

KAL 007 Survivors and the Forced Labor Concentration Camps of the Russian Federation

By Bert Schlossberg

For most people, the understanding that there could be Forced Labor camps in Russia today is totally unacceptable. And yet...

The period from the downing of KAL 007 until the present begins during the era of the Soviet Union, includes its demise and continues through the rise of the Russian Federation.

It is generally accepted that at least 20 million people perished in the Soviet forced-labor concentration camps—primarily under the steel fist of Josef Stalin. Some of these camps were set aside exclusively, or primarily, for captured foreign nationals. It is also generally accepted that all camps were phased out under the reign of the Russian Federation. But is this true?

Such forced labor concentration camps are characterized by the following features:

1. Their occupants are foreign nationals kept there to work against their will for no pay or for insignificant reward -enough incentive to meet quotas.
2. The occupants undergo threats, deprivation, and torture if they fail to meet work quotas or try to escape.
3. Towers are erected and armed guards are posted to ensure that no one will escape. Summary executions exist and are common.
4. Signs of individuation and individualism as well as personal worth “motifs” are ruthlessly suppressed.

The above four features currently exist in camps of the present Russian Federation and are evidenced by the most public of accessible sources—the newspapers of Russia and of elsewhere. Pertaining to KAL 007, some of these forced labor concentration camps are in the same locations reported in the 1990's to be the incarceration region for some of the KAL 007 passengers.

We begin this story with a country lately very much in the news—North Korea. In the recent attempt by North Korea to obtain aid from Japan, North Korea admitted to Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi what Japan had maintained for 20 years—that 11 Japanese citizens had been abducted and forced to remain in North Korea. The abductees involved were college students who vanished while traveling in Europe, a couple strolling along the beach when they were seized by frogmen off a North Korean submarine, a 13-year-old girl taken from her seaside home, and a businessman who suddenly “went missing” on a business trip.

As the Canadian National Post of September 5, 2002 reported, these people were abducted “so North Korean spies could steal their identities, use them to train espionage agents in Japanese customs [the Soviet style so-called ‘charm schools’. B.S.], or simply be brainwashed to become spies themselves.”

South Korea claims that over 400 of its citizens have likewise been abducted to the North for similar purposes.

Now it appears that North Korea has been abducting its own citizens, its common people as well as its dissidents, up to 30,000 of them, and sending them to *the forced labor concentration camps of the Russian Federation*.

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, April 14, 2001

Pyongyang is continuing its Soviet-era practice of servicing its debt to Russia by sending indentured servants to work unpaid in lumber camps across Siberia. The official, who asked not to be named, said last year North Korea services some \$50 million of its 3.8 Billion debt in this way...

"I feel sorry for them. They all look brainwashed", said Taisia Rozhanskaya, deputy head of Regional Immigration Service in the Primorye region. "They wear pins with the portrait of [Kim Jong Il] and have to attend political gatherings twice a week." ...

In the Far East region of Amur, Tynda Les, a private Russian Joint- Stock company has 1,500 North Koreans working for it in a camp many thought was a thing of the past. Ivan Gayev, aid to Tynda Les' general director,... refused to say whether the workers were paid or treated well, but he did say that his company gets 66 percent of all trees the North Koreans cut, with the North Korean government getting the rest....

Amnesty International... reported that in 1996 the camps were run by North Korea's notoriously ruthless Public Security Service and were equipped with their own prisons. Amnesty also reported eyewitness accounts of workers being tortured and even executed by the PSS."

THE MOSCOW TIMES, August 7, 2001

They are working in labor camps unpaid or for an "insignificant" salary, to pay off their country's debt to Moscow. Human rights workers say at least in the past, they were not free to leave the camps and many had been tortured or even killed for trying...

THE SCOTSMAN, August 7, 2001

The camps were supposedly closed down with the end of Communism, but reports in Moscow say they continue to exist, with North Korea using the system as a way of paying off its GBP 5.5 Billion debt to Russia... In return for labour, Russia cuts GBP 35 Million per year off North Korea's debt...

Approximately 30,000 North Koreans worked for little or no pay sleeping in primitive barracks and wearing prison-style garb of striped shirts and blue trousers.

"We know," said Rachel Denber, deputy director of the New York-based Human Rights Watch, "that Russian police are involved in guaranteeing security for those timber camps where the North Koreans are meant to stay. That means that there is an obvious element of compulsion involved."

Whether the guards are Russians, as in some cases, or North Koreans, as in others, whether Russia benefits directly, or, indirectly through joint-stock companies such as

Tynda-Les, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” to the question “Are there Forced Labor Concentration camps today for foreign nationals on Russian Federation soil?”

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The KAL 007 connection is at once thoroughly suggestive and inconclusive. But this should only spur us on—for lives are at stake.

The general area of the present day foreign-national forced-labor concentration camps is the general area that the Israeli Research Centre For Prisons, Psychprisons, and Forced Labor Concentration Camps of the USSR had reported, as late as the mid 90s, to be probable sites for the captured occupants of the downed and ditched passenger jumbo jet. This is the dense Taiga region along the Amur River paralleling the Sino-Soviet border of eastern Siberia. As indicated on the website, www.rescue007.org:

Our knowledge of the whereabouts of members of passengers and crew of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, shot down on August 31, 1983, is based primarily on information received by the Research Centre for Prisons, Psychprisons and Forced Labor Concentration Camps of the USSR. This research center was established by the late Avraham Shifrin, an Israeli who had, himself, spent time in the Soviet prison camp system. As a major in the Red Army and prosecutor for the Krasnodar Region, northeast of the Crimea, he was responsible for sending many to the Gulags. After he himself was convicted on charges of spying for the US and Israel, he was sentenced to ten years on the harshest of prisons; then seven years of exile in Kazakhstan. Mr. Shifrin maintained an extensive network of contacts within the Soviet Union and its successor states. Much of the information that we have was obtained at great personal risk by his contacts.

The Centre’s investigations in 1989 to 1991 determined that the passengers and crew of KAL 007 were taken, upon rescue, to the KGB Coast Guard base on Sakhalin. Within a few days (by September 4, 1983), everyone was taken to the KGB base at Sovetskaja Gavan on the Siberian mainland opposite Sakhalin, roughly 600 miles north of Vladivostok. Here the men, women and children were divided into separate groups. The men and women were taken by train to Tynda on the Baikal-Amur Railway about 800 miles inland where at least some were put to forced labor. The male adults were, at some point, distributed to a number of different camps throughout Siberia some of which were camps that also held American POWs and other foreign prisoners. These camps are identified as camps for foreigners by their total isolation and the lack of villages around them. Normally, when prisoners are released from prison camps they are required to continue living in exile near the prison. Their families join them and villages grow up around the camps. Foreign prisoners are not released; there are no villages around their prisons...

Sources indicate that most of the male passengers and crew were taken to a series of three ultra-secret prison camps in the dense taiga region along the Amur River near the village of Zapokrovsk not far from the Chinese border. These are the same camps where American POWs were known to have been located. They are quite extensive. In the winter, smoke can be seen rising from 80-90 smoke stacks—each barracks has two or three stoves, some 30 or more barrack houses. Unfortunately, all efforts to get to the camps and identify passengers visually failed because of the intense security in the area.

Additional camps were in the area of Cita, headquarters of the Far East Theater of

Operations of the Soviet military, at Nercinski Zavod and other locations. (From FAQ 10: What happened to the surviving passengers and crew after they were captured by the Soviets?)

Another area for investigation is densely forested Tynda along the Baikul-Amur railway approximately 800 miles inland from the Siberian coast. This area is also indicated by Centre researchers as an area connected with one KAL 007 passenger in particular. (The Tynda-Les company involved as agent for the North Korean labor is named after this area).

Sources provided information on one young Oriental woman who was set to work felling timber in the area of Tynda, Siberia. Prior to 1985, she lost her left arm below the elbow in a work accident. (From FAQ 10: What happened to the surviving passengers and crew after they were captured by the Soviets?)

What can be said conclusively is this—the Soviet era mentality allowing for the vast exploitation of slave labor in the millions to “rectify” the failed economics of Communism perseveres into the Russian Federation allowing for the acceptance of “indentured servants” in the tens of thousands as goods in a decades-long balance of payments scheme.

The captured survivors of KAL 007 may have fallen into the clutches of that mentality.