

Volhynia Massacre

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The German Occupation, and the Holocaust

Many Ukrainians hoped that the Third Reich would help create a Ukrainian state. In the summer of 1941 Ukrainian inhabitants of many localities enthusiastically welcomed the arriving German detachments. Ukrainians erected arches to welcome the Germans and they put up Ukrainian flags. On 30 June OUN-B set up Jaroslaw Stećko government in Lvov. Germans, however, were not interested in this political offer and sent the OUN-B leaders (including Bandera) to concentration camps.

In the summer of 1941 Germans initiated a series of pogroms of Jews in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, which the Ukrainian militia formed by Banderites, took part in. For instance, during the Petlura Days (July 25-27) approx. 1,500 people were killed in Lvov. The former Volhynian Voivodeship and parts of the Lvov and Polesie voivodeships were incorporated as Generalbezirk Wolhynien und Podolien into Reichskommissariat Ukraine with its capital in Równe. Not only German, but also Ukrainian administrative bodies were established in those territories. The latter were to ensure delivery of provisions for Germans, recruit laborers to the Third Reich, and construct and repair roads. Lvov became part of the General Government as the capital of District Galicia (*Distrikt Galizien*).

The occupier waged terror throughout Volhynia, which some Ukrainians greeted with dismay. The Ukrainian nationalists from the OUN, however, chose to support the occupier. The Germans conscripted approx. 5,000 volunteers into the newly-created Ukrainian auxiliary police. At the very beginning of the occupation the Germans executed several hundred representatives of the Polish and Jewish intelligentsia on the basis of lists drafted by the OUN. These massacres took place in Krzemieniec, Kostopol, and Równe. Moreover, the Germans carried out arrests, executed inmates in prisons, and conducted public executions. After they had captured Lvov, the Germans inspired a pogrom against the local Jews and murdered 25 Polish professors at Wuleckie Hills in Lvov. Thousands of Poles were detained in concentration camps.

Soon, the Ukrainian police in German service and *Einsatzkommandos* began to organize mass executions of Volhynian Jews. The Jews from the ghettos were not transported to death camps, but killed on the spot, that is, in ditches outside cities or at the edge of forests. By October 1942 the Germans had killed approx. 247,000 Volhynian Jews (97 % of all local Jews).

The executions of Jews in Eastern Galicia began in the fall of 1941. Most victims were intellectuals or “unproductive elements” (that is, people incapable of work). Deportations to death camps (mostly Belżec and Sobibór) began in the spring of 1942. The Ukrainian police also participated in the Holocaust in Galicia. The brutal extermination of Jews proved that people could be killed on an unprecedented scale, with impunity, and in keeping with binding German law.

Photo gallery

