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Psychological Aspects of Captivity in the War in the East of Ukraine

Abstract: *The study aimed to determine the psychological aspects of captivity in the War in the East of Ukraine: the purposes and motives of the capture of Ukrainian Forces (UF); the types of captivity and their specifics; the stages and phases of captivity. The measures included a questionnaire and interview method. 694 former prisoners of war (POWs) (servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and soldiers of volunteer battalions) participated in the study. The research results revealed the purposes of capturing UF: to stop UF advance; obtaining intelligence; demoralization of UF; demonstration of military superiority; capturing prisoners for exchange; unwillingness to kill; receiving a ransom. The UF invaders were military units, professional mercenaries' units, and gang formation units. The stages of captivity (capture and transportation to a place of permanent detention; first interrogation; being held captive; exchange of POWs and homecoming) were characterized by intimidation, aggression, physical, psychological and sexual violence against POWs, the purposeful creation of an environment of mass psychosis among POWs. Captivity kept the POWs in constant tension and fear. The altered mental status of POWs took place in successive phases: life reactions, shock, psychological demobilization, denouement, recovery, and conflict phase.*

Keywords: *psychological aspects, Ukraine, captivity, prisoners of war, war in Donbas*

INTRODUCTION

The dream of mankind for peace is still a dream: wars and armed conflicts do not stop. The problems of occupied territories, destroyed cities, refugees, immigrants, and prisoners of war (POWs) are just a small part of the negative social manifestations of any war. Obviously, the problem of war, captivity, and its consequences are at the center of the attention of the world scientific community.

Human captivity is any situation in which an individual is subjected to the control and will of another person or entity and surrenders power, autonomy, and independence (Mohandie, 2002). Researchers of the problem of captivity distinguish the following main types of it: military captivity (a consequence of hostilities), holding hostages (the result of the criminal activities of terrorists), and pirate captivity (illegal seizure, robbery, or sinking of civilian ships and aircraft) (Organised Maritime Piracy..., 2011; Yun & Roth, 2008; Zerach, 2018). In

modern armed conflicts with signs of “non-traditional war”, “irregular war”, “complex war” or “hybrid war” (Gorbulin, 2014), captivity takes on new varieties. In the conditions of such wars, the boundaries of a military conflict are “blurred” and non-military forces and means are involved in hostilities. “Hybrid wars” are not directly related to the classic military confrontation (Galeotti, 2019; Gorbulin, 2014).

The features of captivity and the conditions of stay of POWs during the First World War were studied by Ariotti & Pegram (2019), Jones (2008), etc. Various aspects of captivity during the Second World War were thoroughly investigated. The study of the experience of being held captive by French (Lloyd, 2013), New Zealand (Johnson, 2019), Australian (Twomey, 2014), and British military personnel (Pattinson, 2006; Pattinson, Noakes, & Ugolini, 2014) showed that the transition from soldier to captive was a destabilizing experience for many POWs. After the Second World War, local armed conflicts began to arise

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around the world. Scientific studies have examined the problems of British POWs in the Korean War (Gray, 1988), the peculiarities of being held captive during the Vietnam War (Park, Pless Kaiser, Spiro, D.W. King, & L.A. King, 2012).

A number of studies are devoted to the problem of military captivity and its consequences for participants in the Arab-Israeli wars. Scientists have focused on the study of coping strategies for the survival of POWs in the captivity (Zerach, (2018), identifying predictors of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the captivity (Zerach, Shevlin, Cloitre, & Solomon, 2019; Levi-Belz, Zerach, & Solomon, 2015), guilt and its effects after captivity (Solomon, Avidor, & Mantin, 2015), and potential transmission mechanisms of the consequences of psychological trauma to descendants of ex-POWs (Zerach & Solomon, 2016).

The results of studies of the problem of captivity have shown that it is based on violence as the use of force and psychological pressure using threats that are deliberately directed against the weak or those who cannot resist (Shyrobokov, 2017). In conditions of captivity, violence manifests itself as aggression and cruelty. These phenomena can be both individual and collective. They are always aimed at causing physical, psychological, and moral harm to a POW. Therefore, violent actions always have an inner meaning (Shyrobokov, 2017). As a result of captivity, a person loses self-confidence and a sense of perspective, chaos appears in consciousness, an irrational state of the psyche is observed, and habitual behavior is disrupted (Magomed-Eminov, 2010; Shyrobokov, 2017). Over time, many ex-POWs experience negative changes in their mental state, alcohol abuse, and the appearance of drug addiction (Zerach, 2018). They often have problems in the service and in the family, and there are signs of mental disorders (Zerach, Shevlin, Cloitre, & Solomon, 2019).

From May 2014 to date in the East of Ukraine (Donbas), active hostilities have been conducted between the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) and illegal armed groups (IAGs). The IAGs include pro-Russian local residents of the occupied territories of Donbas, mercenaries of Russian private military companies, and military personnel of regular units of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (AFRF). The hostilities began after the "Revolution of Dignity" ("Euromaidan") (November 2013 – February 2014) and the occupation of a part of the territory of Ukraine by "little green men" (regular units of the AFRF) of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (February – March 2014). In this war, tens of thousands of people are in combat positions every day (approximately 40,000 on each side). The line of contact with IAGs is more than 400 km. In 2014–2016, hostilities were intense, and from 2017 to date, positional, "trench" battles with a periodic ceasefire are being conducted. This conflict is the essential example of Russia's new policy of "hybrid warfare", which blends propaganda, misinformation, and the deployment of "deniable" Special Forces and regular troops alongside proxies and mercenaries to achieve its strategic ends (Galeotti, 2019; Gorbulin, 2014).

The most serious negative consequences of the War in Donbas are human losses among military personnel and civilians: killed, wounded, missing, and prisoners (Melnik, Prykhodko, & Stadnik, 2019). Ukrainian military personnel is killed and injured daily. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights during the entire conflict period, from 14 April 2014 to 15 February 2020, a total of 13,000–13,200 deaths of persons associated with the conflict were registered: 4,100 Ukrainian forces, 5,650 members of IAGs, 3,345 civilians, including 298 passengers who perished on board of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 on July 17, 2014 (Report on the human rights..., 2020). This number includes those who died directly from hostilities, and as a result of the consequences of injury, disease, careless handling of weapons and explosives, road traffic accidents, as well as homicide and suicide. During this period, about 30,000 people were injured in the conflict zone: 9,500–10,500 Ukrainian forces, 12,500–13,500 members of IAGs, 7,000 civilians (Report on the human rights..., 2020).

According to the Security Service of Ukraine, since the beginning of the war and as of July 1, 2019, 3,245 people have been found and released from captivity in the occupied territories of Donbas, including 1,575 servicemen and employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), 70 members of volunteer battalions and 1,600 civilians. More than 100 military and civilian personnel continue to be held by the IAGs. The exact number of such persons cannot be established due to constantly changing data (Zaretska, 2019). The War in Donbas, like other armed conflicts and wars, has become the object of study by scientists in the field of political science, sociology, and security (Edenborg, 2017; Gorbulin, 2014; Hornish, 2019; Katchanovski, 2016; Nygren et al., 2018). At the same time, the psychological aspects of captivity, taking into account the specifics of the War in Donbas, have been poorly understood.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to study the psychological aspects of captivity in the War in Donbas. The main objectives of the study are 1) establish the types of captivity and characterize their specificity; 2) to study the purpose and motives of the capture of Ukrainian military personnel; 3) determine the stages of the stay of POWs; 4) characterize the main phases of captivity.

Hypothesis 1. The conditions of being in captivity, the methods of psychological pressure on POWs, and the psychological consequences of captivity depend on the type of unit of the invaders, the purposes and motives of the capture.

Hypothesis 2. The stages and phases of being in captivity don't depend on the type of the invader's unit, the reasons, goals, and motives of the capture.

METHOD

Participants

The study followed ex-POWs (N = 694), including 443 (63.8%) military personnel of the AFU, 251 (36.2%) fighters of volunteer battalions captured by representatives

of IAGs in 2014-2016 and were held as POWs. The sample is representative and comprised 44.06% of all captured combatants (1575 persons). The selection criterion for the surveyed was the direct participation in the hostilities of military personnel of the AFU, fighters of volunteer battalions. The sample did not include civilians who were in the occupied territory in forced isolation due to political persecution (political prisoners), hostages taken for ransom, civilians who were on the territory of a military unit of the AFU at the time of capture (volunteers). The time spent in captivity of the surveyed was: 5-16 days – 57 persons (8.2%); 20-45 days – 201 persons (29%), 101-223 days – 362 persons (52.1%), 1-3.5 years – 74 persons (10.7%). The average time spent in captivity (\bar{t}) was 182 days. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects for inclusion in the study while maintaining their confidentiality. The socio-demographic composition of the surveyed is presented in Table 1.

Measures

The measures included a questionnaire and interview method. The questionnaire was developed (Shyrobokov, 2017), consisting of five blocks: socio-demographic characteristics of ex-POW; determination of the type of captivity (unit of IAGs that captured the combatant); establishing the purpose, motives, and reasons for the capture; clarification of the phases and stages of captivity; description of the conditions of detention of POWs.

Interviews with ex-POWs were conducted during the first two weeks after their release. The algorithm for conducting the interview was different from the classical procedure since the ex-POWs were in a state of stress. The interviews were carried out selectively and very carefully in order to collect clarifying or additional information, as well as to determine the main psychological problems that arise among the prisoners. The most significant questions for the study were included in the general scheme of the psychologist's interaction with ex-POWs. They were regulated (supplemented or reduced, ignored, or repeated several times) depending on the dynamics of the mental status of the ex-POWs in each case.

RESULTS

The results of a survey of ex-POWs allowed us to divide captivity into three main types, depending on the unit of the invader.

Captivity by the "Military Unit" type (a unit manned by members of the AFRF). The capture of POWs was carried out, as a rule, with the aim of ending resistance and demonstrating their own strength. Captured were held in prisoner war camps. They had undergone physical abuse during interrogations; the attempts were made in order to persuade POWs to cooperate with the aim of further provocations after the captured were had been sent home (76.5% of the respondents noted).

Captivity by the "Professional Mercenaries Unit" type. Members of these units were captured to demonstrate their strength and intimidate the enemy. The POWs were

kept in pits, which reduced the number of guards and made it possible to quickly eliminate the captured. The interrogation was always carried out using torture, violence, and sometimes – by killing prisoners. Before the exchange, in order to hide the traces of the crime, the POWs were often severely wounded by the mercenaries (11.7% of the respondents noted).

Captivity by the "Gang Formation Unit" type, formed from the number of criminal elements and local residents. The capture of POWs was carried out for the purpose of profit and to obtain reconnaissance. The POWs were kept mainly in the chamber type premises. During interrogations, various methods of the humiliation of the honor and dignity of prisoners, physical, psychological, and sometimes sexual abuse, were used, a video was shot of this process with the aim of further blackmail. Representatives of the gang formations were characterized by a sharp change in their attitude to POWs (its improvement) after receiving guarantees for a ransom or an agreement on the exchange of the captured (11.8% of respondents noted).

A survey of ex-POWs allowed determining the reasons and purpose of their capture by the representatives of the IAGs (Table 2). The main reasons for the capture of military service members were determined: wound; best enemy training; despair and disbelief in one's own strength.

Capturing, as a way of intimidating the enemy, was used mainly by professional mercenaries. 97.9% of respondents believe that such captivity is a "delayed death", that is, murder after cruel torture. Half of the ex-POWs believe that military units, especially those considering themselves to be a "military elite" (paratroopers, army special forces, frogmen, etc.), also used captivity as a means of intimidating the enemy.

88.3% of ex-POWs believe that captivity, as a means of bending resistance, is more typical for the military units. Although 44.6% of surveyed also indicate that for the representatives of gangs, the use of captivity under "mild conditions" was a way of avoiding direct fighting. This was due to their lack of combat experience and unwillingness to risk their own lives.

According to the majority of respondents, in the warfare zone capturing POWs was used as a demonstration of one's own strength along the entire line of demarcation of the warring parties. Respondents said that this was more typical for the professional mercenaries (67%) and military elite units (62.8%). In fact, it was a "business card" of the unit. Some ex-POWs indicated that they could simply be killed during the detention, but they seemed to be playing with them, giving them the opportunity to fight in hand-to-hand combat, or they were persecuted like "hunting game".

59.6% of respondents testified that the IAGs representatives used capturing POWs as an opportunity to release their comrades detained by representatives of the Ukrainian forces. It should be noted that the representatives of military units and mercenaries also took prisoners for the "interchange" for their own people.

Table 1. The socio-demographic composition of the sample, (n (%))

Attribute		Military personnel		Volunteers	
Education	Higher	93 (13.4)		53 (7.6)	
	Secondary technical	29 (4.2)		19 (2.7)	
	Vocational	102 (14.7)		61 (8.8)	
	Secondary	194 (28)		104 (15)	
	Incomplete secondary	25 (6.4)		14 (2)	
	Total	443 (63.8)		251 (36.2)	
Age	18-29	181 (26.1)		19 (2.7)	
	30-39	114 (16.4)		91 (13.1)	
	40-49	139 (20)		76 (11)	
	50-59	9 (1.3)		52 (7.5)	
	60-69	0		13 (1.9)	
	Total	443 (63.8)		251 (36.2)	
Military Status	Age	Officers	Soldiers and NCO	Officers	Soldiers and NCO
	18-29	44 (6.3)	137 (19.7)	0	19 (2.7)
	30-39	38 (5.5)	76 (11)	7 (1)	84 (12.1)
	40-49	1 (0.1)	138 (19.9)	4 (0.6)	72 (10.4)
	50-59	2 (0.3)	7 (1)	11 (1.6)	41 (5.9)
	60-69	0	0	2 (0.3)	11 (1.6)
	Total	85 (12.2)	358 (51.6)	47 (6.8)	204 (29.4)
Gender	Age	Men	Women	Men	Women
	18-29	181 (26.1)	0	19 (2.7)	0
	30-39	106 (15.3)	8 (1.2)	84 (12.1)	7 (1)
	40-49	136 (19.6)	3 (0.4)	72 (10.4)	4 (0.6)
	50-59	9 (1.3)	0	41 (5.9)	11 (1.6)
	60-69	0	0	11 (1.6)	2 (0.3)
	Total	432 (62.2)	11 (1.6)	227 (32.7)	24 (3.5)
Combat Experience	Participation in hostilities	41 (5.9)		92 (13.3)	
	Participation in peacekeeping missions	70 (10.1)		28 (4)	
	No experience	332 (47.8)		131 (18.9)	
	Total	443 (63.8)		251 (36.2)	
Type of Captivity	“Military Unit”	270 (38.9)		53 (7.6)	
	“Professional Mercenaries Unit”	102 (15)		116 (16.7)	
	“Gang Formation Unit”	71 (10.2)		82 (11.8)	

Table 2. Description of the purpose of the capture of Ukrainian military personnel by representatives of IAG, (%)

Purpose of the Capture	Unit Type		
	“Military unit”	“Professional Mercenaries Unit”	“Gang Formation Unit”
Cessation of resistance	88.3	20.2	44.6
Get reconnaissance about Ukrainian units	93.6	97.9	78.7
Intimidate the enemy	51.1	97.9	13.8
Demonstration of power	62.8	67	2.1
Exchange for “own captured fighters”	2.1	11.7	59.6
Unwillingness to kill	36.2	1.1	41.4
Ransom	2.1	8.5	50

Obtaining a ransom, as indicated by 50% of respondents, was the main purpose of detaining the Ukrainian military by representatives of gang units. However, as noted by some ex-POWs, professional mercenaries also used prisoners for getting profit.

Unwillingness to kill was often the reason that the military was captured. This was most typical for the representatives of gang units (41.4%). However, according to 36.2% of ex-POW, the representatives of other units of IAGs didn't want to kill the Ukrainian military as well.

Despite the different types of units of the IAGs, the typology of motives for capturing Ukrainian military personnel we defined as:

1. Mercantile motives. For a certain circle of people, participation in a local armed conflict is a way of earning money. For example, mercenaries ignored any other interests besides personal; the main thing is to get profit.

2. The motive of obtaining power over people, the deepest motive. Violence was used to assert personal power. Through violence, some representatives of the military and political “elite” of the IAGs were asserted, gaining power over people. In their eyes, their own personality became more significant.

3. The motive of interest and attractiveness of war as a field of activity. This is not so much a desire for profit as a desire to get a thrill. For certain people participating in local armed conflicts, the capture of POWs can be just a new, unusual field of activity.

4. The motives associated with a traumatic experience in the past are the reproduction of experienced traumatic situations, but with the obligatory change of roles. For the representative of the IAGs, holding Ukrainian POWs, and

who himself had experienced humiliation or cruel treatment, the characteristic thing is “identification with the aggressor” – the acceptance of the behavior of another person who once caused him moral or physical suffering, and caused pain. Accepting this behavior, the person holding the prisoners himself tries to cope with mental trauma, to overcome its consequences but uses an ineffective method for this.

5. The substitution motive, which occurs in the case when the achievement of the original goal was impossible, therefore, the person sought to realize it in other circumstances.

6. Compensatory motives were associated with the desire to overcome the feeling of inferiority. A man convinced of his own inferiority sought to compensate for his shortcomings. This could be expressed in a strong desire to occupy a high position in society, acquire exceptional knowledge and skills, and to be successful. In such cases, these are socially approved or acceptable formats of compensation, but in some cases, a sense of inferiority led to the commission of rash acts, including participation in IAGs.

The motives for capture were manifested in the same way as the desire of certain categories of IAGs to commit torture, killings, torture POWs, and mock them. We should note that firstly, the motives will differ markedly in specific cases of the behavior of different units of IAGs; secondly, even within the same situation, the purpose of capturing the Ukrainian military will be different (the IAGs may be guided by different motives).

The study confirmed the hypothesis that the conditions of being in captivity, the methods of psychological pressure on POWs, and the psychological consequences of captivity depend on the type of unit of the invaders, the purposes and motives of the capture.

According to the testimony of Ukrainian ex-POWs, they all went through four stages of captivity: “*Capture and transportation to a place of constant detention*”; “*The first interrogation*”; “*Being held captive*”; “*Exchanging of prisoners and homecoming*”.

The fact that a soldier was captured did not mean that he would remain alive. During transportation, a POW could have been killed for various reasons: the prisoner was in a serious physical condition due to injury or contusion; the soldier attempted to escape; the prisoner resisted those who captured him; there was a danger of identifying and destroying the unit, etc.

The representatives of military units treated the detainees as a burden due to problems with food, medical care, etc. (68.1% of the POWs indicated). Therefore, they tried to quickly transfer the prisoners to detention centers or to other units. Representatives of the gangs used the transportation of POWs as self-promotion and a demonstration of power (74.5% said). The exchange of POWs by representatives of a professional mercenary was secretive (11.7% of respondents indicated).

The next stage of captivity was the first interrogation. Here, as well as at the stage of capture and transportation, the POW experienced the vital phase of captivity, as he

understood that his behavior during interrogation could be a death sentence. It was during the first interrogation of the prisoner that they tried to psychologically break down and force them to give the necessary evidence, communicate the information necessary for the adversary, or incline them to cooperate and further provocative activities.

According to testimonies, 45.7% of respondents were severely beaten during the first interrogation. The physical abuse had a character of a meaningless action; sometimes it was not even accompanied by asking questions. In most cases, this was done in order to intimidate POWs and their further incline to betrayal. According to the testimony of 17% of ex-POWs such methods of influence as undressing and interrogating when naked, deprivation of food and sleep were applied to them; 1.1% experienced torture by drowning; 6.4% indicated that firearms were used against them to intimidate and to prevent escaping (each of them was injured to the left leg above the knee).

According to the testimony of 39.4% of ex-POWs, representatives of military units often engaged professional mercenaries for interrogation because of their unwillingness to act as an executioner, to use torture even against the enemy, and the removal of responsibility for committing a war crime. 26.6% of respondents said that they witnessed the killing of their comrades during interrogation, and later they themselves experienced repeated imitations of execution before the next interrogations. They were led to the wall, announced the “decision” to shoot, and shelled the walls to demonstrate their complete power over them.

In the opinion of 18.1% of ex-POWs, the characteristic features during the interrogation of gang members were: the determination of the material condition of the family of a POW; forcing a prisoner to inform relatives that he is being held captive and who is holding him (3.2% of the respondents showed that their relatives were even told who could mediate in the exchange of prisoners); mockery and violence against POWs in order to speed up the ransom (in relation to 7.4% of the respondents, sexual perversions, coercion to eat feces, etc. were used). The whole process was recorded by a video camera, and then the prisoners were blackmailed, threatening to put these materials on the Internet or send them to relatives and friends through social networks.

Thus, the purpose of the first interrogation was the psychological and physical pressure on the POW to intimidate, prevent escape, and incline to cooperate.

The way of treatment of POWs had its own characteristics depending on which unit kept the prisoners (Table 3).

In the prison camps, there were between 100 and 300 POWs (indicated by 45.7% of the respondents). Farm buildings for animals and factory hangars were used for this. The life support system was characteristic of military units in the field: daily routine, food, hygiene only with certain restrictions. To prevent the escapes and riots, the camp administrations used different measures: the officers were separated from the soldiers; those who showed examples of courage were kept in solitary confinement.

POWs who lived in the camps were conditionally divided into two groups: those who adapted to camp life and those who did not go through the adaptation process (as a rule, those who had just arrived). Another category accounted for the highest mortality rate. For POWs who were held in the camps, the pattern revealed by Bettelheim (1989) was characteristic: those who had been held captive for a long time were more loyal to the camp administration than those who had just arrived. Required conditions for keeping prisoners were domestic work: POWs were taken to clean the streets, dismantle the rubble, pick up cartridges, etc.

The respondents indicated that a characteristic feature of the treatment of them by professional mercenaries was their placement in pits (23.4%) or a basement (17%). Bullying and torture during the detention of mercenaries captured by units were aimed at intimidating the military. 4.3% of those polled indicated that grenades were thrown into the pit in which they were kept daily (up to 17 times a day) and the prisoners had to constantly hide from it. As soon as one of the POWs stopped to demonstrate fear for his own life, they began to torture him publicly, and sometimes they killed him.

POWs kept in cellars (17% of the respondents), described their living in conditions of severe blackout, windowless, and poor air circulation. Instead of beds, at best, there were metal shelves, and sometimes just mattresses laid out on a concrete floor. Such conditions very strongly psychologically pressed the prisoners. In addition, those who held the military constantly sought to persuade them to cooperate.

When keeping POWs, the representatives of the gang units most often used chamber-type premises – structures belonging to the former structures of the MIA, the Security Service of Ukraine (11.7% of respondents noted). A characteristic feature of the residence of POWs in such conditions was the concentration of a large number of military personnel in a small room. The number of prisoners in the cells reached 50 people. In the cells, POWs were allowed to listen to the radio, but Ukrainian stations were often jammed. Unlike cellars, chamber-type rooms were equipped with common areas and had windows, they often had medical units or infirmaries. A characteristic feature of the residence of POWs in chamber-type rooms was the mix of military service

Table 3. Description of the methods of keeping POWs by representatives of different units, (%)

Method of Keeping	Unit Type		
	“Military Unit”	“Professional Mercenaries Unit”	“Gang Formation Unit”
Prisoner of war camp	45.7	–	–
Chamber-type room	2.1	–	11.7
Cellar	–	17	2.1
Pit	–	23.4	5.3

members, civilians, and militants, who, according to the IAGs commanders, were guilty of crimes (treason, desertion, looting, etc.).

In addition, strangers were constantly nearby with POWs, observing their actions and informing the administration of the institution about all the misconduct, and sometimes the conversations of the prisoners. 4.3% of respondents noted that POWs who actively interacted with civilians or with militants who were also kept in cells could become targets of pressure and even beatings from their comrades to punish for friendly relations with the enemy.

5.3% of respondents noted that they were kept in pits near the demarcation line of the parties. According to the testimony of 2.1% of ex-POWs, gang units also used cellars, which depended on the location of the unit. Among the features of the maintenance by gang units, all respondents noted a sharply negative attitude towards POWs – representatives of the Ukrainian MIA (they were mocked even after receiving ransom guarantees).

The last important stage of captivity is the return from captivity, receipt by POWs of the message about the exchange and further movement to the line of demarcation of hostile parties, return to the unit, or medical facility. 80.9% of POWs who exchanged by the representatives of military units testify that when they received a message about sending a prisoner to the location of their troops, everyone was offered to admit their own guilt and even give an interview (2.1% of respondents admitted that they agreed to these). Prior to returning the POWs, captors tried to persuade them to make provocations, participate in cooperation and suggested switching to the side of the warring party. A characteristic feature of the professional mercenary unit was that during the exchange of POWs, representatives of these groups did everything possible to prevent their disclosure and further prosecution of war crimes. To this end, POWs were blinded, severe head injuries were inflicted, limbs were amputated, etc. The exchange of POWs by representatives of gang formations was characterized by a sharp change in attitude towards POWs from the moment the exchange was announced. 6.4% of respondents indicated that, before being returned to controlled Ukrainian territory, they were moved to a separate cell, beating and bullying were stopped, they were given clothes, their diet was increased, and even invited to visit captors after finishing combat operations, etc.

The study showed that the attitude of representatives of the IAGs towards Ukrainian POWs of different categories differed from extremely negative towards soldiers of volunteer battalions, negative towards servicemen of the AFU, less negative towards mobilized and more tolerant towards conscript. The attitude towards officers was more negative than towards the rank and file, especially when successful military operations were carried out by units of the AFU. Members of all units of IAGs had an extremely negative attitude towards snipers, scouts, artillery fire spotters, pilots, and machine gunners. After being captured, they were often killed. Attitudes

towards female military personnel were extremely negative on the part of all units and in most cases were accompanied by humiliation, bullying, and sexual abuse.

Almost 100% of the interviewed ex-POWs said that the process of being held in captivity had certain successive phases (Figure 1). The first phase “*Vital reactions*” was characterized by the subordination of all actions of a POW to the preservation of his own life with a characteristic narrowing of consciousness, a change in moral standards and restrictions, impaired perception of time intervals, and internal irritants. For such a situation violation of rational behavior was characteristic. Most of the respondents indicated that the fact of captivity itself was a result of wounds or contusion, however, 14% of respondents said that they surrendered because they did not see another way to save their lives.

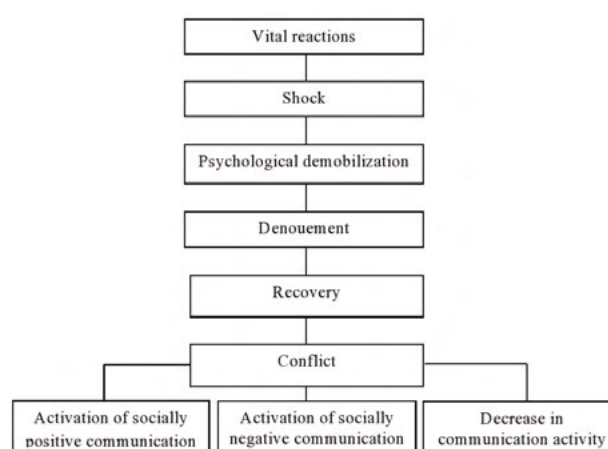


Figure 1: Phases of captivity in the War of Donbas

The second phase “*Shock*” with manifestations of over mobilization was characterized by general psychological stress, mobilization of psychological reserves, increased perception, and speed of mental processes. Reckless courage was often shown, especially in rescuing colleagues, while reducing the critical assessment of the situation, but maintaining the ability to conduct targeted activities. During this phase, the POW “froze”, evaluating the behavior of the representatives of the warring party and predicting their future actions. 97.8% of the ex-POWs characterized this phase as a decrease in activity and communication. In an emotional status, 100% of respondents during this period were dominated by a sense of despair, accompanied by loss of consciousness and a headache, as well as palpitations, dry mouth, and complicated breathing. Behavior during this period obeyed the idea of the heroic deed, self-sacrifice for the sake of saving friends and fulfilling professional and official duties to the end (82.6% of respondents said). However, 15.2% of ex-POWs noted that namely in this phase there were various manifestations of panic moods and reactions, as well as their infection of others.

The third phase “*Psychological demobilization*” in the vast majority of cases was associated with an understanding of the scale of the tragedy and the

emergence of “stress awareness”. This phase, according to 59.7% of respondents, was characterized by an increase in the intensity of manifestations of communication, or even the emergence of new forms of active communication, unusual under other conditions for a given soldier. Respondents felt an irresistible desire to answer questions, tell about themselves not only to other prisoners but also to representatives of the warring party (76% of ex-POWs said). However, according to 73.9% of ex-POWs, the most characteristic for this period was also a sharp deterioration in well-being and psycho-emotional status with a predominance of feelings of confusion (up to prostration), panic reactions, a decrease in the moral normativity of behavior, refusal from any activity and motivation for it. 34% of the ex-POWs were depressed, impaired attention, and memory due to torture and bullying.

In the fourth phase, “*Denouement*”, the dynamics of prisoners' health was largely determined by the specifics of the influence of extreme factors received by physical and mental injuries, as well as the moral and psychological pressure of the situation. According to 59.7% of respondents, during this period, the state of health began to stabilize, but the emotional background remained reduced, there was a restriction of contacts with others, sleep disturbance, and appetite. The constant influence on the psyche of POWs by representatives of the warring party was accompanied by a further decrease in activity, interaction, and communication. 76% of respondents indicated that this was reflected in interaction with other prisoners and the camp administration. Under these conditions, the social interaction of many POWs was noticeably changed. As noted by 30.4% of respondents, this was especially facilitated by blackmail-compromising interviews, the information obtained in the initial phases of the captivity. All this led to attempts by POWs to avoid contacts with both comrades and representatives of the warring party. We believe that this phase can be characterized by a decrease in the psychological resources of POWs, progressively increasing phenomena of overwork, a significant decrease in indicators of physical and mental activity.

In the fifth phase, the “*Recovery*” of the psychological status, was most clearly manifested in the behavioral reactions of POWs: interpersonal communication, concern for comrades intensified, emotional coloring of speech and mimic reactions normalized, humor and jokes began to appear (73.9% of respondents indicated).

In the last, sixth phase “*Conflict*”, in the opinion of almost 100% of respondents, most prisoners had persistent sleep disturbances, unmotivated fears, nightmares that turned into an obsession, and had disorders of the gastrointestinal tract and cardiovascular system. During this phase, internal and external conflict increased. As noted by 46.7% of ex-POWs, they observed a subconscious “identification with the aggressor”, especially among young people, which led to significant problems in the groups of POWs. They directly observed acts of violence among POWs, which were caused by interpersonal conflicts (2.2% of respondents noted).

Neutrality in conditions of detention could manifest itself as a “cognitive nihilism” of a partner. This was characterized by a hostile attitude towards a POW, who gave various information to the representatives of the IAGs in the hope of saving a life, gaining a more loyal attitude of the militants towards him, or gaining priority in the POWs exchange lists. According to 80.9% of respondents, each POW recognized that his life was completely at the disposal of the IAGs, leading to the forced choice of a neutral position on the actions of the enemy, the system of relations between prisoners and militants, as well as torture, bullying, and violence. Such neutrality was caused by the desire to survive and homecoming. The conflict phase lasted the longest and, according to 64.1% of ex-POWs, there was a peak decline in socially negative communication from the moment the POW informed the decision of exchanging him for militants.

Obviously, the captivity phases have a specific time frame. However, it was difficult to define them. This is due to the fact that each time a new stage began or the conditions of detention of POWs exchanged (for various reasons, a prisoner could be transferred from one unit to another), he went through these phases again. Based on the data of ex-POWs, it is possible to trace all phases with time frame relatively clearly at the stage of “Being held captive”, when it lasts a long time (for example, more than 30 days). In this case, Phase 1 “Vital reactions” lasts from a few seconds to 5–15 minutes; Phase 2 “Shock” lasts from 3 to 5 hours; Phase 3 “Psychological demobilization” lasts until the end of the first week; Phase 4 “Denouement” lasts from 5 to 14 days; Phase 5 “Recovery” begins mainly from the end of the second week of captivity and lasts until the news of the release (exchange) is received; the last Phase 6 “Conflict” begins after receiving the message about the release (exchange) and lasts until the release of captivity.

Thus, the POWs being captured experienced clearly defined phases: vital reactions; shock; psychological demobilization; denouement; recovery, and the phase of the conflict, each of which had its own characteristics of influence on the psyche and behavior of POWs.

The study confirmed the hypothesis that the stages and phases of being in captivity don't depend on the type of the invader's unit, the reasons, goals, and motives of the capture.

DISCUSSION

It should be noted that captivity creates a certain psychological complex, which was called the “barbed wire psychosis” (Stacheldrahtpsychose) in the First World War (Bettelheim, 1989). In the conditions of modern captivity, we note a decrease in the activity of POWs in connection with a significant deterioration in physical and mental conditions, as well as their general well-being, especially when a POW isolated from other prisoners. Because of such changes, motivation, and ability to communicate decreased, which led to deep intrapersonal conflicts. In the

future, after the return of POWs, these changes may already manifest in the form of mental and somatic disorders, aggravated by intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, self-destructive behavior, if psychological and psychiatric care is not provided in a timely manner.

Modern psychology distinguishes two approaches to assessing activity and communication in extreme conditions. In the first approach (Kitaev-Smyk, 2009), some forms of changes in the activity and communication of partners in special conditions are distinguished, which are manifested in their positive interaction. Another approach (Stankin, 2008; Prykhodko et al., 2016) considers a change and decrease in the activity and communication of partners in extreme conditions as a manifestation of stress, as a non-specific adaptive-protective reaction. We adhere to the second approach when analyzing behavior in captivity since consider the altered interaction of POWs as a special form of stress. More than half of the respondents indicated that both approaches to the analysis of the specifics of activity and communication in conditions of emotional stress might be appropriate. According to 57.6% of respondents, the first of these approaches may be justified when POWs are held in captivity together with the military personnel of their military unit. Such observations were made by the military that was captured by entire units or was held in captivity by entire camps.

The second approach is more appropriate when studying the adaptation of a soldier to the conditions of captivity. So, 13% of ex-POWs noted that the officers, who were kept together with the soldiers and sergeants, after torture, bullying, and humiliation, especially if the violence occurred in the presence of others, ceased to play the role of commanders. They became isolated, sometimes even carried out suicidal attempts. They stopped taking care of themselves, their appearance, personal hygiene, regular nutrition, and other prisoners. Such a violation of the adaptation process, self-estrangement can be interpreted as a form of protest against social pressure, isolation, not always fully understood by the military man himself.

The creation of an atmosphere of fear and violence manifested itself in almost all stages of captivity. The results of our research are supported by the findings of Mohandie (2002), who describes the phenomenon of human captivity as any situation in which a person is subjected to the control and will of another person or organization and gives up power, autonomy, and independence.

CONCLUSIONS

Captivity during the War in the Donbas is a special type of illegal activity, the main purpose of which is material, political, military, and other enrichment by members of IAGs by intimidating the military personnel. The main thing in conditions of captivity is not only violence against the prisoners themselves, but also the resulting psychological effect – intimidation and the creation of mass psychosis among POWs. This situation kept all POWs in fear and constant tension.

Captivity can be divided into three main types depending on the subunits of the invader: “Military unit”, “Professional Mercenaries Unit” and “Gang Formation Unit”. The main reasons for the capture of the military personnel are injuries and trauma; better preparation of the enemy; despair and disbelief of the military in their own strength. The purpose of the capture was: to end the resistance of the Ukrainian military; obtaining intelligence data on Ukrainian units; intimidation military personnel; demonstrate one's own strength; capturing prisoners for exchange for their people; unwillingness to kill; receiving a ransom.

Captivity in the War in Donbas is characterized by four successive stages: capture and transportation to a place of permanent detention; first interrogation; being held captive; exchange of prisoners and homecoming. Each stage had its own characteristics of impact on the psyche and behavior of POWs. Certain phases were observed in POWs: life reactions, shock, psychological demobilization, denouement, recovery, and conflict phase.

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL STANDARDS AND INFORMED CONSENT

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects for inclusion in the study while maintaining their confidentiality.

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