

# Resettlement Experience by Pastor A. Härter

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Note: A report by Pastor Adolf Härter of his experience during the Resettlement from Bessarabia to the camp he stayed at in Germany in 1940. Pastor Härter was born 11 April, 1897, in Neu-Beresina, Bessarabia. He served the Lutheran congregation in Neu-Postal, Bessarabia (1924-1940); he died in 1967, the result of a fatal accident in Alsleben, about 30 miles northwest of Leipzig, Germany—{*Church and Religious Life of Germans in Russia, (Die Kirchen und das Religiöse Leben der Russlanddeutschen)*, Edited by Joseph Schnurr}. Information within [square brackets] indicate translator's comment.

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## **Experience Report about the Resettlement of the Russian-Germans in Bessarabia, Posttal Municipality, Akkerman District.**

In mid-June, an influential Moldovan said in a political conversation on Bessarabia: “Bessarabia will remain with Romanian forever.” This security would be thoroughly destroyed in the shortest possible time. Unexpectedly for everyone, it was announced over the radio that Romania was handing over Bessarabia to Soviet Russia without a fight. Already on 28 June, Russian troops entered Bessarabia and also came to Posttal. Suddenly, a new situation arose for us. A time of being left in suspense and anxiety arose. So what should happen to us? Even if the Red Army did not make the worst impression on us, everyone felt that we were not going to be staying here. And that feeling intensified more as time went by. From all the speeches, there was again and again not a struggle for nationalities, but a class struggle. Fight the possession. And the arrests and kidnappings began. The *Führer* [Adolf Hitler] was our hope. Once he has brought the Polish Germans back to the Reich, he will not forget us either. Again and again, we were allowed to hear from Russian mouths: Be thankful that you are Germans! When others were arrested and abducted, our lives remained largely untroubled. We felt the protective hand over us. The message sounded like redemption for all of us: You will be resettled, the *Führer* will bring you home. If at first we were still very interested in the question of ownership and some wanted to have his 100 hectares [247 acres] of land, his house and farm again over there; eventually, the question of ownership faded completely into the background. The concern foremost on our minds was: Are we going to get out of here soon, when are we leaving! When the German Commission for the Resettlement arrived, and there were so many Bessarabia

Germans among them, the joy was indescribable. Now a hustle and bustle set in. The wagons were arranged, the suitcases packed. It was difficult for us to say goodbye to our dear dead. We gave them our last greeting. A farewell service with a holy communion celebration took place and all gathered together one more time in our so beautiful, most dear and valued church. In spirit, we said goodbye to everything we once called ours, what our fathers and we had acquired in a 125-year struggle with much effort and work. The last regulations of the Soviet authorities made the departure easier for us.

On 4 October, half an hour before 3 o'clock in the morning, there was a lot of movement in the houses, the last things were quickly packed. Shortly after 3 AM, all the loaded wagons arrived at the gathering place in front of the church and school. Now came the final departure. Wagon-load followed wagon-load. Slowly the convoy moved out of the village. It took strength to leave houses, church and school behind in the darkness. Everyone in his own thoughts at dawn. Indescribable the feelings that passed through our souls. When we arrive at the station, we were loaded into freight wagons (*Güterwagen*). Not once was there a concern for illumination (*Beleuchtung*), let alone to take care of other human needs. At the border station of Reni, many were subjected to strict control. What had been packed into suitcases and bags at home with a lot of effort was now tossed around in front of our eyes. Piece by piece, the investigation and search was carried out in the most thorough manner. Only the one thought—we are coming home to the Reich—did not let us lose our self-control. While out in the open, our things were then soaked in a downpour of rain. It was not until late in the evening that the eagerly awaited ship arrived. It was the best and newest Danube ship, the **Passau**, which had only been put into service 3 months ago. In contrast to the darkness and wet outside, the bright glow of the wonderful lighting greeted us inside. Even the floodlight testified to the light that broke through our darkness. A meticulous cleanliness confronted us. In contrast to the people who want to be bad to us, we felt only love and kindness. In an almost paternal way, women and children, the sick and the old were brought inside the ship. Helping hands were helpful to us everywhere. Although the ship contained 1,145 people, everyone had been taken care of. At this point, too, we would like to express our deepest thanks to the Transport Commander, the nurses, the cook, and all the way up to the Captain. With everything what already lay behind us, we felt: this here is German soil, here we are safe. Exceptionally nice weather favored our Danube trip. In Prachovo [near Belgrade, today Serbia], we were temporarily taken to the transit camp for two days. Here we saw how transports came and went. All the tents were set up close together and new tents were still being erected. At almost incomprehensible long tables, everyone was taken care of royally. To be sure, we had to learn here also to our deepest pain that some burial mounds in the cemetery at Prachovo already covered the people of earlier resettlers. They did not make it home to the Reich. They wait in foreign soil for the eternal homeland and the Great German Reich watches over their graves.

From Prachovo, we went home to the Reich by train through Yugoslavia. In Agram, ethnic German had taken care of our physical well-being in the best possible way. A representative of the bishop and a German representative of the government had appeared at the railroad station to show us their love and compassion. On German soil in Villach [today Austria], we boarded a Reich German train. Although it was already late in the evening, also here we were provided for beyond our expectations. The only dreary thought that came to us was that we are in a country at war.

On Saturday, 12 October, we arrived in the morning at our destination Hohenebelbe [today Vrchlabi, Czech Republic]. Here our paths separated. Already in Arnau [today Hostinne, Czech Republic], some stayed behind and were housed in Camp Forstbad. Another part of the transport was taken to Camp Franzental, and we, the third part of the transport, 108 people, found our accommodation in Camp Benetzko. Probably some people were afraid of life in a camp. To probably have to spend months in the camp, until we finally came to know our destination, seemed intolerable. But how pleasantly surprised we were when our car suddenly stopped in front of a beautiful, large hotel and we were led into a large beautiful hall. Our surprise culminated when, after the welcome by the Camp Commander and the Medical Director, we were led family style into the beautiful room furnished with all conveniences. Relief set in and deep thanks filled our hearts. Dear people they are who look after us here and take care of us in the best possible way. On Sunday mornings, morning prayers take place, celebrations and home evenings promote our living together. The leadership has only one wish which is to make our stay in the camp as beautiful and harmonious as possible, so that after the camp layover period we can go to the work assigned to us, refreshed and strengthened. This place wants to be a real place of recovery for us and so the waiting time does not seem to be too long for us.

Thanks to the *Führer!*

Heil Hitler!

{signed} A. Härter, Pastor

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