



MIECZYŚŁAW PUŁASKI

1. Personal data:

Senior Wachtmeister Mieczysław Pułaski, 43 years old, bookkeeper, married, 2nd Tank Brigade.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

I was arrested on the night from 21 to 22 June 1941, half past midnight, in Tarnopol, in the Zagrobela suburb, Lwowska Street 108, in the house belonging to Chama, on the pretext of checking my papers.

After I was transported to the NKVD station in Tarnopol, the NKVD man who had arrested me told me that I was being detained because I was born in Kraków. I would like to emphasize that I had a passport allowing me to live up to 100 kilometers from the border. I was transported from home to the station in a limousine, forced at gunpoint, lying on the legs of an NKVD man who put his gun to my back. When the car stopped in the courtyard, two NKVD men escorted me to the corridor of the station and placed me in one of the corners. A moment later, Father Bas from the Tarnopol parish was led in. At about 3.00 a.m., I was summoned for an interrogation that lasted until 7.00 a.m. with a few breaks. During the interrogation, a letter was read out that had allegedly been written by my landlady (I don't remember her surname, I gave the surname of the owner of the house; the woman was the widow of some police officer), in which it was stated that while working as a chauffeur at the base – Otdel Tekhnicheskogo Snabzheniya [technical supply department] – I had gone several times to Lwów to collect money, as I had a transmitter-receiver radio. I would like to emphasize that upon arrest, I had on me my *putiovkas* [car authorizations] from the previous three weeks and none of them was to Lwów, but all going in other directions, so they couldn't prove anything. I was divested of all documents, letters, my Longhill watch and a silver cigarette case, but they didn't take away my money. I would like to emphasize that when they were taking me from my house, they didn't let me take any food, underwear, clothes or anything to cover myself with.

After this interrogation I was granted permission to buy something to eat and to smoke. After the *sledowatiel* [interrogator] had left the room and another NKVD man had come



in, I told him that I had the *sledowatiel's* permission to buy food and to smoke, but he beat me up and when I fell, he began to kick me and said, "Eto imeyesh' kushan'ye i kureniye" [Here you have your eating and smoking], and then seated me on a chair in the corner of the room, with my back to the room. Then I was escorted to the prison, where I had to undergo a haircut, disinfection of my clothes, a bath, injections and, as usual, a personal search. This time they took everything except for food and cigarettes, but I managed to smuggle my money in a cap – I hung it on a door handle and so it wasn't searched.

All of this took place in the Tarnopol prison, where I was incarcerated until 1 July 1941. On the morning of that day they took us out to the street, which was bustling with wagons and troops, all running away in great chaos. We were marched to Podwołoczyska under a strong escort of NKVD men and *boytsy* [soldiers] with dogs. We were hastened along, carrying our belongings; the old, loaded with their stuff, couldn't keep up with the rest and, beaten with batons, left their possessions on the road; those who couldn't walk that fast dropped to the ground, and those who were so exhausted that they couldn't go on were shot on the spot, right where they fell. In Podwołoczyska they loaded us into wagons, packing us like herrings in a barrel.

From the day of my arrest, Tarnopol was under constant bombardment by the Germans, which continued day and night. On 6 August 1941 we arrived in Magnitogorsk in order to [illegible] and reach our destination, that is, a prison located 72 kilometers away. We covered the distance on foot, and in two days we arrived at Verkhneuralskaya *tyurma* [prison] no. 1. The whole journey lasted 35 days, and at two stops the stations were being heavily bombed, but our train wasn't hit. The journey itself was very hard; we had to circumvent a lot of obstacles, as the railway line which we were supposed to take was destroyed in many places.

For the first seven days we didn't receive any nourishment other than dirty water to drink; on the sixth day they gave us wooden spoons (one per eight people), and on the eighth day we received a spoon of kasha, and on the next day a spoon of kasha and a loaf of bread per 12 people. At night, some members of the escort handed us a piece of bread and marmalade, and others took money for their rations – there were only two such men by our wagon, which was constantly guarded by four men despite the fact that the windows and doors of the wagon were boarded up. On the 21st day of our journey, a laborer from Tarnopol, one Nowicki, died; two days later a very wealthy farmer also died – I don't remember his surname, but before he

died he had made an oral will to which I am a witness, as is Father Dzieduszek, born in Gródek Jagielloński, a parish priest from the area of Tarnopol. Before we arrived in Podwołoczyska, while we were marching through the corn, one of the Ukrainians began to flee, and when they started shooting after him, we were all ordered to sit down with our heads between our knees and to keep our eyes to the ground, and if someone looked up out of curiosity to have a look at the pursuit, he was beaten and kicked by the NKVD men. The escapee was shot, and when he was captured, he was pierced with a bayonet and left in the corn, unburied.

On 5 August we were unloaded from the wagons in Magnitogorsk and escorted to a camp for *zaklyuchennyy* [prisoners], some of whom worked in iron ore mines. We were placed in two barracks there, as they wanted to feed us up. Having been gathered in such a big barrack, we managed to establish that our group had numbered some 1,800 people, and that by the time we reached Magnitogorsk the number had gone down by approx. 200 people. They kept us there for seven days, during which they fed us up – we received 450 grams of bread per day and cooked meals twice a day – and then we set off for our destination, that is, prison no. 1 in Verkhneuralsk. We had to take a roundabout route around the town before we were led into the prison, as we couldn't be seen; while we were on the way there, they announced that they were transporting German prisoners of war or counter-revolutionists who had shot at retreating Bolshevik troops.

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

Verkhneuralskaya *tyurma* no. 1.

4. Description of the camp, prison:

The prison was situated two kilometers out of town, and surrounded with a wall 2.5 meters high; courtyards for walks were separated from one another. The cells were spacious, and each had two barred windows that were covered with metal sheets. There was central heating, but it was out of commission. The corridors were carpeted so that they could come to the door unheard. The building was supplied with electricity, but in the cells the lights weren't used.

5. The composition of prisoners of war, inmates, exiles:

The majority of prisoners were Ukrainians. In my cell, which held 94 prisoners, there were 13 Poles, 1 Jew, 8 Belarusians, 1 Romanian, and the rest were Ukrainians from Tarnopol

and the vicinity, and from the famous cigarette paper factory, "Kałyna". The majority were farmers and laborers, a few of whom had been incarcerated in Bereza Kartuska: these simply tortured us Poles outright. There were two doctors from Tarnopol and one lawyer from Zbaraż; the relations among these three members of the intelligentsia were quite good. Categories of crimes: membership in Ukrainian organizations and tax evasion.

6. Life in the camp, prison:

Daily life began with *proverka* [roll call] by the light of a horrible torch, and then there was *ubornia*: the cell was divided into two groups, and each went to the toilet, to the so-called washroom which had no water; we left in double file, with our hands behind our backs and our heads down – it was strictly forbidden to look sideways – and we had a walk of a few meters. At best, if someone even managed to turn on the tap, it was possible to rinse your eyes with water, but any washing was out of the question. During the entire period of our stay in prison, we were taken for a bath and disinfection only twice, but we had searches two or three times a month. Then bread was distributed; we got 450 grams of soggy bread and *kipiatok*, that is, half a liter of plain warm water which reeked of resin. After breakfast we went through our underwear and clothes to remove insects, which were swarming by the millions in all the cells; since we didn't bathe, shave or cut our hair, we found lots of them in our beards, moustaches, and even eyebrows both in the morning and after dinner. If we hadn't worked, we would have been eaten alive.

Walking around the cell and standing was forbidden, we had to lie; only occasionally – apart from times when meals were distributed – were we allowed to sit.

Dinner. A clay bowl – three fourths of a liter of soup, the same efforts against insects and waiting for supper, which consisted of one bottle of wheat porridge or soup, then checking our clothes and the evening *proverka* by the light of that terrible and strange-smelling torch. There wasn't any social life, as everything was marred by hunger, and everyone – strangely apprehensive – awaited "something". The Poles stuck together, telling each other in whispers about their tribulations and making plans for the future, of course in case God would let us leave the prison walls and Bolshevik freedom behind. We had such clothes as we had brought from home. Two people from our cell received padded jackets, but during a search they had all the buttons and fastenings torn off. As for books, we got them twice in our cell, each time three serious scientific books written in Russian.

7. The NKVD's attitude towards Poles:

The NKVD's attitude towards Poles was variable, because when you asked for something, they promised you everything, but never kept their word and never gave it to you. The interrogations were very harsh, at first they beat you to force you to plead guilty to the charges and then tried to assuage the situation by making promises. The interrogations were held exclusively at night, several times during one night, usually on holidays and other days important to us. They punished us with incarceration in the punishment cell, and you couldn't take anything to cover yourself with, even if you had something like that, and they gave you food once a day. I myself wasn't asked any questions pertaining to Communist propaganda or information about Poland.

8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate:

Medical assistance was kept to a minimum due to the lack of medicaments and doctors. During my stay in the prison hospital, where I spent 16 days, there were four other arrestees there. There were 44 beds in that cell. Scabies and tonsillitis were very widespread among the arrestees.

9. Was there any possibility of getting in contact with one's country and family?

During the whole period of my incarceration, I had no contact with my country or family.

10. When were you released and how did you get through to the Polish Army?

On 21 January 1942 I was summoned to the prison warden, who gave me my *udostoverenie* [certificate of release] and 58 rubles and told me that I was free, but had to go to a certain oblast to take up a job as a chauffeur because they needed such people there. Such was the information that I was provided with. He told me to go to the house of the kolkhoz leader and to the *woyenko*mat [army drafting committee] in Verkhneuralsk, and he wanted to know what we had talked about in the cell; he particularly asked about how the Ukrainians had treated the Poles and what they had been saying.

After I had been released from prison and had left it, having no clothes and shoes – though the temperature had dropped to more than 45 degrees below – I barely managed to reach the house of the kolkhoz leader, who lived two kilometers away; I found the door open and met a dozen or so prisoners who had already been released, that is, [illegible] and a few



others whose surnames I don't remember, Father Bas and Father Dzieduszeko. We set up a committee and – acting in cooperation with the local authorities, who were of great help, for instance offering us accommodation in private flats – we all decided to join the Polish Army, which was being raised at the time. A few days later we were transported by sleigh to Magnitogorsk, and from there to Chelyabinsk, to a Polish draft board, which examined us and deemed us fit for service and on 8 February 1942 sent us to Lugovoy, where I appeared before another draft board and was assigned as senior cavalry Wachtmeister to the 10th Reconnaissance Squadron, effective from 8 March 1942, where I serve to the present day.

Place of stay, 3 February 1943