

CHAPTER 6

THE OCCUPATION FALTERS

Political Aspects

By the end of the summer of 1942 the Germans had all but squandered their opportunity to establish a workable administration in Russia. And in so doing they had lost their chance to crush the growing partisan movement, for large blocks of the Russian people had turned from them almost to a man. Those natives who in 1941 had been pro-“liberator” had turned apathetic, and those once apathetic had turned back to the Soviets. In Great Russia where Communist influence had always been heavy there had never been any serious question of allegiance. Many large areas there had quickly gone under partisan control and the German Army had not the troop strength to contest the loss. Elsewhere many of the natives still worked for or with the invaders, but the seeds of doubt and disappointment had been planted in their minds. Even if it had been possible to solve the manpower problem in the rear and retain all the security units for occupational duty and antipartisan operations, the deterioration of popular morale and the consequent loss of native support could hardly have been prevented, for the problem went far deeper than a mere question of armed strength.

Hitler had sent the Wehrmacht into Russia to establish and enforce a policy of blindly negative self-interest:

Germany wages war in the east for self-preservation, that is, in order to gain the necessary living space for the German people, and in order to improve the basis for a secure food supply for Europe, but particularly for the German nation. It is not the purpose of this war to lead the people of the Soviet Union to a happier future, or to give them full freedom or political independence.¹

When the Russian, who had welcomed or at least acquiesced in the invasion became aware of this attitude and of German plans for the future, he slowly, and in many cases regretfully, turned away.

General Thomas, the chief of the Armed Forces Economic Office, Von Weizsaecker, State Secretary in the German Foreign Office, and Rosenberg, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories had all believed that the ultimate success of the war effort in the east would hinge on the actions of the population, and all three had very nearly been

¹ OKW/WPr, “Grundlagen der Propaganda gegen Wehrmacht und Voelker der Sowjetunion,” 23.III.42., in *Heeresgruppe Nord, Propaganda Befehle.* 75131/104.

proven correct in the space of 12 months. This is not to say that the eastern campaign was lost in the rear areas—partisans do not win wars; at best they only help prevent others from winning them. In the last analysis, the real issue was decided in the snows before Moscow and on the banks of the Volga at Stalingrad. But German negativism in the occupied territories went far toward uniting a shattered and divided nation against an invader and it certainly gave the partisan movement the strength and popular support it needed to develop into both a potent weapon in its own right and a valuable adjunct to the Red Army in the over-all Soviet defense picture.

Basically, the failure of the occupation was the Germans' failure to understand the eastern peoples, to treat them as human beings, and admit them as equals into the new order being created; the failure to outline a definite program which took into consideration the most basic desires of the people, to broadcast it with an effective propaganda line, and to carry it out; and the failure to provide a standard of living and set up a system of social justice at least equal to that formerly provided by the Soviet Government.

The power of resistance of the entire nation would have begun to crumble the moment the individual Russian became convinced that Germany offered him a better life than was possible under the Soviet regime. The emptiness of German promises was not immediately evident to the Soviet people. They had been discontented with their lot and were weary of Bolshevism, but, with the exception of the peoples in the Polish border areas, they were not imbued with as intense a hatred of Stalinist leadership as the Germans had assumed. The vague and generalized promises of liberation were at first accepted and sufficed to hold popular sympathies.² As time went on, however, the people began to see through the fiction of the "liberation" theme. Slowly but surely they came to realize that the Nazis did not regard them as partners to be admitted into a new society on an equal basis, but only as a group to be exploited according to alien economic and political aims, and they saw that the "liberation" slogan was only a pretext to enslave them according to Nazi methods. Rather than being treated as coequals in a new venture, they found themselves regarded as *Untermenschen*, subhumans, and told that the Germans were a superior race destined to rule the world.

² For initial acceptance of the "liberation" theme in the Ukraine, see staff study on propaganda, *H. Gr. Sued*, 4.XII.41, *Propaganda Angelegenheiten*, 3.XII.42. OKW/635. For confirmation of this point as f: as the northern and central sectors were concerned, see: Final Report Commission in White Russia to Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, 31 Aug 44. EAP 161-b-12/14.

The common Russian's knowledge of the Germans, based only on what he had heard of their high organizational and cultural reputation and the negative Soviet propaganda which had been dinned into his ears for years, was at best vague. Still, in many areas he had placed high hopes on their coming, and his realization of the true tenor of their policy disillusioned him greatly, for in the last analysis he asked for nothing more than a reasonable life and a recognition of his human dignity.³ It was fear of the future and a vague desire for security which drove him back into the arms of Bolshevism; the absence of any positive German policy for the future, coupled with the fact that Soviet propaganda was too often substantiated by German actions. "What do you want with us, if not slavery?" became the stereotyped question.⁴ "We are ready to sacrifice everything for this common battle, but first we want to know distinctly and clearly what [we] will get out of it."⁵

It is amazing how many of the Nazi hierarchy understood the neutralizing force of this negative approach, saw how surely it was driving the Russian people into a common front with the Soviets, and yet were unable or unwilling to try to influence the deteriorating course of events. "It would have been better if we had promised them nothing," wrote Von Homeyer to Rosenberg.⁶ "We have hit the Russians . . . too hard on the head in our manner of dealing with them," diaried even so ardent a Nazi as Goebbels.⁷ One of Rosenberg's deputies went even deeper and saw the real wreckage created by Hitler's steadfast negativism: "The power of resistance of the Red Army and the strength of the partisan movement has mounted in the same degree as the population realized our true opinion of them."⁸

Land Reform

Throughout modern Russian history, the greatest domestic bone of contention had always revolved around the question of the emancipation of the serfs and its complement—the breaking up of the great landed estates and the distribution of the acreage to the peasants. The wave of liberalism which swept over western Europe during the 19th century crept slowly into Russia, bringing emancipation in 1861 and a gradual process of acquisition of land by the liberated serfs. With

³ *Aufzeichnung, Berlin, den 25.X.42., gez. Braeutigam*, in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 331-42.

⁴ *OKH/Fde. H. Ost. Studien, Ia, Nr. 3220/42, 25.XI.42.* *H 3/468.2.*

⁵ Latvian Propaganda leaflet, found 23 Feb 42, in rpt 178, 9 Mar 42 (doc. 3241), in *N.M.T.*, *op. cit.* (Case 9).

⁶ Ltr, Von Homeyer [an unidentified occupation official] to Rosenberg, 30 Dec 42. EAP 99/40, in Rosenberg collection.

⁷ *The Goebbels Diaries*, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-85, entry for 25 Apr 42.

⁸ *Aufzeichnung, Berlin, den 25.X.42., gez. Braeutigam*, in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 331-42.

the revolution the last of the great holdings of the nobility disappeared. The Soviet collectivization of the 1930's, however, which was so bitterly resented by the peasants, voided the gains of 70 years, and at the time of the German entry into the Soviet Union the decisive question with the rural population was still ownership of land. In few cases did the peasant thought process go beyond this basic issue.

In planning *BARBAROSSA*, the needs of the Four-Year Plan dictated that the *Kolkhozes*⁹ be retained intact at least for the duration of the war despite the insistence of Rosenberg's office that they be broken up and an individual agrarian economy introduced. Propaganda units were to impress on the people that immediate changes in the economic set-up would harm everyone and serve only to increase the disruption of economic life occasioned by the war.¹⁰

However, when the maintenance of the collective economy was found to be impossible due to the widespread Soviet destruction and removal of farm machinery and when any resort to individual farming impractical because the necessary small tools were lacking, the *Wehrmacht Propaganda Division* was authorized to tell the people that the collectives were to be transformed into communal farms with the peasant retaining taxfree his cottage and certain small plots of land as his own property. Further, individual efficiency and initiative were to be rewarded with additional grants of land.¹¹ On 3 October 1941, however, there came a sudden policy shift which brought the question of land reform to a halt and prohibited any further discussion of the return of the land to the people.¹²

The reasons for this about-face during a critical period are unknown. It is possible that it was indirectly the work of Erich Koch, the *Reichskommissar Ukraine*, who was a strong opponent of the agrarian policy and thought Rosenberg far too liberal in his policies. More likely the decision was Goering's as head of the exploitation program. In any event, the effect was to postpone a solution until the Soviet successes in the winter of 1941-42 cut deeply into the popular support the Germans had enjoyed. When the new land policy was finally announced much of the effect was lost.

The land reform order, "the Restitution Law" (*Reprivatisierungsgesetz*), put into effect on 16 February 1942, was "to pave the way for a gradual and orderly transition from Bolshevik production on a col-

⁹ *Kolkhozes*: Soviet collective farms; *Sovkhozes*: Soviet State farms.

¹⁰ "Directive for Handling Propaganda for Operation *BARBAROSSA*," *OKW Nr. 144/41, g. Kdos, Chefs, WFSI/WPr., VI.41.*, in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*

¹¹ Annex to Propaganda Dir, 21 Aug 41 in *OKW/486/4, WFSI/WPr.*; also: Oral testimony of Riecke in *I.M.T., op. cit., XI*, pp. 590-91.

¹² Dir, *OKW/WPr, 3.X.41.*, in *OKW/WPr, Propaganda-Angelegenheiten aller Art, X.-XII.41.* *OKW/634.*

lective basis to individual production on a cooperative or independent basis." The *Kolkhozes* were to be changed to cooperative establishments to be farmed on a communalistic basis with compulsory collaboration, each collaborator retaining for his own use, tax-free, a strip of land belonging wholly to him.¹³

Actually, the German political leadership had no intention of carrying out a real land reform and returning the soil to the peasants. One month after the publication of the land decree Hitler assured his advisers that it was only natural that the occupied east, rather than Germany, should pay for the war.

The predominant part of the agricultural soil in those territories must, . . . remain the property of the state, as before; thus the profits from the agricultural production of these enormous state-owned lands will . . . accrue exclusively to the [German] State, and may be used for the liquidation of the internal war debt. . . .¹⁴

Almost from the very beginning the result of the failure to alter the system at an earlier date and to propagandize the change was evident. The expansion of the partisan movement with a resultant increase in terror raids on the natives in the rural areas made even preparatory work for executing the new measures difficult, and in some areas brought it completely to a halt. *Rayons* which in February 1942 had been clear of the bands and in which it had been planned to institute the first land reform were so infested with irregulars by March that the entire civil and economic administration was unable to function. Further, due to the partisan activity and the absence of effective German counteraction a good portion of the population behind *Army Group Center* so feared reprisals by the bands that they refused to take advantage of the proffered opportunity.¹⁵

But only a small percent of the collectives were converted, and then generally only by the Wehrmacht administration and not by the *Reichskommissariate*.¹⁶ Koch was avowedly against giving the people anything,¹⁷ and even though the agrarian policy had originally been the idea of his superior, Rosenberg, he consistently refused to put it into

¹³ *Die neue Agrarordnung, Erl. des Reichsministers fuer die besetzten Ostgebiete v. 16/2/42* in Dr. Alfred Meyer, *Das Recht der besetzten Ostgebiete, Teil Ostland, Wirtschaft, Ernaehrung und Landwirtschaft, Landwirtschaft*. O III, D66.

¹⁴ Ltr, Bormann (on behalf of Hitler) 25 May 42, in *Hitler's Tischgespraech im Fuehrerhauptquartier 1941-42*, Henry Picker, ed. (Bonn, 1951), 136.

¹⁵ *Lagebericht 4, 23.III.42., Wi Kommando Bryansk, KTB, 17.XII.42.—31.III.42. Wi/ID 2.84.*

¹⁶ See: *Bericht, Ortskommandantur Taganrog, 6.VIII.42., Anl. z. KTB, Lageberichte, H. Geb. "B," 18.V.42.—16.I.43.; II Aufzeichnung gez. Braeutigam, 25.X.42, in I.M.T., op. cit., XXV, pp. 331—42.*

¹⁷ See Koch's speech to agricultural officials at Rovno, 28 Aug 42. 99/456, Rosenberg Collection.

effect and Rosenberg was unable to enforce his orders.¹⁸ Behind *Army Group North* there seems to have been as little action on the land question, for late in September 1942 the people were still waiting for the much-publicized farm grants.¹⁹ As for those farms actually changed over, a Rosenberg deputy described them as "bad, miserable copies of Soviet forms of organization from which partly the names have been taken over unchanged."²⁰

In the last analysis, this view was essentially correct. Nothing disappointed the rural population as much as the agrarian reform. The liberation of the peasants from the collective economy was stressed to the limit by German propaganda as one of the main points of the German program in the east. And indeed, the promise to restore the property of the farmer was well designed to win the sympathies of the entire rural population. Generally the first distributions were enthusiastically received and plots were diligently worked right up to the front lines.²¹ In the long run, however, it worked out quite differently. It was a far cry from collective farms via cooperatives to agricultural unions. Too often the simple Russian peasant was unable to discern the difference between the collective on the one hand and the cooperative and agricultural union on the other. The soil which had been the common property of all Russian people now became the common property of the members of the cooperative. This theoretical distinction had no practical value, since it failed to give the new owners any tangible benefits or rights. Organization, management, quotas, and routine remained unchanged. The plot of ground was his, but he could not sell it. Taxes were shifted from the land to the products of the land. Farmers were promised extra acreage for outstanding performance, but it was made equally plain that substandard performance could result in the loss of a man's plot. In the villages from which laborers were taken for shipment to Germany, the people said: "The Germans cannot possibly be serious about land reform if they send the formers to work in Germany." When a plot was assigned to a peasant, 50 rubles had to be paid by the farmer for surveying costs and 20 percent of the yield had to be delivered to the Germans, whereas under the Soviet regime such land assignments were tax- and requisition-free.²² In the end the peasant came to the conclusion that actually there was little change in comparison with former Soviet conditions.²³

¹⁸ See: Oral testimony of Lammers, in I.M.T., op. cit., XI. pp. 48-9.

¹⁹ Rpt, *Korueck 584* to *Sixteenth Army*, 26 Oct 42, in *Anl. 216 z. KTB 3, Korueck 584*. 38998/2.

²⁰ Ltr, Von Homeyer to Rosenberg, 30 Dec 42. EAP 99/40, Rosenberg Collection.

²¹ *Bericht, Wi Stab Ost, 16.IV.-15.V.42.* Wi/ID 2.346.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Army Group "A" Rear Area*, "Final Report of the Activity of Military Government in the Eastern Theater of War," undtd (approx end of 44). 75156/1; see also: *Buchsbaum MS, op. cit.*

Religion

In the matter of religion, from the very first the Germans were offered a unique opportunity to unite a large segment of the Russian people against the avowedly anti-Christian Soviet Government and win them to their "liberation" cause. But again their negativism and tardiness in taking any sort of a stand on the question of the reopening of the churches merely added another item to their long list of lost opportunities. In the same manner in which they feared revival of nationalism, they feared the unifying effect of the reestablishment of a large religious organization and firm church leadership.

Although the question of religion was never of as great moment with the Russian people as the abolition of the collective farms, the reopening of the churches under German sponsorship would not have been lost on a people who basically were intensely religious, and would certainly have brought over the influential Orthodox clergy on a collaborationist basis. In the last analysis, it was Moscow that grasped the opportunity, spreading rumors and propaganda to the effect that Stalin had proclaimed religious freedom for the entire USSR.

It was in the fear of a nationalistic revival that Hitler originally refused to allow the churches to reopen. Jodl reflected the official attitude: "A religious organization based on a unifying Russian church is just as much against the interests of Germany as a political unification of the peoples of the Soviet Union."²⁴ But when the natives spontaneously reinstated worship services in the wake of the Wehrmacht advance, thus facing the Germans with a *fait accompli*, the proscription was relaxed to the extent of tolerating, but never encouraging, religious worship. No foreign priests were to enter the occupied areas and all priests were to refrain from any political leanings.²⁵ Wehrmacht chaplains were forbidden to conduct services for the natives.²⁶

Even after the Russians had opened their churches and the Germans had acquiesced but not helped, they took an obstructive attitude. The SD closed the theological seminary in Volna with the explanation that it had aided subversive elements.²⁷

Rosenberg had originally planned to announce the return of religious freedom ceremoniously, but Hitler decided that on the basis of toleration only it should merely be allowed to come into existence as quietly as possible. Consequently, all possible propaganda effect was lost.²⁸ Rosenberg admitted that his only reason for wanting religious freedom was

²⁴ OKW/WPr, *Grundlagen der Propaganda gegen Wehrmacht und Voelker der Sowjetunion*, 23.III.42., in H. Gr. Nord, *Propaganda Befehl*. 75131/104.

²⁵ *Propaganda Befehl*, OKW/WPr, 21.VIII.41. OKW/1938.

²⁶ See: Oral testimony of Von Brauchitsch, in I.M.T., *op. cit.*, XX, p. 578.

²⁷ Ltr, OKW to Eighteenth Army, 10 Apr 42 in H. Gr. Nord, *Propaganda Befehl*. 75131/104.

²⁸ *Aufzeichnung gez. Braeutigam*, 25.X.42, in I.M.T., *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 331-42.

to counteract Soviet propaganda, appease the local population, and gain an effective theme for German propaganda in the rear areas.²⁹ And even Goebbels saw the need for a clearly drawn church policy and understood its propaganda value.³⁰

In the campaigns prior to *BARBAROSSA*, the Army had restored churches to religious uses when desired by the populace and German chaplains had frequently held services for the people. In Russia, however, there was the strange picture of Hungarian, Romanian, and Italian chaplains holding services for the natives when the German chaplains were not allowed to do so.³¹

Education

Hitler flatly ordered that the people of the occupied territories be denied all but the most rudimentary education. Anything higher, he said, was under no circumstances to be permitted, for a knowledge of reading and writing would enable the eastern peoples to acquire some historical background which might lead them to nationalism and opposition to German rule.³²

All in all, it is extremely doubtful that the average Russian ever became overly perturbed about this matter of schooling, despite the fact the USSR had provided free education and the opportunity for unlimited advancement for the younger generation within the framework of the state. In executing such a policy, however, certainly the Germans lost a valuable propaganda medium, and one the Soviets had always made maximum use of. Probably the most detrimental effect of the whole business was the propaganda opening it gave the Communists who used it to the fullest. "The Germans need land and slaves; slaves must be kept dumb, so they close the schools," was a typical approach.³³ For the Germans, it was just another lost opportunity.

Food Shortages

While in a general sense the decline of native morale stemmed from the German failure to provide positive answers to many burning problems, more immediately felt and direct in its effect on the population

²⁹ Ltr, Rosenberg to Reich Commissioners for Ostland and Ukraine, 13 Mar 42. EAP 99/40 in Rosenberg files.

³⁰ *The Goebbels Diaries*, op. cit., p. 225, entry for 22 May 42.

³¹ See: Oral testimony of Von Brauchitsch, in *I.M.T.*, op. cit., XX, p. 578.

³² Picker, op. cit., pp. 73, 116-17; for additional German views on the educational policy, see: Himmler's speech, 16 Sep 42, in *Persoenl Stab RFSS*. 161-b-12/154; ltr, Von Homeyer to Rosenberg, 30 Dec 42. EAP 99/40, in Rosenberg Collection.

³³ Soviet propaganda quoted in "Urgent Questions of Partisan Warfare and Recruitment of Local Volunteers," in *OKH/Fde. H. Ost*, Nr. 3220/42, 25.XI.42. H 3/468.2.

was the steady deterioration of the food situation. Nowhere during 1942 was there an adequate food supply: while the shortage was more acutely felt in the cities than in the rural districts there was a general retrogression of morale in all areas because of it. Even in the Baltic States and the Ukraine, where popular discontent was not as evident as in the central sector, the short supply of basic food stuffs and the continuous German requisitions steadily deepened the general disappointment of the workers in the occupation administration.

In the urban areas the shortage was most acutely felt. In Stalino, which had a population of 248,000, with all food under a strict rationing system, some 70,000 people had no ration cards.³⁴ In another large city, Rostov, the ration distribution was so uneven that some two-thirds of the people received no food through the German administration.³⁵ Black market prices were impossibly high and the wide differential between all prices and the wages paid by the occupation soon robbed money of the little value it had and forced the urban dwellers into a barter system, carting their household furnishings into the countryside to trade with the peasants for enough food to survive. Even in the farm districts the heavy forced requisitions of cattle and grain lowered agricultural stocks far below the existence minimum and went far toward demoralizing the very peasants who had been promised so much.³⁶

Suppression of Indigenous Administrations

In the border areas of western Russia there was one factor affecting morale which was peculiar to that part of the USSR. The natives in the western Ukraine, White Russia, and the Baltic States were in large measure of non-Russian extraction and generally anti-Soviet in feeling, and the cold and suppressive German attitude toward the numerous anti-Bolshevik separatist groups created widespread disappointment in the many circles that had hoped for national expression. As the months passed following the opening of the campaign, the obvious lack of any positive German policy for the future led the people to ask the question: "What is to be our political future? What do you really want with us, if not slavery? What will our people get out of this?"³⁷

³⁴ *Bericht, Oberfeldkommandantur Donets, 20.XI.42., Anl. z. KTB, H. Geb. Sued, 16.V.42.-18.I.43.* 27089.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Ltr, Von Homeyer to Rosenberg, 30 Dec 42. EAP 99/40, in Rosenberg Collection, *OKW/WPr., Lageberichte, 1.VIII.-15.VIII.42., KTB, OKW/WPr., 12.II.-12.XII.42.* OKW/793.

³⁷ Ltr, Soviet defector [sic] to Ch, *Wehrmacht Propaganda Division*, 1 Nov 41, in *Propaganda-Angelegenheiten aller Art. Okt-Dez 41.* OKW/634; "Urgent Questions of Partisan Warfare and Recruitment of Local Volunteers," in *OKH/Fde, H. Ost, Nr. 3220/42, 25.XI.42.* H 3/468.2; op cit rpt # 178, 9 Mar 42 (doc. 3241) prosecution document book in *N. M. T., op. cit.* (Case 9).

Leaders in the nationalist circles pointedly indicated to the occupation administrators that these questions had to be answered if the people were to be won over, and they desperately tried to demonstrate to them that the establishment of native provisional authorities would form the nerve centers of a strong central government and would lead directly to civil war and the collapse of all pro-Soviet sentiment in the western districts without further German efforts.³⁸

As was the case in all the errors of German policy, Hitler and his advisers were adamant in their refusal to veer one degree from their set path. Certainly their blindness was of their own making, for they were amply advised by those who had been on the scene. The operating armies saw the efficacy of setting up and supporting indigenous administrations, as in the case of the Kaminski group. Although their basic reason for so doing was to enlist native aid in the antipartisan fight, in the case of Kaminski they made no effort to limit his actions to the tactical field. The *Fourth Panzer Army* reported that the non-Soviet population in its rear openly sought a centrum or a symbol of a countergovernment under German leadership, opposed to the Soviets and made up of true Russians, to which they might look for help. As late as January 1942 such expressions as "we have prayed to God to bring us war so that you may come to us and that we, with your help, may drive off the Soviets. We will serve you loyally and honorably . . ." were continually heard in the cities, villages, and prisoner of war camps.³⁹ *Foreign Armies East* urged OKW to give the natives the opportunity to cooperate voluntarily in the governmental structure as the last remaining means of coping with the backsliding of the once collaborative population and thus stabilize the deteriorating partisan situation.⁴⁰ One of Rosenberg's deputies clearly saw how the policy of using the Ukraine as a counterweight against Great Russia had broken on the same rock-bound program of negation,⁴¹ and even Goebbels saw the crux of the question and reasoned that a series of puppet governments might be used as a camouflage for unpopular measures in order to hold proper confidence.⁴² But the Fuehrer and his deputies continued in their same line of thinking and only when it was far too late was the Vlassov movement half-heartedly launched.

³⁸ Ltr, Soviet defector [sic] to Ch, *Wehrmacht Propaganda Division*, 1 Nov 41, in *Propaganda-Angelegenheiten aller Art, Okt-Dez 41*. OKW/634; Shigunov Interrogation, pp. 175, 844-46. EAP 3-a-11/2.

³⁹ Rpt of interpreter, Lt Col Von Blankenhagen, in rpt, *Fourth Panzer Army to Army Group Center*, 7 Jan 42. EAP 99/480.

⁴⁰ "Urgent Questions of Partisan Warfare and Recruitment of Local Volunteers," in *OKH/Fde. H. Ost, Nr. 3220/42, 25.XI.42*. 3/468.2.

⁴¹ *Aufzeichnung gez. Braeutigam*, 25.X.42., in *I. M. T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 331-42.

⁴² *The Goebbels Diaries*, *op. cit.*, p. 225, entry for 22 May 42.

The Forced Labor Program and Its Effect on the Partisan Movement

Granting the detrimental effect of the abortively handled land problem, the question of churches, and the general shortage of food in the occupied territories, the German labor program as instituted in the late winter of 1941-42 probably contributed more to the ultimate frustration of the German war effort in the rear areas than any one other policy. Not only did it have the effect of turning the native population further away from the German cause—and this was particularly important in the case of the Ukraine whence the largest proportion of the workers were to be taken and where the people originally were least in sympathy with Soviet policies and institutions—but also of driving tens of thousands of hitherto peaceful citizens into active collaboration with the mushrooming partisan movement.

The 1941 campaign and the winter stalemate had so depleted German manpower reserves that new sources had to be tapped. This meant that thousands of workers would have to be drawn from war industry and agriculture, while at the same time the output of the armaments industry had not only to be maintained but sharply increased to make good the enormous materiel losses of the fall and winter. To replace the workers thus lost to industry, Hitler ordered the integration of 6,000,000 workers from the occupied countries into the German economy, of which 1,600,000 were to come from the east, 1,200,000 of these from the Ukraine.⁴³ Fritz Sauckel, Plenipotentiary for the Allocation of Labor under the Four-Year Plan, was placed in charge of the program, with the authority to issue instructions to all top authorities in the Reich and in the occupied territories.⁴⁴ All prisoners of war were to be integrated into the armament and nutrition industries, and additional workers were to be brought in from the occupied countries. As far as possible these civilian workers were to be recruited on a voluntary basis. If quotas could not be filled in this manner, a program of forced labor "in its severest form" would be instituted. In addition to this manpower for industry, 400,000 to 500,000 young girls were to be sent from the east for domestic duties in German homes.⁴⁵ The keynote for the treatment of these workers was struck in Sauckel's original program. They were to be "fed, sheltered, and treated in such a way as to exploit them to the highest possible extent at the lowest conceivable degree of expenditure."⁴⁶

⁴³ Quoted by Sauckel in speech to officials of the Generalkommissariat Kiev, 27 May 42, in *KTB Rueistungskommando Kiev*. Wi/ID 2.1297.

⁴⁴ See: Oral testimony of Rosenberg in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XI, p. 485.

⁴⁵ *Der Beauftragte fuer den Vierjahresplan, Des Arbeitseinsatzes*, 20.IV.42., in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 55-71; ltr. Sauckel to Reichskommissare, 31 Mar 42 in *ibid.*, XV, p. 168.

⁴⁶ *Das Programm des Arbeitseinsatzes*, 20.IV.42. in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 56-71.

Although volunteers were originally called for, almost immediately the local administrations were put under considerable pressure to fill minimum quotas as quickly as possible. This led to numerous abuses almost from the start. Both male and female workers were literally pulled from their beds or picked off the streets and assembled without being allowed time to pack clothing, blankets, or food. Families were indiscriminately split up. Many were marched long distances in severe weather and then crowded into cattle cars and locked in without adequate provision for feeding or sanitation. Many, drafted without regard for physical qualifications and unfit for labor services from the beginning, were returned from the Reich in deplorable condition. Such a practice had a very depressing effect on the morale of both the drafted workers and the population left behind.⁴⁷ This feeling was intensified by the spectacle of public beatings and the burning of whole villages for failure to comply with demands for filled labor quotas.⁴⁸ Families were held in ransom for conscripted workers who escaped to the forests. The entire population became widely stirred up and quickly came to regard the transports to the Reich as similar to exile by the Soviets to Siberia.⁴⁹ Fear soon gripped large areas of the Ukraine, and numbers of the natives left their villages for the forest country seeking the protection of the partisans, greatly increasing and strengthening the bands.⁵⁰ Soviet propaganda gave wide play to the whole program and the open German substantiation had an almost immediately visible effect of cutting volunteering to near zero and increasing the powers of resistance of both the Red Army and the irregulars.⁵¹

With this added strength the bands extended their control over larger and larger areas with the result, in the rear of *Army Group Center* at least, of cutting heavily into German attempts to fill their labor quotas there. Against a monthly quota of 30,000, in February 1942 the labor draft authorities there obtained 5,588 workers, the volume growing to a high of 25,000 in July, then dropping sharply to 6,034 in September, and further to 1,191 in January 1943.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Facharbeiter-sammellager Charkow an BfH. Heeresgebiet B., Abt. VII. betreff, Uebelstaende in der Behandlung ukrainischer Facharbeiter, 15.IX.42.*, in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXV, pp. 103-12. For a comprehensive picture of the abuses in the conscription and treatment of forced laborers from the occupied eastern territories, see: "Gegenwaertiger Stand der Ostarbeiter-Frage," *Zentralstelle fuer Angehoerige der Ostvoelker*, 30.IX.42., in *ibid.*, pp. 161-79.

⁴⁸ *Der Reichsminister fuer die besetzten Ostgebiete [Rosenberg] an den Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel, 21.XII.42.*, Nr. 02926/42., in *ibid.*, pp. 74-79.

⁴⁹ *Der Generalkommissar, Shitomir, den 30.VI.43., geheim, Muendlicher Lagebericht des Generalkommissar Leyser ueber den Generalbezirk Shitomir, gehalten in einer Dienstbesprechung vor dem Herrn Reichsminister Rosenberg in Winniza am 17.VI.43.*, in *ibid.*, pp. 319-23.

⁵⁰ *Der Reichsminister fuer die besetzten Ostgebiete an Sauckel, 21.XII.42.*, Nr. 02926/42., in *ibid.*, pp. 74-79.

⁵¹ *Gegenwaertiger Stand der Ostarbeiter-Frage, Zentralstelle fuer Angehoerige der Ostvoelker, 30.IX.42.*, in *ibid.*, pp. 161-79.

⁵² Anl. 52 z. KTB, *Wirtschaftsinspektion Mitte, 1.IV.-30.VI.43.* Wi/ID 2.53.

As the program continued with its devastating effect on popular morale, the occupation administration began to feel the over-all effect more and more acutely. The economic program was especially hard hit by the rise in partisan activity.⁵³ Rosenberg became concerned about the effect on his occupational set-up and remonstrated sharply with Sauckel. The large increase in the bands, he wrote, was largely due to the methods of procuring laborers, the result of which could only be a strengthening of the number and fighting spirit of the irregulars and a danger to all German activities in the eastern areas.⁵⁴

Despite the obviously harmful consequences of the draft, the quotas were raised even higher, 225,000 being demanded from the Ukraine alone between 5 October and 31 December, and 225,000 more by 1 May 1943.⁵⁵ To aid in the draft, the labor officials began calling up workers by age groups, both male and female. With this intensification rather than mitigation of the program, it became more and more obvious that the ruling group in Berlin was completely unaware of the rocks onto which this blind policy was driving the entire eastern war effort.

Treatment of Prisoners of War⁵⁶

The German treatment of Red Army prisoners of war also exercised a deep and lasting effect on the entire Soviet defense effort. It only indirectly touched the natives and influenced them to no such degree as the land reform question which for decades had been their end-all in life. But it did serve to substantiate Communist propaganda, their disappointment and disgust with "liberation" policies, and it heightened and drove them even further away from the "liberators." The effect on the will of the Red Army to resist and the growth of the partisan movement was much greater.

The German position regarding the treatment to be accorded prisoners of war was clear and explicit: "The regulations of the Hague Rules of Land Warfare . . . are not valid since the USSR is dissolved."⁵⁷ ". . . [therefore] the Geneva Convention for the Treatment of Prisoners

⁵³ For the effect on the economic program, see: "Report on the Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43, in *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Der Reichsminister fuer die besetzten Ostgebiete [Rosenberg] an den Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel, 21.XII.42., Nr. 02926/42, in Facharbeiteersammellager Charkow an Bfsh. Heeresgebiet B., Abt. VII, betreff, Uebelstaende in der Behandlung ukrainischer Facharbeiter, 15.IX.42., in I.M.T., op. cit., XXV, pp. 74-79.*

⁵⁵ *Der Generalbevollmaechtigte fuer den Arbeitseinsatz [Sauckel] an den Herrn Reichsminister fuer die besetzten Ostgebiete [Rosenberg], VA Nr. 5780.28/4265, 3.X.42., in ibid., pp. 72-73.*

⁵⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is taken from: *Rosenberg an den Herrn Chef des Oberkommandos des Wehrmacht, betr.: Kriegsgefangene 28.II.42., in I.M.T., op. cit., XXV, pp. 156-61.*

⁵⁷ *Erster Abschmitt: Die Organisation der Verwaltung in den besetzten Ostgebieten in I.M.T., op. cit., XXVI, pp. 592-609.*

of War is not binding in the relationship between Germany and the USSR. . . ." ⁵⁸

In carrying out this policy, the Germans ignored the fact that the Russians, in contrast to the peoples of western Europe who made no attempt to conceal their enmity, initially at least were happy over their liberation and defected and surrendered in large numbers only to find themselves more contemptibly treated than the people of the west. Numbers of them were allowed to starve or die from exposure or typhus. Many of those lagging on marches to the rear because of exhaustion were summarily shot before the eyes of the civilian population. In many cases the natives were forbidden to feed the prisoners. Various ethnic groups were screened out and executed by the *Einsatzgruppen*. Those prisoners who actually reached Germany were so underfed and poorly sheltered that by February 1942 only several hundred thousand of some 3,600,000 ⁵⁹ taken were alive or able to work. Despite the promises on millions of propaganda leaflets and surrender passes dropped behind Red Army lines encouraging Red soldiers to desert, no difference was made between those who deserted as a result of these promises and those who were forced to surrender. As a natural consequence the will to defect became paralyzed and was replaced by a deadly fear of German captivity.

The knowledge that surrender to the Wehrmacht meant almost certain death was not long in coming to the Russian rank and file, not only by rumor but also through the stories of refugees and escaped prisoners and by what the troops saw for themselves when they reoccupied certain areas in the central sector during the winter counteroffensive. This was all in confirmation of Soviet propaganda. Surrenders practically came to a halt when the troops became convinced that fighting to the death in a losing battle was preferable to capture by the Germans. Once eyewitness accounts and personal observations, reinforced by propaganda, had established the facts of enemy behavior, there was nothing left but to persevere to the end.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Anordnung fuer die Behandlung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener," Amt Ausl/Abw., Nr. 9731/41 geh. Chef Ausl., 15.IX.41., in I.M.T., op. cit., XXXVI, pp. 317-27.

⁵⁹ The source of this figure of Rosenberg's is unknown, and it seems abnormally high. Still the number of prisoners taken during the first months of the war was tremendous. Wehrmacht tabulations, which in round numbers appear more reasonably correct, place the figure closer to two or two and one-quarter millions.

⁶⁰ Study, Col Bushmenov on propaganda questions, incl. in rpt, Representative of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories with *Army Group Center Rear Area* to the Ministry in Berlin, undated (early in 1942). EAP 99/480; *The Soviet Army* ("Service Conditions and Morale in the Soviet Armed Forces: A Pilot Study," vol I, [Washington, 25 Aug 51]) (S), pp. 37, 42, 74. This is the aggregate view of a number of Red Army soldiers who were under arms during the first year of the war.

This growing fear of German captivity provided a large pool of trained leaders and personnel for the partisan movement during the formative period when they were most needed. Russian officers, commissars, and soldiers when irretrievably cut off from their own lines disappeared into the forests singly or in groups and joined or formed bands, giving the movement the professional touch which it sorely lacked at the time, and without which it might never have grown into an effective agency of the Soviet war effort.

The Failure of the German Propaganda Effort⁶¹

The efforts of the *Wehrmacht Propaganda Division* to counter this steady loss of native support was woefully inadequate, and ended in failure. It was a losing fight from the start. Closely restricted by short-sighted OKW policy as to what it could and could not tell the people, and opposed by well-executed Soviet counterpropaganda which cleverly exploited almost every aspect of German negativism and almost every German mistake, the *Propaganda Division* never had a real chance to accomplish its mission once the true German war aims were revealed.

The responsibility for the failure was at the OKW level, for the *Propaganda Division* was an operational agency only and worked entirely within the scope of directives handed it from above. Not only were these directives generally vague in content, but they placed sharp limitations on subject matter. So few were the permissible propaganda themes given it that in the last analysis the only positive point offered during the crucial first months of the campaign was that of liberation from Bolshevik oppression, while the population awaited the answers to many vital questions which were studiously avoided. This silence on important basic questions was widely exploited by the Soviets. Added to this was the strong psychological effect of the obvious German inability to either protect the pro-German segments of the population from the partisans or bring an end to the murdering of mayors and village elders and the indiscriminate looting by the irregulars.⁶²

Prisoners of war, defecting Red Army officers, and native intelligence agents all testified to the poorly conceived and executed German propaganda. All agreed that it was based too much on the German viewpoint and demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the Russian thought process. The Russian People, and probably a good portion of the Red Army, could have been won over, they believed, if definite promises had been made and a definite program outlined for the political

⁶¹ For a detailed treatment of German propaganda in the eastern campaign, see: Buchsbaum, *op. cit.* Unless otherwise stated, the factual material in this section is drawn from this manuscript.

⁶² *Bericht, H. Geb. Nord, Nr. 930/42, 4.VI.42., Anl. 150 z. KTB 1, H. Geb. Nord.* 21287/1.

and economic future of the USSR.⁶³ As early as January 1942 *Army Group Center* saw how much damage had been done and believed that the time was past when even a general revision of the whole propaganda campaign could attain any decisive success, especially in the face of the Russian winter successes. Still the situation might be partially retrieved, Von Kluge told OKH, if the general policies regarding the occupied territories and the propaganda approach were radically overhauled. Then the Red Army's will to fight might be considerably lessened and the deteriorating situation in the rear brought at least partially under control.⁶⁴

Equally as shortsighted was Berlin's ignorance of the true nature and power of the common Russian's love for his native land, a side of the Russian mentality to which the Soviets constantly appealed in an effort to stem the German tide. It was not based on any political consideration, but on love of the soil and on a pride in Russian nationality which had lasted throughout many wars and famines. It was never a product of defiant defensiveness, as is sometimes the case in other cultures, nor did it seem under ordinary circumstances to impose any special norms of behavior on individuals. It was simply a national pride, completely apolitical, and was effective in the fight against Hitler because Hitler was a foreign tyrant.⁶⁵

Following the initial German attack, the Soviet propagandists had quickly dropped the standard Communist slogans and placed heavy emphasis on patriotism, playing up "The Great Patriotic War" and the "fatherland." The masthead on *Pravda* was changed from "Workers of the World, Unite!" to "Death to the German Invader." The old czarist heroes were dragged out and the Russian victory over Napoleon in 1812 was given wide play.⁶⁶ In answer to this, the Germans could offer little more than their "liberation" theme, now worn somewhat thin.

To make a bad situation even more difficult, the civilian and paramilitary agencies which followed on the heels of the operating armies, the *Reichskommissariate*, the SS and police units, and the economic and labor organizations, all instituted separate propaganda programs with the result that the entire propaganda effort grew into a maze of independent, unrelated, and uncoordinated projects.⁶⁷

⁶³ Study, Col Bushmenov on propaganda questions, incl. in rpt, Representative of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories with *Army Group Center Rear Area* to the Ministry in Berlin, undated (early in 1942). EAP 99/480.

⁶⁴ Rpt, *Army Group Center* to OKH on propaganda, 31 Jan 42. EAP 99/480.

⁶⁵ Study, Col. Bushmenov on propaganda questions, incl. in rpt, Representative of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories with *Army Group Center Rear Area* to the Ministry in Berlin, undated (early in 1942). EAP 99/480; *The Soviet Army ("Service Conditions and Morale in the Soviet Armed Forces: A Pilot Study,"* vol. I, [Washington, 25 Aug 51]) (S), pp. 37, 42, 74.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ See: Buchsbaum, *op. cit.*

The Partisans and the German Economic Program

Although the bands based within several hundred miles of the front were probably given first priority in the reorganization because they were easily reached and controlled, those in the deeper rear were by no means neglected. As early as May well-led brigades had begun to appear far to the west in White Russia, and under directives from the Central Staff had started working intensively against the German occupation, especially the economic program.⁶⁸ The Germans had made no secret of their intention to milk the Soviet Union dry economically, and the action of the partisans in this sphere must have been part of a Moscow-directed campaign to counter this exploitation.

It was not a difficult campaign to wage. By the spring of 1942 German manpower in the rear was so short that the security commands were forced to use all available security units to guarantee the continued supply of the divisions at the front. Since there was never enough of these even for adequate rail line and highway security, large portions of the countryside went unprotected and rapidly fell under partisan control.⁶⁹

By the beginning of the summer the partisans had paralyzed many phases of the economy in the outlying areas of White Russia and threatened to cause the Germans to lose a large portion of the grain crop which was nearing harvest. Several of the economic inspectorates were completely in their hands. They concentrated on the isolated state and collective farms and dairies and destroyed dozens of them with all their cattle and agricultural stocks. Much the same conditions existed in northwest Russia and some parts of the Baltic States.⁷⁰

As the summer progressed the situation deteriorated still further. Inability of the security commands to control much of the rear beyond the corridors along the major communication axes and the larger population centers made the work of the economic inspectors almost impossible. By July, 50 percent of the *rayons* in White Russia were under partisan domination, complete losses not only economically but as sources of labor.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Monatsbericht, Wi-Stab Ost, Juni 42, KTB, Wi-Stab Ost, 1.V.-30.IX.42.*, Wi/ID 2.346; "Report on the Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53.

⁶⁹ *Monatsberichte, Mai, Juni, Juli 42, KTB, Wi-Stab Ost. 1.V.-30.IX.42.* Wi/ID 2.346.

⁷⁰ Ltr, *Generalkommissar for White Ruthenia to Reichskommissar Ostland*, 18 Sep 42. EAP 99/96, Rosenberg Collection; *Monatsbericht, Wi-Stab Ost, Mai 42, KTB, Wi-Stab Ost, 1.V.-30.IX.42.* Wi/ID 2.346.

⁷¹ *Monatsbericht, Wi-Stab Ost. Juni 42; Monatsbericht, Wi-Stab Ost, Mai 42, KTB, Wi-Stab Ost, 1.V.-30.IX.42.* Wi/ID 2.346.

During the agricultural year 1941-1942—the agricultural year ran from June through the following May—losses of quotas set for meat, grain, and lard were heavy due to partisan action:

Product	White Russia		Baltic States and Northwest Russia	
	Percentage	Tons	Percentage	Tons
Meat.....	65	16,000	40	1,200
Grain.....	60	55,000	40	20,000
Lard.....	55	1,700	16	*340

*Para. 11 of rpt, "Partisan Effect" in *Geschichte des Wirtschaftstabes Ost*. This report is not further identifiable at source. It was apparently compiled in late 1944 or 1945 from a number of reports over the period 1941-45. This was the personal copy of a Dr. Barth. Wi/ID 2.1345.

Even considering the possibility that the Germans had set the quotas so high as to be impossible to achieve without any interference, partisan or other, and the probability that all losses were not caused by the bands, although so reported to Berlin, the figures are significant in that they reveal the extent of the development of the partisan movement in the central sector and the intent of the Soviets to strike at all aspects of the German war effort. In striking at the state and collective farms and at the dairies, the partisans not only denied a source of food to the Germans and at the same time built up ration stocks for themselves, but they created a food shortage among the civilian population which the Germans were unable to solve.

Even harder hit than food production at this early date was the timber industry. Lumbering was a perfect target for the bands because it was very difficult to protect and because an adequate supply of rough-finished lumber was essential to the armies for the construction and maintenance of bridges over the many Russian rivers and logs were needed for corduroy roads through the extensive swamps. The forests were the natural haunts of the bands, and from such cover they easily interrupted cutting and milling operations. In August of 1941 only some 10 percent of the forests were partisan-infested. By April 1942 this figure had risen to 40 percent, by October to 75 percent.⁷² Numbers of forestry officials, both Russian and German, were murdered on the job, and the natives became so terrified of the partisans that they had to be forced to work. As a result, often only narrow strips along the rail lines that were pro-

⁷² "Effects of Partisan Activity on Forestry," *Anl. 4 z. Anl. 52 z. KTB, Wirtschaftsinspektion Mitte, 1.IV.-30.VI.43*; "Report on the Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53.

tected by the security commands and tracts in close proximity to military strong points could be cut. Sawmills were raided regularly and many were destroyed, while log floating was brought almost to a standstill.⁷³ By hiring additional experts and importing sawmill machinery, the lumber output was stepped up despite the partisans. Still, because of their pressure, only 58 percent of the potential output of all the mills in operation could be exploited.⁷⁴

The peat industry was also hard hit. The significance of maintaining an adequate supply of peat lay in its connection with electric power and its importance as the primary source of domestic heat for the population. Behind *Army Group Center*, due to the absence of rapids in the rivers, there were no hydroelectric plants, nor was there any adequate source of coal. Peat was the only fuel available in large quantities for the generation of electricity and any interruption in its production curtailed the power needed for military installations and did much to lower popular morale in the urban areas in much the same way as the food shortage. During 1941 sufficiently large stocks were left over from the previous year to satisfy demands. In 1942, however, some 30,000 workers cut only half that needed, due in large part to the physical and mental threat posed by the partisans.⁷⁵ Actual production totaled only 50 percent of a potential of some 850,000 tons.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Monatsberichte, 1.X.42.-28.II.43, Wi-Stab Ost.* Wi/ID 2.336.

⁷⁴ "Report of the Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53.

⁷⁵ *Monatsberichte, Wi-Stab Ost, Juni-Okt 42.* Wi/ID 2.346; "Report on the Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53.

⁷⁶ *Anl. 5, to "Report on the Effects of the Partisan Situation,"* 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53.

CHAPTER 7

THE GERMANS CHANGE THEIR TACTICS

During the winter and spring months there had been no question in the minds of the Army of the most effective way to deal with the partisan groups and eliminate them permanently. The proper tactic, as they saw it, was an active offense by sufficient first-line troops to carry the fight to them in their own strongholds, destroy their camps and bases, and never relax the pressure long enough to allow them to reconstitute. And they had to be denied the passive as well as the active support of the people. A strictly passive defense with garrisons, outposts, and patrols was not the answer, they knew, for such would leave the initiative with the insurgents and play directly into their hands.¹

In the spring OKH had made a sound move toward pulling the natives away from the partisans when it modified the then standard practice of using reprisals and collective punitive measures to prevent the people from aiding or joining the bands. Then in August, in the more active sphere, it went a long way toward placing all aspects of the antipartisan campaign on a firmer and more centralized military basis when it announced that thereafter all actions against the insurgents would be conducted like normal combat operations at the front, with the operations section of OKH determining the general policy and handling all coordination, and similar questions at lower echelon levels being handled by the operations section of the headquarters concerned.²

The New OKW Antipartisan Policy

During the days just prior to the launching of the attack toward the Caucasus in June of 1942, Hitler himself, for the first time in months, had begun to show a renewed interest in the Soviet partisans. Both in Russia and in the Balkans irregular resistance had been increasing, and with the opening of the summer campaign drawing near he iterated his "get tough" prescription as the surest means of ridding the rear areas of all insurgent threats and securing communications.³

¹ "Report on Effects of the Partisan Situation," 30 Jun 43. Wi/ID 2.53; entry for 4 Nov 42 in *KTB* 2. Teil 2, *Pz AOK* 2. 28499/5; *Bandenlage*, 16.VIII.42.-28.II.43., *Ant. 77 z. KTB, Ia, Pz AOK* 2. 37075/90.

² See: *H. Gr. Mitte, Ia, Partisanenbekämpfung*, 10.VIII.42., *Ant. z. KTB, Ia, Pz AOK* 2. 37075/91.

³ *KTB, Ob. d. Wehrmacht*, 1.IV.-30.VI.42. X-126. OCMH, Foreign Studies Br.

Sometime between June and the first part of August, however, his advisers must have acquainted him with the facts relating to the failure of the unrestricted punitive measures to curb partisan activities and the reaction the same policy was having on the native population. Furthermore they must have persuaded him that the basic changes ordered by the Army were the sounder course, for he drastically changed his tune. On 18 August 1942, OKW issued a new directive on antipartisan warfare which as it was carried out represented an almost complete reversal of views held earlier as to the strategy to be used to suppress irregular activity and indicated a much clearer understanding on the part of Berlin than heretofore as to just what the movement was and how best to combat it and undermine its bases.⁴ This was the first comprehensive order concerning antipartisan strategy issued by the Wehrmacht high command since the repressive directives of 23 July and 16 September 1941.⁵

The war against the bands was to be considered as much a part of general operations as the moves of the front line armies against the Red Army, the directive stated. All means of politics, economics, and propaganda were to be brought to bear. The destruction of the bands required vigorous, offensive action by all available military, SS and police units, which could be released for the purpose, and the "harshest measures" against both active and passive adherents to the movement. The natives' confidence in German leadership was to be restored and their cooperation solicited by fair and above-board treatment and by the assurance of sufficient food.

Himmler was designated the central authority for the collection and evaluation of all information relating to the bands and in addition was given sole responsibility for all antipartisan operations in the *Reichskommissariate*, with the *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber* subordinated to him. In the combat zone and the army group rear areas, however, the Army retained control, with all police forces in the area subordinated to it.

The forces available for antipartisan operations were to be augmented in every possible way. The police and SS units in the rear areas were to be used in active rather than passive roles. They were to be reinforced by the transfer of other organizations subordinate to Himmler to the areas endangered by the partisans. Security units then assigned to the armies and committed in the front lines, but which were indispensable for antipartisan operations, were to be relieved by the Army as

⁴ Dir No. 46, "General Directions for the Intensified Fight Against Banditry in the East," *OKW/WFSt, Op. Nr. 2821/42 g. Kdos.*, 18.VIII.42. in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*

⁵ *OKW/WFSt/Abt. L (I Op.), Nr. 442254/41 g.K. Chefs.* in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*; *OKW/WFSt/Abt. L (IV/Qu), Nr. 2060/41 g. Kdos.*, 16.IX.41. in *I.M.T.*, *op. cit.*, XXXIV, pp. 501-04.

soon as possible. Army training and school units and Luftwaffe ground organizations were to be shifted to areas under partisan pressure, either in the *Reichskommissariate* or the army group rear areas. As a further reinforcement the prohibition against the formation and use of native security units by the Army (which had frequently been ignored) was lifted. However, it was specifically forbidden to commit these units in the front lines. There were to be "no Germans left in the bandit-infested regions who [were] not engaged either actively or passively in the anti-partisan campaign." In addition, OKW ordered that the term "partisan" (*Partisanen*), which had been found to mean "fighter for freedom" in Russian terminology, no longer be used, and the term "bandit" (*Banditen*) substituted in referring to the insurgents.⁶

OKH passed these provisions along to the Army almost verbatim and without elaboration, since the more pertinent ones were already in effect in the operations zone.⁷ Himmler was much more specific and went into considerable detail,⁸ borrowing much from the experience of the security commands. He emphasized the importance of the population's regaining a feeling of security and receiving fair treatment from the occupation administration. Punitive measures, acts of violence, and the like could be justified only in cases where the subjective collaboration of the population with the partisans was clearly established, his directive stated. Where the people supported the bands only under pressure, the bands alone were to be punished. Experience had shown that the people often fled to the forests in fear of reprisals and there became prey to the bands who forcibly recruited the men into the irregular ranks. When collective punitive measures had to be exacted, it was highly important that the reasons for so doing be carefully explained to the people. This latter was considered especially pertinent. Further, the people were to be made to realize that the partisans, following instructions from Moscow, often deliberately attempted to place them, even though innocent, in a position where the Germans would take reprisals—as firing on German troops from a village and then escaping, thus leaving the inhabitants to face the penalties which the Germans might lawfully impose—in order to turn them away from the invaders and into the ranks of the irregulars.

Continuing, Himmler outlined his general tactical concepts relating to antipartisan warfare which varied little from those drawn up by the security units of the army group rear areas. To attempt to meet the partisan's clever, swift and often well-disguised activity with traditional

⁶ See: Entry for 26 Aug 42 in *KTB, H. Gr. Nord.* 75128/13.

⁷ *Gen.St.d.H.-Op Abt. (I) Nr. 10990/42 g. Kdos., OKH, 23.8.42.* NOKW-1635.

⁸ *Bandenbekämpfung, Prs. St. RFSS, Sep 42.* A photostatic copy of this pamphlet is located in CRS, TAG, and is not further identifiable. The translation is that of the Army Security Agency and is confidential.

forms of defense was to court disaster. Passive defense and purely defensive measures only played into the hands of the bands and gave them control of the situation. The objective should always be to seize the initiative and throw the enemy on the defensive, to separate him from the population, to deprive him of supplies from the countryside, to limit his freedom of action, to encircle him, break him up, and pursue him until he has been eliminated. The object was to destroy the bands, not scatter or drive them away.

The first prerequisite for success was accurate information, and highest priority was to be given to the establishment of an adequate intelligence net. All sources of information were to be carefully and fully exploited. A general information net composed of local inhabitants and village officials was to be set up and exploited, a confidential agent service established, and all prisoners carefully interrogated. After the intelligence network was established definite preventive measures were to be taken to limit the activity of the bands.

All residents were to be listed and nonresidents registered and carefully controlled; a dependable communication system was to be established; a number of strong support points were to be set up in the vicinity of important installations both as defense against partisan raids and to bolster the morale of the population; all protective cover which might be utilized by the partisans as defensive strong points or as a mask for an attack was to be eliminated.

Following the establishment of an information net and a system of passive defense, the bands were to be attacked. Antipartisan action was always to be taken only on the basis of sound intelligence, and was to be swift, surprising, enveloping, and mobile. The main thrust whenever possible was to be made against the camp of the partisan leaders, for once the bands were deprived of their commanders, they generally were easily broken up. This type of action presupposed trained shock troops equipped with all necessary weapons.

The organization of "counter" or "dummy" bands was recommended. They were to be made up of units from the security police and the security service and of the *Ordnungspolizei*, with a number of reliable natives, and committed in partisan-dominated areas in the manner of a genuine partisan unit. In this manner they would be able to keep a constant check on the sentiments of the population, make contact with irregular units, and often quietly eliminate partisan leaders.*

Hitler's renewed interest in the security of the rear areas and the growing anti-German sentiments of the natives did not stop with his directive of 18 August. On 26 August, OKW issued a supplementary

* For results of this, see: *OKH/Gen.St.d.H., FdeH/Ost, Nr. 2460/43 geh., 3.V.43.*, in *Kdr. Gen. d. Sich. Tr. Sued Ia, Anl. 37, 30.IV.—1.VIII.43., Abw. Nachr. OKH. Befh. H. Geb. Sued. 39502/41.*

order for distribution to all lower echelons stating that Hitler had directed a comprehensive procedural guide for antipartisan warfare be drawn up on the basis of after-action reports and recommendations of units which had been in actual contact with the bands. All organizations assigned to rear area security duties were ordered to forward detailed reports on their practical experience with the irregulars along with any suggestions such experience might indicate. In these reports, especial emphasis was to be placed on reconnaissance and intelligence, tactics, propaganda directed at both the partisans and the civil populace, treatment of captured irregulars and of the people at large, area control, supervision and security of communication lines, and the commitment of indigenous security formations.¹⁰

Reports submitted to OKW generally bore out the soundness of the contents of the 18 August directive.¹¹ On the basis of these experiences and recommendations, OKW drew up and issued on 11 November 1942 a "Directive for Anti-Partisan Warfare in the East"¹² which elaborated on the general policy relative to the treatment of the civilian population previously established and gave official sanction to the preferential treatment for certain classes of partisan prisoners that several of the line armies and security commands had been granting for some time.¹³

In general, policy relating to captured partisans and to civilians, including women, found to have actively participated in combat remained unchanged: such persons were to be shot or hanged. Likewise, anyone who harbored, fed, concealed, or otherwise aided partisans was to be executed. Partisan deserters, "depending on circumstances," were to be treated as prisoners of war. Captured partisans who could prove that they had been pressed into the movement and who were able to work were to be sent to punitive work details and be considered for labor service in Germany. Collective measures were to be taken against communities in which the partisans received aid of any kind. These measures, however, were to be in relation to the graveness of the offense and might consist of anything from an increase of quotas of requisitioned materials to the destruction of an entire village. Such reprisals were to be exacted only where the inhabitants voluntarily aided the irregulars. The population was not to be placed in a position where it was threatened

¹⁰ *Bandenbekämpfung (O.Qu.)*, OKW/WFSt, Nr. 2391/42, 26.VIII.42., in *Anl. Band 6-11, KTB 6, Ia, AOK 2, 1.VII.42.-31.V.43.* 37418/109.

¹¹ See: *AOK 16, Ia, Nr. 4462/42, 11.IX.42.*, *Anl. 49 z. KTB 5, W/IV, AOK 16, 26.VI.-30.XI.42.* 36588/68.

¹² *Kampfanweisung fuer die Bandenbekämpfung im Osten, 11.XI.42.*, *Anlage 2 to H. Dv. Ia., in Anlage f to KTB, Ia, Kdr, Gen. der Sicherungstruppen, Heeresgebiet Sued, 1943.* 39502/45.

¹³ On this latter, see: app. 2 to ltr, *Second Panzer Army to Army Group Center*, 2 Nov 42, in *KTB, Pz AOK 2.* 28499/67; *Bericht, AOK 16, Nr. 4462/42, 11.IX.42.*, *Anl. 49 z. KTB 5, AOK 16.* 36588/68; *Anl. 67 z. KTB 221 Sich. Div., 12.IX.42.* 29380/9.

with destruction by both sides. In every case where collective measures were taken, it was of the utmost importance that the people be made to understand the reasons. Through propaganda media the partisans were to be informed that as deserters they would be well treated, as prisoners they would be executed. "A different approach [than heretofore used]," the directive concluded "must be used toward the population under partisan oppression."¹⁴

Too Little Too Late

There is much to be said for this change of policy. Militarily it was sound, based as it was on the sum total of German experience against the bands. But it was impracticable in that it presupposed manpower which the Germans simply did not have. Put into practice in the fall of 1941 when the security divisions were full strength rather than mere skeletons, it might have nipped the movement in the bud. In the fall of 1942 there was little chance for it to work.

The bands were to be hit and hit again with strong offensive strikes. Yet there was not enough manpower available to give adequate static coverage to the lines of communication. Security regiments which had been drawn into the front lines during the winter crisis were not returned to the rear area commands,¹⁵ while line units which had helped mop up the rear in the late spring reverted to their parent commands at the conclusion of their missions.¹⁶ The transfer of six training divisions from the *Wehrkreise* to the *Reichskommissariate*, where they were to assume some static guard duties while completing their basic training, afforded some relief and released a few security units for more active employment in the operations zone.¹⁷ These latter small gains to the security commands, however, were more than offset by the loss of training time by the divisions to the ultimate detriment of the armies at the front. All of them were so stripped of detachments up to regimental size for full-time antipartisan work that their training was badly disrupted and in several cases brought to a virtual standstill.¹⁸

Then again, when occasionally a force of sufficient numerical strength for a limited offensive sweep against the bands could be assembled by

¹⁴ *Kampfanweisung fuer die Bandenbekämpfung im Osten, 11.XI.42., Anlage 2* to *H. Dv. Ia*, in *Anlage f* to *KTB, Ia, Kdr, Gen. der Sicherungstruppen, Heeresgebiet Sued, 1943.* 39502/45.

¹⁵ *KTB, H. Gr. Nord, 31.VIII.42.* 75138/13.

¹⁶ *KTB, H. Gr. Nord, 12.IX.42.* 75128/14; *Lage Ost, 20.IX.42.*

¹⁷ MS # C-065a, *op. cit.*, p. 37; *KTB, H. Gr. Nord, 17.IX.42., 18.IX.42.* 75128/14; *OKW/WFSt., Op. Nr. 2821/42 g. Kdos., F. H. Qu., 18.VIII.42.*, in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*; *Gen. Kdo. LXII. Res. K., Ia, Tgb. Heimat-Russland, 9.IX.42.-31.III.43.* 29483; *Gen. Kdo. LXI Res. Korps, Tgb., Ia, 14.IX.42.-31.III.43.* 30500/1.

¹⁸ *Gen. Kdo. LXI Res. Korps, Tgb., Ia, 14.IX.42.-31.III.43.* 30500/1.

literally scraping the bottom of the manpower barrel, almost invariably it comprised such a miscellany of units that effective tactical coordination proved nearly impossible, and as a consequence objectives were rarely attained. Static defense forces were often of similar makeup.¹⁹

Despite these difficulties, superior German organization and planning in the main served to offset any advantage the partisans might have gained at the time. The bands were growing in strength and experience, but they were still building, spreading their influence, and reorganizing, and they still lacked the aggressiveness to be more than a threat for months to come. Yet their potential as an effective military force was good and they would have to be hit hard again and again if they were to be prevented from attaining it.

The changes of policy designed to undermine the movement by weaning away its external support by the people and weakening it from within by granting preferential treatment to partisan deserters were likewise "too little too late." While they were a distinct improvement, the time had since passed when the mass of the people could be brought over into the German camp. Then also, these changes applied only to agencies actively engaged in the antipartisan fight. The civilian administrators of the *Reichskommissariate*, among them those who filled Sauckel's labor quotas and the officials of the economic administration, remained outside their application and served to offset any gains made by other agencies in this sphere.

¹⁹ See: *Bericht, Korueck 584, 27.VII.42., Anl. 159 z. KTB 3, Korueck 584.* 38998/2; *KTB 2, Teil 5, Pz AOK 2, 4.X.42.* 28499/5.

THE PERIOD OF SOVIET OFFENSIVES, 1943-1944

WITH FRONT INDICATED AS OF

- 5 July 1943
- - - 1 October 1943
- 1 March 1944
- - - 22 June 1944
- +— Railways
- +— German
- +— Russian

100 50 0 100
MILES

ORDER OF BATTLE

RUSSIAN

Leningrad Front - Govorov
 Volkov Front - Meretskov
 Kalinin Front - Yeremenko
 West Front - Sokolovski
 Bryansk Front - Popov
 Center Front - Rokossovski
 Voronezh Front - Votutin
 Steppes Front - Konev
 Southwest Front - Malinovski
 South Front - Tolbukhin
 North Caucasus Front - Petrov

GERMAN

Army Group North - Von Kuechler
 Army Group Center - Von Kluge
 Army Group South - Von Manstein
 Army Group A - Von Kleist

PART THREE

1943-1944: THE PERIOD OF SOVIET OFFENSIVES

CHAPTER 8

GERMAN-RUSSIAN OPERATIONS FOLLOWING THE FALL OF STALINGRAD

The Soviet Offensive, Early 1943

Following the fall of Stalingrad and Von Kleist's withdrawal from the Caucasus in January and February of 1943, the Germans attempted to set up their defenses along the line of the Donets River. In a reorganization of the southern command, the *Second Army* was returned to the control of *Army Group Center* while *Army Group South* was reconstituted to consolidate the units of *Army Group B* and *Army Group Don* under Von Manstein's command. Von Kleist remained in the Crimea and the foothold across the Kerch Straits with his *Army Group A*. Von Manstein's major units were the *First* and *Fourth Panzer Armies* and two *Armeabteilungen*,¹ comprising a total of 32 divisions of which 12 were armored. Von Kleist's command consisted of the *Seventeenth Army* and a miscellany of satellite organizations. Many of these latter were no longer effective fighting units.

The Red Army was in no wise content with its victories on the Volga and in the southeast. While the Germans were striving to extricate their units from Stalingrad and the Caucasus, the Soviet offensive had spread further. On 15 January troops of Gen. F. I. Golikov's Voronezh Front² attacked across the Don in the northern part of the sector and quickly routed the Italians at Rossosh and Valuiki. On 23 January they captured Voronezh. They continued the assault and by the end of the month opened the road to Kursk whence the German summer offensive had started.

Meanwhile, in the Don basin, units of Gen. N. F. Vatutin's Southwest Front had closed up along the lower Oskol River and by 2 February held a bridgehead over the Donets below Voroshilovgrad. Several days previously Gen. A. I. Yeremenko had made a crossing at the confluence of

¹A provisional army the size of an overstrength corps, commanded by a corps commander with a corps staff.

²A Red Army "front" was roughly equivalent to a German army, a Russian army to a German corps.

the Don and the Donets. These two springboards placed the Russians in an excellent position to continue their assault after Von Kleist's escape through Rostov. Keeping the offensive rolling, they continued the attack both north and southeast of Kharkov. On 5 February Vatutin crossed the Donets in heavy force in the Izyum area, and before the middle of the month cut the main rail lines running into the Donets bend area and forced Von Manstein to withdraw westward to the old Mius River positions. Farther to the north Golikov captured Kursk on 7 February and then swung to the south and took Belgorod two days later. Continuing, he pushed further south toward the rear of Kharkov while Vatutin attacked the city from the east and south. The city fell on 16 February, breaking the entire German position on the upper Donets. The situation of the Wehrmacht appeared precarious with the Russians threatening to go clear to the Dnepr and trap all German forces east of the river.

At this point, however, the Russian attack slowed almost to a stop. The Soviets' communications lines were badly overstretched and their front in the south had almost doubled in length. This combined with a sudden unseasonal thaw served to give the Germans a breathing spell and an opportunity to consolidate their defensive positions and reorganize. Von Manstein quickly took advantage of his opportunity. Regrouping his armor and aided by reinforcements from other sectors and theaters he struck back at the dangerous salient which had been driven around Kharkov. Starting on 21 February, his *First* and *Fourth Panzer Armies* counterattacked north and south of the city and by 15 March cleared the line of the Donets as far up as Belgorod. In the meantime, however, Golikov had deepened the bulge he had driven around Kursk. By the end of March operations had bogged down in the spring thaw generally along the line the Germans held in the spring of 1942.

In the northern and central sectors operations were on a more limited and less spectacular scale. On the Leningrad front the Soviets in the middle of January launched a limited offensive which in five days cut through a 10-mile wide corridor south of Lake Ladoga. This reopened land communication with Leningrad which had been cut off for over 500 days. During the same period, units of Gen. V. D. Sokolovski's Kalinin Front, which for months had slowly been pushing westward between *Army Groups North* and *Center*, finally occupied Velikiye-Luki, but failed in an attempt to take the Nevel hedgehog and cut the north-south Dno-Nevel rail line. The only other change of note in the north was a voluntary German withdrawal from the exposed Demyansk salient below Lake Ilmen. In the central sector the Germans shortened and straightened their front by withdrawing the *Ninth Army* from the Rzhev salient. This line remained unchanged until July.

The 1942 operating year had started as the greatest in German military history. The summer offensive had driven rapidly to the Volga

and deep into the Caucasus, but the end of the campaigning season found the Wehrmacht generally back where it had started in June. In addition, the Germans had been forced out of the Rzhev-Vyazma salient which threatened Moscow, and the Red Army had been able to drive and hold a deep position in the Kursk area which threatened to sever communications between the southern and central groups of armies. These reverses, resulting as they did in huge and irreplaceable losses in men and materiel, combined with the defeat in Tunisia, brought an end to the period of sustained German offensives.

The Red Army in 1943

The Soviet Army which faced the Germans in the summer of 1943 had little in common with the hordes who had fled in confusion before the Wehrmacht in the first months of the war. Reorganized throughout, it had a paper strength of some 500 divisions, a good number of which were well equipped with modern weapons. The high command had carefully studied the reverses of 1941 and 1942 and assimilated the lessons, as the careful preparations and well-directed execution of the November counterblow at Stalingrad demonstrated. New combat regulations had been drawn up, military discipline had been tightened; insignia of rank had reappeared on Red Army uniforms; and the power of the political commissars had been curtailed, the military becoming wholly responsible for operations. Ample supplies of new weapons were coming off the production lines of plants relocated far to the east in the Ural Mountains, and lend-lease from the United States and Britain was beginning to make itself felt. Even more important was the improvement of morale among the common soldiers. The collapse of the myth of Wehrmacht invincibility combined with the revival of the past glories of Russian arms and a hate of the enemy engendered by the inept German occupation policy and treatment of prisoners of war went far toward making a new fighting man of the Red soldier.

German Strategy in 1943

Compared with former years, Hitler's strategic plan for the summer campaign of 1943 was anything but optimistic and, for once, indicated an awareness of the adverse state of German affairs in the east. His former buoyant aggressiveness was completely lacking and for the first time he talked in terms of a general defensive. He expected the Red Army to continue its heavy attacks at the close of the muddy season and reasoned that if he were to dictate Soviet actions anywhere he had to take the initiative at several points along the front before the Russians struck. The point of greatest danger, according to his reasoning, and the spot at which the Wehrmacht should strike before the Red Army resumed its offensive was the deep salient in the Kursk area which lay like a sore

between *Army Groups Center* and *South*. The two army groups were to ready strong armored forces to the north and south of the salient so that they could attack before the enemy mounted his expected offensive.³ Zeitzler, who had proposed the operation, believed that if successful it would destroy a large number of Red Army divisions, thus decisively weakening the offensive strength of the Soviets, and leave the Germans in a more favorable position for continuing the war in the east.⁴ Elsewhere along the eastern front the Army was to remain on the defensive in heavily fortified positions.⁵ The controversy among the ranking Army leaders over this operation was in reality a dispute over the future conduct of the entire war effort in the east. Many of the generals saw that they could not win and thought that their only prospect of avoiding defeat in Russia was to shorten the line and wear down the Red Army's offensive power by a strategic, or elastic, defense. They contended that the muddy season stalemate following on Von Manstein's successful counterblow in the Kharkov sector offered them an opportunity to consolidate and rebuild their strength to the point where they might hold the Soviets at bay with strong tank forces held in the rear as mobile reserves for rapid movement to any threatened point. Such an operation as Zeitzler envisioned, they argued, was sure to cause severe tank losses and make impossible such an elastic defense. Zeitzler, supported by Von Kluge, insisted that through this operation, in which he proposed to use the latest model tanks, he could regain the initiative. Generaloberst Walter Model, commanding the *Ninth Army*, raised violent objections. Arguing on the basis of extensive aerial reconnaissance, he claimed that the Soviets, in expectation of just such an attack at the most obvious spot in the line, had prepared very strong antitank defenses many miles in depth in the localities of possible breakthroughs and had withdrawn the mass of their mobile units far to the rear. He proposed that a fresh tactical approach be found or else that the whole idea be dropped. Guderian, then Inspector of Panzer Troops, also opposed the operation, calling it foolish from a strategical point of view. He pointed out that the eastern front had just been reorganized and reequipped to the point where a successful strategic defensive fight might be made, but that the tank losses which he felt certain would result from the attack could not be replaced in 1943 and would make such a defense impossible. He argued further that such losses would also greatly hinder defensive preparations for the invasion which was sure to come in the west.⁶

³ Ops Order 5, *OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Op.Abt. (vorg.St.)*, Nr. 430163/43 g. *Kdos. Chefs.*, 13.III.43, in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*

⁴ Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, (New York, 1952), p. 306.

⁵ Ops Order 5, *OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Op. Abt. (vorg.St.)*, Nr. 430163/43 g. *Kdos. Chefs.*, 13.III.43 in "Fuehrer Directives," *op. cit.*

⁶ Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-13; Guderian, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-07.

These controversies indicated more clearly than at any other time the differences in thinking between Hitler and his immediate advisers on the one hand and the majority of the Army commanders on the other. The latter argued in favor of shortening the line in keeping with German manpower limitations and conserving armored strength for a mobile defense, while Hitler steadfastly clung to the rigid policy of holding the line as far from the Reich as possible.⁷

Despite the arguments of his ranking Army leaders, Hitler adopted Zeitzler's views and ordered that the attack, code-named Operation *ZITADELLE*, be scheduled for early execution.

The Battle for Kursk and Kharkov

The Russian forces facing the Germans along the eastern front as the operating season opened in July consisted of some 45 armies organized into 12 fronts.⁸ To oppose these the Wehrmacht had 161 divisions organized into 11 armies and 4 army groups. The disparity of strength, however, was far wider than the number of units would indicate on paper. Russian strength had been building up steadily while the Germans remained unable to replace their extremely heavy losses. Battle casualties alone since the start of the campaign totaled more than 2,500,000 men, and the German nation simply had not the manpower to replace them.⁹

Operation *ZITADELLE* began on 5 July. The plan called for the same tactics the Germans had used many times before and with which the Russians were more than familiar. Model was to send his *Ninth Army*—seven panzer, two panzergrenadier,¹⁰ and nine infantry divisions—against the northern face of the salient, while Von Manstein attacked from the south in the vicinity of Belgorod with ten panzer, one panzergrenadier, and seven infantry divisions. Additional elements of the *Ninth Army* were to drive to the southeast to protect Model's left flank, while *Armeekommando Kempf* covered the right of Von Manstein's effort. No particular care was taken to conceal the directions of the main efforts, and as a result the Russians knew what to expect and where.

From the first hours of the attack it was clearly evident that Model and Guderian had been correct and that the Russians were ready and

⁷ United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Keitel interrogation report, 27 Jun 45. Shuster Collection. Foreign Studies Br, OCMH.

⁸ See: *Lage Ost*, 5.VII.43.

⁹ *Gefechtsausfaelle Sowjetfeldzug, vom 22.VI.41. bis 10.VII.43., Der Heeresarzt b. Obdh/GenQu, Nr. I/4451/43 g. Kdos., OKH, den 14.VII.43.* H 17/189. Losses to 10 Jul 43 totaled 2,614,039 enlisted men and 75,084 officers killed, wounded, and missing. This figure does not include medical and accident casualties or satellite casualties. Nor does it include the number of convalescents returned to duty.

¹⁰ A *Panzergrenadier* division was made up of armored infantry and motorized infantry supported by several units of assault guns.

waiting. The Soviet defenses proved even more formidable than air reconnaissance had predicted. The defense zone ran to a depth of more than 60 miles partitioned into a series of prepared positions, the whole liberally sowed with mines.

The *Ninth Army* made little headway from the start. By 8 July its attack had spent itself after a maximum penetration of but six miles. Tank losses were very high. In the south Von Manstein made somewhat greater progress, but by 16 July he had been forced over to the defensive after losing the majority of his panzers. By 23 July both attacking forces had been pushed back almost to their jump-off positions.

Thus the offensive ended as Guderian had predicted with the eastern army virtually stripped of the armor sorely needed for a balanced defense and with no mobile reserves and no replacements. More serious was the fact that the losses left the entire eastern front highly vulnerable to Russian massed armored attacks.

As the German attack was brought to a halt, the Soviets made their move. On 12 July, following up their attacks on the shoulders of the German pincer, they launched a general offensive on both sides of the salient. Sokolovski and Gen. M. M. Popov, as they drove back Model's attack group, struck simultaneously at Orel from the north and east, while Vatutin and Gen. I. S. Konev hit hard into Von Manstein's divisions further south. The pressure was irresistible and the Germans, with their armor all but dissipated, were forced back rapidly. Orel, for two years the central anchor of the whole German line in the east, fell to Popov on 4 August, while Vatutin entered Belgorod the same day, breaking the German hold on the northern face of the salient about Kharkov. The Soviets never relaxed their pressure, but opened an assault on Kharkov itself. Hitler threw what tank strength he had left into this battle for the city, but was able to delay the inevitable only a few days. Despite fanatical resistance, the city fell on 23 August and the last German stronghold in the southcentral sector east of the Dnepr was gone.

The Germans faced literal disaster. Their losses in Operation *ZITADELLE* and in the defensive battles for Orel and Kharkov had been staggering. In the first five days of *ZITADELLE* they lost 2,268 armored vehicles of all types including assault guns,¹¹ and by 20 July had but 828 serviceable panzers in all of *Army Groups South* and *Center* to oppose an estimated 3,992 Russian tanks in the line and an additional 2,051 in reserve.¹² Losses in personnel were nearly as great. Dur-

¹¹ *Panzerausfaelle ZITADELLE, Stand: 5.—10.VI.43., g. Kdos., in Pz.-Lage "S".*
H 16/237.

¹² *Kraeftegegenueberstellung, Stand vom 20.VII.43., Fremde Heere Ost (11c).*
H 3/119. Unfortunately the extant figures on German tank strength and losses for this period are fragmentary, but such as are available give an idea of the seriousness of the German situation as regarded armor during the period.

ing the period 10 July through 10 August the two army groups lost 163,158 officers and men killed, wounded, or missing.¹³

During the latter part of August other sectors of the front also became active. In the extreme south Gen. F. I. Tolbukhin with his Fourth Ukrainian Front attacked the Mius River positions and forced a breakthrough in the area of the reconstituted *Sixth Army*. Taganrog, at the mouth of the Mius River and the southernmost anchor of the German line, fell on 30 August, while Gen. R. Ya. Malinovski with his Third Ukrainian Front forced a large bridgehead over the Donets east of Izyum. In the meantime, Gen. K. K. Rokossovski continued his offensive west of Kursk and Orel. With the elimination of the Orel and Kharkov salients and the forcing of the German southern defenses along the Mius and the Donets, the Russians were in excellent position for a concerted drive all along the front.

The Drive Across the Dnepr

With their line broken at three strategic points, Orel, Kharkov, and in the Donets bend, and with the Red Army moving powerfully with seven army fronts from the Smolensk area to the Sea of Azov, the Germans had no choice but to withdraw from the Ukraine and to attempt to stabilize the situation at the line of the Dnepr. Driving relentlessly, by mid-September Malinovski and Tolbukhin had forced the Germans to completely abandon the Donets line and before the end of the month were attacking Melitopol and Zaporozhye on the Dnepr. Vatutin and Konev quickly exploited their breakthrough at Kharkov and, despite a desperate counterattack by Von Manstein to cover his bridgehead at Kremenchug over which his units were trying to withdraw, reached the river on 28 September. Two days later Vatutin put units over the river near the mouth of Pripyat and below Kiev, Konev was across southeast of Kremenchug, and Malinovski had a bridgehead south of Dnepropetrovsk. Meanwhile Rokossovski had continued his drive in the Orel-Kursk sector. By 1 October he had reached the upper Dnepr, and was threatening the German strong point at Gomel. With the few German reserves concentrated in the south, Sokolovski opened a strong offensive in the central sector aimed at the key city of Smolensk. Using nine armies on a front of some 110 miles he broke through strong German fortifications in the face of desperate resistance by the *Fourth Army* and entered Smolensk and Roslavl on 25 September. Under this pressure Von Kluge pulled back his line to defensive positions east of Orsha and Vitebsk and held there.

In the south, the Soviets, never relaxing their pressure, gave the Germans no time to consolidate any sort of a line along the Dnepr. The

¹³ *Gefechtsausfaelle Sowjetfeldzug, ObdH/GenQu, vom 22.VI.41. bis 10.VII.43., Der Heeresarzt b. Nr. 1/4451/43 g. Kdos., OKH, den 14.VII.43. H 17/189.*

four fronts between the Crimea and the southern edge of the Pripyat Marshes had been redesignated the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts, and during the first week in October these fronts immediately began exploiting the river crossings they had seized. Taking Zaporozhye on 16 October and Melitopol a week later, they broke the *Sixth Army*'s line from the Dnepr bend to the Sea of Azov and pushed on. By the end of October Tolbukhin had cut off the Crimea and had closed up along the river except at Kherson and Nikopol where the Germans held onto small bridgeheads. On 17 October Konev attacked out of his bridgehead at Kremenchug and swung to the south toward the iron ore center at Krivoi Rog and the main rail line into the Dnepr bend from the west. This threat forced the Germans to give up Dnepropetrovsk, but the *First Panzer Army* was able to hold in front of Krivoi Rog.

During October there was little Russian activity in the vicinity of Kiev as the Soviets enlarged their crossing north of the city and gathered their strength to assault it. Then early in November Vatutin broke his First Ukrainian Front out of the bridgehead and attacked the city from the north and west. Von Manstein, seeing his position was hopeless, evacuated the stronghold and pulled back to the west. Exploiting his advantage, Vatutin continued to drive. On 12 November he captured Zhitomir, and five days later entered Korosten, a key communications center on both lateral and east-west rail lines. Stung by this loss of rail facilities, Von Manstein countered and before the end of the month retook both cities.

During this same period the Soviets were able to make much less impression on Von Kluge's defensive line in the central sector where the *Fourth Army* contained five successive offensives along the Smolensk-Minsk highway toward Orsha. Rokossovski was also repulsed before Gomel, and only by placing tremendous pressure on the city was he finally able to force the Germans to evacuate on 12 October.

On 3 October Yeremenko, with his Kalinin Front, had captured Nevel on the northern edge of the sector and driven a 30 mile wide salient between Nevel and Vitebsk, the anchor of the upper Dnepr line. In conjunction with this attack, Sokolovski, continuing his offensive west of Smolensk, made repeated attacks on Vitebsk in an attempt to envelop it from the south. But the Germans hung on tenaciously, and despite continued Soviet pressure, forced the fight into a stalemate. In January, the Russians, balked by the stubborn defense and the difficult terrain which heavily favored the Germans and which never froze over in an unusually mild winter, abandoned the assault and attempted no further major operations in the central sector during the remainder of the winter.

During the first days of December Konev resumed his attacks in the south, taking Cherkassy in the rear on 14 December and driving on to Kirovo, which he entered on 7 January. The effect of this penetration was to seriously threaten the rear of the German units in the Nikopol area as well as that of the *Eighth Army* above Cherkassy on the Dnepr.

While these probing attacks were in progress, the main effort was in preparation in the Kiev sector. During the first part of December Von Manstein had continued his counterattacks east of Korosten and Zhitomir, but on Christmas Eve Vatutin launched a new, large-scale offensive which by 4 January had driven the Germans out of those two cities and crossed the old Polish border south of the Pripyat Marshes.

The Winter Battles

In January 1944 the Red Army facing the Germans comprised 10 fronts. From north to south opposite *Army Group North* were Gen. L. A. Govorov's Leningrad Front, Gen. K. A. Meretskov's Volkov Front, and Popov's Second Baltic Front; facing *Army Group Center* across the upper Dnepr line Gen. I. Kh. Bagramyan's First Baltic Front, Sokolovski's Second White Russian Front, and Rokossovski's First White Russian Front; and driving against *Army Group South* were the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts under Vatutin, Konev, Malinovski, and Tolbukhin respectively. The German order of battle remained unchanged, with Von Kuechler commanding in the northern sector, Busch in the center, and Von Manstein in the south.

The Soviets struck the first blow of the winter campaign against the *Eighteenth Army* on the left flank of the *Army Group North*. With the exception of the Russian attack to reopen land communication with Leningrad the previous January, this 200 mile sector of the eastern line had remained static for two and one-half years along the Volkov River and the Leningrad perimeter. The *Eighteenth Army* at this time comprised the equivalent of 20 divisions including five Luftwaffe field divisions,¹⁴ two brigades of Latvian volunteers, and the *Spanish Legion*. It had few reserves available, having transferred three infantry divisions to *Army Group Center* in December to help contain the attacks in the Nevel-Vitebsk area. Opposite these units the Russians had concentrated the six armies of the Leningrad and Volkov Fronts.

Looking at the map, the most likely point of attack for the Red Army seemed the salient the Germans held directly south of Lake Ladoga, since it furnished the principal cover for the rail net feeding the line before Leningrad. The Soviets, however, had other ideas. For some

¹⁴ Divisions of Luftwaffe personnel fighting as ground troops. Officered from the Luftwaffe, they were inadequately trained for ground combat and were deficient in heavy weapons and artillery.

time Govorov had been moving strong elements of his command, including heavy masses of artillery, across the frozen Gulf of Finland into the Russian-held beachhead west of the old Czarist capital. By the middle of January the streams, lakes, and swamps to the south were frozen solid and suitable for maneuver. On 14 January he launched his attack, the artillery blasting paths through the prepared German defenses. German counteraction was weak and disorganized, and in four days his units had opened a sizable gap and gained operational freedom.

On the same day, Meretskov launched a surprise attack against the army's right flank. Ignoring the bridgehead he held over the Volkhov River just north of Novgorod, he struck across the upper end of the frozen Lake Ilmen and took the strong German defenses along the river in reverse. Novgorod, the anchor of the line, fell four days later.

With both flanks turned, the commander of the *Eighteenth Army*, Generaloberst Georg Lindemann, had no choice but to withdraw to the south to prevent the larger part of his force being cut off. Momentarily he was able to outdistance his pursuers, and for a few days managed to maintain a line between the lakes in the vicinity of Luga. But Meretskov's pressure on his right soon made this new position untenable and he was forced to pull back again, this time all the way to the Baltic States border. The *Sixteenth Army*, with its right flank thus thrown in the air, was then forced to withdraw westward, and by 1 March the whole of *Army Group North* had taken up a new line extending from Narva on the Gulf of Finland to a junction with *Army Group Center* near Polotsk. From this position the Germans were able to beat off further assaults, and, with the spring thaws approaching, all movement came to a halt until summer.

In the south, Vatutin's attacks of early January, which had overrun Korosten, Zhitomir, and Kazatin and placed the best of the rail net west of the Dnepr in Russian hands, had left *Army Group South* in a difficult position. Only one rail line, the Lwow-Proskurov-Odessa, remained open, and the Red divisions stood less than 90 miles from it at Kazatin. In addition, the *Sixth and Eighth Armies* lay exposed to envelopment from the north. Under such pressure, Von Manstein was compelled to shift much of his strength to the center of his line around Vinnitsa at the expense of weakening his left. He was thus able to screen his last remaining supply link and at the same time lend support to his two armies further south. In so doing, however, he was forced to spread his defenses so thin that he was unable to halt the Soviets who were moving along the lower edge of the Pripyat Marshes, cutting his last lateral link with *Army Group Center*.

On 29 January the First and Second Ukrainian Fronts launched a coordinated attack from the north and east on the *Eighth Army* below Kiev and in less than three weeks cut off and destroyed eight German

divisions. Simultaneously, Malinovski and Tolbukhin with their Third and Fourth Ukrainian Fronts struck convergently at the *Sixth Army* in the Dnepr bend area and by 2 February took Nikopol and Krivoi Rog, the two defensive anchors in that portion of the sector.

Meanwhile from the Sarny area Vatutin continued against Von Manstein's now weakened left and quickly took Rovno. On 3 February he occupied Lutsk and pushed on toward Dubno and Lwow. The retention of this latter city was highly important to *Army Group South* as its loss would have cut the last rail line from Poland and forced the use of the poor Romanian net. The *Fourth Panzer Army* was rushed to the trouble spot and the drive brought to a halt.

After a short period for regrouping, on 4 March the offensive again began to roll along the whole southern front. Gen. G. Zhukov, now commanding the First Ukrainian Front, opened the assault with an attack on a 105-mile front between Dubno and Vinnitsa, with the main effort toward Tarnopol. In the first two days he drove 40 miles between the *First* and *Fourth Panzer Armies*, cutting the Lwow-Odessa line and forcing Von Manstein to pull the *First Panzer Army* from the vicinity of Uman to halt the attack across his rear. On 6 March, Konev struck southwestward with his Second Ukrainian Front and on 10 March captured Uman, which had been uncovered to stop Zhukov. Continuing to push, he reached and crossed the Bug River on 12 March and cut the Lwow-Odessa line three days later. On 19 March he crossed the Dnestr River and a week later, against little opposition, reached the Prutt River on a 125-mile front.

Meanwhile Zhukov, making little headway against the *Fourth Panzer Army* guarding the entrance to Poland along the line Kovel-Lwow-Tarnopol, turned the weight of his attack to the south and took Vinnitsa on 22 March. On 25 March he reached the Dnestr, and three days later captured Cernauti in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains.

Coordinating his movement with Zhukov, Malinovski broke through the *Sixth Army* defenses toward the lower Dnestr, and on 13 March took Kherson. Three days later he reached the Bug River. Pressing on, he forced the evacuation of Odessa on 10 April and on 12 April reached the Dnestr throughout the length of his front.

Then with the Russians feeling the effect of their overstretched supply lines and the spring thaws upon them, the southern front quieted down, the Red divisions standing virtually along the Polish border of 1941.

The Final Drives

In June of 1944 the end was clearly in sight for Hitler's Reich. After five years of war Germany was at last beginning to feel the full fury of its enemies. With the Normandy landings on 6 June the Wehrmacht

became actively engaged in operations on three fronts against vastly superior forces, and because of Hitler's refusal to shorten his eastern line there was no strategic reserve. German divisions were so scattered that everywhere they were forced to fight at an increasing disadvantage. The U-boat campaign had been brought under control in 1943 in the Battle of the Atlantic; and Allied bombing was beginning to take heavy toll of German industrial output. With the approach of summer campaigning weather in the east, Wehrmacht prospects were never darker.

At the start of the summer battles almost every consideration indicated that the Soviets would strike their next major blow against *Army Group Center*. The German hold in the center of the line constituted a huge salient overhanging the Red Armies in the south which to the methodical Russian mind had to be eliminated. The Russian forces there had not been in serious action since the first of the year. Their supply line to the great logistical center at Moscow was relatively short compared to the overextended axes in the south, and, unlike the forces in the Ukraine, they had had opportunity during a quiet winter to rehabilitate the rail lines and build up large stocks near the front.

Nonetheless the Germans, with Hitler dominating almost every plan and disposition, clung to the belief that the major Soviet blow of the summer would be a continuation of the attack in the south, and disposed their divisions accordingly: 37 infantry divisions, 11 panzer divisions, and a miscellany of Romanian and Hungarian units in the south; one panzer and 33 infantry divisions in the center. Strategic reserves in the latter sector comprised the one panzer division, an infantry division, and a panzer group made up of a number of miscellaneous motorized units.

On 23 June the Soviets struck, and against *Army Group Center*. The First Baltic and the three White Russian Fronts¹⁵ launched a general offensive on a 360-mile front from Velikiye-Luki to the lower Pripyat behind a preparation fired by some 380 artillery pieces and mortars per mile of line. The preparation inflicted heavy casualties on the German front line troops and enabled the Red infantry to quickly open a number of holes through which the armored brigades poured. Almost immediately the German situation was desperate. There was no second line of defense to fall back on, and the two reserve divisions were quickly committed and almost as quickly destroyed. Chernyakovski with his Third White Russian Front quickly surrounded Vitebsk and sent his mobile reserves into the fight through a 25 mile gap south of the city. One of his columns reached the Minsk-Smolensk rail line and highway

¹⁵ Rokossovski continued to command the First White Russian Front, but Sokolovski's old Second White Russian Front was reorganized as the Second and Third White Russian Fronts with Gen F. D. Zakharov and Gen I. D. Chernyakovski as commanders.

on 25 June, cutting the *Fourth Army*'s principal line of retreat. At the same time Rokossovski broke his armored units into the Germans' rear through a 20-mile hole in the *Ninth Army*'s front, one column swinging north to encircle Bobruysk, the other driving on to the west. On 27 June he surrounded Bobruysk and trapped some 70,000 German troops. Both Orsha and Vitebsk fell on 27 June, and Mogilev the next day. The loss of these anchors of the line split the front into three segments and brought an end to defensive action on an army group basis. Thereafter, German opposition deteriorated rapidly.

There was no letup in the attack, however, with Gen. I. Kh. Bagramyan's First Baltic Front units driving on Polotsk and Chernyakovski and Rokossovski's right wing enveloping Minsk from the north and south. The fall of the latter city on 4 July trapped almost the entire *Fourth Army* which was fighting some miles to the southeast. In just 10 days the Red Army had completely obliterated the Dnepr line between Polotsk and the Pripyat River and destroyed 25 German divisions. During the next week the pace continued with Baranovichi falling on 8 July and Vilna surrounded on 10 July.

In the southern sector Konev and Rokossovski's left wing launched their summer offensive on 14 July. By 25 July Konev had surrounded Lwow while Rokossovski, swinging more to the northwest to maintain contact with his right wing, took Lublin on 22 July. Two days later he reached the Vistula and on 31 July his units stood only some 12 miles from Warsaw. With the drive through White Russia continuing, by the end of the first week in August the fight in the central and southern sectors had passed over the western boundary of the Soviet Union, whence *BARBAROSSA* had been launched more than three years before.

Further to the north, Yeremenko, now commanding the Second Baltic Front had joined the general offensive on 13 July, attacking along an 80-mile front from Ostrov to the Dvina River. Model, then commanding *Army Group Center*, had foreseen just such an attack in the north and two days before it was launched had suggested that *Army Group North* withdraw from Estonia and northerr. Latvia to below the Dvina in order that its divisions might be used to stabilize the fast deteriorating situation in the central sector, but Hitler turned down the proposal. The Germans facing Yeremenko were strongly entrenched, but their position was without depth, and when OPOCHKA, the central anchor of the line, fell on 15 July they were forced to pull back to positions along the Dvinsk-Pskov rail line and re-form.

Gen. I. I. Maslennikov now joined the fight with his Third Baltic Front just below Lake Peipus, taking Ostrov on 21 July and Pskov two days later. On 25 July Yeremenko cut the road from Dvinsk to Riga, and the next day captured Dvinsk itself, forcing the Germans back

further still. Here they were able to reestablish their line and hold. At the same time Narva on the Gulf of Finland fell to units of the Leningrad Front.

Meanwhile, Bagramyan had taken Polotsk the same day Minsk fell and then swung his attack to the northwest between Kovno and the Dvina. By 15 July he had driven open a 30-mile gap in the front at that point. Then, almost unopposed, he sent his armor racing on toward Riga. On 1 August he stood but 20 miles from the sea, virtually isolating both the *Sixteenth* and *Eighteenth Armies*. Generaloberst Ferdinand Schoerner, newly in command of *Army Group North*, then launched a series of local counterattacks and managed to stabilize his contracted line for a time as the rest of the eastern front quieted down.

In six weeks the Red Army had driven more than 400 miles from the Dnepr to the Vistula; it had virtually destroyed *Army Group Center*, it had isolated *Army Group North* in the Baltic States, and in the south had driven the last German from Soviet soil except in the southern portion of Bessarabia.

After a short pause, Maslennikov continued to push just south of Lake Peipus. By 15 August he achieved a breakthrough and then turned northward into Estonia. Chernyakovski, Bagramyan, and Yeremenko maintained their pressure but, continually checked by stubborn German resistance from a series of defense positions prepared in depth, were unable to break away.

The capitulation of Finland early in September freed a number of troop units to the Leningrad Front and their added pressure forced Schoerner to evacuate Estonia through the narrow escape corridor along the southern shore of the Gulf of Riga which, using the last of his armor, he had been able to maintain in the face of all attacks. When Bagramyan found himself unable to cut through this last life line, he switched his main effort further to the south in a final drive to the coast. By 10 October he reached the Baltic Sea between Liepaja and Klaipeda. The remnants of Schoerner's armies were trapped in northern Latvia, and the Baltic campaign was at an end.

CHAPTER 9

THE PARTISAN MOVEMENT REACHES Maturity

With the failure of the *Sixth Army* before Stalingrad in November 1943 the entire course of the war in the east changed abruptly. The period of sustained German drives came to an end and the Red Army, going over to the offensive along most of the front, gained the initiative from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea.

For the partisan movement the change was highly significant. During the 18 months of its existence, the period of its infancy and growth, it had been pitted against the strength of a winning army. Now, as it approached maturity, it could strike at the rear of a retreating, weakening enemy. It was a promising opportunity.

The reorganization within the movement which had started the previous spring had been only a beginning. During the fall of 1942 and on through the winter and into the spring of 1943 the rebuilding continued. Where the earlier stress had been on the individual partisan units, the emphasis was now placed on a reorganization of the movement as a whole along lines which would make it an efficient auxiliary of the entire Soviet war effort.

Completion of the Reorganization

The new Central Staff of the Partisan Movement that emerged was in effect a fourth armed service, standing on a level with the Red Army, the Red Air Force, and the Red Navy. Despite the fact that it was designed as a ground combat command whose primary mission was to support and aid and abet the operations of the Red Army, its ultimate control was political, not military, descending directly from the Central Committee of the Communist Party through the State Defense Committee, to Ponomarenko, himself a member of the latter agency.

Its structure [see *chart 2*] was similar to that of the Red Army and was organized along conventional general staff lines, with sections for personnel, intelligence, operations, and supply. In addition, there was a political security section headed by a high-ranking NKVD officer, and several special staff sections for such matters as cryptography, transportation, and the like.¹

Directly below the Central Staff were the territorial commands. These were executive partisan staffs for the Karelo-Finnish Soviet So-

¹ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 3," OKH/Gen.St.d.H/Abt. Frde. H. Ost (I/Bd), Nr. 5632/43 g. Kdos., 28.VII.43. H 3/748.

cialist Republic (SSR), the Leningrad area, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Kalinin Front, the White Russian SSR, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (including the Kursk, Orel, and Smolensk areas), the Ukrainian SSR, the Crimean SSR, and the Caucasus. With but one exception, the chiefs of these staffs were Communist Party or NKVD officers, often officials of the former government of the areas. The exact function of these territorial commands is unknown. They did not constitute an echelon in the chain of command.

The lower echelon command organs were grouped laterally according to the Red Army front sectors. Below the Central Staff there were partisan staffs with each front command, exercising control through operating groups set up at the headquarters of each army of the front. Beyond the main line of resistance and under the control of each of these latter were "Operations Groups in the Enemy's Rear" which exercised immediate command of the partisan brigades [see *chart 3*], battalions, and lesser units. These operational groups issued orders to the brigades and separate battalions on the basis of directives from the higher staffs and headquarters; oversaw recruiting training; required regular reports on results of missions, unit strengths, and positions; and strove in every way to maintain and improve discipline.²

Although they were to cooperate closely with their respective front and army commands, the staffs and operating groups were not under military direction. The chain of command was clear: the partisans were to work with and in support of the Red Army, but they were to take their orders from the Central Staff. They were not to allow themselves to be absorbed by the Red Army in the event of a successful offensive. On the contrary, they were under orders to move westward before such an advance so as to remain in the rear of the enemy and under political control. To ensure a continuation of this control under all circumstances, when the political commissar in the Red Army was divested of the greater part of his power he remained secure in his old position in the partisan units coequal with the tactical commander. Furthermore, the Central Staff retained the authority to alter the partisan organization or insert special task groups into the enemy rear without reference to any military agency.³

It was sometime during the latter period of this reorganization that the distinction between the Red Army-led partisan brigades and the purely partisan groups, that had formerly been so marked, disappeared, with the latter being raised to or assuming the level of the former.⁴

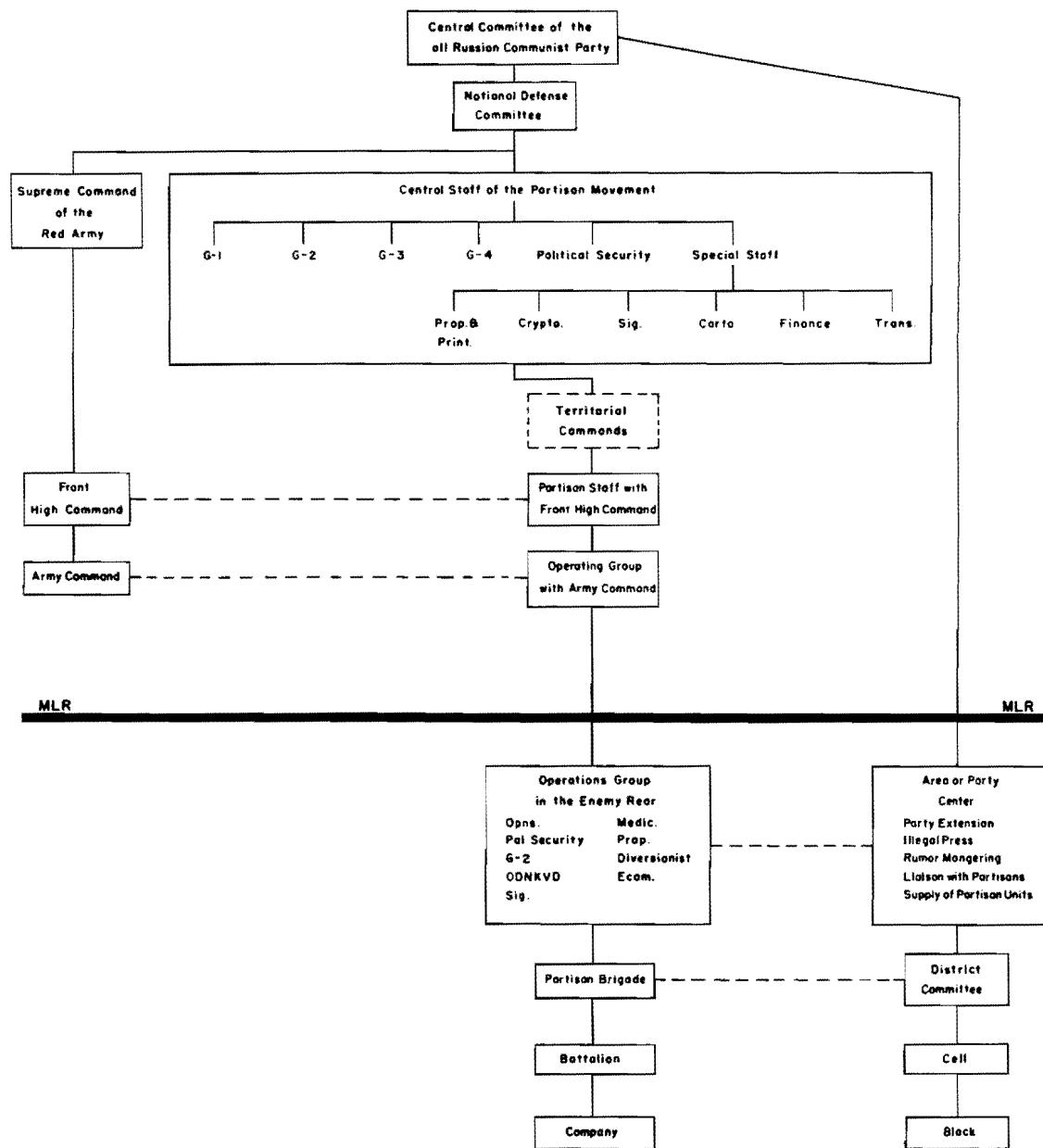
² *Ibid.*

³ Captured partisan directive, incl. to: *OKW/WFSt/WOr, (I/IV). Nr. 4630/43g. 24.VII.43.* in *H. Gr. Nord. Ic/AO, Propaganda, 24.VIII.-24.X.43.* 75131/108.

⁴ See: *Bandenlisten, Februar bis September 43, H. Gr. Mitte, Ic/AO (Abw.).* 65003/4.

Chart 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE PARTISAN MOVEMENT AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE GERMAN REAR WITH
RELATION TO THE RED ARMY: 1943*

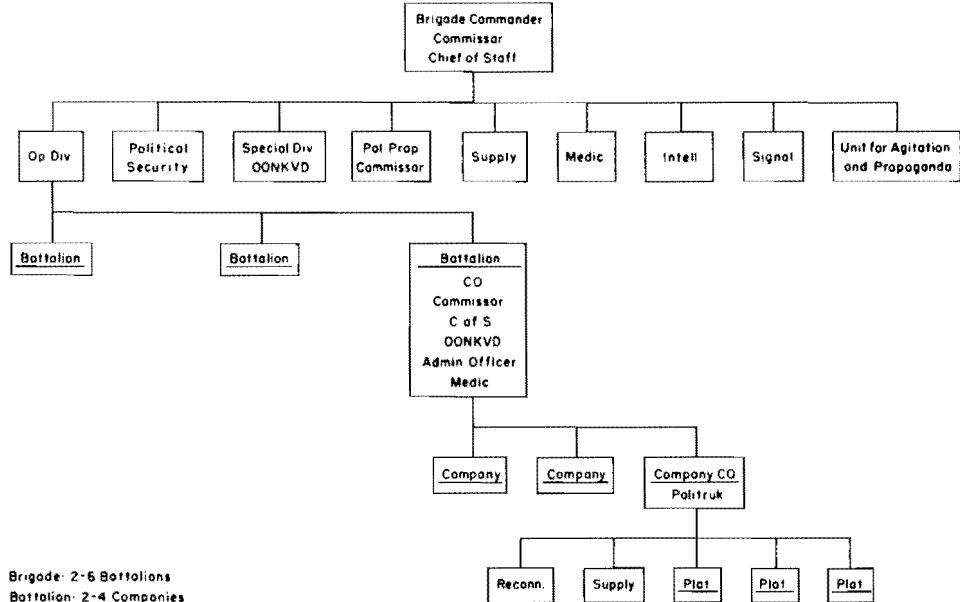


* An. X z. "Nachrichten ueber Bondonkrieg Nr. 3" OKH/GenStdH/Abt. Frde H Ost, Nr. 5632/43, geh., 28.VII.43, D3/748.

Chart No. 2. Organization of the Partisan Movement.

Chart 3

ORGANIZATION OF A PARTISAN BRIGADE *



* Anl 3 z "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 3", op. cit

Chart No. 3. Organization of the Partisan Brigade.

Such was the organization, on paper at least. How well it was ever actually established throughout the whole German rear is impossible to say. In the Ukraine, for instance, where no really serious partisan resistance ever developed, it must have remained rather embryonic. In portions of the central and northern sectors, however, to judge by subsequent events, it must have reached a fairly high stage of development.

Leadership and Personnel

Despite the predominantly political control of the movement, by the spring of 1943 the actual leadership of a good proportion of the bands was in the hands of the Red Army officers, a number of whom had been trained in partisan schools. The political functionaries who in many cases had formed or taken command of bands in the earlier stages of the war became the commissars of the units, and, although retaining their positions as "cocommanders," primarily concerned themselves with political security within their particular unit and with Communist propaganda in their areas of operation. In addition, they often served dually as secretaries of illegal district party committees.⁵

Manpower for the bands continued to be drawn from a variety of sources. Escaped prisoners of war still drifted into the partisan ranks, but in no such numbers as formerly. German occupation policies caused many civilians to volunteer. But by and large, as the movement expanded, the larger proportion of the personnel was drafted from the native populace, forcibly when necessary, although during this period fear of the German forced labor draft and overbearing economic requisitions coupled with the general military situation and widespread Soviet propaganda generally made the use of pressure unnecessary. The Central Staff constantly advised the lower echelons to foster the best possible relations with the natives as a means of facilitating such recruiting.⁶ In some areas recruits were taken systematically by age groups, and at times even women were drafted.⁷ Special attention was paid to recruiting members of the Komsomolsk, the communist youth organization. These young Bolsheviks were highly desirable as combat men or political activists because of their fanaticism.⁸

In partisan-dominated areas recruits were put through a training course. Generally they spent several weeks on probation to prevent

⁵ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 6," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.

⁶ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 3," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost (I/Bd), Nr. 5632/43 g. Kdos., 28.VII.43. H 3/748.

⁷ Korueck 532, Ic. Br. Tgb. Nr. 442/43 geh., 30.I.43., *Feindlage im Korueckgebiet, Stand: 36.I.43.*, in Anlageheft 2 zu KTB Korueck 559, Ia, Unternehmen "Klette 2," 5.I.-19.I.43. 44404/3.

⁸ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 3," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost (I/Bd), Nr. 5632/43 g. Kdos., 28.VII.43. H 3/748.

escape or defection of those forcibly drafted and to give attached NKVD agents an opportunity to check their backgrounds against the possibility of infiltration of agents in German pay. Through informants within the units the commissars also kept a constant check on all personnel.⁹ Desertions of individual partisans were reported to the Central Staff, and their families, if they could be reached, were sent to labor camps in Siberia. If a defector was apprehended, the NKVD both passed and executed sentence.¹⁰ In a number of cases the NKVD terrorized German collaborators into doubledealing by forcing them under threat of death to sign oaths of loyalty to the Soviet regime and then threatening to have the oath delivered to the occupation authorities should the individual fail to cooperate with the partisans.¹¹

Demolition, intelligence, and communication specialists were flown in to the bands both as regularly assigned personnel and as special assistants on training. The radio operators were particularly well trained in their field. They adhered closely to standard procedures and demonstrated far better communications discipline than the average Red Army operators.¹² The better established units were often inspected by Red Army personnel, and high-ranking Soviet officers, both military and political, were frequently flown in to partisan centers for conferences.¹³

Targets

In February the Central Staff issued a directive designating in order of priority the targets the partisans were to attack. At the top of the list were roads, rail lines, bridges, and enemy vehicles and rolling stock. Secondary targets comprised telephone and telegraph lines and supply depots. The bands were to take offensive action against German guard posts, patrols, and other small units only when they had a definite superiority in numbers.¹⁴

⁹ Rpt, Cav Regt Center, to Hq Army Group Center, 23, VI.43., H Gr Mitte, Ia, Nr. 6810/43, in Anl z. KTB H Gr Mitte, Fuehrungsabt., Akte XXII, Heft 10, 11.VI.-31.VII.43. 65002/22.

¹⁰ Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H. 3/738.

¹¹ AOK 4, Feindnachrichtenblaetter Nr. 1, 2.II.43. in KTB, AOK 4, Ic. 2.II.-28.XI.43. 48448/6.

¹² MS P-038, "German Radio Intelligence," (Hist. Div. EUCOM), p. 209 (S). OCMH, Foreign Studies Br; Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H. 3/738.

¹³ Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1." OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H. 3/738; tlg, Army Group Center to OKH, 26 Apr 43, in Anl. z. KTB, H. Gr. Mitte, Fuehrungsabt., Akte XXII, Bandenbekämpfung, Heft 8, 6.IV.-15.V.43. 65002/20.

¹⁴ No copy of this directive is extant. It is referred to several times as the Stalin Order of 25 Feb 43. See: Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H 3/738.

The Bands as Intelligence Organs

Although in 1942 a start had been made toward utilizing the bands as information-gathering agencies, little was actually accomplished in this regard prior to the completion of the reorganization in the spring of 1943. With the establishment of the partisan staffs and operating groups within the Red Army field commands and with the operations groups in over-all command of irregular units behind the German lines, both RO and OONKVD¹⁵ sections were attached to the various partisan staffs [see chart 4], down to and including brigades, to control all Soviet intelligence activities in the occupied areas. Generally the assignment of these sections was espionage for the Red Army and for the party committees in the immediate sector; reconnaissance in line with combat missions and the security of bases and installations; and political espionage for the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow.

To guide and control this work, a deputy chief for Reconnaissance and Information was attached to each operations group, and manuals such as a "Guide for Political Espionage" and a "Guide Book for the Partisan Intelligence Agent," were issued to the lower echelons.¹⁶ A supplement to the latter covered in detail the scope of the information desired, both military and political. It contained altogether 172 questions in 21 fields and covered almost every aspect of the situation in the German-occupied areas. From German occupation agencies and administrative measures to native working and living conditions, education, religion, public health, and political attitude, the list went on to Wehrmacht morale, antipartisan measures and tactics, organization of native police, and a very detailed list on German use of native troops, including nationalities involved, social and economic background, methods of recruiting, inducements offered, morale, and political attitude.¹⁷ The brigade RO's and the commissars of the smaller bands worked to provide answers to these questions through local agent informer nets they set up and through de-briefing sessions with the partisans themselves following an operation. Missions assigned to the bands were often dual-purpose. A brigade working opposite the Leningrad Front received orders to set demolitions along a specified section of rail line, attack an outlying enemy air field, and reconnoiter for German troop strength and dispositions, all in the same mission.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ossobijj Otdel-NKVD* intelligence, i. e. Soviet counterintelligence.

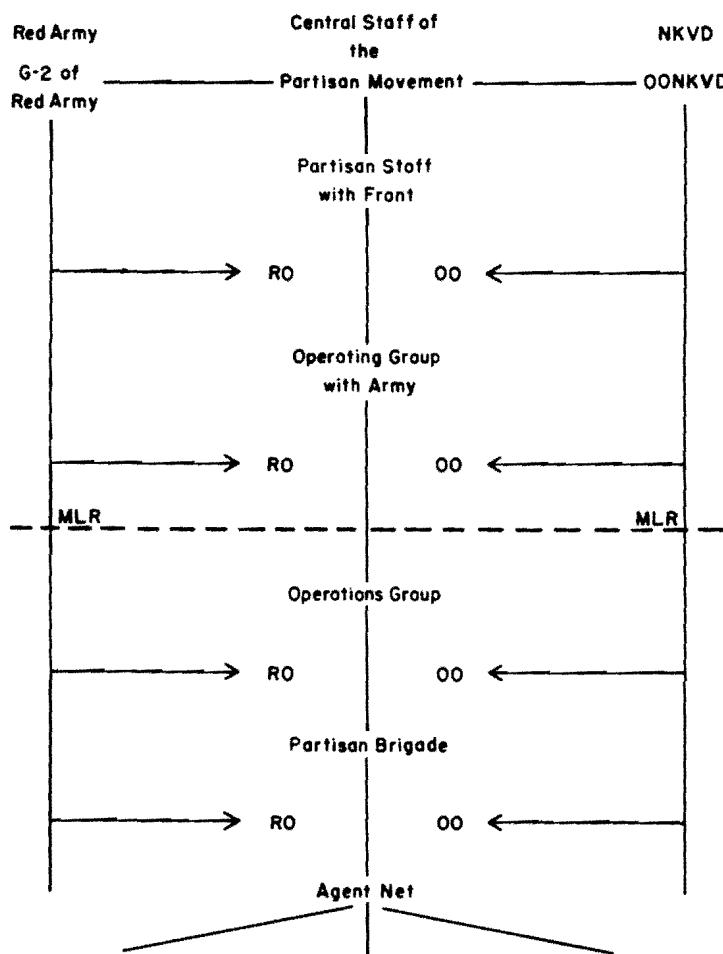
¹⁶ Anl. 9 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 3," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost (I/Bd), Nr. 5632/43 g. Kdos., 28.VII.43. H 3/748; Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1;" "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 4," OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.

¹⁷ Annex 1 to "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 4," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.

¹⁸ Captured partisan order in Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H 3/738.

Chart 4

THE PARTISANS AND SOVIET INTELLIGENCE



RO: Intelligence (Army)
 OO(NKVD): Counter -Intelligence

Chart No. 4. The Partisans and Soviet Intelligence.

Although some excellent information was obtained in this manner, in the long run the informer nets proved the more reliable source. These informers were wives or relatives of Red Army men, local party members or candidates for party membership anxious to qualify themselves, village mayors or elders, and people who worked for occupation agencies, railroad workers, natives employed as servants and workers about German installations, members of the local administration established by the Germans, and local native police.¹⁹

Partisan Propaganda

Some of the bands from their earliest days had directed a crude sort of propaganda at the natives in the German rear in an attempt to wean them away from the occupation. Then late in 1942, coincident with the reorganization of the movement, Moscow moved to increase such efforts and bring all propaganda under its control. In the revamped partisan command structure special propaganda and press divisions were created not only within the Central Staff, but in the territorial staffs and the staffs and operating groups with the fronts and armies.

Units for Agitation and Propaganda were established in brigades and smaller independent units and in the Communist Party centers and district committees in the German rear. Training schools for propaganda editors, writers, printers, and art layout men were set up, and graduates were distributed throughout the movement.²⁰ Depending on their size, the partisan units and Communist Party groups were supplied with large or small field presses, operators, and sometimes editors. Often the editorial work was done by the commissar of the band or the secretary of a local illegal party committee. Raw propaganda material was broadcast regularly to the units over the partisan or party radio net.²¹

Under this centralized setup, the Soviets made every possible emotional appeal and attempted to expose every weakness exhibited by the occupation. Taken *in toto* it appears to have been very effective with a population which long before had begun to waver. The subject matter was the same old standardized material: the success of the Red Army and the partisans; the Allied second front; German intentions to reduce Russia to colonial status; German failure to abolish the collective farms; the fact that taxes and economic requisitions were higher under the Germans than they had been under the Soviet system; stories of German atrocities; the German slave labor program; hints that the Soviets would

¹⁹ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 4," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.

²⁰ See: Stalin Order of December 1942, quoted in *ibid.*; "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 7," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt Frde Heere Ost. H 3/738.

²¹ *Feindnachrichtenblaetter, Bandenlage, AOK 16, III.43.*, in *AOK 16, Ic, TB Ic/AO, z. KTB # 5, Teil VI, 1.I.-31.III.43.* 36588/142; "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 4," OKH/Gen.Dt.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.

correct the social mistakes of the past; and, again and again, the promise that the Red Army and the strong hand of the party would return.²²

In some areas the partisans distributed the land to the natives, setting the agricultural quotas considerably lower than those in the German-controlled sectors.²³ In the rear of the *Second Army* they even went to the extreme of distributing religious printed matter and holding church services for the populace.²⁴

The indigenous native units in German service were primary targets for this propaganda, and by late spring it had not only scored considerable success but visibly hampered German security operations.²⁵

Reestablishment of the Communist Party in the Rear²⁶

Coincident with the reorganization of the partisan movement, Moscow took measures to regenerate the Communist Party in the German rear on a similar centrally directed and uniform basis. The early attempts to revive the party in the overrun areas had been desultory and uncoordinated, patterned after the prewar political setup. Early in 1943, however, this underground organization was completely revised and realigned in accordance with the Red Army order of battle along the front and paralleling the new partisan structure.

Area or party centers—Central Committees of the Communist Party in the Rear Areas,—political counterparts of the partisan operations groups, were established as working headquarters opposite each Red Army front without regard to former administrative divisions. As such, these centers with their command channel running direct from the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow had over-all control of all party organizations and activities in their respective sectors. They exercised their jurisdiction through a number of district committees. The district committees which were responsible for certain well-defined areas of strategic significance as agricultural or industrial districts were broken down into cells made up of a number of blocks, these latter the real germ cells of the party. A block generally comprised a village, a part of a town, a collective or state farm, a small factory, or similar unit.

²² *Ibid.*, Anlage 52 z. KTB Wirtschaftsinspektion Mitte, 1.IV.-30.VI.43. Wi/ID 2.53.

²³ Anl. 3 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 1," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost, 3 May 43. H 3/738.

²⁴ *Bandennachrichtenblatt Nr. 1, Korueck 580, 2.VII.43.*, Anl. z. KTB 25a, Korueck 580, Teil 7, 1.VII.-15.VII.43. 37516/1.

²⁵ *Reichskommissar fuer die Ukraine, V-1-7422, Tgb. Nr. 378/43 geh.*, 25.VI.43. Footlocker 50, folder 4; *Bandennachrichtenblatt Nr. 1, Korueck 580, 2.VII.43.*, Anl. z. KTB 25a, Korueck 580, Teil 7, 1.VII.-15.VII.43. 37516/1.

²⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is taken from: "Working Plan and Program of the Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks) of the Rear Area, 1943," Anlage 1 z. "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 6," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde Heere Ost. H 3/738.

This "Party in the Rear Areas" was to bend every effort to loosen the German hold on Soviet territory by setting up a tight Communist administration wherever it could and at the same time giving all possible aid to the partisan movement. This it was to do by creating and closely controlling Young Communist groups on the farms, in the villages, and in the existent partisan units; by keeping close watch on and exploiting the temper of the natives; through propaganda; through leadership in the partisan movement; and through general preparation for an armed revolt. In this work the party centers were to cooperate closely with the partisan operations groups. The actual connection between the two extended to the procurement of recruits for the bands, the assignment of combat missions to the bands by the district committees in the event of interruption of communications between the bands and the operating groups with the armies, district committee approval of appointments or dismissals in the ranks of the political leadership of the brigades and lesser units, and the procurement of food, clothing, and means of transportation for the bands.²⁷

²⁷ "Nachrichten ueber Bandenkrieg, Nr. 4," OKH/Gen.St.d.H./Abt. Frde. H. Ost. H 3/738.