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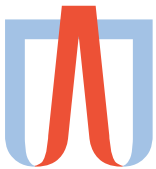
Story of a City
POPASNA
UNDER FIRE



2018



ЦЕНТР ДОКУМЕНТУВАННЯ



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This publication has been made possible due to the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the framework of the Human Rights in Action Program implemented by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. The perspectives and interpretations in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of USAID or the United States Government. The authors and UHHRU are solely responsible for the contents of this publication.

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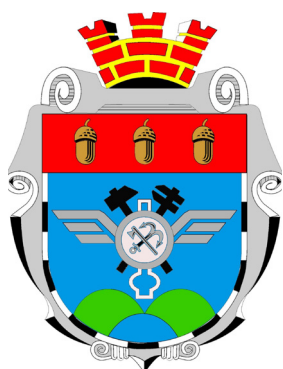
Story of a City. Popasna under Fire / Valeriy Snehiryov, Serhiy Movchan, Svitlana Rybalko / Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union — Kyiv 2018 — 15 pages

Story of a City
Popasna
under Fire

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Introduction



Coat of arms of Popasna

POPASNA is an ordinary city in Luhansk Oblast, the administrative center of Popasna Raion located in the Oblast's south-west, and an important railroad hub.

Among its main companies are Popasna Carriage Repair Factory, Popasna Glass Factory, Popasna Bread Factory, Popasna Sewing Factory «Elegant», carriage depot and locomotive depot. The largest share in industrial production is taken up by machine-building and metal processing – 95.5% (Popasna Carriage Repair Factory).

In the 90s, the city's enterprises were being closed down, with mines being put on «reconstruction» and factories abandoned. Most factories ceased their operations in 2010, and in 2011 the Popasna Glass Plant was shut

down, which resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment. The residents were surviving thanks to agricultural enterprises and private farms. The economic crisis and impoverishment of the population later became the basis for the success of the «Russian Spring» in the region.

UHHRU continues to chronicle the hybrid armed conflict in Ukraine of 2014–2018 by telling the stories of individual Donbas cities.

This report is an analytical work based on testimonies collected in person from the victims of the conflict, official replies of state authorities and local self-government to inquiries, and analysis of other open sources. The study aims to reconstruct historical truth as one of the aspects of transitional justice. The report is supposed to bring together the victims and witnesses of the conflict, and to jointly reconstruct an objective picture of the events in order to minimize the possibility of political profiteering from the conflict.

Occupation

In April 2014, hostilities broke out in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts between organized anti-government pro-Russia armed forces that opposed the ideas of the Revolution of Dignity



and Euromaidan and wanted to repeat the “Crimean scenario” in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts through illegal and unlawful inclusion of these territories into the Russian Federation, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, units of the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ministry of

Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

Russia actively supported these anti-government unauthorized armed groups. This support included funding, arms and fuel supplies as well as hidden participation of Russian soldiers and entire units of the Russian Armed Forces in the conflict.

On 11 May 2014, a sporadic informal polling of the population was held in Popasna and several other cities of Luhansk Oblast, which the organizers christened as «Referendum on the state sovereignty of the Luhansk People’s Republic».

Between 22 May and 22 June 2014, Popasna had been under the authority of a fictitious quasi-state formation «Luhansk People’s Republic». Several independent unauthorized armed groups had been operating in the city during that time. The most numerous of them were Oleksiy Mozhovyi’s group that consisted of up to 200 people, the so-called 15th battalion “USSR Brianka” and Pavlo Dryomov’s group.¹



Popasna liberated from terrorists / Semen Semenchenko / facebook.com

¹ <http://eizvestia.com/politika-video/full/534-eksperty-obnarodovali-perechen-samyh-aktivnyh-terroristicheskikh-grupp-luganskoj-oblasti>



- On July 17, 2014, pro-Russia forces prepared an ambush near Popasna, where a soldier of the 26th artillery brigade Viktor Boyka received

injuries during the assault on a checkpoint.

- On August 14, 2014, pro-Russia forces attempted to seize the city, but Ukrainian soldiers fought them off.
- On September 26, 2014, near Popasna, soldier of the 128th brigade Olexander Mamlay was killed during a combat mission.²

According to the interactive «Memory Map», from May 2014 to February 2018, 19 soldiers were killed in the city (Annex 1) in the course of the anti-terrorist operation.

Person 1:



«Some people arrived, called themselves Cossacks. At first we didn't think much on it. And when the disturbances began, they said they intended to set their rules here. People started dying, and fear came...»

Person 2:

«Now we know that in Pervomaisk, at the frontlines, there are Russian soldiers. Now the enemy can be seen. But when it all started, he was hidden. There were many attempts to seize our city (there are extensive railroad junctions and industrial spurs here). We had a man hiding in a basement with us, he took part in the Chechnya war in his youth. He wasn't talking to anyone. When active hostilities broke out in Popasna, he suffered a heart attack in the basement. He understood the implications well, having survived one war. The man died before an ambulance could arrive. The frontline was stopped in Popasna.»³

² <http://memorybook.org.ua/16/mamlay.htm>

³ <https://wz.lviv.ua/article/209217-vid-moho-domu-do-lnr-20-khvylyn-khodby>

Liberation

Ukrainian troops liberated the city on July 22, 2014 after a fierce shootout with the use of small arms, grenade launchers and heavy armored vehicles. The units of the National Guard of Ukraine, namely the 2nd Special Forces Battalion Donbas (military unit 3057) of the National Guard of Ukraine, attacked the unauthorized armed groups.

It is worth mentioning that Popasna always held a great interest for terrorists. One of the fiercest and longest battles was fought for this city. Unlike in the Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, the militants did not wish to leave the city even

after its liberation by the Donbas Battalion, with the terrorists making numerous attempts to retake it.

Backed by Russian troops, unauthorized armed groups have been trying to recapture Popasna during 2014-2018. This is due to the fact that control over Popasna would allow terrorists to partially surround strategically important Svitlodarsk, cutting off railway connection with Ukraine. Today, Popasna remains the last city to the west of the so-called «LPR» that prevents militants from expanding their control to the administrative border of Luhansk Oblast.



⁴ <https://www.depo.ua/ukr/war/boji-za-luganschinu-scho-stoyit-za-sproboyu-prorivu-boyovikiv-na-popasnu-karta-20170712604139>

Timeline of artillery attacks

In 2014, artillery attacks were carried out by units of the so-called «ASouth-Eastern Army», namely «Ghost», «Cossacks» and Dryomov's unit. They were using multiple rocket launchers Grad.



Multiple rocket launcher Grad

Multiple rockets launchers are designed for killing both exposed and hidden enemy soldiers.

The weapon consists of a rocket launcher and missiles (unguided missiles aimed not at specific targets, but rather at a general area).

- On September 2, 2014, pro-Russia forces fired missiles at the city. This resulted in damage to the carriage repair factory and private homes area. The attacks were carried out from the direction of the cities Irmino and Pervomaisk. Residents of Popasna started leaving the city.⁵
- On September 30, 2014, at about 9:30 am, pro-Russia militants began firing at Popasna with Grad; an ambulance station caught fire, people were killed and wounded.
- On October 3, 2014, the city suffered another artillery attack.



photo: Informator.lg.ua

⁵ https://espreso.tv/news/2014/09/02/popasna_obstrilyana_boyovykamy_zhyteli_masovo_zalyshayut_misto

- On October 4, at about 12:40, militants fired on the carriage repair factory; another attack took place at 15:45, 1 person died, 10 received injuries, 3 of them seriously wounded; residential buildings and gas pipeline were damaged, gas supply to the city was cut off.⁶
- On October 8, 2014, in the morning, unauthorized armed groups began intense mortar attacks on Popasna.
- On October 22, 1 person died and 2 were injured in a Grad shelling.
- On November 26, at about 13:00, Popasna suffered Grad attacks from the direction of Stakhanov, 3 residents were wounded.⁷



of January 26 attacks, 3 people died.⁹

- On January 27, Popasna suffered over 10 attacks with the use of Grads, artillery and mortars; 2 people were killed.
- On January 31, a house was destroyed in Popasna, the woman living there died under the debris, her husband was seriously injured.¹⁰

On February 3, 2015, in the evening, a building was struck by a missile; 77-year-old woman died on the spot. Bodies of the victims of previous



- On November 29, 2014, after 10:00 a.m., militants fired on the city with Grads; missiles exploded in the Cheryomushki neighborhood. One of the locals was killed by shrapnel, another person was injured. In addition, a kindergarten was damaged, windows were knocked out in a school and residential building, and a pipeline was damaged.⁸

• On January 17, 2015, militants fired Grads at Popasna, killing 2 people and wounding 4.

• On January 25, shrapnel from a Grad missile mortally wounded a 50-year-old man. As a result



⁶ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/10/4/7039774/>

⁷ <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1410715-popasnu-obstrilyali-z-gradiv-poraneni-troye-mirnikh-meshkantsiv>

⁸ <http://informer.media/archives/51044>

⁹ <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1427456-vnochi-luganschinu-obstrilyovali-z-gradiv-g-moska>

¹⁰ <http://tyzhden.ua/News/128883>

attacks were found under the rubble – one 52-year-old man and another 60-year-old who died on February 2. Popasna essentially became a ghost city.

By February 9, 2015, out of 22 thousand residents only about 4 thousand remained in Popasna.

February 11 was marked with non-stop bombardment of Popasna and attempts by militants to storm the city. One civilian died in the morning, 3 suffered injuries; one of the neighborhoods was without water for 10 days.

The District State Administration was evacuating civilians daily. That winter, over a thousand people were evacuated in the course of two days.

By February 11, 2015, only about 3 thousand people remained in Popasna out of 22 thousand.¹¹ The city was 70% abandoned.

On February 15, at 00:20, terrorists fired on Popasna with Grads from the direction of occupied Pervomaisk, killing an 87-year-old man and a 69-year-old woman.¹²

Mayor of Popasna Yuriy Onyshchenko:

“ «We have a difficult humanitarian situation, large parts of electricity, gas and water infrastructure have been damaged. Water supply to Popasna has been repaired, but each neighborhood receives water only for one hour, which is of course not enough. Only some 4 thousand people remain here. Many people come asking for humanitarian aid and food». ¹³



Resident of Popasna:

“ «I was a clerk at Popasna railway station. Me and my husband, children and my mother, we left the city in winter, when the attacks began to occur every day. This is still happening. Our apartment was seriously damaged. Leaving Popasna, we only took documents and some clothes for our younger children. I want to thank people who gave us the things we needed. Even if everything stops now, we just couldn't go back...» ¹⁴

¹¹ https://espreso.tv/news/2015/02/11/moskal_terorysty_namahayutsya_uvrvatsya_u_popasnu__po_mistu_postiyno_byut_quothradamyquot

¹² <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1438273-popri-peremirya-boyoviki-vnochi-obstrilyali-popasnu-zaginuli-mirni-meshkantsi>

¹³ <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1436068-u-popasniy-zalishilosya-blizko-4-tis-meshkantsiv-mer>

¹⁴ <http://fakty.ua/205372-pereselency>

Indiscriminate systematic attacks on the city as a war crime

Investigating the hybrid armed conflict of 2014-2018 in Ukraine, it is impossible to avoid the topic of war crimes.

War crimes are a kind of international crimes, as set forth, among other documents, in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 8) – a permanent body of international criminal justice.

The provisions on war crimes include the prohibition of hostilities in cities (densely populated areas - Article 36 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and Article 8 (2) (b) (v). «Attacking or bombarding, by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended and which are not military objectives».¹⁵

The systematic artillery attacks against Popasna, in our opinion, violate this prohibition.



Systematic indiscriminate attacks are considered crimes against humanity or war crimes, as they must be classified as a deliberate attack against the civilian population: The attacks were aimed

specifically at residential areas, with a large number of residents not evacuated or being physically unable to leave.



According to the official data of Popasna District Military Civil Administration and Popasna City Council provided to UHHRU Human Rights Abuse Documentation Center, between September 2014 and February 2018, almost 2 thousand buildings were damaged and destroyed in the city, namely: 56 private houses completely destroyed; 1,645 private houses, 126 municipal apartment buildings and 2 state apartment buildings damaged. We stress that for such a small town with a former population of 22 thousand people, 2 thousand destroyed and damaged buildings is a real disaster.

Despite the supposed «ceasefire», between December 2017 and February 2018, 28 private houses were damaged or destroyed on Vodoprovodna, G. Skovorody and M. Hrushevskogo streets, where no military objects are located.

In the three and a half years of the armed conflict, 48 Popasna residents died (Appendix 2).

¹⁵ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

«Gray zone»

Today Popasna is located 7 km away from the demarcation line.

New water towers were built in Popasna, since the old ones had been destroyed in 2015. The new towers are supplying the 4,000 residents of Popasna around the clock. The International Committee of the Red Cross took over all the

financial expenses for the construction and installation of the towers.¹⁶

Equally encouraging is the announced economic and production growth as well as the creation of new jobs: «Popasna Carriage Repair Factory and State Enterprise 'Pervomaiskugol' hiring specialists».

“ «At first it seemed that nobody cares about this 'gray zone' we found ourselves in. Now we can feel the government's support. Houses have been rebuilt, schools have been renovated. This hasn't been done since the USSR, and not even in the period of independence. We managed to attract a number of international projects».¹⁷



¹⁶ <http://newsvideo.su/video/8218351>

¹⁷ <https://wz.lviv.ua/article/209217-vid-moho-domu-do-lnr-20-khvylyn-khodby>

Conclusion

The course of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and its periodic escalation directly affect the life of the city and the number of people that died after the liberation. Popasna's example demonstrates systematic indiscriminate attacks perpetrated by pro-Russia unauthorized armed groups that fall into the category of crimes against humanity or war crimes, as they must be classified as deliberate attacks against the civilian population: the attacks were aimed at residential areas specifically, where remained a large number of residents that hadn't been evacuated at the time or had no chance to leave the city.

In our opinion, systematic indiscriminate artillery attacks on Popasna violated said prohibitions.

Despite the proximity of the demarcation line and essentially the line of armed confrontation with the occupied part of Luhansk Oblast, the houses,

roads, bridges and administrative buildings in the city are being repaired; all government bodies are performing their duties (e.g. Ministry of Internal Affairs, courts and prosecutor's office, Ukrainian Railways, hospitals, schools and kindergartens, state treasury and others). The city, which had been abandoned by 70% of its residents, is being gradually revived.

Significant material, technical and financial assistance, including aid from international governmental and non-governmental organizations, is a vivid example of the revival of Popasna in particular and liberated Ukrainian Donbas as a whole.

General information on victims of the conflict in the ATO zone for the period of 2014-2018 can be found in the interactive Memorial Map (Human Rights Abuse Documentation Center, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union).¹⁹

¹⁹ <http://memorialmap.org/>

Appendix 1

Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine that died between 2014 and 2018.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Miroshnychenko Igor Lvovych | 11 Nastasyn Mykyta Volodymyrovych |
| 2 Serdiuk Anton Volodymyrovych | 12 Drahonera Denys Volodymyrovych |
| 3 Dikhtyar Ivan Ivanovych | 13 Sokol Olexander Ivanovych |
| 4 Bokhonko Serhiy Serhiyovych | 14 Khomyak Ihor Petrovych |
| 5 Mikhalchenko Serhiy Mykolayovych | 15 Masikevych Vasyil Yevhenovych |
| 6 Mamlay Olexander Anatoliyovych | 16 Galyas Vasyl Gryhorovych |
| 7 Blozva Kostiantyn Vasylyovych | 17 Ahafonov Olexander Olexandrovyeh |
| 8 Nikulin Vitaliy Yevhenovych | 18 Barashenko Yuriy Petrovych |
| 9 Piskunov Georhiy Olexandrovyeh | 19 Furman Mykola Vasylyovych |
| 10 Konstantinov Ihor Viktorovych | |

Appendix 2

City residents that died between 2014 and 2018.

- 1 Ahafonova Rayisa Yakivna
- 2 Andriyev Mykhailo Serhiyovych
- 3 Bairachnyi Mykola Olexandrovych
- 4 Barabash Vasyl Yosyfovych
- 5 Bezdetska Valentyna Pavlivna
- 6 Bezdetskyi Andriy Pavlovych
- 7 Borisenko Olexander Vasylyovych
- 8 Brunko Mykola Vasylyovych
- 9 Bushtets Lidiya Vasylivna
- 10 Valyka Serhiy Viktorovych
- 11 Glushchenko Yuriy Petrovych
- 12 Gorelik Antonina Mykolayivna
- 13 Didyk Gennadiy Anatoliyovych
- 14 Dikhtyariova Lyudmyla Mykolayivna
- 15 Drobotova Larysa Petrivna
- 16 Zmytrovych Inna Serhiyivna
- 17 Katrushko Lidiya Yegorivna
- 18 Kozachenko Volodymyr Leonidovych
- 19 Konovalova Mariya Ivanivna
- 20 Kononov Anatoliy Vasylyovych
- 21 Kulakov Illya Ruslanovych
- 22 Kulakov Ruslan Anatoliyovych
- 23 Lipova Lyudmila Petrivna
- 24 Litvynova Viktoriya Gennadiyivna
- 25 Mazka Viktor Fedorovych
- 26 Malyshevskyi Vitaliy Mykolayovych
- 27 Martynova Tetyana Gennadiyivna
- 28 Mykhryov Volodymyr Mykolayovych
- 29 Mykhryov Mykola Gryhorovych
- 30 Obozenko Serhiy Anatoliyovych
- 31 Pavlova Maryna Vasylivna
- 32 Perevierzieva Olha Anatoliyivna
- 33 Polyviani Volodymyr Ivanovych
- 34 Puzenko Olexander Ivanovych
- 35 Reutska Tetyana Ivanivna
- 36 Reutskyi Petro Petrovych
- 37 Rikhtareva Lyudmila Mykolayivna
- 38 Soboleva Maryna Borysivna
- 39 Spivak Ihor Mykolayovych
- 40 Surov Mykola Volodymyrovych
- 41 Tytyshchenko Svitlana Ivanivna
- 42 Tytskyi Anatoliy Volodymyrovych
- 43 Tymbaliuk Stepan Stepanovych
- 44 Cherepovskyi Valentyn Gryhorovych
- 45 Chudnovets Valentyn Stepanovych
- 46 Chuyko Olena Olexandrivna
- 47 Shapovalenko Mykola Olexandrovych
- 48 Shyshkova Zinayida Semenivna