

Offne Briefe an die Ostfront
8. Folge

An einen Polizeihauptmann:

Sie sind im Osten Hauptmann geworden, wie ich hörte. Haben Sie am Ende in Ihrem Polizeiverband, der die Partisanen bekämpft, sich irgendwie hervorgetan? Ich kannes nicht glauben! Sie gehören doch wirklich nicht zu jenen brutalen-rebusten Polizeibütteln, denen, ohne alle Überlegung und Menschlichkeit die Fragen von Politik und Moral sich primitiv auflösen in Gepolter und Prügel. Sie haben immer die widerwärtigen Kreaturen verachtet und gehasst, die ihre Gemeinheiten mit grinsender Charakterlosigkeit und Zynismus begleiten. Würde ich Ihnen sonst schreiben, wenn ich nicht annähme, dass Sie die Fähigkeit und den Mut nicht verlieren haben, dem Zwang des Gewissens zu folgen, wo es in Konflikt gerät mit einer so offensichtlich bestialischen "Pflicht", wie es der befohlene Mord an der Sowjetbevölkerung ist?

Im Staatskrankenhaus in habe ich neulich einige Kameraden von der Polizei besucht, die aus dem Osten eingeliefert worden sind, wegen Nervenzusammenbruchs, alle. Sie kennen ja die Krankenhausatmosphäre, diese Ruhe besonderer Art; man hatte zudem den Raum mit Blumen belebt, die Kranken durften Musik hören, und zu diesen lächerlich einfachen Requisiten der Gemütheilung gesellten sich, romanhaft geradezu, ein paar Sonnenstrahlen. Übrigens gibt es dort eine Abteilung, von der mir die Kameraden mit beinahe scheuer Erleichterung berichteten, dort lägen die noch schlimmeren Nervenzusammenbrüche: kraftstrotzende Revierbeamte von früher bewegen sich fortgesetzt nur hopsend weiter, wie Kängurus, wissen Sie, und andere wieder rum kriechen auf allen Vieren, schütteln dabei bedächtig den Kopf, das Haar fällt ihnen zerzaust ins Gesicht, und ihr Blick ist, wiederholte jemand beschwörend, "wie bei einem Bernhardinerhund". Ich habe von den Kameraden viel Entsetzliches erfahren, die Ruhe im Zimmer war trügerisch, die Furien wüteten darin. Flüsternd, mit aufgerissenen Augen, die von mir ein Wort erlösender Rechtfertigung erhofften, erzählte man mir von Massenerschießungen der Zivilbevölkerung in Russland, von ausgesuchten Grausamkeiten, von Blut und Tränen ohne Maass, dem ultimativen Charakter der viihischen SS-Befehle, dem unfassbaren Gleichmut hilfloser Opfer, ja, und natürlich vieles vom Kampf der Partisanen, was mich politisch und taktisch ungemein interessierte. Selbstverständlich habe ich keinem der Kranken ein Wort der Tröstung gesagt, da ihnen eine Hilfe gewesen wäre in den grauengepeinigten Dämmerstunden ihrer Abende, umso eifriger enthüllten sie ihre Taten. Soll ausgerechnet ich die Geister der Erschlagenen bannen, soll ich jemandem, der nachträglich, wenn auch qualzerrüttet gesteht, er habe, sezusagen als Tagespensum, auf Befehl mona telang Morgen für Morgen bis zu 50 Menschen erschossen, eine Art Absolution erteilen? Einer dieser trotzdem bedauerlichen Hinrichtungs-kreaturen wird - das wird Sie als Kriminallisten interessieren - das Bild einer kleinen, schmutzigen, aus Lumpen gefertigten Puppe nicht los, ausserdem, fügte er in verworrener Hast hinzu, sei ihm ein Finger steif geworden, infolge einer bösen Bisswunde. Entschuldigen Sie, wenn ich diesen Einzelfall wiedergebe, denn natürlich geht er heute mit einer nachgerade traurigen Alltäglichkeit unter in den hunderttausenden Fällen der Terrorpraxis durch die Organe der derzeitigen Machthaber, allein nur die Fälle in Deutschland selbst gerechnet. Wissen Sie noch, wieviel Grauenhaftes Sie mir gleich 1933 erzählten, Bestialitäten ohne Zahl aus den Kellern der SA- und SS-Terrorlokale, den Zellen und Kammern der Gestapo, dem verfluchten Moor und den anderen KZ-Höllen? Und auch Sie, wie entsetzt Sie damals waren, und dabei kannten Sie aus der Geschichte der Terrorliteratur, die Ihr Beruf Ihnen nahelegte, all die ausgeklügelten Blutrünstigkeiten einer untergehenden Klasse, der Reaktion, gewissermassen schon a priori. Doch zurück zu unserem "Einzelfall": Dieser Kamerad musste, nach seiner Erzählung, die Erschießungen mit dem Revolver vornehmen. Die Opfer hatten hinzuknien, er ging dann in ihren Rücken die Reihen entlang und knallte, ganz nah, seine Schüsse in ihren Hinterkopf. Meine Fragen nach dem Blutring der Schusswunden, der Art des Zusammensackens der Körper usw, beantwortete er mit der Sachlichkeit eines Anatomen, nein, dem Stompfen eines Schlächters, ohne dass ihm, wie von mir beabsichtigt,

tumbling disheveled into their faces, and their gaze is, someone repeated imploringly, "like that of a Saint Bernard dog." I learned of many appalling things from the comrades; the peace in the room was deceptive; the furies were raging there. Whispering, eyes wide and hoping for a word of redemptive justification from me, they told me of mass shootings of the civilian population in Russia, of selected atrocities, of blood and tears without measure, the ultimate character of brutish SS orders, the incredible serenity of helpless victims, yes, and of course much about the partisans' fight, which I found highly interesting, politically and tactically. It goes without saying that I gave not one of the patients a word of consolation that might have been a help to them in the horror-plagued twilight hours of their evenings, the more eagerly they revealed their deeds. Am I of all people to exorcize the ghosts of those beaten to death, am I to grant some kind of absolution to someone who admits belatedly, albeit shattered by anguish, that he had followed orders to shoot up to 50 people every morning for months, as a daily workload so to speak? One of these nevertheless unfortunate execution creatures cannot—this will interest you as a criminologist—rid himself of the image of a small, dirty rag doll, and aside from that, he added in confused haste, one of his fingers has gone stiff as the result of a bad bite wound. Excuse me for relating this individual case, for of course it is drowned out with a nigh sad banality by the hundreds of thousands of cases of terror practiced by the institutions of the current rulers, to count only the cases inside Germany itself. Do you remember how many atrocious stories you told me right away in 1933, about bestialities without number from the basements of the SA and SS bars, the Gestapo cells and chambers, the accursed moor and the other concentration camp hells? And you too, how horrified you were at the time, even though you were familiar, from the history of the terror literature useful for your profession, with all of the elaborate bloodthirstiness of a class in decline, the reaction, to a certain extent a priori. But back to our "individual case": this comrade, according to what he said, had to carry out the shootings with his revolver. The victims had to kneel down, and he then walked along the rows behind them and shot his bullets into the back of their heads, from very close up. He answered my questions about the ring of blood around the shot wounds, the way the bodies collapsed, etc., with the objectivity of an anatomist, no, with the stupor of a slaughterer, without becoming aware, as I intended, of the terrible details of his role, let alone of what your taskmasters call "National Socialism." But at one point he did lose his nerves: he had to kill a young woman, a farmer's wife with her three children. "For what reason?" He shrugs his shoulders: "It was an order." The woman was cradling an infant in her arms, it was bitterly cold, and she was futilely attempting, for the last 2 minutes of her life, to wrap the crying

Open Letters to the Eastern Front
Issue no. 8

To a police captain:

You have been promoted to captain in the East, as I heard. Did you excel in some way, in the end, within your police unit which is fighting the partisans? I can't believe it! You're really not one of those brutal and rough policemen for whom questions of politics and morals dissolve in bluster and beatings, without the slightest consideration or humanity. You have always despised and hated those abhorrent creatures who accompany their cruelties with grinning cynicism and lack of character. Would I write to you otherwise if I did not assume you have not lost the ability and the courage to follow the dictates of conscience when it comes into conflict with

a so obviously bestial "duty" as the ordered murder of the Soviet population?!

In the state hospital in I recently visited a number of police comrades who had been admitted from the East, for nervous breakdowns, all of them. You know the hospital atmosphere, that particular type of calm; the room had also been livened up with flowers, the patients were allowed to listen to music, and, to add to these ridiculously simple props of mental healing, much like in a novel a few rays of sun shone into the room. Incidentally, there is a ward there about which the comrades told me with almost shy relief, where the even worse cases of nervous breakdown are kept: formerly vigorous police officers can only move around by hopping, like kangaroos, you know, and others in turn crawl on all fours, shaking their heads placidly, their hair

child warmly in pitiful rags. With a helpless gesture of apology, she signaled that she possessed nothing more; she had been robbed of everything. To the right of the woman knelt her little six-year-old son, to her left a girl of about two, who toddled back to fetch her doll at the last moment before they had to kneel down. Well—"Dolly come too." As I said, it was a ridiculous, wretched doll made of rags. The child, having knelt down herself in that clumsy childish way, positioned the doll next to her in the snow, kneeling as well, as laboriously as such an action always is. "Who did you shoot first, the mother or the infant?" I wanted to know. "I didn't shoot the infant at all." "Ah, so you spared his life, perhaps gave it to someone else later?" He said no, there had been more and more insubordination in the police force, and an SS man had even been standing guard in the background on this occasion, yes, and suddenly the six-year-old boy had leapt up toward the marksman. According to his story, there must have been a veritable embittered fight between the officer under attack and the child, only for seconds of course, and that was where the bite in his stiff finger came from, and two shots were needed because the first went astray, into the boy's eye, which turned into a dripping mess. The little girl, however, was quite still and collapsed without a sound alongside the doll. Incidentally, there is nothing more to say about this inconsequential doll except that it became our murderer's "tic"; that doll of all things, the other comrades told me, left behind as the last and most helpless thing, that of all things was now his "sickness," and he would soon have to go "downstairs" to the "kangaroos" and the "Saint Bernards." Tell me, Captain, where is the difference between murderers out of degeneracy, out of duty, out of cowardice? At any rate, I have only remembered this whole story because of the absurd detail with the doll, for otherwise is there any memory in all the world, any person, any book, any possibility at all of remembering, of holding onto all the atrocities perpetrated against the Soviet population? Granted your expert calculations that we have such and such a new addition of criminal natures every year, who "normally" occupy the police and the courts due to murder, arson, robbery, and rape; you are right as well that these elements have been rewarded and promoted since 1933, able to live out their bloodlust legally in the jungle of the Gestapo and the SS... The terrible thing, though, is this: that Hitler has managed to make an uncountable number of righteous people into defiled accomplices to his crimes!

Do you remember—you were a lieutenant at the time—how you once dreamed of positioning yourself on the side of the people at the decisive moment, without compromise? Do you remember the agitation in all of the police stations caused by the coup that the sinister Papen carried off in advance on Hitler's behalf, how back then the thousands and thousands of upright police officers, their

fingers on the trigger of their guns, fevered and awaited the call of the Prussian government, the labor unions, and your Social Democratic Party to take to the streets with the masses—a call that never came, its neglect becoming an open gateway to this inferno we have today?! And so now you too are in the East, in the battle against Russia's socialist partisans? May I remind you of your former pacifism, which I never shared because there are not only unjust wars that serve to plunder, but also just wars in defense of freedom and humanity. You, however, thought mainly of the suffering of the land under war, and you quoted the great Scharnhorst to me: "I can tolerate danger without difficulties, but the sight of innocent weebegone humanity bathed in blood beside me, the fire of the burning villages, set by people for their pleasure, the other atrocities of the general devastation, enrage me. God, what kind of life is this? Everything about the military is brutalization!" I return this quote to you today, Captain. Does it not fit word for word with your surroundings and activity in the East, as Hitler wanted?

If we want to take pride in particular national achievements in comparison to other nations, I mean in terms of warfare in this case, then perhaps in this one most of all: having "discovered," made systematic, and—legalized partisan warfare as a unique heroic weapon of a nation.

Think of Clausewitz. Think of the Prussian practice of 1812. Of Gneisenau. Of Schill. It was Prussia's most glorious chapter, in its deepest humiliation, that it so brilliantly intensified the guerilla war of the Spaniards and Russians of the time in its own application. If you spoke Russian, Captain, you might find, in some corner of some pillaged hut, its inhabitants murdered as "snipers," a now once again fervently topical essay by our Friedrich Engels on the "Prussian Franc-Tireurs," in which he praises Gneisenau, "The theorist of free-shooting, the great philosophical franc-tireur." "If he were alive now," he writes with regard to the war of 1870, "perhaps he would see his beau-ideal of popular resistance approached, if not realized, in the French franc-tireurs. For Gneisenau was a man—and a man of genius." Yes, if he were alive now... his ideal of popular resistance... today it is the Russians who embody it in historical logic and unique greatness of heroic courage. Gneisenau, the genius, on the one hand—and on the other hand the brutal cretin Himmler; that is the essence of the matter that places every individual before a personal choice. Do you know what I'd like to do? I'd send you Clausewitz, that unique song of praise to partisan war, based almost entirely on the Russian Patriotic War of 1812. Can it be difficult, Captain, placed between death and death, to make a choice between the proud, honorable Prussian tradition, which appeals to your conscience, and the wretched, brutish

nature of the SS riffraff terrorizing you into the "duty" of murdering Russian patriots?! I—I would collaborate with the partisans. I would go over to their side without hesitation. May those who belong there end up with the "Saint Bernard dogs," out of indecision and pure cowardice. It is simply the case that there are moments and situations for him whose sympathies are with the working class as the pillar of future democracy and socialist humanism, moments when not so-called cleverness of behavior, silence, ducked caution are called for, but initiative, audacity, and, if need be, the ability for self-sacrifice. I would go over to the partisans, Captain, and I deeply hope that I am only telling you what you think yourself, what motivates you.

But I must tell you the following as well: I recently had to explain to an astute Hitler Youth thirsty for knowledge how in 1809 the Tyrolean peasants under Straub, Speckbacher, and others captured 2 French generals, 32 other officers, and, I believe, 5,910 Napoleonic invaders at Bergisel Hill; what the little lad wanted to know demanded this illustrative, not theoretical, explanation, and as enthusiasm for the heroic peasants lit up his face, he received the desired answer to what a "sniper" really is. "Andreas Hofer was one, my boy!"

You see, those were brutal times as well, there was burning hate and wild fanaticism, and Napoleon, the god of war (do you know Stalin's comparison, by the way, in which Napoleon is a lion but Hitler only a shaggy cat?), yes, the god of war was anything but sentimental. Hofer was shot dead, but not brutally murdered like the young peasant woman with her children, who were too small to be partisans; shot dead, certainly, but not in the way the SS brutishly does away with the Russians without trial. Hofer was shot dead—but the mass of his Tyrolean peasants was not wiped out, insidiously and bloodthirstily exterminated along with him. Partisans, according to Hitler, may not be taken prisoner, but must be—killed, and hostages on top of that, as many as can be got. How is it in actual fact? When Schill was waging his partisan war against the French conquerors in 1809, only eleven of his officers were shot dead in Wesel, and they later received a monument. According to the SS tradition, the other 557 "snipers" would also have deserved to die. Indeed, anyone whose knowledge of Prussian history goes beyond Otto Gebühr's kitsch can even find the duty of "sniperdom" anchored in law in the "*Landsturm* ordinance" of 4.21.1813, for it demanded of the Prussians that alongside the regular troops' fighting, the so-called *Landsturm* behind enemy lines was to attack the enemy's ammunition and provisions transports, its couriers, recruits, and hospitals (!), surprise the enemy by night, destroy its late arrivals and detachments, lame it using all means, etc. etc... Partisan war! Even against hospitals!

You would no doubt be highly surprised—I am imagining your face—if you, let's say in the evening, after enduring a hunt for the Andreas Hofers of the Ukraine, the Schills of White Russia, were to find among the Russian "Landsturm," in the midst of the extermination orders before you, Gneisenau's well-known order to the Prussian "snipers": "If the enemy should appear in superior strength, hide the arms, caps, and belt, and appear as simple inhabitants of the country."

Our clubfooted propaganda dwarf would no doubt have called Gneisenau a Bolshevik beast for that. He is having the most hair-raising stories spread. He has a trick for it. People from an apparatus are constantly traveling around, on all means of public transport, "arrived directly from Russia," and these men "on leave from the front" tell their rote-learned fairy tales with the irresistible countenance of the truth, and so loudly that everyone hears them. Or they sit in the beer bars in the evenings, lying in wait for their opportunity to tell stories "directly from Russia," and then (this is part of the show) they let people beg and press them for a while, and then they begin, with the sorrow of disappointment in their voice: "Oh, the so-called workers' paradise." I am reminded of an experience in 1932, as comical as it was revealing: at a National Socialist election meeting in Protestant Holstein, a Catholic raised his hand to speak, an unimposing, meek little man; what he stammered caused Homeric laughter. As long as Hitler did not acknowledge the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in his party manifesto, he called out with inimitable pathos, Hitler simply could not improve the situation of German agriculture. Can you imagine the braying of the Holstein farmers? Impossible! I began to wonder, however, about the little man and his concern; it turned out that the wrinkled dogmatist liked his schnapps, and over a few glasses he admitted to me with one constantly winking little eye (he had a wart on his right eyelid and I couldn't help winking along!), so he admitted to me that he accompanied the party speaker from place to place, sometimes as a Center Party supporter, sometimes as a German National, sometimes as something else. Now, when I heard recently that someone had been telling shocking stories "directly from Russia" on a train, saying he had seen a Russian sniper in whose pockets had been found 24 stabbed-out eyes, 16 tongues, and around 54 ears, that miserable manikin from Holstein with the damned wart on his eyelid came straight to my mind!

On the subject of cruelty, by the way—one thing's for sure: I at least would not have acted particularly humanely had I caught the murderer with the doll tic red-handed, his smoking revolver lowered over the fresh pools of blood, leaning for example over the two-year-old little girl whom he described to me as chubby, "with a nose like a little round button."

Fine: the Russians strictly ban their people from using any cruelty, if you like for reasons of political recruitment. To get as many prisoners as possible. So as later to send as many Germans "infected" with communism as possible back to Germany. But if I imagine quite specifically that I were, let's say, a Buryat, a simple hunter from the endless forests of the Taiga, a fisherman close to nature from the far banks of the Yenisei, a nomad from Turkestan, and for all of these years I had taken in the barely believable event, and it had troubled me deep into my nightly dreams, that the fascists in Germany, with whose workers I felt dearly linked, were enslaving, torturing, murdering the German people...

And now these same fascists had in 1942 invaded my homeland by almost a thousand kilometers in an act of vile treachery and breach of promise, and the SS were hunting down humans in the territories occupied, defended by partisans, inhabited by women and children...

And if suddenly I saw one of these murderers before me, and the corpses in the blood-red snow—my God, would it not simply be human nature if I were to grab the nearest pitchfork, and if I were to say to myself: "For the likes of you, you dog, a simple, quick death is too little!" At such a moment, would not the shadows of the murdered German comrades, the Poles, Yugoslavs, French stand beside me with their whispers of: "Look, they let us die slowly, centimeter for centimeter, and the torment of death lasted many days?"

But no, forgive me; the Russians' political commissars are right, nonetheless right, absolutely right! My dear Buryat, let us comply with them, then. Put the pitchfork aside, dear friend. Take the man prisoner and put him before a court martial! Hitler would be all too glad to see us as bloodthirsty as he is, so that none of his soldiers taken as our prisoner, where their lives and health are in safe hands, really learn to understand what socialism is.

The day of Hitler's defeat is nigh. When this day comes in the East, however, will the rubble of the Nazi army not run the gauntlet on its long way via Warsaw and Posen through a whole irrepressible thicket of patriotic war? And that is not all. There will be no more 1918.

You'd be amazed, Captain, if you came through our police stations and felt the festering hate for the SS spirit. It does not come from the grueling shifts, the starvation portions, and the reluctance toward the system of blind obedience alone. Will you believe it if I reveal to you that many a party member, sensing the unavoidable things to come, is now seeking a kind of counterinsurance from his political enemies? There are even people in the Gestapo who are beginning to understand.

My letter, as I see, has become very long. Yet in the end it suits well the emptiness of dismal hours by the watch fire. And to be honest, I am rather concerned about you. After all, it is also good for you to learn what the homeland feels and thinks. And what the homeland demands of a man fighting the partisans in the East, what it demands of anyone who hopes to be an upright German.

May you fare well.....

