

Deportation to Transnistria

Memories of Dr. Andrei (Bandi) Gutfreund

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.

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From the family photo album

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.

On the Timișoara-Bucharest-Odesa 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.

Working in a hospital meant that almost everyone did what they didn't know how to do. The permanent medical staff consisted of a young Ukrainian doctor and an elderly, as if in a Chekhov play, gynaecologist, who was quietly anti-Semitic, yet took note of the fact that we did not belong to the occupation army. She scraped and scraped and watched child deliveries. However, the nursing staff were relatively good. But they were also helpless for lack of material. I became a radiologist and felt sorry for every patient who came, and I was maybe useful if someone had a big hole in their lung or something else that anyone else would notice. But it still had its advantages, because it was the only apparatus in the whole province, lots of people came, even officers and high officials.

The motto in the old Bucharest was "Niște raze, niște injectii" (A little ray, a little injection). So the word spread quite quickly. I was scared twice. It got dark early, and as it was forbidden to be on the streets after 8 o'clock, anyone could be shot without warning, whether civilian or soldier. So that left 4 Jewish doctors with a room 3x3 meters, a 3-legged table, 2 chairs with holes, a bed + a pair of slats, the latter suited me better because my legs didn't hang out.

It could have been evening, 11 p.m. Banging noise, rough knocking, who is it, what is it?

Deschideți ușa, jandarmerie! (Open the door, police!) The guy comes in and asks where is the tall doctor "*din Timișoara*"? Interestingly enough, I wasn't scared right away, but the others were deathly pale. Get dressed and come with me to see the lieutenant. This notorious murderer, whom we met on the first day, threatened me so gently. Well, bye world, out into the pitch dark of the great Ukrainian night! Two questions were on my mind: first, he wouldn't tell me why he had summoned me, and second, how to get away, but where and where to. So I went ahead, the rifle behind me. A million stars were shining, we only heard very rare distant shots. What the hell, I'll give it a try. Such a glittering night, I said, I've never seen! I couldn't see his face, but he must have thought I was stupid, because he said: *Nu pentru toata lumea.* (Not for everyone.) The whole trip didn't take more than 10 minutes, but when I saw the police building, I was a bit scared. But I didn't even step inside, that I could already hear the guy's delicate baritone at the guard post: "*Hai doctore, am nevoie de dumneata!*" (hey, doctor, I need you!) This no longer sounded dangerous. Briefly, the lord over life and death, his eyes slightly downcast after we entered his room, where I, unaccustomed to bright light, also downcast my eyes. Poor man or

not, the lieutenant admitted that he had some kind of venereal disease and that his wife was coming at the end of the week.

Ach so! Then you're in my hands. The rest of the details are not interesting, but the result certainly is. In a day or two, everyone said hello to me in advance, and the first thing I did was to get unrestricted access to the ghetto. By the way, I treated the Lieutenant-General in such a way that he would never get rid of his trouble in his life. But as it turned out, this was also unnecessary, because after about one year the Russians caught him and shot him dead. So I spent the whole day in the ghetto, not only providing medical assistance, although there were 2 or so Jewish doctors, but I was mainly interested in their fate. They were all from Cernovitch (Cernăuți), except a couple of locals who were left alive. Among them there was a shrewd tailor who had mediated with the local Ukrainians and worked for them, his son (... unintelligible) Unfortunately I found out afterwards that he was shot too, this time by the retreating Romanians.

There was everything there, from a pharmacist to a musician. That would be a long story to tell what types they were (a musician, a football captain, a lawyer etc). I took a particular interest in and cared for a family called Meyer, with 2 little boys and an uncle who was a Zionist leader. Of course, I left them whatever excess shoes, clothes etc. I had. They and others survived.

The epilogue after about 15 years: somebody knocked at the door of the Flesch's crif (barrack) in Holon. Who is it? Meyer. Good, come in. Excuse me, are you Dr. Gutfreund's sister? And he starts crying. – It was your father who saved the lives of my two sons, etc. In short, they were already "vatic" (long time in the country), and made curtains, taught them the craft, which Erzsi still does, and even Imre, as long as he could.

EPISODES

As I was a guest every day at the Lieutenant-General's, I always asked for something for the Jews. In the meantime, the Germans requested Jews for work, whom they transported and then executed. Of course I had to invent all kinds of deadly diseases for those they wanted to send across the river Bug. In such cases the chief physician had to give his consent. I did an X-ray,

moreover I set it up so that he was exposed to the rays, and since he had no idea about anything, he accepted almost anything. So while I was there, no Jews were sent across the Bug.

On another occasion, also with this man, while he was musing about how the Germans were going to win, one of the gendarmes reported that a Jewish spy had been captured. The decree was that if a Jew was caught outside the ghetto, he would be declared a spy and within 24 hours a verdict would be given and of course he would be shot. Bring them in, he said. Of course, I went to fetch him and out of the cellar emerges an old blind Jew in rags, led by a little boy of about 5 or 6 years old, and they were living on begging so they wouldn't starve to death. Domnule Locotenent, așa arată un spion? (Sir, is that what a spy looks like?) He shouts at the gendarme, Du-te-n ... mășii. (F... your mother.) I followed him and escorted him to the ghetto, where they were somehow taken care of.

The atmosphere in the hospital changed a lot after the Soviet offensive, where there were about 30,000 German prisoners. We were now free to go down to the stream where we could swim in our underwear and catch small fish, which were fried on the spot by the ear nose and throat specialist from Iasi. The Romanians are masters of opportunism and we started to be befriended by people who had not even greeted us before. One evening they knocked timidly at the door and the scabby chief doctor (also Popovici) entered and sat down on the only intact chair and announced with a sad face, "Să știți că părăsim Transnistria". (We must leave Transnistria.) We didn't even dare to look at each other, we consoled and encouraged him that, of course, this shouldn't be taken seriously.

All this dragged on until about October 1943. The Odessa railway station was full of trains packed with German wounded, gone was the famous German order, but the journey between Yampol and Odessa was not easy, one Jewish doctor was almost shot dead by desperate German soldiers, but after a somewhat adventurous 24 hour journey I was in Timisoara-Josefin.

My story is only relatively long because what I saw and heard would fill another 100 pages, if not more. Ultimately, it was the Romanians who deported all the Jews of Bucovina and Cernovitz. Transnistria counts about 150,000 Jewish dead (typhus, starvation, freezing, shot to death). The rest 50,000 in Jasi, 10,000 (another story) in Târgul-Ocna, Podul Illoaiei death train also a few

thousand, the rest from the interior of the country, relatively few from the labor camps.

Timisoara about 10-12 deaths from accidents and illness. But all this was Hilton luxury compared to Northern Transylvania, Hungary etc.

Note

This was written by my father, Dr. Gutfreund Bandi, in 1986, at the request of his granddaughter Dana. It was only then that we learned what had happened. Dita Gara, born Gutfreund, Israel, 2023