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The value of bread in the German transit camps in Zamość in the light of memories, testimonies and accounts of oral histories of the former prisoners – Polish people displaced from Zamość region (1942-1943)

Annotation: This article outlines the value and significance of bread for the civilian agricultural population expelled from the Zamość Region by the Germans during the Second World War and then placed in a temporary camp in Zamość (UWZ-Lager Zamość). The feeling of hunger behind the barbed wire of the camps prevailed, often even over the fear. The food rations were considerably limited and insufficient. Pieces of brown bread, made with the worst quality flour, sometimes with the addition of sawdust (the so-called 'trociniak'), were given to prisoners every day for breakfast (with black coffee) as well as for dinner. During the expulsion, some people managed to grab bread or rusks, having prepared them previously before the expulsions, despite the overall ambush and the fast pace of the action. The only thing with higher value than bread in the camp was a person's life.

Keywords: expulsions, occupation, Zamość Region, Poland, concentration camp, World War II, Germans, Children, extermination, bread.

Wartość chleba w niemieckim obozie przejściowym w Zamościu w świetle wspomnień, zeznań i relacji historii mówionej byłych więźniów – Polaków wysiedlonych z Zamojszczyzny (1942-1943)

Streszczenie: W artykule ukazano wartość i znaczenie chleba dla cywilnej ludności rolniczej wysiedlonej z Zamojszczyzny przez Niemców w latach 1942-1943 i osadzonej w obozie przejściowym w Zamościu (UWZ-Lager Zamość). Za drutami tego obozu panował głód, często silniejszy od strachu. Racje żywnościowe w obozie były znacznie ograniczone i niewystarczające. Porcje chleba, czarnego, wypiekanego z najgorszego gatunku mąki, czasem z domieszką trocin (tzw. trociniak), otrzymywali więźniowie codziennie na śniadanie (i czarną kawę) oraz na kolację. Niektórzy podczas wysiedlenia, mimo zaskoczenia i szybkiego tempa akcji, zdążyli jednak zabrać ze sobą chleb lub suchary, przygotowywane w wielu domach jeszcze przed wysiedleniem. Chleb w obozie, obok życia, miał najwyższą wartość.

Słowa kluczowe: wysiedlenia, okupacja, Zamojszczyzna, Polska, obóz koncentracyjny, II wojna światowa, Niemcy, Dzieci Zamojszczyzny, eksterminacja, chleb.

Ценность хлеба в немецком транзитном лагере в Замость на основе воспоминаний, свидетельств и устных историй бывших заключенных - Поляков, переселенных из Замостского края (1942-1943 гг.)

Аннотация: В статье показано значение хлеба для гражданского населения, выселенного из замостского края немцами в 1942–1943 годах и заключенного в транзитный лагере в Замосте (UWZ-Lager Zamość). Голод был за проводами этого лагеря, часто сильнее, чем страх. Пища в лагере была значительно ограничена и недостаточна. Порции черного хлеба, испеченные из наихудшего вида муки, иногда смешанные с опилками (так называемыми опилками), ежедневно получали заключенных на завтрак (и черный кофе) и на ужин. Некоторым во время выселения, несмотря на удивление и быстрый темп действия, удалось взять хлеб или печенье, приготовленное во многих домах до выселения. Хлеб в лагере, рядом с жизнью, имел наибольшую ценность.

Ключевые слова: перемещение, оккупация, замож, польша, концлагерь, вторая мировая война, германия, дети замостского края, истребление, хлеб.

From the late November 1942 until mid-August 1943 (with periods of suspension) Germans would displace people from the Zamość region and pacify those lands¹. It was an attempt at implementing the “Generalplan Ost” and the colonisation of the Zamość region². In this area, the displacement concerned 110,000 Polish People (from 297 villages) including around 30,000 children (about 10,000 children lost their lives or went missing)³. Expulsions forced by the Germans were perpetrated brutally “with an animalistic wickedness and refined in a perverse way”⁴. It was usually a complete ambush: at dawn or early morning, they would cordon off the village, break into people’s houses, rouse inhabitants and then force them to a common gathering point. The hectic pace did not allow everyone to take even the most basic, everyday items. After the preliminary segregation, some would be left in the village as free labour for German colonisers who would confiscate those Polish farms even the same day. The rest of inhabitants would be taken by horse wagons or forced to move on foot (from villages near Zamość) to the transit camp in Zamość (UWZ-Lager-Zamość)⁵.

¹ This study was created as a part of the research project 2017/25/B/HS3/01085, funded by the National Science Centre in Cracow.

² On November 12th, 1942 H. Himmler issued a directive stating that the Zamość district was deemed the first German area of settlement of the General Government S. Datner, J. Gumkowski, K. Leszczyński, *Wysiedlenia w Zamojszczyźnie*, “Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce” Warsaw 1960, Vol. XIII, pp. 20-21 (doc. 4: Himmler’s directive from November 12th, 1942 regarding the first settlement area in the General Government).

³ T. Rawski, Z. Stąpor, J. Zamojski, *Wojna wyzwolenicza narodu polskiego w latach 1939-1945*, Warsaw 1966, T. 1, p. 342; C. Madajczyk, *Generalna Gubernia w planach hitlerowskich. Studia*, Warsaw 1961, p. 136; R. Hrabar, Z. Tokarz, J. E. Wilczur, *Czas niewoli, czas śmierci. Martyrologia dzieci polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej*, Warsaw 1979, p. 48.

⁴ *Niemiecki atak na dzieci*, “Polak” 1943, vol. 9, p. 2.

⁵ The transit camp in Zamość (UWZ- Lager Zamość) was a central transit camp for Polish people expelled from the Zamość region in 1942-1943. It functioned from 18th November 1942 to 18th January 1944 in Zamość, at Lubelska Street (corner of Okrzei Street) in a place previously used for USSR prisoners (Stalag 325). It consisted of around 16 wooden barracks (of different sizes), stables and outbuildings divided by barbed wire and all passages between them were closed in order to prevent prisoners from

In general, there is a very rich symbolic related to bread. In Polish and Slavic traditions, bread represented a symbol of nourishment, wealth and prosperity. The aim of this article is to present the atrocities perpetrated by the German occupant towards the Polish civilians displaced from the Zamość region through understanding the value of bread for the prisoners of the aforementioned camp under those extreme living conditions. The issues of the Zamość region expulsions and the fate of its inhabitants was addressed mostly in the 1960s and 1970s Polish historiography. Thus, it could not possibly account for the documentation stored in archives, museums and most of all the sources studied and shared by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) which were only made accessible in the later years. These are the oral history memories and accounts as well as testimonies heard by the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation⁶ which altogether represent the part of primary sources. These archive records are largely dispersed. The sources used in this article originate from the IPN archives in Warsaw and the District Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Lublin. They are testimonies shared by e.g. former prisoners of the transit camp in Zamość. It happens that the prisoners of that camp were also at some point prisoners of another such transit camp in Zwierzyniec (in the summer of 1943). As a supplement, there are also witnesses testimonials regarding the crimes committed by Germans in the Zamość area, stored in the State Archives in Zamość which represent the results of activities by the Zamość district Commission for the Prosecution of Hitler's Crimes in Poland (between 1965-1969). Moreover, there is also a collection of accounts and memoirs from the State Museum at Majdanek. It needs to be noted that memoirs, accounts, questionnaires forms and minutes have been gathered by this facility from nearly the beginning of its founding⁷. They are complemented by the accounts collected personally by the author of this article. Another very important source of information regarding the existence of the displaced people in the transit camp in Zamość are memories sent as part of the contest "And when they came to burn my house down..." (announced by the "Tygodnik Zamojski" magazine in 1982) stored in the State Archives in Zamość. Only a part of them were published in the "Tygodnik Zamojski" magazine in the 1980s. The goal of this article is to introduce those sources to the academic literature.

In a house that needed to be vacated right away, what would be left was a freshly dissolved or made bread – these were discernible signs of human existence found by the new German settlers. "The village was so poor, we didn't have two pennies to rub together" – as recalled by one of the Zamość region inhabitants – "Bread was worth as much as gold and when you made it, the whole household was celebrating"⁸. The smell

contacting each other. It is counted that 40,000 people went through that transit camp. See E. Dziadosz, J. Marszałek, *Więzienia i obozy w dystrykcie lubelskim w latach 1939-1944*, "Zeszyty Majdanek", Lublin 1969, vol. III, p. 98; W. Zyśko, *Hitlerowska Centrala Przesiedleńcza – Ekspozytura w Zamościu – i urzędy współdziałające w realizacji akcji wysiedleń i osadnictwa niemieckiego na Zamojszczyźnie (na podstawie zespołu akt Archiwum w Lublinie)*, "Archeion" 1979, vol. LXVIII, p. 106; M. Zawrotniak, *Zbrodnie niemieckie w Zamojszczyźnie od początków września 1939 r. do końca lipca 1944 r.*, Zamość 1946, p. 34.

⁶ Commission for the Prosecution of German Crimes in Poland/ Commission for the Prosecution of Hitler's Crimes in Poland 1945-1949. It was eventually transformed to a Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation.

⁷ M. Grudzińska, *Preface*, [in:] "Przewodnik po zbiorze relacji i pamiętników znajdujących się w zasobie Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", M. Grudzińska (Ed. & preface), Lublin 2011, p. 9.

⁸ I. Wlaziłowska, *I pokochałeś ziemię...*, "Tygodnik Zamojski" 1980, issue 46, p. 4.

of fresh bread in a family house just before the expulsion was a memory of Czesław Główka (at the time a 13-year-old boy) who came back home from camping. In fear of displacement, some decided to sleep outside the house – in nearby forests, ravines, swamps or even self-prepared shelters to avoid the expulsion. Czesław Główka and his family fled from their house three times. Regarding their last, nightfall journey to Łęgów: “For the last couple of days, mother was preparing to make some bread. She had a bit of flour. She ground some rye grains over the quern and on a Sunday morning, as she had expected it to be calm, she decided to light a fire in the oven and make bread”⁹. And this is exactly what happened; when Czesław came back home, bread was already rising in the oven: “In the room there was a beautiful smell of freshly made bread. I fell asleep straight away”¹⁰. Unfortunately, nobody expected that everyone in their village will be displaced that day: “Mother quickly packed us a loaf of fresh bread each to put into our small bundles and she packed two loaves into hers. In an instant we were ready to go, each of us carrying a bundle on our backs”¹¹. Before they were transported to the transit camp in Zamość, firstly they were placed in the transit camp in Zwierzyniec. This is where they happened to reunite with the father previously taken “behind the wire” from the village along with all other men between 16 and 60 years old. In the transit camp in Zwierzyniec, Czesław’s mother “(...) was bustling about to retrieve a piece of bread from the bundle when the father said: ‘Do not hustle, you could leave a bar of gold right here - nobody will take a second look, but for bread people are willing to start a fight and we’re with children’¹². Indeed, not only in that camp but also in the transit camp in Zamość to which the Germans transported this family (along with the others), bread had a heavy price.

In the first weeks of displacements in the Zamość region, the transit camp in Zamość was completely overcrowded¹³. From the very first weeks, the transit camp in Zamość was overpopulated. It was then, when bread became somewhat a new currency e.g. allowing for a better spot on a bunk bed in primitive barracks which would not have even standard amenities. The number of those bunk beds would be limited¹⁴, hence people would lay side by side on the bare ground, often even in muddles. As recounted by J.R. (at the time a child): “Through the middle of the barrack there was a path which, even in the lowest of temperatures, under the feet of unimaginable number of passers-by, became a muddy, putrid corridor. The walls sparkled with white frost flakes (...)”¹⁵.

⁹ C. Główka, *Fragment mojego życiorysu z lat 1939-1945*, [in:] “Nie było kiedy płakać. Losy rodzin polskich wysiedlonych z Zamojszczyzny 1942-1943”, preface & selection by B. Kozaczyńska (Ed.), Siedlce 2014, vol. II, p. 160.

¹⁰ *Ibidem* p. 161.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 163.

¹³ The camp could potentially fit 10,500 people and even though at first glance it seemed enormous, during the displacement periods it appeared that without this camp it would be impossible to segregate prisoners. From the beginning of displacements until March 31st, 1943 the average number of prisoners was around 2,000 to 2,500. There were times where this number would reach much higher. See: *Zamojszczyzna-Sonderlaboratorium SS. Zbiór dokumentów polskich i niemieckich z okresu okupacji hitlerowskiej*, C. Madajczyk (Ed.) Warsaw 1979, vol. 1, p. 260 (doc. 98: Sprawozdanie H. Krumeya z działalności zamojskiego oddziału Centrali Przesiedleńczej od początku akcji w Zamościu, od 27 XI do 31 XII 1942).

¹⁴ In some barracks there were no bunk beds.

¹⁵ District Archive of Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation. The

In the later parts of her testimony we could read that "From the moment our group of displaced people came to the barrack, there were so many people that there was not even where to sit on those bunk beds. Thus, for two days, while resting on the bundles, we had to sit on the ground of this muddy and busy pathway between the bunk beds. How happy we were when, on the third day, for a price of a few pieces of bread with butter we got three sitting spots on the planks of the bunk bed"¹⁶.

In the Zamość transit camp there was a horrible famine. The food rations given to prisoners were scarce. According to an account from one of the prisoners (an expelled Pole) who was working in the camp's supply warehouse, the daily ration was a 140g of bread and soup on a potato base (800g) to which a 30g of porridge oats or grits was added (per person)¹⁷. This produce was evidenced, soups were usually made based on swede (sometimes frostbitten) or meat from dead horses¹⁸. Sometimes, if lucky enough, pieces of potatoes could be found at the bottom of the pot. This soup called differently by former prisoners (e.g. "dishwater", "pseudo-soup" or "spit-make") constituted the base meal for all detained. Apart from that, with each breakfast and supper, prisoners were given a ration of bread and black, unsweetened coffee.

It was a brown bread made with the worst quality flower, usually with the addition of saw-dust (PL. trociny) which is why prisoners would call this bread 'trociniak'¹⁹. As stated by one of the witnesses, while eating this little piece of bread (meant for the whole day) there was a palatable abundance of sand grinding between the teeth²⁰. Everyday food rations in the camp were insufficient as confirmed by other witnesses. Some prisoners ate the bread very slowly, taking little bites of small breadcrumbs to make it last longer, as per Janina Zielińska: "We were always hungry – we'd eat our slices of bread that evening or at night, we could not have waited until dinner. Granny would give me her crust and taught me that I should keep it in my mouth longer to avoid feeling hungry, but I'd forget and swallow quickly"²¹. Another witness stated: "(...) every day in the camp we'd get a mix of barley, oats and rye. All ground together. The water

files on the transit camp for the displaced people from Zamość region in Zamość, Lubelska Street, evidence ID - sygn. Ds. 239/67, vol. 1, k.9 (taken from minutes of the witness hearing J. R., District Court in Zamość, Zamość, 30 XII 1965). Children under 14 years old would be placed under those inhumane conditions. They were cared for by the elderly, often infirm or sick. Sometimes, in cases of some children Germans would leave the mothers during the segregation process.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw, files on the Umwandererzentrale" camp in Zamość, evidence ID - sygn. GK 175/217, k. 5 (A. S., "UWZ Lager" w Zamościu).

¹⁸ Soups in the camp were sometimes also cooked on cow's heads, previously stripped from meat. One witness recalls that in times where the number of prisoners was closer to 3,000 or 4,000 people, he would bring (as a cart driver) three to five such heads. See: *Wysiedlanie ludności polskiej w tzw. Kraju Warty i na Zamojszczyźnie oraz popełnione przy tym zbrodnie*, W. Szulc (Ed.), [in:] "Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce" vol. XXI, Warsaw 1970, p. 292 (Witness hearing of Alfreda Śwista, Lublin, 16 IX 1967).

¹⁹ W. and J. Węclawik, *Wysiedlili nas ze Skierbieszowa*, [in:] "Byliśmy w transportach Dzieci Zamojszczyzny", B. Kozaczyńska (Ed), Warsaw 2017, p. 61; A. Kliszczyńska, *Nadzieja umiera ostatnia*, [in:] ibidem, p. 246; H. Kajtel, *Pacyfikacja wsi Psary*, [in:] Idem, "Hitlerowski obóz przesiedleńczy w Zamościu. UWZ Lager Zamość", Bilgoraj 2003, p. 66.

²⁰ M. Magdziak, *Dziecko Zamojszczyzny*, Łódź 2015, p. 29.

²¹ J. Zielińska, *Cztery siostry. Echa najdalszych wspomnień*, [in:] "Nie było kiedy płakać...", Siedlce 2014, vol. I, p. 55.

was boiled with vinegar. Then they'd add that mix to the water and give people to eat. We'd also get a slice of bread and this was meant to last all day. Mother always told us not to swallow but slowly suck in"²². During the periods of intensive expulsions, as a consequence of camp overcrowding, not all prisoners would receive their food rations (there was simply not enough to go around).

In the first days of detention "behind the wire" in Zamość, the only supplements to the scarce food rations were all the items previously taken from home during the expulsion (although it was not always possible) due to the ambush and hectic pace which was highlighted. It was usually bread (in various amounts), flour, sugar, beans etc. Some would take rusks with them, as recalled by Zygmunt Węclawik (at the time a 9-year-old): "For supper again unsweetened coffee and a microscopic piece of bread. (...) my parents were very lucky. A whole box of rusks. They didn't confiscate it. We could even help our neighbours"²³. In the autumn of 1942, in the Zamość region, many households started hoarding food supplies, making bread and rusks, melting lard into containers etc. – all in the fear of displacement. Whatever could be taken, people attempted to bring with them. However, some of the produce and sometimes even whole bundles were confiscated by Germans at the gates of the camp. There were no food items allowed into camp²⁴.

The staff of the camp was very strict about any attempts to beat the hunger, such as beating women, even senseless, as a punishment for preparing meals on the barracks' stoves. Mothers tried to make warm food for their children (e.g. unleavened pancakes) using what they had – either taken from home or obtained from fellow prisoners²⁵. Severe punishments, and even death would be the consequence of throwing over food items through the wired fence. Polish people, living in Zamość, relatives or friends of the prisoners would choose that way to help them (illegally) while risking their lives. In the beginning of the Zamość transit camp's activity, Germans would not pass on the care packages even though their families, relatives or friends would e.g. bring them directly to the camp. Germans would use the bread from those packages to feed the

²² *Zabrali nam dzieciństwo. Wspomnienia wojenne mieszkańców podbiłgorajskich wsi*, preface and selection by D. Róg (Ed.), Biłgoraj 2015, p. 27 (memories of K. Kozioł, Wola Mała).

²³ *Zamojszczyzna w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej (relacje wysiedlonych i partyzantów)*, preface by A. Glińska (Ed.), Warsaw 1968, p. 81 (the account of a medical doctor Zygmunt Węclawik about expelling people from Skierbieszów village).

²⁴ During the expulsion each person could possibly take with them, as defined in the directive: "(...) depending on capacity: a) 8 days' worth of food, b) as many warm and work clothing items etc. as possible, c) each person - for themselves only – a woollen blanket, a duvet etc. however a feather quilt only for small children under the age of 6 and the elder, infirm and sick people, d) tableware, IDs and certificates for all family members etc." Hand luggage could not exceed 30kg. See: *Zamojszczyzna-Sonderlaboratorium SS...*, p. 180 (doc. 58: Wytyczne w sprawie wysiedlenia polskich właścicieli gospodarstw, opracowane przez zamojską filię Centrali Przesiedleńczej). It was forbidden to kill anything other than swine, poultry and taking flour or grains in bags. *Wysiedlanie ludności polskiej w tzw. Kraju Warty i na Zamojszczyźnie oraz popełnione przy tym zbrodnie*, W. Szulc (Ed.), [in:] "Biuletyn Głównej Komisji...", pp. 236-237 (doc. 55, rozkaz operacyjny nr 18 z 14 grudnia 1942 r. w Zamościu, dotyczący wysiedlenia trzech wsi w dniu 16 grudnia).

²⁵ State Archives in Zamość (hereafter APZ), Provincial Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Lublin (hereafter OKBZHwL), Zamość branch, sygn. 7, k. 83 (Witness hearing minutes of the S.N. witness, Zamość, 11 IX 1969); *Zamojszczyzna w okresie okupacji...*, 81-82; L. Pilewicz, *Moje wojenne dzieciństwo...*, [in:] "Byliśmy w transportach...", pp. 88-89.

horses (within the camp)²⁶. Packages or loose food items would be thrown over to the camp site – they were usually apples, onions, pancakes, bread loaves and even milk. Many prisoners recall that fact, among which Lucyna Pilewicz: “During all this time, kind people of Zamość and areas nearby would throw the food over to us. Our uncle would come twice a week to bring some bread and milk in army canteens. Mother used to give us warm milk, she would drink some herself because she was breastfeeding the youngest sister. It was very difficult and highly dangerous to throw anything over the fence. The barracks were secured by two rows of barbed wire as tall as a house and a brick wall patrolled regularly by German guards. People who would throw the food had to be strong to make sure it will go all the way through all these fences”²⁷. Turret guards would open fire towards everyone “hanging around” the camp fence and not all of them were warning shots. As Zygmunt Węclawik (a 9-year-old at the time): “They came from the city. Relatives from the villages not affected by the expulsion. By coming closer to the wires, they would risk their lives. They would bring bread, they would throw it. They chose spots the least visible from the turret. Firstly, by the number 10, and then by the number 9. If the guard saw that, he’d open fire. Sometimes just to scare off but sometimes he would target the people. You had to be careful”²⁸. Another witness recalls a mother coming up to the wired fence: “(...) she managed a couple of times to catch some bread in her apron, and one time even a cube of butter”²⁹. A farmer from Niedzieliska-Przymiarki village near Zamość named Wawrzyszko suffered a terrible tragedy after he was caught trying to throw bread over the fence for his wife and six daughters detained in the camp. As a punishment, he was placed inside the camp and then moved to KL Auschwitz from where he would never come back³⁰. There were more such cases. It would occasionally happen that for a price of a bottle of vodka given to the guards, packages could be safely thrown³¹.

In the beginning of 1943, the camp authorities decided to approve (out of necessity) providing care packages to the camp. Most likely, it had become too hard for them stop throwing the food over the fence from happening³². The care packages were anxiously awaited by the prisoners as they allowed to satisfy the hunger. The package usually consisted of bread and other items which were hidden inside it (instead of the soft inner crumb). Sometimes even notes. As recalled by Medard S. (former prisoner) in one of the loaves of bread, in a care package sent to the camp by his family, he found a note with a very important news he had been waiting for a long time (he had been counting on his family to intervene and the release from the camp)³³. Apparently, the

²⁶ J. Zielińska, op. cit., p. 56.

²⁷ L. Pilewicz, *Moje wojenne dzieciństwo...*, s. 88.

²⁸ *Zamojszczyzna w okresie okupacji...*, pp. 84-84.

²⁹ M. Zubala, *Byłem Dzieckiem Zamojszczyzny*, Warsaw 2009, s. 12.

³⁰ J. Zielińska, G. Motyka, *Gehenna Dzieci Zamojszczyzny*, [in:] “My, dzieci z łagrów” B. Krzywobłocka (Ed.), Warsaw 1998, p. 97; Interview with Janina Zielińska (“A child of the Zamość region”) conducted by the author December 23rd, 2018.

³¹ L. Pilewicz, *Moje wojenne dzieciństwo...*, p. 88; APZ, “Tygodnik Zamojskie” contest “Kiedy przyszli podpalić dom...”, 1982, item 4, k. 148 (entry number 62: M. Surmacz, *Wspomnienia z akcji pacyfikacyjnej osady Krasnobród oraz pobytu w U.W.Z. Lager w Zamościu*, typescript., b.d.).

³² Institute of National Remembrance, Files related to the “Umwandererzentralle” camp in Zamość, evidence ID - sygn. GK 175/217, k. 5 (A. S., “UWZ Lager” w Zamościu).

³³ APZ, “Tygodnik Zamojski” contest “Kiedy przyszli podpalić dom...”, 1982, item 4, k. 146 (entry

Germans did not find the note while checking the package. Usually, during package checks Germans were diligent enough to slice the bread loaves and confiscated whatever was inside such as butter, cheese, honey, eggs or meat³⁴.

The only allowed items were bread, onions or garlic which was, as recalled by Jadwiga M. (at the time only a child) a prisoner's "fondest dream". She says: "in the package there was a loaf of farmhouse bread and a couple garlic bulbs. During our detention we received two such packages"³⁵. Another prisoner recalls: "(...) we received a package very unexpectedly and we stopped being hungry. The number one problem in the camp finally disappeared. We won a fight against death which was to retreat"³⁶. According to one of the nuns detained in the camp prisoners were on one side against the starvation, "(...) each piece of bread from the outside would be shared, it allowed many to survive in the camp"³⁷.

Due to starvation, exhaustion and diseases, including contagious infections, prisoners died in masses. The mortality rate was especially high among children and elders. Every day around 10 to 12 children would die, and during epidemics of infections – even 20 (or more)³⁸.

There were also some cases of swelling due to malnutrition, especially in children. Mothers which had been allowed to stay with some of the children would deny themselves bread, keeping it for emergencies (the so-called 'emergency supplies') to be able to give to a sick child. An uneaten piece of bread or even just breadcrumbs were hidden away in the most ingenious places from being stolen by fellow sufferers. Unfortunately, thefts would occur. There were even cases where the 'emergency supplies' would be stolen³⁹.

From the late June 1943 after resuming the displacements by the Germans (operation "Werwolf"), the transit camp in Zamość would overcrowd in a blink. On July 5th, 1943 the prisoners count amounted to 12,079 people⁴⁰ (e.g. at one point, barrack number 16 would hold 1,300 people)⁴¹. Forcing so many prisoners together most likely led to some people not receiving their daily food ration⁴².

People displaced transferred to the camp sometimes would only stay just for a couple of days while not receiving food at all (they usually would have some food

number 62: M. Surmacz, *Wspomnienia z akcji pacyfikacyjnej...*.

³⁴ K. Blicharz, *Wspomnienia z pobytu w obozie przesiedleńczym w Zamościu*, [in:] H. Kajtel, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

³⁵ J. M., *Nie wierzyliśmy we własne szczęście...*, [in:] "Nie było kiedy płakać...", Siedlce 2014, vol. I, pp. 93-94.

³⁶ K. Blicharz, op. cit., p. 85.

³⁷ APZ, OKBZHwL, sygn. 7, k. 40 (Witness hearing minutes of witness F. B., Zamość, 6 V 1969).

³⁸ *Wysiedlanie ludności polskiej...*, p. 292. The witness was a cart driver for the camp and one of his tasks was removing dead bodies from the camp.

³⁹ J. Zając, *Babcie śpiewały "Serdeczna Matko"*, [in:] "Byliśmy w transportach...", pp. 256-257.

⁴⁰ *Wysiedlanie ludności polskiej...*, p. 230 (doc. 50: Sprawozdanie końcowe z pracy Centrali Przesiedleńczej w Kraju Warty i w Generalnej Guberni w roku 1943, Łódź 31 XII 1943 r.).

⁴¹ APZ, "Tygodnika Zamojski" Contest "Kiedy przyszli podpalić dom...", 1982, poz. 4, k. 135 (entry number 62: M. Surmacz, *Wspomnienia z akcji pacyfikacyjnej...*).

⁴² According to a testimony of M.C. there was only enough soup for as many as 1000 prisoners while their actual number would amount (periodically) even to 16,000 (he was detained in the camp since January 13th, 1943 until January 18th, 1944). APZ, OKBZHwL, sygn. 4, k. 180 (Witness hearing minutes of witness M. C., Zamość, 16 X 1967 r.).

supplies taken with them during the displacement). Throughout this time, illegal trade of different items prospered. Products such as bread, cigarettes, tobacco, and matches or even alcohol could be bought at steep prices "relative to the risk"⁴³. As mentioned by one of the witnesses, bread and all other items were 20 times more expensive than normally. Despite that, there was no shortage of consumers⁴⁴. Illegal barter, conducted even by Germans themselves, was also highly sought-after. Bread and cigarettes could be exchanged for better clothes, golden rings or tooth fillings (golden teeth crowns taken off by the prisoners)⁴⁵.

Bread was an item of a tremendous value and undeniably, it saved lives not only in the Zamość transit camp but also in other camps where Polish people were displaced from the Zamość region, e.g. at Majdanek (KL Lublin). Many former prisoners of Majdanek camp e.g. Katarzyna Matraszek who had been through the ordeal of the transit camps in Zamość and Zwierzyniec. She remembered an especially painful memory related to bread and the period of detention at Majdanek: "I would always be wandering hungry around the camp and at one moment I found myself face to face with a little girl (a daughter of a guard) who happened to be eating bread with marmalade. We stared at each other angrily and suddenly I grabbed her piece of bread and started to run. The girl started to scream to which her father came out of the barrack, wearing a shirt with a pair of braces. He caught up with me and kicked me so hard I bounced like a ball and landed directly in the sewage pit. The other prisoners fished me out with the piece of bread in my hand"⁴⁶. And yet her story could have ended much more tragically.

Many subsequent archival sources and new accounts resurfacing confirm and accentuate the suffering of people of the Zamość region under German occupation. The transit camp in Zamość had become in fact a place for an indirect, mass extermination of displaced and detained Poles from the Zamość region between 1942 and 1943⁴⁷. Inhumane conditions under which both adults and children were forced to survive led to impoverishment and malnourishment followed by a slow, painful death – from starvation and exhaustion. The tragedy of prisoners was fuelled by constant degrading and insults of the camp staff, contagious diseases, filth, vermin infestations as well as shortages of water, medicine and medical care etc. Bread and all other items were rationed daily in amounts insufficient for survival. It could be concluded that bread obtained legally (in approved care packages) and illegally (thrown over the fence or as a result of an exchange) had remarkable value – as a supplement to the scarce daily rations, although even that was not always available to all prisoners. For some, bread would be a life-saver, for the others it might have been the cause of their demise. There were known

⁴³ APZ, "Tygodnik Zamojski" Contest "Kiedy przyszli podpalić dom...", 1982, poz. 4, k. 137 (entry number 62: M. Surmacz, *Wspomnienia z akcji pacyfikacyjnej...*).

⁴⁴ The camp suppliers would be the "seasoned" prisoners (i.e. the ones detained since February 1943).

⁴⁵ State National Museum at Majdanek. Collection of accounts and memories, sygn. VII/O-79, k. 18 (M. Bronikowski, *Początki zagłady biologicznej*, typescripts., Warsaw, b. d.).

⁴⁶ K. Matraszek, *Jestem Dzieckiem Zamojszczyzny*, [in:] "Nie było kiedy płakać...", Siedlce 2014, vol. II, p. 195.

⁴⁷ As per the resolution of the Supreme Court in Warsaw from 1982, the transit camp in Zamość was deemed equal to concentration camps for children until 14 years of age. Supreme Court Law in Warsaw (The chamber of Labour and Social Insurance), 4 XI 1982 r. (sygn. akt III-UZP-5/8).

cases of people getting shot trying to throw food packages over the fence or arrested and transported further to KL Auschwitz. The prominence of bread in the transit camp in Zamość was recalled by many former prisoners after six or even seven decades after the fact. In 2007, during an encounter with one of them, Józef Węclawik who was displaced from Skierbieszów (Zamość district), who is one of the “Children of the Zamość region”⁴⁸, told me that he always has to carry with him at least a crust of bread...

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