

## Missing in Action (MIA) and Prisoner of War (POW)

At the end of World War II, the Cold War was beginning and geopolitical decisions were being made. The Red Army pushed into Eastern Europe, liberating Allied POWs and forced-labor workers from Western Europe. Allied armies moving toward Germany were taking combatants that fought along side the Germans and civilians that escaped the Soviet government. At the Yalta meeting, the three powers made arrangements to address the repatriation of prisoners of war (POWs) and displaced persons (DPs). Later, at Halle, Germany, a final agreement was signed.

Stalin wanted all citizens of the Soviet Union returned and also wanted the Allied Powers to recognize the Soviet government of Poland. To see that happen, the Red Army held Allied POWs hostage as bargaining chips.

The Supreme Headquarters of Allied European Forces (SHAEP) was aware of this. At the time, there were one million Western European refugees in Soviet-controlled territory and a large number of Soviet individuals in the Allied territory. The West also held numbers of Soviet nationals that fought alongside the German army.

Prime Minister Churchill planned on using some of these to resist Soviet aggression after the war. Kim Philby, a Soviet spy who was the head of British MI-6 intelligence agency, relayed this information to Stalin. Churchill's plans were known to the Soviets, and that increased his paranoia of foreigners. Western leadership from the top down knew they were being blocked from entering the Soviet territory to collect the POWs. The Soviets were using the POWs as bargaining chips.

The Allied planners were ordering the forced return of all the Soviet Union POWs and all citizens of the Soviet Union in Allied custody in order to get the return of Allied POWs and civilians. British Field Marshall Harold Alexander was the only high-ranking individual to refuse to enforce the repatriation of 100,000 Cossack troops that had fought against the Red Army. Harold Macmillan handled the move, knowing that to hand these men over to the Red Army was their death sentence.

The Cossacks were forced to return to the Soviet Union. A few of these men committed suicide rather than return to the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the forced return, the British troops opened fire on the Cossack troops, killing some 100 members to get them moving to the ships for transport. At the exchange location, Allied POWs waiting to board the trucks that delivered the Cossacks watched the Red Army and the brutal treatment given to the returning Soviet POWs. The Cossacks were marched off after their senior officer was shot. The Allied troops heard machine-gun fire from the direction of where the Cossacks marched off to. Allied POWs were told to keep their mouths shut and get on board the trucks. At home, British POWs were told to never mention their treatment in the Soviet Union.

At the same time, allied governments allowed 9,000 Ukrainian members of the German Army to be protected from repatriation. These men had helped the Germans SS in Poland to kill Jews and Poles. In 1947, 8,000 German SS were allowed to enter Canada.

At the end of the Second World War, the government said there were 25,000 American POWs still in Soviet-controlled territory and 199,592 British Commonwealth POWs in Soviet territory. The return of U.S. POWs that returned from Soviet territory numbered 4,165, leaving some 20,000 individuals left behind. The Commonwealth returned 168,746 POWs, leaving some 30,846 British Commonwealth POWs behind. There has not been an accurate account of Belgium, Netherlands or other national DPs that were still in Soviet territory. Both the U.S. and Commonwealth governments covered this up. Sightings and photographic and personal accounts over the years gave evidence of the individuals left behind in Soviet gulags. Many of these individuals had technical skills that the Soviets wanted.

Bureaucracy of Western governments said there were no POWs left behind from WWII, Korea or Vietnam conflict and cited National Security for not releasing records. Then in 1992, President Boris Yeltsin of Russia sent a letter to the U.S. Senate admitting that the Soviet Union did hold American soldiers after World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The official comment was that Yeltsin was "drunk" and looking to get aid from the U.S. There was no follow-up officially or by the press. The U.S. government has still not addressed their part in the episode. The BBC program *Mr. Foyle's War* in 2002, did address part of the British part in the repatriation of the Soviet POWs and citizens to Stalin's vengeance. The Cold War had secrets, and those secrets could embarrass nations and their role in the repatriation of POWs and civilians after WWII.

### Sources:

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D.H.Coop is a retired fire/paramedic and retired teacher having taught IB and AP World History 30 years. He continues to substitute, tutor and consult. [www.HistoryDepot.com](http://www.HistoryDepot.com)