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Relations between German Forces and the Local Population in  
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Garmisch, 12 May 1947

EXPERIENCES AS GARRISON COMMANDER AND REGIONAL  
MILITARY GOVERNMENT OFFICER (1942 - 1943)

Relations between German Forces and the local Population  
in the Zone of Operations on the Eastern Front

1. Attitude of the Population

The Russian urban and rural population in the districts of SUMY and KHARKOV displayed a co-operative attitude toward the German Forces. Nowhere did serious disturbances mar the relations between German military personnel and the local inhabitants. Armed bands and partisans, on the other hand, waged illegal warfare, particularly in the area east of SUMY. They received their reinforcements by air from the partisan school at VORENEZH, and constantly harassed the local population, thus constituting a serious threat to military traffic and communications between rear areas and the zone of operations. Due to the small contingents of troops available for anti-partisan operations, and the large area in which bandits and partisans carried out their treacherous raids, the German Forces never succeeded in subduing this elusive enemy. Town and country people alike were averse to partisan activities, which, according to Russian sources, had been carefully prepared in peacetime. They requested fire arms from the German military, so that they might defend themselves against attacks and robbery.

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However, for security reasons that request could not be granted. The co-operative attitude of the population and the fact that the German soldiers were duty bound to promote good will by considerate behavior and active assistance soon established a long-lasting relationship marked by mutual confidence. A liberal interpretation of military regulations in favor of the population, i. e. such regulations as were not concerned with military security, and a policy of non-interference with the private affairs of civilians contributed greatly to mutual understanding. Once the people feel that the enemy forces mean well and will give them protection, friendly relations will not be impaired. Otherwise, a feeling of animosity will arise which will manifest itself in treacherous acts of every description.

## 2. Legal Affairs

Jurisdiction in matters of civil law was vested in a Russian legal section which was part of the municipal administration. A German military court was the competent authority in matters of criminal law and security violations. The civil court had authority to impose fines, and confinement up to six weeks. The activities of the civil court were under close supervision of the competent military government court.

As a rule, we interfered as little as possible in matters of civil law. That proved to be a sound principle.

## 3. Food Supply

With the Russian retreat, all local food supplies vanished. The German economic administrator whose duty it was to provide the

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necessary food supply for the people faced great difficulties in supplying the urban population.

Since experience teaches that hunger arouses all base instincts in man and leads to unpremeditated mischief, all German authorities and the Russian administration had to co-operate promptly and actively so as to apply the realistic doctrine embodied in a motto of ancient Rome: Panem et circenses [bread and games]. In addition to the official allocation of food to the urban population -- the rural population was self-sufficient -- permission was granted for a daily public market which was attended by many people, but was placed "off limits" to all members of the German Forces. Inhabitants of the towns were also permitted to visit the neighboring villages, and the troops were instructed to distribute surplus rations among civilians free of charge. The mayors of villages were provided with a local defense force armed with captured weapons. This unit was to prevent, by force if necessary, any illegal requisitioning or destruction of farm property. A German soldier had no right to make arbitrary requisitions and was severely punished in case of transgression. To supplement the food supplies of the urban population, unlimited areas were placed at their disposal for garden-type cultivation.

Let the people starve and you drive them into the camp of the underground and thereby act against the best interest of your own troops.

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4. Cultural Guidance

In order to offer the population a mental stimulus and diversion from the miseries of war, theaters and motion pictures were opened to the public. The German forces also sponsored the organization of choirs. Since the Russians generally are music lovers and fond of singing, most people joyously welcomed this privilege and made frequent use of it. Almost all performances were attended jointly by German soldiers and the local inhabitants, so that the people would not feel that they were being discriminated against as an inferior class. The Russians are sensitive in this respect. It would be in bad taste, and also dangerous, to use theaters and motion pictures for political propaganda in time of war. Performances would very soon take place before empty houses, and an unfavorable reaction against the propagandist would be the final result. The patriotic and loyal Russians are brought up with suspicion of all things foreign and are afraid that some day they would have to account for their attendance at such a performance. Occasional concerts by military bands also enjoyed great popularity. Loudspeakers, put up throughout the towns, are very common in Russia. Choir concerts in the Russian language and other musical programs were broadcast, and these loud speakers became points of attraction for young and old. Russian-language newspapers, sold at a low price, were much in demand. They sold rapidly, were eagerly read, and then, due to the existing paper shortage, used for other purposes.

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5. Education

Special attention was given to education in order to get the youth of school-age off the streets and thus protect it against juvenile delinquency. Due to the shortage of qualified teachers and textbooks, only reading, writing, and arithmetic could be taught, and that not beyond the level of the second grade. Since a remarkable number of youths were able to understand and speak German, courses in this foreign language under the supervision of language teachers were permitted for volunteer students. In order to provide useful activities for adolescents, training in handicrafts under the supervision of Russian craftsmen was organized in place of formal schooling. Since the Russians are masters in improvisation, these training courses could be conducted with real benefit to the students despite the shortage of materials.

6. Employment

"The devil finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." In accepting the truth of this quotation, a military administration must make it one of its primary duties to provide employment and a means of livelihood for the urban population. All shops and taverns were kept open, and townspeople were employed in numerous Russian administrative offices. Although most goods were scarce and constituted basic commodities, shrewd shopkeepers, braving the difficulties of the time, found ways of procuring and selling articles in steady demand. There was no limitation on private initiative in the manufacture of consumer goods from materials released by the German forces. Opportunities existed in

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all fields of art. A Russo-German commission examined and fixed prices for all finished works of art, so as not to put either purchaser or seller to a disadvantage, and offered the objects for sale to the public. Fishing, and cultivation of small gardens were hobbies of many townspeople and brought an income in addition to supplementing their food rations. Able-bodied Russians were employed in the vicinity of their homes to help maintain important traffic routes in the zone of operations.

7. Medical Care and Sanitation

Sanitary measures for the prevention of epidemics were a matter deserving special consideration. Due to the great shortage of Russian doctors and the lack of medical supplies the people could not receive proper medical care. Only the necessarily limited allocation of bandages and medicines from German army stocks made it possible to provide medical treatment in serious cases. The former Russian hospitals in the cities were restored to operation, and regional hospitals were established for the rural population. Periodic delousing was ordered as a preventive measure against typhus, a widespread disease in Russia. The people, particularly in rural districts, gladly submitted to that measure, as it was in their own interest. Drinking water, as well as the water in swimming pools, was examined for bacteria, and the results were announced to the German forces and the civilian population. Constant co-operation between German medical officers and Russian doctors, and supervision of all civilian installations in the field of public hygiene, including barber shops, by the medical detachment of the military government office eventually resulted

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in proper sanitary conditions.

8. Religion

The German forces did not interfere in matters of religion. Religious activities were left strictly to the discretion of the people. Churches and other places of worship, that were still useable for religious services, were placed at the people's disposal. It was surprising to notice that an active religious life developed, although the churches had been closed for years. Services, conducted by priests, were held frequently and attracted large numbers of people; the custom of church weddings and funerals was also reintroduced. Upon request of the population, all curfew regulations were lifted on high holidays such as Easter, in order to give the people an opportunity to observe the old custom of visiting churches and graves by night as well as by day.

9. Security Measures

With the exception of the measures normally taken by any army against espionage, sabotage, and attempts on the life of military personnel, the military did not exercise any police surveillance over the population. The people were not molested by spot-checking in the streets, or raids on their homes. The Russian authorities registered the inhabitants of the localities so as to establish a census of the population. This census served as a basis for the distribution of supplies and was to prevent any undesired population shifts. Each registrant received an identification card which he had to carry on his person at all times. At the beginning of the warm season, the Russians, with bag and baggage, are known to set out on migrations,

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which in many instances cover hundreds of kilometers and place a heavy burden on the roads. It became necessary, therefore, to bring some order into those movements. While civilian movement was permitted in the zone of operations, moving into the combat zone or into an area of partisan activities was prohibited for reasons of security. Local military government officers furnished the migrant with travel permits, which specified the number of persons traveling with the permit holder, the route of travel, the destination, and the provision that the migrants register with the authorities listed in the permit and request their permission for further travel. Provisional overnight lodgings were established in suitable localities, particularly in towns, and migrants were compelled to report there. It had become necessary to check persons on the roads and in overnight lodgings, in order to ascertain observance of military travel regulations. Additional cause for these security checks was furnished by the numerous Russian soldiers who had escaped from captivity or had fought their way out of encirclements and had joined these migrants only to go into hiding in out-of-the-way places.

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