

HEIN

◆ Life in the Kolyma Gulag

Heinrich Dyck (1913-2001)



Prisoners assembled for roll call at the end of the day listened for the names of those who would be executed.



Another Danzig Baldaev drawing in which he shows mass executions in the camps.



Relics from the tortures in the Butugychag Camp in Kolyma.



Eduard Berzin was the founder of the Kolyma camps. He drove from camp to camp in Lenin's former Rolls Royce. Berzin became a victim of the Purges himself. He was arrested in 1937 and executed in 1938.

The Purges in Kolyma

The Purges continued everywhere in the Soviet Union, including in the remote Kolyma camps. Head of Dalstroy, Eduard Berzin, was arrested late in 1937 and shot. The next commander showed no leniency. The NKVD established execution quotas that needed to be fulfilled to purge the regime's "dangerous enemies," and nearly 6,000 people were executed in Kolyma in 1937-38. In the Zolotisty Goldfields, guards summoned a work brigade from the mine and shot them all in full daylight. At another camp, 30-50 men were killed each day, their corpses dragged off on tractor sledges. The charges were read aloud and were typical for the era: counterrevolutionary activities, failure to fulfill the quota, and espionage.

Varlam Shalamov, survivor of the camps and author of *Kolyma Tales*, wrote, "For many months there day and night, at the morning and the evening checks, innumerable execution orders were read out. In a temperature of fifty below zero the musicians from among the non-political offenders played a flourish before and after each order was read. The smoking gasoline torches ripped apart the darkness...The thin sheet on which the order was written was covered with hoarfrost, and some chief or other who was reading the order would brush the snowflakes from it with his sleeve to decipher and shout out the name of the next man on the list of those shot."

Two more commandants of Kolyma were purged as well. It appeared that no one was safe until Stalin's madness subsided, around 1940.