



## BOLESŁAW KEMPIŃSKI

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Senior Private Bolesław Kempieński, 36 years old, carpenter, unmarried.

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I was arrested on 22 June 1940. I was incarcerated in the prison in Wołkowysk for less than three months. I was taken for interrogation almost every night and – under threat of execution – they tried to force me both to confess that I had allegedly been a member of some insurgent organization and to denounce my colleagues. I didn't know anything about any such organization, so I couldn't plead guilty.

The prison conditions were horrible: filth, lice, and hunger. Three months later they deported me to the north. We were transported as if we were the worst criminals, in sealed and barred boxcars, and for food we received biscuits and herrings, but no water. People were going insane from thirst, and when we cried out for water, the NKVD men shouted back that we'd better be calm, as otherwise they would shoot at us (which they did, but fortunately nobody was hit). In this way we arrived in Kotlas. I was incarcerated there in a distribution gulag camp. A few days later we were transported further down the river on a freight barge and again in conditions that defy description to Knyaz Pogost, and from there again by train to Ukhta, to the Vetlosyan gulag camp, in which there were approximately 3,000 *zaklyuchennyy* [prisoners]. 50 percent of the inmates were Poles, and many of them died there. I cannot say exactly how many, but every day a few were taken to the local cemetery.

We lived in barracks, which were infested with all sorts of vermin. We were driven out for work every single day, without a break. We had only one day off in two months, and when someone fell ill, the doctor wouldn't issue him a medical leave unless he was really gravely ill. Those who didn't meet the work quota received the so-called penal *payok*: 400 grams of bread and half a liter of soup without any fat in it. And it was impossible to fill the quota.



From time to time they screened some Communist propaganda movies, which we had to watch. When someone didn't want to go, he was considered an enemy of the Soviet nation and a *shpion* [spy], and subsequently harassed at every step.

Following the signing of the agreement with the Polish government they changed our status to free laborers, but when a decree came that we could join the Polish army, they didn't want to let us go. We were to stay in the Komi ASSR and work there as free people, but the majority wouldn't comply, and at the beginning of August we left in a transport to Totskoye, to the Polish army. I didn't have any contact with my country and family, as my family lived in Pomorze, under German rule.