

# Bessarabia Refugee Comments 1940

Source: DAI Microfilm T-81; Roll 321; Group 1035;  
VOMI 952; Frame 2452655

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Note: **Refugee Comments #1** appears to be a composite of statements made by various people for atrocities they either witnessed or heard about after the Russians moved into Bessarabia in 1940. **Refugee Comments #2** is by Christian Esslinger from Lichtental, who speaks about what he saw and experienced on his way through Arzis, Bolgrad, Reni, and Galatz. **Refugee Comments #3** is by Waldemar Küst, who tells of what happened in Akkerman as the Russians arrived, how he fled westward through Klöstitz, down to Bolgrad, into Braila and made it safely to Bukarest, Romania. Information within [square brackets] indicate translator's comment.

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Source: DAI Microfilm T-81; Roll 321; Group 1035;  
VOMI 952; Frame 2452656

## Refugee Comments #1

[Translation Begins]

Bukarest, July, 1940

### Statements from Bessarabian Refugees

The Orthodox priest Siniszin was hung by Jews on the cross in the cathedral.

The priest Fotszcu was murdered by Jews.

The colonist Eduard Roduner and his son Eugene were also murdered by Jews in Budacki, which is near Akkerman.

The official (*Prätor*) Spionnu was shot to death by a Jew, Abraham Karolik.

Captain Dojescu was also assassinated by Jews.

Colonel Doenaru, Commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment, was pulled off the horse by the Jews, undressed, spit upon, beaten and chased off.

In the German villages of Gnadenthal and Sarata, inhabitants were murdered by Jews, incited by the Russians and the Red ob.

In another German village—the name is not known—it is said to have been looted and inhabitants also murdered.

The departing Romanian army was disarmed, beat up and mistreated by the incited population of Jews.

In the German colony of Tarutino, the mayor, the village notary and secretary were allegedly murdered by Jews.

In Kischinev, the priest Berososki was murdered by Jews because he did not allow the Jews to take the images of God from the church and burn them. His son was also murdered. Another clergyman in Kischinev had his stomach slashed in front of his church. A major and another officer were disarmed, beaten and spit upon. In addition, all buttons were cut off from their trousers. They were dragged off (*verschleppt*) across the Dnjestr River to Russia.

That III Rifleman Regiment was disarmed, the shoulder insignias were torn off the officers. They were beaten up, and spit upon, and chased out by the Jews from the village of Romaneste, which is located next to the German colony of Leipzig. The officers were all locked in a freight wagon and dragged off to Russia.

[Translation Ends]

## Refugee Comments #2

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### Taken from a Letter from a Refugee out of Lichtental, Bessarabia

The writer of the letter is Christian Esslinger, coming from Grossliebenthal near Odessa.

...First, all the colonists were informed far too late of the rapid arrival of the Russians to Bessarabia. I only found out on the radio on Thursday, 27 June. that I still have a short time to escape, because in my *Nansenpass* [passport for an officially stateless person issued by the League of Nations] it said that I am stateless and a Ukrainian subject. If my passport had been checked, I would have been transported immediately to my homeland and my fate would have been sealed there: Shot (*an die Wand*) or off to Siberia (*nach dem Norden*)! It was only on Friday evening, when the Russians had already occupied **Akkermann** at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, for me to pack my poor belongings to let everything else stand and make my way to the motherland. At 2 o'clock in the morning on 29 June, I drove to the station at **Arzis**, at 5 o'clock in the morning the last train of 60-70 cars departed, and I was all alone in a car. By 9 o'clock we were in **Besaraadskaja**, there were 5 long big trains along with all sorts of belongings of the officials of the Romanians and still a lot of dispersed military. We were held up here until 5 o'clock in the afternoon. In the course of time, from 11:00 AM. to 12:00 PM, no less than 75 to 85 Russian aircraft flew over us, off to the southwest of the railway line. You can easily imagine my excitement. As it later turned out, paratroopers were loaded up in all the aircraft, which were dropped off at Bolgrad and Reni. When we arrived by train in **Bolgrad**, it was 10 o'clock in the evening. We were held here until 6 AM. Every train had to be inspected. I got up for a while. However, it later turned out that only the military was disarmed and the civilians were not checked. Unfortunately, due to fear, I destroyed the letters and photos on the way to Bolgrad. The whole railway line was strewn with scraps of paper. In some places heaps. By sunset on Saturday, we finally got to **Reni**. The train was not allowed to go any further and we all had to get off. Well, it was in Bolgrad that I became familiar with the first paratroopers. They are tough people, well dressed, all in tube boots (shaft boots). Everyone behaved decently and correctly. Unfortunately, civilians were immediately armed there, militias were formed. I saw a herd of pigs, about 12-15, in the pasture, the mob has seized them all for themselves, many better owners brought their sheep to safety; on the rail-line, they wanted to invade the cars to steal, then some from the military shot into the air and the people disbursed. So, to continue by train was out. The Russian Commander, who was already in Reni, then gave us a truck and allowed us to drive to the bridge. From there, a Russian Colonel let us get into another car and I finally arrived safely in **Galatz**, at 10 o'clock in the evening, dead tired. The Russian Commander was a *Polkownik*, very correct and robust, and immediately the soldiers accompanied me. A *Towarischt* (comrade) **Ekkert** had to give us the car. I did not reveal that I spoke good Russian, but only stammered.

...This is what was requested of our German colonists in Bessarabia--they were asked by the local authorities of the People's Council to wait and be quite calm, which they also did. But there was a terribly depressed mood among them, no one wanted to speak any more. The beautiful ripe harvest in the field, the many oilseeds: soy, linseed, rapeseed, mustard and sunflowers for the kingdom stood out there and here the gang of Russians. Then the Romanians requisitioned all the best horses from 4 years old without paying even one lei [Romanian currency], except what the military bought directly. However, what was paid in cash is almost not worth mentioning. Many farmers, with a seeding of 15-30 hectares [37-74 acres], no longer have a single horse on the farm. I had one, and that was taken away.

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### Refugee Comments #3

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#### **Report on the events in Akkerman and the surrounding area during the occupation of Bessarabia by the Russians in June 1940**

Already a few days before 27 June of this year, a certain nervousness was noticeable in the military circles as well as in the Romanian administrative circles. The 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment stationed in **Cetatea Alba** [Akkerman] was suddenly withdrawn, some to Galati, some to Tighina. The rural police detachment (*Gendarmerieabteilung*), on the other hand, has been strengthened.

The administrative authorities, the tribunal, the National Bank, as well as the financial authorities and tax authorities were given a secret order to pack their archives in order to be ready for a possible evacuation. When a white flag was raised on the town hall and on the fire tower, of which no explanation was given on the Romanian side, a panicked escape began, even among the Romanian civilian population. Unending transports, packed with all kinds of furniture and business things, moved to the railroad station. The Jews stood in groups in the streets and whispered and gestured; their behavior became insolent and from their behavior one could see a certain joy in the troubles of others (*schadenfreude*). The Russians kept calm, which expressed neither joy nor suffering, more so an expression of a certain depression. As far as what us few Germans were advised, we behaved calmly, according to our earlier instruction from the leading circles, since we were repeatedly informed that there was no kind of danger for us.

On 27 June, around 8 o'clock in the evening, we received the terrible news that the next day the city of Cetatea Alba would be handed over to the Russians. We immediately tried to get a phone connection with our leading circles in Tarutino, but this was no longer possible. So the panic had reached its peak. Everyone was left to their own devices and acted at his own discretion. Throughout the night, everyone was looking for ways to move forward. Towards morning, I managed with a fellow countryman to bring my wife to the next village of **Sofiental** for temporary safety. I myself stayed in Cetatea Alba to try to figure out how to save my small business, what was to be saved. By 10 AM, most Jewish shops were red-flagged, with Jews wearing red armbands and red ribbons in the buttonhole; they rejoiced clearly and greeted us Germans only with "Heil Hitler." They pointed to the time that had come for reckoning with the Germans and asked us where Hitler would actually be with his help. In the small park in front of the town hall, almost all the Jews were gathered together with the mob of the city to receive the Russian deputation, which was scheduled for 1 o'clock. Bells rang out from all the churches, which in the meantime were also flagged in red. The mob from the surrounding area flocked to the city garden in groups of 100 to 200 men, singing The Internationale [left-wing French anthem of the socialist movement since the late nineteenth century] and carrying red flags, where at the same time communist speeches were held in front of King Ferdinand's monument. A Jew,

lawyer Pincus Steinberg, distinguished himself by throwing a large stone against the bust of King Ferdinand at the given moment of his speech. Around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, Red messengers (*Botte*) allegedly arrived from Ovidiopol with the first Russians; at the same time, about 20-25 aircraft of different sizes circled over the town of Cetatea Alba. Around 3 o'clock, the first Russian tank came from the direction of Bugaz. Since all the streets were overflowing by Jews and the mob, it was no longer possible to observe the events. The situation became so critical that I fled by car towards Sofiental at around 5 o'clock in the afternoon, saying goodbye to the unfortunate fellow-countrymen staying behind. As we were leaving the city, some groups tried to stop the car, but they cleared the way at the last moment, given the pistol being displayed. In Sofiental, they were already aware of war-like events (*Kreignisse*). There was a depressed mood among the fellow-countrymen. Everything looked forward with trust in God in the face of the serious war-like events. Courage could only be sustained with a firm faith in our Führer. "Do not forget us if the escape succeeds" were the cries of the involuntary staying behind fellow-countrymen as I drove from Sofiental. Now, throughout the night, we went unhindered through a number of Russian villages as far as **Klöstitz**. With the Russians, everything was red-flagged, but the behavior was calm. From Klöstitz to **Beresina, Tarutino, Posttal** and **Wittenberg** (a number of German villages) there was complete calm. Work was carried out in the factories, and the trade economies (*Handwirte*) also pursued their daily jobs. There was no red banner to be seen anywhere.. After we had left the last German settlement of Wittenberg, we came to the Bulgarian Rayon and what surprised us when in the Bulgarian villages not only the administrative buildings, but almost all the walls, the red banner waved.

The behavior of the Bulgarian population (*Gagauzen* [Turkic heritage]) was, astonishingly, much more hostile to the fleeing Romanian army and to us than one could ever expect. Individual vehicles of the people fleeing were stopped, those inside were mocked and pelted with stones. It was only thanks to the remnants of the retreating Romanian army, which the gangs respected, that a bloody terror could be prevented on the fleeing civilian population. In such circumstances, we also came to within 2-3km [1-2 miles] of **Bolgrad**. Suddenly, we met 2 Romanian trucks each occupied by 8-10 men who were Russian troops. They stopped us and, after a thorough search for weapons, set us free again with the comment: "You could go wherever you wanted." But with the next truck we were once again stopped, searched and put our belongings out on the highway. With a few good words, I managed to get the two fellows who took the car from us to at least take us to the railway station and then disappear after that with our car. In the meantime, we have seen the following: in addition to the Russian troops, who supposedly landed at Bolgrad with parachutes at 11 o'clock in the morning, large planes have constantly landed very close to us, from which Russian soldiers disembark. The first thing they did was to take the trucks from the military (Romanian) retreating on the highway in order to disarm the individual Romanian troops in groups of 10-12 men. The Romanians did not resist, were disarmed and walked towards the Bolgrad railroad station. Cavalry, artillery and other horse-equipped troops continued their retreat on the highway. From Bolgrad, we travelled with a military train, which was surrounded by the Russians and was only released at 1 o'clock at night, where an uprising of the Jews and Russians fleeing to Russia was suppressed by the Romanian police and military. We also managed to get out of this witch's cauldron by getting on a ship to **Braila**, from where we then reached **Bucharest** by train.

It should also be noted that the Russian military was very demanding and insolent, and permitted rough handling such as ripping off shoulder insignias and ridiculing the Romanian officers. I heard some Russian soldiers standing together speak German and also Romanian. They were not armed with modern machine guns and automatic pistols but with old Russian military rifles, the kind I myself did my military service in Russia in 1913. The equipment made a poor impression. Almost no leather ware! All cartridge bags, belts, etc. were made of fabric, even it was not of the best material. Good alone were the almost leather tube boots. The troops were all young fellows aged 19-22 and, according to their own statements, belonged exclusively to the parachute units.

Finally, I would like to mention in particular that the reception of all the refugees from Bessarabia in Bucharest was organized with the greatest sympathy, discretion and assistance in every respect, which left a very pleasant impression for all of us.

Bukarest, 9 July, 1940

{signed} Waldemar Küst

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