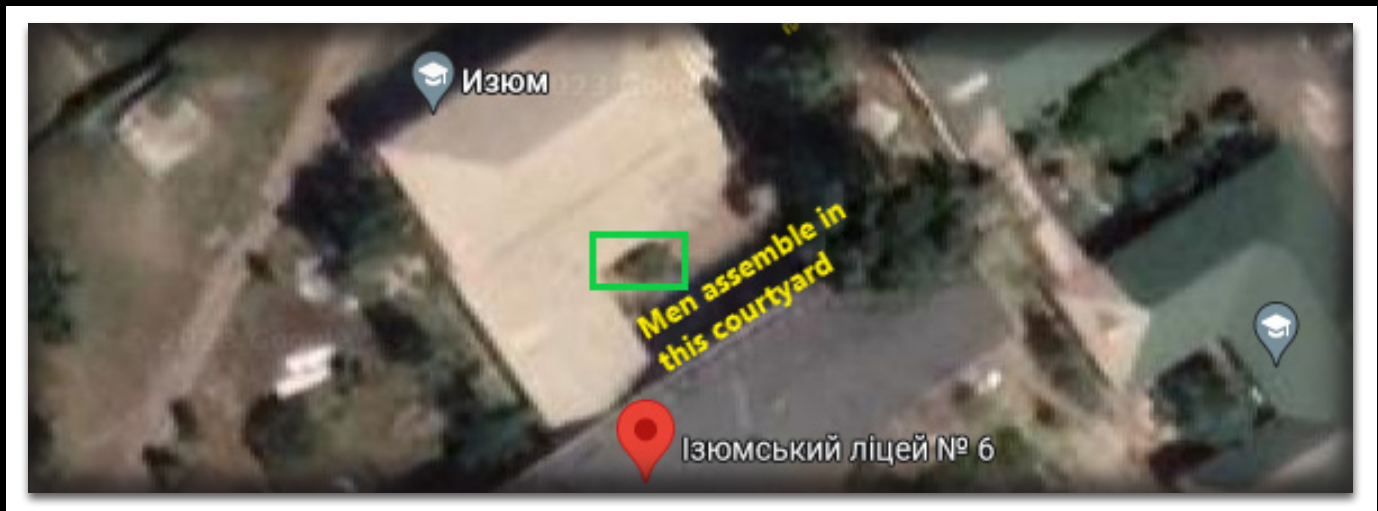


DIGITAL TRACES

Investigating the 'LDPR' units linked to
systematic torture in Izium



SEPTEMBER 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city of Izium is suspected to have been the site of human rights abuses committed on a massive scale by Russian forces and their Ukrainian collaborators during the months of occupation, from early March 2022 to 10 September 2022. This report investigates the digital traces that link so-called 'Donetsk People's Republics' ('DPR') and 'Luhansk People's Republics' ('LPR') units based in Izium during the months of occupation to several crimes and abuses, specifically torture. The units identified match witness testimonies by survivors of torture and illegal detentions.

Although exposing the perpetrators of alleged abuses committed against civilians is challenging, occupying forces in Izium left both physical and digital traces. Open-source investigations have a crucial role in collecting and analysing digital information to complement the findings of on-the-ground investigators, helping to build a more complete picture of what occurred.

- CIR has geolocated 'Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics' ('LDPR') units in several locations across Izium, including two schools identified with high likelihood as torture or detention sites and two buildings close to another reported torture and detention site.
- CIR geolocated videos at School No. 6 which indicate, with high certainty, that the 5th Battalion of the 204th Infantry Regiment of 'LPR' was present in Izium's School No. 6 [49.20389, 37.24890] between April and July 2022. School No. 6 has been described by survivors and on-the-ground investigators from Human Rights Watch as a torture site.
- Luhansk-born military propagandist Roman

Razum, also known as Roman Slynko, who has been associated with the 'LPR' since the beginning of Russia's 2014 invasion, was also present in School No. 6. His videos were a primary source for the identification and geolocation of the 5th Battalion of the 204th Infantry Regiment of 'LPR'.

- Russian and Ukrainian reports, cross-referenced with pictures shared on social media, indicate that the 20th Army of the Western Military District and 'LPR' 'Russian Legion' BARS-13 were based in Izium's School No. 2 [49.22096, 37.26819] at certain points during the months of occupation. Both military forces were likely co-located in School No. 2 at least in April 2022. Witness claims and social media reports indicate School No. 2 was used as a detention centre for captured Ukrainian soldiers.
- CIR's investigation also geolocates the bases of two units from the 'Donetsk People's Republic' ('DPR') to locations close to another reported torture site.
- A Oplot ZP unit's base was geolocated to a compound beside Izium's municipal boiler plant [49.18431, 37.28964]. A 60th Separate Sabotage Assault Brigade 'Veterans' base was geolocated to a building close by which appears to have previously been a government or military facility [49.181007, 37.288286]. Both bases are close to the Izium Instrument-Making Plant [49.176356, 37.290987], where survivors report being held and tortured, including with electric shocks.

The presence of these units at and close to reported torture locations is not in itself definitive proof that

the units committed these human rights abuses. The open-source information available in this case is limited for multiple reasons, and does not support a conclusive finding on its own. However, the digital traces that CIR has identified complement other forms of evidence including witness testimony and physical evidence. This report, therefore, aims to contribute to the information available to investigators on the ground as they pursue justice for the victims and survivors of Izium.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2022, the world woke to news of hundreds of graves being exhumed in the forest of Iziom. The bodies, mostly civilians including women and children, had been buried together by civilian volunteers after being killed during Russia's brutal six-month occupation of the city. Many bodies showed signs of torture.¹ Survivors claim that if civilians were outside their homes at 6 PM, they could be beaten by Russian forces and taken to torture locations.² Subsequent investigations³ have revealed a network of sites across the city where Russian forces held, tortured and in some cases killed captives, including both Ukrainian soldiers and civilians.

Militias from the so-called 'Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics' ('L DPR') played a significant role in the occupation of the city, including in the abuse and violence perpetrated against civilians. This report links a specific 'LPR' battalion to a known torture site, as well as geolocates two 'DPR' units to bases in the south of the city. Less is known about abuses which occurred in the south, which took the brunt of the Russian shelling during the city's capture (see map, below), but one of the known southern torture sites is roughly 600m from the 'DPR' base.

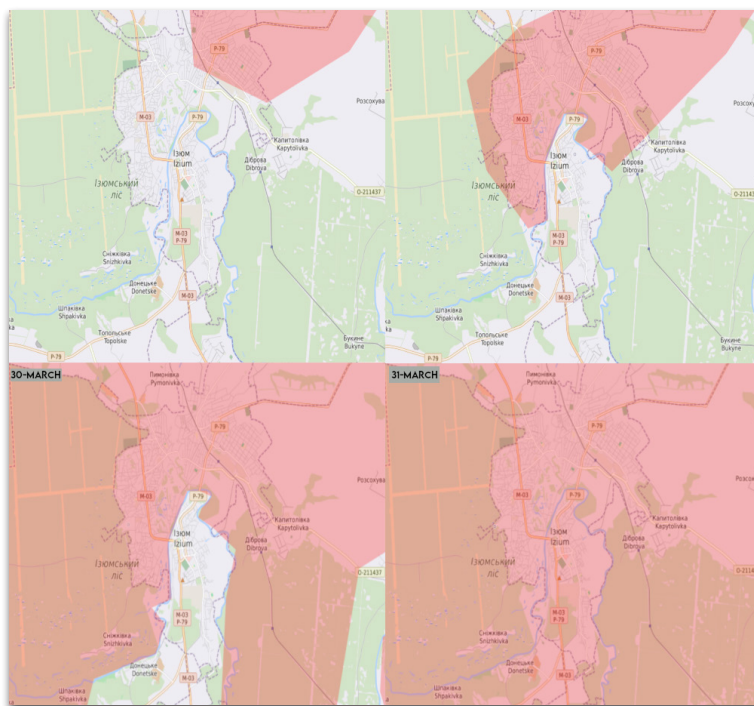


Figure 1: Map showing Russia's invasion of Iziom, with red indicating areas of Russian control. /

Credit: @Liveuamap

1 The Guardian (17 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/16/ukraine-mass-grave-with-440-bodies-discovered-in-recaptured-izium-says-police-chief>

2 24 Kanal (7 December 2022). Available at: https://24tv.ua/vbiti-diti-polamani-rebra-kativni-shkolah-intervyu-meshkantsem_n2203493

3 Associated Press (3 October 2022). Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-treatment-of-prisoners-government-and-politics-aec9afe8d6631795ae9f9478a4ede4cc>; Human Rights Watch (19 October 2022). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees>

Background

The city of Izyum, Kharkiv region, is located approximately 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the Russo-Ukrainian border in north eastern Ukraine. Izyum holds strategic value in the fight for eastern Ukraine, due to its proximity to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, along with its role as a junction city which vital rail and road networks run through.⁴ The city itself sits just to the north-west of Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, two large cities in Donetsk region which, if captured, could have resulted in the total Russian occupation of Donetsk region.

In 2014 and 2015, Ukrainian troops used the city as a 'launchpad' for Anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.⁵ Attacks against Ukrainian troops were reported at the time, but Russia-backed forces never held territory in the Izyum area prior to 2022.⁶

On 24 February 2022, Russia began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine along several fronts, two of which took place in the Kharkiv region, with the apparent aim of encircling and capturing both the cities of Kharkiv and Izyum. The Russian onslaught of Izyum dragged out over several agonising weeks of

shelling but was ultimately successful, leading to the capture of the city on 1 April 2022.⁷

Militias from the Russia-occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions made up a significant proportion of the Russian forces who occupied the city for six months until the Ukrainian army recaptured it in early September.⁸ In particular, so-called 'LPR' militias (who were allegedly among the most poorly trained and poorly equipped of the Russian forces, including many forced conscripts) were reportedly often placed in charge of manning checkpoints and guarding prisoners being held in multiple sites around the city.⁹ These roles put them into daily contact with civilians and provided ample opportunities for abuse and violence. Civilians that survived the Russian occupation have described¹⁰ the 'LDPR' militiamen as some of the worst units of the occupying forces due to their lack of discipline, persistent drunkenness, and random acts of violence and looting.¹¹

"They are drinking a lot, [they] exchange humanitarian help for samohonka [self-made vodka]. Once, these drunk occupants shot dead two children 12-13 years

4 Geneva Solutions (24 April 2022). Available at: <https://genevasolutions.news/ukraine-stories/why-does-russia-want-my-hometown-from-a-resident-of-occupied-izyum>

5 Veja (7 May 2022). Available at: <https://veja.abril.com.br/mundo/kyiv-confirma-14-militares-mortos-e-66-feridos-durante-ofensiva-no-les-te/>

6 Украинская правда (20 May 2022). Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/05/20/7025860/>

7 General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (1 April 2022). Available at: <https://mil.in.ua/en/news/the-russians-are-controlling-izyum-general-staff-of-the-ukrainian-armed-forces/>

8 It should be noted that, although this report focuses on militias from the Russia-occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, these were not the only troops that occupied the city. Reports and witnesses also place in the city several Russian military groups like the 5th Combined Arms Army and the 64th and 38th Separate Guard Motor Rifle Brigades. Source: Shoaib (25 June 2022). Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-claims-destroyed-35th-russian-army-2022-6?r=US&IR=T>; Witness claims also place Chechen fighters and Buryats in the city. Source: Channel 24 (7 December 2022). Available at: https://24tv.ua/vbiti-diti-polamani-rebra-kativni-shkolah-intervyu-meshkantsem_n2203493

9 Deutsche Welle (27 April 2022). Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-ukraine-separatists-are-mass-conscripting-anyone-of-fighting-age/a-61608760> and Ukrainska Pravda (29 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/09/29/7369548/> and Обрії Ізюмщини (9 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/NDieJ>

10 Kharkiv Today (21 June 2022). Available at: <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/pyani-okupanty-zastrelyly-ditey-izyum-prosyt-pro-zeleni-ko-rydory>

11 Kanal 24 (7 December 2022). Available at: https://24tv.ua/vbiti-diti-polamani-rebra-kativni-shkolah-intervyu-meshkantsem_n2203493

old, the pupils of the 11th school. The children ran to the basement but did not reach it approximately 5 minutes before the beginning of the curfew, they saw them and shot them. There are many such cases,” one survivor claims.¹²

Surviving civilians described the ‘LDPR’ militias’ behaviour to the BBC as “marauders” who stole everything, right down to removing double-glazed windows from houses.¹³ On occasion, they allegedly robbed homes as the owners were forced to kneel

at gunpoint in the street. They claimed that the men resented Ukrainians for the eight years of war since 2014 and saw the 2022 invasion as an opportunity to enrich themselves.¹⁴

Using open sources, CIR has identified where in the city several ‘LDPR’ units were based. This includes a school which has been identified with high likelihood as a torture site, along with two buildings close to another reported to be torture and detention sites.

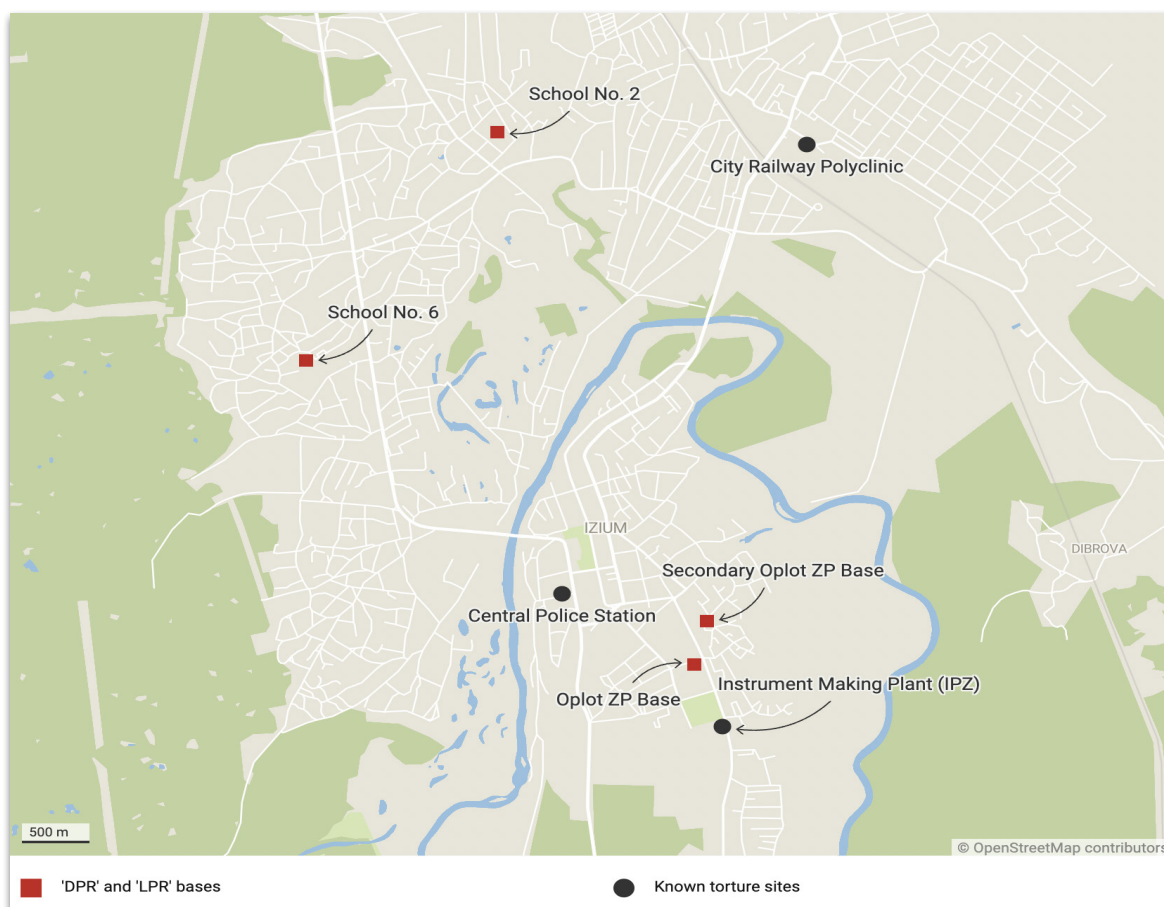


Figure 2: ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ bases and torture sites identified in this report.

¹² Kharkiv Today (21 June 2022). Available at: <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/pyani-okupanty-zastrelyly-ditey-izyum-prosyt-pro-zeleni-korydory>

¹³ BBC (22 April 2022). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61187197>

¹⁴ BBC (22 April 2022). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61187197>

ANALYSIS OF ALLEGED TORTURE SITES

School No. 6 and the 'LPR's' 5th Battalion, 204th Infantry Regiment [49.20389, 37.24890]

Human Rights Watch has identified Iziyom's School No. 6¹⁵ as one of a network of sites across the city where captives were detained, assaulted or tortured.¹⁶ HRW cites interviews with two survivors who say that they were held at the school:

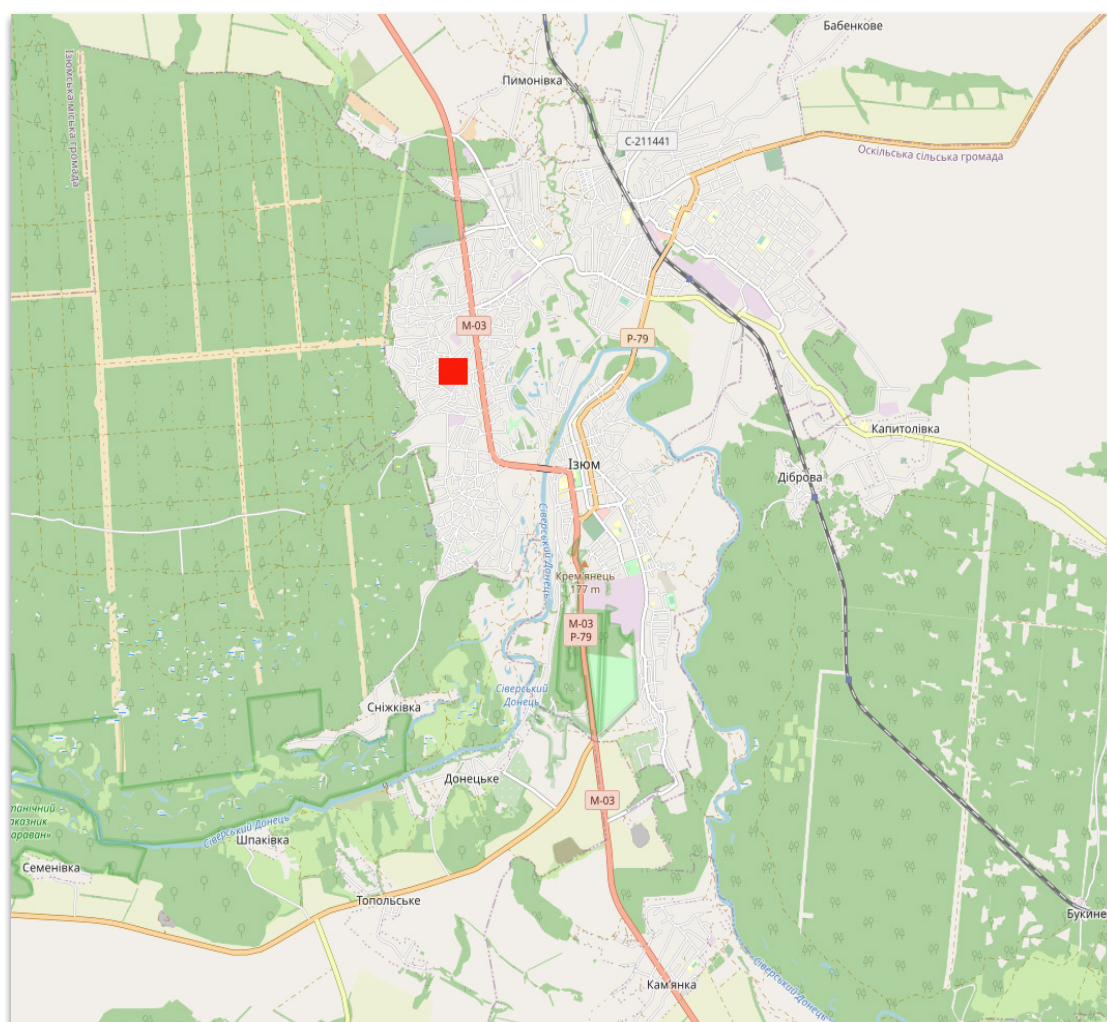


Figure 3: Location of School No. 6 in Iziyom city [49.20389, 37.24890].

¹⁵ Kharkiv regional state administration. Last accessed 16 April 2023. Available at: <https://kh.isuo.org/schools/view/id/11862> ; <https://izium-school6.klasna.com/>

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch (19 October 2022). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/19/ukraine-russian-forces-tortured-izium-detainees>

“On April 21, Ihor, 48, an electrician who was arrested five times, said three Russian soldiers came to his apartment and accused him of having marijuana. They searched the apartment, put a bag over his head, and beat him as they marched him down the stairs and to their car. He said they drove him to School No. 6 and locked him in a hallway storage closet for about half an hour. At one point he said he called them fascists and they started beating, kicking, and slapping him. They brought him to a commander who asked him to identify residents who were members of the Territorial Defense Forces or ATO. They released him the next day.

Zhenia, 19, was detained twice, including once at School No. 6. He said soldiers took him from his home on 24 August: “At the school, one of the soldiers in charge came over and wanted to hit me. I covered my face. He said, ‘What are you, a boxer?’ Then he called over three soldiers and they all started beating me. They held me first in a storage closet and then in an office for three days but would take me outside sometimes to ask me questions and they would beat me; they even hit me on the head with their walkie talkies.”

In September 2022, HRW researchers visited the school and spoke to neighbours who claimed that Russian forces had been living in the school between April and July. A man who lived nearby said that he had spoken to the soldiers many times. He believed that their accents were from the Donetsk or Luhansk regions of Ukraine, and that they were likely to be part of forces from the so-called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ or ‘Donetsk People’s Republic.’

CIR has geolocated videos at School No. 6 which indicate, with high certainty, that the 5th Battalion of the 204th Infantry Regiment of ‘LPR’ were present in the building between April and July 2022.

Roman Razum, also known as Roman Slynko, is a Luhansk-born military propagandist and singer who has been associated with the ‘LPR’ since the beginning of Russia’s covert invasion in 2014.¹⁷ Following the full-scale invasion in 2022, he began

coordinating trips into the occupied areas of Ukraine to deliver packages from home to ‘LPR’ soldiers fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine.

These trips are partly a propaganda exercise, designed to drum up donations to the profoundly under-funded and under-equipped ‘LPR’ troops.¹⁸ Razum and his colleagues filmed videos of themselves collecting, transporting and distributing packages to soldiers on the front lines, as well as allowing soldiers to say hello on video to their loved ones at home. These videos have been published on VK, Telegram and YouTube, accompanied by requests for donations.

The videos depict the soldiers and volunteers unloading packages sent by relatives and friends. The packages have soldiers’ names and units written on the front.

¹⁷ ‘Roman Vladimirovich / Roman RAZUM (Last accessed 30 March 2022). Available at: <https://sanctions.nazk.gov.ua/en/sanction-person/23138/>

¹⁸ Flashpoint (18 February 2022) <https://flashpoint.io/blog/donbas-russia-ukraine-conflict-social-media-chat-usage/>

One such video, dated 26 April 2022, shows Razum and his team unloading packages at School No. 6.¹⁹ The truck pulls in between two buildings; the packages are unloaded, and then the soldiers gather in a courtyard in front of a small tree to thank their loved ones for sending the packages.



Figure 4: Razum and his team unloading packages at School No. 6. [49.20386, 37.24882].

As the soldiers unload the packages, trees and the corner of a building with a green roof are visible in the background (indicated in red). The green roof is also visible behind the truck and trees later in the video as soldiers give their thanks and messages home.



Figure 5: Screenshot from video of 'LPR' soldiers at School No. 6. [49.20386, 37.24882].

¹⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20230322225516/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXh0Vm9EEhM>

The buildings surrounding the courtyard on three sides are made of pale brick with white rectangular windows. A small tree (indicated in green) is also visible in the corner of the courtyard.



Figure 6: Screenshot from video of 'LPR' soldiers at School No. 6. [49.20386, 37.24882].

The features in the video correspond with School No. 6, which is predominately made of pale brick with white, tall rectangular windows (mostly triple windows but with some double and single windows) and has a three-sided courtyard with a small tree which backs onto green-roofed buildings.



Figure 7: Screenshot from video of 'LPR' soldiers at School No. 6. [49.20386, 37.24882].



Figure 8: Google Earth image showing School No. 6, with annotations and markings. The green roof visible in the video is indicated in red, while the small tree is indicated in green.

Later in the same video, Razum performs for soldiers assembled inside the building. The room has a distinctive floor and wall clock. Facebook photos from October 2019 (see Figures 9 and 10, below) show the same floor and wall clock inside School No. 6.



Figure 9: Screenshot from video of LPR soldiers at School No. 6. [49.20386, 37.24882].



Figure 10: Photo of children’s performance in School No. 6, October 2019. Source: Facebook (private individual).

In the video, Razum’s voice can be heard saying “It’s all [for] the fifth battalion,” presumably referring to all of the remaining packages in the truck. Markings on the packages indicate that this is the 5th Battalion

of the 204th Infantry Regiment of the self-proclaimed ‘LPR’. Later videos dated 11 May and 12-14 July show the 5th Battalion still present in School No. 6.



Figure 11: ‘LPR’ soldier in the sports hall of School No. 6 in May. Markings on the package indicate that he is in the 5th Battalion, 204th Regiment.



Figure 12: Video showing 'LPR' soldiers receiving first aid training in the green room with the distinctive chessboard floor in July.



Figure 13: Shot of unloading at the same location. Markings on the box indicate that it is still the 5th Battalion, 204th Regiment, in the school.

Based on these videos, it appears likely that the 5th Battalion, 204th Regiment was based in School No. 6 from at least April to July 2022. This aligns with witness testimony collected by HRW about the

presence of 'LPR' or 'DPR' forces in the school from April to July, and coincides with the period in which civilians were allegedly abducted from their homes, assaulted and held captive in the school.

School No. 2, 20th Army and BARS-13 [49.22096, 37.26819]

School No. 2 was a large school in which multiple Russian units are believed to have been based simultaneously. The school was hit by what appeared to be a Ukrainian HIMARS strike on 17 June 2022.

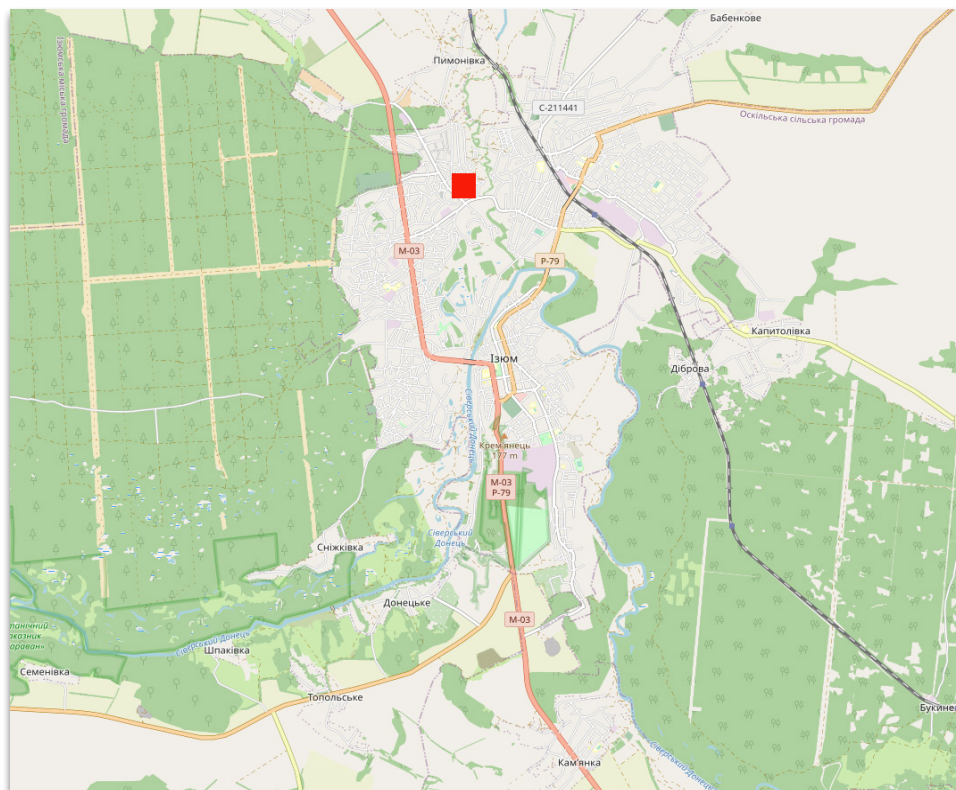


Figure 14: Location of School No. 2 in Iziom city

20th Army of the Western Military District

Reports from both Russian and Ukrainian sources said that Unit 89425, from Voronezh, of the 20th Army of the Western Military District were using the building as a base at the time. A Facebook post by a Ukrainian journalist stated that everyone in the school at the time (approximately 40 people) were killed in the strike.²⁰ The post claimed that in addition to Unit 89425, the casualties also included members of the duty shift of the 533rd command and intelligence center of the GRU (military unit 32801, Voronezh) and high-level commanders in the 20th

Army. This information could not be verified by CIR.

An investigation by Associated Press journalists identified Iziom's School No. 2 as a location where captives, including both Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, were held.²¹ Surviving captives report being subject to routine beatings, and at least two civilians died during their captivity. School No. 2's sports hall was also used as a field hospital for injured Russian soldiers.

²⁰ Roman Tsymbaliuk (18 June 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/IE9n9>

²¹ Associated Press (3 October 2022). Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-treatment-of-prisoners-government-and-politics-aec9afe8d6631795ae9f9478a4ede4cc>

A photograph which circulated among known Russian Telegram channels in early April appears to visually support that the 20th Army was present and likely keeping captives in School No. 2.²²

taken captive by forward elements of the 20th Combined Army. The soldiers are pictured against a wall with distinctive wallpaper. CIR has matched this with wallpaper in photos of School No. 2 posted to Facebook in 2021.²³

The photograph allegedly shows Ukrainian soldiers



Figure 15: Telegram post showing captured Ukrainian soldiers standing in front of distinctive wallpaper.²⁴

²² Старше Эдды (7 April 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/5UyIz>

²³ ІЗОШ І-ІІІ ступенів 2 (15 December 2021). Available at: <https://archive.is/8YSNE>

²⁴ Старше Эдды (7 April 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/5UyIz>



Figure 16: A photo inside School No. 2 in 2021 showing the same wallpaper. Source: Facebook

A photo later published by The Telegraph appears following the HIMARS strike.²⁵ The Telegraph describes to show the same hallway with distinctive wallpaper the school as the 'Russian command centre.'



Figure 17: Photograph of Iziium's School No. 2, 'Russian command centre', after HIMARS strike. Source: The Telegraph.²⁶

²⁵ The Telegraph (17 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/09/15/russian-command-centre-destroyed-himars-missiles-liberation/>

²⁶ Ibid.

BARS-13

Photos posted on 17 April by the 'LPR' Russian Legion' Brigade.²⁷ This includes three photos taken against the same distinctive wallpaper, pink wall and marble-patterned floor in School No. 2. allegedly from the Ukrainian 93rd Mechanized

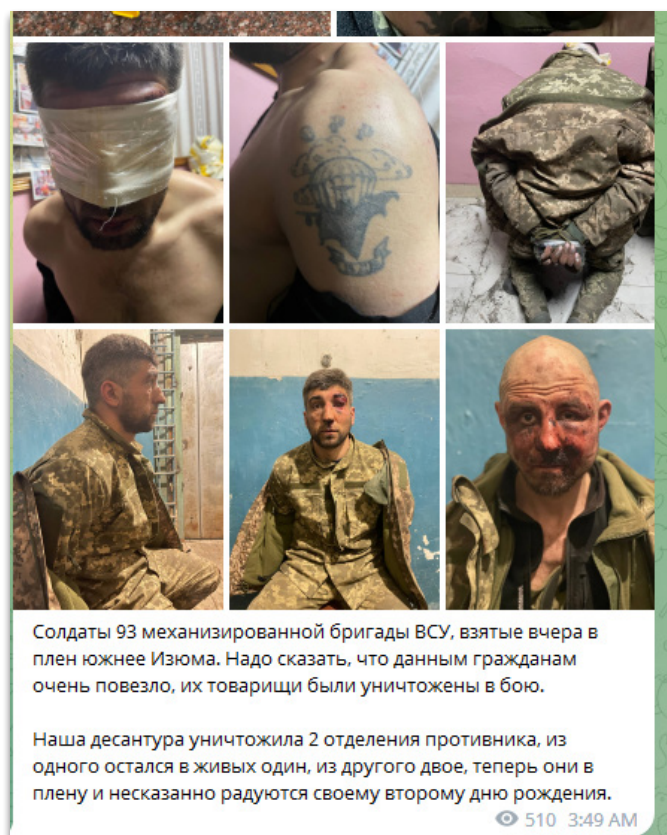


Figure 18: Screenshot of Telegram post from BARS-13, showing captured Ukrainian soldiers. Several of the photographs appear to be taken in the School No. 2 hallway with distinctive wallpaper and photo arrangements.²⁸

BARS-13 is an 'LPR' unit created following the 2022 invasion by Sergei Fomchenkov.²⁹ connection to Zakhar Prilepin.³¹

Fomchenkov is a former member of the Russian National Bolshevik Party who has fought on behalf of both the 'LPR' and 'DPR' in various roles since 2014.³⁰ Like Zavadov, Fomchenkov has a longstanding

Later in the Izium occupation, from at least June until the Ukrainian recapture of the city in September, BARS-13 were based outside the city in an area known as the 'Sherwood Forest' beside the E40 Izyum-Slovyansk highway. However, as this report

²⁷ Русский Ополченец (16 April 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/ZEY1c>

²⁸ <https://archive.is/ZEY1c>

²⁹ Amal News (6 November 2022). Available at: <https://amalantra.ru/russkiy-legion-bars-13/>

³⁰ VZYGLAD (27 February 2017). Available at: <https://vz.ru/world/2017/2/27/859712.html>

³¹ Centre for Investigative Journalism (22 September 2022). Available at: <https://investigator.org.ua/investigations/246901/>

shows, it is possible that they may have been co-located with elements of the 20th Army in School No. 2 around April 2022.

60th Separate Sabotage Assault Brigade ‘Veterans’ and 3rd company ‘Oplot ZP’; (‘Stronghold ZP’) [49.18431, 37.28964] and [60tj]

The Oplot ZP division of the 60th Brigade, a ‘DPR’ militia, appears to have been present in Izium between 5 July 2022 and 10 September 2022.³²

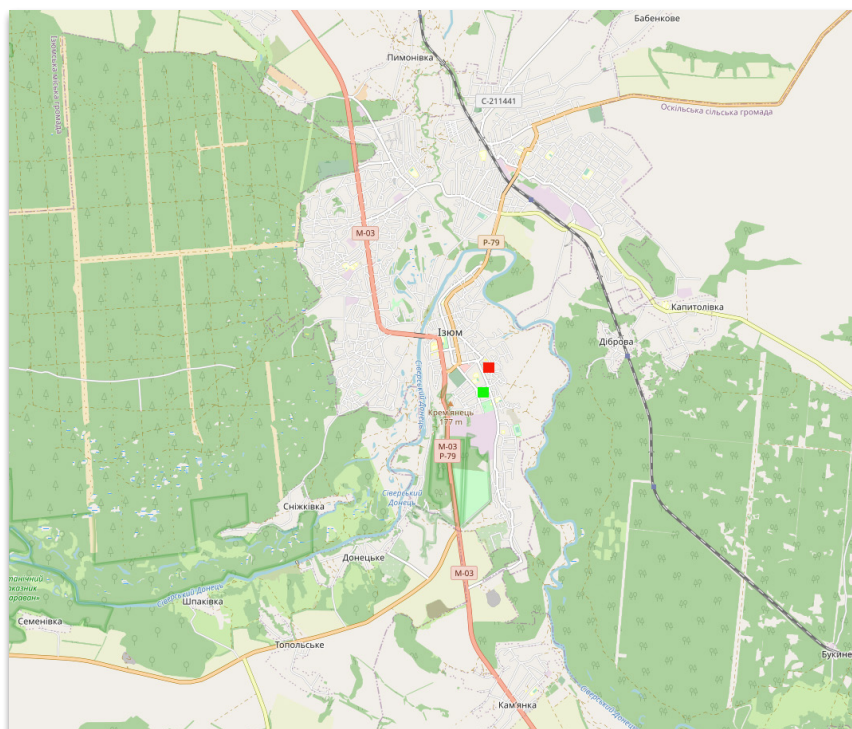


Figure 19: 60th Separate Sabotage Assault Brigade ‘Veterans’ and 3rd company ‘Oplot ZP’.

The 60th Brigade, self-designated as the ‘Veterans’, claim to have been formed in May 2014, the month of violent pro-Russian unrest in eastern Ukraine when the so-called ‘Donetsk and Luhansk Separatist People’s Republics’ were declared.³³ Whilst a number of members claim to have fought in Ukraine in 2014, it is unclear how substantial their presence in the intervening years has been.

In an interview with a Russian journalist, ‘Veterans’ commander ‘Marine’ claimed that when his group reached the Ukrainian border on 28 February 2022, they numbered just 14.³⁴ A month later it was 150, and by late August 2022 the unit had grown into a battalion-sized element.

The Oplot ZP division is led by Donetsk-native Sergey Zavdoveev, who goes by the callsign ‘Frenchman’.

³² Оplot (5 July 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/xfFrn> ; Оplot (10 September 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/NrvOj>

³³ ОДШБР „Ветераны” (5 July 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/MbgLr>

³⁴ Our News (29 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/EQwFD>

Zavdoveev has a long history of involvement with both the 'DLPR'.³⁵ This includes leading previous incarnations of the Oplot division, which has a complicated history and is subject to sanctions in multiple jurisdictions.³⁶

According to an interview with a journalist, Zavdoveev left Ukraine in 2018 following the assassination of ally and benefactor Alexander Zakharchenko, the then head of the self-proclaimed 'DPR', in a bomb blast at a cafe.³⁷ He returned in 2022 to take part in the full-scale invasion, and in July was able to create a fresh version of Oplot, 'Oplot ZP' (presumably, 'Z' refers to the use of the Latin letter as a symbol for Russia's 2022 invasion) under the aegis of his old friend 'Marine' and his 'Veterans'.³⁸ According to the same report, the majority of Oplot fighters originated from Donetsk, (including Zakharchenko's former head of security) with a few from Luhansk and Russia. At least one claimed to have been involved in the capture and occupation of Bucha before arriving in Izium.³⁹

Russian ultra-nationalist writer Zakhar Prilepin, who also fought in Donetsk and Luhansk in the 2014 covert invasion, maintains connections to 'Marine' and Zavdoveev.⁴⁰ He claimed that they were among the last to leave Izium when Ukrainian forces liberated the city.⁴¹ Prilepin also has links to the BARS-13 battalion, which will be discussed below. BARS, or Боевой Армейский Резерв Страны, is a Russian military reserve force which has been active since 2021.⁴² Multiple BARS units are operating in the war in Ukraine.

Based on photos and videos posted by the division and by Russian journalists on social media, CIR investigators geolocated Oplot ZP's base in Izium to a large building in the south of the city, adjacent to Izium's communal enterprise of heat networks (Izium municipal boiler plant) and very close to Kindergarten No. 4. A consistent feature of Russian occupations across Ukraine has been their use of schools and kindergartens as military bases.

35 Depo.ua (28 September 2016). Available at: <https://dn.depo.ua/rus/donetsk/boyoviy-frantsuz-navishcho-torgovtsy-igrashkami-znadobilasya-28092016113000>

36 «Батальон «Оплот», <https://sanctions.nazk.gov.ua/ru/sanction-company/490/>

37 Our News (11 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/1gzDC> ; Al Jazeera (13 August 2018). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/8/31/alexander-zakharchenko-killed-in-donetsk-cafe-explosion>

38 <https://archive.is/JZXe3>; The Guardian (7 March 2022). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/07/why-has-the-letter-z-become-the-symbol-of-war-for-russia>

39 Our News (11 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/1gzDC>

40 RFE/RL (18 August 2022). Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/best-selling-russian-author-boasts-of-killing-many-in-ukraine-s-don-bas/30115450.html>

41 Tsargrad (12 September 2022). Available at: https://tsargrad.tv/news/izjum-jetogo-ne-rasskazhut-oficialno-morpeh-i-francuz-zapechatali-vsu_622847

42 BBC (6 September 2021). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-58465781>

In late July and early August 2022, Oplot ZP invited several Russian journalists to live in and report from their base in Izium.⁴³ Photos and video interviews posted by these journalists on Telegram show Oplot

soldiers in a large, object-strewn yard with a red brick building with square white-framed windows, a smaller red brick building at the back and a tin shed to the front.



Figure 20: Photo of Oplot ZP in front of a red brick building with a tin shed in the background. Source: Telegram.⁴⁴

A video shared on Oplot ZP's VK page shows soldiers kicking a ball around in the same yard.⁴⁵ Additional angles in the video show a small red brick building with white double doors, possibly a garage, at the back (see Figure 21, below); yellow gates beside

another small red brick building at the front with a tall residential-looking building across the road (see Figure 22, below); and a two-story grey building to the side, which appears to be the main building soldiers were living in.

43 <https://archive.is/HAPLV> ; Our News (11 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/1gzDC>

44 Z-Митя «родня» (14 August 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/iHAF0>

45 «Оплот» движение Захара Прилепина (4 December 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/NPbJ5>



Figure 21: Screenshot from video posted on Oplot ZP's VK page



Figure 22: Screenshot from video posted on Oplot ZP's VK page.⁴⁶

Shortly before the Ukrainian offensive to liberate Izium began, six Ukrainian missiles reportedly struck the Oplot base.⁴⁷ According to Zavdoveev, this strike appeared to have targeted the specific room used by Oplot officers. Zavdoveev himself, however, was not present at the time.

⁴⁶ «Оплот» движение Захара Прилепина (4 December 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/NPbJ5>

⁴⁷ Tsargrad (28 September 2022). Available at: https://tsargrad.tv/news/unikalnoe-video-iz-izjuma-glava-oplota-pokazal-itogi-ataki-hi-mars-po-baze_634214

A video published by the journalists embedded within Oplot ZP shows Zadoveev walking around the bombed-out base, which is the same site as shown in the earlier photos and videos.⁴⁸



Figure 23: Screenshot from video posted by Russian journalists embedded with Oplot ZP.⁴⁹



Figure 24: Screenshot from video posted by Russian journalists embedded with Oplot ZP.⁵⁰

48 Ваши Новости (28 September 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/iD3JO>

49 Ваши Новости (28 September 2022). Available at: <https://archive.is/iD3JO>

50 Ibid.

The video shows multiple new angles on the base, including a view of a distinctive building with a chimney stack next door. Based on this, CIR has been able to

geolocate the base to a compound adjacent to Izium's municipal boiler plant in the south of the city.



Figure 25: Screenshot from video posted by Russian journalists embedded with Oplot ZP.⁵¹



Figure 26: Google Earth imagery with markup by CIR.



Figure 27: Google Maps imagery of the municipal boiler plant, including distinctive chimney stack.⁵²

The small cluster of buildings to the north of the boiler plant appear to match the layout of buildings evident in the videos of the Oplot base.



Figure 28: Google Maps with annotations added by CIR, showing the base layout.

⁵² Google Maps (Last accessed 30 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/lzyums%CA%B9ke+Kp+Teplovykh+Merezh/@49.1837013,37.2887817,3a,75y/data=!3m8!1e2!3m6!1sAF1QipOeElgdSiwufGyMKMghs-SAsSrp1uHVA8M9EPO1-!2e10!3e12!6shttps:%2F%2Fh5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipOeElgdSiwufGyMKMghsSAsSr-p1uHVA8M9EPO1-%3Dw114-h86-k-no!7i4608!8i3456!4m12!1m5!3m4!2zNDnCsDExJzAzLjQiTiAzN8KwMTcnMjluMyJFI8m2!3d49-.1842759!4d37.2895303!3m5!1s0x41209e162ed00001:0xfc510ccf3d8e394d!8m2!3d49.1837013!4d37.2887817!16s%2Fg%2F11b6dnrlfj>

An analysis of several images and videos posted to the official 60th 'Veterans' Brigade's Telegram account resulted in the uncovering the location of another site in which personnel of the brigade were active. By matching the surrounding area and internal layout of the compound, as shown above, a location in the city's first microrraion was identified as the second base.



Figure 29: Composite of video stills and Google Earth satellite imagery with markup added by CIR.

The compound itself appears to have been a governmental or law enforcement facility before the occupation of Iziom, and was in use by the 60th Brigade between at least late July and early August 2022. Members of the 60th Brigade appeared to use the compound as some form of base, storing

ammunition and vehicles within the compound walls.

The bases are approximately 600 metres and 800 metres away, respectively, from the Iziom Instrument-Making Plant, where survivors report being held and tortured, including with electric shocks.⁵³

53 Ukrainiska Pravda (29 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/09/29/7369548/>

A comment on Facebook, in response to a post looking for a dog who had been stolen by 'LPR' soldiers, noted that 'LDPR' soldiers had been at the plant. The post appears to use a derogatory synonym for condom, 'Лугандонцы' (Luhandontsy), as a disparaging reference to Luhansk and Donetsk soldiers fighting for Russia (other Facebook posts

and comments from Izium also use this phrase as a reference to LDPR militia).

This is notable given the close proximity of the plant to the 'LPR's Veterans' bases, although this is not definitive proof of their involvement in torture at the plant.

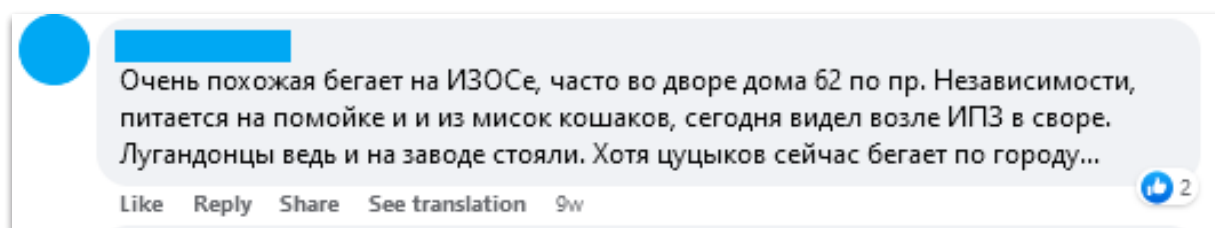


Figure 30: Facebook comment referring to the presence of LDPR soldiers at the Izium Instrument-Making Plant.

The plant, owned by Ukrboronprom, a Ukrainian state-owned defense manufacturer, was first shelled by Russia in the early days of their assault on Izium.⁵⁴ It was captured by the Russians in the first week of April, and then used by Russian forces as a position

from which to shell the rest of the city.⁵⁵ Later, civilians reported being held and tortured in the plant. A survivor told *Ukrainska Pravda* that he was taken captive and held for three days in handcuffs with a sack over his head in the plant:

“[T]hey turned my vest over my face with the hood, wrapped it with tape, put me in the car, they thought that I wouldn’t understand where they were taking me. But I’m a driver, I know my city.

In the basement, there was a container with naphthalene, it was used for something at the plant. [...] The room was very small, there were six of us, there was nowhere for two to lay down, we took turns sleeping. [...] To be honest, they didn’t get to me during the interrogations, but they dragged the boys to the interrogations and electrocuted them [...]”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Epicos (Last accessed 30 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.epicos.com/S/124740/izyum-instrument-making-plant>

⁵⁵ «МІПЛ (6 October 2022). Available at: <https://mipl.org.ua/zrobyly-z-nas-invalidiv-yakyj-shlyah-prohodyat-poraneni-ukrayinczi-yaki-po-trapyly-v-rosijski-likarni/>

⁵⁶ *Ukrainska Pravda* (29 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2022/09/29/7369548/>

CONCLUSION

The liberation of Iziom by Ukrainian forces in September 2022 marked the end of its occupation, but not the end of the city's suffering. An estimated 70-80% of Iziom's residential buildings were destroyed; critical infrastructure, including heating, water and electricity, was knocked offline or destroyed entirely; roads were blocked; food, drinking water and medical care were all difficult for the remaining residents to access. One of the most devastating legacies of war are the landmines scattered across the city, which continue to kill and maim civilians.⁵⁷

Whilst it is Russia that remains ultimately responsible for the tragedies and potential war crimes committed against Ukrainians in Iziom, it is also important to acknowledge and scrutinise the role of Ukrainian fighters from Russian-controlled 'LDPR'.

Many of the victims and survivors of human rights

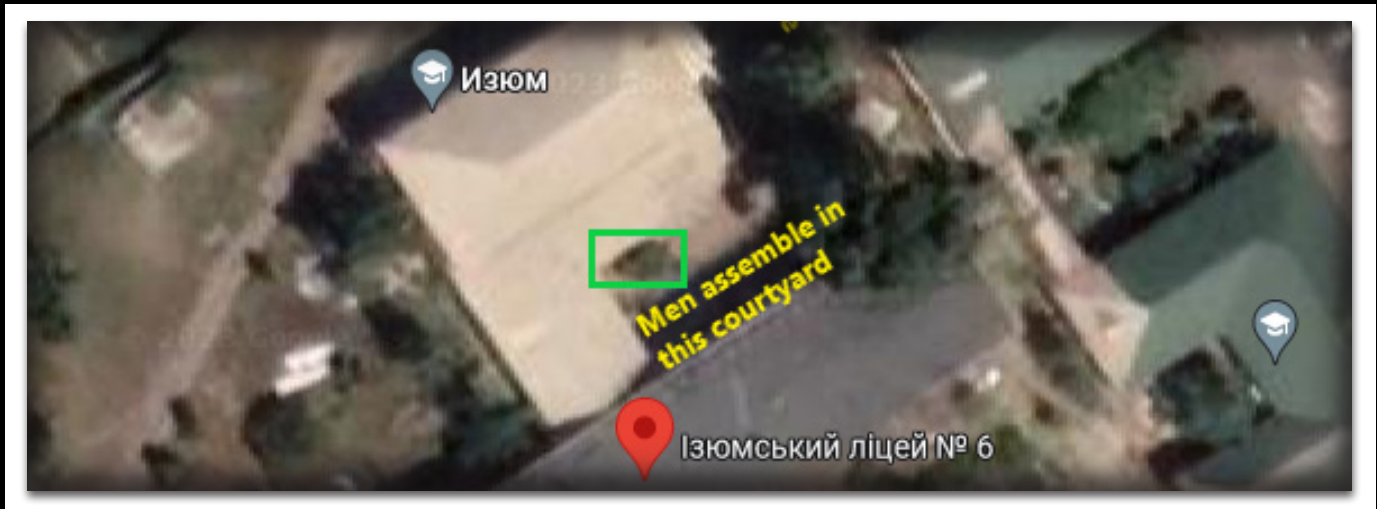
abuses perpetrated during the Russian occupation do not know exactly which units were responsible for the abuses committed against them. Victims were often kept blindfolded, held captive in cellars or similar places, or simply never heard their captors identify themselves by name, rank, or unit.

Piecing together the picture of what happened in Iziom during the long months of occupation is likely to be a slow, painstaking task. This report does not claim to definitively identify the perpetrators of human rights abuses in Iziom. This can only be done by investigators on the ground in Iziom who are able to interview witnesses, examine potential crime scenes and gather physical evidence. Physical evidence is only one part of the picture, however. Through finding and analysing digital evidence, open-source investigations such as this one can help fill in gaps and build a more complete understanding of what has taken place.

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera (7 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/3/7/photo-in-liberated-ukraine-city-civilians-still-pay-price-of-war>

DIGITAL TRACES

Investigating the 'LDPR' units linked to
systematic torture in Iziom



SEPTEMBER 2023