

STANISŁAW KASZKOWIAK

Sergeant Stanisław Kaszkowiak, 40 years old, career non-commissioned officer, married.

I was arrested on 20 December 1939, after returning from the front line, for serving in the Polish Army as a non-commissioned officer voluntarily. I was put in prison in Wilejka, where I stayed until 7 March 1940. I was then deported to a prison in Orsha, where I was until 4 April. Next, I was moved to prison no. 2 in Minsk, where I stayed until 8 August 1940. On 5 August, I was read a sentence of five years of forced labor, and after three days I was taken to Komi ASRR for earthworks at the railway construction Kotlas-Kozhva; I stayed in various places until I was released.

Prison conditions in Wilejka: bright room, clean floor, a straw pallet, and a blanket for sleeping – the room was heated. I was in confinement all the time. Throughout the whole stay, I was let out for a walk twice. Bathing was allowed once a week. Food rations: for breakfast – boiled water, 600 grams of bread; for dinner and supper – around a liter of soup from fodder beets or some groats with no fat.

In Orsha – walks every day, half an hour. Dirty, dark room, unheated; damp concrete floor. Beds shared by two, no bedsheets.

In Minsk – half-an-hour walk every other day. Dirty, damp room, concrete floor which served as the bed. There were 126 people squeezed into an 8x8 meter cell.

Prison no. 2 in Minsk held around 12,000 prisoners. Poles weren't sharing cells with the Soviet citizens, and if they did, it was a rare exception.

Living conditions in the labor camps were initially below any standards. We slept in shelters made from fir branches, on a swamp. We slept in the mud, on posts, and without bedsheets.

We had a maximum of six hours of sleep a day, and worked for 12, 18, and sometimes even 24 hours a day. Food rations: soup two times a day and bread in accordance with the amount of quota filled, from 300 to 900 grams.

Quotas were impossible to fulfill because they were constantly raised. Remuneration I received for the whole time in the labor camps was 24 rubles 36 kopecks.

Offense categories of the people I did time with varied: border crossing, alleged spies, village administrators or those who were doing any kind of state job. There were also thieves who were captured by the Soviets, and finally people who said something wrong about the authorities or the Soviet system, as well as people who were held for nothing.

Attitude of the NKVD towards Poland was hostile. At every opportunity, if they wanted to offend us, they would start with the words "you Polish lord". During interrogation, they asked me about my commanders' surnames. They asked me if the soldiers were beaten in the Polish Army, and when I denied it, they told me I was lying, because a certain (surname) said they were.

Social life among Poles from all social strata was very good, although there were some who didn't have a sense of comradeship – they would take somebody else's cigarette or sugar portion – but these were exceptions. Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Jews formed separate groups. They would quarrel or even fight. Constant complaints on the Polish system and government were the reasons for quarrels and fights. But in the labor camps, when they got to know the Soviet system better, the complaining ceased.

Medical assistance in prison: I know there was a doctor, but I never saw him. In the labor camps there were no doctors, just medical assistants. Medical care was very poor. In hospitals, as for Soviet conditions – it was bearable. Cases of death known to me: Engineer Zdzisław Polański, Reserve Ensign Engineer Pankanowski, Gunner Sergeant Forest Engineer Jan Mazurek, Professional Corporal Józef Kasprowicz, Czarnecki, and many other people, whose surnames I don't recall.

I had no contact with the country or my family.

I was released from the labor camps on 5 September 1941, and informed by the Soviet authorities that the Polish army was being formed in Buzuluk, where I headed at once. In Buzuluk, I was directed by our authorities to Totskoye, where I reported to the Polish army.