

IRENA OLSZEWSKA, JADWIGA OLSZEWSKA

Irena Olszewska, volunteer, born on 28 November 1900 in Sobolówka, Podole,
married to a military settler.

Jadwiga Olszewska, volunteer, born on 16 September 1925 [?] in Równe, Wołyń.

On 10 February 1940, the Soviet authorities entered the apartment and, without any regard for my very ill son, ordered us to get dressed. After the search, they told us to pack. They took us out of Równe, me, my husband, and our two children – our 19-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter, as military settlers.

After a two-week journey, we arrived in the settlement of Połdniewice, in Gorkovsky Oblast. It was surrounded by woods, where we all worked and tried to meet the quotas. We lived in two wooden barracks, divided into long narrow halls with bunks inside. 100 people could squeeze in there. They used to call Poles “displaced people”, whereas Ukrainians and Belarusians were called military settlers or gamekeepers. Most of them had a bad attitude towards us Poles. When someone said something against the Soviet authorities, they denounced them, leading to arrests.

At 4 AM we had to get up and run to stand in a queue for bread, and already at 5 AM we had to go to work. I didn't work, because the medical board said I couldn't. In the summer I used to go to the woods to pick mushrooms and blueberries, which we used to eat. Despite the hard work that my husband and children were doing, the remuneration they got was irregular and insufficient to live on. For what they earned we could buy soup in the canteen, but sometimes there wasn't any. They used to go to work dressed in bast shoes and wadded jackets. Polish people used to help one another if possible.

The authorities didn't have a negative attitude towards us. They used repressive measures only when one of the displaced persons cast aspersions or accusations on them. They used to say to us “if you don't work, you'll die like a dog”. They told us to forget about Poland. In school, they'd make anti-religious propaganda.

As there was no medical assistance or medicines, the mortality was high. People used to die of typhus and dysentery. The epidemics spread very quickly. More than three hundred people died, among them:

Colonel Władysław Mielnik and his son Władysław;

Lieutenant Aleksander Świrski;

Berych;

Królikowska;

Sitański;

Basia Watrusiewicz;

Zdzisław Gadomski;

Wojniłowicz,

Marek Leśniewicz, and many, many others.

I couldn't always correspond with my sister, and we didn't get much information about Poland.

The amnesty was announced on 28 August 1941, and it was a great joy for us. Some people, elderly folks, even cried. We prayed together in our barrack.

On 24 November, we left for Uzbekistan, to the Bukhara Region. We stayed in the kolkhoz of Kalinin. My husband and my daughter went to work, and I stayed with my son, who got sick on the journey. On 28 January, my husband and my daughter left for Kermine and joined the Polish Army there.

On 23 March, my son and I went to Kermine. From there we headed to Persia, and on 9 June 1942, in Teheran, I joined the Women's Auxiliary Service. My daughter and I, we are very proud to wear a Polish uniform.

4 February 1943