

[L.10] *R. Golubeva*

Stenogram of conversation with comrade Lager, deputy chief mechanic of the Kharkov Tractor Plant (KhTP)<sup>1</sup>

March 18, 1944.

Conversation conducted by senior researcher comrade Golubeva.

Stenographer comrade Fischeleva.

Nikolai Yefimovich Lager, year of birth 1881, Ukrainian, lived in Kharkov for 9 years before the war, a mechanic by profession, worked at the 183rd plant,<sup>2</sup> currently deputy chief mechanic of the KhTP.

Home address: Frunze settlement, Louis Pasteur Street, house number 30.

On October 23, as soon as the Germans entered Kharkov, they immediately occupied my quarters. I have a good house and they took half the house as their quarters. They settled five privates and an *Unteroffizier* there.

At first they treated us very rudely, keeping themselves completely isolated. Having stayed for a week, they began to treat us a little better. Later, our entire settlement was populated with Germans.

Every day or two, they would bring chickens, piglets, large piglets (of two-three months). They would slaughter them and offer my wife to prepare food for them. In the course of two days they would eat the piglet and bring another one.

They lived at my house for approximately around a month.

From the neighbors they would take chickens, piglets. They would requisition feed for animals. Seeing as the senior-ranked one lived with me, often people would come, cry, beg on their knees, so that he would not take away the last feed. There was such an episode in the presence [L.11] of my wife, where someone had come to this senior-ranked one to ask for him not to take away the last feed. He snapped out his handgun and said: "I will shoot you like a dog." My wife began to cry and beg. Since he treated her better, since he lived at our house, he let this person go but sent someone immediately and took away all the feed.

After some time, in about a week or a week and a half, a Croatian officer of the major's rank showed up to our house and began to check our documents. My relative was a deputy of the city soviet and for this reason the Croatia came to check the register of tenants. He thought that one of us had left but it turned out that everyone was home. He asked whether I had a lot of coal. Since before the war I had lived not badly materially, I had coal. He asked whether he could take coal. I said that he

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<sup>1</sup> The Kharkiv Tractor Plant is a well-known industrial enterprise that was established during the First Five-Year Plan in the early 1930s.

<sup>2</sup> This factory, known from 1936 to 1957 as Plant No. 183, since 1957 has been called the Malyshev Plant. The factory produces all sorts of heavy equipment and is most known for producing Soviet and Ukrainian tanks throughout the decades. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malyshev\\_Factory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malyshev_Factory)

could, and he took this coal away. The main aim of his coming - to find out whether my relative, a deputy of the city soviet, lives at our house. We were told that if he had caught her, he would have hung her.

I saw them beat privates with sticks so that they would do things faster. They moved out from our house and for 2-3 months nobody occupied our house.

During that period when they lived at our house, it was announced across the city that all Jews should gather in the machine-building barracks. 17 thousand Jews went through registration and were taken to these barracks. I did not see them when they were going there, but people told me that sick elderly people and children were going there.

They lived there for two months, and then everyone was shot. They made pits, doused them in kerosine, and would burn people up.

[L.12] At first, they did not give any food products to anyone. Everyone lived through whatever means. The intelligentsia went hungry. People bartered everything that it was possible to. People made primitive wheelbarrows and would go to Poltava, Sumy, and other districts to barter their things for food products, since it was impossible to buy anything for money. Who was more healthy was able to bring themselves bread, and the rest went hungry. This was for two-three months.

After that they announced that everyone who worked at the plant must show up to the plant. I did not go anywhere for three months. I was afraid to leave the house while there were food products. When the food products ended, we put together a few things and went to barter so as not to die from hunger. I took land and sowed it. I did not work anywhere.

After the first time that our soldiers knocked the Germans out of the city,<sup>3</sup> I went to work at a household plot as a mechanic. Having worked 7-8 days, our troops withdrew, and I was left without work. I thought that the Germans would not take me, as someone elderly. After some time a *politsai* came, and they took me to camp where our prisoners of war had been. By that time, the prisoners of war were not there, and they gathered who they could for the digging of trenches. I dug trenches for 11 days. Then I went to the commandant and said that I am old and weak, and that I cannot dig. As they had an order to mobilize those of up to 60 years, and I was 62 years old, I went to the commandant and explained this to him through the translator. He said to me: “Weg!”<sup>4</sup> I thought that he wanted me out of his face. It turns out they kicked me out of the camp.

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to Operation Star, part of which aimed for and resulted in the Soviet recapture of Kharkiv on February 16th, 1943. German forces would retake Kharkiv again by March 14th, taking advantage of overextended Soviet forces which had quickly liberated vast swaths of territory in the southern areas of the front. This campaign to retake the city by the Germans is known as the Third Battle of Kharkiv (February 19-March 15, 1943).

<sup>4</sup> “Weg!” (or “Geh weg!”, German, for “go away!”), written here in Russian.

So that they would not mobilize me, on April 12, 1943 I showed up to the plant. At the plant I found more than 1000 people. When I went to work at the plant, I did not say that I was a mechanic, but said that I was a fitter, and they appointed me to the repair-mechanical workshop to the *engineer* Kravtsov. I received a pass and began to work at the plant. My wife suggested I turn to Porvatov, who knew me well, so that he would set me up better. With his recommendation, I was set up in car repair under the head of the shop Grebeniuk. After some time he found out that I am a mechanic by profession and transferred me to mechanics' work. At first we were occupied with the cleaning of the building. We were in the building of the tool shop.

Ours had evacuated all the plant equipment, and the Germans gathered approximately around 170 machines from all the plants. The Germans installed many machines and stamping dies in our shop. An auto repair shop was set up at our shop. The workers worked very badly.

They would beat the workers, and I personally was beaten as well. The assignment of installing tubs for the washing of parts was given to me, Porvatov, and Garbuzov, and when I came to the shop to repair the tubs, Shtal'<sup>5</sup> attacked me. He spoke Russian well. He almost beat me and Garbuzov to death. He worked as a military engineer. He started screaming: "Why are you walking here? I will beat you like dogs!"

Prisoners of war also worked at our shop, but ~~not in a large quantity~~ *there were not many of them*. I saw how a *politsai* killed one prisoner of war. The prisoner of war saw a beet on the ground, threw himself at it, and the *politsai* shot at him in the back. His comrades caught him. Then the *politsai* began beating them up. He hit the wounded one in the back with his rifle butt, pushed him with his foot, and in two hours this prisoner of war died.

[L.14] All the workers tried to ~~somehow~~ go unnoticed, in order not to work. We worked very badly. Everyone tried to somehow fulfill the time, just to be counted as being at work.

Once a week they would give 300 grams of bread, made out of sawdust and foxtail millet. They fed us with beet, water, and a bit of potato. People were malnourished. I did not see fatal cases, but I saw people barely walking due to malnourishment. We worked 10 hours.

Of what's going on in the unoccupied part of the Soviet Union, we knew very, very little. Leaflets would make it to us. We kept these leaflets. We would find out the most from defectors. This happened very rarely.

The Germans behaved themselves very roughly. They would beat everyone at the plant. The second time<sup>6</sup> they were a little softer. The Russian guards in particular

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<sup>5</sup> Shtal', a German last name, would likely be rendered *Stahl* in German.

<sup>6</sup> "The second time" likely referring to the second period of German occupation (March 1943-August 1943), after the brief Soviet recapture of Kharkiv in mid-February 1943 and the German reconquest

beat the workers. ~~In particular~~—This was evident when people lined up to receive lunch. They would take people out of the line and leave them without food. ~~In particular~~ The head of the guard, Glagolev, a Russian, treated the workers badly. *He* withdrew along with the Germans. Such a thing happened to me when I was taking two hoes out of the plant. I took them by the permission of the head of the shop. Glagolev did not believe me. He berated me and wanted to beat me. They would beat one up for the slightest trifle. They would put workers into the isolation cell every day, and only because the worker tried to get lunch faster. Our own people did this, Russians.

In the final days we knew that our Red Army was supposed to come if not today then tomorrow. On August 23rd 1943, our soldiers entered the city, and on the 25th 60% of the workers were already at the plant. I went to the plant on the second day after the entrance of our soldiers. I found [L.15] everything destroyed. That which was still left was destroyed and burned down. There was no water at all, and we first set about the restoration of the water pipes. We found machinery and turned on the water. We took a boiler from the depot, transferred it to the pumping station, and on the 3rd we turned on the water to the plant. We put out 100-120 cubic meters of water per day. We set about the restoration of the electrical station. We selected two motors, quickly repaired the generator, and within 2 weeks put out 24 thousand kilowatts. About 600 workers showed up on the first day. These were all workers of the KhTP settlement, who immediately came for the restoring of their plant.

Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev<sup>7</sup> came to our plant. He gave a whole series of directions and instructions and promised to help us so that we could more quickly restore the plant. He instructed us as to which work we needed to set about first. He stopped at some shops and talked with workers. After that, he came again in a month and a half. In comparison to what was under the Germans, the restoration of the plant is proceeding 300% faster. We restored the lower and upper pumping station, the foundry, the mechanical, tool, and blacksmith shops, and two cupola furnaces. Six shops are already operating. There are 100 machines at the plant. They already set the Combined Heat and Power station in operation.

The construction organization deals with the restorative work, and we provide the program, and produce spare parts for the army and for the repair of tractors.

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of the city by mid-March 1943 as a result of the Third Battle of Kharkiv.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_Battle\\_of\\_Kharkov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Battle_of_Kharkov)

<sup>7</sup> N. S. Khrushchev was the Communist Party Chief of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic at the time.