

No. 204

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P. 1

### **“Famine of 1933”**

#### **Memoir of a World War II Disabled Veteran of the First Group Stepan Karpovych Vovk, resident of the Village of Tarnava of Monastyryshche raion, Cherkasy oblast**

I was born in 1915 into a poor peasant family. The family consisted of ten people. In 1918, both my parents died of typhoid within the same month. I was left at the age of two and a half to grow up and live with my older brothers and sisters. My older brothers and sisters devoted more attention to me since I was the youngest in the family. My older brother and his little son died before my eyes, as did my niece, the daughter of my oldest brother. My brother Demian left home to live with his in-laws (*u pryimy*). Three of us were left—I, an older brother, and my sister. This terrible tragedy unfolded before my eyes. On January 26, 1933, all we had left was 12 glasses of peas, two bowls of rye flour, and three buckets of fodder beets. On the aforementioned date, a group of “activists,” Stalin’s minions, entered our house [demanding that we] turn over our grain to the state. My sister asked, how can there be grain here since we’re already swollen [from hunger]. The first activist, Petro Mykolovych Yakubenko, said, “And if we find it, what then?” We told them to go ahead and search. The group of activists consisting of

Fedir Makhteiovych Yakubenko, Volodymyr Vasyliovych Byrko, Fedir Kyrlyovych Krasnoholovets, Kost Mykolovych Yakubenko, Nykonor Yakubenko, and M. P. Mazur began searching. They broke the *lezhanka* (planked sleeping extension of the clay stove), damaged the flues, but didn't find anything. My sister had put the 12 glasses of peas in a bag, placed it on her head, and wrapped a kerchief over her head, and she hid the two bowls of flour underneath the hay which, in those days, was used to cover the floor in the house. They turned everything upside down in the house where three families lived—my older brother and his wife,

P. 2

my older sister, and the three of us. They began patting down our clothing, and Petro M. Yakubenko found the peas on my sister, pulled them off her head along with her hair, and dragged her all the way to the doorstep. They found the flour and the three buckets of beets, and left us hungry, naked, and cold. We sat and cried bitterly. My sister and brother went to work at the state farm and took me with them. We couldn't stay there for long, because we were hungry. At the state farm, horses began to die from *paskudnyk*, and we took that horse meat and ate it. We ate all sorts of muck in order to survive. There were families that ate human beings. There was the family of Stepan Kondratiuk, his wife Zonka, and daughter Maria, while daughter Hania could not eat [human flesh] and could not watch when their last victim was [Stepan's] brother's little son Vasia, whom Maria called to take a walk. They began to bathe him so that he would not notice that they were getting ready to slaughter him. When he saw his uncle Stepan pulling out

a knife to slaughter him, he begged, "don't kill me, I want to live." Vasia was 10 years old. Hania could not stand this grief, this tragedy, she left the house quietly and ran to the neighbors for help. She couldn't save him as the neighbors were out searching for prey, because they were starving. Hania only helped in that Vasia was already the eighteenth victim, but she had not noticed the earlier ones, or maybe she had noticed, but was afraid of her father. But when they were slaughtering her cousin, Hania's heart could not bear it any more and she exposed this evil. Very many people died of the hunger created by the tyrant Stalin and his colleagues, whose aim was to take away every last piece of bread from people

P. 3

for themselves. Here is an example: Marianka M. Hnyda, hungry and swollen, had an embroidered sheepskin coat, which she wanted to sell in order to save her family, but Kost Mykolovych Yakubenko took the coat and his wife wore it for a long time. The coat was embroidered and trimmed along the edges and bottom with grey lambswool (we ask you to describe it, so that the children of this activist read this, and so that Marianka's children, two of whom are alive, know that they are not forgotten, and to remind who wore out their mother's coat.

Kost's brother, Petro Mykolovych Yakubenko, occupied the house of the Muzyka family that had died of starvation, leaving only one daughter alive. Yakubenko had kicked her out of the house. When the famine passed, Muzyka's surviving daughter came to take back her house, P. M. Yakubenko and his brothers beat her up and drove

her out of the village, because they were members of *aktyv*<sup>1</sup> at the time. I watched this tragedy and wondered, would nobody come to their senses, were there no people with a conscience to be found to stop these killers, because they have produced the same kind of offspring, who do not understand the disabled war veterans who are older than they. I can't describe everything, because I don't have enough strength when I think of this terrible tragedy. So many farmers were lost, who toiled and worked so hard on this sacred Ukrainian land. Mykhailo Stepanovych Kudyn, Semen Bahrii were born specialists, and they sent a threshing machine to help people thresh the grain that the peasants had in their gardens. Pavlo Hrabovsky, an avid farmer, and a number of others

P. 4

were repressed and none of them returned, neither dead nor alive. They disappeared, nobody knows where. Our "activists" paid close attention to make sure that nobody said a bad word about Stalin, but I, even though I was young, heard from older people, even during the time of the famine, that he was a butcher. And Vladimir Illich Lenin himself, as he was dying, said that Stalin must not be allowed to govern, because he was very harsh. [Just think] how many people, competent hard-working farmers he drove into the grave. I recited in school: "No cow, no pig, only Stalin on the wall." They expelled me from school for this, and the activists wouldn't leave me alone. I counted the days until being conscripted into the army. I swore never to return to my native village, but the cursed war made me return, because I was disabled at the front and nobody needed me. And this evil Dzhughashvili-Stalin did not value the lives of the disabled veterans

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<sup>1</sup> The local [Bolshevik] party activists

who sacrificed their health so that he could look peacefully out of his window in the Kremlin. He was aware of his own cruelty and was afraid to venture outside the walls of the Kremlin, fearing that somebody who couldn't stand all this would appear and kill him. When he left the Kremlin, a whole army and thousands of vehicles protected him, so that nobody could recognize in which car Stalin was riding. He should not lie in this sacred land, which is drenched with the blood of millions of people. The pain, the famine of 1933-1932 have not been forgotten. This is not something to read about, you had to see with your own eyes how, in a land as bountiful as Ukraine, people dropped from hunger, swelled from poison. It wouldn't have been so bad had they taken this grain, beets, and sour cabbage that they had robbed from the people and sold it, and given the money to the state. But what they took away during the day, they divided among themselves in the evening, and walked around laughing that people were swollen, their wounds leaking rot. It would have been better had I not been born, so as not to have seen such pain. Such was my fate: one's happiness in the morning will be one's happiness to the end.

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Stepan Karpovych Vovk