

Prisoners of the "Second Army of the World"

Stay of Russian soldiers in
Ukrainian captivity



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Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the President of the Russian Federation announced the start of hostilities in Ukraine, calling the full-scale invasion of the Russian army a “special military operation.” Thus, a cruel and bloody war began in the center of Europe, the real goal of which is the complete destruction of Ukrainian statehood. Since the first day of Russian aggression, the territory of Ukraine has been subjected to missile and air attacks. Civilians die from Russian shells, infrastructure objects are destroyed. Mass abductions and torture of civilians, rapes, and robberies take place in Russian-occupied settlements. Forcible Russification and aggressive Russian propaganda became the main elements of the policy of the occupation administrations.

As in any war, as a result of hostilities between the Russian army and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (hereinafter — AFU), soldiers of both sides are captured by the enemy. There is no official data on the number of military personnel of the Russian Federation (in particular, soldiers of the “people’s militia” of the so-called LPR and DPR) who are in Ukrainian captivity. The latest figures were announced on March 12 by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi and were approximately 500–600 people¹.

Since 1929, prisoners of war have been under the protection of the third Geneva Convention and three additional protocols to it². The Geneva Convention was signed by 196 countries, including Ukraine and Russia. However, in 2019, the Russian Federation denounced the 1st and 2nd protocols on the protection of victims during international armed conflicts and non-international armed conflicts. However, Russia is obliged to comply with the principles set forth in the text of the Convention.

The Geneva Convention provides for humane treatment of prisoners of war, their protection from acts of violence or intimidation, observance of the right to respect for their personality and honor, provision of free medical care.

It is worth noting that prisoners of war are in the hands of the enemy state, and not of individuals or military units that captured them. This means that full responsibility for the treatment of prisoners of war rests with the state, not with individuals who keep them.

¹ <https://bit.ly/3Q0qiUn>

² https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_153#Text

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On March 11, the Coordinating Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War was established in Ukraine³. Its main task is to facilitate the implementation of measures aimed at ensuring the fulfillment of Ukraine’s international legal obligations regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

According to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the state spends UAH 3,000 per month to sustain one Russian prisoner of war⁴. This amount includes provision of food, clothing, hygiene products and payment of utility bills. There are separate costs for medical equipment, medicines, and staff salaries.

Russian war prisoners are held in Ukrainian prisons and pretrial detention centers, separately from other prisoners for their own safety. In the isolation cells — they are provided with three meals per day, allowed to walk and use the bathhouse every day, and have personal time. The prisoners are visited weekly by representatives of the UN or the Red Cross.

According to Matilda Bogner, Head of UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, UN observers have information about the improper treatment of Russian soldiers **immediately after their capture**⁵. However, Bogner confirms that conditions are satisfactory in Ukrainian pre-trial detention centers, where Russian prisoners of war are held until exchange. At the same time, the representatives of the UN mission speak of violations in the treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russia and in the ORDLO (certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) controlled by it, both **immediately after capture and in the places of their detention**.

On March 27, 2022, a video was published⁶ showing Ukrainian soldiers shooting captured Russian soldiers in the legs. At the beginning of the video, several people in military uniform are shown lying on the ground with their hands tied. Some of them have bags on their heads, wounds and injuries are visible. Armed men in uniform walk around and ask questions; hear accusations of striking Kharkiv. At the end of the video, the cameraman approaches the minibuss, from which several more people are taken out. A man approaches them and shoots each of them in the legs, after which they fall.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said that in order to discredit the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the enemy is shooting and distributing

³ <https://bit.ly/3QSbFQi>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/minjust.official/posts/394983852667713>

⁵ <https://bit.ly/3QLehPH>

⁶ Links to published videos are not provided for ethical reasons.

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staged videos with the allegedly inhumane treatment of the Ukrainian military towards Russian prisoners⁷. Zaluzhnyi urged to take into account the realities of information and psychological warfare and to trust only official sources.

The adviser to the head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Oleksii Arestovych noted that the actions recorded on the video have signs of a war crime⁸. According to him, law enforcement agencies will conduct an appropriate investigation, and if this fact is confirmed, the culprits will be brought to justice.

As of June 25, there is no additional information from officials.

From the testimonies of Ukrainians who have already been released from captivity and information in the mass media, it is known that torture, beatings, physical and psychological violence are applied to Ukrainian prisoners, which is directly and categorically prohibited by specific clauses of the Geneva Convention. On the territory of the so-called LPR and DPR, where the concept of international law is absent as a phenomenon, on June 9 death sentences were handed down to foreign citizens who fought on the side of Ukraine. This is contrary to all generally accepted legal norms.

The purpose of this publication is to give an overall picture in the context of the stay of soldiers of the Russian army in Ukrainian captivity — to understand who is fighting in the Russian army, what tasks the military command set for the rank and file, under what circumstances they were captured and what is their personal attitude towards the development war waged by Russia. Particular attention is paid to the forced mobilization by the Russian side of Ukrainian citizens living on the territory of the so-called DPR and LPR.

The sources of obtaining information for the preparation of the publication were videos of interrogations of Russian soldiers by law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, interviews of Ukrainian journalists with prisoners, interception of conversations of the Russian military by special services of Ukraine, national mass media, social networks, and Telegram channels.

It is very important to note that the testimonies of captured Russian soldiers, on which this publication is based in general, due to the vulnerability of their situation, fear and uncertainty of the future, may to one degree or another go against the true thoughts and intentions. This fact should be taken into account when reading further.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/CinCAFU/posts/276883854607107>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXSS5Cfx1TE&t=381s>

Categories of persons fighting in Ukraine on the side of the Russian Federation



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Analysis of information from open sources about captured servicemen of the Russian army makes it possible to identify certain categories of individuals fighting on the side of the Russian Federation.

- ❖ **Contract service soldiers (professional army).** For the most part, the Russian army is represented by people from depressed regions of the Russian Federation, who sign contracts for military service with the main goal — to earn money. Military service is often the only way to survive in economically disadvantaged regions of Russia, such as Buryatia or Dagestan. This is the largest category of soldiers fighting in Ukraine, which can also include conscripts who signed a contract a few months after their enlistment. According to the testimony of some conscript prisoners, their command signed contracts for them without obtaining their consent, and that they were “contract workers” only became known to them after the fact.
- ❖ **Rosgvardiya servicemen.** At the very beginning of the war, a convoy of Russian vehicles was destroyed, among the units of which were representatives of the Russian Guard — special purpose mobile units (the so-called OMON) and special rapid response units (the so-called SOBR) of the Kemerovo region. They followed the military through the Chornobyl exclusion zone towards Kyiv. It became known the fact that 12 Krasnodar OMON officers refused to comply with the order to cross the border with Ukraine on

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February 25, considering it unlawful⁹. After conducting an official investigation, the “riot policemen” were fired. They called the dismissal unlawful and sued for reinstatement. Within a week, nine of them withdrew their claims. The main administration of the Russian Guard of the Krasnodar region demanded to classify the process in the case of three employees who were dismissed for refusing to fight in Ukraine.

- ❖ **Conscript soldiers.** Despite the fact that the Russian authorities for a long time denied the fact that conscripts are participating in the war against Ukraine, the capture of many of them and the coverage of these facts in the Ukrainian media forced the Ministry of Defense of Russia on March 9 to admit the presence of Russian conscripts in Ukraine.
- ❖ **Representatives of “people’s militia”/”army” of the so-called LPR and DPR.** This is one of the most motivated categories, characterized by a high fighting spirit and a drive to “win”. Soldiers of the so-called DPR and LPR, which have been fighting with the support of the Russian Federation for 8 years since 2014, are motivated by the desire to “liberate” and in fact capture the entire territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, take revenge on the Ukrainian military for their fallen comrades and take a kind of revenge. Prisoners of this category were rarely seen in the public eye, perhaps due to their refusal to be interviewed.
- ❖ **Forcibly mobilized in the so-called LPR and DPR.** Starting from mid-February on the territory of the so-called LPR and DPR a forced mobilization is undergoing. Men are taken directly from the streets or their places of work and sent to the military commissariats, from where they go immediately to the war zone without training, appropriate equipment and sufficient provisions. The motivation of such soldiers is very low. The vast majority are people who do not have a pronounced civic position, often calling themselves “apolitical”. For one reason or another, they chose to live in the “republics” and adapted to new living conditions. Among them are teachers, miners, factory workers, locksmiths, watchmen, and plumbers. As the analysis of the available information showed, these “soldiers” are the worst armed and trained of all, they are lacking normal supplies, they are often thrown to the front line without body armor and first aid kits, wearing helmets produced in 1945. As they themselves say, on the battlefield they are used as “cannon fodder” to call upon themselves the fire of Ukrainian artillery in order to identify the enemy’s firing points by Russian soldiers. Representatives of this category gave many interviews while in Ukrainian captivity. More details about participation in the war of this category are described in the section “Forcibly mobilized residents of the so-called DPR and LPR”.

⁹ <https://bit.ly/3ym5Bbm>

- ❖ **Mercenaries of private military companies, in particular, PMC Liga (former Wagner).** According to the BBC, at the end of February 2022, the recruitment of PMC fighters for the war in Ukraine began¹⁰. In addition, they began to hire even those with whom contracts were not previously signed, since the main composition of the PMC is kept for the fulfillment of previously signed contracts in other countries. At the moment, recruitment is also open to the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR, residents of the annexed Crimea, and foreigners, only the ban on hiring Georgian citizens has remained. The presence of debts to the Federal Bailiff Service, the absence of a criminal record certificate or a foreign passport also ceased to be an obstacle.
- ❖ **A. A. Kadyrov Special Police Regiment of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Chechen Republic.** Units of Chechen fighters in Ukraine mostly play a supporting role. They protect objects, cleanup and comb the area and do not perform the functions of combat units, assault units or military police. Since the beginning of the war, Russian and Ukrainian military analysts have repeatedly expressed doubts about the combat capability of the “Kadyrov” units — due to the large number of staged videos, they were nicknamed “tiktok troops”. In addition to security forces, those who commit an offense to the local authorities, relatives of critics of the head of Chechnya, as well as prisoners are sent to the war as “volunteers”. Chechen fighters are threatened with massacre of their relatives for refusing to fight¹¹.
- ❖ **Reservists and volunteers.** Due to significant losses in the ranks of the Russian army, a recruiting drive is being conducted in the Russian Federation to attract individuals to the service through the signing of short-term contracts (from 3 months to 1 year). Such announcements are posted in the subway, on job search sites; in the cities, mobile points for conscription for military service are set up¹². In order to increase the number of potential “contract” soldiers in Russia, a law was adopted on the abolition of age restrictions for signing the first military service contract¹³.

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60692632>

¹¹ <https://bit.ly/3u1FGDp>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-61101195>
<https://www.fontanka.ru/2022/05/28/71367554>
<https://www.yakutia.kp.ru/online/news/4772260>

¹³ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-61578987>

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Advertisements in the Novosibirsk subway station



Mobile points for signing contracts for military service in St. Petersburg and Yakutsk

Tasks assigned to military personnel of the Russian Federation



"The Russian-speaking people are being humiliated in Ukraine, we need to help free them"

The most popular phrase among captured Russian soldiers is "We went to maneuvers, but ended up at war." Whether to believe the statement that most of the soldiers captured at the very beginning of the war thought they were going to maneuvers on February 24 or not, agreeing to the thesis that everyone was instructed to say so, is a personal choice of everyone. This publication is not intended to investigate how things actually happened, it gives the testimony of captured Russian soldiers that could add to the overall picture of what is happening.

As mentioned above, most of the prisoners claim that they did not know that on February 24 they would go to Ukraine to conduct hostilities. But there were other options for answers to the question "How did you get to Ukraine?":

- ▶ *"On February 23, the army commander congratulated [us] with the Defender of the Fatherland Day and said that we are moving to Ukraine to liberate the Russian-speaking people from genocide and Nazism, and to return our territories."*
- ▶ *"On the night of crossing the Ukrainian border, the now deceased commander said that we were going to war."*

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- ▶ *“The NATO bloc is expanding, the Russian-speaking people are being humiliated in Ukraine, we need to help free them. There will be our people. Everything will be like in Crimea.”*
- ▶ *“On February 23, [they] have arrayed us, and the commander said that we were on the brink of the 3rd World War. He told us that [we] would return home in 4 days, Ukrainians would not fight for their oligarchs. If we refuse, we will each receive 20 years behind bars.”*

During the interviews, a significant number of prisoners said that at first they were not given any specific tasks, they had to move in a column, waiting for further instructions.

Subsequently, in addition to tasks of a purely military nature, such as providing fire resistance, setting up checkpoints followed by checking passing cars for weapons, guarding bridges and pontoons, organizing a corridor for the passage of a convoy of Russian military equipment, covering it, evacuating wounded soldiers and damaged equipment, Russian commanders set tasks with an ideological overtone. According to the soldiers, they were told that they were going as peacekeepers with the aim of overthrowing the “Kyiv regime” and liberating Ukraine from the Nazis. Some were informed that the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, had “signed” the decree on surrender, and it was necessary to drive a large convoy to Kyiv and back in order to intimidate. Some went on the Nova Kakhovka — Mykolaiv — Odesa raid with the confidence that there is an agreement with the local authorities, and everything will be quick and bloodless, like in Crimea in 2014.

According to individual soldiers, they were given permission, or rather, orders, to open fire on anyone who resisted, including civilians.

- ▶ *“On February 24, a morale officer said to block roads at the belt road in Kharkiv. Local residents began to protest. Morale officer got fed up with this and said to shoot at the civilians. Cars began to turn around, hide. There were casualties among the civilians...”*
- ▶ *“The order was given — to split up, drive down in my car, to take up the defense position [there], no matter what, and shoot at everything that moves, even at civilians. I wanted to run away, but I couldn’t,*

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because there was a blocking squad behind me — they were professionally dressed, without identification marks, with white armbands, like ours.”

Employees of the so-called The SOBR and OMON said that they would have to provide assistance to the Russian military in seizing the territory of Ukraine and ensure control over the captured cities. Their tasks also included suppression of possible resistance of Ukrainian citizens.

There were many separate tasks, but in fact they were set to achieve global goals, such as the seizure of the territory of Ukraine, the establishment of a puppet government, the destruction of Ukrainian statehood, and the forcible Russification of the population. It must be noted that Russian aggression from the first days of the war has been accompanied by the killing of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure; rape and looting, torture and abuse of both civilians and Ukrainian military personnel; filtration camps and deportation of the population of Ukraine. Although the description of the terror of the Russian army on Ukrainian territories is not the focus of this publication, when talking about captured Russian soldiers, one cannot fail to mention all the atrocities committed by Russian military personnel.

Circumstances of capture



“I surrendered so as not to kill anyone”

In the first weeks of the war, many more Russian soldiers were captured by Ukrainians than in the following weeks. It can be explained by the change in the nature of the conduct of hostilities by the Russian army. At the beginning of the war, Russia tried to attack on a large scale and simultaneously along the entire front line, sparing no human resources; its offensive actions were more self-confident, and the intensity of fighting was high. However, later on, the number of active offensive lines significantly decreased, close combat became less frequent, and in some areas of the front, the war took on a positional character. Under such conditions, the capture of the enemy became a rarer phenomenon.

The circumstances of the capture of Russian soldiers varied:

- ❖ after a forced stop due to equipment breakdown;
- ❖ during retreat due to shelling;
- ❖ encirclement by both units of the Armed Forces and local residents (representatives of local territorial defense, hunters);
- ❖ access to other side's positions (confused equipment/checkpoint);
- ❖ after injury and receiving first aid by local residents;
- ❖ being ambushed by the Ukrainian military;
- ❖ lag behind their column;

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- ❖ at the insistence of local residents when the soldiers asked to give them water/food;
- ❖ after long wanderings in the area in order to reach the border with the Russian Federation;
- ❖ detection of wounded Russian soldiers by an unmanned aerial vehicle of the Armed Forces;
- ❖ purposefully letting civilians capture them.

In addition to the above circumstances, one of the not rare factors that led to capture was the abandonment by units of the Russian army of their own soldiers in a difficult situation. Judging by the interviews of the prisoners, it was a fairly common practice for a convoy of Russian vehicles to leave behind individual fighters who were either wounded or their tank/Infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) stopped working or was knocked out.

This approach goes against the Russian patriotic slogan “We do not Abandon Our Own”, which allegedly demonstrates the support of the actions of the Russian army by the civil society in the Russian Federation, as well as the principles of relations within the armed forces, that is, comrades at the front must necessarily help each other, and other options are not possible at all. The degree of hypocrisy of the slogan “We do not Abandon Our Own” can be judged by the testimonies of those captured Russian soldiers to whom it was not applied for one reason or another:

- ▶ *“We were driving in a convoy, and our car was fired upon. A shrapnel hit me under my eye, shattering the eye socket, nose. Instead of helping, ours [soldiers] simply gave [us] up — everyone who was in front went forward, and those who were behind turned around and went back. I was practically blind, because both eyes could not see very well. I reached, or rather crawled, to the nearest house, where the man provided me with the first aid as best he could. Then they took me to a clinic, where Ukrainian doctors treated me.”*
- ▶ *“On the night from March 10 to 11, I was on duty, then went to sleep in the trench. [I] woke up — no one was there, they left without me. [I] walked through the forest for three days. When [I] saw a yellow “Kopeyka” (Zhiguli automobile) and approached it. It was a Ukrainian reconnaissance patrol, to whom I surrendered.”*

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- ▶ *“The battle has begun. In the process of unloading the IVF due to panic, the driver backed up and my leg got under the wheel, which caused a serious injury. During the shelling, I was lying in a trench. In an hour I got out and went to the house where we lived. Retreating, everyone ran away, but I stayed inside because I couldn’t walk properly. Later, I went out into the yard of the house and saw through the fence the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. I had a grenade with me. I thought: “Now I will finish my cigarette and blow myself up.” However, I later changed my mind and [I] surrendered.”*
- ▶ *“During the shelling, my leg was badly injured. There was no promedol, they just tied the leg with a tourniquet. I took off my shoe, because it was filled with blood, crawled closer to the road, and remained lying near the back wheels of the wrecked KAMAZ. Our column drove back and forth along the road. One KAMAZ stopped and they [soldiers] asked me how I was. I asked for a promedol pill and begged to be taken with them. But they just drove away! I went down to the forest strip, saw that two tanks were driving, wanted to crawl towards them, but then I saw that it was the AFU. I caught a branch with my leg and fainted because of severe pain. When I woke up, it was already dusk. I made a splint for my leg from the sticks and spent about a day passing the forest strip. They [Ukrainians] found me near a thermal power plant, gave me warm water — I was very cold, and later they took me to the police station.”*

It is important that Russian propaganda in its numerous stories portrays the horrors of being captured by the “Nazis”, which is why for many soldiers, being captured by Ukraine was one of their greatest fears. During the interview, the Russian prisoners spoke about the fact that they expected abuse and humiliation from the Ukrainian military, and terrible living conditions without food and water.

- ▶ *“When we were walking with Marsel, he was constantly fearmongering — the main thing is not to surrender to captivity, there they will be mocked and humiliated in various ways, he told scary stories. As a result, when we got surrounded, he started shooting back and was wounded. Everything was fine with the others.”*

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In fact, everything turned out to be completely different. Russian prisoners receive 3 meals a day, in the cold season they are given warm clothes, each of them has their own bed, they regularly take showers, and receive medical assistance. According to them, they are treated humanely, without beating, humiliation and abuse.

► *“I am glad that the Ukrainians took me, that they did not kill me, they [Russians] would have killed me. Putin sends 20-year-old children to their deaths. I swear, I didn’t kill anyone, I’m ready to pass the polygraph test. I surrendered myself in order not to kill anyone, I am afraid to kill a person.”*

In one of his stories, journalist Volodymyr Zolkin showed the conditions of detention of prisoners who are in the pretrial detention center¹⁴. He demonstrated the lunch menu, the condition of the shower rooms with cold and hot water, and noted that the prisoners are allowed to watch TV. It should be noted that such detention conditions do not exist everywhere, but the general level of compliance with international legislation on the treatment of prisoners of war is met.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5Mdjo9zEjg&t=3023s>

Forcedly mobilized residents of the so-called DPR and LPR



"I was sure that I would not be drafted because I have disabled parents to support"

On February 19, 2022, on the territory of the so-called DPR and LPR a general mobilization was announced. The corresponding decrees were signed by the "heads of the republics", which, among other things, stated that men aged 18-55 are prohibited from leaving the territory of the region, and the executive power is allowed to seize vehicles and property "necessary for defense needs" from citizens and businesses.

In the first weeks, people were collected according to the lists of communal services, mines, metallurgical plants and other "state" structures, that is, everyone who was somehow registered in the self-proclaimed republics. They mostly said that the mobilization will last for 90 days and the main functions of the conscripts will be to guard facilities, to be on duty at checkpoints, that is, to serve in the rear. Sometimes they were sent to war under the guise of holding annual maneuvers. Often, nothing was explained to those forcibly drafted.

Later, under the conditions of an acute shortage of human resources, military patrols began to grab men from the streets, picked them up in public transport, and came to their homes to give conscription notices. When it became clear that all men were being drafted en masse and forcibly, except for people working at reserved occupations or those who bribed authorities, many began to hide, quit work and did not leave the house. It has become easier for men over 55 to get a job, and women have appeared at some traditionally male jobs.

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Among the captured soldiers were many forcibly drafted residents of the so-called DPR and LPR. Below are their quotes on conscription.

- ▶ *“I was going home. Two people walked behind me, poked me in the back with a barrel, took me to the [City] Executive Committee, and handed me a conscription notice. Then they put me on a minibus and took me to Alchevsk, then to Stakhanov, the next day they distributed [us] among companies and battalions, and in 4 days they were taken somewhere at night...”. (Horlivka)*
- ▶ *“I went to the store. On the way, I was met by a white car, from which 3 employees of the “people’s militia” and 2 commandants got out, and they took me to the House of Culture. After registration, they took me to Ilovaisk. I excused myself to buy food and fled by bus home to Khartsyzk. In a few days, I went to the store again, the car stopped me again, and I was escorted to the House of Culture, from where I was sent to the 21st mine of Horlivka. There were already 200-250 people there, and more and more people were brought in every day. From there, we were sent to Mariupol.” (Khartsyzk)*
- ▶ *“I was going from work by bus. At the Zhdaniv crossroads, the bus was stopped by people with “Commandant” armbands. They took the men and said that [they] would now take us to the Military Commissariat, but they took us to the Franko House of Culture. From there — to the Makiivka meat processing plant, where they gave us a uniform. My sister brought my medical documents stating that I have heart problems, but they still didn’t let me go.” (Donetsk)*
- ▶ *“I am a Russian language teacher, I used to teach Ukrainian. I did not serve in the army. At work, the director told me to go to the Military Commissariat as part of the mobilization. Those who evade will be liable in accordance with the legislation of the DPR. I had to go.” (Horlivka)*

Mobilization took place without the conscripts passing medical commissions, without taking into account the presence of a military service exemption certificate and social “circumstances” of a specific person — for example, having three or more children, dependents with disabilities, etc. Drafted people who had exemption certificates were told that the state of health does not matter, that they will guard strategic objects just for show. In fact, such promises did not correspond to reality.

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- ▶ *“I work at a factory in Makiivka. The company received lists of who should be mobilized. The director was against it for the reason “who will work?”, but still [they] gradually took us away. “I was sure that I would not be drafted because I have disabled parents to support.” But on February 24, they said: “[You have] two hours to pack [your items] and [then go] to the Military Commissariat.” They put a record about me. Everyone who was there was put onto buses and taken to Kholodna Balka (author’s note — a village in Makiivka). There [they] gave us uniforms to wear, assigned [us] to company-battalions, and appointed me as a grenade launcher. [We] stayed in the village for two days. There were a lot of different people there — with cerebral palsy, with Ilizarov apparatus, epileptics, in general, they grabbed them all. I tried to convey [them] that I have parents with disabilities. When [they] took me to Donetsk, they told me that if this was the case, then they would let me go. The degree of tension fell down a little. But the next day, buses arrived and sent us to Ilovaisk, and from there [we were brought] by train to Dzhankoy, and then to Kherson oblast.” (Makiivka)*
- ▶ *“I worked at the school as the head of the IT-club. In mid-February, educational institutions received a mobilization order. We were told that we would stand at the checkpoints for a week while the “DPR” soldiers rested. Since February 19, we have been standing at the Mayorske checkpoint. They gave me a machine gun, which I had never held in my life. Before that, I did not serve, I have a whole bunch of diseases — asthma, a sick heart, besides, I suffer from allergies. On March 1, we came under mortar fire and hid in a dugout. Soon Ukrainian paratroopers came and we surrendered.” (Horlivka)*
- ▶ *“I am 54 years old, I work as a security guard at the enterprise “Liky Donbasu”. [They] called me from work and told me to come to the Military Commissariat, but the next day it was my shift, so I didn’t go. While [I was] at work, after lunch [they] called me again and told me to show up, otherwise they would either fire me or hand over the case to the prosecutor’s office. I arrived at the Military Commissariat and during the registration process I said that I have leg problems. To which I was told “we’ll figure it out” and sent [me] to the assembly hall to wait for the buses. [They] brought us to Kholodna balka, gave us uniforms. That day we spent the night outside. Then they took [us] to Donetsk, where [we] spent 5 days. Then to Ilovaisk and from there to Kherson oblast. Already in place, we spent 5-6 days in sub-zero*

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weather outside under the fence. At first, I was appointed as a company foreman, but after my legs began aching because of the cold, my position was changed to a paramedic, although I never had anything to do with health care.” (Makiivka)

- ▶ *“When we were in Mariupol, there was a man among us with a very poor sight. He generally was getting lost in the evenings. When we drove in the evening, we always watched him.” (Snizhne)*

Food and water provision for this category of persons was extremely unsatisfactory. While in captivity, during the interview, they complained about the lack of drinking water and dry rations, which they had to share among themselves and stretch out for an indefinite number of days.

- ▶ *“The attitude towards us was terrible. Dry rations were provided for 100 people, and there were 300 of us, so we saved them. When we arrived from Dzhankoy to Kherson [oblast], we slept under a concrete fence for 8 days. Well, how to say [we] slept — all the time [we] tried to keep warm, chopped firewood, lit a fire, sewed raincoats-tents, so that there was at least some kind of barrier. I managed to sleep for 1.5-2 hours. When the Russians arrived, they thought that we were prisoners, our faces were sooty, we ourselves were exhausted. Although our battalion commander, a Russian, lived nearby in a 2-story building.” (Makiivka)*

The vast majority of captured residents of the self-proclaimed republics said that they did not undergo any training before entering combat positions. In some cases, there was a short shooting training at the military training area, despite the fact that many of them had never held a machine gun in their hands. A series of regiments were formed from those drafted [persons] — in iron helmets, without body armor, without artillery and communications, armed with “sniper” Mosin rifles of the 1897 model and DShK machine guns of the 1939 model. Due to lack of training, lack of motivation, unsatisfactory armament and supplies, inhumane attitude of the Russian commanders, losses among personnel are huge. This is the phenomenon and hypocrisy of Russian propaganda slogans. Those who are called to be rescued and “liberated” are the first to be slaughtered at fortified Ukrainian positions. Therefore, Russia, using residents of the Ukrainian regions controlled by it, is trying to cover the needs of people in order not to declare mobilization within itself.

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- ▶ *“We were brought to a village near Mariupol. They told [us] to advance to the Ilich factory. We walked about 300 meters, and we were shot — out of five, I was the only one left alive, I was captured. I am sure that the command knew that the Ukrainian military was there. (Snizhne)*
- ▶ *“At the end of March, we were near Volnovakha. We were put on tanks and sent like cannon fodder to the front line, to break through the village of Rozdilne. Without body armor, with only automatic weapons. We were attacked on the way, a lot of people died. Others are wounded, beaten. Another IVF picked us up and brought but not back, but forward! We were attacked again, a couple of people survived, including me...”. (Makiivka)*

If the Russian command somehow tries to minimize its losses, so as not to cause open public discontent in the Russian Federation, and at the same time not to pay 7 million rubles as compensation for the dead Russian soldiers, then no one counts the losses of the so-called DPR and LPR, they do not try to save the lives of their soldiers. Self-proclaimed republics are a non-existent gray area where people are disenfranchised, so there is no need to report thousands of deaths. Of course, there is no provision for compensation for the death of a soldier. The maximum that relatives can count on is a one-time payment of RUB 10,000.

Students from Donetsk were among the forcibly drafted soldiers. Some of them were captured by Ukrainians and spoke at a press conference on March 31. More details about the conditions of their military service are described in the section “Press conferences of captured Russian soldiers”.

It should be noted that residents of the so-called DPR and LPR are not included into the “exchange” lists. Currently, there are soldiers of the Russian army in Ukrainian captivity, much more valuable than unknown miners and locksmiths from the so-called DPR and LPR, so the captured men of the “republics” will remain in the dark about their future fate for an indefinite period of time. De jure they are citizens of Ukraine. Even if some of them have a Russian passport, in practice they are not full citizens of the Russian Federation for the military and political command of the Russian Federation.

The attitude of captured Russian soldiers towards the war



“I don’t see any point in defending the interests of traitors to the people”

Undoubtedly, the statements of captured Russian soldiers regarding their attitude towards the war unleashed by Russia, due to the vulnerability of their position, fear and uncertainty of the future, may go against their true thoughts and intentions. However, given the large number of statements that “no one needs this war” and “we were deceived”, as well as taking into account the length of interviews with prisoners in the absence of edited footage (some interviews lasted about one and a half hours) , when it is impossible to force a person to speak an imposed speech for a long time, it can be concluded that the captured Russian soldiers do not particularly share the idea of “high mission” of “liberating a brotherly people from the oppression of the Nazis”, which the military and political leadership of the Russian Federation insists on. It is worth emphasizing that we are talking about those prisoners with whom interviews were conducted and published, to which they gave their voluntary consent. More details about the setup of the interview are described in the section “Look for Your Own”. Ukrainian humanitarian project for the identification of captured and dead Russian soldiers”.

According to the prisoners, their understanding of the existence aggressive false propaganda in Russia was influenced by their communication with local residents, who met the soldiers with hostility and said that there was no need to “liberate” them from anyone, as well as the awareness of the scale of the causeless destruction by Russian shells about infrastructure facilities, review of Ukrainian mass media.

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- ▶ *“It was stupid of me going here as a volunteer. I believed what was being told on TV. There are good people here, there are no villains that slaughter and kill.”*
- ▶ *“When I saw the news here, what was really happening, I was shocked, I thought my [hair] would turn gray. Cities are destroyed, our soldiers are looting. I watched the Russian news — they say that there is a special operation to liberate the LDPR”. I hope that the Russian people will have at least some clue, and they will start to think and understand that they don’t need this.”*
- ▶ *“The news tells us that there is terrorism, lawlessness, that Ukraine needs help, that the Ukrainian military is oppressing its people, making them human shields. In fact, the opposite is true. We came as aggressors to a foreign land and behave worse than fascists.”*

Many Russian servicemen did not believe the rumors of a future war with Ukraine, as official Russian authorities denied Russian plans to attack Ukraine. Most of the soldiers thought they were on their way to maneuvers because they had not been informed of the impending invasion. When they find themselves in a real war with real deaths and injuries, it dawns on them that their command misled them”.

- ▶ *“There were rumors that we would go to Ukraine, but I didn’t believe it until the end. Before that, [we] watched Putin [on TV], who said that there will be no war.”*
- ▶ *“They took from us [the conscripts] our documents and phones, they didn’t tell us where we were going or why.”*
- ▶ *“I, like others, were used by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and sent to an unjustified war on the territory of Ukraine. Many of my comrades are no longer among the living, the real figures of the dead are hidden.”*

The senior sniper of the Taman division described what was happening quite fully and expressed his attitude towards it:

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- ▶ *“On our TV, they are now saying that there is an easy victorious war and the liberation of Ukraine from fascism. Losses and captures are carefully concealed. The operation itself was suicidal — no principles of the usual warfare are used, there is a banal throwing of meat in the hope that Ukraine will run out of resources. It was not taken into account that the level of training of Ukrainian soldiers has increased since 2014, the number of servicemen has increased, and supplies of weapons and equipment currently exceed ours. That is, simply throwing corpses will not succeed, and if it succeeds, it will be a Pyrrhic victory. Mountains of corpses, hundreds of civilian casualties, thousands of soldiers on both sides, and, as a result, complete economic collapse on both sides. They don’t want to exchange us prisoners, they don’t want to acknowledge us. I consider it treason, and I don’t see any point in defending the interests of traitors to the people.”*

To the traditional questions of journalists, whether they met the “Nazis” from whose oppression they came to liberate the Ukrainian people, the traditional answer was “no”. They hesitated to answer the question “how will you know if a Nazi is in front of you or not?”.

- ▶ *“There are no barbarians here, as we were told.”*
- ▶ *“[During a phone conversation with my brother] If there were Nazis here, I, an Asian, would have been slaughtered by now.”*

Often in interviews, soldiers appealed to their relatives and friends — with a request to go to rallies against the war, call various authorities to publicize the number of casualties; to their colleagues — with an appeal not to go to Ukraine; to those who are already fighting — to stop attacks on peaceful objects, lay down their arms and leave the territory of Ukraine.

- ▶ *“Come to the media, go to the streets, it’s not true that there are no casualties. Of the entire battalion, four of us survived.”*
- ▶ *“We are terrorists, not liberators. Don’t go here, free yourself, hide, break your arms and legs. You do not carry any peacekeeping mission! You will come to destroy, and as a result you will perish yourself.”*
- ▶ *“Guys, stay at home, write reports, and better quit.”*

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Interception of conversations by law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, interviews of captured Russian soldiers indicate that the morale and will to victory in the ranks of the Russian army is very weak, the soldiers do not want to fight and do not understand what they have to die for. Slogans about “denazification” of the people of another country are a weak incentive for soldiers to be ready to die on the battlefield.

Press conferences of captured Russian soldiers



*“Russia has done enough bad things
for us not to be forgiven”*

At the beginning of the war, when one of the communication tasks was to actively inform the Russian and European society of the real picture regarding the invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine, the number of Russian prisoners, the circumstances of their crossing the state border of Ukraine, press conferences of captured Russian soldiers were held in Ukrainian news agencies, for which their voluntary consent was obtained.

In total, during March 2022, seven press conferences were held, in which 43 representatives of the Russian army took part.

On March 2, a press conference was held by officers of the Russian Guard — representatives of special purpose units (the so-called SOBR and OMON) in the Kemerovo region¹⁵. According to the prisoners, one of their tasks was to go to Kyiv and help the Russian army to suppress the resistance of the civilian population, up to arrests, physical coercion and executions. The Russian lieutenant colonel admitted that there is hostile anti-Ukrainian propaganda in the Russian mass media, and the command informed them that a fascist regime reigns on the territory of Ukraine, that the Nazis have seized power and that ordinary people must be helped to get rid of the yoke.

One of the prisoners apologized to the people of Ukraine and added that he would understand if they were not forgiven:

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoKfL4mxrkA>

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- ▶ *“I am really ashamed that we came here. I don’t know why we did that. More precisely, I know — we didn’t know much, we didn’t think much. We have brought sorrow to this land. I don’t know how it can be redeemed. Any verdict, we are ready to accept everything.”*



On March 5, a press conference of ten Russian servicemen was held¹⁶, who called on residents of the Russian Federation to go to anti-war rallies, organize strikes, and block roads in order to draw attention to the war unleashed in Ukraine.

“Russians should turn off their TVs so that they understand that there is [no one] to protect on the territory of Ukraine, Russian-speaking residents are not oppressed in any way, and the only criminals and invaders are ourselves,” says the captured soldier.

According to the detainees, they were threatened with shooting if they voluntarily decided to leave the areas of hostilities and go towards the state border. Russian military personnel said that the bodies of dead soldiers are not taken away, they are

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7T4y614RGQ>

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either burned or buried in mass graves without identification signs. The soldiers say that they are afraid to return to Russia, because they are real witnesses of what is really happening in the ranks of the Russian army.



On March 9, a briefing of Russian intelligence officers was held¹⁷, at which, in addition to a detailed account of how and when they entered Ukraine, the prisoners appealed to the military and political leadership of the Russian Federation with a demand to stop sending soldiers to Ukraine and immediately end the war.

- ▶ *“The army is meant to protect own people, not to attack someone else’s. Our leadership acted shamefully and treacherously, sending its soldiers with aggression to a neighboring state to kill the civilian population there, drop bombs on schools and hospitals. I call on all units, all sane people to lay down their arms. At the same time, on behalf of my brigade, I apologize to every resident of Ukraine for our treacherous invasion,”* says a serviceman of the 15th separate motorized rifle brigade.



¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s39_JFFNhg

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On March 11, a press conference of Russian military pilots took place. They stated that they themselves appealed to the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine with a request to give them the opportunity to talk to the international mass media in order to contribute to the end of the war as soon as possible through joint efforts.



The deputy commander of the 47th Bombardment Aviation Regiment said that in January 2022, the regiment commander received information about the future participation in hostilities in Ukraine, in connection with which training began with flights at extremely low altitudes, with the tactical launch of missiles, tasks were carried out to overcome anti-aircraft systems. The officer admitted that he bombed not only Ukrainian military equipment, but also residential buildings in the Kharkiv oblast. Despite the unlawfulness of the order, it was executed.

It is worth noting that the parents of one of the press conference participants, an aviation squadron commander, live in Kremenchuk, Poltava oblast, and his wife is Ukrainian.

On March 14, Russian conscript soldiers appeared before the mass media¹⁸. According to one of the prisoners, on the eve of the invasion, on February 23, the marking of military equipment began, and when asked why, the commander said that it was to participate in hostilities.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V02iRu930-c&t=260s>

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- ▶ *“We were sure that we would not be sent anywhere. We were always told that conscripts do not fight. It turned out that we were lied to,” said the conscript soldier.*

In addition to describing the circumstances of crossing the border and being captured, the detainees appealed to the President of the Russian Federation with accusations that they were sent to war on his orders:

- ▶ *“Mr President of the Russian Federation, I don’t know why you say that there are no conscripts here. Four more of my comrades are sitting here, who are committing crimes here at your whim. I think you are wrong and you are guilty of all this. I ask you to end all this as soon as possible, so that all Russian servicemen who were tricked into coming here can be returned home. I am very ashamed for myself, for all Russian soldiers, and for you, Mr President... Russia has done enough bad things for us not to be forgiven.”*



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On March 19, another press conference of captured servicemen of the Russian Federation was held¹⁹, including the chief of the howitzer artillery division, who switched to the side of the occupiers in 2014. According to him, 8 years ago, Ukrainian officers were given the opportunity to leave Crimea, but due to many years of active Russian propaganda that the standard of living in Russia is much higher, he took a second oath and remained to serve in Crimea in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.

The captured soldiers noted that despite the fact that they are aggressors and occupiers, they are treated very well in captivity — they are fed and given warm clothes. According to them, all the participants of the conference deeply repent and apologize to the Ukrainian people for all the pain and suffering they have caused. One of the speakers called the President of the Russian Federation Putin a liar and a deceiver who ‘deceived not only the Russian soldiers, throwing them like cannon fodder, but also the whole of Russia’.”



On March 31, the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center held a press conference of nine captured students from Donetsk, who were forcibly drafted into the war with Ukraine²⁰. The detainees said that they received an order to come on February 24 for the reservist training, which was supposed to last for 2-3 days. As they then understood, they were being taken for the “young fighter course”. Conscripts did not undergo a medical examination, even those who had heart problems were drafted. According to the detainees, they were informed that they could be imprisoned for 7 years for evasion, and if the parents hide their whereabouts, they will also face

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzkjeJ0dY3Q>

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7vTMdl4QWw&t=2553s>

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criminal liability. For these reasons, in order “not to break the lives of either themselves or their parents”, they did not hide and did not refuse to attend military reservist training, because they did not know that they would be sent to war.



They received their uniforms and equipment on the territory of the Donetsk meat processing plant. On March 3, they were taken by train through the Ilovaisk railway station to Bilhorod, where they were settled on the outskirts of the city in a sports complex, and on March 5, the students were sent to the village of Vesele in the Kharkiv oblast for the purpose of setting up strong points for further protection and defense.

According to the prisoners, they were sent to a school in the village where there was neither electricity nor water. They were forced to look for water themselves, to turn to local residents. They ate twice a day, ate expired bread, which had an expiration date of March 11, and it was provided on the 20th.

Regarding weapons, the detainees were given old Soviet weapons, which were rusty and decommissioned.

► *“The helmets were made during World War II, the belts are still from the USSR. The comrade took out the spring from the machine gun, and it crumbled in his hands,” says one of the prisoners.*

War crimes of Russian servicemen



“I shot so that they would leave me alone”²¹

Among the captured Russian soldiers are suspects of war crimes. In the Ukrainian Criminal Code, there is only one article dedicated to them — article 438 “Violation of the laws and customs of war”. According to it, criminal responsibility is provided for the cruel treatment of prisoners of war or the civilian population, the deportation of the civilian population for forced labor, the looting of national values in the occupied territory, the use of means of warfare prohibited by international law, other violations of the laws and customs of war provided for by international treaties, as well as issuing an order to perform such actions. If the above actions are combined with premeditated murder, the perpetrator may face life imprisonment.

Vadym Shyshimarin, born in 2000, became the first Russian military officer to stand trial for war crimes after the invasion of Ukraine. For the February 28 murder of a 62-year-old pensioner in the village of Chupakhivka, Sumy oblast, the Solomiansky Court of Kyiv sentenced the captured sergeant to life imprisonment²².

The Koteliv District Court of the Poltava oblast sentenced two Russian soldiers, Oleksandr Bobykin ta Oleksandr Ivanov, to 11 years and 6 months in prison, who on February 24, while on the territory of the Russian Federation, fired at civilian areas with the Grad



Photo — Larysa Kalyk, Bars

²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-61506223>

²² <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-61525507>

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rocket launcher (a weapon of indiscriminate action) of the Kharkiv oblast, as a result of which an electric substation, overhead power lines, residential buildings, a lyceum were damaged in two villages²³.



Photo — Suspilne. Poltava

On April 23, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies reported suspicion under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine to Krasnoiartsev Oleksandr, the SU-34 pilot, who in early March shelled residential areas of Chernihiv²⁴. Krasnoiartsev’s direct speech during the interview with him:

- ▶ *“On March 5, [they] gave me the coordinates of the object. The aircraft was [equipped] 6 FAB-500 (high-explosive aviation bombs of 500 kg), the damage effect distance of each varying from 500 m to 1 km. After gaining altitude, in preparation for the bombing run, I felt a bump from behind, which caused the plane to start to rock. The navigator activated the means of emergency exit of the aircraft. I descended on a parachute, fell on a house in the private sector of Chernihiv, and slid over the fence. Suddenly I heard: “Russian, get out!” I jumped over the fence and ran. A man ran after me, tried to catch up with me, at that moment I used my weapon — shot several times (author’s note — the man died). Then [I] climbed over another fence and climbed into the barn to sit there. I took out a bandage bag,*

²³ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2022/05/31/7349631>

²⁴ <https://bit.ly/3u4FdAd>

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bandaged my cheek, and then people came after me with machine guns. I gave up. Later, a car arrived, where [they] put me and took me to show the bombed-out school and other destroyed buildings...”²⁵.

The day before, Krasnoiartsev dropped 8 high-explosive fragmentation aerial bombs on Chernihiv, each with a damage effect distance of 1-1.5 km.

On May 31, the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Iryna Venediktova, reported that almost 15,000 criminal proceedings related to war crimes committed by Russians had been opened in Ukraine²⁶.



Photo — screenshot of a video interview with Volodymyr Zolkin

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfgvMCl1kbY>

²⁶ <https://bit.ly/3u4uFRL>

Exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia



Military personnel of the Russian Federation who are in captivity in Ukraine can be exchanged for Ukrainian soldiers, if during their stay on the territory of Ukraine they did not commit war crimes.

As of June 9, there were nine prisoner exchanges between Ukraine and Russia²⁷.

Returned to Ukraine:

- March 24, 10 military;
- April 1, 86 military;
- April 9, 12 military and 14 civilians;
- April 14, 22 military and 8 civilians;
- April 19, 60 military and 16 civilians;
- on April 21, 10 military and 9 civilians;
- on April 28, 33 military and 12 civilians;
- April 30, 7 military and 7 civilians;
- May 6, 28 military and 13 civilians.

²⁷ <https://bit.ly/39T8Du8>
<https://bit.ly/3nhC9Np>

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There is no exact information on the number of Russian soldiers who returned from captivity.

On June 6, the draft law (no. 7436) was registered in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine²⁸ on amendments to the Criminal and Criminal Procedural Codes of Ukraine regarding the regulation of the procedure for the exchange of prisoners of war.

In particular, the document provides that the convict is released from serving his/her sentence if a decision was made to exchange him/her he was included in the lists for exchange as a prisoner of war.

If the exchange did not take place, the convict will serve his/her sentence.

If the convict, who was exchanged, again takes part in hostilities and is re-detained in Ukraine, he/she will be in prison for the entire term of imprisonment.

²⁸ <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/billInfo/Bills/Card/39752>

Look for Your Own

Ukrainian humanitarian project to identify captured and dead Russian soldiers

On the initiative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the humanitarian Internet project “Look for Your Own” was launched to identify captured and dead soldiers of the Russian army. The project is coordinated by Viktor Andrusiv, adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs.

According to the organizers, the project is designed so that Russian citizens can find their relatives, whom the Russian government sent to war in Ukraine, and learn about their fate.

“Look for Your Own” is posted on the official website (<https://200rf.com>), as well as in the Telegram channel (https://t.me/rf200_nooow). At the request of Roskomnadzor, the “Look for Your Own” website was blocked in Russia, and a request to remove the corresponding channel was sent to the address of the Telegram service. It is known that the Russian authorities keep silent about the real number of dead and captured soldiers of the Russian army on the territory of Ukraine.

As part of the project, interviews are conducted with captured Russian soldiers, to which they must necessarily give their voluntary consent. The interview is conducted by journalist Volodymyr Zolkin and his colleague. On Volodymyr Zolkin’s YouTube channel²⁹ — more than 100 videos recording interviews with more than 170 captured Russian soldiers. During the interview, the detainees talk about crossing the state border of Ukraine, the tasks set, the circumstances of their capture, and describe their personal motivation to go to war. In conversation, prisoners can freely express their opinion and ask counter-questions. During the interview, the detainee can talk on the phone with his relative, provided that the latter has given his consent to the recording and publication of the conversation. Later, relatives and loved ones can watch the video recording, make sure that their husband/son/brother is alive and

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/c/VolodymyrZolkin>

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well, evaluate his appearance and moral state. In his interviews, Zolkin has repeatedly emphasized that participation in the interview is voluntary, and some of the captured Russian soldiers refuse him, which does not imply any sanctions for them.

Unfortunately, there are no such humanitarian initiatives in the Russian Federation. Ukrainian soldiers who are in Russian captivity cannot call their relatives, and their families do not have the opportunity to watch the video of their relatives alive and well. The maximum that Russian resources broadcast are short propaganda videos with the participation of Ukrainian prisoners, in which their fragmentary lines are presented. It is not clear if the person is saying this because they were told to answer this way, or if these are really their thoughts.

► *“They [the Russians] have already created several channels, one of them is called “Look for Khokhliv” (diminutive slang to call Ukrainians). Offensive name. They are not able to do something normal, high-quality, decent and intelligent. They need to insult and oppress. They consider themselves a superior race. They had attempts to do something similar to ours. Only everything fails, they can’t take an interview, so as not to make 250 rough cuts in a 15-minute video. Every word that doesn’t suit them, they have to cut out... Some of my videos go on for an hour and a half, it’s impossible to train a person so that they answer the way you want all the time. It is clear from my interviews that these are voluntary conversations,” says Volodymyr Zolkin³⁰.*

The Human Rights Watch organization called on the authorities of Ukraine to stop posting personal data of Russian prisoners of war on social networks, as well as video recordings of their interrogations, as this violates their rights guaranteed by the Geneva Convention. According to it, prisoners of war must be protected from insults and curiosity of the public³¹.

At the same time, according to the organizers of the “Look for your own” project, these interviews do not violate the principles of international law, since they are not an interrogation, but a private conversation with consent to video recording. It was emphasized that Part 3 of Article 17, Section 1 of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War provides only that any physical or moral torture (and any other form of coercion) cannot be applied to prisoners of war in order to obtain any

³⁰ <https://bit.ly/30EtVdR>

³¹ <https://bit.ly/3tZR3LN>

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information from them. Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, harassed, or have their rights restricted. In the video, you can see that the prisoners of war answer voluntarily, without coercion. According to Victor Andrusiv, the project has exclusively humanitarian goals.