

The Kyiv Military District Commander

**Fond F-1381 The Kyiv District Military
Commander**

The fond contains 1 Opis, 22 delo

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The State Archive of Kyiv Oblast is home to an archival collection that is a valuable source of material for the study of Hetman P. Skoropadsky's military policy: **The Kyiv District Military Commander (Fond 1381)**.

The fond contains 22 delo (items) from 1918-1919 that had long remained in classified stacks and were only declassified and made generally accessible in October 1988. The fond documents effectively reveal the activity of the liquidation (demobilization) commission that was created at the Office of the Kyiv District Commandant and pertain to the period of the Ukrainian National Revolution, the study of which is highly relevant for Ukrainian historiography today.

On April 29, 1918, as a result of a coup d'état and the dispersal of the Central Rada, a Ukrainian State was proclaimed in the form of a Hetmanate headed by Hetman Pavel [Pavlo] Skoropadsky. Provisional state organization and administrative procedures were defined in two edicts signed by the hetman: the Manifesto [*Hramota*] to the All-Ukrainian Nation and the Laws of the Provisional State System dated April 29, 1918, which was a set of seven enactments.

An order by the military administration of the Ukrainian People's Republic dated April 15, 1918, established that demobilization, collection, protection, classification and inventorying of property was to proceed under the direct control of governorate and district commandants. All demobilization commissions of the former South-Western and Romanian Fronts were to be abolished. Property collection commissions were to be created at district commandants' offices. Governorate commandants were also given the power to establish such commissions. The membership of those commissions was to be approved by the war minister of the Ukrainian People's Republic.¹ When it was formed, the Skoropadsky government had a system of governorate (nine) and district (108) commandants who were appointed by the War Ministry and answered directly to it. They had infantry and cavalry centuries [units of 100] under their command. In accordance with the June 14, 1918, decree by the Council of Ministers, demobilization of the war department's property management institutions was transferred to the authorized representative

for the administration and liquidation of wartime institutions and organizations. On Aug. 23, 1918, the commandants' system was abolished and their functions were reassigned to military garrison commanders and, in the districts, to the military district commander. Thus, district military commanders, who answered to one of the four local brigades (Kyiv, Odessa, Kharkov and Poltava), became local military administration authorities. Each such brigade was responsible for the registration, enlistment and mobilization of recruits for two army corps.

The fond documents pertain to the period of activity by the Kyiv District commandants, the liquidation commission of the Office of the Kyiv District Commandant, and the Kyiv District military commander. These documents comprise mainly of deeds of transfer/acceptance and inventories of arms, military property and equipment that were transferred from the Kyiv district commandant under the control of the Kyiv military commander.

The liquidation (demobilization) commission at the Office of the Kyiv District Commandant was created on June 7, 1918, with six departments: gunnery, engineering, supplies, sanitation and general. From the very first days of its existence, it found itself in a very difficult situation due to a lack of funding. Moreover, property was scattered throughout the city of Kyiv and the adjoining area, stored in the open air or in poorly protected premises. There were no funds to transport it to specially equipped depots. That led to numerous robberies and thefts of military property. In his report dated Aug. 26, 1918, Lt. Col. Novichevsky, chairman of the liquidation commission, gives an assessment of the property in the commission's possession: "The commission has a large amount of valuable property: There is an estimated 1,916,934 karbovanets and 50 kopecks worth of property at the commission's warehouses. In addition to that, the Filvert & Dedina plant has 7,000,000 karbovanets worth of registered property, the South Russian Society plant 650,000 karbovanets, the Oryol Society plant 150,000 karbovanets, Regina Hotel 65,000 karbovanets, and Universal Hotel 16,000 karbovanets; there is 363,000 karbovanets worth of lumber property around the city of Kyiv; 90,000 karbovanets worth of property, which was illegally bought by engineer Adamsom, has been impounded at the railway station. In total, 4,004,934 karbovanets 50 kopecks."² All of that property was poorly guarded and exposed to theft and fraud.

According to a May 16, 1918 report by the Kyiv district commandant, 18 posts were established in Kyiv to protect state and military property. There were three types of guard posts: from the infantry and cavalry century of the Office of the Kyiv District Commandant, from the officer corps and from the students' organization. The posts to guard the depots of the 1st Ukrainian Division, gasoline and kerosene depots, and warehouses of the Southwestern Front's property were the most reinforced.³ A report dated July 8, 1918, testifies to thefts of military property from the depots of the former 1st Ukrainian Telegraph Battalion: "The warehouse is comprised of five sections, each being in a state of complete chaos, and there is no doubt that it has been subjected to systematic looting.*** In the telegraph and telephone section, some telephone sets have been stolen, with empty telephone boxes lying around on the floor. In the supplies sections, all old trench coats, old trousers and shirts are scattered around on the floor."⁴

Furthermore, the fond documents provide a fairly complete description of the classification and amount of weapons, military property and equipment at the disposal of the military units and regiments deployed in the city of Kyiv and the Kyiv District.

In analyzing the military policy of the Ukrainian State under Hetman Skoropadsky, it is important to bear in mind that it was pursued against the backdrop of the German-Austrian presence. Having redeployed an army of 450,000 soldiers to Ukrainian territory, the German-Austrian authorities were not interested in the creation of a battleworthy Ukrainian army. P. Skoropadsky recalls in his memoirs that during their first conversation with General Gerner, chief of staff of the [German-Austrian] forces in Ukraine, he said: "Why do you need an army? We're here; we won't allow anything hostile [to happen] with respect to your government in the country; as for your northern borders, you can rest assured: We won't let the Bolsheviks in. You can form a small unit to enforce law and order in Kyiv and ensure your personal security." That kind of puppet-like dependence of Hetman Skoropadsky's military policy on other states is also manifest in the process of the distribution of military property among the German, Austro-Romanian and Ukrainian military commissions, as is evident from the fond documents. Thus, the chief of staff of the 4th Kyiv Corps, in his telegram to the Kyiv District commandant dated Aug. 3, 1918, reports on the distribution of arms collected from civilians: "(1) the weapons collected by the Germans belong to German military authorities, while the weapons seized by Ukrainian troops belong to Ukrainian forces; (2) if German and

Ukrainian forces work together in the process of disarmament, then the weapons are to be divided up in proportion to the number of troops participating in the process.”⁵ On Aug. 16, 1918, the Austro-Romanian commission on the distribution of military property decided that “the machine guns, cannons and equipment that have for years been in service with the Ukrainian army will be guarded jointly by Austro-Romanian troops.”** Former Austro-Romanian and German military materials**will be returned to their original owner. The military plants and workshops will remain under the control of the Ukrainian state, while the finished goods and the old material at hand will be divided fifty-fifty.”⁶

At the same time, the documents contain numerous reports about attacks on guard posts and the misappropriation of state and military property by German troops. Thus, in a May 1918 dispatch, the district commandant reports to the Kyiv Governorate commandant: “I’m requesting measures to ensure that German troops do not interfere with the orders by the Ukrainian authorities and do not remove the guards stationed to protect state property.”⁷ A report from the German commandant to the Kyiv District commandant, dated Aug. 13, 1918, states that as the German commandant’s office needs premises for the lower ranks and as there is a vacant hospital barrack near the Borodyanka railway station, which belongs to the Kyiv District, “the German commandant’s office in Borodyanka announces that it has requisitioned that barrack.”⁸ The fond documents feature plentiful factual material on the personnel of the Ukrainian Army, the Office of the Kyiv District Commandant and the Kyiv District Military Commander that may be of interest to military biographers and researchers of the period of the Ukrainian State under Hetman P. Skoropadsky.

Hetman Skoropadsky had to pay a hefty price for the illusion that a serious military force had been created: The German government would never have tolerated the creation of a serious military force in Ukraine, as it would imminently have posed a threat to it.

The fond documents are in Russian and Ukrainian. They are in a satisfactory physical condition.

¹ - Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Kyivskoi oblasti, F. 1381, op. 1, d. 7, p. 8.

² - Op. cit., d.18., p. 222 ob.

³ - Op. cit., d. 2, p. 27 ob.

⁴ - Op. cit., d. 10, p. 31.

⁵ - Op. cit., d. 9, p. 3.

⁶ - Op. cit., d. 9, p. 11 ob.

⁷ - Op. cit., d. 2, p. 64.

⁸ - Op. cit., d. 5, p. 1.

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Opis' 1

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