

# The Stalinist Empire in the Fight Against the Ukrainian Insurgent Movement at the Final Stage of the Second World War (1944–1945): the Role of the Red Army

VLADYSLAV HRYNEVYCH

Doctor, senior researcher

director of the Institute of History and Memory Landscape of Babyn Yar

(Kyiv, Ukraine)

✉ milovlada@ukr.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9734-7892>

**ABSTRACT.** This article, based on a wide array of archival documents, presents the analysis of military confrontation between the Stalinist Empire and the Ukrainian insurgent movement in Western Ukraine. Special attention is paid to the role of the Red Army, which, in addition to joint military punitive operations together with the NKVD itself resorted to organising anti-insurgency military measures and took an active part in such activities aimed at destroying the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the underground Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) using such measures as deportation and resettlement of the local population from the front-line zone, military mobilisations and repressions against the families of UPA members. The author concludes that the war of the Red Empire against the Ukrainian national liberation movement embroiled significant masses of civilian population into its merciless millstones, which led to its barbarisation, so this war by its nature and devastating consequences can be considered in essence as the genocidal extermination of the Ukrainian people.

**KEYWORDS:** World War II, Western Ukraine, UPA, Red Army, NKVD, genocide.

## Introduction

The strategy and tactics of the Stalinist Empire war with the Ukrainian insurgents have been actively researched for a long time<sup>1</sup>. This is facilitated by numerous collections of documents, both those published in the diaspora<sup>2</sup>, and those that became available to researchers after the collapse of the USSR. These are documents preserved in the former party archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (now the Central State Archives of Public Organisations and Ukrainica, *Центральний державний архів громадських об'єднань України*) and also in the archive of the Security Service of Ukraine and in others. In addition to these archives, the author actively included in his research a set of documents from the Archive of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation and a collection of documents, the so-called Stalin's Special folders, stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow<sup>3</sup>.

Historians note that the main form of war against the insurgents after the return to western Ukrainian territories from the very beginning was armed struggle. The regime tried to crush the insurgent movement with the full force of its military might. For this purpose, numerous punitive military operations have been actively implemented, the total number of which amounted to more than ten thousand. At the same time, a variety of political-ideological and other measures had been introduced to establish Soviet power in the lands that had just been liberated from Nazi occupation.

<sup>1</sup> Petro Potichnyj, "Pacification of Ukraine Soviet Counterinsurgency, 1944–1956", *Ukraine: The Challenge of World War II*, ed. T. Hunczak and D. Shtohryn, Lanham: University Press of America, p. 171–200; Petro Potichnyj, "The Archive of Soviet Internal Forces as a Source of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency Studies", in: *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, vol. LEX. no. 3–4, Fall/Winter, 2003; Oleksandr Lysenko, "Borotba zbroinykh viddiliv OUN i UPA z radianskym karalno-represyvnym aparatom", *Orhanizatsiia ukraïnskykh natsionalistiv i Ukraïnska povstanska armii. Istorychni narysy*, editor-in-chief S. Kulchytskyi, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2005, pp. 303–393; Anatolii Kentii, "Antykomunistychnyi opir OUN i UPA u pislivoiennnyi period", *Orhanizatsiia ukraïnskykh natsionalistiv i Ukraïnska povstanska armii. Istorychni narysy*, editor-in-chief S. Kulchytskyi, Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2005, pp. 394–444; Oleksandr Gogun, *Mezhdū Hitlerom i Stalynym. Ukraïnskie povstansy*, St. Petersburg: Neva, 2004; Ivan Patryliak, *Vstan i borys! Clukhai i vir... Ukraïnske natsionalistychnie pidpillia ta povstanskyi rukh 1939–1960*, Lviv: Chasopys, 2012, p. 592; "Stalinska imperiia u borotbi z ukraïnskym povstanskym rukhom", in: *Osobyie papki Stalina i Molotova pro natsionalno-vyzvolnu borotbu u Zakhidnii Ukraïni 1944–1948. Zbirnyk dokumentiv*, comp. by Yaroslav Dashkevych, Vasyl Kuk, Lviv branch of IUAD im. Hrushevskoho NAN Ukraïny, Kanadskyi instytut ukraïnskykh studii Alberta skoho universytetu, Lviv: Literaturna ahentsiia "Piramida", 2010, pp. 5–44.

<sup>2</sup> *Litopys UPA [UPA Chronicle]* – a multi-series publication of documents and materials on the history of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which was established in 1976 in Toronto (Canada) and since 1995, the Kyiv series has been published in parallel with the main one. A total of 46 volumes were published in the main series; they included documents stored mostly outside Ukraine, as well as memories, diaries and records of former UPA fighters and members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists. In 1995–2009 there was published 12 volumes of the *Litopys UPA* Kyiv series, which included documents and materials from Ukrainian archives. For details, see: Ivan Patryliak, "Litopys UPA", *Entsyklopediia istorii Ukraïny*: vol. 6: La-Mi, editor: V. A. Smolii (head) and others, NAN Ukraïny, Instytut istorii Ukraïny, Naukova Dumka publishing house, 2009, with illustrations, [online] <http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Litopys+UPA>

<sup>3</sup> "Osobyie papki" Stalina i Molotova..., p. 594.

Quite a variety of forces took part in this struggle on the Soviet part: internal, railway, convoy, and border troops of People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Rus. *Народный комиссариат внутренних дел*, NKVD), special groups of NKVD, field investigators of People's Commissariat for State Security (Rus. *Народный комиссариат государственной безопасности*, NKGB), agents of the People's Commissariat of Defense (Rus. *Народный комиссариат обороны*, NKO) of the USSR and SMERSH, police, various security units defending railway bridges, factories, units of the Destruction battalions (Rus. *истребительные батальоны*) – the so-called *istrebky* (*істребки*, *ястребки*, Lithuanian *stribai*), support units made up from the local population, special armed units of district activists, caunterbands – special units organised from the former members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (*Організація українських націоналістів*, OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (*Українська повстанська армія*, UPA) members, and so on. The leading role at that rested with the NKVD headed by Lavrentiy Beria, whose deputies Sergei Kruglov and Ivan Serov managed counter-insurgency activities from the operational headquarters established in Rivne. During the years of war, NKVD of the USSR (since 1946, the Ministry of the Interior of the USSR) with its system of penal camps – the Chief Administration of Corrective Labour Camps (Rus. *Главное управление исправно-трудовых лагерей*, GULAG) and General Directorate for Prisoners of War and Internees (Rus. *Главное управление по делам военнопленных и интернированных*, GUPVI) – and its own troops was actually a state within a state. In 1944, the NKVD troops were 907 000 men strong, which included separate aviation, tank, cavalry and other units. Beria even asked Joseph Stalin to somewhat reduce this internal army<sup>4</sup>. However, despite a certain reduction in force, at the end of the war 655 000 soldiers served in NKVD special forces. At the expense of civilian employees (846 000 at the end of 1945), Beria's department grew to 1.5 million people<sup>5</sup>. NKVD performed such tasks as protecting the borders of the USSR, fighting criminals, maintaining public order, passporting the population and guarding prisoners in camps. However, the decisive task at the end of the war was the fight against the UPA and similar formations on the territory of Baltic countries, Belarus and Poland.

By the end of July 1944, at the height of the fight against the insurgents, NKVD internal troops had one division, nine brigades, one cavalry regiment and one tank battalion in the Ukrainian area with a total strength of 33 011 men, and one brigade deployed in the territory of Romania. Internal troops of the Byelorussian District consisted of two divisions and one separate rifle regiment (a total strength of 10 461 men)<sup>6</sup>. In early October

<sup>4</sup> State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereinafter – SARF), fond 9401, op. 2, file 99, sheet 183.

<sup>5</sup> *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe. 1944–1989*, ed. K. Persak and L. Kaminski, Warsaw: Institute of National Remembrance, 2005, pp. 34–35.

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Semiryaga, *Kollaboratsyonizm: Priroda, tipolohiya i proyavleniya v hody Vtoroi myrovoi voiny*, Moscow: ROS-SPEN, 2000, p. 508.

1944, only in the western regions of Ukraine there were 26 304 soldiers deployed of NKVD Internal Troops joined into 14 brigades and one division<sup>7</sup>, and by the summer of 1945 this reached 34 865 men<sup>8</sup>.

However, the Stalinist Empire did not have enough of this colossal power to overcome the insurgent movement, so from the beginning of this struggle it had to involve the active army as well.

It should be noted that when we talk about the Soviet power in Western Ukraine during this period, we are talking to a large extent about the Red Army (RA), which became its main personification here. The Party and the Soviet authorities practically did not exist yet and those that were formed here turned out to be so weak and helpless that without military support they were not even able to defend themselves. After the retreat of German troops, the Red Army set out to establish a communist regime on western Ukrainian territories and this regime was maintained. Therefore, all large-scale measures that were carried out here – the fight against the insurgent movement (in particular, military-chekist operations carried out together with the NKVD), military mobilisations, resettlement and deportation of the local population, could not be performed without Stalin's army.

However, the role of the Red Army, which during the Soviet times was transformed into the "sacred cow" of the communist system and stayed beyond the zone of any criticism, was not clearly defined in the fight against the anti-Stalinist insurgent movement even after collapse of the USSR. There is a prejudice that the UPA was fought mainly by NKVD troops and the army was not involved in this process. No less tendentious is the view that the UPA had only local and sporadic skirmishes with the Red Army and fought primarily with the "chekists".

However, neither the first nor the second statement is true. The problem of the relationship between the Red Army and the population of Western Ukraine, and confrontation between the Red Army and the UPA as well as Soviet military mobilisations in Ukraine were first considered in the author's dissertation research and later in a number of his publications<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Bilas, *Represyivno-karalna systema v Ukraini (1917–1953): suspilno-politychnyi ta istoriko-pravovyi analiz*, book 2, Kyiv: Lybid – "Viisko Ukrainy", 1994, pp. 478–482.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>9</sup> The problems of the relationship between the Red Army and the population of Western Ukraine, the Red Army and UPA, Soviet military mobilisations in Ukraine were first considered in the author's dissertation research and later in a number of his publications. See: Vladyslav Hrynevych, *Natsyonalnye problemy v Krasnoi armii v period osvobozhdeniya Ukrainy ot nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov (December 1942 – October 1944)* (dissertation of candidate of historical sciences), Kyiv: 1994; Vladyslav Hrynevych, "Viiskove budivnytstvo v Ukraini 1938–1991", in: *Istoriia ukrainskoho viiska*, edited by Ya. Dashkevych, Lviv, 1996, pp. 332–467; *Suspilno-politychni nastroi naseleennia Ukrainy v roky Druhoi svitovoi viiny (1939–1945)*, Kyiv: IPIEND im. I. FOND Kurasa NAN Ukrainy, 2007; "Stalinska imperiia u borotbi z ukrainskym povstanskym rukhom", in: *"Osobyie papki" Stalina i Molotova...*, pp. 5–44.

## Red Army versus UPA

The UPA leadership was well aware that open actions of partisan units, which had weak military training and poor armament against such a colossal military force as the Red Army, would have disastrous consequences for the insurgents. So they recommended not to engage in clashes with the Soviet troops, but to preserve forces and continue to prepare for further struggle against the Stalinist Empire after its troops moved west. However, when numerous troops of the Red Empire quickly filled the territory of Western Ukraine during the offensive, it turned out to be impossible to avoid clashes.

Basic techniques and methods of the UPA partisan warfare were as follows: terrorist acts against individual military men and small units as well as against party and Soviet leaders, NKVD employees for example; attacks on military convoys with ammunition and food, headquarters, warehouses and bases of the Red Army; sabotage on communication routes, disabling bridges, communication and power lines; gathering intelligence data, which was often exchanged for the Germans' weapons. At the same time, contacts with the Wehrmacht were mostly sporadic in nature and reduced to helping their intelligence services operating in the Soviet rear, such as withdrawing German soldiers and prisoners of war who had escaped from captivity<sup>10</sup>. It should also be noted that as a result of UPA activities, the Red Army was actually deficient in intelligence data about the German army. This was usually provided to it by the Soviet partisans, since the activities of the latter in the territory of western regions were completely paralysed.

The first armed clashes between the UPA and the Red Army took place in the Right-bank Ukraine, but in Western Ukraine where the Soviet troops entered at the beginning of 1944 their numbers began to increase sharply. This was immediately reflected in military documents, such as that reported by the political department of the 13th Army to the command headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front: "During the period of operations of army units and formations on the territory of Western Ukraine, a number of attacks performed by nationalist fascist gangs on groups and single fighters have been observed"<sup>11</sup>.

During the first few weeks after entering western Ukrainian lands, the 287th Rifle Division of this army lost 36 people killed (including eight officers), eight wounded and eleven missing in clashes with the Ukrainian nationalists<sup>12</sup>.

The UPA often attacked Soviet soldiers with large detachments. In particular, on 13 February 1944, in the village of Lyubash, Kostopil district, Rivne Oblast a detachment of up to 800 insurgents engaged in a battle with a group of Red Army soldiers. Five Soviet

<sup>10</sup> Liubomyr Luciuk, Bohdan Kordan, *Anglo-American Perspectives on the Ukrainian Question 1938–1951: A Documentary Collection*, Kingston-Vestal, 1987, pp. 172–173.

<sup>11</sup> *Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation* (hereinafter – AMD RF), fond 393, op. 9023, file 23, sheet 148.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, fond 361, op. 6092, file 110, sheet 223.

soldiers were killed, 25 horses and 15 carts were driven into the forest<sup>13</sup>. In January–February 1944, in total insurgents organised 154 attacks on military units and individual soldiers in the Rivne Oblast alone, as a result of which 439 Red Army soldiers and officers were killed<sup>14</sup>.

Not in the last time, this was due to the significant accumulation of UPA units in the forests of Volhynia where its main bases were located at that time. According to leading party bodies of the Rivne Oblast, there were 56 UPA detachments operating on its territory in January–February 1944; each of them numbered from 100 to 600 soldiers with a total number of 10 600 fighters<sup>15</sup>. According to their data, these detachments included: UPA “Polissian Army” led by “Dubovy” and “Borysten” consisting of five kurins (“Shauly”, “Yaremny”, “Berezy”, “Kory” and “Laidaky”) 3 500 men strong; UPA “Western Army” led by “Eney” (up to 5 000 men strong) and other groups of up to 2 000 insurgents<sup>16</sup>.

Subsequently, the number of UPA battles with the Red Army somewhat decreased. In the summer of 1944 Khrushchev informed Stalin that for the period from March to July, they registered 134 cases of insurgent attacks on military personnel, camps with ammunition and food<sup>17</sup>. For example, on 24 March 1944, in the Rivne Oblast soldiers of the 1031st Rifle Regiment, who were collecting agricultural products (that is, taking away food from the local population) on the order of the army political department, were attacked by insurgents. The UPA fighters recaptured cattle from the Red Army soldiers and returned them to the peasants<sup>18</sup>.

In the Ternopil Oblast, near the village of Bozhykiv in the Pidgaetskyi district, a UPA detachment opened fire with cannons and mortars and then subjected the 1st signal battalion of the 1331st regiment, which was heading to the front, to machine-gun fire. Due to the suddenness of the attack and the intensity of the fire, the battalion suffered heavy losses and was dissipated. Only the next day did individual fighters begin to gather in the district centre<sup>19</sup>.

Subversive activities of the Ukrainian insurgents on railways also caused a lot of trouble for Soviet authorities, preventing uninterrupted supply of everything necessary to the front and diverting additional military contingents to protect the communication routes. For example, on 10 August 1944, in the area of the village of Dobrotvir in the Kamianka-Strumilova district of Lviv, a military train with ammunition was derailed, and on 11

<sup>13</sup> *Central State Archive of Public Associations and Ukrainica* (hereinafter – CSA PAU), fond 1, op. 23, file 703, sheet 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, file 930, sheets 178–180.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>17</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 703, sheet 7.

<sup>18</sup> AMD RF, fond 236, op. 2675, case 78, sheet 307.

<sup>19</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 919, sheet 26.

August on the Kamianka–Strumilova–Rakety line, railway tracks were damaged resulting in accident: eight wagons of the military train crashed<sup>20</sup>. The UPA strikes on the Red Army communications continued throughout 1944–1945 as evidenced by numerous testimonies<sup>21</sup>.

In the first months after the arrival of the Red Army, the UPA often organised attacks on individual settlements. In particular, in February 1944, Ukrainian insurgents conducted six attacks on five district centres of the Rivne Oblast and one district centre of the Volyn Oblast<sup>22</sup>. On 4 February, a detachment of 400 men attacked Volodymyrets district centre in the Rivne Oblast, where six Ukrainian partisans were killed during a shoot-out. In March 1944, a few days after the return of the Soviet authorities, a UPA detachment of 50 men attempted to capture the town of Sniatyn, Stanislav Oblast. A fighter battalion formed from Poles joined the battle with them and the attack was repulsed by its forces<sup>23</sup>. In the same month, Ukrainian insurgents attacked village councils six times<sup>24</sup>.

Soldiers and officers were treated differently in UPA. It happened that the captured Red Army soldiers were released after a short “political talk”, and were equipped with propaganda literature. Instead, the officers were considered by the insurgents as representatives of the Soviet regime who should be destroyed. Eleven officers and 36 men were killed in the Lviv region alone over two weeks (from 27 July to 15 August 1944)<sup>25</sup>. Pilots often became the victims of attacks. On 9 August of the same year, in the village of Maidan, Yanovsky district, Lviv, the UPA soldiers shot three crew members of the plane that made an emergency landing<sup>26</sup>. On 2 August 1944, in the village of Novosilka in the Pidhayetsky district, Ternopil Oblast, they shot the hero of the Soviet Union pilot Major Yakov Toporkov<sup>27</sup>. In the Drohobytzky district of the Drohobytzky region insurgents shot down a U-2 plane and killed two officers of the 8th Air Army<sup>28</sup>.

It is possible that the commander of the armoured and mechanised troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Lieutenant General Andrey Shtevnev, died as the result of Ukrainian insur-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 13.

<sup>21</sup> See: Litopys UPA. Nova seriiia, vol. 4: *Borotba proty UPA i natsionalistychnoho pidpillia. Informatsiini dokumenty TsK KP(b)U, obkomiv partii, NKVS–MVS, MDB–KDB, 1943–1959*, book 1: 1943–1945, compilers V. Lozytskyi, I. Pavlenko, A. Kentii, Kyiv, 2002, pp. 501–502.

<sup>22</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 703, sheet 8.

<sup>23</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 954, sheet 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 919, sheet 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 26.

<sup>28</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 962, sheet 76.

gents' actions<sup>29</sup>. Perhaps the most resonant act committed by UPA units was the attack on the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, General Nikolai Vatutin, who died of his wounds.

Military counter-intelligence was actively involved in finding out the circumstances of the attack and searching for the attackers. In particular, officials of SMERSH of the 1st Ukrainian Front reported:

The attack on the commander of the front comrade Vatutin was committed by the "Oleh" group, which was liquidated by our actions on 22 March of this year. I was committed together with a bandit group "Chernomorets", which was liquidated in the Ostroh district of the Rivne Oblast on 12–13 March of this year.<sup>30</sup>

The detachment commander "Oleh", who was killed in action, had the following entry in his diary: "29.11 [...] two cars were also smashed, in one of which was Vatutin. He was wounded. Documents and maps captured." [...] Counter-intelligence officers noted that "the only surviving member of this gang was captured by us wounded. Hryhorii Troian in his testimony confirms the fact that this gang attacked comrade Vatutin"<sup>31</sup>.

This event led to the organisation of a number of punitive actions by the forces of the Red Army. At the same time, the deployment of NKVD special forces started in this region. At the beginning of March 1944 two divisions, four brigades, one cavalry regiment and one tank battalion of the NKVD troops with a total number of 28 000 men were sent to Rivne and Volyn Oblasts in addition to the existing four brigades (10 000 strong) of NKVD internal troops. Only from 7–27 March 1944, 65 military-chekists operations "on the liquidation of bandit groups" were carried out in Rivne, Volyn and Ternopil Oblasts, during which 1 129 people were killed, 61 wounded and 2 101 people detained in the areas of combat clashes. During this period, 734 active OUN members were arrested as a result of the NKVD's agent operational activities. In a number of districts all forest areas and settlements had been "combed through". During these operations, 7 517 men were detained and sent to recruiting centres in eight districts of the Rivne Oblast and four districts of the Volyn Oblast. They had also completed preparations for the eviction of 500 families of "active bandits" (planned for 28–31 March)<sup>32</sup>.

Simultaneously with these military operations, as stated in this document, "the personnel of NKVD troops and chekists help local authorities in organising and strengthening village councils and in conducting political and explanatory work among the local population"<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Aleksandr Gogun, *op. cit.*, p. 219; In the book by Aleksandr Maslov dedicated to fallen Soviet generals, Vlasov and Germans are blamed for the murder of A. Shtevnev, see: Aleksandr Maslov, *Fallen Soviet Generals. Soviet General Officers killed in battle, 1941–1945*, transl. and ed. by David M. Glantz and A. Maslov, London, Portland: OR, 1998, pp. 128, 201–202.

<sup>30</sup> SARF, fond 9401, op. 2, case 64, sheet 216.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 217.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



Faced with anti-Soviet resistance in the western Ukrainian territories, the Red Army resorted to appropriate preventive measures to combat the insurgents. In particular, in all regiments of the 13th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front the creation of special detachments started, “with the aim of fighting Banderovites” and the security of the headquarters’ premises was strengthened. In addition, a number of directives and orders of the military command forbade Red Army soldiers to walk alone or in small groups without weapons; officers were not allowed to live separately in apartments and houses<sup>34</sup>.

At the same time, the Army assigned special contingents from its reserve to fight against the UPA. Thus, in the spring of 1944, the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front assigned a cavalry division, 20 armoured vehicles and eight light tanks for this purpose<sup>35</sup>.

With growing activity of the insurgent movement, the Red Army increasingly involved its units in the operations against the UPA. Such operations were often carried out at the request of local party bodies. For example, in May 1944 the secretary of the Stanislav Regional Committee Mykhailo Slon informed the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (CC UCP(b)) that the lack of their own forces did not allow him to “comb through swamps and bushes” near Karliv village (since 1947 – Prutivka village) and Dragasymiv (Snyatynsky district) with the concentration of “big gangs of Banderovites”. The Regional Committee applied to the army for help and on 12 May, two companies of the 36th Plastun Regiment of the Kuban Plastun Division engaged in a battle with the UPA, during which (it lasted almost a day), 150 insurgents were killed and 62 insurgents captured<sup>36</sup>.

It happened that clashes between the Red Army and the UPA turned into combat operations with the use of large human resources, heavy weapons, artillery, tanks and aviation.

The Ternopil Regional Committee of the UCP(b) reported that in April–May 1944, after the advance of military units to the west, “open ‘military actions of nationalists’ took place in northern regions of the region, which were suppressed as the result of operations of large military formations of the Red Army and NKVD troops”<sup>37</sup>. The large-scale battles with the insurgents with the participation of the army took place on 22–25 April near the village of Gurba, Mizotsky district, Rivne Oblast (in the area of Kremenets forests) where 4 000–5 000 insurgents were concentrated against around 30 000 NKVD fighters and separate military units with 15 light tanks. The Ternopil Regional Committee reported that according to its data, in April–May 1944, during the preparations of the 1st Ukrainian Front for the offensive, “OUN leadership instructed the commander of UPA Southern Group ‘Eney’ to knock out of action the main road and railway communications of the front in

<sup>34</sup> AMD RF, fond 393, op. 9023, case 23, sheet 148.

<sup>35</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 937, sheet 7.

<sup>36</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 954, sheet 20.

<sup>37</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 919, sheet 24.

the Dubno-Kremenets section in order to disrupt the offensive of the Red Army, to prevent their reconstruction and to start active actions against the Red Army". But due to the fact that the front stabilised during April–July, and the front line was saturated with Soviet troops, a new order was received from the UPA leadership: "not to show any activity, not to engage in clashes with the troops, retain and continue to train personnel, create subversive and terrorist groups for further struggle against Soviet authorities"<sup>38</sup>.

Staying in the territory of western regions for quite a long period, the troops of Ukrainian Fronts (primarily the 1st and the 4th) suffered greatly from insurgents' attacks, so they often initiated anti-insurgency actions themselves. In particular, on 19 August 1944, the Military Council of the 1st Ukrainian Front adopted a resolution "On the liquidation of nationalist gangs and establishment of strict order in the rear of the front-line troops". In order to protect the rear and help the NKVD, one cavalry and two motorcycle regiments were assigned from the front. By joint efforts, from 22 August to 7 September, they liquidated 36 "armed gangs" with a total number of 4 315 men<sup>39</sup>.

In August–September 1944, the NKVD troops together with the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front conducted large-scale military operations in the Drohobytzky region. In particular, in Komarniv district they started the operation on the liquidation of a UPA detachment up to 1 000 men strong<sup>40</sup>. On 5 September, they launched the extermination of UPA units in Medenychi, during which 186 insurgents perished<sup>41</sup>. In total, as a result of joint actions of NKVD troops and the troops of the front, 1 174 people were killed and 1 180 captured in the Drohobytzky region from 18 August to 9 September. Also, 6 000 were detained of those who evaded mobilisation<sup>42</sup>.

Moreover, the Red Army tried to introduce a special military regime in western regions of Ukraine, which was supposed to accelerate the liquidation of the insurgent movement. On 10 August 1944, the Military Council of the 4th Ukrainian Front adopted Resolution No 3 "On the establishment of military order in the front-line zone"<sup>43</sup>. "To fight against enemy agents and saboteurs" as well as "to protect the interests of local population", it was ordered to surrender firearms and cold weapons within a three-day period; it was forbidden to let outsiders in at night, forbidden to hold gatherings and parties from 10 o'clock in the evening to 5 o'clock in the morning, spread false rumours or keep anti-Soviet literature. "Enemy

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

<sup>39</sup> Viktor Ananiichuk, *Vyzvolennia zakhidnykh oblastei Ukrainy vid nimetsko-fashystykykh zaharbnykiv*, Kyiv: Vyd-vo Kyivskoho un-tu, 1969, p. 121; *Istoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskoho Soiuzu. 1941–1945*, in 6 vols, vol. 4: *Izghnannia vraha iz predelov Sovetskoho Soiuzu i nachalo osvobozhdeniya narodov Evropy ot fashistskoho iha (1944)*, chief ed. P. Pospelov et al., Moscow: Voenizdat, 1962, p. 224.

<sup>40</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 926, sheet 75.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 78.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 77.

<sup>43</sup> AMD RF, fond 244, op. 2980, case 10, sheet 26.

whisperers-provocateurs who praise the German army and its predatory policies in the occupied territory”, this document noted, “should be immediately detained and handed over to the investigative bodies and military tribunals”. It was also noted that there was the need to introduce blackout and prevent transmission of signals, including by lighting fires<sup>44</sup>.

To intimidate the local population, the Red Army carried out public executions. In particular, two men were sentenced to be shot in August 1944 in the Staryi Sambir district of Drohobych, and two more were sentenced to be hanged in the city of Sambir. Both punishments were carried out in public. Those killed were OUN activists and UPA fighters<sup>45</sup>.

Many captured insurgents were killed on the spot without trial or investigation. In the memoirs of Ivan Nevidomskyi from the Khmelnytskyi Oblast, who was a soldier of the 350th Rifle Division, there is evidence that this was committed by the orders of officers of “special departments” who did not want to “overload” themselves with work “with these Banderovites”. In the summer of 1944, near Rava-Ruska he witnessed the murder of one and saw the abandoned bodies of eight more village boys who were first forced by Soviet infantrymen to carry anti-tank guns and then shot. All of them were residents of neighbouring villages<sup>46</sup>.

In general, the army received extremely broad powers to fight against insurgents, i.e. to carry out punitive military operations against them, to punish the UPA members and to repress their families. In the order of the commander of the 8th Air Army, Lieutenant General Vasyl Zhdanov and his deputy for political affairs Andrii Rytov with the analyses of implementing directive No 00307 of the Military Council of the 4th Ukrainian Front on fighting UPA, it was noted that it is necessary:

to turn from passive resistance to individual bandit actions to active operations in their districts. Those bandits who oppose us with weapons in their hands must be mercilessly exterminated [...] and their families repressed [...] To explain to people that nationalist gangs of all stripes are nothing more than spies acting on behalf of German intelligence<sup>47</sup>.

### **Deportations, resettlement of the population from the front-line zone and military mobilisations**

Deportations of the population of Western Ukraine were carried out mainly by NKVD. According to the decree of the NKVD of the USSR adopted in March 1944 “the families that include OUN members who are in hiding and those engaged in banditry, as well as the families of convicted OUN members are to be registered and deported to rear regions of

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, sheets 26–28.

<sup>45</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 926, sheet 78.

<sup>46</sup> *Portret temriavy. Svidchennia, dokumenty i materialy*; in 2 books, book 1, compiler P. L. Yashchuk, Kyiv and New York, 1999, pp. 474–475.

<sup>47</sup> AMD RF, fond 244, op. 2980, case 77, sheet 369.

the USSR"<sup>48</sup>. In April 1944, General Ivan Serov reported to Moscow that 2 000 OUN families had already been prepared for deportation to the Krasnoyarsk Territory<sup>49</sup>. In total, almost 66 000 families, or 203 662 people, were evicted from the western regions (excluding Zakarpattia) in the period from 1944 to 1953<sup>50</sup>.

The question of the so-called resettlement of the population from the front-line zone remains less researched, but is also one of the Soviet measures to combat the insurgent movement. After the catastrophic defeats at the beginning of the war, which were also caused by the disloyalty of a large part of the population to the Stalinist regime, the Soviet leadership was suspicious of everyone who did not manage to evacuate to the rear areas of the USSR. On 22 June 1942, issuing an order to Marshal Semyon Tymoshenko for the evacuation from the front-line zone, Joseph Stalin in his characteristic manner emphasised that this was necessary first of all, so that "not a single agent, not a single suspicious person was left in this zone, so that the military rear was 100% clean ..." <sup>51</sup>.

Soon, the practice of resettling people from the front-line territories became systematic. By directive of the Headquarters of the Supreme Command No 170662 of 14 October 1942, People's Commissar of the NKVD Lavrenty Beria was ordered to establish a 25 km-wide, front-line zone with the resettlement of civilian population from this area<sup>52</sup>. In April 1943, by order of the South-Western Front command headquarters, a mass resettlement of a number of districts of Voroshilovgrad and Stalingrad regions started, involving tens of thousands of people. For example, it was decided to resettle 10 370 homesteads – 57 230 people in Lyman district (Stalingrad region)<sup>53</sup>. This extremely unpopular measure among the population was motivated by the need to "avoid unnecessary casualties among the civilian population" and "to fight against spies and enemy agents masquerading as Soviet citizens"<sup>54</sup>.

It is noteworthy that in the territory of western republics of the USSR where insurgent formations were active, the resettlement of the local population from the combat zone, the so-called front-line zone, assumed significant proportions.

In the documents of Stalin's *Special folders* there are records that as of 21 June 1944, according to the report of the Main Directorate of the NKVD troops on the protection of rear areas of the active Red Army, 1 674 618 people were resettled from 25 km of the front-

<sup>48</sup> Mykola Buhai, *Deportatsii naseleння z Ukrainy (30–50s)*, in: *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1990, no. 11, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 17, case 79, sheet 56.

<sup>51</sup> AMD RF, fond 96a, op. 2011, case 26, sheets 94–102; Cited from: Dmytrii Volkohonov, *Triumf i trahediia: Politychnyi portret Y.V.Stalina*, in 2 books, book 2, Kyiv: Polityvydav Ukrainy, 1990, p. 291.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>53</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 553, sheet 25.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, case 542, sheet 6.

line zone. In particular: Leningrad Front – 16 444; 3rd Baltic Front – 49 132; 2nd Baltic Front – 64 137; 1st Baltic Front – 58 162; 3rd Belorussian Front – 50 615; 2nd Belorussian Front – 71 022; 1st Belorussian Front – 363 503; 3rd Ukrainian Front – 131 211; 2nd Ukrainian Front – 491 393; 1st Ukrainian Front – 378 997<sup>55</sup>.

During such events, military personnel with vehicles were obliged to help the civilian population to transport them to the designated places for this purpose (often at a distance of up to 100 km), and political bodies were obliged to ensure an appropriate information campaign (usually lectures on such topics as: “friendship of peoples”, “unity of the front and the rear”)<sup>56</sup>.

In addition to the main task, military mobilisations were also used by the authorities to fight against insurgents. Then, on 25 January 1944, Stalin signed a special order of the State Defence Committee (SDC) “On the mobilisation of Soviet citizens in the areas of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus liberated from the German invaders”<sup>57</sup>. In March 1944, Khrushchev suggested to the Kremlin leaders that they carry out complete mobilisation to fight the UPA. In his letter addressed to Stalin and Malenkov as well as in the draft resolution of the SDC “On special measures in western regions of Ukraine”, this issue was given priority attention. “In order to deprive nationalists of the opportunity to recruit either voluntarily or forcibly members of their gangs”, he emphasised in the letter, “it is necessary to mobilise the entire male population of conscription age”<sup>58</sup>. Khrushchev also reported that he had already given instructions to the commander of Kyiv Military District (KMD) about the priority mobilisation of people of conscription age up to 30 years “as the most active part of the male population”. This leader of Ukrainian communists also informed Moscow that since it would be difficult for KMD alone to cope with this task, he agreed with Marshal Georgy Zhukov on cooperation, and the army and front manning departments would take part in this work<sup>59</sup>.

In the draft resolution of the SDC, the issue of mobilisation was listed under No 1:

In order to liquidate acting gangs and restore proper state order in the western regions of Ukraine, the State Defence Committee decides: 1. To oblige the People’s Commissariat of Defence (comrade Smorodinov) to mobilise the entire male population of conscription age in the liberated districts of Rivne and Volyn Oblasts by 20 March 1944, and in the first instance – up to the age of 30, and in the future, as the districts of the western regions are liberated, immediately mobilise conscription contingents.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> SARF, fond 9401, op. 2, case 65, sheet 265.

<sup>56</sup> AMD RF, fond 361, op. 6092, case 140, sheet 155.

<sup>57</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 706, sheet 13.

<sup>58</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 703, sheet 17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 20.

The draft of this resolution provided for immediate transfer of all mobilised people to the rear districts and after filtering and training send the “best half” of them to combat units and use the rest in the rear (construction, road troops, etc.) and in reconstruction work<sup>61</sup>.

The main burden of mobilisation rested on the active army. On 27 March 1944, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian and 2nd Belorussian fronts mobilised 64 269 and 8 614 people respectively in the western regions, while military commissariats mobilised only 2 826 people<sup>62</sup>. At the same time, the age limits of conscripts were extended. The reference of military department of the Central Committee of the UCP(b) “On the status of conscription as of 27 March 1944” concerned the mobilisation of conscripts aged 18 to 52 instead of the generally defined limit of up to 50 years<sup>63</sup>. Mobilisations were carried out mainly by coercive methods. For example, on 20 April 1944, out of 69 110 conscripts in the Rivne Oblast only 2 620 people voluntarily appeared at military commissariats (not including the towns of Rivne, Zdolbuniv and Sarny); the rest were taken by raids in villages and forests<sup>64</sup>.

General Petro Hryhorenko described the method of mobilisation in this period quite vividly in his memoirs: “The lack of people was so palpable”, he wrote, “that mobilisation was turned into human hunting as slave traders used to catch blacks in Africa. Voluntariness was carried out in the Soviet way, like the organisation of 100% ‘voluntary’ arrival of Soviet citizens to the ballot boxes”. According to Hryhorenko’s memoirs, the typical model of Soviet mobilisation was as follows. The troops surrounded the village until dawn. Having received the order to shoot after the first warning at anyone who tried to flee, a special team entered the village and, going around the houses, drove all the men to the square (regardless of age and health). Then they were escorted to special camps, where a medical examination was conducted and politically unreliable people were withdrawn. The supervision of the mobilised people was highly vigilant. There was a strict responsibility established for bringing officers to a military tribunal in case of any escape from their units. The recruits, in case of an unsuccessful attempt to desert, were severely punished – they were shot and their families were repressed<sup>65</sup>.

Defectors in the Red Army were dealt with immediately and ruthlessly. Usually, to intimidate others, it was done in public. A native of Vilnius, Eliyahu Yones, who survived the occupation in the Lviv region and was drafted into the ranks of the Red Army, mentions in his memoirs that Western Ukrainians often defected to the Germans and even told a case of how he “prevented” such defection of a group of soldiers and was awarded the Order of the Red Banner for this. After the arrest and tribunal, the defectors were shot in front

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 83, case 31, sheet 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 954, sheet 42.

<sup>65</sup> Petro Grygorenko, *Spohady*, Kyiv: Ukraine, 2007, p. 319.

of the ranks and on the order of officers, their grave was trampled down with boots of the soldiers of the entire division, so there was no trace left<sup>66</sup>.

According to the report of the People's Commissar of Defence of the Ukrainian SSR General Vasyl Herasymenko<sup>67</sup>, as of 23 September 1944, 453 000 Ukrainians, 73 878 Poles and 5 588 Czechs were mobilised in Lviv Military District<sup>68</sup>. However, conscription in the region continued until the end of war. In a number of regions, mobilisation had the character of totality. For example, according to data from the party bodies, 16% of the population was mobilised in Volyn Oblast. At the end of 1944, the so-called early conscription of 17-year-olds, during which 30 799 people were drafted in March 1945 in Lviv District, almost 10 000 were sent to military units at the end of 1944. Tens of thousands of men appeared in the rear units of the Red Army after belonging to UPA detachments. In total, over 600 000 people were mobilised in the region during the war.

### The Red Army and the local population

From the very beginning the war in the western Ukrainian territories dragged a large number of civilians into its merciless millstones, whether they wanted it or not. Soviet leaders well understood that without the help of local residents any partisan movement was doomed. In the NKVD document "On the activities of OUN during German occupation" prepared for the Central Committee of the UCP(b), it was emphasised that "The local population support Bulbovites and Banderovites". There was also noted that unlike Eastern Ukraine where OUN did not gain significant support,

in absolute majority of the population of Western Ukraine on the contrary, OUN members had exceptional authority and all kinds of support. Male population of the regions of Western Ukraine aged 15 to 50 is poisoned by nationalist ideology. Most of them are fanatics in these matters<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Yones Eliyahu, *Die Strasse nach Lemberg: Zwangsarbeit und Widerstand in Ostgalizien 1941–1944*, FISCHER Taschenbuch, 2017, sheets 177–179.

<sup>67</sup> The People's Commissariat of Defence of the Ukrainian SSR is the military affairs management body of the republic. Promulgated in accordance with the Law "On the establishment of military formations of the Union Republics and transformation of the People's Commissariat of Defence from All-Union to Union-Republican People's Commissar" adopted on 1 February 1944 by the 10th session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and on 6 March 1944 by the 6th session of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR. The law was introduced as an amendment to the Constitution of the USSR in 1936 (Art. 18a). The declaration of the People's Commissariat of Defence of the Ukrainian SSR was aimed at the achievement of foreign policy by the Stalinist leadership (accession of the Ukrainian SSR to the United Nations, possible accession of other countries to the USSR) and internal political objectives (such as the struggle with the OUN and UPA on the territory of Western Ukraine). During the development of the "Regulations", which determined the structure and functions of the republican military department, there was shown a desire of the Ukrainian political elite to achieve expansion of the republic's rights in a military sphere and the reluctance of this on the part of the centre of the union. The military department of the Ukrainian SSR *de facto* ceased to exist in October 1945, but *de jure* it existed until 1977 under different names (Military Ministry of the Ukrainian SSR, 1946, Ministry of Defence of the Ukrainian SSR, 1953). The People's Commissar of Defence of the Ukrainian SSR was Lieutenant General V. Gerasymenko (11 March 1944 to October 1945). For more details, see: Vladyslav Hrynevych, "Utvorennia Narodnoho komisariatu oborony URSR 1944: Z istorii odniaiei politychnoi hry", in: *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1991, no. 5, pp. 29–37.

<sup>68</sup> SARF, fond 104, op. 11615, case 3, sheet 47.

<sup>69</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 926, sheet 10.

In the report compiled by a group of employees of the Central Committee of the UCP(b) after visiting the Rivne Oblast shortly after its liberation from the Germans, it was noted that “we can cite a large number of facts of the hostile activities of various nationalist gangs. Almost in every village there are large or small gangs of Ukrainian-German or Polish-German nationalists”<sup>70</sup>.

After entering the territories of Western Ukraine, the Red Army immediately felt a change in the mood of the people. “The population of villages of the Rivne Oblast that we went through”, noted in the report of the political department of the 287th Division, “met our units rather indifferently without showing any friendliness. When our units appear in populated areas, people hide in their homes”<sup>71</sup>.

The mood of the population of the Stanislav Region was described similarly: “The arrival of Red Army units and establishment of Soviet power were met by the local residents without any outward manifestation of joy and elation”, reported the political department of the 38th Army<sup>72</sup>.

In general, the relationship between the Red Army and the local population was determined not so much by the joy of liberation from the Germans, but by the cruel laws of partisan warfare, which was increasingly unfolding. Soviet soldiers were impressed by the very fact that the Ukrainian rebels were fighting against them, because the most part of them considered that they were liberators. Meanwhile, the number of attacks on military personnel increased.

According to the report of the political department of the 287th Rifle Division,

Terrorist attacks of Ukrainian nationalists caused distrust of the local residents and many soldiers and officers therefore consider them all hostile to our Red Army. Atrocities and banditry of Ukrainian nationalists have a negative effect on the mood of the personnel.<sup>73</sup>

Under the conditions of a partisan war, it was not easy for the members of Soviet armed forces to take in the complex military and political situation in the region where operated various forces, sometimes hostile to each other: numerous detachments of Polish and Ukrainian nationalists, German saboteurs, etc. It was difficult to distinguish civilians from insurgents. For example, during the assault on Ternopil, when a company of the 1089th Rifle Regiment of the 322nd Rifle Division under the command of lieutenant Solovyov broke into the city and started to comb the streets exterminating the Germans, unknown people in civilian clothes opened fire on Soviet soldiers from the windows of houses<sup>74</sup>. In

<sup>70</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 30, case 1772, sheet 35.

<sup>71</sup> AMD RF, fond 361, op. 6092, case 110, sheets 124, 203.

<sup>72</sup> AMD RF, fond 393, op. 9023, case 23, sheet 153.

<sup>73</sup> AMD RF, fond 361, op. 6092, case 110, sheet 203.

<sup>74</sup> AMD RF, fond 417, op. 10597, case 92, sheet 203.



Lutsk, on 14 February 1944, Polish nationalists fired at Soviet anti-aircraft gunners with a machine gun installed on the church bell tower. In Lviv region, scouts of the 16th Guards Mechanised Brigade located in the village of Sviyash (apparently Svirzh of the Przemyslyansky district) blindly trusted the local residents who deliberately brought them under the fire of enemy cannon<sup>75</sup>. According to the report, in the same village unidentified persons killed a wounded soldier who was left here for transportation to hospital<sup>76</sup>.

Fear of local partisans' attack and the desire to take revenge for fallen comrades sometimes led Soviet soldiers to commit war crimes. A typical example is the event that happened near the village of Kurgany, Ostroh district, Rivne Oblast. On 23 January 1944, four scouts from the 8th Rifle Division were attacked by unknown persons. Three Red Army soldiers went missing and one was wounded, but he escaped and returned to his unit. The next day a cavalry unit (up to 50 soldiers) arrived in the village, led by its commander senior lieutenant Pichkur. The entire male population was herded to its northern outskirts. Pichkur demanded that the villagers "hand over bandits – Banderovites who killed his comrades" and threatened that otherwise he would shoot all the men. People cried, denied the participation of their fellow villagers in the murder of soldiers and asked to take in the situation. Despite these pleas, Pichkur selected 30 men and ordered them to be shot "like Banderovites". With a shot from his personal weapon, he ordered two submachine gunners to shoot at people, as a result of which 18 people were killed, six were wounded (two of them died later), another six miraculously survived because they fell to the ground before the shots rang out<sup>77</sup>.

Having executed the shooting in front of the entire village, Pichkur ordered to set several houses on fire and left, leaving his message to the villagers: "Peaceful Orthodox Ukrainians and Poles!" he addressed them, "I came to you today to take revenge on your village for three soldiers you killed ... For each of our soldiers killed, I will kill 100 men and burn the villages ..." <sup>78</sup>.

As reported by the political department of the 287th Rifle Division, which units soon entered the village, the fact of shooting civilians made such a panicky impression on the local population that many of them hid in their homes when the Red Army appeared<sup>79</sup>. Trying to calm the population, the unit's command called this incident "a provocative sortie of enemy elements"<sup>80</sup>. At the same time, the division's medical battalion provided assistance to the wounded and seriously wounded were sent to the hospital. After a short time,

<sup>75</sup> AMD RF, fond 236, op. 2675, case 65, sheet 81.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> AMD RF, fond 236, op. 2675, case 78, sheet 263.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> AMD RF, fond 361, op. 6092, case 110, sheet 140.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

the village visited representatives of the political department of the 13th Army who explained to the villagers that the fact of arbitrariness on the part of Pichkur “has nothing to do with the attitude of the Red Army towards civilian population”, and that such crimes are unacceptable in the ranks of the Red Army and their perpetrators will be severely punished. To prove this in practice, an open court session on the “Pichkur case” was held in the presence of villagers. Military tribunal sentenced two soldiers to death. However, as soon as the villagers went to listen to another lecture about the “friendship of the peoples of the USSR”, the military prosecutor, “taking into account Pichkur’s combat merits” and the fact that “citizens, after carrying out a lot of educational work, correctly assessed the fact of illegal execution as having nothing to do with the behaviour of the Red Army soldiers”, proposed to replace the death penalty with 10 years of imprisonment<sup>81</sup>.

Hostile attitude towards Western Ukrainians as “suspicious nationalists”, each of whom could be connected to the insurgent movement just intensified. Characteristic views on the local population were expressed by sergeant major Nema – a serviceman of the 162nd Rifle Division of the 13th Army who killed in Shchurovychy village of the Radekhiv district, Lviv region a 50-year-old woman who, as he thought, launched signal rockets during the enemy air raid:

I see Banderovites in every woman and man. This opinion came to me after I saw with my own eyes women and men who mocked our soldiers and commanders, whom we did not have time to pick up on the battlefield during retreat.<sup>82</sup>

The fact that the relations of military personnel with the local population were a certain problem during this period is evidenced by army political reports, which reflected numerous cases of military crimes committed on the territory of Western Ukraine. For example, in the political report of the said 162nd division it was noted that despite the fact that “the personnel have the right views on the issues of attitude towards the local population”, there are still incorrect views on the part of individual fighters and commanders regarding the civilian population. Thus, only in May 1944, it was noted in the document: “there were two cases of murder of citizens and two cases of rape of women among the local population”<sup>83</sup>.

A similar situation was typical for other Soviet units located in the western Ukrainian territory as evidenced by numerous military documents. Thus, the officer of the 359th regiment of the 161st Rifle Division communist Serov, while trying to rape a woman killed a boy who defended his mother<sup>84</sup>. Deputy commander of the 565th rifle regiment of the 161st Rifle Division major Tabachnikov in a drunken state in the village of Oleksentse shot

<sup>81</sup> AMD RF, fond 236, op. 2675, case 78, sheet 264.

<sup>82</sup> AMD RF, fond 1399, op. 1, case 86, sheet 164.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, sheets 163–164.

<sup>84</sup> AMD RF, fond 1399, op. 1, case 86, sheet 106.

53-year-old peasant Medved for refusing to “bring him a woman”<sup>85</sup>. Lieutenant Chernov from the 99th Rifle Division in the village of Nemyriv in a state of heavy intoxication killed a 5-year-old child and wounded a breast-fed infant with a shot from a pistol<sup>86</sup>. Commander of the exterminatory detachment of the 322nd Infantry Division Lieutenant Korotkov instead of “fighting the Banderovites” spent two days together with the entire group drinking hard in the village. At the same time, they arrested people, demanded moonshine, robbed and raped women<sup>87</sup>.

OUN documents also contain numerous facts of abuse of the local population. In particular, in the village of Debeslavtsy, Kolomyia district, eight Red Army soldiers raped a girl, and another three soldiers in the same village raped a 65-year-old woman<sup>88</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the given examples were only the tip of the iceberg of Soviet criminal offences committed by individual military men. But it was the command of the Red Army that took the lead in committing large-scale war crimes against the civilian population. It was on their orders that entire villages were burned down and their civilian inhabitants were exterminated. Beria's son Sergo Beria, who was in the Lviv region in the summer of 1944, recalled that he witnessed the destruction of “nationalist detachment” near Mostysk. Soviet troops surrounded the rebels and offered them to surrender, but they refused. Then three artillery regiments were transferred to this area. After a powerful artillery bombardment not a single survivor was left alive. “Later I found out”, wrote Beria, “that General Konev and General Petrov”, (Marshal Ivan Konev and General Ivan Petrov were commanders of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Fronts, respectively), “assigned up to a dozen artillery regiments to ‘clear the rear’, as they said. The territory was cleaned in this way. Even the Soviet border guards who were entrusted with the security of the rear did not hide their indignation: ‘This is not humane: to conduct an almost army group operation against a handful of people.’ [...] It was difficult to come to terms with this”, noted S. Beria, “we condemned German generals for fighting partisans, while our army units used the same methods, often even in a more brutal form. Whole villages were burned”<sup>89</sup>.

Soviet documents also confirm the fact of burning down whole villages by military men during the fight against insurgents. For example, one of them set forth how the forces of the 51st separate motorcycle regiment of the 4th Tank Army together with the border guards liquidated UPA detachments in Yavoriv, Krakovets and Lyubachiv districts of the Lviv region between 22 August and 7 September 1944. “During this period, 250 insur-

<sup>85</sup> AMD RF, fond 3093, op. 9023, case 23, sheet 145.

<sup>86</sup> AMD RF, fond 3533, op. 1, case 181, sheet 213.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, fond 417, op. 10597, case 92, sheet 294.

<sup>88</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 23, case 926, sheet 35.

<sup>89</sup> “Serho Beriia. Moi otets – Lavrentiy Beriia”, *Kievskie novosti*, 9 June 1993.

gents were killed and the villages of Rogizno, Huta, Lypyna and Nakonechne-Druge were burned by artillery and mortar fire”, the document stated<sup>90</sup>. NKVD members acted in the same way. On 20 August 1944, NKVD members with 500 border guards surrounded the village of Pyryatyn of the Dubensky district, Rivne Oblast looking for a UPA detachment in it, but did not find anyone and burned down 75 homesteads with livestock<sup>91</sup>.

Stalin's *Special Folders* also contain information about the burning of Ukrainian villages during the fights against insurgents. In particular, they contain information about the battle of a chekist-military group of 120 fighters with a UPA detachment of 300 fighters, which took place on 25 October 1944 in the area of Sorotske village of the Terebovlyansky district, Ternopil Oblast. The insurgents resisted stubbornly. The battle lasted from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Unable to “knock out” partisans from the village, chekists applied for help to military aviation. “Flying tanks” – IL-2 battleplanes – attacked the UPA strong point from the air, as a result of which 76 insurgents were killed, 15 of them burned along with the houses set on fire from the planes<sup>92</sup>.

The fact that Soviet battleplanes shelled the “villages of Banderovites” from the air was also testified by the pilot Georgy Beregovy in his memoirs<sup>93</sup>.

Such anti-partisan activity of the Red Army had a negative effect on the morale state of troops, who were forced to fight not with the occupying Germans, but with the local civilian population. General Petro Hryhorenko recalled that his former subordinates from the 8th Rifle Division visiting him in Moscow told him with anger and pain how after the war they burned and destroyed the houses of those suspected of helping the insurgents, how their families, women and children were brought to Siberia, how the population was “thrown out” from villages and farms, how raids were carried out on insurgents<sup>94</sup>.

## Conclusions

The dynamics of the Stalinist regime struggle against the Ukrainian insurgent movement indicates the number of chekist-military operations. During the year of hostilities against the UPA (February 1944–February 1945), NKVD conducted 9 508 chekist-military operations, at that 73 333 persons were killed, 73 965 captured alive, and 53 333 surrendered, including those who evaded service in the Red Army (Soviet losses amounted to: killed – 1 708, wounded – 2 076 and 317 missing in action)<sup>95</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> CSA PAU, fond 1, op. 17, case 1, sheet 137.

<sup>91</sup> Vladyslav Hrynevych, “Viiskove budivnytstvo v Ukraini 1938–1991”, p. 407.

<sup>92</sup> On the course of fight against the OUN in the western regions of Ukraine from 15–31 October 1944: SARF, fond 9410, op. 2, case 67, sheets 359–365.

<sup>93</sup> Heorhyi Berehovi, *Tri vysoty*, Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986, p. 94–96.

<sup>94</sup> Petro Grygorenko, *V podpole mozho vstretit tolko kryv ...*, New York: Detinets, 1981, p. 292.

<sup>95</sup> CSA PAU, fond 9401, op. 2, case 94, sheet 346.

On 1 November 1945, the number of killed among the insurgents increased to 98 696, captured – 107 485, those who surrendered and those who evaded military service – 92 219<sup>96</sup>.

During the analysis of Soviet documents on human losses, one can immediately notice the disproportionate ratio between dead insurgents and NKVD members: the former are usually many times more. This can be explained not only by the fact that a well-armed, appropriately prepared and numerically superior force fought against the rebels, but also by the fact that there were many civilians among the dead. This is indirectly evidenced by the fact that there is a discrepancy in the documents between killed and captured insurgents and the number of weapons seized from them – the number of men is always significantly more than weapons. Thus, it turns out that the chekists either attributed “dead souls” or they were civilians who died during punitive actions and were counted as insurgents.

It should be noted that in the confrontation between the Stalinist Empire and UPA, the Red Army along with NKVD played an important role. At the same time, the involvement of regular troops in anti-partisan actions inevitably led to their demoralisation and at the same time to the brutalisation of the methods of conducting hostilities since the troops had to fight against civilian population. Certain analogies come to my mind at that point. The most significant revision of the standard assessments of the German army during the World War II, which radically changed the views of scientists on this issue in the early 1990s, was carried out by American researcher Omer Bartov. The author proved that not only SS troops, but also Wehrmacht soldiers significantly influenced the process of barbarisation of the war in the East and its transformation into genocidal extermination<sup>97</sup>. This is very reminiscent of the situation in Western Ukraine where both NKVD and the Red Army acted against the UPA and the consequences of their brutal activities fit perfectly into the formula of genocidal extermination of the Ukrainian population.

Regarding the latter, we currently have a legal precedent when the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in March 2019 rejected the complaint of the former KGB employee Stanislovas Drelingas, who was found guilty of genocide for participating in the operation for detaining commander of the Lithuanian partisans who fought against the Soviet authorities – Adolfas Ramanauskas *alias* Vanagas. ECtHR agreed with the explanations of the Supreme Court of Lithuania that systematic destruction of Lithuanian partisans was carried out by the Soviet occupiers and this can be considered genocide of the Lithuanian people. After the arrest, Ramanauskas-Vanagas was tortured, the occupation court sentenced him to death and in 1957 he was executed. In total, at least 50 000 people took part in the post-war armed resistance in Lithuania.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, case 102, sheet 1.

<sup>97</sup> See: Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, NY, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

According to the Minister of Justice of Lithuania Elvinas Jankevičius:

The ECtHR recognised that the applicant was legally convicted of complicity in genocide, which means that the ECtHR simultaneously recognised that the repression of the Soviet Union against the partisans as a significant part of the national group could be considered genocide.<sup>98</sup>

The minister also noted that “the international public opinion has not yet prevailed that Soviet repression, unlike Nazi repression, was equal to genocide. This decision should change the situation”<sup>99</sup>.

Undoubtedly, such an approach should be applied to the Stalinist genocidal repressions in Ukraine. During the second occupation of Western Ukraine, the Red Empire acted here even more brutally than in 1939–1941. In the absence of support from the vast majority of the population, the Soviet government could rely only on a handful of local collaborators and functionaries brought from the East. Actually, this was the main threat from OUN-UPA, which for a long time made it impossible for the Stalinist government to establish itself in the western Ukrainian territories.

Ukraine’s war against Stalin is impressive for its scale, duration, uncompromisingness and sacrifice on the part of the insurgents. In general, Western Ukraine paid a high price for its desire for freedom: from 1944 to 1952, almost half a million people were repressed here (more than 134 000 were arrested, more than 153 000 were killed, and more than 203 000 people were deported for life outside Ukraine)<sup>100</sup>. All this destroys the Soviet myths about the locality, sporadicity and limitation of “thuggish actions of bourgeois nationalists”, their isolation from their people. Without mass support from the population such a struggle would be impossible. Several hundred thousand people passed through the ranks of the UPA and hundreds of thousands of their family members were in one way or another involved in this struggle and also became victims of Stalinist repressions. This formed the tragic and heroic historical memory of anti-Stalin struggle, which despite all the efforts of the empire was never destroyed. On the contrary, it turned into a real national symbol, a fertile ground for nurturing Ukrainian idea of independence. And currently, this historical memory helps to beat the same enemy during the Russian–Ukrainian war.

<sup>98</sup> Lithuania: The ECtHR confirmed the recognition of Soviet crimes as genocide, [online], see: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2019/03/15/7093998/>

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Lavrentiy Beria, 1953. *Stenogramma iyul'skoho Plenuma TsK KPSS i druhie dokumenty*, ed. A. Yakovleva, comp. V. Naumov, Yu. Sihachev, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratiya”, 1999, p. 47.

Vladyslav Hryvevyč

**Stalino imperijos kova su Ukrainos sukilėlių judėjimu paskutiniajame Antrojo pasaulinio karo etape (1944–1945): Raudonosios armijos vaidmuo**

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje, remiantis gausybe archyvinių dokumentų, analizuojama karinė priešprieša tarp Stalino imperijos ir Ukrainos sukilėlių judėjimo Vakarų Ukrainoje. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas Raudonosios armijos vaidmeniui, kuri, be bendrų su NKVD karinių ir baudžiamųjų operacijų, pati griebėsi kovos prieš sukilėlius karinių operacijų organizavimo, o taip pat aktyviai dalyvavo tokiose akcijose, nukreiptose sunaikinti Ukrainos sukilėlių armiją (UPA) ir Ukrainos nacionalistų organizacijos (OUN) pagrindį, kaip antai vietinių gyventojų trėmimas ir jų perkėlimas nuo fronto linijos, karinės mobilizacijos, represijos prieš USA šeimas ir kt. Autorius daro išvadą, kad Raudonosios imperijos karas prieš Ukrainos nacionalinį išsivadavimo judėjimą į savo negailestingas gimas įtraukė nemažą civilių gyventojų skaičių, dėl ko šis karas tapo barbariškas ir jis tiek savo prigimtimi, tiek pražūtingomis pasekmėmis gali būti laikomas Ukrainos tautos genocidiniu naikinimu.

**REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** Antrasis pasaulinis karas, Vakarų Ukraina, Ukrainos sukilėlių armija, UPA, NKVD, genocidas

Владислав Гриневич

**Сталінська імперія у боротьбі з українським повстанським рухом на завершальному етапі Другої світової війни (1944–1945 рр.): Роль Червоної армії**

РЕЗЮМЕ

У статті на основі широкого масиву архівних документів аналізується військове протистояння між сталінською імперією та українським повстанським рухом у Західній Україні. Особлива увага при цьому приділяється ролі Червоної армії, яка крім спільних з НКВС військово-каральних операцій, сама вдавалася до організації антиповстанських військових заходів, а також брала активну участь у таких спрямованих на нищення Української повстанської армії (УПА) та підпілля Організації українських націоналістів (ОУН) заходів, як депортації та відселення місцевого населення з прифронтової смуги, військові мобілізації, репресії проти сімей упівців тощо. Автор висновує, що війна Червоної імперії проти українського національно-визвольного руху затягнула на свої безжальні жорна значні маси цивільного населення, що призвело до її варваризації, а сама ця війна яка за своїм характером, так і нищівних наслідків може розглядатися як геноцидне винищення українського народу

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** друга світова війна, Західна Україна, УПА, Червона армія, НКВС, геноцидне винищення