



## BRONISŁAW BEDNARSKI

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**Bronisław Bednarski, a farmer by occupation.**

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I was deported from a military settlement together with my entire family – six people – on 10 February 1940. My six-year-old son was seriously ill, near death. But they paid no heed to his condition and dragged him out of bed, into the freezing cold, whereafter we were all transported to the station in Klewań, some 25 km distant. They loaded us onto goods wagons, some 50 to 70 people to each; luckily, our wagon was fitted with a toilet. We were strictly forbidden to go outside, and in any case the wagons were always closed shut. The children would cry for water and food, while the guards smiled and talked between themselves: – *Let them die, the Polish masters*. We traveled in these filthy wagons for nearly a month, suffering terrible hunger. Throughout this whole time they gave us some hot soup – twice – and nothing else. Some of the people had been allowed to take food from home – they were a bit better off, for many had nothing, not even a morsel of bread. It was all the worse as we could have bought some food if there had been a possibility. They treated us very badly, making it as difficult as possible for us to survive the journey. Finally, we reached Kotlas. There they put the children on sleighs, while the rest of us – including the elderly – had to travel on foot; we trudged forward for five nights and five days, covering 190 kilometers to the settlement of *Komarłicha* in the Cherevkovo Region of Arkhangelsk Oblast. Two of the children froze to death along the way. When we arrived at the settlement, they lodged all forty or so of us in a barrack. It was so crowded that we lay one next to the other, unable to even turn around. We were pestered continuously by vermin: cockroaches, bugs, mosquitoes, flies. The bugs and cockroaches bit so badly you simply could not sleep.

As regards work, they ordered us to start immediately, not giving us any time to rest after the journey. We were herded into the forest to fell trees – the snow was more than a meter high, and no one should have been forced to toil in such conditions. We worked for days on end,



without any rest, even on Sundays, while our wages were no more than two to four rubles, so that I and my wife together were unable to earn enough for bread alone, seeing as a kilogram of bread cost 1 ruble and 5 kopecks. My wife and I were lucky that we had some articles of clothing (underwear, pillows, coats and other items) from back home, which we would take to the village in secret and exchange for potatoes. Later, when we started receiving parcels from relatives, things improved somewhat. As long as we had clothes to barter, we managed to get by, but when they were all gone, we felt terrible that we were unable to provide even bread for our family. But even if we had had money, we would have been unable to buy anything for it, since there was simply nothing to buy. My wife fell ill with scurvy; her body became terribly swollen and large wounds appeared on her legs, she was completely unable to walk. She cried and the children cried for their mother, but that merciless torturer, the commandant of the settlement, would force her to go and work in the heavy snow while it was 50 degrees below zero. As a consequence, she suffers from leg ailments to the present day. The Soviet doctors had one method of treatment – a single aspirin for everything.

I and my family were released from the settlement on 25 October 1941. They gave us nothing – no carts – so we had to buy two pairs of sleighs and pull them ourselves, with our children on top, all of the 190 kilometers to Kotlas. No rations were issued, but if you had anything to barter, you could get a few morsels of bread. They did not even want to give us any accommodation – you had to give them a shirt, a scarf, or some other item first. It was really difficult to endure. There were so many small children, and they were all crying from the cold, from exhaustion and hunger. We walked for fourteen days, pulling the sleighs all the way to Kotlas. From Kotlas they took us to a kolkhoz in Asia, and from there, towards the end of February 1942, our own Polish authorities transported us to Tehran. After we got there, on 29 March 1942, I enlisted in the Polish army.

I was deported from the settlement of Omelana Mała in the Łuck Voivodeship, district of Równe, commune of Działkiewiczze.