



WŁADYSŁAW CUDZIŁO

1. Personal data:

Second Lieutenant Władysław Cudziło, 34 years old, tradesman, director of a commercial secondary school, married.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

Before my arrest I had lived in Wilno as a war refugee. In January 1941 the Soviet authorities issued a decree that until the end of the month, all war refugees had to make a declaration whether they wanted to take Soviet citizenship or keep the rights they had had so far. Towards the end of the month I reported to the militia station and made my declaration. Then I was referred to the chief of the station, who tried to convince me – for five hours – that I would gain considerable advantages if I took Soviet citizenship. Finally, when he saw that he wouldn't convince me, he made it understood that they had their ways of dealing with the stubborn ones. As I learned later from the arrest warrant, that was the real reason for my arrest. It was stated that I wasn't a citizen of the Soviet Union and stayed without a visa in the Soviet territory, which – under the laws in force – was a crime.

I was arrested on 16 June 1941 during the period of mass arrests in Wilno. I was then told that I would be deported to "other regions" by a government decision, and I was allowed to take about 100 kilograms of luggage. After my arrest I was taken to the train station and loaded into a goods wagon together with sixty-some other prisoners. The majority of them were Lithuanian officials from Wilno. As for the Poles, they represented all social strata, but the group of policemen was the largest in number. After a few days' journey in a cramped wagon, we were unloaded in the town of Medvezhyegorsk on Lake Onega by the Leningrad–Murmansk railway line. There we were sent to a newly established camp, which for a few days already had been partially filled with professional criminals who had been deported from Wilno and Kowno shortly before.

Due to the outbreak of hostilities and the fact that military operations were being carried out on the nearby Finnish border, a few days later we were transferred by ship to the other side

of the lake, where an evacuation by foot of the majority of camps in the area of Arkhangelsk had begun. Our journey lasted for about three weeks, and we covered over 400 kilometers. On the way, we were issued 2.8 kilograms of bread and 10–12 herrings every four days. As the NKVD preferred to avoid making stops in inhabited townships, and since water was readily available only in these, we suffered from acute thirst. On 30 July 1941 we reached our new destination, and my group was sent to a labor camp known as *onieglagier* – the 10th OLP [Otdelny Lagerny Punkt – separate camp point].

4. Description of the camp:

The camp was situated in the vicinity of Arkhangelsk, by the Arkhangelsk–Vologda railway line. The closest train station was in Plesetsk. The camp was made up of ten OLPs, that is, divisions numbering from several hundred to several thousand prisoners. Some of them had separate subdivisions. The camp was scattered over wooded wetlands and covered the area of approx. sixty by thirty kilometers. In dry places, on hills, there were ruins of wooden barracks fenced with wire, which constituted particular OLPs. The barrack in which I spent most of the time housed approx. 180 people, accommodated on both sides on two rows of wooden pallets. In theory, the residents were entitled to receive mattresses and blankets, but in practice we slept directly on the boards, covering ourselves with our own coats. We dumped our stuff out of necessity at the beginning of the evacuation from Karelia, so few had their own blankets. When the autumn came, two brick stoves were moved into the barrack, but they were lit only when the returning work brigades brought in some firewood. When the residents of the barrack were assigned to work far away from the camp, lighting the stove was much more difficult. As for the “public” hygiene facilities, there was a bathhouse, a clothes disinfector and a dryer for wet clothes in every camp. However, it was difficult to maintain hygiene, as the barracks were horribly bug-infested and we didn’t have any soap.

5. The composition of prisoners-of-war, inmates, exiles:

As regards nationality, the following groups were imprisoned in the camp: Russians, Poles and Lithuanians. The majority of the Russians were the so-called “socially dangerous element”, and the rest were ordinary criminals (*chuligany*). Almost half of the Lithuanian group – and the Poles from Wilno were also classified as such – was made up of ordinary criminals (professional thieves and bandits) from Wilno and Kowno. The Poles and the rest of

the Lithuanians represented various social strata, with policemen outnumbering other social groups. Thanks to the fact that the organization of work brigades was left to the prisoners, there were separate brigades for the Russians, Poles, and Lithuanians. Whenever possible, professional criminals were separated from the rest.

There was also a group of Czechoslovakian citizens from Carpathian Ruthenia. These were young boys who, at the time when the Hungarians were occupying Carpathian Ruthenia, were recruited by Bolshevik agitators and fled to the Soviet Union in order to form an army there, which – as they had been told – was to join the Red Army and free Carpathian Ruthenia. When they crossed the border, all 20,000 of them were arrested and sentenced to three years of forced labor for illegal entry. Some of them served their sentences in *onieglagiers*.

6. Camp life:

Unlike the rest, the 10th OLP was called a railway camp. The others were preoccupied with logging, whereas we were tasked with building and maintaining railway tracks, building warehouses, loading and unloading wagons. The wake-up call was some time between 3.30 a.m. and 5.00 a.m., depending on the season. The work brigades had to assemble immediately after breakfast. After the number of prisoners was checked, the brigades set off for work, each under escort. During winter the brigades waited for dawn already at the site, and began their work only when the day broke, and worked until 7.00 p.m. or even longer in summer, and until dusk in winter. When the brigades came back from work, they were again counted, which usually took quite a long time and sparked discontent, especially when it was raining or freezing cold. Then the following repressive measure would be taken: the brigade would be marched back to the site and forced to resume work for some time, so they would finally return to the barracks only around midnight. Food was distributed from four so-called caldrons, depending on the work results. The fourth and the best group consisted of the camp functionaries. In order to be assigned to the third caldron, one had to meet over 125% of the quota. It meant receiving 700 grams of bread and about a liter of soup, and half a liter of groats in the morning and in the evening.

The nutritional value of such food was marginal, so already in the middle of October the majority of newcomers to the camp began to suffer from hunger swelling, and many developed scurvy symptoms. For filling over 100% of the quota prisoners received

remuneration, up to 40 rubles for men. However, the real value of that money was very low, as a kilogram of bread cost about 20 rubles, and one cigarette from five to six rubles. For those who weren't that efficient at work, there was the second and the first caldron, and even the penal caldron. The last consisted of 300 grams of bread and half a liter of soup in the morning and in the evening. Older prisoners received padded clothes and rubber boots (made of tires), while the newcomers had to wear their own due to the lack of supplies of clothes in the warehouses. There was an NKVD representative in each OLP who enjoyed the highest authority and supervised the camp. Following the Polish-Soviet agreement, every time the newspapers mentioned the agreement or the amnesty for Poles, the newspaper was put in a display case.

8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate:

Medical assistance in the camp was provided by a doctor, a paramedic and an inspector, all three of whom were inmates of the camp themselves. Those who were not seriously ill were issued medical leaves, and more acute cases were treated in the local hospital. Thanks to an extraordinarily diligent and kind doctor, a Georgian, there were only a dozen or so deaths in the camp during my stay, and all of the deceased were Russians. During the same period of time, the mortality rate in other OLPs was significantly higher, both among the Russians and the Poles. On the doctor's order, the prisoners who suffered from scurvy received additional meals from the so-called anti-scorbutic caldron. There were special brigades for exhausted inmates that had lower work quotas; some people received bigger bread rations for a time, regardless of work results.

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

When the amnesty was proclaimed, they began to release small groups of prisoners, beginning with those who had already had their sentences imposed on them. Then investigations against the last group of arrestees were launched, but they were promptly terminated.

I was released when these formalities were completed, that is on 14 November 1941. However, I had to wait till the end of the month in the town of Plesetsk for my documents, which were issued only around 30 November. Then I set off for my chosen destination – Buguruslan. On the way I learned that the army command was based in Buzuluk. Therefore,



I made a request to the *woyenko*mat [army draft board] in the town of Buj near Vologda for help in getting there. In the *woyenko*mat I was issued a military ticket for a passenger train and a subsistence allowance of seven rubles per day, and then I was sent to Buzuluk, where I arrived in the first days of January 1942.