

staff. My father said, “We were lucky if we found just the head of a small fish in our bowl.”

Gustav Herling, a former inmate, recalled watching prisoners line up for the first cauldron, i.e., the smallest ration of food, less than half of what the stronger or the favored prisoners received. “Dazed with exhaustion and swooning on their thin legs, they pushed their way through the hatch, whined plaintively, begging for an extra dribble, and peered greedily into the cans of the second- and third-cauldron prisoners.”³³

Solzhenitsyn’s protagonist, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, tells us how unfair everything was in the camp, and like Gustav Herling, he testifies that even the food was distributed unequally.³⁴ Prisoners had their ranks too. The higher-ups, the bullies, the ones who could bribe the cooks and the warders—most of whom were prisoners

33 Quoted in Hosford et al., *GULAG*, p. 23.

34 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963). This is one of three English translations published in 1963. Solzhenitsyn used his own day-to-day experience in the labor camps to create the character of Ivan Denisovich, so true and credible, so close to reality as a simple Russian worker who had served in the Red Army during World War II, was taken prisoner by the Germans, somehow fled the POW camp and returned to his unit, only to be accused as a German spy and sentenced to ten years’ forced labor.

That was common practice during the war. Once an ex-POW crossed back into the Soviet Union, he was arrested as a traitor, no matter what heroic deeds he might have done in the war. “You should have used your last bullet to kill yourself and not fall in the hands of the enemy,” his interrogator reasoned. In *Gulag Archipelago* (p. 61), Solzhenitsyn further explained that the very fact of a soldier being held captive was considered “injurious to Soviet military might.... According to the Stalinist code, they should all have been shot on their return home,” from which it followed that giving them ten years was only “humanitarian.” In the same work (p. 243), he offered another reason for the arrest of Soviet ex-POWs: “It was absolutely clear even to a fool.... They imprisoned all of them *to keep them from* telling their fellow villagers about Europe. What the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve for.”