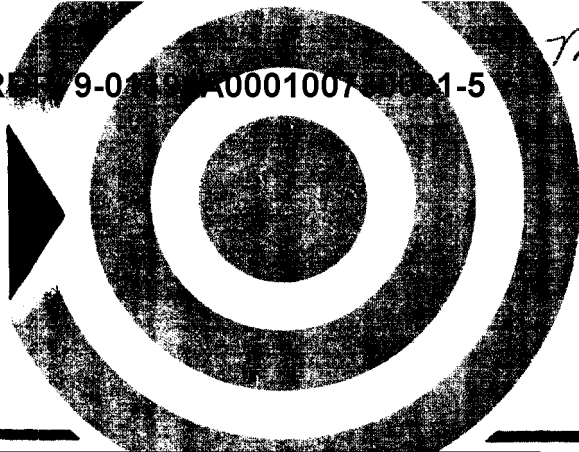


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22 April 1974

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Die Welt, 26 February 1974

VLASOV SIDED WITH THE CZECHS

Who Took Part in the Prague Rebellion of May 1945?

The question of who liberated Prague in May 1945 is a central issue of the campaign raging in the Soviet Union against Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn writes in "The Gulag Archipelago" that the credit for having driven the Germans from the city belongs to the Vlasov units, i.e. units composed of Russian prisoners of war who were placed under the command of the German Wehrmacht. The official party critics of Solzhenitsyn state: "This person ... invented his own story about the mysterious liberation of Prague by the Vlasov units... The entire world knows that Prague was liberated from Nazi control ... by the Soviet and Czech armies." No known materials about the background that led to the expulsion of German troops from Prague are so far at hand to prove the case one way or the other.

The undeniable participation of Vlasov units in the fight against the National Socialist occupiers of Prague has always been concealed both in Czechoslovakia and in the Soviet Union. The present Soviet reactions to Solzhenitsyn's attempt to bring to light the role of the Vlasov units demonstrated that the truth is to be veiled even in this chapter of modern history, just as was done in connection with the secret agreement between Hitler and Stalin on 23 August 1939 about the division of Poland.

When Soviet authors indirectly mention the participation of Vlasov units in the Prague rebellion, they do so to show that the "traitors," who until the end of the war had fought with the Germans, wanted to secure an alibi before history by their intervention in Prague. The fact that the Czech national council, a type of parliament of Benes' government in exile, had expressly and successfully asked the Vlasov army for help is still regarded as classified material in the East.

There are documents in the well-guarded archives in Prague and Moscow in connection with this subject. At any rate, it is an established fact that Prague Radio which was in the hands of the rebels since 5 May, on 6 May appealed in Russian to the soldiers of General Vlasov to take part in the fighting. This fact is also proved by a document of the "Bartos" rebel command, which broadcast a message to Czech General Fiser in Kladno via radio on 6 May at 0650 hours, stating, "It is absolutely necessary that you and the Vlasov units immediately advance on Prague from the West ..." The final military report about the Prague revolt, which was dictated and signed on 11 May 1945 by the commander of the rebels, General Kulvaser, confirms the fact that units of the Vlasov army took part in the fighting at the request of Czech officers.

Prague Communists must have contacted the Soviets in the meantime and were apparently tipped off by the latter that it was immoral, reprehensible and detrimental to the party to have dealings with "traitors." This course of events is made plausible by the fact that Vaclav David, later Czech foreign minister under Novotny and now First Vice President of Parliament, became enraged and said it would be better to accept "limited local failures" than to fight against the Germans with the Vlasov units. Other CP officials stated that, if necessary, one should make allowances for losing the revolt; at any rate, the Vlasov units should not get any credit for the liberation of Prague. However, the attack of David and his colleagues, as shown by the report of the meeting, was not accepted. Some sort of resolution was agreed upon, entitled: "Point of view of the Czech National Council with respect to the military actions of General Vlasov and his troops against the armed German forces in the Prague area."

Item two of this document, drawn up in Russian and Czech, states: "The Czech National Council is indebted to General Vlasov and his soldiers for having come to the aid of the Prague fighting population in response to a radio appeal." The same officials wrote in a letter sent to Vlasov: "General Vlasov: The Czech National Council expresses its thanks to your soldiers for the quick assistance they have given our capital in response to the radio appeal..."

The role played by a Soviet liaison officer during the revolt is still not clear. Their officer, who was dropped by parachute, had a covert meeting place in the Prague district of Weinberge. Eyewitnesses report that the Vlasov negotiators stated during the discussions with the Czech National Council that their collaboration was based on a telephone conversation of the Vlasov command with this officer. He is said to have guaranteed exemption from punishment for all Vlasov soldiers. The officer, however, disappeared immediately after the arrival of the Soviet units on 9 May 1945. Communist historians suspect that he was an emissary of the Soviet supreme command. The Vlasov soldiers, who were handed over to Stalin, were subsequently either liquidated or forcibly repatriated.

Wlassow auf der Seite der Tschechen

In den Mittelpunkt der Kampagne, die in der Sowjetunion gegen Alexander Solschenizyn tobt, rückt jetzt die Frage, wer Prag im Mai 1945 befreit hat. Solschenizyn selbst schreibt im „Archipel GULag“, das Verdienst, die Deutschen aus der Stadt vertrieben zu haben, gebühre den Wlassow-Soldaten, das heißt Verbänden, die aus russischen Kriegsgefangenen zusammengestellt worden und der deutschen Wehrmachtführung unterstellt waren. Die parteiamtlichen Kritiker Solschenizyns sagen: „Dieses Subjekt... dichtete seine eigene Geschichte über die mystische Befreiung Prags durch die Wlassow-Leute zusammen... Die ganze Welt weiß, daß Prag von der sowjetischen und der tschechoslowakischen Armee... von der Nazi-Herrschaft befreit wurde.“ Über die Hintergründe, die zur Vertreibung deutscher Truppen aus Prag führten, liegen bisher keine bekannte Materialien vor, die unserer Darstellung zugrunde liegen.

Die unleugbare Teilnahme von Wlassow-Soldaten an den Kämpfen gegen die NS-Besatzer in Prag ist sowohl in der Tschechoslowakei als auch in der Sowjetunion stets verheimlicht worden. Über diesen Vorgang durfte von keiner Seite die Wahrheit gesagt werden. Auch die jetzigen sowjetischen Reaktionen auf den Versuch Solschenizyns, die Rolle der Wlassow-Truppen ins rechte Licht zu rücken, beweisen, daß auch dieses Kapitel der Zeitgeschichte überfärbt werden soll, wie dies schon im Zusammenhang mit dem Geheimabkommen zwischen Hitler und Stalin vom 23. August 1939 über die Teilung Polens geschehen ist.

Wenn von Sowjetautoren die Teilnahme von Wlassow-Einheiten am Prager Aufstand indirekt angedeutet wird, dann geschieht es in der Absicht, die bis Kriegsende auf deutscher Seite stehenden „Verräter“ dem Verdacht auszusetzen, sie hätten sich durch ihr Eingreifen in Prag ein Alibi vor der Geschichte sichern wollen. Daß der Tschechische Nationalrat, eine Art Parlament der Exil-

regierung Benesch, die Wlassow-Armee ausdrücklich und erfolgreich um Hilfe gebeten hat, gilt im Osten noch immer als geheime Verschlusssache.

Zu diesem Thema gibt es Dokumente in den wohlbehüteten Archiven in Prag und Moskau. Fest steht jedenfalls, daß der Prager Rundfunk, der sich seit dem 5. Mai in den Händen der Aufständischen befand, in den Morgenstunden des 6. Mai einen Appell an die Soldaten des Generals Wlassow in russischer Sprache richtete und sie beschwor, in die Kämpfe einzugreifen. Diesen Tatbestand beweist auch ein Dokument des Aufständischen-Kommandos „Bartos“. Dieses Kommando sandte über Funk am 6. Mai um 6.50 Uhr eine Botschaft an den tschechischen General Fiser nach Kladno. In ihr hieß es wörtlich: „Es ist unerläßlich, daß ihr zusammen mit den Wlassow-Leuten so schnell wie möglich von Westen her auf Prag vorstoßt...“ Im militärischen Abschlußbericht über den Prager Aufstand, der vom Kommandeur der Aufständischen, General Kulvaser, am 11. Mai 1945 diktiert und unterschrieben wurde, wird ausdrücklich bestätigt, daß Einheiten der Wlassow-Armee auf Wunsch tschechoslowakischer Offiziere in die Kämpfe eingegriffen haben.

Inzwischen müssen Prager Kommunisten Kontakt mit den Sowjets aufgenommen und von diesen den Tip erhalten haben, daß es unmoralisch, verwerflich und parteischädigend sei, sich auf eine Zusammenarbeit mit den Wlassow-„Verrätern“ einzulassen. Für diesen Gang der Dinge spricht, daß in der Sitzung des Nationalrates Vaclav David, der spätere CSSR-Außenminister unter Novotny und gegenwärtige Erste Vizepräsident des Parlaments, aufbrauste und sagte, es wäre besser, „lokal begrenzte Mißerfolge“ hinzunehmen, als mit den Wlassow-Einheiten gemeinsam gegen die Deutschen zu kämpfen. Andere KP-Funktionäre erklärten, notfalls müsse man in Kauf nehmen, daß der Aufstand niedergeschlagen wird; Wlassowisten dürfe kein Verdienst bei der

Befreiung Prags zufallen. Der Vorstoß Davids und seiner Genossen wurde allerdings, wie das Sitzungsprotokoll beweist, nicht akzeptiert. Man einigte sich auf eine Art Resolution, die den Titel erhielt: „Standpunkt des Tschechischen Nationalrates zu den militärischen Aktionen General Wlassows und seiner Truppen gegen die bewaffneten deutschen Kräfte im Prager Raum.“

In Punkt II des in Russisch und Tschechisch abgefaßten Dokuments heißt es: „Der Tschechische Nationalrat dankt General Wlassow und seinen Soldaten, daß sie auf einen Rundfunkappell hin der Prager kämpfenden Bevölkerung zu Hilfe kamen.“ In einem an Wlassow selbst gerichteten Brief schrieb dieselben Absender: „Herr General Wlassow! Der Tschechische Nationalrat dankt Ihren Soldaten für die schnelle Hilfe, die sie unserer Hauptstadt Prag auf den Rundfunkappell hin geleistet haben...“

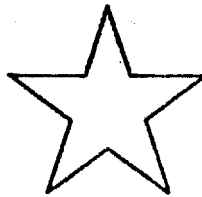
Unklar ist bis heute die Rolle, die ein sowjetischer Verbindungsoffizier während des Aufstands gespielt hat. Der mit Fallschirm Abgesetzte hatte seine Anlaufstelle im Prager Stadtteil Weinberge. Augenzeugen berichten, die Wlassow-Unterhändler hätten bei den Gesprächen im Nationalrat mitgeteilt, ihre Hilfsbereitschaft sei auch auf ein Telefongespräch des Wlassow-Kommandos mit diesem Offizier zurückzuführen. Er soll sich für die Straffreiheit aller Wlassow-Soldaten verbürgt haben. Der Offizier ist, wie es übereinstimmend heißt, sofort nach dem Einmarsch der Sowjetrussen in Prag am 9. Mai 1945 verschwunden. Kommunistische Historiker, die diesen Sachverhalt bestätigen, vermuten, daß es sich um einen Emissär des sowjetischen Oberkommandos gehandelt habe. Die an Stalin ausgelieferten Wlassow-Soldaten wurden später teils liquidiert, teils deportiert.

RUDOLF STRÖBINGER

BY
GEORGE FISCHER

**SOVIET
OPPOSITION
TO STALIN**

**a case study in
world war II**



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Chapter VII
KONR: Committee
for the
Liberation of the
Peoples of Russia



In the history of the Vlasov Movement, the city of Prague twice played an outstanding role. It did so once in 1944 and once in 1945. On the earlier occasion, Prague was the happy scene of the establishment of General Vlasov's KONR — the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia. But if the Vlasov Movement had by then embarked upon its Himmler stage, and hoped for the neo-Utilitarian backing of the powerful SS chieftain, there remained one decisive obstacle.

This obstacle was the war situation. By that time, disastrous and unceasing defeats were being suffered constantly by Hitler Germany. If Himmler's concessions to the Vlasov Movement were caused to a large extent by these war reverses, the entire brief life of the KONR took place in an environment of unmitigated disaster. Only four days after its founding in Prague on November 14, 1944, General Patton's Third U. S. Army entered German territory. By the end of December 1944, the Red Army had flooded into the Balkans and was fighting inside Budapest. The Western Allies were driving ever deeper into Germany. And all along, increasingly heavy bombing raids were destroying the major cities of Germany as well as its communications.

This widespread defeat and destruction, the thorough disorganization and disruption of the entire German governmental apparatus, affected the KONR deeply. Now even those German officials who either from conviction or from bureaucratic habit were quite ready

to furnish the KONR with the military, organizational, or propaganda aid needed for its new activities were often unable to do so. It would be erroneous to attribute all of the KONR's many frustrations to conscious and organized German opposition.

But the KONR was affected by the war situation in an even more fundamental way. When wartime Soviet opposition at last attained a semblance of German recognition and assistance, that Germany was unmistakably crumbling. The KONR was born in an atmosphere of defeat and black pessimism. Behind every action, every thought, every hope of its leaders was the haunting vision of failure, of doom, of death — a devitalizing, dispiriting atmosphere indeed.

Yet on the occasion of the founding of the KONR, the specter of defeat was pushed away. So many frustrations had marked the whole path of the Vlasov Movement that it was only natural that this formal, even ceremonial, recognition of long-cherished hopes should have been greeted as a notable achievement. And indeed this attitude still prevails. Despite its ominous future, despite the fact that neither the achievements nor the drama of the event were great in absolute terms, the Prague meeting of the KONR is remembered as the most historic event in the annals of wartime Soviet opposition.

The activities preceding the founding meeting of the KONR were of a kind all too familiar in the story of the Vlasov Movement. The Vlasov Movement's proposal that the founding take place in a non-German city was adopted. The meeting was scheduled not for Berlin, as first planned, but in the Slavic capital of Prague. But with plans well under way, Rosenberg addressed one more protest, an unusually sharp one, to Bormann, Ribbentrop, and Lammers, as well as to Himmler. The outcome of this was that Himmler gave orders to conduct the Prague meeting on a far smaller scale than had initially been proposed. Instead of the four undersecretaries slated to represent the German government, there was actually only one — SS General Lorenz, as a deputy of the German Foreign Minister and President of the Society of Interstate Associations.¹

Vlasov and other key KONR figures arrived in Prague, and returned to Berlin, on the day of the meeting, November 14, 1944, in a special section of the Berlin-Prague night express. They were escorted to Prague's best hotel, the Alcron, in front of which a German honor guard was posted for the occasion. An exclusive luncheon was given for Vlasov and his closest associates by Karl-Hermann Frank, Reichsminister for the "Protectorate" of Bohemia and Moravia (not to be confused with

Hanns Frank, Gauleiter for occupied Poland). The KONR meeting itself began at 3:00 P.M. in Prague's most festive hall, the Spanish Hall of its ancient palace, Hradčany.² The meeting was first chaired by the oldest member of the KONR, Professor Rudnev. (The other published names of original KONR members appear in Appendix IV.) Vlasov was then elected chairman, and took over the conduct of the meeting.

After a welcome by Reichsminister Frank, Lorenz delivered a speech which conferred official endorsement upon both the KONR — "an ally of Germany" — and its Prague Manifesto. "In the manifesto issued today by you, the foundations for a joint struggle against Bolshevism are outlined with conclusive clarity. On the path to the realization of the aims cited in the manifesto, you may be assured of the support of the German government."³ Following the reading of a congratulatory telegram from Himmler came the principal address of the day — that of General Vlasov.

Vlasov stressed that although opposition inside the USSR never abated, Soviet totalitarianism made a struggle practically impossible. It was only World War II that gave opposition an opportunity to organize itself outside the USSR. Thus, "for the sake of saving the motherland, we sought an honest alliance with Germany. We know that the help which is being furnished to us by the German people is today our sole real possibility to organize an armed struggle against Bolshevism." Vlasov next described his recent interviews with Himmler and Ribbentrop, apparently with the desire of stressing the "spirit of mutual understanding" and the "full support" of these Nazi chieftains. At the same time that he made his formal bow to Hitler, Vlasov once again struck his usual independent note in concluding: "On the basis of trust and common interests between the German and Russian peoples, with an unswerving will to victory, we build our collaboration on the basis of mutual respect. Today we can assure the Führer and the whole German people that in their difficult struggle against the worst enemy of all peoples — Bolshevism — the peoples of Russia are their best allies and will never lay down their arms but rather will go shoulder to shoulder with them to full victory."⁴ After Vlasov's speech, and one by General Trukhin, came the climax, the adoption of the Prague Manifesto.

The Prague Manifesto is the only major ideological pronouncement of the Vlasov's Movement's second stage. It is also the most detailed and most famous programmatic statement issued by the Russian Liberation Movement. In the postwar period, and to this date, the Prague Mani-

festos is cited by a broad range of Soviet exile groupings, and unaffiliated émigrés, as the most acceptable credo for a future struggle against the Soviet regime. It thus enjoys a unique standing in the annals of postwar as well as wartime Soviet opposition to Stalin. Two circumstances stand out as the Prague Manifesto is analyzed. One is the changing status of Germany and the West. The other is the ideological picture within the Vlasov Movement, a subject to be discussed further in Part III.

Faced with imminent defeat, German officialdom by the fall of 1944 had far less absolute self-confidence. This meant an easing of the prohibitions and restrictions that had for so long hampered the Soviet opposition movement. Hence the Prague Manifesto comes closest to reflecting the beliefs of Soviet opposition in World War II. But the counterpart to German defeat was Allied victory. With this prospect ever closer, the Vlasov Movement began to think far more in terms of the Western world and the slogans that might appeal to this possible new ally of Soviet defection. This adjustment to a changing power situation was in large measure not conscious. Even the assertion of its existence might well be met with indignant denials by surviving key figures of the Vlasov Movement. Nevertheless, along with genuine non-Nazi convictions, the shift of the offensive from Germany to its opponents increasingly affected the ideological position of the Vlasov Movement.

Though united in its opposition to Stalin, the Vlasov Movement was otherwise an ever-fluctuating gathering of varying, and sometimes conflicting, currents. And these currents changed considerably between 1942 and 1945. The Vlasovite ideology itself was nonexistent except as an amorphous consensus between the "left" and "right" currents. Articulated ideological positions should be ascribed throughout only to the Vlasovite elite, and far less to the Movement's rank and file. In the latter case, sympathy with the middle grouping intermingled with ideological confusion and apathy. To divine any, or particularly a single, ideological pattern for such an amalgam is immensely difficult at best. It is only necessary to recall the situation that existed at Dabendorf, that least uncongenial spot in Hitler Germany, which was the spiritual and ideological center of the Vlasov Movement. It is a curious paradox that the two groups most responsible for this were the two extreme groups within the Movement, its "right" and "left" currents. The influence of Zykov, or the "left," is generally thought to have been considerable on Vlasov Movement thinking. The "right" wing has claimed that "the Vlasov manifesto . . . was inspired by NTS philosophy."⁵

There is much of interest in the Prague Manifesto, the full text of which is reproduced in Appendix IV. Notable in the Manifesto are the brevity and the stanchly independent tone of its sole reference to Hitler Germany. "The Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia welcomes Germany's help under conditions which shall not impair the honor and independence of our country. This help is at the moment the only tangible opportunity to organize an armed struggle against the Stalin clique." Interesting, too, is its unequivocal "self-determination" stand on the national issue. While insisting on "the unification of all national forces and their subordination to the common cause of destroying Bolshevism as the prerequisite for victory," in its first programmatic point it firmly endorses "equality of all peoples of Russia and their real right for national development, self-determination, and state independence." Its list of reasons why the Vlasov Movement's crusade will be victorious in the end seems incredibly unrealistic when one considers the date of its issuance. But it remains worthy of attention not only as a reflection of the Vlasov Movement's frame of mind but particularly if the crusade's terminus is seen not in German victory but after a continuing anti-Stalin struggle. Yet these and other points are all subordinate in interest to the ideological blueprint of the Prague Manifesto and of its theme: "A new free People's political system without Bolsheviks and exploiters."

One of the most significant aspects of the Prague Manifesto is its position on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime. Despite its bitter indictment of "Bolsheviks" and the "Stalin clique," neither the Prague Manifesto nor the Vlasov Movement in general ever disavowed the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. According to the Vlasovite picture, the Czarist regime was "bankrupt," and in the February Revolution, the people themselves won for Russia the fullest political freedom it has ever enjoyed. It was not only "the overthrow of Stalin's tyranny" but also "the restitution of those rights . . . won in the people's revolution of 1917" for which the Vlasov Movement was fighting. "All reactionary projects involving a limitation of the people's rights" were categorically rejected. But though political liberty had been won in the February Revolution, the Provisional Government proved vacillating and undynamic, "unable to decide on bold and consequent reforms." Therefore the Prague Manifesto does not deny the necessity for the October Revolution with its social and economic innovations. Only after the Soviet government had entrenched itself did it become clear that the people had been betrayed into new tyranny.

"Genuine freedom of religion, conscience, speech, assembly and press" are guaranteed. So are the "inviolability of persons, their property, and homes," and "equality of all before the law." Laboring people are guaranteed "the right to free labor." The land is to be turned over gratuitously "to the peasants as their private property." "Trades, crafts, artisan enterprises" are to be established. "Private initiative" will be granted "the right and opportunity to participate in the economic life of the country." "Free education, medical care, vacation and old-age security" are to be guaranteed by the state "to all." Apparently it is only private property that is "earned by work" that is to be inviolable. The "free choice of land use" assured to the peasants endorses not only individual farming, but also coöperatives as well. Intellectuals are to be provided "with the opportunity to create freely" but only "for the well-being of their people."

An illiberal monarchy, such as Tsarism, is repudiated, but liberal capitalism fares no better, and not merely because, despite the encouragement offered to "private initiative," the great Vlasovite emphasis on state planning automatically excludes large-scale capitalist enterprise. The Prague Manifesto reveals a deep distrust of the Western capitalist democracies, the "plutocrats of England and the U.S.A., whose powers are based on the suppression and exploitation of other countries and peoples." The image of the capitalist as the wanton exploiter of destitute, defenseless wage earners was firmly fixed in the minds of the Soviet-bred members of the Vlasov Movement.

There is no place in the Prague Manifesto for truly international concepts — the "powers of internationalism" are too indelibly identified with "the Stalin clique." Although it is "convinced that the united efforts of the peoples of Russia will receive support from all the freedom-loving nations of the world," it is in nationalism, the peoples of Russia united, that the Vlasov Movement really puts its faith. And finally, the great majority of Soviet defectors stressed emphatically that neither Marxism nor any form of socialism, with its "inevitable" similarity to Stalinism, could lead to a happy and free post-Stalin USSR.

The same issue of *Volia Naroda* that published the Prague Manifesto published other data of considerable interest to this study — the names of thirty-seven signatories who were members of the KONR, and of twelve more who were candidates. Any analysis of KONR membership is at once complicated by the *Volia Naroda* statement immediately following the listing: "The names of some members and candidates of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia are not published

in view of their presence in the territory of the USSR or for reasons of personal safety." And although it is known that the membership was subsequently enlarged,⁸ no complete membership list is available. This is not least because the top officers of the KONR as well as about half of its final total of some eighty members are no longer alive (or are in Soviet hands).

Of the thirty-seven identified full members of the KONR, the following categorization may be made: thirteen former members of the Red Army, including Generals Vlasov, Malyshkin, Zhil'nikov, Trukhin, and Zakutnyi; nine Soviet professors and docents; seven old-émigré leaders; and eight others, including one peasant and two workers.

A second type of breakdown is of interest, particularly in the light of the furor and friction that previously arose regarding the national issue. On the basis of very incomplete analysis — based partially on the names themselves, partially on the testimony of surviving members — thirteen, or just above one-third of the original identified membership, were non-Russian by nationality. The later additions to the Committee were largely non-Russian. As a result, the proportion of non-Russian members rose to half by the time the KONR reached its maximum of eighty members.

Yet the KONR was not able to recruit outstanding representatives of the existing non-Russian National Committees. The one exception from the outset was Shamba Balinov, identified in the *Volia Naroda* of December 13, 1944 as chairman of the Kalmuk National Committee. Moreover, since Cossacks in part sought to be treated as a nationality, the adherence to the KONR of their Lieutenant General E. Balabin may be mentioned. Finally, a subsequent addition was a former wartime general secretary of Kaium Khan's United Turkestan National Committee. But on the whole the major figures of these separatist groups, unwilling to subordinate themselves to Vlasov in a united movement, remained adamantly separate. Vlasov himself⁷ and the Prague Manifesto emphatically backed the "self-determination" rather than the Russian nationalist position. But the gap between the Russian-led KONR and its separatist opponents on the national problem was too great to be bridged under the prevailing conditions, key among them being continuing German cleavage and intrigue on this issue. As a result, despite numerous negotiations, the Vlasov Movement was unable to gain the support of the separatist National Committees, notably that of the Ukrainian National Committee and its Ukrainian National Army, both formally established under Lieutenant General Pavlo Shandruk only on March

17, 1945, as a last-minute counterpart — and counterbalance — to Vlasov and his KONR.⁸ Being at the same time unwilling to leave the field to these national committees, the KONR by 1945 set up five national councils of its own.

As interesting as the national element in the KONR is its old-émigré component. Many tory old émigrés retained their hostility toward this, as toward other manifestations of wartime Soviet opposition, to the end. Thus General Biskupskii, who acted as Hitler's plenipotentiary for Russian émigré affairs in Germany, even while a guest of the KONR at its Prague meeting, reiterated his opinion that Vlasov was an unrepentant Communist and his venture not to be trusted. Yuri S. Zherebkov, however, who filled a similar position in France, became an original member of the KONR. Though Zherebkov is said to have been a German agent within the KONR, his Paris organ, *Parizhskii Vestnik*, was more pro-Vlasov than any other Russian-language newspaper under German control except the Dabendorf publications. In addition to the six old émigrés identified as members by *Volia Naroda*, at least three others held key positions in the KONR apparatus. These were D. A. Levitsky, chief of the KONR secretariat, A. S. Kazantsev, managing editor of *Volia Naroda*, and K. G. Kromiadi, chief of Vlasov's personal chancellery. Thus, while the overwhelming majority of KONR members and of Vlasov Movement leaders in general were of recent Soviet vintage, a number of old émigrés were active and important in the KONR. In general, the KONR stressed its hospitality to all who subscribed to its ideological position, and decried a formal division between "old" and "new" émigrés.⁹ But, contrary to the situation since World War II, it was the recent Soviet defectors who at all times headed and dominated the wartime opposition movement.

The Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia met five times after the Prague gathering, once a month from December 1944 through April 1945. There is, however, general agreement that KONR matters were not transacted by the KONR itself. This committee of fifty, and later eighty, members was mainly a representative body which — not unlike Soviet procedure — would merely approve decisions made elsewhere. Formally, the governing body was a smaller group within the larger committee, the KONR Presidium. Another widely held opinion is that the membership was far from outstanding either intellectually or organizationally. In the make-up of the KONR the stress was on social and national cross section rather than on intellectual capacity or leadership. The truly decisive voices were those of the four

ex-Soviet generals who headed the KONR apparatus, and, above all, Vlasov himself.

Not long after the Prague meeting, Vlasov issued the statement: "The Committee had hardly any time for what is usually called the preparatory period. The central organs of the Committee were created the day after the founding meeting, and immediately started practical work."¹⁰ In the same statement, Vlasov named the four organs — administrative, military, civilian, and propaganda — that became the framework of the KONR apparatus, headed by Generals Malyshkin, Trukhin, Zakutnyi, and Zhilenkov, respectively, and described in the notes to this chapter.¹¹

After the Prague meeting, the KONR apparatus returned to Dabendorf and to Dahlem, the fashionable Berlin sector where Vlasov had resided throughout most of the war and where the KONR had been granted three additional villas from which to carry on its activities. But the immense Allied bombings forced it, early in February 1945, to move from these centers to the Czech resort of Karlsbad, where headquarters were established in the principal hotel, the Richmond. The Dabendorf School was moved to nearby Joachimsthal. As if this one move were not sufficient to dramatize the nightmarishly uncertain and ephemeral existence of the venture, steady German retreats forced the KONR into a second move two months later, in the middle of April. This time the move was to what the Allies had feared would become the great, last-stand Nazi redoubt, the Bavarian and Austrian Alps. This new, and last, KONR center was in the Upper Bavarian town of Füssen.

If the KONR's actual physical existence was uncertain and ephemeral during this grueling last half-year of the Thousand Year Reich, its political existence was no less so. Though finally permitted to build up a comparatively formidable organizational structure, the KONR was still hampered and frustrated at practically every turn by the continuing rigidity of German officialdom. And the waiting had been so long, the collapse was now so imminent, that the total impact of the years of frustration, shattered illusions, and unrewarded compromises became particularly burdensome. A poignant and revealing eyewitness account comes from Dr. N., whose identity, as well as his prominence both in the KONR and previously in the USSR, is known to me. As a leading member of the KONR, Dr. N. speaks of the repeated shocks and disappointments that came with the Vlasov Movement's latter-stage dependence on Himmler. It was after the actual establishment of the KONR that "the greatest disappointment awaited us. It turned out that all our decisions had to be coordinated with the appropriate [German]

commissar. Nobody had the right to write even the smallest paper without his commissar. . . . Many times during this period both I and other members of the KONR doubted the correctness of our decision to join the KONR. However . . . all bridges had been burned, the departure of individuals from the KONR would not improve the situation. Therefore only one thing remained, to grit one's teeth and to try to accomplish at least the minimum which we might be able to."¹²

Chapter VIII
The KONR Army



The brief life of the KONR not only began in Prague. Seven months later, it returned to Prague for its climax—the climax preceding the tragic end. In 1944, the prologue to Prague was Vlasov's *rapprochement* with Himmler and the SS. In 1945, the KONR return to Prague was preceded by the formation and the combat actions of the military arm of the Vlasov Movement—the KONR Army.

In many ways the experience of the KONR Army is strikingly similar to that of its political center, the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia. As with the KONR, this seeming realization of the Vlasovite dream for an independent army began with high hope—and with formal ceremony.

In its January 31, 1945 issue, the front page of *Volia Naroda* was devoted to a major announcement:

ORDER No. 1

To: All Armed Forces of the Committee
for the Liberation of the Peoples of
Russia

Headquarters January 28, 1945

1. This date the Führer of Greater Germany transferred to me and I assumed command of the Armed Forces of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia.

2. The list of subordinate units is contained in a special appendix.

3. As Chief of Staff I appoint Major General F. I. Trukhin, whom I order

to form the Headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia according to approved tables of organization.

Commander in Chief of the Armed
Forces of the Committee for the
Liberation of the Peoples of Russia
Lieutenant General
A. VLASOV

Two weeks after Vlasov's assumption of command of his new military force, a formal transfer took place. The units brought together to form the KONR Army were turned over to Vlasov by General Köstring, still OKH General for *Osttruppen*, or Volunteer Units, as these formations were now called.¹ Yet nothing describes the formation of the KONR Army so well as "too little and too late." It was now hardly more than three months before Hitler's Germany would surrender—and in these remaining three months the KONR Army would see much travail and frustration.

One of the sources of frustration was Himmler, who had promised Vlasov an initial formation of five KONR divisions. As Germany's fortunes declined catastrophically, he now withdrew more and more from his troublesome sponsorship of the Vlasov Movement. Finally it was decided that the OKH General for *Osttruppen*, Köstring, would be charged with the activation of the promised KONR divisions. With the Other Germany center in OKH *Fremde Heere Ost* decimated after July 20, the task fell to Köstring's former *Osttruppen* deputy, Colonel Herre. But the number of authorized divisions was whittled down from five to two, with more to follow if these proved themselves in combat. These were given the following German army designations:

1. First KONR Division — *600th Panzer-Grenadier Division*;
2. Second KONR Division — *650th Panzer-Grenadier Division*.

Vast difficulties still stood in the way of the actual activation of the long-delayed KONR Army. Most of these difficulties were not so much political as stemming from the immense strain under which Hitler's Germany was then seeking to keep itself from collapse. Weapons for the KONR Army were extremely scarce. Germany's economic and manpower chieftains protested vigorously against surrendering *Ostarbeiter* for the manning of KONR units. The *Wehrmacht* was equally reluctant to transfer *Osttruppen* units to the KONR Army. Vast ad-

ministrative chaos began to predominate throughout what once was the vaunted German apparatus. Thus the KONR Army experienced never-ending difficulties in equipping even its meager formations. The extent of the chaos is revealed by an exclamation made by Hitler himself at a military conference on March 23, 1945: "We just don't know what is floating around. I have just heard for the first time, to my amazement, that a Ukrainian SS-Division has suddenly appeared. I don't know a thing about this."² Lastly, an ever-present obstacle to the expansion of the KONR Army was Hitler's continuing disdain for and suspicion of Soviet opposition and its military formations. At a staff conference on January 27, 1945 Hitler once again ranted against issuing German uniforms to any foreigners, particularly singling out the Soviet defectors. "One has no sense of honor around here. Every wretch is put in German uniform. I was always against it."³ Even when a KONR Army was authorized, little practical progress was made.

It is remarkable that the KONR Army came into being at all. One primary explanation for this was the enormous influx from all over German-held Europe — particularly from areas being occupied by the Red Army — of refugees from among Soviet *Ostarbeiter*, *Osttruppen*, and prisoners of war. Thus one of the peculiar features of the KONR Army is its constant swelling in size, caused largely by this steady stream of refugees. It is reported that on one day, November 20, 1944, 60,000 voluntary enlistments reportedly had been received for the KONR Army.⁴

The other major reason for the growth of the KONR Army despite the many German obstacles is the already-mentioned skeleton general staff created at Dabendorf during the months preceding the formation of the KONR and its Army. When the signal finally came to go ahead, in the midst of chaos and flux, the KONR Army set up a strikingly elaborate headquarters and a number of units in addition to the two KONR divisions. At this time, too, on the recommendation of Vlasov and the KONR at its February session,⁵ and with the approval of Köstring, the German army promoted five KONR ex-Red Army colonels to the one-star German rank of major general: Sergei K. Buniachenko, commander of the First Division; G. A. Zverev, commander of the Second Division; Victor I. Maltsev, head of the KONR Air Brigade located at Eger and Marienbad, near Karlsbad; Mikhail A. Meandrov, chief of the KONR Officers School; and B. I. Boyarsky, the deputy to Trukhin.

With a clandestinely organized general staff as its nucleus, the First

Division evolved. Its center was the Münsingen Staging Area in Württemberg, an old, undersize Army camp forty miles from both the Swiss border and Stuttgart. The early strength of the division came to 13,000, according to the ex-Soviet colonel who was chief of Trukhin's Operations Section. At Münsingen, the First Division had little if any German supervision. Following Vlasov's acceptance of the KONR units in February 1945, all remaining German insignia were removed from the uniforms. German headquarters were unwilling at this crucial moment to transfer *Ostbataillone* from front-line duty to the KONR Army. As a result, the base of the First Division was elements of two SS Divisions: Kaminsky's — including, according to one German account, those in the Warsaw uprising's suppression, though Vlasovites deny this — and Siegling's 30th Volunteer SS Division, comprising Byelorussian units badly mangled earlier in the Allied invasion of France.

The activation of the First Division began in November 1944 and was completed by the next January; it was only then that work on the Second Division really started. Therefore it was never as fully activated as the First. But a number of *Ostbataillone* formerly in Norway were assigned to it, as well as Soviet prisoners of war of recent vintage. By the end it was almost fully trained, and equipped at least with small arms. It was based in the Heuberg Staging Area in Baden, some 40 miles from Münsingen, and, like the latter, from Stuttgart. Also located there were the KONR Army's headquarters, its officer units, a Reserve Brigade, and a Construction Battalion. The total of these various units came to 25,000.

During the incredibly brief and chaotic period when the KONR Army was formed, numerous schemes were proposed for expanding it further. General von Pannwitz's Cossack Corps was formally assigned to the KONR Army, but the transfer was never actually consummated. The same was true of the old-émigré Russian Defense Corps formed in Serbia. At the last moment, the old-émigré pro-KONR generals Kreuter and Turkul were authorized by Vlasov to form a KONR division in Austria, but little if anything came of it. And throughout, German authorities either delayed or refused outright to transfer Soviet national units or *Ostbataillone* to the KONR Army. Yet despite chaos and obstruction, the KONR Army finally rose to about 50,000.⁶ A considerable potential, this. But it was a puny number when compared with the Vlasovite blueprints of an All-Russian Army uniting all Soviet nationals under German control,

with the hundreds of thousands of *Ostruppen*— and with the inflated numbers often ascribed to “Vlasov’s Army.”

One last feature to be noted about the organization of the KONR Army is that months and years of past usage led to its designation, even in print in the official *Volia Naroda*, by the old name of the phantom ROA. The KONR Army drew little of its personnel from the *Ostruppen* units that had been described by the fictitious collective term of ROA. But the Vlasov Movement’s propaganda had succeeded in making ROA a vital symbol of the entire Soviet opposition movement. Thus the old term continued to be used, even in 1945, rather than the new name of KONR Army. The practice thoroughly obscured the great difference between the vast, scattered phantom army of *Ostruppen* and the small, united KONR Army commanded by Vlasov himself.

Between the tortuous formation of the KONR Army and the Vlasovites’ return to Prague lies a fantastic episode—the brief history of the KONR Army as an active combat force.

The episode in question was preceded by a small volunteer unit’s going into action on the Eastern Front early in February 1945.⁷ The second instance of KONR Army combat was the outstanding one—and far more complex. At least two eyewitness versions exist, that of the Vlasovites⁸ and that of the German officers closest to the First Division.⁹

According to both versions, what was in effect to be the grand finale of the entire wartime Soviet opposition movement began on March 2, 1945. On that date, General Buniachenko, Commander of the First KONR Division at Münsingen, received orders from the German command to proceed with his unit to the Eastern Front, where it was to occupy front-line positions between Stettin and Berlin. Instead of prompt compliance with these orders, Buniachenko informed the German command that the First KONR Division was under the sole command of the Commander in Chief of the KONR Army, General Vlasov, and that he could not act until ordered to do so by Vlasov himself. Thus, Vlasov was called hurriedly at Karlsbad, the Czech headquarters of KONR itself, and on March 5 he gave the order for the First KONR Division to proceed to the Eastern Front. The move of the division was completed by the end of March, when it was located north of Cottbus, about 70 miles southeast of Berlin and near the Czech border, with the front running at the time on the Oder and Nissen Rivers. During its move, the division had been joined by sev-

eral thousand volunteers from among Soviet *Ostarbeiter* and *Ostruppen*.

The decisive next step took place when General Buniachenko was ordered on April 8 to go into action at a peculiarly difficult spot on the Eastern Front, a Red Army salient near Frankfurt on the Oder River which the German army had not been able to capture during weeks of fighting, and to which access had now been made more difficult than ever by spring floods and continued Soviet entrenching. Buniachenko had not questioned the preliminary order to occupy a certain area just behind the front line of his German front commander. But now he refused to make the move until ordered to do so by General Vlasov. Once again Vlasov was swiftly summoned, and once again he agreed to a compromise with the German command. Thus, on April 11, the First KONR Division entered into combat. After the costly failure of the division’s first assault, Buniachenko abruptly ordered withdrawal from its front-line position. It appears certain, from both the available versions, that Vlasov did not participate in this fateful decision. He failed to arrive at the near-front location of the First Division by April 15, the deadline set by its commander, and on that day General Buniachenko ordered the division to proceed southward.

It may be surmised, in the light of our entire study, that both the Vlasovite and the German versions were at least partially true. German coöperation, even if far from absent, evidently did fail to come up to high-strung Vlasovite expectations. On the other hand, Buniachenko’s uppermost concern to extricate his unit from the foreseeable collapse of the Eastern Front also appears completely plausible. On these facts, the Vlasovite and the German versions agree. The difference between them lies in the interpretation. According to the Vlasovite version, the KONR had been promised that none of its military units would be used separately and that Vlasov would have immediate charge of combat operations by the KONR Army. As to the First Division’s frontal actions, the Vlasovite version emphasizes the suicidal nature of the combat mission assigned to it, and also the criminal failure of German commanders to supply the artillery and air cover promised. Thus the emphasis is on the uniform ill-will and breach of faith on the part of German authorities.

The other version, that of the surviving German officers most closely connected with the First Division, emphasizes something rather different. Asserting that beginning with Himmler’s agreement—in his latest capacity as Commander in Chief of the Weichsel Army Group

— to use the First Division in his sector, Colonel Herre and the other German associates of the KONR Army managed to overcome most if not all of the many obstacles placed in the way of both the activation and the combat use of the First Division. They add that most German field commanders involved approached the First Division with understanding, once its peculiar background had been explained to them. Lastly, the German version does not support the Vlasovite statement that promises had been broken when the First Division was moved to the front without the rest of the KONR Army. Instead, the German version heavily emphasizes the fact that Buniachenko's decision was motivated by his only secondary interest in the Eastern Front; his far greater concern was to preserve all of the First Division's strength for merger with the rest of the KONR Army before the final onrush of Soviet and Allied forces.

Now began a swift withdrawal, with the advancing Red Army following close on the heels of the mutinous division. On April 23, when the division was located east of Dresden, it was offered complete reinstatement in German service if it would agree to stand and fight there under the commander of the Army Group Center, Field Marshal Schörner. This offer General Buniachenko rejected, and, after a tense forced march, dodging both German and advancing Soviet forces, Czechoslovakia was reached on April 28. With Colonel Sakharov's unit added as its Fourth Regiment, the First Division by now had reportedly grown to a force of 20,000.

With its arrival in Czech territory, the First KONR Division entered upon the most dramatic single episode of the entire history of wartime Soviet opposition. On that day, division headquarters were visited not only by Vlasov but by the German commander, Marshal Schörner himself. Once again Buniachenko refused to reënter German service. By May 2, the First Division had moved on to a village some 50 kilometers southwest of Prague. Here Vlasov, still with the First Division, received an emissary who informed him that KONR Army Headquarters, together with the Second Division and other KONR units, were now in Austria, moving toward Czechoslovakia. The emissary also stated that the principal German concern was no longer to regain the services of the First Division, but merely to assure its neutrality toward German units.

At this time, with both Soviet and American forces pressing toward Prague, the Czechoslovak National Council had begun preparing for an uprising against the German occupants. By May 5, the revolt was

under way, and the air waves of Central Europe were flooded with desperate appeals from the Council: "Calling the Allied armies. We need urgent help. Send your planes and tanks. The Germans are advancing on Prague. For the Lord's sake, send help."¹⁰

We know now that the Red Army did not enter Prague until after German surrender on May 9, and that the more rapidly advancing U. S. forces were kept from seizing Prague by an Allied decision to leave it — like Berlin — to Soviet capture. At the time, however, Czech resistance leaders were not aware of this. They were particularly anxious that the Western forces, rather than the Red Army, should be the first to enter Prague. But these were held back by a political decision, while the Red Army tarried, perhaps for reasons similar to its delay before Warsaw in August 1944, when the revolt in the Polish capital was led by anti-Communists, not pro-Communists. Therefore, seeing itself hard pressed by German forces, particularly by the SS concentration around Prague, the Czech resistance center repeated its urgent pleas for rescue to General Buniachenko.

And now the climax of our story is reached, with Buniachenko's decision on May 5 to throw the First KONR Division, the "Vlasov Army," into the Prague resistance against German units. By the evening of May 6, the First Division stood near Prague, and on the following morning it engaged in combat against SS troops within the ancient Slav capital. Here the Vlasov troops were given a jubilant reception by the populace, who were evidently never quite sure just who their saviors were — an understandable confusion resulting from the spectacle of Russian-speaking soldiers in German-type uniforms savagely opposing the SS forces. By the end of that day, May 7, after extremely bitter and widespread fighting, the scales were tipped in favor of the Czech uprising by the First KONR Division.

This, then, was the dramatic finale of the military arm of the wartime Soviet opposition movement. Founded as an act of collaboration with Hitler Germany, denied all but an insignificant, eleventh-hour part in combat, in its last moment it turned upon its erstwhile patrons — and played a leading role in the liberation of a major European center.

But if this episode may shine in glory in the annals of the Vlasov Movement, it was an all too brief glory. For on the same day, May 7, the commanders of the First KONR Division learned to their dismay not only that Red Army rather than U. S. forces were to occupy Prague, but also the more immediately disrupting news that the Czech-

oslovak National Council, the resistance center that had sought the aid of the Vlasov forces, was being rapidly replaced by representatives of Eduard Beneš's Czech government in exile. These new authorities wanted the First Division either to await the arrival of the Red Army and surrender to it or to make a speedy departure from the city it had just helped to liberate. And so at dawn of the next day, May 8, the First KONR Division began its final withdrawal, returning from Prague to the area of the near-by Czech town of Beraun, from which it had begun its liberating action. For a fitting summary of this episode, we have the account of an American foreign correspondent: "Prague really was liberated by foreign troops, after all. Not by the Allies, who did not arrive until the shooting was all over, but by 22,000 Russian outlaws wearing German uniforms. . . . When I reached Prague on Tuesday, May eighth, General Vlasov and his men had melted away as mysteriously as they had come."¹¹

Extreme charges — of treachery and of sheerest opportunism — have been lodged against the Vlasov Movement for this action. How can we explain this striking last-act Vlasovite defection from Hitler Germany?

As to the general charge of treachery, this entire study suggests that so shabby and insolent had been the German treatment of wartime Soviet opposition that concepts such as allegiance and loyalty appear inapplicable. Regarding the specific allegation that the defection of the First KONR Division was part of a long-prepared plan to betray Hitler's Germany, neither the written nor the oral testimony available to me reveals the slightest evidence that the KONR or General Vlasov had prepared this act in advance, either as treason to its former "ally" or for any other reason.

Opportunism, as a factor, cannot be dismissed so easily. Oral testimony to me by both German and Vlasovite officials involved in the events indicates that both Vlasov and Buniachenko were unquestionably concerned about the attitude the West would take toward the Soviet opposition movement, and were therefore undoubtedly motivated in part by the thought that liberating Prague from the SS might make a favorable impression on the Western allies.

At the same time, however, two considerations suggest that the Vlasovites' desire to ingratiate themselves with the West was not the most decisive factor. One of these — which we shall soon discuss at greater length — was their firm conviction that the West's outlook and intentions were essentially anti-Soviet. However erroneous this conviction may have been at the time, the fact that they were so con-

vinced in this attitude greatly reduced any feeling that they might have had of the necessity of appeasing the Western powers.

The other consideration is that events developed far too spontaneously to allow for such premeditation. So much in flux and limbo was the entire war situation, so difficult had communications become between various KONR formations, that actions which might otherwise have been ruled out by cooler heads were given free rein. From all accounts, General Buniachenko was a quick-tempered, impulsive, and far from sophisticated military man. Not only the German authorities but Vlasov himself had difficulty in bridling his irascible temperament. And we know specifically that Vlasov was not with the First KONR Division the greater part of the time; in both key instances, at the Eastern Front and regarding Prague, the final decision was taken by Buniachenko without him. For throughout the month or two before VE Day, Vlasov had become so deeply despondent and fatalistic, with ever more frequent heavy drinking, that in the last critical weeks his leadership was well-nigh absent — as was he himself much of the time. Nor was General Trukhin, as KONR Army Chief of Staff Buniachenko's immediate superior, in Prague, as has been claimed by the German novelist, Edwin Erich Dwinger, in his highly fictionalized *General Wlassow*.¹² Moreover, it appears that to the end Vlasovite chieftains were deeply divided on whether to place the KONR Army at the mercy of the advancing Western Allies or to unite with anti-Soviet formations, either in the Balkans (Draja Mikhailovich, von Pannwitz's Cossack Corps, the old-émigré Russian Defense Corps) or around Prague (as Buniachenko then did on his own). All this suggests that actions which previously would have been given greater and more high-level consideration were now decided upon with a swiftness explainable only by the prevailing chaos.

Chaos was not the only result of the catastrophic decline of German power. The resentments within the Vlasov Movement against the long years of wanton maltreatment and abuse by German authorities now for the first time could be unleashed. As long as no other course than collaboration seemed open, the Vlasovites, like most men in similar circumstances, managed effectively to repress their resentments. But now, although German treatment had actually improved in objective terms, the changed situation made anti-Hitler actions not only more possible but more likely than ever before.

Rebecca West, in her masterly work on pro-Nazi treason in World War II, seems to mirror this explanation: "The Nazis were prone, in

all sorts of circumstances, to make a peculiar error. When one of their enemies became their friend, they went on treating him as an enemy. However ready he might be to serve their interests, however much they might need his help, they continued to savage him. The great historic example of this curious trick is their treatment of the Russian soldiers and civilians who, by tens of thousands, gladly surrendered to them as they invaded Russian territory in 1941 and 1942. These people who might have been their most valuable aids then and forever after, they packed into cattle trucks and sent off to camps where they were starved and tortured. Later they were fetched out and invited to fight alongside the Germans, but by that time their enthusiasm was not what it had been, and the treatment they received in training and at the front failed to revive it.”¹³

One factor emphasized by a German author¹⁴ must not be overlooked. The liberation of Prague from German control would have taken place within a few days under any circumstances. The part played by the First KONR Division was only to speed the inevitable. But the Vlasov Movement itself, born and raised under German patronage, did end with an anti-German act. Prague in 1944 saw the launching of the KONR. In 1945, Prague witnessed its last act.