



## **ELŻBIETA HAFFTKE, JADWIGA HAFFTKE, LENA HAFFTKE**

Section leader Elżbieta Hafftke, born in 1912, clerk at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, residing in Warsaw, unmarried.

Volunteer Jadwiga Hafftke, born in 1911, clerk at the Polish Agricultural Exports company, residing in Warsaw, unmarried.

Volunteer Lena Hafftke, born in 1910, clerk at the Polish Savings Bank in Warsaw, unmarried.

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On 29 June 1940, at 2.30 a.m., we heard a ring at the door of our flat at Sapielny Street 28 in Lwów. When I opened the door, I saw two NKVD men in plain clothes and two soldiers with bayonets who said '*sobiraytes*' [get ready] and then came into my room. They gave us ten minutes to pack our things and then pushed us down the stairs with rifle butts; an open wagon was waiting for us at the gate. We were transported to the train station, and after 12 hours we left for the unknown. We travelled for 28 days in a stock car into which 40 people were crammed. On the way we were fed salty fish, and we got water every few days and only after repeated requests.

The camp to which we were taken was located in the Mari ASSR. The exact address is as follows: Mari ASSR, Yoshkar-Ola (Yoshkar-Ola means a city of exiles), *yashchik* [post office box] no. 1.

It was a camp in the woods, situated 55 kilometers from Yoshkar-Ola – virtually undeveloped, as there were only five wooden barracks there. 510 people were unloaded there and distributed among the barracks. We were placed in a so-called room, which housed 29 people. The social backgrounds of the people there varied, with about 10 percent coming from the intelligentsia from various parts of Poland.



We rested for two days after the journey, and on the third day we were marched to work in the woods. Our job consisted of debarking trees, and moving and sawing logs that had been chopped down by the men. We had to walk 16 kilometers to work. For 15 days of strenuous labor in the forest we received 2 rubles 2 kopecks (I wanted to keep my work record book as proof, but it was taken from me when I was leaving the camp).

After two months of this unbearable toil, we were accused of sabotage, of merely pretending that we were working, of counter-revolutionary leanings, and that we didn't want to use our strength for the benefit of the Soviet Union, and we were told that since we were no use in the forest we would be transferred to so-called "light" work at the railway.

And so another torment began, as our work consisted of stump-clearing, digging ditches and canals 90 centimeters deep, and building embankments. As we couldn't meet the work quotas with this "light" work either – we supposedly met only 10 percent of the quota – we were never able to earn our bread. A loaf of bread cost 85 kopecks per kilogram, and we earned on average from 20 to 30 kopecks per day.

The working conditions simply defy description. We worked almost knee-deep in water, wearing slippers made of bast as we no longer had our shoes. We were led to work at noon and brought back at 3.00 a.m. In winter, when the temperatures dropped to minus 60 degrees, we were marched – almost naked, as we wore only our light coats – to clear the snow from the rails. During work our slippers would freeze to the ice.

We stayed clear of the NKVD authorities, but we were nevertheless called agitators. We didn't engage in anything, and every night there was *proverka*, that is, they checked to see that we hadn't escaped.

The only decent thing was the medical assistance. The doctors were favorably inclined towards us and forbade us from going to work in light clothes. The mortality rate was relatively low. In our room, the following people died: Paulina Duszyńska from Bydgoszcz (52 years old), Jadwiga Malinowska from Volhynia (22 years old), and Władysław Juskiewicz from Gorlice (17 years old) who fell off the wagon during work and died.

From time to time we received letters from Warsaw, from our mother and our friends. We received most of the letters only after the amnesty had been proclaimed, as the letters came mainly from Japan, Warsaw, and Lithuania, and as suspects we didn't receive mail.



On 22 August 1941 the amnesty was proclaimed, and on 6 September we were issued *udostoverenie* [certificates of release], which allowed us to leave the camp and go wherever we chose to. Since we didn't know Russia and therefore had no idea where to go, we sent a collective telegram to Moscow, to the embassy, asking where we should go. Three days later we received an answer, worded exactly thus: *Napravlyat'sya na Chkalovskaya Oblast gorod Buzułuk* [go to the Chkalov Oblast, the town of Buzuluk], signed: Generals Szyszko-Bohusz and Januszajtis. A few days later we set off for Buzuluk and reached our destination towards the end of September 1941. On 15 October we were sent to Tashkent together with the volunteer battalion of Cpt. Krochmal, who was at the same time commander of this transport; however, the Bolsheviks didn't let us disembark there and sent us to Jizzakh instead. In Jizzakh we spent five days and nights out in the open, and then we were placed among various kolkhozes, all of this with the knowledge of our authorities. After several weeks of starvation and backbreaking toil at some Uzbek place (we lived in a stable, and cows were driven out of it just before we moved in) we were summoned to Kermine, where the 7th Division was being formed. After many tribulations suffered on the train (the Uzbeks tried to throw us off of it), and having arrived in Kermine, I fell seriously ill with the flu. I was sick for three weeks, during which the draft board was disbanded (we had filed our applications as soon as we arrived there). We were to leave for Guzar, but in the meantime the 7th Division received an order to go to Persia. We were put on the list of those departing and on 26 March 1942 we left with the 7th Division for Iran, and on 2 April we arrived in Pahlavi, and on 8 April in Tehran.

On 9 April 1942 one of us was appointed commandant of a block in a civilian camp in Tehran. On the following day we appeared before the draft board, were deemed fit for service and on 12 June 1942 were assigned to the staff of Evacuation Camp no. 4, to the Office for the Care of Military Families.

On 2 November we left Tehran, and on 8 November we arrived in Khanaqin.

On 28 December 1942 we were assigned to the Army Artillery Command.