

Case No. 19
Record of conversation
with link leader¹ from the Dimitrov collective farm
comrade P.V. Serdiuk
3 pages.

[L.1]

Recorded in a face-to-face conversation by researcher of the Commission
comrade B. L. Likhter, Dikanka,² February 15th.

Polina Vasilyevna Serdiuk - link leader from the Dimitrov collective farm.
Year of birth 1907, elementary education, Ukrainian, non-party.

I was born in Dikanka and went to school at a 4-grade village school. I worked on my own farmstead, and then at the collective farm as a rank-and-file collective farm worker. I am non-party but I always participated in community work - I conducted sign-up for bonds,³ as well as all kinds of collections.

Me and my husband were the very first to join the collective farm. And those who joined right away worked well together. As for those who also had to be pulled in, with them it was harder. Who understood more, worked better. And even now you see not everyone is conscious. After such a difficult time, after what has been lived through, even then not everyone showed up immediately for collective farm work.

When we isolated the rotten elements in the district and conducted big explanatory work, there started to be more people in the collective farms, and eventually they all came. We no longer had individual farmsteads, - everybody was in the collective farm. We worked and received well for our labor days.⁴ We were prosperous.

There were even those who did not want to receive a cow. We would talk them into taking it. The needs of the collective farm grew every day.

Life became more beautiful and the prosperity grew with every year. Farms grew, and the labor became easier. We worked with a combine, machines, and tractors.

¹ A "link" in the context of Soviet organizational life, including on collective farms, was a small group of members who operated together to fulfill planned tasks. A "link leader" was responsible for making sure the link fulfilled their tasks and that equipment (in a collective farm context, for example) was maintained, and reported to someone above them.

² Dikanka/Dykanka was a small town in Poltava region.

³ As in, government bonds.

⁴ A labor day (trudoden') was a unit of value in Soviet collective farms from 1930 to 1966.

We had the following rule at our collective farm: once you're done dealing with your tasks at home, you go to your collective farm work. You would put on a clean skirt, and smooth out your little kerchief. We would dress up for collective farm work as if we were going to visit someone. We worked cleanly dressed, with songs, and we managed to fulfill our quotas and made it to the movie theater. We had a lot of stores, and we shopped a lot in Poltava.⁵ Anyone who worked well lived well. Root cellars grew. Food products were in abundance, and we were already trying to buy good furnishings, good clothing.

My son studied at the Mechanical technical vocational school. He had not finished his studies when the war began. He quit his studies and began working as a tractor driver from the first days of the war. He was born in 1925. A destruction battalion⁶ was organized here from among party members and the *aktiv*.⁷ My husband - a party member, he worked as a forestry technician - joined this destruction battalion. But they did not take my son, he was only 14 years old.

When the Germans were approaching, they divided the destruction battalion into partisan detachments, but no detachment operated here in Dykanka. What happened to them - it is unknown. I only know that there were no partisans here, while those of them who ended up in German hands and gave up bases, well they were shot.

[L.2]

I was told that my husband stayed behind to connect with the partisans. But I did not know anything about him for two and a half years. Now I know that he is in the Red Army, decorated with the Order of the Red Star⁸ and the medal "For the Defense of Leningrad."⁹ As for my son, the Germans shot him. A statement was filed about him. Three *politsai* lived around me. We were always pestered by interrogations. They beat us, me and my son. They would take us and terrorize us, but they did not shoot me. I want to catch the person who was violent towards our family.

When the Germans returned to Kharkiv the second time¹⁰, ~~my~~ they became especially bestial.

⁵ Dykanka/Dikanka is about 30 km straight north of Poltava, the region capital.

⁶ Destruction battalions were paramilitary units under the control of the NKVD that were to maintain internal security in areas near the military front. Among other tasks, they were to destroy valuable property that could not be evacuated from the advancing enemy troops.

⁷ Aktiv refers to the more active sector of a collective enterprise, like a collective farm.

⁸ The Order of the Red Star was a Soviet military decoration given for various kinds of exemplary service, such as bravery, performance, development of military technology.

⁹ The Medal "For the Defense of Leningrad" was a Soviet medal given to all participants of the defense of Leningrad, which was besieged by German forces from September 1941 to January 1944.

¹⁰ German troops seized Kharkiv for a second time in March 1943.

My son had ties with the youth partisans of the detachment of the communist Besspalov. The detachment fell into the hands of the police. My son got away alive. For my son, they arrested me and held me for six days.

Before the withdrawal, police from three districts assembled in Dikanka. They treated us any way they wanted to. I don't know how I'm still alive. They had a dog attack me and it bit me all over my legs. We were saved only by the fact that the gendarme who conducted our interrogation had been called up to Poltava. And without him they did not shoot and did not hang. The other one began to conduct interrogation in a different way. At my apartment, they took a gas mask and binoculars. And also my son is a partisan. They could have shot me without any kind of papers. But I was in such a state - they freed me, considering me insane.

My son was in Poltava. He worked at a smithy. But when it already got closer to the Red Army offensive, he, with a group of partisan youth, came to the Dikanka forests. In the forests were both our [Soviet] families as well as police¹¹ families. The police carried out a round-up in the forest and killed my son. They did not take him alive and killed him on the spot. I did not know anything. On September 22, 1943, when the Red Army arrived, I am waiting for my son - it can't be that he would not come. I could not stand to wait so I went to look for him myself. I knew the forest well and I stumbled upon a fresh grave. I dug a bit. I see my son's greatcoat. I began to dig more, and I dug out my son. I recognized him right away. I pressed his head to my heart and in this moment I felt - there is nothing more dear to me in the world than our Soviet power.¹² For those like me there is nothing more dear than the Soviet Council.¹³ My son had been a Komsomol¹⁴ member. I was not a mother, but a comrade, to him. I would help him. How much they tortured me for my husband. Then for my son. And it ended with him being no more. They killed my son on September 17, and on September 22 the Red Army came. He didn't make it by only a few days. And how much joy and happiness he and I had when we got the leaflet. For this was a paper from our dear side. And there were dear words on it. I would kiss the leaflet, and I cherished it up to the final hour. I also had another dear paper. I found an official request of a soldier regarding joining the party at the beginning of the war. They were so confident in victory that then, in difficult days, they would join the party. I cherished this official request as a keepsake, as something most dear.

Yes, I stayed by my son for a day. Then a forester came with a cart, and we brought him to the village and buried him.

¹¹ Police: policemen who collaborated with the Germans. Most interviewees referred to these policemen as *politsai*.

¹² The Ukrainian words used here in the original text, "Radian'ska Rada", literally translates to "Soviet Council" or "Soviet Soviet."

¹³ See note 13.

¹⁴ The Komsomol was the major political youth organization of the Soviet Union.

A portion of the people lived well under the Germans too. They would each receive three-two sets of rations and would get jobs. But these were traitors. Honest Soviet people lived badly. Some waited for the Germans. At first they cleaned their feet, but later they became disillusioned. They [the Germans] looted, and made us slaves. People came to understand that we cannot live under the Germans. The villagers did not live but waited. Everyone who had a son in the army or a brother waited for the Red Army.

In 1942, the Germans gathered the people, built a platform, put flowers on tables, prepared lunch, and gathered the people. Some came on their own, others were forcibly driven there. The *starosta*¹⁵ came out onto the platform and began to read some kind of manifesto, in a Ukrainian costume. They forced us to carry bread and salt¹⁶ to them. Nobody understood anything of what they were reading there. But essentially it said that the collective farms are being dissolved, and who will work well for the Germans, he will receive seven hectares of land. But we kept hearing the cannonade and there were people who passed on Soviet news to us. And nobody wanted to take this land.

Then the Germans sat down at the table. They were served vodka and snacks, while we left, and there were tears in our eyes. We recalled our collective farm celebrations. But that celebration was not for us.

At work, the women, as soon as they see the commandant, they tremble, they are afraid. But when, as would happen, someone from among the heads would come to us at the collective farm, with what joy we would throw ourselves to meet them. We had full rights, and we were happy. But under the Germans, who sat down to rest will get either a horsewhip in the shoulders or they will do an interrogation about why you are not working. If you get sick, they will cure you with beatings, with the stick, with arrest. But regardless, we only got up and worked when we saw someone, we saw someone. When no one was around we did not do anything, we would hide in cool spots.

I did not work the first days after liberation - I was sick. But I soon began to take part in the community workload: in the collection of seed grain, for a tank column, and other collections.

¹⁵ Starosta (Староста) is a wide-ranging term of Slavic origin. It has, in certain times and places, meant specific local administrative and communal leadership positions. There was no official starosta position in the USSR. In imperial Russia, the starosta was the representative face of a peasant commune or village community. 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 \(hal.science\)](#)

¹⁶ A traditional way of expressing welcome, hospitality, and trust in many countries, especially Slavic ones.

The Germans burned our grain crops, but there is still buckwheat and sunflower. We harvested everything immediately. Everybody worked without argument, and we worked the spring harvest well. We harvested all we sowed, and now we are getting ready for sowing with real motivation. We know that we will replenish the deficits in the household plots if we work well at the collective farm. No matter how much the Germans wanted to destroy everything here, that will not happen. We already have the embryo of the collective farm. The people work with dedication. Each person has their own grief. And while we are alive, we will raise up the collective farm. We will tell our grandchildren about two and half years of occupation, about what a terrible time we lived through. It doesn't get more difficult. Back then, women would say: if only our saviors would come, we would give everything, we would give our soul and we would work day and night. Now, if somebody begins to work a little worse or is sparing in giving something for the collection, you remind them of these words, and things go better right away.

All our links got mixed up. They would send my link for sowing and for weed control and to the machine.¹⁷ But now we are already getting our own plot.

¹⁷ The "machine" in question could have been one of a range of farm machinery, such as a thresher or combine.