

MARIA STOLNICKA

I will try in a few words to capture the course of my life from the moment of my deportation to Russia, to the date of joining the Women's Auxiliary Service.

[My name is] Maria Stolnicka. I was born on 2 February 1925 in Warsaw. In Łomża I completed two years of secondary school, and on 10 February 1940 I was deported with my family by the Soviet authorities as political exiles in Russia. The departure was so immediate that we were not able to take with us our much-needed things. The journey was undertaken in very harsh conditions. They crammed us in cars (these were the freight cars) like some great criminals.

The place of conviction was Arkhangelsk Oblast, Nyandomsky district, settlement of Ikša, block 90. The terrain was lowland, covered by forests and we were surrounded by marshlands. They placed us in tight barracks conducive to breeding insects. The exiles from nearby areas also occupied the barracks. They lived in the same conditions as myself. My occupation was hard forestry work – wood processing. Work was compulsory with so-called quotas, which mostly no one was able to meet.

Remuneration for the work was so little that it was not enough for living. You got some cash from selling the stuff you brought with you. Clothes, which got destroyed as a result of hard physical labor, could not be purchased anywhere. As a result, people walked around in tattered rags, with frostbite on their hands, legs, and faces. The way authorities treated civilians was reprehensible and merciless. Constant searches for weapons and [illegible] did not leave you in peace, even at night. On top of that, they spread full-blown communist and anti-Polish propaganda.

Medical care was not available at all. Epidemics such as typhoid and dysentery were widespread. There were masses of victims, including also my grandfather and grandmother: Józef Stolnicki (72 years of age) and Ludwika Stolnicka (64 years of age).

I was able to keep in touch with family until the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. However, the messages were limited only to matters related to fate, health, and the life of loved ones.

Liberation. The amnesty put an end to our ordeal. Despite this, we were not allowed to leave our settlement. Wanting to escape this place and join the Polish Army, I acted independently. All by myself, without possessions and clothes, I took the big unknown road. Finally, I reached my destination, and on 20 May 1942 I joined the Women's Auxiliary Service in the territory of Persia, Tehran. I was happy because since then, I have been able to serve my motherland, Poland.

Redhowoth, 4 February 1943.