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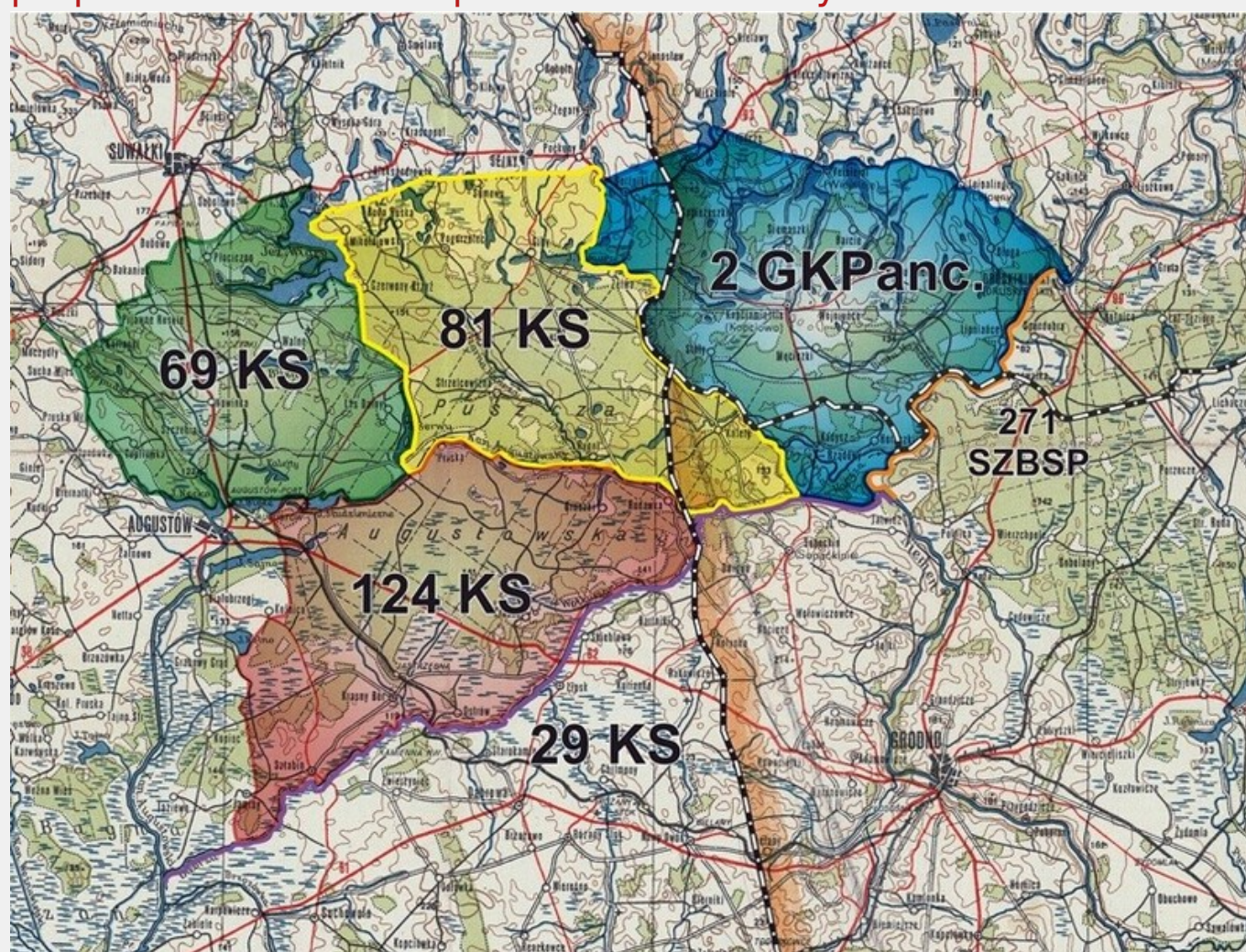
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Augustów Round-up – a crime without expiration

The result of the Soviet operation from July 1945, described today as the Augustów Round-up, was the biggest crime committed on Poles after the Second World War. At least 600 Poles were murdered in an unknown location, and the perpetrators remain unpunished to this day.



Why did the Augustów Round-up occur?

The Soviets most probably wanted to get rid of the Polish underground resistance which had a very strong presence in the northern territories of the Białystok province. The end of the war and the beginning of the Soviet occupation in autumn of 1944 did not bring the desired peace for the residents of the Augustów and Suwałki lands. The decisions of the Yalta conference and the order which it brought, leaving Poland to the mercy of its eastern neighbour, for many soldiers of the Polish Home Army, National Armed Forces and other military formations meant they had to continue fighting until the country would regain full independence.

In the autumn of 1945, the Polish underground conducted a series of operations in the northern parts of the Białystok province, practically paralysing, except for the bigger cities, the functioning of the communist repression apparatus. The society was generally hostile towards the officers of the new order and was eager to aid the indomitable soldiers. The communist government in Warsaw did not have enough forces to pacify the disobedient territory, where the Soviets had a very important transport line which they used for moving the property robbed in the occupied Eastern Prussia.

“All exposed criminals, (...) are to be killed”

Preparing for the operation, the Soviet authorities brought the front troops of the 50th Soviet Army to the Augustów region and, on July 12th 1945, around 45 thousand soldiers began combing the Augustów

Primeval Forest and the nearby villages. The officers of the Regional Public Security Office in Augustów and Suwałki aided them. In the Suwałki region, the 1st Praga Infantry of the Polish People's Army operated as well, cooperating with the Soviets. However, the Polish communist authorities were not even informed on the course and goal of the operation. The Soviet soldiers systematically combed more and more terrain, stopped whoever they found, and if they suspected them of cooperating with the Polish underground, they kept them in filtration camps, usually located on farms. The remaining memoirs describe how the arrested were questioned, often with the use of torture, to make them admit that they were part of the underground or point to others, engaged in the fight for Poland's independence. Even though, the partisans operating in this region had been warned about the concentration of the foreign forces and left the dangerous territory, three days after the Round-up began, the Soviets managed to destroy the unit of the Citizens' Home Army counting nearly 170 people, led by sergeant Władysław Stefanowski codename "Grom", which was still hiding in the Augustów Forest, near the Brożane lake. The fight ended with the death of three and imprisoning of 48 partisans.

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