



DOROTA KLAURUCZ

Volunteer, section chief Dorota K Laurucz, 19 years old, student.

On 13 April 1940 I was taken from Przemyśl together with my mother and sister, since my father had been arrested by the Soviet authorities. We were arrested during the night from 12 to 13 April. At 2.00 a.m. four soldiers and a junior lieutenant of the NKVD burst into our apartment, searched it thoroughly, and ordered us to get dressed and pack our things. We were allowed to take only the most essential items of clothing and some food for the journey. When we asked where we were going, they replied: "Not far, some 100 kilometers away from Przemyśl, because the family of a detainee cannot reside in a city by the border." We believed him and so did not prepare well for the long journey that was ahead of us. From the apartment we were taken by car to the station. In one of the halls there were already many people like us. Before dawn, the entire station and platform were full of people. Most of them were women with children, youths under the age of 20, and elderly people. In the morning we were loaded into wagons which had been waiting there for a long time. These were freight wagons with double bunk beds and boarded up windows. We were locked inside the wagons. Each of these was guarded by an NKVD man. The station was surrounded by the militia and no one was allowed to approach the detainees. We departed at 10.00 p.m. on 13 April. No one knew exactly where we were headed, but at that point everyone realized we were definitely going to Russia. We were going through the Polish territories at night, picking up more detainees along the way. We were fed very poorly: one hot meal a day, and 500 grams of bread per person every other day. The conditions inside the wagons were difficult, there was little space and air, and it was very cold at night.

We were transported to the city of Kostanay in Kazakhstan, where we were loaded onto trucks and taken to *kolkhozes*. We got to the Zuyevka *kolkhoz*, located 80 kilometers away from Kostanay. We were put up in houses of the *kolkhoz* workers (they themselves already had trouble fitting inside). Several days after our arrival we were sent off to work. Those who did



not work were at a risk of losing a roof over their head and their bread ration. During that time (it was spring there) we worked cleaning stables and making *kizyak* (animal manure mixed with straw and water, which was used as fuel). A month later we were transported from our *kolkhoz* to the Karasu Sovkhoz 157, farm 1 (Karasu District, Kostanay Oblast) located 180 kilometers away from Kostanay and from the railway. It was a secluded area. There was nothing there apart from a dozen or so Kazakh shelters, barns for cattle, and an office. Emptiness all around – only steppe and marshes (dried up lakes). There were no accommodations for us. We were placed in a stable, and we saw horses being lead outside. We tidied it up ourselves and moved in. We lived there until late autumn. When it got cold, several families were placed in each of the empty Kazakh shelters. Made out of clay, they were low, dark, stuffy, and infested with a multitude of bedbugs. From the moment we arrived there, we were immediately forced to work under the threat of prosecution, prison, etc. We all had to work, even mothers with small children and children over the age of 12. It was haying season, and we worked in the steppe maybe several or a dozen or so meters from the farm. We lived in a wagon which travelled with us to our workplace. We worked from dawn to late evening with no breaks. The only payment that we received for our work was food during work: half a liter of soup and 500 grams of bread three times a day. For three months I worked raking and stacking hay. At the end of the summer I was assigned to put cattle out to pasture. I had to take care of 150 cows and 70 calves on my own. Conditions while working with the so-called *gurts* [herds] were very difficult, for we were quite far away from the farm (40 kilometers), so bread and other foods were not always delivered to us. We would sometimes have nothing to eat except for milk for three days. We slept in the open air, with no shelter, not even one to protect us from the rain. In the autumn we went back to the farm. I was then tasked with plowing. This was the hardest kind of labor for me. The weather was awful – it was cold, and it rained and sometimes snowed. I had no proper boots for work, my ripped shoes would get wet and stick in the softened ground. I didn't have enough strength to control the four bulls that dragged the plow. They wouldn't walk in line with the furrow, which made work even harder. I was subjected to mean comments and even insults from the supervisor. I worked in this manner seven days a week from dawn to 20.00 p.m. At night I would be dead tired and my right hand would be swollen from holding the whip. Each day we would do 50 kilometers (I counted). I asked the supervisor to exempt me from this work due to my lack of strength and lack of boots. He wouldn't hear of it, but I left anyway and started working at the farm. I was immediately reported and two weeks later, without any interrogation or trial, I was arrested on 10 November 1940 and transported



to NKVD prison no. 7 in Kostanay. I was in a cell with six other Polish women who had been arrested for more or less the same reason. They had gotten arrested because they could not work, for they had small children. Their children stayed under the care of acquaintances among the exiles or were put in Soviet orphanages without their mothers' permission. The prison was located in a two-storied building, surrounded by two walls and "storks' nests", from which the guards watched the yard and the building of the prison day and night. At night, the prison was lit by spotlights.

There were fifteen of us in a cell meant for six people. We were lying so close to each other that we couldn't sleep. The cell was dark (the windows were covered) and damp. We were tasked with tidying up, cleaning floors, and doing the laundry. We received 450 grams of bread a day, half a liter of tea or hot water in the morning, half a liter of soup for dinner, two spoons of kasha in the evening. The reply to my complaint didn't come until 4 March. I was taken to the court in Karasu (our district). Escorted by two militia officers, I had to march, for no vehicles could get through the huge snowbanks. It took us half a day to walk 90 kilometers, and I couldn't go any farther because both of my legs were frostbitten – I had light shoes and the temperature was as low as minus 45 degrees. On the following day I was taken to a local hospital attendant, who diagnosed gangrene in my right big toe and said that I should be transported home as quickly as possible. Before I left, the gangrene spread over three of my toes. At home, with the help of my mother and our female acquaintances, we managed to find the infected spot. The lack of medical care, medicine, and bandages caused the illness to stretch on for five months and ended with the amputation of three toes.

In the summer of 1941 we had a dysentery and typhoid fever epidemic, which caused many Polish deportees to die. I remember the following names: Marian Niezgoda, Zofia Dobrzańska, Zofia and Maria Bystrzycka, Witold Staraniewicz, Zdzisław Stankiewicz (the last two were 4-years-olds).

The deportees were mostly members of the intelligentsia, wives of military men, state officials, doctors, teachers, and so on. Despite suffering through difficult experiences and hard labor, the Poles did not become dispirited. They believed that they would be liberated and hoped for a better future. We all shared this hope – not once did any of us break down and stop believing that we would return to our country. Our misfortune did not bring us down. On the contrary – it inspired us to greater resistance.

We received letters and even packages with food from the home country fairly often by Soviet standards. This contact stopped with the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. Our group of Poles (numbering 60 people) became close, like a big family – we would help out and comfort one another, and we shared our sorrow and our joy caused by every letter sent from Poland. We would sometimes gather round and read out the letters, pray, and reminisce about the old days, for we could only live through our memories of the past. We did that very rarely, however, because we were always being watched by the NKVD, who knew our every move. They treated us ruthlessly – no one cared whether we had anything to eat, wear, or to use as fuel in the winter. We had to struggle to secure these things on our own, since it was difficult to leave the farm, and since the Kazakhs who lived on the farm didn't have anything either. We were always told that we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that we might go back to Poland – we had to live and work there, so we should get used to it. We laughed it off and responded with ironic remarks, for we firmly believed that we would go back to Poland.

The news about the amnesty was like a miracle to us – it was the happiest day for the deportees. Everyone wanted to leave the *sovkhoz* as soon as possible in order to get through to the Polish army which was being formed, and about which we had only scant information. But it wasn't easy to leave. It was harvest time and the supervisor didn't want to agree to release us so early. Several families managed to escape. We couldn't – on account of my leg. Having gone through many obstacles, we finally managed to get out of the *sovkhoz* on 20 October. The Government Representation in Kostanay sent a large group of Polish deportees to Buzuluk. Unfortunately, we did not get there, because in Orenburg we weren't even allowed to step off the train. Instead, we were all sent South. We were told that this was where the Polish army was actually being formed.

This is how our series of journeys from one town to another began. We eventually arrived in Kokand (Uzbekistan), where we stayed only a month because on 30 November 1941 the NKVD took away all the Poles who had Soviet identity cards. They were transporting us in the direction of the North-East, without a specific destination.

For two weeks during this journey we weren't being looked after at all. Unexpectedly, an order was issued stating that we should be brought back to the South and placed in *kolkhozes* near Jalal-Abad (Kyrgystan). We lived in extreme poverty there until the arrival of the 5th Infantry Division – everything was expensive and we had no money or clothes.



In June 1942 I petitioned to be accepted into the Auxiliary Women's Service (I couldn't have done it earlier, because for a long time the wounds in my leg would sometimes reopen). On 20 July my petition was accepted. I was sent to Guzar, where I appeared before the Recruitment Committee and was given a military uniform.