

## ALFRED MICHALAK

### 1. Personal details:

Alfred Feliks Michalak, Second Lieutenant of Cavalry in the Reserve, born 19 November 1902, teacher, head of the public Primary School no. 3 in Wołpa [now Voupa, Belarus], Grodno District; married to Anna *née* Małyszko [nominative form uncertain: Małyszko, Małyszka, or Małyszek], born 1903; older son Jerzy Michalak, born 7 July 1926; younger son Andrzej Ryszard, born 2 April 1929.

### 2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

On 14 April 1940 in Wołkowysk [now Vawkavysk, Belarus], [arrested by] NKVD authorities.

### 3. Name of the camp, prison, or forced labor site:

The prison in Wołkowysk from 14 April to 29 June, later the prison in Homel from 29 June to 17 September 1940; *Samarlag, Bezimenka* region, from 2 September 1941; and Askino, Bashkir ASRR, from 4 December 1941.

### 4. Description of the camp, prison etc.:

The old prison in Wołkowysk: cramped conditions, dirt, sleeping on the floor with no bed. Living conditions were even worse at the prison in Homel; the cells were overcrowded. *Bezimenka* forced labor camp [was] in the steppe, in tents; there were 216 Poles there among 11,000 people.

### 5. Life in the camp, prison, etc.:

*Podyom* [wake-up call] at 5:00 in the morning, breakfast ( usually threshed millet), *razvod* [assembly of brigades and departure to their assigned work] for hours at the gate, in the mud, rain, or cold. No clothes of any kind. Construction of barracks, earthworks, [and] quotas [which were] impossible to meet; *shtrafnyi* [penalty] pot [i.e., lower or worse food ration as punishment] nearly all the time. I received no remuneration, and even the money sent by my wife was never paid to me. [You'd] return from work at 6:00 PM and stand at the gate again, [then] *proverka* [inspection or search], supper, and sleeping with [your] clothes

on, as otherwise they would have been stolen. Constant *proverka* [inspections] and *urki* [“professional” criminals, recidivists (thieves)] were the scourge of the camp. The level of hygiene was intolerably low – lice, bugs, and other vermin; [there was] night shift work, [it was] six kilometers on foot to work and [on] the way back [we went] through mud in the rain. There was absolutely no cultural life, and *kultugolok* [culture corner] in forced labor camps was only for *proverka* [controls] and *armaturnye knizhki* [books about armaments]. There was only radio, somewhere, sometimes, very seldom, and a gazette, *Krasnaya Bashkiria*. [There were] conversations with fellow deportees to maintain the weakened morale, and help in matters of food by sharing *posylki* [packages] received from home.

#### **6. Composition of POWs, prisoners, or deportees:**

Polish officers; non-commissioned officers in the regular forces, particularly from the Border Protection Corps [KOP, Polish military force defending the eastern borders, 1924-39]; civil servants and local government officials; and two teachers [were all] mostly imprisoned as *sotsyal'no opasnyi element* [socially dangerous elements]. The Russians were mostly there for theft; [their] intellectual level varied. Initially there was mistrust, and later there was mutual help at work, small friendly services, and sharing news.

#### **7. Attitude of NKVD authorities to the Poles:**

Apart from using measures such as shouting, repression, propaganda, or false information about the situation and attitude towards the government, towards England, and towards the United States, they tried to undermine my faith in leaving the forced labor camp soon and returning to Poland – even when the amnesty had been signed, as late as October 1941.

#### **8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality:**

In the prisons in Wołkowysk and Homel there was medical inspection from time to time. In forced labor camps there was medical inspection too, but [it failed to eliminate] cuts, ulcers, or scurvy; exemption from work [was granted] only in cases of temperature equal to, or exceeding, 39 degrees. The largest number of people died of pneumonia and exhaustion, and in the summer – of dysentery: bloody *ponos* [diarrhea]. The following people died: on 27 December 1940 – Corporal Edward Gąska; on 2 September 1941 – Kopytman Rubin; I don't remember any other names.

**9. What kind of contact, if any, was there with your country and family?**

I wrote letters very often, and I received one letter from my wife from Wołpa, Grodno District – [it had been] written on 1 January 1940, and I received it on 21 January 1941. I received no more letters [from my wife], but there was one other [letter] from Grodno, from a friend. Both were in Russian. I received food packages, but I was given only parts of them, because those who issued the package to me after I signed [illegible] shared the hardtacks [biscuits] and pork fat among themselves.

**10. When were you released and how did you make it to the army?**

On our release from *Samarłag*, we asked to be sent to the Polish Army; the NKVD authorities sent us – officers in the regular army and in the reserve, as well as non-commissioned officers in the regular army – to Ufa and further, to the Urals, and it was from there that I got to the Polish Army in Buzuluk. I walked and traveled in freight train cars and [traveled] by passenger train without a ticket from Sverdlovsk [now Yekaterinburg, Russia] to Buzuluk from 4 to 14 December 1941, and then I reported to the army command in Buzuluk.