

JAN ANDRONOWSKI

Cannoneer Jan Andronowski, born in 1922.

I was taken away on 13 April 1940 along with my mother and three brothers from Kobryń to settlement no. 27 in the Akmolinsk Oblast in northern Kazakhstan. My father, Maksymilian Andronowski, and two uncles were arrested on 23 September 1939. Initially, they were kept in prison in Kobryń, then they were taken away somewhere and I haven't received any news about them since.

We arrived at settlement no. 27 on 29 April. We were placed with Mrs. Kalitkiewicz and her two children in a small room which measured three by three meters. The housing conditions of the Poles – about 60 families were brought to that settlement – were usually identical. The barracks we lived in were built from clay; rooms with floors were rare. Tasks were assigned to everyone fit for work just a few days after we had arrived.

My two brothers and I were sent to the so-called *stan* [labor camp]. My mother stayed at the settlement with one of my brothers and throughout the whole time earned for the upkeep by selling clothes. At first, the standard of hygiene was relatively high, however, it was getting worse and worse as everything was being disposed of and also due to a lack of soap.

All the residents of that *kolkhoz* were recruited from among the exiles, except for the *predsedatel* [administrator] and the commandant of the settlement. We worked at the *stan* from sunrise to sunset. The lunch break for those who worked with cattle lasted about three hours. The food for the laborers was tolerable until September 1940. After that, the working conditions got a lot harder and the food got significantly worse. The quotas were so high that they were almost always impossible to fill. There was no medical assistance at the *stan*. One of the female laborers was an orderly, but she had no medicine, to say nothing of her lack of education in this field.

I returned to the settlement in late fall, where I soon stopped working because I had no clothes and no shoes.

There were no serious conflicts among the Poles.

Throughout my entire stay in Russia, until the Soviet-German war, we maintained contact with our homeland. Parcels sent from Poland were of great help. Hunger was predominant in winter as no one was paid because the crops had failed. One of the incidents which illustrates the living conditions in the winter of 1940/41 is that in March, when I was at the *stan* for the second time, we ate the carcasses of cattle that had died of starvation for an entire week.

The attitude of the NKVD (especially the lower levels) was hostile. The higher levels usually treated Poles in a better way.

Medical assistance at the settlement was relatively well organized; the hospital was decent and the doctor noticeably cared about the sick. Mortality was high, the number of diseases was enormous. At the end of May 1941, we moved to the so-called *zagotskot* [administrative center], also located in the Akmolinsk region. I worked as an ordinary laborer there as well. In theory, the work was regulated by national law, but the reality was that we worked for the whole day. The only difference was that Sundays were free. We were paid in cash, 150–200 rubles. Being late was punishable in court. In comparison to the living conditions in the *kolkhoz*, the only advantage was that there was an abundance of fuel.

I was drafted into the Polish Army on 6 February [1942] and I joined the 10th [illegible] in Lugovaya on 26 of that month. My family remained at the *zagotskot* base.