

Translation: Galyna Lavrova

[L.1] Commission for the compilation of the Great Patriotic War chronicle

Interview with Maria Vladimirovna Lapkovskaya

The interview is conducted and transcribed by a researcher N.K. Strelkova
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Maria Lapkovskaya is a collective farmer from the Vitebsk region, Drissensky district, Glinitsa village. Born in 1907, non-partisan. Belarusian.

I come from the Vitebsk region, Drissensky district, Glinitsa village. The Germans were in our village in July 1941. My husband was the chairman of a collective farm, he went to the army. I was left with three children. At first, many prisoners of war came, but in the village people were afraid to help, but my brother was in the army, my husband was fighting, I was sorry for them, I thought, maybe my husband was suffering somewhere. I cured one of our Red Army soldiers, I told him, "Eat whatever you want, just spend the night in the barn." The entire collective farm was divided. Our village was located on the borderline between the partisans and the Germans. The Germans were 7 km away from us, the partisans were 10 km away. The latter used to often come to our village. Because of them, a punitive detachment began to rage. The old were driven into a hut and burned, I saw it firsthand how the hut was set on fire.

All the others were driven into the church.

I couldn't get away with small children, so I had to go to the church.

They began to call out those who did not have children to get on transport. I went out of the church with my children, my eldest son was 12 years old, my four-year-old daughter was in my arms and a 6-year-old son was holding on to my skirt. They put everyone in wagons and drove them away. And everyone who remained in the church was burned, including my brother and his family, my sister. We were brought to Latvia. For two days we sat in the barracks on straw, adults on one side, children on the other one.

On the third day, my six-year-old son, Renya, was taken from me, they put a tag around his neck and took him away I don't know where. I stayed there for another two weeks, they put me in a carriage, and my children were left in the camp. At night, they loaded us into carriages, our children were forcibly taken away, the children were knocking at the windows, and we all were tearing our hair like crazy, they beat us, pushed us in the back with guns and made us walk to the station on foot. I don't know where my kids are now, I've lost all my babies! What happened to them, my little ones?

I had gold earrings in my ears, they took them as well as the ring off my finger, my clothes too. On April 20, 1943, they brought us from Latvia to Lublin. They gave us hideous short knee-long dresses, kicked us out of the barracks for a check up – it was cold, we were standing trembling. They took out a Polish woman who received 25

blows for cutting off a piece of a blanket and sewing slippers for her feet. Sometimes we stood at Appell the whole day if anyone ran away from the barracks. [L.2] Once a girl of about 17, Jewish, very beautiful, escaped. And from 6 am to 2 am we were forced to stand at Appell without food or water. If you said a word, you received a lash on your forehead, if you fell, no one had the right to pick you up. The next day the girl was caught and hanged. It's scary to recall the hospital in the camp. There was no nursing care. The only food was rutabaga and unpeeled potatoes. A dozen people died daily. These terrible skeletons, carved by worms, were loaded onto wheelbarrows and taken to the crematorium. There were children in the camp. All adults went to work, no one looked after the children, the children were kicked out of the barracks during the day, the wind was blowing, it was pouring rain, and the children were sitting there. Many children died, swelled from hunger. Then a barracks was designated for the children, they were gathered there, and then they were taken from there, I don't know where. They beat us ruthlessly, they have never beaten us the way they did in the Lublin camp. A person became all bruised, they put people in a machine and beat them hard.

Up to 11,000 patients were brought from the Ravensbrück camp on April 20, 1944, they all were burned, and the remaining ashes were the size of a house. They burned people nonstop – they would unload them, burn them, and bring the others again. A fertilizer was made from the ashes. I don't know how I got through such a life.

I was in the Lublin camp for 356 days. From there I was transferred to Ravensbrück, examined for a week: my teeth, my eye color, my hair, they examined my chest, measured, distinguished one nation from another, looked for signs. In this camp they did not hold me for long, they transferred me to Neubrandenburg, where everyone worked in a factory, I washed the floor in the barracks. We were fed with skilly, for 4 months we ate everything without any salt. But unlike Lublin it was like home, you just thought of not dying of hunger. Here, even though people were buried in coffins, there were no whips, they beat us, ~~but~~ with a stick or a hand.

When, before liberation, they began to kick us out of the camp, I hid. There were 12 of us. God gave us patience, for two days we did not make a sound, and then we went free.

There were no Germans in the camp. We found a huge storage of salt, and they hadn't given us any. We cooked unpeeled potatoes, fried pancakes, sat down at the table, we were sitting not knowing what was happening to us. We ate as much as we wanted, everyone got sick from the potatoes. We were excited that we had finally gotten the holiday, but all around the shells were still falling, the city was burning, the Germans were fleeing, our troops were approaching. A reconnaissance tankman entered our place. He started crying because we were very scary. He asked how we had lived, he walked all over the camp and saw how we had lived. We were freed on April 29, 1945. I can't wait to return home.