

## HALINA PIEKART

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[...]

To the "Zorza" weekly

In response to the appeal concerning unknown surnames of the prisoners of war from Ostashkov, I would like to submit the following data about my brother, who went missing in 1939.

1. Józef Paderewski, son of Maria *née* Zwierzchowska and Franciszek, born on 13 April 1909 in Siedlce, last place of residence: Wronki, Poznańskie Voivodeship – my brother worked in the prison service.
2. Vocational education: locksmith (master locksmith, according to his diploma). After he had done his military service, unable to find another employment, he had to take up a job in the prison service, and was sent to Wronki.
3. His military papers are no longer extant, but he was moved to the reserve.
4. As far as I remember, he held the post of senior guard. During the war with the Germans in 1939, the personnel of Wronki was ordered to release the prisoners and evacuate themselves to the East. At the time I lived and worked in Kamień Koszyrski near Kowel; both towns were then a part of the Polish territories. My sister and her husband also lived there, so our brother came to Kamień Koszyrski. At the time he was married with two children (he had previously sent his family to our parents, to Siedlce). Having learned that the border was still open (there were Soviets there after 17 September), my brother and I decided to return to Siedlce – I to our parents, as I was a 19-year-old maiden at the time, and my brother to his family. We left Kamień Koszyrski on 9 October 1939. Due to a collapsed bridge in Janów Podlaski, we crossed the river and awaited the train at the station. Then my brother got arrested by the Ukrainian militia; they took him right away, and as for me, they left me alone.

In the meantime, the border was closed, so I had to go back to Kamień Koszyrski.

Towards the end of October we received a postcard from Pińsk, with a short message to the effect that my brother was in good health. I went to the address given on the

postcard, but both the surname and the street were made up – it was some chance acquaintance, met on the train, who was kind enough to let the family know that my brother was alive. I began to search for my brother in the prison in Pińsk – but he wasn't there; finally someone advised me to check the municipal jail. Its head, some Cossack, found my brother's file in the ledger and read out: "Resettled to the USSR". Neither I nor his wife (presently deceased) ever received any news from my brother.

In August 1942, I received an official permit (issued by the Germans) and returned to Siedlce, as did my sister and her family. When we came home, my mother told us that she had a visit from an internee – some lower-ranking military man, probably an ordinary soldier, who was deported together with Soviet soldiers and told my mother that he had met my brother in Ostashkov. The prison was located on an island, in a former monastery; my brother had a bushy beard (he had indeed started to grow a beard before his departure and vowed that he wouldn't shave it until he returned home) and volunteered for work in a factory, and thus received double bread rations. These were only indirect news, but I think they must have been accurate. All inquiries made by my sister-in-law met with one response: "Unknown in the USSR".

I read all the lists printed in "Zorza" throughout the summer, and I have an impression that there was a substantial gap between "Pa..." and "Pie..." surnames. Should you have any more information, please write me back.