



RYSZARD KOPYŚĆ

1. Personal data:

Platoon leader, army cadet Ryszard Kopyść, 24 years old, unemployed, unmarried.

2. Date and circumstances of arrest:

I was arrested on 6 July 1940 for being a member of the Union for Armed Struggle.

3. Name of the camp:

The Bureya Railway Camp of the NKVD (*Amur Oblast*).

4. Description of the camp, prison:

A mountainous area, taiga, wooden houses made out of logs. Housing conditions were terrible and cramped, there was plenty of filth, lice, and bedbugs.

5. Social composition of prisoners/deportees:

Various nationalities: Russians, Poles, Chinese, Kazakhs, Georgians, Uzbeks, Kalmyks, Romanians, Karelians, Ukrainians, Turkmens.

Categories of crimes: mostly they were crimes of a political nature. The intellectual level in some cases was very high, but the moral level was very low. Mutual relations were very hostile, even among those who shared the same opinions and ideals. Poles, with their admirable solidarity, were the only exception here.

6. Life in the camp:

We labored from dawn till late evening at the railway. The quotas were very high and consequently hard to fill, even for very strong people. Wages were very low (2 to 5 rubles per month). Our clothes were tattered and we had no cultural life. Relations were very good among Poles.

7. The NKVD's attitude towards the Poles:

We were interrogated by means of tricky, "roundabout" methods. The NKVD men almost always used torture with regards to "counter-revolutionaries" – beating them with rubber



truncheons, sticking pins under their fingernails, plunging their hands into boiling water, etc. They used methods which were aimed at breaking the detainee psychologically and morally (such as by staging his execution etc.), and administered very severe punishments. The mildest punishment for a political crime was ten years of hard labor. Communist propaganda was spread on a large scale. It always presented Poland and the Polish cause in the most unfavorable way possible, while glorifying the "kindness" of the communist system.

8. Medical assistance, hospitals, mortality rate:

Medical assistance in the camp was very limited. Hospitals were sometimes run by our doctors, but their efforts produced no results, for there was a shortage of the right medicines. People were decimated by scurvy, malaria and starvation. We almost never got any information about their deaths. No one knew what happened to them.

9. What, if any, was your contact with the home country and with your family:

Our contact was very limited – one of the reasons was simply the distance. Very rarely did we receive letters from the home country.

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

I was released on 24 December 1941. I travelled from the far East to Semipalatinsk in central Kazakhstan. A delegate of the Polish army, lieutenant Regini, directed me to Tatishchevo, but I did not manage to get there. In the meantime, the army made its way south. I joined the military transport in Emel and arrived in Jalal-Abad. This is where I joined the army on 28 January 1942.