

Germans from Crimea in Labor Camps of Swerdlowsk District



By Hilda Riss

Translation and all footnotes by Merv Weiss

*Published in Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland Heimatbuch
2007/2008, pages 58 – 91. Translation and publication by permission.*

About the author:

Hilda Riss, born 3 December 1935 in Rosental, Crimea, was deported in the middle of August 1941 with her family to Siberia, where nevertheless, she was able to enjoy a good education. She completed her secondary schooling and after that she was a teacher and director of the library in Usmanka, Kemerowo district. She studied at the State University of Tomsk from 1957 to 1962. After her academic studies, Hilda Riss was an associate of the Institute of Crop Management in Alma-Ata until 1982. From 1983 until her retirement in 1991, she was a leading agronomist or a senior scientific associate in Kazakhstan.

From 1959 to 1996 she published five books in Russian under the name "Galina Kosolapowa" and one book in the Tschechnian language on the subject of crop protection. In 1969 she qualified for a scholarship and in 1972 in Moscow received her certificate as senior scientific associate of entomology. After her retirement and particularly after her immigration to Germany in 1995, Hilda Riss increasingly turned her attention to the research of her fellow Germans from Crimea. She wrote her sixth book "Krim nascha Rodina" [Crimea, our Fatherland] in Russian because she wanted to communicate with those German-Russian generations who were not able to attend a German school, in order to keep in contact with them and to gather material for a memorial book in the German language of the Crimean Germans.

Contact information:

Hilda Riss

Gibitzenhofstr. 122

90443 Nürnberg, Germany

Tel: 0911-422454

The first Germans established themselves in Crimea in the years 1804 to 1810. They came from various districts of South Germany and from Switzerland. In addition, Mennonites came from the Berdjansk area of Taurien province in the years 1862 to 1870.

The German immigrants founded eight so-called mother colonies: Heilbrunn, Herzenberg, Kronental, Neusatz, Rosental, Friedental, Sudak-Festung, and Zurichtal.

The beginning was difficult, but in the course of time these people adapted to their new surroundings and turned the countryside into fertile oases. But the bloom of the German colonies lasted only a short time. In 1871 their self-government was abolished and in 1874 general compulsory military service was introduced. All other special rights had already been eliminated earlier. In response to the implementation of these laws, many Crimean Germans emigrated. In the years following the October Revolution and up until 1929, when the Soviet Union hermetically sealed its borders, 900 families emigrated to America, and settled in Canada, U.S.A., Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and other countries.¹

In 1915 there were 314 German colonies in Crimea. In 1926, 43,631 Germans lived there, making up 6.1 percent of the total population of the peninsula. The German colonies disintegrated after a few years of Soviet rule. The land taken from the settlers was nationalized; religious instruction in the schools was forbidden. The people spoke about rich and poor, kulaks and agricultural laborers (Batraken). Kulaks were dispossessed. Stalin's 1929

Germans from Crimea

slogan, "The Kulaks as a class will be liquidated!" became the reality of "Entkulakisierung" or de-kulakization.²

Alexander Solzhenitsyn described it as follows: "The powerful force of de-kulakization was felt a million times and took on un-imagined proportions. The people affected made a large file for the investigation departments. There is nothing in the history of Russia comparable to this action. It was a mass evacuation of people, an ethnic catastrophe, one which was followed by a three-year famine in the years 1930 to 1932, caused neither by drought nor by war. The driving force was so powerful, that no stick or stone was left unturned, and all were swept together into one heap to accomplish this goal." (*The height of the famine can be defined in different ways, but all Russian-German witnesses of that time accept it as the first half of 1933. -Editor [of Landsmannschaft Heimatbuch]*)

Mass ostracism resulted from that first act of the new history. It was repeated by Hitler with the Jews, and by Stalin with "disloyal peoples," which included the German-Russians during the German-Soviet war.

From the archives in Crimea it is known that de-kulakization lasted from 1929 to 1933. In the year 1930 alone, over 25,000 people were exiled from the area of the Crimean peninsula, most of them to the Urals and to the Swerdlowsk district, but also in other regions – Archangelsk, Perm, Baschkirien, Kazakhstan, Siberia, ASSR Komi.³

Through my reading I have learned that during the years of de-kulakization, the deported citizens of Crimea in 1930 had established a settlement in Serow Rayon⁴ of the Swerdlowsk region by the name of "Sewernyi Krym" (North Crimea).

We have researched the deportations of the Germans from Rosental. In 1926 there were 67 homes, which housed 87 families

with children. After de-kulakization, 27 families (31 percent) had disappeared, including the families Bäuerle, Wander, Dyck, Krug, Rissling, Faut, and Fix. The families Antoni, Hoerner, Eisenbraun, Koelsch, Moch, and Reinbold appear to have been decimated. Every third family had no head-of-household.

The most independent, educated, and able people were removed from the villages. Often they were exiled with only what they wore, or what they could carry in a knapsack (backpack). Their possessions were immediately declared to be the property of the *kolkhoz*. As an example, the house of my uncle, A.G. Fix, served as the *kolkhoz* office until 1965. Later it was a residence for teachers, and after 1991, a private residence. It has been occupied for more than 150 years, and will likely withstand the test of time for a long while yet.

The mass evacuation of Crimea began in March of 1930 and continued through the entire month of April. In the two days of April 24-25 alone, eight transports departed Simferopol in the direction of the Urals.

Only a few were successful in returning to Crimea, and of these, even fewer were allowed to return to their home villages. That was the lot of those who experienced de-kulakization. But there were also many who had been left behind, who were arrested and shot.

As the children of the 1930s grew into the adolescents of the war years, they were taken into the *Trudarmee*.⁵ (*By definition, the Russian word "Trudarmee" means labor army. In reality it meant forced labor, in other words, extermination camp. One needs only to observe the death rate in Camp Krasnoturjinsk by reading the sketches of individual fates in the following report.—Editor [of the Landsmannschaft Heimatbuch].*) Mostly they had to work under the worst conditions in mining, timber cutting in the forest, in quarries and road construction, or in the construction of military installations.

During Soviet times, in the years from 1930 to 1950, most of the Germans from Crimea ended up in the Urals. They arrived

Germans from Crimea

in several waves, and their placement depended on various social, economic and political factors, that is:

- To expedite the industrialization of a region;
- Massive deportations of so-called special re-settlers [de-kulakization – MW];
- Deportation of civilians from areas near the front during the Second World War;
- Deportation of Germans from Crimea, the Caucasus, etc.

These migrations were conducted with force and affected various nationalities, including the German-Russians.

According to the population census of 1926, 26,000 Germans lived in the Urals. The majority stemmed from the Volga regions. By 1939 this number had already climbed to 35,400. Included in that number were large numbers of Crimean Germans, because the first waves of Germans deported from Crimea under de-kulakization were sent to the Urals, the majority directly from Simferopol. The exact number of Germans deported from Crimea is not known.

The war with Germany led to the demise of the German presence in Crimea.

In 1941 more than 63,500 Germans, including their non-German family members, lived in Crimea. In only one week, from August 16 to 22, 1941, they were deported (and not evacuated!). Some of these people were taken off the transport trains in the Caucasus and held,⁶ prior to being deported a second time for the purpose of mobilization and assignment to the Urals.

When the order of the wartime administration of the southern front was issued on 25 August 1941 – “About the Re-settlement of the Germans out of Crimea” – there were no longer any Germans in Crimea. It had been planned to take them to North Caucasus, but besides North Caucasus, they also ended up in Dagestan

and Baschkiria⁷ and in the districts of Rostow, Omsk, Swerdlowsk, Perm, and Tscheljabinsk. The last three districts are located in the Urals.

Those Germans who arrived with the first wave in Dagestan in the North Caucasus or in the Rostow district, after bringing in the harvest were deported to the Siberian districts of Novosibirsk, Kemerowo, and Omsk, as well as to thirteen districts of Kazakhstan. According to our incomplete statistics, they were distributed over a total of 440 locations, including 64 in the Urals – 51 in Swerdlowsk district, 8 in Perm district, and 5 in Tscheljabinsk district. The numbers increased even more in 1942 with the arrival of Crimean Germans, who had already previously been deported from their homeland to Siberia.

At the same time, the number of Germans in the Urals climbed significantly with the arrival of those in the *Trudarmee*. Convicted Germans, of whom only a few were free [on the loose – MW], likewise ended up in the camps in the Urals. And finally, young German soldiers, who soon after the war's beginning had been transferred from the Red Army into the labor army, made up a further contingent of the *Trudarmee* in the Urals.

The third wave consisted of German *Trudarmee* laborers from the ranks of the second deportation. At first, those men between the ages of 17 and 50 capable of physical labor had been deported to the districts of Omsk and Novosibirsk, in the areas of Krasnojarsk and Altai, as well as to the Kazakhstan SSR [Soviet Socialist Republic – MW]. By 30 January 1942 the mobilization of 120,000 men was projected for the total wartime effort. The first arrivals in Tagillag⁸ in February 1942 were German evacuees from Kazakhstan and Siberia. In March and April of 1942 there followed local resident Germans, Germans who had not been deported (*ie. from the Asiatic regions of the USSR – Editor [of the Landsmannschaft Heimatbuch]*). Among them however were many Crimean Germans.

The third or Harvest Mobilization of 1942 was the most extensive. This then

Germans from Crimea

affected many women, although they were not sent to Tagillag. However one year later in September 1942 [sic], scores of women arrived at the construction sites,⁹ as well as men from the second deportation drive, primarily from Omsk district and Krasnojarsk area.

When women were called for mobilization in the Soviet rayon of Mamljutki in North Kazakhstan, women who appeared to have no children were immediately rounded up and placed in the *Trudarmee*. Several who had come with children were sent back. They were strongly warned to leave their children at home next time. Lydia, daughter of Georg Kuhn, was summoned three times. Each time she took her daughter Rosa along, and when she was asked why, she answered that she had no parents and did not know where she should leave her child. After that she was left alone.

The Crimeans in the *Trudarmee* worked in various rayons in the Urals. In Tscheljabinsk area, and indeed in the cities of Tscheljabinsk, Kopejsk, Korkino, Mias, etc., these were primarily men. In Swerdlowsk region most of the *Trudarmee* inmates were in camps and were concentrated in construction in Nishnij Tagil, Krasnoturjinsk, Kuschwa and Tawda. Altogether, the Crimeans in the *Trudarmee* worked in more than 30 populated places, including some in Baschkiria, Udmurtien, and other regions.

The first ones mobilized into the *Trudarmee*, including the Crimean Germans, almost all arrived in the harsh winter of 1942/43. Many remained there for eternity.

In the years 1942 to 1946, 6,512 Germans entered the *Trudarmee* in Tagillag; included in this number, according to our limited research, were 382 German men and 32 German women from Crimea. Of these, 81 died (20 percent), 26 were "written off" as invalids (6 percent), 12 were condemned, and 2 managed to escape.

Among the Crimean Germans there were a considerable number of educated men and

women. One hundred and forty-seven men and six women were university educated; 2,594 had received the normal high school education. The number of illiterate Germans from Crimea is stated as 367; we strongly challenge this number, because nearly all Germans in Crimea before the war years had graduated from a German school. However not all could write in Russian. To tell the whole truth, it must also be noted, that some in the *Trudarmee* who were educated were able to continue to practice their profession. Representative of this group was the pharmacist G.A. Fix who was allowed to work in the dispensary.

The Germans forced into the *Trudarmee* in Swerdlowsk district were held in six camps, almost half of them in special industrial construction projects of the NKVD.¹⁰ In the Urals there were four large NKVD concentration camps:

- in Tscheljabinsk (Tscheljabinsk metallurgy)
- in Nikito-Iwdel (Iwdellag)
- in Krasnoturjinsk (Bastroj)
- and in Nishnij Tagil (Tagillag and Tagilstroj)

The goal of this work is to gather together the available archive material and information from the memorial books (*Knigi pamjati*). We also have statements from witnesses of that time period. But that is another subject.

[Editors' note: This article concludes with a list of approximately 400 names of Crimean Germans in the Trudarmee in the Swerdlowsk District. This list is available at www.blackseagr.org/pdfs/crimea_germans_weiss.pdf.]

Surnames included in list online:

- A: Adolf, Anders, Antoni, Artes
B: Baisch, Bär, Baranowskaja, Bäuerle, Baun, Bechthold, Beck, Becker, Beitler, Benz, Berg, Bergsmeier (Bergmaier), Berns (Börns), Birkholz, Birkle, Blank, Bletsch, Bosch, Böshans, Braun, Bub, Büche, Buchmann, Buhling

Germans from Crimea

D: Dewald, Dewald, Dieter, Dorin, Dubs, Dyck (Dick, Dück)
E: Eckhardt, Ehrenberg, Eisenbraun, Ensel, Erikisin, Essau
F: Färber, Faut, Feist, Fix, Föll, Frank, Frasch, Friedrichsen, Friesen, Fritz, Frohmiller, Fütterer
G: Galwas, Geiger, Giesbrecht, Gimbel, Gissler (Hissler?), Görzen, Gross, Grötzinger, Grüner, Günter
H: Haar, Haas (Haass, Hass?), Haller, Halster, Hauck, Heck Heckel, Hegelmann, Hein, Heinert, Heiser, Herbold, Herbst, Hermann, Hirschhorn, Hörner, Hübner, Huckenberger, Hurlebaus
J: Janulis, Janzen
K: Kain (Kein?), Kaiser, Kasper, Kaufmann, Kazki (Katzkij?), Keilbach, Keller, Kelsch, Kilber, Kirchmayer, Klassen, Klaus, Kliment (Clement?), Klotz, Knittel, König, Konrad, Krug, Kühnle
L: Laggay, Landes, Lang, Letger, Liese, Linde, Litau, Ljubinskij, Luse (Luhse?), Lutzner (Lutzner?),
M: Mahler, Maier, Mantel, Markowetz, Martaller, Martin, Marx, Mattheis, Mayer, Meister, Meremes, Merkel, Miller, Minding, Möllmann, Monat, Müller, Murawskij
N: Neble, Neufert, Neugum, Neumann, Nuss
O: Oberländer, Oberzeiser, Oster, Ott
P: Pastler, Penner, Petker, Pfeifer, Pinsker, Polle, Portier, Prinz, Punkt
Q: Quiring
R: Rapp, Regner (born Fefler?), Reibold, Reimchen, Reinboldt, Reinhardt, Remel, Rempel, Resostaber, Richter, Roller, Rott, Ruckhaber, Ruff
S: Sautner, Sawadski, Schäfer, Schamber, Schatz, Schellenberg, Scherer, Schmidt, Schneider, Schoppert, Schreif, Schröder, Schuhmacher, Schurr, Schwarz, Seidler, Seiferling, Seiler, Seitz, Simoni, Stark, Stauber, Stein, Steinhäuser, Stock, Stoll
T: Tibelius, Tiche, Togner, Traxel, Treiber, Treichel
U: Uhl, Ulrich, Utte
V: Vogel, Vollenweider, Vollman, Voth

W: Wacker, Wagner, Wall, Wallenwein, Wallmann, Walter, Walz, Weber, Wedel, Weigum, Weikum, Weisbeck, Weitmann, Wenning, Wernik, Widmann, Wiebe, Wiens, Wild, Wilms, Winkler, Wittenberg, Wulf

Z: Zeeb, Zeiser, Zeisler, Zimmermann

The following information was not part of the original article written by Hilda Riss, but sheds more light on the Tagil labor camp complex.

For full article see Johnson's Russia List, Issue #25, Oct. 2004 at www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/8390.cfm#12

Excerpts from Stalin's Death Camps: The Tagil Camp Complex

by Marina Berestova

Reprinted with permission

Tagillag was set up in November 1941 to build new mines and factories in and around the author's hometown of Nizhny [Lower] Tagil in the Urals. By the end of 1942 it had 43,000 prisoners in several dozen camps... engaged in a broad range of work that now included forestry and agriculture. It contracted to 25,752 prisoners in 1944 and 13,610 at the beginning of 1946.

The total number of prisoners who passed through its camps during the peak years of 1942 and 1943 was 85,547. Of these 59,822 (70 percent) were dead by the end of this period.

A special category of the prisoners was made up of Soviet Germans, who were arrested and deported en masse in 1942. About 7,000 of them were sent to Tagillag....

Prisoners lived in damp unheated barracks, half underground with small windows under the ceiling. There was less than one square meter of space per person. They slept on bare planks in their work clothes. Footwear and warm clothing were in short supply. The diet contained little protein or vitamins, so pellagra and other deficiency diseases were rife – as well as dysentery, typhus, hypothermia (freezing), etc.

Germans from Crimea

The working day of hard manual labor was 11 hours. Even on "days off" a "subbotnik" (1) was usually declared, involving three or four hours work on supplementary tasks such as clearing railroad tracks, digging trenches, harvesting potatoes, repairing the barracks or removing bugs from the planks. But worst of all were the occasions when prisoners were forced to do extra work after their evening meal, typically to unload coal from freight cars for 3-5 hours or even all night long. "They returned exhausted, ate breakfast, and returned to work without sleeping."

One of the most terrible subdivisions of Tagillag was the 13th penal section, set up deep in the forest in 1943. Its purpose was to isolate prisoners who had infringed camp regulations, refused to work or tried to escape – or who were simply disliked by the commandants. They worked felling trees. Their work quotas were the highest and their rations the lowest – no more than 300 grams of black bread and a bowl of gruel [balanda] a day. How long could they last on that? (2)

Tagillag constituted a self-sufficient world in itself. It grew its own food and ran its own bakery and retail network. It also possessed a procuracy, a court, a jail, a police force, a state security department, a printing press and two newspapers (one for staff, the other for prisoners), medical, cultural, and sports units, a post office, a fire service, and – last but not least – a cemetery.

Merv Weiss was born and raised surrounded by German-Russians who settled southwestern Saskatchewan around Prelate and Fox Valley. He began researching his Kutschurgan and Crimean roots in the year 2000 (see www.russianroots.ca) and is always learning more about the history of the Germans from Russia. This article and the list of Crimean Germans in the Trudarmee helped him discover the fate of his uncle. He has traveled to both Ukraine and

Germany multiple times to visit ancestral villages and meet relatives. He is on the GRHS Board of Directors.

Notes

- (1) On a subbotnik people supposedly volunteered for unpaid work of public value on their day off. In practice there was considerable pressure to volunteer, and certainly in the camps there was nothing voluntary about it.
- (2) In his Gulag Archipelago, Alexander Solzhenitsyn mentions rumors of special penal camps in the Far North. However, he does not provide much information about them because he was unable to find surviving witnesses.

Footnotes

1. My mother, her sister, two brothers, and their parents made up one of these 900 families. -- MW
2. "De-kulakization" is not a recognized English word, but best describes the process whereby successful farmers (called kulaks) were stripped of their property, their rights, and were exiled.
3. Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Komi is located in NE European Russia with Syktyvkar as its capital city.
4. Rayon or raion is a municipal district.
5. Soviet "army" of forced slave laborers utilized in a variety of industries and subjected to sub-human living conditions. I have kept the German spelling throughout this article. MW.
6. They were used in the Caucasus to help with the harvest, and then shipped east. -- MW
7. Baschkiria is/was a Soviet republic in the extreme eastern part of European Russia, located west of the Urals in the Volga District. The capital city is Ufa. Dagestan is a Russian republic in the North Caucasus region.
8. City of Nizhni Tagil in the Urals. See www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/8390.cfm#12
9. Tagillag was set up in November 1941 to build new mines and factories in and around the author's hometown of Nizhny [Lower] Tagil in the Urals. See Marina Berestova , Tagillag: bol' i svershenie [The Tagil Camp Complex: Pain and Achievement] www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/8390.cfm
10. Russian acronym for *Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs*, in other words, the State Security Police.