

THE BATTLE FOR EASTERN GERMANY

By KLAUS MEHNERT

Many campaigns or battles of this war which have been called "mighty" or "decisive" were put in the shade by others which followed them. Of course we do not know what may still come; but one thing is certain: the battle which has been raging on the eastern European front since January 12 is, as far as men, material, and issues involved are concerned, the greatest of the present war.

BETWEEN the middle of August 1944 and January 11, 1945, the Eastern Front north of the Carpathians hardly changed at all. The Soviets had succeeded in causing the German troops to withdraw from Estonia and eastern Latvia and had reached the Baltic Sea on a narrow front between Libau and Memel, thus cutting off the German forces in Kurland from a land connection with East Prussia. Otherwise, however, a comparison between our present map and that printed in our October issue of 1944 (p. 226) shows more or less the same front line which, at the beginning of January, approximately followed the eastern and southeastern frontier of East Prussia, the Narev River, the Vistula River, and the northeastern slopes of the Carpathians.

On the western banks of the river barrier formed by the Narev and the Vistula, the Soviets had five important bridgeheads, two on the Narev (Rożan and Serock) and three on the Vistula (Warka, Puławy, and Baranów). The last of these, named after the town of Baranów in German communiqués and after the town of Sandomierz in Soviet communiqués, was by far the largest, including as it did an area of about 2,000 square kilometers and extending 70 kilometers southwest from Sandomierz along the Vistula. Since the course of the war on the Eastern Front had revealed the limited significance of rivers as military obstacles, the German command desisted from an attempt to destroy these bridgeheads and contented itself with preventing their further expansion by fortifications.

THE START

German reports during the late autumn and the winter, especially since the middle of December, showed that the Soviets were filling their bridgeheads with vast quantities of troops and material and that they were also bringing up extremely strong forces to the entire re-

mainder of the Eastern Front between the Baltic and the Carpathians. The main concentration was observed in the bridgehead of Baranów, which was in the sector of the I Ukrainian Front.

During the second week of January, indications mounted that a great Soviet offensive was imminent. It began on January 12, first in the sector of the I Ukrainian Front, and spread within the next twelve days over the entire Eastern Front.

The Six Soviet Fronts

(from north to south)

Front	Commanding General	Starting Date of Winter Offensive
I Baltic	Bagramyan	January 24
III White Russian	Chernyakhovsky	" 13
II White Russian	Rokossovsky	" 14
I White Russian	Jukov	" 14
I Ukrainian	Konyev	" 12
IV Ukrainian	Petrov	" 16

A comparison of this table with that published in our issue of October 1944 shows that the I White Russian Front, commanded in summer by Marshal Rokossovsky, has been taken over by Marshal Jukov, while Rokossovsky was given the II White Russian Front formerly under General Zakharov.

On the whole, the starting dates of the Soviet offensives are identical in the German and Soviet reports. Two exceptions are formed by the offensives of the I Baltic and III White Russian Fronts. Moscow has a habit of only announcing the exact beginning of large-scale offensives if these have led after a few days to successes visible on maps. Whenever this is not the case, the announcement is either delayed or entirely omitted. Thus, for instance, the communiqués of the Soviets never even mentioned the offensive conducted with large forces by their I Baltic Front against the German troops in Kurland. This offensive—the fourth of its kind—began on January 24, and within

a week scores of divisions were embroiled in it. But neither the hoped-for breakthrough to Libau nor any other territorial gains materialized. (The first three Soviet Kurland offensives took place from October 26 to November 7, 1944, from November 19 to 25, 1944, and from December 21, 1944, to January 2, 1945.) The offensive of the III White Russian Front began on January 13; but as it was least successful among all the offensives, with the exception of Bagramyan's, it was only announced on January 19, when Pillkallen fell into the hands of the Red Army after bitter fighting. Moreover, no starting date was mentioned.

THE FIRST FOUR WEEKS

The Soviet winter offensive can be traced in detail, as German and Soviet reports agree strikingly on its geographical course. It stands to reason that, in view of their advance, the Soviet communiqués show off with the names of occupied localities as soon as possible. If, however, the German communiqués published the names of abandoned localities even before the Soviets, this only proves how much the German High Command is endeavoring to keep its own people accurately informed about the course of the fighting, particularly in view of the grave implications of this fighting. And



The Eastern Front during the first four weeks of the Soviet winter offensive (January 12 to February 9, 1945). Red lines indicate the approximate course of the front from week to week

although the getting under way of the winter offensive took twelve days, the German side was within the first day or so fully aware of the fact that this was going to be the Soviet offensive. On January 14, German commentaries were already speaking of "the greatest winter battle of the war" having started.

The accompanying map gives an idea of the chief events.

The I Ukrainian Front was given the task of capturing Silesia, of forming the left flank in the attack on Berlin, and breaking through to Moravia (former Czechoslovakia) at Mährisch-Ostrau, where the River Oder, coming from Moravia, has forced its way through the mountains to Silesia. Konyev's armies were supported on the left wing by the far weaker troops of the IV Ukrainian Front, which have hitherto not been involved in large-scale fighting and which marched along the northern slopes of the Carpathians toward the west.

Having succeeded by a tremendous artillery barrage in breaking the German ring around the Baranow bridgehead, Konyev's troops advanced through the thinly populated Polish-Silesian plain and reached the Oder, somewhere between Kosel and Breslau. Their progress into the industrial region of Upper Silesia, one of the most thickly populated areas in Europe, was much slower. While the German troops only withdrew before Konyev's offensive after hard fighting and step by step, they gave ground on their right wing, i.e., where they were facing Petrow's forces, without strong pressure in order to maintain contact with the German troops withdrawing to Silesia.

Marshal Jukov's I White Russian Front, which was equipped with even stronger armored units, had the greatest successes to show from the point of view of distances covered. Its offensive consisted of two main thrusts. The first, more southern one started from the two bridgeheads of Warka and Pulawy—which were joined up on the third day of the offensive—and led via Litzmannstadt, Kalisch, and through the triangle formed by the Rivers Warthe and Oder to the middle reaches of the Oder in the region of Küstrin, Frankfurt an der Oder, and Fürstenberg. The second thrust, coming from the bridgehead of Warka, was directed north-eastward, causing the abandonment of the ruins of Warsaw by the German troops and leading down the Vistula via Wloclawek, Hohensalza, and Bromberg into Pomerania.

The object set for the II White Russian Front was the isolation of East Prussia from the Reich by a thrust along the lower Vistula and, in conjunction with the III White Russian Front, the conquest of East Prussia. In the northernmost sector, Bagramyan's troops also took part to a small extent in this battle and occupied Memel on January 28, after the Germans had given up this town because its position was too isolated. The offensive against

East Prussia went through regions in which the Russian armies of the Great War had suffered terrible defeats (Tannenberg, August 26-30, 1914; Masurian Lakes, September 6-15, 1914). This time, the Russians had chosen a season in which East Prussia's main protection of a geographical nature, its countless lakes and dense forests, was ineffective. The lakes were frozen; and the Soviets, instead of having to fight for the narrow marshy or wooded strips of land between the lakes, could advance with their tanks across the smooth open surfaces of the lakes. Hence the Germans were forced to give up the greater part of East Prussia to the oncoming flood and to withdraw to an area in the north consisting mainly of the towns of Königsberg and Elbing and an irregular strip of land between them.

By the end of the fourth week of the Soviet offensive (February 9) the front line followed on the whole the River Oder. The Germans still had considerable forces east of the Oder, especially in East Prussia and in Elbing, Marienburg, Graudenz, Schneidemühl, and Posen; furthermore, they held a wide coastal strip between the lower Oder and the lower Vistula, i.e., between Stettin and Danzig, and numerous bridgeheads, especially those of Küstrin, Frankfurt, Fürstenberg, and Breslau, as well as the tenaciously defended industrial region of Upper Silesia and the area between Ratibor and Bielitz protecting the gateway to Moravia. The Soviets, on the other hand, possessed several bridgeheads on the western bank of the Oder, particularly—from north to south—Göritz, south of Frankfurt, at Fürstenberg, Neusalz, Steinau, Parchwitz, Maltsh, Ohlau, Brieg, Oppeln, and Mechnitz, whence they hoped to encircle Breslau and carry out an attack on Berlin.

HUNGARY

Although the present review is concerned with events on the front north of the Carpathians, we must add a few words about the Hungarian front. It was here that the Soviets met with considerable reverses which prevented them from supporting their main offensive with another drive south of the Carpathians. The review of the Balkan front appearing in this magazine (January 1945) dealt with the events up to the end of November. In the course of December one Soviet army conquered the triangle between the Rivers Danube and Drau up to Lake Balaton, while another Soviet army, coming from the northeast, moved west along both banks of the Danube above its great bend. By joining hands, the two armies cut off Budapest from the west. But on January 2 a powerful German counteroffensive began in the great Danube bend. The German right wing recaptured Stuhlweissenburg and pushed toward Budapest from there; the left wing recaptured Gran.

Meanwhile the German-Hungarian garrison held out stubbornly in Budapest. Fighting for each block, it gradually withdrew to the area of the Royal Castle on the west bank of the Danube. The fierce battle for Budapest and the defense against the unexpected German offensive tied down a large number of Soviet divisions which were originally intended to push on toward Vienna. Yet the Soviets were unable to prevent the garrison of Budapest, some 30,000 men, from breaking out through the Soviet ring on February 11 and joining the main German fighting line further to the west.

Throughout this time the detaching movement of the German Balkan army was continued between the River Drau and the Adriatic coast.

NUMBERS

The present winter offensive between the Carpathians and the Baltic—this is revealed by German as well as Soviet reports—is the greatest effort to have been made by the Soviets in the course of this war. From the very first instant they threw huge quantities of men and material into the fray. Moreover, they had brought up such vast reserves that they could afford continually to employ new divisions as well as reinforce those weakened by the fierce German resistance. According to German estimates, 95 Soviet infantry divisions were involved on January 18, i.e., about a week after the beginning of the offensive; one week later, the number was 300. That means that on an average 30 fresh divisions were thrown into the battle every day during the second week. By the end of January the number of Soviet troops, including the tank armies, involved in the offensive amounted to more than 3 million men, representing about one man for every foot of front line.

In comparison to this the German forces employed were small. Indirectly the Soviets themselves have admitted this. During the first two weeks of the offensive, which brought them the greatest territorial gains, even Soviet claims (January 27) placed the figure of German prisoners taken at no more than 86,000. It goes without saying that this figure is more likely to be an overestimation than an underestimation; it also probably includes many members of formations such as the *Volkssturm*, Labor Service, etc. Hence the actual number of members of the *Wehrmacht*—in the narrow sense of the word—taken prisoner during this period, which brought the Soviets to the gates of Breslau, Posen, Elbing, and Königsberg, can hardly have amounted to more than some twenty thousand. As the armored units and motorized troops of the Soviets could advance far more rapidly than the German troops could be withdrawn, the small number of German prisoners allows no other conclusion than that the German Army (1) had only comparatively weak units holding the front line of January

12; (2) that it was able to withdraw part of these forces in good time; and (3) that those left behind continued to fight tenaciously even when they found themselves far behind the front line and completely surrounded.

TACTICS

According to the Soviet reporter P. Petrov, the armored and motorized units under Konyev and Jukov had orders "not to stop anywhere to batter fortified lines or fortifications of the enemy, but to circumvent them and continuously to increase the tempo of advance with maximum speed. Those German troops which offered resistance were to be left to the forces following after." The best example of these tactics is the by-passing of Posen on January 27/29. Jukov's armored spearheads passed the city to the left and right, and it was only later involved in heavy fighting with Soviet troops following in the wake of their armored detachments.

With these tactics being employed, the size of the battlefield and its flat nature made it very difficult for the Germans to fight the advancing armored troops to a stop once they had broken through the front. In the great plain extending from the Carpathians to the Baltic there were enough areas where the Soviet tank armies could advance by avoiding German centers of resistance, just as had been done in France last summer by the US tank armies after the breakthrough of Avranches. Hence, if Jukov's tanks had not been dependent on fuel and ammunition they might well have continued their advance, although with losses, during the third or fourth week. So it was only part of the German objective to parry the Soviet armored spearheads, as was done along the Oder. Far more important was the task of cutting them off from supplies needed for the continuation of the battle. Even the largest tank used in this winter offensive, the "Stalin Tank" with its 12.2-cm cannon, is no more than a dead piece of iron if it has no fuel or ammunition. The Soviets undoubtedly sent off Konyev's and Jukov's tank armies with large fuel and ammunition reserves to render them independent of supplies as long as possible, in a similar manner as the Americans have done with their task forces in the Pacific. ("The Russians have performed an unprecedented feat in the way they gathered large numbers of armored vehicles into formations fitted with all the necessary equipment," declared a German commentator at the end of January.) But at one time or another, the moment must come when the reserves carried along are exhausted and additional material must be brought up from the rear. To make this moment as critical as possible for the Soviets was the task of the German detachments fighting far to the east of the Red spearheads. Not only did they attempt to prevent

the main bodies of the slower Soviet troops from catching up with the tank armies: they also endeavored to destroy all supply routes, railways, bridges, and highways in order to disrupt the supplying of the tank armies.

It proved very difficult to carry this out, the Soviets having intentionally chosen the coldest season for their offensive and, moreover, being favored by an exceptionally severe winter. The cold weather had transformed the entire terrain into one single surface passable for vehicles, in advancing over which the Soviets had to keep neither to bridges nor highways. However, this condition will change with the beginning of warmer weather. Then lakes and rivers will be lakes and rivers again, and Soviet trucks, instead of being able to roll across fields, will have to stick to roads. Apart from political considerations, this is the reason why Stalin is in such a hurry.

The weather was responsible for the fact, reported by both sides, that the air arm played a comparatively small role, especially during January. Not until the beginning of February were planes employed more extensively. This brought with it a perceptible alleviation for the German ground forces by the Luftwaffe, which attacked the tank spearheads—with Colonel Rudel, the champion tank-buster, destroying his 516th tank—as well as the Red supply columns and bridges and railways. Toward the end of January and early in February, the German Navy also temporarily intervened in the land battles for the Samland Peninsula (northwest of Königsberg) and Elbing, without so far having been involved in naval battles with the Soviet fleet. The fact that German troops are still in possession of Kurland and the western shore of the Bay of Riga may be in part responsible for the Soviet fleet not yet having appeared in the southern Baltic.

A NEW FEATURE

The eastern battles of the last few weeks are distinguished from all former battles in that for the first time the majority of them have taken place on German soil. This has transformed the war into one between the German Army and population on the one hand and the Red Army on the other. The *Volkssturm*, created on October 18, 1944, and representing a German levy en masse, has for the first time been sent into battle on a large scale. Their special training in the combating of tanks has proved so successful that the total number of Soviet tanks destroyed in the first four weeks by all German formations—Army, Air Force, SS, *Volkssturm*—was given by German sources as 7,966, a figure that staggers the imagination.

The main weapon against tanks is the *Panzerfaust* (tank fist), which made its first appearance last summer on the invasion front in France and has meanwhile been improved to such an extent that it can be operated effectively by

any *Volkssturm* man after a short training. The former antitank weapons designed for the use of individual soldiers consisted of attached charges and other cumulative charges, whose effect depends on the enemy tank being approached directly by the soldier. This is, of course, a difficult feat that can only be carried out by experienced men and in certain situations and is quite impossible when the attacking tank is moving at a high speed. The *Panzerfaust* has obviated these difficulties, as it



The "Panzerfaust"

can be employed at a considerable distance. Although it is light in weight and easy to manipulate, it is surprisingly effective even against the heaviest tanks, since it is able to pierce armor plates up to 100 millimeters thick. Its propulsion is based on the rocket principle. Projectile, propelling charge, and discharging barrel are united in a single piece, and the soldier holds the barrel in his hands. The sighting equipment is so simple that even an inexperienced man is able to make hits at short range.

The increasingly direct inclusion and participation of the entire population in the fighting has added to the responsibilities of organizations and persons not of a military nature in the old sense of the word. The *Volkssturm*, although its members automatically receive the status of regular soldiers, is organized by the Party and includes the entire male population between the ages of sixteen and sixty which has not previously been called up for service in the armed forces. The huge organization of evacuations is in the hands of the civil authorities. The importance of regional Party leaders, mayors, etc., in backing up the defense of German soil has been revealed by many indications, as has the increasing role of Heinrich Himmler who, as Commander in Chief of the Home Army and the *Volkssturm*, Minister of the Interior, and Head of the Police and SS, holds one of the key positions in the defense of the country. The close co-operation between the old *Wehrmacht* and the new military formations created during the last few months, not foreseen by the Allies, is one of the reasons why they have time and again had to change the dates predicted for their victory.

Indicative of the attitude of the German population is the fact that the Soviets, who

are so fond of posing as "liberators of the people," have so far claimed neither in their radio nor their press that the German "proletariat" has hailed them anywhere as "liberators." On the contrary, in the industrial regions of Upper Silesia the resistance of the population was particularly fierce. In all other places, too, the Soviets always emphasize the grimness of the resistance. An example from the Soviet communiqué of January 19:

The fighting for the town of Pillkallen was very bitter. The Germans defended themselves in the houses with the rage of men condemned to death. Our troops had to fight for every house. Enemy counterattacks came one after another.

After the capture of Tilsit, one of the biggest German towns to have fallen into the hands of the Soviets so far, the *Pravda* correspondent reported (Tilsit, 27.1.45):

In the streets there is not a soul to be seen. The population has long been evacuated. In attics and cellars a few German soldiers were found.

But Tilsit had been in the immediate vicinity of the front since the summer of 1944 and could therefore be evacuated in good time and in complete order. It was not everywhere that the Soviets were confronted with the scene of utterly evacuated towns. In many cases and in large areas, the advance of the motorized Soviet armies was too quick to allow of this. For the German as well as the non-German population of the territories overrun by the Soviets, the last few weeks were a tragedy on a vast scale. But the German population had previously already gone through severe tests and has learned in five and a half years of war and hundreds of nights of bombing to bear up under hardship and danger. Although we find many factual reports in the German press on the terrible consequences of the hasty evacuation of hundreds of thousands engulfed by the war in the midst of winter and on the atrocities committed by the Soviets, we find just as many proofs of the nation's unflinching determination to carry on. The suffering of the population of eastern Germany today is only part of the sacrifices constantly being made by the entire nation in this war and by which it intends to gain victory and existence.

The total number of Germans living before the beginning of the Soviet offensive in the territories occupied or surrounded by the Soviets amounted to some $7\frac{1}{2}$ million. We do not know how many of them were evacuated; according to a Spanish observer, 4 to 5 millions. The fact that this figure is not greater is due to the rapidity of events and the inclusion of almost the whole male population in the detachments of the *Volkssturm*. The Soviets themselves wrote in an article entitled "On the Roads of Germany": "An immense proportion of the German population did not succeed in being evacuated" (11.2.45); and a German commentator explained the staying behind of the able-bodied population by the following simile:

When a dike bursts, the people living behind the dike do not seek safety by running away, for they know that the water is bound to catch up with them. They remain at the dike in order to do their best to fill up the holes or go to the highest elevations, where the flood may surround them but cannot reach them at once.

SOVIET EFFORTS

How was it possible that the German Army, which a few years ago advanced by tremendous victories to the Volga and the peaks of the Caucasus, was obliged in the course of about two years to go back to the Oder? The principal explanation is probably the fact that Germany is conducting a war on two fronts—or, to be more exact, a war in all directions of the compass—and that she is opposed by a coalition of three world powers of which the Soviet Union has directed all its strength against her, England almost all her strength, and America a very considerable part of her strength. This very fact forced Germany to employ a strategy radically different from that followed by her in the years 1939/42, when she carried out major operations on one front at a time only.

Furthermore, we must bear in mind that the Soviet Union was the first power to have carried out total mobilization, almost from the first day of the war and to a much larger extent than the others, having introduced on October 1, 1941, what was called the *rseobuch*, viz., military training for almost the entire adult population. The Soviets had at their disposal a vast territory in and behind the Urals, endowed with rich mineral resources and protected against any enemy raid by its geographical position. Moreover, the Soviet Government had, true to its system and to the nature of its inhabitants, with unparalleled ruthlessness extracted the utmost in troops and labor from its population. And finally it had received large armament supplies particularly from America. In a statement issued by Economic Administrator Leo T. Crowley in Washington on February 1—with the obvious intention of impressing the Soviets with the fact that the Americans had contributed their share in the Red offensive—the following figures on US Lend-Lease deliveries to the USSR up to December 1, 1944, were given:

431,000 automobiles and trucks
12,200 planes
6,000 tanks
1,045 locomotives
7,164 flat cars
294,000 tons of explosives
2,120,000 tons of steel

The report added that in many sectors of the Eastern Front more than half of the Soviet supply service was carried on American-produced vehicles.

SOVIET TROUBLES

The fact that the Soviet Union has been on the offensive for more than two years, has

captured wide expanses of Eastern Europe, and has now advanced deep into German territory, has made such an impression upon the world that people are inclined to overlook existing weaknesses, all the more so since these are less visible in a country so hermetically sealed to the outer world than in any other country.

In a number of articles appearing in this magazine, we have already drawn attention to various significant weak points within the Soviet Union. The fact that our analyses of Soviet affairs are not far off the mark has recently been indirectly acknowledged by a Soviet paper in Shanghai. In a four-column criticism of those of our magazine's articles dealing with the USSR that paper confined itself to generalities and vituperation, making no attempt to answer a single one of our arguments. To answer these arguments, which are not based on imagination but on a thorough study of facts taken from Soviet sources, would require an equally thorough study and is not easy for people who have never been in the USSR, as many of the contributors of that paper, or not even in Russia, as the author of that particular article.

We can fully appreciate that long years of refugee life have given a number of Russians the desire to cease being people without a country and caused them to apply for Soviet citizenship. Once they have taken this step, it is only natural for them to want to see the USSR in as rosy a color as possible and to drown out their secret fears of Bolshevism by taking everything that the Soviets write at its face value. For such people we have but one advice: not to read our articles if they disturb their illusions and peace of mind.

Here we shall discuss a few weak points which have become particularly apparent during the last few months.

Above all, there is the extraordinary strain on the reserves of manpower. In discussing previous Soviet offensives, we have never said that they represented the utilization of the last resources. But that even the human reserves of the USSR are not inexhaustible can be deduced from various indications. The number of Soviet citizens who have fallen, been taken prisoner, been seriously wounded, evacuated from Soviet territories to the West, who perished during the Soviet evacuations, and who fell victim to the hard living and working conditions in the USSR, amounts, according to conservative estimates, to at least 25 million people. To mobilize more and more new armies, the Soviets had to exploit those who remained in industry and agriculture to such an extent that—as is revealed by the Soviet press and radio—there is practically no longer any limitation of working hours and norms, and that large numbers of workers are forced to sleep at their working places in order to

save time. The measures of ceaseless pressure on the workers which we described in "Behind Soviet Production" (November 1944) are constantly being increased by new ones. The latest invention is "Agarkovism." The Soviet Government always endeavors to create the impression that all such methods arise spontaneously from within the ranks of the workers and hence names them, as in the case of "Stakhanovism," after individual workers. The new method, which was allegedly invented by one Yegor Agarkov, consists in several "working brigades"—as the individual groups of workers of a factory are called—uniting to carry out together the work that was formerly done individually by each group and in this way to save the work of a few brigade leaders and a number of workers.

Another serious bottleneck is represented by the system of transportation. The shifting of the Soviet economic center of gravity to the east, the slow progress of reconstruction in the reconquered areas, and the advancing of the front into Central Europe, have extended the supply lines of the Red Army tremendously. The bulk of the war material must be transported from industrial centers in the Urals or in Siberia through regions devastated by war over thousands of kilometers (the distance from Magnitogorsk to the lower Oder is 3,000 kilometers) to the front.

The front demands more and more locomotives, more and more railway carriages, an increasingly rapid traffic on the extending routes of communication. The area behind the front is demanding increasing transports of coal, ore, grain, timber, metals, and other important freights. (*Izvestiya*, 29.12.44.)

Press and radio are full of complaints about the inadequate efficiency of the system of transportation. In December, for instance, the breakdown of the Tomsk railway line, over which a large part of the coal and ore transports of western Siberia are moved, was announced (*Pravda*, 23.12.44).

RADIO BLACKOUT

While the Russian population took a personal interest in the war as long as it believed that it was a "war for the liberation of its fatherland," it is far less interested in a war being conducted in Hungary, Silesia, and Pomerania. In "The End of Soviet Isolation" (December 1944) we already pointed to the danger arising to the Soviet regime from the fact that, after twenty-five years of complete seclusion from the rest of the world, millions of its subjects are now able, as a result of the advance of the Red Army into Central Europe, to find out for themselves how conditions are in territories outside of the Soviet Union.

To what lengths the seclusion of the Soviet population is being carried is shown, for instance, by the way in which the radio system is organized in the USSR. Apart from a tiny number of privileged people, ordinary Soviet

citizens do not possess radio receiving sets. They can only listen to loudspeakers installed in their homes, working places, clubs and meeting halls, all of which are wired to one of the 7,000 or so broadcasting centers (*radiousel*) run by the propaganda departments of various Party organizations. These centers pick up the daily transmissions from Moscow and other Soviet broadcasting stations throughout the country (there are 128 in all), and a program is then compiled from these transmissions to suit—according to the ideas of the Party propagandists—the mentality of the population under their supervision. Moscow recently announced that the number of loudspeakers—5½ million before the war—was to be increased by another million by the end of 1945; no mention was made of receiving sets as are in use everywhere else in the world. Moreover, A. Puzin, the President of the Radio Committee of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, asserted:

Radiofication by means of wiring is and will obviously continue for a long time to be the main trend in the radiofication of our country. (*Pravda*, 16.12.44.)

This double sifting of Soviet programs and the absolute impossibility of listening to any foreign broadcasting station explains the fact that the radio, too, cannot supply the inhabitants of the Soviet Union with any other impression of the rest of the world than that desired by the Party.

The men of the Red Army, having been fed for years with the idea that they themselves were living in a paradise while all other nations were suffering, are apparently so amazed at the high standard of living of the people outside the Soviet Union, especially in Germany, that Soviet propaganda is straining every effort to obliterate this impression. Since the end of January it has been using a trick which strikes one as very funny. On February 15, Comrade Starikov, a war reporter on the I Ukrainian Front, declared in a broadcast from Moscow: "At first when we entered German homes, our soldiers were greatly surprised at the abundance of goods the Germans owned. But later on they found that these were mostly of Soviet manufacture." This theme appears in countless articles and radio reports. The Tass correspondent P. Nikitch, to give another example, telegraphed the following whopper from Silesia on February 8 in a report about things he saw in a German house:

A medicine cabinet. In the cabinet there are a lot of sterilized bandages with the brand "Leningrad Cotton Trust." Here is a Leningrad gramophone. Over there are some tennis rackets marked "Dynamo" [a well-known Soviet sport organization]. In the boudoir I find eau de cologne and perfumes of Teje and shoes of the Paris Commune factory [both well-known Soviet concerns] and silk lingerie with labels reading "By order of the Central Department Store of the People's Commissariat for Trade". . . . In almost every village one can see paper from Dobrush, matches from Rechitsa, agricultural machinery from

Rostov—thousands of Soviet things. . . . Our Lieutenant Sharonov even found a sewing machine from his factory in Podolsk.

WHAT REALLY COUNTS

More important than the weak points within the Soviet Union for the further course of the war is the attitude of the German nation. Lieutenant General Dittmar, outstanding German war commentator, recently explained this attitude, and we can do no better than quote his words:

The fundamental idea that must be inherent in any armed conflict has been reversed and lost every shred of meaning. According to Clausewitz, the purpose of every armed action is to place the opponent in a situation in which the pressure he experiences is greater than the political sacrifices to be imposed in the case of capitulation. What is now being demanded from the German people is no more and no less than suicide by their own choice, the proposed unconditional surrender representing the noose which is to strangle us. But there is no alternative. It is not a matter of either one thing or another: we are only supposed to choose between two paths which, according to the wishes of our enemies, are both to lead to the same goal. That, incidentally, the path leading by way of surrender is the more convenient one for the enemy goes without saying. It is to his very own interest to lure us onto this path, since every day of German resistance forces him too to make boundless sacrifices, gnaws at his national strength, and raises problems at home as well as in the occupied countries which would be at least temporarily solved or adjourned by an unconditional German surrender.

We are fully aware of the strain placed upon our German people at the present moment. The distress among the refugees and evacuees the unbelievable strain imposed upon the troops at the front, the suffering of those afflicted by the air raids, cannot be overlooked by anyone moving around with open eyes during these times. But all this is not worse than the fate in store for Germany were she to lay down her arms unconditionally. Not those are the prolongers of this war who, in view of so unreasonable a demand, are calling for resistance to the utmost: it is those whose idea of peace is the deathly quiet of a graveyard over Germany. In the face of such perspectives, a fight to the bitter end is not only the urgent dictate of necessity but, even under the most painful conditions, an actual relief, because action is always better than the apathetic submission to which the enemy wishes to condemn us. . . .

We are treading a narrow path, threatened on both sides by a headlong fall. Only calm, poised steps, with eyes turned forward, and above all a sure handling of our means of balance, can lead us to our goal. No one can wish to see this path extended beyond the field of vision. But no one can reasonably demand that we voluntarily discard our balancing pole—the armed forces which alone can guarantee our safety and whose blows the enemy still fears—and fling ourselves into the abyss of capitulation.

In connection with these words, General Dittmar recalls a remark of Frederick the Great's which the latter made in one of the dark hours of the Seven Years' War, when there was no visible prospect of his ultimate victory:

"I shall have to continue to balance on the high rope, always trying to keep from falling; but I shall also see to it that from time to time I give my enemies a crack on the head with my balancing pole."