

Bessarabia Resettlement – Four Experiences

Heimat-Kalender 1976 der Bessarabiendeutschen

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Note: The following translation deals with four difference recollections of events that took place during the time that the Soviet army moved into Bessarabia in 1940 and took over the administration of the country and its inhabitants. **Part 1-page 1:** Ludwig Layher, in *Zero Hour for the People of Bessarabia*, interviews several people who related what they experienced personally. **Part 2-page 5:** Eduard Rüb, in *Assistance in the Local Resettlement Commission*, talks about what he experienced as a member of the local Sarata Resettlement Commission. **Part 3-page 8:** Theodor Wursthorn, in *Last Phase of the Resettlement*, speaks about his experiences as one of three German men left behind by the Resettlement Commission to wrap up the process of resettlement. He himself served as a German employee and interpreter. **Part 4-page 13:** Theodor Wursthorn, *Encounter with the Soviets in 1940*, writes about his experiences as the director of the Business Association in Arzis. Information within [square brackets] indicate translator’s comment. Translated with Permission from Stuttgart, Germany.

Part 1

Zero Hour for the People of Bessarabia – 28 June, 1940

Author: Ludwig Layher
HK 1976 - Pages 40-44

[Translation Begins]

The Second World War was already raging in the tenth month; September 1939-June 1940! Peace still reigned in our fatherland Romania, and the Bessarabian farmer was still doing his usual work. But “deep peace” and without misgiving time was no more. Every now and then the prudent hand of the father was missing, the labor power of the adult son and the pulling power of the best horses! Call ups of troops and requisitions and partial mobilization put pressure on the minds; in the hopefully opened German “church schools” the teachers were missing. Instead of the usual autumn maneuvers, soldiers and conscripted reservists move on to trench work; Räscheshti behind Huschi becomes the embodiment of all the trench work, and at home mothers and daughters struggle to spring cultivate the fields.

Then His Majesty, King Charles II, comes to Kischinev, the capital of the country. I am a soldier in the 10th Rifleman Regiment in Tighina and dressed for the parade. But then everything is

stopped again; a Soviet airplane “whips in” and flies over our garrison and Tighina! From now on it is one alarm after the other until finally, in May of 1940, our Battalion is moved from Tighina to Huschi.

Many people from South Bessarabia travel from Räscheshti to German villages in Northern Bessarabia, many as Sunday holidaymakers, some as teachers, in order to hold the Sunday worship service there as sextons in the remote villages.

After the Polish campaign, Russia is awarded a small part of North Bukovina. It was an all too quick reminder that Bessarabia was also a bone of contention. Who could predict that the “Bessarabia Question” will not become urgent again. No one wanted to give up this idea, but in the dark background of such thought processes one saw analogous processes in Latvia, Estonia, Volhynia and the Narew River region [NE Poland]; the Germans were resettled from such “bone of contention regions.” With the horror, there was a consolation!

Germany and Russia are still friendly powers and Romania is still neutral. But then it comes, the zero hour for Bessarabia: in an exchange of notes between the foreign ministers of these three countries, the solution to the Bessarabian Question is pressed in June of 1940!

The “State Council” (*Sfatul țării* / *Landesrat*) meets on this question and discusses the “ultimatum;” surrender of Bessarabia from Romania to Russia within three days, beginning on 28 June, 1940, at 2:00 PM!

The chairman of the People's Council of the Bessarabian German Ethnic Group, Dr. Otto Broneske, by virtue of his office, is a member of this State Council and is in Bucharest. After the “yes” to the ultimatum, he travels back to Bessarabia with this knowledge and fear in order to show to show the loyalty of the Germans to the new occupying power. He cannot deliver more.

“How do I tell my child,” could now be the question in the communication sense. Unaware, day after day, the farmers drove out of the field to cut down their corn, and yet again it was not so unsuspecting!?

Memory is fading 35 years later, and it is difficult for us to write down everything accurate in word and time. But one should do that before everything disappears. From interviews it should be noted:

L.S.: As usual, on 28 June, 1940, I went to pick corn (*Welschkornhacken*) with strangers, female day laborers. It was on the “Shepherd's Path,” where the roads to Gnadental and Arzis forked. Until noon, there was no special traffic on these roads, but rather an eerie and frightening silence. But then it came to life: police and rural police (*Gendarmen*) and vehicles, looking to escape, were increasingly following, and all seemed obsessed with dangerous haste, haste and confusion! This also worried me, and since it began to drizzle lightly, I decided to harness up—and, if nothing more, to go home! But I did not drive down the shepherd's hill in order to not encounter these vehicles, but went “above the vineyards,” over to the road to Neu-Arzis. From there, I then took Mill Street where my sister-in-law living there told me the news of the surrender of

Bessarabia. Then I drove through the whole village to get home to my yard. Zero Hour had already arrived in the village. It was on everyone's lips.

W.L.: On 27 June, 1940, as in the morning before, we prepared the wagons for the trip to pick corn. But things turned out differently. My wife whispered to me that it was better that I would stay and get the midwife. By noon, I was with father of my eldest son. The next day, 28 June, quite early, I was interested in getting to the corn field over there at the "Inclined Road." Even before noon, I had "gone through" so much of the reserve that I could believe that it was sufficient for the whole day, left the younger brother out there with the day laborers, and rushed home. But when I drove down the hill from the Neu-Arzis road into the village and finally came to the makeshift bridge (the real bridge had torn away in the spring high water), I noticed the dashing and chasing around in the yard of the rural police. "There must be something in the air," went through my head. "The chief is packing. The Russians are coming," someone shouts to me at the entrance to the yard and warns me to quickly let the horses "disappear." because those in flight had seized his rested horses. "Oh God," I am thinking, "Jacob is unlucky over there at the 'Inclined Road' which is surely an escape route for the retreating military." In order to save him, along with horses, I hurry out into the field again and guide him and horses into a hiding place over there in the vineyards. And they were not the first ones there who spent the first hours of Day Zero in suspense and fear, and only dared to go home when it was dark.

I.S.-Friedensfeld: On 28 June 1940, I drove unsuspectingly with day laborers to the corn fields. Unsuspectingly, we drove home quite early in the afternoon. But already at the first houses they called to me: "You know that the Russians are coming." (*Waischt scho, D-Russa kommat*) As if in shock, I kept driving and, for all that, noticed much activity in yards and on the street. "We are not going over to the valley of the well (*Nix wir nüber ins Brunntental*)," people shout, because here and there already rested horses that had been taken out of the stables and horse owners forced to haul away rural police and fleeing officials—in the direction of the Pruth River, to the Old Kingdom of Romania.

F.S.-Andrejewka: My neighbor across the street had a radio. In the early news (6:00 a.m.?), he heard the news of the surrender of Bessarabia to Russia and immediately took to the streets with this message. There I met him with several men in excited conversation. "Our beautiful time is gone," was the first general comment. And already the first terrible news chased through the place: fleeing Romanians from Akkerman grabbed the first best horse and wagon—with and without drivers—and hurried with it to the west, to the Old Kingdom. Due to uncertainty, hardly anyone came to a respectable day's work on this day of Zero Hour!

The radio was the first news source about the peaceful surrender of Bessarabia, without further comment, without any condition indications and without mention of a possible later resettlement of the German ethnic group. The Romanian troops leave without a fight, and with them also the rural police, officials and employees of the administrative apparatus. After four days, the Pruth River was the border and—iron curtain! Newspapers stopped coming, the batteries of the radios provided less electricity from day to day. Soon, this news source had also come to a standstill. We lived from one regulation to the other and in the constant hope of resettlement.

With much fresher memories than today, I designed a short role piece “Goodbye to Lichtental” for the first Lichtental Gathering (*Lichtentaler Treffen*) on 20 Mai 1956, in which “speakers” presented situations from those days. From a tape we broadcast the radio message as if it had been “then”—today 35 years ago—“Romania leaves Bessarabia in stages within three days, according to the ultimatum from Moscow!” (*Romania cedeaza pe etape in timp de trei zile Basarabia conform ultimatumului din Moscova / Rumänien tritt in Etappen innerhalb drei Tagen Bessarabien gemäß dem Ultimatum aus Moskau ab!*)

Then the jailer (*Büttel*) appeared, called out and read the new ordinances, then a farmer's wife who let her heart run free! Since it was only a “play” that could have acted out and happened differently in another place, we omit these monologs here and leave it up to the reader to rummage in his memory and bring to mind that which would lead himself to that Zero Hour.

In Lichtental, the jailer appeared, rang the bell and announced:

“From today, every person in Lichtental has to indicate daily, in the evening, to a designated recorder what he has worked during the day. In addition, collection points for the acceptance of grain are set up in the ‘*Deutsche Haus*’ and in some farmsteads. Everyone must submit their delivery to the books immediately. The grain must be flawless and clean, otherwise the supplier will be turned away. The delivery quantity is certified by ‘*Taloni*.’ [stock exchange tokens] Those who have not yet paid their taxes for the whole of 1940 must pay them immediately. A grape collection center will soon be set up at Lorenz Scheid’s place. No wine may be made for your own cellar. Resulting in punishment, it is forbidden to mow soybeans with the machine. They must be plucked by hand. There are no more day laborers. These are used for the construction of an airfield. The horses are to plow daily. Lichtental, 20 August, 1940!” —A female farmer then commented in the “play”:

"He has again read out to us a present. He recently stated that it is forbidden to procure goods such as sugar, tobacco, matches, soap, fabric and the like in free trade. The ‘*Konsum*’ and the other shops would soon be replenished, and there will be no shortage! Look, my basket is empty! I come from the store. ‘*Budit*—is still coming,’ someone told me there. What if I did not have my own tomatoes (*Patletschanna*)? And all travel is forbidden. Our German teachers should continue on language courses and learn Russian! We housekeepers must suffer in these circumstances just as much as our men! There is no mention of clothes or sweets for the children. For my Christian, I could not get a single cigarette, not even a pouch of tobacco. The black market traders are already demanding a whole pud [ca. 16 kg/36 lbs] of wheat for this. And we delivered it without getting cash for it, and with the ‘*Taloni*’ you cannot buy anything! It is no longer a pleasure for a farmer's wife. Our neighbors have already run out of flour, and the millers are stuffing?! The servants fetch the wine from the cellar as if they were ‘*Chasain*’ (Court lords). One good thing is that there are so many radios in the village. One will still operate and catch some good news for us. The good old days are gone for Lichtental!”

Then a radio, again in a matter of fact way, “plays in the play” and broadcasts: “This is Germany sending! We bring news! Berlin: A Resettlement Commission is on the Danube and has today set up in Galati. It will carry out the repatriation of the German-born colonists of Bessarabia.

The agreement has already been concluded and in force between Berlin and Moscow. We salute the German ethnic groups in Bessarabia!”

Thus the Zero Hour ended in Bessarabia, initiated on 28 June 1940.

[Translation Ends]

Part 2

Assistance in the Local Resettlement Commission

Author: Eduard Rüb

HK 1976 - Pages 44-47

[Translation Begins]

With this issue of the Home Calendar for 1976, in the autumn of 1975, about 35 years have passed since our resettlement from Bessarabia. My experiences as a member of the local Sarata Resettlement Commission are still as vividly remembered as if they had only taken place yesterday. Therefore, I would like to note some of them here.

Long before the resettlement, a group of young men in my former hometown, including myself (today I am 80), was given the task of identifying all immovable property and making accurate lists of them. This was the first signal to the assumption that our ethnic group could also be resettled.

On 26 June, 1940, in an ultimatum to Romania, Soviet Russia demanded the surrender of Bessarabia, which was then occupied in a hurry by the Red Army in the period from 26 to 28 June, after the withdrawal of the Romanians. Soon after the occupation, the civilian administration also came, and the first thing was the election of the *Selsowjet* (village council). In my hometown, as chairman of the council, our former cow and horse herder was elected to the village council, in addition to the Jews and Russians, also a German, Traugott Winger, who, through his good linguistic knowledge and his beautiful writing, was immediately confirmed in the office as secretary. This was of great importance to us Germans, as we could always find out what was going on in the local Soviet Council through our informant.

The NKVD occupied rooms of the Werner School. As nearby neighbors reported, rich foreigners were handed over there, interrogated, tortured and taken (*verschleppt*) to the interior of Russia. There was an eerie fear among the population. A person looked with alarm at what lay ahead and was extremely concerned about what this regime would bring us. The land and our homes had been nationalized, that is to say, expropriated, and we should from now on pay a high rent for our houses. The harvest had to be brought in and delivered. In the *Finodel* (tax office), which was set up by the municipal notary Strehle, all landowners—mostly Jews—had to register and were heavily taxed. Once, when I was walking by, I saw Jews coming out very

agitated and crying. When I asked why they were crying, they said that they could not possibly pay the taxes that had been levied on them.

Finally, on 5 September, 1940, the agreement between Germany and the USSR on the resettlement of the Germans in Bessarabia was signed. This radio news was sad and yet reassuring for us Germans.

In October, the German and Russian Resettlement Commission arrived in my hometown and immediately began their work. Our commission consisted of three Reich Germans, chaired by Dr. Mauer, and two Russian officers, both Jews. The group of young men mentioned earlier was assigned to the Relocation Commission to help. The lists of immovable property that we produced at the time were therefore a great help in the official collection of assets by the Reich-German Commission.

The two Russian officers were also busy assessing the houses. In my precinct (*Bezirk*), I was assigned to accompany Lieutenant Friedmann in the building assessment. We went from yard to yard. At first, I had to measure the length of the buildings with a stick of one meter in length, but soon I was only measuring by visual estimation, and Mr. Friedmann recorded everything in his writing pad. He had strange views and ideas about the value of a building, which often led to differences and disputes between us. As an example, I would like to mention the house of a fellow countryman which was completed and inhabited, but had no exterior plaster. In the eyes of the lieutenant, this house was dilapidated and quite inferior. My house, which was plastered with cement and where the living room had been painted by a painter with stencils, it had made a good impression on him and he thought that this house could also be in the city. Maybe he just wanted to compliment me, because I took on a lot of work in his behalf and did some errands for him. When we came to my brother's house, which was new and probably one of the most beautiful and expensive in our village, he saw a small crack in a corner and thought that this house also was inferior and dilapidated!

In the sexton's residence next to the elementary school, a room was set up to receive sums of money in lei [Romanian currency] and rubles [Russian currency]. In addition, each family was able to take 2,000 lei on the journey. Although the money was given in exchange for a receipt, the depositors were not all that sure what the Russians were later planning with the money they paid in, because they were now the masters of the country. Only 50 kg [110 lbs] per person could be taken along as luggage, so a lot of furniture and other valuable objects of daily use would have had to remain in the house, unless the stranger population of the surrounding villages would have streamed in and bought most of these things. The money—especially the Romanian lei—no longer mattered, because they wanted to get rid of it now. From these sales, almost every family had so much money that they were afraid to entrust it to the official tax office.

On this occasion, a secret deposit system was created, which was made known not only in my hometown, but also in the surrounding German villages. This money collection point was entrusted to me, and soon considerable sums of money flowed into my house from all directions. The money was a big concern for our safety, and I asked that I be given, at least during the night, a person as a night watch, which also happened. By the way, I also had to keep a contribution book, because all depositors diverted a generous contribution of money from their amounts.

These were used for various purposes, but mostly distributed to less fortunate fellow countrymen. The contributions arrived so plentifully that, before I left the German Resettlement Commission, I was able to hand over about 60,000 in lei and ruble for their use. One day we were informed that the German Consul was coming from Cernowitz. We should put the money paid into as small as possible a package and make it disappear inconspicuously under the seat of the chauffeur. The money was sorted by some helpers and me by denominations, counted, wrapped and the total amount noted on the wrapping. After that, the lists of depositors were compiled. I cannot remember the exact amount of the money, but a few million had come together.

To protect the money from external influences, we took a flour sack, as it was used by our farmers, and packed the money in layers into it. Unfortunately, the package became very bulky and it was supposed to be as inconspicuous as possible. For lack of a suitable press, two men held open the sack, and a third stepped in to squeeze down the money packets with his feet. The package became flat and correspondingly small due to this treatment. Later, we laughed a lot about this Swabian prank, and we were sorry that we were unable to take a picture of this operation. The lists were placed on top of the money, and the package was tied up tightly. The Consul arrived at the intended hour and was invited to a noon meal by a fellow countryman. He and his chauffeur were already aware of the money action, and so everything went as planned. The chauffeur had to refill water for the car, and, of course, we directed him to the fellow countryman's yard where the package was waiting to be made to disappear. While the water was being refilled, the money was quickly stored under the driver's seat. On the way back, we met a Russian car with two officers. We already felt betrayed and figured we would be stopped and searched. But they just overtook us and drove on. So we happily went back and guarded the car, sitting on the steps while the chauffeur got his food.

After this event, another million came to us and, to our relief, we received the news that the same Consul was going to be in Tarutino at a certain time. The money—ready bundled—came together with the lists in a suitcase, and since the young men were all busy, my wife had to bring the suitcase to Tarutino. In the train, which consisted only of freight cars occupied by many Red Army men, my wife sat with the valuable suitcase and waited nervously for a soldier to say, “Well, mother, open your suitcase!” (*Nu Mamasha, otkro sche tvoi chemodanchik!*) But she arrived at her brother in Tarutino, successfully and unmolested. When he saw the money, he thought it was unforgivable recklessness to run such a daring undertaking in these uncertain times.

To my knowledge, these secret money operations were carried out not only in my hometown, but also in other resettlement centers, so that considerable sums of money reached Germany in these round-about ways. Whether the individual depositors ever fully recovered their funds is not clear to me.

Many of our fellow countrymen did not know what we had to do on a voluntary basis at the Resettlement Commission, while they were able to pack all sorts of impossible things in peace to be brought into the Reich, in our spare time we moved the scale here and there in the living rooms to make sure to not take more than 35 kg [77 lbs] per person.

There was never any thank you or recognition on the part of the Resettlement Commission for our efforts during the resettlement period, nor by the competent authorities of the Third Reich. Well, we have, in the end, also dared to do our work for our fellow countrymen.

[Translation Ends]

Part 3

Last Phase of the Resettlement

Author: Theodor Wursthorn

HK 1976 – Pages 47-53

[Translation Begins]

The Resettlement Commission had completed its work on what had to do with the resettlement of the Bessarabian German people. The people were evacuated. First the old and the sick, the women and children and, after a few days, also the men with the trek. The village was empty. Three German men were left behind by the Resettlement Commission: the Local Authorized Officer (*Ortsbevollmächtigte*), Mr. Depner, the assessor, Mr. Müller (by profession official treasurer), and as a German employee and interpreter, the writer of this report. The Russian Commission consisted of three members: the Local Authorized Officer—a real Russian from over there—and two assessors, the first of whom was also from over there and a graduate of Leninist schools, stuffed with communist dogmas. The second was the local chairman of the municipal council. In this case, what for Alt-Elft was the well-known former field dog catcher from Vädeni (Vedensk). What follows is that I, responsible for the area of Alt-Elft—B9—except for generally applicable events, was to report on events from this municipality, and, as far as I know, from the surrounding villages. In general, the report was to be assessed as tailored for every other locality.

The second and final task of the Resettlement Commission was to calculate and evaluate the assets left behind by those who resettled and relinquished to the Russians. The figures established should now be acknowledged and confirmed by the Russian Commission. There was hardly a case of agreement. The Russian proved to be a stubborn and uncompromising negotiating partner. Every single piece, every horse, every sheep, every plow was haggled over. According to the Russians, the total number of animals and machines left in the community was not correct. The condition, age and dimensions of the buildings were objected to, although the real information could be proven locally.

Today we hear the diplomats' phrase, which is so often used and almost customary, that a 'full agreement' has been reached in negotiations. Well, the German members of the Resettlement Commission were not politically accredited diplomats, but at least they had the necessary training for their mission and were given appropriate powers. I often had a good time admiring the skilful negotiating wisdom of our German authorized officers. And yet it was difficult to reach agreement in even one case. Time and again, the Russians' hard "no" was met. When the

negotiations were deadlocked, it was decided to go to the District Staff (*Gebietsstab*) at Beresina in order to find a solution. There, the Russian Local Authorized Officer was accused, in our presence, in a not exactly polite manner, of crude accusations by his superior Russian District Authorized Officer, and instructions were given to proceed more reasonably in the future. Arriving back home, the same haggling and argumentative talk continued. The trips to the district staff were repeated, but as always, to no avail. Finally, the tug-of-war had to realize that one was not sincere here and that the Russian Local Authorized Officer had no binding negotiating powers. As in Alt-Elft, it was the same in all the other places. Probably at the direction of higher Russian authorities.

It was a gloomy autumn day when, after a previous meeting with the Russian Commission, we went to Katzbach to assess the buildings. Like Alt-Elft, Katzbach belonged to the same local area of Be-9. We were amazed and surprised when a carriage harnessed with two gray horses pulled up and picked us up. That is what the Russian Authorized Officer wanted. I recognized the horses as that of Bernhard Spies from Alt-Elft. The Russian Authorized Officer stopped on the Katzbach hill. One had a good view of the village. He asked, "Mr. Depner, what do they ask for all of Katzbach?" The answer: "To make an offer in this regard exceeds your powers. But it does not take long and Mr. Müller (the assessor) can tell us the price based on his documents." Then the Russian replied: "Then we have to go to work." We drove through the whole of Katzbach to the last house. In the meantime, the Council chairman had now joined us. He, too, is a former field dog catcher; I recognized him by his trimmed black and white colored lip mustache. One could believe that the corporation had sent its members to the abandoned German villages as community council chairmen. One looked at the building from the outside and inside, checked the dimensions. The Russian Local Authorized Officer asks the comrade of the council: "What is the house made of?"

The one asked scratched the wall with a sharp object and said, "The walls are made of raw mud bricks (*Batzen*), and the roof is made of rafters, slats and is covered with reeds." Turning to Mr. Depner, the Russian Authorized Officer said, "When I go to the floor of the house and dance a real Cossack dance, the house will collapse, so all of you have to stay outside so that no one is harmed; I am responsible for everyone." This assessment of the building was overly poor. It was a shepherd's house. Community-owned houses of this kind had usually been built at the end of the village. They were not the most beautiful, but at least solid and roomy enough for a family. But there were more recently built shepherd's dwellings that could be seen. In any event, with this judgment, the gentleman did not want to acknowledge the estimated value of the building. This was followed by a visit to the buildings on a farmyard. Here, too, the local chairman identified the building materials of the individual buildings: stones, wood, roof tiles. The Russian Authorized Officer did not want to try to demolish the buildings, but he developed a completely different, for us a new perspective. "What are all the building materials: wood, stones, limestone, sand, gravel? Natural products and deposits in the earth, thus totally and especially state property and as such are available to every citizen free of charge. What assessment is recorded in a book about a building is only the work that is spent in the construction. Only this counts and forms the value of the object. It should be kept in mind that capital 'labor' pays for itself after a certain number of years, that is to say, it is used up. In other words, the work spent has been compensated by the use of the buildings. For further habitation and use of the buildings, the occupant (owners do not exist in our way of thinking) must pay rent

to the state.” According to this interpretation of the legal relations in the Soviet state, the three German people were struck speechless. They looked at each other in disbelief. Mr. Müller folded his swollen file with the asset lists of the resettled people of Katzbach. After a while, Mr. Depner said: “Mr. Comrade Authorized Officer, we want to go back. The people of Katzbach have too great a debt.”

It was clear that negotiations could not proceed any further in this manner. The negotiations were similarly simmering in the other local areas. The Resettlement Staff decided to settle property matters at the central level—with the District Staff (*Gebietsstab*). On 5 November, 1940, all the Resettlement Commando was recalled from the local areas in the relevant district to Beresina, where it was then possible to work at a higher level with the Russian Regional Staff and Chief Staff Authorized Officer to come to a satisfactory result. On 11 November, 1940, we met for the last time with our Soviets from the local areas. Now much more flexible and willing. They had instructions, and a higher authority had responsibilities and binding powers. The mission of the German Resettlement Commission was completed. The German people, who were the first to be involved, were at long last out of danger and what they had left behind had been taken into account. The Russians have often presented us with problems in their behavior.

But I was very surprised by the Local Authority Officer Comrade von Alt-Elft when he said to me at the farewell: “See you again in Berlin!” That was in Beresina on 11 November, 1940. At that time I did not know that this was the day of the beginning of the crazy time, I would otherwise have understood it as a carnival joke (*Karnevalscherz*). The Russian certainly did not know that either. Four and a half years later, it could have been true. It was only by accident that we both did not say “Hello” to each other in Berlin.

Before I conclude the report on the work of the Resettlement Commission, it should be noted that the resettler had the opportunity to hand over his cash to German Local Authority Officers for receipt, both in lei amounts and in ruble amounts. Also the money that the men had paid for a receipt, either on the day before or the evening before the departure of the trek, all these amounts have been paid to the Chief Resettlement Staff at Tarutino. I do not know what was done with the money. However, during the stay in the resettlement camp, advances were repeatedly paid out on the basis of the receipts. In my case, it was once the City Bank Pausa in Vogtland [a district in the southwest part of Saxony] and a second time the Dresden Bank, Litzmannstadt Branch. The conversion rate was: 100 lei = RM 2 [Reich Mark], — 1 ruble = RM 0.50. The German Resettlement Trouhand Society, Berlin W 8, has issued payment application forms to resettlers from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Thereafter, as a camp occupant, one could apply for his remaining balance, provided that it was not more than RM 200, and as a camp release no more than RM 500. In the application, which, among other things, indicates whether one has debts to other resettlers and, if necessary, lists them. It can be assumed that some of our people are in possession of receipts for paid-in funds. Today they are only a memory of times of an uncertain future, but they were also a guarantee of safe rescue from the clutches of the Russian bear.

In addition, there are observations and impressions that are dealt with here and can only be reproduced in detail because they are taken from the copy of a letter from the Pausa resettlement camp in Vogtland written to Mr. Herbert Weiß, formerly a teacher in Teplitz.

After the departure of the last men with the trek, I came a few more times on the way from Alt-Elft to Arzis through Teplitz. The picture here was the same as there.: Silent and abandoned houses, the farmyards. From time to time one of the new villagers or Red Guards was seen. Witnesses of touching attachment and fidelity to their masters were the dogs, who still guarded the abandoned yards and houses. They were often seen sitting at the front door with a miserable howling and waiting. Since they did not want to open up, they searched elsewhere in the yard or on the street for their brothers. There they met in droves with fellows of the same fate. In packs, they laid siege to the streets and were able to make the passer-by sad and compassionate. Another picture: All the farmyard entrances in Alt-Elft and Teplitz were barricaded with boards, ladders and Harbi [wagon] ladders, so that the cattle, returning from the pasture, could not find their way to their own crib, there to stay overnight or to be milked.

In Teplitz, the decorated farmyards of Simon Zacher, August Handel and Erfle, opposite Handel, were accordingly prepared: windows were nailed shut with boards for protection, the rear part of the yard was divided off as a milking parlor, facing the street as a residential place. Also, for the other animals, spacious yards have been set up separately according to the kind of animal. The entire living inventory of the village was a collective economy, managed by the municipal administration. Because there were no experts in Alt-Elft, the Alt-Elft milk was brought to the dairy in Teplitz, so that there was no milk dispute in Alt-Elft at that time. Butter was made, but none was consumed in place. Without the permission of the municipal administration, no feather-footed animal was allowed to suffer. On the other hand, in Alt-Elft, all dogs were given the death sentence. On 2 November, they were caught with nooses on long poles and loaded onto an enclosed wagon that was travelling from yard to yard. On a yard designated as the place of execution, they were simply beaten to death in a brutal manner. The skins were used. People from the surrounding Bulgarian and Russian villages were sent to the abandoned German villages to feed the cattle indefinitely, to harvest the corn and the grapes, as well as other arranged work. The military was also used for this purpose. People found their food in collective kitchens. A lot of time was taken up every morning for the appeals and the division of labor. When the corn harvest was brought in, every worker was promised 20% of the work he had done. Were people rewarded to this extent? You yourself doubts that. When we left Alt-Elft on 5 November, only a small amount of corn had been harvested. Many of the grapes were still in the vineyard. A lot of rain was hindering the harvesting work very much. In every village, collective wineries had been set up, in Alt-Elft it was on the farmyard of Traugott Ziehmman. Here the barrels and all the necessary equipment from the whole of Alt-Elft, Paris, Katzbach and Kuporani had been brought together. In Teplitz, the farmyards of Andreas Dobler, Alfred Kämmler and Artur Kehrer were destined for this purpose. The barrels lay in long rows. There was enough wine; however, it was not drunk. You saw no one who was drunk. Guards everywhere—day and night! If the wine was slightly fermented, it was transported in large transports of 50 to 60 horse-drawn wagons to the train station or to a camp in Arzis. Also, the corn was peeled off directly in the field, if not stored in large granaries in the village, then granaries at the train station. For 700 kg of delivered corn cobs, the owner received a voucher for 600 kg. There was no end to the delivery of grain from the Russian and Bulgarian villages. One heard from the economically well-placed Bulgarians that not a grain of wheat remained. There was not enough to deliver the prescribed quantity. Now, on the other hand, they had to give fodder grain, so that they remained without bread grain, and in addition also without fodder.

Instinctively, I had to think of how, after the Russian invasion of Bessarabia on 28 June 1940, all local officials were trained in district-by-district training in terms of harvest preparation, harvest work, threshing and grain delivery.

Complicated, but all the more sophisticated was the Russian method of calculating the grain delivery obligation. All workers, all pulling animals, all harvester machines had to be recorded on a list. A harvesting work plan and threshing work plan for the communal work of the villagers had to be drawn up, taking into account the labor force, the pulling animals and the machinery. During harvest time, the harvested areas had to be reported daily and, during the time of threshing, the threshed areas and the threshed results had to be reported. So-called tenth men (*Zehntmänner*) were named for the collection of the data.

One could say that things could not be more awkward. What was a matter of course for every farmer to harvest his grain in time, to thresh it with as much disadvantage as possible and to bring it good into the granary, was now prescribed to him as troublesome and impractical as only conceivable by the authorities.. Here is where it started to bring the free man into state dependence. It was a rainy day when I went to Arzis, to the Commissariat for Popular Production, to collect the documents for the grain delivered by the people of Alt-Elft. This authority was lodged in the house of the former finance official Rădulescu. Two of the three Jankelevich brothers sat at two counters. They were the widely known Jews from Arzis, very rich and had a large general hardware store in Arzis. The one who gave me the documents said, "The business is no longer going. We have closed and we are working here." The delivery of grain was in full swing. I went to the nearby train station. A long row of wagons loaded with grain waited here. They were Russians and Bulgarians from the surrounding area. The existing granaries were full to overflowing. Now the grain was poured into large piles out in the open on some deeply rain-soaked yards and driven over with horse and wagon. With their life's blood, the farmers took the grain harvested with care from the dry granaries and literally poured it onto the dirt and had to tread on it with feet. This senseless activity was a crime against the man who had to destroy the success of his hard work for a whole year in this way. Why was his grain not left for him, which he so desperately needed for his family, for his cattle? There is only one answer to this: you want to make him dependent, docile and ripe for the collective system. Our former neighbors, the Russians and Bulgarians, considered us Germans lucky because we were allowed to relocate. There was no alternative for them.

On 5 November, our Commando went to Beresina. In the neighboring village of Krasna, Red Army supporters assisted in the corn harvest. Large trucks and horse-drawn wagons were stuck in the deep mud. Paths were nowhere and everywhere. The best way through Krasna led between the double row of trees next to the sidewalks. What had been spared from the well-kept trees was changed by the trucks. Here, too, we can see how German diligence and well-kept homes were destroyed.

It seemed that nature also wanted to support the urge to annihilate people. Between 22 October and 12 November, 1940, there were five earthquakes in Bessarabia, including two strong and several weak tremors.

The quake of 22 October was experienced by us Germans in Alt-Elft, during the morning, at 9:30 AM. We were standing around the car to drive to Tarutino when the car started to rock and, at the same time, a strange noise could be heard. At first we thought of ghosts. But soon the earth tremors among us taught us something else. We were looking from the parsonage, where we were living, to the very nearby church tower, and we saw the cross swaying back and forth. We feared the collapse of the tower. But it did not. The aftermath of the quake was cracked and split buildings. Large and solid buildings were mainly affected. The second even more persistent earthquake surprised us in Beresina on 10 November, 1940, at 4:45 AM. After a farewell banquet with the Precinct Staff-Beresina, we were awakened by violent earth tremors and strong noise and weather. Instinctively, everyone was trying to get outside quickly. Those who could no longer get through the door plunged through the window. Even trees did not offer solid supports, one was shaken along with the tree. Screams of fear could be heard from people and animals; also the crashing of falling chimneys and roof tiles. When our Russian adversaries arrived from the Local Precincts on 11 November, we heard their reports about the second earthquake. They compared with the damage caused in Beresina: damaged brick roofs, fallen chimneys, heavily split buildings with partially collapsed ceilings due to the heavy stress on stored grain.

These were scenes, last experiences and impressions that we had to take with us from our old homeland. Truly, not happy with the separation. On the evening of 14 November, 1940, after a ceremonial farewell speech by the Chief of Staff Hoffmeyer, we boarded the special train with sleeping cars in Beresina and traveled via Reni to Galatz. Here we had a layover of a day and the opportunity to see the damage caused there by the earthquake. The damage was significantly greater than in the countryside. Here in Galatz, the Reich Germans of the Resettlement Staff were separated from us ethnic Germans. While they boarded their Danube steamer with very heavy diplomatic luggage, which included, so to speak, the entire German assets of Bessarabia, we were welcomed by the crew of the Danube steamer “Johann Strauss” as if we were on German soil. It headed up the Danube toward the new home.

[Translation Ends]

Part 4

Encounter with the Soviets in 1940

Author: Theodor Wursthorn

HK 1976 – Pages 53-59

[Translation Begins]

On 26 June, 1940, at 12 o'clock, a heavy artillery shell struck Bender (Bessarabia). On the radio, it was learned that, according to an agreement between Soviet Russia and Germany, the area between the Dnjester and Pruth “Bessarabia” had to be surrendered to Russia. The Romanian military, which was in Bessarabia at the time, had withdrawn to the Old Reich (*Altreich*).

About 2,500 ethnic Germans had been enlisted in the Reserve Service (*Concentrare*) at the time, and I was among them also. We were to build the “King Charles” defensive wall at the Dnjester River near Bender.

With this cannon thunder, this service was over. Most Romanian officers fled to the train station. The rest of the officers and crews, all of them unable to find a place on the train, set off on foot toward Leipzig-Romanenka-Galatz. Russians and Moldavians, and also we ethnic Germans from Bessarabia, left the unit on the night of 28 June and went looking for our home villages. I, too, separated from the unit at Romanenka and came home to Arzis on 28 June, 1940, via Tarutino, where Soviet tanks had already been welcomed with flowers by the Jewish population.

Arriving at home in Arzis, I met my family in good health. Since I was the business manager of the Association of German Cooperatives (Business Association), I had to start work the next day. When I came to my office in the morning, “Someone” was already sitting in my chair: the Soviet Commissioner, who had taken over the Business Association. The gentleman introduced himself as Commissioner K., saying, “You used to be the managing director of the Business Association—I hereby appoint you as the director of the District Association. You have to continue the business exactly as before. But if there were any irregularities,” he put his pistol on the table, put his finger on it, and said, “Siberia.” This gesture told me everything. Now he got up and relinquished to me my chair behind the desk. One can imagine under what nightmare I began to work.

Our previous trade (with grain, oil seeds, butter-milk products, eggs) was mainly oriented toward the West (Galatz, Brăila, Bucharest, the Old Reich). But now the border near Galatz was closed. What to do? We had about 10,000 kg [22,050 lbs.] of butter in the dairies, about 1 million eggs in the depot and large quantities of soft cheese. In the summer heat, all easily perishable products. After consultation with K., I telephoned the superior at the headquarters in the district town of Akkerman. No one knew what to do with the grain, nor what to do with butter and perishable foods. The Commissioner drew my attention at the outset to the fact that the laws in the Soviet Union are very strict with regard to the goods which are allowed to spoil. At the moment, I did not know any advice. Then the Commissioner said that I should go to the General of the Army (Supply Army) in Kischinew and offer him the perishable foods such as butter and eggs. I then took the train, via Bender, to Kischinew and went to see the general, who immediately received me. When I presented my plan (I spoke to him in Russian), he did not want to believe that such a thing was possible. He slapped his hands over his head. I offered him 10,000 kg of butter and 1 million eggs. He did not want to take the soft cheese. A commando was immediately formed with enough vehicles and an officer as a companion and inspector.

Since we were not supposed to leave until the next morning, I was assigned a quarter. For the evening meal, I went to a restaurant nearby, where everything was already occupied by Russian officers, almost all of them tipsy. I sat in my corner as a silent observer and could understand everything that was spoken. There was quite loud singing and discussion until a major jumped on the table, pulled out his saber and shouted out loud, “Comrades, in a short time we will be in Berlin!” (And this in July 1940 despite the German-Russian Treaty of Friendship!) With this, a

terrible impression for me at that time, I drove the 130 km [80.8 mi.] to Arzis the next morning. All goods were loaded here. However, there was no money, only a receipt signed by the officer. Our Commissioner K. was there, he had to answer for all this, because he had ordered it.

Our grain warehouses were overflowing with delivered grain, so much so that giant heaps of wheat, barley and oats were in front of the freight yard, all in the open air. The farmers were obliged to deliver all grain immediately. To my objection that the grain would be destroyed in the rain, I was told that this was not all that bad, that there was a thick layer of about 20 cm [7.9 in.] with roots on top of the grain which would not allow the coming rain to penetrate.

Now we had 16 barrels of soft cheese (cow cheese) in the Brienne dairy, which is very easily perishable in the summer. I reported this to Commissioner K. In Akkerman, at his superior's headquarters, he tried to gain by force trucks to come and collect, which was not granted to him. It was ordered that the cheese be brought to Akkerman by horse-drawn wagons. I told the Commissioner that this was now quite impossible in midsummer. But a command is a command, and we sent two horse and wagon teams with 16 barrels to Akkerman (an overnight trip).

It was already clear to me that, in the warm weather, the cheese would be partially spoiled upon arrival. That was exactly what happened. During the inspection, the cheese was found to be bad. A violation of the Food Act was found and the cheese was sent back with a report to the People's Court. I should now be held responsible. I immediately referred the case to the Commissioner who had ordered the transport. He also felt affected and tried to help me out of the difficulty.

He asked who had traded primarily in soft cheese in Arzis. I told him that this cheese had previously been taken and sold primarily by the Jew named Pollak, he was a specialist in cow cheese. K. had the cheese merchant come and asked him if cow cheese had ever spoiled during his career? "But of course, Commissioner, this was a frequent case, especially in the summer," Pollak said. "And so what did you do?" "Well, you know, only about 10 cm [3.9 in.] from the top of the cheese went bad. I removed this cheese, buried it. But the rest was seasoned again with salt and black pepper and put back in the barrel." "Thank you (*Spasibo*)," said the Commissioner, and Pollak was allowed to go. Turning to me, he asked, "Did you listen good? So you know what to do. Before the People's Court meets, everything must be in order!"

I knew the answer. In one night, all the cheese was processed. The spoiled cheese was buried in a pit, the rest, after processing with salt and pepper, was again put into the 16 barrels. The same amount of fresh cheese was added to replace the spoiled cheese. All 16 barrels were loaded again and transported to the egg depot. My trial was scheduled at the People's Court for the next day. The Commissioner informed me exactly about the way things should proceed. As soon as the indictment was read out, I should stand up and ask for the last word, something that each defendant has the right to.

It was also granted to me. I said, "Supreme Justice, I feel innocent and ask the chairman and all members to go to the place and prove to me that the cheese is spoiled." My request was granted and we all drove to the egg depot, where five barrels from different locations were opened.

“Please, gentlemen, try and see if the cheese looks very fresh and tastes very good.” All the members were Jews and would have liked to have seen me convicted. The Commissioner intervened and asked the judge to acquit the Director of the Business Association. That was what happened. The cheese was picked up by trucks on the same day. A big burden was relieved of me. I was free again. But it was not going to be long, just a week, and again a sinister story about me came to me.

One night, around two o'clock, I was called by the Commissioner and immediately ordered to the Dobrowolsky restaurant. One was already very intimidated because one could see every day the “Black Mina” driving through Arzis with arrested Bulgarians, Moldavians, etc. My wife was very agitated. I comforted her and said that I would first pass by Mr. Christian Necker, a member of my staff, and ask him to wait outside and see what was being done with me. I came to the restaurant, was received by the Commissioner and led to a hotel room. There sat two gentlemen, who were introduced to me as electro-engineers (both Jews). The Commissioner began to give a lengthy speech, repeatedly stressing that Arzis had not been able to set up electric lights. Such a large market center as Arzis should have night lights. When he finished his remarks, I was asking myself what I had to do with this. “Yes,” he said, “the two gentlemen engineers could set up electric lights in Arzis if I were to give 250,000 lei from the Business Association. I declined to do so at first, but I had to give in when the Commissioner took responsibility for this money with his signature.

Mr. Necker and I went to our cashier, Paul Jundt, who lived with the Bittau family, at three o'clock in the night, drummed him out of his sleep and brought the money to be handed over to the Commissioner.

Poles were set up in the middle of the road and wires stretched from the train station (Mühle Stelter) to the market square. The electricity was taken from the Stelter mill. When the electric light was turned on, a large municipal meeting was gathered, at which the Commissioner shamed the former mayors of Arzis for not introducing electric lights, saying, “We, the Soviets, are barely a month here and already the electric light is on!” But he did not mention a word about the fact that the money for this light management came from the Business Association. For this money, all of Arzis could have been provided with electricity.

The relationship between the Commissioner and me was relatively good. He had complete confidence in me and repeatedly helped me out of so many awkward situations. (He also got all my furniture with house advice.) He had always held out the hope that I would not resettle, but that I would remain with him in the Business Association. He already hindered it by gradually sacking all German employees and always hiring a Jew in place. In the end, I was alone with only Jewish employees, some of them our former great rivals. Each of you can well imagine what I was thinking!

It was threshing time and our farmers, as already mentioned, had to thresh out all the grain and deliver it before they were allowed to resettle. It must be said that all the German farmers were in a state of the best of their honesty in trying to thresh the grain well. Every day, however, Jews came to the Commissioner and reported that the German farmers did not thresh the grain well—there were still a lot of grains in the straw. The Commissioner listened to these denunciations

and then asked me if that was true. I explained to him that these Jews had no idea about agriculture and were not able to make a judgment about it. He believed me.

When the grain harvest and threshing was over, then came the soybean harvest. Our farmers were no longer obligated under the Resettlement Treaty to bring in the soybean harvest. Preparations for resettlement were already underway. Now the Commissioner played his trump card to the ones making the denunciations. The German farmers had to drive with horse-drawn wagons on the market square. Two boards were placed across each wagon box trough. All Jewish girls, women and boys were summoned and put to work harvesting soybeans. Oh, what cheerful singing there was on the first morning. Singing and cheerfulness going through the whole village on the way to the field. But at that time the soybeans had to be plucked by hand, and every soybean had to be pulled out by the root. But just down at the bottom of the plant, where you had to touch to rip out, were the biggest spines. Now the Jews soon realized that it is not so easy to be a farmer, and the singing soon fell silent. When the first day of work was over, you could not hear any singing on the way home. Most women and girls went to the doctor and wanted to be recorded as being sick. Then the Commissioner set them straight, "First you denounced the hard working German farmers to me—now prove that you can do better!" Without mercy, everyone had to go back to the soybean harvest. This time, all took along gloves, but even that did not help much. On the third day, the women wanted to go on strike, which did not go over well with the Commissioner. He used force and turned to the military for oversight. We heard no more complaints against the Germans on the part of the Jews. Many of them even tried to come with us to Germany.

It happened to many of our fellow countrymen that, after the Soviet invasion of Bessarabia, it was no longer possible to travel by train without further complication, unless they were business trips. I really wanted to visit my mother in Seimeny before the resettlement. To do this, I had to take the train from Arzis to Akkerman. When I wanted to acquire a ticket at the train station, the railway officer asked me if I had a permit. That was new to me. I had to ask for this permission at the town hall (*Selsowet*) and from the Z. K. chairman. He gave me a short answer. "You have to work, with us there are no private visits!" I turned to my Commissioner, who got permission for me, and I was able to travel. In Akkerman, I happened to meet a horse-drawn wagon from Seimeny, which took me along. After passing through Saria, 2 km [1.2 mi.] before Seimeny, I saw my flock of sheep (about 120 Karakul sheep). I got off and told my driver that I was going home on foot. My shepherd was not thrilled at my appearance. He apparently already felt like the owner of the valuable herd and made comments about it.

At that point, I told him that the sheep now belonged to the Soviet state, that he might pay attention, for from now on he was responsible for the whole flock. I took leave of him and my sheep for ever and went to my mother and siblings. It soon became clear in the village that I was here from the upper villages, and in the evening the house of my parents was full of visitors who wanted to hear news about the resettlement. Much was talked about, so that it was not until around midnight that we dispersed. Then my mother said, "Child, you have to leave yet tonight, I have such an uneasy feeling!" She did not let up until my brother Emil drove me to the train station at Mannsburg. It was not until much later that she wrote me a long letter confirming her apprehension. The next morning, at seven o'clock, a closed black vehicle came into the yard, the rear door opened and eight soldiers jumped out, stormed into the house and searched all the beds,

cupboards, the store room, etc.; they were searching for me. My shepherd decided to report that I had come, slandered me and believed that, in this way, the flock of sheep would become his. I do not know if I would have been freed so easily. It was good that I had followed my mother's advice.

In Arzis, in my work as director of the Business Association, the sword of Damocles always hung over me.

Since the Resettlement Commission was already there, I had to draw up a balance sheet to hand over the Business Association to the Soviets. The balance sheet was soon ready, and it turned out that the Business Association had an actual wealth of 5.5 million lei at that time, but the Commissioner did not sign the balance sheet and tried again and again to persuade me to stay. Some of the people from Arzis had already left, so I turned to the Supreme Representative of the Resettlement Commission, Mr. Hofmeyer, and the Soviet Supreme Representative who came and forced the Commissioner to sign the balance sheet and release me.

With mixed feelings, I still think of this time and have written down the events to remind myself again and again of the agitating time from June to October, 1940. Today, we must be grateful to the German Reich for the fact that we were resettled at that time.

[Translation Ends]

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