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The Holocaust in Ukraine – German Mass Shootings

Translation: B08 Babi Yar survivor Iakov Steiuk tells his story to the NKGB, 12 November 1943

Copy

Record of Interrogation

November 12, 1943 Kyiv

I, Authorized Operative of the Second Department of the UkrSSR NKGB, Senior State Security Lieutenant Mostovoi, interrogated on this date as a witness regarding the burning of corpses of victims of the German occupiers during their stay in Kyiv

citizen Yakov Andreevich Steiuk, born in 1915 in Khotyn (Bessarabia), a Jew, citizen of the USSR, from the family of a white-collar worker, non-Party member, by profession a radio technician, education incomplete higher, residing at 30 Mezhyhirs'ka Street, Apt. 17, Kyiv.

Question: Where were you living and what was your occupation before the start of the Patriotic War?

Answer: Before the war I lived in the city of Chernivtsi. Living in the said city since 1924, I first attended a *gymnasium* and a polytechnic institute in Bucharest and did my military service in the Romanian army. After the arrival of the Soviet authorities in June 1940 I worked as the chief of the planning department at the Chernivtsi knitted-goods factory Hercules. I was in this position when the war that began as a result of the treacherous attack by fascist Germany against the Soviet Union broke out.

Question: How did you find yourself in Kyiv?

Answer: On July 2, 1941 I was evacuated with a group of workers from Chernivtsi with instructions to report to the Main Administration of the Knitted-Goods Industry in Kyiv. On July 8, the group of workers with which I was moving could not go on any more because during the night of July 7 to 8 the city was occupied by German troops. Many of the workers in my group died as a result of German terror. I personally concealed myself and left for Kam"ianets'-Podil's'kyi. There, concealing my true nationality [ethnic identity], I managed to get a job as a storeman at an oil refinery, where I worked until August 18, 1942. In view of the threat of being executed and subjected to arrest, I managed to be transferred to the regional administration of a German oil company (the Ukrainöl company) in Kyiv, where I worked from August 18, 1942 until July 7, 1943.

Question: What was the cause of the interruption in your employment?

Answer: The cause of the interruption in my employment was my arrest by the SD (the Gestapo). I was arrested on July 7, 1943 and charged with not being of "Aryan" descent and being by nationality a Jew.

Question: How many times were you interrogated by the SD, and how did you manage to conceal your true nationality?

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Answer: I was interrogated by the SD once, on June 9. When I began categorically denying my nationality, they subjected me to a medical examination by their staff doctor Lazarenko, who concluded that I was a Jew. After being imprisoned without further interrogation in an SD cell (33 Korolenko Street) until July 25, I was sent to the Syrets'kyi camp.

Question: Were you interrogated after you arrived at the Syrets'kyi camp?

Answer: Yes, the first day, when I arrived at the camp, I was called out and asked about my nationality, and when I insisted on my testimony that I was not a Jew, I was severely beaten, as a result of which my right little finger was broken and I was sent back to the camp, to a specially equipped dug-out intended for Jews (dug-out no. 2). As I learned later from other prisoners and from a personal conversation with the SS orderly officer Rader, the inmates in dug-out no. 2 were doomed to subsequent physical extermination.

Question: Describe in detail what you know about the burning of the corpses of victims of terror by the German occupiers.

Answer: Having been sent on August 18, 1943 along with another hundred men to work at Babyn Yar (the place of mass execution of the population of Kyiv), which was under SD jurisdiction.

After arriving at Babyn Yar we were all put in shackles that stayed on us day and night and did not return to the camp.

It is essential to note the circumstance that the guards here were not Ukrainian policemen, as was the case at the Syrets'kyi camp, but exclusively specially selected German gendarmes. At first we did not know the purpose of our excavations, and only on the sixth day, when we had excavated a pit about four metres deep, did we discover a large quantity of human corpses among which there were women, old men and children.

Question: Could you show the excavation site now?

Answer: Yes, I know the excavation site well and can even show the place where iron was buried for the construction of the platforms on which the corpses were burned.

Question: How was the burning of corpses carried out?

Answer: The corpses were in part raised from the pits with hooks and in part by mechanical means using a Polik excavator. The exhumed corpses were laid in layers on specially arranged platforms. After each layer of corpses firewood was spread out and doused with spent motor oil mixed with paraffin. Then, when several layers of corpses and firewood had been arranged to a height of four metres, the platform was set on fire, and in this manner about five thousand corpses were burnt at the same time. No less than ten such platforms were constructed during the work from August 18 to 29.

Question: To what category of persons can you assign the corpses of the exhumed and burnt victims of the Fascist terror?

Answer: As I have already indicated, the overwhelming majority of the exhumed corpses were those of civilians, and they included women and men of various ages and also children. Only at one site at Babyn Yar, where about two thousand corpses were discovered, was it possible to conclude on the basis of the appearance and the preserved clothing that these were the corpses of executed prisoners of war from the officers' ranks of the Red Army.

Question: Name the persons who directed the exhumation and burning of the corpses.

Answer: Of the persons who directed the exhumation and burning of the corpses I personally know the following: SS-Sturmscharführer Topide, who was the technical director of the work and was at the same time the cruelest in respect to the prisoners. He personally executed prisoners who had committed an offence and apparently had himself taken part in the mass executions of the peaceful population of Kyiv in 1941 because he knew all the places where the corpses of victims of the fascist terror were buried. His assistants were Gendarmerie-Hauptwachtmeister Merkel (from Munich), Gendarmerie-Hauptwachtmeister Vogt, Rottenführer Rewer and others whose surnames I cannot provide. It is necessary to note that the Germans took the work of exhuming and burning the corpses extremely seriously, which was evident from the fact that the SD commanding officer (a Waffen-SS colonel whose surname I do not know) and his deputy, a Waffen-SS major, personally visited the exhumation site almost every day.

Question: How did you manage to escape execution?

Answer: Two of the prisoners who were exhuming and burning corpses and who were metal workers by trade and I managed to get a key to the lock on the dug-out where prisoners were housed at Babyn Yar, and on the night of September 28–29, 1943 we opened the door to the dug-out, which was in the form of grating, and, using pliers and a chisel that the metal workers who were working on the excavator had been using, we unfettered about thirty prisoners and escaped from Babyn Yar, first having thrown sand and stones at the sentry who was on duty and who was armed with a sub-machine-gun.

Question: Name those persons who escaped from Babyn Yar and whom you know personally.

Answer: I personally know the following comrades who escaped with me:

1. Georgii Bazhanov, a civil engineer who until his arrest worked at a mill in Vasyl'kiv;
2. Fedor Yershov, who worked for the NKVD before the war and during the occupation was a member of an underground party organization that was active in the Kyiv region, and was connected to a partisan detachment;
3. Lyonia Kadonskii, a metal worker who was employed before his arrest as a shop manager at a weaving factory in Kyiv;
4. Nikolai, a radio technician from the village of Motovylyvka whose surname and other details I do not know;
5. A foreman from the town of Polonne in the Kam"ianets'Podil's'kyi region who worked at the camp as a tailor;
6. Vladimir, a metal worker whose surname I do not remember although I know that he resided in Kyiv and was friends with Kadynskii;
7. Vladimir Davydov, an engineering technician, resident of Kyiv, and other persons whose surnames I do not know. I know nothing about where these persons are at this time.

Question: Where did you hide after you escaped from Babyn Yar?

Answer: After escaping from Babyn Yar I hid for the first few days in a cellar in the Kurenivka district, and then on September 30 went to stay with a co-worker, Bronislava Adamchuk, who was living at 2 Pol'ova Street in Kyiv, where I stayed until October 16. From Pol'ova Street I went to stay with a co-worker, Comrade Sviderskii, who was the chief of staff of a partisan

detachment with the railway party district committee and who resided at 30 Mezhyhirs'ka Street, Apt. 17, where I am still living.

Question: What would you like to add to your testimony?

Answer: I should like to add that the burnt corpses were thoroughly examined, and in this process all valuable items found in the clothing were removed and gold teeth were extracted. I should also like to add that the fresh corpses of SD victims that were brought for burning had obviously been asphyxiated by being enclosed in the hermetically sealed body of the lorry, where exhaust fumes were admitted from the exhaust pipe of the lorry in which new victims of Fascist terror were brought for burning.

Question: Were victims often brought in the said lorry for subsequent burning at Babyn Yar?

Answer: On average the lorry came twice every Monday and Friday every Sunday during the time that I worked there. On average forty to forty-five corpses of asphyxiated people were thrown out.

Question: Can you develop and supplement your testimony?

Answer: I have nothing to supplement my testimony. The record of my statements has been written down correctly and read by me, which I confirm with my signature.

Ia. Steiuk

Interrogated by: Authorized Operative of the Second Department of the UkrSSR NKGB,
Senior State Security Lieutenant

Mostovoi

Faithful [copy]: Deputy Commander the Branch of the NKGB Administration for the Kyiv
Region, State Security Lieutenant

[m.s.] V. Lavrenko

Lavrenko

[Seal]

November 28, 1943

Kyiv

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translated by Marco Carynnyk