

Deportation to Transnistria

Memories of Dr. Andrei (Bandi) Gutfreund



The war began on September 1, 1940, when I was still a soldier in northern Moldova, near Dorohoi. At the 6 o'clock exercises, the Warsaw București plane flew over us and we realized that the war had begun.

They sent us home immediately, which was also not pleasant, because the Iron Guard students threw many Jews off the fast-moving train. My father already received me in Timisoara with the warning that I would be also dragged into the war. The series of labor camps has started. All men between the ages of 18 and 60 were gathered in the field of Electrica and transported that day to various locations such as Brasov, Sibiu, Valea Oltului and Brad. I was left out and was only assigned 10 days later to the water works 10-12 km away from Timișoara. I usually went there by bicycle, and the road to Ghiroda was accessible even on foot from our street. This ideal assignment lasted about 6 months, during which I also worked at the Jewish hospital.

We were not sure at all about the latest news as our radio had to be delivered to the authorities. We knew about the deportation of the Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia to Transnistria. A

group from Timisoara, who had American visas and Soviet transit visas, were all shot (Mannheim, the pharmacist Holzer, Taussig and others). The old communists, including Kain, were deported. Transnistria became a nightmare for the Jews – they were the victims of hunger, typhus, and Romanian and Ukrainian gangs.

Odessa became the capital of Transnistria. The Jews were crammed into the ghettos of Sasgorod, Bersad, and other small towns, in abandoned stables, in horrible conditions. Since typhus also threatened the rest of the population, Jewish doctors were sent from other parts of the country to fight it.

The same situation was in prisoner war camps, where many hundreds of people died every day of typhus, hunger and cold. The winter of 1941-42 was the coldest winter of the 20th century. Many individual tragedies can be listed, direct or indirect consequences of Hitler's dictatorship. The Romanians always knew how to take advantage of favorable opportunities. While the whole of Europe was bleeding and groaning under the Gestapo and SS German boots, Romania remained semi-autonomous. Almost all leaders could be bought for money, a lot of money. Thus, the Jews of Banat, Oltenia, Muntenia and the part of Ardeal that was not under the authority of Hungary were saved. For example, Mrs. Antonescu received an entire fully furnished hospital from the Jews, which of course bore her name. Lots of clothes, gold, etc. Requisition was done officially. Under these circumstances, a guy named Frăteanu appeared in my father's factory and announced that he was the Romanianizer and would take over the factory. My father was so upset that he fell to bed the next day and passed away after 8 days. These 8 days were the most terrible period of my life, from April 4 to 13. Our wedding was announced (scheduled) for the 18th! Since we couldn't call a Romanian doctor because it was forbidden, 8-10 Jewish doctors plus me were not able to diagnose his problem, only after his death a doctor named Pefeffermann, who was also seriously ill, came up with the diagnosis. Perforated ulcer + peritonitis. Since then, I've dreamt about him almost every night. And surely everything would have turned out differently if the diagnosis had been successful and he had been operated on! There was no penicillin or other antibiotics at that time. The whole "story" makes me feel bitter to this day.

In the meantime, there were more and more horror stories, but no one suspected Auschwitz or the like, although on one occasion an SS soldier left his wallet full of money in the pharmacy at Maria, and with horrifying photographs of the Serbian campaign. Streets with hanged people, women, many children. Well, this is just an episode of the horror (illegible) of the times.



Andrei Gutfreund and his wife, Lilly, born Berenyi

In these bleak times, I was called up by the Government of Transnistria, Guvernamentul Transnistriei - Odesa. Mom was pregnant, we have been married for 3-4 months and we lived a day-to day life in a threatening world, like lunatics or rather like some placid onlookers who hoped that the bus that ran over everyone would spare us.

To be continued in the next issue.

Andrei (Bandi) Gutfreund, born 14 May, 1914, in Recas, Romania. He died in 1999, Israel. When he was 6 years old, the family moved to Timisoara. His father owned a linen factory. He graduated the Jewish high school, then studied medicine in Szeged and Naples. His wife Lilly was born Berenyi (1922-2005, Israel).

As a young doctor he had a position at the university, but was sent to work at Ciacova, when he applied for a passport to emigrate to Israel.

The manuscript, the photos and the biography were sent to us for publication by Dita Gara, Andrei Gutfreund's daughter.

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