

[L.1]

Commission on the Compilation of a Chronicle of the Patriotic war

Conversation with Yekaterina Filimonovna Dolgacheva.

Researcher N.K. Strelkova conducts and records the conversation
Neubrandenburg¹
June 1945

Military serviceman's wife from the Moscow region, village Troitse-Golenishchevo, house 83-a.

Year of birth 1891. Non-party. Russian.

I was born in 1891. The war caught me in Łomża,² where my husband worked. He was a lieutenant of a cavalry division. I was not able to evacuate with the first train, but made it onto the second train, which was destroyed in Volkovysk.³ I stood in the water in the reeds for 4 hours, until the air raid ended.

Not one Polish woman lets us into their house, they feel schadenfreude. There is nothing to eat. We found some half-destroyed barn, where all the women and children fit. Then a Pole comes over and says: "Come out, you mighty and undefeated Bolsheviks! The German troopers have landed. Your song is sung!" We saw two Germans approaching the well to drink water. The Polish woman showed them where we were. But the Germans didn't touch us, even gave the children candies. They asked who our husbands were.

We lived terribly. We would go to beg. The Belarusians would give a little piece of bread, the Poles - no. Some were hired to weed, others washed for the Polish women. Each lived how they could.

In 1942, on a Sunday at 4 in the morning there was a knock at the door. They are yelling for us to come out. Everyone got ready quickly. They drove us to the town of Lyaski (near Volkovysk) where they put us in a building without windows and without doors. As military wives, they isolated us from the population. We were forced to sweep the pavement. Every night they would check on us, always looking for partisans. In March 1944, the overseer announced that everyone needs to show up

1 Neubrandenburg, in current-day northeastern Germany, held two prisoner of war camps and Roma and Sinti labor camps during the war. The Red Army captured Neubrandenburg in late April 1945.

2 Łomża is a small city in northeastern modern Poland, about 150 km northeast of Warsaw. Following the division of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939, it was part of the Soviet Union until the Germans invaded in June 1941.

3 Volkovysk/Vawkavysk is a large town in modern-day western Belarus, about 170 km east of Lomza.

at the municipality. We went there, leaving the children at the barracks. They call us up one at a time. They would ask for the name and last name, write it down and ask us to sit down for a little while. We're sitting there for an hour. And another hour. I wanted to go to the bathroom - they aren't letting me. I see that the police have surrounded the municipality. The children are walking around the house and crying. They don't let the mothers go to the children. For whom 3, for whom 4 children were back there. We did not know what the occasion was for us being called up. We thought that it was for work, but apparently they were going to take us to Germany. On the next day, three cars rolled up. They seat all the women and leave the children. There is screaming, crying, fainting. A nightmare. 70 children all together were left behind. The oldest was 11 years old. They brought us to Białystok⁴ in railcars, and from there to the Ravensbrück women's camp. As soon as I took a look at the wall with the wires - I went numb. Well, I'm thinking, we're done for. They took everything away from us, and shaved our heads completely. They gave us striped dresses and wooden shoes. Later they would give a brown dress, with black sleeves. They put No. 32703 on my left arm. 800 people were crammed into a barracks, two [L.2] to one bed. They sent us to work at the factory. In June 1944, red booklets were given out to the ill and elderly. I knew what this means. That's why I rubbed my cheeks, fixed myself up. Anything not to receive a booklet. I worked at the factory, where they make cartridges: we worked 12-13 hours at a time, and I was at the lacquer shop. This enterprise was considered harmful for health. Because of this they would give us each a little mug of skim milk. They beat people awfully. One could not leave the shop to take a drink. They provided a tiny little piece of soap, once a month. In the barracks, they had put me near the bathroom, downright contagion all around, they don't remove corpses on purpose, and in this same place they hand out soup.

After some time, they sent off an entire train from the camp to Hamburg. There we were forced to lay bricks and dig trenches 5 km away from the camp.⁵ You would be so tired toward the end of the day, that you are barely crawling along, you have no strength - and they'll force you to drag a bag, a shovel, and an armful of firewood for the *obzerki*.⁶ They fed us rotten cabbage.

Before liberation there was a rumor that Hitler had shot himself, and that we would all be set free. And indeed, the English came to our camp and they said - come out, you are free. People sang, danced, and fainted from happiness. We tore down the reeds, with which the camp was surrounded. Some Englishmen offered candies,

4 Białystok/Belostok is a medium-sized city in northeast modern-day Poland, about 90 km west of Volkovysk/Vawkavysk.

5 Given that the camp this refers to was somewhere near Hamburg, it may have been one camps in the Neuengamme network. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuengamme_concentration_camp

6 Obzerki: from the German word for a female camp guard, *Aufseherin*.

some cigarettes. They started to feed us well. On May 21, they moved all the citizens of the Soviet Union out of Hamburg. On May 24, they brought us to Neubrandenburg, where we still are. I cannot wait until I get to Moscow. I have two daughters there.