

wish he had been more forthcoming in his description of those nightly sessions that deprived him of the only time he was allowed to sleep, but that also, ironically, gave him the only opportunity for human contact and interaction.

Those long sessions of torturous interrogation followed at length by an obscure and unfounded charge-sheet were nothing but the result of the incomprehensible requirement of the NKVD to document the prisoner's case, albeit with false information, prior to his exile or execution. "It is a curious fact that the Soviet authorities were obsessed with the need to obtain that written confession. In most cases, the fate of the prisoner had already been determined, but long hours of intimidation and torture were used to force the prisoner to sign the false document."⁴⁹

Ordinarily, once a "confession" is signed and the "indictment" is drawn up, a court trial should follow. But in those years of Stalinist terror, the trial was dispensed with. In some cases, the interrogator decided the prisoner's fate. In other cases, like my father's, the case went to "trial." In the absence of the accused, a troika (committee of three) in Moscow handed down the sentence which was either immediate execution or a certain number of years of hard labor in the Gulag. My father was surprised to hear that his file had been sent to Moscow and the decision made there without a trial, without his presence. Perhaps he thought his case was exceptional. But that was the *modus operandi*. As Solzhenitsyn explained, "Troikas—panels

49 Hosford et al., *GULAG*, p. 18.