

Translation: Galyna Lavrova

Transcript of conversation with Assistant Secretary of the Brest City Party
Committee Tatyana Nickolayevna Smirnova

The interview was conducted by a researcher F.L. Yelovtsan.
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Tatyana Smirnova was born in 1908.
Russian.
Member of the Komsomol from 1929 to 1940.
Member of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) since 1940

I was born in the Gorky region, the Ostrovatki village in a poor peasant family. From the age of 7 I worked as a nanny, herded cattle, and studied at the same time. I graduated from the secondary school in 1924. I worked as the head of the library for 5 and a half years, as the secretary of the editorial office of the district newspaper and as the head of the editorial department, for only 10 years. I came here in 1940, started working in the city committee. Before the start of the war I worked as an assistant secretary of the city committee.

At 4 o'clock in the morning on June 22nd I heard a volley. I thought it was a thunderstorm and turned off the loudspeaker. My windows overlook the fortress. I looked out and saw that there was bombing, like a huge thunderstorm, and suddenly there were volleys and volleys. We knew that there would be war. I woke my husband and said, "Get up quickly, the war has begun."

He got up and ran. I put my mother and my daughter in the basement, ran to the city committee. Some people were already there. There was no key to the room with party documents. We left the room. Tupitsyn said, "Go to your families."

I went home, and some people went to the military registration and enlistment office. They were at the military registration and enlistment office until 11-12. At home, many people were already sitting in the basement, many locals. It was impossible to talk much to these locals. They said that now the Germans would be in the city. But when I arrived, the Germans were already in the city. When I was walking down the street, I did not see them, but the windows were already being broken everywhere.

I left the basement, there were wounded people and one person killed. I bandaged one wounded man, tore a napkin, bandaged a soldier, hid cartridges and 2 rifles. They said to me there, "What are you doing? The Germans will come, they will beat you and us together with you."

A squabble began. In the end, the locals took the rifles and cartridges and put them in the trash.

The Germans came at once and started looking for weapons. When they searched the house, they started breaking everything, but no one moved. Several of them came – drunk, swearing, they pointed their rifles at us. Then they left.

In the evening we went to spend the night to our apartment. There were four families all together. In the morning we left our apartment, because it was impossible to stay longer.

As soon as we left, we were surrounded by the Germans. We wanted to get through the fence, but they shouted, “Halt! Halt! Halt!” We stopped, but we couldn’t understand what they were saying. Then they surrounded us and led us away. There were 13 of us: three men, the fourth one was a boy, three children, one old woman, two girls. We were walking. A woman was walking and saying, “I’m not a Soviet,” and she was crying.

And a German shouted, “Kommen, kommen, kommen.”

When we were crossing Perets Street, we turned, and she was walking and shouting that she was not a Soviet. He thought that we were following him, but we turned and ran away.

On the same day they came to our apartment, took our things, asked where we were. A few days later my old mother and my sister went to the apartment. The apartment was open, everything was broken. They took some things. After a while, my mother and sister went there again. As soon as they came, a person from the Gestapo and an interpreter were approaching. They asked who lived here. My sister said, “Clerks live here.”

They asked, “The Bolsheviks?” She replied, “No, why the Bolsheviks?” He said, “Did a commissar live here?” She answered, “No, ordinary employees lived here.” He said, “It’s not possible that ordinary employees live in such an apartment.”

There was a children’s ball on the floor. He kicked it so angrily.

Then my husband came here and already the doors had to be kept closed, because policemen and people from the Gestapo were constantly walking around. Our neighbors, who lived in the same house with us, asked all the time where my husband was. I said that he had gone to the village.

On July 9, there was a mass raid, they took away men and Jews. They took a lot of our people then. My husband worked in communications, and signalmen were taken. They didn’t come to our apartment. Lists of signalmen were made. They suggested that we hand over radios right away, we didn’t pass them, we listened to the radio, however, the quality was poor. When we moved to another apartment, we took one radio with us. If you live upstairs, the receiver takes a lot of electricity. They came and said, “Do you have a receiver?” We said, “No, we don’t.”

They asked, “Then why do you consume so much electricity?” We said, “It’s probably because of the stove.”

When Kiev, Mogilev, Rostov were bombed, we could not believe it. Then they reached Smolensk and were stopped there. We did not hear Comrade Stalin’s speech on July 3. I must say that it was very difficult to listen to the radio because of the radio

jammer, it was deadening the sound so much. I didn't listen to the radio all the time, but I did it from time to time and it was so difficult to catch Moscow's transmissions.

Then we saw that people reappeared. We, the workers of the city committee, regional committee, and other organizations united, discussed the situation. Rosa Radkevich and I were interested in how things stand with party documents. We decided to go there. There was already a hospital there. We went there ostensibly in search of work. We asked about it. Somebody said, "Go to the main infirmary, they are hiring there."

We came there. Rosa could speak a little Polish and understood German, but I didn't understand anything. They asked her, "Is this a Bolshevik woman coming with you?" She said, "No, she wants to work."

Before that, we went into the building of the city committee, where there was also a hospital. We were interested in documents. A German said to us, "Do not go there."

I made believe that I didn't understand anything and went into the room with the party documents. I came in, the door was cracked open. We pricked up our ears. After that we went there to apply for a job. There we looked around the building, saw that there were small holes, we left and warned people to be on their guard. Party documents were either taken away or destroyed. Later I found out that they had burned the party documents.

There was a party member in the city, an employee of the city executive committee, a Jew. She was taken to the Gestapo and charged with being a communist. She was interrogated. They showed her her personal file, which was compiled at the city executive committee. She said, "Yes, I was a candidate, but I was expelled."

Then they made her sign a paper that she would not go anywhere. From this we concluded that they have no index cards. Several communists had already been taken away. Anoshin had been taken away. He, too, could not be charged.

I guess in August, the party leadership, the city committee were organized. The communists themselves decided that something needed to be done. We had some contacts and one day a woman brought me a leaflet. This leaflet called for the fight against fascism, said that the hour of victory was not far off, that one should not be discouraged and do all possible harm.

I went to Radkevich with this leaflet. This leaflet was handwritten. Some woman took it off the wall and came to me. I brought this leaflet to Radkevich and said, "So there is someone." She said, "Leave me this leaflet, we will look for its author tomorrow."

The next time I came, she said, "The author is Lieutenant I.G. Zhulikov, a secretary of the railroad junction committee."

We teamed up with him and decided to organize a city committee and regional committee, and we did it. Yuzhnaya, Zhulikov, Slivko entered the regional committee, and Radkevich, Anoshin, Dzabiev, Semchenko and Zhigimond entered the city committee. Khromova, Babushkina and I were approved as instructors. Zhigimond, Dzabiev, Semchenko were from the railroad and from different areas. The tasks of the

regional committee were to establish communication with the districts and conduct work there. The regional committee quickly collapsed, because it was not easy to fulfill these tasks, especially in the first days of the war, when we knew nothing. We decided to first establish work in the city, and then gradually get in touch with the districts.

But still, we were establishing communication with the districts. Yuzhnaya carried out this work with us, she contacted Zhabinka, the Rachki village, the Kobrin village.

The task of the city committee was to mobilize the people. We set ourselves the goal of harming the Germans in every possible way, explaining the false policy to the population and disseminating reports from the Soviet Information Bureau so that the population should know the truth about this war.

In 1941, we received Stalin's report on the radio, it was reprinted and spread around. In 1941, we listened to Kalinin's New Year's speech, received it and spread it. We distributed reports from the Soviet Information Bureau almost every day.

Along with this, we helped prisoners of war by organizing parcels to them, escapes, preparing passports, supplying them with weapons. I managed to organize several escapes. We directed the ones who escaped to the forest, and we helped some of them get hired. We had been in contact with partisans since 1941. The first signals were from Bialowieza. Semyon and Sergey came to us. We collected some clothes for them, people gave them whatever they could. We collected medicines, ammunition.

We also worked with the Komsomol. We had a Komsomol committee. It was led by Nesterenko. We fired the secretary at one of the bureaus, as he had failed, Bannikov took over his position. Kosynskaya, Popova, Lopatnikova, Ponomarev, Arzhanova were among the activists.

In 1942 and 1943, we learned that the Germans would take away young people and everyone who did not work. We ourselves had not worked for a long time. They took away all those who did not work, there were night raids. This made us get a job. I got a job and consulted with Radkevich. I said, "What do you think? This income does not suit me, it's 36 rubles a week."

She said, "You will be able to carry out the work that we are engaged in."

And in 1942 I got a job. We launched extensive work, we mobilized the Komsomol for this. We explained to the youth and to adults that they should try not to be taken away by all means. A lot of people escaped. They took away only those whom they managed to capture. In 1943, they even took people away from work, and then young people were already organizing mass escapes. There were three thousand people in the camp, and they took away about a thousand, two thousand fled. The youth were explained that either they just had to stay at home and do nothing, or they had to go into the forest.

My own sister was taken from work, and when I came home, my daughter ran to me and said, "Mom, they took our Marusya." I went to the camp and asked, "Well, how is it?" She said, "I still won't go."

She was in prison for two or three days. We offered all sorts of things to the policeman. He said, "I'll take this and that from you, I'll turn away and you should go."

On May 1, I came to her. She said, "What took you so long? I won't be able to escape here, I'll run away on the way. What do you think?"

I said, "I'll bring you a change of underwear." We were standing and talking. She said, "No, I can't..." And at once she jumped over the fence.

A friend followed her and they ran away. They didn't know where to go. They walked, and they were met by a policeman who had guarded them. They went into the yard of a house. A local man was walking by and he asked, "What's wrong?"

I said, "Nothing, here, take a coat." We changed our coats and went away. Then I said, "You shouldn't hang around here, as soon as the policeman comes out, you will immediately be taken away."

I took them to the city, then to the apartment, and I went to work. People asked me, "Has Marusya left?" I said, "She went to Germany."

Also a German who saw her in the camp said that she had gone to Germany. Three days later, she came home and lived there for a whole month while I was getting in touch with the partisans. For a whole month she did not leave the house, only spoke in a whisper. When someone came by, she rushed under the bed or somewhere else. Just when I managed the connection with the partisans, she left at 5 o'clock, and at 12 o'clock the Germans came to us.

They didn't touch me. I looked very old. I would tie a headscarf, wrap myself in it, and they didn't pay attention to me. I said that I had two children and my mother was an old woman. I lived under a different last name. Thirdly, I changed my apartment four times. Thus, I somehow stayed safe.

The city committee worked a lot. We had talks with young people, gave out leaflets, and just explained different things to them. Each of us was a communist, especially activists, we had an anti-fascist group, we told everybody, "Explain, explain." Without this work, we might not have succeeded. The Germans managed to do little. Even the Poles, who treated them more or less well, also protested. We hadn't worked enough among the Poles yet.

We worked in the ghetto. Yuzhnaya worked there, Rosa Radkevich and others went there. Several of our Jews were saved. For example, Aronina lived in our apartments, then she was sent to the partisan detachment, Hamburg too. Our activists were in the ghetto. There was a radio, people there received and transferred reports, and our people went there. There were weapons, machine guns, grenades, rifles, cartridges, automatic rifles. Grisha Meerovich was the secretary of the primary underground organization.

We had arrests among the committee members. At first, Radkevich was arrested, but the Germans did not know that she was the head of an underground organization. She issued a passport to a prisoner of war. The police noticed this prisoner of war at the market, they started pursuing him, he was caught and he told them about her. She was

arrested. She stayed in prison for several days, but that prisoner of war was shot, while Radkevich was released for lack of evidence.

Zhulikov was the second to be arrested. We were somehow at a loss: what if he was shot as a leader. He was confronted with somebody. But that person said that he did not know Zhulikov. After that Zhulikov was released. The second time he was arrested in September 1943, and then he was no longer released. That time he was imprisoned because of treason and it was assumed that there was a partisan woman here, and a policeman who lived next to her knew that she had become a partisan. One day she left and the next day he was arrested. His apartment was ambushed. Zhigimond's wife came, they took her away, Bannikov and Svyatenko were taken away too. Zhulikov was left at the apartment, they stayed with him and then took him away. Nobody knew that he was arrested. Suddenly some people came to me and said, "Zazharsky and Zhulikov have been arrested, everyone is going to leave." I said, "I don't think we can leave, we need to wait."

Then we clarified this issue.

I was an instructor of a large underground city committee, and then a secretary of the city committee before the arrival of the Red Army here. Poplavsky was my boss, he was an authorized representative of the regional committee, from the Central Committee, who descended like a paratrooper, and I went to see him from the city. Of course, it was hard to have those meetings. I had to walk 30 km there. I worked as a cleaner for the Germans in the office. I needed to go there and come back to stoke the wood stove in the morning. Once I came and didn't stoke the stove since I was late. The first time I got away with it, but the second time I was late and I was almost sent to a labor camp. They said, "We forgive you for the first time, but mind you, if you don't stoke the stove next time, we'll send you to labor camps." And I had to go away again. I would arrive at 5 o'clock in the morning, and at 7 a.m. I would already be running.

The men had already seen that I often came, they said, "Ma'am, you shouldn't walk here, there is a gendarmerie."

I listened to them, walked around. I came and saw a full village of Magyars. I came to my friends and said, "Tell them that I came to you to buy potatoes."

There were lots of Magyars. They started speaking, not in Russian, "How did you, grandma, come?" I said, "Very easily." I was wearing slippers made of cloth. They asked me, "Why are you dressed so badly?" I said, "It's war, there is nothing to wear." They said, "Why have you come here?"

I said that I came to get some potatoes. People confirmed that. The Magyars asked, "Are there many partisans in the city?" I said that I didn't know, I had a mother and two children. They said, "If you find out, immediately report to our bosses."

I said, "Ok, I'm afraid of them too."

I was transported and I passed safely. They no longer waited for me there, people were sent to tell me not to go. I came and they asked, "How did you come through?" I said, "I just did somehow".

I went through three villages and all through the Magyars, it was worse to return. I was shown another way back. I used to come to them, receive assignments, take newspapers, leaflets and carry them to the city. There was such a case that we were late. We were walking, it was already five o'clock, it was dark. Civilians said, "Come in here." We went in. We asked, "What is it?" They said, "The Magyars have come to get straw."

We decided to go and arrived safely. And the next time, so as not to be late for work, at 2 a.m. we got up and walked across the field. There was a decree that if a person was noticed in the field, they would immediately be shot. We got to the school and sat on the ground to wait till 6 a.m. Then we went on. The Germans were standing on the road. A boy was walking there. They asked him for documents, and we passed safely near the fence.

Then I didn't spend the night at home, I came straight to work and then they warned me. I sent a friend home and asked to warn my relatives that I was at work. When my neighbor asked me, "Why didn't you spend the night at home?" I said, "I went on a spree, got drunk and stayed there to spend the night."

A person, who worked for us in the city committee as a stoker in the house of party education, knew me as Smirnova. He saw that my daughter and I went to the house where we lived. He asked my neighbors, "Who lives in this house from the Easterners?"

They told my last name, but my last name was already Ponomareva, and I went away with it.

There was another case. Some woman knew that I had great connections, but she did not know that I was Smirnova and said, "You know, there is some kind of Smirnova in the city. She has both news reports and newspapers, she has connections with the partisans. How can I consult with her?"

I said, "I do not know that Smirnova, but I advise you not to do that. And if you get to meet her, then introduce me to her."

After that, I was on my guard. These days I met with her. She said, "You did the job skillfully."

In January 1944, I left Brest. When my sister left, at first we did not know anything about her. Then we found out that she was a partisan. The Germans were supposed to pick on me. A woman came to my apartment and said, "Does Smirnova live here?" My neighbor said, "No, Ponomareva lives here." That woman said, "Why, she has a grandmother and daughter Zoya."

Then there was another spy. She had connections with the partisans and knew that I was the secretary of the underground city committee. When Sarno was taken, there was a panic. She said, "If a Gestapo car approaches you, don't be afraid, they will be partisans. Get in with your things and go." I thought, "Why on earth would the partisans be wearing the Gestapo uniform?" Then my neighbor said, "If you don't go, it will be bad."

I wrote to the detachment to Zakharov, and before that I had asked Poplavsky to take me. He said, "I'll take your family, and you will stay."

I decided to send my family away and leave the apartment myself. Then I wrote a note again to leave the city. They sent me a horse cart and I left. Five days later I was sent back to the city. When I was leaving, I warned my people, "Do not go to my apartment."

I was sent back to the city again and said, "This is your combat mission."

How could I not go. I came to the city, made connections, organized people, took one woman to a liaison and said that through her he would keep in touch. And people have worked until recently.

My daughter also helped me work. I could not distribute all the summaries, reports, leaflets, I sent my mother and daughter to distribute them. My daughter was 9 years old. There was such a case. I had two gas masks. It was inconvenient for me to carry them to Yada Kosynskaya's apartment, I said that I would send my daughter Zoya. As soon as Zoya went out to Moscovskaya Street, she was followed by a man. She came back. She said, "I went down another street, he followed me. I went into the yard, he was standing there. He asked, "Girl, what are you carrying?" I said I was going to play with dolls."

She carried them covered in a basket. Then he stopped. She took another street to enter this apartment, handed over the gas masks, put everything back down again and went back. He followed her again. He asked, "Where did you go?"

She said, "I went to play dolls with a friend." A German was coming over. He said that she had been carrying something in a basket and that she did not admit it. She started crying. The German asked her, "Where did you go?" She said, "I went to play with dolls." He did not understand her. Then she said "Lyalka [a doll]" and he let her go, he said, "Why are you detaining the child?"

Then she did not go home immediately, but walked around it.

When she was carrying a leaflet, I would tell her, "Zoya, come back quickly." She would go, and if she did not find that person, then she would not give it to anyone, but bring it back.

Many of our communists were shot together with their whole families. For example, the Gorins. The whole family was immediately taken away. He had been entrusted with sabotage at the sawmill. He did not fulfill it and his entire family was taken away. Zakharenko's family was also taken away, the entire Zhulikov's family was taken away. They took him sick from the hospital. He later died.