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# Ukrainian Displaced Persons and the Problem of Preserving Religious Identity in the United Kingdom (1940s–1950s)

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**Abstract**

The post-war wave of Ukrainian migration to the United Kingdom, predominantly composed of former prisoners of war, Ostarbeiter, and Displaced persons, represented a significant stage in the development of the diaspora and posed challenges for maintaining national and religious identity.

**The aim** of this study is to conduct a comprehensive examination of the issue of preserving the religious identity of Ukrainian migrants in the United Kingdom during the 1940s–1950s, who were classified as Displaced persons and European Volunteer Workers. The article traces the interrelation between the socio-economic conditions of living in prisoner-of-war camps, hostels, and workers' settlements and the spiritual life of Ukrainians.

**The research methodology** is based on the principles of historicism, interdisciplinarity, and objectivity, employing source-critical analysis of archival materials, eyewitness memoirs, and published studies on the history of the Ukrainian diaspora.

**The scientific novelty** of the study lies in highlighting a little-explored aspect of Ukrainian emigration history – the formation and preservation of religious identity.

**The conclusions** emphasize that religion served a dual function for Ukrainians in the United Kingdom: providing spiritual support amid socio-economic challenges and serving as a marker of national identity. The organization of parish life, cultural centers, and religious communities partially mitigated assimilation processes and laid the foundations for the development of Ukrainian religious and cultural life within British society.

**Keywords:** Displaced Persons, Ukrainian migration, European Volunteer Workers, religious identity, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, United Kingdom

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# Українські переміщені особи та проблема збереження релігійної ідентичності в Об'єднаному Королівстві (1940–1950-ті рр.)

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**Анотація**

Повоєнна хвиля української еміграції до Об'єднаного Королівства, сформована переважно з колишніх військовополонених, остарбайтерів та переміщених осіб, стала важливим етапом у розвитку діаспори та поставила перед нею виклики збереження національної та релігійної ідентичності.

**Мета роботи** полягає у комплексному дослідженні проблеми збереження релігійної ідентичності українських емігрантів у Великій Британії в 1940–1950-х рр., які опинилися в статусі «Displaced persons» та European Volunteer Workers. У статті простежується взаємозв'язок між соціально-економічними умовами перебування в таборах для військовополонених, гуртожитках та робітничих поселеннях і релігійним життям українців, а також аналізується роль Української Греко-Католицької Церкви в організації душпастирської опіки.

**Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципах історизму, міждисциплінарності та об'єктивності, із використанням джерелознавчого аналізу архівних матеріалів, спогадів очевидців, а також опублікованих досліджень з історії української діаспори.

**Наукова новизна** полягає у висвітленні малодослідженого аспекту історії української еміграції – формування та збереження релігійної ідентичності в умовах перебування переміщених осіб у різних таборах.

У **висновках** підкреслюється, що релігія для українців виконувала подвійну функцію: духовної опори в умовах соціально-економічних викликів і водночас маркера національної ідентичності. Організація парафіяльного життя, культурних осередків та релігійних громад дозволила частково зупинити асиміляційні процеси та закласти підвалини для розвитку українського релігійного й культурного життя у британському суспільстві.

**Ключові слова:** Displaced Persons, українська еміграція, European Volunteer Workers, релігійна ідентичність, Українська Греко-Католицька Церква, Об'єднане Королівство

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**Problem Statement.** The Second World War and the post-war political map of Europe gave rise to a large-scale phenomenon that in historiography has been termed "Displaced Persons" (DP). These were millions of individuals who, as a result of military operations, forced deportations, conscriptions into armies, and compulsory labor on foreign territories, found themselves outside their homeland. A significant proportion among them were Ukrainians, particularly natives of Western Ukraine, who after the war either could not or did not wish to return to the Soviet state due to repression, loss of property, and the threat of persecution.

Following Germany's capitulation in 1945, hundreds of thousands of displaced persons were temporarily placed in specially organized DP camps within the occupation zones of Germany, Austria, and Italy. Beginning in 1946–1947, some of these individuals started resettling in various countries of Western Europe, as well as in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The UK was among the first states to initiate an organized program for the recruitment of European Volunteer Workers (EVW) from among the DP, aimed at rebuilding the war-torn economy and addressing labor shortages in agriculture, the coal industry, and other sectors.

Between 1947 and 1950, more than 30,000 Ukrainians were resettled in the United Kingdom (UK). The majority of them had military service experience, had been Ostarbeiter, or belonged to the category of interned persons. Upon arrival to the UK, they were accommodated in special hostels, camps, and former military bases – often in the very same Prisoner of War camps (POW camps) that had been converted into housing for migrant workers[1].

Under the conditions of forced resettlement, separation from the native environment, and uncertainty about the future, the religious factor acquired particular significance for Ukrainian emigrants. For the majority of them, affiliation with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) was not only a matter of faith but also an important element of national self-identification. At the same time, living in an English-speaking environment – predominantly Protestant or Roman Catholic – created challenges for the preservation of their own religious and cultural tradition.

The issue of preserving and transforming religious identity within DP camps and during subsequent resettlement in the UK encompasses several dimensions. First, there was the question of access to pastoral care, since in the initial stages Ukrainian communities were left without their own clergy, and religious services were either conducted by Roman Catholic priests or not held at all. Second, there emerged the need for the institutional organization of religious life: the establishment of chapels, the

[1] POW camps (Prisoner-of-War camps) were intended for the internment of soldiers and were placed under the military control of the Allied forces. DP camps (Displaced Persons camps), in contrast, were established for civilians who found themselves outside their homelands as a result of the war (including Ostarbeiters, escapees from repatriation, and refugees) and were administered under the supervision of international organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and, later, the International Refugee Organization (IRO).

involvement of priests, and the acquisition of permissions for conducting services according to the Byzantine rite.

The proposed examination of the role of DP camps in the formation and preservation of the religious identity of Ukrainian emigration to the UK makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of how, under extraordinarily difficult historical conditions, Ukrainian emigrants consolidated around the Church, how they confronted the challenges of assimilation, and how, on this basis, the foundations were laid for the long-term existence of Ukrainian ecclesiastical and communal life in the UK in the second half of the 20th century.

**Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications.** The topic of Ukrainian DP in the UK context has been only partially explored. Recent studies and publications dedicated to DP demonstrate a sustained scholarly interest in the issues of post-war migration to the UK. Comprehensive studies, including the collective works "The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II" and "Forced and Slave Labor in Nazi-Dominated Europe", primarily focus on the scale of resettlement and the politico-legal conditions of DP integration in post-war Europe.

At the same time, a distinct line of research addresses the everyday life in the camps and the institutional development of Ukrainians. Notably, J. Antons interprets DP camps as "micro-nations" that provided a cultural and educational environment for the preservation of national identity.

The research of P. Rudling highlights the specifics of certain groups, such as former servicemen of the "Galicia" Division, their status, and the mechanisms of their inclusion into post-war British society. Concurrently, a modern approach to the study of DP is presented in the monograph by I. Bailey, which analyzes British policy toward DP in the German occupation zone in 1945-1951, including the selection, vetting, and employment mechanisms that directly influenced the resettlement of Ukrainians in the UK.

Despite the existence of an extensive body of literature on the socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of Ukrainian DP life, the issue of preserving religious identity in the UK has not yet received comprehensive coverage. This gap underscores the need for further studies focused on the role of the clergy, institutional support, and religious practices in countering the assimilation processes of Ukrainian communities.

**The aim of the article** is to examine the experiences of Ukrainian emigrants in the UK after the Second World War, particularly within DP camps and EVW hostels, and to analyze the challenges associated with preserving their religious identity.

**Presentation of the Main Material**. Ukrainian emigration to the UK had a mixed social and regional character: among the newcomers were former military personnel, civilian workers, peasants, and members of the intelligentsia. Their resettlement occurred not primarily as political emigration, but rather within the framework of the British government's economic policy, which aimed to recruit a cheap and disciplined labor force from among the displaced persons.

However, for Ukrainians, arrival in the UK meant far more than merely fulfilling

labor contracts. It marked the beginning of the formation of new communal and religious structures, which were intended not only to ensure survival but also to preserve their national, cultural, and religious identity in a completely new environment.

By the late 1940s, approximately 30,000–35,000 Ukrainians had settled on the British Isles[2]. This wave of resettlement had several sources of origin: DP camps in Western Germany and Austria; interned prisoners of war; and civilian refugees.

Following Germany's capitulation in May 1945, millions of people found themselves in the occupation zones of Germany and Austria, unable or unwilling to return to their countries of origin. A significant proportion among them were Ukrainians, who during the war had been taken for forced labor (Ostarbeiter), interned as prisoners of war, or evacuated alongside German troops. The initial organization of their accommodation and registration was carried out by the UNRRA, and from 1947 onwards by the IRO. For Ukrainians, a number of separate camps were established in Bavaria, Hesse, Württemberg, and in the American and British occupation zones. These camps hosted Ukrainian schools, cultural societies, and religious communities. The majority of Ukrainians who later resettled in the UK originated from these DP camps.[3]

A second distinct and relatively numerous group of Ukrainian emigrants consisted of former soldiers of the "Galicia" Division (later the 1st Ukrainian Division of the Ukrainian National Army). Following Germany's capitulation in May 1945, approximately 8,000–9,000 Ukrainian soldiers surrendered to British forces in Austria and were interned in a camp near Rimini, Italy[4].

During 1945-1947, they remained under the close supervision of the military administration and international organizations. At the same time, the legal status of the former soldiers of the "Galicia" Division provoked prolonged discussions between the Soviet and British authorities. The Soviet Union insisted on their forced repatriation, treating them as "Soviet citizens" subject to return to their homeland according to the international agreements concluded by the Allies at the Yalta Conference in 1945[5]. However, the British government adopted a cautious approach, relying on the norms of international law and the experience of post-war reconstruction. A key argument was that the majority of the interned soldiers originated from Western Ukraine – Galicia and Volhynia – which until September 1939 had been part of the Polish state rather than the Soviet Union. Thus, legally, these individuals could be considered not as Soviet citizens

[2] Post-war camps and hostels. Ukrainians in the United Kingdom. Online encyclopaedia. URL: https://www.ukrainiansintheuk.info/eng/01/camps-e.htm

[3] The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II / ed. by Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Yury Boshyk, Roman Senkus. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1992. P. 90–91.

[4] Rudling P.A. The 14th Waffen-SS Galicia Division: A case study in Ukrainian collaboration. Journal of Slavic Military Studies. 2012. URL: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13518046.2012.705633; The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II... P. 150–151.

[5] Кравець Д. Матеріали до історії переміщених осіб (ДіПі) у відділі рукописів ЛННБ України ім. В. Стефаника. *Наукові записки Національного уні-верситету «Острозька академія». Серія «Історичні науки»*. 2022. Вип. 33. С. 86.

but as former Polish nationals. This approach allowed the British authorities to avoid their forced repatriation and grant them the status of "stateless persons" or DP, under the jurisdiction of international humanitarian organizations. The resolution of this situation was also facilitated by the clergy of the UGCC and Pope Pius XII. The Pope addressed the Western Allies with a request to change the status of the Ukrainian prisoners of war, describing them as "good Catholics and staunch anti-Communists." This appeal contributed to the change of their status from "prisoners of war" to "stateless persons."[6]

Eventually, after a series of screenings, the former interned soldiers were granted the opportunity to resettle in the UK. Beginning in 1947, they became part of the European Volunteer Workers (EVW) program and were assigned to work in the coal mines of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Sheffield, and Scotland, as well as in agricultural estates. This group played a significant role in the subsequent formation of organized Ukrainian life in the UK, as many of the former soldiers were active community leaders, clergy, and teachers.

Another numerous group of Ukrainian emigrants consisted of Ostarbeiters – civilian workers who had been forcibly deported by the German authorities during the war to labor in enterprises of the Third Reich. According to various estimates, over 2.5 million people were taken from the territory of Ukraine, a significant portion of whom found themselves in the Allied occupation zones after 1945[7].

After the end of the war, Ostarbeiters who did not wish to return to Soviet Ukraine due to fear of repression settled in DP camps in Western Germany and Austria. They represented a socially heterogeneous group, including peasants, workers, artisans, and members of the intelligentsia. Many actively participated in the activities of Ukrainian cultural and educational societies, schools, and church communities while still in the camps.

Thanks to the IRO resettlement programs and British labor contracts, some of these individuals had the opportunity to move to the UK. There, they joined the workforce in agriculture, the textile industry, and the service sector[8]. Unlike the interned soldiers, this group included more women and families, which contributed to the faster formation of stable Ukrainian communities.

Upon arrival in the UK, Ukrainian emigrants from various groups (former DP camps in Germany and Austria, interned prisoners of war, Ostarbeiters, and civilian refugees) were accommodated in specially organized facilities corresponding to their social and legal status. The main types of such facilities included:

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[6] Hallmuir Ukrainian Chapel. URL: https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/lockerbie/ukrainianchapel/index.html; The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II... P. 2.

[7] Antons J.-H. The Nation in a Nutshell? Ukrainian Displaced Persons Camps in Postwar Germany. Harvard Ukrainian Studies. *The Journal of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University*. 2020. Vol. 37, № 1–2. P. 177–211. URL: https://www.husj.harvard.edu/articles/the-nation-in-a-nutshell-ukrainian-displaced-persons-camps-in-postwar-germany

[8] The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons After World War II... P. 31.

Prisoner-of-War camps (POW camps) – former POW camps, the most well-known of which were Hallmuir in Scotland and Lockerbie. Initially, these camps served as accommodation for interned military personnel and were guarded by the British Army. However, from 1946–1947, the camps began to be transformed to meet the needs of civilian emigrants and former soldiers of the "Galicia" Division. Within these facilities, emigrants remained under administrative supervision and received basic housing, food, and medical care[9].

The Hallmuir Prisoner-of-War camp was located approximately 2.5 km south of Lockerbie, Scotland. It was originally constructed in 1942 to accommodate German and Italian prisoners of war. After the war, in 1947, the camp was repurposed to house Ukrainian military personnel, primarily from the 14th "Galicia" Division, who had been taken prisoner in Italy. They were transferred to the UK after their status had been changed from "prisoners of war" to "stateless persons."[10]

They were offered the opportunity to resettle in either the UK or Canada: 7,100 individuals chose the UK, of whom 1,500 arrived in Glasgow on 15 May 1947 aboard the troopship India Victory. A portion of the men, 450 individuals, were transferred to the abandoned Hallmuir POW camp, where they worked on local farms and in forestry and later integrated into the local community[11].

Later, at Hallmuir, Ukrainians established a chapel by converting one of the barracks into a space for religious services. This chapel became an important spiritual center for Ukrainian emigrants, where services were conducted in the Ukrainian language. After the camp's closure, the chapel remained in use by the local community, and services are still held there today[12].

European Volunteer Workers hostels (EVW hostels) – dormitories and specialized residential complexes for displaced persons who had signed labor contracts with British enterprises. The European Voluntary Workers (EVW) program was initiated by the British government to recruit labor from war-affected countries, including Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states. Its purpose was to fill vacancies in sectors such as agriculture, industry, healthcare, and others. Under this program, over 21,000 Ukrainians were brought to the UK, many of them from displaced persons camps in Germany and Austria[13].

Ukrainians were accommodated in the following EVW hostels:

- Hampton (Norfolk) – 1,682 individuals;
- Mildenhall (Suffolk) – 1,401 individuals;

[9] Хромейчук О. Радянська репатріаційна місія та британська комісія з перевірки біженців. URL: https://uamoderna.com/md/khromeychuk-repatriation/

[10] Hallmuir Ukrainian Chapel – Scottish Civic Trust. URL: https://scottishcivictrust.org.uk/advice-support/case-studies/ukrainian-pow-chapel

[11] Hallmuir Ukrainian Chapel – Undiscovered Scotland. URL: https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/lockerbie/ukrainianchapel/index.html

[12] Ibidem.

[13] Post-war camps and hostels. Ukrainians in the United Kingdom, *Online encyclopaedia*. URL: https://www.ukrainiansintheuk.info/eng/01/camps-e.htm

- Allington (Lincolnshire) – 1,319 individuals;
- Moorby (Lincolnshire) – 1,264 individuals;
- Botesdale (Suffolk) – 1,010 individuals;
- Dalkeith (Scotland) – 958 individuals;
- Lockerbie (Scotland) – 463 individuals;

These hostels were often former Prisoner-of-War (POW) camps that, after the war, were repurposed to accommodate displaced persons.

Although residents of the hostels spent most of their time at work, Ukrainians, especially in larger groups, actively organized educational, cultural, and recreational activities. They conducted English language courses, lectures on Ukrainian history, maintained libraries and reading rooms, published newsletters, organized choral, folk, theatrical, and instrumental groups, engaged in traditional crafts (embroidery, wood carving), and participated in sports (football, volleyball, table tennis, chess). Choral and dance ensembles performed concerts both within their own and neighboring hostels, as well as for local British audiences. Sports teams competed with other hostels and in local amateur leagues[14].

To organize and manage cultural and educational activities, committees were established, composed of the most active and nationally conscious residents of the camps. Many of them were members of Ukrainian Youth Abroad, Plast, as well as various political organizations. Visits were carried out by representatives of the Central Ukrainian Relief Bureau[15] and the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB)[16], who provided informational and practical support: assisting with social issues, delivering Ukrainian books and newspapers, and arranging visits of Ukrainian priests for conducting services and pastoral care.

Many Ukrainians began joining the AUGB and establishing local chapters within the hostels (by the end of 1949, there were 242 chapters with 12 or more members and an additional 116 smaller groups). Over time, these AUGB committees assumed a significant part of the organizational work[17].

Alongside the numerous Ukrainian clubs, cultural, and sports organizations that emerged in the camps and EVW hostels, Ukrainian emigrants in the UK faced a serious challenge in preserving their religious identity. The predominance of Protestant and Anglican environments, different from the Byzantine rite of the UGCC, created conditions in which Ukrainian religious traditions and practices could gradually be lost. This concerned both daily participation in religious services and the transmission of Ukrainian traditions to subsequent generations.

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[14] The Historic England Blog. URL: https://heritagecalling.com/2023/05/10/a-history-of-ukrainians-in-england/

[15] Central Ukrainian Relife Bureau. URL: https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CC%5CE%5CCentralUkrainianReliefBureau.htm

[16] Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB). URL: https://www.augb.co.uk/about-us-and-our-community/about-the-augb

[17] Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) [Союз Українців у Великій Британії]. Ukrainians in the United Kingdom. *Online encyclopaedia*. URL: https://cutt.ly/gtekIoix

It is still impossible to establish a complete list of priests who regularly served in EVW hostels and POW camps in the postwar years: documentation from government agencies and local communities is incomplete, and many services were held in "field" conditions with visiting clergy. At the same time, sources record the intensive activity of several key hieromonks and priests of the UGCC in the UK, making their visits to Ukrainian emigrants highly likely.

The initial steps in organizing pastoral care were taken through the arrival of priests from Europe. A significant role in this process was played by Fr. Antoniy Hodys, known as the "Reverend Major." Father Hodys arrived in the UK in 1947, at a time when Ukrainian communities were already actively organizing in DP camps. He became one of the first priests to provide pastoral care among Ukrainians, helping them preserve their faith and traditions. His ministry included conducting religious services, catechesis, organizing religious celebrations, and supporting the moral spirit of emigrants.

Another key figure in the development of the UGCC in the UK was Archbishop Ivan Buchko[18]. Notably, Archbishop Buchko was responsible for both the organizational and pastoral success among Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons. He was an enthusiastic leader and spiritual motivator, dedicating all his efforts to the advancement of his faithful. He visited most camp parishes in Germany and Italy, missions, pilgrimages, Christian churches in his homeland, and other countries of Western Europe. He also sought to maintain the Byzantine rite while strictly adhering to Catholic doctrine within his church, promoting traditional Christian education from primary schools to universities. Beyond Christian education, Archbishop Buchko provided both financial and moral support to all segments of the Ukrainian emigration[19].

It is also documented that emigrants were cared for by priests appointed by Archbishop Buchko, including Fr. Josaphat Jean, who arrived in the UK in 1946; Fr. Volodymyr Malanchuk, active during 1949;[20] and Fr. Oleksandr Malynovskyi, who had served in the Apostolic Exarchate of Lemkivshchyna from 1941 to 1945. After completing his service in the exarchate, Fr. Malynovskyi continued his ministry in the UK, where he became Vice-Rector of the UGCC until his death in 1957[21].

**Conclusions.** After the Second World War, the UK became one of the key countries

[18] "Information about the Archbishop's presence in the English camps is available thanks to an article in the newspaper *Nasha Tserkva* (London). The publication reports on Archbishop Ivan Buchko's visit to the camp of Ukrainian soldiers in Sheffield: "His Excellency Ivan Buchko arrived here, where he was welcomed on behalf of the Ukrainian camp team by Colonel Nikitin, and subsequently met the prisoners, represented by Lieutenant Colonel Roman Dolynskyi... Without delay, the Bishop proceeded to the camp church, where at the entrance he was greeted by Fr. M. Ratushynskyi, expressing gratitude for his arrival at one of the last camps of Ukrainian soldiers abroad". Кравець Д. Матеріали до історії переміщених осіб (ДіПі) у відділі рукописів ЛННБ України ім. В. Стефаника... С. 82.

[19] Dushnyk W. Archbishop Buchko – Arch-Shepherd of Ukrainians Refugees. *Ukrainian Quarterly*. 1975. Vol. XXXI. P. 41.

[20] In Exile No Longer: Holy Family Cathedral Celebrates 50 years. URL: https://cutt.ly/RtekPy7d

[21] Malynowskyj Alexander. Ukrainians in the United Kingdom. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20191210044522/http://www.ukrainiansintheuk.info/eng/02/malynowskyj-e.htm

of settlement for Ukrainian emigrants, among whom the majority were former DP camp residents from Western Germany and Austria, interned prisoners of war, and civilian refugees. Overall, within the framework of the EVW program, over 30,000 Ukrainians arrived in the country and were accommodated in POW camps and EVW hostels throughout England and Scotland. Gradually, Ukrainians who initially held the status of "prisoners of war" or DP were able to transition to the category of "stateless persons." This opened the way for their official employment in sectors crucial to postwar UK – primarily the coal industry, as well as agriculture and forestry, where there was a severe labor shortage.

Alongside socio-economic challenges, the issue of preserving religious identity emerged. For Ukrainian emigrants in the UK, the Church was more than a spiritual support; it served as a means of maintaining national identity. Ukrainians insisted on retaining the Byzantine rite in religious services, as it embodied their sense of "Ukrainianness." In the late 1940s, the first Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests arrived in the UK. Their activity marked the beginning of systematic pastoral care and became a tool for preserving Ukrainian identity within the emigrant environment.

It is worth noting that the organization of Ukrainian cultural centers, clubs, and community initiatives in POW camps and EVW hostels partially compensated for the absence of permanent pastoral care. These initiatives created a space for the preservation of traditions, language, and collective memory, helping to slow down processes of assimilation. By the mid-1950s, religious communities had become the centers around which the cultural and communal life of Ukrainians in postwar UK coalesced.

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