

Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/7049,quotThe-Art-of-Survival-Soviet-deportations-from-the-Bielsko-Poviat-19401941-Dep.html>

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"The Art of Survival. Soviet deportations from the Bielsko Poviat 1940–1941. Deportees' Accounts."

We would like to remind our readers about the IPN's publication entitled „Sztuka przetrwania. Deportacje sowieckie z powiatu bielskiego 1940–1941. Relacje zesłańców”.["The Art of Survival. Soviet deportations from the Bielsko Poviat 1940–1941. Deportees' Accounts."]

SZTUKA PRZETRWANIA

DEPORTACJE SOWIECKIE
Z POWIATU BIELSKIEGO 1940–1941



RELACJE ZESŁAŃCÓW



"We have come to a place where people are dying of starvation and cold. How many Poles and non-Poles are left there! How many graves there are! When malaria or typhoid strike, and a person has nothing to eat, the chances of their survival fall drastically"- this and many other poignant accounts regarding the circumstances of repression and deportation of citizens of the Second Polish Republic deep into the USSR are described in the IPN's new publication „Sztuka przetrwania. Deportacje sowieckie z powiatu bielskiego 1940–1941. Relacje zesłańców”.[*"The Art of Survival. Soviet deportations from the Bielsko Poviast 1940–1941. Deportees' Accounts."*] compiled by Wojciech Konończuk.

The study contains twelve accounts of people deported to Siberia from the Bielsk Podlaski powiat in the years 1940–1941. They present the fate of representatives of all pre-war social spheres affected by repression - landowners, foresters, policemen, Jewish merchants, teachers, craftsmen, wealthy and poor peasants as well as Catholics, Orthodox and Jews .The micro-history of this region serves as a case study showing the fate of citizens of the Second Republic of Poland under Soviet occupation.

In all, in four waves of deportations from the annexed regions of Poland, the Soviets relocated deep into their own territory at least 320,000 Poles. At gunpoint, people were given only minutes to collect a few belongings, taken to a train station, loaded into cattle cars, and

sent off on an endless journey in freezing temperatures or scorching heat that killed the weak. On arrival at one of work camps or state-administrated settlements in Siberia, Kazakhstan, Kolyma or Chukotka Peninsula, they were put to exhausting work – usually in logging or mining – in conditions that further decimated them.

Not only in terms of deportation can the plight of the Bielsk Podlaski region be projected on the situation of Poles from other areas the USSR incorporated: Polish citizens were also executed, imprisoned, impressed into the Red Army, or ordered to work for the Soviet industry. The estimates vary, but the number of people repressed by the new occupant over nearly two years (1939-1941) reached a milion. However, while others forms of persecution for the most part targeted men, deportations affected whole families, who, like the relatives of the Katyn Massacre victims, were deprived of male support, protection, and breadwinners - and left on their own in a strange land.

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