I

"We Were Seized by Utter Despair"

From Invasion to Exile

Like most civilians, Maria Wojnilowiczówna, a high school student from a village near Baranowicze in the Nowogród province of Poland, dismissed the talk of war that began in the spring of 1939. Poland was strong, she believed, and in the event of war it would "show" the Germans. Wojnilowiczówna, along with many other Poles, fondly recalls the summer of 1939 as a beautiful and happy time. Even her father's mobilization in August was a sanguine event. "I myself don't know what kind of impression the knowledge of war made on me. War! War! What does it look like?" she reminisces. "What will it bring?" For those of the older generations who had lived through World War I and the subsequent border wars, the idea of war was more concrete and frightening, and women agonized over what might lay in store for the men in their lives. "I wondered why the women at the station who had come to see their husbands off so frightfully despaired," admits Wojnilowiczówna. "Why cry? Was it possible that every one had to perish and not return?" In the first days of September 1939, she was far removed from the war. "At home it was peaceful and quiet," she notes. "Several times I thought to myself: this is supposed to be war? And I couldn't believe in it, I could not imagine, that far away in the west a dogged struggle seethed, that people were shedding blood and dying an honorable death."[1]

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The separation of the battle front and the home was not to last long; Wojnilowiczówna and millions of her fellow citizens—civilian as well as military—were soon engulfed by the Second World War in a way none of them had foreseen or could have imagined possible. As the German army, which had invaded on 1 September without having declared war, advanced eastward, villages and towns that lay in its path endured bombings and floods of refugees fleeing from the Nazis. Overwhelmed by a superior foe, the Polish government, army detachments, and the high command fell back to the southeastern regions of Poland, from which they gradually withdrew to Romania.[2] Reeling from the German offensive, Poles in the east were surprised by the arrival of Soviet tanks and troop columns on 17 September. As the USSR had not declared war, many Poles initially assumed that the Red Army had come to help the Poles fight against the Nazis. The Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty of 1932 had been renewed in March 1934 for ten years, a fact lending credence to this interpretation. In some places, Soviet soldiers themselves encouraged this idea by announcing such assistance as their purpose, sometimes even waving white flags. Furthermore, the Polish high command, also uncertain about Soviet intentions, ordered Polish troops not to fight the Red Army unless it attacked or attempted to disarm them.[3]

What none of the Poles knew was that the Nazi-Soviet Pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on 23 August 1939, included secret protocols to divide the Polish state between the two powers. This aspect of the treaty only became known in the West in 1945, at war's end; the Soviet government denied its existence until 1989.[4] The secret protocols spelled Poland's doom: "In the case of a territorial and political transformation of the territories belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of interest of Germany and the USSR will be delimited approximately along the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula and San."[5] The Soviet government considered that, in light of the German invasion and the flight of the Polish government, the Polish state ceased to exist. At 3 AM on 17 September, Vladimir Potemkin, deputy people's commissar for foreign affairs of the USSR, delivered a note to this effect to the Polish ambassador in Moscow, Wacław Grzybowski. The note further announced the nullification of all previous agreements between the Soviet and Polish governments. Two hours later, the Red Army crossed into Polish territory.[6]

The civilians realized quickly that the Soviets had not arrived in a

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friendly capacity. Poles reacted with shock and despair. Many women found the gravity of the situation reflected in the effect the news had on their fathers and husbands coming back from the German front. Maria Wojnilowiczówna watched her father return after the defense against the Nazis collapsed. "His eyes burned hotly, and it seemed that two tears shone on his cheeks," she recalls. "He did not greet us. He stood for a moment, and from faltering lips fell only one word, full of tragedy and threat: 'Bolsheviks.' I understood everything." A woman from Łomża describes a similar moment: "On the morning of 2 October I saw my father crying for the first time in my life. He came from town and said, 'Children, we are finished.' The Bolsheviks were in town."[7] To women unaccustomed to male tears, this sight was extremely disturbing, representing a break in the male protection and control that they had come to expect—just one rupture of the normal order, promising more to come.

By 1 October, virtually all armed resistance had been defeated; Warsaw surrendered to the Germans; Wilno, Grodno, and Lwów fell to the Soviets. Confident of their conquests, the invading powers had negotiated a new pact on 28 September, the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty, which adjusted and sanctioned the new border between Germany and the USSR, effectively removing Poland from the map of Europe. In an oft-quoted speech at a session of the Supreme Soviet on 31 October, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Viacheslav Molotov, pronounced, "But a brief blow by the German army, and then the Red Army, turned out to be enough to reduce the deformed offspring of the Treaty of Versailles, which had been living off the oppression of non-Polish nationalities, to nothing."[8] The Soviet Union thus acquired 52 percent of the Polish state, along with 13.5 million of its inhabitants.

Soviet representatives moved quickly to establish their authority. They took approximately 200,000 prisoners of war, interning them in camps in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, subsequently transporting some to the USSR.[9] On 22 October, after several weeks of propagandizing, cajoling, and threatening, Soviet authorities held compulsory and predetermined elections throughout the territories of eastern Poland. These elections sanctioned delegates to national assemblies in what were now called Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine. Several days later, these assemblies met and voted to request incorporation into the USSR, which the Supreme Soviet in Moscow quickly granted.

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With the same speed and determination with which they accomplished the submission and incorporation of eastern Poland, the new rulers set out to Sovietize these lands. Large-scale arrests began soon after the invasion, robbing the population of its national and local leaders in the military, political, economic, religious, and cultural spheres. The initial targets were Polish army officers and reservists, government officials, police officers, political activists, landowners, businessmen, administrative elites, and the clergy. Village committees and local militias, formed under Soviet guidance, overturned previously established lines of authority and often carried out acts of revenge for past grievances. When the ruble replaced the *złoty* as legal tender, prewar savings were wiped out and businesses devastated. The economy was further disrupted as land and personal property were confiscated, redistributed, and, in the case of factories and goods, shipped eastward into Soviet Russia. In the spring of 1940, a campaign to force the population to renounce Polish citizenship and accept Soviet passports began; the occupiers made compliance imperative by attaching the privilege of a job or housing to acceptance or threatening arrest or deportation in the event of refusal.[10]

The new regime went beyond reorganizing the military, central and local governments, and the economy. It touched civilians deep in their homes, disrupting families and altering personal relationships. Even one's bed at night was no longer a private and secure space. Just as it did in the USSR, the NKVD conducted most of its business with Polish citizens during the night. "No one could ever be sure that he would sleep through a peaceful night," recalls Jadwiga Niemiec.[11] Security officers routinely barged in on sleeping families in the dead of night, ostensibly to check documents or search for weapons. As part of this procedure, they would often shine flashlights into the eyes of sleeping inhabitants, "as if to drive home the point that they could enter everywhere and could always do what they pleased."[12] And indeed they did. During their searches, Soviet security agents ransacked people's homes, confiscating or destroying what they considered desirable for themselves or subversive to the government. Private property seemingly ceased to exist.

Soviet officers and officials, and later their families, took up residence in the homes of Polish citizens. With little notice, the latter were forced to confine themselves to one room within their own houses and apartments. They watched the newcomers appropriate whatever they desired, including

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food, livestock, and firewood.[13] In many cases, the occupiers soon threw the Poles out of their homes altogether, requisitioning Polish domiciles for their own use.[14] Evicted families had to seek refuge in the already crowded homes of relatives and acquaintances.

Little of daily life remained as it had been previously. Many men never returned home after the organized armed resistance ceased because they either died fighting or were taken prisoner. Some men, particularly those with officer's rank, hid in the woods to avoid certain arrest should they arrive at their homes. Many women write of the terror of waiting for news of fathers and husbands and sons who had gone off to fight. Others recall furtive trips to the woods to see a loved one, to bring him food and clothing. Regina Ostaszkiewicz remembers how her father, the local post office director, would leave his hiding place to see his children briefly, to kiss them. On one such visit the Bolsheviks arrested him.[15]

Many night visits by the NKVD in the early months of the occupation resulted in the arrest of the men of the household. Frequently, security agents lied about the purpose of their visit, saying they were merely taking the relative for questioning; he would return the next day, they promised. Barbara Sokolowska, who lived in Lwów, notes, "The 9th of December is a memorable day for me." On that day the NKVD arrested her father, an army reserve officer; they told her he was only going for a brief interrogation, but he never returned. "Even now, three years later," she adds, "the memory of that nightmarish night makes me shiver and my hatred for the enemy grows." By the end of the year, writes Zofia Sicińska, "there was not a home in town in which they were not crying for someone, from which they had not taken the father, brother, or husband."[16]

Besides the toll of mass arrests, some families were separated simply by chance. With no forewarning that Poland was about to be split within, individuals who happened to be located—on a vacation, a business trip, or even at school—in the western half of Poland, which quickly fell to the Germans, were suddenly severed from their homes and relatives in the eastern part, now under Soviet occupation.[17] The same held true in the reverse direction. A large number of people arrested for so-called border infractions were caught trying to cross from one side of Poland to the other.

As a result of the severe and sudden disruption of families and social networks, females unexpectedly became the sole providers for themselves and their families. In many cases the women had never worked outside the

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home. They now spent their time scrounging for jobs and adapting their skills to the new economic conditions. One popular source of income in urban areas was from sewing clothing, often for Soviet officers and their families; other women survived by giving Russian lessons to Poles trying to find a place for themselves under the new regime. Frequently, women could not earn enough to provide food, shelter, and heat for their families, so they began selling their possessions to get by—a preview of their future existence in the USSR.[18]

Another new feature of life in eastern Poland was the interminable and ubiquitous lines, which appeared as a shocking marker of the changed conditions. People queued for everything.[19] Buying bread, in particular, required long waits each day. In addition to trying to purchase necessary goods, women now stood in lines to gather information about the whereabouts and health of arrested husbands and fathers. Families generally received no notice of the location of arrested members; many women, therefore, devoted large amounts of time and energy simply trying to find this out. If they did learn something, they stood in lines outside the prisons day after day, hoping that the guards would permit them to pass a parcel of food or clothing to imprisoned loved ones. Many women recall the desperate and humiliating ordeal of waiting outside these prisons, subjected to the abuse of guards, the ill humor of wardens, and the cold indifference of the weather. Teodozia Gołowczyńska writes that after the arrest of her husband, she divided her time between the school, where she worked, and prison lines, in which she waited in hope of passing food and underwear to her husband. Another woman went every day, from December through March, to try to deliver a package to her husband in a prison in Brześć-nad-Bugiem; her attempts ended with her deportation in April.[20]

Other women describe painful instances of walking down a street or standing in a line and suddenly catching a glimpse of a family member in a convoy of prisoners under guard and dog escort. The convicts were forbidden to speak and generally prohibited from even raising their heads. Relatives had to watch them being led away, not knowing where they were being taken. "Thus we saw Papa for the last time," recalls one young woman, "and we still don't know if we will see him again, if he survived it all, if they tortured him."[21]

By late 1939, terror, fear, and secrecy pervaded the atmosphere in eastern Poland. In the initial days after the entry of the Red Army, the invaders

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inflamed tensions among Ukrainians, Belorussians, and ethnic Poles, which often resulted in bloody conflicts and the seizure of property. Individuals were prompted to denounce neighbors and coworkers. Many people lost their jobs, others had to accommodate to the new conditions to keep their positions by learning the Ukrainian, Belorussian, or Russian languages. Teachers, in particular, had to make significant adjustments in their work, including removing all mention of God or Poland from their lessons.[22] The Soviet regime disbanded social, charitable, and cultural organizations; it viewed even scout leaders as politically dangerous and, therefore, targets for arrest. Informal groups disintegrated, relationships between neighbors and friends became constrained.

After the new year began, Soviet officials commenced procedures for a more chilling and catastrophic upheaval of civilian life—mass deportations to the interior of the USSR. Many Poles grew suspicious at the sight of increasing numbers of trains at the railway stations in the early months of 1940. Initially, at least, no one expected what was to subsequently transpire: the forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands, perhaps even one million, Polish citizens.

Until its final days, the Soviet government neither publicized data on the forced deportations nor allowed researchers access to the relevant archives; therefore, all calculations came from the wartime Polish government and the underground and, subsequently, émigré historians.[23] Their estimations stemmed largely from material gathered and analyzed by the Polish Army in the East, which was formed in the USSR in 1941. In addition to the testimonies of Polish citizens released from Soviet detention, the army used information collected by the Polish Embassy and social welfare delegates who provided relief to the amnestied Poles from February 1942 until January 1943. These estimates of the total number of Polish citizens forcibly transported from eastern Poland to the interior of the USSR range from 1 to 2 million (see table 1.1).[24] The total includes four categories of people.[25] The first and largest is that of civilian deportees, a group thought to include 980,000 to 1,080,000 individuals. The second category consists of Polish citizens arrested and imprisoned, numbering approximately 250,000. Additionally, between 180,000 and 240,000 men were taken as prisoners of war after the September 1939 campaign. Men forced into the Red Army and work battalions, numbering from 200,000 to 250,000, compose the final category. In the ensuing decades, historians tended to work from these wartime data,

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Table 1.1

Early estimates of the total number of Polish citizens forcibly removed from Poland to the USSR, 1939–1941

Source	*Total*	*Deported*	*Arrested*	*Mobilized to Red Army*	*P.O.W.*
Polish Embassy 1943	1,442,000	1,050,000	—	200,000	192,000
Polish Army 1944	1,692,000	990,000	250,000	210,000	242,000
Ministry of Justice 1949	1,660,000	980,000	250,000	250,000	180,000

Sources: Polish Government in London, *Polish-Soviet Relations: 1918–1943. Official Documents. Confidential.* (Washington, D.C.: 1943), 17–21; AC, box 68, no. 62c, Bohdan Podoski, "Polskie Wschodnie w 1939–1940," 29; Bronisław Kuśnierz, *Stalin and the Poles. An Indictment of the Soviet Leaders* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1949), 80.

arriving at estimates of 1.6 to 1.8 million as the total number of individuals transported against their will from Polish territory into the USSR.[26]

The collapse of the Communist regimes in Poland and the USSR opened new avenues of investigation and discussion, particularly into the so-called blank spots in Polish-Soviet relations. The opening of some Soviet archives has produced new research and dramatically revised—and contested—estimates of the number of deportees. Using documents of the NKVD's convoy troops, those responsible for transporting the individuals from Poland, and of the department charged with overseeing their receipt and placement, Aleksander Gurjanow concludes that the number of deportees reached only 315,000.[27] Similarly basing his work on post-Soviet archives, Albin Głowacki asserts that "the mass deportations of the years 1940–41 encompassed approximately 325,000 Polish citizens."[28] The similarity between these researchers' calculations and the figure given to the Polish ambassador by Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs Andrei Vyshinsky in 1941, has led several scholars to revise their assessments to a minimum of 320,000 deportees and a maximum of 400,000.[29] These figures amount to approximately one-third of the long-accepted total.

The revised data have prompted considerable debate among historians. Some question the reliability of the NKVD statistics and point out that since all figures come from the same basic source—the NKVD—the con-

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currence of documents means little.[30] Given the likelihood of discrepancies in interpreting and executing directives from the center at the local level, it may be that the NKVD documents simply do not tell the whole story.[31] While deportations were carried out methodically and from precise instructions, the testimonies of eyewitnesses confirm an inevitable level of chaos and arbitrariness not accounted for in the central documents.[32] No information exists in the NKVD documents thus far examined either on deaths or escapes from the transports, throwing into question the reliability of statistics from authorities at the receiving end of the journeys.[33] Some NKVD documents, including ones signed by its head, Lavrenti Beria, present different figures, leading one researcher to conclude that "the NKVD registers were not at all precise or unambiguous, so the information in them cannot finally solve the question of the number of deportees."[34]

A critical problem for interpreting Soviet statistics centers on the national minorities: since the regime sought to deny Polish citizenship to Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews taken from the occupied territory, it is unclear precisely who is included in the Soviet figures.[35] One final reason the conclusions of Gurjanow and Głowacki have met with resistance is that complete access has not yet been given to all Soviet archives.[36] Using statistics from later repatriations and demographic studies, some scholars continue to assert that the total number of deportees reached nearly one million.[37] While the early estimates, based on imprecise information, may well be inflated, work on the Soviet documents remains in its early stages, so a complete revision of the data is not yet possible. In the ensuing discussion, both minimum and maximum numbers of deportees will be provided, with the assumption that the real figure lies somewhere in between.

Two categories of individuals taken eastward, prisoners of war and conscripts to the Red Army, were exclusively male.[38] They were military men of all ranks and men of active service age. This book focuses solely on the other two categories: those transported to the USSR as deportees or under arrest —largely a civilian population, including individuals of both sexes. According to early estimates, 10 percent of Polish citizens arrested and sent to Soviet prisons and labor camps were female, numbering approximately 25,000.[39] Based on new research of NKVD documents for Western Belorussia—roughly half of the occupied territory—Krzysztof Jasiewicz estimates that 5 percent of all arrested persons were female.[40] His data, extrapolated to cover the entire area annexed by the USSR, yields an approximate total of 4,500

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Table 1.2
Polish citizens forcibly removed to the USSR by sex and age
(based on early estimates)

	Total	*Deported*	*Arrested*	*Mobilized to Red Army*	*P.O.W.*
Men	1,121,000	434,000	235,000	210,000	242,000
Women	571,000	556,000	15,000	—	—
Age: 15–49	1,128,500	462,500	216,000	210,000	240,000
<15	379,500	379,500	—	—	—
>50	184,000	148,000	34,000	—	2,000

Source: AC, box 68, no. 62c, Bohdan Podoski, "Polskie Wschodnie w 1939–1940," 31–33.

arrested women. Other scholars, however, stress that the total number of individuals imprisoned in the annexed territories has not yet been established.[41]

While most arrested persons were adult males, the majority of deportees were women and children.[42] For decades, scholars have reported that women constituted 52–57 percent of the total, numbering approximately 560,000 (see table 1.2).[43] The revisionist literature generally lacks information on the sex of the deportees. The new figure given for the deportations (320,000) and the old estimate of the percentage of females (55%) yields a total of 176,000. Combining both deportees and arrestees, the number of women who were removed from their homes and forced into Soviet exile ranges from a minimum of 180,500 to a maximum of 585,000.

Several points require emphasis. Those Polish citizens arrested and imprisoned by Soviet authorities were charged, investigated, and sentenced ostensibly according to Soviet law. The charges were routinely fabricated, and many accusations referred to actions not considered criminal in Polish law. The Soviet regime regarded many individuals guilty simply because of their class origins, occupation, political allegiance, or national identity and convicted them for alleged counterrevolutionary activities or as "enemies of the people." In contrast, the civilian deportees, the largest group of exiled Poles, were never charged with any crime. Their social origins or relationships to other Polish citizens sufficed to render them suspicious or dangerous in the eyes of Soviet authorities who exiled them by administrative decree. In the present discussion, this group is distinguished from those arrested and imprisoned—"prisoners"—by the term "deportees," and "exiles" refers to both groups as a whole.

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Table 1.3
Estimates of the four deportations, 1940–1941

Deportation date	Traditional estimate	Revised estimates	
		Gurjanow	Głowacki
1. February 1940	220,000	143,000	140,000
2. April 1940	320,000	61,000	61,000
3. June/July 1940	240,000	75,267	78,000
4. May/June 1941	200,000	36,000	40,000
Total	980,000	315,267	319,000

Deportations occurred in four waves, executed in an astonishingly short time.[44] In the first two cases, over the course of one to two nights, tens or hundreds of thousands of people were disturbed in their sleep, forced to undergo extensive searches, allowed to gather a few belongings, conveyed to train stations, locked inside cargo cars, and then transported eastward, across the Polish border. The first deportation commenced on the night of 10–11 February 1940, involving 220,000 people according to traditional (trad.) estimates or 140,000 according to revised (rev.) estimates, as shown in table 1.3. The next episode occurred the night of 12–13 April 1940 and affected 320,000 individuals (trad.) or 61,000 (rev.). Two months later, on 29 June 1940, another deportation began, involving 240,000 people (trad.) or 78,000 (rev.). The fourth deportation occurred one year later, from late May to mid-June 1941. It was still in progress when the German army invaded the USSR on 22 June, disrupting all Soviet administrative activity in its western territories and prompting the hasty eastward evacuation of Soviet authorities and their prisoners. Estimates of the number of persons transported at this time are 200,000 (trad.) and 40,000 (rev.).

The deportations resulted from the occupying power's desire to rid the territory of eastern Poland of all elements it suspected would be disloyal to the new regime or counterrevolutionary. This meant individuals whose national identity, class origins, political orientation, or level of social activism did not conform to the dictates of the Communist Soviet government, which proclaimed itself the leading force in society. Individuals with relatives abroad or in Soviet prisons and labor camps also became undesirables.[45] Soviet authorities meticulously gathered information on persons of targeted social groups. The nighttime seizures went smoothly and efficiently

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partly because of the surprise and terror of the population but largely because the authorities operated from lists drawn up in advance.

Each of the four deportations had a specific character in terms of the people affected. The first one targeted the military colonists known as *osadnicy.* Mostly privates and noncommissioned officers who fought in World War I and the Polish-Soviet war of 1920–21, they had received free plots of land in the eastern portions of the state under the Polish government's land redistribution program. Almost from the moment the Red Army entered Polish territory, the *osadnicy* were singled out in an extensive propaganda campaign as enemies of the Soviet system. Part of the antagonism stemmed from the policing and Polonizing function that these men and their families had been expected to serve in the borderlands. Additionally, Soviet authorities manipulated the resentment Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants with little land felt toward the colonizers.[46] The Soviet press in the occupied area blasted the *osadnicy* as "servants of the Polish government" who "brutally exploited the peasantry," exaggerating their numbers to 70,000—though the total did not surpass 8,000.[47]

On 5 December 1939, the Soviet Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) adopted a resolution calling for the deportation of the military colonists; detailed regulations for carrying out the operation were issued several weeks later in a resolution entitled, "Instructions for deporting the Polish colonists *(osadniki)* from the western regions of the USSR and BSSR."[48] These documents, until recently secret, reveal the extensive procedures set into motion by the top echelons of Soviet power, directed by Lavrenti Beria.[49] He appointed L. Tsanava as chief of operations for the deportation in so-called Western Belorussia and I. Serov to the corresponding position in Western Ukraine, with instructions to have lists of individuals and families to be deported by early January. Besides the *osadnicy,* this deportation included civil servants, local government officials, police officers, forest workers, and small farmers.[50] Beria's assistant, Vsevolod Merkulov, personally supervised the operation.

The NKVD designated these individuals "special settlers" *(spetspereselentsy-osadniki)* and ordered that they be sent to special settlements of 100–500 families, far from populated areas.[51] Their status thus mirrored that of the kulaks, Soviet peasants deported as part of the collectivization campaign in 1930–1931. Like the kulaks, special settlers lived under the supervision of the NKVD, from which they had to obtain permission to leave the settlement for more than twenty-four hours or even to change barracks.

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The April deportation removed the families of persons who had previously been arrested or taken as prisoners of war—in Soviet parlance, "individuals subjected to repressive measures"—and families of those who fled abroad or went into hiding. Employing the notion of collective responsibility, the Sovnarkom made the decision to deport these families, mostly women and children, on 2 March 1940.[52] Three days later, the Politburo of the Communist Party decided the fate of 14,700 Polish officers interned in Kozel'sk, Ostashkov, and Starobel'sk, as well as that of 11,000 others imprisoned in Ukraine and Belorussia; at the instigation of Beria, these men received "the supreme penalty—execution."[53] Many of these men were the fathers, sons, and husbands of the April deportees, who remained uninformed about the fate of their relatives for several years. The April group also included tradespeople and more small farmers, as well as prostitutes, who were considered "a foreign and dangerous element."[54] Not slated to live in special settlements, these deportees were administratively exiled (*administrativno-vysslanye)* for a period of ten years. Though they lived among the locals and not under NKVD supervision, they could not change their location in exile.

Soviet authorities initially planned to include another group in the April transports, the so-called refugees (*bezhentsy),* but had to postpone their deportation until June.[55] An estimated 300,000 individuals fled western Poland in the wake of the Nazi invasion, ending up under Soviet occupation. In December 1939, the German and Soviet governments agreed to repatriate refugees from their respective partitions. A total of 14,000 Ukrainians and Belorussians left the General-Gouvernement for the eastern part of Poland in the spring of 1940. At the same time, German evacuation committees, under Otto von Wächter, went to work in the Soviet zone, registering those who wished to return to western Poland. Prepared to accept up to 70,000 individuals, they had 164,000 petitioners and began evacuations in April. A total of 66,000 individuals, including some Jews, thus returned to the German partition.[56] When the operation ended in June, the NKVD ordered the deportation "of refugees who desired to go to Germany, but were not accepted by German authorities." Jews formed the majority of this group. This deportation also included small merchants, professionals, and individuals who refused to accept Soviet passports. The NKVD referred to them as "special settlers-refugees" (*spetspereselentsy-bezhentsy)* and sent them, like the February deportees, to live in NKVD-supervised settlements.

The final deportation, one year later, seemed to be a roundup of persons

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in the targeted groups who had earlier escaped capture. On 14 May 1941, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Sovnarkom adopted Joint Resolution No. 1299–526ss, calling for a cleansing of the regions incorporated into the USSR in 1939–40.[57] This episode also affected the Baltic republics, Northern Bukovina, and Bessarabia, which had been incorporated into the USSR in August 1940.[58] The first transports left Western Ukraine on 22 May; the operations in the Baltic republics took place on 14 June and in Western Belorussia began on the night of 19–20 June. Cut short by the German attack on the USSR, this last deportation took place under Nazi bombing.[59] Termed "exiled settlers" *(ssyl'no-poselentsy)*, the June 1941 group was sentenced to outlying places of exile under NKVD supervision for twenty years.[60] Unlike the other deportees, Grzegorz Hryciuk explains, they were given the rights of free Soviet citizens, including a choice of job and place to live, and thus occupied a status between that of special settler and administratively exiled.[61]

The odyssey began for all deportees in the dead of night, as it had for most of those who were arrested. It started as an invasion of the home, no longer a safe and private space. Banging on the door, the NKVD roused the targeted family from sleep. The visit usually commenced with a call to surrender all weapons, followed by a meticulous search of the premises. Females report that the men of their families, if they were still free and at home, were immobilized by the officers, who held them at gunpoint throughout the search, ordering them to keep their arms raised.[62] For most families, this was not the first of such visits. But this time, relates one victim, it "was not really a search but rather an attempt to disorient us in our own home."[63] The screaming, crying, and fainting that resulted testify to the effectiveness of this tactic.

Following the search came the order to dress and pack; they would be leaving their homes. While some officers told the families they were being deported to Russia, others lied. Frequently, they said the family would be resettled in a nearby region where they would join previously seized husbands and fathers.[64] The amount of time agents gave the deportees to pack varied. While on average, families had half an hour to prepare to leave their homes for a journey to an unknown destination, some report being given as little as ten minutes.[65] Though Beria's instructions for carrying out the operation included a list of items the deportees be permitted to bring, up to 500 kilograms per family, some of the officers did not allow them to take

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anything, stating that they would find all they needed in Russia.[66] One woman, whose husband had been arrested, was told that she could take only what she was able to carry; since she had to carry her smallest child and hold the other by the hand, that meant nothing.[67]

Women write of the panic, disbelief, and grief that they experienced at the sound of the deportation order. They describe a nightmarish scene, dominated by cries and screams. Recalls one woman: "Father, who never in his life sang even the simplest melody, starts to sing. Mother faints and the baby cries. We simply don't know what to do." "They didn't let my husband or brother move anywhere my brothers kids started to cry a lot and I just didn't know what was happening around me," writes Stanisława Gwanczuk. Some women screamed and refused to go; the officers merely dragged them out. So shocked was Jadwiga Woźniak that she fell into a kind of trance. Similarly, another woman states that the information struck her "like a bolt from the clear blue sky." Although for those taken in the first rounds of deportation the order came as a shock, many of those apprehended later report knowing exactly what would happen once they heard the knock on the door. Some even report a measure of relief when the moment finally came, feeling that they could not withstand the nervous tension caused by the fear of deportation.[68]

Regardless of their level of expectation, the night of their seizure was one of pain and grief for the deportees, who describe an unforgettably horrible experience. "That freezing and gloomy day 10 February 1940," notes Maria Kielan, "when we left our family home and with tears in our eyes bade farewell to our beloved town, is engraved in my memory."[69] Forced removal from their homes constituted the first step in their total uprooting. Like the former borders of Poland, the boundaries of home and private life were quickly obliterated; the Soviet government regarded as enemies not only soldiers but noncombatants, as well. Jadwiga Wolańska explains: "They took us by force, like some kind of criminals, people dangerous to society, whom it was necessary to remove from their homes, to destroy, to turn into beggars without a roof over their heads."[70]

What they encountered at the train stations did nothing to lessen the trauma of leaving their homes. Upon arrival at the stations, they were locked into cargo trains unequipped for human beings. Even the NKVD, checking several days before the first operation that Beria's instructions for preparing the trains had been carried out, reported a dismal situation.[71] Lack-

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ing seats, toilets, windows, and heat, these trains quickly grew hellish for their passengers, who generally were not allowed out until they had crossed from Polish territory into the USSR proper. According to one woman, they were trains "that we Poles never even dreamed existed." Another deportee remarks that "there was none of that humanitarianism that the Soviets always speak of, for in our country pigs are exported in better conditions than they transport people."[72]

According to many eyewitnesses, the NKVD typically packed forty to sixty individuals into each cattle car; Beria's instructions called for thirty. "There were eighty-some people in the car, like sardines in a can, including several pregnant women and children," writes Aleksandra Wodzicka. The indiscriminate mixing caused considerable distress for the passengers, as a lawyer from Lwów relates: "Under guard, in locked cargo cars, were packed thirty to forty people, without regard to sex or age." The passengers experienced a complete loss of personal boundaries: they had to sleep in a cramped common space and relieve themselves there, either in a bucket or through a hole in the floor. "The journey lasted seventeen days in very difficult conditions," writes one woman, "in cargo cars women, men, children all together."[73] Many deportees include this detail in their descriptions of the transports, suggesting that this enforced intimacy rendered an already difficult situation much worse.

For those individuals deported in the summer months, the crowding of the cars intensified the unbearable heat and lack of ventilation. With only small slits at the top of the walls for air, deportees often fainted. Those transported in the winter found the severe cold similarly hard to endure. Józefa Nowakowska recalls waking up in the transport unable to move; she assumed someone was holding her down but discovered that her hair had frozen to the wall of the car.[74] Soviet authorities typically made only meager provision for the passengers' other needs, leaving them to suffer hunger and thirst. Food was given sporadically and in insufficient quantities; sometimes it was spoiled. At best, the guards distributed one bucket of water for an entire car each day.[75] Describing the typical food allotment, Aniela Kubicka notes that the passengers in her car received one bucket of soup and one of water daily; additionally, each person got a small piece of bread.[76] Some deportees received neither food nor water for several days at a time; they report catching rain or scraping snow off the roof of the car to quench their thirst.[77]

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Women note that the cars rang with the tormented cries of hungry children and the moans of mothers who were powerless to do anything for their little ones. "The children cried to eat, the old people begged God for death," writes Zofia Misiak. The guards did little to alleviate their agony. One woman asked an NKVD guard for milk for her infant. He reportedly sneered, "What, do I have milk in my breasts?" Other Poles recount begging for a drink of water for their children, only to be told, "Let them croak."[78]

The deportees endured these conditions for several weeks, for they were taken far from their homes. Most journeys lasted two to four weeks. Not everyone survived. The mortality rate on the transports appears undocumented and constitutes a matter of dispute among historians. Many deportees report deaths, including suicides, in the course of their journeys.[79] Children and the elderly suffered worst. "Children died from hunger and cold in the arms of their parents, and the unhappy corpses were thrown onto the snow," writes one young woman.[80] Others report watching mothers lose their children, with no opportunity to bury them, which magnified their grief. "One of the infants died after a week and was taken away in a bag," writes Wanda Kulczycka, "without letting the mother take part in the burial of the remains." Powerlessness and despair overtook many. Anna Gimsewska, who was deported in February, remembers the hopelessness. After a three-week transport her group had to travel three more days on sleds in snow to their waists. "I saw stiff infants frozen to death, which mothers left along the road," she relates. "I saw men weakened and driven to despair, who sat down in the snow and sentenced themselves to voluntary death." In the words of one who had survived the transport, "The road was a streak of anguish."[81]

Maria Wojnilowiczówna, who wondered in the beginning of September 1939 what war would look like and how it might affect her, soon saw her world fall apart. Not long after the Red Army invasion, she watched as the NKVD arrested her father. She describes the scene as one of helpless rage and unbounded grief, feelings that, as she stood before the armed soldiers and observed the helplessness of her own father, could find no words, no outlet whatsoever. She writes: "I stood supported by the desk, I watched and it seemed to me that I didn't see anything that was going on around me. . . . They are taking my father from me, they want to separate us, they are vile, they are cruel. Grief, despair, hatred—I suppressed all that within me and had to stand helplessly, for where was I to await rescue and assistance from?"

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As a member of a military family, she was included in the first deportation. On 10 February 1940, Soviet officers seized Wojnilowiczówna and locked her in a train car bound for Russia. Recalling her despair at leaving her homeland, she notes, "I wanted to go as far as possible, without stopping, without an end, for the end was terrifying." Hundreds of thousands of people like her were ripped apart from all that they loved and sent on a journey into the terrifying unknown. "Thus began the wandering of the Polish people from their familial homes," writes one of them, "in a direction unknown, hostile, and foreign to us."[82]

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