

PAWEŁ SZPAKOWICZ

Reserve Second Lieutenant Paweł Szpakowicz, 36 years old, employee of the Warsaw Polish State Railways Management, railroad traffic technician, married; 11th Railway Sappers Battalion.

I was arrested by the railway NKVD of the Soviet authorities on 18 July 1940. The arrest took place at 1.00 a.m. They first observed me for some time in order to catch me [at home]; I was captured in accordance with [illegible] law. I was immediately searched on the spot. They took away all my personal, railroad and military documents, which proved my identity and employment with the Polish State Railways and in the army. The entire apartment was also searched. They took away various souvenirs, photographs and other items, and they demanded that I give up my weapon, although I did not have any. About twelve people were present during the arrest and search. After the search, I was escorted to a temporary jail, to one of several two-by-two-meter rooms, occupied by about ten people. In the room, there were employees of the Polish State Railways who had already been arrested, but also later on three more railway thieves were brought in and locked up with us. We stayed there for two days and then we were all transported to the prison in Białystok, where we were locked in cells in groups of 20-22 [people]. However, it was not long before we couldn't move around freely in the cell, because after a few days the cells started to fill with people arrested for crossing the border. There were 60-70 people in one cell. There were thieves, communists and others among us; in short, a true mix of interesting and uninteresting people, disgusting human beings. Life became very difficult, all the more so because the NKVD interrogations took place at night, almost every day. After some time in such conditions, we (mostly Poles) were all loaded into train cars with barred windows and transported further into the USSR, to the north, towards Ukhta. However, we usually stopped at prisons on the way, for at least a few weeks. On the way to the labor camp, we did earthworks, [using] shovels and pickaxes, around newly constructed camps. We were escorted to work. However, that period didn't last long. After the outbreak of the war, they started to transfer us on foot 200 kilometers further. My task was to remove bark from trunks, dig the ground, and carry concrete on wheelbarrows.

The composition of the prisoners: mostly Poles, of different categories, of Polish nationality, very high moral standing – there were good mutual relations between the Poles. The buildings where we lived were very dirty. The hygienic conditions were terrible. Food: a little piece of bread, a thin soup, and nothing else. For some time, we wore our own clothes, but when they got worn out, we received old, wadded trousers and a *tielogrievka* [jacket]. Following the night trials, they pronounced verdicts. We were sentenced to eight years for being against the Soviet authorities. I received that sentence in Kom, USSR. It was impossible to leave the barrack alone at night and go to the toilet because people were attacked and robbed even of their rags. The robbers were mostly Soviet convicts and they were active both by day and by night. The temperatures fell as low as 45-50 degrees below zero, which made our life a misery. Nobody pitied us and we had no food. We worked from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. As remuneration, I received 700 grams of bread and some soup in the evening.

At that time, the mortality was so great that they organized a better cauldron, especially for those who were exhausted and dying. During interrogations or in other situations, the USSR authorities treated us as people of the worst kind, threatening us, beating, and even [illegible] with cigarettes. The propaganda was mostly aimed at spreading communism.

As for medical assistance, if you had no fever, you would sooner die than be granted a sick leave. I was never in the hospital, but I saw that there were no medications. There were only beds, ricin, and iodine. I don't remember the names of the dead.

I had no contact with the country, family or friends. I only learned from my friends whom I met in the prison or labor camp that they did not even know exactly what had happened to my parents. All the information I received was uncertain and inaccurate, but I held on to it and calmed down, waiting for it all to end soon. I tried not thinking about the fact that some of us would stay and die in the hospitals, where the mortality was high. People usually died of diarrhea. Some prisoners had contact with the home country. They received letters and even food packages from their families, but I did not receive anything. I don't know why. I don't know if the letters got lost or [illegible], but I was not able to make contact with my family, and even now I wonder if my parents are alive, whether they have been deported somewhere by the Soviet authorities, or [illegible]. My father owned some land, while my brother and I were Polish Army officers.

Following the Polish-Soviet agreement, Polish prisoners were gradually released and transported to various towns. When I was released [to join] the army, I met some friends from Poland in one of the transports in Siberia, on my way to the Polish Army in Totskoye. The Bolsheviks had deported them from Poland to Siberia before the Soviet-German war. They told me that in 1941, my wife was arrested and imprisoned, while my son and her mother were deported to Siberia. They did not tell me anything about my parents. During the journey, having received some information about my son and mother-in-law, I started looking for them and I found them, living in despair, poverty and misery. My mother-in-law, a 70-year-old woman who was unable to work, was dying, and my son started begging on the streets. When I found my mother-in-law's relatives I left the old woman at her brother's place. I took my son and began making efforts to go by train and join the Polish army, which was being formed. When I saved a few rubles for the journey, I took my son and went to the army. It was very difficult, but I finally joined them, leaving my son with junior cadets, where he has stayed to date, and I joined the Polish Army, where I have also served to date. It was high time. My aspiration and dream was to serve as soon as possible in our army, and my son has done the same.

Temporary quarters, 3 March 1943