MYKHAILIVKA: CAMP TO VILLAGE

By Marie MOUTIER

When German troops entered the territory of Ukraine, they quickly recognized that the poor state of infrastructure in the region presented a real obstacle to the smooth flow of troops, supplies and other logistical needs of war. The Germans therefore undertook major renovations of the country's road network. The work was entrusted to the Todt Organization¹. The Durchgangsstrasse IV would be part of this reconstruction. This huge highway would link initially Berlin and the Caucasus, across the whole Ukraine. In fact, DG IV connected the cities of eastern Galicia, Khmelnitski², Vinnitsa, Uman, Kriwoj Rog, Dnepropetrovsk and Donetsk³. This work would require a large workforce: Jews and prisoners of war, as well as the local Ukrainian population. Prützmann⁴ delegated by Himmler to oversee the projects, announced in June 1943, a figure of 140,000 workers for only DG IV, as well as German engineers and specialists and 12,000 local police⁵.

In 1942, it was decided that Organization Todt would make improvements to the road linking the Haisyn and Uman Kreisgebiete with the Zhitomir and Kiev *Generalbezirke*. Initially, the old road passed through the towns of Teplik and Ternovka. It was determined that this time a direct line

¹ Engineering organization (1938-1945) named after its founder, Fritz Todt, minister of armaments and ammunition (as *Reichsminister Bewaffnung und Munition*) in 1940. At his death in 1942 following a plane crash, the Organization Todt fell into the hands of Albert Speer and then was placed under the Ministry of weapons and war production (*Ministerium für Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion*). In addition to the work of DG IV in the Ukraine, the Organization Todt undertook other large projects, such as the *Autobahn* project creating a new motorway infrastructure network in Germany, and the Atlantic Wall.

² Formerly Proskurow.

³ Formerly Stalino.

⁴ Hans-Adolf Prützmann (1901-1945), was HSSPF (SS-und Höhere Polizeifuehrer, high chief of the SS and police) for the northern Russia area, and for southern Russia beginning in October 1941. There he was responsible for the inspection of the special defense for Himmler. He is considered one of the main individuals responsible for the massacre of Jews at Riga..

⁵ Andrej ANGRICK, *Annihilation and Labor: Jews and Thoroughfare IV in Central Ukraine*, in: Ray BRANDON and Wendy LOWER (ed.), *The Holocaust in Ukraine*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008, p.190.

would be built between Haisyn and Uman. All of the technical work was managed by the Todt Organization. However, the supply and supervision of the labor force was the responsibility of the SS and police. Several camps were established along this portion of the road to house the necessary labor force: Haisyn, Kiblicz, Teplik, Ositna, Ternovka, Mykhailivka, Narajevka, Krasnopolka and Ivangorod. Initially, the labor force of the camps consisted of Jewsfrom surrounding area. It was soon no longer sufficient to meet the demands of construction, with meager food provisions and increasingly weak physical state of the workers. The SS in 1942 turned to the Jewish-Romanian prisoners of Bucovine⁶. The monitoring of these *Zwangsarbeitslager* ⁷ - including an average of between 100 and 400 prisoners⁸- returned to the SS-*Bauabschittsleitung* of Haisyn whose leader, from May to October 1942, was the SS-Hauptsturmführer Franz Christoffel ⁹, then the SS-Untersturmführer Oskar Friese ¹⁰ until April 1943. The SS also was supported by a Lithuanian and Ukrainian militia for this task. The grueling work, miserable conditions of confinement and isolated or mass executions resulted in the deaths of 20,000 to 25,000 people ¹¹. It appears that mass shootings were orchestrated by the KdS ¹² of Zhitomir (assigned to Vinnitsa) and the KdS of Kiev (assigned to Uman).

The village of Mykhailivka was a dozen kilometers from Haisyn, between the towns of Tarassivka and Granov. The population had a large majority of Ukrainians and Russians. In 1932-1933, Mykhailivka suffered, as did a large part of Ukraine, from the Great Famine, also called

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⁶ There was included a provision, however, in clause 7 of the Treaty of Tighina that no deportation of Jews beyond the Bug should take place before the end of the war operations.

⁷Zwangsarbeitslager or ZAL: forced labor camps..

⁸ See the pre-trial file on Karl Deckert, Major of *Schutzpolizei* and member of Polizeibataillon 304, which perpetrated shootings of Jews in the regions of Vinnitsa and Zhitomir (Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg BA-L, B162-2333, p.571 (ARZ140/1967 Volume 3).

⁹ Franz Christoffel, born in 1898 in Mittel-Lowitz (Pomerania, Germany). The son of an inspector of goods, he enlisted as a volunteer in the German army during the First World War, during which he was wounded three times. He then held a position in the customs administration. He joined the SS in October 1930 and the Waffen-SS in March 1942. He held the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer and was sent to the HSSPF in the area of southern Russia (HA Prützmann). The latter entrusted him with the portion of construction II of DG IV, to Haisyn. See BA-L B162-6154, p.39-40 (ARZ20/1963 Volume 5).

¹⁰ Oskar Friese, born in 1896 in Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland). The son of a machinist, he was sent to the front in 1915 and fought in the West and Macedonia. In the inter-war period, he became a purchaser for a company. He joined the NSDAP in 1932, and the SS in 1933. He held the rank of SS-Untersturmführer in 1938. He was sent at the same time as Christoffel to HSSPF in southern Russia. With Christoffel and Maas, he was one of the major players in the extermination of the Jews in the area of Haisyn.

¹¹ BA-L B162-2333, p.430 (ARZ140/1967 Vol. 3).

¹² KdS: *Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo) *und des Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). Commander of the Security Police and Security Service, the KDS is local echelon of the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, Central Office for Reich Security, headed by Reinhardt Heydrich, then Ernst Kaltenbrunner as of June 1942, following Heydrich's death), under the command of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler.

Holodomor¹³. Brigades of patriots would go from house to house to seize the grain and allowing only one cow and one pig per household. During the winter, the people had only potato peelings and rotten vegetables to eat. Regular carts loaded with bodies could be seen as well as dying people, pacing the village to the mass grave in the cemetery. The distress was so great that a family ate one of its sons¹⁴. We cannot consider the fate of Ukrainian villages during the Second World War without being aware of the considerable impact that the Great Famine left in the minds of the people¹⁵.

Camp Mykhailivka has been studied by many historians to the extent that the archival records on the camp are relatively well furnished 16. Pre-trial files prepared for post-war trials in Germany consist of testimony from former members of the Organization Todt present at the scene, from members of the SS who were in charge of the safety of the road and testimony from survivors. Among these is one source of particular interest for the light it sheds on the lives of the prisoners of Mykhailivka: the diary of Arnold Daghani¹⁷, a Romanian Jewish prisoner. He wrote in captivity throughout the day. However, an essential aspect is not found in the above archives: the role of the village and its inhabitants. The term "camp" should not be thought of as a completely enclosed space, secret and remote. On the contrary, Mykhailivka was a small village, and the Germans, as usual on Soviet territory, used the local structures to establish their occupation and organize the work on the road - and the genocide of the Jews. Thus, despite the abundance of diverse information sources on this camp, it appears that the records alone are not sufficient to provide a comprehensive overview of the operation. The organization of the camp is linked to a certain extent to the local environment. How was the village organized opposite the camp? In reality, it is more appropriate to consider, rather than two parallel structures, two operating one alongside the other. Using data collected by Yahad - In Unum during a research trip of the camps along DG IV, and at Mykhailivka in particular, we now have a new source to consider which, combined with the existing elements in the archives help us further understand the porosity of the Mykhailivka camp.

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¹³Голодомо́р means in Ukrainian "extermination by hunger."

¹⁴ Testimony of Fyodor F. S. (Yahad - In Unum/T1196U).

¹⁵ A number of parallels can be made between the behaviors adopted during the Great Famine and those during the German occupation and the Holocaust, especially the systems of requisition and auctions. See also the testimony of Nikolai S. K. (Yahad - In Unum/T923U) and Vassilina S. M. (Yahad - In Unum/T915U).

¹⁶ For a history and a chronology of the camp, see the Mykhailivka page written by Dean Martin, in the Encyclopedia of labor camps (*to be published with the USHMM*).

¹⁷ Daghani Arnold (1909-1985). Originally from a German Jewish family based in Suczawa (now Romania), he was deported to the Mykhailivka camp with other Romanian Jews. As a painter, the guards and the Germans in the camp regularly had him do sketches. He wrote on scraps of paper the events that took place during his detention. He managed to escape from the camp with his wife and to reach the Romanian zone of occupation. In 1960 he published his notes written at Mykhailivka with the title Lasst Mich Leben (Tel Aviv: Weg und Ziel Verlag, 1960). Later would *appear Arnold Daghani's Memories of Mikhailowka: The Illustrated Diary of a Slave Labour Camp Survivor* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009).

The beginnings of the German occupation

On the eve of the German invasion, Mykhailivka was a rather poor village, consisting of two collective farms, with names recalling the Soviet regime ("17th meeting of the Communist Party" and "Stalin"), whose main products were cereals, corn and sunflower. The Germans penetrated to Mykhailivka in July 1941, after heavy fighting (bombings and shootings which the villagers tried to escape by hiding in cellars and garden trenches)¹⁸.

Upon arriving, the Germans intended to use the local structure to facilitate their occupation. They named a staroste, or village elder, a position similar to that of the Mayor, as well as local police to ensure obedience¹⁹. A German administration also was immediately established near the school building and the Wehrmacht soldiers were installed with the residents²⁰.

Construction on the Haisyn-Uman road began before the creation of the Mykhailivka camp. The Germans first called upon the local workforce. They simply demanded men from the staroste, who transmitted the Germans' order in turn to his subordinates, who went from house to house in search of workers. The Germans relied on this staroste system to requisition workers. Fedor, a young teenager at the time of 16 said he was working on the portion of the road²¹, before the arrival of Jewish prisoners. The Germans had sent orders to the staroste to collect a certain amount of workers among the villagers. The girls cut the roadside grass while the boys sharpened tools and performed heavier tasks, for a small salary of Deutschmarks and food rations. The German engineer and Lithuanians who supervised the work were heard to say that this situation would not last.

Even before the creation of the camp, the Germans integrated the inhabitants of Mykhailivka to the needs of occupants. They also required them to return to work in the kolkhoze collective farms whose products were sent "elsewhere" - probably in Germany. We see very clearly in this example of Mykhailivka that the Germans took the place of the pre-war administrative authorities but

¹⁸ Testimony of Olga F. K. (Yahad - In Unum/T1194U). She stated that the first bomb destroyed a house in the village, killing the couple that lived there.

¹⁹ In districts and cities, local governments of the Kreisältesten and mayors, who were, in turn, above the heads of the cities and municipalities, were directed and controlled by the Gebietskommissar, *Die deutsche Zivilverwaltung in den ehemaligen Ostgebieten*, BA-L B162-204, p. 26.

²⁰ Testimony of Vassili A. G. (Yahad - In Unum/T1193U).

²¹ "... I belonged to the Michalowka base. From there, we worked with Jews, but also with Ukrainian workers on the new portion of DG IV. "BA-L B162-6150, p.75 (AR-Z 20/1963, Volume 1), Deposition of Karl K., in Remscheid, the 13.9.1962. He was a member of the Organization Todt.

did not upturn the whole structure. The establishment of a staroste was key: it provided the link between the occupants and the village.

The German occupiers decided to erect a camp at Mykhailivka, to intern Jews from Russia²² and Romania who would be used for the construction of the nearby road. Also, in order to make best use of local infrastructure, the Germans chose a stable at the kolkhoze for the building of the camp. The camp was then composed of a second stable, with the arrival of Romanian Jews. In November 1942, the camp inmates were transferred from the stables to the school building. As we can see from the field investigation, both camp locations were in direct contact with the houses of the village. The camp was located at the center of the village close to the administration building. Under such conditions, it seems difficult to imagine that the Germans had established camp that was secret from the local population. Similarly it is difficult to imagine that there was no connection between the camps and the village. It remains to be defined the extent to which local residents witnessed the genocidal system and to what degree they were involved by the Germans.

A village organization linked to the camp

A number of Germans were moving into the area of the camp. In addition to the SS, Germans and Lithuanians, responsible for the supervision of the camp and the workforce, there were members of the Organization Todt, overseeing the work on the section of DG IV²³. To these can be added the Wehrmacht soldiers. There also was the arrival of two sisters, young girls from Remscheid²⁴ in the Ruhr, who came to stay at Mykhailivka in the hope of finding a husband among the Germans present. The German presence resulted in demands on the local population.

The German authorities had need of men to guard the two successive camps of the Jews, and to accompany them to work in the quarry and on the road, to supplement the work of the SS, of

We know little about the Russian Jews (or Ukrainian, it is difficult to say) interned in the camp. It is not known the start of their detention. According to the testimony of the Romanian Jews held from August 1942, Jews were already installed in a stable, in a state of apparent exhaustion. The spokesman of the Romanian Jews, Nathan Segal, said: "Once in Mihailovka, we found a stable 25m long, belonging to the kolkhoze. About 400 Ukrainian Jews were there in a dirty, ragged, inhuman state. (B162-1816" Sonderband ", p.6 (AR-Z86/1960), Report of the memories of an eyewitness, by Nathan Segal, October 21, 1943 at Mohyliv-Podilsky). Nathan Segal then managed to separate the Romanian prisoners from the prisoners in a sad state.

²³ Hermann K., for example, lived in Mykhailivka (BA-L B162-6150, p. 159) AR-Z20/1963 Volume 1, as well as G. and H. "They have taken an apartment together in the village" (BA-L B162-6153, p. 16, Volume 4 AR-Z20/1963 log Arnold Daghani. April 16, 1943).

²⁴ The company Dohrmann also operated there, given by the Organization Todt responsibility for the work on the road to Mykhailivka.

which Z. and M. figures were probably the most traumatizing²⁵. The local population was given the following choice: either they were deported to perform forced labor in Germany, or they entered the police force created by the occupants²⁶. Fyodor, born in 1924, chose the latter. He received, like a dozen other villagers, a green jacket, white trousers, and a weapon. Their main role was to guard both teams in the camp, a task they performed in turns, with one at each entrance of the buildings, another making a circle around the camp. This monitoring occurred only at night. During the day, as most prisoners worked outside the camp, there was no guard. Local police officers then accompanied the prisoners to their work. Men of the village guarded the Jewish prisoners. They were organized so that some of them worked one week and rested the other.

Other requisitioned tasks: housing and food. As mentioned earlier, SS, members of the Organization Todt and German soldiers were billeted among the villagers. The latter then lived at the mercy of the Germans. The latter also were requisitioned to provide food and cook. Arnold Daghani mentions several local kitchen aids attached to camp²⁷.

The arrival of a Jewish labor force did not mean that the Germans to stopped the work by the villagers. They resumed work in the fields and some were assigned to the cutting of timber in the area under supervision of the Wehrmacht. At the same time, a Jewish witness who escaped testified after the war that a work camp for Ukrainians existed in Mykhailivka. There were two kitchens: one for the Ukrainian workers and the other, smaller, where the meals for the Germans were prepared²⁸.

By this same system of requisitions, the organization of Mykhailivka village was closely linked to the camp. It could not function without the help of the village, its people and its food resources. Requisitions were already operating before the Germans arrived; they only made use of an already proven mechanism. The Germans took the place of a Soviet regime that fled during evacuations.

²⁵ Both SS had any power over life and death over the Jewish prisoners. "Mr. Nathan had an interview with Segal in the afternoon. We learned that 1.000RM required to leave the infant alive. "(BA-L B162-6153, p.3, AR-Z20/1963 Volume 4, log Arnold Daghani. August 23, 1942). M. was SS-Scharführer. As for Z., Lithuanian SS NCO, he was famous for his arbitrary executions. cf. the testimony of Jewish survivors (BA-L B162-6153, pp.98-112, AR-Z 20/1963 Volume 4), and the evidence collected by Yahad - In Unum on the ground, reporting a cruel Lithuanian (T1193U to T1196U).

²⁶ Daghani confirmed what local witnesses: "The militia Vanka came at noon to see us ... I gave a cigarette to Vanka. This is a very friendly guy who has registered Mykhailivka to avoid being sent to Germany as a volunteer ... "(BA-L B162-6153, p.24AR-Z20/1963, Volume 4, diary Arnold Daghani. July 13, 1943).

²⁷ "She heard Atti Grae grumbling about Stasia, a local kitchen assistant because she also gave us meat in the

[&]quot;She heard Atti Grae grumbling about Stasia, a local kitchen assistant because she also gave us meat in the soup ..." (BA-L B162-6153, p.26, AR-Z20/1963 Volume 4, diary Arnold Daghani. June 23, 1943).

²⁸ BA-L B162-6153, p.93 (AR-Z20/1963 Volume4) *Deposition of Bernhard LOCKER*, Tel Aviv, on 02/05/1961, as part of the file pre-trial of Franz Christoffel.

They took care not to completely disrupt the rural organization. It was at the bottom of a change of command. The use of requisitions allowed the village to keep its bearings and maintain the same reflexes as before the war, with only a minor change in the administrative system. However, the Germans and their auxiliaries brought with them violence in their designs, and did not hesitate to establish a camp in the middle of the village.

A porous camp

When Romanian Jews came to the camp, they were received by Artur K., the SS commander of the camp. The survivor Bernhard Locker said: "Shortly after, Artur K. appeared and said that the few Jews who had tried to escape from the camp were hanged at the gallows, and he immediately threatened to hang anyone who tried to flee or to establish contact with the people of village." There was a death penalty for contact with local people²⁹. The camp of the stables of the kolkhoz was also surrounded by barbed wire. Despite this, it is hard to imagine the absence of any link between prisoners and local: the central position of the two successive camps and the system of requisitions went were contrary to the Lagerkommandant ban.

The contact established between prisoners and mainly involved bartering. These exchanges took place at times with the knowledge of the Germans. Thus, Arnold Daghani, noted that on January 5, 1943: "Following the permission of B. and K.³⁰, there were contacts with farmers and clothing exchanged by prisoners of the camp in return for food.³¹"He also said in his diary that "he who had the chance to work with the German Hermann K., that is to say, chop wood, carry things, look after the garden or do some work in his home secretly received something to eat from the priest of the church, next to the Germans " Some Germans tolerated such exchanges. It was also the case of local Ukrainian police. They left the village regularly to approach the camp: Jewish prisoners exchanged their valuables for food³². Young people also entered the village in the camp, with the knowledge of the guards, to get a haircut from Jewish specialists in exchange for potatoes³³. It seems that the presence of police in the village facilitated this kind of market, and also increased the village-prisoner contact, to the extent that the locals took turns to guard the camp.

²⁹ BA-L B162-6153, p.93(AR-Z 20/1963 tome 4), *Deposition of Bernhard LOCKER*, Tel Aviv, on 02/05/1961, as part of the file pre-trial of Franz Christoffel.

³⁰ They then share the command of the camp since November 23, 1942. See BA-L B162-6153, p.12, AR-Z20/1963 Volume 4, diary of ArnoldDaghani, November 23, 1942. They were both members of the Organization Todt.

³¹BAL B162-6153, p. 14. AR-Z20/1963 Vol 4 diary of Arnold DAGHANI. January 5, 1943.

³² Testimony of Lidia I. S. (Yahad - In Unum/T1195U). His uncle kept the building of the camp school.

³³ Testimony of Vassili A. G. (Yahad - In Unum/T1193U).

Despite the barbed wire and guards, the Jews managed to escape from the camp or work columns, to find food. A Jewish doctor was in the street with a fellow inmate in search of food. They passed the SS officers M. and H. who asked what they were doing here, "I said that K. had sent us to a peasant whose child was sick.³⁴" He received twenty-five blows with an iron bar.

The links were not limited to barter. They were also an opportunity for the dissemination of news from outside the camp. Daghani wrote, May 21, 1943: "We have learned bad news from the village blacksmith. The villagers have said - as they were told - that a mass grave had been dug and that the SS should come tomorrow \dots^{35} Fedor also remembers the arrival of the SS, which foretold the doom of the Jewish prisoners. And the digging of the pit: "Some villagers who passed on the road reported confidentially that a mass grave had been dug ... 36"

Contacts between Jewish prisoners and local people were so common that it was no indication of the strong and violent speech of K. and the barbed wire surrounding the stables. The police played a major role in these reports. According to the testimony of one of them, the children remained in camp during the day - except when it was feared there would be a selection, in which case they accompanied their parents to build the road³⁷ - or in the house of the police, if they were accommodating.

We saw the Germans present at Mykhailivka were not concerned that the locals witnessed their actions towards the Jews - on the contrary, they needed them for common and essential tasks such as monitoring and supply. The villagers witnessed the camp, but also witnessed the executions.

The villagers witnessed the shooting of prisoners

From the field investigation, we find that the place most frequently used for successive executions of prisoners was not far from the camp of the stables. According to information from the German archives³⁸, Andrej Angrick³⁹ reported three executions preceded by selection of camp

³⁵ BA-L B162-6153 p. 19, AR-Z20/1963 Vol 4 Extracts from the *diary of Arnold DAGHANI*. May 21, 1943.

³⁴ BA-L B162-6150 p. 156, AR-Z20/1963 Vol 1.

³⁶ BA-L B162-6153 p. 19, AR-Z20/1963 Vol 4 Extracts from the *diary of Arnold DAGHANI*. May 24, 1943.

³⁷ "All mothers brought their children to work. We were afraid to leave the camp. BA-L B162-6150, p.159 (AR-Z 20/1963 Volume 4), Deposition of SIPERSTEIN Amalie, Netanya (Israel), 06.08.1961.

³⁸BA-L B162-6153, AR-Z20/1963 Vol 4.

³⁹ Andrej ANGRICK, *Annihilation and Labor: Jews and Thoroughfare IV in Central Ukraine*, in: Ray Brandon and Wendy LOWER (ed.), The Holocaust in Ukraine, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2008

inmates: 16on August 19, 1942, 107 in the winter of 1942-1943, and 55on April 26, 1943⁴⁰. Olga F., born in 1929, witnessed the shootings of detainees from the meadow where she was tending the cows, with five others. She saw the approaching columns of Jews, while she stood behind the trees to see more closely what happened. According to her testimony, the Jews were taken, pleading, by a Lithuanian, to a ravine where three graves had been dug. Before the execution, the Lithuanian searched the victims' belongings and extracted their gold teeth. Then he slaughtered them with a submachine gun. The shooter then left the scene a few minutes to ensure that there were no survivors⁴¹. This story is important: we have no specific testimony of the shootings of detainees from Mykhailivka.

The executions did not take place only in the locality of Lissaïa Gora. Summary executions of Jewish prisoners were frequent and random at both work sites. The executioners were not discreet, killing in front of the local police. But this does not say what were the limits of the role of the latter in the genocide. Of the witnesses interviewed by Yahad-In Unum, a majority of them had a family member or were members of the police themselves. We only know that the police were armed, but the testimonies are silent on the extent of their participation.

At Mykhailivka, the field investigation allowed us to better understand the scope of compulsion involved in the organization of the camp. And we also showed that this camp, in the heart of a small village, could not be impervious to its immediate environment. Based on this assumption, it was logical to further study all of those who played a role or were spectators of the camp.

The Jewish prisoners were transferred from Mykhailivka for the most part to the Tarassivka camp, after a partisan attack in the village. Once the camp was empty, the villagers dismantled it: the wood, barbed wire and other materials were used to build their caves⁴² ... When we study the Holocaust in Ukraine, we must bear in mind the essential role of the countryside and its structures, that the Germans could not ignore, and which they used to set up their genocidal work.

⁴⁰ The remaining prisoners were transferred in the majority camp Tarassivka. This camp was liquidated December 10, 1943. For a description of the shooting, see the testimony of Mr. Friedrich, a member of the Organization Todt, of 28.6.1960 in Remscheid (BA-L B162-7380, p.107, AR-Z141/1967 Volume 1).

⁴¹ Testimony of Olga F. (Yahad - In Unum/T1194U).

⁴² Testimony of Vassili A. (Yahad - In Unum/T1193U).

