

en route to Kolyma was likewise certain that his arrest and exile were the result of a misunderstanding, and that Stalin would surely rescue him if only he heard about it. Three days after his vocal protest, guards pulled his body out of the lager.²⁹

Vahram Alazan too wrote to Stalin from his prison camp in Dalstroy (the Kolyma region). He too was convinced that his exile and incarceration were all a mistake.³⁰ He too waited in vain for Stalin's amnesty. But the Dalstroy sovkhoz (state-owned farm) was heaven compared to the ill-famed prison at Magadan on the Sea of Okhotsk, where Alazan and his brigade were taken by steamboat after an excruciating eight-kilometer walk in the snow to a seaport. Nor did Alazan's ordeal end at Magadan. It took another perilous five-day, 600-kilometer journey north in a snowstorm to reach Kolyma's hard labor camps and the uranium mines of Budugechak ("valley of death" in the Tungus language). The temperature in Kolyma reaches -70° Centigrade in the wintertime, and according to Alazan, some 9–10,000 prisoners trudged from their barracks to the mines and back every day. It is daunting to read the names of the Armenian exiles with whom Alazan shared a lager for a while, many of them renowned artists, writers and community leaders.

In rare moments when my father found the courage to talk about his ordeal, I remember that he mentioned the unimaginably harsh workload, the so-called "norm" or "quota" that detainees were expected to complete every day.

29 Aramyan, «Կոլիմա» (Kolyma), p. 54.

30 Alazan, «Տառապանքի ուղիներով» (Through the roads of suffering), p. 100.