



STEFANIA DZIEKOŃSKA

Official stamp, 9 March 1943

Volunteer Stefania Dziekońska, 22 years old, unmarried.

I was arrested together with my parents and younger sister on 10 February 1940, in our place of residence, Borówka settlement, Kostopol district, Wołyń voivodeship.

My father was a forester by profession and worked with the Łuck Directorate of State Forests. When Russia occupied the Polish territory, my father was dismissed. By the force of circumstances we found ourselves without a roof over our heads. Fortunately we had a few hectares of our own land and a supply of agricultural products. When the Soviets entered, our property dwindled day by day.

Upon arrest, the NKVD allowed us to take some clothes and a few kilograms of food, and they made a detailed list of all our possessions. We were transported in carts to the train station in Kostopol, where we were loaded into goods wagons, which were then sealed. The wagon was cramped, dark, and stuffy, and we didn't have any water. We travelled in these conditions for four weeks. During this period we were issued soup three times and bread a few times. Finally we arrived at the station in Kotlas, where we were loaded onto sleighs that had been waiting to take us to various forest hamlets, known as *posełoks*. Each hamlet comprised several residential barracks, an office, co-op, canteen, bakery, *banya* [bathhouse], and infirmary. In the barrack there was one big room with one stove, and pallets – or rather boards for sleeping on – along the walls. Each barrack housed as many people as could be accommodated on the pallets.

We were forced to work from the very first day: men and girls worked at logging, and young boys at transporting timber. In summer, some people worked at making hay. I always had to



work at felling trees. This work was horrible and hard for me. In winter we waded waist-deep in the snow and the temperatures fell to 50 degrees below zero, and in summer we were pestered by swarms of mosquitoes and virulent midges. The quotas were always unattainable for me, and I received from twenty to forty rubles of *plata* [payment] for a decade (that is, two weeks). We worked from 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. Bread and other products could be obtained only in exchange for money. Despite illness my father also had to work, only my mother and younger sister didn't work.

Our family in the home country, especially my brothers, sent us food packages, which saved our lives.

Compulsory meetings were often organized, and Soviet propaganda was spread to the effect that we would never see Poland again, and that we should work for them as it would bring us partial freedom. Nevertheless, we kept our spirits up. Those who skipped work without medical leave received the so-called *progul*. There was a trial for *progul*, and the punishment was the deduction of a given percentage of one's remuneration for several months.

On the evening of 13 September 1941 a Soviet board came to the hamlet, organized a meeting and proclaimed the amnesty. Finally, the long-awaited event had taken place. It was virtually impossible to leave the hamlet. We were not helped, but on the contrary – obstructed. A military settler from our group, Mr. Bocheński, hit upon the idea of making rafts that could take us to the station in Kotlas.

His project was met with enthusiasm, and we built the rafts day and night. The NKVD came to prevent us from leaving. They wanted to stop us by hook or by crook, but neither requests nor threats had any effect on us, and towards the end of September we set off in the direction of Kotlas. From there we went by train to the southern Russia, in the direction of Uzbekistan. In Guzar, on 5 February 1942, I joined the army.