

I

Foundations

I RED ARMY COMMANDER

Until the regime in the USSR changes its policy on access to archives, the biographer of Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov must operate with the barest minimum of material. Vlasov left no personal documents¹ and almost everything that is known about his early life stems from his own accounts to his friends and followers during the Second World War after he had become the so-called leader of the Russian Liberation Movement. Most of the reports and anecdotes originate from individuals who met Vlasov for the first time during the war, since few knew him before that period of common adversity which began with their capture by the Germans.

Surviving photographs of Vlasov show a very tall, dark and rather gaunt individual with horn-rimmed spectacles, holding himself very erect. Early in his captivity he had a crew cut, but from later photographs it appears that he allowed his hair to grow and brushed it back.

Unlike his subordinates, Vlasov never wore a German uniform. A plain jacket of military cut and deep cuffs made out of brown cloth had been obtained for him by his German sponsors – who had great difficulty in finding clothes which were large enough – and a pair of uniform trousers with general's stripes down the side. His buttons were plain and he wore neither badges of rank nor medals, nor do any photographs show him wearing the ROA sleeve badge. His greatcoat was, unlike those of German officers, waisted, beltless and with wide lapels. On the front of his general's uniform cap he wore the white, blue and red cockade of the Russian Liberation Army.

Andrey Vlasov was born in 1900,² the thirteenth and youngest son

of a peasant, the grandson of a serf. His father wanted to provide all his children with an education and worked to supplement his income by taking in tailoring. Despite these efforts Vlasov's father still remained badly off and his youngest son's education had to be paid for by Andrey's eldest brother, Ivan. Ivan sent Andrey to a church school and later to a seminary in Nizhni Novgorod. Here, the education offered did not differ from that provided by a classical 'gymnasium' except for additional courses in psychology and an introduction to philosophy.³ This course of study was cut short by the Revolution. With its onset, the church could no longer offer Andrey real career possibilities, at which, no doubt, his brother had aimed. In 1918 Vlasov entered an agricultural college but agriculture, too, was in a state of disarray and uncertainty. However, in the spring of 1919 Vlasov was called up, and conscripted into the 27th (*Privolzhsky*) Rifle Regiment. He served throughout the Civil War in the Red Army to which, as far as can be ascertained, he devoted all his energies. He seems to have been a good soldier and to have got on well with his comrades. He rapidly gained promotion and made steady upward progress through the ranks. After a few weeks of service he was sent on an officer training course. Four months of training later, he became a platoon commander and was sent to the Southern Front. Vlasov served with a regiment of the 2nd Don Division which was fighting against General Denikin on the Don and Manych. Early in 1920, when the White Armies had been driven out of the Ukraine and the Caucasus, the 2nd Don Division was transferred to the Crimea to fight General Wrangel's forces. Here Vlasov commanded a company and after a few months he was transferred to the divisional staff as assistant to the chief of operations. His next appointment was in command of a mounted infantry reconnaissance section in one of the regiments of the division. By November 1920 the Red Army was in control of the Crimea. At that point Vlasov was given command of a detachment in the Ukraine which fought against Makhno and other anti-Bolshevik groups, or armed bandit gangs, still in existence there. From 1921 to 1923 the Red Army was reduced considerably in strength, but Vlasov had decided to remain a professional soldier and became a company commander in the forces, now reorganised by Trotsky. He was congratulated by the Soviet chief of staff, P. P. Lebedev, when the latter inspected the North Caucasus military district, on his excellent work in training his men. On the fifth anniversary of the formation of the Red Army, Vlasov was presented

with an inscribed silver watch. In 1924 he was appointed commander of the regimental training depot of the 26th Infantry Regiment. In 1928 he was sent to Moscow to attend an infantry tactics course after which he returned as a battalion commander. In 1930, in the same year as he entered the Communist party, he became a tactics instructor at the Leningrad Officers' School for further professional training. Shortly afterwards he was sent to Moscow on an instructors' course. He then returned to Leningrad as assistant to the chief instructor. Very shortly afterwards he was transferred to the mobilisation department of the Leningrad military region. In 1935, an inspection of the region with the deputy commander, General Primakov, found the 11th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Turkestan Division in poor condition. Vlasov was given command of this regiment which, shortly afterwards, was officially recognised as the best in the Kiev military region. Vlasov was promoted deputy commander of the 72nd Division. In 1938 Timoshenko, then commanding the Kiev military district, appointed Vlasov to his staff. In the autumn of 1938 Vlasov was sent to China.

The Soviet Union was pursuing a dual policy in China.⁴ On the one hand it supported Chiang Kai-shek against the Japanese, and on the other the Comintern supported the Chinese communists. Vlasov, who used the pseudonym Volkov⁵ while serving in China, was appointed chief of staff to the Soviet military adviser, General Cherepanov. His duties included lecturing on tactics to the Chinese military commanders. From February to May 1939 Vlasov served as adviser to General Yen Hsi-shan, Governor of Shansi. Vlasov's job was to persuade him of the necessity of joining Chiang Kai-shek's operations against the Japanese. After the recall of General Cherepanov to Moscow, Vlasov performed the duties of chief military adviser to Chiang Kai-shek. In November 1939, after the arrival of the new military adviser in China, General Kachanov, Vlasov was recalled to Moscow. Chiang Kai-shek decorated Vlasov with the Golden Order of the Dragon. Apparently Madame Chiang Kai-shek also gave Vlasov a watch, but both watch and decoration were taken from him by Soviet officials when he crossed the border on his way home. On his return from China in 1939, he was reappointed to the Kiev military district, once again under Timoshenko's command. This suggests that his superiors found him a useful subordinate. He was made commander of the 99th Infantry Division which was notorious for its disarray, due in part to its being composed of a motley

assortment of various nationalities. In 1940 Vlasov was given a gold watch⁶ and the Order of Lenin⁷ for his work in retraining and reforming the division. The division, too, received an award, the Red Banner, and was officially acclaimed the best in the Kiev military district;⁸ Marshal Timoshenko called it the best in the army. In 1940, following official recognition of his work with and successful leadership of the 99th Division, Vlasov published an article⁹ in which his practical attitude to military matters can be clearly seen. He quotes Suvorov¹⁰ and emphasises the importance of constant training and practice. Another article¹¹ eulogises Vlasov and strongly commends his military capabilities, his understanding and care of the men under his command, and his vigilance and accuracy in carrying out his military tasks. No mention whatsoever is made of Vlasov's involvement with or interest in the Communist party or in politics of any kind.

Vlasov's war service was of an exemplary nature. When war broke out Vlasov was on the Ukrainian Front in command of the 4th Mechanised Corps, where Soviet troops came under heavy pressure from Field Marshal von Rundstedt's Army Group South. The defence of Lvov was entrusted to Vlasov, and after its fall, he had to fight his way out of repeated encirclement.¹²

In August and September 1941 Vlasov was in command of the 37th Army defending Kiev. The official Soviet history of the war mentions the 37th Army but does not name its commander. On 17 September, Lieutenant-General M. P. Kirponos, the commander of the Kiev military district, ordered all armies to break out of the encirclement. These orders were transmitted to all armies except the 37th with whom contact had been lost: 'Not having any links with the front, the troops of the 37th Army continued the stubborn fight for Kiev. Outflanked by the enemy the 37th Army only left the capital of the Ukraine on 19 September and started to fight its way out [successfully] of the encirclement.'¹³

In November 1941 Vlasov was summoned to Moscow to help with the defence of the capital. His orders were to report to Stalin at midnight on 10 November. It was his first meeting with Stalin. When Vlasov was asked what he thought of the situation, he said that the mobilisation of untrained workers without the support of the trained military reserves, i.e. the crack troops stationed in Siberia, was useless. Stalin is supposed to have replied that 'anyone can defend Moscow with reserves'¹⁴ but gave Vlasov fifteen tanks, the full sum of what was available.

In describing the defence of Moscow, Professor Erickson writes of Vlasov as 'one of Stalin's favourite commanders', and it would appear that Vlasov was indeed a most able leader doing his utmost in an impossible situation and being given commands of increasing importance. During the defence of Moscow, Vlasov commanded the 20th Army, which is mentioned in *IVOVSS* but again without a reference to its chief. The 20th Army was part of the Northern Group defending Moscow. In the Soviet counter-attack at the beginning of December, Vlasov's troops and Rokossovsky's 16th Army fought their way to the Istra River and then to Solnechnogorsk and Volokolamsk.

Vlasov was interviewed by an American journalist, Larry Lesueur,¹⁵ on 16 December 1941, after he had captured Solnechnogorsk and before the attack on Volokolamsk. Lesueur mentions Vlasov's popularity with his men and his optimistic frame of mind. He was going to capture Volokolamsk that night and he was going to drive the Germans back as far as possible. The French journalist, Eve Curie, working for the American press, saw Vlasov after his capture of Volokolamsk. She writes of him as: 'One of the young army commanders whose fame was rapidly growing among the people of the USSR'.¹⁶ She mentions that Vlasov was a military man who, after twenty-three years' service, judged everything from a purely strategic point of view. When speaking of strategy he instanced Napoleon and Peter the Great as examples of outstanding military commanders. He showed a keen interest in Charles de Gaulle and Guderian as contemporary strategists. Eve Curie (somewhat naively) adds that Vlasov viewed Stalin as his direct superior, both militarily and politically, and was emphatic that the fascists must be annihilated. By January 1942, Vlasov's Army spearheaded the main attack in the Soviet counter-offensive whose final objective was to surround the German forces in the Mozhaïsk-Gzhatsk-Vyazma area.

On 13 December 1941 the Soviet Informburo published a communiqué describing the German repulse from the gates of Moscow together with the photographs of those commanders who had made an outstanding contribution to the defence of the city. One of these was of Vlasov.¹⁷ On 24 January 1942 he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner and promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general.¹⁸

A picture of Vlasov as a talented military commander emerges. The fact that foreign correspondents were allowed to meet him denotes that he was seen as a success by the authorities and must also

indicate the high degree of trust they had in him. Once again, however, the emphasis is laid on the military side of Vlasov's achievements; there is no mention of any kind of political activity on his part.

In March 1942, Vlasov was made deputy commander of the Volkhov Front. General Meretskov, the front commander, mentions Vlasov in his memoirs as a difficult, unwilling and ambitious subordinate, lacking in initiative.¹⁹ This statement can be assessed as one prescribed at a later date, by the Soviet authorities, who by that time were demanding that all mention of Vlasov be critical. But this statement may also be based on truth and could indicate that some personal animosity or professional rivalry existed between Meretskov and Vlasov.²⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that Vlasov arrived from General Headquarters (*Stavka*) in an aeroplane with Voroshilov, Malenkov and the deputy commander of the air force, A. A. Novikov, must indicate that Vlasov's appointment was seen as one of considerable importance. It must be stressed that the claims of Soviet historiography, which lay blame for the defeat of the 2nd Shock Army solely on Vlasov's cowardice and treachery, cannot be sustained. All available evidence shows that the situation on the Volkhov Front had been exceptionally difficult from the very beginning.

On 12 December 1941, Meretskov was called to GHQ and told of the creation of the Volkhov Front. The 4th and 52nd Armies had been assigned to it as well as the 2nd Shock (*udarnaya*) Army and the 59th Army which were in the process of being formed. Meretskov had asked that the 54th Army, which was part of the Leningrad defences, should be transferred to his command. The 54th Army's area of operations was adjacent to the Volkhov front, and the 54th Army was separated from the main Leningrad command by the besieging German forces. The military commander of the Leningrad Front, Lieutenant-General M. S. Khozin, and the city's political controller, A. A. Zhdanov, argued that this was not an obstacle; in any case the 54th Army could attack the German rear and relieve some of the pressure on Leningrad. On the other hand, Meretskov argued that the overall objective of the Volkhov command was to give aid to Leningrad, and that co-ordination of attacks would be hindered considerably by the lack of a unified command in the German rear. GHQ supported Khozin and Zhdanov. The 54th Army remained assigned to the Leningrad Front. Six months later, however, the position was reversed and the 54th Army, as well as the newly formed

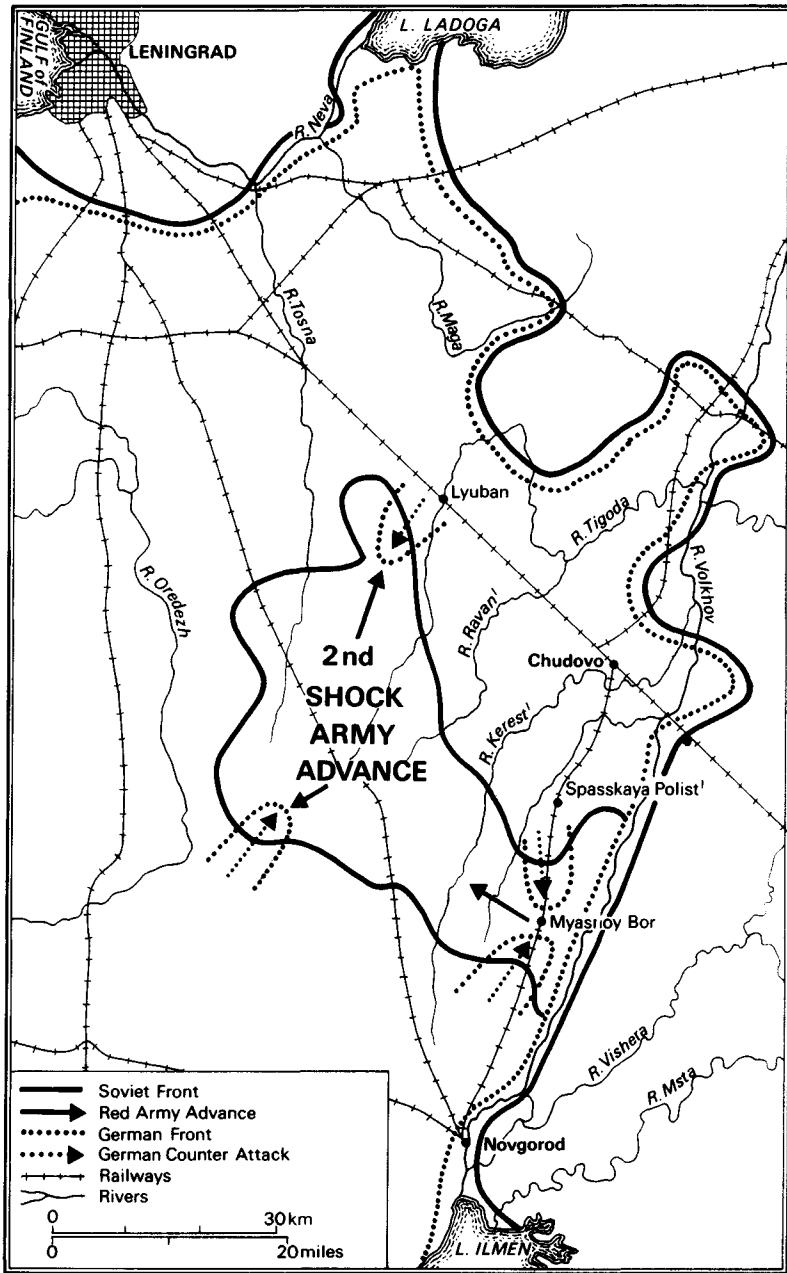


Figure 1 Sketch map of 2nd Shock Army operations, spring 1942

8th Army, was transferred to the Volkhov command. It would appear from this exchange that, from the beginning, friction existed between GHQ and Meretskov over the question of deployment of troops on the Volkhov Front. It is possible that this friction was an added element in later developments on the front, when GHQ did not respond to Meretskov's urgent demands for aid to the 2nd Shock Army.²¹

GHQ wished the troops of the Volkhov Front to continue advancing without any let-up, in order to ease the situation around Leningrad. On 13 January 1942 the armies of the Volkhov Front were thrown into the attack. German intelligence had advance warning of this and the defence was strong and the fire power heavy. The 2nd Shock Army and the 59th Army had been fully committed to the attack. Neither officers nor men were adequately trained. They lacked heavy artillery and ammunition, and were unused to the type of terrain – many of them were recruited from the steppes. It was the first time that they had found themselves in forests and they were frightened by this. In addition, there were constant complaints of the lack of air cover. The advance was slow. The 2nd Shock Army reached Myasnoy Bor and then GHQ ordered that the main attack should be directed on Lyuban and Spasskaya Polist'. Meretskov says of this campaign: 'The Staff at the front and I had overestimated the capacity of our troops.'²² Meretskov decided that the 2nd Shock Army must be reinforced. GHQ complained about the lack of progress. Klykov, who had been commander of the 52nd Army and had replaced Lieutenant-General Sokolov as commander of the 2nd Shock Army on 10 January 1942, complained about the lack of reinforcements and air cover. Finally Meretskov went to the headquarters of the 2nd Shock Army and then to the operational headquarters with Klykov. Here he found that the problem of providing adequate reinforcements had not been solved, and that there were inadequacies in the supply of arms and rations to the front line troops. The casualty returns supplied by the chief of operations, Colonel Pakhomov, were in chaos. Furthermore, his inaccurate communiqués were confusing both the staff and the commander in the field. Orders were being transmitted so slowly that the front line troops were receiving them only after a 24-hour delay. As a result of this chaos, GHQ ordered the replacement of the chief of staff, Major-General V. A. Vizzhilin, and the chief of operations. Major-General Alfer'ev was appointed deputy commander of the 2nd Shock

Army. When Klykov became seriously ill, Vlasov was appointed commander of the 2nd Shock Army.

The advance was continued but with little success. With the spring thaw the position of the army became ever more difficult as communications and supplies were affected. Meretskov suggested three solutions for improving the position of the 2nd Shock Army. First, in order to take its objectives, the army must be heavily reinforced, and this before there was a complete thaw. Second, the army could be withdrawn and another method of achieving its objectives found. Third, the army could dig itself in until after the thaw, when the surface would become passable again, and having been reinforced, it could then renew its attack. Meretskov himself favoured the first course of action, which would allow the 2nd Shock Army to consolidate the gains of the winter campaign and would also relieve the pressure on Leningrad to some extent. The third course of action seemed completely unacceptable, as leaving the army in the swamps would endanger both its communication and supply routes and could result in its being surrounded by the Germans.

The Germans pressed home their attack and on 19 March cut the 2nd Shock Army's lines of communication. After a couple of days Meretskov obtained the necessary reinforcements, successfully counter-attacked and reopened the lines of communication. The Soviet attack was now concentrating on the Lyuban. Meretskov intended to reinforce the 2nd Shock Army with the 6th Guards Corps, which was in the process of being formed and was intended to be stronger than the 2nd Shock Army had been at its original formation. This, however, was not to be. On 23 April Meretskov heard, to his horror and astonishment, that the Volkhov Front had been disbanded. It was now to be known as the Volkhov Operational Group and had been subordinated to the Leningrad Front. Meretskov writes: 'I just could not understand why this unification had taken place. In my view there was no operational, political or any other kind of necessity for this action.'²³

It then became apparent that General Khozin had persuaded Stalin that with this manoeuvre and these additional troops, he could lift the blockade of Leningrad.²⁴ Meretskov was ordered to join Zhukov on the Western Front. Before he left he telephoned GHQ to remind them of the necessity of sending the 6th Guards Corps to reinforce the beleaguered 2nd Shock Army. He was told not to worry. On 24 April he visited GHQ where, in the presence of Stalin and

Malenkov, Meretskov delivered a very blunt warning: 'The 2nd Shock Army is entirely played out. In its present state it can neither attack nor defend itself. Its communications are threatened by German attack. If nothing is done, then a catastrophe is inevitable.'²⁵ He suggested that if it was not possible to reinforce the army with the 6th Guards Corps, then it must be withdrawn from the forests and swamps to the line of the Chudovo-Novgorod railway. He was listened to very politely.

On 8 June, Meretskov was summoned from the Western Front to GHQ. Stalin admitted that combining the Volkhov Front with the Leningrad command had been a very great mistake. Khozin had not carried out GHQ's order of 14 May to pull back the 2nd Shock Army and they had been cut off. Meretskov and Vasilevsky were sent to deal with the situation. On 10 June new attacks were ordered. After a week of heavy fighting, a new corridor, 400 metres wide, was cut from the 2nd Shock Army to the railway line at Myasnoy Bor and the wounded were taken out. The 2nd Shock Army troops, unable to widen the corridor, since their officers had lost control and could not prevent their retreat, fell back in great disorder. By 23 June the area occupied by the Soviet army had considerably diminished and was enfiladed by German artillery fire. A new attack was scheduled for the night of 23 June. German fire was very heavy and communications were cut yet again. On the morning of the 24th, a few troops extricated themselves from the encirclement but subsequently the Germans regained their control of the railway line. On the 24th Vlasov ordered his men to break up into small groups and find their own way out of the encirclement.

Meretskov made efforts at the end of June to find Vlasov and sent in a squadron of tanks to the area where the commander and his staff had last been seen, but neither the tanks nor the partisans could find any trace of him.

Strik-Strikfeldt states that at the last moment Stalin sent in an aeroplane for Vlasov, to get him out before the terrain was finally overrun by the enemy, but he refused to board it saying he preferred to share the fate of his men. This statement is probably incorrect: first, because the number of possible landing sites, frozen in the winter but swamp in summer, would have been substantially diminished;²⁶ second, Meretskov says that the last landing ground was already in German hands.²⁷

This account of the operation of the 2nd Shock Army shows that it

was inadequately trained, poorly supplied and was sent to deal with a situation beyond its capabilities. GHQ accepted none of the recommendations made by Meretskov which would have alleviated the situation and made the attainment of various objectives possible. Although in his memoirs Meretskov makes a number of opprobrious remarks concerning Vlasov's behaviour and indifference to the fate of the army, this is in conflict with the arguments propounded in an article in a military journal.²⁸ In the latter, Meretskov lays all the blame for the defeat of the 2nd Shock Army on GHQ which failed to appreciate the realities of the situation.²⁹ Meretskov's analysis consequently exonerates Vlasov from the standard accusation in Soviet publications that it was solely due to his cowardice and treachery that the 2nd Shock Army was defeated.³⁰

Vlasov was captured on 12 July 1942. His military career in the Soviet Union had now come to an end. His subsequent life and actions in Germany, until the collapse of the Third Reich in May 1945, can only be understood within the context of Nazi ideology and war aims. The picture is further complicated by disagreements among German policy makers and by the radical divergence between Russian aspirations and German objectives.

2 OSTPOLITIK

The origins of *Ostpolitik*, German policy towards the Soviet Union and the occupied territories, can be found in *Mein Kampf*. Hitler maintained that the German nation needed *Lebensraum*³¹ – living space – which could only be obtained in the East. In Russian Bolshevism he saw the embodiment of the aspirations of World Jewry to achieve global domination.³² Furthermore, Hitler regarded the Slavs as an inferior race. He considered that all the achievements of the Russian state were owing to the influence of the Germanic minority.³³ The Slavs could, therefore, be used to serve the German interests, and Russia could be exploited to the same end. In the period leading up to war and after its outbreak Hitler developed these views further and his policies were expressed very clearly to Nazi personnel: the Russians were to become the tools of the Germans. Hitler intended to destroy Leningrad and Moscow completely,³⁴ to isolate and exploit the Russians, and to employ their natural resources for Germany. Such policies and views were supported by the Nazi hierarchy, and Himmler's publication *Der Untermensch*³⁵ was

used to provide further propaganda evidence of the degeneration of the Slavs as a result of oriental influence. This, in its turn, led to the implementation of a very harsh policy in the occupied areas of the USSR by party fanatics, in particular by Erich Koch, the Gauleiter of the Ukraine.³⁶

The Nazi leadership was divided in its approach to the East. Alfred Rosenberg, who was in charge of the Ostministerium, and who considered himself the ideologist and foreign affairs expert within the Nazi party, despite his loyalty to his Führer, could not agree with all of the latter's views on the Eastern problem. Rosenberg accepted the premise that Russia should be exploited for the benefit of Germany, but at the same time expressed an idea which was at variance with some assumptions of the *Untermensch* theory which applied to all Slavs without differentiation. Rosenberg wished to protect and free Germany from any future political or military pressure on her Eastern frontier and was therefore opposed to creating a united Russia. Rosenberg had been educated in Riga and had taken his final examinations in Moscow. He was, therefore, familiar with Russian culture and customs and considered that the Great Russians had been a vital force in the creation of Russian civilisation. Consequently, Rosenberg proposed the creation and isolation of a Great-Russian state, Muscovy, which would be surrounded by a ring of buffer states: Greater Finland, Baltica, Ukraine and Caucasus.³⁷ Rosenberg wished to provide a political programme for the nationalities of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the Great Russians, to enable them to develop into semi-independent states. The practical problems of creating and administering a truncated and subservient Russia, which was surrounded by a ring of semi-autonomous buffer states, were never solved. Although Rosenberg was made Reich Minister for the occupied territories in 1941, his theories and the fact that he was neither a practical nor a successful politician, meant that he clashed with and was overborne by the hardline Nazis such as Koch, of whose appointment as Gauleiter of the Ukraine he had been chary; and although Rosenberg continued to insist on his right and prerogative he was ignored, his directives evaded and questions of administration ostensibly under his jurisdiction were carried out by other agencies.

After the unprovoked attack by the armed forces of the Third Reich on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, German policy towards the USSR and the Russians in the occupied territories was to be

conducted along the lines indicated by the basic assumptions of Nazi ideology. However, as the war progressed various Germans began to express their reservations about the conduct of the war and the attitudes adopted towards the inhabitants of the occupied territories. *Ostpolitik* found a critic, too, in Joseph Goebbels. In his diary for 25 April 1942 he noted that the inhabitants of the Ukraine had initially welcomed the Führer as a liberator, but that this attitude had changed as a result of the harsh treatment meted out to them.³⁸ Goebbels thought the Germans would lessen the threat from the partisans if they could win the confidence of the people. He considered that puppet governments in the occupied areas would serve the German interests better. These governments could carry out any harsh measures that were necessary and would serve as a screen for the Germans.³⁹ Later he was to say that he considered it would be wiser to wage the war against Bolshevism rather than against the Russian people.⁴⁰ Goebbels did, however, emphasise that these measures should have no political significance and were of propaganda value only.

Given Hitler's views, it can be argued that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable, even if in the short run resources to conduct such a war were insufficient or a suitable opportunity for the onslaught did not present itself. However, the inevitability of this course of action was not apparent at the time either to the diplomatic corps or to the military establishment, both of whom focused their attention on avoiding conflict, fearing the destruction and loss that it would bring in its train. The ambassadors in London and Moscow, Herbert Dirksen and Count Werner von der Schulenberg, whatever their early sympathies for some aspects of the Nazi regime, found it difficult, if not nearly impossible to believe that Hitler wanted war,⁴¹ and to the last they endeavoured to promote peace, speaking in glowing terms of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the benefits to be gained from it. Von der Schulenberg, in particular, felt that it would be disastrous for Germany to wage war with the Soviet Union⁴² and made repeated representations to his government on this subject. When war did eventually break out, he used his influence to mitigate the effects of Nazi administration in the occupied territories,⁴³ and even though the Foreign Office was precluded from influencing *Ostpolitik*, he supported attempts to find a political solution for the East, advocating a middle course on the nationality question, with all the nationalities being allowed self-determination.

The military establishment, like the diplomatic corps, included a large number of people who represented and were conditioned by the pre-Weimar regime; they remained relatively free from the influence of the Nazi party with the result that opposition arose from within these groups and dissenting policies could be hatched and harboured for a long period without being betrayed.⁴⁴ Hitler disliked and distrusted the diplomatic corps and the professional soldiers because of their adherence to standards other than his own. He was jealous of their professional expertise and because of their dislike for and lack of comprehension of politics.⁴⁵ He attempted to minimise their influence and power but complained that, unlike Stalin, who had been able to make a fresh start by sweeping away all the class enemies, he, Hitler, had to contend daily with elements hostile towards him.⁴⁶

From November 1937 onwards, when Hitler announced⁴⁷ to the commanders-in-chief of the three services that he proposed to take Germany into war, because of the need for *Lebensraum*, individuals in the armed forces tried to dissuade him from this course of action, which would bring disastrous consequences for Germany. Hitler was not prepared to listen to political arguments from his senior commanders and under a variety of pretexts got rid of Field Marshal von Blomberg, the minister of war, Colonel-General Werner von Fritsch, commander-in-chief of the army, and Colonel-General Ludwig Beck, chief of staff of the army. He also replaced Freiherr von Neurath, the foreign minister and appointed von Ribbentrop in his place. Many senior officers disapproved of Hitler's attitudes and policies but no concerted action could be agreed upon by them to oppose him. Hitler effectively tied the hands of the military by changing the oath of allegiance sworn by the army. When the Nazis originally came to power the army had sworn loyalty to the people and the country: after President Hindenburg's death this was changed to allegiance to the Führer and many officers felt that they could not break this oath. Furthermore, Hitler had demonstrated to the professionals that they had been mistaken in their pessimistic forecasts on the outcome of his aggressive enterprises. Austria, Czechoslovakia and the Rhineland were all annexed and occupied without bloodshed and the blitzkrieg operations against the Western Allies were more successful than the military had anticipated. When war was declared on the Soviet Union, doubts that had been harboured were expressed more openly, and as the campaign did not draw to its victorious close within six weeks as the Führer had

predicted, the voice of the opposition began to be heard and alternative policies were soon under discussion.

The initial march into Soviet territory made rapid progress. Despite warnings both from the British and from his own intelligence services, Stalin could not, or would not, believe that Hitler was going to declare war on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.⁴⁸ When the German forces did attack on 22 June 1941, Soviet forces were caught almost completely unawares. Despite requests from some commanders based on the border, no contingency plans or orders existed in case of an attack. Stalin was apparently thoroughly shaken by the course of events, and when all was in total confusion he retired, locking himself away in his own apartments, and leaving his commanders to cope by themselves. Not only was the Red Army unprepared for a surprise attack, but at that time it was also suffering from a number of 'structural' weaknesses. The army had not recovered from the effects of the purge, initiated after the Tukhachevsky affair, in which the high command echelons were very severely hit and three out of five marshals disappeared; of the field officers, about 35,000 were arrested, subsequently imprisoned or killed.⁴⁹ With the destruction of these cadres, plans for renovation, technical improvements or advances in the army had to be shelved. The new commanders lacked experience and expertise and this was reflected in the pitiful state in which the Red Army found itself when war broke out. Indeed, some of the former, purged commanders, for example Gorbатов (who before the purge had commanded the Parachute Troops Administration), were made to swear not to divulge what had happened to them and were then rushed from concentration camps to the front line as the lack of adequately trained and experienced commanders showed up in some of the early actions of the war. Marshal Rokossovsky is another example of a Soviet commander arrested during the Tukhachevsky purge, to be subsequently rehabilitated, who played a prominent part in the defence of the USSR during the Second World War.

In addition, the population in some of the areas under attack, particularly in western Russia, welcomed the German advance, assuming that the Germans came as liberators from a hated regime rather than as conquerors, and were classed as 'politically unreliable' by the Soviet order. Initially most of the Russians who were to become involved in the so-called Vlasov movement, or Russian Liberation Movement, thought, like so many of their German

contemporaries, that Nazi ideology must be based on, and take into account, logical considerations; it took an appreciable amount of time for them to realise that this was not the case and the arbitrary whims of just one man could sweep all before them. Some of the troops were unreliable too, and the capitulation by a vast number of prisoners was a result not merely of the Red Army having been taken by surprise but because some units had voluntarily gone over to the Germans, refusing to fight for the Soviet regime. To counter this, in August 1941 a directive⁵⁰ was read out to formations saying that commanders who did not carry out their orders or who showed cowardice would be demoted to the ranks or, if necessary, shot on the spot. If commanding officers should surrender to the enemy then they would be deemed traitors and their families would be arrested and punished. If the rank and file surrendered to the enemy they would also be regarded as traitors and would be annihilated by all possible methods – the order specifies air attack – and their families would be deprived of all state aid and assistance. This attitude towards those taken prisoner, for whatever reason captivity had occurred, added to the fact that the Soviet Union had not ratified the Geneva Convention of 1929⁵¹ which dealt with the status of prisoners-of-war, meant that prisoners captured in the first few months of the war endured appalling living conditions and treatment resulting in a very high proportion (in some camps 80% or 90%) dying in the winter 1941–2.⁵²

The treatment meted out to the population of the occupied areas, however, as well as to the prisoners-of-war, slowly began to swing public opinion away from support for the Germans, who were not behaving as expected of the hoped-for liberators, and towards a renewed support for the Soviet authorities. Stalin declared that the war was a 'Patriotic War' in which Russia rather than the Soviet regime was to be defended, and various reforms, particularly in relation to the church, were instigated. State pressure against the church was relaxed, greater freedom of worship was allowed,⁵³ and many believed that this change indicated a modification in the nature of the regime which would continue after the war.

The extent of popular disaffection at the beginning of the war was something that was recognised by both Russians and Germans opposed to Nazi policies in the Soviet Union. Russians opposed to the regime argued that this disaffection could be used to overthrow the Soviet order and to establish a non-Stalinist system. Stalin, allegedly,

also feared that this might have been possible⁵⁴ in the early stages when the German forces appeared to be achieving speedy victories and the true nature of Nazism was not yet apparent to the local population. It was the treatment of the Soviet population which preoccupied the majority of Germans who disagreed with Nazi policies. They did so not because they were concerned with the fate of Russia but because they felt that winning the war was made more difficult by mistaken assumptions on which the Nazi administrators were acting.

From the beginning of hostilities, Russian prisoners-of-war had been made use of by German forces. To begin with, volunteers were used in non-military positions, such as the commissariat or ambulance services, but this developed into their being given arms and serving in military formations. These individuals serving on the German side were known as *Hilfswillige* (*Hiwis*). At the same time, units of Russians were formed; these were mostly of battalion strength and were initially known as *Osttruppen*, a name which was changed to *Freiwillige Verbände*,⁵⁵ although the names *Osttruppen* and *Hiwis* stuck. Larger formations, legions, were recruited from the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union, and were called the *Ostlegionen*, consisting of Turkestan, Armenian, North-Caucasian, Georgian, Azerbaidjan and Volga Tartar legions.⁵⁶ This enterprise was fostered by Rosenberg as a corollary to his plan of independent statehood for the national minorities of the Soviet Union, and it was frowned upon by Hitler who did not wish to have his Aryan troops contaminated by other races. The only grouping favoured by Hitler was the Cossacks. In his early days as a politician Hitler had been supported by some Cossack leaders, and furthermore, Hitler had accepted the theory which demonstrated that the Cossacks were descendants of the Goths and were therefore not Slavs but Aryans.⁵⁷ A Cossack division under General von Pannwitz was enlarged to the size of a corps.

Attempts were also made to set up semi-autonomous military units from Soviet nationals but the earliest experiments along these lines were created for purely military purposes without a political programme. The history of the Russian Liberation Movement (*Russkoe Osvoboditel'noe Dvizhenie*) ROD, is a vivid illustration of the particular problems encountered on the German Eastern Front. Further, the development of ROD, the policies of the various ministries and departments which became involved with ROD, their attitudes both

to ROD and to each other illuminate the contradictions and multiplicity of authority inherent in the Nazi system.

The Russian National Army of Liberation, RONA (*Russkaya Osvoboditel'naya Narodnaya Armiya*) led by Bronislav Kaminsky, was better known as the Kaminsky Brigade.⁵⁸ He held sway in the Bryansk-Lokot region, as a kind of war-lord, was equipped by the Germans and espoused, at least theoretically, a quasi-National Socialist platform.⁵⁹ He engaged for the most part in partisan activity; but the brigade was disbanded in 1944 after Kaminsky had been shot by the SS, and part of the brigade had been employed in suppressing the Warsaw rising. The Gil-Rodionov Brigade,⁶⁰ also known as the SS Druzhina I, was another venture along similar lines. It was led by a Soviet lieutenant-colonel, Vladimir Rodionov, and ended in 1943 when Gil-Rodionov returned to the Soviet side. A third experiment was the Russian People's National Army (*Russkaya Narodnaya Natsional'naya Armiya*) RNNA, or Osintorf (the name of the locality where it was formed) Brigade, which was initially led by old émigrés, including Colonel K. G. Kromiadi, also known as Colonel Sanin, who later was to be in charge of Vlasov's secretariat. In 1942, Kromiadi was replaced by Zhilenkov and Colonel Boyarsky, both of whom were also later to be closely associated with Vlasov. The RNNA was sponsored by the German Army. Field Marshal von Brauchitsch considered it could make a vital contribution to the fighting on the Eastern Front, and Field Marshal von Kluge⁶¹ gave the go-ahead for its formation, but its German and Russian leaders were not able to see eye-to-eye and the RNNA was dissolved in 1943.

Opponents of *Ostpolitik*, however, considered that these military formations in themselves were insufficient. They advocated the formulation of a political solution in the East which would give the anti-Stalin opposition something positive for which to fight. They also insisted that treating the Slavs as *Untermensch* had the effect of increasing resistance as well as making the task of the Wehrmacht and the German administration more difficult. This was clearly and openly expressed in a memorandum written by Dr Otto Bräutigam, deputy chief of the Political Department of the Ostministerium, who said that a Russian 'de Gaulle'⁶² should be found, in the person of a rebellious Red Army general who could lead a Soviet opposition movement. A number of people were approached to lead a positive opposition movement, among them Yakov Djugashvili,⁶³ Stalin's eldest son, who, despite being on bad terms with his father, refused to

co-operate and apparently died in a prisoner-of-war camp. General Lukin, commander of the 19th Army, who was taken prisoner in the Vyazma-Bryansk battles in October 1941, was also considered as a possible leader, in spite of being badly wounded and subsequently losing both legs. However, although Lukin could not be called a supporter of the Soviet regime, he did not trust the Germans and refused to collaborate unless given troops and equipment immediately.⁶⁴ Into these quicksands of politics, collaboration, treachery and anti-Stalinist opposition, Vlasov was now to tread.

3 DECISION TO LEAD

After his troops had dispersed, Vlasov spent more than two weeks, from 24 June to 12 July, wandering in the swamps and forests presumably analysing his position. This fact contradicts the Soviet assertion that he gave himself up to the Germans immediately,⁶⁵ and in one case that he had had contacts with the Germans ever since the battle for Kiev.⁶⁶

The time spent in the forest appears to have been crucial for the evolution of Vlasov's state of mind from that of a prominent Soviet commander, to that of a collaborator with the enemy, and prepared the ground for his subsequent decision to try and form an anti-Stalin Russian Liberation Army; a decision which still gives rise to bitter debates over the morality of his action.

The period between the defeat of the 2nd Shock Army and Vlasov's capture by the Germans gave him a brief respite from the constant pressure to which, as a front line commander, he had been subjected, and allowed him to reflect both on the reasons for his present situation and on possible courses of action in the future.

It must have been evident to Vlasov that he could not easily return to Soviet jurisdiction. His military career was certainly finished. He had been the commander of the 2nd Shock Army which had been beaten. Regardless of where the blame lay, he would be made to pay for it. Other commanders in similar situations had been shot.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly he would be considered a failure and probably treated as a traitor.⁶⁸ Thus, Vlasov, who had been careful to keep out of political discussions and controversy and who had concentrated on practical matters, was finally forced into a position where he had to evaluate his situation and thereby make a political decision.

It seems quite plain that during his early career Vlasov did not

concern himself with politics. His posting to China in the autumn of 1938 indicates that his work was viewed in a favourable light. It is most unlikely that he would have been sent abroad at this juncture, in spite of the need for his specialist knowledge, unless he was regarded as a totally reliable individual. It is said that while in China he was careful not to get involved in political discussion.⁶⁹

The significance of Vlasov's relatively late entry into the Communist party in 1930 has been interpreted by his supporters to mean that he never had any real sympathy for the regime. His opponents argue that it indicates that he was always politically untrustworthy.⁷⁰ Both arguments appear to be over-tendentious. This delay in membership would seem to suggest that Vlasov had kept away from political discussion, had concentrated on the practical aspects of his profession and was finally made a member of the Communist party when his rank demanded it, and possibly in recognition of his military abilities.⁷¹ Vlasov was untouched by any purge or by the consequences of the Tukhachevsky affair. Some supporters have argued that this was because he was in China at the time.⁷² This argument is totally invalid. The Tukhachevsky affair erupted in June 1937 while Vlasov was still in European Russia. Secondly, the Far Eastern Command did not escape the repercussions of the affair. Marshal Blyukher, commander of the Far Eastern Forces, was shot in November 1938. Finally, the fact that Vlasov's posting to China must have been cleared at a very high level suggests that from a political point of view, his record was unblemished and that he was sufficiently trustworthy to be sent on a foreign mission.

Later Vlasov was to tell friends of various incidents throughout his life which had produced a strong impression on him and which reinforced his anti-Stalin feelings. He said that the implications of many such incidents had been thrust below his consciousness and were only rethought during this period in the forest.

Vlasov declared that he had fought in the Red Army during the Civil War because he believed it would give land and freedom to the people. Yet throughout his life he was witness to events which showed that the Bolsheviks were not keeping their promises and were denying the people basic justice. On one occasion Vlasov recounted how he had been reading a newspaper from which it was clear that the peasantry were being very harshly repressed. He was talking it over with his wife when his chief of staff entered, to whom Vlasov remarked that yes, indeed it was a marvellous article and what a

wonderful government they had. When the chief of staff left, his wife looked at him and said: 'Andrey, can you really live like that?'⁷³ Another negative impression intruded itself when Vlasov saw the trains at Kushchevka, a station in the Caucasus, in which the peasantry, the so-called 'Kulaki', were being transported away from their villages to labour camps and exile. He was particularly distressed that he and his wife had helped his parents by giving them a cow and because of this, a year later, they had been classed as rich peasants and punished.⁷⁴ Epstein mentions that during the Civil War, when Vlasov was fighting in the 2nd Don Division, his eldest brother was executed because he was allegedly involved in an anti-Bolshevik conspiracy.⁷⁵ This fact is not mentioned anywhere else, which seems strange, as it would be a very telling argument. If it is true, this must have left an impression on Vlasov, particularly since his brother helped finance Andrey's education.

Although the Tukhachevsky affair bypassed Vlasov, it must have raised some questions in his mind. How could so many members of the armed forces be arrested as traitors and enemies of the regime? Memoirs of the 1930s⁷⁶ provide eloquent testimony that the enormous numbers of arrests could at that time only be understood as the product of some kind of disastrous mistake. If even educated party members could see no better explanation for government policy, it is more than likely that Vlasov would not try to dwell on the implications of the affair. Nevertheless, when he returned from China Vlasov could not but have been struck by the damage inflicted on the armed forces by the purge of the officer corps. Vlasov, according to one account, was much impressed by the relative freedom he had found in China.⁷⁷ Another account states that while in China Vlasov kept out of political discussions, but that it could be deduced from various remarks that he was not in total sympathy with the Soviet regime.⁷⁸ If Vlasov had formed an unfavourable impression of the Soviet Union by contrast with China, this impression must have been considerably strengthened by the outrage of a professional soldier when confronted by the emasculation of the armed forces so manifest in the Finnish campaign. Such doubts must have been augmented when Vlasov encountered brother officers who had been rehabilitated and sent to the front. Vlasov had fought alongside Rokossovsky, rehabilitated in 1939, in the successful defence of Moscow. Later Vlasov was to say that, could he but contact him, he could easily convert Kostya Rokossovsky to his – Vlasov's – way of thinking.⁷⁹

Early in his captivity, Vlasov recounted an occurrence at the beginning of the war which brought home to him the unpopularity of the regime among the population as a whole. Vlasov was sent back to a recently evacuated town to collect some important papers which had been forgotten at headquarters. As he entered the town in his tank he saw the inhabitants preparing to greet the Germans, whose arrival in the town was imminent, with flowers and gifts of bread and salt.⁸⁰ Vlasov was taken aback by this display; nevertheless he stopped his machine gunner from shooting at the crowd.⁸¹ Then while fighting on the Volkhov front, Vlasov received a letter from his wife which said: '*Gosti byli*' – we've had guests – i.e. the secret police had been to search his flat.⁸² This incident cannot have strengthened his faith in the regime.

The outcome of the battle on the Volkhov and the fate of his army must be the decisive factor in explaining Vlasov's state of mind. Why had he been sent to deal with an impossible situation? Why had nothing been done to support the army? For what and for whom had his men died? Vlasov said that while he was in the forest he began to see the errors of the government. He reconsidered his own fate, but decided not to commit suicide. Apparently, he compared himself to General Samsonov who in August 1914, during the First World War, had also been commanding a 2nd Army. When Samsonov felt that he had let down his country, he shot himself. Vlasov said Samsonov had something for which the latter felt it was worthwhile to die, whereas Vlasov was not prepared to shoot himself for Stalin's sake.⁸³

If he was no longer prepared to continue to fight for Stalin, Vlasov was automatically ranging himself against Stalin. Although he did not seek out the Germans, he did not resist when they found him. Vlasov had rested and reassessed his purely military life, and now was to move into the political sphere. His first steps were to reveal his naivety, lack of knowledge and inexperience in this area.

On 12 July 1942, Vlasov was found in a small hut in the village of Tukhovetchi, by the intelligence officer of the German 38th Corps, Captain von Schwerdtner, and the interpreter, Klaus Poelchau. They had already identified one body as that of Vlasov, and local officials suspected that partisans were in the hut. When he heard the Germans, Vlasov came out saying: 'Don't shoot, I'm Vlasov'. On 13 July, Vlasov was taken to General Lindemann, the commander of the 18th Army at their headquarters at Siverskiy (approximately 50 kilometres south-south-east of Leningrad). Vlasov was apparently

struck by his courteous reception from General Lindemann and this first favourable impression may have supported his hope that he could work with the Germans. On 15 July he was taken to Lötzen, arriving there on 17 July, where he was interrogated by OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres). A few days later he was taken to Vinnitsa, in the Ukraine, where there was a camp for 'Prominente'.

There were about 80–100 prisoners here, who were well treated and given German rations. In the camp he met other high-ranking Soviet prisoners. With one of them, Colonel Vladimir Boyarsky,⁸⁴ Vlasov wrote a letter to the German authorities.⁸⁵ In it they advanced the idea that anti-Stalin sentiment in the population at large and among the captured prisoners-of-war in particular, should be utilised by the Germans. They advocated the formation of a Russian National Army.

Judging from the exclamation marks in the margin, the concepts put forward were completely incomprehensible to the German reading the letter. Nonetheless, it appears to have been the catalyst for a number of meetings between Vlasov and various individual Germans opposed to Nazi policies.

Four days after writing the letter, Vlasov was visited by Gustav Hilger,⁸⁶ a diplomat who had been with Ambassador von der Schulenberg in Moscow. After his meeting with Vlasov, Hilger submitted a report to von Etzdorf, the liaison officer between the Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH) and the Auswärtiges Amt⁸⁷ in which he emphasised that mistaken Nazi policy and attitudes towards the USSR and its people, that is to say the implementation of measures which would turn Russia into a German colony, were merely increasing Soviet resistance.

Another visitor at the Vinnitsa camp was Lieutenant Dürksen from the Propaganda Department of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW). His chief, Captain Nikolas von Grote, was also active in the search for an anti-Stalinist Soviet general, who would sign propaganda leaflets designed to be dropped on the Red Army lines, thereby increasing desertion from the forces. Dürksen also suggested that Vlasov should move to Berlin to the OKW propaganda centre at 10 Viktoriastrasse, where other 'Prominente' were held. The officers in OKH and OKW hoped that the use of Vlasov, the attendant propaganda and the consequent rise in the number of Red Army deserters would be a powerful argument in favour of changing Nazi policy. Finally Vlasov met Captain Strik-Strikfeldt, who had been

sent by Colonel Reinhard Gehlen and Colonel von Roenne from *Fremde Heere Ost*, a branch of the General Staff concerned with intelligence gathering on the Soviet Union. Captain Wilfried Strik-Strikfeldt was a Baltic German, who had been educated in St Petersburg and had served with the Russian Imperial Army during the First World War. After the war, he had run a business in Riga. In 1939, following the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact he was evacuated to Poznan and in 1941 he was invited to join the staff of Field Marshal von Bock. In 1942 he was transferred to *Fremde Heere Ost*. Strik-Strikfeldt and Vlasov made friends quickly and it appears that it was owing to Strik-Strikfeldt's persuasion that Vlasov agreed to lead the opposition movement. Strik-Strikfeldt believed passionately both in the possibility of the creation of and in the fruitful effect that the Liberation Movement could have, and he was anxious that Nazi policy towards Russia should be changed in the interests of Russia herself, and not merely because of the advantages it could bring to the German war effort. In this Strik-Strikfeldt was unusual. Among the many opponents of *Ostpolitik*, few cared about the fate of Russia, they were concerned only with the best interests of Germany.

Strik-Strikfeldt became the mainstay of the whole 'Wlassow-Aktion', encouraging and supporting Vlasov through all his doubts and throughout the periods when German policy was at its most inflexible. After the war, some of the Russian participants, when discussing the failure of the Vlasov enterprise, blamed it partly on Strik-Strikfeldt's rank – he never held a position higher than Captain. Because of his lower status, they alleged, he was denied personal contact with the upper echelons of the Nazi hierarchy; in any case, he was only interested in the German point of view.⁸⁸ This is a somewhat unfair accusation since without the constant support of Strik-Strikfeldt it is arguable that the Vlasov movement would have died away at a much earlier stage. On the other hand, initially Strik-Strikfeldt, like so many of his countrymen, failed to grasp the essence of Nazism. He had once said to Vlasov: 'The Führer is still surrounded by men who are blind',⁸⁹ a remark most revealing of Strik-Strikfeldt's attitude. For a long time Strik-Strikfeldt remained convinced that Hitler would be amenable to reason, once the true state of things had been clarified to him. Since neither Strik-Strikfeldt nor many of the other supporters of the idea of the Russian Liberation Movement moved in circles close to Hitler, which would have enabled them to understand more clearly the driving force of Nazism,

the whole enterprise rested on hopes which were extremely unlikely to come to fruition.

It appears the officers of OKH and OKW were concerned as to how long Vlasov would agree to co-operate if they could not make progress towards the actual formation of Russian units. Part of Strik-Strikfeldt's role seems to have been to assure and persuade Vlasov that progress could be made. Vlasov could not have failed to be in an impressionable state of mind at this juncture and the practical, patriotic rather than orthodox Nazi sentiments of these Germans must have been communicated to him. Various incidents undoubtedly had created a bad impression: on his capture Vlasov was marched at the head of a column of prisoners-of-war with the obvious desire to humiliate him.⁹⁰ At a later stage Vlasov complained that German junior officers were not sufficiently respectful to a senior Soviet officer; a major had ordered him to stand up⁹¹ which Vlasov had refused to do, and in another incident Vlasov had refused to participate in a roll-call for all prisoners-of-war, demanding that senior officers should be paraded separately. These, however, were all minor incidents and Vlasov's introductory experiences at German hands had been good, thereby mitigating, in some measure, reports of the barbaric treatment accorded to Soviet prisoners-of-war.

His initial impressions of the Germans and the conversations he held with fellow detainees of an anti-Stalin outlook must have had a considerable effect on Vlasov. His meetings with German officials and officers who understood to some extent the situation in the Soviet Union and who appeared to sympathise with Russian aspirations, probably strengthened his hopes that a solution which would improve the lot of Russians and their country was a possibility. This laid the foundation for Vlasov's decision to co-operate with attempts to create a Russian Liberation Movement. It is equally clear that Vlasov took this decision without being fully aware of the complexities of the Nazi machine. He failed to understand the illogicality inherent in the core of the Nazi system. Vlasov was used to the USSR where the system of control was so pervasive that it would have been very unwise to criticise official policy without higher authorisation. Consequently, when German officers were openly hostile to Nazi policy, Vlasov concluded that this must echo some directive and that policy could be altered. It seems very unlikely, however, that Vlasov, whose early career proves him to have been a practical man, and whose subsequent career shows him to have had the interests of

Russia and the Russians very close to his heart, would have taken such a decision without the conviction that this movement had a chance of success, both in terms of the support that Russians would give it, and because the Nazi authorities would sanction this venture.

At last the opponents of *Ostpolitik* found what they were looking for: a well-known Soviet general who had become disillusioned with the Soviet regime and was willing to lead a liberation movement. This would provide a focus both for those Russians in the occupied territories and for those serving in the Wehrmacht who desired a positive aim for which to fight; a new non-Stalinist order within the USSR, which also was prepared to combat the German goals of ultimate destruction of the Russian state and the subjugation of its inhabitants.

Opponents of *Ostpolitik* in Wehrmacht Propaganda hoped that if they provided proof of the support in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union for a political solution, this would induce the authorities to change their policy. Wehrmacht Propaganda produced a leaflet⁹² which was designed to increase desertion from the Red Army, and Vlasov was asked to sign it. At first he refused, saying that as a soldier he could not ask other soldiers to stop doing their duty. Finally he was persuaded to sign a leaflet which did not include the request to desert. The leaflet was addressed to the Red Army commanders and the Soviet intelligentsia. It was signed by Vlasov at Vinnitsa and published on 10 September 1942.

Vlasov, perhaps, did not realise the duplicity of his captors. Having used him to produce a leaflet which would ring true to the average Red Army soldier, Wehrmacht Propaganda then produced a very similar publication⁹³ addressed to Russian soldiers, officers and political cadres, which said that it could be used as a safe conduct through the German front lines. This leaflet was not signed by Vlasov. Another appeal, however, did bear his name and Vlasov's supporters have claimed that this was a fabrication, which he did not sign, as it contained turns of phrase which linguistically would not have been used by a Soviet officer.⁹⁴ In September another leaflet was produced which put forward a political programme consisting of thirteen points.⁹⁵ The Russian version is supposedly signed by Vlasov but the German copy is unsigned. This was written by Captain von Grote of Wehrmacht Propaganda. Von Grote had suggested that a specific political programme should be formulated for the Russian Liberation Committee. He therefore composed the

thirteen point programme which was dropped over enemy lines as a propaganda leaflet in September 1942.

On 17 September 1942 Vlasov was brought to the Wehrmacht Propaganda centre dealing with Soviet affairs (WPrIV) located at 10 Viktoriastrasse in Berlin. Here Vlasov met other Russian prisoners-of-war, among them M. A. Zykov who was to play a leading role in the establishment and development of the Russian Liberation Movement, and also G. N. Zhilenkov.⁹⁶ As well as having conversations with other high-ranking Soviet prisoners, Vlasov met members of the old emigration, most notably members of the NTS, and had the opportunity of seeing their draft programme,⁹⁷ all of which undoubtedly helped him to form a more coherent and independent outlook.

Von Grote's thirteen point programme was too pro-German in orientation and was expressed in very general terms. As a result, Zykov and Vlasov decided to write their own political platform which would be of greater relevance to Soviet readers. Their programme eventually became the Smolensk Declaration⁹⁸ and was ostensibly issued in the name of the 'Russian Committee' from Smolensk. The Committee, which consisted of Vlasov as chairman and Malyshkin⁹⁹ as secretary, was an attempt to provide a focus for Russian aspirations and to bring the idea of the Russian Liberation Movement out into the open. However, the project was not given official German approval. The Committee was not recognised, and its members were not allowed to travel to Smolensk. The Declaration was signed in Berlin, on 27 December 1942. It was published on 13 January 1943, when Rosenberg gave his permission for it to be dropped on the Soviet side of the front, as a propaganda manoeuvre. The pilot entrusted with the mission of dropping the Declaration made a 'mistake'. This error was arranged by Strik-Strikfeldt, so that the Declaration was dropped on the German side of the lines, thereby making it available to the population of the occupied territories. The German supporters of the 'Vlasov enterprise' hoped that they would get support for their venture from the Ostministerium. The Ostministerium, in its turn, was in search of allies, since its prerogatives and powers were being encroached upon by Koch, Martin Bormann and those who agreed with the *Untermensch* approach. Although the Ostministerium was theoretically in favour of a political solution in the East, it was not particularly inclined to support the Vlasov enterprise since it was a Great Russian initiative which did not fit in

with Rosenberg's plans for a subservient Russia and a ring of satellite states. Rosenberg, however, was willing to support Vlasov so long as he confined his efforts only to the Great Russians and did not interfere with the committees of the national minorities. Vlasov, in his turn, was at first somewhat confused by the emphasis that the Germans laid on the nationality question, which for Russians of his generation was of minor importance, although policy on this modified in the course of time. Rosenberg still had strong reservations about supporting a Russian nationalist movement. Yet he gave permission for the publication of the Smolensk Declaration because he was given to understand – incorrectly – that if he was uninterested in the Declaration, the SS would become involved and Rosenberg did not wish his authority to be challenged on yet one more matter.

The publication of the Smolensk Declaration aroused great interest among both the population of the occupied territories, and the Russian troops in the Wehrmacht. Smolensk was inundated with letters and individuals seeking the fictional Committee.

Rosenberg in his turn wrote to Hitler,¹⁰⁰ expressing all the arguments of the military who wanted a change in Nazi policy, and added at the end his recipe for success, which was to create committees of all the nationalities side by side with the Russians. Hitler, apparently, saw Rosenberg but took no decision on this question of political propaganda, although the dropping of copies of the Smolensk Declaration had caused a number of army agencies to ask why it was not supported by articles in the German press.

After the attempts by Wehrmacht Propaganda, in the summer and autumn of 1942, to increase desertion from the Red Army¹⁰¹ and thereby to demonstrate the positive effect of political propaganda, von Grote attempted to implement the next stage in his plan. His scheme was actually twofold – to obtain official approval for the use of Vlasov's name in propaganda and to form a Russian Liberation Army. Keitel returned all the proposals sent to him, minuting on them that politics were not the business of the army. Strik-Strikfeldt, who did not realise that Hitler was not prepared to change his plans for the subjugation of the USSR, was nonplussed by this negative reaction. Strik-Strikfeldt managed to retain Vlasov's trust and to persuade him that they should continue to work for a change in *Ostpolitik*, despite Vlasov's anxiety lest his name should be used without his sanction.

The creation of the Russian training school at Dabendorf¹⁰² and

the publication of the Smolensk Declaration were additional developments in the struggle to change *Ostpolitik*. It was decided that in order to exploit further the favourable response to the Smolensk Declaration, Vlasov should be sent, under the auspices of the army groups, on a tour of the occupied territories to talk to the population, and to the *Osttruppen*, now referred to as ROA in the propaganda leaflets, even though the units were still dispersed among the German forces and under German control. This idea was the brainchild of Wehrmacht Propaganda designed to illustrate the fervent desire among the population for a political solution in the East, and their desire to gain a political entity. The tour also clearly displayed Vlasov's personal attributes: his charisma and ability to appeal to a large variety of people, his forthrightness and honesty when dealing with them, as well as a certain lack of political guile.

The first trip was organised by Colonel Martin, a subordinate of Goebbels, whose jurisdiction covered Wehrmacht Propaganda, and by von Grote with whose work Martin did not interfere. Initially, Vlasov refused to go, saying that he could not give the population of the occupied territories any positive assurances while the whole enterprise still lacked approval at the highest level. He was, however, finally persuaded by the argument that if the Nazi authorities were presented with an accomplished fact, i.e. great support in the occupied territories for the supposed movement led by Vlasov, in other words support for a political solution, then, once confronted with this development, they would come to terms with the situation. Vlasov was invited to visit the Army Group Centre.

On 25 February 1943 Vlasov, accompanied by General von Schenkendorff's intelligence officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Wladimir Schubuth and Captain Peterson, the erstwhile commandant of the POW camp at Vinnitsa, travelled via Lötzen to Smolensk. He was met by von Schenkendorff, with whom he discussed the political aspects of the Russian Liberation Movement. In the evening he spoke with great success in the theatre to a large gathering of Russians. In his address Vlasov described his career in the Red Army and his reasons for turning against Stalin. He spoke of the aims of the Russian Liberation Movement and emphasised that the Russians themselves must overthrow Stalin. He said that although the Germans were allies, National Socialism could not be imposed on Russia. Using proverbs which seem to have been popular and suited his image as a true son of the people, he added: 'A foreign coat

will not fit a Russian.' In answer to specific questions about German intentions and actual possibilities available to the Russian Liberation Army, Vlasov could only express the hope that there would be increased understanding in German policy-making circles of the need for change *vis-à-vis* Russia.

During the next three weeks Vlasov visited towns and villages in the area. In addition to Smolensk, he visited Mogilev and Bobruisk, where he spoke to volunteer formations, but was prevented from making a speech over the radio by high-ranking officials in the Propaganda Ministry. He created a good impression on the members of an anti-partisan detachment known as the Volga Battalion¹⁰³ in the town of Shklov. Its commander said that Vlasov's clarity, logic and simplicity delighted him.

In all his speeches Vlasov reiterated the same ideas. His constant insistence that Russia should be independent and his emphasis on Russian national feeling were very popular. These sentiments created a favourable impression on the population and gave them hope that Nazi policy would finally be altered. On his return to Berlin, Vlasov sent in a memorandum¹⁰⁴ to the Nazi authorities in which he emphasised repeatedly that because of their short-sighted policies towards the population of the occupied territories, a population which had initially viewed the Germans as liberators, the Germans were alienating the people and thereby only making their own task more difficult. He stressed that it was imperative for the Germans to change their policies. At that moment, Russians in the occupied territories could be mobilised and persuaded to join the anti-Stalin camp but soon it would be too late. He insisted that the anti-Stalin Russians needed a positive goal, which the Smolensk Declaration had provided, but without further developments in this direction, the Declaration appeared unconvincing. Vlasov put forward all the arguments used by the opponents of *Ostpolitik*. Unlike them, however, he did so not because he felt it was in the German interest to produce this change, but because he was concerned with the fate of Russians under German control in the occupied territories and in Germany. Needless to say, this memorandum had no effect on the course of Nazi *Ostpolitik*, although Goebbels read it and commented: 'One cannot but be astounded at the lack of political instinct in our Central Berlin Administration. If we were pursuing or had pursued a rather more skilful policy in the East, we would certainly be further advanced than we are.'¹⁰⁵

Once again the hope that fuelled the entire enterprise is evident, i.e. that when the situation on the front became more difficult, events would ultimately force the policy makers to rethink policy so that a political solution favourable to Russian interests could be found which would also further German interests. Vlasov saw this logic clearly and had no hesitation in spelling it out to both Russians and Germans.

Since the first trip was successful in demonstrating that the population of the occupied territories wanted a political solution, a second trip was arranged. Vlasov was supposed to appear at the May Day celebrations at Pskov. He once again refused to co-operate. He said that he had nothing to offer troops or civilians in the occupied territories and was not prepared to deceive them. Vlasov was eventually persuaded to change his mind but not, apparently, without the use of threats.¹⁰⁶

Vlasov was invited to visit Army Group North by Field Marshal von K uchler. He was accompanied by Eduard von Dellinghausen, who acted as interpreter and was a representative of the OKW and by Rostislav Antonov, Vlasov's aide-de-camp. The visit started off badly. They had to travel by train in a third-class compartment and ran out of food and tobacco. Vlasov was in a very bad mood and repeatedly said that he would go back to Berlin at the first opportunity. Moreover, he did not know von Dellinghausen and was suspicious of the latter's motives. They arrived in Riga late on 29 April and the warm reception given to them by members of the German Propaganda Department put Vlasov in better spirits. In the morning, Vlasov met journalists and then continued his journey to Pskov. Arriving in the evening, he met representatives of various Russian organisations including, once again, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁷ The next day, 1 May, Vlasov spoke at a factory and later at a theatre, in each case to overflowing auditoriums. He was warmly greeted everywhere. After Pskov, Vlasov went on to visit various towns and villages including: Luga, Volosovo, Siverskiy, Tolmachevo, Krasnogvardeysk, Pozherevitsy and Dedovich. At Luga, the crowds in their excitement broke through the police cordon. Everywhere Vlasov was greeted with great enthusiasm and his speeches were rapturously received. Those records of Vlasov's speeches which are still in existence show that his utterances dwelt on the same themes, and that he impressed many, even those who were critical of his actions.¹⁰⁸ He stressed again that

Russia would not permit any form of foreign domination.¹⁰⁹ The German nation, in alliance with the Russians, would help to overthrow the Stalinist dictatorship just as, he said, the Russians had helped the Germans to get rid of Napoleon. He explained that Stalin was using various methods to deceive the population as to his real intentions and Vlasov repeatedly made the point that they must not be taken in by this. Vlasov's nationalism was very blatant and he made little effort to camouflage it from the authorities. At one gathering he asked the crowd whether they wished to be slaves of the Germans, to which with a roar they replied: 'No!'¹¹⁰ Although not an accomplished orator, he spoke with great firmness and his vocabulary was directed at and appealed to the man in the street rather than to the intellectuals, who nevertheless listened to him with interest.

The success of Vlasov's trip in the occupied territories was all that his supporters had anticipated, and provided incontrovertible evidence that the course of *Ostpolitik* should be changed. However, the outcome was a rebuff to all such hopes. In March 1943, Himmler sent Bormann a memorandum¹¹¹ in which he said that Wehrmacht publicity for the Russian Committee was clearly in contradiction to the Führer's will. Later, Himmler received a report of Vlasov's speech given at Gatchina (Krasnogvardeysk), during the second trip, in which he said that the anti-Stalinist Russians were guests of the Germans at present, but when they had won the struggle and were in power, then the Germans would be their honoured guests. Himmler was enraged by the suggestion that 'subhumans' should dare to invite Germans anywhere, and reported this remark to Hitler. Immediately an order was issued by Field Marshal Keitel¹¹² that Vlasov must be returned to prisoner-of-war camp and that his name henceforth should be used only for propaganda purposes.

At the same time Rosenberg was unhappy about the sponsorship of a Russian national movement. As Goebbels noted in his diary for 29 April 1943: 'The Russian General Vlasov, who is fighting on our side in a separatist Army, has been pretty much shelved by the Ostministerium.'¹¹³ Vlasov, it appeared, had lost all support within the Nazi hierarchy.

Vlasov's conduct during these visits shows him to have been a single-minded individual. He had decided on a course of action and was not prepared to compromise to any great extent. Once again

there is little indication of political subtlety on his part. His rationale was that his duty to his country demanded that he should be open and honest with his compatriots even when this led to conflict with the German authorities.

Conjointly with his visit to the occupied territories, Vlasov's Open Letter: 'Why I decided to fight against Bolshevism'¹¹⁴ appeared. This publication was designed to strengthen the effect created by Vlasov's visits to the occupied territories. It gave an explanation of Vlasov's own change of attitude towards the Soviet regime, a change which he called upon his countrymen to copy. At the same time the Letter was a call to arms. Vlasov stressed that he was a typical product of the regime, but that gradually he had become aware that many of the hardships endured by the Russian people were the result of policies carried out by the state. Vlasov declared that during the war he had realised that the interests of the people were not those of the government. This interpretation of his actions, and Vlasov's speeches during his two tours, with the accent placed on patriotism, evoked a very favourable response from the local population. However, the strongly critical reaction of the Nazi hierarchy to this initiative precluded the supporters of the Vlasov enterprise from capitalising on this response, and from developing their ideas any further.

The threat of sending Vlasov back to the prisoner-of-war camp was not carried out, but he was placed under virtual house arrest in Dahlem, a suburb of Berlin. He was, however, able to visit the training camp at Dabendorf, whenever he wished, which was less than twenty miles south of Berlin. In November 1942, Gehlen and Count Claus von Stauffenberg had authorised the setting-up of this training camp for Russians at Dabendorf.¹¹⁵ It became and remained a centre of activity for the Russian Liberation Movement. Dabendorf was under the control of the Propaganda Department of OKW. Baron Georg von der Ropp, who had organised propaganda courses at the Wulheide prisoner-of-war camp, near Berlin, under the auspices of the Propaganda Ministry and the OKW, directed the training programme at Dabendorf.¹¹⁶ Strik-Strikfeldt headed the propaganda section with Captain von Dellinghausen as his deputy. Strik-Strikfeldt was responsible to the OKW, the Propaganda Ministry, the Ostministerium and the SS; he used this multiplicity of authority to his own advantage by playing one department off against another. The Russians picked volunteers, mostly from among

the *Hilfswillige*, who were sent to the camp where, in addition to physical and military instruction, they listened to lectures, took part in discussions and were trained to disseminate the ideas of the Russian Liberation Movement. The assumption underlying the organisation of the camp at Dabendorf was that the Russian POWs and the *Ostarbeiter* should be taught to think in a different way from that which had been inculcated in Stalinist Russia. They would then work within the system of military formations in order to explain these new ideas to their fellow soldiers. Thus, their job was, in some respects, a parallel to the political proselytising role of the commissars in the Red Army, except that the Russian Liberation Movement was expressing different ideas. These Dabendorf 'graduates' were supposed to encourage discussion which would be free from the limitations imposed by Soviet ideology. They were taught to see the faults in the Soviet approach, and thereby were to encourage their 'students' to think along less stereotyped lines.

Despite the efforts of the top Nazi hierarchy to try and impede the development of the 'Wlassow-Aktion', the success of Vlasov's trips in the occupied territories seemed to the Germans to confirm the hypothesis that *Ostpolitik* should acquire a political flavour. An idea put forward by Gehlen and Colonel Heinz Danko Herre of *Fremde Heere Ost* was developed, and on 6 May 1943 the *Silberstreif*¹¹⁷ propaganda campaign was launched. This campaign was aimed at Red Army soldiers in an attempt to get them to desert. The propaganda of earlier attempts to increase desertion, a mixture of crude anti-semitism and material inducements, had been dropped and was replaced in the *Silberstreif* campaign by the appeal of the 'Russian Committee', the Russian Liberation Army and a pledge to treat deserters separately and better than other prisoners-of-war. Apparently, desertion did increase during this period, but this might well have been attributable to other factors and the impact of the *Silberstreif* campaign is neither clear-cut nor easy to assess. The Soviet authorities, however, seem to have taken note both of this propaganda campaign and of Vlasov's visits to the occupied territories and saw in these events an indication heralding a change in Nazi policy.¹¹⁸ In 1942, Soviet propaganda had either remained silent on the subject of Vlasov's capture, or made out that he was being used against his will by the Propaganda Ministry. By 1943, however, the position changed, and much more systematic propaganda, to counter the injunctions of the Russian Liberation Movement, was issued.

This campaign even included an agent, Major S. N. Kapustin,¹¹⁹ who had orders to join the Liberation Movement, kill Vlasov, and set up subversive cells within the Movement.¹²⁰

Notwithstanding the disappointment shared by Vlasov and his staff at Keitel's 'detention' order after the second trip, it was agreed that the fight could still be continued despite the obstacles in its path. In July 1943, Major-General Malyshkin travelled to Paris to give an address at the Salle Wagram. This speech informed the older generation of Russian émigrés in Paris – the centre of post-1917 émigré life – of the existence and aims of the Russian Liberation Movement. Both Zherebkov¹²¹ (who had initiated this meeting) and Malyshkin were reprimanded for their part in the event.¹²² While it seemed that the Russian enterprise was at last getting off the ground, with a centre forming at Dabendorf, and the population of the occupied territories showing interest in the idea of a Russian Liberation Army, Hitler made it quite clear that he was absolutely against all such developments and took steps to prevent further action. On 8 June 1943, Hitler met Field Marshal Keitel, chief of the High Command of the German forces, and Colonel-General Zeitzler, chief of the General Staff of the German army, for a conference at Berghof.¹²³ Keitel had wished to hold the conference to discuss the *Silberstreif* propaganda campaign. He was worried about the wording of the leaflets used in this campaign. Hitler, as the protocol of the conference shows, was not alarmed by this aspect, but he was angry at the political conclusions being drawn by some of the military. Hitler emphasised that the Vlasov enterprise was to be confined purely to the realm of propaganda which was to be directed at the Soviet side of the front. Hitler did not wish Vlasov to travel in the occupied territories, encouraging the growth of aspirations to national independence and the creation of a Russian Army. Hitler stated: 'We will never build up a Russian Army, that is a phantom of the first order.' During the conference, Keitel and Zeitzler were at pains to conceal the extent to which military formations composed of the national minorities of the Soviet Union and of Great Russians already existed, and alleged that most of the Vlasov propaganda had been linked to the *Silberstreif* campaign.

Hitler also seems to have sensed the fact that the conflict between Nazi and Russian aims was such that there could not be real co-operation between them, and that eventually the Russian Liberation Movement might turn against its protectors. As a result of the

Berghof conference, a special talk was given to commanders of army groups on 1 July 1943.¹²⁴ Since Hitler was anxious that the value of auxiliary troops should not be overrated, it was stated that Eastern battalions could be formed but that no political developments should follow. At the same time, Keitel wrote to Rosenberg¹²⁵ to say that the National Committees should not be used to recruit volunteers, that Vlasov was not to travel in the occupied territories, and that, although propaganda mentioning Vlasov's name might be used, none of his programme was to be taken seriously. This was a severe blow for the advocates of a Russian Liberation Army, and members of Vlasov's entourage were to have considerable difficulty in persuading him that he had to continue to promote his ideas.

Despite all these initiatives, the publication of the Smolensk Declaration, Vlasov's visits to the occupied territories, his Open Letter and then the inauguration of the *Silberstreif* propaganda campaign, all of which had proved that there was overwhelming support for a political solution to the Eastern question, no change materialised in *Ostpolitik*. The reaction of the authorities to Vlasov's first trip was an eloquent pointer to their attitudes. Vlasov was deeply disappointed and depressed by Keitel's first order that meant he was to be kept under virtual house arrest, prevented from making any further trips and from expounding his programme, but the *coup de grâce* and Vlasov's final awakening to the realities of Nazism came when he heard the results of Hitler's conference on 8 June 1943. Hitler's adamant reiteration of the fact that a Russian army would never be created was kept from Vlasov for as long as possible by Strik-Strikfeldt.

When Vlasov did learn of Hitler's conference, he completely lost heart. He said that he would return to prisoner-of-war camp. Malyshkin is said to have evoked the memory of the Decembrists who likewise suffered because of their desire for freedom. The Vlasovites certainly considered the Decembrists as their precursors in the struggle for liberty. Zykov and Major-General Trukhin, Vlasov's chief of staff, tried to persuade Vlasov to continue with the struggle and remain as leader of the Movement. They were afraid that if he gave up, his place would be taken by opportunists and reactionaries. Vlasov replied that he would consider it. Strik-Strikfeldt mentions a meeting with an unnamed general, who said to Vlasov that all was not yet lost and that even the appointment of a new supreme commander was possible. This man was, presumably, involved in the

conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. According to Strik-Strikfeldt, after this meeting, Vlasov decided to continue to head the Liberation Movement.

But the news of Hitler's decision had shocked Vlasov profoundly. He must now have realised that there was little possibility for the development of any initiative on his part since the Führer's opposition to ROA was adamant. He had hoped that Hitler would see reason but these hopes had been in vain. It had now been made obvious to him that the Russian Liberation Movement rested on very fragile hopes. It would only continue underground, as a conspiracy. This realisation was certainly a watershed in Vlasov's development as the leader of ROD. It does seem that after this Vlasov's determination to succeed gradually withered away.

After the summer of 1943, all attempts to reopen and encourage the Vlasov enterprise were in vain. Wehrmacht Propaganda's belief in the efficiency of the enterprise waned. The Wehrmacht had never been trusted wholeheartedly by Hitler. The Ostministerium was losing most of its power, and in any case Rosenberg had never really approved of this policy. The Abwehr, which had always been an advocate of a political approach to the Eastern question, was being swept increasingly into the orbit of the SS. In August 1943, Otto Bräutigam reiterated the idea¹²⁶ that some hope must be given to the Russians, that the population of the occupied territories needed to know that the Germans did not regard them merely as a colony fit for exploitation. Once again, this appeal fell on deaf ears. A few individuals, such as Edwin Erich Dwinger, an author and erstwhile SS officer, who originally had agreed with the *Untermensch* idea, but had been converted to a different way of thinking – and then had been attacked for his heretical views – still agitated on behalf of the Vlasov enterprise. So did Melitta Wiedemann,¹²⁷ a journalist who edited the anti-communist periodical *Die Aktion*, and who supported Vlasov and tried to introduce high-ranking officers of the Russian Liberation Movement to Nazi dignitaries. This also had no effect and although activity at Dabendorf continued, the whole project effectively went into abeyance.

This period of forced inactivity for Vlasov was filled by visits to Dabendorf, and travel in Germany accompanied by Strik-Strikfeldt; Vlasov visited Magdeburg, met Baldur von Schirach in Vienna, toured Frankfurt, Mainz, Cologne and took a trip along the Rhine. He also had meetings with the older generation of émigrés such as

General Biskupsky,¹²⁸ a member of the ROVS, and head of the Russian émigré community in Germany, and with S. L. Woyciechowsky,¹²⁹ head of the émigré community in Warsaw. Vlasov, on the whole, created a favourable impression on many who had been inclined to be sceptical of his motives and aims. Vlasov's persuasive explanation of why and how he had decided to turn against the Soviet regime also seems to have had an impressive effect. Vlasov's meeting with Dr Robert Ley, the head of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, however, was not a success. Ley failed to understand any of his patriotic motivation and thought that Vlasov had been personally offended by Stalin.

In September 1943, a further blow was dealt to the idea of developing a Russian Liberation Movement. Reports reached Hitler of defections among the *Osttruppen* to the Soviet partisans. Apparently, these reports so enraged him he demanded that all the units be disbanded, and the men sent to the mines and factories.¹³⁰ Objections were raised by the High Command since this order would have involved between 800,000 and 1 million men, which would have been an enormous loss in manpower. All the German elements in favour of the *Ost* formations had to intervene to get this order reversed. General Heinz Hellmich, GOC *Osttruppen* under the OKH, ascertained from all the division commanders the exact number of desertions. Finally, a compromise was reached. The units were not disbanded but were transferred to the Western Front. This decision was unacceptable to Vlasov and his associates as it negated the essential feature of the Liberation Movement, that these Russian troops wished to fight Stalin. Indeed, on hearing of this decision, Vlasov again suggested that he should withdraw from the whole enterprise and return to prisoner-of-war camp; he was dissuaded from doing so. Wehrmacht Propaganda was keenly aware of the effect of this order on morale and von Grote drafted a letter which he wished Vlasov to sign, a move unexpectedly approved by Jodl. Vlasov refused to sign the letter¹³¹ unless changes were made, but OKW published the letter without making the alterations. The text of the letter appeared in the German-controlled Russian press with the opening sentence: 'By order of the High Command of the German Army ...'¹³² a form of words often used to indicate items in *Zarya* or *Dobrovolets* which appeared as a result of German insistence and not because the Russian staff of the newspapers agreed with the given article. Steenberg suggests a different interpretation of Vlasov's reaction to the transfer, and says that Jodl's approval of the idea of the letter

cheered Vlasov as it was an indication that he realised Vlasov's moral authority with the Russian troops, and, therefore, was giving some indication of official approval for a Russian Liberation Army. This interpretation does not seem to fit in with Vlasov's growing pessimism about the possibility of a successful outcome to the proposed Liberation Movement, a pessimism brought on by his increased experience of the Nazi machine. If Vlasov was encouraged by Jodl's approval of the letter, then it seems that he was clutching at straws precisely because he was depressed at the impasse reached, rather than because he considered it to be a genuine indicator of a change in direction of *Ostpolitik*.

By January 1944, most units had been transferred to the Western Front. Vlasov was not allowed to visit them, although General Malyshkin reviewed the units in France, and General Trukhin inspected others in Italy.¹³³ Both emphasised to the troops that the transfer would be of short duration. However, although this may have satisfied the demands of the OKW in terms of maintaining levels of manpower, it did not satisfy the units concerned in terms of their political aspirations. And although Jodl's letter helped to curb and contain displeasure in the ranks, it was clear to them that there was less chance of forming a Russian Army of Liberation than ever before.

The impetus for further development came from an unexpected quarter: the SS. Himmler had been one of the most fanatical exponents of the *Untermensch* idea, and in 1943, when many people were beginning to reject the concept of a Slav as a subhuman being, had said: 'How the Russians or the Czechs are doing is a matter of total indifference to me . . . Whether these peoples live in prosperity or starve to death interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our *Kultur*. Whether 10,000 Russian females drop dead from exhaustion while digging an anti-tank ditch interests me only in so far as the anti-tank ditch is finished for Germany.'¹³⁴ Himmler had also inveighed against Vlasov and had nothing but scorn for those who supported him. Despite such blood-curdling utterances and the policies consequent upon them, it was the SS and Himmler who were instrumental in creating a reality – limited though it was – out of the myth of the Russian Liberation Army.

This apparent volte-face was less sudden than it might appear. Although Himmler had envisaged that the SS were to be the Nazi elite, composed of individuals who were 'racially pure', and who were

in the forefront of the struggle to spread Nazi ideology, in reality this purity and single-mindedness demanded by Himmler was not maintained. The Waffen SS, the elite of Nazi troops, began to lose some of its racial and ideological purity.¹³⁵ SS Brigadeführer Gottlob Berger was responsible for recruitment into the SS, which was in any case regarded with great disapproval by the regular soldiers in the Wehrmacht. Berger recruited 'racial Germans', for instance those in Rumania, into the Waffen SS. By the spring of 1941 the 'Viking' SS Division had been formed from recruits from Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Norway, all countries which could be considered ethnically Germanic, or which had a Germanic element. From this Berger went on to persuade Himmler that even the Eastern peoples could be recruited, and divisions were formed from the Baltic nationalities, the Ukrainians and the Balkan Muslims. Russians, such as those in the Kaminsky Brigade, also came under the control of the SS at this time.

Himmler had been unwilling to disagree with his Führer on the question of the Vlasov enterprise. In 1943, Himmler is supposed to have called Vlasov 'a Bolshevik butcher's apprentice'¹³⁶ and had forbidden Colonel Gunther d'Alquen to have anything to do with the Vlasov enterprise. Yet, early in the summer of 1944, under pressure from d'Alquen,¹³⁷ Himmler was forced to reconsider his position and finally agreed to meet Vlasov. D'Alquen was an SS officer who had been editor of *Das Schwarze Korps*, the SS paper known for its fanaticism but also for its occasional deviation from Nazi orthodoxy. His experience on the Eastern Front gradually convinced him that the Nazi approach towards the population was a mistake. After mid-1943, with the phasing out of the *Silberstreif* campaign, desertion from the Red Army had decreased. D'Alquen organised another similar campaign, code-named *Skorpion*.¹³⁸ He persuaded Himmler that two of Vlasov's colleagues, Zykov and Zhilenkov, might be used in the *Skorpion* propaganda operation. D'Alquen even proposed that Zhilenkov might head the Liberation Movement in place of Vlasov,¹³⁹ but Zhilenkov declined. Himmler agreed to meet Vlasov on 21 July 1944, but the assassination attempt on Hitler on the previous day caused an indefinite postponement of the meeting.

Strik-Strikfeldt took Vlasov off for a holiday to a convalescent home for SS officers in Ruhpolding, Bavaria. This home was run by a widow, Frau Heidi Bielenberg,¹⁴⁰ whom Vlasov was eventually to marry. This marriage has been a matter of some debate among

Vlasov's staff and supporters. Frau Bielenberg spoke no Russian and knew next to nothing about the Soviet Union; Vlasov spoke next to no German. Furthermore, it seems probable that Vlasov knew that his wife was still alive in the Soviet Union. Colonel Kroeger, later to become the liaison officer between Vlasov and the SS, considered that much of the initiative for the marriage came from Frau Bielenberg. She was attracted by the idea of marriage to someone who was intending to overthrow Stalin, and she imagined that she would become First Lady of the New Russian State. According to Kroeger, Frau Bielenberg's mother insisted that her daughter must marry Vlasov, that the relationship should be legal.¹⁴¹ It is also possible that the SS encouraged this marriage in order to keep Vlasov's mind off politics. If he knew that his first wife was alive,¹⁴² and simply submitted to pressure from the SS to contract this second marriage, this could be a further indication that Vlasov, normally strongminded, had lost much of his will to resist and most of his faith in the possibility of creating a Russian Liberation Army. It was also a bad tactical move to marry a German, especially the widow of an SS officer. Vlasov was leading a Russian movement, a movement opposed both to the Soviet regime and to Nazism. A German wife, a non-Russian speaker, was not likely to be the helpmate needed to encourage the patriotic impulse necessary in such a movement. The Vlasov enterprise suffered yet one more blow at this juncture because many of those who had encouraged a change in *Ostpolitik*, including von Stauffenberg, von der Schulenberg, General von Tresckow and Colonel von Freytag-Loringhoven perished for their part in the 20 July plot.¹⁴³

However, various individuals continued to press for the SS to take over the operation, arguing that otherwise the Ostministerium would do so. Finally, Himmler met Vlasov on 16 September 1944, and it appears that Hitler gave his blessing to the meeting. No transcript remains of this meeting.¹⁴⁴ Strik-Strikfeldt was not allowed in, and Vlasov spoke to Himmler in the presence of d'Alquen, and SS-Oberführer Dr E. Kroeger, who had been head of the Russian desk under Dr Fritz Arlt in Berger's department at the Ostministerium. Kroeger was of Baltic origin and spoke Russian, and ostensibly because of this Strik-Strikfeldt was excluded. Standartenführer Ehlich of Amt III (SD) was also present at the meeting. One account¹⁴⁵ has it that Colonel Sakharov, a Russian émigré and one of Vlasov's aides-de-camp was also there, but others maintain that Vlasov was the only Russian present at the meeting.

Vlasov seems to have regained some of his old energy, and Himmler¹⁴⁶ was apparently favourably impressed by his direct and fearless speaking, and seemingly strong personality. Vlasov put his case resolutely, pointing out all the errors of the German administration. For his part, Himmler, when asked why the SS had produced the *Untermensch* publication which had done so much harm, replied that every race had its subhumans.

At this meeting Himmler gave the go-ahead for the official formation of the KONR (*Komitet Osvobozhdeniya Narodov Rossii*), for the publication of their Manifesto, and for the formation of divisions to be commanded by Vlasov. There seems to be some discrepancy over the number of divisions promised. Vlasov apparently considered that he had been promised ten divisions, and was bitterly disappointed¹⁴⁷ when it was made clear that the Germans would only countenance the formation of two, with the third as a possibility. In addition there is an undated memorandum,¹⁴⁸ possibly the draft of a formal agreement produced by Berger's office, in which the Russian Liberation Movement renounced the territory of the Crimea and promised self-government to the Cossacks and extensive cultural autonomy to the national minorities within Russia. To what extent this can be regarded as a true expression of the views of the parties concerned is arguable, since by the autumn of 1944 the German forces no longer held the Crimea. Also, since Vlasov always promised that the national minorities would be allowed to determine their own future, it would not appear that Vlasov was agreeing to anything very significant.

The formation of the Committee and the divisions, as well as the composition of the Manifesto involved Vlasov in a great deal of work. He was chairman of KONR, and also became commander-in-chief of the KONR troops. It seems probable that Vlasov occupied himself with the various details to avoid contemplating the wider implications. It was clear that KONR had been launched too late, especially since the population of the occupied territories, whose support would have been so valuable, and on which Vlasov had placed such great hopes, had now returned to Soviet jurisdiction.

After the meeting with Himmler, work went ahead in choosing members of KONR and in writing the Manifesto. The date set for making the Manifesto public was 14 November 1944, and the venue chosen was Prague, the last major Slav city still in German hands. From the point of view of the Russians, the official opening was

somewhat of an anticlimax,¹⁴⁹ in that no one from the highest echelons of the Nazi party attended. The publication of the Manifesto, consequently, was not the triumph that the Russians had hoped that their official recognition by the German authorities would prove to be. Himmler sent a telegram, Hitler was silent. The ceremony¹⁵⁰ itself was attended instead by Frank, the protector of Bohemia and Moravia, and by Lorenz, von Ribbentrop's deputy. Initially, Himmler had been expected to attend. But in order not to provoke Rosenberg any further and to lessen the chances of the latter fomenting discord over the advisability of promoting the Vlasov enterprise, Himmler changed his mind.¹⁵¹ It is possible that Lorenz was sent in order to give the whole project a wider appeal. If Himmler had attended the ceremony it would have appeared that Vlasov was merely a tool of the SS, but with the arrival of a representative of the Foreign Ministry, KONR appeared to have some vestige of international significance. In his speech, Lorenz conveyed greetings from the German government. He acknowledged the Committee as the mouthpiece and representative of the peoples of Russia, he affirmed the German determination to fight Bolshevism and said that Germany would provide aid for her ally, Vlasov and his forces.¹⁵²

The fact that the German authorities were now referring to the Russian Liberation Movement as their ally, vividly illustrates German weakness at this stage of the war. But although Himmler had been anxious to appropriate this last 'weapon' and to consolidate his power *vis-à-vis* the Ostministerium and the Foreign Office, once he had achieved his goal he seemed in no hurry to champion the enterprise further. Although every minute was supposedly of value, and the Russians were impatient at the delay, Vlasov was only given command of two incomplete and ill-equipped divisions on 28 January 1945.¹⁵³

At the Prague meeting, the Germans had referred to Vlasov and KONR as their ally and after the meeting implied that KONR was now acknowledged as an autonomous group on an equal footing with the Germans. But the practice remained rather different from theory, and relations between the German authorities and the Russian opposition movement were not good, with each side distrusting the other.

4 KONR AND THE FINAL STAGES

A record of the discussions of KONR and the activities of its various sections and sub-committees has not been preserved for posterity.

The haste with which the Russians were trying to bring the organisation into being, the confusion of the last few months of the war, and particularly the effects of Allied bombing, did not facilitate the preservation of records, while the minutes of the KONR meetings and the lists of names of those involved were deliberately destroyed by Vlasov's secretariat before the evacuation of KONR from Berlin so that this information should not fall into the hands of the Soviet authorities.

KONR was intended to represent the peoples of Russia and consequently its members were to be a cross-section of Soviet society and representatives of the various nationalities of the USSR. Of the thirty-seven full members who signed the Manifesto,¹⁵⁴ thirteen were members of the Red Army, nine were Soviet professors or lecturers, and seven were members of the old emigration, in addition to a peasant woman and seven others; the associate members included two factory workers. Of the non-Russian nationalities of the USSR there were representatives of the Ukrainians, the Kalmyks, Belorussians, Cossacks, the nationalities of the Caucasus and of Turkestan. After the Prague meeting, KONR grew in size to 102 members¹⁵⁵ but no record remains of the names of all the individuals concerned. Although the appointment of the members of KONR was theoretically purely a matter for the *Wlassow-Aktion*, in fact the German authorities had to give their consent. It was intended that the full Committee of KONR should meet each month to ratify the decisions taken by its various sub-committees. After the original meeting in Prague, and a similar meeting to publish the Manifesto in Berlin on 18 November,¹⁵⁶ the second KONR meeting occurred on 17 December 1944¹⁵⁷ and the third and last meeting took place on 27 February 1945, after the evacuation of KONR from Berlin, at the Richmond Hotel, Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia. There was no full meeting of KONR in March and April, only the Praesidium met¹⁵⁸ and discussed, for the most part, the difficulties in equipping and deploying the KONR forces.

A number of sections were established:¹⁵⁹ the Military Section, headed by Vlasov himself, and with General Trukhin as chief of staff; Central Administration was organised by General Malyshkin with D. A. Levitsky, an émigré from Riga, as secretary; the department dealing with civilian affairs, for the most part with problems connected with the *Ostarbeiter*, was under General Zakutny, with Y. K. Meyer, an émigré, as secretary. The Propaganda Section was headed

by General Zhilenkov and the Security Section by Colonel Tenzerov. Further sections were: the Financial Department headed by Professor S. Andreyev, the Academic Committee under Professor Moskvitinov, and the Red Cross under Professor F. P. Bogatyrchuk. Because there were difficulties in setting this up at an international level,¹⁶⁰ owing to the already existing Soviet Red Cross, a new name was coined, 'National Aid' (*Narodnaya pomoshch*). This acted, in effect, as a department of social services, collecting donations and distributing them to those in need, and was organised by G. A. Alekseev. The KONR newspaper *Volya naroda* was edited by an émigré, A. S. Kazantsev,¹⁶¹ although final responsibility rested with Zhilenkov. The central Cossack HQ was commanded by General Tatarin; the Foreign Department was run by Y. S. Zherebkov; a legal department was set up, the adviser was Professor I. D. Grimm; a youth section was also established, which after the war became the basis of the post-war émigré Vlasovite organisations. Some of the departments were little more than notional, for example the Cultural Department, which would account for some minor discrepancies in the memoir literature. Others were in existence and active even before the Prague meeting. For some time before the official formation of KONR, members of the Russian Liberation Movement had tried to improve the position of the *Ostarbeiter*. They wanted the *Ostarbeiter* to be treated on an equal footing with all other groups of workers,¹⁶² and to have the *Ost* sign – worn by all *Ostarbeiter* to distinguish them – removed. The Department of Civilian Affairs dealt with complaints about the treatment of *Ostarbeiter* and was involved in negotiations to improve their conditions. Finally, on 26 January 1945, Himmler issued an order that *Ostarbeiter* were not liable to corporal punishment. The *Ost* badge, however, was not removed, and KONR and the KONR forces continued to receive complaints from *Ostarbeiter* about the treatment which they received at German hands. An apparent success was scored by the Financial Department: on 18 January 1945 the government of the Third Reich concluded a credit agreement with KONR.¹⁶³ It stated that the government of the Third Reich would advance an unspecified sum to KONR for use in the struggle against Bolshevism which would be paid back to the German government once the Committee was in a position to do so. This credit agreement has been used by a number of supporters of ROD as proof¹⁶⁴ that KONR was on an equal basis with the German forces: they were allies and not hirelings.

Between the beginning of December 1944 and March 1945, in order to create a united anti-Stalin front, there was an attempt to initiate negotiations between General Vlasov and General P. N. Krasnov, who had been Ataman of the Don Cossacks in 1918 and was still an important Cossack leader in Germany, but personal relations between the two generals were not good and their political views differed too much to agree upon a common platform.¹⁶⁵ The creation of the KONR military units was hampered by lack of supplies, especially military equipment, as well as by German officialdom. All this, however, was far too late either for a revival of German fortunes, or for the establishment of an effective Russian political centre. Furthermore, since the tide of victory clearly lay with the Red Army, not with the Wehrmacht, the victors automatically acquired a propagandistic and moral superiority.

Discussions were going on in both German and Russian circles as to the best course of action. What should be done both to preserve the Russian units and to utilise them for an effective stand against the Red Army, and how were they to get in touch with the Allies, explain their position *vis-à-vis* both the Third Reich and Stalin, and prevent their own repatriation to the Soviet Union? Various solutions were put forward and a number of individuals attempted to achieve a satisfactory conclusion by different means.

Various plans were put forward for the utilisation of the Russian units. A plan for the fortification of an area in Central Europe was suggested, primarily by a number of Germans, including General Aschenbrenner, Erich Dwinger and Theodore Oberländer.¹⁶⁶ They hoped to unite the KONR units with the Cossack divisions, and anticipated that Field-Marshal Schörner would also take part, although when he was asked to participate, he declined to do so. Together these units would form a 'free European Resistance Movement', and would fight against the Red Army, until the advancing American forces arrived. A German-Russian staff was created in which General Aschenbrenner and Major-General Maltsev, the head of Vlasov's air squadron, took part, but the collapse of the Third Reich and the end of hostilities, came faster than they anticipated. Furthermore, the formations designated for this resistance force were widely scattered. Although Vlasov's 1st Division was approaching Czechoslovakia, the 2nd Division was still incomplete. The Cossack formations were in Austria and in Italy, and the 1st Ukrainian Division was in southern Germany while the

2nd Ukrainian Division, still not entirely complete, was fighting the Red Army in Saxony.

The SS, meanwhile, had their own plans for the Russian formations. At the beginning of April 1945, plans were made to evacuate KONR from Karlovy Vary to Füssen on the German-Austrian border, as part of the plan to concentrate all political organisations and military units in the Alps. Ordered to Füssen in advance of the main party of Vlasov's staff, for whom he was to arrange billets, Colonel Kromiadi entrained for Füssen together with the major part of Vlasov's documents and records. American bombers on their way to Pilsen scored a direct hit on the train, severely wounding Kromiadi and destroying the papers. On 19 and 20 April, the staff of KONR were evacuated from Karlovy Vary to Füssen, although accommodation was insufficient to house everyone. Dr Kroeger went into the Tyrol to find out more about the construction of the redoubt in the Alps and whether it would be possible for all the Russian formations to gather there. Kromiadi, unhappy with this plan, wished to open negotiations with the Americans, and wanted Vlasov to hide in the Alps until the initial wave of reprisals against the Germans had passed. However, Kromiadi's wounds and the swift pace of the final stages of the war meant that none of these plans ever went beyond preliminary proposals.

A number of individuals did realise that the position was already critical, that the Allies must be contacted and the position of the anti-Stalin Russians explained in order to prevent their repatriation to the USSR. Various methods were essayed, but once again it was too late. Ostensibly, General Zhilenkov was in charge of KONR propaganda and director of the Department of Foreign Relations, but he did nothing. It appears that Zhilenkov understood very little of the workings of the Western world, and like so many of the members of the Russian Liberation Movement was inclined to think that the Allies would instinctively understand the position of the Vlasovites, without any further explanation. Yuri Sergeevich Zherebkov, a member of the 'first' emigration, who had been made answerable by the Germans for the Russian emigration in Paris, was very critical of Zhilenkov's attitudes.¹⁶⁷ Zherebkov had supported Vlasov whom he viewed as a Russian patriot and an anti-communist. On his own initiative, Zherebkov had given publicity to Vlasov in the pages of *Parizhskiy vestnik*. In July 1943, he had been instrumental in explaining the genesis and aims of the Russian Liberation Movement

to the Russian émigrés in Paris by inviting General Malyshkin to speak at the Salle Wagram.¹⁶⁸

Zherebkov thought it necessary to get in touch with the Allies and also would have liked to explain to the world at large the position of the Liberation Movement. To achieve this latter aim, he hoped to be able to publish information about the Russian Liberation Movement in the newspapers of neutral countries, possibly by using contacts within the first emigration to get access to these newspapers. In particular, Zherebkov hoped to write a series of articles for the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, but the Swiss constitution and Swiss neutrality prevented the publication of articles of this nature.

When KONR was formed, Zherebkov was one of its members. Shortly after the official ceremony in Prague, Zherebkov suggested to Vlasov the need to contact the Allies and the necessity of publishing abroad the particular circumstances and attitudes of the Russian Liberation Movement. Vlasov, apparently, paid little heed to this, since he, too, failed to understand the role of public opinion in the West and felt sure that the politicians would know about the Russian Liberation Movement and would support its struggle against Stalin. In January 1945, Zherebkov, with Vlasov's permission, started to negotiate with Dr Kroeger and the German Foreign Office to obtain permission to get in touch with the International Committee of the Red Cross.¹⁶⁹ Zherebkov wished the Red Cross to intervene on behalf of Russians who had been serving in the Wehrmacht and had now fallen into Allied hands; it was believed that the intervention of the Red Cross would prevent the repatriation of these troops to the USSR. It was also hoped that Zherebkov might be allowed to travel to Geneva to put the case for the Russian troops and at the same time to contact the British and American embassies in Switzerland. On 26 February 1945, Zherebkov wrote to Dr Lehnich in Berlin. He was informed that the International Red Cross would be willing to help Russians captured while serving in German formations but because of their peculiar status and the anomalous position of KONR, as an ally of Germany, it would be easier for the Red Cross to do something for the Russians if Vlasov could do something in return. It transpired that the Red Cross were very worried that at the last moment, with defeat on the doorstep, the SS might massacre all the inmates of the concentration camps. The Red Cross hoped that Vlasov might intervene with the SS to stop any such eventuality. Zherebkov promised that Vlasov and

KONR would do all in their power to help. Zherebkov then travelled to Prague.

It had been envisaged that Vlasov would be given permission to make a radio broadcast from Prague to the first meeting of the United Nations Organisation in San Francisco.¹⁷⁰ It seemed that here was an excellent opportunity to explain the position of KONR to the Allies. This speech was due to be broadcast on 19 April 1945. Frank, though the protector of Bohemia and Moravia, said that he was unwilling to take the responsibility for such a speech, since this would be a political action. He was unable to contact his superiors in Berlin for their sanction.

On 27 April, Zherebkov met Vlasov for the last time and suggested that since it was unlikely that Switzerland would let him in, Vlasov should take an aeroplane to Spain and there continue his work as the focal point for the Liberation Movement. Vlasov turned down this offer, saying that he had to share the fate of his men. However, Vlasov gave Zherebkov full permission to negotiate with the Swiss authorities and with the Allies. Yet this was to no purpose; when Zherebkov reached the Swiss border on 30 April, he was refused permission to cross it. Zherebkov tried three times to cross the border illegally, and on the third attempt he was successful, but was expelled from Switzerland a few hours later, and so direct negotiations on a personal level with the International Red Cross never took place. Zherebkov also tried to get in touch with Gustav Nobel, through the Swedish military attaché in Berlin, Colonel von Danenfeld, but this was also unsuccessful.

Another Russian, B. V. Pryanishnikov, who worked in an advisory capacity for the Department of Civilian Affairs and was a member of the first emigration, hoped that through contact with the Poles, it might be possible to get in touch with the Allies, but once again this proved to be a forlorn hope.¹⁷¹

S. B. Fröhlich, another Baltic German of Russian culture, and a friend of Strik-Strikfeldt, who was a liaison officer with KONR, went to see General Klecanda¹⁷² to discuss the plan to unite all Russian units in Central Europe, in the region of Czechoslovakia. Klecanda, a Czech, who was a veteran of the Russian Civil War, was well known both in Czech military circles and abroad. His views of the KONR forces and possible further developments were realistic. He said that, in the first place, the Czechs were waiting to be freed by the Red Army, and were therefore not likely to support KONR troops for very

long. He did not think, therefore, that if he added his support to KONR his example would be particularly helpful. People would merely think that he had gone mad or that he had sold himself to the Germans. Secondly, he was of the opinion that the only possible safety for the KONR forces lay with the Americans, but even here he had his doubts because of his experience during negotiations with the West when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. At that time, he had argued that occupied Czechoslovakia must be allowed to keep her officers, 20,000 of them, and not allow them to be murdered, as they would be very necessary in the coming conflict. The Western powers, however, would not believe in the inevitability of the coming conflict and were uninterested in the plight of the Czech officers. Thus, Klecanda believed that similar considerations of short term expediency would prevail in the attempts of KONR to persuade the Allies as to the justice of their cause.

While these attempts to decide on a plan for the utilisation of the KONR forces were taking place, and the debate was continuing as to how to preserve them after the cessation of hostilities, the formations finally took shape and played their part in an effort by the Russians to demonstrate their independence from the German authorities.

The Russians' own plans were nebulous; various plans had been mooted, including Aschenbrenner's idea of defending an area of Central Europe and forming a European resistance movement. An even more tentative plan was that of uniting with the forces of Draze Mihailjovic¹⁷³ and with General von Pannwitz's Cossack Division, in order to retreat into the mountain strongholds of Yugoslavia. In addition to the fear of reprisals and repatriation by the Soviet authorities, there was also the realisation that the KONR troops must link up with the Allies. There was a widespread and deeply held – but unfounded – belief that the Allies¹⁷⁴ despite their alliance with the Soviet Union, would welcome the stand taken by the Russian Liberation Movement against the oppressive regime in the USSR, and that once Nazi Germany had been defeated, the Allies would attack the Soviet Union and destroy the totalitarian system there.¹⁷⁵

The accounts which are available on this last period of the Vlasov enterprise differ somewhat in emphasis.¹⁷⁶ The Russians believed the German authorities had, once again, broken the promises made to them. The Russians wished to be used as a unified Russian command under Vlasov and wanted to preserve their divisions in the face of what they saw as the German policy to use them as cannon fodder in



Figure 2 KONR and the last stages of the war

the last ditch stands. The German interpretation does not accept this accusation that even at this last juncture they were tricking their Russian allies. German officers connected with the 1st Division assert that, with Himmler's agreement, and he was now commander-in-chief of the Weichsel (Vistula) Army Group, all obstacles in the path of creating an actual combat force of the 1st Division had been overcome. Colonel Herre, of the General Staff, was apparently anxious that the 1st Division should be used in action so that when it had proved itself, this would provide a further impetus for the formation of Russian units. However, the order¹⁷⁷ instigated by him in March 1945, making the 1st Division part of Himmler's Army Group and ordering the division to Stettin, became the first in a series of disagreements between the German and Russian commanders on the disposition of the 1st Division.

The 1st Division (600th Panzer Grenadier Division) was formed in November 1944 at Munsingen, in the Württemberg Province. Commanded by Major-General Sergei Kuz'mich Bunyachenko, its ranks were made up of Russian units which had previously been serving in the Wehrmacht. To the 1st Division were also drafted men from the Kaminsky Brigade. After the shooting of Kaminsky (see p. 36) and the utilisation of some of his men in the suppression of the Warsaw rising, other members of the brigade, apparently not those used by the SS, were also assigned to Vlasov. These soldiers were ill-disciplined, their morale was low, and consequently the 1st Division commanders met with difficulty in training them to become part of an efficient and integrated fighting force.

The 1st Division was initially 10,000 strong, but later increased to 20,000. On 16 February 1945 the division held its passing-out parade¹⁷⁸ attended by Vlasov and by Major-General Köstring. Köstring had been appointed in 1943, in succession to General Hellmich, general in command of *Osttruppen*, a position renamed general of volunteer formations on 1 January 1944. Two weeks later, the order from the General Staff dispatching the 1st Division north to Stettin in Pomerania arrived. The division was to be moved by rail. Bunyachenko was outraged at the order which he considered broke the promise made to the Russians that they would operate as a unified command under General Vlasov. It also appeared to the Russians that the German authorities were ignoring Vlasov's position as an independent commander of the KONR force. Bunyachenko immediately got in touch with Vlasov who was with the 2nd

Division (650th Division) at Heuberg, 60 kilometres to the southwest. Meanwhile, Bunyachenko carried out negotiations with Colonel Herre, trying to impress upon him that all orders had to proceed via Vlasov. When Vlasov finally arrived, it transpired that he knew nothing of the order. However, Vlasov was not prepared to support Bunyachenko's intention to disobey German orders totally and to move with his army as quickly as possible to the mountains near the Swiss border, where Bunyachenko could then try and get in touch with the Allies. Vlasov left for German headquarters and returned a couple of days later with amended orders. The division was to proceed to the Cottbus area, south of Berlin. The division would not entrain immediately since the line was under bombardment, but would march to Nuremberg and board there. During the march to Nuremberg, the division was joined by escaped Russian prisoners-of-war, escaped *Ostarbeiter*, and even by Russians serving in the Wehrmacht formations stationed in the vicinity of the route. The numbers became so large that in order to provide rations for them, they were formed into a reserve regiment 5,000 strong, for which the German authorities were willing to allocate supplies, although they could not provide arms. On 26 March, the division reached its destination and on the 27th was ordered to form part of the command of General Busse of the 9th Army. The Russians were concerned about the position of Vlasov, his relationship with the 9th Army Command, and also about the location of the other Russian formations. They were told that Vlasov's position as commander would be respected and that other Russian formations (the KONR 2nd Division, the reserve brigade, the air squadron, the officers' training school commanded by General Meandrov, and the Cossack formations) were all on the way and would form a unified command under Vlasov. On 6 April 1945, however, the division was ordered to liquidate a Soviet bridgehead on the Oder, a task which German troops had been unable to carry out. Bunyachenko once again questioned the validity of this order, saying that he would only accept orders from General Vlasov. Vlasov in fact arrived the next day, with an escort of German officers, and he gave the impression that he had only heard of the order on the previous day. However, he confirmed that the division was to take part in the proposed attack. Apparently, Himmler had insisted that the division participate in this operation as a precondition for creating more units. Vlasov told his commanders that the attack must be undertaken regardless of the risk of

failure and then he conferred with Bunyachenko alone. It is not known what was said at the meeting although it has been surmised that Vlasov told Bunyachenko to withdraw from the front once the attack had failed, to march south, and to use the argument to the German command that nothing would be done without Vlasov's sanction. Vlasov then left.

On 13 April, Bunyachenko mounted the attack but heavy machine gun and automatic fire from the flanks made it impossible to continue the assault. The German command would not allow a retreat and merely repeated that the position must be held. Bunyachenko called his commanders together and ordered a withdrawal. To German requests to explain his behaviour, Bunyachenko replied that the orders he had received from the German command contradicted those from Vlasov and also contravened the aims of the 1st Division. Finally, Bunyachenko was informed that he and Vlasov would be shot, a statement that only served to strengthen Russian suspicion of the motives of the German command. The next day the division was refused rations. The Russians then decided on a further course of action. They warned the German command that if Vlasov did not arrive within three days, then the division would march south in order to meet up with other Russian formations and, if force was used against them, they would retaliate in kind. Bunyachenko was asked to discuss his ultimatum with General Busse but was not prepared to change his point of view, and on 16 April when Vlasov had not arrived, the division began to march south. When Kletwitz was reached, German officers arrived with orders that the division should go to the front. Bunyachenko refused on the grounds that he only accepted orders from Vlasov. When told that Vlasov was occupied with important matters to do with the Russian Liberation Movement, Bunyachenko expressed disbelief and said that this was merely another ruse to trick the Russians. The division continued its march south and near Senftenberg was joined by a separate volunteer regiment under Colonel Sakharov, which had been at the front. The 1st Division, now over 20,000 strong, reached Dresden and came under the command of Field Marshal Schörner of Army Group Centre. Bunyachenko was invited to meet Schörner, but his distrust of the Germans was reawakened and negotiations were not carried out by him in person. The division moved towards the Elbe but despite the insubordination of its commanders, no measures were taken against it, even in those areas where it would have been

possible to stage an attack or an ambush. Schörner later explained that German troops were facing difficulties because of the situation on the front and could not, therefore, spare the time to deal with the recalcitrant Russian division. Secondly, they feared retaliation from Russian units in the Wehrmacht if the 1st Division was attacked, and thirdly, they did not wish the High Command to hear of a clash of this nature for, up to this point, Schörner had not informed OKW of the various difficulties encountered by the German command with the 1st Division.¹⁷⁹

The division crossed the Elbe, once more disobeying German orders to the contrary, and had to employ a subterfuge to do so, sending ambulances over first and, when a narrow path across the bridge had been cleared of mines, the rest of the force followed, thus bypassing the German barriers. Bunyachenko refused another invitation to visit Schörner, using the invented excuse that he had been hurt in a car accident. There were also fears that the KONR Division might be attacked by an SS division, whereupon the KONR Division evacuated the area. On 26 April, the chief of staff of Schörner's Army Group arrived once more, this time with the request that the division go to the front. As supplies were very low, Bunyachenko reluctantly agreed to fight Soviet troops in the vicinity of Brno. Having obtained the necessary supplies, Bunyachenko called his commanders together to discuss their course of action. Once again they agreed that in the interests of the division and of the cause of the ROD their strength should be conserved and not decimated to no purpose. The commanders decided not to obey German orders. On 27 April the division continued its march south. The German liaison officer, Major Schwenniger, was horrified and, after contacting his superior officers, returned to tell Bunyachenko that Schörner would send a tank detachment if they would not obey the order. The division merely continued its march, advancing in combat formation against a possible attack. A letter from General Aschenbrenner had equally little effect.

In Czechoslovakia, Schörner and Vlasov arrived to meet Bunyachenko. The meeting was short and Vlasov, behaving somewhat unnaturally, criticised the action of the commanders in not obeying German orders. Later, when he had got rid of his German entourage, Vlasov explained that he did not disapprove of the division's action, it was just that he had been placed in a position where he had to appear to be on the German side, because if the Germans felt that

they could no longer rely on his influence, then he feared that there would be reprisals against Russian troops in the Wehrmacht.¹⁸⁰ This remark again betrayed the deep distrust with which the Russians regarded the actions of the German authorities. Vlasov went on to say that he was quite happy for Bunyachenko to operate as he saw fit and that he, Vlasov, would not remain with them since he was concerned about the other Russian formations which were in far worse shape than the 1st Division.¹⁸¹

On Czech territory, German commanders were somewhat alarmed by the mutinous division and its intentions, but the Czech population now welcomed the Russian division which was assumed to have disobeyed the Germans. Various Czech partisan units came to the division to ask for supplies and the partisans were prepared not only to co-operate with Vlasov's troops, but apparently even offered Vlasov the leadership of all the nationalist, as opposed to the communist, partisan units in Czechoslovakia.¹⁸² This great friendliness, based on a common hatred of their German oppressors, changed very rapidly when it became evident that it was no longer politically expedient or wise to support the Vlasovites.¹⁸³

Hatred of the Germans led to a number of clashes between KONR troops and German soldiers even before what was, to quote George Fischer's words: 'the most dramatic single episode of the entire history of wartime Soviet opposition'.¹⁸⁴ On 2 May the 1st Division halted 50 kilometres south-west of Prague, where a delegation of officers from the Czech Army arrived from the Czech capital. They introduced themselves as the staff of the Prague rising and had come to ask for support.¹⁸⁵ Initially, Bunyachenko was unwilling to get involved in Czech affairs and did not give any definite answer. However, anti-German feeling was running high amongst both officers and men and this, combined with the friendly reception afforded by the Czech population to the division, made it seem likely that if Bunyachenko did not accede to the request of the Czech insurgents for help, members of the division, as individuals, would become involved in the rising against the Germans. Therefore, in order not to lose command of the troops and also to prevent the division from falling apart, Bunyachenko decided to support the Prague insurgents. By 5 May the uprising was under way, the insurgents appealing over the radio for help.¹⁸⁶ The decision to fight the Germans in Prague was also influenced by the need felt by the Vlasovites to demonstrate to the Allies the fact that they were not

Nazi hirelings and that they were opponents of Nazism. On the evening of 5 May the division reached the outskirts of Prague, and on 6 May took part in the attack on the German troops, including part of an SS division which had been sent to put down the rising.¹⁸⁷

However, Russian aspirations were destined to be disappointed. On the afternoon of 6 May, Colonel Arkhipov, the colonel of the 1st Regiment, was called to a meeting. There he found an American captain in charge of an armoured scout column, which had been sent ahead to discover what was happening in Prague.¹⁸⁸ The Americans wished to know whether the population needed help. Eisenhower had already conducted talks with the Soviet general Antonov and demarcation lines had been agreed upon, but the question still remained of a possible initial occupation of the city by the American forces before withdrawing and leaving it in Soviet hands. The KONR 1st Division naturally knew nothing of such agreements and negotiations. However, Arkhipov was summoned with the other leaders of the Prague insurgents to clarify the situation. The Americans were very surprised to see the German uniforms of the 1st Division, and then asked whether the insurgents needed help or whether they could manage by themselves. The American captain explained that his armoured column was not the vanguard of approaching American forces, and they were not intending to enter Prague; he had been sent on ahead to see whether the insurgents could hold the city by themselves until it could be handed over to the ally of the USA, the Soviet Union. Arkhipov then realised that one of the chief reasons for taking part in the rising, to make contact with the American forces, was illusory; he told the captain that, although in the purely military sense, the KONR division could hold the city, it would be politically inexpedient for them to do so (i.e. that the Americans should enter Prague). How much of all this was understood by the American was not clear, and after the meeting Arkhipov told the insurgents that the division would have to leave the city, since Soviet forces would shortly enter it. That evening he told Bunyachenko and Vlasov what had occurred. On the same day, representatives of the KONR forces met representatives of a newly formed 'Czech government', who declared that they had not asked the Vlasovites for help and did not sympathise with the KONR cause.¹⁸⁹ In reply to the protestations of the KONR officers, they said that the organisers of the insurrection represented neither the Czech people, nor the government, that two-thirds of the government were communist and that their advice

to the KONR Division was to surrender to the advancing Soviet armies.

On 7 May, the KONR troops left Prague and began a march south in order to make contact with the Americans and to come within their zone of occupation. On the way south they found that Major-General Trukhin, Major-General Boyarsky, Major-General Shapovalov and General Blagoveschensky had been captured by partisans. Boyarsky had been shot, Shapovalov hanged, while Trukhin and Blagoveschensky had been handed over to the Red Army. Trukhin had come into contact with the Americans on 5 May and had been ordered to surrender the 2nd Division within 36 hours.¹⁹⁰ When Shapovalov arrived with Vlasov's order to march into Czechoslovakia – the 2nd Division was then in Austria – Trukhin sent Boyarsky to Vlasov in order to persuade him to surrender the 1st Division as well. When Boyarsky did not return, Trukhin set off with Shapovalov and they were captured, as was Blagoveschensky when he went in search of his colleagues. In the evening of 9 May, still on Czech territory, the 1st Division came across tank detachments of the US 3rd Army. On 10 May, negotiations began, and by the 11th, the division was disarmed and was in the Schlussemburg region, whither Vlasov drove as well. The Soviet 162nd Division was encamped not far from the KONR Division. Bunyachenko tried to get permission to cross to the American zone immediately but was unsuccessful. At the same time the Soviet division was sending emissaries over to the KONR Division in order to encourage desertion back to the Soviet side. There was a fear that the Soviet division might advance before the Americans gave permission for the KONR Division to cross over to their zone. Time was gained on this question, when the commander of the 2nd Regiment, Colonel Artem'ev, accidentally encountered Soviet officers, and pretended to have been sent to negotiate terms for the KONR division. It was agreed that at 12 a.m. on 12 May the KONR Division would cross to the Soviet side. Some time had thereby been gained. At 10 a.m. on 12 May, Bunyachenko, with his chief-of-staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Nikolayev, went to the castle at Schlussemburg, the American HQ, where they were informed that, although the American commander sympathised with the position of Vlasov and his men, he had to refuse permission for them to cross the demarcation line. To this announcement was added the information that the Americans were due to evacuate Schlussemburg, and that the town was to be handed over to their Soviet ally. This news was the

death blow for the division. The order was given for the men to dismiss and to fend for themselves.

Steenberg estimated that about half of the division, 10,000 men, either fell into the hands of the Red Army straightaway, or were captured by Czech partisans and then handed over to Soviet forces, and that approximately half of the division got through to the Americans, but many of those who did so were repatriated at a later date.¹⁹¹ Bunyachenko asked to be allowed to join Vlasov in the castle, where they both fell into Soviet hands.

There are four published accounts, by his followers, of Vlasov's capture,¹⁹² which differ slightly in detail: the number of vehicles in the column, and the individuals accompanying Vlasov. However, it seems clear that the column left the castle at Schluselburg in the afternoon, hoping to enter the American zone. In the event, they were met by a Soviet column, Vlasov was identified and taken captive. The Soviet account¹⁹³ of Vlasov's capture states that he was found wrapped in a carpet on the floor of a jeep. However, it seems unlikely that Vlasov, who had already turned down a variety of suggestions as to how he should escape and go into hiding, should suddenly start concealing himself at this late date. He was not heard of again until 2 August 1946 when *Izvestiya*¹⁹⁴ announced that Vlasov and eleven others had been tried for treason by the Military Tribunal of the Supreme Court of the USSR. They had been found guilty of being agents of German intelligence, and had carried out active espionage and terrorist activity against the USSR. They had been hanged.

The fate of the other KONR formations was no better. The 2nd Division now under the command of General Meandrov – Trukhin having been captured by partisans – surrendered to the Americans on 6 May. The government of the Third Reich agreed to surrender on 8 May and Colonel Neryanin and General Meandrov, without waiting for further permission from the Americans, decided to move into the American zone.¹⁹⁵ However, these troops were later interned and, after a number of moves to different camps, were repatriated to the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁶

Very little is known of the details of the imprisonment and interrogation of the leaders of the opposition movement. Vlasov's interpreter, Resler, thought that he may have seen General Trukhin in the corridors of a prison in Moscow, where Resler was being interrogated.¹⁹⁷ Leopold Trepper, who was involved in collecting

military intelligence in Europe during the war for the Soviet Union, and then was arrested after he arrived in Russia in 1945, met someone whom he describes as 'Vlasov's number two man' while in prison. Trepper could not recall the man's name and the description of this man fits neither Malyshkin nor Zhilenkov.¹⁹⁷ It appears that at the trial this individual, although remaining a convinced opponent of the Soviet regime, regretted his involvement in the Vlasov enterprise.¹⁹⁸

The most interesting testimony¹⁹⁹ is that of an officer who was sent to the cells of the leading Vlasovites to persuade them to admit that they had betrayed their country, and to stop criticising Stalin. They were promised that if they recanted, their lives would be spared. Some wavered, but the majority of the leadership, amongst them Vlasov and Trukhin, refused to make such confessions. Trukhin continued to reiterate his position: 'I was not a traitor and will not confess to treachery. I loathe Stalin, I consider that he is a tyrant and will say so at the trial.' Apparently when Vlasov was told that if he would not confess, then he would be tortured to death and there would not be a trial, he replied: 'I know that. And I am very frightened. But it would be even worse to have to vilify myself. But our sufferings will not be in vain. In time the [Russian] people will remember us with warmth.' As a result of this determined resistance to the threats and torture of the interrogators, the trial of Vlasov and other leaders of the Russian Liberation Movement was not held in public, but *in camera*.

The four available accounts of the trial,²⁰⁰ which began on 30 July 1946, are by no means a transcript of the proceedings. All four articles are designed to prove that Vlasov willingly collaborated with the Nazi authorities. Short passages of Vlasov's 'confession' are quoted in support of this accusation. It appears that in the trial Vlasov may have been trying to take the blame on to himself. In two of the accounts he is quoted as saying: 'Undoubtedly, I carried out the most active struggle against Soviet power and carry the full responsibility for this.' It is possible that Vlasov hoped that by claiming full responsibility, his subordinates would be punished less severely. This would be in line with the opinion expressed by him earlier, when it was suggested that he should escape, possibly to Spain, and he replied that he had to share the fate of his men.

In another passage Vlasov describes his activities as 'counter-

revolutionary' and 'anti-Soviet' and his colleagues as 'scum and dregs'. However, such terms are common to this type of trial, and since the context of the remarks is not provided, it is difficult to ascertain the implications of such phrases. Further, since such confessions were induced by the NKVD, it is unlikely that a confession of guilt reflected the truth.

In the case of Vlasov's trial, it has not been possible to verify any part of the proceedings. The accounts of the trial are written in such a way that it is difficult to disentangle objective evidence from the political message. All the accounts stress that Vlasov had very close links with the Nazi authorities, that he had no independent ideology whatsoever, and that there was very little support for him. If that was indeed the case, then it is difficult to understand why the details of the trial were not published. It is also not clear, in the light of these accusations, why it took the Soviet authorities so long to bring Vlasov and eleven close associates to trial. The Nuremberg war crime trials, which were a far more complex and lengthy procedure, began in November 1945.

Sentence was passed on 1 August 1946, and the accused were all hanged on 2 August.²⁰² Rumour asserts that Vlasov and his entourage were hanged on piano wire, with the hook inserted at the base of the skull. One witness states that the method of execution was so horrible that he could not repeat the details.²⁰³

NOTES

- 1 Vlassov, A. A., *Les confidences du General Vlasov, 'J'ai choisi la potence'*, Paris (1947) is supposedly Vlasov's reminiscences, but is clearly a forgery containing factual errors, e.g. an account of Vlasov's meeting with Hitler, an event which never occurred. This publication was designed to discredit Vlasov by misrepresenting the extent of his link with the Nazis.
- 2 The fullest account of Vlasov's life is in a short biography published by one of the lecturers at Dabendorf: Osokin, V., *Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov (Kratkaya Biografiya)*, izdatel'stvo shkoly propagandistov Russkoy Osvoboditel'noy Armii (August 1944). This must be regarded as an official biography and is the main source of information for Vlasov's origins and for his career in the Soviet Union. The biography is little more than a curriculum vitae with some indication of what might be termed 'watersheds' in Vlasov's evaluation of the Soviet regime. The conditions in which this biography appeared undoubtedly influenced its presentation and contents. In the summer of 1944 the position of the Russian Liberation Movement was not easy; their freedom of action was being very considerably restricted by the German authorities. In these circumstances the biography of Vlasov presented an opportunity to stress all

- possible commendable points of both the Movement and its leader. The biography aimed at demonstrating that Vlasov was a genuine son of the Russian people, who was devoted to their interests and not to those of their German 'allies' or to anyone else. At the same time this biography cannot be regarded purely as a piece of propaganda. Any factual distortion would not only have occasioned strictures from Vlasov's contemporaries and colleagues but also would have provided an opportunity for adverse publicity from the opponents of the Russian Liberation Movement. Osokin was the pseudonym of V. Arseniev, see Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 5.
- 3 For a programme of study at a seminary see Brokhaus, F. A. and Efron, I. A., 'Dukhovno-uchebnie zavedeniya', *Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'*, St Petersburg, vol. 11 (1893).
 - 4 See North, R. C., *Moscow and the Chinese Communists*, Stanford (1953), pp. 183, 186; Dallin, D. J., *Soviet Russia and the Far East*, London (1949), pp. 70-3, 129-35, 139-43.
 - 5 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, pp. 9, 11; ROA Archives BAR 7663, Columbia University, Solomonovsky MS.
 - 6 *Krasnaya zvezda* (28 September 1940).
 - 7 *Izvestiya* (23 February 1941).
 - 8 *Krasnaya zvezda* (29 September 1940, 2 October 1940).
 - 9 Vlasov, A., 'Novye metody boevoy ucheby' in *Krasnaya zvezda* (3 October 1940), and reprinted in *Novoe v podgotovke voisk*, izd. Krasnaya Armiya, Kiev (1940), pp. 95-6. In another, shorter article, 'Krasnoe znamya', *Krasnaya zvezda* (23 February 1941), Vlasov again lays great emphasis on the need for constant training, practice and the need for effort in order to achieve a high standard.
 - 10 Alexander Vasil'evich Suvorov (1730-1800) (General, later Field Marshal) is considered to be one of the founders of Russian military tactics. During the Second World War he was one of the Russian national heroes used to emphasise the patriotic nature of the conflict. Stalin mentioned Suvorov in his speech of 7 November 1941, the Suvorov military decoration was instituted in 1942, and in 1943 the Suvorov military academies were created.
 - 11 Ogin, P. and Korol', B., 'Komandir peredovoy divisii', *Krasnaya zvezda* (9 October 1940) and *Novoe v podgotovke voisk*, pp. 97-8.
 - 12 Erickson, J., *The Road to Stalingrad*, London (1975), pp. 131, 165, 166.
 - 13 *IVOVSS*, 2, p. 109.
 - 14 A. A. Vlasov v besede s N. Ya. Galaem, BA-MA collection: Steenberg III and Erickson, J., *The Road to Stalingrad*, p. 222.
 - 15 Lesueur, L., *Twelve Months that Changed the World*, London (1944), pp. 87, 89.
 - 16 Curie, E., *Journey Among Warriors*, London (1943), p. 184.
 - 17 *Krasnaya zvezda* (13 December 1941). The other generals cited were: Zhukov, Rokossovsky, Kuznetsov, Lelyushenko, Govorov, Belov, Boldin and Golikov.
 - 18 *Izvestiya* (3 January 1942 and 25 January 1942).
 - 19 Meretskov, K. A., *Na sluzhbe narodu*, p. 275. On the other hand, Ehrenburg, I., 'Lyudi, gody, zhizn', *Novy mir* no. 1, (1963) p. 91, recalls that

- when he heard of Vlasov's appointment, his first reaction was that it was not a bad choice.
- 20 Osokin, V., *Andrey Andreyevich Vlasov*, p. 22, mentions that Meretskov did not come to the aid of Vlasov's beleaguered army. This criticism could only have originated from Vlasov since none of his staff were captured with him.
 - 21 Stalin had been furious with Meretskov's performance as chief of the General Staff during war games in December 1940 and January 1941. Meretskov had been dismissed. See Erickson, J., *The Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 8–9. It is possible, even though Meretskov had survived temporary disgrace, that he and Stalin did not see eye-to-eye, and therefore Stalin did not respond to his appeals for reinforcements.
 - 22 Meretskov, K. A., *Na sluzhbe narodu*, Moscow (1968), p. 268.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 281.
 - 24 Vasilevsky, A., *Delo vsey zhizni*, Moscow (1976), p. 184. Khozin, M. S., in his article 'Ob odnoy maloissledovannoy operatsii.' *Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, 2, (1966) pp. 39–40 writes that he asked for greater co-ordination between the Volkhov and Leningrad Fronts but that the suggestion actually to unite the two Fronts came from Stalin.
 - 25 Meretskov, K. A., *Na sluzhbe narodu*, p. 282.
 - 26 Recollections of A. Svetlanin, a major in the 2nd Shock Army, as recalled by N. E. Andreyev.
 - 27 Meretskov, K. A., 'Na Volkovskikh rubezhakh', *Voenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, 1 (1965), p. 68.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–70.
 - 29 Meretskov claims that 16,000 broke out of the final encirclement, 6,000 were killed in action, 8,000 were missing. Carell, P., *Hitler's War in Russia*, London (1964), p. 410, says that 32,000 were taken prisoner.
 - 30 See, for example: *IVOVSS*, 2, p. 470, *Bitva za Leningrad*, Moscow (1964), p. 159. *IVMV*, 5, p. 240.
 - 31 Hitler, A., *Mein Kampf*, translated by Manheim, R., London (1972), p. 128.
 - 32 *Ibid.*, p. 604.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 598.
 - 34 *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944*, 2nd edn, London (1973), p. 5: 5–6 July 1941 and p. 617: 6 August 1942.
 - 35 Himmler, H., *Der Untermensch*, SS-Hauptamt-Schulungsamt, Berlin (1942).
 - 36 *TMWC*, 38, p. 90.
 - 37 *Ibid.*, 26, p. 616.
 - 38 Lochner, L. (ed.), *Goebbels' Diaries*, London (1948), p. 135: 25 April 1942.
 - 39 *Ibid.*, p. 169. 22 May 1942.
 - 40 *Ibid.*, p. 254. 14 April 1943.
 - 41 Craig, G. A., and Gilbert, F. (eds.), *The Diplomats 1919–1939*, Princeton (1953), p. 511.
 - 42 von Herwarth, J. *Against Two Evils*, London (1981), p. 188.
 - 43 Hilger, G. and Meyer, A. G., *The Incompatible Allies*, New York (1953), p. 275.
 - 44 Hoffmann, P., *The History of the German Resistance 1933–1945*, translated by Barry R., revised edn, London (1977), p. 350.

- 45 Wheeler-Bennet, J., *The Nemesis of Power*, London (1953), p. 354–5.
- 46 Bullock, A., *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, London (1972), p. 666.
- 47 *TMWC*, 25, pp. 402–13, and *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–45*, Series D.1., Göttingen (1969), pp. 25–32.
- 48 Geller, M. and Nekrich, A., *Utopiya u vlasti*, vol. 2, p. 76.
- 49 Conquest, R., *The Great Terror*, Harmondsworth (1971), p. 645, gives the following figures for the effect of the purge on the armed forces:
- 3 of the 5 Marshals
 - 14 of the 16 Army Commanders Class I and II
 - 8 of the 8 Admirals ('Flagman') Class I and II
 - 60 of the 67 Corps Commanders
 - 136 of the 199 Divisional Commanders
 - 221 of the 397 Brigade Commissars
 - All 11 Vice-Commissars of Defence
 - 75 of the 80 members of the Supreme Military Soviet
 - Half the officer corps, about 35,000, were shot or imprisoned.
- 50 Kagan, V., 'Postscriptum k prikazu', *Kontinent*, 14 (1977), pp. 301–5, and Buchbender, O., *Das tönende Erz* (1978), pp. 96, 295–6.
- 51 *TMWC*, 11, p. 501.
- 52 Streit, C., *Keine Kamaraden*, p. 224.
- 53 Fletcher, W. C., *The Russian Orthodox Church Underground 1917–70*, London (1971), p. 155, and Alexeev, W., and Stavrou, T. G. *The Great Revival: the Russian Orthodox Church under German Occupation*, Minneapolis (1976), pp. 41–66.
- 54 B. A. NS 19/ neu 1246, Baetr. Kapitan Boris Russanow.
- 55 *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, Frankfurt am Main (1965), vol. 3/2, pp. 1483–4.
- 56 Hoffmann, J., *Die Ostlegionen 1941–1943*, p. 12.
- 57 Longworth, P., *The Cossacks*, London (1969), p. 332.
- 58 Dallin, A., *The Kaminsky Brigade*, Harvard Russian Research Centre (1952) and Nikolaevsky, B. I., 'Porazhenchestvo 1941–5 godov i gen. A. A., Vlasov', *Novy zhurnal*, 18 (1948), pp. 218–23.
- 59 Interview: Redlich, R. N.
- 60 Dallin, A. and Mavrogordato, R. S., 'Rodionov, a case study in wartime redefinition', *American Slavic and East European Review*, 18 (1959), pp. 25–33. 'Gil' was a *nom de guerre*.
- 61 Kromiadi, K. G., *Za zemlyu, za volyu . . .*, p. 58.
- 62 *TMWC*, 25, pp. 332–42, von Bräutigam, O., 'Aufzeichnung' 25 (October 1942), Doc. 294, PS.
- 63 Strik-Strikfeldt, W., *Against Stalin and Hitler*, pp. 32–3.
- 64 B. A. Vernehmung General Lukin, 14 December 1941 R 6 77. *Ogonek* No. 47 (1964), pp. 26–30, and Strik-Strikfeldt, W., *Against Stalin and Hitler*, pp. 35–6, 93–4.
- 65 *IVMV*, 5, pp. 139–40.
- 66 Korol'kov, Y., *Cherez sorok smertey*, Moscow (1960), p. 124.
- 67 Svetlanin, A., *Dal' nevostochny zagovor*, pp. 105–6. Svetlanin, a major in the 2nd Shock Army, mentions commanders who had been shot: Rychagov, Klimovsky, Korobkov, Loktinov, brigade commissars and others. If a

- major was thinking of this it seems more than likely that Vlasov must also have had in mind the fate of those who had been put to death as a result of their military failures. In any case Vlasov probably knew of those commanders who had been shot for 'panic-mongering', 'dereliction of duty' in the summer of 1941. See Erickson, J., *The Road to Stalingrad*, pp. 175–6.
- 68 Kagan, V., 'Postskriptum k prikazu', *Kontinent*, 14 (1977), pp. 301–5.
- 69 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 10.
- 70 Tishkov, A., "'Predatel'" pered sovetskim sudom,' *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, no. 2 (1973), p. 91. Tishkov states that Vlasov was kept out of the Communist party because he had been educated in a seminary. Meretskov, K. A., *Na sluzhbe narodu*, p. 297, says that Vlasov became a member of the Communist party merely for the sake of advancement.
- 71 Fischer, G., *Soviet Opposition to Stalin*, pp. 27–8. Fischer considers that Vlasov's commitment to the regime was never maximal, it was a question of necessity and promotion that made him join the party.
- 72 Kiselev, A., *Oblik generala Vlasova*, p. 43.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 74 Novosiltsev, I. L., 'A. A. Vlasov', *Novy zhurnal*, 129 (December 1977), pp. 183–90.
- 75 Epstein, J., *Operation Keelhaul*, Old Greenwich, Connecticut (1973), p. 53.
- 76 See, for example: Ginzburg, E., *Krutoy marsrut*, Frankfurt am Main (1967), pp. 7, 29.
- 77 Kazantsev, A., *Tret'ya sila*, p. 149.
- 78 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 24.
- 79 Interview: I. L. Novosiltsev.
- 80 Buchbender, O., *Das tönende Erz*, p. 265, has photographs of similar incidents.
- 81 Novosiltsev, I. L., 'A. A. Vlasov', *Novy zhurnal*, 129 (December 1977), p. 188.
- 82 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 24.
- 83 Recollection of N. E. Andreyev of article in *Zarya*. It proved impossible to find this issue.
- 84 Dneprov, R., 'Vlasovskie li?' *Kontinent*, 23, p. 302 says that Boyarsky was commander of 41st Guards Division and was taken prisoner when wounded.
- 85 Vlasov and Boyarsky letter. Vinnitsa, 3 August 1942 German translation: Armee Oberkommando 16.1c.Dc. 12 September 1942. Captured German records, US National Archives, Reichsführer SS, TI 175 66 EAP 161-b-12/195 298 2721. Translation back into Russian from the German text in Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 36–41.
- 86 Captured German records. FCO Auswärtiges Amt 997/305 144, 147.
- 87 F.C.O. Hilger to von Etzdorf, OKH O Qu 4 G 15 Auswärtiges Amt 997 305 144, 147.
- 88 Interviews: I. L. Novosiltsev, N. G. Shtifanov.
- 89 Strik-Strikfeldt, W., *Against Stalin and Hitler*, p. 75. The impression gained from Strik-Strikfeldt's memoirs is of an idealist of unwavering honesty and great integrity, but whose political judgement is not without error. This impression is confirmed by von Herwarth, J., *Against Two Evils*,

- p. 289.
- 90 Strik-Strikfeldt, W., *Against Stalin and Hitler*, pp. 70–1.
- 91 Kromiadi, K. G., *Za zemlyu, za volyu* . . . pp. 118–19.
- 92 YIVO, German document 480/RAB/IX.42.
- 93 YIVO, German document, 481/RAB/IX.42.
- 94 Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 44–6.
- 95 YIVO, 482/RAB/IX.42. Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 47–50.
- 96 G. N. Zhilenkov had been the secretary of the Communist party of the Rostokinsky district in Moscow. When war broke out he became a commissar and was captured in the autumn of 1941. He survived by hiding the fact that he had been a commissar and drove supply vehicles. He was involved in the Osintorf Brigade before joining Vlasov. He was editor of *Dobrovolets* and during the composition of the Prague Manifesto was one of the chief intermediaries between the German authorities and the Russians. He was made head of the KONR propaganda section and was ostensibly editor of the KONR newspaper, *Volya naroda*. He was able but with a rather flamboyant personality and not very popular in the Movement. He was hanged with Vlasov.
- 97 Interview: I. L. Novosiltsev.
- 98 See discussion of the Smolensk Declaration, pp. 97–100.
- 99 General V. F. Malyshkin became Vlasov's second-in-command. He was a professional soldier who had been arrested during the Tukhachevsky affair and was subsequently rehabilitated. He was a bitter opponent of Stalin but a convinced Russian patriot. In June 1943 he made a speech in Paris which made the existence of the Russian Liberation Movement known to the Russian emigration.
- 100 Dallin, A., *German Rule in Russia*, p. 562.
- 101 Buchbender, O., *Das tönende Erz*, pp. 207–18. It appears that, although in the autumn of 1942 desertion, in numerical terms, dropped, as a percentage of the total captured, it increased.
- 102 See p. 51.
- 103 Demsky, A., 'A. A. Vlasov v batal'ione Volga' in Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 72–84.
- 104 Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 67–71.
- 105 Lochner, L. (ed.), *Goebbels' Diaries*, p. 271: 29 April 1943.
- 106 von Dellinghausen, E., 'Poezdka A. A. Vlasova v severo-zapadnyye raiony okkupirovannoy chasti SSSR' in Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 85–94.
- 107 Svobodin, I., 'Beseda s generalom Vlasovym', *Novy put'*, Riga (10 May 1943) in Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 108–11.
- 108 Hromenko, G. D., 'Dnevnik', in Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 99–108.
- 109 "General Vlasov v Rige." Vospominaniya morskogo ofitsera. Aprel' 1943', *Russkoe vozrozhdenie*, no. 10, New York (1980).
- 110 Tel'nov, Y., 'A. A. Vlasov na severo-zapade okkupirovannoy Rossii', *Novy zhurnal*, 157 (December 1984), pp. 268–71.
- 111 Dallin, A., *German Rule in Russia*, p. 572.

- 112 Keitel, 18 April 1943, in Heiber, H., *Hitler's Lagebesprechungen*, Stuttgart (1962), p. 266, n. 1.
- 113 Lochner, L. (ed.), *Goebbels' Diaries*, p. 271.
- 114 "'Pochemu ya stal na put' bor'by s bolshevizmom.'" Otkrytoe pis'mo generala Vlasova', *Zarya* (3 March 1943) and in *Dobrovolets* (7 March 1943); see Appendix B.
- 115 Pozdnyakov, V. V., *Rozhdenie ROA*, pp. 44–96, 99–138; Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 276–300; Shtifanov, N., 'Dabendorf' *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, New York (18 February 1974).
- 116 For a discussion of the courses at Dabendorf, see Chapter 2 on the programme, pp. 153–5.
- 117 Buchbender, O., *Das tönende Erz*, pp. 232–44.
- 118 Dallin, A. and Mavrogordato, R. S., 'The Soviet Reaction to Vlasov', *World Politics*, 8 (April 1956), pp. 307–22; Armstrong, J. A., *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, Madison (1964), pp. 243–6.
- 119 Perhaps the choice of the name Kapustin, almost certainly a false one, is evidence of black humour to be found within the security service? 'Kapustin' was the pseudonym used by Gershuni at the SR congress in 1907. He had chosen this name to commemorate the barrel of pickled cabbage in which he had hidden and so escaped from Siberia! Nikolaevsky, B., *Istoriya odnogo predatelya*, New York (1980), pp. 256–7.
- 120 'Aufzeichnung: Betr. Vernehmung des Spions Kapustin der unter anderen mit dem Auftrag herüberkam, terroristische Gruppen zum Zwecke der Ermordung von Vlassov zu bilden'. Captured German files. FCO 997/305 056-058, 997/305 067-071; Armstrong, J., *Soviet Partisans in World War II*, pp. 246–8. See later discussion, Chapter 2, pp. 120–2.
- 121 See Chapter 2, p. 134.
- 122 Interview: Y. S. Zhrebkov.
- 123 Fischer, G., 'Besprechung des Führers mit Generalfeldmarschall Keitel und General Zeitzler am 8.6.1943 auf dem Berghof', *Journal of Modern History*, 23, no. 1 (March 1951), pp. 58–71. For an English translation, see Fischer, G., *Soviet Opposition to Stalin*, pp. 176–87.
- 124 'Auszug aus der Ansprache des Führers an die Heeresgruppenführer pp. am 1.7.43 abends', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 (1954), pp. 305–12.
- 125 Keitel to Rosenberg. Abschrift, Juni 1943. FCO 997 3 305 202.
- 126 Dallin, A., *German Rule in Russia*, p. 584.
- 127 U.S. National Archives Vlassow Documents (Nuremberg War Crimes Trials) No. 5899, 5900.
- 128 ROA Archives BAR 0661, Y. K. Meyer manuscript.
- 129 Interview: S. L. Woyciechowsky.
- 130 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, pp. 114–15.
- 131 Strik-Strikfeldt, W., *Against Stalin and Hitler*, pp. 176–9.
- 132 Text of letter in *Dobrovolets*, 56 (17 November 1943) and *Parizhskiy vestnik*, 76 (27 November 1943).
- 133 'General Malyshkin v chastyakh ROA na zapade', *Dobrovolets*, 17 (1944).
- 134 *TMWC*, vol. 29, pp. 11–73. Doc. 1919 PS.

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- 154 Text of Manifesto *Volya naroda*, no. 1 (15 November 1944) and reproduced in many publications, e.g. Pozdnyakov, V. V., *A. A. Vlasov*, pp. 125–33.
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- 161 Kazantsev, A. S., *Tret'ya sila*, pp. 293–325.
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- 166 Ausky, S. A., *Predatel' stvo i izmena*, pp. 129–34.
- 167 Interview: Y. S. Zherebkov.
- 168 For a discussion of Malyshev's speech, see discussion of anti-semitism in Chapter 2 on the programme, pp. 133–5.
- 169 Zherebkov typescript 1947. Nikolaevsky Archive no. 201, box 1, 3; 'Popytki KONR ustanovit' kontakt s zapadnymi soyuznikami', *Zarubezh'e*, no. 61/62/63 (1979), pp. 16–22.
- 170 Interview: Y. S. Zherebkov; 'Nesostoyavsheesya vystuplenie gen. Vlasova', *Bor'ba*, 13 (1948).
- 171 Interview: B. V. Pryanishnikov.
- 172 Ausky, S. A., *Predatel' stvo i izmena*, pp. 130–1.
- 173 Kazantsev, A. S., *Tret'ya sila*, p. 181; interviews: P. I. Kruzhin, N. G. Shtifanov.
- 174 The British, in fact, via the British Ambassador in Moscow, asked Molotov about Vlasov and his forces. PRO. FO 371 36960. XIN 067 46 – Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to Sir Orme Sergeant, 4 August 1943.
- 175 U.S. National Archives SHAEF Documents G-2 Div. Record Group 331 NND 760210. A.C. of S., G-2 Headquarters XXI Corps. Interview with representative of White Russian Army – 24 April 1945.
- 176 The most detailed eye-witness account is Artem'ev, V. P., *Pervaya Diviziya ROA*. His account provides much of the material available on the actions of the 1st Division, although occasionally the author was not privy to the events described and mistakes and discrepancies occur. This account is an excellent illustration of the state of mind of the Russians and their attitude to the Germans. His account of this final period leaves the reader with the impression that the movements of the KONR forces were similar to those of a caged animal. They knew that they had to escape, but it was not clear how they should do so. Ausky, S. A., *Predatel' stvo i izmena* provides the fullest interpretation of events using Russian, German and Czech sources.
- 177 *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht 1940–45*, vol. 4/2, p. 1150. Lagebuch (7 March 1945), 600 Inf. Div. (Russ.).
- 178 *Volya naroda* (21 February 1945).
- 179 Artem'ev, V. P., *Pervaya Diviziya ROA*, p. 83, n.
- 180 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 181 Ausky, S. A., *Predatel' stvo i izmena*, pp. 202–4 and 222, considers that discipline and training were poor in the 1st Division and that the 2nd Division was, in fact, in much better order.
- 182 Artem'ev, V. P., *Pervaya Diviziya ROA*, p. 107.
- 183 Interview: N. E. Andreyev.
- 184 Fischer, G., *Soviet Opposition to Stalin*, p. 100.
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- 186 *New York Times* (6 May 1945).
- 187 Ausky, S. A., *Predatel' stvo i izmena*, pp. 156–205.
- 188 *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.
- 189 Artem'ev, V. P., *Pervaya Diviziya ROA*, p. 120.

- 190 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 202.
- 191 Steenberg, S., *Vlasov*, p. 208.
- 192 Pekarsky, I., 'Kak byl zakhvachen general Vlasov' in Pozdnyakov, V. V., A. A. *Vlasov*, pp. 416–18. Resler, V., written down by Kruzhin, P. I. in *S narodom za narod* (5 December 1965). Antonov, R., two versions, one to Yakovlev, B. the other to Pozdnyakov, V. V. in Pozdnyakov, V. V., A. A. *Vlasov*, pp. 423–27. 'Poslednie dni generala Vlasova. (svidetel'stvo ochevidtza) 8 July 1945', *Rossiskiy demokrat*, I (1948) pp. 23–7.
- 193 'Vospominaniya byvshego komandira 25go tankovogo korpusa, geroya Sovetskogo Soyuza general-lieutenanta zapasa Ye. Fominykh.' *Izvestiya* (7 October 1962).
- 194 'Announcement of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. Within the last days the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR has been examining charges against: Vlasov, A. A., Malyshkin, V. F., Zhilenkov, N. G., Trukhin, F. I., Zakutny, D. E., Blagoveschchensky, I. A., Meandrov, M. A., Maltsev, V. I., Bunyachenko, S. K., Zverev, G. A., Karbukov, V. D., Shatov, I. S. They were accused of treason and that as agents of the German espionage service, they carried out espionage, diversionary and terrorist activity against the USSR, that is crimes under Section 58, paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 11, 16 of the criminal code of the USSR.
'All the accused admitted their guilt, and were condemned to death under Article 11 of the order of the Supreme Soviet of August 19 1943. The sentences have been carried out.' *Izvestiya* (2 August 1946).
- 195 Aldan, A. G., *Armiya obrechennykh*, pp. 25–39.
- 196 Aldan, A. G. and Kuznetsov, B. M., *Vugodu Stalinu*, London, Ontario (1968), pp. 42–5, 56–7.
- 197 Resler, V., written down by Kruzhin, P. I. in *S narodom za narod* (5 December 1965).
- 198 Ausky, S. A., *Predatel'stvo i izmena*, pp. 265–6, assumes that this individual was Zhilenkov, and that his behaviour was consistent with his earlier actions.
- 199 Trepper, L., *The Great Game*, London (1977), pp. 379–80.
- 200 Grigorenko, P. G., *V podpol'e možhno vstretit' tol'ko krys*, New York (1981), p. 216.
- 201 See p. 18, n. 38.
- 202 See above, n. 194
- 203 Grigorenko, P. G., *V podpol'e možhno vstretit' tol'ko krys*, p. 216.