

ZGONEA, Pavel
Romania Roma Documentation Project
Romanian
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Pavel Zgonea primarily discusses the treatment Romanian Roma experienced while being deported within Transnistria during World War II. He mainly focuses on work conditions, the treatment by foreign soldiers, and also the dire starvation conditions. He names a list of the places they were taken to work, without focusing on the period they were held in each particular place.

[01:] 01:45:02 – [01:] 08:56:15

He gives his date of birth and his place of birth as Zimnicea, where he lived until the deportation and where he has lived since his return; underlines that he suffered a lot when Antonescu deported Roma in September 1942; discusses being taken along with their families first to **Tighina**, Galați County, and from there on to Poarta Albă, Tiraspol, **Rezenaia**, Odessa, and then to **Ucinacov [Oceacov]** – the county's capital; says they were kept for two months in **Kabulga [Cabulga]** (he mentions that this was the Russian name, but the Romanian name was **Alexandru Dan**), where there was a military base for hydroplanes; mentions being taken to the shores of the Bug River after two months; discusses working on the construction of a bridge together with Jews; says that one day as they were working, four of the Jews from his team disappeared never to be seen again; remembers that at another place he worked there were more Jews (he says dozens, but he does not seem to be so sure) who one day were taken by the soldiers away from the working area; he then heard gun shots, but did not manage to see anything, so he is not sure if the soldiers shot them or not; talks about four other places, where he had worked in the field doing various agricultural work, while Romanian guards watched over them and even beat them sometime; *[starts crying while remembering what they were eating]*, focuses on their eating mainly boiled wheat or boiled rice and sometimes even grass; comments on his appreciating communism, because he had the certainty of a job, of a home to live in with one's family and that one had food to put on the table, while before World War II, he worked and lived with his family in the woods and did not have a stable home.

[01:] 08:56:16 – [01:] 20:05:00

He mentions that this was the main reason for which they were taken and deported (72 people) in the first place, because they did not have a home, not even on paper; says *[with pain in his voice]* that only 20 out of the initial 72 made it back home by the end of the war; comments on most of them dying because of the dire conditions, hunger, and lice;

discusses being only 17 when he was taken, just ready for marriage (translator's note: Roma traditionally marry at even younger ages, some even at the age of 8 or 11); discusses coming back at the age of 19; says the only good thing was that he learned a foreign language, Russian; discusses the age of the Jews he worked with as being around 16-17; remembers incidents in which a guard would come and take even 20 people with him, and never bring them back; comments on the rumors that followed each time when workers were taken and people saying: "They are *kaputt* (translator's note: finished in Russian) for sure!"; remembers coming back to the country in 1944 and being told that they were no longer welcome.

[01:] 20:05:01 – [01:] 20:28:03

He remembers their way back from Transnistria and the Romanian soldiers that traveled with them or that they met on the way who were really kind, sharing their food with them and not making any distinctions; stresses that those of them who died, did not die because of the war, nor because they were shot, but because of the hunger, the cold, and the wretched conditions.