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NO 510
FORM II
156-11-1082

POSITIVE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

*Category: _____ * Dossier No.: _____

Subject: REINTERROGATION OF BERNER, Gottlob, General of the Waffen SS

Country: Germany Coordinates: _____

From: Team 11, 7020 AF Counter Intelligence Unit, USAF.

Report No.: 11-156-1219 Number of Pages: 1 Reference: Request No. 874 (specific)

Report Date: 5 December 1949 Information Date: November 1949 Evaluation: Q-3

No. Inclosures: _____ Prepared by: Henry Nelson

Source of Information: General Gottlob BERNER

Distribution: 5 Copies Hq. OSI, District No. 1

1 Copy - Team No. 11 File

1. On 28 and 29 November 1949, General Gottlob BERNER was reinterrrogated at the Prison in LAMBERSH/Lamb (A8029-10529) in compliance with Specific Request No. 874, dated 23 November 1949.

2. BERNER did not obtain additional letters from Doctor HEROLD (PIR 11-138-0749) or from other scientists working in the USSR. BERNER agreed to submit any new information to this office through Colonel GRAHAM, the LAMBERSH Prison Warden. The above mentioned letter was smuggled out from Russia concealed in a food package, sent by Doctor HEROLD to his wife who is residing in MERSBURG (WISM-Lamb). The letter written on tissue paper, was hidden in the double bottom of a tin can filled with foodstuff. Mrs. HEROLD sent a copy of this letter to a former member of the I. G. Farben Trust now in the LAMBERSH Prison.

APPROVED:

Henry Nelson
Agent in Charge

OSI, Team No. 11 District No. 1

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Translation from Copy.

.... First of all I am writing to you what I already said in my January letter home which I copied 27 times and which was intercepted 27 times. There are many things you will be amazed at. I hope everything will be OK....since all these letters have been discovered and because 2 letters which I had melted into glass tubes which were hidden in melted fat, have also been intercepted, I am this time only copying those letters which are already known to the local Secret State Police. I shall then await your acknowledgement and on receipt of it will write you more about what is not yet known at those places. One has to look out and be very careful.

Living and working conditions here are increasingly developing in a way which forces me to consider myself as a civilian prisoner. That is why for some time already I have, with increasing insistence, been pushing my efforts to go home. Everywhere I meet with politeness, but also with refusals. Everybody displays an obvious attitude of reserve and absolutely everything is being kept away from me. This clearly originates with the public administrations which are causing the mistrust and which are very eager to further it. Yet I have never failed from the very beginning to display confidence and good will. However, steadily mounting instead of diminishing mistrust obviously begins to generate in myself a comprehensible suspicion. I have therefore given up all hope of doing any useful work. My main target is thus: "Home I go, I have had enough!" Nevertheless, from all the experience I have gathered I fully realize that chances of success for requests and petitions in this matter are very small. Although I shall continue to grudge no pains in repeating again and again my requests, I doubt whether the administration will ever grow weary of them. It will end by turning a deaf ear, endlessly delaying and suspending everything. Therefore, the home country has got to go busy!

An initiative in this direction would possibly be to get the CDU to address the Control Council by depicting my situation and my fervent endeavors. I expressly declare to be fully aware that my case and my wish represent an example for a great many others in this country who think exactly as I do.

/ this was the letter which was intercepted 27 times and later discovered after being melted into glass tubes/

.... In order to expedite my return home, I will have recourse only to you and the IRC /International Red Cross/. I shall also rely only on the Control Council. This agency has the charge of the German nation and its concerns within Germany and abroad. I have no intention of applying to local Legations of the Western Powers or other foreign States. Such a move on my part might well be taken very much amiss by the local Government and I do not want to risk such a contingency. Apart from that, our attitude is probably the reason why for months every step of ours has been watched over. We are permitted to step out only under organized escort, and we are conveyed all together, under escort, to and from our working place and to and from our domiciles. Many other things are disagreeable and spoil our stay here. The so-called human rights are still constantly being interfered with. We must therefore leave no stone unturned to obtain my return. Please do write to the IRC in addition to my letter requesting them to apply to the Control Council; it is quite possible that my initiative from here is not sufficiently sure to bring success.

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.... The letter to the IRC met with many resistances and I left Moscow only at the end of June through the good offices of a Foreign Legation. For incomprehensible reasons, my comrades also made things difficult.

.... One has to be extremely careful here. Absolutely everything is being spied on. Life here is one in a police state of the worst sort. The Hitler State could not be compared with it. We are not trusted out of sight here. True, there is no lack of politeness, but we meet with distrust everywhere and in the highest degree. All our former Russian friends shun us as much as possible and are visibly embarrassed when spoken to. They certainly have instructions from above to avoid any intercourse with us. In the Institute we are confined to one small room and the library. Mornings I always remark: "Here we are again for eight hours in our prison cell". For months we have not been allowed to go out alone. Always and everywhere an escort is present. Yet our identity cards state in writing that we are permitted to freely move about the USSR. This is the purest mockery. At first our escort was recruited from the house- and kitchen personnel. Now an interpreter and three young girls speaking German have been charged with the task so that they can listen in on our conversations. I am only permitted to stroll alone around the house in the evening. How long will this go on? The work tasks set to me are small and insignificant /only desk work/. As references, I have to rely upon my own memory and the local library, that is public literature; in addition, various file-material from LEUNA and other German booty. Russian sources are being anxiously concealed or withheld. Any insight into the Russian chemical industry is being obstructed or at least veiled. In other words, one comes to know nothing. At present I know just as little about it as a year and a half ago. Therefore my presence here is completely unnecessary-even wrong, because I could with the material on hand do better work in Leipzig where I could interrogate their experts. Here I am not permitted to have any exchange of ideas with local experts. Such objections, however, fall on deaf ears in the higher-up places. The spiritual muzzling of the natives by the government can not be imagined. In comparison, we in the Nazi State were a truly free people. There can be no question here of a true democracy, as I had imagined it. Here there reigns a party despotism which is much worse than the one we formerly had under Hitler. Our human rights and whatever claims we can deduct from them, are not being considered. Not a single one of the dozens of requests and complaints have so far received a reply. We are nothing but regular civilian prisoners, at the mercy of governmental arbitrariness. I no more believe in the possibility of our voluntary release by the Government for repatriation. One will probably have to wait until regular liberation from the outside happens. A lot of patience will be needed for that.

This is the end of the repetition of the many letters which time and again were intercepted and with which I was reproached by the Ministry in Moscow.

.... As soon as you observe that the political situation is pointing towards war and there is an urgent danger of war, see that you disappear from Leuna- that is my urgent advice. The Russians are extremely unreliable and mendacious! They will probably draft into military service all young men. Remarks in that sense have already been made here.

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Our countrymen who are civilian internees here, are also to be drafted. What will happen to us in that case is totally obscure. Therefore go West, as soon as things begin to look bad.

.... I have no rights of any kind here. Dozens of requests addressed to top administrations, Ministries and the Superior Council of Ministers, have elicited no answer, either verbal or written. The letters which I have always sent registered, reach their destination, but there is no reaction to them. Nevertheless I continue writing. I express myself very unreservedly. I ask rather awkward questions, I appeal to the much-praised human rights of which the efficient Mr. Vyshinsky can not say enough in the UN Assembly. All this, however, is nothing but theory. In practice the Russians feel absolutely unfettered by obligations of any kind. This is entirely in line with the national character of a people who ignore the notion of "love of truth" and are basically mendacious. I consider with my comrades that we are in a particularly bad situation, since we do not know what is going to happen to us and can learn nothing in spite of repeated inquiries. In this respect our situation is worse than that of the worst convict. Every prisoner, every person detained, including prisoners of war, is informed about the duration of his detention. He knows that after so many years he will be set free, and he has prospects to shorten his detention and speed his release by good conduct. We, however, have been deprived of our liberty without any indication of reasons for such punishment; and without any indication as to how long this deprivation is to be continued. Where we are, good work is making us indispensable and yet produces results contrary to what ordinary prisoners obtain - our detention is being prolonged. Is this not insane? That is what this State, allegedly the freest in the world, calls Democracy! One could laugh about it, were one not rather inclined to weep, and no end to this state of affairs can be perceived.

.... Even the old mother of Frau Dr. Fröhlich who is over 70 years old and ailing, was refused her return by the Russian Government without any indication of reasons. How often have I requested, verbally and in writing, my return home as well as home leave! All petitions and requests, to Ministries and higher up, remain without reply.

We are not even permitted to go outside a radius of 5 kilometers, but I disregard this rule. I have already had more than one discussion on this matter. Since the fall of 1947 I am nursing plans to escape, but we are so much spied upon and watched over that escape is practically hopeless. Nevertheless, I am continuously watching out for an opportunity to get away with forged identification papers, because the Russians will not let us go before 3-5 years. Only diplomatic or war action can liberate us from this desperate prison....

.... My life here is very monotonous. Work - which is pure dead work - starts day in, day out at 0900 hours. We sit five of us in a small room with primitive wooden tables and on hard ordinary chairs. There for two and a half years we have been writing reports from memory without auxiliary means. Literary assistance is scarce, as well as

all other material. We have to transcribe these reports ourselves on our own typewriter. This, with a punctual stop of one hour for the midday meal, is our life in the office. That is the joyless existence of the Soviet industrial slaves. Prices, indicated in DM East and per kilogram, are: hard sausage 130-170, rice 40-50, roasted coffee 150-170, cocoa 390, tea 400, fat 70-90, oil 60-80, lard 120, hax 110, sugar 30-40. Consumer goods: shoes 600-700, boots 1000-2500, silk stockings 80-100, cloth for suits 600-1000.

You have no idea of the incredible poverty everywhere here. I have to make my own drawings; in short, I have to do things which I did not have to do even as a young chemist, let alone when I was department chief and later director. Conditions here and also in Moscow (which is not a bit better off) are so poorly as we could not imagine them in Germany even when times were at their worst. Quite everything here is in short supply. The only things in which we Germans are not lacking are food and clothes. Our living quarters are princely compared to those of the Russians. There is also an idea that we receive incredibly high pay, especially I. However, when you compare prices to the purchasing power of the Ruble, I am earning less than what I had in Germany after the last tremendous reduction and the enormous tax deductions. The only advantage I have is the exchange rate of the Mark. This explains why I am able to send you sufficient money. If you were here with me, we should have to calculate very, very closely. Poverty here is gigantic. Living conditions are dreadful, every family has normally only one room and must share the kitchen with others. Incomes are very low. There is little order anywhere. Sanitary conditions are devastating. Most ordinary people possess no bedstead. Many have to sleep in one bed with others. As to goods, usually most of them are unobtainable or bad, then suddenly everything can be had for a time. Payment of wages is very irregular. There is a lot of starvation and dirt. The few better-situated people have no manners and no culture. This town has one second-rate movie, nothing else. Social intercourse with the population is being prevented. There is no freedom of conscience or speech. The people are so intimidated that all this talk about the freest country on earth is a complete mockery. There are a great many natives in penitentiaries.

.... Russian officers whom I know in Leuna, look the other way when they meet me, as if they did not know me; there have, however, been some exceptions. Invitations do not exist, of course. We never hear anything about our reports. No one is asking us anything about them. Such conditions, I say, are unimaginable. One has to defend oneself with an elephant's skin.

Work on the plant is very much in arrears. It is planned to become a second Leuna. Almost all the aggregates which were dismantled in Leuna, are here in immense depots of machinery on a meadow under the open sky where the material is steadily deteriorating through atmospheric influences, while a good deal of it is being stolen or transformed into kitchen utensils clandestinely. Yet nothing is available and there are shortages everywhere.

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If we are really to complete the task of getting the plant to the production stage, we must hold out here for another two or three years. Meanwhile a great many people among the local population are hoping for a war and a change in State leadership. Considerable numbers of the people are dissatisfied with the present government because poverty and governmental terror are great. The people are frightened, due to severe punishment dealt out even for minor offenses. Those of us who are in Rubshnaja are not allowed inside the plant. They are brought under escort to their laboratories and back from there to the factory gates whence they go home in a closed bus. I think that we here, the other Soviet industrial slaves, will suffer the same fate some day.

You would not believe the suspicion which reigns here, nor could you imagine the complicated system of supervision and spying applied to us. This system has been built up to the last detail and requires an immense apparatus and a colossal number of people. Each letter of mine is read most minutely.

.... Now about something else concerning the possibility of war. As soon as signs of an imminent war are discernible, Hans must get away to a safe place, because the Russians are likely to draft him. He must not risk that, since that would be the end of his freedom. He must by all means escape that fate. In case of a war do not worry about me. The local inhabitants feel kindly about us Germans and will do nothing to us. They would not even let us suffer privations. The important thing is that in case of war we remain here. This, of course, is not certain, so let us hope for the best. It is important that Hans under any circumstances avoid service in the Red Army. Mangling and irregularities are the rule here, everything is disgusting and repulsive. One must mistrust everything coming from the Russians. Only the country people are harmless and nice.

You can transmit all my news, even the secret ones, to Dr. A. in all details, if you want to, word by word. What I told you are unadorned facts, neither disfigured nor exaggerated. There is no harm in their becoming known, on the contrary. Therefore explain to him that everything is told here according to the truth, and that he can believe everything. Ask Dr. A. on my behalf to assist you in writing to the UN. One must repeatedly inform the UN that we prisoners urgently want to go home, but that all applications remain without reply. See to it that such letters do not get into the hands of the Russians. I have now had my well-substantiated request for home leave refused, although I offered to pledge my word of honor that I would return. However, since the Russian word of honor has no value here, I suppose that mine is evaluated equally. I wrote a violent letter to the State Government. You will soon receive a copy of it.

Recently I wrote already that one should try, with the help of Dr. A., to create at the UN a clear knowledge of the real conditions here and the standpoint at home, as regards our return.

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This is what I presume:

1. I suppose that the Russian Government keeps repeating over there how important we are to them. The truth is that our work is so secondary and is to such an enormous extent suffering from lack of confidence that nothing useful can come out of it, since we are never informed. We are treated as spies and saboteurs and are practically prisoners kept in a "golden cage".

2. I am convinced that the Russian Government loses no opportunity to declare in front of the UN how well we are here and how fabulously we are being treated. I am confirmed in this opinion by the surprise with which we meet continuously - at our impatient desire to return home; we are told that our life is much better here than at home, that we have plenty to eat and to drink, live well and are being paid much better wages than the Russian experts of the same professional class. Seeing the poverty here, all this is correct. However, not long ago I replied to Willesov who made such observations, that Germans value the ideal side of life higher than the material one. In materialistic Russia, however, there is no comprehension for such a point of view. The UN are kept in the belief that we do not wish at all to return, that we live better than we ever did before. The Russians still figure that a good many of us Germans will get acclimatized and remain. It is possible that the UN will be disposed to believe the Russians. They can hear nothing directly from us, as everything is being intercepted.

Every one of my letters is read. I wonder whether letters 37 and 40 will reach you. I sent copies of violent requests to government agencies / remark: these letters did not arrive!/. We please write to the UN with Br.A.'s support. If they are not informed from home, they will never learn the truth. From the Russian side they certainly get nothing but lies.

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