

## SOUTHERN SLAVS PRISONERS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE POLTAVA PROVINCE TERRITORY

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The authors investigate a specific character of World War I captivity in Poltava province on the basis of documents of the Central State Archives of Ukraine and the State Archives of Poltava region, as well as reference materials and articles of the pre-revolutionary newspapers. Particular attention is paid to the Croatian prisoners of war who were held in the Kremenchuk garrison from spring to autumn 1916. The historiography of the problem, the statistics of military captivity of the Great War of 1914-1918 and the national effectives of the Austro-Hungarian army are considered, the number of southern Slavs prisoners of war in Russia is determined and some legislative acts about military captivity are highlighted.

The economic situation of Poltava province, its military-rear infrastructure, functioning of Darnytsia camp and distributing prisoners of war to the regions of the country are characterized. The national, social and confessional structure of prisoners of war who were held in Kremenchuk is analysed, and the probability of national conflicts between the southern Slavs is noted. The types of work performed by prisoners of war in Poltava province are determined. Prisoners of war's living conditions, medical service, nourishment, offenses and relations with inhabitants are considered.

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## ПІВДЕННІ СЛОВ'ЯНИ-ВІЙСЬКОВОПОЛОНЕНІ ПЕРШОЇ СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ НА ТЕРИТОРІЇ ПОЛТАВСЬКОЇ ГУБЕРНІЇ

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**Ключові слова:** Перша світова війна, військовополонені, серби, хорвати, Полтавська губернія, Кременчук.

На основі документів Центрального державного архіву України та Державного архіву Полтавської області, а також довідкових матеріалів і публікацій в дореволюційній пресі автори досліджують специфіку військового полону Першої світової війни в Полтавській губернії. Особливу увагу приділено військовополоненим хорватам, які перебували в Кременчуцькому гарнізоні з весни до осені 1916 р. Розглянуто історіографію проблеми, статистику військового полону Великої війни 1914-1918 рр., національний склад австро-угорської армії, з'ясовано кількість військовополонених південних слов'ян в Росії та вивчено законодавчі акти щодо військового полону. Схарактеризовано економічний стан Полтавської губернії, її військово-тилову інфраструктуру, функціонування Дарницького табору та розподіл військовополонених по регіонах країни. Проаналізовано національний, соціальний і конфесійний склад контингенту військовополонених, що утримувалися в місті Кременчуці, відзначено ймовірність конфліктів на національному ґрунті між південними слов'янами. Визначено види робіт, які виконували військовополонені в Полтавській губернії. Розглянуто умови проживання військовополонених, їх медичне обслуговування, харчування, характер правопорушень та взаємини з місцевим населенням.

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In November 2018, humanity celebrated the centenary of the end of the First World War, a global conflict that has determined the direction of civilization. The Great War of 1914-1918 ushered in an era of extremes and gave impetus to negative trends that led to aggravation of the bourgeois-liberal ideology crisis. They are the most clearly seen while studying the methods having been used during the First World War to solve social and humanitarian problems, such as mass refugees, forced deportations, holding prisoners of war, etc. The Great War regrettable experience in ignoring international law and dehumanizing public consciousness has become a characteristic feature of all the next wars of the twentieth century.

Ukrainian historiography of the First World War captivity problem is in the making now. The Ukrainian soldiers who were held in camps of Austria-Hungary and Germany are the priority object of many scientific works. In such researches a special attention is paid to the ideological work conducted by the leaders of the Ukrainian Liberation Union with them<sup>1</sup>. However, only a few regional studies<sup>2</sup> and some articles about captured Czechs and Slovaks<sup>3</sup> are devoted to holding prisoners of war of the Central Powers on the territory of the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire. Among foreign studies it should be noted an article of the German scientist R.

Nachtigall in the "Ukrainian Historical Journal" about the prisoner-of-war camp in Darnytsia<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, for almost a century, native scientists have studied captivity problems of the Great War of 1914-1918 quite carefully. Nevertheless, against this background "white spots", requiring additional study, are visible. In particular, new historical discourses that emerged at the end of the last century in the post-Soviet space and in the states that arose in the territories of the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia determine the interest in studying the "national" captivity of the First World War. An additional problem in carrying out such scientific researches can be a sufficiently schematic separation of prisoners of war on a national basis in most office documents of the Russian Empire. To a lesser extent, this applies to Germans and Hungarians (Magyars), who were defined as hostile nations and were usually recorded into individual groups. Romanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Czechs, Slovaks were considered to be the friendly peoples, while Croats, Serbs and Slovenes could be registered as "Southern Slavs" or "Serbo-Croats".

Soviet scientists carried out investigations of Croat prisoners of war history in a traditional context, i.e. they considered their participation in revolutionary events and civil war<sup>5</sup>. It should be noted that, in addition to the revolutionary and party problems, these scientific works also contain information on the setting up the Serbian volunteer corps in Russia. During the 1960-1980s in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) the researches dedicated to Yugoslav volunteers of the 1914-1918 and the prisoners of revolutionary events in Russia were also published<sup>6</sup>.

The almost complete absence of scientific works concerning prisoners of the Great War on the territory of modern Ukraine determines the actuality of the subject. Its scientific novelty consists in an attempt to study the First World War captivity in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire, as well as to research the Croatian prisoners of war contingent. The results of the study can be used to create textbooks and generalizing works on the history of military

<sup>1</sup> For eg.: Кривошеєва Л. М. Національно-просвітня діяльність Союзу визволення України в таборах військовополонених українців (1914–1918 рр.): автореф. дис. ... канд. іст. наук: 07.00.01. Запоріжжя, 2009. 20 с.; Саєвич Й. Й. Військовополонені українці в таборах Австро-Угорщини і Німеччини в період Першої світової війни: вишкіл та організація побуту: автореф. дис. ... канд. іст. наук: 22.02.22. Львів, 2007. 19 с.

<sup>2</sup> For eg.: Лейберов О. Військовополонені на Ніжинщині в роки Першої світової війни. *Ніжинська старовина: Науковий історико-культурологічний збірник*. 2006. Вип. 2(5). С. 92–97; Лобко Н. В. Використання праці військовополонених в Лебединському повіті в період Першої світової війни. *Сумська старовина*. 2017. № 51. С. 16–24; Рожкова Л. І. Військовополонені армій Центральної держав у роки Першої світової війни (на матеріалах Сумщини). *Сіверщина в історії України*: 36. наук. пр. К.: Глухів, 2017. Вип. 10. С. 337–341.

<sup>3</sup> For eg.: Дмитрієва О. Є. Становище військовополонених чехів та словаків у Росії у роки Першої світової війни. *Збірник наукових праць ХНПУ імені Г. С. Сковороди*. Серія: «Історія та географія». 2010. Вип. 38. С. 92–97; Дмитрієва О. Є. Територіальне розміщення військовополонених чехів та словаків у Росії у роки першої світової війни. *Збірник наукових праць ХНПУ імені Г. С. Сковороди*. Серія: «Історія та географія». 2011. Вип. 41. С. 90–94; Дмитрієва О. Є. Політика російської влади по відношенню до військовополонених чехів та словаків у період Першої світової війни. *Збірник наукових праць ХНПУ імені Г. С. Сковороди*. «Історія та географія». 2013. Вип. 49. С. 93–97.

<sup>4</sup> Нахтігаль Р. Дарницький табір військовополонених під час Першої світової війни. *Український історичний журнал*. 2010. № 2. С. 103–116.

<sup>5</sup> For eg.: Интернационалисты в боях за власть Советов. М.: Мысль, 1965. 398 с.; Зеленин В. В. Под Красным знаменем Октября: югославянские интернационалисты в Советской России 1917–1921 гг. М.: Мысль, 1977. 252 с.

<sup>6</sup> For eg.: Јовановић И., Рајковић С., Рибар В. Југословенски добровољачки корпус у Русији: прилог историји добровољачког покрета: (1914–1918). Београд, 1954; Поповић Н. Југословенски добровољци у Русији 1914–1918. Београд 1977.

captivity of the Great War of 1914-1918s, that indicates its practical significance. The object of the research are prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army, located in the Poltava province in 1914-1916. Particular attention is paid to the Croat prisoners of war stayed in the Kremenchuk garrison in the spring and autumn of 1916.

The global nature of the conflict has lent an increasing importance to the military captivity of the First World War. So, the total number of soldiers of European countries\* captured during the Great War was 5,328,447<sup>1</sup>, while the similar losses of Russia in absolute figures accounted for 2,417,000 prisoners of war, or 16.1% of the total number mobilized<sup>2</sup>. Because of the Austro-Hungarian army's unsuccessful campaigns on the Eastern Front (the Great battle of Galicia, the Carpathian operation, the fall of Przemyśl and the Brusilov offensive), 1,736,764 of its soldiers were taken Russian prisoners. It totalled 20% of all the mobilized. In September 1917, there were 623,644 prisoners of war of the Central Powers in the Kyiv and Odesa military districts. That totalled 34.4% of all the prisoners of war hold in the territory of the former Russian Empire. At the same time, 24,945 Austro-Hungarian officers and 736,618 soldiers were in captivity in the interior of the country. During the period of 1914-1917, 36,639 people (2.1%) of the contingent of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war were sent to form national units and to be at the disposal of union governments<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of World War I the ethnic structure of the Austro-Hungarian army looked like this: Germans – 24.8%, Hungarians – 23.3%, Czechs and Slovaks – 16.2%, Croats, Slovenes, Serbs – 11.7%, Poles – 7.9%, Rusyns – 7.8%, Romanians – 7.0%, Italians – 1.3%<sup>4</sup>. 12 infantry and jaeger regiments, 2 courier battalions, 2 cavalry regiments, 3 regiments of field and mountain artillery, a field engineer battalion and a commissariat division were formed of the Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian population of the empire<sup>5</sup>.

To determine the number of captured Croats, Serbs and Slovenes on the territory of the Russian Empire, data of Soviet studies are often used –

about 300,000 people<sup>6</sup>. The number of POW's is also calculated by extrapolating their share in the Austro-Hungarian army. In this case it makes 11-12% (200-250 thousand people). It should be noted a significant difference in the national complement of prisoners of war both at the regional level and at different periods of time. So, during 1915-1918 in the Perm province (the Middle Urals) 88 Croat prisoners of war (1.02%), 50 Serbs (0.6%) and 43 Slovenes (0.5%) were kept<sup>7</sup>, that made 2.12% of total contingent of all the POWs. At the same time, in the summer of 1916, in the Alexandrovsk district (Yekaterinoslav province) 80% of prisoners of war engaged in agricultural work were Yugoslavs<sup>8</sup>.

In the fall of 1914, the Russian army's successful offensive operation in Galicia helped to take the first prisoners of war; they were hold in a filtration camp on the territory of the Kyiv fortress. Since October 1914, the prisoners were divided into groups on the ethnic basis: almost all Germans (including Austrians) and Hungarians were sent to the Volga, the Urals and Siberia, and the Slavs were hold in the Ukrainian and central provinces of Russia. Taking into consideration the political importance of this issue, a Special Committee of Protection and Distribution of Captive Slavs was established at the headquarters of the Kyiv Military District. In 1916 the committee was headed by Major-General M. Pismensky. A. Novotny served as secretary<sup>9</sup>. By the end of 1914, there had been a significant accumulation of prisoners of war in Kyiv. The Southern Railways Office ordered to collect all available heated goods vans to transport 36,000 captives of the Austro-Hungarian and German armies<sup>10</sup>.

Before the First World War, the Poltava province was an agrarian region with a relatively small number of agricultural processing enterprises. The cultivation of grain crops, sugar beets and tobacco, as well as horse breeding were the leading agricultural sectors of the region. The vast majority of powerful industrial enterprises, in particular steam mills, woodworking and mechanical plants, were concentrated in

\* Without the Russian Empire.

<sup>1</sup> Мировая война в цифрах. М.-Л.: Военизгиз, 1934. – С. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Головин Н. Н. Россия в Первой мировой войне. М.: Вече, 2006. С. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Россия в мировой войне 1914-1918 (в цифрах). М.: Центральное статистическое управление, 1925. С. 40-41.

<sup>4</sup> Зайцов А. 1918 год: очерки из истории русской гражданской войны. Б.и., 1934. С. 115.

\* In addition, representatives of these nations served in multinational military units.

<sup>5</sup> Österreich-Ungarns Letzter Krieg 1914-1918. II Beilagen, Tabelle 6. Wien, 1930-1931.

<sup>6</sup> Зеленин В. В. Под Красным знаменем Октября: югославянские интернационалисты в Советской России 1917-1921 гг. М.: Мысль, 1977. С. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Суржикова Н. В. Военный плен в российской провинции (1914–1922 гг.): дис. ... доктора ист. наук: 07.00.02. Екатеринбург, 2015. С. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Журналы Александровского уездного земского собрания II очередной сессии 1916 года с приложениями и журналы чрезвычайного собрания 4-го мая 1916 года. Александровск, 1917. С. 198.

<sup>9</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 119.

<sup>10</sup> «Приднепровский голос». Кременчуг. № 760, 1914 г.

Kremenchuk, where at the end of the nineteenth century a power station and the only electric tram in the province were functioned. That chief town of the district was a major economic centre, which accounted for a quarter of the province's total trade turnover<sup>1</sup>.

In 1914, the arrival of prisoners of war in the region was disordered, and the conditions of their detention had no strict regulation. In early September, the Poltava governor A.K. Baggovut suggested the boards to determine the need for prisoners of war, whose labour was planned to be used in 1915. Despite the lack of agreement with accommodation conditions, the town councils of Zinkiv, Kremenchuk, Pryluky and Romny filed applications for 30 prisoners, and Zemstvos of Pereiaslav and Lubny asked for 100 and 150 people, respectively. According to local press reports, in the fall of 1914 the first batches of prisoners of war started working in Poltava (50 people), as well as in the districts of Myrhorod (30 people) and Poltava (100 people)<sup>2</sup>.

In late August – early September 1914, wounded prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army along with Russian soldiers were arriving for treatment in infirmaries of the Poltava province<sup>3</sup>. At the initial stage of the war, the town elite, ladies from charitable societies and those who wish came to the Kremenchuk railway station to meet the trains with wounded soldiers. Journalists noted the total number of soldiers arrived for treatment, as well as the presence of Austro-Hungarian soldiers among them, attitude to whom was rather favourable<sup>4</sup>.

Because of the special recruitment and mobilization of soldiers before the spring field work of 1915, in the agriculture of the Poltava region a shortage of workers became noticeable. At the Zemstvo meeting, the provincial town-councillor R. R. Kapnist raised the question of the need for allotting prisoners of war from Galician Rusyns for agricultural work in the province<sup>5</sup>. In the spring of 1915, a significant number of prisoners of war having been captured in the Carpathian battle and in Przemyśl arrived in the Kyiv camp. From March 25, 1915, for the space of six weeks, 118,000 prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army were being sent to the rear

provinces of the empire; some of them found themselves in the Poltava region.

In July 1915, hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war passed through a new assembly and deportation point, which began to operate in the vicinity of Darnytsia\* station. At the end of 1915 – the first half of 1916, the arrival of new prisoners of war from the South-Western Front to the camp practically ceased, but with the beginning of the Brusilov offensive, the situation was drastically changed. At the end of June, 1916 over 25 thousand prisoners of war were registered in Darnytsia and in mid-July there were about 20 thousand of them, every day eight trains with prisoners of war arrived in the camp, and six evacuation trains were sent to the inner regions of Russia<sup>6</sup>.

In 1915, the use of POW's labour began in most areas of the Poltava region, while the first detachment (520 people) arrived in Kremenchuk district only at the end of April 1916. A special commission was organized to resolve issues concerning the maintenance and conditions for work of prisoners of war at the Kremenchuk district zemstvo<sup>7</sup>. In February of the same year, at the Kremenchuk reserve food store №2 (hereinafter – KRFS №2) prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army had already been maintained. Original sources make thorough study of the maintenance, conditions of life and for work of this contingent to be possible.

According to the normative documents and distribution in the Darnytsia camp, prisoners of war from friendly nations, i.e. Slavs and Romanians, were supposed to be kept in areas under martial law. No documentary evidence of keeping German or Hungarian prisoners of war in Kremenchuk has been identified. Although a POW Serb M. Svilar, who knew Russian and Magyar languages, was sent for consideration the case of a prisoner of war Barshan from KRFS №2 in court at 497 Voronezh squad\*<sup>8</sup>. Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Rusyns made a significant part of the prisoners of war kept at the Kremenchuk reserve food store. Because of the ongoing recruitment to the Serbian division, there were relatively few representatives of the Southern Slavs. According

<sup>1</sup> Статистический справочник по Полтавской губернии на 1917 год. Полтава: Типография т-ва Печатного дела, 1917. С. 187.

<sup>2</sup> «Приднепровский голос». Кременчуг. № 714, 1914 г.

<sup>3</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 977, оп. 1, д. 48.

<sup>4</sup> «Приднепровский голос». Кременчуг. № 704, 1914 г.

<sup>5</sup> Доклады губернской земской управы Полтавскому губернскому земскому собранию 50 очередного созыва за 1914 год. Полтава: Типо-литография И. Л. Фришберга, 1915. С. 231-232.

\* Now it is a district of Kyiv.

<sup>6</sup> Нахтігаль Р. Дарницький табір військовополонених під час Першої світової війни. *Український історичний журнал*. 2010. № 2. С. 103–116.

<sup>7</sup> Кременчугское земство Полтавской губернии. Постановления земских собраний за 1916 год чрезвычайных: 22 июня, 15 сентября и 18 декабря и очередного 52 созыва 12 и 13 ноября с докладами управы и приложениями к ним. Кременчуг: Типография т-ва И.А. Дохман, 1918. С. 115-117.

\* In 1916, it was deployed in Kremenchuk.

<sup>8</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 35.

to the surviving documents, there were about 2% of Serbs, but the exact number of Croats could not be established.

Most prisoners of war were privates of the Austro-Hungarian army. Some of them had special professional training, but peasants and small artisans predominated. Prisoners of war could satisfy their religious needs in the Orthodox churches of the town or in the Catholic Church. At the beginning of September 1916, the chaplain of the Kremenchuk Roman Catholic Church of St. Joseph asked to send a POW Catholic at his disposal for "service <...> in the performance of spiritual needs for prisoners of war". The request was complied, a rusin A. Melnik-Melnitsky, who had a document on the graduation of the teacher's seminary, became the assistant chaplain<sup>1</sup>.

Probably, among the prisoners of war there were conflicts because of nationality, which were typical for the Austro-Hungarian army. Thus, Slavic prisoners of war, worked on Pishchana mountain\*, complained to the Special Commission for the Protection and Distribution of Prisoners at headquarters of the Kyiv military district about the Croat Kalenich, who delayed or did not give them letters and notifications about money transfers at the supervisor's office of a military store. In the response received, it was recommended to stop such activity of the prisoner of war Kalenich, up to his dismissal<sup>2</sup>.

Prisoners of war arrived in the Kremenchuk garrison from the Darnytsia camp in small parties under escort according to orders and preliminary requests. At the beginning of June 1916, 150 prisoners of war arrived at the disposal of the leaders of the military store, and in June 17, 1916, a new escort with an order for 200 POWs was sent from the station "Kremenchuk" to Darnytsia<sup>3</sup>. According to the registration documents dated by July 1, 1916, 612 prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army were at the disposal of the head of KRFS №2<sup>4</sup>. Most of the prisoners, namely 510 ones, worked in two military stores\*\* of the garrison, and the rest of them were in public works in Kremenchuk.

In July 1, 1916, a bakery with a warehouse for finished products and military provisions was

opened in the courtyard of Fialkov's house (corner of Petrovskaya and Alekseyevskaya streets\*\*\*). Prisoners of war worked there<sup>5</sup>. In early July, the store superintendent received a letter with the request to send 20 prisoners of war daily at the disposal of the head of the Kremenchuk bread warehouses. These warehouses were under the control of the authorized for harvesting bread for the army all over the South-Western region\*\*\*\*. In November the need for workers increased and the new application asked to send at least 40 people daily<sup>6</sup>. In July 3, 1916, 610 prisoners of war were turned over to the disposal of the head of the Odesa-Kremenchuk basic food store (hereinafter – OKBFS)<sup>7</sup>.

In 1916, eight POWs were at the disposal of the Kremenchuk Electric Tram and Lighting Directorate, where, among other things, they served steam locomotives during transportation of ammunition. Some of the POWs worked at Pishchana mountain. There were located the New sector of artillery depots of the Odesa military district as well as the factory "Lilpop, Rau and Levenshtein" evacuated from Warsaw, which fulfilled military orders<sup>8</sup>. In November 1916, the Kremenchuk Military and Industrial Committee asked for 15 prisoners of war to be allotted for painting wagons made by order of the Detached Army of the Southwestern Front<sup>9</sup>. Thus, prisoners of war in the Kremenchuk garrison were involved in works "related to military operations" prohibited by both the Hague Convention (Article 6) and the "Regulations on Prisoners of War" (Article 12).

In mid-July 1916 the constantly increasing volume of work and the lack of labour force made the leadership of OKBFS to apply to the Headquarters of the Kyiv military district with a request to send 200 prisoners of war. The request was not complied<sup>10</sup>. In July-December 1916, large parties of prisoners of war did not come to

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\*\*\* Today's I. Serdiuk and T. Shevchenko streets.

<sup>5</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 105, 110.

\*\*\*\* Warehouses were located on the territory of the South Russian Joint Stock Company (formerly "German and the Sons"), now 1905-year street.

<sup>6</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 6, 201.

<sup>7</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 119.

<sup>9</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 212.

<sup>10</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 21.

<sup>1</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 127.

\* A district of Kremenchuk.

<sup>2</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 63, обкл.

\*\* From July to December 1916, about 250-300 prisoners of war worked in the repair shops of two grocery stores.

Kremenchuk\*, despite the significant reinforcement of the Darnytsia camp due to the Brusilov offensive. At the same time, in July 1916, 100 prisoners of war were sent from Kremenchuk to the Lohvytsia military store, 50 POWs – to the Vapniarka military store and 55 ones – to the disposal of the Poltava provincial zemstvo<sup>1</sup>. Data on their return are not available, as well as information about POWs' deaths.

In November 1916, according to the order of the Headquarters of the KMD dated by the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1916, 75 POWs of certain professions were to be sent to the Darnytsia isolation checkpoint. So, 10 joiners, 4 locksmiths, 8 blacksmiths, 8 carpenters, 8 stove-makers, 18 bricklayers, 4 packers, 14 machinists and 1 boiler-maker were required<sup>2</sup>. They were promised to be replaced by an appropriate number of prisoners of war without certain professions. There were no necessary number of specialists among the POWs in the Kremenchuk garrison and in November 10, 1916 71 prisoners of war\*, mainly Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and several Rusyns, were sent to Darnytsia<sup>3</sup>.

In the summer of 1915, recruiters from Serbia arrived to Russia for recruitment volunteers of the prisoners of war of the Austro-Hungarian army. In February 1916, it was decided at the government level to create a Serbian division. In April 15, 1916 9,751 Serbs, 14 Slovenes, 8 Russians, 84 Croats, 25 Czechs and 22 POWs of other nationalities became a part of it<sup>4</sup>. In the summer of 1916, it was decided to form the Second Serbian Division, which was planned to be merged into a united Serbian corps under the command of General M. Zhivkovich<sup>5</sup>. When recruiting into this division, the principle of voluntariness was violated, and all southern Slavs from OdMD were forcibly sent to Odesa. As a result, in October 1916, among the POWs of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes gathered to form the Second Serbian Division, serious riots broke out, in which 13 people

were killed, mainly Croats<sup>6</sup>. A special commission investigated the incident; the subsequent reinforcement of the Serbian units was planned to be carried out exclusively on a voluntary basis.

The huts for prisoners of war were located on Sennaya Square in the house of Gebgold, not far from the railway station and the basic military store. After the fire in August 1916, the living conditions of prisoners of war were checked, and the state of heating and lighting was found to be satisfactory<sup>7</sup>. In early September, the store supervisor applied to the head of the new bath-houses opened by the union of local government institutions with a request to bathe there "505 prisoners of war of the lower ranks"<sup>8</sup>. During a monthly wash in the bath-house, prisoners of war were examined and patients with scabies and eye diseases were isolated<sup>9</sup>.

According to the results of the examination conducted in October 1916, a doctor at the Kremenchuk artillery depots noted the need for thorough repairs of the accommodations for prisoners of war, or their transferring to another building. Patients (with colds, gastrointestinal diseases or injuries) were timely given medical aid out relief or in a military hospital; venereal diseases were not detected. A special cube was allotted for boiling water, food was voted to be tasty, dressings were delivered from the field pharmacy in sufficient quantities<sup>10</sup>.

Kremenchuk district treasury assigned money for the maintenance of prisoners of war. So, in July 20, 1916, 2,000 roubles for 510 people and in August 12, 1916 advance payment of 1,000 roubles for POWs' wages were requested<sup>11</sup>. Despite remittances from relatives (Appendix 1), the majority of POWs tried to improve their financial position as much as possible. The most common way was their unwarranted absence to nearby villages, where there was a catastrophic lack of workers. Prisoners of war were hired for agricultural and other work by soldiers' wives and widows, in

\* So, in July 1916, only 18 prisoners of war arrived in Kremenchuk, and in August of the same year - 20 ones.

<sup>1</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 11, 13, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 197, 520.

\* 63 of them were highly qualified.

<sup>3</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 197.

<sup>4</sup> Милорадович Г. Карантин идей. Лагеря для изоляции «подозрительных лиц» в Королевстве сербов, хорватов и словенцев в 1919–1922 гг. М.: Regnum, 2010. С. 129.

<sup>5</sup> Вишняков Я., Тимофеев А., Милорадович Г. Армия без государства. От сербского к югославянскому добровольческому корпусу в России во время Первой мировой войны: сб. док. – Војска без државе. Од српског до југословенског добровољачког корпуса у Русији за време Првог светског рата: зб. док.; Рос. ин-т стратег. исслед.; Рос. военно-историческое общество; Ин-т И. Андрича. Отдел истории (Республика Сербская). М., 2014. С. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Вишняков Я., Тимофеев А., Милорадович Г. Армия без государства. От сербского к югославянскому добровольческому корпусу в России во время Первой мировой войны: сб. док. – Војска без државе. Од српског до југословенског добровољачког корпуса у Русији за време Првог светског рата: зб. док.; Рос. ин-т стратег. исслед.; Рос. военно-историческое общество; Ин-т И. Андрича. Отдел истории (Республика Сербская). М., 2014. С. 145–147.

<sup>7</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 535.

<sup>10</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 535, обкл.

<sup>11</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 20, 56.

exchange for money and civilian clothes. Taking into consideration importance of the problem, the managers of the military store reported on the necessity to meet the needs of prisoners of war in money and clothing<sup>1</sup>.

With the beginning of the cold season, the question about the condition of POWs' foot-wear was raised. The special garrison commission noted that only 247 POWs of the 506 examined had the satisfactory condition of the "Austrian military boots", 172 prisoners of war had to repair their shoes, and 85 POWs wore bast shoes that "required replacing with leather shoes"<sup>2</sup>. As to footcloths, there was the similar situation. According to the standards, only a pair of footcloths was given to prisoners of war that was not enough for a long period of wear, so they stole sacks in the store and cut them into footcloths. To prevent such cases, the managers of OKBFS allotted 1,000 unserviceable sacks to prisoners of war<sup>3</sup>.

Escapes and unwarranted absence were the most common POWs' offences. Prisoners of war Rusins and Poles were often mentioned in reports on escapes, whereas Croats were absent in the lists of offenders at all. The escapes of prisoners of war were not on a mass scale and had no influence on the change in the number of contingent. In early July 1916 it was reported only about one POW-breaker during the transfer of prisoners of war from one store to another. From August to November 1916, those cases became more frequent, and several people each month left the Kremenchuk garrison.

The managers of the military store sent the offenders under special supervision to the Darnytsia camp, indicating offence, e.g. escaping, stealing sacks, violent behaviour, etc. In one of the lists of prisoners of war sent to Darnytsia there was Milan Kalinich, most likely a Croat, about whom complaints were made to the Headquarters of the KMD. In November 22, 1916, the prisoner of war P. Protsyk was prosecuted by drum-head court martial at 757<sup>th</sup> foot squads\* for the theft of two cans of meat<sup>4</sup>.

On the whole, in the spring and summer of 1916 there was an increase in the number of prisoners of war engaged in agricultural work in the Poltava

province. At that time in addition to prisoners of war from the Darnytsia camp, captured during the Brusilov offensive, the Slavs were arriving from the eastern regions of the empire. In April 1916, before the start of the spring field work, 13 720 POWs were in the districts of the Poltava region; in July 25, 1916 their number increased to 27 451 ones, and in August 10, 1916 – to 28 484<sup>5</sup>. According to rough estimates, in the summer of 1916, the labour of 200 thousand POWs was used in agriculture of the Ukrainian provinces<sup>6</sup>.

In early August 1916 there were 292 prisoners of war at the disposal of the Poltava town council. Some of the POWs worked in the commissariat workshop and in coal depots. The leadership of the Kyiv military district planned to resettle 3,000 captured Czech officers in the centre of the province, but the Poltava town council refused this offer, pleading the lack of free premises<sup>7</sup>.

In the middle of the summer of 1916, the leaders of the province received information about possible riot among prisoners of war. In order to prevent such occurrences, the Poltava governor R. G. Mollov ordered the police officers to pay great attention to all cases of prisoners' refusing to work. If necessary, district police officers had to take decisive measures with the use of weapons and the call of military teams<sup>8</sup>. In addition, the governor placed the recommendations on ensuring the efficient keeping watch over POWs and the use of their labour for consideration of the Zemstvo and town councils of the Poltava region. It was considered to be inexpedient to employ people with disabilities for guarding POWs, and the police leaders together with the leaders of the Zemstvo council were entrusted with general supervision of the work of prisoners of war. From July to September prisoners of war were paid 10 roubles for their work in the province. In other months of the year the payment decreased to 8 roubles. The POWs were handed out 4 roubles a month, and the rest was transferred to the Zemstvo or to the private person who was responsible for providing the prisoner of war with clothes and shoes<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 174, 520.

\* A drum-head court martial was formed in the Kremenchuk garrison in early November after large-scale riots of soldiers at a local distribution point. POWs' participation was not marked in these events.

<sup>4</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 286-288.

<sup>5</sup> «Приднепровский голос». Кременчуг. №1213, 1916 г.; «Полтавский день». Полтава. №№ от 29.07.; 14.08.; 26.08.; 16.09. 1916 г.

<sup>6</sup> Ресент О. П., Сердюк О. В. Перша світова війна і Україна. К.: Генеза., 2004. С. 179.

<sup>7</sup> «Полтавский день». Полтава. №№ от 15.07.; 16.07.; 06.08.1916 г.

<sup>8</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 83, оп. 1, д. 146, л. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Кременчугское земство Полтавской губернии. Постановления земских собраний за 1916 год чрезвычайных: 22 июня, 15 сентября и 18 декабря и очередного 52 созыва 12 и 13 ноября с докладами управы и приложениями к ним. Кременчуг: Типография т-ва И.А. Дохман, 1918. С. 115-117.

For identification, on his street-clothes each prisoner of war had to wear a special tin badge issued by the council. It was recommended prisoners of war Germans and Magyars to be sent to large estates, where proper supervision was provided, and mixed or Slavic groups of 10-30 people each – to small farms. Prisoners of war were categorically forbidden to visit places of entertainment, to leave huts without permission, to be hired by widows in small farms. Unfortunately, all these points of directives were repeatedly violated in practice<sup>1</sup>.

During the summer of 1916, zemstvos of the Ukrainian provinces repeatedly received government orders to debar a certain number of prisoners of war from agricultural work, which caused extremely negative responses. So, during the year Serbian volunteer divisions were formed in Odesa. Southern Slavs prisoners of war were required to be sent there. This was followed by a directive of "Tsentrсахар" on enlisting the POWs to its plants. So, in August 25, 1916, 2,500 prisoners of war, not drawn into work in sugar beet plantations in the Poltava province, were removed from agricultural work and sent to the disposal of "Tsentrсахар". In the late autumn of 1916, most prisoners of war were recalled by the military department from the Poltava province to Darnytsia and sent to volunteer units or to enterprises of the coal and metallurgical industries. In 1917 in zemstvos of Poltava province, the question raised of replacing prisoners of war with migrants from Central Asia or China<sup>2</sup>.

Prisoners of war Slavs quickly adapted to the new social environment, and some of them managed to live in conditions not worse than those of the indigenous population of the region. Sometimes prisoners of war wished to accept Russian citizenship, but, according to the legislation, the solution of this issue was postponed until the end of the war<sup>3</sup>.

No cases of getting POWs into the local criminal chronicle were found, while the reports of agents of the Poltava Provincial Gendarme Board supplemented the picture of POWs' daily life. Prisoners of war who worked in the Kremenchuk Tram Office had a monthly salary of 30 roubles and overtime money, lived in private rooms without proper supervision and wore civilian clothes. In rural areas, prisoners of war often lived with

peasants as full members of the family, attended fairs, and cohabited with single women. One of the gendarme informants reported that the prisoner of war A. Kovachik, sent to work to the laundry at the colony of the mental cases near Poltava, was "negligent, lazy, and urged the rest of the prisoners of war to strike"<sup>4</sup>.

Particular attention was paid to those cases where Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war "carried propaganda both among their people and among the peasants, trying to shake their faith in the Brusilov offensive, proving that all provinces up to the Dnieper would annex to Austria-Hungary". In the summarizing part of this observational note, it was mentioned that only Serbs, Czechs, and Ruthenians were true friends of Russia and all prisoners of war were proposed to be separated according to ethnicity<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, the military captivity of the First World War on the territory of the Poltava province had a number of specific features. So, on the territory of the province there were no special camps of POWs; prisoners of war were kept in huts with rather relative guarding. Unlike the industrial centres of Russia (the Urals, Donbass), in the Poltava region prisoners of war were engaged in agriculture, that was the usual for most of them, and only a small part of POWs worked in the towns.

The proximity of the Darnytsia camp and the centres for the formation of volunteer units (Kyiv, Odesa) caused frequent rotations of contingents of soldiers. The relative proximity of the front and the martial law introduced in 1914 contributed to the predominance of Slavic prisoners of war in the region, with rare exceptions, since most Germans and Hungarians were sent to the eastwards of the Poltava province.

Increasing in the sources, embracing the documents and materials from the archives of the southern regions of Ukraine in it, will make it possible to get more complete picture of such a many-sided phenomenon as the military captivity of the Great War, in particular its Croatian dimension.

<sup>1</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, л. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Кременчугское земство Полтавской губернии. Постановления земских собраний за 1916 год чрезвычайных: 22 июня, 15 сентября и 18 декабря и очередного 52 созыва 12 и 13 ноября с докладами управы и приложениями к ним. Кременчуг: Типография т-ва И.А. Дохман, 1918. С. 19-23.

<sup>3</sup> Государственный архив Полтавской области, ф. 990, оп. 1, д. 3, с. 114-115.

<sup>4</sup> Центральный государственный исторический архив, г. Киев, ф. 321, оп.1, д.220, л. 115.

<sup>5</sup> Центральный государственный исторический архив, г. Киев, ф. 321, оп.1, д.220, л. 73.



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