

## MIECZYŚŁAW SAWICKI

**Mieczysław Sawicki, gunner, farmer, unmarried, 9th Light Artillery Regiment.**

After the Soviet annexation of Polish territory, I was called before an army draft board, on 7 October 1940, and sent away to Uzbekistan, to the town of Andijan. There, I was assigned to the 123rd Heavy Artillery Regiment in which I subsequently served for nine months, until 22 July 1941. 260 Poles served in that unit and during this period 56 of them were arrested by the NKVD and sent in an unknown direction – we were only told that they would never see their country and homes again.

Activities related to our military service took up 12 hours of the day. On top of that, we were also treated to four hours of communist, anti-religious talks. During those they pressured us to abandon belief in God.

On 22 July 1941, I was released from the Soviet army and transferred, along with around 190 fellow soldiers, to an assembly point in Samarkand. In total the camp in Samarkand housed around 5,000 Polish soldiers released from the Soviet army. We were quartered in tents, nearby buildings and some even rested under the open sky. We spent two weeks there and were issued 400 grams of bread plus two half-liter servings of thin pea soup each day. We were then divided into smaller groups and transferred to other camps.

On 6 August 1941, I was taken – in a group of 300 people – to the Kagan camp located 15 kilometers outside of the city. We were put up in barracks and the camp was surrounded by barbed wire. We worked ten hours a day as bricklayers. The individual labor quota was 1,200 laid bricks per day, which was basically impossible to do, given the daily food rations: 600 grams of bread, 40 grams of groats, 20 grams of turnips and 20 grams of oil. Since we didn't meet the quota, we received no pay. Because the work was hard and the food was meager, half of us developed night blindness. The clothing situation was rather miserable: we were issued denim clothes plus just one pair of torn underwear and, because we had no way to wash said underwear, we subsequently suffered a massive lice infestation. Unable to bear these difficult conditions, two of the men escaped the camp; had they been caught, they would have faced a firing squad.

Medical care was basically nonexistent at that camp. While there was a medic – a Pole – he could not really help, having no medications at his disposal except iodine, castor oil and such. Only those so gravely ill that they were basically near death were taken to hospital, where they mostly just expired. Six soldiers died during my stay at that camp. Their names: 1. Julian Drozdowicz, 2. Palij, 3. Smolski, 4. Pietrenko, 5. Dałchun, 6. Picier.

Two of the men lost their minds as a result of constant NKVD interrogation. Four others were suspected of spreading wrong opinions and punished in the following manner: there was a ditch covered with wooden planks that was intended for use as a latrine – the men were put in it for 18 days and constantly watched by a special guard. We were prohibited from giving them food and any food they were given came only from the Bolsheviks; unfortunately, we never discovered what sort of food they got. Once the punishment period elapsed, we only saw their clothes and did not find out anything about their fate.

We had no contact with the home country and were prohibited from writing any letters.

On 17 May 1942, I escaped the Kagan camp and traveled to Guzar, where I appeared before a committee and was accepted into the Polish Army.