



Guard towers, multiple fences, and barbed wire made escape very difficult.

Living Behind Barbed Wire

Prisoners lived behind barbed wire. They might be summoned for roll call between 3:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. No time was needed for dressing: prisoners slept on bare planks in the barracks in their clothes, since no bedding was provided. They would line up in the center of camp in lines of five for the counting, which sometimes took an hour or more in the agonizingly cold pre-dawn air.

The men were then handed their allotment of bread for the day. The prisoners guarded this coarse, black bread carefully. Then they split into brigades, or working parties, and marched off to the coal mines for a long day's work. They received three days off per month.

After 10 to 12 hours of hard labor, prisoners marched back to camp. They stored their work equipment outside the gates, then were allowed one hour in which to wash, rest, and collect their evening meal from the dining hall.

The amount of work they had performed determined the next day's ration. This was the difference of life and death for many of them. Completing 100% of the quota was nearly impossible, but bribing the brigadier with tobacco or cheating somehow might earn them some extra bread. For dinner, prisoners received a small amount of soup, made from grass, or animal entrails. Sometimes the soup was so thin that the prisoners cried.

At 9:00 or so, prisoners were again lined up outside for roll call. Again, they had to stand in rows of five while the guards counted them. Then, they returned to their overcrowded, filthy barracks to sleep.



Forced slave labor in concentration camps was the Soviet solution for political dissidents, prisoners of war, and criminals alike. The Gulag was an elaborate system of thousands of camps set up across the Soviet Union for the undesirables of society. The stated purpose of the camps was "rehabilitation through work."



Prisoners eating their evening meal.
It was often watery soup made from weeds like grass or nettles.



The prisoners marched out of camp each day for work.

