Rubin Udler

THE CURSED YEARS

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Reminiscences of a Holocaust Survivor

Pittsburgh
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The book by Doctor of Philological Sciences, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova Rubin Udler titled «The Cursed Years» is a true account of what his family and relatives suffered during the years of World War II and the Catastrophe on the territory of the Soviet Union occupied by German and Romanian fascists. He knows by experience about the bloodshed in Odessa in October 1941, was a prisoner in ghettos.

Many literary works of different genres were written about the Catastrophe; there are also research works devoted to the tragic fate of Transnistrian Jews who survived the Holocaust. However, the memoirs written by the former prisoners of fascist concentration camps and ghettos in Transnistria are relatively few. Most of these people passed away without leaving any memoirs about what they had been through. This is why the publication of Rubin Udler's book is all the more precious. The author's diaries, usage of documents, wide life experience allowed him to understand deeply and to create a true-to-life picture of the events of those years.

Rubin Udler's memoirs are of great interest not only to those who survived the Holocaust and horrors of the war, but also to the younger generation, especially in the present-day atmosphere of raging of anti-Semitism and terror.

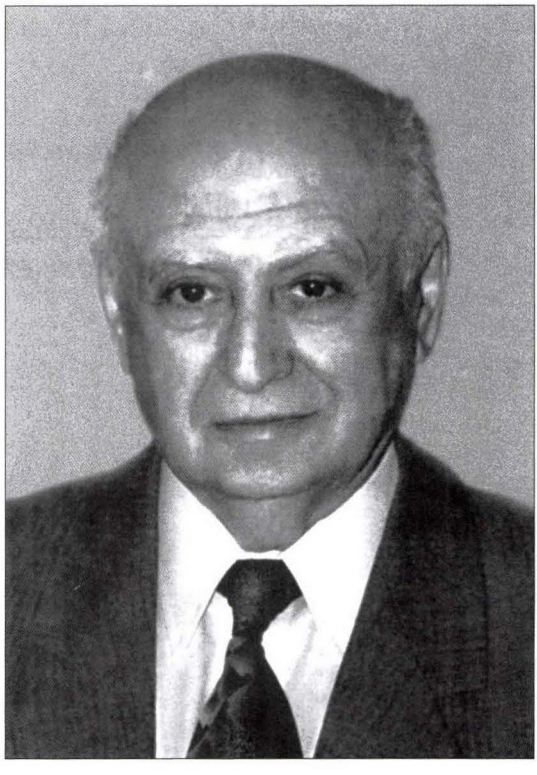
A translation from the Russian of *Годы бедствий* by Rubin Udler
Translated by Gerald McCausland

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY PARENTS,

DINA VLADIMIROVNA AND
YAKOV ARONOVICH UDLER



Rubin Udler

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgment VI
Preface VII
Foreword XII
Chapter 1: Odessa (1941) 1
Chapter 2: Brăila 25
Chapter 3: Akkerman 43
Chapter 4: Expulsion from Odessa 66
Chapter 5: The road to the Ghetto 77
Chapter 6: Vinogradnyi Sad 84
Chapter 7: Grazhdanovka 138
Chapter 8: Vovhovo 150
Chapter 9: Odessa (1944) 164
Chapter 10: The Dimensions of the Tragedy 174
Chapter 11: Destination Unknown 199
Chapter 12: Komi ASSR 220
Chapter 13: Moscow 269
Chapter 14: Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy 296
Bibliography 311
Figure Captions 315
Afterword 317
About the author 320

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For their unfailing moral support, valuable comments, and advice, I would like to express my special gratitude to the first readers of these memoirs: to my wife Mira Il'inichna, my son Arthur, and my daughter Angela Gologorsky.

I hope that my grandchildren – Yakov, who graduated Harvard University, magna cum laude, and now is a medical student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine; Daniel and Iliya, seniors in high school; and the youngest, Benjamin, Rachel, and Ilana – like all their peers, will never be subject to oppression and annihilation on the basis of their nationality and faith. American democracy guarantees this dream.

PREFACE

Dr. Rubin Udler's book ***The Cursed Years*** *is a seminal historical study and moving memoir. Through the unusual fusion of detailed scholarly documentation and personal reminiscences, Dr. Udler gives readers an insight into two crucial, but still largely unresearched chapters of twentieth century history. In the first part of* ***The Cursed Years,*** *he describes the extermination of Jews in Romania, Bessarabia, and the Bukovina under General Ion Antonescu's fascist dictatorship. In the book's second part, Dr. Udler details the NKVD's persecution of innocent people from liberated territories who were often either forced into the labor army or deported arbitrarily to labor camps, where they died of malnutrition, illness, and exhaustion. Among them were Jewish Shoah survivors, including Dr. Rubin Udler himself, who had volunteered to serve in the Red Army in order to fight the Nazi troops. In his powerful book, Dr. Udler vivifies the sufferings of people in both dictatorship; he bears witness to crimes against humanity, yet he also gives credit to those courageous few who helped victims.*

Dr. Rubin Udler is well known to a broad scientific public as prominent linguist and foremost specialist in Moldovan linguistic geography. Dr. Udler's scientific work comprises twenty-five authored and co-authored volumes: monographs, linguistic atlases, university textbooks, dictionaries, and collection of dialectological texts. All of these works make substantial contributions to his field of study, but his multi-volume ***Moldavian Linguistic Atlas*** *is a historic achievement. Dr. Udler, who researched the particularities of spoken Moldovan (also called «Moldovian» and – in the Soviet period – «Moldavian»), established a large collection of recordings; they are preserved in the phonogram archive of the Section on Dialectology and Linguistic Geography in the Language and Literature Institute of the Kishinev Academy of Sciences, Moldova. In addition, Dr. Udler edited and co-edited sixty different volumes on dialectology and linguistic geography. He also published 240 articles in the former Soviet Union, Romania, France, former Yugoslavia, Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland, former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Canada, and the United States. His reputation as distinguished linguist reached far beyond Moldova's boarder. As a result, he was invited as keynote speaker to 130 national and international congresses, conferences, and symposia, held in many different countries.*

Dr. Udler developed some of his most innovative research activities in the time period from 1961 to 1992, when he was head of the Sections on

Dialectology and Experimental Phonetics; Dialectology and History of Language; as well as Dialectology and Linguistic Geography in the Language and Literature Institute (Kishinev, Moldova). From 1989 to 1992 he was also the Adjunct Academician–Secretary of the Social Studies Department at the Academy of Sciences. In recognition of his achievements, the Academy of Sciences in Moldavian SSR appointed him as Corresponding Member.

In 1991, Moldavian SSR became an independent republic, changing its name to Moldova. Two new political parties emerged: one of them fought for the unification with Romania; the other party opposed this because it did not take into consideration the needs of the non-Romanian speaking population in an area beyond the river Dniestr. Unlike Bessarabia (western Moldova), this region had never been part of Romania. In the subsequent years, the conflict escalated into a civil war, which came to an end with the establishment of a new Trans-Dniester Moldovian Republic. During the political turmoil, Dr. Udler and his family left Moldova, immigrated to the United States, and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As the years passed, his thoughts returned time and again to his experiences in Romania, the Soviet Union, and Moldova, motivating him to write his memoir as both a testimony and historical study of the War period.

No scholar familiar with Dr. Udler's work knew about the «cursed years» that darkened his youth. He was still a teenager when World War II broke out. The experience of persecution, bombardment, and deportation turned him into an adult.

In 1925, when Dr. Rubin Udler was born, his hometown Brăila (Romania), located on the shore of the Danube, enjoyed economic prosperity and political freedom. At that time, Romania was a liberal Kingdom. Rubin's paternal grandparents and his father, Yakov Udler, were from the Bessarabian town Akkerman, called in Romanian «Cetatea Albă». In 1918, during the political turmoil following the Russian Revolution, Bessarabians first declared their region independent and then decided to unite it with the Romanian Kingdom. No political, but family considerations prompted the Udlers to move to Brăila in the early 1920s. They joined Yakov's sister Ghenia and her husband Isidor Ghelberg. Ghenia was a remarkably emancipated woman who had left her parental home in order to study engineering at the Bucharest Politechnical Institute, completed her degree in record time, and received an excellent position as an electrical engineer in Brăila. Shortly before starting her career, she married her Jewish fellow student Isidor who came from Roman, a Moldovan Romanian city. A few months later, after finishing his degree in metallurgical engineering, Isidor joined his wife; the couple worked in the very same factory, whose owner later appointed Isidor as his chief engineer. Yakov Udler was very close to his sister Ghenia, and Rubin became good friends with his cousin Leonea, Ghenia's and Isidor's son, who was his age. Rubin's parents, grandparents, and relatives combined their religious beliefs with the progressive ideas of their time. Not only Ghenia, but also her sister Ida had studied and pursued a professional career. Yakov was a hard-working harness-maker and currier, who took over and expanded his

father's business, while continuing a family tradition: he encouraged not only his son but also his daughter to learn, assuring them an excellent education at Brăila's top high schools.

The Udler family and their relatives felt at home in Brăila. But in the 1930 s, growing fascism and anti-Semitism gradually undermined the peaceful interrelations between Romanians and Jews. In 1940, when General Ion Antonescu came to power, the situation of the Jewish minority in Romania rapidly deteriorated. Antonescu's government denied Romanian Jews their civil rights and turned them into a target of growing persecution. Antonescu encouraged numerous pogroms in the entire country. In addition, he decreed to deport to death camps and exterminate all Jews living in the Bukovina and Bessarabia, two regions integrated into Romania after World War I. It was the Nazis regime that had given Antonescu's government the conquered region of Transnistria, located east of the river Dniestr, with the understanding that it would be used as the site for exterminating the Jewish population.

Although violent anti-Semitism had radically changed Romania, Dr. Udler's parents still felt secure in Brăila and did not want to leave their new home in spite of the looming danger. At the insistence of Ghenia and Isidor, who were well aware of the political developments in Nazi Germany and their impact on fascist Romania, the entire family returned to their hometown Akkerman. On 26 June 1940 the Soviet Union forced Romania in an ultimatum to cede Bessarabia, Bukovina and the district of Herța within forty-eight hours. By mid-July, when the Udlers and the Ghelbergs arrived in Akkerman, the entire region was already under the control of the Soviet regime, which ordered its secret service to interrogate and later deport to Siberia and Kazakh SSR alleged «enemies of the people». Among them were religious leaders and so-called capitalists even if they had a proven record of supporting their community and donating their property. Many liberal Jews who were perceived as potential enemies, including Udler's friends were among the deportees. Life was again very difficult. Ghenia and Isidor could not find work. After many struggles, they received jobs first in the small town Sarata and then in Czernovtsy, capital of the Bukovina. They moved there with their son, while Yakov Udler and his family remained in Akkerman.

On 22 June 1941, without any declaration of war, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union. After loosing the first battles, the Red Army was forced to retreat. Yakov Udler and his immediate family fled the approaching Romanian fascist and German Nazi troops, seeking refuge in Odessa. But soon the enemy also encircled and besieged this city. Rubin, his parents, and sister survived the bombardments and the bestiality of Nazi occupation, but did not escape the deportation first to a ghetto in February 1942 and then to several forced labor camps in Transnistria.

Dr. Udler's moving book bears witness to and documents the crimes committed by Romanian fascists and German Nazis during this period of time. Thanks to his remarkable memory Dr. Udler tells the story of numerous victims, saving their names from oblivion. Many of these deportees were robbed, beaten to death, or shot dead. Some died of exhaustion, hunger,

and disease. Others were brought to annihilation camps such as Akhmechetka. Thousands of innocent people perished in Transnistria. Dr. Udler's book is a tombstone for these victims. Yet it also commemorates courage. For Dr. Udler remembers and details the remarkable acts of bravery undertaken by several deportees such as a Jewish physician from Odessa, who helped others in spite of life-threatening danger. Moreover, Dr. Udler inscribes into the consciousness of the presence the memory of those few Russians, Ukrainians, and Romanians who risked their own life in order to save him, his parents, his sister, as well as other deportees.

In March 1944, rumors of the Red Army's victories reached the Udlers. Since Soviet troops were said to be in the region, they decided to flee from the ghetto, but still found themselves trapped in a German occupied hamlet. A brave Ukrainian family helped them. In spite of the cold, Rubin, Yakov, and their Ukrainian rescuer (who was running the danger of being captured by the Germans and sent to hard labor in Western Europe) had to hide in a whole in the earth for a few days. Rubin's mother and sister were disguised as peasants. On March 30, 1944, Soviet troops liberated them. Right away, the father was drafted into the army; Rubin, his mother, and his sister were permitted to leave the hamlet; they followed the Russian troops until they reached Odessa.

Yakov Udler was ready to fight the German troops, but the Secret Service «Smersh» did not send him to the front as he had wished and expected. Rather, he was forced into the labor army, where he had to work under unbearable conditions deep underground in a mineshaft. After several months, he almost died of exhaustion, illness, and malnutrition. «Guilty of nothing, he was nonetheless treated as a criminal», writes Dr. Udler. Yakov's first letters to his family never reached their destination. His wife and children did not know what had become of him; they were living in fear.

Rubin volunteered to help fight the Nazi troops. He too joined the Red Army. First, he was sent to an Artillery School. During his training, the Secret Service interrogated him repeatedly. The mere fact that he was born in Romania and had survived the ghetto aroused suspicion. Rubin and several other recruits were ordered to travel East under the supervision of military escorts. The destination remained a secret until the end of the journey. On 7 July 1944, after many days of difficult travels, he arrived in the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, where he too had to work for the labor army. Rubin, who was obliged to saw down trees and unload trucks, almost died of exhaustion, hunger, and severe illness. For the Shoah victim Rubin, the reality of being treated like a convict was unbearable. His ordeal lasted fifteen months. He survived it thanks to the help of several former prisoners (engineers, technicians, and other professionals who had been released from jail, but obliged to stay in Komi as settlers), a physician, and his aunt Ida, who was living in Moscow. After numerous fruitless efforts to get him out of this camp, Ida was able to obtain an official permission for him to return to study at a Construction Technical School in the capital. Many months later, his father also managed to return to his family. At the end of the war, the Udler family learned that Ghenia, Isidor, and Leonea had

miraculously survived the deportation to a Bessarabian ghetto, where they endured humiliation, hard labor, and life-threatening diseases.

Dr. Udler's story poses hope: for it shows that a teenager can overcome the trauma of genocide, live on without fear, found a family, study, complete a Ph.D., make a remarkable career, and become the leading scholar in his discipline. In spite of his experiences, Dr. Udler remained a kind, tolerant, and generous person. He is a model for present and future generations.

In his book ***The Cursed Years****, Dr. Udler integrates information about hitherto unknown testimonies and still unresearched historical sources, including newspapers. His work is based on extensive research as well as on his diary entries during this time period. Through his findings and his clear analysis of documents, Dr. Udler undoes disturbing myths about the persecution of Jews – myths propagated by Soviet and Romanian historical writings. In the former Soviet Union, historians interpreted the persecution of Jews as one of the aspects of the general human tragedy caused by World War II. It was an official Soviet policy to discourage further analysis of the particularities of this genocide. As a result, the research about the Shoah remained incomplete. Under Ceaușescu's rule, Romanian historians, in their discussions of the Shoah, followed the Soviet model. After the downfall of communism, Romania experienced a rise of nationalism, which brought about a re-interpretation of the past. Figures such as Antonescu were suddenly portrayed as heroes because they were extreme nationalists who suppressed commu-nism. Statues of Antonescu were put up in several cities, although he had been executed as a war criminal in 1946. The persecution and mass murder of Jews under his rule were largely forgotten. In the late 1990s, Romania wished to join the EU. The country was therefore required to distance itself from Antonescu. His statues were removed, but many Romanian historians still tend to have a difficult time in accepting the fascist past of their country.*

Dr. Udler's book ***The Cursed Years*** *demystifies, breaks taboos, and gives insight into largely unknown historical events. It corrects misrepresentations of facts, errors in the interpretation of statistics, and wrong conclusions based on the significant differences in the compilation and calculations of statistical figures. Udler sharply criticizes revisionist and neo-fascist Romanian works; yet he also points to inaccuracies in the presentation and reading of statistics in historical studies by Jewish authors. His book comprises both a crucial documentation of crimes against humanity in general and against Jews in particular as well as a critical analysis of scholarly representations of the Shoah period.*

The Cursed Years *is a timeless work, which opens up a new chapter not only in scholarly research about the Shoah, but also in Jewish Romanian/ Moldovan relations.*

Prof. Dr. Amy Colin
(University of Pittsburgh;
W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University)

FOREWORD

Few remain of those who distinctly remember the great war. The people who experienced it in their maturity have almost all passed from this world and younger generations carry on the memory of it. What do we remember, we who were born on the eve of the war? Of course we remember some things. Bombings, the evacuation, constant hunger, waiting for news from loved ones, terrible death notices from the front, the return home, joy at the victory and a festive parade. In Kishinev in 1945 there was also a parade, which we, preschool boys, stamped into our memories forever along with the great joy of victory. Kishinev, almost completely destroyed, rejoiced, and songs were heard everywhere. Then it was common to sing both as an invited guest and at home, in the company of children and of adults. My generation also remembers this.

But there is an older generation to whom fell a more painful lot. The author of these memoirs, Rubin Yakovlevich Udler, belongs to that generation. As fate willed it, he found himself in far-away Pittsburgh, a major university city in western Pennsylvania. I last saw him in 1989 and then spoke with him by telephone when I was in America in 2001. When I remember him, it is above all his eyes that appear before me: bright, radiant, exuding irrepressible energy. He always seemed to me to be a boundless optimist, a determined and enterprising man. I knew almost nothing of his personal life and could not imagine the kinds of horrible trials through which he had passed.

Rubin Udler is one of the most outstanding Moldavian linguists and the representative of a particular branch of dialectology: linguistic geography. His works were considerably better known to me than was the author himself. Even had he published nothing beyond the multi-volume ***Moldavian Linguistic Atlas****, that alone would have been enough for him to find a lasting place in the history not only of Moldavian philology but of Romance philology in general. Indeed, in order to compile such an atlas, it was necessary to possess a great deal of knowledge and skill as well as thoroughly studying the dialect variants of hundreds of Moldavian settlements.*

Rubin Udler is a zealous scholar, one of those who disprove the rather widespread stereotype of philologists as armchair scholars hidden away in their offices. There is of course nothing shameful about the office aspect of scholars' lives. It is their daily work, their «shop», their «workbench». But it is difficult to imagine Udler in his office. His work has included many expeditions, conversations, and recordings of the particularities of Moldavian

speech. It is his great accomplishment that the living, colloquial language of the Moldavians has been preserved despite their dispersion throughout the far reaches of the enormous Soviet Union. The majority of these people have now passed away, but thanks to Rubin Udler, taped recordings of conversations with them, preserving all the nuances of the speech inherited from their ancestors, are kept in the phonogram archive of the Dialectology and Linguistic Geography Department of the Language and Literature Institute. In recognition of his remarkable scholarly accomplishments he was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Moldavian SSR.

After settling in America, Rubin Udler devoted himself above all to the writing of his memoirs. The need to write memoirs can be of several different kinds. These particular memoirs are the discharge of a sacred duty: the living are obligated to tell of those who are no longer among us, to remind the young of other times and of the people who innocently suffered and perished.

Rubin Udler was born in the Romanian city of Brăila where the Turkish «rajah» had been for a long time and which, after the Russian-Turkish war of 1828-1829, was given to the Wallachian Principality in the Treaty of Adrianopol in 1829. This city went to the Principality thanks to Russia. In this city, as also in Giurgiu, the other city transferred to the Principality, a new municipal administration was established that was then taken as a basis for all of Wallachia. It was to Brăila that the small family of Yakov Udler, by birth from Bessarabia, came in 1921. Yakov Udler was a harness-maker and currier and a very hard worker. He was able to attain notable success in his work, became an employer, and occupied a visible position in the city. His daughter received a good education and graduated from the Women's Commercial Lyceum. His son studied at the prestigious Nicolae Bălcescu Lyceum. But political storm clouds were gradually gathering and fascism began to threaten this family as well. «Fascism and the Udler family» is the major theme of the author's memoirs. This relatively (for that time) small family – father, mother, daughter, and son – came up against the threat of nationalism and anti-Semitism and was forced to solve the problem of their very survival. Discussion centered around ways of preserving their right to life. Rubin Udler writes about family meetings, about how they weighed all the pros and cons and finally despite all misgivings, decided to leave Romania.

He returns to this journey many times in his memoirs. At the beginning of Chapter 4 he writes, «it had been impossible for us to remain in Brăila, ... we should have spared no effort to evacuate ourselves to the interior of the country in order to escape the fascist plague». But they were not able to evacuate themselves further than Odessa and the entire family bore first all the difficulties of the heroic defense of this city on the Black Sea and then the horrors of its occupation by Romanian fascists.

There is no shortage of recollections about the occupation of Odessa and about the regime set up there. But we have here the memoirs of a man who looked at the unfolding events with the eyes of a Jewish youth who

had just recently migrated to the USSR. I had never before read such reminiscences about Odessa in those difficult months at the end of 1941. They are interesting both as personal observations, because every memoirist expresses his own personal nuances, and as an important historical source.

Indeed, memoirs are a particular kind of historical source; they often communicate that information about which other sources remain silent. But Rubin Udler's memoirs are not simply the reminiscences of a witness of those years. These were written by a mature scholar who relied on his journals and on the literature published in different countries. This increases the authenticity of his memoirs and weaves personal impressions into the general historical background of the great events of that time when the fate of the entire world was decided.

Above all Rubin Udler rejects the opinion that there was some kind of «mild» Romanian fascism. In Chapter 10 of his memoirs he writes bluntly: «The brutality of the Romanian organs of power, directed by the Antonescu government, surpassed the ferocity and bloodthirstiness of the Horthyists, Szalasists, Tisoists, Ustashas, and fascists of other European countries such as Poland or Greece. The Romanian fascists were no more humane than the German ones».

This is the witness of a man who not only saw what took place around him but also experienced directly and personally all the horrors dealt out by the fascists' arbitrary will: not merely robbery, mockery, and slaughters, but also the methodical physical annihilation of human beings. However, Udler finds people trying to disrupt this fascist arbitrariness even among the officers and soldiers serving in the Romanian army and among the bureaucrats in the Romanian administration. This includes the family's old acquaintance, Captain Radu M. Badiu; a simple soldier, a former worker from Jassy, a conscientious, religious, and respectable man; the mayor of the city of Chernovitsy, Dr. Traian Popovici; and the commandant of the Edyntsy camp-ghetto, Reserve Captain Alexandru Shishman. The author names all of these decent and honest people. But they were the rare exceptions.

The author angrily holds up to shame the dictator Ion Antonescu and condemns those who today try to whitewash his reputation and to depict him as a national hero. Udler lists by name the ideologists of Romanian fascism and those who annihilated hundreds of thousands of innocent lives bringing these ideas to life. «The Red Army», writes Udler, «was our only hope for liberation from the ghetto and the salvation of our lives. There was no one and nothing else to hope for».

For Rubin Udler, the Red Army was his army and he sees in it a fundamental distinction as compared to the army of the fascists. He describes the joy of liberation from the fascist ghetto in the spring of 1944 and the way in which the Soviet soldiers conducted themselves. In Chapter 8 of his memoirs one can read the following words about the arrival of the Red Army: «How different these people were from the murderous aggressors they had driven off. How significant had ideology, world outlook, and education turned out to be. Passing through before us were older men, many already gray, along with

fresh-faced youths – Russians and Georgians, Tajiks and Armenians, people of various nationalities, the well-educated alongside typical workers and peasants. But they had all equally defended their native land, their homes, their families. They had not enslaved anybody, nor had they mocked those of other faiths».

For this army Rubin Udler himself volunteered to serve. But they sent him not to the front lines but to a labor-army, in the ranks of which he worked more than a year in the far North, in Komi ASSR, enduring yet more difficult ordeals.

Rubin Udler's book is interesting for its sketches from nature, for its reflection of human characters of the environment that he was forced to confront. He showed how the war became a test of strength and endurance. Even in the occupation, among betrayal, collaboration, cowardice, and indifference, he encounters many worthy people. This would include Tanya, the wife of a career officer who wound up in Odessa. «A seemingly ordinary Russian woman», as the author writes, «had saved all of our lives». This would include Uncle Andriy, the work supervisor for the Jews in the ghetto and the Ukrainian Van'ka Zhuk, who openly displayed his hatred of the Germans and Romanians. This would include the Moldavian communist Anton Blanuță, who took in a Jewish girl as his own daughter, and Sergei Petrovich Mezinovsky, who hid them knowing that they were Jews on the run. The author's testimonies are all the more valuable inasmuch as he tells not of literary heroes but of real people who he had met in the desperately difficult conditions of wartime.

The reminiscences of Rubin Udler are not merely a particular kind of family saga, the history of four human lives bound together by very close familial bonds. It is a priceless historical document with great significance for the study of those past events. Scarcely anyone could write such a book today. It also contains his thoughts on the Romanian politics at various stages of the war. The author maintains that the victory of Soviet forces near Stalingrad directly effected a change in the conditions of life for the surviving Jews of Transnistria. As noted in the book, the killing grew less frequent, but the robberies increased. Attention is drawn to the comparative material regarding the attitudes toward Jews in the ranks of the Red Army, where the author did not experience any anti-Semitism, and the attitudes toward Jews in the countries of the fascist bloc. And, of course, the description of the situation in various ghettos is of particular interest. The author notes the great disparity in the fates of the Jews. Some paid with their lives while others bore all the torments of hell but nonetheless survived.

In Chapter 10 he writes of the bribes taken by the Romanian authorities for arranging emigration to Palestine. Despite his devotion to his own people, Udler singles out good and honest people of different nationalities. The author of these reminiscences also dwells on the repressions in the USSR and evaluates them, trying to understand their causes and consequences.

He has his own opinion of the German-Soviet pact of August 23, 1939. He calls it a «gross miscalculation on the part of the country's leaders», that

is, of the leaders of the Soviet Union. Indeed, but interminable discussions about that pact still continue. It was made during the Khalkhin-Gol period, i.e., during the very real Soviet-Japanese war. This factor must not be dismissed. In addition, the desire in these conditions to delay war with Germany must also be kept in mind.

On another controversial topic, that of the presence of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, the author writes unambiguously: «An army presence in the liberated countries of Eastern Europe was a necessity» (Chapter 12).

Rubin Udler thus does not in any way limit himself to the description of that which he himself saw, but also gives his judgement on events from his own standpoint based on his understanding of the course of world events.

Rubin Udler was lucky. His small family survived. He recalls the words of his mother who told him that he had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth and that a Gypsy woman had told her fortune and had predicted long life and great success for her son. What greater happiness could there be than the preservation of his own life and the lives of his family intact? However, 12 members of his extended family – his grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins – had been brutally exterminated by the Romanians. He himself literally returned from hell. He returned and told of it to all those who knew nothing of it, in order to fulfill his duty and to prevent younger generations from repeating the horrors that he had endured.

In the pages of his memoirs, Rubin Udler appears as a consistent antifascist and humanist. These principles run through his entire book, which he has dedicated to those people who gave him life – his father and mother. The book opens with the following dedication: «To the memory of my parents, Dina Vladimirovna and Yakov Aronovich Udler».

While reading the reminiscences of Rubin Udler I gradually felt drawn into his family and I was sad to part with them. I feel the need to continue my association with them, and I hope that Rubin Yakovlevich continues his memoirs. He still has things to tell and there are people who would be interested in reading the next book of his recollections.

Vladislav Yakimovich Grosul,
Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor
(Moscow)

Chapter 1: **ODESSA (1941)**

I begin with Odessa, because I cannot do otherwise. The very name holds for me nothing but horror, for it was there that the sufferings of my family began with a thunderclap of cruelty. My need to begin with this rather abrupt summary reflects the suddenness and shock of a nightmare that enveloped the family of my mother, and lives with me to this day. For that reason I begin with a memorial, if you will, to those closest to me who were lost. This is also my introduction to my family, and to the terrible fate they encountered through one of those eruptions of evil chance we hope never to see again.

Driven by fear of the advancing Romanian and German armies my mother's entire extended family – her mother and father, sister and brothers and their families – fled the small southern-Bessarabian town of Artsyz [Arciz]. When Odessa was then encircled, all 16 of them found themselves trapped.

In October 1941, the fascists took the city. The family's sufferings began on the very first day of the occupation with ceaseless mockery, humiliation, and hardship. The Romanian soldiers and local marauders were taking many of their valuables, so they gave many of these things away in exchange for pieces of bread, bowls of *ciorbă* (a thick bean soup), or simply to avoid being turned over to the Romanian gendarmes or the German SS to be tortured and killed.

My Uncle Nooham Gleizer, the most humble and inoffensive of my mother's brothers, hanged himself in the sad glory of the DOPR-prison of Odessa. They separated him from Hayka, his wife, equally calm and steadfast, and from his son, Yuzya, a kind and well-behaved boy of about 12. Nooham was beaten, mocked and insulted, and brought to a state of spiritual devastation and hopelessness. Early one morning, as we later learned, he uttered the prescribed prayer of the Shacharit and thought deeply over the sacred words: «Look from heaven and perceive that we have become an object of scorn and derision among the nations; we are regarded as the sheep led to slaughter, to be killed, destroyed, beaten, and humiliated. But despite all this we have not forgotten Your Name.... Hashem, God of Israel, turn back from Your flaring anger....» He hanged himself with his own belt. One can imagine to what depths

of despair the Romanian brutes drove this man so that he, a mature Jewish man in his 40s, laid hands on himself, in violation of Jewish law, and committed suicide.

My mother's older brother, Uncle Etsik, was married to Hona Kooza of Shtefaneshti [Ştefăneşti], a shtetl near the Romanian town of Botoshani [Botoşani]. They had two children: Misha, who was my age, and Rita, two years younger. They were beautiful and gifted children and had done well in school. Hona, an intelligent, astute, and resolute woman, persuaded Etsik that they ought to report to the police voluntarily. She would explain in Romanian to the police commissioner who they were and where they came from, and the Romanians, among whom she had lived until her marriage and whom she considered to be good and God-fearing people, would permit them to return home to Artsyz. All four left and sank into oblivion. Hona had made a fatal mistake in trusting the Romanians. These were now different Romanians–legionnaires, members of the fascist organization the «Iron Guard»,who were imbued with a new spirit of nationalism and virulent anti-Semitism.

Many years later, after the war ended, someone told my mother that my cousin Misha was alive and that he, along with other children, had been taken to Palestine with the assistance of an international charitable Jewish society. But our letters, inquiries, and entreaties turned up nothing. He too had disappeared.

My mother's younger brother, Uncle Mottya, together with his wife Dora and their two small children, 6-year-old Unah and 1-year-old Firochka, desperately tried to delay their deportation to the ghetto. With him were my grandmother, Udl; grandfather, Wolf; Nooham's widow, Hayka, with her son, Yuzya; and his younger sister, Sonya, whom he had taken in with her husband, Velvel, and their son, Ezya.

Uncle Mottya was an intelligent, healthy, brave, and energetic man. He spoke both Romanian and German fairly well and had the cunning and skill to pay off potential oppressors more than once. But suddenly, this group also disappeared. During one of the regular round-ups, everyone from the nursing child to the seventy-six-year-old man was taken away.

The Governor of Transnistria, George Alexianu[1], signed many orders and decrees affecting the Jewish population of Odessa and the entire region. All of these documents had but one goal: the destruction of the Jews.

By January 1942 not a single member of our family was left in Odessa.

de Asistență
09282 30 MAR 1944

Ref.J.Nr.15266/1683

C ă t r e
Oficiul Județean Brăila 574
al Centralei Evreilor din România

B r ă i l a

Privește "Soarta Copilului"

Revenim la adresa Dvs.Nr.1199 din 23 Martie a.c.și vă arătăm că sunt în curs demersuri către Ministerul Afacerilor Interne pentru a se autoriza ca unii din orfani așezați în orașele din Moldova să poată pleca în alte orașe ale Țării pentru a fi crescuți și îngrijiți pe socoteala familiilor ce au solicitat aceasta.

De îndată ce vom avea rezultatul, vom reveni.

Vă rugăm deci a face cunoscut aceasta și d-lui Schwartz Jancu din orașul Dvs.,Str.Ștefan cel Mare Nr.254,care a cerut ca orfanul repatriat Mișu Gleizer,aflător actualmente într'un orfelinat din Iași să-i fie dat pentru a-l crește și îngriji.

Șeful Secțiunii,

Dr.A.Rădovici

Secretar,

Dr.E.Costiner

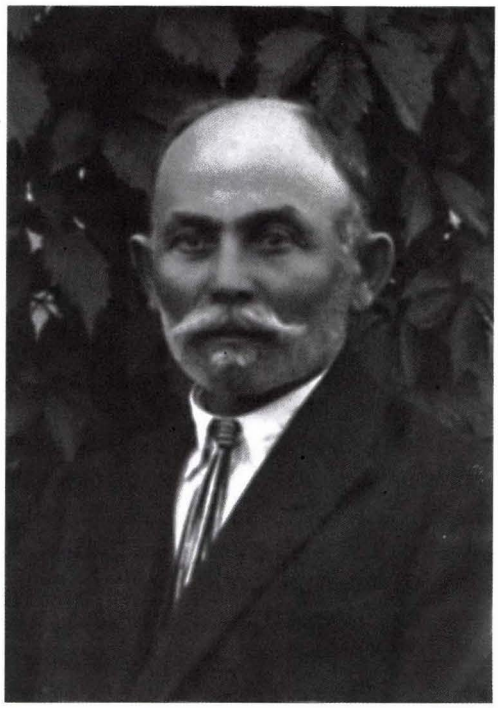
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de Asistență
Comisiunea de Ajutorare

Certificate concerning the search for Misha Gleizer from March 30, 1944.
(From *Documents Concerning the Fate*, vol. 7.)



My grandmother, Udl Gleizer,
Artsyz, 1939



My grandfather, Wolf Gleizer,
Artsyz, 1939



My uncles: Etsik, Nooham, and Mottya Gleizer, Artsyz, 1937



Fira and Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1928



Fira and Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1930



The cousins: Fira, Ezya, Rita, Misha, Yuzya, Rubin, Artsyz, 1935

* * *

After the war, when we had obtained a special permit from the Soviet militia to travel from Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy to Beltz [Bălți], i.e., from Ukraine to Moldova, Uncle Mottya told my mother and me the following story.

Those Jews rounded up during the raid on Odessa were taken by convoy to the transit ghetto in Slobodka, with some traveling on foot and others riding in open freight cars. My mother's entire family spent several days together in an unheated room in a hovel. It was freezing cold. Frightened to death, cold and hungry, the children and the elderly sat or lay on the clay floor, huddled together in the corner for warmth.

Mottya and Velvel went outside to find some sort of food and to learn what fate awaited them. After one such foraging mission, Velvel did not come back. Everyone felt profound fear and grief on his behalf. He might have been caught and sent off with a group of men to sort through the ruins or to some other work from which no one ever returned. Some gendarme who took a disliking to him might simply have shot him dead. There was hardly any fate too unlikely to befall a Jew in that horrible time!

The Romanians began to sort the people in different groups. The old folks were sent in one direction, orphan children in another, the sick in a third, and so on, constantly being dispatched heaven knows where. In this way they separated my grandparents, Aunt Hayka and Yuzya from Aunt Sonya and Ezya.

By some miracle, Mottya managed to wind up in the same train as Dora and their children. For almost two-and-a-half years they suffered indescribably in the ghetto of Sukhaya Balka in the Berezovka district. Death was their constant companion throughout that endless, painful time. In the spring of 1944, Uncle Mottya emerged from the ghetto a veritable skeleton. His wife and children were completely emaciated.

My mother and Uncle Mottya grieved long and bitterly for their lost parents, their brothers and sisters-in-law, their sister and her husband, and their nieces and nephews. In the plundered and just barely restored local synagogue, Uncle Mottya mournfully recited the Kaddish: «May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified ... in the world that He created as He willed. May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel, swiftly and soon. Now respond: Amen».

My mother and Aunt Dora wept loudly, and Unah, Firochka, and I mournfully remembered our beloved relatives who had disappeared forever.

At the destroyed and desecrated Jewish cemetery in Beltz we laid flowers at the mass grave site of the innocent victims, tortured and

executed by the ruthless Romanian legionnaires, the German fascists, and their local henchmen. What human beings are capable of defies the imagination!

Can we forget the horrible crimes or forgive the murderers? Do we have the right to do so? No, we cannot and, moreover, we must not! The spilled blood cries out!

The names of all these twelve family members who perished are immortalized in the National Institute of Holocaust and Heroism at Yad Vashem (Jerusalem), and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington).

* * *

German and Romanian troops approached Odessa in the first days of August 1941. On August 19, on orders from the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, the Odessa defense area was formed under the command of Vice Admiral Gavriil Vasil'evich Zhukov.

The weeks of September and the first half of October were a complicated time for us and for the many other Bessarabians then in Odessa as the front encircled us ever more tightly. The front lines held out in Chabanka, Dofinovka, and on the Tiraspol Road, on the outskirts of the city. We constantly heard the roar of artillery weapons. Men departed for the front lines while the women and young people built barricades.

Those with light wounds would traverse the city to reach the port. Those who could not walk on their own were carried in carriages and motor vehicles. Many civilians gathered on the quay along with the wounded fighters. These were the family members of the wounded who were being prepared for evacuation. They had somehow learned that their injured sons, brothers, or fathers were here in preparation for departure. Here one could see family members of high-ranking workers and military officers, who had the right to be part of the first departures. There were also those who had managed to buy tickets for early passage with large sums of money.

By then I was almost 16 years old, and my father often took me with him to the evacuation centers and to the port. We hoped that we, by virtue of our status as Bessarabian refugees, might get free tickets on a steamship or buy tickets from those who, for one reason or another, could not leave Odessa.

In the teeming crowd of the port we heard many stories and saw human tragedies with our own eyes. One family was hoping to convince their mother to leave Odessa, but she refused at the last minute because she still believed that her son was alive and would return

home to her. Another family was forced to decide whether to leave their paralyzed father or a sister who was dying of cancer in the care of kind neighbors. Yet another group had had their house bombed the night before, and they had not yet been able to recover one of their children from the ruins. Right next to us we heard the groans of badly wounded fighters who were lying on stretchers, already beyond help. Covered with sheets or merely their own greatcoats lay those sons and fathers who had just passed away.

We always returned from that port very upset, our hopes even smaller than before. There were times when we would be offered one or two tickets on a ship, but our parents would not even consider splitting up the family. After one night's bombing raid, my sister Fira, who then was almost 20 years old, tried to convince our parents to let the two of us children go, but they would not hear of it. Our mother stubbornly insisted that either we would survive together or together we would perish. Events would later prove her correct.

With each day the fascists became increasingly bold. Now blockaded, Odessa became a fortress, with help from the outside almost completely cut off. The front retreated far to the east. By August, Nikolaev was occupied and new supplies of equipment failed to arrive. The fallen and wounded regular army soldiers were replaced by home-guard militia, untrained teenagers or men of various ages who had earlier been considered unfit for military duty. The city's food supplies dwindled and rations were reduced. Medicines were no longer available. The Germans and Romanians cut off our water from the «Dniester» station in Belyayevka. Ration cards were issued for water – half a bucket per person per day. With tea kettles and cooking pots in their hands, people stood in long lines at pumps and wells that had been abandoned for many years. Many would return home exhausted with their kettles and pots still empty after hours of waiting in vain.

Air raids and direct artillery bombardment from long-range guns became more frequent. Residential neighborhoods of the city were now the targets. The air raids, conducted with German exactitude, would begin at the same hour each day, and the air-raid sirens would drive all residents into covered entranceways or cellars. Across the street from our house, #73 Karl Marx Street, were cellars where potatoes had once been stored. The residents of the upper floors, with their children and their sick and elderly, moved into the now empty compartments. They had to run constantly up and down the stairs, where terrified people would push and shove each other. The nights in the cellars were dark (from the air-raid blackouts) damp (the ventilation did not work), and plagued by hungry, repulsive, and aggressive rats.. The terrified people would react to the rats with cries of disgust and horror, as we feared for the safety of the very small children and of the sick and elderly.

We boys waited out the daytime gunfire and bombing raids in the covered entranceways. Through the half-opened gateway we watched the fights in the sky and passionately rooted for our anti-aircraft defenders. We desperately needed their success and hoped that they would drive off the German vultures. In those rare cases when our gunners would damage an enemy airplane and it would fall out of the sky toward the sea, leaving a thick trail of smoke, we would run into the middle of the street rejoicing with cries of «Hurrah»! We wanted to believe in a victory that would end the suffering and grief of us all. The clatter of the shell splinters falling like hail onto the asphalt of the street filled us with joy, and we forgot our fear and the need for caution. We collected burning pieces of anti-aircraft shells as valuable souvenirs of an important, if modest, victory.

But often it was our own fighters who burned, and then we would sorrowfully grieve. Once, on August 29, we saw one of our pilots, after bailing out by parachute, cruelly and relentlessly shot by a swarm of Messerschmitts; we could see as he stopped moving, went limp, dropped his head back, and released the shroud lines from his extended hands. We sadly followed his descent until he disappeared behind tall buildings. The boys took off their hats and the girls cried bitterly. Afterwards we learned the name of this hero–Semen Kunitsa.

The night bombings filled us with horror. The bombs fell with a sharp, characteristic whistle that people grew to fear, instinctively huddling against the wall or falling helplessly to the ground. Those on guard duty, mostly women who tended to be awkward and timid themselves, ran across the roofs and attics and barely managed to throw down the incendiary bombs, which others down below would cover with sand.

Whenever demolition bombs or mine shells exploded near us the earth would groan and move beneath our feet. The taped glass of the windows would fly out of its frames and smash on the asphalt with an ear-shattering crash. The roar of falling walls and the screech of the armature intensified the panic. We all feared that the next strike would fall on our house and upon our heads. Mothers clasped their children to their breasts while the elderly clung to each other. No one wanted to survive the death of one of their loved ones. Our closest brush with death came when two projectiles fell half a block from us on Chkalov Street. One ripped into the wall of the second floor of a square building and cut a hole the size of a large door, while the second ended up half buried in the nearby sidewalk without exploding. We cautiously looked it over and then watched the sappers extract it from the ground and cart it away.

Thus the days and nights passed. People lived hoping for better times and for the success of our forces at the front. They dreamed of returning home with their families intact and of resuming their peacetime

lives. Cut off from the rest of the world, we lived on rumors, and the rumors were alarming. One that turned out to be true was that the Germans sank a number of ships on the open sea and that all the wounded soldiers and the evacuating women, children, and elderly were drowned. Relatives and friends went down to the port for news, praying that the reports would not be confirmed. But to everyone's disappointment, the dock workers confirmed the tragic truth.

Conditions became so bad that people were afraid even to go down to the port. Ships displaying the sign of the Red Cross would be bombed while they were being loaded. The enemy planes swooped down and fired away at the unarmed and the wounded with their machine guns. People scattered in panic, leaving behind their suitcases and bundles; crazed crowds trampled those who had fallen amid endless groans, cries, and screams. The burning ships and fuel depots released a pall of thick smoke and a charred smell throughout the city.

* * *

Hitler's forces and the Romanian divisions attacked Odessa with an army of 300,000. Of these, over 160,000 soldiers and officers were killed. The Romanian units, part of the Fourth Army commanded by General Nicolae Ciupercă, took very heavy casualties of over 130,000 soldiers and officers, of whom 71,585 were killed. The battles around Karpovo, Vygoda, Vakaryany, Oktiabr', and especially Dal'nik and Tatarka were fierce.[2]

At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on September 3, 1941, Ion Antonescu, acknowledging the huge losses suffered by the Romanian Army around Odessa, claimed that Jewish commissars, «with diabolical stubbornness», were forcing the Russians at gunpoint to hold their positions. The general course of the war and particularly the battle for Odessa provided more than sufficient proof, he said, that «Satan is a Jew». «He and only he could lead the Slavs like cattle and force them to die, fighting to their last cartridge... . Without the Jewish commissars, we would have long been in Odessa».

At the meetings of the Council of Ministers on September 5, Antonescu reported that the Russians had been very well prepared with supplies and tactical planning. This was the reason, he said, that the bitterly fought battles continued longer than the Romanians had expected and entailed such huge losses. At that same session, Antonescu, like a man possessed, continued to insist that the struggle was not against the Slavs but against the Jews; that this fight to the death was happening because Jewish commissars forced the Soviet soldiers to die with rifles in their hands rather than give up their positions.[3]

The defense of the city lasted 73 days, from August 6 to October 16, 1941. The troops defending Odessa were commanded by the most talented officers: Vice-Admiral G.V. Zhukov, General E.I. Petrov, Colonel Ya.I. Osipov, Majors N.V.Bogdanov and A.A.Malovskii, Captain A.I. Kuznetsov, and others. The last group to board the boats was the marine regiment commanded by Colonel Yakov Ivanovich Osipov.

Then, on October 13, the city became suddenly and ominously silent. No more did we hear the roar and whistle from planes and falling bombs, the thundering noise of carriages and motor vehicles, the firing of weapons. We saw no soldiers or militiamen on the streets. People cautiously emerged from their apartments and cellars, gathered in groups, and anxiously discussed what was happening. No one wanted to believe what some suggested, that our troops had given up the city, that we had been abandoned to our fate. The uncertainty was terrible.

Finally, later that day, we heard a short radio communiqué to the effect that, for strategic reasons, the Soviet Army had temporarily given up Odessa. The next day the streets came alive. I saw men, women, and even teenagers dragging through the streets sacks of flour, bags of tobacco and makhorka (an inferior kind of tobacco), packs of salt and matches, and other goods. After discovering the absence of any civil authority in the city, crowds were emptying the governmental warehouses.

The plundering continued for three days. People broke locks and the display windows of department stores, groceries, and shops with manufactured goods. They carted their loot in children's carriages, in improvised wheelbarrows, in anything they could rig up. It was a perverse kind of stock jobbing. Their sweaty faces revealed instincts that had been hidden until now – embittered animosity, hostility, and greed. Odessa's down-and-outs, thieves, marauders, and drunks suddenly poured out onto the streets from heaven knows where.

Three quiet days free of shootings and bombings were so unusual and strange that we were not capable of relaxing. We were waiting for something, something even more frightening. As the grownups discussed it among themselves we could feel their fear. They repeatedly uttered the word «pogrom». They would not let us boys venture beyond the gateway as uncertainty lay like a horrible weight upon us all.

The morning of October 16 was oppressively quiet. It was difficult to understand what was happening. Only the day before, the street had been overflowing with crowds! We did not venture beyond the entranceway but stayed in and discussed this and that, every so often glancing out onto the street. Suddenly one of the boys called to us in a quiet and frightened voice. We bunched together around the half-opened gate and saw disheveled soldiers in strange, dirty uniforms. They walked about six meters apart, coming from the direction of the railway station

and creeping carefully along the walls of the houses. We closed the gate tightly and ran inside, each to his own apartment.

From behind the window blinds, our whole family began to watch the goings-on in the street. We knew they were Romanians by their uniforms. Their faces were stern, and their eyes showed a tense concentration. They held their rifles at the ready and walked in the same way for a long time. We could not tear ourselves away from the windows. What were they doing? What was going to happen to us? Finally, toward evening, the procession ended and the street was again deserted.

Once they had secured the entire city and ascertained that no Soviet army troops remained, the invaders soon grew bold and abandoned themselves to excesses. They believed that they, the victors, had a right to do whatever they wanted. The terror began quickly. In groups and individually they broke into apartments, supposedly in search of hidden Soviet soldiers, Communists, and Jews. They would strike men and women of all ages with the butts of their rifles and beat them mercilessly while threatening them with immediate execution. They thrust into pockets and haversacks everything their greedy eyes fell upon. They especially favored watches, bracelets, rings, earrings, and money. As soon as they were finished in one apartment, they would race on to the next one to repeat their vile business. The houses and the streets were filled with the shouts of the Romanian soldiers and the howls of the mortally terrified residents who could not understand the Romanians' language. Like rabid creatures the soldiers hunted down young women and raped them in groups, often in the presence of the horrified families.

These plundering soldiers were soon accompanied by the criminal low-lives of Odessa – swindlers of various kinds, pilferers and pickpockets, drunks and prostitutes, and all manner of low-minded individuals who decided that their time had come. They latched onto the Romanians and followed them everywhere, cackling away in their horrible linguistic mixture of Russian, Ukrainian, German, and Moldavian, punctured with gestures and grimaces. They gave aid to the «conquerors», leading the Romanians to the richest apartments which had been abandoned by Odessa's professors, doctors, performing artists, military leaders, and others. They led the soldiers into basement rooms where Jews were hiding and shelters which concealed those who, for one reason or another, needed to keep their presence secret from the occupants.

The days of the soldiers' marauding soon came to an end. Probably some of them went to the front somewhere in the Crimea, while others were herded into the barracks. Only a few small units remained in the city. The army units were replaced by the gendarmerie and by the police. Gendarme inspectorates, gendarme stations, police commissariats, and praetorian services were established, posting

throughout the city orders, decrees, instructions, and regulations, the violation of any of which was punishable by firing squad or by hanging. All demands of the Romanians were to be carried out immediately. They began registering all men between the ages of 18 and 50, some of whom were herded into prisoner-of-war camps. Jews were arrested and sent to prisons. Then they began registering those with specialized training. Jews were again rounded up into prisons. This was followed by orders for Jews to wear six-pointed yellow stars on their chests and backs at the level of their hearts. They were forbidden, among other things, to venture out into the city after a certain hour.

On October 22, the sixth day of the Romanian occupation of Odessa, the building used as the Romanian military commandant's headquarters was blown up at 5:35 p.m. Sixty people perished in the explosion, including the city commandant, General Ionel Glogojanu and part of his staff, including 16 officers, 9 non-commissioned officers and civil employees, and 35 soldiers, as well as two or three German officers.

The Romanians held partisan guerillas to be responsible, even though in fact the NKVD building in which the commandant's headquarters was located had been mined by Red Army demolition engineers prior to the Russian retreat. The bomb had been hidden in a safe, and according to the testimony of Major Alexe Mănguță at the war crimes tribunal, an old woman had warned the Romanians that the building had been mined[4], but they paid her no heed.

This event served as the pretense for an unbridled campaign of terror. General Constantin Trestioreanu, Glogojanu's former deputy, was named the new commandant of the city and head of the Tenth Infantry Division, quartered in Odessa. That very night, General Nicolae Macici, the commander of the Second Army Corps, rushed from Tiraspol to conduct the repressions, along with colonels Ion Stănciulescu, Virgil Stănescu, and Ion Ciocan[5].

On the morning of October 23 the brutal extermination of innocent people began upon order of Trestioreanu and under the personal supervision of Macici. Gallows were hurriedly constructed on the streets and squares of Odessa. They took men off the streets, dragged them from their apartments, and beat and abused them. Some were shot on the spot, others dragged off to prisons.

On that morning of the 23rd, my friends and I once again gathered together in our entranceway, and as usual, the braver ones ventured out to scout around and find out what was going on in the city. This time they all returned quickly and tightly closed the gate behind them. Soon we heard shots, screams, and moans.

Even so, our curiosity overcame our fear. We cracked open the gate and peeked out. Two houses away, on the corner of Marx and Kirov streets, we saw a gallows that resembled a carousel with a pole,

crossbeams, and four nooses; a Romanian guard stood by. On Karl Marx Street, in the direction of the railway station, we saw another gallows with four bodies hanging from it and a column of 20–25 men walking along slowly, guarded by Romanian soldiers. We could see that the soldiers were treating them brutally. Their clothes were in tatters, some of them were barefoot, and their heads were bare. Their faces were black and blue and bloodied. When they reached our building we could see that their eyes were empty, blank, indifferent. They had seen how others, perhaps people close to them, had been hanged, and they knew that the same fate awaited them on the next street corner or a couple of blocks away. They were in shock from the inhuman cruelty that had come upon them, and they had come to terms with their fate; perhaps they even longed for death. Heads hanging low, they trudged mechanically ahead like sleepwalkers.

At the gallows, the condemned and their executioners stopped. The guard and the military escort began to speak among themselves and lit up cigarettes. Then they said something to the first prisoner, who approached the gallows, put down the small stool that he had been carrying, stepped up onto it, pulled the noose around his own neck, and waited quietly. The Romanians barked an order to the next man in the line, who obediently walked up and knocked over the stool. The poor man died meekly. The Romanians continued to chat casually among themselves, waited a few minutes, and then ordered the second one to do the same. And with an estranged air, as if it weren't his own very life in peril, this one, too, put his head into the noose. He said nothing and asked for nothing, standing there and waiting. The command came, the third prisoner pushed him, and in a few moments, the second man also hung still.

Suddenly one of the condemned men, possessed by an instinct for self-preservation, broke out of the line and ran headlong. He managed only to cross the street before the bullets of the military escort brought him down. No one approached him where he lay in a pool of his own blood.

We recoiled from the gate and closed it tightly. We were profoundly shaken by what we had seen and we spoke not a word. We sat on the step in the passageway, huddled close to each other, and maintained a frozen silence. For the first time in our lives we had witnessed an execution, had come in direct contact with the horrors of war, and had understood just what the fascists were capable of.

At that time I had no way of knowing what awaited me and my family: the cruelties of the Slobodka transit ghetto; the train trip to Berezovka in an overcrowded freight car where the living and the dead stood pressed one against another; the trip on foot through Mostovoye to Domanyovka, where the German colonists in the nearby villages robbed us of all we had left including our shoes, overcoats, and shawls; and

finally, the camp-ghetto near the shore of the Bug River, just south of the notorious Bogdanovka where more than 50,000 Jews were murdered and their bodies burned.

Even now I do not know where my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, my cousins were killed, nor where their bodies are buried. May they rest in peace!

In just a few hours on that bloody morning, about 5,600 people were executed without trial. The rest of the population was speechless and paralyzed. By the middle of the day the executions more or less ceased, but the gendarmes and police rounded up many thousands of people and herded them into Odessa's terrible DOPR-prison. At the same time they released all the criminals who had aided them in their plundering. They understood the «new order» in their own way, which meant that they were free to rob, rape, and settle old scores. And in this they gave it their all; they truly excelled.

* * *

On the next day, October 24, the second company of the Tenth Machine Gun Battalion led out of prison everyone who had been detained the previous day (this included men, women, the elderly, and even children and the sick), formed them into columns, and took them several kilometers under military escort out of the city to Dal'nik. The road was strewn with the corpses both of those who could not keep up with the rest due to lack of strength, illness, or hunger and of those mercilessly shot by the gendarmes and soldiers. The details are revealed in testimony given during the trial of Major Vasile Seltea, Captain Alexe Neacșu, Lieutenant Marcel Cornea, and Junior-Lieutenant Eustațiu Mărculescu.

In Dal'nik the first group of Jews to arrive, numbering 40 or 50, were tied to each other with ropes, herded into an antitank trench, and, on the personal order of Lieutenant Colonel Nicolae Deleanu, shot with the utmost precision. The military had been instructed to economize on bullets and time.

This was the beginning of mass extermination. Men were locked in three sheds measuring 25 or 30 by 10 or 15 meters, while the women, children, and elderly were shoved into a fourth shed. There were more than 5 000 people in all. On the command of the same Lieutenant Colonel Deleanu and Lieutenant Colonel Mihail Niculescu, nicknamed Coca, soldiers began shooting with machine guns through slots punched in the walls of the sheds. The heartrending screams were louder than the machine-gun fire. When the firing ceased, in order to finish off anyone who may have remained uninjured or merely wounded and to cover up every trace of the horrible slaughter, the Romanians filled the

garrets with straw, poured gasoline on the walls, and ignited the sheds. On October 25, at 5:35 p.m., one of the sheds in which the men had been kept was blown up as a demonstration of power to frighten the population of Odessa[6].

* * *

Many additional details about this slaughter emerged during testimony during the wars crimes trials of 1945. The Romanian criminals, among them legionnaires and Cuzists, had exterminated innocent and defenseless people simply because they were of another ethnicity and another faith. They had committed the most heinous crimes for the sake of robbery and profit, sending back to their families in Romania suitcases stuffed full with all sorts of booty: gold teeth with brass knuckles, diamond earrings ripped off with flesh still attached to them, wedding bands and rings cut from fingers, fur coats and jackets ripped off shoulders, shoes and boots taken from the feet of those about to be executed. And the families, with unspeakable pride and joy, accepted these «trophies» and made a parade of them in public[7].

Many brutal war criminals were sentenced in 1945. Some of them had already died. But their punishment was too lenient. Academician George Călinescu, a literary scholar, literary historian, and talented writer, has described with characteristic veracity the events of those confused and troubled times, including the behavior of members of various strata of Romanian society. In particular he revealed their attitude toward General Ion Antonescu, the nation's supreme leader; toward the legionnaire movement; toward the Jews; and toward the war itself.

The sudden enrichment of the leaders of the legionnaires as a result of the killings and robberies gave them access to the circles of the upper aristocracy, industrialists, high military officials, politicians, and diplomats. One of the characters of Călinescu's novel *Scrinul negru* is the uneducated, coarse, and unscrupulous legionnaire, Gavrilcea, who gave orders for the plundering and burning of Jewish stores, for attacks upon Jewish passengers on trains, and for other barbaric deeds. He bought an actual palace in the very center of Bucharest and decorated it with an unimaginable collection of paintings, luxurious oriental tapestries, and magnificent furniture. The dowry for his fiancee, Meme, a young impoverished aristocrat, who out of snobbery put on a brown shirt and walked around brandishing a pistol, was collected by his legionnaires from among the Jewish owners of large stores and currency exchange bureaus, from jewelers, the owners of rich textile firms, and others. Gavrilcea exchanged this considerable sum of money for foreign currency and transferred it to a Swiss bank[8].

Cavalry Major Remus Gavrilcea, the cousin of this successful legionnaire, who through high military connections had become a lieutenant colonel and then a colonel in just a few months, married the wealthy widow of a diplomat, Catalina Aldea Zănoagă de Ciocîrlan. Soon thereafter Remus Gavrilcea sent his wife by courier «a box full of earrings, bracelets, and rings that he had received as a gift for services he rendered to some unfortunate Jews kept here on the farm». Catalina pulled on diamond rings, bracelets, and other pieces of jewelry, which were «magnificent and very valuable», and she attracted the attention and envy of all the regulars at the «Capșa», a restaurant in Bucharest frequented by high society.

In fact, the jewelry, the «gifts» from the Jews, had been extorted by Captain Petrișor Hagienuș from 200 deported Jews settled by the Romanian authorities on a state farm. Under threat of being turned over to the Germans, the Jews surrendered all their remaining valuables. On another occasion, Captain Hagienuș forced the Jews to give him three astrakhan coats. On various occasions, Remus Gavrilcea would send Catalina gold watches, rings, bracelets, and genuine pearl necklaces. Everything was extraordinarily expensive and taken fraudulently and by force from unfortunate Jews as they suffered and died from hunger, cold, violence, and disease[9].

There were many such robbers and murderers among the officers. Even greater was the number of their relatives, who used and enjoyed the property plundered from the Jews. Many of them never received their just punishment!

* * *

In the former ammunition depots on the Lüstdorf Road, approximately 6 km from the city, the Romanians drove together the Jews who had been rounded up during raids or who had been in prison, as well as those who had been declared prisoners of war. The ordnance stores, soaked in gasoline, burned for several days. Romanian soldiers buried approximately 28,000 bodies in huge mass graves 100 meters long, 5 or 6 meters wide, and about 3 meters deep.

In the October 26 issue of the newspaper *Odesskaia gazeta*, published by the occupiers, it was reported that, in response to the terrorist bombing of October 22, 200 Bolsheviks had been shot for every officer or functionary of the commandant's office, and 100 for every soldier. In fact, the Romanians had killed more Jews than Bolsheviks. During the days of the terror, October 23–25, 1941, a total of over 40,000 Jews perished.

In the indictment of May 3, 1945 of the People's Tribunal of Bucharest, it is indicated that there had been no terrorist act committed by partisan

guerillas on October 22, 1941, and that, therefore, there had been no justification for the terror organized by the Romanians. The extermination of the Jewish population of Odessa had been planned beforehand.

Guilty of these crimes were Antonescu, Alexianu, Generals Trestioreanu and Macici, Lieutenant Colonels Deleanu, Niculescu, Captains Radu Ionescu, Eugen Bălăceanu, and the soldiers and gendarmes under their command who carried out the orders[10].

Soon after these tragic events, which had taken tens of thousands of lives, the Romanians, on November 3, 1941, issued an order that all Jews except men aged 18 to 45 were to be released from prison. Morally and physically broken, they returned to their homes to find that their parents, wives, and children were gone. New occupants were often living in their apartments, and their property had been plundered.

The misery was the same for the native Jews of Odessa and for those from Bessarabia. The Bessarabian Jews had fled here in order to save themselves from the vengeance of the Romanian gendarmes and officials, who had returned after only one year and were in an aggressively nationalistic mood. All of the Jews found themselves in the same situation, with no rights and no legal protection. They could be beaten, abused, or robbed by any anti-Semitic hooligan.

The fate of all Jews in Transnistria was decided by the governor of the territory, University Professor George Alexianu. It should be noted that in 1938, while still a royal resident in Ţinutul Suceava (Territory of Suchava, i.e., Bukovina), Alexianu, an inveterate anti-Semite, issued on December 1 a decree forbidding the use of Yiddish for any purpose in the area under his control. This war criminal was executed on June 1, 1946, too late to save the lives of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who had been at his mercy[11]. It was Alexianu who signed the orders condemning Jews in his realm of Transnistria to internment and annihilation. With bullets and the whip, as Antonescu had commanded, he compelled the enslaved population to work. In addition to violent reprisals, he directed the theft and export to Romania of state and personal property including Odessa's tram rails, gravestones from the Jewish cemetery, and objects of cultural and historical value[12].

In the indictment of the People's Tribunal, the following description is given of the war criminal: «... Alexianu must be counted among the most sinister characters of Antonescu's regime...», he demonstrated «... tireless activity in the plundering of Transnistria and in the methodical elimination of the indigenous people...», he actively participated in the Odessa slaughter and in the deportation of the Jews from the city.

Especially appalling is the following dialogue between the two state criminals. Upon the suggestion of Antonescu that Alexianu should «herd the Odessa Jews into the catacombs, hurl them into the sea, drive them wherever you want but just finish them off», the latter answered,

«you may be assured that should any of them make the slightest move, not one of them will be left in Odessa»[13].

The chief rabbi in Romania of the time, Al. Șafran, recalls the following: «I heard of the governor of Transnistria, a certain "Professor" Alexianu, famous for his brutality. He resisted all of our attempts to help those who were deported»[14].

In 1993, Olivian Verenca, the former director of the Transnistria Governor's office, published a brochure (for some reason in Kishinev rather than in Romania) in which he tried to justify to the modern reader the actions of his former chief Alexianu. He portrayed him as a competent and well-meaning administrator, learned scholar, and Romanian patriot who had not deserved the punishment he received[15]. How is it possible to rehabilitate this governor, the highest public servant of a territory in which, day after day for two-and-a-half years, hundreds of thousands of innocent people were barbarously killed?

On November 8, 1941, the newspaper *Odesskaia gazeta* published the following order of the military command: «Article 1. All men of Jewish descent between the ages of 18 and 50 are required to report to the city prison within 48 hours of publication of this order, bringing with them only the most necessary things for survival. Their families are responsible for bringing them food in prison. Anyone not reporting within the 48-hour period will be shot on the spot upon discovery. Article 2. All residents of the city of Odessa and the surrounding areas are obligated to communicate to the appropriate police authorities any information they may have about Jews in the above category who have not obeyed this order». A death sentence also awaited anyone who hid or knew about any hidden Jews. The majority of Jews who obeyed this order perished either in the prisons, during forced labor, or in the ghettos created later.

On November 17, the same newspaper published the following order: «All persons of Jewish descent living in Odessa are required to declare all valuable gemstones and metals (platinum, gold, silver) in any form by 12 o'clock, November 19, 1941». The penalty for disobedience in this case was also death[16].

It should be remembered that these orders had been preceded by others applying to all residents of the city: orders to immediately surrender such items as radio sets and even loudspeakers, gas masks, and weapons of any kind. On the corner of Marx and Kirov streets there appeared a huge mountain of radios, which was guarded by soldiers. Then military vehicles started to arrive and take them off to be shipped to Romania.

The Romanians understood that they were only temporarily in charge, and so they wasted no time. The marauding soldiers had simply been replaced with other robbers, but of a higher order: officers, administration bureaucrats, party functionaries, and wheeler-dealers. They took

over the fully furnished apartments, swiped goods from other apartments, and emptied out private and museum collections. Their wives were particularly enamored of astrakhan, mink, and sealskin fur coats; jackets and pelerines; grand and upright pianos; paintings; sculptures; other works of art adorned with platinum, gold, and silver with diamonds, rubies, amethysts, and sapphires; Caucasian and Central Asian tapestries of high quality and astounding designs; crystal; and furniture. These empty-headed and boastful ladies who had never even dreamed of such wealth began competing with one another, pulling on two coats at once with fur straps around the waist, scarves around the neck, and rings with expensive stones on every finger in tasteless combinations.

Then began a massive movement of officers' wives between Odessa and Bucharest. The batmen accompanying them, shy and uncomplaining peasant fellows, exhausted themselves complying with all of the women's whims and caprices. To the Bucharest philistines, occupied Odessa seemed to be some kind of Bolshevik El Dorado.

Soon they began to disassemble factories. The military and administrative authorities of Transnistria, dizzy from the unexpected riches, began sending whole freight trains to points throughout Romania full of equipment, machine tools, vehicles, building materials, and even cattle and grain. They all supported the government of Antonescu in his campaign on the side of the fascists against the Soviet Union. They were content with the bloody anti-Semitic measures taken by the leader of the Romanian nation. It did not matter to them that tens of thousands of Romanian soldiers already lay dead in Ukrainian graves, that many were the widows and orphans. They were not concerned by the ruthless extermination of innocent Jewish children, elderly, women, and men.

But the more experienced, reasonable, and farseeing of them understood that the Romanians could not hold out forever in Odessa and Transnistria. Therefore, they took feverish measures to secure their own personal prosperity. They made sure that all their material gains were transported home to their estates or to their parents or relatives in Craiova, Pitești, or Constanța as quickly as possible. Transnistria was called the «Romanian California»[17].

* * *

In those weeks the Jews were driven to the edge of despair. They had been robbed of any hope for the future and of all civil and human rights; they were defenseless, destitute, and constantly hungry.

In search of refuge, our family managed to find a tiny two-room apartment on the second floor of a building on the right side of a courtyard. A thirty-year-old Russian woman named Tanya and her two small children

moved into another, identical apartment on the same landing. The German bombs had destroyed their building, and her family arrived only with the things they could carry in their knapsacks. Her husband was a career officer who had been at the front since the first days of the war. Tanya did not know where he was or whether he was still alive. She kept to herself the fact that her husband served in the Red Army.

We became friends with her. When she had to go out, she left her children with us. My mother would give her a variety of items to barter for food. We tried not to go out onto the streets so that we would not be rounded up during the raids nor shut away in prison, and Tanya was our only link to the outside world.

We soon encountered a problem with Pet'ka, however, the son of the janitor woman. He was about 20 years old and walked with a limp in his right leg. In the early days of the occupation, he behaved circumspectly, avoiding the Romanians and Germans. But then, at their urging, he began to guide them among the empty apartments left by the evacuated Jews and Russians. Pet'ka saw how the soldiers were free to plunder, and he began to take things for himself. Then he and his mother moved into a richly furnished and comfortable apartment where drunken parties began to take place. Soon enough, Pet'ka became the lord of the courtyard, engaging in extortion, supposedly for the Romanians rummaging through the area, and charging money for any services. One day our father came home and said that he had given Pet'ka a gold ring with a large ruby to have him lead away the Germans and Romanians who were searching through the courtyards. Pet'ka would spend whole days down in the courtyard meeting and accompanying various unwanted guests and running errands for the police. It must be admitted that he never did betray us. Every once in a while, Pet'ka and his mother would walk right into our apartment uninvited, complain about how difficult their situation was, and rather transparently hint at how this or that item in our apartment had caught their eye. Leaving with the object of their desire, they would swear that they had always respected and continued to respect honest and decent Jews.

One night, however, at about 11 o'clock, we found our lives hanging by a thread. We always slept fully clothed and with our homemade knapsacks lying packed and ready on the kitchen table, since our oppressors could come at any moment to drive us away or lead us to jail. Suddenly, we heard loud German and Romanian voices down in the courtyard and Pet'ka's voice insisting, in his coarse Russo-Ukrainian jargon, that all the damned Jews and kikes had already cleared out of his apartment building.

Pet'ka's behavior made perfect sense. He stubbornly told the soldiers that there were no more Jews because earlier he had said the same thing to the Romanian authorities – part of his responsibility as courtyard

janitor. Had he led them to us, he would have lost both the trust of the occupying authorities and his privileges. He might even have been severely punished. So he tried to keep us safe, at least for a time, especially because he was constantly extorting «gifts» from us. Pet'ka was not a decent person trying to protect us, but rather a cowardly, greedy and shrewd representative of a certain déclassé fragment of Odessa society.

The soldiers kept insisting that Pet'ka take them to the Jewish apartments. We could see how, in the building across from ours, they went around with their pocket flashlights from apartment to apartment opening all the doors and looking everywhere.

We stood frozen in fear; our end seemed to have come. But our father quickly recovered his senses, directing us to grab our knapsacks and strip the beds, so the apartment would seem long since abandoned. He knocked on Tanya's door. She was also awake and immediately let us in. Her children were fast asleep in one room. The second room had been blocked off by a plywood wall neatly covered with wallpaper. The previous residents had used the narrow room as a storage space. It was about 3.5 to 4 meters long and less than one meter wide. We moved aside the wardrobe in front of the door to the closet, lifted up our knapsacks, and squeezed inside. Tanya pushed the wardrobe back into place. My mother and sister stood in the corner of the closet while my father and I stayed close to the door. If, God forbid, they found us, perhaps the women might remain unseen.

We didn't move. We tried not to breathe. We froze as if dead.

After a while came loud knocks on the door and the soldiers burst into the apartment. The children awoke and began to cry. For five or ten minutes, which seemed to us an eternity, they stomped around the apartment checking the kitchen and the bathroom, saying there were searching for hidden kikes. Finally they left. Apparently, the crying of the frightened children and the face of the terrified and confused Tanya slowed and even embarrassed the brutes.

Tanya put the children back to bed and gently calmed them down, and then, in total darkness, she sat up for a long time keeping watch on the actions of the fascists. She was extremely upset, having risked her own life and the lives of her children.

We stood there motionless in the airless storage space for many hours, feeling barely alive. We had resigned ourselves to our fate, and even though we did not believe in miracles, a miracle had happened. Had the fascists found us, we would have been beaten, maimed, and tortured on the spot or in the dungeons of police headquarters.

Tanya, a seemingly ordinary Russian woman, had saved all of our lives. This unextraordinary woman, emaciated and exhausted by cares and fears, had found within herself tremendous moral and spiritual

strength and selflessness. We often remembered her later, in the ghetto, dreaming that we would meet her again after the liberation. We would get to know her husband and loudly proclaim to the world that this mother of two small children was a saintly human being in the truest sense of the word.

In the spring of 1944, when my mother, sister, and I returned to Odessa, we could not find Tanya or her children. The neighbors told us that she had suffered greatly during the winter of 1941–1942 and in the spring had left with her children, perhaps to return to her native land. To our great regret, we did not learn Tanya's family name and never found out what happened to her. We hadn't even hoped to survive that hell ourselves.

* * *

There was one other coincidence that saved our lives like a great miracle. One day our father was returning home from forced labor at the Jute factory and had almost reached our gate when he came face to face with Lieutenant Radu M. Badiu, the husband of Marioara Lapoviță. The soldiers under his command were quartered in the neighboring buildings. He promised to meet with our father and try to help us.

Notes

[1] In some books, Alexianu is called George, in others, Gheorghe; cf. Olivian Verenca, *Administrația civilă română în Transnistria* (Kishinev, 1993); Avigdor Shachan, *Burning Ice: The Ghettos of Transnistria* (New York, 1996); Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (Bucharest, 1997); *Procesul mareșalului Antonescu: Documente*, ed and introd by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă (Bucharest, 1995).

[2] *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1970-78), 18:304-05; Radu Ioanid, *Sabia Arhanghelului Mihail* (Bucharest, 1994), 196; *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, edited by L. Dobroszycki and J. Gurock (New York, 1993), 134; Eduard Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu și catastrofa României* (Bucharest, 1993), 69; *România în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, 1989), 377, 381 show that among the casualties of the Fourth Romanian army near Odessa were 17,729 killed, 63,345 wounded, and 11,471 missing in action.

[3] *Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri*, vol. II of *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944* (Bucharest, 1996), 290-91, 297-99.

[4] *See The guilty decision in the case of 38 war criminals in Romania. Izvestiia,* 17 June 1945; Report of the Extraordinary State Committee for the Determination and Investigation of the Crimes of the German-Fascist Invaders and their Accomplices and of Injuries Committed by Them upon the Citizens, Collective Farms, Social Organizations, and State Enterprises and Institutions of the USSR. On the Crimes Committed by the German-Romanian Occupants in the City of Odessa and the Districts within Odessa Region. Moscow, 1944; *Odesskaia gazeta,* 26 October 1941; *Molva,* 27 January 1943; *Documents Concerning the Fate of*

Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust, comp & ed Dr. Jean Ancel (Jerusalem and New York, 1981-86), 5:113, 6:80-83, 113; Moses Rosen, «Noi nu suntem asasini, noi am fost asasinați», *Revista cultului mozaic*, Ediție specială 8 February 1994, 2; Al. Dallin, *Odessa: 1941–1944* (Santa Monica, 1957), 310, 330-32; *Procesul mareșalului*, I:207; *Problema evreiască*, 332-33.

[5] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:59, 61, 79-83; 10:83.

[6] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:113-14, 6:60-61, 81; I.C.Butnaru, *Holocaustul uitat: Considerațiuni istorice, politice și sociale cu privire la antisemitismul românesc* (Tel Aviv, 1985), 337-38; Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagră: Suferințele evreilor din România. 1940–1944* (Bucharest, 1946-47), III:207; I. C. Butnaru, *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and Its Jews* (New York, 1992), 126-27; *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust* (New York, 1996), 71-74; *Procesul mareșalului*, I:106-08; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 248-52.

[7] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:58-59, 90, 132-33, 136, 517; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 29, 35, 93, 126, 132, 157, 168, 180, 298.

[8] George Călinescu, *Scrinul negru* (Bucharest, 1968), 396-98, 403-04.

[9] Călinescu, *Scrinul negru*, 446-47, 450-52, 454.

[10] Borovoi, "*Gibel'...*», 7; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:57-61, 79-83, 280-83; I. Ludo, *Ultimul batalion* (Bucharest, 1960), 101-03, 216; *Historical Atlas*, 74.

[11] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:248; Borovoi, "*Gibel'...*», 9; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 25.

[12] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:73, 176, 177; K. Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni* (Kishinev, 1986), 90-93.

[13] *Procesul mareșalului*, 1: 117, 123, 169-72.

[14] Alexandru Șafran, *Un tăciune smuls flăcărilor* (Bucharest, 1996), 86.

[15] Verenca, *Administrația civilă*. Olivian Verenca was persued as a war criminal. *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6: 54.

[16] Borovoi, „*Gibel'...*", 9.

[17] Dora Litani, *Transnistria* (Tel Aviv, 1981), 57; see Ludo, *Ultimul batalion*, 196; Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni*, 90-92; Dallin, *Odessa*, 375-77.

Chapter 2: **BRĂILA**

So let us return now to the end of the 1930s. Brăila was then a port city on the shore of the Danube, an important commercial, industrial and cultural center of Romania with a population of about 70,000 people. In 1939–1940 only 5,350 Jews lived there. Of those no more than 250 individuals had come from Bessarabia, Bukovina, or Romanian Moldova.

Most of the Brăila Jews were prosperous. The Jewish community supported seven synagogues (Choral, Sacra, Grand, Beth Yakob, Hasidim, Marpe Lenefesh, Armonia), seven rabbis, a home for the aged, a ritual bathhouse, two cemeteries, and three slaughterhouses. The Brăila community also supported the Neti and L.Kh. Scheffer Jewish Gymnasium, an elementary school, libraries, the «Maccabi» sports association, and other organizations.[1]

My father had a leather-goods store and a harness-maker's shop in Brăila, where we lived at the time. He rented space from Mr. Gheorghe Lapoviță and, after his death in 1936, from his wife Mrs. Sevastița Lapoviță, who owned a block of houses and a restaurant. Its address was #159 Regală Street, an animated place on the city's main street at the corner with Roșiori Street. The store adjoined a square, which on market days was full of peasants from the many villages of the county. From my father's store they would buy bridles, reins, leashes, breech-bands, saddles, styles of peasant sandals with special ornamentation, and so forth.

My father also owned a tannery on the outskirts of the city, in the nearby village of Nedelcu Chercea. He taught his craft to the peasant Costică Țuțuianu. Costică, the same age as my father, was a tall, strong man who was characterized by his industriousness and honesty. His son, Petrică, the eldest of five children, followed at his father's heels and in time became an excellent craftsman himself.

Once he had saved enough money, Costică Țuțuianu bought about 20 hectares of fertile land in Bărăgan. On the advice of my father, he spared no resources for his children's education. His neighbors in the village acknowledged his positive character traits and twice elected him to the position of village elder. Our families were friends; I particularly



My father, proprietor of the firm «Iancu Basarabeanu», Brăila, 1939.

remember Sofia, one of the daughters, who was about three years my junior and studied at the Women's Commercial Lyceum.

By family tradition, my father was an excellent craftsman who loved his work as a harness-maker, currier, and tanner. His firm, *Iancu Basarabeanu*, grew successfully and was known to consumers, mostly peasants, throughout at least four counties: Brăila, Râmnicu-Sărat, Buzău, and Ialomița.

Mrs. Lapoviță had two sons, Mișu and Gigi (Alexandru), and two daughters, Marioara and Lenuța. The widowed mother, a serious and energetic woman, ran her complex affairs alone. Thanks to her efforts, her sons and daughters received an excellent education. Mișu had graduated from the Commercial Lyceum, while Gigi studied at the N. Bălcescu Lyceum and little Lenuța was in elementary school. But the most studious was Marioara, who graduated from the prestigious women's Notre-Dame Lyceum.

With her solid dowry, Marioara successfully married a young, handsome, and intelligent officer, Radu M. Badiu. My father and mother, who were friends with the parents of the bride and had known her since childhood, were invited to the wedding, which took place on February 27, 1938. Our family album contained photographs of the parents, cheerful and formally dressed, of the bride in her luxurious

bridal attire, of the groom in his officer's full dress uniform, and of the relatives and friends. It was indeed a happy time.

Radu Badiu confidently advanced in the service and, having saved up some property, became a landowner. For his needs he ordered gear exclusively from my father. The quality of the goods made to his order was excellent.

My father's affairs had gone well from the very beginning. He married my mother in 1921 and, together with his father Aron and mother Malka, moved to Brăila after selling their previous house and workshop in Cetatea Albă (now Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy). With borrowed funds, my father and grandfather opened first one shop, my grandfather's, and then, a few years later, my father's.

They had moved to Brăila because my father's sister Ghenea and her husband Isidor Ghelberg, who had graduated from the Bucharest Polytechnical Institute, lived and worked there as engineers at the nail factory of David Goldenberg. This was later known as the Herescu Metallurgical Factory, the new, Romanianized form of the name Goldenberg. Perhaps the economic crisis engulfing Bessarabia in 1920 also served as motivation for the move. This territory had been annexed to Romania only in January of 1918.[2]

My grandfather and my father, like most of the native Bessarabian residents of this territory, received Romanian citizenship (*cetățenie română*), which guaranteed them certain civil (political and economic) rights.

My only sister, Fira, was born in 1921 and later studied at the Women's Commercial Lyceum, successfully graduating in 1939. She began working as an accountant in the Herescu Factory, where Uncle Isidor had been made head engineer. Fira was very pretty, with regular facial features and an attractive figure. She read a great deal and spoke perfectly not only Romanian, but also French, English, and German. The Commercial Lyceum offered a basic education in the areas of accounting and commercial correspondence in several European languages as well as in other areas of the social sciences. Fira intended to continue her studies at the Commercial Academy in Bucharest. I imitated her in many ways and tried to be more like her. I studied at the Nicolae Bălcescu Lyceum and in 1940 finished the fifth grade. I also read a great deal and enjoyed sports.

But the situation of the Jews became increasingly complicated after the ascent of Hitler to power in Germany. Profascist parties and organizations appeared in Romania, and state-sponsored anti-Semitism grew. Laws were passed restricting the Jews in virtually all spheres of activity. By the end of the 1920s, University Professor A.C. Cuza, chairman of the National Christian Defense League (Liga Apărării

Naţionale Creştine), had already excelled in demonstrations of anti-Semitism. The legionnaire movement, directed by «Captain» Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, grew to great size and strength.[3]

The nationalistically minded intelligentsia, even the poet Octavian Goga, began to engage actively in politics. In his programmatic speech of January 2, 1938 as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Goga uttered the slogan «We want a Romania for Romanians.»[4] He immediately closed the leading newspapers *Adevărul*, *Dimineaţa*, and *Lupta*, which held a liberal-democratic line and for which many talented journalists worked, including the Jews F. Brauner (Brunea-Fox), M. Zelţer (Sărăţeanu), B. Brănişteanu, E.D. Honigsman (Fagure), A. Honigman, K. Blumenfeld (Scrutator), A. Bergman (Munte), and V. Scânteie.[5] More than 120 well-known Jewish journalists lost the right to travel freely by railroad, including B. Maier (Marian), O. Holţman (Lemnaru), D. Ceacâru (Eulenberg), Felix Aderca, Camil Baltazar, Marius Mircu, and Ana Canarache.[6]

The Jews also lost their licenses to sell alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and matches. The government began to expropriate land and real estate, Romanianize Jewish enterprises and societies, remove Jews from all ministries and state institutions, and reevaluate Romanian citizenship, a status that many Jews had obtained after the establishment of Greater Romania in 1918.[7]

Later, the succeeding governments of Miron Cristea, Ion Gigurtu, and, above all, of Ion Antonescu, published decrees forbidding Jewish doctors, pharmacists, engineers and architects from working in their professions. The same thing happened to teachers, lawyers, and to those employed in radio, theater, and cinema. Among these were such talented individuals as R. Şteiner, H. Arati, A. Mendelsohn, H. Jerea, S. Aurian, M. Ilieşu, I. Goldenberg, D. Chenig, and M. Ghelerter.[8]

All Jewish magazines and newspapers, whether published in Romanian or Yiddish, were closed; these included titles such as *Adam*, *Cultura*, *Mântuirea*, *Puntea de Fildeş*, *Egalitatea*, *Curierul Israelit*, *Înfrăţirea*, and *Lumina*.[9]

On August 9, 1940, King Carol II promulgated and published a law on the legal status of Jews in Romania. It divided the Jews into three categories, each with its own restrictions. This was followed by a law forbidding marriages between Romanians and Jews and by other laws providing for the closing of Jewish schools, vocational training schools, hospitals, synagogues, and even cemeteries.[10]

On September 30, Ion Antonescu, now Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Head of the Romanian National Legionnaire State as well as Leader of the legionnaire regime, gave an interview to the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* in which he expounded, with military crudeness,

upon his solution to the Jewish question: expropriate their property, replace Jews with Romanians (primarily with legionnaires) everywhere, restrict the rights of Jews of many categories, and even expel them from the country.[11]

The situation of the Jews in Romania worsened drastically between 1938 and 1940. Attacks on Jewish businesses became more frequent as shop windows were smashed and wares looted. Jewish passengers were thrown from moving trains. Synagogues were desecrated. Jewish students at universities and institutes were beaten, and picket lines were set up by student members of the Iron Guard to bar their entrance to classrooms. In schools and lyceums, nationalistic youth organizations such as *Straja Ţării* were founded. The teachers, especially if they were legionnaires or Cuzists, made anti-Semitic comments in the classroom and infected their pupils with the same spirit.

In many cities of Romania, posters began appearing with labels and slogans such as «kike store», «kike shop», and «Romanians, don't buy anything from the kikes». Legionnaires would stand at the entrances to Jewish stores and bar customers from entering. Many shoppers were forced to return goods they had already bought.[12]

The pages of newspapers and magazines were full of articles, feuilletons, and caricatures attacking the Jews. This was particularly the case with *Porunca Vremii, Calendarul, Cuvântul, Vremea, Iconar, Sfarmă Piatră, Moldova, Prutul, Cuvântul studenţesc, Axa,* and *Gândirea.* The words *jidan, jidovesc,* and *jidovime* (various permutations of the word yid) were printed in large letters.

Even those Romanians who had cultivated friendships and business relationships with Jews all their lives now began to avoid them.

It became clear that the government of Antonescu fully intended to exclude the Jews from all areas of public life, force about 500,000 Jews to leave the country, and generally to purge them by any means. According to the 1936 issue of the Demographic Bulletin of Romania, there were 758,000 Jews in the country, 4,2% of the entire population.[13]

The Jewish communities of Romania went to great efforts to defend the rights of professional and social groups. The chair of the Federation of Unions of Jewish Communities, the talented lawyer Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, actively advocated for his people. The December 14, 1939 issue of the newspaper *Porunca Vremii,* the most anti-Semitic publication in Romania, contained an article «Momentul Filderman», «The Filderman Case», which, even while defaming him, had to admit his civil courage, great learning, oratorical talent, ability to communicate, cultured manners, resourcefulness, and moral authority. In his efforts to defend the interests of Romanian Jews, Filderman appealed to the King, to prime ministers, government ministers, governors, generals, and to

international organizations, revealing the slander, the lies, and the accusations of the anti-Semites. He demanded that the rights of the persecuted be respected and supported.[14]

* * *

The German army's seizure of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland was universally extolled in the legionnaire press of Romania. It resulted in a flow of refugees, including many Jews, who told of the brutality being perpetrated by the fascists.

On June 26, 1940, the Soviet Union delivered an ultimatum to Romania demanding the return of Bessarabia, which had been occupied in January 1918. On June 28, Soviet forces took position on the Prut River, thus annexing to the USSR Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the district of Herţa in Romanian Moldova.[15] A deadline of December 16, 1940, was set for the exchange of populations, and transit points were established at the frontier.

These events had been to a certain extent unexpected, and the reaction was very sharp. The people were angry and alarmed on both sides of the Prut. Many were forced to quickly leave Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, including the Romanian army, the entire civil service attached to the army, the families of the officers, the Romanian gendarmerie and police forces who had been stationed in all cities and towns of these territories, judges, many teachers, doctors, priests, landowners, owners of firms, business people, and many others who for one reason or another could not remain. Social background, religious convictions, and political activity were all decisive factors in determining the steps that people would take. Those originally from diverse provinces of Romania had, over the course of two decades, integrated themselves with the indigenous population. It was clearly a tragedy for the simple people of these areas.[16]

As a result of this new political situation, tens of thousands of Bessarabians of various nationalities tried to return to their homeland. These were peasants, draftees into the army, workers and craftsmen threatened by unemployment, Jews, Russians, Gagauzians and Bulgarians, people frightened of the nationalistic policies of the leading party, members of the intelligentsia who now had no opportunity to practice their professions, and many others.[17]

In some cities, towns, and villages of Bessarabia and Bukovina, the local population (Moldavians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, and Bulgarians) behaved somewhat unreasonably in reaction to the withdrawal of the Romanian forces. They desecrated the banners of the military units, tore off epaulettes, verbally insulted the officers, the people, and the

country. These unpleasant facts were tendentiously reported in the Romanian press and were directed exclusively against the Jewish population.[18]

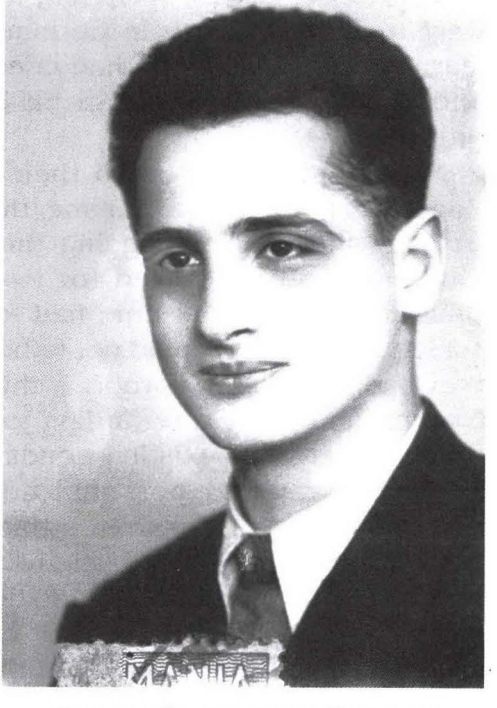
* * *

One day in early July, Uncle Isidor came to my father's store on his way home from the factory and asked my parents to come to his house that evening after work. It was the custom in our large family to discuss important questions together. Ghenea and Isidor contributed their broad range of interests and many acquaintances throughout Jewish and Romanian societies, and my parents brought with them their healthy sense of practicality.

Aunt Ghenea and Uncle Isidor had a one-and-a-half-story house built in the cubist style three years earlier. They had used their own personal designs, including a large, semicircular veranda, a mobile tent, and a cozy courtyard decorated with flowers and bushes. The house was richly and tastefully furnished. Ghenea and Isidor traveled abroad every year; they had been to Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, England, France, and Italy from whence they had brought elegant things to decorate the house.



Aunt Ghenea and Uncle Isidor Ghelberg, Paris, 1937



My cousin, Leonea Ghelberg, Brăila, 1940

One large room on the lower floor was equipped for athletic workouts. Uncle Isidor did his morning exercises there every day and had a boxing trainer. Their son Leonea and I would exercise there as well with an instructor from the local Maccabi association. Another large, bright room was reserved for grandmother Malka – «The Old Lady», as she was called behind her back. Grandmother had been born in Austria. She was well educated, always impeccably groomed and dressed, and carried herself with a proud bearing. It was she who insisted that her daughters, Ida and Ghenea, graduate from the gymnasium and continue their education in institutes. But I will tell more of that later.

The family sat at tea engaged in discussion until after midnight. Fira and I did not wait up for them, but went to sleep. We learned later that Aunt Ghenea, after carefully analyzing the situation, had concluded that it was necessary to repatriate immediately. She believed that our lives were in danger, and Uncle Isidor agreed with her. They had both been in Germany the year before on business. They were accepted as Germans or Romanians since they spoke both these languages proficiently. In factories they were greeted with «Heil Hitler!» In semiofficial, private discussions they learned of plans for industrial integration, penetration into the Romanian economy, the subordination of the political life of Romania to the Germans, and the liquidation of the Jewish population in all satellite states, including Romania. They saw how the Germans were treating the Jews in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. After learning all this, Ghenea had cried during the night in their hotel room and begged Isidor to finish his business quickly so that they could return home.

My parents objected to their conclusion. They believed that the Romanians were more humane, that they were not capable of murdering people, shooting or hanging them simply because they were Jews. They had, after all, lived for twenty years among the Romanians in Brăila and for all that time had felt themselves to be full members of society. My parents could not fathom why they should give up everything they had worked for, uproot us children from our studies in a prestigious lyceum, and leave a rewarding job. And what awaited us in the Soviet Union, where the existing conditions were completely foreign to us? News reports and personal conversations made the realities of communism seem far from attractive. They were frightened by stories of expropriation, dekulakization, [19] exile to Siberia, overcrowded prisons, and general destitution. In addition, grandmother Malka was seriously ill and transporting her was out of the question. But Aunt Ghenea was adamant. The most important thing, she said, was to stay alive.

The family members then parted to think things over, discuss the issue with trusted friends, and see how events unfolded. Sleepless



My grandparents Malka and Aron Udler, Brăila, 1929

nights and tense days followed. Every day we carried the same question everywhere: What should we do? Even close friends could not agree on what to do. Most people originally from Bessarabia desired to go home, to Kishinev, Bendery, Beltsy or Akkerman. The Romanian Jews, from the Old Kingdom, considered other avenues: Palestine, the United States, Canada, or remaining where they were.

Even the non-Jewish Romanians were confused by the issue. The legionnaire bands searched through the cities and villages, threatening Jews, calling them traitors. The legionnaires insisted that the Jews were responsible for losing Bessarabia because all Jews were Bolsheviks. They frequently resorted to violence and brigandage. Antonescu and his adherents saw the solution to the Jewish question to consist in their voluntary emigration from Romania and even from other European countries to as far away as Madagascar. If this could not happen, Antonescu suggested their forced deportation.[20] The Romanian moderates supposed that this would be a temporary inconvenience for the Jews and that passions would calm down in time.

However, the situation quickly worsened with each passing day. Romanians newly arriving from Bessarabia, both military and civilian, told of the humiliations they had endured, of the loss of property, of harassment from the Bessarabians (Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians), the captiousness of the Soviet customs officials, and other



Dina and Yakov Udler, Brăila, 1936



Fira Udler, Brăila, 1937



Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1939

difficulties.[21] The rage and helplessness of the Romanians led to the development of unbearable conditions for Bessarabians, above all for the Jews in Romania.

* * *

On July 4, 1940, grandmother Malka passed away quietly and peacefully after whispering her farewells to us all. She enjoined my father, her only son, and Ghenea, her younger daughter, to stay together and to live in harmony.

We buried her next to grandfather Aron in the Jewish cemetery in Nedelcu Chercea, a suburb of Brăila, down the first path to the right of the gates, in the tenth row, near the stone wall. Their gray stone headstones are identical, written in Romanian with their dates: 1863–31 July 1929; 1868–4 July 1940. The elders, according to our faith, sat shivah, grieving for their mother.

Soon after this, Ghenea and Isidor managed to convince my parents to leave Romania. It was decided that Ghenea, Isidor, and Leonea would be the first to leave. In order to avoid arousing suspicion and anger from those who would wish us ill, they took vacations from work, released their servant, gathered only their trunks and left all the furniture in the house.

In order to be sure that my father would not change his mind, Aunt Ghenea took me with her. Father accompanied us as far as the city of Galați, the border transit point for civilians. The official noted our names for the next transport. The table with the register stood out in the open, under a tree, in the yard of a government building. The customs officials looked at us with hostility, but said little. I don't remember whether they took anything from our luggage. We were part of a rather long line of people of many different nationalities and ages, and everyone was concentrating on the events around them. Accompanying relatives and friends would wander off for a short time to buy something for the journey, and especially to scout the area for legionnaire detachments or hooligans. We knew that a few days earlier, on June 30, thugs armed with machine guns had opened fire on people trying to repatriate across the border. Subdivisions of the Romanian army also participated in the pogrom. Four hundred people were killed or wounded,[22] and during the ensuing panic, some people had their trunks, suitcases, and money stolen. The Soviet government lodged an official protest and demanded that the Romanian government guarantee normal conditions for the departure of Bessarabians to their homeland. Measures were taken to restore order because the Romanians wanted to avoid complications in their relations with the Soviet authorities.

On the evening of July 14, 1940, we were taken to the port. We took leave of my father, who solemnly promised Ghenea and Isidor that once he had our most important affairs in order, he would follow us. We were summoned according to the list, separated from those accompanying us, and led to the landing stage on the Danube. It was already dark when we were transported by a small tugboat to a barge anchored in the middle of the river. Thus we were parted from our entire past, from our life in Romania.

Aunt Ghenea and Uncle Isidor found a small secluded storage space on the barge. There they put our baggage and set up a place for us to rest after the exhausting day under the scorching July sun on the hot streets of Galaţi. Ghenea and Isidor lay down, but they conversed in whispers for a long time before falling asleep. Isidor was particularly alarmed. He was frightened to death of fascism, but feared Bolshevism no less. He had seen the first with his own eyes, the second he knew of only by hearsay.

Isidor came from a prosperous, well-educated family of Romanian Jews. He had received a good technical education; knew French, German, and English perfectly and made frequent and lengthy trips to many countries of Western Europe to further his education. He read a great deal and had an excellent knowledge of contemporary Romanian and foreign literature. He had never been to the Soviet Union. During his courtship of Ghenea, he had been perhaps once or twice in Akkerman, as the old Bessarabians called the city renamed Cetatea Albă by the Romanians, but he did not speak Russian. By agreeing to emigrate from Romania, he was completely entrusting himself to his wife.

When the Romanians seized Bessarabia in 1918, Ghenea was 18 years old. She had graduated from a Russian gymnasium where she was educated in the ideals of Russian literature. Ghenea made a strong impression with her independence of judgment, great capacity for work, and strong will. I believe that at that time she idealized many aspects of society as reformed by the Soviets. She approved of and valued the equality of nations; the right to work, free education, and medical care; and other things enshrined in the Constitution of the USSR. She was convinced that their decision had been the only correct one and she optimistically looked to the future. In that summer Ghenea and Isidor were both 40 years old. They were both masters of their profession, had a great deal of work experience, and hoped that in the Soviet Union, they would be able to put their knowledge to full use.

Leonea and I stayed awake to keep watch. We made places for ourselves next to the parents and talked softly. The commotion on the barge had died down; the people, excited and exhausted throughout the day, grew quiet. By the light of two dim lamps, we could see the

silhouettes of the people huddled together on the side of the ship discussing some urgent question in a lively but quiet manner. It reminded me of a young couple, covered only by a single jacket, looking almost silently into the distance of the river.

Leonea and I were good friends who got on well together. In that summer, as I've already written, I graduated from the fifth grade of the Nicolae Bălcescu Lyceum, Leonea from the fourth grade of the Neti and L.Kh. Scheffer Gymnasium. We had both experienced anti-Semitism of the kind well known to schoolchildren in that environment. In my class, consisting of 45 or 50 pupils, were only two Jews – myself and Zissu Wender. The geography teacher, Vintilă Negreanu, continually told the class that the kikes suck the blood and all life force from the Romanians, mercilessly exploit the people, enrich themselves through swindling, and betray the interests of the country. All the while he would look searchingly at me and Zissu. Some of our fellow pupils, influenced by this teacher's tirades, would harass us during the intervals between classes. Sometimes, when no one in the class could answer a question about the geography of Romania, Negreanu would direct the question to us; we, having prepared our lessons as always, would answer correctly, sending him into a rage. He would howl at the other pupils about how you Romanians are lazy and they, the kikes, are learning all about our country so they can plunder it when they grow up.

Another teacher, Ion Ganea, who taught the Romanian language and who was the commander of the lyceum's Străjer organization, loved to quote from Romanian literature those works in which Jews were portrayed as a cowardly, greedy, and stupid people, creating an atmosphere thoroughly hostile toward us. I can still remember the characters he cited from the plays «The Leeches of the Villages», «Invasion of the Kikes», and «Hershku the Pedlar» by V. Alecsandri; L. Rebreanu's novella «Itzik Shtrul the Deserter»; I.L. Caragiale's short story «The Torch at Easter»; certain poems of M. Eminescu; utterances of I. Creangă; and others. At the Străjer lineup, in front of all the pupils, Ion Ganea would read the names of the Jews with a peculiar, melodious intonation.

Leonea was a shy, impressionable, and good-natured boy. He often came home with a torn cap or uniform, with a black eye or scratched face after fights with the bullies from other schools. Perhaps that is why we had begun to toughen ourselves up and engage in strenuous sports.

Recalling all that, we quietly grew sad. We had parted with many good and intelligent friends – Zissu Wender, Vasile Filip Prometeu Mărgărit, Vasile Trandafir, Victor Malatesta, and others; with talented teachers – Arthur Balland, Oscar Kreindler, Gheorghe Nistor, Constantin Constantinescu and others; and with the progressive-minded director, Vasile Goraș.

We were leaving the city where we had been born, which we loved as its own native children. We recalled the beach on the opposite shore of the Danube, where every summer we would sunbathe, swim, and row in the heavy Russian boats of the old believers; the rink in the city park, *Grădina Publică*, where we participated in competitions to the accompaniment of waltz music; the movie theaters where we laughed at the comedies of Stan and Bran, Patt and Patashon, and Charlie Chaplin, and thrilled to the adventures of Tarzan and of various American cowboys. We remembered the libraries where they knew us well and gave us, without making us stand in line, marvelous books by Andersen, London, Scott, Verne, Doyle, Dumas, Hugo, Balzac, Tolstoy, Sienkiewicz, Istrati, Sadoveanu, Petrescu, Rebreanu, and others, all of which we hungrily devoured. For our ages we were rather well educated and we thirsted for more knowledge. We also recalled the name days and first parties where, we had clumsily danced the fashionable tango and Boston waltz with girls from the lyceum, the daughters of our parents' friends.

Throughout the night, administrative employees would come to the barge in motorboats, call out names, make inquiries, fail to find someone (that is, someone would fail to answer when their name was called), and sometimes take someone back with their luggage. The alarmed people would ask in fear what had happened, why they were being taken back to Galaţi, what they could have done wrong, who these people were, and then, calming down, they would once again grow quiet. Uncle Isidor relieved us on watch, and Leonea and I lay down in his place.

We rose early to a wonderful July morning. The sun's rays reflected in the restless waters of the Danube. Only the birds flying around the barge disturbed the silence. The wild shore, nearer to us, was deserted, and Galaţi had not yet awakened. It seemed that nature was completely indifferent to the fate and movements of humanity, to political strife, and to the approaching clouds of war.

By noontime it was already hot on the barge, and people began to shade themselves with umbrellas and spread-out sheets. Everyone was thirsty, and many took water right from the Danube with children's buckets and bottles. We had all saved food, since no one known when and where we would be able to buy anything. The Lipovans – old believers – came on boats bringing us juicy, ripe watermelons and melons. No one chased them off. Then we realized that there were no officials on the barge. We were abandoned; we belonged to nobody. Those on board became alarmed, peering at the passing ships, motorboats, and rowboats. A system of sentries was formed. People began to introduce themselves to one another. It turned out that the passengers on the barge were Bessarabians of various nationalities who had lived, worked, or studied in places throughout Romania. They were returning to their native village or city, where each one had relatives

or close friends. All had been driven from their familiar places by undisguised nationalism and anti-Semitism.

Soon the tugboat pulled out a second barge and left it anchored about 300 meters from us. They continued until nightfall loading the barge with people who were being registered in Galați. We watched the transfer of the new refugees and tried to catch some words of their conversation, get some information, and recognize someone, but the distance was too great.

Still no one approached our barge, and people began to worry. Many had found it difficult to spend an entire day under the July sun. There were doctors among us who were called upon to aid the sick. Some were given medicines, some others were offered more comfortable places. Soon the main questions nagging everyone were asked aloud: How long would they keep us here on this floating island? Would the enraged legionnaires launch a spontaneous attack? We were, after all, unarmed and defenseless!

The second night also passed without incident. In the morning both barges were taken by tugboat to the port of the Bessarabian town of Reni. The delivery and reception of repatriates took place right on the barges, where the procedure was carried out officially and with exaggerated correctness.

The Soviet military helped us unload, and we refugees were able to sit out in the open air on a green meadow dotted with flowers under a magnificent sky. There we relaxed, no longer fearing an attack of legionnaires or other hooligans.

The border guards stood near the river, and arrivals from Romania who knew Russian chatted with them. Leonea and I strolled from one such group to another, not understanding a word. With difficulty we answered the greeting *Zdraste!* which we heard for the first time. Among the soldiers were a number of Asians with exotic (to us) facial features. They regarded us strangely and we started to avoid them. We received food from field kitchens located nearby. The army gruel, which we had never tasted before, seemed quite delicious, and the fresh bread smelled especially good.

Methodically the Russians organized the new arrivals according to their ultimate destinations. One group soon left for Kishinev; a few hours later we took our places in a train of cargo wagons heading for Akkerman. It was clean in the wagon, and we made beds from fresh hay. This smelled unusual to a city dweller, but also pleasant. Sitting by the open doors, Leonea and I admired the Bugeac landscapes. We were in high spirits and could almost believe that all of our difficulties lay behind us. The future looked bright.

On July 17, we arrived in Akkerman. The Anbinder family, old and

dear friends of Aunt Ghenea and my father, received us as relatives. They owned a two-story house on Nikolaevskaia Street, across from a small garden with a water pump, not far from the ancient fortress. The Anbinders settled Aunt Ghenea's family in two rooms of the house and us in another two rooms.

Mr. Anbinder owned a large book and stationery store in the city center, on Mihailovskaia Street. He was a respected member of the city's Jewish community, a generous person who helped many people in all sorts of ways. All his children had received a good education. His sons were doctors. His eldest daughter was married to a well-known Doctor Schwartzman and his middle daughter to Doctor Goldenberg in the little town of Sarata. A few days before our arrival his youngest daughter, Katiusha, had returned from Romania where she was a philology student at the University of Bucharest.

* * *

Meanwhile, on the other side of the frontier river, my father was returning home from Galați and beginning to prepare quickly for how own departure. His meetings in Galați with Jews from throughout Romania and their stories about the horrors perpetrated by the legionnaires, Cuzists, and other nationalists and anti-Semites convinced him for good to leave the country without delay.

Everything was left in place at our house at #204 Ștefan cel Mare Street. Only our trunks were taken, under cover of darkness, to Manechka, my mother's younger sister, who lived near us on the same street at #254. Iancu Schwartz, her husband, categorically refused to move to Bessarabia, as did his brothers and sisters and their families. They thought about emigrating to Palestine or to America, but these were no more than abstract plans. Father gave Manechka and Iancu the keys to our house.

Mrs. Lapoviță, with whom my parents had been friends for many years, was understanding of our decision. She clearly regretted losing sincere and loyal friends, but she realized that difficult times were coming for the Jews. Father gave her the store and the workshop, both full of goods and machinery, along with the complete physical plant and list of clientele.

At the farewell meal in the home of Mrs. Lapoviță, her son-in-law, Radu Badiu, expressed regret over my father's decision. He tried to argue that with the help of Germany, Romania would get Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina back. He advised my father to wait out the difficult time until the restoration of the old relations. Radu did not approve of the policies and actions of the legionnaires and considered

them to be hooligans and the dregs of society, the agents of fascist politics in Romania.[23] From his high position as a career officer, Radu M. Badiu hated the troublemakers, vile robbers, and thieves who demanded the expropriation of the Jews for their own enrichment.

My mother and Fira exchanged gifts and souvenirs with Mrs. Lapoviță and Marioara, as well as their best wishes. In parting, Radu Badiu and father shook hands firmly and promised to maintain their friendship no matter what life would bring.

Once they had finished taking care of other important affairs for themselves and for Ghenea and Isidor, my father, mother, and sister left Brăila on July 20, 1940. Travelling the same route as we did via Galați and Reni, my parents and Fira arrived in Akkerman only a few days after us.

Notes

[1] C. C. Giurescu, *Istoricul orașului Brăila* (Bucharest, 1968), 231, 248, 282; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 7:338, 404, 415.

[2] *Sovetskaia Moldaviia: Kratkaia entsiklopediia* (Kishinev, 1982), 49, 215.

[3] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:112-26, 130-82; Horia Sima, *Histoire du mouvement légionnaire* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972); Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălățelu, *Garda de fier – organizație teroristă de tip fascist* (Bucharest, 1971).

[4] *Problema evreiască*, 21. Even earlier the history scholar Nicolae Iorga widely disseminated the sensational slogan «A Romania of Romanians, only Romanians, and all Romanians», which became the emblem of Romanian nationalism. *Ideea care ucide. Culegere de studii elaborate de Alexandru Florian și a.* (Bucharest, 1994), 94.

[5] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:183-85, 193; Marius Mircu, *Iar o dată șapte momente* (1988), 189-90, 193-95, 197; Marius Mircu, *Treizeci și șase de stîlpi ai lumii* (1994), 424-30; Sima, *Histoire*, 242; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 10-12; Leon Volovici, *Ideologia națională și «problema evreiască» în România anilor '30* (1995), 47; *Problema evreiască*, 21-23; Mihai Pelin, *întroducere, note și indice de nume în Sioniștii sub anchetă* (Bucharest, 1993), 66.

[6] Mircu, *Iar o dată*, 192, 195-99; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:557; *Problema evreiască*, 22-23.

[7] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:425-26, 535, 567; *Legislația antievreiască*, vol. 1 of *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944* (Bucharest, 1993), 3-10, 25-45, 65-67, 79-84, 127-35; Butnaru, *Silent Holocaust*, 199-203; Volovici, *Ideologia națională*, 73-74; *Problema evreiască*, 22-23.

[8] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:194, 512-13, 518-19, 528-30, 532-34, 544-47, 563-66, 574-77, 589-90, 6:1-3; Mircu, *Iar o dată*, 213-38; *Legislația antievreiască*, 63-65, 71-73, 85-88, 91-92, 191-92; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 181.

[9] The question of outlawing the Jewish press was posed by Horia Sima at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on October 8, 1940. He proposed publishing a decree declaring that kikes may only write in Yiddish and, thus, only for their fellow Jews. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 29 December 1940, Ion Antonescu ordered that «all Jewish newspapers are to disappear; leave only a

single one for the entire Jewish community». *Problema evreiască*, 176-77; Mircu, *Iar o dată*, 189-97; Mircu, *Treizeci şi şase*, 425.

[10] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:438-46, 451, 477-85, 493, 499-504, 509-10; *Legislaţia antievreiască*, 25-60; N.I. Lebedev, *«Zheleznaia gvardiia», Karol' II i Gitler* (Moscow, 1968), 173; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 198-201; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 26-44.

[11] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:536, 551-52; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 181-82; *România*, 308-10; George Magherescu, *Adevărul despre mareşalul Antonescu* (Bucharest, 1991), 1: 189, 203, 323.

[12] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:491-92, 524-25, 556-57, 569, 592, 594-95; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 30; Sima, *Histoire*, 250-55, 341-46; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 15, 41. The talented journalist and writer Mihail Sebastian gave a well-written account of the ordeal of Jewish university students during this dark time. Mihail Sebastian, *De două mii de ani...* (Bucharest, 1995), 28-32, 34-45, 54; *Problema evreiască*, 180-81.

[13] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:228-29; Sima, *Histoire*, 265-69; Volovici, *Ideologia naţionalistă*, 90-92, 127; Mihail Sebastian, *Cum am devenit huligan* (Bucharest, 1995), 271-76.

[14] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 1:241, 250.

[15] *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, 49, 51, 389; *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia*, 16:429; 22:370; A.M. Lazarev, *Ia – moldovanin* (Tiraspol', 1995), 101-31; V. Nedelchuk, *Respublika Moldova* (Kishinev, 1992), 12, 146-49; *România*, 267-69; *The Chronological Atlas of World War II* (Toronto, 1989), 27.

[16] *«Evacuarea Basarabiei, 1940,» Adevărul literar şi artistic*, no. 274 (25 June 1995): 6-7; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 1: 61, 111.

[17] The number of those returning from Romania to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina exceeded 220 thousand. Lebedev, *«Zheleznaia gvardiia»*, 284. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 22 October 1940, Ion Antonescu expressed his unfounded fear that "the kikes who leave for Bessarabia will be settled in Romanian villages, and peasants will be forced even further out. We will end up having all of Bessarabia overrun with kikes.... They will just take it over. In ten years we will find ourselved with ten million kikes and not a single Romanian in Bessarabia». The foreign minister, Mihail Sturdza, suggested repatriating the Jews as a solution: «The kikes should be rounded up and put into concentration camps». There remained only 300,000 Jews in Romania. *Problema evreiască*, 158.

[18] Ion Şerbănescu, «Pentru a respecta adevărul integral...,» *Adevărul literar şi artistic*, no. 276 (16 July 1995): 6-7; «Evacuarea», 6-7; Şerban Lupu, «Românii, mareşalul Antonescu şi evreii», *Adevărul literar şi artistic*, no. 280 (6 August 1995): 7; C. Stănescu, «Cele mai multe minciuni le spun oamenii emoţionaţi», *Adevărul literar şi artistic*, no. 276 (16 July 1995): 6-8; Shachan, *Burning Ice, 23-24;* Magherescu, *Adevărul, 1: 47, 53, 60, 62-65.*

[19] Dispossession of the property of the kulaks, prosperous peasant farmers characterized by the Communists as having excessive wealth.

[20] Horia Sima, *Articole politice: 1950-1963* (1967), 81; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:178.

[21] «Evacuarea», 6-7.

[22] In the official account published in the newspaper *Timpul* on 3 July 1940, it was reported that «the exact number of killed and wounded cannot be accurtely established». See *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 10:495; Mihai Pelin, *Legendă şi adevăr* (Bucharest, 1994), 46; Lebedev, *«Zheleznaia gvardiia»*, 284; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 203; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 58.

[23] *România*, 313; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 170, 171, 173. Comp. Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 1: 177, 326, 329, 331, 338, 363-64, 431, 434, 457; 3:362.

Chapter 3: **AKKERMAN**

On the morning of July 23, Aunt Ghenea, Uncle Isidor, Leonea, and I, along with Mrs. Anbinder and Katiusha, arrived at the train station to meet my parents and Fira.

The railway station in Akkerman (the town had been called Cetatea Albă during the Romanian occupation) was on a dead-end siding seldom reached by passenger trains. Each day one fast train traveled to Bucharest via Bessarabka and Galați, and a second slow-moving train left for Kishinev via Bessarabka and Bendery. The hall of the train station, built during the Tsarist period, was appropriately small, considering its humble function. On the platform, to the right and left of the building, were splendid parterres with variegated dahlias, petunias, pansies, camomiles, roses, carnations, and gladioluses, which gave the place a festive mood. On the square in front of the station, several cabbies with their shabby one-horse droshkies looked for passengers, and some draymen with their larger carts waited to deliver baggage. We had already made arrangements with one of them so that we would not have to wait at the station for them to arrive from town.

At the stairs of the main entrance to the railway hall three women, old believers, were sitting on low stools and doing a brisk trade selling white sunflower seeds in large and small glasses. Nearby, other women were selling bouquets of flowers.

We walked around the open platform along the rail bed in lively conversation. Aunt Ghenea, Mrs. Anbinder, and Katiusha spoke Russian, while Uncle Isidor, Leonea, and I spoke Romanian. I could hardly wait for my parents and Fira to arrive.

Finally the silence was broken by the whistle of a locomotive and we could see the slow approach of a long chain of cargo wagons. Leonea and I ran to the wagon in whose wide-open doors we could see my family standing and happily waving at us. Aunt Ghenea and Katiusha handed flowers to Mama and Fira, and we all hugged and kissed and wished one another happiness and good fortune in our native land.

Father, Uncle Isidor, the drayman, Leonea, and I dragged the heavy suitcases and crates onto the cart. There was a lot of luggage, which we laid out in two rows on its wide floor. The loaded cart rolled rather

easily along Nikolaevskaia Street, which led to the center of town and to the fortress. We all walked alongside talking excitedly. Father and Uncle.Isidor lagged back a bit, discussing some serious matter. Mama, who had not been in Akkerman in over 20 years, joyfully recognized streets and buildings. She had lived the first year of her marriage here. About once every other year, we travelled from Brăila to spend one month of the summer vacation with our mother's relatives in Artsyz, a small town about 70 km from Akkerman.

* * *

We crowded with all our luggage into the two rooms given to us by the Anbinders. My parents and Fira washed up, changed their clothes, and we all went into the living room of our hosts to eat a meal in celebration of our arrival. We sat at a huge table. The elder Anbinders sat with dignity in the honored place at the head of the table while the extended family – sons and daughters-in-law, daughters and sons-in-law, grandchildren, and all of us – took places along either side.

The table was richly set. It was pleasant to see a well-to-do, extended Jewish family gathered together. The women discussed the health and education of their children and grandchildren, housekeeping problems, and the latest fashion. The men devoted their attention to the consequences of the new political regime, the changes that had taken place in the city since June 28, when the Soviets took back Bessarabia.

Many people had hastily fled the city: the families of Romanian officers, state employees, priests, teachers from the lyceums and many schools, judges, lawyers, doctors, large-scale merchants, and landowners. Among them were many nationalists, legionnaires, russophobes, and anticommunists. Some had simply fled for fear of the unknown, abandoning their homes and property, taking with them only a few suitcases. It is not difficult to understand when people may do in such conditions of turmoil.

In those same two or three weeks, many more people flooded into Akkerman. These were for the most part natives of the town who had been working and living in various regions of Romania and men called up for military service; young people engaged in studies of various kinds; seasonal workers; and the like. Thousands of Soviet citizens, too, arrived in Akkerman: military personnel, party workers, government workers, teachers and inhabitants of the surrounding towns and villages.

So the population of Akkerman grew sharply. The new arrivals needed to find housing, and prices rose quickly. Lines formed in front of stores as many food items grew scarce. Rumors began to circulate regarding the exchange rate of money – rumors that turned out to be true. One

ruble was set equal to 40 Romanian leis. One was even required to change a certain sum of leis at this exhorbitant rate. People arriving from the Soviet Union with rubles bought up everything in huge quantities: entire rolls of fabric, shoes by the dozens, complete suits, multiple shirts and sweaters. Goods such as these were generally unavailable in the Soviet Union, and where they were available in the larger cities, they were very expensive. There were serious discussions about the expropriation and confiscation of factories, large workshops, businesses, stores, houses, and plots of land.

The Anbinders, like many other residents of the city who had worked honestly their whole lives and had made themselves secure, were greatly alarmed. They were hearing of arrests, of exile to Siberia, and even of executions. Their sons-in-law, Doctor Schwartzman and Doctor Goldenberg, tried to calm these fears. They admitted that the store and the house might be taken, but denied that elderly people might be exiled or executed. After discussing their options, the men advised Mr. Anbinder to give up his store of his own free will and turn the keys over to the City Committee of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) or to the Executive Committee of the city government. The elderly Anbinders were well into their seventies at this time.

Living in their large house now were not only themselves, but also their youngest daughter Katiusha, Aunt Ghenea's family, and our family. In a few days, the family of their middle daughter was expected to arrive from Sarata. They discussed these and other problems during the meal. All the events taking place in the city were new, strange, and unpredictable.

* * *

A Russian-language newspaper appeared in Akkerman. Day after day it carried announcements, instructions, directions, and orders that we were obliged to obey within a specified time. As refugees from Romania, we were supposed to report to the militia for registration. This sufficed for my parents and Fira who were born in Bessarabia. I, on the other hand, was required to report to the militia once a month since I had been born in Brăila and was considered a foreigner. I was 15 years old at the time.

In addition, everyone was required to receive temporary passports and to register for residence permits. The men had to register with the military, as did women in certain professions, such as medicine and communications. All children of school age were required to attend school. We were forbidden to leave the city without a travel authorization. Unsanctioned demonstrations and meetings were banned.



Yakov Udler, Akkerman, 1940



Dina Udler, Akkerman, 1940



Fira Udler, Akkerman, 1940



Rubin Udler, Akkerman, 1940

* * *

A harness-maker's cooperative (*artel*) was organized in the city. Everyone who wanted to become a member had to turn in his instruments and raw materials and pay rent money for work space. My father gave up without compensation his new electric leather-sewing machine, which at that time had cost him dearly, as well as his tool sets, accessories, and tanned leather. He had brought everything from Brăila, because he had counted on opening his own workshop in Akkerman and working independently. But a Soviet Jewish acquaintance who worked in the financial department of the City Executive Committee talked him out of his plan. By opening his own workshop, he would be considered an independent craftsman and subject to heavy and ever increasing taxation. It would be safer for him to become a worker in the *artel*. My father heeded this advice.

The precarious condition of the *artel* became obvious in the very first months. The manufactured harness gear was sold, the money disappeared, and new sources of raw materials could not be found. The managers stopped paying wages, and the collective was torn by strife. Dishonest people appeared among the *artel* members.

My father soon gave up his share and resigned. He found himself a job managing a warehouse for building materials, which was run by the housing authority under the authority of the Akkerman garrison. He worked alone, without any partners, and received what was for the time a respectable monthly salary. Fira was hired to work at the city branch of the State Bank. Her starting pay was modest, and she was expected to master the accounting particularities of the banking system and its Russian terminology. Our mother had no outside employment, but she managed the household, which in those days was an extremely difficult task.

* * *

The schoolteachers came around to the apartments in August to register all school-age children and youth. Education was both compulsory and free. High School #2 was set up in the building of the former women's lyceum. We lived within the district of this school, and during the last days of August, I was tested and assigned to the ninth grade there.

The new school year began on September 1, 1940. All of the teachers, except for the French teacher, Maria Iosifovna Berman, had come from the Soviet Union, and instruction was in Russian. There were 29 pupils in the class, of whom I knew only Asea Goldenberg, the granddaughter of the Anbinders. But I quickly got to know my classmates and even made friends with a few of them. The school was coeducational; this

was the first time I had ever studied in a class with both boys and girls. After the liberation of Bessarabia, the class contained pupils from many different places: Ukraine, Russia, Romania, towns and villages in the Akkerman district, and locals. The Bessarabians varied in their mastery of Russian. I could not speak Russian at all.

The first months were especially difficult for me; my fellow classmates had to translate the teachers' questions and my answers. They held supplementary Russian instruction for me and for pupils from the other grades. Mr. Anbinder presented me with Russian-Romanian and Romanian-Russian dictionaries, a treasured gift. The print runs of such dictionaries were not large, and they were very hard to obtain. I also had difficulties in Russian literature, but I read a great deal and worked with the dictionary. I did well in all the other subjects. The quality of instruction and the requirements in the lyceum in Brăila had been very high and I was better prepared than many of my fellow classmates.

* * *

For more than three months Uncle Isidor and Aunt Ghenea had been unable to find work in their field. In the city there were mills, oil-production plants, bakeries, slaughterhouses, distilleries, wineries, and artisan workshops, but no metallurgical industry. For Uncle Isidor and Aunt Ghenea, both highly qualified, experienced, and hard-working people, it was psychologically unbearable to find themselves unemployed. Finally, after many applications to local organizations and institutions, the industrial department of the District Party Committee sent them to a repair shop for agricultural machinery in the town of Sarata.

Uncle Isidor and Aunt Ghenea did not know what kind of place Sarata would be or anything about the working or living conditions. They supposed that the work would be far below their qualifications, but at that time they had no other choice. In November of 1940, Uncle Isidor, Aunt Ghenea, and Leonea moved to Sarata. It was hard for us to say good-bye.

* * *

Fortunately an apartment became available immediately next to the Anbinder house on Nikolaevskaia Street, with four rooms, kitchen, bath, large veranda, and basement for fuel and winter provisions. My parents rented it for a manageable sum of money. The building was owned by two Armenian sisters, Marusea and Sonea, and a brother, Garabet. They were all over fifty and none of them was married. They behaved rather strangely, but they were good-hearted, obliging, and honest. They lived in a large annex in the courtyard.

We could not continue to live in the home of the good and hospitable

Anbinder family for a number of reasons. As I've already written, their daughter's four-member family had moved to Akkerman from Sarata. Her husband, Doctor Goldenberg, needed a room for his office. Their son was a university student, and their daughter was my age. They barely fit into the four available rooms. The elder Anbinders had refused to accept money from us for our living space. Winter was approaching and we needed to find supplies of coal, firewood, and reeds, which in those days served as fuel in Akkerman. Finally, we ourselves had found the two rooms to be cramped quarters.

The view from our new apartment to the street was covered by a huge arched gateway and a stone wall, which stood taller than any person. On warm autumn days it was possible to wear swimsuits and sunbathe in the courtyard. The gentle sun and the breeze from the firth pleasantly caressed the body. In the stillness the only sounds were the buzzing of the bees and some sort of beetles flying by. I often studied at the small table in the courtyard or read in the chaise lounge.

Marusea, the younger of the sisters, liked to chat with me. She took delight in the city of Akkerman, where she had lived her entire life and where her ancestors had settled several centuries before. The Armenian community was close-knit and prosperous. The city had an Armenian school, church, and cemetery. Marusea told me a great deal about the city, the life of the inhabitants under Tsarist Russia and during the Romanian occupation, and relations between the Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, and other nationalities who lived together peacefully in this place.

I learned much from her about the complex history of this old city, which had once been the ancient Greek colony of Tyras; about the Antes, the Tivertsy, the Ulichi, the Tatars, who called the city Ak-Libo; about the Genoese, who renamed the city Moncastro and Mavrocastro; about the Moldavians, who gave it the name Cetatea Albă (White Fortress); and about the Turks, who gave the city its current name of Akkerman, or Ak Kirman (White Stone).

With every change in rulers, the names of the streets had changed as well. For example, Nikolaevskaia Street had become Mihai Viteazul Street and then Dzerzhinsky Street. Likewise Aleksandrovskaia-Carol al II-lea-Pushkinskaia Street ,Mihailovskaia Street-Lenin Street, and so forth.

It was thought that the fortress had been built by the Genoese in the 14th century, and by the Moldavians and the Turks in the 15th century.

Marusea had studied at one time in the women's gymnasium and spoke a very correct Russian. She spoke Romanian with a pronounced Russian accent and could not pronounce typical Romanian diphthongs and vowels, such as *oa*, *îi*, *ă*, or *â*; she palatalized dental consonants such as *l*, *n*, *t*, and *d*. She willingly and patiently taught me Russian. I, on the contrary, speaking Russian, stubbornly produced those same

consonants with a hard pronunciation, constantly confused the forms of the accusative, instrumental, and prepositional cases, as well as the perfective and imperfective verb aspects, and used prepositions incorrectly.

Marusea had selected for me works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, as well as other old editions with pre-Soviet orthography. She would correct me as we read, translating words I did not know and explaining background information that only someone who knew Russian reality could understand.

Gradually, through diligent effort, I learned Russian. Looking ahead, I should add that at the end of the academic year my performance on exams in Russian language and literature was evaluated as «good». This achievement was even written up in an article that was published in the local newspaper.



ПОСЛЕДНЕЕ ИСПЫТАНИЕ СДАЛИ ТОЛЬКО НА „ОТЛИЧНО" И „ХОРОШО"

У девятиклассников последнее испытание—русский язык. Уже написан русский диктант и ни один ученик не получил н и ж е хорошей оценки. К устному испытанию по русскому языку все готовились особенно усердно. Повторены были все правила и проделаны упражнения к ним.

Ученица Миссонжник написала письменную работу на „отлично". Устный ответ ее подтверждает твердое усвоение основ русского языка. Она обстоятельно рассказывает о правописании суффиксов, о разрядах местоимений, выполняет синтаксический и морфологический разбор предложения; каждый ответ ее все больше убеждает, что она систематически работала в течение учебного года.

Много работал над материалом и ученик Р. Удлер. В начале учебного года он почти не мог говорить по русски. На устном испытании он отвечал уверенно и точно, и речь его является лучшим фактом, подтверждающим его твердые з н а н и я русского языка. И по устному ответу и по диктанту он имеет хорошие оценки.

Одиннадцать девятиклассников п о р у с с к о м у языку получили отличные оценки. Среди них — Незовибатько, Герценштейн, Бондарь, Штейнберг и другие. Из двадцати четырех учеников двадцать два имеют оценки по этому предмету „отлично" и „хорошо".

9-й класс СШ № 2 завершил испытания по р у с с к о м у языку. Ни один ученик не получил „плохо" по этому важнейшему предмету. Этот факт свидетельствует о том, что ребята много работали в году, и преподаватели русского языка А. И. Шклярук и Е. Д. Барашкова много внимания уделяли практической работе с учениками.

В. САРВАНИДИ.

Article from Akkerman's local newspaper (June 1941)

* * *

During the Romanian occupation, Akkerman was a «dead-end» city in terms of rail access. After the liberation it was decided to connect the city to the Soviet Union's railway network, and, in the fall of 1940, construction of the Akkerman-Odessa branch line began. This required the building of a rail and highway bridge at the mouth of the Dniester River, where a wide freshwater firth, stretching for many kilometers, flows into the Black Sea through a narrow bottleneck squeezed between the sandy peninsulas of the Bugaz and Karolina-Bugaz. At the same time, another branch line was begun from the station at Artsyz as far as the city of Ismail. Rail service breathed new life into Akkerman, which now had access to the Black Sea and the vast expanses of the Soviet Union to the northeast, and to the Danube, Europe's major water artery, to the southwest. The former counties of Akkerman and Ismail were joined into one region as part of Ukraine. Many rural and urban residents became workers and technical specialists running and maintaining the railroads.

* * *

The transfer of Bessarabia to the USSR forced the Germans, who were living for the most part in Bugeac, to emigrate, and many German colonies were deserted in a comparatively short time. More than 100,000 people from prosperous and comfortable towns and villages abandoned their well-built houses, arable land, vineyards, and livestock and, with only their personal belongings, departed in carts for Germany or Poland.[1] It was widely believed that their departure was prompted mostly by fascist propaganda.

The Germans from colonies close to Akkerman sold their belongings at the local market at bargain prices: cows, pigs, furniture, and many other things. I remember that my mother bought a wall clock with a solemn chime and two furniture sets for the bedroom and the dining room.

Soon poor peasants from Belarus and western Ukraine were settled in these abandoned villages. They were both happy and confused. They received stone houses with annexes and cellars, rooms with parquet floors, tiled stoves, carpets, furniture and utensils, large private garden plots and agricultural implements. They all became members of the first collective and state farms of Bessarabia. The Soviets thus transformed the entire social and ethnic makeup of the local population in a very short time.

* * *

The ninth grade met on the second floor of the school. The large classroom was situated in a corner of the building. One row of windows looked out to the east and afforded a view of the ancient fortress where,

in 1940, a military unit was stationed. Sentries kept watch from the towers, and on the square between the fortress and the school, soldiers often went through their drills or marched to brass-band music. They sang in march tempo «*Katiusha*» and «*In the Valleys and the Hills*», popular songs of the time. The kids sitting close to the windows were often scolded by the teacher for becoming distracted by all this.

The tall, jagged walls of the 500-year-old fortress had a citadel, 26 square and cylindrical towers in the Byzantine style, and four huge gates. A wide deep fosse encircled the fortress on three sides and was connected to the firth, the waters of which at one time filled this formidable barrier. This stirred in my mind images of the armed might of the defenders of the outlying districts of once-mighty world powers. I could not comprehend how such a majestic and imposing fortress could have been built here in this savage southeastern part of Europe with the primitive implements of the early Middle Ages. The huge stone blocks, carved and carried from afar and skillfully laid into the fortress walls, stand as a memorial to unknown but heroic craftsmen of this area.

During our free time, we would go to the fortress, stroll along the fosse, and try to peer through the open main gate to the inside. Unlike the kids from Akkerman, I found everything to be new and fascinating. Everything amazed me: the depth and width of the well preserved fosse, which attackers could not have crossed without exposing themselves to fire from the defenders; the powerful walls, which were dotted here and there with round stone cannon balls, which remained forever frozen in the body of the fortress; and the symmetrically placed loopholes, from which lances and arrows flew in the early times, later to be followed by canons and the gunfire of brave warriors. In my lively imagination I could see how the gates would suddenly open and columns of mounted fighters swarm out over the lowered drawbridge to break the blockade.

Once we went with our history teacher on an excursion inside the fortress. We walked upon the rough but sturdily built staircases leading up to the towers and crowded around our teacher at the tall and now silent minaret. We crossed the first courtyard and, beneath the vaults of the interior wall, we passed through the second courtyard where on that very day there had been many soldiers, tents, carts, and horses. Farther, closer to the firth, there rose up the walls of the citadel, within which the ruins of ancient buildings were preserved. The wall of the fortress running toward the firth was very high. Helping each other, we scrambled to the top of the wide wall and peered at the watery expanses through the high, narrow loopholes. In the distance we could see a low strip of land belonging to Ovidiopol. The defenders of the fortress had repeatedly repelled the attacks of enemy flotillas. In time the waters of the firth had receeded from the foot of the fortress wall. Enthusiastic fishermen were sitting with their rods on the rocks below.

We were so engrossed in the history of the fortress we didn't want to leave. Our teacher promised us another excursion to the Museum of Local History and Regional Studies.

* * *

A huge residence known as the Palace of Pioneers became an attractive meeting place for pupils from every school in the city, and there I made interesting friends. The three-story villa with small towers in the center of a huge garden surrounded by a high stone wall was located in the upper part of Akkerman on Nikolaevskaia Street. Until the arrival of the Soviets, it had belonged to the richest person in the city, Mr. Averdian, an Armenian. Among other things, he had owned an electrical power station, a mill, three residential buildings, and 50 hectares of vineyards. He did much for charity, especially helping poor Armenians, and was a good Christian. Averdian paid his employees well and everyone in the city respected him. He fell ill and passed away shortly before the liberation of Bessarabia, and when Soviet forces took control of the region, his wife departed for Bucharest. He left no children, and their entire property was nationalized. Nothing remained of the Averdian family's personal possessions in the Palace of Pioneers. The large rooms and halls were now divided into various sections: one with tables for chess, another for table tennis, yet another for model automobile enthusiasts, and others for nature lovers, for cutting and sewing groups and various kinds of clubs. An entire floor was reserved for the library and reading rooms. Music lessons were also given, and children learned to play the violin, the piano, and other musical instruments. The building housed the rehearsals of a wind ensemble, a chorus, and dance groups, along with sporting competitions. Leonea and I played chess and ping-pong and won prizes at the first city-wide youth matches.

* * *

On the night of November 10, 1940, the city was shaken by earth tremors, apparently for the first time in its long history. We were awakened by the scraping and sliding of the blocks of the house walls, by a ringing that sounded like the clinking of crystal goblets, wineglasses, and vases, and by furniture moving back and forth, including the beds on which we were sleeping. We jumped out of bed and ran into the courtyard in our night garments. Our father instructed us to move farther from the house as the earth moved in waves beneath our feet. Our frightened landlords joined us after a few seconds. Dogs howled and the voices of our neighbors could be heard from all sides. Finally the earth calmed down. Everyone moved out of the courtyards and into the

street, sharing their impressions, interrupting each other in their excitement, oblivious to their outward appearance as they walked around in their sleepwear.

Everyone remained out on the street for a long time. None of us knew what to do whether to go back to bed or wait for possible aftershocks. Finally, exhaustion guided us back to our apartment where we lit the lamps. Beds, table, and chairs had all moved out of their customary places. The doors of the sideboard were open and the kitchen floor littered with the shards of broken cups and plates. We went to bed but left the light burning on the veranda and the doors open.

The next day the entire city spoke of little elses but the earthquake. No one had been killed, but cracks had developed in the walls of many houses. The local paper reported that the epicenter of the quake had been 300 kilometers from Akkerman, at the southeastern crook of the Carpathian Mountains in the area of Vrancea. The Romanian town of Panciu was totally destroyed.[2]

The superstitious elderly among us interpreted this natural event as a sign from God that war would soon come. Some believed this kind of talk and expected the worst; others shrugged it off. Germany, they said, was far from Bessarabia, and Romania would never dare to utter even a word against the Soviet Union.

* * *

Old Mr. Anbinder had listened to the advice of his relatives and friends and freely surrendered to the government his book and stationery store, the largest in the city. With trembling hands he turned over the key to a worker of the City Party Committee, who made polite conversation and even thanked him. Mr. Anbinder returned home relieved, as if a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders. The family believed that they had settled accounts, were now quits with the Soviet regime, and could live out the rest of their lives in peace and without fear. Unfortunately, they were gravely mistaken.

Some time later, I believe it was already December, we were awakened at around four in the morning by heavy pounding on the door and loud cries. It was Mrs. Goldenberg, the Anbinders' middle daughter. My parents, both in their nightclothes, rushed to the door and to let her in, believing that someone had died. My mother brought her a glass of water. She calmed down a bit but continued sobbing as she related how state security forces (NKVD) had just awakened her parents and Katiusha. The officials had presented some kind of written order, but the family was disoriented from grogginess and fear and did not understand it. The parents were told to prepare for immediate departure.

Doctor Goldenberg and his wife were awakened by the sounds of strange voices, pounding boots, and the cries of their parents, but were not allowed to enter their room to help their parents collect themselves, or even to say goodbye as they were taken away in a truck. Mrs. Goldenberg did not know where her parents had been taken and asked my father for advice. Where should she search for them? To whom should she appeal for help? What should they do?

My parents quickly got dressed and, together with the Goldenbergs, rushed to the home of the eldest daughter, who lived nearby on the corner of Mihailovskaia Street with her husband, Doctor Schwartzman. In the darkness of night they could make out a few trucks carrying people up Nikolaevskaia Street toward the railway station.

The Schwartzmans were deeply shaken by this news. The daughters wailed and wrung their hands. They repeated the same questions over and over again: What were they arrested for? To what fate had they been taken? Execution? Siberia? Prison? How would their elderly parents endure the ordeal? What would happen to Katiusha? The family decided to wait until morning to find out what had happened in the city during the night, and then to go to the militia and to other government offices and ask what their parents had been arrested for and where they had been taken.

* * *

The city residents had learned that freight trains were standing ready at the station to which those arrested during the night had been taken, and they headed directly there. Some tried to deliver clothing to these unfortunates, others brought food or money, and still others decided to join their relatives and share their sad fate. Some simply came to say goodbye. The trains were guarded by heavily armed militia and army soldiers. No one was able even to approach the wagons, and only a few managed to catch a glimpse of the tormented faces of their relatives behind the barred windows.

During those tragic days thousands of families of various nationalities were exiled from Akkerman to western Siberia and to Kazakhstan. The Soviet regime of workers and peasants was settling scores with its class enemies: the bourgeois, the capitalists and landowners, and its political opponents – nationalists, Zionists, community leaders, and clergy.[3]

When the Schwartzmans, Goldenbergs, and others went to the militia, the City Executive Committee, and the City Committee of the CPSU(b), they were curtly told that the arrests were carried out on the orders of higher authorities and were in the best interests of the state. The stone faces of the officials left the people with no hope of any reprieve or sympathy, and instilled in them immeasurable fear for their own futures.

* * *

In the following weeks the population of the city lived in tense anticipation of yet further repressive measures. Amid this tension a split appeared as the more well-to-do suspected the poorer and more dependent people of engaging in denunciation, slander, or outright revenge. The Bessarabians began avoiding the Soviets, who regarded them as exploiters who had simply received their just desserts. Many natives of Akkerman did not sleep in their homes at night, but dispersed among friends and acquaintances. In the morning they would carefully watch from behind their homes before returning to them. People became anxious, quick to anger, and sullen.

Even a few pupils from our class had been exiled together with their parents during that night. The teachers did not remark upon this fact, and the other children were afraid to raise any questions as to why their schoolmates had been subjected to such severe punishment.

A month passed, then a second, and the excited minds of the city calmed down. The terrible event was pushed into the background by the routine difficulties of each day.

* * *

People grew accustomed to their new conditions. They retrained, took on new professions, accepted any work they could find in order to earn money and not be considered parasites. Wages were very low, but no one went hungry.

The change in regime removed some conventions of life and eliminated social and ethnic barriers. People ceased paying attention to y*ichus* – social prestige or pedigree. Young men and women fell in love and joined their lives and fates together without regard to the material wealth of their parents or to their past reputations. Marriages were contracted between Jews and Russians, between Moldavians and Ukrainians. Religion or ethnic background was no longer taken into consideration. Many happy marriages resulted.

* * *

Such happiness was not general, however. In the spring and early summer of 1941, deportations of those the Soviet regime considered its enemies continued.[4] People were confused, because among those subjected to repression were families of modest means and workers in the real sense of the word, who were anything but capitalists or landowners and who had never engaged in politics or anti-Soviet activity. Anyone could be deported without justification. No one knew who made up the lists of the doomed and on the basis of what information. Everyone lived in fear.

* * *

The school year ended in June and we began preparing for our examinations. I studied alone at home until the eve of each exam, when we gathered in groups of three or four schoolmates at the house of one of us and quizzed each other on the questions. Thus we helped ourselves and tested our own knowledge.

My entire class passed all the exams. We were all happy to be promoted to the tenth grade, the last class of high school. Some of us dreamed of becoming teachers, doctors, or engineers, while others hoped to enter military professions and become fighter pilots, sailors, or tankmen. A year before finishing the ten-year school program we had already decided which institute, university, or vocational school we planned to enter. We agreed to travel together to Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, or Omsk.

A school soiree was planned for Sunday, June 22. Diplomas were to be given at a formal ceremony to the first graduates of High School #2. Everyone took part in preparations for the celebration – teachers, pupils, and parents. The large auditorium on the second floor was decorated, amateur groups rehearsed their performances, and in the administrative office certificates of good work and conduct were prepared. White dresses were sewn for the girls while suits were purchased for the boys. Everyone looked forward eagerly to it.

Our celebration, however, was not meant to be. Early in the morning of June 22, the fascists, without any declaration of war, treacherously attacked the Soviet Union. The school administration asked those of us in the higher grades to help prepare the school premises to receive the wounded. We carried the student desks, bookshelves, tables, chairs, books, and all the equipment from the physical and chemical laboratories out into the courtyard or down to the basement. In the empty classrooms we set up iron cots, metal lockers, and other equipment as directed by the medical workers.

During the next few days we continued to drop by the school, where in the principal's and administrative offices they gave diplomas to the graduates and certificates to those finishing eighth and ninth grades.

Then things changed quickly and utterly. The older boys were conscripted into the Red Army, and these «Soviet» kids, as we called them, left the city for parts beyond the Dniester River. We all forgot about school. The tense days and nights of war had begun.

According to instructions given by the local radio station, we were to respond to an air-raid warnings by taking cover in our basements or tightly closing all doors, windows, and even shutters, extinguishing the lights, and having ready a supply of food and water. In case of chemical weapons being dropped from the air, we were advised to wear moist gauze bandages as gas masks.

Once the air raid siren did sound, and soon a low-flying biplane aircraft, a so-called *kukuruznik,* appeared and flew some circles over the city. We feverishly extinguished the lights, closed the doors and shutters, moistened our gauze bandages in buckets of water, and covered our mouths and noses. The noise of the airplane had by this time long since faded as we continued sitting in the dark and breathing through the wet gauze. Later, in Odessa, when the German fighter planes really did bomb the city and dozens of anti-aircraft guns went up against them, we smiled as we thought about those wet bandages.

* * *

A few days later, at the end of June, people began to transport industrial equipment, livestock, grain, and other goods to the interior of the country to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy. They evacuated state institutions, other important organizations, and archives. It became clear that the city was to be abandoned. The superior numbers of the enemy forces driving the Red Army units into retreat.

All those subject to military service were mobilized. Fighter battalions and civilian militia detachments were created. Many were sent to build defense plants and other militarily significant installations.

My father was drafted into a fighter battalion, an auxiliary unit consisting of older adults who served in the rear lines, kept order, built defensive fortifications, and did other tasks. Taking his leave of us, he sternly instructed us not to stay in Akkerman, which the Soviets clearly were going to abandon. The Romanians, from whom we had fled out of Brăila, thirsted for revenge for what they sensed to be the humiliating loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in 1940. Neither they nor their German allies would show any mercy to the Jews. Leaflets dropped from the air openly called for the extermination of the Jews. The local press wrote of these rallying calls from the legionnaires and the Nazis. Our father told us to move to Odessa and turn for help to the Grabovetsky family, his distant relatives. He presumed that the Romanians would go no farther than the Dniester and that the Soviet troops, having overcome the effect of the surprise attack, would stop the Germans and drive them off. He believed that in a month or two we would all return to Akkerman.

Everyone drafted into the fighter battalion was over forty. The entire battalion was given only a few rifles, no military training, and no concrete mission. My father spent his first few nights at home and in the mornings he would go off to the meeting point of the battalion. Each day a few more men would have disappeared. Discipline was weak due to the confusion of the commanders and the absence of any coordinated activity.

During those days our father helped us pack our things. Fira did not go to work because the bank had been moved. My time was also free, so the four of us hurriedly prepared for departure. A long line of people stood at the pier to wait for one of the overloaded the barges to carry them and their worldly possessions across the firth to Ovidiopol. Those who did not manage to board a barge during the day would spend the night on the shore.

Each day Fira and I went down to the pier, where the flow of people was unceasing. They were not only residents of Akkerman, but also townspeople and villagers of the region, most of them Jews driven by fear and rumors about the shootings of innocent people – men, women, the elderly, and even children – that were perpetrated by the invaders. One elderly Jew, apparently from Tatarbunar, showed us a leaflet printed in Russian and Romanian. We read the first line with horror: «Bessarabian brethren! Kill the commissars, communists, and kikes!...» We were too terrified to read any further.

Toward evening on July 5 our father came running home and said that their batallion was leaving the city. He hoped to find us through the Grabovetskys or Aunt Ida. If the situation at the front should worsen, we were to leave and head east. He said goodbye, took his sack with supplies prepared in advance, and quickly left. For some reason, we did not take this parting very seriously. We were sure that it would not be for long.

* * *

The news from the front lines was not good. The Red Army was in retreat, and the Romanians and Germans were approaching Akkerman. On the morning of July 7, we left our keys with Marusea and asked her to watch over our apartment while we were gone from the city. We loaded our things into the cart and went down to the moorage. We barely managed to drag our trunks and large packs across the narrow and shaky walkway into a deep barge that soon filled with refugees. A small puffing tugboat slowly pulled our overloaded old tub. The waves of the firth rocked the boat and many became seasick, including our mother.

Across the firth a large crowd had gathered at the pier in Ovidiopol. The local residents had brought bread, milk, and vegetables for the refugees. Market women sold their food both for rubles and bartered for goods. We asked permission to spend the night in the house of a man who agreed to take us to Odessa in exchange for a sizable payment. My mother and Fira began to prepare dinner and provisions for the road, while I set off to see the city.

We used to look at Ovidiopol at night across the firth from Akkerman,

seeing three or four long rows of electric lamps that gave the impression of a large and well-planned city. Up close I could see that it was no more than a large village with unpaved streets running parallel to the shore and peasant-style houses covered by roofs of reed or thatch. Every homeowner had a kitchen garden, orchard, or small vineyard. Ovidiopol could not compare with Akkerman.

* * *

Around five o'clock in the morning, with all our belongings on a cart, we set off for Odessa. At first we made rather quick progress. We had good, well rested horses, and the high road was not busy. On the uphill slopes we got off the cart so that the horses would have an easier time. But by nine o'clock our progress had slowed as the way became crowded with other horses and carts. Crowds of refugees joined the main flow of traffic from smaller country roads. Their carts were filled with their belongings, and the feeble elderly and women sat atop the loads with infants in their arms. In the other direction military units travelled in vehicles or in marching formation. The July sun began to beat down upon us. Clouds of dust stuck to our sweaty bodies and coated our eyes and ears. It was difficult to breathe. We finished all the drinking water we had brought with us and could find no wells along the way.

We made our first stop in the village of Baraboi, where our driver had an acquaintance. We had a bite to eat while our horses rested. Our host could not understand why so many people had left all they had to join the Bolsheviks in their flight. He had labored the required workdays on a collective farm for over ten years and now believed the German propaganda leaflets which promised to make him an owner and allot him land.

Between the two Akkarzhas, Bol'shaia and Malaia, about half-way to Odessa, German planes suddenly swooped down, flew low over the highway, and opened fire upon the panicked refugees. Our cart was in the very middle of the highway and we crawled underneath it. Bullets and debris rattled right next to us upon the stone road. We huddled in a single living clump. Whether we survived or died there, we wanted to be together. After strafing us several times, the planes disappeared in the direction of Odessa. The killed and wounded were laid in the carts and taken to the nearest village. The column of people, now constantly watching the sky, slowly moved onward.

German colonists lived in Akkarzha. The well-made limestone houses were all alike, with the narrow side and its two high windows facing the street. In the extension to the long building were stalls for livestock and sheds. In each courtyard was a stone cellar and a well with a brace.

All the houses were evenly aligned. The wide stone fence, whitewashed with lime, formed a sheer line leading the entire length of the street, interrupted only by the identical gates, each with their comfortable benches. From behind the fence the colonists stared at us with open hostility. They no doubt looked forward to the arrival of Hitler's army – their compatriots.

* * *

Late on the eve of July 10 we entered Odessa. The entire crowd flowed from the Ovidiopol Road into the center of the city. Our driver had been in Odessa before, and he promised to lead us to the railway station. From there it would be easier in the morning to find the Grabovetsky family's house on Karl Marx Street, which began near the station. The column of people moved very slowly as everyone was exhausted from the long walk and nervous tension. It was after midnight before we got to the station, and in the darkness I could see only the contours of what seemed to be a huge building. On the right side of the station plaza was a large group of people with their belongings. We found a bit of free space and unloaded our things. We paid the drayman, and he immediately turned and headed back to Ovidiopol. My mother, Fira, and I gathered our thing into a pile and sat on top of them. Not one of us closed our eyes as we sat there until daybreak.

At around seven o'clock the air raid sirens sounded. We roused ourselves immediately but didn't know where to run or where to hide. To our surprise, our neighbors on either side remained calm and made no move to leave their places. They advised us to remain as well. They were beginning their second day here and had already seen how the Odessa rabble made off with the suitcases and bags of refugees who had scattered in all directions to find shelter from the German air attacks. We followed their example, and soon we heard the all-clear signal. Fira left to search for the Grabovetsky family, while my mother and I remained with the baggage.

A huge park adjacent to the railway station plaza was filled with refugees and their belongings. Women, children, and elderly sat out in the open air under the burning sun while the men came and went. Mothers nursed their babies as older children ran and played among the large sacks, packages, trunks, suitcases, chests, bags, and string sacks. They tripped, fell over, and returned howling to their families. Suspicious looking individuals infiltrated themselves in among the refugees. With ingratiating voices and lively gestures, they made various offers and insistent suggestions to the confused and helpless people, who had been driven from their remote Bessarabian towns and villages

by the war. I followed them with my gaze. In some cases, they succeeded in convincing some people to follow them and they set off for some unknown destination. In other cases, they quietly withdrew as soon as the men returned. The constantly growing mass of people, torn from their homes, gullible and inexperienced, provided easy prey for Odessa's speculators and scoundrels.

* * *

About one hour later, Fira returned together with Olea and Kolea, the Grabovetsky's daughter and son. After we exchanged introductions, they found a flat cart, loaded our things onto it, and paid for it themselves. Twenty minutes later we were in their apartment.

We were welcomed warmly, like relatives, by the whole family. The family patriarch, Mr. Grabovetsky, was around 70 years old and had worked as a bookbinder his entire life. He had taught this profession to his two sons. His wife, Mrs. Grabovetsky, was a very intelligent woman who managed the entire household. Olea, the younger daughter, and her husband, Matvei Samoilovich Liubchansky, lived with her parents. I did not see the elder daughter, Mrs. Kalinsky, and her family. They lived separately in their own apartment and were soon evacuated.

Mrs. Grabovetsky gave us a room and declared, with a tone of voice that forbade any objection, that we would not be turned out as long as they themselves remained in Odessa. The Grabovetskys advised us to go to the evacuation centers, where the registration of refugees took place. There we should try to obtain evacuation ship tickets to the interior of the country. They were the first to express the fear that the war would not end anytime soon, and that it would not be possible to wait it out in Odessa.

* * *

On July 12 my father arrived at the Grabovetskys. He had grown thin and looked exhausted. He shed his crumpled, sweaty, and dusty clothes, washed up, and lay down to sleep. He did not even have the strength to talk with us.

Later he told his tale of futility. His fighter batallion, after leaving Akkerman, had travelled on foot to the right bank of the Dniester near the villages of Udobnoye and Palanka. There they were ordered to dig trenches. The job was physically difficult and did not go well. Before they could finish they were ordered to cross the Dniester. They spent the night in the village of Maiaki in whatever shelter they were able to find. In the morning they were fed well from the field kitchen, given

instruments, and led to the left bank of the Dniester where they were once again ordered to dig fortifications. The commanders indicated the locations for observation posts, pillboxes, and log emplacements. This work too was interrupted by an order to retreat. They built trenches in yet one more place before finally reaching Odessa. Here the Akkerman fighter batallion was disbanded. Bessarabians whose families had been evacuated to Odessa were given documents providing for further evacuation to the east. Many of those whose families had remained in Akkerman now made the trip back.

* * *

The Grabovetsky's elder son and Olea's husband were mobilized into the army. The parents, Olea, and Kolea were given tickets for evacuation by the sea route. They had a week before their departure.

My father and I went to the evacuation center and showed them the certificate my father had received, but we were unable to obtain tickets. Then my father and another Jewish man from Akkerman rented a cart for two families to take us as far as the city of Nikolaev, about 120 kilometers east of Odessa on the banks of the Bug estuary. We were told that Nikolaev was a small city without the crush of people that Odessa had and that it would be easier to set off from there by train or ship to escape the front lines.

Our attempt was unsuccessful. We had travelled only a short distance out of Odessa along a road full of refugees and soldiers when we encountered people fleeing in panic from the direction of Varvarovka and Nikolaev. They reported that German tanks had cut off the road. It turned out that we were encircled, and the entire mass of humanity surged back to Odessa.

* * *

We returned, completely demoralized, to the Grabovetskys at #73 Karl Marx Street. It now seemed that there was no escape from Odessa. None of us had work, and our money was dwindling. To return to Akkerman hoping for mercy from the fascists was out of the question. We were tormented by rumors, each new one more terrifying than the last.

Our mother was particularly distressed about her parents, her brothers and sister, and their families, of whom we had no news. Had they stayed in Artsyz, or had they been able to evacuate somewhere? How would our elderly and infirm grandparents and our small cousins bear up under the difficulties? We tried to calm our mother's fears, telling her that our uncles, Etsik, Nooham, Mottya, and Velvel were strong and

intelligent men who would manage to pull everyone through their new and difficult situation.

Our mother sent Fira and me to the evacuation centers to find out whether any of our relatives were among the refugees who had registered. We made the rounds of several such centers in various districts of the city, but we could not find their names on any of the lists. At one such center there worked a kind woman who told us that we, being refugees, could get free daily food ration coupons and that once in a while there were even free tickets for ship passage out of Odessa and further evacuation of the refugees. She advised us to visit regularly.

* * *

The next morning Fira and I went to the railway station hoping to meet someone from Artsyz, from whom we might learn something about our relatives. It was impossible to enter the hall of the station, which was filled with soldiers and civilians. We went to the park next to the station square and wandered around under the burning July sun among the endless crowd of people and luggage. The air was filled with the deafening adult voices and cries of the children mixed with the endless noise and crackle of radio loudspeakers and public transit vehicles. We were ready to leave when we caught sight of our uncles at the very edge of the park unloading their baggage from carts. Alongside the suitcases sat our grandparents and Aunt Dora with her one-year-old Firochka in her arms.

Fira and I ran to them and checked to see whether they were all there. The meeting was an unbelievable miracle. Only God's will and providence could have directed us on this very day at this very hour to meet up with our kin. We hugged and kissed each other in joy at learning that all, both young and old, had escaped from the hell unscathed. The fascists had been right at their heels.

We reloaded the carts and set off for the Grabovetsky's house. We all felt indescribable joy; an hour earlier we had not even known whether they were alive.

Our good hosts the Grabovetskys were as surprised as we. Suddenly and unexpectedly, there was a new crowd of people in their apartment along and a huge amount of baggage. There was no space even to turn around. The women went into the kitchen to prepare the meal while Olea, Kolea, Fira, and I, with Mrs. Grabovetsky's permission, went to open the apartment of Sofia Kalinsky, the elder daughter who had already been evacuated. Then Olea spoke with another neighboring woman from the same building, who agreed to take in our relatives. Thus everyone was able to live within the territory of the same courtyard.

* * *

Meanwhile, we had to send off the Grabovetskys. On the eve of the departure of their ship, all the men loaded the Grabovetskys' baggage into the cart and took it down to the port, near the appropriate berth. The people with tickets for passage were taking their places in the embarkation line early, since there was a rumor that more tickets had been distributed than there were places on the ship. We took turns standing in line with the luggage, giving the Grabovetskys a chance to sleep before their long and possibly dangerous journey.

Finally we took our leave of them as if they were the dearest and closest people in the world to us. They promised to notify us of their address as soon as they settled. Once again, Aunt Ida had been the link that bound us all together. The Grabovetskys fervently implored us to spare no effort to get ourselves out of Odessa and flee far from the front, as they themselves were doing now.

* * *

Our 20-member family now faced one all-important question: how were we to save ourselves from the fascists? Almost daily they were to bombing Odessa and targeting the city with artillery fire. The elderly, the sick, women, and small children were moved to the basements. The ring of encirclement drew ever tighter around the city. The rations at the evacuation centers were distributed less and less often, until soon they stopped completely. It was impossible to obtain 20 tickets for a single ship. With enough money it might be possible, with luck, to buy one, or perhaps two or even three of them. But none of us was willing to set off piecemeal or in single small families, leaving the others behind. In this way, we all found ourselves stuck in Odessa. Such was our fate!

Notes

[1] The German colonists of Bessarabia abandoned 315,000 hectares of arable land, pastures, vineyards, and other lands. *Problema evreiască*, 490.

[2] *Problema evreiască*, 165.

[3] Șafran, *Un tăciune*, 18.

[4] The last deportation took place on June 14, 1941. Approximately 4,000 Jewish families were exiled from Bessarabia and about 2,000 from Northern Bukovina. Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 28, 30. According to other sources, about 10,000 Jews were deported from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. *Problema evreiască*, 385-86; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 228.

Chapter 4: **EXPULSION FROM ODESSA**

When we met Radu M. Badiu in Odessa in November 1941, our encounter was of a different sort. This time an officer, albeit a very friendly and sympathetic one, of the victorious army was meeting a Jewish family that had already gone through countless humiliations and was extremely frightened, demoralized, and helpless. He came to us, as he had promised, in the evening of the next day, after my father had returned from the Jute factory.

Radu could not hide his shock at what he saw. Instead of the successful, proud, and well-dressed people he had known, he saw before him emaciated, exhausted, anxious, and haggard Jews. Our apartment looked equally wretched. We could not offer him anything, as we had nothing ourselves.

Our parents told Mr. Badiu what had happened to us after we left Brăila, about our experiences in Odessa, the dangers we faced every day, and the hopelessness of our current situation. They also asked him for news of Marioara, about her mother, brothers, and sister, and about how the situation in Romania had developed after we left. We once again confirmed that it had been impossible for us to remain in Brăila, but that having left and ended up in Odessa, we were now in an even worse position. Sadly, we realized too late that we should have spared no effort to evacuate ourselves to the interior of the country in order to escape the fascist plague.

We talked late into the night. Radu resolved to try to help us. He told our father not to go to work at the Jute factory the next morning. He would send a soldier to the administration with the message that my father had been taken by some military sub-unit to work on the repair of their harness gear. We gave Radu our impassioned thanks, to which he replied that he was merely carrying out his duty as a human being. He refused to disgrace himself by violating his personal moral code: the army should not and must not wage war against unarmed and defenseless civilians. To persecute and murder people simply because they are of another faith is criminal and intolerable.

That morning two soldiers brought us some horse's collars, traces, and bridles for repair. They also brought a loaf of bread and a mess tin

of soldier's *ciorbă* with beans. For the first time in many days we were able to eat our fill. One of the soldiers stayed with my father under the guise of being his assistant. The other one showed Pet'ka documentation that my father was now working under the auspices of some military sub-unit and we, his family members, along with him.

Every once in a while Radu Badiu would come by to see our father. They discussed the situation in Romania, particularly the events transpiring in Brăila, the situation in Odessa, and events at the front and elsewhere. Whenever Pet'ka would encounter Radu Badiu in the yard, he would look at him with curiosity and bow to him in obsequious greeting.

We did not venture out into the street. The yellow star of David, the magen-david, sewed with its black background over the heart, cruelly singled us out from other residents of the city. The sign warned passersby that we were outside of the law. Any anti-Semite could cripple or kill us without fear of reprisal. We had the feeling that we lived under a temporary reprieve from a still unavoidable death.

On the advice of our savior, we did not obey on November 17, 1941 when the local administration ordered all Jews living in Odessa to report and surrender all their valuables, including gemstones and precious metals (platinum, gold, silver), on penalty of death.

There were days when our father did not have any work. Then we listened to the stories of the soldier assigned to us, who lived on the outskirts of the city of Iași (Jassy). We were completely ignorant of what had happened in Romania after our departure in July of 1940. This soldier was a middle-aged worker, very religious and a good family man. He was not a nationalist and did not take part in the activities of the legionnaires. It was clear that Lieutenant Badiu valued these qualities in him and for this reason trusted him enough to look after my father. He told us in detail about the Iași pogrom of July 29–30, 1941, which he personally witnessed. Many years later, after the end of the war, I read various documentary accounts about the events of those days and was convinced of the trustworthiness of his description.

* * *

The story of Iași went like this. Iași was the center of Jewish culture in Romania, but over the centuries had also been the cultural center of the Romanian principalities. To the misfortune of the Jews, it was in this city that the Cuzist movement first appeared and where the founding of the «Iron Guard» later took place.

On September 6, 1940, two months after the concession of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviets, the legionnaire government was created. They promulgated a series of laws leading to tragedy for the Jews in Romania.

Every day the anti-Semitic newspapers *Moldova, Prutul, Cetatea Moldovei, Apărarea Națională,* and *Opinia* sowed seeds of hostility toward the Jews. Around these newspapers rallied the inveterate legionnaires and Cuzists Atanasie Gheorghiu, Adrian Pascu, Tudor Dăscălescu, Alexandru Nichita, Anton Gurgu, Aurel Leon, Gheorghe State, Ion Fr. Botez, Gheorghe A.I. Cuza and others, inflaming public opinion.

All the important administrative posts in Iași were occupied by legionnaires. Thus the prefect of the county was Alexandru Ventonică, whose father was the chairman of both the municipal legionnaire organization and of the local Chamber of Commerce. The chairman of the legionnaire organization for all Moldova was Ilie Vlad Sturza; the chairman of the Chamber of Labor was Constantin Foișor; the general secretary of the Chamber of Commerce was Mișu Șerbănescu; and so on.[1]

On June 24 and 26, 1941, the third and fifth days of the war, Soviet airplanes bombed Iași. The newspapers *Prutul* and *Moldova* published provocative articles accusing the Jews of aiding the enemy; that is, of treason. On the eve of June 29, Romanians (army servicemen, policemen, gendarmes, students and lyceum pupils undergoing premilitary training, civilians such as railway workers and craftsmen) and Germans (members of the municipal SS organization, soldiers, and the like) began to rob Jewish homes and stores and herd the Jewish population into the hands of the county police administration. Here the real tragedy began: the men were separated from the women, mothers from their children, the old and sick from the healthy. During the selection process, they beat the people savagely using thick heavy clubs with nails sticking out of the ends. Some people perished under the clubs wielded by these monsters; others were shot while their loved ones looked on. Direct participants in the slaughter included both common hooligans (cabmen, loaders, craftsmen, peasants, petty merchants) and legionnaires and other anti-Semites from among the intellectual and officer classes. As examples one can cite Major Gheorghe Balotescu and Major Emil Tulbure, and police agents Grigore Petrovici and Gheorghe Cristescu, who instructed and armed the participants in the pogrom. The slaughter at Iași was organized by the Secret Information Service with the active participation of Lieutenant-Colonel Constantin Micandru Ionescu and the German Major Hermann von Stranski, an officer of the «Abwehr» Information Service and their subordinates.[2]

The Jews who remained alive were loaded onto freight cars, about 150 to 200 people per car, and the doors were shut and sealed. Accompanied by Romanian and German soldiers, one train of 36 cars was sent toward the city of Călărași-Ialomița while a second one of 50 cars headed for Podul Iloaei. During several days' travel in incredible heat, the people received not a drop of water to drink and were forced

to relieve themselves inside the cars. Some people went out of their minds or committed suicide; others perished from the beatings and from the wounds they had received.

The cars of the first train were opened only several days later upon arrival at the station of Tîrgu-Frumos. Six hundred fifty-four bodies of the Jews who had died on the trip were thrown into a mass grave, along with the bodies of those victims of the pogrom who were still alive but too exhausted to move. Even then the robbery of the unfortunate people continued. This disaster was repeated at the stations in Mircești and Roman, where the captives in the second train were treated in exactly the same way.

From June 30 to July 6, 1,384 persons perished on the train from Iași to Călărași-Ialomița. The largest share of guilt must be assigned to the commandant of the train, Junior Lieutenant Aurel Triandaf, who kept the captives without water, food, and air.

One thousand one hundred ninety-four persons perished within an eight hour period of travel on the train from Iași to Podul Iloaei. The Jews who survived the trip were interned in the camp-ghettos at Călărași-Ialomița and in Podul Iloaei.

Those responsible for these bloody crimes are, in the first place, General Gheorghe Stavrescu, the leader of the 14th division, the sub-units of which actively participated in the searches, burglaries, and killings; Colonel Constantin Lupu, the commandant of the Iași garrison, who incited the military servicemen against the Jews and encouraged the murderers and robbers among them; Colonel Dumitru Captaru, the prefect of Iași county, a rabid anti-Semite who organized the two trains that took the Jews out of Iași; the chief of the county police administration, Colonel Constantin Chirilovici, who despite his position of responsibility, took no countermeasures against the participants in the pogrom.

In the days of the Iași pogrom 14,850 Jews were murdered. More than 4,000 were deported from the city.[3]

The pogrom of Iași did not arise spontaneously; it was planned well beforehand by the anti-Semite government of Antonescu together with German services in Romania.

* * *

In December, just before Christmas, Marioara arrived in Odessa with other officers' wives. They visited the wounded soldiers in hospitals; brought them provisions, woolen socks, and gloves; and tried to cheer them up. A few days later, she came to us and expressed her compassion at our predicament. Marioara was not an anti-Semite, but neither did she condemn the actions of the government aimed at the massive annihilation of defenseless people. On the other hand, she had tears in

her eyes as she told us of what she had seen in the hospitals – young men without arms and legs; young men with contusions, burn wounds, bandaged heads. In her view, the communists were guilty of everything. She understood that the war would not end soon, contrary to the promises of Marshal Ion Antonescu, and she was very worried about her husband, who was a career officer.

When Radu came for her three hours later, they both once again assured our parents that they would do everything that they could to lighten our lot. We shed many tears of thanks.

Marioara took in the sights of Odessa, bought up many nice things, and, accompanied by her batman, left for Brăila.

I recall with great sadness that this was her last meeting with her husband. He perished on February 4, 1943, near the village of Ozereika, around Novorossiisk.

* * *

On December 24, 1941, the *Odesskaia gazeta* published Order #23, signed by the governor of Transnistria, G. Alexianu, regarding transfer of the Jews, the formation of colonies, the need to support oneself by one's own work, and, of course, punishment by firing squad for not following the points of the order. For the most part, the Jews were sent from Odessa to Berezovka and Golta counties as well as to Ochakov county. At that time there remained about 60,000 Jews in Odessa.[4]

The extermination of the Jews entered its final phase. On January 10, 1942, Order #7 was published among the army and garrison of Odessa, according to which a ghetto was to be created in the Slobodka district of Odessa. All Jews within the territory of Odessa and its surrounding area were required to report to this outlying suburb within 48 hours of 8:00 a.m., January 10, 1942. It was permitted to bring along portable things and essential household objects and instruments. A death sentence was prescribed for anyone who failed to report; anyone harboring any Jews faced 5 to 10 years of hard labor.

Our family's situation worsened drastically. We did not know how our caretaker, Pet'ka, would conduct himself; we feared he might summon the police. We did not know what Mr. Badiu would say. The soldier assigned to my father told him in confidence that their unit was being sent from Odessa to the Crimea, where the fighting was fierce.

Pet'ka was cautious. He saw that father was working and that Radu kept dropping by. He bided his time. Our savior tried to calm us, assuring us that the order would not be obeyed strictly since the Slobodka ghetto could not possibly take in so many people in the course of two days. He turned out to be right. We did not ask about the supposed departure of his unit from Odessa and he said nothing of it to us.

Along Karl Marx Street, as along other streets, men, women, and children walked in large and small groups, some under escort, others unaccompanied. The old and infirm were carried in wheelbarrows or on stretchers, heading for Slobodka. As we watched them walk past, we understood that we too, sooner or later, would follow them. During the nights our father sewed four rucksacks, which we stuffed full of basic items needed for survival in for camp life.

But even in such a time of terror sparks of hope for survival continued to arise. Fira insisted on taking the 1939 edition of the *Petit Larousse* in her sack and our parents gave in; it accompanied us throughout our time in the ghetto, where for almost three years it was the only book we ever saw. But more about that later. Our warm, good-quality coats, even though no longer new, had to be altered so as not to attract the attention of marauders. We ripped them in the most visible places and sewed them up again roughly with differently colored thread. My father hid in our outerwear some of our family heirlooms, including my parents' wedding rings; a «P. Moser» gold Swiss pocket watch, which my grandfather had presented to my father on the day of his marriage; a gold medallion with rubies, given to my mother by my grandmother; and other objects. My parents did not want to part with these expensive objects that held so much sentimental value, but they hoped that these things might save our lives in a crisis. My mother and sister gathered a supply of bread rusks and a little salt and sugar, and packed together needles, thread, and a few other small but essential items.

Meanwhile the military patrols, gendarmes, and local residents spared no effort at rooting out any Jews who had not obeyed the order to transfer to the ghetto. Some were motivated by the hope of enriching themselves with others' property, others thirsted to settle accounts, still others were guided by their most base instincts.

* * *

In the first days of February, Radu Badiu came to say goodbye. His unit was leaving for the front, for the Crimea. It was as if we were saying goodbye to life itself. He was clearly aware of that as well, and that he himself would soon face difficult trials. The last thing this honest man did for us was to talk personally to Pet'ka, to ask him to look out for us and not to turn us in. Mr. Badiu gave the impression that he would be returning before long. With warm feelings we also took our leave of the soldier who had helped my father. He left us his home address; there was no telling what the future held in store for this good man who was forced to leave at home a wife, children, and elderly parents.

* * *

The name of Radu M. Badiu ought to be included in that unfortunately short list of righteous gentiles who, guided only by their own personal ethical and moral principles, selflessly risked their social positions and their very lives to save Jews from certain death.

I spent a long time gathering information about this principled, honest, and good man who was fated to live only through his thirty-fourth year. I was assisted by his widow, Marioara Badiu, who in 1996 sent from Bucharest to me in Pittsburgh her personal recollections of her beloved late husband as well as family photographs and clippings from newspapers of the 1940s.

Radu was born on May 19, 1909, in the picturesque village of Gropeni on the bank of the Danube River, 17 kilometers south of Brăila. His parents, Marin and Constantina Badiu, were well-off peasants from the rezeși, [5] prominent proprietors in the part of the village called Băjenarii Gropenilor. They raised three sons, Radu, Alexandru, and Gheorghe, and two daughters, Didina and Chiriachița. The eldest son, who they affectionately called Răducu, received a good education. He finished elementary school in his native village as one of the best pupils. He then studied at the N. Bălcescu Lyceum in Brăila, after which the eighteen-year-old youth entered the Infantry Officer's School in the city of Sibiu. In 1931, Junior Lieutenant Radu M. Badiu was sent to the 38th Infantry Regiment of the 10th Division, stationed in Brăila. In 1936 he enrolled in Bucharest University as a student in the Law Faculty, hoping to become a military judge. On March 15 of the following year, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

On May 29, 1937, a sports festival was held to celebrate the end of the academic year at the Notre-Dame Lyceum, where girls from deserving and wealthy families received an education modeled on monastic practices. The parents and relatives of the pupils, the lyceum teachers, and friends and acquaintances were among the invited guests. Radu Badiu was part of the group of officers present from the local garrison. It was here that he saw Marioara Lapoviță and fell in love at first sight.

They were engaged on Marioara's birthday, September 8, 1937. On the engagement ring he gave her Radu engraved the date May 29, the happiest day of his life. The civil marriage ceremony was performed on February 19, 1938, and the religious one on February 27. The wedding was held in the home of Marioara's parents. Their sponsors at the wedding were Colonel Alexandru Vasilescu and his wife Georgeta, devoted long-time friends of the family. For two-and-a-half-years, until the start of the war, Marioara and Radu lived in love and complete harmony.



Marioara Lapoviţă and Radu M. Badiu. Brăila, 1937



Alexandru and Georgeta Vasilescu, Lenuţa Lapoviţă, Radu and Marioara Badiu. Brăila, 1938

As a career officer, Radu Badiu served at the front lines from the very beginning, taking part in hand-to-hand fighting and witnessing death at close range. The shattered bodies of officers and subordinates from his regiment fell beside him. His letters to Marioara were full of horror and despair. With fear in their hearts, they tried to encourage each other. During the battles around Odessa, outside Dal'nik and Tătarka, in the Crimea, near Evpatoria, Radu Badiu commanded a reconnaissance company of the 38th Infantry Regiment. He was promoted to the rank of Captain on January 24. In the Northern Caucasus, over critical sectors of the front, he commanded a combat company, bravely and skillfully carrying out the complex task of laying mine fields.

On the morning of February 4, 1943, Soviet landing forces came ashore north of Novorossiisk with 31 tanks and artillery. The central command assigned the counterattack to Captain Badiu's sub-unit. Captain Badiu and his soldiers won an important victory in battle in Yuzhnaia Dolina (Southern Valley) near the villages of Ozereika and Glebovka, but paid the ultimate price of their very lives. Captain Radu M. Badiu, holder of the high order «Coroana României» clasa a V-ea cu Spade şi Panglică de «Virtute Militară», was buried with military honors in the village churchyard in Vasilievka, the site of his last command



Captain Radu M. Badiu, Evpatoria, Crimea, 1942



The gravesite of Captain Radu M. Badiu, village of Vasilievka, Novorossiisk, February 4, 1943

post. The combat company of the 38th Infantry Regiment was named in his honor. It was the regiment in which he had served for eleven years with total loyalty.

Marioara was notified of the great feat of arms and heroic death of her eternally beloved husband on the eve of her fifth wedding anniversary. From that time she lived a widow's lonely existence, like a hermit, into advanced old age.

* * *

When most of our supplies were consumed, we decided to depart for the ghetto. The alternatives were to die of starvation or to be forced to join the convoys when we were completely weak and helpless. On the bitterly cold morning of February 10, 1942, we joined a large group of Jews heading for the ghetto in Slobodka. We walked along the roadway in deep snow for a long time. Some passersby stopped and looked at us with eyes full of pity and compassion; others shouted insults and threats. A group of German officers, very young fellows, ordered us to stop, look toward the camera lenses, and smile. Two of them aimed revolvers at us while the others focused their cameras.

They snapped pictures and roared with laughter as they sought the most absurd poses as keepsakes.

On the way, we were joined by Jews who had come out of hiding or were hounded by the patrols. Our already large column stretch ever farther along the length of the roadway with the sick, weak, and elderly falling behind. Before entering the ghetto, we were forced to stand in the freezing cold for a long time. Then the guards counted us and led us in groups of 10 to 15, into mud huts. We were relieved finally to sit down or lie on the clay floor of an empty and unheated peasant-style room. Nerves, exhaustion, exposure, and hunger had taken their toll.

In the morning we were called into the camp office to face the commission for the auditing of property and money exchange. A plutonier, or first-sergeant, asked my father some questions, entered our information into a large register book, and another Romanian, in civilian clothes and with a roguish look about him, searched us. When the plutonier stepped out of the room, this man immediately took advantage of the opportunity to shove into his pocket the German occupation marks (*Reichskreditkassenscheine*) he had found on us and sent us away. Because of his quick greed the valuables that we had hidden were not found.

Frightened and freezing, we returned to the room in which we had spent the previous night. Groups of families huddled together for warmth. We pressed against each other and whispered among ourselves for encouragement. We had, for the time being, escaped mortal danger. Others in the room somehow learned that in a day or two we would be sent off to a ghetto on the Bug. Our mood grew worse.

At that time we did not understand that the ghetto in Slobodka was only a transit point. We did not know that the governor of Transnistria, George Alexianu had signed on January 2, 1942 Order #26, which spelled out exact determinations for the specific districts in which the Jews would to settle, the beginning date of the «evacuation» (January 10), the routes to be taken, what items could be carried with us, and other details.

In his Informational Note #76 of January 17, 1942, Colonel E. Broşteanu, Inspector of the Transnistria Gendarmerie, notified the authorities in Bucharest that the deportation of the Jews from the Slobodka ghetto had begun on January 12. The praetorian service of Odessa published daily informational notices, signed by the city praetor, Lieutenant Colonel M. Niculescu, in which exact data were given. On January 12, 1942, 856 persons, mostly elderly men along with women and children, were dispatched by train to Berezovka station from the Odessa switchyard station; January 13, 986 persons; January 14, 1,201 persons; January 15, 1,090 persons (mostly elderly men aged 50 to 80);

January 16, 1,746 persons; January 17, 1,104 persons; January 18, 1,293 persons; January 19, 1,010 persons; January 20, 926 persons; January 22, 1,807 persons; January 23, 1,396 persons; January 24, 2,000 persons; January 31, 1,200 persons; February 1, 2,256 persons; February 12, 448 persons; February 16, 53 persons; and on February 23, 210 persons. There were no dispatches of Jews from Odessa on January 21, and from the 25th to the 30th because the trains were stopped by snowdrifts and temperatures that plunged below -20°C.[6]

Notes

[1] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:33-35, 48, 50, 379-84, 414-16.

[2] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:36-39, 52, 364-406; Jean Ancel, «The Jassy Syndrome (I)», *Romanian Jewish Studies* 1, no. 1 (1987): 40, 42, 43; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 2: 19, 51-56, 60, 61, 163; 3: 501.

[3] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:41-43, 49, 378, 399, 402, 406-07; Marius Mircu, *Pogromul de la Iași* (Bucharest, 1947); Aurel Baranga, *Ninge peste Ucraina* (Bucharest, 1946), 43-54; Butnaru, *Holocaustul uitat*, 277-88; *Procesul mareșalului*, 1:106; Șafran, *Un tăciune*, 69; Lya Benjamin, «Ne plângem martirii...,» *Realitatea evreiască*, no. 9 (16-31 July 1995): 7; Andrei Oișteanu, «Cine să strige că a uita înseamnă a repeta?» *Realitatea evreiască*, no. 30-31 (June-July 1996): 10, 11, 13; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 203; A. Karetki and M. Covaci, *Zile însîngerate la Iași (28-30 iunie 1941)* (Bucharest, 1978); Ioanid, *Evreii*, 87-120; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 2: 139, 141-48.

[4] Borovoi, *«Gibel'...»*, 13-14, 18 ; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 480-81; Siegfried Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry: Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust 1941-1944* (New York, 1991), 15; *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 141-42.

[5] Translator's note: Free peasants having ownership of land during the Middle Ages.

[6] Borovoi, «*Gibel'...*,» 17-18; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:202-15, 222, 231-33; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 208-10, 225-30.

Chapter 5: **THE ROAD TO THE GHETTO**

Early in the morning of February 12 we were all herded together in front of the ghetto administration building where they called the roll, lined us up in a long column, and, under the guard of Romanian soldiers or gendarmes (I don't remember which), sent us to the Odessa railroad switching station. Our column presented a depressing sight. Four months of life in Romanian-occupied Odessa had plunged a community of hale, optimistic, and neat people into a state of profound apathy and fatalism. The men were unshaven and unshorn, the women unwashed and ungroomed, the children pale and tear-stained, and all were enfeebled and emaciated, tormented and intimidated. They could hardly move their legs through the deep snow, trudging ahead toward new sufferings and ultimately death. The Romanians constantly drove us along with whips and rifle butts. We endured epithets, anti-Semitic slurs, and frightful threats along the entire way.

The people dragged themselves slowly along the route, which stretched for more than 10 kilometers. The elderly, the sick, and children were borne on carts for which their relatives had to pay with money as well as with personal belongings. But not all those who were in need could count on such aid because there were few carts available.

Everyone made great efforts to keep ahead of the tail end of the column. It was from there, the last ranks, that we most often heard the blows inflicted by the guards and, not infrequently, gunshots fired at those who were completely exhausted. Finally we reached the railroad switching station, where freight cars were awaiting us under guard of soldiers with German shepherds. The guards clearly expected some of us to attempt escape since it was generally understood that we would either die of starvation and exposure in the train cars, be shot by gendarmes or *polizeis*[1] along the way, or die of disease, beatings, or malnutrition in the ghetto.

Getting into the freight cars took place in a scene of pure pandemonium. People couldn't hoist themselves up to the high doors, so the gendarmes shoved them at random, like potato sacks, or rolled them in. Their packs, rucksacks, and bags were tossed in after them. The screaming was terrible. The Romanians swore, drove people with

rifle butts, and set the dogs upon them. The people forced their way in through the crushing mass, and they called to each other in order to stay together with their loved ones and acquaintances. Here and there someone would realize that some family member – a husband, wife, or child – was missing and had been jammed into another car or perhaps killed. Mothers reached with outstreched arms, asking that someone pass them their children that had been left somewhere on the ground near the freight cars. The hopelessness of the situation drove people to sob, cry out, or faint. The train cars were soon stuffed with as many people as they could carry and the doors were slammed shut.

Finally the train set off. It was very cold, and a strong draft came in through the open windows. We stood on our feet, pressed closely one against the other. No one was able to sit or lie down, and the unavoidable commenced soon enough. The elderly, small children, those with weak hearts, and the enfeebled began to perish. They died on their feet and, without space to fall, remained standing in place. Many begged for something to drink, but there was no water. People ashamedly relieved themselves where they stood, and the urine and excrement froze immediately. Many fell into total dispair and cried constantly. Others with stronger spirits cursed themselves and swore epithets against the Bolsheviks and fascists.

Next to us were middle-aged people who were discussing all that had happened. They asked, why had the Jews, who had numbered more than 100,000 in Odessa alone, not offered any resistance when their persecutors began throwing them into prisons, hanging and shooting them, robbing and hounding them out of the city and into ghettos? Why had they submissively walked resigned to their own deaths, fearful and cowardly as sheep? What kind of people were they? Throughout the ages and over the entire world they had been intelligent, talented, industrious, astute, enterprising people, helping each other in any way possible. And yet in this terrible time of crisis they were demoralized, estranged, simply unable to defend themselves. Our neighbors came to the same conclusion, as I recall, that I myself had reached at the time. The Jews had not believed that Hitler and his followers could inspire such medieval-style religious hatred, reckless bloodthirstiness, or such insane paroxisms of racism and monstrous folly in the hearts of people in civilized and democratic 20th-century Europe.

Any so many opponents of fascism behaved as if hypnotized – paralyzed, disoriented, and frightened. In countries throughout the continent, incomprehensible horrors were taking place: the premeditated mass murder of a civilian population; the annihilation of cities and villages; the burning of Torahs, treatises, and books; violence; robbery. The Jews had not been morally prepared to resist this kind of vandalism. And they were unarmed.

Standing there was a tall Jew of impressive outward appearance, who was over 60 years old. Although he didn't seem to have been listening to the conversation, but rather reverently reciting passages from the Holy Books, he began to assure us that the current persecutors of the Jews, like the many persecutors of our people during times past, would be severely punished by God for their villainous deeds and that His people would be reborn to overcome all obstacles. And then he continued to chant his prayer with a rocking motion in the Orthodox tradition. The image of this man and the unexpectedness of his speech inspired hope in us.

Our journey proceeded fitfully; the train would stand in stations for long periods, but the doors of the wagons would not be opened. On February 15, we arrived in Berezovka. The gendarmes forced the men to carry the corpses off the train. The frostbitten and the sick were carried off on carts, supposedly to the hospital. Their belongings became the property of the gendarmes. Those who remained were lined up in formation once again and driven into the ghetto. We spent the night in an unheated barracks. In the morning we saw the current inhabitants of this ghetto. It was a terrible sight. Among the dilapidated barracks hungry, ragged, dirty shadows of human beings shuffled around. No one fed them. For a crust of bread they bartered away all that they had. Their threadbare clothes were infested with lice. In spite of the deplorable conditions, these doomed souls tried to find out from us anything about relatives from whom they had been separated. Even in that condition they were still hoping and dreaming. In the midst of the scene I remembered the decorous manner of the man who had read to us from the Holy Books and spoken to us on the train, inspiring us with a glimmer of hope. He reminded us of the infinite power of the Almighty. *Fiat voluntas Tua!* Thy will be done!

* * *

We made the long march from Berezovka to Domanyovka via Mostovoye and Lidievka on foot; our columns of people traced a fearful path of death. The morning of February 16 was ice cold, as were the days that followed. We were so exhausted that we literally slept on our feet. We made slow progress. Our rucksacks became lighter as our food supplies grew small and we sacrificed more and more of our personal items to trade for bread or potatoes. Along the huge, endless steppe, covered with snow, there blew a sharp wind that cut to our very bones. It was extremely difficult to walk, and the road was almost invisible. About ten kilometers from Berezovka we saw, scattered about on the sides of the road, the bodies of people from previous convoys

who had been shot during transit. They had all been stripped naked; their corpses were swollen and had a strange orange color. Our mother forbade us to look at them. We were in horrible spirits.

Our column stopped for the night in a hamlet next to the road. We were sent into the ruins of what had once been horse stables. Because not everyone could fit there, the guards allowed the people to approach the nearby houses to ask the owners for sleeping arrangements and some kind of food. Our father and another man from our column, who had a wife and a six-year-old boy, found such a place and came for us. Having eaten some thin but hot skilly, all seven of us lay down on the bare floor, put our rucksacks under our heads, and immediately fell asleep.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by a knock on the door and by men's hoarse voices. We were very frightened. There in the dark we expected the worst. The son of our new acquaintances cried out, soiled himself out of fear, and began to hiccup loudly. Three lanky men burst into the room with thick sticks in their hands. Stepping on our bodies and feeling around with their paws in the dark, they grabbed several rucksacks and, swearing loudly in Ukrainian, ran out of the room. Coming to our senses, we went out into the yard after them, but we only had time to spy the thieves running away from a stack of hay or straw. We did not dare to run after them, and our women held us back. After grieving for a little while, we lay down again. Our exhaustion took its toll. Our father stayed up to keep watch. We pushed a long bench up against the door.

When it was just getting light, my father and I, along with our new acquaintance (I think his name was Rembus or Rezmus), went out into the yard and approached the stack. By following the tracks in the snow and the disturbed straw, we found our rucksacks where they had been hidden by the robbers. This small victory cheered us greatly. The little that we were able to recover helped us to survive.

A few hours later we resumed our journey. The same endless steppe and the same swollen, orange-colored corpses strewn along the sides of the road. I could see them even when I closed my eyes.

We had already grown used to the shouts and swearing of the gendarmes. The people walked faster than on the day before. We could hardly hear any shooting from the end of the convoy.

It was our fate to endure yet one more ordeal with dire consequences. About midday there appeared on the snowy steppe black dots moving quickly toward us. The Romanian escort guards halted our elongated column, gathered it closer together, and, for the first time, showed concern for us. They warned everyone that German colonists, inhabitants of the nearby village, were approaching. The Romanians hated but also feared the Germans. The Germans scorned the

Romanians and called them Gypsies. The sleighs of the colonists quickly caught up with us. They were well-fed young men with rosy cheeks, in warm, well-made sheepskin coats and high boots. They looked at us with arrogance and hatred. The word *Juden* was spoken with undisguised malice. The sleighs were already riding beside us on both sides, right and left. The Germans had difficulty holding back their high-spirited horses. The Romanian guards found themselves hemmed in between us and the Germans; they held their rifles at the ready and demanded that the Germans get lost. In response the Germans merely laughed insolently and muttered something in German.

Having caught sight of someone wearing a more or less good overcoat, fur hat, winter shawl, scarf, gloves, or high galoshes, shoes, or boots, one of them would plunge into the column holding a whip in their hands and rip the articles of clothing right off their hapless victim's body. Those who tried to resist were lashed by the whips over their faces, hands, or wherever else the blows might fall. Having taken whatever caught their fancy, they turned around and rode back to their colony.

We could see the convoy guards breathe a sigh of relief. They had not been forced to use their weapons and fight with these insolent ethnic relatives of their country's senior ally. But our sorry went out to those poor unfortunates who had lost the last items of clothing protecting them from freezing. The people wept and their tears froze on their sunken cheeks. In this difficult situation humanity nevertheless manifested itself as others gave whatever they could and shared their last items with those who had suffered loss and were now unclothed, barefoot, or bareheaded. We thanked God that the Germans had neither taken us from the Romanians into their colony to be annihilated nor killed us in our column on the spot.

The German colonists of the Odessa region were true and brutal murderers, especially those of the Berezovka district through which our path of death passed on its way to the infamous ghettos of Bogdanovka, Domanyovka, Akhmechetka, and Mostovoye. It is no wonder they were later exiled to Siberia. Their cruelty is recorded in the stark informational notes of the inspectors of the Romanian Gendarmerie in Transnistria: on March 9, 1942, the German civilian police from the village of Zavadovka and from the town of Mostovoye in the Berezovka district eliminated 772 Jews at the ghetto in the village of Chikhrin; on March 13 the Germans from the village of Kartayka of the Berezovka district killed 650 Jews at the ghetto in the village of Khalievka and, after stripping them of their outer clothing and valuables, burned their bodies; on March 16 the Germans from the village of Novo-Kandeli of the same-named district led 120 Jews out of the ghetto of the village of Katouska, stripped them, took all their valuables, and shot them; on March 18 the Germân civilian police of the village of Bernandovka shot 483 Jews; on the same day

Germans from the village of Reichstadt shot a group of Jews in the village of Veselyi Khutor near Mostovoye; on May 27-30 the Germans from the village of Lichtenfeld led 1,200 Jews out of the ghetto at the state farm Sukha-Verba and shot them.[2]

This list is far from complete. No one kept an inventory of the Jews who, while walking the long road from the Berezovka station to the district center of Domanyovka, were annihilated – shot, beaten half to death, hanged, buried alive, or burned – by the German colonists. However, it is known that the greatest suffering at the hands of these monsters was borne by the Jews in the earliest transports. Anonymous martyrs!

On February 20 we arrived in Domanyovka where the convoy guards led us into the local ghetto. We were counted and taken to a large building that had once served as the district clubhouse or movie theater, and, before that (if I am not mistaken) as a synagogue. In the enormous room, with broken windows, it was just as cold as outside. The broken frames of the windows clacked ominously in the gusting wind. The wooden planks of the floor were torn up in a number of places. Perhaps the boards had been used as firewook for heating or for preparing food over makeshift fireplaces made out of broken bricks. Ashes and traces of those fires were apparent between the protruding beams.

The new arrivals began to settle themselves, looking for a place where the wooden flooring was still intact and where it would not be so drafty. We found such a corner, swept and cleaned up as we could the garbage and the rags left by earlier prisoners since disappeared into oblivion. The family of our new acquaintances settled next to us. The men went off to look for food. They were able to exchange some things for bread and a few potatoes boiled in their jackets.

There were many people in the room constantly moving around, going out and returning. It was very noisy; the sick would moan and ask for something or other, the children cried or played, the women complained or argued. Someone was dying right beside us as his relatives wept and murmured the prescribed mourning prayers. They picked up the corpse in their arms and carried it to a place designated for the dead, off to the side. By morning a number of corpses has accumulated. They were taken to the cemetery in carts and sledges. The ground was frozen, so it was impossible to dig graves. The relatives accompanying the deceased could not budge a bit of the frozen earth even with pickaxes; they had, in any case, almost no strength left. They were forced to pile the stiff corpses into a common grave dug long before.

We learned from the earlier arrivals that in the ghetto of Domanyovka there had been real carnage during January and the first part of February. At the command of the prefect of the county of Golta, Lieutenant Colonel Modest Isopescu, local authorities and occupiers had killed about 18,000 Jews. The Jews were first robbed, stripped naked, and then shot dead

in groups of 300 to 400 at intervals of 3 to 4 days. Vasile Mănescu, the praetor of the Domanyovka district, directed the killings. *Polizeis* such as Afanasie Andrushin, Mihail Kazakevici, Prokopenko, and Nikora put particular effort into the completion of these tasks.[3]

The organized shootings of the Jews ceased about one week before our arrival in Domanyovka, on February 15, 1942, when the Romanian military authorities had given the order to halt the mass executions.[4] Shootings and brutal beatings continued, however, on a less organized basis. We were witnesses to this, and everyone who had survived and remained at all fit tried to leave the Domanyovka ghetto. Spring was approaching and the villages needed laborers, because many of the men (Ukrainians, Moldavians, Russians) were away serving in the ranks of the Red Army. Those peasants still living in the countryside were occupied with work on their private plots. The slave labor of the Jews was a welcome convenience for the Romanian administration, which was running the former collective and state farms. Craftsmen and doctors were in particular demand.

Notes

[1] *Translator's note:* The German loanword *polizei* was used during the Second World War in reference to those local inhabitants who officially collaborated with the fascist authorities in the occupied countries.

[2] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:174, 261, 263, 264; Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 21V; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3:187, 210-11, 277, 298.

[3] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:198, 6:70; Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 21-25; D.Z. Starodinskii, *Odesskoe getto* (Odessa, 1991), 42; Rubin Udler, «În iadul Transnistriei» *Realitatea evreiască*, no. 5 (May 1995): 7; Udler, *The Cursed Years*, 393-98.

[4] Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 21; Starodinskii, *Odesskoe getto*, 38; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 261-65.

Chapter 6: **VINOGRADNYI SAD**

On the morning of February 22, representatives of the villages of the district arrived at the Domanyovka ghetto where they had been summoned by the praetor to recruit Jews for work. They selected blacksmiths, carpenters, tinsmiths, stove makers, tailors, furriers, shoemakers, millers, physicians, doctor's assistants – and, fortunately, harness makers such as my father. We were chosen by Uncle Andriy Zakharishchuk (or Zakharchuk), who introduced himself as the representative of a hamlet called Vinogradnyi Sad, a part of the Bogdanovka Village Soviet. We were extremely fortunate to have met this decent and just peasant, a man of about 50 years of age, and to be taken to his hamlet. Thanks to this chance event we remained alive in spite of all of the difficulties, privations, torments, and illnesses we had suffered.

We arrived in Vinogradnyi Sad that evening on Uncle Andriy's peasant sleigh. The floor of the sleigh was covered with hay, and we wrapped ourselves in sackcloth. He took us to a long squat building standing about 150 meters from the nearest peasant houses where a hanging oil lamp burned dimly and several people sat around the *rumynka* stove. Uncle Andriy announced that we would live here with them and that he would come tomorrow morning to give everyone their work instructions and explain the rules of the camp.

The ghetto of the hamlet of Vinogradnyi Sad was in a building in which calves had once been kept. It had a clay floor, three narrow windows, and a low ceiling daubed with clay. In the middle of the room, which was about five meters wide and nine meters long, stood a small stove with a black double-bended flue designed to give off heat. On the right and left sides of the narrow aisle were rough wooden plank-beds of widths that varied according to the number of family members. The spaces between the beds were very small. Some of the pallets were lined with old shabby reed mats while others had thin mattresses of sackcloth filled with straw. During the cold season people would sleep fully dressed and covered with overcoats, cotton-filled jackets, or sacks. All the property of a family or individual was stored under the plank-beds.

The only door led from there into a tiny anteroom which served as a kitchen. The hearth had two large openings. We used one kettle to prepare the food for everyone, and another vessel we used to heat water for various needs. We fueled it with flat pieces of dry pressed cow dung, *kizeak*, whose characteristic smell of manure penetrated into our ragged clothes and, it seemed to us, into our thin bodies as well. This anteroom also contained a small shoemaker's worktable, and a single, poorly constructed door led to the outside.

Our former calf house stood facing a rather deep ravine which began just above us, near the common field, and ran down, ever wider and deeper, toward the Bug River. Streams of rainwater and melting snow would flow down the ravine, most often during the autumn and spring. It also served as our communal latrine, and we would take turns going to use it.

It did not take us long to get acquainted with the other residents of the ghetto. Some had been transferred here from the ghetto at Bogdanovka by the Romanian administration. They were among those who had survived the mass execution there of more than 50,000 people. Uncle Andriy had brought others here from Domanyovka, where, as I've already noted, 18,000 Jews had also been annihilated. All of them, Bessarabians and residents of Odessa, had come here on foot from Odessa in guarded convoys, passing through hell on their way.

The elder of the ghetto was Uncle Filea, Philip Poleakov. He was the oldest person in the ghetto as well, around 48 or 50 years old, who worked as a cutter and shoemaker. Rahel' Kaminskaya, a tall, stout woman, performed the duties of cook. Polina Sukhorukova, who introduced herself as Pelageea Fyodorovna Polishchuk, was a dressmaker. Sasha Zadoin worked as a shoemaker's assistant; Raea Alexandrovich a bookkeeper; Nina Granovskaya a hairdresser. The locksmith Abram Karachunskiy was there with his wife Tsilea, a bookkeeper, his two-year-old daughter, Maea, and his sister, Frida, a dressmaker. Misha Bekker, who worked as a tinsmith, had a wife, Ida, and two little girls, Galea and Shura. All these people were natives of Odessa. David Al'tfir was a good furrier, hat maker, and stove setter. He was here together with his wife, Fanea, his son Nushka (Nooham), and daughter, Feiga. Carol Viner and his wife, Nina, were musicians who had a little daughter, Carmen. These two families had been evacuated from Bessarabia and, like us , trapped in Odessa. The convoys brought them to Domanyovka, from where Uncle Andriy had brought them here.

Rahel' poured out a large tureen of hot soup for us and broke off a hunk of bread for each of us. We were warm and, strangely enough, in a good mood. Soon we fell asleep.

Uncle Andriy, who was to be our immediate supervisor, showed up the next morning and gave us instructions on how to behave. He told

us not to go anywhere without his knowledge and permission, not to steal, not to ask for alms from the local population, not to go into the village; he told us to work conscientiously wherever he directed us and to observe the rules of good hygiene.

Uncle Andriy led my father and me into the stable of the collective farm, showed father the worn-out harness gear and asked what kind of labor and equipment would be necessary to put it into good repair. Father answered that it would require workbenches with special heads, a cutting table, a machine for processing leather, and, most of all, the leather itself in addition to tools such as awls, chisels, knives, and scythes. We agreed to repair quickly the already existing gear, which was clearly insufficient, and to make new gear as well. Father referred to me as his assistant. Since spring was approaching and the peasants and Jews would have to go out into the fields to work in just a few weeks, we also had to sew new peasant sandals for everyone. Thus it was my fate to learn the harness maker's trade in the ghetto.

My mother and sister, together with the other women, were sent to the granary to sift through the grain with large shovels. This work was unfamiliar and difficult. They swallowed a great deal of dust. The local women explained to them what happened with the wheat and showed them how to do the work. During the midday break the locals, among whom were also soldiers' wives, asked the Jewish women who they were, where they were from, how they had remained alive, who among their relatives had been lost. They took pity on them, cried together with them, and became close. Two of the local women carried a fresh loaf of bread and a pot with potatoes from the house and gave them to our women for supper.

A few days later, Uncle Andriy brought a physician from Domanyovka, Hersh Rosenberg, and his wife, Ida. They were Bessarabians.

In the calf house that was our ghetto, we lived in terribly crowded conditions: 27 people (men, women, and children) in six families and six single individuals. We ate together, worked like slaves, overcame various difficulties, often fell ill, and rarely found anything to be happy about. We were one large family joined together in our misery.

* * *

For days on end everyone worked themselves to exhaustion and returned late to the ghetto tired and hungry. During the first few weeks, after satisfying our hunger and resting up a bit, we would listen for hours to our comrades in misfortune tell of their experiences and of everything they had seen and heard. Those who had been in Bogdanovka told, with hearts full of pain, of what took place there and of what they endured. Bogdanovka had been a state pig farm located on the right

bank of the Bug River, 25 km northeast of the district center of Domanyovka in Golta County. In November 1941 Jews began arriving there, most of them rounded up during the raids in Odessa. Many were originally from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and western Transnistria. A month later there were already more than 55,000 of them – people who were worn out from their stays in other camp-ghettos; exhausted from traveling on foot in the long convoys and from being mocked by soldiers, gendarmes, and local scoundrels; hungry, suffering from cold and sickness, robbed and driven to the limits of human strength. They were quartered in pigsties, stables, cowsheds, and barracks, in unbearably crowded, terrible, and unsanitary conditions. Without food or medical treatment, with typhus running rampant, half naked in freezing weather, they died by the hundred every day.

The mass extermination of the Jews in the Bogdanovka ghetto began on the morning of December 21, 1941. Tens of thousands of people were shot and burned. The slaughter was organized and carried out by Romanians and local *polizeis*. But the stories of our ghetto neighbors were incomplete and fragmentary. There was much that they had not seen and did not know.

The April 30, 1944, issue of the Odessa newspaper *Chernomors'ka komuna,* cites a document signed on March 27, 1944 by residents of Bogdanovka and by a few surviving Jews in which they report that the mass shootings continued from December 21, 1941, to February 15, 1942, with a pause for the days around Christmas. Among those who directed the operation were the Germans Fiter and Richter. It was carried out by Romanian gendarmes and local *polizeis* under the coordination of the county police chief, I.S. Silovenko.

The doomed were forced to strip and, in groups of 20, stand facing the ravine called the Bogdanovka Pit. The executioners shot them in the back or in the back of the head. The shootings continued without pause. Both the dead and the merely wounded fell into the ravine where bonfires burned . Children were thrown alive onto the fires in order not to waste bullets. The flames burned day and night.

According to the data of the Extraordinary Government Commission, 54,000 people were killed in Bogdanovka.[1]

In the indictment of the Romanian People's Tribunal, dated May 3, 1945 and signed by the chief public prosecutor, Avram Bunaciu, and public prosecutor, Dumitru Săracu, it is justly noted (I translate almost literally) that no punishment would be sufficiently harsh to atone for the crimes perpetrated, inasmuch as even capital punishment can never fully make amends for murder committed for the sake of sadism or plunder; for the extermination of people on a mass scale; for the barbaric marauding; and for torture inflicted upon thousands or tens of thousands of victims.

The extermination of Jews in the Bogdanovka ghetto was described to the People's Tribunal in detail. Forty-eight thousand Jews had been herded into the ghetto, mainly from Odessa. Lieutenant Colonel Modest Isopescu, who had been appointed prefect of Golta County on October 6, 1941, personally led the mass slaughter. Carrying out the order was delegated to the subprefect of Golta County and prefect's assistant for Jewish affairs, Aristide Pădure, an equally odious figure known among the county's residents for brutality. Pădure also signed this order. He recruited Vasile Mănescu, the praetor of the Domanyovka district, and Vasile Melinescu, head of the Bogdanovka gendarme post. The city of Golta and various villages of the county sent their police, people with no conscience and no soul. The *polizeis* wore white brassards labeled «Romanian Police».

The Germans did not take part in this massacre.[2] The entire command structure of the Romanians bear full responsibility for the crimes. Lone captains or even colonels, even the most dedicated legionnaires, could not possibly have dared such an evil project without the knowledge and permission of the governor of Transnistria, George Alexianu, and the head of state, Marshall Ion Antonescu.

There are today people in Romania trying to rehabilitate the loathsome criminal Antonescu.[3] They have even erected a monument to him as a person unjustly executed by the people's court. These political intriguers are trying to convince the world that Romanians treated the Jews more humanely during the war than did the Germans, the Hungarians, or other fascist myrmidons.

The execution of the Jews began on the morning of December 21, 1941, as has already been mentioned, but the procedure for their elimination turned out to be even more brutal. Around 5,000 people were driven into pigsties, horse stables, and cowsheds – the sick and the lame, the elderly, orphaned children. Sheaves of straw were then piled up in front of the entranceways and windows and on the lofts. These were soaked in kerosene and ignited. Within minutes these buildings were burning like torches. Flaming beams fell onto people still alive, crushing them. The despairing cries of the doomed horrified the remaining Jews, who the Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian *polizeis* herded into a small wooded area near the camp to be shot. Mothers carried their small children in their arms, parents supported their older sons and daughters, and husbands walked together with their wives to the place of execution. In groups of 300 to 400, they were made to strip naked, pile up any valuables they still possessed, and kneel down at the edge of the 30-meter deep ravine where they were shot point-blank with dumdum bullets.

The massacre continued at this accelerated tempo through December 22 and 23. A pause until December 28 was announced to give the

murderers time to celebrate Christmas and to rest. The mass elimination of the Jews then continued on the 28th and 29th of December.

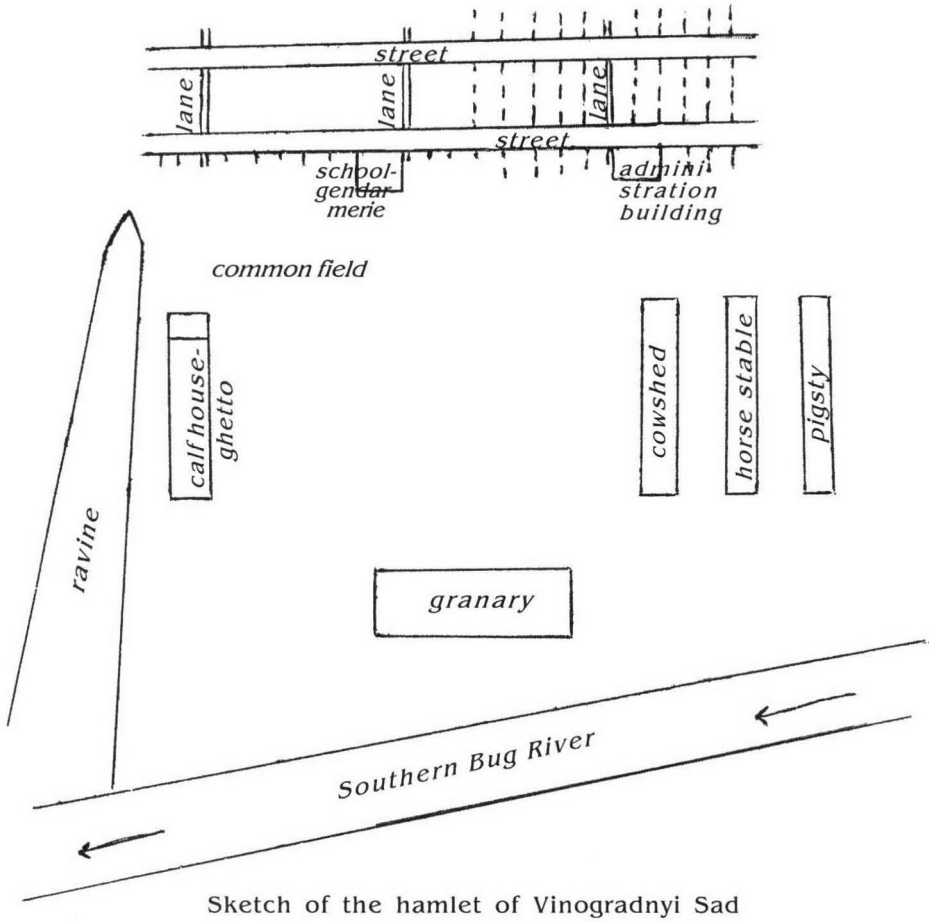
To cover the traces of this horrible action, the Romanians ordered the burning of 43,000 corpses during the two months of January and February 1942, at the command of Modest Isopescu. The burning was planned methodically, using bonfires two meters high and 4 to 5 meters wide. A layer of bodies was placed on top of a layer of straw and firewood, then another layer of straw and a second layer of corpses, and so forth. Thin bodies were alternated with fat ones so that they would burn better. Two hundred physically healthy Jews were forced to carry out this gruesome work. These unwilling servants, working with cries and groans, praying and cursing, under constant scrutiny of the gendarmes and *polizeis*, were forced to burn even the corpses of their own parents, wives, children, sisters, and brothers. Some 150 of this brigade were shot for being too slow in burning the bodies.

At the trial it was proved that the sadist Modest Isopescu personally visited the site of the Jewish executions on Christmas Eve and, for his own entertainment, took pictures of the groups of Jews heading to their death, the naked bodies of men and women, the blazing ravine, and the forest.

Court records show us the wide range of behavior at Bogdanovka. Gheorghe Bobei, the praetor of the Bogdanovka district, directed the robbery of tens of thousands of Jews. He forbade the local population to sell food to the Jews. He confiscated all food, which his people then traded only for gold and jewelry. We also read of the ignoble roles played by two Jewish scoundrels, Izu Landau and Avram Creştinu, who enriched themselves from the grief and suffering of their own people. They were justly sentenced to death. One single Romanian, who himself had earlier participated in the beatings and plundering of the Jews but who refused to participate in the shootings, was the warrant officer Vasile Melinescu, the head of the Bogdanovka gendarme post. He was immediately relieved of duty.

The court heard testimony from 200 witnesses to this drama. Among them were the Jews Haim Kogan, Iancu Kleiman, Hersh Reisig, Iosif Braunstein, Semo Marcovici, and Avram Lupescu; the Romanians Vasile Neneş, Vasile Melinescu, and others.[4] Testimony showed that in December of 1941 and January of 1942 the Romanians shot more than 20,000 Jews in the villages of Marenevka, Marenburg, Novosyolovka, Vladimirovka, and Moldavka, parts of the Karlovka Village Soviet, which was contiguous with Bogdanovka.[5]

Not a single monument or memorial plaque has yet been erected at any of the sites of the mass executions of the Jews in Odessa, Dal'nik, Berezovka, Mostovoye, Domanyovka, Bogdanovka, Akhmechetka, Bershad, and many other places in Transnistria.



Sketch of the hamlet of Vinogradnyi Sad

* * *

The hamlet of Vinogradnyi Sad where we now lived consisted of only two short, straight streets running parallel to the Bug River and a few small lanes running perpendicular to them. The peasant houses were all similar to one another – white with a light blue strip along the bottom and mostly with thatch roofs. On the eastern side in front of the entranceways were long clay mounds of earth, *zavalinkas*. Near each house were smaller structures, orchards, and vegetable gardens. People raised cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and fowl. In the center of the village was an elementary school built according to a standard plan. The administration of the collective farm was a bit farther away.

Between the hamlet and the ghetto was a large common field to which the women drove the cows in the early morning before taking them to pasture. On the other side of the field, across from the gardens of the far street, stood a large granary on the edge of the

high riverbank. The cowshed, horse stable, and pigsty formed the fourth side of the square.

The hamlet was comparatively young, founded in the middle 1920s by landless peasants from various places. It included Ukrainians and Moldavians, though only the older generation spoke Moldavian. Vinogradnyi Sad was part of the Bogdanovka Village Soviet. Bogdanovka was about 7 kilometers to the north, upstream along the Southern Bug River. The collective farm's watermill was about four kilometers south of Vinogradnyi Sad. The name Vinogradnyi Sad translates as «vineyard garden»–not a typical name for such a hamlet. It had been thought up by some optimistic boss dreaming of turning barren hillsides into a fertile blooming garden.

After the war we survivors felt extremely awkward whenever we had to reveal – whether orally, on a questionnaire, or in autobiographical writings–that for over two years we had been prisoners and had endured terrible suffering in the ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad, i.e., in a vineyard garden. The varied reactions to this included perplexity, astonishment, and a peculiar smile that usually communicated sarcasm.

We were forbidden to stroll along the streets of the hamlet, so I did not know where most of the people we were forced to work with lived. We never entered their homes. For food, Uncle Andriy would bring us supplies to last several days at a time. The young shoemaker Sasha carried them to Rahel' in the kitchen. The rations were meager: potato and millet soup, along with some bread. We drank boiled water instead of tea. There were almost no calories in this food and we were always hungry.

Every day I went to work with my father. He taught me how to wield an awl, cut the narrow strips of raw leather called *shuval'niks*, make apertures neatly and at equal intervals for sewing bridles, and cut out and sew peasant sandals. At first my father gave me old breech bands, collars, and reins for me to repair, and gradually I was given the more difficult work of making the separate parts of new harnesses.

Uncle Andriy was satisfied with our work and once in a while brought us a small bag of corn meal or a sack of potatoes. This was a great help for more than just our family, as our mother would treat our new comrades in misfortune to fresh *malay* (a pastry made from corn meal) or potato pancakes.

* * *

Doctor Rosenberg liked to chat with Fira and me, exchanging French and Romanian phrases. He was always tactful in checking our knowledge of Romanian and Western literature (we were not very familiar with Russian literature), classical (Greek and Roman) and eastern mythology,

history, and geography. When disagreements arose, we consulted *Larousse*. The doctor knew Latin well and often used Latin expressions and sayings. He explained their figurative meanings and, with many examples, elaborated on the short commentaries printed on the cyclamen-colored pages supplementing that marvelous dictionary.

Once he explained to us several sayings: «Abyssus abyssum invocat» (misfortune brings misfortune), «Acta est fabula» (the play is over), «Supremum vale» or «Aeternum vale» (forgive at the last or forgive forever), «Ad vitam aeternam» (for all time), and «Fatum» (fate). Then the doctor grew sad and silent. He had recalled, apparently, his former life and recently endured tragedy. Fira tried to cheer him up and distract him by asking where he had studied medicine.

Doctor Hersh Rosenberg gladly accepted the opportunity, telling us he was from a small Bessarabian town where his father had been a rich businessman. The boy studied well, finished his course at the Lyceum, passed his exams, and received the baccalaureate diploma. But at that time it was impossible for Jews to study medicine in Bucharest. A *numerus clausus*[6] was enforced, which prescribed a quota of Jews. And even those few who managed to be admitted endured harassment and beatings from the nationalistic Romanian students and hostility from a significant number of the professoriate.

After consulting with knowledgeable people, his father sent Hersh to study in Milan, Italy. In his last year there he met an intelligent and attractive girl at the same institute. Once he received his doctor's diploma, Hersh returned home together with his chosen and they were betrothed. He began to practice medicine in Orhei (Orgeyev), where the parents of his beloved lived. When summer was over, she returned to her studies. The separation and their correspondence strengthened the bond of their love, and during the next recess they were married.

The young doctors, skilled in their profession and able to communicate well, soon moved to Kishinev. In time they grew well known and patients asked specifically for them. They had a daughter, a happy and beloved child, and a few years later his widowed mother-in-law moved in with them. They lived in peace and worked productively.

In 1938, however, serious harassment, oppression, and persecution born of envy and greed began under the Goga-Cuza government, when nationalists of various hues and anti-Semites raised their ugly heads. Conditions worsened in the following years as the legionnaires, with the support of Hitler's Germany, solidified their position throughout Romania.

The fascist intrigues came to an end in 1940 with the transfer of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union; it seemed that order and a normal way of life would now rule. But a different misfortune soon dashed such hopes. The Soviet regime began to do away with property owners of all

nationalities, who were now considered to be class enemies. Hersh's parents, old and infirm, had willingly handed over their own houses and their store, with all of its goods, to the Soviet authorities. Even so, they were awakened one night, forced into an awaiting truck, transferred into a freight car under NKVD guard, and sent to Siberia. They were permitted to take with them only what they could collect at a moment's notice.

The doctor afterward learned from relatives and friends nearby that his parents' house, still containing all of their property, was occupied just days later by some district chief, an «honest» Communist. *O tempora! O mores!* Rosenberg made no inquiries for fear of putting his own family in danger. The regime was strong and merciless.

Fascism, however, proved to be even more brutal. When the war reached our parts, Doctor Rosenberg decided to evacuate to the interior of the country. In his heart he held the hope that he might find his parents, as it was learned that the exiled Bessarabians had been settled in the Aktyubinsk and Kurgan regions. Hersh spent a large sum to rent a cart and, together with his family, evacuated to Odessa. The way was difficult and dangerous since the Germans were bombing the crossing at the Dniester. They were unable to go any farther than Odessa. Once the city was occupied by the Romanians they shared the fate of all the Jews. The doctor was put in prison and released only after a large bribe had been paid. The entire family was forced into hiding in order to avoid being driven into the convoys. They endured hunger, sickness, and freezing cold – even though, for a time, the invaders made use of Rosenberg's skill as a doctor.

One evening when the doctor returned home from work he could not find his wife, daughter, or mother-in-law. Their room was empty and everything had been stolen. He wanted to end his life then and there; he felt he had nothing more to live for. Someone who wanted their property had obviously alerted the military sentries – perhaps the janitor or one of the neighbors. Doctor Rosenberg made the rounds of everyone he could find hoping that somebody would tell him what had happened to his family. But they all insisted that they had seen nothing and knew nothing.

The next morning, after a sleepless night and with no thought for his own safety, he interrogated the residents of neighboring houses. He searched for his family at the police station, the office of the gendarmes commandant, and other places, but he could not find them. He found himself alone in the world. He then hurried to the ghetto in the hope that he would find his family there. He asked everyone he saw, but could not find them there either. Following the route established by the Romanians, he wound up in Domanyovka. The ghetto administration treated him gently, since they needed the services of a doctor to deal with the large number of sick people. The doctor made inquiries not only of the residents of the ghetto; he ventured even to Gorka, the

notorious place where the doomed were herded into two tumbledown stables on the outskirts of Domanyovka to die: those sick with typhus or dysentery; old men, women, and children, wasted away from hunger. The doctor's family was not there, either.

There was little point in remaining in Domanyovka, nor did he have the strength to do so. His beloved wife, daughter, and mother-in-law were perhaps killed in Odessa or in Slobodka, or shot in one of the convoys. Or they may simply have died from exhaustion and abuse in one of the ghettos.

However, while he was there he noticed a girl who was physically exhausted and totally apathetic. No one looked after her or gave her even a cup of water to drink. Her father, mother, and brother had been executed in Domanyovka, although she had managed by some miracle to avoid their fate. She was unable to sell her belongings or trade them for a piece of bread, since she had nothing left. She also had no specialized training. She had only received her school certificate on the eve of the outbreak of war.

The doctor decided to rescue her. When Uncle Andriy chose him to work at our hamlet, he introduced this girl, whose name was Ida, as his wife. He was about 32 years old while she was around 18. Uncle Andriy perhaps suspected that she was in fact not his wife, but he needed a doctor.

More and more, the villagers of Vinogradnyi Sad came to Doctor Rosenberg. Children fell ill, adults caught colds, the elderly were suffering, the wounded were returning in agony from the front, and women were giving birth. They began calling him to their homes day and night to treat their sick. At the insistence of the villagers, Uncle Andriy gave the doctor permission to leave the premises of the ghetto and to walk around the village when accompanied by the person who had summoned him to their house. The people showed their gratitude to the doctor in the form of gifts of food; one would give him ten eggs, another a hunk of fat, a third some potatoes or flour.

Due to the lack of medicines and instruments, the doctor treated his patients with folk remedies, including decoctions, lotions, cupping, spinal and bone manipulations, massages, and bandage dressings. Sometimes he merely gave advice or treated by suggestion. And the people got well. The girl who was passing as his wife would help him by boiling water and washing dishes, towels, and napkins.

The typhus that had overtaken other villages of the district reached Vinogradnyi Sad as well. Perhaps people had contracted it elsewhere and brought it here, or perhaps the outbreak was a consequence of the difficult living conditions: emaciation, congestion, lice, lack of soap. The sick needed to be isolated. Uncle Andriy understood that the situation was serious and made available an empty mud hut for an

infirmary. The larger room was given over to the sick while Rosenberg and his wife moved into the smaller one. Treating patients from the village was more convenient there than in the ghetto. And the calf house became slightly more spacious for the rest of us.

* * *

Polina, my mother, and Fira fell ill with typhus at the end of March, 1942. They were taken to the infirmary where several villagers were already lying. Within a few days I, too, fell sick, as did Ida, the doctor's wife. We had high temperatures and horrible headaches and became delirious. Our backs, arms, and legs ached. We were totally weakened and exhausted. I don't remember how our doctor, Hersh, treated us; I cannot even imagine it.

When the crisis passed and we began to improve slowly, Hersh occasionally allowed our father to come visit us for a few minutes. Our father had grown thin worrying about us. The Romanians feared a typhus epidemic even though it was well known that the disease affected primarily the weak and the hungry. At the time, the Romanians might have simply decided to kill us all.

We looked terrible. Our hair had been cut with scissors at the roots. We were so thin we seemed to be nothing more than skin and bones. Our father brought us bread, milk, eggs, and anything he could obtain by bartering our belongings. He was very grateful to Uncle Andriy who gave us rations even though we were not working, and, more importantly, did not notify the gendarme post in Bogdanovka that we had contracted typhus.

The elder at the ghetto, the shoemaker Uncle Filea, conducted himself with tact and sympathy during these weeks. He inquired after our health, calmed our father, and had long talks with him. To help us regain our strength he gave our father part of the food he earned from the peasants for sewing and repairing their shoes. Our father agreed to accept this help only when he had nothing left of his own to bring us. With the help of these good people we gained back our health and strength.

* * *

The fate of Uncle Filea named Philip Poleakov, was also difficult. A native of Odessa, the eldest son among a poor shoemaker's many children, he began working early to help his father. After his father's death, Filea went to study with a skilled master cutter. He learned his trade well and earned good money. He completed his military service, married, and raised a son while continuing to help his mother and younger brothers.

At the beginning of the 1930s, as a cutter and craftsman working by himself, he was subjected to heavy taxation by the state finance department. Filea was sentenced to several years imprisonment for failure to pay this tax. He suffered terribly. Thieves and scoundrels in the prison abused him without fear. Gradually he himself was hardened by the experience.

He left prison a year before the outbreak of the war and joined an *artel* as a shoemaker. He earned little, but, as he told it, slept peacefully at night. He felt that Soviet regulations had crippled his life. Filea worked only for the sake of supporting his family. He was totally uninterested in the activity of the authorities.

In the first days of the war, his younger brothers were mobilized and left for the front. Their families and their mother were evacuated. He did not want to join them, thus expressing his attitude toward the Soviets. But in occupied Odessa he learned the true meaning of grief when his only son disappeared. He wound up in one of the convoys from which no one ever returns. Filea and his seriously ill wife found themselves barely alive in Bogdanovka. She was taken away and he never saw her again. He did even want to talk about all the suffering and abuse he himself had to endure.

His shoemaker's craft brought him to Vinogradnyi Sad. He grew fond of Sasha Zadoin, the young shoemaker's assistant, and took him on as his helper, perhaps because he reminded him of his lost son. Sasha was 22 years old. He had been orphaned after losing both his parents during the Romanian reign of terror in Odessa. When the devastating shootings came to and end he found himself in Bogdanovka. Uncle Filea saved his life by giving him the work. Sasha was an obliging, well educated, intelligent fellow. Uncle Filea and Sasha were always together and even shared a single plank-bed.

Uncle Filea organized our ghetto responsibly, capably, and with care. After the arrival of the doctor, days and hours were fixed in a schedule, according to which the inmates of the ghetto were to perform various chores, such as washing their clothes, washing themselves in the tin tubs that Misha had made, cleaning up the living space and the land around the camp, and gathering and carrying in fuel. Filea insisted that Uncle Andriy give us laundry soap and Gypsy combs because without them it was impossible to eradicate the lice. The ghetto inmates sewed themselves skirts and blouses and made foot cloths and other articles out of the sackcloth allotted by Uncle Andriy.

* * *

Once we had recovered from typhus, Uncle Andriy sent us back to the ghetto. We worked, but he took it easy on us. We were distinguished

by our shaved heads. Thanks to the fresh air and relatively light work load, our health gradually returned.

Mama and Fira worked together with the other women in the vegetable garden and greenhouses on the bank of the Bug River. They cultivated seedlings, fertilized the soil, transplanted bushes, planted, watered, and weeded. They ate the early fresh vegetables, such as new onions and garlic, radishes, and carrots. When permission was given, they would bring bunches of vegetables to us in the ghetto.

I worked with my father. When we finished repairing the harness gear, Uncle Andriy brought us several ox hides to tan. According to my father's instructions, carpenters crafted a specialized device, called a *vyrtezh* in Moldavian, with which to soften one's leather. They installed it outside the village on a level surface. We smeared each piece of leather with tar, folded it lengthwise several times, stretched it through the opening on the device, and, under the power of an old horse, turned the leather alternately to the right and the left. Then we took the leather, once again smeared it with tar, folded it, stretched it onto the device, and turned it. Thus we worked the leather for many long hours until it became soft and absorbed the tar. We used this leather to sew new harness gear.

In May or June I was designated assistant to the cowherd. Early each morning I went out to the common field where the women would drive their cows and kept the cows from scattering. The cowherd would soon show up–a rather sullen man about 45 years of age who spoke to me only in Ukrainian. We then went out into the field with the cattle, several kilometers away, holding the cows back when they tried to run too fast and retrieving them from sown fields. At noon we took the cows to drink from the Bug, where we made a *tyrla* (in Ukrainian, «rest area») for about two hours. The cows would lazily lie down or stand around chewing their cud. Women would often come with pails and stools to milk their cows. For us this was time for a meal and a chance to relax. The cowherd would take from a large shoulder bag he had carried all morning a hemp towel, which he would lay on the ground or on a rock face, and then bread, a small hunk of fat, garlic, and sometimes *brynza* (sheep's-milk cheese) and an earthenware jug of milk. While he ate and drank, I had the tiring job of looking after the herd; some of them would continually wander away from the herd, and I was so tired I could hardly wield my heavy cowherd's mace.

After he had eaten and rested, the cowherd took my place, leaving me a bit of food on the clean towel. After my long and strenuous work of chasing the cows I greedily ate everything. The fresh air and the restoration of my young body added to my ravenous hunger. We then set off on our way.

The herd included a beautiful thoroughbred bull the cowherd could

handle well. I, on the other hand, did not know how to approach him. He could be very frightening at times, throwing up earth with his hooves, lowering his head, and growling with menace. It was some time before I felt comfortable with him.

When the sun was low in the sky we turned the herd around and headed back to the village. We approached the common field slowly, holding the herd back so the cows could eat their fill. The sun was below the horizon before we reached the field. When the women came to fetch their cows, some of them would bring me something to eat, which I carried back to the ghetto.

Thus the days went by. I learned the simple particularities of the cowherd's work, and Uncle Andriy and the peasant women were satisfied with me. My health improved and my skin darkened in the sun. Many of the people already knew me and called me by name or simply referred to me as the «harness maker's son».

The soles of my peasant sandals wore out in less than a month, and I often ran barefoot over the stubble, the burrs, and the rocks. After an entire day of this, I could not feel my feet in the evenings. I would bathe them for a long time in a basin of cold water. In the morning, it all began again.

* * *

One late afternoon as I was returning to the village, I came across a skull near the huge rock on the high shore of the Southern Bug River. It lay on the ground, still bearing rich curly hair of a golden color, braided into a thick plait. I stood dumbstruck. The skull, white as limestone, with a hollow spot in place of a nose, two rows of straight white teeth, and two empty eye sockets, was turned a bit to the side, as if throwing a questioning glance in my direction. It was a terrible sight, and I was overcome by horror and fright. But then I was roused from this state by a question: why was only this one plaited skull lying out on the cliff? Mechanically, almost at a run, I covered the entire surrounding area, looking in every rock face, ravine, and shrub, but I could find not a single human bone or a shred of clothing.

I returned to the skull and sat down beside it. I could not take my eyes from it. Who was this little girl? Who was grieving for her and hoping still to find her? What kind of torments did this innocent child endure, and in what suffering did she die? Who will answer before God and before humanity for this ruined life? It was reasonable to assume that the girl had managed to escape from one of the convoys or nearest ghettos in Akhmechetka and Bogdanovka, and that far from the village, fearing beatings and torture, she perished from hunger, exhaustion or disease. Perhaps marauders had cold-bloodedly and greedily stripped

the corpse of its clothing, and hungry dogs had ripped away parts of the body. Or perhaps homeless dogs had dragged the head of the girl here... but why? I could not halt the flow of such painful thoughts.

That evening, deeply shaken by what I had seen, I told the residents of the ghetto about the skull with the plait. I hoped that one of them had perhaps heard about a girl who had disappeared, but no one could recall anything of the sort.

The next day I dug a shallow hole near the rock face and buried the skull with the golden braid. On the rock face I scratched a six-pointed star by which to find the grave of this unknown martyr. I thought that someone would eventually come asking about her, but for all the years we lived in the ghetto, no one did.

* * *

Various events broke the monotony of my cowherd's existence. Several times at the watering place cows crossed over the Southern Bug to the German side. The river was shallow in places, so we could have gone after them to herd them back, but both the cowherd and I were afraid. It could have meant sure death for me and it was dangerous for him as well. In such situations I stayed on alone with the rest of the cattle while the cowherd returned to the village to report the incident to the authorities and the owners. The Germans sometimes returned the cows, but more often than not they would tell us that no cows had been found. The collective farm assisted those who had lost their cows by providing them with a heifer or cow from the collective farm's herd. These were unpleasant episodes for us, because people accused us of sluggishness, and some of them made threats.

On rainy days we suffered terribly. We wore empty bags on our heads but these did little to shelter us from the penetrating downfalls. We shivered in the cold and wind. Clayey soil clung to our feet which felt almost too heavy to move. We would trip and slip as we wielded our maces and shouted at the cows and ran around with all our strength trying to control the wandering herd. In the evening when I returned to the ghetto my entire body ached, and I was so tired I could not even eat.

Sometimes the cows would calve right in the field, where the cowherd doubled as a veterinarian. The newborn calves were helpless, weak, and cute, just like small children, regarding the world with surprise and confusion, trembling and shivering. The owners would immediately come running, helping as they could, carrying the calves in their arms. The next day they would bring us presents.

* * *

Once the cowherd fell ill and I was given an assistant named Nushka Al'tfir. He was a bright, sharp-witted boy about 14 years old with large, intelligent, green eyes, dark wavy hair, and olive skin. He was growing fast but was very thin and hunched over. He was dressed as I was, in old rags that had been washed many times, with patches upon patches, all of various colors and materials. On his head he wore a sharp-cornered cap shaped like a *budyonovka*. I don't know where he obtained such a hat. It was so faded with time that it had a dirty, mousy appearance. He wore it pitched to the side in a dashing manner. We both must have looked strange with our pathetic clothes, shoulder bags, pointed peasant sandals with long straps bound crosswise up to our knees, and the large heavy clubs in our hands sharply set us apart both from the residents of the village and from the other members of the ghetto.

I found Nushka easier to work with. We herded the cows equally and became less tired. We spoke openly and frankly, discussed pressing questions and talking about our dreams. Far from the village, on the open field where there was no other living soul, we sang in Russian the songs we had recently learned in school. «How Wide Is My Country» (*Shiroka strana moia rodnaia*) and «Katyusha» strengthened our belief that we would survive, live free, study, work, and love. We sang Romanian songs as well, strongly and buoyantly, from our school repertoire.

At noon, as the cows took their rest, Nushka baked potatoes on an open campfire, at which he was skilled. Then he raked away the embers, tossed the hot potato from one hand to the other, carefully took off the skin, salted the potato, and proudly presented it to me. A salted baked potato – a delicacy, a meal for a lord! But we resisted the strong desire to satisfy our great hunger. We carefully wrapped the hot root vegetables in a towel to keep them warm, and took them back to the ghetto for our families.

* * *

Nushka was a good son and devoted brother. His mother was always ill and often confined to bed. She suffered from some internal disease from which her entire body seemed to dry up. Nushka and his father washed and patched clothing, prepared meals, and fed and cared for his mother and little sister. Nushka dressed and undressed Feigaly, washed her hair, combed it with a Gypsy comb, killed lice, put her to bed, and told her stories.

Nushka's speech was peculiar. He spoke fluent Yiddish, but often inserted Romanian and Russian words and expressions. At home his parents spoke Yiddish with him, but in school he studied in Romanian

for five years and in Russian for another year. He spoke Romanian with a strong Jewish accent and with a particular singsongy intonation. One had to be proficient in all three of these languages to understand him. But he was an observant fellow and had a sense of humor, so even adults found him interesting to listen to.

Nushka showed touching devotion to his mother. When her health declined, he patiently fed her with a spoon, arranged her straw pillow and mattress, and covered her in an old coat.

Sometimes in the early morning, as the cows were being gathered, the women would bring us fresh milk, a piece of brynza cheese, bread, or something else to eat. Nushka wrapped his portion in a bag and gave everything to his mother by way of little Feiga.

* * *

David Al'tfir, Nushka's father, was one of the many Bessarabian Jews who had no luck in life despite great effort. David lived at first in the small town of Kaushany (Căuşani), where Jews made up a majority of the population. In *Cheder* (elementary school) he learned to read and write a little in Hebrew, but he did not become religious. As a youth he was apprenticed to a stove-maker and mastered this profession. In time he opened his own business, which served the residents not only of Kaushany, but of the surrounding villages. He would proudly say that every stove in Kaushany and in the district bore the mark of D. Al'tfir.

Due to the nature of his work, he visited the homes of many people, conversed with them, listened to their stories both sad and happy. He knew many jokes which he memorized and could tell at any appropriate moment. He was obliging and affable and won himself a large client base. The young, handsome, tall, and well-spoken man with a flourishing business caught the eye of many girls looking for a bridegroom.

He also caught the eye of young wives who pined away alone at home while their husbands travelled to fairs in other towns for a week or so. Without naming names, he would tell stories of his adventures, of the clever coquettishness of his admirers, and their temperamental flashes, inhibited by fear of God and of their husbands. Perhaps he embellished the truth, but everyone willingly indulged in his bragging, which help them forget their own bitter reality for a while.

Then he fell in love and married the modest, quiet, attractive daughter of a well-established hat maker, a man with a steadfast character who lived according to strict rules. And soon greeted the arrival of a long-desired son, Nushkaly.

In the time he had free from his stove-maker work, David learned to sew travelling caps, forage-caps, Moldavian *kushmas*, sharp-cornered fur hats, Russian fur hats, and even men's and women's dress hats. His

father-in-law recognized his talent and, in his paternal and purely Jewish thriftiness, suggested that David start up his own hat-maker's workshop parallel to the stove works. He helped David learn to appraise the quality of astrakhan fells, a business that promised a large income.

David's affairs went well for several years, with the help of his father-in-law. He employed both craftsmen and shipmen, and his income grew. The cares that come with founding a business faded into the past. He had money to spend, and free evenings in which to spend it. He acquired friends who loved to play cards for money and to indulge in a glass of delicious Moldavian wine. And he continued to be attracted to pliable, hot-blooded ladies. The fact was that David could not resist temptation. His interest in his work faded, and he grew more distant from his wife. His competitors began to lure away his craftsmen and clients.

At last he saw that his affairs had gone bad and that he could no longer stand on his own in Kaushany. He also became fed up with his father-in-law's well-justified moralizing. He turned over his hat-making workshop to his father-in-law and his stove-making works to one of his master craftsmen. With his wife and son he moved to the nearby city of Bendery. Acquaintances from Kaushany helped him find work, but there were already master craftsmen with good reputations in this city and regular clients. He invested a certain sum of money to become the partner of an old hat-maker. He worked a great deal, but the business went badly. This was during an economic crisis that engulfed all of Romania, hitting Bessarabia particularly hard. It was also a time of growing anti-Semitism and tension between national groups.

Almost nine years after the birth of their first child, David's wife Fanea gave birth to a daughter and the family's relations improved. His father-in-law, who had followed his son-in-law's behavior from afar, continued to support him by collecting and selling finished goods in other market-places, lending David money, and seeking out orders for him. But this was not enough for David and his family.

Soon after the outbreak of the war, in the general commotion and panic, and without returning to Kaushany for his wife's parents, the Al'tfirs evacuated to Odessa, where they, along with many thousands of other Bessarabians, found themselves trapped. When Odessa was occupied by the Romanians, they paid to be hidden, exchanging their best belongings for food. When there was nothing left to pay bribes or barter for food, they gave up trying and left for the ghetto at Slobodka. Hungry, exhausted, and destitute, they wound up in Domanyovka, having travelled on foot through ferocious cold on the terrible path through Berezovka, Mostovoye, and Lidievka. Whenever David talked about the sufferings and torments of the past months, he always thanked God for sparing the life of his entire family. But he also said that when there are so many evildoers and injustices in the world, even our God is not all-powerful.

The health of David's wife deteriorated with each passing day. After one visit, the doctor told David there was nothing he could do, even if medicine had been available. David was crushed, and cried like a child. Deep within his soul he hoped for a miracle. He asked Uncle Andriy for temporary permission to remain absent from work and sat by his wife day and night. With touching tenderness he reminded her of the happy times they had had and gazed at her with love. He encouraged in her the hope that she would grow strong, recover, and raise little Feiga and Nushkaly – that they would all return home. After all, he said, the ghetto, this damned misfortune, could not last forever; God would not permit that. Then it seemed to David that a miracle occurred. For a day or two she grew more comfortable, ate something, raised herself up, pressed her daughter and son to her and kissed them, and lovingly looked into David's eyes while stroking his hands and thanking him for his care and devotion. In the evening, however, after everyone had eaten and were preparing for bed, she began to fail. David, breaking the ghetto commandment, ran for the doctor. Parents sent their children out of the calf house, and several of the adults went out with them.

Doctor Rosenberg understood that her last hours were upon her, and he asked everyone to leave. Only David remained. They called Nushka and Feiga to say farewell to their mother, and then led them out. All the inmates of the ghetto stood in the yard in a state of distress. These were people who had so recently seen mass executions, frozen corpses on the roadsides, and bonfires where mutilated bodies burned and upon which children were thrown while still alive. But for the first time since the carnage, which they had begun to think of as something from the past, they were faced with the death of one close to them. We were learning that the human psyche is structured in such a way that even the most horrible memories fade with time, but that once they do, death can reawaken the horror anew.

When the doctor emerged, everyone understood that Fanea had passed away. The people remained standing outside for a long time in the cold night. They did not want to disturb David as he sat inside alone with his deceased wife, who had suffered so much. Feiga and Nushka sobbed uncontrollably and none of the women could calm them. When David uncovered her face in order that all might take their leave of her, we were shocked. Her skin was pitch-black.

The next day, the doctor managed to find a cart and sackcloth for the funeral, but there was no wood for a coffin. The women wrapped the body in sacking rather than in a white shroud and laid her on straw in the creaky cart. An old, nearly lame horse laboriously carried the body to the barrow where they had been given permission to bury her. The village graveyard was not for Jews.

The funeral procession included David and his children, along with

Philip, Sasha, and Rahel', who did not leave the ghetto for work. On a slope at the barrow, they dug a shallow and narrow hole, recited the Kaddish, and buried her. They returned without delay, as it was forbidden to stay there too long.

Everyone felt sympathy for David. The residents of the ghetto showed great consideration to him and his motherless children, and tried to distract them from sad thoughts. Rahel', our cook who was always present in the ghetto, looked after little Feigaly. Occasionally, the girl was taken along by her father to his work.

* * *

After the death of Fanea we lived relatively untroubled for several months. We got used to the temperament of Uncle Andriy, our immediate supervisor, and followed the system of rules he set up. He, in turn, was apparently satisfied with us. The inmates of the ghetto worked conscientiously because they had found a measure of tranquility for the first time in many long months of occupation and fear. We had a roof over our heads (so what if it was a former calf house?), we had food to eat every day (so what if it was insufficient in quantity and quality?), and no one tormented us. We saw no Romanian gendarmes or soldiers – for us the personification of abuse and death – although we never forgot that they were not far away: they were in Bogdanovka, in Akhmechetka, and in Domanyovka, and any day they could appear to bring us grief.

Indeed, it was not long before Uncle Andriy came running to us before dawn, in great agitation and even fear. Word had come from the gendarme post in Bogdanovka that a local gendarme post was to be set up in Vinogradnyi Sad. This would immediately require that a suitable building, with a cellar and a large yard, be made available somewhere in the center of the hamlet, along with furnishings, dishes for the kitchen, and other equipment. An apartment would have to be found for the gendarme officer in charge of the post.

Uncle Andriy strictly warned us not to venture outside the ghetto except to go to work, never to show ourselves in the village, and to keep our calf house ghetto clean. Yellow stars of David were to be securely sewn on in front and back. When the gendarmes showed up, we were to greet them courteously.

The local Soviet decided to hand over the school building, which had been constructed only shortly before the outbreak of the war, for the gendarme post. The rooms of the elementary school were bright and large, with high ceilings. Several rooms contained the director's office, the teachers' room, the library, the gymnasium, and the cafeteria in which the children received free meals. A spacious stone cellar was located below, and the schoolyard was protected by with a wooden fence and surrounded by trees and lilac bushes.

Some local residents quickly hauled everything to the old schoolhouse, including children's desks, blackboards, maps, globes, stuffed birds and animals, and Ukrainian and Russian books. With the same haste, women came and cleaned the rooms, washed the windows and floors, and swept up the yard. The peasants had their beds and bed linens, tables, chairs, utensils, and all manner of equipment taken from them. Two days later, five gendarmes and the junior lieutenant who would be commanding them came riding in to Vinogradnyi Sad in two carts.

According to Uncle Andriy's tale, they looked rather miserable – dirty, unshaven, and, above all, hungry. He spoke of the Romanians with obvious disdain and malice, because he, like all Ukrainians, felt that the Romanians were thieving, lazy, arrogant, cowardly, uncultured Gypsies. But the Ukrainians feared them, because they had brute force on their side. They were armed, in league with the Germans, and had demonstrated ferocity during the annihilation of the Jews. They had executed imprisoned soldiers and their commanders, along with local activists such as party members, Komsomol members, and the leaders of village soviets and collective farms.

Like true conquerors, the gendarmes demanded that the village – that is, the collective farm – provide them with daily supplies of fresh food (meat, vegetables, bread, milk). The women were to prepare it for them and clean up afterward, and a man was to be available every day to serve them as an orderly. The administration appointed a Moldavian, who was able to speak with the gendarmes. The commander of the gendarme post was offered several lodgings owned by the most affluent Moldavians, but he preferred to live close to the school, in the house of a teacher whose husband was serving in the ranks of the Red Army.

With the arrival of the gendarmes, the lot of the villagers as well as the ghetto inmates became much worse. The gendarmes, to indicate their importance, nailed over the entrance to their post a sign with writing in Romanian, even though no one in the village could read it. They raised a tricolor flag and discordantly sang some kind of anthem in their language, standing at attention in a short line while sticking out their thin chests. From their yards beyond the fences, the people regarded this scene with puzzlement, surprised at how strangely the Romanians expressed their national pride and loyalty to the Marshall, the leader of their country.

On one of his regular visits to the ghetto, Uncle Andriy warned the ghetto elder, Philip, that the Romanians were interested in us and would soon appear to inspect and perhaps even search us.

On that very night, around 10 o'clock, my father and I left the calf house and went down to the ravine as if to relieve ourselves. I watched out for anyone approaching while my father wrapped our family valuables

in a kerchief and laid it in a flat mess tin with a lid. We then went down the ravine to the Bug, turned right, and walked some 100 meters farther. At a distance of about three feet from the base of a small, steep rock face that could clearly be distinguished from the others in its shadow we dug a small hole with our two knives, laid pebbles along the bottom, and put the mess tin inside. We sprinkled first pebbles and then earth around it, and finally covered it with large stones.

We returned by the same route we had come. As we walked, my father said that only we would know about this place and that anything could happen to any one of us. Even if the Romanians should try to extort information or even beat us, we should never show them where our valuables were buried. We would show Mama or Fira this place only in the most extreme situation.

It was dark when we entered the calf house quietly. Everyone was in bed, but I was unable to fall asleep for a long time. My neighbors were whispering; someone would go out, perhaps on their own mission to hide something from the Romanians.

The next evening, when all the inmates of the ghetto were in the calf house after work, Uncle Andriy and all of the gendarmes appeared in the ghetto with stern faces and rifles over their shoulders. He ordered us to go outside and line up in formation. For the first time we stood side by side, all in a single rank – men, women, and children.

The officer looked us over with undisguised disgust, hostility, and malice. He walked around our rank, front and back. Our appearance was indeed unsightly and pathetic; we looked like real beggars. The soldiers stood fanned out before us. We began to worry since we had no idea how this would end.

With a nod, the officer signaled Uncle Andriy to read out an order. The gist of it was that we, as Jews, were enemies of the Romanian people, traitors sent to Transnistria in order to perform physical labor to help the country wage its holy war against the communists – the adversaries of Germany, Romania, and all civilized Europe. We were to follow strictly the routines established by the Romanian administration of Transnistria for Jews living in ghettos and labor camps. Immediate, severe punishment, up to and including death by firing squad, awaited anyone breaking the slightest rule. The gendarmes would be responsible for our supervision and surveillance. Then Uncle Andriy read out a list of our names, including our professions and current jobs. Uncle Andriy would remain our civilian supervisor.

With that, our first meeting ended. We discussed it all evening and tried to guess what the coming days would bring.

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Once in a while a fellow about 23 years old would come to us in the ghetto. His name was Van'ka Zhuk, a well-built, handsome young man with intelligent black eyes and a rich forelock of black hair. He loved to discuss and elucidate the things going on. His education was limited to the eighth grade, but he was gifted by nature with a sharp mind and he craved knowledge.

Van'ka always asked his interlocutors questions that he was himself unable to answer. He was concerned by everything that took place in the world before the war. How could it happen, he would ask, that the mighty Soviet Union emerged powerless in the face of the fascist army? He bitterly hated them. Why had the Russians, Ukrainians and other nations been unable to stand before the Germans and Romanians and now obediently, almost submissively, like slaves, submitted to a handful of vermin cowering here behind the lines? Were the kikes really all to blame for this? The kikes, whom the occupying forces were so savagely wiping out, sparing neither infants nor infirm old men? Had not the members of the Party and Young Communist League inflicted just as much evil upon their own people and should not they, too, be wiped out with the kikes? He brought us many such questions.

Van'ka Zhuk was mobilized on the first day of the war and sent to the front. The Germans and Romanians stood directly across from his trench. He battled loyally, defending his native land. He fought bravely, as only the Slavs are able when they stand between the enemy and their dear mothers, beloved wives, and sweet children, their past and their future. But his unit was ordered to retreat. He was injured during one of the battles, and his arm was amputated. He recovered in the hospital and returned home an invalid. No one his age was left in the village. Some had been killed, others were fighting or had disappeared without a trace. He could not find his place, and suffered greatly because of his position.

Van'ka Zhuk hated the Romanians and Germans and would not even think about working for them. Understanding his attitude, the administration of the collective farm gave him work within his powers such as that of a night-watchman, a groom in the stables, or a driver. Whenever he would meet up with the gendarmes, Van'ka would not greet them, turning his head away. The commander of the post considered this to be an infringement of order and summoned Van'ka to the post. Another villager, the Moldavian orderly, translated the conversation. Vanea answered with dignity and courage, perhaps even with a bit of impertinence. The junior lieutenant could not contain himself and, perhaps to demonstrate his power in the presence of his gendarmes, delivered a couple of slaps to Vanea's face. Vanea responded only with a significant look, then turned and departed without permission. The

translator froze. He thought that they would shoot Vanea in the back or hang him, but the Romanians were surprised as well. They neither ran after him nor placed him under arrest. Vanea Zhuk, a wounded veteran of the war, had become their open enemy and risen to the top of the list of those considered politically unreliable.

* * *

Second on that list was the Communist Anton Blanuță, a Moldavian of about 50 years of age, tall and thin, with blue eyes and light hair untouched by gray. He was so calm as to be seemed downright sluggish in his movements and his conversation. Nonetheless, he was a diligent worker, an obedient and industrious man. When he became a member of the Party, he did not take a leadership post on the collective farm. He worked from morning till night, a thrifty peasant who loved the earth and the cattle and skillfully led others.

The house in which the Blanuță family lived was well-built and clean. They kept a few sheep, a cow, a pig, and several beehives. Behind their house they had a small garden of about ten fruit trees and a similar number of vine shrubs. Anton Blanuță knew how to make traditional Moldavian brynza cheese and wonderful wine.

When the war began, he was not inducted into the army due to his health. He continued to work on the collective farm and did not evacuate. After the arrival of the Romanians, however, all Communists and Komsomol members were arrested and interrogated. The Romanians asked the villagers about each other's activities under the Soviets, and no one directed any complaints against Anton Blanuță. All his life he had never done anything bad to anyone or hurt anyone, so he was released. He returned home and continued working, but he became closed and began to shun people. He could not understand how anyone could slander one's Communist neighbor without any really serious reason, and in so doing, sentence that person to death by the firing squads.

The Romanians, probably to spread fear, executed several Party and Komsomol members, former brigade leaders, farm managers, the secretaries of the Party organization in the village, the head of the propaganda station, and others.

The commander of the gendarme post summoned Anton Blanuță and began to argue that he, as a Moldavian, or Romanian, ought to be helping the gendarmes. He tried to turn Blanuță against the Ukrainians, who had supposedly oppressed the Moldavians when the Soviets were in control. The commander demanded that Anton become their man and pass on to them everything the villagers said and even thought. In this way, he explained, Anton Blanuță could expiate his guilt for having been a Bolshevik.

The meeting lasted a long time. The commander continually lost his temper, yelled, swore, beat his fist on the table, and threatened to send Anton and his family away from the village and even to penal servitude. Anton Blanuță withstood the verbal onslaught of the gendarme head and declined all his suggestions with a calm demeanor, almost cold-blooded in his dignity. The junior lieutenant concluded that Blanuță was and had remained a committed Bolshevik.

* * *

Instead, the Moldavian serving as their orderly became their accomplice. As a local resident he knew everyone in the village and was flattered to be able to roam the streets with the Romanians and, during which many people would bow to him obsequiously. He enjoyed participating in all the investigations at the gendarmerie, sitting next to the officer. Some peasants decided that he had some power and they began to ask him for help in this or that. He himself started to believe in his own importance. In truth, the people were afraid of him and tried to avoid him.

* * *

The commander of the gendarme post had been an elementary school teacher before he was mobilized. He had graduated from a pedagogical school (*școala normală*) in which only Romanians, most of them children of well-to-do peasants, could study. These types of educational institutions cultivated a nationalistic hatred of and contempt for other peoples. During the eight-year course of study, they instilled in their students a conviction that the Romanians were the direct descendants of the Romans, the most ancient of all peoples living in southeastern Europe, defenders of European civilization, and that they were superior in every way to the Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Poles, and others) and the Hungarians. The Hungarians had appeared in Panonia and Transylvania about a thousand years after the Romanians and had oppressed the Romanians for centuries.

Anti-Semitism had been instilled in the Romanians at home from childhood; the pedagogical schools gave to this hatred a «scientific» grounding by the teachers – Cuzists and legionnaires. For them, the Jews were bloodsuckers, leeches, or spiders, as they loved to caricature the Jews on the pages of newspapers such as *Porunca vremii*. The Jews had to be annihilated, they taught, or driven from the country. Instilled with this kind of anti-Semitic spirit, the graduates of pedagogical schools dispersed among the rural and urban schools and passed on these perverse principles to the next generations.

A few years before the outbreak of the war, when chauvinism and anti-Semitism were at their height, this teacher-commander was already

a committed and active member of the Romanian pro-fascist movement. In recognition he was appointed director of an elementary school in a small town in the northern part of Romania, where the population consisted mostly of Jews and Ukrainians. There he put into practice his principles of crude, forcible Romanianization. He married the daughter of a well-to-do peasant who brought considerable wealth as her dowry. She was a teacher who had graduated from the women's pedagogical school and received an education and indoctrination similar to that of her new husband.

In the evenings, their home was the site of meetings of the teachers of the town, the priest, the praetor (the senior representative of the *volost,* or small rural district), the veterinarian, the commander of the gendarme post, and the owners of stores and restaurants – people who represented the Romanian upper strata of local society. They discussed the political news of the day, applied it to the situation in town, settled their affairs, and worked out plans of action against their competitors – the Jews and Ukrainians. In this milieu, where the director of the school had authority and many connections, he started to devote more of his attention to politics.

In 1940–1941 the international situation worsened, war became a fact, and the reservists among his social circle began to be called up for army duty. With the support of friends who were members of the same party and shared his political and organizational views, he joined the gendarmes at the rank of junior lieutenant. In this way he both avoided being sent to the front and gained the opportunity, under the pretense of doing his patriotic duty, safely to the rear of the action, of oppressing those of other faiths and enriching himself at their expense.

Unlike the hooligans among the legionnaires, he did not personally participate in torture or killing – not in the town where he worked as director, or later in Bessarabia and Transnistria, where he served. He contented himself with extorting large gifts and bribes, supposedly for services rendered. What he plundered he sent home at every opportunity. For the gendarmes such as this, especially for those serving in Bessarabia and Transnistria, the war was like a bottomless well from which they could draw anything they liked, day and night.

The commander was clearly bored in Vinogradnyi Sad. He had nothing to talk about with the men under his command, who were simple peasants in gendarme uniforms; he did not understand the Ukrainians and was rather afraid of them; he hated the Jews. The only person whom he deigned to speak with was our doctor. Even though the gendarme commander realized that his intellect and education were quite inferior to that of Doctor Hersh Rosenberg, he summoned him to the post and engaged him in conversations about the future of Romania and the transformation of Bessarabia and Transnistria into model

provinces with scientifically organized agriculture – a place where only Romanians would receive large plots of the wonderful earth. He viewed Ukrainians, Gypsies, and Jews as a very cheap workforce whose lives here could not continue beyond one or two generations. He told Doctor Rosenberg about his past, about his family, and about his grand plans for the future. These revelations afforded the doctor rare insights into the character and behavior of the gendarme commander.

Romanian historians, looking back, have tried to prove that the huge territory between the Dniester and the Southern Bug rivers, even as far as the Dnieper, had long since been settled by Romanians as part of the Moldavian principality. The junior lieutenant read articles and books by Vasile Netea (*Transnistria*), Ioan Mailat (*Transnistria*), I.A. Nestorescu (*Transnistria noastră*), I. Nistor (*Vechimea așezărilor românești dincolo de Nistru* and *Aspecte geografice și culturale din Transnistria*), Al. Boldur (*Românii și strămoșii lor în istoria Transnistriei*) and others.[7] He believed in their scientific reliability and grew even more proud of his national origins. He wanted to know the doctor's opinions on all these questions. He was of course sure that the war would soon end with the complete victory of Germany, Romania, and their allies.

In his discussions of these and other questions, Doctor Rosenberg obtained practical information about conditions in Romania and the situation at the front. He also learned of the plans that the district and county administrations had for the Jews – which was useful for all of us to know.

One day the commander of the gendarmes fell ill with a chill or the flu. He immediately summoned the doctor, who rendered first aid, but made it clear that medicines would be necessary – and not only for the commander alone. Thanks to this opportunity, the doctor was able to build up a small supply of drugs.

During one of their meetings, Doctor Rosenberg noticed that the gendarme commander acted anxious and even alarmed. He had been informed by the district center that partisans were distributing leaflets and spreading rumors that the Germans and Romanians had suffered a defeat and were being pushed back along the entire front by Soviet forces. The leaflets urged local populations to disobey the orders of the new administration and hinder the transportation of livestock and food to Romania and Germany. Any *polizeis* and other traitors who collaborated with the occupants were warned that they would be punished according to the laws of wartime. The district authorities felt that the partisans were being supported in many ways by former communists and by Jews. Supposedly they had found weapons and writings hostile to the occupants during searches of a few neighboring villages.[8] Therefore the commander had decided to conduct searches and take precautionary measures to intimidate the local people.

When the doctor and his wife arrived at the ghetto that evening, Ida was discussing some issues with other women in front of the calf house, all the while watching to see if the gendarmes were approaching. The doctor warned Philip, my father, and David about the possibility of searches and harsher measures. Fira gave the doctor her *Larousse* wrapped in a kerchief, and Philip turned over the marks that he had earned from the peasants for his shoe-making work. When the doctor and his wife left, Philip, as the person in charge in the ghetto, told everyone to hold their tongues at work, not to get involved in things, not to confide in people they did not know well, and to always return to the ghetto without delay.

The next day Philip was summoned to the gendarmerie where he was told that the calf house-ghetto would be fenced in with barbed wire and access to and from the ghetto would be controlled by a gendarme. Strangers and suspicious individuals trying to enter the ghetto would immediately be taken into custody and delivered to the gendarme post. All Jews were required to strictly observe the camp regime, and until the calf house-ghetto was sealed off with barbed wire, it would be guarded 24 hours a day by the gendarme. Anyone violating the rules would receive severe punishment and might even be shot.

At the command of the junior lieutenant, three gendarmes accompanied Philip back to the ghetto. One remained outside, and the two others began a search in the presence of Philip, Rahel', and Sasha.

When people returned from work, they were greeted by a terrible sight. Mattresses of sackcloth were torn asunder and scattered over the floor along with straw; old overcoats and padded jackets turned inside out with the lining ripped out; worn out men's and women's underwear; and children's clothes. In short, everyone's personal belongings had been shaken out of their bags and purses, thrown around, mixed up, and cruelly stamped upon with the filthy boots of the gendarmes. Even wooden spoons and earthenware bowls, which couldn't possibly have been used to hide anything, had been thrown onto the floor. People wanted to go in and sort out their things, but the gendarmes chased them out, claiming that they had not yet finished their search.

It was not the search itself that upset us; we were already used to such procedures. We were shocked by the way it was carried out, with savage disregard for us, for human beings. Who were they, after all? What made them so much better than us?

The gendarme standing outside was an actual Gypsy, of which there were many in Romania. He considered himself a Romanian, no doubt, because his ancestors had settled in some village or other, given up their nomadic wandering to work on the estate of a *boier*-landowner. His look gave away his true nature: that of a servile sponger, cowardly and shallow, but brave in the face of the kikes as long as he held a

weapon. One assumes that he also performed his service out of fear. The fascist regime of Ion Antonescu treated wandering Gypsies brutally; tens of thousands of them had been, like the Jews, exiled to Transnistria where almost all were annihilated.

The two men conducting the search inside were short and skinny, with shorn heads and low brows. They looked like convicts and had the shifty eyes of thieves, drunk with power and the authority and eager to humiliate the kikes. From their speech it was easy to tell that they were illiterate peasants from the province of Oltenia. They had been told by Iron Guardsmen, roaming the villages during the preelection months in search of votes and gendarme warrant officers that they could do anything they wanted with the Jews.

Finally, satisfied with what they had done and with the expressions of painful helplessness on the faces of the ghetto inmates, they gave us permission to go inside. In the crowded space, in the aisles between the plank-beds, people bumped into one another as they picked up and sorted their scanty belongings. It was a depressing scene. We were all indignant over the purposelessness of the pogrom, but we remained silent. The Romanians watching over us were irritated both because they had found no weapons or leaflets to incriminate us and because they had found no booty worth stuffing into their own pockets. They were also enraged by our persistent restraint.

Suddenly one of them caught sight of the nose-bag hanging over my shoulder. Pleased to find an excuse to seize on someone and let off some steam, he uttered some filthy swear words, as only Romanians could do, took his rifle from his shoulder, and started to shove through the people in the narrow aisle. He demanded in a threatening voice to know why I had not submitted the nose-bag to be searched and what I was hiding inside of it. I politely answered that I was a cowherd just now returning from pasture and that the bag contained a few potatoes, two eggs, and a hunk of bread, which the farmers' wives had given me when they came to take their cows from the herd. He grabbed the bag away from me, strewed everything out onto the floor, and, making sure there was nothing hidden, accused me of thievery and declared that he would punish me for it.

With the butt of his rifle raised, he rushed at me. But my mother, who had heard and seen all of this, was instantly standing between us . The blow of the rifle butt intended for me fell heavily on my mother's head. Blood gushed forth immediately as she lost consciousness and fell with a crash to the floor. We began to scream, thinking that this scoundrel had killed her. He himself was taken aback at seeing the bloodied rifle butt in his hands. My father, in fury and despair, took hold of the murderer with his hands and with a powerful shove in the back,

threw him bodily out of the building. In the darkness that had fallen by then, all three of the gendarmes made a hasty getaway.

My mother regained consciousness and we laid her on the bare plank-bed. Her head hurt terribly, and we could not find any way to stop the bleeding. Someone went running for the doctor, who arrived almost immediately, asking us to step away as he and Fira remained. She brought a wash-basin of water and they stopped the bleeding, washed the blood from her head and face, and took off her bloodied clothing. They cut her hair with scissors from around the wound and bandaged her head.

When my father and I were permitted to go to her, she was pale and her face was swollen. In place of her eyes we could see only narrow crevices between huge dark blue bags of skin. We began to cry. Mama tried to calm us in her quiet, barely audible voice. She tenderly held me to herself, happy to know that I had escaped injury. We begged God for only one thing – that He would let our mother recover.

Dr. Rosenberg left some medicine and instructions with Fira. He asked everyone to keep quiet so that our mother could sleep and promised to come by in the morning.

Outside, Philip, my father, and I told Hersh in detail everything that had happened. He listened to us carefully and said that the situation was very serious and that things could turn out very badly for our father. The gendarme had been carrying out his duty. Philip suggested that perhaps my father might hide for a while until the anger of the gendarmes abated. The doctor answered that this was impossible since they would easily find him and punish him even more severely. In addition, we should not forget that the rest of us still remained in the ghetto like hostages. The doctor saw only one way out. He would go immediately to the commander of the gendarme post, tell him all that had happened, and ask him to have some understanding for our father's condition and to show some human compassion. As I noted above, the commander of the gendarmes had a better attitude toward the doctor than he did toward the other Jews.

That night our father, Fira, and I got not a wink of sleep, but in the morning we all set out for work. Nushkaly and I left earliest of all, and the same Gypsy member of the gendarmes was standing guard at the calf house. This was now his regular post. Then the others, including Fira, left for work, singly or in groups. Our father stayed with our mother. He looked terrible from the stress and the sleepless night he had endured.

In the evening, when I returned from work, I found my parents on the plank-bed. Father was lying motionless on his stomach.

* * *

Doctor Rosenberg found the gendarme commander very angry. He had just been visited by the two men who, on his orders, had carried out the search of the ghetto. One of them had bloody specks on his uniform, and the butt of his rifle was covered in blood. They claimed that they had been forced to defend themselves, that there had been a riot in the ghetto led by my father, who prevented them from carrying out the search order. They demanded that my father be severely punished as an example to the other kikes. The honor of the Romanian gendarmes had been insulted. The commander intended to arrest my father and send him under guard to the county center, Golta, for trial.

After learning from the doctor what had really happened and discussing all the possible repercussions for the Jews of the ghetto and for the gendarmes, including for his own prestige as their commander, they decided that my father needed to be punished in order to satisfy the gendarmes, but that it was not worth making it into a huge case.

It was about nine in the morning when a gendarme came for my father. He took leave of our mother, in case the worst should happen, and, resigned to his fate, followed the gendarme. At the gendarmerie they staged a formal investigation of the event. The gendarmes said that I had not presented my bag for search and that my father had offered resistance, forcing them to resort to their weapons in self-defense. My father's answer was not even heard out. The commander warned him that a military tribunal awaited him should he repeat such an action and then sentenced him to 25 lashes with a birch rod.

Father was shoved out of the commander's office. In the schoolyard in front of the post, he was tied face down onto a wide bench. He was beaten with a birch rod by the very same gendarme who had struck my mother with his rifle butt. He wielded the rod with all his strength and wild sadistic fury. The other gendarmes counted the blows with obvious pleasure and egged on the whipper with a string of epithets against my father and the entire Jewish people. After they had finished, the gendarmes untied my father and went off laughing, conscious of their national and personal superiority. They had exacted their vengeance.

My father was covered in blood and unable to move, and he remained lying on the bench for some time. Then Philip and Sasha helped him stagger back into the ghetto and lie down on the plank-bed. Father pursed his lips and made no sound, in order not to alarm our mother. He spoke neither of his humiliation nor of his unearned suffering.

Uncle Andriy and Doctor Rosenberg, upon hearing of what had happened, were sympathetic to the plight of my parents. There was no expecting anything good from the Romanian gendarmes, and it could

have been worse. Fortunately, they had found some pretext for Fira to stay in the ghetto where she was able to nurse our injured parents.

The entire hamlet was disturbed. For several days, the women coming for their cows in the mornings and evenings asked me how my parents were doing. They brought more food than usual and sympathized with us in our sorrow.

Some considerable time passed before my parents were well again. A deep scar remained on my mother's high forehead for the rest of her life and served as a reminder of the brutality of the legionnaire-gendarme.

Many years later, whenever one of our friends would ask her where she got that awful scar, she would look at me with a mother's tenderness and humbly answer «Praised be God for this also», for things could have turned out worse.

The wounds on my father's back did heal, but a deep imprint had been left on his soul. For the rest of his life, whenever he heard the words «gendarme», «legionnaire», or «fascist», he would grow silent and his eyes would flash in a peculiar way.

The long years that our family spent in the forced-labor camps and ghettos of Transnistria transformed us into different people. Such scars do not disappear, but remain forever.

* * *

The Gypsy – now a Romanian gendarme – guarding the ghetto apparently took his assignment very seriously. He stood about 15 meters from the calf house so that he could see it from all sides. In the morning, before leaving for work, the ghetto inmates would go down into the ravine to relieve themselves. The gendarme suspiciously followed each one of us with his eyes. When we emerged from behind the bushes we would be met by his gaze. Some of us, especially the women, started going farther down the ravine to preserve their modesty. In these cases he would follow them right up to the edge of the ravine. We even began to joke among ourselves about how we no longer had need to fear thieves, since we had such a dependable guard.

Before long, however, he got used to us, and we to him. Philip would bring out a low shoe-maker's bench and he would sit on it like a woman, with his legs apart, holding his gun like a stove poker between them. When the sun grew too hot or when it rained, he took shelter under the eaves of the calf house, evidently afraid to actually enter.

The Gypsy's main responsibility was to watch carefully everyone who went in or out of the ghetto. He kept his attentive eyes on the road from the gendarmerie as well so that no one could catch him unawares or find him doing anything unauthorized.

But his constant sentry duty (he even had his food brought to him)

eventually became simpler. He would go off for a couple of hours at midday to eat, or he would be called by his commander. Then he began to come into the kitchen to get a drink of water or stuff his pockets with roasted sunflower seeds. He would toss several seeds into his mouth at once and greedily chew on them. The scattered seed shells formed a thick layer in the grass around his bench.

After a while, having had a full rest doing such free and easy duty and having eaten his full of the free food provided by the collective farm, the Gypsy, in his role as conqueror, began to pay court to lonely Polina, Pelageea Fyodorovna. With gestures and facial expressions he tried to overcome their language barrier and communicate to her his passionate feelings. He got caught up in this and lost all hesitation. From the gendarme kitchen he began bringing Polina a mess-tin of thick *ciorbă* with meat or a paper bag of large beans – a favorite product of the Gypsies. She would boil them, and together they would go off by themselves behind the calf house where they emptied the deep bowl in a flash.

Once the Gypsy proudly pulled a small package from the deep pocket of his gendarme trousers and unrolled it. Poor Polina was completely stunned to see that it was an urban-cut dress and a kerchief that had been considered stylish back in prewar Odessa. I do not know whether he had bought them, bartered for them, or simply confiscated them. After that he would occasionally leave his post in the evening, after supper, and, with his rifle slung over his shoulder, disappear with Pelageea Fyodorovna behind the rocks near the Bug.

Some people judged Polina harshly. This was not the time for such dalliance, particularly with a gendarme after the slaughter of so many innocent people – our brothers and sisters, children and parents. Others tried to understand her situation. She had endured terrible months, experienced all the horrors of hell, and now this man treated her with all the tenderness he was capable of and seemed to be in love with her.

* * *

Polina had been married twice. Her first husband was a Jew, a young and handsome man who earned good money as a housepainter. She worked as a dressmaker, earned rather well, and of course brought all her money home. But this husband loved to drink with his friends, came home late, and caused all sorts of scandals. They had no children, and after a short time they divorced by mutual consent.

Some time later she fell in love with an Ukrainian fellow, a builder, and married him. She thus became Pelageea Fyodorovna Polishchuk. They got an apartment in a new building on the edge of the city, where there were very few Jews. She spoke Ukrainian well and did not have the outward appearance of a Jewess. All the neighbors and clients

assumed that she was Ukrainian. Her husband's parents and relatives loved her. Four years before the outbreak of the war, she gave birth to twin girls. They looked like their father and were raised in the home of his parents, growing up as true Ukrainians.

At the very beginning of the war, Polina's husband was mobilized and sent to the front; Polina remained in Odessa where she received no news of her husband. In the besieged city, she lived like everyone else, enduring difficulties but not losing hope.

When the Romanians arrived and imposed their new order, it was revealed that she was Jewish. The neighbors immediately began to treat her so badly that she gave up her daughters to relatives of her husband and returned to the house of her own family at the other end of the large city. She suffered from hunger, cold, and all kinds of abuse, hiding wherever she could.

Polina was forced into the convoy and sent to Bogdanovka, where she experienced all the camp's horrors. She barely made it alive to Vinogradnyi Sad. Except for her rags, she had nothing. Here she was able to feed herself and acquire some clothing with her sewing. She engaged in hard physical labor like the other women. She cried often, knowing nothing about her husband and daughters, and looked very bad. I do not know what attracted the Gypsy to this unfortunate woman.

* * *

Once Polina's Gypsy, as the ghetto inmates called him, disappeared for two days. A ghetto without an armed guard seemed strange to us. Even Polina did not know what had happened to him though people kept asking, fearing the worst. Did his absence mean that our lives were going to get even worse? We had gotten used to him, and he seemed, in comparison with the other gendarmes, to be a rather decent human being. Perhaps his attitude toward the ghetto inmates had changed for the better under Polina's influence.

On the third day he returned to his post. It turned out that he had been sent to Bogdanovka on an errand, and even he had been shocked by what he saw there. The Romanian authorities forced a group of Jews to collect gold in a ravine where the bodies of Jews had been burned and covered with earth. Under guard of the gendarmes and the local *polizeis*, the unfortunate Jews had to dig up skulls and extract gold crowns and bridges from the teeth. Thus the Romanians completed their plunder of the victims of the recent massacre. Their avarice knew no limits. In their search for rings, earrings, and other objects of precious metal that had somehow escaped notice earlier as the victims went to their deaths, the Romanians forced the Jews to dig and turn up the

ravine, sift through the soil, sort through the bodies and pry open the clenched fingers of their hands.

In the closed fist of one little girl someone found a small gold medallion with a flower made of rubies and diamonds and photographs of the girl's mother and father. Word of this find spread instantly throughout all of Bogdanovka. Locals in search of easy booty swarmed into the ravine at night searching for gold in the blood- and tear-soaked earth. It went so far that the Romanians, in order to put an end to the gold fever, stationed an armed guard at the ravine. Only they had a right to exploit this particular lode of gold.

Polina's summary of this depressed us all. Many of us had relatives lying in that ravine.

* * *

Unfortunately, such alarming tidings arrived all too often. We were already living in constant fear and expectation of our mortal end when the gendarme commander in Vinogradnyi Sad informed us of orders to send all the sick and disabled to the camp ghetto in the nearby village of Akhmechetka. He beseeched us to carry out all instructions without any sign of resistance.

We knew about Akhmechetka from the stories of Uncle Andriy and some of the local residents of Vinogradnyi Sad who had relatives and acquaintances there. The place was actually a state pig farm, «Akhmechetka Ponds», 12 kilometers from the village of Akhmechetka, far from the surrounding villages. The Jews were living there in dilapidated barracks without doors or windows, surrounded by deep ditches and doubled guards. The nearest drinkable water was about two kilometers away. The people went hungry and perished from exposure and disease. Fourteen thousand Jews, sent there from Odessa, Bessarabia, and Bukovina, had already been shot by the end of 1941. From May 1942, the Romanians began sending the sick and emaciated from all the camps of the Domanyovka district to die a slow death in Akhmechetka, which became literally a death camp. At the command of Modest Isopescu, the prefect of Golta County, 90 percent of the Jews under his jurisdiction were to be sent to die of starvation in Akhmechetka. This was the most terrible camp – a camp that eliminated approximately 4,900 Jews by starvation and disease.

The sadist Isopescu often came here for «inspections». To prolong the painful deaths of the emaciated people he ordered a ration for each person of one potato and one cup of corn meal, to be eaten raw. He took photographs of the dying people and sent them to the editorial offices of anti-Semitic newspapers in Bucharest. The guards for this camp were selected from among the worst blackguards.

Testimony to the events was given to the People's Tribunal in 1945 by many witnesses, former prisoners who survived the horrors at «Akhmechetka Ponds» by some miracle, including Iosup Vakler, Haim Kogan, Edik Landau, Rozhi Freiburg, Semo Markovici, and Sami Merman, and by the Romanians Virgil Neneş, Mihail Cotcu, and others. D. Cervinschi and former prisoner D.Z. Starodinskii wrote about this horrible camp in their memoirs.[9]

* * *

But for us life continued alongside death. Ida, the doctor's wife, was pregnant and the birth was expected in a few months. This unusual event in the life of our small community, which had known so much sadness in the recent past, instilled in us all some hope for the return of life and for the continuation of the Jewish people. We all wanted evidence to believe that the present nightmare would come to an end.

Doctor Rosenberg and Ida, along with all the inmates of the ghetto, thought constantly about how the birth would go, how the child would grow, what awaited him in the future, and how our oppressors would behave, inasmuch as their program was bent on the physical destruction of the Jews.

Everyone helped the future mother in any way they could and tried to distract her from alarming thoughts by telling her stories about the joys of motherhood. The women gave her advice on how to conduct herself in the final weeks of the pregnancy and during the birth.

The doctor carefully chose the time and manner in which to inform the gendarme commander about his wife's pregnancy and his own impending fatherhood. Outwardly the commander took the news calmly. He did not know how his superiors would view this development or how he himself was expected to react.

People in the village began to notice that the doctor's wife was pregnant. They understood the horrible situation of the Jews, their position as inferiors under the fascists, outside the law and subject to the will of anyone, and many villagers tried to help Ida. They brought her diapers, shirts and caps, a coverlet blanket and even a left-over pacifier. Some people were more cautious, donating an old, small washtub, hot-water bottle, or some other item under the pretense that it was for the medical aid station. Still other people disapproved and made no attempt to hide their malice and hatred.

Finally the day of confinement arrived. Hersh and the local midwife oversaw the birth of the child, a rosy-colored little girl with long black hair. Her squeaky little voice touched everyone's hearts.

The young mother, after bravely bearing the labor of birth, wore a tired smile and looked at her little baby. The doctor fussed about and seemed to be a worried youth himself as he walked back and forth

between mother and daughter. Only the midwife remained cool and went about her job in a businesslike manner. Rahel' brought the new mother some freshly prepared food and only had time to glance at the little girl, but when she returned to the ghetto she told everyone that the baby was a beauty. The inmates of the ghetto felt joy mixed with fear. Would the mother and child survive? How would the gendarmes behave toward them? Would they not be sent to Akhmechetka? What would then become of the doctor?

The days passed without incident and we gradually calmed down.

* * *

It was the end of autumn, 1942. The weather was gloomy, with frequent heavy rains. The black earth grew soft and we sank in mud to our knees. It became very hard to run or even walk behind the livestock. The animals were difficult to herd and moved around constantly. Nushka and I exhausted ourselves terrible. We returned home in the evenings soaked through and through, shivering from the cold, and weak from hunger, since it was impossible to swallow even a hunk of break in such weather.

Soon we stopped chasing the livestock altogether, and I was sent to work at the mill. This was a dilapidated water-driven mill situated at a steep bend of the Bug River downstream. It had stood unused for years since the Soviets expropriated it from the old miller and his family, who were sent to Siberia. During the first months of the occupation the residents of the village had been forced by need to restore the abandoned mill. They patched up the walls with slabs and fixed the roof; local craftsmen repaired the paddles, wheels, buckets, chutes, stagings, and drive belts. They completed an awning for carts and a crib for oxen and horses. They even restored the almost forgotten country road, which had been overgrown with grass. For many months I walked each day about four kilometers from Vinogradnyi Sad to the mill along this uninhabited road.

The peasant man in charge of the work was not a professional miller, but he was good with his hands and had a sharp mind. He skillfully regulated the clearance between the millstones, hollowed out paths through the stone, and determined the rotation speed of what seemed to be a huge upper millstone. He himself repaired anything that broke down and kept account of the entire work of the mill.

He was then between 40 and 45 years old. He had a large family with five or six children. Until the war he had worked all over the collective farm, wherever they sent him, and had served as a construction worker, a mechanic, a field team leader in brigades. For some reason, he had not been sent to the front. He was not talkative, and only spoke to me in relation to work.

Even so, he treated me well. I think this was because he knew my father, had seen how he worked, and respected him as a craftsman. I worked at the mill from early morning to late at night, carrying out all his instructions. I was not idle a single minute: I shoveled grain into the buckets, hauled and piled up sacks of groats, cleaned the entire mill, helped unload and load carts from the collective farms, unharnessed and harnessed the horses and fed and watered them.

Peasants came to the mill from all the neighboring villages and hamlets. Most of them were Ukrainians who were burdened with large families and thought mostly of food and clothing. They had already, in a very short time, returned to a natural economy. The village store had long been closed and people were not buying goods. Markets of old clothes could be found only in the cities and towns. The peasants received something from their former collective and state farms, but the Jews had nothing left to barter. During the night they took everything right from the field, traded, and loaned each other what they had. Some people used primitive hand-made manual mills to grind corn and wheat into groats and to feed themselves and their household fowl and suckling pigs. They had learned how to process hemp and to weave. They hammered together scutchers, set up looms in their homes, and dug out old spindles and other long-forgotten contraptions and instruments. But they could not get along without flour. They paid the miller per «fourth» (*chetverik*) of grain for a certain amount of work. Knowing that he had a large family, they also brought him gifts of fat, meat, and honey.

While waiting their turns or working the peasants exchanged the latest rumors: the location of the front, what the Germans were doing in the villages on the left bank of the Bug (the large villages of Bugskoie and Konstantinovka were located across from Vinogradnyi Sad and Bogdanovka), how the Romanians were enforcing their rules, who they were arresting or beating, who had died and who had returned home from imprisonment. Most of the news was sad and alarming. No one knew what would happen to them tomorrow or what their new masters, the Romanians, were preparing for them.

The collective and state farms had not been disbanded. The Romanians preserved them and called them «labor communes» and «state agricultural enterprises», respectively. The administration did not deal with individual households, but with the entire commune, which was more convenient for them. They also took anything they wanted from the former collective and state farms, including grain, livestock, fodder, and timber, and forced the people to work essentially for free. Those who held out hope that the Romanians would then distribute land to them were disappointed. Lawlessness, ignorance of the language, and the threat of brutal punishment for having served in the Red Army or the local administration kept the people in constant fear. Some even recalled

with fondness the prewar regime, forgetting the difficulties and personal offences they had suffered.

Hearing all these conversations at the mill was an education for me. I began to gain an understanding of simple people, to appreciate their aspirations, to read their facial expressions, and guess their unspoken thoughts through their eyes or their limited gestures.

When the people had dispersed in the evenings, the miller would casually ask me a few questions to test how I was taking all that I heard, how I thought, whether our views coincided, and whether I was reliable. I was aware that he, too, was listening to the conversations, and I saw that since he did not know the people well, he preferred to remain silent. He also taught me to weigh each word before speaking.

There were days when there was very little work, either because the peasants were celebrating some kind of Christian holiday or the roads were too muddy to travel, when we did maintenance work on the mill, cleaned up, and drew up accounts of the work we had done. When we had finished we would sit down to eat at the narrow table, coarsely cobbled together out of planks, standing on a single leg in the center. The miller would lay out a piece of salted fat, a few potatoes boiled in their jackets, a couple of onions, a large hunk of bread, and some salt. With the clasp-knife he wore hanging from his belt by a long metal chain he carefully removed the salt from the fat and cut it into small, equal pieces. With the same knife he then skinned the potatoes, cut the onions in quarters, sliced the bread, and unwrapped the salt. He then called me to the table and we began to eat. I was always hungry, but I tried to save part of the food to take back to the ghetto. The miller noticed this soon enough and began to set some food aside for my family.

From our few conversations the miller learned that I had finished ninth grade in 1941 (at that time someone with such a level of schooling was considered to be well educated), that I spoke Romanian and French, and that I had read many books. He began to treat me with open respect, asking me about life in Romania and Bessarabia, about the situation of the peasants, the causes of the war, the defense of Odessa, the disastrous retreat of the Red Army, our own fate, and many other things. A bit later, during my free time, I began helping him with the accounts. He was surprised by how fast I could do the calculations.

The news from the front was the hottest topic among the peasants. Every victory or defeat affected their mood. They rarely read the newspaper published by the Romanians, because they understood how little one could trust the official communiqués from the battlefield. The fascists described a retreat as an «alignment» of the front or «taking up a defensive position in order to bring up reinforcements». But everyone knew that the *blitz* was over. Winter had brought a halt to the onslaught of the aggressors.

The local population, fed up with the continual extortion and thievery of the occupiers, hated the German and Romanian forces more with each passing day. In Transnistria the people had additional reason to hate the Romanians, who robbed the peasants and raped their daughters and wives... The use of the Romanian language, which was incomprehensible to the overwhelming majority of the population, added to their feelings of hostility. In many small villages and hamlets, where there were few Romanians, the residents began to express their unhappiness more boldly and to resist. Partisan fighters appeared in many places and their growing military resistance instilled horror in the fascists. The local people decided to help the partisans in spite of their fear of retaliation.

In 1943, the partisans became bolder, as they began to attack gendarmes and *polizeis*, carry out acts of diversion and sabotage, and spread propaganda among the population. They grew effective enough to inflict significant casualties on the Romanians and Germans, cooperating with the Red Army in military operations to liberate Ukraine.

The success of the partisans, in turn, enraged the gendarmes. For any offence, even the slightest infraction of the rules, they flogged people with poles or brutally beat them. Punishment was often meted out for no reason at all.

* * *

One evening the miller told me not to come to the mill the next morning, but to wait in the hut in the vegetable garden near the mill until he called. I did as he asked. I left the ghetto at the usual time, went down to the Bug River flats, and waited in the hut used by the guard of the garden and melon field in the autumn. Although I was wearing all the clothing I owned, I soon turned blue from the cold. I was afraid to come out of the hut to warm myself because the flats were visible both from the other high bank of the river, where the Germans were, and from our own more sloping side. When the miller finally came down at around three o'clock in the afternoon, I was so cold I could not speak. At the mill I drank down a quart of piping hot water, ate some food, and gradually warmed up. It turned out that the miller had been told to spend the morning grinding flour for the Germans. He was watched by several men from the neighboring left-bank village of Bugskoie, who were accompanied by two Germans, and the miller had wanted to protect me.

* * *

The winter of 1942–1943 was a harsh time for us in the ghetto. Bitter cold and frost, exhaustion, disease, and darkness drove us to the brink of despair. Our calf house was badly heated, even though we

brought in straw, corn and sunflower stalks and pressed cow dung from the fields and farms. We dragged the sacks and bunches of fuel through snowdrifts, bent over under their weight, hardly able to breathe against the biting wind, so that we could boil water or skilly and try to bring some heat to the building. The windows and doors were blocked up with rags and the smell was terrible from the pressed dung, foot cloths, and peasant sandals hanging up to dry. We seldom washed ourselves, partly because soap, which was produced in the hamlet, was a great rarity.

On the collective farm there was no work for Jews. The winter months arrived, when the peasants either worked in private in their homes or rested. Naturally our miserable camp rations became even smaller. In order to support us, Uncle Andriy sent several of us to work in the granaries of the collective farm sifting grain. The workers stood in a line moving the grain with wide wooden shovels from one side of the garner to the other so it would not begin to heat up and rot. It was difficult, dusty work. In the evenings, when Uncle Andriy came to inspect, the people complained to him that they were starving and asked him for permission to take some of the grain. He would stand by the door to watch out for gendarmes and peasants, allowing the ghetto inmates to leave with bags or pails of grain. And for a few days the meals would become more hearty and nourishing.

* * *

In spite of our suffering, we made it through the winter. During the long months of our life in the harsh conditions of the ghetto, people became friends and treated each other more supportively. There were not many of us, and we all worked. Our supervisor, Uncle Andriy, had a good heart. The hamlet of Vinogradnyi Sad, as I've already written, was small and on the easternmost edge of Transnistria, far from the district center of Domanyovka, the Village Soviet of Bogdanovka, and the Romanian administration was far away from us. The combination of these circumstances enabled us to survive.

* * *

Early in the spring mother and Fira went at first with the other women to work in the greenhouses and the vegetable gardens. Later they were sent to the pig farm, where they fed and watered the pigs and piglets, took them out for exercise, and cleaned the pig sties. The work was very difficult and dirty, and every evening, when they returned to the ghetto, they brought with them a terrible stench.

Father continued to work as a harnessmaker, as did the other men

with specialized skills. My own work at the mill lasted several months during which the fresh air, physical labor, and good food (thanks to the miller!) strengthened my body. I grew and matured, and my mother, father, and Fira admired me. In our hearts we prayed to God for the endurance to survive, that He would protect us from diseases and from the caprice of fate, that He would lead us out of slavery.

* * *

In the spring there was less work at the mill, where the miller was now able to handle everything alone. So as soon as it was possible to take the cows out to pasture, I was once again assigned to the job of cowherd. On clear days, from the distant high hill where the herd grazed, it was possible to see the German side of the river where I could see some long strings of glittering, moving lights. The cowherd explained that I was seeing the reflections of the windows of long columns of motorized vehicles travelling along a main highway leading to the front – vehicles with soldiers and military cargo, self-propelled guns, tanks, and so on. He guessed that when the vehicles travelled for hours in the same direction, toward the south-east, the Germans were preparing an attack on the south-eastern part of the front. When most of the flashing lights were moving in the opposite direction, he thought that the Germans had suffered a defeat and were retreating. Certainly the cowherd was not the only one coming up with these kinds of military analyses. Many people could see and understand the movements along this road, and made assumptions about the ebb and flow of battle.

Rumors about events at the front reached Vinogradnyi Sad in other ways as well. Peasants gathered information as they rode to nearby villages on various personal errands, to church on a patron saint's feast day, or to carry out some duty for the Romanian authorities. Occasionally a former resident of the village would return, after moving to some other city before the war, or someone who had been caught on the wrong side of the lines would manage to get back home by traveling at night to avoid the *polizeis*. These people warily alluded to the activities of the partisans, who were in radio contact with *Bol'shaia Zemlea*, where the partisans' headquarters were located.

By such means people began to understand that the war had reached a turning point and that Soviet forces were streaming westward, liberating the land city by city, region by region. Of course we ghetto inmates received such news later than everyone else, and we more cautious. For example, we dared not express by word or facial movement our joy at hearing of the defeats of the Germans and their Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian allies – when they were defeated and taken prisoner in huge numbers outside of Moscow between December 1941 and April

1942; when they were stopped outside Stalingrad at the end of January and beginning of February 1943; and in other areas as well.[10] We hoped against hope that the Red Army would liberate us from the ghetto and salvage our lives. There was no one and nothing else to hope for.

The defeats of the Germans and their allies during 1942–1943 also had its effect on the behavior of the gendarmes in Vinogradnyi Sad. Their rages subsided somewhat and they provoked us less. In their cowardly way they now refrained from mass beatings and were seen in the hamlet only in groups of two or three, always armed with rifles. Infractions were now punished by fines. They demanded marks or material restitution, depending on the circumstances. The peasants sensed the new mood of the Romanians and soon were buying them off with smaller and smaller bribes. The ordinary gendarmes were, to a great extent, following the example of their commander.

For a short time the gendarme commander was joined by his wife. She was either unable to stay long or had no desire to do so. It was rumored that the commander had been for some time in a relationship with the schoolteacher in whose home he was quartered, and the wife could scarcely help but notice this.

He packed up several suitcases of goods, the origins of which only he knew, stuffing large trunks with Ukrainian woolen rugs and embroidered towels; packing sacks with flour and groats; and filling small casks and vats with honey, ham, salted brynza, and other provisions. He loaded all this loot into carts and sent it to Romania with his wife, accompanied by two gendarmes.

* * *

Despite the good news from afar, life in the camp-ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad continued on its depressing, monotonous course. We were exhausted by the hard work and lack of food. We could not shake off thoughts of renewed executions, fears of sickness and extradition to the death camp of Akhmechetka. We were tormented by the danger that we might be separated from our loved ones, and by the awareness of our absolute helplessness in a situation worse than slavery. We were isolated from the Jews living in other camp-ghettos. We had no idea whether anyone in the entire world knew or thought about us, whether any people or organizations were trying to liberate us from our hellish torments or trying to alleviate our sufferings in some way.

Only recently did I learn, from the research and writings of Matatias Carp, Jean Ancel, Moses Rosen, I.C. Butnaru, Julius Fisher, Avigdor Shachan, Radu Lecca, from the book *Martiriul evreilor din România: 1940–1944*, and other sources, of the very significant and many-faceted activities of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania and the

Central Jewish Office of Romania.[11] These sources claim that during the first two years of Jewish residence in Transnistria, the Jews received aid totaling 481,807,045 lei, as well as large quantities of salt (150 tons), coal (300 tons), timber (11,000 square meters), caustic soda for making soap (5,000 kg), and many other goods. In addition to this, in the period from October 1942 to March 1943, a sum of 25 million lei was provided by the American Joint Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Congress, and other foreign donors.

While I have no intention of making any accusations against any Jewish organizations in Romania, I can bear witness to the fact that the Jews in the camp-ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad did not receive any kind of help whatsoever in the form of money, food, or clothing from any Jewish organizations. The assistance apparently went to the Jews from the Old Kingdom of Romania and from the counties of Dorohoi and Chernovtsy, who were to a large extent exiled to the northern Transnistrian counties of Mogilev, Balta, Tulchin, and Zhugastru. The account of the Central Jewish Office of Romania from December 26, 1942, confirms this pattern. From February 18 to December 12, 1942, Jews in the four above-named counties of Transnistria received collective aid in the amount of 35,181,960 lei. The total amount of aid provided to the Jews of Transnistria in 1941-1943 came to 330,918,998 lei.[12]

Romanian Jewish organizations did not manifest any concern for local Ukrainian Jews or for Bessarabian Jews who evacuated to Odessa, were caught there by the Romanians, and who settled among the camp-ghettos in the counties of Golta and Berezovka. It can be assumed that the Romanian Jewish organizations did not consider these people to be *their* Jews. Even the publicity about intolerably difficult living conditions in the Jewish camps, the diplomatic initiatives aimed at freeing some part of the deported Jews, the appeals for improved support for orphans, and the many other actions taken by the leaders of Romanian Jewish organizations were taken on behalf of only the Jews captured by the Romanians and Germans in the cities and villages of Transnistria.[13]

Doctor Meyer Teich, the director of the Jewish community of Mogilev County, recalls with deep distress how in March 1944 the Russians found and confiscated supplies of food, medicine, and clothing received from Bucharest, along with hundreds of thousands of lei and marks and even 100 rubles in gold. He then concludes, as if it were to his own credit, that «in Mogilev County around 70–80% of the deported Jews were saved and repatriated...» while «from other counties (of Transnistria) only 20–30% returned. In some places no one remained alive.»[14] This declaration by Teich bears witness to the heartless and even criminal behavior of some Jewish community leaders. After all, it might have been possible to save the lives of many «other» Jews, whose need for food, clothing, and medicines was just as great!

* * *

In the summer of 1943 the inmates of our ghetto were agitated by the news that the gendarmes might be sending several men from our camp to Varvarovka in order to help build of a bridge over the Southern Bug River. Uncle Andriy brought us this news one morning as he was being summoned to Bogdanovka to receive specific instructions.

There were few men among us: Philip, my father, David, Carol, Hersh, Misha, Abram, Sasha, myself, and Nushka. Our imaginations ran wild with possibilities. A bridge over the Bug could only be built by the Germans, and this would mean certain death. We were filled with horror; the women were already mourning us. For our part, we knew that the wives and children would perish without the men.

Then we began to rationalize. Perhaps they would not take the older ones: Philip; my father; David, who had two motherless children; the Doctor, who was needed by the entire village; Nushka, who was still a boy. That left five: Carol, Misha, Abram, Sasha, and myself. But Misha had two children, and Carol and Abram had one each. That left two of us. Mother began to weep, saying that she would not allow me to go, that she would go with me. Father tried to calm her, telling her he would be with me.

Everyone was in a panic. No one knew how many people they would take, of what ages or professions, or for how long. The ghetto echoed with mourning. The people, already worn out and full of cares, grew even thinner and more depressed. That morning everyone went to work as usual, but throughout the day they kept glancing with alarm toward the village, from where Uncle Andriy would bring the verdict. In distress we prayed to God for mercy.

Uncle Andriy arrived from Bogdanovka toward evening, exhausted, bearing bad news. Construction was indeed underway on a bridge over the Southern Bug River, under the direction of the Todt Organization in Varvarovka. There were already about 1,500 Jewish men there, who had been sent mainly from the camp-ghetto of the city of Bershad. These were Jews from Bukovina, Bessarabia, and even from the Old Kingdom. Conditions were harsh, with people working barefoot and almost naked. Meagre food rations were given out mornings and evenings. Many were ill and suffered without medical treatment, living in cramped dug-outs they had made in the ground. Their guards were extraordinarily cruel. Uncle Andriy was himself upset by his report.

And there was more. Another 900 Jews in the camp-ghetto of the village of Trikhaty, in Ochakov County, were working under the same conditions at the Beton-und-Monierbau enterprise, which was also run by the Germans. In order to speed up the pace of the work, the Germans were demanding that the Romanians send new people to replace those who had died or fallen ill. At first the Romanians wanted several men

between the ages of 19 and 50 from each camp-ghetto to Varvarovka and Trikhaty. This was the reason for calling together the civilian supervisors of the ghettos, including Uncle Andriy. In Bogdanovka they had received a list with the names of all the prisoners of the camp-ghetto in Vinogradnyi Sad, indicating our year of birth, profession, able-bodiedness, former place of residence, and other data. There my father was registered as having been born in 1894, and in subsequent years he remained three years older on all official documents.

As it turned out, however, the Transnistrian authorities decided that it would be simpler and more convenient to take the necessary number of workers from Mogilev, Balta, and Zhugastru counties, where most of the Jewish population was located. But we knew that this decision, like other, was only temporary, as the Germans were demanding more and more people.

* * *

In 1996 I received from the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., a copy of the prisoner list of all the camp-ghettos for the Domanyovka district of Golta County, compiled in December 1943. The original document is stored in the Nikolaev Regional Archive in Ukraine. This list shows that among the ghetto inmates of Vinogradnyi Sad was a certain Liza Blanuță, four years old, born in Odessa. In our calf house-ghetto there was no girl called Liza, but upon seeing this I recalled a story told by Hersh Rosenberg. One evening a very agitated resident of the hamlet, Anton Blanuță, had come to Doctor Rosenberg. Anton was the quiet Moldavian who had resisted the attempts of the gendarme commander to turn him into an informer. His little daughter had fallen ill. She had a high fever, recognized no one, rambled deliriously, and had broken out in a rash. The doctor and Anton Blanuță hurried back to the little girl. Blanuță's wife was busy carring for her, putting fresh compresses on her forehead, straightening the blankets, stroking her plump little hands, beside herself with worry.

The doctor determined that the girl had contracted scarlet fever. He gave them instructions and promised them that the girl would recover within the week. The parents were relieved by his explanation.

During one of the doctor's visits to the sick child, Anton Blanuță told him the little girl's story. In December 1941, one of the convoys of Jews from Odessa had arrived in Bogdanovka. There was no more room left in the pigsties that were serving as barracks, and the unfortunate people, exhausted from the long trip, hungry and frozen, half-naked and ill, huddled together against the leeward wall of the building. There was a deep frost and it was clear that many of them would not survive the night.

Anton Blanuță was returning home on his sleigh. A young woman broke away from the crowd and, struggling through the deep snow, stopped his sleigh. She tearfully held out her child, wrapped in a little blanket, and pleaded with him: «Rescue her! Her name is Liza.» She placed the bundle down at his feet and quickly withdrew into the crowd. She must have feared either that her mother's heart would force her to turn back for her child or that she would be seen by the *polizeis*.

Anton Blanuță took the silent bundle onto his knees, covered it with the bottom flap of his sheepskin coat, and urged the horses on with his whip. The child lay quiet and still for the entire journey. Anton was afraid to touch her. Upon arrival, he immediately carried her into the house, gave her into the arms of his wife, and said, «God has given us a child in our old age. Thanks be to God!» He then went out to unharness the horses.

In the warm kitchen, they unwrapped the blanket and found an emaciated little girl sleeping. They put a copper pan of water on the stove to heat up a clay pitcher of milk and looked closely at the sleeping child, immediately falling in love with her. They tenderly stroked the golden curls, the transparently white little face, and the eyes with their long lashes. In the warmth of the kitchen, the child soon awoke, looked around, and called in a weak voice, «Mama! Mama!» The couple was moved to tears and answered that Mama would soon come. They took off her coat and her clothes and bathed her. Then, wrapping her in a clean blanket and setting her by the stove, they fed her warm milk and a soft hunk of homemade bread. Liza ate everything greedily, her blue eyes lit up, and she began to smile, probably for the first time in many months.

Liza grew stronger and prettier with each passing day. She walked into the arms of Anton and his wife, repeating their Moldavian and Ukrainian words, articulated in her own way, and amused them with her chirping and her games. She was about 18 months old. In those winter days there was little work to do and they spent all their time together. Anton Blanuță and his wife were filled with happiness as the child pushed into the background all their fears and the adversities of the occupation.

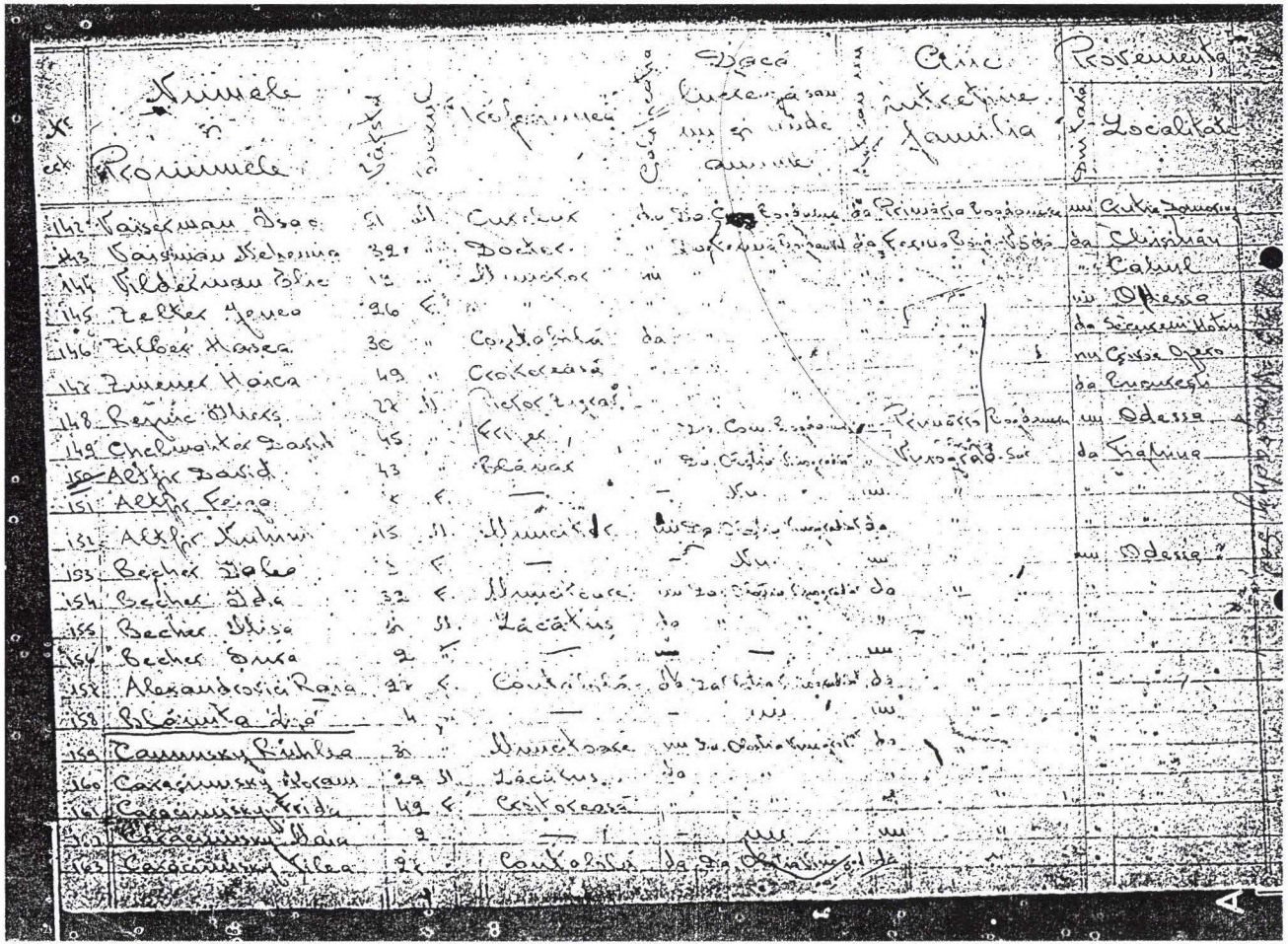
During the last days of December the Romanians carried out the mass extermination of the Jews in Bogdanovka. In Vinogradnyi Sad, seven kilometers from Bogdanovka, one could see the glow of the bonfires upon which they burned the bodies of those they had shot. The wind brought the stifling smell of burning human flesh. If Liza's mother had not already died, she surely perished in the slaughter at Bogdanovka.

The Blanuță family told their neighbors that they had adopted a Christian orphan girl. Some people believed them, others did not.

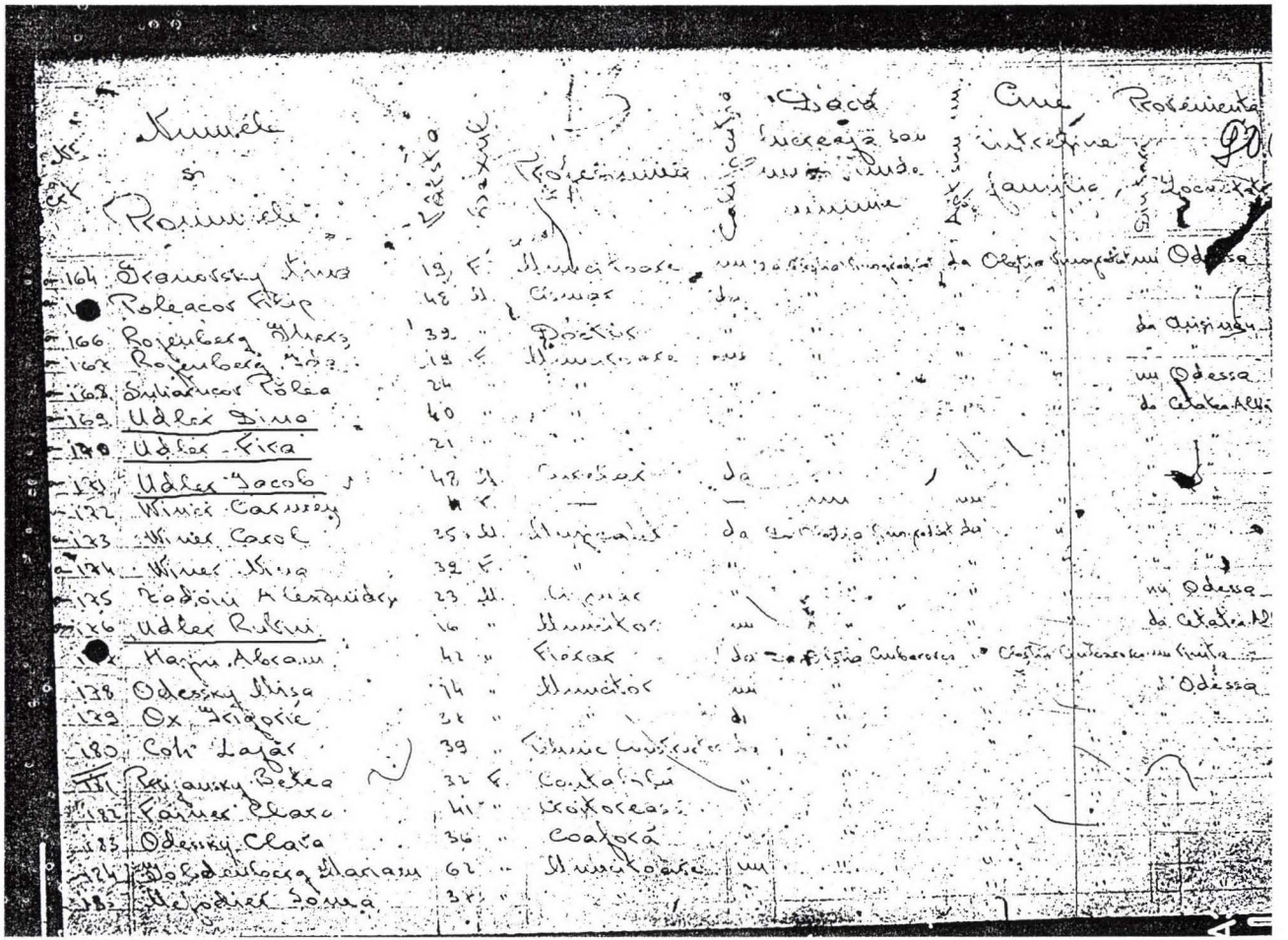
Apparently, the gendarme commander eventually took his brutal



a: Copy of the prisoner list of the camp-ghettos for the Domanyovka district of Golta County (stored in the Nikolaev Regional Archive)



b: Copy of the prisoner list of the camp-ghettos for the Domanyovka district of Golta County (stored in the Nikolaev Regional Archive)



c: Copy of the prisoner list of the camp-ghettos for the Domanyovka district of Golta County (stored in the Nikolaev Regional Archive)

revenge upon Anton Blanuță. When the list of Jews was compiled by the gendarmes in December of 1943, Liza's name was included, under the last name Blanuță.

* * *

The Romanians and Germans acted barbarically not only in relation to the Jews, but to the Gypsies as well. In 1939 there had been approximately 300,000 Gypsies in Romania. From fragmentary evidence I was able to find in several publications, it is clear that the Antonescu government decided to send the Gypsies out of Romania to Transnistria, purportedly in order to colonize it. For this purpose they were permitted to take with them all their belongings. They arrived in Transnistria travelling in their own carts.

Soon the Gypsies realized that they had been brazenly deceived. No action was taken to apportion them the land they had been promised, and they were even forbidden to occupy the empty houses of the Transnistria natives who had migrated east or of the Jews who had been turned out by the fascists. In fact, the Romanian authorities immediately began a program to destroy the Gypsies. First they confiscated their horses and carts, a serious blow to a wandering people. Then they searched the Gypsies and seized all their gold, silver, and money; they even stripped them of their winter clothing. As the cold weather arrived, the people began to die from hunger, exposure, and disease.

More than 10,000 Gypsies who arrived in Golta County in the summer of 1942 were annihilated, thanks to the efforts of the county prefect, Modest Isopescu; the subprefect, Aristide Pădure; the district praetor of Domanyovka, Vasile Mănescu; and their subordinates.

Of the 20,000 Gypsies exiled to the village of Kovalyovka in Berezovka County, more than 7,000 died of typhus. In the village of Trikhaty, German SS troops shot 11,500 Gypsies, after which only about 1,500 persons remained alive. Gypsies were presumably eliminated in the counties of Ochakov, Berezovka, and Balta. In all, 52,000 Gypsies were deported to Transnistria, including approximately 25,000 from the Old Kingdom, of which only 1,500 survived and returned to Romania.[15]

It is clear that the deportation of the Gypsies from Romania and their ordeals in Transnistria deserves more thorough study.

* * *

Throughout 1943 the attitude of the Romanian authorities toward the Jews who were prisoners in the camp-ghettos, changed constantly, depending on how the war at the front was going. Many came to

understand clearly that the war was lost. In the winter, at the very beginning of 1943, the cities of Rostov and Novocherkassk were liberated. The Leningrad blockade was broken on January 18. After their anti-Semitic, inhumane acts in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria and after the genocidal policy carried out with brutality by the Antonescu government throughout the country, the Romanians began an attempt to build favorable public opinion in France, England, and the United States.

Jewish organizations in Romania were granted the return from Transnistria of those surviving Jews who had been deported from Bessarabia, Bukovina, Dorohoi County, and from old Romania and obtained permission to provide them with financial and material aid. They succeeded in proposing their relocation from Transnistria first to the areas from where they had been deported, and then ultimately to Palestine.

In Vinogradnyi Sad the change in the Romanian attitude toward the Jews manifested itself in the disappearance of the gendarme guard from the ghetto. The guard continued to come, but only to take walks with Pelageea Fyodorovna. The gendarmes treated the Jews more calmly when they encountered them at work outside the ghetto. According to the doctor, even the gendarme commander began inquiring about the needs of the ghetto Jews and about their mood. At his order, the collective farm even provided us with some pieces of soap and some sackcloth with which to sew ourselves clothes.

Our outward appearance was indeed terrible. Everything was in rags, patched with cloth of various colors. Tattered foot cloths and stalks of crumpled straw stuck out of our dried peasant sandals. In comparison with our faded and washed-out rags, the skirts and shirts newly sewn together from the rough sackcloth seemed luxurious.

Notes

[1] Borovoi, «*Gibel'...,*» 11-13; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6:92.

[2] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:197, 6:58, 69-70, 72, 78, 89-94; Ludo, *Ultimul batalion*, 408.

[3] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 147, 157; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 40-41; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 6: 229; *Antiiudaizm*, 174-79.

[4] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:198, 6:70, 72-73, 89-96; Butnaru, *Silent Holocaust*, 127-29; Baranga, *Ninge*, 65-79; Ludo, *Ultimul batalion*, 407-08; *Historical Atlas*, 73; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 252-58.

[5] Borovoi, «*Gibel'...,*» 12-13.

[6] A. Cuza had suggested a *numerus nullus*, while Alexandru Vaida-Voevod proposed a *numerus valachicus*, which barred Jews from higher education. Volovici, *Ideologia naţionalistă*, 45,72; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 40-41.

[7] Vasile Netea, *Transnistria* (Bucharest, 1943); Ioan Mailat, *Transnistria* (Bucharest, 1942); I. A. Nestorescu, *Transnistria noastră* (Buzău, 1942); I. Nistor, *Vechimea așezărilor românești dincolo de Nistru* (Bucharest, 1939); I. Nistor, *Aspecte geografice și culturale din Transnistria* (Bucharest, 1942); Al. Boldur, *Românii și strămoșii lor în istoria Transnistriei* (Jassy, 1943); Andrei Florin, *Transnistria: 1941-1943* (Odessa, 1943); N.M. Popp, *Transnistria: Încercare de monografie regională* (Bucharest, 1943); N.M. Popp, «Românii din Basarabia și Transnistria», *Buletinul Societății Regale Române* XL (1942); Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 498, 502.

[8] Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 102-03; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 356-62; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 306, 317-18.

[9] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:198, 501-02, 541, 6:70-71, 91; Borovoi, *«Gibel'...»*, 23-24; Baranga, *Ninge*, 103-07; Samuel Aroni, *Memories of the Holocaust: Kishinev 1941-1944* (Los Angeles, 1995), Appendix 4; Starodinskii, *Odesskoe getto*, 44-57; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 255-56; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 231.

[10] As I learned many years later, reading Marshal Zhukov's *Reminiscenses and Reflections*, the Third Romanian Army, the Fifth, Sixth, Thirteenth, and Fifteenth Divisions, the First Tank Division, the Fifth Army Corps, and other Romanian formations were completely destroyed near the towns of Serafimovich, Kletskaya, Gromki, Perelazovsky, and Golovsky during the battles from the 14th to the 24th of November, 1942, which decided at this stage the course of the Battle of Stalingrad. On November 23, the First, Second, Eighteenth, and Twentieth Romanian Divisions were demolished near Kalach. More than 30 thousand prisoners (soldiers, officers, and generals) were taken along with a huge amount of military hardware. Several tens of thousands were killed. General Mazarini, who had taken over command of all Romanian divisions, was forced to capitulate.

Altogether the fascists lost about 1.5 million men around the Don, the Volga, and Stalingrad. G.K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow, 1969), 429-33, 446; *România*, 479-93; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 72-91.

[11] Carp, *Cartea neagră*; *Documents Concerning the Fate*; *Martiriul evreilor din România 1940-1944: Documente și mărturii* (Bucharest, 1991); *Legislația antievreiască*; Moses Rosen, *Primejdii, încercări, miracole* (Bucharest, 1990); Butnaru, *Holocaustul uitat*, 354; Julius S. Fisher, *Transnistria: The Forgotten Cemetery* (New York and London, 1969); Litani, *Transnistria*; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 297-308; Radu Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat pe evreii din România* (Bucharest, 1994); *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 148-50.

[12] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:306-13, 469-86; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 292, 301, 402-04.

[13] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:226-27, 273, 275, 297, 331-34, 342-44, 390, 438, 487-88, 490, 517-36; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 298, 300, 304-08.

[14] Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 188-89; Rubin Udler, «Noi date despre capitolul transnistrian al Holocaustului». In *Jaloane pentru o viitoare istorie* (Bucharest, 1999), 40-45.

[15] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:199, 303, 541, 6:71, 94, 96,246; 11:34; Ludo, *Ultimul batalion*, 408; Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu*, 113, 121; Dallin, *Odessa*, 306; *Historical Atlas*, 16; Martin Gilbert, *The Macmillan Atlas of the Holocaust (1982)*, 141; *Procesul mareșalului*, 1:79, 110, 245; D.Kenrick and G.Puxon, *Gypsies Under the Swastica* (1995), 108-12; Ian Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome* (Ann Arbor, 1987), 85; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 206. The deportation of Gypsies to Transnistria was halted on October 14, 1942. *Problema evreiască*, 465; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 310-22; Zhukov, *Vospominaniia*, 448-49, 492, 502.

Chapter 7: **GRAZHDANOVKA**

One day toward the end of July, Uncle Andriy came to the ghetto with an order from the praetor's office. My father was to be sent immediately to the hamlet of Grazhdanovka, a subdivision of some state farm (a «state agricultural enterprise») in the Vradiyevka district.

Uncle Andriy, as we could tell from his voice and his whole appearance, was genuinely saddened. During the long months of our stay in Vinogradnyi Sad, he had come to respect my father and I can say that they had become good friends.

We read over the order many times. Indeed, the request specified my father alone, and gave no indication of how long he would be gone. He was to depart Vinogradnyi Sad under gendarme guard on August 2.

Our mother, Fira, and I were horribly upset. For the first time in our lives we were being forced to part with our father. We did not know whether they would allow us to see him, or whether he could take us along or to return to us when his work assignment was finished. We did not know what awaited him in the new ghetto. We had many questions to which there were no answers.

At the request of our father, Doctor Rosenberg tried to find out from the gendarme commander what would happen to us, seeing as we had been brought to Vinogradnyi Sad as members of a craftsman's family. The commander answered formally that, in accordance with Decree #23, signed by Marshal Antonescu and the civil governor of Transnistria, Professor G. Alexianu, Jewish craftsmen were obligated to carry out any kind of work in their specialization and could be transferred from one ghetto to another according to local needs as determined by the county authorities.[1] As far as our case was concerned, the commander assumed that my father's transfer was only temporary and that Grazhdanovka was not such a bad place. We had nothing to fear here in Vinogradnyi Sad as long as we continued to work conscientiously. Should we fail to do so, any one of us could be sent to Akhmechetka.

The doctor promised my father that he would help us in any way he could. Everyone in the ghetto felt the pain of our separation. This was the first time during our entire ghetto existence that the Romanians had separated someone from his family. All our fellow inmates tried to comfort us, each in his or her own way.

Our father was outwardly calm as he packed his instruments in a home-sewn bag, prepared the head of his harness-sewing bench, tied up the *shuval'niks* that he would need during the first days, and tied up his knapsack and the food that our mother had prepared for him. The other ghetto inmates kindly allowed us to be alone for an hour or so in the calf house to say good-bye. Our mother was about to start crying, but she recovered control and stayed calm. We all tried to encourage one another, assured each other that everything would be well, and that God would help us through this latest trial without abandoning us. We asked our father to be careful, to eat regularly, to avoid catching cold, and to try to return to Vinogradnyi Sad or to arrange for our transfer to Grazhdanovka. Father, sad and worried, remanded Fira and me to take care of our mother and to turn to Doctor Rosenberg or to Uncle Andriy should any serious problems arise.

On the morning of August 2, 1943, a gendarme guard came for our father, who loaded his things onto the cart and took his leave of us for Grazhdanovka. It should not be difficult to imagine our mood.

The next evening the gendarme brought us a short note from our father. He had arrived safely at the small camp-ghetto, where he had a modest corner in a peasant house. He had not yet seen either the manager of the state farm nor the immediate supervisor of the ghetto, but promised to send a detailed letter at the first opportunity.

We continued working and waiting. The separation was very difficult for my mother, who constantly worried about our father and feared for our safety. We calmed her fears as best we could, but the weeks passed one after another without further word. Our mother's face grew thin, even as she continued to reassure both us and herself.

Only after about three months did we receive a letter from our father, passed along by a local resident who had travelled to Grazhdanovka on business. Father wrote that he had a lot of work, and that the manager of the state farm had promised to arrange for our transfer. We got this news only in the middle of December.

On December 20, our father came for us, accompanied by a gendarme guard. We were overjoyed to see him after five seemingly endless months. The times were generally very tense, and our father made us hurry, afraid of encountering complications with the local authorities or those in Bogdanovka. My father, the doctor, and Uncle Philip, our ghetto elder, got together with Uncle Andriy to discuss how best to quickly obtain the signature of the gendarme commander. They decided that my father and the doctor would go to the commander alone, and luckily they found him in a good mood. He asked our father many questions about the situation in Grazhdanovka and about the manager of the «state agricultural enterprise» an acquaintance of his. He even reminisced about events from before the war.

The junior lieutenant kept fingering the document my father had brought him, reading it with care, and studying the signatures and the stamp. He made a show of asking Doctor Rosenberg for advice, whether he should perhaps consult with the district and county authorities. It was, after all, a pity to lose such a good specialist, and there was no precedent for this in his experience. Then he summoned the gendarme who had arrived with my father from Grazhdanovka and began to ask him about the instructions he had received regarding our transport. The doctor reminded the commander that permission for the transfer of our family had been given by the very authorities with whom he was preparing to consult and that there was no sense in doubting the correctness of their decision. It was only at this point that the gendarme commander indicated his agreement to our transfer. In so doing, he did not fail to remind my father and Rosenberg that the Romanians were a generous people and the brutality that they had used on the Jews had been no more than the response required by circumstances. Trying not to prolong the discussion, my father and the doctor thanked him and left.

That evening all the ghetto inmates surrounded my father and bombarded him with questions. How many Jews were there in Grazhdanovka and where were they from? What were their living conditions? How did the Romanian administration and the local Ukrainian population treat the Jews in the ghetto? Did they have any contact with Jewish organizations in Romania or other countries? Did they receive any clothing, food, money, medicines? There were also questions regarding the situation at the front, the activities of the partisans – in general, every kind of question regarding the prospects for our future.

In the Vradiyevka district, just as in Domanyovka, where small groups of mainly local Jews (so-called Soviet Jews) were settled, the people were kept in isolation from the outside world and were forced to live on rumors alone. Nonetheless, there was agreement that the Russian forces had achieved great successes during the summer and autumn of 1943, leading to the liberation of the greater part of Ukraine.[2]

* * *

Late that night, when everyone had gone to bed after the long day of work and evening of conversation, my father and I left the camp and went down to the Bug. Being the end of December, the night was very dark and cold. Our clothing did little more than cover our emaciated bodies.

We easily found the rock, but the earth was frozen and we had difficulty digging with only the knives from our mess-tin. When we were done we returned to the ghetto separately. It was quiet and everyone was asleep.

Our parents had a superstition that bordered on fetishism about our gold possessions. They were convinced that these things would help save our lives in an emergency. This faith was handed down by former generations, when Jews had so often been able to ransom their way out of trouble, harassment, and even death with gold rings, medallions, chains, or watches. Of course, we ourselves had also witnessed the opposite, when Romanians received valuables from the Jews and then rewarded them with torture.

* * *

At dawn the next day, December 23, my father prepared a cart lined with straw. We loaded our belongings and some food given to us by good Uncle Andriy and tenderly said good-bye to those with whom we had lived as one family for almost two unimaginably difficult and tense years. Our greatest wish for each other, above all else, was simply to survive. We did not exchange addresses, for we had none to exchange. We did not even know what might happen to any of us in the next moment.

* * *

Many years later, some time in the early 1960s when I was working at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, my wife, Mira, our five-year-old son, Arthur, and I were spending our vacation at the Black Sea. In a department store in Odessa we happened to meet up with Polina Sukhorukova – the same Pelageea Fyodorovna Polishchuk of our camp-ghetto. She had come there with her granddaughter to meet her daughter, who worked as a sales clerk. We were both deeply moved, looking each other in the face with open tenderness and holding each other's hands as if in a dream. We felt almost the joy of finding a lost relative.

We had so many questions for each other. I learned from Polina that at the end of March 1944 the Jews had abandoned the camp-ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad and scattered in all directions to escape the OUN, Ukrainian nationalists who had gone over to the Germans, and the SS.

Philip and Rahel' had married and had lived in Odessa, but Philip had fallen ill and passed away several years earlier, leaving Rahel' a widow. On the day of liberation, Sasha had joined the ranks of the Red Army and fought bravely and selflessly for several months. Philip and Rahel' received encouraging letters from him, full of hope for an early victory and for a speedy return to a life of peace, but after a time they were informed that Sasha had perished a hero. Philip grieved for him as for his own son.

There was some other news. Nina Granovskaya was working as a

hairdresser in Odessa. Raea Alexandrovich had found herself a position as a bookkeeper. Polina had met with them several times, but in recent years they had not seen each other. David and his children, as well as Carol and his family, had left the ghetto one night, and Polina had heard nothing of them since then. Perhaps they had escaped and managed to make it to Bessarabia, or perhaps they had perished in those brutal days of the fascist retreat. As for the good Doctor Rosenberg, soon after our departure he and his wife and daughter had been transferred to another ghetto where a kind of hospital for Jews had been set up. She did not see them again.

Fate had not been kind to Polina herself. Her husband had not returned from the front. She found her daughters, but she left them to live with her husband's relatives. The times were hard and she did not have the means to feed or support the children. Some time later, Polina married for a third time, and once again a happy family life eluded her.

Polina and I exchanged addresses. We wrote each other letters for a time and sent greetings at holidays. Then our correspondence stopped. During one of my later visits to Odessa I tried to visit her at her old address, but she was no longer there.

In this way, in the confusion and cruelty of postwar life, we inmates of the ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad lost touch with each other forever.

* * *

Late in the evening of December 23, we arrived in the hamlet of Grazhdanovka, Vradiyevka district, Golta County. The ghetto was located in a peasant house. Our family was placed in the smaller room in which two young women were living. There was a small kitchen beyond the vestibule, and one of the women, who prepared meals for everyone, gave us some food. We were happy to be with our father once again. We lay down on the plank-bed that our father had hammered together before our arrival and quickly fell asleep. The road had been exhausting and dangerous, and we had been very anxious.

The next morning I went into the larger room, the male half of the house. There I found a dozen youths between the ages of 14 and 18 sitting and lying on plank-beds and on the stove arguing over something. Their youthful faces were adorned by long, uncut hair. They looked me over curiously with their intelligent eyes and we introduced ourselves. They were practically my own age, and I was greatly surprised to see that they were not emaciated. Their bodies were somewhat covered by their ragged clothes, and they had nothing on their feet. Two or three torn, padded jackets and Russian fur hats hung from nails near the door above several pairs of shabby boots. These were worn by whoever needed to go outside. The lads did not go to work every day during the winter lull.

I learned that they were all orphans who had miraculously survived after the pogroms perpetrated by the Romanians and Germans in the first days of the occupation of the small towns of Vradiyevka, Lyubashyovka, and Krivoye Ozero. Their parents and relatives had perished then or died of starvation and disease in the ghetto. The boys had been herded to Grazhdanovka because the state farm was in desperate need of laborers.

Grazhdanovka itself was a small hamlet. A brigade or division of the state farm had been set up there shortly before the outbreak of war. The farm was very rich, encompassing wide stretches of fertile black-earth fields and pastures. Its animal breeding was well-developed, with fully equipped cowsheds, horse stables, pigsties, greenhouses, voluminous granaries, and agricultural workshops.

There were few human dwellings. Some of the farm workers had remained after the start of the war, but many had given up everything and scattered. For various reasons, the people did not want to work. Some did not want to bend before their enemies or help them in any way; others, mostly soldiers' wives and the elderly, did not have the training or physical strength to live and work there. Still others were simply waiting in the hope that the Romanians would distribute the land among them.

The arduous work, which did not demand any special knowledge, was carried out by the Jews. The livestock needed to be fed and watered every day. The boys had been fed well, but they received nothing else. Their clothing and footwear had deteriorated into rags. They had been able to avoid sickness and bravely endure the cold and the exhausting work because of their youth.

* * *

On the evening of our second day in Grazhdanovka the manager of the state agricultural enterprise, a young agronomist, summoned our father. He had promised this manager «thanks» for appealing to the higher Romanian authorities for our transfer from Vinogradnyi Sad, so father took him several valuable things that had until then been saved as precious family heirlooms, reminders of their parents. Our family reunion was paid for in gold.

* * *

The labor communes and state agricultural enterprises created by the Romanians were headed by people sent from the Old Kingdom. Often these were agronomists or veterinarians, and during the first months of the occupation of Transnistria their main task was to organize

the transportation of plundered property to Romania. They sent whole trainloads of choice grain, herds of thoroughbred cattle and horses, combines, tractors, and other moveable property. Their second task was to assimilate the huge expanses of these agricultural enterprises, which was extremely difficult. Few agronomists, veterinarians, tractor drivers, or combine operators remained to do the work. The land was deserted and pillaged. The language barrier was insurmountable, and the haughty attitude of the Romanians toward the peasants and their constant brutality – beatings, robbery, violence, assaults, and lawlessness – had alienated the people from these interlopers. Everyone considered the Romanians to be mere opportunists, temporary beneficiaries of turbulent circumstances.

A recent graduate of the agronomy institute ran affairs in Grazhdanovka. He was the son of rich parents. Like most students in those confused times, he was loyal to the nationalist order set up by the Antonescu government. Thanks to the connections of his father, a crafty old politician, he was appointed head of a state agricultural enterprise in Transnistria. In this way he avoided being sent to the front and gained an opportunity for limitless self-enrichment.

Our manager tried to organize the work, but he did not have the experience needed to organized such a huge and multifaceted enterprise. A Moldavian from some Transnistrian village served him as translator, personal agent, and coachman. The local peasants, mostly Ukrainians, avoided him. His outward appearance and character inspired people's dislike. The Moldavian's daughter, a young and healthy woman, prepared his meals and cleaned the rooms of his living quarters in a large building that used to house the farm's administration. She was also his concubine.

Our manager often received his colleagues from neighboring farms, heads of various district departments, and from the Transnistrian governor's bureaucratic apparatus. They would carouse until all hours of the night, and in the morning the visitors would depart in *britzkas*, light carriages, loaded full of presents.

* * *

Our arrival brought many changes to life in the Grazhdanovka ghetto. My mother, Fira, and the young women spent the long winter nights fixing up the lads' clothing. They patched up the rags, sewed shirts and drawers out of old sacks, repaired the warm padded jackets and Russian fur hats, and cut out new foot cloths. My father sewed them peasant sandals. We made them wash regularly, and they began to take turns cleaning up their room and the land around our dwelling. We even gathered a small supply of fuel in the yard.

The camp-ghetto in Grazhdanovka was quite different from the one

in Vinogradnyi Sad. There the people had been adults with families and constant worries about their children. They had greater life experience, but were somewhat closed to the world. Here everyone was young, healthy, and educated.

Every day I went with my father to work. His workshop was in a small corner in one of the stables. There was much to do; repairing old bridles, breech-bands, halters, and traces, sewing new gear and peasant sandals. Occasionally the local peasants would bring us their private orders as well.

At the end of February our spring work began. The ghetto inmates were transferred from one workplace to another, according to need. Everyone was used as an unskilled laborer, cleaning stables, spreading fertilizer on the fields, bringing in feed for the livestock, building greenhouses, and doing other chores.

Each vening we in the ghetto discussed the events of the day. We often complained of the difficult work, the rudeness of the field team and brigade leaders, and the cold. Everyone felt vulnerable in our uncertain circumstances, but we did not feel so immediately the peril of being sent to Akhmechetka, the camp of starvation and death. Likewise, the danger of winding up at Varvarovka, the camp where Jews slaved away at building a bridge under SS surveillance, had also faded somewhat. We were also far from the Bug River, from which death could easily come.

* * *

We learned from the locals to brought work for my father that the Red Army was progressively advancing, that the Kiev and Zhitomir regions had already been liberated, along with many districts in the Vinnitsa and Rovno regions, and that the successful Korsun-Shevchenko operation had created favorable conditions for driving the enemy out of the Right Bank territory of Ukraine.[3] The well-organized activities of the partisans, the sabotage work of the civilian population, the winter cold, and the lack of good roads were undoubtedly significant allies of the Soviet forces. The people impatiently waited for the next advance of the Red Army and their own liberation from the fascist yoke.

* * *

One day the manager came into the workshop to ask my father something about work. This was the first time I had seen him. He was a young man about 25 years old, of medium height and spare build, fashionably dressed in a sheepskin coat and overlapping trousers of the same color. A soft woolen scarf was tied in a large knot around his neck, and he wore high-quality, heavy-soled shoes from *Mochornitsa*, a

well-known firm at that time, and a gray Astrakhan cap. He held a switch in his hand, and had a proud bearing and a self-assured look. His demeanor underlined the fact that he represented the superior race and that he was the master.

When he turned his attention to me, I answered a number of questions. He noticed how correctly I spoke literary Romanian, with no Jewish intonation, and he asked where I had studied. When I told him I had completed five grades at the Nicolae Bălcescu Lyceum in Brăila, one of the oldest and most prestigious lyceums in Romania, he took on a contemptuous expression and informed me through clenched teeth that the new Romania had no need of educated kikes who would undermine the foundations of its society. He advised me to put out of my head any dreams of further study and to diligently learn the harness-maker's craft from my father. Kikes, he said, should earn their food through physical labor. When I answered in Russian a question from my father, the manager could not contain his anger and exclaimed, «What is this? You've already managed to master Russian too? And you speak French as well?» My father distracted him with business questions. Once he had cooled down a bit and noticed my calloused hands covered with black oil, he solemnly declared, «Calluses are your destiny!»

I knew I had better take care to avoid this man. He was completely suffused with nationalist spirit and fanatically believed the claims of the legionnaires that all the misfortunes of the Romanians were the fault of the Jews, all of whom ought to be eliminated.

* * *

At the beginning of March our manager began to behave strangely. Almost daily he would be gone for long periods of time, riding into the district center and to his neighbors'– the managers of other agricultural enterprises. He completely ceased attending to the affairs of his own farm. It was obvious that he was preoccupied with something serious.

We learned from some of the well-informed local residents that Soviet forces were swiftly advancing. Sure enough, in the early days of March, the Second Ukrainian Front liberated Yampol', and on March 10, Uman', Novoukrainka, and Pervomaysk – our county seat. The battles had already moved into the territory of Transnistria.[4]

On March 14, the manager took out three of the best carts, loaded them to the very top with all kinds of property, harnessed the farm's best horses to them, and sent them somewhere under guard of his Moldavian attendant. Everyone understood that the Romanians were not simply leaving Transnistria, but fleeing.

The next morning it was the manager's turn to get into his gig and set off toward Vradiyevka – without any luggage. We never saw him again.

* * *

The state farm now found itself with a power vacuum. The peasants made off with cows, horses, and pigs, as well as grain, and took to their homes everything they could transport. Our lads helped those who could not fend for themselves in the general chaos and those with whom they had worked earlier. In exchange the peasants gave them quite usable warm clothing.

The lads also brought back to the ghetto alarming rumors: that before the last lines of the retreating fascists, villages were being invaded by Vlasov's soldiers, by the OUN, Ukrainian nationalists, and Kalmucks who had gone over to the German side, as well as by SS troops. This hodge-podge of vicious desperadoes were killing Jews, collecting and driving out all the men, making off with livestock, burning depots and houses, looting, raping women, and brutally beating people.[5]

* * *

Between the 20th and the 22nd of March, 1944, we heard the thundering explosions of cannon shells day and night. At night the sky would sporadically light up as if a large fire were burning, turning pink and fading out by turns. This was the long-awaited front. No one now doubted the quick advance of the Soviet forces, but in the meantime, another desperately important question presented itself. How were we to survive the coming dangerous days as the line of fire swept over us?

One evening my father and I went into the house of a local resident, something we had not done in a very long time. The man was reliable, and had agreed in advance to a meeting with us. He urged us to make our escape from the ghetto. He had heard that after the retreat of the Romanian administration, Vlasov's soldiers, the OUN, Kalmucks, and punitive forces of the SS would annihilate the Jews, savagely torturing them to death. At my father's request he sketched on a scrap of paper a crude map of the country roads we would have to take to avoid hamlets and villages as we moved through the valleys and groves on our way westward. He thought that we ought to travel only during early mornings and late evenings to avoid meeting people and to spend the rest of the time holed up somewhere.

Back in the camp-ghetto we discussed the situation at length with the others. Some wanted to return home in the hope that their relatives would also turn up from wherever they were. Those who were older wanted to wait things out close by and, once our troops had arrived, join up with them to beat the fascists and take revenge for the death of their parents, brothers, and sisters. Others didn't know what to do. It was clearly very risky to stay, so we decided to flee.

People began to prepare in haste for departure. Everyone packed their knapsacks full of bread, homemade rusks, some fat, and a few personal things. We took our tender leave of the others in advance, wishing them all one thing – survival – and went to sleep.

Our family escaped the ghetto on March 24, 1944. It was dark; the hamlet still slept. We walked with difficulty, wading through a mixture of mud and snow. Each person had a large walking stick in one hand for support and to insure a steady footing and a bag in the other hand. We proceeded in single file with our father at the front, our mother and sister behind him, and me in the rear. We dragged along in silence. By dawn we were in a valley far from the hamlet under a gloomy March sky of thick gray clouds. Snow lay along the slopes of the valley, and rabbit tracks were visible in places. The silence was complete. Our father kept a quick pace in the cold so we could stay warm and get as far away as possible from the camp.

After walking like this for several hours our mother grew tired and asked our father to rest for a while. According to the sketch, we should find a stack of straw somewhere nearby, just around the bend, and he agreed that if we could find it we would take a break there. Indeed, we soon saw it, pulled out some of the straw, and built a kind of shelter in the leeward side of the stack. Mother gave us each a piece of bread and a hunk of fat, which we wolfed down in a flash. Then we dozed in the warm straw.

Soon we continued our journey in the cold and damp, the kind of weather that drives even stray dogs into shelters. We saw neither birds nor wild animals nor people, but were glad that we met no one. Any scoundrel could easily have taken advantage of us or reported us to the *polizeis* or gendarmes in the next village, which could mean tragedy for us.

We hoped to find some place to spend the night before it got dark. On the slope of a small hill we saw an abandoned sheep pen and next to it a hut for a shepherd. When we reached the hut a cold, damp wind was blowing from all sides, so we collected several armfuls of sunflower stalks and lit a small fire. The fire gave off a little warmth in the brief time it burned, and we ate a bit and lay down for the night, huddling close one to another for warmth.

Despite our exhaustion, we were unable to fall asleep. We were troubled in spirit and overcome with fears of all kinds, noticing every little rustle around the hut. One of us, I believe it was Fira, recalled that wolves often wandered these areas, and our only weapons were our walking sticks. We tried to put these thoughts out of our heads and dozed for a while. We woke up often, our bodies numb and stiff from the cold.

Early the next morning we moved on according to our plan. There

was not a soul around. Occasionally rain and snow would fall. We stopped only at a well to drink some water, bathe our eyes, gulp down a hunk of bread, and rest a bit. We were driven by fear and the cold.

We spent our second night in a stack of straw.

Notes

[1] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, 5:176-77; Jagendorf, Siegfried, *Minunea de la Moghilev. Memorii 1941–1944* (Bucharest, 1997), 197-99.

[2] The battle in the area of Kursk, Orel, and Belgorod resulted in the rout of the Germans on August 5, 1943. On August 23, Kharkov was liberated; on September 23, Poltava was taken; on October 23, Melitopol'; on October 25, Dnepropetrovsk and Dneprodzerzhinsk; on November 6, Kiev was liberated; then, on November 13, Zhitomir, Kremenchug, Zaporozhye, and Krivoy Rog. See Zhukov, *Vospominaniia*, 492, 502, 512, 516, 517; A. Vasilevskii, *Delo vsei zhizni* (Moscow, 1975), 375; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 183-84, 227, 230, 237.

[3] Carp, *Cartea neagră, 3: 39, 87-88, 133,237, 280, 302;* Zhukov, *Vospominaniia*, 527-33, 539-40; Vasilevskii, *Delo*, 390.

[4] Vasilevskii, *Delo*, 399-405; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 242.

[5] *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 143; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 316.

Chapter 8: **VOVHOVO**

On March 26 our path led us from the valley out onto an open field. The weather improved and the sun even peeked from behind the clouds. After several hours, around 8 or 9 in the morning, we saw a large two-story building directly ahead of us on the right-hand side of the road, perhaps 500 meters away. It might have once been a hospital, technical college, or school, set in the middle of a large yard and surrounded by a high steel fence and tall poplars. In front of the building stood two rows of German soldiers, about 40 in all, facing us as their commander spoke to them.

The blood froze in our veins and we stood stock still. This was the end. My father was the first to return to his senses, telling us to continue moving forward, not to run, and to make neither a noise nor a stir. We walked behind him on mechanical legs which felt neither alive nor dead beneath us. Only God could save us and lead us out of this unavoidable danger. We could hear the words of the Prayer on a Journey, recited by my father and coming from the depths of his soul: «May it be Your will, HASHEM», our God and the God of our forefathers, that You lead us toward peace, emplace our footsteps toward peace, guide us toward peace, and make us reach our desired destination for life, gladness, and peace. May You rescue us from the hand of every foe, ambush, [bandits...] along the way, and from all manner of punishments that assemble to come to earth. May You send blessing in our [every] handiwork, and grant us grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us. May You hear the sound of our supplication, because You are God Who hears prayer and supplication. Blessed are You, HASHEM, Who hears prayer».

And a wonder came to pass. The soldiers, who were listening to their commander, doubtless saw us, but they apparently took us for peasants going to the village, for vagabonds, vagrant Gypsies, or who knows what. Our measured step and appearance from afar did not arouse them, thank God, from what they were doing.

A mere 30 minutes later we found ourselves on the outskirts of some hamlet. We did not go directly through the hamlet, but took some path leading behind the gardens. Near the second or third house we

saw a woman, who looked us over with curiosity. There was nowhere for us to go. Our father went up to her, told her who we were and where we were coming from and asked her for help. Our fate was in her hands. She threw us all a quick and attentive glance, looked around to ascertain that no one was nearby, opened the garden gate and told us to hurry quickly behind her. This was our deliverance. God sent this woman and her husband to us; He directed our footsteps to their house. And our father said: «Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God! King of the universe, who bestowest benefits on the undeserving, for on me hast thou bestowed all good.» To Him be glory and our eternal gratitude!

From my notebook of that time I see that this was the hamlet of Vovhovo, a part of the Karataev Village Soviet, Andreyevo-Ivanovka district, Odessa Region. The name of our host was Sergei Petrovich Mezinovsky. On faded page this name stands next to another one: Lapchinskaia, P.I. Perhaps this was the name of the mistress of the house, our rescuer. Unfortunately, I no longer remember.

There were Germans in this hamlet, who had arrived several days beforehand, and our host was hiding from them. He came into the house only to warm himself and eat. Our father told him the essentials of our story. They believed him and offered to help us, inviting us to eat with them. Mother and Fira changed into peasant dresses and covered their heads in the kerchiefs worn by Ukrainian women, with only their eyes visible. Henceforth they would be the woman's relatives visiting from some neighboring district where the civilian population had been forced to leave. They remained in the house with our hostess. Sergei Petrovich, our father, and I had to hide. At first, we crawled into a hole as deep as a man's height, dug like a well in the garden. It was covered above with wooden boards and then a layer of cornstalks and straw. The crevices between the boards and between the stalks let in air so that we could breathe. Above this stood a high cone-shaped haycock. A dog was tethered a short distance away.

Every so often the mistress of the house would come to the haycock and tell us what was going on in the hamlet. Now a *polizei* was going from house to house with two Germans, recording the cows and calves, giving instructions to bring the animals to the center of the hamlet the next morning. From there they would be lined up and herded away toward the west. This was a convincing sign that the Germans would soon abandon the hamlet. When the *polizei* arrived at our house with the Germans, Fira was lying on the stove, supposedly sick, and our mother was busy with something in the garden.

At night we came out of the hole and went into the kitchen to warm ourselves and get something to eat. Our entire bodies were aching from sitting in the same position in the hole. We quickly paced around in the kitchen while the women massaged us to get our blood moving.

Mother and Fira had time to wash themselves thoroughly. After they had carried out their warm jackets with the yellow six-pointed stars, eaten their fill, and rested in the warm kitchen, they looked completely different and seemed to have grown prettier. We also shed our outer clothing from the ghetto and put on padded jackets.

We were afraid to remain together in the house in case unexpected guests might appeared. Our hosts decided that Sergei Petrovich and my father would once again go down into the hole and that I should crawl into the henhouse. The night was cold, so they took something to cover themselves with in the hole.

The mistress took me out to the henhouse, a squat, adobe structure just over one meter high, built against the side wall of the house. The entrance was a very narrow opening on the far right side, large enough only for the hens and perhaps for a youth. Although I was just skin and bones, I could barely squeeze through. Once inside, I leaned up against a corner where the wall of the structure met the wall of the house. I found it was warm and dark in the henhouse, and, as my eyes grew used to the darkness, I began to make out the perches of the sleeping hens and roosters and the poles which the mistress used to fetch the newly-laid eggs from inside the henhouse. There were also two feeding troughs – one hollowed out from a log and a second one made of tin – and some small brooms. I curled up and fell asleep.

Early in the morning I was awakened by the voices of the Germans and the Ukrainian *polizei* who were rounding up the men. They searched for them in the houses, in the garrets, in cellars, in cowsheds, and even in haycocks and haystacks, which they would pierce through with bayonets and pitchforks.

I placed brooms in front of me, trying to hide behind them, turned my face to the wall, pressed myself against it, and held my breath. One German, as he spoke with someone, poked into the henhouse, flustering the birds. They began to cluck loudly and flap their wings, and the feathers and dust flew out of the small opening. He then straightened himself up, probably thinking that there was no way a man could crawl into such a space.

Our lives had once again been hanging by a thread.

I soon heard the yells and groans of a woman. The fascists were beating someone. I could not tell what was happening or to whom, and terrible thoughts rushed through my head: Fear hath a hundred eyes. The noise and hubbub slowly faded away. I was impatient but fearful to find out what terrible thing had happened, and finally the mistress said from the yard so I could hear that the sadistic soldiers had left. They had beaten a young man black and blue who had been hiding in the garret of a neighboring house, and they were getting ready to hang him in order to frighten the others.

A little while later the mistress took her cow out to the center of the hamlet to turn it over in accordance with the list made up by the *polizei*, and she returned home in tears. The monsters had indeed hanged the neighboring youth, the only son of a soldier's widow.

At a feverish pace the Germans prepared to herd the livestock away. This job was entrusted to the *polizeis* and Vlasov's soldiers. They themselves, together with the Vlasovites, herded the captured men into a convoy. No one knew where they were being taken, but we could imagine many terrible destinations: The Germans might have shot them outside the village, or placed them before their front lines to take the brunt of a Russian assault, or forced them to dig trenches and anti-tank ditches, or sent them far to the rear of battle to work in labor camps. The women who remained in the hamlet with their children and the elderly were left in despair.

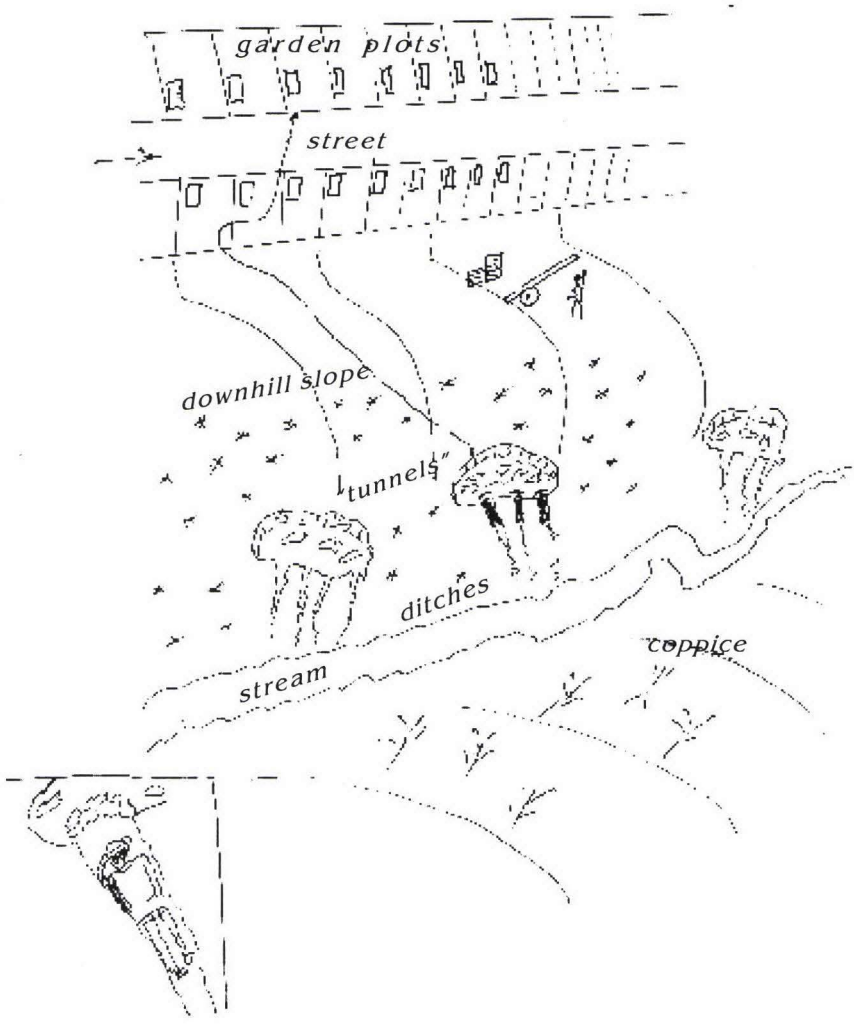
* * *

The bursts of artillery shells could now be heard falling nearby. The Germans were holding the front line somewhere very close to us and our hosts thought it was too risky for us to remain in our hiding places. Sergei Petrovich had one more refuge in mind. It lay outside of the hamlet, and he led us there through the gardens once it grew dark.

The only street in the hamlet, straight and wide, ran along a flat ridge. On one side were gardens, and below the gardens was a slope overgrown in places with shrubbery. Even farther down in the valley were gullies carved in the slope of the hill by snowmelt in the springtime or by heavy rains in the course of the year. We could see that the rain had enlarged several of these gullies to a width of four or five meters and a depth of a meter or more. Within the gullies the water had carved even more, eroded the dirt, and formed rather wide, inclined tunnels. The opposite hillside was covered with a coppice.

Sergei Petrovich had used to go there often, and he had taken note of these gullies and chosen one of them for a possible refuge. We found a large tunnel or hole and descended into it feet first, lying on our bellies. Once inside, we reached back out around the entrance and pulled in pieces of earth, so that from the outside we were invisible. We had enough air to breathe. The earth was very damp and it was almost impossible to move our bodies at all in the narrow cavity.

We remained lying in that position for a long time. When it was completely dark we heard people speaking German and we froze with fear. For at least three hours we were surrounded by the sounds of different voices and sharp commands, the clatter of hooves, the squeaking of wheels, and the beating of pickaxes or shovels. We could even hear Russian swearing.



Sketch of the hamlet of Vovhovo and the «tunnels»

These frightening noises faded away at least, and we lay for a time longer still. Then all grew quiet. We were so afraid and shivering so hard from the cold that we could not even say two words before our chattering teeth cut them off. It was unbelievably difficult for us to even wiggle a finger or turn our heads. Sergei Petrovich whispered that we could not remain lying in our holes like this. Even if we managed to survive until morning, he said, we would be so stiff that we would be unable to make it back to the house in the daylight. So we decided to crawl out of our little «tunnels» and have a look around.

Sergei Petrovich emerged first, after a great effort. He helped me climb out and then together we pulled up my father. We cautiously ascended to the edge of the hole and looked around. We could neither

see nor hear a thing. We began swinging our arms against our chests and beating our feet against each other in order to warm our bodies a bit.

Sergei Petrovich was right; it was impossible to remain here any longer. We jumped out of the ditch and in single file followed quickly and silently as Sergei Petrovich took the lead. When we had gotten part of the way up the hill we suddenly saw the outline of a cannon about 150 meters away. Next to the cannon was a pile, probably boxes of projectiles, and a sentry pacing back and forth.

We did not stop, nor did we scatter in flight. We quickened our pace a bit and continued on our way. I was the last in line. We had already passed the cannon by some distance before I dared looked back. The soldier was standing there, stock still, following us with his eyes as we walked off. We had learned well our lesson about not showing fear, even in the face of grave danger.

We continued up the hill until we came to the familiar garden plots. We walked around them a bit, listened carefully, and went on to the house. Our loved ones immediately opened the door of the darkened house, and we all hugged. We had endured the unendurable. We stood for a long time in silent embrace, feeling as though we had returned from the afterworld.

We warmed ourselves a bit, ate, and then returned to the pit in the yard. I could not stop thinking about how close we had come to death, and I ran all the possible scenarios through my mind. The Germans, marking out their cannon positions, had been standing right on the edge of our refuge. They could have easily looked down and spotted our fresh tracks in the moist earth and guessed that someone was hiding in the «tunnels». Any test shot into our hiding place would have been fatal. Or the cannon guard who had undoubtedly seen us could easily have felled us all with one burst of his submachine gun. But he remained frozen instead, apparently because he could not immediately tell who or how many of us we were. Perhaps he thought we were reconnaissance scouts, one of several groups, and that others would be following us from nearby. Or perhaps we looked like partisans and he was afraid to alert any comrades who might have been hiding in the coppice, watching our progress. Or did the sentry think we were armed and that we might open fire at any moment. Or was he, after all, simply thinking about saving his own skin? Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps....

I was amazed at our composure and our courage. We had continued to walk calmly through the garden plots, even though the Germans and Vlasov's soldiers were all over the hamlet. We had developed an ability to think clearly and avoid panic in so many critical situations over the past few years. What had we not lived through? At such times we had gradually become sure we could overcome anything, that luck was with us, and that death would ultimately lose its power to terrify us. As my

father and Sergei Petrovich huddled together asleep, my mind continued to buzzed with the memories and images of the days just passed.

The next morning the mistress told us that the hamlet was calm. There were no Germans, Vlasovites, or *polizeis* to be seen. Out of enduring fear, however, the people dared not venture beyond their garden fences. And we continued to sit in our hole while a full 24 hours passed quietly.

* * *

At dawn on March 30, the next day, I suddenly heard the sound of muffled Russian speech and a knock at the window. I woke Sergei Petrovich and my father, and we listened attentively. The door slammed shut and once again it grew quiet.

A short time later the mistress called us into the house. There were five or six young men in the room with submachine guns. The table was already set with potatoes in their jackets, bread, onions, and boiled water and the soldiers were quickly eating. When we entered, they stopped for a moment and looked us over with piercing eyes. These were Russian scouts. One of them unfolded a map along the edge of the table and began to ask the master and mistress of the house questions about the Germans, about their fortifications, the roads, the *polizeis*, and other things. They looked at us with a kind of wonder. Having ascertained what they needed to know, they left the house. We were now able to remain.

Soon the ranks of the Red Army began to enter the hamlet, winding along the garden plots and the street from the same direction we had come from a mere four days ago. We could tell that they were with the infantry as they strode along briskly with their backs slightly hunched and their submachine guns held ready. They wore a look of concentration and tension; their unshaven faces and flashing eyes engraved themselves in my memory forever. Our liberators!

The long-awaited end of our miserable slavery had finally arrived. Over the course of 896 days and nights we had endured suffering, humiliation, and the deaths of our relatives and loved ones, and we had come close to losing our faith in humanity, decency, and honor. We had personally experienced the full abominable extent of fascism, nationalism, and rabid anti-Semitism.

We rejoiced at the salvation of our *immediate* family and we grieved over the loss of our grandfather and grandmother, our uncles, aunts, and cousins. For what reason had they been so savagely annihilated? Simply because these good and honest people had been born Jews.

We were unable to console our mother, for this had been her *extended* family. We were overcome at once with joy and with grief on that most significant day.

* * *

The Russian troops marched into our hamlet in ever greater numbers. The single street, deserted just a few hours before, was now a sea of people and machines: trucks full of soldiers, field kitchens, armored carriers, tanks. The local population welcomed the Red Army men with open arms, hugged them, and fed them. Soldiers' wives inquired after their husbands, from whom they had heard nothing, and they looked into each face in the hope of finding the one they longed for. The elderly and the children also rejoiced and believed that their sons and fathers would now return.

We, too, stood watching at the side of the road. How different these people were from the murderous aggressors they had driven off. How significant had ideology, world outlook, and education turned out to be. Passing before us were older men, many already gray, along with fresh-faced youths – Russians and Georgians, Tajiks and Armenians, people of various nationalities, the well-educated alongside typical workers and peasants. But they had all come together to defend their native land, their homes, their families. They had not enslaved anybody, nor had they mocked those of other faiths.

That night ten additional people were quartered in the Mezinovsky house. The women cooked up a pot of borshch and potatoes in their jackets, fetched some fat, and baked bread. The soldiers laid their rations on the table and ate heartily as befitted healthy but exhausted men. They talked of everything, and gave us much surprising and depressing news. Soon the worn-out soldiers went to sleep in one room while the rest of us slept in the other.

At dawn, having refreshed themselves a little, they took their leave of us. For the next two days there was no local authority and the hamlet remained relatively quiet as he advance units quickly pushed on toward the west. Our hamlet, it seemed, was seen as irrelevant, without roads to the outside world.

Of the men who had been herded off by the Germans, many of them had escaped and returned home. Apparently the hastily retreating Germans no longer had any great need of them.

The villagers recovered from the shock of the past few days, full of tension and worry, and now found themselves with much to do in their homes and their garden plots. The spring chores would not wait long. During our free time we helped our hosts and got to know them, shared experiences and our plans for the future. We learned much about the local area. There had been no camp-ghetto in Vovhovo, but Sergei Petrovich and his wife had heard what the Romanians and Germans had done to the Jews. Even here and now some of the local residents enriched themselves at the expense of the Jews. They would take their potatoes and bread and, after exchanging it or selling it, return with fine

things and money, telling their fellow villagers about what they had seen and done. The Mezinovsky family did not take part in this; we did not see a single Jewish trinket in their house.

The Mezinovskys had spent their entire lives in this hamlet. They had lived through difficult years of hunger in which the industrious peasants, the kulaks, had been dispossessed of their property and entire families had been sent into exile. They also recalled happy times when the harvests had been rich, there had been enough food for all, and the people had been content. Young couples had built themselves stately homes and did well for themselves on the land, and many young people had been able to pursue higher education.

The war had put an end to all such normal activities. The village population soon consisted mainly of crippled young men, widowed women, and orphaned children. There also appeared the kind of scum who became *polizeis*, carried out all the directives of the invaders, denounced the village activists, and turned in Communists and Komsomol members, many of whom were then executed.

Sergei Petrovich suffered from a lung disease and was deemed unfit for military duty, even during wartime. He worked as a regular field hand on the collective farm. The Mezinovskys had no children. As they told it, they lived typical human lives, honorably and modestly. The fellow villagers respected Sergei Petrovich and held him in esteem. We ourselves were beneficiaries of the decency of this family. They took us in and saved our lives, risking their own safety without any expectation of reward. These people were saints and they must be counted among those few Christians whose memories will be revered forever.

We hoped that the liberation of the city of Akkerman would soon follow and that we would be able to return home, find work, and before long invite our rescuers to visit us as our guests, as dear to us as relatives. But fate was pitiless, and things turned out quite differently.

On April 2, 1944, representatives of Soviet Counterintelligence (SMERSH[1]) and of the Field Military Registration and Enlistment Office (Field Commissariat) arrived in Vovhovo. They first interrogated all men between the ages of 17 and 60. Everyone who had been in the occupied territory was now suspected of treason, betrayal, and collaboration with the fascists, and this even included those such as us Jews who by a miracle had survived and had awaited the Red Army as our liberators. Next they mobilized the so-called blackshirts from among those men who had passed the first investigation by SMERSH. After one to three days of military training, they were sent to the front lines, almost as a form of punishment. Among these newly mobilized there were youths and men who had earlier been considered unfit for military service who had never taken up a rifle in their lives, and even men of advanced age with shattered health. There was no medical commission and the representative

of the health service certified everyone to be healthy and fit for combat. These men were called blackshirts because they were not given military uniforms, but were sent to the front in their civilian clothing, which comprised for the most part dark gray (or salt-and-pepper), canvas shirts and suits of the inexpensive sort worn by peasants at that time.

The two SMERSH officers sat at the tables in a small room, goggle-eyed at the appearance of my father and me. Finally one of them came to his senses and asked us who we were and where we were from. We said we had come in response to a summons issued to the address of the Mezinovskys, where we were staying. The master of the house, Sergei Petrovich, waited outside the door.

Stunned at our appearance, they immediately understood that we were Jews, but could not comprehend why we were alive and here, in this hamlet. My father, despite his agitation, somehow managed to tell them our story. They listened to him without interrupting, often looking at each other. Then they instructed us to go and wait outside. Apparently our case was special and they did not know what to do next.

Sergei Petrovich began asking us what kinds of questions they had put to us and what they wanted to know. He could not believe that they had not interrogated us but had only listened.

After a short time they called us back in. They told my father to sit across from one officer and me to sit across from another. They gave each of us a blank sheet of paper and penholders with badly sharpened nibs and ordered us to put everything down in writing. It seems they had come up with the strategy of comparing our versions to discover any contradictions. They read our affidavits over our shoulders as we wrote, and again after we had finished. Then they exchanged pages among themselves, carefully going over each word.

While they read, I took my opportunity to look them over. They were men between the ages of 35 and 40 with a military bearing, smartly dressed, clearly used to exercising power. Their haircuts were of the typical short Soviet military fashion. Their faces were clean-shaven and smooth. In all that they were strikingly different from the rugged and ragged Russians who had liberated us. Those were the warriors, the «toilers» of the front lines; these had kept themselves clean by serving in the rear.

They put our papers into a folder and ordered us to go home. They forbade us to leave the hamlet and told us to wait for further instructions. Then they summoned Sergei Petrovich. We waited for him on the street, not far from the building, and afterward he gave us a full accounting of their questions. They asked him why he had not served in the ranks of the Red Army, why he had remained in occupied territory, what he had done during this whole time, who from among the villagers had collaborated with the fascists. When Sergei Petrovich answered that he

had hidden us before the German retreat, they bombarded him with more questions: Why had he done such a thing, risking his own life and that of his wife? Was he sure that we had really escaped from a camp-ghetto? How could he explain the unbelievable fact that our entire family had survived intact? Had we offered him some kind of payment in exchange for shelter? How had we learned to speak Romanian? Where were we from? and many other questions.

Sergei Petrovich emerged from his interview very upset. He had not imagined that saving the life of a Jewish family could elicit such suspicion from the defenders of law and order. Sergei Petrovich was also strictly forbidden to leave his house.

* * *

That evening a major, the commanding officer of Field Military Recruitment Office, came to us on an unofficial visit. He had heard from the SMERSH officers that there was a Jewish family in the hamlet that had survived the Romanian ghetto and he decided to meet and talk with us. He was a tall, thickly built man with a receding hairline and many freckles on his face of about 45 years old. He was neatly dressed and wore several military decorations on his chest.

He introduced himself and politely asked for permission to come into the house. Our hosts made haste to set the table just as they had on the first day of our liberation. We had a long and cordial conversation, which included a long account of his own history. He had been born in a small town of the Odessa region. In his youth he worked together with his father, feeding their large family by working as tailors. He then left home to study, and after graduating from a technical school of civil engineering he served in a sapper unit. He married and became the father of two daughters. Like many military men, he and his family had to move often. He lived for several years each in the Far East, in Central Asia, and in the Russian North, residing in military housing, often in the forest or desert, according to the interests and needs of his unit. They associated almost exclusively with «goyim», because there were practically no Jews in such places. But during his furloughs, they would always spend five or six weeks visiting their parents and thus, among their own, instilled in their daughters an awareness of their Jewish essence.

Yiddish was the colloquial language of his native town. Everyone spoke it, albeit some better than others. Those who came from the large cities or the provinces for summer visits to their grandparents would also immerse themselves in their Jewish heritage. The older generation was proud of its sons and daughters and of its grandchildren as well. Many had become doctors, engineers, teachers, musicians,

artists, and scholars. Everyone turned out to have great abilities or talents. There were, as always, those for whom life had not turned out well, but this did not darken the general picture of prosperity.

During the Finnish campaign, the major, then a senior lieutenant, served on the front lines, so he sent his family to his home town to stay with his parents. He was wounded, but not seriously, and he quickly recovered. When he came to collect his wife and children, everybody tried to show their respect and admiration of his courage. The army newspaper sent to his parents from the front carried an article about the skill and bravery of his subdivision, along with a picture of him and his group of sappers.

The Second World War found him with his unit beyond the Urals. His wife and daughters remained there, seemingly far from the front, while he left to defend his country. He did not dwell on the difficulties of those early days of the war, as the fascists inexorably advanced and occupied Moldavia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and halted only at the very gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. But he told of how he worried and grieved over the fate of his relatives, about whom he had no news. He wrote to various organizations (the Red Cross and Red Crescent evacuation centers) and to people from the occupied regions and republics who were now evacuees scattered in different cities. No one could tell him anything about his loved ones.

After suffering yet another wound, he was put in command of the Field Military Recruitment Office with the rank of major. During the next period of the war, from the end of 1943 to the first months of 1944, as the Red Army liberated the right bank of Ukraine and the Crimea, he personally went looking for his relatives. Whenever his unit stopped in villages, small towns, and cities to mobilize the local men into military service, he would try to find people who might help him find news about his family. As he followed behind the forces of the Second and Third Ukrainian fronts, he met not a single Jew who had survived the horrors of the ghettos – not in the Kirovograd, Nikolayev, or Odessa regions, or anywhere before reaching our hamlet.

Before long, the major began speaking his native Yiddish with my parents; this was partly because the conversation touched upon particularly personal problems. He asked them about the ghettos through which we had come in Odessa, Domanyovka, Vinogradnyi Sad, and Grazhdanovka. He told them the last names of his relatives about whom we might have heard something, and asked us to make inquiries in Odessa. Finally, he gave us an address to which we could write with any information we obtained.

The major said that he sincerely admired the Mezinovskys for their actions in saving our lives during the extremely difficult last days of the occupation. Sergei Petrovich and my father carefully followed this thought by asking the major what awaited them after the interview with the

officers from SMERSH. He reassured us and said that this service was primarily looking for traitors who had collaborated with the occupants for the purpose of punishing them. The remaining men who were fit for military duty would be examined by the medical commission of the Field Recruitment Office and then sent to the front or to reserve regiments. Other factors would also be considered.

We continued to speak for a long time. It was clear that the major had missed the company of those of his own faith. It was also pleasant for us to feel like human beings again, on an equal footing with others rather than slaves.

He took his leave from us warmly, expressing his sympathy and support, looking at us with great tenderness, longing, and sadness. We had little doubt that if his parents and many relatives had stayed in their town, the Germans or Romanians had surely annihilated them. There remained only a glimmer of hope, faith in a miracle.

* * *

The next day we were called to the medical commission of the Recruitment Office. The female physician examined us rather quickly and asked us several questions (such as whether we suffered from mental disorders or venereal diseases, how were our vision and hearing, and whether we had ever been seriously wounded). She then filled out some forms and sent us to the next room where, behind a table with two large register books, there sat a young senior lieutenant wearing multiple stripes for wounds received in battle. He had the air of a martyr, constantly furrowing his brow and pursing his lips as if softly groaning. After a cursory look through the papers before him, which perhaps bore the conclusions of the SMERSH officers and the physician, he asked us no questions but immediately announced his decision. My father and Sergei Petrovich would be mobilized by the Recruitment Office as of April 4, 1944, and placed at the disposal of a reserve regiment designated by some number.

I, however, was dismissed. We were left to guess the reasons why. Of all the ideas we came up with, two seemed to be most likely. First, I had been born in Brăila, Romania, which was to say in a foreign country; in those days foreign birth drew more suspicion than having lived in temporarily occupied territory. Second, I was very emaciated, a «goner» or «weakling», as they used to say back then. In essence, I had merely received a short respite.

We were of course devastated by this news. For the second time we were expected to part with our father, having no idea where he would go. He could be sent to the front, where anything could happen. This would be the better option, because we thirsted to avenge the deaths

of our relatives and the humiliation and suffering we ourselves had endured. But he might also be sent to the rear, where he would be subject to further investigation by SMERSH regarding the miracle of his surviving the ghetto for such a long time. They could sentence him for many years, condemn him to work in mine shafts or cutting forests, or send him to the front as part of a penalty battalion. This last option seemed to us to be a good fortune. As for being released to return home, even after the trials we had endured in the fascist ghettos, we could not even dream of such a thing.

Our goodbyes with my father and Sergei Petrovich were short. Father told us not to linger in the hamlet, but to follow the front toward our home, toward Akkerman. He would write to us there, at first to the General Post Office. We would all try to make contact with his sister, Ida Aronovna Dolinko, who had lived in Moscow before the war. We hoped to find each other through her in case something went wrong. We knew her address by heart. Our father advised us to travel via Odessa, which would in all likelihood be liberated earlier than Akkerman. He told us not to split up, since alone we would likely perish. He advised us to look for friends and acquaintances in Odessa who had been evacuated or sent to ghettos and ask them whether any of our relatives had survived and where they were. We should also try to find some of our possessions in order to clothe and feed ourselves.

Our mother and the mistress of the house asked our father and Sergei Petrovich to try to stay together and to help each other as brothers. The men packed into bags the minimum – a loaf of bread, a piece of fat, a mug, spoon, towel, soap, and razor – and then they left. We joined the other residents of the hamlet who accompanied their fathers, sons, and brothers to the assembly place. Everyone was grieving, and many were in tears. War is a severe trial for all. We had only our faith and hope in God alone that our father would return home alive.

Notes

[1] An abbreviation of the Russian *smert' shpionam*, «death to spies».

Chapter 9: **ODESSA (1944)**

A few days later we warmly bid farewell to our hostess and departed from Vovhovo, where virtuous people and the Red Army had brought us liberation and had returned us to the world of the living. To our great regret, none of us ever again returned there.

It was already April, and the sun warmed the land and dried the roads. Hope of rebirth grew in our hearts. We went on foot from village to village, heading southwest toward Odessa and Akkerman. We no longer had to move in secret, keep to small abandoned country roads, or freeze in fear at the slightest rustle, noise, or shadow. We chose the high road, as we had been advised, and shared it with columns of military trucks, cannons, armoured carriers, farm carts, and streams of civilians, mostly women.

We covered a mere 10 to 15 kilometers a day. It was difficult to walk; we were very weak and we tired easily. Every three or four kilometers we found a resting place along the side of the road, usually near a well. At first the travellers resting there looked at us with wonder or suspicion, surprised by our outward appearance and our peculiar Russian speech with its mix of Ukrainian and Moldavian. Anyone who timidly struck up a conversation with us, however, grew more trusting and friendly. These chance acquaintances gave us directions for our further travels, offered us food to eat, and even invited us to stay the night in their homes when the road passed through their villages. Sometimes military vehicles would pick us up and drop us off at the nearest district center. The soldiers also had sympathy for us, helped us climb into the back of their trucks, made us comfortable, and insisted that we accept canned food, bread, and sugar cubes from among their provisions.

* * *

We knew nothing about it at the time, but the assault upon Odessa had already been executed, and with extraordinary swiftness. As Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky writes, it began on March 26, the very day we came to Vovhovo, and ended on April 14, 1944.

The fascists were chased out of the city of Nikolayev in a nighttime offensive on March 27, Vosnesensk was taken on March 28, Ochakov was liberated on March 30, Zhovten' and Tsebrikovo followed on March 31, and Berezovka and Razdel'naya after them.

Odessa was attacked from the north and east by troops commanded by Glagolev, Chuykov, Shlemin, and Tsvetaev – practically the entire Third Ukrainian Front. They burst into Odessa on April 9, and after that it took three days to liberate the entire city. During the Odessa operation, Lieutenant-General I.A. Pliev's cavalry corps distinguished itself and the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was conferred upon the general.

The forces of the Third Ukrainian Front, under the command of General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky, brought bitter defeat to the Sixth German and Third Romanian armies. According to testimony given by prisoners and documents taken from German archives, the enemy lost 51,000 soldiers and officers in all, counting those who fell and those taken prisoner. In the vicinity of Odessa a huge treasure of military hardware and all sorts of property were also captured.

By April 14, as we were nearing Odessa, the armies of the Third Ukrainian Front had liberated the entire left bank of the Dniester from Tiraspol' to the Black Sea. Thus, so-called Transnistria ceased to exist. The crossing of the Dniester River by forces along the entire front was planned to begin from the 18th to the 20th of April, when the Eighth Army of the Guards was to traverse the Dniester at Belyayevka and Akkerman.[1]

We were literally following in the footsteps of the front. The roadsides were littered with blown-up trucks, carts, and even cannons. We saw trenches with collapsed parapets, scattered cartridges, cases, and discarded helmets. In the villages we saw burned-out houses and the ruined walls of buildings. Women and old men were trying to repair demolished houses, roofs, windows, feeding troughs for their livestock and fowl, pigsties, and chicken-coops. They were also working in their garden plots.

People had begun to organize themselves together into collective farms again and to restore what little had not been taken off by the Romanians. Here and there the winter fields were turning green, bearing witness to the fact that life continues despite human folly.

I don't remember the names of all the villages we passed through, but they included Skosarevka, Zhuravka, Antonovka, Yekaterino-Platonovka, Konoplyanoye, Severinovka, and Il'inka. We also went through a few district centers and towns, such as Andreyevo-Ivanovka and Ivanovka. In some of the latter towns, where many Jews had lived before 1941, the residents with whom we spent our nights told us how the Romanian soldiers and gendarmes brutally abused the Jews, robbed their homes, and tortured and killed them regardless of age or sex,

including even pregnant women. In one place the mistress of the house insisted that we go with her to the cemetery where all the local Jews had been shot and thrown into a single pit that they themselves had been forced to dig under the muzzles of the brutes. She cried and lamented over the neighbors with whom they had lived like their own family members for so many years. We stood there grieving with her by the grave and tried to comfort her. We knew there were many mass graves of innocent people executed by the Romanians in the villages, towns, and cities of Transnistria, in the ravines and forests of this land, in every place where the fascists had tread. This woman swore that she would look after this grave for her entire life and that, if her husband returned from the front, she would place a memorial stone here.

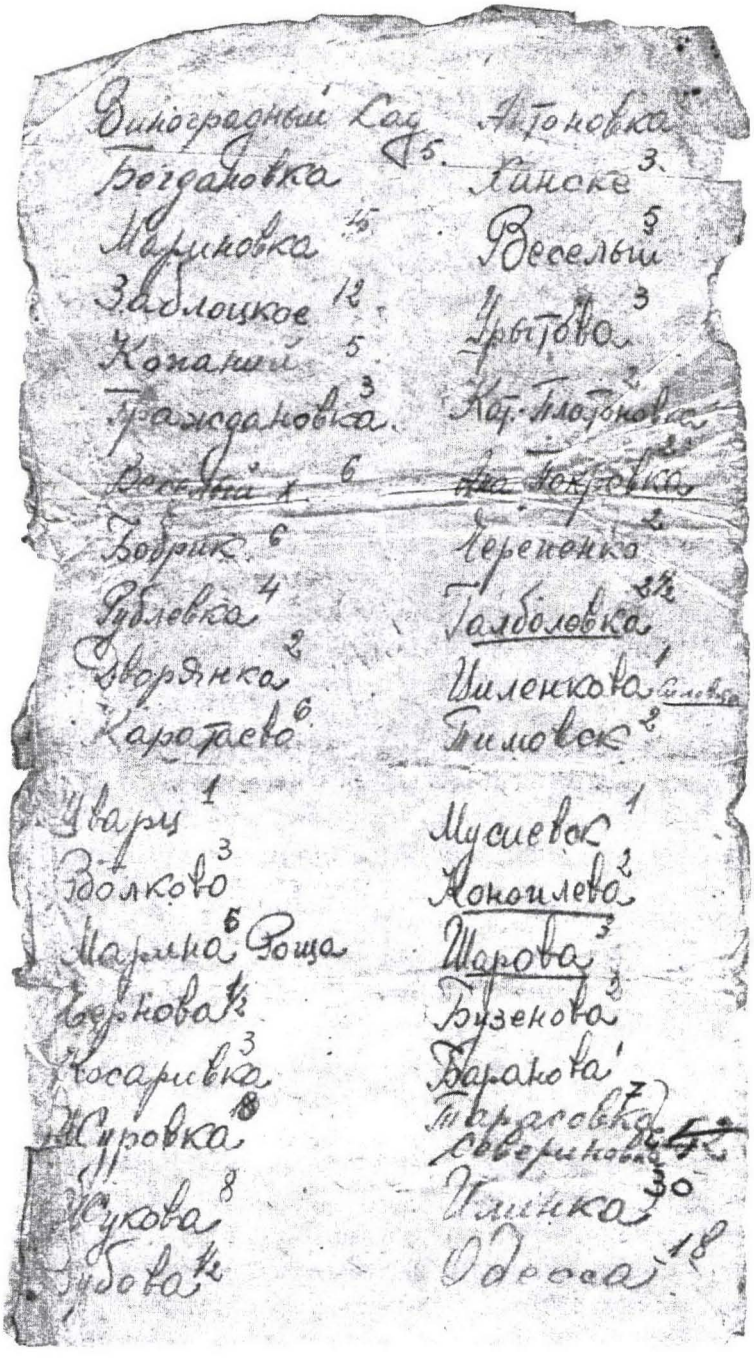
We had already travelled about 120 kilometers and were quite near Odessa, but heavy rains caused us to halt for several days. The road had become so soft it was impossible to walk through the deep mud. The people we were staying with were very hospitable, and advised us to rest up from our long and exhausting journey, to wait out the bad weather with them. They were sincerely sympathetic toward us and understood our desire to return home as soon as possible.

According to our hosts, there was virtually no food left in Odessa; everything had been plundered by the Romanians. So market women went from village to village buying up eggs, butter, sour cream, meat, fat, and any other edibles that could be resold at a large profit. They took this cargo home themselves or got it into the city by hitching rides. For some this was the only way they could feed themselves and their families; for others, it was an opportunity to profit by exploiting the shortages.

In one village (either Severinovka or Il'inka), where we made a halt for one night, the mistress of the house introduced us to a woman who had bought food there and was going to take it to Odessa in the morning. This woman's name was Tanya and she lived in the Slobodka on Gorodskaya Street, #12. She agreed to walk with us; for some reason we were afraid to return by ourselves to this city where we had lived through four months of Romanian terror. We were still gripped by the memory of the horrors we and our relatives had endured there.

We departed with Tanya early in the morning. We walked slowly because our mother was feeling poorly. She was tired from the long journey on foot, but even more so from worry over the fate of our father and over what might await us ahead. Tanya also had difficulty travelling with her heavy cargo. Fira and I helped her, although we ourselves were pretty well exhausted. The closer we got to the city, the more crowds and traffic there were on the road. People came in from the country roads like small streams flowing into a wide river.

At about 6 o'clock in the evening on April 26 we caught sight of



A page from my diary. (Our route from the ghetto at Vinogradnyi Sad to the ghetto at Grazhdanovka, and onward via Vovhovo to Odessa with distances indicated in kilometers.)

Odessa in the distance. We stepped up our pace, and the weight of our cargo seemed to lighten. Our excitement grew and we could feel our hearts pounding. Soon we saw the first houses, then we crossed the canal at Peresyp' and entered the city.

We had hardly gone several city blocks, however, when we were stopped by a loud cry: «Halt! Who goes there? Identify yourselves!» A bright searchlight blinded us and we could see only that one man's hand was holding a gun aimed directly at us. We had hardly expected this kind of reception. We were terribly agitated and tried to guess who they might be. Local bandits? We did not want to believe this. More likely they were a military patrol or militiamen. We did as they ordered and told them who we were and where we had come from. Then two more men stepped out of the darkness with submachine guns and told us to follow them. They took us to what must have been either a commandant's office or a militia station. The one who had told us to halt was a young Kazakh and an obviously ardent fighter. He circled around us several times and looked us over very carefully, trying to ascertain, I suppose, whether we were spies.

These three soon left, probably going back out on patrol, and the duty officer, a young junior lieutenant, began to investigate us. He insistently demanded to see a document that would prove our identity and our story about how we had come from a camp-ghetto. He found our honest tale to be unbelievable.

Accustomed to discipline and perhaps afraid to assume responsibility himself, he went into the next room to telephone someone. We heard him report in a whisper that he had an extraordinary situation. Then, evidently having gained some perspective by what he heard, he returned and treated us much more politely. He congratulated us on our liberation from the ghetto, wished us luck in getting safely to Akkerman, and encouraged us to work successfully for the good of the Fatherland and to hasten the total defeat of fascism. He did, however, ask that we leave him our address in Odessa, our old address in Akkerman, each of our names with year of birth, and the location of our ghetto. We signed and dated the document at the bottom.

When we left there it was late at night and we were surrounded by utter darkness. We reached Tanya's home exhausted and slept very soundly all night after our tribulations.

The spring morning of April 27th was sunny and warm. Tanya gathered various items of food together and went with us toward the center of the city to a market. From there we proceeded by ourselves. We did not know this part of Odessa well and we often asked passersby how to get to Karl Marx Street, which we learned had been renamed Adolf Hitler Street by the loyal Romanians. Each time people kindly showed us the shortest way; we could read on their faces total amazement at the sight of these ragged Jews who looked like they had just returned

from beyond the grave. Long after we passed we could feel their inquiring gazes at our backs.

Finally we turned onto Karl Marx Street, walked to the three-story building at #73, and came to a standstill before the high black iron gates of the wide arched entranceway. We were in a fever of agitation as we paused before opening the gate. Who would we find alive from among our relatives? Would those who had caused us such harm be able to look us in the eyes? Had those few good people who had risked their lives to save ours managed to survive?

We stood still like that before the gates for quite a long time, alternating between fear and joy, holding close to each other and supporting our mother. Suddenly from inside the entranceway a woman opened the gate, saw us, and froze stock still. She looked at us with huge eyes and could not find the words to speak. Then she took hold of her head with both hands, gasped for breath, and gradually began to get her speech back. «Mrs. Udler! Is it you?! And the children? Where is Yakov Aronovich? What's happened to him? Is he alive?» We now recognized her: This was Marusea Rosenberg. She immediately abandoned whatever errand she had to do and returned home, insisting that we come with her.

The first thing that Marusea did was to give us a letter from Aunt Ida, our father's sister, who lived in Moscow. Ida asked who among us was alive, how our health was, congratulated us on our liberation and asked us to send her an answer by telegram. About herself and her daughter Greta she wrote only that they were healthy. The letter had arrived on April 24, but was dated April 14, immediately after Moscow had celebrated the completion of the Odessa operation. Marusea lent us money so we could send Ida a telegram right away, letting her know that we were all alive and that we would write her the details in a letter.

Marusea asked us to stay with her until we had time to officially register. She lived alone in a roomy apartment on the first floor with the windows that faced the street. And she had a bathroom! For the first time during the long years of war we were able to bathe in a real bathroom, with soap and a sponge, taking our time and enjoying the warm water that caressed the body. We felt that we were washing off not only the dust and dirt of the road, but also the mark of inferiority with which we had been branded by the Germans and Romanians. We held ourselves more upright and even seemed to breathe differently. Marusea presented us with clean underwear, which of course hung from our skinny bodies like laundry on hangers. But we were happy. We trimmed our nails, brushed our hair, and regained some semblance of a normal appearance.

We sat at the table and summarized for Marusea what had happened to us after we had left that house. Then she told us about her life and the lives of the neighbors and what had been happening in Odessa under the Romanians.

These were mostly stories of sadness and grief. Of how the fascists had accomplished their goal of ridding Odessa of its Jews. Of how tens of thousands of innocent people were annihilated or exiled to the camps and ghettos of Transnistria. Apartments, courtyards, city blocks, and entire neighborhoods left deserted. Cultural life existed only in the past. Large factories and enterprises closed up and the equipment was taken to Romania. The supply of foodstuffs and consumer goods for the civilian population dwindled to practically nothing. Many people abandoned the city to return to their villages and towns, where it was easier to find food. The population shrank precipitously. Life itself seemed to stop, the city enveloped by dark gloom. Odessa, the southern capital of the country, faded into a provincial city on the outskirts of the impoverished and ruined kingdom of Romania, now ruled by the fascist government of Antonescu.

In order to animate the city, the Romanian occupational authorities facilitated the influx of various kinds of ruthless adventurers seeking to get rich quick. Speculators and other dregs of society rushed in. The Romanians bought up houses being sold cheaply by the Romanian administration and opened up restaurants to cater mostly to the occupants themselves. Local inhabitants did not lag far behind, at leasts those who believed that the new order would last forever. *Bodegas*, beer stands and cheap eating houses became the most common type of business. Prostitution flourished, as young women desperately searched for ways to feed themselves, their children, and their elderly parents. The city was home to many men living for the moment – military men, civil functionaries, speculators. Anything could be bought for marks, and everything was for sale.

* * *

Marusea Rosenberg's own story elicited conflicting emotions in us. This young and attractive Russian girl, a worker in a sewing workshop, had caught the eye of a middle-aged bachelor, an engineer who lived together with his mother. He took Marusea into his apartment and married her, over the objections of his elderly mother. They lived together several years without children in what, thanks to everyone's efforts, remained a peaceful household. By the standards of Odessa at that time, the Rosenbergs lived well.

At the beginning of the war, however, her husband (I don't remember his first name) was mobilized into the army while his mother and wife remained at home. When the Romanians occupied the city and began to drive the Jews into the ghettos, Marusea was unable to save her mother-in-law. The old and sickly woman was thrown out of the apartment by the gendarmes, and Marusea was allowed to remain behind only after she was able to document that she was Russian. She had no news

from either her husband or mother-in-law for a long time. Life became difficult and she had to sell things at the second-hand market in order to feed herself.

One day, Pet'ka, the yardman, came in with some military men, who inspected her large apartment and told her that the best room would now be inhabited by a Romanian *plutonier* – a warrant officer – for several weeks. Time passed and this lodger became her lover. He brought her presents, clothes, and food. The neighbors began to avoid her, condemning her for so quickly forgetting her husband, betraying his mother, and taking their property. Behind her back they called her the Romanian concubine.

But their relationship turned out to be a serious one. When Vasile the plutonier's unit was sent to the Crimean front, he deserted and, with Marusea's help, hid out in various apartments. The military command searched for him for a long time; patrols came to Marusea's apartment day and night, ready to try him for desertion before a military tribunal. Thus the two of them lived for over two years, running and hiding together. Vasile avoided correspondence with his relatives in Romania, learned to speak Russian rather well, and found whatever jobs he could. Sometimes he tried to pass as a Moldavian from the left bank of the Dniester River.

When the Red Army liberated Odessa, Vasile reported to the military authorities, told his story, and offered his services. They attentively heard him out and held him in custody until his case had been decided.

Marusea now found herself in a complicated position. On one hand, she hoped that Rosenberg was alive, would soon get word to her, and return home. In this case she would have to explain why she had not saved his mother and why she had been unfaithful to him with the Romanian; she could not have known how he would react. On the other hand, if the military authorities released Vasile, and she hoped they would because she indeed loved him, her situation would become even more complicated. She could not imagine how it would turn out for her.

* * *

The neighbors from the buildings around the courtyard came to visit us. They tried to help us however they could, although everyone was living in difficult circumstances. They told us that Pet'ka and his mother had left with the Romanians, but no one knew what had become of them.

A Ukrainian family had moved into the apartment we had occupied before our departure for the ghetto. They claimed that the things we had left behind were taken by the Romanians and Germans, and we believed them. But when we went to visit them at their own invitation, we recognized several of our things. Mama did not ask for anything to be returned, as she did not want to cause any complications.

My father's friend, Dmitrii Strelets, with whom he had worked in 1941 at the Jute factory, was sincerely delighted at our return from the ghetto. He and his wife invited Mama, Fira, and me to their home for dinner, and we sat with them for several hours. He asked us to give him Papa's address as soon as we learned of it. Dmitrii also confirmed our conviction that the Romanians and Germans had robbed us, saying they had taken things from him, also. But he had managed to save some items nonetheless, and took out of the wardrobe and the drawer underneath the couch my parents' coats, suits, dresses, a quilt, pillows, towels, and other things. He also gave us some food to get us through this early period.

Several days after our arrival, Fira and Manea Kipens, former neighbors in our apartment building, also returned to Odessa from the ghetto of the village of Karlovka. We learned from them that my mother's younger brother, Mottya Gleizer, his wife Dora, and their children Unah and Fira were all alive. They had decided not to return to Odessa but instead had set off for the northern part of Bessarabia, which had been liberated earlier, apparently heading for Beltz. The Kipens knew nothing of our mother's other relatives.

* * *

On April 29, Fira, dressed as neatly as possible and set off to the State Bank, hoping to find work. To her surprise and joy she was met by the manager and the chief accountant from the Akkerman branch of the State Bank, with whom she had worked in 1940-41. They had returned from Central Asia, where they had been sent with all of the bank's documents. They were waiting for the liberation of Akkerman in order to resume their work there. They accepted Fira's application, gave her a full-time position effective May 1, and invited her to report for work immediately after the holiday. We were grateful and happy about this turn of events. Fira would receive ration cards for food, a salary, and an apartment upon her return to Akkerman.

* * *

On the eve of the May Day celebrations, Mama, Fira, and I went out for a walk. We wanted to take a good look at Odessa now that it had been liberated. We hoped to meet someone we knew who could tell us about our relatives.

For the first time in many years we walked the streets of the city without fear and without shrinking from anyone. The spring was beautiful; the lilacs, white and blue, were in bloom, grafted and lush. We were intoxicated by their scent. On some of the streets, the trees were also in bloom and the bushes were turning green. The sun warmed us as

we breathed in the fascinating smell of the sea. Women with children were relaxing on benches in lively conversation and looking with unconcealed curiosity at each passerby. It seemed as if everyone was waiting for someone or wishing to ask something.

Many of the people took a special interest in Jews. During the second half of April, perhaps several hundred of them, a mere remnant of the camp-ghettos of eastern and southern Transnistria, had returned to the city. On Primorskii Boulevard we met several Jews who, like we ourselves, had survived the ghettos. We asked each other about our families, told our own stories, and expressed the hope that, God willing, someone from among our relatives would return home and that we would be reunited with someone dear and beloved. With heartfelt pain we recalled relatives, friends, and acquaintances who we already knew would never return home, who had perished in terrible torment here in Odessa, in Slobodka, in Dal'nik, in Bogdanovka, Akhmechetka, and in many other places.

Among the first to return from the evacuation were the Breitburgs, Ilimishes, and two other neighboring families. They told us that the Grabovetsky and Kalinsky families, our distant relatives who had sheltered us in 1941, were alive and were preparing to return to Odessa. Their sons and grandson Kolea, Zhora, and Grisha were at the front. They had been wounded, had recovered, and continued to fight.

* * *

The return of the Jews from the ghettos and from evacuation was not welcomed by those who had moved into Jewish apartments and taken possession of their property. These people had grown accustomed to the goods of others, and those who had cooperated with the Romanians and Germans in the betrayal, robbery, and even murder of Jews in Odessa now feared serious repercussions. They had no doubt that the surviving relatives would try to avenge their elderly parents, wives, or children. As a result, many of the returning Jews were greeted with hostility and barred from entering their own apartments, forced instead to find shelter in abandoned cellars and to petition the authorities to intervene. Nothing was not yet under control; everything was tense and unsure, and the front remained very close. The municipal Soviet organizations were faced with many tasks, and everything deemed nonessential was put off until later. The sufferings of the Jews, even in these new circumstances, were deemed nonessential.[2]

Notes

[1] Vasilevskii, *Delo*, 404-08; Dallin, *Odessa*, 381; *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia*, 18:306; *România*, 501-02; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 238-43.

[2] Dallin, *Odessa*, 385.

Chapter 10: **THE DIMENSIONS OF THE TRAGEDY**

The tragedy of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria cannot be compared with the brutality inflicted on the Jews in the provinces of Romania itself[1]. The Romanian fascists were every bit as brutal as the German ones.[2]

Over the course of several months, from June 22, 1941, until February 1942, Jews were mercilessly slaughtered or rounded up and sent to meet their painful deaths in the camp-ghettos of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria. Relentless murders were carried out methodically, day after day in every village and in every city, without an ounce of compassion even for nursing babies, pregnant women, or the feeble elderly.[3]

Alexandru Şafran bears the following witness: «... on the road to Transnistria many of the deported died from exhaustion or were killed with blows from the soldiers' bayonets. Finally, upon arrival, those who were still alive were doomed to perish from hunger or from the lack of any medical care. They had neither clothes, nor food, nor medicines.»[4]

Over several pages of his novel *Scrinul negru*, George Călinescu communicates with touching realism the tragedy of the Jews in the city of Beltz, in Bessarabia. The Romanians and Germans herded honored community leaders with other men, women, and children into cellars and improvised camps enclosed with barbed wire. They starved these people, denied them drinking water, drove them under escort over great distances, and killed those who might fall behind, shooting them and tossing the corpses into pits dug along the sides of the highway. The local residents bargained with the centurions to purchase living human beings. Once a bargain was struck, they would immediately kill the person and strip the clothes off the body. They raped girls as young as thirteen or fourteen as well as younger women. The Romanians and Germans were ceaselessly inventive in their methods of tormenting these unfortunate people.

Călinescu also writes of a Romanian medical officer, a reservist named Hergot, who bore all of these horrors along with the Jews. By coincidence he was living in the home of a rabbi with the similar-sounding name of Doctor Diagot. He perished from the arrogance and

irresponsibility of the military men who came to arrest the Jew whose name sounded like his.[5]

No one has taken on the task of enumerating all those who died of starvation, exposure, disease, shooting, hanging, burning, or drowning during the Romanian Holocaust. There are good reasons for this. For one, precise figures are elusive. The executioners themselves saw no need to document their brutality, savagery, vulgarity, and completely vile behavior.[6] In addition, the Jewish populations were fragmented and moved many times to different locations, with no effort by their tormentors and no ability of their own to keep records.

Nonetheless, the task of accounting for the number of deaths must be attempted, despite the uneven quality of the records that are available. We are fortunate to have population censuses from various years, the testimonies of witnesses and defendants at trials, and a diversity of approximate figures from investigators. Even the executioners themselves, perhaps to show off to their superiors or to justify themselves to judges, occasionally wrote dispatches, short communications, or reports. Thus is it feasible to offer a reasonable, though inexact, picture of the dimensions of the tragedy of the Jews in Romania. This picture will be sketched from several different points of view.

How many Jews lived in Greater Romania in the pre-War years, and how many Jews remained in 1940 in the USSR, Hungary, and Bulgaria?

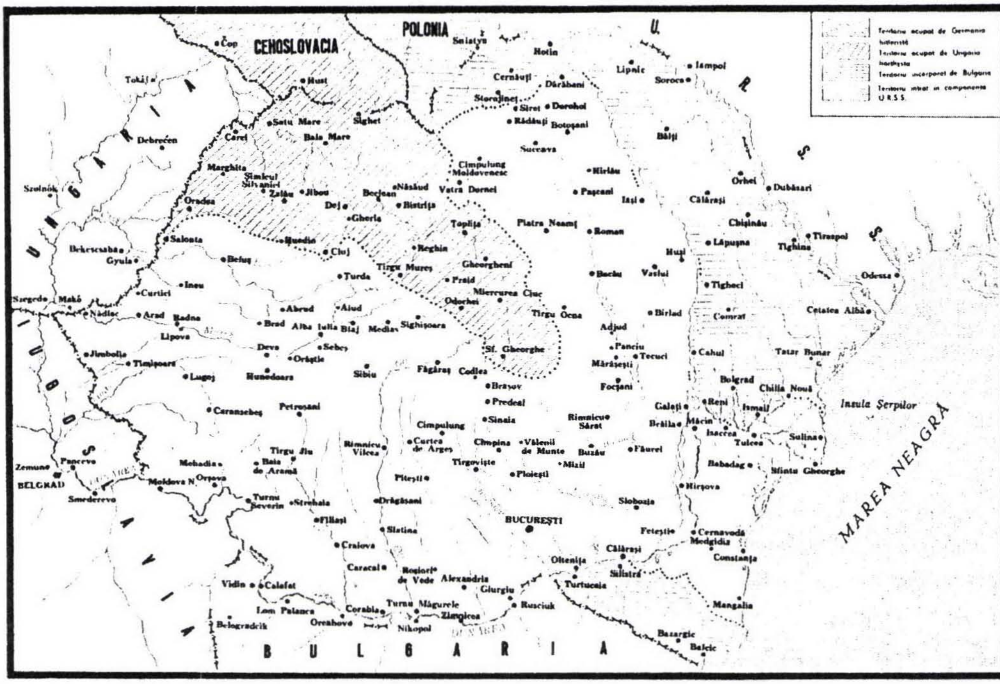
The census of 31 December 1930 indicates that there were 756,930 Jews in Romania, including 206,958 in Bessarabia and 91,101 in Bukovina.[7] According to the census of 31 December 1939, there were 734,901 Jews in Romania. In 1940, when Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the Hertsa district passed to the Soviet Union, there were 278,943 Jews there. When Hungary, in accord with the Viennese dictate of 30 August 1940, occupied the northern part of Crishana, Maramuresh, and north-western Transylvania, 148,273 Jews lived in that territory. In Cadrilater, which was surrendered to Bulgaria in September 1940, there were 846 Jews. In all, Romania lost 427,962 Jews.[8]

In a work by Ionel Calafeteanu and Aurică Simion published in 1983 we find somewhat different figures. In 1930 there were 728,115 Jews in Romania, of which 278,639 were taken into the population of the USSR, 158,489 into Hungary, and 830 into Bulgaria. It follows that the number of Jews shrank by 437,958.[9] This results in a discrepancy of approximately 10,000 persons.

Doctor Moses Rosen writes in his memoirs, edited in 1990, that there were about 850,000 Jews in Romania on the eve of the war.[10]

The US ambassador to Romania from 1981 to 1985, David Funderburk, wrote that before the beginning of the Second World War there were about one million Jews living in Greater Romania.

ROMÂNIA ÎN SEPTEMBRIE 1940



Map taken from *România*, pl 11.

In the *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust*, published in 1996 by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, it is reported that in 1933 there were about 980,000 Jews living in Romania.

At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 13 January 1938, King Carol II declared that «the Jewish problem is Romania's most important problem» and claimed that after the First World War, «Galician and Russian Jews infiltrated the country through illegal means.» Some estimate this number to be about 800,000. «However,» continued the King, «their numbers are 250,000 at the most.» In the documentary report of the Central Statistical Institute, signed by Anton Golopentsia, it is indicated that the number of Jews arriving illegally in the country between 1931 and 1939 did not exceed a few tens of thousands.[11]

In an interview for the *Journal de Genève* on 18 January 1938, Istrate Micescu, the Romanian foreign minister, asserted that there had been three waves of refugees: from Russia due to the Bolsheviks, from Hungary after the suppression of the revolution of Bela Kun, and from Germany after the establishment of Hitler's regime. Micescu made a sharp distinction between native Jews, citizens of Romania, and recent immigrants who were denied all rights.[12]

In connection with a review of citizenship, the forensic statistics of the Ministry of Justice established that there had been 208,217

applications for reconsideration of citizenship status for 962,170 Jews. In this way, over the course of seven years from 29 December 1930 to February 1938, the size of the Jewish population grew by more than 200,000 persons. Such a significant growth in the Jewish population can only be explained by the fact that many Jews entered the country through deception.[13]

How many Jews from Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the Old Kingdom of Romania were deported to Transnistria, and how many of those were killed before deportation?

In a document dated in 1941, the gendarme inspectorate of the city of Kishinev reported to the Romanian Council of Ministers that 55,867 and 45,538 Jews had been evicted to Transnistria from Bessarabia and from Northern Bukovina, respectively–101,405 persons in all. An additional number, approximately 25,000, had been shot or died of disease, hunger, and other causes.[14]

The report of General C.Z. Vasiliu, Minister of Internal Affairs, indicates that Transnistria had received 55,867 Jews deported from Bessarabia, 43,798 from Northern Bukovina, and 10,368 from Dorohoi County, in all 110,033 persons.

Official data from the Inspectorate of the Romanian Gendarmerie of Transnistria reveals that, between October and December of 1941, 118,847 Bessarabian and Bukovina Jews were expelled to the east across the Dniester: 55,913 via Ataki–Mogilev-Podol'skiy, 35,276 via Kosautsy–Yampol', 24,570 via Rezina–Rybnitsa, 872 via Tighina (Bendery)–Tiraspol', and 2,216 via Olaneshty–Yaska.[15]

In the summer of 1942 another 4,200 Jews were deported from Chernovtsy and 450 from Dorohoi County.

In September and October of 1942 yet another 2,530 Jews were deported in several groups from various regions of Romania.[16] Thus, a total of 146,555 Jews were exiled to Transnistria.

There were about 100 souls left in all of Bessarabia, about 14,000 in the city of Chernovtsy, and just over 2,000 in the city of Dorohoi.[17] The remaining Jews, about 125,000 of them, were killed in the villages and cities of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Dorohoi County or on the road to Transnistria.

How many Jews lived in Transnistria, including Odessa, in the pre-War years?

Litani notes that, according to census figures, 153,194 Jews lived in Odessa in 1926. In 1941, the number of Jews in this city had reached 180,000, i.e., approximately one-third of the population of Odessa. In other cities and villages situated between the Dniester and the Bug were another 170,000 Jews in 1941. Thus, on the eve of the war

there were 350,000 Jews in Transnistria.' It can be assumed that there were around 300,000 Jews still there when the German and Romanian forces invaded Transnistria, of whom about 90,000-100,000 lived in Odessa. Many Jews had already evacuated, and a significant number of them were mobilized.[18]

Iosif Schechtman, Avigdor Shachan, and Al. Dallin claim that before the war 300,000 Jews were living in the territory that the Romanians called Transnistria. The majority of them managed to evacuate before the fascist occupation of the region. The Germans and Romanians found 100,000–120,000 Jews there.[19]

Julius Fisher, author of the book *Transnistria: The Forgotten Cemetery*, supposes that at the beginning of the war approximately 300,000 Jews lived in Transnistria. A part of this group managed to evacuate to the interior of the Soviet Union, and another part was mobilized and fought in the ranks of the Red Army. Of the approximately 132,000 remaining local Ukrainian Jews, 92,000 of them were eliminated by the Romanians, and 40,000 by the Germans.[20]

How many Jews from Transnistria, including Odessa, and refugees from Bessarabia and Bukovina, were killed by the Romanians and Germans between 1941 and 1942?

It is impossible to establish an exact number of Jews annihilated in Transnistria for yet another reason: the murders, both of masses and of individuals, were carried out by various services and military formations which, for obvious reasons, left no records. By order of Ion Antonescu, Romanian formations called *Eşalon* (*Eşalon special*, *Eşalon operativ*) and *Echipă* were specially created according to German models, under the direction of Eugen Cristescu. One of the *Eşalon* subdivisions, under the command of Colonel Ion Lissievici, together with Einsatzkommando 11B, carried out a massive slaughter of Jews in Odessa. Other units also engaged in the murder of Jews and the plundering of their property: the officers and soldiers of the Third Romanian Army, under the command of General Petre Dumitrescu, and the Fourth Romanian Army, under the command of General Nicolae Ciupercă, both of which penetrated into Bukovina and Bessarabia; Romanian gendarmes, headed first by General Emil Broşteanu, then by General M. Iliescu; the German Sonderkommando 10B and Einsatzkommando 11A, which belonged to Einsatzgruppe D under the command of Gruppenführer Major-General Otto Ohlendorf; the Romanian administration at the county, district, and village levels, which carried out the orders of Marshal Antonescu and the governor of Transnistria, Professor George Alexianu; members of the Sonderkommando Russland, under the command of SS Brigadenführer Horst Hoffmeyer, which consisted mainly of German colonists of Transnistria (Volksdeutsche),



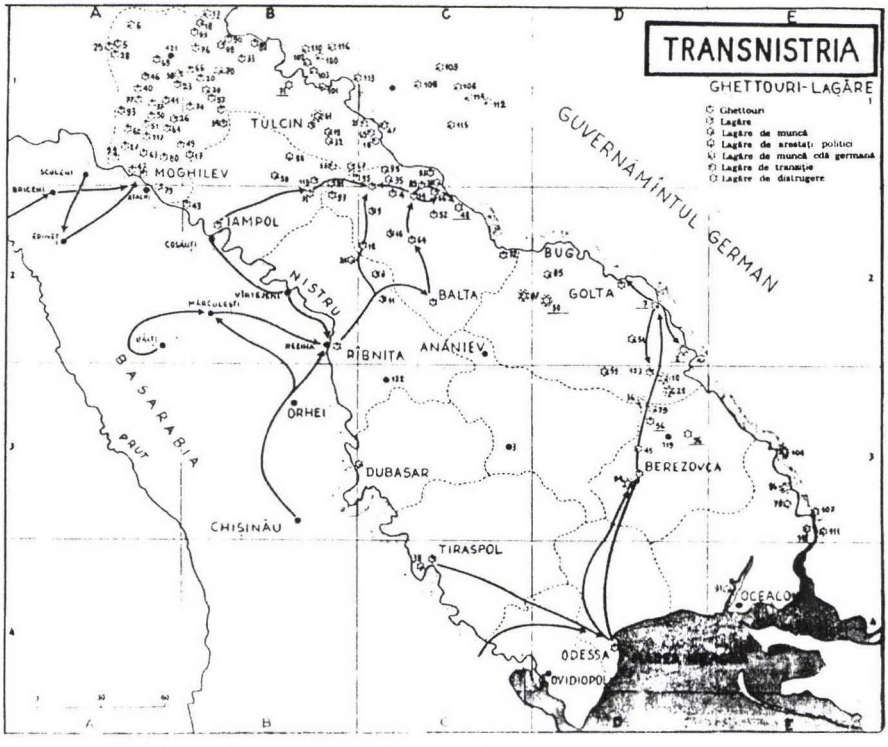
Map taken from *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust,* IV:646.

Romanian and Ukrainian *polizeis*; and numerous civilians (Romanians, Ukrainians, and Germans) who were peasants, railroadmen, office workers, and others.[21]

At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 16 December 1941, Ion Antonescu asked how many Jews were still in Odessa. The Governor of Transnistria, G. Alexianu, answered that there were about 100,000.[22]

These numbers, produced by highly placed officials, indicate that by 16 October 1941, when the fascists seized Odessa, there were more than 190,000 Jews in the city (natives of Odessa, refugees from the cities and towns from Transnistria, and from Bessarabia).

According to Saul Borovoi, there were no fewer than 120,000 Jews in Odessa upon its occupation on 16 October 1941. A memorandum by I.M. Leenshon, a lawyer who was in Odessa in May 1944, indicates that the number of annihilated Jews in Odessa came to about 100,000. The *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* reports that 99,000 Jews were killed in Odessa.[23] No one has yet calculated how many Jews were in Tiraspol', Dubossary, Rybnitsa, Kamenka, Kotovsk, Anan'yev, Balta, Golta, Krivoye Ozero, Mogilev-Podol'skiy, Yampol', Zhmerinka, and other cities and towns of Transnistria when the occupiers arrived; nor do the documents



Map taken from Litani, *Transnistria,* 191.

of the Romanian administration contain data regarding local Jews. One can safely assume that they numbered approximately 200,000.

To this figure we should add those Jews who arrived as refugees from Bessarabia and Bukovina, having managed to evacuate themselves before the arrival of German and Romanian units in the above-mentioned regions, but who were then overtaken by those units in Transnistria. Their numbers, however, cannot be calculated.

The head of the Secret Information Service of the German Army in Romania, Colonel Frank Roedler, reported on 4 November 1941 that on the morning of 23 October, after an explosion in the building of the Romanian military commandant's headquarters, 19,000 Jews were shot near the port, on a square enclosed by a wooden fence. On 24 October an escort of 40,000 Jews arrived in Dal'nik, where all were executed.[24] Roedler writes of the extermination of 59,000 Jews in two locations. But some 5,600 additional persons were shot or hanged on the streets and squares of Odessa on the bloody morning of 23 October. On Lüstdorf Road, approximately 28,000 Jews chased out of Odessa were herded into former artillery ammunition depots and burned alive.

In summary, mass annihilation of the Jews took place in Odessa

(approx. 92,000), Bogdanovka (approx. 55,000), Domanyovka (approx. 18,000), Berezovka (approx. 20,000), Chyorna (approx. 15,000), Tiraspol' (10,000), Bershad' (approx. 20,000), Akhmechetka (approx. 8,000), Dubossary (approx. 6,000), Mogilev (5,000), Shargorod (more than 5,000), and other places.[25]

Official Soviet data indicate that the total number of Jews tortured and killed in the camp-ghettos of Domanyovka district alone comes to 116,000 persons.[26]

Where were the ghettos and work camps established in Transnistria?

Approximately 140,000 Jews were sent to Transnistria in the autumn of 1941 and were settled in 140 localities in 9 counties of the region.

The list of ghettos and camps of Transnistria compiled by Dora Litani, reproduced below, is the most complete of those I have examined. There are, however, 100 settled localities that are missing from Litani's list but mentioned in the following documents: the report of the Central Jewish Organization of Romania, dated 26 December 1942 regarding the rendering of collective aid to the Jews of Transnistria; enclosure #1 to letter #453 addressed to the Commission for the Provision of Aid and dated 22 March 1943; the informational summary of the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie of Transnistria, dated 1 September 1943; and the brochure «People are Still People: The Witness of the Prisoners of Fascist Camp-Ghettos.»[27]

How many Jews of Northern Transylvania were deported by Hungarians and Germans to Auschwitz or killed on the spot?

In Northern Transylvania, under Horthyst occupation, 16 ghettos and nine centers of Jewish population were created. In May and June 1944, 151,180 Jews were deported to Auschwitz. In September 1945, only 15,769 Jews returned to Transylvania (9.4%). Many Jews were murdered in Satu Mare, Sărmaș, and other places.[29]

How many Jews were annihilated in Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, Transnistria, the Old Kingdom of Romania, and Northern Transylvania, and how many survived until 1944-45?

According to the census of 1 September 1943, only 50,741 Jews remained alive in those regions.[30] It follows that another 60,000 Jews had been annihilated from among the deported in a mere two years.

It is essential to remember that the figures cited above do not include the Jews who were in Odessa during the days of its occupation by the Romanians and Germans, nor do they include local Jews who were living in the cities and villages of Transnistria and who had not managed to evacuate to the interior of the country.

The following table supplements the list given by Litani with additional localities[28] of ghettos or work camps.

Mogilev County	Trostianchik	Kantakuzino
Bandishovka	Vasilovka	Ksaverovka
Bronitsa		Liubashyovka
Byrshauts'	Zhugastru County	Novopavlovka
Gordi	Chernivtsi	Rom. Balka
Gromivka	Dzigovka	Vinogradnyi Sad
Ivankivits	Ol'shanka	Vradievka
Klinovka	Tamashpol'	
Koniva	Zhabokrichi	Dubossary County
Kosarinets'		Koshnitsa
Kosharintsi	Balta County	
Kotmazov	Berezka	Anan'yev County
Kozintsy	Berlovka	Chernova
Krasna	Elanets	Ferma Filip
Martinovka	Ferma Dubina	Ferma R. Mariya
Mateykovska	Florino	Hotsului
Matki	Katashin	Petroverovka
Milnovka	Kosharinets	Saraevo
Nashikovka	Krushanovka	Troitska
Naskauts'	Malaya Kirievka	
Nazarnitsa	Malaya Strativka	Tiraspol' County
Nemerchi	Mihaylovka	Razdel'naya
Obuhov	Novaya Obodovka	Sloboziya
Olchedaevo	Ozifka	Tsebrika
Ploska	Peschana	
Politanki	Pilipanovka	Berezovka County
Primishanitsa	Potashna	Balaychuk
Romanki	Romanovka	Berezovka
Rudanski	Staraya Tsybulevka	Ferma Budyonnyi
Sadova	Stratievka	Guliovka
Suhaki	Sumovka	Guliovka-Raznopol
Tarasovka	Tarkanovka	Kovalevka
Tropova	Tartak	Stantsiya Istribinovo
Volodievtsi	Velikaya Kirievka	
Yuzina	Verebka	Ovidiopol' County
	Voytovka	Belyayevka
Tul'chin County	Zabogrishka	
Anchipolovka		Ochakov County
Belousovka	Golta County	Borislav
Bratslav	Grazhdanovka	
Rahnia	Gvozdievka	

LISTA GHETTOURILOR ŞI A LAGĂRELOR ÎN TRANSNISTSRIA

B 2 Alexandrovka 1
C 2 Ananiev —
D 2 Akmicetka 2
C 3 Arva 3
C 2 Balanovka 4
C 2 Balta —
A 1 Balki 5
A 1 Bar 6
D 2 Bogdanovka 7
C 2 Budi 8
C 2 Bondarovka 9
D 3 Bucov 10
C 2 Birzula 11
C 2 Britovka 12
B 1 Brailov 13
C 2 Berşad 14
Briceni
C 1 Cetvartinovka 15
C 2 Cicelnic 16
B 1 Cernevţ 17
B 1 Cazaclovka 18
B 1 Capustiani 19
B 1 Capusterna 20
C 1 Cariera de piatră 21
D 3 Carlovka 22
A 1 Cariskov 23
B 2 Codima 24
A 1 Cuzminţ 25
A 1 Conotcăuţi 26
A 1 Cucavka 27
A 1 Chianovka 28
B 1 Clocotma 29
D 2 Crivoje-Ozero 30
B 2 Crijopol 31
B 1 Chirnasovka 32
B 1 Crasnoje 33
C 3 Ciorna 122
C 3 Dubasari —
B 1 Djurin 34
C 1 Dimidovka 35
B 1 Derebcin 120
D 3 Domanovka 123
D 3 Frunză 36
D 2 Golta —
A 1 Gorai 37
A 1 Grabivţ 38
C 4 Grosolovo 39
A 1 Hrinovka 40
A 1 Halcinţi 121
A 1 Ivăşcăuta 41
A 1 Israilovka 42
B 2 Iampol —
B 2 Iaroga 43
A 1 Iarişev 44
D 3 Kolosovka 45
A 1 Kopaigorod 46
C 1 Ladijn 47
C 2 Lohova 48
A 1 Lozova 49
A 1 Lucineţ 50
A 1 Lucinik 51
C 2 Malo-Kiriuka 52
C 1 Manikovka 53
D 2 Marinovka 54
A 1 Moghilev —
B 1 Moloknia 55
D 3 Mostovoi 56
E 3 Varvarovka 118
B 2 Zabokirit 97
B 1 Murafa 57
B 1 Mişcovka 58
D 3 Nicolaevka 59
A 1 Nimraţ 60
B 1 Nesterovca 61
B 2 Obodovka 62
D 4 Odessa —
A 1 Ozarineţ 63
C 2 Olgopol 64
C 1 Olianiţa 65
C 2 Ostia 66
B 1 Pavlovka 67
B 1 Pasiuka 68
A 1 Popivitz 69
B 1 Pankovka 70
B 1 Peciora 71
B 2 Ribniţa —
D 3 Raschstadt 119
C 2 Savrani 72
C 1 Sumilova 73
B 1 Sargorod 74
D 3 Suha-Balka 75
B 1 Stanislovcek 76
A 1 Stefanca 77
E 3 Slivina 78
A ½ Skazineţ 79
A 1 Slidi 80
B 1 Tatarovka 81
B 1 Tulcin —
B 1 Tivrin 82
C 4 Tiraspol —
C 1 Trostineţ 83
B 1 Verhovka 95
A 1 Tropava 84
B 1 Zatisia 98
B 1 Zemrinka 99
B 1 Tibulovka 119
C 2 Vazdovka 87
B 1 Vapniarka 88
C 1 Vitovka 89
B 1 Voroşilovka 90
E 4 Vigoda 91
Vindueni 92
A 1 Vinozi 93
D 3 Vladislavka 94
B C 1 Verhovka 95
D 3 Vaslinovo 96
A 1 Vendiceni 117

Lagăre germane dincolo de Bug

B 1 Bratlav 101
B 1 Bogokov 100
B 1 Berezovka 102
B 1 Ciucov 103
E 3 Corievka 104
C 1 Gaisin 105
C 1 Ivangorod 106
E 3 Mateevka 107
C 1 Mihailovka 108
C 1 Narajevka 109
B 1 Nimierov 110
E 3 Nicolaev 111
C 1 Ordovka 112
C 1 Seminka 113
C 1 Talalaievka 114
C 1 Taplic 115
B 1 Zarodniţa 116

Of the 140,154 Jews deported from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Romania proper, 87,757 were killed, 68,957 by the Romanians and 18,800 by the Germans. Thus Fisher concludes that Transnistria became a cemetery for 219,757 Jews,[31] of whom the Romanians killed 160,957 of them.

In the preface to Litani's book *Transnistria*, the well-known publicist Itshak Artsi (Itsku Herzig) writes that over a quarter million Jews perished–170,000 local Jews and more than 87,000 deportees from various regions of Romania's prewar territory.[32]

The Macmillan Atlas of the Holocaust carries maps showing the number of Jews living in the cities and towns of Bessarabia and Bukovina on the eve of the war. They omit hundreds of villages, however, that had sizeable Jewish populations. According to the information of M. Gilbert, those killed include 200,000 Bessarabian Jews, 124,632 Bukovina Jews, 105,000 Jews from Northern Transylvania, and 40,000 Jews from the provinces of Romania proper. This brings the total number of Jews annihilated to 469,632. Gilbert also indicates that more than 148,000 Bessarabian Jews and 124,632 Bukovina Jews perished in the camps and ghettos of Transnistria.[33]

The Chronological Atlas of World War Two also indicates that the total number of Jews killed within Greater Romania was 470,000 persons.[34]

It is estimated that a total of only 600 Odessa Jews survived in various ghettos of Transnistria until their liberation, i.e., 1% of the Jews who went to the ghettos.[35] It should be noted here that according to Letter #453 of 22 March 1943, addressed to the Commission of the Jewish Center of Romania, there were 54-60 people from Chernovtsy, Dorohoi, Bucharest, and Roman in the Odessa ghetto in January 1943,[36] which is to say not one Jew from Odessa itself. The ghetto was located at #6 Adolf Hitler Street and contained sewing, shoemaking, joinery, and tinmaking workshops and a hairdresser's shop.

Wilhelm Filderman, the head of the Federation of United Jewish Communities of Romania, wrote in a statement to the government of Romania that of 190,000–200,000 Jews deported to Transnistria, 122,000 perished within a two-year period. This number does not include Jews who were natives of Transnistria and residents of the city of Odessa who were eliminated by the Nazis. During his testimony at a session of the People's Tribunal on 10 May 1946, Filderman declared that 150,000 people had died as a result of Antonescu's rule, and perhaps an even greater number of Bukovina and Bessarabian Jews.

Mișu Benvenisti, the head of the Zionist Executive Committee of Romania in 1941–1943 and head of Ezra, the committee for underground aid to the Jews of Transnistria, claimed before the People's Tribunal that 270,000 Jews had been killed in Transnistria.[37]

The Jewish Aid Commission attached to the Bucharest community

reports that there were 57,214 Jewish deportees from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Romania and around 15,000 Ukrainian Jews alive in Transnistria in March 1943.

The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie of Transnistria, at the request of the Romanian Ministry of Interior Affairs, conducted a census of all surviving Jews. On 1 September 1943, there were 50,741 still alive, of whom 13,980 were Bessarabian Jews and 36,761 Bukovina Jews.

According to Litani's calculations, survivors in Transnistria numbered 58,940 persons deported from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Romania.

Approximately the same figure was reached by the head of the International Red Cross, Charles Kolb, who found that in December 1943 there were 57,378 Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Romania, and around 15,000 Ukrainian Jews.

Litani concludes from her research that in Transnistria – the «Auschwitz» of Bessarabian, Bukovina, Transnistrian, and Romanian Jews – 257,833 persons were killed. This included 87,833 who were mostly from Bessarabia and Bukovina and 170,000-175,000 from Transnistria.[38]

In 1991, Romania marked with great sadness the 50th anniversary of the Jewish tragedy of this region. Many articles and documents were published, authored by both Romanians and Jews. Anti-Semitism was categorically condemned as an extreme form of racial chauvinism. Several articles attempted to present a sum total of Holocaust victims.

The article «50 Years from the Martyrdom of the Jews from Romania» presents the following data: «Dorohoi: 1 July 1940, 70 persons; Bucharest: 21-23 January 1941, 130; Jassy: 29 June-3 July 1941, 12,000; Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina: July-August 1941, 170,000; Transnistria: 1941-1944, 80,000; Northern Transylvania: April-June 1944: 130,000.»[39]

We find these same figures in the article «Discrimination, Racism, and Anti-Semitism» by Nicolai, Metropolitan of Banat. In all, 392,200 persons, whose only crime was that they were Jews, were killed.[40]

These totals do not include the 170,000-175,000 Ukrainian Jews who were burned alive, hanged, shot, drowned, or left to die of starvation, exposure, disease, and the brutality and savagery of the Romanian and German monsters. *In all, more than 560,000 innocent human lives are on their consciences.*[41]

* * *

Many researchers – rabbis, writers, historians, diplomats – have tried to establish the number of Jewish victims in Transnistria, Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dorohoi County in 1941–1944. Best documented are the studies and collections of gendarme and military reports and dispatches, the testimonies of witnesses and defendants at the trials of war criminals, collections of government decrees, and letters such as

appeals from the Jewish Center of Romania. These include works prepared and published by Jean Ancel,[42] Matatias Carp,[43] Marius Mircu,[44] Ion Calafeteanu and Maria Covaci,[45] and others.

Many other works are worthy of study, including books by Moses Rosen,[46] Alexandru Şafran,[47] Eduard Mezincescu,[48] Mihai Pelin,[49] Radu Lecca,[50] and Israel Marcus,[51] as well as numerous articles by C. Nistorescu, P. Cernovodeanu, Gelu Voican Voiculescu, Itshak Artsi, I. Govrin, A. Pippidi, I. Schechtman, Claus Stephani, V. Grunea, and others. These articles have appeared in recent years in various Romanian periodicals such as *Revista cultului mozaic* (Bucharest), *Românul liber* (Bucharest), and *Revista istorică* (Bucharest).

* * *

The significant differences in calculating how many Jews were killed in the period 1940–1944, when Romania was under the totalitarian government of Ion Antonescu, can be explained by the various ways in which the question was posed. Some answered the question of how many Jews with Romanian citizenship perished in the given period, while others gave answers *regarding the number of Jews living in Romania, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria, and Northern Transylvania who were killed by the fascists.* Of course the second formulation is more correct, inasmuch as it gives a full picture of the crimes committed by the legionnaires, the Romanian Army, the gendarmes, and the administration, as well as by the Germans and Hungarians belonging to a single Nazi bloc.

According to Shachan's calculations, there were approximately 800,000 Jews in Romania at the start of the Second World War, which included about 300,000 in Bessarabia and 110,000 in Bukovina. After the liberation of Transnistria there were only approximately 14,000 Bessarabian Jews and 30,000 from Bukovina remaining alive. From the 15,230 Jews deported to Transnistria from Dorohoi County less then 5,000 returned. Approximately 20,000 Jews from the Old Kingdom were exterminated. The total number of victims comes to about 390,000. Shachan adds to this figure another 310,000 local Transnistrian Jews and concludes that the total number of Jews killed by the Romanians and Germans in these territories amounts to about 700,000 persons. Even this, however, does not encompass the total number of Jewish victims throughout what was Greater Romania. More than 151,000 Jews in Northern Transylvania were deported by the Hungarians, and only about 16,000 of them returned from Auschwitz.[52]

Less trustworthy are the figures cited by Radu Ioanid regarding the number of Jews of Romania, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria, and Northern Transylvania killed by the fascists between 1940 and 1944.

Ioanid's numbers are clearly too low, as indicated by the data provided by other studies and the works cited above.

Ioanid writes that before the commencement of hostilities against the Soviet Union, subunits of the Romanian Army and members of the Iron Guard carried out several pogroms: 50 victims in Dorohoi on 1 June 1940, 400 victims in Galaţi on 30 June 1940, and 120 in Bucharest on 24 January 1941. In the Jassy pogrom of 29-30 June 1941, 8,000-12,000 Jews perished.[53]

Jean Ancel claims that around 200 people were killed during the Dorohoi pogrom. One hundred thirty Jews lost their lives in Bucharest in the slaughter organized by the Iron Guardsmen. Many Jews were killed by legionnaires during uprisings in other localities of Romania.[54] There were 14,850 Jews killed in the days of the Jassy pogrom. More than 4,000 were deported from the city in two «death trains», only about 1,600 of whom survived.[55]

Ioanid believes that, of 300,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, about 100,000 were exiled to Siberia by the Soviets, mobilized into the Red Army, or evacuated themselves to the interior of the country after the outbreak of the war. Thus, there were only about 200,000 Jews left in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina after 22 June 1941.[56]

Ioanid's account contains a series of inaccuracies. The number of Jews exiled to Siberia in 1940–1941 was no more than 6,000–7,000.[57] The total number of deportees comes to 300,000 persons, including Moldavians, Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, Armenians, Greeks, and others.[58] During the early days of the war, residents of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were, as a rule, not conscripted into the Red Army regardless of their nationality. Even those several thousand who were hastily mobilized were soon discharged. They were not considered trustworthy. Fearing the Germans and Romanians, many Jews moved east but were forced to return before they could cross the Dniester. Others were overtaken by the fascists in their native localities, and still others were caught in Odessa and other cities and towns between the Dniester and the Bug.[59] Few were able to make their way to Central Asia or to Siberia. The assertion that one out of every three Jews left Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in the course of a single year is unlikely.

Nor does Ioanid take into account the fact that several tens of thousands of Jews came to Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from the time of the ultimatum of 26 June to the middle of December 1940.[60] Over the course of one year (June 1940 – June 1941) the Soviets sent into the liberated territories many thousands of its own citizens, including Jews, in order to organize systems of production, administration, medical care, and education.

This all shows that, contrary to Ioanid's supposition,[61] there were

significantly more than 200,000 Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina at the start of the Second World War. Romanian and German state documents spelling out the numbers of Jews killed and deported from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina also bear witness to this.

Ioanid indicates that tens of thousands of Jews were executed by Romanian gendarmes and by Romanian and German military forces in the first months of the war. Citing Raul Hilberg, he writes that about 45,000 Jews were killed or died «of natural causes» in the transit camps before their deportation. There were 126,000 Jews deported to Transnistria from the transit camps of Secureni (Sekuryany), Edineți (Yedyntsy), Vertujeni (Vertuzhany), and Mărculești (Markuleshty) as well as from the ghettos of Chernovtsy, Kishinev, and others. He writes that not a single Jew remained alive in all of Bessarabia, and in Northern Bukovina 16,000 Jews remained in the ghetto in Chernovtsy while another 12,000 were exiled from Dorohoi County.[62]

But these figures must also be rejected. Romanian sources show that around 140,000 Jews were sent to Transnistria in the autumn of 1941. Antonescu admitted in court that 150,000-170,000 Jews were deported. Filderman gives a figure of 190,000–200,000 Jews deported to Transnistria. Shachan writes that 15,230 Jews were deported beyond the Dniester from Dorohoi County. Ioanid does not take into account the many thousands of Jews left lying dead on the roads to Transnistria.

As far as the Transnistrian, i.e., «Ukrainian,» Jews are concerned, Ioanid believes that a minimum of 22,000 (Abwehr gives 40,000) were executed by the Romanians in Odessa in October 1941. The Romanians deported more than 30,000 Jews from Odessa to Berezovka in early 1942. Upon orders from the prefect, Modest Isopescu, 70,000 Jews, most of them Ukrainian, were killed by the Romanians in Bogdanovka, Domanyovka, and Akhmechetka. Over 30,000 mostly Ukrainian Jews were executed by the German colonists in the area of Berezovka. Thus, the total number of Ukrainian Jews exterminated in Transnistria by the Romanians and Germans, according to Ioanid, comes to about 150,000-170,000.[63]

Other information, cited above, refute Ioanid's figures regarding the Ukrainian Jews of Transnistria. According to Saul Borovoi, there remained no fewer than 120,000 Jews in Odessa alone in October 1941. I.M. Leenshon writes that about 100,000 Jews were exterminated in Odessa. The *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* confirms this number (99,000). Julius Fisher supposes that the Romanians and Germans eliminated approximately 132,000 local Ukrainian Jews. Itshak Artsi writes that 170,000 local Jews perished in Transnistria. The *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* gives a figure of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews. According to Shachan, Transnistria lost in all 310,000 local Jews.

It must not be forgotten that, in Odessa and in many other places of

Transnistria, the Romanians executed Jews who had fled Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, but had been unable to evacuate themselves farther east.

Such are the sad figures that correct Ioanid's calculations. He does, of course, admit that the total number of Jews killed in Transnistria might be higher. He notes that he gives the minimum figures contained in official Romanian documents of the time.[64]

* * *

The figures for Jews killed in Transnistria and Romania published in the *Historical Atlas of the Holocaust* (350,000), in *Revista cultului mozaic* (392,200), in Doctor Moses Rosen's book of memoirs and in an article by Doctor Wilhelm Filderman (around 400,000), in *The Chronological Atlas of World War Two* (470,000) are not sufficiently precise. The following claims can be trusted, due to their agreement with earlier figures. Eduard Mezincescu writes that Bessarabia and Bukovina alone lost 299,516 Jews.[65] Litani concludes that the Ukrainian Jews killed amount to 170,000–175,000, while the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* reports 185,000.[66] The number of Jews exterminated in Northern Transylvania is 130,000 according to the book *Remember*, while Rosen believes the number is 150,000.[67]

* * *

Assigning Blame for the Tragedy

Ion Antonescu, head of the Romanian state, must bear the main responsibility for the loss of Jewish life in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria, and the Old Kingdom. Many of his accomplices, including Radu Lecca, confirm this, as do contemporary authors, such as Voiculescu, Mezincescu, and Andrei Pippidi. Radu Lecca, for example, writes that no honest person could deny that Antonescu supported all the anti-Semitic laws drawn up by the legionnaires and generals, patronized the deportation of Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and from the Old Kingdom to Transnistria, and created the extermination camps in Transnistria.

Anti-Jewish laws suited the needs not only of the legionnaires and the military. These laws were welcomed by many segments of Romanian society: industrialists, financiers, businessmen, landowners, the intelligentsia, and others. The laws on Romanianization allowed them to help themselves to the property expropriated from the Jews (such as factories, banks, trading firms, ships, land, forests, buildings, hospitals, and schools). This robbery proceeded on a national scale and was

accompanied by violence and state terror. This was the material manifestation of Romania's brand of fascist ideology.[68]

Mezincescu provides the following quote from Antonescu's presentation at the Council of Ministers meeting of 16 December 1941: «The kike problem is being examined in Berlin. The Germans want to move them all out of Europe into Russia and settle them in certain regions. But there is still time remaining before this is accomplished. What shall we do with them in the meantime? Wait for a decision from Berlin? Wait for a decision that concerns our own interests? We are supposed to guarantee their security? Chase them into the catacombs, shove them into the Black Sea, but force them out of Odessa. I'm not interested in how it's done. Let a hundred die, let a thousand die, let them all die...»[69]

At the Council of Ministers meeting of 15 April 1941, Antonescu declared that «I'm making way for the masses to slaughter» the Jews. «I shall withdraw into my fortress and, after they have all been eliminated, I will establish order once again...»[70]

It could not have been said more openly nor more clearly.

The hypocrisy, mendacity, and cowardice of Marshall Antonescu is clearly displayed in his address to the Romanian Army on 1 January 1944, when no one any longer doubted the coming defeat of the fascist bloc. He shamelessly claimed that the actions of the Romanian soldiers in the occupied territories were gentle and humane and that no one had been robbed or beaten in the places they had passed. He claimed that they had preserved all human beings regardless of their interrelations, nationalities, or the evil they had inflicted. He continued in this cynical vein: «We deported no one and you struck no one's chest with the dagger. No innocent person was thrown into our prisons and none are held there now. Religious and political freedoms have been protected. We drove no people or families from their homes for political or ethnic reasons.»[71] Apparently, Antonescu did not consider the Jews, Gypsies, sect members, internationalists, and other such beings to be people.

Nevertheless Antonescu was forced to admit in court that, by his calculations, there were «a maximum of 150,000–170,000 Jews» deported, but that Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina were deported for reasons of military and political security as well as «for their own safety [sic].»[72]

The innocent blood of hundreds of thousands of Jews is on the hands of the Governor of Bessarabia, General Constantin G. Voiculescu; the Governor of Bukovina, General Corneliu Calotescu; the Governor of Transnistria, Professor George Alexianu; the Head Praetor of the Romanian Army, General of the gendarmerie Ioan Topor; the General Inspector of the gendarmerie in Bessarabia, Colonel T. Meculescu; the General Inspector of the gendarmerie in Bukovina, Colonel Ioan

Mânecuță; the General Inspector of the gendarmerie in Transnistria, General Emil Broșteanu and later Mihai Iliescu; the generals Nicolae Macici, Constantin Trestioreanu, Constantin Z. Vasiliu, the lieutenant-colonels Mihail Niculescu, Nicolae Deleanu, Modest Isopescu, the Commandant of the «Eșalons», Eugen Cristescu, and others who ordered and carried out the deportation and extermination of the Jewish population, including the Romanian Army, the gendarmerie, the secret police (SSI), the special units («*Eșaloane operative*» and «*Eșaloane speciale*»), the administration and countless numbers of private citizens.[73]

The responsibility for the robbery and annihilation of hundreds of thousands of Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, Transnistria, and the Old Kingdom must be borne not only by the military, but also by the ideologists of Romanian fascism and racism. With their writings and speeches, they poisoned the minds of the often uneducated rank and file among the Cuzists and legionnaires, and they led them to commit mass murder with unheard of brutality.

Among the apologists of Romanian fascism, the propagandists of xenophobia and vehement, beastial anti-Semitism, one finds university professors, scholars and even academicians, writers, journalists, leaders of political parties, ministers, priests, doctors, and others. Particular roles were played by, among others, Alexandru C. Cuza, Nicolae C. Paulescu, Nicolae Iorga, Petre P. Panaitescu, Octav Onicescu, Traian Brăileanu, Mihail Manoilescu, Nae Ionescu, Ion Găvănescul, Alexandru Răzmeriță, Traian Herseni, Nichifor Crainic, Octavian Goga, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Radu Demetrescu-Gyr, Dan Botta, Vintilă Horia, Constantin Noica, Mihail Polihroniade, Pamfil Șeicaru, Stelian Popescu, Ilie Rădulescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Nicolae Crevedia, Ion Veverca, Nicolae Roșu, Mihail Vizireanu, Ion Popescu-Prundeni, Leon Țopa, Valeriu Cârdu, Alexandru Randa, Ion Foti, Ernest Bernea, Horațiu Comaniciu, Toma Vlădescu, Constantin Papanace, Petre Tipărescu, Alexandru Gregorian, S. Dimancea, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Vasile Marin, Ion Moța, Horia Sima, Constantin Stoicănescu, Ion Banea, Corneliu Georgescu, Alexandru Cantacuzino, Mihail Sturdza, Mihail Stelescu, Radu Mironovici, and Gheorghe Clime.

Many of them were brought to trial and sentenced as criminals according to their deeds. Some of them died or were killed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Others fled to various parts of the globe and to this day remain unpunished.[74]

The erection of monuments to Ion Antonescu in the towns of Slobozia, Târgu-Mureș, Piatra-Neamț, Lugoj, Bacău, and in the village of Lețcani is a sacrilege that must be rigorously condemned.[75]

In recent years articles of an anti-Semitic nature have appeared in various magazines and newspapers such as *Europa, Națiunea, România Mare, Țara noastră, Gazeta de Vest, Glasul, Dimineața*, and *Azi*. The authors of these articles attempt to prove that Romanians (even legionnaires!) are not anti-

Semitic at all.[76] They deny the reality of the Holocaust, minimize the numbers of victims from among the Jewish population in the years 1940–1944, or try to justify the actions of the executioner Ion Antonescu and his clique. They claim, in the face of historical fact, that 420,000 Jews survived in Romania during the nationalist regime thanks to Antonescu. In a handwritten addendum to his testimony given to the People's Tribunal, Antonescu wrote: «If it had not been for me, there would be neither one Jew nor one communist alive today».[77]

In fact, it was Ion Antonescu himself who signed the orders for the internment of the Jews in the transit camp-ghettos, the extermination of all Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria, and the annihilation of the Jews of Odessa.[78] After the rout of the Germans and Romanians outside Stalingrad, when it was already clear that the defeat of Hitler's bloc was inevitable, Antonescu refused the Germans' request for the mass deportation of all surviving Jews in the Old Kingdom to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, and Belzek. However, this same Antonescu informed Joachim von Ribbentrop in April 1943 that he would have liked to send 100,000 Romanian Jews to the Crimea to work in the mines. He was willing to allow the remaining Jews of Romania to emigrate to Palestine, but only in exchange for huge sums of money.[79] It was only the defeat at Stalingrad and a fortune in currency that saved the Jews of the Old Kingdom from deportation and death.

The myth concerning Ion Antonescu's role in saving the lives of Romanian Jews was dispelled most convincingly by Radu Lecca, the government official and Antonescu associate who was entrusted with the regulation of «the Jewish problem» in Romania. Lecca trod a narrow line during his brief career, seeking to gain credit from both sides, from the Jews as well as those seeking to exterminate the Jews. From December 1941 to 23 August 1944, Lecca was a commissar general of the government and in fact head of the Central Jewish Organization of Romania, which he himself founded. He was condemned to death for his role in carrying out the anti-Jewish policies of Antonescu's nationalist government. His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by a decree of King Mihai I. Lecca, after serving 18 years and 6 months, was released in 1963, and in 1994 his memoirs were published with the astounding title *I Saved Romania's Jews*. Lecca, a friend of Alfred Rosenberg, director of the Foreign Policy Service of the national-socialist party, was a professional intermediary between the Romanian government and the German embassy. He cleverly and carefully maneuvered between Ion Antonescu and Baron Manfred von Killinger, the German ambassador to Bucharest, along with his representatives of the Gestapo, Gustav Richter and Kurt Geissler. He used his position to extract colossal sums of money from the well-off Jews to prevent their deportation, as the Germans demanded.

Romania's Jews, because of these payments, survived until 23 August 1944 without being deported.[80] However, hundreds of thousands of Bessarabian, Bukovina, and Transnistrian Jews were eliminated with the connivance of the leaders of his Central Jewish Organization of Romania. This organization, amazingly enough, did not consider itself responsible for those Jewish lives, supposedly because Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria had been declared war zones and were under military rule.

Money was again the motive when, in the spring of 1944, just before the liberation of Transnistria by the Soviet Army, the Central Jewish Organization of Romania obtained from Ion Antonescu permission to free 8,000 Dorohoi Jews from the Transnistrian camp-ghettos and to return them to Romania at the «Marshal's rate» of 2 billion lei. In doing so, this organization showed no concern for Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria whose lives were endangered by the retreating German and Romanian troops.[81]

The emigration of Romanian Jews to Palestine generated many additional billions in bribes to leaders within the Romanian military and the civil services, and even to many light-fingered crooks among the Jews themselves.[82]

* * *

The people of Odessa celebrated May Day joyously and with great ceremony. The dark years of occupation were over, the Romanians and Germans had been driven from the city, and people could at last look forward to an end to the war and the return of their loved ones. In the evening the city shook with the sounds of a military salute, with every shot accompanied by joyful shouts of «Hurrah!» It was the first military salute to victory after almost three years of war. The city's residents congratulated all the fighters and wished them well in their drive to victory over the insidious foe and for a safe return home.

As for my mother, Fira, and I, however, we could only think of our father on that first holiday after liberation from the ghetto. We dreamed of his return and of the restoration of our family hearth.

Notes

[1] Other fascist organizations were brutally active in and around Romania at the time, notably the Horthyists, Szalasists, Tisoists, and Ustashas, as were groups in other European countries, such as Poland and Greece. A complete taxonomy of these groups is beyong the scope of this narrative. However, my own investigations conclude that the Romanian organs of power, directed by the Antonescu government, surpassed all of them in ferocity and bloodthirstiness.

[2] Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 20; Leon Volovici, «Romanian Intellectuals–

Jewish Intellectuals during the Dictatorship of Antonescu», *Romanian Jewish Studies* 1, no. 1 (1987): 78; *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 133-38; Eli Vizel', «V zashchitu mertvykh», *Forverts*, no. 31213 (4-10 December 1998): 10.

[3] Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 21; Baranga, *Ninge*, 78; Sonia Palty, *Evrei, treceți Nistrul! Însemnări din deportare*, 2d ed. (Tel Aviv, 1989), 237; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 68-69; Marin Preda, *Delirul* (Bucharest, 1975); I. Schafferman, *Drumuri fără întoarcere* (Jerusalem, 1979); Emil Dorian, *The Quality of Witness: A Romanian Diary 1937-1944* (Philadelphia, 1982); *Procesul mareșalului*, I:105-06, 117. I quote from Alexandru Șafran, who wrote: "In that month, June, the Romanian forces entered Bessarabia and wiped out the Jewish population with unimaginable brutality, even worse than the ferocity they had manifested in Bukovina». Șafran, *Un tăciune*, 78; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 41.

[4] Șafran, *Un tăciune*, 86; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 187, 273.

[5] Călinescu, *Scrinul negru*, 485-503; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3:43, 145.

[6] *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 134. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 3 November 1943, Ion Antonescu gave his ministers the following instructions for their edification: "We can do whatever we want, but we should not promulgate any laws». «Only a fool kills and plunders according to the law». «... every action has consequences both for internal politics and in foreign relations. We must turn the screws making neither laws nor any fuss. We can do much without issuing explicit orders».

At another meeting, on 29 September 1942, the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mihai Antonescu, complained that photographs were being taken of the Jewish transports and that these photographs could be used abroad as proof of the barbarian deeds of the Romanians «while they simultaneously claim to be fighting communist barbarism». *Problema evreiască*, 522-23, 449.

[7] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, X: 46-52; *Problema evreiască*, 75.

[8] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, X:49, 50, 59; *Problema evreiască*, 79. Leon Volovici puts the figure at 767,000 Jews, i.e., 5% of the entire population of Romania: Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 42; *România*, 273-76.

[9] Ionel Calafeteanu and Aurică Simion, *The Condition of the Jews Living within the Romanian State during the Years of the Military-Fascist Dictatorship* (Bucharest, 1983) (cited according to *Documents Concerning the Fate*, X:494).

[10] Rosen, *Primejdii*, 15; Moses Rosen, «Alți actori, aceeași piesă», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 769 (November 1993): 8; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 23; *Așezările evreilor din România: Memento statistic* (Bucharest, 1945-47).

[11] *Historical Atlas*, 13-14; *Problema evreiască*, 24, 75-79; David B. Funderburk, *Un ambasador american între Departamentul de Stat și dictatura comunistă din România 1981-1985* (Bucharest, 1994), 110. The claim of Prime Minister Octavian Goga to the effect that in 1937 there were one-and-one-half million Jews in Romania does not seem plausible. Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 137. The rumor, widely publicized in the press, that there were 2–2,5 million Jews in Romania in the prewar years must also be considered to be greatly exaggerated. The German press took this figure to be factual. *Problema evreiască*, 86.

[12] *Problema evreiască*, 25-27.

[13] *Problema evreiască*, 39-40.

[14] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:192; Aroni, *Memories*, 43.

[15] The statistical report of the Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, addressed to the Transnistrian governor's administration on 9 September 1942, indicates that 119,065 Jews were deported to Transnistria from Bessarabia and Bukovina: 35,276 via Yampol', 53,913 via Mogilev, 1,090 via Tiraspol', 24,570 via Rybnitsa, and 2,216 via Ovidiopol'. *Problema evreiască*, 106.

[16] Litani, *Transnistria*, 50-52, 104.

[17] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:470.

[18] Litani, *Transnistria*, 10, 106; Dallin, *Odessa*, 308, 312; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 159, 160, 440.

[19] Iosif Schechtman, «Transnistria», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 766 (September 1993): 8; Dallin, *Odessa*, 308; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 151.

[20] Fisher, Transnistria, 119–25, 134–37.

[21] Litani, *Transnistria*, 16, 33; Claus Stephani, «Observaţii târzii asupra Holocaustului din România», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 731 (February 1992): 5; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 50-51, 165-67; *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 136-38.

[22] *Problema evreiască*, 364-65; *Procesul mareşalului*, I:258, 262-63.

[23] Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 3; *Chernaia kniga*, edited by V. Grossman and I. Erenburg (Jerusalem, 1980), 84; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York and London, 1990), 3:1080.

[24] *Problema evreiască*, 333; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 249, 252.

[25] Litani, *Transnistria*, 29, 33, 47; Messenger, *Chronological Atlas*, 96-97; Gilbert, *The Macmillan Atlas*, 71, 76, 87; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972), 15:1333; Ancel, «Jassy Syndrome», 34-43; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 4:1145; Palty, *Evrei*, 112, 224, 242; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, III:215-16, 225; Ludo, *Ultimul batalion*, 408; *Chernaia kniga*, 49-56, 80-88; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 168; Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 20, 176; Jagendorf, *Minunea, 72;* Glusberg, *Ruth's, 107, 287; Procesul mareşalului*, II:222; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 248-52.

[26] Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 28.

[27] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:306-14, 345-49, 455-57; «Liudi ostaiutsia liud'mi: Svidetel'stva uznikov fashistskikh lagerei-getto», *Vestnik Gos. Arkhiva Chernovitskoi Oblasti* 3 (1994): 166-67.

[28] In the table I maintain the orthography used in the respective sources. Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 455-58.

[29] *Remember*, pp. 21, 33-34, 58.

[30] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:510-13.

[31] Fisher, *Transnistria*, 119-25, 134-37.

[32] Litani, *Transnistria*, 5.

[33] Gilbert, *The Macmillan Atlas*, 70-73 (maps 77-80), 244 (map 316); *Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 136- 38.

[34] Charles Messenger, *The Chronological Atlas of World War Two* (New York, 1989), 97.

[35] Borovoi, «*Gibel'*...,» 28.

[36] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:348, 354.

[37] Butnaru, *Holocaustul uitat*, 373-74; *Procesul mareşalului*, I:412, II:172; Pelin, *Întroducere*, 76, 118.

[38] Litani, *Transnistria*, 104-05, 107. Shachan on one page claims that more than 800,000 Jews were killed in Transnistria, but on another claims about 700,000. Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 151, 383.

[39] «50 de ani de la martiriul evreilor din România (Bucureşti, 1-3 iulie 1941)», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 717 (June 1991): 6. According to Ancel, approximately 200 people were killed during the pogrom in Dorohoi. Ancel, «Jassy Syndrome», 46; I.Iordan concludes that in the Jassy pogrom 12,000 Jews were killed. Iordan, *Memorii, II*, 327.

[40] Nicolai, Mitropolitul Banatului, «Discriminare, rasism şi antisemitism», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 720 (August 1991): 5; *Remember: 40 de ani de la masacrarea evreilor din Ardealul de Nord sub ocupaţia horthystă* (Bucharest, 1985), 5, 51, 59.

[41] *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 3:1298.

[42] *Documents Concerning the Fate*.

[43] Carp, *Cartea neagră*.

[44] Marius Mircu, *Pogromurile din Basarabia* (Bucharest, 1947); Marius Mircu, *Pogromurile din Bucovina şi Dorohoi* (Bucharest, 1945); Mircu, *Pogromul de la Iaşi*.

[45] Ion Calafeteanu and Maria Covaci, *Situation of the Jews in Bessarabia, Bukovina and «Transnistria» in the 1941-1944 Years* (Bucharest, 1983).

[46] Rosen, *Primejdii*.

[47] Alexandre Safran, *Les Juifs en Roumanie. Les Juifs en Europe. 1939-1945* (Paris, 1949); Alexandru Şafran, *Înfruntînd furtuna* (Jerusalem, 1987).

[48] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu.*

[49] Pelin, *Introducere*; Pelin, *Legendă.*

[50] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat.*

[51] Israel Marcus, *Din nou şapte momente* (1987); Mircu, *Treizeci şi şase.*

[52] Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 382-83; Andrei Oişteanu, «Stigmatul etnic», *Realitatea evreiască*, no. 20-21 (January-February 1996): 5.

[53] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 203.

[54] Florin Constantiniu, «Desfăşurarea evenimentelor din 21-23 ianuarie 1941», *Curierul naţional*, 20 January 1996, 8; *România*, 313 indicates that during the rebellion 374 persons were killed and 380 seriously wounded. Radu Lecca, a knowledgeable witness of these tragic events, declares: «Over 500 Jews were eliminated with barbaric methods, and their corpses were hung on hooks designed for the carcasses of slaughtered swine at the abattoir». «Moisescu [commissar of the legionnaire police – R.U.] ... is the murderer of these 500 Jews, while Geissler [the German police attaché – R.U.] bears the moral guilt». Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 145, 146.

[55] See the articles published in *Realitatea evreiască* (Bucharest), numbers 30-31 for June-July, 1996.

[56] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 203-04; Rubin Udler, «Noi date despre capitolul transnistrian al Holocaustului», in *Jaloane pentru o viitoare istorie* (Bucharest, 1999), 41-44.

[57] Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 28, 30; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 207 indicates that the Soviets deported 5,000-10,000 Bessarabian Jews in June, 1941. Other sources claim that on 13 and 18 June 1941 3,800 Jews from Bukovina and several thousand from Bessarabia were deported to Siberia, a total of about 10,000. *Problema evreiască*, 385, 386; Ioanid, *Evreii*, 227-33, 398-99.

[58] Nedelchuk, *Respublika Moldova*, 13. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 26 February 1942, Ion Antonescu admits that «in the period of Russian rule, many Jews and other foreigners disappeared or were deported, not only Romanians; even their own Russians were exiled. The Russians pursued more than simply the defeat of the Romanian people inasmuch as they deported Jews, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and their own Russians». *Problema evreiască*, 381-82.

[59] Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 30; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 207-09.

[60] The total number of refugees who returned from Romania exceeded 220,000. Litani, *Transnistria*, 284.

Refugees from Romania were not only Jewish communists, as was tendentiously written in nationalist newspapers. Pelin claims for example, based on archival documents, that on 12 July 1940 barges travelling from Galaţi to Reni transported 97 Romanians, 288 Jews, 7 Poles, 514 Russians, 143 Bulgarians, 10 Ukrainians, 3 Hungarians, 157 Gagauzians, 79 Germans, 1 Greek, and 1 Czech. Pelin, *Legendă*, 122.

There were also natives of other provinces among the refugees from Romania. They were provided with false identification cards for significant sums of money. General Jacques Popescu, the Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs, reported at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 11 April 1941 that during the period of legionnaire rule, the *chestura* (police administration) of the city of Galaţi issued false identification papers to Jews wanting to make their way to Russia, and for these false passports they paid a certain amount of money. Large sums were clearly amassed, since 766,000 lei were found in the *chestura's* posession. At this same meeting, Ion Antonescu noted other violations of the law in Galaţi, where the transfer of the civilian population from Romania to Bessarabia, now a part of the USSR, took place. Items of gold were taken from the departing Jews. Entire inventories of jewelry items were compiled, upon which Alexandru Ghica, the general director of *Siguranţa* (the secret political police) in the period of

legionnaire rule, wrote «To be turned over to Mrs. Sima». As is known, Horia Sima, her husband, was at that time the Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the leader of the legionnaire movement. Antonescu instructed General Popescu to investigate this affair. Corruption was characteristic for high-placed government officials in Romania. *Problema evreiască*, 221-22, 228.

[61] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 204.

[62] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 203-05.

[63] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 205-06.

[64] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 206; cf. Ioanid, *Evreii*, 227-33, 398-99.

[65] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 112, 113; *Historical Atlas*, 73; Pelin, *Introducere*, 30.

[66] Litani, *Transnistria*, 104-05, 107; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 11; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 4:1474.

[67] *Remember*, 59; Moses Rosen, «Fascismul un pericol comun», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 761-762 (June-July 1993): 3.

[68] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 284; *Legislaţia antievreiască*, 3-10, 343-45; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, I:74-75; *Procesul mareşalului*, I:85-86, 97-99; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 89, 179-80, 198-201; Ştefan Voicu, *Vremuri, oameni...* (Bucharest, 1980), 170-71; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 2: 159-61.

[69] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 12; Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni*, 88-89; *Procesul mareşalului*, I:104, 263; *Problema evreiască*, 365.

[70] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 107; Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni*, 82; *Procesul mareşalului*, I:104; *Problema evreiască*, 229.

[71] Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 117-19; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 3: 316, 404, 475.

[72] *Procesul mareşalului*, II: 172-74, 176.

[73] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 24, 192; Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu*, 12, 17, 24, 107-08, 110, 123, 140; *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 715-716 (May-June 1991): 2-3; Stephani, «Observaţii târzii», 5; Aroni, *Memories*, 31-34.

[74] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 6-7, 25-33, 41-56, 65-92, 99-178; *Ideea care ucide*, 76-78, 139-56; Horia Sima, *Doctrina legionară* (Bucharest, 1995), 2, 6; *Procesul mareşalului*, II: 251; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 2: 163-64.

[75] Gabriela Adameşteanu, «Extremismul românesc îngrijorează Statele Unite: Cazul Antonescu», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 771-772 (December 1993): 4; *Antiiudaizm, ili peshchernyi mir*, edited by Efim Tkach (Kishinev, 1998), 175-77.

[76] Iuliu Maniu, the leader of the national-tsaranists party, spoke as a witness at the trial of Antonescu and his government and testified that «Horia Sima and his friends were anti-Semites». *Procesul mareşalului*, II: 53. Here I should also mention the following claim by Radu Lecca: «The Romanian generals, police, gendarmerie, and government ministers (Ion Marinescu, Aurelian Pană, Constantin Dănulescu) were much more anti-Semitic than the Germans»; «... Anti-Semitism had deep roots in many strata of the Romanian people. In the villages, the anti-Semitic propaganda spread by the orthodox clergy was devastating». Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 157, 308. Even Patriarch Miron Cristea, the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, delivered anti-Semitic speeches.

It stands to reason that all of the members of the Antonescu government were also ardent anti-Semites. Their speeches in the meetings of the Council of Ministers bear witness to this. I give here only a few examples. Mihai Antonescu, the vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers: «At the risk of being misunderstood by some traditionalists, ... I stand for the forcible migration of all Jewish elements from Bessarabia and Bukovina; they should be thrown out to beyond our borders». «You must be uncompromising». «If necessary, do not hesitate to fire your machine-guns». «Then we will herd them all into camps, into ghettos, or raise your machine-guns and kill them. This would be the simplest, most decisive solution, and the

most sure if we are truly speaking of achieving the physical annihilation of the Jews in the twentieth century». «For the next two to three weeks we will promulgate no laws for Bessarabia or Bukovina ... and thus, without legal formalities, we will enjoy complete freedom» (July 8, 1941). Rear Admiral Nicolae Păiș, an assistant to the Minister of Defense in charge of the Navy: "Erect a gallows, because this is a more visible sign and will make a stronger impression than firing squads» (July 22, 1941). Mihai Antonescu's answer to this: "This is a traditional Romanian method and we will resort to it as well». Constantin Bușilă, the Minister for Public Affairs and Communications: «I am the greatest anti-Semite among you». «As for this very question of the kikes, the government passed a decree that all kikes in state service are to be fired .... Some people ask that they be restored to their positions, while we were in fact very satisfied with their dismissal». «There is also the question of those who are married to kike women» (September 29, 1942). General Ion Sichitiu, Minister of Land Ownership and Agriculture: «There is only one means to get rid of these bugs – burn them» (July 8, 1941). General Constantin Z. Vasiliu, an assistant to the Minister for Internal Affairs in charge of the police and security apparatus: «Our goal is that the Jews take themselves either to Transnistria or to Palestine so that we can purge our country of them» (July 2, 1942). Mihai Antonescu's answer to this: «I don't care whether these elements head across the Bug to Transnistria, or across the Mediterranean to Palestine; what matters is that these elements remove themselves from our territory». In addition to priests, teachers, government employees, lawyers, officers, businessmen, students, and Lyceum pupils, many workers and peasants joined the ranks of the Iron Guard. Volovici, *Ideologia naționalistă*, 66, 75, 80, 81; Ioanid, *Sabia*, 60-64; *Problema evreiască*, 265-68, 275, 314, 316, 418, 419, 451, 452; *Procesul mareșalului*, II: 211-15, 222, 229, 253, 260, 264, 270, 271-72, 274-75; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 1: 381, 423-24, 432; OIE, 238, 390-92.

[77] *Procesul mareșalului*, II: 179; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 3: 367.

[78] Ioanid, *Sabia*, 207-08; *Procesul mareșalului*, I: 97; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 284-85.

[79] Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu*, 114-15, 123; Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 7, 13, 21, 23; Dallin, *Odessa*, 319-20; Jagendorf, *Minunea*, 133.

[80] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 7, 46, 140, 148, 151, 157, 168-69, 175, 180-86, 190-93, 213, 224, 227, 236-38, 264-65, 321; *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 3: 858-59; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 10: 1553-54, 14: 404; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VI: 162-94; *Procesul mareșalului*, I: 172-75; Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 88-89.

[81] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 235-41, 287; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 318-21, 363-64.

[82] Lecca, *Eu i-am salvat*, 242-54, 295-99; Shachan, *Burning Ice*, 293-94, 299, 310-13; Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry*, 132; Pelin, *Întroducere*, 21, 79, 130, 218, 228-29, 244, 248, 252, 264; Carp, Cartea neagră, 3: 243, 249, 250, 263, 309-10, 400, 417.

Chapter 11: **DESTINATION UNKNOWN**

One evening the three of us reviewed our situation. Fira had begun to work daily and was preparing to move, together with the State Bank, to Akkerman. Mama could not even think about work. She had no specialized training; she had always taken care of our home and lived only for the interests of her family. It was clear that she should live with Fira, at least until the return of our father. I had to go to school to finish my 10th-grade schooling so that I could enter the institute and receive some sort of specialized training. But as the war continued, I quietly expressed my wish to postpone my studies and to volunteer for the Red Army. My age made me eligible to be called up, I wanted to exact revenge against the fascists for the innocent lives of our relatives and for our own humiliation and suffering. My mother's reaction was immediate and striking. I could not remember seeing her weep in such despair. Wringing her hands and sobbing, she cried that she did not know where our father was or whether he was even alive, and now her only son, weak, emaciated, and untrained, wanted to leave her to go to war. She declared that if I were killed and Father did not return, she would not survive.

Fira and I had great difficulty in calming her fears. We assured her that Father was alive and that we would soon receive word from him. Not everyone was killed at the front, we said, and it was our duty to fight the fascists and work for the day of victory over those who had brought such misery upon other people, especially the Jews. Little by little our mother calmed down, but she held tight to my had for a long time.

My mother loved me very much and was proud of me. She told us often that I had been born with a silver spoon in my mouth, a sign of good luck and wealth. Furthermore, an old Gypsy woman had once told her fortune, predicting that I would have a long life and great success. My mother believed this firmly.

I can remember so many events from my life that made my mother proud: how I finished elementary school and received a prize; how I passed the entrance exams to the Nicolae Bălcescu Lyceum with a high mark (7.67 out of 10) and became one of only two Jewish boys admitted to the first grade of that prestigious state institution of learning; how I passed my exams «*de capacitate*» (for intellectual abilities) for promotion

to the fifth grade of the Lyceum; and other such accomplishments. For each one of them, my mother repeated how she had been sure that it would turn out so, because of the Gypsy woman's forecast.

After long discussions and with further reminders of the predictions of the fortune-teller about my destiny of luck and happiness, Fira and I convinced our mother to allow me to enlist. So on May 5, 1944, I went to the «Stalin» District Military Registration and Enlistment Office of the city of Odessa and asked to be taken into the army. I spoke with an officer who seemed to be quite elderly. I did not have one single document that would prove my identity or indicate such things as where and when I had been born, my educational level, or that I had been in the ghetto.

This officer treated me as a father would treat his sick son, with sympathy and even tenderness. I told him that my father had been mobilized by the Field Recruitment Office after spending almost three years in the ghetto, that we had no idea what had happened to him or whether he was still alive, and that my mother and sister were living in this unfamiliar city while awaiting the liberation of Akkerman, which would allow them to return home. After hearing all this, he took out Order #336–42, according to which I could not be inducted into the Army. When he ordered me to leave I almost burst out crying and told him that the fascists had killed our loved ones and that I was obligated to avenge their deaths. He fell silent and sat there thinking for some time, looking over the page with my information. He then wrote something on the page and left the room, ordering me to wait in the hallway.

It was late and I had grown hungry, but I had no money; I was unable to leave in any case. Finally my officer reappeared. He smiled at me and said that he was sending me to the Artillery School, which housed a reserve regiment. The good man embraced me, shook my hand, encouraged me to fight well, and wished me to return home victorious and healthy. He gave my file to a soldier who would accompany me. Together with two other young men, we left on foot for the Artillery School, walking in silence for quite a long time. On the one hand, I was happy that they had taken me into the army despite my lack of credentials and that I had gotten my way. On the other hand, I grew sad to think of how my mother would worry.

It was dark when we reached the gates of the school. The soldier handed a packet of documents to the duty officer and left us. We stood at the entranceway waiting. Some time later the duty officer returned and told us that it was too late and to receive us. He sent us home and ordered us to return the next morning at a certain hour.

I did not know the way home, but luckily the other two led me to the gate of my house. They lived nearby and we agreed that I would wait for them at that very spot the next morning.

When I entered the room, my mother and Fira bombarded me with

questions. My mother had hoped that they would turn me away, but I calmed her by saying that I was being sent to a reserve regiment and would likely be instructed in military affairs. I got together a notepad and pencil in order to take notes at the lectures. Mother and Fira promised to visit me as long as I remained in the local regiment.

* * *

While I was at the Enlistment Office, a letter arrived from Aunt Ida in answer to our telegram. She was overjoyed to learn that we were still alive. Ida had been in Moscow the entire time, even during the difficult days when the Germans encircled the city and surveyed it with field glasses. She helped to build barricades and dig antitank trenches. Her efforts and bravery were later recognized with a medal for the defense of Moscow. Aunt Ida wrote that her daughter Greta, the same age as Fira, had completed the Moscow Law Institute in evacuation and was now working as a military examining judge in the city of Cherepovets, in the Vologda Region. Greta was also happy to learn that we had survived.

Aunt Ida also communicated that Aunt Genea, Uncle Isidor, and Leonea were alive. During the occupation they had been in ghettos in Chernovtsy and in Edyntsy. They had all labored terribly, suffered from hunger, and endured abuse. Soviet forces had liberated them on March 29, 1944. Ida gave us their address in Chernovtsy: #13 Alexandru cel Bun Street.

Ida had thus found Genea and her family, as well as us. It now remained for her to find our father.

* * *

On the morning of May 6, my new acquaintances showed up promptly, and the three of us reported to the regiment. Thus began a new stage in my life, and I was excited. For the first time, I was entering into contact with the army.

We were given a rather full meal and then taken to the barracks. The huge sleeping quarters contained rows of plank-beds in two levels running the entire length of the room. There was a tiny table and chair near the entrance, next to which stood the on duty orderly. There were no free spaces on either level of the planks, and many men were lying on the floor. The three of us stayed together and took a corner for ourselves.

I watched the men as they lay there or walked about. They were of various ages and appearances, all wearing threadbare civilian clothes. Some wore knapsacks, which also served as pillows. Many hung together

in groups talking loudly in a lively manner, but others kept to themselves in silence, lost in their own thoughts.

Additional people were continually led into the barracks. The enlistment offices had apparently sent out the «blackshirts» to round up men in Odessa who were trying to evade service in the Red Army. These probably also included deserters, those who had been declared unfit for military service, malingerers, and youths just coming of age.

I didn't feel like sleeping, but I lay down on the bare floor, closed my eyes, and thought about our situation, above all about my father. Where was he? Was he alive? Was he perhaps lying mutilated and alone in some field hospital? My mother could not bear such a misfortune. What would happen to Fira? She was already 22 years old. Would she be able to find an honest and decent husband and create a strong Jewish family? I did not worry about myself. I was sure that nothing bad would happen to me.

The voice of the orderly interrupted my meditations. I was being summoned to the Special Service. I asked my comrades to save my place just in case and followed a sergeant. At the Special Service an officer was intently studying a file that presumably contained the cover letter about me from the «Stalin» District Military Registration and Enlistment Office. He asked me about myself and about my family in great detail, making notes as I spoke. He then ordered me to write down my autobiography. When I finished, he took the sheet and began to compare the document I had written with the notes he had taken as I spoke. He then asked for some further details, apparently trying to formulate trick questions.

Inasmuch as I had told and written the simple truth, he was unable to find fault with anything. Toward the end of the interrogation, he informed me that I was to be sent to the distributive battalion of the 188th Reserve Infantry Regiment. The same sergeant then led me to another, less crowded barracks, where I took a place on the upper plank-beds. For lack of anything else to do, I began to keep a diary and wrote my first several pages.

After supper I found my two comrades, who now seemed like old acquaintances. We went walking around the green, well-tended, peaceful park of the Artillery School while I told them where I had been, what the officer had asked me, and where I was being sent. These two older and more experienced men, who had already spoken with others who had been mobilized, quickly concluded that the Special Service had not yet finished with me; they turned out to be right.

* * *

In the course of a single month the entire peninsula of Crimea was liberated from the German and Romanian occupiers.

When the liberation began, the Fifth Army Corps, Sixth Cavalry, and Third Mountain Infantry Divisions of the Romanians were on the Kerch Peninsula. The First and Second Mountain Infantry and the Ninth Cavalry Divisions of the Romanians were stationed along the Crimean coast.

Signs of decay were apparent among the troops, who were inclined to surrender when given the opportunity. Several Romanian military units appeared to be unreliable and the Germans took them away from the front and concentrated them in the area of Cape Khersonesos for evacuation. Then the Germans withdrew toward Sevastopol. Vasilevsky writes of the huge misunderstandings, leading in the last days to armed conflict, between the German and the Romanian units regarding the order of the evacuation.

Whatever the cause, on April 11, 1944, the forces of the Fourth Ukrainian Front took the cities of Dzhankoy and Kerch; on April 13, Simferopol', Yevpatoriya, and Feodosiya; and on April 14-15, Bakhchisaray, Sudak, and Alushta. On 10 May the forces of the Fourth Ukrainian Front took Sevastopol by storm. In Sevastopol and on Cape Khersonesos, 25,000 German and Romanian soldiers and officiers were captured, along with a large quantity of armaments and other military equipment.[1] By the middle of May the forces of the Fourth Ukrainian Front were able to move from the Crimea to the areas south of the Dniester to overcome the resistance of the enemy.

* * *

Every day we trained by performing military exercises. I was assigned to an antitank gun company, where two of us would carry the barrel of an antitank gun on our shoulders and the other parts of the weapon in our arms. We practiced assembling the weapon on a huge training ground. A young sergeant from Central Asia named Zlydkin was our teacher. He had finished regimental school and been wounded at the front. After recovering from his wound, he was sent to our reserve regiment. Zlydkin was a good man and tried very hard to share all his knowledge with us. We had to practice taking up new positions speedily, almost at a run, and it took great physical health and stamina to do so with such a heavy weapon. On the other hand, our breaks tended to be long and my partner and I had a chance to recover our strength.

We talked about everything during these rest periods. We discussed the situation on the various fronts, particularly in the direction of the Fourth Ukrainian Front. We recalled the difficulties and privations of the



Map taken from Calafeteanu and Simion, *The Condition of the Jews Living within the Romanian State during the Years of the Military-Fascist Dictatorship,* 179

early years of the war, the destruction of cities and villages, the floods of refugees, the communications bringing news of the disappearance or death of loved ones; the tens of thousands of young men left cripples, the hunger and cold endured behind the lines. All of us warriors were characterized by a feeling of patriotism and a strong desire for vengeance.

After a hearty supper we would be led in formation, singing, to watch a film outdoors. I remember that the first film I saw after 1941 was *Rainbow*, based on the book by Wanda Vasilevska.

I was the only Jew in our antitank gun company, but everyone treated me well.

* * *

After about a week I was once again summoned to the Special Service, as my comrades had predicted. I was asked the same questions: where I was born, what my parents did, what kind of education did I have, why had we left Romania in 1940, why had we remained in Odessa in 1941 rather than moving further east, why were we not killed in the ghetto, how had the family survived intact, where was my father now, did I have relatives in Romania or in any other place abroad, and other questions. They wrote down my answers and I was told to sign this statement to confirm its truth.

A few days later I was transferred to the Seventh Company of the Second Battalion. I was no longer among Russians and Ukrainians, but various national minorities, including Moldavians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, Greeks, Poles, Slovaks, Chechens, and Kalmucks. There were rumors that national armies, regiments, and battalions were being formed.

In the moonlit summer nights one could hear in the school park quiet sounds of sentimental Caucasian songs, the sad steppe melodies of the Volga, and, more familiar to me, Moldavian *doinas*, songs expressing longing, sorrow, love, and revolt. The music helped the people chase away worrisome thoughts about the future by recalling their native lands, families, and friends.

On Saturday and Sunday evenings, the mothers, wives, sisters, brothers, and children of my fellow regiment members came to visit the Artillery School. They would stand by the high iron fence for hours and tenderly stroke the heads of their little children, looked with sadness and hope into the eyes of their loved ones, and tried to cheer up their aged parents, who had lost heart.

Everyone tried to help one another. Many city residents brought their husbands and sons tasty food from home – a ring of sausage, a piece of fat, or perhaps a bottle of home-brewed vodka called *samogon* or a large bottle of wine. Soldiers gave the children sugar, American cans of condensed milk or stewed meat. The older family members received

breeches, soldier's field shirts, or extra underwear. Those who did not have relatives in the city asked acquaintances to carry letters or packages for their families.

My mother and Fira came to visit me often, and my first question was always the same: any letter from Father? The answer was always no.

My mother could not get enough of looking at me. I had grown stronger; my physical appearance had improved with the nourishing and abundant soldier's food, the fresh air, and the relatively peaceful life. I had received a brand-new my uniform–riding breeches tucked into strong tarpaulin boots, a soldier's field shirt with a white collar sewn underneath and polished metal buttons, a wide leather belt with a flashing buckle, and a field cap with a red star. My mother tenderly stroked my thick, jet-black hair and prayed to God that the war would soon be over.

Fira was doing well at her job and she was put on a list of those to receive an apartment in Odessa in case Akkerman was not liberated soon.

* * *

After another few days, the Poles and Slovaks among us were summoned to the regimental office and ordered to report with all their things. They were not told where they were being sent, but inasmuch as the front lines were approaching state borders, everyone assumed that national armies were being formed. We bid them a warm farewell.

Our battalion was no longer carrying out military exercises. Instead, we were being sent to do various chores. We sawed firewood for the bathhouse and kitchen, pumped and carried water, peeled potatoes, cleaned out the barracks, performed sentry duty, and so forth. These jobs were not terribly tiring, and I carried them out readily to keep in shape.

* * *

Almost every day companies and battalions were dispatched from our reserve regiment. To fetch them, «buyers,» as the soldiers called them, would arrive from various armed services. At the head of the column marched the regimental band, and the sounds of their music encouraged people and lifted their spirits. Relatives, friends, and even strangers accompanied the soldiers from the gates of the Artillery School, which was located between the third and fourth stations of Bol'shoy Fontan, to the railway station. Some walked embracing the soldiers and they merged into a single flow.

From the high iron fence we sadly watched them go. Wartime brings all kinds of experiences, but always more sadness than gladness.

* * *

Two Jews arrived at our battalion, both older than I. Rosenberg was from Chernovtsy and Yusim was from Kishinev. They had been in the ghetto, lost their families, survived by some miracle, and been sent by the Enlistment Office to our reserve regiment.

I introduced them to my mother and Fira. They could hardly believe that our family had remained alive after spending almost two-and-a-half years in the ghetto. Rosenberg and Yusim tried to ease my mother's fears, assuring her that our father was also in some reserve regiment. Mother wanted very much to believe them and took comfort from their words.

I became friends with Rosenberg and Yusim and we hung out together. One evening we went to see a movie called «Two Friends.» Films of the time were optimistic, designed to lift the spirits of the soldiers, and to inspire in them the certainty of victory.

These intelligent men assumed that our unit would not be sent to the front. They reasoned that the Moldavians, Bulgarians, and Greeks would not be considered trustworthy when the fighting soon moved toward their home region of the Balkans. Likewise, the Kalmucks and Chechens would not be sent because their peoples had supposedly given their loyalty to the Germans and many of them had fought against the Soviet forces. We three Jews would not be sent because we were from Bessarabia and Bukovina.

* * *

After one of my many summonses to the Special Service it became clear to me what was bothering its experienced and very suspicious workers. I had been born in a foreign land, in Brăila, and Romania was fighting together with Germany against the Soviet Union. My parents had been well off, which meant that I had been born into the bourgeoisie. I had also studied in a lyceum, meaning that I had been indoctrinated with a different ideology. In 1940, we had moved to Bessarabia with goals that were suspect, since one does not normally abandon one's property. One might conclude that we had remained in Odessa in 1941 according to some preconceived plan. The fact that the Romanians and Germans had not killed us – Jews, after all – was incomprehensible to these special agents.

The truth, simple as it was, could not counter their suspicions. The truth was that at the time of my birth, Romania was not at war with the USSR; my parents had worked hard and honestly in order to obtain a certain position in society; my sister and I, Jewish children, had studied in state lyceums in order to receive a good education; our family had

abandoned everything and moved to Bessarabia in 1940 to escape the anti-Semitic national-legionnaire state; in 1941 we had been unable to obtain tickets for evacuation by sea for our entire extended family; and we had survived only because God had not abandoned us and we had been extremely fortunate. None of this would have been possible without the help of honest and noble people – Russians, Ukrainians, and Romanians – or without the strong bonds that held our family together. We were devoted to each other absolutely, and we were physically healthy and mentally alert.

* * *

The «buyers» from the border guard took Yusim as a translator of Moldavian. He was very happy about this, because he was promised that he would always accompany the regimental commander. In addition to this, it appeared that he might also manage to get home sooner to Kishinev. We were glad for him.

During a regrouping of the platoons, companies, and battalions, I wound up in the Sixth Platoon of the Sixth Company of the Second Battalion. My platoon was commanded by Lieutenant Ankishkin, and included members of 15 nationalities. We were sent to work in the field and to help out at the *kolkhoz* outside of the city. The soldiers, former peasants, worked with great eagerness as they missed their peacetime work. The weather was excellent and the people sang songs in high spirits.

My mother, Fira, and the wife of Abramovici, my new fellow worker, came one evening to the fence. They told us that women in the city between the ages of 17 and 35 were being mobilized for the restoration of Odessa. This decision did not affect Fira, who worked in the bank, nor our mother, who was 43 years old.

My mother spoiled me, bringing two warm pieces of stuffed fish and *pletsls* – thick, flat, crisp rolls – delicious as only she knew how to cook. She loved to hear my praise of it. But there was still no news from our father.

* * *

On June 5, around 11 o'clock in the morning, about 2,000 fully equipped soldiers were sent quickly to the front. It was said that somewhere north of the Romanian city of Jassy the Germans had begun an offensive against the forces of the Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts.

At the same time, the army newspaper announced with bold headlines that American troops had liberated Rome. In each such announcement we foresaw changes in the course of events and the approaching end of the war.

On June 6, we heard from the radio speaker a communication that landing forces of the British, US, and Canadian armies had landed on the northern coast of France and opened a new front. Four thousand ships and 15,000 airplanes took part in this operation. In our entire regiment the joyful men could speak of nothing but this great success.[2]

A large number of Moldavians from the left bank of the Dniester were brought to the Artillery School. Many of them did not speak Russian, and they kept to themselves.

* * *

On June 9, we were told that the 188th Reserve Infantry Regiment would be leaving the barracks of the Artillery School. We took apart our plank-beds and carried out the regimental property. No one knew where we were being sent. Our unit went past the Alexeyevsky Market in the direction of the Jute factory, and soon we had left the city behind. We stopped often to rest along the sides of the road. By sunset we had arrived at the regiment's disposition point – the village of Novorybal'sk.

June 10 was a day of rest, and we were permitted to stroll around. We found that Novorybal'sk was a small village with a church rising from its center. Each house sheltered women and children who had been evacuated from Ovidiopol', where the front was now located. A small forest began at the edge of the village. Everything was green, and the glades were studded with field flowers. There was a wonderful aroma in the air and total silence all around. It was a truly peaceful patch of land.

During this second night we soldiers slept outdoors on planks while the officers and sergeants took spaces in the school, club, and administration building. I was in good spirits. Looking up at the clear cloudless sky, I found the bright North Star, Ursa Major, and Ursa Minor. It was a long time before I could fall asleep.

One of the local women was preparing to visit her niece, who was living in Odessa on Chizhikov Street, not far from Karl Marx Street. I gave her a letter to take to my mother in which I told her where I was and asked her not to worry about me. For the next several days our routine army life continued with its periods of work, sentry duty, and rest.

* * *

Lieutenant Ankishkin told us that we would soon be setting off for Kharkov, where we would be divided up by nationality to continue our service. Our journey would take more than ten days. We were given our rations for the first four days: a half-tin of canned food, bread, salt, sugar, and millet. In the regiment there were all kinds of suppositions

about what would happen to us in Kharkov: we would be sent to hard labor in Siberia, to cutting timber, to Vorkuta, to work in the coal mines, to Murom, to Murmansk, or some other place. No one believed the lieutenant's assurances; we had been interrogated too many times by the Special Service, and the multinational nature of the unit they had selected suggested that things would not turn out well for us.

On the morning of June 16, 1944, we were brought together in a church yard near the regimental headquarters. We were in full uniform, with rations for several days, but we had no weapons. They announced to us our route: Odessa to Kharkov. Three people escorted us: Lieutenant Ankishkin, a warrant officer, and a sergeant. It was raining, and our mood was grim.

Our column set off at seven o'clock, leaving the village by a different road. We passed through the village of Usatova, where the Germans, before retreating, had executed 20 partisans who had emerged from their catacombs in order to take some prisoners for interrogation.

It was five kilometers to Odessa and we were soaked through by the time we stopped to rest at a deserted freight yard. I got acquainted with a soldier who was a year or two older than I, from the village of Boian (Boyany), Chernovtsy Region. He was a Romanian and his name was Dragoș Petrovici Suprovici. He joined me and Abramovici, with whom I had become friends. We were told to board a train column consisting of only freight cars and found ourselves places in one of them. The Moldavians and Poles boarded separate wagons.

On the morning of June 17, we stopped at Dachnaya station for a long time. The rails were clogged with wagons full of the spoils of war. There was a village nearby, enveloped in the verdant greenery of orchards. We travelled for about two hours to the next station of Vygoda, about six kilometers away.

At the station of Vinogradnaya something unbelievable happened. One soldier, a Moldavian from Transdniester, found his wife, who had been evacuated here more than a week earlier from their native village, where the front was located. The entire company witnessed their joy and spoke of nothing else.

We were also held up for some time at the station of Yeremeyevka. At the small market in front of the station I bought a bottle of fresh milk and emptied it in an instant, along with a piece of soldier's bread.

The station at the junction of Razdel'naya, from which trains went to Tiraspol', Kishinev, and Jassy, had been totally destroyed.

We had travelled a mere 70 kilometers from Odessa, and here our first division occurred. The Poles set off in the direction of Zhmerinka accompanied by the warrant officer, and we transferred onto another train. They assigned us flatcars on which coal was being carried. We cleaned off a space for ourselves so that we could at least sit down,

although enough coal dust settled on us to disguise any small degree of dignity we still possessed.

At the next station, Mikhailovka, the train had to maneuver for a long time and wound up at the dead end of a side track where we were stuck for a long while. Along the railway line was a great deal of broken, scorched, and bent military technical hardware. For the first time I saw the fearsome German «Tiger» tank with its thick steel armor, along with German artillery movers, automobiles, and canons. The swift attack of Soviet forces had obviously brought huge losses to the enemies. The fascists had abandoned everything to escape: ammunition and supply depots, armaments, prepared fortifications. The distance from the railway on which we were travelling to the Dniester, where the front was located, the distance was in places less than 40 kilometers.

Our freight train continued slowly. I remember passing through the stations of Vesyolyi Kut, Ivanovka, and Zatishiye. We stopped often. Soldiers would run along the platforms and find small markets where peasant women were selling food. A single loaf of bread cost 35 or 40 rubles. A few of the soldiers were selling their underwear or field shirts and buying food or *samogon*. At the Mardarovka station, many local residents took seats in our train, travelling to the market in the town of Kotovsk. They shared with us milk and delicious homemade bread.

In Kotovsk we encountered a Jewish family from Beltz returning from evacuation. They lived first in the city of Karaganda, and then in some *kolkhoz* in Kazakhstan. They were poorly dressed and hungry and had been on the road for over a month. They had been forced to sell everything they had. These poor people were not even aware that in 1941 the Romanians had killed on the spot or herded into ghettos all the Jews who had not managed to evacuate themselves from Beltz. We collected a little bit of money for them.

We were then transferred to another train heading east. On the night of June 19 we passed through the stations of Borshchi, Balta, Lyubashyovka, and Velikaya Vradievka. In the morning we stood for a long time in the station of Golta – the very same Golta, the county seat, from which the Prefect, Modest Isopescu, had given the orders for the mass murder of the Jews in Bogdanovka, Domanyovka, and Akhmechetka. Those orders determined the regulation of the brutal living conditions of the Jews in more than 20 camp-ghettos of the county: in Akhmechetka, Bogdanovka, Bukova, Vazdovka, Varvarovka, Vinogradnyi Sad, Vradievka, Gvozdievka, Golta, Grazhdanovka, Domanyovka, Kantakuzino, Karlovka, Krivoye Ozero, Ksaverovka, Lyubashyovka, Marinovka, Nikolaevka, Novopavlovka, Rom. Balka, and Triduby. We were not far from Vinogradnyi Sad, Grazhdanovka, and Domanyovka, where our family had suffered for twenty-six endless months.

But there were no longer any Romanians in Golta, or anywhere in

Transnistria. They had made off under fire from Soviet troops, leaving behind many mass gravesites where the ashes of hundreds of thousands of innocent Jews rest. Will God and the People's Court bring harsh punishment to all those murderers, both military and civilian? Will they receive what they deserve?

The train station at Golta had been left in ruins. Nothing remained of the houses on the adjoining streets except the stark walls and chimneys. Jews who had lived here before the war had all been run out and exterminated. Abramovici and I stood silently, and then he recited the Kaddish.

We crossed the bridge over the Southern Bug River, the one-time eastern border of Transnistria. The water level was very low at that time of year and soldiers were using artillery movers to drag sunken German tanks out of the river.

We passed through the major railway stations of Pomoshnaya, Kirovograd, and Znamenka. At the last station we remained for a long time. I was surprised to hear Moldavian speech there in the center of Ukraine, nearly at the Dnieper. These were mostly girls and childless women up to about 35 years of age, as well as some men, all from below the Dniester. They had been enlisted to work in the mines of Donbas for the reconstruction of the Stalino factories. They had been promised large wages and good living conditions. They were all in high spirits, singing and even dancing near the wagons at the station.

Once again we transferred to another train, and on June 21 we arrived at the station of Pyatikhatki. We were given rations for two days: 900 grams of bread per day, canned food, sugar, salt, and *makhorka* tobacco. I exchanged the tobacco for bread. At the tiny station of Verkhnedneprovsk, I was carried away by the wonderful landscape with hills covered in dense green woods and huge pastures where herds of cattle peacefully grazed. Sizeable villages were visible as far as the horizon, their large white houses enveloped in fruit orchards. It gave the impression that war had not touched this place, that peace had reigned here for ages.

To the right of the devastated train station was a panoramic view of the city of Dnepropetrovsk. Trams travelled up and down the streets among the ruins of houses. A hospital train had pulled up beside us and was being unloaded. Many cripples and severely wounded, some in plaster from head to toe, were carried out onto the platform. It was terrible to look into the faces of these young people, tormented by pain and by the realization that they had no future. The medical personnel all looked exhausted. Once we had crossed the Dnieper, we could see what appeared to be a large industrial city, but everything in it, houses and factories, had been destroyed. In the beams of the setting sun, however, the Dnieper was majestic. Downstream we could see floating barges and the frames of bridges.

I became friends with a young man who was part of a different company. He was educated, intelligent, and interesting to talk to. He wound up with us due to his nationality and because he had been in occupied territory. He was a Greek from Mariupol' and his name was Yarymbash.

On June 22, our train column arrived in Pavlograd, where we were read a lecture. It was exactly three years from the day that the fascist hordes had suddenly and like brigands attacked the Soviet Union. Lord, what had we not endured over the course of those three years!

* * *

At the junction station of Lozovaya we got out of the train and had a meal in the cafeteria. One Chechen challenged Suprovici, and other Chechens at once joined in the fight. They were separated only with great difficulty. The Chechen even threatened to kill Suprovici, until the lieutenant intervened and managed to calm them down.

We travelled farther on a flatcar loaded with corn. A strong summer rain was falling and we were soaked through with no place to find shelter. But soldiers are a clever breed, and many filled their sacks with corn and sold it at the stations for 100 to 150 rubles a sack.

We arrived in Kharkov in the evening of June 24. Like the stations in the other cities we had passed through, this one was also in ruins. A few of us, with the lieutenant's permission, went off for two hours to see the city. Some things had survived: the buildings that had housed the State Bank and Medical Institute, monuments to Nikolai Gogol and Taras Shevchenko, and a few 10-to 12-story apartment buildings. The Shevchenko Museum was impressive. Trollies were already operating. But we also saw many destroyed residential blocks and torn-up asphalt streets. The fascists had brought great ruin to a city of monumental grandeur.

On the way back to the train station we ran into a Polish military unit. All of the soldiers were well dressed and looked very sharp.

That evening we were taken to the barracks, given a cold supper, and a chance to bathe. The next morning we were registered separately, by nationality: Kalmucks, Chechens, Bulgarians, Greeks, Moldavians, western Ukrainians, and Jews. There was talk that the Moldavians would be sent to Novocherkassk and the Kalmucks to Molotov Region. The uncertainty made everyone anxious.

We were transferred to a building that was once the Confectionary Factory on Chebotarskaya Street. After the midday meal, we were given rations for five days, formed into columns of 28 men – Bulgarians, Greeks, western Ukrainians, and Jews – and under the guard of ten escorts armed with rifles, led as if under arrest through the streets of the city. I remember Rosa Luxemburg Square and Stalin Prospect. At

the Balashov Station, we were locked in a single room with a guard at the door. Another escort accompanied us to the lavatory.

We did not understand what was happening. Why were they treating us so abusively? We were outraged at such behavior. But the escorts refused to answer our questions and ordered us to be silent; they were just obeying orders.

That evening we were put on a passenger train from Kharkov to Kazan. Outside the windows of the wagon stretched endless forests. We crossed the river Oskol and continued northeastward. Rosenberg, Khaid, Abramovici, and I took one compartment together and discussed the one question on everyone's minds: What awaited us in that northern territory?

On June 28, we passed through the larger stations of Valuyki and Alexeyevka were we saw the scars of the war, trenches and burned-out wagons. Poorly dressed and hungry children begged bread from the travellers. So many orphans and homeless children!

Four years had now passed since Bessarabia and Bukovina had been handed over to the USSR. How radically our lives had changed! We recalled the events of recent years, the grave losses of our families and loved ones. I thought with sadness of my father, mother, and Fira. How were they faring now? What had happened to my father?

On the morning of June 29 we reached the station of Povorino. Nearby was a military airfield from which fighters took off into the sky with great speed and a deafening roar. This was something new for many of us. Before the war there had only been the small biplane *kukuruzniks* flying over Akkerman. Perhaps a flying school was based here.

We passed through Baychurova, Makashyovka, Rodnichok, and other smaller stations without stopping. All the homes in this area were wooden, which was something I had not seen before. On the edges of the villages there were flocks of geese grazing, and the fields were well cultivated. There was a small market in front of the train station at Balashov, where we arrived at around noontime. All of the food items were expensive; for a loaf of bread, for example, they were asking 240 rubles.

After the stations of Arkadak, Kistendei, and Rtishchevo, the train wagons became filled with women carrying bags and baskets on their way to the city of Penza. Many German and Romanian prisoners of war had been put to work at the junction station of Rtishchevo, restoring the destroyed economy.

In the light of the setting sun the steppe was indescribably beautiful and even shone with a kind of grandeur. Large flocks of sheep and herds of cows were grazing peacefully. The well-kept fields of the *kolkhozes* stretched to the horizon.

On the morning of June 30, our train was standing at the junction station of Ruzayevka when a train from Saratov arrived on the adjacent

track bearing western Ukrainians. They had been mobilized in the middle of March, gone through two months of military training, and were now heading to the front.

Here we encountered several Jewish families returning from evacuation to their homes in Vinnitsa Region. They asked us about their relatives, who had not been able to escape eastward in 1941 when the southern part of Vinnitsa Region had been part of Transnistria and occupied by the Romanians. They hoped that some of their relatives had survived.

We crossed the Mordovian ASSR, travelling from south to north. The Germans had not been in these parts and we saw no destruction. It was as if nothing had touched the even-paced life of the provincial heartland.

After Saransk our train made a long stop at the station of Alatyr'. The city was located on the green and calm river Sura. We walked along the nearby streets, where all the houses were made of wood with beautiful carved ornamentation. Beyond Alatyr', to the northeast, the railway was lined with thick coniferous forests, which provided a background to the white trunks of birches and wide-leafed maples. We crossed many small rivers, lakes, and low swampland. The trackmen's booths along the tracks were surrounded by plots bordered with hazel and nut groves and bramble bushes.

That night we arrived at the station of Kanash (Chuvash ASSR), where we spent the night in a clubhouse near the railway, and on the morning of July 1, we were taken to the bathhouse. I bathed, cut my hair, changed my underclothes, and felt like a new person. We walked back to the train station along the straight, wide streets of the city, which were lined with wooden sidewalks and dotted with large, muddy puddles. The houses were made of wood as well, but many were covered with tin plating. The Chuvash people we met, both men and women, wore woven bast shoes. There was no bread at the market, but peasants were selling milk, curds, sour cream, and butter at surprisingly reasonable prices.

We met Jews from Byelorussia and Poland. They were lucky to have evacuated in time and been able to rescue their children and parents as well as themselves. They worked hard here, but they faced no danger. They intended to return home as soon as their native areas were liberated.

The rooms of the clubhouse contained maps, newspapers, magazines, books, and, most importantly, a radio. We eagerly listened to the latest news, read the reports of the Soviet Information Bureau, and kept track of the front lines on the maps. During these days the Red Army was battling its way toward Minsk and had approached the Byelorussian-Lithuanian border. General Konstantin K. Rokossovsky, in command of the First Byelorussian Front, became a Marshal for his skill in leading the attack.

It was raining, and, in the quiet calm, my fear left me. I was able to

play chess for the first time since the outbreak of the war. In the evening, we would listen to a lecture on the international situation, then the young people would get together. Teenage boys and girls, Russian and Chuvash, arrived, and dancing began. I sat and talked with the local fellows about their lives, their traditions, and their customs.

On July 2, we were given rations for three days: 650 grams of bread per day, two 800-gram packets of concentrate, 35 grams of sugar, 10 grams of salt, and a bit of fat. Rosenberg and I went to the market where I sold a packet of millet for 130 rubles, bought myself a single pencil, then put away the money I had raised. I was happy that I had writing materials with which to continue my journal.We were hurriedly loaded onto the train and set off westward in the direction of the city of Murom.

The landscape totally changed after we passed through Sergach, Tartaley, and Smaghino. We now saw wide, well-tended fields where women, youths, and old men were working. At the junction station of Arzamas, our train turned sharply to the north. We were now completely baffled about where they were taking us. Once we passed through the station of Surovatikha, we understood that we were heading for Gorky. To the right of the tracks flowed the wide river Oka, a tributary of the Volga, where ships and loaded barges were sailing. To the left was a rise covered with trees. Then we saw the huge city of Gorky spread along both shores of the Oka right up to where it flowed into the Volga.

At 3:40 a.m. we arrived at Kazan Station in pouring rain and walked in formation along Chernyshevsky Street, then across a long bridge where the Oka flows into the Volga. The traffic of cars and trams slowed our pace as we continued along Soviet Street past the beautiful Municipal Soviet building, decorated with fountains and flowerbeds. We admired the architecture of the Jewish Library, the «Progress» moviehouse, and other old buildings. We arrived soaking wet at the Moscow Station, where we were given time to change our clothes and rest.

At Gorky's Moscow Station there were many people from Bukovina and several from Chernovtsy. From them Suprovici and Rosenberg learned that their relatives were alive. In such hard times, it was the possibility of such chance meetings that helped people survive and gave them hope of seeing relatives they had heard nothing about for three long years. They exchanged addresses and passed letters along.

On July 4 we travelled farther to the northeast toward Kirov. We passed through the small stations of Semyonov, Uren, Sashunya, Kotel'nich, and Langasovo, with nothing but forest and small streams between. At 12:40 a.m. we disembarked at the railway station in Kirov, on the bank of the river Viatka. In the military waiting room of the station I wrote a letter to Odessa. I told my mother and Fira what was happening; asked them not to worry; described my new comrades, both the Jews and others; and wrote about the cities we had passed

through, the natural surroundings of these far regions, meetings with people returning from evacuation, and other things. I asked them once again whether there was any news of our father and I asked Fira not to write until I had made a final stop somewhere.

In Kirov we also met Jews from Chernovtsy who told us that the city had not been destroyed during the retreat of the Germans and Romanians. They had learned this from friends and from their relatives who had returned from the ghettos.

From Kirov we journeyed to the northwest, which threw our subunit into even more guessing. Where were they taking us by such a roundabout route? In Kazan we had supposed we were bound for the mines or the factories of Aktyubinsk, Sterlitamak, Magnitogorsk, or farther into Kazakhstan. But in Kirov it seemed to us that we were being sent to Nizhniy Tagil, Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, beyond the Urals to Kurgan, Tyumen', or even to western Siberia. Having turned now to the northwest, we could perhaps end up in Murmansk, on the Kola Peninsula, in Arkhangel'sk Region, or somewhere in Komi ASSR, if not in the outlying Nenets Autonomous District. What kind of national armies or military training schools could be located there? We began to lose hope of ever making it to a front or into a national army. The pessimists began to talk of coal mines, timber cutting, and metallurgical and chemical factories. In a word – of the labor front.

The military escorts kept their silence. I think that they too did not know the final destination of our endless journey.

On that same July 4, after three hours of waiting, we boarded the train. We made long stops at the stations of Yur'iya, Velikaya, Murashi, and Bezbozhnik. Crowds of people stood on the railway platforms, drawn by the summer weather simply to stroll around. This was the place where the trains stood for long periods, where one could meet an acquaintance by chance, hear some news, or buy or sell something. On the platform at Murashi there were many crippled young men on crutches among the others. I thought these were local inhabitants who had returned from the front as invalids. They sat on benches engaged in lively conversation with other men and women their own age.

At the following stations of Oparino, Al'mez, and Pinyug, where the train made long stops, I saw even larger numbers of wounded men on the platform: on crutches, with artificial legs, in wheelchairs. We joined the other soldiers from our wagon on the platform and struck up a conversation with them. They asked us about life in recently liberated Ukraine, how order was being restored, and where we were going. As they asked about people from their own areas, we learned that they were not local residents at all. There were many military hospitals nearby as well as homes for war invalids.

Those who had lost one leg to disfigurement or amputation were

hoping to return home after their medical treatment was through, to their parents or to their families, and begin civilian lives. They were grateful to fate that they had at least survived with only these injuries. They had participated in a genuine slaughter from which few returned safe and sound.

One of them told us that in the many homes for invalids were people whose bodies were totally devastated: men who had lost both legs, both arms; men with disfigured faces, deep head wounds, and grave contusions. They were completely helpless. Many of them understood this and did not want to return home only to be a burden to their families. They tried at least to cheer up their loved ones, imploring their friends and sometimes even the volunteer and medical nurses to write letters to their wives, their young brides, their grieving parents, telling them that they had served together in the same section or platoon and that they knew for a fact that their husband, fiancé, or son was missing in action or had heroically fallen in battle in this place or that. As proof they asked their amanuenses to send photographs of relatives or some personal item: an amulet, a ring, a cross, a purse.

It was painful to behold so many young men whose lives had been ruined and hopes shattered by the mercilessness of war. I remember the different expressions of these doomed people. Some of them were sad and confused; others flashed with an irrepressible rage that demanded to know why they were the ones asked to forsake all earthly goods and human happiness. Why were they chosen for such misfortune? The eyes of some of them burned and cried out; the eyes of others merely stared in stubborn silence.

We passed several other platforms from which men our age, their lives knocked of course by the war, looked at us with what seemed to be reproach. I could no longer bear to leave the wagon. Here was yet more evidence that the fascists were beasts. They had not only destroyed millions of innocent Jews, but had brought boundless grief to all of humanity.

On July 5, I awoke early in the morning. We had passed through the small stations of Panasyuk and Makukha and for some reason the train stopped in a field by the river Luza. The air was clean, easy to breathe, and saturated with the smells of wild flowers. Untold numbers of rafts were floating downstream along the Luza. After crossing a bridge, we wound up at the Luza station. We left the wagons and ran in various directions, some for boiling-hot water, others to the tables and stands of a modest market. Women were selling bunches of vegetables containing several potatoes and also some rutabagas and turnips, local root vegetables I had never seen before. They were also selling dairy products, but the prices were high. For one liter of milk they were asking 50 rubles.

A group of Jews was standing on the station platform, and I struck up a conversation with them. They were from Poland, but had not been taken to the front, and were now waiting. They had been told they were to be settled in Voronezh Region and in Kuban', but doubted this very much. All of them wanted to return to Poland. They were receiving material aid (clothing, food, and money) from England and the United States.

Notes

[1] Vasilevskii, *Delo*, 416, 421-22, 425, 428, 430-31; Calafeteanu and Simion, *Condition of the Jews*, 179; *România*, 498-504; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 227, 232, 243, 273-74, 307-11.

[2] Calafeteanu and Simion, *Condition of the Jews*, 171, 180-81; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 318-19.

Chapter 12: **KOMI ASSR**

The next station was Savatiya, and after that we crossed the Northern Dvina River and arrived around eight o'clock that evening in Kotlas, a major junction and river port. This meant we were already in the territory of the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) and, although we didn't know it yet, approaching the end of our journey. We were given rations for another three days. I decided to send my mother a telegram to let her know that I was well and was travelling yet farther, and to tell her not to worry. When the woman at the telegraph office refused to accept a telegram to Odessa, a city that had been liberated almost three months earlier, I was forced to send it to Moscow instead, to Aunt Ida, who would then send it on to my mother.

A train of convicts arrived at the Kotlas station, under the guard of NKVD men and police dogs. An hour later their train set off to the north. It was said that they were going to serve long sentences in hard labor camps.

It was already around midnight, but still light as we sat on the platform of the station and read the newspaper. A worker told us about the «white nights», when the sun rose at three o'clock in the morning and set at 11 o'clock in the evening. At noon the sun did not stand directly overhead as it did at home, but rather in a circle along the horizon. Even between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m., when the sun was below the horizon, it was as light as it was at dusk during our summer back home. In other words, it was light 24 hours a day.

This railway man also told us that the local railroad had been built quickly, between 1941 and 1942, by prisoners working in extremely difficult conditions. The convicts had sawed down trees, built railway embankments through swampy areas, laid down the tracks, built the stations, and established workers' settlements, pushing ever farther north. Only a few hardy souls survived the ordeal, while the vast majority perished from exhaustion, sickness, and exposure. As they fell, their places were taken by thousands of new convicts. The more I heard about this land, the deeper my spirits sank.

The July night was warm, almost like home. The forest extended right up to the station: tall spruces, firs, and pines and widely branching

maples, oaks, and white-trunked birches. The glades were thickly covered with chamomile and other multicolored field flowers.

On July 6th, we were loaded onto another train. From there on we passed through only railway crossings – Miledzh', Chokun, Tatael, Madmas, and others – but not a single village and or tilled field. From behind the tall trees we occasionally caught a glimpse of watchtowers guarding the prison camps. For days on end we saw nothing but forests and watchtowers, swamps and the fallen trunks of trees (whether felled by man or by the wind) with their roots sticking up. There was not a bird or wild animal to be seen, and the land was enveloped by a deathly silence.

We crossed the wide river Vychegda and travelled past several railway crossings – Mezhog, Amb, Vozdino, Sezham – and arrived at the station of Mikun'. The railway man who appeared on the platform explained to us that the only route led to Vorkuta, which was far north of the Arctic Circle. Ahead of us lay Ukhta, Sosnogorsk, Pechora, Inta, and other settlements that we well known as the destination of convicts, primarily those sentenced to long terms for such grave crimes as high treason. They worked under a hard-labor regime cutting timber and digging in coal mines. We were completely crestfallen. Where were we being taken? And why? What had we done wrong?

We crossed yet another river and at 12:30 a.m., still in daylight, disembarked at Knyazh-Pogost in the rain. We marched in formation through the streets of the small settlement. The streets were paved with round logs, underneath which, on the right and left sides, was the marshy mud of a swamp. We walked by a factory of wooden houses and after another two kilometers came to a stop at the gates of a genuine prison camp. Our escorts handed us over to the local NKVD, who went down a list of names. We were searched and forced to surrender our documents, razors, pocket knives, and money. Everything that we handed in was registered in a thick notebook. We were told that these measures were being taken for our own safety.

We were now very far from the 188th Reserve Infantry Regiment, and we were being informed by the camp's warrant officer on duty that we were now army laborers. We were free men rather than convicts, but we would live in the same camp with convicted criminals, albeit in separate barracks. We would work wherever we were sent. This was our duty. The front needed our help. The warrant officer's speech was short and there were no questions.

We were taken into the yard of the camp. The sergeant attending us showed us our barracks, mess hall, club, office, baths, and communal latrines. He left us in one of the barracks, commanding us to get settled and rest until reveille. Tired and in a foul mood, we laid ourselves down fully clothed on the bare plank-beds.

* * *

A new chapter in my life began on July 7, 1944. I was officially an army laborer.

We were awakened early in the morning by a banging on a railroad rail. We were led in formation, carrying our things, to the baths. Our heads were shorn close to the skin with clippers, and our bodies completely scraped free of hair with dull razors. We received a bar of rough soap to be shared by three men. After we showered, we were told that our clothes had been taken to be disinfected in the drying room. We would get them back, but then we would have to surrender them for storage. This measure was in our own interest – so that we would not be robbed.

We were given a new set of undershirts, undershorts, shirts, field shirts, breeches, quilted jackets, foot-cloths, high shoes, and side caps. Everything was in used condition, washed and rewashed, patched up, full of mysterious spots and stains, and terribly chewed up from wear. We looked at once pitiful and ridiculous. For some of the men everything was too big and hung off of them as though they were scarecrows. For others, everything was too tight and fastened awkwardly with round protruding spots. We were all depressed as we ridiculed each other for our appearance. With our shorn heads and faded military outfits, we all began to look alike, losing our individuality, becoming «standard issue».

Washed, clothed, and prepared for our life and work as army labor, we followed an escort to the camp office to be registered. We were warned that there were few clerks, and that therefore we were to respond to the questions with short, clear answers and with soldierly precision. The clerks filled out questionnaires: Name? Date of birth? Place? Family background? Education? Nationality? Do you have relatives abroad? Where and in what occupations? What foreign languages do you know? Were you ever in occupied territory? Where, for how long, in what occupation? and on and on.

One of the clerks compiled lists of those who had specialized training. I had none, as I was still studying. Khaid urged me to register as a bookkeeper, but I did not want to lie and, together with a few of my fellows, wound up on the list of unskilled laborers.

This clerk told me that there was another army laborer in the camp by the name of Udler. I was overjoyed at hearing this, since our family's name is a very rare one. Hoping that it was my father, I asked the clerk for this Udler's first name and age. The answer disappointed me; he turned out to be a relatively young man. I took note of his name in order to find him later, thinking he might at least turn out to be a relative.

We were free for the rest of the day, so I sought out Udler. I learned that we simply happened to have the same last name.

Early in the morning we were loaded into trucks and travelled over a very bad road and through forest and swampland for about 20 kilometers. We arrived at another camp that was encircled with barbed wire. Instead of barracks there were large military tents inhabited by Moldavians from Bendery County and Russian Germans. They had been brought here two days before, working at felling trees and removing branches from the trunks. They sawed logs four or six meters in length and piled them up in stacks, cut off the branches with axes, and dragged them into huge heaps. If they fulfilled their work quota, they were given rations of 550 grams of bread per day as well as a bowl of thin soup with 3 grams of sunflower seed oil three times a day.

There were also convicts in this camp. They lived in other tents, but we met them within the camp. They saw that we were new arrivals and asked us where we were from. They were looking for their own countrymen. Their terms were long; the minimum was 10 years. They were dressed in the same way we were – in used soldiers' uniforms. There were former front-line soldiers among them, as well as teachers and even priests.

That night I hardly slept a wink. I was in despair. Why had I been sent out here together with German colonists, Moldavians, and convicts? I was treated as though I had committed some crime against the Soviet Union. But what kind? Would I be able to endure the trials of camp life, the exhausting work, constant hunger, and arctic cold? Would I ever emerge from this place alive and return home? Would I ever see my father, mother, and Fira again?

At six o'clock in the morning we were given axes and saws and, under escort, left the camp. We went two or three kilometers into the age-old forest and divided into groups: three men to one axe and two men to one saw. The general quota of wood for a group of five men was 30 cubic meters. We worked to the limits of our strength because we depended on each other. Our keepers brought us our midday meal in large containers: a muddy brew containing three grains of groats floating with a mere 3 grams of sunflower seed oil. We looked at each other in confusion. We were very tired and hungry, and we knew that with this pitiful nourishment we would soon be turning up our toes. That evening we had a more filling meal: soup, porridge, and fish. After the meal, Bakhmet, our brigade leader, informed us that because we had worked badly and had fulfilled only 45% of the quota we would not receive full rations the next day. We argued and accused Bakhmet of dishonestly crediting his own friends with the wood we had stacked. This was our first introduction to camp mores.

That same evening I talked with the Moldavians for a long time. They were all natives of the village of Kitskany (Chițcani), near Bendery.

They looked at me, a Jew, somewhat guiltily and conducted themselves warily. It seems possible that back in their village some of them, had killed Jews and plundered their homes.

Our separate tent for army laborers was not finished and Suprovici and I were cold at night. We moved close to one another and whispered among ourselves at length about the situation in the camp until we fell asleep.

* * *

Two commanders, accompanied by the superintendent of work, visited our camp. They listened to the complaints of the army laborers concerning the hard physical labor, the high quotas, the thievery of the brigade leader, and the poor food. Many of us asked to be separated from the prisoners. They promised to take our complaints and requests into consideration and to improve the living conditions.

Eight of us, including Rosenberg, Khaid, Suprovici, and I, were selected to load and unload trucks. It was heavy work, with a quota for each individual of 14 cubic meters of wood. That day we unloaded 24 trucks and we were exhausted.

We were permanently assigned to this work and grew somewhat proficient. In addition, we had breaks from the work and were able to rest between the loadings and unloadings. With difficulty we sometimes fulfilled our quota and received more bread.

After another discussion with the superintendent of work, our quota was reduced. He ordered that we be given mattresses and summer blankets, and arranged for permission to send and receive letters and packages. Our official address was: Komi ASSR, Zheleznodorozhnyi district, Zheleznodorozhnyi workmen's settlement, P.O. Box 219-TsOLP, 3rd detachment.

On July 12th, we were working in the pouring rain, loading and unloading the trucks, when around one p.m. we were ordered to go to the bank of the Vaiku River to unload. Rosenberg injured himself on a stake and was taken to the medical aid station, leaving seven of us. A foreman measured our work: the time when a vehicle arrived, the time it took us to unload, the volume of wood, the time the vehicle departed, and so on. That day we unloaded 16 trucks.

On the Vaiku River, cutters drew huge tethered barges loaded with wood. Enormous rafts floated by, steered by expert raftsmen. Wood floaters were constantly throwing tree trunks into the river. I had never before seen so much timber. It was said that somewhere downstream the wood was taken from the river and sent on by train or ship.

After dinner several other army laborers and I were summoned and

ordered to write our autobiographies. We were actually gladdened by this, guessing that perhaps we would be sent to the front. Then I wrote my first two letters: one to my mother and Fira, the other to Ida. In order not to sadden them, I refrained from complaining. Of course I asksed whether any letters had come from my father.

The radio reported the news that Soviet forces had liberated Grodno and several dozen other populated settlements. Everyone took joy in this as each victory brought us closer to war's end.

On July 18th, a group of 10 people arrived to join our labor group from Kharkov: Germans, Greeks, and Bulgarians. Our original group was mixed up; I was separated from Rosenberg and Khaid and ended up working with the Bulgarians. On July 19th, several more people joined our detachment, including a Frenchman from Alsace, a German from Austria, and a German from Odessa. The Frenchman spoke Russian very poorly and I occasionally served as his interpreter.

We began to receive an additional 135 grams of sugar and a small cake of soap along with our rations, and a welcome decision was announced: As army laborers, we had the right to buy food products at the market. Whoever had surrendered money upon arrival could now take a small sum for personal needs.

* * *

On July 21st, I fell ill. I ran a temperature, lost a great deal of weight, and could not even rise from my bed. At the medical aid station I was given peas (against scurvy) and some powders and excused from work for several days.

Then the second platoon, consisting mostly of Moldavians, left our detachment. It was said that they were being sent to help in the restoration of the Northern Caucasus. I asked Yarymbash, the commander of my platoon, and the doctor's assistant whether I, too, could be sent south at the first opportunity. They promised I could. I wanted to be closer to home. Here the rains were beginning, and it was damp and cold. Everyone was horrified at thought of the approaching winter. We had heard that in these parts the winters lasted for eight months and that the temperature plunged to 50 degrees below zero.

Rosenberg found himself work in the kitchen. This gladdened us, as he was able to slip us extra porridge, fish, and soup.

* * *

On August 3rd, another new group of 11 people arrived. Among them was one Jew with the last name of Epel, born in Galaţi. He had been mobilized in 1941, was wounded, and then treated in the hospital,

from where they sent him to us. Why had he not been returned to the front? Apparently because he had been born in Romania.

That evening we listened to a lecture on the international situation by the Party organizer of the detachment. The Polish Committee of National Liberation, a new Polish government, had been formed in Kelme. The cities of L'vov, Lublin, Bialystok, and Kaunas had been liberated in late July and early August. Soviet forces were battling toward Riga and Warsaw. Tens of thousands of Germans had been taken prisoner. We listened attentively and hoped that the war would end soon, we would be discharged from the labor-army, and survive.

After the lecture there was a meeting of everyone in the labor-army. We challenged the labor-army workers of another detachment to a «socialist competition» and pledged ourselves to fulfill 120% of the monthly quota. We were so emaciated that we hardly knew if we could survive to the end of the month. We didn't know whether to laugh or to cry.

* * *

On August 5th, we were subjected to a medical examination. The doctors, who were mostly Jews, treated us very attentively. My height was 169 cm; my weight was 55 kg. I was assigned to category #1, meaning that I was healthy and would be required to fulfill 100% of my quota. Abramovici was in category #2, responsible for fulfilling only 75% of the quota. Many were classified in category #3. Their bodies had begun to swell, as did their legs, which could hardly move. Their legs had become like logs. Whether this was due to the water, to the climate, or, most likely, to malnutrition, I cannot say. These people were temporarily relieved from work.

* * *

We learned from the newspapers that Josef V. Stalin had been awarded the Order of Victory. The entire country rejoiced and congratulated him for great triumphs and successes on all fronts of the war. In every article it was repeated that he was the thoughtful father of all Soviet peoples, that he took care of every member of our great family, and that the front was approaching the fascist lair.

On August 6th, we had a holiday. I went with Khaid and Suprovici to pick berries. We had to stand in swampy water up to our knees, but the berries tasted good. These were the only fruit we had eaten since our arrival in Komi.

* * *

The rain came down in buckets day and night. The weather turned cold, and we were drenched as we worked. We could load fewer and fewer vehicles, and fell short of our quota. As a result we received only 400 grams of bread per day. We were then sent to another job collecting scattered tree stems in the forest, hauling them on our shoulders, and piling them up in stacks. It was hellishly hard work.

Two Moldavians refused to work. They were arrested and sent to Knyazh-Pogost. The poor fellows were not the saboteurs that our foreman insisted on calling them; they simply lacked the strength to go on working. I do not know what became of them.

The platoon commander Yarymbash asked me to help him compile a list of all personnel, indicating age, nationality, and health category. Yarymbash himself did not know what the purpose of this list was or who needed it. Yarymbash's own health grew worse.

* * *

On August 11th, there was a meeting at which it was resolved that we would fulfill our monthly plan by the 24th. We looked at each other with sadness, knowing this was impossible. But no one made a move to object and the resolution was accepted unanimously.

After the meeting, I wanted to write a letter home, but the pages of my thin notebook had run out and my small pencil stub had disappeared. There was no one from who to borrow writing materials.

* * *

A new group was formed from our platoon and another headed by a man named Debler. Our new commander, Boyandzhiev, was of Greek nationality; I was appointed his assistant and made responsible for filling out all documents.

On August 19th, we left camp at dawn. We were transferred to Knyazh-Pogost, where we were kept in the TsOLP office all day. I bought a cake of soap for 30 rubles, a pocket mirror for 20 rubles, and a pencil and small notebook for 15 rubles. As I had some free time, I shaved, washed up, changed my clothes, and wrote a letter to my mother and Fira.

Here in Knyazh-Pogost, I met Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina who had crossed the frontier illegally into the USSR during 1939 and early 1940. They were underground Communists and were fleeing persecution by the Romanian *Sigurantsa*. They had been captured by border guards and NKVD agents, sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, and sent here, to the desolate camps of Komi ASSR.

At one in the morning, August 21st, we were quickly loaded onto train cars and sent to the station of Mikun'. A cold autumn rain was falling and our mood was somber. We were given our new address: Komi ASSR, Severo-Pechorskaya railroad, Mikun', Building Section, detachment 322. Here in Mikun' we were reunited with those army laborers who had left our detachment earlier. No one had been sent south.

Our new commander was a young man about 26 years old, a tall, fair man with bushy sideburns. His last name was Oksinzov, and he, too, appeared to be a Greek. Before the war he had been a teacher of history and geography. Almost daily we were transferred from one job to another. We unloaded raw lumber off of freight cars for the local housing construction factory, hauled stones and bricks in wheelbarrows and stretchers for the building of an electric power station, dug the ground for the foundation of a building while standing in a trench full of water. We even worked night shifts. It was all terribly difficult. The frost descended, it was cold, and we were worn out.

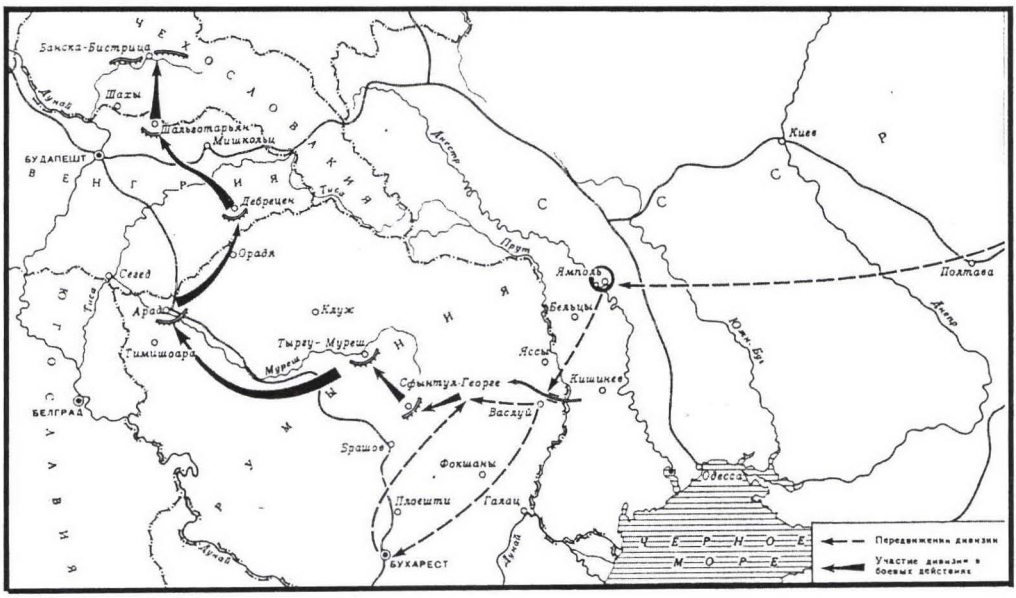
On August 30th, a change was made in the leadership of our subunit. Our commander, Oksinzov, was made political instructor, and our former political instructor, Yasyrov, was appointed our commander. He behaved in a haughty manner and did not try to arrange work so that the people received good rations. He was heard to utter anti-Semitic opinions and all kinds of taunts and insults. The army laborers felt no respect for him and answered his rudeness in kind. At the first meeting with the authorities, we asked that he be disciplined or replaced with another commander, and we were successful.

* * *

The end of August brought great successes for the Soviet armies. Among the Romanian cities liberated were Galați, Brăila (my place of birth), Tulcea, Bucharest, Ploiești, and Giurgiu. The participants in these battles included the Romanian «Tudor Vladimirescu» Volunteer Division, founded on the territory of the USSR in October 1943.[1] On August 23rd, King Mihai declared that Romania was putting a halt to its resistance. Marshal Ion Antonescu and other members of his government were arrested.

Such was the inglorious end of the «holy» war into which Marshal Antonescu had led Romania, in alliance with Hitler's Germany, supposedly for the liberation of the lost provinces east of the Prut and for the annihilation of Communism, which threatened all of Europe.

The Romanians had suffered huge human, material, and moral losses in this war. In a letter dated November 15, 1943, Ion Antonescu wrote to his idol, Hitler, that up to January 1, 1942 the Romanian army had lost 134,136 officers, warrant officers, and soldiers (for the most part in the Odessa campaign); that, around the Don and Stalingrad, 18



Map taken from *Zarozhdenie narodnykh armii stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo dogovora: 1941–1949 gg*, 181

Romanian divisions had been routed; and that another 8 divisions had been lost in Kuban', on the Nogay Steppe, and in the Crimea.[2]

More accurate numerical data regarding Romanian army losses can be found in Eduard Mezincescu's *Mareşalul Antonescu şi catastrofa României*. Between June 26, 1941, and October 17, 1941, which is to say from the outbreak of the war to the occupation of Odessa, the Romanian army suffered 131,307 killed, wounded, or missing in action.

From October 18, 1941, to June 30, 1942, during military operations in the Crimea, on the Kerch Peninsula and outside Sevastopol, in Ukraine, and in the Donets Basin region, Romanian losses came to 248,497.

From July 1, 1942, to September 13, 1944, in the battles between the Don and the Volga rivers, in the Northern Caucasus, and in the liberation of the Donbas region, Ukraine, the Crimea and Moldavia, until Romania's cessation of hostilities against the Soviet Union, the dead, wounded, and missing added up to an additional 218,234 persons.

Altogether, between June 22, 1941, and September 13, 1944, Romania lost 598,038 persons to war.

When Soviet forces entered the territory of Romanian Moldova, somewhere between 150,000 and 170,000 Romanians were taken prisoner.

Romania also suffered additional losses late in the war. From August 23, 1944, to the end of the war on May 9, 1945, in the western

campaign, the Romanian army lost 167,525 killed, wounded, or missing in action.[3]

For much of this tragedy we must hold Ion Antonescu responsible, and forever discredit the dishonest and twisted attempts to absolve him. The Moldavian historian Artyom Lazarev wrote that Ion Antonescu «drove the nearly million-man Romanian army as far as the Don and the Volga in order to conquer 'living space' for Romania,» but that this army «had already in 1941 and 1942 lost just short of 400,000 men, including the almost 200,000 Romanian soldiers and officers who were in Soviet captivity by the start of 1943».

The writer and scholar Constantin Popovici was among the restricted number of those present at the trial of Antonescu and his assistants, which was conducted in Bucharest May 6-15, 1946. At this trial the essence and character of the military-fascist regime in Romania from 1940 to 1944 was exposed. Popovici was also present at the execution of the major war criminals – Ion and Mihai Antonescu, George Alexianu, and Constantin Vasiliu – in Zhilava prison on June 1, 1946. In his book *Memory of That Time*, Popovici gives an unbiased presentation of the entire chain of bloody crimes consciously carried out by Ion Antonescu personally and by Romania's national-legionnaire government, the army, the gendarmerie, the police, and civilians who agreed with these misanthropic policies.

Doctor Moses Rosen, the author of a series of articles exposing the destructive and shortsighted policies of the dictator Antonescu, and the anti-Semitic trend in the writings of his contemporary neonationalist followers, has noted that Antonescu eliminated more than 400,000 innocent Jews (or Judeo-Communists, as the legionnaire press of the day called them), sent 600,000 young Romanians to their deaths, but nevertheless failed to regain Bessarabia. And he asks: «Can history bestow upon such a person the title of hero?»[4]

In his book *I Am a Moldavian*, Lazarev levels harsh criticism against the «Romanian neofascists» and «contemporary Moldavian neo-Romanians» who were trying to rehabilitate the «fascist executioner» Ion Antonescu by presenting him as the «liberator of the Bessarabian and Transnistrian Romanians» who deserved the honor of having one of Kishinev's central streets named after him.[5] The countless crimes carried out in the territories taken from the Soviet Union brought harm not only to the Soviet people, but to the Romanian people as well.

The irrepressible falsifiers of history, Romanian neofascists, distort facts and events in their attempts to vindicate the odious figures of the past and their bloody deeds.[6]

* * *

Bits of war news continued to reach us at the far edge of civilization. On August 22nd, forces of the Third Ukrainian Front liberated our old home of Akkerman, later renamed Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy.[7]

In the first half of September the Bulgarians capitulated, and on September 19th, the Finns signed a truce with the USSR. Many prisoners were taken during the operations of August and September.

During the second half of August, allied American and French forces liberated Paris and the south of France (Toulon, Marseilles, Cannes, Nice, Grenoble, and Lyon). During the first half of September, the armies of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain drove the Germans from northern France, liberated Belgium and Luxemburg, and reached the western borders of Germany.

The quick progress of the Soviet fronts hastened the liberation of Warsaw and the whole of Poland.[8]

We listened carefully to the communiques from Sovinformbureau, still hoping that the victories of the anti-Hitler coalition and the rout of Germany would bring us closer to the end of our sufferings in the wild and frigid expanses of Komi.

* * *

At last, on September 13th I received a letter from Fira. After five months, the first bit of news had arrived from our father. He was alive! He had enclosed the number of his field post office. I was overjoyed. I had thought countless dark thoughts during these long months! I had seen so much! Papa could have been killed or crippled at the front in a hundred ways. He could have wound up in a labor-army, underground in the mines, or among convicts in the forests of Siberia. He could have been working in the chemical factories of the Urals or in Kazakhstan, where people died in countless numbers. Thanks be to God that he lived! Fira wrote that she and our mother were also well and were still in Odessa, waiting for permission to return home to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy.

* * *

On September 15th I received two letters at the same time: one from Aunt Ghenea in Chernovtsy and one from Aunt Ida. My dear Aunt Ghenea, with whom we had lived before the war in Brăila and who had played a large role in my upbringing, wrote that she and Uncle Isidor were working as engineers at a factory, gradually getting their lives back together, and recovering their health after the privations and suffering of the ghetto. Leonea was in the tenth grade and wanted to go into the army in order to take vengeance on the fascists and hasten the

day of Victory. She advised me to try to study in evening school and prepare myself to enter the institute. Aunt Ghenea did not have any idea of the conditions in which I was living and working. Aunt Ida consoled me, saying that the war would soon end, we would be demobilized, and I would be able to decide for myself the next stage of my life. She promised to send me a package of envelopes and writing paper, warm socks, gloves, and a scarf, as she knew better than the rest of my relatives what winter was like in this part of Russia. She also promised to send a transfer of 100 rubles.

* * *

A Komsomol brigade was formed. There were only ten of us. I was not a member of the Komsomol at the time, but I was the right age. We were transferred to a separate, large room where we conducted regular political information sessions, reading newspapers aloud. Our food rations improved. We were given 750 g of bread a day, fortified or antiscorbutic meals, soup, porridge, and sometimes fish. Our mood brightened, we kept the place clean, and we worked with increased desire. The Komsomol organizer of our brigade was Peftiev, a thoughtful and resourceful Greek. He spoke well at the meetings and capably reported on our activities.

* * *

There was no end to the regroupings and reshufflings. On October 1st they brought into our brigade 15 people who had arrived from Odessa only the day before. We were transferred to the night shift and worked in dry, cold weather. We were given padded trousers and large work mittens. The new arrivals were fresh and strong, and the work moved along well.

One night someone stole my mess-tin. This was a terrible loss, as I now had nothing to take my food in. I had to wait until everyone had finished eating and then receive the leftovers in the mess-tin of a friend. I had to gulp the food down to make it to work with the rest.

I ended up having to buy myself a mess-tin with a lid. This cost me 70 rubles – almost my entire savings.

* * *

I received more letters. My mother sent me a clipping from an old Akkerman newspaper dated June 20, 1941, in which the school's Komsomol organizer, V. Sarvanidi, wrote that we 9th-grade pupils of High School #2 had passed our exams in the Russian language. He emphasized that even I, who «had been almost unable to speak Russian

at the start of the academic year», had shown «a solid knowledge of the Russian language» in my oral and written exams and had received a high grade. Dmitrii Strelets, my father's friend in Odessa, had saved this newspaper article together with other documents.

I took this clipping to our political instructor Oksinzov, a former teacher, in order to prove to him that I had finished nine grades and to ask him to help me gain admission to the tenth grade. Oksinzov promised to ask the Enlistment Office, the District Party Committee, and the District Department of Public Education about my right to further schooling.

Aunt Ida wrote that she was trying to have me called to Moscow to study. She advised me to take care of my health and sent me 100 rubles to help. She wrote that nothing more had been received from my father since his first letter, and once again, everyone was worried. What could possibly have happened to him?

We received our pay – 202 rubles for August and 218 rubles for September. This was very little money, since everything was very expensive. But I was content with it, and able to buy at least a few things, such as a waffle-patterned towel from a newly-arrived army laborer for 15 rubles. From another I bought a needle and a reel of thread to sew my ripped up trousers.

* * *

On October 7th I was on duty around 4 a.m. when a cold rain that had been falling all night turned to snow, dense, with large flakes. Toward seven, when I was relieved, a thick covering of snow lay on the ground.The long and brutal winter had begun.

* * *

I was asked to help draw up new lists. This time they demanded answers to questions we were not accustomed to: Have you ever done army service? In which army? Where? When? Were you ever awarded orders or medals? How old are you? Who sent you to the labor-army and from where? Once again all kinds of reports and rumors began to fly.

On October 10th I was summoned again to the NKVD. They asked the same questions, filling in details of my biography. I already knew it by heart.

I received good news from Fira. On September 9th, she and my mother arrived in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. The State Bank had assigned them a nice two-room apartment with a kitchen, corridor, and pleasant courtyard at #22 Novo-Bazarnaya Street. Thanks be to God that their more-than-three-year wanderings had come to an end. Mother and Fira were once again in Akkerman with a roof over their heads. No longer

did they have to go searching around strange homes. And Fira had work, which meant that they would not be hungry. Above all, they were no longer people of the lowest sort, no longer prisoners of the fascist Romanian ghetto, but rather free citizens. Father and I were both alive, and perhaps we, too, would return home so that our family could resume our happy life together.

* * *

On October 23rd, three brigades departed from our detachment. It was said that they had been transferred to the area around Kotlas, to detachment #21. Who knew? Perhaps we, too, would be sent off somewhere. We were like so many rolling stones.

* * *

On October 27th I did not go to work because my left foot had swollen badly. A horribly painful boil left me unable to do anything. It was so bitterly cold outside that one could not even leave one's nose exposed. We were hungry, cold, and embittered. Subgroups were taking shape and conflicts arose between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. I cannot say with certainty what the immediate cause was, but they soon came to blows. The platoon commander and the political instructor investigated the incident. They did not want the top command to learn about it and tried to make peace between the two sides. Many insulting words were exchanged, and having to listen to the utterances of either side was equally painful for me.

That day I received three letters at once. This was better for my ill body than any medicine.

Fira gave me our father's address: Ukrainian SSR, Donbas, Alchevsk, 22 Nagornaya Street. He had written that he was well and working, but nothing more. He gave no explanation of how he wound up there, why he had a civilian address, or what kind of work he was doing. I had all sorts of questions but no answers. Despite that, I was happy he was alive and able to receive letters. I decided to pose all my questions to him directly.

Greta wrote me from Cherepovets that her work as an investigator for the Military Prosecuting Magistracy was interesting and varied, but also rather difficult for a young woman because she often had to interact with murderers and hardened criminals. She wanted to try working as a judge or legal adviser in order to make her final decision. She went into a short description of the city of Cherepovets during that difficult time. It was a major center of the metallurgical industry, a city blackened with soot. The climate was cold and, like many cities of the region, hunger was omnipresent.

In her capacity as a lawyer, Greta promised to find out on what basis

I had been sent to the labor-army and how I could be legally transferred to the active army or permitted to study. I was touched by her concern for me and by the familial, cheery tone of her letter. I had never seen Greta and knew of her only from the stories of my deceased grandmother Malka, who had lived with her eldest daughter Ida in Moscow for several years before the war where she took care of her granddaughter Greta. Greta was the same age as Fira – at that time around 14 to 16 years old.

The third letter was from Aunt Ida. Her nephew Leonechka had shown up at her home without warning, wearing his Soviet soldier's uniform. He had arrived in Moscow with his commanding officer, for whom he was an interpreter. Their meeting was an emotional one as Ida was seeing him for the first time. With evident feeling she described Leonea as a genuinely handsome, slender, and well-mannered young man. He had fully recovered from the ghetto, studied, then entered the army. He had had the fortune to serve under a good leader. His visit to Aunt Ida lasted only several hours. The letter ended with the rhetorical question, full of dismay: How is it possible that, after the ghetto, Leonea wound up in the active army while you, Rubin, find yourself in Komi among convicts?

I was sincerely happy for Leonea and very upset at my own fate. I could not explain it even to myself.

* * *

I had not been able to report to work for a week. The doctor (I don't know his name) had lanced my boil, but I continued to suffer terrible pain and lost a lot of weight. My body was swollen; my fingers left deep hollows in my swollen legs. I was very hungry, but there was nothing to eat. My rations had been reduced because I was not working. I drank a great deal of water.

I was also in a terrible frame of mind. There was no one around to raise my spirits with even so much as a kind word. Not even in the ghetto had my heart been so heavy. Clearly, I had also been affected by an incident of the previous night. An army laborer from the neighboring barrack, swollen from malnutrition and completely exhausted, had gone out to relieve himself. As he returned, he collapsed and, lacking the strength to get up again, was frozen stiff by morning.

* * *

November arrived. The temperature plunged and the snow piled up. The work, whether felling trees, digging trenches, or loading and unloading trucks and freight cars, became incredibly difficult. The quotas were not met and our rations were reduced. Even strong men, used to

hard physical labor, began to give out. The number of people with swollen bodies grew, and no one could help them.

I grew weaker each day and could no longer rise from my bed. I recalled my condition back in the ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad, when I lay delirious with a high fever from typhus. My situation now was even worse because I was alone, my heart was heavy, and my spirit was failing. I slept endlessly, thinking that I would one day fail to wake up.

* * *

I don't know what happened to me for several days. I cannot remember, and my diary had no entries. When this period of unconsciousness and apathy passed, I had one overwhelming desire: to eat. The doctor who had been treating my boil and who knew my half-starved state probably took some pity on me and arranged for food to be brought to me in bed. I greedily gulped everything down but could not satisfy my hunger.

With the knowledge of the doctor and perhaps by his request, Rosenberg, who worked in the kitchen, improved my rations each day. He would add a bit more sunflower seed oil and slightly increase my portion of porridge, toss in an additional piece of meat or fish, and sweeten my tea. Often during the day, while everyone else was out working, he would bring a slice of bread to my bedside.

Once the doctor found him at my side, and we struck up a conversation. Rosenberg reminisced about his relatives who had perished in the ghetto, and I told the painful story of our family, who I would surely never see again as I was not going to survive.

For the first time, the doctor relaxed in our presence, opened his heart, and began to share his own story. He had been arrested in 1937 due to the slander of envious people. He was sentenced to 10 years and sent to Komi. His fate in the camps, among which he was often transferred, was much better than that of many others, due to his professional training. He treated not only convicts and, much later, the army laborers, but also the supervisors and the officers of various departments and their family members. Only in recent years had the conditions of his existence improved somewhat: he was now able to move about without guards, to correspond with his family in Moscow, and, now and then, to receive packages and money transfers.

After his arrest, his family suffered a great deal because of their connection with an «enemy of the people». His wife, an experienced surgeon, had to change jobs. Old friends helped her out. His elderly parents fell sick from grief and soon passed away. His wife and two children had their living space reduced when an employee of the house management moved with his family into their apartment. There was no end to the rowdy scenes and fights as their life was transformed into a

veritable hell. In 1944, his daughter was in seventh grade and his son was finishing his ten-year schooling. The doctor missed them very much, visualizing their undeserved humiliations and privations.

Rosenberg and I tried to console and comfort him, noting that at least they were alive and, thank God, had not fallen into the hands of the Germans.

Since the outbreak of the war, the doctor had repeatedly requested to be sent to the front, where physicians were in great demand, but he was always refused. Like thousands of other convicts, he hoped for an amnesty.

From the day of that first frank and intimate conversation, a sincere friendship was established between us. I apparently reminded the doctor of his son. Rosenberg, who was alone in the world, found in us, I suppose, a kind of support – devoted, loyal comrades. For me, they were nothing less than my saviors.

We met often. Once, inasmuch as I was very weak, I gave the doctor my savings of around 500 rubles and asked him to buy whatever food he thought necessary for me to regain my strength. The doctor, for his part, attended to my recovery. In addition to medicines, he would bring me a small piece of butter, a half-liter bottle of milk, or an apple. He systematically and tactfully instilled in me the faith that I was young, that I would get well, that I would return home, that I would get an education and find my way in life. He drove away all of my doubts. These ministrations, along with Rosenberg's porridges, his somewhat thicker soups, and other food preparations, gradually brought me back my strength.

The doctor promised that after my recovery he would find me work that was within my physical powers. According to him, among the prisoners of the various waves of repression were many educated and decent people: scholars and scientists, teachers, engineers, doctors, artists, and actors. They tried, as far as possible, to help each other with both their moral and material resources, to stick close together, and stay far away from the criminals.

It often happened that such people were forbidden to return home after the end of their term of confinement. After serving out 10 or 15 years, people who had hoped soon to see their families, their wretched wives or gray-haired husbands, their grown children, or the grandchildren born in their absence were instead directed to live «at liberty» in a restricted area like this one. When these people understood that this meant an indefinite continuation of their cruel exile, some of them fainted, suffered heart attacks, or lost their minds. Many reconciled themselves to their fate and summoned their wives or husbands to these far-distant places. It also happened that, after such long periods in the camps, some men and women, whose spouses had for one reason or other denied them, created new families here.

With three years to go until the end of his sentence, the doctor was tormented by doubts: would he be covered by the expected amnesty and be allowed to return home, or would they enslave him forever?

The doctor had acquaintances and friends among those who had served out their terms of imprisonment only to receive not freedom, but forced settlement in Mikun', Knyazh-Pogost, or another settlement or town in Komi ASSR, working involuntarily as specialists in different enterprises and establishments.

* * *

By the beginning of December I felt considerably better. I had not worked for more than a month, but my leg no longer bothered me. I was eating well, and my strength was gradually returning. I did not know how to thank the doctor and Rosenberg.

Having driven away thoughts of death and now looking ahead to the future with hope, I sat down and wrote my father a letter. I did not want to cause him distress and so I told him that everything was fine. I tried to cheer him up and wrote everything I knew about Mother and Fira, Ghenea, Isidor and Leonea, and Ida and Greta. I asked him to tell me about what had happened to him after his mobilization by the Field Enlistment Office. Being able to correspond with my father increased my assurance that our long years of suffering and separation would soon end.

* * *

The doctor found me work that was physically rather light. A temporary worker was need at a mill, where an old acquaintance was the boss. I began work there on December 15th. In addition to the boss, two professional millers worked there in shifts, taking me on as an assistant. My responsibilities included cleaning the mill, filling sacks (usually with groats, more rarely with flour) from crates, which stood near the millstones, dragging the sacks and placing them into different piles according to their contents. In order to drag a full sack up to the upper rows of the piles, we climbed up steps carefully formed out of other full sacks in the lower rows.

The mill was small. The grain was shipped from the south, and we made millet meal, pearl-barley, and oatmeal. Our production was, for the most part, distributed to the kitchens of the prison camps and army-labor detachments. Porridge was omnipresent in our daily menu. We milled flour for the bakeries which, as a rule, baked black rye bread. The millers treated me well, showing me to do and how, and helping me when they saw me having trouble with a certain task.

I fully appreciated the good deed done for me by the doctor, and I

worked conscientiously. The millers were pleased with me, as I was happy in turn to be sheltered from the hard December frost. My comrades, the army laborers, were working themselves to exhaustion in knee-high snow, freezing and suffering from hunger. It terrified me to think of what would have become of me if I had not met my benefactor, the doctor.

At noon we had an hour-long break at the mill. Everyone prepared the midday meal, boiling porridge in a large cauldron. The millers and the boss would add other small contributions. This was our main course every day. After the physical work I ate heartily until full, and with each passing day I felt better.

During the meal the millers asked me about life in Romania before the war, about our family, about our time in the ghetto, and about other things. They gave rather short answers to my questions. After serving out their terms, they had been denied permission to return home. They continued to live in Komi ASSR as free laborers. They hoped that once the war ended an amnesty would be declared and they would be able to leave this place.

* * *

Two weeks went by at this calm place. At the end of one work day the boss of the mill came up to me and invited me to come to his home for dinner the following Sunday. He wanted to introduce me to his wife.

This was my first invitation to visit a Jewish family in exile. My spirits soared as I looked forward to meeting people who lived outside the labor-army setting. I made myself presentable enough, and felt inadequate only in being unable to take a bouquet of flowers to the mistress of the house.

At the time agreed upon I knocked on their door, and my boss opened it. In his domestic environment, his appearance was completely different. At the mill he was always hidden in his sheepskin coat, tightly buttoned up to the neck; his face was stern and care-worn, and he spoke curtly to his subordinates. His head was always covered by his Russian fur hat; now, thick gray hair adorned his proudly held head, and his sharp, short beard looked dignified. His lively, intelligent eyes invited me warmly into his home. It was as if a completely different man stood before me: a peaceful, good-hearted, smiling man who greeted me with open arms.

The mistress of the house appeared in the narrow vestibule. We were introduced, and she pulled me to herself, embracing and kissing me as though I were a long-lost family member. They took my pea-jacket there at the entrance and led me to a small dining room where the table was already set.

I do not remember whether there was a family event that day or whether they were simply entertaining me, a Jewish guest, but the table was festively decorated. It reminded me of our home in Brăila, where my father would invite two or three Jewish soldiers for the Passover feast. Those young people were from small Bessarabian towns, serving in the 38th Infantry Regiment located outside the city. They had permission to celebrate the first seders among their own people. Along with other soldiers, they came to the synagogue where faithful Jews would greet them and invite them to their homes. The Jews considered themselves honor-bound to do such a *mitzvah*, a good deed.

The miller's dining room contained a table, four chairs, and a sideboard. The wooden floor was covered with a homespun rug adorned with a Ukrainian national pattern. Everything was modest, clean, and cozy.

The host fetched drinks – wine and vodka – from the sideboard and put them on the table, and the hostess dished out a noodle soup. We raised our small vodka glasses and the host proposed a toast to a quick and victorious end to the war and to the hope that we would all soon return to our homes.

It had been years since I had eaten a Jewish soup with eyes of fat and neatly cut noodles. One can easily imagine that I ate heartily; the hostess served me a second ladlefull with evident pleasure. Then we ate a genuine Jewish *rosl* with meat, potatoes, and deliciously seasoned gravy.

This homemade stew along with a glass of dry red wine touched me deeply and made me remember all the many small Jewish features and customs of our prewar lives! They had been so commonplace that only after the mournful years of war had passsed, the dreadful wandering, ghettos, and camps, did we began to notice and lovingly recall them.

I was the center of attention at the table. It was evident that my boss had told his wife my story, the terrible story of a young Jew who had gone from the fascist ghetto to the Soviet labor-army where he had nearly perished. She wanted to see and speak with me. Our conversations were honest and confidential from the very start. With great tact, she gently and warmly inquired about our family; about my mother and Fira; about our relatives, both those living and those killed by the invaders; and about our life, especially in the ghetto. When she saw that those memories made me gloomy, she changed the subject.

The tale of my hostess was a sad one as well. She had lived with her husband and two children quite modestly, as did all Soviet people, in the Belorussian city of Gomel', in Poles'ye, not far from the place where the morning cock's crow is said to be heard in three republics: Byelorussia, Russia, and Ukraine. The head of the family worked as an engineer in a mechanized bakery, while she worked as a mathematics teacher in a school. The boy and girl studied in the lower grades.

In 1927, the Party condemned the truckling demands of the right-

wing deviationists and Trotskyites, who were attempting to impede the extensive building of socialism and the collectivization of peasant farms. Throughout the country, the authorities began to arrest those who deviated in any way from the Party line, as by violating the Leninist principle that all must voluntarily join the *kolkhozes*.

Soon after the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), her husband was roused from their bed in the dead of night and taken away. From then on, wherever she turned for help or answers, whether at work, at the District Party Committee, or at the militia, she was greeted coldly, and nowhere would anyone give her an intelligible answer.

For many years she did not know whether her husband was alive or, if alive, where he was living. The material conditions of her life were difficult and her morale low. Almost all acquaintances and even some of her close friends avoided her. Her pay could not support three people. After school (she was glad that she had not been fired) she gave private lessons to make ends meet.

The children also had it hard, even though children were not considered to be responsible for the deeds of their parents. The older child was not accepted into the Komsomol, along with the rest of his classmates, which was a serious trauma to bear. The children were taught that the Party never made mistakes, that all of its designs and actions were directed toward the good of the people, and that its enemies received their just punishment.

The truth was that her husband, frightened half to death, had been taken that very night to jail, where he was threatened, beaten, tortured, and forced to admit to things of which he had no understanding: that he had spoken and acted against the line of the Party, thereby obstructing the construction of a socialist society. They judged him (without any trial) an enemy of the people, sentenced him to ten years in a strict regime camp – considered a light punishment – and sent him away. He spent time in different camps, performing all kinds of work, and enduring a thousand humiliations. He suffered from illness and nearly died more than once.

But thanks to his physical health and sturdy character he overcame all those difficulties and adversities. During the last years of his term his education as an engineer helped him gain lighter and slower work assignments. He served out his 10-year sentence from beginning to end and then, in 1938, he was informed that he did not have the right to return home. Instead he was assigned to a settlement district where he could summon either his family or only his wife. It would have been futile to appeal this decision, and he resigned himself to his fate.

After ten years he was now given permission to write to his family. His first letter stunned everyone. After so many years of oppressive uncertainty and gloomy thoughts, his wife and children suddenly learned

that he was alive. They both cried and laughed with boundless joy, reading and rereading his letter, kissing the page that had been ripped from a school exercise book, spotting it with their tears. They wanted to tell everyone, declare at the top of their voices, that their father was a good man and was free, but they were held back by the fear they might say something to bring him harm. They had to be cautious, because the year 1938 was a terrible time of yet another wave of repressions. The state security organs, under the leadership first of Yezhov and then of Beria, defamed and liquidated prominent figures of the Party, the Government, and the State; high ranking military leaders;[9] and many other people innocent of wrongdoing.

His wife and children wrote a return letter expressing their feelings of love and devotion in reserved tones. They knew that all letters were examined by the censors. After consulting with her grown son and her daughter, they decided that their mother alone would travel to join their father.

It took about two months to process all the documents and make their domestic arrangements. By the time his wife arrived he was already working as head of the mill and had been apportioned a two-room apartment.

They remembered their reunion on the station platform of Mikun' for the rest of their lives. At the bottom step of the train car stood a lone elderly man, just recently released from the camp. In the doorway at the top of the steps stood a woman peeking from behind the back of the conductor, the only passenger disembarking at this station. She was agitated, unable to utter a word or even move. After a moment of silence and tender glances, she stepped forward and he took her from the train in his arms while the conductor carried her baggage. The train departed as they stood there embracing on the deserted platform.

* * *

In the first days of the war their son was conscripted into the army. They received letters from him regularly, and he defended his homeland honorably. His sense of offence at his father's undeserved sentence began to fade. Their daughter managed to evacuate and was living in Uzbekistan. The parents thanked God that their children were alive and had not known the horrors of the German occupation.

Despite all they had lived through, these people looked to the future with optimism. They believed the war would end in victory over Germany and that the day would come when they would be permitted to return to Byelorussia and the family would once again gather together.

They told me that I, too, should have faith in my own return home, that everything would work out, and that our family would again live happily.

Then my host recalled different episodes of his camp life, of people he had known during those long years, the resolute character of some and the cowardliness of others, criminals and camp administrators, and many other things.

I felt that I might have overstayed my welcome and I got ready to leave, but they did not want to let me go. Over tea, my boss expressed his regret that he would not be able to keep me at the mill for the long term. But he, like the doctor, promised to find me work that would not reduce me again to emaciation.

The time I spent with this family, in their warm-hearted atmosphere, gave me the strength to go on facing the difficulties of my harsh daily life.

* * *

On January 12, 1945, I began work as a stock clerk at the sawmill. My boss was Dubovenko, a former political prisoner who was about 55 years old and trained as a forester. He was a man of few words and seemed to me rather severe.

My trainer was a free laborer named Yermakov, who would be leaving the position and was training me as his replacement. I would have to be able to do figures, use specific tables, and work in the yard as well as in the warehouse of the sawmill. My workday would last ten hours, and sometimes several more. The sawmill operated in shifts, and the night shift was quieter.

Among the workers at the sawmill were both free laborers and convicts; the latter arrived and departed under escort, performing the unskilled and labor-intensive jobs. The free laborers interacted with the convicts only when the process of production made it necessary, and always under the watchful eyes of the guards.

* * *

On January 17th, I was working the night shift when around midnight the lights went out in the warehouse. I set off for the nearest shop to fetch the electrician on duty. He was standing by a machine tool with a circular saw. I went up to him, spoke with him a bit, and then stayed to watch how the saw was operated. Through my inexperience and carelessness, I was standing too close to the saw while it was running. Apparently, I made a sudden clumsy move and the blade of the saw cut into my left eyebrow. From the unexpectedness, the sharp pain, and the fear (the blood immediately poured down into my eyes), I momentarily lost consciousness. Fortunately, people took me immediately to the aid station where they washed the wound, stiched it up, and dressed it. I declined to take any sick leave for fear of losing

my position, returning to work with a bandaged eye and my Russian fur hat pulled down to my nose. It was below freezing and I was afraid that the wound would heal poorly. Luckily the blade had not touched the eye itself.

A short time later they took out the stiches. The small remaining scar has pulled my left eyebrow upward, giving my face a slightly ironic, questioning expression.

* * *

When I had a chance, I stopped at the mill when passing by. The millers and the boss all welcomed me. Our conversations dealt mainly with the latest war reports, news from home, and local rumors, such as the possibility of a change of status for people now in Komi against their will. We spoke openly, because we trusted and respected one another. They also fed me delicious food; I was the youngest among them and was always hungry.

* * *

In the early days of February, Fira forwarded me a letter from my father, describing what had happened to him after the fourth of April when he and Sergei Petrovich were mobilized by the Field Recruitment Office. Together with the other men who had been conscripted in Vovhovo and other hamlets of the Karataev Village Soviet of the Andreyevo-Ivanovka district, they travelled on foot about 60 kilometers to the Chervonoznamenka station, where they were loaded onto a train. They arrived 24 hours later at the city of Nikolayev, where they joined a reserve regiment at its first destination. My father and Sergei Petrovich had sent their first letters to us from this city with a return address: Field Post Office #34767. It was now clear that these letters had never arrived.

During their military training, the soldiers were summoned to the Special Service for interviews. A week later, Sergei Petrovich was dispatched to the front. My father bid him farewell as he would his own brother. After being called several times to the Special Service, my father was assigned to another reserve regiment located in Stalino. From there he sent us another letter and indicated his return address as Field Post Office #03292 B, but this letter also failed to reach us. He was then sent to Voroshilovgrad Region where he underwent a rigorous state background and character check in the second department of Special Camp #0310, run by the NKVD of the USSR. He was then assigned to the labor-army working on the restoration of coal-mining shafts.

In 1944, working deep underground in a mine shaft was the equivalent of a hard-labor camp. Many mines had been collapsed or

filled in by the Germans and the equipment destroyed. Exhausted horses and weakened people pushed and pulled trolley bins loaded with wood for supports and work instruments from one end of the mine and hauled out mined coal from the other end. The country needed coal and so sent to the mines army laborers as well as women and men recruited from among those who had been in occupied regions.

My father worked underground for several months, doing everything that was asked of him, which was mostly ancillary, unskilled work. Weakened from his time in the ghetto and the hard physical labor in the mine, my father fell ill, suffering pain in his stomach and lungs. The food was meagre and provided no real nutrition. The coal dust penetrated deep into his lungs. Army laborers received almost no medicines as everything was earmarked for the front.

My father was laid up for three weeks. When he had only somewhat recovered, he was sent to an easier job in a harness-maker's shop, repairing harness gear and sewing drive belts. His harness-making skills saved his life in the labor-army just as it had in the ghetto. Work above ground was significantly lighter than it was underground.

This next letter gave his new address: Ukrainian SSR, Donbas, Alchevsk, P.O. Box «Parizhskaia kommuna,» mine «Delta».

Fira's letter to our father took more than a month in transit. Perhaps the mail service was still working poorly, but it was more likely slowed by having to pass through several checks on the way. It was, after all, a letter sent from the recently liberated Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, a Bessarabian city, to a Jewish army laborer who had been summoned before the Special Service several times in order to account for suspicious points in his biography.

I read and reread my father's letter many times, trying to comprehend all the trials he had endured. Guilty of nothing, he was nonetheless treated as a criminal. In essence, his ordeal and mine were much the same.

* * *

At the sawmill I was fortunate to have a foreman such as Revchenko, who was also one of the liberated deportees. From his stories I learned that he had no family. His parents had been victims of the dekulakization and were exiled, along with their three children, to Western Siberia. First his mother and then his father perished from grief, old age, and the harsh conditions of their life. His younger brother and sister were sent to an orphanage, while he himself went to work as a carpenter's apprentice and easily mastered the skills of the trade. When the time came, he was conscripted into the army. Everything went well until the day when one of his platoon comrades denounced him as the son of a

kulak who had spoken in opposition to collectivization and cursed the Soviet system. This sufficed for a conviction and sentence. Revchenko served out his time as a prisoner and then became a deportee.

This lone man was a very good, responsive character and the cruel years of his confinement had not changed him negatively. He was now trying to find his brother and sister, who had been handed over to an orphanage. His search had so far been unsuccessful. Many years had passed, the children had been transferred from one orphanage to another, and had meanwhile grown up. They were now adults. They could determine their own futures and go anywhere they wanted in the huge country.

* * *

Revchenko helped me a great deal at work. His practical advice, stemming from his many years of work experience, allowed me to become a competent specialist in a short period of time. I was promoted to senior stock clerk in the early days of March.

* * *

By the calendar, it was already spring. According to an old Romanian tradition, March 1st was the day that women were presented with a *mărțișor*, a coin or trinket hung from a string of woven white and red threads. It was a symbol of love and respect as well as an amulet to shield their white faces from sunburn. We saw no sun in Komi at this time of year, as it was night round the clock. We worked by electric lighting the entire day. A deep freeze still gripped the land. The people were chilled to the bone, but work continued from one shift to the next.

There were nights so cold that it was impossible to stand the whole time outside or in the warehouse. We stock clerks, along with Revchenko, would go to warm ourselves in the smoking chamber, a windowless room where clothing was disinfected. It had only one door, and the temperature was very high. If we could not breathe outside due to the cold, in here we could not breathe due to the heat. Once we adjusted to the sharp temperature difference, we thawed out and fell asleep, sitting on the floor. After about 30 to 40 minutes, Revchenko roused us and we went back to work. Our wadded trousers and pea-jackets, fur hats, and the baize footcloths in our high boots held the heat from the room for a little while. Then we froze once again. But this smoking chamber was off-limits to the convicts and many of the army laborers. They warmed themselves by the open fires in the yard or around the stoves – *burzhuikas* or *rumynkas* – in the workshops.

* * *

During the month of March I received one package from Greta in Cherepovets and two from Aunt Ida in Moscow. These packages provided great help to me. They contained several packs of tobacco and cigarette rolling paper, a safety razor with blades, shaving powder and soap, buckwheat and pearl-barley, sugar, salt, a few packs of tea, a wide woolen scarf, and some other very useful items.

On my first day off I visited the doctor, and presented him with two packs of tobacco and some razor blades as a gift. He was very pleased. Out here it was difficult to get so much as *makhorka*, the cheap tobacco. I read him my father's letter, and he believed that my father was very lucky to have escaped the underground work. The doctor was interested in my work at the sawmill. He warned me not to go into the smoking chamber too often, lest my lungs might be harmed.

From the doctor, I went to Rosenberg. I gave him shaving powder and a pack of razor blades. I knew that he shaved seldom because the skin on his face was easily irritated. He was delighted.

* * *

At the end of March I received a letter from Aunt Ghenea that gave a long account of her family's trials and travels over the course of more than two years. She wrote that on April 14th, the entire family was leaving for Brăila from Chernovtsy. This time Uncle Isidor was the initiator of the move. He had not been happy during the year before the war, which he had spent under the Soviet regime. In 1940 he had been unable to find work in Akkerman and the industrial department of the District Party Committee offered him, in the form of an imperative, a move to the town of Sarata, to a repair shop for agricultural machinery.

The owner of this shop was a German. He abandoned everything when he, together with his family and all the Germans, emigrated from southern Bessarabia to Germany. The workers pilfered all the instruments. There were no repair orders inasmuch as the organization of *kolkhozes* was just beginning. Well-to-do peasants who owned technical equipment such as threshing machines and mowers were frightened by rumors of dekulakization and were not concerned with keeping their inventory in good repair. In any case, the workshop had no spare parts and there was nowhere to obtain them because the equipment had not been produced in the Soviet Union. As a result, the shop fell short of its quota month after month. The District Party Committee sought out those guilty for these developments and, of course, identified the director and the engineer. No attention was given to explanations, and sabotage was suspected everywhere. No work at all had been found for Aunt Ghenea.

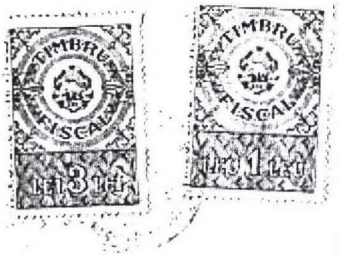
The District Party Committee at last gave its assent and released Uncle Isidor from this job at the beginning of 1941. This was achieved thanks to the great efforts, insistent requests, and well-argued petitions of Aunt Ghenea, who had an excellent command of Russian. With no less difficulty, they finally obtained permission to leave Sarata for Chernovtsy.

Chernovtsy was at that time a large city of European appearance. It had many plants and factories, and both Aunt Ghenea and Uncle Isidor found work in their fields of specialization. The city had a polyglot population of German, Yiddish, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Romanian. Uncle Isidor was easily able to make himself understood with both the plant administration and the workers. The factories were well equipped, received ample shipments of raw materials, and worked at full capacity. Leonea was going to a municipal school with good teachers. They were all content.

With the outbreak of war on June 22, 1941, came new misfortunes and suffering. German and Romanian forces took Chernovtsy on July 5th. After the first days of unrestrained terror and excesses committed by the Romanian and German armies, the Jews were made to wear the Star of David. The synagogues were closed, employment in numerous professions was forbidden, study in state educational institutions was barred to children and youth, Jews were denied the right to receive ration cards for food or to buy anything at the markets. The authorities ordered securities, currency, automobiles, radio sets, and other things confiscated from the Jews. On top of that, the Jews were forced to clean streets and barracks and repair roads without any monetary compensation.

By order of the Governor of Bukovina, General Corneliu Calotescu, all Jews were required, by 6:00 p.m. on October 11th, to abandon their apartments and houses and to move to the ghetto. Kalichanka, the designated district in the eastern part of the city, was not large enough to contain the more than 50,000 Jews who were then living in Chernovtsy. People huddled together in cellers, attics, and storage sheds, taking shelter from the rain and snow. The ghetto district was encircled with barbed wire and held under military guard.[10] Ghenea, Isidor, and Leonea wound up in this ghetto, leaving all their worldly belongings in their apartment or with good neighbors. They took with them only rucksacks with warm clothes and knapsacks of food.

In mid-October 1941 began the deportation from the Chernovtsy ghetto to Transnistria. The plan was to dispatch all of the Jews there, but thanks to the efforts of the city's mayor, Doctor Traian Popovici, and other upright Romanians, approximately 20,000 Jews were left in the city ghetto. For the most part these were people with training and education: engineers, architects, qualified craftsmen, doctors, and lawyers, as well as former officers, veterans, and invalids from the war,



CF.

D E C L A R A T I

Subsemnatul Mihailiuc Neculai, medic, domiciliat în oraşul Vaslui, str.Mihail Kogălniceanu nr.6, declar pe propria răspundere, cunoscînd dispoziţiunile legale referitoare la declaraţiile nedevărate, următoarele :

In perioada 1941-1943 - am fost internat în lagărul Edineţ din fostul judeţ Hotin, unde era de asemenea internaţi soţii Ghelberg Isidor şi Ghelberg Ghenea, împreună cu fiul lor mic Ghelberg Leonard.

In cursul anului 1942 am dat primul ajutor medical, pînă la venirea medicului lagărului, etit lui Ghelberg Ghenea, care a suferit o congestie cerebrală urmată de o hemiparezâ dreaptă cît şi lui Ghelberg Isidor, care a suferit un infarct miocardic.

Dau prezenta declaraţie spre a servi lui Ghelberg Ghenea pentru îndeplinirea formalităţilor necesare în vederea pensionării.

Redactată şi dactilografiată la Notoriatul Capitalei, azi data autentificării, în 3 exemplare.

Copy of the testimony given by Doctor Neculay Mikhaylyuk

artists, composers, writers, and others.[11] Ghenea and Isidor, being engineers, were among those allowed to stay in the Chernovtsy ghetto.

On February 3, 1942, Isidor, Ghenea, and Leonea were driven under guard to a work camp-ghetto in the city of Edyntsy, in northern Bessarabia. The torments endured there and the horrors seen in the ghetto – the unbelievable cruelty of the Romanian gendarmes, the greed and brutality of the Ukrainian and Moldavian civilian population and the Romanian administration – exposed them to the worst of human nature. These indescribable ordeals caused Uncle Isidor to suffer here his first myocardial infarction and Aunt Ghenea a cerebral hemorrhage. Leonea, who was only 15 years old, suffered herniated disks and spondylitis.

Neculay Mikhaylyuk, a prisoner of the Edyntsy work camp and a noble-hearted doctor, administered first aid to them.

The new commandant of the Edyntsy camp-ghetto, Reserve Captain Alexandru Shishman, turned out to be a decent man. In comparison with the situation in 1943, he improved the living conditions and workload of the unfortunate internees.

On February 17, 1943, because Uncle Isidor had documentation proving that his father was a veteran of the 1877 war for Romanian independence, the family returned to Chernovtsy in accordance with a decree promulgated at the highest levels.

* * *

Living in the Chernovtsy ghetto and working as slaves under the regime of the fascist occupants, together with their earlier experience of Soviet reality, led Isidor and Ghenea to the firm decision to escape from the Soviet Union and Romania by any means and to emigrate to some democratic country. After the liberation of Chernovtsy on March 29, 1944, by forces of the First Ukrainian Front,[12] they persevered in their attempts to obtain permission to go abroad to Romania. They hoped that it would be easier to get to freedom from there.

The years from 1940 to 1945, full of suffering and humiliation, had destroyed any illusions in Ghenea's and Isidor's minds regarding the possibility of a just socialist society. I was saddened to lose for long decades, and perhaps forever, my beloved Aunt Ghenea, Uncle Isidor, and my cousin Leonea. But then I grew to understand their decision and I was happy for them.

* * *

I received a letter from my father and his photograph. He wrote that he was feeling well, and that the working conditions had improved somewhat. The food was good enough, he had met the local inhabitants and in his free time he was able to work on the side. He told me that he was receiving cheerful letters from my mother and Fira. He asked me to write him regularly, even if only once a month.

The kind eyes of my father looked at me from the photograph. He had recovered his health a bit. There was more gray hair around his temples, and he had grown a wide, bushy moustache. I carried this picture with me and often looked at it, so happy that my father was alive.

At my next visit to the mill, the boss once again invited me to his home. I accepted his invitation with pleasure. I had enjoyed my time with them, in the warmth that reminded me of my earlier life. From among the packages I had received, I had saved for just such an occasion two packs of tea and a pack of tobacco. My humble gifts were joyfully accepted.

After a delicious Jewish meal, I read them excerpts from the letters written by my father and Aunt Ghenea. They sympathized with the suffering of my father and Ghenea's family. As I read, they asked many questions. Sometimes it seemed as if they and we had lived in different worlds before the war. They gazed at my father's photograph with curiosity and spoke flatteringly of him.

During the conversation the boss of the mill said that the managers of the sawmill were happy with my work and preparing to give me a more responsible section.

* * *

On April 10th Dubovenko called me in and offered me the position of senior foreman. For a time, I would work with Revchenko, who was the one who had recommended me for this post. Dubovenko believed that I would be able to cope with my new duties and ordered me to turn to him immediately if faced with any serious difficulties.

For about a week I did not leave Revchenko's side. He introduced me to the particularities of my new responsibilities in the greatest detail. He acquainted me with the people I would work with, described each of them, and told me how to treat each one. They were all older than I, and included both free laborers and former convicts among the clerks and foremen. Fortunately, from the very first day I was able to establish a good working relationship with all of them.

* * *

Rosenberg and I were guests of the doctor for May 1st. His room was modestly furnished with a small table and clean white tablecloth, two chairs, a neatly covered iron cot, a hanging clothes stand, and a medicine chest.

A half-liter bottle of vodka was on the table along with about 200 grams of butter, thin slices of sausage, a loaf of bread, and a pot of buckwheat porridge – a feast!

We were in good spirits. The end of the war was in sight. Berlin was surrounded by the armies of Marshal Zhukov and Marshal Konev, who met hardly any resistance. On April 25th, the fighters of the First Ukrainian Front met up with the Americans on the banks of the Elbe River. Battles were being fought in southern Germany and in Czechoslovakia as well as in northern Germany. The allies had liberated Denmark, Norway, and northern Italy.[13]

As I've written, we all hoped that a speedy, successful end to the war would improve our situation as well, and everyone was hoping for amnesty or demobilization.

I was deeply grateful to the doctor and to Rosenberg for returning

my life to me. They in their turn thanked God for bringing us together so that our friendship could help all of us through the difficult times in Komi. We proposed our first toast to victory in the war, and our second to friendship. We ate with relish and lost ourselves in reminiscences. Our third and final toast was to happiness for our families, and for the return of all of us to our native lands.

* * *

Since I worked at the sawmill alone, I had permission to leave the territory of our labor detachment as I wished. At the gates I would note the time when I left and when I returned. If I was late due to some situation at work, my boss would give me a «certificate». The following is an example:

Certificate

Army laborer Rubin Udler was needed for work at the lumber exchange until 8 p.m.

Dubovenko

Sometimes when I was not on duty, I would be summoned with a note like the following:

Udler! Report to the lumber exchange immediately. I'll be waiting for you!

Dubovenko

I would quickly rise, dress, and in the dark of night rush to Dubovenko through the bitter cold and the deep snow. Sometimes I was needed to replace a coworker who had fallen ill, or to find some data that was urgently needed, or something similar.

Often it seemed to me that Dubovenko spent every minute of his day and night at the sawmill, living a life that consisted only of industrial production.

I tried to be a conscientious and punctual worker so that I could keep my position. Every day I saw how exhausted my labor-army comrades were when they returned from the forest or the construction sites. Many of them had grown so weak in recent months that they were no longer able to work. I helped them in whatever way I could.

* * *

On May 6th I received another package from Aunt Ida. This time I had to go to the post office in person to fetch it, because packages delivered to the detachment were being opened and food and other

items were being stolen. People started complaining, and so this policy was introduced. I saved the certificate that the detachment commander gave me to present at the post office, a strangely formal identification document that read as follows:

S.Zh.D.S. [Northern Railway Construction]
NKVD
Mikun' Station
8th Detachment

Certificate

Issued to Comrade Udler, Rubin Yakovlevich, to certify that he is a mobilized laborer of the 8th Labor Detachment of the Mikun' Building Section of the Northern Railway Construction, NKVD.

This certificate is issued in order to be presented at the post office for receiving a package of provisions addressed to him.

Head of the 8th Detachment
Signature
Stamp

* * *

On May 9th everyone celebrated the long-awaited turn in the fortunes of war. We commemorated this event in our rooms, as comrades from neighboring rooms dropped in to join us. Each of us good friends – Rosenberg, Khaid, Abramovici, Suprovici, and I – brought to the table what he could. I set out everything edible from the package I had received just a few days earlier. We all were in the best of spirits. It seemed to us that since the war had ended, we ought soon to be released to go home.

* * *

Several days passed with everyone in a festive mood. Gradually we realized that our conditions would not change soon, and the daily grind began again. The country was in a shambles and needed to be rebuilt as quickly as possible. Industry and agriculture needed to be supplied with coal, iron, wood, and other materials. No large-scale army discharge took place. Japan was still engaged in active warfare in the Far East. An army presence in the liberated countries of Eastern Europe was a necessity. The country could not do without the cheap labor of millions of convicts and army laborers. We were expected to understand the problems of the state and to postpone our hopes for amnesty and demobilization.

* * *

I received a letter from my mother and Fira. Normal life was returning to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. Families that had been evacuated to different cities and villages of the republics of Central Asia and Western Siberia were now returning to this city that had been destroyed by the war. People repaired their homes and sought out work. Schools, hospitals, and clinics started to reopen and state institutions began to function. Preparations were made to restart mills and other food industry plants.

Among those who had returned from evacuation was Sonea Shteinberg and her daughter Eva, whose family had been old friends of our parents. Sonea's husband Shaea had died in evacuation. When Sonea and her daughter arrived in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, they found their home occupied by new residents who would not let them in. In 1941, they learned, a family of Ukrainians had taken over their house at #12 «March 8th» Street, and the Romanian administration of the city had, for a pittance, officially registered them as the new owners of the house abandoned by the Shteinbergs. This was standard Romanian procedure for homes left by the Jews in all the occupied cities and towns of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Homes were bought for a song by the Romanians flooding in from the Old Kingdom, as well as by local Ukrainians, Moldavians, and other national groups. Sonea and Eva found shelter with my mother, who gave them a single room, and soon the courts returned the Shteinberg home to its rightful owners.

Fira wrote that Misha Shteinberg, Sonea's son, had come to visit in early May during his leave. He had arrived from Sofia, where he was serving in the Army command at the rank of captain. Misha had graduated from the local boys gymnasium (the M. Viteazu Lyceum) in the summer of 1938. In 1941 he was evacuated along with his family, and a month later he was mobilized and stationed at the front. After being wounded, he was sent to a military training school where he became an interpreter of Romanian and Bulgarian. He participated in the liberation of Romania and Bulgaria as a member of the Third Ukrainian Front. When he learned that his mother and sister had returned to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, he asked for leave and went home for ten days.

Fira had known Misha since 1940. He was two years older, and they had friends in common. The war had savagely brutalized them all. Some were killed immediately on the spot by the Romanians in August 1941 or later in the ghettos of Transnistria; others perished at the front, in the ranks of the Red Army; and yet others were scattered throughout the Soviet Union. The harsh war years along with all that Fira had endured in the ghetto and Misha at the front had made them more serious and wise. At the end of Misha's leave, he and Fira had decided to marry. Their engagement took place the day before his departure.

It was clear from Fira's letter that she was happy and I was very glad for her. Fira's bridegroom was from a Jewish family and was honest, industrious, intelligent, and educated. I was sure that they would build a strong, healthy family. I wrote this to Fira that very day. In my letter, I also congratulated our dear mother and enclosed a page for Sonea and Eva. I congratulated them on the engagement of their son and brother. I rejoiced that we now had new relatives amid all this turmoil and sadness.

* * *

In June, Dubovenko was transferred to a new housing construction factory producing prefabricated houses that were in great demand in areas that had been destroyed by the Germans. The component walls, floors, roofs, windows, and doors were made of wood. Each part had a number, and it was relatively easy to erect a house in a short period of time by following the design.

Dubovenko called me and offered me the chance to go with him to this new factory to work as a technical inspector or sorter of manufactured components. It would be a challenging, permanent position with more responsibilities. I would work inside and receive better pay.

I accepted his offer with gratitude, but told him that I still wanted to continue my studies and asked his help in doing that. He listened attentively to my arguments, agreed with me, and promised to think the problem over.

The new work came easily to me. I was given instruments, rulers, and books which explained the requirements precisely and used diagrams and tables to list the dimensions of the components. At the start I had to butt heads with a few of the brigade leaders and section bosses who did not like my inspections, but I tried to be objective and they finally came to see for themselves the correctness of my conclusions. We never had to appeal any of our disagreements to Dubovenko.

About a month later, Dubovenko told me that he wanted to send me to study to become a «ChOS» inspector (I don't remember what that abbreviation stood for). The demand for such inspectors rose along with the great demand for housing. He gave me time to think it over, because the opportunity was accompanied by the responsibility to continue to work in the Republic of Komi for another three years. Dubovenko was a decent man who understood that I would be well served by accepting this offer, and he gave me the chance to decline it.

* * *

I received a letter from Greta. She told me that with the end of the war against Germany and its European satellites, she had decided it no

longer made sense to spend more time and effort trying to learn why I had been sent into the labor-army or to have me transferred into the regular army. She would concentrate her attention on the possibility of my demobilization and the continuation of my studies.

A month before the end of the war, on April 10, 1945, an order had been issued that allowed military servicemen to be demobilized to continue their education, inasmuch as the country was in great need of specialists in peacetime professions: civil engineers, teachers, doctors, and others.

Encouraged by this order and Greta's counsel, Aunt Ida began to make inquiries in Moscow at technical colleges and institutions of higher learning. Aunt Ida worked as a teacher of history and political economy, and she had many acquaintances who could advise her.

Greta's letter gave me hope. Perhaps, I thought, I could finally get out of Komi and continue my studies. I went to the doctor with this happy news, but he reacted with some reserve. He reminded me that we needed to find out whether this order could include army laborers, persons who had been under occupation, and persons who had been born in foreign countries. In addition, as far as he knew, this order had not been promulgated anywhere in Mikun'. He suggested the following plan of action: first, write to Greta and ask her to confirm the information about which we had doubts and send us the text of the order so that we could present it here when necessary; and second, find out from Dubovenko if he was aware of the existence of such an order. I wrote her that very evening.

Two weeks passed before I had the opportunity to meet Dubovenko in his office and speak with him at length. He knew nothing about this order despite the fact that three months had passed since it was issued. He promised to ask to see it at the personnel department, where such documents usually wound up, and at the District Military Enlistment Office.

* * *

I had been an army laborer for a full year now. I recalled with horror my hard work felling trees in the forest, loading and unloading trucks, and building an electrical power station; my malnourishment and constant hunger; and, finally, my total exhaustion and illness. My spirits were lifted by the realization that there were many decent and honest people among those with whom I had worked and come in contact. It was thanks to them that I was still alive. I constantly felt Jewish solidarity in this place.

* * *

On July 20th I travelled by truck to the district center of Aikino on an assignment from Dubovenko. All district institutions were located in this small town, a short distance from the railroad line. I quickly and successfully finished my job and went with the driver to look at the town center. Almost all the houses were made of wood, with carved shutters and decorated windows, doors, and rooftop edges. The roadways and sidewalks were often laid with rounded blocks of wood and planks. The driveways in front of the District Party Committee, the District Executive Committee, the hospital, and other state buildings were made of thin wooden logs.

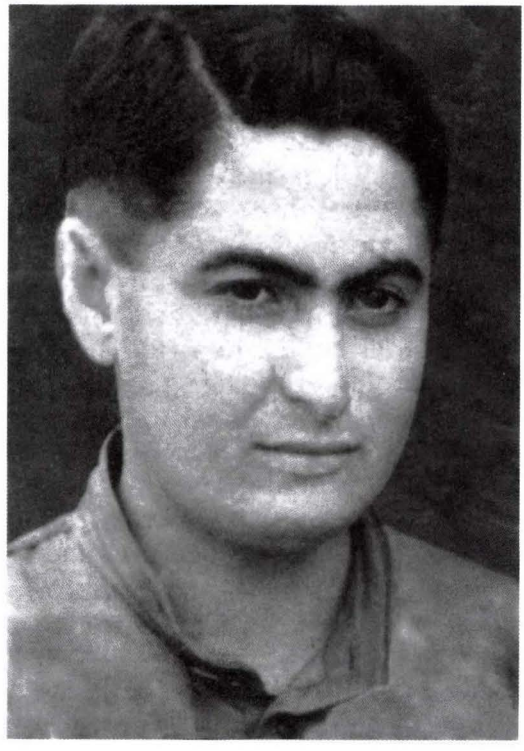
Of the few people on the streets, most were Komis, short in stature with smooth hair and prominent cheekbones. They walked slowly and wore distinctive, hand-made clothing. There were also some Russians, brought here as a result of various circumstances.

As I was walking past the high school building, I decided to stop inside and find out from the principal or the director of studies whether there had been any applications for admission to the upper grades from recently demobilized soldiers.

The school was undergoing repairs, but the director of studies and the military instructor just happened to be in the staff room. They were surprised by my question. They had heard nothing about the order regarding demobilization for continuing education. There were indeed demobilized soldiers studying in the Aikino night school, but they had been discharged due to their wounds. After chatting a bit more about school affairs, I took my leave.

Aikino was located on the bank of the Vychegda River. It was a warm summer day, and for the first time since my arrival in Komi, I felt free, burdened neither by surveillance nor by work. To the surprise of my driver, I got out, quickly undressed and stood naked in the pleasant warmth of the sun. I recalled the beach on the bank of the wide Danube, where I would sunbathe and swim every summer with Leonea, Aunt Ghenea, and Uncle Isidor. How long ago it all was! I walked to the river, where the water seemed cold, but I plunged in and began to swim. I felt physical joy throughout my body, ecstatic with the unexpected feeling of freedom, even though it might prove to be brief.

On the main street we happened upon a photography studio. I was in a good mood and decided to have my picture taken for the members of my family. The old photographer was sitting around with no work and was happy to see us arrive. When our pictures were ready, after a couple of hours, I saw a serious young man (I was already almost 20 years old) with a head of thick black hair and a slightly raised left eyebrow (the mark of the circular saw), who was no longer thin. Since



Rubin Udler, Aikino, 1945

my convalescence and employment at the mill and factory, I had gained seven kilograms. That picture in Aikino was the first one taken since the distant prewar year of 1941.

* * *

In early August Greta wrote me that with great effort she had freed herself from her obligation at the Cherepovets Military Prosecuting Magistracy and left her position. She had completed her required three years as an examining judge. She was still without work in Moscow, which meant that she had neither income nor food ration cards, but she was looking for a more peaceful position in which to use her specialized training as a legal adviser. She lived frugally on her modest savings, and Aunt Ida was very happy that she was once again reunited with her only daughter after four years of separation.

Greta also wrote that the director of the Construction Technical School under the Moscow Housing Administration had promised Aunt Ida that he would send me an invitation to study there. I would have to obtain permission to move to the capital and win the consent of the City

Executive Committee for a Moscow residence permit. The demobilization order of April 10, 1945, was indeed in force and was being strictly carried out. If everything worked out well I would receive a copy of the order along with the invitation.

* * *

At the housing construction factory I became better acquainted with two brigade leaders, Lisitsky and Kovalyov, and with the section boss Margulis, and we even became friends. In our free time we got together in our office and talked about many topics. They were each about 50 years of age. They were educated, had much experience, and had travelled a hard road in life.

At the end of the 1920s, Lisitsky had been working as an engineer at a factory. During the campaign against wreckers in industry, he had been arrested as an enemy of the people. The investigator had beaten him with a rubber truncheon and forced him to sign a confession of sabotage. With a «light» sentence of only ten years, he had been in several different camps. Everywhere he went he met those who had been convicted of «wrecking», «sabotage», or «disruption of the industrialization of the country». The repressions of the technical intelligentsia grew even more fierce after the sensation of the «Shakhty Trials».[14] Political prisoners were knocked off their feet by work beyond their capabilites and the constant hunger of the camps, which drove them to complete torpor. Their last piece of bread would then be taken from them by the criminal convicts, who beat, tormented, humiliated, and annihilated the political prisoners, the «enemies of the people». In 1938, while still in the camp, he was given an additional five year term. He then signed a statement in which he agreed not to leave the area, and he began to live outside the camp, like all the other free laborers.

Kovalyov had worked as an agronomist until his arrest. In 1931, all the newspapers wrote about the discovery of three major counterrevolutionary organizations: the «Industrial Party», encompassing the elite of the old bourgeois technical intelligentsia, which was engaging in sabotage of industry; the «Labor Peasant Party», which defended the interests of the kulaks by disrupting collectivization; and the «Union Bureau of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party», which had been active in Gosplan, the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy, the State Bank, and the Central Union. Kovalyov was accused of sabotaging collectivization and was sentenced in a public trial to ten years. He worked hard on road construction, railway service, and felling lumber. It was rare for any convict to last more than three or four months at such rugged labor. The stronger, hardier ones wound up in the infirmary, from which they would then return to the work brigade. Many simply

died from exhaustion. Kovalyov was fortunate to work for a long period at a state vegetable farm which supplied detachments and camp sites along the Pechora railway line.

Kovalyov told about how streams of camp workers arrived at building sites and enterprises surrounded by barbed wire. Millions of convicts mined coal, chromite and uranium ores, and gold and extracted oil. They worked in metallurgical and chemical industry, energy production, aircraft construction, shipbuilding, lumber processing and shipping, and building canals and railroads. In essence, the country was already unable to exist without the constant exploitation of prison convicts. The strategy of the State was simple but effective: terror existed in order to shackle the entire nation in fear and coerce its people into absolute obedience. Prison sentences were meted out to «wreckers», «contras», and «blabbers». This insured strict discipline in the camps, a total absence of shirkers and drifters, and consistency in the labor force. No one was paid for work done at hard-labor camps, and state expenditures for feeding the prisoners and paying the guards were minimal.

* * *

The history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) is characterized by a chain of judicial campaigns emanating from the upper echelons of power. These judicial campaigns spread throughout the country in waves of unimaginable violence, leading to the execution or imprisonment of millions of innocent people.

In the summer of 1926, the followers of Trotsky and Zinoviev united into an antiparty block, the «New Opposition», which attracted the remnants of vanquished oppositional groups such as «Workers' Opposition» and «Democratic Centralism». In October and November 1927, Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission as well as from the ranks of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks. At the 15th Congress for the collectivization of agriculture, Kamenev, Piatakov, Radek, Rakovsky, Safarov, and others were expelled from the party – a total of 75 leading members of the block.

In November 1928 at a plenary session of the Central Committee came the condemnation of the attempts of the «right-wing capitulators» to make concessions to the kulaks in the countryside and to capitalist elements in the city. A Central Committee plenum expelled Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky from the Politburo of the CC in November 1929.

At the 16th Party Conference in April 1929, a resolution was adopted to conduct a general purge and review of the full and candidate members of the Party. About one-tenth of the total Party membership was expelled.

S. M. Kirov, a popular secretary of the Party Central Committee and full member of the Communist Party Politburo, was assassinated on

December 1, 1934, possibly at the instigation of Stalin. His death served as the pretext for a widespread campaign of reprisals.

In 1935 and 1936 a review and exchange of party documents took place, as a result of which «alien» and «passive» elements were purged.

In 1937 there began mass repressions of prominent Party and state officials and of full and candidate members of the Party Central Committee.

In 1937 and 1938, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was subjected to an utter pogrom. The victims included ambassadors, counsellors, secretaries, attachés, and other executives in the diplomatic corps.

In the summer of 1938 a group of «enemies of the people» infiltrated the Central Committee apparatus and organized the «Counter-revolutionary Right-Trotskyite Center». It was exposed and liquidated.

At the end of 1937 and in 1939, marshals and generals such as V.K. Blücher, A.I. Yegorov, Degtyaryov, M.N. Tukhachevsky, I.P. Uborevich, and I.E. Yakir were convicted, along with the major part of the upper officer corps of the Red Army. In the same period, more than 20,000 members of the Cheka were executed.

In 1937 the most frequently invoked article was for so-called «CRTA» – counterrevolutionary Trotskyite activity. This article was used with particular zeal by the three-member Special Conference (OSO), which sent millions of innocent people to death or imprisonment in the camps.

After September, 1939, the prison camps began to receive believers of various faiths who refused to take up arms due to their religious convictions.

In 1940, L. D. Trotsky was murdered in Mexico.[15]

* * *

Lisitsky, Kovalyov, and Margulis recalled these events and the victims of the OSO threesome, who constantly supplied the camps. My memory has not preserved the names of the scholars and scientists, writers, artists, teachers, doctors, and engineers with whom my new friends had met in various camps. It was terrifying for me to hear all of this; I could not understand why people needed to cripple and torment others to such a degree. Explanations of political and economic motives were not satisfactory to the mind or heart. To me it was a massive and purely Soviet pathological phenomenon.

* * *

Margulis was an accountant by training who had worked in the system of the People's Commissariat of Transport. Accidents, crashes, fires, and other extraordinary events took place constantly on the railroads.

Workers from various services were arrested for wreckage and sabotage, for negligence, and merely for talking too freely. Margulis insisted to us that he still did not understand why he had been convicted and sentenced in 1933 to ten years. He had been transferred from camp to camp and performed hard physical labor until he finally obtained an office position.

Margulis knew well the structure of the North-Pechora camp. Its sections were located along the railroad route. Each section was controlled by a detachment of armed military guards. There was a central deportation point. A special section was in charge of the distribution of the labor force, the registration of convicts, and documentation. The prisoners were divided up by detachments, prison camps, and specialized camps. The political section was the first and foremost in the structure of the North-Pechora railroad construction administration. It had a special cultural-educational department. The medical section had infirmaries and medical aid stations, organized by detachment. Along the Pechora route various enterprises were in operation: woodworking, milling flour, sewing, central repair workshops, vegetable state farms and quarries of stone, sand, and lime. Convicts worked everywhere, according to their training: as doctors, engineers, agronomists, artists, mechanics, and craftsmen. Their unremunerated services were used by officials and officers of the administration, the guards, and their families.

Once he had served out his ten-year term, Margulis signed the statement not to leave the area and started to live as a free laborer beyond the barbed wire of the camp. His old friend and fellow former convict who knew him well both as a person and a specialist invited him to work as section boss at the factory.

* * *

At that time I knew little about Soviet reality, especially about the repressions of various years, political strife, the settling of accounts, and forced migrations. It was interesting to listen to the stories of people who had lived through such grief; lost everything, even their own families; and witnessed the misfortune of others, even intelligent, vigorous, and strong-willed people.

I learned about many things from Lisitsky, Kovalyov, and Margulis: the deportations of hundreds of thousands of Poles and the deaths of many of them in the camps of Pechora, Inta, and Vorkuta; the exile of hundreds of thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians to Pechora, Vorkuta, Kolyma, and Yakutia; the forced migration of Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Karachaians, Chechens, Ingush, Balkarians, Kalmucks, and other ethnic peoples to Eastern Siberia (Kolyma, Indigirka, Aldan, Lena), Komi ASSR, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and

Kirghizia, Siberia (Angara, Irtysh), and other areas.[16] My new friends also told me of the terrible deeds of the NKVD, which were not described in periodicals or books and were known only to eyewitnesses, who were mostly convicts. This all added to my education.

* * *

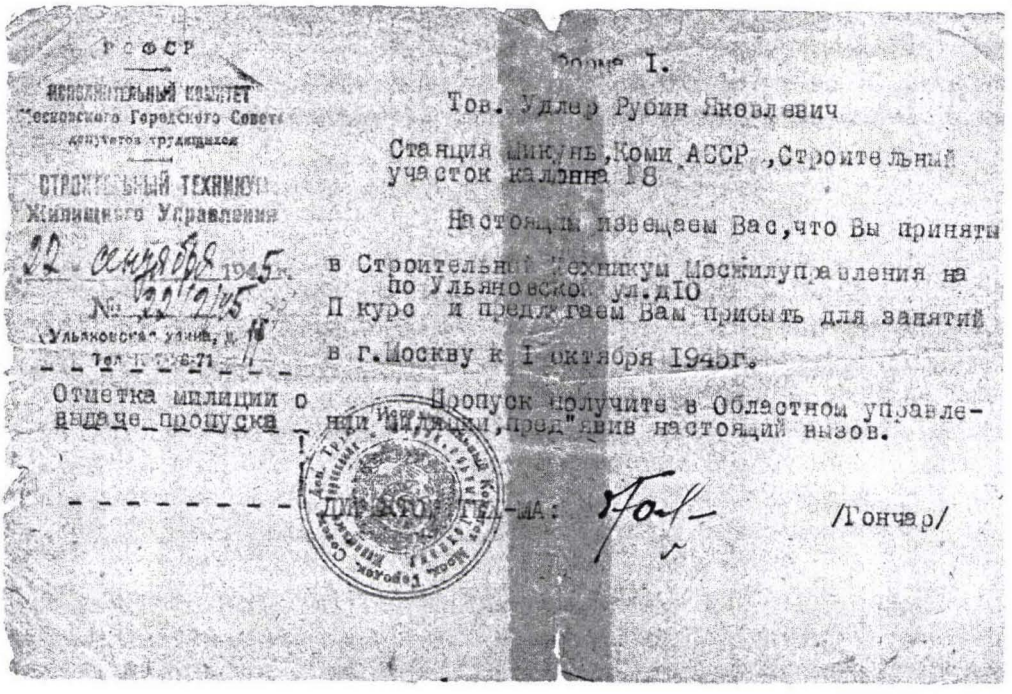
At the end of August Fira wrote that she and our mother were healthy and well. Fira was working, had modestly furnished the apartment, and had bought our mother and herself some clothing. Misha Shteinberg, Fira's fiance, had managed to get himself transferred from Sofia to the staff of the Carpathian Military Command in Chernovtsy. He hoped to be able to move in September or October and then he would get leave to take care of his family affairs. Fira was happy. She and Mother had received pictures from both my father and me almost simultaneously. The sight of us eased their minds greatly and strengthened their hope for our quick return home.

Fira also wrote that several Jewish families had returned to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy from their evacuation in the interior of the country, beyond the Volga. Almost every family had lost someone – father, son, mother, daughter – during the years of war. They had all endured terrible privation and were almost destitute when they made it back home. They had felt like strangers in Western Siberia or in Kazakhstan. In yet worse condition were those, mostly without families, who arrived from the ghettos of Transnistria.

* * *

My happiest day was September 27, 1945, when I received my invitation to study. Reference 1, signed by the director of the Construction Technical School of the Moscow City Housing Administration, Comrade Gonchar, informed me that I had been accepted as a second-year student and that I was to arrive in Moscow to begin study by October 1, 1945. I was to receive my travel permit from the regional militia administration by presenting this invitation. Reference 1 had been issued on September 22. I have this invitation in my file of documents to this day.

The arrival of this document caused considerable agitation. I was probably the first army laborer to be demobilized for continuing education in Moscow. I sought advice from the doctor, who was well aquainted with the ways of doing things in our detachment, and from Dubovenko, my immediate supervisor at the housing construction factory. I then wrote one application to the head of the detachment and a second to the director of the factory. They spoke with me in a very



РСФСР

Исполнительный комитет
Московского Городского Совета
депутатов трудящихся

СТРОИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ТЕХНИКУМ
Жилищного Управления

22 сентября 1945 г.
№ 22/2/45
Ульяновская улица, д. 10
Тел. [illegible]

Отметка милиции о выдаче пропуска

Копия I.

Тов. Удлер Рубин Яковлевич

Станция Шикунь, Коми АССР, Строительный участок километр 18

Настоящим извещаем Вас, что Вы приняты в Строительный техникум Москилуправления на по Ульяновской ул. д.10
II курс и предлагаем Вам прибыть для занятий в г. Москву к 1 октября 1945г.

Пропуск получите в Областном управлении милиции, предъявив настоящий вызов.

ДИРЕКТОР ТЕХ-МА: /Гончар/

Reference 1

supportive fashion and in the morning of the next day I received the certificates that I would need to present to the militia. One day after that, I was issued my travel permit. All that remained was for me to fetch my remaining salary at the factory, gather my things from the cloakroom, and buy a train ticket.

At the factory, Dubovenko, Margulis, Lisitsky, and Kovalyov all bade me a warm farewell. They said goodbye to me as if to a relative, wished me success in my studies and a happy life, and urged me to forget my year in the labor-army as quickly as possible. In my turn, I wished these good people health, happiness, and full freedom. Our parting was a touching scene. Dubovenko hugged me and whispered in my ear, «Now get going!» We shook hands firmly and I left.

My boss from the mill and his good, kind wife also said good-bye to me as sincere friends. They seated me at the table and served me tea and homemade pie. They could hardly believe that I was being allowed to go study. They read and reread the invitation from the Construction Technical School, and they twirled in their hands the travel permit issued by the militia. They rejoiced in my good fortune and, like their old friend Dubovenko, urged me to hasten my departure. They gave me a thick envelope with a letter to their daughter and asked me to send it from Moscow. Clearly, they still worried about the local censors. I left

them Aunt Ida's address, just in case, thanked them for everything they had done for me, and we embraced and said our farewells. I wished them a quick return home and reunion with their children. They stood at the door of their home and watched me until I disappeared around a corner.

The worker in the cloakroom, a good-hearted man of middle age, was waiting for me. He issued all my personal effects according to the list, which included an almost new soldier's uniform. Even this near-stranger looked at me kindly, shook my hand, and wished me luck. It was obvious that he did not often return people their things.

That evening my old army-laborer friends I had arrived with from Odessa gathered in the room where I lived: Rosenberg, Abramovici, Suprovici, and Khaid. We had been working in different places for quite some time now, but after work and on days off we had gotten together and supported each other as we could. They congratulated me on my invitation to study and teased me in a good-natured way. They all had the same single request for me: take their letters and send them on from Moscow. We exchanged home addresses, hoping to meet again someday in freedom. We embraced in a manly manner, kissed each other in farewell, and parted.

It was already around eight o'clock in the evening when I knocked at the doctor's door. He was reading as he waited for me. He seated me across from him and listened as I told him everything I had done since our last conversation. He was surprised by the efficiency with which all my documents had been prepared. It was evident that the demobilization order and its directives regarding continuing education were being strictly observed. I expressed to the doctor my deepest thanks and appreciation as the person who had returned my life to me. He had rescued me from the unbearably hard physical labor, and secured work for me instead at the mill, the sawmill, and the housing construction factory. He had also instilled in me faith in the future.

The doctor gave me a small parcel and a letter, asking me to present it in person to his wife and to tell her everything about how he was living and working and hoping for the future. I was impressed by his steadfastness. He knew that my Aunt Ida lived in Moscow, but he did not once ask that she look in on his family or help them in any way. He did not want to put her in any danger.

We embraced for a long moment in silence and parted. At the door, he wished me luck, and I replied that I looked forward to meeting him again without fail in Moscow if I found myself studying there.

* * *

I rose early the next morning, washed, shaved, and packed my humble belongings in my rucksack. I then went to eat my final breakfast in the camp mess room alone. Everyone had already set off for work. After giving me a large portion, Rosenberg sat down with me and we talked for a bit. I owed my renewed physical strength to the fact that Rosenberg had constantly given me additional food. I promised him that I would always remember my debt to him and would eventually repay him in some way. Rosenberg dreamed of one day returning to his native city of Chernovtsy, and hoped that some of his relatives remained alive.

As I prepared to depart, Rosenberg presented me with a knapsack full of food that he had stored up. With a serious demeanor, he assured me that this was nothing more than the standard rations apportioned to me.

By 9:30 a.m. I was already at the railway station. Upon presentation of my travel permit from the militia, I was given a ticket to Moscow. I emerged on the platform of the Mikun' station. The weather was cold and damp, and there was no one around. I sat on a bench that was standing against the wall of the building and waited for the train to Moscow. I went over everything I had experienced in the Republic of Komi. It had been the hardest period in my life. I had been alone among strangers, in a frigid land, in a camp with convicts, tormented by frequent summonses to the NKVD, exhausted by hard physical labor, constantly hungry, sick, and losing hope of survival and of returning home to my family. The first five months had been a veritable hell. But God had not forsaken me, and good people came to my aid, helping me to survive and regain my strength.

My sojourn in Komi, in the labor-army, had lasted 15 months, from July 5, 1944, to September 30, 1945. In less than one hour I would be leaving for Moscow – the first to do so from among the many thousands of army laborers in my detachment. This was indeed a genuine miracle from God!

The whistle of the engine intensified my emotional state. I hurried to the tracks, and the train had hardly come to a stop when I climbed up into the nearly empty wagon. Standing at the window, I looked at the Mikun' station for one last time. My good friends would be remaining here in the labor detachment for who knew how long.

The platform was empty except for the station-master on duty; no one got off the train. It stood there for a few minutes that seemed to go on forever. I wanted to leave as quickly as possible. Finally, the whistle sounded and the train slowly began to pull out. Mikun' disappeared behind the forest. I was free. I was healthy. I was going to study. I was going to my family.

Notes

[1] At Stalingrad, 72,000 Romanian servicemen were taken prisoner. A meeting of representatives from all camps for Romanian prisoners of war took place on September 16, 1943. They appealed to the Soviet government for the establishment of Romanian volunteer units on the territory of the USSR that would take part in the war against Germany. On October 4, 1943, the State Defense Committee of the USSR adopted a resolution for the formation of the First Romanian Volunteer Infantry Division. Its formation began on October 4, 1943, in the camps of Seletsk, near Ryazan', and was completed at the end of March, 1944. The division was made up mainly of Romanian soldiers and officers who had been taken prisoner in October–December, 1942, in the areas of Serafimovich, Kletskaya, and Perelazovsky. On March 28, 1944, the division numbered 9855 persons. The entire command staff of the division consisted of Romanian officers. Lieutenant Colonel N. Cambrea was appointed to lead. There were Soviet officers-instructors who knew Romanian – among all the Romanian officers. The division was named in honor of Tudor Vladimirescu, leader of the popular revolt of 1821. He had fought earlier in the war with Turkey, had commanded a detachment of Romanian volunteers within the Russian Army from 1806 to 1812, and had been awarded the Russian Order of St. Vladimir with the swords.

At the concluding phase of the Jassy–Kishinev (Chișinău) operation, the First Romanian «Tudor Vladimirescu» Volunteer Infantry Division received its baptism of fire as part of the Thirty-third Soviet Army Corps.

Units of the «Tudor Vladimirescu» Division entered Bucharest on August 31, 1944, as part of the Fifty-third Army of the Second Ukrainian Front. The Division also participated in the liberation of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It was given the honorary title of «Debretsenskaya», and was awarded the Soviet Order of the Red Banner and the Romanian Order «Defense of the Motherland» First Class.

On March 20, 1945, the «Tudor Vladimirescu» Division was taken out of the fighting and did not participate in further military operations.

There were also Polish, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav units and formations created and trained on the territory of the USSR. *România*, 544; A.V. Antosiak, *V boiakh za svobodu Rumynii* (Moscow, 1974), 51-54, 116, 119, 136, 142, 177, 179, 262; *Zarozhdenie narodnykh armii stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo dogovora: 1941-1949 gg.* (Moscow, 1975), 177-80, 182; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 341, 3: 310.

[2] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, IX:348, 625-26. R. Ioanid, citing the German historian Andreas Hillgruber, notes that in the fighting near Odessa alone, 70,000 Romanians were killed and 100,000 were wounded, while during the entire war against the Red Army, Romania lost approximately 300,000. Ioanid, *Sabia*, 196-97; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 232, 243; 3: 125. According to the General Staff the Romanian Army lost on the Eastern Front 624,740 soldiers, officers, and non-commissioned officers. Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni*, 101; Magherescu, *Adevărul*, 2: 286-92, 327-32; 3: 95, 141-46, 243-45.

[3] Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu*, 64, 94, 134, 171; Antosiak, *V boiakh*, 40, 272; *Zarozhdenie*, 200.

[4] Rosen, «Alți actori», 8; Rosen, «Fascismul», 1; Moses Rosen, «Târgoviște – o comemorare simbolică: Martiri și Eroi», *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 759 (May 1993): 1; Moses Rosen, «Spuneți adevărul, domnule ministru! Deschideți arhivele!» *Revista cultului mozaic*, no. 757 (April 1993): 3.

[5] Lazarev, *Ia – moldovanin*, 80-81, 98-99.

[6] Popovich, *Pamiat' vremeni*, 65-107.

[7] *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, 39; Antosiak, *V boiakh*, 98.

[8] Messenger, *Chronological Atlas*, 185, 191, 192, 200-01.

[9] *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Moscow, 1969), 452.

[10] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, V:99-109, 487-89, 515, VIII: 463-69; Gilbert, *The Macmillan Atlas*, 73; *România*, 371.

[11] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VIII: 468-73; Traian Popovici, *Prigoana, ghettoul şi deportarea* (Chernovtsy, 1941).

[12] *România*, 500.

[13] Messenger, *Chronological Atlas*, 222-23.

[14] At these trials, held in the coal-mining city of Shakty in 1928, a number of Soviet engineers were falsely accused of sabotage. This was the beginning of a wave of terror directed against the technical intelligentsia.

[15] Carp, *Cartea neagră, 3: 238; Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii*, 368-72, 377-81, 383-92, 396-410, 415-18, 437-38, 452-56, 467, et al.; *Trotskizm – vrag leninizma* (Moscow, 1968), 234-41, 250-57, 259-65, 292; *Beriia: konets kar'ery*, comp & ed V.F. Nekrasov (Moscow, 1991), 62-67, 70-74, 76-79, 91, 102-08, 112-14, 144-45, 158-60, 163, 167, 170-74.

[16] *Beriia*, 85; Beriia, *Moi otets*, 346; Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of Russian History* (1985), 131, 132; V. Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' «zheleznykh» narkomov* (Moscow, 1995), 231.

Chapter 13: **MOSCOW**

There were only a few men in military uniform in my train car, apparently on official business. They passed the time in groups of two or three, talking, playing cards, or eating. I preferred to remain alone at my window. I was still travelling along the same route by which I had arrived in Komi: Mikun'–Kotlas–Kirov. The window opened out onto a northern autumn scene: a sky covered by dark gray clouds and a heavy monotonous rain. Falling onto sombre, nearly black tree trunks that poked up from the puddles. At the railroad crossings were neither people nor animals nor birds; the platforms of the tiny stations were empty. The train's stops were short even at junction stations and in cities, where only a few new passengers boarded our train car.

After Kirov we turned to the southwest toward Gorky. The long journey had tired me out. Around midnight I put my things into the box underneath a shelf, laid out my military greatcoat, and lay down. I was unable to fall asleep, my head buzzing with thoughts. Much of what I knew about Aunt Ida and Greta had come from the stories of my father, Ghenea, and grandmother Malka. How would they receive me? Would I be able to live with them? Or would I need to find some corner in a room with a strange family or hunt up space in a dormitory? Where would I find the money to pay for a place to live and feed myself? Could I manage the second-year course at the technical school after a four-year interruption in my education? How would my Russian language abilities serve me in a Moscow institution for technical training? No one would be able to give me material help. Fira was already supporting herself and our mother, and our father was still in the labor-army. I would have to work while I studied. I could see my mother and Fira only during school recess and only if I could obtain money for a train ticket and, more importantly, permission to travel to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. As for our father, there was no telling when he would be demobilized.

My exhaustion and the rhythmic rocking of the train finally lulled me into a long and deep sleep. When I opened my eyes, I saw that the seats around me were occupied. We were approaching Gorky. I gathered myself together and sat down to breakfast. I bought two glasses of sweet tea from the conductor, and took some bread out of

my knapsack. I hesitated to take out anything more under the staring eyes of my fellow passengers. I did manage to see that Rosenberg had supplied me with the best he could find in the stock of the kitchen, enough for an entire week.

Once past Gorky, the train travelled quickly. We stopped only in Dzerzhinsk, Kovrov, Vladimir, Lakinsk, Petushki, Orekhovo-Zuyevo, and Pavlovskiy Posad. It's possible that I slept through some other major stations as well.

It was already evening, around six o'clock, as we approached Moscow. From the radio we heard patriotic songs, along with information about the Soviet capital, the Hero-City, Moscow.

The passengers began to fuss about and gather their baggage together. They pulled down their suitcases, baskets, and chests from the shelves, and put on their outerwear. The lights of Moscow were already visible, and many people crowded around the windows of the train car.

I knew that Aunt Ida lived at #5 Bol'shoy Ivanovskiy Lane, apartment #6. This was in the area around Nogin Square, next to the start of the famous Solyanka Street. A young Muscovite from among the passengers offered to direct me to a bus that would take me to Nogin Square.

The torrent of arriving passengers carried me into the Kazanskiy train station and from there out onto Komsomol'skaya Square in front of the station. The first two buses were so jam packed with people that I did not even try to board them. I finally got onto the third.

Moscow made a great impression on me after my experience of Komi ASSR and Transnistria. I was struck by everything I saw from my bus window: the brightly lit streets and the store windows, the crowds of people and cars, and tall buildings. Nogin Square itself was just as impressive, with its huge park, massive buildings, the brightly lighted windows, and the endless traffic of city transit vehicles.

From this square I easily found Solyanka Street and Bol'shoy Ivanovskiy Lane. Across from the wall of some fortress or cloister, a long asphalt road ended against a square-shaped garden around which rose a brick, two-story residential building. Lights were burning in the large entryways, and in one of them, on the first floor, I found a sign indicating apartment number 6.

I adjusted my greatcoat and cap, and rang the doorbell. From behind the door a voice asked, «Is that you, Mama?» I did not reply. The same voice, now with a note of alarm, asked, «Who's there?» I then gave my name and asked if this was the residence of Ida Aronovna Dolinko. The door immediately opened, and before me stood Greta in a warm dressing gown. We broke into laughter and embraced. Thus I finally met my cousin Greta. Aunt Ida had not yet arrived home from work.

* * *

In the long narrow corridor was an old coat stand with a mirror and a huge covered trunk, obviously of prerevolutionary vintage, where Greta invited me to hang my greatcoat and fur cap. The sitting room contained a large table and chairs upholstered in dark green plush and decorated with oval, glazed porcelain medallions; an antique sideboard with crystal shelves holding china and cut glassware; a bookcase, the doors of which conveniently opened downward to form shelves; and a folding sofa with pillows covered by more green plush. A radio receiver and a telephone stood on a small table in the corner.

We sat down at the table across from each other. I answered Greta's questions concerning how the labor-army command reacted to my invitation to continuing education, how the militia treated me, and how my trip had been. She immediately noted that I spoke Russian with a foreign accent and that my case inflexions and grammatical agreements deviated from the standard language. I was crestfallen by the thought that I would certainly have problems at the technical school. Greta noticed this and added that she would help me overcome my language difficulties and learn proper speech. She noted that I would be immersed in a Russian-speaking milieu, I would read Russian literature, and everything would work itself out.

Greta suggested that I take a bath while she prepared the evening meal. She apologized for the lack of such delicacies that would befit such an event. Her discomfort subsided after I fetched from my knapsack the things that Rosenberg had given me: conserved meat and fish, fat, sugar, cookies, hard candies, and two whole loaves of bread. I silently thanked Rosenberg for being such a true friend.

I luxuriated in the bath as I had at home before the war. In slippers and a shirt I came from the bath into the kitchen where Greta was working. After my time in Mikun', I felt genuinely well. I helped her set the table while she told me about her work as a military investigator in Cherepovets. She described the different people she dealt with from various strata of society; about her relations with the employees of the Military Prosecuting Magistracy, and many other things. She found work in Moscow at the Ministry of the Coal Industry of the USSR, which was close to her home, but it was not yet clear what her position would be.

Suddenly the doorbell rang, and Greta went to open the door while I remained in the sitting room. I heard someone ask Greta who the visitor was, as she had noticed my greatcoat, fur hat, and boots. Greta did not answer her question, but asked her something else in turn. Then Aunt Ida herself appeared in the doorway with a tightly bound briefcase of books and exercise books. When she saw me, she dropped her case and exclaimed, «Rubinka! You're already here?! Why, you're the spitting image of Yashenka!» We embraced and kissed in greeting.

Aunt Ida was pleasantly surprised by the relatively rich (for those days) spread that Greta had prepared at the table. She took out a large bottle of cherry liqueur and we toasted my arrival from Komi. They wished me success in my studies, and I in turn thanked them for everything they had done for me and for my family.

We talked around the table about everything: our ordeals in besieged Odessa and in the ghetto; my time in the labor-army; my father, mother, and Fira and her fiance; Aunt Ghenea, Uncle Isidor, and Leonea; my deceased grandmother Malka; the difficulties Aunt Ida had borne in Moscow from 1941 to 1945; Greta's evacuation, along with the Prosecutorial Institute, to Alma-Ata in Central Asia; and so on. There was much sadness in our stories, but also much joy. We looked into the future with confidence. Aunt Ida decided that, since she had no lessons in the school the next morning, she would go with me to the technical school.

We had eaten our fill and were satisfied but tired. We stood from the table and Aunt Ida led me to the second room and showed me the sofa where I would sleep. She and Greta went to clear off the table and to prepare everything for the morning.

The bedroom was smaller than the sitting room, but nevertheless rather roomy. Along one wall, from which hung a beautiful oriental rug, stood Aunt Ida's wide iron bed. An upright piano, open and holding sheet music, stood against the second wall. Against the third wall, behind the door, was a mirror wardrobe and a sofa. Between two wide and tall windows on the fourth wall were a large desk with a pier glass and a tall, three-leaved folding mirror; a comfortable armchair; and, next to it, a dentist's chair. The windows were covered with heavy, dark-green, plush curtains, just as in the first room.

Everything in the arrangement of the apartment bore the stamp of the twenties. Nothing had changed for decades. I lay down on my sofa, made up with a fresh white sheet and warm quilt, and immediately fell asleep.

* * *

On October 2nd I put on my soldier's uniform and went with Aunt Ida to #10 Ulyanovskaya Street, where the Construction Technical School was located. The school's classrooms, laboratories, workshops, library, gym, and other facilities were all together in a two-story brick building.

It was recess when we arrived and the corridors were noisy. The vast majority of the students were girls. Among the youths, I noticed several in military greatcoats.

The principal of the technical school, I.P. Gonchar, did not keep us waiting long. He greeted Aunt Ida as a friend and politely offered me his

hand and invited us to sit down. He congratulated me on my demobilization and on choosing his technical school in which to continue my studies. He said that the country desperately needed educated builders and that young men demobilized from the army were given preference in admission. He invited me to choose any department I wanted in which to study. He added that if I completed my studies with excellence, I could enter the Construction Institute without taking entrance examinations. In the technical school, the size of my stipend would be determined by my performance. All spaces in the dormitory were taken, but if an opening should develop, I would be among the first to be assigned a bed.

Right there, practically under the dictation of the principal, I wrote my application for admission to the second-year course of the technical school and for a space in the dormitory. Comrade Gonchar appended his instructions and sent me with his secretary to the Personnel Department. A staff person there asked me to write an autobiographical essay and indicated the basic points that should be addressed. A student file was opened in my name for my application and autobiography. He gave me a certificate of my student status to be presented at the Military Enlistment Office where I was to be registered, and a second certificate for the District Executive Committee, where I was to receive a temporary Moscow residence permit assigning me to share living space with Aunt Ida.

When I returned to the principal's office I found Aunt Ida and Comrade Gonchar in lively conversation. After a few minutes we took our leave so that I could report to the Enlistment Office, register, and begin my studies all as quickly as possible.

On the way home Aunt Ida told me that the principal of the technical school had been friends with her late husband, Moysey Ruvimovich Dolinko, for many years in his capacity as the chairman of the Education Trade Union's Central Committee. At the corner of Bol'shoy Ivanovskiy Lane, I mailed off the letters of my dear friends from Mikun'. Aunt Ida assured me that letters sent from Moscow would certainly reach their addressees.

* * *

My euphoric mood soon ended as I came up against Soviet bureaucracy, for which papers and certificates carried more importance than human or natural logic. Aunt Ida had received from her house management a certificate saying that she and her daughter, i.e., two individuals, were registered in their living space of 42 square meters. We took this certificate to the District Executive Committee and presented my student's certificate along with Aunt Ida's petition to register me,

her nephew, a student at the Construction Technical School, to live temporarily in her extra space. We were told to return several days later.

When we showed up there the second time, we were sent to the City Executive Committee, as the only body with authority in this matter. It turned out that registration in Moscow was limited by quotas even for those who had relatives in Moscow with living space to spare.

After standing in a long line for several hours, an employee of the City Executive Committee categorically declared that I had no right to live in Moscow since I was demobilized from the labor army and had not been a Moscow resident previously. I should choose any locality outside of a 100 km radius of Moscow, where I would register to live and report to the Enlistment Office.

In a defiant mood, we requested an appointment with one of the vice-chairmen of the City Executive Committee. At the appointed day and time, I arrived with Greta, who was dressed in her military investigator's uniform with epaulettes and stars. After a long wait, we were admitted. We introduced ourselves, presented all our documents, and Greta then logically and convincingly explained the situation. I had been demobilized according to a specific order so that I could continue my education. I had been accepted by the Construction Technical School of the Housing Administration of the Moscow City Executive Committee, and my aunt had extra living space which made it possible for me to be registered there temporarily until I found a place in the dormitory. Therefore, she said, there was no reason to refuse my application. Greta also asked him to take into consideration that I was a former ghetto prisoner.

The high official sitting across from us explained the situation politely but coldly. Huge numbers of people were flooding into Moscow. The city was overcrowded, and there were difficulties with supplies, transit, hospitals, and schools. There were many undesirable and even dangerous elements among the new arrivals. The decisions taken by the authorities were correct and were designed to insure the security of Muscovites and to improve their lives and material conditions. He could not transgress the law and in my concrete case he advised me to choose the town of Vereya, which was to the southwest of Moscow and a mere 25 kilometers from the railroad. In a year or two the situation might change and new residence regulations might be introduced.

We left the City Executive Committee in great dismay. At whose residence would I register in a strange city? Where would I get the money to pay for an apartment? How would I manage to make the daily round trip by train and bus?

That evening we discussed the situation with Aunt Ida, considered various options, and decided that I would have to go to Vereya. We planned to make the trip on the coming Monday.

* * *

On Sunday morning I set off to the address I had for the doctor's wife. Greta gave me good directions to find the street.

The door was opened by a girl about 15 years of age. She was tall, slightly round-shouldered, and slim, had a blond braid, and was dressed in a school uniform. She asked me who I needed to see. Apparently my soldier's uniform set her on edge. People like me never came to their door. I answered that I had arrived from Komi ASSR and wanted to see her mother. A middle aged woman came out from one of the rooms. She seemed no older than 45, was of short stature, had regular features and intelligent, tired eyes, and was dressed in a warm flannel dressing gown. She evidently had heard my conversation with her daughter. She looked me over and invited me in.

I gave her the parcel and the letter from her husband. I saw her eyes flash with simultaneous hope and fear. She did not open them, but quietly asked whether he was well and how he was getting along. She was clearly disturbed and nervous. I was the first living person to come to her from her husband over the eight years of his confinement. I answered this and other questions, trying to calm her. Then the mother went into the other room.

The daughter, who remained alone with me, asked me to describe her father, what he looked like, how he spoke, the sound of his voice and the look of his clothing. She wanted to know if he lived in the same barracks as criminals, who he spent time with, whether anyone did him harm, and where he worked. She had been only seven years old when her father was taken away, and she had only a faint recollection of him. I depicted her father as I knew him: intelligent, kind, decent, and honest. The girl was satisfied. She told me that her brother would finish his ten years of schooling in June and wanted to become a doctor like his mother and father. He was working on the side in order to help the family a little. They lived very modestly although their mother was working in two hospitals.

Soon her mother came back out. She had been crying, but was now calm. It was clear that the doctor had written something about me in the letter, because she now looked at me and treated me differently.

The doctor's wife asked me what I intended to do now. I had to tell her about my unforeseen difficulties with the residence permit. She had also passed through bureaucratic barriers when she had exchanged their common apartment, which they shared with a rowdy family of troublemakers, for two separate apartments. She had undertaken this disadvantageous exchange for another reason as well. She had wanted to get away from the neighbors who regarded them as the family of an enemy of the people and who looked upon them with enmity and suspicion.

We spent about another hour together drinking tea. I tried to encourage them and told them that the doctor was hoping to return home before the end of his term in two years time or perhaps even earlier in the case of an amnesty.

Their son came in while I was still there. The fellow very strongly resembled his father, and was especially interested in his father's morale. I eased his mind on this question, explaining that his father steadfastly bore all the difficulties of his first period of imprisonment and was now working in his profession. He was helping everyone and they respected him in turn. His friends were decent people. I added that the doctor had returned me to life and that I would never forget him.

We parted warmly. The mother thanked me for my warm words about her husband and for carrying out his request. She asked me to visit them regularly.

* * *

On Monday morning, Greta and I set off. We bought train tickets to the station of Mozhaysk, which according to the map was the closest station to Vereya.

It was the middle of October and the weather was dry and cold. We were both wearing greatcoats, fur hats, and winter gloves. Greta's legs grew cold in the train car. She pulled them up onto the seat underneath her and covered them with her coat.

Our fellow travellers told us that a bus ran from Mozhaysk to Vereya seldom and irregularly and was therefore always overloaded. People made their way using passing transportation.

We soon saw this for ourselves. For a very long time there was no sign of a bus at the square in front of the station in Mozhaysk. Together with everyone else we all piled into the open cargo area of a military truck. We remained on our feet there in the open air, holding onto one another. Before departing, the soldier driving the truck and a warrant officer stood on the steps on both sides of the truck and collected the fare: 30 red-paper rubles or a half-liter bottle of vodka per person. The passengers knew the fare, had prepared it in advance, and quickly presented it. Greta tried to pay with a thirty-ruble note for the two of us, since I was a soldier myself and she was travelling on official business, but the military men were implacable. A long line of people were waiting for the same ride.

There was no surfaced road leading from Mozhaysk to Vereya. We travelled an entire hour through a biting wind along a smooth country road. The soldiers let us off on the outskirts of Vereya, as they did not want to risk running into a vehicle inspection or other military authorities.

As I remember it, the town of Vereya was a large village. We walked

to the center along unpaved roads with no sidewalks. The houses were one-story and of wood. A large square of buildings, whitewashed with slack lime, stood on the central plaza forming rows of many small stores. Some of the doors were secured with strong locks, while in other stores some things were for sale. There were few people around.

We had no trouble finding the Town Executive Committee. We were directed to a middle-aged woman who listened to Greta, looked over all my documents, and calmly informed us that we first had to find lodging, then report for registration to the Town Military Enlistment Office, and finally return to her. She advised us to go to the pharmacy and ask the manager there who would recommend a landlady for us.

There were few medicines and only one customer in the nearly empty pharmacy. We found the manager sitting behind the counter in a white smock and with a thick woolen shawl over her head. She listened carefully to our story and said that she could let me a room herself as she was living alone. Her husband had been killed at the front and her son was still serving in the army. She named a modest sum of money for rent, but I was to bring my own bed linens, cut wood, and fuel the stove. She was unable to do this herself since she spent all her days at work and she was ailing. The three of us set off to look at the room. The house was clean, and the room apportioned to me contained a bed, table, and two chairs. We made a preliminary agreement.

Our meeting at the Town Military Enlistment Office went quite differently. The military commissar was an old captain about 55 years of age and had been transferred from active duty due to some injury, contusion, or perhaps from age. He bombarded me with questions and would not even hear out my answers to them. Why had I remained so long in occupied territory without trying to escape to our side, as many other true Soviet patriots had done? Why had I not volunteered to go to the front instead of taking it easy behind the lines, in a labor-army, while the best sons of the Motherland were giving their lives on the war front? And why should I be singled out for the privilege of studying? Let those who had spilt their blood study. He would send me to serve in their place and taste a real soldier's life. He gradually worked himself into a frenzy and began to raise his voice. He didn't like the way I answered him or the manner in which I stood before him. His enmity came into the open.

Greta, who had remained silent for most of this, reminded him of his responsibility. We had come to him to be registered. He became thoughtful and finally barked that he needed time to examine my case. We were to return a week later.

In a state of dismay, we returned to the manager of the pharmacy. We postponed the beginning of our rental agreement for one week. She confirmed our impressions of the state of the military commissar.

We also returned to the Town Executive Committee and told the woman there about what we considered to be the illegal delay imposed on us by the military commissar. We thanked her for her advice to consult the manager of the pharmacy. She reassured us that everything would work out as it should. The law would be followed.

Discouraged and hungry, we stopped by an unappealing local cafeteria and had a bite to eat.

After a long wait, we boarded a passing truck, paid yet another 60 rubles, and returned to Mozhaysk. We arrived home around eight o'clock in the evening.

Such was our inconclusive trip to the town of Vereya.

* * *

The money I had earned in Komi gradually melted away. As I've already written, Aunt Ida worked two jobs – in a school and in some professional technical school. In addition to her salary, she received ration cards and coupons for midday meals. Through these means she had lately been able to support both herself and Greta, whose savings had long since run out. Every day I went to the closest open-air market, the Pyatnitskiy (if I'm not mistaken), and bought potatoes, bread, groats, and whatever else was on the list that Greta compiled. Sometimes we went shopping together. I remember once going with Greta out to Zagorsk and bringing back two big bags of potatoes, which were much cheaper there than in Moscow. We were not the only ones living in such difficult straits. The entire city of Moscow lived on potatoes, kasha, and thin cabbage soup. It seemed that hunger afflicted us all at that time, whether we lived in the ghetto, the labor-army, or post-war Moscow. It was eased mainly with potatoes, the saving food item to which millions owed their lives.

* * *

On some evenings Aunt Ida was free from work. She usually took the armchair at the desk while I sat, half reclining, in the dentist's chair. I listened for hours to stories of her life, and together we looked through photographs from their old albums. She had an excellent memory and narrated her thoughts in an absorbing manner and in beautiful Russian. She taught history and political economy and was an excellent pedagogue.

Aunt Ida was four years older than my father. At the beginning of the century in Akkerman, all Jewish children, boys and girls, studied reading and writing in Hebrew for several years. In some families, this was the extent of the children's education, especially the girls. Ida studied very hard, was very talented, and, on the insistence of Grandmother Malka,

entered the Akkerman girls' gymnasium. This secular school was very prestigious at the time and among its students were children of Russian officials and landowners, the Russian and Jewish intelligentsia, and rich merchants. Capable girls from the poorer social strata made up only the smallest part of those who studied there. The teachers at the gymnasium were highly qualified, the requirements were serious, and the pupils were deeply and skillfully educated.

Ida was in the eighth and final grade of the gymnasium in 1912, when she met Moysey Ruvimovich Dolinko, a teacher at Talmud-Torah. They married shortly thereafter and lived together with Ida's family–Grandfather Aron, Grandmother Malka, Ghenea, and my father. My grandfather owned a large house on Mihailovskaia Street, in the center of Akkerman.

Aunt Ida told about Uncle Moysey with great respect and love. He was about ten years older than she and had been born in Latvia. His parents were well-to-do merchants. He did not want to become a rabbi, although he was a naturally talented and smart young man who was well versed in Judaism. He entered one of the Baltic universities. He soon found himself engrossed in Marxism, philosophy, political economy, and the history of the worker's movement. He broke with his family and became a professional revolutionary. He was repeatedly arrested, convicted, and even sentenced to death. By a miracle he was saved by an influential noblewoman who admired his intelligence and bravery. During one of his interrogations under torture, the investigators knocked out his right eye. Hiding from the police, Moysey Ruvimovich, using the last name of Dolinko, wound up in Akkerman.

In 1913 the Party instructed him to move to Odessa, where Aunt Ida took courses in dentistry. Life was very difficult for the young couple. Grandmother Malka helped them out financially, often keeping this a secret from Grandfather Aron.

During the First World War, Uncle Moysey became one of the leaders of the Odessa Party organization. In 1918, when Bessarabia was annexed to Romania and the Dniester River became the border, Aunt Ida was separated from her home and family. In 1920, Uncle Moysey was transferred to Kharkov, where he was a collegium member in the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Education.

Greta came into the world on July 16, 1921. Several years later, in 1925, Uncle Moysey was summoned to Moscow in recognition of his experience as an organizer. He chaired the Central Committee of the Union of Education Workers, a high post at that time, and received an apartment in the center of Moscow, on Bol'shoy Ivanovskiy Lane. Aunt Ida worked as a dentist at that time, when they bought the chair on which I was now sitting.

The beginning of the twenties were difficult years for the country.

Moscow had shortages of food, clothing, and many other things. Aunt Ida did not have the materials necessary for her work. The number of her patients fell sharply.

In 1925, when Greta had grown a bit, Aunt Ida entered the K. Liebknecht Pedagogical Institute to study history. She graduated in 1930.

Interesting people visited the Dolinko apartment in those years. From the family album, Aunt Ida showed me photographs that captured the images of their friends and acquaintances: the People's Commissar for Education of the RSFSR, Anatoly Vasil'evich Lunacharsky; the Hungarian revolutionaries, Bela Kun and Mathias Rakoci; the Bulgarian political official Georgy Mikhailovich Dimitrov; and others.

Greta was assigned to an elite, model school of ten grades, №25, where the children of the most highly-placed officials studied. She was in the same class as Vasily Stalin, Timur Frunze, Yura Kholmogorov, and even Lidia Tolstoi (a countess by birth). Other pupils included Svetlana, Stalin's younger daughter, Marya (Marfa) and Darya (Dasha) Peshkov, the granddaughters of Maxim Gorky, and Sofiya Radek. It is not difficult to imagine the high quality of instruction in this school.

In 1931, Moysey Ruvimovich was sent to work in the city of Kuibyshev (formerly Samara), where the Regional Department of Education needed additional help after its top administrators had been arrested and executed as enemies of the people. He was named the head of the Regional Department of Education.

Soon after Uncle Moysey's move to Kuibyshev, discord arose in their family life. Aunt Ida did not think it necessary to share with me the reasons for this. By the end of 1931, they had filed for divorce.

Uncle Moysey's work often brought him to Moscow, where he got together only with Greta. He loved her and bought her dresses, a coat, shoes, and other such things, and gave her money and gifts. He never spoke ill of Greta's mother and never told her why he had left them.

On one of his visits, in 1933, he told Greta that he had married and that she had a little brother named Valentin. Greta broke down in sobs and ran off. Aunt Ida patiently comforted her and explained that this was how things were meant to turn out.

But life grew increasingly difficult for Aunt Ida and Greta with each passing year. One salary was not enough to support the family. All their things were wearing out. Greta was already 14 or 15 years old and they did not want to ask her father for help.

Aunt Ida wrote to Grandmother Malka, Ghenea, and my father, and told them of her hardships. It was impossible to help them quickly with money transfers or parcels. There were essentially no relations between Romania and the Soviet Union. They thought up another roundabout route to travel via Hungary–Austria–Czechoslovakia–Poland. Poland then had diplomatic and economic relations with the USSR. Aunt Ida managed

to get an official invitation for her mother, who she presented as a single elderly woman «caught» in bourgeois Romania. My father and Aunt Ghenea obtained for Grandmother Malka a passport for international travel, and they immediately began to equip her for the journey.

Grandmother left Brăila in 1936. Aunt Ghenea accompanied her as far as Vienna, where she changed trains. Her baggage took up an entire compartment. Among her things were pillows, quilts, bedsheets, pillowcases, coats, dresses, sweaters, shoes, gloves, stockings, sugar, groats, and macaroni. In other words, everything Aunt Ida and Greta needed but were unable to obtain at the time in Moscow. Grandmother was also given currency as well as valuables that could be sold or traded if the need arose.

Aunt Ghenea telephoned Aunt Ida from Vienna and reported the exact time that Grandmother's train would arrive, as well as her wagon and compartment numbers. Ida, Greta, and their friends met Grandmother with a car taken from work. Thus, for the first time in almost 20 years, Grandmother Malka saw her eldest daughter and granddaughter.

Aunt Ida showed me the quilts, pillows, coats, and other things that Grandmother Malka had brought, which she and Greta had used for nearly 10 years.

Grandmother eased their lives greatly and gave them both emotional and material support. She sat with Greta while Aunt Ida was at work, and the two of them took walks on days off. She prepared them tasty meals; sewed and repaired dresses, blouses, and shirts; and knitted them sweaters and scarves. In the mornings she stood in line for hours to buy milk, bread, or meat.

Grandmother also found friends with whom she would sit on a bench in the courtyard and discuss all the news and events.

Uncle Moysey met my grandmother on one of his increasingly rare visits and they talked together for a long time. Uncle Moysey said he regretted what had happened and acknowledged some guilt on his part, but he considered it now impossible to rectify the situation. He asked her about Ghenea, my father and others, as well as our life in Romania. Grandmother found him to have aged a great deal and to be depressed. They said a warm farewell, and Greta accompanied her father out.

One evening in 1937, two men from the NKVD came with a warrant to search the apartment of M.R. Dolinko, enemy of the people, Menshevik, and Trotskyite. Aunt Ida let them in and showed them the divorce certificate dated 1931. This did not stop them from performing their full search, but they found nothing of a compromising nature. Aunt Ida and Greta were lucky that Moysey Ruvimovich had left them and remarried. In Kuibyshev a three-member special commission of the NKVD condemned him to death without an investigation or trial,



Aunt Ida Dolinko, Moscow, 1936



Uncle Moysey Dolinko, Kuibyshev, 1936

and the sentence was immediately carried out. Raya Belozerova, his new wife, was convicted to eight years imprisonment in a women's camp in Kazakhstan. Their four-year-old son Val'ka was turned over to a children's home.

Aunt Ida and Greta believed that Moysey Ruvimovich had, like tens of thousands of the old revolutionaries, devoted all his knowledge and strength to the ideals of Communism and had never been an enemy of the people.[1] He was simply a victim of one of the waves of the terror that gripped the country. In this way the lives and fates of innocent people were at the mercy of the high executioners Yezhov and Beria and their assistants, Merkulov, Dekanozov, Kobulov, Goglidze, Meshik, Vlodzimirsky, Abakumov, and many others.

* * *

On the morning of October 15th, Greta received a phone call from the Ministry of Coal Industry of the USSR and asked to report there at 12 o'clock. The ministry was located in a tall building on Nogin Square, not far from our house. It was no more than a 10-minute walk, but Greta was anxious to find out what they would offer her and she set off much earlier than necessary. She had already left all her documents

(including a copy of her diploma, her work record, her reference letter from the Cherepovets Prosecuting Magistracy, and her autobiography) at the ministry on her last visit. She took only her passport, which contained her Moscow residence permit.

Less than an hour later she returned home elated. She had spoken with her future supervisors and someone from the Personnel Department. Her excellent diploma and the recommendation from the Military Prosecuting Magistracy had made a good impression on them. She was invited to direct the legal department and was offered a good salary. Tomorrow, October 16th, she was to report for work.

Aunt Ida and I congratulated Greta. She had been unemployed since August, two and one-half months, and had worried and suffered due to her enforced inactivity and lack of money. We now rejoiced and were happy for her.

* * *

From October 16th, I was home alone. In the mornings I finished the shopping by 10 o'clock and then I read. Their entire home library was in Russian and consisted mostly of historical writings. Many of Aunt Ida's friends and colleagues had evacuated from Moscow during the war years and had left her a large selection of good books. Among them were prerevolutionary multi-volume treatises on Russian history and albums dedicated to the three-hundred-year-old House of Romanov. What attracted my particular attention were illustrated books about the development of the workers' movement in Russia, the first Marxist circles, the first congresses and conferences of the Russian Social-Democratic Worker's Party, and the origins of the Soviet regime. Jewish faces looked at me from the pages of these books. I had not known that there had been so many Jews among the party theoreticians, the organizers of the new state authority, the contributors to the *Iskra* and the old *Pravda*, those surrounding Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov-Lenin in emigration, or the leaders of the Red Army. The books published in those long-ago years listed their real names alongside their pseudonyms and party code-names, for example: Yulii Osipovich Tsederbaum (Martov), Alexander Samoylovich Pikker (Martynov), Yakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov, Moysey Solomonovich Ratner (Uritsky), Lev Davidovich Bronsteyn (Trotsky), Grigoriy Yevseyevich Radomyslskiy (Zinoviev), Lev Borisovich Rozenfel'd (Kamenev), Karl Bernhardovich Sobelsohn (Radek), Lazar Moyseyevich Kaganovich, Mikhail Moyseyevich Kaganovich, Genrikh Grigorevich Yeguda (Yagoda), Veniamin Mikhailovich Sverdlov, Grigory Yakovlevich Brilliant (Sokol'nikov), Lazar Shatsky, Rosaliya Samoilovna Zalkind (Zemlyachka), Maxim Maximovich Wallah (Litvinov), and Iona Emmanuilovich Yakir.

In the evenings I told Aunt Ida and Greta my impressions from what I had read that day and we took down from the shelves some of the books and discussed paragraphs that had attracted my attention. I was continually astounded to learn from Aunt Ida that the majority of these pioneers had been declared enemies of the people by the Soviet regime and had been shot, exiled, or expelled from the USSR, including Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, Yakir, Veniamin Sverdlov, Mikhail Kaganovich, Shatsky, and Yagoda.[2]

The mass repression of 1937 gained strength in 1938 as Beria became the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. Terror took hold of the entire nation. The party and state leaderships in Moscow and in the provinces were purged and replaced. Everyone lived in fear, isolation, and great poverty. Salaries were miserably small, and even in the capital the supplies of food and clothing were insufficient.

Aunt Ida, Greta, and Grandmother Malka shared an additional cause of fear in the wake of Uncle Moysey's execution. It was all too common for the relatives, both close and distant, of so-called «traitors, betrayers, wreckers, saboteurs» – in short, enemies of the people – to be arrested, sent to prison, or exiled.

* * *

Grandmother Malka wrote to Aunt Ghenea and my father, communicating to them in allegorical terms the conditions of life in Moscow and the general atmosphere in the country. She made clear to them that she needed to return to Brăila. Aunt Ida knew she would find it hard to part with her mother, but she could not hold her back. It was impossible in those days to be sure of one's own safety.

At the end of 1938, when relations between the USSR and Romania had improved somewhat, thanks to the efforts of foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu,[3] Aunt Ghenea and my father succeeded in obtaining permission for their mother's temporary return to Brăila. By that time, Grandmother Malka had been given Soviet citizenship. She soon left Moscow, and Aunt Ida and Greta said good-bye to her forever. She returned along the shortest route, across the transit points at Tiraspol'–Tighina (Bendery). Aunt Ghenea was waiting for her on the Romanian side. Grandmother had one tiny suitcase.

Although I was just a boy, I remember Grandmother Malka well. She returned thin, but nonetheless lively, healthy, and energetic. By her own words, the long and cold Russian winters, the Spartan lifestyle, and the daily activity had been to her advantage. The privations had hardened her.

Aunt Ida and Greta smiled as they recalled the admonishments and

advice that Grandmother Malka had given them on the platform of Kiev Station until the moment before her train pulled away.

* * *

On Sunday evening, after finishing our household chores, the three of us sat down to discuss my situation. It was clear that I would not be able to live in Aunt Ida's apartment. And obtaining a residence permit to live in Vereya while continuing to live with Aunt Ida would be risky. The local militiaman might discover me, and after one or two warnings, we would probably face a fine and other serious repercussions. It was unrealistic to live in Vereya and travel every day to the technical school for a whole series of reasons. I did not have the money to pay for the ride, I would waste a great deal of time on the road, and I would miss evening classes. There seemed to be only one way out of the situation. We would appeal to Comrade Gonchar to register me in the dormitory so I could be both in the dormitory and at Aunt Ida's and could thus study normally. In addition, the technical school had a cafeteria where the prices were very low. On Aunt Ida's next free morning, we would once again go to the principal of the technical school.

* * *

Comrade Gonchar received us just as politely as he had the first time. He thought that I had already obtained a residence permit and he was about to congratulate us. Our tale obviously saddened him, and he agreed that I could not study if I had to live in Vereya. He telephoned the superintendent of the dormitory and invited him to his office. It turned out that the dormitory was full to the limit and registering a man who had not yet reported to the Enlistment Office was categorically forbidden. Thus this last possibility was closed to us.

The principal made an exception for me, however, and allowed me to attend classes. He introduced me to the head of the department and informed him of this decision. Comrade Gonchar advised me to think about finding another city outside Moscow's 100-km perimeter that had better transit connections. We thanked him and left.

* * *

I was happy that I would be able to start going to class the next day, even if only as an auditor. I had to catch up with the rest of the group, since I had missed three whole weeks. This did not frighten me since I had no other desire than to study.

In the evening, the three of us sat down and poured over the map of Moscow Region, drawing a circle with a compass. The closest cities outside the circle were Serpukhov, Kashira, and Kolomna to the south, Shatura to the east, and Shakhovskaya and Reshetnikovo to the west of Moscow. None of us had ever been in those cities, and we knew nothing about them no anyone living in them. We decided that Aunt Ida and Greta would make inquiries among their acquaintances.

* * *

There were 31 people in my assigned group, of which only 4 were men. Some were local residents, but most of them were from elsewhere. The majority had finished eight or nine grades. Their first year at the technical school had included mainly high-school mathematics, physics, chemistry, and Russian. Specialized training began only in the second year. Everyone in the group was friendly toward me. I was the oldest and, I believe, the best prepared. Had it not been for the problems with the residence permit and military registration, I would have been a happy man.

* * *

We received letters from my father and from Fira. They congratulated me on my arrival in Moscow and on the start of my studies. They did not know of my difficulties. Father thanked Ida for her efforts on my behalf. He was well, working, and hoping to be discharged on account of his age.

Fira expected Misha's arrival at the end of October. He was finishing up his affairs in Sofia. Mother and Fira were both well.

* * *

In the evenings, Aunt Ida continued the story of her life after the departure of Grandmother Malka. Life became very hard for her, with all the cares of the house once again on her shoulders. She was working two jobs, hurrying from one school to another. In various enterprises and institutions, she gave lectures on conditions in the country and on the international situation. This burden of public service was part of the duty of a history teacher. She saw Greta only in the evenings when the two of them returned home exhausted.

In 1939, Greta finished high school and entered a prestigious institute which was then called the Moscow Prosecutorial Institute. Even she, with her excellent schooling, found the studies challenging.

International events aggravated the economic situation in the country.



Greta Dolinko, Cherepovets, 1944

The Japanese invasion of the region of Lake Khassan and the Khalkhin-Gol River in 1938–1939, the start of the Second World War with the German attack on Poland on September 1, 1939, and the Soviet–Finnish War of 1939–1940 forced the people to tighten their belts further. Enormous resources went into supplying the needs of defending the Soviet Union. The Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Moldavian republics were taken into the USSR in 1940.

After Hitler's seizure in 1940 of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxemburg, France, and, at the beginning of 1941, Yugoslavia and Greece, it was clear that the fascist aggressors would turn upon the Soviet Union.[4] A strict economic regime was introduced, directing all resources toward strengthening industry, especially the defense sector, and the armed forces.

On June 22, 1941, when fascist Germany did indeed attack the Soviet Union, people were shocked. They had been assured that the nonaggression pact signed with Germany in August 1939 would protect the Soviet Union from war. The tone of the press and radio was reassuring, but this represented a gross miscalculation on the part of the country's leaders and of the entire government, for which the population paid a harsh price. Not only military fighters perished in the early months of the war; millions of civilians were killed as well, and a huge part of the nation's territory was occupied by the fascists.

In the autumn of 1941, as the front moved toward Moscow, there began a hasty evacuation of factories, universities and institutes, scientific research centers, museums, theaters, and other cultural institutions. Even many party and governmental offices were evacuated. Greta departed along with the Prosecutorial Institute.[5] She was unable to convince Aunt Ida to leave Moscow and save her life by fleeing somewhere beyond the Urals and the Volga. Aunt Ida believed that the Germans would not take Moscow. She did not want Greta to go hungry in a besieged city, or to go to the front; she was thinking only of keeping Greta safe. She gave her daughter her best warm clothes, all the money she had, and asked of Greta only that she write regularly.

Now left alone, Aunt Ida participated in the antiaircraft defense of the city and in the construction of defensive lines, and generally helped anyone who needed her support. Aunt Ida had never been a member of the Party, but she was a patriot and hated the Germans intensely. In addition, she believed then that we, her family, had all perished in Bessarabia. Later, Aunt Ida was awarded the «Defense of Moscow» medal, of which she was very proud.

Through the years of the war, Aunt Ida lost about half her weight. From among the paltry rations that were given to Muscovites and the modest salary that she received from the school, she still contrived somehow to send parcels and money to Greta, who had only her stipend. Aunt Ida was an extraordinarily devoted mother and had a boundless love for Greta. She tried in every way to protect her daughter from any repercussions stemming from the state's slanderous treatment of her father.

* * *

On the evening of October 30th, we were seated at the table after a strenuous work day when the doorbell rang. I opened the door and discovered a young officer grinning broadly. «Hello, Rubika! I'm Misha!» We embraced tightly, kissed, and looked at each other joyfully. Here was the man Fira had chosen to be her husband!

At the end of the corridor the door to the sitting room opened as Greta looked in to see who had come. She realized in an instant that it was Misha, quickly came up to meet him, and dragged him into the house. Our hospitable Aunt Ida immediately began to fuss, rushing about between the kitchen and the sitting room. Greta set the table once again. Misha took some canned food and a bottle of wine out from his small suitcase. This was the first time since the war that Aunt Ida had had so many relatives together in her home.

When we finally sat down to supper we raised our glasses to our



Misha Shteinberg, Sofia, 1945

meeting, to our getting acquainted, and to the happiness of the young pair. We clinked our glasses with Misha's and then embraced him.

Suddenly, Misha noticed my gaze. I had recognized my father's gold ring. Misha took it from his finger and showed the monogram of my parents' initials on the interior surface. Our mother had given a matching woman's ring to Fira on their wedding day. The family jewelry, preserved at such great risk in Transnistria, had been handed on to the next generation for their good fortune.

There was no end of the questions we had for Misha. He told us that, on October 27th, he and Fira were married at the Registry Office and had a very modest wedding reception at our mother's home. Present were Aunt Sonea and Eva, our mother, three couples from among Fira's work colleagues, and an old friend of Misha's with his wife. Misha was now in Moscow on official business, and would then go to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy for several days. On November 10th, after the anniversary celebration of the October Revolution, he was to start his work at the staff of the Carpathian Military Command in Chernovtsy. He hoped to be given an apartment soon and to bring Fira and our mother there before the end of the year.

Misha told us about himself, his parents, his service at the front and in Sofia, about Fira and Mother, and about his plans for the future.

Misha made a good impression on both Aunt Ida and Greta. He was of average height with regular facial features, intelligent hazel eyes, a

head of red hair, and well-groomed hands. He was sociable, spoke well, and elicited sympathy and respect in his interlocutors. He also looked elegant in his new officer's uniform. Aunt Ida asked him in an affectionate and tactful manner whether he might not have a Jewish friend just like himself who could be a bridegroom for Greta. Greta grew embarrassed and declared that she would choose her own husband.

For his part, Misha asked about Greta's and Aunt Ida's jobs, life in Moscow, and the general attitude of the people. Our conversation also touched upon theater and concerts and other such topics.

Then Misha asked me about my studies and my plans and I told him about everything, hiding nothing. Misha was saddened to hear of my difficulties. He was not optimistic about my chances of registering with the military and obtaining a residence permit in another city of Moscow Region, even if Aunt Ida or Greta had acquaintances there. He concluded that I was not fated to study in Moscow. Our conversation that evening continued until it was late.

* * *

In the morning we all went off to our various affairs. I went to class at the technical school. We were excused from the last period because many in my group were participating in an amateur theatrical performance and had to attend rehearsal. They were preparing for the festivities to take place on the evening of November 6th.

Greta and Misha arrived home soon after I did. We quickly had a bite to eat and then went out together for a stroll through Moscow as the city prepared for the holiday. We walked around on Nogin Square and then took a narrow street past the buildings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party until we reached GUM, the State Department Store, and Red Square. It was full of people, mostly from out of town. They crowded around St. Basil's Cathedral, with its quaint, multicolored domes, looked from afar at the majestic towers and walls of the Kremlin, and listened to the chimes of the clock. For a time we stood around the Lenin Mausoleum, which was closed to visitors, and passed the Historical Museum and the Moscow Hotel to arrive at the small garden park in front of the Bol'shoi Theater. Greta showed us the Pillared Hall of the Soviet of the Union. Along Gorky Street we walked as far as the Byelorussian Station, admiring the monuments to Pushkin and Mayakovsky and gazing at the building of the Moscow City Soviet. We also took a look in the Eliseyevskiy grocery store.

Our mood was brightened by the sight of the lighted streets and squares, the decorated buildings and shop windows, and the huge numbers of people hurrying to and fro. We sensed enthusiasm and a faith in the future.

The war was over and the fascists were utterly defeated; the Soviet Union and its allies had emerged victorious. Peace reigned once again.

Finally we grew tired and turned back, with Greta leading us along different streets. We found ourselves at the Central Department Store (TsUM), then walked around Dzerzhinsky Square and along Kirov Street. In the Chinese store across from the General Post Office, Misha bought coffee, tea, lemons, a desert cake, and candies. Brazilian coffee and lemons from Greece were then being sold only in a few stores, exclusively in Moscow.

Aunt Ida had found our note on the table telling her that we had gone to have a look at the city, but when we arrived back home, she pretended that she was angry at us for going out for a stroll without her. She had grown fond of us and wanted to spend as much time as possible together with us. And moreover, she knew the city very well and could have shown us all the points of interest. We spent a fine evening together, and the cake and tea with lemon were a hit with everyone.

Once again we discussed my situation and weighed my options. Only Aunt Ida had faith in my ultimate success. Greta, who had gone with me to Vereya and had seen and heard everything for herself, doubted that I would find a better reception in another city. I kept silent. I wanted to study in Moscow, but I was unable to imagine how I would surmount all the difficulties that I had encountered. Above all, my heart longed for home. After a short pause, Misha declared firmly: «Tomorrow we're leaving for Akkerman! You will study either there or in Chernovtsy.» No one offered an objection.

* * *

On the morning of November 1st, Misha went to attend to some business of his own, and Greta promised to be home at 1 p.m. to say goodbye. Aunt Ida had the day off from work. Once I had gathered my things together, I helped her around the house. She was upset over my departure as she had grown accustomed to having me there during the past month. Also, Greta would spend all her time at work, and Aunt Ida would once again sit in the apartment alone. I tried to console her, saying that perhaps my father would be discharged and she could come visit us in the summer during school vacation. I told her that we had many fruits and vegetables there and we would relax together in the warmth.

Around 11 o'clock, Misha returned and the three of us set out to buy supplies. At the Eliseyevskiy grocery store, we stood in different lines to buy good dry sausage, herring, olives, butter, cheese, coffee, tea, oranges, lemons, and candies. These kinds of things were only sold in Moscow, especially before the holidays. Suddenly, everything was available!

Standing in the lines were many out-of-towners from Tula, Voronezh, Orel, Yaroslavl', and even as far away as Georgia, Armenia, Lithuania, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Siberia – from throughout the Soviet Union. They bought up everything in huge quantities. Some of them had large families and they were storing up for the future; others were simply planning to resell the food for whatever they could get.

In GUM, Misha bought gifts for Fira, our mother, Aunt Sonea, and Eva. Aunt Ida chose women's leather handbags for herself and Greta – gifts from Misha.

Back at home, we packed Misha's luggage and then ate dinner with Aunt Ida and Greta. I thanked them from the bottom of my heart for everything they had done – for the letters and parcels sent to me in Komi, which helped support me both emotionally and physically during that terribly difficult time, and for the exceptional efforts they had made for me here in Moscow. We embraced heartily and kissed each other in farewell. They also said a warm goodbye to Misha, whom they had met only several days before. I was already at the door when I asked Aunt Ida to explain my sudden departure to Comrade Gonchar and to assure him of my deep gratitude for his invitation to study.

Greta accompanied us to Nogin Square where we said a warm goodbye. She then went on to work, and we descended into the Metro at Dzerzhinsky Square.

At Kiev Station we took our seats in the officer's car on the Moscow-Odessa train. It set off a few minutes after three. Misha and I sat across from one another at a small table by the window. Misha asked me to tell him about the conditions of life in the labor-army. He was surprised at the arbitrariness of the SMERSH officers as they considered the files of those who found themselves in occupied territory and at the mechanical way they determined the fates of these people. How could Jews who had been subjected to fascist violence and survived the camp-ghettos be treated in the same way as the Moldavians and Ukrainians who had mocked them in collaboration with the Romanians and Germans? Why did they refuse to trust the Jews who had regarded the Soviet Union as their only savior and had taken up arms in the Soviet Army to wreak vengeance on the fascists? There were many such «whys,» but no satisfactory answers. I realized that Misha and millions of people like him had no idea of the conditions in which the army laborers were kept and of the type of excessive work they were forced to perform. They had no knowledge of how these unfortunates suffered from exposure, grew swollen and died, and how it felt to be living behind barbed wire with the former accomplices of the foreign murderers and criminals of all stripes.

We hardly noticed as the train passed beyond the dacha settlements

in the environs of Moscow and the cities of Maloyaroslavets, Kaluga, and Bryansk. It was already dark outside our window when the conductor brought us tea. We ate supper and then, exhausted, lay down to rest. I climbed into the top berth and the monotonous beat of the wheels quickly lulled me to sleep.

I awoke early, looking forward with anticipation and joy to meeting with my mother and Fira. Finally, we would be together! I had waited for this day for so long! Was it possible that our father would also arrive home just as unexpectedly? Countless questions filled my mind, each one quickly replaced by another. Would I be able to obtain a passport and military registration card? I had, after all, been discharged specifically to study at the Construction Technical School in Moscow. Would I have to finish tenth grade at my school, or could I find a job and begin to get some specialized training? Would I stay in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy if Fira and Misha took our mother with them to Chernovtsy? What had happened to my friends? Were they still alive?

Misha also rose early and was in excellent spirits. We washed up and sat down to breakfast ravenously hungry. Misha noted that everyone in our train car was eating. Several officers were drinking vodka out of their tea glasses in honor of various special events. There were many reasons to celebrate. They raised their glasses to victory, to their survival, to the bride who waited faithfully, to the family that had been located, and to the hope that there would never again be war and that people would no longer know grief.

From the table next to ours a pleasant-looking senior lieutenant addressed Misha and asked him to drink to charity, a sentiment that had helped to win the battle for humanity's salvation. He poured a 100-gram glass for me as well. We joined him gladly. He sat down with us and with few words told us his amazing story. He had been born in Dal'nik, a village along the route from Tiraspol' to Odessa. He was conscripted at the start of the war, having to leave his parents, wife, and son behind.

At the end of October, 1941, columns of Jews numbering in the thousands came from Odessa, driven by Romanian soldiers and gendarmes in the direction of Dal'nik. Those who fell behind from exhaustion were beaten to death or shot, the corpses left to lie on the road. Toward evening, his father was returning home in a cart when he saw a little girl about four years of age clinging to the bloody corpse of a murdered woman and sobbing weakly. It was clear that the mother had shielded her as she fell on top of her. He took the girl onto his cart, gave her a piece of bread, calmed her down, told her to sit quietly, and covered her with a homespun coat. He then drove home along the edge of the village and together with his wife and daughter-in-law, decided to protect the child. They passed her off as a niece born in another village, and by moving her from one set of relatives to another, they miraculously managed to save her life.

After the end of the war, the senior lieutenant returned home for several days' leave. In the courtyard he saw his son playing with a little girl. She addressed his parents as Mama and Papa.

Misha and I admired the courage and kindheartedness of these people. I knew from my own experience that such people existed. The only pity was that there were so few of them.

* * *

The train stopped for a long time in Zhmerinka. The building of this large junction station stood between the tracks. We left the train car in order to stretch our legs. In one of the halls we saw a swastika – the symbol of violence and mockery – inlaid in the tile. The fascist barbarians had believed Hitler's promise that they would rule the Slavic lands forever. They had been driven away in ignominy, but vile and oppressive traces of them remained.

We travelled south from Zhmerinka through the former Transnistria so sadly familiar to me. We sat at the window as the train passed through districts where the Romanians had built their camp-ghettos and where tens of thousands of innocent Jews lay buried in the earth. In answer to Misha's questions, I told him of our ordeals during those terrible years.

* * *

We arrived in Odessa around three o'clock in the afternoon. On the square in front of the railroad station we got into the car of some rogue who promised us that he would get us to Ovidiopol' in one hour. We were in a hurry to make the last ferry boat. Two other passengers were already in the car. Intercity bus routes did not yet exist and Odessa's opportunists were making a fortune.

Our route passed through the villages of Bol'shaia Akkarzha, Malaia Akkarzha, and Baraboi. Before my eyes rose the scene of July 1941: our flight from Akkerman to escape the advancing Romanian and German hordes; the crowds of people and carts loaded with household baggage on top of which lay the sick, the elderly, and the children; the slow passage through German colonies under the silent and hostile looks of their residents; the whine of the diving planes and the clatter of the bomb splinters against the beam-covered road and the wide strong stone walls; and the fear that hovered over and oppressed all the refugees.

We stopped at the very bank of the Dniester firth, where the ferry was already loading. We quickly paid the driver, whose car was already surrounded by passengers going in the other direction, and ran across along pontoon bridge to the boat, stepping aboad just in time. We sat in the front to see better and feel closer to our city.

Notes

[1] In 1957 Aunt Ida and Greta received official notification from the Supreme Court of the USSR that M.R. Dolinko had been rehabilitated posthumously.

[2] B. Bazhanov, *Vospominaniia byvshego sekretaria Stalina* (France, 1980); Nekrasov, *Trinadtsat' «zheleznykh» narkomov*; *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, edited by J. L. Wieczynski (1985).

[3] Sima, *Histoire*, 235-41, 280; *Dicţionar enciclopedic român* (Bucharest, 1962-66), 4:206-07, 673; *Mic dicţionar enciclopedic* (Bucharest, 1972), 1552; *România*, 137, 246.

[4] *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii*, 456-67, 486-89.

[5] The Prosecutorial Institute merged in Alma-Ata with the Moscow Institute of Law. Greta completed her course at the institute ahead of schedule, in 1942.

Chapter 14: **BELGOROD-DNESTROVSKIY**

A broad firth, approximately nine kilometers wide, separated Ovidiopol' from Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy. A strong, cold wind was blowing, and high waves rocked our boat. We turned up the collars of our greatcoats, pulled our fur hats down to our brows, and pressed close together. We sat for a long time in silence, each of us submerged in his own thoughts. I felt that my patience was at an end. I was eager to see and embrace Mother and Fira and finally to be home.

As it grew dark on the water, the electric lights of the city drew ever nearer. After another 30 minutes we began to distinguish the cogged contour of the tall fortress walls on our right, and the decorated outlines of a church and the multistoried box-shaped mill on our left. At least from a distance my old city of Akkerman looked the same; now I would have to become accustomed to its new name.

Misha seemed to sense my urgent desire to be home right away. He broke the silence by informing me that there was no public transportation in the city and that we would have to make our way on foot. This somewhat cooled my impatience. Loaded down with our suitcases and knapsacks, we climbed from the firth up a rather steep hill, walked past the archaeological excavations in front of the fortress, crossed the central part of the city, and emerged onto Novo-Bazarnaya Street. We did not stop once to catch our breath.

We entered the courtyard at #22, where lights shone in the windows. Misha knocked on a window and called out his name. Fira cracked the shutters slightly and saw him. She threw open the door and they embraced. Then she noticed a man in a military uniform standing in the dark and asked Misha whom he had brought along. I could not hold back any longer, but stepped forward and embraced and kissed Fira. The surprise of seeing me left her speechless. We simply stood there silently in each other's arms. Then, in noisy laughter, the three of us burst into the kitchen where our mother was reading a book at the table. We all surrounded her and hugged and kissed her together. She laughed and cried all at once in boundless joy and happiness. She had not been expecting me at all. When I told my mother and sister that Misha had decided to bring me from Moscow, they embraced him warmly

yet again in gratitude. Mother gazed at me for a long time and stroked my hair and face, noticing of course the scar over my left brow and my overworked hands.

Misha took out the gifts for Fira and our mother and presented them with foods they had not seen or eaten for a long time. My mother thanked him for everything, but she added that I was the best gift from among all that Misha had brought. We then sat down at the table to supper. Misha and I were starved. We ate and talked, and everyone asked all kinds of questions. Mother promised to write two letters the very next day: one of thanks to Aunt Ida and Greta, and the other to my father with the news. He was all that we lacked in order to be completely happy.

I left the table to fetch my father's letters. Fira had brought my things into her room. I got out the letters and laid them on the shelf of a small bookcase. Among the books there was the *Petit Larousse*. I tenderly turned its vellum pages with their multitude of illustrations, maps, and tables, and the thin cyclamen-colored supplementary sheets with Latin and other foreign expressions. On the very first page I read *Ad augusta per angusta* – lofty goals are achieved by surmounting many difficulties. This saying from Victor Hugo was directly applicable to our recent history – millions of Jews had gone through such unbelievable ordeals in order to preserve and pass on to future generations their essence, their faith! I recalled our good Hersh Rosenberg, the doctor from our ghetto of Vinogradnyi Sad, his patient explanations of the dicta of brilliant thinkers, writers, and military leaders.

I returned to the kitchen with the bound pack of letters and the *Larousse*. Fira's face beamed. She had been right when, in those tragic days of January 1942, she had convinced our father not to discard this book from her rucksack. Fira had believed that we would survive and *Larousse* had been her talisman.

We reread our father's letters. Our mother had difficulty holding back her tears. How could it be that after the ghetto our abused and weakened father could be made to work in the mine? Who looked after him when he was sick? We all tried to reassure our mother, insisting that it was all over, that he was now healthy, and that with God's help he would soon come back to us.

Fira and Misha retreated to their own room. Mother and I remained sitting in the kitchen, discussing my plans for the near future.

* * *

The next morning Misha and I walked Fira to her job at the State Bank. We enjoyed the clear and warm autumn weather, which was so unlike that of Moscow, to say nothing of Komi.

Novo-Bazarnaya Street was almost untouched by the war; the one-story limestone houses with their wide three-leaved windows with shutters, three small steps leading up to their main entrances, the small courtyards. The sidewalks were lined with masonry and paved with tiles. Low mulberry trees, planted at equal distances one from another, were bare of leaves at this time of year. With a clatter of horseshoes and wheel tires, an open low-bodied cart loaded with milk-cans drove along the road, which was paved with squared stones. This was the kind of old prewar city I still remembered.

The three-story building of the State Bank on Sofiyskaia Street, built before the First World War, had not been damaged. We parted at the entrance. Fira needed to submit, in timely fashion, her request for a transfer to the Chernovtsy city branch of the State Bank in connection with her move to the place where her husband served. They decided to go to the manager together to make a better impression. I left to take a walk.

I stopped dumbfounded a mere half-block from the bank where Sofiyskaia Street met Nikolaevskaia Street, the main street of Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy running from the fortress through the entire city to the train station. Several city blocks, on both sides of the street, stood in ruins. I continued farther up to Mihailovskaia Street, turned to the right, looked up, and saw the same oppressive scene: fallen walls, burned out window and door frames, heaps of earth, bricks, and limestones, cut and chopped trees. Here once stood Akkerman's commercial center, richly stocked stores and attractive private houses of the Jews. I recalled Malinsky's dry-goods store and Anbinder's book and stationery shop as well as jewelry, furniture, hardware, and grocery stores, a restaurant, a studio, workshops, and beauty parlors. This put me into a frightful mood. I imagined Romanian soldiers and gendarmes, intoxicated with the anti-Semitic propaganda of the legionnaires, bursting into this peaceful small provincial city. I pictured to myself how they killed the Jews – men, women, and children – with bestial fury, hounded them from their homes, raped young women, and went whooping through the entire city herding their victims into a synagogue or into a crowded ghetto before the mass executions, robbed them, took their belongings, plundered their apartments, and burned homes. The Romanian and German hordes, in their holy crusade against the Bol'sheviks, had been more savage than the worst barbarians.

* * *

Statistics from the year 1930 show that in the county of Cetatea Albă, as Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy had been called under the Romanians, there had been 11,390 Jews. Fewer than this, 11,191 Jews, were

registered in 1939. Jews made up 3,3% of the total population of the county. In the city itself, there had been 4,239 Jews in 1930, 12,3% of the population. In 1940 the numbers rose, due to those who had been repatriated from Romania or who had arrived from the USSR.

Jews were also repressed by Stalin's regime in 1940-1941, although their numbers can no longer be established. According to Marius Mircu, about 8,000 Jews were living in the city on the eve of the war. In June and July, 1941, some from among the Jews were mobilized into the Red Army or evacuated to the eastern parts of the Soviet Union.[1]

On August 5, 1941, Romanian army divisions entered Cetatea Albă.[2] The mass murder of the Jews, the torching of their homes, and the plundering of their property began immediately.

Court documents and witness testimony published by Jean Ancel allow us to establish who led the butchery of the Jews, who actually carried out the killings and excesses, and where the shootings of innocent people took place.

On orders of the commander of the Gendarme Legion of Cetatea Albă, Major Mircea Georgescu, around 360 Jews were sent from the ghetto of the village of Bairamcea in a convoy guarded by gendarmes to the city of Cetatea Albă and locked in one of the synagogues. Their guards were commanded by a Warrant Officer of the Gendarmes, Dumitru Smarandache. In another synagogue the police drove together yet 2,500 more Jews from among those who had hidden out and thus managed to survive the pogrom conducted by the military during the first days of the city's occupation. Thousands of Jews were driven into the ghetto. The Assistant to the Police Commissar, Atanase Stomatopol, testified that many Jews gave themselves up to the authorities of their own free will.

The head of the city garrison was Lieutenant-Colonel Stamate Antonescu, the City Commandant was Major Virgil Drăgan, and his assistant was Senior Warrant Officer Marin S. Olteanu. The commander of the sentry company was Captain Alexandru Ochișor. The First Prefect's Assistant of the county was Aurel Bejan.

At the beginning of August, 1941, Colonel Marcel Petala, the Military Praetor of the Third Army, ordered the execution of all Jews in the city of Cetatea Albă. Many have given testimony to this fact: Commander Nicolae Bărdescu, the Police Commissar's Assistant, Stomatopol, Lieutenant Alexandru Buză, the architect Viorel Angelor, the Police Commissar, Gheorghe Dumitriu, Warrant Officer Constantin Marian, Warrant Officer Gheorghe Beilici, Warrant Officer of the Gendarmes, Smarandache, Ioan Calinciuc, Ioan Cristescu, Amilcar Dumitriu, and others. By order of First Prefect's Assistant Bejan, around 12,000 Jews were driven into Cetatea Albă from different towns and villages of the county and then killed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stamate Antonescu, Major Drăgan, Major Filip

Bechi, Major Horia Olteanu, Captain Ochișor, Captain Crudu, and Senior Warant Officer Olteanu commanded the execution punitive platoons. These platoons were made up of gendarmes, soldiers of the 2nd battalion of the 5th Border-Guard regiment, and a fire-fighting section from the 35th Infantry Regiment, and the officers also personally shot the Jews dead. Captain Ochișor, who was called «The Butcher» (*Călăul*) and Major Bechi, who called himself «Herod the Second,» raged with particular brutality, indulging their passion for massacring nursing infants.[3]

They led the Jews out of the synagogues in groups of 30 to 40 and, in covered trucks from the Romanian National Bank, transported them to the places of execution on the outskirts of the city near the Armenian cemetary, in a quarry, on the bank of the Dniester firth, and near the Jewish hospital. The mass shootings continued for four days. According to a statement by Captain Ochișor, the Jews were killed in groups of 900-1,000 and 3,500.[4] The Romanians also annihilated the Jews in the ghetto, in their places of forced labor, on the streets, in their homes, and in the synagogues. The Gendarmes handed several thousand Jews over for extermination to German units that were passing through the city.[5]

Witnesses testified to the bestiality and cruelty of the Romanian butchers. Captain Ochișor personally shot the two daughters of Doctor Bednyi, who was well respected in the city, as well as 15 people suspected of communist sympathies and Kogan, a jeweller whom he had robbed. He finished off Arbid, an old and ill woman, in her bed; Srul Feigin, an elderly man; and others. The bodies of those murdered were left unburied for a long time.

After the executions, Captain Ochișor and Major Olteanu made off with the valuables the Jews left behind in the synagogues and apartments. Immediately before the execution, the Romanian monsters forced everyone – men and women, old and young alike – to hand over their gold and items of value and to take off their clothes and shoes.

Those in the lower ranks also indulged themselves in the arson, robbery, and murder, such as Senior Warrant Officer Ion Cazacu, Gheorghe Agopșa, a soldier of the 35th Infantry Regiment, and others.[6] To this we must add local anti-Semites and hooligans as well.

The motives of the Romanian military's criminal actions, as well as those of various administrative officials, were their political and racial convictions and, to no less a degree, their limitless thirst for personal gain.

* * *

In the empty city park I sat on a bench, completely exhausted. I needed to compose myself and return to my senses. Children were quickly walking to school, taking a shortcut through the garden. I dragged

myself along after them. Somewhere in my unconscious arose the thought or the hope that I might find someone from among my former classmates in the school.

Lessons were underway in the classrooms as I climbed the familiar wide staircase to the second floor, where the upper classes had been located in 1940–1941. The doors of the classrooms opened out into a large, bright, open hall where, between classes, some of the schoolkids would fool around or laugh at each other's jokes while others would be engaged in serious discussions or arguments. This open hall was also the site for soirees, with amateur performances and dances on holidays. On this day, as well, it had a festive look because the school was preparing to celebrate the annual commemoration of the October Revolution.

I stood at the window across from the door of the 10th-grade classroom. The bell rang, and after a minute of total silence the doors to the 7th-and 8th-grade classrooms flew open and the boys and girls tumbled out, some at a run. I concentrated my gaze on the 10th graders, but I did not find even one familiar face. Several people remained sitting in the classroom and I went in to look them over. Suddenly, I heard, «Rubin, is that you?» I turned toward the voice and saw a girl I remembered from the former 7th grade. It was Ida Zef. At that moment it hit me that four years had gone by and, of course, any of my former classmates who survived would be studying at the university or institute by now! We embraced and walked out. Ida asked the teacher, a young woman, for permission to leave.

We walked along the old familiar streets of Akkerman in our school neighborhood. Ida and her family had managed to evacuate to Central Asia, where they lived in difficult material circumstances. When they returned a short time earlier, they failed to find alive any of their relatives who had stayed behind. I gave her a short version of my own story, and then together we recalled our former schoolmates: Shmil Milman and Raea Missonzhnik, Shura Perlis and Maria Treivush, Ruzea Shteinberg and Berta Abramovici, Gedeon Belopol'skiy and Asea Goldenberg, Sonea Krasnyanskaya and Eva Zak.

Sonea Krasnyanskaya and her ill mother had arrived in the city just a few days ago. Her father and younger sister had died in evacuation. Seul Makler had returned a cripple from the front. He had suffered frostbite to his legs and his feet had been amputated. At the age of 19 he got around on crutches. He was studying at the medical institute, and his elderly mother looked after him. Anna Strelets had returned with her family from Uzbekistan. Alea Yaroslavskaya was working as an accountant at a store for the military. Ida knew nothing about the others. Every individual had suffered in his or her own particular way. Some were perhaps killed in Akkerman, others in Odessa or in the ghettos of

Transnistria. The most fortunate seemed to be those who managed to escape to the interior of the country.

At school we had studied side-by-side with Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavians, Bulgarians, and Gagauzians. Together we recalled many of their names: Dmitrii Abramoglo, Igor Braga, Valentina Baltaga, Pavel Baltazhi, Vasily Zverenciuc, Nicolai Iordachiev, Constantin Idriberzhiev, Zina Korovinskaya, Pavel Maslov, Alexandra Nezovibat'ko, Igor Popov-Tolmachyov, Pyotr Petrushin, Vladilen Pavlov, Alyosha Yatskov, and Elena Budyanskaya. Some of them had been locals, from the city or from different villages of the region. These had probably dispersed to their homes. Some kids had arrived in 1940 from the Soviet Union with their families: Alexandra Nezovibat'ko, Igor Popov-Tolmachyov, Vladilen Pavlov, Alyosha Yatskov, and Pavel Maslov. They had hung out together and been the social activists of the school, and they had almost certainly been among the first to evacuate. Their parents were party workers, teachers, officers, and the like. By now no one remained even from among our non-Jewish classmates. Ida was still hoping that someone would turn up and be able to tell her about what had happened in the city during the occupation.

We recalled the names of our teachers as well: Sergei Illarionovich Gontarev, Elena Vasil'evna Vasileva, Anna Il'inichna Shklyaruk, Langina Petrovna Dobzhanskaya, Maria Iosifovna Berman, Nicolai Maximovich Chernov, Dora Izraylevna Goldman, Alexander Maximovich Mulis, and others. Not one of them had returned.

We were saddened. The war had mercilessly destroyed our old world. Between the childhood world of our past and our youth in the present was a chasm that had swallowed up so many good and innocent people and destroyed our dreams, hopes, and emotional ties.

I walked Ida home and promised to visit her regularly. We hoped that some of our classmates might still show up in their native city.

I arrived home in a horrible mood. I had seen with my own eyes what the Romanian occupants had done to the city, and learned what they had done to my classmates and teachers. I felt in my heart the certainty that in some damp soil lay the bodies of Eva Zak, and Shmil Milman, and Shura Perlis, and Ruzea Shteinberg, and others with whom I had been friends.

* * *

I had my afternoon meal alone with my mother, as Fira was still at work and Misha had gone to visit Aunt Sonea and Eva and then set off for the City Military Registration and Enlistment Office. I was pleasantly surprised by the quiet and businesslike way in which I was received. I told a brief version of my story to the head of the appropriate department:

how we had evacuated from this city in July 1941, were in besieged Odessa, forced by the Romanians into the ghetto, and finally liberated by the Soviet Army in March 1944; how I had served in the labor-army for over a year and then demobilized in order to continue my education; how my mother and sister were living in the city and had extra living space (I presented the house register); that my sister was working at the State Bank and that I was going to study here. I answered several questions posed by the department head, who then ordered me to come back on November 10th to receive my temporary military card.

Things went just as normally at the City Executive Committee and then at the House Management Office. They asked me to fill out arrival forms and told me to return to them after the holidays with other neccesary certificates, my military registration, and the house register.

After the purgatory of Moscow and Vereya, the officials of state institutions in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy seemed like angels to me. Later I learned that the local authorities had issued a resolution to expedite the registration of former residents of the city who were returning home either from evacuation or from the army.

* * *

That evening, when everyone was back, I told them that I could not study at High School #2, my former school. I felt it would be too difficult an emotional burden to study there alone at the age of 20 without classmates my own age. What I needed was some specialized training. Fira advised me to go to the recently opened Teacher's Institute, which had a two-year study program. With the current teacher shortage, they would be able to register me in the first-year course. We all agreed with Fira's suggestion.

Fira and Misha were satisfied with their discussion with the manager of the State Bank. He had signed Fira's request for dismissal due to her family situation and promised to help her transfer to the Chernovtsy city branch. He knew personally the manager of that branch and would write a recommendation and positive reference for Fira, inasmuch as he had known her since 1940. The manager once again congratulated Fira and Misha on their new married life.

Misha reminded us again that he was leaving by train in the morning of November 9th to begin his service on the 10th. Once he had been given the apartment he had been promised, Fira would take our mother and join him in Chernovtsy. If our father were to return by then, Misha would issue an invitation to us as well. Otherwise, I would remain temporarily here.

* * *

The morning mail brought us a cheerful letter from our father. He reported that he was healthy and had even regained some weight since he was doing heavy physical work, and he was earning a little money on the side. There were persistent rumors that army laborers of his age would be demobilized before the end of the year, or at least by the beginning of the following year. He asked in his letter when Fira's fiancé, Misha Shteinberg, would be arriving from Sofia and whether they had agreed on a wedding day yet. He expressed his fervent wish to be together with our mother for this family celebration. Further, he wrote to our mother that she should not worry about me since I was with his sister, Aunt Ida, and had begun my studies. Our dear father did not know that Fira and Misha had already been married at a registry office and that I was already home. Our letters had not yet reached him.

Father's letter lifted our spirits. We thanked God that everyone was healthy, that our father might perhaps come home soon, that Fira had married a decent man and that they loved each other.

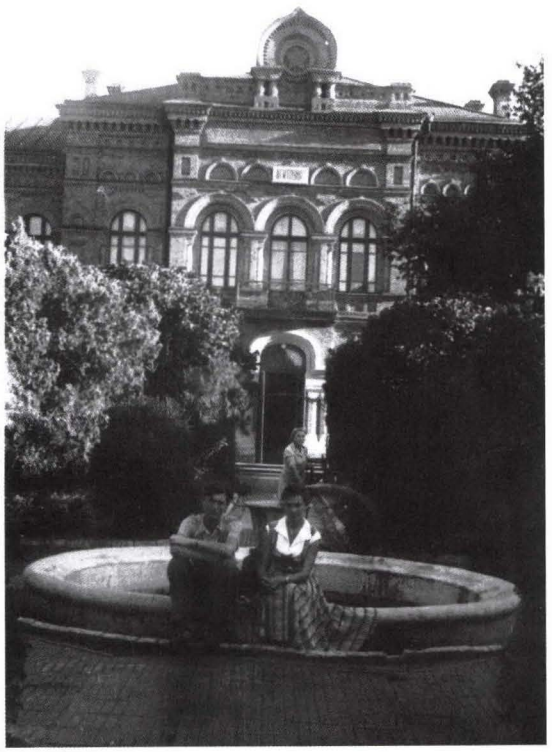
* * *

By about 9 o'clock in the morning I was standing at the iron gates of the Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Teacher's Institute, which was housed in a solid two-story building dating to Tsarist times and had been the city boys' gymnasium. Off to the side of the main building was the two-story dormitory, and half of the immense courtyard was an outdoor athletic facility. Well-shaped poplars and thick lilac bushes grew along the fence. Benches surrounded by decorative evergreen bushes along both sides of the broad, slate-tiled path leading from the gates to the main entrance. Near this front entrance the path divided into two parts running around a wide pool and a fountain in the middle.

The building of the gymnasium had not suffered damage from the war. The huge vestibule contained a large staircase with portraits and slogans hanging on the walls. The staircase led up to the second floor, where the atmosphere and cleanliness of the premises inspired a feeling of reverence.

After a short conversation with the assistant director, he and I went to speak with the director. It was the first time I had entered the office of an institute director. It was decorated with carved furniture, including a desk, bookcase, long conference table, and armchairs upholstered in dark brown leather, as well as a large rug and a crystal chandelier, all from an earlier age. A new radio receiver and a telephone stood on a small table next to the desk.

The director, an intelligent-looking man of about 50, listened to us



Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Teacher's Institute

attentively and asked me several questions about my biography. He said that the schools of the region were in great need of teachers. This institute trained teachers of various subjects for grades five through eight, and the best students would be able to go on to study at pedagogical institutes and universities. Noting that I had completed only nine grades in school and had interrupted my studies for four years, he advised me to take the institute's preparatory course, especially since it was already two months into the academic year. The students in the course were people of my age who had missed several years of schooling for various reasons. They basically followed the a tenth-grade curriculum and would receive graduation certificates upon passing their exams in June. After completing their secondary education in this way, students of the preparatory course would be allowed to take the entrance exams and receive preferential treatment in admission to the institute. In fact, the graduation certificate might also qualify me to apply to any other institute should I decide on another profession.

I followed the director's suggestion. He immediately appended his resolution of acceptance to my application. I was to report for classes on November 10th and to bring all the documentation I would have by

that time: military card, passport with residence permit, a certificate from my school showing that I completed the ninth grade, and several other documents.

I thanked the director for his sympathetic attitude and gave him my best wishes for the holiday. I left his office together with the assistant director, thanked him as well, and literally ran home, overjoyed. All my problems had been solved over the course of two days, and on the tenth of the month I would begin studying with others of my own age. And unlike school pupils, I and the other students of the preparatory course would receive stipends and be permitted to eat in the cafeteria and live in the dormitory.

At home I found only my mother, who was also happy at my good news. It had, after all, been our dream to return to Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, to be together as a family, and for me to study.

* * *

On November 7, 1945, the entire country celebrated the 28th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. In Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, the city's population came out for a march on Mihailovskaia Street, which had recently been named Lenin Street. Mother and I stood with housewives, old men, and children on the sidewalk close to the rostrum set up for the city officials. Collectives from enterprises, institutions, schools, and hospitals passed by with flags and banners, accompanied by brass bands. This was a rare opportunity to see our neighbors and the rest of the city residents gathered together, because all healthy people were obligated to participate in the demonstration march. Many others came from elsewhere to visit friends and acquaintances. We peered at all the faces, still hoping to find someone from among the old residents of Akkerman, friends of my parents or former classmates of mine. I thought that perhaps one of my comrades had quit school and gone to work, or had changed schools, or, who knows, come here from Odessa or some other place simply to visit relatives during the holiday.

We stood for over three hours watching thousands of people march by. We saw very few Jewish faces and none of those we so longed to see. We finally left the throng, disappointed and tired, and set off for home. We walked among the ruins of the former Jewish blocks, not yet ready to believe that the Jewish life of the city had faded forever into the past, that we would never again hear Yiddish, the language of our ancestors.

The *damned years* of Bessarabia's and Northern Bukovina's occupation and of the pogroms unleashed here by the Romanians; the *years of distress* when emaciated and enfeebled souls were torn from their homes and driven in innumerable convoys by the armed bands of

frenzied legionnaires dressed in military and gendarme uniforms to near-certain death in Transnistria; the *years of suffering* from hunger, exposure, illness, and abuse at the hands of the Romanian butchers in the ghettos and forced-labor camps. These were the *cursed years* that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people and forever deformed the existence and the lot of those few individuals whom fate had permitted to live. These years will remain in the memory of all peoples as a brutal and merciless test of the strength and steadfastness of the Jewish spirit.

* * *

To the list of my relatives who met their untimely ends in the ghettos and about whom I have written with a heavy heart on the pages of this book of memoirs, I would like to add the names of those dear family members who passed away in the years following:

Isidor Ghelberg (April 8, 1959)
Ghenea Ghelberg (August 27, 1966)
Misha Shteinberg (April 13, 1970)
Dina Udler (August 17, 1973)
Yakov Udler (June 29, 1975)
Mottya Gleizer (August 2, 1975)
Ida Dolinko (January 24, 1976)
Leonea Ghelberg (April 27, 1985)
Dora Gleizer (February 28, 1989)
Greta Dolinko (February 18, 1994)
Fira Shteinberg (August 19, 2004)

May God grant them eternal rest! May their memories live forever!

* * *

In the early morning of November 9th, we accompanied Misha, now a captain in the Soviet Army, to the firth. His train was to leave at noon, from Odessa to Chernovtsy, where he would start his work at the staff of the Carpathian Military Command. We wished him all the best in his efforts to begin work in a new place and to found a new hearth and home for his young family. In December he received an apartment and brought Fira and our mother to him. Fira was able to do this by obtaining a work transfer that included her in the staff of the Chernovtsy city branch of the State Capital Bank in the position of accountant.

At 8:30 a.m. on November 10th, I was attending my first lecture in a classroom at the institute. I had turned a new page in my biography.



Students of the Preparatory Course of the Teacher's Institute, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, 1946. I am standing first from the right

I moved to the dormitory of the institute and continued studying. The student cafeteria provided me with nourishing and very cheap food. My stipends were sufficient to support myself.

* * *

In the middle of March 1946 my father, together with other army laborers of his age, was demobilized. After a month, at Misha's invitation, my father and I followed my mother to Chernovtsy.

At the railway station we were welcomed by my mother, Fira, and Misha. It was impossible to describe our joy. After the painful and humiliating years in the ghettos, and two hard years of separation, we were together again. Misha, with his handsome appearance, charm, and filial kindness, caught my father's fancy at once.

Chernovtsy produced a profound impression on me. I was astonished by its European appearance, contemporary architecture, historical monuments, parks, and cleanliness. In that city lay open to me so many opportunities: study at a well-known university, medical and commercial/economic institutes, and various technical schools.

In June I passed my exams and received my diploma, thereby completing my secondary education. I was then allowed to take my



Misha, Fira, myself, Father, Mother, Fira's son Sasha, Dora, Mottya, little Fira, and Unah, Chernovtsy, 1949



Uncle Isidor, Leonea, and Aunt Ghenea Ghelberg, Bucharest, 1953



Mother, myself, and Father, Chernovtsy, 1951

entrance exams for the State University, where I became a student at the Department of Romance Languages in the Philological Faculty.

Thus our dreams were fulfilled. Our family was together at last, free citizens able to work and study as we chose.

Pittsburgh
November 30, 1992 – February 14, 1996

Notes

[1] Mircu, *Pogromurile din Basarabia*, 6; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, X:53-54. According to the population records of 1942, not one single Jews remained in the city of Cetatea Albă or in the county. *Problema evreiască*, 90-91.

[2] *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, 39; K. Koval'dzhi, *Limanskie istorii* (Moscow, 1970), 163-73; Antosiak, *V boiakh*, 98.

[3] Mircu, *Pogromurile din Basarabia*, 9; *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VI:214-18. Major from the Gendarmerie Bechi Filip commanded savage, bloody massacres of thousands of Jews in all towns and villages of the Orhei district.

[4] A.D. Bachyns'kyi, «Tragediia evreis'koho naselennia ukrains'koho Podunav'ia: 1941», *Odes'kyi universytet*, no. 21 (15 October 1991); *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VI:214, 215.

[5] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VI:216.

[6] *Documents Concerning the Fate*, VI: 141, 298-300; Carp, *Cartea neagră*, 2: 53.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Rubin Udler.
Figure 2: Certificate concerning the search for Misha Gleizer from March 30, 1944. (From *Documents Concerning the Fate*, vol. 7.)
Figure 3: My grandmother, Udl Gleizer, Artsyz, 1939.
Figure 4: My grandfather, Wolf Gleizer, Artsyz, 1939.
Figure 5: My uncles: Etsik, Nooham, and Mottya Gleizer, Artsyz, 1937.
Figure 6: Fira and Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1928.
Figure 7: Fira and Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1930.
Figure 8: The cousins: Fira, Ezya, Rita, Misha, Yuzya, Rubin, Artsyz, 1935.
Figure 9: My father, proprietor of the firm "Iancu Basarabeanu," Brăila, 1939.
Figure 10: Aunt Ghenea and Uncle Isidor Ghelberg, Paris, 1937.
Figure 11: My cousin, Leonea Ghelberg, Brăila, 1940.
Figure 12: My grandparents Malka and Aron Udler, Brăila, 1929.
Figure 13: Dina and Yakov Udler, Brăila, 1936.
Figure 14: Fira Udler, Brăila, 1937.
Figure 15: Rubin Udler, Brăila, 1939.
Figure 16: Yakov Udler, Akkerman, 1940.
Figure 17: Dina Udler, Akkerman, 1940.
Figure 18: Fira Udler, Akkerman, 1940.
Figure 19: Rubin Udler, Akkerman, 1940.
Figure 20: Article from Akkerman's local newspaper (June 1941).
Figure 21: Marioara Lapoviță and Radu M. Badiu. Brăila, 1937.
Figure 22: Alexandru and Georgeta Vasilescu, Lenuța Lapoviță, Radu and Marioara Badiu. Brăila, 1938.
Figure 23: Captain Radu M. Badiu, Evpatoria, Crimea, 1942.
Figure 24: The gravesite of Captain Radu M. Badiu, village of Vasilievka, Novorossiisk, February 4, 1943.
Figure 25: Sketch of the hamlet of Vinogradnyi Sad.
Figure 26 – a, b, c. Copy of the prisoner list of the camp-ghettos for the Domanyovka district of Golta County (stored in the Nikolaev Regional Archive).
Figure 27: Sketch of the hamlet of Vovhovo and the «tunnels».
Figure 28: A page from my diary. (Our route from the ghetto at Vinogradnyi Sad to the ghetto at Grazhdanovka, and onward via Vovhovo to Odessa with distances indicated in kilometers.)
Figure 29: Map taken from *România*, pl 11.
Figure 30: Map taken from *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, IV:646.

Figure 31: Map taken from Litani, *Transnistria,* 191.
Figure 32: Map taken from Calafeteanu and Simion, *The Condition of the Jews Living within the Romanian State during the Years of the Military-Fascist Dictatorship,* 179.
Figure 33: Map taken from *Zarozhdenie narodnykh armii stran-uchastnits Varshavskogo dogovora: 1941–1949 gg,* 181.
Figure 34: Copy of the testimony given by Doctor Neculay Mikhaylyuk.
Figure 35: Rubin Udler, Aikino, 1945.
Figure 36: Reference 1.
Figure 37: Aunt Ida Dolinko, Moscow, 1936.
Figure 38: Uncle Moysey Dolinko, Kuibyshev, 1936.
Figure 39: Greta Dolinko, Cherepovets, 1944.
Figure 40: Misha Shteinberg, Sofia, 1945.
Figure 41: Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy Teacher's Institute.
Figure 42: Students of the Preparatory Course of the Teacher's Institute, Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, 1946. I am standing first from the right.
Figure 43: Misha, Fira, myself, Father, Mother, Fira's son Sasha, Dora, Mottya, little Fira, and Unah, Chernovtsy, 1949.
Figure 44: Uncle Isidor, Leonea, and Aunt Ghenea Ghelberg, Bucharest, 1953.
Figure 45: Mother, myself, and Father, Chernovtsy, 1951.

AFTERWORD

Professor Rubin Udler's book, «The Cursed Years», is a true story of the suffering that he, his family, and his close relatives endured under the German and Romanian fascist occupation of the Soviet Union's territory during World War II and the Holocaust. He and his family were prisoners of the ghettos and labor camps in Transnistria, but by fortunate coincidence they managed to survive the bloody fighting in Odessa in October 1941. They experienced all the hardship and humiliation of deportation to the death camps on the shore of the Southern Bug.

Before the war, on the map of the world there was no such territorial-administrative formation called «Transnistria». It no longer exists today. The governorship of Transnistria was created on August 19, 1941, according to the preliminary understanding between Hitler and Ion Antonescu. In accordance with Section 7 of «The agreement ensuring the security, administration, and economic exploitation of the territory between the Dniester and the Bug (Transnistria), as well as that between the Bug and the Dnieper (the Bug-Dnieper Region)», which was signed on August 30, 1941 in Bendery (Tighina) by the representatives of the German and Romanian military commands (the so-called «Hauffe-Tatareanu Agreement»), it was provided the organization of concentration camps and ghettos in Transnistria for the Jews and others deported from Bessarabia and Bukovina.

The governorship of Transnistria ceased to exist on March 18, 1944. However, in the history of the Holocaust, the name Transnistria will always exist. Its territory is strewn with the graves of hundreds of thousands of Jews who perished at the hands of the fascist executioners. Accordingly, the name Transnistria has assumed a spot alongside the names of other more massive exterminations camps of European Jewry, which are carved on the marble slabs of The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority (Yad Vashem) in Jerusalem and of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Thousands of works from a variety of genres have been written about the Holocaust. Much special research is dedicated to the tragedy of the Jews of Transnistria. The story of Transnistria's Jews is gradually being incorporated into more general works about the Holocaust of the European Jews. Unfortunately, former prisoners of the fascist camps and ghettos of Transnistria who survived the Holocaust have written relatively few memoirs about their experience. Moreover, without such works it is difficult to imagine completely the nightmare of the Jewish tragedy.

The paucity of memoir sources is understandable. Up to the fall of the communist dictatorship, in view of the State policy on anti-Semitism, the topic of the Holocaust was in fact forbidden in the USSR. It is sufficient to recall that the «Black Book», edited by I. Ehrenburg and V. Grossman, appeared in Russian only in 1980 in Israel. Access to the rich archives of the Extraordinary State Commission of the USSR, and to republic-level, city, and regional commissions for investigation of the crimes of the fascist murderers on the occupied territories was extremely limited. The state permitted research writing about the atrocities and robberies committed against Soviet citizens, but it was impermissible to mention that a considerable number of the victims were Jews. There were no Holocaust museums in the USSR, nor was it possible to erect monuments to Jews at sites of mass executions. Thus, it is hardly surprising that young, and even middle-aged Jews either knew nothing or had only a very vague idea of the horrors their coreligionists experienced during the Holocaust.

The State's policy restricted writing on the Holocaust for many decades. The majority of prisoners from the ghettos and camps passed away without writing their memoirs of the experience. Accordingly, the appearance of every new book of memoirs from the pens of former captives of the fascist concentration camps is especially valuable for us. Such memoirs began to appear in the former republics of the Soviet Union only in the 1990s.

Rubin Udler's memoirs are one of few such works. Rubin Udler was aged 16–19 during the years of the war and the Holocaust, a sufficiently mature age for perceiving what was happening around him. An extraordinary memory enabled him to remember in great detail all that he endured. Later, Rubin Udler went on to become a scholar and researcher. His subsequent life experience enabled him to understand deeply all that happened during that terrible time. His diary records, the attached documentary material, along with a profound knowledge of the internal political life and customs of Romania – where he lived until 1940 – allowed him to paint an accurate picture of the events of those years.

In addition to describing his own family's history on the eve of and during the war, Rubin Udler also offers historians of the Holocaust wonderful material for answering a whole range of critical questions. Among these are: Why did so many Romanian Jews, even those who were relatively well-to-do, leave everything behind in the summer of 1940 and resettle in the USSR? Why did tens of thousands of Jews from Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and Transnistria not elude the Holocaust, but remain in the occupied territories and become victims of genocide? What circumstances allowed a certain number of Jews, prisoners of the ghettos and the camps of Transnistria to survive in this hell? Why did the anti-Semitic rulers of Romania at that time, who for a long period completely shared Hitler's fanatical approach to «the final solution of the Jewish question» in the spirit of Nazism, in a some instant refuse to deport Jews from the Old Kingdom to Transnistria and to the death camps created by the Nazis in occupied Poland? To what extent did events on the fronts of the Second World War influence the policy of Antonescu's dictatorship on the «Jewish question?» Rubin Udler's memoirs with all their

contents counter the contention of several contemporary Romanian authors, who in their efforts to rehabilitate Marshal Antonescu and his regime, revive the «argument» first advanced by the Romanian Fuhrer about his policy of genocide carried out against the Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria.

Rubin Udler sketches portraits of dozens of people, with whom he had occasion to meet, work, and live during the years of fascist captivity. Among them were inveterate anti-Semites and scoundrels, as well as thieves solely interested in seizing Jewish property. But there were also non-Jews: Ukrainians, Russians, Moldavians, and even Romanians, who understood and appreciated the life and labor of the Jews and tried to guard them from the arbitrary actions of the fascist killers. There were also many decent, good-hearted people who condemned the politics of nationalism and anti-Semitism and helped Jews to survive by hiding them and saving them from death at great risk to their own lives and families. The author writes with particular warmth and gratitude about these people.

It happened once that after the German and Romanian forces were driven out of Transnistria, former prisoner of ghettos Rubin Udler found himself in the Komi ASSR, the northernmost autonomous Soviet republic, a territory covered with camps of the notorious Gulag. He was not a political prisoner, but only an army laborer. However, he performed the same kind of labor as many «enemies of the people», who were serving various terms of imprisonment. Rubin Udler did not find himself in Komi by accident. Vigilant officials from the defense commissariat and Smersh perceived him – a Jew, who had survived the horrors of the fascist camps – as a suspicious individual, so far as he had been born in Romania, an ally of Germany in the war against the USSR. As a precaution, they sent him to the north of Russia, to a realm of cold and snow. Udler describes with characteristic keenness this difficult year of ordeals in the labor-army. Here he also met and associated with a variety of people. Among them were staunch Stalinists, as well as honest, decent, and responsive people who were included by the command of the «Leader of Peoples» within the ranks of those considered anti-Soviets, spies, saboteurs, and accomplices of the imperialists. These «enemies of the people», having already accumulated a rich experience of survival in the circumstances of Soviet camps, helped the young Udler to survive in these severe conditions. In equal measure, his own experience of survival acquired in the fascist camps also helped him to survive. After reading his recollections about life in the Komi ASSR, one can conclude that Hitlerism and Stalinism are two sides of the same coin called «dictatorship».

Rubin Udler's memoirs are written in accessible language and will be of interest not only to those who survived the Holocaust and the bloody years of the war, but also to a younger generation. They are particularly relevant in the current world situation, with its prevailing violence of anti-Semitism and terrorism.

Izyaslav Il'ich Levit,
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(Fort Lee, New Jersey)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rubin Udler was born in 1925. The first twenty years of his life are described in his memoir, *The Cursed Years.*

In 1946, Udler entered the University of Chernovtsy. Professor V. A. Lisitsky, the chairman of the Romance Philology Department, turned the attention of his student to the scientific study of East-Romanic dialectology, a practically non-investigated field of research. The Moldavian dialects of the Chernovtsy district came to be the subject of Udler's work, which he presented for his diploma and successfully defended in 1951 for his Bachelor of Philological Science degree.

In September 1951, the Department of Moldavian Language and Literature was opened at the Chernovtsy State Teacher's College. Udler was appointed as the first teacher of the various linguistic branches of sciences. Until 1956, he worked at the newly organized State Pedagogical Institute as professor and chairman of the Foreign Languages Department.

From 1951 to 1952, he also held the job of translator for the *Soviet Bukovina,* the Moldavian regional newspaper.

In March 1956, Udler was selected for the post of junior scientific researcher at the Institute of History, Language, and Literature of the Moldavian Branch of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences (Kishinev).

In 1961, at the Institute of Linguistics of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, in Moscow, he defended his dissertation for a Master of Philological Science. In 1974, the Academic Board of the Institute of Linguistics of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences in Leningrad conferred on him the degree of Doctor (Ph.D.) of Philological Science.

From 1961 to 1992, Udler held the position of chief of the Dialectology and Linguistic Geography Department of the Language and Literature Institute.

In 1989, he was appointed corresponding member of the Moldavian Academy of Sciences.

From 1989 to 1992, he was deputy of the Academician-Secretary of the Social Studies Department in the Academy of Sciences of Moldova.

Udler is the author or co-author of 25 works (including monographs, linguistic atlases, university textbooks, dictionaries, and collections of dialectological texts) and the author of more than 240 articles and lectures (more than 30 of these published in Romania, France, Yugoslavia, Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Holland, Canada, and the United States). He is the managing editor or co-editor of about 60 additional works.

Udler has presented his research findings at more than 125 congresses, conferences, and symposiums that were international, all-union, or republican. He has been a member of numerous societies, associations, and academic councils. He has also been a member of the editorial boards of the philological journals *Moldavian Language and Literature* and *Journal of Linguistics and Study of Literature.*

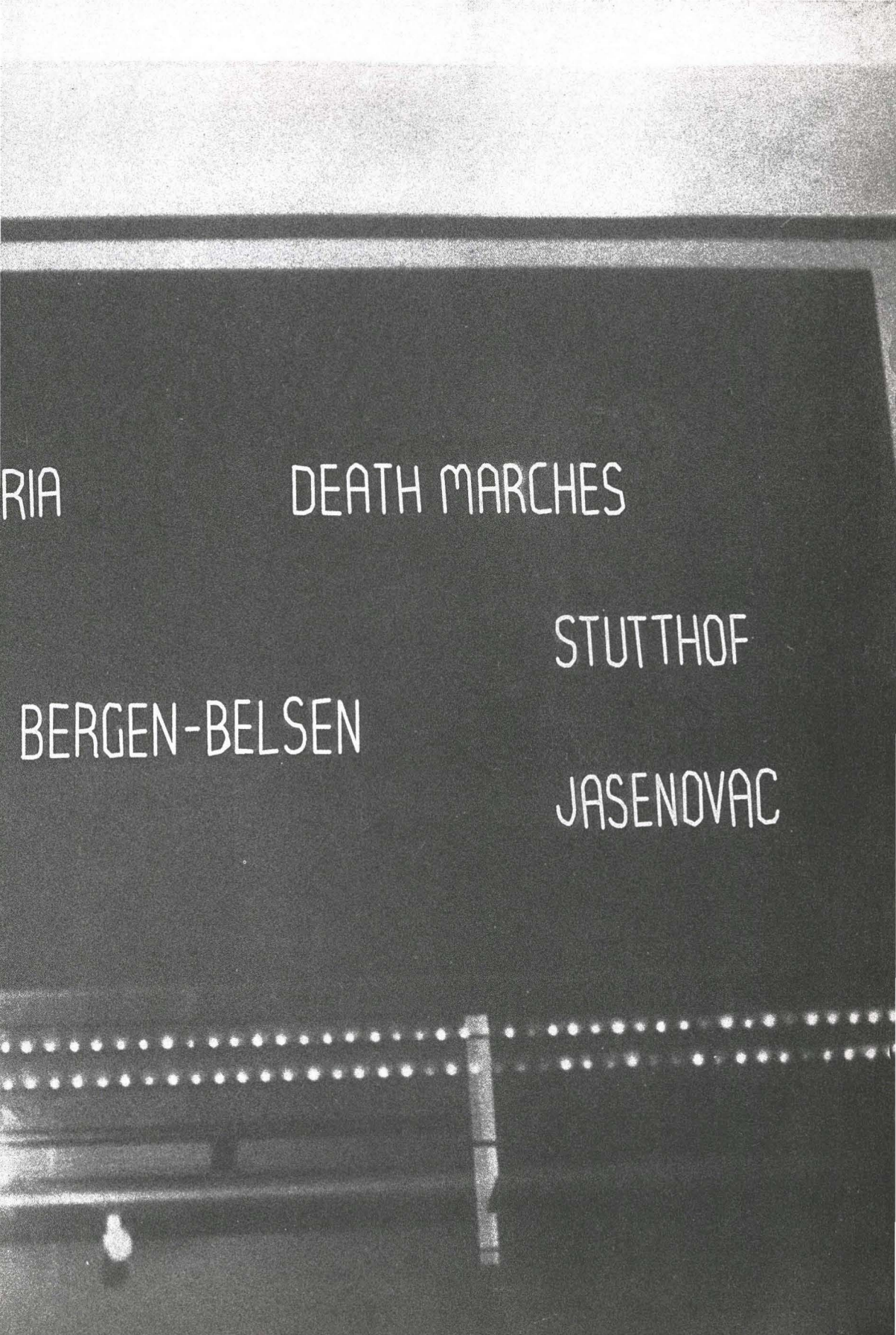
In 1992, Udler moved to the United States where he became an associate of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh and a member of the Holocaust Center of the United Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh. In the United States he wrote his book *The Cursed Years*, published in Russian (Kishinev, 2003).

In his memoir, Udler is careful not to confuse the vast majority of Romanians with those small groups guilty of the robbery and murder of hundreds of thousands of Jews, including the Cuzists, legionnaires, gendarmes, militaries, other anti-Semites, and dregs of Romanian society.

The biography and scientific achievements of Prof. Dr. Udler appear in *Who's Who in the World, Who's Who in America, Dictionary of International Biography, Who's Who in the East, Five Thousand Personalities of the World, Leading Intellectuals of the World, Prezenţe brăilene în spiritualitatea românească. Mic dicţionar enciclopedic, Енчиклопедия Советикэ Молдовеняскэ, Советская Молдавия. Краткая энциклопедия, Славяноведение в СССР. Библиографический словарь, Евреи Молдовы. Справочник, Evreii în literatura, arta şi ştiinţa Moldovei. Îndreptar, Academia de Ştiinţe a Republicii Moldova. 50, and Лимба ши литература молдовеняскэ.*

Udler currently lives in Pittsburgh with his wife Mira. Their two children, Arthur, a computer scientist, and Angela Gologorsky, a physician, live in Pittsburgh and Miami Beach, Florida, respectively.


BABI YAR
JANOWSKA
THERESIENSTADT


RIA
DEATH MARCHES
STUTTHOF
BERGEN-BELSEN
JASENOVAC