

MEASURES TO PREVENT ESCAPE DISCUSSED

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[Article by Claus-Einar Langen, "The Control Network of the GDR for the Pursuit of Escapee Helpers"]

[Text] In the reconstruction of a case of attempted escape, the State Security Service of the GDR came upon a detail which it has now recorded in a film report. The film, which presumably is to be used as evidence for the prosecution in the trial of an escapee helper, documents the sharp observations of the East Berlin police apparatus, with which the escapee helpers can cope only with difficulty, although they go about their work with great inventiveness at times. Thus, it occurred to an escapee helper from the FRG that there is a western passenger car of the same type that is popular with drivers in the GDR. It is the Polski Fiat produced in Zeran near Warsaw under license with the body style of the earlier Fiat 125.

The escapee helper, who found that the uniformity of body seemed to lend itself to camouflage, provided a Fiat 125 with GDR license tags which could be changed by pressing a lever, so that either a FRG or GDR tag would be visible. This mechanism permitted the vehicle to be camouflaged as an auto permitted to be in the GDR and to leave the prescribed transit routes at will. The auto again showed its FRG tags after the escapee was picked up at the agreed spot and the transit stretch was again reached.

The driver of this car was among the 194 travelers who, after the transit agreement went into force 3 July 1972, have been arrested on the transit routes between Berlin and the FRG for helping escapees. Traffic in human beings which is hostile to the state, according to paragraph 5 of the penal code of the GDR, was named as grounds for the arrest of 123 persons. In two cases, the additional charge "state crime directed at another socialist state" was raised; and in one further case the arrest resulted from traffic in human beings which is hostile to the state, in connection with paragraph 97 (espionage). In addition, one traveler was charged with "terroristic acts hostile to the state" in accordance with paragraph 101 of the penal

code of the GDR. Of the 194 travelers seized since 3 June 1972, 71 were arrested on the charge of unlawful crossing of the border. Among these were persons who tried without profit or advantage to themselves to fetch a relative, friend or acquaintance into the FRG and thereby took all the risk of helping an escapee on themselves alone.

The number of arrestees has climbed by leaps and bounds this year. Up to 25 February, the GDR authorities had reported 144 arrests to the FRG delegation leader of the transit commission. On 22 May, the number of arrested escapee helpers leaped to 184. According to Article 16, paragraph 5 of the transit agreement, the GDR is obligated to report fully on arrests made on the four transit routes permitted for traffic to and from Berlin. An information requirement by the GDR authorities on corresponding instances of escape does not exist for the other transit roads in the direction of Scandinavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. On these roads the movement of escapees is far greater than on the Berlin roads, where, according to estimates, up to five out of every ten escape attempts would fail. Chances of success on the other transit routes are admittedly greater, but the magnitude of the escapee movement, which leads primarily into states of the East bloc and from there through Austria to the FRG, presumably results in higher arrest statistics than on the stretch between Berlin and the FRG.

Isolation and Secrecy

The isolation by the GDR judicial organs of those arrested is intended to prevent information on the escape movement and its background from coming to public attention. Thus, the date and place of the trials, which as a rule are not public, are kept secret.

Even the regional newspapers of the GDR are left in uncertainty. It goes so far that the East Berlin press service ADN is often informed of the sentencing of escapee helpers only months after the trial. But trials of GDR citizens who attempted to escape are buried in complete silence. Thus, there are to be neither reports on sentences nor publication of the number of people arrested. The concealment of such proceedings is intended to keep the population in a state of uncertainty about what kind of punishment is to be expected in a case of attempted escape. ADN reports on trials of escapee helpers--reports which emphasize the length of sentence--are intended also to serve as deterrent.

The GDR security authorities take extensive precautions that knowledge which would permit inferences on escape possibilities not be available. In this connection, the authorities take preventive measures such as arranging that persons who belong to an escape group are not convicted in the same procedure, but rather are turned over to the courts for individual sentencing after the preliminary inquiries. Strict censorship of prisoners' mail and special surveillance of the conversations of prisoners with their relatives during visiting times prevent third parties from learning details of escape attempts.

These security precautions lead to the isolation of the prisoners, so that in the execution of sentence, professional escapee helpers who qualify as traffickers in human beings hostile to the state and committers of crimes against the German Democratic Republic come to feel the full severity of a totalitarian regime.

The success of the state security service in making arrests on the transit routes between Berlin and FRG is definitively attributable to gaining exact information on each escape case. The arrestees, forced to confess through skilled interrogation and the threat of greater punishment, believe they can extricate themselves from a seemingly hopeless situation by providing an exact description of the escape preparations and of the course of the escape attempt. Information they give on West German contacts gives the GDR security authorities a basis for still further investigation.

Central Processing of Data?

The answer to the question of whether there is a central office which registers travel into and out of the GDR is of decisive significance if one is to get a full picture of the perfection of control measures on the transit routes. For the traveler, it is always a special experience when he hands in his passport and automobile registration at the GDR check points to show his transit visa. The procedures in the control rooms, to which the traveler has no access, remain hidden to him as he waits for the return of his papers. By accident on one occasion a glimpse of what happened "behind the scenes" was gained. Presumably as a friendly gesture, the control organs at a border crossing point asked two hostesses of a bus company who were accompanying a group of travelers to come inside the office so that they would not have to wait out in the rain. The women noticed that the personal documents of the travelers were examined and a collective visa was issued without a simultaneous check of wanted lists. One can conclude from that that the carbon copy of the visa and data pertaining to the travel group are passed on only later to a central electronic processing center either by messenger or by radio. In addition, there is the information of the police patrols who watch the transit routes. Only that kind of central processing--considering the great stream of travelers--can set a control mechanism into operation which enables the security forces, on the basis of the suspicion clause of the transit agreement, to seize persons or turn them back at the border. Registration of travelers by a manual carding system is impossible considering that some 12 million travelers per year use the transit route to Berlin and the five rail lines alone.

A further danger to the would-be escapee and his helper is represented by the agents of the GDR security service who are located in the FRG. Attempts to infiltrate provocateurs into the escapee helper organizations raise the risk, as does the fact that functionaries of the GDR security organs pass themselves off as would-be escapees. Observers claim to know that travelers who act suspiciously on the transit routes must figure on

being investigated in the FRG. If, for example, investigation shows that a traveler has no definite address in the FRG or is not going for a definite job, then it can be assumed with certainty that the security organs will follow these facts up. The information from CDU's Federal Intelligence Service, on the other hand, according to which residents of the GDR have had to give GDR authorities the mail they receive from the West unopened or reclaim letters they have received from relatives in the FRG, is hardly credible. It can hardly be assumed the GDR security service succeeds by this means in gaining possession of incriminating documents. For the service--in comparably suspicious instances--secret surveillance of telephone lines and correspondence promises greater success.

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