

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

Smolensk. December 12, 1943.

Stenogram of conversation with comrade A. N. Shevardina

Conversation conducted by researcher of the Commission comrade Fedosov
Comrade Roslyakova records.

Anna Nikitichna Shevardina – middle school¹ pedagogue.

I have been working at middle school for twenty seven years. I teach Russian language. Non-party.

On July 15 in the evening the last echelons of the Russians were leaving. The Red Army was taking the back streets towards the Dnieper.² My sister worked at a clinic. She returned home from work at five o'clock. We went into a store. The stores were still working. We bought a half kilo of sugar. When we were walking home, one Red Army man clapped an old man walking by on the shoulder and said, "Pops,³ we are leaving Smolensk!" When we came home, nobody was there. We ran to the garden. This was already at seven, eight o'clock. At this time shells began exploding. It was already getting dark. We ran to the trenches. Almost everybody from the street had gathered there. At night there was a lot of firing. This was the first time we heard the firing and we went through a lot. It was completely dark. Someone asked, "Who is here, in the trench?" I said "Only women." Immediately machine gun fire began straight over my head. Later the machine gun fire began to quiet, but the artillery battle never stopped. The firing stopped around five o'clock. We sat a bit longer in the trench and started to come out. We walked down the street to our homes. At the corner of Red Banner Street we saw a German soldier. A young German soldier was standing there. We had a dog with us. We had to walk past this soldier. He greeted us, ruffled the dog a bit, and said a few words in German. I answered him. To my question as to whether we could go home, he answered: "You can go without worrying."

Our apartment was on the corner. All the apartments were standing open. The apartments did not get closed over the course of two weeks. During air raids inhabitants left for the night to the shelter and left everything behind, but nobody went inside the dwellings. There were no cases of robbery. When the Germans came, the inhabitants were afraid to close up. They thought the Germans would break down

¹ "Middle school" in the Soviet context of the time period covered grades eight through ten, being the final phase of secondary education.

² The Dnieper river flows through the middle of Smolensk, east to west.

³ Here, a term of general casual endearment towards someone older.

doors and burst into apartments. In two hours cars started driving to our street. They put the cars almost by the very windows. When artillery fire would start, with every launch of a shell every one of us threw ourselves into the corridor or somewhere else. Lone Germans would come into the courtyard and calm us. With signs and their heads, they showed that this was not a danger to us. Apparently, they were firing.

From July 15 to 30, primarily at night, there was artillery fire. We did not stay at home overnight. We would go either inside the kremlin fortress walls, or into a crevice. Our women neighbors took cover in the Nikol'skaya tower.⁴ The Germans also looked for shelters. They separated the tower into two parts. Half of the tower was allotted for [L.1 reverse] women and children, and the Germans occupied the second half. They lived there over the course of a few days. There were big rolls of paper there. They blocked up the aperture with this paper.

On the first day they were breaking the doors off of all the stores, but it was primarily Russians who robbed the stores. In the early days, the Germans treated little kids with candies and chocolate. But then [the Germans] began to break into apartments and take valuable things. Russian gramophones and other things appeared on German cars. When somebody would respond to their knocking in German, they would leave.

My acquaintances worked at infirmaries. The doctors and nurses were exclusively Germans. My sister was a registrar at a clinic. The Russian girls had to clean the premises, wash the floors, and feed the wounded. The German nurses observed and directed. They treated the Russian girls in a hostile manner. The doctors treated the Russian service personnel well, according to accounts.

I had a connection with the big infirmary, where the staff of the Belorussian Military District⁵ had been earlier. This entire building was converted to an infirmary. There was a Doctor Bayer there. He was a big specialist in Germany, I think in chest ailments. He was about 55-60 years old. He was very affable. He would give cigarettes and greet you first upon encounter. He died suddenly of myocardial rupture. His coffin was placed in the infirmary. The nurses asked us to buy spring flowers at the bazaar – snowdrops and violets. He was dressed in a military g pullover tunic, but without pants. He was covered only by paper, and his feet stuck out from under the paper. Three officers stood by the coffin, and soldiers helped lay him down. When the Russians asked why he was without pants, a German soldier loudly said: "He hasn't finished his service yet." An officer's imperious shout followed: "Shut up!"

This infirmary provided medical aid to the population, mainly in emergencies.

⁴ The Nikol'skaya tower (Никольская башня) is one of the surviving towers of the Smolensk kremlin.

⁵ Belorussian Military District (BVO): a geographically-based Soviet military formation.

I worked at a canteen. A boy of about sixteen years was sent from the German infirmary to our canteen in the final days before the evacuation. I asked the head of the hospital for him to eat at our canteen. This boy had been wounded in this way: he was going to the countryside for berries, stumbled upon a mine and almost literally lost his sight. The operation was complex. He wears double glasses. He was in the German hospital for eight months. The infirmary could not keep him anymore and they assigned him to the canteen: feed him, use him for work. At first we had him write out ration cards.

They said that a car crushed such and such a child. They sent this child to the infirmary.

So, in certain cases aid was afforded to the population. Canteen workers, in cases of serious cuts and abscesses, turned to the German infirmary. But getting medication there was extremely hard. A worker who became ill was not provided with food during their illness.

They drove Russian prisoners of war through Smolensk. It was 10 or 15° [Celsius] below freezing. They did not feed the prisoners of war. They would fall from malnutrition and were shot immediately. In October 1941, gunfire sounded outside all night. In the morning killed prisoners of war and killed horses were lying about outside. The Germans would say that this was them punishing Russian prisoners of war for the killing of a German. I myself only heard shots, but since I walked ~~only~~ down certain streets, I did not see this. At the canteen they said that there were a lot of corpses along Sovetskaya [L.2] street. They cited a number of 60-70, but I cannot say for sure.

I worked at the Russian canteen, where Russian prisoners of war, invalids, and so forth received food.

Last year I had to be in the Slobodskii district.⁶ I passed through the village Syr-Lipki.⁷ I was passing there about September 8th. There a German car had been thrown down into the river by partisans. After this the Germans showed up, surrounded this village, by their list summoned all the men, and drove the rest of the inhabitants outside. They put women and children on one side, and on the other side – men. They put five of them aside. They announced to them that they will be shot for partisan activities. After that they set fire to five houses right in front of them. When everything was encompassed by fire, they shot this group of five right in front of all the inhabitants.

⁶ The Slobodskii district was immediately north of Smolensk city.

⁷ Syr-Lipki is located about 25 kilometers north of Smolensk.

I had to be in the village Shevelevo⁸ (7 versts⁹ from Sloboda¹⁰) for a few days, where the peasant Andrey Shcherbakov was accused of taking his cow and calf to the Slobodskii forest¹¹ for remaining units of the Red Army. In September units of the Red Army would appear in the villages, receive food there, and then with the appearance of the Germans retreat to the forests. Andrey Shcherbakov was supposed to take his cow and calf to the forest. The Germans found out about this and arrested and shot him. He left behind four small children.

Young, well-dressed girls got jobs through the exchange. Typically, these girls served the officers' casino.

I return again to the prisoners of war. Our co-workers saw how the Germans drove them forward with sticks.

In 1941 the Germans drove the prisoners of war out for the clearing of roads. The German forced one prisoner of war to work in strong frost without mittens and put the mittens in his own pocket. The prisoner of war wanted to crush his head with his shovel, but other prisoners of war held him back. As a result his hands got completely frostbitten. He came to our co-worker and showed him. He did not have hands, but rather knuckles.

Some German military units retreated through Demidov.¹² They stopped in Demidov for maybe an hour, maybe half an hour. During their stop they told the population: "The Russians are behind us. In an hour your sonnies will be with you."

In Smolensk German sentries shot several women who tried to take firewood or coal from them in the evenings.

German soldiers tore off a golden watch with chain from the teacher Yukhnevich. From another teacher, Pirozhkova, they took a suitcase containing valuable things. When they came to complain to an officer, he demanded a written declaration with an exact indication of the unit number and some other markers by which one could identify the soldiers. They, of course, could not indicate the unit number. The officer said that "we will investigate, but indicate what unit they are

⁸ Shevelevo is located about 70 kilometers north of Syr-Lipki.

⁹ 1 Verst is about 1.1 kilometers.

¹⁰ Sloboda was the administrative center of the aforementioned Slobodskii district. Today it is called Przhivalskoye.

¹¹ This likely refers to the large forested area that Shevelevo and Sloboda/Przhivalskoye are located in.

¹² Demidov is a town about 70 kilometers north/northwest of Smolensk.

from, where they are located, how it is possible to find them?” The soldiers were in this village. They did not investigate the case.

In 1941 the prisoners of war died of hunger and cold. In the garbage, they picked up peelings and picked-over bones thrown out at the canteen. Even though it was easy to get firewood, still the premises where the prisoners of war were located did not get heated.

[L. 2 reverse] In the Vozdvizhenskaya church,¹³ going by accounts, 300-400 prisoners of war died per day. Prisoners of war, escorted by two German soldiers, came to our canteen. The first year, the population of handicapped and low-rank employees – was fed only with a thin soup for which they brought the innards and the feet of animals. In summertime, these spoiled. ~~These innards were cooked~~ Broth was cooked with these innards, and then rye flour was poured in. Potatoes were put in, but frozen potatoes.¹⁴ Some days there was so-called potato soup. If the potatoes were not frozen, then boiled potatoes were served.

After the opening of the canteen they would give out 500 grams of bread each to the workers. After about a month and half they started giving out 300 grams to each. The first month they gave one hundred grams of bread with lunch. After that they did not give bread with lunch.

We received one and a half scoops of this broth, about a liter. The population would stand for hours waiting for this swill. They gave it out to the prisoners of war without them waiting on line. They came, received it, and they drove them out to work again.

There were several episodes. Prisoners of war come, escorted by two or three German soldiers. The German soldiers would go to have lunch at their canteen. When they would return, the prisoners of war would disappear somewhere. It was fairly easy to disappear the first year. Firstly, the Germans themselves would release local inhabitants. Secondly, our soldiers would themselves disperse among the villages. Later, they would start detaining people.

In May 1943 four prisoners of war tried to leave. They worked at the hospital. They went in the direction of Dukhovshchina,¹⁵ but they were detained a few kilometers away from the front. They put them in a car and sent them to a camp.

Bartering went on at the German kitchen, next to German cars, in apartments and in dormitories. Russian women brought milk, eggs, and butter. The Germans

¹³ The Vozdvizhenskaya church is a major Eastern Orthodox church in central-eastern Smolensk.

¹⁴ These potatoes were not frozen for preservation. Rather, they were frozen because of improper storage leading their texture and taste to change, The potatoes were, in other words, spoiled.

¹⁵ Dukhovshchina is a town located about 50 kilometers northeast of Smolensk.

traded blankets, sacks for potatoes, flour and so on, bread above all, herring, salt, matches, shoe polish, fish oil. Basically, everything that the German kitchen was rich in.

The first year the Germans did not fence off their dwellings. Over the course of 1942 barbed wire was installed everywhere and entry beyond the boundaries of this wire was forbidden for Russians. Signs appeared: "Entry is forbidden for Russians, we will shoot." A fence of thin birch poles appeared near our dormitory. At some point a gazebo, also of birch, was built. Young birches and spruces were planted by the houses and sidewalks. In the spring of 1942, every piece of land was used for vegetable gardens by the Germans and the inhabitants alike.

The Germans, everywhere, wherever they settled, immediately established a vegetable garden. They sowed peas, beans, onions, and radishes. Everything was tied up, weeded, and watered. In 1943, this was already a different scene. They planted the vegetable gardens, but there was nobody to look after them because units were switching and going to the front.

In 1941 Russians lived in the same houses with Germans. There were strong, stable frosts. Germans lived on the top floor of a ~~this one~~ building. The water supply was damaged. The pipes froze. The Germans washed over sinks, and all the water dripped through from the third floor to the second. The water poured constantly in an uninterrupted streamlet. Suddenly it would pour, as if from a bucket. We went to the top floor to ask to get rid of this problem, and to take note of the situation of the ~~these~~ tenants of the lower floors. The German did not speak. He just kicked us out, and that was all. We contacted the city directorate. They answered that when the Germans leave from this building, we will be able to [L. 3] remove the sinks and stop up the faucets.

When the Germans left the apartments, they did not post guards, so the buildings were subject to horrific destruction. When a new unit arrived, it occupied a different building.

In 1943, maybe a bit earlier, German officers received permission to study the Russian language. By the way, they learned the Russian language with difficulty. The officers kept themselves isolated from the Russian population, and soldiers learned the Russian language much faster. They were perfectly capable of communicating with the Russian "frau."¹⁶ There were those who wanted to study the Russian language. Before their departure from Smolensk several of them were reading stories of Chekhov and Kuprin.

I think there were a decent number of Russian White émigrés.¹⁷ Ganziuk, for example, was an émigré. There were very many such people who spoke Russian

¹⁶ Frau (meaning "woman" in German) is written out in Russian letters in the original: «фрау». In the original, it is also plural - с русскими «фрау» (with German women).

perfectly. Ostrovskii¹⁸ was an emigrant. At first he was the head of the entire district.
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In March 1943 the situation at the front for the Germans was difficult. They conducted a meeting of *folksdeitschi*,²⁰ individuals of German lineage. 500 people left as the first batch. About 100 people left as the second batch; about 15-20 left as the third batch. They were sending them to Łódź (Litzmannstadt).²¹ They left by entire families. They took with them all the possessions they had.

I had acquaintances – Sisters of Mercy. One worked at the Russian hospital. Their father was a German, but he was born and grew up in Russia. Their relatives are also in Russia. Individuals of German lineage were ordered to get ready and go. They went to the commandant's office and stated that they have too many ties to Russia and will not leave. They were told that "we will see each other yet." They emerged from the commandant's office happy that they were able to free themselves from the trip to Germany. On the first or second of May a German officer showed up to their house and said: "Tomorrow at five o'clock a car will drive up. Please be ready for departure to Germany." This was a categorical order. I received a note from them from Orsha.²² After this there was nothing, although there was correspondence with Łódź, because everybody was interested in how those who had gone there lived. Do they live better than in Smolensk? Should one go there or not go there? Code was established: if things were bad, one would write "we live very well." When the first batch arrived, they housed them near Łódź in barracks. They were counting on getting apartments in Łódź. A lot of Jews were evicted from Łódź and there were a lot of free apartments, but they housed them in barracks.

They wrote between the lines regarding food. In the morning they would receive coffee. They wrote it like this: we have been evacuated to a wonderful place, its a remarkable sight. We go to the canteen at seven o'clock in the morning and drink coffee. Lunch is at one – soup and a little piece of bread. Tea at five o'clock. We understood that they received hot food once a day.

¹⁷ White émigrés is a term used to refer sometimes to those who were associated with or supported the anti-Bolshevik White Movement during the Civil War in the former Russian Empire. It is also sometimes used to refer to anyone who left the former Russian empire and early Soviet Union on account of opposing and/or fleeing the Bolsheviks, even if they were not involved with or supportive of the White Movement.

¹⁸ This likely refers to Radasłaŭ Astroŭski / Radoslav Ostrovskii, Nazi collaborator and mayor of Smolensk, Bryansk, and Mogilev under the Nazis.

¹⁹ The Minsk district, part of General District White Ruthenia (Generalbezirk Weissruthenien).

²⁰ Referring to the Volksdeutsche, ethnic Germans living outside German borders at the time.

²¹ The city of Łódź, in prewar and postwar Poland, was renamed Litzmannstadt by the Nazis during their occupation of Poland during World War II.

²² About 120 kilometers west/southwest of Smolensk, in modern-day Belarus.

We worked at the canteen by order of the city directorate. Sometimes Germans came to inspect the canteen. They went around the whole premises and observed what was being prepared. Sometimes they would give compliments. Honestly, in 1943 they started feeding us better. The canteen cooked two dishes. The potatoes were from the Monastyrshchinsky and Krasninsky districts.²³ Sometimes they'll say: "This is good borscht," meanwhile the quality was bad. One time they entered the pantry. There was a stock of some kind of oil there. They made a whole stink about why the oil was not being used. They ordered this oil to be used.

[L. 3 reverse] As regards school affairs, there the Germans entrusted management to the school directorate. Those there from the Germans: Nikitin, Tsygost²⁴ – professor of pedagogy. From the Russians there was, from the early days, Yefimov. The first thing Yefimov did, as soon as the occupation happened and two months later the canteens opened, was set teachers up to work there. When the administration tried to get rid of us, the city directorate, particularly Yefimov, defended us.

There was an order across the schools – remove everything that has to do with the Soviets. All literature that did not suit the existing regime were removed.

In 1943 there was an attempt to introduce religion classes. Corporal punishments were not implemented in schools. The Germans recommended this, but the Russians did not allow this and did not implement it.

The mood of the teachers was such that they awaited the arrival of the Russians. Many had a radio connection in their apartments. They subscribed to the newspaper "New Path,"²⁵ which was published by Dolgonenkov.²⁶ All kinds of rumors went around about what was going on in the countryside and at the front. We read leaflets.

We read the speech of comrade Stalin on November 7, 1942. Each one who found it on their way brought it to the canteen, and we read it and passed it on to others. In 1941 there were Russian leaflets in the German language. In 1943 the

²³ The Monastyrshchinsky district is directly south/southwest of Smolensk. The Krasninsky district is directly southwest of Smolensk.

²⁴ This refers to Doctor Ziegast, who was, according to other sources and in contrast to what the interviewee seems to be saying, the only German in the Russian administration of Smolensk of the occupation period. He was in charge of "Russian education" but apparently did not know Russian.

²⁵ *New Path* (Novyi put') was a Russian-language German occupation newspaper that ran from fall 1941 to fall 1943 and was widely distributed in central Russia.

²⁶ Konstantin Dolgonenkov was a writer and journalist who served as editor of *New Path* for its entire existence.

organization “Free Germany”²⁷ appeared. Leaflets were released in the German and Russian languages.

²⁷ “Free Germany”, or the National Committee for a Free Germany, was an organization formed in the Soviet Union composed largely of German POWs. It aimed to appeal to German soldiers, both at the front and in Soviet POW camps, to fight and act against the Nazi leadership and state.