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MAJ. KIEWITZ'S MISSION. GERMAN OFFICER WITH
THE FLAG OF TRUCE IN WARSAW ON THE EVE
OF SOVIET AGGRESSION

On Saturday, September 16, 1939 Lieut.-Col. Wacław Lipiński, Chief of Information Service at the Command of Warsaw's Defence, put down in his diary: "This morning a German officer with the flag of truce reported himself before the frontline. What he wanted — remains unknown"¹. Much more precise information on this episode can be found in the memoirs *Droga wiodła ugorem (The Road Led Through Barren Ground)* of Col. Stanisław Sosabowski. "It was on September 16, about noon. At that time, while inspecting a sector of defence, I found myself near a barricade that closed the Grochowska highway. Suddenly I noticed a passenger car assisted by two tanks approaching from the side of Grochów. A white flag of truce could be seen on the car. Prepared for every emergency, the barricade ready for battle. I signalled to stop the approaching vehicles. I came in front of the barricade and approached the passenger car where a German officer was sitting. I asked him in German what was the matter. He said that by orders of Hitler and his superiors he came to initiate negotiations on the conditions of Warsaw's capitulation. It should be stressed that the fire of the enemy ceased completely at that time. I conveyed this news immediately to the commander of «Warszawa» Army, Gen. Juliusz Rómmel, and an answer came that the commander of the army had nothing to say on this matter. The officer and the tanks withdrew. An intensive fire of the enemy started again"².

Let us take another record — the memoirs of the Chief of Staff of Warsaw's Defence, Col. Tadeusz Tomaszewski. He writes:

¹ W. Lipiński, *Dziennik. Wrześniowa obrona Warszawy 1939 r. (Diary. September Defence of Warsaw 1939)*, ed. J. M. Kłoczowski, Warszawa 1989, p. 102.

² S. Sosabowski, *Droga wiodła ugorem. Wspomnienia (The Road Led Through Barren Ground. Memoirs)*, Kraków 1990, p. 67 (1st ed. London 1967, p. 48).

“A German officer with the flag of truce, some major, appeared on September 16, in the afternoon. He came from the side of Rembertów and appeared in the sector of Col. Eugeniusz Żongołłowicz, who informed me about it. I reported to the general (Juliusz Zulauf — defence commander of the right Vistula bank — T. S.), who sent me to Gen. Rómmel. I telephoned, and as a reply I received a short, firm: No! — pronounced without a moment of hesitation. As I did not remember well what the international law said on the matter I telephoned Lieut.-Col. Dr. Leon Nowodworski, asking for explanation, whether it was possible not to receive the officer at all. He answered that it is not settled and depends on the commander’s will. So I let things go their way and I ordered Col. Żongołłowicz to turn the messenger away. Judging by this short, firm ‘no’ of Gen. Rómmel, I thought that he meant to keep up defence till the very end and that this ‘no’ resulted from a task set to him by the Commander-in-Chief, which was not known to me at that time. I did not suspect then, that having granted no audience to the German — we would send our own messenger a few days later. I was convinced that the general’s ‘no’ meant we do not capitulate, and I said to myself ‘Lord is Great’”.

A little earlier Tomaszewski expressed the following opinion: “He (the German officer — T. S.) was not granted an audience because at this very moment there was no human power that could force the population and the army to surrender. A surrender is possible only for those who see and understand that they have lost. Warsaw did not see and did not understand that this was the end. How could it be? There was ammunition, there was food, there was an army. Kutrzeba was beating Germans near Łódź, the English (!) were landing in Gdańsk and we should surrender? Over our dead bodies! Only when Russia entered the war, when the last radio-telegram of the Commander-in-Chief was delivered, only when the army was defeated on the Bzura river, when Warsaw was bombed on September 25 and there was a complete lack of water — did the matters become clear and only then could the Polish officer with the flag of truce appear on the barricades without the danger of being torn into pieces by Warsaw vendors”³. It is time to let Gen. Juliusz Rómmel speak. In his memoirs *Za Honor i Ojczyznę* (*For Honour and My Country*) we can read: “About 2 p.m. Gen. Zulauf telephoned and reported that at the intersection of Grochowska and Podskarbińska streets German officers arrived with the flag of truce, assisted by two

³ T. Tomaszewski, *Byłem szefem sztabu obrony Warszawy w r. 1939* (*I Was the Chief of Staff of Warsaw's Defence in 1939*), Londyn 1961, p. 1961, p. 61 (this fragment of memoirs is entitled *Niemiecki wysłannik* [*German Messenger*]; reprinted in: *Obrona Warszawy 1939 we wspomnieniach* [*Defence of Warsaw 1939 in Memoirs*], Warszawa 1948, p. 99).

tanks and handed Col. Sosabowski who was present there a message from the German command, asking for delivering it to the defence Commander-in-Chief. In this connection I ordered Col. Żongołłowicz, who was a commander of the south sector of Praga, to read the message and to give me its content by the phone. In this letter the Germans demanded an immediate capitulation of Warsaw. In case of refusal the commander of German troops would start bombardment and assault of the Warsaw fortress. He left 12 hours for the evacuation of civilian population. This proposal clearly meant that the defence of Warsaw was very inconvenient to the German command and criss-crossed the strategic calculations of Hitler, who declared on the radio as early as on September 8, that the capital of Poland, Warsaw, was seized. The "humanitarian proposal" of evacuating the civilian population from Warsaw within 12 hours spoke for itself, too. This was only a base manoeuvre, meant to tranquilize the public opinion of the whole civilized world, shocked by the barbarity of the Germans. In this way they wanted to transfer all the responsibility for the destruction of the city onto the Warsaw defence command, if it did not accept the humanitarian gesture of cultivated Germans". After some expositions on the subject of technical problems of evacuating 1.5 million people from Warsaw, which meant driving them away into the unknown, Rómmel concludes: "I was well aware that the only aim of the Germans was to seize Warsaw, which was a strategic point joining through its bridges the territory of Western with Eastern Poland, whereas the proposal of evacuating the population was merely a subterfuge, having nothing in common either with humanitarian attitude to the miserable population or with the culture of civilized people. Therefore I ordered Col. Żongołłowicz to tell the officers that I would not speak to them, as I had nothing to communicate"⁴.

Here we should quote a fragment of the radio speech delivered by Lieut.-Col. Waław Lipiński on September 18. He spoke with unconcealed irony: "The day before yesterday, convinced that they had broken the spirit of Warsaw and its defence by the gun-fire and action directed against it they (the Germans — T.S.) sent in an officer with the flag of truce and this officer was not even granted an audience. The command was simply not interested to hear what this gentleman wanted to say. I must admit that I would have asked. Perhaps the Germans wanted to surrender?"⁵

⁴ J. Rómmel, *Za Honor i Ojczyznę. Wspomnienia dowódcy armii "Łódź" i "Warszawa"* (For Honour and My Country. Memoir of the Commander of "Łódź" and "Warsaw" Armies), Warszawa 1958, pp. 292–293. Historians usually make use of this account.

⁵ W. Lipiński, *Dziennik*, p. 213.

This is all the source information relating to the proposal with which the German officer was sent to Warsaw on September 16, 1939. In army documents relating to the defence of Warsaw there is no trace of any report on this matter, either by Col. Sosabowski, commander of the 21 regiment “Children of Warsaw”, and at the same time of the “Grochów” sector, or by his superior, Col. Eugeniusz Żongołłowicz, or the latter’s superior Gen. Zulauf⁶. Let us note that in the accounts quoted by me there are different data concerning the time when the officer (or officers) appeared, their military rank is mentioned only once and no names are given.

As far as historical discussions are concerned, special attention is due to the book by Ludwik Głowacki *Obrona Warszawy i Modlina na tle kampanii wrześniowej 1939 (The Defence of Warsaw and Modlin Against the Background of the September Campaign 1939)*. Without giving the source of this information, the author writes: “On September 16 about 2 p.m. along Grochowska street to the defence position of Regiment 21 German officers Maj. Kiewitz with a second lieutenant came on tanks (*sic!* — T. S.) with the flag of truce, demanding an audience with Gen. Juliusz Rómmel on the matter of Warsaw’s capitulation. The general did not grant it. The man who talked with them was Col. S. Sosabowski. The Germans demanded unconditional capitulation. Their proposals were rejected”⁷. Everything shows that Glowacki found the name of the officer in German documents, most probably in the report (to be discussed later) of Col. W. Weiss, Chief of Staff of the German 1st Corps, part of the 3rd Army that besieged Warsaw from the east.

The study of German source records provides not only additional information on the person of the officer and the course of his mission, but also, what is more important, reveals the inner history of this mission and its connection with the talks conducted at that time on the subject of the Soviet aggression upon Poland, by the German ambassador count Friedrich Werner von Schulenburg, in Moscow. It is strange enough that nobody has so far associated the proposals of surrendering Warsaw made by the Germans on September 16, 1939 with the invasion of Poland by the Red Army on the next day.

Aleksander Bregman in his now classical work *Najlepszy sojusznik Hitlera (Hitler’s Best Ally)* justly observes in connection with the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact: “In Moscow no plan was made of military co-operation of the two states against Poland. It seems that no agreements were signed

⁶ For help in my research I should like here to express my thanks to Andrzej Lechowski and Stanisław Żerański from the Military Historical Institute of Warsaw.

⁷ L. Głowacki, *Obrona Warszawy i Modlina na tle kampanii wrześniowej 1939 (Defence of Warsaw and Modlin Against the Background of September Campaign 1939)*, 4th ed., Warszawa 1975, p. 264.

envisaging formally an armed intervention of the Soviets. What is more no term was established for the invasion of Poland by the Soviet army”⁸. When the news about the declaration of war against Germany by Great Britain and France reached Berlin, on September 3, 1939 at 18.50 hrs. Ribbentrop sent a telegram to ambassador Schulenburg in Moscow, asking him to discuss “Immediately with Molotov and establish whether the Soviet Union thinks it desirable for the Russian troops to move at a suitable time against the Polish forces in the Russian sphere of interests and occupy this territory on their own account. According to our estimates this would be not only a relief to us, but in keeping with the spirit of Moscow agreements would be also in the Soviet interest”⁹. Two days later Molotov answered: “We agree as to the absolute necessity of taking up concrete action in due time. However we are of the opinion that this time has not yet come”¹⁰.

While making a decision about commencing this “concrete action”, that is an armed aggression upon Poland, Stalin thought on the one hand about the choice of the most convenient, i.e. neither too early nor too late moment of attack, on the other of the propaganda justification of this move, i.e. finding a pretext that could in a certain measure justify the action taken and free the Soviet Union from the stamp of an aggressor. Neither should it be forgotten that Stalin, conscious of the defeat in the war of 1920, in which he took part himself, had if not exactly a fear of the Poles, then at any rate some respect for them and highly appreciated the fighting value of the Polish army.

It seemed that the Soviet aggression would start at the end of the first or the beginning of the second decade of September. As it is generally known, on September 8 the Germans issued a false, premature communiqué about the seizure of Warsaw. On the night of September 8/9 at 0.56 a.m. ambassador Schulenburg hastened to send a cable to Berlin, conveying in it the content of the telephone call he received from Molotov a moment before. Molotov said: “I received your communiqué that German troops marched into Warsaw. Please accept my congratulations and regards for the government of the German Reich”¹¹. On the same day at 15.00 hrs. Molotov informed Schulenburg that “the Soviet military action will take place within the next few days”¹².

⁸ A. Bregman, *Najlepszy sojusznik Hitlera. Studium o współpracy niemiecko-sowieckiej 1939–1941 (Hitler's Best Ally. Study on German-Soviet Co-operation 1939–1941)*, 2nd ed. Bruksela 1961, p. 55.

⁹ Cit. after A. Bregman, *Najlepszy sojusznik*, p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹ W. Sukiennicki, *Biała Księga. Fakty i dokumenty z okresów dwóch wojen światowych (The White Book. Facts and Documents from the Period of Two World Wars)*, Paryż 1964, p. 62.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

However when it turned out that the German communiqué was not true, the Soviet side began to temporize. In his report of September 10, 1939 Schulenburg wrote: "At today's conference at 16.00 hrs. Molotov changed his yesterday's declaration, saying that the Soviet government was completely surprised by the unexpectedly quick German military successes. According to our first communiqué the Red Army counted on several weeks, which now were reduced to a few days. Therefore the Soviet military command has found itself in a difficult situation, as because of the conditions in their country they need about two or three weeks more for preparation. Above 3 million people have already been mobilized. I tried to make clear to Molotov the decisive importance of a quick action of the Red Army under the present circumstances. Molotov assured me several times that they were doing their best to speed the action up. I had an impression that yesterday Molotov promised more than the Red Army could do. Then Molotov passed on to the political side of the issue and declared that in connection with the further progress of German troops the Soviet government was going to declare that Poland had collapsed and for this reason it was necessary for the Soviet Union to come to the aid of the Ukrainians and Byelorussians who were "menaced" by the Germans. This argument would give the intervention of the Soviet Union the appearance of justice in face of the masses, and at the same time would prevent accusing the Soviet Union of invasion. This road however was closed for the Soviet government by the *DNB* (German Information Bureau) communiqué yesterday, since according to the declaration by Gen.-Col. Brauchitsch military action was no longer needed on the eastern frontier of Germany. The communiqué created an impression that an immediate German-Polish cease-fire was expected. However if the Germans concluded an armistice the Soviet Union would not be able to start 'a new war'. I said that such a communiqué, completely discrepant from the actual state of affairs, was not known to me and that I would immediately inquire about it"¹³.

The importance of the quoted document is enormous. Especially significant is the fragment saying that the Soviet side was looking for pretexts that would justify their aggression: one of them would be the downfall of the Polish state, another — a necessity to protect Ukrainians and Byelorussians, the citizens of the Polish state, against the Germans. As regards the latter case the Germans simply could not agree to such a formulation. I should like, however, to draw attention to the fragment relating to the mis-

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

understandings connected with Gen. Brauchitsch's declaration quoted in *DNB* communiqué. It appears that on the very 10th of September Schulenburg, after inquiring at the Press Department of the German Foreign Office satisfied Molotov that Brauchitsch's declaration "was completely misinterpreted" by the Soviet side and the armistice was "out of the question"¹⁴. Brauchitsch's declaration probably aimed to give the Russians to understand that the German troops would not encroach on the territory which was acknowledged as the Soviet sphere of interests. By the same a signal was given to the Red Army to commence its action in Poland. Stalin simply did not understand this allusion, on the contrary, he drew, as it appears, a false conclusion that the Germans deceived him and would conclude an armistice with the Poles, by the same ruling out the participation of the Soviets in the division of the loot. One thing is certain — Stalin, at any rate at this very moment — did not fully trust Hitler.

The Kremlin continued to ponder the preparation of the best propaganda justification of its aggression upon Poland. On September 14, 1939 "Izvyestya" published a two-days' earlier telegram of TASS agency from Berlin, bringing the news about a would-be anti-Polish Ukrainian Uprising in Eastern Galicia, and "Pravda" said that "Polish politics does not differ at all from the oppressive politics of the Russian tsardom"¹⁵. Could it be an extension of the Goebbels campaign that preceded German aggression, with its steady motive of persecution of the German minority in Poland?

On the same 14th of September at 18.00 hrs. Schulenburg sent to Berlin a telegram with a note: "Very urgent. Top secret". He wrote there: "Molotov invited me today for 16.00 hrs. and said that the Red Army had reached the state of readiness earlier than it had been expected. Therefore it would be possible for the Soviet action to take place earlier than he had thought during our last talk. [...] For the political justification of the Soviet action (the downfall of Poland and protection of Russian minorities) it was of great

¹⁴ We learn about it from the note by the editors of German documents: *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945*, Serie D: 1937–1945, Band VIII *Die Kriegsjahre*. Erster Band, 4: *September 1939 bis 18. März 1940*, Baden-Baden 1961, p. 35.

¹⁵ A. K. Kurnert, *Rzeczpospolita Walcząca. Wrzesień–grudzień 1939. Kalendarium (Fighting Poland. September–December 1939. Calendar)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 56. The text of the article from "Pravda" translated into Polish was published in "clandestine circulation" by Adam Kersten in 1982. In the article *About Internal Reasons of the Military Defeat of Poland* there are words about a "brutal policy of compulsory Polonization" with regard to 8 m. of Ukrainians and 3 m. of Byelorussians. It should be added that on September 11, 1939 Hitler revoked the uprising prepared by German agents, where a slaughter of Poles and Jews was envisaged and probably a creation of a separate state — Galician Ukraine. One cannot rule out that such an uprising could on the one hand be a blackmail on Stalin — a threat of creating as a result, a state independent of the USSR, on the other it could provide Stalin with a pretext for interference "in defence" of Slav national minorities, oppressed by Poles.

importance that the action should not take place before the downfall of the government centre of Poland, the city of Warsaw (underlined by T. S.). Therefore Molotov asked for possibly exact information, when he could count on the seizure of Warsaw¹⁶.

On the next day, September 15, at 20.20 hrs. Ribbentrop sent to Schulenburg an instruction, which was read in Moscow on the following day at 7.15 a.m. The ambassador was to inform Molotov that the Germans counted on seizing Warsaw within the next few days¹⁷. In order to satisfy the condition set by Stalin and to make his aggression possible as well as to avoid German losses, the decision was taken to propose to Poles a surrender of the capital without fighting. And this precisely was the genesis of Maj. Kiewitz's mission.

On September 15, 1939 Gen. Granz Halder put down in his *War Diary* at 9.15 a.m.: "Leaflets — this afternoon from 14.00 till 15.00 hrs. Time: 12 hours. The civilian population (those not liable to military service, women, children) 12 hours after dropping, direction Siedlce and Garwolin"¹⁸. A few hours later the commander of the 3rd German Army Gen. Georg Kuchler received the following directives from the command of the "North" Army Group: "1. By way of air leaflets the population of Warsaw will be summoned to leave the city on September 15, within 12 hours towards the east (Siedlce) and south-east (Garwolin) in case if the town does not declare a military capitulation. 2. If Warsaw does not capitulate then an air and artillery attack on the left-bank Warsaw will start on September 16 (...)"¹⁹. As it can be seen, the leaflets summoning to capitulation, or in case of further defence of the town, at any rate to the evacuation of the civilian population from Warsaw, were to be dropped as early as on September 15, but apparently this could not be done as time was too short. On the same day at 20.30 hrs., Halder wrote down: "The proposal of assault on Warsaw — rejected. We needn't hurry and we do not need the forces that are standing near Warsaw"²⁰.

On the night of September 15/16 the decision was taken to send an officer to Warsaw with the proposal of capitulation. On September 16, 1939, at 3.45 a.m. an order in the matter signed by Gen. Wilhelm Keitel was sent to the command of the "North" Army Group, and then passed on to be

¹⁶ W. Sukiennicki, *Biała Księga*, p. 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁸ F. Halder, *Dziennik wojenny (War Diary)*. Vol. I. *Od kampanii polskiej do zakończenia ofensywy na Zachodzie (14 VIII 1939 — 30 VI 1940) (From Polish Campaign till the End of the Offensive in the West)*, Warszawa 1971, p. 113.

¹⁹ *Obrona Warszawy w 1939 r. Wybór dokumentów wojskowych (Defence of Warsaw in 1939. Selection of Military Documents)*, comp. M. Ciepłowicz, Warszawa 1968, p. 564.

²⁰ F. Halder, *Dziennik*, p. 113.

executed by the commander of the 3rd Army. Here is the full text of this order — published in Polish by Mieczysław Ci e p l e w i c z in his volume *Obrona Warszawy w 1939 r. Wybór dokumentów wojskowych (Defence of Warsaw 1939. Selection of Military Documents)*:

“1. Führer ordered that during the day of September 16 one of army or corps commanders should send an officer with warrant letters to the Polish commander in Warsaw with a demand of unconditional surrender of the city within 6 hours. In case of refusal the whole city would be treated as a fortress with all the resulting consequences.

2. At the same time on September 16 before noon the air force will drop leaflets with an appeal to the population. The content of those leaflets will be transmitted together with the present text by cable.

3. If the demand of capitulation is rejected, an order will be given to start bombing or shooting at the city.

4. The results of the execution of this order should be reported”.

In addition to this telephone message the Chief of Staff of “North” Army Group Gen. H. von Salmuth wrote to the commander of the 3rd Army: “The attack on Praga envisaged for September 16 is withheld for the present. The officer with the flag of truce to be sent as early as possible on September 16. The time of sending him to be immediately reported”²¹.

The name of this officer appears in documents published in Poland only once, namely in the mentioned report by Col. W. Weiss, Chief of Staff of the 1st Army Corps that was part of the 3rd Army. The report was sent from Sulejówek on September 16, 1939 at 2.30 p.m. or at 12.30 p.m., but certainly not at 2.30 a.m., as the publisher says. Col. Weiss wrote: “According to the words of Maj. Kiewitz, who was sent with the flag of truce, the main position (of the Poles — T.S.) or the back position developed backwards has 3 trenches and crosses the Wawer–Warszawa highway. He reports that this highway is protected by 5–6 successive barriers. The forces of the enemy consist of string infantry, with a large number of howitzers and trenchmortars. In respect of artillery the enemy is much weaker (...) Street fighting should be avoided as much as possible and the attack should go along the Vistula”²². One cannot deny that the German officer acquitted himself very well of his tasks connected with... reconnaissance.

It is clear that more information should be collected about him. I assumed, as it turned out, rightly, that he was the officer of one of the three divisions of infantry that made up the 1st Corps, commanded by Gen. Walter Petzel: 11, 61 or 217 Division. Further on I had to count on luck, that is on

²¹ *Obrona Warszawy*, pp. 565–566.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 566–567.

finding publications discussing the history of the division that took part in the siege of Warsaw from which the officer with the flag of truce was sent. Through bibliography I found in London “Bellona” of 1953 a translation of fragments of Walther Hubatsch’s *61. Infanterie Division*, referring to the action of this division in September 1939. There I spotted the following fragment: “On the morning of September 16 military activity was withheld, since on the behalf of the division Maj. Kiewitz, commander of I/151, summoned the city to capitulation. As the Polish commander did not grant him audience, the fire was resumed at 12 o’clock at noon”²³. This provides evidence that Maj. Kiewitz was the commander of the 1st Battalion, 151 Regiment of Infantry, that was part of the 61 Division of Infantry belonging to the 1st Corps, part of the 3rd German Army besieging Warsaw from the east.

The fact that Maj. Kiewitz was a battalion commander is corroborated by the text devoted to his mission, entitled *Ein Parlamentär kehrt zurück*, inserted in the propaganda publication *Auf den Strassen des Sieges. Erlebnisse mit dem Führer in Polen*²⁴. It appears that on September 22, 1939 at Glinki locality near Warsaw, Kiewitz (the publication, however, does not mention his name!) was introduced to Hitler. It was on this very day that the well-known photos of Hitler watching Praga through a field-glass were taken²⁵. We learn that before the war the officer held a high state office, and for his mission in Warsaw, which was to prevent “wanton destruction and needless bloodshed in the encircled city”, he received the Iron Cross. In his talk with Hitler, Kiewitz said that “he was kept blindfold for several hours at the Polish headquarters, until the answer came that the Polish General saw no reason to receive him”.

²³ *Niemcy o kampanii wrześniowej (Germans about September Campaign)*, “Bellona” 1953, fasc. 3, p. 94. W. Hubatsch’s book is unavailable in Poland. I thank Dr. E. Fröhlich for the xerocopy of this fragment (2nd ed., Bad Nauheim 1961, p. 17). The information about Maj. Kiewitz’s service assignment as well as the data about his participation in September campaign were confirmed by Stanisław Żerański on the basis of materials from the Central Military Archives in Warsaw already after this text was written.

²⁴ Subtitle: *Ein Gemeinschaftsbuch von Reichspressechef Dr. Otto Dietrich und seinen im Führerhauptquartier tätigen Mitarbeitern Helmut Sündermann, Wilfrid Bade, Gunter d’Alquen, Heinz Lorenz*, München 1939, pp. 153–158.

²⁵ M. M. Drozdowski is mistaken in saying in his book *Alarm dla Warszawy. Ludność cywilna w obronie stolicy we wrześniu 1939 (Alarm for Warsaw. Civilian Population in Defence of the Capital in September 1939)* (2nd ed., Warszawa 1969, p. 213), that Hitler was at Glinki on September 15. I established the date of September 22 on the basis of M. Domarus, *Hitler Reden 1932 bis 1945*, Band II. Erster Halbband, Wiesbaden 1973, p. 1366. An account of this journey by Hitler was published in “Völkischer Beobachter” 1939, N° 266 of September 23. A photo of Hitler with a field-glass (without date) appeared in the well-known album by H. Hoffmann, *Mit Hitler in Polen*, Berlin 1939, p. 86; another take, in the company of officers (Maj. Kiewitz may probably be among them): *Der grosse deutsche Feldzug gegen Polen. Eine Chronik des Krieges in Wort und Bild*, ed. H. H. Hoffmann, introduction by Gen. von Reichenau, Wien 1939, p. 184.

Probably the most precise description of the course Maj. Kiewitz's mission took in Warsaw (but here again, without any mention of his name) is brought by the publication of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht of 1941 entitled *Wehrmachtberichte. Weltgeschichte. Der Krieg 1939/40*. The text in question is the communiqué of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, dated September 16, 1939 and entitled *Deutsche Aufforderung zur Kampflosen Übergabe Warschaus*²⁶. It appears from the text that the officer with "the proposal of surrendering Warsaw without fighting in order to avoid the unimaginable bloodshed" was sent at 8 o'clock a.m. and within half an hour reached the headquarters of the Polish regiment. Here he demanded to be led to the Polish General in command of the defence to whom he wanted to deliver letters concerning the conditions of capitulation. Let us note that all the Polish sources say that the time of his arrival at the defence position of the 21 Regiment of Infantry was a few hours later. The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht communiqué says that after an hour and a half (and not many hours) of waiting the officer received a negative answer of the Polish General (i.e. about 10 a.m.) and that no letters were accepted from him for further delivery to the Polish commander. It is difficult to establish exactly when Maj. Kiewitz set on his way back. Col. Sosabowski is certainly wrong in writing: "On September 16 at about 14.00 hrs. on the Grochowska highway before the main barricade I sent away the German officers who came with warrants for negotiations about capitulation"²⁷. I have to remind that the German chronicle of the 61 Division of Infantry speaks about the resumption of fire at 12 o'clock at noon. Kiewitz must have reported himself after his mission between 11 and 11.30 a.m. since Gen. Halder put down on that day: "12 o'clock — Warsaw did not receive the German officer with the flag of truce. I talked to Salmuth: no attack on Warsaw"²⁸.

From the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht communiqué quoted above we learn that only in the afternoon, exactly at 15.10 hrs. the German airplanes dropped over Warsaw "millions of leaflets" with a summons for the evacuation of the population and capitulation of the Polish capital. The German proposals, conveyed earlier by the officer with the flag of truce to the Polish military command and — as it was supposed — kept secret by him, were thus meant to reach the population of Warsaw. The military

²⁶ *Wehrmachtberichte. Weltgeschichte. Ein Karten-Bild und Dokumentenwerk*, comp. B. E. H. Overhues and O. W. Hempel, Berlin 1941, p. 31.

²⁷ Col. S. S. [osabowski], *Z dziejów obrony Warszawy — wrzesień 1939 (From the History of Warsaw's Defence — September 1939)*, "Bellona" 1941, fasc. 11, p. 7. Let us note that Römmel is said to have learnt about the arrival of German officers at 14.00 hrs., while Sosabowski writes that at this hour they already set out on their way back.

²⁸ F. Halder, *Dziennik*, p. 114.

commander of Warsaw was required: "1. Within 12 hours to turn over the city without further fighting to the German troops that surrounded Warsaw. 2. The Polish army in Warsaw was to surrender itself at the same time to the German commanders. 3. If this summons is obeyed the fact should be reported to the German military commander. 4. If this summons is disobeyed, the civilian population has 12 hours for evacuating the city along the roads towards Siedlce and Garwolin. When these 12 hours elapse, the whole area of Warsaw will be treated as a battlefield, which will entail adequate consequences. The period of twelve hours begins at the moment of dropping this leaflet"²⁹. Thus the term elapsed at 3.10 a.m. on September 17. It should be noted that although the Germans proposed a surrender of Warsaw, yet if the army did not want to capitulate, they also envisaged the possibility of evacuating the city by its civilian population only. This does not result at all from the way the matter is presented in Gen. Rómmel's memoirs.

In Marian Marek Drozdowski's book *Alarm dla Warszawy* (*Alarm for Warsaw*) we read: "In reply to the demand of capitulation an appeal to the inhabitants of Warsaw was issued by gen. Rómmel on September 16"³⁰. Its full text was published in *Cywilna obrona Warszawy we wrześniu 1939* (*The Civil Defence of Warsaw in September 1939*). It runs as follows: "The citizens of the Capital. The Commander-in-Chief, Marshal of Poland Edward Śmigły-Rydz, separated from Warsaw, but commanding directly the group of our troops in the south-west, has sent me the following order: The capital should be defended, as with the fact of keeping it is connected the honour of the Nation. At the hard moments through which our Army is going it should be borne in mind that manhood and steadfast fight, connected with the spirit of offensive will finally win. This fight should be carried on on every line without rest and with faith in the final victory! Time works for us. The enemy's resources are dwindling. So — let us carry on the fight and keep up our spirits!"³¹ Although the appeal bears a date, I suppose that it was written before the arrival of the German officer and the dropping of German leaflets. It is not a reply to German demands, as there is no allusion to them in it whatsoever. Incidentally it should be noted that the wording of the appeal by General Rómmel was not identical

²⁹ *Cywilna obrona Warszawy we wrześniu 1939. Dokumenty, materiały prasowe, wspomnienia i relacje* (*Civil Defence of Warsaw in September 1939. Documents, Press Materials, Memoirs and Relations*), comp. by L. Dobroszycki, M. Drozdowski, M. Getter and A. Słomczyński, research dir. S. Płoski, Warszawa 1964, p. 81.

³⁰ M. M. Drozdowski, *Alarm dla Warszawy*, p. 212.

³¹ *Cywilna obrona Warszawy*, p. 75. This appeal was published on September 20, 1939 in N° 2 of "Official Diary of the Civil Commissioner at the Command of Warsaw's Defence", entry 14. The poster has been preserved in the collections of 6th Department of the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw.

with the one he received from Marshal Edward Śmigły-Rydz³². That the appeal was issued earlier is testified by the record in the conspiratory brochure *Warszawa w ogniu. Kronika dni wrześniowych* (*Warsaw on Fire. A Chronicle of September Days*). Under the date September 15 — Friday, this chronicle notes: “In the afternoon on the walls of the city appears: *The Appeal of the Commander-in-Chief*”, followed by the text of Gen. Rómmel’s appeal which is identical with the one quoted above³³. In my opinion Gen. Rómmel was barred from the acceptance of the German conditions of capitulation precisely by the issue of the appeal saying that a surrender of the capital would put a blame on national honour.

Without an access to Soviet documents it cannot be established whether and what Stalin knew about Maj. Kiewitz’s mission and the proposals relating to Warsaw’s capitulation conveyed by the Germans in the leaflets³⁴. In my opinion it is quite probable that he learnt, if only from telephone or radio reports of his agents, about the imminent German–Polish talks in the foregrounds of Warsaw. If such news reached him then he could fear — let us remind of the misunderstandings in connection with Gen. Brauchitsch’s statement — that Germans would conclude an armistice with the Poles and he would not be able to start a “new war” in this situation. On the other hand, while taking the decision about the invasion of Poland by the Red Army Stalin knew the communiqué of TASS agency from Berlin of September 15, published in “Izvestiya” on the morning of September 16. The communiqué spoke about the arrival at Zaleszczyki of the Polish Government “which apparently plans to cross the frontier onto the territory of Rumania”³⁵. Stalin came to the conclusion that he could not delay matters any further.

The German ambassador was summoned by Molotov for 18.00 hrs. In his report to Berlin Schulenburg wrote: “Molotov said that the armed action of the Soviet Union would start at once, may be even on the next day or in two days’ time. [...] The Soviet Government plans to justify its action as follows: The Polish state has collapsed and ceased to exist; therefore all the

³² On September 8, 1939 the Commander-in-Chief wrote in a letter sent to Gen. Rómmel: “Dear General! You take the command of Warsaw, which should be defended as long as there is enough ammunition and food, so as to centre the largest forces of the enemy on Warsaw. I trust that you will do this historical duty well. The city should be defended on the outskirts, around, from the west and from the east”. In the directives given to Gen. Rómmel on the next day he was given the task of “defending Warsaw even if it is isolated from the rest of the army forces”, cit. after L. Głowacki, *Obrona Warszawy*, pp. 62 and 174.

³³ Nemo (Halszka Buczyńska), *Warszawa w ogniu. Kronika dni wrześniowych* (*Warsaw on Fire. A Chronicle of September Days*), Warszawa 1942, p. 22.

³⁴ Unfortunately this is not made clear by the materials printed in the publication: *Dokumenty wneshey politiki 1939 god.* Vol. 22, book 1 and 2, Moskva 1992; cf. review by E. Duraczyński “Dzieje Najnowsze” 1994, N^o 2, pp. 120–125.

³⁵ W. Sukiennicki, *Biała Księga*, p. 66.

agreements signed with Poland are no longer valid: the third powers (*sic!* — T.S.) may try to take advantage of the resultant chaos. The Soviet Union feels obliged to take action, in order to protect its Ukrainian and Byelorussian brothers and enable the miserable population to go on working in peace”³⁶. In the note handed on the night of September 16/17 by Molotov’s deputy Vladimir Potemkin to Polish ambassador Wacław Grzybowski the justification of the aggression is very similar in substance, with the only difference that it includes the following sentences: “Warsaw, as a capital of Poland ceased to exist. The Polish Government has collapsed and does not show any signs of life. This means that the Polish state and its Government actually ceased to exist”³⁷. While speaking on the radio on September 17, a few hours after the invasion of Poland by the Red Army, Molotov said: “Warsaw, as the capital of Polish state does not exist any more. Nothing is known about the place where the Polish Government is staying”³⁸. One should think that at this very moment he did not know whether Germans were already in Warsaw or they would occupy it any moment or whether the Polish Government had already crossed the frontier or would do it quite soon.

However, let us come back to the events on the Vistula. On September 16 in the evening the commander of “Warszawa” Army was approached by the doyen of the diplomatic corps, the envoy of Norway in Poland, Niels Christian Ditleff, and asked for the possibility of contacting the German command as to the evacuation of foreign diplomats and their families who still remained in Warsaw. The publishers of *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej* (*Polish Armed Forces in the Second World War*) write: “Gen. Rómmel agreed to it and the matter was positively settled after a few days of negotiations”³⁹. No mention is made of the strange case of the Polish officer with the flag of truce, to this day unclarified, who together with the representative of the diplomatic corps was awaited by the Germans on September 17 at 22.00 hrs. on the highway Mińsk Mazowiecki — Praga⁴⁰.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³⁷ *Sprawa polska w czasie Drugiej Wojny Światowej na arenie międzynarodowej. Zbiór dokumentów* (*The Polish Cause During World War II on the Arena of International Politics. Collection of Documents*), Warszawa 1965, p. 83.

³⁸ W. Sukiennicki, *Biała Księga*, p. 70.

³⁹ *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej* (*Polish Armed Forces in World War II*). Vol. I *Kampania wrześniowa 1939* (*September Campaign 1939*). Part 4 *Przebieg działań od 15 do 18 września* (*The Course of Action from September 15 to 18*), Londyn 1986, p. 190.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Sprawozdanie o przeprowadzeniu specjalnego zlecenia w nocy z 17 na 18 września 1939* (*Account of the Realization of Special Mission on the Night of September 17–18, 1939*) signed by Lieut.-Col. B u c h e r, officer of the Chief Staff of the 1st Army Corps (translation of the German document by Lieut.-Col. Kazimierz G o l e n i o w s k i made in 1967). Military Historical Institute Warsaw, old call n^o: VII/7/31, new call n^o: VII/1/67. I repeat my thanks to Andrzej Lechowski and Stanisław Żerański for their help in getting access to this document as well as those quoted later.

Some information on this subject can be found in the already quoted book *Alarm dla Warszawy* by M. M. D r o z d o w s k i . He writes that against the will of Stefan Starzyński (Major of Warsaw) and Waclaw Lipiński, who “were against letting the foreigners out of Warsaw”, Gen. Rómmel agreed to it and the date of the departure of their representatives for negotiations with the Germans was fixed as September 17. “As the result of negotiations the day of September 21 was fixed as the term of leaving Warsaw by the diplomats and the foreign colony. On September 16 in his radio speech Ditleff announced — not entitled by anybody — the participation in negotiations with the Germans of a representative of the civilian population of Warsaw. [...] When matters were cleared it turned out that the would-be representative of the population was the officer of the Home Guard, the former official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Waclaw Sokołowski, who acting as liaison with the diplomatic corps provided Ditleff with a warrant for such an announcement. As Sokołowski acted on his own, without consulting the Civil Commissioners, by order of Starzyński he was put in the prison in Daniłowiczowska street, from which he escaped. On the next day the Warsaw radio broadcast an amendment to Ditleff’s statement”⁴¹. We learn from the footnote that there are some accounts that Sokołowski was shot.

Let us once again take a look at Gen. Halder’s diary. On September 16 at 24.00 hrs. he put down: “Führer ordered to revoke the attack on Warsaw from land and air on September 17”⁴². As it is well-known this was the day of the most intensive artillery bombardment of Warsaw. On this day the Royal Castle was almost completely consumed by fire and St. John’s Cathedral suffered greatly⁴³. On September 17 Halder put down: “Noon. Warsaw asks for the reception of an officer with the flag of truce so as to negotiate the matter of evacuating the population. Answer on the German radio. Then Warsaw asks for the reception of an officer to negotiate the evacuation of the diplomatic corps”. At 15.30 hrs. another entry appears in the diary: “An order from Hitler’s train: To reject the request in the matter of evacuation, the term has elapsed. To conduct radio propaganda in case of projects of capitulation, to announce a readiness to receive the officers with the flag of truce”⁴⁴. On the next day, September 18, Halder writes: “(Hitler) would be reluctant to negotiate the case of Warsaw with Russia. Not to shed

⁴¹ M. M. D r o z d o w s k i , *Alarm dla Warszawy*, pp. 211–212.

⁴² F. H a l d e r , *Dziennik*, p. 114.

⁴³ Cf. W. B a r t o s z e w s k i , *1859 dni Warszawy (1859 Days of Warsaw)*, Kraków 1974, pp. 44–45.

⁴⁴ F. H a l d e r , *Dziennik*, p. 115.

any more blood than necessary. To drop leaflets over Warsaw, to conduct radio propaganda"⁴⁵.

In the so-called Alexandrian documents, whose microfilms are partly in the possession of the Military Historical Institute in Warsaw there are three German military documents concerning the awaiting of the officers with the flag of truce on the evening of September 17. One, which I have already mentioned, is the account of Lieut.-Col. Bucher from the 1st Army Corps, written on September 18 in Sulejówek, the seat of the headquarters of the corps, another is the order to the commander of the 3rd Army, sent from the Land Forces Army Group "North" on September 17. Here are its sizable fragments: "On September 17 at 22.00 hrs. at the post designated by the Chief Command of the 3rd Army two officers with the flag of truce will appear: a) one officer from the doyen of the diplomatic corps in Warsaw, b) one officer in the matter of evacuating Warsaw: (...) The officer in the matter of evacuation of Warsaw should be informed in writing that: a) The Polish commander of Warsaw's Defence refused to discuss the same problem with the German intermediary on September 16. b) The term of evacuating Warsaw given to the population in leaflets has elapsed with no result. c) In the meantime the German army made all the military preparations for the attack on Warsaw. The deployment of artillery has been finished. d) For this reason the German Armed Forces have no more possibility of negotiating the evacuation from Warsaw of the civilian population, but must demand an unconditional capitulation of the city. e) The term for a reply to this offer — until 8. a.m. on September 18."⁴⁶ The third document contains information on the place and way of receiving the officers. They were to come in two cars with lightened white flags, each officer in another car. A cease-fire was to be preserved at the extent of 2 km. left and right of the highway"⁴⁷. The account of Lieut.-Col. Bucher, apparently responsible for the whole action, shows that the officers did not come, and from time to time fire was opened at the Germans from Polish positions. The officers were awaited, among others, by the person known to us from the previous occasion. "About 22.00 hrs. — we read in Lieut.-Col. Bucher's report — in one of the further cars came to us Maj. Kiewitz, commander of the 1st Battalion of the 151 Regiment of Infantry. He was to extend particular protection over the deputy (the word "doyen" missing — T.S.) of the Diplomatic Corps". I should like

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ Doc. N°: Ia N° 0304/39 g., microfilms at the Military Historical Institute in Warsaw, call n° as in note 40.

⁴⁷ Doc. N°: Ia N° 0505/39 k., microfilm.

to note that the service assignment of Kiewitz mentioned here is exactly the same as that mentioned by the German historian Walther Hubatsch.

We already know that on September 22, 1939 the German officer had an occasion to relate his mission to the leader of the Third Reich himself. It appears that on October 27, 1939 he talked with the leader on this subject again. Here is a note in Goebbels's diary: "At Führer's. Kienitz (*sic!* — T.S.) telling of his experiences as an officer with the flag of truce in Warsaw. An uncanny story! He sat blindfold for a few hours, until he was sent back without achieving anything. The commander of Warsaw did not want to receive him. Poland had to pay for it with the destruction of Warsaw. A high price!"⁴⁸ The misreading of his name by the editor of diaries Elke Fröhlich caused that the officer was acknowledged to be Gen. Werner Kienitz, commander of the 17th Corps, the same, which marched into Cracow on September 6, 1939⁴⁹.

It appears that for his Warsaw mission Maj. Kiewitz received not only the Iron Cross but also a promotion. There was an additional prize, too. As soon as in August 1940, as a "colonel", he was an aide-de-camp of the King of Belgium, Leopold III⁵⁰.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

⁴⁸ *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente*, ed. E. Fröhlich, Teil I *Aufzeichnungen 1924–1941*, Band 3: *1.1.1937–31.12.1939*, München 1987, p. 622.

⁴⁹ According to Interimregister of this edition (p. 149). On this basis I put forward the idea, mistaken, as it turned out, that it was General Kienitz who in major's uniform performed this mission; Cf. T. Szarota, *Die Luftangriffe auf Warschau im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, "Acta Poloniae Historica" vol. 69, 1994, pp. 122–123 as well as *Naloty na Warszawę podczas II wojny światowej (Air Raids on Warsaw During World War II)*, "Kronika Warszawy" 1993, N^o 3/4, p. 16.

⁵⁰ On September 16, 1940 Goebbels wrote down that Kiewitz saw Hitler and told him about King Leopold, cross with England and studying with pleasure the Nazi ideology; see *Die Tagebücher* Bd. 4: *1.1.1940–8.7.1941*, München 1987, p. 282. This time again the editors misread Kiewitz as Kienitz in the manuscript and so they wrote in Interimregister. I received confirmation of the fact that it was Kiewitz who was liason officer of the Belgian king from the director of Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Historiques de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale in Brussels José Gotovitsch. At the same time I learnt that Kiewitz's first name was Werner (just like Gen. Kienitz's), that he wrote his name von Kiewitz and appeared in Belgium earlier as colonel. The function of Col. Kiewitz in Belgium is described more precisely by Czesław Małajczyk, who writes that he was "a liason officer between Hitler and Leopold", *Faszizm i okupacje 1938–1945. Wykonywanie okupacji przez państwa Osi w Europie (Fascism and Occupations 1938–1945. Occupation as Realized by Axis States in Europe)*, vol. I, *Ukształtowanie się rządów okupacyjnych (Occupation Administrations Take Shape)*, Poznań 1983, p. 322.

Annales

Histoire, Sciences Sociales

Fondateurs : Lucien FEBVRE et Marc BLOCH. Directeur : Fernand BRAUDEL
Revue bimestrielle publiée depuis 1929 par l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales
avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

50^e ANNÉE — N° 4

JUILLET-AOÛT 1995

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