German propaganda and the special treatment of Estonian prisoners of war in Germany in World War I

Abstract

About 3000–5000 Estonians who served in the imperial Russian army in World War I ended up as prisoners of war (POW) in German prison camps. Initially, they were treated as any other "Russians" and suffered from malnutrition, back-breaking work, and harsh treatment by the guards. From 1917, however, as Germany had settled on the strategic aim of conquering the whole of the Baltic region, they increasingly began to be subjected to special treatment with the goal of making them more "German-friendly." The new German policies meant better working and living conditions, but also some exposure to German propaganda. Drawing on research on the war experiences of Estonian soldiers and the relevant ego-documents by the prisoners, the article considers the impact of these German policies on the lived experience of the Estonian POWs.

Keywords: prisoners of war; World War I; propaganda; nationalism; Estonia

Out of the roughly 80,000 Estonians who served in the Russian army in World War I (Tannberg 2015, 9–20), approximately 3000–5000 spent time as prisoners of war (POWs) in German prison camps.[1] Often they remained in captivity for years, and were able to return only long after the peace negotiations had been concluded. Their total numbers are very difficult to estimate, primarily due to the very patchy survival of relevant administrative records. How many of these men died in imprisonment or decided to stay in Germany is even more obscure. In general, their war experience remains little-known and little-studied.

As I hope to demonstrate, the present lack of attention accorded to Estonian (and other Baltic) POWs undervalues their actual – as well as imagined – political and economic significance. More specifically, the present case study considers their war experiences in the context of the German military authorities' policies of separation (*Absonderung*) and special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*), to which they were increasingly subjected as the war progressed. Using documents produced by German authorities, as well as the ego-documents of the POWs themselves, I will be looking at the development of the German special treatment policies and their significance for the lived experience of the Estonian prisoners.

The Estonian POWs were not special in this regard. Many of the same or similar policies were also applied to other nationalities serving in the Russian army, and only rarely were the Estonians targeted as a separate group of their own. This holds particularly true about the other Baltic nationalities, the Latvians and the Lithuanians, whom the German authorities would normally consider together with the Estonians. For this reason, the first half of this article looks at the development of German policies towards the Baltic POWs more generally, and its analysis applies to these other nationalities as well. It is in the second half, when looking at the lived experience of the POWs on basis of their ego-documents, that I focus solely on Estonian POWs. This narrower focus in the second half primarily reflects my own linguistic abilities and familiarity with the relevant source material, rather than any deeper academic considerations. I therefore hope that this Estonian case study can be complemented with comparative studies of POWs belonging to the other Baltic nationalities.

Previous research, sources, and source criticism

The generally low degree of interest, academic or otherwise, that has been accorded to the fates of the Estonian POWs in Germany is hardly unexpected. In Estonia, just as elsewhere in eastern Europe, World War I long remained a "forgotten war" in terms of historical research and public commemoration. The POW experience, which as Heather Jones (2008, 19) argues has been long overlooked even in the West, was thus doubly marginalized. It is only recently that first academic studies of Estonian POWs have appeared in print.[2]

Unfortunately, the sources about Estonian POWs are far from satisfactory. The records of the Prussian Ministry of War (*Preußisches Kriegsministerium*, PKMIN), which oversaw the functioning of the German prison camp system, were destroyed in the bombings of World War II and can only partially – and painstakingly – be reconstructed from its correspondence with other institutions (Kuldkepp 2018, 61). It also seems that the POWs themselves, mostly engaged in monotonous physical labor far behind the front lines, did not consider their experiences particularly worthy of interest. Only about 20 of them are known to have written or dictated memoirs, to which we can add a few diaries and other ego-documents.[3]

Finally, even if primary sources exist, they can be difficult to interpret. Official documents, preserved in a haphazard and fragmentary state, present a challenge to anyone seeking to reconstruct the development of German policy. The ego-documents are even more rife with source critical issues. Letters and diaries written in prison camps were subject to censorship and self-censorship, limited by the intended addressee or readership, and constrained by general norms of significance and appropriateness. Memoirs published or collected in interwar Estonia additionally suffer from the inaccuracies of the authors' fading memory, wisdom in hindsight, and later socio-political attitudes. In particular, the accounts collected by the Committee on the History of the War of Independence[4] in the second half of the 1930s

– the majority of those preserved – are characterized by the assumption that only these aspects of World War I that somehow led up to the Estonian War of Independence were important enough to be recorded (Esse 2019, 50). This meant that the years spent in prison camps could be summarized rather briefly. Characteristically, a reviewer of Eduard Grosschmidt's published memoirs (see below), complains over the fact that the author had included a lengthy section on his war imprisonment, "distant and unimportant for us" (Ambur 1936, 179).

German designs towards the Baltic provinces

Germany's unenviable position of having to fight the war on two fronts made the prospect of concluding a separate peace with Russia a naturally attractive option. If realized, this would have freed up the German armies on the Eastern Front for a decisive victory in the West; generally regarded as the main theatre of the conflict. Moreover, in their efforts to push Russia towards peace, Germany's leadership could exploit the Tsarist empire's inner weaknesses: the social and national antagonisms that had sparked the 1905 revolution during the Russo-Japanese war. Following the example of the Japanese, the German Foreign Office and General Staff came to support various Russian separatist and social revolutionary movements with money, weapons, and promises of future privileges; a cooperation that began already in the early days of the war.[5]

A further question was on what terms this future peace would be concluded. Certain men at the highest levels of German leadership, such as General Erich Ludendorff, wanted to obtain major territorial concessions from Russia, effectively reducing it to its pre-eighteenth century

"Muscovite" core.[6] The counter-opinion, emphasizing the importance of the long-term monarchic-autocratic commonalities between the two great powers, argued for a more cordial settlement and the maintenance of the pre-war territorial *status quo* apart from some minor adjustments. This led to a stalemate, which was only resolved in 1917 with Ludendorff as the *de facto* military dictator of Germany side-lining his opponents and enacting an unabashedly annexationist program in the east (Fischer 1959).

One of the central sticking points in this disagreement was the fate of the Baltic borderlands of Russia. On the one hand, they were particularly tempting for the German annexationists as Estonia, Livonia, and Courland already had German-speaking overclasses. On the other hand, this Baltic German element formed only 6.5% of the population, and their traditional privileges and the whole system of provincial governance associated with them had become increasingly contested by both Russian modernization and by Estonian and Latvian nationalism, which had expanded into mass movements. Encouraging the latter would have inevitably meant the demise of the quasi-medieval German-dominated social order in the Baltics, and possibly raised obstacles for future annexation (Fischer 1959, 296–297). Perhaps for this reason, the policy of revolutionization was withheld from the Baltics (Fischer 1959, 296) and a proposal to extend it to the Latvians seems to have been rejected by the German General Staff already in August 1914.[7]

Meanwhile, the Baltic German propagandists in Germany[8] were agitating for the conquest and annexation of the whole of the Baltic region, which they saw as a way to deal with the threat of both Russification and the native nationalisms. Well-connected and able to evoke feelings of German national pride by referring to its "cultural mission in the East," they gained significant influence, further hindering any genuine support developing for Estonian

and Latvian national movements. Indeed, it was much more palatable for the German annexationist leadership to put their weight behind the two-pronged solution to the Baltic question proposed by the Society for the Promotion of Inner Colonization (*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Inneren Kolonisation*, GFK) and the Baltic German propagandists: mass colonization of the Baltic Provinces with German-speaking settlers and accelerated Germanization of the native population through propaganda and German-only education.[9]

Of course, as long as the relevant territories remained unoccupied, there was no land available to colonize or Estonians and Latvians to Germanize. The conquest of Courland by German troops in April 1915 nevertheless meant that more attention came to be accorded to the region and the Baltic German publicists won a broader audience. Also, by this point, a large contingent of Estonians and Latvians had become available to be influenced by German propaganda – the prisoners of war.

The beginnings of separation by nationality and special treatment of Russian POWs

The awareness that not all Russian servicemen were ethnically Russian, and that many Russian nationalities could indeed be anti-Russian in their collective outlook, was already widespread among the German leadership by early 1915. This insight, together with the desire to weaponize the enemy's domestic political tensions, led to the idea of conscripting the POWs for German war aims. According to this line of thinking, the prisoners had to be separated into different camps according to religion or nationality (*Absonderung*), and subjected to some form of special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*).[10] The special treatment

policy, meant to promote German-friendliness, could take the form of outright propaganda,[11] but would in the first instance normally mean improvements to the prisoners' everyday lives.

As far as we can tell, the first group of Russian POWs subjected to special treatment were the Baltic and Volga Germans (the so-called *Deutschrussen*) from already September 1914 onwards. A proposal to this end had been put forward to PKMIN by GFK,[12] which saw them as possible future settlers of the sparsely populated eastern reaches of the German Empire (Kuldkepp 2015, 145–146). Already in January 1915, however, GFK also recommended the extension of these policies to all religious and national minorities of Russia. Now, the purpose was no longer inner colonization but rather the encouragement of "centrifugal tendencies" threatening the cohesion of the Russian state, i.e., national and religious separatism.[13]

There are reasons not to overestimate GFK's influence: similar ideas were also being proposed by other interest groups.[14] But whatever the impetus, PKMIN proved receptive: in spring 1915, captured servicemen belonging to the largest minority groups in the Russian army – Ukrainians, "Tatars" (i.e., Muslims), and "Caucasians" (i.e., Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis) – began to be collected in special camps (*Stammlager*) and subjected to propaganda measures meant to enflame their national and religious grievances against Germany's enemies (e.g., Steuer 2014, 169–170; Nagornaja 2010, 181).

The central message of the propaganda was that the future independence of the prisoners' homelands was connected to "the German idea" and therefore required them to contribute to the German war economy. After being influenced in this way, the prisoners who had proven to be politically trustworthy (especially those unable to work) would be sent out to the work brigades in the countryside to disseminate these views among their working comrades. Another part of the propaganda efforts was directed at the prisoners' employers and guards

who needed to be made aware of the purpose and importance of the special treatment measures (Nagornaja 2010, 186).

As suggested by the description above, the special treatment also had another purpose: to increase the prisoners' productivity. Able-bodied POWs did not generally remain in the camps during the day but were sent to outside work in brigades of initially 50–100 men.[15] This practice made their employers significant stakeholders in POW policy, causing tensions with PKMIN. While the employers were interested in keeping the use of labor flexible and unencumbered by regulations, PKMIN and its subordinate military authorities were more concerned about escape attempts. Over time, the economic argumentation won out: from spring 1915 onwards, the use of civilian guards was allowed; from the end of 1915, the prisoners were permitted to remain at their workplace overnight, and the minimum allowable size of work brigades was decreased to 30 men or less (Oltmer 2006, 82–86).

Subjecting the POWs to a special treatment regime could potentially help to combine the German authorities' political goals with the employers' requirement for more flexibility. Nevertheless, even though PKMIN argued that separation of prisoners by nationality would increase the effectiveness of their work, the employers were generally unwilling to have the men relocated and established work brigades broken up (Nagornaja 2010, 186). This was likely the main reason why the separation and special treatment efforts were never completely successful.

The attempts to institute special treatment of Baltic POWs in 1914–1915

Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian POWs had also been included in the plans drawn up by GFK and GFK had even contacted prominent Baltic German personalities, such as Friedrich Eduard Lezius (Professor of Theology at University of Königsberg) and Johannes Haller (Professor of History at University of Tübingen), to help with the production and dissemination of propaganda in the relevant languages (Kuldkepp 2015, 146–149). It was nevertheless the efforts of the Baltic German lobbyists that in spring 1915 led to more concrete steps towards the realization of this goal.

In autumn 1914, Baltic German activists in Germany had established a society called the German People's Guard (*Deutscher Volksschutz*), meant to stand up for German economic and political interests in the Baltic provinces and Finland. At a meeting on 20 March 1915, the decision was taken to also find opportunities for spreading pro-German propaganda among the populations of these Russian border regions. As these territories yet remained unoccupied, propaganda would be primarily directed at POWs belonging to the relevant nationalities. To this end, Finnish activist Fritz (Fredrik) Wetterhoff was tasked with contacting both PKMIN and GFK.[16]

Wetterhoff was the leader of the Finnish bureau in Berlin and a leading figure in the *Jäger*-movement that smuggled young Finns from Finland to Germany where they formed a special military unit for the liberation of Finland from Russia. Wetterhoff now set to work with great enthusiasm, taking over the relevant contacts from GFK and developing them further (Kuldkepp 2015, 149–153).

The aim of the planned propaganda, as formulated by Wetterhoff in April 1915, was to ensure the prisoners' loyalty to Germany through the employment of two methods: "systematic description of the actual war situation" and "political explanation of the differences between

the economic, social, and cultural life in Germany and Russia." He thought it advisable not to make the political intent obvious from the beginning, but instead start by making positive adjustments to the prisoners' everyday lives, e.g., by making pastoral care available in their native languages. Referring particularly to the Estonians, Wetterhoff claimed that the few educated men among them (generally officers) already spoke good German and were German-minded, therefore they should be separated first and later used to influence the soldiers.[17]

Wetterhoff's own personal goal was to expand his small Finnish detachment through the inclusion of Baltic and Baltic German POWs into a broad foreign legion for the liberation of the oppressed peoples of Russia. Although this plan failed due to opposition from other Finns who wanted to keep it a purely Finnish enterprise, Wetterhoff did achieve some limited success in compiling lists of Baltic POWs, procuring literature from occupied Courland, and organizing religious services in Latvian and Estonian. The lack of collaborators able to speak the relevant languages, as well as the general unwillingness of German military authorities to assist him, nevertheless meant that by autumn 1915, Wetterhoff had most likely given up on the idea (Kuldkepp 2015, 151–152; 156–158).

German policies targeting Baltic POWs in 1917

After Wetterhoff's initiative petered out, not much seems to have happened in the way of special treatment of Baltic POWs for the next year and a half. While similar ideas were still being floated by émigré politicians,[18] and modest special treatment measures (such as pastoral care in the native languages) continued to be practiced occasionally, there is

evidence that PKMIN considered political agitation inadvisable; probably because the fate of the Baltic provinces was still unclear in the German war plans (Nagornaja 2010, 196–197).

In the summer of 1917, however, the idea resurfaced, now with PKMIN's full authority behind it. This change in attitude was most likely connected to the strategic decision taken by the German Supreme Command (*Oberste Heeresleitung*, OHL) on 23 April 1917 to attempt to conquer, in addition to the already occupied Lithuania and Courland, at least a part of the rest of the region, including the Estonian islands.[19] Since the German leadership had now embraced an annexationist solution to the Baltic question, it was necessary to adopt policies that would ease future occupation. It seems likely that the idea of subjecting Baltic POWs to special treatment was put forward in this context.

The primary example followed was that of German-speaking Russian POWs, who, as noted above, had enjoyed some privileges already since autumn 1914. These included higher pay compared to other Russian POWs, permission to wear civilian clothes, more relaxed security, a ban against being called "Russians" by the guards, etc. (Nagornaja 2010, 188–189; Doegen 1921 175–176, 188). Similar measures would now be extended to Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian POWs, considered a potential German-friendly avant-garde.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that the initial decision to enact special treatment measures on Baltic POWs was made on 2 May 1917 at a PKMIN meeting in Köningsbrück.[20] Soon more concrete orders followed. In a circular on 17 June, PKMIN announced that the allowable languages for POW correspondence would now also include Estonian and Latvian (Lithuanian was already allowed). The camps that did not have a translator were asked to send letters in these languages for censorship to Sagan-Grünthal (today Żagań in Poland), a *Stammlager* designated for Baltic POWs unfit for work.[21]

In a further communication on 28 July, PKMIN provided a more comprehensive list of measures together with the rationale behind them. It claimed that already before the war, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians had been mostly free of enmity towards Germany and after 1905 even gravitated towards German-friendliness. During the war, however, anti-German propaganda had intensified in the Baltic provinces, and now the only way to counteract it was to introduce their POWs to German culture, working habits, and economic prosperity. For this purpose, prisoners were to be sent to work alone or in small groups in successful, owner-run German farmsteads. This was also to have economic benefits for the farmers, since Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were "culturally more developed" than Russians. Furthermore, the prisoners were to be allowed correspondence in their native languages, more parcels from home, pastoral care in their own languages, access to newspapers and religious texts, primers of German, etc.[22]

By early December, PKMIN claimed that the new policy had already produced good results. Especially the prisoners with a peasant background, employed in farmsteads, had been fully able to meet the expectations from the perspective of both the German war economy and "the future relationship between our and their peoples." PKMIN also asserted that special treatment measures were to be enacted regardless of the wishes of the individual prisoners, and that the employers and guards had to be informed of the aims of the policy.[23]

The rationale behind the special treatment of Baltic POWs thus combined political and economic reasoning. It also hints at a broader vision of Germany's special civilizing – or rather, Germanizing – role in the Baltics, something that was to become more important over time.[24] While there was a definite paternalism evident in German treatment of POWs from the Russian army in general (considered primitive and backward, they were thought to need

German instruction in everything from work habits to cleanliness) (see Hinz 1999), the Baltic POWs had come to play a special role in the imagination of German annexationist authorities: that of a gateway towards winning the hearts and minds of the peoples living in these future German lands. To this end, the Baltic POWs' lives would be made easier and more varied, ensuring that they could carry the message of German economic and cultural success back to their homelands after their release. The resulting boost to local economic development and encouragement of pro-German cultural change was expected to benefit the achievement of German colonialist aims in the east.

The Brest-Litovsk peace talks and the special treatment policy

The conquest of Riga by German troops at the beginning of September and the occupation of the Estonian islands in October 1917 meant that the territory under the control of the Supreme Commander of All German Forces in the East (known as Ober Ost) was substantially enlarged. The prospects of conquering the northernmost parts of the Baltics now also appeared more likely.

At a high-level meeting of OHL generals and government ministers in Berlin on 3–5 November, a confidant of the Baltic German activists, Colonel Ernst Buchfink, read out the declaration of Baltic knighthoods pleading to have the whole of their homeland put under German protection.[25] It was well-received, but it also highlighted the need to mobilize a broader German-friendly movement backing this sentiment. On 13 November, OHL ordered the Baltic German representatives to collect petitions also from Estonians and Latvians, in

which they would request immediate invasion by the German army, the separation of their homelands from Russia, and future association with Germany.[26]

The need to step up propaganda efforts was directly connected to the fact that the Russian October revolution, beginning on 7 November, had finally made the long-awaited separate peace a distinct possibility. Already on the day after the seizure of power, the Bolsheviks had released their Decree on Peace "without annexations or indemnities" on basis of national self-determination. Two days later, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Ottokar Czernin recommended to the German chancellor Georg von Hertling to go along with it, as the rhetoric of national self-determination potentially opened a way of permanently severing from Russia its western borderlands populated by minority nationalities.[27]

The idea of annexation by national self-determination was not new. Already a few weeks after the February revolution, a similar peace resolution had been passed by the Petrograd Soviet and welcomed by the war-weary public opinion in Germany. The lesson for the German leadership, however, was not to revise Germany's war aims but rather to obscure them. Instead of annexations, Ludendorff suggested, one could talk about "the revision of borders", and the then-chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg argued that it would be even better to speak of Courland and Lithuania as future "independent states" that just happened to be militarily, politically, and economically dependent on Germany. This was the strategy that was subsequently employed, particularly after the German parliament with its liberal and social democratic majority passed the Petrograd Soviet resolution on 19 July, much to the embarrassment of the annexationists. Two days later, Ludendorff proposed to the Foreign Office that a "national policy" (*völkische Politik*) be adopted in Courland and Lithuania, meaning that prior to the annexation, the local military authorities had to convene

a Diet (*Landesrat*), which would nominally represent the local population and submit to Wilhelm II a plea for German protection. At the end of July, the government approved of the plan, which was indeed successfully put in practice in Courland on 21 September (Kuldkepp 2016, 374–377).

Later in the autumn, proofs of "national self-determination" to leave Russia and join Germany were obtained also from the rest of the region. On 12, 13, and 23 December respectively, the Estonian, Livonian, and Öselian knighthoods, following the demands of OHL, passed initially secret resolutions announcing their separation from Russia. On 22 December, a petition to the same effect with 330 Latvian signatures was procured in occupied Riga. Petitions also started to be collected on the occupied Estonian islands and in the still unoccupied Latvian and Estonian territories (Kuldkepp 2016, 381–395). It is therefore not surprising that when the Soviet delegation presented an ultimatum at the beginning of the Brest-Litovsk peace talks (22 December), refusing to accept any peace that came with annexations and indemnities and was not based on the principle of national self-determination, Germany again decided to play along and accepted these principles as a basis for the negotiations (Chernev 2013, 729).

The question of Russian POWs now acquired a new importance from both political and economic point of view. As the Baltic territory was targeted by the petition-collecting campaign, the POWs could be used for procurement of more propaganda materials. On 4 December, PKMIN asked local military authorities to secretly forward them the prisoners' letters that "by their contents would be particularly suitable to strengthen the longing in Russia for peace and to reduce the hate for Germany." At the same time, lists (grouped by

nationality and party affiliation) were to be put together of POWs who were suitable for carrying out further propaganda tasks.[28]

The main challenge, however, was the question of POWs' impending return home, which the prisoners naturally expected after the conclusion of peace with Russia. Ober Ost, too, had requested the return of certain Latvians and Estonians, especially managers of large land estates and landowning farmers.[29] The challenge for the German authorities was, however, not how to facilitate their return, but rather how to make sure that the peace talks would not endanger the POWs' contribution to the German war economy. The return of all 1.2 million Russian POWs in Germany would have had a devastating effect, as the number of German POWs in Russia was a mere 160,000–180,000. OHL therefore demanded that prisoners be exchanged only man-for-man and only for as long as all Germans and Austrians had been returned home. The POWs themselves had to be explained that their return was delayed due to transport difficulties (Oltmer 2006, 95–96).

Such considerations relate more broadly to the labor policies of German military authorities in occupied eastern Europe, which were increasingly marked by coercion. Given that even nominally voluntary laborers were not allowed to leave once they had been recruited in service of the German war economy (in itself a far from voluntary process),[30] it is unsurprising that the German leadership found it impossible to release the Baltic POWs, however great the political expediency of such a step would have been otherwise.

In this situation, expanded special treatment regime could to some extent be used as a compensatory mechanism. On 30 December, PKMIN affirmed that all POWs from the Russian army would be separated from other, non-Russian nationalities, their pay raised to the same level as that of German workers or soldiers, certain restrictions on their

correspondence lifted, etc. At the same time, the POWs themselves were to be told that their return would be possible only after the signing of the peace treaty and threats made that the prisoners caught trying to escape would be the last ones released.[31]

The expansion of special treatment to all Russian POWs did not mean, however, that the Baltic POWs were now put on an equal footing with the others. Rather, there was to be even more focus on the political role envisioned for them in the future. This is illustrated by a set of documents originating from the Lechfeld prison camp in early February 1918, meant to explain the special treatment policy to guards and employers. In these papers, it is stated that the goal of the special treatment was to allow the Baltic POWs "to raise the still lowly culture of their homeland" after returning home. To this end, German policy was to awaken their national feelings, distance them from Russians, and strengthen their love for Germany. As PKMIN put it, it was self-evident why "in the current political situation" it was necessary that the Baltic provinces would, as far as possible, be populated by German-friendly elements. The Baltics would become a protective wall on the German eastern boundary against the dangers and instability of Russia, while also creating a border zone that would ensure the future prosperity and development of German trade.[32]

Advances were also being made in print propaganda. In January 1918, a weekly newspaper in Estonian and a series of pamphlets began to be published in Berlin-Steglitz. Entitled *Eesti Heal* (The Estonian Voice), the newspaper published war telegrams, articles (including many on non-political topics), fiction, and practical information for the POWs.[33]

Special treatment policies during the 1918 occupation of Estonia and Latvia

After the breakdown of the Brest-Litovsk peace talks, German forces began a renewed offensive on the Eastern Front on 17 February. Its success convinced the Soviet leadership to resume the talks, and on 21 February, Germany presented armistice conditions that were accepted three days later. On 3 March, the Soviet delegation signed the peace treaty by which Poland, Courland, and Lithuania were separated from Russia (Chernev 2013, 734–735). By an additional treaty on 27 August the same year, Russia also gave up its sovereignty over Estonia and Livonia, occupied already by the end of February.

Now that the peace treaty was finally signed, the question of the POWs' return home became even more pressing. In late May, PKMIN suggested that the special treatment measures that applied to all Russian POWs be extended further: the freedom of movement increased, arbitrary punishments by guards and overseers reduced, etc. Although the concrete measures were left to the discretion of the camp authorities, some noticeable improvement was in any case desirable.[34]

Again, since the privileges of all Russian POWs increased, those of the Baltic POWs had to increase even more. As some "politically trustworthy" German-speaking POWs had been allowed to return home already from autumn 1917 onwards, a similar right was now in some cases accorded to the "also German-heritage [prisoners] who nevertheless cannot be considered pure German-Russians," that is, Estonians and Latvians. In mid-June, it finally became possible for some of them to return, although getting necessary permission was complicated and probably also time-consuming (Kuldkepp 2018, 70–71).

On 29 June, a meeting was held between the representatives of PKMIN and local military authorities to discuss the special treatment of Baltic POWs. The delegates agreed that the experiment had been a success from the economic point of view and similar measures could

be expected to produce good results also in the future. POWs with a peasant background had shown themselves to be entirely free from enmity towards the Germans, while working-class POWs, although likewise reliable workers, were somewhat less trustworthy. At the same time, it was admitted that only in rare cases were the POWs in favor of their homelands' annexation by Germany, that they did not understand why they deserved special treatment and had a very passive mindset in general.[35]

Regardless of this seeming propaganda failure, it was nevertheless decided to continue the special treatment to win the "complete trust" of the POWs, as Entente and Bolshevik propaganda was supposedly on the rise, and the prisoners were generally of the erroneous opinion that they were being held for no reason after the peace had been concluded. It needed therefore to be explained to them that they are of "German heritage" and their governments'[36] alignment with Germany meant that they had to remain in Germany for as long as necessary.

The special treatment policies therefore remained in place until the end of the war, although there are reasons to be skeptical about the degree to which they were followed. In mid-September, one prison camp inspection argued that it was pointless to send civilian authorities and employers any further memoranda explaining the aims of special treatment, since the civilian authorities were busy and paid little attention to such vaguely worded regulations, while the employers cared little about anything outside of the actual contracts that they had signed. It might also happen, the camp inspection argued, that such papers could make their way into the hands of the prisoners, which was to be avoided.[37]

Indeed, the special treatment policies had originally been secret, out of the fear that Russian reprisals could target German POWs in Russia (Nagornaja 2010, 188). In the end, however, PKMIN was willing to make its benevolence towards the Baltic POWs publicly known.

Possibly motivated by Wilhelm II's recognition of the "independence" of the Baltic German puppet state, the United Baltic Duchy on 22 September, PKMIN issued on 22 October a press release about its special treatment of Baltic POWs.[38] Meant to be published in the newspapers of Germany and the Baltic provinces, it did make it to print in some cases,[39] but probably had next to no impact with only a few weeks remaining until the signing of the Compiegne armistice.

This press release declared that already for more than a year, German military authorities had been paying attention to the fact that the culture of the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian POWs is western European and stands on a firm German basis. Since these peoples had expressed their wish to establish close economic and political ties with Germany, it was important that their POWs maintained a sense of belonging to their own nations. For this reason, they had been given special privileges regarding correspondence, reading material, and pastoral care in their own languages.

Moreover, to provide the POWs with the best possible understanding of German society and economy, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians had been separated from other POWs from the Russian army and sent to work alone or in small groups under carefully chosen employers. Thanks to this, their living conditions improved significantly, and they had an opportunity to learn German and study the highly developed German agriculture, allowing them to establish beneficial relations with Germany in the future. The authorities had also already started freeing civilian prisoners, POWs unfit for military service, and those particularly needed in their homeland, while a general release of POWs was delayed due to transportation difficulties.

The lived experiences of Estonian POWs in Germany

As Liisi Esse (2019, 50–55) has shown, the experiences of Estonian servicemen in World War I were to a significant degree colored by the national antagonisms in the multinational Russian army. The Estonians' generally poor knowledge of Russian estranged them from other soldiers, making service more difficult, while their Lutheran faith and (in the opinion of Russians) "German-like" language and culture fostered suspicions of German sympathies, which easily led to bullying. Conversely, the feelings that Russian-speakers were unfairly privileged created resentment among the Estonians, and their generally better level of education and above-average literacy contributed to feelings of cultural superiority. As put by Joosep Allikas from Kangru, captured in February 1915, in his diary entry from 8 November 1914:

> And what else! I can no longer endure this treatment! My God, it is not the physical suffering that is the hardest, but the impossibly crass lack of consideration! Deep ignorance and crudeness! (Allikas 2015, 658–659)

Esse argues that the resulting lack of camaraderie with the Russian soldiers and low level of respect for the Russian officers weakened the Estonians' general motivation to fight and had a detrimental impact on their image of the Russian army and Russians in general. Instead, the feelings of resentment fostered Estonian nationalism and improved the image of the enemy. She notes that amongst other things, this meant that they would sometimes find war imprisonment less daunting than their previous serving conditions: the experience of being captured is often described in surprisingly positive tones as a surprise and relief that the propagandistic rumors about German barbarism had been groundless (Esse 2019, 53–54, 57–58).

While some sources indicate that this was indeed the case,[40] there are also counterexamples (e.g., Grosschmidt 1936, 66–68, 94), which rather affirm the validity of the Russian propaganda. Initial positive experiences were often also very quickly followed by negative ones,[41] and life in prison camps was still perceived negatively, with its descriptions dominated by poor working conditions, hunger, and isolation, caused by lacking knowledge of Russian and German. The positive experiences, as reported, nearly always relate to work in individual farms, where work was easier and food and treatment better. Esse (2019, 58–60) conjectures that this was mostly because of the prisoners' Lutheran faith, their ability to learn German faster than the Russians, and their origins in the "German" borderlands of the Russian Empire. Given what we know about PKMIN's intentions for the Baltic POWs, however, it would be relevant to ask whether it might actually have been the German special treatment policy that played the most important role in making their imprisonment more bearable; with the various other factors being secondary to the decision to take the POWs out of camps and send them to live in farmsteads in the first place. To this end, the final sections of this article will look at the surviving evidence by Estonian POWs themselves to try to detect the workings of German policies.

The experiences of Estonian POWs before the institution of special treatment policy

In the first years of the war, when the special treatment policies had not yet been extended to Baltic POWs, memoirs and diaries indicate that Estonian prisoners were usually deeply unhappy with their lot. Put to live in camps of 1000–30,000 prisoners, they without exception complained about hunger, low-quality food, back-breaking work, and violent guards.[42] Jaan

Ambos, a skilled dairy worker from Tapa, who had been captured at the end of September 1915, later summarized his experiences as follows:

> This was a life I would not wish for my worst enemy. The food was extremely bad. For seven men, we were given two and a half pounds of bread per day, and with it nothing but unsweetened tea. Despite the poor food, we had to work the fields like horses. I have pulled the plough for three days. Not alone, but one plough with 20 men, but nevertheless in front of the plough instead of the horse.[43]

Johannes Tideberg, a soldier with elementary education from Palmse, who was also captured in September 1915, had a similarly rough prison experience. After making it from battlefield to hospital barely alive, he went on to work in two separate camps, creating new farmland out of swamp, and was finally injured in spring 1918 while working in harsh conditions in coal mines.[44]

Nevertheless, some managed to improve their situation by acquiring a higher position in the camp hierarchy. Educated Estonians, with their good knowledge of German, could become interpreters, guaranteeing themselves and their co-nationals a slightly easier life, as noted by A. Parv, an NCO and ex-volunteer from Tartu, who was captured in November 1914.[45] Similarly, schoolteacher Joosep Allikas repeatedly mentions that his profession earned him some respect from the Germans.[46]

The echoes of the men's previous experience in the Russian army are often detectable in the accounts. Not infrequently, parallels are drawn between the arrogance and stupidity of the German guards and the Russian soldiers.[47] Parv also admits to Estonians still having feelings of superiority derived from the idea of being more cultured than ethnic Russians:

> Estonians, Latvians, some Poles as well as Englishmen, French, and Belgians behaved in a very correct way, which is why their treatment by the guards was much better than it was towards the Russians, whose beastly nature drew to them a general contempt, both by the guards and their fellow prisoners.[48]

Occasionally, there are signs of awareness that some nationalities from the Russian empire were being treated differently from the others. University of Leipzig graduate Vilhelm Altermann, who was interned right at the beginning of the war and spent six weeks in harsh prison conditions in Rostock, mentions how, after his release, the German authorities suddenly began to show some kindness to the Finns and "those who had remembered to call themselves Balts."[49] The timeframe described fits with the date of the enactment of GFK's proposal to begin special treatment of German-speaking Russians, and indicates that even some Estonians were able to benefit from this "Baltic connection."

A few Estonian POWs also noticed the separation of other nationalities in the spring of 1915. Allikas (2015, 700) notes in a diary entry on 15 March that Jews and "Tatars" had been separated from the others. Another schoolteacher, Jüri Uustalu, captured together with Allikas in East Prussia, writes that their camp in Czersk was visited by an Estonian-speaking pastor who handed out bibles in Estonian.[50] This seems to coincide temporally with Wetterhoff's attempts to reach the Baltic POWs through the provision of pastoral care.

The experiences of Estonian POWs after the institution of special treatment policy

The food situation in the camps during the last two years of the war tended to be worse than before, and POW accounts are dominated by the theme of hunger and descriptions of barely

edible foodstuffs that they were being served.[51] Yet a definite sense of improvement and relief is observable from the point onwards when the camp authorities "recognized" the men as "Baltic" and subjected them to the policies of separation and special treatment. This could happen at slightly different points in time: some prisoners experienced the change already in 1917, while for others it coincided with the beginning of the German occupation of Estonia.

In some cases, the Estonian prisoners were moved to a new camp with better conditions. Allikas, for example, went through such a move in May 1917[52] with a marked improvement in his circumstances:

> Our life is now pretty good, we have never been given so much freedom as now! … Here, in the village, where the camp is, we are under no oversight whatsoever, everyone does their work like a free person. In the evening, the guard arrives at 10 o'clock. From 7 to 10, everyone does and goes around as they wish; you can take a walk under the trees in the camp, and when the music plays and there are Polish girls around, you can dance and have a good time with them. They even come freely into the camp to dance. Large numbers of us spend time playing cards.[53]

In many other cases, the improvements were connected to the policy of sending the POWs to work alone or in small groups in proprietor-run farmsteads. Karl Rohtla (Rosenthal), a farmer with primary education captured in East Prussia, tells that his life got much better, as there was now more food, and the farm owner was friendly. Rohtla also notes that the prisoners were taught German from German primers for Estonians.[54] Parv writes that in 1917, he was moved to a country estate close to Hannover, where he spent almost a year learning about agricultural methods, "especially how to raise chickens, something, which I used even later in Estonia,"[55] testifying to the attainment of some of the intended goals of the German

policies. Industrious prisoners could even make good money working for the farmers, as noted by Mihkel Kaur, imprisoned in Sennelager close to Bielefeld in 1918 (Kaur 2015, 578).

Often, the improvement in circumstances was connected to the beginning of the German occupation of Estonia in spring 1918. Tideberg reports that after the war with Russia ended, Estonians and Latvians were brought together in the Neuhammer camp and an amnesty declaration was read out, according to which they were now "German subjects since Germany had liberated small Estonia and Latvia from the Russian Bolsheviks and robbers."[56] Soon afterwards, they were sent out to the countryside to work, where Tideberg stayed in the service of a farmer until April 1919, when he was told it was possible to return to Estonia. Tideberg was sorry to leave the German family and afterwards regretted his decision to do so.[57]

Interestingly, there are several references to outright conscription of POWs into the German military. When rumors had started circulating about the German occupation of the Baltics,[58] Parv and the others were apparently moved overnight to a different camp, where they were given an opportunity to join the German army, receive German citizenship, and obtain land in the Baltic provinces. According to Parv, however, nobody took up the offer.[59] Voldemar Kasela (Repnau) had a similar experience in the Malmedy prison camp: the Baltic and Ukrainian prisoners were informed that they were now German subjects and offered a chance to join the German army on the Western Front as volunteers.[60] Kasela, who did take up this opportunity, later admitted that his subsequent service at Verdun was like a vacation, with a good life and good food.[61]

This side of the special treatment policy is perhaps best illuminated by the account of Lieutenant Eduard Grosschmidt (later Suursepp), who was captured in the aftermath of the

conquest of Riga in August 1917 and imprisoned in the officer camp on the island of Dänholm, close to Stralsund (Grosschmidt 1936, 118–119, 126). Grosschmidt reports that early in 1918, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian officers from Dänholm were sent to camp Crefeld close to the Dutch border, apparently known as the "Baltic baron camp" since it had been used to collect German-speaking Russian officers. Although the food improved and there was more freedom, the contingent of about 40 Estonian officers sent to Crefeld reacted bitterly to the arrogance of the Baltic German officers who were not pleased to share their living quarters with "peasants." Grosschmidt found himself unable to let go of the thought that "by sending us here among the barons, they have somehow particularly wanted to punish the Estonians" (Grosschmidt 1936, 168–172).

Grosschmidt, who was aware of the German practice of grouping together POWs according to religion or nationality, astutely sensed that "the courting of the Baltic Germans, the collection of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians together with the barons, and all these relatively significant privileges and benefits that separate the Crefeld camp from the others, are likely the first preparations for the coming United Baltic Duchy" (Grosschmidt 1936, 174, 177). It seems that Estonian officers were indeed among the first to be directly targeted by propaganda, just as proposed by Wetterhoff already in 1915.

Soon, rumors started in Crefeld that all Baltic officers were to be sent back home to serve in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian territorial regiments under German command. The Estonian officers were indeed sent home in April 1918, surprised to find themselves described as "Baltic German Lieutenant," "Colonel with German ancestry," etc., in the new personal identification papers they received. On the way back, a stop was made in Berlin,

where the Estonians enjoyed the hospitality of Baltic German activists who showed them around in their "new capital" (Grosschmidt 1936, 186–189).

The soldiers generally had to wait at least until the autumn. In early June 1918, rumors reached Joosep Allikas that preparations were being made for the prisoners to be sent back home. By that point, the guards were treating the POWs as almost free people.[62] Another milestone was the German revolution, which saw the replacement of the hated militia guards with former front troops who did not care to enforce any restrictions at all.[63] Jüri Uustalu was released on 14 November;[64] presumably the same happened to Allikas.

The failures of German propaganda

As noted above, at PKMIN's meeting on 29 June 1918 it was admitted that the German propaganda efforts among the Baltic POWs had mostly been a failure. The evidence of ego-documents easily bears this out: while the prisoners' circumstances tended to improve with the enactment of special treatment policies, any signs of actual German-friendliness are rare and regrets, if any, over the subsequent decision to leave Germany tend to have little to do with fondness for Germany and more to do with the prisoners' attachment to the families where they had been placed to work. The one Estonian prisoner, August Plei, whose memoirs give evidence of a sustained positive experience in Germany, seems to have been a special case, since he spent his time working in a veterinary hospital in apparently good conditions.[65]

Other than that, the prisoners' ego-documents contain very few expressions of fondness for Germany or Germans. Only Johannes Vaiksaar, imprisoned in France close to Belgium in 1918 in a position of overseer (meaning he did not have to work), wrote in his diary that

"until now, the Germans have loved and protected me" and "I must thank the heavens that no German has until now said a bad word to me; I have rather been praised for keeping everything in order."[66] But even in this case, such sentiments seem to be due to him being treated better than other prisoners, not due to any appreciation of Germany as such.

It is much more common to see prisoners almost driven to desperation by the news of German conquests in the Baltics. Joosep Allikas, for example, was very upset by the conquest of Riga, seeing the now almost certain prospect of a German occupation of Estonia as "a horrible, unavoidable misfortune for [his] homeland,"[67] which contrasted sharply with the hopefulness he had felt during the Russian February revolution.[68] Upon hearing about the German occupation of Tartu, Allikas gave up hope of ever returning home:

> Soon, the word "Estonian" will have disappeared again, and the Baltic barons will in the future only know "peasant," some sort of a working animal! … This is how I think: the world is big enough to find a corner where you can live without the hated Germans! Good-bye, homeland, and the beautiful days of youth! Everything is permanently gone![69]

Even officers, who particularly seemed to be targeted by German special treatment, generally failed to show appreciation. Ensign August Schönberg, who had been imprisoned for four years, writes that the Estonian and Latvian officers who were interned in the Friedberg officers' camp (one of the *Stammlager* for Baltic officers) did feel some improvement during the German revolution, but not to the extent they had expected, having read the declarations of freedom and brotherhood in German newspapers. "There will be no brotherhood with Germans! Anyone who knows the Germans even a little bit knows that it will not happen."[70]

Conclusions

In most cases, the fates of Estonian and other Baltic POWs in Germany changed over the course of the war. Initially, they were treated as any other "Russians" and not subjected to the policies of separation and special treatment that German military authorities had applied to the German-speaking Russian subjects and other, larger minority groups in the Russian army early on. Initial attempts in 1915 to extend such policies to Baltic POWs do not seem to have amounted to much. A decisive change did take place in 1917, when Germany settled on the strategic aim of conquering the whole of the Baltic region. In anticipation of the occupation, a secret propaganda campaign was launched to promote feelings of German-friendliness among Estonians and Latvians. It seems that it was in this connection that the policies of separation and special treatment also began to be applied to Baltic POWs.

For the Baltic POWs in Germany, now seen as future German subjects, the new German policies promised better working and living conditions, separation from other Russian nationalities, and some subjection to propaganda aiming to encourage German-friendliness. Comparing the official documents to the relevant ego-documents by the POWs themselves, it seems fair to say that the special treatment policies did have some positive influence on their circumstances. Furthermore, the ego-documents reveal some knowledge, or at least credible assumptions on part of the prisoners about the existence of special treatment, including its political goals.

What also seems to be certain, however, is that there were local differences to the timing and extent to which these policies were applied (if at all), and that they mostly failed at creating

the intended German-friendly sentiment. In the end, the negative sides of imprisonment – hunger, isolation, homesickness – felt both before and after the institution of special treatment, seem to have negated the relative relief the prisoners felt thanks to their improved situation. When given the chance, the POWs still wanted to leave behind Germany and the harshness of the years of imprisonment, even if there was likely some later disappointment when they discovered that their perhaps idealized image of home did not quite correspond to the reality of Estonia in 1918–1919.

There are also reasons to be cautious of overinterpretation. The number of known narrative accounts by Estonian POWs is small, and they are in many cases written down about two decades after the events. They are also not necessarily fully representative of all varieties of the POW experience. Crucially, the present corpus does not include accounts by those POWs who decided to remain in Germany and could possibly provide a counterexample of German propaganda "working as intended." This, in turn, is a reason to draw attention to the Baltic dimension of the German special treatment policies. German authorities almost never thought of Estonian POWs as a distinct group in their own right; they would normally be treated together with their Baltic brothers. In addition, from a research point of view, augmenting the corpus with Latvian, Lithuanian, and Baltic German accounts would provide a larger and more varied set of texts to study, most likely allowing us to reach more nuanced findings.

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Kansallisarkisto (KA) [The National Archives of Finland].

Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA) [The Political Archive of the German Foreign Office].

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Notes

[1] On the reliability of these numbers, see Kuldkepp 2018, 61. Many Estonians were also captured by the Austro-Hungarian army.
[2] For existing research on Estonian POWs, see Ross 2012; Esse 2019; Kuldkepp 2015, 2018, 2019.
[3] These sources are cited in the last part of the article.
[4] The central organization collecting war memoirs of Estonian servicemen.
[5] The idea was propagated by the Baltic German academic and confidant of Wilhelm II, Theodor Schiemann. See Katkov 1968, 67–9.
[6] Ludendorff was not the author of this policy, which can be traced back to Gottlieb von Jagow, the State Secretary of the Foreign Office in 1913–1916, who was influenced by the views of the leading figures of GFK. See Fischer 1961, 204–5.
[7] Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (forthwith PAAA), R 20983, 6. A note by Gerhard von Mutius, 06.08.1914.
[8] About this rather heterogenous group, see Lenz 1982.

[9] About German colonialism in the Baltics, see below. About GFK's role more specifically, see Nelson 2011.
[10] It was not only the German authorities and lobby groups that called for the separation of prisoners. The British and French governments also protested against their POWs being housed together with the Russians, thought to be carrying epidemic diseases. See Steuer 2014, 162; Nagornaja 2010, 184.
[11] About German propaganda as directed at POWs, see Steuer 2014.
[12] The Finnish National Archives (forthwith KA), M2620, kansio 16, Erich Keup to Hugo von Keussler 10.04.1915.
[13] PAAA, R 20865, 18–9. Friedrich Ernst von Schwerin to PKMIN, 27.01.1915.
[14] In the Ukrainian case, it was the lobby group Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (Bund zur Befreiung der Ukraine) that worked out the plan together with GFK: Golczewski 2003, 553–5.
[15] About the work brigades and the structure of the German camp system, see Sergeev 1997, 118–9.
[16] KA, M2620, kansio 15, 89–90. Protokoll der Vorstande-Sitzung des Vereins „Deutschen Volksschutz" vom Sonnabend d. 20. März 1915. Wetterhoff was closely involved in the Baltic German propaganda efforts, which he saw as helpful in directing the main attention of German decision-makers towards the east and thus also brining about his main goal, the liberation of Finland from Russia.
[17] KA, M2620, kansio 5, 96–7. Wetterhoff to von Schwerin, 29.04.1915.
[18] E.g., by Aleksander Kesküla. See Kuldkepp 2015, 154–6.
[19] PAAA, R21753, 2–3. Aufzeichnung über die Besprechungen am 23.4.17.
[20] Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (fortwith SächsHStA), 11248, Nr. 6994, 80. The camp inspection of the XII and XIX army corps to PKMIN, 04.08.1917.
[21] SächsHStA, 11352, Nr. 150, 356. Zulassung der lettischen und estnischen Sprache im Kriegsgefangenen-Postverkehr, 17.06.1917; SächsHStA, 11248, Nr. 6994, 78. Sonderbehandlung lettischer, litauischer und estnischer Kriegsgefangener, 28.07.1917.
[22] SächsHStA, 11248, Nr. 6994, 78. Sonderbehandlung lettischer, litauischer und estnischer Kriegsgefangener, 28.07.1917.
[23] Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart (forthwith HStA Stuttgart), M 1/8, Bü 225, Berichte der stellv. Gen. Kdos. auf den Erlass v. 28. Juli 1917, 04.12.1917.
[24] About German colonialism in the east, see Mann 1965; Volkmann 1970; Lenz 1996; Liulevicius 2004; Nelson 2011.
[25] PAAA, R 21755, 99–102; Buchfink 1936, 556–8.
[26] PAAA, R 21755, 104–8, Befehl für die in Livland und Estland zu treibende Politik. See also Kuldkepp 2016, 379–81.
[27] Czernin to Hertling, 10.11.1917 in Zeman 1958, 76–7; Chernev 2011, 372.
[28] SächsHStA, 11248, Nr. 6994, 251, Briefpost der Kriegsgefangenen, 04.12.1917.
[29] HStA Stuttgart, M 1/8, Bü 225, Berichte der stellv. Gen. Kdos. auf den Erlass v. 28. Juli 1917, 04.12.1917.
[30] See Westerhoff 2011, 2013.
[31] SächsHStA, 11248, Nr. 6994, 270–78, Bericht!, 30.12.1917.
[32] SächsHStA, 11352, Nr. 562, Kriegsgefangenenlager Lechfeld, Abteilung für deutschstämmige Kriegsgefangene. Merkblatt für die Arbeitgeber, 01.02.1918.
[33] About the newspaper and the pamphlet series, see Kuldkepp 2019.
[34] Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kriegsministerium 1688, PKMIN to Stellvertretende Generalkommando of the I Army Corps, 22.03.1918.
[35] SächsHStA, 11352, Nr. 562, Bericht über Besprechung der D.R.O. sämtlichen Korpsbereichs im Kgl. Pr. Kriegsministerium am 29.6.18.
[36] What was meant were the puppet governments that were being installed on basis of Ludendorff's *völkische Politik*. The "government" of the so-called United Baltic Duchy (*Vereinigtes Baltisches Herzogtum*) was a notable example.
[37] SächsHStA, 11352, Nr. 562, Memorandum nr 29360 of the camp inspection of the XII and XIX army corps, 13.09.1918.
[38] SächsHStA, 11352, Nr. 562, 337280, PKMIN's circular 5787/9.18. U.K.D.R., 22.10.1918.
[39] Von den lettischen und estnischen Gefangenen. *Pernausche Zeitung* 09.11.1918; and Ueber die Sonderbehandlung der Letter, Ester und Litauer in den deutschen Gefangenenlagern. *Libauische Zeitung* 11.11.1918.

[40] See, e.g., August Plei, ERA.2124.3.1014, 20–1, who writes that "from this first sight, I even felt love for Germans, while I despised the Russians." Esse (2019, 57–8) cites the same example.
[41] See, e.g., A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 26.09.1938.
[42] See Joosep Allikas's diary entries on 12.02.1915, 16.02.1915, 03.03.1915, 11.04.1915 (Allikas 2015, 686–710).
[43] Olin hobusena adra ees. Paasvere töösangar pajatab. *Virumaa Teataja* 06.10.1939.
[44] Johannes Tideberg, ERA.2124.3.1449.
[45] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 30.09.1938.
[46] Diary entries on 20.05.1915, 12.06.1915, 30.06.1915 (Allikas 2015, 723–31).
[47] See, e.g., A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 26.09.1938.
[48] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 27.09.1938.
[49] -K. 1915. Kuus kuud Saksamaal vangis. *Tallinna Teataja* 30.01.1915.
[50] Jüri Uustalu, ERA.2124.3.1613, 12.
[51] See, e.g., Voldemar Kasela (Repnau), Seitse aastat sõjatules. *Uudisleht* 26.02.1939.
[52] Diary entry on 30.05.1917 in Allikas 2015, 744.
[53] Diary entry on 08.06.1917 in Allikas 2015, 745–6.
[54] Karl Rohtla (Rosenthal), ERA.2124.3.1136, 6.
[55] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 02.10.1938.
[56] The supposed cases of POWs being offered German citizenship require further research. Based on official sources, PKMIN seems to have been cautious in accepting former POWs as German subjects. See Nagornaja 2010, 185.
[57] Johannes Tideberg, ERA.2124.3.1449, 34–8.
[58] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 05.10.1938.
[59] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 11.10.1938. Parv actually writes that the POWs were offered a chance to join Rüdiger von der Goltz's Iron Division, which would have been impossible in 1918.
[60] Voldemar Kasela (Repnau), Seitse aastat sõjatules. *Uudisleht* 01.03.1939.
[61] Voldemar Kasela (Repnau), Seitse aastat sõjatules. *Uudisleht* 03.03.1939.
[62] Diary entry on 06.06.1918 (Allikas 2015, 777–8).
[63] A. Parv, Saksamaal vangilaagris. *Postimees* 09.10.1938.
[64] Jüri Uustalu, ERA.2124.3.1613, 24.
[65] August Plei, ERA.2124.3.1014.
[66] Johannes Vaiksaar, ERA.2124.3.1627, 29–30.
[67] Diary entries on 24.08.1917 and 25.08.1917 (Allikas 2015, 756–7).
[68] Diary entries on 04.10.1917 and 07.10.1917 (Allikas 2015, 760).
[69] Diary entry on 27.02.1918 (Allikas 2015, 769–70).
[70] Saksamaalt koju. *Sakala* 20.12.1918.