

ZBIGNIEW KARPUS ❁ MACIEJ KORKUĆ ❁ WALDEMAR REZMER

# PRISONERS OF WAR 1920



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OF WAR 1920



Institute of National Remembrance  
Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against  
the Polish Nation

ZBIGNIEW KARPUS ✎ MACIEJ KORKUĆ ✎ WALDEMAR REZMER

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## Introduction by English Editor

This book can be instructive for those seeking insights into the Soviet or Russian methods of war, in the fields of truth and memory. It also provides some details on the Kremlin's approach to armed conflict, its resolution and its aftermath realization of peace treaty terms as well as the Kremlin's approach to the issue of historical memory, including its manipulation. Whereas chapters 2 and 3 of this book will provide a detailed account of the fate of Polish and Soviet POWs of the fighting in 1920 the first chapter will introduce the topic from the perspective of its historical significance and instrumentalization by the Kremlin.

It will also provide an overview of just how the Katyn Massacre was cruelly instrumentalised and distorted by its very perpetrators in the Kremlin both during WWII and also over subsequent half a century of Soviet domination. Distortions of the truth that persist to this very day.



# Chapter 1

Maciej Korkuć

“To be taken advantage of –  
if it proves to be essential”.

## The Kremlin’s Anti-Katyń narrative and the POWs of the 1918–1920 Soviet–Polish War

In April 1990, acting on behalf of the Soviet Union, President Mikhail Gorbachev officially acknowledged that it had been the Soviet Union that had committed the Katyń Massacre fifty years earlier. A few months later, in November 1990, the same Mikhail Gorbachev, in a targeted official request dated November 3, 1990, demanded that some earlier historical event was to be found in the history of Polish-Soviet relations, “as a result of which the Soviets incurred losses”. This was to be done in order to “take advantage of it (that earlier event) – if it would prove to be essential in the ongoing talks with «the Polish Side»”<sup>1</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup> *Rosporyazheniye Prezidenta CCCP, Noyabr’ 3, 1990, [in:] Katyń – dokumenty ludobójstwa. Dokumenty i materiały archiwalne przekazane Polsce 14 października 1992 r.* Warszawa 1992, pp. 126–131.

essence this was an undertaking to ‘invent’ a problem, which in the prevailing political environment of the time, would be used as a form of historical counterbalance to the predicted negative political, diplomatic and moral repercussions arising from revealing the truth about the Katyń Massacre. As a result, we have the ‘invention’ of the so-called problem of the POWs of 1920, and its later implementation into the political agenda of ongoing bilateral relations.

The criminal decision of 1940 to murder captured Polish officers was just one of a series of political calculations made by the Soviet authorities. One subsequent related political decision of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the later strategy of falsifying the crime following the initial unearthing of the Katyń Massacre in 1943. Another political decision was to attribute these criminal executions to the Germans. A further political decision by Moscow was to demonstrate, via an orchestrated display of indignation by Soviet diplomacy, in the face of any information which would in any way attribute the crime to the Soviets. These political decisions taken by the Soviet authorities (and later by the authorities of the Russian Federation) laid the foundation for the ‘invented’ and false narrative concerning the fate of Soviet POWs, men captured some 20 years before Katyn during the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1919–1920. A false narrative that soon emerged after the Soviet authorities conceded in 1990 that they had actually committed the Katyń Massacre. Such a “calculus of damage” limitation was consciously made to offset the truth about the Katyń Massacre.

Hence, the systematic political decisions taken by the Kremlin from the beginning of the 1990s leading to an increased interest in the fate of these earlier POWs from the years 1919–1920. This topic ceased to be a narrow area of interest in the field of historical research. Following these political decisions

of Moscow, it was now elevated to the level of a problem in bi-lateral relations.

This happened despite the full knowledge of the Kremlin that in 1920 there were no actions that had been taken which could be in any way likened to the Katyń Massacre and the international dimension of that later event.

In the post-war years an ideologized historiography existed in the USSR and within its communist satellite states including The Polish People's Republic (henceforth: **PRL**, the accepted Polish acronym) it shaped the historical narrative according to a formula that postulated an exclusively positive portrayal of both all the parties and all the states controlled by Lenin and Stalin, that they had brought "national and social liberation". The precise nature of the historical account was dependent on the prevailing needs of the ruling Communist party and its Moscow head office. A constituent part of this narrative was, in turn, the presentation of a opaque image of all countries and powers with which Soviet Russia or the USSR had engaged in conflict. We are thus faced with a potential instrumentalization of every fact that the Communists could transform into an accusation. Along with this we have the reinforcement of a polarising formula in which the Soviets always represented the forces bringing "freedom and brotherhood of the people". In contrast, every opponent of the Bolsheviks was represented as an immoral and ruthless "adversary of humanity's progress".

This is the background which allowed for a contemporary political conflict of the 1990s to be somehow linked to the destiny of POWs from 1920, creating an artificial historical counterbalance to the Kremlin's admission of the truth about Katyń. Firstly, we need to briefly surmise the essence of the Soviet-Polish War in the years 1919–1920 and the consequences of Stalin's policies towards Poland during World War II, with the

Katyń Massacre and the Kremlin's Katyń lie in the background. In this way, we can better address the question of just how, in the years from 1943–1990, official Soviet historiography (including of course the analogical official historiography of Poland's post WW II communist PRL state) depicted this Polish-Soviet war, and how the Soviets ascribed the perpetration of the 1940 Katyń Massacre to the Germans. By outlining Moscow's initial accusations against these 1920's "White Polish interveners" one can demonstrate just how distant those original concepts were from what was later devised by the Kremlin in the 1990s.

### **"Launching the decisive battle"**

Firstly, let us consider the facts. From the Polish point of view the war with Bolshevik Russia in the years 1919–1920 was a war in which at stake was the independence of their country then endangered by the plans to spread the Communist Revolution to the west of the European Continent. At stake were also the eastern borders of the newly re-emerging Polish State or 'Commonwealth'. Poland's Chief of State Józef Piłsudski also attempted to support the aspirations of Ukrainians to build their own separate state, which could have, by its mere existence alone also assure Poland of an additional layer of security, following the predicted resolution of political chaos in the former Russian Empire and cessation of internal conflicts.

From the perspective of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the conquest of Poland and the elimination of this newly independent, re-emerging country, was to be one of the stages of the plan to spread the Revolution into post-Versailles Europe (and on to the world). At the end of March 1919 Lenin announced that "all over the world the association of Communists is growing. In a number of countries Soviet power has already triumphed.

Soon we shall see the victory of communism throughout the world; we shall see the foundation of a Worldwide Federation of Soviet Republics.”<sup>2</sup> During the Second Congress of the Communist International on 19th July 1920, and the apparently victorious advance of the Soviet counter-offensive, Lenin delivered a speech on the international situation. He said *inter alia* that “today everywhere the advanced proletariat is by our side. Proletarian armies exist everywhere [...]. If our comrades in all lands help us now to organize a united army, no shortcomings will impede us from accomplishing our task. That task is worldwide proletarian revolution, the creation of a Worldwide Soviet republic.”<sup>3</sup>

At roughly at the same time the army high command of the Soviet Western Front then fighting the Poles, roused their soldiers’ emotions with the following words (2nd July 1920): “The time for revenge has come. You will drown the criminal government of Piłsudski in the blood of the crushed Polish army. [...] The road to igniting the global maelstrom leads over the corpse of white Poland. We will bring happiness and peace to working people on the tips of our Bayonets. The time to march out has come. To Warsaw, to Minsk, to Vilna – march!”<sup>4</sup>

Faced with such a perspective Poland’s stated intention to remain an independent sovereign country would necessarily become an obstacle on the way to spreading the Soviet revolution westwards across the Continent. As early as August

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<sup>2</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 29, March–August 1920, Moscow 1974, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, April–December 1920, Moscow 1974, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> L. Korczak, J.S. Dąbrowski, M. Ustrzycki, P. Franaszek, M. Korcuć, *Dzieje Kresów*, Kraków 2006, p. 310. See A.A. Daniłow and Ł.G. Kosulina and M.J. Brandt, *Istoriya Rossii. Nachalo 21 veka*, Moskva 2007, p. 120.

1920, Lenin declared: “The revolution of the proletariat, the overthrow of the yoke of capitalism, is on the march and it shall come about in every country in the world.”<sup>5</sup> And in the political report from the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks) a month after the Soviet defeat outside Warsaw, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> September he stated: “The war against Poland, or, to be more precise, the July–August campaign, has radically changed the international political situation.”, and added: “Our army’s near capture of Warsaw has incontestably shown that the centre of the entire system of world imperialism, which rests on the Treaty of Versailles, is located somewhere very close to the Polish capital. Poland, the last anti-Bolshevik stronghold fully controlled by the Entente, is such an important element in that system that when the Red Army threatened that stronghold the entire structure was destabilised”<sup>6</sup>.

Yet Warsaw did not fall: the massive and successful counteroffensive the Polish Army and its Ukrainian allies launched from bridgeheads over the Vistula and Wieprz Rivers marked the turning point in the war. The armies of the Soviet Western Front now retreating in panic, were partly scattered east of Warsaw and partly escaped into the lands of what was then German East Prussia. The Bolsheviks were rapidly losing the land they had earlier occupied. The Soviet South-West Front, whose objective had been to seize Lwów was also forced to retreat. A joint defence by Polish and Ukrainian troops repulsed the latter front’s attack, spearheaded by the cavalry of General Budyonny on the town of Zamość near Lublin.

The fate of the war was then sealed in a second great battle fought in late 1920. Hoping that the Polish army would be

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<sup>5</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, pp. 275–276.

suffering from exhaustion due to being constantly on the offensive, the Russians attempted to organise a counterattack, which was meant to change their declining fortunes on the front. Piłsudski grasped this fact while he himself aimed at conducting a decisive attack before the Soviets, who still had a huge army, could regroup their forces. Between 20<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September 1920, a battle was waged on the banks of the Neman River, which took place in an area stretching some 20 miles from Wołkowysk and Grodno to Druskienniki in Lithuania. This was the second decisive battle of the Polish-Bolshevik war. By means of a risky flanking manoeuvre, the Poles were able to utterly crush the entire Soviet front. A hasty retreat by the Red Army, who again lost a great number of their soldiers, thus began. Having recaptured a number of towns from the Soviets, the Poles then entered Minsk on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1920. Three days later 18<sup>th</sup> of October, a ceasefire which had been signed earlier, on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920, came into force.

Already after the defeats in the battles of Warsaw and the Neman River, Lenin clarified his strategy on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1920 stating that "by destroying the Polish army, we are destroying the Peace of Versailles, on which the whole current system of international relations is built. Had Poland turned Soviet, [...] the Peace of Versailles would have been smashed, and the entire international system put in place as a result of the victory over Germany would have collapsed. [...] Had the Red Army's victorious advance continued another few days, not only would Warsaw have been captured (that would not have mattered much), but the peace of Versailles would have been destroyed. Therein lies the international significance of this Polish war". And he recapitulated: "That is the source of the international crisis. That, too, is the source of our new difficulties now. It was when, as you know, we lacked just a little strength to reach

Warsaw, [...] when, after its heroic efforts without parallel or precedent in the past, our army's strength was spent, then the moment of our military downfall came. We have now fallen back very far to the east"<sup>7</sup>.

The peace treaty signed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921 in Riga ended the war with the Soviets. The Polish-Soviet border settled on during the negotiations was a compromise proposal. To a large extent it resembled the western border after the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Second Partition of Poland. Poland had defended its independence. At the same time, Poland gave up on any tangible attempts to create an autonomous Ukrainian state.

During most of the next two decades, the Republic of Poland was an independent country bordering the USSR. This situation endured until 1939.

World War II began in Poland with the combined invasion by Germany and later the Soviet Union. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1939 the two totalitarian states established "borders of friendship" along the Ribbentrop–Molotov line. Likewise, both countries began wide scale repression of Polish society. The Soviet Union, similarly to Germany, pursued a policy in its occupied zone aimed at exterminating the social and national elites (the Katyń Massacre would be just one element of this policy). Within the international context, Stalin wished that the Western European conflict now underway would turn out to be long-lasting and destructive for both sides in the western theatre of Europe. Such an outcome was expected to lead towards the radicalization of public mood thus contributing to an envisaged subsequent Communist revolution. Nonetheless, the Soviets supported Germany with many of the resources necessary for it to invade Europe and pursue this war. The subsequent surprise attack by

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<sup>7</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31..., pp. 305–310.

Germany on her former ally on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 caused a transformation in alliances: with the USSR now joining the camp of the Allies.

Having signed up to the principles of the Atlantic Charter with his new allies, Stalin feigned respect for the values that bound these "united nations". Yet contrary to these principles, when the Red Army's next encroachment onto Polish territory began (in January 1944), the Soviet Union now conducted premeditated actions directed at preventing the restoration of an independent Polish state.

The USSR thus linked the removal of the German occupation to a concurrent effort aimed at the destruction of the Allied Polish Underground State and its structures set up underground during German occupation. An underground state then set upon uprising and self-liberation. The Soviets availed of their de-occupation of all Polish territory to now repeat their earlier 1939 annexation of most of Poland's eastern pre-war territory and the confinement of the rest of Poland to an eastern border along the Bug River. They did all this despite the clear and well proven Polish readiness to undertake allied cooperation in the fight with the Germans. The Polish forces expected nothing more than reciprocity based on values consistent with the charter of the United Nations, more specifically respecting the sovereignty of its Polish ally. Yet this was precisely what the Kremlin did not agree to. In the years 1944–1945 Stalin prevented the reconstruction of a free and independent Republic of Poland. Taking advantage of the presence of Soviet armed forces in Poland, he inhibited the Polish national authorities in exile, leading the fight for the independence of Poland from London, to return to their homeland. Through terror, massive repressions and outright war crimes Stalin destroyed the Polish Underground State, as well as any social networks attached to Poland's independence.

Today in Russian school textbooks there is no place for the factual truth that the soldiers of the Red Army were in fact fighting and actually died to achieve the military and political goals as defined by the imperialist policy of Stalin. It is an indisputable fact that the Soviets wished to use the war's context to extend the power of the Soviet empire to other countries. One of the primary goals of Stalin was to prevent the reconstruction of a free Poland. In the actions of the Kremlin, we can see a firm determination to ensure the incorporation of the eastern part of Poland into the USSR and to utterly subjugate Polish society. Soviet soldiers – in contrast to the slogans of Stalinist propaganda referring to the “liberation of Poland” – were in fact now the instrument of its renewed conquest five years into of World War II. Disregarding the specifics of the actual conduct of Red Army soldiers on these conquered lands, we need to mention that no rank-and-file soldier had any influence over how his struggle, or his death, would be instrumentalised by the authorities of the totalitarian Soviet state. However, as the organized force of that state, they contributed to the subjugation of Poland. After once again crossing the pre-war borders of Poland in Volhynia in January 1944, the Red Army was henceforth a tool of the Soviet occupation which now followed on from the German one<sup>8</sup>.

The fact that Stalin did not wish Poland to become an independent state should constitute the initial starting point for any discussion on Soviet-Polish relations at the time. Again, the Soviet Union seized the eastern Polish land, almost half of its pre-war territory. In turn, with reference to this event,

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<sup>8</sup> The fate of the low-rank Soviet soldiers in the Red Army was thoroughly described by Nikołaj Nikulin. See N. Nikulin, *Soldat*, trans. A. Knyt, Warszawa 2013.

Russian history books repeat, as during the times of Stalin and Brezhnev, the catchphrases of Communist propaganda about the "liberation of Europe" and "liberation of Poland". In this way, the propaganda formulations from the Stalinist era were consolidated into the historical memory<sup>9</sup>.

Indeed, in the conflict of those two totalitarian systems the Soviet Union did defeat the German Reich and forced them to retreat from Polish territory. In the Soviet (and later Russian) narrative, the actual number of Soviet soldiers who fell in Polish territory within its new borders tended to be somewhat overstated. The figures, however, do not constitute a field of material disputes. Nonetheless, the statement itself that around 600,000 Soviet soldiers and circa a million German soldiers had perished on the territory of modern-day Poland does not appear to justify anything that took place on Polish territory, what Polish citizens were subjected too in the aftermath. The numbers of dead soldiers alone do not tell us anything about the political goals for which the soldiers were sacrificed. They tell us nothing about the political goals of Stalin. Inasmuch as the number of Germans who died tell us nothing about the political goals of Hitler. Yet, the role of Hitler in the history of Poland had been clearly delineated in Russia. The same however, cannot be said with regard to any reliable information on Stalin's policy aims and his factual opposition to an independent Poland during World War II.

Naturally, the political decisions of the Kremlin, carried out by millions of Red Army soldiers, determined that in 1945 in the place of Hitler's enslavement a new regime of enslavement was forced upon the Polish nation, and this time by Stalin.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. A.A. Daniłow, Ł.G. Kosulina, M.J. Brandt, *Istoriya Rossii. Nachalo 21 veka...*, pp. 245–248.

The new communist authorities imposed upon Poland were brought from Moscow in July 1944 titled the so-called Polish Committee of National Liberation. Under the protection of the USSR, they forcibly introduced a Stalinist political system in Poland based upon utter terror and absolute dependence on the Kremlin. Its core was the Communist security apparatus established under the supervision of officers of the Soviet NKVD. It was completely subordinate to the Soviets, being modelled on the existing NKVD apparatus and followed the orders of Soviet masters. Stalin thus imposed an alternative satellite state on the Poles, which was entirely reliant on Moscow, and which was obliged to imitate the model of Soviet Stalinism. In this way, the Red Army became a tool in Stalin's hands for the subjugation of the allied state of Poland along with the new Polish regime's efforts at feigning the independence and autonomy of this entity.

Stalin and his Soviet successors never agreed to the withdraw of permanent garrisons of the Red Army from Poland. Polish society had to wait as long as fifty years, almost until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to finally regain its pre-1939 independence. The Soviet, later Russian armed forces, which had played a crucial role in the maintenance and wielding of power by the Communist party in Poland, finally departed in 1993. Thus, it was not until the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Poland truly became a part of the free world again.

During the years of Communist enslavement in Poland (1944–1989), the authorities were dependent upon a Moscow imposed Soviet propaganda narrative, both in schools and in public life. This narrative covered both the Polish-Bolshevik war and the history of the Second Republic of Poland, World War II (including the Katyń Massacre), as well as the subsequent post-war decades. These (Kremlin imposed) visions

departed starkly from the facts, though they served to co-create the pre-prescribed ideological identity of both the USSR and that of its satellites, in this case the communist PRL state subject to it.

### **"The powers of reaction, the right wing and the conservative side"**

In the Soviet narrative the 1918–1920 war against Poland, the Kremlin's desire for conquest of the continent and its attempt sweep away the "Versailles order" in 1920 was not accentuated. For a variety of reasons they decided that in their account of this war that neither this march to the West "over the dead body of white Poland" nor the attempt to ignite the international fire of revolution by the Red Army in the West should be highlighted. They held the view that the image of a nascent Soviet state, assailed from all sides, a victim of foreign invaders, would be far more advantageous. They had no intention to present the Soviets as aggressors wishing to rule over the world. Therefore, in history textbooks in the USSR, and later also in PRL Communist Poland, there was a somewhat different explanation to these events than the one cited earlier in this chapter with those quoted words of 1920 from Lenin himself. This alternative vision of history was already being formulated by Stalin in "Pravda" as early as 1920. Attention was drawn instead to a suitably presented "Polish aggression", one intentionally linked to the wider interventions of the western powers of the time: "There is no doubt that the expedition of landlord dominated Poland against a worker-peasant Russia is essentially an expedition by the Entente. It is not only that the League of Nations, at whose head stands the Entente and of which Poland is a member, most evidently approved the expedition of Poland against Russia.

Above all it is clear, that without the Entente's help Poland could not have attacked Russia. Instead, France, England and America with the use of all their means – arms, uniforms, money and instructors – assisted Poland offensively”<sup>10</sup>.

Although the absurdities of this reasoning are evident<sup>11</sup>, interpretations like this, with political goals to the fore, resulted from the need to mobilize the masses under Bolshevik banners. Already from that time they were intended to perform a specific role within the political-propaganda goals of the Bolshevik or Soviet authorities. Later, this political narrative was strengthened by means of ideologized visions regarding the history of the Bolshevik state, written with the clear benefit of hindsight. It also should be emphasized that these visions remained as prevailing Soviet “historical interpretations” appearing in textbooks for historical instruction in the USSR. At best they were supplemented by suggestions, also far removed from the facts, concerning the alleged coordination of activities by these aggressive “White-Poles” and other White Russian forces under Wrangel<sup>12</sup>, under the auspices of the alleged authorities of both powers, that is “western imperialists”. The theme of “Trotsky's treason” would also later appear in this historical narrative<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> J. Stalin, *Nowa wyprawa ententy na Polskę*, „Pravda”, 25–26 V 1920, cit.: *Historia Polski 1864–1945. Materiały do nauczania w klasie XI*. ed. Ż. Kormanowa, Warszawa 1952, pp. 328–329.

<sup>11</sup> Also Józef Piłsudski polemicized with such a vision in a publication discussing the events of 1920, cf. J. Piłsudski, *Rok 1920* [J. Piłsudzki the year of 1920], trans. A. Bogusławki, Łódź 1989, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Piotr N. Wrangel (1878–1928) – general in the Red Army, a commander of the cavalry in the “white” army of General Anton Denikin, in 1920 a commander of the “white” Russian forces holding the Crimea, Odessa and Kubań, after the ultimate defeat to the Bolsheviks he remained in exile.

<sup>13</sup> *Historia ZSRR*, ed. A. Pankratowa, p. 3, trans. Z Drukierowa *et al.*, Warszawa 1955, p. 294.

This alleged alliance and cooperation between the "White Poles" and Wrangel would also be recalled as a means to explain away the causes of the Bolshevik or Soviet failures in their war with Poland in 1920. However, the word "defeat" would accordingly be omitted in the output of the propaganda machine. The admission that the Red Army had suffered such a resounding defeat in 1920 against an only recently reformulated Polish Army, challenged the myth of its "invincibility" in far too direct a way.

Therefore, the importance and international importance of the Polish victory in 1920 was, as a general rule, diminished. Instead of an obvious statement regarding the defeat, what followed were euphemistic formulas as "the failure to achieve the declared aims" and suchlike explanations. With this approach, it appeared to be easier to explain away why the Red Army "did not win" against Poland. In Soviet textbooks and studies – and later also in publications from Stalinist Poland subjugated by the USSR, the following formula was repeated: "Entente – «bourgeois-land owner Poland» – Wrangel". That is why Lenin's declarations from 1920 about the conquest of the world would hence be subtly concealed by the more practical explanation of the necessary "defence against an invasion of white interveners". Therefore, Lenin's opinions which were more consistent with this narrative were projected, for instance about the collusion of "the international imperialists in order to choke the Soviet Union with two hands: the Polish offensive and Wrangel's offensive"<sup>14</sup>. These were the most damning of the accusations which were to then strengthen the negative image of "Piłsudski's Poland".

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<sup>14</sup> *50 let Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil. Fotodokumenty*, Moskva 1967.

Furthermore, what was imposed upon the citizens of the USSR in the inter-war period would become the canon for the historical interpretations that would also apply in Poland after 1944. After the war, no longer just in the Soviet Union, but also in occupied Poland, the Soviet historical narrative would be in force, also with regard to the Polish-Soviet war. This would be a significant element of the functioning of the Communist state. The imposition of this ideologized vision of modern history on Polish society in the years 1944–1989 (including the trauma of the widely-known Katyń Lie) actually constituted an essential identity element of Communist power implemented in Poland by the USSR. Indeed, it was one of the ideological and historical foundation stones of the People's Republic of Poland. The acceptance of this Soviet version of modern history and its instruction in Poland became an inherent element of the 'lived' Communist reality. This lived reality endured from the times of Stalin's initial nominee Bolesław Bierut, up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century era of Wojciech Jaruzelski, who assumed power in the PRL as a result of the Brezhnev's decisions and even served as President till the end of 1990.

This negative image of the pre-war Republic of Poland as presented in PRL schools and official propaganda was linked to a pre-existing Soviet narrative of a "bourgeois and landlord dominated" state that was "oppressive towards peasants and workmen". Every defeat of the Second Republic of Poland, every problem which might accentuate this negative image of pre-war Poland, was availed of in propaganda by bringing them to the fore and exaggerating them. As a result, the narrative about the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1920 was in Stalinist Poland, and similarly later in the USSR, manipulated. The Bolsheviks and the Communists were depicted as the alleged defenders of independence (!), and the Polish authorities with Piłsudski as

their leader were presented as a “revolutionary”, “landlordly” and “criminal” regime.

In the materials used in the instruction of “the history of Poland” authorized and published by the Communist authorities in 1952, the war of 1919–1920 was described in precisely the same manner as it was in the Soviet Union. Specifically availing of the following formula: “western imperialists” and the Entente – “bourgeois-landlord Poland” – Wrangel (the aforementioned White Russian commander). In the so-called “Polish” textbook, the role of the guide is performed by quotations from *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which depicted the expedition of Piłsudski and Petlura as being intended to “seize” Ukraine and Belarus in order to “restore the power of privileged Polish land owners [...] and [...] help Wrangel defeat the Red Army and thus bring back to power in the Soviet Union the land owners and the capitalists”<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, the authors of the above textbook added erroneously, not taking the actual facts into account, that Piłsudski was “equipped with weapon and instructors from France, England and the United States and undertook his actions on the basis of orders from domestic bourgeois elements and foreign imperialism, doing so against the desires and interests of the Polish nation”<sup>16</sup>. They were also determined to explicate that “while fighting the young Soviet Country, Piłsudski allied himself with all the contemporary counter-revolutionary powers. Behind the slogans of nationalism and anti-Russian sentiment the indoctrinated illusion that the fight was against ‘old imperial Russia’ [actually] lay hidden an alliance of the Polish reactionary element with the darkest

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<sup>15</sup> *Historia Polski 1864–1945...*, p. 329.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

of Russian and Ukrainian reactionary forces, an alliance openly hostile towards the Polish nation”<sup>17</sup>.

Also, in the above cited publication, issued just thirty-two years after the events described, an attempt was made to emphasize the illegitimacy of the authorities of “landlord Poland”, intended to draw a stark contrast with the aims of “our Russian brothers”<sup>18</sup>. We must be conscious of the fact that the Communists from Warsaw and Moscow kept full control over the historical archives, including those taken over by the Second Republic of Poland. If the Soviet principals of the PRL State authorities had been interested in searching for any alleged “hidden facts” during that time, they would have had considerable scope in which to pursue such envisaged activity. No other archive, than that relating to “Work item no. 1” – the name bestowed upon the acts relating to Katyń, was so heavily guarded in Moscow. However no materials could have been hidden from the authorities of Communist Poland in the official PRL archives. Thus, there is no doubt that any possibly felony committed by inter-war Poland that contravened the rules of war, would have been used to underline the infamy of such a “bourgeois-land owner” regime. Not without reason any elements that could possibly confirm the alleged danger inherent in the Polish “darkest reactionary element” was sought out. However, in a situation where millions of Poles still lived who remembered those times and many were still young, it appeared to be more advantageous to seek to reinterpret the facts and simply conceal certain aspects of the events and by such means construct a radically new reality, since the effect of such outright falsehoods could turn out to be markedly different from that

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<sup>17</sup> *Historia Polski 1864–1945...*, p. 329.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 336.

intended. Hence the role played by accusations and denouncements as evidence of "Polish terror" denouncements depicting actual factual events such as the justifiable arrest of Communists made behind the lines was raised<sup>19</sup>. They were described with the use of specific, though hardly suitable, terminology, one that was to equate these courageous Polish national resistance activities with the nefarious practices of the German oppressor of World War II: "At the same time the [Polish] terror directed at the revolutionary peasants and workmen is deepening. Prisons and concentration camps fill up (over 5,000 of the so-called detained)"<sup>20</sup>. This was the single accusation of "crimes" which could be formulated against the Polish authorities. Indeed, the term "concentration camps"<sup>21</sup> was used here intentionally in order to produce an explicitly negative connotation with the then recently discovered German genocide. Given that this "reactionary" Poland was supposed to have murdered tens of thousands of people, could such a fact have been overlooked in these texts?

Yet the topic of the POWs from the earlier Polish-Soviet war does not arise in publications issued later under Communist rule in the PRL, nor even in the publications prepared by their Soviet principals. The pattern of the narrative remained intact, for instance, in 1968 in the USSR a jubilee, richly illustrated volume to commemorate the fifty-year anniversary of the Red

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<sup>19</sup> They were fully justified, since the Polish communists conducted sabotage action in the Polish rear, calculated to support of approaching Bolshevik troops.

<sup>20</sup> *Historia Polski 1864–1945...*, p. 333.

<sup>21</sup> To read more, see A.J. Kamiński, *Koszmar niewolnictwa. Obozy koncentracyjne od 1896 do dziś*. [The nightmare of slavery. Concentration camps from 1896 till today]. A.J. Kamiński, and A. Zarychta, Warszawa 1990, pp. 29–62.

Army was published. The framed description of the war against Poland was a duplicate of the earlier propaganda narrative: “*In the spring of 1920, the Entente undertook a new aggression against the Soviet Union. The principal forces for this were of the troops of bourgeois landowner Poland and the rump of the Denikin army under the command of baron Wrangler then concentrated in the Crimea. The Communist party commanded the Soviet state to eject the imperialists. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1920 the principles of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union «the Polish front and our objectives» were published, prepared under the supervision of V. I. Lenin. Tens of thousands of workers of the Soviet Union joined the ranks of the defenders of the socialist Homeland. 20,000 Communists were sent to the West and South-West Fronts in 1920. In the summer of 1920, the Red Army developed offensive actions along the West and South-West Fronts. Soviet troops defeated the enemy and drove on westwards towards Warsaw and Lwow. In August, the Battle at the Vistula River took place. Despite the fact that the course of this battle was unsuccessful for our army, the situation of ‘landlord’ Poland remained difficult. On 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 in Riga an armistice was signed*”<sup>22</sup>. There was nothing was mentioned here about POWs taken by the Polish Army, nor indeed about Polish POWs captured by the Soviets. In fact, the former were not victims of any mass Polish crime, though any information about their numbers would tell us much about the true scale of the Soviet defeat.

Maria Turlejska was in the avant-garde of ideologized party affiliated “historians of modern times” in Communist PRL. She devoted one of her “historical papers” published in 1972 to the war of 1919–1920. It was entitled *Pochód za Dniepr, pochód za Wisłę* (*March to the Dnieper, march to the Vistula*), where

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<sup>22</sup> 50 let Sovetskikh Vooruzhennykh Sil. Fotodokumenty, Moskva 1967.

we can also see the essence of Communist “historiography”. She portrayed events in a way to justify and highlight Soviet arguments and condemn Polish actions. We can clearly see this in the concluding remarks: “War against revolutionary Russia strengthens the reactionary forces, the right wing and the conservative side in Poland [as per the original copy]”<sup>23</sup>. In these circumstances, any “crime of genocide” would appear to be an ideal, coronational proof of this road to perdition and confirm this infamy of “bourgeois Poland”. However, despite the abundance of other negative opinions presented in the assortment of fact concealment, manipulation and distortion, no such reference to genocidal activity could be observed.

In the era of Mikhail Gorbachev, in the second half of the 1980s, “perestroika” and “glasnost” contributed to a liberalization in the field of historical discussion – both in the USSR and also in its satellite the PRL. We might even speculate that a concept appeared in the Soviet Union to modify somewhat the manner of presenting the war of 1919–1920. Nonetheless, hope for this turned out to be futile. Both “reformation” and “transparency” in the times of Gorbachev had their limits. The narrative of the Polish-Bolshevik war did not in fact change. The party authorities simply did not perceive such a need. In a history school textbook, published in 1988, for secondary students (for the 9th grade in the Soviet ten-year education curriculum) – *Istoriya SSSR*, its authors (Iwan Fiedosow, Jurij Korabliw, Jurij Kucuszkin, Wiktor Szerstobitow) delivered to the young citizens of the USSR the prevailing set of key information points approved by their political masters. It is worth accentuating the fact that the people who today form a large part of the political elites of Russia learned from such texts. The

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<sup>23</sup> M. Turlejska, *Spór o Polskę. Szkice historyczne*, Warszawa 1972, p. 37.

history curriculum of the time encompassed the period from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 1930s<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, we are able to find some information on the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. Of course, there was no requirement to indicate what the war was like from the perspective of the Poles fighting for their independence and borders. Likewise, facts which could have presented Poland in a positive light were also avoided. And additionally, the narrative known from the political-ideological formula of the previous decades of the Entente – “bourgeois-land owner Poland” – Wrangel – was still in force. The message was unilateral and, as earlier, radically politicized. It surmised the war with Poland as an aggression of “*the imperialists of the United States, England and France*” against the “*success and bounty of the great socialist October Revolution*”. Thus, the war of 1920 depicted the Bolsheviks as the forces of good, liberators of the people and the working class, while the “bourgeois-landlord Poland” was to be a tool in the hands of the worst powers then allied against the emerging Soviet Union. Again, it followed the same pattern which was emphasized by the title of the relevant subsegment: *Odparcie interwencji burżuazyjno-obszarniczej Polski i rozgromienie Wranglowszczyzny* (Eng. “The Repulsion of the Intervention by Bourgeois-Landlord Poland and the rout of the Wrangel supporters”<sup>25</sup>). Everything that had earlier been fabricated or invented about Poland, all the misrepresentations of reality still so needed by the Soviet authorities could be found in this text. And as earlier, the sole challenge in this version of history was how to shape the justification for defeat in the war with

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<sup>24</sup> *Istoriya SSSR. Uchebnik dlya devyatogo klassa sredney shkoly*, ed. J.S. Kuskuzkin, Moskva 1988.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221–223.

Poland. The above-mentioned theme starts as follows: *"In the spring of 1920, the imperialists organized a new military invasion of the Soviet Union. Two armies took part in it: the army of bourgeois-landlord Poland and the white-guard army of general Wrangel, who occupied the Crimea. The imperialists of the United States, England and France significantly strengthened them with arms, tanks, armoured cars, planes and uniforms. Advisors and instructors were sent to the Polish army".* In addition, *"the reactionary Piłsudski and the Polish authorities were implacable enemies of the Soviet Union"*. Moreover, a key new slogan was attached to this discourse one that was imposed during the Communist hold on power, it said erroneously that *"Poland regained its independence owing to the victory of the October Revolution"*. Equally unreasonable explanations appeared claiming that this *"bourgeois-landlord Poland remained fully dependent on the imperialists of the Entente, who gave her the role of a strike force in a new anti-Soviet march"*, and *"while preparing the invasion, Piłsudski's followers disseminated fake (sic!) information about the threat to national independence from the Soviet side"*<sup>26</sup>.

What followed this introduction was a description of the offensive by the Polish army in April 1920 that took place *"without declaring war"*. As earlier, in these history textbooks no account had been given of the genuine circumstances of the seizing of Kiev and Ukraine by the Bolsheviks nor the abolishment of the nascent Ukrainian People's Republic was mentioned. Nor was any information given about the alliance of Poland with the Ukrainian People's Republic and the true goals of that Polish march towards Kiev, the aim of which was to hand it over to their accompanying Ukrainian allies. Instead, they wrote that *"the Soviet army displayed resistance, bravery and heroism in*

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 222.

*fierce defensive battles*". Then, we read that after displacing the Soviet army from Kiev to the east bank of the Dniepr River, "the Communist party called for the Red Army and all working people to inflict a crushing defeat on the new march of the imperialists". Propaganda statements by Lenin that the Bolsheviks "had approved and approves Polish independence and the Polish People's Republic" were quoted. Finally, it was added that "the mobilization of the Communists and Komsomol members to the Polish front took place"<sup>27</sup>.

Soviet students then could read, a description of the successes in the counter-offensive by the Soviet South-West Front and West Front and the rapid retreat of the Polish army "behind the Bug and Vistula Rivers". Nonetheless, it was emphasized that the Red Army "did not manage to realize their intention of encircling and crushing their opponent". The defeat on the Vistula River was explained by the fact that the Red Army had to fight with the army of general Wrangel at the same time<sup>28</sup>. Allegedly, this was the reason why the Polish army "managed to launch a counter-offensive. The Soviet troops were forced to leave the territory of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus". The Soviet hopes for a renewed offensive, crushed by the Polish victory in the Battle of the Niemen River were omitted, while it was stated that "the Soviet authorities, not wishing to prolong the war, declared that they were willing to make peace with Poland", and "the Polish authorities, not having the strength to prolong the war, assented to the peace talks. In March 1921, a peace agreement was signed"<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Additionally, some fake information was passed saying that Poland was to receive "a great number of arms and ammunition from France", see *ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222–223.

It also appears to be somewhat difficult to imagine that in such a publication by the authors of this thesis on the infamy of "bourgeois-landlord Poland", a state which became the tool for the imperialists and also for executing of the will of Piłsudski – "a bitter enemy of the Soviet power" and a supporter of "free Ukraine" that such authors surely would not have passed up the opportunity to reveal any mass crimes committed by the Poles, had any such indeed taken place. There was, not yet any need to "balance" the truth on the Katyń Massacre, since at that time the Soviet version of the Katyń Lie was in force.

This situation changed when the top authorities of the party and the Soviet state concluded that the Soviet perpetration of the Katyń Massacre could no longer be denied. They certainly acknowledged that continuing the lie would bring more harm than good to the Soviet state. Hence, a decision was reached to confess to committing the crime, one that the Soviets themselves had classified at Nuremberg some 40 years earlier as an act of German genocide. By no means did Gorbachev here intend to display candour, but instead sought to minimize the increasing diplomatic costs of the rolling fiasco resulting from the decades long strategy of falsifying the truth of the Katyń Massacre.

Thus, in this way, the Soviet authorities would suddenly begin to combine two events which were in fact no way analogous: the fate of the Polish officers killed in 1940 and falsified for several decades with the fate of the Bolshevik POWs of 1920 an occurrence which had never been the object of any act of falsification. Nothing in this resembled mere coincidence.

### **“No information was passed to anyone”**

When we attempt to consider the problem of the death of POWs in 1920 (both Polish and Soviet and on both sides of the front) in the same frame as the systemic murder of Polish officers and state officials by the NKVD in 1940, the fallacy of such an approach becomes immediately obvious. There is no justification to try and juxtapose these two starkly contrasting issues on the same platform. Just like we cannot compare death in the prison camps during World War I with the orchestrated mass genocide committed by the Germans in their death camps during World War II. Indeed, the inability to perceive these obvious differences may actually serve to undermine or suppress the memory and the commemoration of the victims of these brutal crimes, and also the role of the perpetrators.

As we know, the authorities of the Soviet Union confessed to the Katyń Massacre only in 1990, exactly 50 years after the crime was committed by the NKVD. For over five decades the Katyń documents were listed as the most closely guarded and highly classified archival materials of the Soviet Union. The leaders of the USSR did not have to search for them. They knew perfectly well where these classified acts were held. It sufficed to simply disclose them – the leaders of the Soviet party and State did not consent to this precisely because they recognized their significance. Their revelatory impact for unmasking the character of the Soviet state, its criminal character, the willingness of Soviet diplomacy to resort to the most brutal methods. Since 1943, that is from the time of the public disclosure of this Soviet crime by the Germans, a strategy was implemented to accuse the German Reich of having committed it. The Soviet authorities (also as a pretext for all the Communist authorities

in the countries dependent on them, including the PRL) expended immense means to this end, which manifested itself in many different actions:

- blocking any possibility to elucidate the crime by engaging the State's repressive apparatus, both of the Soviet and its satellite states (including the PRL) to pursue any actions leading to the discovery of the truth about the crime;
- enunciation of false testimony by diplomats and leaders of the USSR;
- destroying documentation and testimonies to the crime;
- fabricating testimonies, extorting hundreds of false testimonies and minuting them;
- publishing false articles and books;
- conducting a disinformation campaign in the international arena;
- performing permanent diplomatic actions and reacting to the actions of other countries aimed at disclosing the truth about the crime;
- attempting to extort declarations from other countries that would confirm the false account of the events;
- breaking diplomatic relations with a Polish state (legally represented by the London based Polish government in exile) whose citizens were the victims of the crime, doing so under the pretence of the indignation caused by that state's request that an investigation be undertaken by the International Red Cross in Geneva;
- arresting witnesses to the events and members of the families of the murdered;
- repressing all those who sought to tell the truth about the crime (until the end of the 1980s);
- conducting other disinformation activities, mainly by the secret service;

- carrying out of numerous exhumations directed at giving greater credence to existing fake protocols of post-mortem;
- organizing an exhumation commission to feign scientific research into the testimonies in order to confirm the erroneous and fabricated course of events;
- attempting to level fake charges against people innocent of these crimes and sentencing them in the pomp of the international law before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg;
- destroying in secret the commemorations and the symbolic graves of the victims, if they included any factual information regarding the perpetrators or the true date of the crime (primarily on Polish territory);
- erecting a monument in the place of the crime that included fake information about both the time when the crime was committed and its perpetrators;
- organizing commemorative events by the criminals in the place of the crime, complemented by declarations of “revenge against the perpetrators”.

A separate problem was the lack of any clarification to the mysterious deaths of people who had access to evidence regarding the falsification of the testimonies and preparation of the “Soviet narrative of Katyń”, chief among them the death of Nikolai Zorya, an advisor to the Soviet prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials 1945–46<sup>30</sup>.

Crimes and lies were important underpinning elements of both the German and Soviet forms of totalitarianism. For public opinion, the truth about the Katyń Massacre carried out in the spring of 1940 simply had to be denied. However,

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<sup>30</sup> See J. Zoria, *Droga do prawdy o Katyniu* [in:] *Rosja a Katyń*, ed. A. Dzieńkiewicz, Warszawa 2010, p. 18.

concise and substantive information on this topic can be seen in records of secret correspondence at the highest levels of government and the repressive apparatus. The head of KGB Alexander Shelepin succinctly described the Katyń Massacre nineteen years after the fact in a top secret document sent to Nikita Khrushchev in which he postulated the destruction of a document concerning the Polish prisoners of war murdered by NKVD: *"Overall, based on a decision by a special troika of the NKVD of the USSR, 21,857 people were killed, of which in the Katyń Forest (Smolensk district) 4,421 people were shot, in the Starobyelsk camp near Kharkiv 3,820 people, in the Ostashkov camp (Kalinin district) 6,311 and 7,305 people were executed in other camps and prisons in western Ukraine and western Belarus. The whole operation, the extermination of the prisoners of war, was conducted in compliance with the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union this is also referred to as the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of 5<sup>th</sup> March 1940".* Shelepin additionally explained that *"from the time of this operation, that is since 1940, no information connected to this affair has been disclosed and all the related files which amount in total to 21,857 are kept in a sealed room"*<sup>31</sup>. This information remained immutably one of the most closely guarded secrets of the Soviet Union. Both the circumstances and the nature of the crime committed against prisoners of war were unprecedented in modern history. When making these criminal decisions and also subsequent to their implementation, the Soviet leaders would have been fully aware that juxtaposing this crime with the fate of other prisoners of war from the

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<sup>31</sup> Memo of the USSR's head of KGB A. Schelepin for N.S. Khrushchev dated 9 March 1959. *Notatka szefa KGB ZSRS A. Szelepina dla N.S. Chruszczowa z 9 marca 1959 r.* [in:] *Katyń – dokumenty ludobójstwa*, p. 43.

European theatre, including those in the Polish, prison camps of World War I or the years following during the Soviet-Polish War would be a misuse.

While committing this crime, they were exclusively focused on achieving their own ideological and political goals. They knew very well that they had been making decisions that had no equivalent to any actions taken by the Republic of Poland that re-emerged in 1918.

In 1940, the Soviet leaders never expected that this crime would be divulged. Initially in the years 1940–1943, everything seemed to indicate that fact, even despite the capture of the land around the Katyń region during the course of the war by the invading Germans. In accordance with the expectations of the Soviet commanders, no information about the crime had been divulged. This makes it all the clearer that none of the Soviet leaders was at that time considering any means to “balance” the crime by some “settlement of wrongs”, nor did anyone predict that there would emerge a necessity to blame another country for it.

The situation changed significantly in April 1943 when the Germans announced that they had discovered the mass graves of Polish officers and state officials. The uncovering of the death pits in Katyń constituted a huge problem for Stalin. The whole media narrative of the allied coalition had been formulated around an argument of moral supremacy over the Axis aggressors, the criminals of the Axis Powers and the moral abyss that separated both camps. Only a few months had passed since the declaration of the United Nations on prosecuting German perpetrators for genocide and mass murders of the Jews. Owing primarily to the information gathering endeavours of the government in exile of the Republic of Poland, on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1942, several dozen allied governments had already condemned

*"the atrocious policy of extermination committed in cold blood"* by the Germans. They expressed their determination to punish those people responsible<sup>32</sup>. Nonetheless, the information provided by the Germans a few months later in April 1943 now revealed a similar level of criminality on the part of both totalitarian countries (the Reich and the Soviet Union). This crime completely disavowed Soviet propaganda, in which the USSR was depicted as an allied country defending freedom and peace against the aggression of powers bringing enslavement, crime and war. Facts proved that in effect the moral standing of the Soviet state was no higher than the moral standing of the German rulers with their death camps, the perpetrators of genocide.

Examining this case, albeit only theoretically, we may contest that any admission by the Kremlin to having committed these crimes as well as any subsequent sign of atonement would have at least obliged the USSR to shy away from committing any such subsequent crimes, for example deportations and mass repressions in internal politics of previously foreign states, but also to resign from any further aggression and war in its foreign policy. However, we know full well that neither then, nor at any later date did Stalin ever consider revealing the perpetrators of this crime. Nor did he – most importantly – attempt to change the totalitarian and criminal nature of the Soviet state. Widespread terror was still availed of to ensure the stability of Bolshevik rule, and mass crimes and repression against millions of people (including whole countries or nations) were to remain the foundation of the Soviet regime as it 'liberated' and subjected the nations of Eastern Europe in 1944–45.

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<sup>32</sup> *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, pp. 377–378.

The fact that the Germans also attempted to use the Katyń Massacre to further their own national interests, constitutes a separate issue. Information on the crime (already discovered in 1942) was strategically not published by the Germans until after defeat at Stalingrad, when a turning point on the Eastern Front was clearly discernible.

At the time of discovery, Stalin already perceived a tangible possibility of a march westwards (towards Poland). He himself now strived to escalate tensions with Poland, unequivocally aiming to break off international relations, and subsequently delegate rule over Polish society to alternative authorities, to ones entirely dependent on Soviet masters.

Nonetheless, Stalin wanted to be perceived as not only the material, but also crucially, as the moral vanquisher of Hitler. As a result, he chose a cynical method of accentuating any lack of clarity on the facts in the international arena, taking advantage of wartime and post-war political determinants to facilitate the falsification of facts, even if these facts appeared unreliable in the context of the significance of the crime. He proceeded thusly, with no concern about the insubstantial nature of the Soviet's "evidence of innocence". The Soviets spared no effort to use the growing significance of the USSR in the anti-German coalition to reinforce their false arguments about Katyń as a German crime, or to at least keep the allies reticent or silent on the topic.

With regard to Great Britain and the United States, silence sufficed. With regard to Poland, already in 1943 the Soviets were attempting to force this false version of events onto the authorities of the Republic of Poland in exile. They reacted to a Polish request in 1943 for an investigation, to be directed by the International Red Cross, with deep cynicism and treated it as a pretext to break off international relations. Later as the Red Army was approaching the pre-war Polish borders, Stalin

continually demanded that the authorities of the Republic of Poland acknowledge that the Germans were in fact responsible for the Katyń Massacre. He put it as one of the most fundamental conditions for the restoration of international relations. Conscientious of the fact that by wading deeper into this falsification of their own crimes, the Soviet Union realised clearly that with the unveiling of the truth about the Katyń Massacre, the criminal aspects of Soviet Communism would be exposed. As would be the cynicism and brutality of the methods being practiced by the Soviet diplomatic services and its propaganda apparatus both in 1943 and in later years. Adherence to this in foreign politics (and also by the Russian Federation following the dissolution of the USSR) made the Katyń Massacre and the related Katyń Lie a topic that still resonates in the public arena.

### **"Katyń's graves still cry out, calling out all over the world"**

The attempts to force the legitimate authorities of the Republic of Poland to accept the Katyń Lie did not succeed (and it is worth pointing out that with Stalin's determination to conquer Poland, such a concession – immoral and insulting towards the victims of the crime – would not have altered much). For in the years 1944–1945 Stalin did not intend to allow – and did not allow – an independent Polish state to be rebuilt. He systematically marginalised the position of Poland among the countries then comprising the anti-German coalition, wishing to deprive her of any agency with regard to the decisions of the Great Powers. From 1944 onwards, he built a satellite quasi-state on Polish lands, one kept subdued by the Soviet army and governed by Communists he'd brought in from Moscow who were all subordinate to him.

The subsequent re-exhumation of the murdered officers, organized with great fervour and with the widespread application of propaganda, this time of the Soviet kind, was to provide conclusive findings. Yet it simply became another stage in the falsification of the crime. “The Special Commission on investigating the circumstances of the executions of the POWs – the Polish officers in the Katyń Forest by the German Fascist invaders” was appointed by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party Bolsheviks – VKPB – on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1944. It was called the commission of Burdenko (following the name of its chairman Nikolay N. Burdenko, the main surgeon of the Red Army) and it operated in compliance with guidelines and on the basis of materials prepared by a group of officers whose work was supervised by the leader of NKGB Vsevolod Merkulov (who was in 1940 actually engaged in executing Polish officers)<sup>33</sup>. His subordinates fabricated documents accordingly, prepared “evidence” and protocols on the interrogation of false witnesses. They also provided a final report to be signed by a commission composed of academic and “moral” authorities as well as experts from the field of forensic medicine<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, in a grotesque and quite literal sense, the murderers from the Soviet services, accomplices in the Katyń Massacre itself, now prepared a report ascribing their own crimes to others. The Burdenko commission stated

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<sup>33</sup> N.S. Lebediewa, *Katyń – zbrodnia przeciwko ludzkości*, trans. K. Bidakowski, Warszawa 1997, p. 353.

<sup>34</sup> „Report by the Special Commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting of prisoners of war and Polish officers by the German fascist invaders in the Katyn woods”. *Raport Komisji Specjalnej do spraw zbadania okoliczności rozstrzelania przez niemieckich najeźdźców faszystowskich w lesie katyńskim jeńców wojennych – oficerów polskich* [in:] B. Wójcicki, *The truth about Katyn (Prawda o Katyńiu)*, Warszawa 1953, pp. 155–192 (Appendix 1).

that their "conclusions [...] find their confirmation in the exhibits and documents extracted from the Katyń graves" and "arise from the testimonies of witnesses and medical examinations ordered by the court [and] show that the prisoners of war – Polish officers – were executed by the Germans in the autumn of 1941". It also stipulated that "while executing the prisoners of war – the Poles in the Katyń Forest, the German Fascist invaders were systematically realizing their own policy of extermination towards the Slavic nations"<sup>35</sup>.

As early as 1944, in Moscow a pamphlet was published in Polish entitled *Prawda o Katyniu* (Eng. "The Truth about Katyń"). The publisher approached the scope of the crime very broadly (of course blaming the Germans). He wrote that "the murders in the Katyń Forest was another sequential link in a whole series of conscious German crimes committed against the Polish nation, and particularly against the Polish upper or educated class. It was the *sine qua non* of «a new order», an essential condition for converting Europe into the German barn, pigsty and stable for the «Herrenvolk»"<sup>36</sup>.

In the Soviet narrative, a crucial role was played by comparisons showing the scale and significance of the murder: "This was [all] performed by the same hand. Katyń is a logical complement of Majdanek, Treblinka, Sobibór, Auschwitz; in the same way as the death camps are complementary to Katyń"<sup>37</sup>. This sentence is worth remembering. This actual false attribution of the perpetration of the crime, let us set that aside for a moment. Something else we also must notice is that these

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

<sup>36</sup> *Prawda o Katyniu*, printed by the Association of Polish Patriots, Moskwa 1944, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

enumerated locations, the sites of actual genocide by Germany, were considered by the Soviets to be an adequate backdrop or even to be analogous to the Katyń Massacre.

In addition, by falsely attributing the perpetration of this crime to the Germans, they dotted the logical i's by announcing that "*The time of the final judgement against the German thugs is coming: the Katyń case will be a substantial argument on the list of accusations to the historical tribunal. Already today the Nazi murderers should face their deserved punishment*"<sup>38</sup>. Written in a similar vein was the content of the commemoration inscription in Russian that was placed over the graves in Katyń after the reconquering of this area by the Red Army (a photo of the board was reproduced in the pamphlet): "*Here, in the Katyń Forest, in the autumn of 1941 the bestial Nazi bandits shot dead 11,000 prisoners of war – soldiers and Polish officers. Soldiers of the Red Army: take revenge upon them!*"<sup>39</sup>. Soviet decision-makers who ordered this inscription to be placed knew full well just who had been the real perpetrator of this crime. And they realized that the phrase "bestial bandits" (Russian: *izwiergi*) accurately described the true criminals: the Soviet authorities and the services subordinate to them who carried out their orders.

The most important text was published by Wanda Wasilewska, a member of the Supreme Council of the USSR, the right-hand of Stalin concerning all Polish affairs, a woman formally chosen by him to head up the crypto-communist "Association of Polish Patriots" then established in Moscow. Wasilewska referred to the second, Soviet exhumation of the site in the

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> A photo of the inscription: *ibid*, p. 8; repeated by: B. Wójcicki, *Prawda...*, pp. 40–41.

following manner: *"The Katyń graves have been opened. They are still cry out, calling out all over the world. With German bullets in the skulls, documentation and irrefutable proofs about this atrocious German crime and the atrocious German evil". This distortion was intended to be both zealous and emotional. So it was: "At no time must you forget about the horrific death of our brothers (fellow Slaves) and fellow soldiers, who were murdered in this criminal manner, who were defencelessly driven to the grave pits, who were pushed down into the common pit, who were later pulled from their graves as jackals and hyenas dragged out the dead and whose corpses were then preyed upon just as hyenas and jackals prey upon any corpse"*<sup>40</sup>.

The Soviets attempted to give international prominence to the conclusions of the report of the Burdenko commission prepared by Mierkulov's officers during the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremburg in 1946. They intended to accuse people not involved in the Katyń Massacre, which was starkly defined as a "genocide" by the Soviet prosecutors and to then summarily execute sentences passed in the name of "international justice". Critically, in this way, the whole victorious allied camp would have become a complicit hostage to this Katyń Lie, and such a "court crime" would have been for evermore attached to the foundations of Nuremburg law impinging forever upon its potential future legitimacy. However, among the four-person body of the International Military Tribunal comprised of prosecutors and judges, there was only one Soviet representative. Thus, the Soviets could not simply impose their own falsifications upon it. The investigations into the selected "perpetrators", in turn, started to reveal the many inconsistencies in the Soviet narrative. In these circumstances,

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<sup>40</sup> *Prawda o Katyniu...*, p. 3.

and without giving any explanation for their decision, the Russians simply omitted the issue of the “genocide in Katyń” from their final indictment. The representatives of the United States, Great Britain and France duly accepted that omission without comment.

Despite the fact that one uniform propaganda version was upheld, the Katyń Massacre remained a problem for the Soviet authorities, and also for their subordinate Communists in Warsaw. The official version had revealed itself to be so unconvincing that the process of dealing with the subject started to evolve over time. References to this “German genocide” began to fade, something that most evidently contrasted with the memorials and the established remembrance places for actual German atrocities.

Moreover, in general terms, the issue of Katyń was still treated as dangerous both in the USSR and in Stalinist dependent Poland. Any search for the truth about the crime or any proclamations regarding it resulted in swift repression. Though in textbooks imposed on the Poles “*the issue of the Fascist crimes committed against the Polish officers in Katyń*” was referred to (albeit not with regard to the alleged date of its perpetration, but with regard to the presentation of evidence defaming the Polish government in exile)<sup>41</sup>, no anniversary of the crime was ever celebrated. The time of its perpetration was estimated as autumn of 1941 by the Burdenko commission. Although in the Katyń Forest itself a monument was erected to the alleged victims of the German crime of 1941 (the inscription reads: “*Here are buried prisoners of war, Polish officers who were cruelly tormented by the German-Fascist occupants in the autumn of*

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<sup>41</sup> *Historia Polski 1864–1945...*, p. 475.

1941"<sup>42</sup>), yet this savagery conducted by "*the German-Fascist occupants*" was seemingly 'accidentally omitted' in the official calendar of national memorial events.

Since, according to the USSR, this crime was committed in the autumn of 1941, then its tenth anniversary would have fallen to the autumn of 1951. Yet, no memorial events were held to commemorate this "German genocide", neither in Post-War Stalinist Poland nor in the USSR.

Notwithstanding this, the crime of Katyń was again receiving publicity. In the United States in 1951 a Congressional Select Committee of The House of Representatives to Investigate the Katyń Crime and study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyń Forest Massacre was established (the so-called Madden Commission, named after its head, Congressman Ray J. Madden). The Soviets were powerless to stop this. Although in American historical memory the important work of that Madden commission remains overshadowed by the far more famous, McCarty Commission and the 'Red Scare' of the same era. Therefore, the Soviets appointed their own analogical "Katyń committee" with representatives of the KGB<sup>43</sup>. They also roused the Stalinist authorities ruling in Poland to action. On 1st March 1952 the Communist Polish government of Józef Cyrankiewicz published a statement on the subject in "Trybuna Ludu", the newspaper of KC PZPR (Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party), in which they protested "*the propaganda actions of the government of the United States, as being a component of aggressive military preparations*". They wrote

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<sup>42</sup> The Katyń case – information brief – secret – March 1976. *Sprawa Katyńska – krótka informacja – tajne – marzec 1976* [in:] *Katyń – dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> N.S. Lebediewa, *Katyń...*, p. 355.

*in a statement that “the murder in Katyń of thousands of officers and Polish soldiers was committed by Nazi criminals, who aside from the Katyń Massacre had committed hundreds of similar crimes across the Polish and Soviet lands. The Katyń Massacre was tied to Nazi actions, aimed at the physical extermination of the Polish nation, actions realized systematically during the period of occupation. The Katyń Massacre was a product of these genocidal Nazis acolytes, who the American authorities have released from prisons, entrusting them to prepare new crimes against the Polish nation and all nations which cherish peace [highlights by M.K.]”<sup>44</sup>. Echoing the propaganda of their Soviet principals and the perpetrators of the crime, the Communist government in Warsaw added that “the Polish nation, which became acquainted with the Nazi methods of extermination used in Auschwitz, Majdanek and many other death camps situated in Polish land, does not doubt that this atrocious Katyń Massacre was a deed of these Nazi thugs. The lies of Nazi propaganda were ultimately disclosed by the evidence collected and irrefutably determined in the presence of Polish representatives by the Soviet Special Committee on the determination and examination of the circumstances surrounding the extermination of the prisoners of war, Polish officers, by the German Fascist invaders. The whole world passed judgement on the murderers of Katyń, just as it passed judgement for their atrocious crimes in the concentration camps in those thousands of towns and villages of Europe. Genocide goes hand in hand with provocation”<sup>45</sup>. At the same time and in response to the works by the Madden Committee*

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<sup>44</sup> Statement by the Polish communist government from 1 March 1952. *Oświadczenie Rządu z 1 marca 1952 r.* [in:] B. Wójcicki, *Prawda...*, pp. 193–194 (Appendix 1).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

a book by Bolesław Wójcicki *Prawda o Katyniu* (Eng. *The Truth about Katyń*) was hurriedly written and published twice (in 1952 and 1953). Apart from repeating the well-known propaganda schemata, that book abounded in accusations comparing the "German slaughterers from Katyn" to "American torturers" from the Korean wars. It is a circa two-hundred-page report of various aspects of "Goebbels' Katyń's provocation" and subsequent actions undertaken by "the would-be American rehabilitators of the Wehrmacht"<sup>46</sup>.

These circumstances illustrated ever more explicitly the failure of the existing strategy of offensive propaganda supporting the Katyń Lie. Neither in the wider world, nor among the Poles, had the Soviet version of events taken root to any great extent. Therefore, the Communists became ever more determined to resort instead to terror and to censorship. On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1952, The Communist Ministry of Public Security prepared instruction no. 6/52 for the purpose of "*suppressing and thwarting provocation attempts by the enemy to sow discord between the Polish nation and the USSR and incite disunity, conflict [...]. People who were convicted of spreading such provocative slander, distributing Nazi pamphlets and «Katyń» documents falsified by the occupying German authorities; people who were convicted of writing anonymous inscriptions and slogans in public places, publishing and distributing leaflets and organizing joint Katyń auditions from «Głos Ameryki» [Eng. «Voice of America»] etc., were to be arrested and brought to justice [highlights by M.K.]*"<sup>47</sup>. Outside of the public eye, people who strived to

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 5, 9.

<sup>47</sup> S. Ligarski, *Bojownicy prawdy o zbrodni Katyńskiej w PRL*, „Plus Minus”, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2019, <https://www.rp.pl/Zbrodnia-Katynska/304069890-Bojownicy-prawdy-o-zbrodni-Katynskiej-w-PRL.html> [accessed on 6.06.2020].

learn about the Katyń Massacre were simply sentenced to imprisonment. Adults were prosecuted, but also the youth who in their underground actions recognized the need to preserve the memory of this crime as one of their most important tasks were invigilated<sup>48</sup>.

In subsequent decades, the truth about Soviet responsibility for the Katyń Massacre became an open secret in Communist Poland. Nevertheless, it was a dangerous topic and, despite a certain liberalization of the system, discussion of it could still incur repression. The authorities of the PRL understood that the tale imposed on the Poles about “the eternal friendship” which Soviet Russia and the USSR were to maintain with Poland could not be tarnished with the truth about such an atrocious murder, one which even the Soviets themselves referred to as “criminal bestiality” and genocide.

Therefore, in the 1960s and 1970s their *modus operandi* was now grounded in staying silent or persecuting those who were reluctant to stay silent. In the censorship instruction of the Central Office for Control of the Press, Publications and Entertainment of 1975 it was stipulated that “*While evaluating any materials on the death of the Polish officers in Katyń, the following criteria were to be satisfied: 1. No attempt shall be made to blame the Soviet Union for the death of the Polish officers in the Katyń Forests. 2. In the research papers such expressions as «shot by the Nazis in Katyń», «died in Katyń», «was killed in Katyń» can be released. In cases where the use of such an expression as «died in Katyń» and a date of death has been provided, it is only permissible to set a date after July 1941. 3. The expression «prisoners*

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<sup>48</sup> S. Ligarski, G. Majchrzak, *Katyń – bitwa o prawdę w PRL*, [in:] *Pamięć o Katyniu*, Szczecin 2020 (a historical supplement to the „Kurier Szczeciński”, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2020).

*of war» should be eliminated with reference to the soldiers and Polish officers detained by the Red Army in September 1939. The term «interned» is an appropriate word. The names of the camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostaszków, where the Polish officers, who were later exterminated by the Nazis in the Katyń Forests, were detained can be exempted [highlights by M.K.]”<sup>49</sup>.*

In the USSR, the entry “Katyń” was removed from encyclopaedias and historical works. Yet, some other innovations also appeared. The town called Khatyn in Belarus, a settlement whose similar sounding name could be easily mistaken with Katyń, was now selected as a special place for commemorating the victims of German crimes. This was indeed, one of many thousands of places where the Germans had murdered the civil population. Yet it would be in this specific place where a huge memorial complex would be erected, which until the present day is still used to recall the atrocities of those times<sup>50</sup>.

Yet all these actions still proved futile. In the 1970s and 80s, new publications kept appearing in the global media space relating to the topic of the Katyń Massacre, Katyń monuments were unveiled which unequivocally indicated the perpetrators and the year 1940. The Katyń Massacre and the Katyń Lie entered into the realm of interest of Parliaments and representative bodies from various western countries. The truth about Katyń was also sought by the underground press, by those demanding independence and listed in the demands of the democratic opposition, particularly after the formation of NSZZ “Solidarity”. In the USSR itself, a number of diligent historians, writers and defenders of human rights began to disseminate the truth

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<sup>49</sup> A. Przewoźnik, and J. Adamska, *Katyń. Zbrodnia – prawda – pamięć*, Warszawa 2010, p. 204.

<sup>50</sup> N.S. Lebediewa, *Katyń...*, s. 355.

about Katyń and as a consequence paid a very high price, not infrequently the cost of their freedom, while others were subject to various acts repression<sup>51</sup>.

### **“Eradicating the political dimension of the problem”**

Ultimately, it was Mikhail Gorbachev, elected to the post of Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, who had to face up to the problem of the total lack of credibility in the Soviet narrative about Katyń. He also realized that interest in Katyń was not dissipating that it would not simply disappear into oblivion. On the contrary, this Soviet crime was becoming more and more widely publicized. For the authorities of the USSR ruling during the times of “reform – perestrojka” tied to the policy of “transparency – glasnost” declared by Gorbachev, it was clear that continued adherence to a false version of events would only become more problematic. When the limitations on censorship were loosened in the USSR, more could now be shared about secret facts from history. After several decades of spreading falsified versions of historical events, ones which had created a foundational element of the “ethos” in these countries or “democratic people’s republics”, any disclosure of the truth about Soviet crimes had an equally huge significance for the politics of the present as well as for history. Since lies, particularly the Katyń Lie, were one of the national foundations or keystones of the superstructure – to use a term from the dictionary familiar to the Communists. The continued absence of commemoration or outright concealment of subsequent anniversaries together

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<sup>51</sup> Such individuals and actions are described by Natalija S. Lebedewa, *ibid*, p. 356.

with the censorship of texts only served to confirm that the Soviet authorities were hiding their own crimes. The guardians of the Katyń Lie within Communist Poland, with Wojciech Jaruzelski at its head, acted identically.

In this particular case Jaruzelski was completely loyal and at the beck and call of Moscow, and not without justification. In his ascent of the Communist country's career ladder, he wilfully<sup>52</sup> participated (as head of the Central Political and Educational Board of the Polish Army, as Deputy Prime Minister and as Minister of National Defence, and latterly as Prime Minister and First Secretary of KC PZPR) in propagating the Soviet Lie about the Katyń Massacre. The party and state apparatus that he led, consistently and actively fought back all attempts to popularize the truth about this crime. When, in the 1980s, Jaruzelski, with the consent of Leonid Brezhnev, as head of the ruling party in the PRL, had introduced martial law, any attempt to seek the truth about Katyń still continued to be brutally opposed. Monuments to Katyń erected to commemorate the victims were destroyed (such as those in the so-called Katyń Valley at the Powązki cemetery in Warsaw). In turn, government services dependent on Jaruzelski still continued to arrest people engaged in disclosing the truth about Katyń (for example Jerzy Łojek, Adam Macedoński, Stefan Melak). Officers of the Communist repressive apparatus persecuted those who laid flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers in Warsaw on the true anniversary date of the crime<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Jaruzelski himself suggested that he believed in the Soviet version until the 1950s. It appears to be difficult to comment on it or question it. Nonetheless, it confirms a fact that while building his career, also with reference to this matter, he supported defenders of this lie. See W. Jaruzelski, *Słowo wstępne* [in:] J. Maciszewski, *Katyń. Wydrzeć prawdę*, Pułtusk 2010, pp. 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> S. Ligarski, *Bojownicy prawdy...*

Yet the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev concerning a controlled broadening of historical discourse brought new challenges. In 1987, an official visit of the Polish leaders of the PRL in Moscow was organized. In an atmosphere of declared “transparency” Gorbachev and Jaruzelski now decided to set up a common committee composed of party historians from both the Polish PRL state and the USSR in order to discuss matters which were defined as “white gaps” in “mutual relations”. This initiative was designed to feign the willingness of both countries and parties to engage in discussion<sup>54</sup>. It is also probable that they were counting on the development of a common narrative line in certain other matters concealed up to that point due to political reasons. With reference to Katyń, the Soviet authorities did by no means reckon on ‘searching for the truth’. On their side, these actions were simply for show, since within the Kremlin it was widely known just what had happened in Katyń and where the files documenting this crime were kept<sup>55</sup>. Some members of the committee on the PRL side, could sense the pressure from Polish society. Jarema Maciszewski, a key figure who was to be the head of Communist Poland’s delegation to this new committee and was also at that time rector of the Academy of Social Sciences (a body created by the Communists), later stated that “*I do not think that any intelligent person then,*

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<sup>54</sup> See W. Materski, *Od cara do „cara”. Studium rosyjskiej polityki historycznej*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 176–178.

<sup>55</sup> It cannot be excluded that some Polish historians – although they were members of the party accustomed to concealing facts (and some, for instance Andrzej Werblan and Ryszard Nazarewicz, were spreading a false narrative about the Katyń Massacre for years) – reckoned on the number of topics made known to the general public would be extended with the consent of the Soviets. Such conclusions could be at least be drawn from the memories of Jarema Maciszewski, see *Katyń...*

*had any doubts concerning the date and the perpetrators of the murder in Katyń*"<sup>56</sup>.

If Gorbachev had decided to disclose the truth, no such conferences would have needed to be organized and no such instrumentalized actions of this kind would have needed to be taken. The truth, however, was never the actual aim, instead the goal was the development of a new strategy for the falsification of historical events. When Gorbachev personally became acquainted with the content of Katyń "Work or file no. 1", he was said to have told one of his associates that *"It would be better if you had concealed that and that without my consent no one may get acquainted with it. One can get one's fingers burned with it"*<sup>57</sup>. There is every likelihood that from the end of 1988 a new concept to discover some "Polish crime" was already being developed in Moscow, one that it would have enabled the Kremlin to show a certain equality in the "score of wrongs" together with a similar calculus on the score of concealment. This concept would be designed to weaken the expected fallout from any potential disclosure of the truth about the Katyń Massacre. The aforementioned Jarema Maciszewski in his recollections quoted from a discussion held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1988 with the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Valentin Falin. He was a confidential advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev and head of the Novosti Press Agency, referencing this conversation Maciszewski noted *"Looking straight into my eyes, he said «The documents are here». After a moment of silence, I stated that I had never had any doubts about it and asked: «And therefore what stands in the way – in this time of perestroika and glasnost – of telling the truth to our nations and*

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>57</sup> W. Materski, *Od cara do „cara”...*, p. 183.

to the whole world?». «It is a complicated matter» – he responded briefly. I went all in: «Are you searching for an equivalent on our side? You won't find one». «Most probably» – he responded<sup>58</sup>. The work of the commission did not officially lead to any breakthrough on this matter, since the Soviet side did not disclose any documents.

Curiously enough, the very same Valentin Falin had already, in 1987, employed completely different methods in order to popularise a new vision of history. In the paper *Novoye Vremya* he attempted to redefine history in order to portray Poland, the globally acknowledged victim of the common German-Soviet invasion, as instead, actually being the country responsible (!) for the outbreak of World War II<sup>59</sup>. Such manipulations were at that time entirely ineffective, yet they revealed methods which would later be used by Soviet and subsequently Russian Federation propaganda to distort facts<sup>60</sup>.

Ever new ways were being sought to substantially weaken those forces seeking to demask the still concealed truth. It was known that the crime could not have been falsified for so long without the risk of both Soviet academics and the state authorities discrediting themselves. Despite this, they remained focused on half measures. In 1988, the matter of the reconstruction of the “memorial complex” in Katyń was repeatedly raised, which would have also brought up the necessity of then making

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<sup>58</sup> J. Maciszewski, *Katyń...*, p. 195.

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, *Od cara do „cara”...*, p. 179.

<sup>60</sup> Contemporary speeches about history by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in the years 2019–2020 are in the same vein. See *Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of World War II*, „The National Interest”, 18 June 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982> [accessed on: 21.06.2020].

the complex available to the delegation from Poland. It was at this point that it was also acknowledged that there was now a new requirement to erect – as it was phrased – “a monument to the Soviet prisoners of war that participated in the exhumation works and who had later been killed by the Nazi and buried in this territory”<sup>61</sup>. It appears to be somewhat difficult to perceive here any actual desire to commemorate these Soviet prisoners of war, inasmuch as no such initiatives had been undertaken earlier by the authorities. This was an element of a peculiar political waiting game, playing for time. Nonetheless, the problem could not be postponed indefinitely, because owing to the accelerating events in Poland following a new wave of strikes there in 1988, the political transformation in the Eastern Block was gathering pace.

Additionally, from the beginning of 1989, time pressure was being felt in Moscow, pressure linked to the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of the German and Soviet aggression against Poland in September 1939. This also coincided with the now sanctioned political reforms and transformations in the PRL from the well-known ‘Round Table’ talks, reforms which now drew the attention of the entire world. It became all the more important to elaborate “a continued or revised Soviet mode of operation with reference to the Katyn issue”<sup>62</sup>. They recognised the need to disclose the truth about the murder committed by the Soviets (which, in fact, was already well known to the world). Nonetheless, during internal discussions, various suggestions were submitted, for instance in March 1989, it was

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<sup>61</sup> Attachment to the readout from the Politbiuro protocol from 5 May 1988. *Załącznik do wyciągu z protokołu Politbiura z 5 maja 1988 r.*, [in:] *Katyn – dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, pp. 87–89.

<sup>62</sup> Readout from the Politbiuro protocol from 31 March 1989. *Wyciąg z protokołu Politbiura z 31 marca 1989 r.* [in:] *ibid.*, p. 101.

proposed to acknowledge that “blame for the Katyń Massacre should rest with «the Stalinist NKVD», [and] not the Soviet Union”<sup>63</sup>. This was a somewhat absurd idea, though it still constituted a departure from using downright lies to now favour mere half-truths. For indeed, no reasonable thinker would believe that in the times of Stalin, the NKVD could have ever acted in a political vacuum, and without the orders of the highest state actors.

At that time the political transformations in Poland were still being observed in the Kremlin with the utmost attention, equally with reference to matters of “history and accountability”, treating in a way the PRL as “a laboratory of perestroika”. Thus, it was the Polish Head of State Wojciech Jaruzelski who was to perform a substantial role in the Soviets process of extracting themselves safely from this Katyń conundrum. It was also understood that under his rule, the Communist leaders of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the PRL (throughout the last few decades) had upheld the Katyń Lie in just the same way as the bosses of Jaruzelski in Moscow had done. In that ongoing period of political transformations in the PRL, the Soviets still perceived Jaruzelski and his people as a group who could in some way limit the negative echoes of the Katyń Massacre for Moscow. Valentin Falin reported that “*the leaders of the PRL are manoeuvring in order to satisfy their own country while also avoiding any accusations of disloyalty from the side of the Soviets*”. Yet, he added that the Solidarity opposition now “actively played” with “the Katyń case” in order to “undermine trust in the cause of close relations between Jaruzelski and the USSR”, and “in the case of a further complication in the internal

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<sup>63</sup> Memo on the “Katyń question” 22 March 1989. *Notatka w „kwestii kатыńskieje” z 22 marca 1989 r.* [in:] *ibidem*, p. 103.

situation in Poland, the Katyń problem might become a pretext for a reckoning"<sup>64</sup>.

As a result, close attention was paid (by Valentin Falin, Vladimir Kryuchkov and Eduard Shevardnadze) to the broader context of the Katyń case, specifically with regard to the implicit within it, tangible responsibility of the USSR for the outbreak of World War II: *"Analysis of the situation indicates that the more the problem is prolonged, the more the Katyń issue is transformed into a bone of contention, not just for past, but also for current Polish-Soviet relations"*. The authors of this opinion realized that *"the Katyń topic"* was intrinsically connected in a wider context to *"the outbreak of World War II and the invasion of Poland by Germany"*, and that *"the Poles suggest that the Soviet Union was no better, and perhaps even a worse actor than Germany at that time, that it does not bear any less responsibility for the waging of the war or even for the initial defeat during that war of the then Polish state"*. They also drew attention to the emergence of questions about the fate of the remaining officers who were murdered in the USSR, but in places other than Katyń. And it was there that this ascertainment arose: *"Most probably it would not be possible to avoid a clarification of these tragic events from the past, neither for the leaders of the PRL nor for Polish society. Time in this case is not our ally. Perhaps it would be prudent to say how it was in the past and just who exactly was responsible for this crime, what happened, and only then close this case. In the end the costs of such a modus operandi would be lower than the losses caused by the present indolence"*<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Memo of Valentin Falin from 6 March 1989. *Notatka z 6 marca 1989 r.* [in:] *ibid.*, pp. 109–111.

<sup>65</sup> Memo on the "Katyń question" 22 March 1989. *Notatka w „kwestii katyńskiej” z 22 marca 1989 r.* [in:] *ibid.*, pp. 105–107.

In subsequent months, the political situation changed. After the limited or ‘contracted’ Polish elections of 4 June 1989 the course of events in Poland accelerated, even though these were not fully free elections. The political system of the PRL now underwent rapid erosion, nevertheless the new contractual Parliament, in which the Communists and their satellite parties were guaranteed 65 per cent of seats, still elected Wojciech Jaruzelski in June 1989 to the post of the President of the PRL (though by a margin of only one vote).

In 1989, in the era of political changes, the fear of an intervention by the USSR played a significant role, a fear intentionally stoked by the Communist authorities. For this reason, Jaruzelski was considered to be someone who would guarantee the USSR maintenance of the influence that it had wielded in Poland. Adam Michnik wrote about this in “Gazeta Wyborcza”: *“What is Poland when perceived from the perspective of Moscow? It is a huge and important laboratory for the process of transformation from a totalitarian system to a parliamentary democracy. Our failure or success will either strengthen or curb the tendencies for the return of Stalinism in Moscow. [...] A new treaty is needed [...], but one that would guarantee continuity. An agreement can serve as just such a treaty, pursuant to which a candidate from the Polish United Workers’ Party will be elected President, and the post of Prime Minister and the mission of the formation of a government will be conferred upon a candidate from «Solidarity». Such a President would guarantee the continuity and binding nature, of international agreements and of military alliances. Such a government would have the mandate of the vast majority of Poles [highlights by M.K.]”*<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> A. Michnik, *Wasz prezydent – nasz premier*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 3 August 1989.

The Russians could always rely on Jaruzelski, even in political matters relating to the Katyń Massacre. In his new role, the onetime Communist dictator in Poland was now a guarantor of the political interests of the USSR during this period of transformation. His election was, however, justified by Polish fear of the empire and the necessity to assure Moscow of the continuity of "*international agreements and alliances*". Jaruzelski was also aware of the ties between his own political interests and the defence of the Kremlin's interests. This also extended to historical matters, which had so shaped the image of the Soviet country.

Not by accident did the authorities of the USSR express their gratitude by defending Jaruzelski's "good name". They openly acted in this way even during talks with the new Solidarity Prime Minister of the PRL Tadeusz Mazowiecki. In November 1989, during a meeting with him, the Prime Minister of the USSR, Nikolai Ryzhkov unequivocally demanded protection for Jaruzelski and in fact for the PZPR regime against any historical reckoning. Incidentally, the above talks showed that the Russians addressed the issue of Katyń in such a way as to allow Jaruzelski to play a leading role. This was for them a much safer way of settling this matter. This was why Mazowiecki during the talks, stated with irritation that "*Your Minister does not agree to raise the Katyń issue [in a communiqué after the discussion between the Prime Ministers of both countries]. It is difficult for me to consent to the fact that in the communiqué from the meeting of Mikhail Gorbachev with general Jaruzelski, the case of Katyń was raised, but in the talks with me, it does not exist*"<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Notes by W. Kuczyński from the conversation between T. Mazowieckiego i N. Ryzkova during the official visit by the Government Delegation to Moscow. *Notatki W. Kuczyńskiego z rozmowy premierów T. Mazowieckiego*

With reference to the Katyń case, the role of Jaruzelski as a guardian of the interests of Moscow did not change in 1990 either – after further changes in Poland including the renaming of the state and the changes to its national symbols, removing Kremlin imposed symbolism. Moscow still nevertheless intended to avail of him in narrative manipulations aimed at diminishing the resonance of the facts then emerging from the criminal history of the USSR. Yet the persistent adherence to the Katyń Lie was in the interim becoming ever more complicated, primarily due to the actions of a few courageous Russian historians (among others Natalja Lebedeva, Valentina Parsadanova & Jurij Zorya), who had located new archival material on the topic of the Katyń Massacre. After they had discovered these materials originating from the Head Office of the NKVD of the USSR and regarding the Katyń case, Falin the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of KPZS now alerted Gorbachev on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1990, stating that these historians were preparing material for publication which would reveal both the methods and the actions of the Kremlin with regard to the Katyń Massacre. Stating that this would render impossible any continued pretence that no materials on this matter were to be found in the archives: “*The materials disclosed by the researchers [...] will not allow us to adhere to earlier versions and avoid dotting the ‘i’. Taking the upcoming fifty-year anniversary of Katyń into consideration, it would be advisable, one way or another, to define our position*”. They assumed that the “lowest costs” would be incurred when Jaruzelski, as President, would now be availed of as a partner in the process

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*i N. Ryżkowa podczas oficjalnej wizyty delegacji rządowej w Moskwie [in:] W. Kuczyński, Solidarność u władzy. Dziennik 1989–1993, Gdańsk 2010, pp. 26–27.*

of disclosing these “just recently recovered” archive materials. Falin suggested that it should be formally communicated that although full documentation of “the Katyń tragedy” had not yet been recovered, documents had been found which challenged the reliability of the findings of the Burdenko commission and that *“the conclusion can be drawn that the extermination of the Polish officers near Katyń was the work of the NKVD, and personally of Beria and Mierkulov”*. In this way a peculiar play or *theatrum* was now performed, in which the arduous work leading to a gradual disclosure would be feigned, even though the facts of the matter for those people now playing out their respective roles (including Gorbachev and Jaruzelski), were in fact self-evident. Interestingly, with reference to this plan of action, Falin stated in the end that *“a question remains as to when and in what form Polish and Soviet societies should be informed about the above conclusion”*. Here Jaruzelski was also set to perform a significant role in representing the Soviet state rational: **“We would need the advice of the President of the Republic of Poland, considering the necessity to eliminate the political aspects of this problem and at the same time prevent any emotional reactions [highlights by M.K.]”**<sup>68</sup>.

Backed up against the wall by the subsequent disclosure of ever more documents, the Soviet authorities now endeavoured in their own peculiar way to manoeuvre between lies and half-truths right until the very end. This course of action was followed through as planned. On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1990 during a visit by Jaruzelski to Moscow, Gorbachev handed over to him two folders with copies of selected documents. In the official

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<sup>68</sup> Memo of V. Falin to M. Gorbachev from 22 February 1990. *Notatka W. Falina do M. Gorbaczowa z 22 lutego 1990 r.* [in:] *Katyń – dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, pp. 105–107.

communiqué, the USSR admitted that the NKVD had been the perpetrator of the crime. Ten days earlier plaques commemorating the victims of the “German Fascists” had been removed and instead a new inscription was placed in honour of “hundreds of innocent Soviet citizens [sic!]”<sup>69</sup> murdered by the NKVD.

The fact that they could take advantage of Jaruzelski as a trusted ally of the Kremlin, and thereby an active participant over the years in the falsehoods of the Katyń Massacre, guaranteed complete harmony during the time of this ceremony. Jaruzelski did not broach any topics which were inconvenient for the USSR (or indeed for himself) and deemed the disclosure of part of the documentation to be a generous and friendly gestures from “the Soviet side”. Nonetheless, the Soviet manipulations with regard to the Katyń Lie would not end here.

For obviously, not all the documents had yet been disclosed. Even then the authorities of the USSR did not treat this issue as a chance to remove the burden upon them arising from these past acts of distorting or manipulating the truth. Yet this was still all in the realm of a peculiar political game. For indeed it might turn out that one day legitimate financial claims and subsequent demands for reparations could be raised. Moreover, addressing these issues was certainly not something in the personal interest of Jaruzelski<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> A. Przewoźnik, J. Adamska, *Zbrodnia katyńska. Mord – kłamstwo – pamięć*, Kraków 2011, pp. 166–167.

<sup>70</sup> Then Jaruzelski, disregarding his participation in the long-term falsification of the Katyń Massacre (and the victimization of people who insisted on speaking the truth), stated that he himself had forced [sic!] the admission of guilty upon the Russians. He wrote about it in the following way: “While preparing to pay a visit to the USSR in the first months of 1990, I communicated via an official channel that I would not pay this visit, if the Soviet side did not tell the truth about the Katyń Massacre. [...] Without a commitment from the Soviet side that they would disclose

The question arises how the advances in the transformation of Poland influenced Gorbachev's decision concerning "the Katyń issue". In the subsequent months of 1990, Poland started on its path to full independence. Demands for fully free parliamentary elections were increasing, while the tenure of Jaruzelski as a contractual president was now shortened. At the end of 1990, the first free and common elections for the President of the Republic of Poland were planned. For the USSR, this meant the loss of control over the last offices which were held by people connected to Moscow. The Kremlin had to prepare for the fact that Jaruzelski would be replaced by a President who was not a party to any long-standing relationship of dependence and close relations with Moscow. Moreover, it meant the loss of a man in the office of the President of Poland, on whose support they had counted. As illustrated in the reference to "diminishing the political dimension of the problem" relating to the disclosure of the truth about the Katyń Massacre. As can be assumed, it was acknowledged that they now had to adequately prepare for a new set of relations with Poland, including with reference to, among other things, historical settlements. Thus, finding an issue that would "counterbalance the crime" became part of the new agenda of Polish-Soviet relations.

On 3rd November 1990, Gorbachev, as the President of the USSR, issued a regulation whose point no. 8 instructed that "the concerning the fate of the Polish officers be expedited", and in which notably point no. 9 of the text read as follows: "[I instructed] *the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the Prosecutor's Office of the USSR, the Ministry of Defence of the USSR, the Committee for State Security (known as the KGB) of the USSR to*

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the truth about the Katyń Massacre, I could not go there" (W. Jaruzelski, *Słowo wstępne...*, pp. 16–17).

*conduct, together investigation with other institutions and offices, research to be concluded by 1st April 1991 referring to events and facts from Soviet-Polish bilateral relations, as a result of which the Soviet side incurred losses. The above data are to be used – if necessary, in talks with «the Polish side» about «white spots»*<sup>71</sup>. Professor Wojciech Materski, later a member of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues, summarized Gorbachev's actions in the following manner: “*Wishing to diminish the scale of the odium then falling on the Soviet Union, [Mikhail Gorbachev] ordered that thorough research to be undertaken in order to find at this last possible moment something that the Polish side could be accused of and which would constitute a counterbalance, following the mantra of a crime for a crime*”<sup>72</sup>.

How to find something that would be the equal to this crime, which the Soviets had themselves qualified as genocide at Nuremberg, an occurrence that matched the most heinous of crimes committed by the Germans? What's more, the original crime's scale had been now been exacerbated by all the actions the USSR had undertaken in relation to publicizing and imposing their Katyń Lie in the years 1943–1990. The exceptional nature of such outrageous practices on both the international and domestic scene appeared to be self-evident.

Did any “concealed mysteries” of a similar ilk or at least with some parallel in nature to that of the Katyń Massacre and the Katyń Lie, exist in the history of the Second Republic of Poland? For several dozen years, since the destruction [in 1939] of Poland's independent statehood by Germany and the

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<sup>71</sup> *Rosporyazhenie Prezidenta CCCP, Noyabr 3, 1990 [in:] Katyń. Dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, pp. 127–131.

<sup>72</sup> W. Materski [review], „*Krasnoarmeysy v pol'skom plenu v 1919–1922 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov, Moskva 2004, ss. 912*”, „Dzieje Najnowsze” 2006, no. 38/1, p. 234.

USSR, all documents stored in the state archives since the times of the Second Republic of Poland had been openly available to Communist decision makers in Warsaw and in Moscow. The authorities of the PRL, similarly to their masters in the Kremlin, had maintained the mysteries about Soviet crimes for decades, and persecuted all those who spoke the truth about the Katyń Lie. They had held fast to maintaining these mysteries, yet they had not achieved the intended effects, neither within Polish society, nor in the court of international public opinion. Together with the Soviet authorities, they had participated in the more effective insidious rooting of an ominous image of “bourgeois-landlord Poland” during the period of its inter-war independence in the years 1918–1939. Could anyone imagine that such Kremlin acolytes would not have taken advantage of the opportunity to publicize any hidden “mass murder” [by Poles] from the time of the Second Republic of Poland, if indeed any such had taken place?

However, as the history of the Katyń Lie illustrates – everything is a matter of political decisions. Inasmuch as Gorbachev ordered his people to find an event around which a political, “settling of scores” narrative could be constructed, it still had to be conceptualised. And so it was. For suddenly, special interest was awoken in Moscow with reference to the fate of the Bolshevik prisoners from the war with Poland in 1920. Despite all the factual discrepancies, ever since the 1990s various methods have henceforth been deployed aimed at publicizing the tale of Polish crimes committed against a notably ever-increasing number of Bolshevik prisoners of war.

Since then, the history of the prisoners of war of 1920, which had earlier neither aroused any controversy nor evinced any interest other than among specialists, nor had been treated as a concealed mystery of any sort, now suddenly become included

in the political agenda of “difficult issues”, perceived by the Kremlin as one of the ‘problems’ in its relations with Poland. In fact, it swiftly established itself in both Russian political writing and bilateral diplomatic relations. As Wojciech Mater-ski stated: “*Soon the first publications were prepared together with statements for the media, in which events from eighty years earlier were [now] manipulated. As Gorbachev had expected, regrettably, Russian scholars had also joined in the creation of the so-called anti-Katyń*”<sup>73</sup>. Inasmuch as the scholars had earlier been involved in popularizing the Katyń Lie by politicians, now, in compliance with Gorbachev’s instructions, different research circles also took part in studying “the issue of the prisoners of war of 1920”, for instance at Moscow’s State University, at the Military Historical Institute of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR later the Russian Federation or at the Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR later the Russian Federation<sup>74</sup>.

Up to that point what had been a narrow field of studies for historians, the issue of the fate of the various prisoners of war from different countries and different wars, now became highlighted and instrumentalised by the Kremlin. The place of the Katyń Lie was henceforth to be occupied by new manipulations connected to the prisoners of war of 1920. “*Nobody was concerned here about any elementary logic. The number of Red Army soldiers initially taken prisoner by the Poles was now compared to the number of those who had returned or had been formally repatriated. This however, excluded the tens of thousands of prisoners who had escaped from the internment camps in the fluctuating war zone or those who had disavowed their loyalty*

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Idem, Od cara do “cara”...*, pp. 187–188.

*to this Soviet Red Army and had subsequently been recruited by anti-Soviet Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian military formations then active on the territory of Poland. Not to mention those numerous POWs released from their internment who had quite simply refused to return back [to the USSR]. Subsequent [Kremlin] «discoverers» pronounced successively that there were sixty thousand, then eighty thousand, then one hundred thousand or over a hundred thousand of these POWs, exorbitantly pushing these estimations to the limits of absurdity without any reference to source documentation”<sup>75</sup>. However, what has to be emphasized, was that the difference between those who died of illnesses during the camp epidemics of 1920 and the fate of victims, those shot in the brutal Katyń Massacre of 1940, was now to be blurred and obscured.*

Most auspiciously of all, the fate of Russians from non-Bolshevik formations White Russian Army or WW I servicemen, even those who had stayed in the very same prison camps, would not arouse any interest whatsoever from the Russian side.

### **“And we also remained nobly silent”**

We will again quote Professor Wojciech Materski, who accurately summarized the whole problem the Polish-Bolshevik war prisoners and the manner of its introduction into the agenda of Polish-Soviet international relations: *“Despite the fact that until 1939 [Polish-Soviet] mutual relations were poor or proper at best, nobody in the Soviet Union ever thought to present the problem of any alleged wilful extermination of the Red Army soldiers held in Polish prison camps. Far too many eyewitnesses to those specific events were still alive both in Poland and in the*

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 189.

*USSR. Thus, up until the turn of the 1980s and 1990s the problem of the Soviet prisoners of war of 1920 was not addressed in any historiography. It was recognized at most in an informative, non-conflictual manner on the margins of studies of Polish-Soviet relations in the first stage of the functioning of the revived [post WWI] Commonwealth*<sup>76</sup>.

Yet in the Second Republic of Poland no such crimes were ever committed, and therefore consequentially in Poland:

- no top-secret special operations directed at concealing any facts were carried out;
- people were not threatened with any sanctions for either talking or writing about the Bolshevik prisoners of war of 1920;
- no secret burials were organised in places remote from population settlements, the dead were instead buried in the middle of existing grave sites that were widely accessible, in ceremonies bereft of any national or religious pre-determinants;
- no actions were undertaken that were directed at assigning any responsibility for the fate of these prisoners of war to any other nations;
- no attempts were made on the international arena to falsely accuse or sentence any persons who were involved in the functioning of camps.

Even more points could be added to this list.

The prison camps established across various countries both during World War I and after its end, were – euphemistically speaking – far from perfect. By way of illustration and drawing upon a source example unequivocally distant from Poland and Russia, we can thus quote fragments from the accounts of an

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 237.

Austrian soldier. In fact, this man was an ethnic Pole from the Austrian Partition lands, the Podhale region, he'd been taken into Italian captivity: *"Enraged by past defeats, the Italians retaliated, as far as they could, against prisoners of every nationality. Those marching were beaten, kicked, had mud and stones thrown at them, and in particular were starved, for the Italians themselves did not have food for their own soldiers. They chewed dry grape vines, old bones, dry leaves (November). For just one beetroot civilians would receive concealed silver medals. And even these were gained by deceit or in despair at risk of being beaten or facing other punishment. [...] we were driven from Padua like dogs and outside the city, in the swamps and moors we were driven into barbed wire. For two days and two nights, we were kept in these swamps almost without food. What is more, it started snowing and raining, so it was impossible to lie or rest, and we could only wait standing around for mercy or death. [...] Without coats, which had been stripped from our backs on the first day of the search, in the clothes made of nettles, without warm underwear, and in torn shoes we stood in the mud soaking wet [...]. We received one rusk for each person, and one tin of food for five people every twenty-four hours. [...] People were suffering from dysentery or were shaking from malaria. Some managed to obtain some sacks or some rags which replaced their coats and wore them on their backs fastened by string or wire around their chest. And this was how the invincible heroes walked in ranks, torn, sometimes bare-foot, unshaven, dirty, with vermin in their rags and hungry. [...] One Italian soldier stricken by mercy threw a few loaves of bread to the marching columns. What happened then is hard to describe. There was a swarm of bodies. A few hundred prisoners attempted to gain at least a piece of bread. [...] Only when they started shooting live ammunition at the crowd and pulling away bodies did they manage to restore order. Two of them were grievously injured,*

*a dozen had minor injuries, and several dozen were scratched with torn uniforms, or with their arms and legs sprained*<sup>77</sup>.

In all such camps whether in Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany, Italy or France the death rate among the thousands of prisoners of war was relatively high. Deaths were due to the harsh living conditions. Even objective factors such as the infrastructure, completely unprepared for detaining thousands of people over a prolonged period of time had an effect. In different European countries in the course of the war and post-war conflicts prison camps were genuine breeding grounds for diseases and were thus conducive to epidemics, to say the least, sanitation and provisions left much to be desired. As was mentioned earlier, individual countries also had problems looking after their own soldiers, let alone prisoners of war. 1920 in Poland was still a time of war and conflict. Military authorities administering the camps had to enforce discipline among the prisoners. There must have been abuse and acts of violence in the camps. Such behaviour might have happened in any of the locations where prisoners were held. Guards used guns when the prisoners attempted to escape, and it was not unheard of, that a person trying to escape was executed. Some prisoners died of injuries, and others of natural causes, which appeared to be normal (if tragic). It suffices to visit the cemeteries of the dead prisoners of World War I, for example the German camp Lamsdorf (Łambinowice), where only in the years 1914–1919 7,000 soldiers-prisoners of various nationalities perished and were buried<sup>78</sup>. And this was a camp in Germany, proper, on land

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<sup>77</sup> W. Kuraś, *Wspomnienia o mojej wsi Waksmund oraz własne, od czasów zamierzchłych aż do dnia dzisiejszego*, Waksmund [no date], typescript, pp. 181–187.

<sup>78</sup> See: Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Łambinowicach (The Central Museum of Prisoners of War in Łambinowice), Stary Cmentarz Jeniecki

that had never been occupied territory, in a country which had until 1918, remained a stabile state entity, which still expected victory in the war.

These places were not shrouded in mystery: neither in Germany, nor later in Poland. The presence of POWs was understandable due to the circumstances of war. The dead of such camps were openly buried in cemeteries, at sites available for civilians. The names of the dead were registered in civil offices, though without any classification. The burial of POWs was carried out in the same places where one's own soldiers, people from different armies, war veterans, etc. were buried. Documentation did not go to the classified archives. So was it with the POWs, who died in the prison camp in Dąbie near Krakow. Here a list of the dead was only compiled both by the Krakow Health Authorities and by the administration of Rakowicki Cemetery, where the bodies were buried in allocated sections in completely open ceremonies, since there was nothing to be concealed.

Of course, the situation of POWs taken captive in the years 1919–1920 (or that of those people interned) was not enviable – neither on the Polish, nor on the Soviet side. If we thus want to juxtapose the fate of the Bolshevik POWs (not only those) in Polish captivity, then it would have to be compared to the situation in other camps at that time – in the Russian and Bolshevik camps, where diseases and epidemics, but also different circumstances impacted the high mortality rate<sup>79</sup>. This will be the task of chapters 2 and 3 of this book. Nonetheless,

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(The Old Prisoners of War Cemetery), <http://www.cmjw.pl/miejsce-pamięci-narodowej2/stary-cmentarz-jeniecki,7.html> [accessed: 28.05.2020].

<sup>79</sup> Two texts included in the publication below deal with the issue of the Polish POWs in the Soviet prison camps and Soviet POWs in the Polish prison camps.

nowhere in Europe during World War I, nor on the territory of a reemerging Poland during the war with the Bolsheviks, did any crime even remotely similar to the crime known to us as the Katyń Massacre, ever occur.

Moreover the fact that the fate of POWs in the years of 1919–1920 could have quite feasibly been the object of an earlier fact-based debate, is supported by the actual existence of earlier joint publications by Polish and Russian historians. Despite some differences in the accentuation of certain aspects, and occasional divergent evaluations, we may draw from the various publications a generally consistent account of the Polish-Bolshevik war (commonly referred to on the Russian side as the Soviet-Polish war). This illustrates that scientific discussions free from political pressure and without any propaganda elements had been successful in revealing and recognizing historical facts. One such common piece of work was the volume titled *White points – black points. Difficult issues in Polish-Russian relations (1918–2008)*, within which elaborate texts about Polish-Soviet relations in the years 1919–1921 were penned by Daria and Tomasz Nałęcz on the Polish side, and by Giennadij Matwiejew on the Russian side. In turn the problem of the Katyń Massacre, its circumstances and the truth about it were thoroughly presented in another work by Natalija Lebedewa on the Russian side (the Polish texts were presented here by Albin Głowacki and Andrzej Przewoźnik)<sup>80</sup>.

Additionally no documentation concerning the Bolshevik POWs in Poland had ever been registered as classified. Some of these documents were published in Russian as early as

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<sup>80</sup> *Białe plamy – czarne plamy. Sprawy trudne w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich (1918–2008)*, ed. A.D. Rotfeld, and A.W. Torkunow, Warszawa 2010, pp. 85–140.

2004, with the participation of the authors of other chapters of this very publication – Zbigniew Karpus<sup>81</sup> and Waldemar Rezmer<sup>82</sup>. In a review of this book by the already-mentioned Professor Wojciech Materski, we may read, "Volume «*The Red Army soldiers in Polish captivity*» is a testimony to the high standards of professionalism exhibited by the historians and archivists of both countries. Publishing it is yet another proof that Polish and Russian academics may find, even in the most difficult questions of our interwoven, complex yet mutual history a *modus vivendi*, a common language – irrespective of the meanderings in prevailing political relations, especially today. [...] Both academic milieus proved that they could conduct rigorous research, that they did not have to surrender to the pressure of current political contexts, respect each other, and above all – the historical truth, even if it appears to be somewhat difficult to settle"<sup>83</sup>. In Poland, in turn, a book by Lech Wyszczelski, with the title: *Jeńcy wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1919–1920* (Eng. *Prisoners of War of the Polish-Russian War in 1919–1920*) was published<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> A Russian historian Gennadyi Matveev, a specialist in the problem of POWs in the period of the Polish-Bolshevik war, once wrote about Professor Zbigniew Karpus that he is an expert invoking the foremost authority among the Polish historians and journalists. See G.F. Matwiejew, *Yeshchio raz o tsisliyenosti Krasnoarmeytsev v pol'skom plenu v 1919-1920 godokh*, „*Novaya i noveychaya istoriya*” 2006, no. 3, <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/JOURNAL/NEWHIST/PREKATYN.HTM>.

<sup>82</sup> W. Materski [review], *Krasnoarmeytsy v pol'skom plenu w 1919–1922...*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>84</sup> L. Wyszczelski, *Jeńcy wojny polsko-rosyjskiej 1919–1920*, Warszawa 2014. Also see the interview with the author: *Historyk: Eksterminacji bolszewików w Polsce nie było. Nie było żadnych obozów śmierci*, „*Polska Times*”, 18 X 2014, <https://polskatimes.pl/historyk-eksterminacji-bolszewikow-w-polsce-nie-bylo-nie-bylo-zadnych-obozow-smierci/ar/3611547> [accessed: 27.05.2020].

Debates between scholars conducted in the spirit of respect for the knowledge of the historian, enable them to conduct a constructive dialogue – even with regard to topics which have been through artifice raised to the role of an international dispute. Such discussions also allowed them to treat the outcome and the genuine scope of the Katyń Massacre and Katyń Lie with due respect. As if independently of the official misleading Kremlin narrative, in today's Russian textbooks, the Polish-Bolshevik war has been presented with due respect for the facts, not the as in Soviet times. As was the case in the already-mentioned *Istoria Rossii (History of Russia)* by Daniłow, Kosulina and Brandt<sup>85</sup>. It remains regrettable that we do not find any information on the Katyń Massacre there. In turn, in the academic book *Noweyschaya istorija Rossii (Modern History of Russia)*, the findings are more positive. The manner in which the Soviet-Polish war is presented does not arouse any greater controversies<sup>86</sup>. Certainly, the approach to Polish affairs and the different approaches to World War II could be a subject of debate, however, we must admit that in this textbook we can find references to the Soviet crime in Katyń, and the USSR is described as a totalitarian country<sup>87</sup>.

In journalistic writings, political aims often obscure the results of true historical research. In the past, one could hope that the Russian authorities would support comprehensive historical research concerning the Soviet crime of totalitarianism and its essence. After all, it appears rational that the number of Russian victims during the time of Bolshevik totalitarianism

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<sup>85</sup> See A.A. Daniłow, Ł.G. Kosulina, M.J. Brandt, *Istoriya Rossii...*, pp. 119–121: sub-section *Wojna c Polszej. Razgrom Wrangielja*.

<sup>86</sup> *Noveyshaya istoriya Rossii. Uchebnik*, ed. A.N. Sacharow, Moskva 2016, pp. 196–197.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 288–310.

should oblige contemporary Russians to both remember and to seek disclosure of the truth. It is near impossible to imagine a dialogue about the past with any (modern-day) Germans, who would choose to depict World War II through Nazi eyes, glorifying Hitler and repeatedly manipulating the truth about the crimes of the Third Reich. Unfortunately, among today's political elites in Russia, propaganda theories arising from the worst years of Stalinism, continue to take the lead. Despite the countless Russian victims of Communism, the glorification of Soviet totalitarianism still persistently reveals itself, unabatedly in the actions of Russian state authorities, and in a manner devoid of any respect towards the victims and for the value of historical truth<sup>88</sup>. In the same vein, from time to time we can observe distortions of the truth with regard to the fate of Bolshevik POWs in Poland, which is often still put forward as a counterbalance to the truth about the Katyń Massacre<sup>89</sup>.

In the times of Vladimir Putin, Mikhail Gorbachev's earlier decision about the necessity to find some anti-Katyń had the effect of engendering a subsequent wave of manipulations and lies in Russian media. This was accompanied by "historical lectures" by Russian politicians at the meetings of various bodies, seldom with any regard for facts. Journalists often take advantage of these occasions to remind people of this allegedly mutual "score or tabulation of wrongs". The modern media

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<sup>88</sup> For more about this, see K. Chawryło, *Stalin w dzisiejszej Rosji. Popularny i potrzebny*, „Komentarze Ośrodka Studiów Wschodnich”, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2017-10-31/stalin-w-dzisiejszej-rosji-popularny-i-potrzebny> [accessed: 20.06.2020].

<sup>89</sup> English Editor's Note: One could even make the case that the Katyń lie with regard to the deaths of Soviet POWs is one of the original versions of modern day "whataboutism".

in this way provide their recipients with information that is inconsistent with the facts. By way of illustration, in May 2011, material regarding ‘Polish’ – as they were intentionally referred to, ‘death camps’, was emitted on the Russian public television (Channel 1) as part of the main evening news broadcast. Viewers were informed among other things that: “Poles murdered Russian POWs, kept them in inhuman conditions in concentration camps, and sentenced them to starvation”. Terms such as “concentration camp” or “death camp” were and indeed are, deliberately selected and then interwoven into public discourse in order to form the underlying fabric for false correlations with the German state’s genocidal activities of World War II<sup>90</sup>. It is also characteristic that the number of around 2,000 POWs who died (primarily as a result of an epidemic) in the prison camp in Tuchola, has in some subsequent Russian journalistic accounts, inexplicably risen to 22,000, which is a number curiously close to the number of the victims of the Katyń Massacre<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> See: *Rosyjska TV: W obozie pod Tucholą masowo ginęli czerwonoarmis- ci*, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011, <https://bydgoszcz.tvp.pl/4561452/rosyjska-tv-w-obo-zie-pod-tuchola-masowo-gineli-czerwonoarmisci> [accessed: 27.05.2020]. Zbigniew Karpus discussed the problem of the prison camp in Tuchola (and a difference of opinion with Gennadij Matveev appeared in the Russian materials) in the interview published in “Gazeta Pomorska”. He also discussed the circumstances of the largest alleged execution of enemy soldiers done by the Poles, that is the shooting of 199 Bolshevik soldiers ordered by General Władysław Sikorski, and he emphasized that it had occurred in accordance with the articles of war the men having been sentenced by a military court for the murder of wounded soldiers in a Polish field hospital. See *Nie było rozkazu: „Mordować jeńców”*, “Gazeta Pomorska”, 30 May 2011, <https://pomorska.pl/nie-bylo-rozkazu-mordowac-jencow/ar/7226340> [accessed: 27.05.2020].

<sup>91</sup> *Nie było rozkazu: „Mordować jeńców”*, “Gazeta Pomorska”, 30 May 2011, <https://pomorska.pl/nie-bylo-rozkazu-mordowac-jencow/ar/7226340> [accessed: 27.05.2020].

The more natural equivalent to the memory of these Bolshevik POWs of 1920 would of course be the memory of Polish POWs from the same period who were in turn captured by the Soviets during the course of this war. Yet the essence of the actions taken by Russian authorities was focused on exposing a 'Polish' crime as a substitute topic and as a counterbalance to their own (Soviet) crimes of the years 1939–1945. Admitting responsibility for the Katyń crime, after so many years of distortions and manipulations in the international arena, could thusly be presented as a frank and most noble-minded gesture on the part of Moscow. At the same time, we notice a form of 'memory blackmail' or extortion with postulations highlighting the moral inferiority of the country of the victims, specifically Poland, since that country refused, in contrast, to admit to its alleged guilt. This falsehood serves as the basis for the following juxtaposition: A Russia, which is able to overcome its criminal past as opposed to a Poland which is unable or reluctant to do the same. The "good grace" of Russia is thus depicted in a one-sided fashion, while the memory of the victims of the Katyń Massacre, the earlier Katyń Lie and its true importance to international relations have all been astutely pushed aside. Moreover, the invention of such 'Polish crimes' leads automatically to a facility in augmenting the [estimated or speculated] number of Russian POW 'victims' to numbers inconsistent with any historical findings. Moreover, this Kremlin inspired 'correction' of these numbers by historians is then depicted as all but proof of a 'long suspected' Polish infamy. Precisely in this way, the whole magnitude of the NKVD's actual crimes may be somehow drowned out by this flood of false anti-Polish accusations, and the Poles predictably virulent and vocal defence of the outraged memory of their murdered officers.

The essence of this behaviour can be noticed in an editorial text published a year after the Smolensk air disaster on 11th May 2011 in the highly popular Russian magazine “Arguments and Facts”: “Mikhail **Gorbachev** in 1990 **apologized** to Poland for the shooting of thousands of Polish officers at Katyń by the NKVD. Later the same act was performed by Boris Yeltsin. Recently Dmitry **Medvedev** **condemned** «the act of cruelty in Katyń», and the State Duma made a resolution in which Stalin and his fellows were blamed for it. The editorial staff of «Arguments and Facts» addresses the President of the Republic of Poland Bronisław Komorowski to call for the opening of a new chapter in the relations between Russia and Poland, that he also show good will, by admitting to the carrying out of mass murder on Russian POWs during the war of 1919–1921 and the closure of the [now existing] cement plant on the site where the [so-called] concentration camp in Tuchola. Nobody attempts to diminish the scale of the crime committed by the NKVD in Katyń, nor to justify it. However, in Polish-Russian relations **there should not be «nonreciprocal»** actions, we are obliged to conduct an open discussion about the ‘white spots’ in our history. At the same time the editorial staff of «Arguments and Facts» is preparing an appeal to the authorities of the Russian Federation and to the society to erect a state memorial in Tuchola, where thousands of our citizens rest and by means of such an action manner restore their names (memories) [highlighted by M.K.]”<sup>92</sup>. It should be noted that the predecessor to the then Polish president Komorowski had been Lech Kaczyński. A Polish president who had openly questioned this Russian version

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<sup>92</sup> *Russkiye plennyye pokoyatsya v Pol'she mezhdru tsementnym zavodom i karnizatsionnymi stokami, Yezhenedel'nik*, „Argumenty i Fakty”, 11 V 2011 (no. 19).

of events during the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWII's outbreak in Gdansk in September 2009, and who 7 months later died in the 2010 Smolensk plane disaster.

Hence, the Russian POWs who died in the prison camps on the Polish side were not juxtaposed with Polish prisoners who were at the same time perishing in prison camps on the Soviet side, though logic would seem to require it. Instead, the Kremlin persistently uses this issue to distort the significance of the Katyn Massacre. Actions which serve merely to confirm that in reality what matters is the on-going political effect, not any respect for the dead Bolshevik POWs. Besides, the number of the dead as it so happens, has by now been raised to a quite absurd scale, exceeding **one hundred thousand**. Just such a number was presented a decade ago in a text by a key figure Vladimir Medinsky, who served as the Russian Minister of Culture in the years 2012–2020, and as a member of the Council on International Relations set up by President Putin, he was also a member of the Russian Military Historical Society. Such an inflated number which has nothing in common with respect to the facts. It was published in "Komsomolskaja pravda" in November 2014 the same year Russia seized Crimea and initiated conflict in the Donbass. This article is significant since it was also published on the Internet website of the embassy of the Russian Federation in Poland under the link *On the history of Russia and Russian-Polish relations*<sup>93</sup>. Several of the points raised therein follow *à rebours* the well-trodden path taken by the Katyn Lie. The author writes for instance that "such actions

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<sup>93</sup> W. Miedinskiy, *Kuda ischezli 100 tysyach plennykh krasnoarmeytsev? – Куда исчезли 100 тысяч пленных красноармейцев?* „Komsomol'skaya Pravda", 10 November 2014], [https://poland.mid.ru/ob-istorii-rossii-i-rossijsko-pol-skih-otnosenij/-/asset\\_publisher/xpeMk6tAITJb/content/id/23079304](https://poland.mid.ru/ob-istorii-rossii-i-rossijsko-pol-skih-otnosenij/-/asset_publisher/xpeMk6tAITJb/content/id/23079304) [accessed: 27.05.2020].

[as those committed] by the Polish authorities were referenced curtly in Nuremberg as «crimes against humanity»<sup>94</sup>.

The level of historical argumentation availed of in the Medinsky article can be unequivocally proven by his clarifications concerning the topic of the fate of the POWs from 1920 and the absence of any reference to it for such a long time in Russian historiography: “*After 1945 the topic of the Red Army soldiers who died in concentration camps was not addressed out of embarrassment. [...] We could have mentioned Tuchola, the other Polish death camps for the Russians – and the question would have inevitably been raised, for what reason did they die? Polish comrades from the Socialist camp [say to us] how could this have happened? And we [thus] nobly remained silent [sic!]. Out of the same «courtesy» the Polish comrades did not mention Katyń [highlights by M.K.]*”<sup>95</sup>. This message – about the alleged partner like relations in the field of memory or lack thereof by “Polish and Soviet comrades” including these nonsensical suggestions that Stalin’s acolytes from Poland, so obedient to Moscow their based masters, were in any way concerned about the fate of officers murdered by the NKVD, is illusory. Moreover it disregarded elementary facts such as the puppet like character of the Polish Communist government and the co-participation of the authorities of the PRL in the ongoing Soviet policy of falsifying Katyń. It can only be convincing for readers, including the youth, who are unfamiliar with the topic under discussion. It appears to be impossible to assume that the average Russian citizen would give any credence to the fact that Polish Communists were on the same side with regard to the Katyń Lie as their Soviet masters. Similar authors to Medinsky also reference “genocide”, and

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

one of them even “explains” the matter, by drawing attention to the alleged analogies between the German crimes and concentration camps of World War II: “*With reference to Piłsudski, he evidently deserves the privilege of being named the father of the system of concentration camps for the mass extermination of POWs. KL Auschwitz is a logical continuation of the death camp in Tuchola*”<sup>96</sup>. Moreover, availing of a level of sarcasm devoid of even an elementary sense of gravity and respect, also for the millions who died in the Holocaust, Medinsky in his text added that “*in [the Polish – added by J.S.-W.] concentration camps it is true, they did not kill with gas*”<sup>97</sup>.

The text by Medinsky also shows how articles like these are [closely] coordinated with the actions of the Russian authorities, since its publication coincided with a formal Russian request was sent to Polish authorities, regarding the erection of a monument to Bolshevik POWs who had died in the camp in Dąbie near Krakow (now a suburb of the city and which was described by the author as “*the fallen in the concentration camps*”) men who had been subsequently been buried in the military section of Rakowicki cemetery in Krakow. In September 2014 (with war already raging in the Donbass), the embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Poland, while making reference to a conversation from 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013 between the Russian and Polish Ministers of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and Radosław Sikorski, respectfully announced that “*a decision had been made by the Russian side [sic!] about the commemoration of Soviet military men, executed or who died in captivity during the Soviet-Polish war in the years 1919–1921*

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<sup>96</sup> P. Pospiełow, *Polyaki khotyat dobit'sya ot nas pokayaniya za okkupatsiyu*, „Nezavisimaya Gazeta”, 10 IV 2007.

<sup>97</sup> W. Miedinski, *Kuda ischezli...*

[highlights by M.K.].” As was specified, “*this concerned the erection of a symbol of remembrance*” on Polish sovereign territory in Krakow’s Rakowicki cemetery<sup>98</sup>, “*at the place of their interment*”. A pre-prepared “*architectural and artistic design [draft] of this symbol of remembrance*” had been attached and its intended location was indicated. This attachment was prepared by the Russian Military Historical Society, who’s representative was none other than the very same Medinsky. The above-mentioned “*symbol of remembrance*” was to be a conspicuous five-metre-high monument (a sculpture to be cast in bronze)<sup>99</sup>.

This document was diplomatically economical in its formulations. However, Miedinsky’s simultaneous press article, which was also promoted on the official website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation, being considerably more open to linguistic flexibility, illustrated the Russian intentions more frankly. All this is should be remembered was occurring at a time when refugees from the initial Donbass conflict were arriving en masse in Krakow and many Ukrainians including those from the Majdan shootings were still receiving medical assistance for their wounds in Krakow hospitals.

The situation arising from this initiative became the object of an exchange of correspondence with the Voivodeship Office in Krakow responsible for maintenance of the city’s military burial site. The Embassy of the Russian Federation assumed that the military site they had singled out was over the grave site of the Bolshevik POWs. However, contrary to the belief of the Russians, this site was in fact the grave site for soldiers of

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<sup>98</sup> English Editor Note: A location with a significance for Poles akin to Arlington Cemetery in Virginia

<sup>99</sup> A letter by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Poland to the head of the Department of the National Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites dated 18th September 2014.

various different formations, including the Polish Army and Russian though non-Bolshevik aligned formations. Therefore, the representatives of the Polish side suggested constructing a commemoration to all of those buried at the site, not only the Bolshevik dead. In a document of 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert, the Secretary of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, was astonished by the fact that Russian diplomats were not in the slightest interested in the Russian soldiers of other formations: *"The Russian side when putting forward their commemoration project only for the POWs of the Red Army from the time of the Polish-Bolshevik war, exhibits a complete lack of interest in the soldiers buried there from the Russian Army of World War I"*<sup>100</sup>.

Meanwhile the voivode of Małopolska Jerzy Miller requested that the Institute of National Remembrance (henceforth the IPN) precisely analyse the preserved personal records concerning those people interred there in the years 1919–1921. The results of this in-depth academic research, which included supplementary lists of several thousand people, and the findings resulting from them, were all included in an extended document which the Head of the Department of the IPN in Krakow delivered to the voivode of Małopolska. An analysis was performed on records of the deceased and interred based on the following official sources:

- books of the deceased from the Board of Health in Krakow from the years 1919–1921 (although the data from 1921 did not relate to any burials at Rakowicki Cemetery, it instead includes data referring to burials at another Krakow military cemetery in Prandoty Street);

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<sup>100</sup> A letter from the Secretary of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites to the voivode of Małopolska dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

- records of the deceased from the Administration of the Municipal Cemetery in Krakow from the years 1919–1921;
- lists of soldiers buried in Rakowicki Cemetery in the years 1919–1920 and in 1921 (“The Book of Military Interment”);
- lists of soldiers buried at the Rakowicki Cemetery in 1921<sup>101</sup>.

The outcome of the research conducted, revealed that during the first months of 1919, non-Polish soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian Army were still convalescing in Krakow hospitals and in the city. Some of them may have remained in Małopolska precisely owing to their poor health. Those WW I soldiers who did not recover and died were then buried successively in military mass graves. The preserved records do not allow us to infer that they were all indeed POWs. For these were Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Germans, and also included individuals who were not identified (with just the following description: “*died on train No. 48*”, “*unknown soldier found in Kopernika Street*”, etc.). The burial sites which were mentioned in the letter from the Russian Embassy were already located within the public part of the cemetery. They were also situated next to the sites of Polish soldiers, including those from units which had taken part in the battles for Polish independence and the establishment of Poland’s post war borders. In 1919, soldiers of the Polish Army were also buried at these sites at Rakowicki Cemetery. Among the burials chronologically registered in those lists, we can find personal information regarding prisoners of war and those who were interred. These were both soldiers and civilians – representatives of countries who were at that time in conflict with the Poles: [specifically, if intermittently],

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<sup>101</sup> A document addressed by the Head of the Branch Office of the Institute of National Remembrance in Krakow to the Małopolska Voivodeship Office dated 9th June 2015.

Ukrainian factions and Czechs. They were also buried in the same military sections along with Poles, soldiers of different units of the Polish Army, as well as policemen, local militia, officials of the state authorities and members of the people's militia, and even with some "veterans of [the Polish Uprising of] 1863". They were buried in compliance with military customs adopted in civilized countries – with equal respect for each soldier's death, without differentiating between one's own and the enemy soldiers. Therefore, we can find burial records there not only POWs from the aforementioned POW camp in Dąbie [Krakow], but also soldiers from the company which was charged with guarding that camp<sup>102</sup>.

The first, individual burial of a soldier from the Bolshevik Army was not registered until April 1919. The next one was registered in May of the same year. A few more followed in June. The causes of their death included lung diseases and typhus. These soldiers were also buried with respect, together with Polish soldiers, those buried, included Ukrainian POWs and soldiers who had recently returned from WWI Italian captivity. Altogether, in 1919 out of 990 soldiers buried at Rakowicki Cemetery, seventy-three were Bolshevik Army POWs. This amounts to 7.4 per cent of all the burials registered in the year 1919. Based on a detailed list of the buried soldiers-prisoners, it was confirmed that it matched the lists of people who were registered in the books of the deceased of the Board of Health and books of the deceased of the Administration of the Municipal Cemetery in Krakow. Among the actual burials registered in "The Book of Military Interment" only four Bolshevik prisoners recorded as having died in 1919 were missing (though they were also buried in the Rakowicki Cemetery). All the

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

remaining ones – despite some slight inconsistencies in transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet (or mistakes in the recording of their names) – were registered in these lists which had all been maintained independently of each other<sup>103</sup>.

The practice of using mass graves for the deceased soldiers from different armies (including the Bolshevik POWs) was also continued in 1920. In these mass locations, 1,045 people were buried that year. These were military men (including prisoners of war) who had died in different locations and under a variety of circumstances. Therefore, the burials did not relate exclusively to the camp in Dąbie, nor to any single specific military hospital. Many died in Krakow hospitals, but there were also some who simply died in the hospital train on the way back from the front<sup>104</sup>.

The number of deceased Bolshevik POWs did not change notably. Out of 1,045 burials in the specified military sections there were 117 Bolshevik POWs, which equalled 11.2 per cent of all the burials. In the burials registered in “The Book of Military Interment” only five Bolshevik POWs who died in 1920 were missing, who once again turned out to have also been buried at Rakowicki Cemetery. Towards the end of the document, it was stated that: *“Summing up all the data from «The Book of Military Interment» for the years 1919–1920 out of 2,035 burials only 188 were Bolshevik soldiers, which amounts to 9.2 per cent of all the burials. If we add the nine Bolshevik prisoners, not registered in «The Book of Military Interment» for the years 1919–1920 but listed in the data of the Board of Health and Administration of the Municipal Cemetery, to the number of the 188 soldiers mentioned earlier, the number of burials of Bolshevik soldiers will amount*

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

to 197. This is the number of Bolshevik POWs, whom we know were laid to rest in the Rakowicki Cemetery". Hence, with reference to the specific burial sites which were of interest to the Russian side, it was proposed that all of the deceased interred there be commemorated with a common inscription. As was stated in the response by the IPN to the voivode, *"it would be somewhat difficult to find a justification for the attempt to single out only the prisoners from the Bolshevik Army. The reason for this is their wide distribution among other deceased laid to rest there and the relatively small number of Bolshevik POWs among those were buried at this site, not exceeding 10 per cent"*<sup>105</sup>.

It was proposed that the Soviet Russians be commemorated in just the same fashion as those who appeared among the soldiers of different nationalities and had also been buried in the mass graves and listed in order according to the actual number of burials (Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Czechs, Hungarians, Jews, Austrians and Germans, who died of injuries and war deprivations or owing to diseases and epidemics in the years of 1919–1920). In this way, this inscription would not only account for Bolsheviks, but also for Russians, that is soldiers of anti-Bolshevik formations, including those from the units of Anton Denikin and Butov. Their memory was also to be treated with the due respect – just like all the other soldiers, even though the Russian side had not mentioned them in their correspondence of 2014. This above outlined proposal was put forward to the Russians. Based on the information received from the Małopolska Voivodeship Office, no response to this suggestion was ever formulated by the Russian Federation.

However, in a new article presented on the website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Miedinsky

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

stated – after first citing a few places in Europe where monuments to POWs could be found (as if to infer there were no such memorials in Poland) – that it was a mystery why in Poland the above proposal had caused such a strong reaction: “*the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the voivode, the mayor of Krakow, some parties and unions – all started to decry a vile provocation by the Russian Military-Historical Organization*”. And, as if rhetorically, he asked: “*And what is this all about? It’s about a modest monument with a cross in ... a cemetery*”<sup>106</sup> At the same time – following the tried and trusted methods and practices of Soviet diplomacy with reference to the Katyń Massacre – he promptly moved on to enunciating the well-known propaganda slogans from the Stalin era arguing that “*600,000 Soviet soldiers, «famed» for liberating Auschwitz and Majdanek, had died to liberate the Polish land from the Nazis*”<sup>107</sup>.

Finally, we should note the fact that the cemeteries of Soviet soldiers in Poland remain under the protection of the Polish state as war graves. This is done irrespective of the renewed seizure of Polish land that the Red Army started in January 1944, when the war against the Germans was availed of by Stalin to forcibly impose a Communist system on Stalin’s newly defined borders of Poland and on the Poles themselves, a system based on complete dependence upon the USSR. Poland is still today in the process of removing the residues of Communist totalitarianism from the public sphere. For the commemoration of victims from the time of Soviet enslavement and Communism, including the truth about the victims of the Katyń Massacre, cannot be entwined with the preservation of propaganda monuments glorifying Stalin and Soviet totalitarianism.

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<sup>106</sup> W. Miedinski, *Kuda ischezli...*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Monuments such as those which appeared in Poland during the Communist era.

Soviet propaganda objects upon which multiple symbols of Communist ideology and where falsified inscriptions were all placed are being gradually removed, while all cemeteries of Soviet soldiers who actually fell in the battles with the Germans still remain under Polish state protection and continue to be maintained as such. Even where these are graves of those who actively participated in combating [and suppressing] the allied Polish Home Army and the independent Polish underground during the years of Germany's retreat 1944–1945 as well as those Poles hunted down by the Stalin imposed regime in later post-war periods, and who are buried among the graves of the soldiers who fell in these clashes with the Germans. All these are also in no way damaged by the legitimate process of purging Communist ideology from the public space referred to above. In contradiction to media reports occasionally spread in Russia, no graves of Red Army soldiers are being destroyed in Poland. Quite the contrary, in many places these military burial sites are now being renovated in a spirit of respect both for historical truth and those soldiers' sacrifice and death – even for the soldiers of foreign armies. Every Russian citizen who wishes to visit Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow, will find the graves of the Soviet soldiers near Prandoty Street without any difficulty (close to the sections allocated for Polish and British soldiers and also German soldiers of the Wehrmacht). One can also visit the cemetery of Soviet POWs murdered by the Germans in nearby Skotniki, whose comprehensive renovation was financed by Poland's Małopolska Voivodeship Office and by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). One can still visit dozens of cemeteries in nearby towns and villages, including the municipal cemetery in Chrzanów, to which the remains of

the Red Army soldiers were recently moved. Moreover, this reinterment process was carried out in a fashion that met with high recognition and appreciation as expressed by the Russian consulate in Krakow.

Propaganda distortions relating to the death and places of rest of soldiers' due to the apparent return of modern-day Russia to Stalinist propaganda. Specifically Kremlin efforts to instrumentalise facts regarding; the outbreak of World War II, the horror visited on Polish citizens by that conflict, and later under Soviet dominion, not to mention the essentially genocidal nature of the German occupation with its death camps. None of these Kremlin efforts can be reconciled with even elementary respect for historical facts. Nor will such manipulations permit any meaningful and honest commemoration of the tragic fate of all these soldiers and POWs – both from the years 1919–1920, as well as those who died during the two World Wars.

(2020)

## Chapter 2

Waldemar Rezmer

# Polish Prisoners of War in Soviet Captivity

The Hague Convention of 18 October 1907<sup>1</sup> regulated the issue of prisoners of war during World War I and for over a dozen years following its conclusion<sup>2</sup>. The Republic of Poland, restored in 1918, ascribed to the resolutions and guidelines of this convention during its wars for independence and establishing its borders in the period of 1918–1921, including the war with Soviet Russia, even though the Convention itself was not formally ratified until in 1927.

In compliance with the international law on armed forces prevailing between 1918 and 1921, conventionally referred to termed as the law of war, prisoners of war were defined as members of the armed forces of the country at war, but also

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<sup>1</sup> The Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, The Annex to the Convention – Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland [henceforth DzU RP] 1927, No. 21, item 161.

<sup>2</sup> The resolutions of the Geneva Convention of 27<sup>th</sup> July 1929 were in force from 1929. See, DzU RP 1929, No. 103, item 864.

included people assisting those armed forces<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the term, armed forces also encompassed militia and voluntary forces, provided they fulfilled the following conditions: they were led by a person responsible for their subordinates, they wore a permanent and visible military badge distinguishing them as combatants, they bore their arms openly, and that they abided by the law and customs of war in their deeds. The population of an unoccupied territory, who in the face of the approaching enemy took up arms in order to fight with them and had thus no time to organize themselves, was treated on equal terms with the armed forces provided that they carried their arms openly and respected the laws and war customs. Within the armed forces of the belligerents both combatants and non-combatants could be distinguished. During the Polish-Soviet war combatants were usually referred to as “bayonets” or “sabres”. Others in the formation would be listed as “those maintained” [support services]. However, when captured by the enemy, both the former, i.e. combatants, and the latter, i.e. non-combatants, were all treated as prisoners of war.

The fundamental rules concerning the conduct and treatment of POWs were stipulated in an Annex to the Hague Convention, in regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, chapter two on *Prisoners of War*. In Article Four, it was declared that prisoners of war “*are under the authority of the hostile Government, and not that of the individuals or corps*

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<sup>3</sup> Art. 13 of the Convention says that “Individuals who follow an army without directly belonging to it, such as newspaper correspondents and reporters, sutlers and contractors, who fall into the enemy’s hands and whom the latter deems expedient to detain, are entitled to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they are in possession of a certificate from the military authorities of the army they were accompanying”.

who capture them. They must be humanely treated. All their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers, remain their property”<sup>4</sup>.

After having been captured, a prisoner of war, if questioned, “is obliged to give his true name and rank, and if he infringes this rule, he is liable to have the benefits due to prisoners of his rank curtailed”<sup>5</sup>.

Prisoners of war were held by the Government of the country which had captured them. “In the absence of a special agreement between the belligerents, prisoners of war shall be treated with regard to board, lodging, and clothing on the same basis as the troops of the Government who captured them”<sup>6</sup>.

Prisoners of war, excluding officers, could be forced to work. However, such work was to reflect the physical abilities of the prisoners. It was not to be too excessive and “shall have no connection with pursuing the operations of the war. [...] Work carried out for the State was to be paid for at the rates of pay in force for work of a similar kind done by soldiers of the national army, or, if there are no such in force, at a rate according to the work executed. When the work was performed for other branches of the public service or for private persons, the conditions were to be settled in an agreement with the relevant military authorities. The wages of prisoners shall go towards improving their conditions, and the balance shall be paid to them on their release, after deducting the cost of their upkeep”<sup>7</sup>.

Officers – prisoners of war – “receive the same rate of pay as officers of the corresponding rank in the country where they

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 6.

*are detained, providing the amounts were refunded by their own Government*"<sup>8</sup>.

Prisoners of war were to "enjoy complete liberty in the exercise of their religion, including attendance to services of whatever church they may belong to, on the sole condition that they comply with the law-and-order regulations implemented by the military authorities"<sup>9</sup>.

And "after the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall be carried out as quickly as possible"<sup>10</sup>.

Of great importance was the regulation of the Hague Convention that forbade soldiers "to kill or wound an enemy who, having laid down his arms, or having no longer any means of defence, has surrendered seeking mercy"<sup>11</sup>.

An inquiry office for prisoners of war was to be instituted on the commencement of the hostilities in each of the belligerent states, and also in neutral countries if they had taken in belligerents on their territory. Such offices were to maintain a record of the prisoners, which was to include: the regimental number of the prisoner of war, his name and surname, age, place of origin, rank, unit, date and place of capture (internment), wounding, or death (if the prisoner died in captivity), as well as any other important detailed information. These individual records were to be sent to the Government of the other belligerent after the conclusion of peace. It is likewise the function of the inquiry office to respond to any inquiries about prisoners in their records. For this reason, it received full information

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 23c.

from the various services about prisoners and the interned, where they were staying, change of their location, their release on parole, exchanges, escapes, admissions to hospital and also deaths. The inquiry office was also to receive and collect in specified locations all objects of personal use, valuables, letters, personal documents, etc., found on the battlefield or left behind by prisoners who were released on parole, exchanged, or interred in hospitals or ambulances, and to forward them on to the parties concerned<sup>12</sup>.

A significant role in supporting prisoners of war and those interned was also played by charitable foundations acting in compliance with the law in their countries. They could secure for themselves or for their representatives, accreditation enabling them to carry out philanthropic activities within the remit permitted by the prevailing military requirements and administrative regulations in force<sup>13</sup>.

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921, i.e. before the actual peace treaty was ratified, a Polish-Soviet agreement on prisoner repatriation was signed<sup>14</sup>. It regulated the principles governing repatriation of all the political prisoners, the interned, emigrants, refugees (including escapees) and also prisoners of war held on the territory of the other side. In order to satisfy the obligations resulting from this agreement, two Joint Commissions – one in Moscow and another one in Warsaw – were to be established. Each Commission was to be comprised of two delegations: Polish and Soviet. Each delegation consisted of three members as well as

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 15.

<sup>14</sup> To see the text of the agreement: *Красноармейцы в польском плену в 1919–1922 гг.*, „Сборник документов и материалов”, составители: Н.Е. Елисеева, Г.Ф. Матвеев, К.К. Миронова, Н.С. Тархов, З. Карпус, В. Резмер, Э. Росовска, Москва 2004, doc. No. 256, pp. 491–502.

two substitutes and the necessary supporting personnel, albeit no more than thirty people<sup>15</sup>.

The term prisoner of war was defined in the agreement, in a way to be consistent with the stipulations of the Hague Convention. These consisted of soldiers from both parties to the agreement taken prisoner by the armed forces of the other side along the Russian–Ukrainian–Polish Front, as well as those who were not soldiers, but were considered as part of the armed forces, and who were also taken prisoner by the opposition armed forces. A regulation stating that prisoners of war were also those persons who comprised part of the Polish units and formations and were taken prisoner by the Soviet army („взяты в плен российско-украинскими армиями”) during activities on other fronts and who had been disarmed and interned by the Russian and Ukrainian authorities<sup>16</sup>. The above regulation was crucial for the Polish side, since in the area of Russia in the years 1917–1920 several Polish units and tactical formations had been fighting separately with Bolshevik forces. These clashes were concentrated in Eastern Russia and in Siberia (the main core of this group was made up of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division fighting in the Kuban region and at a later date near Odessa, the 4<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division of General Lucjan Żeligowski, operating in Belarus in the area of Bobruisk, the Polish I Corps of General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki operating in Ukraine, and the Polish III Corps of General Eugeniusz Henning de Michaelis operating in the Murmansk Oblast, i.e. in northern Russia, near Murmansk and Archangelsk). During the fighting many of these forces had been taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks, though some of them were shot, the others were being held in prisons, hospitals, and

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 10, p. 495.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 2, par. 2, pp. 491–492.

camps. After they had now been granted the status of prisoners of war, efforts could be made to secure their release.

It was stipulated in the agreement that all prisoners of war would be released, irrespective of their military rank and the position they occupied (or the function they performed). A rule of “everyone for everyone” (“всех за всех”) was in force<sup>17</sup>. Owing to prevailing logistic reasons (difficulties in organizing transport and catering for these prisoners of war), it was agreed that the sides would exchange no more than 4,000 civil repatriates and 1 500 prisoners of war per week. The sick and the disabled were to be treated with priority, but also those who had been kept in the worst holding conditions<sup>18</sup>. All persecutions, repressions and penalty executions were to be suspended.

The transport of healthy prisoners during the winter months was to be carried out by means of heated carriages, the sick and exhausted, irrespective of the season, were to be, as far as it would be feasible, transported in sanitary carriages. Crucially those suffering from infectious diseases were not to be transported with healthy prisoners. They would be permitted to leave the camp after they recovered<sup>19</sup>.

In order to estimate just how many Polish soldiers did not return to their Homeland from Soviet imprisonment, we shall first make a summation of the casualties the Polish Army suffered during the wars for independence and borders. No easy task. The armed forces of the Second Republic of Poland were only constituted from the autumn of 1918 already during a time of war: from 1st November onwards a war was already being fought with the West-Ukrainian People's Republic for Lvov and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 28, p. 500.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 31, p. 500.

Eastern Galicia, December 27<sup>th</sup> the Greater Poland Uprising commenced (in the lands around Poznan), on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1919 hostilities were undertaken by the Czechoslovakian army in the region of Cieszyn (in the east of the present-day Polish-Czechia border), initiating the war on Cieszyn Silesia, Spiš and Orava, and in the spring of 1919 bloody clashes occurred in the similarly disputed Wileńszczyzna region with units from near the town of Kaunas in modern-day Lithuania, something which later simmered on as an undeclared war until 30<sup>th</sup> November 1920<sup>20</sup>.

During all these clashes, soldiers of one or the other party to the conflict fell into the hands of the opponent – and in compliance with the applicable articles of law – they became prisoners of war. Summarizing, prisoners of war were both members of the armed forces of the belligerent country, and those accompanying or supporting the armed forces, who had fallen into “*the power of the enemy during the activities of land, naval army and air forces*”<sup>21</sup>.

Therefore, the soldiers of the Polish Army who were taken prisoner by the Soviet army were also, prisoners of war. The difficulty was that the war of the Republic of Poland with Soviet Russia was never actually formally declared. We know when it ended. The agreement for a cease fire between Poland and Soviet Russia was signed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 in Riga, it bound both sides to “*cease hostilities on land, on sea, and in the air [...] on 24.00 CET on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1920*”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> More on the topic, see, W. Rezmer, *Konflikt z Litwą* [in:] *Wojna o wszystko. Opowieść o wojnie polsko-bolszewickiej 1919–1920*, [The conflict with Lithuania [in:] The war for everything. An account of the Soviet-Polish war 1919–1920] ed. W. Sienkiewicz, Warszawa 2010, pp. 209–257 and *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> *Encyklopedia wojskowa*, [The armed forces encyclopedia] ed. O. Laskowski, vol. 3, part 29, Warszawa 1933, p. 673.

<sup>22</sup> *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej* [The emergence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Republic]. *Wybór dokumentów* [A collection of documents] 1866–1925, eds. H. Janowska, and T. Jędruszczak, Warszawa 1984, doc. No. 304, pp. 601–603.

After this date, clashes still continued in the east, but they were conducted independently in the area of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Ukrainian People's Republic those of ataman or Hetman, Symon Petlura, and also in Belarus by the forces of General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz leading a self-proclaimed nationally diverse Russian People's Volunteer Army (*Rosyjska Ludowa Armia Ochotnicza*)<sup>23</sup>. For neither this first formation, nor the second were formally part of the Polish Army. Hence, the soldiers serving under Petlura and Bułak-Bałachowicz that were taken prisoner could not be qualified as Polish prisoners of war.

Another problem related to those soldiers of the Polish Army who, during service on the Polish-Soviet line of demarcation and in the neutral zone, were captured by the Red Army after 18<sup>th</sup> October 1920. We can find frequent reports of various incidents and armed clashes. For instance, on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1920, III Operational Corps of High Command informed: "4. A. *in the sector 11. DP – 13 bm. the Bolsheviks, having crossed the line of the neutral strip and the border of the Polish state, attacked the estates of Połówkowicze and Smolicze (ten kilometres to the north-east from Klecko), plundering them completely*"<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> English Editor's Note: Kremlin authorities as well as several Jewish organisations, among others the, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, on multiple occasions implicated these formations as having been responsible for several attacks and pogroms committed against the Jewish populations living where they operated. Notably the allegedly complicity of formations led by Bałachowicz in such acts when capturing the towns of Pińsk, Minsk and Homel.

<sup>24</sup> *Komunikaty Oddziału III Naczelnego Dowództwa Wojska Polskiego 1919–1921*, [Reports by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch of the Polish Army General Staff 1919–1921] prep. M. Jabłonowski, A. Koseski, Warszawa – Pułtusk 1999 (series: *O Niepodległą i Granice*, vol. 1), doc. No. 832, pp. 742–743: *Komunikat sytuacyjny z 14 grudnia 1920 r.* [Situational reports 14 December 1920].

Formally speaking, on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1920 the Polish-Soviet war did not end. It was not concluded until the peace treaty in Riga was signed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921, in which it was stipulated: “*Article 1. The two Contracting Parties declare that a state of war has ceased to exist between them*”<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, the Polish side treated as prisoners of war any soldiers who had been captured by the Red Army after the ceasefire. On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1920 the commander of III Operational Corps of the High Command wrote in a communiqué: “*4. A. [...] The command of the army lodged a protest via its delegation in Minsk to the Bolshevik authorities with reference to the abuses communicated in the neutral zone and demanded that the Soviet troops retreat from this neutral zone. Some steps were taken to free six uhlans (Polish soldiers of light cavalry) taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks in the neutral zone (on the Soviet side)*”<sup>26</sup>. Two weeks later, III Operational Corps informed: “*Out of the patrol of the 15<sup>th</sup> Regiment*<sup>27</sup> *taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks in the neutral zone, five uhlans, who escaped from the transport to Smolensk, returned. One uhlan from this patrol remained in captivity*”<sup>28</sup>.

In conclusion, we may unequivocally state that also the Polish Army soldiers who were taken prisoner between 18<sup>th</sup> October 1920 (ceasefire date) and 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921 (peace treaty date) also held the status of prisoners of war.

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<sup>25</sup> *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej...*, doc. No. 313, pp. 633–638: *Traktat pokoju między Polską a Rosją i Ukrainą, 18 marca 1921 r.* [The peace agreement between Poland, Russia and Ukraine of 18 March 1921]

<sup>26</sup> *Komunikaty Oddziału...*, doc. No. 833, p. 743: *Komunikat sytuacyjny z 15 grudnia 1920 r.* [Situational report 15 December 1920]

<sup>27</sup> We are referring here to the 15<sup>th</sup> Poznań Uhlan Regiment.

<sup>28</sup> *Komunikaty Oddziału...* doc. No. 847, p. 748: *Komunikat sytuacyjny z 29 grudnia 1920 r.* [Situational report 29 December 1920]

Far greater difficulties arise when attempting to specify the exact date of the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet war. Moreover, this is the moment when the question of prisoners of war first arose for both sides.

In Polish and Russian (Soviet) historiography there is no conclusive answer to the question of when the Polish-Soviet war started. The majority of scholars support the thesis that it occurred in mid-February 1919 (most often the date 14<sup>th</sup> February is stipulated). Among those are Mieczysław Wrzosek, who wrote: “*After the conclusion of the agreement in Białystok, the troops of the Polish Army marched from Podlasie towards the Niemen (Neman) River and on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1919 near the town of Mosty clashed with the formations of the Red Army. The Polish-Soviet armed conflict, which so far had only a potential character excluding the incident in Vilna during the first days of January, now became a fact*”<sup>29</sup>. A similar view is held by another scholar Lech Wyszczelski: “*The beginning of the hostilities in this war is accepted as 14<sup>th</sup> February 1919 [...] a regiment led by captain Piotr Mielnicki took Bereza Kartuska by storm, forcing the garrison of the Red Army to retreat to the east, and a subsequent Polish group clashed with the Russians near the town of Mosty on the Niemen*”<sup>30</sup>.

The date of 14<sup>th</sup> February 1919 as the date during which the first clashes between the troops of the Polish Army and the Red Army took place, and as a consequence the date of the outbreak of war, is also the date provided by over a dozen other

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<sup>29</sup> M. Wrzosek, *Wojsko Polskie i operacje wojenne lat 1918–1921* [The Polish Army and armed forces operations 1918–1921], Białystok 1988, pp. 57–58.

<sup>30</sup> L. Wyszczelski, *Wojsko Polskie w latach 1918–1921* [The Polish Army in the years 1918–1921], Warszawa 2006, p. 300.

Polish scholars, and by the British historian Norman Davies, so renowned and highly valued by Polish publishers<sup>31</sup>.

A second group of historians claims that this war started three days later, that is on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1919. Among them is Andrzej Garlicki, who wrote that by fulfilling the Białystok agreement “*that predicted 10,000 Polish soldiers passing through the territory occupied [by the Germans] to establish a front against Soviet Russia, Polish troops reached the Niemen River. On 17<sup>th</sup> February at Maniewiczze – following a report of the General Staff – «the unit under the command of Lieutenant Sandecki<sup>32</sup> then waged a victorious battle with the Bolshevik army»*. Hence, it was assumed that this date was the date of the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet war”<sup>33</sup>.

There are also other historians who provide different dates and those who cannot, or do not wish to, specify the beginning of the war. In 1930, in the first synthesis of the Polish-Soviet armed conflict published in Poland, Adam Przybylski claimed that it was close to the 20<sup>th</sup> (“end of the second decade” as the Poles phrase it) of February<sup>34</sup>.

Czesław Brzoza and Andrzej Leon Sowa, however, view this problem in a somewhat different fashion. The authors of *Historia Polski 1918–1945*, published in 2006, state that “*direct conflict erupted at the beginning of 1919 when the German army retreated from their previously held positions in the area lying to*

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<sup>31</sup> N. Davies, *Orzeł biały – czerwona gwiazda Wojna polsko-bolszewicka 1919–1920* [White Eagle – Red Star The Soviet-Polish War 1919–1920], trans. A. Pawelec, Kraków 1997, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Lieutenant-colonel Jan Sandecki was a commander of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment.

<sup>33</sup> A. Garlicki, *Pierwsze lata Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [The first years of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Republic, Warszawa 1989, p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> A. Przybylski, *Wojna polska* [The Polish War] 1918–1921, Warszawa 1930, p. 59.

*the east of the Bug River and began to be replaced by Polish and Bolshevik troops then entering. On 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919, the first exchanges of fire occurred at Bereza Kartuska in the Polesie region, and then three days later at Maniewiczze in the Volhynia region. These clashes commenced the undeclared Polish-Soviet War*<sup>35</sup>.

Likewise, Russian (or Soviet) historians find it difficult to determine the exact date of the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet War. They either enumerate various dates for its outbreak, stay silent, or they use some other enigmatic terms. The highly valued researcher into this war and its active participants, Nikolai Kakurin in his most famous work “Гражданская война в Росснн: война с белополяками” written together with Vladimir Melikov<sup>36</sup> included the somewhat vague information that the Western (Soviet) Army “at the end of 1918 occupied a considerable part of Lithuania and Belarus”, and at the turn of 1918 and 1919 its “troops resumed its march of liberation: on 9<sup>th</sup> January it seized Wilkomierz (now Ukmerge in Lithuania), on 13<sup>th</sup> January it then entered Słonim and on 25<sup>th</sup> January and it seized Pińsk. [...] Already at the end of January the first scant mounted and infantry troops of the Polish legionaries were engaged in clashes with the troops of the West Army. However, they were unable to resist the march of the Western Army – they merely slowed down its tempo – which on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919 allowed it to reach the settlements of Poniewież (Panevėžys) – Słonim – Bereza Kartuska – Ivanovo railway station (to the west of Pińsk) – Sarny – Owrucz”<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> C. Brzoza, and A.L. Sowa, *Historia Polski* [History of Poland] 1918–1945, Kraków 2006, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Н. Какурин, В. Меликов, *Гражданская война в Росснн: война с белополяками*, Москва 2002.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 16–17.

The very same historian in his other work “*Стратегический очерк гражданской войны*” was more precise in claiming that in January 1919 the Western Army, while marching to the west, which presupposed reaching the line of the lower Niemen River – the border of East Prussia – Białystok – Brest-Litovsk, engaged in fighting with “troops of the Polish legionaries” (“отрядамн польских легионеров”), which emerged for the first time on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1919 from the side of Wolkowysk (Vawkavysk in modern-day Belarus)<sup>38</sup>.

Mikhail Meltyukhov prepared a paper of several-hundred-pages on the Polish-Soviet conflict entitled “*Советско-польские войны*”. However, he did not explain in it when the war started. He only stated that “*in February 1919 the Soviet-Polish Front opened up stretching from the Niemen to Prypeć (Pripyat) Rivers*”<sup>39</sup>. Nonetheless, in a book published a year earlier “*Советско-польские войны. Военно-политическое противостояние 1918–1939*” he wrote that “*on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 Polish troops seized Vilna but on 3<sup>rd</sup> troops of the Red Army approached the city and on 6<sup>th</sup> January they forced the Poles to withdraw*”<sup>40</sup>. Hence, Meltyukhov admits that already during the first days of January 1919 Polish-Soviet clashes over Vilna had been taking place. However, for unknown reasons, he subsequently did not consider them to be the beginning of the war. We can infer from his work that the war only broke out at the

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<sup>38</sup> Н. Какурин, *Стратегический очерк гражданской войны* [in:] *Военная история гражданской войны в России 1918–1920 годов*, Москва 2004, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> М. Мельтюхов, *Советско-польские войны*, Москва 2002, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> „1 января 1919 г. польские части заняли Вильно, но 3 января к городу подошли части Красной армии и 6 января выбили из него полиаков” *Idem*, *Советско-польские войны. Военно-политическое противостояние 1918–1939 гг.*, Москва 2001, p. 20.

beginning of February 1919. It was at that time when the troops of the Polish Army marched eastwards: on 4<sup>th</sup> February they occupied Kovel and on 9<sup>th</sup> February Brest-Litovsk. From 9<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> February the German Army let the Polish send their troops to their previously held line: the Niemen River near Skidel – Zelwa River – Różanka River – Pruzany (Pruzhany) – Kobryń. The Poles also captured Białystok. In this way, the Polish-Soviet Front was created, one which led from the Niemen to Prypeć Rivers<sup>41</sup>.

In turn, Genadij Matveev, in his introduction to a published volume of documents depicting the fate of the soldiers of the Red Army taken prisoner by the Poles, wrote that “*the first armed clash took place in Bereza Kartuska in Western Belarus on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919*”<sup>42</sup>.

The Polish and Russian historians mentioned above did not pay too much attention to events which took place at the beginning of January in the Vilna region. Quoting the earlier mentioned Mieczysław Wrzosek, the events from the beginning of January 1919 can be described as “*the Vilna incident*”<sup>43</sup>, for Lech Wyszczelski these were the “*first armed clashes*” and “*a prelude of war*”<sup>44</sup>, and for Mikhail Meltyukhov had been merely “*the removal of the Polish troops from Vilna by the Red Army*”<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>42</sup> „Первое боевое столкновение произошло в Березе-Картуской в Западной Белоруссии 13 февраля 1919 г.” *Красноармейцы в польском плену в 1919–1922...*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> M. Wrzosek, *The Polish Army...*, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> L. Wyszczelski, *Niewypowiedziana wojna. Polsko-rosyjskie działania militarne w 1919 roku* [The undeclared war. Polish and Russian military activities in 1919], Toruń 2005, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> „Выброс с Вильны польских отрядов Красной Армией” М. Мельтюхов, *Советско-польские войны. Военно-политическое...*, p. 20.

Nevertheless, it was not in fact a so-called “incident”, but instead in reality, the beginning of the Polish-Soviet war, since it was then that the soldiers of two regular armies: the Polish Army and the Red Army first clashed.

At the end of December 1918, the majority of the German garrison left Vilna, the rest with the local headquarters of Ober-Ost was scheduled to leave the city on 31<sup>st</sup> December. The troops of the Red Army were approaching from the east. The headlong evacuation of the German garrison surprised the Polish side: “*Piłsudski had assumed that the Germans would [only] leave the territory of «Ober-Ost» in March, whereas their [actual] evacuation started earlier*”<sup>46</sup>. In such circumstances, General Władysław Wejtko, who from 29<sup>th</sup> December 1918 led the Command of the General Headquarters of the Polish Army in Lithuania and Belarus, took the decision to seize Vilna, the most crucial city in the so-called Wileńszczyzna (Vilna region). The troops of the National Self-Defence of Lithuania and Belarus, who were subordinated to General Wejtko, in compliance with the order of Józef Piłsudski of 8<sup>th</sup> December 1918, were thus considered as part of the regular Polish Army<sup>47</sup>.

The operation whose purpose was to take control over Vilna commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 at 16.00. Within a few hours,

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<sup>46</sup> W. Jędrzejewicz, and J. Cisek, *Kalendarium życia Józefa Piłsudskiego* [Calendar of the life of Josef Piłsudski], 1867–1935, vol. 2: 1918–1926, Warszawa 1998, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> S. Aleksandrowicz, *Zarys historii wojennej 13-go Pułku Ułanów Wileńskich* [Outline of a conflict the 13th Ulan Regiment, Warszawa 1929, p. 5; *idem*, *Samoobrona Wilna w 1918–1919. Na 50-tą rocznicę powstania 13. Pułku Ułanów Wileńskich* [The self-defense of Vilna in 1918-1919. On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Vilna Ulans], in „Przegląd Kawalerii i Broni Pancernej” [The review of Cavalry and Armoured Formations] 1968, vol. 8, No. 50, p. 85; W. Jędrzejewicz, and J. Cisek, *Kalendarium życia...*, p. 29.

most strategic locations in the city had already been seized. On the night of 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> January two buildings on Wronia Street (No. 3 and 5) were seized, which were the headquarters for the Bolshevik Vilna Council of People's Delegates<sup>48</sup>.

On the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> January General Wejtko sent troops to the outskirts of the city – towards Nowa Wilejka, Niemenczyn and Lida – from the 1<sup>st</sup> Vilna Uhlan Regiment, who were to perform reconnaissance, particularly on the movements of Soviet troops then marching towards Vilna. On the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> January, those troops captured the area of the railway station Nowa Wilejka. In the early morning of 4<sup>th</sup> January, the infantry of I Battalion and part of IV Rifle Battalion also approached the area of Nowa Wilejka. On the morning of that day near the Nowa Wilejka station, soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Vilna Uhlan Regiment then clashed with soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Pskovsky Rifle Regiment, belonging to the Pskovsky Division of the Soviet Western Army.

Already on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1918, the Soviet Western Army had received an order to capture the area reaching the line of Jakobstad – Dyneburg – Święciany – Mołodeczno – Minsk – Słuck – Kalinkowicze – Homel. After having accomplished this order, the three military groupings involved were to then march further west, following the retreating German troops, heading towards Mitava (now Jelgava), Poniewież, Vilna, Lida, Baranowicze and Pińsk<sup>49</sup>. On the Vilna axis, the Pskovska Division was to conduct operations, on the Lida axis it was the

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<sup>48</sup> *Борьба за советскую власть в Литве в 1918–1920 гг. Сборник документов*, Вильнюс 1967, doc. No. 45, pp. 85–87.

<sup>49</sup> *Директивы командования фронтов Красной Армии (1917–1922 гг.)*. Сборник документов, vol. 1: Ноябрь 1917 г. – март 1919 г., Москва 1971, doc. No. 463, p. 482.

Western Division, and along the Pińsk line of advance the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division<sup>50</sup>.

By 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1918, following the orders of the commander of the Western Soviet Army and having encountered no resistance, the Pskovska Division together with the Vilna Rifle Regiment (seconded from the Western Rifle Division) had already reached the line of Jakobstad – Dyneburg – Novoalexandrovsk (Jeziorosy) – Widze – Święciany. They were to station there until the so-called Latvian groupings of the Red Army arrived, who were to subsequently take charge of the Latvian sector of the front. It was not until the right-wing troops of this northernmost Pskovska Division were relieved, that they could march on with a few groups further to the west towards Poniewież and Wiłkomierz. For political-propaganda reasons, Vilna was to be captured earlier by the [Soviet] Vilna Rifle Regiment operating independently<sup>51</sup>. On 22<sup>nd</sup> December a decree was issued in Moscow by the Council of the People's Commissioners, in which the independent Lithuanian Soviet Republic was now declared, stating that Soviet Russia would “*fully support the government of Soviet Lithuania and her army in the struggles for the liberation of Lithuania from the burden of the bourgeoisie*”<sup>52</sup> including the contested territories around Vilna.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 the command of the Soviet Western Army was thus surprised to hear that Poles had pre-empted them and taken Vilna. Therefore, not resting on their laurels they ordered an immediate full-scale offensive against the Polish

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<sup>50</sup> Балтушис-Жемайтис, *Гражданская война в Литве в 1919 году*, „Война и Революция” 1929, книга 7, p. 88.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> J. Ochmański, *Historia Litwy* [The History of Lithuania], Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1990, p. 279.

forces with all their might. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Brigade marched towards Wilkomierz and Poniewież, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Brigade (1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Pskovsky Rifle Regiments) strengthened by the Soviet Vilna Rifle Regiment headed for Vilna, along the rail line leading from Dyneburg through Podbrodzie to Vilna. A third group consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rifle Brigade, which was ordered to capture Wilejka, and from there continuing along the rail line from Mołodeczno to Vilna advancing on the historical capital of Lithuania<sup>53</sup>.

After having reached Podbrodzie, the Soviet forces were split. The Vilna Rifle Regiment was commanded to march on towards Niemenczyn through the junction at Wilejka, and after overcoming these settlements on the water obstacle of the winding Neris River, it was to enter Vilna from the north-east. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Pskovsky Rifle Regiments were to head for Mickuny, and after capturing it, attack Vilna directly from the east, first seizing the Nowa Wilejka railway station. Moreover, two Soviet Regiments of the 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division (145<sup>th</sup> and 146<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiments) were marching from the south-east, from the area around Mołodeczno.

4<sup>th</sup> January 1919 at dawn, the Soviet Vilna Rifle Regiment together with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Pskovsky Rifle Regiments assembled on the outskirts of Vilna. In the morning of the same day, the 1<sup>st</sup> Pskovsky Rifle Regiment of the Red Army approached the Nowa Wilejka railway station. As it turned out this had been occupied by soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of the Vilna Uhlan Cavalry of the Polish Army. A short fight broke out, as a result

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<sup>53</sup> B. Waligóra, *Walka o Wilno – okupacja Litwy i Białorusi w 1918–1919 r. przez Rosję Sowiecką* [The fight for Vilna – the occupation of Lithuania and Belarus in 1918–1919 by Soviet Russia], Wilno 1938, p. 54. See also, Балтушис-Жемайтис, *Гражданская война в Литве...*, p. 89.

of which the Poles retreated towards Vilna with one Polish soldier being taken prisoner<sup>54</sup>.

The battle which ensued on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1919 in the vicinity of Nowa Wilejka was thus actually one fought by two regular armies: the Polish Army and the Red Army, and as such marks the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet war, while the aforementioned Polish soldier then taken captive was to be the first prisoner of this war.

From November 1918 until December 1920, Poland was forced to fight for both its independence and the contours and extent of her borders with several neighbours. During these clashes, the Polish Army suffered casualties estimated at 663,723 people, including 47,055 which were irretrievable losses among officers, non-commissioned officers and private soldiers. 19,841 having been killed in battle, and 27,214 having died of illnesses and or wounds (Table 1). The conflict with Soviet Russia was the longest of these conflicts undertaken by Poland and the one which led to the highest number of casualties.

**Table 1.** A list of casualties of the Polish Army according to type of death, divided into military ranks – from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920.

rank	Fallen in action	died				total
		of wounds	of illnesses	of accidents	unknown causes	
officers	1 014	224	359	54	68	1 719
cadets	206	40	55	5	7	313
non-commissioned officers	2 589	597	1 387	112	194	4 879
private soldiers	15 418	3 343	16 160	933	2 308	38 162

<sup>54</sup> Балтушис-Жемайтис, *Гражданская война в Литве...*, p. 89.

rank	Fallen in action	died				total
		of wounds	of illnesses	of accidents	unknown causes	
rank unspecified	614	199	617	35	517	1 982
total	19 841	4 403	18 578	1 139	3 094	47 055

Source: *Record of Polish Army losses. The fallen and the deceased in the wars of 1918–1920, Warszawa 1934, Appendix 4: List of Polish Army losses according to the cause of death with a subdivision of ranks for the period November 1918 to December 1920.*

In the wars waged in the years 1918–1920 the principal and largest formation type within the Polish armed forces were the infantry units. Treated as the main fighting force capable of engagement in every military objective. On the basis of experience gained during World War I, it was believed that only an infantry force was able to capture a defended area, overcome it and destroy the enemy while also retaining control of the captured area. Hence, the infantry took part in all strategic operations, battles and clashes. Accordingly, it incurred the greatest losses. Inasmuch as in 1919 and in the first months of 1920 the Polish infantry, which carried most of the weight of the clashes, was losing only a few hundred people every month (for instance in April 1919 – 753 soldiers, in June of the same year – 899, in January 1920 it increased to 1,560, already in May 1920 casualties amounted to 2,191 soldiers, in June 2,505, in July 3,181, in August there were as many as 4,362, in October – 1,219, and in November (that is during the month when the Polish-Soviet ceasefire was declared) – 657<sup>55</sup>. The data as presented should

<sup>55</sup> Lista strat Wojska Polskiego. Polegli i zmarli w wojnach 1918–1920, [Record of Polish Army losses. The fallen and the deceased in the wars of 1918–1920] Warszawa 1934, app. 45: Wykaz strat wojsk polskich według daty śmierci z podziałem na rodzaje broni [List of Polish Army losses according to date of death with a sub-division for type of armed forces].

not surprise us, as the greatest losses occurred between May and September 1920, that is in the months when the Polish-Soviet War was at its height<sup>56</sup>.

The second place with regard to casualties incurred was occupied by the cavalry forces, which were also classified as a principal fighting formation. Cavalry was long regarded in Poland as the national mode of fighting, strongly connected to the tradition and history of Polish armed forces and – significantly – it was immensely popular in society. In the wars fought by the Polish Army in the period of 1918–1920 the artillery also held among the most important places in terms of both the number of soldiers engaged and the role it played on the battlefield. Cavalry and artillery, beside infantry, took part in all operations and battles fought against the Red Army. Therefore, it seems understandable that they incurred the highest personal losses (Table 2).

**Table 2.** A list of casualties of the Polish Army according to the type of death and type of unit – from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920.

	Fallen in battle	died				total
		of wounds	of illnesses	of accidents	unknown reasons	
infantry	16 405	3 271	10 491	579	1 765	32 511
cavalry	1 831	276	857	74	182	3 220
artillery	587	166	1 319	103	171	2 346
command ranks	60	53	724	47	68	952
medical service	33	45	837	17	76	1 008
armoured forces	58	25	45	2	14	144

<sup>56</sup> To see more: F. Libert, M. Różycki, *Straty piechoty w wojnie 1918–1920 r.* [Infantry losses in the war 1918–1920], In „Przegląd Piechoty” 1934, R. 7, p. 8, pp. 202–208.

	Fallen in battle	died				total
		of wounds	of illnesses	of accidents	unknown reasons	
air force	46	21	112	21	11	211
sappers	177	64	863	78	85	1 267
communications forces	9	15	237	27	14	302
military police	31	48	211	23	16	329
motorized forces	5	6	82	10	5	108
supply trains	10	17	356	21	31	435
armament services	–	4	31	8	2	45
supply services	10	20	261	18	16	325
staging services	53	64	1 072	46	90	1 325
justice service	2	–	55	2	5	64
navy	24	2	25	7	2	60
schools	2	2	81	9	7	101
non-assigned	498	304	919	47	534	2 302
total	19 841	4 403	18 578	1 139	3 094	47 055

Source: *Record of Polish Army losses. The fallen and the deceased in the wars of 1918–1920, Warszawa 1934, Appendix 2: List of Polish Army losses according to the cause of and armed forces division for the period November 1918 to December 1920.*

Infantry, cavalry and artillery also registered a high and continually increasing number of wounded and sick. The greatest number of which was recorded in July and August 1920, again during the peak months of the Polish-Soviet struggle (Table 3).

**Table 3.** A list of wounded and sick soldiers of the Polish Army – from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920.

		wounded	sick	not diagnosed	total
Infantry	officers	2 585	4175	449	7209
	non-commissioned officers and privates	98 013	284 283	28 033	410 329
Cavalry	officers	281	363	80	724
	non-commissioned officers and privates	4 497	20 045	1 640	26 182
Artillery	officers	146	621	14	781
	non-commissioned officers and privates	2 656	23 503	1 836	27 995
command ranks	officers	137	1 463	16	1 616
	non-commissioned officers and privates	1 153	23 090	1 944	26 187
medical services	officers	27	415	6	448
	non-commissioned officers and privates	330	10 170	695	11 195
armoured forces	officers	32	53	1	86
	non-commissioned officers and privates	251	1 441	91	1 783
air force	officers	28	65	3	96
	non-commissioned officers and privates	146	1 516	124	1 786
Sappers	officers	30	104	2	136
	non-commissioned officers and privates	757	7 707	525	8 989
communications forces	officers	18	162	–	180
	non-commissioned officers and privates	541	10 029	677	11 247
military police	officers	5	58	–	63
	non-commissioned officers and privates	285	4 419	286	4 990
motorized forces	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–

		wounded	sick	not diagnosed	total
supply trains	officers	11	102	1	114
	non-commissioned officers and privates	266	6 679	481	7 426
armament services	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–
supply services	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–
staging services	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–
justice service	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–
navy	officers	3	7	–	10
	non-commissioned officers and privates	81	276	35	392
schools	officers	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	–	–
Non-assigned	officers	50	169	11	230
	non-commissioned officers and privates	3 467	6 967	1 972	12 406
total		115 796	407 882	38 922	562 600

Source: *Record of Polish Army losses. The fallen and the deceased in the wars of 1918–1920, Warszawa 1934, Appendix 1: List of Polish Army losses for the period November 1918 to December 1920.*

*The List of casualties of the Polish Army Killed and deceased in the wars of 1918–1920* prepared at the beginning of the 1930s was based on materials collected at the Information Bureau of the Polish Red Cross. The fact that this office was established was a consequence of the commitments resulting from the Hague Convention. The materials of the Polish Red Cross

were complemented by information gained from the acts of the Episcopal Curia of the Polish Army, from documents obtained from the sanitary Department of Military Affairs, Military Historical Office and Central Military Archives. We can infer from the above list that in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1918 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920 a number of 54,063 soldiers (Table 4) were missing through not necessarily captured as POWs. This number represented an increase of 2,930 more soldiers than the numbers revealed in earlier Polish historical–military literature: 51,351 missing<sup>57</sup>.

**Table 4.** A List of the missing soldiers of the Polish Army from November 1918 to December 1920.

type of unit		1918	1919	1920	no date	total
infantry	officers	1	62	463	1	527
	non-commissioned officers and privates	27	3 075	43 719	377	47 198
cavalry	officers	–	7	49	–	56
	non-commissioned officers and privates	1	88	1 968	–	2 057
artillery	officers	–	9	40	6	55
	non-commissioned officers and privates	6	55	1 321	–	1 382
commands	officers	–	–	25	–	25
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	11	383	–	394
armoured forces	officers	–	2	7	–	9
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	2	32	–	34

<sup>57</sup> W. Sikorski, *Nad Wisłą i Wkrą. Studium z polsko-rosyjskiej wojny 1920 roku* [On the Vistula and Wkra Rivers. A study of the Soviet-Polish War 1920], Lwów – Warszawa – Kraków 1928, Appendix 13; F. Waga, *Stużba zdrowia w czasie wojny* [The Health Sector in a time of wars], Warszawa 1929, p. 6.

type of unit		1918	1919	1920	no date	total
air force	officers	–	–	8	–	8
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	19	–	19
sappers	officers	–	–	5	–	5
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	9	432	–	441
communications forces	officers	–	–	5	–	5
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	6	210	–	216
military police	officers	–	–	1	–	1
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	17	65	–	82
supply trains	officers	–	–	2	–	2
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	75	–	75
navy	officers	–	–	–	–	–
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	–	26	–	26
medical service	officers	–	1	17	–	18
	non-commissioned officers and privates	–	8	203	–	211
Non-assigned	officers	–	1	17	–	18
	non-commissioned officers and privates	1	147	1 051	–	1 199
total		36	3 500	50 143	384	54 063

*Record of Polish Army losses. The fallen and the deceased in the wars of 1918–1920, Warszawa 1934, Appendix 1: List of Polish Army losses for the period November 1918 to December 1920.*

Out of 54,063 soldiers who went missing during the struggle, a large proportion were taken prisoner. The percentage of those who actually vanished without trace was minor. They were never found (since they drowned in waterways and lakes,

sank in swamps, or were simply buried under the rubble and heaps of earth), thus they could not have been listed in the casualty numbers.

In the list of those missing we also come across deserters from the Polish Army who for various reasons (ideological, defeatist, fear of punishment by court-martial or other disciplinary punishment, cowardice) defected to the enemy. Later some of them joined the Polish “Red” troops being formed by the Soviet authorities and were to become the basis of the Polish Red Army.

The decision to form such an army on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1920 was taken [just before the Red Army’s two great defeats at the hands of the counterattacking Poles,] by the Soviet Revolutionary Military Council<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, already the next day, on 15<sup>th</sup> August, the commander of the Western Front Mikhail Tukhachevsky, [still unaware of the change in fortunes at the front,] gave the order for the formation of a rifle regiment and a reserve regiment (each comprising three battalions), which were to be the basis of the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Red Army<sup>59</sup>. It was to be a voluntary army, recruited in Polish territory and from prison camps allowing the prisoners-volunteers to enlist<sup>60</sup>. However, the actions taken were not particularly effective. On 12<sup>th</sup> September 1920, it was announced that “[there is] *roughly [only] a thousand people in the Polish Army. These are people «delegated» to the army, of*

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<sup>58</sup> The Russian National Military Archive in Moscow – henceforth RPWA (an acronym denoting: Росийский государственный военный архив – РГВА), fond 18, desc. 3, issue 62, c. 16.

<sup>59</sup> W. Najdus, *Lewica polska w Kraju Rad 1918–1920* [The Polish left in the Soviet Land 1918–1920], a Soviet sponsored propaganda publication, Warszawa 1971, p. 315.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

*Polish nationality, Russians who are speakers of Polish, Polish volunteers and prisoners of war*”<sup>61</sup>.

In a report by Polish counterintelligence prepared in September 1921, it was stated:

“Polish prisoners of war in the Polish Red Army.

The Polish prisoners of war who constituted the Polish Red Army can be divided into two categories: volunteers and those who were mobilized. Volunteers were recruited most commonly among Jews as well as among military men who had escaped of their own accord the previously occupied Polish territories of the Russian Empire, most often owing to fear of the punishment they could be subjected to for perceived crimes they had committed in the Polish Army. There were around a thousand of these mobilized in total, including an marginal number of officers, doctors and hospital attendants from the former 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Division. All of these were incorporated into this Polish Red Army in Babruysk that was then constituted in September 1921. When this Army, in light of the later declared ceasefire with Poland, was officially disbanded, the Polish prisoners were subsequently incorporated into the units of «Upraform of the Red Communards»<sup>62</sup> in Moscow and also the Samara, Ufa and Penza governorates. The largest section, of more than 300 people, formed the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Rifles UpP of the Red Communards in Belebey<sup>63</sup> in the Ufa governorate.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 351.

<sup>62</sup> The Upraform of the Red Communards – The Directorate for the Formation of Units of the Red Communards (Управление формирования Красных Коммунаров).

<sup>63</sup> After the declaration of a ceasefire on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 with Poland, these “Red” Polish military formations under Soviet command became an unwelcome bone of contention politically hindering the normalization of relations. Therefore, in compliance with the order of the Military and Revolutionary Council of 20<sup>th</sup> November the Directorate for this

They stayed there until May of that year, when, as a result of efforts made, they were released from active military service and then via the Władykinsky camp in Moscow were sent in groups back to Poland.

During their time with the Soviet or Bolshevik army, throughout the winter and spring [1921], less attention was paid to military education, and more to acquiring politicisation competencies. Political lectures, meetings, performances (instruction in reading and writing), as well as education concerning four classes of basic grammar school absorbed the largest part of a soldier's day and illiterates (of whom there were still many) were instructed in reading and writing. The influence of this political agitation was on the whole substantial for these men, and barely half of the prisoners decided to return to Poland, while the rest remained in Russia or returned in small groups equipped with special instructions to now commence anti-state operations in Poland.

On the whole, the prisoners who returned from the Red Army constituted an element imbued to a greater or lesser

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Formation, the Polish Red Army was officially disbanded. In fact, this change was somewhat cosmetic in nature: it actually transformed into the Directorate for the Formation of the Red Army. The Polish units subordinate to the Directorate were then renamed as the units of the Red Communards, only the adjective "Polish" was left out, which specified their national character. In order not to complicate the recently initiated peace negotiations with Poland, the Soviet authorities decided to move units of the Red Communards from Roslavl (in the Smolensk Governorate) and Dubrovka (in the Oryol Governorate) to the Eastern European lands of Russia. The Reserve Regiment of Cavalry was stationed in Perm near the Ural Mountains, the reserve division of artillery in Kungur (in the Perm governorate), with the rifle regiment in Belebey (to the south-east of Ufa). Initially, they intended to station them in Ufa, however, there were not enough suitable lodgings. Additionally, a typhus epidemic which was escalating forced them to lodge the regiment in Belebey. See, W. Najdus, *Lewica polska...*, pp. 355–356.

extent with the Bolshevik spirit. Based on Polish intelligence reports drawn up after the 1921 Riga Peace treaty, they could not be regarded as fully trustworthy, despite the fact that they had served under coercion. This especially applied to the officers among them. Some [Polish] prisoners, that is the more intelligent non-commissioned officers, were assigned to be instructors of «the Polish courses for the Red commanders» in Moscow (with the name changed to «Courses for the Red Communards»). They are still working there on the education of the Polish red commanders until today”<sup>64</sup>.

We do not possess any reliable sources as to the number of deserters. Nonetheless, it appears that it was not a particularly large group. Assuredly, it would not be a serious mistake if we were to assume that deserters – a group formally included in the official military statistical tables under the term missing – constituted a group of only a few hundred people.

During the Soviet advance in early summer of 1920 approximately 3,000 soldiers were taken into Lithuanian captivity in July 1920 (the majority from the 4<sup>th</sup> Rifle Brigade of Lt. Col. Stefan Paślowski, which formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lithuanian-Belarusian Division). These prisoners were released in December 1920. In a telegram sent by the head of the Polish 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to the Ministry of Military Affairs in Warsaw, it was reported:

*“On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1920 the last group of prisoners returned from Lithuanian captivity in the number of 446 privates, including*

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<sup>64</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [Central Armed Forces Archive henceforth: CAW], 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Branch of the General Staff (Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego)), call no. I.303.4.1707, *Raport Ekspozytury Wydziału II Sztabu Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin o obozach jeńców w Rosji z 21 września 1921 r.* [Report of Branch Department 2 of the Staff Command Lublin District regarding prison camps in Russia dated 21 September 1921].

*317 of whom were sick. Stop. The following officers returned: Lt. Col, Paślawski, Capt. Jocherson, Second Lt. Kaźmierowski, Second Lt. Lusik, Second Lt.. Koch, Second Lt. Topolski, Second Lt. Cyprys, Second Lt. Lenarczyk, Second Lt. Sulik, Second Lt. Sikorski, Second Lt. Chnicz, Second Lt. Laskowski, Second Lt. Górnicki, Second Lt. Rudnicki, Second Lt. Nowolieniuk and Second Lt. Szablowski. Stop.*

*The Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, Division IV, L.dz.8142/IV*<sup>65</sup>.

Additionally, in the summer of 1920 the German authorities interned around 5,000 soldiers of the then retreating Polish Army that entered Eastern Prussia. They belonged to a few divisions (mainly battalions and regiments of the Border Riflemen and part of the III Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment), separated from the main Polish forces by the advance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Cavalry Corps and thus forced to cross the German border. Therefore, we shall include in this number Polish prisoners earlier taken captive by the advancing Soviets and then transported to East Prussia by the above-mentioned Soviet 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps. A Corp that, in face of the later August route outside Warsaw, had been unable to break through the Polish encirclement that had closed near Kolno. They then also chose internment by crossing the German border on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> August. The Soviet commander Komkor (Corp Commander) Hayk Bzhishkyan claimed that during the near two-month offensive, in which his corps took part, that is from

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<sup>65</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych [2<sup>nd</sup> Staff branch of the Ministry for the Armed Forces], call no. I.300.47.327, Telegram dowództwa 3. Armii do Oddziału IV [Telegram from the Head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army to Branch 4], L.dz.8142/IV, do Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych z 18 grudnia 1920 r. [to the Ministry for the Armed Forces dated 18 December 1920].

4<sup>th</sup> July to 26<sup>th</sup> August 1920, the forces subordinate to him “slew up to 8,000 Poles, 13,000 were taken prisoner. Some of these were sent to the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, some to the infantry division [rifle division] and to the [Soviet] Lithuanian army”<sup>66</sup>. These troops then brought with them “600 wounded, 2,000 prisoners and 11 Polish cannons”<sup>67</sup> into East Prussia.

Taking into consideration the data presented earlier, we can with considerable certainty assume that the remaining roughly 44,000 soldiers of the Polish Army who were registered as missing, were in Soviet captivity. In actual fact there were even more soldiers who were in the hands of the Red Army, though a lot of them had been captives for just a short time. A change in the military situation at the front allowed them to be freed from the Soviet forward positions by their own units or other troops of the Polish Army. A number of them had already escaped from captivity during transfer to the Special Department (Особый отдел) of the relevant tactical formation where they were set to be interrogated, escaping either from the assembly point or during transport to concentration camps. They escaped sometimes individually, but also in groups of people. Some escaped several times. Since they returned relatively quickly to their units, they were not formally registered as among the missing.

The Polish soldiers who were taken prisoner by the Soviets belonged to various branches of the Polish Army and related services, they served in multiple command structures, units, departments, and military institutions. Since infantry accounted for the bulk of Polish armed forces, the largest number of prisoners were to arise from that formation (47,714 officers,

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<sup>66</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Варшаву! Действия 3 Конного Корпуса на Западном Фронте. Военно-исторический очерк*, Москва 1928, p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

non-commissioned officers and privates registered as missing). Prisoners from the cavalry corps came second, and in third place – artillerymen.

The largest group of Polish Army soldiers who were taken prisoner by the Soviets on a single day, namely 11<sup>th</sup> January 1920, belonged to the [Polish] 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division operating deep inside Russia. They had been formed in 1919 in Siberia from Poles living there from the time of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century deportations and from captured WWI soldiers of Polish nationality who'd been earlier mobilized into German and Austro-Hungarian armed forces, taken prisoner during the War and then released from Russian captivity. There were even a large number of Poles in this division, who'd been enlisted into the WWI army of the Russian Empire, and who after the Revolution in 1917 were demobilized. These did not want to fight with the "white" Russian army of Alexander Kolchak and preferred to join the Polish national forces. At the beginning of April 1919, already 10,772 officers, non-commissioned officers and privates were serving in the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division<sup>68</sup>. It comprised three rifle regiments, an uhlan cavalry regiment, a regiment of field artillery and many other smaller auxiliary and sub-branch services.

By the spring of 1919, the military situation of the army of Admiral Kolchak was rapidly worsening. When a huge offensive was launched by the Red Army at the beginning of April, their troops captured Buguruslan, Belebey and Ufa. Taking advantage of this victory, in the summer the Bolshevik tactical formations of the Eastern Front captured Kungur, Perm, Zlatoust, Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk. By mid-August the whole of

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<sup>68</sup> CAW, Akta WP, call no. I.122,91.753, Spis oficerów i żołnierzy z 11 kwietnia 1919 r. [List of officers and soldiers from 11 April 1919].

the Ural region was now controlled by the Red Army, and its troops reached the Tobol River. These defeats of the “whites” allowed for the ‘activation’ of Bolshevik partisans across the entire area of Siberia. The Trans-Siberian Railway was now particularly exposed to their attacks as well as the railway lines connected to it. To secure these important arterial lines for the Whites, Polish troops were used, who successfully repelled the Bolshevik partisan attacks.

It was after the Bolshevik forces captured Omsk – the keystone of Kolchak’s regional control – in November 1919, that anti-Bolshevik Front fell apart. Now the optimal solution was clearly a quick evacuation of these Polish troops via the Trans-Siberian Railway to the east, to Vladivostok and the on to other ports on the Pacific Ocean, from where they could be safely shipped to Poland avoiding the fighting in Western Russia. Nonetheless, it was incredibly difficult to accomplish this plan, since there were also Czechoslovakian units that had also been allied to the “whites”, units located further east of the Poles, beyond Novonikolayevsk (now Novosibirsk). Taking advantage of the protective screen which these Polish troops now served, as a form of rear-guard securing the Czechoslovakian units moving slowly eastwards. Repelling constant attacks by the troops of the Red Army and also from Bolshevik partisan groups, the Polish units under Colonel – Col. Walerian Czuma, commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in Eastern Russia and Siberia, reached Krasnoyarsk [central Siberia] at the end of December, and a few days later moved even further to the east – to the Klyukvennaya railway station (c. twelve kilometres from Krasnoyarsk). There they were halted since Czechoslovakian transports were ahead of them and for this reason the Poles could not pass.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January 1920 Col. Czuma called all his commanders for a meeting in order to make a decision concerning further

movements. They decided that a dispatch should be sent to Gen. Jan Syrový, the commander-in-chief of the Czechoslovakian Corps, stating:

*“The regular Red Army marched into Krasnoyarsk on the night of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> January, today, tomorrow they will enter Klyukvennaya. Exhausted by previous battles and having lost a hundred soldiers and with several hundred wounded, we will naturally be powerless to stop this offensive. Not seeing any other solution and considering this situation as excessively destructive for all the remaining Polish transports – the Polish Command in this tragic moment puts in a final request and proposal to you that you allow twenty Polish trains and an armoured train pass the Czech operational transports without being stopped. For its part, the Polish Command will immediately offer twenty-two fully loaded transporters with locomotives to the Czech Army. In the event of a rejection of the proposal, the Polish Command, regarding the impossibility of abandoning women and children in the field, in the name of brotherly love, we kindly ask you to let through just five transports with the wounded, and accompanying women and children”<sup>69</sup>.*

General Syrový did not agree to the request of Col. Czuma. In his dispatch, he informed the commander-in-chief of the Polish Army in Eastern Russian and Siberia that *“no Polish transport can be allowed to go to the east. Only after the last transporter has departed from the Klyukvennaya railway station can you move further. Further negotiations and requests referring to this, I consider as finite, for this issue has been exhausted”<sup>70</sup>.*

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<sup>69</sup> H. Bagiński, *Wojsko Polskie na Wschodzie: 1914–1921* [The Polish Army in the East 1914–1921], Warszawa 1921, p. 583.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 584–595.

In these circumstances, not wanting to endanger his soldiers, nor the accompanying families in an unrealistic and hopeless fight, Col. Czuma sent a delegation on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1920 to the Bolshevik command in order to set the terms of surrender for the Polish troops concentrated around Klyukvenaya. After a few hours of talks, the following protocol of the agreement was signed:

### PROTOCOL

Talks between the plenipotentiaries of the Chief of the Polish Army Command – Colonel SKIRGENKO-JACEWICZ [sic<sup>71</sup>], Captain [Franciszek] POKORNY, Lieutenant DEBOWSKI [sic<sup>72</sup>], private 1st Class KOZIELKIEWICZ [sic<sup>73</sup>], Chief Officer [Ignacy] MAKOWSKI, and Feldwebel BASEWICZ [sic<sup>74</sup>] – on one side, and the Political Commissar of the 264<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment on the other. The talks take place at the Balay Station on the Siberian Railway on 10 January 1920 at 10 pm.

The Soviet government guarantees the inviolability of personal property [and] the personal inviolability of surrendering persons who show loyalty to the Soviet government; such persons will not be separated from their families and will be transported by echelons to the c[ity] of Krasnoyarsk, where an order from the Supreme Command of the Red Army will be issued.

1. [number repeated] Supplying the Polish echelons with sufficient food for several days from supplies which will be

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<sup>71</sup> Correctly: Col. Skirgiełło-Jacewicz.

<sup>72</sup> Correctly: Lt Dyboski.

<sup>73</sup> Correctly: Cpl. Koziełkiewicz.

<sup>74</sup> Correctly: Sgt Jasiewicz.

allocated in each echelon for the sustenance of Polish citizens and their families.

2. The Polish Army is expected to fulfil the following: the immediate and complete surrender of arms, and loyalty to the Soviet authorities.

Political Commissar of the 264<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the Red Army

[signature illegible]

Plenipotentiary of the Polish Army Command

Col. Skirgienko-Jacewicz<sup>75</sup>.

Captain Franciszek Pokorny

Lieutenant Dybowski<sup>76</sup>

Senior Officer Ignacy Makowski

Corporal /-/ Kozielkiewicz<sup>77</sup>.

Sergeant /-/ Bacewicz<sup>78</sup>

The protocol was drawn up in two copies, one to be kept at Red Army headquarters and the other at Polish Army headquarters.

Political Commissar of the 264<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment of the Red Army

[signature illegible]

For the authenticity of the signature:

[handwritten signature of Moszynski Lt. staff adjutant]<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Correctly: Col. Skirgieńko-Jacewicz.

<sup>76</sup> Correctly: Lt Dyboski.

<sup>77</sup> Correctly: Cpl. Kozielkiewicz.

<sup>78</sup> Correctly: Sgt Jasiewicz.

<sup>79</sup> RPWA, fond 470, desc. 2, issue 15, c. 87.

After the return of the delegation with the signed agreement, Col. Czuma formulated the capitulation order to his troops, announced the same day:

*“Not being able to march further east, I have commenced negotiations with the military representatives and the commissioner of Soviet Russia in order that our army and its individual members be ensured the best possible conditions of further existence. Peace envoys sent: Colonel Skirgiello–Jacewicz, Captain Pokorny, Lieutenant Dyboski, Sergeant Jasiewicz, Master Corporal Makowski, Senior soldier Kozielkiewicz, report:*

*1) The Polish Army, after laying down its arms, will be sent back to Krasnoyarsk in the same transports;*

*2) the personal inviolability of the members of the Polish Army to be guaranteed;*

*3) food will be left in the transports for a period of fifteen days;*

*4) the inviolability of personal property will be guaranteed;*

*5) more precise conditions will be provided after their confirmation by the higher command in Krasnoyarsk. For that reason, I order the Polish Army to stay in their transports, keep calm and avoid all clashes with the advancing troops of the Red Army”<sup>80</sup>.*

The decision of Col. Czuma was addressed with mixed feelings. The majority of soldiers – c. 8,000 – decided to follow the order and lay down their arms. In the report of the head of the Department of Prisoners of War of the Polish Delegation in the Joint Commission, drawn up in July 1921, we can find a passage saying that there were “10,000 POWs of the ex 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division”<sup>81</sup>. There were not as many as that. Most probably the

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<sup>80</sup> H. Bagiński, *The Polish army...*, p. 585.

<sup>81</sup> RPWA, fond 308, desc. 19, issue 272, *Sprawozdanie kpt. Kotwicza-Do-brzańskiego, kierownika Wydziału Jeńców Delegacji Polskiej w Komisji*

family members of the soldiers in the evacuation transports were also registered as POWs.

Col. Czuma was also taken prisoner at the Klyukvennaya railway station. Things turned out to be much worse than had been expected, for the Soviet command did not intend to fully respect the provisions of the capitulation agreement. Only the soldiers' families remained free, albeit with no food supplies. Their situation was tragic, since the Red Army and Bolshevik partisans robbed all of them, both the civilians and the soldiers. The junior officers were sent to prison camps, and the senior ones, from the rank of captain upwards, were imprisoned. Among these was Col. Czuma. From the privates refusing to join the Red Army, they formed working squads, who were sent to work in coal mines or to repair rail infrastructure. Around 1,600 soldiers (including 468 officers) were sent to the camp "Wojennyj gorodok" near Krasnoyarsk<sup>82</sup>.

Many of them did not survive the severe conditions. For instance, Capt. Jan Doliński died in the Soviet prison. Col. Czuma was first kept in the prison in Krasnoyarsk, and later taken to Omsk, from where he was sent to Moscow, to Butyrka prison<sup>83</sup>. Unfortunately, this period of his life is practically unknown.

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*Mieszanej ds. Repatriacji, dla Komisji Mieszanej o przebiegu repatriacji z Rosji z 11 lipca 1921 r.* [The account of Captain Kotwicz-Dobrzański head of the Department of Prisoners of the Polish Delegation to the Joint Commission for repatriation and the Joint Commission of the conduction of repatriation from Russia dated 11 July 1921], c. 243.

<sup>82</sup> To read more, see, *Polscy jeńcy wojenni w niewoli sowieckiej w latach 1919–1922. Materiały archiwalne*, [Polish war prisoners in Soviet captivity in the years 1919 to 1922. Archive material] eds. M. Skowronek, and A. Gutowski, Warszawa 2009, *passim*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibide* doc. No. 237, pp. 416–420: *Protokół nr 3 z posiedzenia Rosyjsko-Ukraińsko-Polskiej Komisji Mieszanej ds. Repatriacji z dnia 10 maja 1921 r.* [Protocol Nr. 3 from the sitting of the Russia, Ukrainian and Polish Joint Commission for repatriation dated 10 May 1921]

In his personal records there is no description of his prison ordeal<sup>84</sup>. He himself did not publish his own Siberian memoir.

In compliance with the provisions of the agreement on repatriation of 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921 and the peace treaty signed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921 ending the Polish Soviet war in the east (signed by Poland, Soviet Russia and a subordinate Soviet Ukraine) these countries were to “*commence repatriation as swiftly as possible of all political prisoners, those interned, prisoners of war, refugees and emigrants staying within the borders of their country*”<sup>85</sup>. These provisions, however, were not realized in their entirety. By the end of the summer of 1921 only a portion of those people concerned had returned to Poland. For the troops of the aforementioned Col. Czuma, the transit back lasted a very long time and took place in harsh conditions. The first convoy (a draft of cars) with POWs – soldiers from Czuma’s 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division left Krasnoyarsk on 14<sup>th</sup> August, and arrived in Moscow on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1921, that is to say that to traverse this distance it took them three weeks.

“*A week before they left, they were grouped into «pieriesielenczeskom» point, where in the open air, poorly fed, they stayed until their departure on 14<sup>th</sup> August. Since during these three weeks of waiting, there were heavy showers and the POWs had no*

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<sup>84</sup> CAW, Akta Personalne, call no. 2857, Akta osobowe gen. Waleriana Czumy. [The personal record file of General Walerian Czuma]

<sup>85</sup> *Dokumenty z dziejów polskiej polityki zagranicznej 1918–1939* [Documents from the annals of Polish foreign policy 1918–1939], vol. 1: 1918–1932, eds. T. Jędruszczak, and M. Nowak-Kielbikowa, Warszawa 1989, doc. No. 31, pp. 133–148: *Układ o repatriacji między Rzeczpospolitą Polską a RFSRR i USRR, z dodatkowym protokołem z dnia 24 lutego 1921 r.* [The accord on repatriation between The Polish Republic and SFSR and Ukrainian SSR and additional protocol of 24 February 1921]; *ibid.*, doc. No. 34, pp. 150–174: *Traktat pokoju między Polską a Rosją i Ukrainą z 18 marca 1921 r.* [The Peace Treaty between Poland, Russia and Ukraine dated 18 March 1921].

shelter, and more than 200 soldiers from the brigade were robbed of duvets, coats and pots (they also wanted to take their shoes and exchange them for slippers, which did not happen owing to a lack of slippers), these people found themselves in a very critical situation without care and support. The departure set for 28<sup>th</sup> July for unknown [reasons] was prolonged to 14<sup>th</sup> August [...]. During the stops on the journey from Krasnoyarsk to Moscow the provisions [...] of the convoy were as follows:

- 1) in Achinsk,  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound of bread was given per person.
- 2) in Mariinsk, – soup (water with wheat) and  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound of bread.
- 3) in Novonikolayevsk – soup.
- 4) in Omsk three zolotniks<sup>86</sup> of meat, a few spoonfuls of groats and salt, nine poods<sup>87</sup> of flour for the whole convoy.
- 5) in Yekatarinburg – soup (water with wheat) and a pound of bread with a half [word illegible] non-green oats; a sample piece attached.
- 6) in Perm –  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of bread.
- 7) in Vyatka – 1 pound of bread.
- 8) in Iaroslav –  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound of bread.

The convoy arrived in Moscow on 4<sup>th</sup> September, which means that it was en-route for three weeks. During these three weeks  $4\frac{1}{4}$  pounds of bread, four soups and a few spoonfuls of salt were given to each man, and a few teaspoons of sugar for the children. In Yekatarinburg the bread was inedible, owing to the lack of food the coarse oat grains caused an increase of stomach conditions [word illegible] of the already weakened organisms of prisoners”<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> Zolotnik – a Russian unit of weight (equals 0,004265 kg).

<sup>87</sup> Pood – a Russian unit of weight or mass (equals 16,38 kg).

<sup>88</sup> The National Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow – GARF (Государственный архив Российской Федерации – ГАРФ), fond R.-8358, description 8, issue 22, c. 428–428v: *Protokół przesłuchania jeńców*

For unknown reasons, the action of sending back the Polish POWs from the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division conducted from the end of July 1921 did not include many of their number. Among them was Col. Walery Czuma. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1921 the Polish *chargé d'affaires* Tytus Filipowicz<sup>89</sup>, in a verbal statement delivered to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin, drew attention to the fact that the agreements had not been fully respected, since there were still c. 10,000 Polish POWs and c. 3,000 hostages and other people interned in Soviet camps and prisons. "*Among these are Polish officials: Kaługa, Bukowski and Kowalski, imprisoned for eighteen months and an official of the old Polish Representation in Moscow, Malhomme, imprisoned for nearly two and a half years and Col. Walery [Walerian] Czuma, imprisoned since 11<sup>th</sup> January 1920.*"<sup>90</sup>

It is somewhat difficult to state just to what extent this official speech by the Polish diplomatic representative influenced the expedited release of Czuma. Most probably only in a limited fashion since he did not arrive in Poland until 20<sup>th</sup> January 1922. After his arrival, it turned out that this stay of several months in the Soviet prison had undermined his health. As a result, he was given eight months of sick leave. It was not until his return from treatment, during which he remained at the disposal of the Minister of Military Affairs, that he was sent on a course for

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*powracających z Krasnojarska o przebiegu podróży z Krasnojarska do Moskwy, 6 września 1921 r.* [Protocol from the interrogation of prisoners returning from Krasnojarsk relating to the conduct of the journey from Krasnojarsk to Moscow, dated 6 September 1921].

<sup>89</sup> Tytus Filipowicz was a Polish *chargé d'affaires* in Soviet Russia from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1921.

<sup>90</sup> *Zwycięzcy za drutami. Jeńcy polscy w niewoli Dokumenty i materiały* [Victors behind the wire. Polish prisoners in captivity Documents and materials], (1919–1922). prep. S. Alexandrowicz, and Z. Karpus, and W. Rezmer, Toruń 1995, doc. No. 76, pp. 190–193.

higher officers in the Experimental Centre for the Instruction of Officers in Rembertów near Warsaw. He completed this course on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1922 and first took up the post of a commander of the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was stationed at the time in Vilna, and then later became its commander.

However, a large grouping of the soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division under the command of Col. Czuma had not respected his orders to surrender, not wishing to be taken into Soviet captivity. Already on the night of 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> January 1920 some of them had started to break through towards the east. The commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Polish Rifle Division Lt. Kazimierz Rumsza, Maj. Franciszek Dindorf-Ankowicz with a group of soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Tadeusz Kościuszko Rifle Regiment, Capt. Józef Werobejow with some artillery men and Maj. Ludwik Jurkiewicz and Maj. Jezierski with over a dozen cavalrymen managed to make good their escape. Despite great transport difficulties, severe frost, hunger, and an epidemic of typhus, they reached Irkutsk, from where they travelled to Harbin [China], where a meeting place for all the soldiers of that division had been organised. Therefore, small numbers of troops came to this town, individual officers and soldiers, from which a battalion was formed. Owing to the help of the Polish Military Mission in Siberia, with Gen. Antoni Baranowski and high commissioner Józef Targowski at its head, who arrived in Harbin from Poland at that time, the above-mentioned battalion was able to return to the country via the sea. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1920 after a two-and-a-half-month trip on the English steamer "Jarosław", these Siberian soldiers (120 officers and 800 non-commissioned officers and privates) arrived in Gdansk<sup>91</sup>. They became the staff basis

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<sup>91</sup> H. Bagiński, *The Polish Army...*, pp. 587–592; T. Marcolla, *Po kapitulacji V Dywizji WP na Syberii* [After surrender, the 5th Division of the Polish

of the Siberian Brigade formed within four weeks and at the beginning of August when they relocated to the front to face the then Soviet attack on Warsaw. The Siberian Brigade, which joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Army of Gen. Władysław Sikorski and fought to the north-west and to the north of Warsaw along the Vistula and Wkra Rivers, played an important role in the victorious Battle of Warsaw, during which the advance of a division of the Western Front of Mikhail Tukhachevsky was held back.

The capitulation of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1920 near Krasnoyarsk, during which circa 8,000 of the remaining Polish soldiers were taken prisoner, was the largest single capture of Polish soldiers by the enemy side during the whole Polish-Soviet war, in terms of the actual number involved.

Assuredly, it would be impossible to prepare a complete list of the Polish soldiers who were taken into Soviet or Lithuanian captivity in the years 1918–1920 or who were interned in Germany. In most cases and for a variety of reasons there appears to be no possibility to provide their complete personal data. The first months of battles conducted with different opponents and on a few fronts were at the same time a period of frantic, often chaotic and spontaneous, military organizational actions. One of the most fundamental problems that the creators of the Polish armed forces had to settle at the beginning was the issue of rules for supplementing the staff personnel of the Polish Army. They had to decide whether recruitment was to be based on compulsory conscription or on volunteer enlistment. The conviction that the number of new soldiers assured would be certain, regular and relatively large contributed to a preference for the first solution. Against it were such factors as the lack of

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Army in Siberia], in the monthly publication „Głos Kaniowczyków i Żeligończyków” 1939, No. 7, pp. 3–4; *ibidem*, No. 8, pp. 16–17.

a fully shaped general-administrative and conscription apparatus, and also the exhaustion and fatigue of Polish society by war, which directly influenced the physical and psychological weariness of the men who were subject to conscription. Under various pretexts, they could indiscriminately avoid enlisting, all the more so that a number of them had already served in the Russian and Austro-Hungarian army, where they had directly experienced the lack of discipline in the units in which they served, and where some had even contributed to it. Additionally, we can observe a large increase of radical, or even revolutionary, feeling, within Polish society. There was a real threat that by means of compulsory conscription “*an unwelcome element*” would be enlisted, namely people who could conduct destabilizing operations, and weaken the army’s uniformity from the inside. The conduct of these people could result in the engenderment of a defeatist attitude, support for pro-Bolshevik agitation, fraternization with the enemy, or even individual or group surrender to captivity.

In the end, they agreed on the second solution. This meant the suspension of the conscription of the year of birth 1897, ordered by an act of the [previously German initiated] Regency Council of 19<sup>th</sup> October 1918.<sup>92</sup> From this moment onwards, conscription to the Polish Army was voluntary. The system used turned out to be effective and fully acknowledged the organizational, financial, logistic and personnel capabilities of the army. Not only officers, non-commissioned officers and privates of the old legion formations, the eastern corps and the armed forces of Austria-Hungary came to the recruitment

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<sup>92</sup> J. Dowbór Muśnicki, *Moje wspomnienia* [My memories], Warszawa 1935, p. 72; M. Kukiel, *Wskrzeszenie Wojska Polskiego* [The resurrection of the Polish Army], „Bellona” [London], 1959, part 4, p. 40.

points, but also untrained academic and secondary-school youth, members of the official Polish Military Organization and other independence organizations, and craftworkers, working class and peasant youth<sup>93</sup>. There was a relatively high level of education among those who enlisted in the army, significantly exceeding the average level of Polish society at that time. Additionally, they were enthusiastically disposed towards the emergence of their new country and its armed forces, treating conscription as a civic duty. They displayed tremendous spirit and demonstrated a profound understanding for the many limitations, difficulties, or even ordinary material hardships. This attitude materially aided in the process of instruction and ensured high morale among the units, despite large shortages in armament, equipment and provisions and rather miserable social and living conditions. Such units as battalions, troops, batteries, which were later consolidated into greater organizational structures, were formed from volunteers recruited in the military districts operating from 30<sup>th</sup> October. By mid-January 1919, the personnel count of the Polish Army had already risen to 110,000 soldiers.

With the Soviet advance on Warsaw in the summer of 1920, the military situation of the Republic of Poland became dramatic. As a result, on 1<sup>st</sup> July the Parliament of the Republic of Poland decided to establish a Council of National Defence, which was eligible to take decisions “*in all matters concerning waging and ending the war and the peace settlement*”<sup>94</sup>. With reference to these events, the activity of the Council was concentrated mainly on the issues of rapidly increasing the size of the army, providing adequate armament and provisions,

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<sup>93</sup> A. Przybylski, *The Polish War...*, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> *Powstanie II Rzeczypospolitej. Wybór dokumentów...*, doc. No. 286, p. 560.

maintaining a high level of discipline and good morale, the living conditions offered to volunteers and their families and to disabled soldiers<sup>95</sup>. It was the Council that empowered the government to recruit first the age-group born in 1890–1894, and later that of 1885–1889. However, on the basis of earlier recruitment actions – among other things the conscription of the age-groups of 1895 and 1902 enacted by Parliament, there was a considerable concern that the number of projected recruits would not be reached. Therefore, they returned to the method already tried and tested, namely voluntary recruitment. The most important rules concerning recruitment to the Volunteer Army were stipulated in the order of the Ministry of Military Affairs of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1920. All citizens of the Republic of Poland were to be admitted, those who had so far been exempted from military service (officers under 50, others up to forty-two years old), and youths not subject to conscription, that is of the age of seventeen and eighteen. Boys of this age were recruited only after permission had been submitted by their parents or their guardians.

The greatest number of volunteers enlisted in the first week of recruitment, circa 30,000, the following week there were 21,000, in the third and fourth weeks – 12,000 each. In total by 20<sup>th</sup> August 1920, 77,514 volunteers had been recruited. Among them, there were 457 officers, 27,143 former non-commissioned officers and privates and 49,914 people with no military instruction<sup>96</sup>. Altogether, 105,714 new soldiers enlisted into the Polish Army during the voluntary conscription of summer 1920. The

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<sup>95</sup> *Polskie ustawodawstwo wojskowe* [Polish armed forces legislation], prep. M. Buszyński, and B. Matzner, vol. 1, Warszawa 1930, p. IX.

<sup>96</sup> J. Szczepański, *Wojna 1920 roku na Mazowszu i Podlasiu* [The war of 1920 in the Mazovia and the Podlasie regions], Warszawa – Pułtusk 1995, p. 125.

majority of them, as many as 67%, had not previously served in the army. Among the volunteers, the demographic of eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds dominated. Nonetheless, there were also many fifteen and sixteen-year-olds, who had run away from home in order to enlist to the army.

The formation of an army based on volunteers at the turn of 1918 and 1919, and later in the summer of 1920 caused a problem with their registration. In the heat of necessity neither the volunteers, nor their commanders took due care about whether or indeed, how they had formally been registered. No list of soldiers was systematically drawn up. The absence of such lists made it impossible to run a central personal register and then to correct it when the need arose. A number of these volunteers did not attach any importance to obtaining documents (certificates, identity cards, military service books) confirming their affiliation to the Polish Army. Polish soldiers were also not at the time equipped with permanent identity cards or tags, which would additionally inhibit their registration in case of death or captivity.

Sometimes it occurred that when enlisting in the army, volunteers intentionally provided false names in order to prevent themselves from being located or traced. Such behaviour was noted especially among school children, who in this way wanted to avoid being sent home. An intentional change of name was also common among the Polish soldiers from the formations created in Russia (including those who'd escaped the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division's capture in Siberia). By changing their names, they wished to protect themselves and their families against possible [future] reprisals by the Soviet authorities.

A great number of volunteers who set off to the front in the first months of the struggle or who took part in the summer 1920 campaign to stop the Soviet "march over the Vistula River",

had not been registered anywhere. This was also true of those who, during the intense fighting, joined up with the marching companies (battalions) sent to the divisions fighting at the front in order to supplant casualties. Soldiers from these divisions often went to directly into battle having not been registered by anybody. Many of them died or were taken prisoner. And since they did not feature in any record, nobody could later enquire after them. Their fate was made known indirectly from the testimonies and accounts of their colleagues, with whom they had stayed in captivity, and since many prisoners of war escaped from Soviet captivity and reached their homeland via different routes.

After the initial surge with the declaration of Polish independence in November 1918 from January 1919, the number of volunteers joining the army started to decrease. Yet, the external threat was in fact increasing. From, among other directions, that of Soviet Russia, whose Western Army, after having captured both Minsk and Vilna, had marched to the west in three formations, following the German troops retreating from WWI positions<sup>97</sup>. The Soviet authorities did not conceal the fact that their aim was to establish a Polish Soviet Republic as well as a Lithuanian Soviet Republic. In order to prevent this happening, the military potential of the Republic of Poland had to be increased. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1919 an act was passed by the Provisional Chief of State Józef Piłsudski about a partial compulsory conscription of recruits from the age-group of 1898<sup>98</sup>. From this

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<sup>97</sup> *Директивы командования фронтов Красной Армии (1917–1922 гг.)...*, doc. No. 463, 475 and 482, pp. 482, 499–501, 509–510; W. Rezmer, *Konflikt z Litwą...*, pp. 211–219.

<sup>98</sup> B. Woszczyński, *Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych [The Ministry of the Armed Forces] 1918–1921. Zarys organizacji i działalności [An outline of organisation and activities]*, Warszawa 1972, p. 113.

moment, compulsory conscription started to play an even more important role in the system of supplementing Polish Army recruits. The legal basis for this conscription was provided by a provisional act on common compulsory military service<sup>99</sup>. Introduced in stages, the earliest being in the area of the former Kingdom of Poland, West Galicia [West Lesser Poland or the Krakow region] and in the Cieszyński Province, in the spring of 1919, this act first embraced the age-groups of 1896–1899. In August 1919, a few further districts of East Galicia [closer to Lvov] were included. In September, younger age-groups: 1900–1901 were enlisted, and later this act was used to recruit men born before 1896. After the incorporation of Pomerania into Poland in January and February 1920, the act also applied to those living in that area. A year earlier, on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1919, the Office of the Supreme People's Council issued a decree about compulsory service and recruitment into the insurgent army of Poles inhabiting Greater Poland [Poznan Region] and born in the years of 1897–1899<sup>100</sup>.

It has been estimated that in the period of 1919–1920 over one million recruits were enlisted to the Polish Army owing to common military service<sup>101</sup>. Unfortunately, there were many illiterates among them, which prolonged and hindered the process of training. Consequentially, this also had negative

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<sup>99</sup> P. Stawecki, *Ustawodawstwo wojskowe II Rzeczypospolitej* [Armed Forces legislation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Republic] 1921–1926, Published in „Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny” [Armed Forces Historical Review] 1978, No. 4, p. 44.

<sup>100</sup> A. Czubiński, *Powstanie Wielkopolskie 1918–1919. Geneza, charakter, znaczenie* [The Greater Poland Uprising 1918–1919. Origins, character, importance], Poznań 1978, p. 340.

<sup>101</sup> *Zarys dziejów wojskowości polskiej w latach* [An Outline of the annals of the Polish Armed Forces in the years] 1864–1939, ed. P. Stawecki, Warszawa 1990, p. 274.

repercussions when registering them, not only at the moment of their arrival at the division, but also later during their service (the problem of recording desertion, field court cases, disciplinary punishment) and also in the event of death on the battlefield, while staying in hospital or after being taken prisoner.

Illiterate soldiers in the Polish Army often did not know with precision their surnames precisely how they sounded and how to write them down, some did not know their exact date or place of birth. They also did not pay attention to seemingly insignificant changes in the reading out of their names and surnames. Additionally, serious mistakes and carelessness were also made while writing down the names of soldiers taken prisoner, those kept in camps and work units or those who stayed in hospitals. These seemingly insignificant changes in terms of phonetics and orthography created two differing, and hence often two separate prisoner records. A substantial cause of errors in the records was a diversity in spelling used by the record keepers, which often resulted in dire consequences especially with reference to foreign sounding names<sup>102</sup>.

The greatest distortions in registering names emerged in the lists drawn up by hand, especially with where the clerks wrote illegibly and did not know the Polish language and alphabet (or sometimes only partially). The widespread lack of typewriters meant that lists drawn up with them were scarce. However, even in these lists a large number of mistakes occurred, since the writers were unable to transliterate and write down Polish names and surnames accurately in the Russian alphabet.

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<sup>102</sup> English Editor's note: This issue was accentuated by the prevalence of both the Roman and the Cyrillic alphabet among soldiers on both sides especially with regard to soldiers from the lands of Eastern Poland previously part of the Russian Empire.

In compliance with the provisions of the agreement on repatriation, the exchange of POWs started in mid-March 1921. It was to be conducted at two border points: at the railway stations Niegorieloje<sup>103</sup> near Kojdanów (Koidanova, on the Soviet side) – Stołpce (Stolbtsy, on the Polish side) on the arterial line Moscow – Minsk – Baranowicze (Baranavichy), and also at the station Zdołbunów (Zdolbunow, for both sides it was recognised as being in Poland) on the railway line Równe (Rivne) – Szepietówka (Shepetivka) – Kiev<sup>104</sup>.

The first groups were made up of Red Army troops sent to Soviet Russia. Despite the “one for one” obligation included in the signed repatriation agreement the exchange did not take place symmetrically (Table 5). The Soviet authorities justified this state of affairs by referencing the difficulties encountered obtaining adequate carriages for the transportation of people and the shortage of functioning rail locomotives. Most Soviet rolling stock had already been heavily utilized, was often badly damaged having been left without maintenance for many years. The second reason for the delay was the overloading of the main rail lines, which resulted in very slow pace of transport and multi-day stops at railway junctions.

Rail transport on the Polish side functioned far better, although the state of the post WW I rolling stock and the rail infrastructure was also poor.

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<sup>103</sup> Before the border, there was still one more Soviet railway station, Mezinówka, located at the watchtower for the Soviet border troops. The standard gauge railway led from Poland, along which the international trains from the West travelled. In turn, the broad-gauge railway led to Stołpce from Russia. This arrangement of tracks obliged the POWs to be moved to carriages with a different track gauge.

<sup>104</sup> *Zarys dziejów wojskowości polskiej...*

**Table 5.** The course of the exchange action of POWs between Poland and Soviet Russia from 16<sup>th</sup> March to 12<sup>th</sup> October 1921.

1921	Number of POWs sent to Soviet Russia	Number of POWs who arrived from Russia	
		Officers	non-commissioned officers and privates
16th March	1 503	–	–
until 20th March	–		430
until 17th April	9 743	90	3 935
until 5th July	31 026	142	17 452
until 23rd August	40 773	175	22 751
until 6th September	51 313	185	23 654
until 19th September	54 454	185	24 740
until 29th September	59 276	199	25 966
until 6th October	60 618	199	25 966
until 12th October	64 971	418	26 022

Source: CAW, 4. Army designation. I.311.4. 329 and 56, Communications on the situation in camps for prisoners of war and the interned April 1921; *ibid*, The General Staff, Sztab Generalny, 5<sup>th</sup> Branch personnel designation. I.303.9.27 Communications on the situation in camps for prisoners of war and the interned in the period July–October 1921 r.

From March to July 1921 10,694 POWs arrived in Poland through Niegoriełoje station, and a further 5,762 through Zdołbunów. From July to December of that year, 12,119 and 3,791 POWs respectively returned to the country through those same stations. Later their number significantly decreased. From January to July 1922, a total of 2,460 non-commissioned officers and privates and 13 officers returned from Soviet captivity. In total, from March 1921, when the action commenced, 34,839 POWs had returned to Poland by mid-1922. After adding those who successfully escaped from Soviet camps, prisons, working squads, hospitals and transports (there might have been a few

hundred of these), we would get roughly a number of 35,500 POWs who returned to the country.

In the Polish-Soviet agreement of 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921 it was stipulated that repatriation was to take place voluntarily, without constraint<sup>105</sup>. A portion of the Polish POWs who decided to stay in Soviet Russia availed of this opportunity. There were various motives for this decision: ideological, opportunistic (fear of punishment for desertion or for other reprehensible deeds committed during their service in the Polish Army or during captivity, for instance activity in pro-Bolshevik operations<sup>106</sup>), the conviction that Bolshevik power in Russia would be short-term, or also simply material or family reasons. These later reasons dominated especially among the soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, whose relatives were often still in Siberia, who had there their own farms, or had been the owners of thriving firms and workshops, shops and warehouses, and often possessed luxurious houses in Siberian towns. In the report for the Polish Delegation in the Joint Commission of 11<sup>th</sup> July 1921, it was noted that: “Prisoners who joined the [Soviet] party are afraid to return to Poland and declare that they are staying in Soviet Russia”<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> *Красноармейцы в польском плену в 1919–1922...*, doc. No. 256, Art. 3, p. 492.

<sup>106</sup> From time-to-time lists of POWs were drawn up, of those who joined the Communist party and conducted pro-Bolshevik agitation in prison camps. See, e.g. CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the Ministry for Armed Forces, designation. I.300.76.500, A Letter of Agency in Baranowicze to II Department of Headquarters of the Ministry of Military Affairs with a personal list of Polish prisoners, who joined the Communist party in Soviet Russia and were canvassing for the Bolsheviks, dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1921.

<sup>107</sup> “Записавшиеся в партию пленные боятся возвращаться в Польшу и заявляют деларации остаться в Советской России.” RPWA, fond 308, opis 19, sprawa 272, Sprawozdanie kpt. Kotwicza-Dobrzańskiego, kierownika Wydziału Jeńców Delegacji Polskiej w Komisji Mieszanej ds. Repatriacji, dla Komisji Mieszanej o przebiegu repatriacji z Rosji [Reports

For this reason, c. 5–8 per cent of the POWs intended to stay in Bolshevik Russia<sup>108</sup>. In yet another announcement prepared on 5<sup>th</sup> August, it was stated that over 1,000 POWs did not intend to return to Poland. In a report prepared by the Polish Bureau of the Russian Central Committee of the Communist Party it was boasted that owing to the well-organized and intensive agitation and educational activities 186 POWs had joined the Red Army, and c. 2,000 now remained voluntarily in Russia. From mid-March until 1<sup>st</sup> November 25,000 POWs were sent to Poland<sup>109</sup>. We can read in the conclusion that “*a significant number of the POWs who remained in the Soviet Republics, as well as a substantial number of members and candidates of the party, among whom the brave comrades appear, indicate that the actions conducted among POWs had not been in vain. [...] It needs to be added that actions aimed at the re-evacuation of POWs held in Siberia has not been completed, therefore staging points (Moscow, Smolensk, Minsk) have to be prepared for the necessary [propaganda-agitational] attention to POWs during their return*”<sup>110</sup>.

The attitude of the Soviet political and military authorities towards their Polish POWs changed depending on the course of war. Throughout this time, however, the Bolsheviks perceived

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of Captain Kotwicz-Dobrzański Head of the Department for prisoners of the Polish Delegation to the joint Commission for Repatriation, and the Joint Commission for the conduct of Repatriation from Russia], dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 1921, c. 244.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> The Russian National Archive of Social and Political History (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории) in Moscow, fond 63, description 1, case 25, The report of the Polish Bureau at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia for the years 1920–1921 dated 15<sup>th</sup> November 1921, c. 37.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Polish society (and the Polish Army) as an amalgamation struggle, in which a “*the proletariat of cities and villages was fighting with the reactionary element*”. Therefore, various actions were undertaken to bring about internal degradation and division in the Polish armed forces, to “win over” private soldiers (“*coming from the working and peasant classes*”) and together with them bring about the outbreak of a revolution in Poland, the consequence of which was to be the creation of “the Polish Socialist Soviet Republic”. Attitudes and actions among the POWs who were qualified as anti-Soviet were opposed ruthlessly. Aside from a particularly aggressive agitational campaign, on the one hand a plethora of repressive actions were used, but on the other hand incentives and promises referring to social and living privileges were offered.

The most essential elements of the Soviet policy towards Polish POWs and the methods used were included in a report by the Lublin Agency the II Department of District Command drawn up in September 1921 some of the findings of this report are listed below:

“Polish POWs in Soviet Russia.

The Soviet government perceives Polish POWs as counter-revolutionaries and treats them at relatively the same level as POWs from their (national) «internal fronts» and all other kinds of opponents to the Soviet authorities.

Every person who transgresses against the adopted state law is a counter-revolutionary and is sent to forced labour camp. Therefore, in these camps we can come across various elements, such as: POWs of Denikin, Yudenich, Kolchak, Wrangel, prisoners-members of insurgent bands, political and civilian criminals, convicted criminal offenders and finally Polish POWs. This last group was generally treated the worst, both by the higher command [as well as] by the lower-rank officers. The fate of our

prisoners in Soviet Russia changed often and, due to this fact, this time can be divided into three stages:

1. From the beginning of the Polish-Soviet war until the beginning of June 1920
2. From the beginning of June 1920 until November 1920
3. From November 1920 until the end of war.

In the first stage, that is during 1919 and at the beginning of 1920, our POWs were treated relatively decently. Throughout the area of Soviet Russia there were not many of them and those who managed to escape from death straight after being taken prisoner at the front or just behind it, could hope that they would survive until a potential exchange. They were located either in Lithuanian-Belarusian territory in Vitebsk, Smolensk or in the Volga governorates. Many worked in the villages, relatively few were in camps, and the local authorities did not treat Poles with particular malice.

In the second stage relations changed significantly. The splendid march of our (Polish) army to Ukraine [and] the seizure of Kiev at first appalled the Bolsheviks, and later triggered a desire for revenge. A mass transfer of troops from Siberia to the Western Front started, with these troops composed predominantly of half-savage tribes who showed an inclination for plunder and blood.

Polish POWs were made to feel this change of mood: persecutions of all kinds commenced, as well as arrests and trials.

When the Soviet Army advanced forward in June 1920<sup>111</sup>, the Bolsheviks, seeing the diminishing resistance of our [Polish] troops and being convinced that the whole of Poland would

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<sup>111</sup> The offensive by the Soviet Western Front under the command of Mikhail Tukhachevsky started on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1920.

become their prize, ceased to feel any qualms in relation to their potential responsibility for the fate of the POWs and now started to treat them worse than cattle. When the number of POWs was still increasing swiftly, when groups of ragged, barefoot and hungry Polish soldiers started to fill the camps for the interned, oppression then rose to a peak.

Food rations began to run out in July almost everywhere, the rates of bread decreased to  $\frac{1}{2}$  [or] even to  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound a day; POWs were fed on decayed cabbage, linseed-cake<sup>112</sup>, some POWs were sent to field labour and to factories, where the number of work hours frequently amounted to twelve–fourteen a day.

With the arrival of autumn and the collapse of the Soviet army relations now worsened even further, persecutions deepened, epidemic diseases began spread: (among which) spotted typhus and relapsing typhus and scurvy.

In the third stage, that is after the ceasefire, when the fighting at the front had stopped, the Soviet authorities started to treat Polish POWs as useful tools, by means of which they would be able to cause political upheaval in Poland. As a result, Communist agitation spread far and wide.

In the camps, meetings were organised, which were at first forced, and later driven by the incentive of additional portions of bread and soup. Schools were opened, which were seemingly intended to instruct the prisoners in reading and writing – though in practice this instruction was mainly how to agitate for the power of proletariat.

Moreover, they strongly encouraged prisoners to join «the Polish Red Army», or even started to forcibly enlist as, for instance, in the Smolensk Camp, where around 300 POWs were

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<sup>112</sup> Linseed-cake – commonly serving as fodder for cattle and hogs, made of oilseeds.

mobilized, or in Siberia, where the former medical staff of the 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Rifle Division was allocated to Bobruysk.

All these operations were systematically and carefully led by the Polish Communist Bureau in Moscow<sup>113</sup>.

The agitators sent by them traversed the whole country visiting prison camps and spreading the principles of Communism among them. This work was most intensively carried out in camps in Moscow, Jarosław, Riazan (Ryazan), Charków (Kharkiv) and Smolensk, in Połtawa (Poltava Central Ukraine) it was relatively less intensive.

It seems necessary to draw attention to the fact that a substantial contribution to this initiative was made by those POWs (in the majority Jews<sup>114</sup>) who, being already convinced by the principles of Communism, were now spreading them among their colleagues, these converts quite often 'unmasked' officers and soldiers suspected of counter-revolutionary tendencies, and by doing so enjoying the acclaim of the Soviet authorities and taking advantage of various privileges, not infrequently arousing resentment among the remaining, hungry Polish soldiers.

As a consequence of these progressive stages in treatment, the situation of the POWs was very harsh. On the one hand soldiers saw famine, squalor, hard work, prison and Cheka<sup>115</sup>, but on the

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<sup>113</sup> The Polish Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia.

<sup>114</sup> English Editor's note: Jewish peasants on average had higher literacy rates than ethnic Polish peasants.

<sup>115</sup> Cheka (VChK, ChK) – the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем), since August 1918 All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption (Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией, спекуляцией и преступлениям по должности). It was led by Feliks Dzierżyński.

other, they were also encouraged to join various undercover cells and clubs, the Communist party and the Red Army, in exchange for which they were promised better food, clothes and even relative freedom. Individuals who were not well-formed and who weak in spirit, even among the officers, surrendered to the persuasion of their agitator colleagues and betrayed their own flag by joining the Soviet party or the Red Army. The agitation spread in the schools also fuelled by means of schoolbooks published in Moscow by Dzierżyńska<sup>116</sup>. This state of affairs lasted until 21<sup>st</sup> September 1921, and the agitation, despite the ceasefire with Poland, did not decrease, but instead intensified until the last possible moment with prisoners of war being convicted for the smallest misdemeanour to confinement, or even corporal punishment.

The condition of the officers was a hundredfold worse. They were most often separated from the other soldiers, did not, on the whole, with rare exceptions, give in to Communist agitation. This so enraged the Soviet authorities that as a result they became the object of deception and persecution, with such victims filling prisons and hospitals as a result.

At the beginning of the repatriation and exchange process the situation of POWs changed inasmuch as they received some minimal freedom, they could leave camps on receipt of permits, and the Polish representative offices could give them provision benefits. The Soviet authorities amended a number of earlier rules which flouted international law. In essence though, they still continued their propaganda agitation, entirely ignoring the interventions of the Polish delegates.

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<sup>116</sup> Zofia Julia Dzierżyńska born Muszkat (1882–1968) – wife of Feliks Dzierżyński, since 10<sup>th</sup> April 1919 was a member of the Council at the Department of the University of the National Minorities of the People's Commissariat for Education and was at the same time leading the Polish Section. In the years 1920–1922 she ran the Rosa Luxembourg Polish-language school in Moscow.

It needs to be stressed that surely in no other war did such a great percentage of POWs return to their country via illegal routes as occurred during the Polish-Soviet war. The mass escapes of the Polish POWs from Russia can be explained by:

- a) disorder within Russian territory,
- b) susceptibility to corruption among the authorities and the army,
- c) the determination among the majority of the population to help all those who had any conflict with the new Soviet authorities,
- d) the large percentage of POWs who knew the Russian language well,
- e) the incontestable patriotism of the soldiers, their hatred of the Bolsheviks and Russians in general.

Anyone could take the initiative who had the courage to risk the hardships of the journey to escape the camps, labour units and even from prisons, via rail or on foot and headed west, though they often fell victim to the barbarity of the Soviet anti diversion units like the Regional Transportation Section of ChK<sup>117</sup>, etc.

However, numerous prisoners still managed to cross the border, thanks to their courage and fortitude.

We should also accentuate the fact that soldiers of the infantry and artillery were not as harshly treated nor so closely guarded as the cavalry soldiers, airmen, and in particular the redcaps and soldiers of H's [Haller's] troops<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>117</sup> ORT ChK – The Regional Transportation Section of the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Отделение Районной Транспортной чрезвычайная комиссия по борьбе с контрреволюцией и саботажем).

<sup>118</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Głównego Generalnego [2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff], call no. I.303.4.1707, Raport Wydziału II Sztabu Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin o obozach jeńców w Rosji z 21 września 1921 r.

It was earlier stated that the attitude towards the Polish POWs was not unequivocal. This was most visible at the front immediately after prisoners were taken. At this point, decisions were made about their fate, and often about their very lives. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1920, i.e. four days before the first Soviet offensive on the Western Front under Mikhail Tukhachevsky directed at Poland, the Revolutionary Military Council issued an order calling for “generous treatment” of the Polish POWs and instructing that this order be read out to all companies, troops, battalions and divisions<sup>119</sup>. Less than a month later this same order concerning the treatment of Polish POWs and escapees was sent to the armies building the Western Front by its commander Mikhail Tukhachevsky<sup>120</sup>. In these orders we can read that it was recommended that soldiers be treated kindly, paying attention to the fact that the majority of the Polish soldiers had been enlisted “*forcibly*”, and many of them “*owing to their ignorance*” did not understand that they had been sent to war “*with class brethren*”. They also indicated the need to keep the POWs alive thanks to the valuable information in their possession – about enemy forces, their methods of fighting, state of supplies, moral, actions accomplished, and plans. Therefore, after being captured, they were to be sent to the

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[Report of the Branch of Department 2 of the Command Staff for Lublin on camps for prisoners in Russia dated 21 September 1921].

<sup>119</sup> RPWA, fond 4, desc. 3, case 59, c. 144v, Order No. 217 Rady Wojskowo-Rewolucyjnej Republiki do wojsk Zachodniego i Południowo-Zachodniego Frontu, 10 maja 1920 r. [of the Council of the Military-Revolutionary Republic to the Western Armies and the Southwestern Front 10 May 1920].

<sup>120</sup> RPWA, fond 104, desc. 4, case 727, c. 427, Order No. 1102 dowódcy Frontu Zachodniego Michała Tuchaczewskiego odnośnie do postępowania z polskimi jeńcami i uciekinierami, 4 czerwca 1920 r. [of the Commander of the Western Front Michał Tuchaczewski regarding treatment of Polish prisoners and deserters, 4 June 1920].

Special Department for interrogation. It was only later that they were to be sent to prison camps. These orders were not always enforced. Much depended on the middle-rank and lower-rank commanders. Hence, instances of friendly attitudes towards the POWs were encountered, but also situations in which POWs were killed, tortured, their clothes and boots taken, and their valuables stolen.

Multiple instances of POWs being killed were encountered in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army of Semyon Budyonny. Among its soldiers, the belief dominated that cavalry could not be burdened with POWs, since it would lose its greatest strength, its speed of action. Both in Budyonny's formations and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps of Komkor Gaya Bzhishkyan, formed to a large extent from Cossacks, anti-Polish propaganda and Bolshevik agitation also caused criminal deeds of this nature. Mass agitation, "*under the pretence of slogans of class struggle, internationalism and universal revolution, incited the basest of instincts among some of the Cossacks, Russian peasants and workers, which deafened their ears to the fading echoes of the old moral norms based on the Orthodox faith*"<sup>121</sup>.

One of the most callous crimes was committed by the cavalry soldiers of Budyonny on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1920 near Zadwórz close to the railway station of that name (to the east of Lvov). In this place, Battalion 240 of the Voluntary Infantry Regiment formed from secondary-school and university students and the Lvov intelligentsia under the command of Capt. Bolesław Zajączkowski had attempted to block the route to Lvov for the Budyonny cavalrymen. After having repulsed a few charges by the Soviet cavalry, the battalion started to retreat towards

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<sup>121</sup> A. Smoliński, *Zarys dziejów I Armii Konnej* [The actions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army] (1919–1923), Grajewo 2003, p. 72.

Borszczowice, since they were running low on ammunition. They could not resupply as the enemy artillery shells had destroyed the rail carriages with ammunition that had been standing at the railway tracks. The poorly trained volunteers, without much battle experience, were unable to successfully confront the charging masses of the Soviet cavalry out in the open. The seventh charge broke the defence of the Polish infantry which had been summarily organized near the railway station. Most of the Polish soldiers died in this battle<sup>122</sup>. Captain Zajączkowski committed suicide. Several dozen soldiers, including many who'd been wounded, were taken prisoner.

Their fate was reported upon by Izaak Babel, a soldier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army, who was also a correspondent for the field front paper “Красный кавалерист”:

“At dawn, we are moving, we should cut the railway tracks – everything takes place on 17<sup>th</sup> August – the railway tracks of Brody – Lvov.

My first battle, I saw the charge, they are gathering in the undergrowth, commanders of the brigades are rallying to

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<sup>122</sup> More on the topic of clashes, see: *Polskie Termopile. Pamięci bohaterów poległych pod Zadwórzem w boju z najazdem bolszewickim* [The Polish Thermopylae, the memory of the fallen heroes of Zadworze in the struggle against the invading Bolsheviks], Lwów 1924; J. Białynia-Chotodecki, and S. Rayski, *W dziesiątą rocznicę bitwy pod Zadwórzem, Horpinem i Firlejówką! Ku uczczeniu pamięci Poległych w ofiarnym boju z najazdem bolszewickim Bohaterów* [On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Zadworze Horpinem and Firlejówką. To commemorate the memory of the fallen in the sacrificial fight against the invading Bolsheviks] 1920–1930, Lwów 1930; J. Pogonowski, *Bój o Lwów Z walk Armii Ochotniczej z 1920 roku.* [The battle for Lwów The fight of the Volunteer Army of 1920], Warszawa 1992 (reprint, edition 1, Gdańsk 1921); L.A. Leinwand, *Obrona Lwowa w 1920 r.* [The defence of Lwów in 1920.], published in „Rocznik Lwowski” 1991, pp. 29–31; J. Odziemkowski, *Zadwórze* [in:] *idem, Leksykon wojny polsko-rosyjskiej* [Lexicon of the Soviet-Polish war] 1919–1920, Warszawa 2004, p. 468.

Apanasenko<sup>123</sup> – the cautious Kniga<sup>124</sup> is scheming, he comes, and inundates with words, showing the hills near the forest, they had discovered the enemy position near the ravine, the regiments are eager to charge, sabres in the sun, the commanders pale, the hard legs of Apanasenko, hurrah.

That's how it was. The fields, the dust, the company stretched out at the end of the plain, Apanasenko swearing like a trooper to his kombrigs: erase these bastards, smack them in the face. [...]

Thundering «hurrah», the Poles are smashed, we are heading towards the battlefield, a tiny Polack wriggles his polished nails among his thin hair on his pink head, answers evasively, dodges, mutters, well, yes. Sheko<sup>125</sup>, inspired and pale: say what your rank is – I, he gets confused, am a sort of warrant officer; we withdraw, that one is taken away, behind his back a boy with a pleasant face cocks his gun, I shout – Sheko! Sheko pretends that he does not hear it, he rides off, a shot rings out. The tiny Polack in pants falls down in convulsions. It makes one lose the will for life, murderers, unprecedented villainy, criminality.

They rush the prisoners, tear off their uniforms, a strange sight – they take them off theirs, swift, they shake their heads, everything in full sun; it's but a little indiscretion, our commanders standing right alongside, indiscretion, no it's stupidity, you observe though you fingers. Though I will not

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<sup>123</sup> Iosif Rodionovich Apanasenko (1890–1943) – from 5<sup>th</sup> August to 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 a commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division.

<sup>124</sup> Vasilij Ivanovich Kniga (1882–1961) – in August 1920 a commander of the I Cavalry Brigade in the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division.

<sup>125</sup> Yakov Vasilyevich Sheko (1893–1938) – from 5<sup>th</sup> August to 14<sup>th</sup> December head of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, between 12<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> October 1920 also its commander.

forget this ‘sort of warrant officer’, who was so treacherously murdered.

Horrible events are ahead of us. We crossed the rail line near Zadwórze. Poles try to break through along the rail line to Lvov. In the evening, an attack near the manor house. What a scene. I ride with *wojenkom*<sup>126</sup> along the first line, we beg them not to kill the POWs. Apanasenko washes his hands of all of it. Sheko mumbles: why not and played out a monstrous role. I did not look at their faces, they pierced with swords, they finished them off, one corpse then another, these ones are still taking their clothes off and the others are being finished off, wails, cries, rattles, our squadron was leading a charge, Apanasenko stands off to the side, well dressed, Matusevich’s<sup>127</sup> horse had been killed, so he runs about with a terrifying, dirty face, searches for a riding horse. It’s hell. What kind of freedom do we bring, it’s horror. They search the manor. Take the people from their hiding places. Apanasenko – do not waste ammunition, slaughter them. Apanasenko always says that – slaughter a sister, slaughter the Poles<sup>128</sup>.

Descriptions of how the Polish soldiers taken into captivity were treated can be found not only in Polish documents and descriptive sources (accounts, memoirs, testimonies), but also in the memoirs of the soldiers of the Red Army that were published after the war. Depending on the author (whether it was

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<sup>126</sup> *Wojenkom* – a military commissary. From 13<sup>th</sup> August to 4<sup>th</sup> September 1920 Vladimir Vinokurov (1899–1938) was a commissary of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division.

<sup>127</sup> Matusevich was a troop commander in the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division.

<sup>128</sup> I. Babel, *Dziennik 1920*, trans. and prefaced J. Pomianowski, Warszawa 1990, pp. 145–147. The same *idem*, *Armia Konna i inne utwory* [The Cavalry Army and other creations], trans. J. Pomianowski, Warszawa 2010, pp. 168–169.

an ordinary soldier, a commander or a commissar), the time of writing and the character of the record, with regard to the issue of the treatment of the Polish POWs these descriptions differ considerably. By way of illustration, let us examine the description of a fight at Zadwórze in the above fragment of *Diary* by Babel and later the contrasting memoirs of Budyonny, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army, who presented it in the following way<sup>129</sup>:

“In order to directly lead the troops charging Lvov, I with K.Y. Vorishilov<sup>130</sup> decided to go to the railway station Zadwórze. [...] In the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> [a mistake, it was on 17<sup>th</sup> August], as had been planned, we rode with assistance from the troops of Revvoyensoviet<sup>131</sup> to Zadwórze. Outside the village, we rode up on to the hill from which there was a good view. To the west, a plain stretched out with clearings and streaks of undergrowth. To the south-east, behind the rail line, a large forest extended, at the edge of which was situated the hamlet Połonicze with an Orthodox church towering in solitude. The thunder of cannon could be heard behind the forest and we could occasionally hear long series of fire from machine-guns. We were standing in silence, observing a panorama lifelessly stretching out in front of our eyes. Then Voroshilov shouted:

– Poles!

I looked through my binoculars. Indeed, to the east from the village of Połonicze, the Polish infantry was emerging onto the

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<sup>129</sup> С.М. Буденный, *Пройденный путь*, vol. 1, Москва 1958; vol. 2, Москва 1965; vol. 3, Москва 1973.

<sup>130</sup> Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov (1881–1969) – from 17<sup>th</sup> November 1919 to 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1921 a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army.

<sup>131</sup> The Revolutionary Military Council.

plain. Somewhat further, at the edge of the forest, the cavalry was forming a battle stream.

– Do you see that? – I pointed Kliment Yefremovich towards the cavalrymen.

– Those are ours.

We had not even managed to exchange a few words when the cavalrymen attached in a wide assault formation.

Sidelong sunbeams like leverets started to jump off the blades of swords. We heard a roaring «hurrah» and together with the mass of cavalry they charged the enemy infantry.

– If the Poles would not surrender to captivity, they will be sliced up like cabbages. To stop this charge with fire is already unfeasible, the opponent is in panic – I said observing the course of events.

The columns of infantry started to split, we heard a few uncertain shots, and subsequently witnessed an astounding picture. Throwing down their machine-guns, the infantry soldiers ran to meet cavalrymen with arms stretched to the front or upwards. Those in gallop were jumping off their horses and embracing the Poles.

Fancy that! I don't understand what was happening there – I did not comprehend it.

– We have to go there – Voroshilov proposed.

We rode off the hill and headed cross-country to the place where this notable event had taken place. An assistant of the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division of M.I. Chumakov<sup>132</sup> was already galloping towards us.

– What is happening there? – I asked when he approached.

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<sup>132</sup> Mikhail Ivanovich Chumakov (1884–1957) – deputy commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade in the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division. С.М. Буденный, *Пройденный путь...*, vol. 2, pp. 322–325.

– So you see what it looks like, they're kissing and embracing each other as if they were friends, not enemies – he pointed to the rear where the brigade remained. – the Poles left their guns and ours don't have any reason to cut them down, since they aren't presenting any opposition.

– They should have done that long ago – remarked Voroshilov.

When we approached the Polish and Russian soldiers, they were standing in small groups, smiling, gesticulating and embracing each other. They surrounded us in a dense circle.

These are comrades Budyonny and Voroshilov. Have you heard about them? – the cavalrymen pointed at us.

The Poles nodded their heads and observed us with curiosity. Then, across the whole field we suddenly heard a choral «hurrah» on the occasion of the peaceful end of fighting. Everyone shouted – both the Poles and the Red Army members.

When they were slightly quieter, a well-built, round-shouldered soldier approached to us and accompanied by the approving murmur of those gathered he spoke broken Russian.

– I am a workman. Like almost all of those present here I have experienced the World War. We were not sent out against the Red Army, as long as the nobility could send the deluded youth to the front. And now our turn has come. But we don't want to fight against brothers – Russian workers and peasants. We need peace – and raised his hand in a clenched fist.

– This Soldier speaks correctly – said Voroshilov. – The Red Army is forced to fight with Polish troops only because the bourgeois government of Piłsudski does not want peace and strives, in alliance with Wrangel and with the help of international capitalism, to destroy the Soviet Workers' and Peasants' Republic.

When the improvised meeting ended, I proposed to Chumak:  
– Send the Polish soldiers to the rear and continue to carry out your tasks”<sup>133</sup>.

This idyllic representation of the battle of Zadwórze in the memoirs of Budyonny was intended to build up a mythology for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Army in Soviet Russia. Works by many Bolshevik writers, political writers, filmmakers and historians were intended to serve this same aim. A depiction of the real course and character of the Polish-Soviet war was not in the interests of Budyonny or his closest associates, nor in the leadership of the Soviet party, state or army authorities, since it contrasted to starkly with the propaganda account of the history of the civil war and armed conflict with Poland. After all, it had been the Republic of Poland that was accused of waging the war so as to realize “the imperialist plans” of capturing land in the east and returning to the pre-partition borders. The vivid memory-based writing of Babel hindered the creation and reinforcement of this idealized picture of the [Soviet] Cavalry, and by implication that of the Red Army, an important element of which was the Cavalry in the years of the civil war. It is no surprise that the accusation against Babel which was formulated by Semyon Budyonny already in 1924, that of “groundless and biased defamation of the Red Cossacks [...] became a starting point for many subsequent attacks on the writer, and with time his arrest (on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1939), death sentence by a «troika» of the NKVD sitting in the office of Lavrentiy Beria in the Butyrka prison on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1940 and his execution the next morning”<sup>134</sup>. Izaak Babel was killed by Maj. Vasily Blokhin, commander

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<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> I. Babel, *Dziennik 1920...*, p. 6.

of the Administrative–Economic Department of NKVD. An ominous omen for a few weeks later it was Blokhin who led the execution of the Polish POWs conducted in Kalinin, who'd been taken prisoner during the campaign in 1939 and had been imprisoned in Ostaszów (Ostashkov). Today they are buried in Miednoje.

In the diary of Babel<sup>135</sup> a description can be found about other crimes committed against Polish POWs:

“17<sup>th</sup> July 1920. Liski

A fight along the rail line towards Liski. Slaughter of POWs [p. 13].

27<sup>th</sup> July 1920. Chotyń

POWs were transported, one, perfectly healthy, was shot twice without any reason by a Red Army member, the Pole twists and wails, somebody puts a pillow under his head [p. 50].

28<sup>th</sup> July 1920. Chotyń

An account about how a Polish regiment laid down arms four times and again took them up, when they were attacked with broadswords. [p. 52].

3<sup>rd</sup> August 1920 [between Brody and Klekotów]

A battlefield [...] Budyonny speaks to Kolesnikov and Grishin – ‘because I will shoot you dead’, both leave on foot, pale. Still earlier – a fearful field, strewn with the slain, inhumane atrocity, injuries beyond belief, crushed skulls, young, white, naked bodies shine in the sun, notebooks scattered, cards from military service books. Gospel, dead bodies in the crops [p. 80].

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<sup>135</sup> The same in *idem, Armia Konna...*

18<sup>th</sup> August 1920 [Jabłonówka]

The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade finds a ford and crossed the Bug near Pobużany [...] they send me back to Jablonówka, I am to listen to the testimonies of POWs [...] The interrogation of the POWs in Jabłonówka. People only in underwear. Among them Jews, fair-haired Polacks, exhausted, an intelligent boy, the blunt hatred of those interrogating, the bloody underwear of the wounded, they don't give them anything to drink, a boy with a chubby face gives me documents. Happy, I am thinking – you managed to escape alive. They concentrate around me, they enjoy the kindness in my voice, a pollen of misery is spreading, what is the difference between Cossacks and them, delicate thing. [...] Further on – at the enemy's positions. Two naked, mascaraed Poles, with tiny faces slashed by swords, bleach in the rye in the sun [pp. 139–140].

[19<sup>th</sup> August 1920]

We move towards Lvov. Batteries come nearer and nearer. An unsuccessful fight near Ostrów, nonetheless the Poles retreat. Reports on the defence of Lvov – professors, women, youth. Apanasenko will slaughter them – he hates the intelligentsia, it is at his very core. He dreams of a peasant, Cossack state, aristocratic in its own way.

21<sup>st</sup> August 1920. Adamy

A talk with a commander of the Artillery Division Maksimov; our army goes for *rozdobęda*<sup>136</sup>, this is not a revolution, but a riot of wild lawlessness?

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<sup>136</sup> *ozdobęda* (an old-Polish term) – an expedition for booty.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps in contrast commenced their own military history in the northeast on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1920 in Połock (Polotsk). Then Komkor Gaya Gai Bzhishkyan arrived with his staff. Earlier they had been the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Corps. To concentrate the troops needed to carry out the decisive attack on Poland planned for the beginning of July 1920, the Soviet command decided to delegate Komkor Gaya and his staff to Mikhail Tukhachevsky, commander of the Western Front. In Połock, Gaya took command of the new 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps, whose operational backbone were two divisions of cavalry: the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division of Komdiv<sup>137</sup> Nikolai Dmitrevich Tomin and the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division of Komdiv Vasilij Matuzenka.

In the summer of 1920, in “the march over the Vistula River” the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps under the command of Gaya showed good operational skills. In August 1920 – subordinated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Army charging on the right wing of the Western Front – he moved forward along the border with East Prussia and rushed deep into northern Poland – advancing the furthest of all the Soviet forces. His main troops captured Brodnica and reached the line of the Drwęca near Toruń. Following a plan worked out by Tukhachevsky to crush the main Polish forces and capture Warsaw, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps strived to force the Vistula between Bobrowniki and Nieszawa, it stormed Włocławek and Płock, and then later with great determination endeavoured to escape the Polish encirclement. *“The 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps commenced its retreat being encircled by the enemy. In these actions, we do not find anything characteristic of the cavalry. There was no proper «protection of the retreat». On the contrary, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps, as the only unit capable at that moment of fighting*

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<sup>137</sup> English Editor Note: A title for the commanding officer of the division.

*actively, took on the role of a battering ram, clearing the way for others to pass, while often preserving their equestrian style. The infantry, retreating at the rear, was not shielded by the cavalry, and was getting thinner by the moment while either crossing the Prussian border or capitulating*<sup>138</sup>.

The Corps stormed the Polish blocking lines five times but did not abandon the infantry and supply trains, even though they would have had a greater chance to save themselves if they had. In the retreat two division commanders fell, one brigadier, and even the inspector of the corps<sup>139</sup>. It is noteworthy that during the retreat the first signs of a decline and breakdown in morale appeared in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, a unit formed to a large extent from workers of the industrial centres in the Urals, that is people who were ostensibly better politically instructed and ideologically more trustworthy. Another division of the corps, the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division comprised of Kuban Cossacks, that is people who, according to the terminology of the time, were reactionary and rather hostile towards Bolshevik ideals, were more courageous and persevered to the end. It would be the only tactical unit of the Western Front which crossed the German border on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1920 in East Prussia in an orderly fashion. However, it also had on its conscience the crime it committed against Polish POWs in northern Mazovia in August 1920.

Two thirds into the month of August, the situation on the Soviet Western Front had changed radically. They could no longer even think about pursuing an attack on Warsaw. The Polish divisions from the counterattacking special strike task

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<sup>138</sup> S. Żukowski, *Działania 3. Konnego Korpusu Gaja* [Activities of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry corps of Gaj], Warszawa [no date of publishing], p. 95.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 96.

force under the Commander-in-chief was advancing from the Wieprz River in the south, moving rapidly towards the border with East Prussia. Tukhachevsky wrote: “the 4<sup>th</sup> Army wasted so much time that, when it came down to it, they could not fulfil their assigned task. This very fact, in connection with the disorganization of the Mozyrz Group, which had reached its apex, and owing to the fact that the enemy, who had learnt their boldness from us, and charged at us with fierce speed, assuring in advance the certain downfall of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The only hope that could have arisen would have been had the enemy stopped at least for some time or reduced the speed of his offensive in order to organize his rear. However, he did not do that. On 20<sup>th</sup> August, throwing back the units of the 16<sup>th</sup> Army in disorder and assaulting the flanks of the troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Armies one after the other, the opponent secured the line Przasnysz – Maków – Ostrów – Bielsk – Brest-Litovsk. Meanwhile the 4<sup>th</sup> Army was only just approaching the initial starting point. The troops of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies maximized their strength to stop the charge of the enemy and thus allow the 4<sup>th</sup> Army pass through a narrow passage between the Narew and the East Prussia border. Nonetheless, this task appears to have been unfeasible. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Armies were caught in uneven fights, in the toughest conditions possible, having lost a significant part of their strength, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Army could not be saved. Its greater part was pushed against the East Prussia border and forced to move into German territory”<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>140</sup> M. Tuchaczewski, *Pochód za Wisłę. Wykłady wygłoszone na kursie uzupełniającym Akademii Wojskowej RKKK w Moskwie 7–10 lutego 1923 roku*. [March to the Vistula. Lectures during the supplementary course of the RKKK Army Academy in Moscow 7–10 February 1923], trans. A. Bogusławski, Łódź 1989, p. 199.

Demoralization appeared in 4<sup>th</sup> Army's rifle divisions of Komandarm Dmitry Savelyevich Shuvayev<sup>141</sup> particularly quickly and on a mass scale, when this operational formation together with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps of Komkor Gaya then subordinated to it was cut off in northern Mazovia from the rest of the Soviet forces of the Western Front, and when such information reached the soldiers, it caused a general panic. It was at this point that all the mistakes committed during the formation of the rifle divisions could be seen. Aside from poor tactical and under fire training, we can also point to a lack of any sense of fortitude and confidence within the troops, a lack of internal unity and trust on the part of the soldiers towards their commanders, and among the commanders towards their subordinates<sup>142</sup>. Not trusting his soldiers in such a crisis situation, the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army Komandarm Shuvayev left his two divisions and simply drove off via Mława to Grodno, as early as 20<sup>th</sup> August. The lack of capable command resulted in widespread disorder: "*The infantry moved in small groups, as regiments moved together, some clambering on carriages, some marching without weapons. When there was a need to charge, the infantry lay in line and shouted «Hurrah!» with all their might, and did not move an inch forward*"<sup>143</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> He took command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1920 taking the place of the wounded Komandarm Yevgeny Sergeev.

<sup>142</sup> W. Rezmer, *Działania wojenne nad dolną Wisłą w sierpniu 1920 r. Próba analizy operacyjnej* [in:] *W 75-lecie Bitwy Warszawskiej 1920. Materiały z konferencji naukowej 30 XI – 1 XII 1995 r. i uroczystości w dniu 20 sierpnia 1995 r. pod Pomnikiem Poległych Obrońców Wisły 1920 roku* [Armed actions on the Lower Vistula in August 1920. Efforts at operational analysis [in:] The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw of 1920. Materials from the academic conference 30 November–1 December and the commemorations of 20 August 1995 at the Statue of the Fallen Defenders of the Vistula 1920], ed. D. Kuźnicka, Włocławek 1997, p. 106.

<sup>143</sup> S. Żukowski, *Activities...*, p. 77.

The commander of the Gaya Corps strived at all costs to break through to the east and save the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps from destruction. This required a rapid retreat. Therefore, on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> August, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps left Drobin and, after a forced march, the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division reached the region of Radzanów, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division arrived in Strzegów. Meanwhile, Mława was captured by the troops of the [Polish] 5<sup>th</sup> Army of General Władysław Sikorski, moreover the rail line Ciechanów – Mława was also taken by the Polish infantry, which was aided by two armoured trains patrolling the section south of Mława.

Reconnaissance patrols sent from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps reported that troops of the Soviet 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division in conjunction with some cavalry formations had attempted to charge through the Polish blockade near the railway station in Konopki. Nonetheless, they had been repulsed, therefore they were now striving to break through towards Mława. Near a town already captured by the Poles, numerous troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army had gathered. They were in panic and complete disorder. Having assessed the situation, Gaya came to the conclusion that his corps without its supply trains could break through towards the south-east, and, by advancing towards the rear of the Polish 5<sup>th</sup> Army, could escape from encirclement. For this to work, however, they would have to leave the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division in the Mława region.

Ultimately, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps decided to stay with the infantry and make an attempt to break through the Polish barricade. Being shielded by the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division from the south, Gaya sent his second tactical formation, that is the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, together with that part of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division still capable of fighting, to enable a breakthrough in the areas of Wyszyny and the railway station at Konopki.

Located nearby the rest of the Soviet 18<sup>th</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions proved unable to fight. At the very sight of the enemy, the infantry from these divisions scattered and laid down their guns. A third tactical formation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, the 12<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, which had advanced furthest in its march towards Pomerania, capturing Brodnica, was now being crushed, and its remnants had crossed the East Prussia border.

The expectation on the part of the infantry from the Soviet Rifle Divisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army that the cavalry would beat them a pathway to the east and evade the Polish encirclement were justifiable. In particular, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps of Komkor Gaya retained considerable military strength. When, near the village of Szydłowo, they encountered the Polish barricade which was formed from the 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (of some 900 bayonets) with a battery of artillery, the Soviet *“infantry under heavy fire from their opponent was again stopped just a few steps short of the village Szydłowo. Neither requests nor threats helped. People lay around inertly and shouted «hurrah». Having seen a group of cavalymen (the staff of the corps, division of the commander and the staff of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division) approaching the infantry, the line formation started to shout: «Send the cavalry!».* Everybody took up the shout: *«Bring me the cavalry, cavalry to us, cavalry forward!»*<sup>144</sup>.

The charge that was intended to break through the barricade was scheduled for 6.00 am on the morning on 22<sup>nd</sup> August by Komkor Gaya. Taking advantage of thick fog, the cavalry struck Konopki. Major Seweryn Nowicki, commander of the [Polish] armoured group, died from the first shots of the Soviet artillery, which caused confusion among the Polish troops. In a report sent at midnight on 22<sup>nd</sup> August the

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<sup>144</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Варшавы!...*, p. 226.

command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, communicated that: “*Part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Enemy Corps, consisting of c. 1,200 sabres, 3 cannons, a few dozen machine guns and 700 infantry carriages, which most probably constituted the possessions of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division of the Soviet Infantry, attacked the section of our 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, that is the village of Wyszyny, and from there Szydłowo. After very heavy clashes with our [Polish] 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and armoured group of Maj. Nowicki, the enemy’s overwhelming force broke our [Polish] two battalions of the 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, after which the enemy attacked Mława from the east, although they were repulsed after suffering great losses. During these battles, however, the enemy managed to move their supply trains and troops towards Szumsk. It was ascertained that the Kuban Cossacks had murdered 150 soldiers of the 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, taken prisoner during today’s action, torturing them in an inhumane manner*”<sup>145</sup>.

The circumstances of this crime were presented differently by Gaya. He claimed that his troops did not commit it. According to him, these atrocities against Polish POWs were perpetrated by the Red Army members of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division. Gaya described this event in the following way: “*the infantry commenced a ruthless assault on the Poles: they shot them, chopped them with spades and immediately ripped their clothes off. The wave of Red Army members that was hungry for revenge could not be stopped... With great effort we managed to save 300 Poles*

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<sup>145</sup> *Bitwa Warszawska 13–28 VIII 1920* [The Battle of Warsaw 13–28 August 1920]. *Dokumenty operacyjne* [Operational Documents], p. 2: (17–28 August), doc. No. 591, p. 395. See also, *ibid*, doc. No. 625: *Komunikat operacyjny poranny dowództwa Frontu Północnego, Oddział III, z dnia 23 sierpnia 1920 r.* [Operational Communications of the dawn command of the North Front 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch of 23 August 1920].



Division were stationed and instead attack the 202 Infantry Regiment in Grabów. Unable to withstand the Soviet onslaught, the Polish infantry left Grabowo, thus opening a passage towards the town of Chorzele for Gaya's cavalymen. They then ran into the troops of the [Polish] Siberian Brigade in the west of this town. They fought fiercely for almost a whole day 23<sup>rd</sup> August near Chorzele, and later also for the town itself. By 17:00 the situation of the troops, which had defended Chorzele, that is I and II battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment and II and III battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiments, had become critical. From the front, they were attacked by large forces of enemy infantry and cavalry, while at the rear, in turn, the troops of the Soviet cavalry advanced on them from the border with East Prussia. Apart from this, their ammunition was running out. In this situation at 18:00, the commander of the defence of Chorzele ordered a retreat to the east bank of the Orzyc River. This order was obeyed<sup>150</sup>.

The commanders of the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Army portrayed the battles at Chorzele in the following fashion: *“On 23<sup>rd</sup> August, the enemy attacked the Siberian Brigade with parts of the 33<sup>rd</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Soviet divisions and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps all told to the tune of about 10,000 people at the bridgehead of Chorzele. The Siberian Brigade, after an almost thirteen-hour battle, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, who managed to break through to the east with the majority of their forces. The roads were inundated with supply trains and technical and economic*

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<sup>150</sup> A detailed description of the fight for Chorzele, see: F. Dindorf-Ankowicz, *Zarys historii wojennej 82-go Syberyjskiego Pułku Piechoty* [An outline of the campaign of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment], Warszawa 1929, pp. 39–43; W. Scholze-Srokowski, and M. Daniszewski, *Zarys historii wojennej 83-go Syberyjskiego Pułku Piechoty* [An outline of the campaign of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment], Warszawa 1929, pp. 36–37.

*equipment, weapons, ammunition, etc.; several dozen members of the Soviet cavalry were taken prisoner. The enemy troops strayed into the forests to the west and south-east of Chorzele, which hindered communication between our [Polish] troops. These troops cross the German border with their possessions. The Germans welcomed them heartily. Own losses – significant*<sup>151</sup>.

The command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army provided information about the fights around Chorzele with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps in a report of 24<sup>th</sup> August (at midnight) we will quote two fragments from it:

“I. According to the report of Gen. Krajowski [Franciszek Krajowski – commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division] and Maj. Ocetkiewicz [Marian Ocetkiewicz – commander of the 144<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment], who captured Chorzele on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, up to 1,500 sabres broke through Chorzele, with one battery and from 300 to 500 infantry soldiers, with this last group mostly unarmed. This very group was surrounded of all sides, but, owing to the rapid retreat of the Siberian Brigade towards the south-east, the enemy managed to flee. The fact that in the forests and roads leading to Chorzele much artillery and infantry ammunition was left, which the enemy did not manage to take testifies to the hastiness with which the enemy fled. The Kuban Cossacks were to state that on no condition would they surrender and they themselves shielded the retreat, since others would have surrendered long ago. The enemy plundered its way home, stealing horses and cattle. Near Chorzele, our [Polish] troops of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division again ran into the corpses of our own soldiers, massacred in a savage way with their eyes

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<sup>151</sup> *Bitwa Warszawska 13–28 VIII 1920...*, doc. No. 645, p. 480: *Dowództwo I. Armii, Oddział III, Sytuacja z dnia 23 sierpnia 1920 r., Szczegóły walk Brygady Syberyjskiej pod Chorzelami* [Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch. Situation on 23 August 1920. Details of the clashes of the Siberian Brigades near Chorzele].

put out. Between Janów and Mława there were up to 2,000 Soviet infantry, most often unarmed, then breaking through in groups to Germany. To the west of the line Działdowo – Mława – Ciechanów just small infantry units and Soviet cavalry. According to the reports of the 1<sup>st</sup> Poznań Division [14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division], some enemy troops (including two Cossack regiments) had gone over into German Prussia.

They stated that the Bolsheviks who had crossed the border in Neidenburg [now Nidzica in Poland] were given complete freedom of movement and had not been interned. A local soviet from Działdowo who escaped to Germany was arrested at the border by the German authorities and was sent back under Polish jurisdiction, while members of that soviet were taken to a summary court.

II. In retaliation for ninety-two privates and seven officers murdered in an atrocious way by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Cavalry Corps, shot today at the site of the execution of our [Polish] soldiers, two hundred Cossacks taken into captivity from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Cavalry Corps were shot. They were shot by soldiers of the 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, to which those murdered had belonged<sup>152</sup>.

The French Military Mission in Poland reported on the execution of the Cossacks to Paris from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps: “In response to the execution of ninety-two soldiers and seven Polish officers by the Bolshevik 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps, on 24<sup>th</sup> August two hundred Cossacks belonging to this corps were shot in the same place where the Polish soldiers had been executed<sup>153</sup>.”

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, doc. No. 678, p. 544: *Dowództwo 5. Armii, Oddział III, Meldunek sytuacyjny z 24 sierpnia 1920 r., godz. 24.00*. [Command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch Situational Report 24 August 1920 at 12 am]

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, doc. No. 731, p. 628: *Francuska Misja Wojskowa w Polsce, Meldunek sytuacyjny wieczorny z dnia 25 sierpnia*. [The French Military Mission in Poland, Situational reports of the evening 25 August].

After having broken the barricade in Chorzele in the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> August, Gaya's cavalry went through the town and marched swiftly towards Myszyniec, defended by the isolated III Battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment.

The onslaught on Myszyniec started at 10 am the following day. Gaya's cavalymen were supported by three artillery batteries from the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division. After a four-hour fight, the town was taken, and the remaining Polish soldiers defending there now retreated to the north. Pursued by part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, they crossed the border with East Prussia and were interned by the Germans. Gaya claimed that in Myszyniec his corps had captured one cannon and eight machine guns and had taken one thousand Polish soldiers into captivity<sup>154</sup>. The number of POWs given is not credible, since the staff of Myszyniec consisted of only one Polish battalion comprising just a few hundred soldiers. Apart from that, part of this battalion, not wanting to be taken into Soviet captivity, had as mentioned earlier previously crossed the German border and had been interned in East Prussia<sup>155</sup>.

We can read in the situational report from the HQ of the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Army that: *“Further to the information passed earlier about the fights in Myszyniec, we additionally report [that] the battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Siberian Infantry Regiment, sent on 23<sup>rd</sup> August towards Myszyniec, disrupted the supply trains of the enemy 53<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Division near the village of Czarnia, taking one hundred and twenty POWs and captured Myszyniec. On 24<sup>th</sup> August after a fierce fight with the larger forces of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Cavalry Corps*

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<sup>154</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Варшаву!...*, p. 232.

<sup>155</sup> F. Dindorf-Ankowicz, *Zarys historii wojennej 82-go...*, p. 43; W. Scholze-Srokowski, and M. Daniszewski, *Zarys historii wojennej 83-go...*, p. 37.

*which had encircled Myszyniec, part of the battalion retreated to the south-east incurring heavy losses – this fact is still not confirmed. Atrocious treatment of the wounded by the Cossacks has been reported*<sup>156</sup>.

After a few hours rest, the Soviet 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps left Myszyniec and headed towards Kolno. Sometime after they had started marching, Gaya realized that the infantry and supply trains of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division had not started marching towards Kolno. They had headed to the north, towards Dąbrowa. In Dąbrowa, Komkor Gaya caught up with the command of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division, from whom he heard that he had been unable to keep discipline within the ranks, the Red Army soldiers were hungry, exhausted and sick, and half of the army had already crossed over the nearby German border.

Based on recorded testimony “According to the testimonies of one of our [Polish] soldiers who escaped from Bolshevik captivity on Prussian territory, around five to seven thousand Bolsheviks crossed the Prussian border on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the current month near Leman<sup>157</sup>. All were disarmed and interned in the barracks; he, since he was in plain clothes and pretending to be a driver<sup>158</sup>, was released”<sup>159</sup>.

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<sup>156</sup> *Bitwa Warszawska 13–28 VIII 1920...*, doc. No. 766, pp. 712–713: *Dowództwo 1. Armii, Oddział III, Meldunek sytuacyjny nr 261 z dnia 27 sierpnia, godz. 7.00* [1<sup>st</sup> Army Command 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch, Situational Report nr 261 dated 27 August 1920, 7 am].

<sup>157</sup> Leman – the town on the Turośń River, located circa ten kilometres to the north of the then main road from Myszyniec to Kolno.

<sup>158</sup> A coachman (owner) of *podwoda* – a peasant’s cart with horses (Bolsheviks mobilized them as a means of transport).

<sup>159</sup> *Bitwa Warszawska 13–28 VIII 1920...*, doc. No. 722, pp. 606–607: *Dowództwo 4. Armii, Oddział III, Meldunek sytuacyjny południowy, 25 sierpnia 1920 r., godz. 13.00* [4<sup>th</sup> Army Command, 4<sup>th</sup> Army Command, 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch, Situational Report south, dated 25 August 1920, 1 pm].

Gaya attempted to convince the commander of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division to join up with his corps and other remaining forces to take part in the attack on Kolno, albeit he did so without success. At this time, however, the Poles attacked Myszyniec, where the rear guard of the corps was stationed. The 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division being attacked from the south and west had to leave the town and now headed for Kolno, following the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division. During this clash, all units of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division, along with the commander and supply trains crossed the German border.

In a reconnaissance report drawn up by officers of II Division of the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Army we can read:

*“The commanders of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division [53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division] took command over the remaining soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. In the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> August, this unit broke the front near Chorzele and then marched towards Myszyniec.*

*After having reached [the town of] Zaręby, the unit stopped, having heard that Myszyniec had been captured by our [Polish] troops (from the testimonies of those who had escaped from captivity). In the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> August, the whole infantry along with its supply trains crossed the German border (source: confidential r. [reports]). German border guards disarmed the passing enemy troops and segregated them in order to send them to concentration camps (testimony of an officer of the Polish Army who had escaped from Bolshevik captivity)”<sup>160</sup>.*

Gaya’s cavalymen, who, while still fighting, were moving onwards to Kolno, saw the escape of their own infantry to East Prussia<sup>161</sup>, a fact which did not raise their morale. After dark-

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, doc. No. 720, p. 695: Dowództwo 1. Armii, Oddział II, Raport wywiadowczy nr 137 z 25 sierpnia 1920 r. [1<sup>st</sup> Army Command, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch, Intelligence Report nr 137 dated 25 August 1920].

<sup>161</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *Ha Bapuaaey!*..., p. 233.

ness fell, the fighting stopped. The Soviet troops broke away from the attacking Poles and approached Kolno at around 2 am on 25<sup>th</sup> August.

However, there were already troops of the Polish 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, who had advanced part of their forces north, up to the Prussian border. The 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was directed towards Mały Borek – Stawiski. Łomża was manned with the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, who sent one of its battalions to Osowiec, and a further two to Radziłów, to protect the rear of the main forces of the [Polish] 4<sup>th</sup> Army from the east. In this way, Gaya's troops marching from the west were thus overtaken by a few hours, and thus the Polish Army blocked their only line of retreat through Polish territory<sup>162</sup>.

Despite the enormous military advantage of the Polish forces, Gaya still wanted at all costs to break through to the east. At 6am on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> August the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps commenced its onslaught on Kolno. They fought fiercely for a few hours, yet the attacks of the Soviet cavalry were ineffective. The terrain, with dense undergrowth and deep muddy forests, hindered the classical cavalry strikes used by the regiments of the corps. The wings and rear of the enemy could not be attacked, since the Polish infantry occupied those few passages in the forest. Frontal attacks ended in heavy losses. The first signs of a collapse were seen in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division. Its commander reported to Komkor Gaya that his three regiments, utterly exhausted by long marches, shortages of sleep and of ammunition, started to panic and headed north and crossed the German border near the village of Lenczik. This again materially affected the moral of the rest of the troops.

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<sup>162</sup> W. Sikorski, *Nad Wisłą i Wkrą. Studium z polsko-rosyjskiej wojny 1920 roku*, Lwów – Warszawa – Kraków 1928, pp. 208–209.

In the evening of 25<sup>th</sup> August, only six cavalry regiments remained at the disposal of Komkor Gaya. Yet they were modest in terms of the number of soldiers, which now did not exceed two hundred sabres each. The morale of the Red Army had been undermined, and only the regiments of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, where the Cossacks served, were still ready to fight.

Regardless of the sheer exhaustion of his subordinates and the lack of ammunition, at 21.30 Komkor Gaya commanded the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division to once again assault along the road to Kolno. The order was obeyed, but the cavalymen only reached a distance of three kilometres from the town. There they again crashed into the Polish infantry. They had no chance to break through their position with a frontal attack, and the forest and swamp area did not allow them to manoeuvre around. The situation became dire for the corps, since the Poles now struck from the rear, and their small reconnaissance groups also appeared in the north, along the border with Germany. This could also have meant the closing of that route of swift escape into [German] East Prussia. In spite of this, Komkor Gaya did not give up. He gave another order to break through to the east at all costs. The Red Army soldiers were to carry this out by fighting even only with their sabres. The battle lasted for three hours. The Cossacks from the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division attacked the Polish infantry either on horseback or on foot and – as Gaya would claim – “slew” up to four hundred Poles. *“They did not take any POWs, since they could not be transported behind the carts and there was no one who could guard them”*<sup>163</sup>.

Komkor Gaya learned from [Polish] captives that in the area of Kolno there were two Polish infantry divisions: the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup>, and further to the south, in the area of Nowogród,

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<sup>163</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Варшавы!...*, p. 234.

a further two as well as other units. Just in front of Kolno, the road leading to the west to the town was understood to be controlled by two Polish infantry regiments. In turn, two further ones were stationed as a rear-guard – one in Kolno and one in the town Wincenta (eight kilometres to the north of Kolno). According to the testimonies of the [above] captives, in Kolno on 23<sup>rd</sup> August two rifle divisions of the Soviet 15<sup>th</sup> Army were crushed and those who remained crossed over the German border. Szczuczyn, Grajewo and Osowiec were also captured by the Poles on 24<sup>th</sup> August, as was Augustów. The above information reflected the reality of the situation, since the area of Kolno was manned with four regiments from the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Three of them (59<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup>), with positions facing westwards, closed the routes from Kolno to the border with Germany. The fourth (62<sup>nd</sup>), positioned in the village Łabno (four kilometres to the east of the town), was playing the role of the rear-guard<sup>164</sup>.

Not being able to open up the route through Kolno, the remaining soldiers from the Soviet 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps now spontaneously headed to the north-west, towards the village Łacha, trusting that they would move towards Wincenta and in this way bypass the Polish blockade. It turned out, however, that the eastern bank of the Pisa River, between Kolno and the border with East Prussia, was also being manned by Poles (of the 59<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment).

The Red Army soldiers from all the regiments of the corps were now walking towards Łacha on foot leading their tired horses. This march did not boost their morale. The signs of the

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<sup>164</sup> See, L. Radwański, *Zarys historii wojennej 62-go Pułku Piechoty Wielkopolskiej* [Outline of the military campaign of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Greater-Poland Infantry Regiment], Warszawa 1929, p. 20.

headlong retreat by Soviet troops were visible everywhere. Likewise, the proximity of the border with Germany tempted the soldiers. Despite being constantly monitored by the command staff and commissaries, the ranks of soldiers diminished hour by hour. A substantial role was played by information passed to the Red Army soldiers by the German border guard that their colleagues, that is the soldiers of the Soviet 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Armies, were already in East Prussia living there “*well and freely*”<sup>165</sup>.

Gaya also marched with the staff of the corps following his own regiments towards the village of Łacha. They continually strived to hear any trace of a Soviet broadcasting station via the wireless. Nonetheless, there was no answer. Finally, they heard the signal of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army, distant and weak. Despite this, a telegram was sent: “*To the commanders of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Armies and deputy commanders. After fierce fighting and severe hardships, on 25<sup>th</sup> August I approached Kolno. The entire infantry of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army crossed the border. I attempted to get to Grajewo. We have absolutely no bullets or cartridges. Please provide the coordinates to the frontline fast. Komkor Gaya, wojenkom Ścibor*”<sup>166</sup>.

Receiving no response to his radiogram, after four hours, the staff of the corps followed the troops who were heading for the village of Wincenta. However, they only got to around three and a half kilometres from this village. It turned out that Wincenta itself and the eastern bank of the Pisa River were staffed with strong Polish forces. The bridge next to the village had been destroyed by Poles. The Red Army soldiers and part of the

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<sup>165</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Баруавы!*..., p. 235.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* Of the radiogram sent to the addressees, only one of its parts got through: “To the 4<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and deputy commanders. After fierce fighting and severe hardships, on 25<sup>th</sup> August I approached Kolno. The whole infantry...” (*ibidem*).

command were of the opinion that owing to the exhaustion of their people and their horses, as well as hunger and casualties, further fighting made little sense. In order to formulate a comprehensive picture of the situation, Komkor Gaya convened a “military Soviet”, during which he presented the difficult situation of the corps, and the possibilities for conducting further battles. Subsequently, he demanded a clear answer as to whether they were able to stop their soldiers from crossing the border and whether, considering the casualties and fighting with only sabres, they should strive to join the troops of the Red Army. The opinions of the command varied. Taking into account their lack of ammunition, an immensely difficult operational position, the utter exhaustion of their people and lack of information concerning the position of the frontline, some supported crossing the border. Others continued to heavily criticized the conduct of the “*wojenkoma* corps”, “*politodielo*” (the political sections of the army) and all the other “comrades” who had already chosen to cross the German border and reached East Prussia, they demanded to continue fighting.

The effect of this meeting was a decision to make one more attempt to break through. Gaya would claim that while preparing this decisive and final assault he ordered the commanders of the divisions to send all their wounded (400 people), the remains of the supply trains and services, and Polish POWs – who amounted to 2,000 in all divisions of the corps – over the German border<sup>167</sup>. At 18.00 on the dot the commanders of the divisions received new orders. The 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division was

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<sup>167</sup> In the fragments of his memoir published a few years later, Gaya claimed that 400 wounded, supply trains and services and 1,000 POWs were sent to East Prussia. See, *Отход 3-го конкорпуса на Запфронте, „Революция и война. Военно-научный журнал” 1921, No. 4–5, p. 170.*

to protect the rear of the corps leaving this part of the forces as a rear-guard, and also to conduct reconnaissance towards the village Łacha. The commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division was to capture the bridge near the village of Wincenta with a force of one brigade, and with the force of their remaining troops seize the village of Koziół, then attempting to cross either via the bridge or the ford. The commander of the artillery, who had four cannons in his disposal, was to support the assault, taking advantage of the last forty rounds. The battery of the artillery from the repository of the 161<sup>st</sup> Rifle Brigade who had joined the corps was also to support the attack, taking advantage of their remaining bullets. Were this assault to succeed, either in the area of Koziół or near the village of Wincenta, all units were then to quickly move towards this ford. Owing to significant forests in the area, this assault was to be carried out on foot.

Having received these orders, the commanders began to carry them out. The commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division sent strong reconnaissance units to the west in order to protect the rear of the corps. Half an hour later, an offensive of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division was launched to break the line. A particularly fierce fight took place near the village of Koziół. The bridge was taken out and on the east bank of the river two Polish infantry regiments were defending themselves, blocking the ford crossing near Koziół and Wincenta villages. The Polish infantry was dug in and its defence was based on well-positioned machine guns. Three attacks of onrushing Soviet cavalry broke against the line near Pisa. At this time the Polish troops defending themselves in the area of Wincenta commenced limited offensive operations, nonetheless, they quickly returned to their position on the east bank of the river.

The fight, lasting two hours, bringing no resolution. During the fight, Komkor Gaya (his command post was located near

the bridge in the vicinity of the village of Wincenta), then intending to introduce one last unit of his rear-guard taken from the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division to expand the offensive line, received a report from the commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division that his brigade, assaulting in the area near the village of Koziol, had broken of its offensive and withdrawn. Also the men of the artillery battery of the 161<sup>st</sup> Rifle Brigade who abandoned their ammunition and crossed over the German border. After a while, the commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment informed Komkor Gaya that one of his cavalry regiments was also crossing the border. It became clear that the Soviet command would not be able to stop the ever-increasing wave of soldiers heading towards East Prussia.

After a consultation with his subordinates from the command of the corps and commanders of the division, Komkor Gaya announced that in order to stop this wilful and disordered crossing of the border a combined crossing into East Prussia would be prepared at night. For the greater part of the evening, the wireless of the corps broadcast dispatches, but no contact was made. As a result, Gaya commanded that all operational documents, orders and the wireless to be destroyed<sup>168</sup>.

On 26<sup>th</sup> August at 4.40 in the morning the remains of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps crossed the East Prussian border. In his memoir, Gaya acknowledged with pathos: “*The dread of the Polish Army, the military avant-garde of the Red Western Front – the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Corps had ceased to exist*”<sup>169</sup>. Earlier, three divisions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army under the command of Shuvayev had done the same, as had two divisions from the 15<sup>th</sup> Army under the

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<sup>168</sup> Г.Д. Гай, *На Варшаву!...*, p. 237.

<sup>169</sup> *Идет, В германском лагере. Жизнь и быт интернированной Красной Армии в Германии в 1920–21 гг*, Москва 1932, p. 12.

command of August Kork and one division of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army led by Vladimir Lazarevich.

On entering East Prussia, the troops of the Red Army were disarmed by the Germans and directed to a camp in Arys (now Orzysz in Poland). There, around 40,000 interned Red Army soldiers and around 5,000 interned Poles were gathered. Gaya claimed that these were just half of the 10,000 Polish soldiers who had sought refuge in Germany in the first half of August 1920, to escape from Gaja's corps then attacking from the east<sup>170</sup>. The camp was designed for 5,000 people, but instead nine times that capacity was held there.

It was moreover not too carefully guarded, and so those held there escaped with ease – the Red Army soldiers headed through Lithuania into Soviet Russia, while the Poles returned home informing of what they had seen while in captivity. Captain Wojciech Fyda, the head of the II Department of the command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army reported that *“on 7<sup>th</sup> August in Rajgród 200 German Communists were seen travelling on fifty carriages towards Grodno. On 10<sup>th</sup> August Germans in uniforms, with an officer at the lead, were passing Grajewo towards Kolno. This officer stated that the Communists of the Reich would soon attack Poland through the Poznań district (the testimony of an officer who had escaped from Bolshevik captivity)”*<sup>171</sup>.

Gaya's cavalry stayed in Arys for only two weeks. Owing to the overcrowding of the camp and the difficult living conditions, the German authorities made a resolution to send the interned Red Army soldiers to camps located deep inside Germany. From

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<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>171</sup> *Bitwa Warszawska 13–28 VIII 1920...*, doc. No. 720, p. 695: *Dowództwo I. Armii, Oddział II, Raport wywiadowczy nr 137 z 25 sierpnia 1920 r.* [Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch Intelligence report nr 137 dated 25 August 1920].

Arys they were transported to Königsberg, and later at night by ship to Stettin. Gaya claimed that ship transports with the interned were monitored by the Polish navy ships and the ships of Entente. They ascertained that these transporters were not sailing to ports in Soviet Russia<sup>172</sup>.

In Szczecin, the interned Red Army soldiers were put into railway carriages and were transported to camps throughout Germany in Soltau, Kressen, Havelberg, Hameln, Salzwedel, Celle (some twenty-five kilometres to the north-east of Hannover), Lichtenhorst (circa forty kilometres to the north of Hannover), Baireit, Ahlen-Falkenberger Moor and Parchim<sup>173</sup>.

Gaya with the staff of the corps and of the cavalry division left Arys with the second last convoy. All were transported to the camp in Salzwedel near Berlin, which could accommodate from three to three and a half thousand people. Gaya stayed in this camp until October 1920.

In compliance with the treaties (both the treaty on repatriation of 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921 and the peace treaty of 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921), repatriation was to encompass all prisoners on the territory of a given country, political prisoners, the interned, POWs, refugees and emigrants. However, these resolutions were not fully implemented. In Soviet camps and prisons Polish soldiers remained. In January 1922, the Polish Delegation working for the Joint Commission had to intervene once again with reference to delays in releasing prisoners and sending them back to Poland. The Russian-Ukrainian side was informed that *“echelons with POWs No. 224 and No. 225, that is the men of the V Krasnoyarsky echelon, which had left Krasnoyarsk on*

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

*26<sup>th</sup> October the previous year, and the Moscow echelon with eleven wagons of POWs from Moscow camps and hospitals, were stuck for the sixth successive [January] day at the railway station of Kołodnia near Smolensk. Both echelons are held in overly harsh provision and sanitary conditions, since POWs receive only ¼ pound of bread as a daily ration. As a result of these conditions, 60 per cent of prisoners are sick, and over a dozen have died...*"<sup>174</sup>.

The Soviet authorities delayed the release of some prisoners for a variety of reasons and on various pretexts. Most frequently, they questioned the fact that these were actually prisoners subject to release. Hence, they had to be [firstly] officially recognized as such, which prolonged their stay in captivity, for this recognition required the enforcement of a number of bureaucratic and administrative operations. In the National Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, we can find documents, including certificates issued using the forms of the Siberian Branch of the Polish Delegation in the Joint Commission on Repatriation in RSFSR and UkSSR, confirming that a specific person was indeed a Polish POW.

These certificates were still being issued in April 1922, which proves that at the time there were still prisoners in Russia who had not yet been released. The content of these certificates was identical, since the same form was used and filled only with the personal data of a given prisoner. By way of illustration see the following example,

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<sup>174</sup> GARF, fond R.-8358, opis 8, sprawa 32, k. 15, Pismo Delegacji Polskiej w Komisji Mieszanej do Delegacji Rosyjsko-Ukraińskiej w sprawie sytuacji aprowizacyjnej i sanitarnej eszelonów z polskimi jeńcami wojennymi, 26 stycznia 1922 r. [Copy 8, case 32, k. 15, Letter of the Polish Delegation to the Joint Commission to the Russian-Ukrainian Delegation with regard to the supply and sanitary situation for Polish prisoners of war 26 January 1922].

“Novonikolayevsk<sup>175</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1922

To  
the Representative of the Russian–Ukrainian Delegation  
in the Joint Commission on Repatriation  
in the Siberian District

The Siberian Branch of the Delegation of the Republic of Poland on Repatriation testifies on the basis of the specifications that Mr Słaby Jan, s. of Peter, is indeed a Polish prisoner of war and requests that an adequate certificate be issued to the aforesaid authorizing him to be registered in the local office for the repatriation of prisoners.

REPRESENTATIVE OF DELEGATION: [Henryk Biegański]  
on behalf of the Secretary of the Delegation: [signature  
illegible]<sup>176</sup>.

Additionally, the release of some prisoners of war was also delayed owing to their qualifications and skills needed at that time for the Bolshevik economy, transport and shipping transport and inland navigation. This in particular concerned educated people and those who possessed technical skills, that is railway men and technical rail personnel, technicians and road

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<sup>175</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> February 1926 the Soviet authorities changed the name of the city into Novosibirsk.

<sup>176</sup> GARE, fond R.-8358, opis 23, sprawa 8, k. 151, Zaświadczenie Ekspozytury Syberyjskiej Delegacji Polskiej ds. Repatriacji potwierdzające status jeńca wojennego, 4 kwietnia 1922 r. [Copy 23, case 8, k. 151 Statement by the Siberian Branch Delegation to Poland for repatriations, confirming the status of prisoners of war dated 4 April 1922]

and bridge construction engineers, communication specialists (specialists in telephones and telegraphs), technical personnel for mining work, and even sailors. Efforts to release eight officers of the navy were still being undertaken in October and November 1922. Not only was the Polish Delegation in the Joint Commission involved in this, but also the Ministry of Military Affairs.

On 27<sup>th</sup> October 1922 General Brigadier Józef Trzemeski<sup>177</sup> from the Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs sent a letter to the head of this Ministry, in which he requested:

“I have learnt from private letters received from the former officers of the Russian navy, captain of 2<sup>nd</sup> rank mechanical engineer Roman Brylewski and senior lieutenant Eugeniusz Józwickiewicz that we can find eight Poles, former officers of the Russian navy, in the Novosspasky camp in Moscow:

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<sup>177</sup> Józef Franciszek Trzemeski (1878–1923) – an officer of the navy of the Russian Empire, in 1898 he took up studies in the Military Medical Academy (Военно-медицинская академия) in St. Petersburg. After graduation, starting in 1904, he was a doctor on various ships of the Russian Navy. He took part in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and in World War I. In June 1918, he volunteered for the Polish forces organised in the United States. He arrived in France with them and then joined the Polish Army of General Józef Haller. From the spring of 1919, he was the chief doctor at the instruction camp, and subsequently deputy sanitary head of the Polish Army in France. After the arrival of this army in Poland, he was appointed to the post of sanitary head of the South-West Front, and later the Pomeranian Front. From 18<sup>th</sup> March 1920 he was head of the Hygiene Section in the Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs, head of the sanitary service of the Branch of the High Command of the Polish Army and the proxy of the head of the Sanitary Department at the Ministry of Military Affairs. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1922 he advanced to the rank of Brigadier General with seniority as of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1919.

Szaniawski Ignacy<sup>178</sup> captain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank  
 Brylewski Roman [captain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank]  
 Józwickiewicz Eugeniusz<sup>179</sup> senior lieutenant  
 Czeczot Rafał lieutenant<sup>180</sup> of the artillery  
 Berens [Mikołaj]<sup>181</sup> ship engineer  
 Niewiadomski Mikołaj [ship engineer]  
 Zdaniewicz [ship engineer]  
 Sławski Mieczysław mechanical engineer.

These officers were first kept in prisons and now have been kept in a camp for over fourteen months without any reason and allegedly the Bolsheviks will agree to their repatriation to the country exclusively on grounds of exchange.

The Polish Delegation on Repatriation in Warsaw placed these officers on the list for exchange already in July this year, but so far no exchange has taken place.

At present a need has arisen to expedite the exchange of these officers and their return to the country, since they have recently been divided into two groups, out of whom one remained in the Novospasky camp, and the second was moved to the Ivanovsky camp (in Moscow), yet the officers of this latter group are deprived of the right to enter the city and certain limitations have been imposed on them. Beside this, two of these officers (captain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank Brylewski and senior lieutenant Józwickiewicz, both from the latter group) are sick and the coming winter will definitely result in a deterioration of their condition.

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<sup>178</sup> For a complete biogram, see *Polska Marynarka Wojenna* [Poland Naval Armed Forces], p. 1: *Korpus oficerów* [Officer Corp] 1918–1947, ed. J.K. Sawicki, Gdynia 1996 *Kadry Morskie Rzeczypospolitej* [The Naval cadre of The Republic of Poland], vol. 2), p. 443.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 350–351.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 480–481.

Informing the General about this situation, I would be most grateful if you could intervene quickly with reference to these Polish officers.

I know two of these officers, captain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank Brylewski [and] senior lieutenant Józwickiewicz, in person and vouch for them.

Trzemeski, General Brigadier<sup>182</sup>.

Out of approximately 44,000 soldiers of the Polish Army listed as missing during the Polish-Soviet war, by 12<sup>th</sup> October 1921 already 26,440 thousand POWs had returned to Poland, among whom were 418 officers. Repatriation, however, did not end after this date, for instance rail transports from Siberia were still arriving at the beginning of 1922. Until the autumn of that year, subsequent groups of POWs continued to arrive in Poland in an organised form after having settled all the formalities. The escapees also returned. They took the decision to escape to Poland or countries adjacent to Soviet Russia individually or in small groups, from where – as they claimed – they could easily reach the country. Most frequently, it was Finland and Estonia that served as such transit countries.

No complete registration was conducted of the Polish POWs who returned – whether by legal or illegal means – from Soviet captivity in the later period from mid-October 1921 to November 1922, when repatriation in all practical numbers ended. At a conservative estimate, there could have

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<sup>182</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego) [2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff], sygn. I.303.4.1743, Pismo gen. Józefa Trzemeskiego do szefa Gabinetu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych w sprawie zwolnienia oficerów marynarki, 27 października 1922 r. [Letter of General Josef Trzemeski to the Office of the Ministry for the Armed Forces with regard to the release of naval officers dated 27 October 1922].

even be more than 3,000 of them. After adding them to the 26,440, who's return had been registered earlier (before 12<sup>th</sup> October 1921), we get around 30,000 Polish POWs who had returned to Poland.

Since around 44,000 in total were missing, presumed captured, and some 30,000 prisoners had returned, the question arises: what happened to the remaining prisoners, that is some 14,000 soldiers? From the information included in the Soviet documents it followed that between 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers had stayed voluntarily in Soviet Russia. In the report of the Polish Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union we read that as of 1<sup>st</sup> November 1921 circa 2,000 POWs had refused to return to Poland. Whereas according to the data of the same Polish Office dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1922 about 8 percent of the POWs did not want to return, which would correspond to a number of 3,000<sup>183</sup>.

Assuming that in fact roughly 3,000 POWs decided to stay in Russia, we are left with some 11,000 prisoners who were either killed after being captured, were murdered in camps or prisons, had died during transit to the camps, within the camps, in the repatriation transports on the way back to Poland or had otherwise died or disappeared due to unknown reasons.

The largest group among these missing POWs are those who were murdered in captivity or those who died of their wounds or as a result of illnesses.

Most camps in which Polish POWs were kept were situated in the northern, European part of Soviet Russia. Most probably this location choice resulted from issues of security and the intention to hinder their possible escape due to the harsh

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<sup>183</sup> Polish war prisoners..., p. 13.

climate. Moreover, not many previously deported Poles had settled there, there were no regions where any Polish diaspora from the time of Imperial Russia, could be found living in large numbers. In September 1921, a list was drawn up of the locations or camps, in which Polish prisoners stayed:

“A. Camps:

1. Borowicze (Borovichi) [Nizhegorodskaya oblast]	c-a 300
2. Briansk (Bryansk)	c-a 400
3. Charków (Kharkiv)	c-a 3000
4. Czugujew (Chuhuiv)	c-a 1000
5. Daniłów (Danilov)	c-a 360
6. Iwanowo-Wozniesieńsk (Ivanovo-Voznesensk)	c-a 500
7. Jarosław (Yaroslavl)	c-a 1500
8. Kazań (Kazan)	c-a 200
9. Kijów (Kiiv)	c-a 500
10. Kinieszma (Kineshma)	c-a 300
11. Kołomna (Kolomna)	c-a 200
12. Kostrom (Kostroma)	c-a 450
13. Krasnojarsk (Krasnoyarsk)	c-a 500
14. Moscow – Andronievsky Camp	c-a 20
15. [Moscow – Camp] Kozukhovsky	c-a 500
16. [Moscow – Camp] Novo-Pieskovsky	no data
17. [Moscow – Camp] Novo-Spassky	c-a 30
18. [Moscow – Camp] Rozhdestvensky	c-a 200
19. [Moscow – Camp] Ordynsky	c-a 500
20. [Moscow – Camp] Vladykinsky	c-a 900
21. Myszkino (Myshkin)	c-a 100
22. Niznij-Nowogorod (Nizhny Novgorod)	c-a 200
23. Nowogród (Novgorod)	c-a 150
24. Orsza (Orsha)	no data
25. Orzeł (Oryol)	c-a 400

26. Petersburg	c-a 600
27. Połtawa (Poltava)	c-a 400
28. Rżew (Rzhev)	c-a 500
29. Rostów (Rostov)	c-a 450
30. Rybińsk (Rybinsk)	c-a 550
31. Riazań (Ryazan)	c-a 400
32. Samara	c-a 600
33. Smoleńsk (Smolensk)	c-a 600
34. Sormowo (Sormovo)	c-a 400
35. Syzrań (Syzran)	no data
36. Symbirsk (Simbirsk, now Ulyanovsk)	c-a 600
37. Twer (Tver)	c-a 500
38. Tuła (Tula)	c-a 2000
39. Witebsk (Vitebsk)	c-a 200
40. Wołga (Volga)	c-a 150
41. Wiatka (Vyatka)	no data
42. Woroneż (Voronezh)	c-a 400
43. Włodzimierz (Vladimir)	c-a 500

#### B. Brigades and working regiments:

1. Brigade I – Murmansk Rail
2. Brigade II – [Murmansk Rail]
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> Working Regiment – Czugujew (Chuhuiw)
4. [3<sup>rd</sup>] Working Regiment – [Charków, Kharkiv] The Donbass

#### C. Larger groups of POWs on labour secondment:

1. The town of Skopin in the Ryazan Governorate – coal mines
2. Siberia – coal mines

#### D. Groups of POWs in the Red Army:

1. Moscow

2. Belebey (Belebey)
3. Penza Governorate”<sup>184</sup>.

From the above list provided, it may be concluded that in September 1921, that is half a year after the beginning of the repatriation process, at least 21,260 Polish POWs were still being held in Soviet Russia. However, there were definitely more than this, since we do not possess any data on the number of prisoners who were held at the railway stations along the Murmansk arterial line. These were the stations: Lenarta, Zwanka, Gortjemo-Tele, Pasza, Piotrozawodsk (Petroyavodsk) and Murman. At these stations, POWs were forced to load wagons with wood obtained from the surrounding forests. In August 1920, there were 1,650 such prisoners<sup>185</sup>, and in October 1920 in the Zwanski Camp alone, in which prisoners working at the Zwanka rail station were held, there were still 253 prisoners of war, while in the Paszka Camp (Paszka station) there were 197<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>184</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff, Report unit 2<sup>nd</sup> Department of the Command Staff for the Lublin District regarding camps for prisoners in Russia, dated 21 September 1921 (Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego), sygn. I.303.4.1707, Raport Ekspozytury Wydziału II Sztabu Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin o obozach jeńców w Rosji z 21 września 1921 r).

<sup>185</sup> GARF, fond 6, opis [copy] 10, sprawa [case] 39, k. 51, Wykaz liczbowy polskich jeńców wojennych przetrzymywanych w obozach, sierpień 1920 r. [Numerical list of Polish war prisoners held in camps, August 1920].

<sup>186</sup> RPWA, fond 9, opis [copy] 12, sprawa [case] 15, k. 15 (p. 1–2), Wykaz obozów polskich jeńców wojennych sporządzony przez Wydział Polski PUR, 15 października 1920 r.; Rosyjskie Państwowe Archiwum Historii Społeczno-Politycznej) [List of camps for Polish war prisoners prepared by the Polish branch of the PUR, dated 15 October 1920. Russian State Archive for History Society and Politics] (Российский государственный архив

Likewise, we do not have data referring to the number of the POWs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Working Regiments. The former was located in Chuhuiv (in the city of Donetsk, in the Donbass). These POWs were lodged in barracks, in which throughout the winter of 1920/1921 there were no windowpanes. They slept on wooden bunks, with no bedclothes. There was a permanent shortage of firewood and water. The daily food ration amounted to one pound of bread and – theoretically – soup without meat was distributed once a day. In fact, there was not even any soup, since it could not be cooked due to lack of firewood or water. Sometimes the POWs were given six zolotniks of sugar. *“During nine months underwear was given to the prisoners twice. Since laundry was made difficult, lice spawned to an alarming extent”*<sup>187</sup>. Similar conditions were to be observed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Working Regiment in Kharkiv, which *“was divided into six companies, of which Polish Communists were the commanders. In the war-ravaged city destroyed theatres and warehouses served as barracks. Food consisted of one pound of bread and soup made of half-rotten cabbage every day. Sanitary conditions were very harsh, vermin were always present, prisoners bathed once a month, once every two months their underwear was changed. The endlessly hungry prisoners were rushed to work and then to the «Polish Workers’ Club» for meetings and lectures. Such soviet [indoctrination] agitation was conducted by Polish Communists*

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социально-политической истории) [henceforth: RGASPI], fond 63, copy (opis) 1, case (sprawa) 205, k. 1–3.

<sup>187</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego), sygn. I.303.4.1707, Raport Ekspozytury Wydziału II Sztabu Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin o obozach jeńców w Rosji z 21 września 1921 r. [2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff Report unit 2<sup>nd</sup> Department of the Command Staff for the Lublin District regarding camps for prisoners in Russia, dated 21 September 1921].

*in a very active fashion, albeit with limited effect. Prisoners used to go to the club solely to drink a cup of hot tea and eat a piece of bread, since these were distributed after each meeting as an added incentive*<sup>188</sup>.

The largest number of camps, though not actually large in terms of the number of prisoners held, was located in Moscow and its vicinity. Officers were held in the Adroniewski camp, small, but one of the best organised. Conditions there were undoubtedly the best in comparison with other camps. *“POWs lived in small cells, prepared for three–six people. [...] A daily food ration consisted of  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and subsequently  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of bread, once a day soups with ten zolotniks of horse meat or beef, in the evening  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound of wheat groats. Aside from this, in the morning and evening hot water and a spoon of ersatz coffee was distributed. No sugar at all, raisins were dispensed, candy or nothing at all”*<sup>189</sup>.

The Soviet authorities established camps for the prisoners taking advantage of various buildings (abandoned barracks, monasteries, warehouses, post-industrial premises), often totally unsuited to quartering larger groups of people. They were lacking in running water, in sanitation, light and heating. There were neither beds nor bunks, hence out of necessity the prisoners slept on the floor, which was often made of stone or compact clay. Prisoners were not provided with bedclothes, blankets, rarely (or never) could they use baths or wash their underwear. A number of POWs were held in prisons together with criminals, profiteers, people regarded as the enemies of the Soviet state, or soldiers from the “white” formations.

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

Many soldiers were deprived of their uniforms, boots, blankets and personal belongings when taken prisoner. Valuable objects (rings, watches), coats and jackets were also taken away. Therefore, the majority of the POWs did not have appropriate clothes or boots when they entered camps.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1920 the Council of Labour and Defence – the body of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (henceforth RSFSR) supervising and coordinating the actions of the people’s commissars in the field of defence – commenced delegating the supervision of all the Polish POWs held in the RSFSR to the Main Directorate of Public Works of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). This very council and its area branches were to keep POWs in specially allocated quarters. The People’s Commissariat of Food was committed to providing POWs with a food standard comparable to the standard that Red Army soldiers serving in rear units received. The food rations for POWs were to be on the same level of rations for the army. The POWs were to receive the same remuneration as working Red Army soldiers<sup>190</sup>.

However, decisions made at the national level had no influence – or little influence – on the actual living conditions of the POWs and the work they did. POWs received food rations far below those of the soldiers of the Red Army serving in rear formations. The products they received (bread was of the most basic kind) were of low quality and of limited quantity. POWs who worked inside the camp and those employed in hard physical work outside the camp (most often loading and unloading wagons and barges) were sometimes given additional

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<sup>190</sup> RGASPI, fond 2, opis [copy] 1, sprawa [case] 15403, Protokół posiedzenia Rady Pracy i Obrony, 17 września 1920 r. [Protocol from the meeting of the Council for Labour and Defense dated 17 September 1920].

food rations. They also worked in factories, coal mines and metal ore mines. They worked on farms, performed logging, cleaned the streets in cities and repaired roads and rail infrastructure. Sometimes POWs volunteered to work hoping that they would receive a larger food ration or pay. In order to utilise the workforce at the maximum level, POWs were formed into working teams, working regiments and brigades. Those working in farming or agri-processing plants (sugar plants, mills, oil mills) were in a relatively better position, since they could 'organize' additional food products for consumption.

In the written testimonies and questionnaires, which they had to complete after their return in the country, Polish POWs testified that their nutrition in captivity was very poor; it was not unheard of that for two or three days they would receive no food at all. This was justified not only by the disastrous economical state of Soviet Russia (especially with regard to food rations), but also by the poor organization of the supply system for the camps, the incompetence of camp authorities, as well as malpractice and the theft of products intended for prisoners.

In most camps the sanitary conditions were truly tragic. The sanitary service of the Red Army was responsible for sanitary-medical operations in the camps. Points of medical care, the so-called quarters, were created where the sick could be treated as well as those who suffered accidents at work. There were also camp hospitals and field hospitals, but there were no medicines, nor regular dressings nor any products necessary to maintain hygiene.

The consequence of malnutrition, of being housed in cold, dirty and stale rooms, of the impossibility to change clothes or even doing the laundry was a plague of lice and bugs. These conditions prompted the spread of infectious diseases.

In the descriptions by POWs held in Boroviche we can read:

*“A group of our prisoners came to the camp on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1920 in a number of around three hundred people. They were accommodated in the disinfected barracks, given underwear, towels and some were provided with blankets. This sequence, however, lasted only for some time, and after a month this cleanliness disappeared. Filth, lice and typhus, of which circa eighty people died during winter and spring, were everywhere.*

*Those who were slightly sick were taken to the camp infirmary, where they were left almost totally bereft of any care, and those who were severely sick were taken to hospitals. Having chosen his assistant from among the prisoners, a man whose name was Besler, the camp commandant, a Latvian called Jent, then robbed the prisoners of every portion of bread or sugar. They sold even the clothes belonging to those staying in the infirmary. [...] The camp commandant Jent, subsequently, Vinogradov, tolerated all manner of acts of violence and cruel treatment by the transportation staff and officials towards the prisoners. Moreover, they often actively participated in them. There were cases of prisoners being badly beaten”<sup>191</sup>.*

Aside from camps in which the prisoners stayed permanently, there were also some that constituted temporary points. One such was the Camp of Forced Labour in Petersburg. Prisoners who returned from hospitals were sent there. From there they were sent on for labour secondment, mainly to the working groups spread out along the Murmansk Railway.

In June, the head of the Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs General Lieutenant MD Franciszek

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<sup>191</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego), sygn. I.303.4.1707, Raport Ekspozytury Wydziału II Sztabu Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin o obozach jeńców w Rosji z 21 września 1921 r. [2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff Report Unit 2<sup>nd</sup> Department of the Command Staff for the Lublin District on camps for prisoners in Russia dated 21 September 1921].

Zwierzchowski received information on the state of sanitary conditions in Russia from the Polish Delegation of the Joint Commission on Repatriation the result of their inspections incamps for the Polish POWs. When forwarding on the data that he received to Branch II of the Headquarters, he wrote:

*“I am in possession of information on the sanitary conditions in Russia this time exceptionally from private sources. Owing to the extraordinary situation in which our Delegation is working, I consider it inexpedient to inform the official offices. To a certain extent, these private sources reflect reality more closely than our official sources. This is a result of the fact that official statistics – as in today’s Russia – are intended to prove, above all, that the Communist party and its conduct are in every respect leading the country to a common state of happiness, that the present indisposition, or rather catastrophic state, of the economy will pass, that social life will improve in every respect. Therefore, with regard to sanitary conditions, reality will also have to yield way to the goals of party agitation [ideology] in other words, that the «excellent proletarian sanitary organization» operates effectively so that the epidemic of typhus has been combated, etc.*

*Through articles in the contemporary [Soviet] press, during meetings, with Communist doctors and their superior Siemaszko MD (The National Commissariat for Health Care) prove that only the proletariat with their «red doctors», «red sisters» and various committees of the proletariat can fight the epidemic more effectively than bourgeois countries”<sup>192</sup>.*

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<sup>192</sup> RPWA, fond 308, opis 10, sprawa 278, k. 532, Pismo szefa Departamentu Sanitarnego Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych gen. ppor. lek. Franciszka Zwierzchowskiego do Oddziału II Sztabu, 21 czerwca 1921 r., k. 532. [Copy 10, case 278, k. 532, Letter of the Head of the Department of

The terrible social, living and sanitary conditions, in which large groups of POWs, which amounted to a few hundred or even a few thousand, were quartered, resulted in prisoners coming down with infectious diseases on a large scale, such as spotted typhus, relapsing typhus and dysentery which plagued Russia at this time. In the information of the Polish Delegation to the Joint Commission on Repatriation it was reported that: *“Soldiers report a terrible form of typhus which struck in the autumn [1920] and winter of the previous year [1920/1921], now there is no typhus «since almost everyone got sick in the winter». For the time being, it appears to be very difficult to get hold of any statistics for this epidemic”*<sup>193</sup>.

There is still no data referring to the number of Polish POWs who fell victim to infectious diseases. On the basis of the fragmentary information on the epidemiological situation in individual camps, we can estimate that this number might have amounted to a few thousand people. In Kharkiv alone there might have been around 3,000 people. Second Lieutenant Stefan Kazimierczak, an officer of III Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Legions (3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division of the Legions), bombardier Witold Laskowski from 2<sup>nd</sup> battery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the Cavalry Artillery (1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division), and private soldiers Jan Kujda and Kazimierz Jarzębiński from II battalion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division), all officially testified that:

*“On arriving in Kharkiv, the 3<sup>rd</sup> working regiment was formed from Polish prisoners. Barracks were arranged in a building unsuitable for living. A few hundred POWs were*

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Sanitation at the Ministry for Armed Forces General Franciszek Zwierzchowski to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the High Command dated 21 June 1921].

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 534.

*quartered in small rooms; bare bunks were prepared for sleeping, on which only a third of the people could sleep, while the rest slept on a dirty floor. For all this time provisions were distributed irregularly, and there were days during which we received nothing. Pay due to soldiers (one thousand two hundred Soviet roubles a month) was almost never paid (the money went to the Red commanders of the companies). Seven hundred people received uniforms in December, the rest when they were leaving for Poland. [During the stay] A bath without disinfection was arranged four times, underwear was changed three times, the consequence of which were epidemics, dysentery, typhus, jaundice (and those of cholera and plague less often) decimating the regiment which remained with no sanitary supervision. Out of 3,000 [Polish] POWs in Kharkiv only one soldier did not suffer severely, out of 180 sent on labour secondment to Mykolaiv, 40 returned – the rest died. On 28<sup>th</sup> August 1920 [some] 3,300 POWs<sup>194</sup> left for the Donbass, 900 returned to Kharkiv at the end of May – the remaining died [a few words unintelligible] epidemic. Despite this critical state of affairs all prisoners had to work, specialists had permanent jobs, some were taken to institutions for temporary work, the remainder cleaned the city, loaded wagons, etc.”<sup>195</sup>.*

These extremely harsh living conditions did not stop Polish Communists from conducting aggressive agitation or

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<sup>194</sup> English Editor's note; This higher number referred to in the account might relate to an ethnically mixed group of prisoners, ie Poles and others.

<sup>195</sup> CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych, sygn. I.300.500, Protokół-sprawozdanie z położenia jeńców Polaków w 3. pułku robotniczym w Charkowie, 7 lipca 1921 r. [2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the Ministry of the Armed Forces sygn. I.300.500. Protocol report on the conditions of the Polish prisoners in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Labour Regiment in Kharkiv 7 July 1921].

indoctrination among the prisoners. In June 1920, the Polish Bureau at the Smolensk Governorate Committee of the Communist Party of Russia sent a letter to the Polish Bureau at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia in which it was postulated that the matter of political-propaganda work be settled among the prisoners. They drew attention to the fact that *“as the war on, the Western Front was growing with bourgeois Poland, the matter of Polish POWs taken prisoner became more and more important and urgent. Direct monitoring of the Smolensk Polish Bureau<sup>196</sup> led to the conviction that it seemed necessary for Polish Communists with the help of their organisations to take an active role and carry out the agitation and propaganda work among the Polish prisoners. The Polish Army is falling apart and our agitation among those taken prisoner is always successful in preparing future revolutionary fighters for the workers’ rule in Poland”<sup>197</sup>.*

One and a half years later in November 1921, the so called Polish Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Russia summarized their actions among the prisoners, emphasizing that: *“When prisoners of the Polish Army arrived from the Western Front in larger numbers, the Polish Bureau understood instantly how important the work among these*

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<sup>196</sup> The above “direct monitoring” took place in the camp of the Polish POWs in Smolensk. It was at that time when the temporary (staging) camp to which POWs captured on the territory of Belarus during the first May offensive of the Soviet Western Front led by Tukhachevsky were sent. The number of prisoners held in the camp fluctuated – it ranged from two hundred to as much as one and a half thousand. After a short stay, prisoners were sent to permanent camps, situated deep inside Russia. After the new offensive on the Western Front commenced on 4<sup>th</sup> July, the number of POWs in the camp increased once again to around one thousand.

<sup>197</sup> RGASPI, fond 63, opis [copy] 1, sprawa [case] 240, k. 88v, Pismo z 5 czerwca 1920 r. [Letter dated 5 June 1920].

*proletarians and peasants was, with the majority having been forced to take up military uniforms. [...]*

*The specific periods when [agitation or propaganda] work was carried out among the POWs are characterized separately:*

*The first period comprises August and mid-September [1920]. This was devoted to collecting data on the living conditions of the prisoners and their status, establishing contacts with those interested and internal institutions as well as organization of the section.*

*The second period lasted from mid-September 1920 until 1<sup>st</sup> February [1921]. During the first few weeks, the data obtained was to be systematized, evaluated and on this basis a plan of work was to be elaborated. It soon transpired that the very first task was the regulation of the administrative side of the prison camps and the material protection of the POWs, as well as remedial work with reference to all injustice or criminal activity and disorder, which started to appear here and there. Harsh orders, and above all, the appointment of suitable commandants and instructors in the camps, very soon eliminated all unwelcome phenomena. The matter of material protection (quarters, provisions and clothes) cost a lot in terms of effort and energy. Owing to the arduous steps, this aspect was also successfully solved. Only after these fundamental aspects were completed, could one proceed to further political and educational work. The results of this work can be illustrated by the following figures.*

*There were thirty-four camps with a total of 24,000 POWs. The number of instructors amounted to thirty-four.*

<i>Schools for the illiterate</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Number of students in them</i>	<i>639</i>
<i>Libraries organised</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Clubs</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Meetings organised</i>	<i>99</i>

<i>Lectures delivered</i>	151
<i>Talks organised</i>	432
<i>Party circles</i>	11
<i>Party members and candidates</i>	123
<i>Party schools</i>	6
<i>Number of those who joined the Red Army</i>	186

*The third period lasted from 1<sup>st</sup> February to 15<sup>th</sup> November 1921. From the moment of the transfer of the Polish Department «Pura»<sup>198</sup> to the Main Board of the social works<sup>199</sup>, the work among the POWs of the Polish Army henceforth took on the following form:*

*1) All POWs of the Polish Army were registered in sub-departments of social works and organized into work teams.*

*2) To conduct cultural and educational work, a sufficient number of instructors were appointed.*

*3) To strengthen political and educational work, commissioners were appointed for the prisoners' affairs in all governorates with Polish POWs.*

*In Central Russia and Siberia (except for Ukraine) in thirty-seven camps there were 32,000 POWs. Forty-five commissioners and instructors conducted work among these prisoners.*

*In compliance with the resolutions of the Council for Work and Defence of 15<sup>th</sup> [17<sup>th</sup>] September 1920, the POWs of the Polish Army were organized into work teams:*

*a) A work team consisted of three hundred and sixty people and was divided into platoons and these into sub-squads.*

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<sup>198</sup> PUR (ИИР) – The Political Directorate of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (Политическое управление Реввоенсовета).

<sup>199</sup> It was the Main Board of the Public Works of the People's Commissariat for the Internal Affairs.

b) The commanders of these teams was appointed by the staff of the people's & peasants' army.

c) The prisoners were provisioned in line with the prevailing norms applicable to Red Army soldiers in the rear.

Main workplaces:

a) In coal mines, in Skopin, Ryazan governorate, in Siberia and Kuznetsk Basin.

b) In forestry works – for the preparation of firewood.

c) In the commissariat of roads and transportation – the erection and repair of rail tracks, loading and unloading wagons and ships.

d) In Soviet farms.

#### CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

Cultural and educational Commissions were organized within every Work Team or in every camp, these consisted of three people (exclusively prisoners) who worked under the supervision of the instructor of a given team or camp.

Their work looked like this:

Schools for the illiterate (except Siberia)	29
The total number of learners attending (POWs)	8 382
Clubs – reading rooms	15
Libraries	37
Theatres	12

#### POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

Party circles	42
Party members and candidates	397
Party schools	9
Learners	123
Meetings on various topics for the whole period	544

<i>Lectures and talks</i>	2 839
<i>Various assemblies</i>	214
<i>Monthly average of meetings on different topics</i>	150
<i>Lectures on different topics</i>	290
<i>Talks on different topics</i>	500
<i>Various assemblies</i>	40

*The re-evacuation of the prisoners started in the second half of March [1921]; by 1<sup>st</sup> November [1921] 25,000 prisoners had been sent back.*

*Around 2,000 POWs stayed in Soviet Russia voluntarily.*

*Notice: the data in this report concerns Central Russia and Siberia. Ukraine is not included, since it worked [with the POWs] separately.*

*It needs to be added that work on re-evacuation of the prisoners had not been completed in Siberia, and hence the staging points (in Moscow, Smolensk and Minsk) were to be prepared for the necessity of attending to POWs during their transport”<sup>200</sup>.*

After their repatriation and arrival back in Poland, POWs had to undergo compulsory sanitary quarantine, their identity was checked, the circumstances of their capture were clarified and their conduct during captivity verified. In the event of any ambiguities, POWs were sent to an Isolation Camp in Dęblin. There, conversations were conducted with them that were intended to explain these ambiguities; they also filled out specially prepared forms<sup>201</sup>.

<sup>200</sup> RGASPI, fond 63, opis [copy] 1, sprawa [case] 25, k. 30–38.

<sup>201</sup> English Editor’s note: It is instructive to note that the Polish authorities were sufficiently aware and attuned to the Kremlin’s propaganda skills and had thus prepared such a formal vetting process to verify the possibility that these indoctrination methods may have been applied to some of the POWs then returning from captivity.

*“QUESTIONNAIRE  
of the examination of soldiers and refugees returning from  
captivity*

*Name and surname of the person examined:*

*Assignment:*

*Place and year of birth:*

*Most recent place of residence:*

*Joined the army as a recruit or a volunteer:*

*Where and when taken prisoner:*

*Alone or in a larger group and with whom:*

*Prison camp they were sent to:*

*Who was the commander of the camp:*

*How many prisoners it held:*

*How were they fed:*

*Sanitary conditions in the camp:*

*Who led the propaganda:*

*The influence of the propaganda and who gave in to it:*

*Information of military content – general*

*Addresses of the people known to the examined,  
who are well disposed towards Poles*

*The level of education and intelligence of the examined:*

*(-) [signature of the examined]*

*The opinion on the examined given by the intelligence officer*

*(-) [Surname and name and the rank of the intelligence  
officer]*

*Certified true copy:*

*[signature].”*

Source: CAW, Oddział II Sztabu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych, sygn. I.300.76.493.

This sometimes lasted a few weeks in order to determine the identity, since POWs who were returning to Poland

commonly did not have any documents that could confirm their personal information, or they were traveling with documents that they had received while in captivity and which had been issued for other people. It was also important to determine how a prisoner had behaved in captivity. On the basis of the information collected, people who had been sent in transports with the aim of conducting anti-Polish activities were identified. Their personal details were handed to the II Division of the Staff of the Ministry of Military Affairs and other military and police bodies responsible for the security of the state. By way of illustration, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November the Forward Post in Dęblin reported as follows:

*“To*

*II Division of the General Staff  
in Warsaw*

*I received information from one of the prisoners who arrived in our Isolation Camp that the following privates arrived with him:*

*1. Kalina Jan from 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment 2<sup>nd</sup> Machine-Gun Company*

*2. Wroński Wacław 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Regiment*

*3. Rak Stanisław 9<sup>th</sup> Guard Rifle Regiment*

*4. Łyskasz Bronisław 4<sup>th</sup> [Guard Rifle Regiment]*

*5. Dudka Cyryl 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Legions, 10<sup>th</sup> company*

*6. Norzyc Adam 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> company*

*7. Pacht Natan 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> company*

*– who had [all] served in the Red Army in Petersburg, were trusted by the commissars and had most probably come to Poland to realise objectives.*

*The above privates are finishing a 14-day quarantine on 11<sup>th</sup> November and will leave for their original units [...].*

*The above-mentioned information I communicate with a request to issue further orders*<sup>202</sup>.

Last convoys with the POWS arrived in Poland at the beginning of 1922. However, as mentioned earlier many did not return. Therefore, personal letters – “*Lists of the missing POWs*” were forwarded to the Polish Delegation to the Joint Commission in Moscow from the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs. The above lists were sent by the Polish Delegation to the Russian–Ukrainian Delegation on Repatriation in Moscow. In a letter dated 7<sup>th</sup> February 1922, they requested:

*“In the attachment, the Polish Delegation is sending a list of Polish POWs who were taken prisoner but who have not returned so far and about whom no information is known.*

*The Polish Delegation requests that every possible search be initiated, and if located, they be sent to Poland.*

*At the same time the Polish Delegation requests that information be sent with the results of this search*<sup>203</sup>.

A list of four hundred and ten prisoners were added to this letter. Basic personal details (surname, name, name of father, date and place of birth) were provided, military assignment, date and place of being taken prisoner, and in some cases also the possible place of captivity subsequent to been taken prisoner<sup>204</sup>.

During the days which followed, the Polish Delegation to the Joint Commission sent subsequent letters to the Russian–Ukrainian Delegation on Repatriation in Moscow, asking for

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<sup>202</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the General Staff (Oddział II Sztabu Głównego (Generalnego), sygn. I.303.4..2480, Letter from the orward Offensive Position to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of the Ministry for the Armed Forces dated 2 November 1921 (Pismo Posterunku Ofensywy do Oddziału II Sztabu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych, 2 listopada 1921 r.).

<sup>203</sup> GARF, fond R.-8358, copy (opis) 8, case (sprawa) 31, k. 7.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, k. 11–28.

information on the POWs figuring on the lists delivered. For instance, a list sent on 14<sup>th</sup> February included the personal details of eighteen prisoners<sup>205</sup>, a list drawn up on 20<sup>th</sup> February – a further sixty<sup>206</sup>. It is somewhat difficult today to estimate how effective these official interventions were. For sure, they played some role, since from January to July of 1922 almost 2,500 more POWs returned to the country.

During the Polish-Soviet war, which started on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1919 and ended on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1921 with the peace treaty in Riga, around 44,000 soldiers of the Polish Army were assumed to have been taken prisoner. They became Soviet POWs. By July 1922 around 35,500 had returned to Poland. Some POWs – around 2,000 – decided to stay in Soviet Russia. Therefore, we can assume that it is clear what happened to around 37,500 prisoners after the war. There is, however, no knowledge of what happened to the rest. Thus, the fate of the remaining 6,500 remains unknown. Multiple hypotheses can be formulated that they were simply murdered by the fast-moving Soviet units just after being taken prisoner, they were killed or died during transport, met death in the camps or prisons having been killed or died in captivity, that they remained in Soviet Russia without informing anyone, that they escaped from captivity, but for differing reasons did not return to their home country. However, these are all just hypotheses. In order to receive answers, to at least some of these questions, meticulous research still needs to be conducted. The foundation of this should be archival research, conducted especially in Russia and Ukraine, [specifically] territorial archives in the areas where camps with Polish POWs were located, and work teams were formed with

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, k. 41v.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, k. 45–46.

their participation (teams, regiments, brigades). Such research would most certainly bring positive results. By way of illustration, we may point to the research conducted by Dr Renata Opłakańska in the Archives of Minusinsk [near the Mongolian border] which served as the source for a subsequent article<sup>207</sup> on the repatriation of soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division to Poland, who following their capitulation near Krasnoyarsk in January 1920 were held in Soviet captivity in the Yenisey governorate in southern Siberia. Of course, any further future archival research will be dependent on effective co-operation with the relevant Russian and Ukrainian authorities.

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<sup>207</sup> Р. Оплаканская, *Трудная дорога домой. О репатриации военнопленных 5-й польской стрелковой дивизии на юге Сибири в 1921 г.*, „Europa Orientalia. Studia z Dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich” [“Europe of the Orient. A Study of the Annals of Eastern Europe and the Balkan Countries”] 2015, vol. 6, pp. 59–72.



## Chapter 3

Zbigniew Karpus

### Soviet Prisoners of War in Captivity in Poland in the Years 1919–1921

The topic of prisoners of war, the interned, repatriates and forced labourers who were deported from the area then occupied by the countries of the Triple Alliance (or Central Powers), was one of the most important matters in Polish-Soviet relations. The numbers involved were vast, amounting to many millions of people who relocated both from the west to the east and in the opposite direction. This mass phenomenon commenced immediately after the conclusion of World War I, at a time of rebirth for the Independent Polish state<sup>1</sup>. It needs to be emphasized that the first repatriations of Poles from the East took place even earlier, just after the peace treaty between Germany and Austria-Hungary and Bolshevik Russia had been signed in Brest-Litovsk<sup>2</sup>. Nonetheless, these repatriations did not have a mass character and moreover they were intentionally

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<sup>1</sup> English Editor note: and the simultaneous collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian, German and Russian Empires.

<sup>2</sup> English Editor note: This treaty complemented the German Empire's intention to create a series of dependent eastern 'satellite states' including Poland and Ukraine all closely tied to the German state and economy.

hindered by the German occupying authorities. Mass repatriations did not commence until the end of war in November 1918. The earliest, examples of this phenomenon could be observed on the western border of the reemerging Polish state<sup>3</sup>.

As a result of the defeat of the Central Powers, the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the revolution in Germany, prisoners of war, citizens of the former Russian Empire the interned and people forcibly taken for labour –started to return from the eastern border regions of the Central Powers to their homelands (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, the Baltic states). The first groups of Russian POWs and forced labourers moved onto the territory of what was then the Kingdom of Poland<sup>4</sup> freed from German occupation as early as mid-November 1918, that is during the period of formation of centralised state power in Warsaw, Poland. Russians were returning to their homes via the main land communication lines that lead through the territory of Poland from west to east<sup>5</sup>.

Warsaw was for many the first stage in the journey to the east: with its main railway junction where people arriving sheltered

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<sup>3</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy i ukraińscy na terenie Polski w latach 1918–1924*. [Imprisoned and interned Russians and Ukrainians on Polish lands in the years 1918–1924], Toruń 1997, p. 15–17.

<sup>4</sup> English Editor note: An earlier satellite Polish state entity set up during WW I by the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Reich.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem, Ewakuacja rosyjskich jeńców wojennych przez terytorium Polski w pierwszych miesiącach po odzyskaniu niepodległości (listopada 1918 – październik 1919* [w:] *Od obcego panowania do niepodległego państwa. Materiały sesji naukowej zorganizowanej na 70-lecie odbudowany Państwa Polskiego*, red. [Evacuation of Russian prisoners of war through Polish territory in the first months after independence (November 1918 – October 1919) [in:] *From foreign dominion to an independent state. Material from the academic proceedings organized for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reformation of the Polish State*. Edited by] M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 1991, pp. 75–93.

in the old German barracks in the Powązki district (it had been partly destroyed by the people of Warsaw after 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918). The first transport of Russian POWs left Kalisz for Warsaw shortly after the evacuation of the Germans on 14<sup>th</sup> November. The Russians held in the prison camp in Szczypiorno were travelling in these transports. In total, just in the period only from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of November some 14,000 POWs were sent from Kalisz<sup>6</sup>.

The situation was similar in the prison camp of Strzałkowo<sup>7</sup>, in the prison camps in Pomerania (Tuchola, Czersk, Dantzig/Gdańsk and Schneidemühl/Piła) and in East Prussia (Lautenburg/Lidzbark Warmiński and Arys/Orzysz). The process of evacuation of these POWs and Russian labourers from Germany to the east occurred in an unrestricted fashion and without any obstacles in place on the German side (this approach could be observed in November and December 1918). In this way, the German authorities endeavoured to swiftly rid themselves of surplus peoples on their territory, especially owing to the difficulties presented in providing for them, and also, as Polish authorities suspected, they sought to destabilize the situation in a re-emerging Poland<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych [henceforth: AAN], Rada Główna Opiekuńcza [Main Welfare Council], vol. 1347, Pismo Komisarza Opieki Społecznej na Ziemię Kaliską do Ministra Opieki Społecznej z 16 listopada 1918 r. [Letter of the Commissioner for Social Affairs in the Kalisz lands to the Minister for Social Affairs]; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> English Editor Note: Located east of Poznan on the then existing border of the Kingdom of Poland and German II Reich, in the region now known as Greater Poland

<sup>8</sup> Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [henceforth: CAW], Gabinet Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych, vol. 402, Pismo Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników do Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych z 17 marca 1919 r., k. 609–610; AAN, Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów RP, Protokół z 158. posiedzenia z 25 kwietnia 1919 r. [Office of the

This spontaneous process of Russian nationals relocating from the west to the east was halted at the end of January 1919. When, on the explicit demand of the Polish authorities, the Entente countries forbade transports of Russian POWs and labourers to the east through Polish territory as of 22<sup>nd</sup> January of that year. During the next few weeks, the Polish authorities closed the western and northern borders by forming border guard units. To give an impression of the scale of the migration phenomena taking place in the first weeks after Poland regained independence, we need to state that from 15<sup>th</sup> November 1918 until 20<sup>th</sup> January 1919 over 510,000 people in total transited into Poland from the west, a number comprised of 210,000 Poles, 281,000 Russians and 20,000 POWs of other nationalities. In total there were circa two million Russian POWs as well as a few hundred thousand forced labourers being held in the lands of the Central Powers during World War I<sup>9</sup>.

The authorities of the Polish state re-emerging in November 1918 quickly perceived a security problem resulting from this mass migration, which occurred after the termination of the hostilities. Therefore, to control this phenomenon, as early as 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 the National Office for the Return of POWs, Refugees and Labourers commenced its activity (following an official decree for its establishment by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland of 30<sup>th</sup> December 1918). This institution was formed out of branches of the earlier existing Central

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Ministry of Armed Forces [**henceforth**: MS Wojsk.], vol. 402. Letter by the State Department for the repatriation of: POWs, refugees, and labourers to the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 17 March 1919, p.p. 609-610: The Central Archives of Modern Records hereinafter AAN, Protocols from the Polish Republic Cabinet Meetings, Protocol of the 158 sitting of 25 April 1919.]

<sup>9</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 18-19.

Welfare Council, which had been established by the German initiated and controlled Regency Council<sup>10</sup>.

Those Russian POWs and labourers who still remained deep in Germany having not managed to secure evacuation to the east by 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1919 were now to be taken care of by the authorities of Germany and Soviet Russia. They simply had to find a new evacuation route. Eventually, they were transported via sea – from Szczecin to Riga or to Petrograd (St. Petersburg), a process which continued until 1921. Poland thus did not consent to any transports of Russian POWs from Germany in the late autumn of 1920<sup>11</sup>.

We should point out that the Soviet authorities in Moscow themselves very quickly noticed a problem with the Russian POWs and labourers evacuated to their homeland via Polish territory. Even by the beginning of December 1918, a delegation of the Russian Red Cross sent from Moscow with Efim Weisbrod at its head presented itself to the State Office for the Return of the POWs, Refugees and Labourers. The purpose of this delegation was not only to organize humanitarian aid, but also to initiate political talks with the Polish authorities in Warsaw. Meanwhile the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, adhering to the general principles of Polish policy then in force to refrain

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<sup>10</sup> AAN, (Prezydium Rady Ministrów RP) 1918–1939 [The Presidium of The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Poland **henceforth**: PRM], vol. 9856/1919, Sprawozdanie z działalności Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników z 1919 r. [Report on Activities of the State Department for the Repatriation of PoWs Refugees and Workers from 1919], p. 144; A. Juzwenko, *Polska a „biała” Rosja od listopada 1918 do kwietnia 1920 r.* [Poland and ‘white’ Russia from November 1918 to April 1920], Wrocław 1973, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> J. Krasuski, *Historia Rzeszy Niemieckiej 1871–1945* [History of the German Reich 1871–1945], Poznań 1986, p. 281; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 22–29.

from establishing any contact with the Bolshevik authorities, refused to grant accreditation to this mission, as such it did not commence its activities.

Undeterred by this failure, the Soviet side then sent a new humanitarian mission, with Bronisław Wesołowski and Leon Alter at its head. This arrived in Warsaw on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1918. It also did not receive permission to undertake its activities, and its members were interned and after eleven days were subsequently expelled from Poland. As is known, during the return transport of this delegation to the east on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1919 a tragic event occurred. In the vicinity of the Łapy railway station near Białystok, four members of the delegation were shot dead by the Polish functionaries escorting them<sup>12</sup>. These actions were condemned by the Polish authorities and the perpetrators were brought to justice.

Only the third mission of the Russian Red Cross led by Paweł Hess, which arrived in Warsaw at the very end of December 1918, was granted permission to undertake its activities. This delegation secured the recommendation of the Russian Charitable Society acting in Warsaw and that of the International Red Cross. Only then were the Poles confident that its members would not engage in the conduct of political activities. This mission was instead engaged in giving aid to citizens of the Russian Empire travelling through Poland from the west to the east. It was however not to give aid to Bolshevik POWs who started to arrive in Polish camps after the Polish-Soviet clashes commenced, ie from mid-February 1919<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> English editor note: These events are well known to many Poles moreover, they occurred at a highly sensitive time when the Red Army was seizing Vilna from the hands of the Polish Army.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 47–52; W. Materski, *Tarcza Europy. Stosunki polsko-sowieckie 1918–1939* [The shield of Europe. Polish-Soviet Relations 1918–1939], Warszawa 1994, pp. 27–28.

In the first months of the Polish-Soviet war, these battles were not overly intense in nature, and therefore the number of the POWs on both sides was limited. By comparison, it should be added that in November 1919 (that is in the period when this conflict in the east was suspended and Polish-Soviet negotiations were taking place in Mikaszewicze) there were 7,096 Bolshevik POWs in Poland (Table 1), in the camps in Strzałkowo, Wadowice, Łańcut, Pikulice, Dąbie and Brest-Litovsk. There were thus not many of these POWs, and therefore this problem was not discussed during the talks in Mikaszewicze (now in Belarus and named Mikashevichy).

**Table 1.** Number of the Bolshevik POWs in Poland in 1919.

Camps for Bolshevik POWs	Number of POWs (November 1919)
Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	2 784
Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	1 860
Prison Camp No. 3 in Łańcut	–
Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	2 036
Prison Camp No. 5 in Brest- Litovsk	1 002
Internment Camp No. I in Dąbie (near Krakow)	1 274
Internment Camp No. II in Dęblin	–
Internment Camp No. III in Modlin	–
Total	7 096*
20 labour units of the POWs working mainly at the railroad construction	–
Total	7 096*

\* such data are to be found in the document of the army  
– such a phenomenon does not exist, camps in liquidation

Source: CAW, Branch IV Polish Army High Command [**Henceforth: NDWP**] (Prisoners section) volume 35a. Clarifications of the Ministry of War regarding prisoners and the interned presented to the Polish Parliamentary Commission on 6 November 1919; Branch I of the Ministry of War volume 276, Presentation on the topic of camps for prisoners and holding areas of 1919 k.2-9.

The issue of the release of the Polish hostages held by the Soviet powers and the mutual exchange of interned civilians was discussed in Mikaszewicze. The Polish side attempted as far as possible to ensure for the Bolshevik POWs and also Ukrainian POWs from the Ukrainian People's Republic and West Ukrainian People's Republic, appropriate living conditions in the camps. Not always was this possible. It should be noted that in the autumn-winter period at the turn of 1919 and 1920 difficult conditions with regard to sanitation and provisions were observed in some of the camps. This was caused by neglect on the side of the central military authorities and the actual commanders of the specific camps. This problem was spotted by among others the Polish press, but also by Parliament, whose delegation visited the respective prison camps. Its report was then presented during the plenary debates in parliament. As a result of the interventions of Members of Parliament in the spring of 1920, significant improvements in the prisoners' conditions were implemented. At the beginning of spring, many POWs in the camps were now released home (these were mainly Ukrainians from East Galicia), and Bolshevik POWs in turn were sent to work in agriculture and for state institutions. In this way their living conditions (provisions and sanitary needs) improved noticeably<sup>14</sup>.

It should be emphasized that the Polish authorities had no intention to hide information on the living conditions of the POWs staying in the Polish camps, and they were made public for foreign charity missions who were in Poland at the time

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<sup>14</sup> CAW, Oddział I MSWojsk [1<sup>st</sup> Branch of the Ministry of the Armed Forces], vol. 99, Opis stosunków sanitarnych w obozach jeńców i Stacjach Rozdzielczych z 15 marca 1920 r. [Description of sanitary conditions in the PoW camps and the Regulating Stations (Processing Facilities) as of 15 March 1920]; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, p. 53.

(American, British, Ukrainian). Their reports, sometimes very critical, have been preserved in both the Polish and Russian archives<sup>15</sup>. Members of these missions were allowed to enter camps, despite the fact that Poland (similarly to tsarists Russia and Bolshevik Russia) had not yet signed the Hague Convention, nor the Geneva Convention, both of which referred to POWs. The Polish military authorities in a number of preserved documents stressed that, although Poland had not signed up to the above conventions, it was applying them with reference to the Bolshevik POWs.

For the Polish authorities, the bigger problems with the Bolshevik POWs started after the victorious Battle of Warsaw. As a consequence of this clash, over 40,000 Red Army members were taken prisoner (Table 2), while subsequent battles increased this number extensively. It is estimated that after the end of the Polish-Soviet conflict (that is after 18<sup>th</sup> October 1920) on the terrain of Poland there were circa 80,000 Soviet POWs, that is those who could have been considered prisoners of war (Table 3). A subsequent 25,000 Soviet POWs had volunteered for the anti-Bolshevik military units then being formed in Poland (those of General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, and General Boris Permikin, the Cossack units of Vadim Jakovlev and Alexander Salnikov and the Ukrainian units of Symon Petlura)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Z. Karpus, *Opieka medyczno-sanitarna nad jeńcami bolszewickimi w Polsce w latach 1919–1921* [Medical and sanitary care for Soviet PoWs in Poland 1919–1921] [in:] *Historia medycyny wojskowej na przestrzeni dziejów* [History of military medicine through the ages], ed. A. Felchner, B. Płonka-Syroka, Wrocław 1997, pp. 76–88.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 62–65; *idem*, *Wschodni sojusznicy Polski w wojnie 1920 roku. Oddziały wojskowe ukraińskie, rosyjskie, kozackie i białoruskie w Polsce w latach 1919–1920* [Eastern allies of Poland in the war of 1920. Armed units of Ukrainian, Russian, Cossack and Belarussian forces in Poland 1919–1920], Toruń 1999, pp. 169–170.

**Table 2.** Number of the Soviet POWs taken prisoner during the Battle of Warsaw until 10<sup>th</sup> September 1920.

Army	Date	Number of POWs
1. Army	until 8.09.1920	8 914
2. Army*	–	–
3. Army	until 10.09.1920	3 756
4. Army	until 10.09.1920	13 179
5. Army	until 10.09.1920	13 669
6. Army	until 10.09.1920	1 643
Total	until 10.09.1920	41 161

\* this army sent all the POWs to the 4<sup>th</sup> Army (its Distribution Posts and Control Stations)

Source CAW, Branch IV Polish Army High Command [NDWP] (Prisoners section) volume 17 Lists of Bolshevik prisoners registered at the Transit Points and Concentration Stations for prisoners from 14 August to 10 September 1920. Report from the inspection of facilities for prisoners, 2nd Army 5 October 1920.

**Table 3.** Number of the Soviet POWs in Poland in 1920 (November–December). Note In these tables and within the text of this chapter the word *Station of Concentration* will be used as a literal translation of the Polish phrase to describe what were in fact holding areas for POWs prior to their onward transport to other camps or to repatriation points. These were not camps in a formal sense and were in no way analogous to the Concentration camps organised and run on Polish sovereign territory during the Nazi German occupation of 1939 to 1945.

Camps and other facilities for POWs and the Interned	Number of POWs	
	10.11	20–22.12
Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	16 402	14 624
Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	439	1 705
Prison Camp No. 3 in Łańcut	–	–
Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	822	734
Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno	1 712	1 096
Prison Camp No. 6 in Tuchola	4 000	6 960

Camps and other facilities for POWs and the Interned	Number of POWs	
	10.11	20–22.12
Internment Camp No. I in Dąbie (near Krakow)	2 905	3 369
Internment Camp No. 13 in Łuków	–	–
Regulating Station (or Processing Facility), Prisoner Station of Concentration Station in Puławy	1 461	998
Regulating Station (or Processing Facility) in Stryj	200	196
Regulating Station (Processing Facility), Prisoner Station of Concentration No. 21 in Białystok	–	162
Regulating Station (Processing Facility), Prisoner Station of Concentration No. 22 in Dorohusk	–	120
Regulating Station (Processing facility), Prisoner Station of Concentration No. 23 in Lvov	31	34
Prisoner Distribution Post (Transit Point) in Wołkowysk (Vaukavysk in Belarus)	–	393
Prisoner Distribution Post (Transit Point) in Brest-Litovsk (Brest in Belarus)	–	462
Prisoner Distribution Post (Transit Point) in Kowel (Kovel in Ukraine)	–	202
Prisoner Exchange Point in Baranowicze (Baranavichy in Belarus)	–	
Prisoner Exchange Point in Równe (Rivne in Ukraine)		
Total	31 842	29 305
For labour in the working units and private people	45 000	–
Total	76 842	–

Source: CAW, Branch I Ministry of Armed Forces, volume 276, Report nr 34 on the situation in camps 23 September 1921; volume 118, Report nr 3 from 22 December 1920 r.; 1<sup>st</sup> Corp District Command, volume. 9, Report nr 40 of 5 March 1921; Branch IV NDWP (General Affairs), volume 21, (Case Nr 4260) Report nr 22 from 26 I (January) 1921; Biuro of the Ministry of Army Affairs, volume 402, Report nr 10 from 30 May 1921; CAW (Central Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Intelligence Section), Branch II, volume s5, 58, Reports nr 29 and 37 from 23 August and 12 October 1921, p. 64–64a, 171–172.

The number of Soviet POWs who were in Poland in the autumn of 1920 was thus significant. The Polish side had great difficulty taking proper care of them, especially in the face of the approaching autumn and winter cold. Moreover, in the autumn of 1920 the Poles were unprepared for this situation, all the more so since there were other important matters distracting from the attention of the Polish authorities, which had to be quickly handled. Among them was the problem of the 50,000 interned soldiers and their families from the former Poland allied Russian-Ukrainian military units, who at the end of November 1920 with the cessation of hostilities were again in the territory of Poland. Furthermore, there were issues with the demobilization of its own units at the front (including the transport of volunteers fighting in the units of General Józef Haller's Blue Army Poles from America), as well as the exodus of people from Soviet Russia (Polish POWs, migrants and escapees), which commenced immediately after the termination of hostilities<sup>17</sup>.

The magnitude of the tasks that awaited the Polish authorities that autumn meant that especially at the turn of 1920 and 1921 massive problems emerged, especially in the prison camps and the camps for the interned former Polish allies. The Polish authorities had difficulty securing appropriate lodging, adequate sanitary and medical care, not to mention suitable provisions for the numbers of POWs and interned. These temporary problems led to dissatisfaction among the POWs and the interned, moreover, these were instrumentalised by the Soviet delegates during peace negotiations in Riga.

The Polish-Bolshevik war, including the earlier setbacks of the Polish army in the late spring and summer of 1920 meant

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<sup>17</sup> *Idem, Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 135–143.

that also many Polish soldiers were taken prisoner by the Soviets. Regrettably, it is quite apparent that providing an exact number is challenging, since there is no reliable Polish or Russian data on this topic. We can define this number at approximately 40,000 Polish POWs<sup>18</sup>. The Polish side was naturally greatly interested in them, and therefore much attention was given to their swift return during the peace negotiations in Riga. This issue was often raised also because, based on previous Polish experience it was feared that the Bolsheviks would start building military units of a so-called Polish Red Army from the ranks of Polish POWs. Such endeavours were indeed pursued in October 1920 in Bobrujsk (Babruysk). As intelligence reports state, as a result of persuasive agitation conducted by Polish Communists in the POW prison camps and the use of various coercive methods, even among the officers of lower ranks enlisted in the above-mentioned units. Therefore, the Polish side wished to promptly reach the camps where Poles were staying and in this way disrupt such Soviet plans<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The Russian National Military Archive in Moscow [**henceforth**: RPWA], fond 4, copy 3, case 423, 657; fond 7, copy 2, case 191, 398, 376, 805, *Materiały dotyczące pobytu w niewoli sowieckiej jeńców polskich; Zwycięzcy za drutami. Jeńcy polscy w niewoli* [Materials on the period of Soviet captivity of Polish POWs. Victors behind the wire. Polish POWs in captivity] (1919–1922.) *Dokumenty i materiały*, oprac. [Documents and materials elaborated by]. S. Alexandrowicz, and Z. Karpus, and W. Rezmer, Toruń 1995, pp. VIII–XIX.

<sup>19</sup> RPWA, fond 470, desc. 2, issue 19, *Ulotka Komunistycznej Partii Robotniczej Polski skierowana do jeńców wyjeżdżających z Rosji Sowieckiej* [Pamphlet of the Communist Workers Party of Poland for POWs repatriated from Soviet Russia]; fond 470, desc. 2, issue 10, *Raporty eksperta wojskowego, członka polskiej delegacji pokojowej w Rydze z listopada i grudnia 1920 r.* [Report of the Armed Forces Expert, of the Polish peace delegation to Riga for November and December 1920].

The first official Polish-Soviet document in which the problem of care for POWs was mentioned was an agreement signed on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1920 in Berlin by representatives of the Polish Red Cross and Russian Red Cross. This agreement prolonged the validity of an earlier agreement signed in November 1919 in Mikaszewicze that concerned the exchange of interned civilians, although in this new agreement both sides also ensured the protection of POWs of the Polish-Soviet war. This help was to be provided through the agency of delegates appointed by the Polish Red Cross and the Russian Red Cross. In Poland, aid for Bolshevik POWs and interned civilians was to be provided by Stefania Sempołowska of the Russian Red Cross, and for Soviet Russian care over Polish POWs this was in the hands of Katarzyna Pieszkowa<sup>20</sup>.

Sempołowska and her co-workers received permission to visit prison camps no earlier than 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1920 after overcoming a certain resistance by the central military authorities<sup>21</sup>. There was the expectation that Sempołowska's activities were to be correlated with the commencement of Pieszkowa's work. Nevertheless, we know little about the latter's interest in Polish POWs. For that matter has not, so far, been the object of

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<sup>20</sup> S. Michalski, *Spoleczna i pedagogiczna działalność Stefanii Sempołowskiej na tle epoki*. [Social and pedagogical activities of Stefania Sempołowska during the era], Warszawa 1973, p. 239; *Życie i działalność Stefanii Sempołowskiej*, [Life and activities of Stefania Sempołowska], ed. N. Gąsiorowska, Warszawa 1960, p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> CAW, Oddział IV NDWP Sekcja Ogólna, vol. 21, Upoważnienie dla S. Sempołowskiej i jej współpracowników do wizytacji obozów jeńców z 2 listopada 1920 r. [Official Permission for Stefania Sempołowska and her co-workers to visit POW camps dated 2 November 1920]; Obóz Jeńców i Internowanych nr 1 w Strzałkowie [Camp for POWs and the Interned Nr 1 in Stralkow], vol. 21, Protokół wizytacji obozu w dniu 19 listopada 1920 r. [Protocol for the visit to the camp 19 November 1920].

research by Russian historians, as has been the case with regard to the fate of the Polish POWs staying in the Soviet captivity.

The matter of the POWs was also raised in the document signed on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 in Riga, which ended hostilities between Poland and Soviet Russia (the so-called preliminary agreement). This was regulated by Article Seven, whereby both sides were to appoint Joint Commissions without delay, which were to organize protection of captives, the interned, POWs, exiles and emigrants. The exchange of POWs and repatriates was to be regulated by a separate agreement concluded at a later date<sup>22</sup>.

The problem of POWs and repatriates played an important role during further Polish-Soviet negotiations conducted in Riga, leading to the concluding peace treaty. The proceedings took place within various commissions. The issue of POWs was discussed in the Commission on the Exchange of POWs, Refugees, Hostages and Exiles, at the head of which were two co-chairpersons – Edward Zalewski and Iwan Lorenc. A significant role in implementing the resolutions of the arbitration agreement of 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920 was played by the Polish-Russian-Ukrainian Military Arbitration Commission operating from Minsk in Belarus, including matters concerning POWs. Lieutenant Józef Rybak was at the head of the Polish military delegation that was part of this Commission, and he was later replaced by Lt. Col. Dr Jan Hempe. At the head of the Soviet Commission was Cyril I. Szytko. Apart from matters connected to compliance

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<sup>22</sup> „Monitor Polski”, nr 235, 15 X 1920 r.; W. Kumaniecki, *Odbudowa państwowości polskiej. Najważniejsze dokumenty 1913 – styczeń 1924* [The Reconstruction of Polish Statehood. Essential documents 1913 – January 1924], Warszawa – Kraków 1924, pp. 422–426; J. Dąbski, *Pokój ryski. Wspomnienia, pertraktacje, tajne układy z Joffem, listy* [The Peace of Riga. Recollections, negotiations, secret arrangements with Joffe, letters], Warszawa 1931, pp. 20–24.

with the conditions of the ceasefire, determining the armistice line, solving current disputes and explaining border incidents, the joint Military Arbitration Commission devoted much attention to matters involving POWs and interned civilians<sup>23</sup>.

At the beginning of November 1920, the leader of the Polish Delegation in this Commission, with the consent of the central military authorities, proposed an immediate exchange of forty-one sick Polish POWs who were then in hospital in Minsk (and who had not managed to evacuate during the retreat) in return for a number of Bolshevik POWs staying near the armistice line (in Baranowicze). The Russian side accepted this proposal yet seeing how invested the Poles were in it, they demanded double the number of their own POWs (that is eighty-two). Eager to ensure medical care for their sick POWs, the Polish side accepted this proposal. The exchange of this first group took place at the railway station in Stołpce on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1920 (thirty-six Soviet POWs for seventeen Polish). The manner in which it was conducted showed that also the Polish side was not prepared for a swift exchange (which it had demanded during the peace negotiations in Riga). As reports by the Polish officers reveal, the Polish transport with Bolshevik POWs arrived with a considerable delay, and the POWs aboard, contrary to orders from Warsaw, were in a very poor condition. As Lt. Col. Hempel noted in his report: "*The Bolshevik POWs, who were mostly sick, arrived in a deplorable condition that was insulting to even a primitive concept of humanitarianism. The wagon was full of faeces and stank so that one could scarcely approach it*". This incident bore witness to the irresponsibility of

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<sup>23</sup> RPWA, fond 470, desc. 1, issue 12, Tłumaczenia sowieckich telegramów przejętych przez stronę polską 2 listopada 1920 r. [A translation of Soviet telegrams intercepted by the Poles 2 November 1920].

the Polish prison service in Baranowicze. Following the suggestion of Lt. Col. Hempel, the military authorities punished those responsible for their negligence. This incident served to provide the Soviet side with yet another argument and was availed of by Adolf Joffe during the negotiations in Riga<sup>24</sup>.

At the time when the above exchange of sick Polish POWs in Minsk took place, the Polish Delegation formulated a new proposal for an exchange of civilian hostages: this time an equal one. The Poles demanded the release of bishops Kazimierz Michalkiewicz and Zygmunt Łoziński. The Bolshevik side acceded to this and in exchange demanded five people, including Polish Communists and two women (Kukowicz and Olszańska – who were Poles, the wives of high-ranking Soviet officers, who had not managed to evacuate to the east). Not wanting to allow for yet another non-equivalent exchange, the Cabinet of the Republic of Poland rejected the whole project. They partly returned to this matter at the beginning of March 1921 when the Polish side proposed an exchange of the above women for two Poles in Moscow prisons (Anna Matusiewicz and Halina Dybczyńska). Based on the surviving archive materials, it appears this exchange took place<sup>25</sup>.

At the beginning of January 1921, both sides prepared lists with the names of sixty-two people who were to be exchanged in the first instance, before any organized repatriation action would commence. Polish Communists held in Polish prisons

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<sup>24</sup> RPWA, fond 470, desc. 2, issue 21, Odpis depezy dr. J. Hempla z 12 grudnia 1920 r. opisującej przybycie do Mińska transportu z jeńcami bolszewickimi z Baranowicz [Copies of the depeches of J. Hempel dated 12 December 1920 describing the arrival to Minsk of a transport with Soviet PoWs from Baranowicz].

<sup>25</sup> RPWA, fond 470, desc. 2, issue 12, Dokumentacja dotycząca indywidualnych wymian z lutego i marca 1920 r. [Documentation relating to individual exchanges performed in February and March 1920]

(among others in Pawiak, Wronki, Mokotów, Krakow) dominated the Bolshevik list, but there were also military prisoners (officers) held in the Dąbie camp in near Krakow. Both sides had difficulties locating the people present on the lists, and especially the Soviet side could not find details about the persons of interest to the Poles. The first exchange was to take place as early as February 1921, yet at the end of January the Bolshevik side had only been able to find twenty-nine of the sixty-two people from the Polish list<sup>26</sup>.

During the negotiations in Riga, the Polish Delegation attempted to conclude a treaty at the earliest possible juncture, on the basis of which an exchange of POWs could begin. The draft for the agreement on the exchange of POWs was proposed very early, and after initial hesitation and a certain delay it was finally accepted on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920 by the Soviet delegates. Members of the Commission on the Exchange of POWs, Refugees, Hostages and Exiles. The agreement postulated that the exchange of POWs should start ten days after the date of its signing. The Polish side posited that the exchanges would commence on around 10<sup>th</sup> January 1921. However, for the agreement on repatriation to be in force, it had to be signed by both delegations at the plenary meeting. However, Adolf Joffe

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<sup>26</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy [The National Archive in Bydgoszcz] [henceforth: APBy], Urząd Wojewódzki Pomorski w Toruniu [Regional Government for the Pomorski Region in Torun] (1920–1939) [henceforth: UW Pom], vol. 4870, Spis osób zażądanych z niewoli polskiej na zasadzie imiennej wymiany z 21 stycznia 1921 r. [The list of requested people in Polish captivity based on an exchange of named prisoners 21 January 1921]; *Wymiana więźniów politycznych pomiędzy II Rzeczypospolitą a Sowietami w okresie międzywojennym* [The exchange of political prisoners between the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Republic and the Soviets in the period between the two world wars]. *Dokumenty i materiały* [Documents and materials], prep. W. Materski, Warszawa 2000, pp. 5–12.

delayed signing the agreement for a long time, and it only finally happened on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921<sup>27</sup> (Table 4). The reason behind this behaviour might be the fact that the Bolshevik delegates were attempting to force the Polish side to accept resolutions which were unfavourable for Poland in the field of economic matters (the return of the rolling stock). The attitude of the Soviet side also resulted from the fact that they were unprepared for a quick exchange of the POWs to which it was obligated by the resolutions of the agreement. For the majority of Polish POWs were held in Siberia and their transport in such a short time-period to Minsk or Szepietówka was unfeasible. In addition, just like the Poles, the Bolsheviks had a problem (of which there is proof in their archives) with the adequate preparation of the POWs for exchange (including supplying them with coats, uniforms and boots). These obstacles have so far never been referred to by Russian historians when studying the issue of [Polish] prisoners during the Polish-Soviet war.

**Tabela 4.** Number of the Soviet POWs in Poland in the period between January and October 1921.

Camps of the POWs and the interned	Number of the Soviet POWs					
	26 I	5 III	30 V	23 VIII	23 IX	15 X
Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	12 860	12 268	6 485	3 602	3 654	344
Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	702	74	71	–	–	–
Prison Camp No. 3 in Łańcut	–	–	–	620	–	–
Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	652	738	–	–	–	–
Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno	1 090	1 093	2 146	689	–	–
Prison Camp No. 6 in Tuchola	7 530	11 000	7 662	1 832	693	152

<sup>27</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 108–110; J. Dąbski, *The Peace of Riga...*, pp. 159, 179.

Camps of the POWs and the interned	Number of the Soviet POWs					
	26 I	5 III	30 V	23 VIII	23 IX	15 X
Internment Camp No. I in Dąbie	3 255	4 987	3 271	3 291	1 183	46
Internment Camp No. 13 in Łuków	–	–	–	172	140	132
Regulating Station (Processing Facility) Station of Prisoner Concentration in Puławy	911	891	741	842	1 719	49
Regulating Station (Processing Facility) in Stryj	186	–	–	–	–	–
Distribution Station, Station of Prisoner Concentration No. 21 in Białystok	814	479	883	–	–	113
Regulating Station, Station of Prisoner Concentration No. 22 in Dorohusk	40	12	6	–	–	–
Regulating Station (Processing Facility), Prisoner Concentration Station. 23 in Lvov	496	1 404	–	–	–	–
Prisoner Distribution Post / Transit Point in Wołkowysk	856	456	33	78	72	–
Prisoner Distribution Post/ Transit Point in Brest-Litovsk	722	1 078	1	1 169	57	–
Prisoner Distribution Post / Transit Point in Kowel	566	702	582	29		–
Prisoner Exchange Point in Baranowicze	863	487	613	427		–
Prisoner Exchange Point in Równe	–	7	607	109		–
Total	29 131	35 045	25 399	12 884	9 201	965
For labour in the working units and private people	–	–	15 585	5 271	–	–
Total	–	–	40 984	18 155		

Source: CAW, Branch I Ministry of Armed Forces., volume 276, Report nr 34 on the situation in camps 23 September 1921; volume 118, Report nr 3 from 22 December 1920 r.; 1<sup>st</sup> Corp District Command, volume. 9, Report nr 40 of 5 March 1921; Branch IV of NDWP (General Affairs), volume 21, (Case Nr 4260) Report nr 22 from 26 I (January) 1921; Biuro of the Ministry of Army Affairs, volume 402, Report nr 10 from 30 May 1921; CAW (Central Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Intelligence Section), Branch II, volumes 5, 58, Reports nr 29 and 37 from 23 August and 12 October 1921, k. 64–64a, 171–172.

## Medical and sanitary care for Soviet POWs in Poland in the years 1919–1921

During the struggle to establish the borders in the east between 1918–1920 there were numerous POWs and interned persons who were held in Polish captivity<sup>28</sup>. Apart from this, in the territory of the re-emerging Poland, groups of POWs from World War I began to arrive practically from the beginning of November 1918 (both from the east and west) Poles, Russians and representatives of other nationalities. The scale of this phenomenon was enormous<sup>29</sup>. From the beginning the Polish authorities were confronted with the very difficult task of ensuring adequate living conditions for them, appropriate provisions and suitable medical and sanitary care. In this manner, the authorities attempted to protect their own citizens from epidemics of infectious diseases, which were developing with great intensity in the area of the Eastern Front.

In the following section, an attempt will be made to depict what this medical and sanitary care for POWs looked like during the Polish-Soviet war. Similar sanitary regulations were also provided to POWs from World War I, refugees and re-emigrants returning from Poland. As was already mentioned, the

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<sup>28</sup> CAW, Oddział II MSWojsk. (1775/89), file [henceforth: f.] 327, Dokumentacja dotycząca liczebności jeńców w obozach I oddziałach robotniczych w listopadzie 1920 r. [Documents relating to the number of POWs in camps and labour units in November 1920].

<sup>29</sup> AAN, PRM, vol. 6693/1920, 9856/1919, Materiały dotyczące działalności Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników z lat 1919–1920 [Materials relating to the activities of the State Department for the Repatriation of POWs, Refugees and Workers for the years 1919–1920]; A. Juzwenko, *Polska a „biała” Rosja...*, pp. 126–127.

National Office for the Return of POWs, Refugees and Labourers was responsible for these groups<sup>30</sup>.

The POWs taken prisoner during the battles in the east in the period of 1918–1920 were subject to the High Command of the Polish Army at the front line. When such POWs were taken prisoner in the territory of the country, responsibility then lay with the Ministry of Military Affairs. In the structure of the Polish Army's High Command within IV Branch two sections operated: One was the Section for the POWs and the other was called the General Section. In turn at the level of Army Command was the Office and the Inspectorate for POWs situated within the Ministry of Military Affairs. There the issues of POWs and the interned were subordinated to the Department of POWs and the Inspectorate of Prison Camps, which was the part of I Branch of the Office. Questions of intelligence issues or interrogation remained under the jurisdiction of II Branch (Department IV on POWs)<sup>31</sup>.

On the basis of the rules and regulations passed by the Polish military authorities at the outset of hostilities in February 1919, after the first POWs and interned persons were taken into Polish

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<sup>30</sup> AAN, PRM, vol. 6693/1920, 9856/1919, Materiały dotyczące działalności Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników z lat 1919–1920 [Materials relating to the activities of the State Department for the Repatriation of POWs, Refugees and Workers for the years 1919–1920]; DzU RP 1919, No. 3, item 84.

<sup>31</sup> CAW, Departament Zdrowia MS Wojsk [Department of Health at MS Wojsk], vol. 2; 1st Branch MSWojsk, vol. 28, Pismo w sprawie organizacji MSWojsk. z 20 lutego 1920 r.; [Letter relating to organisational matters at the MSWojsk 20 February 1920] (J. Błoński, *Pamiętnik 1891–1939* [Memoires 1891–1939], Kraków 1981, p. 139; Z. Karpus, W. Rezmer, *Służba jeniecka w Wojsku Polskim w latach 1918–1939* [Prison services in the Polish Army in the years 1918–1939], „Studnia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości” [Sources and Materials for History of the Army] 1992, vol. 34, pp. 207–229.

captivity, they were sent to [a series of holding facilities, firstly] assembly points established for every division fighting at on the front. Subsequently, they were sent to transit points (which were established at the beginning of 1920) operating at the Command Staging Area and from there to [so-called] Distribution Points [Processing or Stations of Concentration] where they were put in quarantine before being sent to a requisite camps localized inland. At every stage of this process, POWs were provided with adequate medical and sanitary care<sup>32</sup>.

The first formal regulations governing POW care and processes were issued by the Polish military authorities in mid-February 1919. They were supplemented at the end of April 1920, at the outset of the offensive in Ukraine<sup>33</sup>. In line with the above regulations, every assembly point functioning at the [army] divisional level was to be equipped with a bath and a delousing point, and also adequate medical and sanitary staff. Every prisoner of war at this stage was to be bathed, deloused and checked by a doctor. Subsequently, POWs were sent to the distribution stations at the Command Staging Area, where they were again checked by a doctor and were subject to disinfection and delousing. There was also an infirmary, baths and a delousing point at every transit point.

Subsequently, POWs were now sent from assembly points to Regulating (Processing) Facilities. These were facilities operating

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<sup>32</sup> CAW, NDWP Oddział IV (Sekcja Jeńców), [Branch IV POW Section], vol. 34; 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 92, Instructions by MSWojsk. Dated 11 February 1919. pt. „Porządek transportowania jeńców i internowanych”; [“Conditions for the transportation of POWs and the interned”] (Z. Karpus, and W. Rezmer, *Służba jeniecka [Prison Services]...*, pp. 212–215.

<sup>33</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 94; 5<sup>th</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 27, Instructions dated 29 April 1920. pt. “*Porządek transportowanie jeńców I internowanych*” [“Conditions for the transportation of prisoners and the interned”]; NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (Prisoners Section) vol. 34.

in the front-line area (subordinated to the High Command of the Polish Army or to the Ministry of Military Affairs), whose main task was to gather and to then send POWs brought by the front-line units to prison camps located in the Polish interior. Before being sent, POWs underwent compulsory sanitary treatment (a bath, an exchange of underwear, disinfection of clothes) and a medical check-up. To accomplish this procedure, every such station was equipped with specialist sanitary facilities (baths, disinfection installations, delousing points) and adequately trained personnel<sup>34</sup>.

To ensure the epidemiological security of the country, according to sanitary regulations in force, every Regulating Station was obligated to:

- Conduct precise and complete sanitary treatment and delousing of POWs;
- Conduction of a 4-day quarantine of POWs before transporting them to the camps;
- Treatment of the sick and ensuring their transport to military hospitals;
- vaccination against smallpox, typhus, cholera and dysentery;
- send POWs and internees to prison camps or stage districts of the National Office for the Return of the POWs, Refugees and Labourers, only after all of the above operations had been completed<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> CAW, NDWP 3rd Branch, vol. 48, Instructions MS Wojsk. z 29 kwietnia 1920 r. pt. „Porządek transportowania jeńców i internowanych” [“Conditions for the transportation of prisoners and the interned”] together with appendices.

<sup>35</sup> CAW, Department of Health MSWojsk., vol. 7, Tymczasowe przepisy sanitarne dla Stacji Rozdzielczych i obozów jeńców z 16 lutego 1919 r. [Temporary sanitary regulations for Regulating Stations and POW camps dated 16 February 1919]; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani w Białymstoku i Brześciu Litewskim w latach 1919–1921* [POWs and the interned in Białystok and

Pursuant to the regulations binding in specific Regulating Stations, medical and sanitary care over every group of 150 POWs and or internees, was to be exercised by: one surgeon, two sanitary non-commissioned officers and four paramedics. Apart from that, there were to be hospitals located at these Stations, with a number of beds corresponding to 10 per cent of the prisoner group, as well as an obligatory epidemiological ward and infirmary<sup>36</sup>.

POWs who were diagnosed with infectious diseases were not to be sent from the front zone [assembly points] to the Regulating Station or processing facilities. On the basis of the assigned surgeon's decision, they were first placed in wards for sick prisoners, which were specifically created at military hospitals at the front line.

Subsequently, the sick were sent to hospitals for POWs operating at every Regulating Station. Only after they had recovered were they sent to the requisite camps, and convalescents were sent to a camp specially set up for them at the beginning of 1920, this was prison camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno, where they stayed until fully recovered and were later sent to other camps. A similar procedure was adopted with reference to sick POWs enlisted into labourer units and allocated to work for the government or for private sector<sup>37</sup>.

The Polish authorities only started to send Bolshevik POWs for work outside the camps in the spring of 1920, when most

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Brest Litovsk in the years 1919–1921], „Zeszyt Naukowy Muzeum Wojska w Białymstoku”) [“Notes from the Museum of Military Science in Białystok”] 1992, p. 6, pp. 70–72.

<sup>36</sup> CAW, NDWP 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch, vol. 48, Instructions dated 29 January 1920.

<sup>37</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Instructions of MS Wojsk. dla obozów, oddziałów robotniczych jeńców i Stacji Rozdzielczych z 1919 r. [For camps and POW labourer units and Regulating Stations from 1919]; NDWP 3<sup>rd</sup> Branch, vol. 48, Instructions dated 29 April 1920.

Ukrainian POWs from the Ukrainian Galician Army were released home. Until then only Ukrainian POWs had been performing works for the military and government institutions<sup>38</sup>.

Mandatory medical help was also provided for POWs and internees after their arrival in the camps. According to regulations the personnel of every prison camp also comprised, usually of two surgeons, from four to six non-commissioned officers with sanitary duties, one pharmacist and over a dozen paramedics. As far as it was feasible and practical, surgeons medical and sanitary personnel were recruited from the POWs in the camp. There were also instances of medical and sanitary aid being organized by nurses, both Polish and from a variety of foreign missions; for instance, by nurses from Great Britain in the Białystok camp. This staff, paying no heed of the risk of catching infectious diseases, served the prisoners selflessly<sup>39</sup>.

In every prison camp, there was both an infirmary and a hospital, in most cases with an epidemiological ward, as well as internal medical and surgical care wards. Based on the archive materials available, we can state that in the first half of 1920 in Poland, independent hospitals for the POWs and internees operated only at the camps and Regulating Stations. They were located in the following towns: Białystok (an infectious disease hospital with 370 beds), Dorohusk (an infectious disease hospital with 150 beds), Dąbie near Krakow (an infectious disease hospital with 150 beds), Lvov (a hospital with 200 beds), Dolin

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<sup>38</sup> CAW, Office of MS Wojsk, vol. 402; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Report of MS Wojsk. at the turn of 1919 and 1920 r. *o stanie obozów jenieckich i Stacji Rozdzielczych* [Regarding the state of prison camps and Regulating Stations]; S. Rudzki, *Zarys historii szpitalnictwa wojskowego w Polsce* [An overview of the history of army hospitals in Poland], "Army Doctor" 1927, vol. 9, aneksy.

(a hospital with 100 beds and an infectious disease ward with 50 beds), Łańcut (a hospital with 220 beds and an infectious disease ward with 150 beds), Pikulice (a hospital with 108 beds and an infectious disease ward with 200 beds), Stryj (a hospital with 160 beds), Grodno (an isolation hospital with 421 beds), Brest-Litovsk (an isolation hospital with 524 beds), Strzałkowo (a hospital with 1,337 beds including an infectious disease ward), Szczypiorno (a hospital with 450 beds) and Tuchola (a hospital with 200 beds). It sometimes happened that sick POWs from the labour units were sent, when such a need arose, to civil hospitals or ones that operated under the National Office for the Return of POWs, Refugees and Labourers<sup>40</sup>.

On the whole, the system of medical and sanitary care described above, encompassing POWs and internees, functioned effectively in Poland, especially in the year 1919. When there were only 30,000 POWs and internees in the camps (including 7,000 Bolshevik POWs, 16,000 Ukrainians and some 6,000 interned civilians)<sup>41</sup>. Yet, not even then was it possible to fully cope with epidemics of infectious diseases among those who were in the camps. For in precisely that year, a terrible sanitary situation was observable in POW Camp No. 8 in Brest-Litovsk (Brest). There around 1,500 Bolshevik POWs died from various types of typhus and dysentery. At the end of 1919, owing to the poor

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<sup>40</sup> CAW, 5<sup>th</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 27, Instructions dated 29 April 1920 r. with appendixes pt. „Wykaz szpitali dla jeńców i internowanych” [“A list of hospitals for POWs and the interned”]; A. Felchner, *Stan zdrowia żołnierzy Wojska Polskiego w 1920 r.* [State of health of Polish Army soldiers in 1920], „Archiwum Historii i Filozofii Medycyny” [“Archive of the History and Philosophy of Medicine”] 1993, No. 56, p. 4, p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> CAW, NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (Prisoners Section, vol. 35a; 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 276, Materiały dotyczące obozów dla jeńców i internowanych [Materials relating to camps for POWs and the interned]; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, p. 41.

living facilities and sanitary conditions, the military authorities closed the [then existing] POW camp in Brest-Litovsk<sup>42</sup>.

In contrast the positive effects of the efforts taken by medical and sanitary services in the prison camps and Regulating Stations can be supported by the fact that as of mid-February 1920, out of a total of 20,469 POWs and internees in Poland only 702 POWs were suffering from different types of typhus, 222 from dysentery, and from other diseases 1,019 (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Number of the sick Soviet POWs or Internees in the camps and Regulating Stations in the period of 10<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> February 1920.

No.	Name of the Regulating Station or the Camp	Number of POWs	Number of sick				
			spotted typhus	relapsing typhus	typhoid fever	dysentery	other diseases
1.	Regulating Station in Białystok	494	17	17	4	15	81
2.	Regulating Station in Brest-Litovsk	390	0	0	0	0	0
3.	Regulating Station in Stryj	161	6	0	22	0	31
4.	Hospital for the POWs in Grodno (Hrodna in Belarus)	79	8	48	0	4	25
5.	Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	11 169	82	0	0	23	727
6.	Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	2 930	201	65	0	197	11
7.	Prison Camp No. 3 in Łańcut	2 067	23	128	0	0	5
8.	Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	916	6	0	1	8	126

<sup>42</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 70–74.

No.	Name of the Regulating Station or the Camp	Number of POWs	Number of sick				
			spotted typhus	relapsing typhus	typhoid fever	dysentery	other diseases
9.	Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno	721	0	0	0	0	11
10.	Camp internees in Dąbie	1 542	52	19	3	7	2
	Total	20 469	395	277	30	222	1 019

Source: CAW, First Branch of the Ministry of War Volume 99. Weekly record of sanitation in the prison camps and regulating stations prepared by the Department of Hygiene at the Ministry of Armed Forces for the period 5 to 15 February 1920.

In the spring months of 1920, the situation of the POWs and internees in Poland improved considerably. As a result of the release of the majority of Ukrainian POWs and also a change of the situation on the Eastern Front caused by the return of the Polish units from there, the number of POWs and internees in the camps decreased markedly. Additionally, in the summer months the demand for workers in agriculture rose. Living, sanitary and provision conditions for the POWs assigned to such work were much better than for those who stayed in the camps. In July 1920, after the negotiations between Józef Piłsudski and Boris W. Savinkov, the Russian Political Committee was established in Warsaw and the formation of Russian units to participate in the mutual struggle with the Bolsheviks now commenced. The main recruitment base for these new formations was among Russian POWs in Poland<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 69–102.

The difficult sanitary and rations situation that resulted in a new epidemic of infectious diseases in the prison camps in Poland, occurred in the late autumn of 1920. In this period, following the victorious Battles of Warsaw and the Niemen River, a combined 80,000 to 85,000 Bolshevik POWs were taken prisoner. Polish military, medical and sanitary services could not immediately ensure adequate care for such a large number of POWs. Over 50,000 Soviet POWs were in prison camps at that time, and almost the same number (circa 35,000) were assigned to work in labour units. The rest, that is from 20,000 to 25,000 people, had voluntarily joined the Russian and Ukrainian military units then being formed in Poland for the purpose of a common struggle with the Bolsheviks<sup>44</sup> doing so shortly after being taken prisoner by the Poles. Additionally, the loss of specialist sanitary and medical equipment during the hasty Polish retreat from the east in the summer of 1920 exerted a significant influence on this difficult situation for the POWs, a situation exacerbated by the damage suffered to large swaths of the country, through which the troops of the Red Army had marched. Aside from that, the Polish side also had to ensure care for another group of circa 30,000 soldiers (and their families)

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<sup>44</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MSWojsk. (1775/890), vol. 327, Description by the 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MSWojsk. Dated 10 November 1920 pt. „Stan obozów jeńców i internowanych, Stacji Rozdzielczych oraz oddziałów robotniczych jeńców” [“Regarding the state of POW camps, camps for the interned, Regulating Stations and POW labour units”]; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 107–110.

from Russian, Ukrainian and Cossack formations, their recently acquired allies. These units, after experiencing just one clash with the Red Army, now in November and December 1920, crossed the Polish Front and had to be interned as foreign troops bearing arms due to the cease fire terms. Subsequently, these soldiers were placed in camps located inland, ones in which till that time only Bolshevik POWs stayed<sup>45</sup>. They were grouped in practice in two camps: in Strzałkowo (14,000 at maximum) and Tuchola (from 10,000 to 11,000 at maximum), to which POWs were transported from other camps (in inappropriate conditions and during a harsh winter); and this transport had an influence on new outbreaks and epidemics of infectious diseases, including cholera, typhus, dysentery and flu. In the winter months at the turn of 1920 and 1921 (November–January), we can observe a substantial increase in the number of sick POWs in camp hospitals (these tendencies for individual camps in the period Dec 2020 to Oct 2021 are illustrated in Table 6).

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<sup>45</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 135–142.

**Table 6.** Number of the sick and the deceased and a total number of the Bolshevik POWs in selected camps on specific days in the period from 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1920 to 12<sup>th</sup> October 1921.

Date	Number of the sick	Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiołno	Prison Camp No. 7 in Tuchola	Internment Camp No. 1 in Dąbie	Prisoner Concentration Station in Putawy	Total
22 XII 1920	Number of sick	4 700 <sup>1</sup>	754	6	–	1 838	360	432	
	Number of dead	41	4	–	–	18	3	8	74
	Number of POWs	14 680	1 705	734	–	5 568	3 369	1 019	
17 I 1921	Number of sick	4 033 <sup>2</sup>	102	328 <sup>3</sup>	–	1 833	304	319	
	Number of dead	22	–	–	–	12	–	1	35
	Number of POWs	12 905	718	597	–	7 254	3 231	917	
19 II 1921	Number of sick	2 497 <sup>4</sup>	362	183 <sup>5</sup>	582	1 953	308	157	
	Number of dead	5	–	–	1	28	–	–	34
	Number of POWs	12 312	475	647	1 108	9 292	3 969	902	
Number of dead	5	–	1	–	–	11	11	–	28
Number of POWs	12 268	74	738	1 093	10 997	3 319	891		

Date		Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno	Prison Camp No. 7 in Tuchola	Internment Camp No. 1 in Dąbie	Prisoner Concentration Station in Putawy	Total
30 III 1921	Number of sick	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	Number of dead	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	Number of POWs	9 629	15	109	2 642	11 066	3 018	874	
30 IV 1921	Number of sick	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	Number of dead	5	–	4	–	3	–	–	12
	Number of POWs	5 503	72	110	3 034	9 273	2 547	832	
27 V 1921	Number of sick	940	–	–	166	443	180	32	
	Number of dead	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	4
	Number of POWs	6 450	–	–	2 198	7 606	3 271	738	
23 VIII 1921	Number of sick	63	–	–	70	63 <sup>6</sup>	85	6	
	Number of dead	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	
	Number of POWs	3 602	–	–	689	1 832	2 085	842	

Date	Number of sick	Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo	Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice	Prison Camp No. 4 in Pikulice	Prison Camp No. 5 in Szczypiorno	Prison Camp No. 7 in Tuchola	Internment Camp No. 1 in Dąbie	Prisoner Concentration Station in Puławy	Total
23 IX 1921	Number of sick	62	-	-	-	11	-	18	
	Number of dead	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Number of POWs	3 654	-	-	-	693	1 183	1 719	
12 X 1921	Number of sick	17	-	-	-	4	-	-	
	Number of dead	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Number of POWs	344	-	-	-	152	46	45	

<sup>1</sup> forty-eight POWs suffering from cholera

<sup>2</sup> thirty-nine POWs suffering from cholera

<sup>3</sup> ninety-seven POWs suffering from typhus

<sup>4</sup> eleven POWs suffering from cholera

<sup>5</sup> seventy-two POWs suffering from typhus

<sup>6</sup> seventeen POWs suffering from dysentery

Source: CAW, Branch I Ministry of Armed Forces, volume 118; Report nr 3 on the situation in camps and Processing Facilities from 22 December 1920.; Report nr 31 from 23 September 1920; Branch IV NDWP (General Affairs), volume 30, Report nr 17 from 17 January 1921; Biuro of the Ministry of Army Affairs, volume 402, Report nr 9 from 27 May 1921; 4<sup>th</sup> Army, volume 329, Report nr 49 from 30 March and nr 61 from 30 April 1921.

One consequence of the infectious diseases epidemic was an increasing number of deaths among POWs in the camps. In the month of October 1920, 619 POWs died in Strzałkowo; in November – 1,682; while in December – 1,558. In subsequent months, owing to a considerable effort by the Polish authorities, the number of deaths decreased substantially: in January 1921 – 793, and in February – 259. What must be emphasised is that the clear majority of these POWs, died due to epidemics of infectious diseases. It can be gleaned from preserved archive materials that in December 1920 in Strzałkowo 1,558 Bolshevik prisoners died of which: dysentery – 609, cholera – 86, various types of typhus – 863 (Table 7)<sup>46</sup>. Generally speaking, we can state that in the whole period in which Soviet POWs were held in the camp in Strzałkowo (from June 1919 to October 1921) circa 8,000 people died there (Tables 7 and 8)<sup>47</sup>. They were buried in the camp cemetery, and their surnames are, for the most part, known.

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<sup>46</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MSWojsk. (1775/89), vol. 916, *Statystyka śmiertelności jeńców bolszewickich w obozie w Strzałkowie za grudzień 1920 r.* [Statistics on mortality rates among Soviet POWs in the Strzałkowo camp in for December 1920].

<sup>47</sup> CAW, Biuro Wyznań Niekatolickich [Office of Non-Catholic Faiths] (1918–1939), vol. 60, 61, *Spis zmarłych jeńców w Strzałkowie za czerwiec–sierpień 1921 r.*; Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu, Starostwo Powiatowe we Wrześni [List of deceased POWs in Strzałkow for June–August 1921. Poznan State Archives, Local Government Office in the town of Wrzesien] (1918–1939) [henceforth: APPoz, SP Września], vol. 181, Wykaz pochowanych na cmentarzu obozu jeńców w Strzałkowie w okresie [List of the interred at the cemetery of the Strzałkow PoW camp in the period] 1915–1921; CAW, Obóz Jeńców i Internowanych nr 1 w Strzałkowie [Camp Nr 1 for PoWs and the Interned in Strzałkow], vol. 9a, Imienny wykaz jeńców bolszewickich zmarłych w Strzałkowie w okresie 29 kwietnia 1919 – 1 marca 1921 r. [List of names of Soviet POWs who died at the Strzałkow camp in the period from 29 April 1919 to 1 March 1921]; 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MSWojsk. (1775/89), vol. 916, *Statystyka zmarłych jeńców w Strzałkowie w grudniu 1920 r.* [Statistics for deceased PoWs at Strzałkow in December 1920]; Z. Karpus, Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy..., pp. 114–116, 133.

**Table 7.** The cause of deaths of the Bolshevik POWs died in the camp in Strzałkowo in December 1920.

Cause of death	Number of the Bolshevik POWs
dysentery	609
cholera	86
spotted typhus	564
relapsing typhus	163
typhoid fever	31
paratyphoid	105
total	1 558

Source CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch of The Ministry of the Armed Forces Command (1775/89), volume 916, k. 44, List of deaths in the Strzałkowo camp for December 1920.

The situation in Tuchola was just as difficult. Throughout the whole period in which Bolshevik POWs were held in this camp (from the end of August 1920 until mid-October 1921) 1,933 prisoners died as a result of the infectious diseases epidemic. The greatest number of deaths was recorded in January 1921 with 561.

**Table 8.** Number of the Bolshevik POWs in the camp in Strzałkowo in the period from June 1919 to August 1921.

Date	Number of the deceased POWs
June 1919	20
July 1919	48
August 1919	52
September 1919	52
October 1919	65
November 1919	84
December 1919	263
January 1920	322

Date	Number of the deceased POWs
February 1920	212
March 1920	143
April 1920	141
May 1920	124
June 1920	97
July 1920	21
August 1920	52
September 1920	191
October 1920	619
November 1920	1 682
December 1920	1 558
January 1921	793
February 1921	259
March 1921	114
2–31 May 1921	49
1–23 June 1921	28
3–31 August 1921	6
Total	6 941

Source: CAW, The office for non-Catholic denominations (1918-1939), volumes 60, 61, lists of the dead from the Strzałkowiec camp for the period June-August 1921. Camp for the interned Nr 1 in Strzałkowiec, volume 9a, list of names of Bolsheviks who died in Strzałkowiec in the period 29 April 1919 to 1 March 1921. Branch II Ministry of Armed Forces, (1775/89), statistics on deceased prisoners in Strzałkowiec in December 1920. APPoz, SP Września volume 181, List of those buried in the cemetery of the prisoner camp in Strzałkowiec in the period 1915–1921.

In subsequent months, there were significantly fewer deaths in the camp in Tuchola: in February 1921 – 157 people, in April – 19 (Table 9)<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> APBy, UWPom (1920–1939), vol. 24277, 24356, 24357, Dokumentacja dotycząca zmarłych jeńców w obozie w Tucholi za okres 1914–1921 [Documentation relating to deceased POWs at the camp in Tuchola in the

**Table 9.** Number of Bolshevik POWS who died in the camp in Tuchola from 30<sup>th</sup> August 1920 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 1922.

Period	Number of the deceased
3 VIII – 2 XI 1920	437
3–30 XI 1920	296
1–31 XII 1920	333
1–31 I 1921	561
1–28 II 1921	157
1–31 III 1921	64
1–30 IV 1921	52
1–31 V 1921	20
1–30 VI 1921	8
1–31 VII 1921	0
1–31 VIII 1921	2
1–30 IX 1921	0
1–15 X 1921	0
1 XI – 31 XII 1921	2
1 I – 31 VII 1922	1
Total	1 933

Source APBy, UWPom (1920–1939), Health Section, volume 11855, Materials relating to infectious disease and incidents of death in the Tuchola camp in the period 1 March to 25 October 1921; Regional government records for Tuchola (1920–1939), volume 704, Accounts of the founding assembly of the Regional Association of the Polish Memorial Cross in Tuchola of 20 July 1921; Tuchola. The camp of POWs and the interned 1914–1923. Prepared by Z. Karpus, W. Rezmer, Toruń 1997, p. XLVII.

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period 1914–1921]; CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch I MS Wojsk., vol. 118; Biuro Wyznań Niekatolickich [Office of Non-Catholic Faiths ], vol. 61; 4. Armia, vol. 329, Dokumentacja dotycząca sytuacji w obozie jeńców w Tucholi za okres 1920–1921 [Documentation relating to the situation in the POW camp in Tuchola in the period 1920–1921]; Z. Karpus, Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy..., pp. 114, 133.

In the spring of 1921, as a result of a considerable effort made by the Polish authorities and a decline in the overall number of POWs after the commencement of the exchange of POWs in mid-March, the epidemics of infectious diseases in the camps were overcome. Owing to this, from April 1921, instances of deaths of POWs in Polish camps were sporadic<sup>49</sup>.

Based on numerous Polish sources, we can estimate that from 14,000 to 16,000 of Soviet POWs died during the whole period in Polish captivity<sup>50</sup>. Claims by journalists and some Russian historians that 60,000 POWs died or indeed even more, are entirely unfounded not being based on any practical or reliable sources. Just like the accusations levelled against the Polish military authorities regarding maltreatment of Russian POWs<sup>51</sup>.

The dead Bolshevik POWs were buried in mass graves in camp cemeteries. Throughout the inter-war period, they were under the protection of the Polish authorities: they were fenced off, cleaned, and obelisks and crosses were erected<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 114, 133.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> J.W. Iwanow, *Zadolgo do Katyni. Krasnoarmiejcy w adu polskich konclagieriej*, „*Voyenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*” 1993, No. 12, pp. 22–26; I.W. Michutin, *Polsko-sovietskaya woina 1919–1920 g* [Polish-Soviet War 1919–1920], Moscow 1994, pp. 235–238; A. Achmatowicz, *Strzałków to nie Katyń, Tuchola – nie Miednoje. Kwestia jeńców sowieckich wojny 1919–1920 w Polsce*, [Strzałków is not Katyń, Tuchola is not Miednoje, The question of Soviet POWs of the 1919–1920 war in Poland ] „*Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*” [“Study of the Annals of Russia and Central and Eastern Europe”] 1995, vol. 30, pp. 99–112.

<sup>52</sup> APBy, UW Pom, Rep. 4 No. 9687, Dokumentacja dotycząca cmentarza obozu jeńców w Tucholi z lat 1920–1939 [Documentation regarding the cemetery at the POW camp in Tuchola in the period 1920–1939]; APPoz, SP Września, vol. 181a, Dokumentacja dotycząca cmentarza obozu w Strzałkowie z 1924 r. [Documentation regarding the cemetery at the prison camp in Strzałków from 1924]; „*Życie Warszawy*”, 27 VII 1994 r., pp. I–III.

Unfortunately, bereft of such care after 1945, these cemeteries later fell into ruin.

In order to show what conditions POWs lived under in Poland (in the years 1919–1920), how they were treated by the Polish side and how they were fed, in the following section, the on the ground situation in selected prison camps will be presented (the camps for POWs and internees in Wadowice and Brest-Litovsk, as well as in the Regulating Stations and Stations of Prisoner Concentration or Holding Facilities in Brest-Litovsk and Puławy).

### **Prison Camp No. 2 in Wadowice**

The prison camp in Wadowice was established at the beginning of WW I by the Austrian authorities. It consisted of eighteen ground barracks, from which some were made of brick and some of wood. They could hold circa 6,000 people at a maximum<sup>53</sup>. The camp was equipped with essential technical and sanitary facilities, such as a kitchen, a mechanised laundry, water conduits, a sewerage system and a hospital with a few dozen beds.

After the fall of the Austria-Hungarian Empire in November 1918, the camp in Wadowice together with its POWs was taken over by the Polish military authorities. Russian, Serbian and Italian POWs held there were sent home. Such a swift assumption of control over the prison camps in Galicia (in Wadowice, Łańcut, Dąbie near Krakow) prevented them from being devastated.

The camp in Wadowice remained empty only for a short time. Already in November 1918, POWs and internees of Ukrainian

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<sup>53</sup> J. Błoński, *Pamiętnik...*, pp. 123–135.

origin started to be sent there from East Galicia<sup>54 55</sup>, and from mid-February 1919 (after the beginning of Polish-Bolshevik hostilities) – also transports with Bolshevik POWs. The poor state of the preserved archive materials makes it impossible to precisely estimate the number of Russian POWs in Wadowice in the first half of 1919. There were most probably a few hundred of them<sup>56</sup>. After the reorganization of structures for catering with prisoners conducted by the military authorities in July 1919, the camp in Wadowice received a new official name “Prison Camp No. 2” and was allocated to POWs and internees of Ukrainian coming from East Galicia. Bolshevik prisoners were transported to Prison Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo<sup>57</sup>.

In November 1919, 2,902 Ukrainians were in the camp in Wadowice, including 1,860 POWs and 1,042 internees. In the first year of the camp’s operation, Capt. Kopystyński was its commander<sup>58</sup>. In the months to come, POWs and internees of Ukrainian nationality were successively released and sent back home. A subsequent group of Ukrainians were directed to Wadowice after the start of the Kiev operation in April 1920. At that time, 12,000 soldiers from units of the West Ukrainian People’s Republic, these were the so-called Sich Riflemen, who

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<sup>54</sup> English editor note Due to clashes between Poles and Ukrainians over control of the area around Lvov

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 47–52.

<sup>56</sup> Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 47–52.

<sup>57</sup> CAW, 4<sup>th</sup> Branch NDWP (Prisoner Section), vol. 4, *Rozporządzenie MSWojsk. w sprawie organizacji obozów jeńców i internowanych z 26 lipca 1919 r.* [Ordinance of MS Wojsk with regard to the organization of camps for POWs and the interned dated 26 July 1919].

<sup>58</sup> CPHAU, fond 309, *Wspomnienie Juli Wojakiwnej o pobycie w obozie w Wadowicach za okres lipiec–sierpień 1919 r.*, [Recollections of Julia Wojakiwna of her time in the Wadowice camp period July–August 1919] p. 9; J. Błoński, *Pamiętnik...*, p. 127.

were taken prisoner. After the victorious Battles of Warsaw and on the Niemen River, during which c. 90,000 soldiers of the Red Army were taken into captivity, Bolshevik POWs were again sent to the camp in Wadowice. At the beginning of October 1920, 2,104 soldiers were being held in this camp<sup>59</sup>.

Owing to its good living and sanitary conditions in mid-September 1920, the Polish military authorities assigned this camp to cater for Lithuanian POWs who were to be gathered there before being exchanged with Lithuania. Following instructions from the military authorities, they were treated differently, for instance receiving higher food rations. There were not that many of them: at any one time there were around 100 prisoners. In accordance with an agreement on the exchange of POWs they had returned to Lithuania by December 1920<sup>60</sup>. At the same time, the majority of the Ukrainian internees and POWs held in Wadowice were sent back to East Galicia. Their place was occupied by soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic – former Polish allies who after just a single short battle with the Bolsheviks in November 1920 crossed back over the Polish front line and had to be interned. On 12<sup>th</sup> January 1921, there were 602 Bolshevik POWs, 122 Ukrainians from East Galicia and

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<sup>59</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MSWojsk. (1775/89), vol. 327, Zestawienie statystyczne jeńców bolszewickich przebywających w obozach z 1 października 1920 r. [Tabulation of Soviet POWs held in camps as of 1 October 1920].

<sup>60</sup> CAW, 4. Armia, vol. 509, Rozporządzenie w sprawie nowego porządku ewakuacji jeńców i internowanych z frontu do kraju z 11 września 1920 r. [Ordinance with regard to new standards for the evacuation of POWs and the interned from the front to the state dated 11 September 1920]; Z. Karpus, *Wymiana jeńców wojennych między Polską a Litwą (październik 1920 – styczeń 1921)* [Exchange of POWs between Poland and Lithuania (October 1920 – January 1921)], „Zeszyt Naukowy Muzeum Wojska w Białymstoku” [“Notes from the Museum of Military Science in Białystok”] 1991, part 5, pp. 102–109.

some 2,180 internees from the units of Symon Petlura housed in the camp in Wadowice. In the following months of 1921, the number of the Bolshevik POWs decreased, as a result of which the camp in Wadowice became de-facto a camp for interned soldiers of the Ukrainian People's Republic<sup>61</sup>.

The camp in Wadowice functioned until the end of October 1921, that is until the moment of the termination of the operation of the exchange of POWs between Poland and Bolshevik Russia. At that time, for economic reasons, the Polish authorities started to close part of the facilities allocated so far to POWs and internees. The Ukrainians who remained in Wadowice were now directed to other camps for the interned, for instance to Kalisz, Szczypiorno and Strzałkowo. In mid-October 1921, only thirty-seven people remained in Wadowice<sup>62</sup>. After the liquidation of this camp, its premises were handed over to the Command of the V Corps in Krakow.

Much is said in Russian publications about the food and provisions for the Bolshevik POWs kept in Polish captivity. Accusations of starvation are addressed. Such claims could not be further from the truth and are not based on any reliable documentation. During their stay in the camps in Poland, POWs and internees received the provisions specified by the regulations of the military authorities dated April 1919. In the Polish Army at the beginning of the 1920s, seven tables of provisions were in

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<sup>61</sup> CAW, 5<sup>th</sup> Staff Branch MSWojsk., vol. 27, Komunikat nr 15 o sytuacji w obozach jeńców i internowanych z 12 stycznia 1921 r. [Communique Nr 15 regarding the situation in the camps for POWs and the interned dated 12 January 1921] [**henceforth**: Communique Nr. 15...]; 4. Armia, vol. 329, Communique Nr. 39 dated 1 March 1921

<sup>62</sup> CAW, Wydział Wywiadowczy [Department of Intelligence], vol. 282/58, Komunikat nr 37 z 12 października 1921 r. [Communique Nr. 37 dated 12 October 1921]

operation. The POWs and internees who did not work received provisions according to table “E”. In compliance with this, every prisoner was to receive: 500 grams of bread, 150 grams of meat (four times a week beef, twice a week horsemeat and once fish), 700 grams of potatoes, 150 grams of hard vegetables or flour, and also 10 grams of fat or lard (in addition, 100 grams of soap a month). In the memoir written by an interned Ukrainian, daily provisions in the camp in Wadowice in the autumn of 1919 looked as follows: breakfast – soup or tea, dinner – cabbage or other vegetables with meat, supper – coffee or tea and bread (everyday a quarter of a loaf of bread per person)<sup>63</sup>. The POWs and internees who’d taken on work in state institutions or camps and the Lithuanian POWs all received provisions according to table “C”, which corresponded to the norms of provisions granted to Polish soldiers in garrisons (except that POWs did not receive a ration of cigarettes). According to this table, a daily ration equalled: 700 grams of bread, 250 grams of meat, 700 grams of potatoes, 150 grams of flour or hard vegetables, 30 grams of fat or lard, 50 grams of marmalade and also spices. By way of illustration, the provisions of the POWs sent from Wadowice to work in Warsaw in December 1920 consisted of: breakfast – sweet coffee and bread, dinner – potatoes with meat and groats, supper – groats with lard and additionally marmalade<sup>64</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> CAW, *Dziennik Rozkazów Wojskowych* [Army Command Log], vol. 4, Rozkaz nr 39 z 8 kwietnia 1919 r. [Order Nr. 39 dated 8 April 1919], d. 945–967; CPHAU, *Wspomnienie Juli Wojakiwnej o pobycie w obozie w Wadowicach za okres lipiec–sierpień 1919 r.* [Recollections of Julia Wojakiwna of her time in the Wadowice camp period July–August 1919], p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> CAW, *Oddział Naczelnej Kontroli Wojskowej* [Branch of the Chief of Army Control] vol. 16, *Pismo Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego nr 1 z 29 grudnia 1920 r. w sprawie jeńców z obozu w Wadowicach pracujących w Warszawie-Pradze* [Letter from the Commander of the General District dated

The above provision norms for the POWs were – for objective reasons – not always adhered to, owing to provisioning difficulties among other challenges which Poland faced in the years 1919–1921. When it was impossible to provide the POWs and internees with all the staples of their provisions, they were substituted with other products in greater amount. Most often there were problems with meat, and then the POWs would receive more potatoes, root vegetables or bread.

Moreover, the prevention of outbreaks of infectious diseases (typhus, cholera, dysentery) constituted an important issue for the Polish military authorities. These diseases occurred with a particular intensity during the autumn-winter months at the turn of 1919 and 1920 and 1920 and 1921, transmitted by the mass number of Bolshevik POWs from the Eastern Front. Despite the efforts of the Polish sanitary authorities to undertake preventive actions, infectious diseases were a major cause of death among POWs and internees in the camps in Poland, including at the camp in Wadowice. At the end of November and December 1920, when the epidemic of typhus and cholera struck, four or five POWs died every day<sup>65</sup>. This is still far fewer (based on data from November 1920) than in the prison camps in Tuchola (where 296 POWs died that month and in Strzałkowo (where 1,682 POWs died in total that month). Good living

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29 December 1920 on the subject of POWs from the camp in Wadowice working in the Praga district of Warsaw].

<sup>65</sup> CAW, 1st Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 118, Raport dowódcy obozu w Wadowicach o sytuacji w obozie z 25 grudnia 1920 r.; Gabinet Ministra Spraw Wojskowych [Report by the Commander of the camp in Wadowice on the situation in the camp dated 25 December 1920; Office of the Minister for the Armed Forces], vol. 402, Korespondencja w sprawie epidemii cholery w obozie w Wadowicach z 24 listopada 1920 r. [Correspondence on the subject of the Cholera epidemic in the Wadowice camp dated 24 November 1920.]

and sanitary conditions and the exemplary administration of Lt. Col. Polkowski at the camp in Wadowice had considerable influence on this outcome, a fact confirmed by the numerous commissions who visited the camp in the years 1920 and 1921<sup>66</sup> (Appendix 1).

### **Prison Camp No. 8 (Regulating Station (or Processing Facility) in Brest-Litovsk**

Close to the front line a staging area for the National Office for the Return of the POWs, Refugees and Labourers was organized in Brest-Litovsk after its seizure by Polish units at the end of February 1919. It was situated in a pre-existing fortress and it could house up to 4,000 people at a time. It was equipped with a kitchen (that could serve one thousand meals a day), a delousing station and also a hospital with 500 beds. Over the period from 1<sup>st</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> September 1919 this staging area gave assistance to a total of 55,513 people<sup>67</sup>. At the end of 1919, when the flow of POWs through this staging area was

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<sup>66</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MS Wojsk. (1772/89), vol. 1788, Pismo gen. K. Sosnkowskiego do Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Kraków z 17 września 1920 r. w sprawie sytuacji w obozie w Wadowicach; Raport MS Wojsk. z 17 grudnia 1920 r. z wizytacji Obozu Jeńców nr 2 w Wadowicach; Oddział I MS Wojsk., vol. 115 [Letter of General K Sosnkowski to the Command of the General District Krakow dated 17 September 1920 with regard to the situation in the camp in Wadowice; Report of the MS Wojsk dated 17 December 1920 relating to the inspection of POW Camp Nr 2 in Wadowice; 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk].

<sup>67</sup> AAN, PRM, Rektyfikat 47, vol. 48, Komunikat o ruchu na etapach Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników w okresie 1 maja – 30 września 1919 r. [Communique on staged movements by the State Department for the Repatriation of POWs, Refugees and Workers for the period 1 May – 30 September 1919]; vol. 49, Informacja o etapach Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników

decreasing, the authorities of the National Office for the Return of the POWs, Refugees and Labourers proposed the liquidation of some staging areas, including the one in Brest-Litovsk. Ultimately, this proposal was not implemented and this staging area continued to function, though its significance never returned to the levels reached in the first months following its formation<sup>68</sup>. In the spring of 1919, the High Command of the Polish Army undertook actions aimed at establishing a camp for Bolshevik POWs in the fortress in Brest-Litovsk. Initially, some 20,000 POWs were to stay there, though later the camp went on to hold 40,000 or even 100,000 POWs<sup>69</sup>. This front-line camp was to gather POWs from the entire zone of hostilities, before they were to be sent back behind the lines. The orders of the High Command of the Polish Army concerning the establishment of the prison camp in Brest-Litovsk were issued at the beginning of June 1919. A few days later groups of POWs were directed there. This urgency was caused by the situation then emerging on the western border of Poland, as a result of

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z czerwca 1919 r. [Information of stages from the State Department for the Repatriation of POWs, Refugees and Workers dated June 1919]

<sup>68</sup> AAN, PRM, Rektyfikat 47, vol. 51, Pismo Państwowego Urzędu ds. Powrotu Jeńców, Uchodźców i Robotników do Prezydium Rady Ministrów w sprawie likwidacji części etapów z 26 listopada 1919 r. [Letter by the State Department for the Repatriation of POWs, Refugees and Workers to the Presidium Cabinet of Ministers regarding the elimination of some stages 26 November 1919].

<sup>69</sup> AAN, Office of the Sejm and Senate, vol. 21, Pismo w sprawie obozu jeńców w Brześciu Litewskim z 30 maja 1919 r. [Letter with regard to the POW camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 30 May 1919]; CAW, NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (Prisoner Section), vol. 35, Spis obozów jenieckich z 8 sierpnia 1919 r. [List of prisoner camps dated 8 August 1919]; 1st Branch Command MSWojsk., vol. 93, Schemat dotyczący spraw jenieckich z 20 lipca 1919 r. [Plan of prisoner issues dated 20 July 1919]; Z. Karpus, Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy..., pp. 47–53.

a threat from Germany. This situation arose in the period that preceded the signing of the peace treaty in Versailles by Germany. In the face of tense border relations with Berlin, the Polish military authorities were forced to issue regulations relating to the evacuation of the recently created camp in Strzałkowo together with its entire personnel and POWs. The Ministry of Military Affairs now made a decision to establish in Brest-Litovsk a run-off branch of the camp of Strzałkowo in the west. However, they abandoned this idea after the decision by the High Command of the Polish Army to organize a prison camp in the Brest-Litovsk fortress<sup>70</sup>. The evacuation from Strzałkowo commenced on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1919 as a result of which around 3,000 Bolshevik and Ukrainian POWs were then transported across Poland to Brest-Litovsk. When relations with Germany were normalized in July 1919, the decision concerning the evacuation of the camp in Strzałkowo was rescinded. After the change in circumstances, the military authorities now allocated the premises in Brest-Litovsk only for interned Germans, and in the event of a sudden influx of POWs from the front, a supplementary camp was to function there<sup>71</sup>. In reality though, the

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<sup>70</sup> CAW, NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (POW Section), vol. 2, Letter of MSWojsk. do komendy obozu w Strzałkowie z 10 czerwca 1919 r. [To the commander of the camp in Strzałkow dated 10 June 1919]; Letter of MS Wojsk. w sprawie ewakuacji obozu w Strzałkowie z 3 czerwca 1919 r. [with regard to the evacuation of the camp in Strzałkow dated 3 June 1919]; vol. 3, Zestawienie obozów i stacji z 20 lipca 1919 r. [Presentation of camps and stations dated 20 July 1919]

<sup>71</sup> CAW, NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (POW Section), vol. 3, Letter MSWojsk. w sprawie obozu w Brześciu z 28 czerwca 1919 r. [With regard to the camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 28 June 1919]; Letter of NDWP w sprawie obozu w Brześciu z 1 sierpnia 1919 r. [with regard to the camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 1 August 1919]; AAN, Office of the Sejm and Senate, vol. 27, Letter of MS Wojsk. Do marszałka Sejmu w sprawie obozu w Brześciu z 9 sierpnia

number of Bolshevik POWs in the camp did not decrease, but in fact it increased systematically, reaching a total of over 8,000 (Table 10) at the beginning of August 1919.

**Table 10.** Number of POWs and the interned staying in the facilities in Brest-Litovsk in the period from August 1919 to October 1921.

	Prison Camp No. 8	Regulating Station (processing facility) of POWs and Internees	Distribution Point Transit Hub / Points for POWs	Prisoner Concentration Point or Holding facility of POWs and Internees
1 VII 1919	4 000	–	–	–
6 VIII 1919	8 000	–	–	–
3 IX 1919	5 955	–	–	–
10 X 1919	3 875	–	–	–
6 XI 1919	2 146	–	–	–
20 XII 1919	200	–	–	–
5 II 1920	–	392	–	–
15 II 1920	–	390	–	–
30 IX 1920	–	–	870	–
1 XI 1920	–	–	1 138	–
2 XII 1920	–	–	1 067	–
28 I 1921	–	–	462	–
15 II 1921	–	–	–	411
5 III 1921	–	–	–	722
27 V 1921	–	–	–	1 068

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1919 r. [to the Marshall of the Sejm with regard to the camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 9 August 1919].

	Prison Camp No. 8	Regulating Station (processing facility) of POWs and Internees	Distribution Point Transit Hub / Points for POWs	Prisoner Concentration Point or Holding facility of POWs and Internees
23 VIII 1921	–	–	–	2
23 IX 1921	–	–	–	1 170
6 X 1921	–	–	–	66
12 X 1921	–	–	–	57

Source: CAW, NDWP Branch IV (Prisoners Section) volume 3, List of camps and Regulating (Holding) Facilities from 2 July 1919. The office of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, volume 402, Account of the Ministry of the Armed Forces with regard to POWs dated 28 November 1919; NDWP Branch IV (Prisoners Section) volume 3, Letter of the NDWP to the Marshall of the Sejm dated 9 August 1919; volume 6, Report from the inspection of the camp in Brest Litowski on 10 September 1919 I volume 35a, Clarification of the Ministry of the Armed Forces regarding the situation in Pow camps of 6 November 1919. Branch I of the Command of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, volume 97, Protocol from the conference on POWs in camps dated 20 December 1919. NDWP Branch IV (POW Section) volume 35b, Numbers of POWs at transit stations as of 2 December 1920. Command of the 4th Army volume 563, Report on the numbers of POWs under the responsibility of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army command from 20 September to 1 November 1920; NDWP IV Branch (General Affairs Section), volume 30, Report nr 23 from 28 January 1921; 1<sup>st</sup> District Corp Command, volume 9, Report nr 40 from 5 March 1921; Branch 1 Ministry of the Armed Forces Command volume 99, Weekly list on sanitary situation in prisoner camps and Regulating stations / processing facilities for the period 5–15 February 1920. Office of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, volume 402, Report 9 from 27 May 1921; 1st District Corp Command, volume 9, Reports nr 32 from 15 February 1921. CAW Branch II of Ministry of War, volume 282, Report nr 29 of 23 August 1921; volume 282/58, Report nr 34 from 23 September 1921; volume 282/58, Reports nr 36 and 37 from 6 and 12 October 1921.

The camp in Brest-Litovsk was organized very quickly and in specific circumstances (due to the threat from Germany), and as such it was practically unprepared to receive such a large number of the POWs. It was located in a fortress within the complex's six buildings: in the citadel behind Reduta, in Count Berg Fort, in the so-called "Bug-Szopy" fort, and in the Grajewski barracks.

Moreover, POWs also stayed in a hospital specially set up for them and in a military penal prison<sup>72</sup>. In comparison to the other prison camps in Poland, the living conditions in the Brest-Litovsk camp were among the worst. As a result, it did not take long for an epidemic of infectious diseases to break out: specifically of typhus and dysentery, which led to numerous deaths. During the epidemic, according to Polish data, between 1<sup>st</sup> August and September 1919 a total of 1 392 POWs died in just one part of the camp alone (in the “Bug-Szopy” fort). In other buildings, where conditions were better, the epidemic’s number of victims was substantially lower, for instance in the Count Berg Fort, 185 POWs died between 1<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September 1919 (Table 11).

**Table 11.** Number of deaths of POWs in Brest-Litovsk in 1919.

Name of the building	Deaths in total
	Period
“Bug-Szopy” fort	1392
	1 VIII – 24 IX 1919
Count Berg Fort	185
	1–25 IX 1919
Total	1577
	1 VIII – 25 IX 1919

Source CAW, NDWP IV Branch (PoW Section), volume 6, list of deceased PoWs in Brest-Litovsk from 28 September 1919; Report from the inspection of the Brest-Litovsk camp on 10 September 1919; Statements, t1505617, Statement of Z. Żulika-Żulikowskie in August 1919 working in the command of the fort camp at Brest-Litovsk.

<sup>72</sup> CAW, NDWP 4th Branch Prisoner Section, vol. 6, Raport w sprawie inspekcji obozu w Brześciu z 10 września 1919 r.; Gabinet Ministra Spraw Wojskowych, vol. 402 [Report on the inspection of the camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 10 September 1919; Office of the Minister of the Armed Forces vol. 402], Memoriał Departamentu Sanitarnego w sprawie jeńców z 28 listopada 1919 r. [Memo of the Department of Sanitation with regard to POWs dated 28 November 1919].

Prevailing conditions in this period in Brest-Litovsk were best described by Capt. Sterling-Okuniewski in a report for the Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs, who visited the camp on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1919. He stated that: *“the POWs are ragged, clothed in rags, lice-ridden, haggard and scrawny. They are a picture of abject misery and despair. Many are without boots and underwear, most of them possess only the residues of such items. A number of POWs are suffering from spotted typhus, relapsing typhus, dysentery, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis, malaria, venereal diseases, which as a result of the lack of space and delousing, the filth, and lack of isolation of the healthy from the sick has the potential to cause the infection of the whole prison camp or its larger part. Every day an increase – by up to fifty people – can be observed in the numbers of the severely sick requiring hospital care. Provisions for the POWs are meagre and monotonous (pea soup for ten days running), there has been no salt for a long time and very little meat, no bread at all in the last weeks...”*<sup>73</sup>.

After having been acquainted with the conditions in the camp in Brest-Litovsk, the military authorities immediately set about improving them by refusing to accept new POWs, and above all through improved supply of provisions and clothes. Subsequently, in view of the approach of winter, a decision was made to liquidate this camp and establish a Regulating Station or holding area on its site<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> CAW, Gabinet Ministra Spraw Wojskowych [Office of the Minister of the Armed Forces], vol. 402, Memoriał Departamentu Sanitarnego w sprawie jeńców z 28 listopada 1919 r. [Memo of the Department of Sanitation with regard to POWs dated 28 November 1919]

<sup>74</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch Command Sztabu MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Raport o sytuacji w obozach i na stacjach z grudnia 1919 r. [Report on the situation in camps and stations for December 1919]; vol. 91, Wyciąg z rozkazu NDWP

(Appendix 3). As a result of this decision, the number of POWs in the camp started to decrease rapidly, so that by the end of December 1919 there were only 200 POWs staying in the Count Berg Fort<sup>75</sup>.

**Table 12.** Number of the POWs in Brest-Litovsk – status as for 11<sup>th</sup> October 1919.

Name of the building	Total	Ukrainians (POWs)	Soviet POWs	POWs (the interned civilians)
“Bug-Szopy” fort	1 894 <sup>3</sup>	1 894	–	–
Count Berg Fort	685	153	361	70 (Ukrainians) 101 (Russians)
Grajewskie Barracks	1 180 <sup>2</sup>	580	600 <sup>2</sup>	–
Officer’s camp	116 <sup>1</sup>	60	6	1 (woman)
total	3 831	2 568	825	468*

<sup>1</sup> 36 officers lived in the town.

<sup>2</sup> 600 Cossacks were taken prisoner in August 1919 near Minsk and were to be sent to the south of Russia to join “white” formations.

<sup>3</sup> the majority Ukrainians from Galicia

\* including 7 women and 2 children

Source: Państwowe Archiwum Federacji Rosyjskiej w Moskwie, fond 3341, opis 6, dzieło 3, pp. 5–23.

The separate Regulating Station or processing facility in Brest-Litovsk started its activity at the end of November 1919, but, after only a month, owing to the difficult sanitary conditions, it was closed. Then, at the beginning of March 1920, its premises were allocated to Polish allied Ukrainian units (those subordinated to Ataman Symon Petlura) formed in Poland from POWs and

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nr 181 z 1 listopada 1919 r. [Excerpt from the order of NDWP Nr. 181 dated 1 November 1919]

<sup>75</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch Command MSWojsk., vol. 97, Protokół konferencji odbytej w sprawie jeńców z 20 grudnia 1919 r. [Protocol from the conference on POWs of 20 December 1919]

internees from the Ukrainian People's Republic. With the help of the Polish side, two Ukrainian divisions, the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (under the command of Lt. Marko Bezruchko) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division (under the command of Lt. Oleksandr Udovychenko), were established. After the start of the Kiev operation of 1920, these units marched to the front at the end of April. They then numbered 556 officers and 3,384 Cossacks<sup>76</sup>. At the same time (the beginning of March 1920) the forces of General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, were evacuated from Latvia, roughly one thousand soldiers, and was routed to Brest-Litovsk. It was to be reorganized and reenforced prior to leaving for the Eastern Front. However, in the face of Polish losses inflicted by the Bolshevik June offensive, this unit, at their own request was sent to the front already 9<sup>th</sup> June 1920, where it joined the group of Lt. Józef Rybak and initially fought near Kalenkowicze<sup>77</sup>.

After the beginning of the Kiev operation, the High Command of the Polish Army, anticipating a larger group of POWs, issued an order at the end of April 1920 concerning the creation of Prison Camp No. 8 in Brest-Litovsk. Its commander was to be Maj. Lewandowski, a deputy commander of the camp in Strzałkowo. The camp was to be allocated to Cossack prisoners, who might later join the Polish side voluntarily<sup>78</sup>. Owing to the

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<sup>76</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch Command MS Wojsk., vol. 103, Pismo w sprawie organizacji Obozu Jeńców Nr 8 w Brześciu Litewskim z 29 kwietnia 1920 r. [Letter regarding the organisation of POW camp Nr. 8 in Brest-Litovsk dated 29 April 1920]

<sup>77</sup> Z. Karpus, *Działalność gen. S. Bułak-Bałachowicza i jego oddziału w Polsce podczas wojny 1920 r.*, „Zeszyt Naukowy Muzeum Wojska w Białymstoku” 1990, pp. 89–90. [Activities of General S. Bulak-Blachowicza and his units in Poland during the war of 1920. “Notes from the Museum of Military Science in Białystok”]

<sup>78</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch Command MS Wojsk., vol. 103, Pismo w sprawie organizacji obozu w Brześciu z 29 kwietnia 1920 r. [Letter regarding the

unexpected advance of the Bolshevik offensive and their seizure of Brest-Litovsk in summer 1920, the camp did not commence its activities. Nor was it reactivated after the victorious Polish counter-offensive. In its place, instead a Distribution Point for POWs was established in the autumn of 1920 under the command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army whose task was to receive the POWs captured by the units of that Army and send them swiftly to prison camps<sup>79</sup>. Subsequently, at the beginning of February 1921, as a result of the exchange of the POWs between Poland and Russia and Soviet Ukraine, the Prisoner Distribution Point in Brest-Litovsk was now transformed into a Prisoner Concentration Point or holding area. Its functions were concentrated on preparing Bolshevik POWs for the envisaged prisoner exchange and sending them on to the Exchange Points of POWs in Baranowicze and Równe<sup>80</sup>. This Prisoner Concentration Point in Brest-Litovsk functioned until the completion of the exchange of the POWs. It was closed pursuant to the order of 9<sup>th</sup> October 1921 together with other prisoner facilities acting up to that time in Poland<sup>81</sup>.

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organisation of POW camp Nr. 8 in Brest-Litovsk dated 29 April 1920]; vol. 105, [Depeche regarding the camp in Brest-Litovsk dated 6 May 1920]; NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (General Section), vol. 16, Porządek ewakuacji jeńców i internowanych obowiązujący od 1 lipca 1920 r. [Conditions for the repatriation of POWs and the interned binding from 1 July 1920].

<sup>79</sup> CAW, Dowództwo 4. Armii [Command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army], vol. 563, Liczebność jeńców przy 4. Armii z września i listopada 1920 r. [Numbers of POWs with the 4<sup>th</sup> Army from September and November 1920]

<sup>80</sup> CAW, NDWP 4<sup>th</sup> Branch (POW Section), vol. 35a, Stan obozów i stacji z 1 lutego 1921 r. [Conditions of camps and stations as of 1 February 1921]; Dowództwo Okręgu Korpusu nr I, vol. 9, Komunikat nr 40 z 5 marca 1921 r. [Command of the District Corp Nr I, vol. 9 Communique Nr. 40 dated 5 March 1921]

<sup>81</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 282/58, Komunikat nr 37 z 12 października 1921 r. [Communique Nr. 37 dated 12 October 1921]

## **Regulating Station (or Processing Facility) for POWs in Puławy near Lublin**

Along with the signing of the preliminary treaty (on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1920) and the termination of hostilities with Soviet Russia (18<sup>th</sup> October 1920), the Polish side commenced work to resolve the issue of prisoners of war. The most pressing problem in this period was the efficient evacuation of POWs from the areas subordinate to the High Command of the Polish Army (the front line) to adequate prison camps located inland away from front lines. This operation had already begun during the battles at the front and concluded eventually at the end of October 1920. As a consequence, POWs were sent to camps in Strzałkowo, Wadowice, Pikulice, Szczypiorno, Tuchola and Dąbie, even though insignificant number of them still stayed in Regulating Stations or holding facilities, for instance in Puławy, Stryj, Lvov, Białystok<sup>82</sup>. At the very same time Prison Camp No. 8 in Rembertów was liquidated (and its POWs were moved to Tuchola), as well as the Prisoner Concentration Station in Modlin – due to living conditions (it had also been established in the premises of an old fortress)<sup>83</sup>. Somewhat earlier, the Prisoner Concentration Station in Siedlce was closed<sup>84</sup>. In their place,

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<sup>82</sup> CAW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 107, Stan obozów jeńców i Stacji Rozdzielczych z 10 listopada 1920 r. [State of POW camps and Regulating Stations as of 10 November 1920]

<sup>83</sup> CAW, 4<sup>th</sup> Branch NDWP (POW Section), vol. 21, Sprawozdanie z inspekcji Stacji Koncentracyjnej Jeńców w Modlinie z 31 października 1920 r. [Report from the inspection of the Concentration Station for POWs in Modlin dated 31 October 1920; ]; vol. 20, Likwidacja stacji w Modlinie, 12 listopada 1920 r. [Closing of the Modlin station 12 November 1920]

<sup>84</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch NDWP (POW Section), vol. 6, Letter of the NDWP to MS Wojsk. Regarding the transportation of POWs to camps dated 18 October 1920

Regulating Stations were established in Puławy (in October 1920) and Dorohusk (in December 1920). These were to receive POWs and internees from the southern section of the front, where the Polish counter-offensive had started later than that on the northern front<sup>85</sup>.

With the advent of the autumn chill in 1920, the situation for the POWs in these camps deteriorated drastically. This was caused by lack of boots and clothes, and also the transport of POWs to camps in unheated wagons with inadequate provisions. In all the camps, this resulted in the outbreak of epidemics of infectious diseases, especially typhus and cholera. At the earliest, already at the beginning of November 1920, such difficult sanitary situations arose in the Regulating Station in Puławy, where POWs sent from the Prisoner Distribution Point in Kowel had been gathered<sup>86</sup>. The inspection conducted on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1920 by the head of the Sanitary Service of the Command of the Lublin General District Gen. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Dąbrowski, revealed that sanitary facilities in the Regulating Station in

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<sup>85</sup> AW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MSWojsk., vol. 276, Pismo nadzoru budowlanego Garnizonu Puławy do Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin z 25 października 1920 r. w sprawie remontu na Stacji Rozdzielczej w Puławach; Odpis depeszy Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin do MS Wojsk. z 29 listopada 1920 r. dotyczącej sytuacji w Puławach i organizacji Stacji Rozdzielczej w Dorohusku [Letter by the Building Inspectorate for the Puławy Garrison to the Commander of the General District Lublin dated 25 October 1920 regarding the renovation of the Regulating Station in Puławy; Copies of the depeches of the Commander of the General District Lublin to MS Wojsk dated 29 November 1920 regarding the situation in Puławy and the organisation of the Regulating Station in Dorohusk].

<sup>86</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Odpis pisma skierowanego do Dowództwa Żandarmerii Wojskowej przez rtm. T. Tomaszewskiego z 12 listopada 1920 r. o sytuacji jeńców w Puławach [Copy of the letter directed to the Commander of the Military Police by Captain T. Tomaszewski dated 12 November 1920 regarding the situation of POWs in Puławy].

Puławy were not functioning, and therefore POWs could not receive the mandatory hygienic care. It was also pointed out that *“POWs were transported to the station in a state of abject squalor, and hence they easily contracted diseases; and a hospital estimated, set up for 120 beds was at that time catering to around 250 sick”*<sup>87</sup>. The difficult situation in Puławy deteriorated even further after the arrival of subsequent transports of POWs from the Distribution Point in Kowel. One transport sent from Kowel on 5<sup>th</sup> November with 300 POWs was composed mainly of those sick with infectious diseases. After their arrival in the Regulating Station, as many as 131 of these prisoners were sent to hospital. As noted in the above report: *“POWs had travelled five days without food, and therefore after their arrival in Puławy, as they left the trains and were directed towards the station, they rushed towards a dead horse lying at the side of the road and started eating raw carrion. The dead body of a prisoner was thrown out of the transport onto the railway tracks near the station in Lublin”*. Conditions in the overcrowded hospital itself were very poor. The sick were lying on bare bunks in unheated rooms owing to the lack of firewood<sup>88</sup>. This situation led to the outbreak of an epidemic of typhus in a short period of time, as a result of which from 10<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1920 some 247 POWs died (the number of POWs in the Regulating Station or holding area in Puławy amounted to around 1,100 prisoners)<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Raport szefa sanitarnego Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin gen. ppor. Dąbrowskiego po inspekcji w Puławach w dniu 17 listopada 1920 r. [Report by the head of sanitation of the General District Lublin Command Lieutenant General Dabrowski following the inspection in Puławy on 17 November 1920]

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Odpis depechy Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin do MSWojsk. z 29 listopada 1920 r. o sytuacji w Puławach [Copy of Depeche's from the General District Lublin

The General Surgeon of the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Epidemics Lt. Prof. Emil Godlewski recorded his impressions of the visit he paid on 28<sup>th</sup> November in Puławy in the report for the Ministry of Military Affairs. During his visit to the camp baths, he noted: *“I went there [to the baths] with a doctor and other officers and found a dead body on the table where the prisoners were putting their clothes prior to taking a bath. In the second room there was one dead body lying in the corner and two people lay in agony. The prisoners who were in the baths filled me with horror, they were haggard and exhausted to the extreme”*<sup>90</sup>. In the opinion of the surgeon visiting the station, the rations of the POWs were insufficient to ensure survival: there was no tea or sugar, even for the severely ill.

After having reviewed the above report, the Ministry of Military Affairs reacted immediately by suspending those responsible for the situation at the station and launching an investigation against the inspector of the prison camps at the Ministry of Military Affairs Lt. Col. G. Marski and the commandant of the Regulating Station in Puławy Maj. Chlebowski<sup>91</sup>. Nonetheless, these decisions did not improve the situation in

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Command to MS Wojsk dated 29 November 1920 regarding the situation in Puławy].

<sup>90</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch Oddział I MS Wojsk., vol. 118, Raport naczelnego lekarza Nadzwyczajnej Komisji ds. Walki z Epidemiami płk. prof. dr. E. Godlewskiego z wizytacji w Puławach z 28 listopada 1920 r. [Report of the Chief Medical officer to the exceptional Committee for combating Epidemics Colonel Professor Dr. E. Godlewski from the visit to Puławy on 28 November 1920].

<sup>91</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 118, Rozkaz MS Wojsk. z 4 grudnia 1920 r. o wdrożeniu śledztwa przeciwko inspektorowi ppłk. Marskiemu i komendantowi Stacji Rozdzielczej w Puławach mjr. Chlebowskiemu [Command MS Wojsk dated 4 December 1920 regarding the commencement of an investigation against Colonel Marski and the commander of the Regulating Station in Puławy Major Chlebowski].

the camp. The Head of the Sanitary Service of the Command of the General District in Lublin Gen. Lt. Col. Dąbrowski later reported on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1920 that: *“the sanitary conditions in [the Regulating Station in Puławy] have not improved since the last inspection (16<sup>th</sup> November), but rather deteriorated”*. The commandant still did not obey regulations, which caused an escalation of the epidemic of typhus. Gen. Dąbrowski was highly critical towards the condition of the hospital, *“which was overcrowded, dirty, without supplementary bed linen, and due to a lack of firewood, cold”*. However, compared with the situation in November, the food provisions for the POWs had improved, especially for the sick, in the opinion of Gen. Dąbrowski, they were even *“very good, though still served in an inappropriate fashion. The sick did not have any plates or spoons, they used their own improvised utensils”*. As a consequence of this general state, the death rate was high for such a camp: up to fifteen a day. The conditions in which healthy POWs were kept were also rated critically: *“Clothes consist of rags, the POWs are exhausted, there is no discipline among them, they sit apathetically around the stove. Owing to a lack of clothes and exhaustion, they cannot be used for labour, which exacerbates even further their mental and physical state”*<sup>92</sup>.

The situation in the Regulating Station in Puławy began to improve only after the next inspection visit conducted on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1920 by the top authorities of the High Command in the General District in Lublin. After this inspection, the requisite services were ordered to carry out necessary renovations

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<sup>92</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 276, Raport szefa sanitarnego Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin z inspekcji w Puławach z 3 grudnia 1920 r. [Report by the head of sanitation of the General District Lublin Command from the inspection in Puławy on 3 December 1920].

and adequately prepare the station for winter conditions within a week. In addition, a command was given that bowls, forks and knives, as well as old uniforms, boots, underwear and blankets be distributed from military stores to all POWs. For an interim period, until further notice, the POWs in Puławy received better food rations – according to table “B” – and also including tea, sugar and tobacco<sup>93</sup>. The above actions, as well as the fact that further groups of POWs were not sent to Puławy, had a gradual influence on the improvement of the situation for the Soviet POWs. In December 1920, the death rate of the POWs systematically decreased, down to a few deaths a day, which testifies to the suppression of the typhus epidemic. Ultimately, from mid-February 1921 in the archive materials there cease to be reported incidents of deaths among the POWs staying in the Regulating Station in Puławy<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., Pismo Dowództwa Okręgu Generalnego Lublin do MSWojsk. z 7 grudnia 1920 r. dotyczące sytuacji na stacji w Puławach. [Letter from the General District Lublin Command to MS Wojsk dated 7 December 1920 regarding the situation in Puławy].

<sup>94</sup> CAW, 1<sup>st</sup> Branch MS Wojsk., vol. 118, Depesza stacji w Puławach o sytuacji jeńców z 21 grudnia 1920 r.; Komunikat nr 3, Sytuacja w obozach jeńców i Stacjach Rozdzielczych z 22 grudnia 1920 r. [Depeche's from the station in Puławy regarding the situation of POWs from 21 December 1920; Communiqué Nr. 3 Situation in the POW camps and the Regulating Stations dated 22 December 1920]; 4<sup>th</sup> Branch NDWP (General Section), vol. 30, Komunikat nr 15 z 12 stycznia 1921 r.; Komunikat nr 16 z 13 stycznia 1921 r.; nr 17 z 17 stycznia 1921 r.; nr 18 z 18 stycznia 1921 r.; nr 22 z 26 stycznia 1921 r.; nr 23 z 28 stycznia 1921 r.; Dowództwo Okręgu Korpusu nr I, vol. 9, Komunikat nr 24 z 30 stycznia 1921 r.; nr 25 z 11 lutego 1921 r.; nr 29 z 9 lutego 1921 r.; nr 32 z 15 lutego 1921 r. [Communiqué Nr 15. Dated 12 January 1921; Communiqué Nr. 16 dated 13 January 1920; Nr 17 dated 17 January 1921; Nr. 18 dated 18 January 1921; Nr. 22 dated 26 January 1921; Nr. 23 dated 28 January 1921; Command of the District Corp Nr 1 vol. 9, Communiqué Nr. 24 dated 30 January 1921; Nr. 25 dated 11 February 1921; Nr. 29 dated 9 February 1921; Nr. 32 dated 15 February 1921.]

## Repatriation of POWs and Refugees Between Poland and Soviet Russia

The treaty on repatriation signed in Riga on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1921 was a part of the overall Polish-Bolshevik peace treaty. It was composed of thirty-eight articles, outlining the technical side of the exchange of the POWs (their repatriation was to take place first), subsequently refugees, repatriates and exiles were to be exchanged. The Joint Commissions (in accordance with Article 10) were to supervise the process of repatriation of all of the above-mentioned groups. Two Joint Commissions were to act – one in Warsaw and the other one in Moscow. Members of these commissions were entitled to visit the camps for POWs and internees, prisons and the other places of stay of those who were subject to repatriation.

Repatriation was to take place at two border points (situated on two main railway lines): at the railway station Stołpce and Kajdanów (on the rail line Baranowicze – Minsk) and at Zdołbunów (on the rail line Równe – Szepietówka)<sup>95</sup>.

In accordance with the resolutions of the treaty on repatriation, the exchange of POWs was to commence ten days after its signing, that is at the beginning of March 1921. The Polish side was prepared for it and at the outset over 3,000 POWs ready to participate in the exchange were assembled in Baranowicze (well-equipped, well-fed and dressed). Yet, the Russian side dragged out the exchange process. They advised of 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> March as the date for transport of the first Polish

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<sup>95</sup> CAW, 4<sup>th</sup> Branch NDWP (General Section), vol. 30, Instrukcja dla Punktów Wymiany Jeńców z 19 stycznia 1921 r. [Instructions for the POW Exchange Centres dated 19 January 1921], k. 1–12; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 125–126.

POWs to the points of exchange. This approach forced the Poles to send official protest notes to the Soviet delegation in Riga. Ultimately, the Poles did not wait until the Soviet side was ready and the first transport with Bolshevik POWs was delivered to Stołpce on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1921. Two days later the first transports with Polish POWs were directed westwards by the Bolsheviks<sup>96</sup>.

In this way, the mass repatriation between Poland and Soviet Russia commenced, first comprising of POWs, and later of internees, exiles and others. It lasted several years, until 1925, encompassing over 1,500,000 people, including c. 1,100,000 or 1,200,000 people who left Russia for Poland. Following the terms agreed on in Riga, POWs were repatriated as the first group. That operation ended in mid-October 1921<sup>97</sup>.

As the official statistics show, a fact which is not questioned by the Russians, altogether 26,440 Polish POWs (including 418 officers) returned to Poland, while 65,797 POWs were sent back to Bolshevik Russia. Apart from that, 965 POWs (officers and Communists) remained in Poland after October 1921, these were to serve as a guarantee that Russia would also send Polish POWs who were still held in the territory of Russia (as was claimed by the Polish side). Finally, even this group of the Bolshevik POWs returned home at the beginning of 1922<sup>98</sup> (Tables 13 and 14). After this date, no reports exist informing

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<sup>96</sup> The Russian National Military Archive in Moscow, fond 470, desc. 1, issue 36, Dokumentacja w sprawie pierwszego transportu z jeńcami polskimi i sowieckimi z marca 1921 r. [Documentation on the first transport with Polish and Soviet POWs from March 1921]

<sup>97</sup> J. Kumaniecki, *Pokój polsko-radziecki 1921* [Polish-Soviet peace of 1921]. *Geneza, rokowania, traktat, komisje mieszane* [Genesis, negotiations, treaties, joint commissions], Warszawa 1985, pp. 126–142.

<sup>98</sup> „Monitor Polski”, nr 247, 29 X 1921 r.; J. Kumaniecki, *Pokój polsko-radziecki 1921...*, p. 135; Z. Karpus, *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy...*, pp. 124–131.

about any transports with the POWs sent to Poland by the Bolshevik side. It needs to be emphasized that in accordance with the treaty on repatriation the return of the POWs to their homeland was voluntary. One could refuse to return by simply filling in a suitable declaration. However, among the Bolshevik POWs staying in Poland, this behaviour did not occur on a mass scale. Based on archive materials we can state that roughly one thousand Bolshevik POWs remained in Poland (usually these were people of Polish origin or those who had relatives in Poland, and also those who were bitter enemies of Bolshevism). It is unknown whether similar cases occurred among the Polish POWs held in Russia.

**Table 13.** Number of the POWs exchanged between Poland and Soviet Russia in the period from April to October 1921.

	1921							
	by 15 IV	by 28 IV	by 30 V	by 23 VIII	by 19 IX	by 6 X	by 12 X	by 15 X
Number of POWs sent to Russia	6 000	21 646	23 000	49 773	54 454	60 618	64 971	65 797
Number of POWs sent to Poland	*	11 582	*	22 926	24 925	26 165	26 440	*

Source CAW, Office of the Ministry of Armed Forces, volume 402, Reports nr 9 and 10. On the situation in the camps from 27 and 30 May 1921; Branch 1 of the Ministry of Armed Forces, volume 276, Report nr 34 from 23 of September 1921, CAW Branch II, volume 5 and 58, Reports nr 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37 from 23 August, 13, 20 and 23 September, 6 and 12 October. K. 64, 156–164, 171–172; volume 2 Account of the stay by the Bolshevik delegation in the Strzalkowice camp 30 April to 5 May 1921. K. 112: "Monitor Polski", nr 247, 29 X 1921, s. 3: Victory over the wire. Polish POWs in captivity (1919–1922). Documents and materials elaborated by S.S. Alexandrowicz, Z. Karpus, W. Rezmer, Toruń 1995, p. VIII–IX

**Table 14.** Overall results of the repatriation operation from Poland to Soviet Russia in the period from March to October 1921 (divided into months)

1921	Prisoners of war		Civilians			
	number of transports	number of POWs	within the treaty		outside the treaty	
			number of transports	number of captives	number of transports	number of captives
March	7	5 601	–	–	1	8
April	12	8 643	–	–	–	–
May	13	9 906	1	26	1	18
June	7	5 886	7	436	–	–
July	11	11 022	5	406	1	35
August	12	10 229	2	261	2	99
September	9	8 599	9	485	1	2
October	7	5 911	7	219	1	6
Total	78	65 797	31	1 833	7	168

Source: „Monitor Polski”, nr 247, 29 X 1921 r., s. 3; J. Kumaniecki, *Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921. Genesis, negotiations, treaties, joint commissions*, Warsaw 1985, s. 135.

In conclusion, it is necessary to add that soldiers of other nationalities, including Latvians, Austrians, Lithuanians and others (for instance Chinese) also served in the Red Army. Having agreed with the diplomatic representations of these POWs countries of origin and also with the consent of those interested, the Polish military authorities enabled their repatriation to their homeland. POWs from Latvia, Hungary and Austria took advantage of this opportunity, something which was recorded in Polish military records of the time. This was not a large group. We can estimate roughly speaking 1,000 Bolshevik POWs came under this form of repatriation<sup>99</sup>. This

<sup>99</sup> CAW, Obóz Jeńców i Internowanych nr 1 w Strzałkowie, vol. 31, Sprawozdanie wywiadowcze nr 1 o sytuacji w obozie za okres 15 listopada – 1 grudnia

category of POWs has not been acknowledged in the estimations prepared by Russian historians, who put forward that even up to 60,000 Soviet POWs never returned from Polish captivity (though estimations in this respect are divergent and oscillate between 40,000 and 60,000 Red Army soldiers, who were to have died in Polish captivity, though even larger numbers are also raised)<sup>100</sup>.

Based on the preserved Polish archive materials, we can assume that the number of those Bolshevik POWs who died in the Polish captivity did not exceed 14,000–16,000 during the duration of their captivity, that is from February 1919 through to October 1921 (some 7,000 to 8,000 POWs died in the camp in Strzałkowo, roughly 2,000 in the camp in Tuchola, the rest in other places in Poland, for instance in Brest-Litovsk – c. 500 POWs, in Puławy, in Wadowice, or the Dąbie camp near Krakow)<sup>101</sup>.

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1921 r., k. 7; Sprawozdanie nr 2 za okres 9–24 września 1921 r. [Camp Nr. 1 for POWs and the interned in Strarzalkow vol. 31, Investigative report Nr. 1 regarding the situation in the camp in the period 15 November – 1 December 1921, k. 7; Report Nr. 2 for the period 9 – 24 September 1921]

<sup>100</sup> M.W. Filimoszin, *Tragedia niewoli. Strzelałem do dziesiątek ludzi tylko dlatego, że wyglądali jak bolszewicy*, „Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy” [The tragedy of unfreedom. I shot at dozens of people just because, they looked like Bolsheviks, “Historical and Military Review” 2001] 2001, No. 2, pp. 104–110.

<sup>101</sup> *Żołnierze Armii Czerwonej i internowani zmarli w obozach jeńców i internowanych w Polsce 1918–1924. Komputerowa baza zmarłych jeńców sowieckich z wyszukiwarką*, [Soldiers of the Red Army and the interned died in camps for POWs and the interned in Poland 1918–1924. Database of dead Soviet POWs with search feature.] <http://jeńcy1920.archiwa.gov.pl> (a website of the Head Office of the State Archives in Warsaw with a list of 11,419 names of the Soviet POWs who died in Poland, pp. 768, and including six hundred pages of appendixes); Z. Karpus, *Russian and Ukrainian Prisoners of War and Internees Kept in Poland in 1918–1924*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 127–129; *idem*, *W odpowiedzi M.W. Filimoszinowi* [In Response

In the Polish-Russian discussions which have been ongoing for a few years about the number of the Russian POWs who died in Polish captivity between 1919 and 1921 no mention has been made by Russian historians regarding the difficulties of Polish POWs in Soviet Russia. In Russian publications, no information has been put forward on the camps in which they stayed, on their living conditions, nor above all, with regard to the number of Poles who died in captivity. Based on the estimated data of the Polish military authorities from the inter-war period, we can determine that anything from 16,000 to 20,000 Polish POWs (close to 50 per cent of all) died in Soviet captivity<sup>102</sup>. Thus, the Polish side, bearing this issue in mind, should, proceed in the same assertive fashion as the Russians with regard to their POWs, firmly requesting from the Russian authorities a clarification regarding the fate of these Polish POWs from the years 1919–1920.

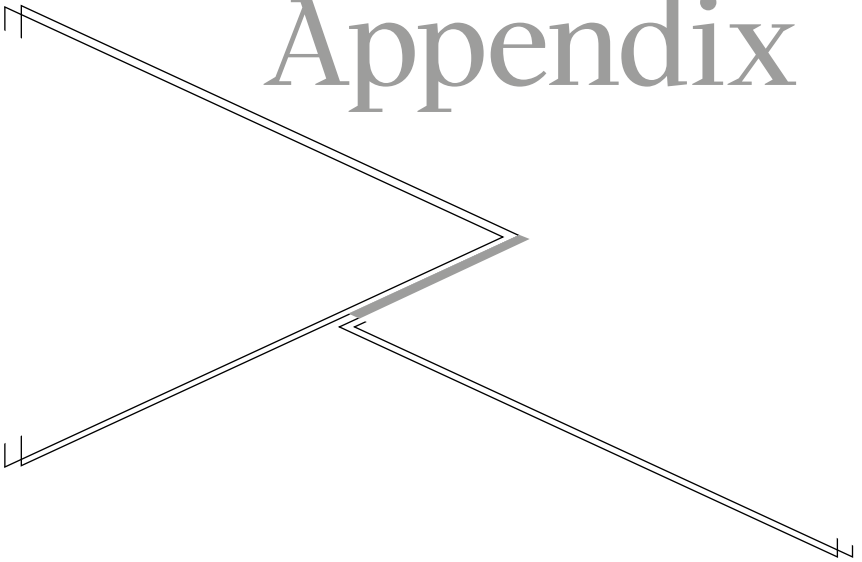
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to the M.W. Filimochin article] in, („Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy”. [“Historical and Military Review”] 2001, No. 2, pp. 111–115.

<sup>102</sup> *Zwycięzcy za drutami...*, pp. VIII–X.



# Appendix





## APPENDIX I

### Report on the condition of the camp in Wadowice as of 25<sup>th</sup> October 1920

(CAW, Oddział II Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych /1772/89/, vol. 1788)

The text of the “Report on the condition of the camp in Wadowice” is published with no abridgements. Only the spelling has been changed and less transparent abridgements have been developed. The publication of this document will contribute to the expansion of knowledge about the functioning of the camps for POWs and internees in Poland in the inter-war period, and the living conditions of Bolshevik POWs.

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The Command of the  
Prison Camp  
in Wadowice  
L. 599. Classified.

Wadowice, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1920

REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE CAMP  
drawn up pursuant to the regulation of the Command of the  
General District of II Department of the General Staff  
L. 100015/II. Def.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE CAMP

##### 1. Register

A camp is a home registration unit for the prisoner of war as much as a backup battalion for a soldier. The registration facilities aim at presenting a detailed picture of the place of

stay of every POW; and its purpose is to prepare materials for statistics of the movement of POWs in the whole country.

After the arrival of the POWs in the camp, they are bathed and deloused; after a thorough personal search during which all the objects that can be used to escape, such as: files, shears, maps, compasses, all manifestos, letters, books of political content, money (over 100 MKP [Polish marks]) [...] and valuable objects have been collected from the POWs, and handed to the management of the depository. After having checked the state of uniforms, a transport officer registers the incoming transport and the name of the convoy guard to the transport directory, confirming [to the head of the camp] both the reception of the incoming POWs and all documents.

The transport is usually received by a transport officer or intelligence officer. Transport which comes after office hours is received by an inspection officer who reports the number of POWs to the Commander of the Supervisory Unit or to a transport officer and relays the documents of the respective transport.

After the arrival of the transport, the general surgeon is informed, whose task is to check the health condition of the POWs, after which the prisoners bathe and undergo delousing. Having completed the above formalities, registration dates for specific POWs are recorded.

Having recorded overall costs of the POWs and having issued certificates with the registration number and with the signature of the registry officer, newcomers are placed in the quarantine barracks (barracks 13, 14, 15, 16) for a period of 14 days. During quarantine, newcomers are not allowed to meet other POWs nor work.

The registration chancellery leads newcomers through the numbering machine, assigns index numbers and conducts

segregation and registration of the POWs according to nationality, and pursuant to the instruction of MSWojsk. Oddz. II Sztabu, L. 9506/Def. – 20 of 2 IX 1920.

## 2. Status

- a) there are exclusively 15,838 POWs in the record status of the camp, of whom: 4649 are in the camp, 1347 are in hospital, 9842 are in labour units;
- b) nationality statement:  
Russians – 2794, Ukrainians – 3097, Poles – 9, Hungarians – 2, Lithuanians – 93, Romanian – 1; furthermore, 9842 POWs in the labour units, whose nationality was not determined due to lack of precise data;
- c) army affiliation:  
from the Bolshevik army – 12 647 (including 6 women),  
from the Ukrainian – 3081, from the Lithuanian – 97, among internees – 17;
- d) the barrack status of the camp: 4649 POWs, of whom:
  - 1) Bolshevik POWs – 1620: disabled – 237, officers – 100, convalescents – 143, women – 4, POWs able to work – 1144;
  - 2) Ukrainian POWs – 2953; disabled – 21, officers – 4, convalescents – 10, POWs able to work – 2828;
  - 3) Lithuanian POWs – 58;
- e) 1347 POWs are held in the military hospital in Wadowice, including: Bolshevik POWs – 1171 (including 2 women), Ukrainian POWs – 128, Lithuanian POWs – 35, internees – 13;
- f) movement of the POWs and internees:
  - 1) in October and November 7454 POWs and 18 internees arrived in the camp;  
5044 POWs and 13 internees left;
  - 2) 8902 Ukrainians were released;

- 3) 488 of the Bolshevik POWs were sent as volunteers to the anti-Bolshevik Russian Army;
- 4) 313 volunteers were sent to the Petliura army.

### 3. Internal order

The camp is built of 18 barracks for the prisoners: 1 – transitional; 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11 and 16 – for the Ukrainian POWs; 5 – for the convalescents and disabled; 8, 9 and 12 – for the Bolshevik POWs; 13, 14, 15 and 10 – quarantine; 17 – club, cinema for POWs in the process of building, including an isolation ward for women, and 18 – a barrack of the commander's office, where POWs (tailors, shoemakers, repairmen, etc.) live.

In the barracks, individual POWs receive places on bunks, arbitrary change of places is absolutely forbidden. Each prisoner receives, as far as possible: a straw mattress, a pillow and a blanket, for which he is responsible. In case of destruction, as long as it is stated that he deliberately destroyed state objects, he is entered into the camp report and adequately punished pursuant to the instruction. Subsequently, the Economical Commission exacts due payment from the soldier's pay or depository in order to cover the damage incurred.

All the POWs are divided into companies, platoons and sections. One non-commissioned officer of the Polish Army from the Supervisory Unit should be allocated for each company of POWs as commander of the company, pursuant to the instruction for the camps and regulating stations. Nonetheless, owing to a shortage of these, non-commissioned prisoners fulfil this function.

The companies are divided into platoons and a prisoner is a leader of each platoon. Platoons are again divided into sections, and in each section a section leader is appointed from among the senior prisoners.

The commandants of the companies, platoons and sections are also the commandants of the barracks, in which they live with their units. They are also responsible for cleanliness inside and outside the barrack, bunks, etc. They appoint POWs for cleaning, washing floors, windows, carrying water, cleaning privies, etc. The commandants of the companies, platoons, or sections allocate the inspection service in the barracks, which checks whether no reprehensible malpractices are committed when POWs rest in order to – for instance – prevent fire. These commandants are not only responsible for order inside and outside the barracks that they are entrusted with, but also for discipline in subordinated units. They report all disorders, incidents, conspiracies and plots, etc. Every morning at 08:00, these commandants also report the state of the barracks to the chancellery that conducts records, which is later submitted to the Command of the Camp, and the Economical and Provision Commissions.

POWs who are not arrested and who do not work move freely inside the demarcation line, which is carefully marked and adequately presented to the POWs. Going beyond this line is forbidden and every person, aside from orderlies and those who work either in a disinfection unit, workhouses, at technical appliances or at the construction site, is justly punished for trespassing.

All POWs get up at 06:00. First, they wash in washrooms intended for them, then at 6.30 the POWs chosen by the commander of barrack 4 fetch breakfast in barrels. The head of the barrack convenes a meeting and with the inspection control of the barracks breakfast is delivered by turns to platoons and sections. Then, POWs turn to their assigned occupations. Those who work obtain better sustenance (following table/chart “C”). Dinner starts at 11.30 following the same order as above. After a two-hour break, POWs again return to their

activities and work until supper, that is until 18:00. After supper, POWs have free time, during which the commandant of the barrack appoints the night guard and at 21:00 all POWs go to bed, apart from the inspection service, who stay observant until a wake-up call.

#### 4) Sustenance and pay

- a) POWs receive food following a provision table/chart:
  - POWs who work in the camp, prisoners-convalescents, prisoners-officers and POWs of the Lithuanian Army – according to the provision table/chart “C 2”,
  - POWs who do not work – according to the provision table “E”.

#### Delivery and reception of food items

Based on the menu proposed by the provisions unit in consultation with delegates selected by the POWs and from among them, corresponding to the sanitary requirements and [following] the number of POWs presented by the Economical Commission, a list is composed by the provision unit. Next, an adequate amount of food items is provided for individual kitchens. This list of food items is subject to control by the Economical Commission and delegates. Apart from that, food items given and meals prepared can be checked by the general surgeon of the camp with reference to their amount [and] quality. Delegates receive food items with acknowledgement of receipt from the provision store and with the assistance of an inspection officer, which then are in their full control. They control the kitchen personnel with reference to the way meals are prepared. With regard to the sanitary aspect, everything is subject to the direct control of the general surgeon of the camp, who checks both the quality of the meals and how they

are prepared. Delegate-prisoners report every day that they have received amounts of the products that they were assigned from the provision store and have distributed meals evenly for all the POWs.

#### Delivery and reception of food

Bread is delivered from the provision store for individual barracks to commandants, prisoners from the barracks, or companies, platoons, etc., and these distribute them in their own barracks. Food: breakfast, dinner, afternoon snack and supper are delivered for each barrack separately to one dish. Distribution among the POWs takes place under control of the commandant of the barrack and of the inspection organs.

There are two common kitchens in the camps which prepare meals for the POWs:

- the first kitchen consists of 18 cauldrons with a capacity of 4160 litres
- the second kitchen consists of 4 cauldrons with the capacity of 575 litres.

In the first kitchen meals are prepared for: POWs with no occupation [and] prisoner-officers. In the second kitchen, meals are prepared for POWs who work hard, prisoner-convalescents [and] POWs from the Lithuanian army.

Only those who cook, delegates selected by their colleagues, an inspection officer and a general surgeon are allowed to enter the kitchen. The Command of the Camp reserves to itself the right to inspect it through the agency of the Supervising Unit, without any control, which is in fact provided by delegates. This Supervising Unit appoints an adequate organ, that is a Polish soldier as a leader of the kitchen, who exercises general control over the kitchen in order to prevent all malpractices and maintain absolute tidiness.

b) Soldier's pay

1) Dues:

- prisoners-officers receive a monthly pay in MKP,
- prisoners-privates receive a daily soldier's pay in the amount of 60 fen. [pfennigs],
- prisoners-privates employed in the camp receive daily remuneration of 40 fen., apart from 60 fen. of pay, therefore their daily pay amounts to 1 MKP,
- prisoners who work at civil employers receive a daily pay of 10 MKP, of which 1 MKP 50 fen. they receive net, the rest, that is 8 MKP 50 fen. is their deposit, paid and deposited in the fund of the Economical Commission of the camp. Withdrawal of these deposits occurs on the personal request of the POW, in the amount stipulated by the instruction, or on the day of the release of the POW.

2) Uniforms:

The state of uniforms is not entirely acceptable, and it – above all – concerns all POWs of the Soviet Army, who come to the camp in a deplorable condition straight from the front, circa 90% arrive barefoot and without coats. Small groups who arrive in the camp are supplemented with uniforms as needed from supplies held in the store of the camp and allocated for this purpose. This supplementation of the outfit for large groups of POWs arriving in the camp is not without difficulties, since larger transports of uniforms have to be preceded with an order and, obviously, delivered. To partly tackle the sudden shortage of uniforms for these POWs, blankets are distributed, and the remaining items are completed gradually with the arrivals of transports with uniforms.

The state of supplies of uniforms in the store is entirely sufficient for satisfying sudden needs. Uniforms in the store of the camp intended for POWs are either new or unworn, yet

after disinfection and mending they are completely usable. In order to repair clothes and boots, tailor's workshops have been organized in the camp – with sewing machines at the disposal of the POWs – and a shoemaker's with one sewing machine. Only POWs can work there. The average daily efficiency of the tailor's workshop at sewing clothes: 18 jackets or 27 trousers, or 9 coats, at mending old clothes – 30 complete suits. The shoemaker's workshop completes 18 pairs of new shoes and mends 55–60 pairs of old ones.

#### 5) Hygienic and sanitary appliances

The prison camp has the following working appliances:

##### a) disinfection unit, encompassing:

- appliances for bathing,
- disinfection apparatus for delousing clothes and bedding,
- machine laundry,
- water pump,
- a device for disinfecting camp sewage.

Bath installations for the POWs consist of: a changing room, a hair-dresser's, shower, dressing room. Hot water is delivered to the shower by a ribbed boiler heated by coke.

The bath installation for officers consists of 2 bathrooms: in the first one, there is one bathtub with a gauze and a bath stove, in the second one – seven bathtubs with a bath stove heated by coke.

The disinfection apparatus consists of a steam boiler producing steam and 6 disinfectors, to which steam is led via pipes.

The machine laundry consists of a cylinder and a centrifugal machine to wring out washed underwear. It is driven by a motor (the centrifugal machine is now being repaired). The washed underwear dries in two drying sheds heated by steam from the main stove.

A water pump delivers water for the prison camp and military hospital. It is driven by a petrol motor during a day, and at night by an electric motor. At present only the petrol motor is working, since the electric one is being repaired.

Sewage and camp sewers meet in a large concrete tank, from where they are discharged outside the camp after quicklime have been added. Bathing and delousing occurs in the following way: POWs from every barrack come at least twice a week to bathe. In the changing room, they are divided into two parts, from 50 to 100 people. Their clothes are folded and tied in knots marked with numbers, and are taken on stretchers to a delousing unit, while the POWs bathe. There they receive 6 pieces of soap, which are later given to the next group. After they have been used, new ones are provided. Clothes stay in disinfection units for an hour under the effect of steam, after which they are taken back on stretchers. They are distributed to the POWs following the numbers placed on the knots. 10 groups of 100 POWs each can bathe in a day.

b) Washstand

This is placed in a room specially prepared for this purpose available day and night. It consists of 45 basins and 6 taps; washing takes place following a fixed order.

c) Sanitary personnel

This consists of one general surgeon, two prisoner-doctors, 5 hospital attendants and a sanitary assistant for keeping order. Sick POWs report to the officer on duty, or the commandant of the barrack, who at the allocated times introduces them to a general surgeon. Check-up of the sick takes place in a separate building, comprising a chancellery, a doctor's room, a casualty ward and an infirmary where the sick are observed. A morning visit takes place at 9. 00. On average 80–90 sick come every day, out of whom some are treated in hospital, others undergo

outpatient treatment. Those who are treated in hospital are usually suffering from fever. Apart from the barrack that has already been mentioned, a general surgeon possesses special barracks for his own use for strict control of newly arrived transports. The first-aid-kit is equipped with all the medicines necessary for outpatient treatment and emergencies. It needs to be remarked that the health state of the POWs during summer is much better than in winter.

Pedantic cleanliness is maintained across the whole camp: selected working units sweep the streets and camp squares. Twice a week the floor and bunks in the barracks are cleaned. Additionally, the barracks are refreshed and disinfected by whitewashing.

#### 6) Political mood, prisoners' behaviour and their treatment

It appears to be necessary to state that the Bolshevik POWs are of low intelligence, politically unaware and enlisted most often by force to the Soviet Army. All ideals and political programmes are most often unfamiliar to them. A relatively higher intelligence and sophistication can be observed among the Ukrainian POWs, who, however, do not depict willingness and anti-national predisposition.

There are 32 Communists and, inasmuch as the living possibilities allow, they are kept separately under strict control and the control of the intelligence officer or the Commander of the Supervising Unit, hence their influence on the community of the POWs is restricted. POWs are treated relatively severely, which is required to maintain discipline and order among such a large mass of people of various types. Anyhow, the Camp Commander has the right to impose disciplinary punishment at the report. Physical punishment is absolutely prohibited and does not occur at all. Also, complaints about improper treatment of the POWs by privates of the Polish Army do not happen. Still, those who

wish to hurt the POWs are prosecuted and severely punished. Inasmuch as a POW commits a reprehensible deed, he can be punished by the Camp Commander at the camp report.

The Supervising Unit, comprising an officer, non-commissioned officers and privates of the Polish Army, is responsible for the supervising service in the camp, its intelligence and internal service, the police service, the maintenance of order inside and outside the barracks, as well as the supervision over the statutory order of the day.

The behaviour of the POWs in this camp is roughly speaking faultless, no national nor political antagonisms can be felt. In general, they live in harmony, as one can imagine life among such a large group of people of such variety. In addition, they present no intention of agitation.

#### 7. Life of prisoners of war

The command of the camp attempts as far as possible to make the life of the POWs bearable by taking care of their general appearance, cleanliness, humanitarian treatment and giving permission to contact their families via correspondence subject to censure. POWs are also allowed to meet their relatives and acquaintances from 10.00 to 11.00 and from 15.00 to 16.00. Such visits take place at the eastern gate, in a guardroom at the presence of the supervising units. The visitors can bring food items to the POWs, these, however, undergo strict control by the inspection officer before they are given back to the POWs.

Provided that a POW behaves impeccably and deserves trust, the Camp Commander grants him a pass to the town with the assistance of a soldier of the Polish Army so that he can buy necessary items, working equipment, etc. Naturally, the POW is carefully examined by the head of the guard room before leaving and after coming back to the camp. An attempt

by the Camp Commander to expand cultural and educational activities is supported most effectively by Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), who deliver books, materials to write, etc. As a result of their activities, a Russian library has been established, comprising 103 volumes and 450 brochures and is led by the POWs themselves. An elementary school has also been established for the illiterate consisting of 200 reading primers. POWs have been helped to form choirs and an amateur theatre.

Barrack 17 has been designated a club or rather a type of day room for the POWs, where a cinema-theatre will also be arranged by the YMCA in the days to come. POWs who reveal passion and artistic skills have the opportunity to paint or do woodcarving. Paints and tools to conduct these activities are also delivered by YMCA.

### Conclusions

The Local Camp Commander claims that the particulars of the organization of the POWs in the camp stipulated by the instruction of MSWojsk. Oddz. I Sztabu L. 3020/Mob. correspond to its aim in its entirety and do not require any changes. The sustenance for the POWs according to table "E" may raise doubts as to their quantity, however, experience teaches us that these norms are utterly sufficient for those who do not work physically or mentally. In addition, there is a necessity to show a difference between the POWs and privates of the Polish Army.

Nonetheless, an increase of the amount of money from the POWs' own deposits and settled by the quoted instruction at 25 MKP would be recommended.

Certified by  
(Lt. Col.) Polkowski  
Camp Commander

## APPENDIX 2

### Report on the state of the camp in Dąbie near Krakow as of 26th November 1920

(CAW, Oddział II MSWojsk. /1772/89/, vol. 1788)

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The Command of the Camp                      Dąbie, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1920  
for the Interned No. I in Dąbie  
L. ADJ. 5801.  
Report on the state of the camp

To  
the Command of the General  
District of Department II of  
the General Staff in Krakow

In response to the letter of the Ministry of Military Affairs of Department II of the General Staff 14458/Defensywa we wish to inform that the Polish authorities took control of this camp in November 1918 from the Austrian government. Since then 30,000 internees and POWs have been registered. As to their nationality, these POWs and internees were mostly from Russia, Ukraine, though partly from Czechoslovakia, Germany and Austria. At the end of 1919, Poles also started to arrive. Throughout its existence, the minimum number of people amounted to 1000 and the maximum to 7000.

The present state of the camp is as follows:

POWs and internees in total	–	4096
of whom:		
– POWs	–	1816

– internees	–	2280
POW nationality:		
POWs from the Bolshevik Army	–	1640
POWs from the West-Ukrainian Army	–	170
POWs from the Lithuanian Army	–	6

The POWs from the West-Ukrainian and Lithuanian Armies are to be released, however, owing to the epidemic of cholera this release cannot be granted at present.

The state of the internees and their country of origin

There are 1100 citizens of Russia and Soviet Ukraine, the rest are citizens of the Republic of Poland, excluding a few citizens of Germany. There are 405 women among the interned, predominantly Bolshevik nurses.

The state of the hospital:

Number of the sick in total	–	428
of whom:		
– POWs	–	370
– internees	–	58
Those suffering from infectious diseases	–	65
Those suffering from other diseases	–	363

Total number of those treated in hospital from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1919 to 1<sup>st</sup> November 1920:

Number of people in total	–	14,857
of whom:		
– POWs	–	9210
– internees	–	4698
– internees from the Army of Gen. M. Bredov	–	959
Casualties in total	–	514

### Sanitary and hygienic conditions

The whole camp is swept and splashed with lime every day, rubbish is taken outside the camp and burnt. Water in the camp is from the city water supply system.

### Bathing and disinfection

All internees and POWs take a bath once a week. At the same time, their clothes are handed in for disinfection, while dirty underwear is sent to the laundry, in exchange for which they receive clean underwear. The bath, disinfection and underwear laundry is free of charge.

### Rooms

The internees and POWs live in brick and wooden barracks prepared adequately for mass living. Barracks are divided into rooms, and: wooden barracks into three, brick into a few, depending on the size of the barracks. At most 150 people live in one room. They sleep on bunks or beds, depending on the intelligence level and behaviour in the camp. Next to every barrack, there is a kitchen run under the supervision of the internees, or POWs, while the Camp Command pays attention to order, tidiness via their official organs, and warns against malpractices. Camp privies are cleaned of faeces with water-carts.

### Sustenance

POWs and the interned are provisioned following table "E", while convalescents and those who are working hard as: shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, locksmiths, those working in the baths or disinfection unit and nurses, according to table "C". Provisions reception is effectuated by delegates of the interned from individual barracks, who keep watch over whether the received provisions are justly distributed among the interned.

The privates of the Polish Army, who are appointed by the Camp Command as commanders of the barracks, have direct control over general order in the area of barracks, including the kitchen.

### Uniforms

Parts of missing uniforms of the POWs and internees are supplemented by the Camp Command as long as uniforms are available in the store, after those are mended in the camp workshops. Two-thirds of the interned and POWs are provided with straw mattresses, blankets and coats, and everyone with clothes, underwear and ankle boots.

### Pay

POWs receive only 60 pfennigs a day, while internees do not receive any pay. Some have their own deposits, which the Camp Command gives them back pursuant to the Regulation of the Minister of the Military Affairs of Department I of the General Staff L. 3020/Mob., that is 25 Polish marks a month, in exceptional cases they are allowed to withdraw larger sums. The amount of 25 marks is currently insufficient, and it would be advisable to increase it to 100 Polish marks.

### Treatment of the interned

The internees and POWs are subject to the rigour of military discipline, therefore the organization of individual groups is modelled on military organization. Every barrack is organized in the same way as a company. A private from the Polish Army is the commander of the barrack, while more prudent POWs or internees are commanders of a platoon. One officer is the commander of a few barracks, and apart from him, an officer from the Supervising Unit who controls all POWs and internees. He receives requests and complaints at the report of the

internees and POWs and has the right to punish disciplinarily analogically to the right of the commander of a company.

### Correspondence

Every internee can write a letter and a postcard once a week, which is handed to the camp post office, from where, after censure, they are handed to the General Post Office. Correspondence and packages addressed to the internees are received on the same day and after censure given to the addressee. Apart from the right of correspondence, the interned can meet people from outside the camp and receive packages every day from 11.00 to 13.00. Visits take place in the presence of an officer of the Polish Army, who controls the packages given and listens to the conversations.

### Cultural and Educational Work

At the endeavours of the Camp Command, a cinematographic apparatus has been purchased, and in one of the barracks a cinema-theatre for the interned and POWs has been organized. Before the quarantine of the camp, performances were taking place every day, and apart from that, amateur performances were staged once a week at the efforts of the internees. Recently the YMCA (American Young Men's Christian Association) has engaged in this activity, for this purpose a club room has been organized for the interned as a centre for educational work.

### Political mood

The POWs are remarkably calm, they do not think about anything but food, or sometimes about work. While some of the interned are occupied vigorously with political life, frequently comment canards from the political life of Poland and other non-Bolshevik countries. In order to secure the camp

from agitation, the Camp Command has divided POWs and internees appropriately. Agitators and dangerous elements are isolated in one barrack. All others are free to move around the whole camp from 7.00 to 19.00.

The interned rebelled only once when persuaded to by agitators. A hunger strike was organized. They wished to compel the Camp Command to satisfy their postulates: provisions for winter for the barracks, an extension of visiting time, permission to go to the town and many other postulates – all the demands strictly connected to administration and service in the camp. After thorough explication of the consequences of the hunger strike to the interned, the interned calmed down and collected the food that was due to them.

The interned also wished to celebrate the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in the camp, however, official bodies prevented it. Apart from that, no political incidents have been reported.

### Shortages

It would be advisable:

- 1) to develop camp workshops, where specialist workers such as shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, locksmiths and others could be used, since the great majority of the interned are professional workers.
- 2) to install a sewage system in the camp.
- 3) to renovate the camp.

Certified by: Camp Commander in Dąbie  
[Stanisław] Tarabanowicz Lt.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Rocznik oficerski*, Warszawa 1923, pp. 84, 385, 396; CAW, Oddział I MSWojsk., vol. 109.

### APPENDIX 3

#### **Report on the visit of plenipotentiaries from the International Red Cross to Ukrainian POWs in the camp in Brześć nad Bugiem\***

(The National Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow, fond 3341, desc. 6,  
part 3, pp. 5–23)

Dear Sir,

We<sup>2</sup> have the honour to attach to this letter a copy of the report on the prison camp visit to Brześć Litewski by one of our plenipotentiaries on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 1919.

Since there is a substantial number of Bolshevik POWs in this camp, we can assume that this report will interest you. We attach a list of Bolshevik POWs<sup>3</sup> prepared by our plenipotentiaries: on the basis of which you will be able to inform their families about the situation of the prisoners.

We kindly request that you accept our assurance about our most profound respect.

Member of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

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\* The document was drawn up in French, and was subsequently translated into Russian in Geneva and then sent to Moscow. Prof. Emilian Wiszka translated it from Russian into Polish.

<sup>2</sup> The addresser of the parcel and the author of the accompanying letter use the plural form.

<sup>3</sup> This list has not been found.

Geneva, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1919

2 attachments

copy

Warsaw, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1919

A report on the visit to Ukrainian POWs in the camp in Brest Litovsk on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October<sup>4</sup> 1919 by the plenipotentiaries [of the International Committee of the Red Cross] Doctors G. Szatene and Wiktor Głoor, accompanied by Doctor Komius<sup>5</sup> – a surgeon at the French military mission.

Long ago did the Polish authorities propose the Warsaw Mission<sup>6</sup> to control the care delivered to POWs.

Firstly, the general doctor of the French military mission, Lt. MD Gotje had an unfavourable impression of one of the camps in August during his sanitary inspection<sup>7</sup>.

Secondly, complaints from released prisoners about being poorly treated have been communicated to envoys of the Ukrainian government.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October, the Central Board of the Polish [Red] Cross informed us that a journey to the prison camp in Brest Litovsk would take place on 11<sup>th</sup> October on Saturday at 7.00 from

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<sup>4</sup> This should be 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October. On 11<sup>th</sup> October a notification came, and the visit to Brześć was made on Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> October. On the same day, the inspection started and lasted until Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> October.

<sup>5</sup> Some French names were written in phonetic script. Also Polish names – written in French by ear, later translated into Russian, and subsequently to Polish – may be distorted.

<sup>6</sup> We refer here to the French mission.

<sup>7</sup> Most probably the author is talking here about the visit to Brześć nad Bugiem which took place on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1919.

Wiedeński Railway Station<sup>8</sup>, together with a delegation of the Polish Red Cross. Its representative was Ms Dora Wyszynska, who wholeheartedly contributed to our investigation.

We were welcomed by Gen. Józef Szamota, commander of the fortress, under the power and supervision of whom the POWs find themselves. Their number amounts to 3861 as of 10<sup>th</sup> October: 825 Bolsheviks, 2568 Ukrainians and 468 civilians. Among whom were 7 women and 2 children. The POWs were lodged in four camps: Bugoszopy, Berg's Fort, an Officer's Camp (116) and Grajewskie Barracks.

We were shown around by General Surgeon Micurg, the deputy surgeon of the fortress – since the general surgeon of the fortress had been infected in the camp and died on 7<sup>th</sup> September of spotted typhus – and his assistant Józef Fiszer MD.

A statistical statement was handed to us by Adjutant General, Lt. Wasku.

a) Bugoszopy camp is under the command of the reserve Lieutenant. The number of the POWs there is 1894, of whom the majority are Galician Ukrainians.

The miserable scene of a camp consisting of barracks, some of which are ruined, left us with a dispiriting impression. The barracks and old stables where the POWs live are filled with a repulsive smell.

The POWs, who are cold, tightly surrounded the fire, in which a few logs were burning and which is the only way of warming themselves. At night, the POWs crowd in groups of 300 people into a dimly-lit and draughty barracks. They are arranged in narrow rows, on bunks without straw mattresses

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<sup>8</sup> A mistake in the translation into Russian. It should be the Wileński Railway Station.

or blankets. There are a lot of young people in the camp, under 20, who scare the observer with their pale faces, haggard skeletons and glowing eyes: they endure the hunger much worse than the old.

Owing to a lack of organized medical service, only the most severely sick have been evacuated in the number of 150 people to the hospital, of whom 90 were suffering from dysentery, 60 from so-called exhaustion due to hunger and physical tiredness, manifesting itself in swollen legs, faces and kidney stones (from lack of urine).

The kitchen – large, but dark; the cook [is] one of the POWs, who is assisted by a few comrades, 4 vats that contain 340 litres.

The chief who himself referred to the lack of food, said that the POWs eat three times a day: at 6.30 in the morning they receive black coffee and 30 grams of bread; at noon a soup, 150 grams of meat, 50 grams of grease, 150 grams of vegetables or 700 grams of potatoes; at 6 in the evening black coffee. Milk is not distributed. Thanks to the Americans, 10 grams of flour is added to a soup and 20 grams of sugar is given to every prisoner.

Those working receive a bonus (100 grams) bread and beef, 50 grams of jam and 25 grams of tobacco, which is equal to the portion of a Polish soldier.

Drinking water is fetched from the Bug River, which has to be boiled due to its cloudiness. Since the last month there has been a steam filtering locomobile (model by A. Hofman in Berlin) filtering 200 litres a day. 100 grams of soap is given per day<sup>9</sup>, and for those working – 200 grams. General remarks. The military command, after a two-month unsuccessful endeavour, deemed it necessary to leave this camp and organize

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<sup>9</sup> In the original text, but it should be: per month.

a new one named the Red Camp<sup>10</sup>, located to the north-east of the fortress.

b) Berg's Fort Camp [is] hidden in the underground bastions behind a heavy, airtight door, with a tiny square for everyday exercise. The chief – Lt. Okussok, deputy of the commander Brenner, is suffering from spotted typhus. In the camp, there are 685 POWs, of whom:

Ukrainians

civilians	–	70
soldiers	–	153
[total]	–	223

Bolsheviks

civilians	–	101
soldiers	–	361
[total]	–	462

There are two Alsations among them – Jean Wille from Metz and Ekman from Saarbrücken. Lt. of the French Military Mission Gotje MD had already demanded their release in August as well as the release of two countrymen – Jean Laboon from Szlestad and Gutmacher from Zurich, registered as dead of spotted typhus, the former on 25<sup>th</sup> and latter on 30<sup>th</sup> August.

Sleeping rooms are adapted from low-ceiling rooms with a curved vault, dimly-lit, with storied wooden bunks, and bedding only for the sick.

Heating – with wood, stoves.

Lighting – electrical.

Water – drinkable.

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<sup>10</sup> It should be: Prison Camp “Red Barracks”.

The sick are bathed and disinfected in bathrooms after arrival, where there is a washstand with nine taps, and they are given 100 grams of soap a month.

Privies – not the buildings [] – a hole cleaned carelessly and unsatisfactorily.

Field hospital – for 44 beds, under the supervision of Plawiński MD, who has been suffering from spotted typhus for 8 days in Warsaw and whose duties are being fulfilled by his deputy.

In the most part, the POWs are in rags, many suffering and have a miserable appearance, especially the youth. One, older, is lying with severe swelling of both legs; another one, younger, has a swollen face as if a wasp stung him – sustenance for all the POWs is insufficient. At the command of the senior commander, the POWs receive 200 grams of bread (300 grams for those working), 80 grams of meat, black coffee without milk. The administrative board has received sufficient clothes and underwear from the Americans, which are to be distributed in the nearest future.

Pay – is given every 10 days, 3 marks per person and 10 marks for the labourers employed most often in field work.

c) Officer's Camp<sup>11</sup> – officers are arranged in two-storey bastions. Of 116 POWs 36 people are engaged and live outside the camp. Among the remaining 80, 60 are of Ukrainian nationality, 6 – of Russian, there is also 1 woman, a few young orderlies and civilian prisoners.

The sleeping rooms are arranged in low-ceiling rooms with a curved vault, lit by two windows facing east. Every person has a bed, with no bedclothes or straw mattresses.

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<sup>11</sup> The Officer's Camp was located in Fort IX.

Sustenance consists of meat – 150 grams, bread – 250 grams, instead of 500, which is often exchanged for 80 grams of meat, vegetables – 150 grams, potatoes – 700 grams, coffee – 20 grams, sugar – 30 grams, milk is not distributed.

Any garment which is in rags as a whole will be exchanged for one sent from America.

d) Grajewskie Barracks<sup>12</sup> – next to the railroad between the town and the fortress. Commander – Capt. Kulik, whose benign attitude is emphasized by the POWs.

A pleasant impression from outside corresponds to the inside arrangement of the room – large, lit on two sides by large windows, in which there are iron beds with straw mattresses and bedclothes. 580 POWs are lodged on two levels. On the second – the healthy, on the first – convalescents from malaria, who stay there for 10 days after 14 days spent with no fever in epidemic hospitals.

There is also a small room for 12 officers. A separate kitchen, an additional one, and large is situated on the same level, intended for the healthy – everything is clean, vats are heated with wood, whose supplies will be enough for the winter (35,000 cubic metres). Sustenance is the same as for the POWs.

600 Cossacks [Bolsheviks] live in a separate building, a regiment that surrendered to the Polish Army in August [1919] near Minsk and whose return to the south of Russia is being organized.

e) the Red Camp – to the north-west from the fortress, amid a group of brick barracks surrounded by ruins and barbed fencing. Capt. Engineer Michał Leśniewski is preparing five typical

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Camp of the POWs and the Internees “Grajewskie Barracks”.

buildings consisting of three large rooms, each for 200 people, with six cylindrical cast-iron stoves heated with wood.

Eleven high windows give enough light. They assure us that electrical lighting will be fed into the sleeping quarters from the central supply in the fortress.

Until the delivery of beds, the POWs will be sleeping on straw on the floor. One building is intended as a kitchen – a large, light room oriented to the east, in which 5 vats are placed on two brick boards. There is a surgery for the sick in this building, who, when the need arises, will be sent to the Grajewski Hospital.

The installation of bathtubs [has been] already planned, but has not started yet. The Polish Red Cross set up disinfection apparatus. Drinking water pumped from two artesian wells is considered the cleanest in the fortress, owing to its remoteness from the residential area.

### The Commission for the Release of POWs<sup>13</sup>

In a large conference room, where the Commission sits, on Sunday morning we were introduced to its members and president, Lt. Śliwiński, who confirmed the decision on the release of 120 POWs on that day, and 300 the next day, without prejudice to those who should be released in the future.

The Commission has been acting for only three weeks and expects that they will be able to release 97% of the POWs, continuing to hold only those who are defiant and dangerous propagandists.

Complaints – are common and refer to the following: “we are hungry, we are cold, when we will be released”. However, it needs to be accentuated, as the exception that proves the rule,

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<sup>13</sup> Also known as the Disability Commission or the Special Commission.

that the Bolsheviks convinced one of us that they prefer their current fate from the situation of the soldier at war.

### Conclusion

The Brześć Camp was this summer [1919] a true town of the dead owing to the settlement in rooms unprepared for living and mixing of the healthy with those suffering from infectious diseases, of whom some died from lack of food, which can be confirmed by numerous instances of exhaustion and oedema connected to hunger (contracted after a 3-month stay in Brześć).

Starting from September, the following changes were planned and partly realized: the evacuation of part of the POWs to better equipped camps, the release of some POWs, an improvement [of the standard] of rooms, food supplies (still insufficient) and attitude [of the staff of the camp towards the POWs].

However, we can assume that [with] the approach of the winter season the military authorities will not cease doing this and, especially, the commission for the release of the POWs will intensify their actions and complete its programme – the return of almost all POWs to their homeland.

Additionally, friendly and beneficial interventions on the part of numerous foreign missions: the French and especially the United States Mission have to be noted. The latter provided all the POWs with underwear and clothes.

The remaining camps should, according to us, be subject to inspection starting from the beginning of winter.

### Medical service of the fortress

This remains within the competence of Mazur MD, who replaced doctor Cheraca, who died of spotted typhus on 17<sup>th</sup> September.

Two dangerous diseases have been raging in the camp – dysentery and spotted typhus – whose transmission was triggered by keeping the healthy and the sick together, a deficiency in medical help, food and clothes.

Medical personnel paid tribute to this epidemic. Of 8 doctors suffering from dysentery one died, of 4 students [of medicine] – one died, 10 sisters of mercy who contracted spotted typhus recovered, and of 13 paramedics only one died.

In order to secure medical personnel, so valuable at a time of war and epidemic, they are recruited from among the convalescents who take advantage of the immunity they have gained.

The death statistics started at the beginning of August with 180 casualties a day of dysentery<sup>14</sup>.

The official statistics for the period between 7<sup>th</sup> September and 7<sup>th</sup> October are as follows:

**Table 1.** Number of the sick in individual buildings in the camp in Brześć nad Bugiem (Brest)

Camp, hospital/ disease	dysentery	spotted typhus	malaria	exhaustion	Total no. of deaths
Bugszopy	579	40	497	817	1933
Berg's Fort	211	243	274	–	728
Grajewskie Barracks	48	43	17	127	235
Garrison Hospital	404	13	14	–	431
Epidemic Hospital	–	[no data]	[no data]	[no data]	–
Grajewski Hospital	–	275	315	248	838
Total	1242	614	1117	1192	4165

<sup>14</sup> This was, most probably, the first record referring to the number of deaths from a few days.

**Table 2.** Number of deaths in individual buildings in the camp in Brest Litovsk

Camp, hospital/ disease	dysentery	spotted typhus	malaria	exhaustion	Total no. of deaths
Bugszopy	399	3	12	247	661
Berg's Fort	139	67	4	–	210
Grajewskie Barracks	25	3	4	5	37
Garrison Hospital	112	4	3	–	119
Epidemic Hospital	–	48	17	32	97
Total no. of deaths	675	125	40	284	1124

These numbers unequivocally prove the accuracy of the register of deaths presented by a group of POWs, according to which from 27<sup>th</sup> July to 4<sup>th</sup> September, that is over 38 days, 770 POWs died – Ukrainians kept in the camp in Brest Litovsk<sup>15</sup>.

It needs to be noticed that the number of POWs held in the fortress [camp] reached the number of 10,000 in August and decreased to 3861 by 10<sup>th</sup> October.

This decrease is explicated, despite the number of deaths, by the release of POWs and their relocation to numerous camps in Galicia, Poznań, Strzałkowo, Modlin, Dęblin, etc., where hygienic conditions [are] also unsatisfactory.

4 hospitals remained within the competence of the Medical Board in Brest Litovsk:

- Military Hospital No. 1 (located behind the station building, intended for the Polish Army; see the report of doctor Szatene of 29<sup>th</sup> April).

<sup>15</sup> There are over a dozen prisoners on this list who were not of Ukrainian nationality.

- Grajewskie Barracks Hospital near the railroad, within the fort.
- Epidemic Hospital No. 2 (260 sick as of 10<sup>th</sup> October) with an outbuilding, intended exclusively for those suffering from dysentery.
- Garrison Hospital (343 sick as of 10th October) in the fort (see the report of doctor Szatene of 29th April).

The Grajewskie Barracks Hospital under the supervision of Maj. Kamelga [*sic*], has been open for 5 days only. 363 comfortable beds stand in large, bright, well-aired rooms, lit on two sides by two large windows. The kitchen [*is*] clean, the pharmacy and a small analytical laboratory are well maintained. Of 287 sick, 74 people have spotted typhus, 111 – malaria, 102 are being observed. Apart from one free bed – due to a death – there are 75 free beds here.

We saw a few chambers of the Epidemic Hospital, where 90 sick from dysentery were lying, of whom most were already recovering, and chambers where 60 people suffering from exhaustion, which was characterized by swelling of the lower limbs and face and general weakness. Chambers with 5 to 8 sick [*are*] clean and well-lit. The sick, wrapped in grey blankets, are in the custody of sisters of mercy, and a doctor visits them once a day.

### Treatment

Medical personnel complain about a shortage of medications, which they strive to obtain from the military authorities in Warsaw. There is camphor (10%, for spraying), degetalic and caffeine in their order; this treats dysentery with a specific protective and medical serum.

### General remarks

We were surprised by the lack of communication between doctors, no statistics of the sick and deaths, justified by the constant changes of personnel.

### Conclusion

Registration documents, handed to the main command, were returned with the following notes:

285 Bolshevik prisoners,

1155 Ukrainians.

Still 1950 registers to be received.

Recent notices: we are informed from Gen. Szamota, who arrived this morning from Brest Litovsk that as a result of an official request from the representative of the International Committee [of the Red Cross], two Alsatian POWs – Jean Wille from Metz and Ekman from Saarbrücken have been released; that the relocation of POWs from the Bugszopy Camp to a new Red Camp will take place on 20<sup>th</sup> October; that the Special Commission on the release continues its activity and that the main aim of the General's presence in Warsaw is to increase bread rations (even if portions of meat were to be reduced) and also to improve the situation of the POWs<sup>16</sup>.

Doctors G. Szatene, W. Gloor, Kamius

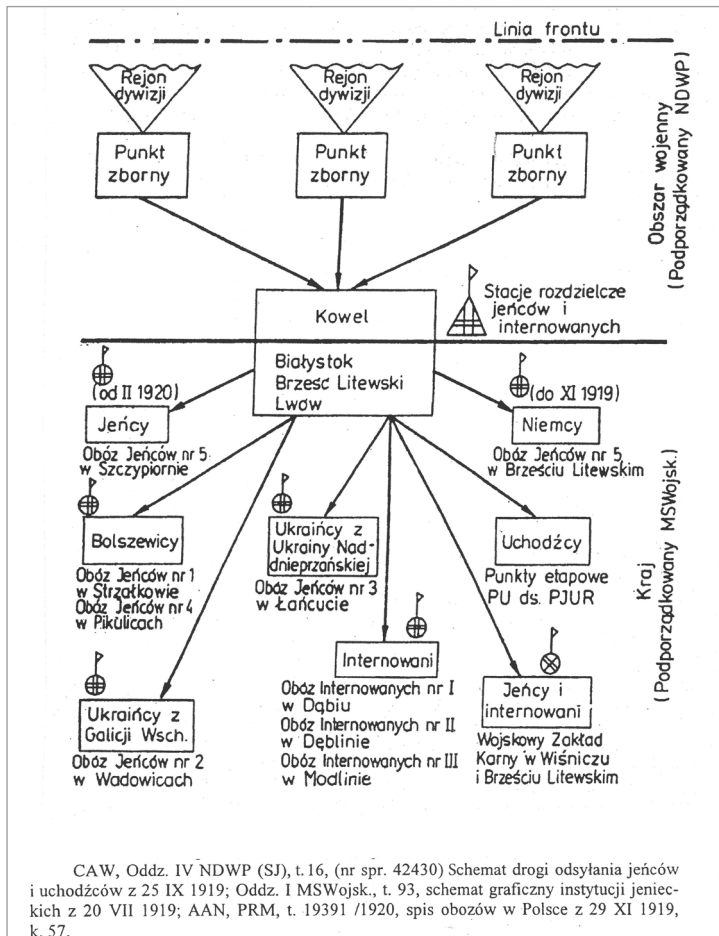
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<sup>16</sup> The hostile attitude of Gen. Józef Szamota towards the Ukrainian POWs allows us to treat his declaration as insincere. The announced relocation of the POWs from the "Bug-Szopy" Fort arranged for 20<sup>th</sup> October was not realized on time. During the visit of the Ukrainian Military Mission on 27<sup>th</sup> October there were still over one thousand and five hundred POWs, including nine hundred and seventy-eight Ukrainians.

## APPENDIX 4

### The evacuation route of the POWs and internees from the front to the camps effective from September 1919

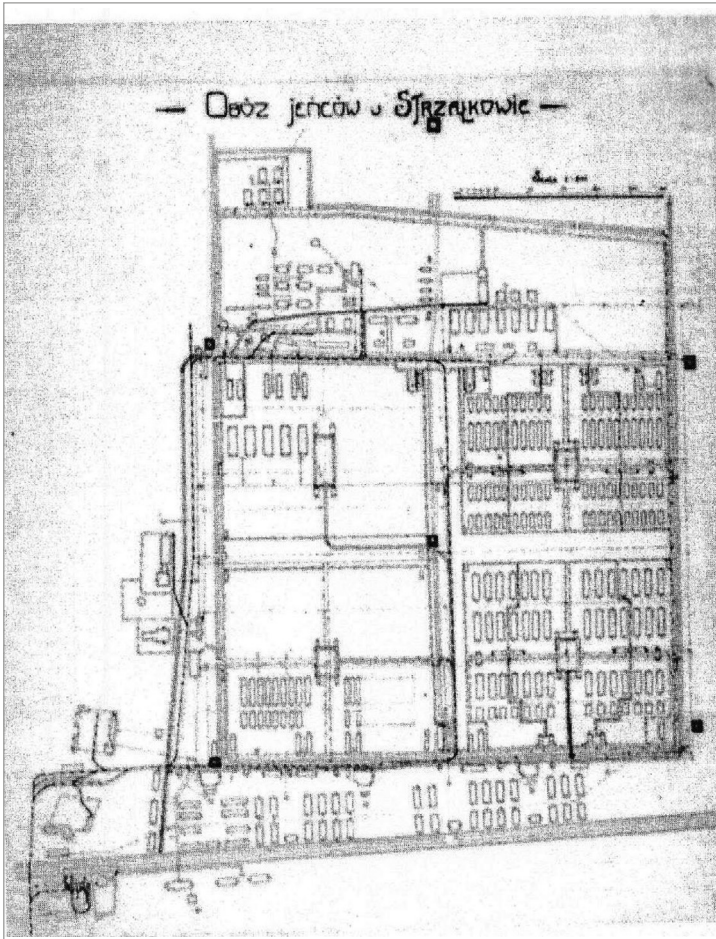
(CAW, Oddział IV NDWP /Sekcja Jeńców/, vol. 16, Schemat drogi odsyłania jeńców i uchodźców z 25 września 1919 r.; AAN, PRM, vol. 19391/1920, Spis obozów w Polsce z 29 listopada 1919 r., p. 57)



## APPENDIX 5

### A plan of POWs Camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo – as of 1920

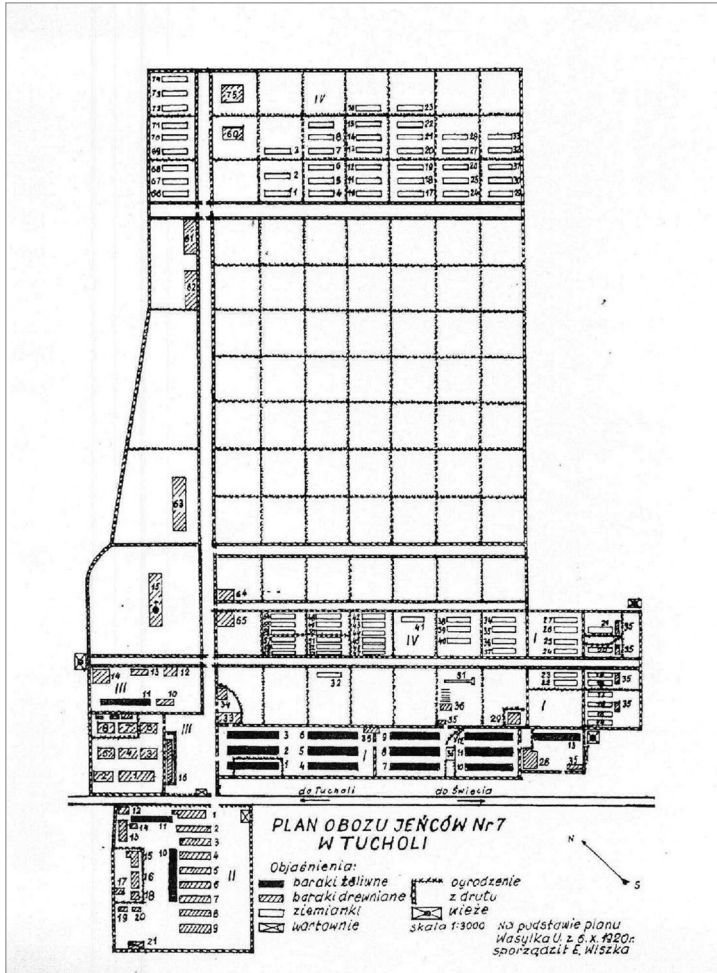
(CAW, Oddział I MSWojsk., vol. 104)



## APPENDIX 6

### A plan of Prison Camp No. 7 in Tuchola – as of 1920

(Centralne Państwowe Historyczne Archiwum Ukrainy we Lwowie, V. Ogonowski, „Chronika taboru polononych «Obóz Jeńców nr 7»”, vol. 1–2, Tuchola 1920, rkps)



## APPENDIX 7

### Number of POWs Camp and internees in Poland in November 1919

(CAW, Oddz. IV NDWP (SJ), vol. 35 a, wyjaśnienia MSWojsk. w sprawie jeńców i internowanych udzielone Komisji Sejmowej z 6 XI 1919; Oddz. I MSWojsk, vol. 276, referat w sprawie obozów dla jeńców i Stacji Rozdzielczych z 1919, k. 2–9)

Obozy jeńców i internowanych	Liczba jeńców i internowanych				Razem	Docelowa pojemność obozu ustalona przez MSWojsk.
	jeńcy			internowani		
	bolszewicy	ukraińcy				
		Galicja Wsch.	Ukraina Naddnieprzańska (URL)			
Obóz Jeńców nr 1 w Strzałkowie	2784	5836	–	1812	10 432	20 000
Obóz Jeńców nr 2 w Wadowicach	1860	–	–	1042	2902	6000
Obóz Jeńców nr 3 w Łańcucie	–	–	610	239	849	6000
Obóz Jeńców nr 4 w Pikulicach	2036	–	699	243	2978	6000
Obóz Jeńców nr 5 w Brześciu Litewskim*	1002	–	779	365	2146	–
Obóz Internowanych nr I w Dąbiu	1274	239	–	2288	3801	8000
Obóz Internowanych nr II w Dęblinie*	–	–	–	149	149	–
Obóz Internowanych nr III w Modlinie	–	–	–	70	70	–
Razem	7096	7935	2088	6208	23 327	4000
20 Oddziałów robotniczych jeńców pracujących przeważnie przy budowie kolei	–	6000	–	–	–	–
Razem	7096	13 935	2088	6208	29 327	4000*

## APPENDIX 8

### Number of Soviet POWs in prison camps in Poland in the period from November 1920 to October 1921

(CAW, Oddz. I MSWojsk., vol. 276, komunikat nr 34 o sytuacji w obozach z 23 IX 1921; vol. 118, komunikat nr 3 22 XII 1920; DOK I, vol. 9, komunikat nr 40 z 5 III 1921; Oddz. IV NDWP (SO), t. 21, (nr spr. 4260) komunikat nr 22 z 26 I 1921; Gab. MSWojsk., vol. 402, komunikat nr 10 z 30 V 1921; CAW-CA MSW, W-W Oddz. II, vol. 5, 58, komunikaty nr 29 i 37 z 23 VIII i 12 X 1921, k 64–64a, 171–172)

Nazwa obozu	Liczba jeńców sowieckich							
	1920 r.		1921 r.					
	10 XI	20–22 XII	26 I	5 III	30 V	23 VIII	23 IX	15 X
Obóz Jeńców nr 1 w Strzałkowie	16 402	14 624	12 860	12 268	6485	3602	3654	344
Obóz Jeńców nr 2 w Wadowicach	439	1705	702	74	71	–	–	–
Obóz Jeńców nr 3 w Łańcucie	–	–	–	–	–	620	–	–
Obóz Jeńców nr 4 w Pikulicach	822	734	652	738	–	–	–	–
Obóz Jeńców nr 5 w Szczypiornie	1712	1096	1090	1093	2146	689	–	–
Obóz Jeńców nr 7 w Tucholi	4000	6960	7530	11 000	7662	1832	693	152
Obóz Internowanych nr I w Dąbiu	2905	3369	3255	4987	3271	3291	1183	46
Obóz Internowanych nr 13 w Łukowie	–	–	–	–	–	172	140	132
Stacja Rozdzielcza, Stacja Koncentracyjna Jeńców w Puławach	1461	998	911	891	741	842	1719	49
Stacja Rozdzielcza w Stryju	200	196	186	–	–	–	–	–
Stacja Rozdzielcza, Stacja Koncentracyjna Jeńców nr 21 w Białymstoku	–	162	814	479	883	–	–	113

Stacja Rozdzielcza, Stacja Koncentracyjna Jeńców nr 22 w Dorohusku	-	120	40	12	6	-	-	-
Stacja Rozdzielcza, Stacja Koncentracyjna Jeńców nr 23 we Lwowie	31	34	496	1404	-	-	-	-
Punkt Wysyłkowy Jeńców w Wołkowysku	-	393	856	456	33	78	72	-
Punkt Wysyłkowy Jeńców w Brześciu Litewskim	-	462	722	1078	1	1169	57	-
Punkt Wysyłkowy Jeńców w Kowiu	-	202	566	702	582	29		-
Punkt Wymiany Jeńców w Baranowiczach	-		863	487	613	427		-
Punkt Wymiany Jeńców w Równem	-	-	-	7	607	109		-
Razem	31 842	29 305	29 131	35 045	25 399	12 884	9201	965
Na robotach w oddziałach robotniczych i u osób prywatnych	45 000	-	-	-	15 585	5271	-	-
łącznie	76 842	-	-	-	40 984	18 155	-	-

## APPENDIX 9

### A leaflet distributed by Poles at the Eastern Front encouraging soldiers of the Red Army to surrender of their own free will

(AAN, Instytucje wojskowe, vol. 54)

#### ПРОПУСК.

Настоящим пропуском может воспользоваться всякий солдат Красной Армии, которому наложена власть жидовских комиссаров и царских генералов, который понял, что мира можно достигнуть только братаньем с Польской Армией.

Пред'явителя пропуска примут по братски и настроят.

Настоящим пропуском может воспользоваться как отдельный солдат, так и целый отряд, напр.: взвод, рота, батальон, эскадрон, батарея.

За принесенное оружие и приведенных лошадей мы хорошо заплатим.

Политический Отдел  
Польской Армии.

#### Przepustka.

Okaziciel niniejszego winien być przywitany po bratersku, nakarmiony i odstawiony do odpowiedniej komendy Armji.

Na odebraną broń i konia należy mu wydać kwit.

Pieniądzy osobistych i umundurowania nie konfiskować.

Wydział Polityczny  
Armji Polskiej.



## APPENDIX 10

### A leaflet distributed by Poles at the Eastern Front encouraging soldiers of the Red Army to surrender of their own free will

(AAN, Instytucje wojskowe, vol. 54)

## Пропуск в плен.

Вашен на 10 дней со дня получения.

Красноармеец! приходи к нам с этим пропуском.

Приноси с собой свое ружье.

Ты получишь хлеб и полное солдатское содержание.

В плену с тобой будут обращаться по бра

Главный Командир Центроплена



*A. Dariusz*

## APPENDIX 11

### A leaflet distributed by Poles at the Eastern Front encouraging soldiers of the Red Army to surrender of their own free will

(AAN, Instytucje wojskowe, vol. 54)

В БОРЬБЕ С КОМУНИСТАМИ ОБРЕТЕШЬ ТЫ ПРАВО С.О.Ф.

### Пропуск к Полякам.

Пред'явителя сего, бежавшего из войск Лейбы Троцкого из-за нормить хорошо, снабдить папиросами и отослать в штаб дивизии, откуда он будет по истечении двух недель отпущен на волю.

Добровольно переходящим разрешается работать на полевых работах за установленное жалованье 30 марок (300 сов. рублей) ежедневно.

Желающие переезжать на Юг России, где крестьянская армия Врангеля подходит к Ростову и Екатеринославу на основании этого пропуска пользуются правом получения проездного железнодорожного и пароходного документа.

Мы, нижеподписавшиеся представители 214 красноармейцев, 21 и 5 пех. дивизии и весь 59 полк кавалерии „Стеньки Разина“ и IV бригада кавалерии подписью подтверждаем точное исполнение вышеизложенных условий.

Васюков Виктор  
5 р. 184 полк.

Градобоев Филип  
5 р. 44 полк.

Шапов Андрей  
89 полк.

Соловьев Алексей  
163 полк.

Нарташев Артемий  
5 р. 44 полк.

Коваль Сидор  
телегр. 5 р. 150 п.

Новиков Николай  
59 п. кав.

Синица Александр  
59 п. кав.

Горбачев Павел  
59 п. кав.

Ахмид-Вали-Нефрич  
59 п. кав.

Уткин Василий  
59 п. кав.

Власов Тимофей  
59 п. кав.

ТОВАРИЩИ! СПРЯЧЬТЕ ЭТОТ ПРОПУСК ОН ОКАЖЕТ ВАМ ВЕЛИКУЮ  
УСЛУГУ.

## APPENDIX 12

### A leaflet distributed by Poles at the Eastern Front encouraging soldiers of the Red Army to surrender of their own free will

(AAN, Instytucje wojskowe, vol. 54)

## КАК СДАТЬСЯ КРАСНОАРМЕЙЦУ?

Красноармеец! Ты решил сдать, ты понял уже, что дальнейшая война ведет лишь тебя к гибели, а Россию к разорению.

Как сделать это?

Легче всего сдать во время отступления.

Притворяйся больным, оставайся в деревне, прячься в лесу или кустах. Во время наступления воспользуйся ночью чтобы перейти на сторону наших войск. Когда заметишь издали еще наш патруль или развед, поднимай белый флаг (хотябы четую тряпку или кусок рубахи) и кричи: сдаюсь!

**Лучше всего сдавайтесь целыми отрядами.**

Для этого организуйте предварительно кружки верных людей — земляков.

По близости польских позиций окружайте незаметно комиссаров и коммунистов и по данному старшим сигналам разоружайте их и арестуйте, а потом переходя на польскую сторону приводите с собой. Если будут сопротивляться — убивайте.

**При сдаче привозите с собой оружие:** за него вам заплатят по хорошей цене царскими деньгами. Кавалеристы пусть приводят лошадей; артиллеристы — пушки.

Если не удастся — пусть по крайней мере уведат лошадей и принесат замки: они за них получат вознаграждение.

Точно также привозите великое количество снарядов, оно у вас будет куплено. За свои личные вещи и деньги не опасайтесь: их у вас не тронут.

**Но сподлите же: сдавайтесь!** Это вовсе не трудно и не опасно. А попадете в плен — убедитесь сами, что поляки хорошо обращаются с пленными, кормят их и не обижают.

**Сдавайтесь же!**

## APPENDIX 13

### Statements of death of Soviet POWs deceased in the camp hospital in Tuchola

(CAW, Biuro Wyznań Niekatolickich 1918–1939, vol. 60, 61)

Szpital w Tucholi Wzór L. 16.

1886

1309/6

### Karta skonu.

Nazwisko i imię Lwow, Aleksander  
 Stopień wojskowy jeńiec bolszewicki  
 Przydział taktyczny Katonia kina • Jarmara  
 Wiek 19  
 Wyznanie prawosławny  
 Dzień i godzina skonu 11/10  
 Przyczyna śmierci Enteritis  
 Podlega (nie podlega) sekcji /



Tuchola, dnia 11 lutego 1921.  
[Signature] [Signature]  
 Dowódca Szpitala Ordynator

Szpital w Tucholi Wzór L. 16.



1910

1309/7

### Karta skonu.

Nazwisko i imię Lomonosow Anton  
 Stopień wojskowy jeńiec bolszewicki  
 Przydział taktyczny praxmka • Jmolenta  
 Wiek 20  
 Wyznanie prawosławny  
 Dzień i godzina skonu 11/10  
 Przyczyna śmierci Anaemia  
 Podlega (nie podlega) sekcji /

nr 7 w Tucholu  
1. 2  
W

Tuchola, dnia 11 lutego 1921.  
[Signature] [Signature]  
 Dowódca Szpitala Ordynator

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