

Vasiliy Marempolskiy “Recollections of a Jersey prisoner”
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In the summer of 1942 Vasily Marempolskiy, Stepan Vikchrischuk and Grigoriy Borodin from the Ukrainian village of Markushino in the Poltava region, aged between 14 and 16, together with Vasil Dusheiko from Poltava, Ivan Gapon from Kirovograd and other unfortunates, were taken to Jersey by the German occupying forces.

After journeying by train via France the prisoners arrived at St Servain, where they spent a day or two at a male transit camp. There were around 1000 prisoners of various nationalities, including Ukrainians, Russians, Tartars and Belorussians. The camp was part of the infamous “Organisation Todt” (Germ. *death*). The author noted that discipline at this camp was much stricter than in the previous camps of Peremyshl and Forhgeim. Every German soldier carried a short coloured truncheon or a wooden or rubber stick which they used a lot to beat the heads, backs or legs of the prisoners at any time, particularly when they were lining up to receive their ration of soup.

The prisoners were sorted here according to their state of health and general condition – the strongest had “Gelman-Litman” stamped on their palms with ink. Teenagers and the weak were stamped “Olch”. Everybody had his picture taken and was given a number. Vasiliy Marempolskiy (VM) was given the number “363”, and was assigned to the second group. This group consisted of weak exhausted adults and elderly men plus a small number of teenagers.

Then they were marched to St Malo and sailed by ferry to Jersey.

At this time the prisoners did not know where they have been taken. VM commented that it was only later that he learned that the British territories occupied by the Germans in La Manche because of their proximity to Great Britain and Northern Ireland were regarded by the German forces as an excellent strategic base against Britain and also as part of the line of German defense known as the “Atlantic Wall” which stretched from Norway to Spain. It was Hitler’s intention to create highly equipped defensive fortresses . Construction of this defensive line was carried out by “Organisation Todt” using slave labour from Europe. The main workforce was to arrive from Eastern Europe, especially from the occupied parts of the Soviet Union, either civilians or prisoners of war. That is why echelons of prisoners were travelling through Europe to St Malo, where they were secretly taken to Jersey, Guernsey and Alderney.

The prisoners, exhausted by their long journey through Europe, arrived at the Jersey port, where they were lined into 4 columns and marched via the town guarded by “todters”. Locals, mainly women, were standing along the sides of the streets, and when the column reached one of the high buildings, the women tried to rush in and give the prisoners food such as bread and fruits – obviously, they were

waiting and had prepared food beforehand. But the guards repressed the prisoners with their rifle butts.

The asphalt highway turned into a wide embankment some km long, very close to water. Further along the column turned into a small uphill inland road leading into this rocky island. It was very hot and stuffy. The prisoners were tortured with thirst, exhaustion and hunger, but raging guards were kicking those who slowed down shouting: "Schnel, Russich Shwain" (Germ.) (*Quick, Russian pigs*). Those who did not have any energy to walk received showers of blows – one had his head covered with blood, another had a smashed nose, and there were drops of blood left on the road.

On top of the hill they passed through a little village of gray stone buildings by a church with a cock on the spire instead of a cross, with a notice at the front – "St Peter". They circled some time on little rocky country roads until they saw lots of dirty-greenish coloured barracks, the gate was bearing the sign "Immelman camp". That was the end of their journey - the slave camp where they would be building a defense line to "hedge" Hitler's Reich .

The column went through three gates covered with barbed wire, two of them near the entrance, the last one a bit further inside, and stopped at the wide pebbled parade-ground .

Working camp "Immelman" was 5 long wooden barracks with toilets on the left, on the barracks lodging the Germans on the right and a kitchen near the gate. It was surrounded by two walls of barbed wire. In between them there were armed guards patrolling. The kitchen and Germans' lodgings were separated from the prisoners' huts with another high wall thickly covered with barbed wire. There were the komendatura (the offices of the commandant of the camp), the commandant's flat, the German guards' lodgings and the flats of the "chiefs" – the "forbaiters" of the working brigades – i.e. German operating personnel.

The new arrivals (about five hundred men) were ordered into a U-shape. The German camp commandant Fritz Budrich walked to the front , tall and slim built, together with the Polish interpreter Kazimir Novak (p.44 – around 40 years old, small and roundish) and a couple of dozen Germans-"todts" with swastikas on their sleeves.

The "greeting " by F.Budrich as translated by the Pole came to: "Here you will live and work for Great Germany, and those who try to escape will be shot without warning."

Then the column was broken up into groups of twenty five men , and every brigade was assigned to a German officer. VM and his fellow prisoners were taken by a green-eyed slim built German aged around 45 years with a darkish face and black hair – Max Gaints. The brigade was numbered "4". Start time for work – 5 o'clock in the morning, by which time breakfast should be finished. Tickets for lunch and dinner were distributed by Gaints. (**Translator's note* - Secretly he later came to be known amongst the prisoners as "Black" – "Chorniy" in Russian)

The barrack was gloomy, the naked light bulb covered with blue paint. The long building was separated into three rooms with dividing doors. In the room where VM was to live there were bunks made from bare un-polished boards, in three levels. The occupants of the lower levels suffered with a continuous rain of dust . No pillows, no covers.

Somebody mentioned that he had seen another camp on the way.

According to K. Novak, there have previously been Spanish workers living in “Immelman”, but they have been transported to another camp.

When prisoners were receiving their dinner, they would line to get their portion of bread and soup. Initially they were given bowls which they were told to carry around all the time. The bread ration was 200 grams and was to last for the whole of the next day. The cook was Spanish. The soup was lukewarm water with pieces of cabbage, some other greens and turnips which typically were grown by local farmers to feed cattle.

During the night it was possible to hear the waves in the sea.

Chapter VI. "Soviet Russia, British – very good!"

The 4th brigade now knew their permanent place of work. We would march from "Immelman" in a column of varying width, depending on the size of the road, and then, on narrow pathways, the boys would march in single file, with "Black" walking behind. Some of prisoners who were at the front tried to run ahead as far as possible to steal something from the locals' gardens or vegetable patches. They would try to pluck a couple of sourish apples, or to pull out a carrot, or turnip, or swede. Anything to fill an empty stomach. It was surprising, but not one farmer complained to the Germans about such thefts by the Russian *heftlings*.

But all of us could not run ahead at the same time, so the boys made a timetable, and when such raids were successful, the proceeds were shared amongst those nearest. One morning I got the chance to dash out. "Black" seemed to be in a good mood. For being late he had hit Ivan Gapon lazily and only once on the shoulders, casually pushing Machmud aside as he did it. Now he was walking behind, deep in his pleasant thoughts. He was convinced that no "Russian dog" could run away: the island was small and full of soldiers, field-police and Gestapo agents, and the shores were full of mines, so even if someone made it to the port, he would not get on the boat – there were guards at every step. Occasionally, there were some incidents when a prisoner would climb over the barbed wire, and then return bringing some swedes or carrots. Those who were caught were beaten with switches.

... and "Black" Max Gaints was definitely in good humour. I wondered why. Maybe it was because he had a week off and had only returned to work yesterday! According to the rules in the Jersey camps, on two Sundays a month the brigades worked only till midday, the rest of the day being a "holiday" when the prisoners stayed in camp, attending to their chores: typically, they washed their rags, mended their shoes and clothes.... and killed their fleas and lice. But on those "holiday" Sundays the prisoners were not given dinner. Max Gaints would not have given us, poor pigs, a rest even for half a day- the only reason for the "holiday" was to give the Germans a rest, even though their "work" was not difficult, depending on the temperament of the individual "chief" – one would use his stick more than another. He, Max Gaints, worked unsparingly, and this was noted even by the commandant of the camp, Frits Budrich who pointed him out as an example for the others. Perhaps this was the explanation for his good mood. Or maybe it was just his week's holiday. Even the half-days could be spent well. All the Germans, apart from the guards and policemen on duty, were taken to St Helier. They went to bars and watched a patriotic movie with a documentary about the heroic invasion by the Fuhrer's soldiers of the Eastern Front near Rostov. Then they drunk real French cognac and paid a visit to a bordello. "Black" always smiled when he thought about the

Algerian girl, Saida, one of those who were specially selected from French bordellos and sent to the Islands for the satisfaction of the Germans– both the military and the todts.

And the German overseers, the “forbaiters, worked unsparingly. They had to get up every day at half past four in the morning and see to those Russian pigs! But it was still better for them to be in Jersey than in that bloody Russia in its second year of carnage of the Fatherland’s sons. “Black’s” younger brother, Otto Gains, died for the Fuhrer and the Great German Fatherland. The previous winter he had had frostbite near Moscow on his hands and legs and had died in hospital. Bloody country! It was peopled not with humans but animals. The Fuhrer had promised to finish the war the previous winter. Now the second winter was approaching, and the newspapers were full of a new word: Stalingrad! How long they have spent there – but they still couldn’t capture the bloody city! It was rumoured that when Stalingrad fell, the war would be over. Those Bolshevick Russians – real barbarians! It didn’t seem to matter how many were killed, or how many were crammed into German camps- and there were quite a lot in Jersey- they just kept fighting. Bloody Asians!

Look at those in the 4th brigade – 25 heads. Even though they were only teenagers, who never fought, they still looked at you like wolves. Give them freedom – and they would bite your head off!

And then “Black’s” good mood disappeared. His eyes filled with blood and seemed almost to jump out of his head! He was looking for somebody to relieve his aggression on. It happened to be “Grandpa Luka”, who was hardly able to walk after “coffee”, shuffling along on his swollen legs. “Black” grabbed his stick, rushed over to the old man and hit him with all his might on the shoulders.

“Why do you hit me?”

“Walk faster, Russian idiot! Dirty pig! Scabby dog!”

And he followed and tormented “Grandpa Luka” until the wretched man stumbled and fell over.

The column was getting nearer to the permanent working place. During this time the column had slowed its pace and I found myself out in front. I ran ahead as fast as I could. I noted a garden ahead. I looked back – nobody to be seen. There was an apple tree with red apples. I climbed up it frantically. As quickly as I could I plucked handfuls of fruit and hid them in my pockets, behind my shirt. I jumped down but then froze with fear – there was an old man standing in front of me, dressed in a waistcoat and a black hat. Beneath his ginger moustache a smoking pipe jutted from his mouth. Maybe he was the owner of the farm. My first thought was to flee, but my legs did not obey and I stood like a rabbit hypnotised by a boa constrictor. But the farmer did not look aggressive and didn’t try to grab my collar- if he had I would probably have run away. He just stood there calmly smoking and asked me something in an unknown language (I did not speak English). He pointed at my chest and asked:

“ Are you Russian? Russian?”

Firstly I just shrugged my shoulders but then I remembered some words that I had learned from Danko Nechipay and said:

“I am Russian... I am hungry...”

To my surprise, he understood and said:

“Yes! Come with me.”

He waved his hand inviting me to follow him. I wanted to run away, thinking it was a trap and the farmer would hand me over to “Black”. But the man was walking towards the house and beckoned me to follow.

“What will be, will be”, I decided and went with him. I was calmed by the peaceful appearance of this man.

There were a woman about 40 years old and a blonde, blue-eyed, freckled girl, possibly, their daughter, in the yard at the front of a two-storey, granite house. The girl was about seventeen years old. They abruptly stopped working and looked at this stranger with surprise and fear, possibly thinking about the consequences for them.

“Good morning!” I said in Ukrainian. Then, realising they did not understand, repeated in German “Gooten Morgen!”

“Good morning!”, said the girl.

The proprietor said something in a singing, throaty voice to the woman, and she said “Yes” and ran inside the house. The owner moved a chair to a table under a big tree and offered me a seat. The landlady brought a plate of mashed potato and some pieces of white bread. I looked incredulously at the landlord and landlady and their daughter, and they were nodded their heads inviting me to eat. Never in my life had potato with butter tasted so wonderful! Then I remembered about “Black” who would be looking for me any minute and quickly used the fork. I quickly drank a quarter of milk and put the bread in the pocket.

“Spasibo!(* *“thank you” in Ukrainian*) Merci! Danke shon!” I bowed to the hospitable owners who were looking at me with pity.

The landlord was saying something to me, waving his hand. Even though I did not understand the language I guessed by his intonation and honesty that I was being invited to visit them again. I nodded my head, agreeing, and ran to the embankment of the road. The boys were already collecting their spades and metal sticks, and were moving to their places. Max was walking around the box of tools, and luckily did not see how I jumped out of the bush.

“Where have you been?” – Grisha whispered cautiously. “ We were afraid that “Black” would notice your absence. We brought your spade”.

When I told them about the Jersey farmer and his family and food they could not believe me.

“Rubbish!” said Stepa.

“Look, here!” I took out of my pocket the pieces of bread and divided them into three, giving it to my friends. Also I divided the apples.

“And that Jerseyman let you keep the apples?” Birischuk was very surprised.

“As you can see – yes! Otherwise you could not eat them.”

Surprised by this meeting I was thinking about it the whole day as I hit the granite with my crowbar, worked with the spade or pulled the heavily loaded trolley along the rails.

During the two and a half months that I suffered in “Immelman” nobody spared any kind words. Everyday I only saw the raging eyes of “Black”, heard his endless swearing, and endured his kicks and blows. Exhausting 22 hours work (*sic*), continuous hunger and nonstop thoughts about food! And yet it seemed that even there on that half-wild island there lived people who sympathised with a poor slave. And each new day the work was no easier: the same labouring with the crowbar, collecting rocks into the trolley, pain in the waist, crazy shouting by “Black”, who was always beating somebody over the shoulders – Gapon or Machmud or “Grandpa Luka” – but I was far away from it. Inwardly I was thinking of a farmer and his wife and daughter. In the evening I asked Danko Nechipay how to ask in English: “Where is the front?” and tried to remember this expression.

Next morning I again run ahead and with all my might rushed towards the familiar house trying to win as much extra time as possible. I saw the farmer’s daughter from far away and she was possibly waiting for my because she invitingly waved her hand. She quickly brought some milk and bread with butter. I sat at the table- this time without fear- drinking the tasty milk and eating the bread, and the girl was standing there or lying on the tree trunk staring at me with blue eyes. She had a pitiful smile on her lips. Then the farmer and his wife arrived and smiled at me as if to an old friend.

“Aha, Russian!”

Obviously, the farmer wanted to chat to me, he was talking all time in his throaty voice, repeating some times “Russia”, but I could not understand. But when he firstly pointed at me, then to himself, then took my hand into his and said “Soviet Russia – British – very good!” I guessed that he was saying that it was good that Soviet Russia and Britain were allies. And I nodded my head with agreement and shook the hand of my ally. His hand was hard and horny, the hand of a worker, who respects physical labour.

“German – no good!” the farmer said, and I immediately guessed that he did not like Germans. It was good!

“Mister, where is the front?”

The farmer got livened up.

“Front- Stalingrad!”

“And Moscow, Leningrad – Russian?”

“Oh, yes! Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad - Soviet!”

“Thank you, merci!” I jumped up, realising that those cities had not been taken by the Facshist forces- although the Germans were bluffing that these cities had fallen. It would be good news for my comrades!

The girl entered the conversation, I understood she wanted to introduce herself. She called herself Nelly, the father – John, the mother – Mary.

“What is your name?” – she asked with tender voice.

“Vasil- or Vasiliy.”

“I understand. You are “Basil”, in English.”

“So, we are introduced.”

“Yes, Basil!”

Then I started feeling anxious and pointed to the sun which had already risen.

“I have to go! Good bye, Mr John, Mrs Mary, Miss Nelly! Auffiedersein!” I said, remembering the way to address English people from Dickens’ novels.

Nelly pressed into my hand a small package, and I quickly ran, waving goodbye. The boys were already working, and “Black” was standing alert . Obviously he had noted my absence. I went very cold. I decided to use a trick. I hid the package under a bush and came out pulling my trousers up.

“Where have you been, you lazy git?!” - Max shouted with rage, pointing at his watch. “Ten minutes – ten of the birch!”

“Mr chief, I – *krank (German word)* , I have stomach pain... I have been in there, in the bush...”

“Back to work!”- he hit me over the shoulders with his stick.

I got away lightly – as I told the boys.

The following days “Black” became more careful, because he noted that the prisoners were sneaking off and he could not tolerate that. In the mornings and in the evenings he would not permit the column to become spread out so there was no opportunity to run ahead. I desperately wanted to visit the welcoming farmers – but I did not have the chance, so all I could do was think about them every day with gratitude.

I shared the news that the Germans had not taken Moscow, Stalingrad or Leningrad, with Danko Nechipay , and soon not only the 4th brigade but the whole of “Immelman” had the news circulating. Once walking to lunch I met an English girl, who was cutting the green grass with a small scythe which looked like a sickle. She was dressed in a burgandy coloured coat and yellow hat, with locks of blonde hair hanging down beneath it. I felt something familiar about her. And when I passed by her I heard a quiet voice:

“Basil!”

It was the farmer’s daughter.

“Miss Nelly, you?”

“Yes.”

She nodded, gave me a warm look with her blue eyes, pulled a small packet from underneath her coat and pushed into my hands.

“Merci, Miss Nelly,” - I just had time to say as she quickly mounted her bike and left without looking back. Luckily, “Black” was at the front and saw nothing.

“What did she give you?” – asked Stepa.

“We will see,” - I replied and hid the packet in my father’s jacket.

Only after we finished our meagre lunch did I wink to Borodiy, Vichrischuk and Ivan Gapon. We hid behind a bush and opened the packet. There were pieces of bread with butter and cheese and boiled, washed potato. The boys ate Nelly’s present with such happiness! We felt something distant, homely, motherly!

“The lucky devil!” Stepan said to Grisha with envy. “See, Vasil did not visit her, so she came herself!”

“And not with empty hands!”

“I would be happy if such visits were every day, then we would get more pieces!”

“How beautiful is this Jersey girl!”

“And she’s fallen in love with such fool! Watch, when we return home we will tell everything to Oksana!” (**Vasily’s sweetheart*)

“It must be under question whether he will go home! For such a girl I would stay here on the island.”

“She is not that beautiful: freckles, ginger hair...”

“The more ginger the better!”

But I did not pay attention to the friends’ jokes. At least their hunger had been eased so they were able to joke! They were happy with that piece of bread with the bit of cheese and the boiled potato! I felt much more gratified for this present: it touched my soul! Behind this girl and her parents I saw workers who hated the occupying Germans and who felt solidarity with the poor and unlucky. They stretched out a friendly hand to the slave just because he is a citizen of the country which fights Fascism. Such a gesture is worth more than the most dear present!

Chapter VII. Fellow villagers meet

Autumn brought with it continuous rain. Gales, low clouds and endless rain. Wind would crawl inside the prisoners' poor clothing, which was wet all the time because of the rain, and cold would drill through their bodies. The ocean was raging. It was now possible to hear the waves not only during the night, but also during the day through a curtain of rain.

Cold found its way into the barracks, which had holes in the roofs and no heating. Exhausted prisoners would come back from a grueling day's work and fall half-dead onto their bunks, trying to cover their bodies and heads with the gray rags, and lying close to each other in an attempt to get warm. But the rags did not have time to dry by the time that the command "Auchtstein" was again being barked, and the gray columns of exhausted prisoners would once more march out of the gates of the camp. Slavery never stopped, and every day people were hardly able to drag their feet through the messy, sticky loam.

As autumn advanced, more and more fell ill and corpses began to be found in the camp. People were dying whilst working: falling down and never getting up again! The first victim in Max Gaint's brigade No 4 was "Granddad Luka". For his last couple of days he hardly walked because his legs were so swollen from drinking too much of the "coffee" made from alder. And finally, one morning he did not manage to reach his working place, fell down to the ground, and raging "Black" finished him with his knotty, gnarled stick. After the lunch break his corpse was put in a van and taken off somewhere. Not many in the brigade knew his real name – Ivan Antonovich Aksenov. "Granddad Luka" was only 32 years old. A week later, Mikola Korneychuk from Kiev, whose body was already dried and shriveled, was killed – crushed under a trolley loaded with granite. It was unclear whether it was an accident, or suicide, because he could no longer stand the hunger and torment.

In the middle of October the brigade was working in a different place, and had a different task, but one that was no easier than the previous one – digging ditches for cable lines. In fact, during the previous 3 weeks our brigade was put to a number of tasks, and we had been in various places in the island, but in none of them did we get any rest. Sometimes, those working alongside us were prisoners of many nationalities – Spanish, Algerian, Moroccan – soldiers of the French Army captured by the Germans, or civilians from other occupied European countries.

I stuck my heavy spade into the sticky loam, salty perspiration mixing with the cold rain, but I did not feel cold. In my head I continuously thought about the friendly family of farmer John and his wonderful daughter Nelly whom I had not seen for a month by then. I was sure that if those meetings had continued I would not have been starving as I was then. But our 4th brigade had been moved into a totally different area of the island.

After I had been to various places in the island I had a clearer picture of Jersey. The island was not very large and there were hills and valleys. By the sun I could tell that our camp "Immelman" was situated on the west side of the island on top of a high plateau near the coast and not far from the small village of St Peter. The wild, rocky parts of the island were covered with bracken and thickets of gorse, which had yellow flowers all summer, and with wild blackberry bushes and dense fern. And there were patches of granite covered by clay like soil where the local farmers had made small fields and gardens with vegetable patches hedged with curly-headed cut trees. The local population was not very dense, in general consisting of English (sic.) farmers. Their stone farm buildings were spread all over the island. They grew wheat, corn, turnips and swedes to feed cattle, and fruits and vegetables. It seemed that the local climate was suitable for such products. Also I heard that those brown cows grazing by the farms gave milk with a very high fat content. True, when my friends gave me some milk I thought that never in my life had I tasted such wonderful milk. Who and what the people of the town and port of St Helier were, I did not know yet because I had been there only once after our arrival when the prisoners were marched through town and were given fruits and bread by the local women. But when I was working in various places I could see from there beautiful buildings of the town covered with flowers. It seemed that before the war this island used to be real resort.

There were a lot of empty houses on the island left by their owners when the Germans occupied the island. Jersey was under a regime of occupation, but here it was more relaxed than in other occupied European countries. Hitler's officers were nice to the locals, even the local government was working together with the German military authorities. But the local population was sympathetic towards Soviet prisoners, even if the local farmers were afraid of the Germans and did not show their feelings openly. People like farmer John and his daughter Nelly were of the most courageous.

There were a lot of prisoners on the island who were taken there from all over Europe and Africa – dark Spanish and French, black skinned Algerians and Moroccans, blonde or red haired tall Netherlanders, Dutch (sic.) and Polish, Belgians, Czechs. But the majority were Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian, Moldavian and other nationalities of the Soviet Union, who were altogether called by Germans "Russich Shwein". The majority of them were civilians, but there were prisoners of war too. I already knew about some concentration camps for Soviet prisoners: apart from our "Immelman", "Udet" was the biggest camp on the island where around 1000 Soviet civilians were kept, together with a lot of Spanish. There was also "Melders", a civilian camp, and the camp for Soviet prisoners of war, "Brinkfort". It was rumoured that life for the Soviet soldiers was more horrible than for civilians – they were working at the quarries and building bunkers.

Other foreign workers were living in varied conditions: more difficult for the Spanish and Algerians, who were living behind barbed wire, but in less strict discipline than in our camp. Other foreign workers were enjoying freedom of movement, were lodging in empty houses abandoned by their

owners who left the island or in barracks without guards. They were fed not badly. Also they were paid wages which could be used to buy additional food, and they were receiving postal deliveries from home, and some were receiving deliveries from the Red Cross. The most horrible living conditions, were only for us, enslaved Soviet citizens!

Because of this foreign workers, especially the Spanish, felt sympathy for Soviet prisoners. The majority of the Spanish prisoners were aged between 30-50 years old, generally ex-soldiers of the Republican Army. They had a harsh fate. After being pushed by divisions of Franco and Mussolini supported by Hitler they have crossed the French border, but Dalad'e's government appeared to be traitors and threw them into concentration camps. 450,000 Spanish and international brigades soldiers were put behind barbed wire in France in camps Vene, Argeles, St Seprein, where discipline bore not much difference from German concentration camps. Later most of them were sent by the French government to Spain for trial by Franco, and others were sent to Northern Africa, and also to build the Maginot Line in North of France, where they stayed until the Germans arrived, and then they were taken by Hitler to build his "Atlantic Wall" which had as a part of it the fortified region of the Normandy archipelago in La Manche. That is how there, in Jersey there were so many Spanish, and I understood why they were so sympathetic towards Soviet people. As in those tragic days for the Spanish nation only the Soviet Union helped Spain, at the same time France and England helped Franco to suffocate revolutionary Spain. An now when the column of Russian prisoners passed by the working Spanish, they threw bread and cigarettes, secretly saluting with the "Rot Front" gesture...

There were quite a lot of German forces in Jersey, but they did not intervene in the prisoners affairs. Management of the camps and construction work was the responsibility of the hated "Todts" – the semi-military construction and field-engineering "Organisation Todt" members of which had brown khaki uniforms with swastikas on their sleeves. Rumours were that these uniforms were trophies from the Czech army uniform captured by Hitler's forces after Czechoslovakia was annexed. All the German "chiefs" (forbaiters) who were mostly of German nationality were particularly cruel. I even heard that they themselves had been prosecuted and were sent to the island for some misdeed. And there they were using especially cruel methods on the prisoners in order to get back in favour with the Fuhrer and have their misdeeds erased. One of the cruelest sadists was Maz Gaints – nicknamed "Black".

Those were my thoughts whilst I was digging the sticky loam and getting wet under the rain. I felt cold through my wet clothes but could not leave the ditch and hide in a dry place as hated "Black" was standing on top of the ditch watching me.

"Shnel! Work faster, Bolshevik bastards!" he shouted hysterically, swinging his heavy knotted stick and landing it on the heads, shoulders, hands and legs of the prisoners, who were covered with bruises, scars and bloody blisters.

But this day something happened which would be remembered by myself and my fellow villagers for a long time. When the whole brigade was totally wet through with rain, “Black” gave the signal for lunch break. The truck which delivered “gruel” stopped under cover. We quickly emptied our bowls, and started squeezing out our trousers and jackets. Then we saw a new brigade of Russian prisoners unfamiliar to us.

“Where are you from?” I asked a thin blonde boy.

“We are from “Udet”, Raihle’s brigade. And you?”

“From “Immelman”. Do you know by any chance – Terentiy Koshovoy and Michael Melnikov? They are from Vinnitsa region, near Khmilnik, the village Markushino – my fellow villagers. We were separated in St Malo.”

“They are from our column. Look, there they are!”

I went to the column and stared at Terentiy, checking whether he would recognise me. He shouted “What are staring at?” and suddenly stopped. – “Is it you, Vasily?”

We hugged each other. By this time Grigoriy and Stepan arrived, together with Michael Melnikov.

“Terentiy, Misha – where did you appear from?”

We could not hide our happiness. Everybody was excited as if he was meeting his own brother.

“We were looking for you, but nobody had seen you, you simply disappeared.” said Michael. “Where do you live?”

“We are in “Immelman”. And you?”

“We are from “Udet”. How you have changed!”

“And you... look at Terentiy – he looks ridiculous: lost so much weight, taller, eyes inside hollows...Michael looks as he was before.”

“ But look at my feet - covered with blisters! And you are anorexic like devils! Do you get harsh treatment?”

And for a long time we were happily amazed with our meeting.

“ How is life for you?” I asked Terentiy when everybody had calmed down a bit and sat down on the floor. “When did you arrive?”

“How do we live? My back is now like a beaten steak thanks to Raihle. He is short, lean, couple of fingers missing on his right hand, but he can hit very hard with his truncheon or fist.”

“Our “Black” gets a new stick twice a day.”

“Raihle is more cunning - he uses a rubber hose filled with sand.”

“At least he has white skin.” (sic.)

“All of them are the same. I have seen him: eyes wide open with rage. But let’s not talk about them! You asked how did we get here? After our separation in St Servain our group was taken to barracks. Then we learned that you had gone. Next day we were taken to the boat and delivered to Jersey, to

“Udet”. So here we are. The slaves of “Gelman-Litman & Co.”, which constructs military defenses on the island.”

“So , “Olch & Co.” builds railways. That what it is!”

“Yes.”

“So what do you do?”

“We dig holes. And then Dutch and Belgians build bunkers. And before we were working rock at the granite carrier, passing from one to another by hand. Once our boys decided to have a break for a cigarette. Suddenly Raihle arrived and shouted: “Ferfluchter gund! Smoking break! You can do without it! You must work!” and hit everybody on the shoulders with his hose. He has an assistant Loius – he used to be humanitarian, he did not beat anybody. But now after Raihle’s training he hits in the ribs. But what you do?”

“We in general break rock. Break the cliff, make gravel for the railway track. How is your food ration?”

“Can’t you see our faces? Only turnip gruel.”

“So, the same as for us.”

“I heard that “Immelman” is quite small. Is it true?”

“There were about 500 people in four barracks, but now it is less.”

“They died?”

“Yes.”

“We have the same: people are dying like flies, others get injured... There are about 1000 Russians in “Udet” plus quite a lot of Spanish. Our guards and police are like wild tigers.”

“Who of our regional neighbours live with you?”

“Quite a few: Stepan Pavluk from Torchinsk, Mikola from Skarzintsi, Ivan Lilik, Petro Fit and Stepan Zacharov from Mitintsi, Marchenko from Ribchintsi. Also Pobidash from Pustovit...”

“I do not know him.”

“You do. He is scum – a policeman in “Udet”! Do you have any Russian police in “Immelman”?”

“None.”

“We do. Now it is strict rule. Worse than the Fascists! Particularly our fellow, Pobidash from Pustovit, who travelled with us in the same train car.”

“Which one is he?”

“He has a black mustache, and went on his own free will in place of his daughter. Remember, when we were singing Soviet songs, he shouted : Shut up, it is not Soviet rule!”

“Yes, I remember now.”

“Now he walks in our camp with a white band over his sleeve and a stick: policeman. And he tortures us like cattle! And Zurkin with Kuptsov – they are policemen too..”

“What a surprise! Our camp policemen and guards are only the Germans, “todts”.”

“Lucky you! Our traitors are worse than the Germans! I promised to Pobidash that I would get him unless I die here and we do not meet back at home. I will pay him back!”

“He deserves it, scum!”

“Do you get tied to the post for misbehaviour?”

“No, they have not invented it yet.”

“Ours tie us up to a concrete post! Mikola from Skarzintsi got tied with barbed wire around his hands and legs, he spent the whole night like that. He does not know how he managed to stay alive.”

“They are butchers!”

“Boys, did you hear when they would send us home?”

“Nobody knows. Firstly we heard that we would work here for 3 months, then – home. Now it is quiet.”

“We have the same rumours .”

“Any news about the front?”

“Nothing certain. Spanish prisoners told us that the German invasion on the east failed. And Stalingrad has been surrounded for a month now but they cannot take it.”

“And they won’t! The same way that Moscow and Leningrad did not fall. It is a fact, I was told by an Englishman. We will see victory!”

“As it is said, our street will have a celebration” (*Russian proverb*).

“And then we will be asked where have we been , what have we been doing.”

“But it is not our fault that we are here. We were made slaves!”

“And, probably, not only us. Could be millions.”

“That’s right. But it is partly our fault that we were brought here. We should have gone to the forest, to the partisans.”

“Why are the English not doing anything? They are our allies, but they keep very quiet.”

“They could have sent landing force here, they have enough ships.”

“Who knows... Once we saw 3 English planes. They were attacked by anti-aircraft guns, turned round and never returned.”

“They are probably afraid: the Germans are strong! And we help them...”

“What a life!”

“And our girls do not have a nice time either. Poor things, they were left in Germany. Did you hear about them?”

“No. And they would not know where to write.”

“Should we have a drink for our meeting?”

“Drink dirty water from the puddle... Bloody German slavery! How could we imagine?”

“We knew it would be difficult, but not this horrible.”

“Keep your chin up! Soon we will get back to Markushi.”

“Boys, do you know why Vasil will not go back?”

“Why?”

“Because he has an English girlfriend here!”

“Where did she come from?”

“Ask him.”

“It is true?”

“Stop talking rubbish, Stepan. During one of our raids I met a local family. They gave me food – bread, boiled potatoes. Stepan had some, and still he is excited...”

And the villagers kept talking for quite long time remembering home, families, thanks to the rain. I looked at the boys and saw how they had changed during the last months. That boyish courage had left Terentiy’s eyes. His grey eyes showed now something new and stubborn. But he was too thin and pale... Michael Melnik had changed less : he was physically strong, wide shoulders, long hands, slow in movements. But he bore signs of slavery too...

At this time the rain stopped. One could see continual waves in the ocean from these heights. Patches of ground-green camouflaged barracks situated almost on the ocean side became clearer.

“There is a camp. Is it your “Udet”?” I asked Teren.

“No, our camp is more south, on the hill, far from the coast. This is probably “Brinkfort”. You see the watch-towers on the four corners? Our prisoners of war live there.”

“They seem to be guarded more than us.

“I heard that the discipline there is even stricter than ours. Not long ago we were laying cable near the rock carrier, and saw their column. The Germans had guns and dogs. The prisoners were dressed in tattered Red Army uniforms or jackets with red crosses on their chests and shoulders. The majority wore wooden shoes. When they walk they sound like horses...”

The sun started showing, and “Black” gave a signal – time to start work. The villages hugged each other, bid farewell and shook hands promising to meet more often. All were happy and excited with this lucky chance meeting. This unexpected meeting had shaken our souls. Every one was remembering dear Ukraine, dear friends and relatives, and their eager hope for freedom...

Bent low I was digging the sticky ground, but my thoughts were at home...

Chapter VIII. Tragedy with parsnips

But the island of Jersey was giving new trials... During those autumn days I was just unlucky. You do not have time to get to grips with one misfortune before another falls on your head. I was tortured with hunger, it exhausted my power, forced me to search for ways to find something edible...

Not far from the place where Max's 4th brigade had been working for some days, I saw a garden with late, red apples. The weather had got better, it was sunny for two days, the puddles dried, and it felt if summer had returned. The ocean calmed down and became blue...

I was carefully spying after Black, hoping he would leave for some time, but he was not planning to leave the column. But this lunchtime after I had quickly drunk my "soup" and found a moment when Max himself had gone to eat I decided. The friends approved and I jumped into the bushes, scrambled through ditches, climbed over fences and finally reached the garden. Nobody was around. I chose a richly harvested apple-tree and jumped onto it. I tried an apple – a bit sour, but no time to choose riper. I had a hiding place: it was long ago when I had made holes in the pockets of my father's jacket, and now I stuck the apples straight inside. After a couple of minutes, the bottom of my jacket was heavy and full. I jumped down – still nobody around. Again I climbed over fences and crawled through ditches and returned back. Just in time! Black was just walking towards the column, pulling out from a pocket his policeman's whistle.

"Good boy, just in time!" praised me Grisha, when I gave everyone two reddish apples. We ate them secretly.

"We will take the rest to the camp, hide it and we will have food for a couple of days!"

"Take your jacket off, because the lining is pulled out too much."

"True..."

I took my jacket off and carried it in my hand. At the work place the boys put their clothes together in a heap. Work started. Everything seemed OK. Black by some reason was jolly and shouted less than usual. I kept glancing at him from side with anxiety, staying bent over so as not to get extra attention. But in the evening, nearly an hour before the end of the working day, Max looked at the heap of clothes with suspicion. He came closer, touched my jacket with his stick. I became frozen.

"Whose *mante!* Whose rag?" he screamed.

"Not mine... Not mine..." the boys were answering fearfully, moving the heads.

"So whose?" The "Chief" screamed with more anger.

I looked around confused and bewildered, but there was no help from anywhere. My legs became weak, but I overcame my fear and stepped forward.

"This is my jacket" I said and looked down.

"Come here, open it!"

I opened the jacket and displayed the fruits.

“So you, bastard, you have stolen apples?!” shouted Black, his eyes full of blood and rage, bursting out of their sockets. “ Stolen apples, sacrilege?!”

And my shoulders received a shower of blows. Shielding my head with my hands, I slipped out, jumped aside, but it was beyond me to run away from the well-fed and strong Fascist. He ran for me and brought his stick down on my shoulders and head with a shout...

“Bring them!” he screamed and dragged me, out of breath, to the box of tools. “Pour them out, empty them in here!”

I emptied all my “harvest “.

“March to *arbait* (work – *Germ.*)!” he spat and hit me on the shoulders with his stick for the last time.

I took my spade. I did not cry, but my head, hands and shoulders were aching after the beating. My heart was full with anger, and I swore: “You, Fascist scum, I will pay you back!”

How I would thank Black I did not know yet...

After the last signal, when we were putting our metal sticks and spades into the box, Black like a priest handing out blessing was giving every prisoner an apple. I weakly came the last, but when Max saw me, he lashed out with his stick, I twisted away and avoided the blow. The boys avoided my eyes, and no one dared to chew those unlucky apples in the front of me...

And before my wounds from Max’s stick had had time to heal, a new disaster befell me, which crept up on me slowly and without notice like a cat to a mouse on soft paws...

We were working at the place where not long ago we met our fellow villagers Teren and Michael. When digging the ditch the brigade reached a green meadow. The ground there was soft, covered with green grass and other juicy growth. Nasar Gusatyi from Ternopol was digging near me, much older than myself, but much more exhausted – like a skeleton with yellowish skin over it. The fleas were walking over his rags, walking on his head, even in his eyebrows... Generally, these parasites invaded the barracks and there was need for dramatic action to get rid of them. We had not washed nor had a shower or bath since we were taken to the island to “Immelman”, and we were not given clean underwear or clothes. We washed our rags in cold water without soap. So these parasites had ideal living conditions and were breeding like wild fire. The parasites were biting our bodies very painfully, especially behind the collar, in the waist and in the groin. The boys tried to kill them with the fire causing them to crack like gunfire. But it was impossible to stop them. Some who were particularly exhausted lost any desire to struggle with them – and the parasites were drinking their last juices... That was Nasar Gusatyi: his swollen legs hardly carried his exhausted body. That was the result of his passion for “coffee”. In the morning he would collect a whole bowl of the smelling liquid, dark and without sugar, and would drink until his stomach would resemble a drum. And at

lunch and dinner he would add water to his soup: it made it feel like more food. But his body would swell up, his feet would become heavy as if filled with lead... These were the signs of encroaching death... Already dozens of the prisoners had died in the camp, and often they were “coffee-drinkers”.

. Luckily, Markushers (i.e. those from Markushi) did not drink it...

So, that was Gusatyi’s fault for my misfortune. Whilst digging he spotted some root. He took out a knife, peeled the root and started eating it. But this time my intestines were mad with hunger, and when I saw my neighbour eating something, I asked with surprise:

“What are you nibbling?”

“This is parsnip. Do you want to try?”

“What is parsnip? Can one eat it?”

“At home, we add it to borsch and soups to enhance the flavour...”

“And it is tasty?”

“Almost like carrot ... Look how much of it is around...”

My stomach was demanding food; I could not wait for lunch... Devil with it, if Gusatyi could eat it I would too. I remembered the song I heard in my childhood:

“The fish was dancing with lobster

And parsley with parsnip

And onion with garlic

And the girl with kosak...”

It looked like parsnip was edible! So I tried it whilst Black was not around. Grisha and Stepan were far ahead, and the column stretched out for 100 meters... I dug out a couple of white roots, peeled them and tried. They tasted semi-sweet, sickly sweet-sour. I chewed a bit and swallowed with disgust. Just to ease my hunger I forced myself to eat two roots...

In half-an-hour the lunch arrived. The boys were eating “soup”, standing under cover where we once met our villagers from “Udet”, but afterwards they had not come back, they had been transferred somewhere else...

Suddenly everything in my eyes got dark, the earth started moving around quickly... I looked at Stepa with surprise, wanted to say something but did not have time: my legs buckled and bent under, and I fell on the ground... I do not remember what happened after that because I fainted instantaneously... Later Stepa and Grisha told me.

“What is with you, Vasilko?” screamed frightened Grisha, but the boy, i.e. myself, was silent with a white face like a corpse. Slowly my eyes half-opened, and I moaned.

“What happened to him?” Stepan asked Grisha anxiously. “We were just talking to him, he was even laughing... And then he felt down...”

The whole brigade surrounded me.

“Call the chief!”

Max arrived after a minute.

“*Was ist lios?* What happened?” he shouted, seeing me lying half-dead on the ground. He poked me with his stick but I just rolled over and did not make a sound. “Who hit him?”

“Master chief, nobody hit him...He was standing with us, talking and suddenly he fell down”

“Car, to the camp!” shouted German.

The truck arrived which earlier brought the cisterns full of “soup”, opened the side. The boys lifted me and put me near the cisterns.

“Master comrade, we will go together” said Grisha pointing at himself and Stepa.

“*Nicht!* One!” screamed Black and ordered Stepa to leave the car.

I regained consciousness in the camp. Slowly I opened my eyes and saw two dark figures on top – Grigoriy Borodiy and somebody else, older. Only later did I recognize the hairy head of the camp field doctor Michael Ivanovich whom I visited often with festered boils and wounds, and which he put ichtiol cream on. I saw strange circles, and my mouth felt sour.

“Water...” I said weakly.

“Now, Vasia, now!” Grisha run to the bucket. “Here, drink.”

“How do you feel?” asked the field doctor.

“Why am I here?”

“The truck had brought you, don’t you remember?”

“No...”

“Dear boy” said me Michael Ivanovich. “ You have food poisoning. What did you eat today?”

“What? ... Soup...”

“And this is all?”

“I think all. And, I remember, the parsnips ...”

“What parsnips? Where did you get them?”

“There, in the meadow ... We dug them out with Nasar Gusatiy and chewed them...”

“Now, my friend: after this parsnip you could have died – we almost lost you! Never again, you eat those parsnips!”

... I really did not remember a thing. When Grisha told me how I fell down under cover, how they took me by car to “Immelman”, how the field doctor Michael Ivanovich filled me with some mixture with force after which I was twisted in vomiting – I was as surprised as if my friend was telling me about somebody else.

After an hour, I felt stronger. Firstly, I sat on the bed, then stood up and swaying as if I was walking against a strong wind walked to the barrack with Grisha’s support.

In the evening, when the 4th brigade came back to the camp, breathless Stepa Vichrishuk rushed in.

“Vasya, you alive? What happened to you?”

When I told him how Nasar Gusatyi had showed me how to eat that parsnip, Stepa jumped:

“I have forgotten to tell you: Gusatyi died, his dead body had already been brought back to the camp.

So, you were eating that parsnip together?”

“Together... I just tried, and Nasar had a lot...”

“Now he will not eat anything anymore!”

“Then that was my way too...”

“Forget about it! Now you will have long life!” encouraged me Grisha...

Next morning I walked to work again. And Black, as if nothing had happened, pushed me forward with his stick:

“Move faster, animal!”

The column was marched to an old workplace- to dig into the mountain. But I was even happy – never again would I see that parsnip...

I had a secret, which was know to nobody apart from Grisha and Stepan. It was a long notebook – a piece chopped off from some old ledger, where, with a broken indelible pencil I was jetting down the affairs happening around me, the camp lexicon, German words – something like a diary, but if the Germans found it I would be very unlucky indeed... Sometimes my head would create some poetry lines, which I would write down too to in my “undercover” book. I did not own boots with top flaps like Taras Shevchenko (**famous Ukrainian poet of 19th century, who spent a long time in penal servitude for his anti-tsarist poems - translator remark*), but I carried that book in the lining of my father’s jacket or hid it in my bed. In those days I continuously remembered lines from Shevshenko’s “Kobsar”, and I was comparing the fate of some Ukrainian comrades – prisoners in Turkish dungeons, which in reality had many similarities to the concentration camp “Immelman”. Slowly in my head I gave birth to the versus I called “The prisoner’s thoughts”, the last lines of which I finished that autumn’s evening. And after reading it again I smiled happily. Grisha noticed that and said:

“O, Vasilko has composed something interesting, let me see.”

I was shy even for my closest friend, but said:

“OK, you can read it, but silently”

“Can I listen?” asked Christuk.

“Read with your eyes...”

And moving closer together the boys read the versus.

..... Versus – not translated

I was closely watching the boys whilst they were reading.

“Excellent!” cried Grisha with excitement.

“All he has written is the truth , just like Shevchenko!” said Stepa.

“We did not know that we had a real poet amongst us!”

The word “poet” gave me invisible wings, gave my heart some new, unknown power!

Chapter IX. Meeting behind bars

We, Ukrainians, expected December, the first month of winter to be full of white snow whirlwinds, windows painted by frost with strange exotic palms... But here, in Jersey, it was an unusual winter: the island was covered with fog. Waking up in the mornings, the prisoners did not see the daylight – first the island was shrouded into a black darkness, which changed into grey milk, with visibility no more than 10 paces. The prisoners were happy with this, because they would leave for work half-an-hour later. Sometimes the fog would clear at midday; sometimes it would continue for the whole day. The sound of the tides was getting louder, and we imagined ourselves sailing on some giant ship!

Now there were machines at the place where the 4th brigade started breaking into the mountain with their crowbars in the summer, but we had moved ahead very little being hampered by the hard rock. All day the noise of the compressor rumbled and roared in whirlwinds of dust: three young, blonde, tall Dutchmen drilled deep holes into the granite breast of the mountain. Then two German demolition engineers put dynamite into the holes, connecting electric cables to the cartridges. One of them would give a blast on a trumpet, everybody would run away for a hundred meters, and another German who was hiding underneath an iron trolley, would turn the holder of an electrical machine – and the explosion rumbled! The earth jerked heavy stones and thousands of fragments and splinters were flying in the sky, with a cloud of dust growing over the mountain. And when the dust settled everybody would return to the ruined mountain and more work was on the way. Pebbles and ground were loaded into the trolleys. The Dutch would switch their augers for miner's picks and pneumatic drills and smash big lumps of granite into small ones. It seemed that the management of Organization Todt was unhappy with the progress of the columns of the Russian prisoners, because despite the "efforts" of chief Max Gaints, using our crowbars, we had gone through no more than 200 metres, working just to get to the evening without any special efforts. Therefore, in order to speed up the opening of the railway the commanders put in the machines.

At one moment of pre-explosion haste, when "Black" weakened his attention, I used it for my own interest. When the German blew the trumpet, for everyone to leave their workplaces, I hid in the bushes and then rushed to see my old English friends whom I had not met for a long time. I saw the proprietor near the familiar house.

"Mr. John, Gутten Tag!"

The landlord turned his head, pulled his unchangeable pipe out, and smiled with surprise.

"Ah, Russian Basil! Come!" he waved his hand and led me inside the house, sitting me at the kitchen table. "Mary!" he shouted into another room, and mother and daughter came out.

"Hello, Mrs Mary, Miss Nelly!.."

“Basil, where have you been, why did not visit us?” Nelly chirped like a bird.

“I was working very far from here, over there!” I waved my hand.

“How thin you are!” the girl pointed at my sinking cheeks. Then looked at my dark, sharp, hard callused hands, breathed with sadness and nodded her head: “What they have done to you!...”

During this time, the mother prepared food: potato soup, bread with butter, milk. I quickly dealt with all of it. I stood from the table, thanked everybody and asked the father:

“Mr John, how is the front?”

“The front is good! Red Army... Stalingrad!” he clenched his fist meaning that the Red Army was standing tight, the city on Volga was standing its ground. “The British Army and American – the African front, Algeria! Soon they will be here! Then freedom will come to Jersey...”

“Good, very good!” I agreed with lit up eyes.

Nelly came closer to me, looked at my mended shirt full of holes, and said something to her parents.

“Yes” said the father, and the mother left the room and after couple of seconds brought back a brown jacket with a round bottom, not new but as good as!

“Put it on!”

I put the jacket over my tattered shirt. It was long, wide, and convenient, with long sleeves.

“Good!” John slapped me on the shoulder, and I went red.

“Thank you, mother!” I kissed Mary’s hand, and she had tears in her eyes. “Goodbye, Mr John, Mrs Mary, Miss Nelly!”

I was already outside when Nelly shouted:

“Basil, wait!”

She forced into my hand a half-baton of bread.

“Merci, Nelly!”

When I run back to the mountain, my fellows were already returning to their working places. I was very afraid that “Black” would have noticed my absence and would ask where I got the jacket from. Had I not already suffered enough misfortune? Thankfully, luck was with me.

“What a lucky one you are!” said Grisha Borodiy with envy, chewing pleasantly strong-smelling English bread, when I told him about my new visit to Nelly’s family.

“I already said that he doesn’t need to go home! He will get married here and will become the master!” mocked Stepa.

I just smiled... Talks about home, our dear Ukraine were occupying the prisoners more and more. There were various rumours, which were spread one after another. It was said that after we finished building the railway we would be sent home... In the last days the main gossip was that a party of prisoners had already been sent home. And this news was confirmed...

Once we, those from Markushi, by accident met the Raihle's column from "Udet". There was only Michael Miroshnik.

"Where is Teren?" I asked.

"Oh, he is the luckiest of us all! He is probably at home by now!"

"True?"

"True. He was sent from the island two weeks ago."

And Michael told us what had happened to Koshoviy. Their chief, that short finger-less Raihle, appeared to be a real butcher. Teren in general had a stubborn character, did not obey the Germans, and was doing everything the wrong way round. Raihle often beat Teren with a rubber hose and left him without lunch, so that at the end Teren was on the last stage of dystrophy and could not walk. He was put into the camp sickbay. And not long after that the sick and crippled from "Udet", about seventy prisoners, were sent from the island by boat to an unknown destination, but there were rumours that they had been sent home...

"He got lucky, Koshoviy!" envied Stepa Vichrishuk. "When is our turn?"

"Who knows, it is heard that soon everybody will be sent..."

"When half of us die!"

"Probably, then..."

The villagers split again, but from that time there was hope in our hearts that departure from this bloody island was not far away...

In the meantime, we had to work, without rest, hollowing the rock with our pick-axes, filling the trolley, pushing it on the rails to the ditch and tipping it out. And when the embankment fell down, we built it up again and leveled it. And then the people would take crowbars in their hands and with the command "One-two, go!", "One more, go!" we would infill the railway lines... Then everything would start all over again...

To say the truth, there were occasions when "Black" would disappear somewhere – maybe to get a new stick from the woods or to drink some water- then the prisoners would immediately stop work and rest a bit. And Max knew that when he was absent the work stopped. So he would steal up to the side where nobody expected him, catch us off guarded – and then satisfy his "appetite" on the backs of the prisoners.

Another time when he had gone somewhere, the boys straightened their backs.

"Go and check where "Black" has gone" Grisha said to me.

I put my spade down, looked around – he was nowhere to be seen! Just as I was going to give the signal to the boys to take a rest I suddenly saw him: he was sitting bow-legged straight in the front of me, behind a bush of blackberry. I could see his white underwear and in his hands he had a piece of paper, possible a letter from his wife, which he was re-reading before using it. Generally, reading

letters in the toilet – seemed to be an army habit. “Black” could not see me. I noticed a round, quite big stone on the side of the embankment and suddenly got an idea: I would pay “Black” back for all his offences! Without thinking, I pushed the stone and it started rolling down the embankment. I jumped to my spade and started working. Some of the prisoners saw my action, but nobody knew for sure what happened. But when almost in unison with the sound of falling rock we heard “Black” cry out, everyone immediately understood, and we all became very busy with our work. What would happen now?! Half-crippled and relying heavily on his stick, Max crawled up. His face was grimaced with pain and rage, he was swearing horrendously, spitting saliva. Running towards us he screamed madly:

“Who?! Who did this, you Bolshevik bastards?!”

His mad eyes were running around the boys, but they were looking at him with surprise, as if were seeing him for the first time.

“Who threw the stone, you mad Russian dogs?!” shouted the Fascist, running toward Grisha Borodiy, who was standing nearest to him, and raised him stick.

“I do not know, Master Chief! May be it fell down by itself...” said Grisha protecting his head with his hand against the coming blow. But the stick landed on his shoulders. Then the raging “Black” was running screaming and asking everyone:

“Who, Russian dog?!”

“I did not see...”

Thwack!

“Who?”

“I do not know...”

Thwack!

My back received a blow too: I too said that I did not see. But now I was casting sidelong glances with worry at the others: would someone get frightened by that knotted and gnarled stick and point at me? Then I would be dead: “Black” would mix me into the ground!.. But the boys were standing mute, they were used to being beaten. And then without getting an answer “Black”, choking with swearing, sat down on the granite, powerless... I celebrated victory inside myself! Aha, now you, Fascist scum, you have been paid according to your deeds! Pity, the stone only hit you on the leg, not in the head! The boys were thinking the same but worked with double effort, wondering what would happen later: because the matter was not finished yet, “Black” would not give us such a present! And true, Max was watching us until the evening with inhuman rage, punishing the exhausted, and disobedient people with horrid cruelty. But in the evening he gave us the cruelest punishment: he did not give us the tickets for dinner, we were left without bread and “soup”.

Hungry people were locked in the barracks, and they sat down on their bunks tired. Nobody said a word...

I was feeling badly: it was my fault that the boys were left hungry...

"Grisha, I will go now and tell "Black" that it was me" I whispered to Borodiy. "May be, he will give you the tickets..."

"Shut up!" angrily said Grisha. "Everybody takes the blame, because you paid "Black" for all of us! We will survive... We should get bread tomorrow..."

"But how can you stand it?"

"What can you do?"

"Grisha... Lets run away from this hell..."

"Where? We are surrounded by water... We are separated from the mainland..."

"We could sneak to the port... There are ships, which sail to France... We can hide on the ship – and sail! There it would be easier..."

"They are waiting for you there! Don't you know that the island is full of Germans? It's rubbish, we will get caught immediately..."

"We have nothing to loose... What if we do not get caught? Let's try, the devil with it! See, Danko ran away, they did not catch him..."

"You do not know this for certain... No, Vasilko, I will not get into such an adventure... And my advice to you: Don't... Let's go to sleep..."

Grisha turned around and soon I heard his snoring... But I was full of anger. How much can a man stand it?! Already we were only bones and skin! No, I had to run away, and immediately, that night! But I needed good companion, and neither Grisha nor Stepa would join me... Never mind, I would escape myself! If I could not manage to sneak to a boat, I would go to Mr John, he would introduce me to good people... There must be real fighters, an underground organisation...

The plan of escape was born instantaneously, I could not calm down, go to sleep... All around me exhausted convicts were fretfully, like frightened rabbits: one was talking in his sleep, another was moaning, the majority were snoring... Sometime early night, I made my final decision. Quietly I went across the floor and opened the door. It was very dark and raining. Only the spotlight occasionally lit up the kitchen. I quietly rushed into the toilets, and listened: there were human voices somewhere – probably, the guards were talking to each other. The voices were approaching. Soon their slow steps passed by. So that night the guards were walking around together instead of one by one. That was better. I would have about 10 minutes before they returned. I waited a minute, and then it was time to start...

A little while previously I had checked behind toilets and there was the place near the post where there was a small hole, which could be widened. I pulled the wire – it moved: the hole got bigger. I

put the leg in – it went through. But when my head and a hand went through I became entangled on a barb. I froze. With my free hand I managed to free my shoulder, but caught my trouser leg... Finally, I crawled through the first hedge, and there was one more to go. Here it was easier. I went to the post and crawled up on the wire. On top I swung my legs over and jumped to the ground. I just had time to run 10 metres and lie in the ditch when I heard the heavy steps. “Had I been seen?” – the thought was drilling. Luckily, the guards went by without stopping busy with their interesting conversation. I felt easier. As the Germans moved further away, I got up, stumbling over and getting caught by the bushes of blackberry. I trudged along and stole away from the camp. I was walking on a road leading to St Helier, where there was the main dream – the port with ships one of which would take me to France... And from there I would go to dear Ukraine... How? I would see... Soon in the darkness I was walked through a field, my feet slipped on something hard... “Beetroot or Swede!” – the thought lightened me and I immediately felt dreadful hunger. I fell on my knees and touched some round tubers... I pulled one out, cleaned it with my jacket and bit deeply into it... Only after I had chewed it did I realise that it was a turnip. The farmers cultivated them the whole year round to feed their cattle. What a joy that turnips exist! Even though it tasted between a radish and a Swede, it was edible. I sat straight on the ground and ate the cold sour tubers until my stomach was full. A couple of tubers I put inside my pocket to reserve for tomorrow: I did not know when I would next find food, this would be my breakfast... When I stood up, I realised that it was more difficult to walk: I perspired, my energy left me, I felt sleepy... There was darkness around, only the sound of the ocean waves could be heard: ocean was near... At least before morning I had to get to the town... As far as possible from the bloody “Immelman”. Because in the morning “Black” would discover that Marempolskiy had gone... Then they would start to search...

I don't remember how long I walked... I went through fields, crawled over ditches, went downhill in meadows and walked up hills... I ran out of power, and trudged along in some semi-consciousness state... I regained my sense of reality only when I blundered into something sharp: a hedge of barbed wire... Immediately my jacket was caught by sharp barbes, a bell began to ring... And whilst I was trying to free my jacket, I heard heavy steps, and a shaft of light beamed straight into my eyes... An automatic rifle chattered, bullets whistled past by my ears...

“Halt!” somebody shouted in German.

Two soldiers in metal hats with rifles ran towards me, grabbed my hands and led me off somewhere... What happened after – I hardly remember... Like a dream, I remember being led by those soldiers, pushing me with the rifles... In a room I was undressed and searched but apart from two turnips, they found nothing.

“Who are you?” an officer demanded.

I realised that to refuse to answer was impossible and replied:

“Ich bin Russich... Camp “Immelman”

“What have you been doing outside in the night?”

“I got lost... I was looking for the camp “Immelman”

The Germans kept asking about something else but I could not either understand or reply to their questions... At dawn I was put into the back of a truck in a convoy, and we drove somewhere... And then I saw German planes with black and white crosses... “Aha, I had made it to the German airdrome, that’s what I had done!” – I realised. I was driven over asphalt-surfaced road between fields and gardens of the English farmers, and then I saw the port and the town in the distance... My heart ached... So there I was being taken under guard to that town where I wanted to go... But everything was ruined: I was a slave again, and did not know how all this would end... We went by narrow town streets, the car stopped somewhere in the centre near a beautiful building, with a German flag with a swastika on its flagpole. I was led into a room where there was a German officer sitting at the table. He started asking me about something, but I replied:

“Ich nich fershtein... Ich bin Russich...Camp “Immelman” ...

After that they led me to the basement and locked me in the cell. It was semi-dark inside. When my eyes got used to the dark, I noticed a figure on the floor in the corner: a slim blonde man was looking at me with grey eyes.

“If I am not mistaken, I have the company of a fellow countryman” he said on clear Russian language.

“So, and you are Russian?”

“What devil, if not Russian, can sit in this hole... Come here, do not be frightened... Sit here, closer. May be you have a cigarette?”

“No, I do not smoke.”

“But, I see, you are only a child... What camp?”

I did not like it that this unfamiliar Russian had immediately started asking me questions... May be he was a spy?

“What is it to you?” I blurted out.

“I see, you did not fall from a tree. I am happy that I now have somebody to talk to... Sit down. You will get to know me, you will understand that I am not a spy! Am I lying? You were walking to the port to get on the ship and go from here... home!”

“May be yes, may be no... Where we are?”

“At the German headquarters of the island of Jersey.”

“Have you been here long?”

“That is a military secret” said the Russian, and we both laughed.

I put my wet jacket on floor, I looked at my companion closer. He was a young blonde man about twenty years old, with clear grey eyes, underneath which there were blue bags, with sunken unshaven cheeks.

“Did they beat you?”

“Do you think they were smoothing me up?”

I already liked the voice of this Russian, and said:

“You guessed right that I planned to go to the port... I am from “Immelman”, do you know this camp?”

“I heard about... I am from “Brinkfort”... I had the same plan like you... But they caught me, Herods (**Biblical Judi tsar who ordered to kill all newborn babies in order to kill Christ*)...”

“So you are a prisoner of war?”

“Aha.”

“I heard that it is worse there than in our camp, civilians...”

“I know that you do not get much honey too ... What is your name?”

“Vasil Marempolskiy... I am from Ukraine, village Markushi in Vinnitsa region... May be you heard of it? And you?”

“I am Siberian, from the village Lokot in Altai... I was serving in Ukraine in the army... Our brigade was stationed in Berdichev...”

“Berdichev? But this is near my village, only 40 km...”

“And you did not trust that we are fellow villagers... Glad to meet you. My name is Krockchin Michael Maksimovitch.”

“A pleasure... Have you already been interrogated?”

“A couple of times. They keep questioning whether I had helpers. We often broke the rock-breaking machine.... But no way will I tell them!”

“ Do they beat you when they interrogate you?”

“Oh, And how!”

Thus I met Michail Krockchin.

“You know, I have not slept this night, I desperately want to sleep...”

“Sleep, you will feel better...”

I lied curled up and quickly drifted into oblivion... In my dreams I saw “Black” running after me with his stick, and the Germans in their metal helmets...

When I woke up I saw the cell with barred little window and Michail.

“So, slept a bit? You slept disturbed... What did you dream about?”

“Black” was running after me with a stick...”

“German?”

“Chief of our column... Mad animal!”

“They all are the same.. Do you think ours are better?”

That day the prisoners were not disturbed for some reason, and we talked until late evening... I felt trust toward my friend in trouble and told him almost everything about myself... How I lived in Markushi, how I dreamed about partisans, but instead was caught and taken to Germany... Happened to be in Jersey... How I met Mr John and his family... How I paid back “Black” for all his tortures and escaped from the camp dreaming to get on a ship....

We were not given lunch. Only in the evening did the German throw us two pieces of bread and two cups of water, and we ate two turnips, which I still had in my jacket. When we lay down covered with my jacket, I listened to Krockin’s story about his fate...

“How did you get taken into captivity?” I asked.

“That is a long story...”

And Krockin told how he, born in Siberia, was enrolled to serve in the Army in April 1941, he was serving in Berdichev in autobatalion... But it already felt as if a war was in the air... On 16 June they were woken up by the alarm and went to the border on the west, and five days later the bombs started exploding, planes with black-white crosses appeared in the sky – the war had began. Michael was near little town Kremenets... They retreated to Kiev, where they stood hard in defense, it was decided to give the Fascists a fight! But the Fascists realised that they would not take Kiev by storm... They encircled us, and then went further east...

“Then you had been defending Kiev? When was it taken?”

“In the middle of September, last year.”

“But the Germans who occupied our village were boasting that they had already taken Kiev!”

“Lying dogs! We gave them a hard one in Kiev! But we were surrounded and separated from the rest of our forces.”

“You got captured there? “

“No, it happened behind the river Dnepr, on the left bank...”

And for over two hours Micha Krockin was telling me about his wanderings in the POW camps of Ukraine, Germany and France, his escapes, captures life in prisons and camps. The last escape was from the transit camp in St Servain... He wandered around Bretagne and but was caught by the gendarmes. He spent more that a month in the prison of Renne.

“I was taken to St Malo from Renne under convoy of two gendarmes and immediately put on the boat... In the morning I was on this island...”

“You alone were taken to Jersey?”

“Yes, alone, shut in a crew cabin. The boat was delivering cement to the island.”

“Was it long ago?”

“In the middle of September.... Under guard, I was sent to the camp of captured soldiers “Brinkfort”. There I had twenty-five lashes and then was sent to work. We were working in the rock carrier from dawn till dusk. Labour was very difficult, and overseers were mad as dogs!”

“I thought it was only our Max “Black” that was like that.”

“They are all the same!.. But from the first day, I had thought about what sticks I could gather and where I could hide them to sabotage the Fascists! I found some reliable boys and we would break the rock-breaking machine... We would load rocks in the trolley... As a rule, you should fill it with pebbles, fragments. We were looking for big rocks, which we cut into round shapes. And we shaped white rock, which is hard as granite. With the help of those nearby we would load that rock into the trolley and conceal it with a covering of pebbles. The trolleys were turned out into the breaking machine, and then on top of one we would unload another trolley. And the breaking machine cannot take this large rock, because it is round and slips through. As result the whole machine stops and we have to clear the whole machine and take out the rock.... At this time, our boys whose job was to load the trolleys could get at least some rest...”

“Good idea!”

“The poor are good for inventions (*proverbial colloquium*)!” laughed Krockin. “But this did not go on for long. The Germans realised that it was done intentionally. “Saboteurs, saboteurs!” – they shouted and were beating people up with keys and increased supervision... Then I resented to my old tricks... My first escape was not successful. I realised that I cannot escape from the island. After two days I was caught, no, more correctly, I went to the German coastal artillery territory at night, and they got me...”

“The same as me, as last night walked on the German airfield...”

“They took me back to camp “Brinkfort” and tied me with barbed wire to the cement post. This is the punishment for escape in our camp. If you are strong, you can survive the night, and in morning they untie you and put you at the head of the column as penalty... I survived. But how many weaker prisoners died there!... During the night, a man gets very tired, barbed wire eats in the body, bloodstream stops and a man dies... In the morning, they untie already cold corpses...”

“They have not done this yet in our “Immelman”.... Maybe before I get taken back there they will prepare a similar post. I am too weak, I will not stand this execution...”

“You, Vasia, almost a child. What to punish you for?”

“They do not look at it like that... And you ran away again after that post?”

“As you see... And no luck again!”

“Tell me how did you escape this time?”

“As follows... As penalty I was forced to take rocks from the sea and load them on the trolleys. One must not just take it out, you go into the sea up to your neck, feel the stone with your feet, dive and

collect it. Otherwise, the automatic rifle is looking at you... I was tormented like this for a couple of days and decided to run away again. This time I decided to get on to any ship, which was leaving the island... Everything was going according to plan. I hid in the port behind some empty boxes. Found a ship, which had to go from the island and was being loaded with cargo... Even got brave enough to approach the loaders, Islanders-English asked them to help me to get on board. They understood my intention, guessed who was I. I managed to get on board of the ship, which was ready to depart. But soon I felt it was dangerous to hide in the cargo where the Germans would soon come to check. So, I moved to the nose of the ship. There were anchors and drums with ropes, where I hoped it would be less dangerous. But whilst moving over I ran face to face into the commandant of our camp, who was leaving for a holiday in Germany. He knew my face well. He shouted: "O-o-o, Russich Shpatsiren!" – and then, as they say, no comments! I was taken here, to headquarters."

"Why did he have to find you, when you already were on board!" I was shocked.

"Yes, Vasia, my bad luck. .."

"Shame! Overnight you would have been in France... How did they deal with you here then?"

"The Gestapo questioned where I was going and with what objectives, who helped me etc... They took me as Soviet spy... But what could I say? To get answers they hanged me on rope, which was put under my armpits... If I lost consciousness, they let me down, poured cold water over me – and then the interrogation continued, again hanging... After they did not get anything from me, they threw me into this hole... The translator told me yesterday that he pleaded for me that is why I am still alive... And he said that will take me back to "Brinkfort", but I have to stop running away and work well for Great Germany! I am sure that the cement post is waiting for me in the camp!"

"You won't run away anymore?"

"They are stupid! I will escape anyway! I do not want work for them! May be it will be my last escape but I have one choice from two: either life or death!"

"You have a lot of experience of escapes! You, Misha, are a real hero!"

"I am not a hero at all. I am like anybody else... We are just people. And we must remember that everywhere and in all circumstances!"

"You opened my eyes on many things... I will never forget you!"

"Enough, Vasilko, time to sleep... Soon it is going to be morning..."

I could not sleep for long, turning around. I was thinking that tomorrow I would be taken to interrogation, would be hanged and they would insist on my confirmation that I was a spy... But I do not have anything to hide... Krockin, possibly, did not sleep either, but I was not sure whether I should disturb him... Just before morning I drifted into a short sleep little more than a drowsy state...

I woke up because of metal gnashing... It was already light. Michael was sitting next to me, leaning on the wall.

“Vasia, that is for me... Farewell!”

Whilst I was opening and rubbing my eyes, a big Gestapo soldier dressed in black uniform came in and shouted:

“Krockin, *Rauch!*”

When getting up Michael grasped my hand, shook it and went out with a curled back without looking back...

“This is a man!”- I thought with excitement about Michail Krochin. I have not seen such bravery here, amongst the prisoners in Jersey before...

After half an hour they came for me. A tall mannered German officer about 45 years old questioned me. “He is not from the Gestapo!” – I thought with ease. I admitted from the beginning that I was from “Immelman”, Max Gaint’s column. .. Yesterday in the evening when we were walking home I was very hungry and went to a field to get a turnip... The column had gone, and I got lost and spent the whole night looking for my camp but could not find it...

“Why did you appear at the military airdrome?” the German bristled up. “Who sent you there?”

“I walked into the wire by accident at night...”

“You are a liar!” the German got angry and raised his hand but did not hit.

I cried, and through my tears kept repeating that I got lost...

“How old are you?”

“Fifteen...”

“You are too young. You must not run away from the camp. You must work honestly!”

Fortunately, that was the first and last questioning...

Next morning I was punished in “Immelman” with ten lashes, and truddling to work again under the eyes of the hated “Black”, whose bloody stare did not leave me for a moment...

After that meeting with Michail Krockin I became interested in the life of our prisoners of war in the POW camp “Brinckfort” and learned that there was an active underground organisation, which was preparing the escapes of our captured soldiers who were more organised than us, civilians. And some of them achieved serious successes in their search for contacts with a local international organisation of Resistance to Fascism which already existed on the island of Jersey. I will try to tell about some episodes...

Chapter X. Hands of English friends

One autumn morning a long column of “Sovietische Kriksgefangen” – Soviet prisoners of war from the camp “Brinkfort”, which was situated in a narrow line on the western coast of Jersey, close to the seaside, marched with a dense line of predatory “todts” with Alsations and automatic guns. Their feet clad in wooden shoes stamped towards the granite carrier, which was situated in the northwest side of the island. As usually, it was before the dawn. The hardest type of granite was worked there, which after being split and smashed in the machine was used in the construction of bunkers all around the coast of the island. The guards ensured that their charges, dressed in general in tattered Red Army uniforms, were keeping the line order “su fleur” – in four.

The black haired big forehead of the young Siberian Fedor Buriy from Tomsk stood out in one of the front lines of *heftlings* with their thin unshaved faces... He was taken to Germany in June 1942 along with a grey mass of starved, tattered, half-dead prisoners of war from the camp in Orshansk, who were already losing any hope for survival. But he was not left there, as after “sorting” within the group of some hundreds of men they were forced into cargo car trains surrounded by barbed wire and driven away... Where to – nobody knew... This way they arrived in France, St Malo, and in August, as some of the first Russians, were stuffed into the hold of a tattered cargo ship and thrown onto the unknown island Jersey, where they were marched behind three walls of barbed wire of the labour camp “Brinkfort”... The main labour expected of them – supplying granite from the carriers to build bunkers on the seaside... Mostly they were young men, who had already been through bloody fronts and deadly camps for prisoners of war, and yet, after this, they still refused to believe in their minds that the end was near...

“Escape, escape!” – the thought was drilling their brains, even if they did not know where to run because everybody could see that around them was water, sea, ocean! .. There were not many locals, English, mostly farmers, whose houses were spread throughout the island, they grew grain – wheat, corn, barley, and turnip and swede to feed the cattle. There was a garden by every farm with red apples, sweet-sour tasting, they were used, as they learned later, to make house wine – cider...

A dense net of rain hung over the island in the morning. Work in the carrier was postponed: to reinforce their military constructions the Germans were using only dry detritus. Hungry prisoners left their tools on cut ledges of the mountain and were moving downwards to the stone-breaking machine. From the side, near the guard shed, Nazi bandit “todts” watched them. This time some of the prisoners looked hopefully for a narrow patch of turnips... Wet leaves were crunching under feet, somebody managed to pull out a round fruit – teeth immediately ground it.

“Halt! Halt!”

Urging shouts of the toddlers and the used butts of their guns quickly restored order in the column... Fedor Buriy did not rush for turnips this time – the road behind the stone-crushing machine and the steep way up to the mountain terrace took his attention. He turned around and did not see the guard who rushed to those who went to green of turnip plantation...

And to be or not to be! The very first step and immediate alert: there were two cars standing on the road... Who were there? German engineers or local civilians? A man in a leather jacket and beret waved his hand... And Buriy decided. He jumped behind the car and started clambering onto the upper terrace...

“Why were they not firing guns? Why? They had not noticed...!” This guess gave him that invaluable shot of power that prevented him from panic, to throw his tired body over the ledge and stick the head into the rain sodden green shrubbery of a blackberry bush... The blood started running from his fingers cut by the sharp rocks ... His grey clothes were stained with blood. And crude red crosses had been painted with a wooden stick on his grey jacket: a cross on the breast and the back... They were visible from a long distance to make certain that a bullet could hit the body...

“Is it really freedom? Is it the end of this prison jacket?”

As if in reply to the escapee's thoughts, dry fire whipped down at the quarry. His body instinctively pressed almost painfully to the ground... The minutes seemed long like a day without a piece of bread... Then sufficient time seemed to have passed to suggest there was to be no pursuit. And luckily, there was no chase... He had managed to run away – more than he could hoped for in his long dreamt plan.

His wet jacket became heavier. The red crosses became brighter... Now Fedir was running down hill, looking back all the time, hiding behind blackberry bushes... His energy was going with hunger and tiredness... Only when the escapee was certain that there was nobody chasing him did he walk calmly, with straight back, somewhere inside the island. There were bright small patches wheat grass, dug out potato, turnips, hedged with sharp blackberry bushes... Time to time there were fruits on apple trees, and Fedor could not help to stop underneath one tree and lessen his hunger and thirst...

The farmers' houses were spread all over the island with considerable distance between them. They were mainly of brick and stones, two-storey buildings with farmyards and sheds. The brown-coloured cows and calves, the famous Jersey breed, which give milk with a 5% fat content were walking around on leads or freely wandering... The Germans were not seen anywhere, nor were the English farmers ...

According to his reckoning, Fedor was now not less than 2 km from the granite carrier... What to do next? First of all to ask for bread, to get at least some energy, because his power was draining... Then to find a cover somewhere to spend the night, to dry a bit... But everything must be done so as to avoid walking into the Germans, to avoid return to that bloody concentration camp “Brinkfort”!..

Because if he gets caught he will get tied to the concrete post and he, exhausted, will not survive the torture... It looks like he can't avoid meeting with the English, but he must be careful whom he approaches. Probably the best would be the poorest...

And when the rain stopped Buryi came close to a small farm. He lay down hiding behind a bush of heather... There was a middle-aged man doing something near a shed... Who was he: friend or enemy? Fedir remembered the man in the beret: he did not betray him, helped him to escape... It looked like there were friends on this island... This encouraging thought gave him courage. He got up, walked towards the gate...

The farmer Rene La Motte, a middle-aged islander, with black-framed glasses and a brown hat, smiled at the unfamiliar man. When he saw the red cross on his chest, he alarmingly looked around: he realised who had come to him... The columns of people with such crosses he saw on the coast, where they were marched to the granite quarry under enforced convoy... It was said that they were "Russian prisoners" – Russian POW... Before Spanish prisoners were visiting the farm, who were working on the coast. But they were behaving with greater freedom, could speak English or French a bit. But this one was acting in a far more guarded sign: he was hungry...

"Come, comrade" the farmer said in German. His gesture seemed to Fedor inviting and determined. They went into a kitchen with pebbled floor and an old wooden staircase up to the first floor. The proprietor poured a glass of milk and put out some slices of white bread. Buryi hastily chewed, and when he had drained the milk, leaned over the table and fainted... Friendly warm hands picked him up, moved him onto the sofa, and then the stranger opened his eyes. He saw above him friendly face of the farmer with his short mustache and some children, boys. The smallest, John, asked his father: "Who is it? Is it Bill?"

"Yes, it is Bill" replied the father.

Only later did Fedor learn that he was named Bill – after William, the oldest son of the farmer, who since before the Occupation had been serving in English Navy somewhere far away from the island, and the younger children had not seen him for a long time...

In the evening Rene went out to the yard. The island dived into blue fog. The sound of the ocean waves was heard ... The farmer was thinking over difficult thoughts... Then he quickly came back into the house, took the guest to the yard, and then away from the curious eyes of the children, to his wheat field, which was situated not far from the farm. There he created some sort of hovel for the guest in the barn fully filled with hay...

Fedor Buryi did not know that he would live there for a long time. Rene would bring food and necessities himself. Bill's hovel was filled with illustrated magazines and clean paper: to spend time, he was drawing with a pencil – he always liked drawing... Sometimes Rene would spend hours with him. These were subject lessons of English, the basics. It would start like that. Bill pointed at one or

another item, Rene named it in English, and Bill would write the transcription down and try to say it phonetically correctly. In such manner, with German words and mimic and gestures at first, the two representatives of different nations and social groups were communicating, both bonded with hate toward Hitler's occupants, both patriotic anti-Fascists. Their daily meeting grew into trust and closeness – into the feeling which at difficult time bonds people with one similar goal, the interests of their nations...

So Siberian Fedor Buriy, now Bill, became a member of the large family of Jersey farmer Rene La Motte. During all his later life he would call that youngish Jersey farmer, The Man with Big Soul, the man who was the first to help on the long Jersey Odisseya of the Siberian from Tomsk, Fedor Polikarpovitch Buriy. He became Bill, Rene's oldest son-sailor. The farmer and his wife were caring for the young Russian as for their own son, and the smaller children treated him as their older brother Bill.

The barn was his constant place of life, both day and night. Often Fedor would observe the surrounding life through the little window. The farmer told him that this was the outskirts of the northwest part of Jersey, the village of St Ouen. The ocean covered half of the horizon, and was always audible, the noise being louder at night. The sea would change colour depending on the weather: it was blue and gold when quiet and sunny, and when the sky was covered with clouds, the sea would get grey, the waves carried on top white curly lambs, the grey waves were coming on shore with great power... Now, with autumn rains, the sea was continuously grey and foggy...

Bill observed how the locals were passing by on the nearby road by bicycles – women, children, men... Rene told him that there were not many locals as more than a third of the island was evacuated to England before the Nazi occupation. That's why there were so many empty houses with windows and doors crossed with boards... Sometimes German soldiers would drive by on motorcycles... Some times he saw the columns of people – his brothers, Soviet POWs or civilians – grey, miserable – rushed by the todts. His heart would rise, and bath in blood – he again imagined himself in that column...

Now Bill knew definitely where he was. Rene brought the tourist map with England on one side, France – on another, Gulf La Manche English Channel – in the middle. The group of islands called the Channel Islands was situated in this Gulf. The biggest was Jersey, nearer France than England. Its territory is small, the capital – St Helier. This is the port where the prisoners were delivered to the island. So the way back to the Motherland lies through this port...

Often during sleepless nights Bill would move with his thoughts to his family, in the so distant Siberian town of Tomsk... He was born in the village Luki in the Smolensk region in 1919, near the Belorussian town of Mogilev, but after he finished 4 years primary school in Luki's school his peasant family moved to Tomsk. There he went to secondary school but could not finish it as he was the

oldest son in the family. They were difficult times for the country. When he was fourteen he was forced to do something to help his parents. And the boy went to crafts college where he studied drawing and painting. There he was paid a stipend. He graduated with honours (diploma and silver medal). Later he was sent to Moscow where he studied photography. Soon he was mobilised, where he served until December 1940 in Vladivostok... Demobilized as officer in reserve. When the war with Germany began he was mobilized in June 1941 again and went to the front with one of the Siberian divisions...

He fought in familiar regions of his childhood... Last autumn information bulletins of the Soviet Informburo said that there were heavy long fights on the Smolensk front. Days seemed one prolonged fight for the member Fedor Buriy of the Siberian infantry division. The division was breaking through the enemy's circle near Viasma... Fedor was standing until death, fighting till the last bullet...

He stood up and commanded to the group of soldiers: "Fight till death! No step back!"... Sharp wind stiffed his mouth with powder smoke... his voice quieted, he fainted... A bunch of grenades threw him off the top of a moving truck... Fedor fell on beloved land, spreading his hands like wings trying to embrace all the width of it...

... His face was covered with blood. Fedor heard an alien voice above him: "*Shwaine*, get up!"

He opened his eyes: the first thing that surprised him was the angular Fascist swastika that looked like prison bars ... He was taken to occupied Viasma... From there to Dorogobush... He tried to escape on the way to the partisans. He was captured, beaten, thrown behind the barbed wire of Orshansk' concentration camp... He tried to escape again...

... He ducked away from an unexpected blow. The shoulder blades crushed at the back... He felt another blow, then again... He was being beaten – cruelly, angrily, because he tried to escape... His head was nodding powerless. But his half-dead body still felt thousands of small sharp jabs, as he was twined round with barbed wire from the camp... And suddenly the same thought again: "To escape!"...

... Bill imagined sharply the echelon of "dead men" crossing Europe... The only one metal can with sour ersatz-coffee with stale/hard 100g lump of thin liquid soft bread. Then.. What was then? Yes, the hold of a cargo ship... and Jersey, the concentration camp "Brinkfort"...

Exhausted he weakly hit the granite rock with his sledgehammer. Then he was noticed. And he was beaten again in the same pitiless and cruel manner...Then he said to another Russian boy, from Siberia too, Gavril Denisov:

"We must escape, not to lead this dogs life of an existence!"

He agreed, but did not use the moment. Why?.. The escape this time seemed for Fedor Buriy too successful...

... Now Bill in his heart was again near Moscow, which he was guarding with his life.

“How is Moscow? Is it still standing? Did Germany take it?” he questioned Rene.

“Boshes did not take it, they moved back!” explained Rene, drawing on a piece of paper the line of the Eastern front, which was moving towards Stalingrad.

“This is good!” Bill was happy. He knew that the Islanders, like the French, called Germans “boshes” after some sort of bug similar to a locust...

Once in the evening Rene came to Bill with his face full of a good-humored secret. He picked up with a hayfork a bunch of old hay, and there lay hidden a box radio-station underneath. Bill knew that the German occupation authorities prohibited the population of the island from using radio stations and photo cameras and ordered all such items to be surrendered to the German command, otherwise the punishment was severe. It looked like Rene was not afraid!

Rene switched the apparatus on, they heard crackling, music, voices, then they got London, last news...

“What is there new on the fronts?”

“The Germans are unable to get through to Stalingrad in the Russian front...”

“Excellent!”

It seemed a shame to end such an evening...

Now Bill himself would switch the apparatus on daily hoping to catch Moscow but he could not. The radio was working on a battery the power of which was not big. Anyway listening to London he heard names of Russian cities and had a good idea about current front affairs... News was good for him. And the fact that Rene had hidden the radio, and had not surrendered it to the German occupation authorities, enhanced the standing of the English patriot in Bill's opinion.

“Would it be possible to send this news to the POW camp “Brinkfort” or to the quarry?” dreamed Bill and shared this idea with Rene.

“We will try, I will speak to a Spanish acquaintance” promised the farmer.

Bill knew that Rene had meetings with a Spaniard who spoke French, was working as field engineer in the quarry and had the opportunity to communicate with Russian prisoners... And Bill wrote a leaflet in Russian where he told about the current front in Soviet Russia... And although it was under penalty of death for Rene and his family, Rene sent it via the Spaniard to those tormented but not obedient Russian people...

Some weeks after Fedor Buriy woke up after a deep unconsciousness in the room of the farmer Rene La Motte. Long ago his grey jacket with crosses had been burned. Now he looked like a typical Jersey islander: fitting short jacket, blue beret on his head. And although his main living place was in the barn some evenings he went to the house and he tried to work on the farm to thank at least somehow for the care of the family of wonderful farmer Rene La Motte...

Jolly farmer Rene often visited the little shop of Mrs Luisa Goold, which was situated less than 1 km from his farm, where he liked to share a joke with the ladies. It was a time when nice Auntie Goold gave him a credit until the end of the year. But the war worsened her commercial business.

The talks of the locals in the grocery now tended to be about heavy fighting on the far Russian front. The topics of kitchen and everyday life went to the background.

Always clean shaved Mr Rene La Motte left the shop that evening without his usual joke. Mrs Goold noticed: every time after news from the front the blue eyes of Rene would almost hide in the sugar bag. And lately he started buying much more food than usual.

After Rene had gone and the square shop with its detached kitchen had emptied, Mrs Goold was going to lock the door but she heard the voice of her younger sister. Mrs Eve Foster arrived from St Helier. She was lively, full of energy and news.

“You know what our brother has done?” she started with excitement. “His pupils – real men! They went on strike. Yes! Imagine: they stopped attending German lessons! Harold agreed that it was his idea. I think that it will not please the German commandant Von Shmett...”

The sisters talked about Louse’s children over cup of coffee. Where were they now? Louise, who had gone grey recently, went into deep thought. The bedrooms of her sons were empty... The oldest, Dick, died at the Normandy front before the Jersey occupation, in the first year of the war... The youngest, Alex, was studying in Oxford, and now his whereabouts were unknown: somewhere fighting the Germans... She was lonely...

“We heard that the our only hope for freedom from occupation lies with Russia, it is our ally... Only it can break Hitler... And we must help it... I do not know about you, but I share this idea...”

“Yes, Russian successes are not satisfactory as yet but they fight bravely!” replied Louise. “You know my secret, a hidden radio. Sometimes I listen to London... So I am up to date”

“Did you see the Russian prisoners, POWs, civilians, who were brought to the island?” asked Eve.

“I did not see, but heard that they work in the granite quarry on the coast...”

“And the boshes are tormenting them – horror! I saw for myself!”

And Eve told her sister how she was going to visit her in the summer but never managed... That morning a column of people moving on the road took her attention. They were Russians. Bare feet were shuffling on asphalt. The faces of the prisoners seemed grey and dead staring out from their tattered decaying clothes. The Germans with guns and Alsations surrounded the column of exhausted people... Eve felt numb: eyes full of misunderstanding. This was the first time anything like this had been seen here... She automatically touched the nearest woman. That was her old friend Augusta Metcaff. She nodded with a sign to her neighbour and the majority of the women rushed from the pavement to the prisoners. Their bags full of vegetables and fruits were emptied quickly: everything from them was forced into the stretched out hands.

“Raus, raus!” cried the guards.

The prisoners were rushed to the west towards their long barracks... Those barracks on the west coast were frightening the whole island!

That night both sisters could not go to sleep...

... Sometime in autumn Mr Rene La Motte was returning from the shop of Mrs Goold and met on the way an old friend – the Constable of St Ouen.

“Listen, Rene” quietly said the Constable. “There are rumours in the German command that you hide somebody... Be careful... Also there was a signal that the locals of St Ouen steal German rails and use them for house fires... The Germans want to check it and search the whole parish... Be careful! But you did not see me...”

The transparent hint of his old friend worried Rene seriously. Such warnings do not come empty: the boshes can come to search the farm any minute... What to do with Bill? The closer he drew to the farm the more worrying the question was getting...

They discussed it together: Bill understood the situation... To leave his friend farmer out of suspicion he decided to go into the field to spend the night in the hay stuck. There he would think about something... They leave as friends... Bill took out of his pocket the only photo he carried with him for some years...

“Rene, this is for you to remind you about me!”

On the back of it Bill wrote an aphorism struggling with his English: “Friends are tested in trouble. To my friend Rene and his family. Autumn 1942...”

It was after midnight when Bill got up from the aromatic hay. The sky had stars somewhere near sea. According to Rene’s suggestion he would go to good-hearted Auntie Louise Goold...

Bill had already visited her shop. It happened when he risked first to walk in the suburbs of St Ouen. Who would suspect that the young man dressed in a clean English suit, with face and manners of Briton was actually a prisoner? Even careful Rene advised him to visit the shop, hinting about the good nature of Auntie Goold. When they met their eyes they registered mutual understanding. Mrs Goold knew who he was...

... The doors of the shop lead onto the street along which was a shrubbery of sharp bushes. Hiding in their shadow, Bill came to a two-storey building. Nobody answered the door after light knock. He knocked again, louder. He heard the shuffle of slippers and short English: “Who?”

He could not answer this straight question. Mrs Goold looked out of the window. Their eyes met.

“Is it you, Bill?”

“Yes, me”.

“What happened?”

“I had to leave the house of Mr La Motte... I do not know where to go now...”

“Come with me in this case. I lost one of my boys in this war, and others are far away. I want you to replace them for me. I will look after you...”

“Thank you, Mrs Goold”

She gave him the empty room of her son Dick...

... One month passed from the time when Bill started living at Auntie Goold's. He soon became accustomed such that he would go in to the yard. He would be introduced as “the Nephew of Mrs Goold”.

With this Bill would make a respectable face and reply in clear English. Months of study and conspiracy were not wasted. Now the dictionary delivered to Dick's room by Eve Foster is not opened often. Later Bill was walking freely around St Ouen...

The house was filled with news when younger sister Eve and the brother Harold Le Drulenek would visit the older sister. The slimmed down teacher would joke about the deeds of his “on strike” pupils, and cheer Bill up with news from the front. Once quieter he finished his observations.

“According to my observations, ” he said, “an underground organisation has started activity in Jersey helping escapees from the camps. At least I saw their leaflets...”

He immediately remembered the name of an Englishman popular in Jersey doctor McCinstree...

“Is it possible to get in touch with this organisation?” asked Bill hopefully. He wanted to act, to help his comrades.

“I do not know,” thoughtfully replied Harold. “I heard from somebody that this organisation only looks for hide-outs for escapees, gives them food talons and forged German “Auchweist”...”

“I need documents too,” said Bill.

Once Auntie Louise said secretly:

“Bill, not far from here lived one Russian, an escapee from those barracks..”

“Really, Russian?”

“Yes, he lives with the family of my neighbour...”

“Can I meet him?”

“I will speak to the proprietor”

“Is it far?”

“No, about 200 meters from us... The house of blacksmith Mr Harret...”

And Louise pointed through the window to the small house, which was standing lower in the valley.

Next evening Auntie Louise said to Bill that he should go to Mr Harret, they were waiting for him.

When Bill entered the blacksmith's yard he saw a low figure in the darkness. And only as they drew closer did he recognise his friend from the camp.

“Denisov! Gavrill! You!”

“It is me, Fedya...”

“And you escaped from hell?”

“Yes, run away..”

“When?”

“Two weeks I live here... And you? You are unrecognizable – look very English! And you have put on weight! Where do you live?”

“Nearby... I am not Fedor now, I am Bill...”

“ I am called Charlie... Charles , like Darwin”

“What is happening in the camp, are the Fascists raging?”

“Tormenting, scum... Kill to death! And people die from hunger, dysentery, and typhoid... Boys fell down like leaves from trees...”

“ Do they run away?”

“They do, but often they are caught... They tie them to the cement post for a night... Last one I saw tied was Michail Krockin... Do you remember him?”

“Of course! He was tied when I was there too... So, he again tried to escape? Bloody boshes! And you ran from the quarry?”

“No, from the camp... After you went I could not calm down... Was cursing myself that I did not go with you... Who do you live with, who is your host?”

“I have a hostess, Auntie Louise Goold. She has a little grocery shop. She keeps me as her son...”

“ I have a good host too... He is a blacksmith.. Long time ago in the times of the Civil War he was in Russia ... drowning in the sea. Russian sailors saved him, if I understood correctly... He is for us with all his heart!”

Two friends, prisoners, escapees, fellow neighbours- Siberians, spent a long evening together remembering all – home, front ... That they were fighting at the Moscow front almost next each other, both were caught... And together they went through all of Germany and France from Orshansk concentration camp, and in the camp “Brinkfort” they shared the same bunk, shared a last turnip...

“ I am so happy to meet you!”

“Me too.. More than three months I did not hear our loved language... So now I will talk more than enough with you, dear Gavril!”

... Lieutenant Gavril Egorovich Denisov was born in the village of Pensa of the Chulim area in Novosibirsk region. When he was only three, he did not of course know that in the sea near Murmansk there was heavy sea fight raging...

... The sea was agitated. Heavy bombs were tearing the high waves, eating steel towers of the dreadnoughts... The British sailor Materim Harret sent a bomb into the trunk of cannon, but did not have time to fire it: unbelievable power tore the floor from underneath his feet, and he found

himself in boiling after explosion water... The captain of the Soviet esminets (**a type of armed Russian Naval ship – transl.*) simply said when the British sailor was pulled out of the water half-consciousness: “Give the man some food!”

Materim Harret did not understand Russian revolutionary sailors but what he saw were not the devils as he expected told. And when the buckwheat was eaten and the rolled cigarette of Russian tobacco smoked, the British realised that there are common people elsewhere.

... Gavrik Denisov from the small Siberian village did not know that the Soviet commissar ordered Red sailors to save the British sailor from death...

Gavril had various jobs after he finished school. Later he was made bookkeeper as a gifted boy. Then he was sent on a course, and Gavril Egorovitch worked as an accountant in collective farm “Avangard”... He was mobilised in February 1940, and studied again – in the infantry college in Slatoust. On the third day of war ground lieutenant Denisov entered the fight against the Germans. He had fought in Brest, protected Orsha, Mogilev, Moscow suburbs... For bravery he was awarded the rank of high lieutenant. He was wounded in the leg and in the hand, and when an enemy bullet went through him he was captured... He woke up in the prisoners’ camp... When he got better, he tried to escape... Was caught and tortured... Especially in the concentration camp of POWs in Orsha... From there he was sent to Jersey... But he did not give up his thought about escape, especially after the successful escape of his friend Fedor...

The night was miserable and dirty. In the morning came rain. The guard in the high tower was half-asleep. Denisov quietly crawled near the tower, and the night ate him up... He crawled long until realised that there was no chase. Then he stood up trying to get as far as possible from the horror camp “Brinkfort” until the morning. His energy was leaving: half-starving camp food portions and exhausting slave labour were leaving their signs ... He was not sure now whether he was free... Now he was surrounded by strangers and he did not know about their customs or their language... And when in the morning he came to a little house, which was sitting on the hill over the ditch, he risked to knock. A not very tall Englishman with red beard came out on the porch.

“I – Rus... Prison... Escape...” he was saying pointing at himself and waving his hand and still looking around expecting danger.

“Here, here” the Englishman invitingly waved looking around.

And Denisov risked going into the house ... and was still there with this kind Englishman – blacksmith Materim Harret, that British sailor who was pulled out of the water and saved from death by revolutionary Russian sailors... After the escapee was well fed he was given a flat to live in – the attic... And he, lieutenant of the Red Army Gavril Egorovitch Denisov, did not know yet that he would be lucky to spend over two years in the big family of blacksmith Harret until the end of the war and the freedom of Jersey...

They, our heroes, ex-prisoners Bill and Charlie met often... They spent ages talking about the front in distant Russia, waiting for news about Victory and freedom...