

ANTONI GMYZO

Bombardier Antoni Gmyzo, born in 1912, farmer, bachelor.

On 22 September 1939 I was disarmed in the village of Drożyszcze and escorted to the town of Rożyszcze, where I was kept for three days. I was given something to eat only once – bread and water, and then we were loaded onto railcars and taken to Shepetivka. I spent 12 days there. We were fed every 24 hours: half a liter of soup and 200 grams of bread.

After that I was in the following camps: 7–8 October – Ostróg (a stable), from 9 to 15 October – Dubno (a hop house), from 15 October to 20 December – Verba (a barrack), from 20 December 1939 to 14 April 1940 – Radziwiłłów (a railroad building), from 14 April to 7 August – Verba (a barrack), from 7 August to 20 December – Radziwiłłów (a railroad building), from 20 December 1940 to 10 February 1941 – Brody (a castle), from 10 to 15 February – Tarnopol (tents), from 15 February to 7 May – the village of Czarnolin near Tarnopol (a stable), from 7 May to 28 June – Stawki, an airport near Tarnopol (a summer barrack), from 28 [June] to 20 July 1941 we were escorted by foot from Polish territory to Russia, to Zolotonosha. During the journey we suffered from hunger. We received 150 grams of bread and half a liter of soup every three days, and then not always. In Zolotonosha, we were loaded onto a train, 70 people per car. The food conditions were the same as mentioned above.

The conditions in the camp were inadequate – in terms of water, firewood, cold, dirt, and cramped spaces. I slept without any bedclothes, on a bare bunk. The hygiene was very poor, we had no soap. We also lacked water. Dirt, lice. The only thing that saved us sometimes was the disinfection chamber, but there wasn't enough of that either.

The average number of prisoners in the camp was from 250 to 2,000 – Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and others. People were very friendly, their moral standing was high.

The camp life was very difficult: we were woken up at 3.00 a.m. and we worked for over 16 hours. The quotas were so high that they were impossible to meet, but we were given food after meeting the quota (depending on how much we did). We walked around naked and barefoot – those who still had their Polish clothes were sort of dressed. The Soviets were not eager to give away their clothes. The NKVD spread propaganda saying that Poland would never exist again, and showed us various pictures in newspapers. They claimed Poland was a pestilent tree that had to be uprooted.

Medical assistance was negligent. Mortality – one prisoner was shot for walking away to answer a call of nature, Edward Szczepański in Radziwiłłów; and another on the way to Russia – Antoni Chroł, near Volochysk. We had almost no contact with our families. When my sister came to see me, we were allowed only a 30-minute visit.

I joined the Polish Army in Starobilsk, the 16th Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Wiśniowski.

Place of stay, 25 February 1943