Instructions to the *Wehrmacht*
Field Marshal von Reichenau, November 10, 1941

Regarding the conduct of troops towards the bolshevistic system, vague ideas are still prevalent in many cases. The most essential aim of war against the Jewish-bolshevistic system is a complete destruction of their means of power and the elimination of Asiatic influence from the European culture. In this connection the troops are facing tasks which exceed the one-sided routine of soldiering. The soldier in the Eastern territories is not merely a fighter according to the rules of the art of war but also a bearer of ruthless national ideology and the avenger of bestialities which have been inflicted upon German and racially related nations.

Therefore the soldier must have full understanding for the necessity of a severe but just revenge on subhuman Jewry. The Army has to aim at another purpose, i.e. the annihilation of revolts in hinterland, which, as experience proves, have always been caused by Jews.

The combating of the enemy behind the front line is still not being taken seriously enough. Treacherous, cruel partisans and degenerate women are still being made prisoners-of-war and guerilla fighters dressed partly in uniform or plain clothes and vagabonds are still being treated as proper soldiers, and sent to prisoner-of-war camps. In fact, captured Russian officers talk even mockingly about Soviet agents moving openly about the roads and very often eating at German field kitchens. Such an attitude of the troops can only be explained by complete thoughtlessness, so it is now high time for the commanders to clarify the meaning of the pressing struggle.

The feeding of the natives and of prisoners-of-war who are not working for the Armed forces from Army kitchens is an equally misunderstood humanitarian act as is the giving of cigarettes and bread. Things which the people at home can spare under great sacrifices and things which are being bought by the command to the front under great difficulties, should not be given to the enemy by the soldier even if they originate from booty. It is an important part of our supply.

When retreating the Soviets have often set buildings on fire. The troops should be interested in extinguishing of fires only as far as it is necessary to secure sufficient numbers of billets. Otherwise the disappearance of symbols of the former bolshevistic rule even in the form of buildings is part of the struggle of destruction. Neither historic nor artistic considerations are of any importance in the Eastern territories. The command issues the necessary directives for the securing of raw material and plants, essential for war economy. The complete disarming of the civilian population in the rear of the fighting troops is imperative considering the long vulnerable lines of communications. Where possible, captured weapons and ammunition should be stored and guarded. Should this be impossible because of the situation of the battle, the weapons and ammunition will be rendered useless. If isolated partisans are found using firearms in the rear of the army drastic measures are to be taken. These measures will be extended to that part of the male population who were in a position to hinder or report the attacks. The ..."wait and see" attitude must give way to a clear decision for active collaboration. If not, no one can complain about being judged and treated a member of the Soviet system.

The fear of German counter-measures must be stronger than threats of the wandering bolshevistic remnants. Regardless of all future political considerations the soldier has to fulfill two tasks:

1.) Complete annihilation of the false Bolshevist doctrine of the Soviet State and its armed forces.

2.) The pitiless extermination of foreign treachery and cruelty and thus the protection of the lives of military personnel in Russia.

Barbarossa Decree
May 13, 1941

Decree on the jurisdiction of martial law and on special measures of the troops

The exercise of martial law serves primarily to maintain military discipline. The wide extent of operational space in the East, the form of combat that this offers, and the peculiarity of the enemy, present tasks to the courts martial...that, with their limited personnel, they can only solve, if military law restricts itself for the time being to its central task. That is only possible if the troops themselves defend themselves against every threat from the enemy civilian population without mercy....

I. Treatment of criminal acts by enemy civilians
1. Criminal acts of enemy civilians are withdrawn until further notice from the jurisdiction of courts-martial and summary courts.

2. Guerrillas are to be dispatched without mercy by the troops either in combat or while trying to escape.

3. Furthermore, all other attacks by enemy civilians against the Wehrmacht, its members and retinue are to be repelled on the spot by the most extreme measures up to the destruction of the attacker.

4. Where measures of this kind were missed or were initially not possible, the suspicious elements are to be immediately brought before an officer. He will decide whether they are to be shot. Collective drastic action will be taken immediately against communities from which treacherous or insidious attacks against the Wehrmacht are launched, on the orders of an officer with at least the rank of battalion commander upwards, if the circumstances do not permit a speedy apprehension of individual culprits.

5. It is expressly forbidden to detain suspected culprits, in order to hand them over to the courts when jurisdiction over native inhabitants is restored to these.

II. Treatment of criminal acts by members of the Wehrmacht or its retinue against native civilians
1. For acts which members of the Wehrmacht or its retinue commit against enemy civilians, there is no compulsion to prosecute, even when the act represents a military crime or offense.

2. In judging such deeds it is to be considered in any proceedings that the collapse in the year 1918, the later period of suffering of the German people, and the battle against National Socialism with the movement’s countless sacrifices of blood are incontestably to be attributed to Bolshevik influence, and that no German has forgotten that.

3. The chairman of the court must therefore examine whether a disciplinary reprimand is appropriate or whether it is necessary to institute judicial proceedings. The chairman only orders court-martial proceedings for acts against native inhabitants, when the maintenance of discipline or the protection of the troops demands it. That applies, for example, in the case of serious acts that result from the loss of sexual restraint, are derived from a criminal disposition, or are a sign that the troops are threatening to run wild. Criminal acts, by which lodgings or supplies or other plunder are senselessly destroyed to the detriment of our own troops, are not on the whole to be judged more leniently.

Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars

In the battle against Bolshevism, the adherence of the enemy to the principles of humanity or international law is not to be counted on. In particular the treatment of those of us who are taken prisoner in a manner full of hatred, cruelty and inhumanity can be expected from the political commissars of every kind as the real pillars of opposition.

The troops must be aware that:
1. In this battle mercy or considerations of international law with regard to these elements is false. They are a danger to our own safety and to the rapid pacification of the conquered territories.

2. The originators of barbaric, Asiatic methods of warfare are the political commissars. So immediate and unhesitatingly severe measures must be undertaken against them.

They are therefore, when captured either in battle or offering resistance, as a matter of routine to be dispatched by firearms.

The following provisions also apply:

2. ...Political commissars as agents of the enemy troops are recognizable from their special badge—a red star with a golden woven hammer and sickle on the sleeves.... They are to be separated from the prisoners of war immediately, i.e. already on the battlefield. This is necessary, in order to remove from them any possibility of influencing the captured soldiers.

These commissars are not to be recognized as soldiers; the protection due to prisoners of war under international law does not apply to them. When they have been separated, they are to be finished off.

3. Political commissars who have not made themselves guilty of any enemy action nor are suspected of such should be left unmolested for the time being. It will only be possible after further penetration of the country to decide whether remaining functionaries may be left in place or are to be handed over to the Sonderkommandos. The aim should be for the latter to carry out the assessment.

In judging the question "guilty or not guilty", the personal impression of the attitude and bearing of the commissar should as a matter of principle count for more than the facts of the case which it may not be possible to prove.