

WACŁAW FORNALAK

Gunner Wacław Fornalak, 23 years old, locksmith assistant, bachelor.

I was forcibly drafted into the Soviet army on 5 May 1941 and taken to Russia, to the town of Unecha in the Oryol Oblast.

While in the military, I lived in the forest five kilometers from Unecha. We lived in tents – Poles with Ukrainians. I stayed there until 22 June 1941. On 23 June, we set off on foot for the front. We walked from 40 to 50 kilometers per day. After we'd covered 40 km, we set up firing points and entrenched ourselves for a day or two, and then we continued marching, getting closer to Smolensk and Bryansk.

This lasted until July. When we were near Smolensk, an order came to send all the *zapadniki*, that is, Poles and Ukrainians, outside the front line for labor. Therefore, we were loaded on a train and taken to Oryol. We spent a week there and then we were transferred to as far as the Urals, to Kamensk. In Kamensk we were forced to do earth works and had to meet the quota of five or six cubic meters per person. As for food, we received 800 grams of bread and half a liter of millet or pea soup. If you did not meet the quota, you were given 400 grams of bread and you had to go to work. And if you refused or said that you couldn't work, you were locked up for three or four days. The work was hard because we were weak and the food was poor, but we had to work because a Soviet *komandir* breathed down our necks and urged us to work, "work, work, you Polish lords, or you won't get any bread to eat."

We worked for 12 hours per day, finished at 6.00 p.m. and returned to the barracks where we lived. Then, we went to the kitchen to have supper. After supper we returned to our barracks. Everyone was tired and wanted to go to bed, but we had to wait for the political commissioner who came to the barrack and checked if everybody was present. He talked

to us twice a week, informing us of the events on the front, and he often said that Poland had disappeared and would never exist or rise again. If someone told them that Poland still existed and would exist, that Polish troops were being formed in England, commanded by Sikorski, they said that was a lie and the person was locked away for seven days. When winter came, they cooked frozen potatoes and cabbage for us. A portion of soup consisted of half a potato and a piece of cabbage leaf, the rest was water. We lived on bread. Later on, we were given a wadded jacket and trousers, plus winter hats and Valenki boots made in the countryside. The temperature sometimes fell to 50 degrees below zero, but we were driven out to work. I worked like that until 6 January [illegible], but then I fell sick with scurvy and I had a lot of boils all over my body. I had a big boil on my right knee that made it impossible for me to work. I stayed in the barrack until 4 February and on 5 February I was examined by a medical commission and I was released as I was unable to perform manual labor. They gave me 140 rubles for the journey and told me to go wherever I wanted, so I bought a ticket from Kamensk to Chelyabinsk, and I left. When I arrived in Chelyabinsk, I found out that there was a Polish outpost there and I put my name on the list. We were soon sent to Tashkent, and from Tashkent to Chokpak, where I appeared before a draft board on 16 March 1942 and was enlisted into the Polish Army, where I have served since.

I have not written any letters to my family who stayed in Poland and I have not heard from them since 22 June 1941.

21 February 1943