

Uczni polscy rozstrzelani w Katyniu, Charkowie i Twerze

Polish scientists among the victims of the Katyn, Kharkov and Twer massacre

SUMMARY

On September 17, 1939, when Poland had been defending itself for over two weeks against the Nazi aggression that marked the beginning of World War Two, units of the Soviet Red Army crossed the eastern borders of the country. The joint onslaught by two aggressors soon led to mass arrests and reprisals against the Polish intelligentsia. The Germans were responsible for the “Sonderaktion Krakau”, “Intelligenzaktion Pommern”, “Intelligenzaktion Schlesiens”, that is campaigns in which thousands of Polish citizens were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Among them were scholars and scientists from universities and colleges: in Kraków (Cracow), 183 professors and associate professors were arrested, and in Lwów – about fifty.

The actions of the Red Army included the capture or execution of many thousands of Polish army officers. Many of those were reservists called up just before the breakout of the war, who in their civilian lives taught at Polish universities or were members of the Polish Academy of Sciences and members of learned societies. One of the atrocities committed by the Soviets was the Katyn massacre, which claimed the lives of thousands of Polish officers, among them 67 scholars from Warsaw, 24 from Kraków (Cracow), 25 from Poznań, 17 from Lwów, 14 from Wilno, 2 from Lublin, 2 from Puławy / Bydgoszcz (from the agriculture college – SGGW), and 2 from Breslau (now: Wrocław).

The 159 officers mentioned above had been held in the camps – at Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszków. They were executed and buried in Katyn, Kharkov and Mednoye. Many officers had also held captive in prisons in the Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia (Belarus), but their place of death and burial remains unknown. Eight names from the list of those imprisoned in the Ukraine are relevant in the context of the present article.

The numbers of those executed, though terrifying in themselves, are not however the most important aspect of the losses suffered by the Polish intelligentsia. The victims of the crimes described above included some of the leading scholars and scientists in their fields, whose achievements made an important contribution to science and learning in Poland and worldwide. The scholars had also played an important role in Polish economy and industry, culture, journalism, art, literature, poetry and sport. Those losses had a very painful adverse impact on Polish education after World War Two, when the universities and colleges resumed their activities after the six war-time years of being banned; there were simply not enough instructors, professors and scholars with the requisite intellectual authority.