

[1.1] Recorded during a personal interview by comrade Berta Likhter, senior researcher for the Commission on the History of the Great Patriotic War, on February 19, 1944, in Stalino<sup>1</sup>, Donbass<sup>2</sup>

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I was born in 1897 in Kharkov. I've worked in the medical field for more than twenty-five years. I spent six years as a nurse, and I've been a doctor since 1923. I had a difficult operation early in the war and was evacuated from Kharkov as a patient. Both myself and my mother, who's eighty years old, along with my husband and our two sons, were able to get out of Kharkov. But all three of them had to go into the army. They could only bring me and my mother as far as Stalino. They went to the enlistment office and joined the Red Army. The two of us couldn't go anywhere without them. I couldn't even get around on crutches, so I was stuck in Stalino.

It's been two years and a half already, and I haven't been out – not to the theater, the cinema. A lot of people have come to see me for medical advice. I've seen so much sorrow, I still have the sense that I'm in full mourning. You can't remember all the horrors of the German presence here, but there are specific events that are so ingrained in your memory that you'll see them until the day you die.w

I remember Dr. Ksenia Kolesnikova. She was arrested on suspicion of being a party member. We pleaded with the prison doctor to arrange for her to visit the clinic. We thought that if she could get out of the prison hospital, we would be able to hide her and get her to safety. But she was accompanied by two guards who never left her side. We weren't able to save her. She looked just awful. Every inch of her body was bleeding and bruised, she'd been so badly beaten. All we could do was give her some warm milk, and she lay for a while on our sofa. Her guards wouldn't let us speak to her, so we didn't find out anything new. When they were taking her away, she whispered: "Colleagues, I'm dying." We never saw her again. I'll never forget Kolesnikova. Even now I can remember the anguish and torment in her face, that awfully beaten body.

I remember the death of Dr. Brand, the director of our clinic. He converted around forty years ago so he could marry a Russian girl. When the Germans started killing Jews, we managed to get him some morphine. But they took it off him during his arrest. He asked us from jail to send him some more, but it didn't work out.

In February 1942 they were arresting party members. They got all the occupation police together at 1 a.m. to conduct a manhunt. Eichman<sup>3</sup>, the mayor of the city, was in charge.

They did everything they could to get me to work with them, made a lot of promises. The head of the passport desk revealed that he was a partisan. He courted me with promises that we would be helping Russians. His wife warned me about the manhunt. She managed to warn Dr. Volkova, a venereologist and party member, and several other doctors and workers that she knew.

The party members were taken to Petrovka<sup>4</sup>, where they were subjected to all kinds of humiliations. [1.2]

The Germans are such scum: thieves and speculators. People learned what evil means under the Germans. I think bribery was the only thing that saved us. I saw so many workers that had been so badly beaten by the Germans that they could barely drag themselves into the clinic. I remember this one time when a man brought his wife in on a wheelbarrow. She had severe inflammation of the kidneys. They were from Kalinovka, a village three or four kilometers away. It was best to give her medication in secret, so that's what was done. The husband would come to see me, and through him I gave her medicine. After three months she got better, she pulled through, perhaps because of the treatment. She was determined to come see me, but to get to the clinic she'd have to go by the Voroshilov Hospital. The Germans had set up their own hospital there. She was carrying an infant when she came. She didn't know about the German hospital, nor did she know that Russians weren't allowed to go close to it. The Germans gave her twenty-five lashes for that. Bystanders got her and brought her to the clinic. She was crying uncontrollably – the shame of it was so unbearable. All of that time recovering, and for nothing. We eventually were able to find her husband, and he brought her back home with the wheelbarrow.

It was a difficult time when my husband, my sons, and my brother had to set off with their bags, leaving me, who could not travel, and my elderly mother. But after seeing all these horrors under the German regime, I feel so glad that they are on the other side, that they're in the Red Army. If you put together all these events, you'd get a sense of how unimaginable life was under the Germans.

One time this worker was brought to me. It was his wife who brought him. He was in a state of shock: he was shaking all over and stammering, unable to speak. I gave him some medication and sent him home to rest. Somehow or other he managed to calm down. The next day he told me what had happened. He was walking down the street. Two Germans from the S.D.<sup>5</sup> grabbed him and put him in a truck. He was sure he'd been arrested. They take him to the courtyard of the police station, where he's transferred to another truck that's full of people, and they all go to the Maria mine<sup>6</sup>. There they start tossing people alive down into the mine. The worker is told to hold open the car door. It was winter, but these people had no clothes, they were naked. This one large man wrapped his arms around one of the Germans and pulled him into the mine with him. After that the Germans tried to make the worker push the people down into the mine, threatening him with a revolver. He made a run for it, and they shot at him, but he was unscathed. That was why he was so unsettled.

As a senior doctor with experience, I was a bit bolder when it came to helping people. You'd find an illness, then give them a pass or a note that would exclude them from being mobilized, from having to work for the Germans. We made a lot of engineers and high-skill workers into "documented invalids." We deceived the Commission that was inspecting people to be mobilized and sent to Germany. A

German doctor was checking us, the Russian doctors. Just before you go, you take two grams of caffeine, and your heart beats like crazy. The German doctor has to reject you – “nicht gut” – because they can’t take people with heart conditions. [l.3]

Jews weren’t allowed medical treatment. Shumilina and I would treat them in secret. So many of them were mutilated! Broken arms, festering wounds, bloated from starvation. From some of the injuries you could see clearly how unimaginably badly they’d been beaten. Instead of killing them, they beat them to extort money. This was being done by Russians traitors who had joined the collaborationist police.

I’ll never forget my visit to a barracks for Russian prisoners of war. There was concern about tuberculosis. The Germans – even the doctors – were terrified of tuberculosis. In order to avoid exposure, they called for a Russian doctor. It was a grim scene there in the barracks. This was in the winter of 1942. The men were practically naked; they’d been given some sort of sacks to wear instead of shirts. For food they were being given chaff – what gets separated from the grain during threshing – mixed in cold water. Straw was crawling with insects. Some of them were bloated from the hunger and were frightening to look at. These weren’t men, but pure sorrow. Others were nothing but skeletons: you could see their bones through their skin. Most of them had diarrhea because of the hunger. The smell was awful.

The barracks had one small room with a hot stove, and it was a bit cleaner. It contained about a dozen prisoners and a German interpreter. There ended up being no tuberculosis; a man had starved to death. All these unfortunate men looked at me with hope – here’s a Russian doctor; she can help – but there was nothing I could do. After finding that there was no tuberculosis, I tried to talk to the German doctor, but he interrupted me rudely, saying that this was no longer my concern, and that I was to tell them only about what I’d been summoned for.

In late 1941 there was a fierce frost, and I saw prisoners going without shoes. Behind them was a trail of blood. A patient of mine told me that near the barracks they were burying people who were not completely dead. The [collaborationist] police were burying them. The snow was moving on top of these living pits. [...]

I came across a lot of women who were living with the Germans, the Franz-Hansis, as they are now called in the city. In the first days of the occupation there was a massive increase in venereal diseases. Soon there were specialized camps for infected women, where they would have to stay for at least six months. Many uninfected women ended up there as a result of their diagnostic system. If a German just pointed a finger to a woman and said she was infected, she was taken and sent off to the camp, no questions asked. Whether because of drunkenness, mischief, or because they’d raped them in the night, the Germans would report whoever they wanted.

Once there was a woman who had a German in her apartment. He was infected. [l.4] He was sent to the front without being cured. There, the infection got worse. He said where he’d been living, and he threatened her with the camp. She locked her children in the apartment and came to the clinic to beg

for help.

Many women were ruined like this. They find fault with her for some reason, call her in for questioning, and rape her. And if she's been infected, she'll try to get her revenge by infecting others.

From the very beginning they opened a brothel at number twenty on the seventh line. There was another on campus for the Italians. They had official recruitment announcements for these brothels.

Marusiya Shepovalova, an aide at the clinic, told me about one girl who had come to Stalino from Stalingrad. She'd lost her papers, and she had no job or place to live. She was afraid of being sent to Germany. Some woman brought her in and sold her in this brothel. She cried and asked Shepovalova: "How can I escape?" She and other women said that it was usual for them to have between eight and twenty men. Women who ended up at the brothel lasted three months before losing their strength and their health. They were cast out sick and no longer fit to live.

If a woman came to work and had the least bit of interest, within two days she'd have a cohabitation pass; if she was disinclined, they'd start to harass her. One woman said: "I have a two-year-old boy who I've got to feed. But I'm losing a third of my work because I refuse to cohabitate." I know of another one, a young woman who got a job as a machinist. A German started to harass her. After she had clearly refused him, he started to bully her. He made her clean his boots and wash his feet, even though this had nothing to do with her job. But she complied, just so she wouldn't have to live with him. There was no way for her to quit. He threatened her so she wouldn't leave. In the end, they came to her apartment and took her away. No one's heard anything since — she's gone.

As soon as they refuse to live with one of them — especially the German officers — they're sent to Germany.

One time I was called to see a patient in the village of Kalinovka. There was a German in one of the rooms: pot-bellied, old, insignia of a commandant. There were suitcases all around him: he was getting ready to go. The other room was completely empty. It looked like everything had been sold. All that remained was a little white crib that had been lovingly taken care of. Inside was a two-year-old child. Next to the crib was a young woman in a white ball gown who the Germans had decked out with baubles: rings, earrings, and so on. It turned out that she had a severe form of schizophrenia. I knew that the Germans would have her shot if I told them, so, without giving the diagnosis, I asked the interpreter to call for her relatives. Her sister came, and when I told her, she broke down in tears. It turned out that she and her three children were dying of hunger. She told me that her sister had sold everything she had. Eventually hunger and need compelled her to go with this fat old man who was lodging with her. Then started the drinking and debauchery, all while she pined for her husband, who is in the Red Army. So she went mad. I left that apartment with a heavy heart, and [1.5] I don't know how that young woman's story ended.

In the village of Kalinovka there lived a family: a father, a mother, a fifteen-year-old boy, and a fourteen-year-old girl. One night four German soldiers broke into their house and accused them of being partisans. They beat the boy within an inch of his life, and they beat the father, who barely made it. They locked the door and tied up the mother. The four of them raped the girl right in front of her. Then they took everything and left. The father beat on the window and yelled for help. Nobody came. The girl was beside herself. I tried to comfort her for a long time. I said that she should think of this rape as a serious injury, like being bitten by a rabid dog. Fortunately, she didn't get reported for infection, but the mother was very worried that she'd try to kill herself.

There was one funny episode. This one time a German came to a hut where the wives of miners and red army soldiers were living. He said that he was a doctor and that he had to check them for venereal diseases. Incidentally, they would even have orderlies calling themselves doctors. Anyway, he looked around until he found what he wanted. He kicked out a nine-year-old boy, the son of this woman. He closes the door and starts to undress. This big, attractive woman, she immediately grabbed him by the arms, threw the latch on the door and yelled for all the women to gather around. They beat up this "doctor," and he ran out without his trousers, having barely escaped from these furious wives. The woman was afraid and rushed over to me to ask for a medical certificate so she could hide herself in the village. Naturally I gave her one, and I reassured her that nothing would happen because he'd be too embarrassed to tell anyone. She returned one week later. Nothing happened. It seems he was frightened off by his shameful beating.

Once, women from the village of Mikhailovsky and other nearby villages sought refuge in the polyclinic. There was such terrible violence that they abandoned their children and livestock and simply ran away.

The Germans boasted that they had come to colonize the Asians. They declared: "You have built houses everywhere, but there is no culture in them." Yet they themselves plundered the houses down to the last stool.

Any German medical orderly has a higher status than any Russian doctor. I hated the Germans, so in my clinic I tried as best I could to help only Russians. Despite the threats and rationing I never went to the labor exchange just because I knew I'd have to see Germans there. [1.6]

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 1869, this settlement, now the city of Donetsk, was originally named Yuzovka for its principal founder John Hughes. It was renamed Stalin in 1924, then Stalino in 1929. In the wake of de-Stalinization, the city became Donetsk in 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviation for Donetsk Basin, a large coal and industrial area on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Eikhman (1904-1947), was born into an ethnically German family in Zaporozhe Province. He joined the Communist Party before the war. As Stalino's Deputy Mayor, Eikhman played an instrumental role in the persecution and murder of the city's Jews. He was appointed Mayor of Stalino in May 1942. For his crimes,

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Eikhman was sentenced to death in 1947. See A. V. Ivashchenko and L. M. Zaslavskaia, *Slezy Kholokosta* (Donetsk, 2012), pp. 17-18; <https://infodon.org.ua/stalino/381>

<sup>4</sup> A neighborhood on the Western outskirts of Donetsk.

<sup>5</sup> SD: The Security Police of the German SS forces.

<sup>6</sup> A mine located in the village of Kotovskoe (Ignat'evka), today part of Donetsk's Kalinin district.