

On German Orders. The Volhynian Massacre in Soviet Partisans' Memoirs

Denys SHATALOV

Researcher

“Tkuma” Ukrainian Institute for Holocaust Studies (UA)

sokyrynyk@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is devoted to the analysis of the narrative displayed to the mass Soviet reader of the anti-Polish ethnic cleansing conducted by Ukrainian nationalists in 1943 in Volhynia. The sources used in this paper include the most widely published books of partisan commanders who were active in the region. These texts are examined as sources aimed to shape public opinion about the Ukrainian nationalists after the war. For the Soviet public, the memoirs of Soviet partisans operating in North-West Ukraine in 1943–1944 along with propagandist anti-nationalist literature were the main source of information about the **Volhynian Massacre**. In these books, the stories about the massacre appear, above all, to be a propaganda tool. The comparison of the depictions of the Volhynian Massacre provided by partisan authors with modern scholarly works shows us intentional distortions by the former. It may perhaps seem paradoxical to note that the partisan memoirists, who tended to discredit the Ukrainian nationalists, preferred to blame them only as perpetrators, but not as the initiators of the anti-Polish massacres in Volhynia. The anti-Polish “actions” were described primarily as a direct initiative of German occupational authorities, whereas the detachments of nationalists’ organisations were portrayed as its faithful executors. The memoirists stressed the disinterestedness and unwillingness of ordinary Ukrainian peasants to participate in the massacres and the alienation of its organisers from the broad masses of working people. In this light, the Soviet partisan memoirs give us little help in understanding the Volhynian massacre itself, but serve as an excellent example of Soviet propaganda efforts aimed at modelling representations of the past.

Keywords: The Volhynian Massacre, Ukrainian nationalism, war memoirs, the “Great Patriotic War,” Soviet propaganda, Soviet partisans.

Résumé :

Cet article est consacré à l’analyse de la représentation proposée au lecteur soviétique du nettoyage ethnique anti-polonais réalisé par les nationalistes ukrainiens en 1943 en Volhynie. Les sources utilisées comprennent les livres les plus largement publiés des commandants partisans actifs dans la région. Ces textes sont examinés comme des sources destinées à former l’opinion publique au sujet des nationalistes ukrainiens après la guerre. Pour le public soviétique, les mémoires des partisans soviétiques opérant dans le nord-ouest de l’Ukraine en 1943–1944, ainsi que la littérature antinationaliste de propagande, ont été la principale source d’information sur les **massacres de Volhynie**. Dans les livres analysés ici, les récits de massacres apparaissent avant tout comme un outil de propagande. La comparaison entre les représentations des massacres de Volhynie fournies par ces auteurs et les ouvrages scientifiques modernes éclaire les distorsions intentionnelles des premiers. Il peut sembler paradoxal de constater que les partisans, auteurs de mémoires, qui avaient tendance à discréditer les nationalistes ukrainiens, ont préféré les blâmer uniquement en tant que bourreaux, mais pas en tant qu’initiateurs des massacres anti-polonais en Volhynie. Les « actions » anti-polonaises ont été décrites principalement comme une initiative directe des autorités allemandes d’occupation, tandis que les détachements des organisations nationalistes étaient présentés comme de fidèles exécutants. Les mémoires soulignent le désintérêt et la réticence des paysans ukrainiens ordinaires à participer aux massacres et l’éloignement de leurs organisateurs vis-à-vis des larges masses de travailleurs. Ainsi, les mémoires des partisans soviétiques ne nous aident guère à comprendre les massacres eux-mêmes, mais constituent un excellent exemple des efforts réalisés par la propagande soviétique pour modeler les représentations du passé.

Mots-clés : Massacres de Volhynie, nationalisme ukrainien, mémoires de guerre, « Grande guerre patriotique », propagande soviétique, partisans soviétiques.

On German Orders. The Volhynian Massacre in Soviet Partisans' Memoirs¹

The fight against Ukrainian nationalists (and consequently against the idea of Ukrainian independence) was one of the constant components of propaganda in the Soviet Union during the entire post-war period. Nationalists were usually accused of collaborating with the Nazis, working for “world reaction,” seeking to restore the bourgeois order, murdering Soviet activists and civilians etc.² But, among these actual and fictional deeds of Ukrainian nationalists, the real and biggest crime of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN, hereafter always the branch controlled by Stepan Bandera) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was almost totally neglected in Soviet propaganda —namely the Volhynian Massacre (Portnov 2016).

In the autumn of 1939 Volhynia, the north-west region of Ukraine, which in 1569–1793 and 1920–1939 was part of Polish state, was included in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The German-Soviet war, starting in the summer of 1941, reinforced Polish nationalists' hopes for the restoration of the Polish state in its 1939 borders. At the same time Ukrainian nationalists treated the war as an opportunity for establishing an independent Ukraine. To exclude Polish claims on this region the OUN leaders intended to “relocate” all its Polish inhabitants (16.5% of the whole local population) to Poland. Instead, in the spring of 1943 in German-occupied Volhynia partisans of the UPA controlled by the OUN started ethnic cleansing in Polish villages.

There is no consensus in the historiography defining the causes and nature of the Volhynian events. Some Ukrainian authors prefer to write about the “Volhynian Tragedy.” According to them the massacres were the spontaneous actions of Ukrainian partisans and civilians and an episode of wider confrontation in the Polish-Ukrainian borderland in the war years (Ільющин 2003; В'ятрович 2011). Some Polish authors suggest considering these events as a genocide of civilian Poles by Ukrainians (W. Siemaszko and E. Siemaszko 2008). Western scholars prefer to talk about ethnic cleansing and stress the central role of Ukrainian nationalists as its initiators (McBride 2016; Snyder 2003). Estimates of the number of victims

¹ The author expresses sincere gratitude to Andrii Portnov, Viktoriia Serhiienko and Olha Bello for recommendations, support and preliminary discussion of this text.

² For a tentative bibliography of Soviet publications against Ukrainian nationalists, see: <http://forum.milua.org/viewtopic.php?f=86&t=17619>.

also differ widely; most now claim about 40,000–60,000 civilian Poles killed and a few thousand civilian Ukrainians murdered in revenge actions (Мотика 2013, 276–279).

The Volhynian events have been a frequent research subject in the last three decades. But this topic was almost totally hushed up in the Polish People's Republic and Soviet public space. It is noteworthy that works of the Soviet period are not mentioned at all in the historiographical overview in Ukrainian historian Ihor Il'yushyn's monograph on the Volhynian events. This absence is not even recorded. It seems that for the author the Soviet hushing up of the Volhynian Massacre is a self-evident phenomenon (Ільюшин 2003).

Oleksandr Osipyanyan, dealing with the memory of the Volhynian events, wrote about the “expulsion from the public sphere of any memories of Ukrainian-Polish ethnic cleansing” during the Soviet period and about the “taboo” on such mentions:

The motivation for such a ban is obvious, because Polish and Ukrainian workers built socialism, some in the Polish People's Republic, others in the Ukrainian SSR / USSR. In accordance with the official Soviet ideology, contradictions could exist only between different classes of one nation or between exploiters from different nations. There could be no contradictions between workers of different nations a priori. The brotherly Polish and Ukrainian peoples, along with others who chose the socialist path of development, were moving together towards a bright future (Осипян 2004, 308).

According to Pawel Machcewicz, in the Polish People Republic the topic of Volhynia-43 was blocked as a research subject due to its potential “anti-Sovietism”: Ukrainians building socialism were a brother nation to the socialist Poles, and the former “Kresy,” the eastern lands of the Second Polish Republic, had since 1939 been part of the Ukrainian SSR (Machcewicz 2005, 6). However, as Roman Hryts'kiv noted, we cannot claim there was a complete hushing up. The topic of the Volhynian events was raised by some Polish historians during the socialist period, in particular by Ryszard Torzecki. He saw the reasons for the conflict in the Nazi “divide et impera” policy, the chauvinistic policy of the Ukrainian nationalists and Polish-Ukrainian contradictions in the interwar period (Грицьків 2003, 148–151).

1. The Soviet partisan memoirs: Between memory and ideology

Although the Volhynian Massacre did not become the subject of historical research in the USSR, there were some Soviet publications that dealt with the topic. Ihor Il'yushyn indicated among the sources of his research the memoirs of Soviet partisan commanders, who “devoted a lot of attention to highlighting the issues of the relationship between the Soviet partisans and the local Ukrainians and Poles, as well as the defence of the Poles during the attacks on them by the UPA” (Льюшин 2003, 81).³

It seems that for the Soviet public, these texts —the memoirs of Soviet partisans operating in North-West Ukraine in 1943–1944—, along with propagandist anti-nationalist literature, were the main source of information about ethnic cleansing in Volhynia. In this paper, I intend to look at these memoirs not as sources for studying the situation in Ukraine during World War II, but as sources for shaping public opinion about the deeds of the Ukrainian nationalists after the war and to analyse them from this point of view. This paper is devoted to the analysis of the narrative displayed to the mass Soviet reader of the ethnic cleansing in Volhynia in the memoirs of Soviet partisans. My first goal is to examine the points made in Soviet-period publications, to understand how the authors of these texts managed to explain the Volhynian events to a general readership, especially the sensitive question of how and why Ukrainians —one of the Soviet nations— participated in the killing of Polish peasants (also representatives of the working classes) in Volhynia.

First editions of the memoirs covering “the Great Patriotic War”⁴ were published in the Soviet Union in the 1944–1945. At the end of the 1940s, the memoirs of the famous partisan commanders (Sidor Kovpak, Aleksey Fëdorov, Pëtr Vershigora, Ivan Kozlov, Vasiliy Kozlov and others)⁵ were published. Mass publication of military memoirs began in the late 1950s. This publishing work could be considered as a part of the “Soviet people’s heroic deeds during the Great Patriotic War” myth creation process.

³ The only attempt at studying Soviet literature sources, including partisan memories, concerning the UPA, known to me, is in the form of simply retelling them (Гончарук, Григорий, и Александр Нагайцев. 2004. *Украинская повстанцы в советских литературе и документах 1944–1953 годов*. Одесса: Астропринт).

⁴ The myth about “the Great Patriotic War” held a key position in Soviet Discourse, meaning the German-Soviet War that started on June 22, 1941. In fact, the World War II as a conflict that started on September 1, 1939 and involved the majority of the nations of the globe, was described almost like an event that was happening in parallel to the Great Patriotic War.

⁵ In this paper, the Russian spelling is used for all the names of the memoirists, even of Ukrainian or Belarusian origin, according to the Russian editions of their books. Ukrainian names of people and places are spelled the Ukrainian way.

In the entire range of Soviet war memoirs partisan books may hold the biggest share.⁶

Some of the most famous Soviet partisan commanders started to write their books even before the war with Germany came to an end. The reason why they were so eager to share with the readers their stories about very recent events was simple enough. One of these authors, Mikhail Naumov, the former commander of a partisan cavalry unit, mentioned it:

As early as 1944, according to Khrushchëv's direction⁷ many commanders, political workers and representatives of intelligentsia, after they had finished the partisan war, wrote their memoirs and appended them to the raid reports (Наумов 1953, 386).

The "Great Patriotic War" myth began forming in the war years and these publications occupied a significant place in this process.

The general ideological message to be sent to the readers through partisan memoirs is clear: to show the full involvement of the people in the struggle with the invaders, to demonstrate that the Soviet people in Nazi-occupied territory, except for a small number of traitors, dreamed of the restoration of the Soviet system, and rose up *en masse* against the enemy. At the same time, almost all the memoirists active during the war years in Western Ukraine covered in their texts the Red partisans' struggle against local nationalists. In some of these books the reader also could find detailed references to the Volhynian events.

To analyse the narrative of the Volhynian Massacre provided to Soviet readers my paper uses the most widely published books of partisan commanders who cover the topic. There are the memoirs of David Bakradze *By the Blood of Heroes* [Кровью героев] (two Russian editions in 1956 and 1961 and two Ukrainian in 1959 and 1968), Anton Brinskiy *On the Other Side of the Front* [По ту сторону фронта] (six Russian editions between 1954 and 1966 and one Ukrainian in 1976 (Part1), 1978 (Part 2)), Pëtr Vershigora *People with Clear Conscience* (parts 1–2). *The Carpathian Raid* (parts 3–4) [Люди с чистой совестью; Карпатский рейд] (19 Russian editions between 1947 and 1990 and one Ukrainian in 1974) and *The Raid to the San and the Vistula* [Рейд на Сан и Вислу] (five Russian editions between 1960 and 1990), Terentiy Novak *Few Know the Password* [Пароль знают немногие] (Russian editions in 1966 and 1975), Aleksey Fëdorov *The Underground Obkom Acts* (part 3–4) [Подпольный обком действует] (five

⁶ For more details about war memoirs as specific genre in Soviet Union, see Shatalov 2018.

⁷ In that period Khrushchëv was the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Ukraine.

Russian editions between 1954 and 1985 and three Ukrainian in 1971, 1976 and 1981) and especially *The Last Winter* [Последняя зима] (five Russian editions between 1965 and 1985 and four Ukrainian between 1965 and 1982).

These books (like other Soviet war memoirs) were published and republished by the various all-Union, republican and regional publishing houses. According to my estimates, reeditions of the analysed books were made by 15 publishing houses. Most active among them were Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR (*Voenizdat*), Publishing House of the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (*Molodaya Gvardiya*), and *Sovetskiy Pisatel'* Publishing House. The Political Literature Publishing House of Ukraine (*Politizdat Ukrainy*) published Ukrainian translations of the memoirs as well as their Russian editions. Every edition was printed in number from 45,000 to 150,000 copies.

The analysed memoirs, and first of all those written by Vershigora and Fëdorov, due to the huge number of copies printed were probably available in almost all libraries, including schools. The number of editions and the print-run also show us high reader interest in these texts (but, of course, in the Soviet Union reader demand could only partly affect the publishing process). Also, three feature films based on the Fëdorov and Vershigora books were made —*The Underground Obkom Acts* (four parts, 1978), *In the Forests Near Kovel* (three parts, 1984) [В лесах под Ковелем] and *From the Bug to the Vistula* [От Буга до Вислы] (two parts, 1980). With high public interest in the events of the “Great Patriotic War” these books offered readers stories about the war that were “nonfiction” (presented as stories of eyewitnesses), “authoritative” (their authors were glorified partisan commanders, Heroes of the Soviet Union), and —what is also important and distinguishes them from many other Soviet publications— artistically vivid. For the two first parts of his *People with Clear Conscience*, Pëtr Vershigora was awarded the Stalin prize in prose literature in 1947.

However, it should be borne in mind that excepting Vershigora, these partisan commanders were not professional writers. While reading their books, as well as most other Soviet war memoirs, we should remember that these texts usually had two co-authors. One was a former partisan or military man, whose name was printed on the book cover, and another was a so-called “literary handler,” just briefly mentioned in the publication details. Vladimir Uspenskiy described his own experience of being “literary handler”:

I many times carried out the so-called “literary recording” of memoirs. Or, simply put, I sat down and wrote a book for an “experienced person,” using the documents

he collected, his drafts, and oral stories. [...] With some of the most educated and clever [memoirists] we worked together, and one general turned out to be so illiterate that he could not state in writing either facts or the most elementary thoughts. I had to “depict” everything for him, from beginning to end. Fortunately, the main documents were at hand (Успенский 1993, 5).

First Aleksey Fëdorov's book was written with help from Evgeniy Bosnyatskiy and second —from Evgeniy Shatrov: Anton Brinskiy's literary handler was Boris Pil'nyak and Terentiy Novak's Anatoliy Stas'. In preparation of the Russian translation of Bakradze's memoirs (initially it was published in Georgian) Vershigora participated.

To understand these texts, it is important to note that direct reminiscences (or episodes given as reminiscences) in them are accompanied by large explanatory fragments devoted to a general description of the situation according to the authors in the region during the war years. These inserts did not so much reflect the real memory of past reality, as convey the ideological conjuncture of the text's writing period. Therefore, directly as a source for the history of Ukrainian nationalism the texts of Soviet memoirs can give us little: attacks by nationalists on Polish villages are usually not dated, in most cases names of settlements attacked are not indicated, nationalists are either anonymous, or their biographies in the books are not correlated with known members of nationalist organisations. In this regard, these memoirs are more appropriately to be treated as propaganda texts, whose main purpose was to convince the reader of the deep hostility, but at the same time, of the worthlessness and incapability of all Ukrainian nationalists. Unlike the Germans, they were even portrayed as a somewhat caricatured enemy, weak in the military sphere and completely dependent on the occupants, mere executants of their will. The merging of nationalists and Germans in the narrative of the Soviet authors was also expressed by the term “Ukrainian-German nationalists” (here the memoirists followed the language of the official Soviet antinationalist proclamations) (see as examples Вершигора 1947, 246; Фёдоров 1985, 13, 331).

When being republished, partisan texts could be subject to adjustments related to ideological developments. First of all, the memoirs published in the first decade after the war, which were often overflowing with laudatory mentions of Stalin. In editions printed after 1956, after “destalinisation,” all mentions of Stalin, even in “ideologically neutral” episodes were frequently removed. For example, in the first edition of *The Underground Obkom Acts* by Aleksey Fëdorov “the two big portraits —of Lenin and Stalin” raised by somebody behind the German *oberst* speaking to local peasants were mentioned. Another story concerned the

forester who kept Stalin's portrait during the occupation and brought it to the underground meeting of Communist activists in the fall of 1941 (Фёдоров 1955). In later editions, only Lenin's portrait was mentioned in the first episode and the forester had brought not Stalin's, but Lenin's portrait (Фёдоров 1981, 117–126). In this book other modified or removed episodes could be found, as well as new additions. The same occurred with other Soviet war memoirs. But as far as I was able to track, episodes related to the situation in Volhynia were not excluded;⁸ although as I will show with the example of Fёdorov's text, amendments with ideological implications could be made.

2. The massacre as a German initiative

Soviet partisan units relocated to Volhynia in the spring and summer of 1943, moving there as the frontline shifted west. Here the Red detachments found themselves in a new environment, marked by the activity of Ukrainian nationalist structures.

Pётр Vershigora⁹ presented to readers the landscapes of the Rivne region, opened up to the partisans of the Kovpak unit in July 1943 after they crossed the Sluch river, as follows:

The day is clear, windless. Only small white clouds hang in the blue sky. However, here clouds of black smoke are rising to meet them. This is a signal of German flunkies at the outposts. They set fire to the farms that once belonged to the Poles. Until recently, they lived here peacefully, being interspersed with Ukrainians and Russians. Now there is no one in the Polish farms. Their population is either slaughtered or has fled to the east –under protection of the Soviet partisans. Smoke rises in thick tornadoes into the windless sky. It spreading above like a black mushroom, floating on the hills. A smell of burning joins the smell of the steppe (Вершигора 1950, 39).

In this fragment plundered Polish farms are described in the summer of 1943 as a typical part of the regional landscape in Volhynia. Nearly the same routine

⁸ I compared editions of Aleksey Fёdorov's *The Underground Obkom Acts* from 1955 and 1981 (Ukrainian version) and of Pётр Vershigora's *People with Clear Conscience* from 1947 and 1990 (Фёдоров 1955; Фёдоров 1981; Вершигора 1947; Вершигора 1990).

⁹ Pётр Vershigora (1905-1963) worked before the war as an actor and film director at the Moscow film studio. At the beginning of the war he was mobilised into the Red Army. In July 1942, as a delegate of the intelligence department of the Bryansk Front he was sent to the Bryansk Forest area, one of the main centers of the partisan movement. From August 1942, he served as Deputy Commander for Intelligence in the Kovpak partisan unit. From December 1943, he was commander of the First Ukrainian Partisan Division named after Kovpak. In 1944 he was awarded the rank of Major-General. In 1947-1953, he taught at the Academy of the General Staff of the USSR. Vershygora was actively engaged in writing; in 1947, he was awarded the Stalin Prize for the book *People with a Clear Conscience*. Hero of the Soviet Union (1944).

of life in the region is described by Aleksey Fëdorov,¹⁰ commander of another partisan unit:

Moving to the Kovel area through the Volhynia forests, we often came across small Polish farms. If somewhere above the forest the crows swirl with a croak, it means that there is a Polish farm there! It is only of two or three courtyards. The doors to the huts are wide open. It smells with a sweetish corpse odor. But if you will enter—you will see not corpses, but a bloody mess. The whole family is hacked literally to pieces. As an instrument of execution, the Banderites preferred a poleaxe [*sekira*]—a long-handled wide axe (Фёдоров 1985, 226).

In the accounts of most memoirists, the reasons for these massacres in Volhynia were rooted not so much in the OUN ideology itself (although they did not contradict it), which, apart from general phrases about its “reactionary nature,” was not actually described, as in the direct initiative of the German authorities. “The occupants sowed hostility between Ukrainians and Poles in the occupied territory. The darkest elements were used by the Gestapo to carry out provocative plans, civilians mercilessly exterminated by their hands,” such a comment is made by David Bakradze,¹¹ one of the commanders of the Sidor Kovpak partisan unit (Бакрадзе 1961, 69). Anton Brinskiy,¹² the commander of the partisan brigade explained in the same vein:

[...] in the struggle against the nations of the lands they had seized, the Nazis adhered to the old tried and tested principle of all enslavers: divide and rule. They fanned national discord between Ukrainians, Poles and Russians, and the Ukrainian nationalists helped them with it (Бринский 1966).

Pëtr Vershigora wrote in most detail about the causes of the massacre:

From Rivne, Luts'k, Volodymyr-Volyns'kyy, Dubno and other centers of Western Ukraine, on a signal from their leadership, many nationalists who had served the Germans with faith and truth in the Gestapo, police and gendarmerie have left.

¹⁰ Aleksey Fëdorov (1901-1989) before the war was the first secretary of the Chernihiv regional committee (*obkom*) of the Communist Party of Ukraine. In 1941, he was left in the region for the organisation of the underground struggle. He formed and headed a partisan formation, at the same time heading the underground regional party committee of the Chernihiv and later Volhynia regions. In 1943 he was awarded the rank of Major-General. After the war he consistently worked as first secretary of the Kherson, Izmayil and Zhytomyr obkom, next was the Minister of Social Welfare of Ukrainian SSR. Twice Hero of the Soviet Union (1942, 1944).

¹¹ David Bakradze (1917-1977) was gun commander at the beginning of the war. In the autumn of 1941, he was captured. In the summer of 1942, he escaped from POW camp, and in September 1942 he was enlisted in the Kovpak unit. In its ranks he went from gun commander to regiment commander. After 1945, he was in the reserve, and worked in various economic organisations of the Georgian SSR. Hero of the Soviet Union (1944).

¹² Anton Brinskiy (1906-1981) was a professional military commander. In 1941, after being surrounded, he turned to partisan methods of struggle. The brigade organised by him answered to the intelligence department of the General Staff of the Red Army; from August 1943 he headed the Operational Reconnaissance and Sabotage Center, which acted behind enemy lines. After the war he continued his military career. After 1954 he retired and was engaged in literary work. Member of the Union of Writers and the Union of Journalists of the USSR (since 1968). Hero of the Soviet Union (1944).

They went to the woods, having announced their desire to fight the Germans to the whole world. They fought with the Germans in words and declarations, in leaflets; one of them even had the mark of German printers in Luts'k. However, in fact they were massacring civilian Poles (Вершигора 1947, 252).

Poles who sought help and protection from the occupants were offered weapons for self-defence only if they joined the auxiliary police, although “until now, the privilege of being a German *Schutzmann* was entirely for Benderites [бандеровцы].”¹³ The Poles had no other choice, and “the end of February and March of the forty-third year is remarkable for the organisation of Polish police battalions” (Вершигора 1947, 252).

Then Vershigora noted what other memoirists had not described: Polish police battalions began killing Ukrainian civilians. As the main beneficiary of this mutual massacre he named Himmler:

The uprising of the people could not be suppressed by the troops, and also the Nazis did not have a lot of troops. It was necessary to poison the minds of the people, it was necessary to put out into the arena the old, tried and experienced provocateurs. And they were found [...]. [The Germans] began to fight against the menacingly growing partisan movement by provocation, inciting national conflicts (Вершигора 1947, 252).

Reading these episodes, we should remember they were not reminiscences per se; the authors, excepting Brinskiy, described events happening before their relocation to the region. The idea of the German occupation authorities as direct initiators of anti-Polish violence in Volhynia is not supported by modern scholars, even by those, who like V'yatrovych prefer to minimise the fault of the Ukrainian nationalists in these events (В'ятрович 2011). Thousands of members of the OUN left the auxiliary police and moved to the forests to join UPA units in the spring of 1943 under the decision of the OUN leaders to turn to the armed struggle with the occupants, both German and Soviet. Mass desertion from the police not only by OUN members might also be influenced by the provocation from the Soviet partisans headed by Anton Brinskiy. Having contacts with Ukrainian policemen he had this disclosed to the Germans expecting that the policemen who escaped following German repressions would join Red units. However, they preferred to join the UPA (Мотика 2013, 59–62; Snyder 2003, 212–223). The ethnic cleansing

¹³ It is characteristic that even in the early post-war Soviet texts the Ukrainian nationalists could be called “benderites” [бандеровцы], instead of the correct form “banderites” [бандеровцы]. The form “benderites” comes from the name of Stepan Bandera, the head of most numerous branch of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists –OUN(B). Nevertheless, in the Soviet public space “benderites” was often applied to all supporters of Ukrainian nationalism, even those who belonged to other organisations. The form “benderites” is a widespread popular distortion; although we can see examples of its use in literary texts.

is named as initiative of Клым Savur (Dmytro Klyachkivskiy), the commander of the UPA in Volhynia (Ільющин 2003, 190–196; Мотика 2013, 78–80; McBride 2016, 636–638). Hence, the memoirs complied rather with the general line of Soviet propaganda, whose goal was to emphasise the nationalists' submission to the “fascists.”

3. “Class Alienation”: Portrayals of perpetrators

Following the ideological line, any specific organisers of the murders in the memoirs were portrayed as directly associated with the Germans. In David Bakradze's memoirs the organiser of the extermination of the Polish village was named as “the Ukrainian nationalist, bandit Sashko, who served in the Gestapo” (Бакрадзе 1961, 69). According to Vershigora, Sashko, who started his service in the Gestapo as an interpreter, managed to climb the career ladder owing to the extermination of Jews and his cruelty to the local population (Вершигора 1947, 251). Then he was pretendedly fired by the Germans, and almost immediately he:

Showed up at the head of a gang of fifty or sixty, half of whom were also “fired” from the police and the other half were recruited from criminals, a gang that declared a struggle for “independent Ukraine”, allegedly against the Germans, but in fact started a massacre of the Polish population (Вершигора 1947, 251).

In *The Carpathian raid* by Vershigora, the leader of the nationalist squad, given the pseudonym “the Black Raven” [Черный Ворон], was also described as a direct German agent:

‘The Black Raven’ was dropped as a paratrooper and saboteur by the Germans in the first days of the war, he operated in the Slavuta, Kremenets’ and Shepetivka areas in the rear of the Red Army at the time of its retreat. Then he became the head of the Schutzpolizei in Kremenets’. Then he moved into the woods. He is still in touch with the fascists. He catches Soviet prisoners of war in the woods fleeing from the camps and shoots them on the spot. In recent months, also, probably by German order, he has been exterminating the Polish population (Вершигора 1950, 78).

Vershigora wrote about one Goncharenko, which was named one of the UPA commanders, that at the end of 1941, acting on SS orders:

He chased and shot Soviet prisoners of war along the roads, flushed out from the woods the families of Red Army officers —their wives and children— and killed hundreds of Jews. After the beginning of 1943 [...] by order of the Volhynia and Rivne Gestapo, he began to specialise in the massacre of the Poles. Like any renegade, he was particularly keen on the massacres of Catholics, whom he had previously joined for career reasons. By national-religious civil strife the fascist bosses hoped to divert the population from the anti-Hitler struggle (Вершигора 1960, 102–103).

In *The Last Winter* by Aleksey Fëdorov, the capture of the Banderite agent Ivan Lukyanyuk nicknamed “Stalnoy” (“The Steely”) infiltrated into a Soviet partisan unit, was mentioned. According to the biography given in the book he had been an OUN member since the age of 15. In 1941, Lukyanyuk joined the police, and was then transferred to the Feldgendarmerie. In its ranks he participated in anti-Jewish “actions” in Volhynia. In the spring of 1943 he joined the UPA where, according to Fëdorov, he continued his “activity”:

During the occupation, about two hundred thousand civilians were killed on the territory of the Volhynia region. They fell not only at the hands of the Hitlerites. Tens of thousands of Volynians were killed by Ukrainian nationalists. Ivan Lukyanuk kept his own account. He confessed that he participated in the killing of eighteen thousand Soviet citizens first in the ranks of the Hitlerites and then in the Banderite detachments (Фëдоров 1985, 226).

A common feature of the murderers, which emerges from the memoirs, is their “class alienation” from the Soviet people. Goncharenko, mentioned by Vershigora, was “the corporal of the Polish service from the military colonists [из осадников]... adopted the Catholic faith” (Вершигора 1960, 103). “Sashko” was called the son of Volodymyr’s priest (Вершигора 1947, 251), and the anonymous initiators of the brutal murder were “*kurkul* sons” (in the Soviet tradition rich peasants were called *kurkuly* in Ukrainian or *kulaki* in Russian) (Вершигора 1950, 85). Ivan Lukyanyuk was called by Fëdorov the son of a village teacher, but from the age of 15 he was under influence of nationalist ideology (Фëдоров 1985, 226).

All these characters also have another common feature: they differ widely from real prototypes, if we can find them at all. A few UPA members nicknamed “The Steely” are known, but they operated in other regions and there was no Ivan Lukyanyuk among them. The same is true for Sashko. “Honcharenko” was the name given to the chief of staff of the UPA-North (the command of the UPA units operating in Volhynia) Leonid Stupnyts’kyy. But his biography is quite different from that of Vershigora. Stupnyts’kyy was an Orthodox native of Cherkassy region and a lieutenant colonel in the Ukrainian People’s Republic army in the years of the Civil War. In the summer of 1941, he headed the Kholodnyy Yar First Ukrainian Regiment of militia organised by the OUN. Soon the detachment was made by the Germans into the 365th Training Ostbattalion attached to the 5th Field Training Regiment of the Wehrmacht. After the unit was disbanded in the spring of 1942, Stupnyts’kyy transferred to the fire department in Rivne and then headed the local Ukrainian Aid Committee, which served as a mediator between the local community and the German authorities. In the spring of 1943 he joined

the UPA (Ковальчук та Вовк, 2009). An even more interesting case is “The Black Raven.” Only nationalists with nicknames “The Black” or “The Raven” are known, but they did not operate in Kremenets’ area. Probably Vershigora meant Ivan Klymyshyn “The Kruk.” His nickname was the Ukrainian name of one of the subspecies of ravens. Klymyshyn actually started the war as a German saboteur. Then he participated in the OUN marching groups, sent to the eastern regions of Ukraine in an attempt to establish there a local administration controlled by the nationalists. This conflicted with the Germans’ plans and in May 1942 he was arrested by the Gestapo in Kyiv. After escaping, Klymyshyn was appointed the head of the OUN in Kremenets’ region. Here in the beginning of the 1943 he organised one of the first UPA detachments, which became famous for its anti-German actions (Літопис УПА 2010, 56).

According to Aleksey Fëdorov the nationalists also tried to involve ordinary peasants in the murders. This OUN and UPA practice was described in the paper by Jared MacBride. The author examined one such “action,” when the nationalists mobilised Ukrainian peasants, whom they had ordered to come with their axes, led them to the Polish settlement and only there explained their “tasks” (MacBride 2006). But Fëdorov described this practice in a different way. He cites a letter allegedly received by an officer of his unit from a village occupied by the nationalists:

[The nationalists] mobilised all men between the age of 16 and 50, armed them with sticks, rakes, forks, gave them tin tridents for their hats, and Haydayenko conducted drilling with them, set the peasants on the Poles: “Rob, burn, cut everyone!” (Фёдоров 1955).

Further in the letter the class factor and the German factor “came up”:

[...] And the Polish lords and landlords [*панів и поміщиків*] in their estates, these Haydayenko doesn’t touch, because the Germans protect them (Фёдоров 1955).

Additions to this episode included in the later editions of the book are significant. It was specified that the tin tridents, the emblems for the hats, the only piece of equipment given to these mobilised “soldiers,” were made in Germany. According to this new narrative, the nationalists not only set the peasants on the Poles but directly involved them in anti-Polish actions: “and once [the nationalists] led [the peasants] ‘against a fierce enemy’ —to a nearest Polish village. ‘Rob, burn, cut everyone!’” (Фёдоров 1981, 619). The new paragraph next stressed the alien nature of these nationalists for the locals: “The peasants wrote that Haydayenko and his gang came from the east;” allegedly one of its members confessed that he had served as headman in a village near Kharkiv and

Haydayenko himself was a Cossack from Semirech'ye, the region in Central Asia. He was sentenced for killing the head of a collective farm and didn't even know Ukrainian properly (Фёдоров 1981, 619–620). As we can see, all these additions have a clear ideological implication –stressing the Germans' influence on the nationalists and emphasising that anti-Polish ideas weren't popular among local Ukrainians. References to this last point could be also found in the memoirs of the head of the Rivne underground, Terentiy Novak.¹⁴ He relates, according to one of the partisan commanders, that fleeing from the nationalists “Poles and Ukrainians come to our unit together” (Новак 1966, 371). In this way the absence was emphasised of any contradictions among ordinary peasants, not subject to nationalist influence.

4. The “Bestial Cruelty of the Nationalists”

However, even though Poles were mentioned as one of the main categories of Ukrainian nationalists' victims, they were often listed together with other groups, i.e. not described as “exclusive victims.” Terentiy Novak wrote about one Robotnitsky, a head of the “Ukrainian police” in Volhynia. He followed the instructions of OUN leaders according to which “Russians, Poles, and Jews were shot in ravines, woods next to graves dug in a hurry along the shores of the quiet Horyn' River. Special courts comprising former kulaks and followers of Petlyura dealt with shady Ukrainians” (Новак 1966, 75). “The Black Raven” “burned the huts of Poles and Soviet activists in all villages” (Вершигора 1950, 77). Fёdorov showed the position of the OUN on the national issue without unambiguous “preferences”: “the leaders of the OUN inculcated in the members of their organisation a blind, fanatical hatred of Russians, Poles, Jews.” After the inclusion of Western Ukraine in the USSR in 1939, “the OUN activists [оуновцы] transferred their fierce anger also on any Ukrainian, if he was only sympathetic to Soviet rule [был за советскую власть]” (Фёдоров 1985, 224). The UPA, being controlled by the OUN, according to Fёdorov put this national policy into practice: “Banderites killed a Pole for being a Pole, a Jew –for being a Jew,” the lives of Ukrainians who demonstrated the slightest loyalty to the Soviet regime were also in danger (Фёдоров 1985, 226). In his account, a certain “Golden Company” [“Золотая рота”], an elite unit of the UPA, was specialised in this way:

¹⁴ Terentiy Novak (1912-1983), an activist of the Communist Party in Volhynia during the period of its entry into Poland, was sentenced to 30 years in prison in 1939. After the inclusion of Western Ukraine in the USSR he was a worker for the Rivne City Committee of the Communist Party. After the beginning of the war he headed the Rivne city underground organisation, later joined the partisan detachment. In 1944 he headed a unit of international partisan brigades as part of the Polish Armia Ludowa. After the war he worked in the State security service. Retired after 1965. Hero of the Soviet Union (1965).

To cut in quarters a peasant suspected of helping the partisans, to saw alive a Soviet activist, to “chop” Polish farmhouse dwellers “for stew,” to crush a Jew’s head with a club (Фёдоров 1985, 280).¹⁵

This company, quite predictably, was described as consisting exclusively of “class alienated” elements: “Sons of Western Ukrainian landlords and kulaks, criminals who had escaped from prisons, bulbashes [бульбаши] who were not killed by the partisans” (Фёдоров 1985, 279). “Bul’bashi” or “Bul’bovtsy” were Soviet authors’ names for members of the Taras Bul’ba-Borovets’ “Polissian Sich,” the nationalist organisation that competed with the OUN and the UPA. Anton Brinskiy wrote about members of this organisation in a style similar to the description of the UPA by Fёdorov. The “Bulbovites,” among other deeds, carried out “anti-Polish, anti-Russian and anti-Jewish agitation, accompanied it by bloody massacres” (Бринский 1966). As we can see, the murders of Poles were shown as only one of the components of the nationalists’ activity. But at the same time, unlike the anti-Polish, any specific nationalist “actions” against Jews, Russians or sympathisers of the Soviet authorities weren’t described in the analysed memoirs.

The main feature depicted of the anti-Polish “actions” is their extreme cruelty. However, it is obvious that the partisan authors personally saw, maybe, only the final scene, but not the process itself. Therefore, David Bakradze retold the information received by partisan scouts during their visit to the unnamed village:

A gang of fifty to sixty people broke into a neighbouring village, whose population was completely Polish, and began to exterminate all the inhabitants: old and young, women and children. Only a few managed to escape. The bandits carried out an atrocious massacre of their defenceless victims. They killed with axes, wooden stakes, iron bars (Бакрадзе 1961, 69).

Most likely Vershigora described the same attack. The scouts claimed to have been to the crime scene in person and even dispersed the nationalists before they finished their work:

Tonight a group of fifty armed men burst into one of the small Polish villages, a forest farm of thirty huts. Unknown people surrounded the village, set up posts, and then began to go from hut to hut and exterminate the inhabitants. Not by shooting, not by execution, but in brutal destruction. Not by shots, but by oak stakes on the head, by axes. All —men, old men, women, children. Then, apparently, drunk with

¹⁵ The description of the episode of the assault made by the partisans of the camp of this “Golden Company” is noteworthy: “A hefty Banderite, wielding a long-handled ax, killed one partisan, wounded another. He could not be approached. Then Oleksiyenko threw himself at the axeman’s [секирник] feet. Knocked him down. But the bandit’s last blow fell on the company commander’s head. He did not rise and will never rise from the ground, funny and a little mischievous Andyusha Oleksiyenko!” The whole scene both in content and style is reminiscent to the reader rather of a medieval adventure fiction or fantasy genre work, than a description of a real event (Фёдоров 1985, 282).

blood and senseless murder, they began to torture their victims. They cut, stabbed, strangled (Вершигора 1947, 247).¹⁶

Historians also noted the brutality of the killings (see ЛЬЮШИН 2003; W. Siemaszko and E. Siemaszko 2008; MacBride 2006). Such methods, as well as attempts at involving peasants, could be explained as the organisers' will to report all anti-Polish violence as a peasant riot (Motyka 2016). However, undoubtedly, for the Soviet memoirists, who didn't explain these motives, the emphasis on the "barbaric methods" of such murders, committed not even with the use of firearms, also served as an ideological reminder of the "bestial cruelty of the nationalists." Also, we can note that in the accounts of the Soviet memoirists the theme of Volhynia-43 wasn't conceptualised. As for the Holocaust, in the Soviet texts there was no special term for these mass murders.

The bloodthirstiness of the killers extended to mixed families too. In Terentiy Novak's book, the partisan messenger described what was happening in Volhynia as follows:

After all, it comes to what: if a father in the family is a Pole, and the mother is Ukrainian, Banderites slaughter the father and children; if a mother is a Polish — they cut children and mother. In villages, they say that nationalists sometimes force fathers to cut off the heads of their own children... (Новак 1966, 371).

In the Vershigora memoirs, there is a story about one such murder. In the Kremynets forests, the Red partisans used local peasants as porters for their troops. One such "mobilised" man was "not an old carter, with gray, Cossack-style moustache hanging down." It was noticeable that he bore some pain inside —and one of the local partisans told his story. The peasant served as messenger for "The Black Raven" and was listed in good standing by the nationalists:

And then their orders came: to slaughter the Poles.... And he had a wife, Ruzia [diminutive form of Polish given female name Róża (Rose)]... They cut out all around. He saved his own at first. [His] wife's sister and mother also moved to stay with him. That's what killed them. They thought nobody would touch them. And then these bosses arrived. Kurkul sons —they all set up headquarters. "Well, my friend, prove to us that you are a sincere Ukrainian [щирый украинец]." And they forced him: first, the wife by his own hands... And then they heated up: "And cut the children!" —they say. But he couldn't. So they killed [кончили] the children in front of him. He was like a madman for a long time, twice he was taken out of the loop (Вершигора 1950, 85).

¹⁶ See also *Zapiski razvedchika* [Записки разведчика] by Ivan Verezhnoy (Бережной, Иван. 1962. *Записки разведчика*. Горький: Горьковское книжное издательство, 298), where most likely the same episode also is mentioned.

The stories of the murder of one's own family members are known in the history of almost every interethnic conflict. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian reader in this episode could find additional allusions, inspired by the classic work of Ukrainian literature — *Haydamaky* [Гайдамаки] by Taras Shevchenko. This poem of the mid of the 19th century tells about the *Koliyivshchyna* —the bloody uprising of Ukrainians on the Right Bank of the Dnieper, during which a few thousand Jews and Poles were exterminated in Uman in 1768. One of the leaders of the rebels-*haydamaky*, Gonta in the poem, personally killed his own sons because their Polish mother raised them as Catholics.¹⁷ However, it remains unclear whether Vershigora himself (the arts professional) suggested the possibility of such allusions when writing *People With a Clear Conscience*.

Conclusion

Therefore, the reader of the Soviet partisan memoirs could get information about the massacre of the Poles, organised in Volhynia by the Ukrainian nationalists. The quite detailed descriptions and explanations of the murders of Poles in Volhynia provided in these books, show us that the memoirists did not count on any basic knowledge of the Volhynian events among readers.¹⁸

In the books analysed, the stories about the massacre appear to be first of all a propaganda tool. For the Soviet readers, the absence of independent sources made information given by the memoirists both inescapable and non-verifiable. The comparison of the narratives of the Volhynian Massacre displayed by partisan authors with modern scholarly works shows us intentional distortions by the former. At first sight, it may seem paradoxical, but the partisan memoirists, tending to discredit the Ukrainian nationalists, preferred to blame them only as executors, but not as initiators of the anti-Polish massacres in Volhynia. Their anti-Polish “actions” were described primarily as a direct German initiative, and the detachments of the UPA and the “Polissian Sich” as only the faithful executors of it. These stories about past events also concerned a situation contemporary for author and reader. Since almost all Soviet families had members killed during World War II by Germans, exaggerating OUN engagement with the Nazis could

¹⁷ And then the rebels brought to him/A Jesuit, a monk,/With two young boys. “Look, Gonta, look!/These youngsters are your sons!/They’re Catholics: since you kill all,/Can you leave them alone?/Why are you waiting?/Kill them now...”/[]/“My sons are Catholics.... I vowed/No Catholic to spare./Esteemed assembly!... That there should/Be no doubt anywhere,/No talk that I don’t keep my word,/Or that I spare my own.../[...]/Such woe, my sons, today is mine/As cannot be conceived!/My children, kiss me, for not I/Am killing you today/It is my oath!”/He flashed his knife/And the two lads were slain. *Translated by John Weir*.

¹⁸ At the same time in many cases, the Soviet memoirists who referred to the Nazi extermination of the Jews did so only in the form of brief references, implying that the readers had no need for additional explanations to “decipher” the episode (Shatalov 2018).

be an effective tool for setting readers against Ukrainian nationalists. In this regard it served also to discredit not only the OUN itself but the entire Ukrainian national movement contemporary to readers (its many leaders had a nationalist background) and the idea of Ukrainian independence itself, showing them as the “worst possible” thing —the “fascists’ invention,” alien by its origin in the minds of Socialist Ukrainians.

The massacre itself and its sadistic forms appeared to the reader as a consequence of the degeneracy of the very essence of Ukrainian nationalism and its supporters and even the level of the textual description emphasised once again the “bestial nature” of nationalism. In the memoirs, the killing of the Polish population, although described in relative detail, was not shown as a separate phenomenon, but rather as a manifestation of the “bestial nature” of nationalism, along with killings of Jews, Russians and Ukrainian sympathisers of the Soviet system. The memoirists stressed the disinterestedness and unwillingness of ordinary Ukrainian peasants, who had no grudge against their neighbours, to participate in the massacres. The alienation of the massacre organisers from the broad masses of the working people is also shown through their social origin. Therefore, reading Soviet partisan memoirs gives us little help in understanding the Volhynian massacre itself, but serves as excellent example of Soviet propaganda efforts turned on the past.

Bibliographical references

- Machcewicz, Pawel. 2005. “The Institute of National Remembrance and Coming to Terms with a Difficult Past: World War II and the Communist Dictatorship.” *InterMarium* 3(8): 1–10. <http://ece.columbia.edu/files/ece/images/machcewicz.pdf>.
- McBride, Jared. 2016. “Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944.” *Slavic Review* 3(75): 630–654.
- Motyka, Grzegorz. 2016. “Zbrodnia wołyńska 1943 roku i mit buntu ludowego.” *Dzieje najnowsze* XLVIII: 53–66.
- Portnov, Andrii. 2016. *Clash of Victimhoods. The Volhynian Massacre 1943 in Polish and Ukrainian Memory*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/andrii-portnov/clash-of-victimhood-1943-volhynian-massacre-in-polish-and-ukrainian-culture>.
- Shatalov, Denys. 2018. “Non-nipped Memory. The Holocaust in the Soviet War Memoirs.” *Проблеми історії Голокосту* 10: 127–188.
- Siemaszko, Władysław, and Ewa Siemaszko. 2008. *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, t. 1–2. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo von borowiecky.
- Snyder, Timothy. 2003. “The Causes of Ukrainian–Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943.” *Past and Present* 1(179): 197–234.

- Бакрадце, Давид. 1961. *Кровью героев*. Тбилиси: Заря Востока.
- Бринский, Антон. 1966. *По ту сторону фронта*. Горький: Волго-Вятское книжное издательство, книга 1. https://royallib.com/book/brinskiy_anton/po_tu_storonu_fronta.html.
- В'ятрович, Володимир. 2011. *Друга польсько-українська війна, 1942–1947*. Київ: Видавничий дім “Києво-Могилянська академія.”
- Вершигора, Пётр. 1947. *Люди с чистой совестью*. Москва: Воениздат.
- Вершигора, Пётр. 1950. *Люди с чистой совестью (Карпатский рейд)*. Москва: Московский рабочий.
- Вершигора, Пётр. 1990. *Люди с чистой совестью*. Киев: Политиздат Украины.
- Вершигора, Пётр. 1960. *Рейд на Сан и Вислу*. Москва: Воениздат.
- Грицьків, Роман. 2003. “Польська історіографія українсько-польського збройного конфлікту часів Другої світової війни.” *Український визвольний рух* 2, 148–169. Львів: Інститут українознавства ім. І. Крип'якевича НАН України.
- Ільющин, Ігор. 2003. *Волинська трагедія 1943–1944*. Київ: [б. в.]
- Ковальчук, Михайло, та Олександр Вовк. 2009. “Підполковник армії УНР, генерал-хорунжий УПА Леонід Ступницький: сторінки біографії.” *Військово-історичний альманах* 1(18): 4–40.
- Літопис УПА. Нова серія. 2010. *УПА і запілля на ПЗУЗ 1943–1945*, т. 14. Київ-Торонто [б. в.]
- Мотика, Гжегож. 2013. *Від Волинської різанини до операції “Вісла”: польсько-український конфлікт 1943–1947*. Київ: Дух і Літера.
- Наумов, Михаил. 1953. *Хинельские походы*. Ленинград: Ленинградское газетно-журнальное и книжное издательство.
- Новак, Терентий. 1966. *Пароль знают немногие*. Москва: Воениздат.
- Осипян, Александр. 2004. “Этнические чистки и чистка памяти: украинско-польское пограничье 1939–1947 гг. в современной политике и историографии.” *Ab Imperio* 2: 297–328.
- Успенский, Владимир. 1993. *Тайный советник вождя*. Москва: Прометей.
- Подпольный обком действует: Книги 1–3*. 1955. Москва: Воениздат http://militera.lib.ru/memo/russian/Fedorov_af1/index.html.
- Фёдоров, Алексей. 1985. *Последняя зима*. Москва: Воениздат.
- Фёдоров, Олексій. 1981. *Підпільний обком діє*. Київ: Видавництво політичної літератури України.