

## JÓZEF FLASZA

### 1. Personal data:

Lieutenant Józef Flaszka, born on 13 January 1900 in Tarnów, Border Guard Deputy Commissioner, married, three children.

### 2. Date and circumstances of the arrest:

On 10 February 1940, my family (wife and three children) and I were arrested, but we were not told for what reason. NKVD officers and the local Ukrainian militia (the village of Antonów, Czortków District), having forced the door and windows open, burst into the apartment at 5.45 a.m. Threatening us (even the children) with revolvers, they ordered us to assemble immediately, not allowing us to pack any food or essential items. When I asked them to let the children have a meal before we set off, an NKVD officer declared, "they'll survive; they've already had enough to eat." Our home was completely plundered and local Ukrainians confiscated the more valuable items for themselves.

### 3. Name of the camp, prison or place of forced labor:

That day we were loaded onto cattle railcars, 40–50 people in each, at the Biała Czortkowska station. We were not given any food or firewood (the temperature was from 15 to 25 degrees below zero at that time), and we were taken in the direction of the Soviet border.

The journey took 18 days by train and eight days by sleigh. Any food during the journey was out of the question. Throughout the journey (26 days) [illegible] "dinner" in the form of a type of [illegible] five times 200 grams of bread per person. If it had not been for the food items secretly taken from home, probably nobody would have made it to the destination.

The sanitary conditions during the journey were indescribable. There was no toilet in the railcar. I tried to get something done about it, but the NKVD would always reply: "it's too comfortable as it is for such Polish scum."

Three people in the railcar died along the way, of cold and hunger.

As soon as we reached the destination of Sosnowka, Kosa Region, Molotov Oblast, the arrestees were assigned to barracks. The next day, we were taken to work in the forest. The

village, situated 400 km away from the railway station, was infamous for all of its previous residents – including the arrestees – having died of hunger and physical hardship.

#### **4. Social composition of prisoners, POWs, deportees:**

Almost ninety percent of the arrestees came from the countryside, and the transport included only a small percentage of the intelligentsia, almost all of whom were Poles. As for the country people, they were Ukrainians. Initially they were hostile towards the Poles, but later on, when the living conditions became more and more difficult for all the arrestees, the Ukrainians began seeking closer relations with the Poles [illegible] participation in [illegible] meetings organized by the Polish intelligentsia.

[Illegible] relations between the arrestees were cordial, but there were also occasional cases of treason and betrayal of national interests. However, it has to be pointed out that the NKVD authorities treated both categories identically, and I did not notice any special privileges for the informers.

#### **5. Description of the camp, prison:**

The Sosnowka camp was situated deep in the immense Ural forests and consisted of 80 twenty-person barracks. Ten people were accommodated in a room measuring four by three meters. The buildings were in poor condition, leaking and poorly equipped. Many people suffered frostbite on their legs and arms in those "houses." Hygiene? There wasn't any. Officially there was a nurse, but as a rule there were no medicines, bandages or disinfectants. Being granted sick leave was out of the question unless you ran a fever of 39 degrees or lost a limb to frostbite or by having it cut off with an axe in the forest.

There was always one judgment for all afflictions: pretending; and then you were punished for skipping work.

It was patently obvious that the Soviet authorities did not care about keeping Polish citizens alive and healthy, that they rather strived for us to die quickly of hunger, the cold, and exhaustion.

#### **6. Life in the camp, prison:**

Life in the camp was very monotonous, split between work and rest. The working day started at 6.00 a.m. (in winter at 7.00 a.m.) and lasted until 6.00 p.m., with an hour's break at noon.

Literally everyone worked: men, women, and children from 14 years old. Those who did not want to work because of their health or age did not have the right to buy bread or soup in the canteen.

The required work quotas were generally impossible to meet for the ordinary person, and one has to bear in mind that women and adolescents worked under the same conditions as the men. For people working in the woods, the quota was set at 6–12 cubic meters per person. We were paid two–three rubles per day, but we needed five–six rubles to support ourselves. It is clear that the majority of people suffered from hunger and died of exhaustion. Eight hundred people were brought to the camp, but at the end of 1941 there were only 650 people. The rest had died.

The Soviet authorities did not provide us with any clothes. We were all dressed in rags because we had sold those clothes in decent condition in exchange for a piece of bread for the children and for ourselves.

Social or cultural life did not exist. Everyone was alone with their worries, afraid of informers, who are privileged in Russia.

#### **7. Attitude of the NKVD towards Poles:**

The attitude of the NKVD towards Poles was brutal and vile. During interrogations, they read out incriminating testimonies, entirely made up, in order to find a suitable section of the criminal code for the offender. The information given about Poland was biased, ridiculing the Polish state and authorities.

The youth were obliged to participate in communist meetings, where the young minds were treacherously molded, deprived of the principles learned in Poland, and inculcated with communist poison. The results of this “work” became clearly visible a few months later, when sons or daughters began giving statements incriminating their own parents.

#### **8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality:**

Medical assistance as such did not exist, while the care that existed was mere window-dressing. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Russians, just like the Germans, considered the Poles an inferior race, which of course had an impact on how Poles were treated, and the supplies that they received.

**9. Was it possible to keep in touch with the home country and your family?**

I had no contact with the home country. I did not know what was happening and the information provided by the Russians was adequately manipulated and adjusted for the benefit of Soviet propaganda.

**10. When were you released and how did you join the army?**

I was released from the camp on 5 December 1941 and after two months of travel I reached the town of Kermine in Uzbekistan, where I was enlisted into the army on 28 January 1942.

Place of stay, 24 February 1943