



Michael Hope: **Polish deportees in the Soviet Union.** Origins of Post-War Settlement in Great Britain. Veritas Foundation Publication Centre, London 2000, ISBN 0 948202 76 9

Foreword by Tomasz Piesakowski PhD
Polish University Abroad, London, 1998

"Michael Hope has given a well-recorded account of the fate of Poles from the time of the outbreak of the Second World War to the demobilisation of the Polish Forces in the West. His book adds to the short list of British authors who have written on this subject in English. His broad and comprehensive summary is of important historic value.

On the 31st March 1939 Great Britain assured Poland it would provide immediate support to the Polish Government in the event of a threat to Polish independence. Britain was later unable to fulfil this promise and the Author explains why. An authoritative account is given in the book of the military events that took place during the September campaign and of the **occupation of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.**

The secret German-Soviet agreement concerning the fourth partition of Poland and Soviet aggression against Poland confirmed that the Soviet Union was unilaterally to violate the main bilateral and multilateral treaties agreed with Poland. These treaties were the Treaty of Riga, ratified on the 18th March 1921, and the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, ratified on the 25th July 1932 for a period of three years and then extended until the 31st December 1945. On the 22 September 1939 the German-Soviet agreement was reached concerning the division of Poland, and on the 28th September a treaty of friendship was signed in Moscow by the two aggressors, finalising the demarcation line further east and formalising relations between these two countries.



The joint communique issued on the 28th September declared:
"The Treaty ratified, conclusively solves all problems resulting from disintegration of the State of Poland and forms the long-term basis for lasting peace in Europe (...). Both governments, therefore, will try their utmost so that by agreement with other powers necessary, the termination of hostilities can be achieved (...). If, however, the efforts of both governments fail to meet with success, it will mean that England and France take upon themselves responsibility for the further continuation of hostilities. In that case the German and Soviet Governments will reach agreement about further action".
(Pravda, 29 IX 1939).

In the first phase of the occupation, the Soviets carried out a previously prepared plan for liquidating Poles as "enemies of the people": civil servants, judges, the police, professional army officers, factory owners, landlords, political activists, leaders of cultural, educational and religious organisations, and others activists in the community.

In Moscow an immense plan was drawn and signed by Colonel Serov, Deputy Commissar for Security to deport over a million Polish citizens. It was intended to remove "socially dangerous and anti-Soviet elements". The deportees were to be 'finished off' in prisons, forced labour camps and places of enforced settlements in the northern parts of European Russia and Central Asia where conditions would

ensure their liquidation. From winter to June 1941 the NKVD carried out four mass deportations of about **1,500,000** Polish citizens, mostly ethnic Poles. (*See above - about Stefania and her family*). As a result of the Soviet invasion, about **250,000** Polish servicemen (*see above - about Zbyszek*) became prisoners of war. Polish officers were separated and placed in three camps: Kozielsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov.

Beria in his report to Stalin stated that "all officers are uncompromising enemies of the Soviet Union, are anti revolutionists and should be sentenced to death". The Soviet Union had violated the Geneva Convention of 1929, and defied all aspects concerning Prisoners of War.

According to the Author's calculation, **81,000** Polish troops crossed the southern border of Poland by September. They entered into Hungary and Romania (*see above about Zbyszek's uncle - Zenobiusz*) following the overwhelming conquest by these two aggressors (*i.e. Germany and the Soviet Union - WJW*). Small groups and individuals followed after September. All the Polish naval ships managed to safely reach England by the 1st September.

The Polish Armed Forces were formed in France. Representatives of the Polish Government based in France continued to represent Polish interests and to ensure the continuity of recognition of the struggle against the Axis Powers. After the collapse of France, the majority of Polish Forces were evacuated to Great Britain. General Sikorski, Commander in Chief, was greeted enthusiastically by Churchill who said: "Tell your Army that we are comrades in life and death. We shall conquer together..." As the Author quite rightly comments, General Sikorski never lived long enough to witness the betrayal of Poland by Churchill and the Western Allies in Teheran and at Yalta.

General Sikorski believed that a potential army could be created from the remaining Polish deportees in the Soviet Union. Michael Hope comments that "his prime concern was the welfare and release from captivity of **two million people**". As a result of the Sikorski-Maisky agreement (which was strongly opposed by some Polish sources), Stalin agreed to issue "amnesty" to Poles.

The Polish army was formed in the USSR, commanded by General Anders. Mutual mistrust created many difficulties. Stalin established his own "Polish Government" and a limited symbolic contingent of the "Polish Army". Eventually General Anders' Army .evacuated to the Middle East. This amounted to **7% of the total number of deportees and imprisoned** who had been left behind in the Soviet Union.

After reorganisation and intensive training the Army was ready to fight the elite units of Wehrmacht in Italy. After glorious battles and many sacrifices, the Poles learned about the shameful outcome of the results at the Yalta conference. Anders in a heated discussion with Churchill concerning the Yalta decision was blatantly told that the British Government never guaranteed the Polish eastern frontiers and that Anders could take away his divisions. Anders sent a letter to the Commander of the 8th Army, General McCreery asking for withdrawal of the 2nd Polish Corp from action, and was told that no troops were available to replace the Polish Corps and a withdrawal could endanger the 8th Army.

The Polish Army was demobilised after the war and the Polish Resettlement Corps was formed as "recompense" to its faithful and loyal ally.

Michael Hope gives the Anglo Saxon reader a well written, documented and informative account of a betrayed nation, and he must be congratulated for his

effort.

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London, 1998

Excerpts from the **Text** by Michael Hope:

Poland: Deportation and Exile

(page 16) "... By the end of 1939 the pattern of movement by Polish **prisoners of-war** was northwards and eastwards as they were redeployed by their Soviet captors into prison camp and forced labour conditions in the Soviet Union itself. Many were sent to the Arctic and sub-Arctic region of the White Sea and the Solovetsky Islands for forced labour on the White Sea Canal Others were directed into forestry and logging operations deep into Siberia where, working in the sub-zero winter of 1939/40, many first had to construct their own labour camps whilst attempting to survive in holes dug into the snow. Many men were sent to construct roads in the Smolensk and Kharkov areas. A foretaste of what was to come for future Polish deportees were the numbers of work parties sent to areas of Archangelsk, Sverdlovsk, and Novosibirsk together with regions of Soviet Central Asia: the Altai, Baszkirska, and Krasnoyarski Kraj, to construct labour camps in remote areas or alongside penal colonies. Typhus, dysentery and malnutrition were endemic throughout this dispersal, abetted by starvation diets, and mortality rates were high..."

(page 17) "...particularly in the winter and spring of 1939/40. Grave digging and the organisation of burial parties were the principal off-duty occupations handed to unit leaders. In this manner, long before Solzhenitsyn's disclosures, the Poles became the first Westerners fully to experience the vicissitudes of the Soviet penal system, and regard contemptuously his assertion that: 'even the Poles.... existed in far more tolerable conditions'. (9)

(9) A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*. London 1974. p. 219.

The Soviet terror machine began operations in Poland immediately after the occupation following the 17th September attack by the arrest of leading citizens and civil servants, and professional and academic classes. Lists of suspected people, professions, institutions and nationalities had been prepared beforehand. All 'unfavourable elements' were physically removed once they were identified, and the Soviets, having longer experience in political terror than their German counterparts, with the 1930's purges as a preparation, spent no time in "wasteful experimentation", to quote Gula. "...

(pages 18 - 22) "...The first of (these) mass deportations of the **civilian population** was organised on 10th February 1940, when nearly **a quarter of a million** men, women and children were transported to Northern Russia and Siberia from the wide rural areas of eastern Poland, Galicia, and the Polish 'enclaves' in what was later designated the West Ukraine..."

"...The deportation of 10th February - a period of extremely severe cold - was effected by a total of 110 trains, each carrying slightly more than 2,000 people..."

"...a second, large, mass transportation of **330,000**, mostly women and children, started on 13 April and... a total of 160 trains dispersed the victims into areas of Asiatic Russia, mainly to Kazakstan and further eastwards to the Altai Kraj, where

many from the earlier enforced exodus had been directed into work camps and 'koloniyas'... The(se) annexed territories contained nearly 13,000,000 million people and constituted more than one half of Poland's territory. ...nearly one fifth... (of the population) had disappeared into Siberia and Northern Russia by the end of the year."

"...A third deportation was exercised over June and July 1940 in which **a quarter of a million** Poles, mainly refugees from central and western Poland were moved to the north of the U.S.S.R. around Archangelsk, Sverdlovsk and Novosibirsk, and to the republics of Bashkirsk, Maryjska, and to the Krasnoyarski Kraj..."

"...A fourth wave of deportees, totalling about **200,000**, of which just over half were from the Wilno area, were known to be widely scattered in various parts of the U.S.S.R..."

"...Including the relatively small percentage of Ukrainians, Jews and Byelorussians, the total number of Polish citizens deported by the Soviet Government during its 'eternal friendship' with Nazi Germany between 1939 and 1941 amounted to approximately **1.680.000** people, not including prisoners of war.

Among these it is calculated that there were 560,000 women, 380,00 children and about 150,000 elderly and sick persons.

By the middle of the following year, 1942, **half of the above total were dead.**"...



Russia: The Camps

(page 23) "...The deportee was a non-person, a slave of the Soviet penal system, and a status at once emphasised upon arrival at prison, labor camp, or penal colony: - 'here you will live and here you will die'; *niechevo*, you will get used to it; and the notorious 'who does not work, does not eat'. ...

... (by) the middle of 1940, some 1,500,000 then surviving Polish civilians, men, women and children, were imprisoned in sub-human conditions throughout the U.S.S.R., from the Caucasus to the White Sea, in steppe, tundra and taiga, from the Urals to the mountains of Russian Asia. ...

...At the same time approximately 220,000 Polish servicemen were imprisoned in Siberian concentration camps and committed to forced labour. ...

...Those who were incapable of work by their age, illness or infirmity, or infancy, were excluded from ration issue. Prisoners were expected to work notwithstanding climatic extremes, and were deployed as forestry or factory labour, road construction and mining. In the cottonlands of Kazkstan and

Kirghizia Polish labour, much of it by women and children, was used in the digging of irrigation canals. "...

Sikorski and the Polish Government in London

*(page 27) "... (before the war) Stalin had murdered 25 million of his own people, and imprisoned countless millions more. **

**The Russian historian and ex Red Army General Dmitri Volgokonov, using KGB archive, has calculated that 14 million people died in the camps during World War II - more than twice as many as died in the holocaust under Hitler. "...*

"... In London the British Government was at war with Germany; the Polish Government was at war with both Germany and the U.S.S.R. ... Sikorski... indicated to Churchill that he was prepared to come to some accommodation with Moscow with the aim of being allowed to form a Polish Army in the U.S.S.R., but certainly not at the expense of relinquishing Polish territory annexed by the Russians. ..."

Barbarossa, 22 June, 1941 (German attack on the Soviet Union).

(page 31) "Sikorski acted quickly. ... negotiations (which) concluded, on the 30th July, with the Polish-Soviet pact signed by Sikorski and the Soviet Ambassador Iwan Maisky, in the presence of Churchill and Eden. This treaty provided for the restoration of relationships, the creation of a Polish Army in the U.S.S.R., and a so-called 'amnesty' for all Polish citizens detained in Russia..."

(page 32) "... a Polish-Soviet Military Convention took place in Moscow and was concluded on 14th August..., (it) was restricted to a single matter: the creation of a Polish Army in the U.S.S.R. ..."

(page 33) "... On 4th August, General Wladyslaw Anders, ..., who had been imprisoned since September 1939, was released from the Lubianka to be notified of his appointment as Commander in Chief of the reformed Polish Army in the U.S.S.R., ..."

(page 34) "... At this stage it was calculated by Anders and his staff that about 15,000 officers and an unquantifiable number of N.C.O.'s and other ranks were unaccounted for."

(page 35) "... it was agreed that the assembly point for the new army would lie between the Volga and the Urals, with the main headquarters at Buzuluk, near Kuibyshev. A newly created 5th Division would be stationed at Tatischevo, and a 6th Division and Reserve Regiment at Totskoye. ..."



Polish troops in a camp, near Buzuluk, Winter 1941
© Imperial War Museum and British Library

"... The physical condition of these men was appalling. ... Typhus and dysentery were commonplace, and many deaths had occurred in transit from imprisonment to freedom. In Buzuluk the supply of food was so inadequate that the starvation rations were more meagre than in the labour camps. ..."

(page 36) "... As the winter of 1941 approached, the number of problems multiplied. The Soviet authorities failed to supply provisions as agreed, over half the personnel had no boots, and weapons have been supplied for only one division. ..."

"...By December 1941 the numbers of Polish servicemen who had succeeded in reporting for duty at the reception centers had reached 44,000, but ration issue by the Soviet General Staff was deliberately maintained at 26,000...."

*... (At a meeting with Stalin on 4th December) "...it was agreed (that):
... iii The army will be transferred to the southern part of the country
iv A few thousand Polish soldiers will be sent to Great Britain for special training..."*

From Yangi-Yul to the Caspian, 1942

(page 37) "The new headquarters of the Polish Army was in Yangi-Yul, near Tashkent, with widely separated units being based in Kirgisia, Kazakhstan and Tadzykistan. Evacuation of the army began immediately after Christmas, the first large group leaving Buzuluk on 15th January 1942."

"Between January to June 1942 the Polish Army continued to be plagued by typhus, ...with an increasing incidence of dysentery; soon afterwards malaria followed. ..."

(page 38) "The outcome was death on a vast scale. ..."

By mid-March the Army numbered 70,000 despite the transport difficulties and the intransigence of the Soviet General Staff which, again, had adjusted rations to only 40,000 this figure being further reduced to 26,000 on 16th March.

Significantly, camped along the soldiers for the first time were numbers of civilian refugees..."

(page 39) "...No assistance whatsoever was offered by the Soviet authorities and those Poles who were incapable either by age, infirmity or lack of dependants, to travel were condemned to a continuing captivity. ..."

(page 40) "...There was still no news of the missing officers and continuing official denials as to their existence. ..."

...To this was added reports of trainloads of thousands of released prisoners of war being diverted to the south 'to await the arrival of the main army'. They were sent by rail to Turkestan, and from there by boat along the Amu-Daria for forced labour. After the war it emerged that only a few of these men ever returned alive.

...

...Stalin (who) was forced to agree that he could no longer provide rations for the Polish Army above the scale of 30,000. On 18th March, ..., Stalin gave Anders permission to conduct a rapid evacuation to Persia via a reception depot at Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea, of about 40,000 evacuees. The convoys were to go by rail to Krasnovodsk, and from there by boat to Pahlevi. ..."



Polish Evacuees from Siberia, The Caspian crossing from Krasnovodsk to Pahlevi, 31st March 1942
Courtesy of the Polish Institute and Secretariat

"...Between 24 March and 4th April 1942 the Krasnovodsk depot received 33,039 military and 10,789 civilian evacuees, ..."

The survivors crossed the Caspian in batches in Soviet ships to Pahlevi between 26th March and 10th April.

A second evacuation took place to Krasnovodsk drawn from largely Uzbek and

Kirghiz territory in August 1942. The exodus was larger, consisting of 44,832 military personnel and 25,437 civilians, and placed in transit from Krasnovodsk to Pahlevi between 8th and 30th August. ..."

Exodus: Persia, India, Palestine and Africa

(pages 42-46, summary of dates, places and events)

- hospitals opened in Teheran, Pahlevi and Isfahan (with the assistance of the Red Cross and Polish-American Relief Organization

- five refugee camps opened in Teheran, Meshed and Achwaz, hostels for the elderly, an orphanage and a community center

- in May and June 1942 the more able-bodied men and women of military age were transferred to camps in Palestine to prepare for active service - those under age joining the "Junak" units preparing for service later

- on 3rd May at Quastina, Palestine, the newcomers were officially merged with the Carpathian Brigade - the new unit was designated 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division

- on 12th September General Sikorski named the army 'The Polish Army in the East' (A.P.W.)

- Commander in Chief - General Anders

- headquarters at Quizilh Ribat in Iraq

- the main base at Quassasin in Egypt (under the command of General Michal Karaszewicz-Tokarszewski

- on January 16, 1943 - in a Note, the Soviet Government informed the Polish Government in London that all Poles remaining in the Soviet Union and originating from the provinces under Soviet occupation would be considered Soviet subjects. (Such Poles were doomed to remain in Russia)

- on April 13 1943, the German radio broadcast a report that the corpses of thousands of Polish officers had been found buried in the Katyn forest.

- in a Note dated 25th April 1943, the Soviet Government brakes off the diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in response to the Polish Government's request that the International Red Cross verifies this information

- on 3rd July, 1943, General Sikorski is killed in an air crash off Gibraltar, after attending staff conferences at Kirkuk and Cairo

- about 35,000 civilian refugees and dependants are temporarily distributed among campsthroughout the British Empire:

- Persia - Teheran, Achwaz and Ispahan (mostly children)

- India - Chela, Balachedi, and Kolhapur; also a transit camp in Karachi; a settlement camp at Valivade near Goa

- East Africa - 22 settlements have been established in Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya and Rhodesia

The Polish Second Corps

(pages 46-48, summary of dates, places and events)

- on 22nd July 1943, the newly created Second Corps was assigned to the British Eight Army, with General Anders keeping overall command. The

main Polish force was moved from Iraq to Palestine, with its new headquarters at 'Kilo 89 Camp' near Gaza

- the transfer of Second Corps to Italy was completed between December 1943 and March 1944 via Qassissin, and from Alexandria to Taranto. The initial sector designated for the Poles was on the River Sangro, with headquarters at Vinchiaturo

- in May it was given a task of breaking the prolonged German defence of Monte Cassino (a key route to Rome). After a series of attacks, Monte Cassino was taken on 18th May - a turning point in the Italian campaign

- in July winning the battle of Ancona (thus securing the supply bridgehead)

- in August and September - breaking through the German 'Gothic Line' and advancing to the northern Appenines by October and November

- in November/December, at the Teheran Conference Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed with Stalin (without any Polish representation), to the existing annexation of the eastern half of Poland

- on 21st April, 1945 - liberating Bologna (one week before the final German capitulation in Italy)

Yalta: February 1945

(page 49) "In reality the post-war fate of Poland had been decided at Teheran, which militarily ensured that Poland would be liberated by the Red Army rather than by the western allies, and politically paving the way for the division of Europe into spheres of interest. ..."



"...The Conference, taking place between the 4th and 11th February 1945 occurred at a time of substantial Soviet advances into Poland and East Germany. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin now ratified the earlier Teheran accord and confirmed that the Curzon line, with some small adjustments, should be the new Polish-Soviet border. No agreements were reached about the exact territorial compensation which Poland was to receive at Germany's expense, but

Roosevelt and Churchill readily accepted Stalin's proposal that a new 'Provisional Government of National Unity', initially based at Lublin, now under Soviet control, be established..."

"...The Polish Government, despite its internal differences denounced the Yalta Agreement on 13th February 1945, describing it as the 'Fifth partition of Poland, now accomplished by her Allies'

The aftermath of Yalta

(page 51) "...The hopeless plight of most personnel of Second Corps who had no homes to return to fuelled strong resentments against the attitude of the British Government and the continued Soviet occupation of Poland,"

"...Some leftist sections of the British Press, sympathetic to the Soviet media, began to brand Anders and his Poles, together with the exiled Polish Government as 'fascists' and 'warmongers',

(page 52) "...during the course of the war and particularly after the events of 1943, as Stalin and Soviet Russia became stronger, the position of London Poles became weaker.

The final diplomatic blow came with the de-recognition of the Polish government in London by all the western allies on 5th July 1945, who on the same day, established diplomatic recognition of the Soviet sponsored Provisional Government of National Unity, ...".

"...The loyalty of the Polish Armed Forces to the continuing and now isolated exiled Polish Government, despite its derecognition, was an embarrassment to the British Government, which urged all Poles to go home. ...On 15th September 1945, a British Government circular to all Polish troops inviting them to volunteer for repatriation was issued,"

(page 53) "..., on 21st May (1946), at a meeting in London, (the new Prime Minister) Bevin told Anders of his ideas and outline plans to transport Polish troops to Britain (from Italy) and to create a Polish Resettlement Corps to help those who found it impossible to return to their homeland. ...

Movement from Italy started shortly after Bevin's confirmation of the arrangements to the Commons on 22nd May 1946, and about 19,000 men were brought in before the end of June.

By the end of the year and during the course of 1947 a total of 207,000 Polish servicemen were gathered in Great Britain, of which only 37,000 - 17.9% - decided to return to Poland.

...out of Anders' 80,000 evacuees from Russia only 310 volunteered to return to Poland, ... "

The Polish Resettlement Corps

(pages 54-57) ...There was unquestionably professional and occupational degradation, ..."

"...a total of 32,600 civilians, mostly families and other dependants of Second Corps, were brought to the United Kingdom between 1946 to 1949,...Nearly all these totals were women and children, with the high ratio of orphans.

(and other statistics)

Polonia Restituta?

(page 58) "...Forty years after these events, the historical commentator Leszek Kolakowski summarized what had happened:

"Let us remember that Poland was in no way represented at Yalta and the fate of millions was decided by three old men: a bloodthirsty tyrant; a terminally ill statesman who knew little about the issues and a realpolitiker of a declining empire".

"...From the first to the last (day of war), the Poles, numerically the fourth largest of the western allied forces, never stopped fighting. ..., for the great majority of the disillusioned fighting men and their dependants, there was no

recognizable country of their own left which they felt able to accept. Yet another Polish diaspora had begun... ."