

Oula SILVENNOINEN
Helsinki

UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN FINLAND 1941 – 1947

Оула СІЛЬВЕННОНЕН
Гельсінкі

УКРАЇНСЬКІ ВІЙСЬКОВОПОЛОНЕНІ У ФІНЛЯНДІЇ 1941 – 1947

Під час війни проти Радянського Союзу, Фінляндія захопила близько 13 000 військовополонених-українців. З'ясування їхньої долі – мета нещодавно заснованого дослідницького проекту Національного Архіву Фінляндії (*Kansallisarkisto*) “Військовополонені у Фінляндії. Екстрадиції 1939 – 1955 рр.” Попередні дані вказують, що під час війни близько 700 українців було передано німецькій владі. Велика кількість українців, аби уникнути репатріації до Радянського Союзу після закінчення війни втекла до Швеції, або переховувалась у Фінляндії.

Finland took part together with Germany in the war against the Soviet Union. During the summer and autumn of 1941 Finnish troops advanced to positions just north of Leningrad and to the river Svir in Karelia. They occupied Petrozavodsk and cut the White Sea canal north of the Onega. During this advance, tens of thousands of prisoners of war (POW) from the Soviet Army fell into Finnish hands. Most of them were Russians, but among the prisoners were also represented practically all the minority nationalities of the Soviet Union. A considerable number of the prisoners were Ukrainians. This paper describes the fates of the Ukrainian prisoners of war in Finnish hands.

A research project named “Finland, POW’s and extraditions, 1939 – 1955” has recently been set up by the National Archive of Finland (*Kansallisarkisto*) to clarify the conduct of Finnish authorities toward prisoners of war and civilian internees during the war and immediately afterwards. Of particular interest here are the extraditions of prisoners of war from Finland to the German authorities. This paper is a short summary of what is known so far. The most important question at present is what kind of archival material could be found in the Ukrainian archives concerning the varied fates of Ukrainian prisoners of war.

The spark for the founding of our research project came from a book published in Finland in late 2003, which argued that Finnish authorities handed over to their German allies a far larger amount of people than previously known, and that among those people was a number of Jews, Communists and members of Soviet intelligentsia, all people who could expect no mercy from the Germans¹. In other words, the Finnish authorities were suspected of having aided and even taken an active part in the crimes of the Nazis. Historians were quick to point out that the complete picture is likely to be far more complex. The Finnish authorities unquestionably did hand over people to the Germans, but to which extent this was done in accordance to the ideological goals of the German National Socialists remains questionable. Instead, a large number of people were probably handed over on a voluntary basis, as the Germans seem to have been eager to recruit the minority nationals of the

Soviet Union to their own troops or as workforce. This is especially true with the Ukrainians, whose contribution to the German war effort was perhaps the most conspicuous of all the minority nationalities of the Soviet Union.

The figures and some of the conclusions remain tentative, as research into this matter is still in its early stages. I hope, however, to be able to offer you at least a glimpse of the whole picture.

Conditions in the prisoner-of-war camps

The Finnish Army took during the war around 64 000 Soviet prisoners, most of them at the early phase of the war. In the winter 1941 – 42 there were over 56 000 prisoners of war in the Finnish camps. Resembling the German practice the Finns also screened their prisoners of war. The idea was to separate from the mass potential collaborators, people of Finnish or Finno-Ugric ethnicity and those with valuable knowledge of the enemy. On the other hand, potential troublemakers and communists were to be isolated from the rest. In the process, the nationality of the prisoners was recorded. A thorough analysis of the breakdown of the Soviet prisoners according to nationality does not yet exist. For comparison, however, the data collected by the Norwegian State Archive (*Riksarkivet*) concerning all the prisoners repatriated after the war from Norway, indicates that Ukrainians formed around 20 percent of the grand total of Soviet prisoners². Thus, an estimate of the number of Ukrainians in Finnish prisoner of war camps throughout the war would be almost 13 000 persons.

The unexpectedly great number of prisoners put the camp administration into a situation with which it could not cope. The prisoners were held under bare sky for prolonged periods and later housed in cardboard tents instead of proper barracks. The food situation in the whole country was critical, and as a result the prisoners of war were given too small rations. Furthermore, there is evidence that the prisoners were given unequal treatment according to their nationality. The Finno-Ugric Ingrian Finns and Karelians usually received the best treatment, after them the other Soviet minority nationalities. Russians had to survive with the smallest rations. Between the summer 1941 – autumn 1942 over 17 000 prisoners died in the camps through malnutrition, disease and exposure. The situation in the prisoner of war camps started to get better only during the summer of 1942, when it had already attracted international attention and the authorities began to rectify the situation. All in all, the death rate of prisoners in the Finnish camps comes close to 30 percent. The rate is high, but not completely exceptional. For comparison, the death rate of Soviet soldiers in German camps is around 60 percent. The death rate of Finnish soldiers in Soviet captivity seems to have been around 40 percent³.

If we estimate that there were 13 000 Ukrainians in the Finnish camps, a death rate of 30 percent would translate into almost 4000 fatalities. These numbers can only be thought as rough estimates, however. Furthermore, it is to be noted that the comparatively high mortality in the Finnish prisoner of war camps was a result of the difficult conditions of the winter 1941 – 1942. After that, the death rate fell to normal levels. There is no evidence of systematic violence towards the prisoners, but some forms of punishment not allowed by the international treaties signed by Finland were in use. The hardest of them was flogging, and it was again the Russian prisoners who were treated harshest also in disciplinary terms. Additionally, some 1000 prisoners were shot in escape attempts and similar instances⁴.

For those Ukrainians in the prisoner-of-war camps, new options also began to open up. The Finnish armed forces and intelligence services recruited prisoners to serve as interpreters and agents and propagandists. Again, the exact number of Ukrainians recruited is not known, but there were probably a few dozens of Ukrainians working in the army intelligence (*Päämajan tiedusteluosasto*) and propaganda (*Päämajan tiedoitusosasto*) sections. The prisoners of war also showed considerable interest in taking up arms against the Soviet Union. By the fall of 1942 Finnish military authorities had received over 16 000 requests from the prisoners of war expressing their wish to fight against the Soviets either in the Finnish or German army⁵.

Prisoner extraditions to the Germans

The Finnish authorities soon began to organize prisoner-of-war exchanges with the Germans. The Finns were mainly interested in getting Finno-Ugric prisoners transferred to Finland. The idea was to recruit them to fight in the Finnish Army, or settle them in the areas conquered from the Soviet Union, where they would help populate a buffer zone and bring a welcome increase into the Finnish population. In exchange the Finns handed some of their prisoners over to the German intelligence, security and military authorities. An estimate of the amount of people extradited, given by the Finnish Army after the war, was 2661 persons. The majority of these people were Soviet minority nationalities, Estonians, Ukrainians and Caucasians. Estonians repatriated to German-occupied Estonia were the largest group among them. After them, there were 666 persons who were classified as Ukrainians or Caucasians, lumped here together for some unknown reason. The exact number of Ukrainian prisoners among those handed over is still unclear, but it nevertheless rose to hundreds of men. The probable reason for the heavy representation of Ukrainians among the prisoners extradited from Finland has to be sought from the involvement of Ukrainians in the German war effort⁶.

As it is known, ever since the beginning of the German invasion there were Ukrainians who wanted to fight the Soviets alongside the Germans. The Germans also very quickly set up the Ukrainian Nationalist Revolutionary Army for anti-partisan duties. Furthermore, the German military intelligence service, *Amt Ausland/Abwehr*, began to recruit both men and women for informers, interpreters and agents. There were also those who served the Germans as laborers, guides, cook, launderers and other menial tasks, generally known as *Hilfswilligen*⁷.

The brutal occupation policy of the Germans and the formation of a Ukrainian nationalist and anti-German partisan movement, the U.P.A., soon turned many Ukrainians against the Germans. Throughout the war, however, there were Ukrainian nationalists ready to enlist themselves in German service, through which they hoped to achieve the independence of Ukraine. Ukrainian involvement in the German war effort remained pronounced, and finally led to the formation of a complete Ukrainian SS-division (*14. Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS*) in the spring of 1943. At the same time the Germans set up the so-called Ukrainian Liberation Army, which held nominal authority over all the Ukrainian troops in German service⁸.

The high number of Ukrainians among those extradited from Finland merits a thorough investigation into the reasons of their extradition and their eventual fate in German hands. The high number of prisoners volunteering for service against the Soviet Union gives reason to suppose that the majority left Finland voluntarily. Further traces of them have to be sought from the archival material of the Ukrainian troops recruited by the Germans.

Escaped prisoners of war

For Finland, the war against the Soviet Union ended in September 1944. The Soviet Union wanted the prisoners of war to be repatriated immediately. This repatriation was to be put into effect forcibly if necessary. Many of those who did not want to return decided to flee.

Those Ukrainian and other prisoners who had taken up service in the Finnish Army as interpreters, interrogators, intelligence workers and propagandists, had been promised that they would not be returned to the Soviet Union. It seems that most of them were helped to Sweden after the armistice⁹. Many of those in the prisoner-of-war camps also decided to flee rather than return. During September – October 1944, when they were awaiting transportation to the Soviet Union, these prisoners began to disappear from their prisoner-of-war formations. Some of them tried to get to Sweden to be safe from repatriation, but surprisingly many stayed in Finland. To understand how they were able to do this, we need to have a short look into the war-time system of employing the prisoners of war.

During the war, Finland was still a country whose economy rested on agriculture. Small family holdings were the norm, and in a time of crisis they had to bear the burden of feeding the country. As men were drafted into military service the farms experienced an acute shortage of labour, which

threatened to further deepen the food crisis. A solution was sought from employing the reservoir of workforce of the prisoner-of-war camps, whereby farms and industrial companies could apply the military authorities for prisoners to work. Conditions in places of employment were often far better than in the camps, and food was more plentiful. As the prisoners were often lodged in local families, treatment was understandably more lenient than under military authorities and camp discipline. The prisoners sometimes developed close ties to their employers¹⁰.

The police was charged with finding and returning the escaped prisoners to the Soviet Union. They showed no great enthusiasm for this task, and the Ministry of Interior had on several occasions to coax the police into acting more forcefully¹¹. Despite this there were in June 1947 several hundred escaped prisoners whose whereabouts were unknown. Among them were 56 Ukrainians, of whom some were known to have escaped to Sweden and some had returned voluntarily to the Soviet Union. All in all, the authorities had information of some 400 Soviet prisoners of war who were known to have moved to Sweden. The real number probably was even larger¹². Most prisoners reported as escaped in late 1944 were, however, somewhere in Finland, probably under a false identity and often employed by their war-time employers¹³. Of the 56 escaped Ukrainian prisoners of war who were missing in 1947, only one, Ivan Danilovitsh Guts, was known to have returned to the Soviet Union by 1951¹⁴.

The large number of Ukrainians among both the prisoners of war and among the people extradited to the German authorities makes their fates an important topic for the research project now in progress. The most important unresolved question is the fate of the Ukrainians in German hands. The project will also look for further information about the fates of people, Ukrainians and others, who were returned to the Soviet Union after the war. Further research will hopefully clarify the issue further.

¹ Sana, Elina: Luovutetut. Suomen ihmisluovutukset Gestapolle. WSOY. Helsinki, 2003.

² The exact numbers are available through the internet in: <http://www.arkivverket.no/riksarkivet/kilder/nett.html>

³ Heikki Ylikankaan selvitys valtioneuvoston kanslialle, Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 5/2004. – P. 28.

⁴ Hallikainen, Janne: Toimen menettämisestä raippaan, pilkasta luotiin. Graduate thesis, University of Jyväskylä, 2000. – P. 115.

⁵ Ojala, Veli: Heimopataljoona 3. Graduate thesis, University of Helsinki, 1974. – P. 21–22.

⁶ Heikki Ylikankaan selvitys valtioneuvoston kanslialle, Valtioneuvoston kanslian julkaisusarja 5/2004. – P. 29.

⁷ Ready, J. Lee: The Forgotten Axis. Germany's Partners and Foreign Volunteers in World War II. McFarland, Jefferson, 1987. – P. 144–145, 156.

⁸ Ready, 1987. – P. 272–274.

⁹ Kujansuu, Juha: Kenraalikoppi ja sikalaryssät. Licentiate's dissertation, University of Jyväskylä, 1999. – P. 171.

¹⁰ Manninen, Turo: Oulun sotavankileiri 1941 – 1944. – P. 147–148. Article in: Olaus Magnuksen jäljillä. Scripta Historica 30, Oulun historiaseura, Oulu 2003; Kujansuu 1999. – P. 199–200.

¹¹ Sisäasiainministeriön yleiskirje (Circular letter of the Ministry of Interior) 18840/P, 1.12.1945. The circulars and lists of missing prisoners of war are available through the Internet in: <http://www.genealogia.fi/>, under the headlines "Luetteloita ja hakemistoja" and "Neuvostoliittoon palautettavat kansalaiset 1945–1953".

¹² Sisäasiainministeriön yleiskirje 8500/P, 30.6.1947.

¹³ Sisäasiainministeriön yleiskirje 12168/P, 12.9.1947.

¹⁴ Sisäasiainministeriön yleiskirje 9989/P, 13.9.1951.