



IRENA FELDMAN

**Volunteer Irena Feldman. I was born on 24 February 1909 in Warsaw. I am married.
I worked as a private clerk in a trade office.**

On 29 June 1940, my husband and I were deported from Białystok for refusing to accept Soviet passports.

We traveled for two weeks until we finally got to the city of Plesetsk in the Arkhangelsk Oblast. In Plesetsk the women and children were loaded into trucks, while the men were marched 90 kilometers to a hamlet in the woods. (This was the Arkhangelsk Oblast, Priozyorny region on the river Onega, the *Krasnov mech-leso-punkt*).

There were almost five hundred deportees there – Poles of the Judaic faith, mostly families expelled from their home cities (for example Pułtusk) by the Germans. Except for a handful of intelligentsia, these people were accustomed to physical labor. All of them were used to fell trees in the forests, at a distance of five to seven kilometers away from where they were forced to live, from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Exemption from work was granted to those who developed a high fever, passed out while working, or suffered from some incurable disease.

We worked in winter in freezing cold weather, wading knee-deep through the snow, and trudging through water during the spring thaws. In summer, we began work at 3.00 a.m. To be given our bread – the women received 500 grams and the men 700 – it was necessary for us to meet work quotas, which involved cutting down a certain quantity of cubic meters of wood and getting it ready for transport. Those who were sick were given 300 grams of bread. Unfortunately, there were very few people capable of filling the quotas. We were paid very little. It wasn't enough to buy bread, a stinking fish soup or – sometimes – millet kasha.



Sundays were our only respite – of which we were later deprived. A handful of intelligentsia, despite the week-long physical toil, would gather on Sundays in one of our dwellings. We shared all the news we had and organized memory exercises of sorts – people recited whatever they remembered and read letters from our families, although we received very few of them. These moments helped us survive, but they were prohibited. When caught, you would be severely punished for participating in what the Soviets considered to be forbidden meetings.

The mortality rate was high. At first, people would have accidents at work because they hadn't yet learned how to perform their new "jobs". Later they died from hunger and exhaustion. We had our own doctor who, often putting himself at risk, intervened with the authorities on our behalf. For this reason he was transferred, and his place was taken by an eighteen-year old feldsher, a Russian girl.

We were released on 6 September. Despite great difficulties, we managed to get to Kuybyshev, from where we were sent north, to the valley of Farab – a destination which we never reached. By some miracle we went straight from Kogon to Tashkient, where we joined a military transport of airmen and sailors headed for Buzuluk, where we joined the army on 5 December 1941.