

POWs of World War I in the Kazan Province

Ralif R. Gizzatov*

Kazan Federal University, Russia

Askar A. Gatin

Kazan Federal University, Russia

Dina A. Mustafina

Kazan Federal University, Russia

Marat S. Gatin

Kazan Federal University, Russia

Lenar F. Abzalov

Kazan Federal University, Russia

Abstract

The relevance of the topic is due to the need to generalize the available material on the history of the First World War from the point of view of the involvement of Kazan province in it. The goal is to study this war as a historical event, accompanied along with death, physical and moral mutilation of people, and the emergence of new social strata in the deep Russian rear: internally displaced persons (refugees) and persons caught in the power of enemy (prisoners of war). The purpose of this paper is dictated by the desire to explore this inevitable consequence of the First World War. We will try to consider the nature and peculiarities of using the labor potential of prisoners of war from the countries participating in the Triple Alliance, in the Kazan province in 1914-1917. The leading method to investigate this problem was the system approach and system analysis, which allowed considering people captured in the deep Russian rear as the prisoners, as part of the complex phenomenon of the world war, that was the captivity. By means of general scientific and special-historical methods, the numerical and national composition, peculiarities of accommodation, conditions of detention and the organization of labor of prisoners of war who arrived in Kazan are analyzed. Based on the newly introduced archival materials, the reasons for the difficulties encountered with the placement of prisoners of war, the number and the employment of prisoners were clarified. It is concluded that there is a noticeable difference between the order and working conditions of prisoners of war in different counties of the province, in the countryside and in cities; and also on the absence of intentional violation of the rights of prisoners of war.

Keywords: POWs; World war; Kazan province; Austro-hungarian.



CC BY: [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

1. Introduction

The urgency of the problem is due to its poor development within the territorial framework of the Kazan province and the incorrectness of the transition to a comprehensive reconstruction of the phenomenon of military captivity in Russia without local research, and the practical sounding of the theme of captivity as a phenomenon engendered by the war and having a continuation in our days. Appeal to it is legitimate in order to educate by history, especially by recreating the objective picture of this phenomenon which is difficult for analysis. In recent years, domestic and foreign historiography has seen a surge in scientific interest in the problem of captivity during the First World War (Egger, 2005). The documents reflecting the socio-economic and political situation of the prisoners of the First World War, located in the Kazan province, revealed by us in the National Archives of the Republic of Tatarstan (NA RT), served as the basis for determining the purpose of this study. Without claiming for completeness of the coverage of this problem in this paper, we will try to find out the number and characteristics of the employment of prisoners of war in the Kazan province in 1914-1917. To achieve the goal, it is necessary to solve a number of tasks: 1) to find out whether the requirements of international law on the conditions of internees were observed; 2) to highlight the peculiarities of employment of the prisoners of war g (Gabdrafikova, 2017; Surzhikova, 2014).

2. Methodology

In studying these aspects of the topic, we sought to maximize the combination of general scientific and special-historical methods on the basis of universally recognized principles of historicism and objectivity. The historicism principle requires a researcher to examine phenomena and processes in development from the time they have been arisen, taking into account the influence of various circumstances on them in the concrete historical situation. The

*Corresponding Author

leading method for studying the problem was the system approach and system analysis. Based on the principle of the context, they allowed us to consider the situation of those interned in the deep Russian rear as a part of that complex phenomenon of the world war, which was the military captivity (Grabar, 2010).

3. Results and Discussion

Experts estimated that during the entire period of the First World War, about 13% of soldiers and officers were captured from both sides - about every seventh to eighth. In the captivity of the Central Powers, there were a total of more than 4 million people, among the Entente countries - 3.5 million. In the conditions of military turmoil, the influx of large numbers of prisoners, the language barrier, the lack of translators, the need for rapid distribution of large masses of people and the multistage process of their deployment and final dislocation, recording and registering the movement of captive people was difficult. Hence there are discrepancies between the information collected by the General Directorate of the General Staff, the Central Information Bureau, the Central Board of Prisoners and Refugees. The relatively small number of Germans among the prisoners is explained by the results of the propaganda carried out in the German troops that they had to die rather than surrender (Surzhikova, 2011). The majority of prisoners of war were soldiers and officers of the Austro-Hungarian army. The reason is seen in the absence of a bond and a single idea, and a necessary moral spirit capable of uniting a multinational army (Grekov, 1997; Nikolaev, 2018).

Kazan became a milestone point for the distribution of captured officers and soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian army. During the years of the First World War, about 40 thousand prisoners of war passed through the city, of which almost 16% were quartered in the Kazan province. The first echelon with the prisoners arrived in Kazan on July 28, 1914, and on August 10, 1914, 908 captured soldiers appeared. The railway branch connecting Kazan with Moscow was a dead-end, therefore the first consignments delivered to Kazan were partially transported to the cities of the province. By January 1, 1916, there were 266,033 prisoners of war in the military district of Kazan, of which 170,820 were involved in the performance of work. Out of 95,213 people, 3990 were officers, and among the remaining people, 91,223 were presumably wounded and sick. In the cities of the province there were 8,855 prisoners, including 474 officers. By the end of 1916, a large group of prisoners of war from the Troitsky camp arrived in Kazan. By September 1, 1917, in the Kazan region, there were 285,376 prisoners of war, i.e. the increase for 8 months was 19,343 people. Counting the number of prisoners of war, who were in the province after October, 1917 is extremely difficult (Garafutdinov, 1967).

The appearance of prisoners in the region caused a set of problems: 1) the insufficiency of special premises for dwelling of a constantly multiplying number of prisoners of war; 2) difficulties in organizing constant control over prisoners dispersed at different points; 3) violations in the organization of the allowance of prisoners of war during their transportation through the territory of the district; 4) disregard by the commanding officers of medical examinations of prisoners sent outside the district; 5) the need to treat ill and isolate infectious patients; 6) employment of prisoners of war, their refusal to work and runaways; 7) violation of the prohibition to officers to have batmen, etc (Gergileva, 2006; Sadykova *et al.*, 2018).

An analysis of the solution by the military and civil authorities of the problems that have arisen makes it possible to conclude that they were striving, based on objective opportunities, to observe basic international legal norms for prisoners of war. The provincial authorities were not ready to receive such a large number of prisoners of war. In Kazan, two camps were organized: 1) Hungarians, Germans, Austrians and Italians from the Austro-Hungarian army have been stationed in the warehouses of Alafusov factories and works; 2) Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Crimean Tatars from the Turkish army were placed in the wooden barrack of O. Petzold's breweries on the territory of Pletenskaya Sloboda. Then prisoners of war were placed in military barracks, in poorly adapted premises, in hastily hammered barracks of newly established camps, in abandoned monasteries, in various kinds of buildings (barracks) at factories, in school premises during the summer holidays, in apartments of ordinary people, at private farmsteads, in dugouts. They also began to be sent to camps in Chistopol, Tetyushy, Cheboksary, Bugulma, Buinsk, Yelabuga, Mamadysh, Laishevo, and Tsarevokokshaisk. The difficulties with the deployment of prisoners of war were aggravated by two factors: 1) the arrival in Kazan in the summer of 1915 of 57 thousand refugees; 2) the concentration in the cities of the province of soldiers from reserve units before sending to active service. Sometimes the same barracks served for soldiers of the Russian army and prisoners of war successively. An attempt by the commander of the district to stop the sending of new prisoners of war did not have an effect, the influx of prisoners of war nullified all efforts of the authorities: the barracks for the prisoners there still lacked. In addition, the camps in the Kazan province were not the main place of stay for prisoners of war; they were more likely to serve as transit centers and labor exchanges (Guryanova, 2014; Lyukshin, 2002).

In the current situation, it was difficult to supervise the dispersed prisoners, and to observe sanitary standards in places of mass congestion. As a result, civil authorities were dissatisfied with military commanders who did not exercise proper supervision over the prisoners, and those are dissatisfied with the actions and measures taken by the civil authorities to organize the detention of prisoners. Penalties have been imposed on the perpetrators for clear violations, if it was possible to prevent them. Unsatisfactory conditions of detention of prisoners of war, naturally, did not have the best effect on the recovery of the wounded and the physical condition of the rest. Unusual and severe climate, infectious diseases, mass epidemics caused high mortality among prisoners of war. However, the state of affairs was not the same in all locations for prisoners of war. The command of the district reasonably believed that prisoners do not feel the inevitable constraints that they should feel as prisoners of war by virtue of their position. At the same time, there was no obvious intent and desire to keep prisoners of war in conditions far from the requirements of international norms (Kutyavina and Mankovsky, 2016).

The most vivid violation of the principles of the Hague Convention manifested itself in the employment of prisoners of war, although the involvement of prisoners of war to light works, except for military production was permitted. The desirability of forcibly employing prisoners without payment, with the provision of only an official government ration, was noted in the rescript of Nicholas II dated August 20, 1914, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Council of Ministers immediately requested information from the governors about the need for free hands. According to the adopted on 7 (20) October, 1914 the Regulations on Prisoners of War and the Rules on the Procedure for Granting Prisoners of Peoples for Official and Public Works, administering of all cases of prisoners of war was entrusted to the military department, the camp regime of detention was prescribed, and the mandatory involvement of prisoners of war to work without remuneration was introduced. However, the maintenance regime remained mild and liberal: captured officers-Slavs were not involved in productive labor; Sunday walks were preserved for soldiers (Rokina, 2015; Semenov and Yagudin, 2005). All this deviated from the principles of the 1907 convention, but was maintained to promote the liberation character of the war. Prisoners of war received 50 rubles of salary (with an average worker's salary of 25-60 rubles. On March 8 (21), 1915, the departments were given the right to give prisoners of war money for cash reward. The job placement was carried out at the request of interested institutions and societies in the Ministry of War. In fact, the administering over prisoners was transferred to local authorities, and the departments that used their labor, provided financing for delivery, supplies and protection (Nachtigal, 2005).

Since February 1915, prisoners of war (by February 20, 1917, 1,174 people, and 2,218 people in the districts) began to be involved in work at large industrial facilities, the construction of barracks, the construction of a pier, expansion of the embankment (dam), the layout of the empty urban land, pasture of cattle, work at an electric power station and a gas plant, in a bakery, at municipal, wood and meadow wagon trains, a workers squad, and military barracks (33, p. 19; 34). The work of prisoners was used in the works carried out by the municipal and zemsky councils: in the construction of a water pipe, the cleaning of territories (Mamadysh), in forest works, in landlord farms and sometimes in farms of well-to-do peasants. From March 1915 to January 1917, the percentage of prisoners engaged in agricultural work in the province was more than 10 thousand (10-15% of their total number), and reached 70% in the district, together with those engaged in forest work. A third of their earnings were spent by the executive council on their supplies and meal, which did not differ from that of local agricultural workers. The work of prisoners of war was also used on works not allowed by international law on war. Thus, at the beginning of 1916, 2,518 people worked at the construction of the railway that connected Kazan with Yekaterinburg, including 200 Germans, 2108 Austrians, 159 Slavs, 42 Romanians and 9 soldiers of the Turkish army. In combination with poor living conditions, excessive labor led to the development of various diseases and death, to refusal to perform work and escapes (Nagornaya, 2010).

4. Summary

In the province of Kazan, there were placed prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army, as well as small groups of soldiers from the Turkish army. The number of prisoners was much higher than the limit of their placement. Their living conditions often did not differ from the conditions of the standing of Russian troops and were not universally unsatisfactory. As the war prolonged and economic hardship increased, the outflow of the able-bodied male population to the front began to be filled by prisoners of war forcibly attracted to productive labor. Areas of employment, the order and working conditions of prisoners of war in different counties of the province, in the countryside and in the city were different. The requirements of the Hague Convention were often not respected: there was a use of their labor in banned defense production, at the construction of railways and buildings. But it is unjustifiable to assess these violations as unequivocally negative actions (Shcherov, 2000).

5. Conclusions

The situation of prisoners of war who found themselves in the province of Kazan, since the autumn of 1914 to the revolutionary events of February 1917 as a whole was satisfactory. It fully corresponded to their unfree, but formally respected belligerent status, protecting the prisoners from intentional and overt violation of human rights.

Acknowledgments

The work is carried out according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

- Egger, M. (2005). *The relief measures of the austro-hungarian or austrian government for the austro-hungarian POWs in Russia and Italy 1914-22. A research report, military and civil war experiences 1914-1918.* Ed. G. Barth-Scalmani. University publisher Wagner: Innsbruck. 79-112.
- Gabdrifikova, L. R. (2017). We could not understand why our masters suddenly fled, Prisoners of war in the territory of the Kazan province in 1917. *Echoes of the ages, Gasyrlar avazy.* ½.,
- Garafutdinov, R. A. (1967). *The food crisis in the Kazan province on the eve of the February Revolution of 1917. Collection of post-graduate works.* Kazan. 15-32.
- Gergileva, A. (2006). Prisoners of war of the first world War in the territory of Siberia, the Author's abstract of the thesis for a Candidate degree of historical sciences: 07.00.02. Krasnoyarsk.
- Grabar, V. E. (2010). Materials for the history of the international law literature in Russia. *Zertsalo:*

- Grekov, N. V. (1997). *German and Austrian prisoners in Siberia (1914-1917). Digest of papers.* Omsk, Siberia. Germans. Russia. 154-80.
- Guryanova, S. I. (2014). Organization of medical assistance to prisoners of war of the Central Bloc in Vyatka province in 1914-191. *Military-Historical Journal*, 5: 52-56.
- Kutyavina, M. N. and Mankovsky, I. Y. (2016). The legal status of pows on the territory of the russian state during the first world war. *Science and Modernity*, 3(154):
- Lyukshin, A. (2002). Yeah, they dangle after our women, Prisoners of war in peasant Russia. *Rodina*.
- Nachtigal, R. (2005). *Prisoner of war on the eastern Front 1914-1918, Literature report on a new field of research.* Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main.
- Nagornaya, O. S. (2010). Another military experience. Russian prisoners of war in Germany during the First World War (1914-1922). *M New chronograph*. 440.
- Nikolaev, V. E. (2018). Copyright protection for music, Russian-German ties in the second half of the XIXth-early XX centuries. *Astra Salvensis*.
- Rokina, G. V. (2015). Foreign prisoners of the first world war in the mari region. *Humanitarian and Legal Research*, 1: 72-75.
- Sadykova, R., Turlybekov, B., Kanseitova, U. and Tulebayeva, K. (2018). Analysis of research on foreign language translations of the epos the path of abay. *Opción*, 34(85).
- Semenov, V. G. and Yagudin, I. R. (2005). *Prisoners of war on the territory of the Kazan military district and Orenburg province at the initial stage of the First World War (according to the orders from the Kazan military district for 1914-1915). The Eurasian Necklace. Almanac of the Public historical institute of the peoples of Orenburg region named after Musa Jalil.* OGPU Publishing House: Orenburg. 6: 90-110.
- Shcherov, I. P. (2000). *Tsentroplenbez in Russia, the history of creation and activity in 1918-1922.* The State Pedagogical University: Smolensk.
- Surzhikova, N. V. (2011). Prisoners of war in the bogoslovsky mountain district, Statistics and economics, bulletin of the Ural State University. Series 2. *The humanities*, 3(93): 110-29.
- Surzhikova, N. V. (2014). *Military captivity in the Russian province Political Encyclopedia (1914-1922).* Moscow.