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ILLUSTRATED CAMP LIFE



Forced-labor workers, during the Soviet Union's Stalinist era, built the Kolyma Road using hand tools. It was back-breaking work which took place during harsh weather conditions. Painting by V.A. Svetlitjsnij, displayed at Magadan's regional museum.

Unlike the Nazis, who documented all kinds of concentration-camp atrocities, the Soviets (under Stalin) did not photograph events and living conditions in the Gulag. We learn of forced labor camps from survivor stories.

We see how places looked, and how people were treated, through artistic renderings created by prisoners like <u>Nikolai Getman</u> who spent eight years in Kolyma, one of the worst camps. (His crime? Being with a fellow artist who drew a caricature of Stalin on a cigarette pack. An "informer" turned them in.) Memories of what he and others had endured were forever seared in Nikolai's mind.

When released, Getman became a "politically correct" artist. But unknown to Soviet authorities, he also created forbidden paintings which survive. They are historically unique as a record of life in Soviet concentration camps.

- Prisoners, usually sorted into groups of five, made the long trek to Soviet camps by rail and <u>uncovered trucks</u>
- even when the cold weather was no longer bearable.

• As work in any particular area neared completion, old camps were <u>abandoned</u> and new ones were built. Prisoners too sick to make the move were <u>left behind</u> to die. Since the Stalinist regime endlessly found reasons to consign people to the camps, there was a steady stream of replacement labor.

• After gold was discovered thousands of kilometers from the port of Magadan, labor-camp workers were forced to build Kolyma Highway, a 1200-kilometer <u>Serpentine</u> Road, using only pickaxes, crowbars, shovels and wheelbarrows. Such workers were forced to sleep outside, no matter how bad the weather.

• At least in the <u>gold</u> and <u>diamond mines</u> one had a chance to survive. The same could not be said for those who mined uranium or dug for gold in the permafrost of Indigirka.

• In Siberia, the <u>Upper Debbin Camp</u>, was a place of death for many. The camp motto ("through honest labor lies the road to release") reminds one of the Nazi concentration-camp motto *Arbeit Macht Frei* ("work makes one free").

• At lunchtime, when the Siberian temperatures dropped to -50 degrees Celsius, the prisoners <u>ate</u> warm balanda (a kind of soup or gruel made from the tops of vegetables). <u>Daily rations</u> were always woefully short of what a human needed to perform the back-breaking work.

• <u>Women prisoners</u>, singled out for special treatment, were despised by the rest of the inmates. Wives, and children, of political prisoners (so-called "enemies of the state") fared little better than their husbands and

fathers.

• Children old enough to work did - often with their mothers who, among other things, <u>cut down trees</u> with primitive hand tools. Young children were left in the barracks, unsupervised except by camp guards.

• Every minute of rest that <u>prisoners took</u> was added to their 14-hour day. Escape was next-to-impossible. Getman knew <u>two men who tried</u>, but they were recaptured. Both were sentenced to twenty-five more years.

• Prisoners who could not endure the wretched conditions tried to harm themselves. If they did not die from <u>self-inflicted wounds</u>, no one gave them medical help.

 People of many nationalities and religions worked, and died, in the camps. In "Eternal Memory in the <u>Permafrost</u>," Getman depicts the death of a Russian Orthodox Christian and a Buddhist. In <u>Waiting to be Shot</u>, he remembers 159 men who - for no reason - were roused from their barracks in the middle of the night and executed.

• During Stalinist times, a person could be sent to the Gulag for practicing one's religious faith. In "<u>The</u> <u>Preacher</u>," Getman has memorialized an old prisoner encouraging two others, reminding them that good will triumph over evil.

• Dogs, maintained in <u>The Guards' Kennel</u>, were better maintained than the political prisoners (called zeks). When a <u>zek died</u>, he was tossed in the snow. A famous song, describing that situation, sums it up: "...no one will ever learn where my grave is."

• For the slightest reason, like showing disrespect to a guard, prisoners could be subjected to torture by <u>komariki</u> - small mosquitoes which would cover a person's body for 30-60 minutes while <u>the prisoner</u>, firmly secured to a tree, was unable to brush the insects away. At the end of that session, the prisoner would usually die.

• Those who survived the gruesome camp conditions received "<u>rehabilitation</u>" papers and were permitted to return to "normal" life.

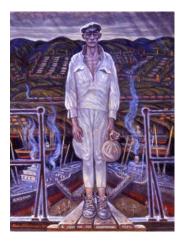
Nikolai Getman died on August 29, 2004. He was 86 years old. To the end, he believed good will always triumph over evil. The artistic legacy he has left (entrusted to the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u> which has generously placed his paintings online) will allow people everywhere to never forget the agony of unremembered (or unknown) millions.

Similarly, Soviet propaganda posters which still survive show us how government can use art to achieve *its* own objectives.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ILLUSTRATED-CAMP-LIFE-I-Am-David</u>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ILLUSTRATED-CAMP-LIFE-I-Am-David

Media Stream



<u>Nikolai Getman - Artistic Work</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nikolai-Getman-Artistic-Work</u>







<u>Getman Painting - Traveling to Camps in Uncovered Trucks</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Traveling-to-Camps-in-Uncovered-Trucks</u>



<u>Getman Painting - Abandoned Mining Camp</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Abandoned-Mining-Camp

<u>Getman Painting - Sick Prisoners Were Abandoned</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Sick-Prisoners-Were-Abandoned</u>













Getman Painting - Prisoners Built Road with Hand Tools

Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Prisoners-Built-Road-with-Hand-Tools

Getman Painting - Working in the Mines

Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Working-in-the-Mines

Getman Painting - Working in the Diamond Mines

Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Working-in-the-Diamond-Mines

Getman Painting - Upper Debbin Camp

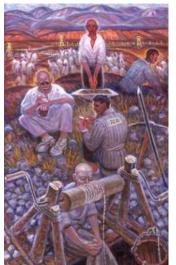
Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Upper-Debbin-Camp

<u>Getman Painting - Prisoners Eating</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Prisoners-Eating</u>

<u>Getman Painting - Distributing Food Rations</u> Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Distributing-Food-Rations









Getman Painting - Women Prisoners

Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Women-Prisoners

Getman Painting - Female Laborers Forced to Cut Trees

Image, described above, online courtesy Jamestown Foundation. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Female-Laborers-Forced-to-Cut-Trees

Getman Painting - Prisoners at Rest

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Prisoners-at-Rest

Getman Painting - Recaptured Prisoners

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original Getman painting is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Recaptured-Prisoners











Getman Painting - Self-Inflicted Wounds

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original Getman painting is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Self-Inflicted-Wounds</u>

Getman Painting - Eternal Memory in the Permafrost

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original painting is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Eternal-Memory-in-the-Permafrost

Getman Painting - Waiting to be Shot

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). Original painting maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Waiting-to-be-Shot</u>

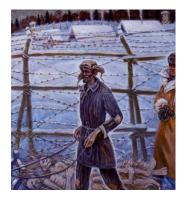
Getman Painting - The Preacher

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). Original painting maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-The-Preacher</u>

Getman Painting - The Guards Kennel

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original painting is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-The-Guards-Kennel







Getman Painting - Dead Prisoners, Tossed in Snow

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). The original painting is maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Dead-Prisoners-Tossed-in-Snow

Komariki in the GULAG Photo online, courtesy Russian-language photo forum website. PD View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Komariki-in-the-GULAG</u>

Getman Painting - Execution by Mosquitoes

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). Original painting maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Execution-by-Mosquitoes

Getman Painting - Rehabilitation Papers

Image, described above, online courtesy Global Museum on Communism (<u>The Gulag.org</u>). Original painting maintained by the <u>Jamestown Foundation</u>.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Getman-Painting-Rehabilitation-Papers