



JANINA GRODZIŃSKA, OLGA GRODZIŃSKA

Janina Grodzińska, a volunteer in the Women's Auxiliary Service, born on 25 April 1923, with no civilian occupation, unmarried.

Olga Grodzińska, a volunteer in the Women's Auxiliary Service, born on 15 November 1902, a singer by profession, married.

On 13 April 1940, we were deported together with our father, Henryk, from Łuck in Wołyń. Just a few days before, my father had been released from prison, where he had spent seven months after being arrested for engaging in community activities. My brother was arrested at the same time, but we have no information regarding his present whereabouts. We were allowed to take all our belongings, as the local guards were on the whole favorably disposed towards us. After three weeks of journeying in impossibly difficult conditions, we arrived at the sorting station in Pavlodar, from where we were distributed between individual settlements. We were unloaded in front of the old abattoir; as it turned out, the majority of families were forced to live there for a number of months because the local authorities forbade house owners from renting out flats to Poles. The name of the village was *Lebiaze*, and it is located in the Pavlodar Oblast of Kazakhstan, by the Irtysh River, some 130 kilometers from the train station.

Due to the fact that not all of us Poles could find jobs, two months or so after our arrival we were moved to the steppes (within the same oblast) to work at haying in a sovkhos in *Bieskaragaj*. We lived in a shelter made from hay, a so-called *bałagan*. Kazakh tractor drivers – dirty and ridden with lice – slept right next to us. All of the Poles living in the sovkhos were employed together. The Polish colony in Bieskaragaj comprised some 30 Polish families and twice as many Ukrainian. The wives and children of policemen formed the majority, however those of officers and civil servants were also present. The Ukrainians – typical peasants,



interested solely in their material welfare, hostilely inclined to us Poles. The Polish families organized themselves in groups depending on their intellectual level, but whenever mutual assistance was required, differences in social status or education played no role whatsoever. The moral fiber of Polish deportees was on the whole satisfactory. The Ukrainians were simply too loyal towards the Soviets, however they didn't hide their pro-German sympathies from us. They enjoyed slandering us and repeating macabre stories about how we maltreated them back home. Arguments and quarrels between Poles erupted during the winter hunger.

Work in the sovkhoz was carried on throughout the year. In summer, we would be woken at 4.00 a.m. and driven to work on foot, usually without any breakfast. Some of the Polish women took a course for tractor drivers – for which they had to pay by obligating themselves to work in the sovkhoz for two years (they were forced to do so by hunger) – and operated tractors and combine harvesters, while the others worked at haying and winnowing. Sleepy and hungry, we worked until dinner, which we wolfed down standing – hurried by the foreman – and then rushed back to our jobs. We would return to our shelters late in the evening. Although we toiled for 17 hours, we were unable to carry out the norm. To mow 18 hectares a day with these clapped-out tractors was simply impossible. The winnowing machines would break down or jam every few minutes, and so this quota too (seven tons per day, for which we were to be paid five rubles) remained unfulfillable. On average, we winnowed three tons, and thus earned no more than two rubles per day, while our bread ration would be decreased to 500 grams for failure to carry out the norm. In winter, we worked removing snow from buildings in the sovkhoz, while the women tractor drivers toiled in workshops, having been promised additional bread for greater involvement in their work. During a period of six months – from November to April – we didn't see any bread, living on bran and other winnowing waste.

We were loathed. The Soviets said that we were eating up their precious bread, while at the same time being unable to work efficiently. Their children would sing some anti-Polish propaganda songs behind our backs, the women were jealous, while the men kept on forcing us to work.

The local hospital was literally occupied by Poles. The personnel tried to help us, however the lack of drugs and proper food crippled all their positive efforts. In turn, we would be decimated by epidemics of typhus fever, diphtheria and scarlet fever. The mortality rate was staggering: more than 30 people died during the first winter (Maria Dobrowolska froze to



death due to the lack of firewood, leaving behind a 6-year-old boy, Wiera Rowczyk orphaned three children; Jan Jankow, Nikitiukowa, Sierpińska, Dynus, Pożniak and others, whose surnames I no longer remember, were also among the departed).

We were kept going solely by the letters and parcels sent by family and friends. During winter, however, all contacts and correspondence would be completely severed.

My father was arrested yet again just prior to the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet agreement. Our living quarters were searched from 11.00 p.m. to 9.00 a.m. They were looking for weapons and clandestine documents. The militiamen took with them even the smallest scraps of paper, intending to use them as evidence at trial. My father was finally released a month after the amnesty was announced, and we all left for Pavlodar, from where my father traveled to the Polish Army recruitment post in November [1941], and we in the spring of next year.

Official stamp, 4 February 1942