

BRUNON GUSSMANN

Personal data (name and surname, rank, age, occupation and marital status):

Brunon Gussmann, second lieutenant, aged 28, teacher, unmarried, Infantry Reserve Center, 3rd company.

Date and circumstances of arrest:

I was arrested on 29 June 1940 in Włodzimierz Wołyński, when all inhabitants from the western and central districts of Poland were being deported.

Name of the camp (prison – forced labor location):

In July 1940, I was taken to Novosibirsk Oblast, Zyryanskoye Raion, the settlement of Kashtakovo. At the end of August 1940, a part of the exiles was deported due to the lack of residential premises to Tomsk region, Timiryazevskoye mechanized logging point, to the 28th and 34th quarter. I was assigned to the 34th quarter.

Description of the camp, prison, etc. (grounds, buildings, housing conditions, hygiene):

The settlement where I lived (34th quarter) was located 15 kilometers away from Tomsk, on the other side of the Tom River. Through the taiga where we lived, from the Tom River, as far as 25 kilometers into the taiga towards the Ob River, a narrow-gauge railway run. We worked at tree felling (pines and birches), timber carting, loading, unloading and rafting. The area was quite dry, sandy, with pine forests prevailing, the climate was healthy.

Hygienic conditions were tolerable. We lived in wooden barracks; each family had their own "cabin." It was very cold in winter, because there was only one iron stove and one kitchen in the entire barrack. In summer, there were plenty of bedbugs and mosquitoes which were relentlessly annoying. With the effort of all barrack inhabitants, the premises were clean and neat – no lice.

The composition of POWs, prisoners, exiles (nationality, category of crimes, intellectual and moral standing, mutual relations, etc.):

In terms of nationality, Jews prevailed, Poles constituted about 5% of the exiles. Mutual relations were satisfactory. A few Jews stepped out of line, but finally they came to their senses.

Life in the camp or prison (daily routine, work conditions, quotas, wages, food, clothing, social and cultural life, etc.):

The working location was approx. 7–9 kilometers away from the barracks. At the beginning, we were transported by railway, but later we had to go on foot. In order to arrive at work on time, we would wake up at 5.00 a.m., and return at 8.00 p.m., and upon the outbreak of war, when we had to work 11 hours a day, we would come back around 11.00 p.m.

Until the spring in 1941, we could reasonably endure. Those who worked received (in exchange for money) one kilogram of bread. Those who did not work – 400 grams. From time to time we were sold products such as different types of groats, pasta, herrings, sweets, soap or even fabrics and shoes. Potatoes could be bought in the nearby kolkhozes at relatively decent prices. When it came to cash, the situation was worse. Earnings were low. We earned about 2–4 rubles a day on average, for which we could buy only bread, some groats and potatoes. Those who had families, were not always able to buy their bread portions. Jews who had plenty of belongings were doing better – they sold them in the nearby Tomsk and could make a living. In the same period, in the forest you could buy dinner (soup or porridge) and 200 grams of bread. Work was hard, quotas were high, impossible to meet.

In the spring of 1941 the conditions worsened. Although we earned more, we couldn't buy anything. The bread portion was reduced to 800 grams and later to 600 grams, the price of potatoes increased terribly due to bad crops, while other products were not available at all. You couldn't buy dinner or bread in the forest either. We ate berries and mostly mushrooms. Mushrooms and some potatoes were our main food. Fat was not available, milk and eggs were so expensive that we couldn't even dream of them.

Some exiles were given warm clothes and shoes, for which their salaries were cut. Others did not receive anything at all, but had to work. We couldn't buy anything independently, because we had no funds. Failure to go to work or late arrival resulted in a trial and detention (prison, labor camp) lasting up to six months. Alternatively, 25% were deducted from the

earnings for several months. There was no time for establishing relations or for culture. If on Sunday we did not have to work, all Poles gathered to talk, sing religious, national and military songs. In May, we organized a May religious service in one of the houses. From time to time we were given a Russian newspaper.

The NKVD's attitude towards Poles (interrogation methods, torture and other forms of punishment, Communist propaganda, information about Poland, etc.):

NKVD authorities were very ill-disposed towards us. In each settlement there was an NKVD commandant who considered himself the master of our life and death. You couldn't go anywhere without a pass, and the passes were issued reluctantly. At every turn they expressed that we were their enemies and mistreated us purposefully. At the shops, bread was sold first to the locals and then to us. We were the lowest "third category." In general, the local community was friendly to us. They detested Jews, claiming that they were the reason for their suffering. About Poland it was said that it would not raise again and that we would never go back there.

Upon the announcement of the amnesty, they suggested that we become Soviet citizens. As far as I know, no one agreed, even from among the Jews.

Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate (provide the names of the deceased):

Medical assistance was on site. In nearly each settlement there was an infirmary with a doctor or a medical assistant. The seriously ill were transported to the hospital in Tomsk. Mortality among children was significant, among older people it was lower. About 20 people (including children) died out of about 300 people in total. Among the deceased were: Juliusz Trepkowski from Nakło, Klara Trepkowska and Stanisława Siudzińska – also from Nakło, Maria Sawicka from Lublin (on the Ob River), Elżbieta Kłyś from Dębica, Icek Alerhand, Staw.

Was there any possibility to get in contact with one's country and family?

I corresponded with my family that I left in Pomerania directly by post. One third of the correspondence was delivered to the place of destination on both sides.

When were you released and how did you manage to join the army?

I was released on 26 September 1941 and left Tomsk on 6 October. The Soviet authorities did not want to release us, because at the same time they had to liquidate the premises where we had worked. However, the firm attitude of us all forced the Soviets to release us after a few days' strike. As we weren't allowed to go to the west, most of us went to the south. We were not told about the emerging Polish army.

At some station near Tashkent, I joined a Polish transport from Buzuluk. With this transport I travelled through the Amu Darya River to the Karakalpak Republic, where I stayed until 25 November 1941. We were then transported back to a kolkhoz in Kitab. Due to hunger, I left the kolkhoz and worked in the city as a *pechnik* [stove-maker]. I earned about 7–8 rubles a day, but this wasn't enough to make a living, so I was on my last legs. In January 1942, the 6th Infantry Division arrived in Kitab and Shakhrisabz, to whose concentration point I was called on 20 February. From there I was sent to the 6th Brigade in Guzar on 27 February.

Encampment, 10 February 1943