

Resettlement Report from Beresina, Bessarabia 1940

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Note: A report by Teacher Jacob Becker of how the Resettlement of 1940 was experienced by the folks in Beresina, Bessarabia. He speaks about the exodus of the Romanian authorities, the arrival of the Soviet authorities, the preparations for departure from Beresina, and the journey up the Danube River to their Resettlement Camp in Saxony, Germany. Information within [square brackets] indicate translator's comment.

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[Translation Begins]

Travelogue concerning the Resettlement of the ethnic Germans from the village of Beresina, Akkermann County, Bessarabia, into the German Reich.

On 23 June, 1940, the Romanians were given an ultimatum by the Russians regarding the evacuation of Bessarabia. On 25 June, the result of the negotiations was announced, Romania must vacate Bessarabia within the course of 4 days. All the authorities were suddenly not uttering a sound and very German-friendly. All of a sudden, the biggest screamers were powerless. There was a whole cavalry regiment in our village just at this time. The officers and non-commissioned officers were half dead. No one wanted and could believe it, since even the then King Charles II had said that he was not going to give up a single furrow of this province, even if it came to war. It is obvious why, because Bessarabia was the granary of Romania. Suddenly this "heroic capitulating." It is not uncommon for the officers to deal in a terrible manner with the soldiers from Bessarabia, when one of them tried to spring out of the ranks on the way back to get home, he was simply gunned down. A cavalry regiment came to our village in the evening; it was 10:30 PM. My neighbor and I sat outside the gate, and we saw some of them coming toward us with a lantern. Each of us retreated to our own house. I waited in the house—at the window. They went to the stable and got the horse harness there—I could not do anything because they had guns, whereas, at best, I might have had a stick. They moved on. The next morning, my father-in-law came and told almost in tears that they had stolen his horse, 2 pigs, along with 60-70 buckets of wine (each bucket at 10 liters), and almost all the hay. When they finished this work, they wanted to come into the house, but luckily the horse tore away from them at that moment and so they could not enter by force because they had to catch the horse. There were several instances where they did their robbing and stealing. That was on 28 June, in the evening. When the Russian tanks arrived the next morning, the troops broke up in a most disorderly fashion.

It was on 28 June when the first indication of the Soviet-Russian Army showed up at the upper end of the village. Two small tanks with 6-8 soldiers. There was great anxiety in the ranks of the German population. After all, these were forerunners from the land of horrors, from the land where hundreds of thousands, even millions of innocent people, fell victim to the communist system. Because of this, everyone was taken by one thought: How now are things going to go with us? What are they going to do with us? We were very scared and anxious when we saw the long rows of Jews from neighboring Tarutino, screaming and yelling with their red flags, on which the hammer and sickle and the Zionist star appearing in our streets. It was evening time. Every German retreated to his home with unspoken and alarmed heart. The following days then brought one meeting after the other. They wanted to instill in us the communist idea. The teachers and staff were brought together in particular. The Constitution was explained, illustrated, and explained to us also. The village was divided into 3 blocks. Each one was assigned to one. There we should make these "healing teachings" clear to the people. But you could see how we were put off, and that the enthusiasm was not all that great. That is why this explanation action did not go anywhere.

On the very first day, a committee had been put together. Jews, Russians and also Germans had to be replaced. After several days, these were disbanded and others appointed. A Russian who had been a sheep-herder in our community until then, who could not read a letter of the alphabet, was elevated to mayor. Likewise, their non-commissioned officers and officers (there were only commanders) also showed by their handwriting that these people perhaps did not have much education. I had the opportunity to have a captain-doctor at the table for a meal. The man did not even understand how to handle a knife and fork. The term napkin is apparently also foreign; for in place of this he used quite thin dressing material, whose fibers remained in the stubble of the beard after cleaning the mouth. A third of these commanders were Jews.

Farmers were to deliver grain and order the autumn seed. Teachers and staff should take part in schooling. All shops and industrial enterprises were nationalized. I had the opportunity to get to know district representatives of the Soviet Union, especially with the nationalization of the second largest mill in Southern Bessarabia, the mill of Mr. Eduard Lemke in Beresina. The whole inventory was written down and when the owner asked if he had anything else to do in the mill, he was told that he could go home. Therein lies the whole "salutary blessing doctrine" of what is yours, that is mine. The Moor (*Mohr*) has done his service, the Moor can go. One day, the employees were also told that they could now go home. The successors in the business office were exclusively Jews. It was the same scenario also in the shops. All the people, even their military, went about distant, beaten and low-spirited. No one dares to speak a word there. In 2-3 weeks, there was absolutely nothing left to buy and get.

One beautiful day, however, new life came into the ranks of the German population. In fact, the German Commission's departure to Moscow was notified of the preliminary action of the resettlement of the Germans in Bessarabia and North Bukovina. This was already a deliverance notification for us. The joy was much greater when the conclusion of the negotiations was reported. But the joy reaches its highest point when the arrival of the German Resettlement Commandos was announced. It was Sunday morning. Suddenly, the sound of a German battle song penetrated our ears. Everyone ran to the courtyard gate. What was there to see? "German

soldiers,” went from mouth to mouth. “These are the ones who want to bring us home,” said another. They were our saviors!

Right away, in the next days, began the recording of the list of resettler assessment and also the work of the asset assessment. We worked on this matter every day for 14 days. A great shock for the Russians, when they saw that the Germans were relocating 100%, they always expected only 40-50%. They could not believe that we were leaving our belongings, our thriving villages. But they had to convince themselves that the voice of blood is always the most powerful. Even a Soviet-Russian orator who treated with irony the doctrine of race, people, and blood had to convince himself. Relentlessly, the work went on. And already on 23 September, those who were to drive the large freight wagons to the border area of Reni were notified. What a surprise. Packing took place the whole night. On the morning of 24 September, the entire streets were full of people. Big beautiful freight wagons stood there, beautifully decorated with greenery and flowers to welcome our loved ones. At 7:00 AM, the first transport started to head on out. The empty residences looked quite strange. In my neighbor’s case, for example, all the meat and sausage of the two pigs slaughtered the previous day sat there. In others, chickens, geese, ducks, and cows were in the stables and could not get out. So everything was left lying and standing around. Those left behind started packing. How the women and mothers made preparations and got worn-out. Everyone wanted to focus on at least 14 days of food for their family, because for such a long way you certainly need a lot. How different it turned out to be! How impatient the people were that the departure was not sooner to go to the dear German homeland. Everyone wanted to get to the land of the ancestors faster.

The day finally came. It was on 2 October. This was the second transport. A long train had arrived at our railroad station. A Soviet Russian train. They were freight cars. Around the walls of the same were mounted boards. That was our seat. At 6 o’clock in the evening, the train headed on out. Everyone was saying that he would never see this place again in his life. Everything, the whole past—from the arrival of the grandparents—to that moment, passed by the mental eye. Nothing could change our mind. Every now and then a tear, then almost every car heard one of our beautiful folk songs. So one after the other was sung. Joy radiated from every face. The next morning, we arrived at the port of Reni. Here we found the representatives of the Russians. Because our train driver was busy elsewhere, I had to go from car to car with them. All the people were counted. As far as I can remember, only 2 were examined.

After this, all the women and children had to get on the ship. We men stayed behind and brought the luggage onto the ship. It was called **Uranus**. It is one of the most beautiful ships used for this purpose on the Danube. Now that everyone and everything was in the ship, I was one of the last to get onto the ship. An old mother asks me when we were actually going to be loaded onto the ship? I told her that we are all in the ship and it would not be long and it will leave the port. She was overcome with astonishment and amazement. “Well,” she said, “I thought we were in a beautiful house now.” Many of our people were on a ship for the first time in their lives. One imagined a barge rather than such a “floating house.” Not long after, our ship started to move. It was time to say goodbye to the Bessarabia soil, which has become so dear to us. Farewell songs of thanksgiving and cheering songs rang out. It went up on the “beautiful, blue Danube”—and while we were thinking about it, we entered the port of Galatz. Here our ship stopped and we saw some German comrades that we knew. But the stay should not be too long and soon went

upstream again. On the one side we saw the mountain plains, while on the other side we saw the high banks of Bulgaria. Suddenly a signal. Now what? That was the signal for the first meal on the ship. Wonderful food! Then our women saw how unnecessary it was that they were so worried—of dear food. Well, and after the meal, the canteen was opened. Oh, there was beer and so many other drinks! Even sweets for the women and children. We were able to pay with Romanian money. That was something extraordinary for us; for since the withdrawal of the Romanians there was no such thing in the Bolshevik “Paradise.”

Yes, that was wonderful! I also drank one with some of the older men. Then I said to them, “Now let us draw a comparison between the immigration of our old ancestors and that of our resettlement.” I had approached the right subject. Everything was now talked about. How they came with bag and baggage (*Kind und Kegel*) on wagons and carts to Bessarabia (in the autumn of 1814, via Bender). How they overwintered in Russian and Moldavian villages. How they came to the village in the spring of 1815, which today is the large village of Beresina, with more than 2,700 inhabitants. Want, sickness, deprivation were their most faithful companions. The years around 1830 were discussed in detail, as the plague raged, several years since total crop failures occurred, the Turkish War in 1877, the Japanese War in 1905, the World War, the great flood of 2 October, 1927, and now the resettlement. One beer after another was drunk. Then I went to the young people, because I too am not yet old. What enthusiasm! Every natural beauty was admired. Movement [Nazi Party] songs, battle songs were sung—one by one. Were we finally out and in the Reich! Outside and in Germany! We can even greet openly and freely with “Heil Hitler,” for we were not allowed to do this in a foreign land. The most passionate for everyone was to participate in any organization of the N.S.D.A.P. [*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* – Hitler’s Nazi Party] Already in spirit everyone saw the order, discipline and cleanliness which can only be in the Great German Empire. But a sigh of relief came from everyone when he remembered that he was no longer regarded as a minority, that he could no longer be regarded as a stranger in a foreign country, but that each of us was not in a foreign land, but headed for the homeland of our fathers, yes, to the homeland, where today our ideal, the *Führer*, the fate of the country and the people so masterfully directs and guides!

We stopped in Russe to fill oil—and continued through the Iron Gate [narrow, difficult passage between mountains] and many other places. Now came the night. Everyone got 3-4 blankets and each looked for his place. Now, one last song was sung and then we went to bed. Before falling asleep, many anecdotes were told and one after the other fell asleep. Everyone woke up fresh and cheerful the next morning. And further, ever further our journey continued until we anchored the next day, at 2:00 AM, in the Yugoslavian port of Prahovo. “All women and children on shore, the men to unload the luggage!” was the order. In the shortest possible time, the command was carried out. A final handshake with the crew of the ship and then we went back to the loading of the luggage onto the freight wagon. Then a half hour journey to the transit camp. Once here, we were welcomed, all the rules of camp life announced. Then the luggage was unloaded, stacked and covered. Now we went to the tents. There were 30 of them. The arrangements were wonderful. For everyone a special mattress, pillows and blankets. Special dining rooms where we are presented with the very best food. A canteen where you can enjoy sweets for the children, various drinks for the adults, and a special department for medical treatment. Nothing, nothing was lacking. Again, our women had to see that they were unnecessarily worried about meals. Great were the Yugoslavian youth who volunteered to do all

the work that presented itself in the camp. This idealism, this love and devotion to us, their German brothers and sisters! They spoke enthusiastically about the Reich and the *Führer*. I stood for a long time with them and they talked about a lot of bitterness which they had to endure in their adopted homeland, and considered us lucky that fate had been so gracious to us and brought us home to the dear German fatherland.

The next day, towards evening, our luggage had to be loaded up again. And not long after boarding, the train was on its way. To our astonishment, a band started up and played in a most beautiful manner. Others of the dear brothers and sisters of Yugoslavia sang farewell songs, and some of ours, a small part of whom had to be left behind, secretly wiped a farewell tear. Again, here we saw it correctly: blood belongs to blood and that we really discovered here the feeling of belonging together. We saw handkerchiefs and waving hands fluttering, then the train rolled on. We continued to see nothing but a green, wide plain. It was almost dawn and we had to sleep again.

We arrived in Zaoskebrod the next morning. Here we received a very sumptuous breakfast again by the ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia. What struck me most about this was an elderly woman who was serving breakfast. She cried bitterly as the train started to move. Her gaze told me: you are allowed to go home, but we are not allowed to come along. We still have to stay in the foreign country. My grave must probably not be on German earth, but in a foreign country. We greeted them all warmly as the train passed by. Here we also saw Serbian soldiers. They were all very dirty and made a very poor impression. Quite typical Balkans. We drove through Zagreb, a beautiful, big city. The railway line runs through the city. A large long bridge passes over the railway. Street-cars could also be seen here. And again and again a variety of our beautiful German songs. It was already noon. We arrived in Agram. A fabulous noon meal was served here. The men were also handed cigarettes and newspapers. Time and again it was seen from the conversations that these German brothers are very sorry that they are not allowed to join us. They are also “far from the land of the ancestors.” What this means is only understood by the one who had to live in a foreign country.

So we kept going, always further. Finally we approached the border. It was night, 10:00-11:00 PM. Then we came to Villach [today in Austria], the border station. Here swastika flags, German soldiers, German people, representatives of the Party—S.A. [*Sturmabteilung*, Storm Detachment, the Nazi Party's original paramilitary wing] etc. Only German sounds could be heard. We were on German soil. That strange feeling. We are now at home in our motherland! So that it was unnoticed, everyone wiped a tear from their eyes. No one could resist this feeling of such great joy. The first thing to welcome us was an air-raid alarm; something completely new for us. Everyone knew, but no one said a word. Then came the evening meal, a kind of omelet (*Schmarren*), the first evening meal in the “homeland.” Yes, this word—“homeland”—is so important, so beautiful, so telling to us who lived so far away from the “homeland.” S.A. men came and gave the men cigarettes further along the way. As a mother cares for her child, so the *Führer* took care of us, his brought-back-home children through his representatives. It is indescribable, these first moments on German soil.

Finally, the train started to move, getting closer and closer to the set goal. We were able to read German sounding, real German names on the railroad station buildings such as: Salzburg,

Tüssling, Mühldorf, Rohrach etc. All are German. We came to the Sudeten Region [area in Czechoslovakia occupied by ethnic Germans]. Eger—the Egerland [far north west of Bohemia in the today Czech Republic] where Czechs murdered German people simply because they identified themselves as Germans. Then I and several comrades spoke to a Sudeten German-train engineer by profession. He, too, could hardly express his gratitude to the *Führer* and the Reich. He said, “We are free people again today, and because we are, we owe only to our precious *Führer*! We drove past Karlovy Vary [a spa town situated in western Bohemia, present-day Czech Republic, on the confluence of the rivers Ohře and Teplá], who has not already heard of the famous Karlovy Vary! Then it was night again, which we were very sorry about; for all the windows of the cars were occupied, and everyone wanted to see more and more of dear Germany, of which he had dreamed about so much. Comparisons were made between our Bessarabia and this homeland ground. Even the changeable nature brought our people to the point where they jumped from one window to the other to see all the magnificent landscapes. The next morning, we arrived at our destination of Hammer-Leubsdorf [Saxony]. Once here, our Camp Commander welcomed us warmly in the camp, saying that at this point this camp should be our home. We have all arrived healthy and in good condition. We are now in our “homeland!” Greater Germany is now also our fatherland! Freely and openly we can say that the *Führer* is also our *Führer*! What good fortune! It is hard to believe that we are redeemed and saved “from the lion's jaws”—the Soviet paradise!

We owe all this to our dearly beloved *Führer* Adolf Hitler and his political party. This compels us to express our most sincere thanks! We can give thanks today. We all pledge that we will use all our knowledge and skills, all that we are and have, even if it must be, even our lives for our beloved *Führer* Adolf Hitler, for the people and for the fatherland! The Almighty preserve for us our *Führer* and greatest field commander of all time!

Hail [*Heil*] Hitler!

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[Translation Ends]

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