



FRANCISZEK KOZIARZ

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On 28 October 1939, the functionaries of the Soviet militia removed me from my settlement along with my four neighbors; aside from this, they robbed us of everything they could take with them: livestock, grain and food supplies. Our removal had followed repeated searches – we were threatened and harassed both by the aforementioned militia and the local populace, whom they had turned against us.

Up until the day I was deported to the north, I was living with my wife's relatives. On 10 February, my family was arrested; my children were taken straight from school and they were all transported to the train station in Krzemieniec. I was absent the day my family got arrested. On the fourth day I was also arrested and taken to my family at the train station in Krzemieniec, where we met in one wagon. The wagons were closed and it was dark inside; a sickening stench from the toilet located in the wagon was the first smell that hit my nostrils. In Brańsk we received hot food.

On 27 February 1940, at the Kotlas station, we were loaded onto sleighs, and after a six-day journey in bitter frost we reached our destination. We were deported to Lensky District, to Zapan Yarenga on the Vychegda River in the Arkhangelsk Oblast.

The hamlet was made up of several derelict barracks. The rooms were divided into cubbyholes that could hold one person, but instead whole families – each consisting of a few members – were crammed into them. We were plagued by all sorts of bugs and had no relief from them, as all attempts at eliminating them were futile.

57 families of military settlers and four families of rangers were deported to that settlement. There were some inhabitants there already – Polish families deported from Witbesk, who were so terrorized that at first they were afraid to admit that they were Poles. The repressive measures that were used against them consisted mainly in separating families and deporting



individual members to far-away locations. Mutual relations were correct, even cordial, and people supported and helped one another.

We worked in the forest at logging, and in summer we toiled by the river, tying logs together and floating them downriver. Those who were robust lived a bearable life, but those who had families to feed were often destitute. Our work was done on a piecework basis and we had to meet quotas, which in the case of the women were incommensurate with their strength. Families supported themselves by selling the last bits of clothing off their backs and exchanging their clothes for foodstuffs whenever such an opportunity presented itself.

We were treated harshly and ruthlessly by the authorities in the hamlet. Poland was slandered, and it was said that the Poles had treated laborers as slaves, and that soldiers in the Polish Army had been beaten and tortured. In their opinion, life in Poland resembled what we found and went through in Russia. The issue was constantly debated and quarreled over, and we always gave direct answers, explaining the factual state of affairs.

There was no school in the hamlet, so the children were running wild or had to earn their living.

Medical assistance took the form of advice rather than treatment, this being due to the lack of medicaments and properly trained staff.

After some time we were given the offer to settle for good and build houses. This proposal elicited no response, even from the few Ukrainian rangers.

On the day the amnesty was proclaimed, all of the families went south; we then saw the effects of malnourishment and exhaustion, as corpses marked our road to freedom. In April 1942, in Chokpak, I enlisted in the Polish Army, and my family left for Persia.