Meeting at Potsdam. Charles L. Mee, Jr., (New York: M. Evans & Co., 1975. 301 pp.)

From 17 July to 2 August 1945, Joseph Stalin, Harry Truman, and Winston Churchill (who was replaced by Clement Attlee on 28 July) met at the Cecilienhof at Potsdam ostensibly to settle the fate of post-war Europe and to ensure lasting cooperation among the war-time allies. During the two weeks duration of the conference, the western press corps cooled its heels in nearby Berlin waiting to report on the anticipated peace agreement. But they were to be disappointed. The final declaration, as Charles Mee shows, was a "tripartite declaration of the Cold War." The participants, he caustically remarks, managed to rescue "discord from the threatened outbreak of peace."

It was at Potsdam that the "Grand Alliance" (Churchill's overblown metaphor) irrevocably fell apart. After all, it had been Hitler who had brought them together by waging war against them one by one, and Hitler's death had put an effective end to the cooperative effort. The inflamed rhetoric of the Cold War soon obliterated the fact that the alliance had always rested on a most tenuous foundation. The West and the Russians had always mistrusted each other's motives. But once the war had ended and the Cold War begun, both sides put forth the myth of a harmonious military and political cooperation now shattered by the other side's perfidious behaviour. Thus toward the end of the war and especially after its conclusion the former allies immediately began to haggle over the spoils of victory. Needless to say, their claims frequently produced counterclaims.

Stalin insisted that since the Red Army had played by far the leading role in Germany's defeat and since the Nazi invasion of Russia had caused immeasurable devastation, Russia should receive adequate compensation from Germany and its allies. Additionally, Stalin demanded a free hand in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland where his armed forces were already consolidating their position.

Stalin contended, as he had done at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, that control of Poland was irrevocably tied to the security of the Soviet Union and that no degree of Western opposition could change the position of the Soviet delegation on this all-important issue. Stalin, patiently and doggedly, refused to yield on this point. Thus Poland, over which World War II began in Europe, "became one of the *casus belli* of the Cold War."

But Truman was in no mood to recognize Stalin's claims. He ignored the advice by the State Department's experts on Soviet affairs. On board the *Augusta,* which carried Truman's entourage to Europe, the most informed man on Russia and Eastern Europe was Charles Bohlen who had served in the United States embassy in Moscow. Yet Truman never consulted neither him nor another passenger, H. Freeman Matthews, the chief of the European Division of the State Department. Most incredibly, Truman did not see fit to invite W. Averell Harriman, his ambassador to the Soviet Union, to come to Moscow. Instead, Truman turned for advice to his poker-playing friends and James Byrnes, his Secretary of State, a man with a "broad ignorance of for-

eign countries." At Potsdam, Byrnes and Truman were determined to give the Soviet Union absolutely nothing.

On the main point of contention, *i.e.*, the post-war status of Germany, the West and the Soviet Union stood at opposite poles. Stalin insisted on $20 billion in reparations from an exhausted nation, a policy meant to keep Germany prostrate. But to the United States and Great Britain the Russian demand posed several disadvantages: an impoverished and helpless Germany was no deterrent against potential Russian westward expansion; it might succumb to Communism; it could become neither an exporter nor importer of American goods; and if the United States intended to rebuild Germany, the Russian demand meant that American money and equipment would simply pass through Germany to Russia as reparations. To the Russians the question of reparations was paramount; to the United States the primary problem was to rebuild Germany. There could, therefore, be no meeting of minds on this point. As a result, both sides began to carve out spheres of influence in Germany. The seeds for two Germnaies were sown at Potsdam. The question of reparations, Mee notes, "split Germany consciously and intentionally, realistically and definitely."

It is a widely held belief by the American public that the United States seldom obtains the fruits of a military victory. The miliary wins a war and the diplomats then proceed to lose the peace. Following World War II, so the argument goes, the wily Communists became the beneficiaries of American diplomatic ineptitude. In contrast to this view, Mee presents a picture of American negotiating skills, hard bargaining, and intransigence. At Potsdam, Truman and his delegation conceded virtually nothing to the Russians (and to the British for that matter.) On the question of reparations, the American negotiator, Edwin Pauley, a shrewd businessman who had headed the United States delegation to the three-power Allied Reparations Commission in Moscow in April 1945, seemingly did yield to the Russians. He agreed that they deserved to receive the bulk of reparations—55% of the final amount. The United States and Britain were to receive 22½% each. Too late did the Russians realize that Truman had no intentions of granting the Russian reparations from the Western zones of occupation, especially, the industrialized Ruhr region. The Russians, in this fashion, received 55% of nothing.

The Potsdam Conference accomplished nothing of a positive nature. It merely fueled the mutual suspicions and distrust. Immediately, upon returning to Washington, Truman asked Congress to approve a program of military training and an increase in military spending. And in Moscow, Stalin summoned his nuclear scientists and ordered them to step-up their work on the atomic bomb without sparing the cost.

Mee has presented us another revisionist study of the origin of the Cold War. Stalin is no longer the sole culprit. Although Mee stresses that all participants at Potsdam must accept a portion of the blame for the Cold War, most of his criticism is reserved for Truman who resolutely refused to recognize the legitimacy of Russian demands. The evidence Mee presents suggests that Truman did not seek to avoid a conflict with Stalin and very little that he did at Potsdam "could be construed as part of a plan for tranquility."

The proponents of the liberal interpretation of the origin of the Cold War has insisted that it was a struggle between tyranny and freedom. Stalin, the bloody dictator, made postwar cooperation impossible. In contrast to this argument, *Meeting at Potsdam* clearly shows that neither Truman, Churchill, nor Attlee (not to mention Stalin) were interested in championing the cause of individual liberty. When they convened around the green baize table only national considerations mattered.

On the eve of the Potsdam Conference, the United States set off the first atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico. With this explosion the United States became the sole recipient of a most awesome weapon. Truman was now in a position to deal with Stalin from a position of added strength. At the same time he was now able to hasten the surrender of an already helpless and defeated Japan before the Russians, who had promised to join the war against Japan three months after the defeat of Germany and were ready to do so on 8 August 1945, could establish themselves in the Far East. Thus a sordid spectacle ensued. The Japanese were desperately trying to arrange an end of their war with the United States through the Soviet government with whom they still had diplomatic relations. But Stalin refused to become an intermediary fearing that an early Japanese surrender to the United States would deprive him of an opportunity to intervene against a weakened and exhausted opponent. Truman, who knew of the Japanese efforts to end the war, wanted to end the conflict but without Russian military or diplomatic contributions. Thus the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "the greatest thing in history" according to Truman. The use of the atomic bombs, Mee concludes, was thus "wanton murder." Mee here restates an argument raised first in 1948 by the British physicist P. M. S. Blackett *(Fear, War and the Bomb)* and popularized in 1965 by Gar Alperovitz *(Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam.)*

Charles Mee has written a valuable, highly readable study that concentrates on an event generally neglected by historians who have focused on the Yalta Conference and later events especially in 1947 add 1948. *Meeting at Potsdam* was written for a general audience, not specialists in the field, and it is by no means the definitive, the last word. It remains, nevertheless, a most useful contribution to our understanding of the origins of the Cold War.

HARRY PIOTROWSKI
Associate Professor of History
Towson State College