



## HELENA BORASIŃSKA, JADWIGA BORASIŃSKA

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Volunteer Helena Borasińska, born on 5 May 1898, Goszczyno Górne, Płock district, warszawskie voivodeship, wife of a military settler.

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Section leader Jadwiga Borasińska, born on 6 July 1925, Sutkowszczyzna settlement, Horochów district, wołyńskie voivodeship, daughter of Helena; we lived in the Sutkowszczyzna settlement. Currently in the Head Office of the Women's Auxiliary Service at the Staging Area Command, 1st Company.

When the Soviets crossed our border, we expected everything but the fate that befell us. This hurricane struck us on 10 February 1940 at 3.00 a.m., when we heard voices and knocking on the door.

They stormed in so unexpectedly and menacingly; their conversation in raised voices seemed ominous and sinister to me. Since it happened in the small hours, we were all in our beds. They entered, guns in hand, and their first words were, "*Vstavay, zabiraysia!*" [Get up, get ready.] My dad and two brothers were stood by the wall and guarded by one man with his gun at the ready. The rest carried out a search. They searched for weapons and must have had precise information, as they were so persistent in their pursuit. Seeing that my dad continued to answer them in the negative, claiming that he didn't have any weapons, they took him to another room, ordered him to sit down and began to question him about something, about weapons, about various organizations. My mama was in the kitchen: she couldn't come either to our room or to dad's, so she walked to and fro, wringing her hands in agitation, semiconscious and in great despair. My little brothers and I were ordered to get dressed and pack our things. While we were packing, we noticed the cruel behavior of that traitor: he was putting his gun to our dad's forehead. We didn't pay any heed to the fact that we weren't supposed to go into dad's room, we stormed in. We took a firm



grip of that ruffian's hand and began to pull at it. My youngest brother and I began to cry terribly, because we heard the words that man uttered to our dad: "*Govorit, bo ubyu*" [Talk or I'll kill you.] He looked at us in amazement and spoke once again, "*Chtoby ne eti rebyata, ubil by tebya*" [Had it not been for these children, I would have killed you.] He ordered my dad to stand up and get ready, as we had half an hour left. They began to load our things onto a sleigh; we were almost dressed. They took us to the school. Since it was close to our house, we walked the distance. There was an assembly point at the school. All families were being brought there, but since it was only one room, you can easily imagine how stuffy and cramped it soon got. We stayed there until 3.00 p.m. Everyone came there, all the authorities, and after a short conference, they took all the families one by one to the sleighs, checking them very carefully.

They read out our surname, and check whether there are six of us: dad, mama, three little brothers and me.

We got in, bundled up warmly, and set off. Where? Where to and what for?

We go. The weather was freezing, and snow began to fall in large flakes. The sleigh dashed through the snow, and our dear house was staying behind, quicker and quicker, or rather we were leaving it behind.

We reached the train station at 8.00 p.m. They tell us to get into the wagons. They watch us closely. There is a small, cold, frosted and draughty wagon, and there are 54 of us. We remained at the station for 36 hours. At 4.00 a.m. on Monday the machine began to tug and whistle. We go.

The journey was dreary, we got cold and sick in the wagon. It took two weeks. During the journey we received bread and soup three times.

We arrived in the Arkhangelsk Oblast, Solvychevodsk district, Vostochno settlement. The hamlet wasn't big, and it was situated 39 kilometers from a small train station in Kharitonovo. A narrow gauge train almost reached the place of our residence. There our dreary, sorrowful and very hard existence began. Our barracks were situated in a large valley, surrounded by dense forest. Six long, old and austere barracks were to be our home now. Each was divided into two parts and was 20 meters long. One such large room had to house 9 or 10 families,



depending on the number of family members. Over 50 people could live in one room. We didn't have any furniture, so there was almost enough space. Later the barracks were divided into smaller rooms, cages. It was worse, as the space was more confined, but at the same time it was more convenient, as one could move around freely and without restraint – previously there had always been some Soviet man in the room, and besides the company wasn't close-knit. There were a few Poles we had to watch out for, more so than for the enemy. Apart from our barracks, there were also some houses that were much prettier: these were flats, offices and other places, such as stables, *detskiy sad* [kindergarten], school, canteen. The residential buildings, both ours and theirs, were terribly infested with all sorts of vermin – bugs and cockroaches were eating us alive, and there was nothing to exterminate them with.

Cleanliness and hygiene were limited to clean floors; that was enough. The rest didn't matter.

It was a tough life, we had to work in harsh conditions, the old and the young alike. Children up to 14 years of age went to school, and older children had to do light work. But what kind of light work could be found in the woods? Sawing timber and the like.

The workdays began at various times, depending on the time of the year: at 5.00 a.m. in summer, and in winter, as the day is shorter, at 4.00 a.m.

It was freezing cold in winter; the gloomy, sad day begins at 4.00 a.m. In order to get anything for breakfast in the canteen, we had to go and join the line. The canteen opened at 4.30 a.m. – we could buy some soup or groats, and 400 grams of bread in addition to the allotted ration of 800 grams for those who were working and 400 grams for those who were not. The canteen was always short on bread, and there was no other way to buy it.

Then – 6.00 a.m., it is still dark and we hear the loud tolling of the bells. Time for work – frost, blizzard, the weather doesn't matter, you have to go because the foreman of the forest makes the rounds to check whether everyone went to work. There were so many squabbles about that! Some people were sick, but it was so difficult to get a medical leave that they wouldn't be issued one, and so it is hardly surprising that they didn't want to go to work, nor those who weren't adequately dressed or physically fit for the work they had to perform. In such cases people were led to work by force. Although we worked honestly, they were never satisfied. They required us to work as hard as possible and fill the work quotas, but it was never enough – when they noticed that the prescribed quota was met, the following day it was raised.



Sometimes the NKVD authorities would come during the day and make the rounds of the forest; they had such strange habits. During these rounds they carried out interrogations, and then various things happened: some people were arrested on the spot, and many were admonished. In short, they treated the Polish laborers as dirt, although the Poles should have been valued for the kind of work we performed for them.

As a result, such scheming and ill behavior towards us had a hugely discouraging effect on people, both with regard to themselves and to the work itself. During the first days of our stay, when we didn't know anything about the organization of work, my mama used to go to work with the others as ordered. Later on only the rest of us worked, that is the five of us. Mama had so much to do in the household: maintaining cleanliness, mending clothes, drying them and other jobs, of which there were so many that sometimes she had to stay up at night. As for me, at first I worked shoveling snow here and there. Later I fell ill, I had an attack of appendicitis. They couldn't take me to the hospital, it was too far. I stayed at home. When I recovered, I was granted an exemption from hard labor. They didn't allow me to be idle at home, I began to work as a cashier at the canteen. I worked until I had a second attack, and again I didn't receive any help. I was lucky that it wasn't purulent appendicitis. The workday ended at 5.00 p.m., and then everybody came back. However, it was a long time before they actually reached home, as they used to work far away, which was very exhausting. In the evening after work, people would gather secretly in small groups in order to keep their spirits up. There were many people who so badly needed to be comforted: the poverty-stricken, those who had suffered the loss of their wives or children, those who wanted to commit suicide. No, you mustn't! There is a lot of work ahead of you! We live for our dearest ones, for our so longed-for homeland. We had to cheer up the weaker ones, and there were many such individuals, whole groups – dozens, even – coming back from the weekly meetings, which always had only one subject: "*Bolshe rabotayte, Polsha ne budet*" [you better work, there'll be no Poland] – these words were repeated over and over. And since the Poles always denied and [illegible] in politics, there were constant arrests and interrogations, which were carried out at night. Searches, checking attendance, etc. were also always conducted at night. Children were often summoned and questioned about various matters. It was so in my case: sometimes I'm in the canteen, doing one thing or another, and the NKVD comes; of course they come also to the canteen for breakfast or dinner. They begin to chat, joke, ask questions. Sometimes one of them brings a little present for me, a bottle of cologne or something like



that; they must think that I'll be impressed. But I was well aware that they were very much interested in everything concerning my dad and his colleagues. Because of all the questioning I found this work very stressful, and I preferred to work in the woods. Later, I have no idea how, they learned that I kept a journal. On the night of 8 May 1941 a few of them came to carry out a search. They took all my letters and kept looking. We didn't know what it was all about. Then they found that journal of mine, and took me immediately to the command office, but since it was already in the small hours, they kept me there until morning and then promptly put me in jail. I was to be incarcerated for three days and nights. However, I spent only one day there, but only due to the fact that nobody could fill in for me at the canteen.

They harassed us in all ways imaginable. Hard work, conditions, climate – all led to the spread of diseases. A lot of older people fell ill, but the majority of the sick were children. There was a bout of typhoid fever in one of the barracks, but we took care ourselves to isolate the afflicted from the rest. As a result, there were many deaths in the hamlet. 58 people died from 115 families. Later, during our journey south, again a lot of people died. I don't know exactly how many. 77 people left our settlement, and there are 51 now, so 26 died. Two entire families from our settlement perished – both the parents and the children. One was composed of seven people, and the other of six.

The separation of the families was very nasty. It was done to break us in health and in spirit. They tried all possible means to attain this goal.

The older ones were sent far away to perform hard labor. They wouldn't be back for weeks.

It is difficult to describe what we went through. We suffered windy, freezing winters, springs with torrential rains, and damp autumns. There were so many days when we couldn't even buy the bread rations to which we were entitled, because they hadn't paid us in months. Besides, what the four of us earned was never enough, we had to sell things and exchange them for such products as potatoes or flour. It was very difficult, but sometimes we managed to obtain something that way.

We exchanged letters with those who had remained in our country; it took a lot of time, but at least we had some contact. We received letters and packages. The letters were read in the command office, where a great many were destroyed – as I witnessed myself – while the rest were delivered. The addressee had to come to get the letter him or herself, and then open



the envelope and take out the contents, and sometimes they demanded that the letter be read out to them.

We endured everything with patience and hope that soon everything would be changed. Indeed, on 15 August 1941 the amnesty was proclaimed. They couldn't come to terms with it, they choked on the words "you're free", because they couldn't forget the words which they had been using to convince us before.

On 24 September 1941 my whole family set off on a journey, with the hopes that we were to join the army. However, we made the rounds of various kolkhozes instead. We suffered new hardships, maybe worse than up north. We didn't even see any bread there. We had to work, but this time we didn't work in the woods or in the snow, but at digging canals. For meeting the work quota we received 200 grams of barley. We had to live on this. In the kolkhoz, old and dilapidated *kibitkas* served as our quarters. It was cold and we were hungry.

Then my oldest brother developed pneumonia. He had already been in poor health back in the north. Due to all this hard work he suffered from lowering of the stomach. The life we had was horrible. We took him to the hospital. My dad, mama and younger brother were taken far away, 60 kilometers away for labor. I stayed at home with my youngest brother. We were very miserable there and every day seemed hopeless to us, as there was no one to comfort us. We went to the hospital every other day. My dad joined the army directly from the place he had been taken to. My mama didn't know that dad had joined the army, and she came back to us. As if she knew somehow. On the second day after she came, my brother and I went with her to the hospital. We came just in time to say goodbye to Tolo. Oh God – on 6 February 1942 the sad blue eyes of my darling brother looked at us for the last time. He died, poor thing.

On the second day after the funeral, my little brothers went to join dad, as he had sent us a message that he was in the army in Guzar. My brothers and I joined the army students corps. My mama and I spent one more month in a kolkhoz. We couldn't leave because my mama fell ill. We received letters from my dad, he kept writing that we must come to Guzar. It was difficult to escape the kolkhoz, as despite all our efforts the NKVD didn't want to release us from labor. I made the rounds of a great number of offices, trying to obtain various papers which we needed to be able to leave. The certificate of release and the tickets were



the most difficult to get. We arrived in Guzar on 29 March 1942, and we found dad there. We made strenuous efforts, we submitted applications for admission into the army. Our applications weren't turned down. On 3 April 1942 we joined the ranks of the Women's Auxiliary Service of the Polish army.

Then we were happy, because we didn't have to worry any more. The whole family was in the army, we didn't have to work and exhaust our strength. Now all of us work here, but we are happy to work, as we know that it is for our own benefit and the benefit of our compatriots. We are all in uniform and proud of it. We work persistently, and our sole dream is to get to our beloved Motherland, so longed for, the Most Serene Republic of Poland.