

Antoni, Antonina, Daniela, Teresa Olszak

Antoni Olszak was born in 1900. He took part in the Polish-Soviet War in 1920 and returned from that war with missing toes due to frostbite. Daniela and Teresa Olszak were the daughters of Antoni, who worked in the 'Strem' factory in Strzemieszyce.

In 1939, the Second World War began. For Polish families it was the worst nightmare. Antoni Olszak took up the fight again against the occupying forces, this time against the Nazis. He joined the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), which is active on the 'Strem' factory site. On the factory premises he operated the Political Consultative Committee (PKP), which was organised by Czesław Gruszczyński.

For the Nazis, the 'Strem' factory was really important. They produced nitroglycerine for the armaments industry there and fats for the chemical industry. Every sabotage activity was a great loss for the Nazis. The sabotage was a priority for the PPR, as it disorganised work both at the 'Strem' factory and at the Strzemieszyce locomotive depot.

However, the year 1943 arrived and the Gestapo made arrests in the 'Strem' factory as well as in the railway industry in general. At night, on 23rd August 1943, the Gestapo arrived and arrested the whole Olszak family. They were taken to the prison in Mysłowice, where they awaited the verdict of the Nazi court.

Antoni Olszak was imprisoned at Auschwitz (Auschwitz I). His wife Antonina, together with their daughters Daniela and Teresa, were sent to Birkenau concentration camp (Auschwitz II). Antoni in a death march got to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. However, he did not withstand the hardships and the evacuation. From Sachsenhausen came the news of his death.

Daniela was sent to the Ravensbrück camp and then to a munitions factory 10 km from the camp. Her stay there was a double torment. Murderous work at the factory and the SS men guarding them, who beat and even shot disobedient prisoners,

and on top of this the Allied troops who bombed the military facilities. Prisoners were exposed to death by both the Nazis and Allied forces.

In April 1945, the Allies liberated the Ravensbrück camp and munitions factory. Daniela was among those who were given refuge in Sweden. There, she first worked on a farm and then found work as a nanny with the Wignell family. With the Wignells she found peace and respect. However, she wanted to know what was happening to her family. She knew nothing about her father and sister Teresa. She wrote a letter to Mrs Marianna Smutek, her father's sister. She found out that her sister was still alive, but that her father had died in Sachsenhausen. Unfortunately, the authorities in our country at the time did not agree to Teresa's departure. In September 1946, Daniela therefore decided to return to Poland.'

The presented story left a very big mark on the whole family and changed the lives of the characters who experienced those tragic moments. Mrs Marianna Smutek, who is my aunt, decided to write down this story to commemorate the family and to free herself from grief and bad emotions by transferring them onto paper. She also had another goal in mind - to save the family story from being forgotten.

Daniela Olszak mentioned in the story was my great-grandmother who died in 2013. She never talked about her story or her experiences during that time. She was a very helpful, kind and loving person who did not deserve such a harsh experience. The Wignells treated Daniela as their family, having contact with her until the end of her days. They also supported my aunt Marianna and the next generations of my family. The Wignells are wonderful, full of empathy, loving, and helpful people. It was thanks to them that Daniela, my great-grandmother, had a place to go and experience the family atmosphere after the difficult period she endured in the camp.

I did not have the opportunity to meet Antoni, Teresa and Antonina Olszak, but I know from family stories that they were wonderful and kind people who could always be counted on. All the facts described in the story above come from my aunt Marianna Smutek - Antoni Olszak's sister.