

Bolshevik Destruction of Gnadenburg in the Caucasus

Source: DAI Microfilm T-81; Roll #598; Serial 816; Group 1035;

Item 1255; Frame 5386193-5386195

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[Translator's Note: The following information is located within a file folder of DAI (Deutsches Ausland-Institut) documents captured in Germany during World War II which holds documents indicating that research about ethnic Germans in Russia was being compiled in 1940-41. Words within square brackets indicate comments by the translator.]

[Translation Begins]

Research Department "Swabians Living in Foreign Lands"

The Destruction of the German Colony of Gnadenburg in the Caucasus by the Bolsheviks

In 1936, owing to the return home of the last free farmers of the Franconian-Swabian Gnadenburg Colony in the Caucasus, farmer Speimann, in the homeland of his father and in the small village of Illschwang, south of Hesselberg, revealed the dismal destiny of this Caucasus colony. It was first established in 1880 at the foot of the snow-covered Elbrus on the watershed between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, by the mountain river of Terek, by the best German farmers from Obermichelbach and Kematen in Franconia, as well as by stragglers from Horb in the Black Forest. Gnadenburg embraced 52 large farmyards each about 160 Morgen [1 Morgen = 2,621 sq. meters or .65 acres]. The colonists provided themselves with their own system of government. Smoking and vodka were forbidden, in exchange for which flourished the vineyards of the Wuerttembergers. For breeding, Holland cattle were obtained from the German colonists on the Black Sea, horses from Russia. Czar Alexander II approved of their arrangement. The taxes were low and so great wealth developed. The colony did not take much notice of the [First] World War. Also, the Bolsheviks did not press forward for a long time, because the mountain tribes and the Cossacks rose up in one movement and helped establish the strong points of the White [Army]. After the collapse of this movement, the German farmers took note of the taxes which became merciless which affected their belongings and life. Through the distressed children of the Volga colonists, who out of compassion absorbed them, the poison of the Bolsheviks forced its way through on them.

In 1929, the Bolshevik collective was forced upon them. To begin with, there was still the profit from the vineyards when the Bolsheviks took away all the grain. The mismanagement was so great that farmer Speimann, who with successful resistance, managed his property and ground just as good as the whole collective together. Working 24 hours a day, the German colonist, who through imposed fines, taxes and contributions, could not come up with it. He received 1.2 kg of wheat for a day's work, and his wife less. And there was also a child to provide for. In a whole year, a bigger child received only 1½ *Doppelzentner* [doppelzentner = 100 kilograms or 102.2 lbs.] of grain from which it also had to be clothed. An old man, under the same condition, also received no more, and a woman even only 1 *Doppelzenter* a year. The hourly wage for the

farmer was one and a half kopeck and, for 10 hours of work, a vineyard worker received two and a half ruble.

Then the Politburo positioned a mountain Jew and a female Polish Jew as Gnadenburg's local authorities. A 75,000 ruble tax was placed upon farmer Speimann. In his dire need, as a German, he turned to the appropriate department for help and was immediately jailed for this. He was told that his complaint was of no concern to anyone, for Russia deals only with the collective, not with individuals. So the Jewish administration took possession of not only the farm, the produce and the machinery, but also the people, and no one was able to speak out against the injustice.

On 01 January, 1934, the Jewish executive forced the inhabitants of the Gnadenburg collective, to totally plunder farmer Speimann. For 6 days they removed everything, the horses, the cattle from the barns, the furnishings from the house. They left only a bed and a shirt for the mother and the daughter. After his return from the long journey to the court of justice, Speimann found his yard in such a condition. At the same time, he was stricken from the tax list and made him someone without a say in any matter, comparable to the condition of being free as a bird. The wife and daughter had to endure the worst of the ill-treatment, since they wanted to wring even more from them.

A month later, Spiemann, under the false pretenses of espionage, deduced from the possession of an old community church newspaper, was arrested and imprisoned. Without due process, he was sentenced to 10 years in a concentration camp far beyond Moscow and with criminals was hauled off in an enclosed delivery wagon. Unable to leave the wagon for 5 days, it ended up with 20 funerals due to the struggling of the criminals with each other, the intense heat and the dreadful stench. Under a Jewish supervisor and Jewish management, he was forced to work on a canal from Moscow to the Volga River. Whoever got sick was robbed of his clothing and left lying there. As nourishment for the work contract, the Jewish provisions provider supplied rotten fish and foul cabbage, as well as moldy bread, which was to sustain the workers.

As a result of the intervention of the German legation, Speimann came to the Putrowka prison in Moscow, which held 40,000 inmates. From here he went to another prison in the foreigners section where he was again visited, checked and questioned until he, under the protection of the German legation, but without knowledge of the destiny of his family, was deported from Russia. When he, via Minsk, arrived at the camp for foreigners at Schneidemuehl, he could hardly comprehend the joy over his freedom and return home to Germany. Eventually, after some time, it happened that the German legation was able to send his wife and son to him. "We forgot, now that we had each other, that we were now without possessions and that all that we and our father obtained with difficulty in the past 6 decades remained in the hands of the Bolsheviks. Since then, the family lives in a small house in Illschwang and strives to establish a new life.

A verbal report about farmer Speimann as told by Oskar Franz Schardt (published in the evening supplement of the *Stuttgart NS-Kurier* on 23 November, 1936, No. 547, page 4).

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