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AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN RUSSIA'S TURKESTAN AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOP THE REGION

Abstract: This article concerns Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who were captured by the Russia soldiers and deployed in one of the regions of Russia, Turkestan. It also discusses captives' circumstances and their contributions to the development of Turkestan region.

Key words: POWs (prisoners of war), captivity, World War I, Austro-Hungarian army, military camps, refugee group, camp regime, the Allies, the Red Cross, asylum, penitentiary.

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Introduction

During the World War I, millions of people were killed and wounded at the front, and many soldiers became prisoners of war.

On the eastern front, the Austro-Hungarian Army saw a tremendous amount of damage, but the loss was nothing compared to the captured soldiers. European historians have estimated that more than 10% of the Austrian-Hungarian army had been captured.[1] However, there is still no definitive decision on this issue. According to the archives of the Austrian-Hungarian Ministry of Defense, the number of prisoners was 1 479 289 people, but according to Gaston Botard, who worked in the ministry's statistical office, they were 1,672,672. [2] Based on a Hungarian study of statistical data, military prisoners reached 174,427 in 1927. [3] According to recent evidence of the military history of the Moscow Central Archive, Russia captured 1,605,870 prisoners. [2] A recent research by Hungarian historians has also shown that they were around 1,600,000. So, these latest statistics are closer to reality.

Materials and Methods

A research by German researcher Elsa Brandstorm shows that the Hungarian soldiers accounted for 47.07% of the Austria-Hungarian army [4], but their number of captured soldiers was not

large enough. According to the archives of the Military History Institute in Budapest, Hungarian prisoners of war were over 600,000. [2]

There are a number of reasons why the Austro-Hungarian soldiers could become prisoners. Firstly, the Russian army soldiers were more than the Austrian-Hungarian army on the east front, and the Russian army was well armed, especially in the artillery. In this way, the resistance of the Liberation Army was weakened, and the spirit of their soldiers was much lower. Secondly, because of the panslavizm, some of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers did not want to fight against Russia. Many soldiers in the Austrian-Hungarian army knew Russian. This made it easier for them to get in touch with the Russians. Third, many soldiers were against the war. Because most of the military officers were sent to the war as political prisoners. For most soldiers on the east front, military camps seemed to be the safest place.

In 1914, the military prisoners of the Austro-Hungarian army began to be deployed in the military camps in Turkestan. Their total number was over 150,000. At first, they were under the control of the military, but most of them were released from military barracks in the mid-1916s, provided that they did not escape and run away from police custody.

In the early years of the war, especially in 1915, the Russian government took the policy of unofficially

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discriminating prisoners of war among the prisoners. The aim was to encourage members of the Slavic nation to join the war from Russia side against the Allies. The Slavic prisoners realized that they would be freed from captivity and that their independence was the defeat and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This kind of divisive action by the Russians led to conflicts between the Slavs and the non-Slavs almost every day in the military camps. The "bosses" of the camps assigned the Czechs, Serbs and other Slavs to administrative matters in the military camps to deliberately cause a conflict. For Hungary and Austrian prisoners, this discrimination policy was not fair. The czar's government did not want to equalize the "status" of war prisoners, on the contrary, they wanted to break the Austro-Hungarian Empire by promoting anti-Austro-Hungarian ideas.

There was a "class distinction" in prison for captive prisoners. The captured military soldiers, according to the Hague Conventions of 1907, Part II, Article 17 [5], would take the same salary in their captivity as they took when they had been working in their own country. As a result, military officers earned from 50 to 75 rubles per month.[6] However, there were no monthly salaries for more than 1,500 ordinary soldiers.

Military camps were mainly located in industrial areas. But close proximity to the industrial zone did not guarantee the possibility of providing medical care to prisoners of war. As a result, some 300,000 prisoners were killed in Russian military camps [2], with the death rate in Russian military camps higher than the Allies. As a result of the spread of many infectious diseases, the Austro-Hungarian prisoners also died. Specifically, typhoid and dysentery were common diseases among the Austrian-Hungarian prisoners.

The Austro-Hungarian prisoners suffered more than German prisoners because their government failed to exert pressure on the Russian government to change the attitude towards the captives. According to one Hungarian historian, the Hungarian prisoners of war, Vereshchagin and Repin, describe the conditions in the Russian military camps as follows: "The walls of the camp are extending from the glaciers to infinity. The beds looked like separate floors. Always half of them [the beds] were dark, and there were "animal-like" people who came down with typhoid. The rats were eating the dead bodies. The corpses were like a piece of wood. Many bodies were frozen. The cold was so powerful that it was impossible to dig the grave. Therefore, the corpses of the dead were open until the spring. The snowstorm was covering the dead bodies, and when the sun had set, the sun was melting snow on some corpses and icicles appeared hanging from the head, arms and feet of the dead." [7] During the summer, living conditions were very bad. Dark and ruined cellars made from the mud were full of

prisoners, very hot temperature and an incredible number of lice and ticks.

Also, the food supply of the prisoners was not so good. They often ate not enough. At that time, one of the Hungarian prisoners remembers: "I was forced to work. We lived like animals. The payment to us was enough to buy only tobacco. If we were to ask for more food, we would have been locked and would only get water." [8]

It is clear from the above that the situation in military camps was beyond recognition. The Austro-Hungarian prisoners who had been denied by their own government, who had been abused by officers and fought in the war against their close associates, had been sentenced to life in such a harsh environment.

Because of the rigidity of military camping, many captives tried to escape. Using the weakness of Turkestan's military, 1,457 soldiers and 72 officers escaped from the Turkestan military camps from late 1914 until March 1917.[9] The majority of the refugee group was Austrians. They hoped to find shelter and employment opportunities among local residents. In some cases, rural residents also helped them find a job. Because there were the captured soldiers whose professions were needed for Turkestan region - engineers, mechanics, architects, builders, agronomists, artists, sculptors and musicians. During this period, the above mentioned skillful workers in Turkestan were very few. Even, Austrian captive military musicians performed at the Tashkent Symphony Orchestra led by F.Sedlyachek.[10] From 1915 to 1916, the Bukhara railway project was carried out by Austrian military engineers.

Delegations from Sweden and Denmark visited Tashkent to protect the Austrian-Hungarian interests. In particular, in March 1916 in Tashkent a delegation of the Swedish Red Cross headed by Hoken fon Shulmen and representatives of the Danish embassy in Petrograd visited Tashkent in December of this year.[8] Thus, in the end of 1916 - beginning of 1917, the situation with the prisoners of the Austro-Hungarian prison in Turkestan improved.

After the February 1917 events, the camp regime for prisoners of war in Turkestan became much simpler. As a result, prisoners had the freedom to do certain activities, such as leaving camps, wearing their own clothes, free walking on the streets, and building relationships with local people during the day. It should be noted that on June 22, 1917, the special commission discussed and permitted a document allowing prisoners of war to marry local girls.[8] Thus, the process of assimilation between different nations intensified. The proof of this can be seen today in Uzbekistan with a few Russian-speaking Austrian citizens.

In 1918, the Foreign Affairs Committee of Turkestan started its work. He was led by Austrian, Max Grosser. Since then, the Austrians had gradually

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returned to their homeland. But some prisoners preferred to stay in the Turkestan area and made a great contribution to the construction culture of the country.

The Austrian prisoner of war, architect Ludwig Panchakevich (1873-1935) made a project on the construction of the Roman Catholic Church in Tashkent, the capital of the Turkestan General-Governorate, and instructed builders to complete the construction. He also led the creation of an external and internal artistic solution of the Tashkent Winter Theater in 1917 (later the building of the Art Museum of Uzbekistan).[10]

In 1919, the sculptor E. Rush created the "Liberty Monument" in Samarkand.[10] The construction of the building involved Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovakia and former German prisoners of war. They were forced to stay in Turkestan despite the fact that they were released, and they took part in the construction of architectural sites.

Still, there are boxes for bookshelves by the skillful Austrian prisoners in the National Library of Uzbekistan named after Navoi. Austrian doctors, who were former prisoners of war, also worked in hospitals.

Former Austrian military prisoner Brukman worked as a technical technician at the Committee for the Protection of Ancient Monuments in Samarkand. In the spring of 1920, he took part in the excavation at the Ulugbek observatory under the leadership of archaeologist M. E. Masson. Masson described Brukman as "He was not only a very helpful assistant but also a kind-hearted and sociable friend." [10]

Below are some of the biographical data of the Austrian-Hungarian army members, who contributed to the development of the culture and life of the country, despite being a prisoner of war in Turkestan:

Ernst Kleiber was born on December 15, 1886 in Budweis, Czech Republic. On June 25, 1904, he finished school and continued his education at Prague Technical University. He finished studying there on December 15, 1911. In March 1912, he joined the post office in Linz (Lower Austria) as a technical supporter. He was drafted into military service in August 1914 and became a Przemysl Fortress officer in Galicia. Kleiber was captured by the Russian army in the Prjemisl Castle in February 1915 and sent through the Orenburg-Tashkent railroad from Orenburg to Perovsk (Turkestan, now Kazakhstan) prisoners' camp. In October 1916, he was transferred to the military camp in Osh through Andijan.[11]

During his imprisonment, Kleiber painted unique pictures of Turkestan's flora and fauna. Her collection of pictures "Butterflies and butterflies" is important for zoologists and botanists in studying the Turkestan's flora and fauna. Even in 1927, Czech zoologist Prof. Dr. Ludwig Freund who worked in Prague estimated Kleiber's works higher, but was

unable to find money to publish this because of not having enough finance.

Ernst Kleiber was granted asylum in April 1918, but never returned home. His only open letter to his mother on April 26, 1918 was the last information which says that he was he was traveling to the Far East.[11]

Gustav Krist (July 29, 1894, 1937) is an Austrian traveler, prisoner of war, carpet distributor and writer. The data which he collected in his travels and in the period of being a military prisoner were about Russia and Central Asia. Particularly, his diaries written during his captivity are valuable historical sources in the explanation of the processes of World War I. Christ was born in Vienna in 1894 and took the education here. He later worked as a technician in Germany. When World War I began, a 20-year-old Christian was enlisted to the Austrian-Hungarian army. In November 1914, he was wounded several times and was captured by the Russians on the front line of the San River in the eastern front. This led him to spend his time with German and Austrian prisoners of war in Turkestan for the next five years. After being hospitalized, he faced a difficult life. In December 1915, 300 prisoners were sentenced to death on a freight train from Koslov to Saratov. The inclusion of Swedish Red Cross spokeswoman Elsa Brandstrom into this process survived him. Christ remembers that he was one of the four prisoners who survived among 300 men. [12]

His first military camp was in Kattakurgan, near Samarkand. That congenital ability he had to study languages, and before World War I began he also learned Russian and other eastern languages, helped him to become a translator at the military camp. For this reason, during the five years he spent there, he learned about the people, villages, and the environment in that area. Christ lived and recorded what he had seen in his diary. Surprisingly, he wrote his impressions on cigarette packs and kept them in Bukhara tobacco tube. Because during this period, prisoners of war spent their money to purchase mostly tobacco.

In 1916, he escaped from Kattakurgan and arrived in Tabriz through Marw, Northern Afghanistan and Mashhad. Since Tabriz was the center of the Iranian carpet industry, it was engaged in the trade of wool and carpets together with local Iranians. In Tabriz, however, he was captured by the Russians and sent to the Aleksandrovsky castle in the Caspian littoral penitentiary. Later, with the help of the Red Cross, a military camp was closed and he was sent to Samarkand.

After the February 1917 events in Turkestan, the country became very dangerous. The reason was that the Soviets, the White Army, the Basmachis, and other international powers had begun fighting for power. During World War I, Samarkand was closed to foreigners. By 1917, he succeeded in reaching

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Samarkand. His direct contact with local people made it easier to trade with them. Her memories give valuable information about the people and culture of Central Asia. The manuscripts say that Christ liked to talk to the locals, and enjoyed watching the Islamic historical heritage, especially the Shahi-Zinda complex in Samarkand.[12]

Conclusion

It is clear from the information that prisoners of war, in particular, the Austro-Hungarians, had made a great contribution to the development of the country during their lifetime in Turkestan. Some preferred to stay here because of the tight bond to Turkestan, they did their job, worked in almost every aspect of social life. This necessitated their future life to be connected with Turkestan.

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