

Institute of National Remembrance

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The Wola Massacre, survivors' testimonies

The Wola Massacre was one of the greatest atrocities committed by the Germans in WWII. Soon after the Warsaw Uprising broke out, the occupant retaliated against the civilian population of Warsaw, indiscriminately killing men, women and children. These accounts were given by people who narrowly escaped death and watched thousands die.



Józefa Marczak, 47

We were halted, ordered to stand facing the square where the machine guns were positioned, and immediately the first bursts were fired. Hit people fell, shrieking and screaming.

I saw my husband and children go down and I collapsed myself, unhurt; already on the ground, I got a bullet in my left arm. Lying motionless on the corpses, I played dead.

After a while, the bursts died down; both nearby and farther away, I heard heavy steps and single shots. I understood that it was soldiers walking among the bodies, looking for survivors and finishing them off with handguns.

I lay there, quietly, for a long time, maybe two hours, and when I opened my eyes, I saw that the "Ukrainians" were still in the square. My little son crawled up to me, wounded. I begged him to lie still and be silent, but he'd been shot through a lung and was in too much pain. An untimely move gave him away.

I heard heavy steps and a shot, and after that, my boy did not move anymore. From the town hall building a

burning window frame fell to the street, and I saw the clothes on my son's dead body catch fire.

Wiesława Chelmińska, 13

. . . The SS-men would order a few of us into the basement, and as soon as the people went in, I heard gunfire. When our group shrank to about 30 persons, they took me and my mother into that basement . . . The moment I walked in, I saw blood on the floor, and in the cellar ahead of me, a meter-high pile of corpses. The electric light was on. In the corridor was a bunch of SS-men, and at the door to each of the cellars stood an SS-man with a cocked weapon . . . They told me to enter the room with the meter-high heap of bodies and puddles of blood. My mother and I were ordered to climb the pile of corpses. My mother went first, and I saw an SS-man shoot her in the back of the head, and I saw her go down. I followed her and fell without waiting for the soldier to fire – but he did, and hit my right shoulder. After that, around twenty people were forced to climb that pile before being shot. A few corpses fell on me, covering me completely except for my head. There was a clock in that basement that chimed hour after hour, so I know it was 1 a.m. when the SS-men finally left.

Bernard Filipiuk, 44

The Gestapo man yelled, "Move!", and a second later I heard "Fire!" in German, followed by a volley of shots; I collapsed with Father Zychoń, who had been holding my arm, supporting me because I'd been very weak after my surgery – and it was his weight that pulled me down. I immediately realized I was alive and unhurt, but pretended to be dead because I was aware that the Gestapo man was finishing off survivors.

In my group of twelve was a woman. She held a baby, maybe a year old, in her arms, and with that baby she was executed. She'd asked a Gestapo man to kill her child first, and then her, but he only smiled and said nothing. I heard the baby cry for a long time after the shooting, and its whimpering made my blood run cold.

Apolonia Żabicka, née Fronczak, 55

A body of a man fell on me, and his blood splattered my face. When the bursts died down, I heard single handgun shots, and saw soldiers walk among the prostrate people, finishing off whoever was still alive. I lay under that man's corpse all day . . .

Having emerged from under the mass of bodies, I spotted the corpses of the following people from our house: my mother Marianna Fronczak, 76, my brother Władysław Fronczak, 54, his wife Cecylia, 49, their daughter Alicja, 17, . . . my sister Franciszka Łucka, 43, her husband Stanisław Łucki, 47, their sons Eugeniusz, 20, Zbigniew, 18, and daughter Henryka, 13, their ward Alusia Krakowiak, 7, my sister Kazimiera Rutkowska, 45, her son Edward, 21, -

Wanda Lurie, 33

Until 5 August I stayed in the basement with my three children aged 11, 6 and 3½; I was nine months pregnant . . . on that day, German gendarmes and Ukrainians entered the yard, calling on the residents to leave the house immediately . . .

In all, there were over 500 of us collected near that factory . . .

The Germans let in – or, rather, pushed inside the factory, via the Wolska Street gate – a hundred people at a time. I was in the last group. In the yard, I saw meter-high heaps of dead bodies. There were several such piles, covering both the right and left side of the first courtyard. I recognized bodies of neighbours and friends. We were taken down the middle, to the narrow passageway that led to the other yard. There, the Ukrainians and gendarmes divided us into groups of four . . . when such a four approached the spot where bodies lay, the Germans and Ukrainians shot each of the group in the back of the neck from behind . . . I was in the last group . . .

So I walked in the last group of four, with my three children, to the execution site, holding the hands of the two younger ones in my right, and the hand of the older son in my left. The children walked, crying and praying. The older boy once saw the dead and cried that we'd be killed too. Suddenly, a Ukrainian fired into the back of his head, and the next bullets hit the younger children and me. I fell on my right side. The shot was not fatal: the bullet entered the left part of my neck, crossed the lower section of my head and exited through my right

cheek. I got maternal haemorrhage. Along with the bullet, I spat out a few teeth. I felt the left side of my head and body go numb, but I was conscious, and lying among the corpses I saw almost everything that was happening around.

I lay there three days, until Monday (the execution was on Saturday). On the third day, I felt that the baby I was expecting was alive.

Franciszek Zasada, 46

Both groups were formed into a kommando for burning corpses . . . On 7 August, our groups were taken outside, ordered to undress, and, wearing only trousers, herded down Sokołowska Street towards Wolska, where we were put to work burning bodies . . .

At 21 Wolska Street, we found the bodies of around 100 men, executed by shooting. We burned them on the spot . . .

At 85 Wolska Street, in the farm tools and machinery store, we found some 300 corpses wearing priest's robes, and 80 others clad in civilian clothes. All these

people had been shot. We burned them there.

On the same side but a few houses down the road, at 21 Wolska Street, we came across around 50 bodies of men, all shot. Many of them wore bandage.

At 60 Wolska Street, on the premises of pasta manufacturing plant, in the middle of the courtyard we found a pile of bodies, two metres high, 20 meters long and 15 meters high. They were mostly men, only some of them were female and childrens' corpses. It took us many hours to burn the pile, which could have counted over 2,000 bodies, more or less. While we were busy burning them, a Gestapo officer, a man of middle-height, with three stars on the collar, blonde hair and tanned complexion, brought from the street a few men dressed in civilian clothes and shot them at once. We burned their bodies with the rest.

On the corner of Płocka Street, our group were ordered to sit down, and then one of the Gestapo men told us we would be spared in return for burning the bodies . . .

We entered the "Ursus " factory by a large gate in Wolska Street. The courtyard, all the way from the gate to the recess in Skierniewicka Street, was covered with bodies of men, women and children. There could have been 5,000 of them . . .

In the evening, at 47, 49 and 54 Wolska Street we collected smaller numbers of corpses. From no. 47, around 100 bodies, from no. 49, 3 that we found by a pit full of water . . .

The next day, we worked in Wolska Street, collecting smaller numbers of bodies from the entrances to several houses.

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