

JANUSZ GRABOWSKI

Corporal Janusz Grabowski, 24 years old, forester, bachelor.

On 24 April 1940, two of my colleagues and I were arrested in a small hamlet near Turka. The NKVD accused me of attempting to cross the border, for the obvious reasons, armed with a Polish Vis pistol.

After a report was drawn up, I was transported to the prison in Sambor. For now, they were treating me pretty well. The living conditions were more or less as follows: a cell, previously fit for four people, now had to accommodate at least eight and sometimes even twelve, depending on the frequency of transports deep into Russia.

Food: 400 grams of bread, groats soup for dinner and some groats as the main course, and groats in the evening, with no fats at all or at least I didn't see any.

After a month, I was sent away and confronted with the janitor of the tenement house I had lived in. He told them about my social background and what he thought of me. Then, I was taken to Przemyśl and the same happened there. Afterwards, I was taken back to Sambor. Naturally, I spent the entire journey in a railcar specially adapted for transporting prisoners, so with barred windows. It was only during the journey that I noticed the negative attitude of the NKVD towards Poles: we asked them for water, which we could see 10 meters away from our car. They not only refused, but also called us the worst names.

My investigation was still ongoing, but now it was different. They wanted to force me to confess to crimes I had never committed, they twisted my fingers, and put a gun to my temple.

I stood trial in May. At the judge's table there was a prosecutor, a judge, two lay judges, and an attorney. I was alone, I had nobody who would say at least one good word about me.

The defense attorney remained silent. Finally, after four hours, they read out the verdict, according to which I was sentenced to four years of imprisonment in faraway labor camps and deprived of citizenship rights for five years. In June, I left Sambor with a transport. After a few days of journey I crossed the border at Podwołoczyska.

Between June [1940] and January 1941 I was held in various prisons. All of them were the same – dirt, lice, and lack of clothes. In January I arrived at the labor camp in Cherepovets near Leningrad. We lived in an Orthodox church building, and had to walk eight kilometers to work. The food was awful: if you wanted to receive 900 grams of bread and some water with groats three times a day, you had to dig up a one-by-one meter pit, two meters deep. The ground was frozen to a depth of 180 cm. Nobody met the quota, because it was beyond human capability.

However, everything must come to an end. On 1 September 1941, I was released as a result of the Polish-Soviet agreement, and on 19 September I joined the Polish army.