

[L.1]

Commission on the Compilation of a Chronicle of the Great Patriotic war

Written record of conversation
with Nadezhda Vasilyevna Trush

Conversation conducted and recorded by researcher N.K. Strelkova
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Before the war: metallurgical engineer at the Dnepropetrovsk metallurgical plant.
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In 1941 I graduated from the Metallurgical Institute in Dnepropetrovsk and worked at the city's metallurgical plant. I didn't get a chance to evacuate: I was materially supporting two elderly invalids, who didn't want to leave the place they were used to, their own home, and I couldn't bring myself to leave my parents alone. On July 24, 1941 the Germans came into the city. I didn't work for a whole year, traded things in the village, and we lived off of that. In summer of 1942 a *politsai* came with a summons to go to Germany. I had to go work for my plant in the technical bureau, where about 15 people worked, out of a total of about 500 workers total at the plant. There were about 10 Germans at the plant, and they could hit a foreman or worker in the face, if they didn't like something. Everybody lived off of rumors.

In 1943 when there was an offensive near Sinelnikovo,¹ arrests and crackdowns began. On the balcony of one house I saw a man hung with a sign: "they hung me, because I didn't give up my weapon."

I worked at the factory for about a year. A denunciation against me, contents unknown to me. They arrested me. They put me in the Dnepropetrovsk camp, where the commander was an inveterate thief and bandit. Who he doesn't like, he commands "Lie down!," and you lie on the ground until he allows you to get up. Or makes you sing songs as he chases you into the bath house, and after the sauna forces you to lie on the damp ground. He gathered all the arrestees in Igren (suburb of Dnepropetrovsk). We see that they are cleaning their machine guns, getting ready for something, and we decided that they were going to shoot us. They took everyone to the Jewish cemetery, where they had already shot 10,000 Jews. I remembered: an old woman is sitting next to me, keening and strongly regretting that she didn't take off her overcoat, better to have given it to her grandchildren, since it'll go to waste for naught anyway. But they didn't shoot us, and in August 1943 sent us to Germany. The heat in the wagons was unbearable and

¹ Soviet-German military clashes occurred around Sinelnikovo, about 50 kilometers southeast of Dnepropetrovsk, and the surrounding areas as part of the Voroshylovgrad (current-day Luhansk/Lugansk) operation to push the Germans out of the north Donbas region in January and February 1943. Sinelnikovo was important to German supply lines going into the Donbas.

they let us out just once every 24 hours to relieve ourselves and get a cannikin of water broth warm and dirty. A bright impression remains of camp Buchenwald, here we didn't feel the regimen, but when we got to Ravensbrück, we understood what life is like in Germany. A horrific impression remains of the *obzerki*² (overseers), dogs, roll calls.

[L.2] I remember – there was rime ice on the roof and they stood us outside without kerchiefs, stockings, and in light dresses. German women – sadists, getting genuine gratification from beating people up. I also observed such a scene: a young girl is walking from work, tired, barely plodding along, and for fun and a laugh an *obzerka* sets dogs on the young woman. Our girls gave these *obzerki* very apt nicknames. We called one *obzerka* redheaded little cow. She had a puffy face, a heavy gaze, murky eyes. She beat one young woman for smiling, and once forced us to stand outside in dresses in autumn for five hours straight, just because that's what she wanted. We called another *obzerka* Bobik³ – she is constantly shouting, shouting like she's barking, picking on someone, hitting someone. And she looked like a dog too.

Before, books had given me the impression that German women were models of virtue, but they were in fact profligates. For example, a foreman gets in behind the collar of her dress and holds his hand on the *obzerka*'s breasts, no resistance, just complete pleasure on her face. And when riding in the train car, they slept with *politsaii* in plain view of everyone. Dreadful profligates. When I was in Ravensbrück, they hounded us to work in the factory.

In the bathroom we set up our own sort of club, you could talk there and share and hear news. An *obzerka*, to kick us out of the bathroom, would pour dirty water on us. And so you walk around wet, with nowhere to dry yourself. We were always starving in the camp, so a lot of time was devoted to conversations about food. This was an obsession all over the camp. We fantasized, remembered, presented recipes, talked about how to cook, and what dishes they were! Various creams, garnishes. I remember one Polish woman, my bedmate. The relish with which she remembered her mother's cooking. She'd remember, start moaning, and would wail her "Jesus Maria."

At the factory we worked two shifts from 6:30 to 6:45: the day shift and the night shift. The first question, when the shifts meet is "what's for Koliada (dinner)?"⁴ All the workers from the East at the factory were given the newspaper "Labor." We also read German newspapers, and pried news out of the foremen. Rumors about Hitler's death or an uprising in Berlin went around several times.

We managed to have a geographical map. We found a geographical map ripped to pieces in a basket – we glued it together and would mark the movement of the front. The

² A nickname for the overseers, derived from the word *obzor*, which means "view." Possibly also influenced by the German word for a female camp guard, *Aufseherin*, from which the "e" in *obzerka* may be derived.

³ Common name for a dog, particularly a stray or outside dog.

⁴ *Koliada* is a traditional Slavic name for Christmas-time and Slavic rituals around Christmas-time. It might be used here as a way to refer to dinner as having a holiday-like status, in a perhaps somewhat joking manner.

girls wanted to read – there were no books. In secret from the *obzerki* we wrote down in notebooks what we could recall. I had a notebook of poems of Pushkin and Lermontov. Some had entire songbooks compiled. A very warm recollection remains in my memory of November 7, 1943. We lived in a small barracks of about 100 people. The head of the barracks was a Czech woman (the head of the barracks is responsible for order in the barracks) who treated us very benevolently, and she allowed Frenchwomen to come to our barracks, who saluted us on our holiday. Everybody sung quietly and danced. We even sang “The Internationale.”

Sometimes the *obzerki* forced us to sing, and we would sing “Red Moscow,” since the German women didn’t understand anything anyway. In the Ravensbrück camp singing was forbidden, but in the Neubrandenburg [L.3] camp singing was allowed. We would secretly visit each other. This year the Czech women invited us to their place, where there were also Yugoslav women. Everyone sang their national songs. Then the Yugoslav women sang their national anthem “Freedom.” We gathered into a small room, but how good it was! The Yugoslav women made a very good impression – they got along well amongst themselves. Once they punished them and forced them to stand at roll call all day. They stood and sang, cheering each other up.

The Frenchwomen feel very miserable in the camps. They came to the camps with luxuriant hair, managing to drag jars of cream with them, and then became the most dreadful-looking. Russian women were the hardiest of everyone, even though it was hardest of all for them.

The Polish, Yugoslav, Czech, and French women received parcels from the Red Cross, while the Russian ones lived very badly, but they did not lose heart. In the camp you had to fight to get everything, including water and soap. The Frenchwomen were all so neglected, with purulent wounds.

The Czech women make an exceptionally good impression, knowing history and Russian literature well. I developed the opinion that the entire Czech intelligentsia was in the camps.

Among the Polish women there is a dreadful difference between an intelligentsia woman and a regular woman. One knows languages well and understands science, the other – completely unlettered.

Among the Russian women such a sharp difference was not present.

Especially benighted and uneducated were women from Western Ukraine - can’t say two words, puts a little cross instead of a last name.

Frenchwomen – birds of the air⁵, only talking about love - and the Polish women are also of this opinion that women are made only for love.

Czech and Yugoslav women, with a broader outlook, demand more rights and opportunities for woman’s lot.

⁵ Implying they had their heads in the clouds.

They hounded everyone to work. God forbid someone should become ill with tuberculosis. They put all the pulmonary ill into one room with tightly shut window shutters, where they lay like logs.

One of the means of punishment of the healthy was placing them among those with tuberculosis. In one girl, who appeared healthy, they found it... they took her away to Ravensbrück and burned her up. She was not afforded medical aid.

In the most recent time we dug trenches and black moths⁶ flew above the city – they were burning documents. You could hear the rumble of guns. The camp leadership ordered everyone to leave, but we, eight people, locked ourselves in a basement and sat there more dead than alive.⁷ On the next day we sent a scout to find out what's going in the camp. It turns out 150 people were left in the camp who began to run the place, and in the kitchen there was a huge feast.

At noon on April 29th I saw the first Red Army soldier – so much happiness, I can't even convey it with words.

⁶ "Black moths": pieces of burned documents in the air.