



ELIASZ MACHNACZ

Rifleman Eliaz Machnacz, born in 1900, civilian occupation: farmer. Address in Poland: the commune and village of Dokudowo, Lida district, post office in Dokudowo.

I was taken prisoner by the Russians on 18 September 1939 together with my entire unit (military supply column no. 333) in Nowojelnia, district and voivodeship of Nowogródek.

On the evening of the same day we were sent to Nowogródek; we stayed there for one day and were then sent to Stołpce, where we arrived after two days on the road during which we received nothing to eat. Two people who collapsed during the march due to fatigue and hunger were shot. I don't remember their surnames.

In Stołpce, where we stopped for two days, we once got buckwheat soup, without bread. After these two days we were loaded onto a train and sent to a POW camp in Kozelsk. During the journey, which took some six days, each of us received 400 grams of bread, some salty fish and some water each day.

When we arrived in Kozelsk, the officers and policemen were put aside and placed together in separate barracks, which were fenced with barbed wire and more carefully guarded than ours; we were forbidden to enter into any communication with them.

The living conditions in Kozelsk were very hard. The barracks were cramped, and lice and bugs pestered us all the time. Food was also scarce, as the place was severely overcrowded. Two times a day we received soup and 800 grams of bread, which resembled grey mud. In the morning we got our soup at about 10.00 a.m., and the evening ration was issued at about midnight.

During our three-week stay in Kozelsk, almost everyone was summoned some 10 times for various investigations. They asked us about our occupation, economic position, membership in various social organizations etc. After these investigations and interrogations, a few privates were sent to the camp for officers and policemen.



After three weeks in Kozelsk, we – the privates – were transported for work in ore mines in Kryvyi Rih. In the barrack in which I lived, one half was occupied by 500 of our people, POWs. Out of 500 people, 400 worked underground in ore mines. I spent six months in Kryvyi Rih. Throughout this period, trains with ore were regularly sent to Vinnytsia [?], usually two trains per day.

Remuneration for work depended on the percentage of the work quota that one met. During the first month we received food regardless of our work efficiency, but later food depended on meeting the work quota. This led our group to stage a strike, which lasted for about two weeks. During the strike, people were summoned individually and given money in order to induce them to end the strike. Some took the money but did nothing to break the strike, but since we were destitute, after two weeks we had to accept the imposed conditions and resume work.

The strike was followed with arrests, which took place gradually: every day, a few people were arrested and placed in separate barracks, where they stayed under heavy guard and didn't go to work.

Some time later we were deported to the north, to the vicinity of Vorkuta, where the majority of us were forced to build roads and the railway. The last stage of our journey to Vorkuta was a two week march, during which we often received food once every three days, and only moldy bread. During the first month of my stay near Vorkuta we received only 300 grams of bread per day. There wasn't any salt, and the drinking water was unhealthy, as it was muddy.

I spent 13 months in the vicinity of Vorkuta. As for cases of death that are known to me, eight people died in my group, the majority of them of diarrhea.

In close vicinity of our camp, there was another camp for civilian exiles from Poland (who were sent for forced labor in [illegible]). The mortality rate in that camp was very high, and almost each day two, three or four corpses were taken out, and they often lay for several hours on the ground in front of our barrack, in plain sight. Platoon Leader Hoszyk (currently in the 5th Infantry Division) was the commandant of my barrack: he harassed the POWs, pulling them by their legs from the pallets and driving them out to work, which was witnessed also by my friend Jan Kopenich, currently serving with me in the same unit.



We wrote letters to our families, but we were forbidden to write where we were, and as our address we had to give: Moscow, no. ...

We were released on 17 July 1942 and escorted to Kotlas. There we were handed over to the NKVD, and they sent us to the Polish Army in Vyazniki.

In Kotlas, before we were sent to the Army, we were thoroughly searched. In Vyazniki we were divided according to branches of service and appeared before the draft board, and then we were sent to Tatishchevo, where we were enlisted into the 5th Infantry Division.

Official stamp, 9 March 1943