

# Waldemar Zettel and the rebuilding of Prakla

GERHARD KEPPNER, Seebruck, Germany

On 16 May 1945, exactly eight days after Germany surrendered in World War II, Waldemar Zettel, residing in Falkensee near Berlin, was named acting director of the Gesellschaft für Praktische Lagerstättenforschung (company for the practical exploration of geological deposits) by the newly appointed communist mayor of the small community of Brieselang in what was then East Germany. This brought considerable status. The final sentence in the appointment read: "He is authorized to use his bicycle to travel between his home and place of work." Even today Zettel wistfully recalls his then so important means of transport. Just a few days after his appointment, a Red Army soldier, waving a submachine gun, proposed a deal—to exchange his battered bike with two flats for Zettel's well looked-after, fully functioning model. Who could say "no" under such circumstances? That was simply the way things happened.

German cities were in ruins, especially Berlin where the Gesellschaft für Praktische Lagerstättenforschung (Prakla from now on in this article, although it was not until 1951 that this became the company's official title) had its headquarters ... if that name still applied to the bombed-out offices or to a company which the Soviet government, controlling the portion of Berlin where Prakla was located, had seemingly eliminated. A Zettel memorandum from July 1945 describes the situation:

The company has been dissolved in accordance with a command from Moscow because it has a capitalistic structure and follows capitalistic aims. A capitalistic structure is perceived in the company operating under civil law and carrying out scientific surveys for money, as well as in the fact that the director is also a leading civil servant in the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung (German Bureau for Mineral Exploration), i.e., the client is the same person as the contractor. ...

The company property found in Brieselang has been confiscated and whatever could be moved has been taken away. All that remains in Brieselang are the house at Forstweg 1 with the outbuildings, the plot of land, some furnishings and fittings, the business papers and some of the survey results worked out by the survey crews.

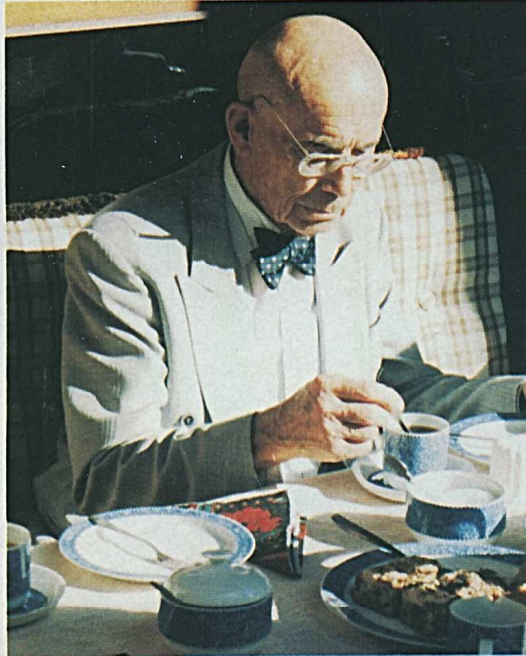
In other words, Zettel had been appointed head of a company that had been dissolved by the government of one of the two superpowers. In retrospect, it seems incredible, but he managed to rebuild this devastated and officially dissolved company into one of the most important geophysical service companies of the past half century.

To be fair, he did not start exactly from zero. He did have authorization to move around relatively freely, the right to take care of what was left in Brieselang, the assumption that some skilled employees were dispersed throughout the four occupied zones, along with, it was hoped, some seismic

equipment, gravity meters, torsion balances, and maybe even vehicles hidden away in barns or wherever.

This was what Zettel had to consider when pondering whether to accept the mayor's offer. The decision was not easy. On the plus side, the job brought some economic benefits rare in war-ravaged Germany. However, the negative side was grim. The three managing directors of the dissolved Prakla had either been taken prisoner, were missing, or were dead. Thus, accepting the challenge was a daring step. It would mean engaging in a scientific and business battle—fought in Russian, German, and English—that would continue for years. Another complication was that a new war was in the making that was soon to be dubbed "cold" and whose front line ran right through the middle of a crushed and destroyed Germany.

Obviously, Zettel accepted the challenge and won his battle. This is the story.



Waldemar Zettel

**Rise and fall.** Prakla was founded on 23 March 1937 with a nominal capital of one million Reichsmark (RM) that was funded from the German Reich. The sole shareholder was the Deutsche Revisions und Treuhand AG (German Auditing and Trust Company). The company's founding was very much influenced by the German policy of national self-sufficiency. The Geophysikalische Reichsaufnahme (Geophysical Survey of the German Reich) had been established, and its ambitious goal was to investigate the country with geophysical means in search of mineral deposits. Competition with the privately owned Seismos, which had been in existence (with considerable success) since 1921, was viewed as a positive circumstance because the new company's founders felt that competition would stimulate performance. The new company had its headquarters in Berlin. Bernhard Brockamp was appointed director, and simultaneously served as vice president of the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung. In June 1938, Friedrich Trappe was won over from Seismos and appointed a managing director and head of the Seismic Department. The third managing director was Josef Gutter, who was in charge of administration.

Trappe had joined Seismos in 1925 after gaining his doctorate at Göttingen in applied electrical sciences. He then had five very successful years in the United States searching for and finding salt domes and oil. This earned him recognition as Ludger Mintrop's most capable scientist.

Brockamp, like Mintrop, came from the same Göttingen school of thought shaped by Emil Wiechert, who was convinced that a seismograph had to have a heavy mass and had to function mechanic-optically.

Trappe, on the other hand, felt the only chance of developing the geophones and seismic systems that could make reflection seismic the premier method of geophysical exploration was by application of electronics. At this point he



(a) Am Kleinen Felde 12—entrance to the first postwar Prakla headquarters in Hannover, 1947; (b) “shooting” truck in the Balkans—a wartime improvisation; (c) Phänomen Granit 25—first recording truck for reflection seismics; (d) old Dodge trucks of the U.S. Army were furnished with new cabins and equipped as seismic recording trucks.

thought of a former Seismos employee whom he considered congenial and a scientific equal.

Waldemar Zettel, born on 25 July 1903 in Hannover, was the eldest of six children of a furrier. He graduated from high school at Clevertor and started studying physics in 1922 at the university in his hometown. After obtaining his degree (1928), he remained at the university as an assistant and subsequently gained his doctorate (1934). The experimental work at the university had borne fruit, for it had resulted in innovative vibration systems, in robust, portable, and highly sensitive geophones which made it possible to carry out seismic measurements of astounding accuracy.

Up to then, Zettel's life had progressed according to plan, now fate needed to play its part and bring everyone and everything together ... and that is exactly what happened. Friedrich Trappe met the new Ph.D. in the university library. They started talking and Trappe quickly realized that here was the scientist Seismos needed for the immense task associated with the Geophysikalische Reichsaufnahme. Zettel joined Seismos on 1 March 1935. He stayed until 15 August 1936. It was a short yet fruitful period: He and Trappe developed, as part of a complete reflection seismic instrument, the legendary moving coil geophone—the only geophone used in German reflection surveys for more than a decade. He was also active as a party chief and thus had the opportunity to field test the systems (and of ensuring that work continued when the instrument failed).

About 32 months later Zettel was at Prakla. During that time he had never lost contact with Trappe or Seismos. The German Navy Research Establishment in Kiel had kept him busy working on the problems of underwater acoustic propagation and echo sounding. But he remained in Kiel only until Trappe—now working for Prakla—offered him a position worthy of his specialist knowledge: head of the development laboratories in Brieselang near Berlin. His job was to develop and improve seismic and other geophysical instruments, and in particular geophones and amplifiers.

The central offices in Berlin were near, yet not too near. In fact, just 10 km separated his work in Brieselang from his home in Falkensee, where he had a house and garden, a wife and two boys (and later two girls). So, as of 1 May

1939 he was on the payroll of the company with which his name was to remain associated. This was exactly four months before the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

German geophysicists were not sent to the front lines. Their job was to look for strategic materials, develop new and better systems, and improve existing ones. Zettel had to supply instruments to survey crews in Germany, and also those in the occupied territories. A general geophysical working schedule for the Ukraine in 1943 compiled by the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung allocated survey areas between Kiev, Kharkov, and Poltava to three reflection and two refraction crews, along with eight gravimeter and 10 torsion balance crews of Prakla and Seismos. The control point was at Romny. Place names are mentioned, such as Glinsko and Priluki, that later gave their names to oil fields. The exploration targets were structures discovered the previous year with the gravimeter and torsion balance.

On 10 and 15 June 1943, trains carrying the crews left for Kiev, into a region that had been conquered at a terrible price at the end of October 1941 and lost in September 1943 at an even greater toll. On 5 July, perhaps before the crews had even reached their destinations, the greatest tank battle of all time broke out near Kursk. This battle, known in history under the code name Citadel, raged within hearing distance of the crews until 15 July. Kharkov was lost for the second and final time on 22 August. Caught in the whirlpool of retreat, it was a fight for survival—a fight that even today the survivors regard as a miracle.

Those on the German home front also needed miracles. A devastating air raid on Berlin in November 1943 destroyed the Prakla headquarters in the Prinzenpalais. Brieselang took over the administration, or at least what was left of it.

There was nothing heroic in the correspondence handed down from this period; no mention of great times. The longer the war went on, the more shattering the notes and internal memos: Whoever did not look after the tires of his company vehicle, for example by exceeding the extremely low speed limits and thereby promoting increased tire wear, faced a prison sentence of up to two years. Detonators and boxes of explosives were to be returned to the manufacturers. Even pay packets were in short supply. Meanwhile the

Der Präsident  
des  
Reichsamts für Bodenforschung

Gesch.-Z. ....

(Bei Beantwortung ist obiges Geschäfts-Zeichen anzugeben)

Удостоверение.

Геологический Комитет состоит  
под военным покровительством.

По приказу коменданта г. Берлина  
учреждение должно быть срочно  
приведено в порядок.

Гр А-р, инж. Вальдемар Цеттель,  
геофизик  
Родился 25.7.1903.

адрес: Фалькензее под Берлином,  
Финкенкругерштр. 24

обязан ежедневно являться на  
работу Инвалиденштр. 44, и не  
подлежит привлечению к другим  
работам.

Ввиду дальнего расстояния ему  
предоставлено право пользования  
велосипедом.

Berlin N 4, den 23. Mai 1945  
Invalidenstraße 44 Bs.  
Anruf: 4259 11

Bescheinigung

Der Stadtkommandant von Berlin hat  
das Reichsamt für Bodenforschung un-  
ter seinen militärischen Schutz ge-  
nommen und angeordnet, das Amt be-  
schleunigt arbeitsfähig zu gestalten.

Herr

Dr. Ing. Waldemar Z e t t e l  
Geophysiker

geboren am: 25. 7. 1903,

wohnhaft: Falkensee bei Berlin  
Finkenkrugerstr. 24

ist daher verpflichtet, täglich zum  
Arbeitseinsatz Invalidenstr. 44 zu  
erscheinen und darf zu anderen Arbei-  
ten nicht herangezogen werden. Das  
Bild darf nicht nachgelagert wer-  
den.

*Waldemar Zettel*  
Paeckelmann  
(Prof. Dr. Res. Geol.)



The Soviet commanding officer of Berlin placed the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung under his military protection and ordered that it be made fully functional as a matter of priority. Dr. Zettel's bicycle could not be confiscated!

fronts were relentlessly closing in.

On 16 April 1945, the Russians began their advance on Berlin. By the 25th, the city was encircled and Brieselang and Falkensee, to the west of the city center, were in the hands of the Russians. Zettel remembers how the artillery took up position behind his house in Falkensee and opened fire on Berlin. The family huddled in the cellar while listening to the columns of tanks droning through the streets. The hours were filled with an absolute fear of death—sitting on suitcases packed to bursting point, not knowing what would happen in the next minute or in the ensuing night. Every time hobnailed boots came crashing through the rooms, accompanied by a guttural yelling, Zettel quickly scattered the contents of the suitcases about the room. No container, no bag, nothing should be packed and on view to tempt anyone to take it with them. He urged his four children to cry and shriek wildly, to cling to their mother's skirt and to his trouser legs. Amazingly, the phone was still working. Zettel contacted Trappe, who lived in a neighboring district. They somehow contacted Russian officers and saved the laboratory in Brieselang from being destroyed or plundered and, with satisfaction, realized the Russians were very much interested in preserving the valuable objects, even if only as spoils of war.

Berlin surrendered on 2 May. The artillery duels ceased. A Polish unit moved into Falkensee. On 3 May, Trappe's telephone was silent. Zettel went to discover what was going on and found his revered boss lying dead in front of his burning house, shot through the head. His hand held a white piece of cloth. A woman who had escaped the massacre by

playing dead explained, sobbing, that the doctor had come out of the house waving this white piece of cloth because the shooting just would not stop. Later, in the ruins alongside other residents of the house, Mrs. Trappe was found—burned to death.

Five days later, on 8 May 1945, the war in Europe was over. Prakla, like much of Germany, was devastated: the headquarters in Berlin was destroyed; the laboratories in Brieselang were intact but inaccessible; the materials and vehicles of the field crews were spread to the four winds, if not destroyed, plundered, or cannibalized; Trappe was dead, Bernhard Brockamp taken prisoner, and Josef Gutter was missing. Prakla was, in effect, stone-dead. And it would have remained stone-dead had not 42-year-old physicist Waldemar Zettel refused to accept this shameful and premature end to his company.

**Difficult new beginnings.** Zettel must have been pleasantly moved when he discovered that the Russian officers were happy to find an expert who appeared authorized to give information and accept instructions, and whose loyalty they greatly respected. Soon, Soviet experts too were brought in. In a report sent to the British North German Oil Control in Hamburg on 24 February 1946 "on suggestion of Major A. E. Gunther, British Oil Field Investigation, 912 Mil. Gov. Det. Celle," Zettel described the situation in the Russian occupied zone:

By the events of April '45 the company was deprived of its managing directors. Having so far been the autho-

To whom it may concern.

This is to certify that Dr. Z e t t e l is authorized by Military Government to travel in the British Zone for the purpose of collecting instruments, or parts thereof, in order to carry out Seismic Surveys under the authority of North German Oil Control.

Authorized by

CELIE  
22 May 46

*A. P. Yellay*  
North German Oil-Control  
912 Mil. Gov. Det. Celle



Autumn 1947. Gertrud Zettel, nanny G. Domin and the children reunited in the West.

### The British, too, were interested in Zettel's pursuits.

rized agent I was appointed manager by the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung, Berlin, and by the shareholders of the company, with the instruction, firstly to get hold of and to secure the company's property.

In the months of June and July '45, I was engaged in the central office of the company at Brieselang near Berlin, being at the disposal of the Russian Military Government, who had sent there a delegation of geophysicists. Unfortunately I did not succeed in preventing the complete expropriation of the company's property, as far as this property was in the Russian Zone. The whole laboratory, the library, the workshop, the stock of instruments and material for the field crews were all taken away and transported to Russia. The buildings of the company, the bank accounts, and all commercial records not destroyed before are under seizure and at present inaccessible.

Let us see what led up to this report by examining what happened in the Russian zone just a few days after the end of the war; the essential points are:

The newly installed, old-communist mayor of Brieselang appointed Zettel to the position of acting director of Prakla on 16 May. At night Zettel remained at home in Falkensee to protect his family and the just-planted seed potatoes from ravenous plunderers. During the day he would be in Brieselang trying to save company property.

He was very successful in the first endeavor, but achieved mixed results in the second. Among his first duties was a detailed "Report on the company" which described the goals, structure, management committees, and the activities carried out during the war, including the operations outside of Germany in Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Croatia, Serbia, France, and Norway. No addressee was given, just: To whom it may concern! For sure, the report was directed, among others, to the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung in Berlin, which, amazingly enough, was soon to start up activities under the same President Barsch who had issued the Ukraine directives. Zettel explained the situation in a letter to Barsch, also mentioning that the Russians curtly refused his request to acknowledge the equipment confiscated in Brieselang. Shortly after, on 30 July 1945, Zettel received an "acknowledgment" from Barsch, who appointed him director of Prakla. It read:

The Gesellschaft für Praktische Lagerstättenforschung is a German company and operates under the supervision of the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung. A substantial part of its equipment is in the west sectors of Germany.

In order to regain possession of this, if possible, it is desperately urgent that Dr. Zettel travels to the province of Hannover during the month of August.

The letter of 30 July had a stamp depicting the eagle of the Third Reich (although the swastika had been scratched out). Zettel received this appointment as director of Prakla a few days after he had been visited by a delegation led by Lieutenant Colonel Fedinsky, which brusquely announced the dissolution of the company on Moscow's orders. Zettel's subsequent two-page "note on talks with Lieutenant Colonel Fedinsky on 31 July 1945 in Brieselang" concluded with a dismal outlook:

The execution of geophysical field work in the whole of Germany is to be the sole responsibility of the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung (this referred to the Berlin department), which is now headed by the Russian geologist Lieutenant Colonel Matvejew. Survey crews are to be equipped with the material left in the other sectors of Germany as there is hardly anything left in the Russian sector.

To implement this plan and procure the equipment it will be necessary to obtain the agreement and support of the other occupying powers. ... A remark by Lieutenant Colonel Fedinsky suggests the outcome of the conference currently being held in Potsdam will be of great significance also in this respect.

The situation was a bureaucratic maze. The letter appointing Zettel as director of Prakla, required that he go to the province of Hannover, that is, into the "west" sector, to procure Prakla property for the "east" sector! Simultaneously, the Soviets had hauled everything they found to Russia, dissolved Prakla, made the Reichsamt in Berlin, which was in their sector, the new guardian of geophysics, and speculated on how to get at the equipment left in the other sectors of the former German Reich.

Fortunately, Lieutenant Colonel Fedinsky was friendly and considerate. He knew that Zettel had a wife and four children to feed, and he also knew of the critical food situation of the defeated Germans. Now and again he would slide a tin of sardines across the desk to Zettel. Nevertheless, the recipient suspected that his future and that of the company he wanted to revive could find a better climate in the west. Zettel kept thinking of Hannover and the surrounding district of North Germany. This was the home of the German oil industry and of producing oil fields, where geophysics had its classic sphere of activity, and where—he assumed—employees with foresight would have safely hidden valuable equipment before the collapse.

Zettel traveled to Hannover twice at the end of 1945 and several times in 1946. He referred to himself as an "artist" in illegal border crossings, even though at that time there was neither a wall nor barbed wire to overcome. While the family remained in Falkensee, the "border" commuter, often on foot, lodged with his sister, Ilse von der Hyde, in Hannover. His letter of 24 February 1946 to the NGOC (North German Oil Control) read in part:

... as soon as the Russian delegation had left Brieselang, I immediately started for Hannover, where I arrived at the end of August 1945. I at once contacted the Crude Oil Department of the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung, Celle, and, on suggestion of the managing director, Professor Dr. A. Bentz, I verbally reported several times about the affairs of the company to Major Gunther.

Up to this day, I and my collaborators have been busy concentrating the company's property, a good deal of equipment having been transported into the building of the Reichsinstitut für Erdölforschung, Hannover, amongst other things two sets of seismic equipment for reflection and refraction, twelve torsion-balances, and four gravimeters.

Further equipment and especially vehicles are still scattered over different parts of the British Zone, partly without sufficient safeguarding. It was not possible to secure them, as no permit to drive a motorcar has been available up till now.

Following a suggestion made by the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung, I am now on the point of promoting a new firm for geophysical prospecting. I have the funds necessary to start at my disposal. As to the personnel, some of the former employees will be reengaged.

The funds at my disposal are my own pecuniary resources.

The equipment and vehicles I want to borrow for my purposes are entirely the property of Prakla.

He added that the shareholder of Prakla too, the Deutsche Revisions und Treuhand AG, which still existed and still had its headquarters in Berlin, agreed with the planned procedure, which was hiring out the Prakla equipment at a suitable price to this company that was to be founded. And finally, the all-important conclusion that had to be expressed with appropriate humility:

... provided that the competent British authorities give their consent. I herewith ask for this consent.

But the time was not yet right for this consent. The facts were hard and clear: The ban on Prakla in the British sector was to remain. All equipment had to be stored in Hannover, remain the property of the military government, and be subject to Law No. 52. Furthermore, it did not help Zettel that the Treuhand appointed him sole managing director on 25 March 1946 at an extraordinary shareholder meeting, and subsequently entered his name in the commercial register in Berlin-Mitte (although the shareholders must have sensed that it would not be possible to revive Prakla should the new managing director succeed in forming his own geophysical company on the side).

Despite these remaining obstacles, Zettel had achieved a great deal in those few months: Contact to former employees had been established, material and equipment tracked

down and, in accordance with the orders, stored in Hannover. Of greatest importance, however, was his contact and close cooperation with Alfred Bentz, the head of the Oil Department at the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung in Celle near Hannover. Just as Barsch had done in the

Russian sector, Bentz quickly gained the respect of the occupying forces in the British sector. (He was destined to become the "big oil man" of the Federal Republic of Germany.) Bentz immediately bet on the man who came in from the cold. He, just as Barsch had done, issued Zettel with an almost identical authorization "to safely store geophysical instruments and other materials for executing work ordered by the military government for maintaining and increasing the oil production." The two Reichsämters—here in Berlin, there in Hannover—had the same thing in mind, albeit different collection points for the instruments. This was a modest prelude to the division of the country, in fact to the division of the world into East and West.

The year 1946 must have been a very frustrating one for Zettel. It was a year for trying out things, a year of setbacks, of crushed hopes, a year of journeying on the coal truck among Falkensee, Berlin, and Hannover—perilous odysseys that took days, yet furthered the cause just millimeters. It was a struggle on all fronts: The Russians and the British made their demands; the Reichsämters had their instructions but also their own ideas; the shareholder, the Treuhand, wanted to have its say, and the infamous questionnaire had to be filled in; and time and again it had to be asserted in writing that one had never belonged to the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party) or one of its organizations. Zettel complied patiently with all demands. His loyalty and integrity were rewarded with respect. He was gaining friends.

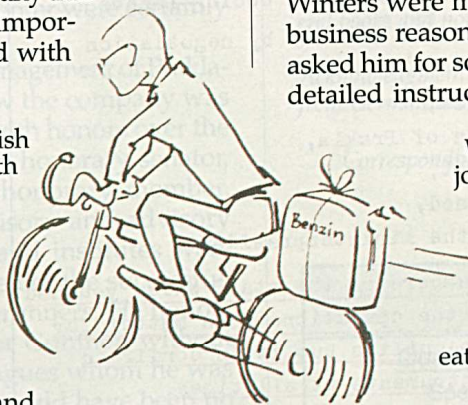
**Breakthroughs and setbacks.** Imagine this lone fighter and petitioner wearing his baggy, well-worn suit, presenting his plans to the smart, well-dressed, well-fed British officers. The German population lived on just 1050 calories per head well into 1948. In the Soviet sector the situation was bleaker. Winters were murderous. A geologist wanted to travel for business reasons with Zettel from Hannover to Berlin and asked him for some tips. He received a two-page letter with detailed instructions, the most important of which were:

When choosing your attire and food for the journey, bear in mind that you may have to travel in an open freight car, that you must not attract the Russians' attention by wearing decent clothes, and that the food situation in the Soviet sector is rock bottom. You should not count on being able to buy anything to eat as soon as you go east of the River Elbe.

They did not in fact journey together. Zettel's reason:

... I do not intend as you do to return to Berlin and Falkensee as fast as possible, but want to get hold of as much food as possible on the way and take it home. That means that I will very often interrupt my journey.

In spite of these seemingly insuperable conditions, Zettel kept at it and started to make some progress on the business front. In a letter to Major Gunther he wrote that he expected work for two or three seismic field crews from the



German oil companies DEA, Elwerath, Itag, Preussag, Schachtbau, and Wintershall, so he could count on a monthly lump sum of 12 000 RM for a seismic party. Moreover, he had gathered all the equipment he could find in the west sectors and stored it in Hannover, according to instructions. It was now time to test the instruments to see if they were still functioning, but he was not permitted to remove them, even temporarily, from storage. The company's bank account had a healthy balance of 14 790.87 RM, obtained from the sale of reports finished in the intervening period for former customers, whom he hoped, would soon become new customers.

Gunter's reply was not too encouraging; he was promised "all the possible support," but he should not count on a quick decision. Thus, it appeared that there was still a long, thorny way to go before the final breakthrough.

A major setback came on 29 October 1946. The Property Control Section of the military government confiscated the stored Prakla equipment in a lightning operation. The NGOC had asked Zettel to travel to Rheine and Meppen,

but he had to cancel, writing: "I was and still am being interrogated by a British Authority, which, I suppose, is the Intelligence Office." He was "put through the hoop" for two days.

But no "irregularities" were found, and on 10 December an Elwerath truck brought back the confiscated material, with a beaming Dr. Closs of the Reichsamt für Bodenforschung at the wheel.

What had caused this turnaround? Probably the support from Bentz; probably also the pressure that may have come from the oil industry to bring an end to the blocking of the geophysical potential which was so desperately needed. The NGOC summary of these events is a bureaucratic classic. It justifies the confiscation by tainting Zettel and then, in effect, turns him loose:

Subject: Affairs of Prakla—9th Jan. 47

To: Property Control Section

Confirming our conversation of this morning, it is considered in this office that Dr. Zettel has not had sufficient commercial or administrative experience to justify his being given permission to reactivate Prakla or to use any organization which he may intend to set up for carrying out seismic surveys using Prakla instruments. Nor is it thought that he will be able to obtain the necessary financial backing. On the other hand it is recognized that he has exceptional technical qualifications.

In view of this and having regard to the importance of getting the instruments into use as soon as possible, it is proposed they be made available to the oil companies on a rental basis, with any income from this source being credited to Prakla. Dr. Zettel is to be allowed access to the instruments to be able to satisfy himself that they are being used with due care. The companies would be allowed to employ the services of Dr. Zettel and any of the members of the staff whom he was proposing to use, should they so desire.

So as of this time, the oil companies could hire the equipment they required from Prakla, and they could engage the services of Zettel and his staff. What more did one want? The spell had been broken. Still, there was a long way to go before all the obstacles were overcome. The situation improved slowly, with great effort and difficulty, but they were free of the worst constraints.

**Out of the woods.** It started off with very modest test surveys, such as the seismic recording of the large detonation on Helgoland carried out by two small crews, one of which was led by Zettel. At the end of March 1947 the first seismic reflection crew was put together for Gewerkschaft Elwerath. Party chief was to be Rudolf Köhler, who had returned in one piece from the Ukraine. At the end of that year, Prakla employed three seismic crews.

Tel.- Celle Civ 2963/3557  
Ref.- NGOC/C/14/426

North German Oil Control  
c/oHQ Mil Gov Kreis Gp CELLE  
912 HQ, CCG, BAOR

Subject:-Use of Prakla  
Survey Instruments. 20 Jan 47

To:- Dr.W. Zettel  
HANNOVER

Confirming our conversation of this afternoon you are hereby authorized to prepare for use the two Seismic Survey instruments at present under the control of the Geologisches Landesamt in HANNOVER.

It is understood that you undertake to have the first outfit ready in four weeks time and the second in eight weeks, providing you are enabled to proceed to BERLIN without delay, to obtain parts for the second instrument.

It is agreed that you will make the instruments available to the Oil Companies on a rental basis.

Priorities for use will be notified by the Geolog-Landesamt.

The financial arrangements will be settled by negotiation with

- (1) Price Control HANNOVER,
- (2) Yourself as Custodian of Prakla,
- (3) Geologisches Landesamt,
- (4) The companies concerned,
- (5) The Finance Dept of the Ministerpräsident.

The part which you, or any members of the staff which you had proposed to assemble, will take in the operations is a matter for decision by the companies using the outfits but it is confirmed that you may have access to the instruments at all times.

CELLE  
LRT/RN

I.R. Tilley  
NORTH GERMAN OIL CONTROL  
(I.R. Tilley)

cc. Major A.E. Gunther  
" Geol.Landesamt  
" Head of Oil Section 229 Mil Gov LAND NIEDERSACHSEN  
" NGOC, ZEO, CCG, HAMBURG, Prod.Sect. for information.

Zettel had to deal with five different authorities for the "financial arrangements" to conduct his work.

The pay was a monthly lump sum of 12 000 RM per crew, which was enough to buy 10 kg of coffee on the black market. But that did not bother anybody!

By the end of 1948 there were five crews, by 1952 it was up to 15 (three of which were abroad), and by 1958 no fewer than 45.

The official decision to relocate the company headquarters from Berlin to Hannover was announced on 20 January 1949. As early as the end of 1947 the first private moves had taken place: Zettel brought his wife Gertrud and his two daughters to Hannover after previously having relocated his sons in the west because the Soviet regime did not want to have the sons of a non-socialist academic at college.

For the company, the time had come for expansion, for reaping the harvest, and for success. Prakla became part of the German economic miracle. But the miracle was not handed to them on a platter, and no one knew that better than the head of the newly founded company.

The takeover of Seismos in 1963 was, for Zettel, not the taking over of a competitor, but rather the end of a schism. For Zettel, who had started with Seismos, this was a logical act of reunification. Even today he feels proud to have realized this step. Numerous hurdles had to be cleared and challenges overcome, of which the successful entry into the digital age and the setting up of a data center were certainly not the least.

In 1968, as Zettel handed over the management of Prakla-Seismos to the next generation, he knew the company was in good order. He had been showered with honors over the years: His university had made him an honorary senator, the German Geophysical Society an honorary member. Appointments to positions in supervisory and advisory committees of important companies and institutes were usual—the reward as well as the burden of the successful.

Today he is still grateful to his forerunners. He honors the memory of Alfred Bentz and Major Gunther; without them and the numerous capable colleagues whom he was able to bring into the company, there would have been no success. Against his old adversaries he bears no grudge. Smiling to himself, he recounts how a horde of Red Army soldiers robbed him as he and his eldest son crossed the sector border on foot. They threw his rucksack onto the snow and rummaged through its contents for anything of use. His protests attracted only a hefty clout on the head.

Waldemar Zettel never misses a meeting of the former Prakla-Seismos employees, held in Schulenberg near Hannover, which take place twice a year and where up to 100 people gather. Today he lives with his second wife, Anneliese, in an idyllic setting in Dorfmark, a small village

on the edge of the Lüneburg Heath. His first wife, Gertrud, died in 1983.

In his 95th year, Zettel guided this fortunate visitor and author through the garden and wood of his two-acre plot of land, through which the Böhme stream flows, where ponds provide frogs and fish with an ideal biotope, and where one could almost get lost if it were not for the agile host briskly leading the way.

We enjoy the sunny, mild autumn. The leaves show their first warm colors. When I invite Zettel to speak of times gone by, he is not nostalgic and interrupts his account frequently to point out various aspects of the vegetation, various rare plants. He knows their names, their origins, their habitats, what soil they love, and who pollinates them.

Mrs. Zettel presents the visitor with a book of poems. In it the Lüneburg Heath is celebrated in verse, a countryside full of melancholy magic. Those who love tranquillity and long, peaceful, rambling walks, those who want to be alone with their thoughts and memories, will find here what they are looking for. E



Zettel and his wife Anneliese in their house at Dorfmark.

*Gerhard Keppner studied geology and geophysics at the Technical University of Stuttgart and, after gaining a masters' degree, joined Prakla at the beginning of 1958. Subsequent to many years as a party chief and supervisor in Germany, Morocco, Libya, Somalia, Algeria, and Gabon, Keppner took over in 1979 as editor of the Prakla-Seismos Report and other publications. From 1985 to his retirement in 1991, he was*

*responsible for public relations at the company. He has also written several books and novels.*

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## Interpretation<sup>3</sup>

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