

Translation: Galyna Lavrova, Ray Brandon

Stenogram of an interview with Maria Gaivoronskaya, assistant at the Stalin Industrial Institute's Department of Inorganic Chemistry

23.02.1944

City of Stalino.¹ Industrial Institute

Interview was conducted by Likhter
Stenogram taken by Shamshina

Born 1915. Graduated from Voronezh University in 1939.

My father was a craftsman, a tailor. I was born in Buturlinovka, not far from Voronezh. In 1929, my father died, we moved to Voronezh, I studied there. During the second year of my studies, I lost my mother. I was left with my brothers. My brothers went on studying, I went on studying. In 1939, I graduated from the university, married, and ended up with a job here.

My husband worked at the institute, he was a graduate student, worked as an assistant. I worked in a research group with Professor Ivanov. During the German occupation, Ivanov was actively involved in the newspaper *Donetskii Vestnik*. I worked for him for 2 years before the occupation. He wanted to do good by everyone. He treated my husband and me well. Prior to the occupation, I was in a difficult situation and turned to him. He said, "I can't help you, it's better for you to stay with your relatives, now that your child is sick with croupous pneumonia. If I'm not provided a warm railway car, I won't go."

My husband was mobilized for service in the army, my two brothers perished. My husband was in Chuguev, from Chuguev he ended up in Tashkent. We lost contact with him. Just now, I learned that he had been at armor school in Tashkent, from there he ended up in Nizhnii Tagil. For meritorious service in combat, he was awarded the Order of the Red Star, and on July 21, 1943, he died in the fighting for Belgorod.

I wanted to visit my brothers before the evacuation. I don't have any relatives. My husband's disabled father and his old mother remained alive. My husband's sister was taken to dig trenches. While they were evacuating, she came back – and the German troops came right behind them. Tram service was suspended. I was left without means in a stupid situation. I decided, whatever happens, happens, and consigned myself to my fate.

Almost everyone at the institute stayed. [The authorities] took only those they considered more essential to take: the Jews, and they suggested more prominent professors leave. Our former director was fired for disrupting the evacuation. The

¹ 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. The Soviets returned to Stalino in the first week of September 1943.

military commissariat was of no help². I went to see them on the last day, “Why so late?” They gave me an assignment, but I couldn’t find a cart, or anything else. I came home and began to cry, as if I were saying goodbye to my life.

I was looking out the window when the Germans started arriving. It was October 20. [My husband’s] father kept asking [his wife] why I was crying and bawling so. [My husband’s] mother was crying, too, since her daughter had yet to return from digging trenches. So, we also stayed. Later, my husband’s sister came back the same day the last troops were retreating. They blew up the bridge, our plaster crumbled and fell on the head of [my husband’s] father. He was awfully frightened. A month passed after the Germans arrived, and he died. It was hard to believe that the Germans had come.

After the Germans came, I went to work at a school. I worked until February, the upper classes were closed, and I became unemployed. From that point on, I was going to the country-side all the time to trade things. I can’t even tell... (she cries). Work brought absolutely nothing. Early on, they wouldn’t give us bread, they wouldn’t give us anything for dependents. We had to trade all there was of our clothes for milk, for bread. Later, I was going to the country-side all the time, traded things – in the winter, [I went] with a sledge, like a horse, I undermined my health. I had to haul coal myself, anything you can imagine.

In the summer of 1943, the police took me away to the trenches, in February, the Reds were still expected,³ but then, when they didn’t come, at that point, the Germans began to dig up the entire city. They started to mobilize the entire population, even those who had children. My child was three years old, they also mobilized me. I refused this work, I made reference to the fact that I had no one to leave my child with, my husband’s mother was old, and she wasn’t able to babysit a child. I said that I had no one. They started to threaten me and wanted to send me to a camp, and they said they’d send my child to an orphanage. I went, worked for three days in the trenches, then went to a friend with whom I worked at the institute to ask that they assign me work.

He set me up in a factory, where there was an office for physics and chemistry. But there was almost nothing to do in the offices. I started to work with carbonated water. I carbonated water for the workers. I didn’t work anywhere else before the Reds entered [the city again]. We only supplied some workers with water. There was no carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide was brought in from Makeevka,⁴ and we only supplied workers with water.

From the very first day the Germans arrived, they started to rummage around in every corner, to search for what we had. For example, my grandmother had some

² Since Gaivoronskaya’s husband was a professional soldier, the military commissariat was under duty to help her.

³ After the German surrender at Stalingrad on February 2, 1943, the Red Army launched a series of operations, which, by mid-February, brought the front to within 55 km of downtown Stalino in the northwest. To the north, the Soviets came within 70 km of the city. The Germans managed to regroup and force the Soviet troops about 100 km to the northeast and back over the Donets River before months end.

⁴ Major city that borders Stalino/Donetsk on the east.

sunflower oil. They took away her oil. As a matter of first course, they fell upon the Jews. As soon as they entered our place, they looked to see whether there were any icons, [asked us] “Jude?” etc. The Germans didn’t behave this way in the city center, because for all that the high command forbade them to loot. Although we weren’t quite on the outskirts of the city, two German soldiers burst in at night. They began to check passports. I said to them:

“Your identification? It’s forbidden for you to be out at such an hour.” He swore at me, pulled his revolver, and wanted to shoot. Granny shouted at me:

“What are you thinking, Maria, why are you talking to them?”

He wrote down my last name, promised to summon me to the commandant’s office, but never did. They looted under the guise of searches. In the last phase, there were a lot of deserters among them. They would hide in apartments, therefore they were forbidden to visit apartments without a warrant.

I was an eyewitness to such facts as the tormenting of prisoners. I worked at a school not far from the city, in the small village of Avdot’ino.⁵ I was walking in the direction of this village and, starting from the Bose [sic]⁶ factory, a lot of prisoners were being driven off. They looked pitiful, were barely walking. Many of them were in no condition to walk, they were put on carts. Someone from among the Russians tried to throw them something. They rushed for a piece of bread, [and the Germans] began to beat them. I went on, a prisoner was already lying in the field, his fingers broken off. It was such a dreadful scene that I couldn’t look. When I approached the village, a dead man was lying there. In the village, the peasants told me that so many of [the POWs] had been beaten outside the village, near the village. One was so exhausted that he could no longer walk. At their own risk, the peasants took him away, and he died 10 minutes later, without even managing to say where he was from, what had happened. They drove them through [the village] in several waves, one after another.

Several times, class was disrupted at school, because every one of the schoolchildren had a father, a brother at war. Once, the principal forbade them to go out and look at the prisoners, the children cried so much that it was impossible to hold classes. They were crying, and I was sitting there crying.

There was a prisoner of war camp at the Lenin Club⁷, hundreds of frozen and starving [soldiers] were carried out every day. One of the prisoners fled, told us how

⁵ About 10 km south of the city center in Donetsk.

⁶ Eduard Bosse (1854-1927) was an engineer, entrepreneur, developer of industry in the Donbas region, as well as a key founding father of Yuzovka. The enterprise named after him was a machine-building factory located on the city’s outskirts.

⁷ Lenin Club: a monumental three-storey edifice and surrounding park built in the constructivist style in 1929. During the war it was turned into a concentration camp. Prior to their retreat from Stalino, the Germans blew up the club. Many victims were buried in the park where a monument “To the Victims of Fascism” was erected after the war.

they tormented him, he was given one hundred grams of uncooked millet per day, and nothing else.

When the Germans came, they immediately organized a labor office, they started to send everyone to work, to send young people to Germany, at first as if on a voluntary basis. They depicted life in Germany in such colors, as if it was nice and easy there. Several believed it to the point that they themselves left for Germany, and when [people] learned what life was like there, [the Germans] started to send them using compulsory measures. Those born in 1924, 1925 were taken away.

When the Germans arrived, they soon started to organize their own order, to organize the district administration, to take away horses, cows, chickens. As soon as a chicken went outside, they'd rush to fry it at once. They would try to take the last egg in the house.

Soon, they took on the Jews, started to register them and in the end took them all to a mine. This mine wasn't far from us, it was the Kalinovskaia mine.⁸ They took them there by truck. In general, it was of course impossible to say a word against it.

So, I hardly worked. The school was closed. I traded everything in the house, and the mood was horrible. In February, we were so disposed [to believe] that our boys were just about to arrive. The people were so famished and had experienced so much anguish from the fascist regime that we couldn't wait for our boys. Even those who had been expecting the Germans felt that this wasn't right. When the Germans reported on the radio that the Russians were trying to advance and then were repulsed, the mood was such that you just wanted to lie down and die. We were so fed up, so sick and tired of life [under occupation] that, if our boys weren't coming, there was no reason to live.

The newspapers have reported less than what actually happened. In fact, there were more atrocities than is reported. The Germans literally gave us with nothing. I received 200 grams of bread, they didn't give me anything for my child. Then, they started to provide 300 grams of bread, but some bread that was. Maybe those who rubbed shoulders with the Germans lived better.

I wouldn't even let the thought cross my mind that I could remain in the hands of the Germans. My brother wrote, "Why are you worried, the Germans will never be in the Donbass." And here I am now – liberated, while my husband, my two brothers, my husband's two brothers have perished on the front.

The Germans didn't persecute those who were in the Red Army. They even registered Red Army women and gave them 100 grams of bread each. There was even a special cafeteria for them, but the food there was horrible. This was done for the sake of propaganda.

⁸ According to *The USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*, this took place April 30 and May 1, 1942. During the operation, about 3,000 Jews were murdered. Their bodies were dumped down the shaft of a coal mine.

One time, when Grishino⁹ was taken, the police retreated from there. I had left a village, a woman was helping me. We ran into these policemen and asked them to help us drag our things across the bridge. We were walking and cursing the Germans. They said, “And you are still unhappy, Hitler is giving you at least a small ration, but what are they doing with our wives there now!”

They looked at the Russians as if they were swine, they didn’t consider us people. My friend was in Grishino. When things were bad for them there, they raped girls. They were standing at this woman’s house. She had two very young daughters. The girls fled. They tied her dress over her head, tore up all her things, and beat her up, because she hid her daughters.

A German came to our place, and it was impossible to kick him out, he intended to sleep. It was necessary to approach an officer and ask him for help in kicking him out.

I’m not a party member.

Ivanov wrote, “You expect the Reds to bring you buns, butter.” No one expected this, but everyone was expecting their own people. Everyone understood that there was a war going on, and they expected liberation, not some kind of buns. At any rate, we knew that our boys would give us more bread than the Germans gave us.

⁹ Located a little less than 55 km northwest of the city center in Donetsk, this town is now called Pokrovs’k. Grishino was the town’s original name. From 1934 to 1938, it was called Postyshevo in honor of the Soviet politician Pavel Postyshev, first secretary of the Ukrainian communist party. During the war, the town was known as Krasnoarmeiskoe. In 1962, it became Krasnoarmeisk, which lasted until 2016.

The events discussed are likely from the first half of February 1943, when Krasnoarmeiskoe was captured for a week, while Donetsk remained in German hands.