

MARIA OWCZARZAK

Private volunteer Maria Owczarzak, 40 years old, married.

On 20 September 1939, my husband was arrested for being a sergeant of the State Police and deported to Russia, to Ostashkov [illegible]. I haven't had any information about him. On 18 April 1940, as the wife of a sergeant of the State Police, I was deported along with my daughters to Kazakhstan, Kellerski region, the Liubimowka kolkhoz.

This kolkhoz was situated on the steppes. Poles and Germans who were transported here from the Polish frontier in 1936 lived there. We were living in sheds and it was very cold because there were no windows and the doors were broken in. We had to walk a few kilometers through the steppe in low temperatures, 50 degrees below zero. We picked the tips of grass blades that were protruding from the snow. I went to the chief of the NKVD and asked for straw. He said that straw was for the *kolkhozniks*, not for the bourgeois.

They didn't want us to work, we were the enemies of the state, Polish masters according to them or something like that. Before we came to Russia, the chief of the NKVD gathered people together and told them that we were the same Poles who, after the Germans came, were ripping off ears and gouging out eyes, and that was the reason why they were deporting us to Russia. They wouldn't let us buy anything in the cooperatives, they said that we could live on our own supplies. We weren't allowed to move away from the kolkhoz. We were being watched and we had to report ourselves three times per month.

We lived on what we had, although we hadn't brought many things with us, because we were only allowed to carry 50 kilograms. They stole the rest of my belongings right before my very eyes, I couldn't take them because there were soldiers with rifles, and one with a smaller gun, and I could take only what he allowed me to take.

After the amnesty, they took us to carry out forced labor by the Akmolinsk–Kartaly railway. The work was really hard – I was working alongside my daughters, one was 15 years old and the other was 16 years old. In November 1941, upon our request, they took us to the South

of Uzbekistan. Again, we had to work hard, and we got 200 grams of barley. When I found out that women also could join the army, I was seriously considering it, as I didn't have little children, only two grown-up daughters – I tried really hard to join the Women's Auxiliary Service so I could work for Poland.