



ZOFIA DZIEDZIEJEW

Volunteer Zofia Dziedziejew, born on 15 July 1908. I lived in the village of Czudzin, Czuczewicze commune, Łuniniec district; my husband had a liquor license and received a war disability pension following the wars of 1918 and 1921. From the outbreak of the war in 1939 my husband served in the Citizens' Guard, and when the Soviets were about to cross the Polish border he was forced to leave his family home and go with the Polish Army. I haven't heard from him since. I was left alone with two children.

On 19 February 1941, at midnight, I heard knocking at the door. I got up and when I saw that the house was surrounded by the NKVD, I didn't want to open the door. However, when they began to hammer on the door and forcefully demand that I let them in, I had no other choice but to comply. Their first words were: "put your hands up!", and three lieutenants pointed their guns at me, ordering me to stay put, to which I responded with an ironic smile: "It's a shame for Soviet officers to assault a defenseless woman with a gun". Then an even bigger bunch of Red Army soldiers stormed in and began to search the premises. They demanded that I hand over any weapons which were in my possession, and at the same time robbed me of money in silver coins and all gold trinkets – a watch, rings. They said that I couldn't take these things, but had to give them up for *gosudarstvo* [the state]. When they finished their job, they allowed me to comfort my crying, scared children, and ordered me to be ready to leave within half an hour. I was to take all necessary stuff – both clothes and food – weighing up to a hundred kilograms. On 20 June we set off for the long journey. We travelled by train for 21 days, and during that time we received hot soup only three times. Each wagon had two small windows by the roof, and the doors were constantly closed shut. We were allowed to fetch drinking water once every two or three days. In this way we reached Altai Krai, Novosibirsk Oblast, Kamen region, Borovaya sovkhos no 305. I had to go to work there and dig three-meter deep pits. The daily work quota was set at six cubic meters. Those who

failed to meet the quota were issued 200 grams of bread and a ruble per day. Twice a month we had to report to the NKVD for the region, which had its headquarters forty kilometers from where we were staying. And then on 12 September [1941], one lieutenant came to our sovkhos, organized a meeting for Polish families and read out to us that we were free Polish citizens from then on. In the sovkhos I lived with one family who had also been exiled. The thirteen of us lived in a tiny house, without beds, table or benches, on bare ground. On 20 November I rented a car, for which I gave 300 rubles. I took two other poor Polish families, Mrs. Grabińska with two children, and the ten of us went to the town of Kamen. I went to the NKVD chief, and in the *pasportnyy stol* [passport office] in Kamen I was issued an *udostoverenie* [certificate of release]. On 25 December I left for Novosibirsk. By boat [illegible] they kept us in the dark so we didn't realize there were Polish posts in Russia. It was freezing cold and snowy outside, the children were cold, but we weren't allowed to enter the building of the station, although it was really warm in there. However, merciful God put an end to our misery. I met an acquaintance of mine, Mr. Stanisław Strzelczyk, who told me that there was a Polish post at the station. At first I thought that either he was mad or I had gone insane. But he took my hand and led me from the queue (I was queuing for a ticket, as I was to go to my cousin in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic) to a small room, where I saw our colonel and our captain, whose surnames I don't know. I cannot find the words to express my feelings. I really believed that I was dead and this was a dream. I didn't know how to begin, what to ask for – several dozen pairs of eyes were looking at this scene. The eyes of satanic, pardon me, Soviet chiefs. So I blurted out, "Save me, colonel!" To which the captain replied in a soft, kind voice, "We cannot promise you anything, we are sending everyone to Farab". However, this wasn't yet the end of our suffering and hunger. We went by Amu Darya to Gurlin [?]; the journey there took eight days, and the return journey 21 days. There were 350 people on the barges: there was hunger, cold, and death. We made a stop by the riverbank every single day to bury from seven to twelve people. Later, in a kolkhoz in Achumbambaj [?], we ate grass. We were forced to work and were issued 200 grams of flour. It was worse when we got grain, because then I had to go and ask to use a quern and pay for it. Our work consisted of sowing [illegible]. I left without a shirt, because everywhere I had to rely on my own means. On 8 February 1942 I found myself in Tehran.