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Ossoverts

ORDER OF THE DAY

Issued by Marshal Stalin on August 14 and addressed to
Army-General Zakharov

TROOPS of the 2nd Byelorussian Front, continuing their offensive, today, August 14, carried by storm the town and fortress of Ossoverts, powerful fortified district in the German defences on the River Bobr covering the approaches to the borders of East Prussia.

In the fighting for the capture of the town and fortress of Ossoverts distinction was won by troops commanded by Col.-Gen. Boldin, Lt.-Gen. Grishin, Maj.-Gen. Zakharov, Col. Kazak, Col. Fedotov, Maj.-Gen. Gasparyan, Maj.-Gen. Dalmatov, Maj.-Gen. Smirnov, Maj.-Gen. Krasnoshtanov, Col. Suprunov, Maj.-Gen. Kirillov, Maj.-Gen. Terentyev, Maj.-Gen. Shkrylev and Col. Aretemyev; artillerymen commanded by Lt.-Gen. of Artillery Sokolsky, Maj.-Gen. of Artillery Degtyarev, Maj.-Gen. of Artillery Karepin, Maj.-Gen. of Artillery Vassilyev, Col. Yelkin, Col. Zyablikov, Col. Korolev, Col. Korotkikh and Col. Turchaninov;

tankmen commanded by Maj.-Gen. of Tank Troops Shirobokov, Col. Shmyrov, Col. Rodionov and Col. Kozikov;

airmen commanded by Col.-Gen. of Aviation Verzhinin, Lt.-Gen. of Aviation Ossipenko, Maj.-Gen. of Aviation Baidukov, Col. Yakushin, Col. Volkov, Col. Grishchenko, Col. Pokayeva and Maj. Rubtsev;

sappers commanded by Maj.-Gen. of Engineering Troops Blagoslavov, Col. Melnikov, Col. Tretyakov, Col. Vizirov, Col. Loginov, Col. Mirotvorsky and Maj. Petrov; and signallers commanded by Maj.-Gen. of Signals Troops Borzov, Col. Teikovtsev and Maj.-Gen. of Signals Troops Novarchuk.

To commemorate the victory the units and formations which particularly distinguished themselves in the fighting for the capture of the town and fortress of Ossoverts will be recommended for conferment of the name "Ossoverts" and award of Orders.

Today, August 14, at 22.00 hours (Moscow time), the capital of our Motherland, Moscow, in the name of the Motherland, will salute with 12 artillery salvos from 124 guns our gallant troops of the 2nd Byelorussian Front which captured the town and fortress of Ossoverts.

For excellent military operations I express my thanks to all the troops under your command which took part in the fighting for the liberation of Ossoverts.

Eternal glory to the heroes who fell in the struggle for the freedom and independence of our Motherland!

Death to the German invaders!

*J. V. STALIN, Marshal of the Soviet Union,
Supreme Commander-in-Chief.*

SPEEDING ON

The Soviet Information Bureau communique states that during August 14, west and south-west of Pskov, the Soviet troops continued fighting offensive engagements in which they captured the town and railway station of Antsla, and over 100 other populated places including Verkhulitsa, Kakhku, Tsirgaski, Symerpalu, Tsoru, Sjanna, Murati, Skryni, Aizupe and Salni, and the railway stations of Vagula and Symerpalu.

In the area of Rasseinai (Rossieny) they beat off attacks launched by large forces of enemy infantry and tanks.

Troops of the 2nd Byelorussian Front, continuing their offensive, on August 14 carried by storm the town and fortress of Ossoverts, powerful fortified area of the German defences on the Bobr River.

North-west and west of Sandomir, repulsing counter-attacks launched by enemy infantry and tanks, they fought engagements for the expansion of the bridgehead on the left bank of the Vistula River.

In other sectors of the front there were no important changes.

During August 13 Soviet troops on all fronts disabled or destroyed 79 German tanks: 22 enemy aircraft were shot down in air combat or by A.A. fire.

SOVIET-AMERICAN PRELIMINARY NEGOTIATIONS ON POST-WAR CIVIL AVIATION

The following statement has been issued by Tass Agency:—

In the course of June and July of this year, on the initiative of the Government of the United States of America, negotiations took place in Washington between representatives of the United States and the Soviet Union on problems of post-war civil aviation. The negotiations were of a preliminary nature and were conducted in a friendly atmosphere.

As a result of these negotiations the delegations of the Soviet Union and the United States of America have achieved mutual understanding of the interests and viewpoints of both negotiating countries with regard to the tasks and course of development of international aviation after the war. In particular it has been established that the organisation of an International Committee on Civil Aviation with advisory technical functions, which will serve to facilitate flights and contribute to the greater security of international air lines, may prove expedient.

Agreement has been reached on the exchange of views in the near future between technical experts of the United States of America and the Soviet Union on problems of co-ordination of technical measures in the field of international air transport.

REASONED CONCLUSION

Statement by Helmuth Mayer, a senior mechanic of the "Z" detachment of the German 31st Flotilla of mine-sweeping cutters:

I have come to the conclusion that the Esthonian people hate the Germans. Whenever a German soldier or sailor approaches a group of Esthonians, they immediately disperse. If a German starts talking to an Esthonian worker, the latter usually pretends not to understand him or becomes so absorbed in his work that he does not hear the question.

In the past few months assaults on Germans have become frequent in Tallinn, Tartu and elsewhere. In the mornings, German patrols discover the bodies of Germans shot or stabbed to death at street crossings, in squares, in gateways or behind kiosks.

The garrison commanders in Esthonia have issued an order forbidding German soldiers and sailors to appear singly in the streets after nightfall. The assassinations continue, however, and nobody has been caught.

CONQUEST OF THE RIVERS

By Colonel P. Kovalevsky, Red Army

THE Byelorussian battle was largely an engineers' offensive. Byelorussia is a maze of rivers, lakes, swamps and forests. In the eastern sector flow the Dnieper and its tributaries. The southern sector is veined by the multitudinous tributaries of the Pripyat. To the west lie the upper reaches of the Nyemen with its tributary the Shara, and the Narev, with its tributary the Bobr. In the north the western Dvina winds among lakes and marshes.

The Republic is traversed by three paved highways and seven or eight dirt roads more or less suitable for traffic.

The armies of four fronts had to develop their operations in wooded, swampy country offering little space for manoeuvring big forces, and in many areas practically impassable by mechanised troops.

The "Fatherland" and "Tiger" Lines

The Vitebsk-Zhlobin-Minsk triangle was formidably defended. The bombastically named "Fatherland" line covering the approaches to Vitebsk, Orsha and Mogilev comprised three fortified areas, each consisting of a main defence line, backed by a second and in some sectors a third. There were three lines of trenches with a highly developed system of communication passages, numerous ferro-concrete and earthen firing positions and shelters against heavy shells and bombs. All the big towns—Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, Zhlobin, Rogachev—were equipped for all-round defence and street fighting.

The sectors traversed by water obstacles such as the Western Dvina with its tributaries, and the Dnieper, were covered by artillery and trench mortar and machine-gun fire and thick with wire obstructions, anti-tank ditches and minefields.

The Polotsk defence line lay along the river Berezina. Reinforced by lakes, rivers and marshes, it really did seem capable of withstanding a long siege. The Germans smugly called it their "Tiger Line." The Berezina bogs made it almost impossible for big mechanised forces to operate. The Germans paid particular attention to the Borisov-Bobruisk sector of their Berezina line.

The first task of the Soviet engineers was to prepare for the concentration of strong forces, to overcome water barriers such as the Western Dvina and the Dnieper, and in doing so to mislead the enemy as to the direction of the main blow. These problems were brilliantly solved. The offensive was launched on June 23, and next day the troops of the 1st Baltic and 3rd Byelorussian Fronts blasted the Vitebsk fortified area. On the 25th they forced the Western Dvina, and on June 28 the troops of the 2nd Byelorussian Front forced the Dnieper on a wide front and captured Mogilev.

The German first line defences were pierced, but this initial success had to be developed. There were many more points of resistance, many new obstacles and minefields to surmount. "The Shumilino sector," wrote a war correspondent on the 1st Baltic front, "was of exceptional importance to the enemy, as it covered the Vitebsk-Polotsk railway and highway and the approaches

to the Western Dvina. Here the Nazis built very strong defences." Then followed the cool remark: "In the village of Sirotino sappers extracted over 3,000 mines."

How many Sirotinos there were in the Vitebsk-Zhlobin-Minsk triangle! Not dozens, not hundreds, but thousands. And when the tactical depth of the enemy's defences had been pierced, and thousands of men, machines and guns were ready to advance, the engineers had to pave a way into the operational depth of the enemy lines.

Before the troops lay the formidable Berezina line and a number of other water barriers such as the Drissa, the Dvina, the Svisloch and the Sluch, meandering through trackless country. To make matters worse, the rain came down in torrents.

The engineers had to overcome the water barriers and deal with minefields in the forests. They had to accompany the tanks, plant mines on the flanks. It was their job to seize strongpoints near bridges. All this had to be done without delaying the advance of the armoured forces. It looked impossible. But the timetable was observed. On July 1 the Berezina was forced and Borisov was captured. On July 2 mobile units forced the river Viliya, seized Vileika and captured Nesvizh and Stolbtsy, in the south. On July 3 Minsk was cleared.

The Soviet armies advanced 16 to 20 miles a day. Several armies were on the move, each with its motorised rear, which theoretically needed two good roads—and there were no roads good or bad. Soviet mobile troops overcame such "impassable" areas as the stretch between Lepel and Borisov, and found themselves in the enemy's rear. Infantry, tanks and artillery plunged across water obstacles which the German Command thought were bound to hold up the Soviet offensive.

Link-up with Partisans

Anyone unacquainted with Soviet life and the temper of the Soviet people will find it difficult to understand the speed of this advance. The friendship of the Soviet peoples is part of the secret. The Byelorussians never doubted that the Russians and other brother-peoples of the U.S.S.R. would come to their aid. Consequently, when the Red Army began its victorious push, Byelorussian partisans operating in the deep rear of the enemy fell on the German garrisons, wrecked lines of communications, forced passages for our mobile units through the thickets, and showed them secret paths.

On the night of June 25-26 a battalion under Captain Kazantsev broke through to a bridge across the Western Dvina. The enemy was established on the opposite bank and the bridge was mined. One of the engineers, Senior Sergeant Blokhin, pumped bullets into the German sentries with one hand and with the other rendered the explosive charge harmless. He killed four Germans and saved the bridge.

The day is not far off when Blokhin and his comrades will be clearing minefields in Prussia, blasting more "impregnable" fortifications and forcing the rivers Oder, Elbe and Spree.

THE 20th GERMAN GENERAL SIGNS

The following statement has been made by the Commander of the 73rd German Infantry Division, Lt.-Gen. Doctor Franeck.

MOSCOW, August 10, 1944. To Generals and officers of the German Army: I, Lt.-Gen. Doctor Fritz Franeck, Commander of the 73rd Infantry Division, fully endorse the address of the 19 generals of the Central Group of Armies with the five Corps Commanders at their head: Infantry Gen. Voelkers, Commander of the 27th Army Corps; Infantry Gen. Holwitzer, Commander of the 53rd Army Corps; Lt.-Gen. Hofmeister, Commander of the 41st Tank Corps; Lt.-Gen. Mueller, Commander of the 12th Army Corps; and Lt.-Gen. Baron von Luetzow, Commander of the 35th Army Corps.

"I—the twentieth general of the Central Group of

Armies to sign this address—am convinced that only resolute struggle against Hitler and his regime can free the German people and the peoples of Europe enslaved by Hitler from oppression and arbitrariness, and rapidly bring about a termination of the war.

"Like the rest of the generals, I am ready to take part in the struggle against Hitler and his clique. End this senseless war! Hitler is trying vainly to drag it out: by so doing he can postpone his doom only for a short time. He has already sacrificed millions of Germans, the healthiest and most virile section of the people are bled white on the battlefields.

"To retain the army in his hands he is now compelled more than ever to resort to the help of his S.S. bands and courts. They pick out generals and officers dis-

(Continued on page 3)

A CONVERSATION IN POLAND

By War Correspondent Major Boris Polevoy

I SAT talking with Josef Widank outside the Polish village of Szczeke. An old crucifix turned grey by the rain and wind crowned the green hillock on which we sat.

Widank had been a sergeant in the old Tsarist army. He had fought at Mukden and under Brusilov in Galicia. Despite the long lapse of years his bearing was still soldierly—he wore the Cross of St. George. Paying no attention to the growl of the guns, he told me how he had lived under the Germans.

Sitting on the grass beside us was Widank's brother-in-law, a gaunt peasant, thin as a skeleton, with long white hair and a bald patch on the top of his head, and a girl with a round sun-tanned face and high blond *chevelure*. They listened intently, trying to understand our Russian, and now and again interjecting a phrase which Widank translated.

Migration to Forests

"When the Germans came everybody in Szczeke, and plenty more, packed up and moved beyond the Vistula," Widank related. "We left because we knew from the first World War what the Germans were like. We hid in the forests on the other side of the Vistula. In the winter the frost and snow drove some of us back to our homes. Those who were young and had any sort of weapons stayed in the forest. They formed peasants' battalions and became guerillas.

"But let one of the others tell about them. I went back home, so I can tell you what it was like in the village. I had over four years of it. We Poles were something worse than cattle in the eyes of the Germans, worse than dogs. They set some value on dogs, but not on us. They took a dislike to one of our peasants, Stanislaw Wintrob, and killed him. We had a young lad named Stanislaw Brik. One day a German killed him because he thought Stanislaw didn't bow low enough, and nobody called him to account. The Germans said 'You Slavs are our serfs. Your lives and property belong to us.'

"Now, Pan Majsak here was a rich man before the Germans came." Widank nodded to his white-haired brother-in-law, who began to speak violently, rapidly in Polish. A nervous flush rose to his cheeks. Widank nodded, and then translated.

The Farmer

"Pan Majsak says he has two cows, but he had to deliver to the Germans 1,000 litres of milk a year from each of them. He has about three acres of land, but he had to surrender practically the entire harvest to the Germans, so that by Christmas his family had no bread and had to live on pancakes made of potatoes mixed with bark. He had to sell part of his implements and property to buy milk to make up the requisition when the yield of his cows dropped, because anybody who didn't deliver all the Germans asked for was sent to a concentration camp."

Majsak added something in an angry, grating voice.

"He says that under the Germans, though he had two cows, he could not give a cup of milk to his daughter, who is consumptive. He says that by spring the people in our village were starving. Anybody can bear that out."

The fair-haired girl, whose name was Helena Endo, broke in. She spoke passionately, and so fast that the old soldier scarcely had time to translate.

"She says that when the German cloud had covered half the sky and began to move into the Soviet Union, the Poles let their hands fall in despair. They lost all hope of seeing the sun again, and felt it would be better to die than to live as a draught animal on a German farm. But suddenly in the east the sun broke through the black clouds, and here, beyond the Vistula, many hundreds of miles from the Volga, Stalingrad gave us hope."

Then the three of them, in a mixture of Polish and Ukrainian with a few Russian words thrown in, began telling me about the peasant battalions in the forests. Whole villages had joined these guerilla groups. Women

washed and repaired the partisans' clothing and girls served as nurses. The weapons they bore had been won from the Germans in battle. The first and largest guerilla detachment called itself the "Stalingrad" battalion: another was the "Moscow" battalion. Towards the end there were several hundred men in the "Stalingrad" detachment. Its leader was a school-master, and its ranks swelled with every Red Army victory.

But it was not only the guerillas who resisted the Germans. The villagers, themselves starving, willingly shared their last crust with the partisans. They threw their grain into the lakes rather than deliver it to the enemy. The guerillas had their secret "wireless stations" in the forests. A system of messengers spread far and wide the news of the victories of the Red Army and the Allies, reports on the activities of the Union of Polish Patriots and the exploits of the Polish divisions under General Berling.

Faith in ultimate victory rose high as the Red Army swept westward. The whole district rose up. The large village of Struski, the rural district centre, refused to deliver produce to the German Army. A punitive expedition was sent. The peasants received it with scythes and pitchforks and killed three S.S. men. The Germans burned the village. (I have seen where it stood. The site is overgrown with weeds).

Thanksgiving Masses Held under Fire

Streams of trains laden with battered armament and endless columns of ambulance cars were seen moving west. The inhabitants of whole districts were rounded up by the Germans and sent to fortify the Vistula. But the workers ran away before they reached their destination. Villages migrated entire to the forests. Labour had to be brought in from Silesia and Moravia. Towards the end the Germans did not dare travel the roads near the Vistula at night. Even in daylight they only moved in large columns protected by armoured patrols.

When the first Soviet tanks appeared on this side of the Vistula the villagers rushed to meet them, although the battle was still raging and shells were bursting all around. Even in the zone of artillery fire thanksgiving masses were held in the churches. Red and white Polish flags were brought out of hiding places where they had lain for nearly five years. The villagers came with their horses and carts and volunteered to help build bridges.

During the brief bivouacks in the villages the peasants eagerly invite our officers and men into their homes, give them the seat of honour under the crucifix and entertain them with the best they have. And while the soldiers are resting the women will wash their tunics, sew on buttons and put on a patch wherever it is needed.

The peasants of Poland and the men of the Red Army get along excellently. They are linked by common hatred for the enemy. The friendship is cemented by the gratitude of the Poles for their deliverance, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the exemplary conduct of the Soviet forces.

20th GERMAN GENERAL SIGNS—(continued)

contented with Hitler and send them to the gallows. However, they will not succeed in intimidating the German people or the finest part of the generals' and officers' corps, but will only all the more rapidly rally all anti-Hitlerite forces for struggle.

"The German Army includes many generals, officers and men from Austria and other countries of Europe enslaved by Hitler. While they are shedding their blood on numerous battlefields, the violence and arbitrariness of the S.S. and Gestapo reign supreme in their native countries. It is high time for generals, officers and men to understand that every day Hitler and his clique hold power means more senseless sacrifices. Therefore, I call for resolute action. The struggle against Hitler is the struggle for the liberation of the German people and peoples of Europe enslaved by Hitler."

THE BIGGEST DEATH FACTORY IN EUROPE (3)

By Konstantin Simonov

IN the third and largest chamber the corpses were evidently stacked awaiting their turn to be incinerated.

The entire floor was found covered with charred skeletons, skulls and bones. This was the result not of a deliberate cremation, but of the Germans' attempt to do away with the evidence. They set fire to the third chamber, and the bodies then lying in it were burned. There may have been scores of them or hundreds. It is hard to say, for it is impossible to count this inextricable mixture of charred bones and fragments of scorched flesh.

It is only a few steps to the crematorium itself, a large, rectangular building of highly resistant firebrick. This contains five brick furnaces arranged one alongside the other, with hermetically closing iron doors which now stand open. The deep furnaces are half full of incinerated vertebrae and ashes. In the space in front of each lie skeletons which the Germans had intended for cremation. Three of the heaps are the bones of men and women. The other skeletons are those of children from ten to twelve years of age, to judge from their size. There are five or six skeletons in each pile.

Each furnace was built to accommodate six bodies. If there was difficulty in fitting them in, the operatives did not hesitate to hack off protruding arms, legs or heads.

The five furnaces could handle a large number of bodies daily. Originally the process of incineration took forty-five minutes, but gradually, by raising the temperature, the Germans succeeded in doubling the capacity of the crematorium: the incinerating process was speeded up by twenty minutes and more.

* * *

Experts have already examined the fireproof brick of which the furnaces are built, and conclude from various deformations and changes that the temperature in the furnaces exceeded 1,500 degrees Centigrade. Additional evidence is furnished by the cast-iron dampers, which are also deformed and show slight traces of melting.

If we reckon that, on an average, each batch of bodies took half an hour to cremate, and if we bear in mind—as is generally testified—that since the autumn of 1943 smoke poured from the crematorium chimney stack incessantly day and night, we may conclude that some 1,400 bodies were disposed of daily.

The need for a crematorium was largely determined by the Katyn forest affair. Fearing further exposures resulting from the excavation of pits in which they had buried their victims, the Germans in the autumn of 1943 undertook extensive exhumations on the territory of the Lublin camp. From an enormous number of pits around the camp they dug up the semi-decayed bodies of people they had shot, and burned them in the crematorium so as to obliterate all traces of the slaughter.

The ashes and incinerated bones from the furnaces

were poured into the same pits from which the bodies had been exhumed. One of these pits has been opened: it contains a layer of cinders and ashes one yard thick.

Beyond the camp, inside a barbed wire fence, are the brick foundations of a new block. Only one shed was completed. Nobody lived in it, but it contains perhaps the most gruesome evidence of all. The floor of this shed, several yards long and wide, is heaped to a height of over 6ft. with the footwear of people executed here in the past three years. How many pairs there are it is hard to say. They spill out of the hut through windows and door. In one spot the weight of them has pushed out part of the wall, which has fallen outwards together with piles of shoes.

Every kind of footwear can be found here—torn Russian military top boots, Polish soldiers' boots, men's shoes, women's slippers and thousands on thousands of children's boots, shoes, sandals that would fit children of ten, eight, six. There are even babies' shoes.

If you climb over the mountain of shoes to the rear of the shed you realise the meaning of this monstrous storehouse. Here are stacked in separate piles tens of thousands of soles, heels, vamps and leather clippings. Here shoes which as a whole were too worn for further wear were taken apart. Like everything else in the death camp, this storehouse was built for a strictly utilitarian purpose. Nothing belonging to the slaughtered victims was to be wasted, neither clothes, shoes, bones nor ashes.

* * *

So much for the camp proper. Another department was housed in a large building in the town of Lublin. It was a sorting house for everything removed from the massacred people. In one room tens of thousands of women's dresses are stored, in another tens of thousands of men's trousers, in a third tens of thousands of sets of underlinen, in a fourth thousands of women's hand bags, in a fifth tens of thousands of sets of children's clothing, in a sixth shaving sets, in a seventh hats and caps.

I spoke to some German prisoners who happened to march past the crematorium and the corpse-filled ditches. They denied having had any hand in the matter. They declared it was the work of S.S. troops. But when I later questioned an S.S. man who had worked in the camp he assured me that the wholesale slaughter was the work not of the S.S., but of the Security Service, in other words the Gestapo. The Gestapo men, on the other hand, declare it was the work of the S.S.

I don't know which of them did the killing and which the cremating, who stripped the shoes from the victims and who sorted the women's dresses and the children's clothing. But it seems to me that the nation which produced the perpetrators of these crimes must bear full responsibility, and all the imprecations of humanity for what its representatives have done.

(To be continued.)

4th ANTI-FASCIST MEETING OF SOVIET WOMEN

The Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee, of which Valentina Grizodubova, the famous airwoman, is chairman, will hold its fourth conference on Sunday, August 20, in Moscow.

Among the speakers will be women who have distinguished themselves in industry and on the war front, and women partisans from Byelorussia, the Ukraine and the Baltic Soviet Republics.

The proceedings will be broadcast.

NOTED ARABIST'S WARTIME DIARY

The well-known Soviet scientist Professor Ignatii Krachkovsky has completed a volume entitled "Musing over Arabian Manuscripts"—a kind of scientific diary which he has kept during the war. In this volume he describes discoveries in Arabian philology, the Asiatic Museum of the Academy of Sciences, and encounters during his travels in Syria and Egypt.

Krachkovsky is working on a History of Arabian Geographical Literature, covering the seventh to the twentieth centuries. He began this extensive work before the outbreak of war.

OIL FROM THE CASPIAN

High quality oil deposits have been found to the north of the Caspian Sea at Kashkara. Oil fountains have gushed from the first five oil-wells, drilled to no great depth (750ft.). On the area already investigated as many as 50 oil-wells can be drilled. An oil reservoir is under construction in Kashkara, 10 miles of pipe line are being completed, and a workers' settlement is being built.

This year the Kashkara oilfield will produce hundreds of tons of oil a day.

For the first time in the history of Volga navigation, a caravan of barges has arrived in Moscow direct from Astrakhan after a voyage of 2,000 miles. The caravan brought to the capital over 25,000 tons of fuel.

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