

BORDER DUTY SEEN AS DIFFICULT, HONORABLE

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[Text] Seize The Agent! Writers of the GDR border command depict the period when the line of demarcation had not yet been completely secured as an underworld of smugglers and spies instead of as a mass escape from the republic.

They serve in the "Border Command" of the National People's Army [NVA]; the military publication ARMEE-RUNDSCHAU refers to them as "The comrades who are sentinels of peace,"--those approximately 54,000 men who control the 1,346 km long barbed wire and mine studded line of demarcation with the FRG ranging from Dassow in the north to Hirschberg in the south of the GDR.

Military duty on the "western border of the state" is considered to be both demanding and honorable by the propagandists. For, as seen by NVA Lt Col Erhard Dix: "At no time can our border be protected with half-measures. The soldier must be completely committed."

The commander of these troops is Lt Gen Erich Peter, one of eight GDR deputy ministers of defense. Under him four major generals lead each of the regional commands, "North" in Kalbe in the Altmark, "Central" in East-Berlin, "South" in Erfurt, and "Coast" in Rostock. On the border with Poland and the CSSR there are, in addition, two independent units with stations at Frankfurt on the Oder River and Pirna, as well as two helicopter squadrons and two training regiments stationed in Thuringia.

Peter's troops are supported by thousands of so-called "border helpers," usually SED members or reservists who live in the vicinity of the border and who are also "to prevent assaults against the border of our state," according to the Magdeburg VOLKSSTIMME. Exceptionally vigilant ones from this "group of amateur actors" (as they are called in border guard slang), are decorated with the medal "for exemplary border service" as recently was the case of a game warden from the border area.

With the massive deployment of professional and amateur spies, and the resolute completion of the barrier system into a "modern border," the SED has recently moved a good deal closer toward its objective of complete insulation of the GDR. In any case, according to the computations of the Bonn Interior Ministry, every eleventh escape from East to West still succeeds: 969 so-called blockade breakers were recorded last year, 46 percent fewer than in 1973. The risky way through the mine fields is chosen only by every fourth escapee.

The quiet on the western front affords the NVA sentinels the opportunity to polish the image of their heroes from that time when the border was still partially open. The greatest of these is indisputedly Sergeant First Class Sepp Hausladen who "laid down his submachine gun only when he reached 60." That is how the GDR author Karl-Heinz Raepfel described the retirement of Hausladen 12 years ago. The former mill worker from Bavaria had intercepted 950 "violators of the border" until that time. For this he received a patriotic medal of merit.

In the meantime Lt Col Dix, a member of the "Central Working Group of Literary Border Soldiers," has also written about being "on patrol with Sepp" and his "almost legendary German Shepherd dog 'Assi.'" Hausladen must have had a fabulously good day: "What luck, eight with one blow," Dix counted--eight times: "Assi get him! Seize the agent!"

Of course Dix, as well as his literary NVA colleagues whose works have now been published by the GDR military publishing house in an anthology "Only a Few Hours," have carefully concealed the massive escape from the republic which once threatened the existence of the East German state. The border writers describe almost exclusively ominous smuggler types who are trying to reach the West with valuable cameras in their packs, or border violators coming from the opposite direction: "A track, comrade lieutenant colonel," reports one of the authors, "A track from the FRG to the GDR."

There is the 26 year old "provocateur" Goetz, armed with the "small black Beretta" and a "face seething with hatred," whom "they would honor as a hero over there." But it does not work out that way, for this "Eastern Specialist" trained by the U.S. Army, is captured just in back of the demarcation line. In the meantime, "over there the area is teeming with uniforms. Two American vehicles have driven up to the barrier. They snatch the binoculars from each other to catch a glimpse."

Then there is the American helicopter which has agents armed with pistols and radio transmitters on board. But there is also the soldier Hentschel and his guard post commander Edmund Aue, who take care of the "strange birds," Aue, now a lieutenant colonel and a chronicler of the border at that time in 1954, captured the helicopter and confronted the crew with the evidence: "Well, gentlemen, how is it now with your claim that you only got lost during your flight?"

And finally, there is the former friend from school who continuously smokes western cigarettes and raves about western cars, who would like to bribe the border guard Gebhard in order to "infiltrate someone" into his sector. The "scoundrel" offers "DM 3,000." The sergeant decides to save his ex-friend "from an act that he surely would soon regret" and turns him over to "the comrade of the state security service on duty."

Almost every report makes it clear that the GDR border guards really know the temptations of the West against which they protect their people. And they know the colleagues from over there. This is an example of the wording: "Apparently the mercenaries were once again trying to gain courage by drinking. One of them was staggering around examining his automatic rifle, and while doing so he dropped a round of ammunition on the ground. Another crawled away into a corn field,"--the wild West.

Soldier Schwab, a draftee, 20 years of age, depicts the Red contrast: "I cannot imagine," he reflects while on winter sentry duty, "that the officers over there bring hot tea to the border and themselves take along a bag with the bottles."