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Source: *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1/2 (June 1999), pp. 73-84

Published by: [Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036769>

Accessed: 14-04-2015 01:50 UTC

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Cooperation between the German Military of the Weimar Republic and the Ukrainian Military Organization, 1923–1928

ANDRII BOLIANOVSKYI

Germany played an important role in the history of the Ukrainian movement for independence in the early twentieth century. For example, Germany influenced the events of 1917–1918 during which it supported the government of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi. Germany's defeat in World War I reduced but did not end its interest in Ukrainian nationalism. This study of cooperation between the German military and the Ukrainian Military Organization (Ukrains'ka Viis'kova Orhanizatsiia, UVO), an underground organization founded in 1920 to continue the struggle for Ukrainian independence, shows how the German Ministry of Defense of the Weimar Republic—the Reichswehrministerium (RWM)—and its division of espionage and counter-espionage, the Abwehr-Abteilung (AA), maintained an almost singular interest among German institutions in the cause of Ukrainian national liberation.

Germany under the Weimar Republic—which was proclaimed in 1919 following the defeat of the Central powers—experienced economic recovery after 1923 thanks in part to foreign loans. In the military sphere, however, the Treaty of Versailles stipulated that Germany's security affairs were to be closely supervised by the Allied powers (Great Britain, France, and the United States). For example, until 1927 the German Ministry of Defense could not have a separate espionage division. Although it could conduct counterespionage within Germany, it was permitted to do so only against the representatives of those countries which were not part of the Allied bloc in World War I.

The Weimar Republic, however, in many instances acted in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Rapallo, concluded between Germany and Soviet Russia in April 1922, is a case in point. Leading to military cooperation between the two parties, the agreement thus directly contravened the Versailles accord. However, such collaboration was consistent with the sentiments of members of the RWM and the AA. These military officials advocated the development of close ties with Moscow to the detriment of Poland. Poland had gained its independence in 1918 after the collapse of Austria-Hungary, but the new Polish state included former German territory, the loss of which some German military officials could not accept. These officials thus aspired to exert pressure on Poland and weaken its power, reasoning that if Poland could be destabilized from within, it would be made vulnerable to intervention from the

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outside. At an opportune moment, the German army could strike against Poland and regain lost land.

It was in this context that the German officials welcomed the activities of the UVO. Many of its members were veterans of the Ukrainian-Polish war in Galicia of 1918–1919, and UVO activities in the early 1920s were largely directed against the Polish state. The UVO proved to be a useful leverage for Germany, which financially backed UVO sabotage operations against Poland when they were considered beneficial, but withdrew the support in moments of accord with Poland. German military officers hoped to artificially aggravate Ukrainian-Polish relations in the event of war by use of propaganda (sowing the seeds of mistrust between the two groups) and by generally creating antagonism between Poland's national minorities and the Polish government. However, the destabilization that ultimately ensued did not depend solely on German efforts: the Polish state with its own actions alienated itself from Ukrainians, who accounted for approximately 15 percent of the population of Poland. Moreover, even without German assistance or sanction, UVO members at their leaders' behest would still have destroyed communications, telegraph connections, and bridges, and would have committed other acts of sabotage or created other diversions.

Soon after its formation in 1920, the UVO made preparations for an uprising against Polish rule in western Ukraine. Already in 1921, its Executive Command showed a readiness to coordinate their actions with German military officials in order to obtain the maximum possible benefit for the UVO.¹ In a letter to the UVO leadership in western Ukraine dated 17 February 1921, Ievhen Konovalets', who would later take charge of the organization, wrote that Germany was calling for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles "at all costs and under all conditions" and was thus "maintaining ties with everyone, including Ukrainians." UVO readiness remained throughout the year, even though it carried out no actual steps for the establishment of ties with German officials at a time when such contacts were maintained by others, especially Skoropads'kyi and Ievhen Petrushevych, the president of the former Western Ukrainian National Republic who led its government-in-exile in Vienna. In a letter to Petrushevych dated 5 April 1922, Iaroslav Chyzh, a member of the UVO leadership based in Prague, underscored that "[The UVO] prepare for the expedient use of relations with the Germans."² Subsequently, Konovalets', who since July 1921 was commander of the UVO, endeavored to take advantage of RWM acceptance and support. He believed that UVO-RWM interaction would steadily increase German military interest in Ukrainian affairs and the German Ministry of Defense in turn could eventually incline other German ministries toward the "Ukrainian question." Beyond this, Konovalets' also wanted to exploit the ties with the RWM as a means of strengthening the UVO organizationally. The former captain of the Ukrainian Galician Army, Rikhard (Riko) Jary, also known by his aliases "Iaryha-Rymart" and "Karpát," became the liaison between Konovalets' and the RWM.

In November 1918, shortly after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jary, hitherto a captain in the Austrian army, along with other officers switched to serving (in his case, again as captain) in the Ukrainian Galician Army, the regular armed forces of the Western Ukrainian National Republic. After the termination of the Ukrainian-Polish War in Galicia toward the end of 1919, he was interned together with other Ukrainian officers in Czechoslovakia. Here he came into contact with his former brothers-in-arms who had united with the UVO, and declared his readiness to assist in the Ukrainian national liberation movement. Due to the fact that Jary had many acquaintances among the Austrian and German officers from his student days in the Austrian military academy, he was not required to personally perform any special tasks, but only to renew contacts with the Austrian and German officers. In so doing, he established contacts with German conservatives, specifically the leading activists of the National Union (*Heimatsbund*).³ Characteristically, people who knew Jary—notwithstanding their personal attitude towards him—acknowledged his immense talents and foresight. The UVO (and later the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) activist Zynovii Knysch characterized Jary thus: “A capable and clever person, Jary splendidly understood the German psyche, its good and bad sides, and skillfully played on it.”⁴ Jary indeed was hardworking, pragmatic, and skilled in resolving technical issues and in executing orders, and he quickly demonstrated his inexpensibility in developing these contacts for the UVO. He also knew how to receive support for his initiatives from *Konovalets*. The prevailing complex conditions, along with the military sphere of activity of the UVO, assisted Jary in solidifying an influential position for himself in the organizational apparatus.

The hastening of contacts between the UVO and the RWN was precipitated by the Entente resolution of 14 March 1923, which granted Poland sovereignty over Galicia. Following from Jary's earlier efforts, in May 1923 *Konovalets* concluded a written agreement with the chief of the AA RWM, Friedrich Gemp, upon which the UVO became involved in espionage activities.⁵ The espionage information received by the UVO cells was transformed into exchange material for assistance, arms, explosive devices, and anything else required for the development of comprehensive revolutionary actions. Espionage also was used as a source for obtaining funds, which the UVO could then use to make purchases for the organization. The leadership of the UVO decided to pass on certain information from the UVO affiliates and cells—gathered in preparation for an armed conflict against Polish rule in western Ukraine—to the espionage service of the Reichswehr. They expected that the funds received for the transfer of political, military, and economic data would afford the Ukrainians the opportunity in the future to become partners with interested foreign countries, especially Germany, and that such partnership might provide prospects for the UVO to assume the leadership of any revolt that occurred in western Ukraine. In 1925, the UVO established direct contact with the German espionage and counterespionage division in Berlin, especially the First Com-

mand of the AA RWM and the division “for war preparations with the assistance of ethnic minorities.” Captain Voss, who developed secret plans in the event of a possible war with Poland, headed the latter division from 1926. His secretive activities contravened the official external policies of the Weimar Republic. They were hidden from the public and retained in strict secrecy not only from the world, but also from other German government institutions. As a result, each month during 1924–1927, the UVO received from the AA RWM a subsidy of 9,000 deutschmarks. Among the results of the agreement between the two countries, was the guarantee that members of the UVO’s military wing would receive German revolvers manufactured by the firms Deutsche-Werke, Werk Erfurt, and Ortiges-Patent, which could not be purchased in Poland.⁶ With this agreement secured, the UVO did not renounce sabotage and diversionary actions. Indeed, such actions were considered essential, not least for spreading propaganda about the Ukrainian revolutionary movement and drawing attention to it in Germany and in European countries, in order to positively change their attitudes toward the Ukrainian question.

The Executive Command of the UVO was based first in Lviv and later in Vienna, but with the decline of the influence of the pro-Entente group and the corresponding strengthening of the faction pressing for closer ties with the RWM, it eventually moved to Germany. As early as 1924, from his base in Berlin, Konovalets’ created an UVO network that spread across western Ukraine.⁷ The National Executive (*Kraieva Eksekutyva*) of the UVO in western Ukraine, which was under the command of Konovalets’, at that time consisted of two divisions. Andrii Mel’nyk, who was accountable to Konovalets’, led the military division. The espionage division was under the control of the former captain of the Ukrainian Galician Army, Osyp Dumin, who was subordinate to both Konovalets’ and Mel’nyk. The courier between the espionage division and the National Executive of the UVO in western Ukraine was Maria Dudrykivna, who periodically traveled to Berlin to receive orders for organization matters.⁸ Finally, from 1926 the UVO Executive Command settled in Berlin for a period of time. From here, the leadership planned the basic operations of the UVO and developed a general operational command for its affiliates in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Latvia, and, eventually, in the United States and Canada. In the beginning of 1924, the main headquarters of the military office of the UVO moved to the Berlin suburb of Schöneberg; the propaganda division was centered at 83 Kurfürstenstrasse; the military division, known to trusted individuals as the “office of Fedir Konovalets’,” was located at 30 West-Pariserstrasse. The UVO leadership in Berlin, besides Konovalets’, comprised Corporal Ivan Il’nyts’kyi, Captain Mykhailo Matchak, Major Vasyl’ Kuchabs’kyi; in Königsberg resided Captains Jary and Dumin, and Petro Hardaiko.

Already from the first years of work in the UVO, Jary and other activists in the organization displayed differences, which were clearly manifested in the conflict surrounding the aforementioned leader of the UVO espionage division,

Dumin, who gained notoriety over the so-called “espionage affair” of 1924.⁹ Personal competition between Jary and Dumin served as the cause of the conflict between them: Jary had learned that Petrushevych wanted to endow Dumin with the same ties to the Reichswehr from his government-in-exile that Jary had gained as an UVO representative. Dumin was eventually forced to leave Berlin and moved to East Prussia, where he lived for some time in Königsberg. The Union of Ukrainian Officers also played an important role in UVO propaganda activities within the Weimar Republic in the German capital. Its building at 11 Hauptstrasse in Berlin was transformed into the organization’s headquarters. It was precisely in this building that the UVO mouthpiece *Surma* and other propaganda brochures were published by Mykola Koval’, Mykhailo Zaryts’kyi, Mykola Mirchuk, Nazar Zalozhets’kyi, and Mykola Doroshenko. Ukrainian student groups in western Ukraine openly disseminated UVO materials published in Germany.¹⁰

The port city of Danzig (Gdańsk) served as an important transit point in the ties between the German military and the UVO in western Ukraine. From 1927, a special unit of the National Executive of the UVO in western Ukraine operated in Danzig and was headed by Andrii Feduna, a graduate of a Przemyśl (Peremyshl) gymnasium, who studied at the local technical school.¹¹ Initially, the UVO National Executive in western Ukraine received arms, ammunition, and money from Germany only through Danzig, transported illegally by couriers from this Free City—over which Poland had been given charge of foreign policy, commerce, and customs, but where the legislative assembly was of German composition.¹² The local Ukrainian student union Zarevo played an important intermediary role in the transport of literature into western Ukraine. Despite the fact that it had only nine members and was the weakest of the Ukrainian organizations in this city, it had a special status. The most active UVO members in Danzig belonged to Zarevo. Upon completion of their studies, these members returned to western Ukraine and there occupied leadership positions in the UVO.¹³ Instructions for the Volhynian branch were transmitted by the UVO Executive Command from Berlin using couriers, who traveled through Gdynia, a second port built by Poland 16 kilometers to the north of Danzig, and Białystok.¹⁴

In the framework of military cooperation with the UVO, the Königsberg division of the RWM organized several military training sessions for members of this organization. On 1 May 1924, as a result of Jary’s efforts, three-month military courses were initiated for UVO members in East Prussia. In the first such course there were 56 participants, mainly tourists or emigrants from western Ukraine. Subsidized by the RWM, the officers received 50 deutschmarks and non-officers 25 deutschmarks, along with monthly board.¹⁵ Proportionally to the expansion and intensification of the ties between the RWM and the UVO in 1925–1928, the number of these courses increased at the beginning of 1925. For example, in the Berlin district of Schöneberg a course was held for former Ukrainian officers.¹⁶ In the fall of 1928, 200 UVO

members, the majority of whom came from western Ukraine, enrolled in a training course organized in Germany.¹⁷ Similar courses found endorsement and acclaim even in UVO programmatic publications. For example, in 1929 the UVO propaganda publishing division printed 10,000 copies of a brochure, which declared that:

[Any] enslaved nation, which steps forth into an armed conflict with the nation's enemy, should organize not only on the fatherland's soil partisan divisions and improvisational armies, but should strive to create army divisions on the territory of neighboring countries which have a supportive attitude to the liberation activities.¹⁸

From the standpoint of military matériel, cooperation with German military institutions was undoubtedly beneficial to the UVO, and the precedents of similar cooperation can be found in the histories of many other national-liberation movements (for example, Croatia). It appears that on the one hand, the approach of obtaining espionage materials for profit following a period of inertia may have tempted the UVO to push their main aims into the background, while expanding the apparatus of espionage and neglecting other divisions and priorities. Thus, by concentrating the activities of the organization in a narrow sphere, the UVO plan of a multidirectional evolution would have undoubtedly been jeopardized. Moreover, the UVO would have been prone to dependence on external forces, which, with the passage of time and through manipulation, would have dictated its direction. On the other hand, it is clear that an important consideration for the UVO was the possibility of facing the condemnation of its activities by other Ukrainian organizations. Such condemnation could only lessen the UVO's popularity. Yet the support of the community was required for a broad promotion of its message; otherwise, it would have been difficult to silence the critics who accused the UVO of conducting activities for the benefit of foreign intelligence services.

In the end, taking such considerations into account, the strategy of sharing information gathered through espionage with German intelligence agents was abandoned. According to the UVO activist Volodymyr Martynets', the active espionage conducted by the organization lasted altogether for only about a year and a half. Not wanting to be oriented toward Germany alone, Konovalets' at the same time secured ties with government representatives of other European countries. In 1925, for example, he established contacts with Latvian government officials. The interaction proved very fruitful. According to Martynets', "concrete, quite substantial assistance, even though limited by the capacity of small Latvia" was obtained.¹⁹

From the mid-1920s, the practical gathering of information by the UVO affiliates stumbled into serious Polish military counterespionage activities and culminated in a wave of arrests and imprisonment of UVO participants and leading activists. In each of the Polish provincial administrations in western Ukraine, this was done by the Polish Defence Organs—the Social-Political

Divisions (Wydziały społeczno-polityczne), which from 1925 until 1934 were renamed the Divisions of Public Security (Wydziały bezpieczeństwa publicznego) and officially were the political divisions of Polish state security and public order.

As a result of the Polish actions, on 25 March 1924 the regional disciplinary court in Lviv convicted the following individuals on charges of spying for the benefit of Germany: Andrii Meľnyk (sentenced to 4 years of imprisonment), Vasyľ Kovalenko (3 years), Ievhen Zyblykevych (3 years), Bohdan Zelenyi (2 years and 6 months), Teodor Vorobets' (2 years and 6 months), Mykola Bilians'kyi (2 years), Mykhailo Hak (2 years), and Iryna Vakhnianyn (1 year and 3 months).²⁰ In 1924, maintaining the same accusation by the Polish police, a case was instigated against Ol'ha Basarab. In January 1926, a ram-bunctious trial was conducted against Volodymyra Pipchyn'ska and other UVO members in Cracow, and in 1927 another trial commenced in Lviv against Vasyľ Atamanchuk and others.²¹

In the course of interrogations, Basarab was killed in captivity in February 1924. Her death prompted a protest by Ukrainian Sejm deputies to the Polish government, but it fell on deaf ears.²² In fact, the Polish police were instructed to act on long-range plans, and on 21 July 1926 a new wave of arrests of UVO members was made. The result of this action was the confirmation that there existed espionage divisions of the organization in Cracow, with affiliates that functioned in Warsaw, Katowice, Przemyśl, Lviv, Ternopil, Stanyslaviv, Poznan, and Iavoriv near Lviv. In total, 70 people were arrested on that day, most of whom were found in possession of incriminating evidence. Among the arrested were 2 Poles, 2 Jews, and 66 Ukrainians. Of this number, 90 percent were representatives of the civilian intelligentsia and student youth, and a 21-year-old Ukrainian soldier serving in the Polish army. In Cracow, 10 people were arrested; in Katowice, 1; in Lviv, 6; in Warsaw, 5 (this number includes Roman Shums'kyi, the leader of the center); in Przemyśl, 42. Espionage instructions, airport photographs, cameras, and countless military documents stolen from Polish military institutions were uncovered in the possession of those detained.²³

The arrests in mid-1928 netted almost one hundred UVO members who were incriminated for activities for the benefit of Germany. The loss of their cadres evoked disappointment from the central command of this organization in Berlin and caused an internal conflict. Reaching their peak in the fall of 1928, the arrests evoked disenchantment with the policies of Konovalets', which to a great extent influenced the change in the UVO leadership in Galicia. The members of the UVO National Command in western Ukraine spoke out against making UVO activities dependent on Germany or on any other country. The UVO field command, "Volodivka," proclaimed the following statement in a communiqué of April 1927 that it prepared for organization members:

A military organization cannot politicize itself by orienting itself externally, but must work with its own revolutionary, national forces and thus the new slogan: "Only with our own efforts can we build our own state!"—We must inject this slogan into the bones, blood, and minds of our current generation.²⁴

The split between the UVO Executive Command and the National Command found manifestation in the dissatisfaction with Jary's latest activities. He was accused of financial manipulations; specifically, of using funds from RWM to purchase two villas for himself in the Berlin-Falkensee and Vienna-Glognitz regions. The allegations, however, were nothing more than malicious propaganda directed at Jary to compromise Konovalets' and his leadership of the organization. In reality, Jary was quite financially secure: he received a small Austrian pension for his service in the Austrian army until the end of the First World War, he owned property in Austria, and moreover the UVO covered his travel and organizational expenses.²⁵ The allegations actually strengthened rather than weakened Jary. On Jary's reaction to the accusations, one of Konovalets' closest co-workers, Mykola Stsibors'kyi, later reminisced:

Sensing the vulnerability of his position within the movement, Jary with greater determination strove to solidify it—the whole time creating situations where his participation was mandatory in the solution, and at the same time creating the impression that he was irreplaceable in his position.²⁶

The criticisms directed at Konovalets'—among them, that he did not value the organization's cadres—did not have a proper basis. First of all, in UVO espionage activities, people unsuitable for any other work were often employed—sometimes people who were not even members of the organization. Secondly, in Galicia the former Austrian criminal code continued to function, and from a pragmatic point of view, to be accused of military espionage was advantageous to the extent that it foresaw no more than five years of imprisonment, whereas pseudo anti-governmental activities against Poland led to severe punishment—including even the death penalty. Furthermore, other problems were present. At a time when Bohdan Hnatevych was the UVO national commander, there was a revolution in the Galician organization. The major initiators were Volodymyr Horbovyi, Bohdan Kravtsiv, Mykola Velychkov'skyi, and Ivan Rudakevych. They removed Roman Sushko from the leadership of the UVO national command in Galicia, appointing Horbovyi to temporarily occupy his position. Kravtsiv and Iaroslav Baranov'skyi, the main instigators of the removal of Sushko, were summoned to a revolutionary tribunal of the organization in Berlin. They traveled there in September 1928 by way of Danzig and Marienbad. At the convening of the UVO tribunal, presided by Konovalets' and in the presence of Jary, Martynets', Omelian Senyk, and a certain Hurs'kyi (the leader of the espionage division), Sushko was formally removed from the leadership in Galicia and replaced by Iuliian Holovins'kyi.²⁷

Holovins'kyi did not allow the organization to be stained with activities benefiting foreign intelligence services. He maintained that the work of the

espionage division was unnecessary for organizational means when other tactics such as expropriations served the cause better. Holovinskyi consistently limited the work of the espionage division and oriented it not toward the gathering of information, which would have interested foreign armies, but toward assessing information, of the sort that was required for the organization of actions in the event of an uprising. Neglected, the espionage apparatus continued to function for some time—and there were even a few court cases regarding earlier issues—but the scale of UVO espionage activities narrowed to a minimum.²⁸

In 1928, when Germany was freed from the control of the international commission and was able to freely act in the framework of general military affairs, cooperation with the UVO was deemed unnecessary. The number of territorial divisions within the *Abwehr* was expanded from the 4 that existed from 1921, to 9. Only 4 of the 9 conducted espionage in Poland. Through the division of Polish territory into 4 spheres of activity, it seemed that German intelligence was not at all interested in the Ukrainian lands within Poland. Its main tasks were to uncover and control the subversives near the border, that is, in the western provinces of Poland bordering on Germany. Not one of the aforementioned divisions stretched their activities into western Ukraine, for which there was no separate division. Instead, there was active cooperation established with German ethnic minorities and their organizations, especially with the German League (*Deutschtumbund*) and the National League (*Volksbund*).²⁹

Near the end of 1928, the new minister of the *Reichswehr*, General Wilhelm Groener, gave the chief of the *Abwehr*, Colonel Ferdinand von Bredow, a directive to halt the financing of UVO activities. As some RWM documents attest, this occurred as a result of a recommendation from Skoropadskyi, who was personally acquainted with Groener from the period of the German occupation of Ukraine in 1918. In a memorandum dated 17 November 1933, which touched on the loosening of the contacts between the RWM and the UVO, Captain Voss noted that in 1928 he had terminated the financial support of the UVO “following orders from Minister Groener [and] Colonel von Bredow, [who acted] it seems, not without the influence of Hetman Skoropadskyi.”³⁰ Skoropadskyi felt that the UVO, which generally employed terrorist methods in their actions and acted in competition with the Hetman movement, would provide little benefit in the popularization of the Ukrainian question. He also surmised that as a result of the termination of the financing of UVO activities by the German military, this organization would perforce limit its operations in western Ukraine and gradually lose its supporters, who would then switch their allegiance to the Hetman movement, which in turn would receive German military and other official support. Such a unilateral and abrupt break in cooperation between the RWM and the UVO led to a crisis in relations between them. As a result, cooperation with the German intelligence sector was suspended for almost four years.

In protest against RWM actions and its position towards the UVO, Konovalets' decided to move his center of operations to a neutral country, specifically to Switzerland. After a trip to the United States, he moved to Geneva; by the beginning of 1929 the entire leadership of the organization under him was transferred there. For its part, in 1928–1932 the RWM did not sponsor any further espionage in western Ukraine and in general did not pay any attention to Ukrainians, which was attested to by the UVO members arrested by the Poles. For example, Andrii Danchevskyi, an UVO member who was detained by the Polish criminal police in November 1930, averred that “. . . the UVO is not involved in espionage for the benefit of other countries.”³¹

The strategy now emphasized by the UVO became clearer in the course of 1930 with the campaign it activated of military actions and sabotage against the instruments of Polish rule in western Ukraine. These brought brutal reprisals by the Polish government known as the “pacification” of the Ukrainian population. A new era in Ukrainian-Polish relations began at a turning point in European history.

NOTES

N.B. The Ukrainian archival citations are rendered in the form fond/opys/sprava/pages.

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