



JÓZEF GOK

1. Personal data (name, surname, rank, age, occupation and civil status):

Platoon Sergeant Józef Gok, 45 years old (born on 26 October 1898), a telephone operator of the State Railways at Baranowicze-Poleskie station, married, with two children.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

I was arrested on 3 October 1939 in my flat, having been denounced to the NKVD by an employee of the Railway Roads Divisions in Baranowicze, one Józef Pikutowski, regarding my cooperation with the "Orfeusz" II Branch [clandestine military organization].

3. Name of the camp, prison, place of forced labor:

My interrogations commenced on 3 October 1939, and I was detained in the cellar of the local prison. Between 14 October 1939 and 31 March 1940 inclusive, I was incarcerated at the prison in Baranowicze, cell no. 14, while from 1 April until 18 September 1940 – at the prison in Minsk (USSR), cell no. 98. On 19 September, we were sent to the rallying point in Kotlas, arriving there on 3 October; on 28 October we left Kotlas and marched – for three days – to the Corrective Forced Labor Camp on the Northern Dvina River, which was administered by the NKVD.

4. Description of the camp, prison, etc. (grounds, buildings, living conditions, hygiene):

The prison in Baranowicze (Polish): the premises, buildings and living conditions were satisfactory until the Soviets ransacked the place, stealing the beds, bedlinen, clothing and food supplies, and demolishing the fittings, equipment and other items of property.

The prison in Minsk: an old brick building with filthy interiors, infested with vermin. The living conditions were terrible: overcrowding (my cell, which measured 7 by 8 meters, housed 135 prisoners), filth, a lack of air, no potable water, no possibility of washing yourself or even changing your underwear, no normal beds or even plank beds (we slept on the bare cement floor).

The camp: located in the swampy taiga near Arkhangelsk, no buildings – we had to live in tents; everything else was the same as in prison, with the difference being that we slept on bare plank beds made from logs, and this was especially difficult to endure in winter.

5. Social composition of POWs and prisoners (nationality, category of crimes, intellectual and moral level, mutual relations, etc.):

The camp had more than two hundred prisoners – Poles, Byelorussians (the most numerous) and Jews – detained as criminals: “politicals”, civil servants and government functionaries, farmers, and those who had crossed the Polish-Soviet border to the USSR of their own free will and ended up being arrested anyway. The intellectual and moral level of the non-Polish inmates was very low, for they were Soviet sympathizers. Mutual relations were nonexistent.

6. Life in the camp, prison, etc. (the course of an average day, working conditions):

In prison: we would wait anxiously for our food rations, be called for sentencing and sent to a camp or another prison, undergo interrogation at night, and sometimes receive smuggled snippets of information about the war in Poland and our families and friends.

In the camp: we would be woken up at 4.00 a.m., be given breakfast, and thereafter summoned for roll-call, following which they would divide us into work gangs. Then the guards would force us out the gate, beating us along the way, while at our destination we would try to secure the best work tools available (the work was very hard, particularly when the temperature fell to 52 degrees below zero). The quota: removal of 3.8 cubic meters of earth (we worked on the railway) using a wheelbarrow. We received hardly any remuneration (throughout my period of detention in the camp, that is from 30 October 1940 to 18 September 1941, I was given 29 rubles and 90 kopecks). If you carried out the norm, you would receive food of the best – third – category: 900 grams of bread, and be entitled to buy 100 grams of boiled sweets, 10 grams of halva, a packet of shag tobacco or a cigarette, and a quarter liter of whey – provided that these products were available in the camp shop and you had some rubles (normally you did not).

Food: if you were allotted the first (worst) category, you would receive 300 grams of bread, while if a doctor so decided, you would be assigned the second (medium) category – 500 grams of bread; “it was difficult to live and yet impossible to die”.

Clothes: quilted shoes and trousers, and a donkey jacket – all old and worn, handed in by one of the Stakhanovites. Mutual relations: prisoners of each ethnic group kept to themselves. Cultural life: when we left the camp in the morning and returned from work in the evening (around 9.00 p.m.) someone would play a tropak on a harmonica, while the leading Stakhanovites (Byelorussians or Jews) would sing the *Katyusha*.

7. Attitude of the authorities, NKVD towards Poles (methods of interrogation, torture, punishments, Communist propaganda, information about Poland, etc.):

The NKVD treated us Poles with great severity, suspicion and brutality. My interrogations, usually two or three in a row, took place at night. They would beat me in the face and kick me, and also shoot at me – two or three times – from a revolver, having stood me face first against the wall. I was sentenced to eight years of corrective forced labor in a camp. Propaganda: their own, concerning the political, economic and military development of the land of the Soviets. They backed this up with statements to the effect that their country was free of spies, lords, and the bourgeoisie, and also that all their citizens were workers, who thanks to their hard toil have everything and are well off. And – they would add – if you worked well, you too would enjoy life in the Soviet Soyuz ("paradise"). As regards Poland, they said that the country would never be reborn, for they had concluded a pact with the Germans whereby Poland would be wiped off the map for good. They also added that the part of our country occupied by the Soviets had already been incorporated into the USSR and divided into oblasts, regions and kolkhozes; indeed – they would state with conviction – the very inhabitants of these lands (your wives and children, they declared) had demanded this, and are now grateful to the Soviets for being freed.

8. Medical care, hospitals, mortality rate (provide the surnames of those who perished):

Medical care – some iodine and a thermometer, which were used in cases of fatal illnesses or frostbite of the hands, legs, ears, nose or face; some people were sent to the hospital, but it was a well-known fact that these trips ended in death along the way.

9. Was it at all possible to keep in touch with the home country and your family? If yes, then what contacts were permitted?

I had no contact with either my family or anyone in the home country since the date of my arrest (3 October 1939), nor do I have any such contact at present.



10. When were you released and how did you get through to the Polish Army?

I was released on 18 September 1941 and directed to Kyzylorda. I reached Orenburg, where I learned from some passing civilian women that a Polish Army was being organized in Totskoye. I therefore turned back and, on 30 September 1941, reported to the staging area in Totskoye, where I was accepted and enlisted in the Polish Armed Forces.

Official stamp, 23 January 1943