MGO's Daily Work

The daily work of a Military Government Officer (MGO) in any county in Wuerttemberg-Baden was dramatized over AFN Stuttgart Nov. 19 in a program entitled “Your Commander Speaks —.” Participating in the program were Mr. Charles M. LaFollette, state director of OMG Wuerttemberg-Baden; Mr. Eugene Walters, chief of the Field Relations Division, OMG WB, and Mr. Nathan Malchman, AFN commentator. Transcript of the program follows.

LaFollette: I have had the feeling that many of our occupation personnel have only vague impressions of the mission of a field Military Government Officer down in a small county or Landkreis. Most persons seem to think he has much direct power over the German local administration; whereas he has none at all. Then few begin to realize the tremendous responsibilities that fall on his shoulders in the all important reorientation program.

Malchman: How many field Military Government Offices are there in Wuerttemberg-Baden?

Walters: Twenty-nine—one for every landkreis and city.*

Malchman: How many men do you have in each detachment?

Walters: That varies directly with the size of the county. In Stuttgart, for instance, we have four Americans, but in counties such as Buchen, only one.

Malchman: Didn’t they used to be much larger?

Walters: Yes, back at the end of the war our biggest detachment numbered 90 officers and men. That was when . . . (fade out). (Dramatic factual voice comes in clearly.)

Announcer: The month was May in the year 1945—the most devastating war in history was drawing to a close. Germany was in chaos with industries, homes and human lives in wreckage. But the German people started to build again—to bring from the ruins of Germany a new industry in Heilbronn, a home in Sinheim, a farmer’s barn in Mergenthal— and with it a new outlook on life, vague hopes of principles of freedom and a future place in the nations of the world—when they started working again amidst the wreckage of 1945 they found beside them American Military Government—there to guide and assist them. Then came 1946 and gradually conditions settled—trains were running again, trucks were on the highways carrying food from the fields to the cities, and in every little village, every community, life slowly returned to normal. With these changes there came changes in Military Government too. Except for a few instances the Military Government Officers relinquished all responsibility for the actual administration of governmental affairs in his Kreis. It remained for him to advise and assist the Landrat and the Buergermeisters, to guide these elected officials and to see that they carried out their duties in an efficient and democratic manner.* Oh, yes, there have been changes, many changes in Military Government since 1945, but we can best show you what we mean by paying a visit to one of the many Military Government Liaison and Security Offices in Wuerttemberg-Baden. So come with us to the Military Government office in your own Landkreis, and as we enter the door we hear— (fade out).

Secretary (to MGO): Sir, the Landrat is here to see you. May I show him in?

MGO: Yes, please do.

Malchman (whispered): Pardon my ignorance, Mr. LaFollette, but what’s a Landrat?

LaFollette (hushed): He’s the chief county executive. He has considerably more power here than any county official at home.

MGO (to Landrat): Good day, Herr Landrat. How are you?

Landrat: Very well, Major. We are having fine weather for the crop today. Have you a few spare minutes? I’d like to discuss a few questions with you.

MGO: Very good. Please have a seat.

Landrat: Thank you. The first matter I would like to discuss with you is the problem of the Buergermeister elections. Three elections in the Kreis will have to be run again. In Steindorf and Reinfeld none of the candidates received a majority vote, and in Erldendorf there appear to be a number of violations of the election laws. I have appointed an unbiased committee to investigate the matter and report the results to my office. Do you have any further suggestions?

MGO: No. As far as I can see you are following the proper procedure under German law. You know that unless there are irregularities that would concern Military Government directives, the whole affair should be handled by you. Incidentally, Herr Landrat, I noticed that Eichenberg seems to be doing an outstanding job in housing the expellees. What do you think?

Landrat: Yes, I had the same impression and I intended to bring up this point today. The Buergermeister there has taken a number of steps


Glossary of Terms

A few German and technical terms, in common use in occupation discussions, appear in this program. These may be translated as follows:

Kreis . . . . county
Landkreis . . . . rural county
Stadtkreis . . . . city
Landrat . . . . county administrator
Buergermeister . . . . mayor
Buerger . . . . villager
Gemeinde . . . . community
MGO . . . . Military Government Officer
OMG . . . . Office of Military Government
DM . . . . Deutsche mark (German money)

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which have materially improved the relationship between the old and new Bürgers in his Gemeinde, and I believe that this fact should be publicized so that other Bürgemeisters might be induced to follow his example.

MGO: That's an excellent idea; how do you plan to do this?

Landrat: I intend to bring it to the attention of all the Bürgemeisters at our next meeting, for one thing. MGO: That's good. Perhaps you could also get the newspapers interested and publicize the good work a little more broadly. You could invite newspaper reporters to inspect conditions in this Gemeinde and have them see for themselves the improvement. It would inspire not only Bürgemeisters of our Kreis but the people too.

Landrat: Yes, I hadn't thought of that. That could easily be arranged. In the meantime I have another problem to discuss with you. As you know, Professor Schulz is one of the leading educators in the Kreis. He has just received an offer to attend a conference on educational matters in Switzerland and will need an exit permit to get there. He hasn't much time to get this permit since the conference is in two weeks. Is it possible to speed up the processing of his papers?

MGO: Yes, Herr Landrat, fortunately it is. I am glad you brought this matter to my attention. Military Government is trying to give not only educators but business people and officials the opportunity of seeing what goes on in other countries and the latest methods developed by these countries. Just recently this matter has been expedited, especially for educators, and, if you will have Professor Schulz stop by as soon as possible, we shall see that his papers are forwarded to the Educational and Cultural Relations Division of Land Military Government and processed as soon as possible.

Landrat: Thank you very much, Major. He will certainly appreciate this. (Voices fade out. Announcer comes in.)

Malchman: Sounds to me like an MGO must be expected to solve problems like that. Mr. Anthony once did over the radio.

Walters: It often does seem that way. You see, very frequently today the Military Government Officer and his family are the only Americans in a county. To all the people there they represent not only Military Government in Germany but the entire United States of America.

Malchman: An MGO's job sounds like a tough assignment to me.

Walters: It is. And our MGO's realize the pressure that is put on them because of the peculiar situation. They naturally do everything they can to represent our democratic way of life as it should be represented.

Now the mission of an MGO can be stated briefly. It is:

1. To insure compliance by all concerned with Military Government laws and policies and to assist in their implementation;
2. To observe, advise and assist German governmental agencies in the administration of German laws; and
3. To help promote the development of democracy in Germany.

The last mission is by far the most important. Obviously it is of little value to help Germany rebuild economically if it is going to be the same old totalitarian-minded nationalist state as before. The field Military Government Officer is the key to the democratization program.

At least once a week he represents MG at a town meeting in his county. He ...

Malchman: Pardon me, but exactly what happens at these town meetings?

LaFollette: Why don't we listen in on one? (Fade out.)

1st Bünger: Herr Landrat, when the damage done by wild boar is estimated will the quota of the whole community be reduced or only the quote of the individual farmer?

Landrat: If there is legitimate crop destruction by boar, then the quota of both the farmer and the Gemeinde will be reduced. If boar have eaten all of a farmer's potatoes, then the farmer, of course, cannot deliver them. These arrangements, however, are made by local authorities.

2nd Bünger: I have a question for Military Government. We know that America is sending over great amounts of food which are distributed to the people. But what happens to the Deutsche marks which are paid for this food? Who gets those DM?

MGO: At the present time food is being imported into Germany with funds appropriated by the US Congress and with Marshall Plan funds. This food goes to the German economy's distribution system, from where it is sold to the German people. The DM resulting from the sale of this food go into a blocked account which is controlled by Military Government. Plans are being prepared at present, I understand, to put those blocked accounts under the control of the Economic Council in Frankfurt and to establish a agricultural credit bank or some credit institution which will extend credit to industry and agriculture.

3rd Bünger: I would like to ask a question concerning the road between here and Goetzingen (fade out).

Walters: And so it goes on into the night. The Germans are beginning to realize that their own public officials are responsible to them. Questions are aired, ideas stimulated.

Malchman: Do you have any idea how many of these forums you have held?

Walters: Over 600 now, I believe.

Malchman: How long have you been doing this?

LaFollette: You know by now we just quietly get our work done down here in Wuerttemberg-Baden without any fanfare. But for your information, the concentrated program of town meetings started in Wuerttemberg-Baden in December 1947, and so has now been adapted in the other Laender.

Walters: The democratization work of the MGO does not end with the forum. He frequently holds meetings—sometimes called seminars—with leading officials on leading questions. His advice and the assistance of Military Government are constantly being sought.

Malchman: There's just one thing that bothers me about the MGO at these forums.

Walters: What's that?

Malchman: How he can stand up there and do such a good job of an-

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