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The Holocaust in Ukraine – Transnistria

Translation: *E05 German Military Intelligence Reports the Bombing in Odessa and the Subsequent Massacre of Jews, 4 November 1941*

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The head of the Defence Office Romania reports on 4 November 1941 about the bombing attack in Odessa and subsequent shootings of Jews.

Letter from head, Defence Office Romania (No. 11035/41g Leiter), Bucharest, signed Rodler, to Ic/Army Supreme Command, German Military Mission, German Air Force Mission and German Navy Mission in Romania, 4 Nov. 1941

Re: Report on Perceptions in Odessa

The officer assigned here to liaise with the Romanian Secret Service was in Odessa after its capture by the Romanians; he reports on his perceptions and impressions there:

The impression one gets already upon entering Odessa is totally different from any impression one gained when entering one of the other occupied cities in the East. Particularly striking is that hundreds and thousands of men of an age liable for military induction are roaming about in the streets.

According to data from the Romanian General Staff, the Romanians took some 7,000 Russian prisoners. A number many times greater than that are hanging around the city's streets dressed in civilian clothing. In any case, all these persons served in the Red Army and either remained on voluntarily or were intentionally left behind. It is easy to read the hostile attitude in the faces of these men. More than half the residents of the city are Jews (some 300,000).

In the initial days, steps were taken with relative loyalty against the Jewish elements. Nowhere did this lead to any particular excesses. Despite this, until my arrival, night after night there had been fires and small explosions in the city. The dock area of town has been closed off since 21 Oct. But the population is located in part inside this cordoned-off zone. In the port dock area, quite large quantities of explosives, ammunition, hand grenades, bundled 'baled charges' with extra explosive heads [Geballte Ladungen are hand grenades but with six extra explosive heads] detonators, etc. are lying around in the open. Even if there are guards and sentinels on duty, it is of course not difficult to take possession of these items.

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The entire port facilities are completely intact, and precisely this fact strikes one as a bit odd, since it is common knowledge that before their withdrawal, the Russians destroyed all facilities that might prove useful for the enemy.

In the city, in contrast with Chisinau, Dorohoi, Czernowitz and other towns, buildings have not suffered from detonation. The only structures that have been destroyed are those hit by German or Romanian bombers or heavy artillery.

There is a relatively large car park [car pool?] in the port facilities area. Yet after a brief inspection, it was noted that most of the cars there have incurred some damage.

A number of cannon can also be found in the dock area. Among these are some heavy cannon, 15-cm howitzers, flak artillery and other ordnance. The sighting devices have been smashed. Many lorries are lying awash in the sea, in some cases you can see half the vehicle visible above the surface. Yet one can find some remarkable material in the dock warehouses. There are large quantities of various rubber items. The warehouses for tires have been burned. One could see some tires floating around in the sea. Entry to the port has now been prohibited for all persons, including military men in uniform. To enter the port area, a special ID is required; it is issued by the Port Captain.

People say that on 17, 18 and 19 Oct. 1941, columns of German motor vehicles repeatedly drove into the area, loaded material at their discretion and then sped off.

Based on site maps discovered, the catacombs under Odessa have an expanse of over 200 km. Some 160 entry points are known. Aside from that, almost every Russian patrician house has access to the catacombs via its cellar. According to intelligence from Communist circles available to the Romanian Secret Service, there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of Red Army soldiers and Communists within these catacombs.

Up until 22 Oct., all military life in Odessa was concentrated on Angel St. The Romanian Military Command has its offices in the building of the NKVD leadership located on this street. During the time of Bolshevik rule, only persons enjoying special privileges under the Communist system resided in the neighbouring houses.

From the first moment of occupation in Odessa, the Romanian Secret Service dispatched warnings to the Command based on intelligence they had gathered. It said that without exception, the buildings on Angel St. were all mined with explosives. On Tuesday, 21 Oct., the building of the Romanian Command was temporarily evacuated due to an alarming rumour. At 3:30 p.m. on 22 Oct., two Communists are reported to have phoned; they again said that the building was going to explode within the next 30 minutes. Because of the events of the previous day, this threat was not given enough attention. At 5:50 p.m., the building actually exploded. At the moment of explosion, the following German officers were inside the building: Capt. at Sea Schmidt, Corvette Capt. Reichert, Capt. Of the Coast Artillery Kern and a Lieutenant in the Coast Artillery as well as two specialist officers [*Sonderführer*]. They were all killed.

According to unconfirmed reports, there were also believed to have been two other tank officers in the building. Among Romanians, the Commander of the 10th Division, General

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Glojjanu, and his entire staff were in the building at the time of explosion. Up until the hour of my departure from Odessa, a total of 46 bodies had been recovered from the ruins, among these 21 officers. A further number of bodies will be found when clean-up personnel get to the rooms located on the ground floor. The total number of dead is estimated at ca. 80. The clean-up operations pressed ahead with notable speed and orderliness. Just 10 minutes after the blast, two large searchlights of the Romanian flak artillery had already been brought in and were in operation. After the catastrophe, the neighbouring buildings were vacated. This was all the more necessary since rumours were circulating that all the other surrounding buildings would also be blown up that same night.

There can be no doubt that the explosion was set off by a remote-control electrical device. In the morning hours of 23 Oct., in the immediate vicinity of the destroyed building, a complete telephone system was discovered under the bed of a Jew; it was presumed to be directly connected with the NKVD men in the catacombs. The detained Jew stated that the partisan attacks were being directed from the catacombs. As a reprisal for the bombing, there were mass shootings during the night of 22/23 Oct. The morning of 23 Oct., on a square in the dock area surrounded by a wooden fence, approximately 19,000 Jews were shot, their corpses were doused with gasoline and burned. The head of surveillance for the Romanian telephones told me that on Friday, an additional 40,000 Jews from Odessa had been sent to Dalnic. There they had been placed in anti-tank ditches and shot.

*translated by William Templer*