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# **Identification of captured soldiers of the tsarist army based on nationality in Austria-Hungary, 1915: separation of Ukrainians\***

## **Introduction**

The events of the First World War led to the concentration of tens of thousands Ukrainian soldiers of the tsarist army in prisoner of war (POW) camps on the territory of Austria-Hungary whose government tried to play the “Ukrainian card” to further its own interests. For this purpose, Vienna gave permission to create Ukrainian national camps, including in Freistadt, by relying on the services of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (ULU), a non-partisan political organization founded by Ukrainian revolutionary emigrants at the beginning of the First World War. The most important task at the initial

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stage of the ULU's activities was to single out soldiers who identified as Ukrainians from among the prisoners of the Russian army. This task was complicated by the Russification of the vast majority of Ukrainians, as well as their low educational level and, in some cases, complete illiteracy. Due to the fear of repression from the Russian tsarist regime, many Ukrainians, even after moving to Freistadt, refrained from participating in cultural, educational and national organizational work. However, these difficulties were resolved over time, which proved that the operation of separating Ukrainians from the general mass of prisoners of the Russian army based on national identity was a success.

### Historiography

Despite the fact that Ukrainian historiography contains a considerable number of papers dealing with Ukrainian soldiers of the tsarist army who were detained in the POW camps of Austria-Hungary (primarily in Freistadt), this problem requires further research. Some information on the identification of prisoners based on their nationality was provided by I. Sribnyak<sup>1</sup>, but his accounts were brief and did not offer a complete description of the course and consequences of this process. A more recent article by Sribnyak described the process of identifying captured Ukrainians, but only in a single camp<sup>2</sup>.

In turn, several studies by Austrian researcher V. Moritz focused on the general aspects of detaining Russian soldiers in POW camps<sup>3</sup>, but did not discuss in detail the preparations for separating Ukrainians from the general mass of prisoners, a process that was accomplished by the ULU in "mixed" camps.

There is no information on this problem in the body of research on ULU's history which focused primarily on the political aspects of the covert interactions between the ULU and the Austrian government<sup>4</sup>. Lviv historian I. Pater made an attempt to compre-

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<sup>1</sup> I. Sribnyak, *Poloneni ukraiynsi v Avstro-Uhorshchyni ta Nimechchyni (1914–1920 rr.)*, K. 1999, pp. 29–31; idem, *Orhanizatsiyna diyalnist Soyuzu vyzvolennya Ukrayiny u taborakh polonenykh tsarskoyi armiyi (1914–1916 rr.)*, "Eminak" 2016, vol. 1, issue 2 (April–June), pp. 99–103.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Tabir polonenykh voyakiv tsarskoyi armiyi v Knittelfeldi (Avstro-Uhorshchyna) v kintsy 1914 – – pershyi polovyni 1915 rr.: vyokremlyennya ukraiynsiv ta yikh samoorganizatsiya*, [in:] "Doslidzhennya molodykh uchenykh u konteksti rozvytku suchasnoyi nauky". Materialy VI shchorichnoyi Vseukrayinskoyi naukovo-praktychnoyi konferentsiyi, 21 kvitnya 2016 r., Kyiv 2016, pp. 133–142.

<sup>3</sup> V. Moritz, *Zwischen Nutzen und Bedrohung. Die russischen Kriegsgefangenen in Österreich 1914–1921*, Bonn 2005, p. 384; eadem, *The treatment of prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary 1914/1915: the historiography of prisoners of war in the late Habsburg empire*, [in:] *1914: Austria-Hungary. The origins, and the first year of World War I*, eds. G. Bischof, et al., series: Contemporary Austrian Studies vol. 23, New Orleans 2014, pp. 233–246; eadem, *Kriegsgefangenschaft im Ersten Weltkrieg in Österreich-Ungarn. Themen und Fragestellungen als Ausgangspunkt neuer Forschungen*, [in:] *Die Mittelmächte und der Erste Weltkrieg*, eds. M.Ch. Ortner, H.-H. Mack, Wien 2016, pp. 292–300.

<sup>4</sup> H. Grebing, *Österreich-Ungarn und die «Ukrainische Aktion» 1914–1918*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas" 1959, vol. VII, pp. 270–296; W. Bihl, *Österreich-Ungarn und der «Bund zur Befreiung der Ukraine»* [in:] *Österreich und Europa. Festgabe für Hugo Hantsch zum 70. Geburtstag*, Graz–Wien–Köln 1965,

hensively analyze the history of ULU's creation and activities, but his monograph makes only a brief reference to the separation of Ukrainians in multinational camps by ULU's delegates<sup>5</sup>.

The aim of this article is to fill the gap in historical knowledge about the ULU based on a wide range of archival sources stored in the Central State Archive of the Higher Authorities of Ukraine, the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine (Lviv), and the Library and Archives of Canada.

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The ULU's first initiatives in POW camps that were created with the permission of the Austrian monarchy date back to September 1914, when the ULU Presidium began to develop projects for its activities among captured Ukrainians. In the "Project of the [Union] for the Liberation of Ukraine's (ULU) on behalf of the Captured Soldiers from Russian Ukraine", the ULU stated that there was a large number of Ukrainians among the captured soldiers and officers of the Russian army in Austria-Hungary, and it suggested that the Austrian government should take measures to spread national liberation ideas among the prisoners and foster a positive image of the allied states whose troops "bring Ukraine national freedom and social benefits (...) to release Ukraine from national and social oppression of Moscow's yoke". Given the fact that many captured Ukrainians had not developed a national identity, the ULU planned to initiate an extensive cultural and educational campaign to "teach the prisoners Ukrainian literacy, Ukrainian national songs, and acquaint them with Ukrainian history"<sup>6</sup>.

To implement these activities, the campaign was to involve "the best forces that could be found (...) among Galician and Bukovyna Ukrainians, as well as members of our organization, Russian Ukrainians"<sup>7</sup>, who were in Vienna at that time. Shortly after the ULU Presidium's appeal, national-educational and cultural-educational programs were implemented among captured Ukrainian soldiers in Austria-Hungary (and later in Germany) by Mykhailo Havrylko, Mykola Golubets, Fr. Kost Danylenko, Fr. Yevhen Turula, Vasyl Simovych, Roman Dombchevskyi, Vasyl Pachovskyi, Mykhailo Novakivskyi, Andrii Luniv, Dr. Volodymyr Starosolskyi, Volodymyr Temnytskyi, and others<sup>8</sup>.

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pp. 505–526; idem, *Einige Aspekte österreichisch-ungarischen Ruthenenpolitik 1914–1918*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas" 1966, vol. XIV, pp. 539–550; R. Mark, *Zur ukrainischen Frage im ersten Weltkrieg: Flugschriften des «Bundes zur Befreiung der Ukraine» und ihm nahestehender Publizisten 1914–1916*, "Zeitschrift für Ostforschung" 1984, no. 33, pp. 196–226.

<sup>5</sup> I. Pater, *Soyuz Vyzvolennya Ukrayiny: problemy derzhavnosti ta sobornosti*, Lviv 2000, p. 275.

<sup>6</sup> Central State Historical Archive, Lviv (CDIA Ukrainy, Lviv), 360.1.53.15.

<sup>7</sup> Central State Archive of Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (CDAVO Ukrainy), 4405.1.13.23–24.

<sup>8</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.13.31–323B.

Over time, these activists were joined by Bohdan Lepkyi, Osyp Okhrymovych, Volodymyr Levytskyi, Mykola Chaikovskyyi, Osyp Bezpalko, Fr. Omelyan Hnidyi, Stepan Smal-Stotskyi, Omelyan Terletskyi, Yakiv Ostapchuk, and many other high-minded and patriotic Ukrainian intellectuals, who were hardened in socio-political and cultural-educational work and had considerable teaching experience. Most of them were members of the ULU's Educational Department in the Freistadt camp, which coordinated all aspects of national-patriotic work with captured Ukrainians. At the same time, one or two ULU representatives were directed to the so-called "mixed" camps, and they relied solely on "single units or small groups of captured Ukrainians who regularly communicated with the Union"<sup>9</sup>.

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As noted in the "Report on the activities of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine among the Ukrainian nationals in the Russian POW camp", the ULU attempted to "become acquainted with the prisoners and identify prisoners of Ukrainian nationality with the purpose of transferring them to a separate camp"<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of these activities was to give rise to "a strong young Ukrainian element that was aware of itself and its interests and was loyal to the state which took care of it and enlightened it"<sup>11</sup>. For this purpose, the ULU proposed to conduct a survey among the prisoners with the aim of identifying "politically conscious Ukrainians" who "can be used after separation to assist the Union's agitators", and collecting military information that could be used by the allied command at the anti-Russian front. After the survey, politically conscious Ukrainians were to be separated from the general population of prisoners in a special barrack, and eventually transferred to a Ukrainian camp<sup>12</sup>.

In the late 1914 and early 1915, the ULU focused its activities on this very group of prisoners in the hope of educating future agitators and propagandists. This strategy would enable the Union to spread its influence to other categories of prisoners. Brochures and anti-tsarist "leaflets" were printed for this purpose. At the same time, national and cultural work was to be carried out to distribute Ukrainian books among the prisoners, hold public reading sessions, create choirs and include Ukrainian songs that were banned in Russia in their repertoire, teach Ukrainian literacy (reading and writing) and give lectures on the history of Ukraine. The scope of these activities in the camps was to be significantly increased if necessary<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LaAC), the Andry Zhuk Collection, MG30, C167, vol. 15, file 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, file 14.

<sup>11</sup> CDIA Ukrainy, Lviv, 360.1.53.15–16.

<sup>12</sup> CDIA Ukrainy, Lviv, 360.1.53.16.

<sup>13</sup> CDIA Ukrainy, Lviv, 360.1.53.17.

These provisions were specified in the “Program of the ULU’s activities among prisoners”, and the ULU’s representatives in the camps were tasked with acquainting prisoners with the political life of the allied states and “organizing groups for studying other scientific problems (...) and reading national, political and propagandist materials”. In the program, the Union also declared its readiness to collect information on behalf of Germany and Austria-Hungary “about the public mood in Ukraine and (...) in the Russian army, as well as other information of strategic importance that could be shared with the authorities of the allied states in the pursuit of common interests”. The program also emphasized the need to initiate a broad “national and political consciousness-raising work” and spread anti-Russian sentiments among captured Ukrainians, which would enable the ULU to recruit individuals who were “most devoted to the cause of the Ukrainian people” and “would be sent to Ukraine in smaller and larger divisions established by the ULU, with the help of the allied states, to conduct a revolutionary or a military action coordinated by the general military plan of the allied states”<sup>14</sup>.

Taking into account the objective interests of Austria-Hungary, at the beginning of October 1914, the ULU began preparations for separating Ukrainians from Russian prisoners in the Freistadt camp and six other POW camps, where ULU delegations were sent to conduct political propaganda measures. The Union’s representatives were tasked with acquainting politically conscious prisoners with the main areas of the ULU’s activities and carry out a census of Ukrainian soldiers<sup>15</sup>.

Andriy Luniv and Mykhailo Gavrylko were among the ULU’s first delegates to be sent to the Hungarian camp of Somorja. In their report forwarded to the Presidium of the Union on 5 October 1914, they stated that there were 11,000 prisoners, including 5,000 Ukrainians from different regions of Ukraine, in the camp. According to their assessment, “the living conditions of the prisoners are very deplorable”, because a significant number of prisoners lived “in holes in the ground” that could accommodate several people. The prisoners were particularly bothered by the fact that “during the rainy season, the holes are filled with water, prisoners catch colds and get rheumatism”<sup>16</sup>. Despite the fact that these “holes” were only a temporary place of residence (at the time the report was written, two-thirds of the prisoners had already been transferred to newly built barracks), living conditions in the camp left much to be desired.

The fact that the prisoners “were dressed (...) very badly did not go unnoticed by the ULU representatives. Many prisoners have no overcoats, only uniforms, and some are only in shirts. The linen is dirty and there is no change”. Due to unsanitary conditions and the lack of water, all campers were infested with lice and could not wash. The fact that

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<sup>14</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.8.2–4.

<sup>15</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.13.23.

<sup>16</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.25–26.

“prisoners do not get any news from the world, have no reading materials” made their life “even more bleak”. Finally, Hungarian guards had an openly hostile attitude towards the Ukrainians (the ULU’s delegates experienced this first-hand and were not allowed to conduct a census of Ukrainians). According to A. Luniv and M. Havrylko, only by improving the living conditions of camp residents, one could hope to convince them of anything<sup>17</sup>.

The ULU’s work in this camp was continued by Oleksandr Skoropys-Yoltukhovskiy (in the second half of October 1914) who observed a certain improvement in living conditions. Some prisoners were transferred to temporary quarters, where they slept on the floor and rotten straw, whereas others were placed in newly built barracks where the conditions were much better. Most prisoners requested Ukrainian books, in particular the works by I. Franko. In late October and early November of 1914, the camp was visited by Dr. Mykhailo Novakivskiy who managed to conduct a census of Ukrainians. According to his report, over 2,000 Ukrainian and 1,400 Polish prisoners were present in the Somorja camp at that time.

V. Temnytskyi, another ULU representative who also briefly worked in this camp, reported on the national-political ideas of Russian soldiers and Little Russians in Somorja. In their opinion, “the Poles could be given their Poland, but no one in Russia could cope with the creation of Ukraine. Ukrainians have their school and their language, but Ukraine must remain under Russian control”<sup>18</sup>. This observation indicates that the majority of captured Ukrainians lacked a separate political identity and regarded Ukrainian independence as an absolute impossibility.

On 22–29 October 1914, A. Luniv and M. Gavrylko visited the Hungarian camp of Boldogasszony, where around 9,000 prisoners of various nationalities, including 6,000 Ukrainians, were kept. Living conditions in this camp were quite satisfactory; prisoners resided in wooden barracks, and the sick were kept separately. The construction of stone buildings accommodating 400 prisoners each began. The project was initiated by the camp’s commandant, Colonel Ludvik Longardt, who treated “the prisoners not as enemies, but in a fatherly manner, and tried to improve their life in the camp and make their fate more tolerable” and “treated Ukrainians with special sincerity and was quite well informed about the Ukrainian cause”<sup>19</sup>.

While visiting this camp, the ULU delegates noted that “all the prisoners would be happy to get something to read”. Most camp residents requested *Kobzar* by T. Shevchenko, as well as religious literature. A significant number of Ukrainians from the Dnieper Region wanted to learn to read and write; therefore, even minimal ULU efforts to establish primary schools could give quick and positive results in raising national con-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.25, 45, 58.

<sup>19</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.11.55–56.

sciousness. This work was facilitated by the fact that several Ukrainian prisoners were “politically conscious” and “prisoners of other nationalities also sympathized with the Ukrainian cause”<sup>20</sup>.

During every visit, the ULU delegates reported on the presence of a certain number of Ukrainians in the camps. According to A. Luniv’s report on living conditions in the Dunaserdagel camp (8–16 November 1914), 2,087 Ukrainians, around 1,000 Poles, and over 10,000 Russians were stationed in the camp. All of them were housed in barracks and provided with basic necessities, including underwear and blankets. A. Luniv mentioned that “many of the prisoners were politically conscious individuals who declared that they were happy to go into captivity”<sup>21</sup>.

This state of affairs clearly indicates that some Ukrainian prisoners who remained under the influence of the Little Russians’ imperial worldview were able to change their perspective in captivity. In a letter of 23 November 1914, Petro Dyatliv and Dr. Mykhailo Novakivskiy informed the ULU that they had compiled a list of 4,000 Ukrainians in the Esztergom camp in Hungary<sup>22</sup>. In a report of 8–15 November 1914 describing life in the camp, M. Novakivskiy informed the ULU about the attitude of Russians who “consider the loss of Ukraine as the greatest misfortune” and did not object to granting certain rights to Ukraine, “including autonomy, if only Ukraine did not do anything to separate from Russia”<sup>23</sup>.

Ivan Railyan, who worked in the Kleinmünchen camp (near Linz) in mid-December 1914, reported on the success of the Ukrainian propaganda. In this camp, prisoners willingly placed their names on the “list of Ukrainians” after one of the inmates had received a letter from a friend in the Freistadt camp informing him that Ukrainians in Freistadt read magazines, attended lectures, and used the library<sup>24</sup>.

The results of the ULU delegates’ work in POW camps in September-December 1914 were summarized by A. Zhuk, a member of the ULU Presidium, in an “interim” report on the Union’s activities. During this time, seven ULU “deputies” visited five camps several times (which took a total of around 120 days at the cost of 8,859.60 Austrian Krones, hereinafter – k.a.). Their efforts led to the development of lists of Ukrainian prisoners who were to be transported to a Ukrainian camp in Freistadt. The ULU also took credit for the establishment of Ukrainian libraries in camps where the Ukrainian census was conducted. The ULU distributed its publications and the Ukrainian translation of the Holy Scriptures among the prisoners (at the total expenses of 2138.45 k.a.). A large library had

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.9-13.

<sup>22</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.9.

<sup>23</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.16.8.

<sup>24</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.45.



been developed in the Freistadt camp, where an ULU employee (V. Simovych) educated the prisoners to provide Ukraine with “thousands of trained agitators and organizers”<sup>25</sup>.

The ULU continued its activities in 1915, when Volodymyr Temnytskyi was sent to the Reichenberg camp at the beginning of January. In his letter to the ULU, he reported that 4,715 Ukrainians had been placed on the lists, of whom 900 were transported to Freistadt. However, since new transports of Ukrainian prisoners continued to arrive at the camp, the ULU sent Anton Charnetskyi to Reichenberg to update these lists. After the update, the lists contained 4,723 Ukrainians, whereas some 1,500 Ukrainian prisoners had not signed up<sup>26</sup>.

On 3–24 January 1915, ULU delegates were also working in the Rosenthal camp (near Reichenberg), where approximately 20,000 prisoners were stationed. A total of 8,700 long-term residents had signed up on the list, of whom 1,000 had been transported to Freistadt by January. Considering such a large number of camp residents, the lists were made by barrack elders and processed by the ULU delegates. The work was facilitated by the fact that food in the camp was good, and the prisoners complained only about small daily portions of bread. A significant number of camp residents needed spiritual consolation, and in their report of 27 January 1915, A. Charnetskyi and V. Temnytskyi wrote that “all prisoners were immensely pleased and eager to receive Ukrainian books”<sup>27</sup>.

Several days later, V. Temnytskyi also visited the camp in Reichenberg where more than 24,000 prisoners were kept, including (according to V. Temnytskyi’s calculations) 8,842 Ukrainians (“Little Russians”)<sup>28</sup>. His report included a detailed description of the prisoners’ diet (but did not specify the size of food portions), and it provided additional information about their daily life in the camp. Camp residents received food “three times a day. Soup made of flour and water is eaten early for breakfast. The prisoners detest this dish. On some days, porridge, *ryzh* [rice – *authors*], or *barabolyan styranka* (grout) is served instead of soup, and the prisoners eagerly await these days. At noon, they are served lunch composed of brine, meat and other food items. Lunch is tasty, and the prisoners complain only about small portions. Dinner is porridge or mashed potatoes, and sometimes soup”<sup>29</sup>. Basing on his observations of the camp residents’ life, V. Temnytskyi concluded that food portions were indeed small (compared with the Russian army), but that their diets contained meat which was not served in the tsarist army.

The characteristic features of prisoners of different nationalities, which may or may not be described with “political correctness”, but provide reliable information about the behavior of Jews and Russians in the camp, are of significant scientific and political in-

<sup>25</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.13.23–24.

<sup>26</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.3, 6.

<sup>27</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.3–4.

<sup>28</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.17.

<sup>29</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.9.



terest. According to V. Temnytskyi, Jewish soldiers were “particularly suspicious”, but he did not provide any details. In a report of 11 February 1915, Temnytskyi gave a more detailed account of Jewish intellectuals [*volnoopredelyayuschyjesya* which means “free to determine themselves” – *authors*] who were “almost all, without exception, Russian patriots who not only firmly believe in the victory of Russia, but ardently desire that victory. Jews – small merchants and craftsmen – are the worst element. All their efforts are directed towards ensuring the best and most useful position for themselves in the camp. On the one hand, they do not want to come into conflict with Russia and are trying to gain the favor of the Moskals and military seniors by denouncing [here: accusing – *authors*] everything they can, but on the other hand, they are trying to gain the favor of the Austrian military, including through espionage [here: watching – *authors*] and denunciation<sup>30</sup>.

During their communication with Russian soldiers, the ULU delegates (V. Temnytskyi and A. Charnetskyi) portrayed this category of prisoners “as Austrian agents who want to stir opposition against Russia and will undoubtedly get everyone into trouble”. At the same time, the Jews made attempts to compromise the Ukrainians in the eyes of the camp commandant’s staff by claiming that Ukrainian prisoners were disseminating “anti-Austrian propaganda” in the camp, which led to a conflict between the Austrian commandant’s officer on duty and the above-mentioned ULU delegates. The Jews’ attitude came as a surprise to V. Temnytskyi who believed that “due to pogroms, persecution, restricted settlement areas and other acts of oppression, Jews were the greatest and the most ardent enemies of Russia”, while in fact, these accounts were merely “fables spread by the Jewish press in Europe – but in Russia, the horse laughs at it”<sup>31</sup>.

Obviously, some Jewish prisoners were willing to help the Ukrainians. V. Temnytskyi mentioned a soldier who “also did us a great service by collecting spears (...) from the barracks, obviously for a fee”<sup>32</sup>. However, these were only isolated cases, which only confirmed the general rule – at the beginning of the war, the overwhelming majority of captured Jews supported Russia’s imperial policy. Moreover, some Jewish prisoners actively promoted the misanthropic “values” of the “Russkiy mir” and did their best to prevent the Ukrainians from escaping this fatal delusion.

Attention should be also paid to V. Temnytsky’s account of Russian prisoners who “not only enjoy a privileged position in the POW camp, but also act as inspectors who exert control over other prisoners. Russians often assume such a role and try to influence the behavior of other prisoners through intimidation. I have heard these words spoken on more than one occasion: “Well, well, do not overstep the mark – we’ll be back in Russia, and you will be responsible for everything!”. The prisoners “are strictly controlled by the

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<sup>30</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.25.

<sup>31</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.25–26.

<sup>32</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.26.

*Moskals*, and any prisoner who dares to utter a single word of criticism against Russia will be threatened or at least warned about the punishing hand of the Russian authorities”. Thus, V. Temnytskyi’s observations confirmed the general conclusion that the Russian Black Hundreds strongly believed in the inevitable punishment for all “foreigners” who dared to question the inviolability of the Russian empire.

Every time V. Temnytskyi started a “conversation with the prisoners, abusive remarks and threats would follow from the *Moskals*” who “in the Russian army, generally control soldiers of other nationalities”. During their communication with V. Temnytskyi, the prisoners often “paid close attention to see if the *Moskals* were listening to the conversation. A conversation would be suddenly interrupted whenever a *Moskal* approached our group”. The prisoners admitted: “We are afraid of them, who knows what kind of people they are. You can’t trust them. They follow us, eavesdropping on our conversations.” As a result, V. Temnytskyi concluded that many Russian prisoners “were obviously rats who were sniffed out”<sup>33</sup>.

V. Temnytskyi’s report well illustrates the challenges faced by ULU activists who attempted to compile lists of Ukrainians during their visits to POW camps. Despite the fact that their efforts were undermined by fierce resistance from the Black Hundreds, they were not completely in vain. The ULU representatives (including O. Bezpalko and O. Okhrymovych<sup>34</sup>) also visited other camps in Austria-Hungary through the end of February 1915 (according to other sources, the visits to the camps continued until May 1915)<sup>35</sup>.

The ULU’s attempts to separate tsarist army soldiers, in particular the Ukrainians, based on their nationality gained considerable attention in the camp. While the Russians considered it unequivocally negative, a growing number of Ukrainians supported this action. In some camps, the prisoners tried to solicit the ULU’s support for their transfer to the Ukrainian Freistadt camp, as it had been done by a group of Ukrainian prisoners from the Marchtrenk camp (Austria-Hungary) who, in a letter of 5 May 1915, asked the Union for help in escaping from the camp, where the “Muscovites” outnumbered them, and “cause a lot of quarrels and other unpleasant incidents in our lives, while the government officials in charge of supervising the prisoners often punish those who are completely innocent”. The Ukrainians asked the ULU to consider their “wretched life among Muscovites!” and to assist in their transfer to Freistadt<sup>36</sup>.

The Vienna headquarters occasionally organized trips for members of the ULU Educational Department members, and the report submitted by R. Dombchevskyi de-

<sup>33</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.59.22.

<sup>34</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.17.16–17.

<sup>35</sup> K. Danylenko, *Rozviiy suspilno-natsionalnoyi dumky v tabori Freistadt*, “Soyuz vyzvolennya Ukrainy” 1979, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4405.1.178.113.

serves special mention. In the second half of December 1915, Dombchevskiy was sent on an information and propaganda mission to multinational POW camps of tsarist army prisoners. In a report of 19 February 1916 detailing his visits to POW camps in Wieselburg, Feldbach, Knittelfeld and Gröditz<sup>37</sup>, Dombchevskiy described his communication with the prisoners and the officers of camp commandant offices, which provides an objective account of the general mood and the situation in “mixed” camps.

Approximately 9,000 prisoners had been stationed in the Wieselburg camp at the time of Dombchevskiy’s arrival (many more prisoners worked outside the camp at that time). According to R. Dombchevskiy, “the prisoners were depressed by the severe regime and terrible living conditions”, but “the camp is in good order”, and the prisoners “have their music and theater”. Dombchevskiy noted that in the Wieselburg camp, “Ukrainians are actually separated from their associates, and the same applies to other camps”, which implies that the process of national separation of prisoners in Austria-Hungary was underway at the time.

Prisoners were also beginning to overcome their fear of the Russian autocrat, as demonstrated by Dombchevskiy’s report (around mid-December 1915) which described the prisoners’ reaction to the visit of “Sister Romanova”. Her arrival at the camp was a “great nuisance” for the prisoners who initially complained to her about their life in the camp. However, one of the Russian prisoners – the “unreliable” Gavriil Demanov (Demyaniv) – said that the prisoners’ troubles were caused by “the backwardness of the Russian people and, above all, by the government which keeps the people backward”. After that, Demanov “threatened ‘the Sister’ with a revolution that would be staged after the war by ‘Russian’ people who had been offended, and exposed ‘the Sister’ as an informal diplomat and a lurcher [spy, agent – *authors*]”<sup>38</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that G. Demanov was supported by the remaining prisoners who forced “the Sister” to listen to his speech to the end, whereas her only response was that the entire affair was “madness”. Her departure from the camp clearly indicates that the prisoners had rejected her “humanitarian” mission because none of them “said good-bye to her”. Only G. Demanov gave “the Sister” his home address and said that he was ready to assume responsibility for his every word because “if there wasn’t a war, I would have been sent to Siberia”. After that, a representative of the Austrian-Hungarian Ministry of War (Linghardt) who accompanied “the Sister” “was very evil” and “condemned him [Demanov – *authors*]”, claiming that only a Ukrainian could show such disrespect for “the Sister”<sup>39</sup>.

In his report, R. Dombchevskiy also noted that in the camp, he “encountered only a few Ukrainian intellectuals who were politically conscious”, among them Fedir Dudchenko-Krasovskiy of the Terek Cossack Force. Despite the “fury of Black Hundreds ensigns”,

<sup>37</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.1–31.

<sup>38</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.2–3.

<sup>39</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.3.

Dudchenko-Krasovskiy was able to establish a “community of Ukrainians” in the so-called “intellectuals’ barrack”. The latter argued for the expediency of granting autonomy to Ukraine as a part of Russia, but at the same time he spoke “about his Ukrainess very consciously and unceremoniously”, paying no attention to anyone from the “Black Hundreds”<sup>40</sup>.

R. Dombchevskiy’s explanatory talks induced 25 Ukrainians from the “intellectuals’ barrack” to voluntarily move to Freistadt. However, a Ukrainophobic Austrian unter-officer learned about their intentions and ordered them to clean toilets as a punishment, and the group was forced to give up their plans. Despite this failure, R. Dombchevskiy initiated a committee (headed by F. Dudchenko-Krasovskiy) that would distribute the literature sent by the ULU to the camp<sup>41</sup>.

After inspecting the Feldbach camp, R. Dombchevskiy noted that it was very well organized and that “the lives of the prisoners are not bad”. The camp officers (mostly Hungarians) were sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause, and 3/4 of the prisoners inserted their names into the lists of Ukrainians. According to R. Dombchevskiy, this was not true, although there were indeed many Ukrainians in the camp<sup>42</sup>. In particular, Mykhailo Bilichenko was the “center of gravity” for other Ukrainian camp residents. Due to his efforts, the Ukrainians were able to exercise greater control over the camp theater which previously had a distinctly “Russian face”. The relevant costs were covered by an Austrian officer (Lieutenant Julius Klock) who spared no expense. After some time, the theater began to make a profit, and Klock was reimbursed for his investment. The organizers were also able to raise funds for the Red Cross during stage performances.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the Russians’ aversion to and complete disinterest in the dramatic arts, J. Klock made M. Bilichenko the director of the theater. In turn, M. Bilichenko managed to completely Ukrainianize its repertoire. Amateur actors did not have written scripts when preparing for their parts in Ukrainian plays (*Slave and Courtship at the Vechornytsi*, a one-act play), but this did not stop them. The actors performed (and learned Ukrainian songs) from memory, and R. Dombchevskiy noted in his report that Ukrainian actors “were renowned for their enthusiasm and willingness to work”. Performance programs were also produced by the efforts of Ukrainians because local Austrian residents often visited the theater. Despite these circumstances, theatrical performances represented a fairly high level and were popular with the public. According to R. Dombchevskiy, recitations of T. Shevchenko’s works by M. Bilichenko sounded especially good on the camp stage<sup>44</sup>.

Before his departure from the camp, R. Dombchevskiy called a meeting of Ukrainian amateur actors (Kuzmenok, Horodetskiy, Zasyadko, Franz Kurovskiy) and the theater’s

<sup>40</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.5.

<sup>41</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.6.

<sup>42</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.11.

<sup>43</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.16.

<sup>44</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.16.

supporters (40 people were present) to establish a committee and discuss the possibility of holding “lectures and promoting literacy”. Meeting participants were also keen on creating a library and asked the ULU to send Ukrainian publications to the camp and to assist them in developing the camp theater<sup>45</sup>.

In Feldbach, R. Dombchevskyi met with “Freistadt residents” (80 prisoners had been transferred to the camp for work) who hoped to return to Freistadt, “which has become something of a home for them”, as soon as possible. These prisoners assured R. Dombchevskyi that they “don’t long for a house as much as for Freistadt” as well as “for lectures, singing, books”. As a result, Dombchevskyi submitted a special request to the camp commandant’s office to transfer these prisoners to Freistadt<sup>46</sup>.

After Feldbach, R. Dombchevskyi visited Knittelfeld, where he had worked for a long time as an organizer of Ukrainian prisoners. According to his observations, nothing had changed in the camp, but the theater hall nearly ceased to exist after the Ukrainians had departed. However, the theater’s old name, “Ukrainer-Halle”, was preserved. Therefore, any organized national work was no longer carried out in the camp because the vast majority of Ukrainians had left for Freistadt<sup>47</sup>.

In the Grödig camp, R. Dombchevskyi did not find any organized groups of Ukrainian prisoners, but the visit reaffirmed his conviction that “great cultural, customary, and even racial differences exist between a Ukrainian and a *Moskal*”. He observed that “Ukrainians live separately, they don’t want to have anything to do with the *Katsaps*”, because the latter “are always scoundrels”, and here the Russians always had the undisputed primacy. As a result, the Ukrainians “tolerate and avoid the *Katsaps*”, but preferred not to have anything to do with them. R. Dombchevskyi eavesdropped on several conversations between the prisoners and heard one of the “Poltava guys” calling a Russian a “stupid *Katsap*” who ate “only porridge and shchi”. In Ukrainian, this expression implies starvation and the lack of strength for physical work. In contrast, Ukrainians were better suited for hard work because they ate “good bread and lard”. The main problem, according to this prisoner, was that the Russians had a “cheesy” attitude to everything Ukrainian<sup>48</sup>.

Marchtrenk was the last camp visited by R. Dombchevskyi during this trip. In the camp, the Ukrainian community was organized by K. Danylenko, an agronomist from the Kharkiv region, who was “politically conscious, a steady supporter of the Union and the “Sich[ovy] Rifle[men]”, mobile and talkative”<sup>49</sup>. About twenty educated Ukrainians lived in a separate “intelligentsia barrack”. Even before Dombchevskyi’s arrival, this group of Ukrainians sent a telegram to the ULU Presidium with a request to be transferred

<sup>45</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.17–19.

<sup>46</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.12.

<sup>47</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.20.

<sup>48</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.24–25.

<sup>49</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.26–27.

to Freistadt. Having called all willing camp members to a meeting, R. Dombchevskyi delivered his report and compiled a list of prisoners who wanted to move to Freistadt (224 people in total). He notified the commandant's office of the number of prisoners to be transferred to the Ukrainian camp<sup>50</sup>.

Dombchevskyi's visits brought the desired results. Many politically conscious Ukrainians were transferred to the Freistadt camp, and those who remained were united in Ukrainian circles and communities. It was also important that the ULU's activities in Austria-Hungary in 1915 initiated a complex process of identifying Ukrainian nationals. Although the vast majority of prisoners were neutral, and some were openly hostile to the ULU, positive developments in many camps could no longer be denied.

Gradually, the concept of Ukrainian liberation gained more support from the prisoners, many of whom began to openly support the ULU slogans. The Ukrainian campaign was especially successful in Freistadt which soon became the first Ukrainian camp on the territory of the Central Powers. According to another (unsigned) ULU document entitled *On Ukrainian propaganda among prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary*, most of the ULU's educational efforts took place in the first half of 1915<sup>51</sup>.

Over time, Ukrainian and even some Russian prisoners began to write letters to the ULU on their own initiative, requesting Ukrainian literature. The ULU office in Vienna received 20–30 such letters each day and attempted to satisfy all requests despite the lack of funds. The Union's efforts were considerably obstructed by the fact that printed materials could not be mailed to POW camps. The ban had been introduced in Austria-Hungary at the beginning of the war, but in the end, the ULU managed to obtain a permission from the Austrian-Hungarian Ministry of War to freely distribute its publications to the prisoners<sup>52</sup>.

These accomplishments laid long-lasting proper foundations for the ULU's efforts to unite Ukrainians and establish a community of Ukrainian activists.

## Conclusions

The need to rank Ukrainians based on their origin and national sentiment in the Freistadt camp prompted the ULU to send its representatives to multinational camps, where they were to conduct surveys and draw up lists of prisoners willing to move to a new place of detention. The success of the ULU delegates largely depended on subjective factors, including living conditions (in camps where living conditions were harsh, most prisoners had no desire to cooperate), the camp regime, and, in particular, camp guards' and commandants' attitudes towards inmates, and the number of Ukrainians in

<sup>50</sup> CDAVO Ukrainy, 4404.1.20.28, 30.

<sup>51</sup> LaAC, The Andry Zhuk Collection, MG30, C167, vol. 15, file 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem.

the camp. The lists could have been compiled sooner had there been any Ukrainian activists who were not afraid to stand against the mood of the masses.

At the same time, in most camps, many inmates supported the imperial ideology, including the Black Hundreds and Little Russians who exerted psychological pressure on the prisoners and attempted to prevent communication between the Ukrainians and the ULU envoys. The reports forwarded by ULU members contain vast information about the shameful behavior of the Russians who, due to their inherent traits (innate treachery and desire to rule, tendency to drunkenness and aggression, brutality and gluttony, but also cowardice and readiness to yield to a stronger opponent), were incapable of self-organization. The Russians poisoned Ukrainian minds, terrorized politically conscious Ukrainians, and intimidated other prisoners with threats of physical violence.

However, the dark and evil influence of Russian prisoners which was plagued by the great power propaganda was eventually overcome. After the arrival of the ULU delegates, Ukrainian communities were established in the camps, and their members updated lists of prisoners who wished to be transferred to Freistadt. Thousands of Ukrainians applied for the transfer in hope of escaping the toxic and extremely unpleasant influence of Russian inmates in mixed camps. The ULU's accomplishments, including the creation of lists of Ukrainian nationals, laid long-lasting foundations for the ULU's efforts to unite Ukrainians and establish a community of Ukrainian activists, albeit a small one, who were willing to risk their lives and carry out the difficult task of spreading national liberation ideas not only in POW camps, but also on Ukrainian lands in Russia.

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#### **Identification of captured soldiers of the tsarist army based on nationality in Austria-Hungary, 1915: separation of Ukrainians**

**Summary:** The article summarizes the process of identifying and separating Ukrainians from tsarist army soldiers who were captured by the Austrian-Hungarian forces. In 1915, such efforts were initiated by members of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (ULU) who surveyed camp inmates and compiled a list of prisoners willing to move to a Ukrainian camp in Freistadt. The procedure was complex because many inmates supported the imperial ideology, including the Black Hundreds and Little Russians who exerted psychological pressure on the prisoners and attempted to prevent communication between the Ukrainians and the ULU envoys. The compiled lists of Ukrainian nationals laid long-lasting foundations for the ULU's efforts to unite Ukrainians and establish a community of Ukrainian activists, albeit a small one, who were willing to risk their lives and carry out the difficult task of spreading national liberation ideas not only in POW camps, but also on Ukrainian lands in Russia. Owing to the ULU's efforts, Ukrainian prisoners were transferred to the camp in Freistadt which was the center of Ukrainian life in 1915–1918.

**Keywords:** separation, prisoners of war, camp, Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, Austria-Hungary

#### **Identifizierung der Nationalität der 1915 in Österreich-Ungarn gefangen genommenen Soldaten der zaristischen Armee. Die Besonderheiten bei der Separierung von Ukrainern**

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Artikel analysiert den Prozess der Separierung im Jahr 1915. der Ukrainer aus dem Kreis der von der österreichisch-ungarischen Armee gefangen genommenen Soldaten der

zaristischen Armee. Dies wurde von Vertretern der Ukrainischen Befreiungsunion übernommen, die eine Umfrage durchführten und eine Liste derjenigen aufstellten, die bereit waren, in das Ukrainische Lager in Freistadt zu ziehen. Die Durchführung der Aktion war eine ziemlich schwierige Aufgabe, da sich unter den Kriegsgefangenen eine beträchtliche Anzahl von Anhängern der imperialen Ideologie befand – Schwarzen und Malorussen, die psychologischen Druck auf die Gefangenen ausübten und versuchten, den Ukrainern das Gespräch mit Vertretern der Ukrainischen Befreiungsunion zu erschweren. Die durchgeführte Zählung der Kriegsgefangenen ermöglichte es, eine dauerhafte Grundlage für die ukrainischen Vereinigungsaktivitäten zu schaffen und darüber hinaus eine (wenn auch kleine) Gruppe von ukrainischen Aktivisten zu bilden, die in der Lage waren, selbst unter Einsatz ihres Lebens die Ideen der nationalen Befreiung nicht nur in den Lagern, sondern auch in den ukrainischen Gebieten unter russischer Herrschaft zu verbreiten. Dank der Bemühungen der Union wurden die ukrainischen Kriegsgefangenen im Lager Freistadt versammelt, das von 1915 bis 1918 das Zentrum des ukrainischen Lebens blieb.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Separierung, Kriegsgefangene, Lager, Ukrainische Befreiungsunion, Österreich-Ungarn

### **Rozpoznawanie narodowości żołnierzy armii carskiej w 1915 roku wziętych do niewoli w Austro-Węgrzech: specyfika wydzielenia Ukraińców**

**Streszczenie:** W artykule przeanalizowano proces wydzielenia w 1915 r. Ukraińców spośród żołnierzy armii carskiej wziętych do niewoli przez wojsko austro-węgierskie. Zajęli się tym przedstawiciele Związku Wyzwolenia Ukrainy, którzy przeprowadzili ankietę i sporządzili listę osób chętnych do przeniesienia się do ukraińskiego obozu we Freistadt. Przeprowadzenie akcji było zadaniem dość trudnym, gdyż wśród jeńców znajdowała się znaczna liczba wyznawców ideologii imperialnej – czarnosecińcy i Małorosjanie, którzy wywierali na więźniów presję psychologiczną, starając się utrudnić Ukraińcom rozmowy z przedstawicielami Związku Wyzwolenia Ukrainy. Dokonanie spisu jeńców pozwoliło stworzyć trwały fundament pod działania jednoczące Ukraińców, a ponadto stworzyć (choć nieliczne) grono działaczy ukraińskich zdolnych, nawet z narażeniem życia, do szerzenia idei narodowowyzwoleńczych nie tylko w obozach, ale także na terenach Ukrainy znajdujących się pod panowaniem rosyjskim. Dzięki staraniom Związku jeńcy ukraińscy zostali zgromadzeni w obozie we Freistadt, który w latach 1915–1918 pozostawał centrum życia ukraińskiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** separacja, jeńcy, obóz, Związek Wyzwolenia Ukrainy, Austro-Węgry

