

KAZIMIERZ ŚLASKI

Corporal Officer Cadet Kazimierz Ślaski, born on 15 July 1923, 2nd Tank Brigade.

I was deported from Lwów to Kazakhstan on 13 April 1940. The journey lasted 15 days. During this time, we were not treated so badly. We had enough food. There were 24 people in the carriage.

After arrival and unloading, we were taken to the local kolkhozes. I was transported to the village of Kirovka, about 27 km from Kostanay. We were forced to work immediately upon arrival without any rest; they threatened to not give us bread. After a month, I decided to escape, and I did. After six days of travel, I was caught and taken to Kostanay where I was put in a remand prison. I was alone in the cell. The lack of food was a problem. I was called in for investigation only at night, and I was not allowed to sleep during the day. Because the investigation produced no result and my detention was prolonged, I started a hunger strike. In response, I was transported to a criminal prison. Here, I stayed in a common cell where there were many thieves. There were no Poles. After several months, I was deported to Iwdieli [Ivdel] (a place in the Ural mountains) in several stages. I traveled for two months by train, with stops in Czelabińsk and Swierdłowsk. [There were] terrible conditions: we were allowed to take care of our physiological needs only once a day, [it was] horribly crowded, and [we were plagued by] hunger.

After arriving to Iwdieli [Ivdel], we were dropped on the snow, barefoot and hungry. We were locked in barracks, where several hundred people were kept. There were more Poles here. I stayed here for three days. I then received bast shoes, a cap, and linen gloves, and they sent us to work at the first point, about 10 kilometers from the station I arrived at. It was in December and the temperature was around negative 30 degrees. I was loading wagons for two months and my legs became so badly frostbitten that I was sent to the hospital. I stayed there for a month and went back to work again.

I was wood rafting, waist-deep in the icy water. After work, we returned to the barracks, where we fell asleep on wooden bunks in wet clothes. In the camp, the majority [of

non-Poles] were thieves. Their attitude to us Poles was terrible. They were robbing us of everything. The escorts and the camp command also treated Poles badly. They sent us to the worst labor; after work, if we did not meet our quota, they put us in detention.

Mortality among the Poles was very high.

After the announcement of the amnesty, things became even worse: we were chased to work with bayonets; in the evening we were sometimes kept a few hours longer. The food was terrible: 450 grams of bread and a bowl of soup twice a day, which consisted of 90% water and the rest was husk. After being released from the camp, I returned to Kostanay, where I was ill for a month. When I recovered, I left for Totsk [Totskoye – village in the USSR, in the region of Orenburg] and joined the army.