Netto, Lev Aleksandrovich
Interview recorded in Moscow, on 03.10.2004, by Alena Gennad'evna Kozlova.

- Lev Aleksandrovich, let's go back to the very beginning: what can you remember about your family, your grandparents, and your roots as such? What do you remember about all this?
- Well, to some extent, a certain amount of information did impress itself on my memory when I was still but a child and has stayed with me ever since. First of all, though, I must admit that I only know about my grandparents essentially from what my parents told me about them, because, unlike my parents, none of them ever left Estonia for Russia. Both my parents were originally from Estonia: my father came to Russia as early as 1905, in fact, when he was called up for military service. However, although he was sent to the Far East, the war with Japan was already drawing to a close then, and he didn't see any active service as such. After demobilization, he stayed on here, in Moscow, and worked in the Singer Factory. Mama arrived in Russia, together with some girl friends of hers, in 1917, not long after the February Revolution. When these turbulent, exciting times were beginning for Russia, young people elsewhere also became interested in all the events that were taking place there. And besides, where my parents came from – that was, after all, Russia in those days: Estonia was then a Russian province.
- What were your parents' names? You forgot to mention them.
- Aleksandr Genrikhovich and Iuliia Vil'iamovna.
- So your mother came to Moscow in 1917?
- Yes, together with some girl friends of hers. And this was shortly after the February Revolution – a period which was very agitated, with all these political rallies, manifestations, and various parties vying for leadership. Mama would always say that it was a very interesting time to be in Moscow, where they went round in red kerchiefs, naturally, as was the custom in those days, and where on every square, at every street-corner, they would come across some meeting or manifestation. She and the other girls, of course, didn't have a very clear idea of what all these political events were about, but everywhere they went, they saw this, so to speak… this spirit of…
- Enthusiasm?
- Yes… whenever someone had finished making his speech, there would always be cries of "hurrah" and ovations. Even though, sometimes, the speaker being cheered by the crowds might have said something which was completely the opposite of what the speaker before him had said and which the crowds had received with no less enthusiasm… [*laughs*] you know, all these slogans, exhortations, and so on. And it was at these very meetings that Mama became acquainted with the sisters of Teodor Nette, who became her first new friends in Moscow; they were together quite a lot, and it was thanks to this that Mama was accepted, so to speak, into a rather high circle. She was subsequently employed by the Secretariat of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, where those sisters also worked. Yes, that's how it was. And he [Teodor Nette – A.G.K.], of course, given that he was a…
- A diplomatic courier?
- Yes, that's right, a diplomatic courier… So, yes, he was also based at the Secretariat, and that's how Mama came to be acquainted with him. At home, I remember we had this photograph in our family album which showed those sisters, Mama's friends, and Teodor himself. But by that time Mama had already met my father. Although our surnames are almost identical, my father's ancestors weren't related in any way to Teodor Nette's: he was a Latvian, whilst our surname is very much an Estonian one. I do know a little bit about our family's roots: for example, that,

though my parents were Estonian, our surname, in fact, wasn't originally Estonian. Our ancestors came to the Baltic from Italy.

- How come you're so sure about that?

- I once tried to trace back my family's origins and found out that my great-grandfather, an Italian – if I remember correctly, this may perhaps even have been in the closing decades of the eighteenth century – was invited to Estonia by a local German baron who was looking for a gardener. So my great-grandfather went to that nobleman's estate, performed his duties well, attaining particular renown with the roses he grew for his master, and decided to stay there for good. That's how the surname Nette appeared in Estonia. From what my father told me, all I know is that he had twelve brothers and one sister.

- That is, your father had?

- Yes, that's right, I'm referring to my father's immediate family now. But the thing is that he practically never saw his eldest brothers and couldn't remember them at all. That's because his elder brothers, as soon as they reached the age of twenty or so, all went to sea, as was the custom in Estonia back then – that is, they enrolled as sailors on trading vessels and so on. They all set off into the big wide world and many of them never returned home again, not even for a brief visit. So that's why the surname Nette, or Netto, has spread quite far and wide, sometimes even appearing in distant countries [*laughs*].

- So your Italian ancestor founded a new Estonian clan!

- Yes, quite so! However, only my father and his younger brother, Sergei, came to Moscow. Their sister stayed in Estonia, and, of course, after marrying, she went by a different surname – in the end, for some reason, my father lost contact with her. Now, as I was telling you earlier, he had decided to stay on in Russia after demobilizing from the army. He had already started to work in Estonia, having qualified as a cabinet-maker: before coming to Russia for military service, he had lived and worked in the city of Valka [Valga], which is on the border with Latvia. Thanks to that he had various Latvian friends and learnt to speak Latvian well. Apart from his mother tongue, he was quite fluent in Russian and Latvian. I mention this about the Latvian friends and acquaintances he made back then in Valka, because when he was finally demobilized and returned to Moscow – somewhere about 1910 – he met up with these friends again, here in Moscow, and, as it turned out, they were to play a significant part in his subsequent fate. Because after the October Revolution, these lads came to be stationed in Russia with units of the Latvian Rifles – the so-called Latvian Riflemen – and that's how my father, an Estonian by birth, eventually came to form part of a battalion of Latvian Rifles. And as such he actively took part in the revolutionary events in Moscow [26 October – 2 November 1917]; he told me how his unit had been deployed to Moscow after [the Bolshevik seizure of power in] Petrograd…

- So he took part in the revolutionary events in Moscow?

- Yes, he was in Moscow when the pro-government forces [the Committee of Public Safety] surrendered to the Bolsheviks. But he had in fact been involved in revolutionary activity even before joining the Latvians. I've actually got here at home the memoirs of one of the…of a Russian who, together with my father, had carried out underground revolutionary activity in Podol'sk. You see, he later wrote down all that he could remember of those years, precisely because no relevant documents of the period had survived. All that remained were these memoirs.

- Have they been published, these memoirs?

- No, they're unpublished… I'll explain: it was when my father reached retirement age and started to fill in the application forms for a personal state pension, but it turned out that for this certain documents from the past were necessary which either had never been issued in the first place, or had been lost or destroyed. My father and those friends of his who were still alive all muttered indignantly amongst themselves that they had, after all, carried out the Revolution and it hadn't

occurred to them back then to take out documents proving this as a precaution for rainy days or old age! The thing is that in order to receive such pensions, they were asked to provide concrete evidence that they really had taken part in so-and-so an event, or had been associates of so-and-so a person.

- So that friend of your father acted as a witness?

- Yes, that's right, to corroborate the facts and everything. Because my father and his friends decided amongst themselves that they would all write or produce testimonies for each other, and that's how they managed in the end to secure their pensions. During those years, as he later told me, he had in fact moved quite a lot in these revolutionary circles. Especially when, in [July] 1918, there were these uprisings against the Bolsheviks in Moscow and the fate of Lenin's plans was said to have hung by a thread – they had reportedly been on the verge of a total collapse. In those crucial days, the Latvian Rifles, being the most reliable defenders, indeed the most loyal supporters of the new regime, had defended [the Kremlin] and crushed those rebels in Moscow – that is, Spiridonova [Maria Spiridonova (1884-1941), leader of the Left SR's] and all those Mensheviks and SR's. In this sense my father – precisely as it is testified in these memoirs – was always loyal to the Party line: he wouldn't tolerate any deviations from it whatsoever, under no circumstances. This seems to have been a peculiar characteristic of [*laughs*] these Latvian Riflemen, for once they had resolved on one particular course, that is, to follow Lenin no matter what, they would not hear of any divergences or anything of the sort. They were ready to lay down their lives for Lenin, but simply refused to assimilate any new…

- Ideas?

- Yes, they refused to tolerate or recognise any new ideas.

- Did your father tell you anything about the revolutionary events in Petrograd or Moscow, or about the anti-Bolshevik rebellions in 1918?

- No, my father was, in general, a man of few words: he didn't seem to want to talk about these things. That I nevertheless know where he was at specific moments during these years, where he was sent on missions, and what kind of work he was engaged in – is all thanks to what Mama told me. In front of me, she would recall out loud various events and incidents, often in a fragmentary fashion, and all this somehow impressed itself on my mind, though I never came to know about these things in detail. But, anyway, Mama liked especially to recollect what she had witnessed while working at Narkomindel [the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs]. In particular, what she considered to be her most significant moments there: say, seeing Lenin once when he called in at Narkomindel and made a speech. With Trotskii she came into contact several times, apparently helping him to prepare some of his speeches. Since he had after all been directly in charge of Narkomindel for a while, he became, so to speak, her idol. That's why, when I, her first son, was born in 1925, she gave me the name of her idol: Lev.

- Did your father occupy any rank?

- No, none at all. He had been a non-commissioned officer in the Tsarist army and there's even a photograph of him in the old uniform, but there aren't any photographs of him from his years of service in the Red Army, and, as far as I can remember, he never attained any rank. All I know is that he was an artilleryman, but in his subsequent career it wasn't this that mattered – that is, whether he had a rank or not – but, rather, his ideological loyalty. This I gathered from what Mama told me about how in Moscow, after the October Revolution, father had been elected to the first [revived] Moscow Soviet of Workers' Deputies – as a matter of fact, as a delegate of the woodworkers, to which he belonged by virtue of his professional training, though the representatives then did not form groups according to professional affiliation as such, but rather divided into sections. After that, he went on to carry out trade union work, serving mainly as a trade union representative. He did tell me some things about his work in one of these trade unions,

at the Krasnopresnenskoe tram depot. Apart from that, I also remember myself how, when I was born in 1925, my parents were already living on that alleyway off Sretenka Street, where we would spend so many years. In the same flat as us there were three other families – also families of ex-Latvian Riflemen. That was normal in those days, this kind of…

- Communal apartment?

- Yes, communal apartment, that's right. And one of these Latvians – a close friend of my father who had actually introduced him to Mama – he had two rooms in this apartment, whereas father just had one. But when I was born in 1925, they swapped rooms: that Latvian told father that now that he had a family and a small child, he could do with those two rooms more than he and his wife, who until then had had them all to themselves, so he suggested that they swap. So, as you can see, it was all done on comradely, amicable terms. Yes, there was always this basic human decency... In this apartment, you see, there lived a tightly knit little colony – an Estonian colony, effectively, although in those times there were, in general, quite many Estonians all over Moscow. They had their own [Lutheran] church, as well as a club where they could meet and socialise. I also recall that we were sometimes asked over by this or that Estonian family, but all I can remember from these visits is how we children played amongst themselves, since, naturally, we didn't take part in the grown-ups' conversations. What I do remember are the children I played with. As to growing up in that flat, where, apart from ours, there were three other Estonian families, I especially remember how on holidays – especially on New Year's Day – all the families would club together to lay on a particularly lavish table in one of the rooms, although this was intended more for the grown-ups – we children would soon step out of the room and play or chatter amongst ourselves. This was always so merry and interesting; we were all bound together by this great sense of friendship. So that's how life was for us in that flat. In 1927, Mama gave birth to a little sister for me, but she died when she was barely a few weeks old. I don't know why or how it happened – I was never interested in finding out – but later I did overhear a conversation between my parents, from which I discovered that if my little sister had survived after all, there would just have been the two of us – that is, me and my sister – and my brother would never have come into this world [*laughs*]. So it must have clearly been decreed somewhere by Fate that my brother Igor was to be born in 1930. The two of us grew up together on that alleyway off Sretenka. I can also remember the early 1930s and that my father was often away then on various missions. In fact, he was at work almost all of the time. You see, there was this campaign then, for which so-called 'thousanders' and 'five thousanders' [the young Party workers sent to organise the kolkhozy in the 1930s who were known as 'twenty-five thousanders' after the number of the first cohort of recruits] were constantly being recruited and dispatched to peripheral territories in order to help consolidate Soviet power, as it was considered then. And father would always be called upon to take part in these missions. I remember particularly well the various times he returned from missions in Central Asia. Of course, he didn't tell me anything about what he had done or what it was like over there, but I've got this vivid visual recollection of… of how I would help father to clean his firearms: this revolver which… At the time it was for me just something fascinating and fun, but when I was older, I came to the conclusion that seeing that father had to clean his gun afterwards, that evidently meant that he had had occasion to use it. Mama told me once that on one of these missions, on which father had been sent I can't remember where exactly, their group had been led by Voroshilov's daughter. I think she felt rather proud, in fact, that father had been involved in such an important undertaking… Now, Mama had continued working at Narkomindel until I was definitely on the way – so until late 1924 – but after that the situation there started to change. After I'd been born, she did go back to Narkomindel and worked there for a while, but soon, in 1926 or 1927, she decided to leave again. Many others also left at the same time in order not to be, so to speak, an eyesore to the new… in order not to be…

- Between two fires?
- Yes, exactly, between two fires. Her decision proved well-judged, because she wasn't persecuted or targeted subsequently, even though she had been working in Narkomindel when Trotskii was still in charge. I also remember the years immediately after Kirov's assassination in 1935 or 1934 – which year was it that he was murdered?
- It was in 1934.
- Yes, in 1934, the 1st of December – well, as I was saying, all those events which began to unfold after that assassination.
- In what ways do you remember those years?
- Well, for a start, these periodic mass demonstrations were introduced. On the May Day holiday, for example, on the 7th of November [October Revolution Day] – by that time father was already working on Trubnaia Street, where the so-called People's Commissariat of Medium-Machine Building [in fact, of Tank Production] was based. On these holidays, the staff would always take part in these popular demonstrations, after which they would hold a banquet – just tea, though, was served at these banquets: as far as I can recollect, no alcoholic drinks were consumed.
- And where did these banquets take place?
- On the actual premises of the Commissariat – that's where they would all gather. Now, the staff there was drawn mainly from the old guard, whose members, ever since 1917, had been appointed to posts in industry, the trade unions, or the Party, and they all knew each other well, of course, and liked to meet regularly on social occasions. I remember how it was always interesting to see these… after all, those years were quite hard in terms of food shortages and all that, so it was amazing to see how at these gatherings the staff would always receive some special food parcels – they were usually given out to them after the demonstrations, and on some occasions they would even be given consumer goods too. Thus, despite these years of scarcity, I saw quite a lot of these things at home. And these gatherings would take place every year, effectively: the management of the Commissariat would get together all the staff, most of whom knew each other from the early days of the Revolution and so weren't just simply colleagues, but adherents of the same cause in the truest sense of the word. However, it was around this time that these members of staff began to disappear, little by little, one after the other – I heard my father and his friends starting to discuss amongst themselves what was going on, where the country was heading for, and why people who were known for their impeccable honesty, devotion to the cause, and who were absolutely beyond any suspicion, were now all of a sudden being unmasked as 'enemies' or what have you. But the fact was that they were starting to disappear, and this alone was enough to cause great anxiety. It was also around this time that we stopped visiting those other Estonian families who, like us, had settled in Moscow – no more invitations were exchanged, if you see what I mean. Now, I went to a school on Markhlevsaia Street, which was right in the centre of Moscow, not far from the Lubianka Prison. I remember how in spring we children liked to – we must have been in the fourth or fifth form, I think – we liked to go running during the long breaks and we would often run round the building of the Lubianka. What I wanted to tell you about is the following detail, which I think characterises quite well our mentality as children back then: when we ran round this headquarters of the NKVD, there would be a soldier standing by each door, dressed in a *budenovka* [a helmet-like winter-cap made of broadcloth, and named after the Civil War hero Marshal S. Budennyi] and holding a rifle with a bayonet, and whenever we saw him turn his face away from us, we would try to peer into the semi-basement windows, because, you see, we often whispered between ourselves that shootings were taking place somewhere down there. It wasn't just me who had heard that from my parents; other children, with whose families ours wasn't acquainted at all, had also overheard their parents saying that… In those times, it was clearly a very…
- It was this persistent rumour, wasn't it?

- Yes, it was a rumour that was very much afloat, and everybody had heard about it in some way. Well, when we ran back to our class-room once, I remember how we even started to discuss it and whispered to each other: “It isn’t Russians who do the shooting: they’ve got these Chinese guys in the firing squads, ’cos the Russians just can’t do it – they started going crazy when they made them do the shooting once…” That’s how it was: I remember that very well. It was a child’s impression of those years, you might say, but all the same it was founded on something very concrete: it wasn’t simply something we’d dreamt up. No, all that actually happened and was on everyone’s lips at the time. Well, after that, of course, came 1937 and 1938, and those ex-Latvian Riflemen we shared the apartment with disappeared one by one… I can’t say for sure now in which years exactly, but eventually they had all vanished.

- Do you remember in what circumstances they disappeared – if the NKVD came for them in the middle of the night, if they carried out any searches? Do you have any recollection of that?

- No, these particular moments didn’t leave any trace in my mind… Which is not surprising, if you think about it, because all these disappearances, these arrests took place late in the evening or at night, by which time, of course, we children were all fast asleep. We didn’t know about these details as children. It was only later that… again, it was Mama who, much, much later, would always talk about how as soon as they heard the door bell ringing, she and father would start trembling: who had they come for now? So one by one these three families disappeared. One of them, a certain Kikas and his daughter were rounded up together, and we never saw any of them again. Then, that other Latvian called Grauding, he was simply arrested and vanished without trace. They didn’t arrest his wife, but she was later evicted from the apartment and given a miserable garret, where by all accounts she lived like a beggar-woman. Then, on the floor below, in flat no. 6, there was this Moris, who worked in the Commandant’s Tower of the Kremlin, where he occupied quite an important post, in fact. A chauffeured car would drive him to work in the mornings and back home in the evenings. He didn’t live in a communal apartment, but had a flat all to himself and his family. I was close friends with his son Bruno, who was a year older than me, so I frequently got to visit their flat and could see that they were living on an altogether different footing to us on the floor above: they had everything you could think of. But this Moris, too, disappeared one day. And, naturally, Bruno and his mother and sister were also evicted from their flat. I think they were allocated living space of some sort in Seliverstov Lane, but subsequently the family fell apart further still: I don’t know what became of his sister, but Bruno, who was born in 1924, joined a Home Guard division immediately after hearing of the German invasion, but never returned from the front. No one knows what happened to him. And as for his poor old mother’s fate, one can only imagine the worst – she probably also ended up like that Grauding’s wife, who was given housing somewhere, but eventually became what we would nowadays call a *bomzh* [a homeless vagrant] or something of the like. Later, I would often ask myself how father, in contrast, managed to stay alive. That is, why the NKVD had left him unscathed? However, this wasn’t something which just happened to him, but to a whole lot of residents in our block, who were also left be by the NKVD – it wasn’t at all that exceptional. So eventually – after I had returned from thirteen years of wanderings, so to speak, with the army and in the gulag, after surviving all that – when I was able to discuss with others how could it have been that father wasn’t touched at all by the NKVD, I came to the conclusion, looking back at the events of those years, that it had simply been a fluke, nothing more. Because it was often the case that the agents who came to carry out the arrests were a peg too low, to put it mildly. Tipsy as they were, they would mix up the surnames of the persons they were supposed to arrest, the flat numbers, and so on. It’s not implausible that on one of their visits to our block they knocked on the door, say, of flat no. 9, the one opposite ours, and asked: “Does so-and-so live here?” The person who opened the door may have said: “No,

there's no one by that name here." – "All right… you're coming with us, get dressed, come on… they'll sort it out over there." And they may well have marched that person off to their prison, noting on one of their lists that so-and-so – let's assume it was my father they were after – that this Netto fellow was no longer alive. Or, rather, they might simply write down that the man they'd just arrested *was* Netto and leave him to persuade his interrogators at the prison to swallow the camel, as the saying goes, of his actually being someone else. And it was evidently thanks to a coincidence of this very sort that father managed to survive. Because of his age, he wasn't liable to military service any longer, so he continued to work in the same Commissariat, later Ministry, of Medium-Machine Building [Tank Production]…

- In what year was your father born?

- In 1885. Now, in 1940 various special Party schools (in particular, artillery schools) were set up in Moscow – the Nakhimov Schools [for army and navy cadets] were established later – there were just five of them, I think, and I attended Special Party School No.3. I still remember how father went with me to enrol me in this school, which was near Kursk Railway Station – I've forgotten the actual name of the lane on which it was situated, but have this strong visual impression that it was somewhere near Kursk Station. When we were received by the Director of Studies, this very tall Soviet Army officer – a Captain, if I remember correctly – father started discussing something with him and said at the end: "It is our duty as Communists to set up our children on the same path which we took ourselves." That's why he enrolled me in that school, even though I didn't have any inclination or desire as such to serve in the armed forces. But there wasn't anything I could do: father had chosen my vocation for me.

- What were you actually interested in? Did you have any clear ideas back then about where you would have liked to study if it had been up to you?

- You know what? Ever since earliest childhood I had wanted to become a caretaker. Because in the alleyway where we lived, we had this caretaker called Uncle Petia who was in charge of our building and the courtyard, and we children would always help him with his work, say, with clearing the snow in winter and other jobs – it was great fun, but nonetheless we always made sure to treat him with respect. If, say, he told someone off or sent him packing, all of us would obey without so much as a mutter. We simply saw all the time how other grown-ups would greet him first and respectfully take off their caps, so we couldn't help sensing that here was someone who had great authority. And in those years, [*laughs*] I too wanted to be like Uncle Petia and become a caretaker just like him, so as to be able to put things into order. Later, when I started going to school – especially after I joined that special artillery school, but even before that, too – I became very interested in mathematics. I would even go to these voluntary informal classes organised by our teacher as a kind of 'math circle'. You see, in the special school we had this very old teacher called Stratilatov – I can still remember his surname – who had set up a study group for those pupils – there were just four or five of us in all – who were especially interested in maths. He would teach us separately, outside normal school hours, and set us all kinds of advanced problems in logic. That way we definitely broadened our mathematical horizon, and there were even a few times when I was so engrossed in these advanced concepts that I forgot to do my ordinary homework, even the maths exercises for the next lesson – and for that Stratilatov would always pedantically give me a *dvoika* ['two' out of five - an "unsatisfactory" mark]. But he knew, of course, that I was diligently working on the assignments he set us in his 'math circle', and so in my log-book there would always be a string of *piaterki* ['fives' out of five - equivalent to 'excellent]. By the way, I've still got five or six commendation certificates for having obtained top marks in all subjects! Despite having been put into that military college, you see, my dream was still to study at university – I've even got this certificate… in 1940, when I was in my first year at the school, I took part in the Moscow Mathematics Olympiad for entry into Moscow State University, and,

although, I didn't win any of the prize medals, I was nevertheless awarded this Certificate of Honourable Mention, which I still have with me to this day. Yes, that was my dream: to plunge into the realm of science, as it were. That's why serving in the armed forces didn't attract me at all, but there you are: my father had decided my fate for me by pushing me into this occupation, [*laughs*] probably hoping that I would kind of follow in his footsteps. Well, and then the war started: I still remember very well the 16th of October of 1941 [when the panic to get out of Moscow in view of the swiftly advancing Germans reached its peak]…

- Let's just go back a bit, if you don't mind… In 1940, in the early months of 1941, was there a sense that a war with Germany was inevitable? I mean, of course, you knew about the recent war in Spain: what did you think about that? How did the Soviet propaganda work: what kind of books did you read and what were the films you saw during that period?

- Oh, there I should say straight away that we were all brought up on such films as "If War Comes Tomorrow" ["Esli Zavtra Voina" (1938), the title of which was based on a famous song written in the same year: "If War Comes Tomorrow, / If Tomorrow We Are to March"]. You know, all these films which showed how we would fight against the Fascists. All these films came out precisely in those years when those negotiations [leading to the Russo-German Treaty of Non-Aggression of 23 August 1939] were taking place. Ribbentrop arrived in Moscow, and the grown-ups, whenever they spoke amongst themselves of what was being cooked up, said that… well, they just couldn't take it seriously, really… there was this sense of disbelief: How could such a thing happen, what did it all mean, when surely they were supposed to be our enemies?! Yes, that's what there was: this general feeling of disbelief. And that's why even we, despite still being children, also had our own thoughts on the matter as it was officially presented – we all understood very well that the Germans were our enemies, and that there was nothing more to it. Now, when the war started in 1941, we were staying at our dacha in Zvenigorod, where we usually went every summer, and when we got back to Moscow and I met all my schoolmates again, I can tell you that we all greeted the commencement of the war with exultation and enthusiasm. Why was that, you may ask? Well, it was precisely because now at last we had the chance to show our enemies what stuff we were made of. As that song went, if tomorrow there's a war, it's off into battle that we'll go… and carry the war into the enemy's own territory and smash him there! And how we would smash them – that was also shown in those films: say, how we would bomb Berlin to ruins and all kinds of military operations. And that's why we all thought: "At last! We've waited long enough!" – and that our lives would reflect the reality of these films (!) and that we would become like…

- Like the heroes of those films?

- Yes, but… time was to show that everything turned out [*laughs*] not quite as I had been shown it on the silver screen. But there really was this mood, and not just in my case, for it swept across our whole… take our courtyard, for example: in the building where we lived, there were very many children – you could almost call it a children's colony! – and we were all, to the last child, carried away by this spirit of exultation. Moreover, it's worth pointing out that this general mood of ours was in no way affected by those years of repressions that we had just experienced. Take Bruno, for example, whose father had disappeared – we still continued to stick together all the time – he never showed any feeling of rancour or discontent or anything like that…

- Of rancour against the Soviet authorities?

- Yes, that's what I had in mind. But there was nothing of that in Bruno: like all of us, he just saw that those over there were our enemies, and that here we were, as one man, behind our country – our Soviet Union!

- What was your attitude towards Bruno? You knew, after all, that his father had been arrested, that he was an 'enemy of the people': what did you think about that?

- What I would say is that you have to bear in mind that all this took place over a long period of time, over several years – that is, all these sudden disappearances of people, all these trials of Rykov, Bukharin, and all the others… the Industrial Party trial [of 1930]. When the first of these trials started taking place, they led to animated discussions amongst the grown-ups: again, I can't give any details as such, but I do know that the general atmosphere, the general attitude towards all this was that something incomprehensible and uncertain was happening; that these people weren't enemies or traitors or spies, but, on the contrary, that this incomprehensible thing was happening and… Yes, that's what the grown-ups said amongst themselves…

- Your parents too?

- And this [general atmosphere] was transmitted to us children, so that's why no feelings of mistrust built up in us over these years, let alone animosity against Soviet power, the government, or against Stalin himself. No, all this was perceived by us as some intrigues or other being plotted by [our] enemies.

- The parents of some of your class-mates were probably also arrested, weren't they? – so was this ever talked about at your school? Did the teachers mention it in class, perhaps?

- No. In the circle of children with whom I was friends, there was nothing of that: we had always been friends and would always stay so. As for Bruno, yes, his father disappeared – the other Latvian Riflemen were all a bit older and their children were already adults [so I wasn't in any contact with them] – and his family simply fell apart in the end, but I always remained his friend. We were great chums, and I never felt the slightest shadow of a doubt [as to his family's integrity] – on the contrary, Bruno's misfortunes kind of instilled into me a greater respect for him. I mean, take his father: he was also a Latvian Rifleman, a revolutionary; he had helped bring about our Revolution, and it was on the strength of his merits that he had been working in the Kremlin. I was never envious of how, say, his father was driven to and from work in a chauffeured car, or of how they had this separate flat for themselves – they had all kinds of things, even their furniture was completely different to ours… I was often at his place, we would often play there, and I saw that all his toys were also completely different and that I couldn't dream of ever having such toys myself, but I never ever felt in any way that… you know, that this somehow implied that Bruno was from a different sphere, from a different, well…

- A different social stratum?

- From some higher status in life. No, the only thing that counted was that our fathers were loyal friends, and this loyalty of theirs, this devotion was something that they passed on to us too. That's why personally, looking back at the friends I had then, I can't think of anyone with whom I might have fallen out in some way over these issues; or to whom I couldn't confide absolutely everything and, likewise, he to me; or who actually ceased to be a friend. There wasn't anything of that. It is precisely this which was so characteristic of us – namely, that we absorbed this sense of loyalty, which became part of our own flesh and blood and was so firm and clear that nothing could alter it in any way. Not even these repressions – they simply couldn't shake our childlike loyalty and devotion.

- Was this so for ever or only up to a certain point in your life?

- Well, I must say that what I saw later in life clarified a lot… I mean, later I saw life as it really was, came into contact with a wider circle of people – but that wasn't until I joined the army, until my internment in a German POW camp, and so on and so forth…

- Let's see – in 1940, you were fifteen, right? So you had completed the tenth form…

- Oh, I was fifteen in 1940, was I? Yes, you're right there, but in 1940 it wasn't the tenth form [of secondary school] that I completed, but the eighth.

- Sorry, yes, the eighth, and then you enrolled in that artillery school.

- That's right, in 1941 I was admitted into the ninth form of this special school, where we had to wear a fully military uniform.

- What were the regulations like at that school? Did you live at home or were you a boarder?

- No, I lived at home, but I was at the school for most of the time, anyway: we were also given to eat there, you see – the meals were free, I think – and our clothes, our uniforms were provided too. In fact, they fitted us out with everything that we needed. In the summer of 1941, we went to a training camp…

- Where was this camp?

- Somewhere outside Moscow, I can't remember exactly where. And all we saw of the first raids on Moscow were the Luftwaffe planes flying overhead…

- So that means you stayed in the training camp whilst the war was already going on?

- Yes, that's right, we were in this camp on the outskirts of Moscow, whilst the city itself was bombed and barraged with fire-bombs – these bombing raids on Moscow took place mainly in the summer months, and when we returned to Moscow in the autumn, I heard all the lads, and my father too, talking eagerly about how they had been stationed around the city to keep a look-out for the German planes and how they had carefully lobbed these fire-bombs into patches of sand or water. It all sounded so exciting, and we had missed all the action by being in that summer camp! Well, on September the 1st, a new academic year was supposed to begin, and I started the ninth form of this special school – classes actually went on as normal for a while, that is, until the 16th of October of 1941.

- And what happened on the 16th of October? Why is that day so memorable for you?

- Because our school folded up on that day, just like that – everything had been abandoned, and the school's entire directorial staff and officer corps had been evacuated somewhere, as we found out later.

- So there was a general evacuation of Moscow on that day?

- Yes, it was a sort of general panic evacuation. Of course, before that, various families who were more in the know had already left, but what happened on that day was this panic rush to get out of the city. Our teachers and instructors hadn't just abandoned the school premises, but us pupils too – this became clear to us when we went to our various schools in the morning and didn't find anyone there: they had already gone! Later, someone found out that an order had gone out – just before the 16th – to evacuate the school to Siberia, so that explains why all the staff and boarders had vanished by the time we day-boys arrived at the school premises that morning. And father said: "Well, seeing that they're gone and you've been left behind… that means fortunately I won't have to go looking for you. You won't be wandering around those faraway parts. We'll stay here, the two of us – that way, we menfolk will stay together in one place." You see, Mama was in Zvenigorod with Igor, whilst father and I were in Moscow.

- Do you remember how Moscow looked on that day? What was going on in the streets?

- There was this general shambles on the street, with various acts of violence on property and some looting of shops here and there. I also heard that some factories were also being pillaged – that is, the workers at each of their respective factories tried to make off with everything they could lay their hands on.

- Did you see anything yourself?

- [*sighs*] What could I see? – given that father wouldn't let me out of the house and ordered me to stay at home at all times. He wasn't sure himself what to do – whether to go into evacuation or not – but the thing that troubled him most was that Mama and Igor weren't in Moscow… They were at our dacha, which meant that our family was effectively torn in half. Now, the Commissariat of Medium-Machine Building [Tank Production] had, of course, been evacuated, whilst father stayed behind in Moscow. As far as I can understand, there had been some kind of agreement, or

something or other, between father and his bosses at the Commissariat – I can't say for sure, though, because he never talked about it – an agreement whereby if the Germans managed to enter Moscow, he would burn all the Commissariat's documents. That I do know, because I actually saw him destroy various books and letters and newspapers and…

- Did he destroy all these papers at home?

- Yes, he burnt them all, because everyone then was afraid that the Germans would succeed in taking Moscow… this was considered quite likely, despite that fact that a defence belt was being created around Moscow. Our own special school had also sent us cadets to help dig trenches, anti-tank traps, and set up these anti-tank 'hedgehogs' – I still remember this very well, how we helped build these fortifications somewhere in the Kriukovo area. And apart from this, barricades had been raised all over Moscow itself: all the approaches, access roads, and streets had been barricaded – that I have a vivid recollection of. They were proper barricades, assembled just as they should be.

- What were they actually made of?

- They were mainly made of, well… of iron and stone – there were all these anti-tank hedgehogs and iron gratings and bars of the kind used in reinforced concrete…

- And they were piled up right on the streets?

- Yes, the streets were all blocked off – and then there were these… they'd actually been put there to serve as barricades… these tram cars and buses. Yes, I remember how some of them had actually been turned over somehow and left there sprawling across various streets. So, as you can see, all kinds of things were gathered up and used… to set up these rather chaotic fortification barriers – yes, yes, there was all that. And when the Germans actually started approaching Moscow, my father, who was determined to stay put there, sent me off to Zvenigorod, together with an acquaintance of ours, in order to help Mama and Igor to make their way to the capital. So we embarked on this long, roundabout route – not by the usual Belorussian Highway, but, rather, taking a train towards Volokolamsk from the Riga Railway Station – and eventually made it to Zvenigorod. That was the first time I found myself in front-line territory because, although the Germans didn't occupy Zvenigorod, they were all over the surrounding villages, as were the Finns, too. But, as I said, Zvenigorod itself was never taken by the enemy, and it's quite curious this: that even then I didn't get to see the front-line as such. Yes, the city was shelled, but I didn't see our front-line – what I did see, though, was how these "Katiusha" multiple rocket launchers were deployed to shell the German positions. I saw this truck drive past our house with one of these "Katiushas" in tow…

- This was actually within Zvenigorod itself?

- Yes, yes – I saw the truck drive up a promontory just outside the city limits, and how the "Katiusha" fired off a volley in the direction of the enemy troops – these blazing rockets cut through the air, exploded somewhere in the distance, then the "Katiusha" fired another salvo of rockets, and after that the truck immediately turned round and drove off back to the city precincts – within a few minutes the hilltop where it had just been was intensively shelled by German counter-battery fire. Yes, I saw all that with my own eyes. One of these shells even landed on our dacha, or, rather, the roof ridge of the house next to ours, and caused the whole roof to come tumbling down. That happened right in front of us – fortunately, no one was injured too badly and there weren't any fatal casualties. The first time I actually saw someone killed in this war wasn't until we – that is, Mama, Igor and me – were making our way to the Zvenigorod railway station from our dacha, hauling the few possessions we'd been able to take with us on a sledge: in Ignat'evo, this village which we passed on the way, I saw one of our soldiers lying dead in the ditch-side of the road. Half of his head had been battered open. He had evidently come under shell fire from some nearby trench-mortar and been killed on the spot. That was the first time I'd seen a fatal

victim of this war, and it impressed itself deeply on my memory, especially as I was still almost but a child. To this day I can still see him, lying there, stretched out lifelessly on the snow, his skull smashed open. That was, of course, a sight which I had never seen until then and which I somehow had never imagined possible – that is, that someone could be killed or torn to pieces by a mortar-shell just like that. Well, in the end, the three of us got to the Zvenigorod station, where, after a good deal of difficulties, we just managed to get onto a train for Moscow – some sort of service was still running. When we arrived in Moscow it must have been November or thereabouts, and, as our train approached the city – or, rather, as we were leaving behind Zvenigorod and passing through its environs, we had seen not so much the front-line as such, in the sense of a zone of fire, but rather these fresh Red Army divisions which were starting to converge around Moscow. It was quite a reassuring sight: seeing our own Red Army soldiers in their white fur-jackets and felt boots, dressed properly for the winter, in contrast to what we'd come across earlier – even that dead soldier I'd seen in Ignat'evo, for example, had been wearing just ordinary shoes and a plain overcoat: almost summer dress, if you think about it. But these fresh troops we saw now were equipped in an altogether different manner. They had come all the way from Siberia, people said – from Siberia! And it was true, I saw it with my own eyes how these reinforcements were coming. After that, the general mood that had prevailed earlier, this rumour which, so to speak, had spread from mouth to mouth – namely, that the Germans would capture Moscow – all that died away, and there was no longer any panic rush to get out of the city. But still, it was, of course, difficult and tough for us, as was to be expected: food supplies weren't distributed regularly, for example. That's why, if I remember correctly, we took half a sack of potatoes with us from Zvenigorod – because we knew what was awaiting us in Moscow: father had told us to gather any provisions we might have in our dacha and bring them with us. So these last two months of 1941 were also a time of uncertainty to some extent, but the difference was that everyone was calm now: there weren't any more panic rushes to get out of the city – everyone was waiting for it to come. That is, for our troops' counteroffensive, which, if my memory doesn't fail me, was already under way by December. But, of course, when this counterattack was launched, we were already in Moscow and didn't get to see how it progressed – all I saw there was this first wave of reinforcements, which certainly did seem to confirm that all that hadn't just been empty talk…

- It gave you this sense of hope, didn't it?

- Yes, that something was actually being done at last and that… because, you see, at that time there were all these stories going round about how all the important persons had been evacuated or had fled, but… in contrast, as I can remember very well, Stalin was still at his post – Stalin hadn't gone anywhere – he was still in Moscow! yes, he had a special bunker somewhere near one of the stations of the Moscow Metro – I think it was the Kirovskaia [now Chistye Prudy] Station, which was right next to us on Sretenka Street. And this also, in a way… you see, in those years we had all retained a certain faith, a childlike devotion, which now seemed to be borne out by all that was happening – it was this faith in our capability to force the Germans to retreat more and more, in our strength increasing from day to day. That's why, when our counteroffensive started, we were all carried away by this enthusiasm which was in such contrast to the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that had prevailed earlier… Well, as I explained earlier, my school had been evacuated – there was, in fact, no teaching at all in any of the Moscow schools at that time – so I went to a vocational training college, which was based on the premises of the "Kompressor" Factory, on Enthusiasts' Highway, and was immediately… I'd decided to train as a lathe operator… and was immediately, without any preliminary training almost, put behind a lathe and shown how to use the cutting tools. And so there I was turning out mortar-shells and anti-tank grenades – that was what our 'training' consisted of. That is, we were in effect working in this munitions factory, but,

officially, we were being given training in... well, I suppose, one always has to start somewhere! So that's how I picked up the rudiments of the lathe turner's profession – by turning out shells!

- What was your working-day like?

- Oh, our working-hours could vary quite a lot because the German bomber planes were still carrying out raids on Moscow, and so there were these frequent air-raid alarms. We would work in two shifts, naturally, each one lasting some ten hours, as was the norm in those days. Then you have to add the time it took me to get to the factory and back – but, in fact, I often had to stay over night in the factory. I remember that this happened a number of times: we would have to pass the night there because of an air-raid alarm. Whenever this was announced, we couldn't go home after our day's work, nor could the night shift workers come to the factory, since all traffic, all public transport would immediately come to a halt. So sometimes I had no choice but to stay on the factory premises for 36, or even 48, hours in a row. So, as you can see, our working-day depended on all these factors. But on the other hand, we were catered for there – we had these special workers' rations, as they were called, and there was a canteen, so in that respect, yes, everything was…

- Well organised?

- Yes, that's fair to say… it was more or less all right. I remember how for a while, when I was working in that vocational training college, I received this worker's ration which included some soup and something else too – *kasha* [porridge] of some sort – and I would eat all this, naturally. But if the ration happened to be supplemented with some rissole made of groats or something – so that it at least bore some resemblance to a real rissole! – I wouldn't eat it myself, but took it home with me, to give it to my younger brother. Yes, it's such moments which I remember particularly well from that time: this notion of having to assume some responsibility… even though I was only just sixteen then… this awareness of how difficult the situation was for all of us, and therefore this notion that it wasn't enough to be just a dependent, but that one had to face up to the realities of life…

- Where did your father work during this time?

- He…was still in that Commissariat…

- But I thought that the Commissariat had been evacuated?

- Yes, it had, but one or two people did stay on. And that's why, once the threat of Moscow falling into the hands of the Germans had receded for good, they were able to set up… well, re-establish some section of their Commissariat, and were thus… Father worked in the supplies department, or, rather, given that the department hadn't been re-established yet, he was responsible for sorting out these supply contracts… well, in short, he was definitely working. They evidently still had some important functions to perform over there at the Commissariat, and when, subsequently, the other members of staff started to arrive back in Moscow, it gradually resumed its normal activity again, and after the war father continued to work there – right up to his retirement with a pension.

- So that means that during the war, especially during these first months, you could also count on your father's ration card, isn't that so?

- Oh, yes, the ration cards – I was going to tell you about that: yes, I had one, a worker's [class one] ration card; my father also had one; then, after Mama started to sew linen… this regulation linen for the army… she too was given a ration card…

- Did she sew at home?

- Yes, that's right, on her sewing machine. So, as I was saying, she would sew these sheets and blankets for the army and was therefore also entitled to a worker's ration card. In fact, the only one in our family not to have one of these cards was little Igorek… but, actually, no, there I'm wrong: he did have a children's ration card.

- A dependant [class three] ration card…

- Yes, that's what they were called – dependant cards. Well, and Igor had one of them.
- What did your brother do during the war?
- Well, let's see: in the autumn of 1941, he couldn't go to school either, like me, but when the schools reopened in 1942, he went back to the classroom and, of course, carried on simultaneously with those sporting matters of his… because he was a real enthusiast, you see… He'd actually started to take up football before the war… Now, he was born in 1930, so that means he was ten and eleven in those years: well, already then he was crazy about football…
- Was he a member of some junior club or 'football circle' at school?
- No, there simply weren't any, not yet anyway… No, at first it was just a matter of kicking a ball about on our courtyard with some of our neighbours' children; then they began to organise matches between teams recruited from the children of each apartment block around our yard; and, finally, they even set up a team to represent our street and played in matches against teams from other, nearby streets.
- So these were just teams which would arise spontaneously?
- Oh yes, it was all very much done on a spontaneous basis…
- In your courtyard did you always have two fixed teams, or did the players vary?
- No, no, they weren't proper teams as such – what would happen was that a number of children, even some from other blocks on our street, would get together and agree on who would be in each team, on the conditions of play, and so on… I also played in these matches myself a couple of times, but only when one of the teams, say, happened to be short of a player. Yes, then I might jump in to make up the required number, but otherwise I wasn't really that interested in football any more, and I would just watch them a bit. Now, with Igor it was quite different: as soon as he got back from school, without going up to our room or anything, he would simply put his satchel down on the ground, next to whatever was being used as one of the sides' goalposts, and they would instantly select him for one of the teams, because he just had this… this downright passion for football! He was so quick and agile that the other lads, who were all fifteen or sixteen, didn't mind that he was just ten, and they would immediately pick him for their teams…
- So already then he was an acknowledged star player…
- Oh yes, he was acknowledged all right! Now, you asked me about junior clubs – the thing is that there weren't any yet in those years, but, on the other hand, there were these real, professional matches one could go to watch. However, the first time we had the chance to get tickets – when Dinamo Moscow were playing – Mama simply wouldn't let him go. Eventually, though, he managed to persuade her by saying that he would go with Leva, his big brother. Well, in that case, if Leva was to accompany him, then, of course, everything would be all right!! And that's how he got to see his first match on a real football pitch… The first few times, in fact, I always accompanied him to the stadium – whenever a match with Dinamo Moscow was on, because that was always a real feast-day for him! A bit later, still during the war mind you, when life started getting back to normal again and all the schools reopened, he was able to join one of these 'football circles' at the Young Pioneers' House on Stopani Street [now Ogorodnaia Sloboda Lane], which was in the same district as our block of flats, not far from the Kirovskaia [now Chistye Prudy] Metro Station. He started training properly there and eventually went on to…
- When your brother got back home from the stadium, would he discuss these matches with you, or seek to share his emotions after his team had won or suffered a defeat?
- Oh, sure he did, sure! After all, his heart literally bled for Dinamo Moscow, whenever they happened to be beaten. He was a real "Dinamovite" to the marrow, as they say, and knew all the players, whereas the only players familiar to me were the Starostin brothers, who made such a great stir at the time after clinching victory for their team against the Spaniards [the four Starostin brothers played for Moscow Spartak, who, in the summer of 1937, managed to beat a touring team

of Basque star players from the Spanish league 6-2. The Basques had come to the USSR to raise funds for the Spanish Republic]. We were all so proud of these Starostin brothers, it was just this feeling of… this welling up of pride, high spirits and at the same time a kind of, well,… of nation-wide pride, to put it that way. So, yes, Dinamo Moscow was his passion, that's how it was. But, all the same, this never led to any sort of hostility or aggression, you know, of the kind one sees so often in recent times, when these…

- Fans?

- Yes, because in those days the fans weren't like that – in fact, there wasn't such a word yet in the Russian language. And neither was there any of this settling of accounts after matches, any of these brawls and scuffles that we see nowadays – that I can vouch for, because I sometimes went along to the stadium myself. There just wasn't anything of the sort. I suppose, people just backed their teams as one is supposed to, that is, simply giving expression to their emotions, but nothing more. Yes, that's how it was. And everyone was friends with one another – the children would all get together to play other games, too, like Cossack bandits, or these other ones. And, yes, there were, of course, baddies and goodies in these games, but it was only ever for fun: we didn't otherwise treat anyone differently or pick on anyone… we were all simply children… And in Moscow there were, for example, quite a few Tartars: some actually living in our block of flats… And as I told you earlier, there were all these Latvians and Estonians… and many others too, especially of Caucasian nationality… Incidentally, there were also many Chinese…

- In your block?

- No, not exactly, not in ours, but in the block next door, where there was this Chinese laundry – what I don't remember is if it was a private enterprise or… but I do know that there were all these Chinese working there. That's why there were also Chinese children on our street. And, again, no one would ever pick on anyone else or start calling him names or whatever – we didn't consider anyone else to be somehow different to us: for instance, the Jews, of which there were quite many… One of my best friends was Jewish – Rozenblium was his name; we were in the same form at school. And I would sometimes go round to his place, and there was nothing odd about his folks or anything – yes, it was a Jewish family, that's true… rather distinctly so, for that matter, but as people we were alike, on completely equal terms: there wasn't any sense of inferiority, or of exclusivity, you know, of being the chosen… no, there wasn't anything of the sort from either side, it just didn't show up, and this was what… yes, it was this spirit of internationalism, which was entirely natural…or, rather, how should I say?

- Genuine…

- Yes, this genuine spirit of internationalism, you see, and it was so strong that even in later years nothing could break it, not in my case anyway. I mean, I know that because later some of my friends, when I met them again in Moscow many years later, they did want to cross out and change some things [when renewing their internal passports – perhaps the notorious 'entry no. 5']… I remember there was this family in the same courtyard as ours – the Glukhovs – and they had a son called Iura, who was born in 1924 and so was a year older than me – like Bruno – and that Iura had an elder brother called Kolia, I think, about whom we would whisper between ourselves: "He's in jail, they've locked him up – he's a thief." And in those times, you see, that was like some major accident. It was something completely incomprehensible to us – this [being a thief] was something which just wasn't in human nature… I mean, to us this Kolia seemed to belong to a different sort of people.

- So, in a sense, this family was kind of branded?

- Exactly, this Kolia was in a sense branded for the rest of his life. But don't get me wrong: this doesn't mean that we somehow treated his brother differently – no, there was nothing of that. I remember when he came back home after having served some sentence [I don't think it was the

first one] over there – I've got this faint recollection of him: he was about ten years older than us and kind of… kept himself to himself, you know, sort of apart. He didn't seem to want to join in our group, and, of course, he couldn't care less for any of our games. And we all sensed that he had become someone who wasn't at all like the rest of us – almost from a different species, really; from a kind of different category of humans… you see, that's how it was. But these were always exceptional, freak cases… yes, there were a couple more like him in some of the courtyards next to ours, but every such case was always something exceptional, rather like a major road accident, to put it that way… because our life was in general suffused by this spirit of unity, and there was nothing that could shatter this child-like enthusiasm and solidarity; nothing that could divide us and turn us against one another like enemies…

- Did you and your brother go to the same school?

- No, we were in different schools.

- Why was that?

- Because…oh, I couldn't say – I mean, I was at so many different schools… the first school I attended, into whose first form I was admitted, was this one on the corner where Sadovaia Street was intersected by First Meshchanskaia Street, which now has just become Prospekt Mira [Avenue of Peace]. Near the school was that Sukharev Tower, which stood right at the cross-roads, if you can picture it to yourself – now, when I joined the first form, it was 1933, so… yes, I attended that school for two years, and I remember how during my time there, I witnessed the Sukharev Tower being blown up and demolished little by little: every morning, on my way to school, I would see how this or that section had gone, until there was nothing left on the spot where it had once stood. They didn't do any of this demolishing work in the daytime, only at nights. And do you know why explosives had to be used? Well, it was because when the tower was built [in 1692-95], the substance they used to bind the bricks together wasn't cement, but some kind of lime-wash mixed with this…oh, I've forgotten, this…

- Egg-white.

- Yes, that's what it was: egg-white. And the binding was so strong that it was impossible to prise out the bricks one by one. The only way round it was to blow the whole thing up.

- Did you ever ask yourself, though, why they were blowing it up?

- It was simply because the tower was blocking the traffic: I mean, it stood right in the middle where Sretenka Street leads onto First Meshchanskaia Street and crosses Sadovoe Kol'tso [the Garden Ring, one of the busiest thoroughfares of Moscow] – right at the cross-roads!

- So it was in the way?

- Yes, it was obstructing the flow of traffic: I mean, nowadays, they would simply have built some traffic circle around it, but in those days the planners weren't so far-sighted and decided that since it was in the way… Incidentally, it was the same with the… Do you know why the Sadovoe Kol'tso [Garden Ring] is called that? It's because there were gardens dotted all along it. I remember them very well. I also have this recollection of going to this school in the winter and, on my way there, seeing how these chaps in *telogreiki* [quilted jackets] and short padded coats were cutting all those trees down, using two-handed saws. The plan was to widen the street, and so I soon saw other work brigades laying out macadam, too. And, yes, eventually, we had these widened streets where once there had been all those old houses and gardens.

- What a shame!

- Yes.

- Did you also see any church buildings being destroyed? Perhaps you remember how the Christ the Saviour Cathedral was demolished..?

- No, I only heard about these demolitions, but I certainly didn't go to see them myself: they were in remote areas of the city and, besides, what was the point? I mean, the whole thing felt kind of… I didn't feel any particular desire to see it with my own eyes.

- So it was just an everyday sort of thing was it?

- Well, considering that they'd decided to blow these churches up, it seemed to be something necessary, something they had to get done and over with. As far as my parents were concerned… well, I see that you're getting at the question of religiosity… My parents weren't…

- Believers.

- They weren't believers as such, they didn't go to church – father, in particular, didn't believe in all that. But I was christened, though.

- Really? Who christened you?

- Oh, it was done by this Estonian woman whom we called Auntie Polia – she was good friends with Mama. Yes, I was christened, and so was my brother.

- But I suppose this must have been done with your parents' permission?

- Yes, yes, it all happened when Mama was still working [at the Secretariat of Narkomindel]. I was barely one or two years old and was looked after by a nanny: this old Estonian woman who didn't speak any Russian almost. That was, in fact, the reason why until the age of six or seven my own Russian wasn't very good either.

- Can you still speak Estonian? Did you manage to keep it up later?

- Well, as a child I was, of course, fluent in Estonian, but then it kind of faded away, and it wasn't until I joined the army and was assigned to an Estonian unit that, after about a month, it all…

- Came back again?

- Yes, it all fell back into place, and I was able to converse in Estonian again. Well, as I was saying, this nanny we had would take me to church. I can still remember that church there was on Sretenka Street, but which was later pulled down: yes, I remember those large black [altar-]doors inside; it was all so… Our nanny, she was, of course, a believer.

- Was it a Roman Catholic church?

- That's what I don't know – I simply couldn't say. I wasn't aware then of all these differences there are between Orthodox and Catholic churches – all I knew is that it was a church, because it had all these crosses and icons: all the things that churches are supposed to have, right? But as to its denomination or whatever… I simply didn't pay any attention to that…

- Were there any pews or not?

- Well, if my memory doesn't fail me, no, there weren't any – there actually weren't any pews, so I suppose, now that you've mentioned it… I suppose that it must after all have been an Orthodox church. Yes, and even though our nanny was Estonian, she attended this church because she simply wanted to commune, as they say, with God, and it didn't matter to her what type of church it was. And, besides, there weren't any Estonian churches in Moscow, anyway. So in her case it was purely a matter of faith, let's put it that way. Now, I also remember very well how at home we would always have a New Year's tree in time for New Year's Eve – even when there weren't any for sale because it was forbidden! No matter what, we would always have a 'tree' every year – this is how Mama would go about it: we had this cradle made of wicker lying around, you see, and Mama would stand it upright, and then we would all decorate it with all kinds of toys – we would also manage to get some candles from somewhere. Perhaps you're wondering if they actually were proper New Year's tree ornaments?! Well, they were! We made them ourselves, you see – we would hang the cradle with apples and nuts we had painted over, and with these rattles we'd also put together ourselves – anything you name, we had it on our tree! So every New Year we would have this artificial tree in our room, without fail!

- And what about presents? Were you given any on the morning of New Year's Day, or the night before? And did your family celebrate the occasion with sweetmeats, junkets, or anything like that?

- [*sighs*] Unfortunately, the fact is that we didn't have any ritual as such of giving presents on that day – however much I stretch my memory, I simply can't remember any instance of it being otherwise. Yes, treats there were – Mama would always make something special – but as for presents… I'd say it simply wasn't a time yet in which people could afford to give presents, if you see what I mean. Because these pre-war years were rather tough, after all. I remember very well how we would go to this Torgsin shop on our street ["Torgsin" stands for the All-Union Association of Trade with Foreigners, which operated a system of shops from 1930 to 1936, at which any Soviet citizen could buy scarce goods in exchange for foreign currency, gold, silver, or other valuables that he might have at home]. Do you know what I'm talking about when I say Torgsin? Yes? Well, evidently, father had some valuables or other that he could bring to the shop; Mama also had her wedding ring and some other trinkets; and I remember we also had this clock which we took to the shop once, and then there was father's gold watch-chain… So, in short, we sometimes had no choice but to shop in this Torgsin store on Sretenka Street. It simply wasn't a time for buying presents, as you can see! I remember, Mama had this brooch with a gold… no, actually, with a setting made of some precious stone…and inside was this portrait of a woman: well, all that went on buying butter and other food for us children at this Torgsin store – because our parents lived only for us, everything they had they would give to us children.

- So your father's wage wasn't sufficient in itself for your family to get by tolerably?

- No, of course not, and, besides, sometimes you just couldn't come by certain goods and necessities at the other [state] shops – there were a lot of goods which they simply didn't have in stock or in very short supply, and for some you still needed to have ration cards. So that's why little by little all these valuables of ours trickled into this Torgsin shop: our silver spoons, too, everything… if it had some value, it all ended up at that store. Oh, and I already told you about my parents' wedding rings.

- Does that mean that your parents were married according to the rites of the church?

- Yes, why not? they were married…

- But you don't know for sure?

- No, for aught I know, as one says… I simply didn't ask myself such questions at the time. But seeing that, yes, there were these wedding rings, then I don't see why they couldn't have been married in church – but as to the whys and wherefores, that I can't tell you.

- Now, these silver spoons, that brooch – how had they come into your family's possession? Were they perhaps part of your mother's dowry?

- Well, for a start, there couldn't have been any question of a dowry – that's for sure! No, it has to do with the following: you see, in 1928, when I was just three, Mama took me on a visit to Estonia – it was still possible to travel [there] freely at the time. By the way, that's when I got to see my grandfather, that is, Mama's father, and his second wife, who both lived in Tartu.

- What did they work as?

- Let's see: at that time, they were already in… you know, Mama was from the countryside as such – father told me that – but at the time of our visit [in 1928] her father had already managed to move to Tartu, where he worked in this…he was doing some job for the municipal authorities…

- So he was a state official?

- His duties had something to do with going round the city and checking that everything was in order. I don't remember what exactly his work consisted of, but it was something of the sort. However, that's only my mother's parents – of my paternal grandparents I know nothing at all. Well, and, as I was saying, when we got back from Estonia, Mama had brought a couple of things

with her: valuables and the like. My parents sold part of them in order to buy a third of a house in Zvenigorod.

- I see – that was the dacha where you…

- Yes, that was our dacha, where we would spend every summer. But it was only thanks to Mama having brought those things from Estonia. We didn't part with all of them, though: I've still got some bits and pieces from that time – even some very nice blankets – which were passed on to me, I suppose.

- From one generation to the next.

- Yes, almost like heirlooms, as it were – in fact, from the way we've stored them so carefully, you might think they were relics!

- Do you keep them in that same dacha?

- No, no – here in Moscow. That dacha was sold after the war, or, rather, that third of the dacha which had belonged to us. Because, you see, there were these other Estonians living in Zvenigorod and they were keen to have those extra rooms, and since… yes, since Igor didn't want to spend the summers in there any longer, and our parents didn't either – I wasn't there, so I had no say in the matter – they decided to sell it. Though selling isn't the right word for it: they just made it over to these acquaintances of theirs, for some token payment – that's all, that's how they settled it. Yes, that's another characteristic scene from those times – although I wasn't present at that particular one – and do you know what I've been thinking about all this? Well, that it didn't have anything to do with some blind faith in [God] or whatever, but that all this was done in an everyday, human sort of way. You know, people then, they got along with each other and didn't allow any of those… because, of course, those things like religion, nationality, say, or one's social position, or whatever, the flat one lived in – they were all, of course, different for each individual person, but in their day-to-day dealings people were…

- So all those factors didn't have any bearing on how people got along?

- Yes, that's right: people would get on well marvellously with one another, there wasn't any hostility or resentment about this or that. Yes, there really was this fusion, this welding of people into this sense of solidarity – that's how I would describe it.

- If you don't mind, let's go back to the subject of your school education – why did you change schools various times, as you yourself said? What was the reason for that?

- Let's see now: I was at that first school for two years – during which the Sukharev Tower I told you about was demolished – now, that school was actually rather far from where we lived: it was necessary to cross Sadovaia Street [i.e. one of the various stretches of Sadovoe Kol'tso], and so a grown-up would always have to take me to school – usually Mama, but sometimes also Igor's nanny – which wasn't that convenient, of course. Even though our street was supposed to be in the district covered by that school! So, anyway, for the next two years I attended a school on Markhlevskii Street [now Miliutin Lane], which was behind Stretenskii Boulevard, from the other side. Then, from the fifth form to the seventh, I was at this school in Ulanskii [Ulanov] Lane which was even closer to Kirovskaia [now Chistye Prudy] Metro Station. That was the third school I attended before finally enrolling at that special Party school near Kursk Railway Station. But that was a newly-established school, of course… whereas all the other schools I'd attended earlier were located in these old buildings, you know. Now, Igor was luckier than me: when he reached school age, he went straight to a new school. I say luckier because all the ones I'd been to – except the one on Ulanov Lane, which was also a new school – were housed in these old buildings which had simply been refitted inside. They weren't originally intended for teaching purposes, of course, so they'd had to be reconverted in this rather slipshod manner. Igor, though, got to attend this new school on Sretenka, our street – it was right next to our block of flats, in fact – and he completed both his primary and secondary education there, in the same school. So, to answer your question,

the reason why I changed schools several times was one of practicality and convenience: my parents didn't want me to have to go to a school that was too far away.

- Were there any situations in which you had to stand up for Igor, or support him in any other way? – you know, as an older, stronger brother sometimes has to for a younger one… Or would he himself ask for your help?

- Well, how shall I say… you see, in our family there was what I'd call a matriarchy. That is, Mama was for us the most important person. She didn't work any more after Igor was born, but she was always so… so meticulous, strict, and principled, and she took charge of our upbringing – Igor's and mine – and we would obey her every word as if it was holy writ, because for us Mama was a saint! And not just then, but all her life, right until her death and even beyond… In Mama's last years, Igor already had this ailment of his, but, all the same, he would always rush off from wherever he was to spend some time with Mama, because she was simply everything for us. And that's why, to return to your question, the following scene has just sprung to my mind: I was at home – so was Mama – when suddenly these little girls came running in and shrieking: "Auntie Iulia, Auntie Iulia! Igor's just been duffed up in a fight! He's cowering there and crying…" They obviously wanted her to come down and take a hand in the matter, but Mama said to them: "Well, if he's been beaten up, that serves him right, doesn't it? – if he hasn't learnt how to hit back yet. So, girls, mind you don't come in here squealing again!" And she didn't go down to look for him in our courtyard and comfort him, let alone to ask him who'd done him over – no, she just stayed there where she was until Igor himself decided to make his way up. That's how she was: she wanted to nurture in Igor this courage and resilience, so that he would be able to stick up for himself instead of going whimpering to his parents, as other children do. So that's why, even though I was his elder brother, I too never went to his rescue whenever he got himself into some scrap! And, I tell you, there were many occasions for such fights! Because, you see, right next to where to we lived, there was this *mikroraion* [neighbourhood unit], which we would call the "Amerikanka" [*tr. approx. as* "the Americans' place"], since it was inhabited mainly by foreign workers who'd come to Moscow and were employed at various construction sites across the city, or on some other, I don't know, industrial locations or whatever. Well, and we would often do battle with the children from the "Amerikanka", trying to emulate that film "Aleksandr Nevskii" [Eisenstein's famous monumental film was released in 1938].

- In what sense did you do battle with them? Do you mean you actually had fights? Or was it just a case of standing your ground with a bit of bravado?

- Oh no, we sometimes did have these fights – real fights!.. We would make these wooden swords and spears, as well as these… how do you call them?…No, not crossbows, far from it!…No, these… hmm… Muskets! That's it! Yes, these muskets which we would pack tight with broken-off matchstick heads and some steel from some…

- Really, wooden muskets?

- No, no, we'd make the barrel out of these rounded metal pipes, drilling a hole for the fuse, and, after packing it with all the phosphorus we could get from these matches, we would stop it up with some wadding, and there – that was our home-made musket, ready for battle! Now, father was the Chairman of our local Housing Committee, or whatever they were called, and so he wasn't exempt from this…

- Community work?

- Yes, that's right he had to do this [unpaid] community work, and so, in this capacity, he would often confiscate these muskets from us and hide them somewhere at home – often just on top of a cupboard, and my mission was to find these weapons and return them to their [*laughs*] owners again!… So, yes, sometimes we would have these… I remember very well this occasion on which we got ourselves entangled in this rather serious group fight – so serious, in fact, that the militia

[municipal police] were finally called in. Yes… and they dragged us off to the local militia office – but all they did was just to sort us out a bit, ask us why we'd got ourselves into such a mess, and in the end they just left it at that, without any further consequences… All they'd wanted really was to break up that fight and get us to calm down…

- Were these fights, then, based on the 'class-struggle'?

- Well, that's… you see, the reason why we called their neighbourhood unit the "Amerikanka" was because the West was somehow constantly being…

- Set against the Soviet Union?

- Yes, that's right, the West was always being set against us, because all this propaganda was aimed at… all these films and books and everything were intended to show that America over there was so-and-so, that all the Americans were this bourgeois lot, and…

- So your fights were grounded in ideology, then?

- Yes, you see, yes… there was an ideological basis, and that's why we joined battle with them… But, I mean, the way we fought, of course, was simply no more than a bit of childish jousting…

- And there weren't any accidents with those muskets?

- Not as far as I can remember there weren't. It was all just really this… you know, we also made ourselves these shields like Aleksandr Nevskii and his men… It was all rather more like a demonstration of…

- Your readiness to fight back?

- Yes, that's absolutely right – our readiness for action and to fight back, as you said…

- Against an alien ideology? [*laughs*]

- Yes, you see, there was precisely something like that, so… But, by the way, I had actually forgotten about all that – I'd never really thought back to these things, and it's only now that you asked me those questions, that these images have sprung back in my mind. And, yes, all this somehow did weld us together: all of us Russian citizens… [Tr. note: To refer to "Russians," Netto uses here the high-sounding *rossiiane*, instead of the standard *russkie* with good reason. For the archaic noun *rossiianin* implies precisely a citizen of the Russian State (*Rossiia*) and its 'successor,' the Soviet Union, without marking out his nationality as (Great) Russian – something that the adjective *russkii* inevitably does.]

- By which you mean, of course, Russian citizens of all nationalities?

- Yes, that's why I used the phrase "Russian citizens" instead of "Russians." Yes, Russian citizens. Incidentally, I've just remembered something that happened when we had the population census in 1939 – not just in Moscow, but all over the Soviet Union – and these census-takers came round to our block of flats. Well, it was father's turn first, then Mama's, and then they asked us children too: "What nationality are you?" I said: "I'm Estonian." Nothing odd there, given that both my father and mother were Estonians and were registered as such, so I was too… Now, that was in 1939, so that means Igor was nine, whilst I was already… fourteen or so… Well, so then the census-takers asked Igor: "And what nationality are you, young man?" And he said… I can literally see him in front of me, as if it had all happened yesterday… he replied: "I'm Russian, I am!" We were all like wonder-stricken: father and Mama just didn't know what to say. And the censor-takers, I think, were also a bit perplexed; they weren't so sure now if Igor really was my brother or if… But I explained to them clearly that we were brothers and that he was, of course, Estonian like all of us… One of the censor-takers, however, seemed to be sharper than the others and wasn't too impressed by my attempt to shed light on things: "Well, if that's what that young Soviet citizen says, that's what we'll write down."

- Did you all take him to task afterwards for what he'd said?

- Not at all, there wasn't any scolding at all: I don't remember father or Mama doing anything in particular… and a bit later, he was issued with his own internal passport and there the entry [no.5]

said: “Russian,” and that’s exactly what he was, for the rest of his life. I think of it this way: that at up to the age of nine Igor was still an Estonian – he at least knew a couple of words of Estonian, even if he didn’t speak it fluently – because, you see, unlike me, the nanny he grew up with was Russian. But when he reached the age of ten, and then for the rest of his life – he died when he was sixty-nine, so that means… yes, for a good sixty years he was a Russian!

- And he actually felt Russian?

- Yes, all the time, and in his passport he always had “Russian” in that box.

- Was your attitude towards him always that of an elder brother towards a younger one? That is, did you have this sense of being somehow responsible for him?

- What a question! I mean, of course I did: he was my younger brother, and I was ready to do anything for his sake… when he was still a toddler, you know, I sometimes even had occasion to look after him like a nanny and to – pardon me – take out the chamber-pot and all that… and when we were at our dacha in Zvenigorod, in the summers, this sense of him being in my charge was even stronger, because there I would carry him on my back and take him to where the pine trees were and to those hillocks on the ground where we would find wild strawberries to pick… and I taught him all kinds of things: whether it was climbing trees or fishing, or…

- What about his attitude towards you? What was that like?

- His attitude?

- Yes, in what ways he showed it and…

- Well, I’ll explain to you how it was, if you like. Now, it was many, many years after those summers I’ve just told you about… it was when this television channel was making a documentary for the 60th anniversary of Moscow Spartak – and Igor was already dead, so this Georgii Zanin interviewed me and asked me lots of questions about Igor, but he also asked me this: “Lev Aleksandrovich, have you ever cried in your life?” For a few moments, I was at a loss as to what to answer, but then I remembered this episode which I wanted to tell you about, and replied: “Yes, I’ve cried twice in my life.” – “Please tell us about it,” he said. So this is what I told him, and it will also help answer your question: the first time I cried – and, moreover, cried awfully bitterly – was in 1941…no, sorry, 1940, when I left the special school to… oh, hang on – no, that was in 1941, of course… Right, so the academic year at my artillery school was supposed to start a bit earlier than usual [i.e. before the 1st of September], and that’s why father decided to come to Zvenigorod and take me back to Moscow with him. Mama and Igor were going to stay on at the dacha, but they walked with us to the station, or, rather, to this spot halfway between our house and the station, where we’d decided to bid each other farewell, so that it wouldn’t be so sad as on the platform. Well, we all kissed each other goodbye, as one does on these occasions, and then father and me walked on, leaving them standing there, but we didn’t get further than twenty or so steps when suddenly this terrible howling started: I was howling, and so was Igor back there… I mean, if one thinks about it, there wasn’t any real reason to behave in that way, because two weeks later he and Mama were supposed to be coming back to Moscow anyway, and we would all be together again, so why this howling all of a sudden, you might ask?… But, still, we howled, and there was nothing we could do about it! Like me, he simply didn’t seem able to calm down, and Mama took us by the hand and tried to comfort him: “Igorek, don’t be like that, Leva’s just going to Moscow, and we’re going there too in a few days. He’s not going to disappear anywhere…”, and made all kind of assurances like that! And all this was because we were always together – in the winter and in the summer – playing or getting up to all kinds of things. That is to say, we were always together, except when playing football because we would then be in different…

- Teams.

- Yes, on different sides.

- Now why was that?

- Well, it was like this… you see, for some reason I always preferred remaining in defence, whereas he was a born striker, and so I'd always get furious whenever he managed to get pass me.
- [*laughs*]
- He was so small and quick, and as he got closer I would see him smiling, laughing, even looking me in the face, and before I knew it, he'd already dribbled the ball past me. And for some reason it just turned out that way: we would always be on opposite sides, and even though he was so small, there was just no chance of stopping him, of tackling him – he would almost always dodge our centre backs and score a goal. Well, the frustration I felt on these occasions didn't last very long, as it was just a game. As for everything else, I was always on the same side as him, and didn't mind it at all if he always got the lion's share of everything: the best part of our rooms at home, or the yummiest food. Everything always went to little Igorek, because he was so little and such a rascal! So that's why I would always play with him: for example, when real New Year's trees started appearing and we could get hold of one, we would sit under it and try to make some decorations to hang on its branches. The trouble was that he always liked to break all kinds of things, even toys, and so he would point at the tree we'd just hung with all these presents and say: "Levushka, give me something, I'll smash it." And he would take the mallet I'd just been using to rig up a stand for the tree, and smash whatever I gave him to pieces. That's how it was with him! He just didn't have this… because I, on the other hand, always wanted to make and build things, whereas he was all for smashing everything to smithereens! And our relationship was marked by these constant high spirits… and affection for each other… just as it should be between brothers.
- Was your relationship always the same, though, or did it change a bit over the years?
- Oh, that was only later that…
- All right, then I'll leave that question for the time being, until we get there.
- Yes. Because I mean that was after I'd been in the army and been captured, and all that – because when I was in the army, I was assigned to this Estonian division…
- Ah, but the last thing we got to was when the war had just started and you were working and training as a lathe turner – so what happened next?
- Right, that's where we got to, isn't it? So, yes, then I completed that factory training programme and was given some certificates to this effect, and then I was just transferred to another factory, the 'Stankolit' one, which was in Mar'ina Roshcha [Mar'ina Grove, a district in the north of Moscow], and was once again assigned to lathe-work, in military production. The only difference was that, whereas in that 'Kompressor' factory I'd been turning these shell cases, in 'Stankolit' I was put into a mechanical workshop, where they made all kinds of moulds, supports and mould boxes, to cast those shells and grenades in, and my task was to round them off on the lathe. Now, when I was at that 'Stankolit' factory, I had actually already received my call-up notification, because, you see, in the autumn of 1942 they were already calling up those who'd been born in 1925. That is, lads who were just seventeen – some of them weren't even seventeen yet, like quite a few of my friends who were drafted into the army. Most of them didn't return: yes, those were harsh years, particularly those very first years of the war. Now, I was finally inducted into my combat unit in March 1943… Actually, wait a second!, I forgot to tell you that when I was at that 'Stankolit' factory, I joined the Komsomol: that is, first I sent in my application via the factory, and then I was summoned to the Dzerzhinskii raikom [District Committee] of the Komsomol, which was on Rozhdestvenskii Boulevard. It was an occasion which I remember very well… and it was in the same month, in October [1942] that I was also summoned to the military commission, and since I was an Estonian – they didn't even bother to ask me if I knew the language or not! – because in my passport it clearly said "Estonian," I was assigned to the Estonian combat units. Because, you see, there was this Estonian division into which they placed all those Estonians who'd come to us after our withdrawal [from the Baltic States, in June and July 1941], but then, of course, its personnel

strength got smaller and smaller, due to the heavy losses, and so they had to start replacing them with Estonians who were…

- Estonians who were in fact Russians, yes?

- That's right, and, as I said before, there were quite a few in Moscow, but in the main they raised these new recruits from the huge Estonian colonies there were in Siberia – that is, the descendants of all those Estonians who'd come there in Tsarist times to settle on the free lands… Well, anyway, I also wound up in this division. That is, first I was sent to a reserve regiment for training, but I didn't stay there very long – just a couple of weeks or so – as I a volunteered immediately for a company with a marching order, because I'd spoken to some lads who were in this company. I'd told them about the special artillery school and how I'd already been taught such things as how to assemble and disassemble a rifle, that is, that I already knew all the military basics, so to speak [*laughs*], and that's why these lads said that there was no point in me hanging around in a reserve regiment somewhere in the rear – that is, near Sverdlovsk, where the training camp was – and that I ought to come along to the front, where it would be much more interesting… It was the same with the lads who'd been wounded at the front and were now recovering in our camp's field hospital: they also encouraged me to join that company… So that's how I ended up in the front-line: just outside Velikie Luki, in fact… the 1st Belorussian Front. That's where that Estonian division was deployed… and, yes, there's this other moment which I'll never forget: it was when we were passing through Moscow on the way to the front, and our troop train stopped briefly in Kazanskii Railway Station, and I decided to get off and run home to say goodbye. I ran all the way, or sort of, and it just took me fifteen minutes to get to our Sretenka. I don't remember who opened the door for me, but when I walked into our room, there I saw Mama sitting… by her sewing machine and crying… And it was this sight which was later to play such a decisive role in my fate – I'll explain why later. Well, I greeted her and said goodbye – that was all, and already I was off, spurting back to the station, to my troop train. It hadn't left yet, fortunately, and when I boarded it, everything was all right: none of the officers had noticed that I'd just been on this brief absence without leave! And so then… it was off to the front. Well, there I was assigned to this machine-gun company; and strange as it may seem, the gunner was this daredevil Estonian, a strapping fellow, whereas I, despite being shorter and weaker, had to carry the whole turret of this "Maksim" machine-gun which weighed a good thirty-two kilos. That means that if you're walking somewhere where there's no paved road, say, in a forest, or in one of those marshes in Belorussia, then your feet just get stuck in the mud all the time and your shoulders start hurting a lot. That's why even today, when I start thinking back to the war, or something from that time floats up in my mind just like that, the first thing I feel is always this pain in the shoulders. And that's because, evidently, all that marching with those heavy turret-pieces on my back somehow got into my bones and marrow, even though it wasn't actually that long a time… Now, our position wasn't very favourable at all: it was real front-line territory with shelling and mortar-fire from all directions, and we were sited in clusters and fired back. Now, this was in 1943, not long before the Battle of Kursk: that's why in our section of the front we had to carry out these manoeuvres to draw the Germans towards us and prevent them from reaching the Kursk area. And it was also so that we actually had something to do – there were such operations too, you see. Well, and there was a lot of bombardment and mortar-shelling there, and lots of casualties... As for our supplies, we were definitely very hard put. I remember it was spring, and when we got some soup or this *balanda* as we used to call it… [*balanda* was also the name for the watery prison soup served out to prisoners in the gulag]

- So you actually had a field-kitchen in your part of the front?

- Yes, and they would give us some rations or other. But, as I was saying, to fatten up the soup a bit – if that's the right word – we would rip out some nettles and one or two other plants, and add

them to that *balanda*, to at least sustain the illusion that we were eating cabbage soup! And that's what we would eat – it's not that surprising because we were really in the second or third class when it came to…

- Supplies?

- Yes, supplies, and we all understood that. And so when this delegation from the Estonian government came there to speak to us – you see, the government [the Supreme Soviet established in Tallinn in July 1940] had also been evacuated when the Germans invaded and was in exile in Moscow. Now, they'd set up this Central H.Q. in Moscow to coordinate the Estonian partisan movement, and they were looking to recruit Communists and Komsomol members for their operations in enemy territory – Naturally, I volunteered as soon as I had the opportunity. And there I came across this Captain… no, Lieutenant Kniga, who turned out to be a Russian from Estonia; that is, he'd happened to be born in Estonia, and that's why he had such a surname [*laughs*] ['Kniga' (*lit.* 'book') is probably a corruption of one of the many Estonian surname beginning in 'Ki-' to make it sound more Russian, but at the same time Russians who heard it couldn't have helped laughing, as they would never have come across such a surname amongst their compatriots] Like me, he too had been in the [Red Army's] Estonian division: because there they also recruited Russians from Estonia, who knew Estonian. By the way, almost as soon as I'd joined that Estonian unit, all the Estonian I'd known when I was little immediately surfaced up from wherever it had been slumbering, and I could talk to my comrades in Estonian with no trouble at all!… Now, in Ivanovo there was this training school for the Estonian partisan detachments, which trained explosive-handlers for sabotage operations and all other kinds of specialists that might be needed. And it also trained soldiers for our units [in the Red Army] because these were, in fact, very thin on the ground: the units I'd been with weren't really combat units, we'd just been used to hold the enemy up for a while... I was in that school for just a few days, because this Captain Kniga said to me: "Listen, Lev: since you know Estonian and you know Moscow like the palm of your hand, I've been thinking if you would be ready to… because, you know, we need to have someone there, in the Central H.Q. of the Estonian Partisan Movement: a soldier who can perform this, how do you call it?… this guard-duty… that is, go round on patrol and so on… but what's most important is that he'll have to sort of liaise between the Estonian H.Q. and the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, and I was thinking if…" Now, you see, the Soviet partisan movement's Commander-in-Chief was none other than Voroshilov [Marshal K. E. Voroshilov, the Civil War hero, whose influence in the Supreme Command was cut down to a minimum after his strategic incompetence had become clear in the first months of the German invasion. As Commander of the Partisan Movement, he would presumably cause less harm to the Soviet war effort]. And the commandant of our Estonian H.Q. was this Karotamm, the First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee… And I immediately agreed to the Captain's proposal: after all, it meant that I would be at home, in my dear Moscow. So that's how I was transferred back here, and performed the sorts of duties that guards do… garrison duty, when it was necessary, then all kinds of assignments, like taking some packets or other to the Central Staff, and so on. I was thus able to see how the [Estonian] partisan squads were formed: they would select small groups one at a time, and infiltrate them into the occupied territories. That's where they planned all the operations. Well, and I was able to go home every so often and see my family – especially when there was some holiday and I didn't have to stay to do guard-duty… However, in the autumn of 1943, it was again that Captain, or, rather, Lieutenant, who… you see, he was in charge of these selection matters… who said to me: "Lev, you know what? I mean, all this sentry-duty can't be very interesting for you, isn't that so? Now, what do you say about going to do some real fighting stuff?" And I, well – it didn't seem such a bad idea. On the contrary, I felt this surge of enthusiasm, knowing that people were being sent on these missions involving such great responsibility and that there was something

stirring in Estonia at last: the prospect of an extensive partisan campaign like that which was taking place in Belorussia where they were even starting to set up Soviet districts [i.e. districts in the German-occupied territories where Soviet authority was re-established]. So yes, there was this… these patriotic feelings I was swept up by, as well as the prospect of doing something interesting… I replied: "All right, I'm all for it!" – "Good, so first you'll go this school where they'll train you to become a mine-laying instructor for sabotage operations. It's not far from here: near the Sokol Metro Station there's this institute where they train cadre officers to lead the partisan units." – "I'm ready, any time!" I said, and that's how I was sent to that… school… and was trained as a mine-laying instructor. We would have these dry runs, that is, sabotage exercises – now, it was in the winter months, so the whole ground was covered in snow – in which we would lay these mines at specific points – they weren't real mines, of course; they just had a small tolite charge, and they didn't blow anything up; they were this single-explosion type. And that's how we practised mining railway tracks, organising attacks on ordnance depots, how to disarm or kill any sentries that might be guarding them. In short, everything that's required for such operations…

- So that was all in the training programme?

- That's right, yes, that's what we were taught. And, of course, they also showed us how to handle all kinds of weapons. That was interesting too. And all the more so because the lads with whom I was being trained would come along to our place in the evenings, or whenever it was possible – always in civvies, because at the institute they didn't mind giving us leave at all. We didn't have to risk absenting ourselves without leave, or anything like that: all we had to do was just ask the staff officer and tell him why we wanted this short furlough. Yes, so these lads were at our place a number of times. Now, they were from the Estonian group, but in that school there were also Russian and Belorussian groups, because so much of our territory was still in German hands at that time, and great store was set by these partisan units led by specialists. So that's the kind of school we had in the Sokol district – a very across-the-board one!… Now, let's see – yes, 1943 was drawing to a close, and the German encirclement of Leningrad had already been broken, so one could get into the city not just across the [Ladoga] lake, but also on trains from the mainland. And that's why Central H.Q. of the Estonian partisans decided that the time had come to intensify guerrilla and sabotage operations on Estonian territory, that is, behind the German lines. So they set about forming these detachments to parachute into the deep rear. Now, these units were drawn mainly from those who'd been in the Estonian training camp in Ivanovo, so those of us who'd been training in Moscow, in the Sokol district, were just divided up between the various groups: in pairs, so each group would have two, say, mine-laying instructors from our school. Knowing this, I and one of my best friends from the school, who'd been round to our place on many occasions – I've still got his photograph – we asked if we could be put in the same group. Now, we linked up with the detachments we'd been assigned to on the way to Leningrad because, you see, that other special military training school had been evacuated from Leningrad to Ivanovo shortly after the Siege had begun, and it was now supposed to return there first [before those detachments it had trained were to be parachuted into enemy territory]… So that's how we ended up in Leningrad for a few days: the blockade had been lifted almost completely, and there weren't any more bombardments, of course, and so I was able to see with my own eyes in what state the city was… Barricades everywhere, these craters in the buildings, the plaster crumbling off the walls. Few people on the streets. It all left such… such an unpleasant impression – it seemed that something was still left over from those long months of the Siege, a sort of decay – I mean, you didn't have the feeling that life there would get back into full swing soon, there wasn't any upsurge of joy on the streets. On the contrary, it seemed as if the city was slowly mouldering away, people would walk soundlessly on the streets, fearfully even; they would suddenly stop still and gaze in some direction… You could see that all these people were… well, you just had to look in their eyes and

you would see how frightened, how scared they all were… and one really could sense that they had gone through so much – just by looking at their faces and eyes which told of this terrible inner desolation … yes, all this left a strong impression on me… Our mood, on the other hand, was entirely upbeat. We were burning with patriotism as we waited to be flown over Estonia. Now, the fact is that none of us had ever jumped with a parachute before, but they assured us that it would all work automatically, from inside the plane, and that we didn't have to worry about parachute training. And besides, in order to prevent us from feeling depressed [whilst waiting for the plane], they gave us good extra rations: bread, tins, and a couple of other things… and it was thanks to them that we could always have a bottle or two [of vodka] on hand. That was very easy to get hold of: you just had to walk out of the gates, and after a few steps you'd already find someone offering vodka in exchange for our rations. We were, of course, young then, so there wasn't much that could dampen our enthusiastic mood, especially if we'd had a couple of swigs. The thing is that they'd actually taken us to the airfield twice already to put us on a plane that would drop us over Estonia, but then it had all been called off at the last minute, and we'd have to go back to the base – there'd evidently been some news of something that could jeopardize our mission. Well, anyway, we would walk back, in quite a merry state after a bottle or two, singing songs… It wasn't a time to start thinking about yourself and getting worried… Besides, they'd taken all our personal documents from us, everything – even any photographs we might have – so that nothing could betray our identity if we were captured – and we were all variously dressed. Some of us in short fur coats, others in greatcoats, but all of us, of course, in civvies – in short, precisely as partisan fighters are meant to be dressed. As I said, it was only when they sent us to the airfield for the third time that we actually boarded the planes and set off – they flew us on these Douglas planes [probably the Douglas C-47 Skytrains, which were frequently used by Soviet pilots to land or drop supplies to partisan units]. I remember very well how we flew over the front-line: we could see all these explosions and shooting going on, and these white currents of tracer cutting through the air. But finally we reached the point where they were supposed to drop us – we had flown deep into Estonian airspace – and given the order to "make ready" for jumping: that means you have to fasten the hook to the parachute rip cord and then jump off – well, that was all there was to it; the parachute's release-mechanism was self-acting, and you didn't have to think or know what was going on… and apart from that, there was, first of all, the fact that we were all, as they say, nicely tanked up, and that does make a big difference to any apprehension you might have about doing your first parachute jump! And, secondly, when you're flying in a plane, you can't help wanting to break out of this cramped space into the open. So when they opened the hatch, and all this fresh air streamed in, all you want to do is literally just leap out! And so, one by one, all of the lads jumped off – someone, of course, was there to help us fasten the rip cord properly to the hook – and then it was my turn too… and I jumped. I wasn't thinking at all about how or if the parachute would open [*laughs*] – all you hear is the jumpmaster shouting: "Hop!" and then you feel this sudden jerk. And for a few seconds you're suspended in mid-air… because that parachute, the rip-cord is of a specific length… I've never bothered to find out how long they are!… But, anyway, there's this jerk and the parachute opens up, and I started my descent like a real paratrooper – now, the night was pitch-dark: there was no moon that night, and one couldn't see a thing. Of course, at the training school they had shown us how to land properly, how to draw in the harness – that is, we had some notion of how you're supposed to control the parachute… Well, I landed safely – in this woody area, where there was also a swamp by the shore of a lake. Yes, I landed well enough, hadn't injured myself anywhere – unlike some of the other lads whose legs were badly hurt, because… one of us, you see – it was actually our group's commissar [although the institution of 'political commissar' had been abolished in 1942, in order to restore single command in each Red Army unit, commissars would still be assigned to partisan brigades] – he had hurt both his legs

because he'd landed on some ice. We had no choice but to leave him behind in one of the farmsteads, after hiding him in some hay barn or other…

- How many of you were there in the group?

- Nineteen – that is, twenty, including me – that was our group, from one of the planes, but in all, there were four planes, each one with a similar group, and all of us put together made up the squad. Our commander was Batov. There was another squad, too, led by Vinnikov.

- And you were supposed to come together again as a single unit?

- Yes, that's right, the order was to reassemble as one squad after we'd managed to find every member of our group. And we were also supposed to find the supply parachutes, where there were supposed to be extra explosives, small arms, and food, and then to link up with the other groups. The trouble was we weren't able to find our supply parachutes for some reason – we couldn't understand what had gone wrong, or perhaps the planes had just dropped them without bothering to check that they were flying over our area – you know, just to fulfil the orders they had of dropping so-and-so a number of parachutes, but not so much concerned about the supplies actually reaching us [*sighs*]. And not only that, but we also weren't able to find the other groups, so in the end we just had to assemble in our group again and move on, in case someone had noticed our landing. Now, there were two Estonians in our group who – in 1940, that is, – had been in the liquidation squads which had scoured these very forests, looking for those Estonians who were against Soviet rule [armed guerrillas which formed in resistance to the mass deportations of Estonians in June 1941 and operated mainly from the forests], so that's why they knew the area well. They were our principal…

- Guides…

- Yes, guides…

- But you had to carry your commissar, didn't you, as he'd broken both his legs?

- No, he hadn't broken them – it's just that he couldn't walk. Probably some severe dislocation or something… So we just had to leave him behind; I mean, he himself instructed us to: "Just leave me and move on – you've got a mission to carry out…"

- You walked past some farmstead and left him there, yes?

- So we did.

- Without knocking at the house or trying to find someone…

- No, we just left him there – that is, not on the main farm itself, but in a hay barn or some other outbuilding. We laid him down on the hay, that was all. And then just moved on, but we didn't manage to find any of the other groups. And then, later, when we were already in… it was about a month or so that we traipsed through the Estonian forests. If I remember correctly, we stayed in one place for about a week, hiding in some dugout. We did have some provisions with us, but they weren't enough, of course, so we asked at the various farms we passed by, and they would always give us something. None of the farmers ever complained or anything, we didn't have any quarrels at all, nothing of the sort. I suppose it was this sense of loyalty which they couldn't help feeling towards us, because, after all, we had come there as liberators.

- Did they actually perceive you as liberators, though?

- Not really – that was just this official term, because, in fact, they were quite ill-disposed to us, of course… I mean, they would alert one another by phone if they knew we were in the area, and that's why we'd always send someone else to knock at the next farmer's door, and we made sure to hide properly and move on to different areas – but, all the same, we did have a few skirmishes, because they too had some sort of home guard, and I'd say we lost one or two of our men in these brushes with them. Yes, there were a couple of incidents like that…

- Now, although you hadn't been able to find your supply parachutes and you didn't have all the necessary material, did your group still have some specific directive? What were you

supposed to do, these nineteen of you, given that you were without your supplies, your weapons and explosives…
- Quite right, exactly…
- and that you hadn't been able to link up with the squad – so what were you supposed to do next?
- Next?… Well, you're quite right in asking this, especially as we now didn't have any hope of finding our comrades and assembling into our combat unit. Now, you asked if we had any particular directive – I should say first that we'd been parachuted into Estonia not so that we would start carrying out sabotage or diversionary activities on our own account, but rather as reinforcements for the brigades which were already operating there, to help them cause more effective disruptions of the communication lines and so on in the German rear.
- So you had to find those brigades?
- Exactly, that was our brief. But when we actually landed there, that all turned out to be sheer… as they say… oh, I don't know… a sheer mirage, or some raving wishful thinking, or simply someone trying to pull the wool over their superiors' eyes by feeding them these lies. Because there was absolutely not a hope in hell of us finding in Estonia any…
- Soviet districts… [like the ones that had been formed in Belorussia, where, thanks to the partisans, Soviet power had been re-established in some areas from which the Germans hadn't yet retreated]
- Yes, any Soviet districts… or even just some locality – there just wasn't anything of the sort! That's how it actually was on the ground in Estonia.
- But where there actually any partisan brigades in Estonia? Estonian ones?
- There weren't any. As we later found out, the whole battalion that had been sent into Estonia, crossing the frozen Lake Chudskoe [Peipus in Estonian] on skis, – made up of some four hundred partisans – had been almost entirely annihilated. They'd managed to cross the lake all right and enter Estonian territory – the German troops stationed there hadn't engaged them in battle – and they also managed to get into this forest. But then the Germans lured them out onto some glade which was surrounded by machine-gun nests, and the partisan battalion was mowed down almost to the last man. Only a handful of men had managed to escape from this trap. When I later ended up in that prison [in Tartu, after being captured by the Germans], I met some of the survivors of that unit. One of them was this lieutenant or captain, called Lesnoi, who was actually a Belorussian – one of the Belorussian partisans, who'd been sent… that is, seconded to the Estonian [Partisan] H.Q. [in Moscow] to instruct them in guerrilla tactics and discuss his experiences – all in this spirit of mutual solidarity. And I remember that – when we were put in the same cell – he was seething with indignation all the time and saying: "What the hell did they think they were doing?! How could they allow such a… It must be some act of treason! They're actually doing it on purpose!" Do you see what I mean?… That's what it was. I mean, I too had been a witness of this treason: the way they sent whole groups of people into occupied territory…
- To their certain destruction?
- Yes, to their certain death… and it was all just to be able to report to the Central Estonian H.Q. in Moscow that so-and-so many people and detachments had been sent. As for the outcome of these operations and the fate of those involved, that was hardly of much concern to them. It seems incredible, doesn't it?… but, well, you'll see that all this is very relevant to what I'm going to tell you about our own group's final battle in the Estonian forests. We were still looking for our comrades, of course, in every area where we thought they could be. And on one day, as we were searching through a section of a forest, we suddenly saw, coming towards us, what clearly looked to be soldiers, so we immediately hit the dirt, but then our commander shouted: "It's our pals!" Because over there we could hear them talking in Russian, and shouting something in pure

Russian! Our comrades, at last! we all thought, and also cried out something like “Hurrah!” At last we’d found our comrades and were all together again! We jumped up and started running straight towards… that is…

- Towards them…

- Straight towards them, but when we got to… I don’t know… some 50 metres, surely not less… from where they were, we saw that they were in German uniforms – like hell they were our pals! And we were almost like thunderstruck: what was going on?! Then I heard our commander’s order: “Get down!” Well, as soon as they saw us fall to the ground, they opened fire on us. And we too didn’t lose any time and started firing back… As it turned out, this was a punitive squadron made up of Russians. From Pskov Oblast; they were all young lads, like us, the same age as us… Well, and that’s how our last engagement started. And we soon realised that there was no point in saving up our [rifle] cartridges – even though we also had these cartridge drums for our PPSh-41’s [Shpagin sub-machine-guns, named after the weapons designer Georgii Shpagin], as well as some *limonki* grenades [‘lemons’ – nickname of the Soviet F-1 hand grenade] – it was pointless going easy with our rounds because we had no choice but to try to fight our way out. On one side was this lake, and they were already advancing towards us, shooting all the time – they clearly had plenty of ammunition, even these incendiary bullets, flaring all around us. Then and there I happened to witness one of these moments from the Great Fatherland War, when one heard the cry: “For the Motherland! For Stalin!”… I know there are some people who say that that never happened, that it was something dreamt up later. But I actually saw this, I witnessed such a moment; I was, in fact, about to shout so myself, but it so happened that our commander, Lieutenant… Batov got up – evidently he’d run out of ammunition for his sub-machine-gun – all he had left was this hand grenade, and he got up, hurled it at them, and cried: “For the Motherland! For…” That was all: he was blown to pieces, these explosive bullets tore through his skull, he… all my clothes were spattered in… grey. That was all, he was dead, but lying next to me was this other lad, my friend from the training camp in Sokol, who’d also been trained as a mine-laying instructor… There were these boulders, almost rocks, close to us, and he said: “It’s all over, Leva.” We were, of course, speaking in Estonian with each other, and he just said: “It’s all over now, that’s our last…” I can’t remember what exactly he said, probably simply that we were done for… and, quite literally, within a few seconds or something, I looked at him, turning round, because he was a bit behind me, and saw his head… sink, and he was all covered in blood… so that was it, we’d got ourselves done for – it was just me left lying behind this boulder… our commander had been killed, and… And I too had just one *limonka* left, so I pulled out the pin, held it in my hand, pressed my hands onto the ground so that I could push myself up quickly… because that’s what the commander had done: he’d jumped up and shouted… So I was bracing myself to jump up too, and I closed my eyes for a second – and that’s when I saw Mama crying in front of me – just as I’d seen her on that day I told you about, when I stopped by, and she was sitting there, sewing and crying – her image appeared before me, I saw her, and there my strength left me; I couldn’t press against the ground any more; all I did was to throw the live grenade, the *limonka*, over those rocks by the lake, and stayed put on the ground. And it was just a matter of, I suppose, seconds before I heard steps coming towards me and this voice: “Get up! Stick them up!” That was it. And it turned out that just two of us from the whole group were still alive. Now, right in front of me, some five metres from me was this member of the punitive squadron, lying on the ground, and aiming his rifle straight at me, getting ready to shoot. It looked as if his legs were shattered or something – anyway, he was definitely wounded… And another soldier ran up to him and kicked the rifle out of his hands: “Think what you’re doing! You were just about to pick off one of our folks!” But what else could he do when we [the partisan units] were such a hotchpotch from the start? Fortunately, the other lad had stepped in and deflected the rifle, because the wounded one could

well have fired and hit me – and killed one of his own people… Then suddenly this Estonian fellow came running up – I'll never forget the sight of him, in this winter cap made of fox-skin and this short fur coat – he was also shouting in Estonian: "Where are those… where's that milksop of a liberator, eh?" And when he saw me, he started gesticulating like mad in front of the soldiers and demanding that they handed me over to him – and he was holding this axe in his hand – who knows what was going on in him! but he literally seemed like some wild beast, his eyes ablaze with fury, and he was waving this axe in his hand and advancing towards me. There I couldn't help thinking that this time it really was all over for me… But, as it turned out, soon after our skirmish was over and the firing had stopped, the Germans moved in to put some order into the situation… and I saw these two German echelons, these two parties of soldiers converging on our battleground from opposite sides. Yes, so it was clear that we had fallen into this trap, they'd had us completely encircled…

- But up front were these members of the punitive squadron…

- Yes, the Germans had thrown them in first – also to a sure death… That is, they wanted us to simply kill each other off, and they didn't move in until the skirmish was over… Anyway, as I was saying, that Estonian was brandishing his axe and shouting: "Let me have him!" when suddenly a German officer walked up to us, said something in German, which was probably an order to the Estonian to lay off trying to kill us, since the Germans saw us as their rightful war-trophy. And so they handed us over to the Germans, who transported us to a prison in Tartu: it was just German soldiers in the convoy, none of the members of that punitive expedition, no local Estonians. So they transported and committed us to that prison: clearly, they too had their targets to fulfil; they had to report to their superiors that they'd destroyed a further partisan unit… And in this prison I had my first interrogation, which gave me a lot to think about: although they actually only interrogated me once. But I still remember how they led me into a study where this Estonian was sitting by a desk… a rather old and portly fellow, who started reading out some surnames to me, and I saw that he had some lists on his desk and that he was putting marks in various places on the sheets in front of him. He asked me who'd been in my group, who'd been killed in that skirmish and who'd perished during our march through the forests – and I answered what I knew, that there were just two of us left: me and this Lebetpaium; that our commander had been killed, and that was all I said. But he kept reading out other names from his lists and asking me if I knew of their whereabouts – which means that they already had a full list not just of who was in our group, but of the whole squad! And I also found out then that one of the four planes which had flown us over Estonia had been shot down and the group it was carrying had, of course, perished in mid-air.

- So that means that they also knew about the planes and had been expecting them?

- Yes, exactly. As for the other two groups, they had been parachuted into Estonian territory like ours, but over some… and besides, we'd all been dropped over places that were quite far apart, so that's why we hadn't been able to find one another after landing. A bit later, whilst I was still in that prison, they brought this other lad – from the group in the second or third plane – he was also a Russian Estonian, from some place called Toska, I think, or perhaps from somewhere in the environs of Leningrad – I can't remember exactly. Anyway, we became friends, and he told me that their group had also been defeated in combat and captured…

- Had his group been parachuted at the same time as yours, after all?

- Yes, but they did it in such a way so that we wouldn't be able to find one another – and they too hadn't been able to find their supply parachutes. Who knows whether they actually dropped them or not – if they had dropped them, we would probably have been able to get on the other groups' tracks, and they on ours, but as it was, we had nothing to go by… Someone in the Estonian H.Q. obviously knew how to go about his designs in the most… You see, later, when I returned from captivity and was serving in the army, I wrote to the Estonian partisan movement's H.Q. – the war

was already over by then – and told them about this whole situation. I described at length what had happened and asked them to send me my identity documents which I'd left behind there, which was an entirely legitimate request, as the hostilities were over, and I knew that my documents had been filed away somewhere in Leningrad. But they didn't send me anything… At the H.Q. there was this sergeant, whom I just couldn't stand for some reason… I couldn't help looking at him askance every time I saw him… And I also told him about my suspicions: that someone in the Estonian Staff had been passing on all this information to the Germans and that was why it had all ended so badly both for those who were parachuted in and for those who crossed the lake [Peipus] on skis – almost everyone taking part in these missions had perished or been captured – and I concluded by saying that it was sheer and utter treason that lay behind all this. But I never got any reply, nor any letter of acknowledgement… No one was interested in getting to the root of the matter… of course, the war was over by then, and nobody could see any point in starting some tentative investigation… All I can say is that this left me with a very bitter aftertaste, because to this day I am still convinced that it needn't have been that way, if you see what I mean…

- How long were you imprisoned for? Is it really true that you were just interrogated once?

- Yes, because they interrogated mainly those Estonians who – as I already explained to you – had been in Estonia before and who were therefore known to a number of locals. It's from them that they squeezed out most of the information they wanted. For my part, I'd hardly spoken to any [local] Estonians and didn't know anyone – the only Estonian, really, whom I'd been friends with had been that lad who'd been in the same training camp as me, in the Sokol district – he had also been in a liquidation squad… [presumably this refers to one of the units sent in the spring of 1941 by the recently established Soviet government in Tallinn to scourge the Estonian forests for guerrillas who resisted the Sovietization of their country]

- What was his name?

- Enn, and I think his surname was Taler. Enn Taler, yes… Those Estonian [partisans] whom they interrogated in the Tartu prison, they were beaten pretty badly: they would always return to the cell with blood-stained shirts. They were tortured in order to make them talk, as well as to punish them for their previous activities – they really caught it, they did… In my case, on the other hand, they didn't seem to… just as that berserk Estonian had called me a milksop of a liberator, so it seems that old interrogator didn't seem to take me seriously. He had this grin on his face which seemed to say: "Ha-ha-ha, some liberator!"… Anyway, we were held in that prison until they'd got together a little group – enough to fill a truck – and then they drove us to the camp.

- Where was this camp?

- Near Viljandi, still in Estonian territory. Now, as a matter of fact, it turned out to be a kind of transit or collection point camp, because there were various other groups there: not just Estonians, but also Russians – it seems that in the same way as they'd done with us, they'd also parachuted some purely Russian squads in order to carry out sabotage operations in the Estonian rear. But, of course, Estonia wasn't the same as Belorussia, and their fate was predictably very much like ours…Then from this camp in Vil'iandi they loaded us onto a narrow-gauge train which was heading for the city of Dvinsk [Daugavpils], in Latvia. And these Russian lads, they wanted to make an escape and so in one of the wagons they cut a hole through the floor, and, I think, two or three of them managed to tumble out through it, but then, almost immediately afterwards, the alarm was sounded and the train stopped. I don't actually know what happened to those lads… but at the rear of any train when it's being used to transport prisoners, there are always some sentries looking out of the rear wagon, looking out for irregularities, so given that those lads must have landed on the track, they would have been noticed immediately – that's why the alarm was instantly raised, and I suppose it's not hard to imagine what happened to them… All the way to Dvinsk they transported us like some bandits whom they… and all the more so after that escape

attempt, when they locked us up in the wagons and didn't give us anything to drink or eat for almost two days… But finally we got to that camp in Dvinsk, which this time was a real, large POW camp. And it was this very camp which… provided me with my first reasons for… it was here that things started to become clear in my head… Well, first of all they had to march us from the railway station through the city, in this long line, until we reached the camp… [*sighs*]… and the local population – I don't know who'd told them to assemble on the streets – most likely the Germans had, but who knows – these Latvians asked the guards whom they were marching through the town, and the latter said something to the effect that we were bandits and partisans. And then they all started shouting: "Stalinist bandits, Stalinist bandits!" and throwing stones and spitting at us. Yes, I remember all that very distinctly, and how we walked on without flinching, arm in arm, silently supporting one another and just looking at the road all the time – and how I had this feeling of pride almost, that we were being insulted in such an unjust way… That's how it was: such a strange and unexpected turn of events, and if it hadn't been for this pride in the cause we'd been fighting for, then… But when we were finally interned in that camp, after a couple of days we noticed these huge long mounds – probably a hundred or more metres long – not far from the camp, and it turned out that these were ditches in which the bodies of all those Soviet soldiers who'd been killed in their hundreds, thousands, and millions back then in 1941 or1942 had been hastily thrown, and then they were just covered over with earth. And it was the same in the outskirts of Dvinsk: I don't know how many such ditches there were, or how many had been killed overall – no one knows that. But, anyway, these were the first signs for me that something wasn't right: I mean, just think how many soldiers and people had perished – and our unit too had been destroyed almost to the last man – what kind of a war was that? I mean, there'd been all this talk about how we would carry the war to the enemy's territory, how we would teach those Germans a lesson, and yet it had all turned out the other way round: they were wiping us out like flies… and not only that, but the manner in which we were being slaughtered: it wasn't just a question of falling in battle, but…

- This ill-considered, treacherous [waste of soldiers' lives]…

- Precisely – it was being sent to your death in this treacherous way – and all those millions who were lying there, they had all been betrayed. And it was the same with us partisans: yes, there were just a couple of hundred or thousand of us; it wasn't on the same scale, of course, but still we too had perished in this treacherous way. And you just couldn't help starting to rack your brains, asking yourself what was behind all this: how is it possible that… what kind of a leadership is that which sends me to my certain death? I'd gone to fight against the enemy, for our Motherland, but in fact it turned out that I'd been betrayed, I'd been sent to… So what did this all come to in effect? These, then, were the first…

- The first doubts…

- The first doubts – quite right – my first doubts in the rightfulness of everything I'd believed in so devotedly until then.

- Was it a large camp? How was it laid out?

- Yes, it was a large camp. It had these large *zemlianki* [earth dug-outs], made in this… And on the top these… well, I suppose they weren't really *zemlianki*, since they're entirely in the ground, but rather with these…

- Joists?

- Yes, that's right these joists running over the top, so you have this structure partly below ground level, as it's easier to set up, and it's also warmer. First, this kind of foundation pit is excavated, and then from the sides you have these logs stacked so as to make up a roof… and you can more or less survive in there…

- Did you have to build these *zemlianki* yourself?

- No. When we came, the camp had already been there for some time – many had already perished there… And those POW's, of course, they were put to work and made to build new *zemlianki* if they were needed. Not us – we weren't taken anywhere to do any work: after all, we were bandits!
- So POW's and partisans were two distinct categories?
- That's right; they immediately put us in these separate barracks. We weren't together with the rest.
- Does that mean you were living in barracks, rather than these *zemlianki*?
- No, no, we were in the same type of pits as everyone else: something in between a *zemlianka* and a barracks, I suppose. It's just that they kept us apart from the others. I mean, of course, there were occasions on which we could and did make contact with the other prisoners: to ask or say or find out something, or just to chat a bit. As it turned out, though, again, they didn't keep us for long in that camp either. We were transferred once again – to Kaunas…
- How long were you there for, in Dvinsk? A week, a month?
- I'd say it was probably a month, after all. Yes, we were there for about a month.
- Were there any checks, any roll-calls?
- No… well, they did always check, according to the regulations, and everyone there was…
- And you weren't made to any general, maintenance work inside the camp?
- No, none at all – they didn't assign us to any work, as I said… They gave us a daily ration – of course, not as much as those who were working got. The food was really very disgusting, and, to be honest, I'd prefer not to have to tell you what kind of things they gave us to eat: quite often it would be some broth or other which stank of horse-dung, you see. They'd evidently just taken the innards out of some horses or whatever, thrown them into a cauldron – without bothering to clean them beforehand – and stewed it all up. All the same, we had no choice but to eat whatever they gave us, and I wasn't all too fussy by then anyway [*sighs*]… But more important than all this is that when they were marching us from Dvinsk to Kaunas – in this long column – we weren't separated from the others any more, like "Stalinist bandits," we were together with all the POW's … And so, when we were trudging on northwards, I suppose, or the north-west… [*Note*: actually to the south-west]
- Sorry, what month and year was this?
- It was getting on for autumn. The autumn of 1944, that's right. So that means Estonia was already starting to be liberated, and the Germans were withdrawing, and… We actually saw these German units passing us on the highway. They were retreating, and we too were also being marched away – to Kaunas, as I said. Now, on the way there we came to this agreement… you see, during the stops, when we were allowed to rest for a bit, we were able to talk amongst ourselves, and this Georgian in our group – who'd told us that he was a major in the Soviet Army – he wanted to organise this… he said that we had to escape, that the Germans were all withdrawing, and that we definitely ought to escape by dashing off into the forest. And when we all agreed with him, he said that what we would do was this: we would pick a suitable moment, he would give the signal and we would then all throw ourselves on our guards, disarm them or whatever, depending on how it worked out, and run off in separate directions. And then it would be everyone for himself, as you can see – not a joint escape… But nothing came of it in the end, because that suitable moment never materialised. You see, almost all the time we were marching along, in our column, these German units on trucks, in cars, on motorcycles, kept roaring past us, and so we all understood that if we gave so much as the slightest sign of intending to escape, these army units would… It was these we had to reckon with, not the guards, because, you see, the guards were generally old men and, besides, they were just armed with rifles – they didn't even have any tommy-guns, just these rifles. So it was really just the semblance of an escort. But those *Wehrmacht* units constantly flitting past us – these tanks and trucks with machine-guns – they

would immediately annihilate us: there was not a chance in hell of getting through, so that's why that major's, so to speak, idea… his initiative…
- Didn't materialise.
- Yes, that's right, nothing came of it in the end. Now, when we finally got to Kaunas, they put us into this wide-gauge train heading for Germany.
- How long did this stage of your transport take?
- I'm afraid my memory fails me there – I don't remember how many days we were on the move, but at least it wasn't so bad, this transport, because they didn't separate us partisans from the other POW's – there were some of our group in each wagon, you see – and so that's how they took us to Frankfurt-am-Main, which is quite near the French border. I've often asked myself why they took us there – well, I suppose the obvious answer is that they themselves were pulling out now [*laughs*], but, still, why did they bother to take us POW's with them? When they could simply have shot us… and I just don't see why they did that. I think it's still an open question: it's still unclear on what grounds or considerations they decided to evacuate us… And so after reaching Frankfurt, we were put into this POW camp, which was also very large [like the one in Dvinsk]: however, there weren't just Russian POWs, but also Frenchmen, and, I think, some Englishmen too, all divided into various sectors. And the only difference [to Dvinsk] was that this time we were sent to do work – to clear up… for some reason I've forgotten the name of the town, but, anyway, to clear up the streets after air raids.
- Rubble removal.
- Yes, exactly, that's what we were put to do, and afterwards we would return to the camp. But the food we got was again the same, you know: broth, *balanda* [watery prison soup], that kind of stuff – just enough to keep us alive and on our feet, so to speak. Now, the French POW's, in contrast… their living conditions were altogether quite different to ours: they received food parcels through the Red Cross and they didn't need any of the camp's catering! And I think – at least we didn't see any – that they didn't go out to work either. You know, POW's aren't supposed to work in principle, and these Frenchmen supported themselves on their own account; that is, they lived on what their government sent them [through the Red Cross]. We, on the other hand, were marched to work and fed this *balanda*. And when we passed their sectors, or whatever they were called, as we left the camp, we would see these vats into which they poured out the rations which they didn't eat, but which they were still given according to…
- According to the camp regulations.
- … the camp regulations or the norms. Now, in our walk of life whenever one is marched out of the camp to work, one should always have some kind of mess-kit at hand, including, of course, a spoon – that's the essential weapon! So whenever we passed those sectors, our… our 'warriors' would rush there and scoop out of those vats everything that was inside: it was all a sloppy mishmash, of course, but one could, to some extent, claim that it was at least edible. And the German guards who were escorting us to our place of work, they would start shouting things like: "These Russian swine!" All in that kind of spirit – downright offensive, as you can see – and they would try to push them on, but they didn't always manage to – now, shoot they didn't, of course; they just wanted to use those means to get them to move on. I for my part never tried – not a single time – to get myself an extra sup of this so-called food by this method, since the very idea [of acting like that] seemed somehow so unpleasant: it was something which I just couldn't fathom. That's how it was… And in relation to this I had another of these moments which got me thinking: I mean, we too were POW's, so were we being treated this way because we weren't human beings like everyone else, or what? Because, I mean, over there they'd been killing us, and executing us, and now, when we were in captivity, they were starving us to death, feeding us with the devil knows what, with some slops, and marching us to work all the time. Then what about the French

POW's? – why were they being looked after [by their government and treated more leniently by the Germans]? Who was behind all this? What excuse was there…
- Did you discuss these things amongst yourselves in the camp?
- Of course we did. We definitely discussed them.
- Did any of you perhaps know at that time that Stalin had said that there were no Russian prisoners of war, only traitors? [Order No. 270, which forbade any surrender to the enemy, was issued by Stalin as People's Commissar of Defence on 16 August 1941]
- So that was the reason why, I see… well, in this POW camp there weren't just partisans like us, but also people who'd simply been captured in battle. And they were treated no better than us… So there was this general mood amongst us… which made people question what was going on at the front. Because some of them told us how at the front, if you didn't charge once the order had been given, if you somehow hesitated, they would shoot you in the back – that is, you'd be shot by these… how do you call them?
- Barrier troops. [*zagradotriady* – NKVD special forces attached to the regular army for the purpose of stopping any panic retreats]
- Yes, by these barrier troops. So there was another example of how our soldiers were being treated. And all this made you somehow… you see, we did discuss these things, and they were generally known. And it led to a certain inward… that is, there wasn't any longer this devotion, so to speak, to the regime and to Stalin, but, rather, a certain inward spite began to make itself felt, you know: what's going on here? haven't I been completely deceived? they don't even consider us human beings!… What kind of a regime is that?! … And all this gradually started swelling up in you, and that's how there emerged a sort of awareness of the actual reality of… of things as they really were…
- Could I just ask: amongst the Soviet POW's – who, as you said, were confined in a separate zone – were there any distinct groupings according to nationality? Were you, for example, looked upon with hostility for being an Estonian?
- No, there wasn't any of that there either [as there hadn't been in pre-war Moscow – *cf. supra*]. You didn't get that in the army, and when we were in captivity, that kind of thing never happened. Take that commander, for example, who'd wanted to organise our escape – he was a Georgian, but… I mean, anyone could see that he was Georgian – he was so tall and imposing – but when we were discussing our plan for escaping, no one cared where he came from: we were all united in a common cause, we were all as one man.
- Since you were all Soviets.
- Yes, we were all, as they say, of one mould.
- What about the other prisoners – say, those Frenchmen – were you able to talk to them?
- No, we never did… the only time we saw them, really, was when we were being marched off to work, and passed by their sector. Whenever we walked past, they would always, for some reason, go up to the barbed-wire fence and look at us, and sometimes they'd shout something or wave their hands…
- Weren't they perhaps trying to pass you something, some cigarettes or a piece of bread? No?
- That… well, I don't really know, to be honest – perhaps there were such instances: some of us, after all, did run up to their fence, you know, to those vats, and perhaps then they were able to hand them something or throw it over the fence – a packet of cigarettes or whatever – that's quite possible: it's just that I myself didn't take part in these raids on their vats, so I never came into any contact with them.
- So you can't say for sure?

- No, I can't. But I do remember well how they behaved towards us – that is, from afar: they had this friendly, greeting gesture which… and one did feel that they were, so to speak…
- Declaring their solidarity with you?
- Yes, this solidarity – that they regarded us as comrades.
- I've heard that in some camps there were these little markets… A place where one could barter a cigarette for a piece of bread, or trade for various things you might need…
- No, in that POW camp I don't remember anything like that. Because there… it was, after all, such a shabby place. And I for my part didn't smoke anyway – never have. However, when we were working in that town [clearing rubble], some of us did look out for cigarette stubs on the streets and would pick them up, that's true.
- And was it possible to trade those for something? For example, although you didn't smoke yourself, but if you had gathered up, say, three cigarette stubs, could you get something for them at all?
- Oh, that's something which I didn't occupy myself with either – for some reason, it just didn't seem right to me that one could go and trade that kind of… I mean, to take someone else's bread and give him a few fag-ends in return… It was the same when I was in the [gulag] camp, in Noril'sk, and received parcels [from my family]: I'd ask them to send me some *makhorka* [poor tobacco of the kind smoked by gulag prisoners], but I never swapped a single gram of it for… bread – I'd just hand out this *makhorka* to my close friends… that's why… already then when I was in German captivity… no, I just couldn't reconcile myself to the notion that by these means one could… Again, it was something that somehow… divided people, if you see what I mean, whereas I was always somehow striving to share with others.
- Did you have an elder in your barracks, some kind of senior prisoner in charge of things?
- Of course we had seniors, but it wasn't as if they were… no, it wasn't as if we had a brigadier, if that's what you mean. [in the gulag system, a 'brigadier' would have overall responsibility for a group of workers, deciding who did which specific job and ensuring that the whole 'brigade' fulfilled the daily norm set by the camp administration] No, it was simply those who knew a bit of German – so that when the Germans gave out some order, these seniors could then pass it on to us; or if, say, something needed clarification, then they could go and ask the guards or overseers. That's whom the Germans chose.
- What were your living conditions like?
- We lived in these *zemlianki* or, in some cases, near a *zemlianka*.
- And how many of you were there to a *zemlianka*?
- Well, there must have been some… I'd say up to a hundred. Certainly not less, and quite possibly even more than that.
- So they must have been huge *zemlianki*?
- Oh yes, these very long ones; they dug them that long from the start.
- Like burrows.
- Well, but they were evidently handy for the Germans – since you could fit more people into them.
- Was it just one person to each plank-bed?
- We'd sleep on the planks… well, when we were in those barracks, they didn't have anything: no mattresses or bedding, just these planks, and we had to use our clothes as a bedding of sorts.
- And you all had to sleep beside one another?
- Yes, that's right, in this long row – all of us.
- So it was a kind of long shelf you had in your *zemlianka*.
- Yes, a long communal shelf – that's exactly what it was – this long communal shelf.

- What about the food – would they bring this *balanda* to you somewhere on some distributing cart, or did you have to fetch it from the kitchen?
- When we were in Dvinsk, yes, and also when we were on the journey [to Germany] – then we would go the kitchen to get our food, and there was even this instance when… remember when I told you how we arrived there [in Dvinsk], when some of us had tried to escape [through the floor of the train-wagons], and what I said about the locals calling us all bandits, and that they wouldn't give us anything to eat or drink [on the train after the escape attempt]? Well, when we finally got to the [Dvinsk] camp, and they took us to the kitchen for the first time – there was this stench – it was summer and boiling hot, and there was this horse smell in the air around the kitchen, and it provokes this kind of…
- Revulsion.
- Yes, some kind of process is triggered, and the main thing is this thirst one feels – and I didn't want any of that *balanda*, just something to drink… and when I walked up to that soup cauldron – I had this bowl with me, or something like that from my mess-kit with which to scoop up the stuff – and I remember that I lost consciousness. And this Pavel with whom I was staunch friends – we always tried to stick together if we could – and this fellow called Turov, who was also in our group – we tended to keep to these little groups, you see – well, they lifted me up, ladled up the portion of *balanda* that I'd been supposed to get, and helped me to move on to the table where they poured out water for you. And when I'd drunk a few sips of that water, that revived me a bit – that is, I hadn't actually fainted as such; I'd just been in this… I don't know… this kind of state of…
- A black-out.
- That's right, this black-out, and I'd somehow lost my sense of orientation. So the first thing I did was to drink up my water, and only then did I touch that *balanda*. Yes, that had all been in the kitchen [of the Dvinsk camp], but when we were marched off to work [in the Frankfurt camp], they wouldn't bring us anything to our work site: we would just set out in the morning, work over there for as long as they kept us, sometimes even until dusk…
- But they must have given you something in the mornings?
- Yes, in the mornings yes – they did give us something. I don't remember what it was exactly, but, on the whole, it was always some form of *balanda*, sometimes with a slice of bread to go with it. And when we returned to the camp – usually in the evenings – we knew, of course, what ration was waiting for us! but since we knew what to expect… that's why some of us, as I told you, rushed to those French vats, in order to pick up something 'extra' before receiving the regulation fare. That's what it was like.
- When you were clearing rubble in the town, did you ever have any contact with the local population? Or was there simply no chance?
- There wasn't. We had guards all around us – that's the way it was. So no, I don't recall that we ever had any dealings with the locals.
- Did you ever hear anything about some underground organisation in your camp?
- Well, as far as our camp was concerned, there wasn't anything remotely like that. I mean, what that Georgian had suggested to us, that was just this fleeting idea. It certainly didn't lead to any organisation or… So no, in our camp there wasn't. Now, when they transferred us once again, from that camp to one outside – this I do remember exactly – to this camp near the city of Eisenach… here we were put to do all kinds of agricultural work… Well, things were slightly better in that camp: it was not impossible to find, now and then, some carrot or whatever from last year's crop lying around in the fields, and, yes, it was better there. That is, we more or less managed to survive… Well, and… yes, I think it was after we'd… now, when we arrived in Eisenach, it was still 1944, so it must have been early in the following year. Yes, that's right, we were then all brought to this other camp – this was precisely at the time they were setting up the

Russian Liberation Army – the ROA – you know what that was, don't you? Yes, so they took us all to this camp – that is, apart from us, all these [Soviet] prisoners from other camps in Germany – I've forgotten, though, where this one was – but, anyway, there they had this public loudspeaker which relayed to us these sort of summons to join the ROA. In short, there was all this agitation to try to convince us to enlist in this ROA: they explained to us what it was; that it had been set up by the [Russian] government[-in-exile], headed by Andrei Andreevich Vlasov; that its aims were so-and-so – all this they explained to us, and how they were going to fight against the Bolsheviks, against the Communists, and they invited us to form part of it too. Well, I wouldn't say that from our contingent, that is, those of us who'd been taken there from Eisenach, that… it didn't look as if anybody was that keen on enlisting, although our life in the camp was, you know…

- Hard.

- Yes, not that attractive, so to speak. And, of course, from our group – that is, from us former partisans and the others ['normal' Soviet POW's] – there wasn't a single person – not as far as I can remember – who agreed to go and…

- Join that army.

- And join that army. That just didn't happen amongst our group, but insofar as it is known that people did enlist… I suppose it was because they were somehow just fed up with living in such conditions… That's why they gave everything up and left for the ROA, shutting their eyes to everything… and, besides, you've got to take into account the different circumstances in each of these camps.

- In what sense do you mean different circumstances?

- No, what I mean is that in each camp a lot depended on the kind of work you had to do – so I meant different in the sense of the Germans and the various assignments they might force you to do. Take our situation for example: true, when we were being moved from one camp to another, they would prod and hurry us, but it was never the case that… they never put us into a penal camp or into any cells or whatever. On the contrary, we were always rather surprised that they kept moving us from one camp to the next… I mean, we were even marched from that one in Eisenach to the south of Germany – once again!… in this large column, with the Germans pressing us on all the time. And this was all taking place when the Second Front had already been launched! [i.e. after the Normandy Landings of 6 June 1944]… Now, Frankfurt-am-Main is near France, so that means that when they moved us from there, they'd wanted to get us away from the approaching Second Front. And, similarly, they shifted us west, away from the advancing Soviet army… these Germans, they were driving us on all the time!… remember what I said, that it's still not clear to me why they didn't just shoot us all… no, instead of that, they took the trouble of moving us westwards, and then from Frankfurt-am-Main, from the west to the south of Germany… What was all this for?!… Now, it was when they were marching us to the south… that these three of us made an escape. You see, the convoy guard wasn't particularly sophisticated – just these old men with rifles… on foot like the rest of us. There was one guard on one side of our column, which was a hundred or even two hundred metres long, and then one in front, and another following the column from behind – it was all really just to keep up appearances, almost! So that's why when we were crossing this ravine, going across this little bridge, the three of us – that is, that Turov, who was from Leningrad, me, and this Lithuanian – we all jumped off the bridge together and hid under it as the remainder of the column was passing through… and no one noticed anything, well… no one chased after us. They all vanished off in the horizon, and after that we roamed about German territory for some two weeks, I suppose, hiding in these barns and living on the turnips we pulled out of these bins where they'd been piled for the winter – they grow a lot of turnip in those parts! – or carrots and a couple of other things too…

- Were you trying to get to a specific destination?

- No, we were just… well, we kind of knew that the front-line, the western one, was closing in and…

- And you were hoping to hold out there until it reached the area you were in?

- … well, yes, to hold out for a while and avoid being captured… and, besides, we also came into direct contact with some German peasants, and they…

- What was their attitude towards you?

- Their attitude?… well, I simply just don't know – perhaps it was indifferent, but, then again, who knows?, or perhaps they did feel some sympathy for us; it's just impossible to tell. They saw that we were POW's, especially given that we were dressed in these old German uniforms… which had faded considerably – they'd probably been used and washed ten times before they were left to us… because all of us POW's were given these German army uniforms, you see, and the peasants knew very well what to make of us when they saw us in them. Now, that Lithuanian, he was fluent in… well, I suppose, not really fluent, but he could understand German all right, and so whenever it was necessary to ask for something, he was able to get in touch with them and explain things… But in one place we were finally caught: it was early in the morning when we suddenly heard this voice: "Halt!" Well, we'd had it – it was this German… we realised that there was no way of getting out of this… it was a patrol from the German military police which was operating in the area. They'd posted these sentries along the road – I don't know what their purpose was, but, anyway, they stopped us all right, and they didn't have to question us much: it was pretty obvious from how we looked that we were fugitive POW's. Their officer gave some order to two of these military policemen, and they marched us off to this… where we saw the ground beginning to slope down into this ravine… and they led us to its edge… and below us we saw… this column of POW's who were resting against the scarp of the ravine… it wasn't the same column, of course, from which we'd made our escape, but some different one… and the policemen simply handed us over to this column, that is, to the old soldiers who were convoying it…

- And so you joined them…

- Yes, we just stayed in that column and… But listen to this: that Lithuania who understood German – he'd heard the officer tell his men that there was this column of POW's resting in that ravine, and how he'd ordered them to take us there, but if the column had already moved on, then they were to leave us there… in the ravine… Quite obvious what he'd meant… And the Lithuanian told me afterwards: "When they were taking us to that ravine, you and Volodia were just walking gaily along, whereas my legs were giving way under me: I couldn't walk because I'd heard that if… in five minutes' time they might shoot me and dump me in that ravine… and you were just strolling along, almost smiling even!"

- And you yourself didn't have any foreboding at all – as to why they might be leading you to the ravine?

- No, since we'd already realised there that… you see, it was clear that since they hadn't shot us on the spot… they surely wouldn't take the trouble of marching us somewhere else if that's what they were planning to do… It's true, though, that at first we were afraid, seeing that they were from the military police with these… metal crescents on which it said: "Feldgendarmerie" – in German, of course. [The *Feldgendarmerie* were the military police units of the *Wehrmacht* and wore a steel gorget, suspended from a chain around the neck, as a badge of authority] This didn't look very encouraging, and we were at first expecting a bullet through the neck… that someone from this patrol service would dispose of us in short order… So when, instead, they led us away on the road, we felt this huge relief that they hadn't killed us after all, that we had this new lease on life, so to speak. But that Lithuanian, of course – when he heard what their provost had actually said, his legs couldn't but give way under him. So there's another of these episodes which has stuck in my mind.

- When you were in that new column, where did they take you then?

- I think we walked for one or two days before… I remember, we passed by several large villages, where they had these supply points, where you could get some food – like field-kitchens, I suppose, and they gave us something to eat there, too. Besides, I also noticed that the Germans had these farms which were… almost like… well, very similar to our kolkhozy: these large farmsteads which had been amalgamated and on which there were lots of labourers at work. We only marched in the daytime, and for the first or second night we were put into some barn or hay-loft, where we all had to sleep side by side… When we got up the following morning, we were rather bewildered at first: our convoy guards seemed to have vanished, and below, on the highway, these Studebaker trucks [probably the Studebaker US6 model, produced in the USA during the war years and well-known to Russians because many of these highly reliable trucks were supplied to the Red Army under the Lend-Lease programme] were roaring past… brmm, brmm! And in the Studebakers were these black fellows… negroes. So it was the Americans who'd come and freed us!… We all shouted: "Hurrah!" and rushed to get a glimpse of their trucks and lorries. A bit later, some real Americans – white ones – turned up, and as soon as they saw us, they ran towards us, and we all embraced one another, and some of them brought us cigarettes and shared some of their tuck with us … There was such enthusiasm – almost like the meeting on the Elbe. [On 25 April 1945, a patrol of the 5th Soviet Guards Army made contact for the first time with American troops from the U.S. First Army near Torgau, on the River Elbe, leading to the famous "Handshake of Torgau" the following day] However, there it was the two fronts linking up for the first time, whereas in our case it was just this unforeseen meeting between American soldiers and…

- And Soviet POW's, right?

- Exactly – and, mind you, they didn't call us or refer to us as "Soviets," but always as Russians: we were all Russians to them, even if amongst us there were a couple of Central Asians… as far as the Americans were concerned, even if we'd had black skin, they would still have called us Russians! So, anyway, I was with the Americans for two months…

- On their occupied zone… and how did they look after you there?… that is, give you to eat, medical treatment, accommodation, and so on? What was the name of the place where you took up quarters?

- It was some village, but I don't remember the name. There was a small town nearby… It didn't really feel as if we were in real front-line territory: these Americans were simply from some independent units. They would set out in the mornings and return to the village towards evening – you see, they were billeted in various houses there, and, when they got back, they would put aside their weapons, have something to eat, and rest… We would help them by cleaning their weapons and somehow also managed to communicate with them, using various hand gestures or, in some cases, scraps of German. Everyone seemed keen to communicate, that's all. And we also had a chance to observe what their army life was like… Now, remember I told you that lately we'd been doing mainly agricultural work, that is, for the Germans – yes? Well, we must have acquired a certain knack for that type of work, because when they [the Americans] left, those Germans immediately started inviting us…

- To work?

- To work for them, yes. And, in fact, many of us stayed there – in those… I wouldn't call them *derevni* [Russian villages, which always tended to be laid out after the same pattern: huts close together, without the isolated peasant holdings more typical of Germany, say]; they aren't like ours, but what's the word for them? I can't …

- Hamlets?

- … remember – not *derevni*, but.. well, let's just call them German villages for convenience's sake… Yes, so these Germans invited us to come to work for them, said that they would provide us with board and lodgings, and that we would later be able to go back [to the Soviet Union],

whenever we decided to. And some of us also went to that town, where these committees had been set up – they were drawn from Soviet POW's and Russians who'd been deported to Germany as forced labourers. It had all been put on an organised footing, you see, and there were these committees which drew up lists and records, as well as carrying on propaganda to get us to emigrate to the west…

- These committees actually engaged in propaganda?

- Yes.

- It was the Americans who organised them, right?

- Well, I don't know who actually organised them: whether it was the Americans or, perhaps, some of the Russians who were working there, or it may even have had something to do with the Russian Liberation Army – I simply don't know, because although we did visit that town, looked round it and listened with great interest to what was going on, we preferred to stick to our work…

- In agriculture.

- Yes, in agriculture. We lived all right, you see, and had sort of decided to take things in their stride, not worrying too much about the future.

- So you didn't register yourself anywhere?

- That's right – we didn't.

- And where did you live?

- Oh, we just lived in those houses.

- You mean in the houses of the farmers who were employing you?

- Yes, yes, in their houses. Why not?… And sometimes we [liberated POW's] would get together and discuss things, exchange opinions – that kind of stuff.

- I imagine you had slightly better clothes to change into for these meetings, yes?

- Yes, we had some… Oh and, you know, it proved very interesting: there were all these suggestions to emigrate, not just to France, say, but… you see, a number of French POW's who'd recently been liberated were also there.

- And they suggested that you should come with them?

- "Why don't we all go to France together?!" some of them even said to us, "we've got this town there which is teeming with Russians, and you won't be short of friends and comrades!" And then there were also these announcements on the radio or at rallies in the town: "Anyone who wants to go to Australia or to Canada, please report to so-and-so."

- And did any of you go there?

- The majority did go, in fact, to get registered, and I think their applications were actually filed. And even in the case of us three – who weren't at all attracted by all that, since we wanted to return home, to what was ours – even in our case… Well, I for one might almost have stayed in Germany and ended up becoming a German national!

- How did that happen?

- It happened… Well, as they say, I had the chance to make my fortune! I'd accepted employment at a certain German farm – the farmer had gone off to the front and was killed in action, so it was his widow who was in charge of the farmstead. She was about forty or so and had this sixteen-year-old daughter, and one day she said to my face: "Leo (that's how they called me: Leo), stay here and settle down on our farm: you can work the land, and it's all yours. Please say you will. And my daughter's already sixteen." That's what she said – now, it's true that I had been talking to her daughter and even managed to keep up a conversation of sorts, since after having been in Germany for so long, I had started to pick up simple words, which was made all the easier by the fact that at school I had once learnt some German: so I just about managed to understand what she was suggesting. But I said that it didn't suit me.

- Because you wanted to return home at all costs?

- Yes, I said that I didn't want to stay there forever – although, of course, settling and working on that particular farm would have been quite an agreeable prospect, because there was this warmth and kindness – not at all like over there [in Soviet factories and farms?] – and, moreover, I did have this view that if one really was going to do something, then one should do it seriously, and not just for the fun of it or fleetingly or… And yet, throughout all this time, I was still keeping in touch with what was going on in that town: I'd go there with my two friends and try to find something out regarding the situation. We heard, for example, that on the nineteenth of May a further group [of liberated Soviet POW's] would be taken to the Soviet zone. That is, there were also days on which people wishing to go to Canada, say, or Australia were told they could register and given specific instructions – similarly for those who wanted to emigrate to France – but on that particular day it happened that they were making transport arrangements for those who wanted to go to the Soviet zone. So that's when we decided that we would return to our mother country, to our own people.

- But, as you said, there was this propaganda to persuade you to emigrate to the West. Now, did they say that if you returned to your country instead, so-and-so a fate was waiting for you there?

- Yes, that Siberia was in store for us.

- What did you think about that?

- Well, what I knew for sure was that I'd been captured and held there…

- Against your will?

- Yes, and I understood that I was in a sense a 'traitor to the Motherland.'

- So you were aware of the consequences of returning?

- But the thing was that I hadn't actually committed any crime for which I was liable to punishment – that's what I assumed anyway.

- Which means you didn't feel guilty in any way…

- No, at that moment, I didn't feel any particular guilt. All right, I was prepared to be subjected to some punishment of sorts over there [in the Soviet Union] for a year perhaps, or even two. That is, as a kind of criminal punishment, in effect. Generally speaking, I didn't have a very good grasp of reality then…

- So you were prepared to have to justify yourself and perhaps even be punished, but what had never occurred to you was to worry about the scale of the punishment.

- That's right, I just couldn't imagine that… I mean, I was even prepared to serve a jail term, since, after all, it was true that instead of smashing the enemy on his own territory, as I'd dreamt about before the war started, I had ended up in captivity, which was admittedly a silly thing that couldn't be undone… But surely they would also take into account that I was so anxious to return home because that's where my father, mother, and brother were… And so that's how it came about that on the nineteenth, the three of us went to that town, after having bidden farewell to those Germans – when we were almost on the verge of tears, in fact…

- You mean the families you'd been working for?

- Yes, that's right, the farmers for whom we'd worked. Well, and so we reached the assembly point in the town and saw these American… Studebaker trucks and lorries already lined up and ready to set off. The lorries were open, so we could see everyone who was heading for the Soviet zone with us: there were also some Russian women who'd been deported to Germany for forced labour and who were carrying these children: you see, they had married locals and had children, and now they too were returning home like us… all of us together. The Americans gave us some presents – a few clothes, a bit of food on top of the ration we received for the journey – it was quite an emotional thing again. The column, I'd say, was made up of ten or so trucks and lorries. So then off we were, driving through their… their…

- Occupation zone…
- Yes, their zone – and when we were driving through it, it was again mainly Americans we saw on the roads, and they all saluted us joyfully. These Americans who saw us clearly thought we were fine and decent fellows for being so eager to get back to our home country, and they all showed us great sympathy and warmth…
- Of course, returning home, which for them [the American GI's] was always such a joyful occasion…
- Yes, yes, of course, and that's why they were so happy for us. In their eyes one could read the joy they felt at being able to express their sympathy to us. They would all salute us, and some of them would throw us cigarettes or whatever they had at hand. I remember how some of us even found themselves the proud owners of these splendid American cigarette-cases… and there were lots of other things like that. Now, when we started crossing the demarcation line, I realised immediately that I was returning for nothing – because the first thing I noticed was how our soldiers, who were standing at their various sentry posts, didn't look at us with any enthusiasm at all…
- They weren't glad to see you?
- No, not at all – on the contrary, we heard all kinds of terms of abuse being muttered: "Look who's coming: these traitors!", "Deserters!"… And I understood that I'd made a mistake in returning, but it was too late. They took us to a filtration camp, where they immediately set about sorting us into categories. The filtration process was like this: first, they separated out all the women with children – that's those who'd been in Germany as forced labourers…
- Do you know where they'd been working?
- Somewhere in Germany itself, but I can't say exactly where…
- That's all right, it doesn't matter. So they separated the women with children…
- Yes, and later we found out that the children had also been separated from their mothers. Then they started sorting us by age, separating the older men from those who were still fit for military service. And then they even went on to separate us according to our professional skills and the various posts those of us who'd been in the regular army had held. Take that Volodia Turov, for example – we'd been together in captivity and in the partisan squad, and we were both captured at the same time… actually, not quite at the same time, but we were put into the same prison and we were always together in the various POW camps they sent us to – well, he was a driver by profession, a chauffeur, and they immediately snapped him up and assigned him to some vehicle column. So I never saw him again, although he did send me a letter when I was later stationed in the Ukraine. And that Lithuanian friend was also picked for some group – I can't remember which one exactly – so there I was, all on my own. None of my old acquaintances were put into the same group as me; I was surrounded by all these new faces. Well, and they kept us there for about a month, I'd say – during all that time, we never left the camp premises… In short, they kept us there until they'd finished recording all the details – about where and…
- Were you taken to interrogations?
- Yes, they interrogated me and wrote everything down about how, where, what, and…
- The circumstances of your capture?
- Exactly – all those circumstances: about how I'd been captured, where I'd been taken and so on. I don't know for sure, but given that there were probably all kinds of people in the filtration camp, they may well have been looking for some… and that's why they had to check everyone so thoroughly – especially me, since I'd been put into the category of those who were going to be used to reinforce various army units. You see, the army units there in Germany had also been depleted quite heavily. Anyway, we were supposed to return… on foot – from Germany and through Poland, all on foot. And that's why we were supposed to serve as reinforcements for those units.

- So you explained to them in detail how you were taken prisoner?
- No – the interrogation was being carried out by SMERSH [*lit.* 'Death to Spies' – a military counterintelligence service, which was subordinated to the Commissariat of Defence during the war and operated independently of the NKVD], after all, so they only wanted to have the main points. For example, I didn't tell them about that vision I'd had of Mama, or any such subtleties, because I understood that all that…
- Didn't interest them…
- Yes, it wouldn't have interested them at all. So I told them about what they were after: the German camps I'd been taken to and so on. I did also tell them, though, about how they'd encircled us near that lake, how they'd told me to put my hands up, and how I had and thus ended up in captivity – that all belonged to their field of competence. But as for trying to justify myself or lamenting my misfortune in order to win sympathy – that I certainly didn't feel any inclination to do…
- In those units you were assigned to, what was their attitude towards you as a former POW?
- Oh, in the units it was fine – they didn't condemn me or anything. On the contrary, they showed understanding and… After all, we were sharing all the hardships of this march through Europe, including these various spurts we had to make in order to cover enough ground per day… And apart from that, we were also going through Poland and saw all those, you know [concentration camps]… Yes, though first of all we went through Germany, and, well, it was so that we stopped by at some of these abandoned German houses – because the Germans too had run away when the Soviet forces were advancing into their country – and yes, there were a couple of odd bits and pieces which came in handy; things that had been stored away. We were just marching through [without any specific intention of carrying out pillage], and all we had was this haversack which contained only what was absolutely essential, so… By the way, one comrade – I found out about that later, and I was so stupid that I hadn't realised back then that one could [*laughs*] carry such things, that they might even come in useful!… you see, it was when we arrived in Western Ukraine that I found out that one of our soldiers had discovered, in some house or somewhere else, a whole packet of sewing-machine needles… And he'd taken them and brought them home, where they proved to be of great value, since there wasn't a single factory in the Soviet Union that produced them at the time! They were rated as highly as pure gold [*laughs*] – that's how it was!… I just wanted to tell you that as a kind of anecdote…
- That was very housewifely of him!
- Yes, he proved a very economical soldier – he'd gauged the conditions that awaited us at home quite rightly. So, as I was saying, I got along well with these soldiers, made friends with them: with some more, with some less, of course, but they certainly didn't cold-shoulder me [for having surrendered and been a POW]. Now, in our section we also had a commander, this young lad – I've got this photograph on which you can see the two of us – he was covered in medals, despite being so young, but he too was carrying one of these haversacks like the rest of us. As for the more senior soldiers – the sergeant-major in charge of our platoon or company… because, you see, we were marching together with this small column on horseback…
- A transport-column?
- Yes, that's the word: a transport-column. They'd sometimes agree to carry a few of the things [we'd found in these abandoned houses] for us, on top of the food supplies they were transporting – by the way, they always gave us dry rations, even though we were wearing our feet off on these long daily marches. You see, we would get up in the morning, at first dawn, and start walking whilst the sun rose little by little. In the hottest part of the day, we would rest somewhere in the shade before being ordered to get up again and handed out our food – I can't remember what it was exactly, but at least we did get a bite or two to eat – and then we would continue on our way. Even

as it got dark, we would still be plodding along. In connection with this, there's one detail that has stuck in my mind: you see, we had to march like a proper army column, four soldiers abreast in each line, and we were keeping step with each other to such a degree of regularity that if the person in the line in front of you suddenly stopped for some reason, you'd smash into him, because we were all in this state of perpetual drowsiness…

- You had the automatic pilot on!

- [*laughs*] Yes, something like that, because we really did keep trudging on for a while after the order to halt had already been given! By the evenings we were quite literally walking half asleep, and the command would only just about manage to rouse us out of this state – more or less. But, ironically, it was merely to be told to lie down and sleep! So that's how we covered up to eighty or even ninety kilometres a day, as was expected of us. But it meant walking from daybreak to late evening, with only a sort of rest in between, when it was too hot to move. That's how we marched through Germany, the whole length of Poland, and eventually reached Western Ukraine and the city of Kovel. Our whole division left Germany on foot, and alongside us some of our soldiers were driving… whole flocks of German cows… And whenever we marched past a railway line, we could see that the trains were definitely running and, in fact, were packed full – but not with our soldiers. We didn't see a single special train of our troops to whom we could have waved…

- And why was that?

- Because they were using all the trains to freight all these goods being repatriated… both on a private level and on State orders. For example, all the lathes when I was working – you see, when I returned to Moscow after Noril'sk, I went to work in the 'Kalibr' instrument factory and there…

- All the lathes were war trophies?

- Yes, precisely. And it was that kind of thing they were transporting on the trains – again, I can testify to that, since I later actually worked on them. And, besides, they were lathes which… represented a real value; they certainly weren't any old lumber, that's for sure… We, on the other hand, had to walk all the way!

- And what was it like being stationed in Kovel?

- Well, in effect, I served there for… let's see: it was 1945 when I was taken out of the filtration camp and assigned to that unit –I'd been in the American zone for some months – so that means that after all that I served in the army for a good three years…

- Were you able to write to your mother and brother?

- Yes, of course, I was already receiving letters from them by then…

- I suppose they hadn't received any news from or about you during all that time you were in captivity?

- They just… as it turned out, they had received this notification saying that I'd gone missing… And when, later on, I was arrested… I managed to send them a note, and that was the only way they were able to find out about it, because they never received any official notification whatsoever. That's how it was, can you imagine?!

- That is, your family wasn't officially informed in any way?

- Officially… about my arrest, no. That's why when father, having found out about my arrest [through my note], went to his… Ministry and said: "I request to be transferred to this abrasives factory in Moscow because I can't carry on working in the Glavk." [Central Directorate – each of the industrial ministries of the USSR had such a department which controlled certain areas of the particular branch of industry falling within the ministry's competence] When they asked him why, he explained: "Because my son is accused of being a traitor to the Motherland and has been arrested!" And then they started trying to dissuade him from his decision: "You don't really mean that, do you?! Have they actually given you an official notice? Come on, you're talking nonsense! … All you have to do is apply for this certificate that he's gone missing – and no one will find

out…" – But father insisted: "No, I can't stay here. My conscience won't allow it. My Party conscience – or however you call this Party… sentiment – simply doesn't permit me to remain here if my son has been recognised for a traitor to the Motherland!" And so he was transferred to that factory, where he worked as a storeman right up to his retirement. Of course, he did join the factory's primary Party organisation [the Party cell established in each organisation that had at least three Party members amongst its staff] and attended their meetings without fail, but it wasn't…

- Your arrest had affected him deeply.

- Yes, exactly, he was broken by it, although he remained loyal [to the Party and the regime] to the very end, of course – his faith never left him.

- Did he believe in your innocence, or did he consider that, seeing you had been in captivity during the war, you must have been guilty?

- No, no, he believed all right.

- That you weren't guilty…

- And afterwards, when I was going to be released… It was in effect thanks to his petitions on my behalf that I was finally released.

- So he regularly sent off petitions for your release?

- Yes, he wrote letters and provided all this evidence and… But it's probably better that I save this until we get on to the Kengir uprising. Then I'll tell you about it.

- What about Igor? What was he doing during your…

- Oh, Igor – he was already an acknowledged sportsman by then.

- He didn't have to do military service?

- He was called up, but he managed to dodge the draft – that is, he was sort of sheltered and… in the end, he got away without having to do his military service.

- Who sheltered him?

- Why, the Spartak Moscow players! That's why he didn't have to go to the army... It's interesting to think that he might have ended up playing for Dinamo – if it hadn't been for the way they treated him there when he turned up at their training pitch once: you see, they turned him away with the excuse that he was just a kid and that they had loads of those coming every day and fancying themselves future stars… Well, and then he was somehow noticed by one of the Spartak scouts, or perhaps even by one of the players – I don't remember who it was exactly – and that's how he ended up in Spartak. First he was in the children's team, then in the youth one, and so he really put down roots in the Spartak society – he retained this utter devotion to Spartak right until his last days, in fact... Now, when he reached conscription age, TsSKA Moscow [the football team of the Central Sports Club of the Army] tried to sign him up with the following promise: "Don't worry, just turn up at the division you've been allocated to, and we'll get you of there straight away and snap you up for the TsSKA!" But the Spartak club members also had their channels of influence, it seems: they also had a few lads who knew how to sort such a matter out and were thus able to ensure that Igor wasn't drafted in the end… On all the forms he had to fill in at the time, he wrote: "My elder brother was reported missing." Mama told me once how he'd said: "Oh what a mess Levushka has made of things! Now I won't have any real openings or chances. Yes, I'll be playing football professionally, but I'll never be allowed out of the country for matches abroad."

- He said that in connexion with your arrest?

- Yes, with my arrest… see what I mean? Yes, I remember that it was definitely in connexion with my arrest. Well, and every time he was about to set off for some match abroad, and he had to fill in these questionnaires, he would always write that in the entry about family members – and he never had any hmm… any…

- Any obstacles put in his way…

- That's right: he actually never felt himself targeted or obstructed in any way by the authorities. But, of course, to be honest, he had somehow… well, when I was released and able to return home, and I met him, there was this sort of chill cast over us. The way he was looking at me betrayed a certain… well, it's just that he didn't believe [in my innocence] in the same way as father had. And I could tell that he didn't quite feel at ease in my company… I must say, though, that this estrangement didn't last for ever, because eventually there did come a moment when his eyes were opened to the truth… I'll tell you about that later.

- How did your arrest actually happen? Was it in Kovel where you were arrested?

- No, as a matter of fact, it wasn't in Kovel where I was arrested. First of all, I was assigned to a so-called anti-aircraft machine-gun platoon: it was just made up of… sixteen soldiers… at any rate, not more than twenty… that's in the whole platoon. We operated these large machine-guns and for some reason weren't considered a combat unit, but part of the anti-aircraft defence service. [Already at the time of the Second World War, the Soviet Air Defence Forces were in effect an independent armed service – in most other countries, responsibility for anti-aircraft defence would normally lie with the air forces] That's how it had been during the war and it stayed that way afterwards too: so we hardly ever had to do any drill, and during my three years of service I got to see a number of towns until we were eventually stationed in Western Ukraine. Why? you may be asking yourself. Well, it was for the simple reason that our unit was supposed to be self-supplying in terms of provisions: that is, in the autumn we had to lay in our own stock of vegetables and everything else that we needed. And so we would travel round the villages and… procure these supplies…

- In 1947, when there was such a famine? [1946 had been a year of severe drought in the Ukraine which led to many peasants starving in the countryside, as they were unable to fulfil state procurement targets.]

- … well, the famine…

- Wasn't 1947 one of the hardest years?

- Yes, there was mass starvation.

- And so what did you see there, in the Ukrainian villages?

- I saw some terrible things, some really terrible things… Well, to start with, when this famine had already set in, we had to drive around the countryside and procure supplies. And I remember quite clearly how we once set off for this area in Western Ukraine – it was somewhere near the Poles'e [a marshy region in Belorussia which is traversed by the Pripet River], that is, closer to Belorussia than the Ukraine, and we were in a car, of course – normally we went in trucks or lorries – and together with us was this plenipotentiary responsible for enforcing the harvest-collection. He was a civilian, of course, and had been appointed by the rural authorities: we'd been attached to him as a kind of escort, because it was absolutely essential to be armed when carrying out such a mission – all the more so as he was travelling in an ordinary car. So, well, we drove round the area, stopping here and there to collect the supplies that were due to us, and, finally, at one of the larger settlements we unloaded the car and were given part of the supplies to take with us as our provisions. But there were also cases when we had to walk through the gardens of these *khaty* [as the peasant houses in Southern Russia, the Ukraine, and Belorussia are normally known] and actually go into them. Here's one particular incident which has stuck in my mind: I'd been sent to procure supplies together with this Ossetian. He was from Northern Ossetia, in fact – Pliev was his surname, and I can still remember his face: he was older than me, probably by ten years or so, and he had this sturdy and mature look about him – but there was also something harsh in his character, one could feel that immediately. He'd also been through front-line service during the war. Anyway, the two of us were armed, of course, and we were walking along this road when he suddenly said that nearby, close to the forest, was this other *khata* which hadn't yet delivered the

specified… quantity of supplies. So we went into that house – it was quite big and solidly constructed – and in this large room we saw a woman with three or four little children scampering around her. It was almost impossible to tell how old she was, since she was wearing some nondescript rags and looked so exhausted… the war years had clearly left their mark on her. And that Pliev addressed her rather gruffly, calling her by her surname and using "thou": he then started to rattle out a list of all the crops, eggs, milk, grain, and so on and so on, that her farmstead had failed to deliver in the quantities specified by the state quotas. Well, there she began howling and crying and telling us to go on and take what little she had left without troubling ourselves to think about those children; they might as well starve to death, she screamed and pointed to this heap of potatoes which had been piled up in a corner of the room – there was just about enough to fill three or four sacks perhaps. And the children too started screaming something and hiding behind her. Everyone was off their hinges, and yet that plenipotentiary – yes, he was with us too – he just calmly motioned to us: "Come on, gather them up." But Pliev gave him such a look… I thought he was going to knock the fellow down with one blow!… turned round to leave the house and said: "Let's go, Lev, that's enough." And so we walked out, got into the car and drove off, leaving him there…

- The plenipotentiary?

- Yes, and after that we never took part in such operations again. Pliev had said: "Enough!" He said something else too, in front of the official, though I can't remember the exact wording, since he had this rather strong accent, but it all sounded very convincing… in those parts where he was from, you see, they really do have this imposing manner when talking. Anyway, the gist of what he said is that what we'd been about to do was some villainy, unworthy of decent human beings – to take away the last few potatoes from a half-starved woman and her children! – and he vented his indignation at the official who'd ordered him to do such a thing, raised his fist and threatened to kill him on the spot if… That's a real fact which I was a witness to, and it's not for nothing that it left such an impression on me, because that official had, after all, been acting on higher orders – that is, the authorities everywhere had endorsed such measures. And it was on that basis too that our army was maintained in Western Ukraine, so I really don't understand those who later, when looking back at their years of service there, asked: "But why were the locals so hostile towards us? Why did they try to murder us?"… For example, let me tell you how we were put to gather in the harvest: they gave us this assignment when it was clear that the locals were too weakened by hunger that they couldn't manage to bring in the crops on their own. So we were sent to help them. It was already autumn, and there were these long shafts of maize which we cut to the ground, as well as all other kinds of cereals – that's where I took part in a grain harvest for the first time in my life, cutting down oats and wheat and you name it... However, there would often be rifle-shots fired from behind the maize… the blame was laid on these hmm… what do you call them?… on these Banderovites… [the followers of Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian nationalist leader murdered by KGB agents in 1959, who had sustained a guerrilla campaign against the Soviet regime ever since it annexed Western Ukraine in 1939 (and who also fought against the Nazi invaders)] but in my view they weren't Banderovites at all, since the latter were, after all, some kind of organised Polish guerrilla units, [Western Ukraine had been a part of the independent Polish state until its annexation by the USSR in 1939 – which is why Lev Aleksandrovich refers to the (Ukrainian) followers of Bandera as Poles] whereas those shooting under the cover of the maize stalks were simply the locals who had had all their produce seized in the way I've just told you about, and who hated us… us soldiers. However, I must add that they didn't fire on us – I didn't hear of a single instance of any of our soldiers being killed – they murdered those representatives… the plenipotentiaries. Yes, they would pick them off, and, I suppose, good riddance too!

- Did you think about those things at the time? That just as you had been received by a hostile population in Estonia – where you arrived thinking you'd be welcomed as liberators, but found that the Estonians weren't so keen on that – so you were received in a hostile mannner by the population of Western Ukraine?… Did this stoke up your doubts further?
- Oh absolutely, all this gave rise to these inner… this feeling that, well, if all this was part and parcel of our Soviet… of our Soviet system… then this clearly showed that the Soviet regime's attitude towards the individual person was… well, it was as if a person simply didn't count for anything… In contrast, the Americans… they… well, for example, when they came back after some operation, they would put aside their weapons without any ado whatsoever. The following day, each soldier might well pick up a different tommy-gun to the one he'd had the day before, but that wasn't a problem at all: what mattered was that he left the base equipped and armed. With us, on the other hand, it's like this: if you lose your numbered gun – which is registered in your name – then you'll have to face a tribunal for sure, and you might end up executed or thrown into prison or whatever! So what is more important after all? With the Americans it's clearly the individual person – he's what matters above all, and the rest – that is, all these pieces of steel and metal – is just a bunch of trifles, worth nothing in comparison. With us it's completely the other way round: the individual person counts for nothing. A soldier is nothing… a peasant is nothing, a worker is nothing… so what does it all add up to? To nothing! What do we believe in then? what are we hoping to build, what kind of future do we intend to build with this attitude? All this sub-consciously, gradually started accumulating in me and gave rise to a certain estrangement… from my [earlier] devotion to this system, although it's true that I did join the Komsomol again when I was in the army – you see, I'd written asking for my identity documents to be sent back to me, but nothing ever arrived from Estonia, so given that I was an active… no, actually, to start with, I wasn't yet an active Komsomol member… but precisely because I was a soldier who… who was honestly fulfilling his duty – that is, since I was an exemplary product of our… oh, what was that phrase they used so often?…
- Military and political training…
- Yes, I was a real high-flier in our military and political training – that's why they sent my parents these letters – I know I've got them here somewhere, but I just can't find them… otherwise, I would have liked to show them to you… I just don't know where they've disappeared to… I mean, I've still got this triangle which I drew once at school and I know exactly in which drawer to find it, but as for those letters… – you see, they were letters thanking my parents for having such a son, such a model military and political trainee… there was one particular letter which I wanted to show you, but I just can't figure out where I might have put it by mistake… So yes… now, what was I going to tell you about?
- You were saying how you joined the Komsomol – what happened after that?
- Oh yes, the Komsomol. So I wrote up this report – I described everything in detail, that is, how I had ended up in captivity and so on – because, after all, everyone in the military units knew about all that, so it was no use trying to hide that. Well, in the end they just told me to send in an application and assured me that I would be admitted into the Komsomol – and I was! And as soon as I was in the Komsomol, I redoubled my efforts and became an exemplary [Communist soldier] in all respects… I started participating in, and carrying out myself, political [i.e. Party] work, which meant giving talks all the time and that kind of stuff – yes, I found myself on the Board of Honour [a board put up at almost all Soviet factories, institutions, and enterprises, which showed the photographs of their most outstanding workers and a summary of their achievements]. Now, when I was sent to… that is, when I was detached from my military unit – it was part of our demobilization, you see – he [the unit's commander? or some comrade?] saw my photograph on the Board of Honour, took it down and sent it to my parents, explaining in a letter that I had left the

unit but forgotten about my photograph, which sooner or later would be thrown away anyway, so that's why he had decided to send it to my parents – so that they would hang on to it and give it to me later, since he was sure that I would be pleased to see my photograph again: the photograph that had been put up on our Board of Honour!… Now that we're on the subject of my military service, you'll also be interested to know about the attitude of everyone else towards me: well, for as long as I was in that unit, I can say for sure that it was precisely as before [in pre-war Moscow]: there was never any sidelong glance in my direction; no one so much as suggested that I might be inferior in some way [for being Estonian] – no, there was absolutely nothing of that, neither on the part of my fellow soldiers, nor on that of the sergeant staff [i.e. the instructors at the regimental school] – not even the regimental commander was ill-disposed towards me in any way! I'll tell you how I found out about that: you see, when I was being sent around on all these missions and assignments, there were quite a few other Estonians [in our division] who'd also gone through the same experiences as me – that is, not that we'd been together in the same camps, but they too had suffered German captivity somewhere. And all these Estonians were somehow brought together and then taken to Estonia. Since I was away on these missions at the time this group was being assembled and arrangements for its transportation – let's call it that – to Estonia were made, I didn't end up forming part of it. I was able to remain with my unit, and the lads said to me later: "That's swell that you weren't here when they were… you know… and that you're still with us! We'll all stick together and complete our military service from first to last." There was also a time when they were recruiting, so to speak, people for these work battalions – each regiment, or whatever, was supposed to detail a specific number of soldiers, and, as it happened, they, again, detached mainly those who'd been in captivity and who – like me – had been allocated to these divisions just as reinforcements… and who perhaps had been convicted sometime in the past or, in general, had some… well, some kind of…hmm…

- Some taint in their past.

- Yes, even if it was of the slightest kind, it was sufficient. And I too had been picked out and included in the list of those due to be sent any day to this general work battalion. However, the Komsomol organiser of our company – Vetrov was his surname, that I remember definitely… and I think his first name was Viktor – went to the regimental commander and explained to him that I was an exemplary soldier – goodness knows what sort of phrases he came up with! – and requested that… – oh yes, he made much of the fact, of course, that I was in the Komsomol – … he requested that I be kept in the regiment, since I was indispensable for carrying out our political-educational activities. And I did stay in the regiment: I was struck off the list of those allocated to this construction battalion, which means that the regimental commander must have given a direct order at some point – so that's how I was able to complete my military service… as a normal private [i.e. not having to do any specifically non-military tasks]…

- So you were never promoted at all and remained a private?

- That's right. I had to resign myself to that lot, because the rank of sergeant which I'd received after completing my course in that…

- In the 'special school'?

- Yes, exactly – the thing is that they didn't have any of…

- Any of your identity documents…

- Yes, absolutely nothing – they [the officials from the former H.Q. of the Estonian Partisan Movement] hadn't returned a single one of them, and so I was left as poor as a church-mouse, as they say: I didn't have any documents or certificates or testimonials from before the war… Now, I was demobilised in 1948 – you see, demobilisation was carried out according to the *raiony* [districts], or regions, as we would say now, from where the soldiers came from or where they'd been summoned to the military commission. Yes, and it was soon going to be the turn of Moscow

and Moscow Oblast – within a month or so, in spring – and all of us who were due to be demobilised were sort of detached from the unit a few months earlier… yes, and we were seen off by our fellows and the officers, who paid us certain marks of respect – as is the practice in the army – handing out to us various letters and warm congratulations and that kind of thing – all the commanders and staff officers were there. In a word, it was all in accordance with the regulations for seeing off soon to be demobilised soldiers…

- So you were now able to go home?

- Well, the thing is that we weren't going home just yet – we were actually seen off on a train heading not for Moscow, but, rather, to this place where part of our division was stationed and doing timber cutting work… that is, various sorts of maintenance and supply work on behalf of the division. As you can imagine, with our demobilisation coming up soon, we were all keen to get home and rather fed up with all that political and educational lecturing-to… but, still, when they asked us to sacrifice a few weeks of our future civilian life to go there and help with getting supplies ready for our old regiment – things like sawing wood, and so on – we were only too glad to help out and boarded this train full of enthusiasm… I was there for about a month and I remember how we were able to go hunting for wild boars. It was a marvellous spot in the countryside!… Well, and it was from there that I set off into the wolf's mouth and ended up in the SMERSH headquarters in….

- Did they send you a summons or something?

- No, I wasn't sent for at all; it was like this: someone suggested to me that I ought to accompany this messenger who was going to the Army Staff in the city of Rovno with some packet. You see, these messengers, especially if they'd been entrusted with something very important, weren't supposed to go on their own: they had to be accompanied by someone else. So, anyway, the company sergeant-major said to me that he was going to recommend me for the task of accompanying that messenger and that I had no reason to decline such an assignment, since the journey there and back would take no time whatsoever and I was soon going to be demobilised anyway, together with all the lads from Moscow who'd completed their service. I replied: "All right, I'll go to Rovno – I've already been there a few times already, in fact, but I don't mind going one more time." And so I set off, accompanying this sergeant, I think – though, actually, I'm not entirely sure any more… perhaps he was a senior sergeant – and we got to Rovno. He was carrying the packet, whilst I was armed with a… no, actually, no, I didn't have a weapon at all.

- Did he have one, though?

- Yes, he definitely had one: I saw that he had some kind of pistol. It was easy to tell, since there was this bulge in his jacket. A tommy-gun or a rifle would, of course, have been inappropriate for such a mission, but he definitely had this weapon, probably a TT [The 7.62 mm calibre Tokarev TT-33 service pistol, in use between 1933 and 1955, was one of the favourite weapons of Soviet officers] or something of the sort. Anyway, we eventually arrived in Rovno: I didn't get to see the Army Staff, but ended up instead in the counter-espionage headquarters of the 6th Army…

- So was it all just a pretext? That is, had they sent you there deliberately, knowing that it was merely a pretext for handing you over to SMERSH?

- Well, I can only imagine that the decision had already been taken somewhere high up in these counterintelligence organs that someone like me who'd been in captivity and in the American zone had to… I mean, it was around this time that they started picking out [former POW's] like me and carrying out…

- Purges of the ranks?

- Yes, purges, filtering, and checks on whether everything in your identity documents matched what you'd said on previous occasions, and so on. If I had joined that work battalion after all, I'm sure I wouldn't have been filtered there…

- Who knows…
- Well, I did in fact give the matter a lot of thought at the time and came to the conclusion that a work battalion is principally just that, whereas in a military unit which forms part of a division completely different rules apply and…
- I see, but tell me how did you actually find yourself in the SMERSH headquarters and what happened there?
- Let's have a little break, if you don't mind?
….
- We got to the point of your arrival in Rovno, and you were going to talk about how you ended up in the SMERSH headquarters.
- Yes. Well, when we arrived in Rovno, I naturally trusted that sergeant entirely – you know, the sergeant who was supposed to deliver the packet – that is, that he knew the way to the Army Staff building, and as we were walking there, supposedly, I didn't have any reason to feel the slightest, well…
- Suspicion…
- … the slightest suspicion or misgiving. We arrived at that building, walked in… and past the guards – they let us through with no trouble at all – I was even a bit surprised that they hadn't asked us for our documents or expected us to show them some access permit. I could only assume that the sergeant was somehow connected with the Army Staff. That is, I saw that we weren't actually in the Army Staff H.Q., but, rather, in some sub-unit of the Staff where the packet was to be delivered. Anyway, I remained in this waiting-room whilst my sergeant walked into the office attached to it. However, he soon emerged from it again and told me to just stay there and wait for him a while, assuring me that he would be back soon. Then he left… Now, that did put me on my guard a bit: surely, if the mission had been fulfilled, the packet delivered, what did we have to stick around there for? But I soon set my mind at rest by telling myself that he probably had some other assignment to carry out and that I needn't be so impatient. Besides, the two of us were supposed to return together. Well, after I'd waited there a while, I was suddenly called into that office myself – I did as I was told, of course, and went in. There were a number of people there, one of them this senior officer who asked me: "Do you know where you are?" That, again, made me feel a bit apprehensive, and it was with a note of bewilderment that I replied: "How do you mean where? I've come to the Army Staff to help deliver this packet." The officer put on this… this rather unpleasant smirk, as if he was relishing my ingenuousness: "Hmm.. you are in the offices of military counter-espionage… you're under arrest and will duly be taken to a prison." It was approximately in that order that he explained my situation to me, and, of course, it instantly left me flabbergasted: I just didn't know what to think, seeing that something like that could be sprung on me just like… I don't know… it was the abruptness of it all that was so shocking. And I, so to speak, lost my nerve – they evidently hadn't expected anything else… I wasn't the first one, after all, on whom they'd played out such a scenario; they knew all the tricks of their trade, and that's why they immediately set about kneading me, when I was at my most pliable [*laughs*]. So they started by removing my shoulder-straps, snipping off the buttons of my uniform jacket, and taking off my waist-belt – in short, they followed the whole procedure that one is supposed to mete out to arrestees – at least, that's what I assumed, since I'd never been under arrest before. Well, and after that… after I'd more or less recovered my senses, they started plying me with questions about how it had all happened… you know, where exactly I'd been and what I had been doing during all that time… I later found out his [the interrogating officer's] name: it was this Major Fedorov… well, he laid special stress on asking me about what I'd been doing when I was there [in the American army base], what I'd told them [my fellow soldiers about my experiences in the American zone]… and behind all these questions I couldn't help feeling that there was actually something concrete;

that in a way they did have a point, because all these things really had happened to me – it wasn't as if they were forcing me to make up something or whatever. No, I really had been in the American occupation zone for two months! and, afterwards, when I was serving with my unit, I had indeed talked with my… that is, it wasn't as if I'd been seeking an audience at all costs – no, it's just that the lads, most of whom hadn't been in direct contact with the Americans, were curious and interested in hearing what I had to say about what their soldiers were like, how they conducted themselves, what their attitude was towards army life and things in general, and what kind of things they would talk about. So that's why I had tried to convey to them everything I'd seen and heard over there, both what I'd experienced directly and what others in their turn had told me: I did it all the more eagerly, as it really was interesting for me to look back on those experiences… And [during the interrogation] I also didn't feel as if I had to hide anything of what had happened during those two months, far from it! Well, everything I said was taken down in these protocols which in the end I signed without any reserve whatsoever. And that brought to a conclusion, so to speak, my first brush with… with my investigators.

- Where were you taken after that?

- Oh, I was immediately led downstairs. It turned out, of course, that this building had an extensive basement where a number of cells were located – in other words, it was a proper lock-up; I saw that as I walked past the various cells whilst they led me to mine. As I later found out, I'd been put into cell no.2. There were two other detainees inside – there wasn't any room in that cell for more than three people and, as it was, we were rather cramped: the only way one could get some sleep at night was by lying down in a row beside one another. As you'd expect, the door had a peep-hole through which the warder outside would look every now and then to check up on us. Near the ceiling was this little window which had been blacked out, but still let some light through, and it evidently looked out into the street because you could see the feet of passers-by flitting past. But, of course, the whole thing was tightly sealed off and no one up there, on the street, could so much as suspect that there might be some prison cells just a few metres below…

- Didn't you remember about your childhood years and how you used to run around the Lubianka?

- That's right, we often ran past it, past the "house built on blood." But no, for some reason I didn't think back to those years; I didn't draw any parallels between the one and the other, because, after all, I was then going through such an abrupt and radical change in my fortunes that… I somehow still couldn't explain to myself how it all hung together and…

- And what had happened…

- Yes, how one thing had led to another, and so on. Besides, before all that it had never occurred to me anyway to start making these comparisons and… Well, soon afterwards, the interrogations started – there was literally one every day. That is, during the day, of course, I would be in the cell, and it was only in the evenings that I was walked to the interrogation rooms. In the daytime, that warder would make sure, by peeping through the inspection hole, that none of us tried to steal a wink or two. So, as I was saying, the interrogations were carried out at night – in some cases they could last all night long – and after my first interrogation, I began to realise what it was that they wanted from me… that is, realising isn't quite the word for it, as, on the contrary, I felt this even greater…

- Bewilderment.

- Yes, so many incomprehensible things kept cropping up. For example, they would relentlessly pelt me with questions and… you see, I'd explained to them that I had returned from the American zone of my own accord; that there had indeed been this propaganda there to persuade us not to go back to our Motherland; that we had been made these promises that we could choose any country, any continent, to settle in, and that life over there had been painted in the rosiest of colours…

Again, this elicited one of these malicious smirks from my interrogator, who said something like this: “If it was so wonderful over there, why did you come back to us then? Are you an idiot or something?” – as you can guess, he certainly didn’t mince his words and came up with various such phrases in the course of the interrogation – “So stop trying to have us on and tell us what actually went on there. Who recruited you, eh? When? What mission were you given? Who were you supposed to link up with here? Who was the spymaster over there?” And a host of other questions in this vein! Now, when they’d first told me that I was under arrest and would be thrown into a prison immediately, I had been flabbergasted, as I told you, but the questions they threw at me during these interrogations left me utterly speechless, as it were, since I would never have thought… not even in my dreams… that such… such accusations could be levelled at someone who was completely innocent. How could they do this to me when I had never given the slightest cause for any such suspicions?… when I had never committed any of the actions I was being charged with?… not even inwardly had I ever allowed myself to harbour such thoughts… I mean, I’d always been desperate to get back home… to the motherland, just as any normal person, I suppose, has this overarching notion of the “Motherland.”… So, of course, I immediately started denying everything, remonstrating with their accusations and saying that there’d never been anything of the sort, never! Well, and then, of course, these somewhat harsher methods began to be applied… I could literally feel how every successive interrogation became progressively harsher… yes, they stepped up the level of cruelty bit by bit…

- What methods did they use?

- Well, to start with, I was immediately… you see, the major had this way of striking one with the flat of his palm, and that’s what he did; he would strike me on the rib-cage [*sighs*] and that really did hurt, as it turned out… And after that, he would once again urge me to confess… I refused, of course, and the whole procedure was repeated over and over again until he saw that I couldn’t bear these blows any longer. Then he changed tack: I was taken to this cold [punishment] cell, with nothing more than my underclothes on me – it was just impossible to sit or lie down, so cold was the floor – and, after a while, the lid of the food hatch opened, and I saw the major looking in: “How’s it going, eh? Haven’t frozen yet?” I was trembling and incapable of articulating a single word… but at least I could still feel some life stirring in me… Of course, they didn’t take it to the point of letting me freeze to death, but, still, they kept me there for a while and went on with the interrogation afterwards. “Have you got it? If you don’t want to sit in the punishment cell again, you know what you have to do: start talking!” And they put these manacles on my hands – I’d never come across such devices before… that is, I do remember having seen in some film how the hero or whoever was manacled and thus rendered completely immobile, fettered to the spot… but the ones they used here were not quite the same. To start with, you could move your hands a bit, but the more you did so, the tighter these manacles would snap around your wrists – they had some sort of self-tightening mechanism. And you eventually get to a point when you see blood trickling down your arms and you feel such an intense pain… and the manacles clench your wrists tighter and tighter, and you realise that if they were to contract even further, they would almost certainly break your wrist bones in two, see what I mean?… Of course, they never let it get to that point [*laughs*]…

- Just until you started bleeding, yes?

- That’s right: they literally cut into your flesh, these manacles. Oh, and there was another method of torture which I was subjected to: that’s when they crush your fingers in a door jam. And they actually did this to me once – at first, they didn’t shut the door all the way, just enough to jam my fingers against the frame: it obviously hurt, but I was still able to endure it. Then they rattled off their questions again, telling me to confess this and that, and to just sign this declaration if I

wanted to get it over and done with. I kept refusing… and then they clearly overdid this door-jamming procedure, because… as you can see on the index finger of my right hand… Look…
- The skin's all cracked…
- Yes, and I lost consciousness as a result of this very intense pain. They obviously broke off the interrogation then, as it was pointless carrying on when the arrestee was unconscious. When I came to, I found myself in the cell again and I looked at my finger, and saw that it was wrapped in something and drenched in blood. That's how I realised what had happened in those few seconds when I lost all consciousness. The two lads, however, who were in the same cell as me, said that that wasn't too bad; that I shouldn't lose heart, since I wasn't the first one on whom they'd tried out such a method; that it would eventually heal and that I should even count myself lucky, because there were worse things they could do to you. Personally, though, I couldn't imagine anything worse than that: I mean, they couldn't exactly squeeze in your head between the door and the jamb, could they? That's ridiculous!… But, anyway, that was what I had to go through there, and Fedorov left me, so to speak, a memento of himself and his methods which would stay with me for the rest of my life. After that experience, however, I began to seriously worry about what they would come up with next, and that if it carried on like that, I might be left an invalid. Now, shortly after my arrest, when the initial shock had passed, I had started reflecting on how this must clearly be linked to the fact that I'd been in captivity, and had sort of reconciled myself to the thought that this was perhaps the punishment which was long overdue [for having surrendered to the Germans] and which I just had to endure. But at the same time, I still wanted to live a bit more and certainly didn't want to end up as an invalid, so that's why I said to them that if they wrote everything up that they'd been throwing at me during these interrogations, I would sign the declaration. And after I'd expressed my willingness to sign all this, they stopped subjecting me to these nocturnal tortures. For about a week, perhaps even for ten days or so, I was even left in peace, and I was able to slowly recover in my cell. Eventually, I even tried to remove this improvised bandage from my finger and was surprised when I still felt this pain there: there was this scar in the middle of the finger and I could see the suture which they'd somehow cobbled up. But, fortunately, the finger had healed – and perhaps it just had to under those conditions: the wounds which dogs sometimes get usually heal by themselves, don't they?… without any medical or surgical intervention… so I suppose it was the same in my case. Our organisms seem to have this striving to somehow stay alive. Well, and when I was called out again for another interrogation – there seemed to be no end of these! – at night, as usual, I was taken to a different investigator: this Captain Drozdov, a younger man, who probably wasn't that much older than me and who was a little peculiar in his own way. He immediately started telling me that he and his colleagues had come to the conclusion that I was right, that I'd never been recruited [as a spy], that they understood that clearly… But he said that I had to take it from him in good faith that, although I wasn't a spy, it didn't mean that I would be able to get out of there so easily: he said that there were many cases like mine, and that if out of a hundred – he actually quoted this figure – that if out of a hundred arrestees like me, just one proved to be a real spy, that was all right because it meant that they had fulfilled their assignment… and as for the rest, they just didn't give a damn about them! Yes, he said those very words to my face! For that reason, he said, I ought to accept what he was about to propose to me. He suggested that a new accusation would be brought against me and that I'd eventually just be sent to a prison camp; then he simply started reading out those counts of my indictment which I was supposed to plead guilty to: that I had deliberately surrendered into captivity, after having killed my commander and betrayed the whole squadron [to the Germans] – he actually read all this out to me! – and that when I was in the POW camp, I had betrayed to the Germans those friends of mine who'd been planning to attempt an escape – in other words, that I'd been an informer, and so on and so forth in the same vein. But there it was again

the case that… as a result of this crude offer and all these brazenly formulated preposterous accusations… I understood that I simply couldn't confess to them [*laughs*]… and so I said: "But none of that ever actually happened – it's all completely wrong!" and started explaining to him what had actually taken place there in the Estonian forests… But he interrupted me: "No, no, I'm not interested in all that. Look, go back to your cell and think about it. If you still refuse to co-operate, we'll bring your parents here – your old father and mother – and let them proudly admire their little 'traitor to the Motherland'." And in this 'sportive' mood, which never seemed to leave him, he ordered the warders to take me downstairs again to my cell. Well, and there I recounted, as always, my latest experiences to my fellow inmates – you see, everyone there would share his experiences from every… meeting he had had with the investigator in charge of his case. Now, together in the same cell as me was this Soviet Army major, Verkhatskii, whom they were also trying to make out as a spy… and also this other chap from Western Ukraine: a certain Kirill – I've forgotten his surname – who'd served in the army during the war and, afterwards, when those events in China were being planned [This refers to Stalin's deployment of Soviet experts and weapons – from mid-August 1945 – to support Mao Tse-tung's campaign against Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang], he was enrolled in one of these special detachments which were crossing the Chinese border to carry out various operations against the Kuomintang… By the way, did you know that they recruited mainly soldiers from Central Asia for these detachments? – because, you see, there are many settlers from the Central Asian republics in Western China, and so these soldiers could easily be passed off for Chinese – their faces were more or less the same shape – even though the detachments which were being formed were, of course, Soviet, not Chinese ones. That Kirill told us quite a lot about his time in Western China: their assignment had involved some secret operation on the part of our armed forces to help set up a kind of opposition [government] in certain areas which would then support the Communists – well, and the whole plan did work out in the end [By 1949 Mao and the Communists controlled all mainland China], and those mobile formations which Kirill had served in had contributed quite significantly to this victory. However, he'd been accused of somehow having established a secret link to the Kuomintang and having passed on to them various pieces of classified information. In other words, he too was supposed to have been working as a spy! So, as you can see, the three of us had a lot to share with each other regarding our – let's put it this way [*laughs*] – our experiences of being accused and interrogated on much the same charges. Well, and they, of course… especially the major, who seemed to have come across many such cases before of people being arrested and never released again… he, in particular, gave me this advice: since such accusations were being brought against me, there was no point in me continuing to offer resistance, especially as they were prepared to involve my parents in the whole affair. He said that this was, of course, just a trick to frighten me and that he didn't think that they would actually do as they'd threatened… Nevertheless, his advice to me was to confess, since there was no chance whatsoever of my being cleared of these charges and released: "What you need to do is to get yourself convicted, so that they'll send you to a proper prison and then to a camp. And from there you'll see how things may perhaps change for the better. Don't forget that nothing is ever still in life out there, so you've definitely got to get out of here. Besides, you need to think about your health a bit – all right, your finger's healed here after all, but you'll see how in the prison they'll treat you differently and help you more." So, after these admonitions and parting words from my comrades, I did tell the investigator that I was ready to sign anything they wanted, as long as they promised not to trouble my folks with this whole business. And, of course, the captain was completely satisfied with my readiness to co-operate and immediately set about drawing up all the mandatory documents and protocols. I signed them all, to be honest, without even reading through them, since I didn't care any longer: I didn't want to have to peruse this whole dossier one more time and get myself exasperated in vain. After my decision

to comply and my confession to all these false charges, I was, of course, left in peace again – although, to give him his due, that Captain Drozdov didn't make use of any procedures of torture or coercion whatsoever: he evidently had his own tried method. Moreover, my case was a run-of-the-mill one, so to speak: all these charges could easily be made to stick on anyone who'd been in the army and been captured by the enemy, and there was nothing specific that had to be extracted from the arrestee in such cases. They did, though, withdraw the accusation that I had been a spy, because they had evidently realised that there was nothing behind it and that if they continued to press this charge against me, my case would go on indefinitely. You see, when someone confesses to being a spy, the investigators have to present a report detailing what exactly he'd been doing, whom he'd been working for, how he'd gone about getting the information, and so on… And that's why they let me alone again for a while. Now, all this – the first and second stages of the investigation – lasted for about three months, I think… yes, March, April, and May… around three months. And, of course, after I'd signed all that, they calmed down a bit and didn't call me out for any further interrogations at first, which meant that I could rest properly at night and didn't have to risk trying to steal some sleep during the day [which was strictly forbidden in Soviet prisons]. So for a while I was spared those walks to the interrogation rooms… However, eventually I was called out again, without being told what for. I thought at first that it might perhaps be for a further interrogation, that there was something they'd forgotten at the last one… But it wasn't so – Captain Drozdov said: "The court hearing's going to take place now." I replied [inwardly?]: "Well, if there's going to be a trial, so be it. That is, after all, what you were aiming at all along. I understand that, so it's all right by me." So I walked into this room where three officers were sitting around a table; sitting next to them was my Captain Drozdov, who proceeded to read out all those accusations and protocols which I'd signed. Now, whilst he was reading out this indictment, he would every now and then glance at me straight in the face – I didn't like that at all… He seemed to be hanging on my lips, afraid that I might suddenly open them to protest in some way… to say that I'd been made to sign all that under coercion… or to deny the charges. Oh, actually, he had warned me about that just before the hearing: yes, he'd told me to not even think about trying to deny anything, as it would just make things worse for me. But I had in fact already come to that conclusion myself: I reckoned that if I did anything like that, they might very well smash in my ribs, or whatever, and that it would be better if… in short, if I just conducted myself as my good captain had advised me to. So, when the accusation had been read out in full, they asked me, of course: "Do you confirm everything that has been said here?" And I replied: "Yes, I fully confirm and admit everything that was said here." Then I was led out into the corridor, literally just for a few minutes, and made to face the wall – as is the norm in these cases, because, you see, other inmates were being moved down this passageway, and the guards didn't want any of them to encounter me, and vice-versa, not even so much as to exchange glances! Soon I was led back into the room and had my… sentence read out to me… By the way, Drozdov wasn't there any more: since I had owned up to everything, his role was accomplished; he had fulfilled his mission and his presence was no longer required… Anyway, the overall sentence was for 'treason against the Motherland,' and then came all the individual points: that I had committed these crimes purposely and by design; that I'd killed my commander, which had led to our squadron falling apart and its destruction by the enemy; that I'd continued my treacherous activities in the German camps – and, as a result, under Article 54 (that's an article from the Ukrainian Criminal Code, which was applied in my case as I'd been charged on Ukrainian territory and was equivalent to Article 58 in ours) was sentenced to 25 years in a prison camp and 5 years without civil rights afterwards. I was also told that I had the right to appeal as long as I did so within a certain number of days. I think I didn't actually answer anything to that; I just took cognizance of it as a possible variant to this whole affair [which wouldn't affect the final outcome anyway]. And so then I returned to my cell,

almost in good spirits, I'd say, since all this seemed so unreal in a way – these 25 plus 5 years, that is, thirty years in all, even made me want to laugh, and when I was back in the cell, my two fellow-inmates noticed this and asked me: "What's come over you? Why are you so cheerful all of a sudden?" I told them what had happened upstairs, and they said that they weren't surprised – that everything was clear to them – but they insisted that I didn't take it all so lightly. They said that I ought to take into account what the court, in strict compliance with the statutes, had notified me about – namely my right to file an appeal. Of course, as they explained, that wouldn't ultimately change anything, but it was nevertheless absolutely essential to submit an appeal, since otherwise I would be taken straight to a prison in Rovno, where I could be put into a convoy at any time and be transported to a camp. The hardships of such a journey, they said, could very easily finish off what little I had left of my health after these three months of being under investigation. In order to gain some time in which to recover before all these hardships fell on my shoulders, they firmly advised me to write out an appeal: for such petitions normally took two months to be processed and sent back, and in the meantime I would be able to regain some of my strength, which was always better than nothing… Well, I was certainly grateful for this solicitude of theirs! When I was finally dragged out of that basement and taken to a prison, I did exactly as they had advised me to: that is, as soon as I was asked – shortly after having arrived at the prison – if I intended to file an appeal, I replied that I most definitely was planning to. So they gave me the relevant form and a pen, and I wrote out my appeal: I explained that I didn't recognise these accusations as valid, that what was described in them didn't correspond to what had actually happened – true, I didn't write that certain extraordinary… methods of coercion had been used on me… because I did genuinely feel guilty about some of the accusations brought against me [i.e. that of having surrendered to the Germans] and I didn't need to be subjected to any torture or coercion to face up to these… but the charges concerning events before that [my surrender] simply didn't make sense, I protested – it was clear that they were mere words… Now, I was put into a rather small cell in the Rovno prison, where there were probably twenty or thirty other fellow-inmates. Naturally, I got to know them all very quickly and saw that there were just two others who were in the same situation as me. The majority were local inhabitants who'd been put into prison under suspicion of having ties to those Banderovites. However, judging from their appearance and what they said amongst each other, it was obvious that these were people who had absolutely nothing to do with those military groups of the [Organisation of] Ukrainian Nationalists! There were both old men and these very young lads amongst this unfortunate group – nevertheless, each one of them would regularly receive parcels containing… bread, lard, and that kind of stuff. And although the three of us happened to be soldiers and, what is more, without kith or kin in the Ukraine [*laughs*], we would still get a share of this bread and lard that was much appreciated by our generally empty stomachs, because, you see, the parcels they received were so generous that there was enough to meet their own needs as well as to share with their friends and comrades in misfortune. Oh yes, in that prison [in contrast to the SMERSH headquarters] they did allow us out into the fresh air – they would take us out to walk in this yard. And I remember how once, as we were being led down the stairs – our cell was on the first floor – … it must have been on one of my first days in that prison, and it was a nice summery day… There was this window in one of the walls of the stairwell, and that day it was open and leant against the wall, so it acted as a kind of mirror… As I was walking down the stairs, I decided to stop and have a look at myself inside this makeshift mirror… and at first I just couldn't believe that it was me in the reflected image – I even moved my hand a bit to see if that image actually repeated my movements, and of course it did, but I still couldn't bring myself to believe that this bald fellow looking out at me from the window glass was actually me!… I mean, when I arrived in Rovno, I was just as I'd always been – we were preparing for demobilisation, so we didn't have to bother anymore about getting our hair trimmed short and I was glad to be rid of

my crew cut and that I was beginning to look like a normal person again… But in just three months I had turned into an old man! I realised that I would have to carry this other mark and memento of Major Fedorov for the rest of my days… Well, in comparison [to the SMERSH basement], my spell in that prison really was a respite for me: I regained some of my strength and my finger healed up fully. After almost two months, though – my comrades' estimate hadn't been that wide off the mark! – I was again summoned to the prison office and told that the decision regarding my appeal had finally arrived. I was allowed to read it and was surprised rather pleasantly to see that I'd been cleared of a number of charges: namely, the accusation that I had deliberately surrendered to the Germans after having murdered my commander and allowed the rest of our squadron to be slaughtered. All that was rescinded from my indictment, which now effectively contained just the one accusation that, during my time in the German POW camps, I had betrayed friends of mine who were planning an escape… That was now the 'only' accusation against me, but, all the same, the original sentence remained in force: that is, 25 plus 5 years! Oh yes, and it also said somewhere in that document that this sentence was under no circumstances open to appeal… Well, what can I say? I instantly felt this tremendous relief, because, I mean, it really was very painful for me to look back to my fallen comrades, especially my commander, whose death right before my eyes had been so heroic, and know at the same time that I was officially being accused of… So you can imagine what a relief it was when I was exonerated of these terrible accusations… I now felt, as it were, that I had the right to consider both my conscience and heart clear of any guilt… So, of course, I signed the relevant document to confirm that I'd been informed of the outcome of my appeal, and was taken back to the cell. I didn't stay there for much longer, though, because soon my turn came to join a transport of prisoners being taken to the camps. This happened, in fact, only a few days after I'd found out about the result of my appeal. There must have been about ten of us in the group – not just people from our cell, but from other parts of the prison too – and we were made to get into the open trailer of this goods truck which drove us to the railway station – the prison, you see, was in the outskirts of the city, whilst the station was somewhere near the centre. This journey also proved to be very… well, emotional and memorable for me, because… I mean, to this very day those three months I spent sitting locked up indoors – in the SMERSH basement with its casemate-like cells, in the prison, where we were only allowed to walk briefly in this small yard and had no chance to see the surrounding world and Nature… because, after all, Rovno is a southern city, you know, and the beauty of these climes was so evident for all to see on that sunny day when we were being driven to the station… And this thought struck me there and then: that everything around us was so beautiful – was it really possible that everything in life could be that beautiful? – and yet there I'd been, living on without really paying much attention to all this… So I felt this sense of exhilaration within me – this happiness at being able to see all this beauty around me and at finding myself in its midst… Well, eventually we reached the station, of course, and there was this Stolypin wagon waiting for us – [a normal train carriage that had been adapted for transporting large groups of prisoners – named after P. A. Stolypin (1862-1911), Prime Minister from 1906 to 1911] that was, in fact, the first time I'd ever seen one of these wagons. So now I knew at last what they were like, after having heard so much about them! The train was heading for Kiev, as we were supposed to be taken to the Kiev Transit Prison… I already knew then that… you see, I'd been told in advance that my place of confinement would be the Russian Far North… That Major Fedorov had mentioned to me on a number of occasions that they would be sending me to a place which wasn't even on the maps! And so it actually turned out: for I was transported to the Far North. I soon realised that this destination hadn't been chosen by the prison authorities as such, but, rather, that it was my investigators [in the SMERSH headquarters] who had clearly issued the instruction that I was to be taken to a suitable place…

- A recommendation…

- Yes, it was on a recommendation of sorts from them that I was sent there!… Now, in Kiev there were also these… you see, it was a large prison – two hundred people to a cell – and I witnessed an incident there which I would also like to tell you about. Everyone in the cell had to take his bowl and fetch his portion of *balanda* [prison soup]… of course, there was such a large number of people in our cell; it was literally chock-full… We weren't even allowed out for walks in the prison yard: instead, we had to sit in the cell all the time. Now, at lunch-time, they would pass a tureen with some kind of *balanda* through the food-hatch, and we would serve it out ourselves – we had our own bowls and were generally supposed to be responsible for how we distributed the food allotted to our cell. However, our dispenser, as I soon found out, was one of these… well, he was clearly from a gang of petty thieves…

- One of the *blatnye* [a colloquial term for professional criminals in Russia]**, a criminal…**

- Yes, that's right, one of these – and in our cell there were a number of the same ilk. As I understand it, they all occupied the lower bunks… You see, in Kiev we had these triple-decker bunk-beds – we wouldn't all have fitted into the same cell if it hadn't been for them, because there were so many of us. It was practically impossible for all of us to climb down at the same time and stand on the floor of the cell! That's why for most of the time we would just be sitting or lying down on the bunk-beds – only when necessary would we get down from them and step onto the floor… As I was saying, the distribution of food was such that they [the criminals] picked out for themselves the thicker and better portions of the soup. Our cell was also assigned sugar and bread rations, and they, again, would split the greater part of these rations amongst themselves. We would all say nothing – me too, of course. During my first days in the cell, I carefully observed these goings-on and even began accustoming myself to these new laws of the prison… Now, next to me in the same bunk was this Ukrainian called Mikola: one could sense that he'd got round a lot… that he had seen his fill of life. It's quite possible that he'd been in one of the military units of that Ukrainian guerrilla army I mentioned earlier. He certainly had this… you could sense it in his character, in the things he said, and by his actions, that he had this tenacity and resolve. And one day he said to me: "That's enough! I'm fed up of making a fool of myself. I'm going to get up now," – the food had just been delivered at our cell, – "go up to that dispenser fellow and give it him, just as he deserves! But if any of his mates tries to interfere, get up from the bunk too." I promised to do as he said, and he made his way down to the floor, went up to the dispenser, as if intending to collect his portion, and, with all his might, struck that thief on the cheek – moreover, not with his fist, but with the palm of his hand. The blow was so hard – Mikola clearly had a strong hand! – that blood started trickling down the poor fellow's cheek. He was, of course, taken aback and stood there undecided as to whether he should risk fighting back… But there and then, three of his mates leapt up from the lower bunks – which they had all taken up as if they had a prerogative right to them, like to everything else… Well, I did exactly as Mikola had told me to: when they jumped up, I too swept down from my bunk-bed. Now, I was still wearing my army uniform, and in our cell there were other lads who were also in uniforms or fatigues. As it turned out, Mikola and I didn't have to take any further action, since the dispenser fellow simply threw down the ladle he'd been brandishing in his hand, and he and his three associates rushed to the door and started banging on it and shouting. Almost instantly, the door was opened from outside, and they all disappeared from our cell: we never saw them again. It was quite clear that they had realised that, seeing that one soldier had got up, if they tried to lay into Mikola, other soldiers would also rise from the bunk-beds and they would be in for it. So, experienced as they undoubtedly were, they decided to opt for the safest course and ran away from us! This episode served as a kind of lesson to me that here, now that I was in prison, it was essential to avoid being by oneself: on the contrary, one had to stick together with other people, there had to be a sense of unity and

solidarity, so that one could, more or less, feel like a human being – that's how important it was. Because if there hadn't been this notion, if, say, those crooks hadn't run away – that is, if I hadn't supported Mikola – then our place almost certainly wouldn't have remained on the upper-level bunks, but, rather, we would have had to sleep on the floor beneath them. That is, we would have been intimidated into giving up our beds… that is, as it usually happens in prisons – as I later found out – when people allow themselves to be humiliated without protesting or offering any resistance… Well, and it was for that reason that most of us, naturally, tried to get to know each other and strike up various acquaintances whilst we were still in this Kiev prison. And one of the more experienced prisoners gave me the following piece of advice: he said that in prison it was possible to get hold of… which was important because over there [in the camps] one was allowed to receive food parcels… so, yes, he said that one should get hold of a scrap of paper, write on it a letter home, fold it up in the form of a triangle and put one's address on it – then, at some point during the transport, there would always be an opportunity to throw the letter out of the train window and onto the platform of some station. Someone would eventually pick it up and post it to its destination. A very practical method, as you can see! So that's what I did: we managed to dig up a small sheet of paper somewhere – that is, one of the prisoners who had relatives in Kiev was able to get hold of one and gave it to me – and one of my neighbours on the upper-level bunks even drew a nice little picture on it. I got my letter ready and waited until it was my turn to be taken to the station and put on a transport train.

- And, as you said before, your family actually received that letter and that was the only way they found out about your arrest…

- Yes, that's what happened… A long journey awaited me – I was to be taken to the polar regions, after all – so after Kiev the next stop would be Moscow, and so on… Now, not long after we had boarded one of these Stolypin wagons in Kiev… that is, we were loaded onto a wagon which was on some siding not far from the station, for we certainly weren't supposed to board the train together with the normal passengers who would later be gathering on the platform! Then, after the train had been made up and our wagon incorporated into it – you see, the Stolypin wagons were always attached as close as possible to the engine – I threw my letter out straight onto the platform…Well, when we eventually arrived in Moscow, I saw that the platform there was bustling with people, which seemed to confirm that the advice I'd been given was correct: that letters thrown off a train would actually be picked up and sent on to their destination… Yes, Moscow: we arrived, of course, at Kazan Railway Station, from which a few years ago I had set off to go to the front – and from this crack in the wall of the carriage we could see the other passengers leaving the station. Nothing surprising here, since life was, after all, supposed to be going on as normal – and, yes, all these people walked past our wagon. Perhaps they did know something about what was going on, but what the eyes don't see… For they couldn't see us at all as they walked past. [The windows of Stolypin wagons were normally barred]. A bit later, the train was shunted onto a side track, and we were picked up by this covered truck with "Fruits" painted on the side and taken to the transit prison in Krasnaia Presnia [a western district of Moscow]. This was a multi-storey solid building made of brick and concrete, where the cells were quite small, each one housing just ten or fifteen inmates, no more than that, and it also had a small courtyard for the prisoners to walk in. The cells were built around this central quadrangle, so from outside the building looked perfectly normal: you couldn't tell by looking at it that it was being used to hold prisoners. However, the most important thing about this place is that it was here that I unexpectedly… you see, one day the warder called out my surname, I went up to the hatch in our cell's door and was told that there was a parcel for me. I was rather surprised at first, but, then, when I was given the package – it was quite a small one – and found this note inside it, I understood that Mama had been at the prison and left that parcel for me…

- So she had received your letter, right?

- Yes, I understood that my folded triangle had reached its addressee… Since it had obviously been posted by someone in Kiev, the postmark on my makeshift envelope would have read "Kiev," so when it reached my parents, they – knowing that the final stop of the Kiev-Moscow trains is Krasnaia Presnia, not Kiev Railway Station – must have deduced that I was being held somewhere in that district – or perhaps they'd written to Kiev and found out that there was this transit prison in Krasnaia Presnia for prisoners being transported northwards. At any rate, Mama was able to make her way to that prison, where she went to the director's office, gave them her name, and they checked their records and confirmed that an inmate with such a surname was being held there. So that's how we managed to establish a connection of sorts: during the three weeks or so that I was held in this transit prison in Moscow, Mama would regularly leave small parcels for me at the prison. This was, of course, very pleasant and touching, but, unfortunately, I couldn't send any reply: it wasn't the same as in a hospital, you know, where after receiving a parcel you are free to write a letter of thanks. No, none of that was allowed at the prison. All I could do was wait for the next stage of our transport. And one day, these covered trucks – I think this time they were labelled "Bread" – drove into our prison yard again and picked us up. As we drove through my native Moscow, I saw a number of familiar places: you see, the trucks drove into the Garden Ring [Sadovoe Kol'tso] from First Meshchanskaia Street [now Prospekt Mira], so we soon passed Sretenka Street and that spot where the Sukharev Tower had once stood, and then we drove past… oh, what's the name?… yes, past the K. F. Sklifosovskii Hospital, which is on the other side of the Garden Ring, some hundred to two hundred metres from our block of flats in Daev Lane, where I was born and grew up essentially, although we later moved into another house in the area. Then we reached Red Gates [Krasnye Vorota] Square, turned left, and arrived at Kazan Railway Station. So all these places were familiar and dear to me from my childhood years! In Kazan Station, a long goods train was waiting for us – not at a platform, of course, but on a siding. It had already been made up, so we were immediately put into various freight wagons and off we were on our journey east. I had this certain feeling, so to speak, that… well, you see, the journey involved many long stops – it wasn't at all like a regular train where the engine-driver can even decide to leave out some smaller stations, so as to make up for lost time. No, our train had to stop frequently for all these checks the guards carried out in the wagons, for letting us out into the open air when they saw fit, and for getting food [at local stations] – there was nothing extraordinary about all this, but what did strike me was this thought that yes, no question about that: "Broad is my native land, / Many are her forests, fields, and rivers!" [the opening verses of the famous "Song About the Motherland" (Pesnia o Rodine, 1935) by Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach]. And to this day, whenever I travel on a train and look out of the window, I say to myself: yes, all this is wonderful, but only when you are able to be a free person, because when you are peering at all this beauty through some crack in the wall of your wagon and you know that it is all out of your reach, you can't help feeling rather miserable. And to make things worse, you also know that it isn't in these regions where, supposing you survive that long, you'll be spending the next twenty or thirty years of your life, but in some Arctic territory, where the winter, as you've been told, lasts eight months and there are only three or two months of summer!… Eventually, we reached Sverdlovsk [Ekaterinburg], where we had to go through the whole business again of being taken to a transit prison. It was already snowing, the first frosts had appeared, and it was pretty cold, especially seeing that we were dressed far too lightly. All the same, we had to hold out as best as we could, since we had no choice: we weren't provided with any warm clothes for the winter. No one gave us anything, so we had to make do with what we were wearing at the time we were put on the train: I at least had the greatcoat of my army uniform with me. Well, and then it was again another spell in one of these huge cells… and again I was witness to an incident in which… You see, in

this cell it was virtually impossible to lie down properly: one either had to stand or sit all the time. Everyone would sleep half-sitting and squeezed against each other, because the cell was so small and overcrowded… As it turned out, in our midst were again these types who like to expropriate, or 'examine', the knapsacks of others. One day, for example, we heard a terrible cry and saw this juvenile rushing headlong to the door and shouting: "Help, help! The Fascists are murdering me!" He had evidently tried to 'examine' the contents of someone's knapsack and got his just deserts. So, as I said, he made for the door as fast as his legs could carry him and was, of course, immediately let out of the cell by the warders. This incident made me wonder, in fact, why the authorities sometimes put such ruffians into cells which they knew to be occupied mainly by Article-58'ers [that is, political prisoners], and I came to the conclusion that they did so deliberately. Well, so that was one conflict we had… In this cell I also made a number of acquaintances because, thanks to my experiences in Kiev, I knew how important it was to look round and try to find people likely to become your friends, in order to create a feeling of comradeship and mutual understanding. Such friends turned up very soon, in fact: they were mainly soldiers and officers. Now, one of the latter was this Siberian called Fedor Timofeevich Smirnov-Korotovskii: he had a double-barrelled name, so to speak, because, although his original surname was Korotovskii, he had adopted the name Smirnov after returning from captivity [secretly, on a German mission] to the territory of the USSR during the war. He had lived for a while under this assumed identity – in effect, illegally, because he was linked to the German counter-espionage service [the *Abwehr*]. Apart from that, [*sighs*] as I later found out, since he would talk about it all the time, he'd also had many friends in the Russian Liberation Army, that is, in Vlasov's forces. You see, these were people who… well, lads whose ideas were different to ours… they were all Russians and for them the concept of Russia was what mattered above everything else: they rejected the notion of the Soviet Union… and so, forming part of the German army, as it were collaborating with the Germans, they had set themselves the goal of restoring Russia – the same goal which to all extents and purposes, as I later found out from Smirnov and others, was pursued by Vlasov too. That's why he had sought to set up his own army and came up with all these ambitious plans for the future [The Prague Manifesto, published in November 1944], but Hitler hadn't trusted him after all and deprived him of the opportunity to put the strategic task he had envisaged into practice. As you know, the end result of it all was a complete failure, and they [the Vlasovites] were all then handed over by the Americans to the Soviet authorities.

- So had this Smirnov been in the Vlasovite army?

- Yes, he joined it when he was [serving] under Canaris… [Admiral Wilhelm Canaris (1887-1945), chief of the *Abwehr*, the military intelligence agency of the German High Command, who was involved in various plots to overthrow Hitler]

- But how did he manage to get there?

- Because he was serving in the… he was an officer…

- So he was an officer in the German army, was he?

- Well, yes, he was practically a German officer… You see, they had these schools there [in Germany] which trained intelligence officers whom they would then infiltrate into Soviet territory by various means. These were people who were supposed to carry out organisational and subversive activities in the Soviet rear. They were trained and equipped by the Germans…

- So Smirnov had been taken prisoner, and then enrolled in that school?

- Yes, yes, exactly. That's how it was.

- And he was eventually infiltrated back into the USSR?

- … I don't remember exactly what he told us in that respect, but what more or less happened is that he and some other lads returned to Soviet territory and somehow managed to establish themselves illegally in the Baltic. [The Baltic nations were reoccupied by the Red Army in the

summer and autumn of 1944] But this was only for a while, though, since he was recognised by someone and identified, which, of course, led to his arrest. He also got a sentence of 25 years, just like me for having supposedly betrayed my fellow Soviet POW's when they were planning to escape. Yes, we'd been handed down exactly the same term. And that's why we both became close friends and sought out each other's company, all the more so since it was so important to look for friends… Now, after Sverdlovsk [Ekaterinburg] we eventually reached the transit camp in Krasnoiarsk, which was, in fact, the railway terminus. From there we were supposed to travel on… that is, to sail up the Enisei River on barges, but we'd arrived too late in Krasnoiarsk: the winter had already set in and the Enisei was icebound. So we had to wait until it became navigable again and passed the winter in that transit prison camp in Krasnoiarsk. This prison was also of the barracks type – that is, it just consisted of these wooden barracks, there were no stone buildings at all. Of course, it was equipped with all the requisite units: a power supply block and so on… yes, and also a post office, where we could collect parcels sent to us. We Article 58'ers [political prisoners] were confined in a separate barracks, but the other ones housed those convicted simply of ordinary [non-political] crimes, and that's why fairly often there were all kinds of… clashes, which were quite… which sometimes even ended fatally. Because, you see, these criminals would attack us politicals whenever we came back from the post office after having collected our food parcels: we had to cross the *zona* [the area in which the prisoners of a camp lived; it was usually fenced off with barbed wire] to get to the post office, and that meant having to go past the criminals' barracks, so in these situations they would try to attack us on the way back and rob us of our parcels. However, as a rule, none of us, including me, would go there alone: we always went in a group. So yes, sometimes they did succeed in pilfering something or other from us, but in return we would teach them a very good lesson. You see, we were all filled with this team-spirit, this inner sense of orderliness, which meant… well, that we weren't at all prepared to put up with these criminals lording it over everyone else. That's why there was even one occasion on which they all jumped out of the windows in their barracks and fled to the *zapretka* [*zapretnaia zona* – 'forbidden zone', the no man's land around the prisoners' *zona* which they weren't allowed to enter]… or perhaps it was to the *vakhta* [the guardhouse, usually situated at the entrance/exit point of the *zona*], in order to save their skins. You see, there'd been this bloody battle… well, not a battle as such – it's just that we had decided to show them that we weren't prepared to stand their behaviour. It was after one of their usual attacks on people who were coming back with parcels – this time they'd managed to pillage quite a lot of the parcels – that we took the decision to… give them a good lesson. And that's what we jolly well did, and they all ran out of their barracks and subsequently decided to move to another one…

- That is, you went into their barracks and picked a quarrel with them?

- Exactly: we started pummelling them, and they obviously didn't like the look of that and decided to clear out immediately. After all, as the saying goes: you may be a wolf amongst the sheep, but amongst the wolves you yourself are a sheep – and that's how it actually turned out then. When they saw that they were in for real trouble, they gave up at once and, well, decided to take a safer course: that is, to flee and make off for some other place, perhaps another camp or…

- Could they really decide just like that where they wanted to live, where they wanted to go?

- No, no, it's just that in such a case the camp administration wouldn't think of sending them back to their old barracks. So all those who had fled from them weren't forced to live there again.

- Why was the administration so obliging towards them? From what you said, it almost seems as if they were prepared to meet every one of these criminals' whims!

- Well, the way I understand it is this… Take, for example, that juvenile who'd shouted: "The Fascists are murdering me! Help, they're murdering a Soviet person!" This goes to show that these *urki* [another slang word for professional criminals] were considered Soviet people, and, since the

guards were also Soviet people, they almost certainly understood one another better than they would, say, us Article 58'ers. In their eyes, we were after all traitors and backstabbers who had no Motherland – who had nothing, in fact, and who in principle ought to be eliminated. They [the *urki*], on the other hand, were of the same stamp as the guards, so that's why these didn't send them back to live in those extreme conditions that we were quite prepared to create for them.

- Doesn't this have to do with those terms 'socially alien' and 'socially close'?

- Yes, you're quite right.

- That is, the criminals were 'socially close'.

- Yes, they were very close indeed – that's absolutely right; it's probably the best way to describe it, isn't it? Well, we could see that, we sensed this attitude towards us, and that's why when they left our part of the camp… You see, that camp was really huge – it stretched out from behind the Krasnoiarsk transit prison and was divided into real *zony* [the plural of *zona* – see above]… when they left, that barracks for ordinary criminals was actually closed down in our *zona*. As to why the administration was always so keen on putting the Article 58'ers together with these… hmm… with these…

- Criminals.

- Yes, yes, with the criminals… Well, it's perfectly clear that in this way they wanted to intimidate the Article 58'ers, to keep them in check and hand. Because there had been a time, you know, when they [the *urki*] really did lord it, and the whole Gulag system as such rested on this fear, this passive subordination and obedience: when it simply didn't occur to people that they ought to at least try to offer some resistance. But by this time a new contingent of people was beginning to arrive in the prisons and the camps: people who had been through the war, who had looked death in the eyes more than once, who'd emerged from the crucible of the Great Fatherland War – and with them it was necessary to adopt a somewhat different tack. However, the camp administration hadn't yet managed to adapt itself to the new circumstances, and that's why such conflicts still kept flaring up. Subsequently, of course, this fact was taken into account – for example, when we finally did arrive in Noril'sk, we found that yes, the Article 58'ers had at last been fully separated from the criminals, and the reason for this was simple: the Article 58'ers were, after all, people who had worked all their lives, who still worked and would continue to do so, whereas you really couldn't get very far with the criminals! Now, in the case of this construction work, this Komsomol construction project, for Noril'sk, you see, had been officially declared one of these projects… Well, it was clearly supposed to yield results, to give our country all these non-ferrous and other precious metals… So that's why such camps were set up in other corners of our country, and each one of them has its own characteristic name: Gorlag [the special coal-mining camp in the Noril'sk complex], Rechlag [another special coal-mining camp, in the Vorkuta complex], Dal'lag [a Gulag subdivision in the Amur region], and so on.

- Did you end up in Noril'sk straight after your wintering in the Krasnoiarsk transit camp?

- Yes, that's right, after the Krasnoiarsk… that is, when our group was formed into one of these… hmm… oh, what's the word again?… this…

- Transport of prisoners.

- The next scheduled transport of prisoners, yes… But the thing is that for some reason ours was actually the last party to arrive in Noril'sk that year, as we effectively spent the whole summer in the Krasnoiarsk transit camp. As to what rationale lay behind this, well, we actually didn't even bother to speculate on it – we were just contented about still being on the 'mainland'. Oh, and besides, this spell on the mainland turned out to be quite memorable for me, because I became acquainted with… Well, to start with, I should explain that over the winter we all had many opportunities to meet and get to know other people. For example, Fedor Smirnov and me, we both spoke to various members of the party of prisoners who had arrived from Noril'sk in the preceding

summer – they were what we used to call “dandelions”, that is, people who’d already been left invalids and…

- So they were prisoners who had been sent back to the mainland on grounds of ill health?

- Yes, they were *aktirovannye* [prisoners who had been certified as invalids and exempted from hard labour]... But the main thing I wanted to tell you is that they had all once been the élite of the Revolution – yes, that group was made up of all those who had been at Lenin’s side – even before 1917 – and who’d stayed together all those years… and who in 1937, or in some cases even earlier – from 1935 onwards… You see, that’s the year when, as it is generally believed, the foundation of the Noril’sk complex was laid – which actually means that this year is the 70th anniversary of its foundation!… So yes, these people had been declared invalids and transported back to the mainland, although the majority of them stayed on in Noril’sk, in perpetual exile… But the ones we met had happened to be allowed to return and they were doubly fortunate in that they’d also managed to sail up the Enisei without any accidents – you see, there were many stories about barges with prisoners returning from Noril’sk to the mainland failing to negotiate the powerful rapids upriver and going under with everyone on board… Anyway, their party had managed to get to Krasnoiarsk, and they were put in the transit camp for a while before being sent – not to well-deserved domestic comforts after all the hardships they’d endured, but, rather, to various prisons on the mainland, where they were to spend what little remained of their lives. Fedor was in regular contact with them, and… from his conversations with them, he was clearly able to gain a lot of…

- Inside information on what was expecting you in Noril’sk?

- Well, yes, there was that too – it was definitely useful to hear their experiences – but the main thing is that Fedor was able to see for himself that these were people who, despite being in this situation – that is, despite having been invalided out, so to speak, and left with no more than these invalid certificates of various categories for all their efforts both before and after their imprisonment – well, that they had still remained the same as they had always been: they had carried out the Revolution and to the last they considered themselves devoted to the Revolution. They didn’t believe that the regime had consciously, that is… repressed them. They’d served out long sentences, but they were still convinced that the blame for this lay with… again, with these… well, with the ‘imperialistic secret services’, which had somehow slandered them and engineered their arrest by the Soviet authorities on some misunderstanding… They were still faithful to… the Leader…

- They were faithful to the ideas of the Revolution…

- Yes, that’s…

- But in this case did they consider Stalin or Lenin to be the Leader?

- Oh, in this case it was Stalin… yes, that their devoted Leader had once been Lenin, that goes without saying, but now it was Stalin who… Stalin was Lenin’s most devoted disciple, and that’s why the reason for their arrests couldn’t be other than that he had been misled and that he hadn’t had the chance to look properly into their cases. That’s why all this was taking place… it was being engineered on purpose by… Well, all these imperialistic secret services were highly knowledgeable and devious, and it was well in their capacity to organise all this and instigate these [show] trials. So, as I was saying, in the summer of 1949, when we were in the Krasnoiarsk transit camp, Fedor and me were able to talk to them all, and I got to know a number of his friends too. We had a good deal of conversations – on anything you might care to name, on life, on our country, about all these situations, attitudes, and such concepts as Soviet power. Because, you see, Fedor was fully convinced that Soviet power as such didn’t exist and that the Soviet… Union was this contrived formation which in reality had no legal basis for its existence. For there hadn’t been any union, he explained – the various nations had been made to enter the Union by force of arms.

So there wasn't any Soviet power, and no socialism whatsoever too – neither full socialism, nor… what was the other term they used? Full socialism and…
- Developed socialism? [A concept which Brezhnev developed in the late 1960s and widely trumpeted in the following decade]
- Yes… that there hadn't been anything of this at all, and it had just been invoked as a kind of smokescreen… by the Communist system, whose strategic aim was to set up a universal Communist republic, but on the basis of a dictatorship… And given that it was to be a dictatorship, there simply couldn't be any freedom, any equality of rights for the people who would again be divided into certain categories and groups. So it was after all these conversations, explanations, and discussions, that Fedor somehow let me in on this… well, that there was this underground organisation which wanted to achieve the regeneration of Russia and to build a democratic state. It wasn't at all a question of going back to the monarchy, to the *tsar'-batiushka* [the notion of the Tsar as the 'Little Father' cherished by the Russian peasantry in particular and not seriously challenged until the massacre of Bloody Sunday in 1905] – that wasn't what we needed: what we did need was a civilised, democratic State. And, well… as for the programme or charter [of this organisation], all that had just been agreed upon verbally for the time being, but Fedor told me that there was this organisation which also existed outside of the prison system; however, in our camp this cell had apparently been set up and I was invited to join it. Well, I was definitely ready for that, because I'd been asking myself so often lately if the situation really was as he had explained it – and I had myself experienced and seen this attitude of the regime towards the individual human being: this violence, coercion, and terror – then one couldn't get away from the question: "What is to be done?" – just as with Chernyshevskii. [This question was the title of the famous propagandist novel, written in prison between 1862 and 1864 by the radical critic and political thinker Nikolai Chernyshevskii (1828-1889)] In such a situation, of course, it was necessary to join forces: we had to stick together, since only then was it possible – as our experiences in prison and in the camps so strongly indicated – only in this way was it possible to retain the dignity of a human being, so to speak. One had to be together with others, and that's why I naturally agreed to join this underground organisation, which was called the "Democratic Party of Russia".
- How were you admitted into it?
- Well, as I was saying, there wasn't any charter as such which laid down how new members were supposed to be admitted. What one had to do was to take an oath, which would be written on a piece of paper and read out – the gist of this oath was that the person taking it swore to fight against this… this totalitarian regime and to dedicate all his life to this struggle. After that, the piece of paper would be burnt… actually, no, before that you had to make a cut in your hand with a razor or a knife and let some drops of blood drip onto the paper – then it would be burnt. So it was a way of validating this oath with one's own blood, of committing oneself with heart and soul to take this path. Well, and after that I got to know even more these other people who were closer in their outlook…
- That is, they were all members of that party in the camp?
- Yes.
- Really? And you actually knew that they were members of this party?
- Yes. Thanks to the first party assignments I was given, I became involved in copying the letters which these lads wrote to people outside the camps about the situation in our country, explaining what kind of regime we had, what was awaiting us in the future if… you see, at that time, those Chinese events [see the notes above] were looming large in our minds, it was 1949… So all these questions found their way into these letters – they discussed these events which showed how the Communist system was spreading and gaining ever more ground in the world. And my task was to

copy out these letters – I was still pretty young, you know, and so I was just assigned this task. The sending or passing on of the letters was taken care of by others. As far as I could tell, there was a certain communication avenue: that is, the letters would somehow be passed on to someone outside, and that person would see to it that they were sent to various addresses across the whole country.

- Was it easy to get hold of paper, though, to copy these letters?

- Yes, it was in fact quite easy, because in the food parcels we were sent, there were also letters from our relatives, so we could use that paper, as well as the envelopes, of course…

- Where did you actually sit down and copy them out? Surely you couldn't do that when you were in the barracks?… Or could you?

- Well, why not?… I mean, no one in the barracks could tell what I was actually doing: as far as they were concerned, I was simply writing a letter home… they had no way of telling if…

- So you did do this work in the barracks?

- Yes, exactly. Of course, just in case, whenever I or someone else was writing out such letters, a friend would keep a look-out, and if, say, an overseer or a guard walked into the barracks, we would immediately crumple up the paper a bit. Besides, to be on the safe side even more, we would always have this… hmm… standard template of the first lines of a letter we were supposedly writing home – just in case anyone cared to inquire what…

- So you would show them that instead of what you were actually writing…

- Yes, that's right. So that way we could just say that we were writing a letter home and let them read through it by all means, if they wanted to, as we had nothing to hide!…

- Did you have some kind of secret cache to put the letters in? I mean, you were making all these copies and you would have to hold on to them overnight, before you could pass them on the following day…

- No, no – it wasn't like that… All I did was simply to copy them out…

- And as soon as you finished copying them…

- I would give them to Smirnov… You see, that was the procedure we'd established. I mean, I knew these other lads – Gusev, Mamontov, Kovalenko – who were all affiliated to this party in some way, but I didn't collaborate with them on any specific assignments. I would just be set my task by Smirnov and would then hand him the stuff that I'd got ready – it was precisely to safeguard the secrecy of our organisation that we had this rigid… well, system of links. To ensure that I really was carrying out his instructions and no one else's, I was only allowed to be in contact with him: as they say, too many cooks spoil the broth. It would have undermined our security if I had been taking orders from five other people or whatever. So it was in this [conspiratorial] spirit that we spent that summer – we weren't marched to work at all, so that's why we had all these opportunities to exchange opinions, to put in a few words or listen attentively depending on… you see, in my case, as I was still rather young, I was more interested in listening or being present at these conversations in which the elder prisoners would discuss all these questions – about the Soviet regime, you know, and socialism, and all these important matters that impinged on the life of our country… But eventually, we were put into the last group to be transported to Noril'sk for that year: we were loaded onto a barge and hauled down the Enisei. Just two days, literally, after having set off, Fedor whispered to me: "Lev, we've decided to prepare an escape – we're going to cut through the barge, and you too have been chosen for the team which is going to do this." I replied: "All right, you'll see how we get that done in a jiffy!" So we set about cutting with these steel plates which we'd removed from some American army boots – you see, in the soles of their boots the Americans would put these steel plates which made them very durable and reliable and gave them this great elasticity, because the steel was quite flexible. These plates were terribly strong and it was very easy to grate through… to cut through wood with them. So that's how we

set about cutting through a hole in the side of the barge. Now, in the mornings and evenings there were these inspections: our whole contingent would be huddled onto one side of the barge whilst the guards checked the other side, and then we would be told to move to that side, so that they could finish off the inspection. They didn't notice anything because we had taken care to camouflage the… you see, the barges were constructed of these… hmm… squared beams, but on the inside there was also this planking, and it was this which we would carefully remove from the section of the barge we were cutting through and put back again when we'd done what we could in the time we had available between these searches. As we knew when these would take place, it was very straightforward to cover our tracks in good time.

- But surely there were loads of people who could see you?

- Well, as a matter of fact, at the section which we were cutting through we were always surrounded by lads who, as far as I could tell, were also taking part in the escape attempt or who at least were in the know, so they were all trustworthy, and we didn't have to worry about anything on that account. Naturally, whenever it was my turn to go there and carry on cutting, I never worried that someone might be looking over my shoulder – I could be sure that all that had… well, I suppose…

- Had been taken care of….

- Yes, that it had been sorted out beforehand. Oh, and besides, when we were lying on our berths – each of us had a berth to himself, you see – it was perfectly normal if someone took some bed-sheet or some other material and hung it round his berth as a kind of screen, if he wanted to have some privacy. So if a berth was covered by some kind of curtain, it was nothing to get suspicious about, and we could get on with the cutting undisturbed… I remember very well how after a few days of this, I saw that the beam we were cutting through had come loose at one end – now, these beams were such that if you could dislodge one end, the whole rib would… in a word, I saw that all we had to do now was to cut a bit on the other end and we would have an opening through which one person at a time could squeeze through… and there was light shining through the breach at the end which we'd been working on. All that there was left to do, was to pierce the other end a bit, and that was it: we would then have our opening. So we set about cutting from the other end, but then, of course, the whole thing went to the dogs! On one fine occasion, during one of these searches, a guard noticed – we'd evidently failed to stick back the planking properly – … he noticed something suspicious, went up to that section of the hold, pulled out the planks, and discovered the breach we'd been cutting through. The alarm was immediately raised, and, having only just managed to foil our escape attempt, the guards started to check us all like mad: they looked at our hands to see who had them callused or sore – because, you see, even though we took care to wrap rags around the end of those steel plates which we were holding when cutting, they were still quite painful to handle. In my case, I was lucky that I had these work-hardened peasant's hands, so to speak, and that I'd always remembered to wind a rag round the steel plate: thanks to that there weren't any obvious red marks on my hands. However, a number of people – some fifteen or perhaps even twenty – were rounded up by the guards on suspicion of having been involved in this attempt. I know for sure that two of our lads who had indeed been cutting through that beam as well wound up in that group. They were Mikhail Neuto, from Belorussia, and a Latvian called Arnol'd Iansens: a very tall and stalwart Latvian… a real *bogatyr*, in a word, [the *bogatyri* were the mighty heroes of Russian folklore] of the kind you can come across quite often in the Baltic. So they too were rounded up and taken away – I don't know, perhaps they hadn't taken enough precautions when handling those steel plates… but the fact is that they caught the guards' attention and that was it… After that, of course, we had to abandon our plans for making an escape.

- And where did the guards take those they'd rounded up?

- Well, you see, there wasn't just one hold in the barge: we were in this large, main hold, but it seems there were also some other cabins, and the guards probably locked them up in one of these. We never saw any of them again… When we arrived at the Dudinka port [on the lower reaches of the Enisei River], they were loaded off the barge before us, and we saw them being taken away in some cars. The rest of us were marched, in a column, to the railway station, where we boarded a narrow-gauge train that took us to Noril'sk. So we didn't see any of them again: except for one of these lads, I never found out what happened to them subsequently. That Mikhail Neuta, for example – no one knew what became of him. As for that Latvian, Arnol'd Iansens, I do know that he was sent to the Kalargon punishment camp and that there… – although it wasn't so much a camp as a prison… it was one of the most feared prisons, and hardly anyone ever returned from there…

- Was that also in Noril'sk?

- Yes, Kalargon was on the outskirts of Noril'sk, and there all the brigadiers were these *suchennye* thieves, [criminal prisoners who had become *suki* (lit. 'bitches'), that is, who were collaborating with the authorities in return for a number of privileges, and who were despised as renegades by the *blatnye* and also much hated by ordinary prisoners] who had started serving the administration. You see, their task was to destroy, little by little, all those 'honest' thieves, the so-called *vory v zakone*, [lit. 'thieves-in-law' – the slang word for the toughest and most feared professional criminals amongst the Gulag population] who refused to leave their high life, 'mend' their ways and work for the camp directors – yes, they were all gradually eliminated, in different ways. But in Kalargon the bulk of the prisoners were, of course, the politicals, and they were put to work in a stone quarry. their work consisted simply of dragging stone blocks from one place to another: it was completely pointless, futile work, and it was just designed to wear out the people made to do it. That was its only purpose. Now, as long as that Arnol'd was as strong as a *bogatyr* [a Russian folk-hero], the brigadiers, of course, left him well alone, since he could give them as good as he got, if not more… So they weren't in a rush to… you see, they knew that time and this pointless, exhausting work would get them in the end, so they were in no hurry to settle scores with those people who refused to be intimidated by them. However, when, in the end, he too became emaciated; when, to be honest, he was rendered a *dokhodiaga*, [from the verb *dokhodit'* – 'come to the end (of one's strength)': a word used to describe the weakest prisoners who were on the verge of dying from starvation and who almost ceased to be regarded as human] as it often happened in the camps… That was at some time in winter, when they would makes these camp fires on the stones and now and then allow the prisoners working in the quarry to warm themselves a bit… now, that Arnol'd was warming himself at one of these fires, but that was something they didn't let you do for long, and he was soon told to get a move on and go back to work, but for some reason he again started showing something of his rebellious temper and refused to budge from the fire… That's when the brigadier took this iron bar, and with one blow – he was evidently an old hand at that kind of stuff – smashed his skull… and that was it, that's how Arnol'd's life was put out…

- Who actually told you about that?

- Oh, that was when we were in camp division no. 5 [not 'Fifth Division'?], where there were also quite a few from the thieves' contingent who'd been sent to Kalargon and who'd finally decided to co-operate with the camp administration. It was those who got themselves appointed brigadiers, work-assigners [a 'soft', clerical, job which involved checking the number of workers in each brigade in the mornings], and so on… But, still, it was from them that we were able to find out things such as which of the 'thieves-in-law' had perished over there [in the punishment camp], or which of the politicals – that kind of information could only reach us through them. And they would also talk about who'd done these people in, which brigadiers were responsible… sometimes even mentioning their names, which didn't say much to us politicals, who weren't particularly

interested in these matters anyway, but the professionals, the ‘thieves-in-law’, they did prick up their ears… And, later, if any of these brigadiers crossed their path in the [general] work zone – because, after all, they weren’t stationed forever in that Kalargon, they would be transferred to other zones – and they were recognised or tracked down, well, then the thieves would make short shrift of them. That was a basic law, so to speak, and such incidents were legion. As they say, the truth will always leak out, and that also proved to be the case here…

- Everyone knew what was going on.

- You see, those lads, although they’d landed themselves ‘trusty’ jobs as work-assigners, they still had some sense of… well, of… a kind of respect for human life… in a way…

- That is, they did have their notions of justice?

- Yes, a certain notion of justice – something of that had still survived in them, and even though they’d agreed to collaborate with… that is, they’d joined the ranks of the *suchennye*, as we called them… even so, if you looked a bit closer, you’d find that there were, nevertheless, various layers. It’s perhaps difficult to imagine, but even amongst them there were various sorts of people… By the way, now that we’re on the subject, I did subsequently come across some work-assigners who, well… who did me a good turn, as a matter of fact…

- They helped you…

- Yes, they did – in a couple of ways. You see, after all, they did want to stay alive… and they understood that if they were to go too far, that is, irrevocably step out of the bounds of a certain human decency… well, what I mean is that they knew that if they allowed themselves to act like beasts towards the ordinary prisoners, their days were numbered. So, as long as they kept that in mind, it didn’t matter that they were occupying all these ‘trusty’ positions like work-assigner, brigadier, or whatever, or even if they were just in the camp workshops or kitchens [such prisoners were still regarded as privileged because they didn’t have to work outdoors], as long as they showed some sympathy, even the criminals wouldn’t trail them and sentence them to death [as they often did with those who had broken their ‘code of honour’, especially with the renegade *suchennye*]. But if, on the other hand, they did start losing their human countenance, if they started jeering at people – at anyone, be it the politicals, or their own ilk – well, then, that was it: they’d signed their own death-warrants. And there were many cases of such retribution, so to speak, against trusties who’d gone too far… Well, if you ask me, I think it was right that they got what they deserved. It was fully just, from the standpoint of… well, exactly, from the standpoint of justice…

- Yes, that seems a more justified attitude, but, of course…

- Well, that was the way it was… So, as I was saying, we finally arrived at Noril’sk in this narrow-gauge train, and we were then sent to camp division no. 4 – now, this was, I think… it hadn’t started snowing yet, so it was somewhere around early September, if I’m not mistaken…

- In 1949?

- Yes, 1949 – a very important year that was… So we were again formed into a column and marched to our camp division, the fourth… that is, all of us who’d just arrived on the transport from Krasnoiarsk, and of course… I mean, we all knew what Noril’sk meant: practically the only ones who returned from that place were ‘dandelions’ – complete physical wrecks. Life was very gruelling over there. We were left in no doubts about that from the very start – already during this first transfer, as we were approaching the camp. In the places where we’d all been imprisoned until then, there was nothing remotely like this tundra we were being marched through… and the order which the head of the convoy guards shouted out, that was also something I hadn’t heard before: he instructed us that a step to the left, or a step to the right, and even… he actually showed us, I don’t know why – was he joking?… even jumping up into the air would be considered an attempt to escape, and that the convoy would fire without warning. Well, we all said to ourselves – do as

you like, for God's sake! you're the convoy, you know your stuff, you're the bosses round here! So, as we were walking on the tundra – camp division no. 4 was some two kilometres from Noril'sk… now, of course, the city has just sprawled into that area – anyway, this incident happened which affected me personally too. In front of me, as we were walking along… we were all walking arm in arm, you see, two or three people abreast, so that the column was as compact as possible – in fact, we'd even been ordered to walk arm in arm, to prevent the slightest disarray in the column – well, in front of me on the left, someone – I didn't know who it was, of course – suddenly stumbled… he'd caught his foot on something… and he couldn't help coming loose from the person whose arm he'd been holding, he just tumbled out of the column, to the left. And instantly… I mean, it was literally a matter of a few seconds… a series of shots rang out… The guards were firing, and they also let slip the dogs… you see, to either side of the column there were these patrol dogs being led by the leash, and I even remember how I was afraid all the time… you see, it was the first time that I saw guards with dogs… and these dogs… well, they were straining at the leash, you could tell that once let loose, they would hurl themselves at the prisoners, and if they caught you in their jaws, that was it… And they were literally just a few metres from us. You could see that the dog-handlers could barely hold them in leash, and it was them I was worried about – far more than about those sub-machine-guns with which the guards were equipped. I kept saying to myself all the time: what if that dog there suddenly breaks loose and goes for me?… because, after all, a dog is a dog, and you've got no chance if it's been trained to kill… So when that fellow in front of me tumbled out of the column and the dogs were let loose, they pounced on him – he was already down, riddled with bullets from the guns – and started tearing him to pieces. Of course, the guards immediately ordered us all down, and we all sat down on the spot, some in puddles of mud, wherever we happened to find ourselves along this stretch of the tundra. Well, then they set about clearing up what had supposedly happened: this 'attempt to escape', as they called it. Eventually, they leashed in the dogs again. So we were sitting there for some twenty minutes, or more like half an hour, whilst they sorted out the facts of the 'case', filled out what looked to be like some documents, and, in general, bustled about for appearances' sake, really, to make it seem as if they were actually holding an inquiry into the matter and trying to ascertain the facts. Well, after that, we moved on again and that poor fellow… he was just left lying there. I didn't know who he was, and, later, when we reached the camp, I asked various people, thinking that someone would surely have known him. But no, they didn't even know his surname, nothing whatsoever, and so it all remained in the dark. And I couldn't help thinking afterwards that I too had been walking right close to that person and that if I too had st-st-st…

- Stumbled?

- Yes, and I'd been looking at those dogs all the time, I remembered how scared I'd been, and so I couldn't help thinking that if I too had happened not to notice some little stump or some clod or something, say, one of these plants which grow close to the ground, then I too might well have stumbled, slipped out of the column, and been in that person's place. So, well, that was the first… the first revealing moment which made it clear to me what kind of a place we'd come to and what was expecting us in general – what regime applied here and how they would treat us. It was pretty obvious that our lives weren't going to be at a premium. And in the camp, of course, no one was in the mood to think of escaping for quite some time… We had, after all, been warned that a step to the left would be treated as an attempt to escape, so they were obviously not going to check first whether someone had fallen out of the line simply by accident. It was clearly on such principles that this whole guard system rested, and the very way these guards had been trained… That was also an important aspect, you see: the training these guards received, it was something I often had occasion to think about, later on. I mean, these soldiers were deliberately drilled in this stern discipline, this harshness which… the purpose of which was to stop them from ever showing any

kindness towards the prisoners, if they ever felt inclined to do so, that is. Anyway, for working up there in Noril'sk, they'd evidently made sure to pick a batch of recruits who'd been given a good grounding in that respect.

- You mean these young soldiers were being constantly worked upon to…

- Yes, of course…

- They were made to believe that they were dealing with terrible criminals?

- Yes, yes, in their barracks there were all these slogans on posters put up on the walls: "Soldier, who are you guarding?", for example, followed by a farrago of names and phrases describing us: that we were criminal who'd done this and that, who'd… oh goodness knows what they came up with… that we were traitors of the Motherland, who, if we ever got the opportunity, would pounce on them and murder them, who were conspiring to destroy the Soviet people… that was the general tenor. It's true, though, that once I did see a soldier being removed from a watchtower, have his shoulder-straps pulled off and his sub-machine-gun taken away from him, and then he was led away to some part of the guards' barracks. And why was that, I wonder?

- Yes, why?

- Well, it's obvious that from his watchtower he must have been talking to someone, or perhaps he'd thrown some note behind the barbed wire – that is, somehow made contact with the *zona* – and someone in another watchtower had…

- Seen him…

- Yes, some sentry must have seen him, or it could have been the convoy guard doing the morning count… But, whatever, the guard who'd seen him phoned the administrator's office, and soon someone came to march him off. So you see, that was the way they made sure that… I mean, even if there were decent people amongst these soldiers, if they allowed themselves to be soft-hearted or even just showed some basic respect to a convict, and someone noticed that, then they were in for trouble. They would either… I don't know, become prisoners themselves, or they might be transferred to some other area… or heaven knows what punishments the camp authorities might come up with. So that was one instance I saw with my own eyes in camp division no. 4, but these things did happen time and again – just conversations, I mean, but enough for them to be subjected to disciplinary action… and, yes, this happened several times, it was even a frequent occurrence, you might say.

- Were you also living in barracks there? How many were you in that division of the camp?

- Well, in this camp unit no. 4, where we were assigned to, we lived in these two-storey brick buildings… made of red brick, and they were, of course, subdivided into various sections. Some had double-decker bunks, and others these communal shelves again, on which each of us at least had his own fixed place to sleep. The majority were these general shelves, of course, but, as I said, some sections did have these bunk-beds partitioned for two people at each level, and there were even a few individual camp-beds, since some of the, shall we say, maintenance staff [i.e. prisoners not doing physical work outdoors] also lived in these barracks. When I first arrived at this unit, I was put into the barracks with communal shelves, as we were all assigned to *obshchie raboty* ['general work' – hard labour]. Our first job was to build this… what's it called?… this technical college in Noril'sk. And I, for my part, had to carry bricks on this trestle which you would carry on your back, fastened with some straps round your shoulders – then, on the boards they'd place some four or five of these heavy bricks, and I had to carry them up to the third or second floor of the building under construction. That was my first job there. Then, when the real cold set in, a few weeks into the winter, we were transferred to a construction site in a copper-smelting factory. The stacks had all been erected, everything was almost ready, the converters had also been built, and by the 21st December of 1949, the factory was supposed to send this gift to Moscow: the first ingots of copper blister extracted from Noril'sk ore. But, anyway, we were sent there – again, to do

general work – and finished off the construction of the manifolds, the pipe system for the factory's effluent. It was still outdoor work, though, and the frosts were terrible: as it happened, in that winter they reached 50 degrees below zero! I don't recall the frosts of any of the other years I was there being as harsh as those we had in 1949. And very many people froze to death, because, you see, the whole thing was run like this: in the mornings, when our shift was to be marched to the factory, they had to count us first at the *vakhta* [the guardhouse which all prisoners had to pass through when leaving the *zona* with their work brigades and on returning there after their day's work] – they counted us five at a time, making sure that there were as many 'heads' as had been asked for at the construction site. Then, after having reached the factory, we would be let into the 'production zone' and each team would follow its brigadier to the various places of work around the site. When our shift was over – there were two shifts, you see – that is, after some ten hours of work, we then had to march back all the way to the camp, so, in total, that meant we were out of the *zona* for a good fourteen hours every day, and sometimes even more because of all these checks and head counts when entering and leaving the camp which took up a colossal amount of time. Being at work was, in fact, better than having to stand outside the *vakhta*, freezing, until the guards finished counting us. And if, during the evening count on the factory perimeter, as we were led out through the gates, it turned out that someone was missing – even if it was just one 'head' – the command "Stop!" would be given, and we knew we wouldn't be going anywhere until we'd found…

- So you had to look for the ones who'd gone missing?

- No, it wasn't us prisoners who did that, it was the guards. They would go off and… yes, it was the convoy, not the work-assigners [who also took part in checking the numbers of prisoners], who would search for the stragglers, and the guards, of course, already knew where to look. They didn't bother checking the factory workshops, where it was warm, because they knew that the people who'd gone missing had most likely just sneaked away from work to have a rest somewhere and had ended up frozen in the snow. So we'd have to wait, knowing, of course, what had happened, especially as there would always be someone who'd noticed this or that fellow slipping away from the brigade… which was simply madness, as the only way to survive in this cold was by moving all the time and getting some work done…

- Did they always find those who'd disappeared?

- Yes, as a rule, it was always so that we would eventually hear a shot in the distance… you see, we didn't know how many people were missing, but when there was a shot, that meant that they'd found someone: either that person had frozen to death already and was lying there motionless, or, if there was still some last trickle of life in him, well, what use could he be in such a state?… and the guards would simply finish him off, that's all. Sometimes, though, we'd have to sit waiting a bit longer, because there'd been two or three of these 'stragglers', and it wasn't until we'd heard one or two more shots after the first one that we were ordered to get up and marched back to camp division no. 4. Those who'd been left behind were accordingly struck off the brigade lists, recorded as having frozen to death, and that was it… with temperatures of minus 50 you didn't have to do much explaining in the death certificate…

- Were there any rules in the winter about not marching prisoners to work if temperatures fell below a certain point, or if the wind force exceeded so-and-so metres per second?

- No…

- There weren't any concessions to the weather at all? You had to go out regardless of the frosts and the wind?

- Yes, that is, as far as the frost was concerned, I soon realised that there was no limit to the extremes of cold we were supposed to hold out in. That was when that smelting factory had to be ready to extract its first copper in time for the 21st of December: frost or no frost, we would have

to go there and get the work finished, as Moscow had to get its present. Now, you also mentioned the wind – well, I can tell you that… this was later, though, when I'd already been transferred to camp division no. 5 – so that means it was 1950 or, more likely, 1951… anyway, at some point in the winter of 1950/51, when we were on our way to work, this *purga* [a severe snow-storm] suddenly descended on our area – it was of the kind they call a black *purga* up there… The wind was so strong, and, then, there was also the frost to reckon with, so we had to walk shielding our faces with a small plank of plywood which we would make ourselves, because covering your face with, say, a glove didn't help at all. The wood, on the other hand, did… but let me try to give you an idea of what these winds were like: for example, if we were walking…

- Downwind…

- … yes, if we were walking before the wind, it would just sweep you along, but if you had to go against it, you literally had to lie down, like this, and the wind was so strong that it would tilt you upwards by a good thirty degrees, I'd say, and you had to try to trudge on in this way, leaning forward all the time, as if letting yourself fall flat on your face, because if you tried to walk face on to the wind, it would whip you up and…

- But you still had to work, even in such winds?

- Oh yes, we would still go to work, no exception was made. Now, when we were inside the camp, we had these ropes stretched out… it was for when we had to go from the barracks to the blockhouse where the food was served – although usually our grub would be brought to us in the barracks… but, all the same, there were these ropes or cables stretching from one building to the next which we could hold on to when walking during these blizzards, so that we didn't lose our way… as, otherwise, you might end up wandering into the *zapretka* [the forbidden zone], where you could easily get shot. Yes, that's something I remember very well: these ropes we had to hold on to, so as not to go the wrong way. But all this was just for a few days at a time – the blizzard would eventually let up and we'd have normal visibility again… a black *purga* of this kind would normally only last for five days or so, at most a week. And they didn't come that often, either – just as rarely, in fact, as the Northern Lights, especially the coloured ones… because the ordinary, white bands formed all winter long. As soon as frosty weather set in, you could count on seeing the white lights, but those coloured Northern Lights, they were really a natural wonder…

- But you saw them, though?

- Yes, I did, but only three or four times – not more… that's how rare they were! [*coughs*]

- What were the rules like concerning mail? Were you allowed to write and receive letters?

- Just two letters a year. We were allowed to write home twice a year.

- And how often could your family write to you?

- The same…

- Really, just two letters a year?

- Yes, that's all we could receive, and that… No, actually, hang on… What I said isn't quite correct: we were allowed to receive more… That is, I know for sure that we couldn't write more than twice a year, but as for receiving, the rules were more generous: I can't say exactly how often, but it was, at any rate, more than twice a year. And in addition to that, we were also allowed to receive food parcels. For example, I would regularly receive parcels – so, yes, it was like that, it's quite right of you to have drawn my attention to… yes, the regulations were indeed that, officially, we couldn't receive more than two letters a year by post, but we were allowed to receive more – including packages… I would receive a parcel from home approximately once every three months. I would usually ask my parents to send me some *makhorka* [rough tobacco] – and some lard and sugar. The first time I asked for *makhorka*, I even got this letter from them where they asked me with some bewilderment: "What, have you really taken up smoking?" I had to explain that no, it

wasn't for my use, but for my pals', because, as I pointed out to them, tobacco in the camps was at times more precious than bread!

- Were there ways of evading the official rules and passing on letters out of turn, so to speak?

- Yes, of course.

- How for example?

- Well, you know, it was like this: if you were assigned to general work, then it wasn't at all easy to pass on letters. But, later, when I was working in this machine shop… to start with, there was the fact that… I suppose I might as well explain, seeing that you've asked this question… You see, in this shop there were also a number of voluntary workers… To be honest, though, the way they worked was this: on paper, they were all supposed to be working there as lathe operators, tool-makers, and in all sorts of other jobs… electricians, and so on. But the truth is that they didn't move a finger; it was us prisoners who did all their work for them, on top of our own work, mind you. However, in return for our covering all the assignments on their roster, they would bring us bread, something to smoke, the odd bottle now and then. And they would also pass on letters for us.

- So you could get letters to your family sent through them?

- No, I didn't actually resort to their help for that, as a matter of fact, because I had the opportunity of doing it another way.

- How was that?

- Because… well, you remember those letters I told you about, the ones in Krasnoiarsk?

- Yes, of course.

- The ones I was given to copy. Well, when we were in Noril'sk, after we'd got the feel for how things were up there, we started writing a lot of those letters from there too.

- That is, you continued copying these leaflets in Noril'sk?

- Yes, it was again something we did on a large scale… although what they actually wrote in these letters of theirs didn't really concern me as such, but thanks to that I was able to write letters myself, as often as I needed to… I would write home, as well as to some people I knew. So yes, I could get my letters sent on in this way and didn't have to, so to speak, well…

- Explore other avenues?

- Yes, that's right – because, you see, with the voluntaries you also had to… that is, it wasn't entirely reliable or safe to hand over letters to them. You had to do it on trust, but how could you be sure that they didn't burn the letters or throw them away, or perhaps even hand them in to… well, you know where. Because the fact that they brought us bread and other things, that didn't mean that they were on our side: it was just a way of paying for the work we'd done for them. But if you gave them a letter and asked them to send it on, they might well hand it over to the authorities and… You simply had to have a reliable channel of communication – I did, and that's why I didn't have to depend upon their help to get letters through.

- So your organisation remained active?

- Oh yes, all that carried on…

- And it was probably gaining in numbers, wasn't it? Do you remember seeing new faces at the meetings?

- But we didn't have any meetings at all! Absolutely not!

- So your only point of contact with the organisation was still this Fedor?

- Yes, yes, all contacts were maintained in this way, between individual members in the chain of command – and since my link man was Fedor… well, he had generally forbidden me from seeking out new friends in the camp and even so much as mentioning the existence of our organisation in conversations with anyone else. He'd evidently decided that the best way I could serve the organisation was by staying in this role, by being affiliated just to him. So he was the only person I

knew, and it was through him that I was able to get these letters home passed on. Later, when our organisation had actually drawn up a programme, it was still only through him that I got to see the text, as he told me to make some copies of it, and when I'd finished, I just gave them all to him. And whenever I had to be introduced to some member, or given any, so to speak, party errands – which could be almost anything, sometimes not even remotely connected with politics, but just concerning internal matters of the camp – it was invariably through him all the time. That was, I suppose, a law we had to observe to ensure our organisation's security…

- What kind of errands were you given?

- Well, for example, if it was necessary to get a parcel to someone in the SHIZO. That's the punishment isolator, the SHIZO [an acronym for *shtrafnoy izolator*], where our lads were often confined… and if some parcel had arrived for any of us who were still in the *zona*, we would try to get some *makhorka*, some bread, or a piece of lard to them…

- So you would bring them these illegal parcels secretly?

- Yes, that's right, as they weren't allowed any of those things there… And, for example, one who was often put in the SHIZO was a prisoner called Klimovich [Rygor (or Grigorii) Klimovich, a Belorussian and one of the leaders of the Noril'sk uprising, who later wrote the book *Knets Gorlaga* (*The End of 'Gorlag'*) (Minsk, 1999)] – the name's familiar to you, isn't it? Yes? Well, on two occasions I was entrusted with bringing him these parcels. That is, Fedor would tell me that today, at so-and-so a time, a particular guard would be on duty, whom I just had to go up to and tell him that I'd brought a parcel for Klimovich. That was all I had to do. So I just went over to the SHIZO, looked for that guard, gave him the package, told him who it was for, and that was all there was to it: he would pass it on to Klimovich. So, as you can see, there were some guards who… that is, our organisation had some kind of link to people we could trust amongst the guards. It was, of course, all invisible and illegal, but, all the same, this link still existed. There's no doubt about that because Klimovich himself said, and it's also in his book, that he would regularly receive parcels – even a few portions of stuffing, yes, he mentions those… and I still remember the jars we were sometimes sent in these parcels… As to how and why we managed to get these parcels to him, that he doesn't write about in his book, because, you see, for most of the time until the uprising [of May 1953], he was kept either in the prison or in the punishment isolator – he would always wind up in one of the two, since he was such a rebel. He would openly protest against any of these humiliations or cases of arbitrary treatment by the guards, even managing to reach various [MVD] officers and the camp director himself, whom he would challenge to defend so-and-so a measure. That's why he was also put on trial for some verses he'd written, and so on. I mean, he was determined to act that way, putting all his cards on the table: it's not in vain that he referred to himself as a rebel. But that kind of attitude was evidently also necessary, someone had to perform that role, if you see what I mean, in order to… well, to maintain and preserve a certain atmosphere. However, if you have too many of these rebel types, then all that comes out of it is a sort of chaotic revolt which is ever so easy to suppress [*laughs*] in the most elementary manner, and you'll probably get yourself destroyed in the process, too… So, anyway, when such people turned up in the camp, they would often be locked up in punishment cells, especially during [Soviet] holidays, and generally separated from the rest. And they were also kept under surveillance… at least, I think so… because all these… how do you call them?… these informants, of which there were very many…

- Did you actually know who the informants were?

- Not at all, no, no. Again, it's quite right of you to ask, because, you see, to be honest, I didn't… Well, I was talking to Formozov [Nikolai A. Formozov, the author of a number of articles on the famous uprising in the 'Steplag' camp near Kengir in Kazakhstan] about this once, and I told him that, frankly, I didn't know how it worked exactly, but that it would definitely be worth trying to

find out how this system of informants worked – whether, say, each one was working on his own and was in direct contact with the operative commander [an official from the Gulag 'Third Division', which was responsible for recruiting informers amongst the prisoners] in the camp, or whether there was also one of these networks, so that one denunciator would be working in tandem with two or three others… I said I didn't have any idea of how it had worked, but that it was a question which interested me, as it were, like a historian studying how life was in the camps, and it was one that I'd kept encountering… And that Formozov said to me that he'd never thought about that, and that he also didn't have a clue as to how such a system… because, you see, in the memoirs there are about life in the camps, I can't think of any by these operative commanders or what have you. In fact, I doubt very much whether there actually are any memoirs at all which could shed light on this whole thing. Because there definitely must have been a special system in place, yes…

- Were you ever locked up in a punishment cell yourself?

- No, no… I always sort of kept a low profile, you see, I didn't go round sticking my chin out. Of course, I would carry out all the assignments I was given, I did everything I was told, and I wasn't afraid of being betrayed or being left in the lurch, because I trusted those whom I was sent to on these various errands. Besides, as I said, that Fedor Smirnov, he forbade me to get in touch with people on my own initiative… For example, when I was transferred to camp division no. 5, I saw there lots of people whose names Klimovich mentions in that book of his: Gritsiak, say… I saw them all and knew them, but I didn't have any direct dealings with them myself. I just saw that they had these meetings with Smirnov. And my duties actually included… this was during the uprising itself, when the strike committee would assemble together with members of the Russian underground 'Centre', as well as the Ukrainian and Lithuanian ones [such 'Centres', secret groups organised by nationality, emerged in various camps and played a leading role in the various Gulag uprisings of the 1950s], and all that was going on… Yes, one of my duties then was to escort Smirnov to these meetings and check that there wasn't anyone trailing him. Afterwards, Smirnov would, of course, tell me a good deal of things about what decisions they'd settled on and what questions they'd been discussing… yes, he would let me in on all that, but I had this ban placed on me which forbade me from… well, so to speak, from poking my nose into any…

- From acting on your own initiative…

- Yes, from getting involved in anything myself… It was so that I didn't put my foot into it, you see, so as not to put people at risk. And so even during the uprising, I wasn't allowed to get involved in any of these mass actions, that is, doing agitation work amongst our fellow prisoners… so that I didn't come into notice. If I had, for example, been in contact with the members of the strike committee, that would have meant that everyone would have seen in me an active participant of the uprising…

- But Smirnov, on the other hand, was a member of the strike committee, yes?

- No, no. He wasn't a member either. Someone else from the party joined the strike committee, not Smirnov…

- Were you all agreed on… that is, did your party support the idea of a strike, was it also trying to organise mass strikes? I mean, as you said, there was someone from your party in the strike committee…

- Well, let's see, in camp division no. 4 that was Volodia Nedoroskov…

- In camp division no. 4 there was also… oh, but hang on, at what time were you actually in division no. 4?

- Oh, by then it was 1952…

- So you were transferred to that division in 1952…

- Yes, and I was sent back to division no. 4, the one I'd been in when I first arrived in Noril'sk…

- You went back to the fourth. And when the uprising took place, were you still there?
- In 1953, yes, I was still there.
- And how did the idea of the uprising actually take shape?… when did it start to be planned?
- No, no, no… First of all, you see… well, the thing is that when I was sent to division no. 5, that is, way before the uprising, I came to know these various people: that's Tikhon Petrov, Melent'ev, as well as Kolesnikov… oh yes, and Dikorev too. Yes, I made their acquaintance had a number of conversations with them, but we didn't talk about, or indicate that we were members of the party, see what I mean, yes? We would get together and discuss… well, even various situations that affected us personally, and we even also considered some political questions, but it was always just as good acquaintances might do, certainly never as members of that party… Because the only party member I was supposed to know as such was Smirnov. But it was clear to me, and probably to them too, that we were, in fact…
- Members of the same party.
- Yes, of the same… that we were in this common cause. But we weren't supposed to show this or act in any way that would… Besides, in division no. 4, or, rather, no. 5, Smirnov set up another party, which was called… well, it was variously referred to as the party of "Leninists" or the "Loyal Leninists"… I'm not sure what the exact name was, but it had the word "Leninist" in it, that's for sure… Well, that party was made up of older prisoners, you know, who before being arrested had held these various traditional posts: say, in counting-houses, in offices… or who'd been in engineering, as qualified engineers, that is… There were even some tank battalion commanders, I think… yes, and also a number of senior technical workers who'd been serving sentences ever since 1937… these "Loyal Leninists" were on the whole people who'd been in the camps for many years. And that Smirnov encouraged them to band together, and they would meet regularly, in groups of five or ten, to drink a bit of tea and talk about things. They weren't at all afraid of meeting openly like that, of being reported by someone. I mean, they had nothing to hide from informers or the authorities: when they discussed the reasons why they'd wound up in prison and who was to blame for it, well, it was plain as a pikestaff that they thought it was… they all believed in Stalin, you see, and thought that their arrests were due to intrigues by imperialistic agents, that there really had been these provocateurs who fabricated those false…
- Denunciations, trials?
- False denunciations and trials, as a result of which innocent people had suffered and were now in labour camps… but there was nothing subversive which could be hung onto them, and their organisation was never touched or anything. None of them was ever punished with solitary confinement or whatever… Well, that was very important and essential for Smirnov, since he himself was still under a certain degree of surveillance – in his file, of course, there was a record of his past involvement [with German military counter-intelligence], and that's why they still carried on shadowing him… on holidays, say, the First of May or the Seventh of November [October Revolution Day], he would be confined in the SHIZO for five days or a whole week. Then he would be released again, but, still, there was always this cloud hanging over him. So that's why it was so important for him… if, say, someone tried to incriminate him for his contacts with these people, he could always reply that yes, there was this organisation, and that they were meeting regularly to study and discuss the works of Lenin. By the way, it was he who made me study Lenin's works.
- Was it actually possible to get hold of those works there?
- Of course, in the library, by all means – they had all the works of Lenin, Marx, Engels, and you could borrow them to read, study, discuss, and all that was… well, given that they made this

opportunity available, it shows that it was considered part of the re-education of us 'enemies of the people'…

- And how did he explain to you that you ought to study the works of Lenin?

- Oh, that was because Smirnov had a very high opinion of Lenin. He saw in him a great organizer whom one could learn a great deal from, about how to carry out underground work, how to run a party and what methods you had to use, and so on. And he said that in order to know your enemy, you had to study him properly. That was a golden rule of his, and that's why all the other lads would also take part in these conversations and borrow and study these books independently. For my part, I really did read a lot of Lenin's works, and do you know what, I almost read the whole Engels! But Marx, on the other hand, never quite appealed to me… I borrowed *Das Kapital* and started to read it, but I just couldn't take it in, it was all so… it all went against the grain with me and seemed so incomprehensible… I think it was all these issues of economics that… well, they just didn't interest me really, and that's why I just sort of skimmed through it, but didn't go into anything in detail. With Engels and Lenin it was quite a different matter: we were expected to work through them carefully and… and actually understand them.

- You had to fathom them in depth…

- Yes, yes, in depth. So there was all that to be done, and then, apart from that, Smirnov was also in contact with a… not a party this time, just a group of… or, rather, a contingent of people who were… well, criminals, honest thieves [i.e. ones who weren't collaborating with the camp administration like the *suchenye*], who'd also come through a specific route and ended up in our camp, indicted under Article 58.

- For having escaped at some point, I imagine…

- Yes, for escaping – when they were caught, they had Article 58 slapped on them, and that's how they ended up being together with us. Well, amongst them there were quite a few with whom we maintained a direct link… as I explained earlier, they were those who would carry out given… when it was necessary to punish someone… and they would then effectuate the sentence. That was their job. The real Article 58'ers never got involved in that kind of stuff. They never did any blood-letting. Those people, on the other hand, were in a way getting back at their enemies who'd been persecuting them and trying to wipe them out. And apart from that, many of these criminals were people who in the past had… or, rather, whose parents had also suffered repression… that is, going back to the 1920s and 30s when there were these revolts [against the requisitions under War Communism and forced collectivization later]. For example, that Nachinkin, as far as I know… at least, that's what he told me himself, and Fedor also told me that he came from the family of a well-to-do peasant who'd been… not dekulakized, but, you know, during this rising of... what was it?… yes, during the Tambov rising and all that *Antonovshchina* mess. [In August-September 1920, Aleksandr Antonov, a former Socialist-Revolutionary, had formed a Green Army from the thousands of peasants in the Tambov region who were embittered against Communist officials and requisition teams. The insurrection was not fully crushed by the Red Army until May 1921 and involved savage measures against the local population.]

- Oh yes, the…

- And hmm… his father and elder brothers had been killed. I think one of them was actually shot…

- Kotovskii was sent to crush the insurrection. [Grigorii Kotovskii (1887-1925), a Civil War hero and commander of a famous Red Cavalry brigade]

- Yes, that's right. Well, and then, after the whole thing had been put down, they rounded up all the old people, the women and children, all of them without exception, from these villages and deported them to Siberia, but that Nachinkin – he was ten or eleven at the time – he managed to run away and… became a *besprizornik* [a 'waif' – one of the hundreds of thousands of orphans and abandoned children who roamed Russia in the 1920s] and a thief. Then, as he told me in the

camp, he had started taking revenge and murdering various militiamen and these Party officials, plenipotentiaries, in the countryside, but he was eventually caught at some point, whilst robbing some shop, and sent to a camp. He'd tried to escape, but failed and was handed down a sentence under Article 58, and that's how in the end he wound up in our camp and came to form part of our line of command, if you see what I mean. That's why he too was a, well, [*laughs*] tried and tested, and loyal person. Yes, and he had these young lads under his wing – also criminals who'd been caught trying to escape – and they would stick together, along with this other person, who was from one of the various… strata in our party… or, let's put it this way, who was making common cause with us. And it was really only amongst themselves that they got along, they understood and supported each other… Oh, and the only thing is that, as far as Nachinkin's life story was concerned, I had something of a disagreement with Klimovich [the author of the book on the Noril'sk uprising mentioned above]. In his book, he writes that he came from the family of some high-up Party worker, but that doesn't fit at all with the Nachinkin I knew, who was from a totally different…

- He was a peasant.

- … yes, from a well-off peasant family. And who as a child experienced that rising, which ruined his life. He had this hmm.. nickname and also this glaring scar… this large scar on his forehead, just above his right temple, if I remember correctly… I mean, if you looked at him, it would immediately strike your eye. And so I wrote to Klimovich – this was before 1992, he hadn't written his book yet – and explained to him that the Nachinkin I'd known didn't seem to be the same person he had in mind – later, you see, we ceased to be on the same friendly terms as before – and I told him I'd be grateful if he could send me a few lines, describing Nachinkin as he remembered him, giving his hmm… conspiratorial name and if he had any… no, of course, I didn't mention the scar, I wanted to see what he came up with himself regarding this person whom he'd taken to be Nachinkin… so I asked him if his Nachinkin had any…

- Distinctive features.

- Yes, yes, if he had any specific features or mark that sprang to the eye, something of the sort… because I do think that either it was one and the same Nachinkin, or he'd mixed him up with someone else, perhaps deliberately… Well, I didn't get any reply. So that's something I've never been able to understand…

- Yes, it seems ambiguous…

- Yes, no, well, you know, it's something one would like to clear up… And later I also wrote to him concerning some of the other lads [who took part in the Noril'sk uprising], hoping that I'd find out why he'd been avoiding these questions of mine… It's just that I wanted to get it clarified once and for all.

- Did you yourself have any conspiratorial name, some pseudonym given to you by the party?

- Yes…

- You did.

- Yes, [*laughs*] that's something I've never told anyone about. Until now, no one had ever asked me that.

- Did all of you, then, have party names?

- No, not everyone. Fedor did. When he admitted me into the party, he gave me a conspiratorial name, and then he told me his… that's all… nothing more to it.

- Do you mind saying what it was?

- Sorry?

- Is it all right if I ask what name you had?

- Oh, I suppose so, why not… My conspiratorial name was… the one he gave me was "NALIM". ['Burbot' – an eel-like freshwater fish]

- Why was that?
- I don't know why, although I've had my thoughts on the matter and I suppose… well, a burbot is a fish which is quite difficult to catch, as it's always hiding somewhere and never really shows itself. Yes, and his conspiratorial name was "Sea-gull"… so perhaps he chose mine as the complete opposite of his… that is, he was always flying and…
- He was always in sight, in the public eye almost, whereas you were working in obscurity!
- Yes, that's right, I was always in the background, and he kept me there too, all the time…
- Do you think he was trying to shelter you?
- Yes he was, because, first of all… well, it's not that he was trying to protect me, but simply because I was directly bound up with him and because I'd seen all the other people, that's all. And that's why he didn't want me to come under notice – it was again a matter of safeguarding the security of our organisation. Because if I'd been arrested, let's assume, they would have subjected me to torture and tried to force me to talk… and I might well have blabbed something out – even just in a state of unconsciousness or something… in these circumstances anything can happen, you know… And so, better than taking such a risk, which was something we just couldn't afford to, on principle, it was better to make sure that I wasn't too exposed. So that's why, yes, he was sheltering me in that sense, but not, say, as an individual in whom he saw… I don't know, his younger brother or something, no… But, as a matter of fact, to me he was – and remained so for life – just like an elder brother, if not more…
- Well, I'm sure that that also played a part in his attitude – that he wanted to protect you like a brother as well as in his capacity as a more senior party comrade.
- You see, I could feel how close we'd grown in our views, how our attitude was the same in all matters – we could almost read each other's thoughts sometimes, and there was this…
- You were just 24, weren't you? 25.
- Precisely, I was still…
- You were still very young, after all…
- Exactly – whereas he was born in 1918, so he was seven years older than me, which in those times really meant a lot. Because he'd gone through the mill of all these harsh things and... So yes, there was definitely that factor too.
- He was someone you could rely on for spiritual support.
- Yes, absolutely, he gave me this spiritual support. For example, in the fourth… no, sorry, the fifth book about the uprising [in the series *O vremeni, o Noril'ske, o sebe…* (*About Time, Noril'sk, and Ourselves…*) produced by the non-commercial publishing fund "Noril'sk" and bringing together the recollections of former prisoners of the Noril'sk camps, as well as other people who worked in the industrial installations in the region - seven volumes have appeared so far.] well, there I wrote something about this, and it's interesting that [Galina] Kasabova, the editor, when she had a look at that part of my account, she didn't put any question mark in the margin… Oh yes, and there's something else I was intending to tell you about: in camp division no. 5, where I was sent for a while from no. 4, I again ended up in a repair and machine workshop, where everyone soon introduced themselves to me and I too told them a bit about myself. Well, almost immediately, they latched on to my name: "Hey Netto, listen, you don't happen to be related to the footballer Netto, do you?" You see, by that time, after [joining Spartak Moscow in 1949]…
- He'd already started making a name for himself.
- Yes, very much so! And so I would say: well, yes, he's my brother. Of course, being the brother of Igor Netto, that was…
- It helped!
- Yes, it helped a lot, in fact, and it was actually thanks to that that I came to know Andrei Starostin – you know who that was, don't you?

- Of course. The Starostin brothers, the footballers. [Nikolai, Aleksandr, Andrei, and Petr Starostin were the heroes of the Spartak Moscow team in the second half of the 1930s]
- Yes, there were four brothers.
- Four brothers, and all of them footballers.
- A whole family of footballers, and they were all sent to various…
- … prison camps.
- Precisely, and Andrei Starostin ended up in Noril'sk. All four brothers had toured Europe and had been able to see so much: England, Spain, France… you name it! Well, I didn't know the other brothers, I never really had a chance to talk to them – that is, Nikolai [1902-1996] was a sort of nodding acquaintance, when I was back here in Moscow, but the only one of the brothers I did get to know properly was Andrei Petrovich [1906-1987], who became one of my mentors, you know, one of my main teachers in the sense of ideology, who refused to recognise the Soviet regime and said that Soviet power was nothing but…
- Was he a member of your party? Or perhaps you don't know?
- Well, since I did see him together with Fedor…
- You think that…
- … yes, I do think that he was. And, besides, there was something else which confirmed for me that he was in our party… That was when… Well, seeing that I've already broached the subject, I might as well tell you everything! In camp division no. 5… it was like this… for example, the work we were carrying out there: these letters, all these kinds of questions and the preparations we were making for an escape, and then getting all those parcels to people in the SHIZO… And a couple of other things too, but in order to escape you had to have proper [civilian?] clothes… and these clothes belonging to individual prisoners were kept in specific cloak-rooms, which weren't so easy to gain access to. But, at any rate, I was involved in this operation to… well, first of all, I would be given wax moulds which had been made from various keys and which I would hand over to my friend Arno, an Estonian who was in the same workshop as me. He would then cut a duplicate of each key, I would pick it up and…
- Pass it on…
- I would hand it over, and they would then… well, for example, it was as a result of this that Klimovich over there in the SHIZO could start to receive these [*laughs*]… that is, it wasn't me any longer who would take them to him; he would receive them from someone else, these…
- Parcels.
- Yes, so there was all this that we were involved in… But apart from that, we also had to meet… you see, there was a lot of transferring going on in our camp: people would be shifted from one unit to another just like that, and, if I remember correctly, there were also some from our division who'd been sent to unit no. 1 in Kaerkan… Yes, you've got to be careful not to confuse them: Kalargon and Kaerkan, they had different types of regime: Kalargon was a punishment camp, whereas Kaerkan was just a normal camp, one of the six camps of our Gorlag. People would be transferred there on the basis of certain… well, for some particular purpose – either to bolster the workforce there, or, who knows?, perhaps there were other reasons. So that's why there was all this transferring all the time – maybe it was simply so that people, well…
- So that people didn't build up too many friends, acquaintances…
- Yes, to avoid too much fraternisation – you're quite right. And that's why Fedor had this hunch that he was going to be put on a transport and taken to some other camp division – he evidently had some contact person in the administration who'd tipped him off about this. Well, and the thing is that in division no. 5 we had managed to establish a communication route to the outside which was pretty reliable: whole bundles of letters would be passed on through it, and Fedor even told me that we had a radio transmitter on the other side of the barbed wire fence which, if necessary, could

be linked up and it would transmit radio addresses for us to the local population. So that's why it was important to prevent this route from rusting, but if he ended up being sent to Kaerkan – which was on the outskirts of Noril'sk – or to Medvezhka, a mine in the mountains, the whole thing would fold up. So one day he said to me: "Look, I want to give you the liaison password, in case I have to leave. If you use it, they'll know what to make of you, and you'll be able to…

- Keep up this contact route.

- … keep up the route and use it for our vital purposes." He told me the password, it was: "Black *purga*", and the countersign was supposed to be: "My native element." Yes, those were the parole and countersign. But I was a bit worried and said to him: "All right, if someone comes to me and says that, I'll know what to answer, but what about if I'm supposed to seek them out myself? I mean, I can't just say to the first person who crosses my path this…"

- Black *purga*.

- Yes, "black *purga*!"… and he replied: "Don't worry, it's someone you know." I instantly started running through the people I knew who might be acting in such a capacity, and the first, most likely one who came to mind was Andrei Starostin. So I asked Fedor if it was him, but he didn't say anything – he just shook his head. All of a sudden, though, it was clear to me that it couldn't be anyone else, since Andrei Petrovich really did have an amazing range of contacts in the outside world… because, you see, until he was sent to Gorlag, he was in Noril'sk as an unguarded prisoner [a privileged status accorded to some Gulag prisoners, who could sometimes even reside outside the *zona*]. He was, after all, coaching the Noril'sk Dinamo team! That meant he could also travel with the team to Krasnoiarsk for regional tournaments. But eventually they managed to remove him to… that is, someone evidently sent a complaint to Moscow about the outrageousness of allowing an 'enemy of the people', who'd been convicted under Article 58…

- To coach Soviet players…

- To coach this team and travel to Krasnoiarsk… His team, you see, had begun to dominate the regional tournaments, and that was evidently the last straw – so, out of envy, he was immediately…

- Sent to that camp…

- Yes, they packed him off, locked him up for a while, and then put him into Gorlag. But he was still able to remain in touch with various people he knew and… Besides, people always trusted him, and he too had this faith in the integrity of others, and so that's why there was always someone ready to help him make contact with his wide circle of friends and acquaintances 'outside'. It was for all these reasons that it immediately occurred to me that Fedor's liaison man might be Andrei… but, as I said, all he did was to shake his head and ask: "Everything clear?"… Well, as it turned out, I didn't have to come into direct contact with this… this communication route myself, even though Smirnov's misgivings did prove to be well-founded and he was transferred from our division. But, fortunately, he was just put into camp division no. 4 – you see, the fourth and fifth divisions worked on the same site – on the 'Gorstroi' [Municipal Construction] project, building the infrastructure of Noril'sk. And Andrei Petrovich worked in the 'Gorstroi' office, which meant that…

- He could still provide the contact route you had before…

- Yes, the organisation managed to keep its main contacts. So, of course, I didn't have to become part of that link myself. And, come to think of it, several years later… But first I should say that I was eventually transferred too – also to division no. 4, where I again ended up working in a repair shop, and, to top this series of coincidences, it so happened that Fedor was in the same workshop as me, in the tool-making and repairing section! As a result, all these details were always fresh in my mind… and, leaping ahead now, several years later, when I'd already been back in Moscow for some time, I met Andrei Petrovich at Igor's wedding – that was in 1960, when Andrei Petrovich

was head coach to the Soviet national team, and Igor was captain – they'd just won the inaugural European Championship in Paris… And, yes, I met him there, and in later years as well, and what I wanted to say is that I had this itch to try out that password on him and see how he'd react, if you see what I mean. But I didn't in the end, because… well, because that password, after all, hadn't been meant to be used to just satisfy one's curiosity, but for something very important… You see, when we were finally released, some of us, including me, kept trying to somehow find our party's organisation, to get in touch with those other members who hadn't been in the camps… you know, the ones Smirnov had told me about back in 1945… but none of that came about, the connection we'd had in the camp to various members of our party who were at large was never re-established, and so it was that the whole thing – our manifesto, our ideas – never actually went beyond the prison camp level… But perhaps it was just me who didn't move in the right circles, and, say, if…

- Starostin…

- … yes, if Starostin for his part had succeeded in communicating with the organisation, then he would have been bound to tell me and he would have first had to use the password… to make sure that the two of us really were in on the same… that is, that we really did belong to the same organisation. And the same goes for me: if I had known anything, then I too would have been obliged to tell him. Well, as it turned out, at that meeting, or, actually, no… a few years after Igor's wedding, when we bumped into each other again, he asked me if I'd heard anything about Smirnov and where he was. Well, so I told him that Smirnov was already dead – he died in 1968, you see – but Andrei Petrovich didn't seem to want to delve further into the matter, and we left it at that… But it was still obvious that he knew that I'd been in contact with Smirnov all the time… yes, there was no doubt about all that; it's just that afterwards there hadn't been any concrete actions, any attempt to realise the ideas we'd been so committed to… there was simply nothing concrete to speak for all our…

- Have you considered this, though ?… I mean, do you think there really was this organisation 'outside'? Or perhaps Smirnov had just made you believe that, in order to keep your morale up, to give you a sense of purpose and confidence, for example…

- Well, the way I see it is, first of all, that I was then… Oh, but there's one other thing I wanted to tell you about in connection with Starostin. After his… after he returned to Moscow, he also went back to Spartak, you see – he was reinstated there, I suppose, apart from the rehabilitation he was given, and so he was once again able to take part in the life of the club and soon became friends with Igor… and after that, I noticed how much he had evidently influenced… That is, whenever I had some conversation or other with Igor, I would recognise those very views of Starostin's which I too had lapped up in the camp – in short, his whole outlook on things, and when I had a look at Igor's notebooks once, I even came across some phrases or excerpts he'd noted down, which coincided with some that had also drawn my attention when reading these various works. Well, for example, this remark of Tolstoi's: "Do what's necessary and do what you ought, and come what can." [In fact, a French proverb: "Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra" which Tolstoi was very fond of quoting in his last years.] That's something I had written down in Noril'sk once, and, later, after Igor's death, I found the very same words in his notebook. So that was a further sign of… and, besides, his attitude towards the Soviet regime – I realised that so much was due to the influence of Andrei – of course, I don't mean that he was trying to somehow win over younger, impressionable people to his ideas. No, it was simply the way how, in conversations with him, it was so clear what he thought about various things in life, that is, about the situation in which our country was, and what life was like for our people as a whole, and, more specifically, the conditions in which our sportsmen had to… Because, you see, Igor too was very much dissatisfied with the attitude towards sportsmen which was nurtured in our country – but, on the other hand, he didn't approve of what he'd seen abroad either… that is, what he'd seen there also didn't square

with democratic notions and basic human kindness… on the contrary, there you would also get this pressuring and…

- Exploitation.

- Yes, this terrible exploitation. And so here too, in conversations on these subjects – not about the Party, of course, or anything of that sort, but simply on this level of general views on life, you couldn't fail to notice the effect Starostin had had on him. And towards me he also became appreciably more… hmm…

- … more cordial

- … more open, yes. That's what.

- Was it this situation which you had in mind when you said earlier that his eyes were finally opened to the truth?

- Yes, that's exactly what I meant, and that it was above all thanks to his acquaintance with Starostin… because, you see, Starostin really was – that's how I see him – he really was a democrat to the core… for me he was without any doubt whatsoever a great democrat who, even under such conditions, was still able to recognise and appreciate the value of life. And who was able to stay true to this principle: "Don't rush, there's a time for everything. Everything has to ripen."

- Did you meet Igor regularly after you'd returned from the camp?

- No, you see… we often… that is, we did meet now and then… but it was mainly when Mama was still alive, and we would both come to her place – on all these holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays. We often saw each other after matches, too. One episode, in particular, has stuck in my memory: the three of us were together – Igor, Mama, and me – and it was also after some match… You see, after matches, Igor would always, without fail, go round to Mama's. She would cook him something to eat, and he would rest at her place for two or three hours – on the divan he liked so much! Yes, and we'd often strike up some conversation and discuss something. Well, once, during one of these conversations, he started talking about the fate of Soviet sportsmen in general and said that there was always this unrelenting discipline which… well, he kind of indicated that this surely couldn't be a healthy phenomenon and that our country was doing something which was clearly wrong. Now, Mama was very devoted, you know how I told you about her devotion to Trotskii? – well, she saw in him one of the true leaders of the Revolution, and she left Narkomindel when… She apparently said something about how even before they'd forced Trotskii's resignation [from the post of People's Commissar for War, in 1925] and before they actually began persecuting him, they'd already set about making life impossible for him – that is, they hadn't tried to murder him as such, or put him in prison, but they were using every possible means to force his hand and persuade him to leave the country. And just before she left her job at Narkomindel, when she was with some friends or acquaintances, she even repeated – or perhaps she just heard it from someone else – what Trotskii had said: "Yes, they'll put Russia through the wringer". That is, the way Stalin was going, he would ultimately make the Party, and Russia too, knuckle under… And during this conversation we had after Igor's match, she also said this phrase again: "Yes, they really have put Russia through the wringer, as Lev Davidovich used to say." And Igor said in his turn: "What do you think, do you think that if… instead of Stalin we'd had Trotskii, it would have been better?" Poor Mama didn't know what to say, she just fell silent and… I don't actually know how she took that remark, how she interpreted the tone of his words. But, I mean, the very way he phrased it: "What do you think, would it be better now if instead of Stalin we'd had Trotskii?" – it was clear that he himself didn't think it would have been better, and that, all the same, this whole system… this system would still have been in place and people would, again, have had no choice but to become the executors of this system.

- No matter who carried through this system…

- Yes.

[BREAK IN THE RECORDING]

- … [In my account for the series *O vremeni, o Noril'ske, o sebe…* – see above] it says what we did in the course of the uprising, all that happened, who was who amongst the various leaders, certain key moments are mentioned, and also the assignments I was given to do by Smirnov. As well as the various demands [of the prisoners' committees to the Moscow commission sent by Khrushchev] and instructions, but all this is, properly speaking… well, it shows an invisible layer of this life.

- All right, so let's leave the subject of the uprising till the next time we meet. Perhaps now you could say a bit about Igor: when you came back from the camp, how was your first meeting with him after so many years?

- When I returned to Moscow, father was still alive, but already in the last stages of his illness, and he was very poorly: there was something wrong with his lungs. Nevertheless, we did have time to talk to each other a bit. And, well, I saw that father was still exactly the same as he'd been before… let's see, before… I hadn't been home for thirteen years, but he was still the same as I'd known him before all that happened – that is, he was utterly devoted to the Party. Do you know what the most valuable thing for him in life was?… It was his Party-membership card, that's what. For example, whenever he left for the bathhouse, he would always hide it at home in such a way that no one else would be able to find it. Mama had always laughed when she saw this: "Who're you afraid of here? Who do you think is going to take it?" – "No, it's only thanks to this fixed order that I can go to the baths without worrying – because I know that I've hidden it properly." [*laughs*] That's the degree to which he… Yes, and when I arrived back in Moscow and went for some walks with him round the city… that is, we would go all the way to the Maiakovka [Maiakovskii Square, now Triumfal'naia Square], where there was this traditional bathhouse – and sometimes, if Igor was with us, to one on the Domikovka. Mama would always go to the baths on Astrakhanskii Lane, but we were regulars at the one on the Domikovka – you know, near this new building and where the Leningradskaia Hotel is, in that area. So we would go to these places, stroll round the streets a bit, and on one of these occasions he said to me: "Leva, do you understand what… I mean, right now we're walking along on the pavement and here's this solid, beautiful, and trusty asphalt. But right here, under the Tsar, there were just these cobble-stones, and if you were driving round in a carriage, they would jolt and shake up all your entrails... So do you understand now: this is what Soviet power has achieved!" – see what I mean?! I remember how these words made me shudder, and I couldn't help saying inwardly: "For God's sake! Can you really be that stupid!… What, do you think that abroad or where all the capitalists are, they're all driving and walking on cobble-stones?! You don't even have a clue as to how they live over there, and so you value this and think that now that Soviet power has come, everything has suddenly turned for the better and that a completely different way of life has begun!…" So that's how blindly he believed in what Soviet power had accomplished. But as to how it had thrown Russia… into an abyss, that…

- He didn't see that?

- He just refused to see that. All that he was prepared to see was that things had somehow become better. That was all that mattered. Not what had happened to Russia – this Russian tragedy of the twentieth century which had taken place, the fact that his very friends, these…hmm…

- Latvian Riflemen.

- Yes, that these Latvian Riflemen and that the entire old guard who'd been with Lenin from the very start had been destroyed – that… well, he'd actually seen that, he'd known about it, he had

himself been scared, he'd trembled whenever the doorbell rang… So where and how had he managed to stow away all those memories?! I just don't know what to call this…

- Didn't he take offence at these words of yours? Or did you try to respect his feelings?

- Yes, of course I did, and I wouldn't have said those things to him anyway – I just thought that way. I simply nodded as if I agreed with him, and all I said was this: "Father, come on, you don't really think that everyone else in the world is still driving on cobble-stones and that they're all so hard up?! You can find this asphalt everywhere, everywhere!" Otherwise, I just tried to please him all the time and spared his feelings. Because I'd already seen that there was no point in trying to force the truth on these… well, I mean, in the camp I'd seen how all these 'dandelions' [frail old men], all these Leninists, continued to believe blindly and didn't want to take note of what was actually happening in real life; they simply didn't want to get at the root of all these things, you see… Just like many others after them, after Stalin, also didn't concern themselves with these lesser details and just wanted to be faithful to their idea that it was still necessary to achieve world revolution and create a universal republic, all under the aegis of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

- Was your father happy to see you come home?

- He didn't display any particular gladness, any particular expressions of joy… but it had been him, after all, who'd written that letter saying that his son couldn't be a 'traitor to the Motherland'. Yes, he'd sent that to the Supreme Soviet, and they took fifteen years off my sentence. It was evidently thanks to these petitions that I was just meant to serve a term of ten years, and that amnesty which came later extended to people with ten-year sentences. So that's how I was released, and they even allowed me to return to Moscow… it was evidently a special form of release because…

- In what year were you released by amnesty?

- In 1956.

- In 1956?

- That's right, in January 1956. And, as I was saying, many of the lads who were released at about the same time… in fact, all of them, they all had to stay on in Noril'sk, as 'free settlers', [prisoners given early release, or those who had served their full term but weren't allowed to settle in urban centres, would often be sent to live in a 'free settlement' near the camp from which they had been released and often continued doing the same work as before, albeit now as 'voluntary workers'] whereas I was… I mean, I just couldn't understand why all of a sudden they'd issued me with this permit to Moscow – and they even gave me a train ticket to Moscow, can you believe it! Well, as it turned out, it was all thanks to father having written that letter – that is, he'd actually written in his own name, saying who he was, and why he didn't believe that I was a… So that had evidently had some effect and… Besides, when I was rehabilitated and went… True, father had actually died by that time… You see, I wrote three letters, appealing for rehabilitation, but each time the Military Procuracy turned down my application on the grounds that I had confessed my guilt, which meant there couldn't be any review of my case. And it was only when I wrote to the journal "Kommunist", saying that I'd read all their recent articles about justice – in those years, they wrote a lot about that - but that I hadn't seen any of this justice being applied to me yet… And so an inspector from that journal – Bystrova was her name – she got in touch with me and I told her everything… and she seemed to empathise with my situation, and what my father had done on my behalf... Of course, she didn't know anything about those events in the camp. Essentially, my account boiled down to this: that I'd been serving my sentence, had been released, and that was all, just that [*laughs*]. No mention at all of any parties or organisations… of course, she could guess, since I'd been in Noril'sk precisely during those events which…

- But you didn't talk about them.

- Not to a single soul!

- So in which year were you finally rehabilitated, then?
- In 1958.
- 1958… After she published an article in that journal?
- Yes: it was thanks to her that I was granted – along with very few others, I think, of the millions of our people who'd been in the camps – a personal audience with Rudenko, the Procurator-General of the USSR… I actually had an audience with him, which lasted for some fifteen minutes. He didn't ask me anything about… which article I'd been indicted under, or what my case involved – he'd already seen a summary, I think, before the audience. He just said a few words, asked me some things about father. And then he said that Iurii Sanych, his assistant, was there, and that I needn't worry at all, because justice would prevail in the end, he said – and that he had instructed his assistant, who was sitting next to him, to look into my case. He then wished me all the best, and that was that. Now, his assistant – when I went to see him later – he told me that they'd had to request the Carpathian Military Okrug [District] to send them my file, since they hadn't been able to find it in Moscow.

[End of the recording]