

[L.1] Record of conversation with comrade Vera Tikhonovna Bagina

Director of an orphanage in Kiev.

Year of birth 1908, Chernigov gubernia, Ukrainian, non-party, before the war worked at the Military-political college as director of the pre-school. Finished Gorky Pedagogical institute in 1941.¹

Kiev.

25/II-44.

Before the occupation I lay ill for ½ month (the arrival of the Germans caught me sick in bed). In May of 1942, I started working as a teacher at the orphanage. In 10 days I was appointed the director, because the director of the orphanage Nastasya Dmitrievna Trokhimenko had left to work at a school. Only four-year-schools were operating. The German authorities insisted on 3-year education, pointing to the need to use children of the 4th-year for physical labor. There were 5 orphanages in Kiev. Our orphanage used to be on Tryokhsvyatitel'skaya Street², and then on Gogol Street³, from where the Germans moved the orphanage to Korolenko Street⁴, since the building was taken for Tabaktrest.⁵ There were 70 children who were Ukrainians, 5 - Jews, and 4 Russians.

Methodological guidance came from the "Department of culture and education"⁶. The sole methodologist was Yurkevich (she herself was a pre-school

1 The Gorky Pedagogical Institute has a long history, going back to 1834, with many name changes. It carried this name from 1936 to 1991. Today it is called National Pedagogical Drahomanov University and is one the largest employers in Ukraine.

2 Tryokhsvyatitel'skaya/Tryokhsvyatitel'ska Street is located in central Kyiv/Kiev, not far from the Dnipro river, and several famous churches. It was originally named after a church of the same name (which literally means "of Three Saviors") and was renamed multiple times throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, holding this same name since 1991. Technically, it appears that this name, Tryokhsvyatitel'skaya/Tryokhsvyatitel'ska, was not the official name of the street going back all the way to the early 1800s, and that the official name of the street before and after the war was Жертв революции (victims/martyrs of the revolution), but either the old original name was still in heavy colloquial use through the decades or the Germans changed the name back to this original name during the occupation (and their choice to pick this name in particular might also indicate that the name was probably still used colloquially). [Трехсвятительская - Цікавий Київ \(interesniy.kiev.ua\)](http://interesniy.kiev.ua)

3 Gogol/Hohol Street, named after the famous writer, is located about 2-3 km west from Tryokhsvyatitel'skaya Street, further away from the Dnipro but still relatively central.

4 Korolenko (Короленко) Street, known since 1944 as Volodymyrska Street, is/was a relatively lengthy street that runs very roughly between where Tryokhsvyatitel'ska and Hohol streets run.

5 Tabaktrest Ukrainy ("Ukrainian Tobacco Trust") appears to have been a state tobacco producer in Soviet Ukraine. The text seems to indicate that the Germans took it over.

6 "Department of culture and education" is written here in Ukrainian (Відділ культури і освіти), followed by the Russian translation of this in brackets in the original text. The institution may have been a city-level division of the People's Commissariat for Education. What is referred to here is

worker, while the orphanage was for those of school age). In actuality, there weren't any methodological guidelines. Yurkevich would insist on religious education and for there to only be Ukrainian language at the orphanage, and would check the sanitary condition of the orphanage. According to the guidelines of the "Department of culture and education," all children had to get baptized. This was the idea of one orphanage director - Il'chenko. She was the first to baptize all of the children from her orphanage - 115 people (of school age). Head of the city council Khvorostivskii, who had bought little crosses and a few cows for the children, was the godfather. Not one of the orphanages followed Il'chenko's example. Yurkevich insisted on baptizing the children and the orphanage premises,⁷ and on celebrating Easter. We celebrated Easter gladly - we baked sweet buns. At Il'chenko's orphanage, Easter was arranged comfortably, with the active participation of the godfather.

Materials. They did not allow old learning materials to be used, and there weren't any new ones. They studied without textbooks and without notebooks. During school hours, children were sent to do wild grass weed control, as well as for the gathering of medicinal herbs.

The school was closed in the winter. The older children worked at domestic tasks, at the sewing shop, embroidery, papier-mâché (they made dolls) - all of this only for themselves.

In the time of the occupation, children who were orphans and who were not orphans (of the Kiev intelligentsia) would enter, infested with lice, sick, [L.1 reverse] and hungry. The pedagogical personnel as well as their peers welcomed the children readily and convivially.

An instruction was received to send children 13 years and above to the labor exchange, and also to notify about Jewish children and children of Communists. School director (in which our orphanage residents went to school) comrade Korbut, through his connections, helped in every way possible so that the children of the orphanage did not end up at the exchange, but worked at their shops.

We did not report about the Jewish children thanks to our harmonious pedagogical collective, while Il'chenko sent off 16 people, among whom were Jews and children of Communists.

In February 1943, Khvorostovskii and the Germans refused to sustain orphanages, ordering the committee of assistance to take them. The battle between these organizations went on for 3 or 4 months. The orphanage was taken off the budget. The existence of the orphanage was due to collection from the population

likely a German-run version of this division.

⁷ A premises cannot be baptized, perhaps the interviewee intended to say "blessed" or something separate regarding the premises, but "baptized" seemed ideationally close enough in the flow of speech.

(“Chamomile Day”).⁸ People would throw money for poor orphans into the alms box. In addition, lotteries and concerts were organized. The orphanage eked out a pitiful existence.

Supply. The “committee of assistance” supplied the wounded, then the city council department of supply. Bread from corn cobs and millet husks was given. Fats were not given. The “committee of assistance” would give some clothing, but not the city council.

There was an instruction to hang portraits of the Führer in the building. One portrait was hung in the vestibule by one of the older children. There were no portraits in classes or in *gruppy*.⁹ They learned only Ukrainian and Russian songs. Not one German song was learned.

My return from the city was accompanied by my telling of what the Germans are doing in the city: beating people with sticks, hanging people off of balconies, driving people to *katorga*¹⁰ in Germany and to be shot.

Five boys, from 10 to 13 years old, fled, with the goal of getting to the partisans. In Novoselki¹¹ village a *starosta*¹² stopped them, took their knives, and scared them a bit. The boys returned to the orphanage. There was an episode where, in the presence of the children, someone from the German army declared the orphanage vegetable garden his own. When I exited the building, the children rushed to me with screams: “This fascist, he took the vegetable garden!” The German became furious and, with a twisted face, began to scream: “We are not fascists, we are national-socialists!” It was ordered to immediately explain the difference

8 “Chamomile Day” («День ромашки») most likely refers to a day of assistance and solidarity with tuberculosis sufferers that began in Sweden in 1908 and became widespread in the Russian Empire, also continuing to have a degree of unofficial societal recognition in the Soviet period. It is also known as “White Chamomile Day” and “White Flower Day.” As a “day of giving,” people may have been giving to other causes as well, as suggested by this interviewee. [Какой сегодня праздник 24 июня: что отмечаем \(1plus1.ua\)](#)

9 A *gruppya* (literally, a “group”) in this context likely refers to rooms in which the orphanage residents lived - slept, did homework, played, etc. They were likely grouped into these rooms approximately by age.

10 Penal labor in the Russian Empire. The interviewee is using the term here in reference to German forced labor.

11 Novoselki/Novosilky (Новоселки/Новосілки) is just outside the city limits of Kyiv/Kiev today, about 13 kilometers south/southeast of the city center.

12 Starosta is a wide-ranging term of Slavic origin. It has, in certain times and places, meant specific local administrative and communal leadership positions. In imperial Russia, the starosta was the representative face of a peasant commune or village community. Soviet power abolished the starosta position. The Germans appointed starosty as their agents after they arrived, replacing chairpeople of collective farms with starosty. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Starosta>; [Ukraine SIG: Hard Memory: A WW II Memoir of Nova Ushitsa \(jewishgen.org\)](#); [German Agricultural Occupation of France and Ukraine, 1940-1944 \(hal.science\)](#)

between fascists and national-socialists to the children. We did not explain the differences, but only warned the children to not say anything - otherwise, they would be killed.

Once, the orphanage received a letter from a former resident of the orphanage, who had been taken away to Germany (Nuremberg). The letter, which described life behind wire in a concentration camp, was read to the older children. The girls cried.

The pedagogues worked a lot on proper speech and the sanitary hygiene of the children. Narrative storytelling (made up by the teacher) was especially developed. It was, of course, not political.

[L.2] Evacuation. There was a “restricted zone” in Kiev, in which the orphanage was also located. The Germans ordered us to get out of this territory. The orphanage moved to the nursery on Saksaganskogo Street.¹³ After a week, we received a *Stadtkommissariat*¹⁴ order regarding the evacuation of the orphanages out of Kiev: the school-aged to Rovno,¹⁵ the pre-school-aged to Vorzel’.¹⁶ The orphanages move out two each day with an interval of every 3 days. It was ordered to move everything out. There was the following system at the train terminal during embarkation: the children - in one car, food products - into another, possessions -into a third. Il’chenko’s orphanage moved out in full, with the cows even. We declared our orphanage infectious (we sent one child to the hospital under the suspicion of typhus).

The orphanage doctor examined three healthy children and established a diagnosis – typhus, and to be sent to the typhus ward. We received the order to embark anyway. Once again, we sent 5 healthy children to the hospital. We received the order for the third time: departure in 4 days. We started to send healthy children to the typhus ward of the hospital every time. Doctor Solovyeva at the typhus ward, and also the director of Gorzdrav¹⁷ Chobotarev (now works as the deputy of the chairman of Gorzdrav) assisted us in this. Chobotarev would write orders to the hospital. With the help of his initiative, a commission was created which sent children with typhus to the typhus ward. We maintained the quarantine until the last moment. The more valuable things were sealed in the basement. Some items were

13 Saksaganskogo/Saksahanskoho Street runs generally a few kilometers south of the streets mentioned as locations of the orphanage earlier in the interview.

14 In German-controlled Ukraine, the *Stadtkommissariat* (“city commissariat”) was a city, or town, administration.

15 Rovno/Rivne (Ровно/Рівне) is a medium-sized city in western Ukraine that was the seat of the German administration of the German-created *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*, their occupation administrative unit for Ukraine, and its capital.

16 Vorzel’ (Ворзель) is a settlement not far to the west of the Kyiv city limits, about 30 km from the center of Kyiv.

17 Gorzdrav: shortened form of “city health services.” This would be a city government department in charge of public health and all the hospitals and health services provided in the city.

packed and lay in the vestibule for show. The fake massive typhus epidemic saved the orphanage. Not one child was sick with typhus and not one was taken out of Kiev.

The same pedagogical collective as in the time of the occupation operates now. Thanks to all of our unity we were able to save ourselves and the children.

25. II. 1944.

Kiev, Korolenko, No. 71.

V. Bagina.