

In the Eyes of a German Soldier and a General on the Eastern Front in 1941

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to a critical analysis of the diary of an ordinary German soldier (corporal) Hans Roth and the notes, messages and letters of General Gotthard Heinrici, who were in continuous battle on the Eastern front from June 1941. The value of their epistolary heritage lies in the fact that, unlike post-war German memoirs, they do not bear the stamp of external editing and the correction of self-censorship. On the other hand, the reason for choosing Roth's diary and Heinrici's notes was the contrast between the ordinary trench soldier, on whose shoulders all the hardships of combat trials fell, and the general spending most of his time at headquarters, which makes it possible to look at the war from different perspectives, albeit from one side of the front. Despite the sometimes significant differences in the description of battles and military life, both sources paint a picture of war, monstrous in its cruelty and scale of destruction, unheard of hardships and torments that affected not only the active troops, but also the civilians, some of whom Hitler's invaders condemned to deliberate physical destruction.

Keywords: World war-II; 1941; Eastern front; Wehrmacht; Red army

INTRODUCTION

This year's significant date the 75th anniversary of the great victory brings us back to the harsh years of World War II. The worst of them for Russia was, of course, 1941, when Germany and its satellites treacherously attacked the USSR. In this regard, the problem of the enemy's perception of those tragic events for Russia is of particular interest. In turn, this problem raises many questions: how did the German aggressors justify starting a war with the Soviet Union? How did they evaluate the fighting qualities of the Red Army? How was the local population treated? We will try to answer these and other questions in this article by analyzing the descriptions, assessments, opinions, and experiences of German corporal Hans Roth and Wehrmacht general Gotthard Carl Fedor Heinrici. Both of them fought on the Eastern front from the very beginning of the war, carrying out Hitler's criminal plan "Barbarossa," designed to end the Soviet Union in a few months in 1941, turning its Western part into several colonies, and the local population in fact, into disenfranchised slaves. Poland, captured by the Germans in 1939, could serve as the model. From there General Heinrici wrote to his wife in April 1941 before the attack on the USSR: "Poles and Jews flex their sagging muscles like slaves to prepare

everything as quickly as possible. They don't stand on ceremony with them in this area. It is approximately like in ancient times when the Romans conquered a particular people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It should be noted that an attempt to examine the chosen topic in detail, although without using the materials of Heinrici and Roth, was made in the book by the famous British military historian Robert Kershaw, published in English in 2000 under the title war without garlands. However, in the preface he complained about the lack of memoirs written by ordinary soldiers of the Wehrmacht: "Until now no one has published the memoirs of operation Barbarossa made by the direct participants ordinary soldiers". This statement is rather strange, given the many memoirs written by German soldiers from the ranks of private or non-commissioned officers who fought on the Eastern front from June 1941 for example: 3, Russian translation. Although, of course, we must admit that much more famous memoirs were left behind by German generals and field marshals, outstanding pilots, or tank men who wore officer's epaulets.

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Received: 14-Mar-2022, Manuscript No. JDFM-22-16255; **Editor assigned:** 16-Mar-2022, PreQC No. JDFM-22-16255 (QC); **Reviewed:** 30-Mar-2022, QC No. JDFM-22-16255; **Revised:** 13-May-2022, Manuscript No. JDFM-22-16255 (R); **Published:** 23-May-2022, DOI: 10.35248/2167-0374.22.12.239.

Citation: Grinev AV (2022) In the Eyes of a German Soldier and a General on the Eastern Front in 1941. J Defense Manag. 12:239

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Here we need to clarify one important point: the lion's share of German memoirs was written after the war, when the result was known, and therefore former Wehrmacht soldiers had the opportunity to adjust their records accordingly. A number of such memoirs were translated into English and partly into Russian and wide spread in modern Russia. Therefore, in order to avoid post-war sources in which information about the war crimes of the Wehrmacht was suppressed, its losses minimized, and the right accents sometimes skillfully placed on the narrative, we have chosen the diaries of Hans Roth and notes of Gotthard Heinrici on the war. The last were published recently and have not yet managed to enter the scholarly circulation. Both of them were directly connected with the military campaign in the East and their text was not subjected to military censorship or post-war self-censorship, which is their historical value. Of course, any diaries and notes of individuals are always characterized by subjectivity, but it gives this type of source its unique flavor.

Another reason for choosing Roth's diaries and Heinrici's notes for our analysis was the contrast between the ordinary trench soldier, on whose shoulders lay all the hardships of combat trials, and the general, who spends most of his time at headquarters, which allows you to look at the war from different perspectives, even on the same side of the front. Their social origin and chosen profession give additional specificity to their works. Conscripted into the Wehrmacht at the age of 30 odd, the petty bourgeois Hans Roth had a small firm engaged in graphic design (as they would now say—a design studio) in Frankfurt am Main. Even before the war with the USSR he took part in battles in Belgium and France and received the lowest non-commissioned officer rank of corporal. Unlike Hans Roth, who was originally purely a civilian, Gotthard Heinrici, who was born in East Prussia, deliberately chose a career as a soldier. Although his father was a Lutheran priest, his maternal grandfather was a Prussian officer from an old noble family and among his relatives was field Marshal Karl Rudolf Gerd von Rundstedt. Dedicated entirely to his military career, Gotthard Heinrici went through all of the 1st World War and was awarded the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd class. At the beginning of the 2nd World War, during the blitzkrieg in France, he commanded the 12th Corps at the rank of lieutenant general, and successfully overcame the famous "Maginot Line." During the attack on the USSR, Heinrici led the 43rd Corps of Army Group Centre, and then commanded other Wehrmacht formations. He fought until the end of April 1945, rising to the rank of colonel general, receiving the Knight's Cross with Swords and Oak Leaves for successful conduct of operations, while non-commissioned officer Hans Roth went missing in Belarus on June 25, 1944.

After these preliminary remarks we turn to specific questions and comparative analysis. First, let us find out: were the historical characters we selected loyal to the Hitler regime, or were they just soldiers who blindly followed orders? According to the diary of Hans Roth, he was a typical victim of Hitler's education and propaganda, as evidenced by an entry in his diary: "God knows, we are loyal soldiers on the front line with all our hearts! We trust our leaders and bear a heavy burden without complaints with an open heart. In this regard, the emotional epithets that he periodically awarded to enemies on

the Eastern front are characteristic: "Bolshevik Horde," "barbarians," "red devils," "Asian bastards," etc. In this respect, General Heinrici is much more reserved. He mostly used the ethnic term "Russians" or the relatively neutral word "enemy," without descending to outright swearing. He was clearly not a fanatical supporter of Hitler, although he fought for him to the very end. The Nazi order on the whole suited him just as most German generals: the Führer had revived the German army, to which Heinrici had devoted his life.

Regarding the attack on the USSR, there was no significant difference of opinion between general Heinrici and corporal Roth: neither of them wanted to see the criminal nature of this action. However, the general, by virtue of his position, learned about the plan "Barbarossa" long before the corporal of the 299th Infantry Division. As early as September 1940 Heinrici wrote in his diary: "Many things today are similar to the times of Napoleon. He also marched on Moscow, and perhaps it was not of his own free will, but rather because he was forced to do so by the struggle with England". Indeed, this is how Napoleon justified his aggression against Russia: according to the logic of the emperor, this country remained the only decisive power on the continent that could become an ally of the British. On the eve of the attack on the USSR, in a letter to his wife, Heinrici again returned to this topic, noting:

We must neutralize a neighbor who could become dangerous for us if we were to move against England—on the Suez Canal, or by attacking the island. Next, the campaign should give us agricultural areas that can produce enough to feed the whole of Europe. The latter is probably the main concern since America is already unofficially at war with us. To a certain extent, of course, the ideological confrontation also plays a role.

Corporal Roth, without going into such strategic considerations, wrote on June 19, 1941: "Hooray! The greatest battle of all time begins the day after tomorrow!". Very soon he was to bitterly regret these words. At the end of August, General Heinrici also sobered up, telling his wife: "The war here has been very costly for us. Was it really necessary?"

The very day after it started Heinrici sent a letter to the family saying: "Yesterday we were confronted by a Russian division, which we took completely by surprise and then defeated. Masses of soldiers roam everywhere in the endless forests, are on countless farms, and often shoot at us in the back. The Russians are generally waging an insidious war. Therefore, our men carry out sweeps harshly, without mercy. It is strange to read accusations of treachery on the part of a general whose army suddenly and treacherously attacked a peacefully sleeping country. He had noted it himself the day before: "The Russian army was literally lifted from their beds by a cannonade. No one has ever been caught off guard like this; they were all lying in their beds, sleeping, and they had to run out almost in their underwear". By the way, neither the corps commander Heinrici nor the company corporal Roth on the front line noticed anywhere even the slightest signs of the alleged impending attack by the USSR on Germany, as the well-known revisionist historians Viktor Suvorov (V.B. Rezun) and Mark Solonin write in their books about the beginning of the war.

It was only a couple of days after June 22, and the resistance of Soviet units began to clearly increase, which General Heinrici could not help noticing: "In general, it seems that the Russian is allocating its forces to the East. But when it comes to fighting, he fights hard. He is much stronger than the French soldier. Extremely hardy, cunning, and treacherous." And he added: "By any standards, the war here is very difficult. First of all, unimaginable transport difficulties, huge spaces, endless forests, difficulties with language, and so on. All previous campaigns were rather child's play compared to the current battles. Our losses are significant, but those of the Russians are very, very high". He is literally echoed by Corporal Roth: "Many things in the battle of the last days remind me of the forest battles in France a year ago, but the Russians are not the Belgians and not the French, they are a different kind of enemy. The French would try to avoid unnecessary losses. While these fight like madmen. And they never give up!"

Soon the mutual fierce confrontation reached a climax. General Heinrici testified: The war in Russia is incredibly bloody. The enemy suffers losses not seen before in this war. The Russian soldiers are told by their commanders that they will all be shot by us. Instead of surrendering, they shoot every German in the back. This, of course, causes counter measures on our part, which are quite severe and so both sides become embittered, resulting in a lot of people losing their lives and he continues: "The Russian that was located right in front of us is now destroyed. A monstrously bloody battle. In some cases, we gave them no quarter. The Russian brutalized our wounded. In response, our men shoot and kill everything that wears a brown uniform". Similar is the testimony of Corporal Roth: "Soldiers do not spare anyone or anything, destroying everything they see".

In addition to the brutal killings, the German army from the very beginning of the campaign in the East engaged in widespread looting and requisitioning, which general Heinrici could not conceal: "Everywhere our boys take horses from the peasants for our carts, which causes the villages to cry and wail. This is how the population is 'liberated' (from the Bolshevik regime AG)." But he did not prevent the robberies, remarking with melancholy: "There are still enough chickens, eggs, and veal. But soon almost everything will be sucked out of here". Although he did not have to hunt geese and piglets on farmsteads, he constantly ate such provisions obtained by subordinates, and later was ready to profit from the valuable furs of foxes from a captured farm near Likhvin (where his soldiers had already shot several animals for no reason). However, the Russian furs could not be sent to the family, and he was sorry to inform his wife: "Yesterday I went to the fox farm again. Again, the soldiers stole the six largest foxes. In addition, it is said that Hermann Goering confiscates all valuable furs from animal farms. This means that it's not going to work out with the blue fox". His regiments, like locusts, consumed everything of the local inhabitants, condemning them to the torment of hunger. "The troops are most pining for a drinkable ration that they have run out of," Heinrici complained "there is no tea or coffee, and they are forced to live on soups. Otherwise, they live well. They eat everything they find around them. But even this is not enough". It was similar in the Wehrmacht units in which the

company corporal Roth served in Army Group South (although he mentioned a couple of times that German soldiers shared food with starving residents of Kiev and prisoners of war). The result was already evident in December 1941, as Roth was informed by a colleague who returned from vacation: "Heinz Stichel returned from Germany. He tells a lot of interesting stories and at the same time told us about the terrible famine in Ukraine. They spent two days in Kiev. There the situation is even worse. Hundreds of people die of starvation every day. Anti-tank guns are placed everywhere to stop riots if necessary".

Naturally, the brutality of the invaders provoked retaliatory actions and from the first days of the war partisan fighting developed in the rear of the Germans. "The Russians are willing to use guerilla tactics (Spanish partisan war A.G); here, we can say, they have no equal," noted Roth. He did not hide the fact that the Germans used draconian measures to fight the partisans: "In the second half of the day, 10 hostages were shot. We now do not stand on ceremony, but act with an iron hand the city gallows are not empty. Executions have become an integral part of everyday life. Only thus should it be". Just for helping wounded Red Army soldiers you could pay with your life. Heinrici openly told his wife about it: "Today we had to execute a Communist woman who nursed the wounded Russians who remained in our rear, and fought against us by all means. Such is war here".

The partisan movement particularly intensified by the end of 1941. "The area is full of partisans," Heinrici wrote in early November.

The Bolshevik government ordered all members of the party to remain in our rear in order to conduct a partisan struggle. They destroy the stock, they burned an eight million mark supply of leather in Likhvin, and, unfortunately, they make successful raids over and over again. First of all, they attack small requisitioning parties that are sent around by the troops to get food. During the day, the partisans hide in the forests and ravines in their shelters, and at night they go to the villages for food. Our Russian translator took up the fight against them with great zeal. The population has already informed us about the partisans more than once, because they are afraid of being harassed by them. Only with the help of the peasants can the partisans be captured. The interpreter managed to catch and kill 15 people in the past three days, including several women. The partisans are sworn to each other. They allow themselves to be shot, but do not give up their comrades. Everyone is impressed by the partisan spirit. No one gives anything away; all are silent and go to death.

The brutality of the war in Russia made Heinrici remember history: "Customs and mores are as in the Thirty Years' War. Only those who have power have rights. I have spent six and a half years of my life in war, but I have never seen anything like this".

But the partisans were a side issue in the military routine of General Heinrici and Corporal Roth. Their main attention was focused on the front, where, without ceasing, there were bloody battles. Already on July 20, Roth had to admit: "Huge losses have undermined our combat capability. No less eloquent is the

entry from August 15: “There is almost no one left in the 530th Infantry Regiment, it is supplemented by the remnants of the 528th and 529th”. The Soviets, disorganized by retreat, suffered even greater losses. Desertion increased in the Red Army, as General Heinrici remarked in his notes in August and later: The Russian, however, is very battered. It is a miracle that he finds the strength to resist again and again despite the losses and damage he has suffered. Now it all depends on who will persevere. Since there are numerous examples of disintegration (of Soviet troops.-A.G.), it should be assumed that one day even if not soon the whole group behind the front line will fall apart. Whole companies were already running over to us. And the demotion of commanders at all levels is also a bad sign”.

Characteristically, similar entries are rare in Roth’s diary. This can be explained by the fact that the strongest part of the Wehrmacht army group centre achieved more impressive success than the weaker army group South, in which Corporal Roth fought. After all, it, on the contrary, was opposed by the largest group of Soviet troops. Hence the more modest successes of the Wehrmacht in the South and the greater combat stability of Red Army units in this section of the Eastern front.

Like other Germans who fought on the Eastern front, Roth noted that the Russians were masters of disguise. In addition, they mined everything at the slightest opportunity: “Roads, both temporary and permanent, were mined a month ago. Then they planted with grass the mined roads and paths. Two of our men were torn to pieces this morning by hand grenades stretched between branches”. In addition to the usual mines, they used booby traps, ball mines, dogs with explosives, and so on, so that Roth with irritation wrote: “Mining of the territory left to us is constantly improving; the Russians are inexhaustible in inventions”.

General Heinrici was also concerned about this adversity: “The new habit of Russians to mine roads, which has already caused enough damage, is very annoying” In November, he and his troops were introduced to a new invention of the enemy: “It has new mines thin wooden boxes 20 centimeters long, 5 centimeters high and wide. They only need to be put in the snow. They caused us a lot of damage”. The mine war reached a special scale in Kiev where previously placed land mines began to explode after its occupation by German troops.

Roth wrote: “Two days after our capture of the city, three barracks suddenly exploded, one of which was occupied by German soldiers. And from that day on, almost every hour there was an explosion in the city, something was sure to go up in the air factories, warehouses, hospitals, schools everything was first blown up and then destroyed by fires”.

Echoes of the events in Kiev even reached Heinrici: “They say that the situation in Kiev is not very favorable since the Russians left and hid a huge number of mines and explosives before they departed, which are now exploding into the air. Such conduct of hostilities that we are witnessing has nothing to do with war within the bounds of decency”.

I would like to ask the German general: is it within the bounds of decency to shoot innocent hostages? Or, perhaps, within the framework of “military decency” that there was mass destruction

of the Jewish population of Kiev, whom the Nazis accused of involvement in the bombings? Corporal Roth testified: “The SS Special Forces have their hands full. Round-the-clock interrogations and shootings. Even those who seem to them just suspicious are put to the wall right in the streets and the bodies of the killed are left lying there. We walk right through pools of blood, and there are traces of blood everywhere on the sidewalks, fresh and already caked.” Roth then quotes a young SS man who told him gruesome details about the shooting of Jews in Zhytomyr. “If there were gaps between the corpses, they were filled with dead children in general, there was no time to spare there were supposed to be 1,500 people and all had to fit in the trench. Then more machine-gun fire, and if someone continued to moan, they were finished off. Then the next group was in line, and so it continued until the evening.” At first Roth did not believe the narrator, but he suggested that they ride their bicycles to Babi Yar so that the army corporal could see firsthand the effectiveness of the “work” of the SS. “What I saw,” Roth wrote in his diary, “was terrible, and this terrible picture I will not forget until the end of my life”.

There is no need for any Soviet propaganda the Nazis themselves testified against themselves in the most eloquent way. In addition to the extermination of innocent people, Soviet cities and villages were devastated. Heinrici stated, viewing the ruins of ancient Chernihiv in mid-September 1941: “The destruction of cities in this war in the East can be compared, perhaps, only with the Thirty Years’ War” [1]. But, according to the Nazi general who initially blamed the Bolsheviks: “Bolshevism has completely destroyed everything that was beautiful in this ugly country. The little that remains is finally destroyed by this war”. It begs the question: who unleashed it?

Both Hitler’s general and the ordinary corporal were struck by the extreme poverty and primitivism of the life of the local population. Thus, General Heinrici wrote to his wife on July 8. Now we are in the real Russia. Kapyll is the name of today’s village. Everything is in a state of monstrous decline. We are getting acquainted with the fruits of the Bolshevik culture. The furniture is very primitive. There are no stores. Farmers must work for society: they receive a third of the crop with food (in kind) and 80 rubles a year. A kilogram of butter costs 36 rubles! Also, as payment for work, each comrade is entitled to some items that he receives in the state warehouse, which is in every city, that is, soap, cigarettes, socks, one suit a year! This is the Soviet Paradise.

Later he added a few more touches to this sketch: “In addition, everything here is in a terrible and neglected state. Everyone tries to live as poorly as possible so as not to be convicted or shot as an owner. Accordingly, houses and apartments are mostly in an indescribable state. Corporal Roth echoed him, describing the village hut and the life of its inhabitants: “All this gives the impression of something prehistoric, something that could only be seen in person at the dawn of human civilization.” And he summed up: for the rest of my life, painful pictures of Russian life are imprinted on my mind”. Cities also looked no better: “It is always the same everywhere even in cities primitivism and poverty prevail”.

General Heinrici saw the causes of the local population's plight not only in the economic policy of the Bolsheviks, but also in the utter apathy and indifference of the Russian people, who were ready to work only from under the stick. Oddly enough, Corporal Roth provided a deeper explanation of the causes of Russian poverty [2].

The Bolshevik criminals shamelessly deprived their people of a normal, happy life for the sake of weapons, the scale of which is unique in the world. If our motto was 'Guns instead of butter,' then in the Soviet Union 'No butter, no shelter, just the essentials. Only the guns!' The Bolsheviks succeeded in misleading the world about the number of weapons. We underestimated the red leaders, their soldiers, and their weapons. It is impossible to imagine that there is so much weaponry in this country, and this applies to both its number and power. Not to mention aircraft, tanks, and automatic weapons. And if we talk about the soldier of the Red Army he is a strong enemy, a persistent fanatical fighter, which we have not yet met".

It is possible to agree with Roth's opinion, but at the same time to emphasize that without the development of a heavy industry for creating weapons the Soviet Union would have been simply crushed by the German war machine, which had the resources of almost all of Europe at its service.

For his part, General Heinrici attributed the desperate resistance of the Red Army to the Bolshevik system: Monstrous energy mercilessly mobilizes all forces and sends soldiers into battle without regret. Thus, the Russians have achieved successes that our former opponents did not attain. Our losses are also significant. The campaign against Russia has taken at least as many lives as all the other campaigns combined. It is still unclear how the case will end here. There is no feeling that the Russian will one day want to give up, as the Frenchman did.

However, Heinrici was well aware that this was not just about the Communist system: "One can imagine that after we so unexpectedly attacked Russia, many Russians, even dissenters, sided with Stalin out of love for their country".

But it was Stalin and a number of his military leaders who bore a significant share of the blame for the heavy defeats of the Red Army in 1941. Mad orders to attack at all costs and hold the defense when it was advisable to withdraw led to huge senseless losses. Of course, the company corporal, due to his position at the bottom of the army hierarchy, could not assess the effectiveness of the actions of the Soviet command, but he repeatedly noted the senseless mass attacks of enemy infantry on German machine guns, which led to colossal casualties and attested to the extremely low competence of the Red Army command staff. General Heinrici also described similar suicide attacks. He demonstrated the low level of generalship of some of the enemy's commanders in the following episode.

The chief of staff of the Russian 63rd Corps, whom we took prisoner, when asked why he did not take countermeasures to eliminate this deadly danger (the German breakthrough), said that he did not consider a strike from this side at all possible. He thought that his flank was absolutely securely covered by two rivers the Berezina and the Dnieper. He did not believe that in

four days we could overcome these additional protecting barriers [3].

According to Heinrici, Soviet commanders sometimes acted contrary to normal military rules: "In addition, they are completely unpredictable, carry out the most extravagant plans against all the rules of military art, and it is due to this that we find ourselves in the most unpleasant situations". At the same time, the vicious Stalinist system, which blocked the initiative of the commanders of combat units, led to heavy losses, which did not escape the attention of the German general: Often the actions of the Russian command are incomprehensible. They do things that we can't understand and that don't seem reasonable. For example, anyone who does not hold a position is shot. When we asked the Russian chief of staff of the 63rd Corps why he did not withdraw his corps while there was still time, he replied that he had twice requested permission to withdraw from his army superiors. (No one on the other side can act on their own initiative; they must request permission from their superiors). His army left both requests unanswered and sent back a messenger. So the high command runs away from responsibility! As a result, the Russian 63rd Corps remained in Gomel and was lost. Similarly, here several divisions were stuck in a completely meaningless position and were captured [4].

As for the various branches of the Red Army, both Corps Commander Henrici and Corporal Roth generally held similar views on their combat effectiveness. Much has already been said about the infantry, but the experience of "communicating" with enemy aircraft in Heinrici and Roth is markedly different at first. If the Soviet Air Force almost disappeared for a few days in the area of offensive of General Heinrici's corps in early July 1941, suppressed by the Luftwaffe's superiority, then in the South, where Roth's division operated, the situation was quite different. Here the most powerful grouping of Soviet troops was concentrated, including aviation. It is no accident that on July 8, Roth noted in his diary the result of a raid by Soviet bombers on his military unit: 41 people were killed and 82 wounded. The raids continued unabated and on July 28 Roth recorded: "Russian bombers and fighters make our lives very difficult. Their favorite aim is our military transportation". When the Red Army's aviation recovered from the first shock in the central sector of the front, General Heinrici had to admit that the Russian "pilots are also brave and fly even in terrible weather conditions," attacking the Germans from the air.

A similar picture was observed with regard to the tank forces of the Red Army. According to the records of Corporal Roth, attempts at mass tank attacks by the Red Army at the very beginning of the war usually ended in disaster, given that the basis of the armored units of the Red Army were light T-26 and BT tanks with bulletproof armor, which were easily knocked out even by small German anti-tank guns. At the same time, the Yu-87 dive bombers provided great help in repelling Soviet tank attacks. According to the testimony of Russian veterans, it was from air strikes that the weakly armored light BT and T-26 tanks suffered huge losses.

However, the main enemy of the German soldier was the Soviet artillery. Roth recorded an incident that took place on June 30, 1941: "We barely had time to eat when something terrible

happened. A shell from the damned 122-mm gun, which was systematically firing at us, hit Franke's squad. When the cloud of smoke cleared, we saw a nightmare. In this chaos among the scattered ammunition boxes, wreckage of twisted metal and puddles of blood lay eight bodies of our companions". The force of Soviet artillery attacks was sometimes so great that some German soldiers literally went mad. Nor did General Heinrici ignore the power of the Soviet artillery. In a letter to his family dated August 18, 1941, he wrote: "Two days ago, the Russian so knocked us out of the command post with two heavy batteries that only by a miracle we got off with seven wounded. At the same time, the enemy, the general noted, usually did not lack ammunition: "The troops in some areas withstood the most severe trials many times over the course of 2-3 days, they were simply covered with shells, as in the (First.-A. G.) World War." Heinrici concluded with regret: "Alas, the Russian artillery is very good. It is very accurate and, unfortunately, very mobile". However, the Russians also had their weak point: communication. After three months of fighting, Roth concluded: "It was the lack of reliable radio communication that played a negative role in their defeat [5].

The difficulties of the campaign on the Eastern front were greatly compounded by the nature of Russia, its vast expanses, endless forests, autumn mud, and winter freeze. In this regard, neither Roth nor Heinrici report anything original. Combined with the abominable roads, these factors caused the Wehrmacht's autumn offensive to the East to stall, putting General Heinrici in a state of deep depression. In his letter to his family dated October 23, 1941, he gave a vivid example:

For example, the truck took 36 hours to cover 35 kilometers. Everyone was thrilled that it made it at all. Most of the columns are stuck in impassable mud, in the swamp, in the rutted roads with shell holes that are half a meter deep and are filled with water. The trucks, which were already barely moving, now have broken down completely (it is impossible to get spare parts). Gasoline, bread, oats nothing arrives. The horse-drawn carts are also stuck, the guns can't be delivered, all the personnel, infantry or whatever, are pushing the vehicles more than fighting. The roads are littered with dead horses and broken-down trucks. Wailing is heard again and again: this cannot continue [6].

DISCUSSION

Corporal Roth left a laconic entry in his diary on October 27: "The issue of troop transport has become a huge problem". The bad roads did not permit the Germans to capture Moscow when they had an overwhelming numerical advantage. General Heinrici lamented about this: "Everything stopped because of precipitation and roads. We are stuck not far from Moscow, our goal. Finally, the ratio of four German divisions to one Russian division was reached. But we can't use it."

He added an entry on October 30: "In general, we are stuck together with all our motorization, since the main prerequisite for it is missing solid roads. Nature has won over technology. We were very lucky that this did not happen at the end of September, when we started destroying the central group of

Russians, but what an irony that we are stuck right at the gates of Moscow".

Soon the autumn mud was replaced by freezing and deep snows. Among the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, the number of cases of frostbite increased sharply, and some soldiers froze to death, while others, unable to stand it, resorted to shooting themselves. This was the result of the risky business of the Hitlerite leadership, which did not bother to supply its troops with winter uniforms, hoping to deal with the USSR in just a couple of summer months. Then began a massive offensive by the Red Army, which led to a serious German defeat at Moscow in December 1941. In a letter to his wife dated December 16, Heinrici admitted: "In the entire (First.-A. G.) World War, I was never in a situation such as we are experiencing now. What will be the outcome - everything is in the hands of the Lord". Now the general began to turn more often to God and wait for a miracle, recalling the unenviable fate of Napoleon's army: "It would have been impossible to hold out being surrounded, so we had to retreat. We walked away on snow and ice just like Napoleon in his time. The losses are similar. Apathy among the personnel is growing. The state of the troops cannot be called anything but deplorable". A similar picture of the winter retreat is contained in the diary of the company corporal Roth who fought to the south in the Oboyan area. He recorded on December 28 [7].

Soon after midnight, at the cost of heavy losses, we still managed to get out of the encirclement. The details of this transition cannot be described in words almost running in 35-degree cold in snow almost to the waist, escaping from the enemy that outnumbers you by almost 10 times! Only a healthy person, and even then not everyone, can do this. As for the wounded, light or heavy, they were lost in the snow. Now we know that most of them preferred to put a bullet in their head rather than get caught by the enemy.

At the end of 1941 Roth's diary ends with an entry on December 31 describing the terrible scene of the results of the Soviet bombing of Oboyan, during which many German soldiers were killed, as well as in a sortie to a village occupied by the Red Army with two machine guns [8].

If we now compare the notes of General Heinrici and Corporal Roth with the memoirs of other German participants in the campaign to the East we can sometimes observe a striking similarity despite the fact that their authors were not familiar with each other's records. For example, General Heinrici gave this characteristic to the enemy: "The Russian is completely unpredictable in his behavior during these battles. One moment he fought bravely as never before and then again he wanders through the woods and allows himself to be captured". In the memoirs of another participant in the fighting on the Eastern front, non-commissioned officer Gottlob Bidermann, it says almost the same thing.

When we began our campaign against the Soviet Union, we found ourselves face to face with an unpredictable enemy whose actions, resistance, or loyalty could not be predicted or even estimated. At times we encountered fanatical resistance from a handful of soldiers who fought to the last cartridge and, even

after running out of supplies, refused to surrender. Sometimes, we had an enemy who surrendered in droves, offering minimal resistance, and without a clearly visible reason.

On the other hand, if General Heinrici and Corporal Roth attested to the most severe battles and heavy losses during the campaign against the USSR, then in the memoirs of the commander of the 9th Army Corps of Army Group Centre, Hermann Geyer, the war in 1941 was a picture of a victorious march to the East, and the main enemy was not the Russians, but the terrain and climate: "Much worse for us than the fire of the enemy and the partisans were the cold, snow, and supply interruptions". It turns out that if it weren't for bad roads, weather, and late delivery of supplies, General Geyer and his troops would have been able to get from Brest to Moscow in just a couple of months, making 20 km a day.

CONCLUSION

Of course, the actual fighting on the Eastern Front, as described by Corporal Hans Roth and General Gotthard Heinrici, had nothing in common with Geyer's writings. At the same time, both of the former were cogs of the inhuman machine that came to sow death on the expanses of Russia and in their diary entries we do not find a shadow of remorse for the criminal war they were participating in from the very beginning. And it is not surprising, since at the end of 1941, in the face of a serious defeat in the battle for Moscow, they could not imagine the Red Army being victorious in May 1945.

In general, the notes, messages, and letters of General Gotthard Heinrici and Corporal Hans Roth are very valuable sources on the history of the Second World War and their analysis allows us to see the war without embellishment through the eyes of an eyewitness with all its inhuman details.

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