

## MICHAŁ GOLDBERG

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Gunner Michał Goldberg, 30 years old, married, head of a film laboratory in Warsaw.

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After the Germans occupied Warsaw, my wife and I ended up in Baranowicze, a town occupied by the Russians, where I worked as a painter. In spring 1940, following a very severe winter, the Russians carried out a passport campaign, while those Poles who did not want to become Soviet citizens were reportedly to be sent to the part of Poland occupied by the Germans. Naturally, I did not accept their passport, but I also did not go to the area occupied by the Germans either, because the latter did not want to let us in. Since the Russians did not know what to do with us (as it seemed to us at the time), we had a few calm weeks.

Then one night the NKVD militia knocked on our door. We were given 15 minutes to pack our belongings, and they informed us that we would be taken away deep into Russia. A truck took us to a freight train, where 40 people with baggage were crammed into a railcar intended for transporting animals. It was impossible for everyone to sit down at the same time because there was not enough room. There was no toilet, the car was locked, and the escorts would not even let us out during stops. As a result, we were forced to satisfy our physiological needs in a very unpleasant manner. What is more, there was no water for washing. That created conditions that a normal, cultured person was unable to bear for long. When it comes to food, it was not that bad, because the residents of Baranowicze brought us large supplies of food to the station. The Russians on the other hand gave us a kilogram of bread, a bit of sugar, and several dozen grams of sausage per day. After two weeks of traveling in such conditions we arrived at Tavda station, next to a river of the same name (a tributary of the Ob River), where we were loaded onto barges and transported by water further north. The conditions on the barge were so bad that the journey by train seemed to us like the ultimate luxury. It should be added that the Soviets gave us a piece of dry fish only once for four days, while our supplies

had already been used up. After four days, they set us ashore on the river bank, from where we headed deep into the forest. They marched us through a swampy forest, full of terrible mosquitoes, to our destination.

There was an old, dilapidated hamlet by a small lake in a clearing in the forest. It was called Kurenivo, and was located in the Sverdlovsk Oblast, Tabarynsk Region, Owdierino Selsoviet [rural council]. It was a type of village where small identical houses were situated in rows, forming a street. There were 80 such houses, and four of them were big buildings: the school, office, bathhouse, and bakery. We were accommodated in groups of 10 per house, the houses roofless, and with no stoves or window panes. We were given hatchets and were told to "settle" there in three days.

The deportees were Poles, mostly from towns near Warsaw and Łódź, and fifty percent were Jews. That was a pretty good thing, as it was hard to break those people's spirit. We laughed at the NKVD officers who told us all the time that we would never go back to Poland, that we should not think about our home country, and that we should just settle there (they gave each of us a piece of land to grow potatoes).

We did farm work, worked in a brickyard, worked at hay-making, collected phloem fiber from trees for bast shoes, and worked in the forest. Women also did all those things. The pay was poor, the quotas were high. For meeting the quota, which was impossible for us, they paid five rubles. On average, we earned one or two rubles. For hay-making and rafting, which was the hardest work, we were paid 15–20 kopeks. We were allowed to buy a kilogram of bread and three kilograms of groats per person per month. We did our own cooking. In winter we only worked in the forest. The women burned branches, while the men felled trees and transported wood. We had to be on the assembly square, from where we set off, before 6.00 a.m. If we were late, we were tried and ruthlessly sent to prison. For smaller offences, the deportees were locked in solitary confinement. We finished work at 5.00 p.m.

We were not allowed to attend any meetings or pray together. The doctor (feldsher) acknowledged that we were sick and granted us sick leave only having consulted the chief officer. If the chief wanted, a sick person had to go to the forest. Those not working and children were given only half a kilogram of bread. According to the rules, we were supposed to go to work if it was warmer than 36 degrees below zero, but the thermometer was

constructed in such a way that it never showed temperatures lower than 35 degrees below zero, although the temperature in nearby villages was 40 degrees below zero. As for clothes, they gave us padded jackets and pants, fur hats, padded boots, and bast shoes for which they took deductions from our pay.

Up until the Russian-German war I corresponded with people from Warsaw and Baranowicze. I received food packages from Baranowicze.

In the fall of 1941, we learned about the Polish-Russian agreement and a few days afterwards an NKVD commissioner visited us, distributed *udostoverenies* [certificates of release], and allowed us to leave the hamlet at our own cost. After six weeks of grueling travel by passenger trains and cattle cars, we reached the south, where a Polish army was being formed. At Kogan station I learned from Poles traveling in the opposite direction that the trains were headed to some river, where people were loaded on barges again and forced to work. My wife and I escaped from the train and went to Bukhara, where I applied to appear before a draft board.

Having applied many times to different Polish-Russian draft boards, I was finally referred to the army in Guzoz, where I joined the Polish Army on 8 March 1942.

Place of stay, 28 February 1943