

ALEKSANDER LEONOW

1. Personal details (name, surname, rank, age, occupation and marital status):

Cannoneer Aleksander Leonow, born on 27 February 1913 in Mogilany, Zdołbunów district, worker, bachelor, Ukrainian.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

I was taken prisoner on 22 September 1939 between Łuck and Włodzimierz. The 45 Infantry Regiment left from Równe in the direction of Włodzimierz. Along the way, Russian tanks surrounded us and took us prisoner. We walked to Równe on foot, to the main gathering point of Polish prisoners. There were already about 12,000 soldiers there. We were held in military barracks in Równe.

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

From there, we were transported by train to Szepetówka, where we spent a week. Then we were taken to Novograd-Volynskiy. We stayed there 6 weeks. We were taken to repair roads and dig potatoes. The number of prisoners reached 18,000. Later, I was deported via Kiev to Zaporzhye, where we were placed in a POW camp. There were about 4,000 of us there. We worked in 24-hour shifts unloading iron ore from wagons and loading iron. In February 1940, I was transported to the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, where I worked on the construction of the iron road from Kotlas to Kozhva. Apart from the prisoners-of-war, there were also some Russian prisoners there who were housed in another gulag.

4. Description of the camp, prison:

The POW camps were located in wooden barracks. We slept on three-story bunks. Conditions were extremely crowded. Bedbugs, lice and fleas everywhere. There were also a lot of rats. We went to the baths once a month. Water was handed out in mugs, and we were not given any soap at all. We got a change of underwear once a month. Much of it, however, was only rags.

Food—the quality and quantity depended on whether or not we made the quota. There were as many as four large pots—I, II, III and IV. Most only made enough for the first and second pot. The pots differed in terms of the amount of dumplings, groats and oil in the soup. We received from 300 to 900 gram portions of bread. On average, we got 500–700 grams of bread. The morning meal at 5:30 a.m. consisted of tea and bread handed out in the evening. Lunch was at 2:00 p.m.—soup with dumplings or pasta, or with groats too. Dinner, depending on whether or not we made the quota—was a piece of fish and soup. Pot III and IV also got some *lepyoshka* [flat bread].

We worked for 12 hours. Conditions were very harsh. The designated quota for earthworks was: 4 m³ of clay and 9 to 10 m³ of sand. For loading railway transports—22 m³ for two people. We were given no remuneration, no more than a pack of makhorka [rustic tobacco]. First, we worked in our own clothes, and then we were given clothes and shoes, half worn-out. The comradeship among the soldiers was very good. There were no books, games or newspapers. Anyway, if there had been any entertainment, it would not have been possible to enjoy it in the prevailing circumstances. Everyone was thinking only about eating and resting after hard labor and getting rid of the vermin that drank our last drops of blood.

5. Composition of prisoners:

Most were Poles but there were also Ukrainians, Belarussians and Jews. There was a hostile attitude towards the Jews.

6. Life in the camp:

Whoever did not go to work or did not work on a job was given 400 grams of bread and water, and was locked up for a night in the cells.

7. Conduct of the NKVD towards the Poles:

Every week the NKVD arrived and carried out interrogations. I do not know what they asked about because I was never taken for such interrogations.

8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate:

There was almost none. If anyone had a headache, he was given iodine. One doctor who handed out too many sick leaves was sent to a penal colony. He was probably a Pole,

a Soviet citizen, also a prisoner. There was an infirmary. The most common ailments were rheumatism, bone fractures, scurvy, swelling of the legs, general emaciation and exhaustion. During my stay in Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic 125 men from approximately 2,500 died within five months. It is most likely that more died, because we were divided into two camps. Two were killed while cutting trees.

9. Was there any communication with homeland and family? If so, how was it?

There was no communication with the homeland.

10. When was he released and how did he get into the army?

We left Komi on 22 August 1941 in the direction of Vyazniki near Moscow, where the Polish military commission was stationed. From Vyazniki I was sent to Tatishchev, where I was assigned to the 13th Infantry Regiment.