



ZYGMUNT KURZMAN

1. Personal data (name, surname, rank, Field Post Office number, age, occupation, marital status):

Platoon Leader Zygmunt Kurzman, non-commissioned officer; 28 years old, private clerk, married; Polish Forces, paiforce no. 138.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

March 1940: I was arrested at night in the flat of my relatives in Stanisławów.

3. Name of the camp, prison or forced labor site:

TomAsinLag – Tomsk-Asino Camp.

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

The camp was situated in the middle of the taiga, on swampy ground – a bog. The barracks stood on support posts and were very heavily bug-infested. There was mud and water beneath the barracks, a breeding ground for mosquitoes. The barracks were unlit and full of rats. A small barrack with six beds was converted into a hospital. A paramedic worked there as a doctor. In the hospital [illegible] and the living barracks.

5. The composition of POWs, prisoners, exiles (nationality, category of crimes, intellectual and moral standing, mutual relations etc.):

The majority of exiles were Poles, most of them sentenced for attempted border crossing, and there were also many Soviet citizens of various nationalities, mostly thieves. Many of the Poles were officials of the central authorities in Warsaw, and there were a few lawyers, all of whom manifested their Polishness in everything they did. It was clearly visible that the prisoners supported one another and offered their fellow inmates modest assistance in financial difficulties.

6. Life in the camp, prison etc. (daily routine, working conditions, work quotas, remuneration, food, clothes, social life etc.):

Work [illegible] work in the forest, and in summer at floating lumber downstream. With the temperature at minus 50 degrees, we worked in the forest felling trees, without proper clothing. In summer, despite improvised masks, we were all bitten to the point of bleeding by midges and mosquitoes. The work quotas were exorbitant, for instance felling and preparing 8 cubic meters of timber per one person. Our food depended on meeting the quotas: on average, a daily ration consisted of half a kilogram of dried fish, completely rotten, about 60 decagrams of black bread and soup, that is, water in which fish had been boiled. We were quite often harassed by our fellow exiles, Russians, from whom the camp authorities offered us no protection. In the barracks, we were rather close-knit. As far as cultural diversions are concerned, there weren't any except for two or three loudspeakers over which propaganda was broadcast all day long.

7. The NKVD's attitude towards Poles (interrogation methods, torture and other forms of punishment, Communist propaganda, information about Poland, etc.):

I was interrogated twice by the NKVD: I was summoned at midnight [illegible] to a room in which three NKVD officers were sitting. I stood for an hour, and none of them seemed to notice me. A huge automatic gun lay on the table at which a major was sitting. This was all about fingering the organizers of a strike that had been staged in the camp in connection with hard conditions [illegible]; I was finally accused by the interrogator of being one of the organizers. When I denied this and provided an alibi, they showered me with threats and began to try to talk me into denouncing the alleged organizers. When I couldn't answer to that, they kept me for 36 hours in a cold, closed room without any food, and then they allowed me to return to the barrack.

In connection with the above-mentioned strike, the authorities arrested two Polish citizens, who were then taken to who knows where, vanishing into thin air. As for the attitude towards Poland, we were told at every step that Poland as a state could be talked about only in the past tense, and when we claimed that it would return to its proper condition – arguing that England and America would help – [illegible] they replied that they would never give up a patch of land on which a Soviet soldier had planted his foot.

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

A paramedic – an 18-year-old "doctor" with two years of hygiene courses – treated all diseases with ichthyol. There wasn't any operating theater. There was one Russian



paramedic, she suffered from a venereal disease. Mortality wasn't high. The main cause of death: lack of food. Two people died of mushroom poisoning – they had picked them to satiate their hunger. When they fell ill, they were left without any help, to die a slow death.

9. Was there any possibility of getting in contact with one's country and family?

I received only one letter from the International Red Cross in Geneva, in which I was notified that my father, who lived in Kraków, was looking for me. The letter contained an international stamp for my reply, but the NKVD told me that Russia didn't recognize such stamps and that I wasn't allowed to send an answer.

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

I was released on 10 September 1941, but my journey to join the Polish Army that was being formed at the time was not provided for. On the contrary, they tried to talk me and the others into staying, promising much better conditions – a salary of 350 rubles and freedom in living arrangements, as well as assistance in all these matters. However, when it became clear that all the efforts of the camp authorities to induce us to stay were to no avail, we were issued certificates valid for three months, and then we were allowed to leave the camp. We weren't paid any money, and we had to go to the train station – located 150 kilometers away – on foot, obtaining food by our own means. At the station in Novosibirsk I learned from other Poles that in Totskoye they were no longer accepting volunteers for the Polish Army, and that all those who reported there were being sent by our authorities to the south, to the vicinity of Samarkand. In the vicinity of Tashkent I managed to board a train carrying volunteers to the Polish Army. I reached the Amu Darya River with them and was transported to the town of Kungrad, where with the help of a Polish delegate (Capt. Fiałkowski) I was placed in a kolkhoz. Only on 12 March 1942 was I called into the Polish Army, together with the others who were in this area at the time. On 26 March I came to Iran in a transport comprising some 2,500 people and was officially enlisted into the Auxiliary Military Service.



Questionnaire for the former prisoners and exiles in the USSR (continued)

As for the deportation of civilians, they were simply thrown out of their homes, without any reason, and the procedure was more or less the same in all cases. These citizens were taken from their homes at night, with their entire families in most cases – with little children – and allowed to take a minimal amount of their portable property, which in practice amounted to a few kilograms of food but no warm clothes. These people were literally herded from various villages to train stations that were sometimes several dozen kilometers away, and then they were loaded onto heavily guarded trains. Despite freezing temperatures, they waited for many days and nights for the trains to be filled, and [illegible], and after two or three days of waiting, during which they received nothing to eat, they were deported into the bowels of Russia.

As for the court trial, I was sentenced in absentia. The verdict was served on me in Novosibirsk, where one of the NKVD officers told me that a Moscow tribunal, a so-called “troika”, sentenced me to ten years of forced labor. Many of my companions were tried in the same manner.