

MANUSCRIPT DATA SHEET

- I. Author: Walter von Unruh, Lt. General
- II. Title: War Experiences in Russia,
Chapter I: Commandant of Brest-Litowsk
Chapter II: Commander of the Fourth Army Rear Area
- III. Date Ordered: 28 March 1947
- IV. Sources:
- A. Consultants: None
- B. Documents: Diary notes and one manuscript.

Lieutenant General [General der Infanterie]
z.V.* (ret.)

Garmisch, 25 April 1947

00079

Walter von Unruh

P.W.E.8

A Contribution to the History of the Campaign in the East.

Preface

As an old general officer who has lived through ten years of military conflict during the course of two world wars, I am - like so many of my fellow officers - opposed to war. This conviction has not been fostered by the wisdom of advanced age; on the contrary, I expressed it as early as September of 1915 - to the late Emperor William II and his Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that no amount of precautionary measures will ever prevent or discourage war so long as the world is not dominated by one power alone. The old rule still holds true: To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.

So far as Germany is concerned, that maxim no longer applies. Two world-wide armed conflicts have proved that this State - a mere speck on the globe - cannot defy the nations of the earth. As a country with an increasing population, Germany inclined toward a policy of territorial aggrandizement. Today, what is left of Germany - about sixty million people - is confined within extremely narrow territorial limits. No longer does Germany represent an entity; it is but a mass interspersed with numerous alien elements that is ruled by four victorious powers. The speck on the globe has dwindled to the size of a pin point. Completely demilitarized -

* Editor's Note: z.V.: regular officer recalled to active duty but subject to retirement. TM-E 30-451, C I, Section II, page 7.

00079. not only its military machine dismembered, but also its martial spirit broken, every war potential removed or destroyed, stripped of all arms - a nation like the Germany of today can under no circumstances devote another thought to rearming for the sake of security. It depends for its existence on the measures and plans for the future which the occupying State may adopt.

00080 All of us are wondering whether we shall have to experience another war, and, if so, to what extent we might become involved. The Americans have already told us that every nation is forced to prepare and protect itself. I cannot visualize a war on German soil in which the German people are not a party. English history serves as an object lesson on how to employ other nations in one's own quest for power.

The writing of military history constitutes a vital part of preparedness from which a wealth of experiences and lessons can be assimilated. Mistakes and setbacks will be fully as enlightening as victories. If I volunteered my assistance for the writing of this history, my motive was not the prospect of a reward. My decision is predicated on one consideration only: whether to cast my lot with the United States, or with the other party. I deliberately chose the side of the United States and her allies, because I see a future for the Germans in such an alignment, and because I believe that in times to come the United States and her allies will perhaps not need us, but certainly will protect us and back us up.

Hatred and vengefulness are emotions of the past, peace and friendship are the goal now - that was the American Christmas message to the Germans. I gladly subscribe to those aims. Perhaps such co-operation will also succeed in establishing a feeling of confidence. Perhaps the U.S. officers and the U.S. Military Government will then - despite all political counter-currents - be able to regard the German general officer not as a guilty

00080 party, but - once he has been cleared - will recognize him to be free of guilt and a potential supporter in a joint effort. I, for one, submit this request as a prerequisite for my voluntary co-operation.

Signed: von Unruh

Lt. General, Z.V.

Chapter I.

00081

COMMANDANT OF BREST - LITOVSK1. Conditions in BREST-LITOVSK

On 26 July 1941, having completed my work in a publishing house in Berlin, I was ready to depart on a vacation trip. Just before leaving my hotel I received a telephone call from the Army Personnel Office. I was informed as follows:

"You herewith are recalled to active duty. You have been appointed commandant of BREST-LITOVSK. The state of confusion prevailing in that city makes it necessary for you to depart this very evening."

I replied that this was impossible, because I would first have to travel to REGENSBURG in order to get my uniforms. I was advised to hurry. The order took me by surprise, and was unwelcome. Having reached the age of sixty, I had no longer reckoned with the possibility of active service. I left immediately for REGENSBURG, where I arrived on 27 July. That same morning I went to see the sub-district leader (a certain Weigert) of the National-Socialist Party, and submitted my resignation from the Party. On 28 July my preparations were completed, and I arrived in BERLIN on 29 July. That same evening I left for WARSAW, where I arrived during the morning of 30 July. I asked my namesake - since deceased - Brigadier General [Generalmajor] Walter von Unruh, the commandant of WARSAW, for the use of a motorcar, and reached BREST-LITOVSK in the afternoon. I immediately took over the command of the city, and now was Major General z.V. and Commandant. My superior was the Military Commander in the Government General, Lieutenant General [General der Kavallerie] Freiherr von Gienandt, who had his quarters in SPALA. I reported to him by telephone that I had assumed command.

00081

I found a military government detachment in existence. Its small staff was headed by Captain Huber, who formerly had been a technical sergeant in my regiment in REGENSBURG. I did not interfere with his functions and his independence in local affairs, and devoted myself to the more important tasks. The citadel had been razed by fire and shelling, and only the gates were standing. On the whole, it was a terrible heap of rubbish, smoking and stinking, from which remaining Soviet soldiers were still firing sporadic rifle and machine-gun bursts. Every thoroughfare was blocked by the demolished BUG bridge, and by ruins, duds, and smother. All supply columns and troops on the forward move had to be rerouted via a swampy dirt road north of the citadel. Frequent traffic stoppages and breakdowns were the result. In the event of rainy weather this road, too, would have become impassable.

00082

The city had sustained some damage, to be sure. It was, however, still well preserved, though rather dirty. The inhabitants were Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians. The mayor and the members of the city council were Poles. All public life had come to a standstill. Supply shipments from the country had ceased.

The Ukrainians asked me to turn the mayor's and city councilmen's jobs over to them. But I decided to let the efficient Polish mayor continue in office, and saw to it that the Ukrainians were represented in the city council. The representatives of the Jewry asked for protection and freedom, which I guaranteed them. The lighting system had been destroyed, the trunk thoroughfares were in a deplorable condition, the water-supply system did not function. The railroad station was without drinking water; all water had to be brought in buckets from the contaminated MUCHAWIEC River. The slaughterhouse was unsanitary and had no running water. Many windows in town were broken. The streets and courtyards in

00082 the Jewish section were filthy. Not more than three kilometers north of the city was a new and modern barracks complex which might have housed an entire regiment complete with motor vehicles and horses, had not all window panes been broken or removed, the lighting and water systems destroyed, nearly all furniture removed by the natives from near and far, and roofs and gutters partially been dismantled.

Wherever one looked, reconstruction work had to be done. The city complained about a total lack of funds, material was not available, and the Jews did not want to work outside their courtyards because they were afraid. The city was full of soldiers; it harbored two Landeschützen [local defense] battalions, a technical battalion in the process of rehabilitation, signal units, motor convoys, a large automotive repair shop, large hospitals, supply units, radiotelegraphy units, as well as transient personnel and tank replacements. The streets were used for parking lots, and were congested. The men had no place to go, though I soon was able to make appropriate arrangements for them in a bank building.

The problem was: money, money, materials, and workmen. It was difficult to get money through official channels. Materials could be procured in Warsaw, but only for money. Workmen were available, but volunteered to work only in exchange for money and food. Money and food could not be allotted by the Administrative and Fiscal Office because they had no more than they needed.

00083 At this point I discovered a vault in the bank. I called on a Jewish expert who opened the heavy steel doors for a compensation. I entered the vault with the administrative and fiscal officer and the paymaster. We found iron cabinets filled with ruble and chervonets bills. The bank statement, duly drawn up, lay on the table. There were about twenty-two million rubles, and the equivalent of three million in

00083

notes which had been withdrawn from circulation. I took two million for reconstruction purposes, and had that fund administered by the Administrative Office and the paymaster, under supervision of the local military government officer. The remainder I turned over to the Administrative and Fiscal Office of the Military Commander.

Now work really started. Material came from Warsaw, and all experts among the inhabitants, and all business concerns went into action. Everyone able to work joined in. I inspired the Jews to speedy work by giving them a bonus of flour, bacon, and fish which I had found under the ruins of the citadel. I stirred the technical battalion out of its inactivity and assigned to it proper professional work. Whether soldier or inhabitant, everybody participated. I opened up the markets, invited the rural population, and gave the inhabitants permission to go to the country. I gave 100,000 rubles to the municipal administration so that it might be solvent again.

Soon the city and the citadel sparkled with cleanliness. The street leading through the citadel was repaired. The road level under the gates, which were not high enough, was lowered; streets were leveled; bridges were built. Two weeks later convoys from the front passed through the citadel. For convoys en route to the front I built a detour south of the citadel, with a large bridge. No further stoppages occurred.

All soldiers having no duties in town were moved outside the city limits. The barracks complex had light and water again, and was occupied. The railroad station was improved; four weeks later it had fresh drinking water. A well-directed and clean isolation hospital was established. After a few days the last Soviet soldiers in the citadel had been captured. The officer and his men were cared for; they were allowed to rest, and to eat, drink, and smoke until they were evacuated.

00083

All firing had ceased. One saw happy faces again. No longer did the partisans threaten life and property. One could move about unarmed. Quiet and security reigned. The PW hospital in the barracks complex still caused some concern. There were between 1,000 and 2,000 patients who were cared for by German and Russian doctors and Russian nurses. Though the buildings and sheds were surrounded by barbed wire, one could get through at nearly all points. The guard of old Landeschützen was wholly inadequate, particularly at night. The Soviets, however, liked it so well in the hospital compound that none thought of escape. They fled only when they had recovered and were about to be evacuated. News of their impending evacuation had to be kept from them.

00084

During the second half of August, Colonel Blumentritt, the Fourth Army Chief of Staff, paid me a visit. He introduced his companion, a young, slim colonel, as his G-3. This I did not believe. The purpose of their visit was to inquire whether I considered the citadel and the city absolutely safe, and whether I would assume full responsibility for their being safe. I replied in the affirmative. The puzzle of that visit was to be solved shortly. A few days later I received the confidential information that Hitler and Mussolini would land at the airport in order to inspect the citadel. I was to receive them at the airport, to take proper safety measures along the road leading to the citadel, and to insure the safety of our visitors up to the time of their departure by plane in the afternoon.

2. Visit of Hitler and Mussolini.

One morning toward the end of August, about 0900, two Junkers planes landed at the airport of TERESPOL. Hitler and his entourage descended from one of them, Mussolini and his entourage from the other. I reported; for the first time I stood face to face with the Führer. He thanked me

00084 with the customary greeting - hand raised - thanked me, and paid no further attention to me. Mussolini and his entourage shook hands with me. The Commander in Chief of Fourth Army, Field Marshal von Kluge, to whom I had previously explained the structure of the citadel, acted as the guide.

First, the party drove to the 600-mm guns, which had been brought back from HANOVER and put into their former positions expressly for this occasion. The battery commander had the task of explaining the guns to Mussolini, and had to create the impression that we had a great many more of them. Mussolini inquired how heavy the shells were. The answer was, "Rather heavy." The next question was, "How heavy is this giant gun?" Answer: "Very heavy." Mussolini smilingly said he thought so, too. Third question: "What is the range of the guns?" Answer: "Very long, but not too long." That stopped further questioning. Hitler's face expressed sarcasm, while I could not help thinking that the Axis partners did not seem to trust each other very much.

In the citadel, the rocket fragments were to be gotten out of the way before the inspection tour; otherwise, not much was to be seen outside of ruins and deep shell craters. But our visitors were very interested in seeing everything. They were also shown the church which the Russians had converted into a moving-picture theater, and which was near collapse. The project by which the Soviets had diverted the BUG River into a tributary enjoyed particular attention. By this device an island west of the BUG that belonged to the citadel was to be incorporated into the Soviet Union, since the BUG River was to be the Soviet frontier to the West. In this fashion both gentlemen, Hitler always ahead, strolled through the citadel for two hours without talking to each other or observing niceties of protocol. Then everybody returned to the airport, where breakfast was served from the field kitchen. I was just about to withdraw, when the

00085

00085 colonel approached who had previously visited me in the company of Colonel Blumentritt. He now introduced himself as Colonel Schmudt, the aide of the Führer, and informed me of the order that I was to take a seat in the tent of the Führer. There, Hitler and Mussolini sat next to each other at a table. I had to take my seat at the other table - my back turned to Hitler - next to the Italian Chief of Staff, Cavallero, together with an Italian general staff officer, Keitel, and Jodel. Hitler explained to Mussolini the German advance which, he pointed out, already had progressed beyond SMOLENSK. I only heard Hitler state that he refused to consider the URAL mountains an obstacle, or a frontier toward Asia. I was horrified by such seemingly unfeasible adventure. As to the rest, Hitler listened to my conversation with Cavallero. He seemed to be particularly interested in my views on the future of the Ukraine. I described my experiences with this freedom-loving people, advocated their independence as a sovereign nation, and voiced my opinion that the Ukrainians should be organized so that they might take up the defense of their country.

Later, Keitel told me Hitler's comments to the effect that, "This General reveals a keen sense of perception, and one must bear him in mind, but his views are nonsense. My own opinion on the Ukrainian issue is altogether different. I shall not commit myself for all times to come." Without having taken notice of me, Hitler and his guests departed in their two planes.

3. The Terrain around BREST-LITOVSK

In the course of time I really had grown to like the Ukrainians in my region. In the beginning, I received information from several sections that partisan groups had been formed. This news necessitated frequent personal investigation. First, the southern sector was reported to be a

00085 trouble spot. It extended to WLODAWKA, east of WLODAWA. But when I arrived there I found complete peace and quiet. German frontier guards were on sentry duty at the BUG bridges. Their function was partly to constitute a defensive rear line, partly to prevent smuggling from Russian to Polish territory and vice versa. Bad stretches on the road leading along the east bank of the BUG from BREST-LITOVSK to WLODAWKA - a highway which at one time ran just east of the very front line of the Soviets - were reinforced with steel plates. In that manner the road was kept in passable condition. The steel plates were exceedingly practical; later on they were transported by truck to the east, where they served to cover swampy sections of the express motor highway during the bad-weather season. In the southeast, the villages of MALORYTA, RATNO, DYWIN southeast of KOBRYN, and particularly the woods west of MALORYTA - in the direction of the BUG River - were notorious centers of partisan activity.

00086 I traveled to the southeasterly sector and looked up an old Russian colonel residing southwest of MALORYTA, who had been pointed out to me as an influential person. I asked him to lead me into the woods to see the partisans. He replied that though he had heard about them, he had no further information. He led me to a wooden shed in the forest where an old man lived. The man said that the Soviet soldiers, who had been there until recently, had moved away in easterly direction. However, he wanted to show me something. He led me to a forest road that was littered with bogged-down artillery pieces. Approximately one hundred brand-new guns of all calibers, as well as mortars, had bogged down at this point on the flight from the BUG to the east, and had become immovable. Several missing breechblocks were buried in the ground near the guns, but the freshly dug spots were easy to find. No soldiers were in sight, but in the nearest village I found the accessory carts, limbers, wheels, harnesses,

00086 rubber tires, and all sorts of equipment that had been appropriated by the peasants. All that materiel was promptly earmarked for the German forces.

I appointed the Russian colonel my personal representative, made him executive mayor of more than 20 villages, and ordered him to enlist his peasants for transporting all of the materiel to MALORYTA. In return, I exempted the peasants from requisitions and from having to furnish horses. Soon I was guest of honor in MALORYTA. I returned the sawmill - which had been taken over by the air force construction troops - to the community, and helped in general wherever I could. For the Russian colonel, who needed a helper, I retrieved his son from a PW camp in Bavaria. On Sundays the community invited me to their folk festivals, at which all the neighboring villegers appeared. They performed Ukrainian folk dances and songs for me. I had become a friend of the Ukrainians.

The BREST-LITOVSK---MALORYTA---KOWEL railroad line had been destroyed. I asked the railroad administration to have it repaired because I needed the line and considered it important. The request was rejected. I inspected the line as well as the available material, and concluded that with the help of the inhabitants and material I could do the job myself. I then reported to the railroad administration that I myself would restore the line to MALORYTA. Hurt in their pride, the railroad authorities decided that what I could do they were able to do too, and with the help of the inhabitants the railroad to KOWEL was put back into operation.

Friendship was soon established also with RATNO, DYWIN, and other villages. In easterly direction my jurisdiction extended to shortly before KOBRYN on the great West-East express motor highway. I inspected this place, too, which I remembered as a way station on the march to the PRIPYAT MARSHES in the summer of 1915. While it lived in my memory

00087

as a dirty, cholera-infected Jew hole, I found also here a friendly, clean, and healthy place, and an efficient and fair senior military government officer. That part of my area which lay northeast and northwest of KOBRYN was reputed to be partisan infested. I did not find any partisans, but again found guns that had been left behind. Not too far north of the express motor highway was a modern gasoline dump with an inventory of one million liters. It had been confiscated by the Luftwaffe. Gradually, all the Soviets who had been overrun and left stranded during the first assault across the BUG withdrew toward the east into the PRIPYAT MARSHES. The starting point for most of them was the almost inaccessible village of DYWIN, southeast of KOBRYN. By questioning the inhabitants there, one could gain a clear picture. Later on, the Soviets in the PRIPYAT MARSHES, far in the rear of our front, were to become a source of great trouble to us. Toward the south, my jurisdiction only extended to a depth of twenty kilometers, just beyond the outer fortifications of the fortress of BREST-LITOVSK. The forts were filled with ammunition and materiel, which little by little were brought into the citadel for evacuation. As late as the middle of August, scattered Soviet soldiers were found in a water-surrounded fort.

Toward the end of August I was able to report to the military commander that peace had been restored in BREST-LITOVSK and its entire hinterland. One could drive unarmed and unmolested through the city and the open country. Very shortly I received the following order: "On 2 September your sector will be taken over by the civilian administration. In BREST-LITOVSK you will on that day relinquish your command to the Reich Commissioner for the Ukraine, Gauleiter* Koch (KÖNIGSBERG). As of 2 September, you are ordered to inactive status in the Zone of the Interior."

*Editor's Note: Regional Leader of the National-Socialist Party.

00087

When, on 2 September 1941, I stepped into my car to depart, the mayor of BREST-LITOVSK presented me with a gift of honor, a plain ring bearing the inscription, "The grateful city of BREST-LITOVSK." I have saved both ring and citation.

On 3 September I was back in BERLIN, went to see my publishing house, asked for leave, and was glad to be back in an activity which I had grown to like. On 4 September I returned to REGENSBURG, and once more was a civilian and my own boss. But events again took an unexpected turn.

Details will be discussed in Chapter II.

Signed: von Unruh

Lt. General, z.V.

Chapter II.

COMMANDER OF THE FOURTH ARMY REAR AREA1. Ride to SMOLENSK

On 3 September 1941 - upon reporting myself back from BREST-LITOVSK to the Army Personnel Office - I was at once asked whether I wanted to take the post of commandant of the CHANNEL ISLANDS, which now had to be fortified, or whether I would take over their command for at least a short time. My immediate departure would have been a prerequisite. I refused, since the inquiry did not constitute an order.

Only a few days after my return to civilian life in REGENSBURG, the Army Personnel Office in BERLIN called me by telephone. I was told, "You are herewith recalled to active duty, and appointed commander of the Fourth Army rear area. Your headquarters is designated Kordück 339. You will report to Fourth Army Headquarters in SMOLENSK."

I started the long journey on 10 September, and arrived in BREST-LITOVSK on 13 September. There, conditions had changed. The town commander had been barred from reconstruction work, and the mayor complained to me that he had been deprived of all freedom of action. The administrative area of East Prussia had been advanced to the northernmost outer fortifications of BREST-LITOVSK. Frontier guards kept this border closed. The city had lost all its hinterland toward the north. The jurisdiction of the Office of the Civil Commissioner General of the Ukraine began in BREST-LITOVSK, and Gauleiter Koch ruled from the BALTIC to the BLACK SEA. I shall return to this subject at a subsequent point.

Since the rubles I had left were no longer needed after all bills had been paid, I settled accounts with the town commander and the paymaster, and remitted the balance of approximately one million rubles to the Administrative Office of the Military Commander, Government General [Poland].

00088 I borrowed a motorcar and driver from the repair shop, and in the morning of 15 September started on my trip to SMOLENSK. The express motor highway was deserted; hardly a motor vehicle was to be seen. All traffic had shifted to the railroads. The eye had an unobstructed field of view clear ahead to the horizon. Nothing but solitary birchwood crosses, 00089 battered Soviet steel helmets, German and Russian tanks, skeletons of dismantled motor vehicles, signs bearing the inscription "rest area," crows, and - sparingly interspersed - Russian roadside inns --- those were the variations of scenery. Hardly a village was to be found along the highway; the hamlets led a peaceful existence away from the road, as well hidden as possible. Since advancing troops avoid detours, and the approach roads were in the worst possible condition, these villages had largely been spared the tribulations of war. On the basis of extensive experience they had deliberately been built off the express motor highway, although the highway probably was constructed later than the villages. However, camouflaging the villages toward the military highway was obviously an effective measure.

My trip took me through KOIRYN, and via the northeast express motor highway to SLUTSK. There - after a ride of three hundred kilometers - I met the first soldiers in the local military government detachment, where we also could get gasoline. After another 120-km ride we reached BOBRUISK. Looking at the structure of the BERESINA bridge, and the traces of the fighting for the river crossing, I clearly conceived what a difficult obstacle the BERESINA River would present in an advance, and even more in retreat. BOBRUISK had a regional military government office and an airport. This at last was a firm foothold again after a 420-km ride. MOGILEV, my destination for the day, was more than another 100 km away. The senior military government officer warned me against driving alone,

00089 because the partisans frequently attacked motorists from the woods. But I had received the same warning already at SLUTSK and nothing had happened to me, so I set out on the trip. The driver and I were equipped with one carbine each.

I received fire for the first time after crossing the DRUT* River, and saw the first group of partisans, who apparently wanted my car, only twenty kilometers before MOGILEV. I escaped, however, and reached MOGILEV and the headquarters of the commander of the rear area of Army Group Center, General von Schenckendorff. I stayed there overnight, and was briefed on the situation in the army rear area. The army had advanced too rapidly. It was impossible to reconnoiter the terrain alongside the express motor highway because of the lack of military and police forces. Above all, cars capable of cross-country movement were lacking. Most side roads were impassable for ordinary motorcars, especially in bad weather. They all got hopelessly stuck. Likewise, recovery troops were lacking who might have salvaged abandoned tanks, guns, cars, and all kinds of raw material. Consequently, everything remained wherever it was, and the partisans dismantled and removed it all, including the guns in the tanks.

00090 General von Schenckendorff showed me his chart of partisan strongholds, and statistics of partisan attacks and demolitions. Partisan activities centered on the following sectors:

Around and east of KRICHEV.

All around MSTISLAVL.

*Editor's Note: The German original states, "the PRUT River," which is obviously a spelling error.

00090

From east of ORSHA to west of SMOLENSK, along both sides of the express motor highway.

Southeast of VITEBSK.

Around MOGILEV and BOBRUISK, as well as between SLUTSK and MINSK.

Just the very lack of suitable transportation made it impossible for the small forces of General von Schenckendorff to penetrate into the out-of-the-way villages, into the swampy areas, and into the remote woods. It is indeed possible for an army to sweep across and overrun a large area, but then the occupied territory has to be mopped up. We paid heavily for neglecting to do so. Mopping up includes such jobs as marking roads and distances; repairing bridges and roads; installing and maintaining wire communications, and posting small guard details at exchanges; providing horses and native labor; evacuating all army property left along the way; disarming the native population; furnishing small cars capable of cross-country travel; winter marking of roads and snow fences; furnishing commanders and senior military government officers with light planes (Storch); establishing water-supply points; providing quarters for railroad personnel; making comprehensive preparations for the wintertime operation of railroads, and arranging for roundhouses, air raid protection, protection of the right of way, ramps, sidings, and signal towers. For railroads in particular, too little was done.

An all-inclusive organization of the rear area is an indispensable and vitally important measure. Because the front cannot be held unless that job is accomplished, manpower and experts have to be made available for it. But General von Schenckendorff's suggestions in this direction had no effect, because nothing at all was available. There was but one governing principle: everything for the front. Under those circumstances things could not go well for any length of time. One cannot push ahead

00090 if the hinterland is in a state of confusion. The next morning I drove on and reached ORSHA and, 170 km farther, SMOLENSK. ORSHA was badly damaged and burnt. The express motor highway teemed with the characteristic life of the supply road, the life line of the Army Group.

2. SMOLENSK

00091 The town was full of soldiers and transient convoys. During the fighting, most of the quarter on the right bank of the DNEPR had been destroyed by gunfire and burnt down. The buildings along the road leading to the airport were well preserved. The bridges across the DNEPR had been demolished and replaced by wooden bridges. I was impressed by the exemplary regulation of traffic by a traffic control battalion. Almost no stoppages occurred in all this confusion.

I went to the military government detachment which was located in a bank building together with the billeting office and the forward directing center for personnel in transit. The latter directed all stragglers, men on leave, and replacements to the front on the basis of the maps and rolls of the Fourth and Third Panzer Armies, and of Ninth Army. Men of the Second Panzer Army were shipped to BRYANSK by convoy or plane. A bank, too, had been established, where one could exchange German marks for rubles, and vice versa. In some districts the officers and men were paid in rubles.

I found my quarters on the market square, in a hotel occupied by personnel from many different units. I greeted my staff, Korück 339, which consisted of but a few officers and the required number of men. There was an old, constantly coughing billeting officer, who once had been a major in the general staff and then a preacher in a religious sect.

00091

Though clearly marked by death, he could not be persuaded to return home so long as a spark of life was left in him. There were further a tuberculous medical corps major, an efficient professor and veterinary corps major, a judge avocate, an aide, a junior adjutant, and three interpreters who had seen no previous service, altogether a very small staff. Although the billeting officer* was given to the passion of making telephone calls all day long, I observed that there was hardly any constructive work to do for the staff. According to a service regulation for the commanders of army rear areas, the work of the staff should have comprised the following:

1. Directing the supply in co-ordination with the Chief Supply and Administration Officer.
2. Responsibility for the direction of convoys and highway traffic.
3. Responsibility for the condition of roads and bridges.
4. Observation and control of the native inhabitants.
5. Fighting the partisans.

This was certainly an ambitious program, but the activities mentioned in the first category were taken care of by the very efficient and self-reliant Chief Supply and Administration Officer of Fourth Army, in co-ordination with the transportation commissioner of Army Group von Bock. For reasons of expedience, the army commander had entrusted the duties mentioned in categories 2 and 3 to two generals from Fourth Army Headquarters. Thus, the only remaining duties were those mentioned in categories 4 and 5. For these however, only insufficient forces, or none at all, were available.

* Editor's Note: The German term used in the original is Quartiermeister, i.e., supply and administration officer. However, since the author fails to mention that his staff included such an officer, it may be presumed that he is referring to the earlier-mentioned quartiermacher, i.e., the billeting officer.

00091 One lone military police battalion with three companies was at hand. This
battalion, however, was at the same time employed by the army generals in
connection with the duties mentioned in categories 2 and 3 above, in addition
00092 to being used by the Chief Supply and Administration Officer for guarding
food, ammunition, and gasoline depots. Only a small element of the
battalion was charged with protecting the road from ORSHA to SMOLENSK and
getting a hold of the partisans. Smelling trouble, however, the partisans
moved into the area west of KRICHEV, west of ROSLAVL, and endangered the
supply road in that region. Consequently, there was hardly anything for
me to do. I reported to ^{the} Commander in Chief, Fourth Army, Field Marshal
von Kluge, who talked about the impending offensive; I attended the daily
briefings by the Chief Supply and Administration Officer on shipments and
the transportation and supply situation; I went to see the commanding
generals of the left wing of Fourth Army. These were the Generals Geyer -
an unrelenting critic - the Austrian Mattern, and Schroth. I visited the
military government detachment in ROSLAVL (key point of the line of depar-
ture for the impending offensive) which, because of its importance, was
subordinate directly to Fourth Army Headquarters. During the course of my
visit I became familiar with road conditions and the supply traffic. I
looked around SMOLENSK, and watched from my window the uninterrupted stream
of convoys to and from the fronts. The exemplary order and discipline as
well as the abundance of motor vehicles impressed me greatly. The left
wing of our army was located on the heights west of YELNYA. Adjacent
to the left stood the Third Panzer Army; the point of main effort of its
right wing was at DOROGOBUZH.

The commanding generals all agreed that the attack - if it had to be
launched at all during that year - was being delayed much too long. They
thought that operations would extend into the winter, and that the outcome

00092 might prove catastrophic. We were not equipped for winter. The generals probably did not know that the railroad and supply situation made the delay necessary.

During this period of inactivity I was paid a visit by the Commanding General of the Army Group, Field Marshal von Bock. He had been one of my divisional staff officers in 1916-17, when I was Chief of Staff of the Carpathian Corps. He asked me how I liked my position. I answered, "Not at all." I said that I had been happier and of greater value in my civilian capacity, and that I should be very grateful if I were sent home soon. He thought that the situation would change shortly, as soon as the new offensive would begin. I pointed out the following two objections against the offensive:

1. I reminded him of our joint effort in the CARPATHIANS. Despite the order to cross the CARPATHIANS, I had - on my own initiative, and counter to the intentions of General von Seeckt (at that time the Chief of Staff of the Army Group) - halted the offensive in the CARPATHIAN Mountains toward the end of September, and withdrawn to a winter position. I chose that line of action because I was unable to supply the troops in or beyond the CARPATHIANS, and because we would have perished in the severe winter. Thus, with our forces in winter position at the proper time, supply and billeting functioned well, and there was hardly a case of frostbite in the ranks. Not before the summer of 1917, and only after thorough preparations, did our offensive carry us over the CARPATHIANS and through the province of BUCOVINA to the Rumanian border.

In my opinion it was too late for an offensive aiming at Central Russia. I was sure that the Russian winter would surprise us and find us unprepared; therefore I was in favor of going into a winter position.

00093

2. I reminded Field Marshal von Bock of the book "Outline of a World History" by General Count York von Wartenburg, who was burnt to death in his asbestos house in China. He had explicitly advocated a step-by-step advance in a war against Russia. The author stated that our armies should not resume their forward move until the rear areas had been brought under complete control. This, however, was not at all the case in our situation.

Bock replied that he shared my views, but that Hitler demanded the attack because he did not consider SMOLENSK protected against winter attacks. Buffer terrain had to be gained. However, Hitler had agreed to a cessation of further offensive operations immediately after the successful execution of the attack, and to taking up a winter position.

For the rest, Bock complained about a stomach ailment which caused him serious trouble.

3. The VYAZMA Pocket.

On about 2 October 1941, after weeks of preparation, the offensive was launched that led to the encirclement of Soviet forces opposing the Third and Fourth Panzer Armies. Unfortunately, I have no information on the plan of attack or the conduct of operations; they were secret for us in the rear areas. I considered myself just a peripatetic bystander, and had no specific duties.

The entire supply came from or through SMOLENSK, where the railroad station was still not in full operation. Russian planes had dropped bombs on the terminal installations, and had caused substantial damage and confusion. A great many items therefore had to be brought up from ORSHA. Only one low-capacity track of the railway from SMOLENSK to POCHINOK (half-way to ROSLAVL) was in operation. Thus supply had to be shipped there by motor convoy. The road from the express motor highway to the POCHINOK railroad station was paved, to be sure, but the trucks and cars broke so

00093 many axles that the drivers preferred driving alongside the road, over the open field. In POCHINOK were a railway station headquarters, and food, ammunition, and gasoline depots with administrative offices and service personnel, further a field bakery which had to supply the two corps south and north of the road from POCHINOK to YELNYA. Fourth Army shipped supplies up to POCHINOK. From that point the supply vehicles of the corps Geyer and Mattern took over. For the expected prisoners, POCHINOK had been supplied with food, and equipped as a transient PW camp. Another PW camp had been set up in a village west of the express motor highway. A great influx of prisoners was anticipated, who were to be transported via YELNYA and ROSLAVL. The main PW camp was in SMOLENSK, a long way off.

The road from POCHINOK to the front west of YELNYA was not improved. It was completely impassable in several parts, and the convoys had resorted to driving over the open fields along both sides. This practice resulted in numerous losses of motor vehicles. Since the express motor highway from SMOLENSK to ROSLAVL, the passage through ROSLAVL, and the express motor highway from ROSLAVL to YUKHNOV (main supply route) were of paramount importance, I disentangled traffic stoppages which - northeast of ROSLAVL - at times seemed almost beyond solution. These traffic snares resulted from the demolition of the bridges across the OSTER, the DESNA, and - later - the SNOBOT River. Portable bridges had to be built off the highway until such time as the repair of the regular bridges could get under way. The approaches to these bridges were very carefully chosen, but the swampy ground caved in. Infantry and artillery had to push vehicles and guns. In the rapid forward surge, convoys on the march attempted to pass these stopping along the road until everything was completely jammed and no vehicle could move either way. Passenger cars that were in a hurry found themselves helplessly stuck in between. In the

marshy sections on the way to the portable bridges one could often see from four to five parallel convoys painfully attempting to move toward the front or the rear area. Further stoppages were caused by the depots which were located along the express motor highway. These depots were designated by first names. The first letter M, for instance Mausi-Marta, stood for ammunition depots; the letter V, as in Valli-Veronika, stood for ration supply depots; and the letter B, as in Berta-Beate, marked a fuel depot. Only women's names were used. This system had been adopted as standing operating procedure throughout the army rear area, and had the advantage of being an easily understood security device. Driving into and out of such depots caused stoppages; if the depot parking lot was already occupied, the vehicles had to park on the highway.

00095 Although I was pleased with the discipline and the zeal to push forward, I considered organizing the traffic control system a very difficult task, but one that might ultimately decide success or failure of the battle. A few long-range guns that fired on the roads made work even more difficult. Soviet planes rarely appeared. They would have wrought havoc during the difficult river crossings. Enemy air superiority over the express motor highway would have made supply and evacuation operations completely impossible. The Army Commander, Field Marshal von Kluge, had his C.P. forward. Most of the time he was on the road inspecting corps headquarters, divisions, or artillery. Only at night did he return to his headquarters, a small camp north of ROSLAVL.

As early as the fourth day of the offensive he had moved his headquarters forward. After YELNYA and the heights west of that city had been taken by Corps Geyer, I went there to inspect traffic and supply. I met General Geyer in his C.P. northeast of BALTUTINO. He had just returned there, his face looking like a raw hamburger. Shortly before YELNYA his car had hit a mine. Otherwise, the attack had gone according to plan.

00095. YELNYA had yet to be mopped up and occupied, and an advance guard support was to be sent beyond the city. Communications in the direction of DOROGOBUZH, and a further advance toward that place were to be secured.

The crossing of the upper course of the DESNA River again caused a traffic jam of the worst sort. The bridge had been destroyed, and the terrain was marshy. It was a difficult task for the engineers, and the drivers and convoy commanders did their best. I walked from the bridge site into YELNYA. In many places our prospective quarters unfortunately were burning down, and space for hospitals and PW camps was short. In the beginning, space for headquarters and troops was likewise lacking. Many a mine still exploded in the side streets of YELNYA. The place first had to be made safe by engineers.

I also had a look at the Russian positions west of YELNYA. They were poorly constructed, and could be considered adequate only near the road. The casualty rate among the Soviets was insignificant; however, I saw about 5,000 prisoners getting under way to POCHINOK. They grabbed every turnip or cabbage in the fields. The Russian soldiers made a good impression.

The southern wing of the attacking army made rapid progress despite poor roads, and despite having to surmount two difficult and awe-inspiring obstacles in the form of crossings over the steep embankments of two wide river valleys. Railway engineer troops and construction troops had been employed at an early stage in order to put the line from ROSLAVL toward KIROV as well as the railroad bridges back into operation. Some railroad material for maintaining this local traffic had been left behind by the Soviets. They had retreated too hastily. Several thousand prisoners returned along the railroad line also from this sector. Our troops took KIROV and continued to advance beyond that city. They reached the express

00096

motor highway on the KIROV---ZANOZNAYA railroad line. Again engineer and construction troops were quickly at hand to put the KIROV---ZANOZNAYA line into usable condition. Ramps and sheds on the express motor highway south of MILYATINO were converted into a station. This railroad was very valuable as a supply line, but the railroad from ROSLAVL to KIROV continued to be a headache.

I failed to get my car from ROSLAVL to KIROV, and since the express motor highway was too crowded with vehicles I felt that my foremost duty lay in insuring order on the left wing of the army, where a great number of prisoners was supposed to be assembled. After the difficult trip to YELNYA I had little trouble with the PW problem, although we lacked transport personnel. A thousand prisoners were usually guarded by two or three men. Whoever wanted to escape could do so easily. But things looked bad at the sector of the Second Penzer Army. There, more than 100,000 prisoners had surprisingly accumulated at DOROGOBUZH. In that area, and in the vicinity of VYAZMA, the bulk of the Soviet army had been squeezed together. West of DOROGOBUZH the demolished bridge across the DNEPR halted the evacuation. Rations and shelter for such large numbers of men were not available. I received calls for help from that area, but could not get there because a bridge was out. I sent engineers and several trucks with rations. I suggested that about 25,000 prisoners be sent to me to YELNYA, who would then be detoured via POCHINOK to SMOLENSK. They did not arrive, however. Instead, large numbers of prisoners swarmed over the fields and villages in order to grab whatever was fit to eat. The first night frost had set in. Human hands could no longer pull turnips.

I proceeded to MITYAZHEKOVO and points east, where I met rear echelon units and artillery. From there, too, support went out to DOROGOBUZH. Combat units of our forces had made the difficult crossing over the UGRA

00096

River, and had already reached the OSMA River. The Chief Supply and Administration Officer of Third Panzer Army intervened at DOROGOBUZH, and a few days later all problems had been solved. In moderately freezing weather I drove on dirt roads in the direction of SPAS-DEMENSK. The maps no longer were of much use. We drove through villages that never had seen a motorcar, with names never heard of or registered anywhere. Despite tremendous difficulties we finally reached SPAS-DEMENSK by nightfall, and I reported to the Field Marshal, whose quarters were in the rectory next to the church.

00097

I was informed that no lull could be expected, but that the divisions had been moved up and into position for an immediate advance in the direction of KALUGA---MEDYN---GZHATSK. Some of them were already on the march. I was ordered to remain in SPAS-DEMENSK, to report on the condition of the roads and the traffic on the express motor highway, and to see to it that the access road from SPAS-DEMENSK to the express motor highway was put in good condition. This road was passable only for vehicles with cross-country mobility and for light 3-ton trucks, but passenger cars could negotiate it only with difficulty. The two latter types of vehicles bogged down in the majority of cases. SPAS-DEMENSK was a trap in rainy weather. The large forest - 35 km wide and 45 km long - to the east along the MILYATINO---VYAZMA railroad line was still swarming with Russian stragglers. A surprise attack from there on army headquarters at SPAS-DEMENSK was not at all out of the question. Consequently, I was charged with organizing the local defense. Despite a number of alarming reports no attacks occurred. But a surprise attack was made on a police company which was cooking its rations alongside the express motor highway at

00097

DOLAGA.* The company lost men, equipment, and vehicles. Attacks also occurred south of MILYATINO. Convoy traffic on the express motor highway was endangered, but a tank formation which happened to be passing through at that time restored the situation. However, the raids on the express motor highway never stopped entirely.

Field Marshal von Kluge left SPAS-DIEMENSK on the fourth day of the offensive and moved up to YUKINOV. I moved into his quarters, and was once again sent forward to the UGRA and OSMA Rivers in order to ascertain whether any German troops had remained there. However, I found no German troops north of the UGRA. Wherever I went I only encountered Russian soldiers as well as bogged-down guns and vehicles, and deserted-looking villages the inhabitants of which apparently had gone into hiding upon hearing the noise of the engines. I heard shooting all around me. A great number of weapons and cartridges were lying around. Just when my car, not being fit for cross-country travel, got stuck for the fiftieth time, I was attacked by an armed column of twelve men. My interpreter and I had one submachine gun each, the driver had a carbine. We opened fire at a range of 500 meters, and while this distance was beyond the effective range of the submachine gun, it made at least a noise. Eleven of the attackers took to their heels, but one remained. I got a hold of him because I needed help for pushing our car. But the four of us were not strong enough. I dispatched the prisoner into the woods with the order to get four strong fellow-soldiers, but unarmed. Reward: cigarettes. Help came in no time, and I could take off again. Four of the Soviet soldiers beat a retreat, but I took my prisoner along, thinking he might

*Editor's Note: DOLAGA could not be located on any map. The author might possibly refer to DOLGAYA.

00097 still come in handy. At any rate he created quite a sensation when we had to drive through a village that was exclusively inhabited by Russians. But before the Soviets had had time to figure out this strange situation, I was gone. I delivered my prisoner to a lonely German field hospital northwest of YELNYA because he badly needed delousing.

00098 A few days later the Field Marshal ordered me to inspect the remnants of the pocket north of the OSMA River. I went by rail-truck along the large forest in the direction of VYAZMA. I stopped frequently, because I thought that I saw altogether too many Russians along the right of way and the roads to and from the forest. It was indeed a miniature Völkerwanderung. I learned that even stronger forces had gathered in the forest and along the way to DOROGOBUZH. I would have liked to send the Russians within our army area southward to the express motor highway going through SPAS-DEBENS'K, because there was a PW camp on the highway at that point. But they only smiled amicably and meant that the PW camp at VYAZMA was closer. They knew their way well enough, but did not go to VYAZMA.

In VYAZMA I transferred my truck to the rails, and ordered to be driven in the direction of SMOLENSK regardless of the protests of the railroad authorities. I did not get beyond GIRDYATINO,* because two Russian ammunition trains had been blown up there by aerial bombing. Together with my junior adjutant and my interpreter I now proceeded on foot along the railroad and reconnoitered to the north and to the south into the pocket -- the stage on which the final curtain had fallen on the drama of the battle of encirclement. It was a gruesome sight. Nothing had been done

*Editor's Note: GIRDYATINO could not be located on any map. The author might possibly refer to GRIDYAKINO.

00098 . to remove the traces of the recent fighting. Corpses were lying in the same positions in which death had overtaken them, with half a head or none, with the upper or lower halves of their bodies gone; artillery pieces with dead horses and drivers littered the countryside; tanks, cars, trucks, vehicles, and tractors stood around individually, in groups, and in larger numbers. All the traces of the battle of annihilation bore witness to the fact that it had been a living hell despite the great number of soldiers that had escaped death. The air was full of stench, smoke, and the noise of rifle fire. If one went into the direction from which a shot had come, one could see Soviet groups unabashedly sitting around a fire. Asked whether they had fired, they would answer, "No, it was the next group." Approaching that group, one received a similar answer. It was an uncomfortable situation. I inquired about casualties, and villages and farms were pointed out to me. I was told that Russian doctors and female nurses as well as adequate medical supplies were on hand. Wherever one looked one could see horses grazing, with or without saddles, with and without bridles, the saddles frequently hanging down their bellies. In short, every vision of an excited imagination had come to life. Everywhere people were eating horsemeat, and in every home a piece of horsemeat was being cured or smoked.

00099

The Field Marshal, by reason of my report, put the 137th Division of Major General [Generalleutnant] Bergmann - killed at KALUGA - at my disposal. It found much work to do, and restored order in an area divided into battalion and regimental sectors. Doctors and veterinarians were sent to help. They had lots of work for four weeks. About 30,000 prisoners and much materiel were brought in. Whatever Soviets were able to take to the forests and other wooded areas made up the nucleus of a future army of soldiers and guerillas. Most of them procured peasant clothing. - Most

0009 of the horses which we rounded up died of kidney colic. - In SPAS-DEMENSK we soon discovered the radio station, as well as liaison men from the forces in the large forest who were in contact with the radio station. - The road to the express motor highway was never made passable. Time and again it became flooded or buried under snowdrifts, in spite of snow fences many meters high.

4. Advance on MOSCOW

One could hear it everywhere: On to Moscow. The road signs read, "Moscow 250 Km," and everybody was on the move. The date was 13 October 1941. The dreaded Central Russian winter was setting in. Short frost and snow periods were still alternating with muddy periods. The express motor highway began to get soft and full of holes; considerable manpower had to be employed to keep it in usable condition. The natives told us that the highway should not be used during the muddy period in the fall or during the thaws in April, else it would be ruined. The experts were right, but the highway happened to be the artery through which the lifeblood of the army flowed.

Strong forces were employed for restoring the following railroad lines to operation: the ROSLAVL---KIROV---SUKHINICHI---KALUGA line; the line from KALUGA to MYATLEVO - where the large rations, ammunition, and fuel depot was under construction; the KALUGA---MALOYAROSLAVETS line; finally, the KIROV---VYAZMA line, and its branch line from ZANOZNAYA to SPAS-DEMENSK. In the north, at the army boundary, preparations were made for getting the SMOLENSK---VYAZMA---GZRAATSK---MOZHAYSK line into operation.

The highway bridges across the RESSA and, especially, across the UGRA proved a particularly bad bottleneck for traffic on the express motor highway. Field Marshal von Kluge moved into a headquarters in the woods southeast of YUKHNOV. My quarters were in the rectory of SPAS-DEMENSK.

00099

I spent most of my days standing or driving on the express motor highway, disentangling traffic snarls. I reconnoitered the roads, but found them absolutely impassable for motorcars except for those capable of cross-country travel. Having none of the latter at my disposal, I was unable to solve tasks of that nature.

00100

The advance of our troops and their attacks were highly successful in the beginning, as I concluded from the gain of territory and from the number of transient Russian prisoners. Toward the end of October the Field Marshal moved his headquarters forward to MALOYAROSLAVETS; I moved into his previous headquarters in the woods near YUKHNOCV. After the railroad via SUKHINICHI---MYATLEVO had been put into operation, the Chief Supply and Administration Officer likewise moved his supply base to MALOYAROSLAVETS. His forward move made matters a great deal easier for corps and divisions in the beginning of November. The corps convoys now had to cover shorter distances. But the divisions had a difficult time reaching their distribution points on account of the mud which froze on the surface and then broke under the weight of the cars. Everywhere Russian peasants had to be employed with their light sleighs to ease the transport problem behind the front. In that connection the hardy Panjo horses deserve honorable mention. The peasants and their horses were cared for by the troops, and rendered us valuable service. Only during the retreat, when their native villages were lost to the enemy, did they desert us. One had to appreciate their position.

It had, however, become increasingly difficult to supply the army. The capacity of the railroad line to the front was inadequate. The same was true in the case of the line from SMOLENSK to ROSLAVL. Therefore, additional supplies had to be secured from SMOLENSK, and particularly from

00100 KRICHEV. This procedure presented difficult problems for the convoy traffic and the officer in charge, Colonel Zimmermann. A round trip of 600 km put an extraordinary strain on trucks, especially in wintertime and on bad roads. The expenditure of fuel was enormous.

Moscow still was the goal of the offensive. A secret order from the Führer was received: Moscow was not to be entered, but only surrounded. Thus, our forces still could not go into a permanent winter position. According to Goebbels' propaganda speeches over the radio it was obvious that Russia had been beaten decisively, that no more Soviet forces were in existence before Moscow, and that the Soviets had to draw on their last reserves and had to commit War Academy students, cadets, labor troops, and students in order to halt our advance. While these allegations may have reflected the true situation at some points, the War Academy students represented a military elite, and the other forces were also fighting for their holy Moscow. They even went over to the attack and inflicted considerable losses on our ranks.

The main factors, however, were the rigors of winter and the increasing fatigue of our troops. Any offensive is doomed to fail under such circumstances. The lack of winter clothing, and rations that were completely inadequate for such conditions were factors contributing to our complications. One has to consider that the troops had been on the march and fighting since June, and had advanced several hundred kilometers. Uniforms and overcoats had become shabby, shoes were worn out, wet, and full of holes. Underwear and sweaters were the same that had been issued during the summer. There were no parcels from home. Fur vests, ear muffs, fur gloves, wristlets, woolen socks, felt boots - in short, everything the Russian wore was nonexistent for us. I overheard the Field Marshal inquiring from the Chief Supply and Administration Officer whether the second set of woolen

00101

00101 blankets could be issued. The blankets finally were given out despite the objections that they would have to be abandoned during an advance because the infantry would be unable to carry the additional load, and that no more blankets were available once these were gone.

The front-line troops, who were so close to Moscow that they could see the Soviet star on the Kremlin, sensed that the forward push had lost its momentum. The last hurdle could no longer be taken. At this point, a truly great military leadership would have had fresh, winter-equipped reserves with truck transport facilities available at the front. Sleighs and snowshoes should have been ready; but then, the Führer wanted to have won the war by the time the winter arrived.

One could see the front thinning out. The troops began to suffer from frostbite and diseases. There were no reserves to fill such gaps. All the commanding generals and division commanders asked for the cessation of fighting and a withdrawal from the enemy. Isolated reverses had begun to set in. The Soviets strengthened their front with more and more reinforcements, and all prisoners who were brought in had every bit of clothing necessary for winter warfare. All of us at the front froze. Anger rose about Goebbels' propaganda lies. One wished that he were at the front! The result of such propaganda was that the military authorities at home also believed that victory was ours. They considered the winter problems in the East as ended, and the motto was, "Not even another button for the Moscow front." By the beginning of November, however, the front had definitely become static. The bad weather made air support almost impossible. Many units of the air force were transferred to the Zone of the Interior for refitting. The front grew thinner and thinner, the gaps between the individual units larger and larger. Our forces put up with this state of affairs because the individual villages and farms now

00101 became the centers of resistance. Those places were converted into strong points.

Behind the front line things looked no better. The organization of the rear sufficed for the advance, but not for a state of permanency. Now it had to be improved and perfected, but the necessary means were not available. The convoys, always on the move, had no place to halt. They could not leave the express motor highway. The adjacent villages and homes were primitive. If a convoy was forced to halt, the men had to rest somewhere along the highway. There were no parking lots away from the road; thus, the vehicles pulled up on the highway and blocked the path of the following convoys. The soldiers went into the homes to cook and to warm themselves. Relations with the inhabitants were friendly. The natives provided wood and heated the big Russian stoves on which the whole family slept closely huddled together. In return, they received food and tobacco from our soldiers. On those occasions on which I myself suffered too much from the cold, I had to bear witness to such domestic scenes.

00102 Organization of the rear area required the following:

1. Setting up and equipping of PW transit camps at intervals of thirty kilometers, with ration warehouses and quarters for guards. These camps were built by the prisoners themselves, who were experts in this line of work. Notices were posted outside the PW camps: "Attention, Convoys! Take along prisoners."

2. Every fifty kilometers a barracks camp had to be set up for convoy personnel. These camps had to have facilities for distributing food and hot tea. Parking space with a service station for gas and water had to be provided off the highway.

3. Roads had to be built parallel to the express motor highway for the use of foot troops, columns of prisoners, columns of horse-drawn

00102

vehicles, and Panje vehicles. They disrupted all motor traffic on the express motor highway, and the incessant passing of cars and trucks had a tiring effect on troops and horses.

4. Log and mud huts for personnel guarding bridges had to be built, and equipped with storerooms and stoves. The men on these guard details were not relieved for months, and their duty was strenuous because of the ever-present danger from partisans.

5. Infirmaries, dispensaries, and warming rooms had to be set up at parking lots and PW camps, and telephone stations had to be installed.

6. Feeding and watering places for animals had to be provided at these strong points.

7. Every five kilometers barracks had to be built for those prisoners who were employed as maintenance personnel for the express motor highway. Stations for the Organization Todt had to be established.

8. Every fifty kilometers a mobile troop detail had to be stationed for protecting the express motor highway against partisans.

9. An airfield for liaison planes surveilling the express motor highway had to be built, and a towing service set up for vehicles that had broken down or had been abandoned.

10. Military police stations had to be set up for the details regulating traffic on the express motor highway.

The creation of such an organization was attempted, but not fully accomplished. Quarters were short everywhere. In the rear area, YUKHNOV and SPAS-DEMENSK were particularly crowded. The hospitals which had been set up at those places were overcrowded. As time went on, a lack of ambulances made itself felt more and more. The rear elements of the divisions, corps, and the Army piled up in ROSLAVL, far in the rear. I

00103 shall come back to this at a later point.

Meat became particularly scarce. Horsemeat was the bill of fare even at headquarters of the Chief Supply and Administration Officer. There was no cattle. Troops that were used to handling motors and were furnished horses had frequently no understanding for the animals. Horses could not be turned on and off like a piece of machinery, but required good care after a day's work. The horses' need for water at low temperatures was often underestimated, and many kidney ailments were the result. Units that are allocated horses must have personnel that know how to handle the animals and like them, otherwise the expenditure is too great.

Horse stables and motor-vehicle shelters were not to be had anywhere, nor was it possible to build them during the course of events.

We were no experts at guarding prisoners. Guard details for movements of prisoners were badly understaffed. Seldom were there more than three guards for moving a thousand prisoners. There was not enough personnel. As a result, prisoners fell out and disappeared. Unescorted prisoners making their way alone to the nearest PW camp were no rarity. Often one did not know whether they were prisoners, road repairmen, or partisans. At any rate, they were prospective partisans. The PW's belonging to the road-repair crews went unguarded into the forests to cut wood. It was up to them whether they wanted to return. Once I went alone into the woods at YUKHNOV. There I saw scattered groups of from five to twenty unguarded Russians sitting around fires. One group approached me. I thought that I had been taken prisoner, but they only asked me to join them around the fire. We succeeded in getting to understand each other, and they laughingly told me that they were laborers building large barracks in the PW camps. I put up with this undesirable state of affairs because I considered the artful construction of the barracks too important to be

00103 jeopardized. Later on, when our front was pushed back, these weatherproof quarters turned out to be very useful for our front-line soldiers.

Thus, there was a shortage of personnel everywhere, not only at the front. In conjunction with other events, which I will report later, that situation resulted in excessive partisan activities outside of the immediate vicinity of the express motor highway. In wartime, the importance of organizing PW affairs such as transportation, transport facilities, shelter, supply, care, and evacuation is easily underestimated. In fact, one can never do too much in this respect. Prisoners, particularly if they are treated well and in a friendly manner, constitute a source of manpower to be drawn upon for work in the rear area and the Zone of the Interior. The following are the principal problems: weatherproof shelters at thirty kilometer intervals; readily available rations, always a particularly

00104 difficult item for us because we had far too little for ourselves; transport facilities for moving exhausted, wounded, and ill prisoners; quick evacuation by railroad. One always has to take the position that the prisoners had no part in bringing about the war and all the bloodshed. One can help them best by sending them as quickly as possible to the Zone of the Interior in order to put them to work, always feeding them well. Neither our personnel nor our means were even remotely adequate to meet the needs. Such services have to be especially well organized and equipped.

The same applies to salvaging booty and war materiel. Much went unsalvaged, and rotted away or was appropriated by partisans and natives. Again, a well-organized service with prime movers for towing away equipment should be in existence. While we had such an organization, we did not have the necessary personnel and equipment.

The front had become static, or, to be more precise, it slowly disintegrated. A persistent clamor went up for winter equipment. Division

00104

Bergmann, which had been kept in the VYAZMA pocket for clearing away the debris of battle, was the only available reserve. Also this division was now moved up to the right wing of the army in the KALUGA region, and had to endure strenuous and difficult winter marches to that area.

Field Marshal von Kluge was a man of exceptionally forceful energy. In his cross-country car, or even a Panje sleigh, he visited all accessible headquarters on his front as often as possible. He and his staff were quartered in a colony of one-family houses on the northeasterly outskirts of MALOYAROSLAVETS. A few bombs would have sufficed to put the entire army staff out of business. When he was in his headquarters, Field Marshal von Kluge maintained telephone contact with all headquarters in order to receive detailed reports. But even he could not change the situation. He repeatedly assured me that he had protested against the winter attack on Moscow and against extending operations into the winter. He told me that Hitler himself had informed him that he had ordered the attack despite all objections, because he was convinced that it would succeed. Hitler felt that he would miss his chance if he waited until spring.

Well, the chance was missed anyhow. The one remaining question now was how to remedy the situation. We both agreed that an early withdrawal far to the rear was the right thing to do. Von Kluge intended to take appropriate measures, but suspected at the same time that the Führer would strongly oppose this plan.

00105

Cold, snow, icy blizzards from the east, bad roads, poor quarters, poor food, and inadequate clothing made life a living hell for the soldiers. On top of the hardships the Soviets attacked night after night. They were, however, repulsed in the majority of cases. Only the partisans behind the front were taking a brief winter rest. Fortunately, we were also

00105

spared the always dreaded attacks by packs of wolves.

5. Conference of Army Group Commanders in ROSLAVL

Around 4 December 1941 the army commander appeared at my headquarters in the woods near YUKHNOV and stayed overnight. He was en route to ROSLAVL, where Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, the Commander in Chief of the German Army, had called together Army Group Commander von Bock, the Commanding General of Second Army, Guderian, the Commanding General of Fourth Army, von Kluge, as well as their neighbor to the left, General [Generaloberst] H6ppner. Von Kluge and I discussed the situation. He confirmed that it was impossible to hold the front. Rumors about our retreat from Russia already circulated in the rear areas, and whoever had a map studied the crossing over the BERESINA, remembering Napoleon's retreat in 1812. Von Kluge was determined to take a strong stand in favor of a major withdrawal.

Von Kluge reappeared the following evening to spend the night. He reported that a retreat had been agreed upon. Guderian and H6ppner, whose tanks were not equal to prevailing winter conditions, also had advocated a large-scale retirement. Early in the morning the Fourth Army Commander returned to MALOYAROSLAVETS, and soon thereafter secret orders appeared, the gist of which was as follows:

Convoy movements to the east will cease. During three consecutive days, beginning tomorrow, all dispensable convoys and vehicles will return to ROSLAVL. Immobile guns, mortars, and tanks are to be demolished or rendered unusable. The troops are to follow on the fourth day. Special orders will be issued.

I did not learn how far the retreat really was to go, or which positions were finally to be occupied. I only received a telephone call from the Chief Supply and Administration Officer. He needed the KIROV---VYAZMA

00105 railroad as a supply line. He told me he had requested that this line be protected behind our new front.

For three days the vehicles rolled back in three parallel columns. Then, after this tremendous expenditure of fuel, the following order from the Führer arrived: The front will be held. The columns will advance again. Whoever retreats will be court-martialed.

00106 But the position could not be held; slowly but surely it was forced back. A whole series of commanding generals and division commanders were relieved of their commands, but their successors were just as unable to stem the tide of catastrophe. Simultaneously with the order of the Führer, news arrived that Field Marshal von Brauchitsch had retired "for reasons of health," and that Hitler himself had assumed command of the German Army. A most unfortunate start.

From this hour on the Army was without a commander in chief. Hitler had neither the time nor the necessary training for the job. Nobody was now in a position effectively to represent the interests of the Army. Instead, Himmler gained in power.

Views were expressed that all generals of the German Army had the duty to resign as one body. During wartime, however, such a move would have constituted mutiny and a breach of the oath of allegiance. Likewise, the religious concept of the sacred nature of the oath, as well as the old tradition and military education spoke against it. We still were living according to the principles of the catechism from the Thirty Years' War:

You do as you are told to.

Don't curse or think, you're just a link.

Army commanders like the generals Guderian and Hoppner, as well as others, of course dutifully drew their own conclusions. Considering the Führer's order unfeasible, they ignored it and retreated because they

00106 placed their responsibility for their men above a blind execution of orders against better knowledge. Consequently, they were relieved of their commands, along with a great number of locally commanding generals and division commanders.

signed: von Unruh

Lt. General, z.V.