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Author

Helmut GREINER
Ministerialrat im OKW
Born: 30 April 1892
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Helmut GREINER joined the Army in December 1913, entering the 132d Prussian Infantry Regiment as an officer candidate, and in July 1914 was promoted second lieutenant with commission dated 23 June 1913. In World War I he served at the various fronts from the outbreak of war to June 1917, with two brief breaks to recover from wounds. In June 1917 he was detached to serve as military attache on the staff of the German Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, from which he was transferred to the Historical Division of Army General Staff, Berlin, in January 1919, remaining there until discharged from the Army in March 1920, with rank of captain. Less than a month later GREINER was appointed archivist in the Military History Section of the Historical Branch of the Reichs Archives at Potsdam. He remained in this service until 1935, and it was during this period that he continued his studies in national economy and history at the Berlin University from 1921-24. Also during this period he did a great deal of writing on the German official history of World War I and was promoted Archivrat.

On 1 April 1935 GREINER was re-called for service in the Wehrmacht, promoted Regierungsrat (equivalent to major in rank) and attached to the re-organized Historical Division of the Reichs Archives, a branch of the Military History Research Institute of the Army. On 18 August 1939, he was transferred to the National Defense Branch, which later was re-designated

* Administrative official attached to Wehrmacht Command, equivalent in rank to a colonel.

Wehrmacht Operations Staff (Wehrmachtsfuehrungsstab), in Hitler's headquarters, as Keeper of the War Diary. Promoted Oberregierungsrat on 1 May 1936 and Ministerialrat on 1 October 1940, GRAINER was removed from his post on 22 April 1943 because of his known anti-national-socialist sentiments. Following this he was detached to the Office of the German General Attached to Italian Armed Forces Headquarters in Rome for a brief spell, 15 June - 31 July 1943.

From that date to the end of the War, GRAINER was not employed, being considered politically unreliable. He was captured by US forces at Oberhof, Thuringia on 4 April 1945.

In addition to his career in the civil service and the Wehrmacht, GRAINER is a well-known writer on military subjects in the historical vein, his published works including, VETERANS OF WORLD WAR I, a collection of essays by soldiers of that War; THE 1916 CAMPAIGN IN RUMANIA, written for the Swedish General Staff; THE 1916 INVASION OF BELGIUM AND THE FIRST MAJOR BATTLES; THE FRENCH MOBILIZATION IN 1914; THE AMERICAN WAR OF SECESSION; GUERRILLA WARFARE IN 1870-71 and FRENCH MOBILIZATION PLANS, 1885-1914, some of which were written specifically as instruction manuals for use in training.

OPERATION BARBAROSSA

On the afternoon of 29 July 1940, General of Artillery JODL, the Chief of Armed Forces Operations Office,* appeared at the special train of the Department for National Defense which was being held at Bad Reichenhall during HITLER's stay at the Berghof. Under the seal of strictest secrecy, he informed Colonel WARLIMONT, the Department Chief, as well as the chiefs of the operations divisions of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Lieutenant Colonel von LOSZBERG, Lieutenant Commander JUNGE, and Major von FALKENSTEIN, that the Fuehrer had decided to conquer the Soviet Union by force of arms.

This news aroused extreme astonishment and consternation among the above mentioned officers. Indeed, had not HITLER, while addressing his generals at the Berghof on 22 August 1939 and in his Reichstag speech of 1 September, declared emphatically that the nonaggression pact signed by Germany and the U.S.S.R. on 23 August signified a complete reversal of German foreign policy and for all time precluded the possibility of hostilities between the two nations! Furthermore, had not HITLER concluded this pact principally to insure that Germany would not again become involved in a two-front war as it did during World War I! In addition, the Soviet Union thus far had fulfilled the terms of the treaty in every respect, and the German-Russian credit agreement of

* Later changed to Armed Forces Operations Staff.

19 August 1939 and the highly important commercial treaty of 11 February 1940 had resulted in remarkable benefits for Germany. Moreover, immediately after the fall of France, HITLER had issued the first instructions for a partial demobilization of the Army, particularly with regard to the discharge of the older age classes and especially technicians, and had ordered that there be a shift of emphasis on armaments in favor of the air force and the navy. These instructions indicated that he no longer anticipated any large-scale ground operations but was concerned only with war against England. Also, on 16 July 1940 he had actually ordered in his "Fuehrer Directive # 16" that preparations be made for landing operations in England. When in spite of this, HITLER suddenly announced his intention to attack Soviet Russia, the reasons which induced him to take this step could only be surmised.

In this connection, it is questionable whether HITLER ever actually intended to adhere to the German-Russian treaty and whether (as he had asserted in his Reichstag speech of 1 September 1939) he really regarded it as a decisive political turning point. It was possible that he had concluded the treaty simply to eliminate the danger in the rear, in preparation for the expected clash with the western powers, and had been convinced from the first that STALIN, too, would abide by the pact only as long as it served his purpose. It will probably be difficult to ever answer this question with absolute certainty. The fact that HITLER had always emphasized our ideological conflict with Communism and had proclaimed his foreign policy aims in his book "Mein Kampf," and his

unscrupulousness in connection with the signing and fulfilling of treaties, were definite indications that he did not look upon the German-Russian nonaggression pact as a permanent arrangement but as a stopgap measure serving to postpone the settling of accounts with the U.S.S.R.

An additional reason for the attack on Russia might have been the fact that the Russians were constantly advancing further westward, and endangering our own military operations. In 1939, when the treaty was signed at Moscow, the Soviet Government had declared emphatically that it had no intentions of occupying, bolshevizing, or annexing the states located within their sphere of influence. Yet in spite of that, the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Esthonia -- where the U.S.S.R. had maintained military strongpoints since the late fall of 1939 -- were occupied completely in June 1940, immediately bolshevized, and incorporated into the U.S.S.R. several weeks later as federal republics. In addition, the U.S.S.R. issued an ultimatum to Rumania on 26 June, requesting the return of Bessarabia as well as the northern part of Bukovina which had never belonged to Russia. Two days later the Soviets marched into those territories, and they were incorporated into the Soviet Union as Federal Republics of Moldavia and the Ukraine. This move had brought the Soviet Union alarmingly close to the Rumanian oil fields in which Germany was vitally interested. The Russian advance led to Rumania's waiver of the guaranty pledged by England and France on 13 April 1940 and to her closer connection with the Axis powers, while HITLER promised his full support to the Rumanian Government and instructed

the Foreign Intelligence and Counter Intelligence Office, headed by Admiral C. W. Clegg, to take measures for the protection of German oil interests in Rumania.

However, no matter how much the fundamental conflict with Communism and the Russian advance to the west might have played a part in HITLER's decision to attack the Soviet Union, I do not believe that they were the determining factors. Above all, they do not adequately explain why HITLER made this decision at a time when preparations for an invasion of England had just been started. For there can be little doubt that HITLER did not reckon at that time with any participation by Russia in the war against Germany. On the contrary, he believed -- as evidenced by repeated statements to this effect -- that for a reasonable length of time he could definitely depend on a friendly attitude on the part of STALIN. He was also of the opinion that the Soviet Union was too weak from a military point of view and too much handicapped by the state of its home politics to be willing to risk a major armed conflict. Consequently, in this connection, he was under no pressure to act hastily and could even postpone the final settlement of accounts with Russia until he had an absolutely free hand. Surely there must have been another important reason which gave rise to his plan to attack Russia in the near future. I believe we can hardly go wrong in assuming that the reason can be found in the following:

From the very beginning of the war, HITLER had looked upon England as his chief enemy. However, he lacked the military strength to conquer

her. Since it seemed to be out of the question to come to an understanding with England, at least under the conditions which HITLER desired, it became his principal aim to break England's will to resist by force of arms.

When the British Government, contrary to expectations, remained firm in its decision to continue the war even after its fighting forces had been driven from the Continent and after France had fallen, HITLER ordered intensified air and naval warfare against England and preparations for landing operations. However, he undoubtedly took the latter step with some reluctance, because in view of Germany's hopeless inferiority at sea and the lack of naval transports, he probably did not really feel equal to this difficult task. He probably feared a setback which would certainly undermine his prestige considerably and might have very serious political consequences. He even seemed to have been rather skeptical from the outset of the prospects for success of the intensified naval and air warfare. In any event, he was apparently not nearly as optimistic about it as GOERING. This uncertainty induced him to look strategic stopgaps which might enable him to reach his goal with less risk. This then might have led to the plan to conquer Russia quickly -- for he had reckoned with just a brief campaign from the very beginning -- in order to deprive England of the last trump card she might still possess on the Continent and thus force her to come to terms. As I said before, all this is only conjecture, but many statements made subsequently by HITLER, as well as JODL, definitely indicate that these theories come quite close to the truth.

Owing to the fact that no specific data has been furnished by the parties concerned, I cannot say whether and to what extent General JOEL offered any reasons for the new plan during his conference with the officers of the National Defense Department. He announced that the following spring would probably be the time when the campaign against Russia would begin. Originally HITLER apparently had planned to attack the Russians as early as the fall of 1940. However, he had given up this idea, evidently because he had been dissuaded by Generalfeldmarschall KEITEL who probably pointed out that the Russian winter would greatly handicap the German advance and that the strategic concentration of the German Wehrmacht in the newly gained eastern area involved certain requirements which it would not be possible to carry into effect in a few weeks.

In order to fulfil these prerequisites the National Defense Department was assigned the task of compiling a Wehrmacht High Command directive for all the branches of the Wehrmacht, which was to be designated "Aufbau Ost" (Development of the Eastern Territories) and for which General JOEL issued specific guiding principles during the conference on 29 July. On 2 August, General WAREIMONT * submitted a first draft of this directive to Generalfeldmarschall KEITEL. In the introduction, the following statement appeared, in order to veil the real purport of the order:

The Fuehrer has abandoned the idea of establishing an independent Polish rump government and has decided to incorporate the occupied eastern territories into Greater

* The Chief of the National Defense Department was promoted to Generalmajor on 1 August 1940.

Germany. Owing to this fact, it also has become necessary for the Wehrmacht to consolidate and develop the newly won eastern territories, in all respects. Besides, during the war, the ever increasing menace of air attacks in the west requires that the protected eastern territories be utilized for military purposes in greater measure.

The directive further stipulated that these actions be governed by the following precepts:

Any reorganization or training of forces for which a need will arise in the future should be preferably effected in the eastern territories, and for this purpose the necessary facilities for training maneuvers should be set up immediately. If necessary, Wehrmacht supplies of all kinds should be transferred to the east from the western areas which are exposed to air attacks. The Wehrmacht requirements covering the improvement of the railway and road network are to be transmitted to the competent Reich agencies at the earliest possible moment; the signal communication system is to be improved; installations of the armament industry which serve the immediate troop requirements are to be set up in sufficient quantities; furthermore the mapping system for the east should be immediately adapted to the needs of the forces. On the other hand, the measures concerning the development of fortifications in the country, which have been scheduled on the basis of earlier regulations, are to be deferred for the present.

The directive added that these instructions would be sent simultaneously to the top level Reich agencies concerned and the Governor General of the occupied Polish territories.

Referring to these concluding remarks, the Supply Section of the National Defense Department on 7 August, called attention to the fact that, according to reports on hand, the civilian agencies were still uninformed about the pending incorporation of the Gouvernement Général into Greater Germany. It was pointed out that the OKW (Wehrmacht High Command)

directive would now apprise the top level Reich agencies and the Governor General of the political decision made by the Fuehrer from which these agencies would draw far-reaching inferences. In order to avoid this, it was proposed that the Fuehrer directive be made public by the Chief of the Reich Chancellery or the Reich Minister of the Interior, acting as central agency for all questions affecting the eastern territories.

As HITLER, contrary to statement made in the introduction to the Wehrmacht High Command directive solely to conceal actual motives, at that time was by no means clear as to what he should do with the Polish rump territory, he specified, as a result of the above mentioned objection, that the aerial warfare in the west should be the only reason offered for the measures scheduled for the east. In this amended form the directive was signed on 9 August by the Chief of Wehrmacht High Command and distributed to the Wehrmacht branches, the top level Reich agencies, and the Governor General.

In all probability, the Commander in Chief of Staff of the Army at that time had already been informed of HITLER's new plan and were therefore familiar with the real purpose of the Wehrmacht High Command directive; but exactly when this orientation took place is not certain. On 3 September 1940, when Generalleutnant PAULUS assumed his duties as Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, General HALDER handed him an operations plan covering the campaign against Soviet Russia, which was still incomplete and on which Generalmajor MARCKS had been working thus

far, and instructed him to finish this plan after investigating all attack possibilities and proceeding on the assumption that 130 - 140 divisions would be available for this purpose. In this connection, he was to take into account from the first the utilization of Rumania as an area for the strategic concentration of the German southern wing. HITLER had set the following strategic objectives: (1) to annihilate the Russian forces stationed in western Russia and to make sure that none of the elements would escape in fit condition to the rear; (2) to capture Leningrad, Moscow, the Ukraine, and the northern part of the Caucasus with its oil wells; (3) to reach a line from which the Russian air force would no longer be able to effectively attack Germany; the final objective was to be the Astrakhan-Volga-Archangel line. *

Independent of the considerations and investigations of the General Staff of the Army, the National Defense Department also had to compile an operations plan for the campaign against Russia. The Department was given its assignment either during the conference on 29 July or soon thereafter ** by General JOEL, who obviously tried to arrive at a basis on which to develop his own ideas concerning the planned operations, so as to be adequately prepared for the consultation with Generalfeldmarschall von BRAUCHITSCH, which was expected to take place in the near future, in connection with the results of the Army High Command investigations.

* According to testimony given by Generalfeldmarschall PAULUS during the first trial of war criminals held at Nuernberg in February 1946.

** The exact date can no longer be ascertained.

The Commander in Chief of the Air Force also seems to have been informed by HITLER of his new plan early in the game, for it is reasonable to assume that the operations staff of the Air Force already knew of this project when, on 8 August, they requested the OKH (Army High Command) to furnish the necessary data in connection with the development of the ground organization of the Air Force in the east. On the other hand, the Commander in Chief of the Navy was apparently not notified by HITLER until the end of September, which, however, does not preclude the possibility that he had been previously informed of the new scheme by some other means.

For the present, the two plans of operations and the OKW (Wehrmacht High Command) directive were held in abeyance. On 21 August, HITLER merely sent word via General JOEL to the Commander in Chief of the Army that "it is urgently necessary to fortify immediately the Baltic Seacoast with batteries," and that, "for political reasons, it is desirable that an armored unit be detached without delay to East Prussia." The reason for the latter measure was undoubtedly the fact that the Soviet Union, through its recent occupation of all of Lithuania, had forged ahead right up to the eastern borders of East Prussia. The OKH (Army High Command) assigned the 1st Panzer Division which arrived in East Prussia at the beginning of September.

At this time, however, other projects were still foremost in importance -- above all Operation SEELÖWE as well as the plan for an attack on Gibraltar and the contemplated commitment of German armored forces in