

Translation: Galyna Lavrova

[L.1]

Commission for the compilation of the Great Patriotic War chronicle.

Transcript of conversation with Mitrofan Reutovsky

The interview was conducted by the scientific secretary of the Commission, comrade A. A. Belkin.

Transcribed by Comrade O.A. Roslyakova

Kyiv. February 28, 1944

Mitrofan Reutovsky is a senior gardener of gardens and parks in Kyiv. Born in 1896, Ukrainian, a native of the Kursk region, Rylsky district.

When the Germans came to Kyiv, many people hoped to see cultured people. Before the retreat of the Red Army, the director of our former institution visited us and said, "We will by no means surrender Kyiv, ~~and if the Germans come here, they will not come for long, while the Germans are cultured.~~" From the first steps they showed how cultured they were.

First of all, our director of the landscape design trust disappeared without a trace. He was taken to the Gestapo. I cannot say if he was a party member. He set a meeting for November 1st. When we got together, he was summoned from his office and we never saw him again.

The most terrible act was the killing of the Jews. I had good acquaintances among the Jews, in particular, one mechanic. We also scolded him that while being sick he went on foot from Kiev and somewhere beyond Brovary he got on a train and left. I had an acquaintance Schwartz, a public utility worker, he had been working since the 1900s, and his wife, Tabak, a dentist. She and I always shared books. She always found great books. I am, as they called me, a bit of a bibliophile. There were some rumors through the council that the Jews were being taken to some remote areas and they would live there. This Schwartz, as a Romanian citizen, continued being an employee of the bath and laundry trust. At first he lived at a doctor's house, then moved on to my friend Lebedev. I was his surety. He went to work as a bathhouse director ~~of the bath and laundry trust~~ in Pecherka. He got into the Gestapo.

I saw this procession of Jews in the streets. Many of them supposedly guessed where they were being taken. ~~One of my acquaintances~~ *told* that a Jewish woman left with a boy. She dressed modestly, but at the same time elegantly. She was wearing all white and the boy was wearing white too. She took one pound of flour with her. She behaved somehow mysteriously outdoors. Then they interpreted that she had seen some kind of a dream that they would be killed. They say that it was a continuous flow of people. They walked for several days, although the order was to appear within a few hours.

For some reason, they did not assign the chief in our landscape design trust, even later, when I was in the Gestapo, there was no chief in the trust. This made it easier.

I was ~~arrested~~ *summoned for interrogation* in March 1942. [L.1 the reverse side] A summons was sent in which I was asked to appear at the criminal security department. I already had information that Schwartz and Tabak were gone. When I went to the investigator, the senior investigator Korbut was sitting there, he used to be the secretary of the district court, another, a young one, was his assistant. The assistant interrogated me. The assistant, apparently, was a Ukrainian. He ordered to take everything out of my briefcase and pockets, saying, "Otherwise, I'll search you." I told him that I did not understand why he needed it. I said, "Is this a way of intimidation or am I the accused?" He said, "You will find out now." He began by asking me if I was a Jew. I said, "No, I've never been one. According to all the documents, it is clear that I am not a Jew." Then he started asking, "Who are your Jewish acquaintances?" I named my acquaintances and I mentioned Schwartz. I felt it was all about Schwartz. The assistant asked me, "How do you know Schwartz?" I said, "His wife has been treating my teeth for twenty-five years, besides, we often exchange ~~money~~ books. And she was extremely fond of planting flowers on her balcony and everywhere else. And my family was treated by her." He said, "Did you know that he was a Jew?"

And all the time he said Jude. I said, "I did, but I know that he is a Christian Jew, that in 1907 he was baptized in Vienna and accepted into Lutheranism. He has saved this testimony, and you've probably seen this testimony." He asked, "Has he ever helped you with anything or not?"

I said, "I had rare meetings with Schwartz, because he was working and I was working. I went to treat my teeth to his wife. Sometimes, when there were no patients, we talked about the books we had read. She was a fan of Vinogradov, Tarle, me too.

He asked me who Tarle was and said, "What kind of Ukrainian are you if you have signed a knowingly deceitful questionnaire?"

I said that for me all people were the same, no matter what nationality they were. Moreover, he had been baptized. All those who adopted Christianity, Lutheranism, Orthodoxy have always had the same rights in all states, even in Tsarist Russia full rights were granted for Jews who adopted one or another religion.

He said, "If all Ukrainians had such a national feeling like you! The Jude have been living off you."

I was tempted to say that the Germans had come to live off us, but I, of course, did not say that. No particularly important charges were brought against me. I asked him at the end of the interrogation, "I can't figure out in what capacity you are interrogating me: as an accused or a witness?"

He said, "You're not mistaken, don't you see that you are to blame?" I said, "Jews have always had rights in all states. A new authority has come and new laws *must be promulgated, and then people must be judged.*"

He said, "Have you read Goebbels' article?" I honestly haven't read this article. They let me go. They said, "Go away".

Old man Khodasevich from our landscape design trust was also summoned to the Gestapo. He was terribly frightened, but he made a very cunning thing. He said that he did not know that Schwartz was a Jew, but considered him a Romanian. It saved him. He received only a fine of two thousand rubles. [L.2] He was running around for the whole month, was nervous, and I decided that this thing was not worth his while and I was calming him down.

On May 9, I came to work, a summons was brought to me saying that I have to appear in that very criminal department. Passing through the facilities of the trust, I went to Vladimirskaia Gorka, went in there, they closed me down and I never left that place. First I handed over my passport to the investigator on duty, then I went upstairs to the secretariat. The secretary was an avid "Ukrainian". He started telling me that I was Ukrainian by birth, but in essence I was a traitor and he announced to me that I would be serving forced labor for six months. His assistants came. I asked him to let me see the boss before he formalized all this and I went to the boss. These two assistant investigators led me. We came to the room. A dark German, not at all Aryan type, was sitting there looking nervous. I submitted my request, in which I asked on what grounds a citizen of Ukraine, who did not know new laws that had not been published, was convicted of signing a questionnaire to a friend who had not committed any crime, and in addition, no one had warned that questionnaires must not be signed. When my application was translated to him, he started shouting, stamping his feet, banging his fist on the table. He shouted, "Weg!". I continued to speak. The assistants took me away. Actually, they dragged me out and put me down into the basement. They said that my case would be sorted out and I had to wait. I spent the day, the evening came and nothing happened. I spent the night, the next day nothing happened either. There were no parcels allowed for two days. My wife, my mother-in-law and my daughter didn't know anything.

There were two people in this cell: one was a driver who worked in the yard, the other one was a peasant from across the Dnieper, who was tried for the fact that he, being the head of a cooperative shop, when the Soviets were leaving, did not hand over everything, but appropriated a suit and trousers. He offered me some food, but I refused. The next day this man fed me. The first day he left a large piece of bread, put it near me, but I did not touch it. At night they ate this piece of bread themselves. On the third day, these same assistants appeared, who took me away from the chief, and took me upstairs to the office. There they received a paper for five more people, young people, and we went with the same assistants to the Gestapo on 33, Korolenko street. The assistants were unarmed. On the way, they said that they would only sign us up and we would go to work to our places.

In this group there was one bricklayer, who was sentenced to a month of forced labor because, being in the village with his mother, recovering from typhus, he was seven days late for registration. He was imprisoned for this. At first they fined him for three hundred rubles, then they decided to force him work as a bricklayer for a month.

He worked in the camps for five and a half months, then they shot him, they shot him because he got sick.

When we were going to the Gestapo, everyone had the confidence that they would work at institutions. So the assistants said. There was one Pole among us who had been mobilized in Poland to come here, to Ukraine. [L.2 the reverse side] The office gave out large envelopes. I thought, what were these envelopes, then there was some case against us? Then they gave each of us numbers and took us to the Zeughaus [armory]. In the Zeughaus we were met by a brutal, fierce, huge black German, he started searching everyone in turn. When my turn came, I said, "This is justice, this is the West!". He didn't understand a thing. A Volksdeutscher [a person whose language and culture had German origins but who did not hold German citizenship] was there, but he didn't say anything to the fierce German. When the latter searched me, I reached into my pocket and found a small nail. I told him, "Take away this nail, since you never know what can be done with a nail, with such laws anything at all can happen with the use of such a nail!" He understood, apparently, and got so angry that he hit me. I started protesting. Then the Volksdeutscher said, "Why did you keep giving remarks all the time? Shut up, or it will be worse." The guys started tugging at my jacket. We were taken upstairs, then down the stairs. We got into the second cell of the first floor. There were five people and there were eleven of us, and the cell was for four people, there were four bunks. So two people slept on a bunk and three people slept under a bunk. The window was overlooking the wall, closed by a visor tilted at an angle of 10°, that's why there was always twilight in the cell. They gave us 40-50 grams of bread. There were two days in a row when nothing was given. I stayed there until May 22, without going anywhere. Then they started taking us to work. Sometimes there were ferocious sentries, who just taunted the prisoners.

In my cell, the person we shared the bunk with used to be a storekeeper of a railway regiment who was surrounded. He was connected with the underground, but, apparently, this young man was shot, because once returning from work, I did not find him, but his things – a coat, a hat – remained.

During my two weeks in prison, from May 9 to May 22, I became so weak that when I was taken out into the air, I fell down. When I was taken out into the yard, they announced to me that they were taking me to work. I was very afraid to get to Syrets. At this time, huge camps were being built there. But I was lucky. I ended up in the former vacation house of scientists – the Transfiguration Monastery. In the truck, there was a freelance gardener. When this gardener found out that I was from the landscape design trust, he decided that I would help him out. "I need to get out of there," he said, "because what they promised is not given. I know that they will put me in prison." Later, when he brought my notes to my apartment, he said that he needed to leave, because sooner or later he would be caught with the notes that he had to transfer from prisoners. When we arrived at the site, he announced to the chief German that there was a worker here who was better than him, since he was not a scientist, and was illiterate. The German answered him, "Both you will work, and he will work."

Since I happened to fall, I was terribly afraid that they would send me back. I asked this gardener to ask ~~this~~ German not to write that I was not fit, that I would soon get better. He said that he himself was interested in me being accepted, "Don't worry, you will not be sent back under any circumstances."

25 of us were brought to this vacation house. This was the estate of the chief of the Gestapo. His last name was Erlinger. The arrested were laying out the tracks. A native Volksdeutscher was assigned to keep an eye on the arrested. [L.3] He kept an eye on me too. When this Volksdeutscher ~~left~~ *was leaving*, ~~this gardener~~ *he* said to me, "You know, Reutovsky, on the first day I was afraid that you would leave! *I thought you would pretend to be weak.*" When I worked with a rake, I kept falling all the time. I asked a girl who worked in the flower garden to work a little instead of me. I was very weak for 4 weeks. Thanks to this gardener, I got in touch with my home. They started sending me parcels with food, however, the food was meager: some peas, porridge.

The first year of my work in this house was relatively fine. There were eight Jews there. They walked freely, but were bound by mutual responsibility. In the Gestapo on Korolenko Street, the food distributor was a Jew, and another Jew delivered food to us. Later we were told that Jews had disappeared from the Gestapo. They also helped pass the notes.

To save money, we were fed in the following way: in the morning they gave us 400 grams, maybe 500 grams of bread, some coffee and that was it. Go ahead, work. When you came home from work in the evening, you were given a bowl of soup, which was thicker than the one for all those arrested. Usually the arrested were given half a liter of skilly, and we were given more than a liter.

At first we spent the night in the Gestapo. On June 27 or 28, they finally transferred us to this property, they believed that it was unproductive to drive us by car, and monastery buildings had bars on the windows. We were glad to be accommodated there. 15 of us worked there. There was no case when we betrayed each other.

In the first summer there was a wonderful harvest of tomatoes. When it came to harvesting the tomatos, we announced to the boss that there was waste. After the rain, cracks appeared on the tomatoes, sort of like rot, but, of course, such tomatoes are even tastier. He allowed two tomatoes to be taken for each person. In the evening, the arrested and civilian workers were given two tomatoes for dinner.

When in the spring we received an order regarding greenhouses, 15 workers from the camps were brought to us. In the camps there were so-called foremen and sotniks [men in charge of hundreds]. For the most part, these were Ukrainians taken from those arrested. Often there were looters and offenders among them. A handsome tall man called Gorobets, a former driver, came to us. After a while, they told me that Gorobets was beating the arrested. I told him about it. He said, "I can't, Mitrofan Vasiliyevich!" We learnt such facts that he received other people's parcels, for no reason beat people for about anything. The manager Kolmeier found out about this.

One Sunday I was walking through the garden. I heard some inhuman screams. This was Pan Kolmeier shouting. I must say that all German chiefs, from big to small,

are crazy. I heard him screaming. I looked out into the alley where the arrested were working, and saw that he was beating this Gorobets. The rest were standing straight, trembling. In the evening I was sitting behind my bars, suddenly I heard, "Ouch, ouch!" and the rattle of a wheelbarrow. It was a loaded wheelbarrow full of sand, and he was being urged by two Volksdeutsch policemen whipping him with might and main. He [Gorobets] had to get away from them with a loaded wheelbarrow. And the alley was 350 meters long. He was chased along this alley five times. They themselves were soaking wet with sweat. One of them was Peter, later he became a real butcher, our Russian-German, the other one was Hendrich. This Hendrich was settling personal scores. Once during mowing time this Gorobets was working with his artel [a team] and called him a bad word. [L.3 the reverse side] When he was running under the blows of the whip, he especially felt those whips. Hendrich was beating him saying, "This is for you, this is for you!" After that Gorobets was demoted from being a brigadier and nobody else beat us.

Before that, we had Kuzmenko for three weeks. He was sort of an agent with them and he got caught in some unseemly business. He was sent as if to the army. After a while, a German from Vienna, Gogberg, appeared with us. He served somewhere in the regional Gestapo. He was the first to beat the Jews. Once he hit Misha Safyanik. One day we returned from the mowing. He gave each of them a ~~barrel~~ wheelbarrow with sand and urged them with these ~~barrels~~ wheelbarrows twice down the alley. This Gogberg turned out to be neither a Jew nor a German – a mix. Soon he disappeared from here. We suspected that he had been finished off. He went to exchange the looted things and never returned.

In September 1942, I was offered to keep working. The term ended in November. I thought for a long time whether to stay or not. Then the translator told me quite clearly that a period of six months could be a period of twenty-four months, "So you will lose if you do not agree." At the end of September, I agreed to keep working. Kolmeier treated me well. I was provided with the so-called freedom.

In the spring of 1943, one day Kolmeier called me into his dining room to talk about planting for the next year, about seeds and other things, and then he said, "I am so pleased with your work that I never even reprimanded you. With your weakness and thinness, what would have happened to you if you had got to Syrets!"

The farm was expanded. Several dozen workers were transferred here. There were already more than 200 of them. They picked up a large two-story house, where the radio station was located, and equipped it as a prison with bars and wire. Kolmeier became in charge of the camp for the arrested. Then cruel punishments and executions began. This Peter stood out here. When other Volksdeutsche were sent to the front and to other services, he became the guard chief and started beating the arrested. He disliked one of ours so much that one day, returning from the field, he shot him. In the evening he sent Jews to bury him. He made us run through the alleys, forced us to crawl with our hands on the back. There was a certain Stepan, he had a Ukrainian last name (I don't remember it), he was hefty, always well-dressed, because the chiefs gave him clothes

out of the loot. He came up with all these punishments. There was also a builder of those arrested, hunchbacked, very feisty. Together they came up with all these punishments. Stepan ran away with the policemen. When the Red Army arrived, he was hanged.

From May 1942, I stayed until the very end, until September 22. On Monday, September 20, I saw that the Germans were about to flee. I met Kolmeier, who told me, "On Wednesday you have to submit a report, how many vegetables, workforce, etc. there is". I said, "Okay". I met Volksdeutscher Heinz on my way. [L.4] He treated our people well, and always shook hands with the Jews. He said, "Mitrofan Vasiliyevich, you should know that on Wednesday afternoon we are going to get away. Disappear somewhere and warn your family." I came home on Thursday, September 23rd.

In the camp, all the police were Ukrainians. Among them there were all sorts of people. There was a case when the policemen conspired to arrange an escape, but someone betrayed them. They got arrested. The four arrested were supposed to flee. The policemen agreed to break the bars. Two of the arrested managed to escape into the forest, but two did not have time to leave. They were hanged at night.

Let me tell you about gardening. In one of the parks I had 4000 roses. Now there are fifteen hundred left. Partially they died because they were trampled, and most of them were plundered by the Germans. There are several rose bushes sticking out at the Council of People's Commissars house. If they arranged landscaping, then it was at their country houses, but not in public places. The Germans set up parks on their estates. City parks deteriorated because they did not receive funds for maintenance.

The Germans did develop vegetable farming. On the estate where I worked, the Germans started pig breeding. In order to make a feeder for the pigs, they demolished an apartment building. There were three residential buildings near the NKVD [The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs] radio station. They broke them to make a forge with a mechanical workshop, a pigpen and a feeder for this pigpen. Stables, a pigpen and a cowshed were built from those bricks.

How can you justify the fact that they ripped out the frames, parquets and cladding from the house of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine?

They did not have any accounting. Only in 1943 did the clerks and the Volksdeutsch translator come. They started doing relative accounting. We started recording what we were sending to the police to the city, what we were sending to the Gestapo. The first year, nothing was recorded. A report was written to the chief director of the Gestapo, Erlinger. All the profits were given to him. On Sundays he came to have a rest, to run in his underwear. What was he like? He was a tall, lean man, always pensive, rarely smiling. He had so much on his conscience that he could not smile. He was irritable. Usually three or four Volksdeutsch chiefs came with their translators and typists. He had a deputy for the economic matters. This one was also gloomy. He came on Sundays wearing a civilian suit, while usually he wore military clothes. He liked horseback riding. A riding horse was specially brought for him, it was fed with sugar and selected oats.

I don't remember them having parties. I know that in the evenings they had intense and violent drinking parties. Some were shooting at the ceiling, others were breaking glass and dishes.

When the bombing victims were being buried, a pompous procession was organized. I remember one Sunday a memorial service for Shevchenko was announced. It was interesting for me to see it. The requiem was performed by Nikanor. He was a Ukrainian autocephalous priest. He wore a beautifully sewn ~~dark~~ linen cassock, very beautifully embroidered. [L.4 the reverse side] In his speech he said almost nothing about Shevchenko. There was a complete praise of the Germans and blasphemy of everything Soviet and Russian in his speech. Panteley was the same.