



## JAN BEŁZKI

---

Senior Rifleman Jan Bełzki, born in 1896 in Potok Górny, district of Biłgoraj, Lublin voivodeship, married (wife's name Maria), 40 years of age, with four children, namely: Leokadia, 17 years old; Czesława, 16 years old; Aleksander, 13 years old, and Czesława, 10 years old.

---

Being a military settler, on 10 February 1940 I was deported with my wife and children from the village of Skurcze near Łuck. They did not allow us to take even the most necessary personal items, and sent us and our children – hungry – to the nearest train station, in Nieśwież. From there we traveled for four weeks in filthy and dark goods wagons, like animals, to the Arkhangelsk Oblast. They gave us neither food nor water, even though we needed it so desperately during this long and arduous trip. The lack of water forced our children to scrape ice off the wagon walls in order to quench their thirst. A great many people fell ill during the voyage, and quite a number died. We were taken to the settlement of *Jaguźel*, surrounded by impenetrable forests and swamps, far away from other villages. While there, we would fell trees in order to eke out a living. Our wages were laughable, especially as we lacked the strength necessary to fulfill the quotas. In consequence, we were forced to sell off everything that we owned – clothes, etc. Our group numbered some 150 Polish families. The worst thing was the road leading to our settlement – it was in a state of such disrepair that frequently no food could be brought up, and as a result we would experience great hunger and impoverishment. At times we thought that we would be forced to live out our lives in this forest, especially as the Soviets threatened that they would never let us go, saying that we should kiss goodbye to Poland, for the Soviet paradise was and will continue to be the best place to live (although we always ridiculed such propaganda). We hoped and, indeed, somehow sensed that one day we would regain our freedom, that God would not forget us. There was a school there, but they taught only in Russian; Polish was



forbidden. We therefore made attempts to teach our children in Polish ourselves. They also forbid us to pray and scoffed at anyone who they saw wearing a cross or a medallion.

The hygienic and health conditions were absolutely terrible. We had some kind of bungler-cum-doctor who always said that we were healthy and that slowly we would grow accustomed to our surroundings – even to the Soviet poverty.

We remained there right until our release (the amnesty). When we learned that they would be letting us go, we immediately left on foot, with our children, walking 65 kilometers over the snow. Many of us sustained frostbite in our ears and legs, while a great many perished. When we finally boarded the rail wagons – dirty and cramped, as per usual in Soviet Russia – a feeling of joy overcame us. We traveled for more than four weeks, finally arriving in Kazakhstan. We stayed in *Gorozakonia* for a few weeks, whereafter they sent us to the *Oktiabr kolkhoz*; there, we experienced the most difficult and critical moments of our lives, for initially we were ordered to work for 300 grams of black bread, while later – when supplies ran out – we received no food at all. We were forced to eat grass and roots for nearly two months, until we were enlisted.

I have been serving in the Polish Army from 26 March 1942, while my wife and children have already left for Africa.

Official stamp, 7 March 1943