

Translation: Galyna Lavrova

Odessa. June 20, 1944

The interview is conducted by the Commission researcher Chermensky
Transcribed by Roslyakova

Pavel Petrovich Aveshnikov. I am a train controller, I was a porter during the occupation. Born in 1897. Russian. Now I am temporarily managing the farm. I was born in Odessa. Non-partisan.

During the first days, when the Romanians came, they took hostage mainly the Jews, they took children, women, old people, everyone. And they took Russian men aged 18 to 50. They came on October 16. On the 18th I was taken away with the Jews. I spent six weeks in a concentration camp. They drove me to work. The young were selected from the Russians, mainly prisoners of war were selected. The prisoners who were in the army stood out with their clothes and uniform boots. They saw: a young man wearing uniform boots. They took him out. They took away hundreds of men. If there weren't enough men, they took the older ones. Gradually, the number of young people increased, and they were re-selected again. They were divided by hundreds. If anything happened in this hundred, they were shot.

On October 21, after the explosion in the building of the NKVD, many were hanged on the squares of the city. Many people were shot in the streets, corpses were scattered on the pavements. They burned corpses in artillery warehouses. We were sent there to bury them. The pits were already ready. We threw the corpses there and buried them. The Germans took pictures during our work.

They shot about 500 people from our camp. At first, they took a hundred people. They were taken away under a strong escort. An hour and a half later they took another hundred people, led them, only the convoy was not so strong this time. I was also in this hundred. They brought us to the prison. They left us near the prison, the eldest of the guards went to the prison. At that time, some women were returning from the side of the artillery depots, and we already knew the women, we had been in prison together. They were walking and crying. "What's the matter? Why are you crying?", "God forbid that you were taken there." And they walked away. We had such a thought that they would probably shoot us. When the elder one came out, they drove us further behind the artillery depot. When we approached the wire fence, we were stopped. In the courtyard there were about 50 or 60 Romanian soldiers standing in the ranks. We were so downhearted! Apparently they were going to shoot us. Romanian soldiers were on the other side of the fence, we were on this side of the fence. Then they started leading these Romanian soldiers out. We waited for them to surround us, but they passed by. After they passed, we were taken inside the courtyard, led between the warehouses. There were shovels there. They ordered us to dig the ground. There was a Moldovan translator

among us. While working, one Romanian soldier, a sergeant or another rank, took him and led him somewhere. He was wearing a padded jacket. He returned wearing a black greatcoat, like our railway greatcoat. This greatcoat was not a railway one, but a port worker's one. We learned that he had shot this man, and had taken his greatcoat for himself.

After a while, I was released. I went to the Odessa station to work. I met some porters.

The Romanians treated us very rudely. They demanded that we speak Romanian. We did not speak Romanian. They scolded us for this in their Romanian language. In my heart I was very indignant: they came here and they demanded from me that I spoke Romanian.

We had a semi-automatic blocking. The switches were dismantled and all the good things were taken away.

When I worked as a porter, we were standing at the accesses wearing aprons.

Before the war, we were going to launch bus traffic, almost everything was ready. The trolleybus line was extended further along Karl Marx Street. The wiring was almost complete. I had an acquaintance who worked on a tram. He was taking off this wiring. I asked him, "Why are you taking it off?", "All this will be sent to Bucharest." They took everything off, even the rails. On Morskaya Street and on Lecarta Street, the tram rails were removed and taken to Bucharest. All good 4-axle Pullman-type wagons were also taken away.

We, porters, were forced to load. We loaded fireproof cabinets of the best condition and sent them to Bucharest. The worst ones remained here. A lot of furniture was taken away, especially the pianos. Sewing machines, hand and foot types, bicycles – all were taken away. Everybody seized things, from a soldier to an officer. We, porters, were like loaders, workers in the city. You worked at the station, then they gave you the order to get a brigade of eight or nine people. We went to the city to an apartment. We moved grand pianos, pianos, expensive cabinets. We brought them to the station, deposited them in the luggage space. The stationmaster kept one of the pianos, then sent it off. There were also sewing machines, electrical appliances – stoves, irons. They were all taken away from here. We laughed at this, of course, in secret. They called themselves a civilized country, but here they bought absolutely everything from us and took away whatever they came across, if only the thing shone. They even took nickel bumps from the beds.

As for the passenger service. At first, there were no passenger trains as such, only military ones. The cashier would come and sell the tickets, but people were not allowed on the train. They followed everyone, they hollered, made noise. The next day they would be placed somewhere. Then they started up passenger trains. Tickets were sold unlimited. A passenger train has a certain number of seats or reserved seats. They didn't stick to the norm. There were a lot of passengers, especially women, who went to the village to buy food and were engaged in speculating. These women got into the carriage. The inspectors came and kicked them out of the carriage. This carriage was

then occupied by the Germans. They insisted that one carriage was for the Germans, another one was for the military Romanians. But it always happened that the Germans occupied two passenger carriages and the Romanians occupied two passenger carriages. The women occupied buffers, rooftops. For the right to leave, they had to have a pass from their district police. It was a real misfortune for a passenger to go out with luggage. Let's say I was carrying a passenger's belongings. Five policemen were checking my stuff.

I used to hear about the bribery of the Romanian police, but it was hard to believe that bribery could reach such extent. There were such cases. You got the capital punishment – shooting. You gave a bribe. Someone would be shot, and you would be released. All passengers were put in one line so that there was a passage. Each passenger tried to push themselves closer to the door. Here it started: you gave a bribe to a policeman – he let you pass, after a few steps there was another one – and you bribed him. Then the third, fourth, fifth – each one had to be bribed. The police officers were at the door. All the passengers surrounded them. Those who did not know about this, were outraged by such orders. Women were fighting, screaming, swearing, fighting. All this happened before boarding. The chief policeman came and always with a stick. With this stick he set up a line. Of course, those who were at the front suffered from his stick. The rear ones saw nothing, they made noise. He pushed the front ones back, hit the tallest person on the head with a stick. I am tall. You stood in line, you got a few strikes with a stick on the head while you were getting out with a passenger, with luggage. There were many scandals. The Germans were beaten several times. They went to the commandant. They made a scene. This is what the cultural service for passengers was like.

There was a general public works duty. I had to work for two months a year. We, workers, received one mark a day, then one and a half, then we were given three marks a day. The bread cost, I think, two and a half or three marks. If you didn't do something, you were fined for two or three days. You were lucky if you did not get any fine. Sometimes it did not depend on you. You worked diligently. Something needed to be done, but no one warned you. If the job was not done, then the team leader was fined and the workers were fined at the same time.

There were some workers who walked along the platform and did not know what kind of service they were doing. A man was walking along the platform and his whole service was in this, since he was one of us, Russian. Old men who had worked on the railroad for thirty-five years knew them. They said that this one was once a duty officer or a stationmaster. I also worked a lot – for twenty-four years. I knew some people too. A man was walking and it was unknown what he did. It turned out that these people were doing good things. They demanded information from doorkeepers and porters, so that they talked about everyone, who, what they were during the Soviet regime, were they party members or not? Then the lists were handed over to Siguranța, people were summoned for interrogations and imprisoned. If you slipped money, they would boldly and openly tell you that such and such informed on you. If you didn't give money, they

wouldn't tell you; the case would be on hold, and you would be in prison. If you brought a petition, gave it to an official, then your petition would be processed.

For the first time I was in prison as a hostage. The second time, 37 people were taken from the Odessa-main station, all the people from the list was taken. There was a certain Vasilko. His wife was a newspaper writer. She wrote a number of articles of religious content with defamation of the Soviet regime. She called herself Nabok-Vasilko. That's why there were two Vasilkos here at the station: one was a holder of St. George cross of the old army. When the Romanians came, he put on the St. George ribbon (he has already died), the second one was Danko – a porter. This one was paralyzed, he was twisting his head. Through these two, Vasilko knew who the party member was, who served in the internal affairs agencies. They made lists of 37 people and submitted them to the Siguranța. We were summoned there. They were only interested in one thing: if you were a member of the party.

When they entered the city, they issued an order that everyone belonging to the Communist Party had to register within ten days and warned that those who would not turn up for registration within this deadline would be tried by a military court to the fullest extent of martial law. The deadline seemed to be from five to ten days.

We had a German interpreter, who was on duty at the station. His name was Yakov Neigun. He was an interpreter between the administration and the Russian workers. When the station master received this list, he handed it over to Neigun, and the latter called people according to the list and immediately sent them to 12, Bebel street. This list was signed by Vasilko and Danko. They, too, had to go there. Still, they could not gather everyone, because they were on shift duty. 25 people were immediately taken. There was a small kitchenette at the station. We were all crammed there. We were sitting there from six in the morning until eleven. Then the investigator came. He immediately asked if there were unregistered communists. Six people raised their hands. "Who are unregistered Komsomol members?" And with that he left. We stayed there until the evening. He came in the evening. In the evening, several more people arrived. He asked the same question again. By 11:30 pm, a porter Panenko, who had already been summoned earlier, came. When he was interrogated, he could not make out the signatures on this statement. He recognized the address. He wondered who signed this statement. He sent his wife to this address. His wife bribed a janitor at the house. The latter told that Vasilko lived here. Then Panenko told us, "I know who did it – Vasilko and Danko." Thus, we found out who informed on us.

They were interested only if someone belonged to the Communist Party and whether a person was registered or not. They demanded proof of non-partisanship. It was necessary to call the janitor of the house if you had lived in the house for at least five years. Those who had lived less than that in this house had to call the janitor from the house where they had lived before. In addition, two male and three female witnesses had to be present. An enquiry about relations to the Communist Party was sent to the police. This lasted up to 4 months. They summoned me every other day, then I was

summoned and interrogated every day. This was the period when our troops were approaching, when the civil authorities handed over the city to the military authorities.

When the military arrived, they cleaned up the population, created a commission. This commission operated from January 17 to 25, 1944. On January 20, 1944, I was summoned. Before that, three porters were released by this commission. They were taken on the 17th, and on the 19th they came to work. I had a conversation with one of them. He said it was so horrible. So many suspicious people were detained that all the premises both on the second floor and in the premises of the consumer union warehouses were filled with people.

On January 20th I was summoned. Five Romanians came to my house, detained me and sent me to the district police. They put me in prison. At ten o'clock they called me. There was a woman in the duty room. Together we were taken to 12, Bebel street. From there, without questioning, they brought us back to the police. They put me in a cell again. The next day, five of us were taken there: two women and two men. It was January 22nd. They led us along the pavement. They brought us to 13, Bebel street. They left us in the yard. We were standing there for about an hour. From there we were transferred to house 12. There were already some people there. After us, forty more people were brought in. One word was heard: "liber". This was the happiest word. And there were also words: "arax" and some other word. These words meant: to detain.

I was summoned. I got into a room, the table was on a dais. A military man with an order was sitting at the table. Some police commissars were standing around. They were wearing black uniforms with aiguilles and simply civilian clothes. They called me. The Commissioner asked my last name, first name and my address. He asked this military man something. And then he said in Romanian, "Guy" and left. I realized that I was detained because the word was not "liber". I was taken to a bay under a glass roof. Five minutes later, another person was brought in. A woman was brought five minutes later. She was a village woman of 61, "I've never been arrested in my life." I asked, "What did they ask you?", "They asked if I had been a communist. I said that I had never been one in my life." The three of us were sent to house 13. Only three of us out of forty people. We were imprisoned. Eleven people were from the commission. Among them there were two railroad workers: Neigun and the other one. They were arrested on the 20th. On the same day, ten people were sent to prison, and three of us were left. They let us into a common cell for the night. We spent the night there.

When I joined the arrested people, we started figuring out what was Siguranza, counterintelligence, and the commission, and the pretorat. Pretorat is the city administration, like our militia, Siguranza is like our NKVD. We did not have counterintelligence. This was the most terrible organization. Being commissioned was the worst because you didn't know what you were accused of. You could be in prison for years. You could be in prison for six months, then they would summon you, ask you one word and return you to prison again.

We stayed there for two days. On the second day, two more engineers were brought in. They were on January 17th or 18th at the commission. One of them was

released, they said, “Liber”. He was a construction engineer, and at that time he served as a deputy director of the 1st city hospital. The second one was an electrical radio engineer and worked at the junction station. He was hired as a specialist to restore the radio relay center. They wanted to detain him, but he knew some words in Romanian. He told me that he had been checked, the commission considered the case and he had been released. At the commission they asked, “Why aren’t you working?”, “How come I’m not working? I am.” And he showed his ID. “Well, go home. We’ll find out.”

One of them was released without warning, the other one with a warning. They stayed there from January 18th to 23rd – four days. As soon as they came home on January 23rd, they were taken away again and brought to us. The next morning, at about twelve o’clock they were sent to prison. We were in prison until the last day, March 30. When the Romanians transferred the prison to the Germans, we, 71 people, were released. Everybody was taken according to the list. There were four people off the list: an engineer, a guide, myself, and another person.

I did not know what I was accused of. My wife petitioned, applied to the prosecutor of the Siguranza. She found out that I had been accused of being an investigator of the people’s court, working in a court “troika” (three-member jury) and driving people to hard labor, working in the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, the State Political Directorate and counterintelligence. I was the people’s assessor of the visiting session of the transport court of the Odessa railway for five years before the war. From 1920 to 1924 I worked in the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission and the State Political Directorate. I did not participate in troikas, I was not in counterintelligence either.