

## ANDROCHOWICZ KAZIMIERA

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Androchowicz Kazimiera, section leader in the Women's Auxiliary Service platoon, staging area command, born in Lwów in 1904, a Postal Service clerk, married to Jan Androchowicz – a platoon officer cadet in the 2nd Tank Brigade.

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On 9 April 1940 at 1.30 p.m. four Soviets arrived and, following a search of our apartment, arrested my husband. I didn't have enough time to recover from this blow, for on the third night they came for me. I wasn't at my place, I was spending the night at my sister's, and this is where they found me. I was ordered to get dressed and go home. Once at home they drew up a list of my furniture. I wasn't even allowed to take any provisions. They claimed that there was no point in my taking anything because they would provide me with everything I needed, including an apartment, the same as my own. I was also told that my husband was going with me and that we were simply being resettled to a new place.

Upon arrival at the train station, they opened a train car with nobody inside and told me to get in. When I asked after my husband the officer replied that my husband was in another car and that we were going to be reunited once we reached our destination. Loaded into the same car as myself were, among others: Mrs. Pieleszek, Pficnerowa along with her mother and children, Janiszewska and her child, Ewa Turkowa, Mrs. Zarzycka and her daughters, Mrs. Kondycka and her children, and many other people whose names I don't remember.

The first moments in the car were horrible – people were in tears, reminiscing about their past, inquiring after their loved ones, guessing at where we were going. After two days of waiting at the train station we set out on a twenty-day rail journey through Tarnopol, Podwołoczyska, Proskuriv, Zhmerynka, Vinnytsia, Kiev, Konotop, Kharkiv, Chapayevsk, Kuybyshev, Samara, Ufa, Chelyabinsk, Kurgan, Petropavlovsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Barnaul, Semipalatinsk, Kokpekti, Komsomolsk.

The conditions inside the railway car were horrible. No sanitary facilities. Lots of children and a few sick people. Our food consisted of black bread (there was plenty of it) and soup served at train stations every second day, regardless of the time of day or night. Once, when we were called to have soup at 2.00 a.m., no one from our car went out to eat it. After calling us a number of times, our escort threatened we would get nothing to drink the following day. The threat was of course solemnly carried out. Only after our insistence to get some water did they give it to us at some station in the evening.

On the morning of 1 May they ordered us to get off the car. We found ourselves at the train station in Dzangis-Tobe [?]. Having been loaded onto ox-drawn carts, several people per cart, we set out on a further trip across the steppes. The heat was terrible. The sun was burning hot (after three weeks spent in the train car our skin was unaccustomed to such sun). We were in danger of suffering from sunstroke. We rode during the day and stopped for the night in the steppe. The nights were cold and we had to stay awake to keep our possessions from being stolen. The ride lasted five days and four nights. On the evening of 5 May, not without some adventure (either an ox died or the cart's wheel broke or a cart got bogged down in the mud etc.), we reached Biegacz (that was the name of the sovkhos to which we were brought. It was a penal colony intended for both Polish and Soviet citizens). The Semipalatinsk district, the Kokpekti region, Komintern Sovkhoz, Farm no 1, Biegacz.

We were told to get our things into some cramped cowshed where there had still been cattle only the day before. The air inside was stale and damp. We were quite stubborn in our refusal to do as we were told, and although they tried to force us we prevented them from carrying our things into the cowshed. The locals took pity on us, taking some of us to their own homes. We were offered milk and cheese (the only food they had). They tried to give us some words of consolation: "No need for you to cry, we were the same bourgeois as you are, and now we live a different life".

Not two days had passed before an NKVD officer appeared and, in a hearty speech, told us that we had to go to work, that we weren't there to repair our health and that it was high time to put an end to our idleness. He encouraged us to produce *kiziak* (fuel made of manure). To me fell the task of cleaning tools and machines in the garage. I spent almost two months doing this, being paid 60 rubles (as I reckoned later, I spent 80 rubles on the bread which I was allowed to buy). In July I didn't work at all. On 2 August, at 4.00 a.m., two

foremen arrived demanding why we were still asleep when everyone was already in the carriages. Awakened from my sleep, I assumed we were being displaced somewhere else. It turned out later that I was being lied to. There were only a few women sitting with their luggage in the carriages. These were the women whom they had assigned to work in the grain warehouses.

The grain warehouse was located five kilometers away from our sovkhos, in the middle of nowhere. There was only a foreman living there in a small dilapidated house.

That is where our torment began. They refused to sell us bread when we failed to meet our work quotas. The quota was set at one ton of pure grain per person per eight hours, and whether or not the foreman was willing to acknowledge the filling of the quota depended exclusively on the mood he was in.

I worked there until 20 November 1940. That day we were kept outdoors from the morning until 4.00 p.m. It was cold and snowing. Having no warm clothes, I caught a horrible cold and on the following day I didn't go to work. The foreman, accompanied by the director, arrived at my place. I was lying on the cold clay ground. They told me that I would be tried if I failed to appear at work immediately.

When I explained that I was sick – I was so hoarse that I could hardly speak – they allowed me to stay and they even promised to send me a doctor. The latter, a Polish woman called Kosińska, appeared a few hours later. Having no medicaments, all she could do was to give me a sick leave.

I lay like this until 7 December. That day the foreman came and told me to pack my things and leave. He said that, unable to work, I was of no use to him any longer. For my work from May to November I was paid 277 rubles. Having returned to Biegacz, I found a place to stay at the house of some Russians who charged me 30 rubles a month. Time passed that way until summer. I lived on the money and packages I received from my sister. I also got some money for my furniture.

On 29 August 1941 the NKVD representative arrived. He called us up and asked where we wanted to go, because we were free. I was so surprised at what he said that at first I didn't know where to go.

I moved to Kokpekti, where it was still possible to buy some vegetables and fruit (neither were available at our penal colony). In Kokpekti I received a telegram from my brother, Captain Żołnierczyk, from the 5th Division stationed in Tatischevo. He summoned me to him.

On 29 October 1941 I set out on a train journey, intending to go to Tatischevo. I reached Tashkent, from where I couldn't get out. I spent 10 days sitting in the train station unable to get a train ticket. I was told that trains were carrying only soldiers. Finally I got to Samarkand where, again, I spent two days and two nights sitting in front of the ticket office, trying to purchase a ticket. I learned that civilians weren't allowed to go to the Saratov Oblast. In this way I lost contact with my brother.

Along with a group of convalescents who had arrived from Tatischevo, we were taken from Samarkand to Turkestan and further, by a narrow gauge railway, to Siergo. Then we rode a distance of 250 kilometers on camels – four days and four nights of traveling through steppes and in the freezing cold. On 5 December 1941 we got to kolkhoz Intymak, the Turkestan Oblast, in the Suzak region.

Initially only the men were required to work. In February the men were conscripted into the army. At the same time typhus reached epidemic proportions and not two days passed without someone's death (mainly the men). I remember the names of some of those who died: Dąbrowski from Warsaw (22 years of age), Platoon Leader Herman, Senior Sergeant Drapiński, railway clerk Rączkowski from Lwów, a reserve lieutenant from Kraków [named] Kępka. Herman, Rączkowski and Dąbrowski died from hunger and cold. There was no medical aid there and the hospital was some 22 kilometers away from where we lived, and those who were infested with lice weren't admitted to it.

On 12 March 1942 I fell ill with typhus myself. After seven days of lying at home I was taken on a cart full of sacks of grain to the hospital. I was running a fever of 39.5 degrees Celsius. The conditions in the hospital were disgraceful. Lice, dirty bedding. Although the floor was washed every day, it wasn't clean. Vessels were emptied in our room, which contaminated the air. Food was very poor. We received, morning and evening, hot water tinted with herbs, a ration of bread (about 700 grams) which – with a fever of 39.5 degrees Celsius – I couldn't eat. In the afternoon we had *lapsha*, that is, dumplings made of dark flour in water with a touch of fat. Although very affable, our doctor (a Russian woman) was

helpless, lacking any medicaments. Showing us much kindness, she always told me that we would soon return to Poland.

I felt weak for a long time after being discharged from the hospital. I was looking for my brother. I wrote him letters. I sent him telegrams, but I received no answer. As I learned later, the post office kept all correspondence.

That is how I survived until July, trading whatever I had left for milk and flour – there was nothing else I could get. In July I received a letter from my brother. He had been looking for me for seven months. After learning where I was he immediately sent a non-commissioned officer to take me with him.

On 25 July I left Suzak and went to Turkestan, where I was in for a new surprise. Although I had my papers, the NKVD officer didn't allow me to go further. The non-commissioned officer was allowed to continue his journey. Having to stay there, I was in despair. What was I going to do in a city where everything was so expensive? There was almost nothing left for me to sell and the money I had was running out.

After fourteen days of going from office to office, including the Polish Representation, I made the acquaintance of the wife of the head of the NKVD office. Her husband, after receiving a huge bribe, agreed to take me as an arrestee to Tashkent. In Tashkent, Polish soldiers told me that the 5th Division had already left. Arriving in Tashkent in vain, I went with these soldiers' families to Yangiyol. From Yangiyol I was sent with the evacuation train to Krasnovodsk, from where I traveled by ship to Bandar-e Anzali. On 27 August 1942, I arrived in Bandar-e Anzali.

In this city I was reunited with my husband, about whom I had had no information during my entire stay in Russia. On 23 September I left Bandar-e Anzali and went to Tehran, where I joined the WAS (Women's Auxiliary Service) as a volunteer.

From the start of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany I was in touch by letter with my family, that is, with my mother and sister who remained in Lwów.