

KONSTANTY MISIAK

Lieutenant Konstanty Misiak, born 1888, tradesman, married.

After crossing the Latvian border together with a unit of the Braslaw National Defense Battalion on 20 September 1939, I was arrested by the Latvian authorities and imprisoned in the internment camp in Daugavpils. After some time, our camp was moved to Libawa [Liepāja], and then to Ulbroka near Riga, where I stayed until 28 August 1940; on this day I was deported by the Soviet authorities to Kozelsk and put in an internment camp. I stayed there until 29 June 1941. That day, together with the Polish Army soldiers who were staying at this camp, I was deported to the camp in Gryazovets (northern Russia) near Vologda, where I stayed until 2 September 1941.

The camps in Kozelsk and Gryazovets were located inside the grounds of former Russian monasteries, while in Kozelsk most of the soldiers lived in church buildings equipped with three-story bunks. [About] 400 to 500 people lived in these buildings, or rather Orthodox churches, while the rest occupied the monk houses. In Gryazovets, some of the soldiers lived in residential buildings, and most of them in barracks, which were built when we arrived in Gryazovets, where the barracks' structure consisted of gable walls and a roof, and the side walls were open. Two-story bunks were set up in these barracks, where we slept.

In the Kozelsk camp, the housing conditions were unenviable. Apart from a lack of straw, the bedbugs which we fought every night were the most burdensome; not hundreds, but thousands. This caused us the most grief. Some time had passed before the Soviet authorities, more so the authorities of our camp, provided us with an anti-bedbug powder, which significantly reduced their number.

In the first weeks after arriving in Kozelsk, we slept on bare bunks; later we were given straw mattresses, one blanket and one sheet each, a headrest and some straw for pallets – considering the relations there, such supplies made it possible to cope. The staff officers got beds. The residential buildings were generally poorly heated, but we did not feel the severe

cold; on the other hand, in Gryazovets, the cold was hard to bear, mostly for those who lived in the barracks. The cold was mostly bothersome during the night, so much so that some of the soldiers never lasted until morning, mainly those who did not have their own warm cover, so they had to get up, heat the boiler, boil water and warm up, sipping the boiling water, as it was hard to get tea.

We washed our underwear ourselves. Despite there being a laundry [?], we preferred not to use it, because we would then get our underwear more blanched than laundered. We were taken to bathe in groups every 10 days; there wasn't always hot water available, but we got used to it being warmish. The hygienic conditions left much to be desired.

The internees in the Kozelsk camp consisted of officers and privates of the Polish Army, State Police officers and constables, Border Guard officers and sergeants, and others.

With the exception of very few individuals, the moral condition of all the internees left nothing to be desired. Mutual relations were generally good, but there were always rats.

Everyday life began with a wake-up call at 6:30 AM. After breakfast at 7:30 AM, the group of people assigned to work started working in the camp at 8:00 AM. Work included paving the streets, sawing and chopping wood for the kitchen, and other tasks related to life in the camp, while those who were employed full-time received an additional *payok* [auxiliary package] in the form of a pack of tobacco and an additional portion of soup. Those assigned to the kitchen to peel potatoes, beets, and to do other jobs, did not receive anything for their work (that's how it was in Kozelsk). In terms of the amount, the food we got was sufficient; in terms of quality, it left much to be desired. When it came to clothes, if someone didn't have any, they could get some. Specifically, a so-called *kufayka* [wadded coat] or wadded pants, though they were in used condition, and one change of underwear.

Social life and relations between the internees were very cordial. One would help the other if they could, either materially or spiritually. Cultural life included reading Polish books among the internees or ones borrowed from the camp library, learning English, French, playing chess, and other forms of cultural entertainment.

The NKVD authorities' attitude towards the Poles was not only unfriendly, but simply awful. The internees were mainly interrogated at night, but also during the day. Above all, threats were used like exerting pressure on the family, deporting the family, depriving the family

of their earnings, removal from work, and in terms of the actual person – imprisonment, separation from the family, deportation to a labor camp, and other threats; this included making things up. The punishment of arrest was applied for minor offenses.

Not all of the interned officers staying in Latvia were transported to Kozelsk. Thirteen officers headed by Col. Edward Perkowicz and Lt. Col. Swiatkowski were arrested and deported to the interrogation prison in Riga. Small parties of people were also deported from Kozelsk. One of these parties (22 officers), headed by General Przeździecki, was deported and imprisoned in the Lubyanka. There were several other parties aside from them. Most were officers and privates from unit II.

The communist propaganda stood up to its task. There were no films without propaganda, the lectures that were organized from time to time by the camp authorities could not be carried out without communist propaganda. Due to this propaganda, some of the internees were drawn into organizing a so-called *krasnyi ugoлок* [literally "red corner," a communist interest group] in Kozelsk. General Wołkowicki has the detailed data on all these manifestations as he was the commandant of the camp in Gryazovets.

As for information about Poland, we did not get any; we were completely cut off from the world, and if we learned anything about Poland, the Polish government, or the Chief Commander, it was only from Russian newspapers or radio, and it was usually rather negative in tone.

Medical care was provided, though it was poor, but it was worse when it came to medications. As for mortality, if I remember correctly, five people died in the camp in Kozelsk, and two took their own lives by hanging themselves. I don't remember the names of those who died. Two people died in the camp in Gryazovets.

In terms of communication with the country, I received several postcards, but only one card from my wife, who was deported to Kazakhstan on 12 April 1940, together with my mother and daughter.

I was released from the camp in Gryazovets on 2 September 1941. I joined the Polish Army which was forming in Russia, on 29 August 1941, in the camp in Gryazovets, where a conscription commission was set up a few days before our release.

Temporary station, 19 February 1943