



**MEDIA
INITIATIVE**
for Human Rights

A photograph of a prison camp. In the foreground, there is a single strand of barbed wire supported by wooden posts. Behind it is a concrete wall. In the background, there are two buildings. The building on the left is on fire, with bright orange flames and thick black smoke rising from it. The building on the right is a two-story concrete structure with a window. The sky is a pale, overcast grey.

THE CRIME IN OLENIVKA:

facts and testimonies about the most
massive massacre of Ukrainian soldiers
in Russian captivity



INTRODUCTION

On the night of July 28 to 29, 2022, within the confines of Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120, also known as Olenivka, a tragic event unfolded resulting in the **deaths of over 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war**, with an additional **140 sustaining injuries**, all of whom were members of the Azov Special Purpose Detachment of the National Guard of Ukraine, marking this incident as the most significant confirmed act of mass killing of Ukrainian prisoners of war since the onset of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. The survivors were egregiously denied proper medical care, leading to further fatalities and severe physical and psychological damage.

As of February 2024, the investigation into the catastrophic events at Volnovakha Colony No. 120 remains ongoing, with no definitive conclusions regarding the circumstances leading to the explosions. The individuals responsible have yet to be identified. Nonetheless, even at this juncture, an analysis of the events preceding and following the explosions clearly indicates that the Russian Federation ("RF") has breached numerous rights of Ukrainian prisoners of war as stipulated by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

This implies that the responsibility for ensuring the rights and overall treatment of servicemen in captivity squarely falls on the detaining party, in this case, the RF. Any unlawful actions or failures to act by the state holding prisoners that result in death or pose a grave threat to the health of a prisoner of war under its protection are strictly prohibited and recognized as a grave infringement of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Geneva Convention III), potentially qualifying as a war crime.

According to Geneva Convention III, prisoners of war are accorded protected status, with the Convention outlining the conditions of their capture, detention, and rights of POWs.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, prisoners of war are to be evacuated to camps situated a safe distance from the combat zone to guarantee their safety post-capture, a criterion Russia failed to meet in the instance of Correctional Colony No. 120. When Ukrainian prisoners of war were placed there, hostilities were occurring merely 20 kilometers away.

SECONDLY, the treatment meted out to military personnel in captivity must adhere to principles of humanity. Contrary to this, the RF has subjected Ukrainian prisoners of war to torture, physical, psychological, and other forms of abuse, as corroborated by servicemen who have been released from captivity. They further testify to the deplorable conditions of detention, which pose significant risks to their health and lives. Notably, immediately following the explosion at the colony, the injured were left without medical assistance, awaiting evacuation to hospitals for more than five hours, in the absence of any medical professionals capable of providing the necessary aid on the colony's premises.

Consequently, the Russian authorities neither attempted nor undertook all essential measures to safeguard the lives of the wounded prisoners of war post-explosion, thus neglecting their responsibilities as outlined by IHL, particularly Geneva Convention III, to which it is a signatory.

Six hours after the explosions, only a fraction of the critically injured servicemen were transported to hospitals in Donetsk. Those with less severe injuries were abandoned on the premises of Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120 without adequate medical care. The widespread loss of life among prisoners of war at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120 may be deemed a war crime and possibly a crime against humanity.

In September 2022, Russia consented to the exchange of the first 16 servicemen who were present in the building rocked by the explosions. By May 2023, the RF had repatriated an additional eight servicemen. Nonetheless, the majority of the injured remain in Russian captivity. As of December 2022, some military personnel with grave injuries from the explosions, including limb amputations, were seen in hospitals in videos disseminated by Russian media. From the beginning of 2023, the whereabouts of these individuals have become unknown. MIHR possesses information suggesting that some prisoners are being relocated to detention facilities in the occupied territories of Ukraine, with others being transported to the RF. At present, the majority of the eyewitnesses and victims of the mass fatalities among Ukrainian servicemen at Volnovakha Colony No. 120 are still in Russian captivity.

It should be noted that throughout the entire period of Ukrainian soldiers' detention at Correctional Colony No. 120, representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were granted access to this

detention site only once—on August 2, 2022. However, they were precluded from engaging in direct communication¹ with the servicemen held there. Following the explosions, despite the ICRC's requests² to Russia for access to the locations where the injured were receiving treatment and where the bodies of those who perished might have been transferred, as well as to the sites where other prisoners of war could have been moved, their efforts were futile. Subsequently, the ICRC was also denied such access. Furthermore, the UN Mission established on August 3, 2022, to investigate the facts surrounding the incident on July 29, 2022, in Olenivka, Ukraine, was unable to access the site of the explosion. In early January 2023, the UN Secretary-General disbanded this mission due to the absence of necessary conditions for its deployment, including the assurance of the mission's safety.

The Media Initiative for Human Rights, in collaboration with partner organizations, has prepared two comprehensive submissions concerning the events in Olenivka. The first submission was directed to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, a body established by the UN Human Rights Council dedicated to investigating human rights and international humanitarian law violations amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine since 2022. The second submission was addressed to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Within these submissions, we provided an in-depth account of the events at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120, drawing upon the testimonies of eyewitnesses to the events, the victims and their families, as well as the families of the deceased prisoners of war. Beyond recording the absence of medical assistance and the inadequate evacuation of severely injured individuals, we highlighted known instances of torture, physical, psychological, and other forms of violence, and described the substandard conditions of detention faced by Ukrainian prisoners of war.

1. В Оленівці ми справді були два рази": речник МКЧХ розповів про спроби отримати доступ до українських полонених / Суспільне новини, 15.08.2022 <https://susplne.media/271495-v-olenivci-mi-spravdi-buli-dva-razi-recnik-mkch-rozpoviv-pro-sprobi-otrimati-dostup-do-ukrainskih-polonenihi>
2. Оленівська виправна колонія: військовополонені та роль МКЧХ / Сайт МКЧХ, 04.08.2022 <https://blogs.icrc.org/ua/2022/08/04/olenivka-viyskovopoloneni-rol-chervonyi-hrest/>

The primary objective of this document is to chronicle the events that unfolded at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120 and to shine the spotlight on Russia's cruel treatment of prisoners of war, which has led to the worsening of their health conditions and resulted in deaths. Relying on firsthand testimonies documented by the MIHR team, we embarked on an exhaustive journalistic investigation and conducted a legal analysis of the amassed data. This effort unveils the perpetration of international crimes by Russia and its breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). We underscore the critical need for thorough investigations into the explosions at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120 on both national and international levels, assert-

ing that bringing the perpetrators to justice serves as a fundamental mechanism for averting future violations of globally recognized standards and laws.

This analysis is structured as a chronological and step-by-step reenactment of the events leading up to, during, and following the explosions. Additionally, the document incorporates findings from the MIHR's investigation regarding the likely culprits behind the explosions, as well as those directly responsible for withholding medical assistance — thereby violating international law standards. In closing, we offer recommendations to various stakeholders who could play a role in uncovering the truth about the incidents at Correctional Colony No. 120.

■ From February 24,

the first day of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Azov brigade was at the forefront of defending Mariupol, situated on the Azov Sea coast.

■ On May 16, 2022,

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in his capacity as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, issued a directive to the commanders stationed at Azovstal to prioritize the preservation of their personnel's lives and vacate their defensive stances.

■ From May 16 to 20, 2022,

The evacuation of military personnel ensued.

Over
86 days
the city's defense
was protracted
↓
82 days
characterized
by complete
encirclement

Resulting in
≈2500 soldiers,
including those
from the Azov brigade,
becoming POWs of Russia.

Their captivity was verified by the ICRC.

A fraction of these soldiers found themselves confined within Correctional Colony No. 120 in Olenivka, located in the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk Region.

№ 120

TRANSFER TO THE BARRACKS: UNEXPECTED AND RAPID

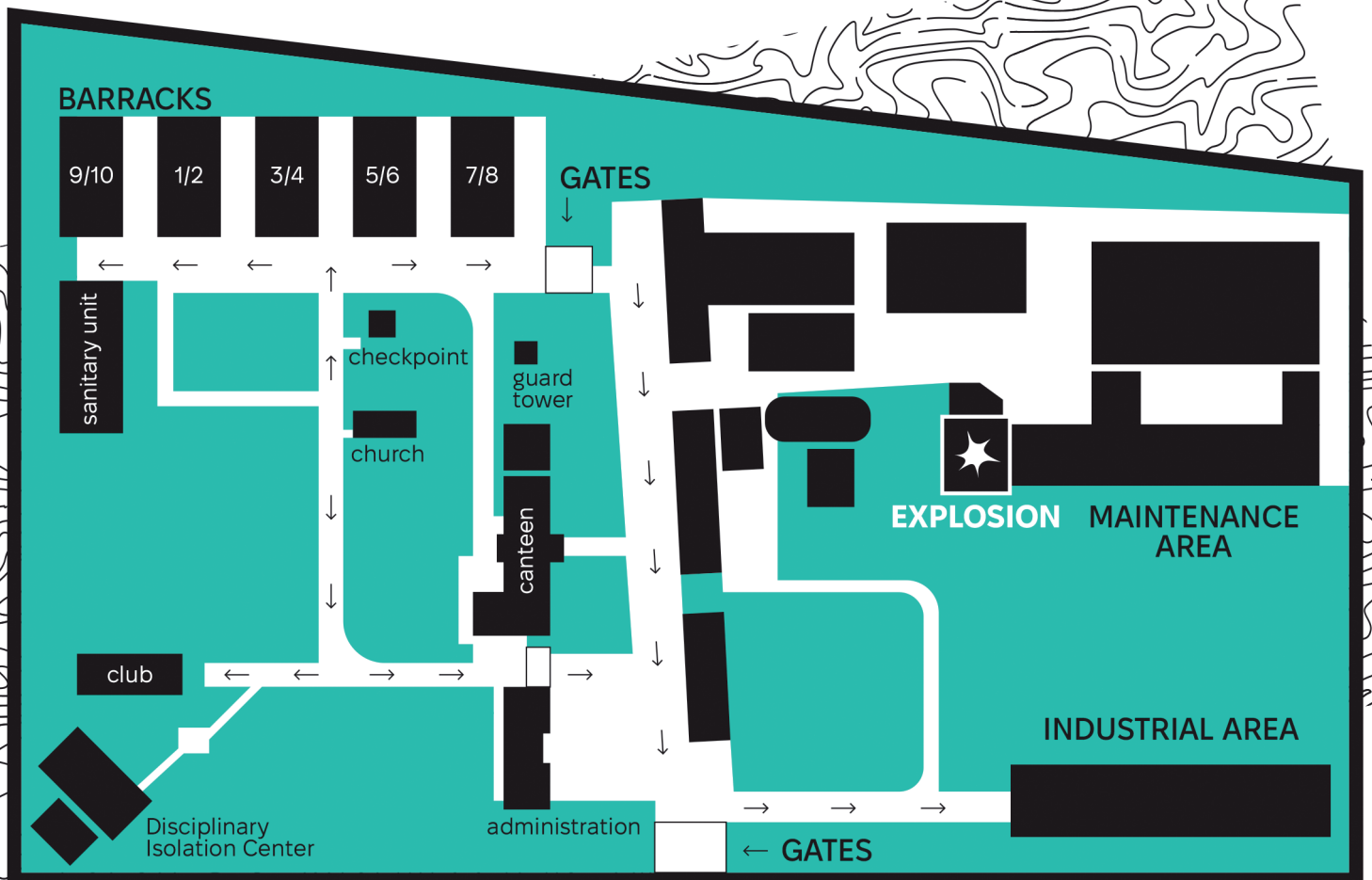
"I immediately told the guys: 'Remember this day. It's not coincidental that we've all been assembled,'" says a serviceman with the call sign Avocado.

He was released in an exchange, regarding their removal along with 52 more servicemen from barracks number 9/10 on July 27, 2022. This specific barracks was reserved for Azov members captured during the evacuation from Mariupol in May 2022. It was 11:30. The colony guards explained that this move was initiated to free up the barracks, necessitating the relocation of some prisoners to a different facility.

This transfer from multiple barracks to a new location unfolded throughout the entire day, with the prison-

ers of war being escorted in small groups. Witnesses recalled the day before when administration officials of Correctional Colony No. 120 visited the barracks with lists of those designated for transfer.

Ultimately, the aim was to consolidate 200 Azov members within the new barracks, strategically placed within the colony's industrial sector. This area, previously not used for detaining prisoners, was hastily adapted specifically for Azov members, as indicated by visible signs of recent renovations.



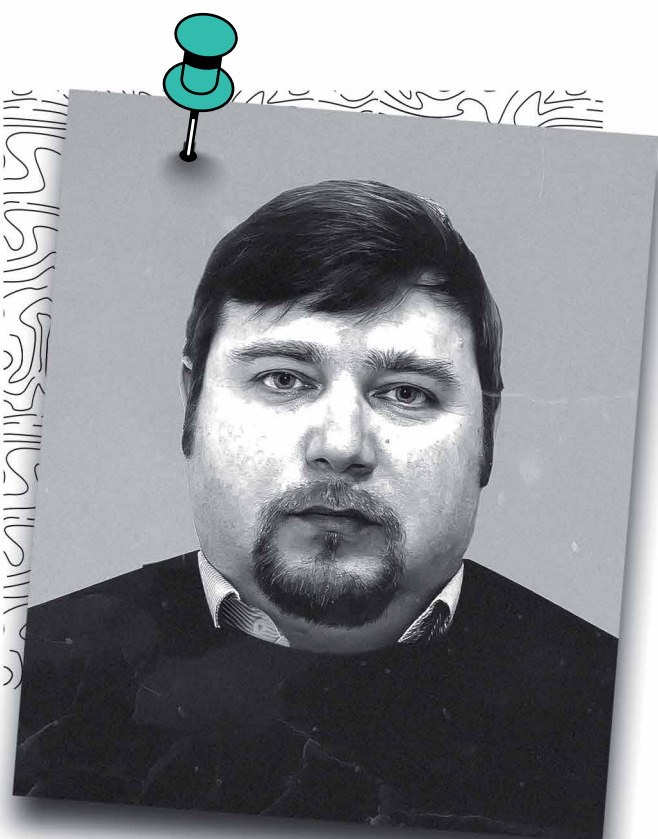
Owing to the specific number of 200 Azov members who had been transferred, the prisoners coined the term "**barracks 200**" for this facility. Historically, the military have used the term "cargo 200" as a coded reference for transporting the remains of the deceased. Currently, in Ukraine, the term "on the shield" has supplanted the previous usage.

On the very evening of their arrival, seven prisoners, identified as artillerymen, were escorted from this barracks. It was later revealed that they had been moved to a pre-trial detention center in Donetsk. Consequently, 193 prisoners remained, representing a diverse cross-section of Azov units, many of whom were unacquainted prior to this. The criterion employed by the administration of Correctional Colony No. 120 for selecting prisoners for this transfer remains ambiguous. The barracks accommodated a mix of soldiers, officers, founding members, and those who had joined during the siege of Mariupol. The senior-most among them was Lieutenant Colonel Dmytro Bukaryov, Azov's deputy commander for artillery. Their commonality lay in their association with Azov.

Upon their arrival in the new barracks, prisoners were allowed to select their bunk beds. The large room was outfitted with double-decker metal beds, around which comrades from the same units congregated.

There were no guards on the inside; instead, security measures were enforced externally, beyond the perimeter fence encircling the barracks. Adjacent to the barracks, a trench had been excavated, its presence conspicuously documented in satellite imagery post-explosion, though its intended purpose remains speculative.

The servicemen were perplexed by their relocation from the colony's internally secured area.



"Upon our arrival, we noticed the absence of mattresses on the beds. It was apparent that the toilets had been recently constructed, and a shower facility installed. My conviction was that our stay would be brief. Yet, some pondered why we were brought here if an exchange was impending. I assumed that it would facilitate easier bus access, given our proximity to the exit," Avocado said.

← Subsequently, **Sergey Evsyukov**, the overseer of Correctional Colony No. 120, made his appearance in the barracks. Distinguished by his decision not to conceal his identity behind a mask, Evsyukov explained that their stay in this facility would not be prolonged, merely for the duration of renovations in other barracks.

The following day, July 28, the guards assembled all the prisoners of war outdoors, instructing them to form lines adjacent to the fence. People who entered the barracks began wiring the structure for electricity. The surrounding area was later encircled with barbed wire.

EXPLOSIONS AND FIRE

Around 11:30 p.m. on July 28, 2022 an explosion resonated outside the barracks and across the colony's expanse.

The majority of the prisoners of war dismissed it, attributing the noise to the proximity of the front line — merely 20 kilometers from Olenivka — and their familiarity with such disturbances. They had even observed enemy aircraft coursing over the colony.

"Moreover, the Russians were positioning launchers near the colony. We observed and even found humor in it. We darkly joked that it would only take one strike to leave no one for exchange," says a serviceman with the call sign Avocado.

He was among those who grew concerned. Prompted by the initial explosion, he descended from his bed, put on his boots, intent on venturing outside to assess the situation. However, his peers dissuaded him from doing so. *"I removed the boots, climbed onto the lower bunk. That is my last recollection,"* says Avocado.

At approximately 11:45 p.m., a subsequent explosion rocked the barracks that housed 193 servicemen. This was swiftly followed by a third explosion.

"After the explosion in the barracks, I found myself hurled onto an adjacent bed, which knocked my teeth out. When I regained consciousness, I was sprawled on the floor," says a medic with the call sign Hasan. Positioned far from the barracks' entrance, Hasan hastened toward the exit: *"I navigated through toppled beds. The blast wave had displaced most inmates. Beneath my feet, I detected a slick substance akin to motor oil, intermingled with blood. Approaching the exit, the sight of dismembered corpses confronted me. Bodies lay strewn about, their lives extinguished instantaneously. One body ablaze resembled a torch amidst dense smoke and flames."*

Predominantly, those situated near the barracks' exit succumbed to the explosion, totaling over forty. Many sustained extensive shrapnel injuries, cranial traumas, fractured limbs, and blunt force impacts to the thorax and abdomen. Notably, at least one serviceman perished in the barracks' remote corner, distant from the blast's epicenter, where most servicemen were spared

from harm. This suggests that in the ensuing turmoil, he failed to locate the exit, ultimately succumbing to the smoke from the fire.

The wounded extricated themselves on their own. Following the explosion, the colony's officials—both administrative and security personnel—did not come to their rescue.

The injured emerged, crawled, and were carried to an alley adjacent to the barracks, and there are known cases of some of the injured dying outdoors.

The colony's administration did not request external medical assistance. For about an hour, medics from the principal barracks were barred from attending to the wounded prisoners, despite their readiness to assist and possession of basic first aid supplies, upon hearing the explosions and cries for help.

When the prisoner medics were eventually granted access, they saw the colony's leadership nonchalantly observing from behind the fence as Azov members perished in the alleyway. *"Their demeanor was almost gleeful, relishing the surrounding chaos,"* a witness interrogated by MIHR disclosed. Furthermore, they conspicuously did not seek cover in anticipation of further assaults, as if assured of their safety.

The evacuation of the critically injured commenced a full six hours post-explosion, at dawn. A minimum of five servicemen perished, their lives lost due to the absence of timely resuscitation efforts. An additional three succumbed en route to medical facilities, partly due to inadequate transport means—the injured were transported not in ambulances but in trucks.

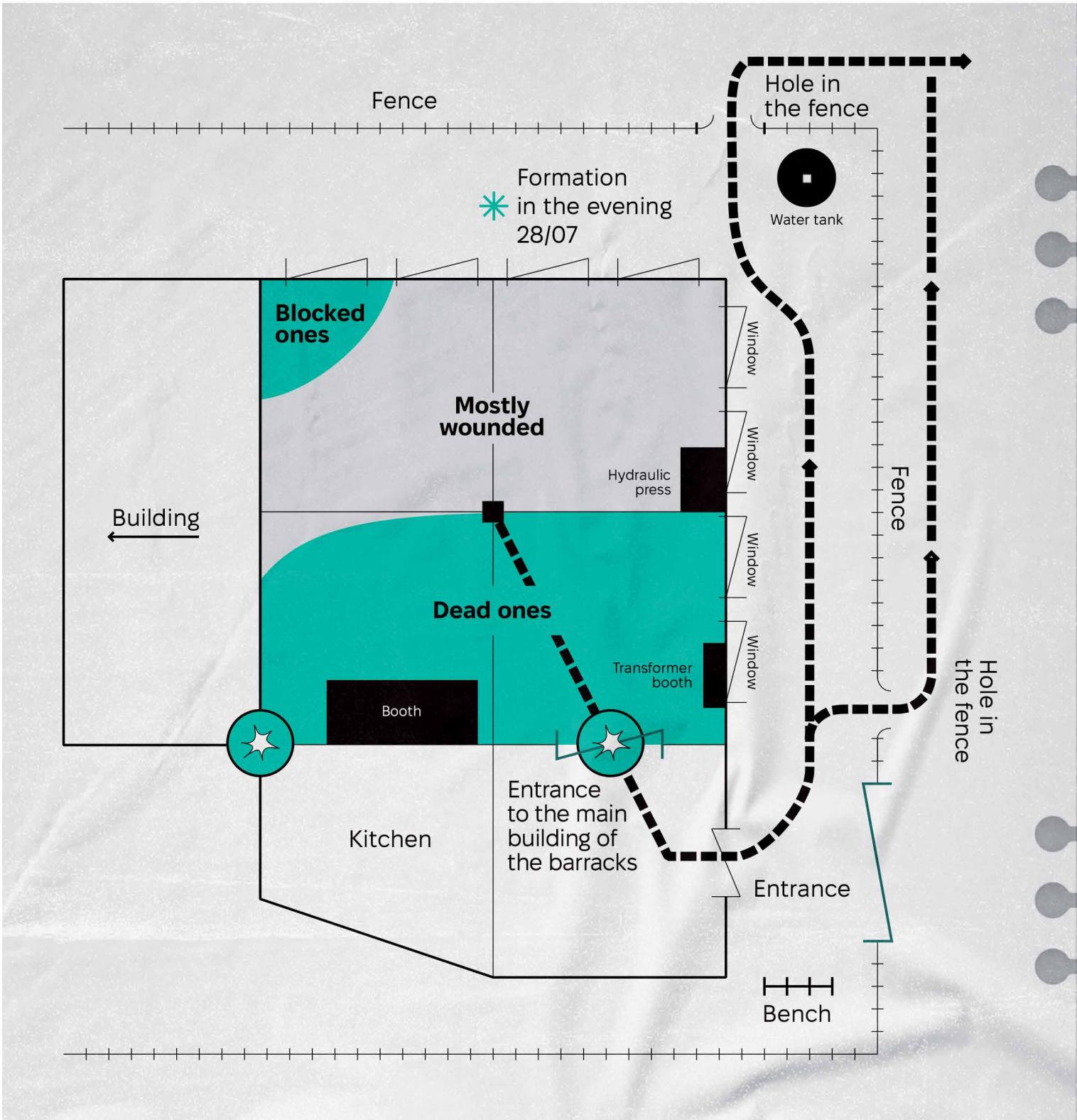
"Those incapacitated were positioned at the forefront, while those able to sit were placed at the rear. Picture this: seated on the floor, wounded, bleeding out, and the vehicle persisting at a high speed. Abrupt braking jolted us; devoid of anything to cling to, we were tossed about," recounts Avocado.

11:30 p.m.

First explosion

11:45 p.m.

Second explosion
+Third explosion right after



Probable places
of explosions

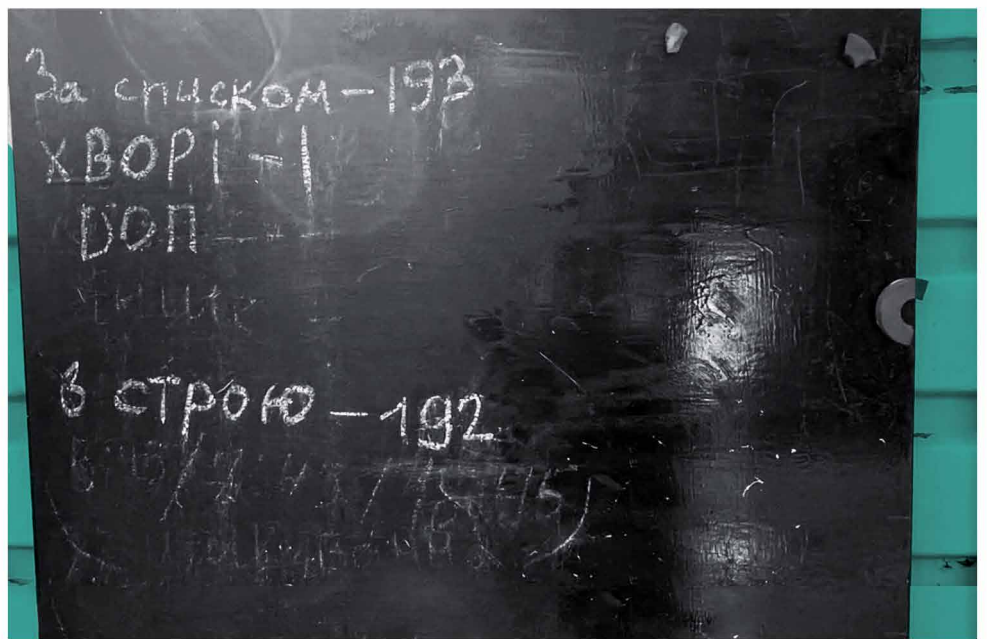


Evacuation
routes

AMONG THE DEAD AND WOUNDED

The morning of July 29, 2022, saw the Russian Ministry of Defense releasing the initial casualty lists, naming 53 individuals presumed deceased and 75 presumed injured.

The precise tally of Azov fighters present in the industrial zone barrack post-explosions became public through a video disseminated by the Russian side. Inscribed on a chalkboard was the message: “Listed — 193, ill — 1, present — 192.”



“I was the one who wrote on that board. The handwriting was how my mother deduced I had been inside that barracks,” says a medic with the call sign Hasan.

Anna Lobova found her husband, Senior Sergeant Oleh Lobov’s name, on the published list, initially classified among the deceased and subsequently among the injured. It wasn’t until mid-August 2022 that Anna saw a video showing injured Azov members in a hospital. Her husband appeared in one of the segments. *“Oleh’s comrades were the first to see the video, forwarding it to me with a note: ‘Watch the video from beyond’,”* the Azov fighter’s wife says.

Svitlana Solonska found the name of her husband, Vladyslav Solonsky, assistant to the deputy commander for logistics, on the list of the wounded, but had no news concerning him for an extended period—he didn’t appear in any hospital footage. It later emerged that Russia had repatriated Vladyslav’s remains to Ukraine on August 10, 2022, as part of

a deceased exchange operation, without mentioning that his demise was a consequence of the Olenivka explosion. Come late October, DNA matching confirmed Svitlana’s fears. Solonsky had died aboard a truck, succumbing to a grave abdominal shrapnel injury. *“He simply bled to death,”* the woman laments.

Subsequent scrutiny revealed inaccuracies in the casualty lists published by the Russian authorities. Names of additional fatalities surfaced only post-September 21, 2022, following another POW exchange that saw the return of 16 barracks survivors, from whom initial testimonies were obtained. Nevertheless, these were insufficient for compiling a verified list of all 193 POWs. By February 1, 2024, a complete catalog of names remains elusive.

ON HOSPITAL BEDS



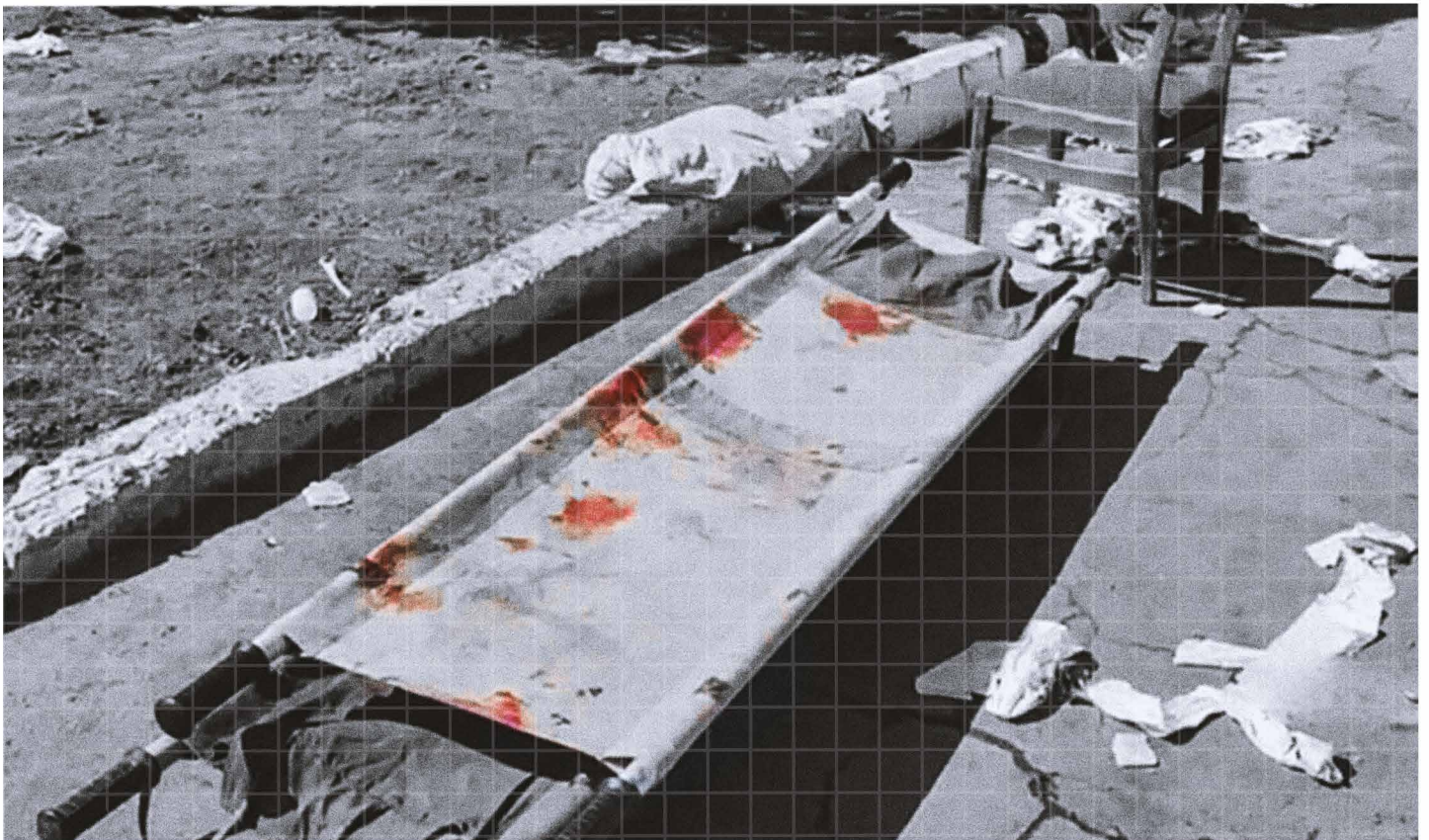
All critically wounded were initially dispatched to central city hospital No. 14 in occupied Donetsk. Some of them were later reallocated to hospitals No. 15 and No. 16 in Donetsk.

Recollections from the wounded indicate that most of them needed surgical intervention. Surgeries were performed without anesthesia. Hospitalized Azov members recounted local medical staff's unpreparedness for the influx of casualties and a deficit in medical supplies. The initial hours post-admission saw many languishing on stretchers in hallways, awaiting medical evaluation.

"I was brought into some room; when the guard asked hospital personnel where to place me, they replied: 'Anywhere, as long as he's not obstructing passage.' The cold was unbearable. Upon expressing this, I wasn't given a blanket but instructed to speak Russian. Positioned beneath an air conditioner, I shivered. Their reaction was to mock me: 'Look at the khokhol shiver.' It was a prolonged ordeal before finally being admitted to a ward in the evening," says Avocado.

By September, some of the wounded believed to have received adequate medical care began returning to correctional colony No. 120. Some of them were later exchanged. The persisting injuries of those retained in captivity were overlooked by the overseers, who subjected them to torture and harsh treatment.

Some of the wounded continued their hospital stay in Donetsk until December 2022. Subsequently, according to data available to MIHR, they were relocated to correctional colony No. 27 in occupied Horlivka (referred to in Russia as VK No. 4) and pre-trial detention center No. 2 in Taganrog, Rostov Region, Russia. The Russian side has yet to disclose the precise whereabouts of those affected by the Olenivka barracks explosion to either Ukrainian authorities or international bodies.



INSTEAD OF A HOSPITAL WARD, PUNISHMENT IN DISCIPLINARY ISOLATION

Seventy-six Azov members, bearing minor wounds, were not taken to hospital. They found themselves consigned to disciplinary isolation (DI), distributed across two cells. 36 prisoners were crammed into one cell intended to accommodate no more than ten individuals. Overcrowding and sweltering conditions precipitated infection and decay of injuries. Incarcerated medics administered medical care. The situation in the adjacent cell was the same.

"In such temperatures, all bandages are soaked and imbued with biological discharges. Everything decomposes

and sours. We would arrive to administer new dressings, yet were permitted entry merely once every four days. During "Kirusha's" (Kirill Shakurov, whom the detainees designate as one of the most ruthless overseers of colony No. 120 — MIHR) shifts, we abstained from visiting, as we faced the peril of potentially remaining there indefinitely, be it dead or alive," says Ivan, a medic among the captives.

Once the majority of wounds healed, Azov detainees were relocated to the barracks.

CONCEALING EVIDENCE OF THE ATTACK: RUSSIA BLAMES UKRAINE

After the explosions, come morning, the barracks within the industrial zone stood vacant. At around 10:00 a.m. on July 29, the colony's administration convened some of the prisoners from the principal barracks, dispatching them to clear the rubble from the explosion.

"The guards came for us at dawn: 'So, are you ready to gather limbs? You were the leader in barracks 9/10, correct? Then go and gather them.' I assumed that our barracks was hit," recounts an Azov fighter known by the call sign Snail.

It fell upon Snail to identify the dead comrades strewn upon the ground, but he managed to recognize merely four of them.

He recollects that around 11:00-12:00 p.m. on July 29, 2022, the guards commanded those disassembling debris and extricating bodies from the barracks, to go to a neighboring building for a meal. Snail, slightly delayed, personally witnessed how the colony guards extracted projectile fragments from sacks.

"The fragments surfaced in the barracks later on. They were brought there prior to the journalists' arrival. They worked within the barracks for roughly an hour and a half, after which we were instructed to resume work," Snail explains.

Russia accuses Ukraine of having caused the explosions at the colony, alleging the deployment of the HIMARS high-mobility artillery rocket system, of American provenance, which it had received previously³. Contrarily, Ukrainian and global analysts, upon inspecting the damage site via publicized videos and photographs, instantaneously repudiated Russia's charges. They inferred the potential employment of lesser caliber armaments, for instance, the 2S1 Gvozdika self-propelled artillery system. By mid-August 2022, the Prosecutor General's Office speculated on the probable usage of thermobaric weaponry. *"We are talking about a capsule containing a combustible mix for thermobaric explosions created by flamethrowers such as SHMEL, SHMEL-M, RYS. This deduction was formulated following the scrutiny of accessible video records, engaging specialists familiar with the deployment of units and divisions for radiation, chemical, and biological defense, ammunition identification, and the utilization of engineering units and divisions⁴,"* they said.

In October 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report similarly contesting Russia's allegations concerning Ukraine's use of the HIMARS system. The UN specified that pinpointing the precise weapon type and origin proved unfeasible, yet *"the structural damage pattern aligns with the described munition traveling from an eastward to westward trajectory⁵."* In essence, from an area under Russian control.

3. Summary of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation on the progress of the special military operation in the territory of Ukraine / Website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, July 29, 2022 https://z.mil.ru/spec_mil_oper/news/more.htm?id=12430926@egNews

4. Вибух в Оленівці могла спричинити російська термобарична зброя — генпрокурор / Суспільне новини, 1.08.2022

<https://suspihne.media/266831-vibuh-v-olenivci-mogla-spriciniti-rosijska-termobaricna-zbroa-genprokuror/>

5. OHCHR 36th Periodic Report Ukraine 04.10.2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/coiukraine/23-10-04-OHCHR-36th-periodic-report-ukraine-en.pdf>

ALLEGED PERPETRATORS

On July 28, 2023, under the procedural guidance of the Office of the Prosecutor General, notices of suspicion for violations of the laws and customs of war were issued to Ukrainian citizens holding positions in the so-called "State Budgetary Institution Volnovakha Correctional Colony of the State Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the DPR" (Part 2 of Article 28, Part 1 of Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine). These individuals are the institution's head, Sergey Evsyukov, and his subordinate, the junior inspector of the surveillance and security department, Kirill Shakurov. Investigation data suggests they inflicted physical, psychological, and sexual violence against at least a hundred servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine⁶ who were in Russian captivity. The suspicion notice does not discuss their involvement in the Olenivka explosion.

Witnesses interviewed by MIHR contend that the colony's head, Sergey Evsyukov, was at least aware of the organization of the mass murder of prisoners of war, and at most, played a significant role in the execution of the organized murder. They stress that he did not just stand in the alley where the wounded and killed were located immediately after the explosions but also blocked medics from attending to them, even though he saw that the wounded were dying and bleeding out.

"The head stood there with his entourage, laughing, drinking coffee; he was enjoying himself," recalls a serviceman

with the call sign Hasan. He, along with other released prisoners, identified Evsyukov in a photo.

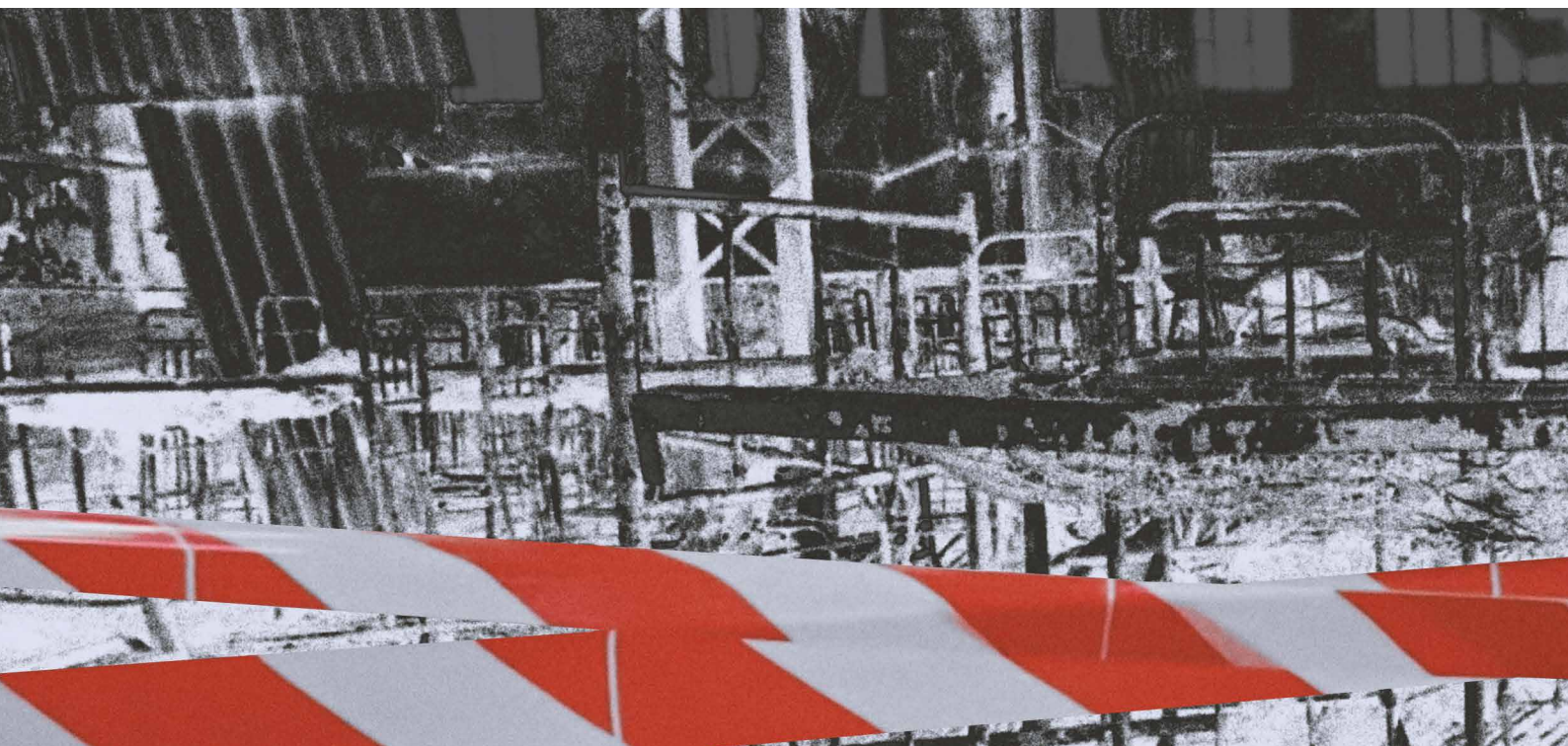
Evsyukov's command also included his first deputy, Dmitry Neyolov, and the head of the operational department of the prison, Vyacheslav Yakurnov. Like Evsyukov, they were former Ukrainian law enforcement officers - police officers who betrayed their oath and sided with the occupying authorities after Russia occupied part of Donetsk Region.

Witnesses report that officers of the Russian Federal Security Service, the Main Intelligence Directorate of Russia, and the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service were constantly present on the premises of the club at Correctional Colony No. 120 during the day. Former prisoners of war heard some of their call signs and saw the faces of others. Among them were those who rotated, and constants who escorted the prisoners to "interrogations" in Donetsk or "investigative activities" in Mariupol at Azovstal.

The likely manager of the Olenivka colony is Kirill Popov⁷, the first deputy head of the Moscow branch of the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service. Three prisoners of war who were in the Olenivka correctional colony confirmed under anonymity that they saw Popov at this detention site. He issued orders and coordinated the administration's work.

6. Жорстоке поводження з військовополоненими – повідомлено про підозру начальнику та інспектору колонії в Оленівці, де утримувались військові ЗСУ / Сайт Офісу Генерального прокурора, 28.07.2023 <https://www.gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/zorstoke-povodzennya-z-viiskovopoloneniimi-povidleno-pro-pidozru-nacalniku-ta-inspektoru-koloniji-v-olenivci-de-utrimuvalis-viiskovi-zsu>

7. The Kyiv Independent Olenivka POW camp, where Ukrainians were tortured, was likely supervised by a high-ranking official from Moscow, 28.11.2023 <https://kyivindependent.com/olenivka-pow-camp-where-ukrainians-were-tortured-was-likely-supervised-by-a-high-ranking-official-from-moscow/>



INVESTIGATION AND SEARCH FOR PRISONERS

The Security Service of Ukraine and the Office of the Prosecutor General are investigating the murder of prisoners of war in Olenivka. A major challenge is that operatives lack access to the crime scene, most witnesses are still in captivity, and those potentially involved in the murder hid their faces under masks. Meanwhile, the victims and their relatives note that despite the declared priority, the Ukrainian investigation has made little progress a year and a half after the crime. They hope international mechanisms will assist the national investigation.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court could investigate the mass death of prisoners of war in the Volnovakha correctional colony No. 120 at the international level. Courts of third countries also have jurisdiction under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Russia, however, refuses to cooperate and provide access to the incident site.

Another concern for victims and their relatives is the whereabouts, detention conditions, and physical condition of about a hundred wounded prisoners of war who have been in hospitals for an extended period. For instance, Anastasia Hondyul only saw her husband Artem in a Russian video from the hospital immediately after the explosions at Correctional Colony No. 120. She reports that her husband suffered a shrapnel wound to the pelvic bone during the battles for Mariupol, but they could not remove the fragment in the medical bunker at Azovstal due to a lack of proper equipment. He sustained a second injury on the night of July 28 at Correctional Colony No. 120.

"I do not know what injury he sustained. I saw him in a segment on the Russian channel Russia 24, where he personally addressed me. He said he was almost intact, loved me, and was waiting for the exchange," Anastasia says. She adds that her husband appeared very thin in the video.

Released Azov members also affirm that individuals with severe injuries from the explosions remain in captivity.

"Lyokha was very badly hurt. I could only remember his name. He was brought to hospital No. 15, to my ward, all in casts: thigh, leg, arm, no lower jaw; they inserted a tube into his stomach for feeding. When the nurses came, he refused to eat, we tried to feed him ourselves. We were then transferred to hospital No. 16, but he stayed there. They were supposed to reconstruct his jaw," shares a serviceman with the call sign Bumblebee.

As of February 1, 2024, Azov members who were in "barracks 200" have almost not appeared in exchange lists — the last few were returned on May 6, 2023. Since the explosion in Olenivka on July 28, 2022, only 22 wounded have been returned from captivity. Most of them, after rehabilitation, resumed their military duties. One of them died in November 2023 during the battles in the Kreminna area of Luhansk Region. Analysts and journalists of the Media Initiative for Human Rights, based on witness statements, managed to reconstruct the events of July 27–29, 2022, and establish almost all the names and call signs of Azov servicemen who were gathered in the barracks before



the explosions. This list needs minor clarifications. Currently, we cannot publish it, as some prisoners' families still do not know that their loved one was in the barracks where the explosions occurred.

Russia returned the bodies of 57 deceased prisoners of war to Ukraine, claiming they belonged to those who died in "barracks 200" on the night of July 28-29, 2022. However, five remain unidentified - that is, there are no DNA matches or confirmations that they were in the mentioned barracks. Ukraine conducted a forensic examination of the bodies of servicemen from "barracks 200". No weapon fragments were found in them, only residues from the explosions, including metal structure remnants. The investiga-

tion was complicated by Russia storing the bodies of the deceased in improper conditions - initially on the premises of Correctional Colony No. 120 near the barracks in the open air under the summer sun, and later — in a basement without refrigeration units.

As of December 2023, according to the Olenivka Families Community association, 49 Ukrainian servicemen who died from the explosions at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120 have been buried. The latest funeral took place on December 17, 2023, for the deceased Vladyslav Volkov.

Some examinations are still ongoing.

MIHR INTERVIEWED:



10

**servicemen
from the barracks**



3

prisoner medics

who provided medical assistance
immediately after the explosions



3

relatives



4

eyewitnesses

who were outside the barracks



RECOMMENDATIONS



To the State of Ukraine

Cooperate with civil society organizations documenting testimonies and gathering evidence for effective investigation of events at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120.

To third states

- ✔ Strengthen and assist the national investigation into this crime by engaging experts to determine the cause of the explosions in Correctional Colony No. 120.
- ✔ Appeal to the ICRC with a request to visit places of detention of Ukrainian prisoners of war and check the conditions of their detention and treatment.
- ✔ Emphasize and facilitate the release of severely injured Ukrainian prisoners of war, those who can no longer return to the battlefield.
- ✔ Emphasize at the diplomatic level that Russia violates the norms of IHL and IHRL and does not ensure the rights of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russian captivity. Draw the international community's attention to these violations and demand accountability for the perpetrators.
- ✔ Facilitate access to the site of the explosions for further investigation of the events at Volnovakha Correctional Colony No. 120.
- ✔ Try to obtain access to the findings of the investigation of the events at Correctional Colony No. 120 conducted by Russia for further analysis.

To the International Committee of the Red Cross



- ✔ Identify the places of detention of all Ukrainian prisoners of war who were in the barracks during the explosions, were injured, and are still in Russian captivity.
- ✔ Visit places of detention of Ukrainian prisoners of war to establish the conditions of detention and treatment of prisoners in these places.
- ✔ Facilitate the return to Ukraine or a third country of prisoners of war who suffered amputations, are seriously ill, and those who require immediate medical assistance.

To other international organizations



working on the issue of violation of the rights of prisoners of war

- ✔ Conduct investigations into the violations of the rights of Ukrainian prisoners of war who are being held in Russian captivity.
- ✔ Advocate and demand accountability for individuals responsible for potential war crimes and other international crimes perpetrated against Ukrainian prisoners of war throughout the Russian aggression against Ukraine.
- ✔ Engage in collaboration with Ukrainian civil society organizations to share expertise on the documentation and investigation of violations of international law by Russian officials against Ukrainian prisoners of war.



Media Initiative for Human Rights is a Ukrainian NGO established in September 2016. The goal of the organization is to combine awareness raising, analytics, and advocacy towards detecting and responding to human rights violations.

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