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COUNTRY Poland/USSR

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SUBJECT Polish Prisoner's Account of Soviet
Concentration Camps.

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Transporting of Prisoners

1. Prisoners were transported in unventilated cattle cars with no protection from the 40° winter weather. There was an average of 50 people in each 15-ton car. Daily rations consisted of 220 gr. of biscuit, 50 gr. of salted bacon, and one teaspoon of sugar. No water was furnished; when prisoners called for it guards would come into the cars, beat and kick the poor, and invite their dogs to take away what food they had. Told the cars contained Germans, the population cursed the prisoners and threw stones. In each car there were informers who conducted investigations during the one-month journey.

The Camp

2. Upon arrival at a destination prisoners always had to walk a few miles to the camp, often through deep snow, surrounded by guards and dogs. Camps usually consisted of badly and hurriedly built barracks infested with bedbugs. Straw was used in lieu of blankets. Often there was no water in the camp. In these cases it would have to be brought in on sleighs pulled by six to eight men for a distance of two kilometers. Washing was out of the question.
3. Camps near the mines were well off for fuel as everyone would bring a piece of coal from work. In other camps fuel had to be brought in sleighs pulled by men. "Fleet service" in huge vats was done as a penalty for bad work or lack of discipline. In one of the camps (Kumbar 9/285) the commanding officer, a Captain Florynski, created a special brigade of former AK / Armja Krajowa, or Home Army officers/ for this filthy task.

Food and Working Conditions

4. Twice a day, in the morning and evening, prisoners received three-quarters of a liter of soup from rotten cabbage leaves and other such vegetables, three to four spoonfuls of kasha, and 600 grams (one kilogram if working in the mines)

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of bread. Once a month they got a half kilogram of sugar. Most of the fat, flour, meat, and canned stuffs received at the camp was eaten by the camp administrators; very little reached the prisoners. In the spring, when no cabbage was left, they boiled thistles and nettles. To avoid complete emaciation the inmates sold whatever was left of their belongings, stole at their working posts, and made all sorts of things to sell. In that way they helped each other to survive. There were some doctors (also Poles) but facilities were so inadequate and medicines so scarce that sickness was a habit. Tuberculosis, diarrhea, pneumonia, and sciatica were particularly prevalent.

5. Daily working hours ranged from eight hours in the mines to ten hours in the buildings. Pay varied from 100 to 300 rubles a month. Some of the mine workers received premiums to encourage greater output--e.g., one kilogram of bread (20 - 30 rubles), one kilogram of potatoes (6 - 16 rubles), one liter of milk (12 - 25 rubles), one egg (7 - 10 rubles), one kilogram of bacon (250 - 450 rubles). These prices varied with the seasons and the appearance of items on the free market.

Events After Germany's Surrender

6. When the fighting stopped prisoners expected to be released, but not until Sep 45 did any return to Poland. Those remaining were mostly social and political workers, AK officers, or German spies.
7. On 27 Dec 45 a second transport left from Stalingorsk. Food became scarcer and fat or meat non-existent. In the spring of 46 the authorities received orders to favor the Germans, who were given the status of guards. Though unarmed, they could be distinguished by white bands on their sleeves. This scandalized the local population who from then on became friendlier toward the prisoners. The administration of the camp was also turned over to the Germans. The authorities explained that this was because they planned to send all the Poles home, keeping only the Germans. In Jun 46 about 150, mostly AK officers, were selected and sent east, probably to Kazan, under very strong escort.

Return to Poland

8. On 15 Jun another transport of about 2,000 people, mostly Poles who had served in the German Army or Germans who knew Polish, was put together. This group went to Stalingorsk and then to Brzesc where a Polish Government delegate took over. From Brzesc they were taken to a camp in Milecin near Wloclawek for screening. All except 350 collaborators were sent home. But many Poles still remained in Soviet camps.

Trip from Stalingorsk to Wloclawek

9. Destruction between the Ustawaja station and Baranowicze is widespread. Stations, bridges and cities are completely destroyed and only a few villages have survived. The fields are mostly unplowed and grass is high on what were battlefields. Between these one does see strips of land with very poor crops on them. Along the track there are whole German factories on railroad cars. On the side of the tracks uncovered machinery is dumped sloppily to rot away. Some things, naturally, are being carried away by the local population.
10. At the Katyn station prisoners tried to get the "kolchozniki" who had spent the whole war there to talk about Polish officers murdered in Kozia Gora/ Kozia Glow 2. They would look around fearfully to see if anyone was watching or listening and then without a word would leave. The place is now guarded by the Soviet Army and no one can go there.

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11. At Krasnaja prisoners saw a man in a Polish major's uniform walking up and down with an old bearded kolchoznik. When they spoke to the officer in Polish he did not understand.
12. From Smolonsk onward crowds of women would board the train, hanging on the buffers and sitting on the roof. They would go as far as Brzesc to get bread and potatoes which they would take back home. The difference on the Polish side of the frontier was noticeable. There the fields were tilled, the houses clean, and at the stations women came and sold bread, butter, sausages, milk, and cheese.

Other Soviet Camps

13. In many camps in the Stalinogorsk region there are still about 1,500 Poles, mixed with Germans. In Mar 46, 5,500 Poles, including 4 AK generals and 700 AK officers, were still in a large camp at Kasan. Most of them probably are still there.

Disposition of the Soviet Population

14. After the war ended there was great disillusionment. This was especially true among the Soviet soldiers who had been treated unjustly. Repatriated from the west, they were placed in workers' battalions where the discipline was very stiff. Their food was no better than that of the Polish prisoners' but their working norms were higher. Intelligent elements and officers often also worked in the camps. When they were taken from Germany they were told tall tales about the future. Thus they are now filled with hatred for the authorities. They sow discontent and a whispering campaign against the regime is going on. They work lazily and sloppily, and often there is sabotage, with destruction of tools and materiel and stealing. Politically they are a very conscious element. Anti-Semitism is strong among them.
15. During the summer and autumn of 45 robber bands started roaming the country. In the Stalinogorsk region a few higher officers of the NKGB were murdered. Rumors among the local population are eagerly hunted and received. They see their only salvation in a war between the USSR on one side and the US and Great Britain on the other. All are convinced that nowhere else in the world is life as bad as in the USSR. The reputation of the US is immense. During the war the population saw many US goods whose quality was far superior to Russian. The Soviet masses are drawn to the picture of the US, with the freedom and wealth of its citizens. It is hard to conceive that the USSR could push its masses against the US as they were able to stir them against the Germans.
16. Those who were in Poland speak well of the Poles. In 1946 Soviet efforts to create hatred of Britain could be seen. This campaign was intensified in the press and radio after Churchill's Fulton, Missouri speech. During this time the masses lived in the conviction that war was imminent. They prayed for it. When a plane appeared on the horizon, they looked eagerly to see if it was a foreign one. The people saw that what the USSR had been telling them for years was all lies.
17. Poverty, terror, and injustice are on the increase. The 1945 crops remained in the fields not only because of the manpower shortage but because of the hatred of the "kolchozniki" who receive so little grain for their hard work. They have to steal from the State allotments in order to live. Primitive methods produce very small crops even from the very rich lands. There is a severe shortage of livestock, particularly horses and cattle. In 1946 prices continued to climb; the only drop was in clothing and shoes which were brought back by returning soldiers who had to sell them for food.

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