

## **Essay by a Ukrainian student from Pervomajsk**

*This essay is one of more than three hundred examples of published students' reflections resulting from a class unit about forced labourers and prisoners of war. The unit was developed and tested in the course of the NOVA DOBA project »(No) War Heroes. Reinforcement of the history of Ukrainian Forced Labourers and Prisoners of the World War II« in collaboration with more than 70 teachers in Ukraine.*

»When I saw the photos I found myself comparing many photos which showed the Soviet prisoners of war in the camps of the Nazis in the occupied territories in the summer of 1941-1942 (Photos 15,17,28) with the photos that showed Germans in the soviet captivity between 1941-1942 (Photos 25, 26, 27, 34). In both cases the prisoners look horrible. They are exhausted and dirty due to the lack of hygiene. The heated conflict between the Soviet Union and the Germans during the Second World War tore down all limits of the usage of ideological confrontation. Even though the international laws contain norms that are supposed to regulate the situation of a prisoner, such as the Geneva Convention from 1929, both sides ignored those norms. No matter if we look at the German or the Soviet captivity, the situation of the prisoners was in both cases horrible; they suffered from disrespect, hunger, cold, a lack of medical assistance, unnecessary works and arbitrary shootings. All this seems shocking, what is even more shocking though is that this situation and treatment was also projected onto civilians in captivity in both the USSR and Germany. This underlines again that the violations of human rights is an integral part in totalitarian regimes.

As a contrast to the Germans in Soviet captivity we can look at picture 33. The portrayed Germans that were captured by the British during the Italian campaign do not look as miserable like their compatriots in the Soviet captivity. The picture 34 with the German prisoner from the 17th of July 1944 in Moscow triggers sadness and pain. Those people were invaders. However, I do not feel hatred. I pity them, as if it were an arbitrary weak

and helpless man. The paintress Alla Andrejewa once told that all the inhabitants of the city were invited in the radio to watch when the German prisoners were taken along the garden ring of Moscow. She did not go. But from those who went she heard two stories and remembered them. The first one about how the Germans looked at the kids that were taken by the mothers. The second one was about the women, who cried and said: "...ours are being walked through the city somewhere exactly like this". She pitied her enemies, because after all humanity overcomes hatred.

The prisoners have a right to life. According to the den Haag peace conference 1907 and the Genova Convention 1929 and 1949, captivity is not an act of revenge or punishment, but an act of prevention with the purpose of keeping the prisoner from further participation in the hostilities. This topic is very current today. The state of the Ukraine does anything possible to allow its citizens to return home. And we already have several examples of successful returns.«

*For more details about the project and further students' essays in Ukrainian language see <https://www.novadoba.org.ua/content/%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B3%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%97-%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%96>*