

## LANGUAGE, CULTURE, COMMUNICATION

## BLACK HOLE OF CAPTIVITY IN THE UNIVERSE OF WAR

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“Even a cup of coffee for a prisoner of war may  
appear as the highest manifestation of humanity.”

*Author*

**Summary**

The article examines the psychological features of military servants in captivity. The methodological basis of the research is indicated. The article includes an analysis of the works of experts in various fields of knowledge. Scientific works since the Great Northern War of 1700-1721 until the ongoing Joint Forces Operation in eastern Ukraine were reviewed. We have proved that POW's (prisoner of war) rationalization of conduct is positive because it greatly contributes to the survival in captivity. The expediency of resorting to mimicry for the captured military servants is substantiated. We considered the models of POWs' behavioral mimicry and gave concrete examples. It is determined that the creation of a multifaceted illusion on them (their thoughts, reasoning, and attitude) is the basic condition for successful mimicry of POWs.

We defined the dependence of the duration of the POW's process of adaptation to new conditions on the individual cognitive interest of a particular serviceman, as a natural desire to get information about the environment and understand the laws of its functioning. It is identified that the process of the POW's adaptation involves a review of their values of life. The necessity of vaccination against captivity is theoretically substantiated and proved.

We proved that rehabilitation measures are mandatory for all persons released from captivity. The results of the research allow forming a holistic view of the effectiveness of POWs' behavior regulation using symbolic mimicry, the importance, and the expediency of further research.

**Keywords:** POW (prisoner of war); vaccination against captivity; uncertainty; stress; emotional death; additional trauma; starvation; behavior regulation; symbolic mimicry; illusion.

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**1. Introduction**

Captivity is when the world of things around, which was in the process of steady increase, suddenly falls into a black hole. At the same time, the possibility of interaction with that world disappears. There is a complete collapse of the worldview of a military servant.

Getting captured is characterized by the loss of serviceman's habitual sensations. Perceptually, a person no longer can perceive familiar signs that symbolize security, predictability, and sustainability of the future. A POW falls into a universe of uncertainty, where a human can do nothing because almost nothing depends on his/her will. A POW faces many situations in which the personal experience can no longer be used. A captured serviceman is completely immersed in a new previously unfamiliar value-ideologically dimension which confuses a person and requires the replacement of old concepts of survival with new ones. Ambivalent thoughts and feelings only increase the POW's feeling of helplessness in the face of new challenges and threats. The process of adaptation to the conditions of captivity involves an in-depth study of the new environmental terms. During the process of adaptation, there is a gradual inclusion of POW's personality in the information environment. Here, a human draws new knowledge which was not a part of his/her previous experience.

The methodological basis of our research is the study of personal factors of stress management in the special conditions of V. Osodlo; symbolic regulation of individual conduct of O. Khmiliar; the research results of captivity in war of Yu. Shyrobokov; marine captivity of A. Pobidash; narrative stories of S. Asieiev, V. Hlukhovskiy, Edwin E. Dvinger, D. Pavlychenko, V. Frankl. Specific clusters of Internet resources, reports of international missions and organizations are deeply researched.

Given the relevance and insufficient elaboration on the problem, the aim of the article is the further theoretical analysis of psychological characteristics of the behavior of a serviceman in captivity. This article considers the psychological mechanisms of regulating POWs' behavior through symbolic mimicry, as one that contributes to survival in captivity. Theoretical research methods were used in the process: observation, analysis, synthesis, comparison, and generalization.

## 2. Body text

Formation of the worldview of modern military servants takes place under the influence of dominant tendencies of the Ukrainian society, national integration into the European community, NATO bloc structure, and professional military training. The less a serviceman is prepared for possible capture and captivity, the more expected physical and mental trauma a human may experience in captivity. A lot of armies around the world have already got training programs for possible capture and survival in captivity. Domestic psychological science did not stay away from the process.

Having studied the psychological aspects of captured servicemen, O. Khmiliar states that this awareness by a serviceman is delayed. At first, a serviceman cannot believe what happened (*Khmiliar, 2017*). The adaptation of a serviceman to captivity is gradual, based on information coming from the environment in the process of interaction with him/her and others. The success of POWs' adaptation is associated with the development of their ability to quickly perceive, accumulate, and assimilate information about environmental change. It should be noted that adaptation to new conditions depends on the individual cognitive interest, as a natural desire to get information about the environment and understand the operational principles. Thus, we can assume that servicemen with well-developed social intelligence can adapt to new conditions in a shorter time and thus alleviate their situation compared to other POWs. It is worth noting that for such individuals the situation of uncertainty is not a factor of stress and frustration. But it acts as a resource for achieving and maintaining a sense of psychological well-being (*Osodlo, 2013; Cherevychnyi, 2019*). In this context, tolerance to uncertainty should

be seen as a stable personal characteristic that shows a person's willingness to make decisions on which he or she feels insecure or at risk.

The guards are delighted with their courage towards defenseless people, as POWs usually cannot complain about their arbitrariness. The burden of all mistakes and miscalculations of the camp administration is shifted to POWs when emergencies occur.

Captivity is a continuation of military service and it is not meaningless, because the "army behind the barbed wire" continues to wage its war. This war is in the struggle for one's self, one's own life, and one's consciousness. This struggle is superior to the struggle at the front, although it is fought in the backyard of war (*Dvinger, 2020*). Such a struggle leads to maturity, which is unattainable in everyday life.

### 3. Vaccination

Targeted psychological training is a vaccination that aims to prevent significant trauma (physical and psychological) of a military servant. It should include preparation for interrogation, skill formation of evading the answers, and manipulating of information, including using symbolic mimicry. The need for special psychological training of the military in case of captivity is approved and actively implemented in most of the leading armies of NATO bloc countries. It is justified by the fact that a certain model of adaptive behavior of a POW can help him/her survive in captivity. One of the main goals of mental preparation for the captivity is to train self-control under strong psychological pressure. It is achieved through an artificial and controlled approximation of the conditions of servicemen's stay to the conditions of real captivity.

Since the captivity conditions are alien to the conditions of everyday life, and to reduce the stress reactivity of servicemen, it is necessary to decrease artificially the level of novelty of such situations, which can be achieved through special training. The human body decodes the signals coming from the burden at practice and during combat activities in the same way. Thus, preparation for possible capture can maintain the physical and psychological health of a serviceman. According to K. Ulianov, the stress reaction of a serviceman is a motivating factor for adaptation to a new environment (*Ulianov, 2020*). When a serviceman is captured, he/she must realize that a couple of years and several hundred kilometers will now separate a POW from freedom. The POW's release may not occur immediately, but a person will be definitely released. The State is making every effort to release him/her as soon as possible. The ability to interpret signs and signals depending on the situation and its context acquires particular significance for a POW.

Quick orientation in a situation of uncertainty of the present-day captivity is the basis of skills that a serviceman must have (*Cherevychnyi, 2019*). To speed up adaptation to conditions of uncertainty, POWs should learn from the experience of those who were captured earlier, because imitating their behavior, the prisoner is on the path to saving his/her own life.

Another component of the survival skills in captivity is the skill of a serviceman to put his/her will before the physical beginning. Throughout military history, they save on prisoners. Quality eating for the own army is always an urgent issue of any warring country, so prisoners are the last of those who can count on worthy food. The guards deliberately resort to man-made food deterioration of POWs to inflict additional trauma. Every POW should be ready for prolonged fasting. Love, friendship, envy, mercy, humanity, hunger for fame, and honesty – these feelings disappear as a piece of junk during prolonged starvation (*Dvinger, 2004; Shalamov, 2013*). Lack of suffering – that is the happiness of a prisoner. Mastering the

ability to enjoy the simple pleasures is a protection from despair and suicide (*Frankl, 2018; Hlukhovskiy, 2008; Khmiliar, 2017*).

Released prisoners note in their numerous testimonies that they had the possibility of committing suicide almost every day, and there were many reasons for it. The question of whether to fight for his/her life becomes existential for a POW (*Frankl, 2018*). Silence is the way to save energy.

The only thing that remains unattainable and belongs purely to the prisoner is his/her inner freedom and dignity. Surviving in captivity “with honor” or “at any cost” is a conscious choice of every serviceman (*Asieiev, 2020; Hlukhovskiy, 2008; Pavlychenko, 2014; Frankl, 2018; Shyrobokov, 2020*).

#### 4. Mimicry

Creating a multifaceted illusion about oneself (one's thoughts, considerations, and one's attitude) is a fundamental condition for successful mimicry of POWs. Symbolic mimicry is a sensory-intuitive formation, a synthesis of thoughts, feelings, and images that construct and generate an infinite number of processes and states which regulate the actions and deeds of a POW. The endless ingenuity of the mind must help a POW on a daily basis. Getting rid of all sorts of suspicions on the part of the guards and becoming as if one with the “grey mass” of other prisoners is an important condition for survival in captivity.

Entering into captivity symbolizes the beginning of another life, different from usual. And in this new life, a human must learn to live under the new rules. Destabilization of the living space happens to a serviceman. A whirlpool of previously unfamiliar sensations absorbs the old perceptual experience of the prisoner's personality. The previous life of a POW seems to be a dream or a fiction which has nothing to do with the moment, hour, and place where a person is now. They look too striking in the mind of a prisoner. In captivity, habitual things change their value and their scale. A POW's life is a continuous chain of humiliations from morning till night, until a blessed sleep takes his/her consciousness away from suffering. A constant reflection of the experiences and thoughts governs the individual conduct (*Illiushchenko, 2020*). Mind tricks, natural or acquired, must be on the guard of the POW's life-preserving, the physical and mental health.

The use of POWs as labor force has been widely used throughout the history of captivity. In the captors' eyes, the POW's life may cost no more than the clothes a human is dressed in (*Shalamov, 2013*). An important factor of the man-made deterioration of conditions in captivity and infliction of additional suffering is the POWs' involvement in work which is life-threatening or harmful to their health. That is why POWs are left without proper clothing and equipment during dangerous work. For further injuring of the prisoners, safety rules are deliberately neglected during their work.

If the conditions of captivity require hard work, and smoking POWs are allowed to smoke, it is advisable to pretend to smoke. After all, the rest of the POWs at work is a challenge to the very system of punitive captivity and almost a crime, but a smoke break every hour is a rule. A smoke break for a prisoner is not only an opportunity to rest and save some energy, it is above all an opportunity for information exchange (even in short phrases). The behavioral mimicry of a POW can be embodied by substituting verbal signals with nonverbal ones (replacing words with gestures).

During the recruitment process, a POW must develop the ability to predict for what kind of jobs a work team will be formed in order to take a place in the work team that will have easier

work. The POW's behavioral mimicry is embodied in a particular game in the proxemic system. Certain actions can be an example of such a game: moving away from the guard, stepping aside, disappearing from the guard's field of view, and appearing at the right time when lining up a small work team. Usually, large teams are recruited only for hard physical work. Mind tricks are usually the ability to understand people, anticipate their actions, and crack their motives. The POWs' answers must be short and only with the question because unnecessary words irritate the guards. After all, the identity of a prisoner is despised and humiliated in every way. Uncertainty over the future and lack of information (unlike inmates in prison) about the end of captivity deprives a POW of the opportunity to calculate the (moral) strength, and sometimes even exhausts a POW. Eventually, such a prisoner completely loses interest in his/her fate, and life seems no better than death. Along with this, a fear of death disappears.

During the captivity, a POW always witnesses cases of abuse and humiliation. In the future, it ceases to cause resistance or disgust, and something like an emotional death comes to a person. A POW stops responding to such scenes (*Asieiev, 2020; Frankl, 2018; Khmiliar, 2017; Shyrobokov, 2020*). Thus, we can argue that it is commendable if a POW has any survival strategy, even if it looks towards the future for only one or two days.

Prisoners are usually guided by their desire to achieve homeostasis. They seek to ensure a balance between conservation and loss of energy because the lost energy cannot be returned to the captive by poor food (*Serhiichuk, 2001*).

At the same time, the narrative stories of released persons show that prisoners can always count on the sympathy of at least a certain part of the local population and even the guard. POWs must use this treatment to their advantage to improve living conditions, better nutrition, and receive emergency supplies and medicines.

## 5. Nonverbal cues

The human face is a poly signal system and an important physical characteristic of his/her internal state (*Khmiliar, 2016*). In order to establish constructive communication in his/her favor, a POW must be able to interpret correctly both verbal and nonverbal signals of the guards. Usually, the hands of the guards are on the weapon, and their body position is distorted by wearing a bulletproof vest. Therefore, the manifestations of facial expressions become especially important. Well-known scientists who laid the foundation for the study of facial expressions are C. Darwin, P. Ekman, and C. Izard. An obstacle to the correct interpretation of the guards' facial expressions is the wearing of military masks (balaclavas). It does not allow fully decoding their mood and attitude to the prisoner. The guards hide their faces to avoid further identification to be prosecuted for war crimes. In this situation, the most informative channel for nonverbal information is the eyes of the guard. Hiding the face by the guard contributes to the depersonalization of his/her conduct, the release of aggression, as well as the dominance of secret behavioral intentions. Depersonalization through identity masking promotes antisocial behavior and encourages guards to act aggressively against prisoners, breaking the usual taboos on interpersonal violence.

In 2019, humanity faced a pandemic of **COVID-19**. Anti-epidemic measures around the world require wearing of medical masks in public places that cover the nose and lips. Like POWs, humanity is deprived of several channels for getting and further decoding the facial expressions of another communicator. Conditionally, humanity ends up in the same conditions as POWs. An important channel for obtaining nonverbal information, that remains available, is the eyes. At the same time, the facial expressions of a POW should enhance the meaning of the

words he/she said, or at least not refute them. The arm movements, the hand position, the head tint, the body inclination must also be the part of “one symphony”, i.e. be congruent. The gaze of a prisoner should not challenge the person under whose authority a human is staying now.

## 6. Conclusion

We can say that the capture of a serviceman symbolizes the beginning of another life, different from usual. In this life, a person must learn to live according to the new rules. The enemy's task is to enslave the body and destroy the identity of the prisoner of war. A POW falls into a universe of uncertainty, in which a human can do nothing because almost nothing depends on his/her will. A POW faces a large number of situations where the personal experience can no longer be used. A captured serviceman is completely sunk into a new previously unfamiliar value-ideologically dimension which confuses a POW and requires the replacement of old survival concepts with new ones. Ambivalent thoughts and feelings only increase the prisoner's sense of helplessness in the face of new challenges and threats.

The infinite ingenuity of the mind must help POWs on a daily basis. Creating a multifaceted illusion about them (their thoughts, views, and attitude) is a fundamental condition for successful mimicry of POWs. In our opinion, symbolic mimicry, as a regulator of the actions and deeds of a POW, can hide true thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. This will greatly contribute to survival in captivity. It should be noted that a POW personality who is tolerant of uncertainty does not experience the destructive effects of stress and frustration. In this context, the situation of uncertainty is a resource for achieving and maintaining a sense of psychological well-being. For achieving the psychological willingness of servicemen to be in captivity during training, it is important to have elements of intentional suffering (hypokinesia, humiliation, physical pain, etc.), which are integrated into the experience of a serviceman and will not cause significant stress reactivity.

Being in captivity is not meaningless, because the “black hole of captivity” cannot absorb a person who continues to fight for his/her self, life, and consciousness. It should be remembered that a person is capable of more than she thinks, if her life depends on it.

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