

At the Junction of War and Peace – On Some Legal-Military Dilemmas of the End of the Polish-Soviet War (1920–1921)

This work is dedicated to the legal and military aspects of the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1921, when after defeating the Russians in the Battle of Warsaw (August 1920), the Poles pushed the border with Russia eastward. At that time, many legal issues arose that needed to be resolved almost immediately. First, this involved the demobilization of a large number of Polish soldiers and the establishment of the Border Guard in their place, as well as allowing the State Police to establish administration alongside the local governors. Second, it concerned the restoration of discipline in the army, which, after two major Polish victories over Russia (the Battle of Warsaw and the Battle of the Niemen), required the implementation of radical punitive measures (including the introduction of the death penalty). Third, there was the issue of prisoners of war and their transfer – on the basis of exchange – to the Russian side. Fourth, finally, it was about establishing Polish administration in the occupied territories. The issue of compensation for war invalids has been presented separately.

Keywords: *military law, Polish–Soviet War, prisoners of war, Border Guard, Military Police*

1. General remarks

Legal issues arising from the struggle for independence in any country constitute an important research problem for each nation. This is well understood, for example, by the Hungarians, the Poles' brethren, who took up arms many times during various difficult periods in their history. It was no different with Poland and the Poles, when – from the Middle Ages – it was necessary to temper the hot-blooded 'descendants of the Sarmatians' through the law created by the official commanding the army, called a hetman. The "Hetman Articles", as they were called, regulated legal relations in the areas through which the Polish or Lithuanian army passed.¹ Military statutes and legal acts issued by the Polish underground revolutionary authorities, such as during the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), the Kraków Uprising (1846), the November Uprising (1830–1831), or the January Uprising (1863–1864), are a separate topic. It is not the time or place to deal with them, although they are certainly interesting examples of legal practice in areas associated with one military authority or another. I will address some legal issues arising from the chaos of the war of 1919–1921, when Poland repelled the aggression of Soviet (Bolshevik) Russia against Central Europe.² *Mikhail Tukhachevsky*, commander of the Red Army, and supporting him, the

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1 For more on this topic, see: ŁOPATECKI, Organizacja, prawo i dyscyplina w polskim i litewskim pospolicym ruszeniu.

2 In general, see: DAVIES, White Eagle, Red Star, the Polish-Soviet War.

leader of Soviet Russia, *Vladimir Lenin*, were of the opinion that “*through the corpses of Poland they will reach the West.*”³

They did not reach it because Polish units, with strong logistical support (especially regarding the supply of weapons and ammunition) from their nephews – the Hungarians – prevented them. General *Nándor Taróczy*, and later *István Sréter* – the Hungarian Minister of Defense – and the entire government of *Pál Teleki*, handed over to Poland millions of rounds of ammunition from the Hungarian army’s stockpiles. Several hundred Hungarian volunteers also fought on the Polish side.⁴

And later – as the title of the 1955 film put it – “*the heroes are tired*”, it was time to unwind. *Karol Łopatecki*, already quoted above, also drew attention to *Themis* – “*Legislation to this day constitutes one of the most important – and often underestimated in historiography – elements determining the level of military professionalism.*”⁵

I wanted to shed light on this brief period in the history of the Polish–Soviet War of 1919–1921, when, after the victories at Warsaw⁶ and the Niemen⁷, the tension among soldiers and society eased and optimism returned to the streets. It is worth considering how this spiral of war, the involvement of enormous resources to achieve victory, was quickly disarmed and demobilized, how the lives of those taken prisoner were shaped, those who went into the reserves, the administrative authorities, and finally, what happened with the border itself, how it was secured. I will try to answer these questions in light of the source material I came across in the State Archive in Lviv, specifically many regulations of the military law that was emerging at that time.

These were mostly military orders and circulars from the highest Polish military authorities. It was also a demonstration of the development of military law, which effectively allowed the transition from a strong field army to a peacetime footing; it was the process of shifting military administration to civil administration; and finally, it was demobilization and prisoner exchange.

Today, in the era of conflict on Poland’s eastern border, as well as those of Hungary, Slovakia, the Baltic countries, and all of NATO, it is worth recalling that conflict, which ended with great Polish victories near Warsaw and in the Battle of the Niemen, securing a peace favorable to Poland in Riga. In the article, I show the problems that arose after the end of frontline operations, when diplomacy brought the two countries – Poland and Russia – closer to peace, and how these issues were resolved.

3 For more on this topic, see: MUSIAŁ, *Po trupie Polski na Zachód*.

4 Before the outbreak of World War II, one issue of the magazine *Wiarus* was dedicated to Hungarian aid during the Polish–Russian war of 1920–1921 – *Wiarus*, Year IX, No. 7, Publisher: Military Scientific and Educational Institute, dated February 12, 1938.

5 ŁOPATECKI, *Organizacja, prawo i dyscyplina w polskim i litewskim pospolitym ruszeniu* 10.

6 In general, see: KUKIEL, *Bitwa warszawska*; TUKHACHEVSKY, *Pochód za Wisłę*.

7 In general, see: KUTRZEBA, *Bitwa nad Niemnem*.

2. Relaxation of units – Border Guard

On January 6, 1921, a report prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding competency issues between the regular units of the Polish Army and the Border Guard reached the Ministry of Military Affairs and the headquarters of the Polish Army Staff. The issue concerned the prevention by the regular army of Polish Border Guard units from crossing into the eastern border. The mentioned letter emphasized the necessity of cooperation between the Polish army and the Border Guard, especially since the army units had no experience in guarding and properly securing the border. After all, that was not their role. The Ministry referred to Article 6 of the Decree of the Council of National Defense of July 20, 1920, on border protection (Journal of Laws 64/1920, item 426), which clearly allowed state authorities possessing the proper service credentials to stay in the border zone. The letter ordered “*not to create difficulties*” in the free movement of Border Guard formations across the entire border area, which also concerned Greater Poland and the General District Commands in Kielce, Warsaw, Krakow, Lviv, Poznań, and Pomerania.⁸ Upper Silesia was not mentioned here, as this area was going through a period of conflict with Germany, known as the period of the Silesian uprisings.

The question arose as to why the Border Guard had difficulty positioning itself where it was supposed to be – at the border. The problem was the discipline prevailing in the military, or rather the information circulating publicly about its laxity or sometimes even its complete absence. History knows many examples of abuses resulting from this, and it is quite possible that some Polish soldiers returning from the victorious war with Soviet Russia remembered a passage from the infamous case of attempted rape in the village of Zabawa in Lesser Poland, where a Russian soldier during World War I (1916) murdered sixteen-year-old *Karolina Kózkówna*, who was defending herself against enslavement, and who is today beatified by the Roman Catholic Church.⁹

The Border Guard and the Military Gendarmerie were becoming indispensable, especially during such a difficult period of a particular army’s operation. This is a normal, though undesirable phenomenon. After the war ended, when the pre-battle tension subsides and everything slowly becomes clear, the darker sides of human existence emerge, or as the saying goes, “*when reason sleeps, demons awaken*.”¹⁰

Military units stationed at the front were to be relieved as quickly as possible for indefinite leave, which in practice meant moving into the reserves, and in their place, new military cohorts were to join the army, receiving assistance in maintaining order from units of the Border Guard, the State Police, and the aforementioned gendarmerie.¹¹ This is indeed what happened – moreover, the relief of front-line units proceeded smoothly and quickly, which was the result of two basic facts: the considerable cost of maintaining line units; the spreading slackening of discipline.

The gendarmerie aroused dislike among front-line soldiers, and even contempt.¹² The Minister of Military Affairs, *Gen. Kazimierz Sosnkowski*, ordered in a letter dated June 18, 1921, addressed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, that such abuses be punished without mercy.

8 State Archive in Lviv, hereinafter referred to as CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, carte 1.

9 PIĘCH, Blessed Karolina Kózka 189–195.

10 For more on this topic, see: KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały*.

11 KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały* 347–357.

12 JĘDRZEJCZYK, *Moja wojna* 139.

Most of these pathologies occurred in rural areas, where there were requisitions, robberies, and the grazing of meadows.¹³ The relevant border district governors also had to be informed about changes at the borders. Division I of the Polish Army Staff – Recruitment and Supplement Section issued a special order on February 19, 1921, regarding the procedures for the indefinite leave (demobilization) of privates, that is, active-duty soldiers. This act introduced detailed rules for recording such soldiers entering service, established the content of the so-called mobilization cards, and introduced individual registration cards. Furthermore, it regulated the procedure for reporting to the registration officer in order to carry out a reservist check.¹⁴

Two military registration lists were maintained: those who served during the Polish-Soviet War, and those who had not yet served in the Polish Army but were deemed fit for military service.

This documentation was maintained by a special registration officer within the District Replacement Commission. Soldiers who were indefinitely discharged after leaving front-line units had to report to the District Recruitment Command within 8 days, where the aforementioned registration was carried out. This was an important move, as in the event of renewed conflict, conscription needed to be “*implemented immediately*.” The date for an additional registration was set for the period between March 15 and April 15, 1921, during which the registration officer maintained an additional registration list. The Ministry of Military Affairs was keen on expediting the demobilization process, and at one point the enlistment of soldiers from new cohorts into military units was suspended, and officers were even forced to fulfill the duty of directing soldiers to civilian life. Soldiers who reported for medical examinations to obtain a military category, once listed, were directed to civilian life.

An order was issued that only the cohorts of 1896–1900 should remain in units guarding the Polish-Soviet border.¹⁵ It was also noted to limit this to cavalry, technical troops, and gendarmerie. Demobilization was to be carried out immediately, and all formalities for discharge were to be reduced to the absolute minimum. Soldiers returning to Poland from various fronts of World War I were also subject to registration “*under the general rules*,” especially if they had previously registered at Polish military posts abroad.

This concerned the age groups from the years 1886–1902.¹⁶ Demobilization included non-commissioned officers and soldiers serving in the cavalry, in cavalry units (age groups 1885–1880). As we learn from the circular of the Staff of Department I of the Ministry of Military Affairs dated January 21, 1921, directed to subordinate units, General District Commands (hereinafter: DOG), especially the Branch in Białystok, Department IV of the Staff of the Presidential Office of the Ministry of Military Affairs, and the Supreme Command, a major problem for the army became a certain relaxation, caused by the great victory over Soviet Russia.¹⁷

One manifestation of this insubordination was the minor yet troublesome thefts committed by soldiers returning from the front by train. This concerned particularly units passing through Białystok, hence an order was issued to the commander of the DOG in Białystok to reinforce

13 CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, c. 66.

14 CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, c. 4.

15 CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, c. 5.

16 CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, c. 5.

17 There were sharp clashes between the regular army and the police, which the soldiers contemptuously called the ‘head cheese’ and the gendarmerie (referred to as the ‘spurs’). See: KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały* 355. The Polish Army prohibited the creation of police patrols on the border. SPRENGEL, *Policja państwowa a organy władzy publicznej w polityce ochrony bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego w Polsce w latach 269*.

military police posts at key railway stations.¹⁸ As early as November 6, 1920, by order of the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Military Affairs, General Niesiołowski, the areas around train stations were being strengthened, with the execution of this duty entrusted to special regional commanders. It was recommended that the dispatch of soldiers from the front be entrusted to energetic officers, who would curb the rash behaviors of subordinate soldiers.¹⁹ Demobilization of sailors from the 1896, 1897, and 1898 cohorts of the Navy was postponed until October 1, 1921.²⁰

As we read in this circular: *“In the event of a short halt of transports within railway stations, if the station is not simultaneously a military supply station, it is necessary to prohibit disembarking from the train in large groups, and for this purpose, during stops, posts shall be assigned to the transports to prevent moving away from the train.”* Any excesses were to be punished as severely as possible, holding all co-responsible parties immediately criminally liable.²¹ For such individuals, a report was drawn up and sent to the nearest DOG in Białystok.

To ensure this duty was properly carried out, the commander of OG sent special control officers, who were to examine on-site the performance of duties by the military posts. Such inspections were to be repeated from time to time.

The soldiers were therefore returning to their home regions according to the established schedule, and in front of the Ministry of Military Affairs another problem arose – preparing the Soviet prisoners of war for release and simultaneously for exchange for Polish prisoners of war. These prisoners, soldiers (but not officers), worked in labor units, and their role in providing certain construction infrastructure was significant. In the circular of Section I of the General Staff – Prisoners Section of the Ministry of Military Affairs, dated January 22, 1921, addressed to DOG in Lviv, a plan for dealing with Soviet prisoners was presented. It was necessary to bring those prisoners who worked in Polish private enterprises to the POW camps, and then gradually empty the labor POW camps across the country.²²

The problem lay in the lack of labor for physical work. The Ministry recommended that DOG employ workers on a contractual basis or establish special military units to complete investments carried out by prisoners of war. The execution of this duty was entrusted to the commander of OG. He determined the order of liquidation of labor units: first, private entrepreneurs; then units assigned to civilian government authorities; next, prisoner labor units at factories, offices, and military units were to be liquidated; and finally, prisoner railway units and those units that DOG considered essential and difficult to replace were demobilized.

18 CDIAUL, collection 146, inventory 8, no. 4854, c. 10.

19 It did not always succeed. There were very tense relations between the gendarmerie and the Greater Poland army. The soldiers called ‘Poznanians’ contemptuously referred to the gendarmes as *kacaps*, and there were occasions when they beat police patrols, such as on February 22, 1920, in Białystok, where, in addition to policemen, soldiers from Greater Poland even beat the commander. See: KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały* 353. In Rzeszów, there was an incident when a train with soldiers from the 21st Infantry Regiment stopped at the station, and one of the soldiers insulted a policeman, as a result of which he was arrested. It turned out that his comrades got off the train and surrounded the police station, demanding the release of their colleague from custody. Only the intervention of the officers of the 21st Regiment prevented an attack on the station. See: *O niepodległą i granicę* 573; KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały* 353.

20 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 71.

21 Relatively often, such people were sentenced to death by shooting. KASPRZYCKI, *Bez sławy i chwały* 346.

22 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, kc. 16.

To implement the penultimate directive, it was recommended to accelerate repairs of military facilities and those of significant importance to the army. Such facilities included, for example, military shooting ranges.

The commanders of OG were responsible for presenting the order of liquidation of prisoner-of-war camps (by February 1, 1921). To assist in fulfilling this duty, among others, county governors and other authorities, both civilian and military, were appointed.²³

Another problem facing the military and society was the numerous war invalids. Regardless of the degree of disability, a person was considered war invalid if they had the appropriate disability certificate. Such documents had to include a photograph of the invalid and certification from the local authority regarding the person's identity. Instructions on how to proceed when issuing these documents, as well as regarding the care of such people, were held by county governors, city magistrates, and also in police stations. The Central Branch of the Care Section of the Ministry of Military Affairs in Krakow, in a letter sent to the General Delegation of the Government for Lesser Poland in Lviv on January 28, 1921, provided detailed information on how the procedure with disabled veterans should be conducted and how important it was to have a disability booklet.²⁴

I mentioned in this article the cases of theft and insubordination by soldiers returning from the war. In addition, there were dishonest transactions that exploited the military. Such a situation occurred, for example, in the small town of Słupca, where the deputy commander of the Polish Military Organization on December 7, 1918, withdrew from the municipal treasury, for 'military needs', from the so-called Grain Department, the amount of 14.368 marks and 19 pfennigs. The liquidation section operating in the town did not record the transfer of this amount for military purposes, and the aforementioned deputy disappeared with the cash without a trace. An investigation was launched to find the suspect, which came up against the Ministry of Military Affairs.²⁵

3. Military administration

One of the important existential matters for the Polish state was the reorganization of the cordon and the eastward shift of the border, which took place after the cessation of hostilities.²⁶ On March 20, 1921, the Polish border nominally moved eastward to the Niemen, Szczara, and Stochod rivers, while in terms of administrative division into counties to Sejny and Augustów (although the Grodno Fortified Area was incorporated into the district of the country) further to the line of the Niemen River (dividing Grodno into two parts) and to the eastern borders of the counties of Wołkowysk, Prużany, Kobryn, Kowel, and Włodzimierz Wołyński to the border of the Lesser Poland stage inspection of the 6th army, which remained unnamed. It is worth noting that these areas today are partially part of three countries: Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine.

23 Civil authorities were not adequately prepared for the function of state governance, which resulted from a lack of administrative personnel, especially when it came to district governors. Lack of education and low morale were the main shortcomings of these offices. MIERZWA, *Starostowie Polski międzywojennej* 91. Meanwhile, in Upper Silesia, when Poland took over authority over this plebiscite area, many officials of German origin left Silesia. The Polish administration requested the remaining ones to stay until their own administrative staff could be appointed. See: MAŁECKI, *W miejsce czarnego – orzeł biały* 43–61, especially 49.

24 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 22.

25 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 23.

26 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 38.

There was also a transfer, in terms of military administration, to the country of the areas lying west of the aforementioned border line in the following way: the part of the territory located north of the Brześć Litewski – Pripyat River line to the DOG Warsaw Branch with its seat in Białystok; the part of the territory located south of the aforementioned line, that is, the western counties of the Volhynia Voivodeship, to DOG Lublin.

There was also supposed to be a connection between the so-called tactical cover and military service on the cordon under the Supreme Command, which was dictated by the limited forces after demobilization. In practice, it was about creating posts and control stations, which were staffed by military forces the size of staging battalions. This had the consequence that the responsibility for duty on the cordon, that is, on the border, lay with the cordon service leadership and the military gendarmerie. In case of personnel shortages, additional military forces from those Polish divisions stationed in nearby areas could be sent to the border. The period of service at the border lasted three weeks, after which they were relieved to undergo military training.

This is also a contemporary military problem: should the army secure the border, or rather the Border Guard and the Police? The question is whether it wouldn't be better for the tactical units of the Polish Army and NATO to coordinate during training rather than wasting time guarding the border with Belarus.

From the circular of the Ministry of Military Affairs Branch drafted on February 28, 1921, general guidelines related to the reorganization of the Supreme Command cordon and the eastward shift of the western boundary of the staging area, it follows that priority should be given to the training of divisional infantry units rather than border guarding.²⁷ Commands of the General Areas withdrew line and divisional cavalry units from border service and relocated them to inland areas for reorganization and training. The Ministry of Military Affairs requested that the Area Commanders issue orders for the takeover of areas that had been excluded from the so-called staging areas. In turn, at the disposal of the Ministry of Military Affairs remained: a) in the 6th Army, one depot battalion in Kowel, one in Luboml, b) in the 4th Army, one depot battalion in Prużany, one guard battalion in Kobryn and Brześć Litewski, c) in the 2nd Army, one depot battalion in the Sokółka area, in the localities of Świrz and Wołkowysk, one depot battalion in the Augustów, Suwałki, and Grodno area, one depot battalion of the Grodno fortress, d) deployment of the field gendarmerie according to a separately established plan.

In order to establish the details for transferring territories designated from the so-called staging areas to the state, on March 20, 1921, the command of the 2nd Army to Volkovysk and the 6th Army to Kovel convened special handover-receipt commissions. The commissions were made up of civil commissioners of these armies, representatives of the commands, and the so-called staging inspections. Their task was the smooth transfer of territories occupied by the military administration to the civil administration.

The command of the 4th Army also sent a representative to the field in Volkovysk. The so-called staging inspections were subordinated to the district commands. Their task was to keep records of units and personnel handed over to the district office for the creation of a neutral zone militia.²⁸

The aforementioned acceptance and handover committees indicated the warehouses and facilities still under the control of the armies, which needed to be divided into those belonging to the country or to the military. Similarly, rooms had to be identified for the so-called reserve units. This primarily concerned cavalry squadrons. As an example, we can take the 3rd Uhlan Regiment

27 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 38.

28 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 39.

from the second part of Poland. Its headquarters, since 1926, were located in Tarnowskie Góry, in the part of Upper Silesia occupied by Poland, but the 3rd squadron was based in Pszczyna, about 80 km away, and the reserve squadron in Bochnia.²⁹ The dispersion of these units from each other was more than 80 kilometers, and even much more (from Pszczyna to Bochnia is over 120 km). Communications to individual units were conducted through couriers.³⁰

The military police – staging units – played a huge role in stabilizing the occupied territories. These were cavalry units, divided into squadrons (the equivalent of battalions).

In the 6th Army, two squadrons covered the area of the Kovelski and Włodzimierz Wołyński counties, in the 4th Army one squadron served the Pruzany and Słonim districts, and a gendarmerie platoon was assigned to the Brześć Litewski Fortified Camp, while in the 2nd Army, a total of two squadrons were formed. During the conferences held at the level of the Ministry of Military Affairs and the individual armies, it was decided that the operation of the logistics troops would be determined by orders issued jointly for them by the Ministry of Military Affairs. These units were to be systematically reduced or even disbanded. The decision on this matter was made by the respective army commands. Similarly, personnel numbers in the railway protection troops were reduced. All garrison and support services were transferred to frontline units or reserve units.

Local security matters were handed over by the military authorities to county governors and the stage gendarmerie stationed in the respective counties. In practice, this involved the elimination of posts, stage stations, county command headquarters, and city headquarters. The temporary organization of brigades was abolished, and their headquarters were disbanded. Personnel from the disbanded units were incorporated into stage battalions. Only two fortification area headquarters – for Brest-Litovsk and Grodno – and the city headquarters of Kovel were left unchanged and not disbanded, while from the posts, only the commands in Włodzimierz Wołyński, Wołkowysk, and Kobryn were retained.³¹

On January 8, 1921, the Main Requisition Commission began its work, tasked with reviewing complaints and objections to the decisions of the district requisition commissions at the Headquarters of the Military Districts regarding war benefits. The commission's seat was located in Warsaw at 87 Marszałkowska Street, and its members included: as chairman (representative of the Supreme Court), Judge *Aleksander Półkoźic Wolski*; representative of the Sejm, Deputy to the Legislative Sejm – *Seweryn Czetwertyński*; representative of the Ministry of Military Affairs, lawyer *Józef Dzierżanowski*, Major *Dr. Władysław Typprowicz*; representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – ministerial counselor *Atenogenes Pawlikiewicz*; representative of the Ministry of Treasury – clerk *Karol Gorczyński*. The commission received visitors every day except Sundays and holidays, from one to three in the afternoon.³²

29 MAŁECKI, Z dziejów Wojny Bronnej Polski 1939 r. Bitwa graniczna pod Pszczyną 61–62.

30 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 43.

31 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 43.

32 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 46.

4. Prisoners of war and their exchange

The exchange of prisoners is one of the most important activities in any armed conflict, and its implementation leads to the recognition of a given organization, such as insurgents or warring groups, as a subject of international law. The Polish side signed an appropriate agreement on the exchange of prisoners and hostages with the Soviet side on February 24, 1921.³³

Primarily, workers' units were disbanded, which concerned agricultural workers and those employed by private entrepreneurs.

Special prisoner concentration points were established at the Headquarters of the General Districts. They were located: for DOG Warsaw in Białystok (concentration camp³⁴ N – 21); for DOG Lublin in Puławy (concentration camp N – 24); for DOG Łódź, Poznań, and Pomerania, the non-quarantined part, prisoner camp No. 1 in Strzałkowo; for DOG Kielce and Kraków, the internment camp Dąbie (section for prisoners); for DOG Lwów, concentration camp N. – 23 Lwów).

Among all of them, the camp in Strzałkowo aroused considerable emotion, where many prisoners died as a result of infectious diseases.³⁵ Camp tasks were: the concentration of prisoners, arriving from various work centers; liquidation of prisoner labor units; preparation of prisoners for transport to the prisoner exchange point; thorough preparation of prisoners in terms of hygiene, that is, haircuts, disinfection, bathing, vaccinations, examination of health status for transportation; preparation of equipment for prisoners in the form of better, though used but repaired, clothing, underwear, and footwear (for this purpose, it was necessary to expand shoe and tailoring workshops in the camps and provide appropriate material, including that stored in warehouses); registration of prisoners; transport of prisoners to exchange points, which was determined by each order from the Ministry of Military Affairs, delivered via telegraph.

Prisoners were transported to the aforementioned exchange points by medical trains in compact groups, each consisting of 500 people, under escort and with a precise nominal list (in two copies). The order from the Ministry of Military Affairs required that each prisoner be provided with suitable provisions for the journey.

A point that surprised contemporary researchers was the option mentioned in the aforementioned order to remain in Poland. Prisoners were sent either to Russia or to Ukraine, but not all prisoners wanted to return. For those who decided to stay in Poland, an appropriate declaration had to be completed in three copies and sent within seven days to the Prisoners Section of the Ministry of Military Affairs, which made decisions regarding the asylum seeker's fate.

For those who decided to return to Soviet Russia, a nominal consignment was prepared for each transport in two copies. One copy was left at the exchange point, and the other, with acknowledgment of receipt, remained in the camp records.

33 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 50.

34 The term concentration camp – used at that time – has little in common with the German concentration camps of the “Third Reich” as well as with the Extermination Camps. For more on this topic, see: KAMIŃSKI, Koszmar niewolnictwa.

35 OLSZEWSKI, Jeńcy internowani zmarli w obozie Strzałkowo w latach 1915–1921.

5. Plan and order of liquidation

The specific Command of the General Districts decided on the plan and order of prisoner exchange transports, although, in principle, the collection of prisoners and exchange were to take place in three stages: the first concerned the aforementioned prisoners – those working in agriculture, convalescents in hospitals, loose groups, and others working for private entrepreneurs or in redundant units at military authorities; this period was to last from April 20 to May 4, 1921; the second included the liquidation of labor camps at military institutions, and the liquidation was to be completed within three weeks; the third was intended for the liquidation of prisoner labor units that were difficult to replace quickly, such as from railway companies or medical orderlies.³⁶

During the establishment of camps by the OG Commands, it was necessary to ensure that the concentration of prisoners did not lead to overcrowding of the camp. The labor detachment of prisoners subject to disbandment had to be transported along with the personnel, escort, and all livestock, both alive and dead. The prisoners had to be bathed, deloused, examined by a doctor, and provided with uniforms and footwear. Following the liquidation of a camp, records were compiled, the camp books were closed after inspection, and handed over to the OG commander, who then submitted them to the Ministry of Military Affairs (Department I, Infantry Section). Those executing the order were obliged to respect the humane treatment of prisoners.³⁷ Previously, the Polish side had treated prisoners harshly, while the Russian side committed numerous murders.

The analogy between the Polish-Soviet war and the contemporary Russian-Ukrainian conflict is visible to some extent, as every war carries the same burden of bad experiences. It is important to break through hostility, reluctance, and contempt and to talk to each other. This applies to both the enemy and one's own people.

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36 CDIAUL, collection 146, description 8, no. 4854, c. 51.

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