

# THE PURGES IN NEUENDORF

1938

## 1942 village report, Neuendorf, by A. Thiessen

To make the population submit to the collectivization idea, they started so-called anti-kulaktivization. Those that it applied to were put onto a wagon and were supposed to be led away to an unknown destination. But, the population took a stand against it, and didn't let them go. The GPU came to arrest the household heads, but those who had been warned had already gone into hiding. Then, night after night trucks with police and GPU arrived, and the persecution began.

The men were arrested first and the other family members were sent later. Most of them perished in the Urals and Siberia. Only a small percentage returned. From our village alone, there were 15 families (60 people) who were exiled. They attempted to portray the Kulaks as bad people. In my case, they set fire to my house which was located near to elevator where all the grain was stored. It was supposed to look like the house was set on fire by the Kulaks, then spread to the elevators and intended to harm the collective building.

To keep the population in line, one person or another was arrested from year to year without reason. Another tactic was to close the church and cancel the services. I was one of those who was arrested on 27 April 1935 and was sentenced to three years of hard labor. It turned into 4 1/2 years, because they didn't let me go home after three years. I was permitted to return in 1939 only because of the agreement between Germany and Russia.

The worst time of my exile was the interrogation. Days and nights, without interruption, without sleep, I stood in front of my interrogator and a GPU man nearby. They tried many different ways to extract from me what they wanted to hear, not what I did. It was unbelievably hard. Nerves were so strained that many lost their sanity. There were articles on the table, guns were thrown into your face, the air was thick with commotion: noise, wrestling, hitting and swearing. That's the way their investigation was conducted. I was led through secret passages and rooms until terrible shivers would come over me. Even in the cell, you weren't free from the fear of the investigation. Once in a while, one or another of the cellmates would return from interrogation, completely beaten down and would report what happened to him. The most horrible things were reported. It was always about political crimes. One had to sign a paper attesting to having done something

that you had never done - something that you had not even thought of doing. Or, you had to give information about others that would in turn cause arrest and exile of the persons revealed in the information-session.

I remember the conversation with Jacob Bergen of Einlage, with whom I was sent to Kazakhstan in exile. One morning he told me, "one more night like this and we'll all go crazy". I tried to comfort him and said "I got three years, you 10, but we will be able to stand it and go home after the sentence is over". I was fortunate and returned. But my friend, only God knows what happened to him.

"We were together in these horrible conditions for two months. Then, when we arrived in slightly better surroundings, I told him, "Not only have we endured these two months, but we haven't gone crazy and we're smarter. I think it is possible in this way we would stand the long time that's still ahead of us".

"Yes, dear friend" he said, "we both think we're still normal, but if we should meet a person who is really normal, would he find us normal?" But the life in the labour camp was not rosy. You got an easier job or task or if you were young and healthy, or if you had connections with home, or if you had received anything from home; then it could be bearable. But, if you were sick or old, or were not able to meet your quota, your rations were made smaller immediately and very often you died. It was terrible to observe. Under strong guard, they were dragging themselves to watch the emaciated frame of these men. From the job to the camp under the watchful eyes of the strong guard. As soon as the labour camp was in sight, they had to line up and march into the camp through the gate where they were met with mockery like no man has ever seen - all accompanied by sarcasm.

The second largest wave of repressions/arrests were in 1937/38 when the best 50 men of our village were arrested and exiled. At this time they took two of my brothers and one of their sons. They weren't heard from again. As far as we know, my brothers died after serious illnesses. My brother's son came back after 18 months.

Having experienced these circumstances and such fear, that only intensified when World War II started, we gratefully lived through the time of the German occupation of the Soviet Union, becoming free from the GPU via the German Army on August 18, 1941.



**George Siemens of Neuendorf was just 10 years old the night he watched the NKVD arrest his father from their Neuendorf home.** They took all of his uncles, too, and their family never saw any of them again. In 1992, family members were able to learn their fate: the Siemens men had been taken to the nearby Russian city of Zaporozhia and shot. The Siemens family members listed to have been arrested in 1938 in Neuendorf were Peter Siemens, age 22, Salamo Siemens, age 32, Gerhard Siemens, age 34, and Heinrich Siemens, age 39.