

NAZI AND SOVIET CRIMES AGAINST POLES 1939–1945



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

Author: dr hab. Sebastian Piątkowski
Series graphic concept:
Aleksandra Kaiper-Miszulowicz
graphic design:
Magdalena Śladecka
Anna Łukasik
Reviewed by: dr hab. Filip Musiał,
dr Paweł Skubisz
Pictured: Women observing post-war
exhumations of victims of Nazi crimes
in Firlej near Radom in 1945.
Photo: National Archives in Radom

Although November 1918 brought independence to the Polish Republic, many Poles remained outside of its borders. Many of them lived in two countries neighbouring our country - the Soviet Union (there were about 1.2 million of them) and Nazi Germany (about 1 million). Since the Communist Soviet authorities and the German authorities - especially after the Nazis took over - were negatively disposed towards our country, the situation of the Polish minority there became worse and worse every year.

BEFORE THE WAR CAME

Officer of the Soviet political police (NKVD).
Photo: public domain

The areas where Nazi harassment of Poles was most common were Silesia and the Free City of Danzig. There were numerous instances of the suppression of the activities of Polish social and cultural organisations, as well as beatings of members of their authorities and activists. The most severe repressions were directed against those who, in the early days of the independence, were in favour of incorporating the Prussian partitioned territories into Poland.



Nazi party members destroying a Polish post box in the Free City of Danzig (1939).

Photo: National Archives in Gdansk



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

In 1937–1938, the Soviet political police carried out the so-called Polish Operation. It was a mass atrocity against Poles and people with Polish roots, who were accused of belonging to secret, anti-communist organisations and plotting against the authorities. Our compatriots, who had previously resisted collectivisation and atheisation, were treated as an "uncertain element" and unwilling to accept the anticipated war between the USSR and Poland as well as the Western countries. This action, based on lengthy investigations combined with physical and psychological torture of prisoners, resulted in a tragic outcome: more than 111 000 people were sentenced to death and almost 30 000 sent to gulags.



Zofia Witkowska-Landa - home carer shot in September 1937.

Photo: Scientific and Information Centre "Memorial" in Moscow



Franciszek Bodziszewski - a student of medicine, shot in 1938.

Photo: Scientific and Information Centre "Memorial" in Moscow

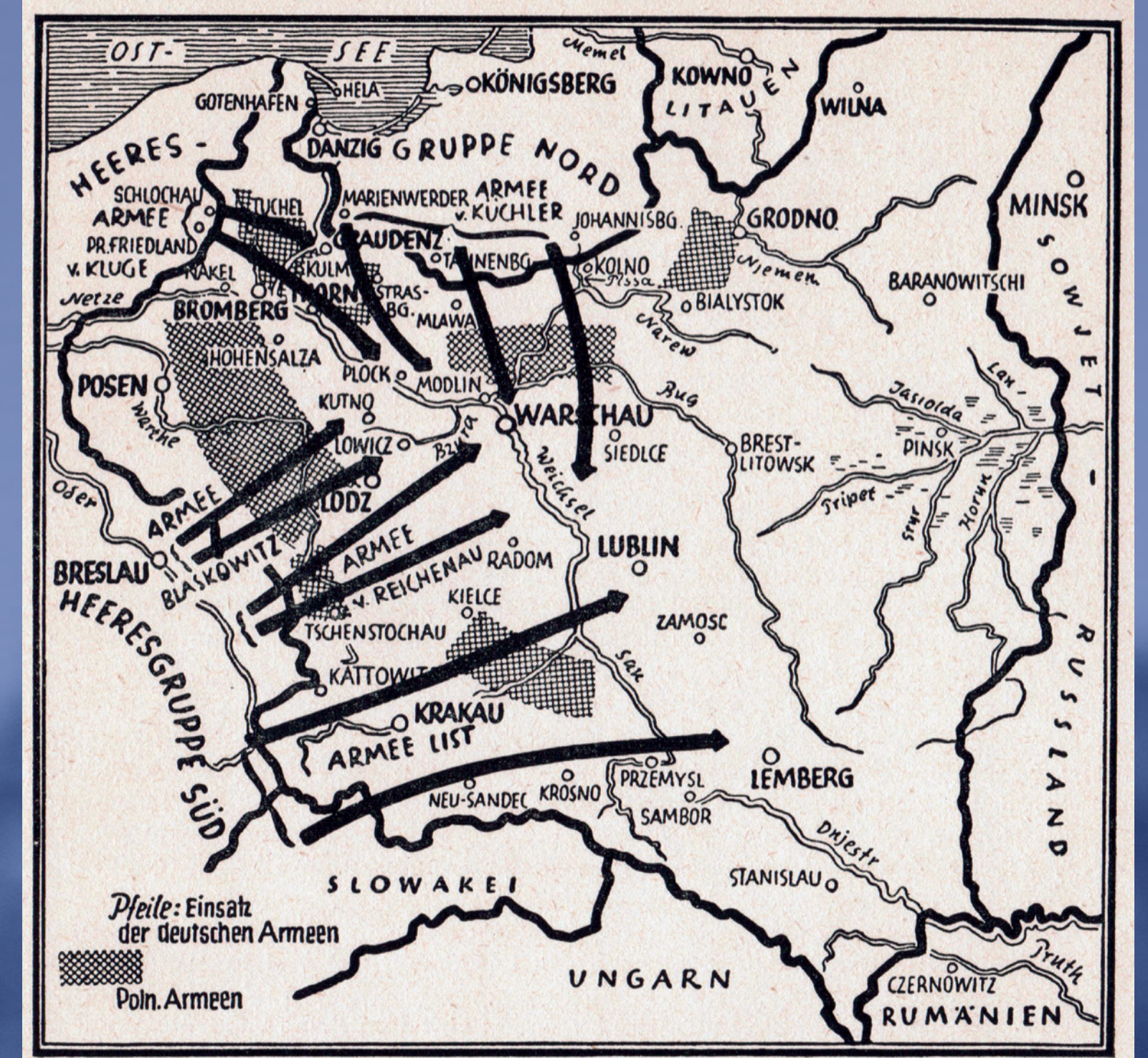


Franciszek Bodziszewski - a student of medicine, shot in 1938.

Photo: Scientific and Information Centre "Memorial" in Moscow

SEPTEMBER – A TRAGEDY FOR CIVILIANS

On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany attacked Poland. Despite the heroic struggle of the Polish soldiers, they suffered defeat in the clash with the invader, who had a crushing advantage in aircraft and armoured weapons. Waiting for the aid previously guaranteed by France and Britain proved futile. The next blow came on 17 September 1939, when the Soviet Union launched its aggression against Poland.



Map showing the directions of the Nazi forces in their attack on Poland.

Source: *18 Tage Weltgeschehen. Der Feldzug gegen Polen*, Lipsk 1940.

The invaders' concept of total war assumed that every person who stood in the way of the Nazi army was an enemy. Luftwaffe aircraft often attacked civilian buildings, and the victims were men, women, and children. The soldiers of the Wehrmacht did the same, committing numerous crimes against the inhabitants of villages, towns and cities. There were also numerous murders of civilians in the Eastern Borderlands. Among those who died at the hands of Red Army soldiers were the citizens of Grodno, who had taken part in the defence of the city. The attacks of the communists, who collaborated with the aggressors, on landed estates led to the death of around 200 landowners and their family members.



Jezuicka Street in Lublin destroyed during the bombing of 9 September 1939.

Photo: AIPN

The deaths of thousands of people were accompanied by enormous material damage. During air raids and fights, entire towns and villages were destroyed - such was the fate of Wieluń, Frampol and Zwolen, among others. Many inhabitants of Warsaw, Lublin and many other places have also lost their homes, flats and all their possessions.

Twelve-year-old Kazimiera Kostewicz over the body of her sister, killed by a Nazi airman near Warsaw.
Photo: Julien Bryan/AIPN



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE



SEPTEMBER – A TRAGEDY FOR SOLDIERS

Polish soldiers, along with a seventeen-year-old volunteer, taken prisoner by the Nazis.
Photo: NAC (National Digital Archives)

During the battles against the invaders, more than 70,000 Polish soldiers were killed, about 420,000 were taken prisoner by the Nazis and about 250,000 by the Soviets. Both aggressors committed numerous war crimes, shooting Polish prisoners of war and failing to provide medical care to the wounded.



The events in the area of the village of Dąbrowa near Ciepielów became a symbol of Nazi war crimes, where, after the battle, the Nazis shot many soldiers taken prisoner, also killing the wounded found on the battlefield. Around 300 Poles lost their lives there on 9 and 10 September 1939.

Nazis over the bodies of Polish soldiers near Dąbrowa.
Photo: public domain.



A plaque commemorating the martyrdom of the prisoners of war of the German camp (stalag) VIII A in Görlitz (now Zgorzelec). Between 1939 and 1945 nearly 120,000 captured soldiers of various armies were imprisoned there, of whom around 10,000 died of disease, starvation and slave labour.

Photo: AIPN



Polish Army soldiers who had been taken prisoner were also murdered by the Red Army in mass or individual executions in Lwów, Kowel, Tarnopol and Złoczów. NCOs and privates who were taken prisoner soon became prisoners in German forced labour camps and Soviet gulags

Polish soldiers in a temporary prisoner of war camp.
Photo: public domain.



Particularly tragic was the fate of those who defended Poland in September and were taken prisoner by the Soviets. The invaders left in captivity all the officers of the Polish Army, most of whom were reserve soldiers, working in civilian life as teachers, doctors, lawyers, state and local government officials, businessmen, and so on. Together with them, all - regardless of their rank - soldiers of the Border Protection Corps and officers of the State Police, Border Guard and Penitentiary Service were imprisoned. Most of the prisoners of war were imprisoned in camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov, while some were held in prisons in what are now Ukraine and Belarus. In the spring of 1940, the Soviet party authorities, led by Joseph Stalin, decided to murder them all. The forest in Katyn and the prisons in Kharkov, Tver and other cities became the places of death for almost 22 000 prisoners of war. The basic motive for the Katyn Massacre was the Communists' desire to murder the Polish intellectual elite, so that it would be easier to supervise and exploit the population of the occupied country.

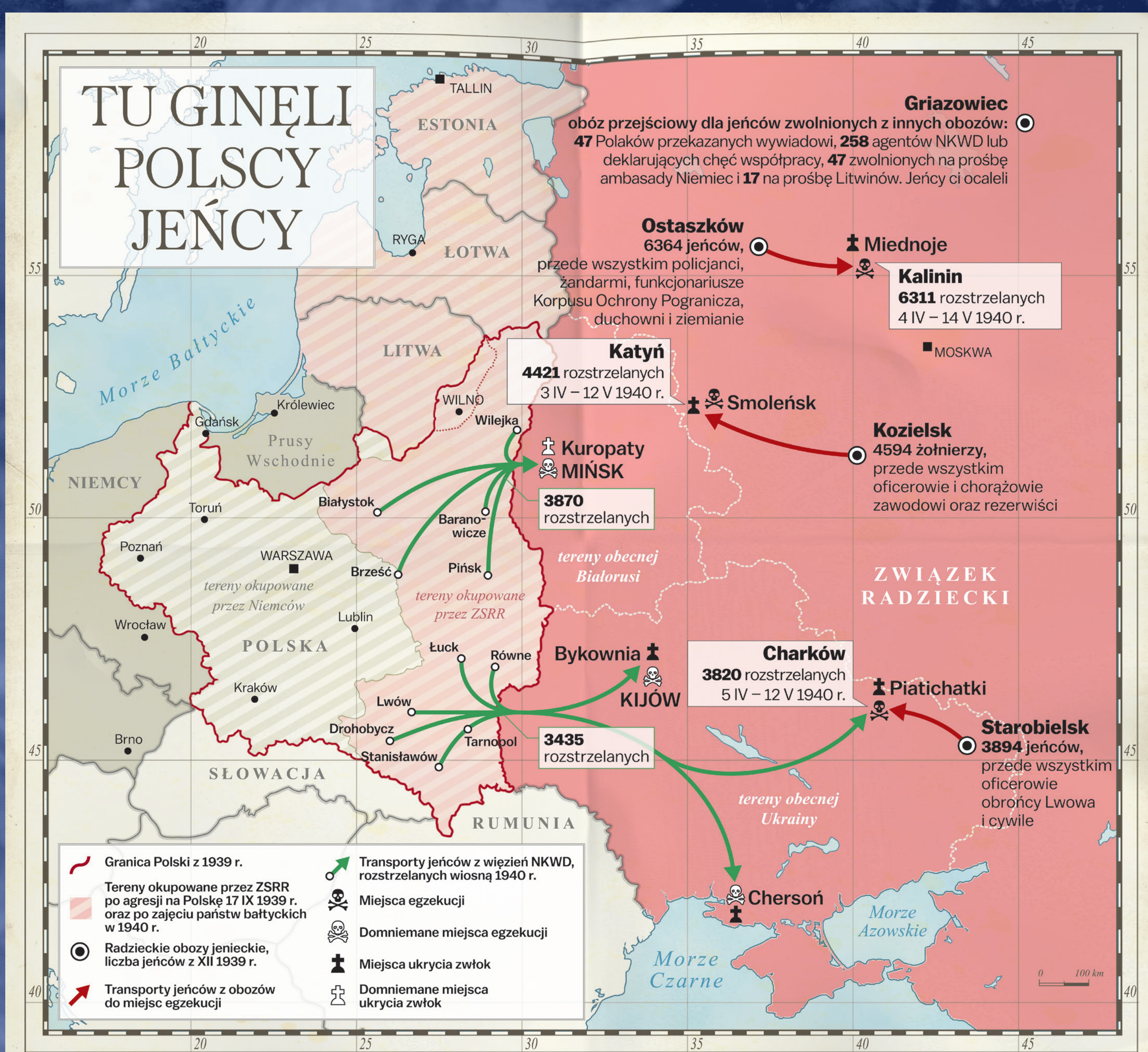
THE KATYN MASSACRE



The mass graves of Polish Army officers murdered in Katyn were discovered in 1943. The final resting places of many victims of the Soviet massacre, as well as their names, remain unknown to this day.

The rope-bound hands of a Polish officer whose remains were exhumed by the Germans at Katyn in 1943. Photo: AIPN

The remains of a Polish officer exhumed by the Germans in Katyn in 1943. Photo: AIPN



PL	EN
TU GINĘLI POLSCY JEŃCY	HERE THE POLISH PRISONERS OF WAR WERE KILLED
Griazowiec obóz przejściowy dla jeńców zwolnionych z innych obozów: 47 Polaków przekazanych wywiadowi, 258 agentów NKWD lub deklarujących chęć współpracy, 47 zwolnionych na prośbę ambasady Niemiec i 17 na prośbę Litwinów. Jeńcy ci ocalili	Gryazovets transit camp for prisoners of war released from other camps: 47 Poles handed over to the intelligence services, 258 NKVD agents or those willing to cooperate, 47 released at the request of the German Embassy and 17 at the request of the Lithuanians. These prisoners survived.
Ostaszów 6364 jeńców, przede wszystkim policjanci, żandarmi, funkcjonariusze korpusu Ochrony Pogranicza, duchowni i ziemianie	Ostashkov 6364 prisoners of war, mostly policemen, military policemen, Border Protection Corps officers, clergymen and landowners
Kalinin 6311 rozstrzelanych 4 IV – 14 V 1940 r.	Kalinin 6311 executed 4.04–14.05.1940
Kozielsk 4594 żołnierzy, przede wszystkim oficerowie i chorążowie zawodowi oraz rezerwiści	Kozielsk 4594 soldiers, mostly professional officers and ensigns as well as reservists
Katyn 4421 rozstrzelanych 3 IV – 12 V 1940 r.	Katyn 4421 executed 3.04–12.05.1940
Kuropaty MIŃSK 3870 rozstrzelanych	Kuropaty MIŃSK 3870 executed
KIJÓW 3435 rozstrzelanych	KIJÓW 3435 executed
Charków 3820 rozstrzelanych 5 IV – 12 V 1940 r.	Charków 3820 executed 5.04–12.05.1940
Starobielsk 3894 jeńców, przede wszystkim oficerowie, obrońcy Lwowa i cywile	Starobelsk 3894 prisoners of war, mostly officers, defenders of Lviv and civilians
Granica Polski z 1939 r.	Polish border in 1939.
Tereny okupowane przez ZSRR po agresji na Polskę 17 IX 1939 r. oraz po zajęciu państw bałtyckich w 1940 r.	The territories occupied by the USSR after the aggression on Poland on 17 September 1939 and after the occupation of the Baltic States in 1940.
Radzieckie obozy jenieckie, liczba jeńców z XII 1939 r.	Soviet POW camps, number of prisoners of war from December 1939.
Transporty jeńców z obozów do miejsc egzekucji	Transports of prisoners of war from camps to places of execution
Transporty jeńców z więzień NKWD, rozstrzelanych wiosną 1940 r.	Transports of prisoners of war from NKVD prisons, shot in the spring of 1940.
Miejsca egzekucji	Places of execution
Domniemane miejsca egzekucji	Presumed places of execution
Miejsca ukrycia zwłok	Places where the bodies were hidden
Domniemane miejsca ukrycia zwłok	Presumed places where the bodies were hidden

Map of the places of execution of the Katyn Massacre victims
Photo: <https://panstwowa.policja.pl>

DESTROYING POLISHNESS – WESTERN BORDERLANDS

In the Polish territories annexed to the Reich there were many execution sites where the Germans carried out mass and individual executions as part of the "Intelligenzaktion", a plan to destroy the elite which began in the autumn of 1939. In Pomerania these were, among others, Piaśnickie Forests, Szpęgawski Forest, Paterek, Barbarka, and in the region of Łódź - Lućmierski and Łagiewnicki Forests. In Greater Poland, public executions of Poles were carried out in Śmigiel, Śrem and Gostyń, among other places. Only in the forests of Piasnica were probably killed about 14 thousand inhabitants of Pomerania and Poles living in Germany before the war.

From the very first days of the occupation, the Polish territories incorporated into the Reich - Pomerania, northern Mazovia, Greater Poland, Łódź with its region, and Upper Silesia - became the focus of a massive Germanization campaign. Its first victims were representatives of the local elite - veterans of battles for Polishness, state and local government officials, teachers, priests, landowners. They were imprisoned, tortured and then murdered at mass execution sites or imprisoned in concentration camps. Their relatives were forcibly resettled to the General Government. They left their homes as paupers, robbed of all their possessions.

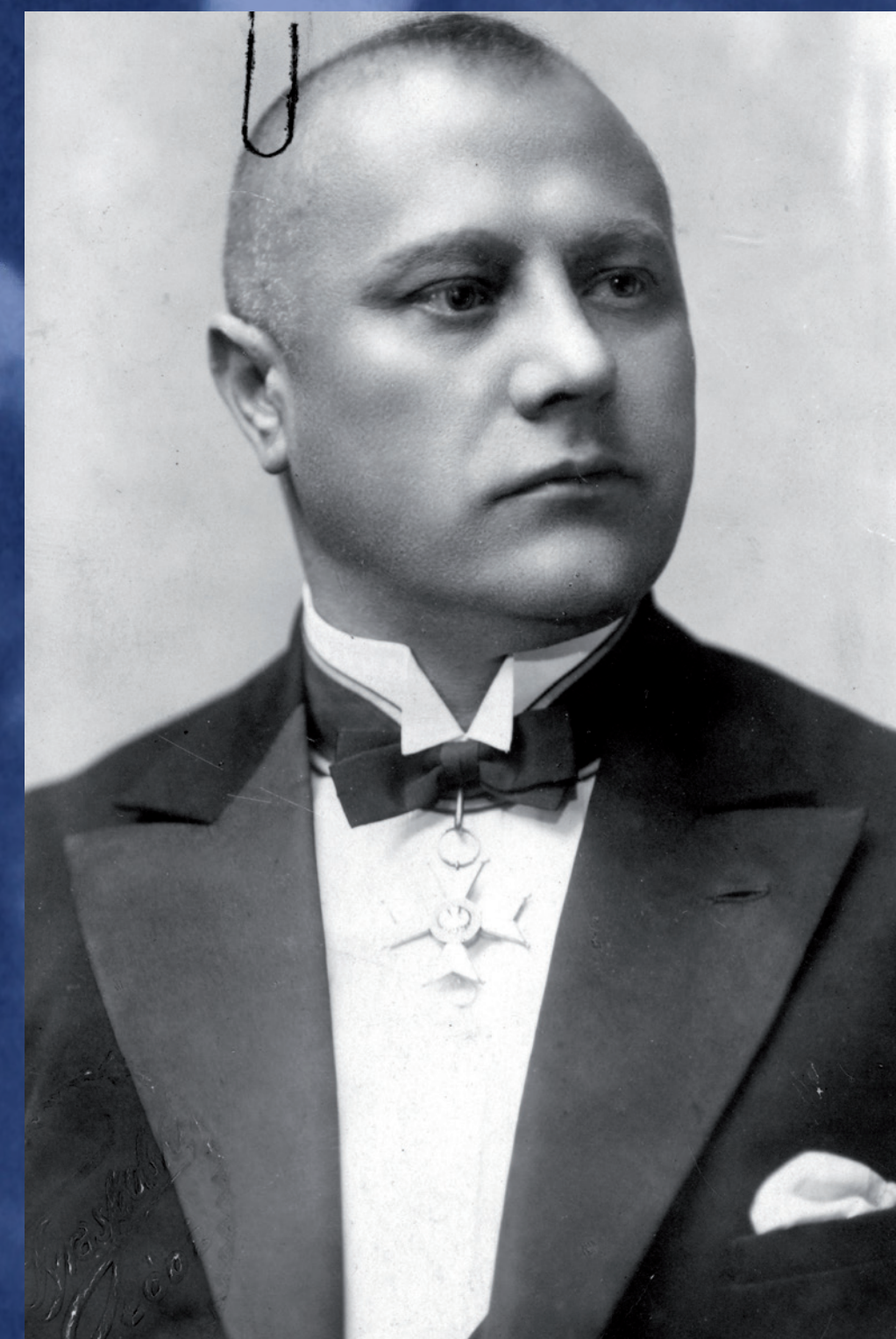


Post-war exhumations in Paterek, Pomerania - the brother of Mroczka vicar Fr. Henryk Walkowski, by his remains.
Photo: AIPN



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

Forced displacement of Poles
from Lodz in 1940.
Photo: AIPN



Aleksy Rzewski - a prominent
political and local government
activist, Mayor of Łódź, murdered
by the Germans in December 1939
in the Łagiewnicki Forest.
Photo: NAC

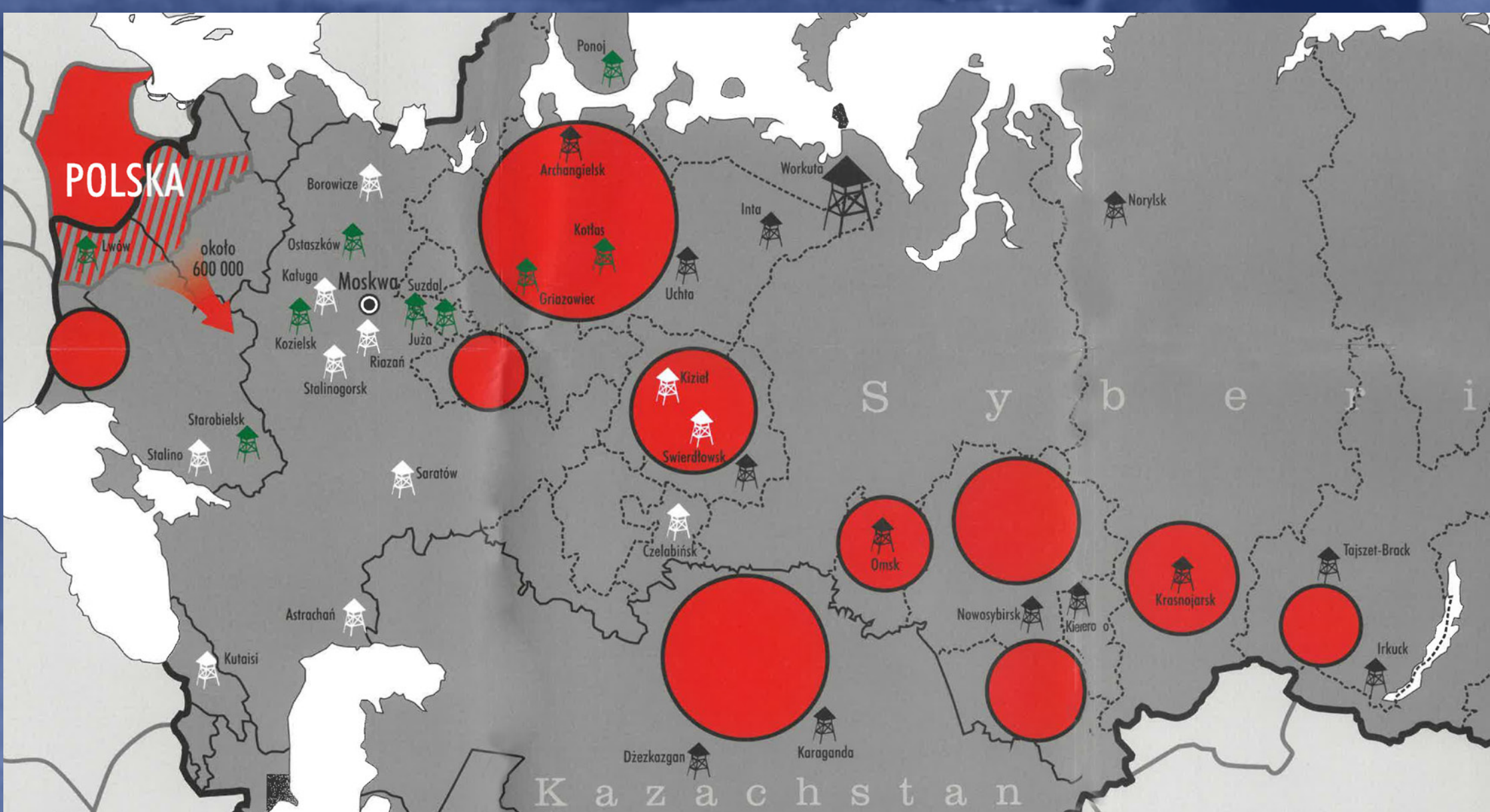
DESTROYING POLISHNESS – EASTERN BORDERLANDS

Kazimierz Berbecki and his colleague
Polish deportees - forced
labourers in a gulag in Fiedorówka (location unknown)
in September 1941.
Photo: KARTA Center



Orphaned children of Polish exiles, staying at an orphanage in the village of Majon-Kum (Kazakhstan) in spring 1945.
Photo: KARTA Center

In the Polish Eastern Borderlands annexed by the Soviet Union, the overriding aim of the occupying forces was to annihilate all persons deemed to be enemies of Communism and the new regime - state and local officials, political and social activists, landowners, industrialists, merchants and wealthier farmers. They were sent to prisons, from where they were transported to forced labour camps (gulags). In 1940, there were also mass deportations of Polish citizens to remote areas of the Soviet Union - to Siberia, Kazakhstan, Bashkiria and Yakutia. The deportees vegetated in extreme poverty, dying of hunger, disease and the consequences of slave labour. The number of deportees is unknown - it was probably around 320,000, although some estimate it to be as high as one million men, women and children.



Map of the Soviet Union showing the main areas to which Polish citizens deported from the Eastern Borderlands in 1940 were sent.
Photo: KARTA Center



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

FOR A RADIO, A BULLET, A LEAFLET...

From the autumn of 1939, the wave of crimes also spread to the German-occupied central Polish territories, where the General Government was established as a "settlement area" for Poles and Jews. In order to intimidate its inhabitants, people were arrested on charges of involvement in the emerging resistance movement, possession of weapons, ammunition and military equipment, or possession of clandestine publications. The intelligentsia was considered a particularly dangerous class. In particular, the arrest in November 1939 of over 180 professors from the Jagiellonian University and other universities, who were imprisoned in a concentration camp, reverberated around the world. A few months later, widespread horror was spread by the news of the fate of families from the Końskie and Opoczno areas who were supporting the Polish Army's Detachment of mjr. Henryk Dobrzański „Hubal”. The pacification carried out by the Germans affected over 30 villages, of which 4 were destroyed completely and the rest - partially. More than 700 people died at that time.



Poles sentenced to death by a German court moments before they were taken to the place of execution. Photo taken in Plonsk in the autumn of 1939. Photo: AIPN

Execution of 52 inhabitants of Bochnia near Cracow and the surrounding villages, carried out by the Germans on 18 December 1939 in retaliation for an attack on a police station by conspirators. Photo: AIPN

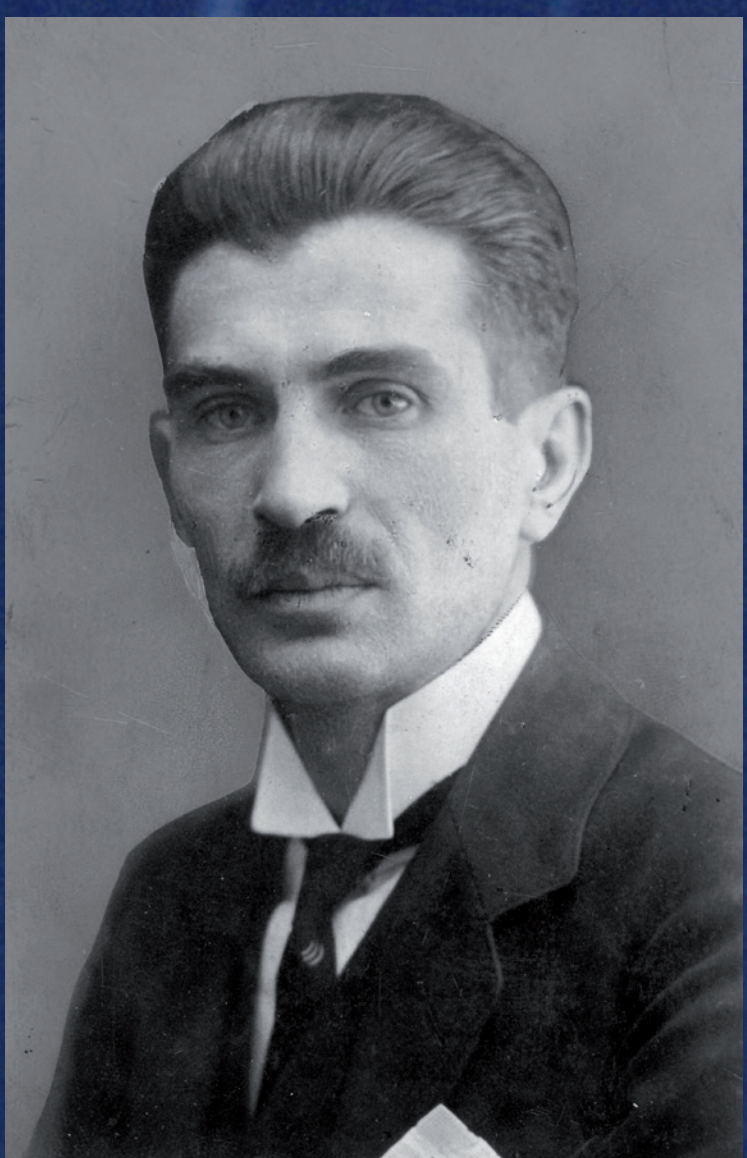
PAMIĘCI MIESZKAŃCÓW GAŁKI, GIELNIÓWA I MECHLINA ROZSTRZELANYCH W DNIU 4 KWIECZNIA 1940 R. PRZEZ HITLEROWSKIEGO OKUPANTA ZA WSPÓŁPRACĘ Z WYDZIELONYM ODDZIAŁEM WOJSKA POLSKIEGO M.JR. HENRYKA DOBRZAŃSKIEGO „HUBAŁA”

GAŁKI			
DOBRA CZ	STEFAN	CIEŚLAK	JAN s. ANTONIEGO
FRYMEL	ADAM	CIEŚLAK	JAN s. PAWŁA
FRYMEL	JÓZEF	CIEŚLAK	JAN s. MACIEJA
FRYMEL	STEFAN	CIEŚLAK	JÓZEF
FRYMEL	SZYMON	CIEŚLAK	WŁADYSŁAW
FRYMEL	APOLINARIY	KUC	FELIKS
DSZCZEDA	STANISŁAW	KUC	GRZEGORZ
PALYGA	STANISŁAW	KUC	JÓZEF s. JANA
PLUTA	JÓZEF	KUC	JÓZEF s. FRANCISZKA
PLUTA	STANISŁAW	SOKOŁOWSKI	ADAM
POMYKAŁA	ANTONI	SOKOŁOWSKI	GRZEGORZ
POMYKAŁA	JAN s. WŁADYSŁAWA	SOKOŁOWSKI	JAN
POMYKAŁA	JAN s. JÓZEFA	SOKOŁOWSKI	STANISŁAW
POMYKAŁA	PIDTR	STACHOWICZ	JAN
POMYKAŁA	STANISŁAW s. WŁADYSŁAWA	SZCZEPAN CZYK	JÓZEF
POMYKAŁA	STANISŁAW s. ROMANA	SZCZEPAN CZYK	WALENTY
SIERADZKI	JAN	WASIAK	JÓZEF
SIERADZKI	MICHAŁ	WARDA	JAN
WÓJCİK	ANTONI	WÓJCİK	JAN
WÓJCİK	MARCEL s. MICHAŁA	WÓJCİK	JAKUB
WÓJCİK	MARCEL s. STANISŁAWA	WÓJCİK	IGNACY
WÓJCİK	MICHAŁ	WÓJCİK	FRANCISZEK
WÓJCİK	ROMAN	WÓJCİK	WACŁAW
NATORSKI	WŁADYSŁAW	MECHLIN	KRZYŻANOWSKI JÓZEF
BRÓŁA	TEOFIL	DEBOWSKI	ADAM
BRÓŁA	FLORIAN	KOWAŁSKI	ANDRZEJ
MYSLIŃSKI	BOLESŁAW	KORNATA	JÓZEF
MYSLIŃSKI	PIDTR	KRÓL	BRONISZ
OLESIAK	STANISŁAW	WIECZOREK	JAKUB
PANCER	MICHAŁ	WIECZOREK	JAN
SKORUPA	FILIP	WISNIEWSKI	FRANCISZEK
SKORUPA	JAN	WISNIEWSKI	PAWEŁ
SKORUPA	GRZEGORZ	WISNIEWSKI	PIDTR
WÓJCİK	STANISŁAW	WISNIEWSKI	WŁADYSŁAW
ZAGDAŃSKI	STANISŁAW	WISNIEWSKI	STANISŁAW

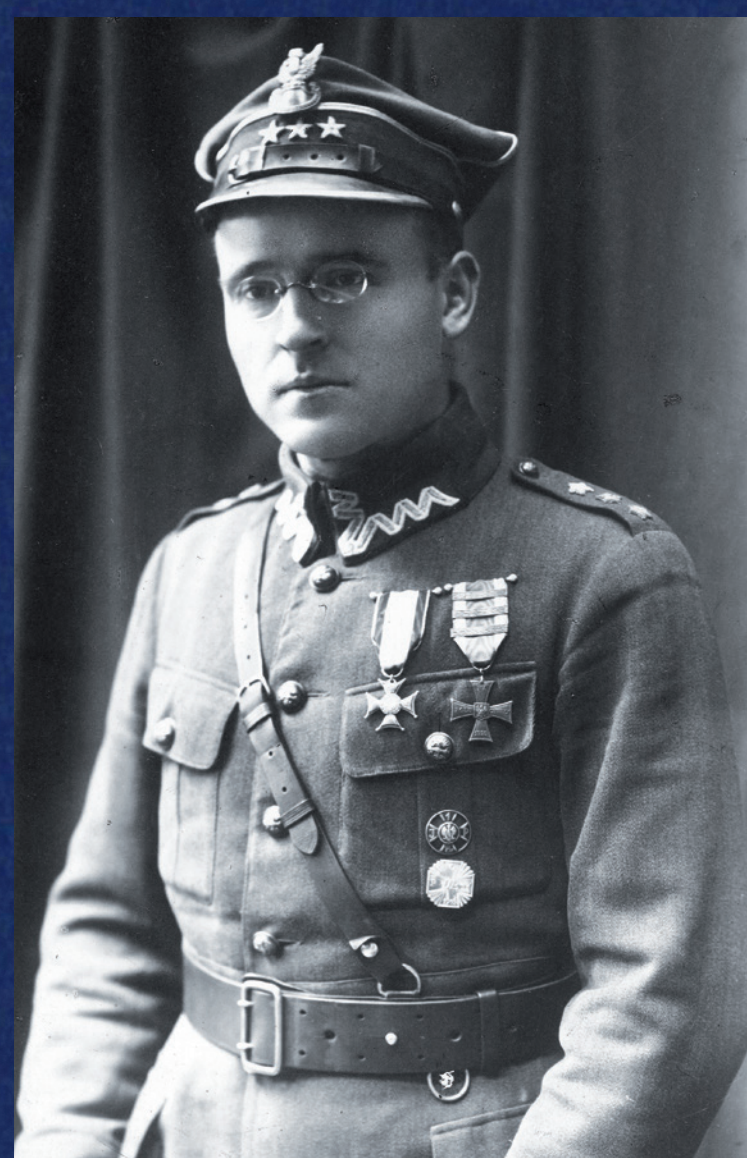
A plaque commemorating over 140 farmers from the villages of Gałki, Gielniów and Mechlin, who were arrested for supporting a unit of mjr. Henryk Dobrzański "Hubal" and executed in Firlej near Radom. Photo: Sebastian Piątkowski

IN THE CIRCLE OF THE AB- AKTION

The tragic culmination of the first stage of German extermination operations in the General Government was the so-called extraordinary pacification action (Aktion AB). In the spring and summer of 1940, around 6,000 people were murdered and many more deported to concentration camps. The executions involved political and social activists, members of the intelligentsia, people involved in the resistance movement, as well as professional criminals. The crimes were carried out at execution sites located in the vicinity of many towns. These included Palmiry near Warsaw, Krzesławice near Kraków, Rury Jezuickie near Lublin, and Olsztyn and Apolonka in the vicinity of Częstochowa.



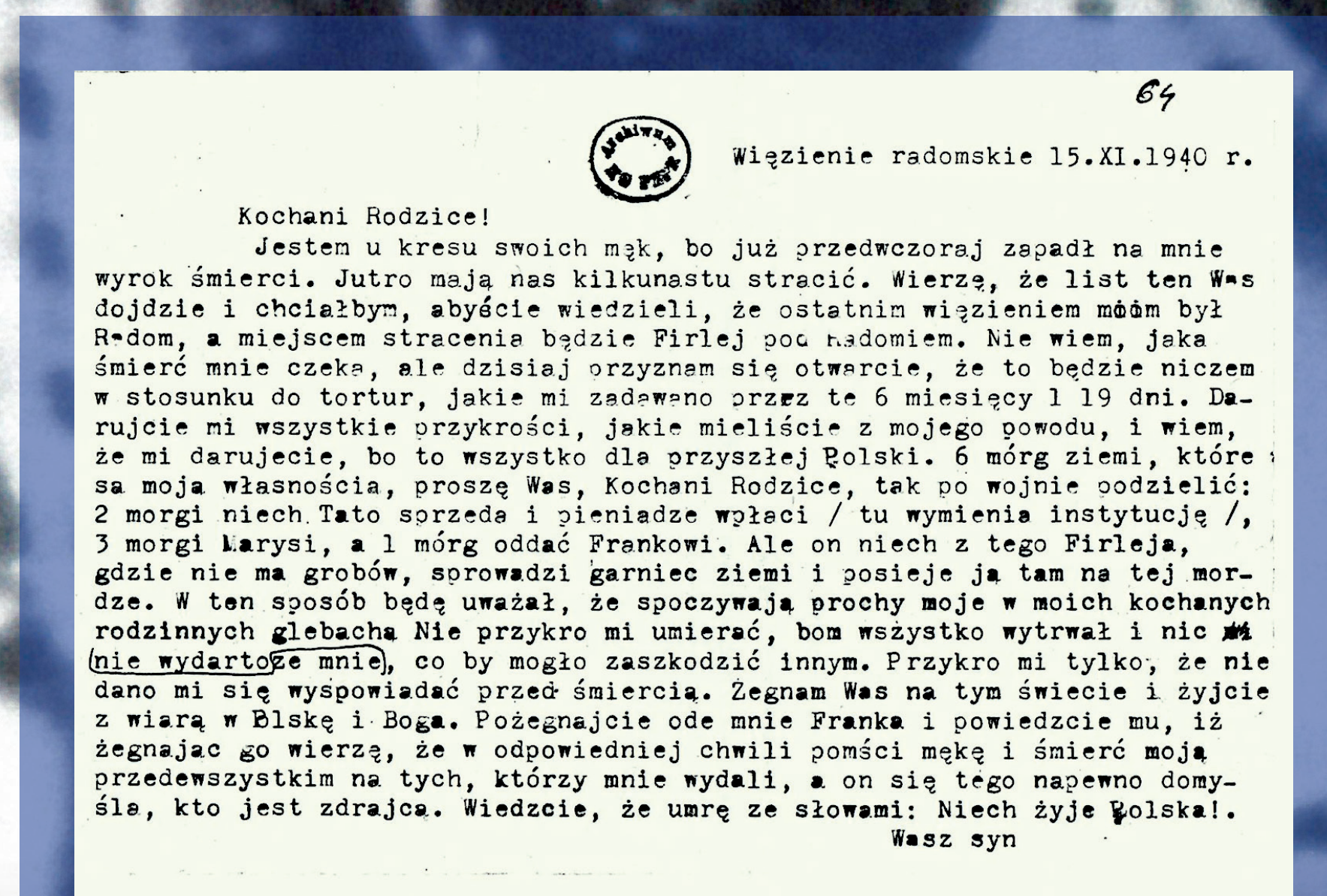
Maciej Rataj - an outstanding politician of the people's movement and social activist, Minister and Marshal of the Polish Sejm, murdered in Palmiry.
Photo: NAC



Stefan Lelek-Sowa: independence activist, soldier of the 1st Brigade Polish Legions, judge of the Court of Appeal in Lublin in Lublin, senator of the Republic of Poland - murdered in Rury Jezuickie
Photo: NAC



Halina Jaroszewiczowa - a well-known pro-independence, educational and social activist, member of the Women's Civic Labour Union authorities, deputy to the Polish Parliament, murdered in Palmiry.
Photo: NAC



Copy of a farewell letter sent to his parents by a Pole sentenced to death in 1940. The identity of the author remains unknown to this day.
Photo: AAN



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

Women with eyes covered with black blindfolds, led by the Nazis to the place of execution in Palmiry near Warsaw in 1940.
Photo: NAC

THE TIME OF GALLOWS

As the years of occupation passed, the Nazis reduced the number of secret executions, which took place in forests, far from human settlements. The desire to paralyse the public with fear and cut them off from cooperating with the resistance movement meant that from 1942 onwards public executions were organised with increasing frequency. Prisoners were executed on gallows placed in busy places in towns, along roads and railway lines, forcing Poles to watch the execution itself and the bodies of the murdered. In smaller towns, the condemned were executed in markets and main squares. These crimes were often carried out on market days, as farmers from the surrounding areas came to the towns in large numbers at those times.



Germans supervising the digging of a mass grave for prisoners killed in an execution. The victims' hands are clearly visible, tied behind their backs with rope. The place and date of taking the photograph are unknown. Photo: NAC

Obwieszczenie!

Stefan Siewierski zobowiązany do odbycia Służby Budowlanej, urodz. dn. 2. 9. 1922 r. w Warszawie, zamieszkały w Radomiu przy ul. Struga 71, Oddział 3/201 Służby Budowlanej w Warszawie, został w dniu 22. 7. 1942 r. zasądzony przez Sąd Specjalny

na śmierć

ponieważ zbiegł w dniu 29. 6. 1942 r., zabierając ze sobą odzież, stanowiącą własność Państwa.

Radom, dnia 5 sierpnia 1942 r.

Der Stadthauptmann.

The so-called 'death placard' informing about the sentencing to death and execution of a young Pole. Stefan Siwierski was only 20 years old at the time of his death. Photo: National Archives in Radom

Execution of Home Army soldiers and their relatives at the railway station in Rożki on 12 October 1942. The bodies of the murdered hung on the gallows for a whole day, and on order of the Germans, every passenger train passing through the station had to stop in front of the execution site for a prolonged time, so that the passengers could imprint the image in their memory. Photo: AIPN



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

OBWIESZCZENIE

1.

Poniżej podaję dosłownie brzmienie 3-go rozporządzenia o ograniczeniach pobytu w Gen. Gubernatorstwie z dn. 15. października 1941 (Dz. Rozp. GG. Nr. 99 s. 595) do wiadomości.

Na podstawie § 5 ust. 1 Dekretu Führer'a z dnia 12 października 1939 r. (Dz. U. Rzeszy Niem. I str. 2077) rozporządzam:

Artykuł 1.

W rozporządzeniu o ograniczeniach pobytu w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie z dnia 13 września 1940 (Dz. Rozp. GG. I str. 288) ze zmianami drugiego rozporządzenia o ograniczeniach pobytu w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie z dnia 29 kwietnia 1941 r. (Dz. Rozp. GG. str. 274) wstawia się po § 4 a następujący § 4 b:

§ 4 b

- 1) Żydzi, którzy bez upoważnienia opuszczają wyznaczoną im dzielnicę, podlegają karze śmierci. Tej samej karze podlegają osoby, które takim żydom świadomie dają kryjówkę.
- 2) Podżegacze i pomocnicy podlegają tej samej karze jak sprawca, czyn usiłowany karany będzie jak czyn dokonany. W cięższych wypadkach można orzec ciężkie więzienie lub więzienie.
- 3) Zawyrokowanie następuje przez Sądy Specjalne.

Artykuł 2.

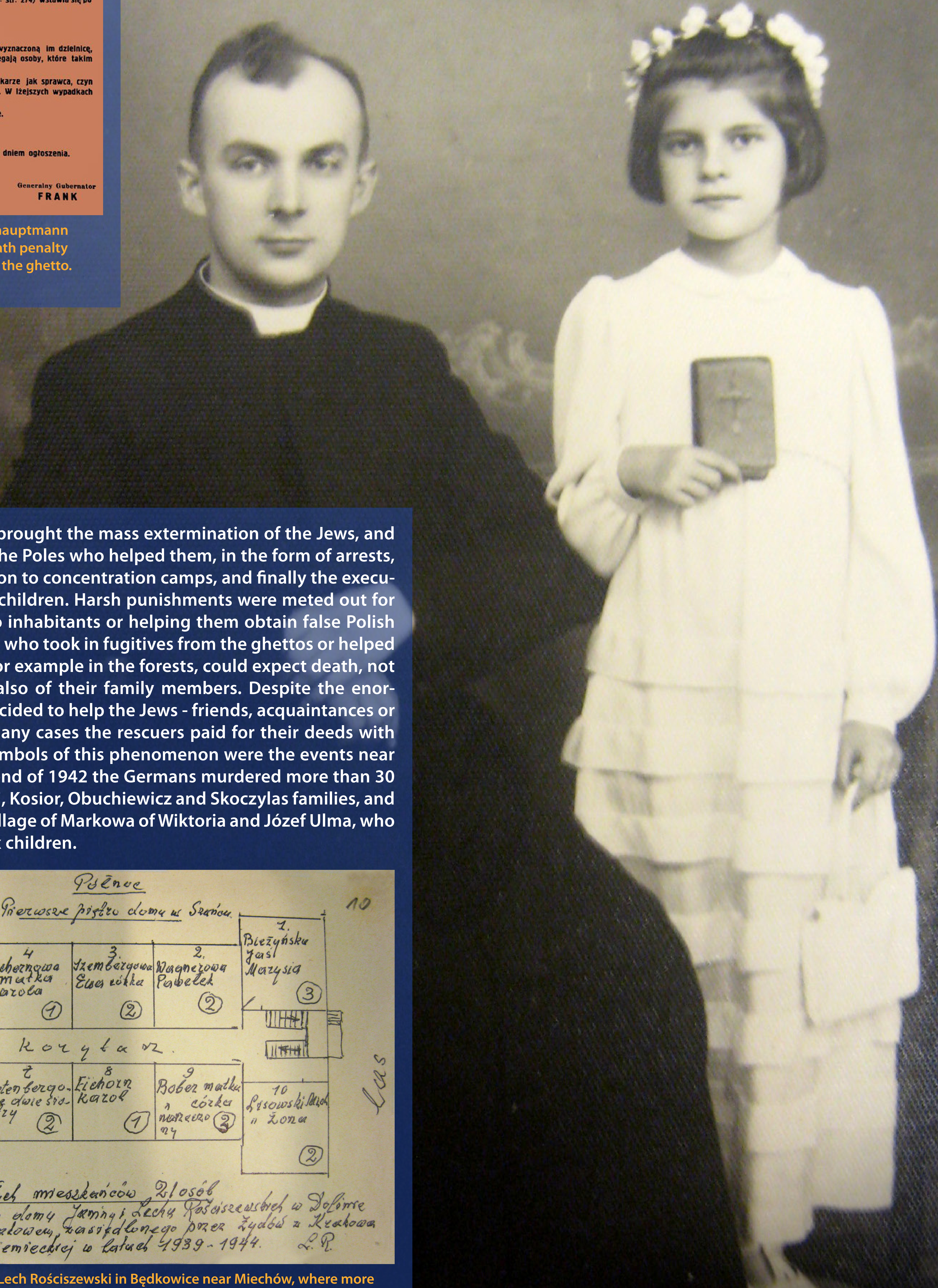
Rozporządzenie niniejsze wchodzi w życie z dniem ogłoszenia.

Warszawa, dnia 15 października 1941.

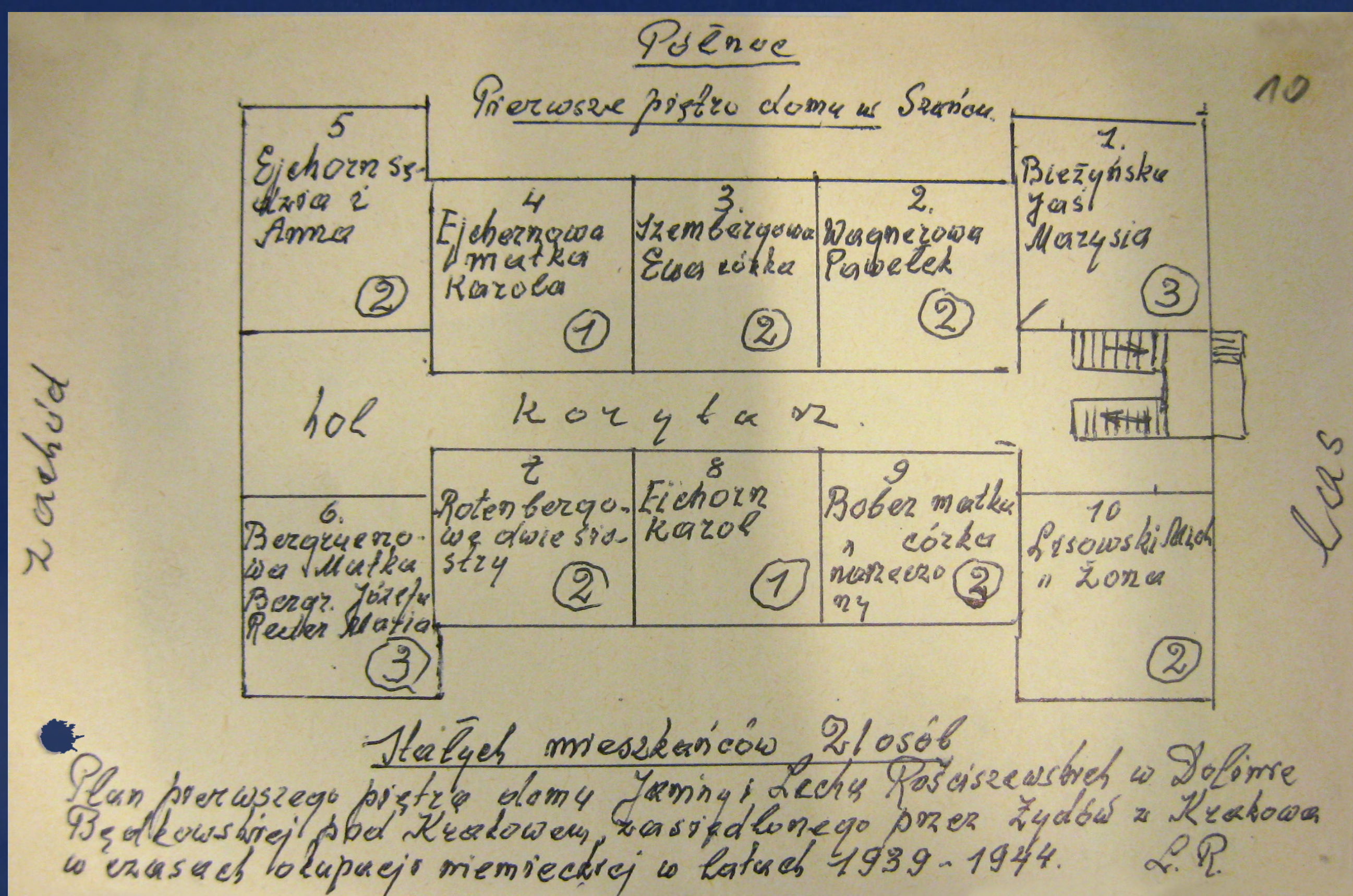
Generalny Gubernator
FRANK

An announcement by the Kreishauptmann of Jarosław informing of the death penalty for Poles who help Jews leaving the ghetto. Photo: AIPN

WITH UTMOST BRUTALITY



The German occupation brought the mass extermination of the Jews, and the brutal repression of the Poles who helped them, in the form of arrests, imprisonment, deportation to concentration camps, and finally the executions of both adults and children. Harsh punishments were meted out for supplying food to ghetto inhabitants or helping them obtain false Polish documents. Every person who took in fugitives from the ghettos or helped them survive in hiding, for example in the forests, could expect death, not only of themselves but also of their family members. Despite the enormous risk, many Poles decided to help the Jews - friends, acquaintances or complete strangers. In many cases the rescuers paid for their deeds with their lives. Among the symbols of this phenomenon were the events near Ciepeliów, where at the end of 1942 the Germans murdered more than 30 people from the Kowalski, Kosior, Obuchiewicz and Skoczylas families, and the 1944 murder in the village of Markowa of Wiktoria and Józef Ulma, who were killed along with six children.



Plan of the house of Janina and Lech Rościszewski in Będkowice near Miechów, where more than ten people of Jewish nationality were hidden. Most of them were murdered by the Nazis, and it was only by luck that their guardians managed to save their lives. Photo: AIPN

Anna Kerc - a Jewish girl who was hidden by a Polish family. This photo is a mystification - thanks to the borrowed communion dress and the help of a friendly priest, it was possible to take a photograph to prove the girl's Catholicism and her receiving her first Holy Communion. This did not save Anna from being killed by the Nazis. Photo: AIPN



The extermination operations carried out throughout the occupation period also affected the villagers to a great extent. In retaliation for supporting partisan units and diversionary groups, hiding Jews and escapees from prisoner-of-war camps, failing to comply with orders and not paying in time for compulsory deliveries, there were individual and collective executions and deportations to concentration camps and to work in Germany, combined with burning houses and farm buildings. Within the borders of present-day Poland, there are more than 800 villages that have been affected by such actions.

VILLAGE ON



Nazi military policemen against the backdrop of the burning buildings of the village of Goryń, whose inhabitants refused to willingly abandon their homes in 1940 and give up their land for the needs of the military training ground.

Photo: National Archives in Radom



Between 1942 and 1943 in the Zamojszczyzna region, the Nazis carried out an operation to remove all Poles from the area. One of the villages pacified at that time was Białowola, where over 50 people were murdered.

Photo: AIPN



Ruins of the village of Sucha, burned down during the occupation.

Photo: public domain



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

People from a displaced village near Zamość gathered at the assembly ground. In the foreground an SS officer and Nazi soldiers taking part in the action.

Photo: AIPN

THE HELL OF THE CAMPS

KL Majdanek - the crematorium furnaces together with the human remains excavated from them.
Photo: AIPN

Prisoners who escaped death in executions were often imprisoned indefinitely in concentration camps by the Nazis. Places such as Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, Majdanek or Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg have become symbols of German extermination operations against hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. Prisoners there died in large numbers from starvation, disease, slave labour, beatings, executions and other forms of terror by the overseers. "Hell for women" was the name given to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, the majority of whose prisoners were Polish women. They were subjected, among other things, to murderous pseudo-medical experiments leading to death or permanent disability.



German concentration and extermination camps in the Reich and on occupied Polish territory.

Source: <https://truthaboutcamps.eu>

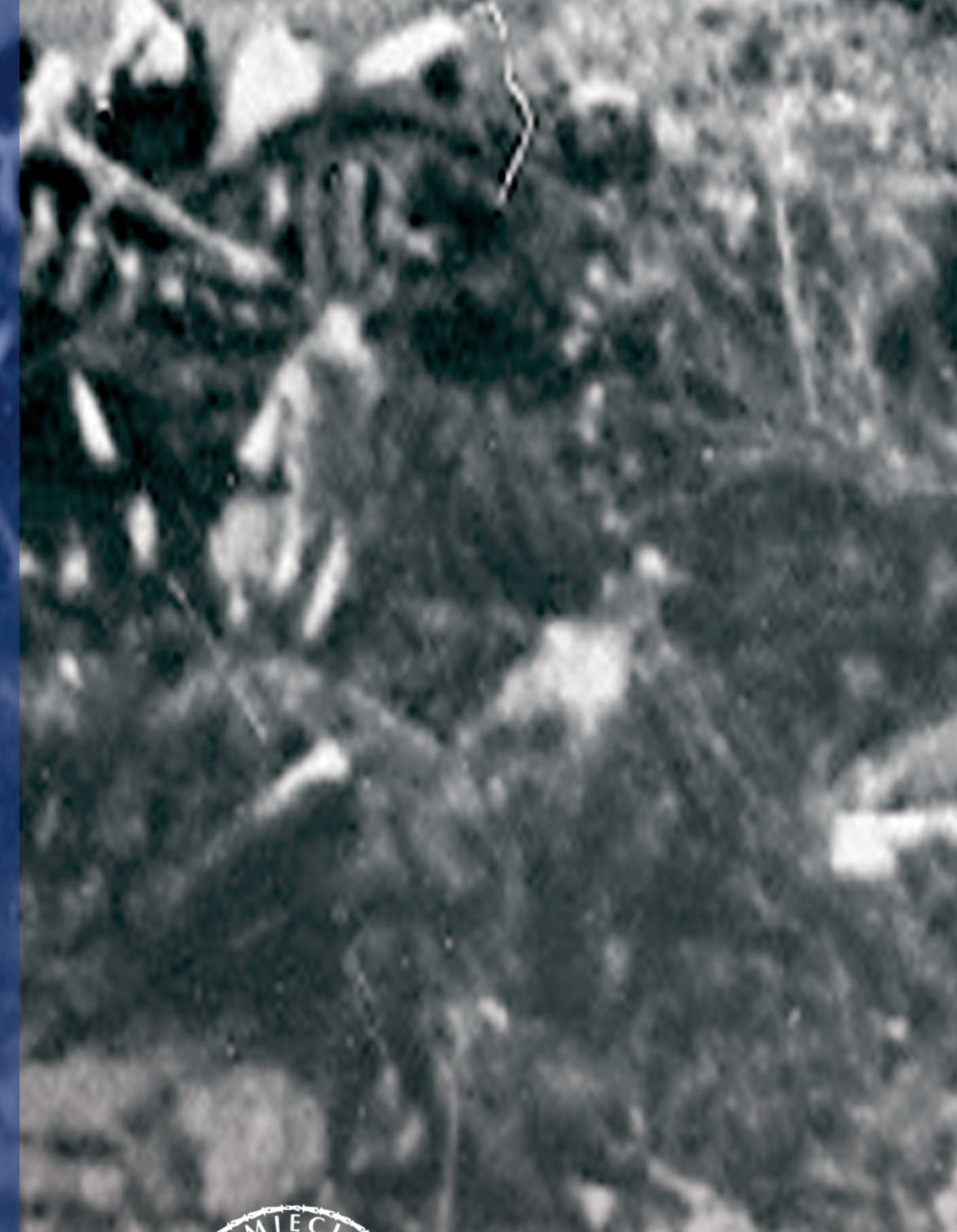
PL	EN
Najważniejsze niemieckie obozy koncentracyjne i niemieckie obozy śmierci w granicach tzw. Wielkich Niemiec w latach 1941-1944	The most important German concentration camps and German extermination camps within the borders of so-called Greater Germany from 1941 to 1944
Niemieckie obozy koncentracyjne Rok rozpoczęcia działalności	German concentration camps Year of commencement
Niemieckie obozy śmierci Rok rozpoczęcia działalności	German extermination camps Year of commencement
„Wielkie Niemcy” 1941-1944 na tle współczesnych granic Niemiec i państw sąsiednich	„Greater Germany” 1941-1944 against the background of contemporary borders of Germany and neighbouring countries



Fr. Kazimierz Sykulski - parish priest in Końskie, executed in 1941 in KL Auschwitz. In 1999 he was beatified by Pope John Paul II among 108 martyrs of the Second World War.
Photo: Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim



Female prisoners of Auschwitz concentration camp inside a barrack in 1945.
Photo: AIPN



The Nazis' aim was the total extermination of the Jews, including Polish citizens. They were murdered in mass and individual executions and died in ghettos and forced labour camps. The extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Kulmhof, Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka became the places of death for most of them.
Photo: AIPN



INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE

The events that took place in the first days of the Warsaw Uprising in the Wola district are considered to be the largest single massacre of civilians in Nazi-occupied Europe. For a long time, with particular intensity on 5–7 August 1944, its civilian inhabitants were executed in great numbers and used as "human shields" to cover tanks, combat vehicles and infantry units. The victims were men, women and children, and the executions were accompanied by rapes and robberies. The number of victims of the Wola massacre is estimated at around 40 thousand people. The mass murder is part of the tragedy of insurgent Warsaw, where some 180,000 civilians died as a result of armed and extermination operations.

POLSKI CZERWONY KRZYŻ
ZARZĄD GŁÓWNY
BIURO INFORMACYJNE

data: 29. 8. 1944

PROTOKÓŁ Nr 2622/50
o ekshumacji zwłok znajdujących się
na terenie Wola 24 - Karłowicza 13709

Nazwisko i imię: W. W.
Wiek lub data urodzenia: plec. murk.
Imiona rodziców: narod.
Ostatnie miejsce zamieszkania: /
Przynajmniej jedna: /
Miejsce ostatniego zwłok: z domu w bombie
Miejsce górze pochowano: Wola - Karłowicza
Nr sprawy: 189144
Znaki szczególne: /
Uwagi: /

Przewodniczący P.C.K.: /
Lekarz: /
Kierownik Oddziału: /

Protocol of the post-war exhumation of the bodies found at Wolska Street in Warsaw. Photo: Polish Red Cross Archive



THE SLAUGHTER OF WOLA



Northern Downtown. Burnt human remains in the gate of a tenement house. Presumably victims of a shell explosion fired from a Nazi rocket launcher. August 1944. Photo: Eugeniusz Lokajski „Brok”



The courtyard of one of the burnt tenement houses on Marszałkowska Street. 17 August 1944. Photo: Joachim Joachimczyk „Joachim”

When Germany attacked the USSR on 22 June 1941, there were tens of thousands of political prisoners - Poles, Ukrainians, Belarussians and Jews - in Soviet prisons and detention centres. The Polish prisoners were dominated by people considered to be "enemies of the people", members of the anti-Soviet conspiracy, and relatives of those murdered - unknown at the time - in the Katyn Massacre. Although the Soviets made attempts to evacuate prisoners to the east, the speed of military action meant that this was not possible everywhere. Two days after the fighting began, the head of the Soviet political police, Lavrenty Beria, ordered his subordinates to shoot all prisoners unsuitable for evacuation, lest they be freed by the Germans. In the following days, the Soviets carried out gruesome executions in dozens of places, murdering inmates in cells, in prison courtyards and at suburban execution sites. These murders took place in Lviv, Czortków, Stanisławów, Stryj and many other cities. The prisoners from Dobromil were murdered in a particularly brutal way, some of them being killed with sledgehammer blows. Historians estimate that the so-called prison massacres resulted in the deaths of approx. 30 thousand people - mostly Poles.

NO ONE HEARD THE SCREAMS...



Women trying to find the bodies of their family members in the courtyard of the prison in Ternopil, where the Soviets murdered more than 500 people.
Photo: public domain



Vasily Blokhin - Soviet political police officer, executor of death sentences in prisons and camps, including the Katyn Massacre. Historians estimate that he murdered around 10-15 thousand people with his own hands.
Photo: public domain



Women trying to find the bodies of their family members in the courtyard of the prison in Ternopol, where the Soviets murdered more than 500 people.
Photo: public domain



The bodies of the victims in the courtyard of the prison at Łackiego Street in Lviv. In this place, as well as in other Lviv prisons, the Soviets murdered about 7 thousand people.
Photo: public domain

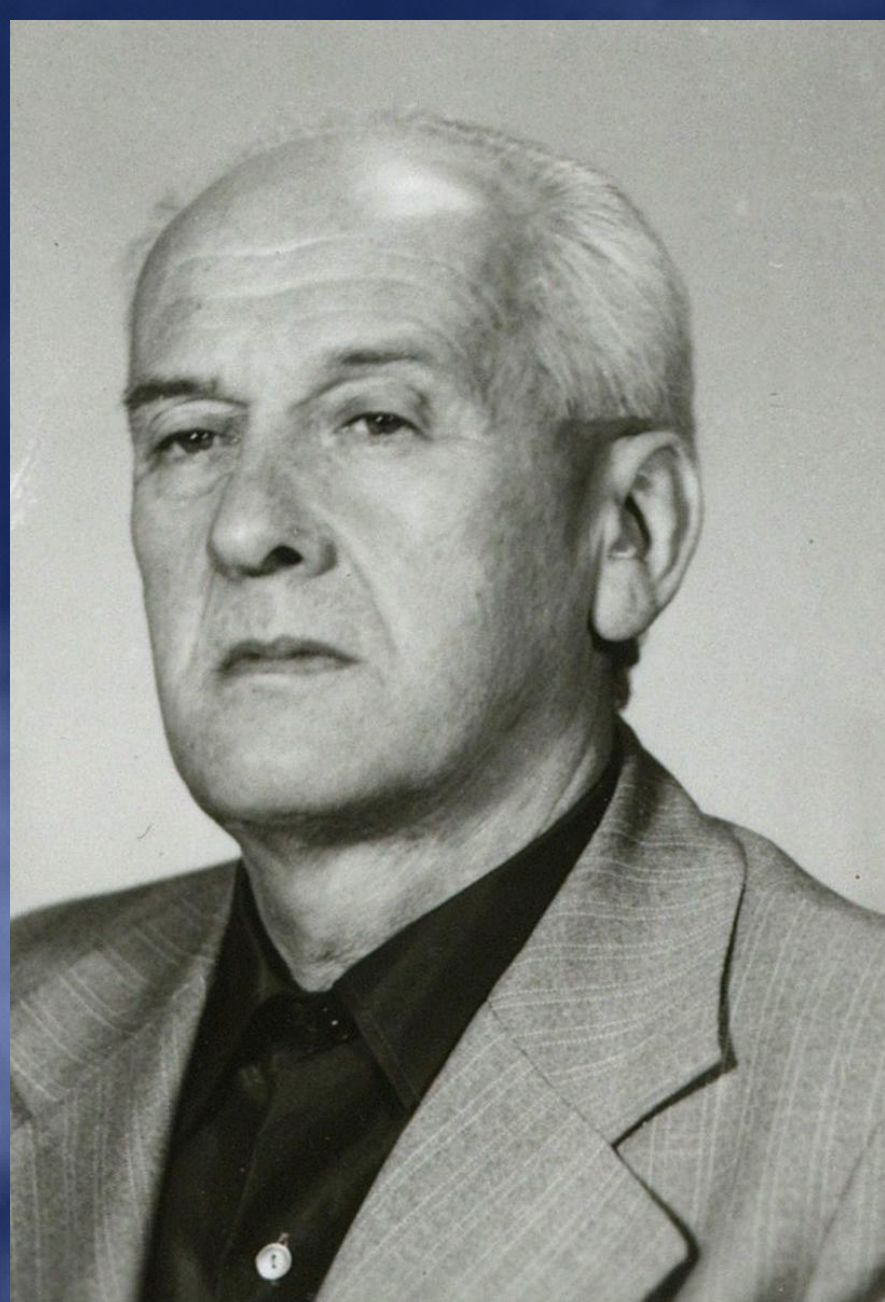
The bodies of the victims in the courtyard of the prison at Łackiego Street in Lviv.
Photo: public domain



TO DESTROY "POLISH NATIONALISTS"

The first victims of the action of destroying the structures of the AK by the Soviet partisans were the soldiers of the unit of ppor. Antoni Burzyński "Kmicic", operating in the area of Lake Narocz in the Vilnius Region. On 26 August 1943. "Kmicic" was invited for talks with the commander of 1st Vilnius Soviet Partisan Brigade, płk. Fiodor Markow. During the talks, he was murdered and his subordinates were disarmed, which resulted in killing about 80 Polish partisans.
Photo: AIPN

Beginning in the spring of 1943, the Nazi-occupied lands of Poland became the scene of a guerrilla war that intensified month after month. In the areas of Białystok, Nowogródek, Vilnius, Volhynia and central Poland regions, strong groups of Soviet partisans operated alongside Home Army (AK) units, or units created by Polish communists. Soviet commanders were instructed that in addition to fighting against the Nazis, their task was also to "prepare" the areas concerned for the arrival of the Red Army, by destroying "Polish nationalists". Although the soldiers of the Home Army fought alongside the Soviets to capture many cities, including Lviv and Vilnius, their later fate was tragic everywhere - the officers were murdered or arrested, and their subordinates were stripped of their weapons and subsequently sent to arrests and prisons. As the front was advancing, the Soviets also dropped parachute jumpers - NKVD agents - into areas still occupied by the Nazis, whose job was to gather information on people who could pose a threat to the new, communist government.



Kpt. Władysław Kochański "Bomba" - Cichociemni, commander of a partisan AK unit in Volhynia, commander of the defence of Huta Stepańska against attacks of Ukrainian nationalists. Captured deceitfully in December 1943 by Soviet partisans, he was taken to Moscow and there sentenced for 25 years imprisonment as an "enemy agent". He served his sentence in Kamchatka, doing slave labour in a copper mine. He only managed to return to Poland in 1956.
Photo: NN Theatre (Teatr NN)



S. P.
 PAMIĘCI SĄDOWNIKÓW RADOMSKICH
 PODSTĘPNIE ARESZTOWANYCH
 17 STYCZANIA 1945 R. PRZEZ NKWD
 NASTĘPNIE WYWIEZIONYCH DO OBOZÓW
 URALU I SYBERII I TAM ZAMĘCZONYCH

SĘDZIOWIE
 BATYCKI ANDRZEJ
 BULCZYŃSKI KAROL
 DEDEWICZ TEODOR
 DOBRZAŃSKI STEFAN
 DOMAGAŁA TADEUSZ
 DZIURZYŃSKI JÓZEF
 JANKOWSKI KAROL
 KANIEWSKI FRANCISZEK
 PALUSZEK JÓZEF
 PIWOWARCZYK BOLESŁAW SEK.
 STANKIEWICZ TADEUSZ
 SZLESIŃSKI ZYGMUNT
 SZYDŁOWSKI BOLESŁAW PROK.
 WITKOWSKI EUGENIUSZ

MAJ 1990 R.

A plaque in the seat of the Radom Regional Court, commemorating employees of the judiciary, recognised by Soviet military counterintelligence as "politically unreliable", arrested and deported to the Urals.
 Photo: Sebastian Piątkowski

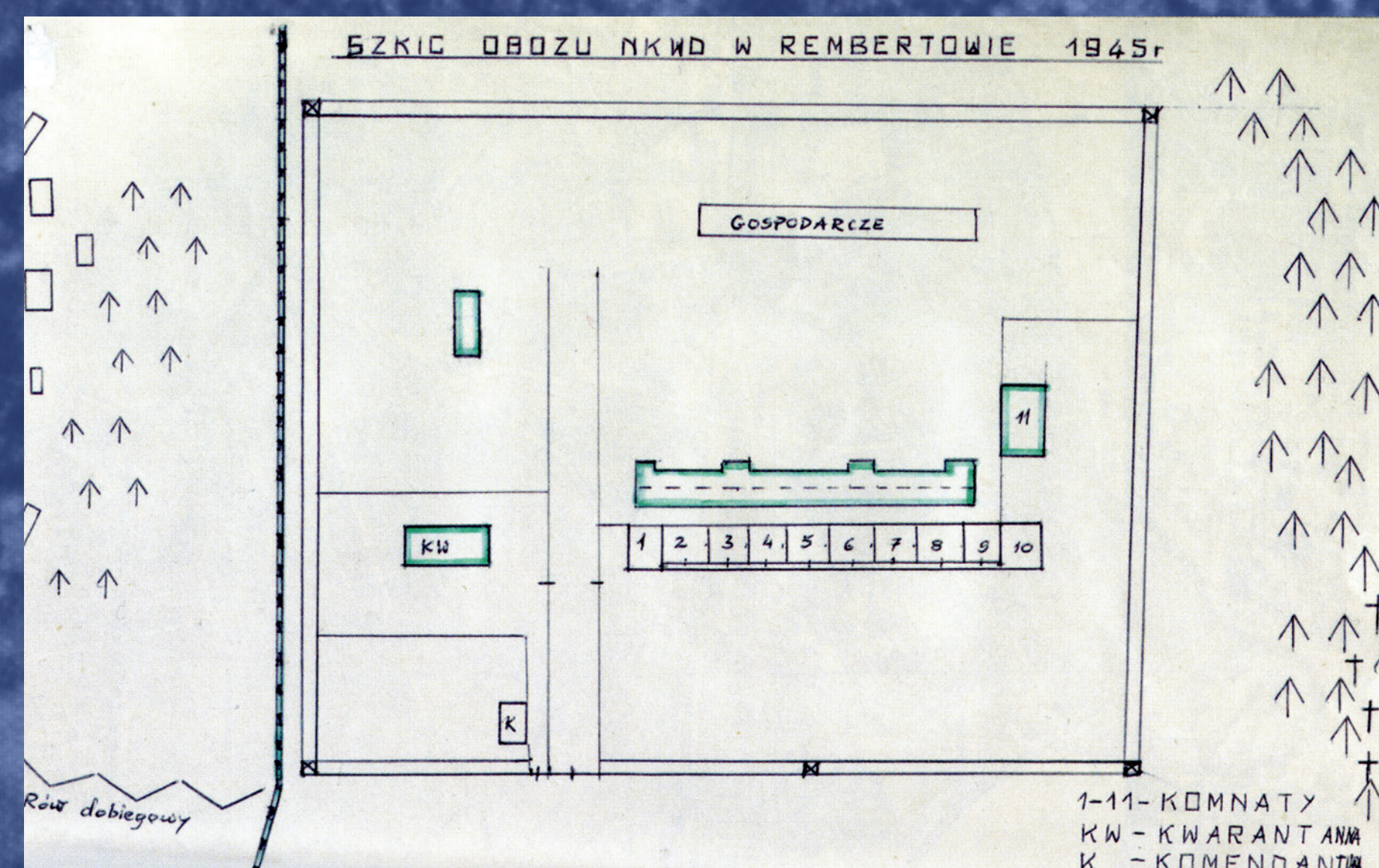
During the night of 3 to 4 January 1944, in the area of the town of Sarny in Volhynia, Red Army troops once again crossed the state border of the Republic of Poland. In the following months, frontal fighting moved westwards, bringing severe defeats to the Nazis in clashes with the Soviets. In more and more areas occupied by the Red Army, a precise scenario of "cleansing" the back of the front was carried out. Line troops were followed by operational groups of military counterintelligence ("SMERSH") and political police (NKVD), carrying out arrests of people considered to be real and potential enemies of communism. The targets of these actions were Home Army (AK) soldiers from guerrilla units that were being disarmed, members of underground organisations, representatives of the local intelligentsia, people accused of collaboration with the Nazis. The detainees were placed in the so-called special camps, which were located, among others, in Białystok, Przemyśl and Skrobów, as well as on the grounds of the Nazi concentration camp in Majdanek. Historians estimate that by mid-1945, in central Poland alone, the Soviets had arrested around 25 000 people, deporting over 16 000 of them to gulags in places such as the Urals.

"CLEANSING" THE BACK OF THE FRONT

Remains of factory buildings, witnesses of the NKVD presence in Rembertów.
 Photo: AIPN



NKVD officers with their subordinates.
 Photo: AIPN



Sketch of the Rembertów camp made on the basis of witness statements in the early 1990s.
 Photo: AIPN

A NEW ENSLAVEMENT

The successes achieved by the Red Army in the battles against the Nazis and their allies were received by the Poles with enthusiasm, widespread hope for an end to the bloody occupation and faith in the rebuilding of lives ruined by the war. However, in many towns in central Poland from which Nazi troops had been driven out, the people suffered violence at the hands of Soviet soldiers. After the line troops left, the reserve soldiers, deprived of supervision by their commanders, committed robberies, assaults, beatings and even murders. Watches, jewellery, shoes and alcohol were particularly prized loot. Sexual violence against women and girls, resulting in rape, has become a real scourge. These events assumed a mass scale when the front reached the Polish territories incorporated into the Reich, i.e. Greater Poland, Silesia and Pomerania. Also, this part of Poland was not treated by the Red Army as a liberated area, but a conquered one, where one could act without any restraint. Among the crimes which have gone down in history are those committed in Miechowice (today a district of Bytom), where in January 1945 the Soviets executed around 380 men and women, as well as the arson attack on St. Joseph's Church in Gdansk, where dozens of people died.



Red Army officers on the street of Katowice.
Photo: AIPN



Propaganda leaflet about the Red Army.
Photo: AIPN

Women on the streets of Gdansk during the battles for the city.
Photo: AIPN



The walls of prisons and detention centres scattered across the country became silent witnesses to the joint action of the Germans and Soviets, who were striving to seize full power over Polish society. It was a rule that after the Red Army occupied a given village, officers of the Soviet military counterintelligence ("SMERSH") and political police (NKVD) occupied buildings that had been vacated only a few hours earlier by officers of the Gestapo and other Nazi police formations. The cells in their basements were quickly filled with prisoners considered to be enemies of the new regime. It happened sometimes that people who had previously been arrested by the Nazis ended up in the same basement again. When the Soviets left the city after the initial "cleansing" of the area, officers of local structures, subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security, took control of the buildings and the people held there.



A building at Kościuszko Street in Radom - in 1939–1945 in its basement there was a Gestapo jail, and in 1945–1947 an NKVD and Public Security Office jail.
Photo: Arkadiusz Kutkowski

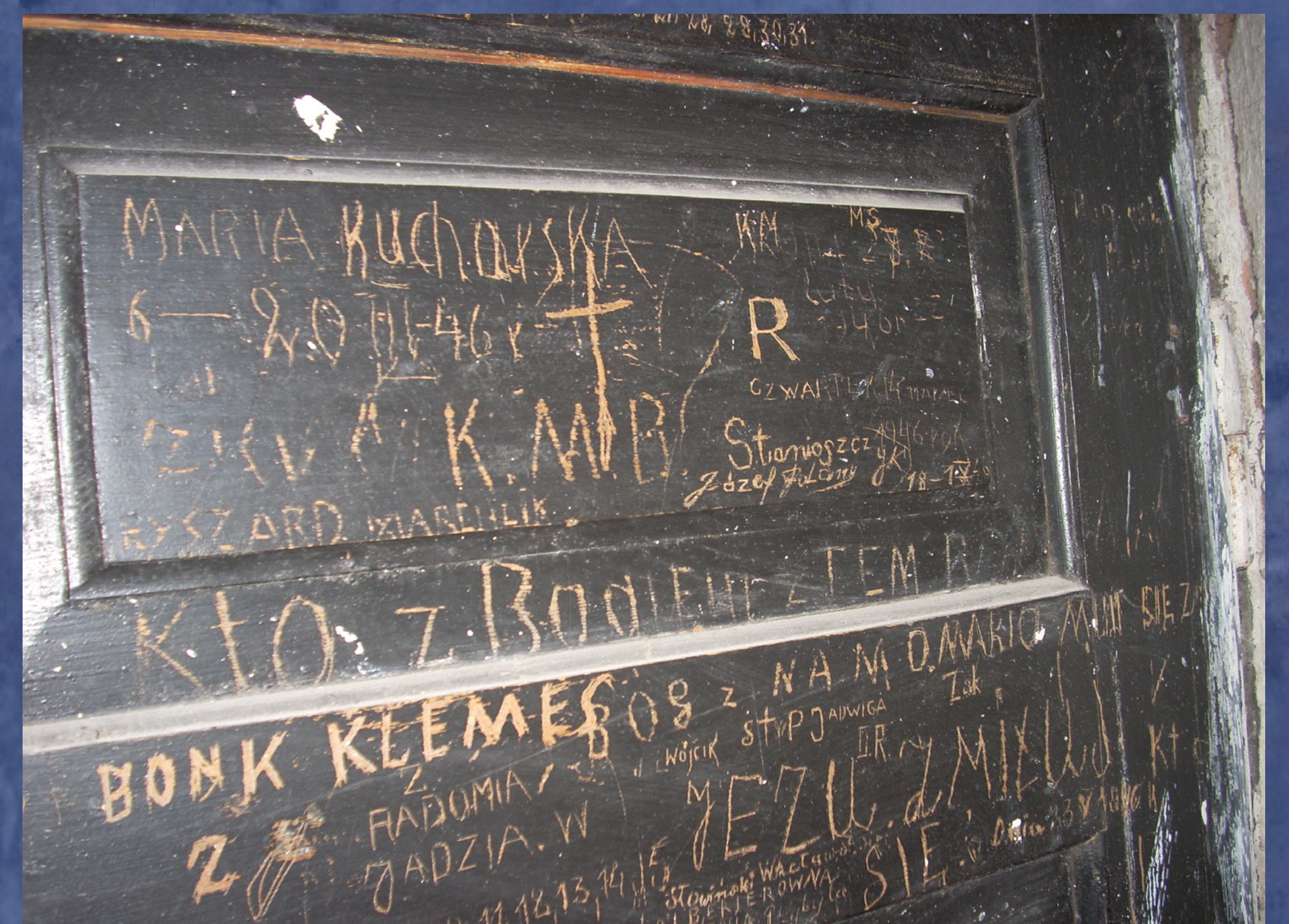
The basement of the building - a barred window in one of the cells with a cut in the wall that made it impossible for the prisoner to pull himself up on his arms and look outside.
Photo: Arkadiusz Kutkowski



IN THE SAME PRISONS, IN THE SAME CELLS



The basement of the building - a metal door to one of the cells with a distinctive peephole through which the guard keeping watch on the corridor could see into the room.
Photo: Arkadiusz Kutkowski



The basement of the building - a door inside one of the cells, on which traces were left by prisoners arrested both during the occupation and in the post-war years.
Photo: Arkadiusz Kutkowski



BALANCE OF LOSSES

POLISH CITIZENS VICTIMS
OF THE YEARS OF WAR AND OCCUPATION:

6 MILLION 28 THOUSAND PEOPLE (of which
about **3 MILLION WERE OF JEWISH
NATIONALITY**):

FALLEN AND KILLED in military action -
644 THOUSAND.

Murdered in extermination camps, during
executions, pacifications, ghetto
liquidations - **3 MILLION 577 THOUSAND.**

Murdered and died in concentration
camps, forced labour camps,
etc. - **1 MILLION 286 THOUSAND.**

Died outside the camps due to
mutilations, wounds, difficult living
conditions - **521,000.**

DIED: 39% of doctors, 33% of general
and secondary school teachers,
30% of university employees and
scientists, 28% of priests, 26% of
lawyers

