



FRANCISZEK KARPIERZ

Rifleman Franciszek Karpierz, farmer, unmarried.

On 17 September 1939 I was taken prisoner by the Soviets. It happened in the township of Borszczów.

The first POW camp in which I was imprisoned was in Kamianets-Podilskyi, the second in Tiotkino, the third in Kryvyi Rih, the fourth in the vicinity of Przemyśl, the fifth in Jaworów, the sixth in Czerlany, and the seventh – the prison in Starobilsk. I didn't work in the first camp, but as regards food, hygiene and housing conditions, they were so horrible that I cannot believe to this day that I managed to survive.

In the third camp hunger compelled us to work, and besides we were taken by force for hard labor in the iron mines. We didn't receive any remuneration for our work, and both the hygiene and medical assistance were so poor that some things couldn't be helped – all of us had lice for the whole two years of our captivity. When someone was sick, the doctor would accuse him of pretending and order that he be driven to work. We were kept in jail for a few days and coaxed into applying for Soviet citizenship. We also built an asphalt road from Przemyśl to Lwów, and later worked at an airport construction site.

We worked from dawn to dusk. When someone didn't work, because for instance he was old, sick, or weak, he received barely enough food to stay alive.

The NKVD treated us as their worst enemies. They harassed us at every step and laughed at us, saying, "Can you see your own ear? And you won't *uvidite* Poland, either". At the outbreak of the German-Soviet War there were 2,000 of us in the camp near Gródek Jagielloński. The whole camp set off on foot under heavy escort. We marched to the Soviet border in Podwołoczyska. On the way, those prisoners who couldn't walk any more stayed behind,



and then they were dragged into a ditch, killed and left there. Many of my friends died, but our help was ineffectual, as everyone was utterly exhausted. I don't know any surnames. In Zborów, six of my colleagues were killed, but I know only one surname, that of Jan Kieliszek from Warsaw.

I was released from the camp in September 1941.

I had contact with my parents during my entire stay in captivity – we exchanged letters. One month I got the following letter: "Dear son, don't write to us any more, as we are going to Russia. The Soviets took all the settlers and they are taking us to Siberia. We are being deported for being settlers. Wait for our new address." A month passed and I received another letter, not from Poland this time, but from the following address in Siberia: Altai region, Novosibirsk city, Kureczyński [?] forest point. When I read that letter, I thought that I wouldn't survive this blow. However, my parents survived two horrible years. When they went south to Uzbekistan in 1942, they found the living conditions even worse, and omnipresent hunger resulted in an epidemic. Then my father buried my sisters, Rozalia and Eleonora, and then my brother Jan and mother Maria. Finally, crushed by misery, he put an end to his life. And so I had to say goodbye to what I held most dear – my family, innocent, killed by the Soviets.

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