

FRANCISZEK ROŻEK

Rifleman Franciszek Rożek, son of Andrzej and Maria, born in 1896, State Police functionary, married with two children; from the 1st Guard Battalion Company, attending a course for drivers at the 104th Transport Company.

Interned and taken away on 12 July 1940 from the internment camp in Wyłkowyszki in Lithuania to the internment camp in USSR territory, in Kozelsk.

I was in the internment camp in Kozelsk from 15 July 1940 until 15 May 1941.

The camp was located in the dilapidated buildings of former monasteries and Orthodox churches. We lived in monastery rooms, from 8 to 40 of us per room. There were about 600 people in one of the churches, and nearly 280 in the other. There were three-level bunk beds in the churches, and two-level beds in the monastery rooms. We slept on bare wooden boards for about two months, then we received mattresses and some wet and rotten wheat straw, which served as bedding until the end of our stay at that camp. The dwellings were mostly badly lit and wet, and there were a lot of bugs. Hygiene was completely neglected.

There were over 2,500 internees. They included officers of the Polish Army and the police of various ranks, as well as non-commissioned officers of the Border Protection Corps, gendarmerie, the Polish Border Guard, State Police functionaries, and officer cadets of the Polish Army. The latter were taken away to other camps in November 1940. The camp accommodated younger and older people, aged up to 60 years old, mostly Polish, of a higher mental standing. The relations between the internees were good. We'd been interned because we were the citizens of Poland. We were transported to the camp in Kozelsk from the camps in Lithuania and Latvia.

We mostly worked inside the camp: paving, demolishing the ruins of former monastery houses, renovating the buildings and houses so that people could live in them, removing debris from demolished monastery buildings, etc. In addition, the work of individual people was becoming more common in the camp, despite difficult conditions and a lack of tools.

Things such as knives, a piece of iron that could serve as a hammer, or a sharpened wire that could be used as a chisel were confiscated by the NKVD during searches. In spite of all that, the work went on uninterrupted. The prisoners would make chess pieces, mandolins and guitars from marble and wood, they would sculpt various things, they would make foldable knives and razors. Moreover, there was a choir and an orchestra comprising 50 people. The choir sang Polish songs and a few Russian ones, the orchestra included violins, guitars, mandolins – obviously made in the camp – and a club piano, which was out of tune. I was interned as a State Police functionary (from their viewpoint, the enemy of working people).

The food in the camp in Kozelsk included: 800 grams of bread (officers would get 500 grams of dark bread and 300 grams of white bread), half a liter of soup, a couple of spoons of thick cereals, boiled water (*kypiatok*), fats (oil), about 20 grams of sugar. Five packets of shag (fibers) were issued per month, five books of tissue paper and five matchboxes, about 100 grams of regular soap. There was one bath and one enormous common toilet.

During the 10-month stay in the camp in Kozelsk, we were interrogated by the NKVD organs. They would call people up at various times during the day, as well as at night. During interrogations they caused people to break down and reveal the nature of their service, they asked about participation in the current war, as well as the previous one against the Soviets in the years 1918 – 1921. Apart from that, they argued that Poland was a bourgeois country and they urged to forget about its existence, because there would be no more Poland and communism would rule the world. Such was the aim of the propaganda led by the NKVD organs in clubs, during talks and readings, through the movies displayed in cinemas, the literature available to us in the camp, and the radio.

After the interrogations had been completed, many internees were taken away from the camp at night in vehicles, to an unknown destination. They were taken away individually and in groups. I remember two people who were taken away: Feliks Spadniewski, a policeman from the Nowogródek Voivodeship, and Colonel Dąbrowski.

On 15 May 1941 we were separated from the officers and taken north to Murmansk. We were transported in locked railcars, in harsh conditions.

When we were approaching Murmansk, through the cracks in the wall of the car and through one large window, I saw many camps and people at work, accompanied by Soviet soldiers

with rifles. The hats of the Polish soldiers who were forced to labor in the camp stood out among the workers.

In Murmansk we received a wadded hat, two wadded jackets that served as a coat, wadded trousers and shoes with rubber soles. We were transported from Murmansk to the Kola Peninsula on the "Stalingrad" ship. The journey on the ship was unbearable due to the lack of space, food, hygienic conditions and absence of medical care.

On the Kola Peninsula we disembarked at the port on the Ponoy River, onto the empty tundra. We slept on wet ground, as it had started to thaw after the winter. That was in June. Labor lasted for 12 hours and included building tents, working on road construction and the furnishing of an airport. Food: during the day we received from 80 to 120 grams of bread, two pieces of sugar, soup twice a day, dried fish.

There was no bath, medical assistance didn't exist, the sick would lie on their pallets together with the healthy.

After the outbreak of the Soviet-German war on 12 July 1941 we were transported by ship from the Kola Peninsula to a camp near the port in Arkhangelsk.

The conditions in the camp were difficult in every respect, [the prisoners] started to fall ill en masse, there was no medical care. Diseases were caused by dirt, rotting litter, dirty water, and the lack of food and poor hygiene.

On 23 July we were taken away to Suzdal by train, in freight cars. The food was better there. We were released after the amnesty had been announced. On 24 August 1941 I joined the Polish Army, and on 8 September, I arrived in Tatishchevo.

During my entire stay in the USSR I received one telegram and two letters from my wife from Kazakhstan, and one letter from the family from the German partition.

I remember my impressions from my stay in the USSR as the worst in terms of the political system, deceitfulness and the life of the local people.