

WANDA DASZKIEWICZ

1. [Personal details:]

Section leader Wanda Daszkiewicz, 22 years old, volunteer, student.

2. [Date and circumstances of arrest:]

I was arrested by the NKVD at 10 o'clock, 10 February 1940 in Hoża village near Grodno. I was told that my mother and I were going to be transported to another Oblast, and then that we were going to join my father who was a prisoner of war in Kozelsk. In the end, having taken only essential belongings, we were transported to the station and loaded into *tieplushki* [heated goods wagons]. The transport to Russia began on 11 February.

3. [Name of the camp, prison, or forced labor site:]

I was taken to Ural to Molotovskaya Oblast, Stephanovka settlement.

4. [Description of the camp, prison:]

The settlement was located on two mountains and surrounded by forest. Its two-room buildings were made of wood (there were around 50 of them) and each was inhabited by three or four families. The walls were red with bedbugs. It was impossible to eradicate them. I don't even want to mention the subject of hygiene, since it was talked about a lot in theory, but in reality, it didn't exist. In spring, when the sun started to shine and the streams started to flow, the odor was simply unbearable.

5. [The composition of POWs, prisoners, exiles:]

Around 800 people lived in our settlement. Mostly foresters and settlers. The majority were of Polish origin, but the number of Ukrainians and Belorussians was also significant. The people came mostly from rural areas, so their intellectual standing was rather poor. When I was living in the settlement, I saw that they were especially vulnerable to manipulation by the local authorities, who profited from this. Only the intelligentsia had their own stance. Mutual relationships were relatively good. I wouldn't say that people were close to each other, as it's supposed abroad to have been. Everybody lived for themselves.

6. [Life in the camp, prison:]

I myself didn't work, because I was determined that I didn't want to work for a foreign country. That's why the settlement commandant, a fierce communist, considered me to be a saboteur, counterrevolutionary, etc. During one year and a half, I was made to work twice for a month, maximum. In winter, I cleared the snow, in spring I burned branches. Since I didn't work, I got only 400g of bread and nothing else. I didn't have the right to any clothes.

There was no social life. We weren't allowed to gather. We wanted to organize May devotions, but it was strictly prohibited. Cultural life didn't exist at all. Of course, there were some "art" groups visiting us and from time to time and the cinema came round, but I didn't take part in those events.

7. [The NKVD's attitude towards Poles:]

The NKVD authorities had a rather negative attitude towards Poles, and I mean only Poles, not Belarusians and other people who passed as Poles because they lived in Poland.

Once the settlement commandant wanted to make me work, but I refused outright. Full of anger and hatred, he shut me up in a cell for two days. After two days he let me out, but threatened that if I didn't work they would arrest my mother. That's why I had to work. A few times, he took me to a prosecutor for interrogation and threatened me with prison or work in a mine. Regardless of his threats, I still didn't work.

They often organized communist mass meetings; however, there weren't many supporters to take part in them. At the meetings one could hear relentlessly: *Zabud'te o Pol'she!* [Forget Poland!] There will be no Poland. What did you have there? Poverty, misery and nothing else. This was the news they gave us about Poland.

8. [Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate:]

When my mother got seriously ill, I called in a feldsher (with three months' experience, is this a feldsher?!), but he only said, "She's already old – let her die". That was the only help I got. Generally, the mortality rate wasn't too high. The people that died were mostly old people. I can enumerate the names (that I remember well) of the people who died in my presence: Waldemar Łazarz, Kisiel, Suchocka, Gryg. However, the mortality rate got very high when we headed South, after the amnesty had been announced. Then, when we settled in kolkhozes, people started to contract typhus. It was at that time that my mother died.

9. [Was there any chance to get in contact with one's country and family?]

I stayed in contact with my country. I exchanged letters with my sister-in-law, who lived in the Soviet territory, and with the other one who lived in the German territory; however, it was less frequently, since she didn't receive my letters.

10. When were you released and how did you manage to join the army?

When my mother died, I was left alone. I felt like a castaway on a rough sea, with no support at all. Having barely recovered from typhus, I was too weak to go to one of our posts in order to get some information about the forming ranks of the Women's Auxiliary Service. It was March 1942.

By coincidence, a friend of mine came to our kolkhoz from the 8th Infantry Division (in Chokpak) and seeing me in such a lonely state he took me to Chokpak. There, after many difficulties, on 8 April 1942, I received internal orders. My dreams came true.

The transport of the 8th Infantry Division left for Guzar on 22 April. I went with them too.

These were the circumstances of my joining the Women's Auxiliary Service.