aboard ship I wanted to fit into the routine as much as it was possible.

With the hostilities in the Atlantic ended, the ships of our task force were not darkened at night and, except for extra-vigilant lookout watches, the passage to Europe was made under normal cruising conditions.

A part of each day was devoted to conferences with Secretary Byrnes and Admiral Leahy, shaping up the agenda for the forthcoming conference and preparing a written brief on the problems that were expected to be brought up at the meetings. Most of the afternoons on the voyage were spent in this way.

It was a wonderful crossing. The Augusta had a fine band which played during the dinner hour each evening. There were movies every night in Secretary Byrnes's cabin. I was up early every morning to take some exercise on the deck and spent a good deal of time talking with the members of the crew. I also ate a meal in every mess aboard the ship, taking my place in the "chow lines" with my aluminum tray along with the men.

The third day out the Augusta left formation to take position for a gymnery exercise. The Philadelphia was used as target ship. This was what was called an offset practice—that is, the deflection sight scales in the gun directors controlling the fire, as well as on the guns concerned, were offset so that the fall of shot was four degrees to the right of the line of the target. Thus, while the fire was actually directed at the target ship, the shots landed some five hundred yards or more astern the Philadelphia.

I witnessed the practice from the navigating bridge through binoculars that had also been offset to the same degree as had the fire-control instruments, causing actual misses to appear as hits on the target ship.

On the same day the first news stories by correspondents accompanying the party were released for publication and transmitted to Washington by high-speed circuit. Press Secretary Ross had hoped that all information concerning my trip could be withheld until the party was safely ashore at Antwerp, but a news leak in Washington had occurred the night...
before when a columnist broke the story on a radio newscast, and it was
no longer considered necessary to hold up release of the stories submitted
by the White House correspondents on board.

On July 14, our eighth day under way, we entered the English Channel,
where we were met by the light cruiser H.M.S. Birmingham and six
destroyers. They escorted us along the southern coast of England, and
as we passed Dover we were so very close inshore that I got an excellent
view of the famous White Cliffs. I was much impressed by the joining-up
maneuvers of the escort force, and signaled Rear Admiral Cunningham
Graham, the British commander, my appreciation and admiration of the
beauty and precision of the maneuver.

As we entered the North Sea, the H.M.S. Birmingham and the de-
stroyers, which had proceeded ahead of us, reversed course and passed
us to port, in column with the cruiser leading. As each ship passed the
Augusta, the crews “cheered ship.” Officers and men were in ranks along
the port rail, and each ship’s crew appeared to shout in unison, “Three
cheers for the President of the United States.” Later I received this mes-
 sage from Admiral Cunningham Graham: “It has been a great honor to
us to have had the privilege of escorting you through the English Chan-
nel. On behalf of all officers and men of the escorting force I ask you to
accept our sincere good wishes.”

On the last night of the voyage we were forced to restrict our speed to
ten knots because of mine fields in the North Sea and wreck buoys mark-
ing the location of sunken Axis and Allied ships. I was up early the next
morning, which was Sunday, to watch the hundreds of wildly enthusiastic
Belgians and Hollanders who thronged the little towns along the Schelde
Estuary and cheered our ships as we passed by. It was clear that the news
of our arrival was no secret. As we passed Flushing, Holland, I observed
thousands of GI’s waiting for ships to take them home. At one
Augusta, standing in to shore. These were a large group of German pris-

iners of war, cooped up behind barbed wire in an Allied prison camp.

It was difficult to realize that I was looking upon the scene of a devas-
tating war which had just ended. Along the riverbanks I saw very little
evidence of damage caused by the war. Everything appeared peaceful
and in order, and large herds of fat cattle could be seen grazing in the
green meadows along our way.

But as the Augusta moved slowly into the harbor of Antwerp and
proceeded to the municipal dock, I could see something of the war’s
devastation in the wreckage from bombing. The Augusta moored at 10:04

A.M. on July 15, and the Philadelphia tied up astern. We had come 3,387
miles from Newport News in nine days.

During the nine days I had spent at sea I had been in constant touch
with developments at home and in other parts of the world through the
unique facilities which had been set up aboard ship.

The office of the first lieutenant of the Augusta had been made over
into a communications center which was complete in every detail. This
was designated as the Advance Map Room, corresponding to the Map
Room in the White House.

Here messages were received and transmitted in virtually the same
volume and with the same dispatch as at the White House itself. For all
practical purposes, the Advance Map Room was the White House during
the time the Augusta was under way.

Among the messages I received was one from the British Ambassador
to Washington, Lord Halifax, forwarding a message from Churchill.

Great Britain had had a general election on July 5 (although the re-

sults would not be known until July 26, to allow a three-week period for
the counting of the soldier vote). The future of the government was at
stake and could have an important bearing on the forthcoming conference.
Churchill expressed the belief that his government would obtain a major-

 ty but added, “As you know, electioneering is full of surprises.” He said
it was “most unlikely” in any event that he would resign on an adverse
result. He would await the result of a confidence vote in
the House of Commons on the King’s speech and would take his dismissal
from the House of Commons. Churchill went on to say that the King
would not open Parliament until August 8, and a parliamentary session
would not take place before August 10. But he advised me that the politi-
cal members of the British delegation would quit the conference on July
25 in order to await the results of the poll in England. This, he said, would
avoid any possible embarrassment when the results were made known.
But the British delegation could return to Berlin on July 27, and he said
that he personally would be able to stay there, if necessary, until about
August 5 or 6. Churchill added that whatever happened in England the
conference should not be hurried. He recalled that the Crimea conference
was somewhat abruptly curtailed.

At Antwerp a special communications plane was waiting to pick up
mail pouches from the ship for Washington, D.C., and one of the letters
it carried back was to my mother and my sister.

July 12, 1945

Dear Mama & Mary,—I hope you are both well and that everything is all
right with you. It is with me. We left Norfolk at 7 A.M. last Sunday. July 7,
on a nice sunny morning, and the trip has been most pleasant and restful. Went to church at 10:30 with officers and men. Sat around on the deck with Mr. Byrnes and Adm. Leahy most of the morning and took a nap in the afternoon.

Saw a picture show that night—we have one every night. On Monday, inspected the ship from top to bottom. Found a boy on board whose name is Lawrence Truman. He comes from Owensborough, Ky., and is the great grandson of our grandfather's brother. He's a nice boy and has green eyes just like Margaret's. Looks about her age.

We had target practice on Monday firing eight inch, five inch and forty millimeter guns. Right interesting to an artillery man. I've had various meals with officers mess, warrant officers and petty officers. Tonight I eat with the crew.

We'll land Sunday, and this will be mailed then. I wish this trip was over. I hate it. But it has to be done.

The King of England has asked me to call, as have the Kings of Denmark and Norway. But I think I'll come home with all speed when the show's over in Berlin. Take care of yourselves. Love to you both.

Harry

Just before I went ashore from the U.S.S. Augusta, I received a welcoming party that included the American Ambassador to Belgium and Mrs. Charles Sawyer, General Eisenhower, Admiral Stark, General Lee, General Surles, General Koenig, J. H. Keeley, Consul General to Belgium, Rear Admiral McCann, and Captain Kelly Thomas, British naval officer in charge at Antwerp. A representative of the Prince Regent of Belgium also greeted me as I landed to begin the thirty-five-mile motor trip to the airport northwest of Brussels.

The evidences of war's destruction were less marked along the road than in the city of Antwerp, but I saw many bombed-out homes and factories and temporary wooden bridges. Most of the damage here, I was told, was done by V-bombs. We passed Breendonck, which was reputed to be the Germans' biggest and most feared concentration camp for Belgians during the war.

The road from Antwerp to Brussels was guarded by soldiers from the 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division—the division in which I had served as a captain during World War I. The route was lined with spectators—mostly Belgians just recently liberated from the Germans—who came to watch our forty-car caravan.

Shortly after noon we arrived at the airfield. A military band and four hundred picked men of the 137th Infantry Regiment performed a brief honor ceremony, and then I reviewed the honor guard. Each man in the guard was a "five-star" combat man. I talked with several of them before boarding my plane, the Sacred Cow. Two other C-54's were waiting to take the members of the presidential party, which split into three groups for the flight to Berlin.

I was told that Secretary Byrnes took the controls of the No. 2 plane while en route from Kassel to Magdeburg. Those two cities, as viewed from the air, appeared to be completely destroyed. I could not see a single house that was left standing in either town. The German countryside, however, seemed to be under cultivation and presented a beautiful appearance.

After a flight of about three hours and a half we landed at Gatow airfield, ten miles from Babelsberg. I was greeted at the airfield by a large delegation including Secretary of War Stimson, Assistant Secretary McCloy, Assistant Secretaries Clayton and Dunn, Ambassadors Harriman, Pauley, and Murphy, Fleet Admiral King, Minister Lubin, Lieutenant General Clay, Major General Floyd Parks, and Soviet Ambassadors Gromyko and Gousev. Honors were accorded by a detachment from the 2nd Armored "Hell on Wheels" Division, following which I inspected the honor guard. Then another automobile caravan took us to our quarters in Babelsberg, passing through a section of Potsdam on the way. A part of the road we took was guarded by American and British troops, but the greater part was patrolled by green-capped Soviet frontier guardsmen, this being a Russian-controlled zone. In less than thirty minutes we had arrived at our final destination.

Babelsberg lies about twelve miles southeast of Berlin, between Berlin and Potsdam. It is in a thickly wooded area along winding Teltow Canal and Griebnitz Lake. The town was quite popular with the Germans as a summer resort and was also the seat of Germany's movie colony before the war. My quarters was a three-story stucco residence at No. 2. Kaiserstrasse which had formerly been the home of the head of the German movie colony. The building, which was promptly designated as the "Little White House," although it was painted yellow, was right on the lake and was surrounded on three sides by groves of trees and shrubbery forming a very beautiful garden that reached down to the lake. The house had been stripped of its furnishings during the war but had been refurnished by the Russians. Quartered in the house with me were Secretary Byrnes, Admiral Leahy, Press Secretary Ross, General Vaughan, Captain McMahon, Commodore Vardaman, Chip Bohlen, and others. A map room and communications center had been installed with direct wire service to Frankfurt and Washington. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and State Department parties also lived in Babelsberg in close proximity to the Little White House.

Prime Minister Churchill lived at 23 Ringstrasse in Babelsberg, about two blocks from my residence. His was a similarly large house. Generalissimo Stalin also resided at Babelsberg, about a mile from the Little White
House, on the way to Cecilienhof, where the conference sessions were to be held.

The day had been long and strenuous, and I retired early. It was the following morning, July 16, when I met Prime Minister Churchill for the first time. He came to call on me, but I did not feel that I was meeting a stranger. I had seen him on several occasions when he had been in Washington for conferences with Roosevelt, although I had not talked to him then. We had had a number of telephone conversations since I had been President, and in that way a personal contact had already been made.

I had an instant liking for this man who had done so much for his own country and for the Allied cause. There was something very open and genuine about the way he greeted me.

Accompanying Churchill on this social visit were his daughter Mary, Anthony Eden, Sir Alexander Cadogan, and Commander C. R. Thompson, naval aide to the Prime Minister. No business of the conference was discussed. I did tell the Prime Minister that I had an agenda which I would like to present at the meeting and asked him if he had one. He said, "No, I don't need one." Then we talked briefly about the latest news in the Pacific.

Churchill and I never had a serious disagreement about anything, although we argued about a great many things. He was very grateful to the United States for what we had done, and he was a very great admirer of Roosevelt. On the fundamentals of great principles we were in complete agreement.

I liked to listen to him talk. But he wasn't very fond of music—at least my kind of music.

Later that day I wrote Mama and Mary my second letter since leaving Washington:

July 16, 1945

Dear Mama & Mary:—Arrived in Berlin yesterday afternoon about three o'clock and was met by all the Foreign Ministers and high ranking officials of Great Britain and Russia and a special contingent of American soldiers whom I had to inspect. We then came to a beautiful house on a lake in Potsdam, which formerly belonged to the head of the movie colony. It is said that he had been sent back to Russia—for what purpose I don't know.

I had a very pleasant visit with the Prime Minister of England this morning, and I am expecting a visit from Marshal Stalin either this afternoon or tomorrow. I hope I shall have an opportunity to write more in detail later, but I want to get this off to you so as to get it in the pouch that is to leave here this afternoon.

If you will address your letters to the White House with instructions that they be forwarded on to me, I will get them promptly.

Lots of love to you both.

Harry

The arrival of Marshal Stalin from Moscow was delayed because of a slight heart attack which he had suffered—this was a well-kept secret. He was due to arrive on the following day.

I took advantage of this unscheduled delay in the opening of the conference to make a motor tour of Berlin. Our motor convoy left Babelsberg early in the afternoon and soon turned onto the famous autobahn, heading north for what was left of the German capital.

About halfway to the city we found the entire American 2nd Armored Division deployed along one side of the highway for my inspection. We stopped, honors were rendered by a band and honor guard, and I left the sedan in which I had been riding and entered an open half-track reconnaissance car. In this I passed down the long line of men and vehicles, which comprised what was at that time the largest armored division in the world. Men and tanks were arrayed down the highway in front of me as far as the eye could see. The line was so long it took twenty-two minutes to ride from the beginning to the end of it.

Our motorcade then drove to the center of Berlin and turned to drive down Wilhelmstrasse to the remains of the Reich Chancellery, where Hitler had so often harangued his Nazi followers. I never saw such destruction. "That's what happens," I said, "when a man overreaches himself."

The remainder of our drive took us past the Tiergarten, the ruins of the Reichstag, the German Foreign Office, the Sports Palace, and dozens of other sites which had been world-famous before the war. Now they were nothing more than piles of stone and rubble. A more depressing sight than that of the ruined buildings was the long, never-ending procession of old men, women, and children wandering aimlessly along the autobahn and the country roads carrying, pushing, or pulling what was left of their belongings. In that two-hour drive I saw evidence of a great world tragedy, and I was thankful that the United States had been spared the unbelievable devastation of this war.

The next day I met Stalin for the first time. He came to pay a visit at the Little White House shortly after his arrival at Babelsberg. He was accompanied by Molotov and by Pavlov, who acted as interpreter. Secretary Byrnes was present, and Charles E. Bohlen acted as my interpreter.

Stalin apologized for being late, saying that his health was not as good as it used to be. It was about eleven o'clock when he came, and I asked him to stay for lunch. He said he could not, but I insisted. "You could if you wanted to," I told him.

He stayed. We continued our conversation through lunch. I was impressed by him and talked to him straight from the shoulder. He looked
me in the eye when he spoke, and I felt hopeful that we could reach an agreement that would be satisfactory to the world and to ourselves.

I was surprised at Stalin's stature—he was not over five feet five or six inches tall. When we had pictures taken, he would usually stand on the step above me. Churchill would do the same thing. They were both shorter than I. I had heard that Stalin had a withered arm, but it was not noticeable. What I most especially noticed were his eyes, his face, and his expression.

I was pleased with my first visit with Stalin. He seemed to be in a good humor. He was extremely polite, and when he was ready to leave he told me that he had enjoyed the visit. He invited me to call on him, and I promised him I would.