

JÓZEF STAWECKI

Rifleman Józef Stawcki, exiled to labor camp PechorLag, USSR; 53 years of age,
Roman Catholic, merchant, married, three children.

On 19 October 1939, I was arrested by the NKVD and taken from my home in Białystok. They accused me of belonging to some independence organization, [and] of having been a prisoner in 1905. At the same time, they accused me of fighting against the Soviets as a volunteer in 1919. Three women testified against me for killing a *komandir* [commander] in 1920: Anna Mańkiewicz, Anna's sister Helena, and Ms. Wiszniewska – all of them resided in Białystok on Dziesięciny Street. In addition, I was accused of campaigning against the Soviet elections, which were to be held on 22 September 1939.

I was put in prison in Białystok. The first day they interrogated me, they brought the aforementioned charges against me. A few days later, they summoned me at midnight and the investigator asked me whether I pleaded guilty. I said I did not [plead guilty], [so] he called two soldiers and they led me to the prison courtyard and put me into a taxi. They drove me to the military cemetery at the zoo in Białystok. They gave me a spade and I was told to dig a hole. When I started to dig, they asked me whether I knew what the hole was for. I said I did not know and one of them replied, "You are digging this pit for yourself." I dug up to my knees before he began to interrogate me again, but I did not confess anything. He pushed me down into the pit and told me to dig further. When I reached waist level, he called me and said: "This is the last time. If you don't confess, then you'll get a bullet in the head." He promised me that the Soviet Government would forgive those who speak the truth and plead guilty, and also said that he felt sorry for my young children and wife, and that it was better for me to confess. I replied that if they had witnesses, they should put them in front of me and make them state the alleged crimes [I committed].

He then told me to turn around, and told his soldiers to load the weapon. But instead of killing me, he approached me and hit me on my nose with the butt of a Nagant revolver and yelled at me to fill the pit [back up]. I was brought back to the prison. I was interrogated a few more times at night, but they did not bring along any witnesses.

I was sent to Grodno prison on 29 January 1940, where I lived in difficult conditions, and in March 1940, I was transferred to the Brygidki in Brześć, and then to Minsk after seven days. The conditions there were so atrocious that it is difficult to describe them: they placed 119 of us in cells that had [previously] held 30 prisoners. After five weeks, they took us to Vitebsk. There, I had a sentence read out to me of eight years of heavy labor camp. During our journey they very often did not give us bread, but instead gave us herring and no water.

In September, they took us to the labor camp PechorLag, where conditions were very severe. The quotas were very high and it was difficult to meet them. In a short time, because of weakness and exhaustion, I swelled up and they sent me to the hospital, where I was admitted for dysentery and swelling. Later, when I felt better, I was sent back to the commando for weak people, where I fell ill again, this time with pneumonia. After my recovery, I was sent back to *sangorodek* [prison hospital], where I stayed until my release.

In September 1941, I was forced to go 20 km away to Krasnogvardeysk kolkhoz [collective-owned farm], which was named after Stalin, where I lived in hard conditions until I joined the Polish Army on 3 February 1942.

10 March 1943.