

JÓZEF WOŹNIŃSKI

Personal data (name, surname, rank, age, occupation and civil status):

Józef Woźniński, reserve corporal, aged 43, stationmaster for the Polish State Railways, married.

Date and circumstances of arrest:

On 14 June 1941 I was charged with being a fifth column member because I arrived in Wilno from the location which had been annexed by the Third Reich (Poznań) and did not accept Soviet citizenship.

Name of the camp (prison – place of forced labor):

Camp no. 47 (2) – Sosva in the Gari Raion. Inmates performed exclusively forest labor, sometimes up to 20 kilometers away from the camp.

Description of the camp, prison, etc. (grounds, buildings, living conditions, hygiene):

The camp consisted of four barracks in a marshy forest area. The perimeter was surrounded by five-meter poles and barbed wire. Barrack space was insufficient for the number of inmates being housed, so the camp was significantly overcrowded. Due to the lack of water, soap, extra underwear and light, as well as the close proximity of heavily sick prisoners and a general lack of free time, maintaining hygiene was impossible.

Social composition of POWs, prisoners, deportees (nationality, category of crimes, intellectual and moral level, mutual relations, etc.):

There were approximately 900 inmates in the camp. 50% were Polish citizens (of those 20% were Jewish), 30% were Lithuanians and 20% – Estonians. 90% of the prisoners were there on political charges, 10% were being detained for criminal activity. The intellectual and moral level of the Poles was high but morale decreased with time – many began to fall into despair, they lived without hope and any thoughts of the future.

Life in the camp, prison, etc. (the course of an average day, working conditions, quotas and norms, wages, food, clothing, social and cultural life, etc.):

Life in the camp was very depressing. A normal day started with a wake-up call at 4.00 a.m., followed by work roll-call at 5.15. We left the camp for work at 6.00 a.m. Work ended at 8.00 p.m., we returned to the camp at 8.45 p.m., ate our supper at 9.00 and had final roll-call at 10.00 p.m. If any prisoners appeared to be missing at roll-call, the thing could drag on until 11.00 p.m. or even later and that was actually rather frequent. Days off for rest were not a thing in the camp. 90% of our work was forest labor, about which we knew basically nothing. Each person had an assigned labor quota but none of the Poles were able to fulfill it. Our food rations consisted of 400 grams of bread and two servings of soup a day; a serving was three quarters of a liter and the soup was mostly water – no fat. In rare cases, we would also be issued one herring per three people. Nothing else was provided.

Attitude of the NKVD authorities towards Poles (methods of interrogation, torture, punishments, Communist propaganda, information about Poland, etc.):

The attitude of the NKVD towards Poles was mostly bearable but they did indulge in quite sophisticated cruelty, occasionally turning downright brutal and even using weapons against us. Any refusal to comply with an order led to spending the night in a punishment cell and having one's meager food ration further decreased. Sick people with a body temperature of 38 degrees would be dragged out of bed and forcibly sent to work. Information about Poland did not reach us – we were being told that Poland had ceased to exist and would never rise again.

Medical care, hospitals, mortality rate (provide names of the deceased):

We had three doctors in the camp – they were inmates who were allowed to provide care for the other prisoners, but were given an explicit upper limit on permissible work absences. If they exceeded this limit, they were punished with a manual labor assignment. As a result, the doctors generally tried not to go above the stated limit. The medical care they provided was not really effective, given the lack of medications, instruments or even food for the seriously ill. Therefore, the mortality rate soon rose to 22%.

Names of the deceased: Tarasiewicz (widower, landowner from the Wilno area), Zdzichawski from Wilno, Count Mycielski from Kobylepole near Poznań, Leon Mazurek from Poznań

(Św. Marcin Street), Tadeusz Wieczorek from Ostrów Wielkopolski (bank clerk), and Jerzy or Józef Szwarc from Poznań (around 25 years old).

Was there any possibility to get in contact with one's country and family?

No contact with the home country or our families.

When were you released and how did you manage to join the army?

I was released on the night of 16 January 1942. I was in the first released group; there were 100 of us and we were led by Lieutenant Colonel Hass – we traveled by rail to Lugovoy, where the Polish Army units were being formed (the journey took six weeks). It is worth noting that in the end of November 1940 [sic!] medical care in the camp improved significantly and we started hearing that we would be released. We were also occasionally read articles about the war – obviously, they extolled the Red Army and its successes. Poland and the Polish Army were seldom mentioned at that time.