

Conditions in a Ukraine Village in 1941

Source: DAI Microfilm T-81; Roll #599; Serial 817; Group 1035;
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Translated by Allen E. Konrad
PO Box 157 Rowley, IA 52329 (USA)
E-mail: onamission1939@gmail.com
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[Translator's Note: From 1930 to 1941, during the rule of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union had a collective farm system known as Kolkhoz System. When the German Army invaded the Soviet Union, Karl Stumpp had the task of visiting the various ethnic German communities, in their collective system, occupied by the German Troops. Among many reports made by Karl Stumpp, the following document deals with some locations in the Ukraine. Words within square brackets indicate translator's comments.]

[Translation Begins]

1941

Document

#34/V

B. FROM THE RUSSIAN DIARY OF OUR ASSOCIATE ST[UMPP] (Same as Document A in Number 33/1941)

The Conditions in the Russian village

On 11 August, we left L. on a trip to our new destination in the Far East in a wonderful drive in the open car. Both Russian tanks and wagons were shot up or burned on either side of the road, including the big ones. We encountered a group of Ukrainian women in one village, with sacks of bread on their backs, going 30 km (18.6 mi) or more on foot to visit their men who are in captivity. Now we were actually in Soviet Russia. I took every opportunity to speak to the people and hear from them how it was to be under the Soviet regime. But you did not really need to ask a lot, you only have to look at these people, especially the children, and you notice the **psychological and physical distress in all of them:**

The living conditions exhaust every resource of description. The houses look neglected, often without windows and in part without a roof. A farmer told me that they always use the roof straw as fodder in the spring and then cover the houses with new straw in the autumn. If they do not get any straw, the house is left uncovered and it rains or snows in.

Nutrition is extremely bad. Most of all, people don't have bread! They live on potatoes, turnips, cabbage, cucumbers. When I asked a group of young farmers about meat, they looked at each other and then said to me: we have not seen that for months. The children look particularly bad, pale, skinny, hollow-eyed. Most of them have rickets. One day I saw a group of farmers with

sacks. The inquiry revealed that they went 30-40 km (18-25 mi) to get salt. It was bad salt, but at least salt.

Things are bad when it comes to **clothing** – torn, no underwear, barefoot. The children told me that in many cases they also go barefoot in winter. Shrugs over and over again: what should we do? A poor people without a will of their own. They remember the collective only with horror. All without exception think reluctantly about the collective (*Kolchos*). “The loafers had it good and the industrious had to work themselves to death,” said a farmer! They all feel that it is like a deliverance that they can now work without constantly living in fear!

Everything is focused the **harvest**. None of it has been destroyed by the Bolsheviks , but it stands beautiful! They have only destroyed the machines, so that everything is cut with scythes and sickles. For that they are especially fortunate. It turns out that it is almost only women working. The men are in the army, banished, in captivity, shot... Everywhere you see collectives, so that people are always working in groups. The scythes and sickles come primarily from Germany. The buildings in the collective farms look very neglected and are partly without roofing or even collapsed.

The people are happy that they have their Sunday and the church again. The church is full on Sundays. Yesterday (14 August) was a holy day. The one was able to see everywhere women, children and men going with flower bouquets.

In a prison camp I met up with **Volga Germans**. They told me they were separated immediately after capture. They are satisfied with the treatment and engaged as interpreters. They were put together with Black Sea Germans in Schitomir. The Germans and Ukrainians are now taken away from the Russian front and transferred into the interior as unreliable in the eyes of the Russians.

One of them, Viktor Alexander Held, comes from Stassburg, Volga. Friedrich Rusch, born 05 April, 1914, is a vehicle driver who comes from Enders. Heinrich Magel, born 22 July, 1922, comes from Balzar and is a locksmith.

The statements of these 3 Volga Germans, who come from way different areas, the north, the south, the west, all say the same thing. Rusch knows the villages around Enders including Katherinenstadt, Magel those around Balzer, so that the following described conditions certainly apply to at least 35-40 German villages, that is 20% of the German settlements, with the exception of individual yards, have mostly disappeared.

The German settlements all remained **purely German**. Only a few (approximately 2-4) Russians have settled, so in Strasbourg, 2 are in the cheese-making trade and 1 engaged as an accountant in the tractor station. There are no Jews.

Therefore, it is very seldom that **mixed marriages** take place. In the home villages of the interviewed Volga Germans no case of an mixed marriage is known. On the other hand, they all say that, contrary to earlier times, it is happening much more that marriages end up in divorce.

This seems to be the case especially in larger villages influenced by the lack of civilized manners of the city culture. There is no known case in Strasbourg.

People talk to each other only in German, as they call it Low German (*plattdeutsch*), in reality it is the Hessian dialect. Rusch and Magel can hardly speak Russian, although they served in the Russian army.

I was able to establish beyond a doubt the following **economic and political** conditions:

1. The collective system was forcibly introduced in all villages in 1929. Up to this year, life was bearable. Then the distress started. 1929 was also the year when thousands of Volga Germans were banished. Unanimously, all 4 (some time ago I spoke with Demmler from Laub) said that over the half of the inhabitants were sent in exile. Whole rows of houses became empty. They demolished these houses and built collective building (Kolchosgebaeude), or they just let them deteriorate. **Kotlas**, Gouv. Wologodsk and Kasakstan were specified as the places of exile. A number of new German settlements had to be created in these areas. The people had to clear the woods here and make the land capable of cultivation.

2. Out of this mass banishment, the people were banished in the following years:

- (a) The Brotherhood (*Stundenbrüder*), Prayer Brethren (*Betbrüder*) in 1936-1937.
- (b) Due to stealing out of necessity in the years 1931-36 (these were banished for a limited time and sometimes came back home). Due to hunger and despair, people have taken food from the collective or from the field, which was charged against them as theft of State goods.
- (c) Political opponents (= deserters)
- (d) Due to violation of the working discipline, many ended up in prison or exile. Coming late to work 3-4 times was enough for someone to end up in prison for a few years, or to be sent into exile.

3. There was agreement that the largest **famine** was not in 1921/1922, but in 1931-1936, and the one again in 1933/1934 was called the worst. 15-20% of the population was to have starved! Magel gives the number as 1,500 for Balzer. In his own family, 5 people starved, the parents and 3 siblings. The people sat at the gate of the yard and gnawed on their fingers. Dogs, cats, mice, and rabbits were eaten! In Norka, a mother butchered her two little boys. She was then shot and her daughter was thrown into prison.

Churches have all been converted into clubs. It was torn down in Balzer. At home, many devotions are still held with singing. To my question, whether people would go back to church, if allowed, both replied at the same time: O yes, yes. The youth, too? "Yes, real fast (*krell*)."

All 4 Volga Germans are overwhelmed. They are all, every one of them fed up with Bolshevism and are waiting for deliverance by means of Germany.

[Translation Ends]