

The History of Nazism in Ukraine: The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), 1917-1941

Part I

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Introduction

With the war in Ukraine raging, it is time to trace the history of fascism in Ukraine. Once believed to be an anachronistic Cold War relic, the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) has emerged as the most successful post-war fascist group. Politicians around the globe shout its fascist slogan "Slava Ukraini", a phrase that originated with the League of Ukrainian Fascists, was adopted by the OUN and popularized by Stepan Bandera while he and the OUN were on trial for the assassination campaign the OUN was waging in Poland.

In Ukraine, the United States, Canada and Britain, monuments are built to the Ukrainian SS veterans who killed over a million Jews, hundreds of thousands of Poles, and countless Ukrainians, Russians and Byelorussians.

Today Israel and Poland are among Ukraine's biggest sponsors.

In Ukraine itself it is illegal to criticize these mass murderers. In the West their history has been whitewashed for decades by Cold War academics who allowed escaped Ukrainian war criminals to shape the history of Ukraine and the Soviet Union. Most importantly thanks to two CIA backed coups or "colour revolutions" the first in 2004 and the second in 2014, the heirs of the OUN were given almost total control of Ukraine. OUN ideology has become the official ideology of Ukraine and Nazi thugs are given total impunity to terrorize anyone who complains.



Fascist paramilitaries have been incorporated into the police and military while others like the Azov battalion have retained a certain autonomy answering only to Ukrainian Intelligence the SBU or the Interior Ministry. Even Ukrainian presidents have difficulty reigning in these fascist groups who openly defy them when the presidents are not busy pandering to them.

This article will trace the origins of the OUN and explain its history up to the eve of Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. By then the OUN, working closely with both German military intelligence (the Abwehr) and the SS, had begun to plan their genocidal takeover of Ukraine. From Nazi occupied Poland the OUN/B controlled over 20,000 underground activists ready to take up arms to exterminate Jews, Poles, and Russians and organize a warm welcome for the Nazis in Soviet Ukraine. Part two will cover the horrific war crimes the OUN carried out during the war. In part one I will be relying mostly on the definitive, "Stepan Bandera The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist: Fascism, Genocide, and Cult", by Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, which I recommend to anyone looking to do an in-depth study of the history of the OUN.

History of Ukrainian Nationalism and Fascism

The early Ukrainian nationalists were socialist leaning moderates. They were poets, romantics and intellectuals who drew inspiration from the peasants and Cossacks and their unique Russian dialect, which was also spoken in Southern Russia. The name Ukraine simply meant borderland and its people were known as Malorussians, which meant "little Russians". Yet as the craze for nationalism swept Europe some intellectuals began to think of Ukraine as a separate nation. Of these the main influence on the later fascist Ukrainian nationalists was the historian Mykhailo Hrushev'sky.

His monumental history of Ukraine portrayed Ukrainians as a completely separate race from Poles or Russians and attempted to sever the historical ties between the closely interlinked Russia and Ukraine. Russians traced their origins to the Kievan Russ (centred in modern day Kiev, Ukraine) and viewed Ukrainians and Byelorussians as close cousins to the Russians.

Many Ukrainians viewed themselves as Russians. Also many Russians moved to Ukraine during the 18th and 19th centuries. Even today most Ukrainians speak Russian. The Russian empire encouraged this merging of the two identities and tried to discourage the use of Ukrainian.

Hrushevs'kyi's work would inspire another far more extreme Ukrainian nationalist in Russian-controlled Ukraine, Mykola Mikhnovs'kyi, who would preach a worldview that saw a Ukrainian race surrounded by enemies that needed to be eliminated. He inserted 19th century Social Darwinism and scientific racism into Ukrainian nationalism, writing in the majority Russian city of Kharkov. He labelled "Russians, Poles, Magyars, Romanians and Jews as enemies of Ukraine" (as long as they ruled or exploited Ukrainians) and hoped to create a Ukrainian state stretching from the Caucasus to the Carpathian Mountains.

His Ten Commandments of the UNP (Ukrainian National Party) founded in 1904 would be a major influence on the OUN. It included such memorable lines as "Do not marry a foreign woman because your children will become your enemies." Elsewhere Mikhnovs'kyi wrote "Ukraine for Ukrainians, and as long as even one alien enemy remains on our territory, we are not allowed to lay down our arms."

80% of Ukrainians lived within the Russian empire. The other 20% lived in an area that had once been controlled by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and, after Poland was dismembered and ceased to exist in the late 18th century, were ruled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They were known as Ruthenians and their language was closer to Polish than to the dialect spoken in Russian Ukraine. The Austro-Hungarian Empire encouraged extreme Ukrainian nationalism seeing Ukrainians as a vital counterbalance to the rebellious Poles.

The area the Ukrainians or Ruthenians lived in was known as Eastern Galicia. This was the situation when Stepan Bandera was born in 1909. The OUN had its origins entirely in this western controlled part of Ukraine. In the wake of World War 1 and the Russian Civil War this territory would be controlled by a reborn Poland once again in the form of Poland's Second Republic. The Second Republic also included the Western Ukrainians in Volhnyia part of Russian Ukraine conquered in its war against the Soviets.

Over the centuries Ukrainian aristocrats in Poland had decided to assimilate and become Polish nobles. Thus most of the Ukrainians were peasants. Poland also encouraged the creation of the Greek Catholic Church, which continued to follow the Orthodox Christian rite while subordinate to the Roman Pope instead of the Orthodox Patriarch. By Bandera's time the Greek Catholic Church was an important element of Western Ukrainian identity and many OUN leaders like Stepan Bandera were the children of Greek Catholic priests, who were also hard-core Ukrainian nationalists.

While swearing loyalty to the Polish state the Greek Catholic Church would enrage the Polish government by acting to support the OUN ringing church bells when OUN members were executed, or as a warning when police were on the way to disrupt Ukrainian nationalist events and holding memorial services, called Panakhydas, for various "heroes of Ukraine". They were adopted as nationalist martyrs in the OUN cult.

Ukrainians in western Ukraine were mostly peasants (until 1848 they were serfs) working for Polish landlords and their Jewish managers. West Ukraine thus gave birth to a nationalism that was full of hatred for Jews and Poles. The OUN would target both for extermination. The

OUN would combine traditional Ukrainian anti-Semitism with Nazi “racial science.” However Poland was an authoritarian military dictatorship. This was another major influence on the OUN who lived in Poland. Dmytro Dontsov found it much safer to vilify the Russians and the Soviet Union who were enemies of Poland than to risk the wrath of the Polish state.

Dontsov was a former Marxist who argued that Ukrainian nationalism should purge itself of all elements of socialism or democracy both of which he blamed for the failure to establish a Ukrainian state. By 1922 Dontsov had found his model in Mussolini’s fascist Italy. He was even more impressed by Hitler and the Nazis. Dontsov translated these fascist thinkers into Ukrainian. He also wrote the introductions for fawning biographies glorifying Mussolini and Hitler. He popularized fascism, anti-Semitism and Russophobia among the students of Bandera’s generation.

His vulgarized version of the philosophy of Nietzsche, Fichte, and Rousseau argued that Ukrainians must cast aside conventional morality and be willing to commit any crime if it meant the birth of a Ukrainian state. Dontsov praised fanaticism as a virtue. However he resisted numerous invitations to join the OUN for fear of being arrested by the Polish government.

Image: Yevhen Konovalts, the OUN’s leader from 1929 to 1938 (Licensed under the Public Domain)

Origins of the OUN

Having introduced some of the intellectuals who developed or inspired Ukrainian fascism, let us go back in time to World War 1 and the Russian Revolution to introduce the historical origins of the OUN. The OUN were made up of two generations. The older generation had fought on the side of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War 1. Some formed the Sich Riflemen, which included future OUN leader Levhen Konovalts. They were from Western Ukraine. During World War 1, Galicia would be a battleground between Russia and the Austrian and German forces. Russia captured Galicia only to be forced back out again.

When in 1917, the February Revolution overthrew the Tsar and installed a mildly left wing “democracy” ruled by Kerensky, Ukrainian Nationalists in Russian Ukraine created a Rada and declared their autonomy within the Russian Empire. It was headed by the left wing Vinnichenko as Prime Minister. Later that year the October Revolution overthrew the Kerensky government in Russia. The Rada decided to take advantage of the chaos and declare a Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) on 20 November 1917.

The head of military affairs was Symon Petliura who would become infamous for his mass murders of Jews during the civil war, killing 50-60,000 of them. The OUN would adopt him as a hero of Ukraine. In 1926 Petliura would be assassinated by a Jewish survivor who had lost his family, anarchist Sholom Schwartz. Exposing the horrific crimes of Petliura’s forces at the trial Schwartz was declared not guilty by the sympathetic jury. Today Petliura has once again been declared a hero of Ukraine.

The Soviets were desperate to end the war with Germany and had been negotiating what would be known as the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Ukrainian People’s Republic had sent envoys to the negotiations and the Germans and Austrians recognized their claims, as did the Soviet negotiators. The Soviet Union was also backing a self-proclaimed Soviet Ukrainian republic. When this Soviet Ukraine sent envoys the Germans refused to let them participate.

Tensions were rising between the Soviets and the Ukrainian People's Republic or UNR. The UNR were allowing the white Russian army (the Counter-Revolutionaries), led by General Kornilov, and their allies among the Don Cossacks, lead by Hetman Kaledin, to operate on their territory while disarming Red Army troops and forces loyal to the Ukrainian Soviets and urging Ukrainian troops serving in the Red Army to return to Ukraine. On 15 December 1917 the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed giving Germany and Austria control of huge swaths of Russian territory in exchange for peace.

Freed from the German threat on 17 December 1917, the Soviet Government sent the Ukrainian People's Republic an ultimatum demanding that the UNR cease shielding the white army, disarming Soviet troops, and blocking the passage of the Red Army. British and French envoys promised to aid the Rada if it resisted the Soviet ultimatum. The Soviets were backing Ukrainian communists attempt to set up a communist parallel government in Kharkov while officially recognizing the Ukrainian People's Republic.

The detail is too complicated to discuss here. However Ukraine became a battleground between the Red Army, the Germans, the Polish, and the white Russian counter-revolutionary forces. Also fighting were the West Ukrainian army, Petlura's forces, the forces of the Ukrainian Anarchist Makhno, and various bandit warlords and Cossacks. Kiev would change hands more than a dozen times. Initially the Ukrainian People's Republic rejected the Soviet ultimatum to allow the Red Army to pass through to attack the white forces. However war was avoided for a couple months. Soon the Red Army was occupying Kiev as the Rada lacked popular support.

People wanted land reform not Ukrainization, something viewed as annoyance by many Russian speakers. The Rada forces had deserted to the Red Army. However the Soviets would control Kiev for only three weeks. The Rada turned to the Germany and Austria who recognized the UNR. The Germans invaded Ukraine forcing the Red army to withdraw. Symon Petliura's forces took power.

In April 1918, the Germans disbanded the Rada and installed a puppet Government under Hetman Skorpadsky. Germany was under an economic blockade with its people facing starvation. The Germans proceeded to loot Ukraine's grain, angering the peasants. In November 1918 the German military collapsed and they abandoned Ukraine. Skorpadsky retreated with them. Petliura and the new Rada government called "The Directorate" seized power in Kiev yet again before being forced out by the Red Army. As Petliura's forces retreated they carried out massive pogroms against the Jews.

Petliura's forces often dressed up as communist forces to carry out these Pogroms murdering the communist sympathizers who came to greet them first, and then spending days robbing, raping, and murdering the rest of the Jews. With Germany out of the war, Britain and France were free to back the even more bloodthirsty white General Denikin in his attempt to destroy the Soviet Union. Ironically Denikin was a Russian nationalist who viewed Ukraine as inseparable from Russia. Denikin's forces carried out equally horrific pogroms. Petliura allied with Denikin and then with Poland.

In western Ukraine they declared their own Ukrainian republic the ZUNR on 1 November 1918 in Lvov.

The backbone of its military (the UHA) was veterans of the Sich Rifleman. At the same time Poland proclaimed the independent Second Republic The war began in Lvov as Ukrainian

and Polish militias battled for control of the city. A Polish Ukrainian war began for control of Galicia. Poland eventually would crush and absorb the West Ukrainian republic. The ZUNR leaders would go into exile and form the UVO. Ironically many of the men from its army would desert to the Red Army. This was because the Red Army was waging war against Poland and the Ukrainian People's Republic (in Russian Ukraine), which had signed a deal with Poland surrendering Polish control of Western Ukraine.

The complex story of the Russian civil war in Ukraine would need its own article or book to do it justice. However there are a couple of lessons that can be learned. Ukrainian nationalists were happy to become tools of foreign powers while supposedly seeking independence. Ukrainian nationalists were willing to see their country exploited economically by foreign powers. Ukrainization had little appeal in Russian Ukraine. The Soviets won because the Ukrainian people were more concerned with their economic situation.

Although briefly united by treaty on 22 January 1919, the Western Ukrainian ZUNR and the Russian Ukrainian UNR ended as bitter enemies. Ironically the OUN, with their dreams of genocide, still considered the mass murderer Petliura a hero although he had sold out to Poland, recognising the Polish claim to eastern Galicia in exchange for Polish support. Ten years after Petliura's assassination, the OUN issued a pamphlet urging Ukrainians to beat or kill a Jew to avenge Petliura.

Finally the Polish-Soviet War ended on 18 March 1921. Poland and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Riga awarding Poland control over Eastern Galicia and Volhynia with around 5 million Ukrainians.

Ukrainians were Poland's largest minority making up 16% of the population. In Galicia, which the OUN would plot to turn into a Ukrainian state, the population was 47% Polish, 42% Ukrainian and 11% Jewish. In Eastern Galicia, Ukrainians comprised 62% of the population along, with 25% Poles and 12% Jews.

The rest of Ukraine became a Soviet republic within the USSR with 26 Million Ukrainians (or Russians) living there. Around 500,000 Ukrainians would live in Czechoslovakia and 800,000 in Romania. Czechoslovakia was supportive of Ukrainian nationalism allowing Ukrainian schools and universities. Ukraine was home to many other ethnic groups including Hungarians, Romanians, and Germans. After the civil war ended, Soviet Ukraine was relatively stable. During the 1920s, the NEP (New Economic Policy), a rollback of socialism, favoured the peasants. Lenin gave the Soviet republic of Ukraine a huge swath of Russian territory along the Black Sea coast called Novorossiia along with the industrial areas of Donetsk and Lugansk.

To this day, Lenin is still condemned by Russian nationalists for the decision; one Russia appears intent on reversing in the current war. Lenin strongly promoted Ukrainization, forcing government officials to learn Ukrainian and building Ukrainian schools and universities. In 1923 the Soviets even convinced the nationalist Ukrainian historian Hrushevs'kyi to serve in the new government as head of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

In the 1930s, collectivization would lead to a famine and a low level civil war throughout the Soviet Union including Ukraine. Western historians love to demonize the Soviet Union for collectivizing agriculture ignoring the fact that it was collectivization that finally ended the

periodic famines that had rocked Russia for centuries. Collectivization was necessary in order for the Soviet Union to industrialize and establish the military strength it would need to resist the coming genocidal German invasion.

The OUN diaspora has mythologized the famine during collectivization as an attempted genocide "The Holodomor" and used it to justify their horrific crimes during World War 2. The OUN claim that the famine was deliberately engineered to wipe out Ukrainians. This ignores the fact that Russia and Kazakstan were equally hard hit. Moreover it overlooks the role of grain speculation and export of masses of grain to the West by Ukrainian merchants, offered high prices by Western buyers. The famine was the result of bad weather and economic warfare waged by the West. Mainstream historians, especially in the English language literature, continue to promote the view that the economic troubles in the Soviet Union and their consequences were always and entirely of the government's own making.

Today the OUN justify their crimes by vilifying the Soviet Union but in reality they had no presence in Soviet Ukraine and operated only in Poland and from exile in Europe. It was only after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, when the Soviets would occupy Western Ukraine as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was Ukraine briefly united. The Soviets would launch a crackdown on the OUN, a fascist terrorist group spying for Nazi Germany, arresting thousands of suspected members and executing hundreds. This would continue until the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.

Image: Andriy Anatoliyovych Melnyk (1890–1964) (Licensed under Fair Use)



It was in Poland's Second Republic that the OUN would have its origins. In 1920 the veterans of the Sich Riflemen who had fought for the ZUNR in western Ukraine founded the UVO an underground terrorist army. UVO stood for Ukrainian Military Organization in Ukrainian. Its founders were Levhen Konavalets, Andrii Melnyk and Roman Sushko. Konavalets would head the UVO and later the OUN until his death. Melnyk would head the OUN after Konavalets. The UVO was not a mass political organization but instead a terrorist group that funded itself by spying for the German Abwehr (Military Intelligence).

Initially the main political party of the Ukrainian nationalists were the UNDO who sought to win independence through legal and democratic means and initially were opposed to fascism and terrorism. By the 1930s however, the right wing of UNDO secretly worked

closely with the OUN. The UVO founded the OUN the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists at the 1st Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists in Vienna held between 28 January and 3 February 1929. The OUN were to be a mass political organization recruited from Ukrainian nationalist youth groups that were popular in Poland. The OUN were to indoctrinate the public and wage a terror war against the Polish authorities.

The older generation of OUN leaders in exile formed the PUN while young recruits like Stepan Bandera worked for the Homeland Executive back in Poland. The PUN tried and failed to unite all Ukrainian political parties but they did manage to infiltrate and gain control of many Ukrainian youth groups. The younger generation of OUN were even more radical than their elders and their elders were openly fascist.

The younger generation had joined nationalist youth groups at age 8 and at age 15 graduated to groups for teenagers. As teenagers they had devoured the works of Dontsov and other fascists. The younger generation included names that would later become infamous for their crimes like Stepan Bandera, Yaroslav Stetsko, and Roman Shukhevych. At the beginning of the 1930s, the younger generation of OUN were highly motivated, fanatical, reckless youth. Historians call them the “Bandera Generation.”

Image: Stepan Bandera (Licensed under the Public Domain)

Stepan Bandera



Stepan Bandera was born on 1 January 1909 to Andrii and Myroslava Bandera. His father Andrii Bandera was a Greek Catholic priest and an ardent Ukrainian nationalist who had served as a deputy in the short-lived ZUNR (West Ukraine) had helped raise armed units of Ukrainian nationalists and had served as a chaplain in the ZUNR's army the UHA. Stepan's mother Myroslava was the daughter of a Greek Catholic priest. The Bandera family had four sons and 3 daughters. Stepan Bandera didn't attend elementary school because the village teacher had been drafted. Instead his parents home-schooled him, raising him to be a fanatical nationalist and a devout Greek Catholic. However, unlike his father, Stepan would value his nation even more than religion.

Young Stepan Bandera joined the nationalist scout group Plast where he befriended the future head of the OUN Homeland Executive Vasyl Okhrymovich. That friendship would lead Bandera's quick rise through the ranks of the OUN. Bandera joined the nationalist youth

group OVKUH where he met future infamous OUN members Roman Shukhevych and Yaroslav Stetsko. By his teen years Bandera and other young future OUN leaders were fanatical fascists who spent their time reading the works of Dontsov and Mykhnovs'kyi. Bandera's hobbies included singing, hiking, doing impressions, sticking pins under his fingernails, whipping himself, burning himself, and smashing his fingers in door jambs.

He was attempting to train himself to resist torture. For young Ukrainian nationalists the Polish high schools were a battleground. Poland was determined to teach them loyalty to the new Polish state. Ukrainians like Bandera were determined to resist by destroying symbols of Polish nationalism and disrupting class as much as possible. For Bandera education was secondary. The cause was everything. Once he became head of the Homeland executive Bandera would have one of his former high school teachers Ivan Babii assassinated for being a Ukrainian who followed Polish government orders.

By 1927 Bandera had joined the UVO and was doing reconnaissance work for them. In the fall of 1928 Bandera headed for University in Lviv a hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism. Bandera would never graduate because his studies were constantly interrupted by arrests for nationalist agitation and ties to murders. Bandera had a sort of split personality. He was deadly serious when it came to organizing. Yet when his work was done, he loved to joke and play pranks with his fellow OUN members. Physically unimpressive he was a captivating speaker.

In the Spring of 1929, Bandera joined the OUN. He was a talented organizer and rose quickly through the ranks. By 1930 Stepan Bandera was in charge of distributing OUN propaganda. He was nicknamed "Baba" which meant woman because he often cross-dressed as a woman while carrying out his OUN missions. In 1931 Bandera was put in charge of smuggling OUN propaganda in from Czechoslovakia and Gdansk. That was also the year his best friend and the head of the OUN's Homeland Executive Okhymovich died after being arrested and possibly tortured by the Polish authorities.

Ivan Habrosevych would become the new head of the Homeland Executive and when he was forced to flee wanted Bandera to replace him. However Bandera was in prison until June of 1932 and had to settle for being deputy leader upon his release. By January of 1933 Bandera was the de facto head of the OUN Homeland Executive and he became the official head during the OUN conference in Berlin in June of 1933. Bandera's leadership would see a massive escalation in OUN activity and high profile assassinations. He was acting on the orders of the PUN the OUN leadership in exile.

The PUN needed Bandera to stage spectacular attacks that would help their fundraising efforts among Ukraine's diaspora in the United States and Canada. OUN power and influence in the form of the Ukrainian lobby would continue to grow in the United States and Canada in the decades that followed. Originally Canada's Ukrainian population had been notoriously left wing and after the Russian October revolution were considered a serious national security risk because of their widespread support for the new communist regime.

However at the end of the Russian civil war many white Russians and Ukrainian nationalists would relocate to Canada and the US. Veterans of the west Ukrainian UHA army formed the Ukrainian War Veterans Association, which along with the Ukrainian National Federation raised over \$40,000 for the OUN. In the US Henry Ford used a group of Ukrainian fascist thugs to terrorize labour organizers.

The main sponsors of the OUN were Germany, Lithuania, and Italy. Germany and Lithuania provided funding, military training and passports. In the border wars that followed World War 1, Poland had captured an important chunk of Lithuania including its main city. Lithuania funded the OUN in revenge. Italy provided OUN training bases and Stepan Bandera's brother Oleksandr spent years in fascist Italy studying for a degree in political science and engaging in fascist activism. Italy was a major backer of the Croatian Ustashi.

The OUN were close allies with the Croatian Ustashi and the two groups trained and conspired together. Both groups would later have the distinction of carrying out atrocities that were so horrible that even the Nazis were shocked. During the Cold War both groups would be among the most influential fascist émigré groups. Both groups would also return to power at the end of the Cold War. A revived Ustashi in Croatia, under Franjo Tudjman in the early 1990s, and the OUN in 2004 and 2014 both incited civil wars and NATO interventions.

The former would be instrumental again in the destruction of Yugoslavia, while the latter would re-ignite war against Russia. Nazi Germany would become the OUN's most important sponsor. The UVO/ OUN's espionage no doubt helped the Germans when they invaded Poland. We will return to the Nazi-OUN alliance later. It is interesting to note that Poland also discovered that the OUN were being backed by Britain's MI6.

OUN Ideology

Before turning to the OUN terror campaign in Poland let us examine the OUN ideology. The OUN would later spend decades trying to rationalize or deny their collaboration with the Nazis. Yet in reality they carried out their crimes not just to please their German masters but because it was also fully in accord with their own ideology. The OUN were openly fascist, although there was some debate in their early years whether fascism was possible without control of a state. Eventually they decided that they would need a fascist movement in order to create a state.

This movement would have to be like those Hitler and Mussolini had created to seize control of pre-existing states. The OUN believed in two types of revolution. The first was a "permanent revolution", what the OUN called their endless war to indoctrinate the masses with their version of Ukrainian nationalism. Ukrainians were to be constantly mobilized in the struggle with the Polish government in the process becoming ever more radicalized.

The second revolution was to be a "national revolution". Unified by the OUN the Ukrainian people would found a fascist dictatorship and create a Ukrainian state. The OUN despised democracy even more than communism. They wanted a dictator known as a Providnyk or a Vozhd, the Ukrainian version of a Führer. Once a national revolution had succeeded, the OUN would proceed to eliminate all their enemies: Jews, Poles, Russians and the rest of the ethnic minorities. The cities where Jews often outnumbered Ukrainians would be cleansed. Inter-marriage between Ukrainians and other ethnicities would be banned.

Every area of life sports, culture, religion, and economics would be reorganized in support of the OUN goals. All other political parties were to be banned. The OUN ideology had become interchangeable with Nazi ideology. Their plans had been inspired by the Nuremberg racial laws of Nazi Germany. By the late 1930s Hitler was considered a hero in west Ukraine and the OUN hoped Germany would invade Poland and allow the Ukrainians to establish their own fascist dictatorship. Hitler however had other plans for Ukraine.

OUN's Terror Campaign

In order to wage their permanent revolution, Bandera and the homeland executive waged a terror campaign that became a low intensity civil war. The OUN correctly predicted their terror campaign would lead to mass imprisonment of Ukrainians. Bandera was ordered to set up an OUN stay behind network that would operate from the forests. The UVO had tried to assassinate the future Polish dictator Pilsudski back in 1921. It was the OUN assassination campaign that would launch Stepan Bandera into fame or infamy. During the 1930s the OUN would claim hundreds of victims.

Poles who mocked Ukrainian nationalists would often end up dead. So would Ukrainians who dared to criticize the OUN. Bandera was also obsessed with killing suspected traitors within the OUN. Bandera was especially skilled at setting up mass propaganda campaigns. Any OUN member killed was turned into a martyr and a whole cult was set up around the person with the aid of the Greek Catholic Church. This had begun before Bandera's time but he was very successful at popularizing it.

In addition to foreign financing the OUN relied on armed robbery to raise cash. Their favourite targets were banks and post offices. If one of the robbers happened to be killed he was turned into a hero of Ukraine. Every OUN trial or arrest was also used to gain publicity for the cause. The Ukrainian nationalists had built mounds to honour the fallen UHA soldiers of the short-lived ZUNR government of Western Ukraine. Bandera ordered all Ukrainian villages to build mounds whether or not there were any soldiers buried there so that they could gather for OUN events.

The Polish government in turn ordered the mounds destroyed. Soon all over Galicia Ukrainian villagers were battling police with hoes and pitchforks in defence of the mounds. The OUN also began destroying the tombs of Polish soldiers and police. If the government succeeded in destroying the mounds they were often quickly rebuilt.

Bandera neither smoked nor drank. In the Summer of 1933 Bandera decided to launch a national boycott of alcohol and tobacco. However his goals went beyond health concerns. His real targets were the Jewish merchants who sold alcohol and tobacco, and the Polish Government that got a cut of the sales. Bandera ordered any Ukrainian caught drinking during the boycott beaten and also ordered a campaign of arson to burn down Jewish-owned taverns. The OUN launched another anti-Semitic campaign where gangs of OUN thugs would go around and break all the windows in Jewish neighbourhoods.

They also went around burning down Jewish houses and destroying Polish farms. The OUN also tried to destroy Polish rail lines and telecommunications infrastructure. Bandera launched a massive campaign to destroy Polish nationalist symbols in schools and ordered the assassination of teachers. The OUN bombed a newspaper they thought was pro-communist. Most of the hundreds of OUN victims killed during this period were thus ordinary people whose names are lost to history.

It was the OUN's high profile assassinations that would make the OUN infamous and nearly end Bandera's career. On 22 October 1933, the OUN attempted to kill the Soviet Consul in Lvov to protest the famine in Ukraine. However in a case of mistaken identity the assassin killed the secretary to the consulate Aleksei Mailov instead, also wounding a Polish janitor. The assassin Mykola Lemyk received a life sentence for his crime. On 31 March 1934, Bandera ordered the assassination of OUN member Bachyn'skyi whom he suspected had

ties to Polish intelligence. The assassins were close friends with the victim; so they all got drunk together and then killed their friend.

On 15 June 1934, the OUN carried out their most successful assassination, killing Polish Interior Minister Bronislaw Pieracki in Warsaw. The assassin Hryhorii Matseiko first tried to kill Pieracki in a suicide bombing. However he failed to press the trigger hard enough to detonate the bomb. Instead Matseiko followed Pieracki and shot him twice in the back of the head. He then opened fire on his pursuers, wounding a policeman. Managing to escape with the help of the OUN, he was smuggled into Czechoslovakia and then fled to Argentina with a Lithuanian passport. The morning of his death Pieracki had met with Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, raising awkward questions after Germany offered refuge to some of the escaped OUN plotters.

Initially the police suspected the Polish fascist group UNR was responsible. However the sloppy assassin had left clues like the unexploded bomb and his clothes with a yellow and blue Ukrainian flag sewn into them. Stepan Bandera had actually been arrested the day before the assassination in a raid that captured 20 other OUN members, including the bomb maker. Apparently the Poles did not yet realize that Bandera was the head of the OUN Homeland Executive. Bandera denied everything including being an OUN member.

By 17 June 1934, the police had solved the Pieracki case. However they kept quiet. Instead Pilsudski turned Pieracki into a national martyr with all the pomp and circumstance that America uses to bury an assassinated president. A state of national mourning was declared in Poland. All theatres were closed and festivities cancelled while the coffin was carried around the country by train to be greeted everywhere by mourning crowds. Thus Poland was at a fever pitch when the government announced that the OUN were responsible on 10 July 1934.

Two weeks later the OUN would carry out another assassination on Bandera's orders, killing a Ukrainian high school director and teacher Ivan Babii. Babii had once punished Bandera for helping a fellow student cheat on an exam. The assassin, Mykhailo Tsar, shot himself in the head when he realized escape was impossible. The murder enraged even the Ukrainian nationalist press, which denounced the OUN as terrorists. On 9 October 1934, the OUN were accomplices in the Ustashi assassination of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in Marseilles, France.

Mussolini was so embarrassed when his ties to both groups were exposed that he ordered the Ustashi and the OUN confined to two small separate villages in Sicily. The trial of the Ustashi assassins would take place in 1935, at the same time as the OUN trials in Poland.

Poland held two big trials of the OUN leadership. The Warsaw trial dealt with the assassination of Pieracki and lasted from 18 November 1935 until 13 January 1936. The Lvov trials dealt with the OUN's other murders and crimes and lasted from 25 May 1936 until 27 June 1936. Together some 20 defendants were tried. Czechoslovakian intelligence had raided an OUN leaders home, seizing thousands of pages of OUN documents to which they gave the Polish government access.

This "Senyk archive" revealed a great deal about the OUN's goals and structure. Stepan Bandera and many OUN members continued to deny everything. However a few OUN members turned on the group and as state's evidence agreed to testify, knowing the OUN would no doubt seek revenge by killing them. Some OUN defectors felt guilty for the

murders of fellow Ukrainians especially fellow OUN members. Others caved in under interrogation. The Polish prosecutor, Zelenski, performed well in proving the state's case against the OUN.

At the Warsaw trial Bandera and other defendants refused to testify in Polish (in which they were all fluent) while the court refused to hear testimony in Ukrainian. Bandera was dragged out of the courtroom kicking and screaming for his contempt of court. It was at the Warsaw trial that the OUN first started using the slogan "Slava Ukraini" publicly in combination with the Roman (Nazi) salute. Vira Svientsitska was the first to shout the slogan with salute in court as she was being dragged from the courtroom for refusing to testify in Polish.

Bandera and Mykola Lebed would shout the slogan at their sentencing. Lebed would later be the main OUN figure backed by the CIA, after carrying out horrific crimes for the Germans during the war. Stepan Bandera, Mykola Lebed and the bomb maker Iaroslav Karpynets would all receive death sentences when the Warsaw trial ended on 13 June 1936. The other defendants received long prison sentences of between 8 and 15 years. Luckily for the OUN the Polish Parliament had abolished the death penalty on 2 January 1936. This act spared the lives of the leaders of a movement that would go on to murder hundreds of thousands of Poles.

Instead they were sentenced to life imprisonment. Poland used the Pieracki murder as a pretext to build a prison camp for Ukrainians. Many low level OUN members were given local trials. By 1938 when Ukrainian owned agricultural firms were refusing to supply the cities—in the wake of a Polish police crackdown on nationalist demonstrators—Poland gaoled some 30,000 Ukrainians.

The Lvov trials were more relaxed. The defendants were allowed to testify in Ukrainian and instead of denying their crimes the OUN sought to justify them. Bandera was allowed to give a long courtroom speech where he portrayed himself as a Robin Hood figure helping the poor Ukrainian peasants against the evil Poles and Russians. He put himself forward as the OUN's Providnyk or Führer ignoring the OUN leader in exile Konavelets.

In his speech Bandera argued the true measure of the OUN was not their willingness to die but their willingness to kill and that not hundreds but thousands of people needed to die in order to fulfil their goals. Full of self-serving lies Bandera's legendary Lvov courtroom speech is still read and reread by fascists in Ukraine today. The Lvov trial made Bandera a superstar among Ukrainians in Poland and the diaspora.

Arrested the day before the Pieracki assassination Bandera would remain in Polish prisons until his eventual escape in September 1939. Bandera and other OUN prisoners used their time in prison to study and organize. They taught some of their fellow Ukrainian prisoners to read and write and each OUN leader gave lectures on a different academic topic. In prison Bandera and the OUN mentored Hryorii Perehinak, who would go on to play a major role in the mass murder of Poles in Volhynia during the war. Bandera and the OUN waged three hunger strikes which the Polish prison guards ended by force-feeding them through their noses. The OUN also plotted to free Bandera. One plot involved impersonating monks to help Bandera escape.

The Polish authorities however were reading the OUN's mail and arrested the plotters. Another scheme involved bribing his prison guards to release him with money raised from overseas Ukrainians. The OUN cancelled the plan either because they feared it was a trick to

kill Bandera while escaping or they feared reprisals against other OUN prisoners if Bandera escaped. The authorities were so concerned about these OUN plots that they built guard towers at one prison and also kept moving Bandera around. The Bandera escape plans became even more intense after the OUN head Konavalets was assassinated in Rotterdam on 22 May 1938. Bandera's supporters wanted him free so he could gain control of the OUN. Poland had him transferred to a prison in Brest.

OUN in World War 2

Finally on 1 September 1939 Nazi Germany invaded Poland and World War 2 began. In the chaos Bandera was finally able to escape on 13 September 1939. Bandera headed for Lvov. A small part of the German military was occupying Galicia. The OUN had risen up and begun by massacring 3,000 Poles and an unknown number of Jews. The remnants of the Polish military were massacring Ukrainians and Jews. However Bandera quickly realized that the time was not yet right for the OUN to seize power because western Ukraine was about to become part of the Soviet sphere of influence as part of the Molotov and Ribbentrop Pact.

Bandera and many of the OUN headed for the German occupied portion of Western Poland called the General Government. On 17 September 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Poland and despite years of OUN propaganda many West Ukrainian's welcomed them as liberators. Bandera's family would eventually get caught up in the Soviet crackdown on the OUN in western Ukraine. In March 1941, a couple months before the German invasion of the USSR, they arrested Stepan's father Andrii and two of Stepan's sisters for harbouring an OUN member. His sisters were deported to Siberia while his father was sentenced to be shot.

Bandera headed for Cracow, which was to become home to 30,000 OUN members and their sympathizers. Along the way Bandera stopped in the town of Iavoriv where the OUN and the German military engaged in a brutal massacre of local Jews and burned down the local synagogue. Bandera never mentioned the incident or other OUN mass murders. Arriving in Cracow, Bandera soon met his future wife, OUN member Iaroslava Oparivska. They would marry in June of 1940. Bandera had more than romance on his mind. He wanted to seize control of the OUN.

In November 1939 Bandera headed for a spa in Slovakia for an OUN meeting. Then he headed for Vienna where he met up with the current head of the Homeland Executive Lopatyns'kyi. They decided to head to Rome to confront the new OUN head Andrii Melnyk. Melnyk had been a founding member of the UVO and OUN but was not as well known in Western Ukraine as Bandera. Melnyk had been made the OUN head at the 2nd congress of Ukrainian Nationalists held in Rome in August 1939. The assassinated OUN head Konavalets had named Melnyk as a successor in his will. Bandera's followers claimed the will was a forgery. Bandera considered Melnyk's top advisers to be traitors.

Bandera and Lopatyns'kyi arrived in Rome mid January 1940. Stepan reunited with his brother Oleksandr, who had earned a PhD in political economy since arriving in Rome in 1933. They then met with Melnyk and demanded that he fire his advisers, appoint Bandera's picks to OUN leadership and then go into exile in Switzerland. Melnyk in return offered to make Bandera one of his advisers but demanded the obedience of the Homeland Executive. Bandera believed that Melnyk also ordered his assassination so Bandera went into hiding.

The OUN was moving towards its split into the OUN/M headed by Melnyk and the OUN/B headed by Bandera. On 10 February 1940 Bandera and his supporters like Roman

Shukhevych declared a revolutionary leadership in the OUN. Soon each side was expelling the other from the OUN. Each side was accusing the other side of being married to Jews and being secretly controlled by the Soviet Union. It became a bit of a comedy that would turn dark. During the war Bandera would have many of his OUN/M rivals assassinated including Melnyk's advisers whom he had labelled as traitors.

Today the Ukrainian nationalist obsession with traitors in high places remains a defining characteristic of post-Maidan Ukraine. Bandera's OUN/B would ultimately win the power struggle since they enjoyed better connections to OUN activists in Soviet-controlled Western Ukraine, were more popular among Ukrainians in German-controlled Poland and with the young. The Nazis would work closely with both the OUN/M and the OUN/B. They seemed to favour the OUN/M as more easy to control. Ideologically there was little difference between the two and the OUN/B and OUN/M fought over who was the more pro-Nazi.

From 31 March until 3 April 1941, the OUN/B held their own second Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists at Cracow, deliberately ignoring the Second Congress convened in Rome that had appointed Melnyk head of the OUN. Bandera was declared Providnyk of the OUN. The OUN/B published a pamphlet expressing their ideology. In the months leading up to the invasion of the Soviet Union they were planning with their German handlers in the Abwehr. The OUN/B claimed "Jews in the USSR are the main pillars of the Bolshevik Regime, and the avant-garde of the Moscow imperialism in Ukraine."

They announced that they were planning to ally with Byelorussians, Finns, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Latvians and other "enslaved nations" to destroy the USSR. They announced that they would destroy the collective farms and replace them with a free enterprise system. They created a red and black OUN/B flag symbolizing blood and soil. They announced their policy as "one people, one Party, and one Leader".

On 10 April 1941, the OUN expressed elation when the Nazis allowed the Ustashi to carve a Croatian puppet state out of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. That clerical-fascist state, to which the first Croatian president in 1991, Franjo Tudjman, belonged, waged a genocidal campaign against Jews, Gypsies, and Serbs and Orthodoxy. The OUN/B sent Croatian dictator Ante Pavelic their personal congratulations by telegram. The Nazis had already created a fascist puppet state in Slovakia. Hence the OUN/B were convinced that the Nazis would allow Bandera to rule Ukraine as dictator after the German invasion.

OUN and Nazi Germany

Throughout 1939-1941 both factions of the OUN were working closely with Germany's military intelligence the Abwehr headed by Wilhelm Canaris, as well as with the SS. Their Abwehr handlers were Wilhelm Canaris, Theodor Oberlander, Hans Koch, and Alfred Bisasz. Oberlander would become infamous for his role with Ukrainian and Pan-Turkist SS units. The Abwehr provided resources for the OUN to train and arm it's forces in German-occupied Poland and Soviet-controlled West Ukraine. The Abwehr recruited 350 OUN members into the Nachtigal Battalion and 330 OUN members into the Roland Battalion.

A further 800 OUN/B members were trained at the Ievhen Konovalts Military School in Cracow to form task forces that would seize control of local governments and raise Ukrainian militias to carry out genocide. The Abwehr recruited OUN members as spies, translators and soldiers. The Abwehr also trained refugees from west Ukraine and sent them back to infiltrate the Soviet Union. The Soviets managed to capture 486 of them as they

crossed the border. The Abwehr planned to have the OUN attack Soviet forces from the rear.

In May of 1941, after weeks of work, the OUN/B finalized plans for their role in the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa), which would begin 22 June that year. The Germans would tell the OUN the exact date of the invasion so the OUN underground in the Soviet Union could be ready. Their plan was recorded in the "Struggles and Activities of the OUN in Wartime" or Struggles and Activities plan for short. It was written by Stepan Bandera, future war criminal Roman Shukhevych, Lenkavs'kyi and Yaroslav Stetsko (later head of the World Anti-Communist League's Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations, who would be invited to the Reagan White House).

Its goal was to "establish the totalitarian power of the Ukrainian Nation in all Ukrainian territories." It listed the OUN/B's future allies, other minorities in the Soviet Union like the Baltic States, Belarus, plus the Finns. Of course their key ally was the Nazi Germany.

OUN activists were to travel the countryside proclaiming an independent Ukraine and welcoming the Germans in the name of Stepan Bandera. They would avoid combat with the Red Army leaving that for the German Wehrmacht. Instead they would organize the countryside. The plan identified its enemies clearly as Poles, Russians, Jews, and Ukrainians who failed to support the OUN. These enemies were to be liquidated.

The plan called for forming militias in the countryside comprising all males aged 18-50. These gangs would drag off their enemies to forests and other desolate places to be massacred. All Jews were to be registered and then eliminated. The OUN/B was to compile a death list of Poles and NKVD informers. The OUN/B planned to recruit the countryside to purge the cities that were full of Jews, Russians, and Poles. The OUN/B would seize control of all local government; remake the education system along Ukrainian fascist lines.

The plan called for the creation of youth groups that would indoctrinate children starting at age 6. At age 10 they would join the next group and at 18 the next group until at 21 they would join either the OUN, one of its paramilitary formations, cultural or sporting fronts. The plan provided for a huge list of OUN/B fascist slogans to mobilize the masses like "death to Muscovite Jewish Communism." and "Ukraine for Ukrainians." In other words the OUN/B were planning on creating a fascist dictatorship lead by Stepan Bandera that would then eliminate Jews, Poles, and Russians as well as anyone in Ukraine who was an obstacle to their plans.

Hitler however had his own plans for Ukraine and the Soviet Union. In Hitler's insane dreams Ukraine was destined to become Germany's version of America's Wild West or British India. He envisioned German settlers hardened and transformed by the colonization of Ukraine. Hitler was a big fan of Westerns and cowboys. Ukrainians were in his view just like the Russians inferior Slavs who were to be massacred and enslaved. Ukraine would become part of Greater Germany. He planned to enslave the populace.

The more pragmatic Nazi view was championed by Alfred Rosenberg and by the Waffen SS who saw many useful allies in Eastern Europe like the Ukrainians and championed an international view of fascism. During the war, as the tide turned against the Nazis, they would increasingly adopt this more pragmatic view; relying increasingly on their Ukrainian fascist allies.

On 22 June 1941, Germany would invade the Soviet Union and the OUN would follow the

Wehrmacht into Ukraine. The next years would bring untold suffering and horror to the Soviet people. The history of the OUN would enter its bloodiest phase. They would play a vital role in helping the Germans commit mass murders and other crimes throughout Ukraine and the other occupied territories. These I will discuss in Part 2 of this series.

Read Part II:



[History of Nazism in Ukraine: The OUN during World War Two, 1941-1945](#)

By [Hugo Turner](#), November 08, 2022

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Sources

My main source is the highly detailed *Stepan Bandera The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist Fascism, Genocide, and Cult* by Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe. I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the history of fascism in Ukraine.

The section on Ukraine during the Russian civil war relies on Edward Hallet Carr's classic *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Volume 1*. Pages 289-307. Part of a 3 volume series I recommend if you want an in-depth study of the political, economic, and diplomatic history of the Russian revolution.

The section on Hitler's plans for Ukraine relies on Wendy Lower's "*Nazi Empire Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*," which tells the horrifying story of the German occupation of Ukraine.

For a discussion of fascism in Ukraine after the 2014 Maidan coup I recommend *Ukraine in the Crossfire* by Chris Kaspar de Ploeg.

A PDF version of *Fraud, Famine and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard* by Douglas Tottle, debunks the "Holodomor" myth.

[Click to access tottlefraud.pdf](#)

Additional details on massacres of Jews during the Russian civil war in Ukraine can be found in Yasha Levine's recent articles.

Yasha Levine on Petliura

<https://yasha.substack.com/p/my-ukrainian-grandma-and-our-lost>

Yasha Levine on Denikin

<https://yasha.substack.com/p/white-russian-saviors>

Yasha Levine on the Holodomor

https://yasha.substack.com/p/holodomor-and-the-erasure-of-jewish?r=45jbs&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email

Cynthia Chung on the History of the OUN Part 1

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