

[L.1] Commission on the Compilation of a Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War.

Smolensk. December 2, 1943.

Stenogram of conversation with comrade M.D. Egorova.

Conversation conducted by researcher of the Commission comrade Fedosov.

Comrade Roslyakova records.

Maria Dmitrievna Egorova - librarian.

Before the war I worked at the regional library. In the middle of June 1942 I went to work for the Rosenberg Task Force.<sup>1</sup> When I went to work for the Rosenberg Task Force, the library was under somebody else's direction. I don't know where the task force was located. People said somewhere near the prison. I worked on the sorting of journals. I worked there along with the female teacher Gendel'. The male teachers Milostanov and Vatskevich worked there as well. These journals were predominantly post-revolutionary. There were very many journals. We did not account for them exactly, but they included a very large quantity of specimens. In the beginning of 1943, the journals were all arranged alphabetically, sorted by their years and series. Later they took all these journals away. The journals were packed and sent off without our involvement. I cannot say where they sent them. The Pole Gendel' was closer to the Germans. She said that they had sent the journals to Minsk. Before that, reference and bibliographic journals were repeatedly sent to Riga. There was a record of journal articles and newspaper articles. Everyone was looking for the journal "Bibliografiia,"<sup>2</sup> but we did not find it.

Others dealt with sending, but I did not participate in this work. I saw them send off a lot of medical journals. We asked where they would be sent. They said that they would be sent to Mogilev, where the opening of a medical college was anticipated. 10-12 thousand books were sent off, but where they were sent, we do not know for sure. As it happened, one day we showed up and these books were not there. Right before the arrival of our soldiers to Smolensk, we were preparing an encyclopedia for sending off.

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1 Rosenberg Task Force (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg): a special task force under Alfred Rosenberg that looted art, libraries, and archives in German-occupied Eastern and Western Europe. M.S. Zinich, "Deiatel'nost' operativnogo shtaba A. Rozenberga po vyzovu kul'turnykh tsennostei iz SSSR," *Voprosy muzeologii* 3 (2011), no. 1, pp. 116-125

2 "Bibliografiia": a Soviet scientific journal of bibliography. It continues to be published in Moscow today, where it began to be published in 1929. It is the oldest professional journal of bibliography and librarianship in the former Soviet space.

There was brochure material on different questions at the regional library. They wanted to take this away too. I do not know if they were able to take it away or not.

The task force moved out even before the evacuation of the population, on the 17th-18th. The population evacuated on September 21. I ran into Berezkina, a girl of 18 years who worked as a cleaner at this task force. The Rosenberg Task Force left without approval from Minsk, but they sent them here again for the books. Going by her words, the encyclopedia and the brochure material were taken. Everything that was packed in boxes was taken away.

The building where the Rosenberg Task Force was located was blown up and set on fire. The Rosenberg Task Force, as I said, was somewhere near the prison, while the library was transferred to another premises at Smirnov Square in June. The Rosenberg Task Force was located on the second floor, while the library occupied the 1st, 3rd, and 4th floors.

We did not have contact with the Germans. A Russian woman was the manager at the Rosenberg Task Force, a former regional library worker. She served as a connection point between us and the Germans. She left along with the task force. She behaved badly, despite her being a grown woman - 38-39 years old. This [L.1 reverse] repelled me from her to the point that I would scream at her. She was favored by one of the Germans.

One day a German boss comes and asks:

- Do you know how to speak German?
- I don't
- Yes, you do.
- I speak German the way you speak Russian.

The other German bosses simply did not notice us. When we were working, they would come to take a look. It ended there.

We had to live through a lot over the time of the occupation. There were cases of mass shooting of prisoners of war. One time we heard gunshots the entire night. In the morning, my sister and I went to the line for horse meat. A few killed prisoners of war were lying near this store. One was hit in the temple and lay in a puddle of blood. A few hours later I was walking on this same square. The corpses of killed prisoners of war were still laying there. They were no longer there along Kiev Chaussée, but there were enormous puddles of blood at every step along the chaussée and the sidewalk. A few days later, I had to go down past the Dnieper.<sup>3</sup> I saw several unremoved corpses, ~~and there were particularly many horses~~. One is lying near the wall. A woman came up and covered his face with a handkerchief.

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<sup>3</sup> The Dnieper river flows roughly through the middle of Smolensk, east to west.

They used the prisoners of war to transport water. They were harnessed to a cart and had to pull the cart by the shafts. They took firewood to the laundry to wash German clothes.

One time I happened to see them drive prisoners of war. I caught up with one young lad of about 20-22 years old. He was wounded, very exhausted, and had only a shirt on. It was so hard for him to walk. He says: "I will not make it to the infirmary." I was walking together with him and calming him - the camp is very close, we'll make it. Indeed, I brought him all the way to the camp. They beat those who lagged behind.

In this group, with which I walked, was one Jew. I drew nearer and talked to him. It was very cold. He wore blue pants and a broadcloth pea coat. He was without a hat. He was very cold. Wet snow fell and stuck, freezing immediately.

I approached him and asked:

-Why are you so poorly dressed?

-The Germans took everything from me. I'm a Jew.

Several Jewish women lived on our street. At first the Germans spoke with them very politely. Then one day they drove them to Sadki.<sup>4</sup>

Two boys, our neighbors who came to visit very often, lived across from us. One was thirteen years old, the other about eighteen. This second, older one would say:

-You are not afraid that we come to you often?

-No, I am not afraid.

This boy kept waiting for the Russians. He kept asking when the Russians will come, our Red Army. He worked at a bread factory and would receive bread. In other words, he was sated. But they were horribly dispirited by their being Jews. They were called "Yudy,"<sup>5</sup> with contempt. The thirteen year-old was simply afraid. He would run up and say:

-Auntie, I ran here on my own, the Germans did not notice me. But I am afraid. The Germans shout: "Yuda, come back!" And I have to go back.

There was such an episode. He is calling my younger son: "Come with me to our place?" My little son went. When they were coming back, the Jewish boy wanted to walk my son home.

[L.2] Then my son told me what had happened.

-I am walking, mom, and Beba is walking with me. A German is standing at the middle of the bridge. The German began to scream: "Yuda, back!" I passed, but Beba went back and started to cry.

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4 Sadki: a small settlement north over the river from Smolensk's city center. An area there bordering a Jewish cemetery was cleared and the Smolensk ghetto established in early August 1941.

5 "Yudy", a Russianized pluralized version of German "Jude."

They were later evicted, and they died.

Camps for prisoners of war were organized, with plank beds. An accident occurred there. The plank beds collapsed and many people died.

My son worked as a manual laborer for the Germans. There was a hotel, called "Soldatenhaus," where he worked. He would very often come home disturbed. "Today, -he says, -they beat two of our two guys half to death so badly that their heads swelled up." They beat one man of about forty so badly that in his whole life he had not experienced such a state.

I always asked: "Is that right, sonny?" He says: "Yes, mom." After the Germans had left, he told me that he also was often beaten. "For what?" - "I don't want to say."

We experienced horribly many humiliations. He went to work there only because we were almost dying of hunger. We all developed anemia. Boils appeared. To be fair, though, my son was sated there.

In 1941, the Germans went from apartment to apartment and took peoples' clothing. They came to me too. They took my squirrel fur coat and immediately one of them put it on himself and adjusted his collar. From my older son they took a sheepskin coat and a hat. They wanted to take from my younger son, but I said: "Have mercy!" They took the hat off my small child. They wanted to take my felt boots, but they turned out to be too small for them, and they did not take them. They walked our whole building up and down and took warm things. In addition, they took a Singer sewing machine. They did not take any more things from me. They would come very often. I got horribly nervous when they would come to the apartment, and I would leave to the hallway. They would come in and take anything that they might like, and this was considered par for the course. We were in the countryside. When we came home, everything had been plundered. They took a bicycle from one boy, my son's friend. He quarreled with them. They beat him and took the bicycle anyway.

25..... they sent him off to Germany. He was born in 1926. They sent him a notice from the labor exchange that he has to appear for sending off to Germany. A female doctor advised us to turn to doctor Dobrov, so that he would make him sick. This doctor turned out to be so kind that he gave him a note saying that he has tuberculosis. They did not take tuberculars. I was scared to send him there. They did not take him to Germany. I was told that he needed to be set up at a road school. I set him up at a road school. But it turned out that the road school does not help. When they sent him a second notice, I turned to the head of the road department. This was the engineer Krasovskii, who had once attended the university together with my husband. He provided a fake document saying that my son is in the Monastyrshchinsky district<sup>6</sup> doing an internship. I presented this document to the

6 The Monastyrshchinsky district is directly south/southwest of Smolensk.

labor exchange. They told me that after his internship he will have to come there. The document was good until September 15. School began after September 15, but they had no time on September 15 already.

Professor Bazilevskii was a teacher at the seminary.<sup>7</sup> Bazilevskii made it so that those studying at the seminary were taken very last. That is why the youth that did not want to go to Germany went to the seminary. Nobody wanted to go to Germany. They went there like one goes to forced labor.

My husband is an engineer. He was called up back in March 1941 for the construction of a defensive line at the border. He was in [L.2 reverse] Poland. I do not have information about him.

There was a full prison of German youth that did not want to fight. My sons saw that the Germans were often led in entire groups of arrestees, shackled in irons. One could often see Germans doing manual labor. In the first year [meaning, 1941-1942], there weren't any arrested Germans, but then there were very many. Lately, they've said: "Why did we come here? What did we need this for?"

During the time of the air raids, 190 thousand died. Nothing is left of the city.

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<sup>7</sup> Boris Vasilyevich Bazilevskii was deputy mayor of Smolensk during the German occupation and a long-active academic astronomer. As director of the seminar, which the Germans newly opened in October 1942, he was said to have saved many prisoners of war and young people from being sent to Germany. [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Базилевский, Борис Васильевич](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Базилевский,_Борис_Васильевич)