

Post-War Sightings of Human Remains at Rohatyn Vodokanal ***RJH interview of Ivan Semenka, retired vodokanal manager***

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This document summarizes an interview conducted by Rohatyn Jewish Heritage (Marla Raucher Osborn and Jay Osborn) with Ivan Semenka (Іван Семенюка) about encounters with human remains buried at the Rohatyn vodokanal site, known as the north Jewish mass grave site associated with the aktion of June 6, 1943 and possibly other killings. The interview took place at the vodokanal on 04 January 2018. We were introduced to Mr. Semenka by Mykhailo Vorobets, who also participated in the interview. Interpreting between English and Ukrainian languages was by Vasyl Yuzyshyn.

Mr. Semenka retired as manager of the vodokanal in 2011, after working at the site for many years. During his time at the site, he heard from eyewitnesses to human remains uncovered during sand extraction work, and he personally saw human remains at two locations during excavations for new building foundations. His recollections of these sightings seemed quite clear and precise; although the past excavations probably did not expose the full extent of the graves, using existing built features at the site for reference, he is quite definite about the locations and extent of the human remains he saw.

During the interview, the group stood at or on the sites Mr. Semenka described, while he pointed to the boundaries of the uncovered remains, to areas which were excavated but revealed no remains, and to areas where he was not aware of any excavations in the past decades. We asked whether he was aware that archaeological research was conducted at the site in spring 2017, and he replied no. He mentioned that "some people came seven or eight years ago and asked about the mass graves" but he did not remember who they were; actually, it was Marla and me with Alex Denysenko, on 04 April 2011, shortly before Mr. Semenka's retirement, although we did not ask about precise grave locations at that time.



With Mr. Semenka at the vodokanal site, in January 2018 (left) and April 2011 (right).

The location labels in the text which follows refer to matching labels in the this aerial view of the site:



Aerial view of the rear section of the vodokanal site, with annotated survey areas, structures, and probable mass graves. Bing maps data © Microsoft; survey area data © Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University.

- Areas A~G correspond to the radar grids of the same labels during the spring 2017 non-invasive survey by the Centre of Archaeology at Staffordshire University. The nearest grids to the terrain identified by Mr. Semenka are greenhouse areas D and E, and area F behind the greenhouses at the wooded hillside. The survey and data analysis found a linear trench feature primarily in area F but probably spanning to area G, likely a mass grave, and an additional feature in area G which may be a grave.

- The greenhouses are labeled T1~T4, corresponding to survey areas B~E. Mr. Semenka says the greenhouses were erected in 1982~1983, like many other structures at the rear of the vodokanal.

- Structure C1 is the two-story mixed-use building at the east end of the greenhouses, currently unused. Mr. Semenka says this building was also erected in 1982~1983. Adjacent and attached to the structure C1 is an open storage area (a roof and support pillars over a concrete floor, without walls).

- Structure C2 is the small garage used by the security guard at the rear of the vodokanal; adjacent to the garage are a number of animal pens and cages.
- Structure C3 is the workshop building at the south edge of the rear area of the vodokanal. Mr. Semenka says this structure was also erected in 1982~1983, and that no human remains were uncovered during the building of the structure.
- Area M0 is the probable mass grave identified by the archaeologists in their 2017 report, in the form of a buried trench likely spanning survey areas F and G.
- Area M1 spans the terrain east of structure C1, through the shallow north-south ditch to the east, and from the open storage area to roughly the north corner of the greenhouse T4, below the adjacent hill slope. According to Mr. Semenka, this area contained a large number of human remains, uncovered in ~1982 during excavation for the foundation of structure C1. Mr. Semenka also told us that the intended location of structure C1 placed it partially on area M1, but when human remains were uncovered, the structure was relocated several meters to the west (where no remains were found).



Probable mass grave area M1, outlined in magenta color (the group is standing over the grave area). The slope and ditch in the foreground are likely part of the grave area, although Mr. Semenka was more positive about the flat area in front of the building.

- Area M2 is adjacent to the greenhouse T4, north of and outside the greenhouse perimeter, at the fourth or fifth greenhouse support post from the east end. This area contained a smaller number of human remains, uncovered during excavation for the foundation of greenhouse T4. Mr. Semenka said that no bones were found inside the

greenhouse (consistent with the results of the archaeology survey for area E), or under the current greenhouse foundation wall. He also said that workers did not excavate further north, so he does not know the extent of the grave in that area.



Probable mass grave area M2, outlined in blue color. According to Mr. Semenka, human remains were found just outside the greenhouse foundation wall at the fourth or fifth roof pillar from this near (east) end. He did not know the extent of this grave area.

Conclusions:

The newly-identified probable grave areas M1 and M2 are both outside of the survey grid areas which were prepared and surveyed in 2017 as part of the mass graves investigation at the north (vodokanal) site in Rohatyn. Based on the recollections of Mr. Semenka, we believe that area M1 should be protected as a grave along with the trench feature in areas F and G, and that area M2 should be cleared of vegetation so that further inspection and investigation is possible there. To better understand the actual boundaries of these probable mass graves, we also believe that additional non-invasive archaeological surveys should be made in and around areas M1 and M2, especially before any significant work is begun in those areas at the site.

