

Victor Tiurin (Tjurin)

Victor Tiurin was born in Russia to a poor family. Although his passport stated 1 May 1924, he did not know his actual date of birth. In 1942, when he was just 18, he and the head of the kolkhoz (collective farm) were arrested on charges of helping partisans. As a result, they were both cruelly whipped, and suffered a long interrogation and a period of incarceration in Orel prison. Later, Tiurin was sent to Germany and then to St Malo via Belgium. During this long train journey, he recalled how the



Russian prisoners were starved of food. Local people in Belgium and France threw them scraps and brought them bread, while railway workers reportedly expressed solidarity with the prisoners. After the group arrived in St Malo, they were sent by boat to Alderney the next day. Tiurin was initially assigned to a construction group to build 'pillboxes'. He recalled how many labourers died because of the poor-quality food they were given and the extremely harsh conditions on the island. They were quickly replaced by new labourers. As well as the Soviet prisoners, Tiurin recalls how Spaniards, French, Dutch people and Jews were present on the island. Despite the language barrier, he noted how they found ways to communicate and support each other. Tiurin escaped the fate of many of his fellow labourers because he managed to secure work in the harbour where he could acquire some extra food. During his time on Alderney, he was aware of the proximity of the island to England

and hoped that he and his fellow prisoners would get help from the British. In his post-war testimony, he described how efforts were made by labourers to alert the British to their presence. This included an ill-fated escape attempt by three of Tiurin's friends who were hung when their stolen boat was detected by searchlights. In 1943, Tiurin was then sent to the French coast to dig defence positions, he believed because the 'pillboxes' on Alderney had been completed. He recalled how French people helped them in different ways, for example by sharing food, helping with escapes and so on. During the frequent Allied raids in May 1944, Tiurin and some of his fellow Soviet prisoners escaped. They eventually reached Cherbourg where they were liberated by the Allies the following month. He was able to steal photographs from his personnel file prior to his departure. He lived in France for a year before returning home in 1947. He became a geographer, who won many awards and eventually held the title of Distinguished Professor at the Kuban State University (2000).

Things to discuss:

1. How many camps were on Alderney and when was it liberated?
2. What do you think the long train journeys were like?
3. Research what we know about Orel Prison.

Sources:

Tiurin (ed.), *Tiurin Victor Nikolaievich as founder of agricultural geographic scientific school in the South of Russia. К 90-летию юбилею Виктора Николаевича Тюрина (On the occasion of the 90 anniversary of Viktor Nikolaevich Tiurin)* (Krasnodar: Kuban State University, 2014).

Much of this profile is a summary of Tiurin's testimony which was featured in *Territoriya avtomatizatsii*, 3 May 2015, p.17

Mr Tiurin, pers. comm.

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