

ANTONI ŁUKASZEWSKI

Cannoneer Antoni Łukaszewski, born in 1906, a state contract official of the Ministry of the Interior (Insp. Sap.), married, place of residence Zdołbunów in Wołyń.

I was arrested on 22 June 1940 by the NKVD authorities in Zdołbunów and imprisoned that day in Równe prison in [Wołyń], accused of belonging to the Polish secret organization, the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ). In fact, I did belong to it and I was a member of the Union of Armed Struggle district command in Zdołbunów, acting as the head of military-intelligence. The commander of the Wołyń district of the Union of Armed Struggle was Colonel Tadeusz Majewski ('Szmigiel') who had been arrested before us, during a search when the listed names (though encrypted) of members of the organization were found.

I stayed in the Równo prison until 15 November 1940. There, too, I underwent an 'investigation', whereby the accused had to finally 'confess' to things that he had never committed. He was finally forced to sign all charges, not because he had been broken, but because he figured out that all resistance was futile. Not only the actions carried out or plans made by our Union of Armed Struggle, but any incident involving the derailing of a train, petrol or oil silos being torched and other acts was attributed to us. Even the disappearance of several dozen Soviet soldiers from the unit, who simply changed into civilian clothes, left their uniforms in the forest near Kostopol and deserted. The investigation, along with questions and typical vituperations, was accompanied by kicking and beating (e.g. hitting the thighs with a hook, a fist to the head or rifle butt which gave me a broken nose). In the forest, next to the village of Kołodenska in the Równo district on the other day, I dug out—under the supervision of NKVD Investigative Judge Klimiuk, Sergeant Gosbyezopasnosti, some 'prosecutor' organized for this purpose and several NKVD privates—a pit where they would bury me, according to their statement, as an 'enemy of the state', a counter-revolutionary, because I did not tell them what they wanted and how they wanted. From June to November 1940 I was interrogated 172 times, almost always at night. I was dragged there up the stairs in a constant state of exhaustion, hunger, which was an everlasting feeling, and insomnia with the words of the interrogators ringing in my ears. Sergeant Gosbyezonasnocmy, Klimiuk, Borkowski, and Kydimon of the Równo NKVD were able to apply and use methods that could have aroused admiration and terror in even the cruelest executioners of the Middle Ages

After the investigation and the trial which took place between 13–15 November in the Równo district court, during which all the accused persons—11 men and 4 women—were ‘proved’ to have committed all the ‘crimes’ they had been accused of in terms of belonging to the Union of Armed Struggle, we were sentenced (Stanisław Bąk—teacher, Władysław Kędzierski—school inspector, Witold Bidakowski—a Zdołbun starost civil servant, Henryk Sokołowski—railwayman and I) to death by firing squad as enemies of the people and the Soviet system—‘the benefactors of humanity’.

The rest of my fellow detainees received 8–10 years of *trudovoye i ispravitelnykh robot v dalnikh oblastiakh SSSR* [labor and correctional work in remote oblasts of the USSR]. After 14 days, 5 of our sentences were modified to 10 years of the above-mentioned labor camps.

8 of our Union of Armed Struggle group are currently serving in the Polish army and almost all of us have the original indictments and court judgments.

In February, I was deported with many others to Uchtizymul in Komi ASRR, where I stayed until the end, that is, until the amnesty.

Both in prison and in the camp—apart from starvation—abuse was meted out in a bestial manner, especially against the intelligentsia. Kicking, rifle butts and slaps—they were doled out at the drop of a hat to anyone who could not or could no longer react to the behavior of our guardians, the armed guards.

The worst, however, were those who were put in with the everyday criminals, the *zhuliks*—Russian criminals—and there more resistant members of the intelligentsia were given a higher degree of punishment. They had to give them their own clothing and footwear (or they just took it from them), share every single penny they happened to have and make their quotas for them that were unfeasible even for healthy and well-fed people. There was almost no medical care. Only those who with an observably high temperature were considered to be ill. Therefore, the mortality rate from exhaustion and diarrhea was very large, reaching 30% among the intelligentsia and about 20% among those used to hard physical labor. Hygiene—none. No laundry was ever done, and clothes could not be washed in the baths. The barracks were ridden with bugs and the clothing with lice. Everyday ‘hunts’

were organized and sometimes yielded very good results and a good 'hunter' could track down and kill 40 or more lice. The bed bugs swarmed in their hundreds.

The clothes they gave and the footwear made of old car tires wore out very quickly. There was no question of exchanging them for better ones. Most got frostbite on their legs and arms. Many suffered from pneumonia and these were taken to the hospital, from which one in ten returned. I got hold of a list of the deceased in December 1941 at the Polish army command in the USSR and the special operations unit in Tock.

For absenteeism from work, reports were written and execution was threatened, and even the most physically exhausted were locked in the cells, on *shtrafnoye payek* [penalty ration]: 300 grams of bread (in reality 150–200) and half a liter of 'soup', when even a normal portion with rancid fish bones was insufficient.

On days off—Sundays—special educators gave talks or lectures, in which they condemned everything Polish, connected with religion and the Christian culture, propagating the idea of communism as the future system for the whole world, and now 'happy' was Russia and other nations united with her.

It is significant that the Russians convicts from the intelligentsia and enemies of the nation showed us a lot of compassion and friendship, and—as old regulars—assistance too, sharing their experience and advice. On the contrary, the Ukrainians and Belarusians—Polish citizens, most of whom tried to harm us by any means or by informing on us (overheard conversations or imaginary stories about the Poles' attitudes towards national minorities in Poland, their persecution, etc.). They were maliciously hostile towards us, and we often heard them say with particular joy: 'Yours is over!', spiced up with an appropriately virulent and equally vulgar epithet.

There was also a large group of Jews of Polish citizenship in this camp. They, in their typical fashion, would faun to us Poles, because we were in the majority, but they gave our guardian angels—*vospitateli* [educators]—the worst possible advertisement of the political system and relations in Poland. They cynically explained to us that they were doing it for bread. And it has to be admitted that it worked: all the baths, bakeries and warehouses were filled with them, and if only a few of them were used for general works, they were relieved.

The whole camp (Uchtizymul) numbered, according to long-term Russian prisoners, around 45,000 people—including about 30,000 Polish citizens in 1940. In section no. 15, in Tsementstroy Ukhta there were around 450 Poles (out of 870 prisoners), of whom after the amnesty only 25% were sent back to Totskoye or other Polish army organization centers, while the rest were partially sent to work, as free hands in various towns in Komi, but quite a large percentage remained in the camps, not covered by the amnesty. I have this information from a reliable source, from people who were released from the camps in the last round, in the summer of 1942.

I left the camp in Uchta on 6 September, via Kotlas, Gorkiy, Penza and on 18 September, 1941, I arrived in Totskoye, where I joined the Polish Army.

Finally I would like to add that the majority of Poles in prisons and labor camps believed that this misery would not last as long as our 'liberators' wanted and, with mutual encouragement, we remained, apart from minor exceptions, brave, waiting for our true liberation and the moment when we could join the ranks of the Polish army, in order to be able to bring—but not from the amnesty of a wild tyrant—liberation to those who remained in captivity in homeland.