

OSTROWSKI

"Zorza" Weekly Editorial Office

00-551 Warsaw

Mokotowska Street 43

"Missing persons list"

(deliver to Mr. Jędrzej Tucholski)

Dear Mr. Tucholski,

In regard to the call announced in "Dziennik Łódzki" and in "Zorza" Weekly for sending in information about Polish POWs who had been in the camps: Kozelsk, Ostashkov, Starobilsk in USSR, I'm sending all information known to me about my father, who had been imprisoned in Kozelsk camp and was shot in Katyń. Below is personal data of my father, accordingly to the questionnaire provided by you in "Dziennik Łódzki."

1. Jan Bolesław Ostrowski

- son of Wacław,
- born 1 September 1896 in Warsaw,
- resident in Łódź prior to 1 September 1939 at Kopernika Street 74, flat 3.

3. Military data:

- rank: captain,
- kind of weaponry: artillery, 4 PAC (Heavy Artillery Regiment) in Łódź,
- career officer (permanent duty),
- function: MOB (conscription) officer.

5. He got to Soviet custody in Kovel around 20-21 September 1939. At that time in Kovel, Soviet army captivated around 10-15 thousand soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers of the Polish Armed Forces.

6. Received correspondence: one single letter from the Kozelsk camp, dated end of November or beginning of December 1939.

Father's surname was listed in the list of the murdered in Katyń which was announced in 1943 in the occupation press ("Kurier Warszawski"), stated by the German authorities and Polish Red Cross committee.

Father's surname is also on the Katyń list compiled by Adam Moszyński [published by] Gryf house (London) and on the list issued in Leszek Szczęśniak's book "Katyń. List of victims and missing persons" under entry AM 767, as well as on the "list of victims" published in "Zorza" weekly under entry 3269 (no. 19). Items found by the body are in accordance with what the occupational press had stated.

8. [...].

Back to the circumstances of my father being taken prisoner by the Soviet army, I would like to describe them in more detail for a simple reason that I along with my mother, were eyewitnesses to this event.

On the day of the war outbreak, that is 1 September 1939, my father, as an officer in MOB [conscription] matters, kept performing drafting duties. I don't know whether it was within his original regiment (4th Heavy Artillery Regiment) or within another military unit, or another tactical group, for example the 28th Infantry Division, which was a part of "Łódź" army. Due to the operations he performed, my father was in disposal of a car, assigned to him because of the mobilization.

On 3 September or 4 September my father decided, that due to military units withdrawing from Łódź towards Warsaw (probably the units of "Łódź" army), he would take us, that is me and my mother, to Warsaw, where the family of my mother and father lived. Many of the soldiers' families were in similar situation, running away alongside the military units from the German army onrush. In the evening hours of 4 September or 5 September 1939, we left Łódź and set out towards Warsaw, like everybody at that point. The route of this war exile of the soldier's families including mine, didn't lead to Warsaw, however, due to a quick offensive by the German army that caused our direction to change for retreat to east. We were progressing every day alongside the army withdrawing east, through the towns of: Brzeziny, Jeżów, Skierniewice, Zawady, Mszczonów, Grójec, Góra Kalwaria, Garwolin, Żelechów, Łuków, Radzyń Podlaski, Wisznice or Parczew, Włodawa, Chełm, Luboń, Kowel.

We reached Kovel around 18 September 1939. After two days of staying in Kovel, where about 10-15 thousand soldiers and officers were rallied, on the third day morning, that is 21-22 September 1939, Soviet army entered Kovel. After Kovel was taken over by them, the Polish Armed Forces rallied there were disarmed and captivated.

All of the soldiers and civilians, including soldiers' families, that is also me and my mother, were sent to Włodzimierz Wołyński under Soviet escort, on foot. In Włodzimierz, all of the prisoners and the civilians accompanying them were loaded onto freight wagons and deported towards the eastern border of Poland. The route led from Włodzimierz via Kowel, Kiwercke, Klewań, Równe, to Zdołbunów. In Zdołbunów, the Soviet authorities removed all the civilians out from the transport, keeping just the soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers.

At that point, I found some lodging alongside my mother, in some lousy hotel, as there was no way of returning home due to lack of any railway connection with the west. I suppose it was as late as 24-25 September 1939. Next day after separating the POWs and the civilians my father found us in the hotel and after spending some time with us and speaking to my mother, he said he had to go back to the transport, because he had given his word to the Soviet authorities he would be back. During this conversation we learned that during that whole night, the transport with Polish POWs was being moved to another track at the station and in the morning it turned out it was at the Zdołbunów station again. In such circumstances, my mother tried to find out from the Soviet authorities whether she could go along with the prisoner. In response, she heard that the POWs were not in Zdołbunów any more, that they had been moved to Shepetivka (a village on the USSR side, beyond the former Polish-Soviet border). My mother and I stayed in Zdołbunów and only after a couple of days, after railway communication was organized, we got on the way back home. The first and the last message from my father didn't reach us until the end of November or at the beginning of December – it was a letter from the camp in Kozelsk.

It remains to be resolved whether the route of my war journey alongside my father and mother was the withdrawal route of the 28th Infantry Division, as on the "list of victims" published in "Zorza" Weekly, there is the following information next to my father's surname: "28 DP [Infantry Division] headquarter". I can't really say right now, how my father found himself within the 28th Infantry Division headquarter. One thing is certain – that the 4th Heavy Artillery Regiment didn't work as a standalone unit, but its specific divisions were assigned to various tactical groups.

Please note that on the day of the war outbreak, I was only 13 years old and today, 50 years past those days, my memories might not be as sharp and detailed, and I'm especially not sure whether the dates I had given are in line with the factual situation.

Considering your plan of publishing the book about Katyń tragedy next year, I suggest securing a way to buy the book for the Katyń victims' families, for example by proxy of "Zorza" Weekly. I am mentioning this because the publications issued so far on the topic of Katyń are very hard to obtain in a regular way, that is buying them at bookstores.

Allow me to conclude my letter at that point and wish you good luck in discovering the truth about the fate of our fathers.