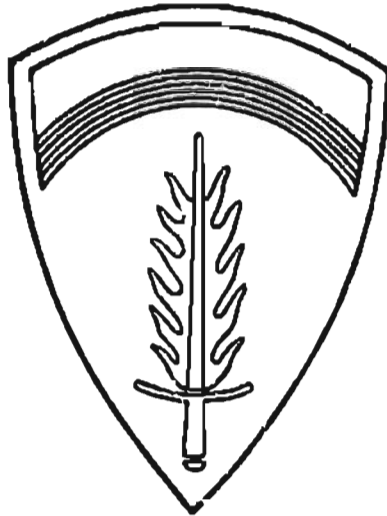




edited by Mad Dog



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**NOTES ON THE EXECUTION OF WAR DIARIES**

**IN THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES**

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HISTORICAL DIVISION  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE  
FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES BRANCH

*22 pages*

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
SPECIAL STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

12 July 1949

Note to: AC # A-860

By: Kenneth W. Hessler  
Major, Infantry (Res)

After the first oral interview I had with Major Schramm at Oberursel on 23 August 1945 (see ETHINT 14) I asked Major Schramm to prepare a more extended account of the preparation and contents of the German War Diaries from the highest to the lowest levels in the German armed forces. I believe that these two accounts, taken together with other oral interviews and oral interrogations of Greiner and Scheidt, present a fairly accurate picture of German War Diaries.

Perhaps a more complete and authentic picture can be secured if the American historians who have reviewed German War Diaries would frame a few additional questions for Major Schramm, and if Greiner and Scheidt were given an opportunity to review Schramm's comments and to annotate them with observations of their own.

Being the relevant portion of "Manuscript" No. A. 860, by Schramm.

(c) The War Diary (Kriegstagebuch) of the Supreme Command.

According to my knowledge the O.K.W. refrained from keeping a War Diary which included all its departments, owing to the vast dimensions of the organisation. The procedure observed in the Operations Department was as follows: Every evening the most important events, orders, etc, were summarised by a General Staff Officer who took care that the documents were complete and were filed in chronological order. The General Staff thus confined itself to the preparation of material for future research in as comprehensive a manner as possible, with notes to serve as a guide. Nothing was recorded concerning the manner in which important situations arose, the time-honoured principle of the General Staff being observed i.e. its outward role was advisory and executive, its members remaining anonymous. The achievements of the General Staff were not credited to any of its members, but equally it accepted responsibility for the mistakes of the individual.

There was never any question of a general O.K.W. War Diary (for the O.K.W.) owing to the fact that it comprised far too many departments, offices and people, widely differing in type and not all located in one place. It was only possible to keep a War Diary in the Operations Sections i.e. the Armed Forces Operations Staff (A.F.St) as this began as a quite small section and did not increase to more than 25 to 30 officers and officials until the early part of 1943. As compiler of its War Diary, Ministerialrat Greiner was attached to the Führer h. where he was placed under the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff; he had collaborated in writing the history of the World War and, as a retired Captain who had taken part in the World War, possessed experience. At the start he was given only one clerk; in 1943 he had an N.C.C. and a L/Cpl. and later, though only from time to time

The following working procedure gradually evolved from practical experience: by taking part in the daily situation conferences which the Deputy Chief held with the department chiefs and a few other officers, the war Diarist was kept informed of current events. If necessary he was able to glean further information in the course of his daily life in the office buildings and in the officers' mess. He also read documents currently submitted to him which were arranged in chronological order by his assistants; as these documents were frequently used again the War Diary files served as archives for the entire staff.

After a period of two months it was assumed that all papers had been received and would not be required for any further purposes, and that therefore their evaluation could begin. This consisted of noting down the contents of each document day by day, arranging them for each day according to theaters of war, and giving brief preliminary data on the operations of the previous day, thus making it clear to the person using the War Diary on what grounds the measures for the following day were based. As a result of this it became necessary to make many cross-references. Since this only resulted in a confusing mosaic, gradually measures of lesser importance whose execution was spread over a period of days and weeks, were more and more collected and entered under the most important date. A subject index enabled information to be supplied when required regarding past events and actions.

The fair copy of the final text was checked by the Deputy Chief and copied; it was then passed to the Archives together with two further copies and the consecutively numbered documents and maps. The number of documents which passed through the K.T.B. (Section) increased as the war went on. According to an estimate made in the K.T.B. (Section) (including situation reports) the documents which were passed to the War Historical Section in 1944 filled 120 box-files.

In the long run, this principle of collecting subsidiary material proved to be unsatisfactory, since both important and unimportant matters were dealt with on the same level and were repeatedly removed from their context in order to preserve chronological sequence. (Because of this I called it the Spaghotti-System). I was therefore given permission to alter this system as from l.l. 44. As I now had a free hand I proceeded as follows:

1. During the daily situation conferences I made notes which I then dictated (usually four and on important occasions twelve or more pages). In this way I recorded not only events but also the impressions which prevailed around noon each day, as the result of reports received by the Armed Forces Operations Staff, and also the way in which a new situation was assessed, and information regarding measures adopted or planned. To this extent, the "Lagebuch" which developed in this way supplemented the Situation reports (Lagebericht) which were distributed daily. For future users however the latter had the disadvantage, namely that they presupposed the existence of large scale (Detailkarten) and situation and C.B. maps.

2. From time to time I approached the deputy Chief, the first General Staff Officer, the department head, and where necessary, the technical advisers (Sachberater) for an account of developments as well as for the views and intentions of the Armed Forces Operations Staff (W.F. St). It was often difficult to arrange a convenient time. In spite of this, however, I found that the importance of these interviews, of obtaining the most vital facts and the reasons governing the actions of the High Command, was fully appreciated, particularly by Generals Harlimont and Frhr. v. Buttlar. In this way a great deal could be recorded which was not contained in the documents and which, in many cases explained their contents for the first time; e.g. the transfer of a division to the North and measures to meet the threat of action in the West or South West. The dictation afterwards made on the basis of

my notes were then combined with the "Lagebuch" to form a memorandum file ("Werkbuch").

3. From now on the documents were no longer filed in chronological order, but according to theatres of war and subject matter. (e.g. aerial warfare, personnel replacements etc; and under these sub-headings, again in chronological order).

4. Following the procedure outlined in paras 1 to 3 a picture of events was worked up which, being provisional, was called an evaluation (Ausarbeitung). The chief purpose of this evaluation was to link-up the documents, i.e. outgoing orders and incoming reports with events made known at the situation conferences and - supported by the 'interviews' - to assemble the raw material for future historical presentation. The basic obligation was to see that no personal view should have any influence and that the documents from which the unimportant material had either been briefly noted or removed, should be analysed so objectively that later assessments of the progress of the war were not anticipated.

This system of compiling an evaluation (Ausarbeitung) was limited in-as-much as the War Diarist did not see very much beyond Sperrkreis II in the Führer H.Q.; and was thus debarred from access to matters of the greatest secrecy i.e. why this or that decision had been made in Sperrkreis I. This in any case was not necessary for the later text, since for the conduct of the war at Führer level, General Scherff was appointed Special Representative of the Führer ("Sonderbeauftragter") for the War History. Apart from this, discussions on the situation held with the Führer as well as his conversations with leading personalities had been stenographically recorded since the end of 1942. It could therefore be assumed that if General Scherff had added his own knowledge to the facts contained in the stenograph report, and introduced the result into the Ausarbeitungen,, or had the latter revised accordingly, then the result would have been a comprehensive picture of the war from the view point of the Supreme Command.

the documents, the prospect of achieving the above has now been destroyed.

Signed F.E. Schramm



MS # A-860

NOTES ON THE EXECUTION OF WAR DIARIES IN THE  
GERMAN ARMED FORCES

By

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NOTES ON THE EXECUTION OF WAR DIARIES IN THE  
GERMAN ARMED FORCES

1. The KTB of the lower staffs: All units, from company, battery, etc., upward were obliged to conduct a war diary; if parts of these units or formations of lesser strength were employed, the same obligation was valid for them. The regulations effective for these war diaries were effectively bettered over those of the First World War, but not changed in essentials. The principal order with practical examples was printed, and was to be pasted in the front of the folder which every unit received before going into action. This order was replaced in the course of the first year of the war by a new idea based on experiences made in the meantime.

In the company, battery, etc., the Company Commander himself was responsible for the conduct of the KTB. In the battalion, etc., upward, the Commander turned this assignment over to his adjutant or to a liaison officer, but he himself was obliged to supervise its execution and to acknowledge it with his signature. A fair copy was to be

given up from time to time through the next highest channel and the supervising offices to the archives of the three parts of the Armed Forces. The most important orders, messages, etc., situation maps, sketches, etc., in the original or in copies were to be added.

The ideal would be when every incoming and outgoing order, and even messages, immediately after receipt would be marked with indication of time and contents, and even the substance of the most important telephone conversations. In practice this was hardly practical, and the longer the war lasted the further away the ideal got. Sometimes paper and writing materials were lacking, sometimes a quiet place and a table to write on, sometimes everything. In addition there was the steadily increasing burden of unit commanders and leaders with assignments of all sorts, the decrease in their interest in "writing up reams of paper" and also the decrease in training as well as education in general. In the final years of the war, so stormy in the West as well as in the East, the initial system of KTB execution more or less completely collapsed, as I saw the situation. When a catastrophe becomes imminent, the writing of history by those who are taking part in it themselves has lost all rights.

The greater part of the KTB's conducted by the troops must be considered lost, whether lost in the retreat or burned. The last is known to be true of those KTB's which had already been turned in.

This loss, as the experience of the last World War shows, is to be regretted. Then the records deposited in the Reichs-archives buildings were so piled up that because of their weight concrete pillars had to be used although it was a new and modern building. This was not adequate; large wooden barracks were built in the garden for the other records. This material was only in part made useful; usually only in case in which single units were concerned with publishing a "Regimental History" for its one time members. A great number of these were printed, but they illustrate only a fraction of the entire course of events, and were in addition of very uneven merit, so that any presentation from the point of view of higher historical research would not get much from them. Only exceptionally was there a student who had a military background as well as the historical view; mostly it was a matter of books which had value only for the participants.

In the execution of the World War History, which comprises over a dozen volumes, and thus was too extensive, the mass of this material was drawn upon in only a very few number of cases. For such a presentation the KTB of a division is

usually the lowest material which can be of interest: what a regiment does or doesn't do is unimportant in the great scheme. There are a few exceptions to this rule, as for example in the First World War the conquest of the Liege forts, and of Doumont and Vaux, that is, cases concerned with events spatially limited but decisive for the conduct of a campaign.

2. The KTB of the middle and high commands (division to army group): (I point out that I speak of division and corps on the basis of my own experience, since I conducted such KTB's officially for two years. I have an idea of the conduct of an army group KTB, since I was once requested to examine the KTB of C in C Southeast).

For the middle commands essentially the same orders were effective. In the course of the war it was ordered that the special sections (I C: Reconnaissance, Special Services, etc; IV A: Sanitation and Hygiene; IV B: Veterinary Functions; IV C: Supply, etc) should deliver exclusive reports of their activity, but this system did not justify itself, since it presumed an interest and care in the designation of dates and facts which ordinarily was not to be found. Usually these reports were quickly patched together after repeated requests, and if they then corresponded in form to the requests made, their substance was more or less worthless. It was clear

that anything useful could be had only when responsibility was given to one person.

In the division and corps the first adjutant officer (O-1) conducted the War Diary. These officers frequently changed, since these places are usually filled by candidates for the General Staff, and so one would be bad, and be followed by one who was worse. A really good KTB would have belonged to the exceptions, for the O-1 had many duties. If he was in addition young and lusty, he regarded the KTB as the task to be completed last and to be cut short.

The O-1 was the best suited officer of the Staff for this job, because ordinarily he sat with the G-3 in the same room, and heard all the oral and telephone conversation of the G-3, and could ask him at any time what the General (at corps in addition the Chief of Staff) had ordered. He could follow the course of events particularly well, if his telephone or that of the G-3 was on the same line as that of the General, or of the C of S, which often happened, so that the G-3 could be kept informed of current decisions and considerations. With careful procedure, consequently, a diary could have been conducted in which important conversations were recorded.

The knowledge of an O-1 had its limits when a discussion of the commander or higher superior took place with the General or Chief of Staff to which he was not admitted. This was often

the case, since the G-3 ordinarily took part in these conversations, and the O-1 was busied with the telephone. It was a question then of his adroitness, of his interest, and his relationship to his superior, how exactly he would be informed of the substance of such discussions. The most fortunate solution would have been if the O-1 were to have presented a draft in the evening based on his notes made during the day and the orders and messages he had selected, to the General or the G-3, which would have been corrected, completed, and approved by them. Even at those staffs where the evening hours were burdened with this sort of work, the ideal could have been realized only if there was not much work to be done, and the superior took a personal interest in the proper conduct of a KTB. These formed the exception. At very many staffs the KTB was prepared at the last, when there was time and space, or filled out intermittently by the O-1, and the superior who was to sign would in only a few cases give himself the trouble, if he was presented the KTB before it was sent up, to work through it for its correctness and completeness.

At the armies, there were officers who were officially or semi-officially charged with the conduct of the KTB. Wounded officers were used for this, who could thus make

themselves still useful, or Reserve officers, who were professional archivists, or in any other way adapted for this work.

At the army groups, there were among the others civil employees of the War History Section, that is, professionally trained minds, and if these were not available, there were officers or civilians to whom such a task could be entrusted. Since from Corps upward, the staffs had available their own map printing section, they were in a position to add good battle maps, etc., to the volume of appendices.

The difficulty from army on upward consisted in the fact that entrance to the C of S, or the Army or Army Group General was more difficult here than in the O-1's relation with his general. The army KTB custodian was referred to what the staff officers or the assistant staff officers wanted to tell him. If the general was ready to receive him, he must always expect to be put off, or to break off in the middle of his questioning, because something more important had come up - and from a military standpoint everything was more important than what posterity would sometime read.

Of course there were exceptions here too, of the chief or the army commander placed value on knowing their activities and the basis for them to be set down in black and white, or if other positive factors were at work. But even here it was



a question of good will because so much was thrown at the generals and their staff officers, that the personal information of the KTB custodian could take place only intermittently and often not completely. It was therefore a question of the dexterity, of the personal place which the KTB custodian had attained within the staff, and his ability to feel "something in the air," whether or not he succeeded in establishing the events completely and correctly as they happened.

In large measures such a deficiency was eliminated by having anything in any way important retained in writing by the army within the staff sections, and sending a copy to the KTB officer. Therefore a large part of his activity consisted in giving order to the records and maps, noting their essence in the KTB chronologically, and providing that all staff sections gave their material to the KTB, or that they provided carbons of their correspondence as a matter of routine. One way or the other, army or army group KTB would consequently be nothing more than an extract from records patterned in a calendar style.

It was impossible to close off such a diary daily. The individual sections needed the incoming messages for days if not for weeks as well as the notes of verbal reports and consultations. The KTB custodian could proceed either by designating it as addenda, when this material belatedly came

to him, or so arranging his work that he first began to extract from the records when he could presume that everything essential had been given to him.

3. The KTB of the Supreme Command. The Army General Staff had renounced - as far as I know from the very first - because of its gigantic organization, any attempt to conduct a KTB that would include all its sections. The procedure in the operations section was that General Staff officer condensed in the evening the most important events, orders, etc., and provided that these records were bound completely and chronologically. Therefore the General Staff limited itself to arranging the material as orderly as possible for later research, and to indicating the proper path for research by notes. If nothing is noted about the origin of some important circumstances, the old principle of the General Staff was ruling, according to which the General Staff was only a consultative and executive organ, while its members remained anonymous; what the General Staff did should not be attributed to one person, and reversedly, the failure of individuals was borne by the entire staff.

No common diary for the OKW could be considered, because the OKW comprised much too many different sections, offices, and courts, which were not even lodged in the same places. The only KTB possible was one of its operations section, that

is, of the WFSt, for this was originally very small, and in early 1943 had grown to only 25-30 officers and civil employees. For this KTB, Ministry Advisor Greiner, who had collaborated on the World War opus, and who possessed experience as retired captain and participant in the World War, was taken into the Fuehrer's Headquarters and assigned to the Deputy Chief of the WFSt. As first he was given only one assistant; in 1943 he had one sergeant and one private; later, but only temporarily, he was given a third assistant.

From experience, the following work procedure was established: the KTB execution was kept informed by participating in the daily discussions of the situation held by the Deputy Chief of the WFSt with the section leaders and some other officers; by his common life in the office barracks and the officers' billets, he was given the opportunity for further information if necessary. In addition, he worked currently through the records deposited with him, which were bound by his assistants. Since in many cases these records were still needed, the Record Portfolio of the KTB served as the archives for the whole Staff.

When two months had passed and it was thought that all documents had been delivered and could not be used in any other way, work was begun. This was done by noting day by day the substance of the records, organizing them within the

day according to the theaters of operations, and then prefixing them with short notes on preceding military events to make clear to the user on the basis of what situation the measures succeeding were taken. It proved to be necessary to make many back and after references. Since in this way the result was a confusing mosaic, the less important measures, whose completion was drawn out over days and weeks, were condensed more and more under the important dates. A card catalog with key words made possible information asked for on past events and measures.

The fair copy of the text originating thus was read through and signed by the Deputy Chief, and then turned over to the archives with two further copies and the consecutively numbered records and maps. The volume of records which came to the KTB increased in accordance with the war situation from year to year. According to a survey made in the diary, the records of the KTB, turned over to the War History Section, inclusive of summaries of the situation, filled out 120 covers.

This conception of concentrating the auxiliary facts did not satisfy in the long run, because it treated the important and the unimportant on the same plane and the thought connection was torn into pieces at the expense of the chronological sequence. (I called it for that reason the spaghetti system.)

On 1 Jan 1944 I received permission to rework it. Since I received a free hand, I proceeded in this way:

a. I took notes on the daily discussions, which I then dictated (normally 4, at moments of crisis, 12 and more pages). In this way I retained not only the events, but also the general impression arising at 12 o'clock of every day from the incoming messages of the WFSt, along with the judgment of the new situation, and occasional indications of the measures planned or performed. In this extent the "Situation Book" (Lagebuch) so composed, supplemented the "Estimates of the situation" (Lageberichte) mimeographed daily, which had the disadvantage for a later user of presuming not only detailed maps, but situation maps giving order of battle.

b. From time to time I visited the Deputy Chief, the G-3, the section leaders, and in some cases, the individuals concerned, and asked for a resume of developments, as well as of the intentions and opinions of the WFSt. It was often difficult to ~~make~~ free time but I found - particularly with Gen Warlimont and Freiherr von Buttlar - an understanding of the importance of these "interviews," which were designed to find a path through the mass of records, to select the most important, and to clarify where the Supreme Command had found a turning point. In this way much could be

established which was not in the records, and in many cases made an understanding of the records possible; so, for example, the transfer of a division in the northern area and measures against a threatened action in the west or southwest. The dictation which I appended on the basis of my notes was then united with the "Lagebuch" to make a "Merkbuch" (notebook).

c. Thenceforward the records were not bound according to chronology, but according to the theaters of operations or topics (for example, the air war, replacements, etc), though within these subsections the arrangement was naturally a chronological one.

d. On the basis of 1 to 3, took place the working out of a presentation of events, which, to indicate its temporary character, was designated as an "elaborate draft" (Ausarbeitung). Its goal was to establish a relationship between the records, that is, primarily, outgoing orders and incoming messages were correlated with the events made known in the discussions of the situation, and - supported by the interviews - thus the raw material prepared for a later historical presentation. The fundamental obligation was not to let subjective judgments influence, and to view the records, of which the unimportant ones were then summarily extracted or pushed aside, with an objectivity in

which later judgment of the course of the war would find nothing to reproach.

This system of "elaborate drafting" had its limits since the XTB execution could not penetrate the so-called Sperrkreis II in the Fuehrer's headquarters (an untranslatable pun on Wehrkreis (Service Command) and Sperrkreis, which would mean obstacle area) and so was denied a view of the last secrets, why Sperrkreis I came to such and such a decision. But this seemed in view of the later redrafting not completely essential, because in matters of command, General Scherff as the Fuehrer's "Commissioner for the Writing of War History" was in the immediate retinue of the Fuehrer, and received stenographic notes of the Fuehrer's conversation with the leading personalities. It can therefore be presumed that if Gen Scherff had incorporated both his knowledge and the stenographic notes into the draft, or would have had the draft revised to harmonize, the result would have been an exhaustive picture of the war from the point of view of the High Command.

This possibility has been destroyed by the burning of the records and Gen Scherff's death.