

SYLWESTER MARTENKA

Lance Corporal (Rifleman) Sylwester Martenka, son of Feliks and Augustyna, born 14 December 1890 in Rządkowo, Chodzież District, Poznań Voivodeship, State Police officer (senior constable), Roman Catholic, married, living in Wilno at Filarecka Street 23, flat 2.

After crossing the Polish–Lithuanian border on 19 September 1939, I was interned [imprisoned] and placed in the Vilkaviškis camp. After Lithuania was seized by Russian troops on 10 July 1940, the camp was taken over by the Russian army, and on 12 July I was transported to Kozelsk, USSR, together with other internees.

There were about 300 people in the transport. Between 45 and 60 people were put into one 15-tonne train car, the doors were tightly sealed and only two iron-barred windows were open. The route led from Vilkaviškis through Kaunas, Wilno, Mołodeczno [now Maladzyechna, Belarus], Minsk, [and] Smolensk, [to] Kozelsk. The railway cars were jam-packed and there was little air inside. More than ten people passed out on the way; they were not given any medical assistance. There were policemen, soldiers, and officers in the transport. In Mołodeczno, the transport was trans-shipped to a broad-gauge train. During transport we were not allowed to get out to relieve ourselves; we did that in the train cars, through a small hole in the door. The food during transport consisted of bread, dried salted fish, and an insufficient amount of water. Water was provided twice a day, two buckets per car. During transport the heat was enormous, so the lack of water was acutely felt.

On the way, the transport was divided: military men were directed to the camp in Yukhnov, while military and police officers, as well as police, Border Guard, military police, and Border Protection Corps personnel, were sent to Kozelsk. I stayed in Kozelsk from 15 July 1940 to 15 May 1941. Investigations continued all the time; each person was interrogated more than ten times; they demanded that we disclose the names of people who collaborated with the police in Poland, threatening that we would be deported to Siberia, etc. The food in the camp was sufficient; each day we received 800 grams of bread, soup in the morning, soup

and thick groats porridge with oil, as well as small quantities of meat for lunch. The sanitary conditions were good, the place was clean, we had a bath once a week. Medical assistance was good, [it was] usually provided by Polish doctors; there was a well-maintained hospital in the camp, but there was a shortage of medicines.

From December 1940 we were allowed to write one letter a month to our families in Poland. After receiving a reply from the family, everyone was individually summoned to the office of the camp authorities, where they showed you the letter and demanded the disclosure of [the identity of] informants. If you refused, they drove you out of the office and didn't give you the letter.

In March 1941, I received a letter from my wife, from Wilno, which contained a photograph of my wife and children. When I came to the office, an NKVD officer showed me the letter and the photograph, but didn't give them to me, demanding that I disclose the names of informants; when I refused, I was thrown out of the office and never received the letter at all.

In Kozelsk, we lived in buildings that were sufficiently heated during wintertime.

On 15 May 1941, with a thousand of my colleagues, I was deported from Kozelsk to Murmansk, and then, on 5 June, placed on board a ship called the Stalingra and taken to the Kola Peninsula, where on 19 June I was put to work at the port, unloading barges. The work was very hard [and] there was no shelter, so we spent the nights under an open sky; it rained heavily for a few days at that time. Work lasted 12 hours a day. There was a shortage of fresh water to drink and use for cooking. On 4 July 1941, after we had finished unloading a ship, we were sent to a camp located 10 kilometers into the Kola Peninsula, where we were given 200 grams of bread a day and one tin of peas every five days. On 13 July we were placed on board a passenger ship, the Uzbekistan, and transported to Arkhangelsk; from there, on 22 July, we left for Vladimir; [next,] we were placed in the camp in Suzdal, where on 24 August I was transferred together with the others to the Polish authorities and, on 8 September 1941, sent in a transport to the Polish Army – 5th Infantry Division in Tatishchevo.

Encampment, 9 March 1943