

Anatomy of a Mennonite Miracle: The Berlin Rescue of 30-31 January 1947.

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Introduction

A formal note of protest was received at the American Embassy in Moscow in May of 1947. The protest claimed that 1,981 Mennonites, who were Soviet citizens, had been cleared by the American military authorities in Germany for emigration to Paraguay even though the Soviet occupation forces “did not (repeat not) give any sanction whatever for the dispatch of Soviet citizens to Paraguay.”¹

The Soviet note prompted a search of relevant military records in Berlin. The reply drafted by a military attaché in Berlin, quoting extensively from a telegram signed by Lt. General Lucius D. Clay, the former Deputy Military Governor, Germany, who had authorized the Mennonite emigration, read in part as follows:

Upon informal inquiry by General McNarney and myself during recess January 30 meeting, Soviet member Control Council stated he had no objection to transfer approximately 1000 Mennonites Berlin to US zone. Request made to avoid possibility incidents during train movement and not attempt at detailed explanation made by us (McNarney and Clay) as to exact Mennonite status, hence Sokolovsky's consent “may well have been given in ignorance” but nevertheless he concurred and movement completed satisfactorily. Recommend Sokolovsky not be implicated by name but merely reply train movement informally cleared Soviet High Command, Berlin...Our understanding is we are authorized by our government to resettle displaced alleged Soviet nationals not coming within repatriation agreement with Soviet Union.²

The dramatic rescue of 1,115 Soviet Mennonites from Berlin³ during the night of 30-31 January 1947 has long been of great interest to Mennonites.

The rescue has been described as a miracle,⁴ an answer to fervent prayer,⁵ or a consequence of alcoholic intemperance by Soviet officials.⁶ There seemed to be no logical explanation for the unexpected and unofficial authorization by the Soviet military commanders which allowed the Mennonite refugees to leave Berlin. It was a miracle as inexplicable as the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites of the Old Testament.⁷

The records of the Organization for the Military Government for Germany, United States (OMGUS), of the United States Forces, European Theatre (USFET), and of the Commander-in-Chief, Europe (CINCEUR), together with new published biographical material on General Lucius Dubignon Clay, provide a new and different perspective on those momentous events.

Much of the story, as it is known in Mennonite communities, is based on the work of two master story tellers, Peter J. Dyck and Barbara Smucker. The objective of both went far beyond a mere retelling of historical facts. Peter J. Dyck has stated emphatically that "our intent is to build up the church, to strengthen faith, to invite to serious, even costly discipleship."⁸ In the introduction to *Henry's Red Sea* Barbara Smucker promises to tell the story of a miracle, written so young people can understand an important part of contemporary Mennonite history.⁹

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck's recollections, and their three part video evocatively titled "Gott Kann" (God can), tell and retell the story essentially as myth rather than as history. Myths, according to a dictionary definition, are stories which "embody the convictions of a people as to their gods or other divine personages, their own origin and early history and the heroes connected with it."¹⁰ Myths can be, and I believe in this case are, factual, honest and accurate. They differ from other historical writing in their objectives, but not necessarily in their factual accuracy. The Dycks and Barbara Smucker candidly state that the religious meaning and significance of the dramatic and emotional events of January 30-31 in Berlin were most important to them.

A detailed examination of new archival documentation on this subject need not undermine or cast doubt on the religious significance of those events. It does, however, provide a partial explanation of events which have long been regarded by many as miraculous.

The Background

The unconditional surrender of the Third Reich in May of 1945 left the war-devastated country under allied military occupation. The three major allies, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States, divided Germany into four zones of occupation, the French achieving a post-war prominence not earned on the battle field. The cities of Berlin and Vienna were also divided into four zones of occupation, although it was expected that the allies would work closely together.

Each of the allies established their own military government in their zones, but an Allied Control Authority was established to co-ordinate the policies of the occupying powers. The governing body of the Allied Control Authority was the Allied Control Council on which each of the occupying powers had representation. In January of 1947 the four senior military officers of the Allied Control Council were Royal Air Force Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas of Great Britain, General Koenig of France, Marshal Vassily Danilovich Sokolovsky of the Soviet Union and General Joseph T. McNarney of the United States. McNarney, who had succeeded Dwight D. Eisenhower in November of 1945 as commander of the United States Forces, European Theatre (USFET), was primarily concerned with the administration of the United States forces in Europe and delegated most of the responsibility for the military government of Germany (OMGUS) to his deputy, Lieutenant General Lucius D. Clay. A similar arrangement had existed between Marshal Zhukov, the first Soviet representative on the Allied Control Council, and his deputy military governor Vassily Sokolovsky. Sokolovsky had been promoted when Marshal Zhukov returned to Moscow late in 1956.¹¹ Clay and Sokolovsky played crucial roles in the Berlin rescue of Soviet Mennonites.

The four military governors often found it difficult to work together in reasonable harmony. The Americans had particular difficulties with the French, but got along well with their Soviet counterparts.¹² Generals Eisenhower and Zhukov and Deputy Military Governors Clay and Sokolovsky became very friendly. Clay later recalled that "Eisenhower and Zhukov would always reminisce. Both of them had fabulous memories, and they were always telling what happened here, there and everywhere."¹³ According to Clay's biographer, Clay and Eisenhower were both "dedicated to FDR's goal of meaningful cooperation with the Soviet Union, and both rejected bellicose advice from American diplomats that confrontation was inevitable."¹⁴ That spirit of amity between the Soviet and American military commanders in Berlin still prevailed in the early months of 1947, and made possible the peaceful and orderly movement of the Soviet Mennonite refugees from Berlin to Bremerhaven.

The movement of these refugees was problematic because of agreements made between the three major Allies regarding the treatment and disposition of refugees and displaced persons. There were tens of millions of these people in Europe at the end of the war, but early in 1945 Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill had decided at meetings in Tehran and Yalta that displaced persons and refugees should be returned as quickly as possible to their own countries. Most refugees and displaced persons were eager to return to their homes, and at least ninety-five percent returned in the first five months after the end of the war in Europe. There were, however, at least 1,000,000 and perhaps as many as 2,000,000 refugees and displaced persons who could not return to their home countries, or were unwilling to do so. Most of these had been citizens of the Soviet Union when the war began.¹⁵

At Yalta Stalin and Roosevelt had signed an agreement relating to prisoners of war and civilians which outlined the procedures for the transfer of Soviet citizens liberated by the Americans, and American citizens liberated by the Soviets. Such citizens, whether prisoners of war and other civilians, were to be separated immediately from ordinary prisoners of war and other civilians. They were to be fed and maintained in separate camps or points of concentration "until they have been handed over to the Soviet or American authorities." The agreement did not explicitly address the problem of how Soviet citizens who refused repatriation should be handled. It neither sanctioned nor forbade the use of force in such cases.¹⁶

Soviet officials demanded the return, by force if necessary, of all people usually described in Soviet documents as "liberated Soviet citizens," arguing that only war criminals and people who had rendered aid and comfort to the enemy would reject the opportunity to return home. There were, however, many refugees and displaced persons who refused repatriation to the Soviet Union. Millions had suffered terrible hardship during the years of Soviet collectivization and the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. When German troops occupied large regions of the Soviet Union, many of the local people had collaborated with or enlisted in, German military units. After the war it was very common for such people to deny their Soviet citizenship. If that failed they insisted that their dealings with the Germans had been involuntary. They had been coerced, or had acted under duress.

Two groups presented particular problems. The first were members of a rather loosely organized Russian Army of Liberation led by dissident Red Army General Andrei Vlasov who had gained several brilliant victories early in the war but lost confidence in Joseph Stalin's leadership and plotted against him. Vlasov received some rather grudging support from Germans and at one time led as many as 900,000 men. Stalin wanted Vlasov and his men to stand trial in the Soviet Union for their alleged war crimes. Many of these men had fled westward during the last stages of the war, and there was inevitably violence when British or American commanders tried to turn any of the Vlasov followers over to the Soviets. Most were forcibly repatriated between May and September of 1945. Their tragic fate, and the adverse publicity associated with the involuntary repatriations, however, sharply reduced the enthusiasm of American and British military officials for any and all involuntary repatriations.¹⁷

A second large group of displaced persons and refugees also refused voluntary repatriation. These were an estimated 150,000 ethnic Germans, including approximately 35,000 Mennonites from eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. These people had lived in territories occupied by German forces in 1941 and 1942, and had been evacuated when the Germans had been forced to retreat following their defeat at Stalingrad. The Soviet government wanted all their former German citizens repatriated. Most, of course, resisted, and force was used from May until September of 1945 to repatriate approximately 80,000 of the 150,000 Soviet German refugees and displaced persons in Germany at the end of the war.¹⁸

The bulk of the repatriations were completed during the first five months following Germany's unconditional surrender, but it had been possible for many "liberated Soviet citizens" to avoid involuntary repatriation. There had, first of all, been considerable confusion in areas which were a part of the Soviet zone but which were held by British and American troops when the war ended. Once the Soviet military authorities gained effective control of all parts of the occupation zone assigned to them they resorted to harsh and continuing forced or involuntary repatriations of "liberated Soviet citizens" living in the Soviet zone.

The Soviets also argued that "liberated Soviet citizens" living in the American, British and French occupation zones should be turned over to Soviet authorities, by force if necessary. But some American and British military officials were never enthusiastic about forced repatriations of former Soviet citizens while others lost whatever enthusiasm they had when they saw the brutality and adverse publicity associated with the involuntary repatriations. They had no sympathy for proven war criminals, but questioned the repatriation of ordinary citizens who had merely done what seemed necessary to survive in the shifting tides of war.

One of those lacking enthusiasm for the involuntary repatriations was Lieutenant General Lucius Clay, the American deputy military governor in Germany. Clay was a Southerner and the son of a former United States senator. He had grown up on stories of suffering in the South following its defeat in the Civil War. It was widely believed that he brought a perspective rooted in the South's experiences during the Reconstruction era to the office of Deputy Military Governor, Germany. Clay explained how that impression was created:

At one of our meetings I said I was going to be damn sure that there weren't any carpetbaggers in the military government: that no one, if I could help it, was going to make an exorbitant profit out of Germany's defeat. Well, a lot of them didn't know what a carpetbagger was. But they went and looked it up, so they immediately determined that I'd been influenced by my background. Maybe I had.¹⁹

Throughout his administration Clay showed an unusual sensitivity for the sufferings of the victims of war. Perhaps that was due, at least in part, to the fact that he had never held a battlefield command. He had commanded the enormous Ordnance Department during the war, where he had dealt mainly with bureaucratic and administrative problems. Later he became the only American military commander to be specially honoured by the Jewish community for his efforts on behalf of Jewish refugees. He deserved similar honours from many other refugees. As early as November of 1945 Clay expressed the hope that the American sector of Berlin might become a "haven of refuge."

That optimistic statement co-incided with the appointment of General Joseph T. McNarney as Military Commander of USFET, succeeding General Dwight Eisenhower who had been promoted to become the American mil-

itary Chief of Staff. McNarney's attitude toward forcible repatriation of Soviet citizens became obvious on 4 January 1946 when he sent an official letter on the subject of "Repatriation of Soviet Citizens Subject to Repatriation Under the Yalta Agreement," to the senior military commanders in Germany. In this letter provision was made for the involuntary repatriation of three categories of persons who had been both citizens and residents of the Soviet Union on 1 September 1939. The three categories were:

- a. Those captured in German uniforms.
- b. Those who were members of the Soviet Armed Forces on and after 22 June 1941 and who were not subsequently discharged therefore.
- c. Those charged by the Soviet Union with having voluntarily rendered aid and comfort to the enemy, provided the Soviet Union satisfies the US Military authorities of the substantiality of the charge by supplying in each case, with reasonable particularity, the time, place, and nature of the offenses and the perpetrator thereof. A person's announced resistance to his repatriation or acceptance of ordinary employment in German industry or agriculture shall not of itself be construed as constituting rendition of aid and comfort to the enemy.

The new procedures placed the onus of proof entirely on Soviet repatriation officers. If they provided proof satisfactory to the US military authorities that an individual had voluntarily rendered aid and comfort to the enemy that person could be repatriated "without regard to their personal wishes and by force if necessary."

The letter also indicated how United States military commanders should deal with those Soviet citizens refusing repatriation who did not fall into any of the three previously cited categories. Commanders should make every effort to facilitate the repatriation of such individuals, but the order then went on to state specifically that "you are not authorized to compel involuntary repatriation." Soviet repatriation officers must be granted access to Soviet citizens refusing repatriation, but if no proof was furnished that an individual fell into one of the three indicated categories involuntary repatriation must not occur.²⁰ The policy of involuntary repatriations had thus been significantly modified. It was no longer a general threat hanging over the heads of all "liberated Soviet citizens" who did not wish to return to their homeland. The new instructions were not always scrupulously observed, but they confirmed policies Lucius Clay had advocated for months.

In this confused and rapidly changing situation a small group of Soviet Mennonites found their way to the American sector of Berlin. They were still treated by the American military authorities like any other refugees and displaced persons. Few questions were asked. The Americans were not interested in gathering information which they were obliged to share with their Soviet counterparts but which might then be used to support Soviet demands for the involuntary repatriation of these desperate refugees.

One very unusual Mennonite made it his personal mission to assist these frightened Soviet Mennonite refugees who had found temporary refuge in the American sector of Berlin. He was John J. Kroeker, son of Jacob Kroeker who was a prominent Russian Mennonite theologian, evangelist and publisher who had left Russia to live in Germany in 1910. John Kroeker had moved to America and married there, but returned to Germany in 1939. He later wrote that he had lived in Berlin since 1940, and survived by doing whatever was necessary at the time. Peter J. Dyck reported that John Kroeker had worked at the Nazi SS headquarters during the war, using his SS contacts and information from the fields of the *Sicherheits Dienst* of the SS to establish closer contacts with Soviet Mennonite refugees when these were being evacuated from the Ukraine and resettled in Poland. Robert Kreider, however, has stated that Kroeker worked for the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (VOMI) in Lodz during the war. Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, also had responsibility for the work of VOMI, but it was administratively separate from the SS. Kroeker had, in any case, obtained permission in May and again in October of 1944 to visit many of the Soviet German and Mennonite evacuees.

Kroeker was very much concerned about the welfare of the Soviet Mennonite refugees, and worked very hard to contact and register as many of them as he could. With the support of some friends, he established a small office in Berlin which he gave the impressive title of "Menno-Center, Provisional Representative of the Mennonite Central Committee," even though he had no authorization from the Mennonite Central Committee to do so. He later explained his independent actions thus:

By beginning at a time when everybody was dazed yet from the shock of the collapse I could lease a floor at the above address, which will serve whatever needs will come up. An amount of repairs and renovations has still to be made, and I am not yet having any glass in the windows. But the city tries to help me, and way back in my mind I am hiding some hopes that I might have a chance to win with the aid of the Red Cross or the Military Government, as far as building materials are concerned.²²

These efforts were of great value to the desperate and terrified refugees. Through his office and extensive travels throughout the Soviet zone Kroeker brought many refugees to the comparative safety of the American sector of Berlin. But most of these refugees had no formal legal status in Berlin. The Americans and United Nations relief administrators provided only very limited assistance, but the weak and still ineffective civilian German government refused to provide food rations or employment permits. There was consequently a constant struggle to get the emergency food, shelter, clothing and other essential supplies needed by the refugees. In his efforts to meet these needs John Kroeker was able to establish particularly good relations with Mr. C.F. Taylor, the director of Team 501 of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Taylor allowed Kroeker to use the UNRRA office and postal connections, through which Kroeker was able to contact

American and British military officials and senior MCC officers in North America.²³ Taylor and the Food Agriculture Unit of OMGUS also provided emergency food rations, and early in 1946 208 of the Soviet Mennonite refugees were admitted to the UNRRA camp at Zehlendorf. One perceptive early Mennonite observer of Kroeker's work assessed it thus:

Though Kroeker's political history is blemished, I am fully confident that God has used this humble, sacrificial man as an instrument of His Will. He has given his all to these Mennonite refugees. To them he has been the shepherd. Kroeker reports that he was imprisoned for two days some months ago by Allied Security. He says that he told them his story in full. Counter intelligence is keeping an eye on him. From the F.A.U. [the Food and Agriculture Unit of OMGUS] men, who have been helping this little group with food packages, I learned that Security is keeping tab on Kroeker. The F.A.U. men feel that Kroeker is a very sincere, devoted — though imperfect man.²⁴

Kroeker's methods had been honed in the desperate experiences of life in Berlin during the final days of the Third Reich. They were unorthodox, sometimes exploitative, but also desperately needed by many of the refugees. One of Kroeker's more daring and controversial actions involved the issuing of unauthorized identity cards which Mennonite refugees then used as passes on the streetcars and trains, and to obtain emergency assistance. These passes were small cards on which Kroeker had stamped:

Menno-Centre
Prov. Representation of the
Mennonite Central Committee
J.J. Kroeker, Manager.

Astonished and legitimately appointed MCC officials later reported that "the amazing thing is that they [the Berlin refugees] show these slips at railway stations and are given free transportation into Berlin, no difficulties encountered whatsoever."²⁵ Kroeker's passes were unusual, but had a precedent in the unofficial "Nansen" passes issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the 1930s and by the "Menno" passes issued by MCC officials in order to expedite the movement of Mennonite refugees into Holland. They were all based on the assumption that the refugees involved were "stateless," or whose national identity was in dispute. They needed some form of identification which the informal passes provided.²⁶

Kroeker's administrative practices were unusual. He was also seriously hampered by his wartime record of service with the SS, but his most serious problems, at least as far as MCC officials were concerned, related to a fondness for alcoholic beverages. Various Mennonite leaders who dealt with Kroeker and with the refugees he had taken under his wing commented on Kroeker's drinking, which together with his tainted political past made Kroeker unsuitable as an official representative of the Mennonites.

Kroeker rendered desperately needed help and encouragement to the Soviet Mennonite refugees in the American sector of Berlin immediately after the war. He could not, however, solve the long-term problems of the refugees. They needed a new country to which they could emigrate to begin life anew. The economic conditions in Berlin made permanent residence for refugees not afforded proper legal status impossible. The German zones occupied by the western allies already had an enormous surplus of destitute refugees, and the local civilian authorities were as reluctant as those in Berlin to give refugees from the east food ration cards or work permits. Soviet officials, on the other hand, continued to press their claims that these refugees be repatriated.

The Crisis of June 1946

Soviet military officials became aware of the Soviet Mennonites in the American sector of Berlin late in 1945 or early in 1946. They first made informal requests for authorization to interrogate the refugees, but met with no co-operation from the Americans. The Americans had become disillusioned with the forced repatriation practises and discontinued them late in 1945. John Kroeker, and a little later C.F. Klassen, M.C. Lehman and Sam Goering, had established amicable relations with Major Thompson, the Chief Displaced Persons Officer of the Berlin Command of OMGUS, providing him with information about the Soviet Mennonite refugees and their history. Kroeker, in a review of the history of the Soviet Mennonite refugees which he sent to C.F. Taylor, the UNRRA administrator in Berlin, described them "as one of the most severely haunted and persecuted group of people of the world. Only the Jews in Germany can be compared to them."²⁷ He evidently hoped a policy comparable to that implemented for Jewish refugees might be applied to the Soviet Mennonite refugees. MCC officials, on the other hand, were more inclined to emphasize the Dutch ancestry of these Mennonite refugees, particularly since the Dutch government had allowed some of the refugees into Holland because they claimed they were of Dutch ancestry.²⁸ This difference of emphasis when dealing with the citizenship of the refugees did not prevent complete agreement between Kroeker and MCC administrators that emigration overseas offered the only feasible long-term solution to the problems of the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin. In the meantime, the threat of forced repatriation remained.

In June of 1946 Soviet repatriation officers officially demanded free access to all the Mennonite refugees in Berlin, as was their right under the Yalta Agreement. The American military authorities complied, and on 17 June 1946 Soviet repatriation officers interviewed the heads of families representing some 430 Mennonites. All the Mennonites denied that they were Soviet citizens, but the Soviet repatriation officer Colonel Wassiljtchifoff concluded that they had in fact been citizens of the Soviet Union on 1 September 1939. An American board of officers appointed to determine the citizenship of these people also concluded "that all of the Mennonites at

present in Berlin were citizens of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, with the exception of three families who had been in Berlin since 1929." The Americans informed the Soviet repatriation officers of their findings.²⁹

The American military officers also forwarded to their Soviet counterparts a copy of General McNarney's military letter of 4 January 1946. The Soviets were then invited to:

Submit in writing a list of the names of those persons in this group who, in their opinion, fall within the categories mentioned in paragraph 1, subparagraphs a, b, and c of inclosure No. 1, together with written evidence substantiating this claim. It is requested that this list be presented to this Headquarters not later than the 15th of August 1946.³⁰

The Soviet repatriation officers never submitted the requested list, together with the required written evidence, and on 21 August 1946 the American commanding officer of the Berlin district sent a second letter, noting that no reply had been received to his earlier letter. He then went on to say:

I am now assuming that you have no further interest in these people and I will take immediate steps to dispose of them as contemplated under the provisions of the letter, Headquarters, United States Forces, European Theater, dated 4 January 1946.³¹

The OMGUS records provide no direct evidence why Soviet repatriation officers did not submit a list of the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin, but their efforts elsewhere to secure the repatriation of such refugees had not been successful. While they could, in many cases, demonstrate that these people had collaborated with, or served in German military units, American officials generally accepted Mennonite and other Soviet German refugee claims that they had done so under duress. It was difficult for the Soviets to prove, to the satisfaction of the American authorities, that such collaboration had been entirely voluntary. Without documentary and detailed proof provided by the Soviet repatriation officers, the Soviet Mennonite refugees in the American sector of Berlin were not in imminent danger of involuntary repatriation. The crucial American policy change occurred more than a year before the frightened refugees left Berlin, but they had no way of knowing that, and forced repatriations from the Soviet zone continued even after the western allies ceased to co-operate with the repatriation of refugees in their zones.

The new American policy had been communicated immediately to the Soviets, but not to the refugees. It remained American policy to encourage and facilitate, by any "practical arrangements which exclude the use of force, threat or coercion," the repatriation of "liberated Soviet citizens." Soviet repatriation officers were readily admitted to the refugee camps to gather information, and American officers were required to "minimize the development of organized resistance to repatriation." Known leaders of

resistance groups were to be segregated, and groups of resisters were separated into smaller groups "to prevent continuance or recurrence of organized resistance."³² The use of force, except for Soviet citizens falling into one of the three designated categories where irrefutable proof had been provided was, however, no longer authorized.

Some American and British military officers reportedly did not follow the new repatriation policy enunciated in the letter of 4 January 1946. MCC worker Peter J. Dyck later complained that many Soviet Mennonites were forcibly repatriated "surprisingly late."

First of all let me say that it was surprisingly late that the Americans and the British stopped cooperating with the Russians and handing Russian-born refugees over to them on demand. The Russians came in all boldness across the borders into the camps and asked the camp leader if he had any people in his camp from Russia? If the answer was yes the Russians proposed to take them off their hands, and the Americans and the British used to think that was just great. That's what we're here for to solve the refugee problem. Good, take them, that's 100 or 1000 less. And they would hand them over to be shipped back to the Soviet Union.³³

Dyck is vague about precise dates, and after making the above charge immediately goes on to discuss the tragedy of the 23,000 Soviet Mennonites who were forcibly repatriated after the war, without making the necessary distinction that almost all of those forcible repatriations occurred within five months of Germany's unconditional surrender. Refugees caught in the Soviet zone remained subject to involuntary repatriation, even after the change of American policy. Unofficially that change came early in October of 1945. It was made official on 4 January 1946.

The interviews by Soviet repatriation officers of the heads of Soviet Mennonite refugee families in June of 1946 caused understandable panic among the refugees and the MCC officials eager to help them. The refugees could not remain indefinitely in Berlin. Most lacked food ration books or work permits. UNRRA and OMGUS agencies which had provided emergency assistance were growing tired and impatient, while Soviet pressure to repatriate the refugees threatened the amicable relations which senior Soviet and American military commanders were trying to maintain. The refugees desperately needed a new place, preferably overseas where they could begin a new life.

The Search for a Way Out

The plight of some refugees in Berlin was reported in the *New York Times* on 19 June 1946, followed by reports on 29 June that these refugees had been allowed to leave for a South American country. The precedent thus set greatly strengthened the determination of American military officers to resolve the problem of the Mennonite refugees without further unfavourable publicity.³⁴ A long-term solution had to be found for the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin, whose number continued to grow throughout 1946 as more and more people who had been in hiding in the Soviet zone found their way to

this “haven of refuge.” Emigration seemed the only practical solution, and the June 1946 crisis prompted decisive action by Lt. Col. William Stinson, the American military officer responsible for Displaced Persons in the Berlin Military District, OMGUS.

Stinson and his predecessor, Major Thompson, had been carefully briefed by several Mennonite leaders. John Kroeker had provided detailed information on the history and identity of the refugees, first to UNRRA administrators and then, during the third week of September, to American military officials. These efforts were reinforced by C.F. Klassen, who briefly visited Berlin in December of 1945, and after that by other MCC administrators. Klassen promised to do what he could to have MCC send relief supplies to the refugees, while at the same time working on plans for the emigration of the refugees. Klassen apparently recognized that involuntary repatriation was no longer an imminent danger for the 112 Soviet Mennonite refugees he found crowded into 16 rooms in one large house in Berlin. He agreed that emigration provided the only long-term solution to the problems of these refugees. In his reports to Canadian Mennonites in January 1946, Klassen referred to intense Soviet attempts to persuade refugees to return voluntarily. He also cited instances where determined resistance had been successful.³⁵ He promised to get emergency relief to the refugees, and began to work on emigration plans.

Klassen’s very brief visit to Berlin in December of 1945 was followed three and a half months later by a second short visit by another North American whose main responsibility it was to make appropriate arrangements for the shipment and distribution of emergency relief supplies sent by volunteer relief agencies. Klassen, as already indicated, had promised that the MCC would provide relief supplies. The military authorities, however, wanted a co-ordinated and orderly relief distribution organization. They did not want a host of independent voluntary relief agencies, getting in the way of the military while doing what seemed best to each of them, without reference to the priorities and policies established by the military governments. A special umbrella organization, the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operations in Germany (CRALOG), was therefore created in early 1946. All the voluntary relief agencies operating in the American, and a little later in the British zones, had to become members and operate as a part of CRALOG. A parallel umbrella organization, the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA), operated briefly in the British zone before relief activities in the two zones were more closely co-ordinated.

MCC was one of the founding members of CRALOG. It named a young American Mennonite, Robert Kreider, as its representative on the CRALOG council. Kreider, as a CRALOG official, visited Berlin in April of 1946 for several weeks as a member of the vanguard CRALOG team to negotiate program understandings with OMGUS. The negotiations were prolonged, and any involvement Kreider had with the Soviet Mennonite refugees was unplanned and outside his official mandate. His letters and reports,

particularly those to MCC officials in North American, are, nevertheless, a model of clarity and perceptiveness.

Kreider quickly established contact with John Kroeker and wrote a moving account of his first encounter with the refugees. His reports on Kroeker's work and his blemished political history and his problems with alcohol have been cited above. He then added:

I informed Kroeker that I was in no position to authorize his efforts for the MCC. My job was CRALOG. I explained that I have a great "extra-curricular" concern in his work, however. Further, I explained that the MCC could ill afford to have him as an official representative in view of his debatable past. Of course, unofficially we are ready to back him to the hilt.³⁶

Kreider also had extensive conversations with Major Thompson, who had been consul for Paraguay in Philadelphia. He had come to know the Mennonites while serving in that capacity, and worked on their behalf when posted to Berlin. Thompson informed Kreider in April of 1946 that:

Russians to turn over these 210 Mennonites to the Soviet Allies. Thompson and his superior, General Barker—Director of the Berlin Military District, are much concerned that these folk be saved from extermination. Thompson, an enormously self-confident man but full of integrity, said that he is ready to stake his position on these people. But he needs, he says he needs desperately some assurance, that Canada will take these people. If he had some such written assurance, his negotiating power in Quadripartite debates would be immeasurably strengthened. There is a probability that on April 15 the Russians will request in writing, what they have requested only orally, that these Mennonites be turned over to the Soviets. Thompson, in his tough army way, has told the Russians that if he does not receive a written request before midnight April 15, he will consider that the Russians have no further right to these people... Any definite Paraguayan and/or Canadian immigration promises will spell life for these Mennonites. Meanwhile the refugees continue to pour into the island of Berlin.³⁷

Kreider had assessed the situation correctly. The American military officers in the Berlin Military District and senior OMGUS officers were not willing to turn the Mennonite refugees in Berlin over to the Soviets, but the refugees could not remain in Berlin either. Emigration was the only reasonable alternative, and Kreider concluded his long report with a recommendation "That someone be selected to come into Germany to work specifically on the Mennonite DP problem of which Berlin and Russian Zone have perhaps the most critical problems."³⁸ That someone turned out to be Peter J. Dyck, whose posting to Berlin was approved in June of 1946 immediately after Soviet repatriation officers made their official request to interview the refugees.

MCC officials in Europe and the United States responded quickly to the information provided by Robert Kreider. Enquiries regarding immigration prospects were made with the help of State Department officials in Washington. These made it clear that it would be virtually impossible to bring the Berlin refugees immediately to Canada or the United States. The government

of Paraguay, however, was willing to accept the refugees immediately, provided a ship could be found to transport them across the Atlantic. Shipping was still very scarce, but the services of a Greek ship were tentatively booked, provided the necessary authorization could be obtained to move the refugees. Delays eventually forced MCC officials to seek other shipping arrangements, but the search for a new homeland, and the means to get them there, was as critical to the rescue of the refugees as the work entrusted to Peter and Elfrieda Dyck in Berlin.

Dyck's assignment, in his own words, was "to take them [the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin] out of [the American military officers'] hands and out of their Sector. He [Lt. Col. Stinson who had succeeded Major Thompson as Displaced Persons officer in the Berlin Military District] wanted me to get those 125 out."³⁹ MCC, working in close collaboration with the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, was to find a country to which these refugees could go.

On his arrival in Berlin, Dyck immediately encountered John Kroeker. He readily acknowledged that Kroeker had rendered invaluable service in gathering and protecting the refugees. Kroeker could not, however, be of much help in making the necessary arrangements for the emigration of the refugees. Dyck quickly took complete control of the refugees, insisting that Kroeker "sever all connections with the refugees." "We did not," Dyck later said, "want him [Hans Kroeker] to be part of the MCC operation. That became very clear to me from the very beginning."⁴⁰ Dyck justified this action, charging that

Kroeker was an alcoholic. He both saved our people by luring them to him and protecting them in that partially destroyed building, and at the same time he used our people. He used them by frightening them that the Russians were going to get them. They were within a few blocks of the Russian Zone. Now if they could give him something, if they had anything like gold rings, some jewelry, clothing, maybe a little food, then he would bribe the Russians and they would leave them alone. Of course, they believed him. He was their protector. They stripped themselves and handed it over to him. I am told by these people that it took some time until they began to notice something rather curious. That every time when there was a Russian scare, every time when he said they are going to get you, every time when he came for more stuff to bribe them with, every time when that happened and they handed stuff over to him, he came home staggering and drunk. They began to be suspicious about these "wolf, wolf" stories. Still they had no choice. They were flies in his spider web.⁴¹

Dyck was apparently aware of the policy of the western allies regarding the involuntary repatriation of refugees in their zones. He assisted when the interviews of the heads of refugee families were followed by more detailed interviews and enumerations of all the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin, stating confidently that "I believe they [the refugees] have nothing to fear because they will be declared 'stateless' and therefore are genuine 'D.P.s'. Even if not, they still do not fall into any of the three categories... which are

the only ones by which they can be forcibly repatriated.”⁴² He wrote to another MCC worker with even greater confidence.

Off the record I can say this, however, that the US officers who interviewed our people were deeply impressed with what they saw and heard and more than one of them, in particular Col. Stinson, has assured me that before the Russians get them... well, the Russians won't get them, that's all. I am convinced they won't.⁴³

Dyck was concerned about getting approval from the Soviets to move the refugees out of Berlin, but the most pressing problem in July of 1946 was to make arrangements so the refugees would have a place to go after leaving Berlin. That was not easy. Canada, the preferred destination of the refugees, still had a very restrictive immigration policy. Paraguay was willing to admit them, but there was a serious shortage of shipping immediately after the war. Protracted negotiations eventually secured for the MCC the charter services of the Dutch ship *Volendam*, but MCC had to guarantee the cost of almost \$500,000. Complicated European transportation arrangements also had to be made, the most problematic being the movement of the refugees from Berlin, across the Soviet zone, to their proposed point of debarkation at Bremerhaven. All the necessary arrangements were finally agreed to, at least orally. The *Volendam* was to leave Bremerhaven on 1 February 1947, carrying the approximately 1,000 Mennonite refugees in Berlin and an approximately equal number of Soviet Mennonite refugees from other camps in the American zone of occupied Germany. There were, however, fears that the Soviet military authorities would not permit the removal of the Berlin refugees. The western allies had transit rights across the Soviet zone to their sectors of Berlin, but there might still be a military encounter if the Americans tried to move the refugees whose nationality was in dispute across the Soviet zone without official Soviet permission. The whole problem of Allied transit rights, of course, became the focus of a major international incident in 1948, culminating in the massive American Berlin air lift. In January of 1947 Generals Clay and Sokolovsky, whose relations were much more cordial than those between their political masters, still hoped to avoid such an incident.

The Rescue

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, working closely with Lt. Col. Stinson and other American military officials, made all the necessary preparations for the evacuation. No official permission was ever obtained from Soviet officials in Berlin, but General McNarney and Lt. Gen. Clay were able to obtain unofficial authorization from Marshal Sokolovsky to move the refugees. Sokolovsky's actions in this instance were consistent with the amicable relations that had prevailed from the beginning between Clay and Sokolovsky.

Clay and Sokolovsky respected one another and got on well together. Their wives also maintained amicable social relationships. Clay later recalled some of the happy times he and his wife spent with the Sokolovskys.

Marshal Sokolovsky's wife came. She used to come over with him and have dinner with us every once in a while, look at a movie. We went over and had dinner with them a couple of times. In other words, it was really very friendly until '47... I liked Sokolovsky, I really did. He could quote the Bible more frequently and more accurately than anybody I'd known. He was very intelligent. Very interesting. Loved to read English novels, especially Jane Austin.⁴⁴

The OMGUS records contain a number of invitations exchanged between the Clays and Sokolovskys to dinners and social and entertainment functions. In Washington and Moscow the volume of acrimonious rhetoric between the two wartime allies had escalated rapidly after the death of President Roosevelt in 1945 and the espionage disclosures of Igor Gouzenko which, when finally taken seriously in July of 1946, marked the alleged beginning of the Cold War. But those tensions did not immediately strain the amicable relations between the two senior military commanders in Berlin. Clay's biography describes how they dealt with the growing tension between their two countries.

There was a great deal of mutual respect and each appeared to recognize that the insults and denunciations that were a standing feature at their meetings had nothing personal in them... Sokolovsky, because he had been trained in a school of diplomacy where the calculated insult was a standard weapon, and Clay, because he was alert and adaptable. They never stood on their dignity once the fishwives' sessions were over. Out they would go to the bar, arm in arm, and have a drink.

In this favourable atmosphere, Clay managed on occasion to score some points by applying quiet diplomacy in the course of off-the-record conversations. One day at the Control Council, when the Soviet deputy military governor had read a particularly offensive statement obviously drafted by one of Moscow's party hacks, Clay took Sokolovsky aside and politely pointed out that such speeches were hardly helpful toward continued co-operation of the two countries. The Russian listened quietly and did not reply. But for a long time no such provocative speeches were forthcoming. In a similar fashion, Clay was able to end the kidnapping of German prisoners, probably in an effort to gain intelligence, from the trains from Berlin to Helmstedt under American control. After a number of such incidents he again had a private conversation with his Soviet counterpart. He would be constrained, Clay said, to put guards of fifty soldiers with machine guns on each of the American trains with instructions to shoot anyone who boarded the train or interfered with its operation. He added that such an incident would be unwelcome in America as well as in Russia. Throughout the meeting he was consistently polite and thoroughly businesslike. Shortly after this conversation, Sokolovsky issued an order forbidding any train jumping or kidnapping.⁴⁵

The arrangements for the removal of the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin were handled in the same way as these other incidents. Clay or his subordinates had made it very clear that they would not turn the refugees over to the Soviets unless specific documentary proof was provided that they had

voluntarily rendered aid and comfort to the enemy or were covered under one of the other clearly defined categories of Soviet citizens subject to forcible repatriation. The Americans also made it clear that the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin would be moved, with or without Soviet permission. Fifteen years later, when Frank H. Epp wrote to General Clay asking about his recollections of the incident, Clay replied:

I do remember that I called Marshal Sokolovsky to demand a pass for the Mennonites which I obtained. If we had not obtained the pass, we would have moved them out any way.⁴⁶

Clay had decided to move the refugees, but hoped to avoid an unfortunate incident. He gave instructions to the appropriate subordinate officers to ensure that all necessary preparations be made, including the placing of armed guards on the train just in case their services might be needed.

One of the American military officers closely identified with the exodus later wrote:

I was of the opinion that General Clay obtained permission for movement of the Mennonites from some staff officers of Sokolovsky and not the Marshal himself. If my memory serves me correctly this permission was obtained while Gen. Clay was attending a party given by Sokolovsky on Tuesday prior to the movement of the Mennonites on 30 January, 1947.⁴⁷

This letter suggests that on Tuesday, January 28, General Clay persuaded Soviet staff officers not to oppose the movement of the Mennonite refugees out of Berlin. The Soviet staff officers may have agreed while under the influence of liquor, but they did not have the authority to make a final decision in the matter.

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck indicate in their detailed and comprehensive recollections that the original departure date was changed at the last minute. The OMGUS records shed no new light on the reasons for this change. They simply explain the sequence of events of 30-31 January 1946. There is no reason to dispute the statement by the Dycks that Lt. Col. Stinson had made detailed preparations for an earlier departure. Stinson's own letter suggests that he believed the concurrence of Soviet officers at the party on 28 January cleared the last remaining obstacles, while the Dycks' descriptions of Stinson's reactions when the date was changed suggest that he was overruled for reasons he did not understand.

The delay or change of the departure of the refugees from Berlin led to efforts by MCC officials in Washington to exert pressure on the State Department. Those efforts elicited only a short and sharp directive not to move the Mennonites from Berlin without Russian permission.⁴⁸

The failure to move the refugees on the date originally scheduled prompted Peter Dyck to prepare a letter of petition and to seek a personal interview with General Clay on 27 January 1947.⁴⁹ He was received politely but offered no assurances.

Alternative plans for a possible later departure were mentioned, but the disappointment and uncertainty proved terribly unsettling and added drama and suspense to later accounts of the rescue. A special prayer meeting was arranged, which subsequently became a key part of the story as Mennonites know it. The American military records, of course, make no reference to the prayer meeting, but Elfrieda Dyck describes it thus:

That evening [January 29], around suppertime, they called from [the camp and, I think it was Abraham Fast that called me, and said, a number of people had been in the office this afternoon and asked whether we could have a prayer meeting this evening... When I came to the camp later the prayer meeting was just over, but the people told me about it. They all felt that it had been a wonderful meeting, they had prayed for a miracle. That God would do a miracle. They knew that the ship was supposed to leave the next day. As I went from one house to another I happened to see one of the older men setting his suitcase outside his door in the hallway. I went to him and asked, Mr. Sawatzky what are you doing? Well, he said, you know, we prayed for a miracle and I want to be ready if God is going to answer our prayer. So I am packed and ready to go. It was amazing what this did to the other refugees who heard him.⁵⁰

Lt. Gen. Clay had not received authorization from Marshal Sokolovsky when the first departure time came. He and General McNarney had stated repeatedly that they would not turn the refugees over to the Soviets. But they preferred to move them from Berlin to Bremerhaven with rather than without Soviet authorization. Perhaps Clay had hoped to get Sokolovsky's concurrence earlier, but meetings of the Allied Control Council provided the best opportunity for informal and unofficial arrangements between the two commanders.

The meeting of the Allied Control Council was held on Thursday, 30 January 1947. The meeting began at 2:30 p.m. During a recess at mid-afternoon McNarney and Clay asked Sokolovsky if he would object if they transferred approximately 1,000 Mennonites from Berlin to the United States zone. Sokolovsky agreed to the transfer in much the same way that he had responded to other problems he and Clay had resolved informally.⁵¹ The American staff officers were informed at 4:30, and met at 5:00 p.m. to make final arrangements for the departure of the Mennonite refugees. Peter Dyck had gone back to Bremerhaven where he feared he would be faced with the difficult decision whether to delay the departure of the *Volendam* or to allow it to sail without the Berlin refugees. It seemed to him that the Berlin refugees would not be allowed to go. But at 6:30 on January 30 Elfrieda Dyck was informed that the people would be taken out and must be ready, with their baggage outside their houses, at 8:00 p.m. They would be picked up by military trucks.

The truck and train trip was delayed several hours but there were no diplomatic or military incidents. The refugees left the Lichterfelde-West train station at 2:45 a.m. on 31 January 1947. The train arrived at the border crossing of Helmstedt at 2:20 p.m. and at Bremerhaven at 1:34 a.m. the next

morning, 1 February 1947. The people and their baggage were immediately loaded onto the *Volendam* which departed for Paraguay at 4:00 p.m. of the same day.⁵²

Conclusion:

The military records in Washington provide logical and rational explanations for an event which those directly involved in it, and many others who have heard their story, have long regarded a miracle. In the Mennonite accounts the sympathetic, co-operative and helpful support of Major Thompson and Lt. Col. Wm. Stinson are often singled out for praise. That praise is justified, but these American officers could have accomplished very little on their own. It was the fundamentally decent and humanitarian refugee policy officially enunciated slightly more than a year before the rescue of the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin which made possible that rescue. The fact that there was no military incident while the forty-car train filled with the refugees and their effects made its way across the Soviet zone was due to the relatively amicable and practical way in which Lieutenant General Clay and Marshal Sokolovsky dealt with many problems that arose between the two occupying powers.

The nature of the relationship between Clay and Sokolovsky became evident again when Clay had to deal with the Soviet note of protest. The note itself was apparently a result of extensive coverage given the story in the North American press. The *New York Times* portrayed the entire incident as a major American diplomatic victory over Marshal Sokolovsky,⁵³ but in his response to the Senate Department's request for information General Clay took great care not to embarrass or harm Sokolovsky. He specifically asked that Sokolovsky's name be kept out of any official reply, and then provided a ready excuse if Sokolovsky were to be taken to task by his Soviet masters. Sokolovsky, Clay noted, had not been given detailed explanations, and his consent "may well have been in ignorance."⁵⁴

Mennonites are not inclined to see much in military leaders, particularly in a Marshal of the Soviet army, deserving of praise or even respect. During war and in the military governance of a defeated people many terrible things happen. But the rescue from Berlin of 1,115 Soviet Mennonite refugees without bloodshed or a serious military encounter is not only a story of what God and his busy and hardworking MCC workers did. A Marshal of the Red Army who could quote more Scripture more accurately than most Christians, and the first American to become a full general in the United States army without any combat experience, also played a vital role in the events of 30-31 January 1947.

Notes

¹United States National Archives (hereafter referred to as USNA, RG 59, Department of State, File 740-00119 control (Germany)/ 1-3147. Telegram from Marshall to USPOLAD Berlin, 15 May 1947.

²*Ibid.*, File 740.00119 Control (Germany)/6-947, Telegram from Murphy, Berlin, quoting Lt. General Lucius D. Clay, to Riddleberger, Assistant Secretary of State, Department of State, Washington, 9 June 1947. Drafts of General Clay's report, together with several drafts of the telegram eventually sent are in USNA, RG 260, Organization for the Military Government of Germany, United States, (OMGUS), Adjutant General's Office, (AGO), Decimal File [hereafter OMGUS AGO], 383.7 — 1947. The clause asserting the right of the United States military officers to permit the emigration of Soviet citizens from the U.S. zone of Germany apparently caused the greatest concern and was redrafted at least three times before the telegram was sent from OMGUS to the Department of State.

³There is an inconsistency in the various records regarding the number of Mennonite refugees involved in the Berlin rescue. Lt. Col. Wm. Stinson who was in charge of the actual transportation of the refugees from Berlin to Bremerhaven and subsequently wrote a very detailed and factually precise report stated that 1,115 Mennonite refugees had been taken out. The exchange of telegrams between OMGUS and the Department of State refers to 1,025 Mennonites, but Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus, The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution*, (Altona, Man.: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council), 1962, (hereafter Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*), p. 378, refers to only 928 Mennonite refugees in Berlin in January of 1947. The number given in Robert Kreider, *Interviews with Peter J. Dyck and Elfrieda Klassen Dyck*, (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee), 1988 (hereafter *Dyck Interviews*) p. 259 and 264 is 1,205 refugees. Herbert and Maureen Klassen, *Ambassador to His People. C.F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees*, (Winnipeg: Kindred Press) 1990 (hereafter Klassen, *Ambassador*) p. 132, say the figure is 1,125.

⁴Klassen, *Ambassador*, p. 145.

⁵*Dyck Interviews*, p. 247. A complete transcript of these lengthy unpublished interviews is available at the Conrad Grebel College Archives. I am grateful to the Executive Secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee for granting me permission to use and quote from these interviews.

⁶Conrad Grebel College Archives, (hereafter CGCA), Hist. Mss. 1.26.7, Frank H. Epp Collection. Notes on an interview with Bill Snyder, March 8, 1962, and Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 378.

⁷Barbara Smucker, *Henry's Red Sea*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press), 1955.

⁸Peter J. Dyck to Ted Regehr, 30 January 1991. Peter Dyck's constructive and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article are gratefully acknowledged. Robert Kreider also responded to the earlier draft in a letter dated 16 January 1991 to Harry Loewen who made a copy available to me. Both of these participants in those events have allowed me complete freedom to interpret the events as I thought appropriate, but their comments have helped me to understand some aspects of the situation in Berlin better, and they have also corrected several factual errors.

⁹Barbara Smucker, *Henry's Red Sea*, Introduction.

¹⁰*The Consolidated-Webster Comprehensive Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Chicago: Webster's), 1953, p. 478.

¹¹Biographical information, and details of the offices held by Clay and Sokolovsky are given in John H. Backer, *Winds of History: The German Years of Lucius DuBignon Clay* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold), 1983, (hereafter Backer, *Winds of History*), p. 87.

¹²Backer, *Winds of History*, and Jean Edward Smith, *Lucius D. Clay, An American Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Co.) 1990, (hereafter Smith, *Clay*).

¹³Smith, *Clay*, p. 261.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁵There were also large numbers of refugees and displaced persons who had been citizens of other East European countries on 1 September 1939. The new post-war governments in all the East European countries other than the Soviet Union readily accepted refugees of non-German ethnic background, but refused to readmit Germans. Those countries, in fact, expelled ethnic Germans still living within their borders. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, insisted on the repatriation of all "liberated Soviet citizens."

¹⁶OMGUS, AGO, 383.7 -1945-6, "Agreement Relating to Prisoners of War and Civilians Liberated by Forces Operating Under Soviet Command and Forces Operating under United States of America Command, done at the Crimea on 11 February 1945."

¹⁷For details of the violence which accompanied these repatriations, and the subsequent tragic fate of those repatriated see Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 1977.

¹⁸The comparable Mennonite figures usually cited are 35,000 Soviet Mennonite refugees and displaced persons, 23,000 of which were forcibly repatriated. The figure of 23,000, however, probably includes Soviet Mennonites who died during the evacuation or were overtaken by the Soviets and immediately repatriated or executed. The Mennonites comprised approximately 10% of the 1.1 million Germans living in the Soviet Union on 1 September 1939. Approximately 350,000 were evacuated westward by the retreating Germans, but in September of 1945 only 70,000 ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union, including 12,000 Mennonites, were still in the American, British and French zones.

¹⁹Smith, *Clay*, p. 239.

²⁰All quotes on this and the preceding page are taken from OMGUS AGO, 383.7 - 1947, L.S. Ostrander, Adjutant General, by Command of General McNarney to the Commanding Generals, Third US Army Area, Seventh US Army Area, Berlin District, re Repatriation of Soviet Citizens Subject to Repatriation Under the Yalta Agreement, 4 January 1946.

²¹Details about John J. Kroeker are drawn from Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen (hereafter AMCG) Bender Papers 52/17, 53/44 and 55/13. The first two files contain three lengthy reports written by John J. Kroeker and sent to MCC officials in August and September of 1945. Details of Kroeker's wartime activities, particularly his service with the SS and his contacts with the *Sicherheits Dienst*, are given in *Ibid.*, 54/41, Peter J. Dyck to Hiebert/ Goering, Wm. Snyder, Howard Yoder, 25 June 1946. The information from Robert Kreider came in a phone call to the author on 28 February 1991. Information on John J. Kroeker's father, Jacob Kroeker, are available in Christian Hege and D. Christian Neff, eds., *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, II Band, (Selbstverlag: Frankfurt am Main & Weierhof (Pfalz), 1937, p. 576, and in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, p. 246. For a description of the work and records of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, see Peter J. Klassen, "Sources for Russian Mennonite Research in German Archives and Libraries," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1979), p. 21-34.

It seems probable that Kroeker worked for the SS, but at least during his two visits to the Warthegau district of Poland he would have been attached to the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*. Robert Kreider has also suggested that Kroeker may have worked for the *Deutsches Auslandsinstitut* in Stuttgart. That institute gathered much information on Germans living outside the *Reich*, and co-operated closely with the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*.

Only Kroeker's personal file is likely to show clearly which German agency he worked for at various times during the war, and I have not been able to find that file. What is clear is that he worked with the German agencies most concerned about the welfare and resettlement of ethnic Germans that had to be evacuated westward after the German defeat at Stalingrad.

²²AMCG, Bender Papers, John J. Kroeker to H.S. Bender, Prof. Lehman and Dr. A. Warkentin, 27 August 1945.

²³AMCG, Bender Papers, 55/13. This file contains three lengthy reports, together with supporting documentation, written by John J. Kroeker on 27 August, 10 September, and 18 September 1945. Also included is a copy of a letter written by John J. Kroeker to C.J. Taylor, Director, UNRRA Team 501, 10 September 1945.

²⁴AMCG, Bender Papers, 52/17, Robert Kreider to Sam Goering, Howard Yoder, J.N. Byler, 13 April 1946, p. 4.

²⁵AMCG, Bender papers, 52/17, Robert Kreider to Sam Goering, Howard Yoder and J.N. Byler, 4 April 1946.

²⁶The Soviet Mennonite refugees were never officially recognized as being "stateless." Kroeker, MCC officials, Board Members of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, and even some American State Department employees, urged that these people be recognized as being stateless, but their claims to such a status were successfully disputed by some UNRRA and particularly by IRO officials. Officially the Soviet Mennonite refugees identified in the American, British and French zones of occupied Germany remained "liberated Soviet citizens." But they did not fall into one of the three categories of those who could be repatriated against their will and by force if necessary. In the Soviet zone involuntary repatriations continued.

²⁷AMCG, Bender Papers, 55/13, John J. Kroeker to C.J. Taylor, Director, UNRRA Team 501, 10 September 1945.

²⁸When the Soviets heard of the Dutch action they quickly put a stop to it, threatening to delay the repatriation of Dutch soldiers who had been taken prisoner by the Germans and held in what became the Soviet zone.

²⁹OMGUS, AGO, 383.7 - 1947, Major General Frank A. Keating to Major General Alexander Kotikov, re Disposition of Persons with Doubtful Citizenship (Mennonites), 29 July 1946.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*, Frank Keating to Major General Alexander G. Kotikov, 21 August 1946.

³²All the above quotations are from *Ibid.*, L.S. Ostlander to Commanding Generals, 4 January 1946.

³³*Dyck Interviews*, p. 212.

³⁴AMCG, Bender Papers, 51/39, Clipping from *New York Times*, 19 June 1946, entitled "160 Refugees Huddle in 4 Rooms in Berlin Awaiting New Homeland." *Ibid.*, 51/43, Clipping from *New York Times*, "218 in Berlin Flat Find Haven Abroad."

³⁵See for example, "Brueder in Not! Br. C.F. Klassen's Mitteilungen von seiner Mission in Europa," *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, 69 Jahrgang, No. 2, 9 Januar 1946, p. 1 & 4, and Klassen, *Ambassador*, p. 131-2.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Dyck Interviews*, p. 157.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.* Details of a specific incident which particularly infuriated Dyck are given in AMCG, Bender Papers, 54/41, Dyck to Hiebert/Goering, Wm. Snyder, Howard Yoder, 25 June 1946.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.* Peter J. Dyck to Marie Brunk, July 1946.

⁴⁴As quoted Smith, *Clay*, p. 262.

⁴⁵Backer, *Winds of History*, p. 87-88.

⁴⁶Mennonite Heritage Centre, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Archives, 1336/1030, Lucius D. Clay to Frank H. Epp, 5 June 1962.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Dyck *Recollections*, p. 240.

⁴⁹A copy of Dyck's letter is in OMGUS. AGO 383.7-1947, Peter J. Dyck, Commissioner Emigration Officers MCC to Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, commanding General US Forces in Europe, 27 January 1947. This letter differs in some relatively unimportant details from the way Dyck later remembered it. At the time Joseph T. McNarney was still the Commanding General, USFET, while Clay was Deputy Military Governor, OMGUS. McNarney requested reassignment in March of 1947, at which time USFET was reorganized and Clay became Commander-in-Chief, Europe (CINCEUR). Dyck also discusses how he felt during the interview with a four-star General. Clay only received his fourth star in March of 1947, becoming the first full general in the history of the United States army who never served in combat.

⁵⁰Dyck *Interviews*, p. 247.

⁵¹OMGUS AGO 383.7 - 1947, Telegram to AGWAR from CINCEUR signed Clay, 8 June 1947. The agenda and minutes of the Fifty-third Meeting of the Allied Control Council on 30 January 1947, of course, has no reference to the unofficial arrangements regarding the exodus of the Soviet Mennonite refugees in Berlin. Both Generals McNarney and Clay were at the meeting, as was Major General Keating who had dealt with the Soviet repatriation officers when they visited the refugees in June of 1946. The Agenda for the meeting on 30 January 1947 did include consideration for a proposed "Report of the Co-ordinating Committee on the Plan for the Report to the Council of Foreign Ministers." That report, among other things, documented clearly the fundamental differences between the Soviets and the western Allies regarding "population transfers." The contents of that report became public shortly after the Berlin exodus and contributed further to Soviet-American tensions. All the relevant records of the Allied Control Council are in OMGUS, Allied Control Authority, Allied Control Council Minutes.

It is highly improbable that Sokolovsky was under the influence of liquor when he gave his approval in mid-afternoon on 30 January 1947. The social arrangements which were a part of the Allied Control Council meetings have been described thus by General Clay: "Every time the Control Council met, whoever was chairman gave a reception after the meetings right in the Control Council building. Not a very elaborate party, just tea and coffee and sandwiches, a little wine or champagne. No hard liquor. No, I take that back: when the Russians were hosts, they had vodka." Smith, *Clay*, p.261. The Allied Control Council meeting of 30 January 1947 was chaired by the British member. Word of Sokolovsky's unofficial approval was sent to the American staff officers late in the afternoon, before the post-Council meeting reception began.

⁵²CGCA, Hist. MSS I.26.7, Frank H. Epp Collection, Copy of Report made by Lt. Col. Wm. Stinson to Col. B.L. Milburn re Authorization and Movement of Mennonites out of Berlin.

⁵³See particularly the article by Dana Adams Schmidt, entitled "Soviet Permisson to Depart Obtained by Gen. McNarney After Threat of Shootings," published in *The New York Times*, 15 February 1947.

⁵⁴USNA RG 59, Dept. of State File 740-00119 Control (Germany)/6-947, Telegram from Murphy, Berlin, quoting Lt. General Lucius Clay, to Riddleberger, Assistant Secretary of State, Department of State, Washington, 9 June 1947.