

Deportation to Transnistria

Memories of Dr. Andrei (Bandi) Gutfreund (continued)



Part TWO

(Part ONE below)

On the Timișoara-Bucharest-Odessa road, I wanted to travel in a proper carriage, but the colonel refused to let me in as a passenger, even though he didn't know I was Jewish. The Jewish forced labour camp was called "compulsory labour". The fact that we were bold enough to make demands shows how much we believed in miracles, or were just stupid, even insolent under the circumstances.

After a 19-hour journey to Odessa, I arrived in Odessa, where a lieutenant named Ilania was waiting in a car. He was a broken man, a converted legionnaire (Garda de Fier), and he was beside himself, telling me about the events of the past week and how he hadn't felt like a human being since. There were 200,000 Jews in Odessa. The resistance fighters had blown up a Gestapo building. Whereupon they crammed as many Jews as they could into the synagogue and set it on

fire from four sides. But it wasn't not the Germans, but the Romanians! Anyone who tried to escape through windows or small holes was machine-gunned. 420 wounded people managed to escape, but two were seized by Ukrainian inhabitants and handed over to the Germans. Their fate was sealed.

After reporting to the government medical department, where we – we were about eight, from Iasi, Constanta, Bucharest – were received by a drunken officer, and treated as lepers, we were given our assignments. We were assigned to Yampol, which was the furthest from Odessa. On the train, people were talking about the fire in Odessa. A Ukrainian remarked that now there were even more of them (Jews N.ed.) than before. He asked me where we were going? Yampol is an ugly little place, full of ugly Jews with noses like that and ears like that (the Ukrainian said. N. ed.). But are there still Jews left?, I asked innocently. Meanwhile, the others (now only three) were huddled together, frightened, but I kept on needling them.

In Yampol, gypsy soldiers checked on me and stared at my shoes. I was afraid I would arrive at the hospital barefoot so I left as quickly as I could.

The town (nebich) looked like Chakova, but what struck me was that there were no civilians anywhere. We found out that there was a curfew! As we were in civilian clothes on a horse-drawn carriage, people thought we were new Romanians invaders.

The hospital is typical of European hospitals of about a hundred years ago. On arrival we met the director, a young man called Popovici, who declared that you worked here, you worked there and we were in there for about three minutes and I could see immediately that he was scabby but scratching away unperturbed. I told him I wouldn't have any more problems if I knew where we were going to live, eat, etc. So we left and got a room, which was normal in the Soviet system, but the others hadn't slept like that yet : the three of us on straw mattresses in two Sochnut beds.

To describe my experiences, I would have to write twice as much, but I better spare you, so I will try to be brief.

Of course, the next day I had to face realities. Some Jews were working in the courtyard of the hospital under a wild drunken Ukrainian. Of course, I approached them and spoke to the

Ukrainian as if I were the future director. He got two cigarettes and that settled it. It turned out that they lived in a ghetto, now in semi-human conditions, in deep misery. Among them there were doctors, rabbis, watch repairers, tailors, etc. There were also a few robbers and traffickers who were ready to rat on their fellow mates in exchange for small gains.

Since the patients in the hospital were starving, medicine was almost zero, especially babies were dropping like flies. We had to eat. We knew that there was a family called Malinovski, who had some kind of a restaurant, so we set off to find it. We walked about 300m, and were met by a savage officer, his hand on the revolver. Who are you ? Jewish doctors who work in the hospital. Where's the yellow star? But sorry, we're quasi-soldiers. You're a bunch of stinking Jews like the rest of you. Put it on immediately, or you'll have trouble with me. It turns out that a lieutenant named Popovici was also the leader of Siguranța, the lord over life and death.

But when he left, we went to the restaurant and we enjoyed what we found, though Busteni (? N. ed.) was a delicacy compared to this.

To be continued in the next issue.

Part 1

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.

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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