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President of the Institute of National Remembrance Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D. paid tribute to the Polish civilian population of Warsaw – victims of the German massacre in the Wola district, Warsaw, 5 August 2021



















President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D. took part in the ceremony of paying tribute to the civilians of the Wola district, murdered by the Germans during the Warsaw Uprising. The ceremony started at 6.00 p.m. at the monument to the Victims of the Wola District Massacre in the Pamięci Square, at the junction of Leszno street and Solidarności Avenue in Warsaw.

More on the Warsaw Uprising:

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/digital-resources/articles/8492,The-most-beautiful-Polish-battle.html>

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8486,Warsaw-Uprising-1944-Battle-for-Polan>

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<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8498,Shots-of-the-Warsaw-Uprising.html>

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8488,The-Institute-of-National-Remembrance-is-commemorating-the-77th-anniversary-of-t.html>

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8503,The-IPN039s-President-Karol-Nawrocki-pays-tribute-to-fighters-and-civilians-who-.html>

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/8504,The-IPN039s-leadership-honouring-Warsaw-Uprising-heroes-and-victims.html>

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From the beginning of the occupation, the Germans regarded Warsaw as the center of Polish resistance. In December 1943, the Governor-General Hans Frank wrote in his diary, "There's one place in this country from which all evil comes: it is Warsaw. But for Warsaw, we wouldn't have four-fifths of the problems we are facing. Warsaw remains the source of turmoil, the point from which unrest spreads in this country". The city, although formally brought down to provincial status, remained the center of Polish life. It was here that the authorities of the Polish Underground State were based and thriving armed underground operated.

For these reasons, the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944 was treated by the Third German Reich leaders as an opportunity

to rid of the problem of Warsaw. Adolf Hitler's order to raze the city to the ground was specified by the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler: "Every inhabitant is to be killed (including women and children), and no prisoners are to be taken. Warsaw must be levelled to the ground to set a terrifying example to the rest of Europe." The task was entrusted to SS-Obergruppenführer and Police General Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, who took command of Wehrmacht, SS and police units.

The Germans committed murders on civilians from the onset of the fights in the Wola district. However, the atrocities perpetrated between 1 and 4 were retaliation for the outbreak of the Uprising, and their scale was limited. The victims of German crimes at that time were primarily able-bodied men, suspected by the Germans of links with the underground. Additionally, also the first instances of using civilians as "human shields" to cover infantry and tank charges took place at that time, as was the case in the area of Okopowa and Wolska streets.

In the evening of 4 August, new German forces tasked with suppressing the uprising arrived in Warsaw. They were 1,700 soldiers of the collaboration RONA unit, a battalion of the "Dirlewanger" SS regiment (immediately dispatched to the Wola district), battalions of SS, Wehrmacht and cadet officers from Poznań, and the 608th infantry regiment under Col. Schmidt. These troops were reinforced by several companies of the German police from Warthegau towns and cities, and the overall command was given to police Major General Heinz Reinefarth. In the morning of 5 August, these forces launched an attack towards the center of Warsaw, mainly along Wolska and

Górczewska streets. At the same time, from early morning, a massacre of civilians was in progress, especially in those sections of Wola which were in German hands from the first hours of the Uprising.

Initially, civilians were murdered in flats, cellars, courtyards and streets. The Germans set fire to several residential buildings, and shot the escaping people with machine guns. In this way died, among others, the inhabitants of so-called Hankiewicz houses at 105/109 Wolska Street (about 2,000 victims). In the afternoon, the units subordinated to General Reinefarth changed tactics. Civilians from nearby houses were herded to a few selected spots and murdered there. On "Black Saturday", 5 August, the largest mass executions took place near the railway workshop halls in Moczydło Street (according to various estimates, between 4,500 and 12,000 people were killed), in the Orthodox Christian cemetery (several hundred victims), in Sowiński Park (about 1,500), in the Franaszek factory (between 4,000 and 6,000), and in the "Ursus" plant (between 6,000 and 7,500).

The scale of the German atrocities was reduced after General von dem Bach-Zelewski, arrived, who, mainly for military reasons, forbade the killing of women and children. Nevertheless, on 6 August, more mass murders took place in Wola, in particular in the Kirchmajer and Marczewski farming machinery store at 79/81 Wolska Street, where about 2,000 perished. Also in the following days of the Uprising, crimes against the civilian population in Wola - as well as in other districts of Warsaw - were committed, though on a smaller scale.

The exact number of victims in Wola in the first days of August 1944

remains unclear. It is impossible to determine it, as the number of survivors was small, and the Germans obliterated the traces, but present-day estimates put it between 38,000 and 65,000 people.

by Maciej Żuczkowski

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