

# German repressions in the Częstochowa area during the Second World War

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## Abstract

During the Second World War, civilians in the occupied Częstochowa region were subjected to various forms of repressions. These included arrests, deportations for forced labor and to concentration camps, executions, and the most brutal measure of all – pacifications of villages. Rural areas were also subjected to German policy of economic exploitation. Similar conditions prevailed in the remaining lands of occupied Poland. The system of governance introduced by the Germans, perforce criminal, was aimed at achieving the total subjugation of Poles. No manifestations of national life were tolerated, while all aspects of civic activity came under the strictest scrutiny and control. Those who supported pro-independence organizations and involved themselves in the provision of assistance to Jews were a particular target of repression. German pacification campaigns resulted in the deaths of Poles of both sexes and all ages. This committal of numerous crimes of appalling brutality, including genocide, constituted a clear and flagrant violation of the provisions of international treaties.

The Częstochowa area<sup>1</sup> suffered the first losses already at the onset of the 1939 Defensive War. The Wehrmacht units entering Poland committed numerous crimes, among others setting fire to buildings and executing Polish citizens. Repressive operations of this kind were rarely connected with military action. In the main, they were retaliation on the local populace for the stubborn resistance of regular troops of the Polish Army. The methods of terror included taking hostages, death threats, brutal treatment, various types of harassment, as well as destruction and robbery of property. The shooting of civilians usually did not follow from any formal procedure, and in many cases even the personal data of the victims were not checked. The majority of executions were conducted ad hoc and spontaneously, but first and foremost arbitrarily, for which reason they may be called war banditry.

The casualties of 1 September 1939 included residents of three villages in the Kłobuck district: Konieczki (three people), Koski (four people), and Przystajń (one person). Next, on the night of 1/2 September, the villages of Parzymiechy and Zimnowoda, both situated in the Częstochowa district, were pacified. The Germans shot 75 and 39 people respectively, and razed both locations to the ground. On the following day (3 September) in the township of Krzepice (Krzepice commune), the invaders gathered the residents in the market square and began shooting. As a result, 30 people perished. On the same day in the Myszków district, south of Częstochowa, Wehrmacht troops surrounded and set fire to the village of Mysłów (Koziegłowy commune). The soldiers shot at anyone who attempted to escape. Some people suffocated or burned alive in the basements of farm buildings which the Germans had set alight. 22 people died at the time, including 10 children. On 4 September, German soldiers shot 104 people in Żarki (Żarki commune) (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 54, 64, 71, 99, 101).

The Wehrmacht units marked their advance into Poland with a succession of tragedies, committing crimes against civilians who were not taking part in fighting off the aggressor. The armies of the Third Reich thus violated international treaties on the laws of war, including for instance the Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land, appended to the 1907 Hague Convention IV (Kosowska, 2011, p. 63).

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1 The terms “Częstochowa area” and “Częstochowa region” are neither geographical nor historical in origin. They are used here to denote lands which gravitated towards Częstochowa (in an economic, cultural, and religious sense) as the largest urban center in the region. Historians variously fix the boundaries of that area, basing themselves mainly on the financial-economic aspect, as no specific cultural patterns or mental ties developed in the region. For this reason, the term will be written in lowercase (cf. Sobalski, 1965).

By 6 September, the Germans had perpetrated crimes in a dozen or so villages in the vicinity of Częstochowa, all situated along the route of the German Tenth Army, which was commanded by General Walter von Reichenau (including xvi Panzer Corps and xv Light Corps). The killings included: in Koszęcin commune – Koszęcin (seven people), in Konopiska commune – Hutki, Rększowice, and Łaziec, in Kłobuck commune – Łobodno (13 people), in Poczesna commune – Nierada, in Lipie commune – Napoleon (10 people), in Kruszyna commune – Baby and Jacków (14 people), and Kruszyna (38 people), in Mstów commune – Małusy Wielkie (11 people), in Przyrów commune – Zarębice (25 people), in Dąbrowa Zielona commune – Cieleńniki (11 people), Chrząstów (presently a district of Koniecpol; 21 people) and Kajetanowice (72 people). The German soldiers also committed numerous crimes against the residents of towns. In Częstochowa, 4 September 1939 was dubbed “Bloody Monday”; according to various estimates, on that day the Germans murdered from 227 to 500 people (Pietrzykowski, 1985, pp. 16–23; Pietrzykowski, 1964, pp. 14–21; Domański, Jankowski, 2011, pp. 25–28).

The first 55 days of the Wehrmacht on Polish soil were marked by the brutality of its soldiers, who often destroyed Polish townships and killed their residents without any reason, just as a pre-emptive measure. Only some expeditions were military in nature, with their objective being – for instance – a search for weapons (for example in the village of Stany in the Częstochowa district, where three men were killed for hiding Polish Army weapons) (Pietrzykowski, 1985, p. 28). Civilians were in particular danger near large concentrations of troops, where they would be attacked for largely inexplicable (and oftentimes imaginary) reasons. For instance, if weary, inexperienced and careless soldiers accidentally wounded their comrades at their billets, blame would be placed on the local populace or on alleged “soldiers of the Polish Army”, who purportedly had already resorted to partisan warfare (Böchler, 2009, pp. 22, 84, 87). In October, Augustyn Gwóźdź, a teacher from Kalety, was arrested on charges of shooting a German soldier. He was killed on the way to prison. Six men were murdered in Mokrzysz (Mstów commune). In the same commune, the village of Jaskrów became one of the first mass execution sites. On two separate dates – 9 and 25 November – the Germans brought in some 47 arrestees from Częstochowa and shot them there (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 41).

Also worth mentioning here are the crimes committed by auxiliary units assigned to the main Wehrmacht forces. These included: deployment units (so-called *Einsatzkommando*), operational groups of the Security Police, units of the Order Police, Field Gendarmerie, Secret Field Police, and the self-protection militia (*Selbstschutz*), which was composed of members of the local German minority (Durlej, Gmitruk, 2008, p. 10; Pietrzykowski, 1989, p. 135; Pietrzykowski, 1964, pp. 10–11). Among the numerous crimes which they perpetrated was the shooting of four local farmers in the village of Piasek (Koszęcin commune) in September 1939 (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 74).

## German occupation policy in the first months after the end of military action

Following the end of the September Campaign, the territory of the Second Polish Republic was divided between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. The Germans split their conquest into two parts. The western lands – the Pomeranian Voivodeship, the Silesian Voivodeship, the Poznań Voivodeship (Wartheland), a part of the Łódź Voivodeship along with Łódź, the Suwałki region, the northern and western parts of Mazovia, as well as the western parts of the Kraków and Kielce voivodeships – were incorporated directly into the Reich, with the intention being to make them ethnically German. The occupier forbade the use of the Polish language and closed Polish schools. Poles were deprived of senior posts in administration and business, and also of their property and assets. A part of the Polish populace was subjected to brutal deportations (Fajkowski, 1972, p. 15).

The deportees were usually sent first to transit camps, and from there transported in cattle wagons to the General Government. Deportations were often accompanied by murders and ad hoc executions. Such an instance occurred on 29 June 1940 in the border area, in the village of Gajęcice (Pajęczno commune), where three people were shot during a deportation. Displaced from their property, Poles could usually take only these belongings which they could carry with them. They had to leave behind all immovables, livestock, and house furnishings. Thus vacated, their real estate was handed over to people of German ethnicity who arrived from the Baltic Sea region, the USSR, and even from the area of the Black Sea. In the commune of Brzeźnica, for example, residents were expelled from approx. 1,800 out of a total of 2,128 homesteads, and their property was taken over by 50 Germans from Volhynia and Bessarabia (Kosowska, 2011, p. 80).

On the remaining Polish lands the Germans established the General Government, which was divided into four districts (on 1 August 1941, an additional fifth district – Galicia – was established). In accordance with German plans, the GG was to function as a labor pool and a source of economic supplies for the Third Reich. For this reason, schooling was significantly curbed, while strict regulations were introduced in order to gain absolute control over all spheres of civic activity, enforce economic exploitation, and suppress Polish national life (Fajkowski, 1972, p. 17).

The Częstochowa area, situated in the Kielce Voivodeship, was divided between the Third Reich and the GG. The majority of the former Częstochowa district (mainly its north-western part, and to a lesser degree the southern) was annexed to the Reich, specifically to the Wartheland and the district of Blachownia in the *Regierungsbezirk Oppeln* in the Province of Upper Silesia. The city of Częstochowa was incorporated into the Radom District of the GG (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 9). *Kreis Tschenstochau* comprised 10 smaller units (*Bezirke*): Częstochowa – city, Rędziny, Kruszyna, Dobryszyce, Gosławice, Maluszyn, Radomsko – town, Radomsko – district,

Dąbrowa and Olsztyn (Kosowska, 2011, s. 80). Therefore, the present paper will deal not only with lands of the former Częstochowa district, but also – though to a lesser degree – with those of adjacent districts.

What has to be emphasized in first order is the difference between the policies pursued by the Germans towards the Polish populace in the annexed territories and the inhabitants of the GG. Poles who found themselves in the lands incorporated into the Third Reich had to adhere to stricter regulations than those in the GG. They were not, however, exposed to so frequent repressive operations as the populace of the GG. Moreover, in areas which they considered their own the Germans refrained from applying some of the methods which they employed regularly in the GG, for instance the pacification of villages (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 10).

The complicated situation of Poles in the annexed territories is also worth mentioning. The Poles who lived there were frequently made to sign the German People's List, and the men who did so would be drafted into the German army. The recruitment of new soldiers, especially in the last stage of the war, was the main reason for forcing Poles to sign. However, those Poles who had been enlisted in the Wehrmacht by force took the first opportunity to flee. Towards the end of 1944, as the front was approaching, desertions became commonplace. In the areas still controlled by the Germans, absconders were searched for and killed – on 31 December 1944 in Lubliniec, Franciszka Prawda was murdered by German police officers who came to her house in order to arrest her son, a Wehrmacht deserter. Some Poles refused to sign the lists. Very often they had to go into hiding, facing serious consequences for their behavior. On 14 August 1944 in the village of Szyszków (Praszka commune), a Pole was shot for his refusal to sign the *Volksliste* (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 90).

Crossing the border between the Third Reich and the General Government was strictly forbidden, and Poles could move freely on both sides of the frontier only if they held special passes. Penalties for illegal crossing were severe – up to and inclusive of death. In 1940 in Wólka Prusicka (Nowa Brzeźnica commune), German border guards shot nine Poles charged with illegally crossing the border. Throughout the Second World War, functionaries of German customs offices and Border Guard posts committed numerous crimes, employing the same methods of terror as those used by the Gestapo and other German police forces (Pietrzykowski, 1985, p. 74). For example, probably in 1941, border guards executed a Pole in Wola Wiewiecka (Strzelce Wielkie commune); in 1942 they killed Stanisław Smętek in Kotowice (Żarki commune), and in 1944 a 16-year-old Polish girl in Góra Włodawska (Włodowice commune). On 30 September 1944, assisted by police officers, they shot 17 people in Cielętniki (Dąbrowa Zielona commune) (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 20, 38, 50, 96).

When the military authorities handed over the occupied territories to the German civilian administration, the Polish populace was subjected to further repression. The wide array of methods of intimidation included round-ups, arrests, executions, and deportations to labor, penal and concentration camps. First and foremost, the occupier targeted leadership groups which could have potentially become the bulwark of resistance to the Third Reich, namely the intelligentsia in the broadest meaning of the term (clergy, teachers, physicians, scientists, etc.), officers of the reserve, social and cultural activists, and former administrative and governmental functionaries of the Second Polish Republic. The Germans intended to destroy the identity of Poles, and this necessitated the liquidation of those which they considered to be its embodiment – the intellectual and social elites. They were convinced that the annihilation of the intelligentsia would erase Polish national awareness, turning the remainder of society into a passive and docile source of unskilled labor. In the annexed territories, the Germans launched the “Tannenberg” and “Intelligenzaktion” campaigns; their equivalent in the GG was the “AB-Aktion”. Critically, all three operations were based on mass executions and deportations to concentration camps (Pietrzykowski, 1964, pp. 48–56).

Mass arrests of intellectuals in the Częstochowa area began already in the autumn of 1939. During a special operation conducted in Częstochowa, the Germans arrested many local social and political activists, teachers, students, and civil servants, including the city’s president. All of the detainees had to testify about the structure of the organizations in which they had worked before the war. In this way, the Germans infiltrated the milieus of intellectuals, civil servants and political activists. The information thus obtained served as the basis for subsequent arrests. Some people were then released, only to be detained again in the spring of 1940. Arrests under the “AB-Aktion” were conducted in several rounds (Pietrzykowski, 1987, p. 137).

The next wave of arrests swept across the area in March 1940, following a meeting of the Reich Defense Committee for the General Government. As a result of decisions taken by this body, mass arrests of intellectuals were carried out in individual districts. All those detained in the Częstochowa area were locked up in the city’s Zawodzie prison. Some prisoners were transported to concentration camps (among others to KL Sachsenhausen, KL Buchenwald, KL Auschwitz and KL Ravensbrück). The first transport from the Radom District bound for KL Sachsenhausen left Radom on 15 July 1940. Along the way the train stopped in various towns, collecting arrestees from, among others, Częstochowa (50 people) (Pietrzykowski, 1985, pp. 51–53, 230–231). Out of 670 deportees from the entire Radom District, only 38 survived the camp (Domański, Jankowski, 2011, p. 107).

Many of those detained were subjected to immediate liquidation. The Germans conducted killings in a dozen or so locations in the Częstochowa area. One of them was the so-called Gallows in the village of Olsztyn (Olsztyn commune). Executions had been carried out there even before Poland regained independence in 1918, thus earning the place its morbid name. Arrestees from the prison in Częstochowa were brought to Olsztyn in several groups (on 11, 12, 28 and 29 June, and in July and October 1940). Together with the victims of subsequent executions (e.g. from 1944), over 1,600 people were murdered there. In the following years, the Germans turned the Olsztyn "Gallows" into a site of martyrdom of Soviet POWs (Pietrzykowski, 1977, p. 69). Another execution site for intellectuals from the Częstochowa area was the village of Apolonka (Janów commune). As part of their plan of annihilation of Polish elites, the Germans carried out three mass executions there (Pietrzykowski, 1987, p. 139; Pietrzykowski, 1964, p. 55).

### The German economic policy in the GG

German economic policy treated the GG as a site of economic exploitation. In the initial phase of the war, the Germans strove to improve agricultural production. From mid-1942, however, due to the intensification of the war effort, further improvements in farming methods were abandoned in favor of systematic increases in burdens on farmers. In consequence, smallholdings were subjected to a system of exploitation which consisted in interfering in the structure of agricultural ownership (through planned and ad hoc confiscations of property), imposing obligatory quotas, raising tax burdens, and – towards the end of the war – the mass pillaging of property and agricultural produce.

Those who failed to deliver their quota on time were subjected to punishments, which included floggings and beatings, arrests and incarceration in labor camps, and also deportations to concentration camps. In some cases, punitive expeditions were sent to villages and their inhabitants were murdered (Fajkowski, 1972, pp. 20, 35, 37). It seems that this may have been one of the main reasons for the pacification organized by the Germans on 28 October 1943 in Krasice (Mstów commune). Gendarmes from Kaszewice arrived in the village demanding an explanation for the non-delivery of the grain levy. Several people were then arrested for delays in handing over their quotas. Others were also arrested, but it remains unknown on what grounds. All those detained (10 persons in total) were killed in Aniołów (Częstochowa commune) (Relacja Wacława Jurczyka, 1948; Relacja Marianny Kały, 1948; Relacja Stanisława Żyźnego, 1948).

Apart from produce levies, villagers also had to deliver meat or pieces of cattle. Each cattle farm was closely controlled by the Germans

in order to prevent the handing over of food to partisan units and underground independence organizations. Illegal slaughter was severely punished, up to and inclusive of execution by shooting. On 16 June 1942 in the village of Łężyce (Pajęczno commune), the Germans murdered three farmers for this reason. Probably in 1943, the same fate befell a young woman in the village of Kamińsko (Przystajń commune). On 10 December 1943 in Dylów Szlachecki (Pajęczno commune), Stanisław Szczęsny was arrested and subsequently shot for the non-delivery of levies (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 32, 46).

As time progressed, the quotas were raised so much that farmers were no longer able to meet them. But the Germans knew no mercy in their collection, practically robbing the farmsteads and regularly meting out capital punishment in the event of any delays. On 3 February 1944 in the village of Gołuchowice (Kroczyce commune), German gendarmes shot four farmers accused of procrastination in the delivery of levies (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 37).

The German policy of economic exploitation of the occupied territories was based on the treatment of their inhabitants as a cheap labor force. Due to the lack of volunteers for labor in the Third Reich, the Germans introduced forced recruitment, using either physical force or, less frequently, economic pressure. Avoidance was punished with the seizure of property, incarceration in a prison, labor camp or a concentration camp, or even with death. Village residents (including children) who were deported for labor worked in almost all sectors of the German economy: agriculture, industry, construction, crafts, and services. A transit camp of the Arbeitsamt operated on Jasnogórska Street in Częstochowa, and people who were selected for transport to the Third Reich were placed there. As regards living conditions, it resembled a concentration camp. In 1942, about 3,000 people passed through the camp every month (Pietrzykowski, 1968, pp. 16–20, 43).

Deportations of laborers from the Radom District reached their peak in February and March 1943. The increase in the number of transports resulted from a growing demand for forced laborers in German industry. In the wake of defeats suffered on the Eastern front, the Germans called up successive classes – including industry workers, who had hitherto been protected. Thus, Polish forced laborers were to ensure the continuity of operation of German factories. It is estimated that throughout the occupation, about 82,000 people were deported for labor in the Reich from Częstochowa and the Radomsko district, that is 82% of the population (Pietrzykowski, 1968, p. 57).

The majority of Poles deported to Germany were very badly treated by their employers. They were forced to work a dozen or more hours a day, and were frequently treated in a brutal and ruthless manner. Corporal punishment was meted out even for the smallest transgressions, while fleeing one's workplace could be punished with death (Łuczak, 1993, p. 549).



Shootings of escapees occurred throughout the German occupation. In 1940 in Kochanowice (Kochanowice commune), German gendarmes shot two men for fleeing from forced labor. In August 1943 in the village of Dankowice-Piaski (Kłobuck district), Stanisław Chabrajski, who had been deported for labor to the Third Reich and subsequently ran away, was captured and executed by shooting. In 1944 in Góra Włodowska (Zawiercie district), gendarmes shot a young man who had also escaped from forced labor (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 29, 38, 48).

### Repressions against villagers who helped the resistance

After the Germans had implemented their plan of cleansing the Polish nation of its leadership elite and German laws and administration became relatively established, a period of comparative “peace” set in in the General Government. Towards the end of 1941 and in the beginning of 1942, German repressions decreased in intensity. Typical for this period were individual arrests and executions. These changes could be observed throughout the Radom District. It was only in mid-1942 that raids on villages – accompanied by the herding of people to a single location where they would be shot, and by the open committal of mass murders – once again became commonplace. On 21 August, the German gendarmerie surrounded the village of Choroń (Poraj commune). All the farmers were marched to one point and a list of 11 names was read out. While the remaining men were released home, the hapless 11 were shot on the spot (Fajkowski, Religa, 1981, p. 81).

Isolated pacification actions were also conducted at the time, for after the appearance of the first partisan groups in the area the Germans focused their effort on destroying the structures of the nascent Polish underground. As a result, the region experienced a wave of executions of people engaged in pro-independence activity. Towards the end of April 1942 in Biskupice (Poraj commune), the Germans shot one person suspected of involvement in the resistance, while on 8 December 1942 in Antolka (Niegowa commune) they killed a Home Army soldier (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 14–15, 22).

The second half of 1942 marked a turning point in the German policy towards rural areas in the GG. Terror became the principal method of governance and the main tool for obliterating those groups of Poles that posed a threat to the Third Reich. Pacifications became more widespread in the spring of 1943. The sharpening of the course was connected with the implementation of preventive actions intended to intimidate those villagers who supported active partisan units. From then on, the Germans more readily resorted to the most severe method of repression, i.e. pacifications, which were accompanied by killings of residents, the pillaging of property, and the complete destruction of farm buildings. Repressive

measures became decidedly more brutal and cruel. Ever more frequently, victims included not only those accused of underground activity and their families, but also chance bystanders (Fajkowski, 1972, p. 19).

A prominent example of the actions undertaken against rural communities is the expedition organized by German gendarmes from the station in Szczekociny, who on 14 May 1943 carried out arrests in the village of Marcjampol (Lelów commune). The Germans were searching for partisans. Having herded a dozen or so men to one location, they chose the five youngest, who could have potentially been engaged in the resistance. They were shot solely on the basis of this presupposition (Fajkowski, Religa, 1981, p. 81). A penal expedition was also sent to Chrzastów (presently a district of Koniecpol), as the residents were suspected of membership in pro-independence organizations. On 30 June 1943, gendarmes from Gidle surrounded the farm of the Myśler family. They killed several people in the house, and then set it on fire. In total, 11 people perished in this operation. On 25 July 1943 in the commune of Żytno, in Czechowiec, the Germans murdered four men: two partisans and two Polish civilians who were helping the fighters (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 17, 24). In the autumn of 1943, repressions were directed against the villages of Ewina, Jacków, and Kozie Pole from the same commune, and also the village of Bichniów in Secemin commune. On 12 September in the area of Ewina, the Germans conducted an operation against a unit of the People's Guard. 18 guardsmen perished in battle, as well as an unspecified number of Germans. In revenge for the German losses, the village that had provided shelter to the partisans was pacified. Three people were executed by shooting and one farm was burned down (Fajkowski, Religa, 1981, pp. 82–83). Also in Bichniów, a clash with a Polish partisan patrol resulted in a wave of repressions. Four Poles died in the fighting. Following the incident, the village was surrounded by gendarmes from the station in Włoszczowa. The Germans herded the residents to the center of the village and began shooting. 37 people were killed on the spot in the massacre. It was often the case that operations against members of the Polish underground were accompanied by repressions against people who were running late with levy deliveries, or by rounds-up for forced labor. Following the massacre in Bichniów, the Germans arrested seven local farmers. The men were shot on charges of failure to fulfil their quotas.

In order to uncover the structure of the Polish underground and expose those who gave support to the resistance, the Germans established a network of informers and collaborators. They also drafted so-called proscriptio lists, which later served as a basis for arrests. Such was the scenario of the pacification of Jaworzniak (Żarki commune), which was carried out on 31 October 1943 by gendarmerie and police units. Having first surrounded the village, the Germans went from homestead to homestead in search of hidden weapons., wielding a list of people who were to be arrested. Those detained were then executed near the school building.

The surnames of 22 victims have been determined (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 41).

Similarly as in other regions of occupied Poland, in the Częstochowa area the Polish Underground State also conducted operations targeting the economic and strategic interests of the Third Reich. These chiefly took the form of sabotage in production plants serving the predominantly military needs of Germany, and of activities aimed at immobilizing (or at the very least obstructing) German road and rail communications. In response, the Germans took revenge on captured resistance members and civilians (both factory workers and chance victims). Towards the end of 1943, a successful act of sabotage was committed in Huta Raków in Częstochowa (steelworks that had been taken over by the German HASAG concern). In retaliation, the Nazis held a public execution of 20 members of the underground. It was carried out in Gidle (Gidle commune) on 16 December (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 36).

The Germans routinely murdered individuals or smaller groups of Poles on the basis of allegations that they were active in pro-independence movements. Quite often, these were spontaneous acts of bestiality. In 1943, gendarmes shot a resident of Ciężkowice (Jaworzno commune) on the road near Gidle. He was accused of serving in a partisan unit. A young woman was shot by gendarmes on similar charges on 3 November 1943 in Ciężkowiczki (Żytno commune). On 10 December 1943 in the same commune, in the village of Borzykowo, another woman was shot on the basis of unproven allegations that she had provided assistance to the partisans (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 15, 21, 36).

Public executions were clearly intended to intimidate the residents of Polish villages. Having first brought prisoners or civilian hostages to a selected location, the Germans would herd all the residents of a settlement to its central square and force them at gunpoint to watch the condemned die. Such was the course of an operation carried out in May 1943 in the village of Gruszewnia (Kłobuck commune): 20 hostages were brought in – in all probability from the prison in Częstochowa – and executed, with all the residents of the settlement being forced to watch. Similar actions were conducted in Nowa Wieś (Kłobuck commune), 9 kilometers away (Relacja Franciszka Bachniaka, 1948; Relacja Marii Parkitny, 1948; Relacja Kazimierza Polaka, 1948; Relacja Marii Skoczylas, 1948; Relacja Stanisława Turka, 1948).

Gendarmes from the station in Chorzenice conducted about a dozen or so public shootings of this kind. The German garrison included Second Lieutenant Korber, Meister Bock, and Wachtmeister (Sergeant) Rachow (Kosowska, 2011, p. 85). They carried out executions on the grounds of nearby estates. For instance, in the spring of 1943 the Germans shot four Poles and a Jew in a field on the Nieznanice estate which bordered on the so-called Sadzonki forest. In the summer of the same year they executed ten men (three Poles and seven Jews) in a sand quarry on the same estate.

This site was later used for other mass executions. In mid-1943, functionaries of the Chorzenice gendarmerie perpetrated further crimes, this time against the Jewish populace, killing at least seven people in the Jewish cemetery in the village of Mstów (Mstów commune). On 16 October 1943, in the forest complex surrounding the village of Mykanów (Mykanów commune), they murdered three Jews and one Pole; all the victims had been brought in from Prusicko (Nowa Brzeźnica commune) (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 63).

### Help for the Jewish populace

The year 1943 also saw an increase in the number of Polish assistance initiatives focusing on the Jewish populace. Discriminatory decrees against Jewish citizens had been issued already in the first weeks of existence of the GG. The Germans ordered Jews to wear armbands, confiscated their property, obligated them to provide labor, and finally gathered them in ghettos. The largest ghetto in the area was located in Częstochowa and had 48,000 inhabitants (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 11). Jews were forced to work for the German occupier, however they received no remuneration. The Germans often committed crimes while overseeing laborers. On 12 September 1940 in the border town of Jaworzno (Rudniki commune), the Germans shot 17 people (five men, five women, and seven children) who had been working on repairing the road to Parzymiechy. In October 1940, the Germans shot 20 Jews in Praszka – the victims were unfit to work in the stone quarries in Przedmieście (Praszka commune). Escapees from liquidated ghettos were also murdered. On 27 July 1942 in the village of Łęg (Kruszyna commune), the Germans shot 11 Jews who were hiding in the forest complex (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 42, 57, 80).

The Germans combined the implementation of their plans against the Jewish populace with a strict prohibition on the provision of any assistance thereto. Violations were punishable by arrest, imprisonment, deportation to a concentration camp, or execution by shooting. The death penalty was applied not only to the person who was hiding and the person providing shelter, but also to the family members of the latter. Despite the threat of such draconian punishment, some Polish villagers made an attempt to support the Jewish populace. Their help took various forms: some gave Jews food and even allowed them to spend the night in their farm buildings, while others decided to conceal them on a permanent basis.

Both those providing shelter and those availing themselves of assistance had to take the utmost care to maintain secrecy. They could be denounced by a neighbor concerned for his family's safety, or by a blackmailer or informer who happened to be in the village. Once notified, the Germans would react brutally and swiftly, destroying property, setting homesteads on fire and murdering their residents. For instance, probably

in February 1943, two Jews were tracked down by the Germans. The gendarmes murdered them in a forest near Skrzydlów (Kłomnice commune). In March, Władysław Niełacny was arrested for providing assistance to these Jews; he was detained in the village of Rzeki Małe and thereafter transported to Chorzenice, where he was murdered. In the first half of 1944, a female resident of Konary (Kłomnice commune) was arrested on charges of helping the Jewish populace. On 1 June, the German Special Court in Częstochowa sentenced her to death, and she was executed on 2 November (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 18, 48). On 31 December 1943, the residents of Brzózki in Kłobuck district (Popów commune) witnessed a number of Jews being shot in the nearby woods – an appalling example of the occupier’s brutality. The villagers were forced to bury the bodies, however their own settlement escaped unscathed (Relacja Franciszka Kasprzyka, 1948).

### The final year of the German occupation

In 1944, repressive operations in the Częstochowa area took the form of manhunts for members of the Polish resistance. The first were organized already towards the end of January. At the time the Germans targeted partisans who were “holed up” for the winter. On 6 February, several hundred Germans surrounded the village of Czech (Żytno commune), where a partisan unit was billeted. Fighting soon ensued, and several Poles were killed; the rest managed to withdraw to the nearby forest. The Germans searched the entire village. They herded the civilian populace into the barn of Józef Pietras. Next, they covered the building with straw and set it alight. 29 residents died in the flames. In addition, the occupiers pillaged the farmsteads (Fajkowski, Religa, 1981, pp. 83–84).

The number of manhunts for partisans and operations against the villagers who helped them continued to grow throughout 1944, however repressions reached their peak in the period between May and July. Basically, this was an attempt at bringing the situation under control in order to prevent a widespread uprising in the General Government. The Germans strove to incapacitate all groups (officers of the Reserve, law enforcement officers, teachers, civil servants, members of the Main Welfare Council, and the clergy) that could potentially organize resistance in the event of an uprising. The Germans obsessively viewed all arrestees as collaborators of the resistance. The civilian populace also suffered the consequences of skirmishes between Nazi and partisan units. In mid-May, acting in retaliation for the death of a gendarme who was killed in a clash with the partisans, the gendarmes murdered two people – one of them the local priest – in the village of Garnek (Gidle commune). Throughout the occupation, the gendarmes shot 12 people in this village for being members of partisan units (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 35).

In a public execution carried out on 5 July 1944 in the village of Jezioro (Wręczyca commune), the Germans hanged six people suspected of cooperation with the underground. The German operation in Wygoda (Gidle commune) was also connected with a clash with partisan troops, in this case a unit of the People's Army commanded by Jakub Salnikow, nom de guerre "Jasza". On 30 July, the first meeting of the underground Łódź Voivodeship People's Council was held in the neighboring village of Ojrzeń, with "Jasza's" soldiers providing cover. At the same time, a Vlasov Army unit and the gendarmerie began the pacification of Wygoda in retaliation for the earlier killing of a German officer. Salnikow's unit rushed to the defense of the slaughtered residents, and a gun battle soon ensued. In total, the Germans killed 19 people (two of whom were burned to death), burned down nine houses and 17 farm buildings, and completely looted the village (Fajkowski, 1972, p. 334).

At the beginning of August 1944, the Red Army captured the Sandomierz bridgehead. At the time, the Polish Underground State was intensifying its operations in connection with the implementation of Operation Tempest and the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. In consequence, the Nazis lost control over many of the administrative units located in the southern part of the Radom District. German operations in the remaining area of the Radom District were usually carried out ad hoc and in an uncoordinated manner, and mostly in retaliation for the activities of partisan units. On 10 August, a Home Army unit commanded by Second Lieutenant Jerzy Kurpiński, nom de guerre "Ponury", launched an attack on the Arbeitsamt barracks and a Hitlerjugend camp. In response, the Germans organized a round-up on the Myszków-Koziegłowy road and shot 25 chance passers-by. Three days later, on the Niegowa-Tomaszowice road, the gendarmes shot four more people (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 65). In October, the Germans pacified Jacków (Żytno commune). The reason was the considerable activity of partisan units in the vicinity of the village and undeniable and full support provided by local residents to the members of these groupings. In December, in retaliation for a partisan action, the Germans organized a manhunt for civilians in the commune of Kroczyce. On 11 December they pacified the villages of Kroczyce Stare and Lgota Murowana, shooting ten and five people respectively. A few days later the same fate befell the residents of Kroczyce: 15 people were killed during the pacification.

The outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising and increasing Soviet pressure on the front line caused the Germans to send fresh troops to the Radom District. The Wehrmacht took a more prominent part in repressive operations than before, with its soldiers committing individual murders near the frontline. For instance, on 18 August in Gidle they murdered Marcin Kundek. In Biskupice (Poraj commune), the Germans shot Władysław Skorek, a member of the resistance, while in Herby (Herby commune) they killed Kazimierz Trzepizur (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 15, 36, 38). Operations against the Polish underground were supplemented with mass

executions of prisoners. One such execution took place in August in the village of Brzózki (Popów commune), where a German soldier had recently perished. After a few days, the Germans conducted a retaliatory action. An unidentified unit arrived in the village, bringing with it a gallows made of poles. A sentence was duly read out and ten prisoners were hanged (Relacja Franciszka Bachniaka, 1948; Relacja Jana Sikory, 1948).

In the autumn, German military units, police forces, gendarmes, clerks and settlers from the Radom District made a headlong retreat. Until November 1944, repressive operations were carried out mainly by the Wehrmacht. On 23 September in Silnica (Żytno commune), German policemen and soldiers shot 104 people. On 30 September soldiers, gendarmes and border guards pacified the village of Cielętniki (Dąbrowa Zielona commune), killing 17 people. In October in Dobrogoszczyce (Kroczyce commune), gendarmes assisted by Wehrmacht soldiers executed 28 people suspected of involvement in the pro-independence movement (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, pp. 21, 30, 88; Domański, Jankowski, 2011, p. 101).

A different operation was conducted by the Germans on 4 October in Patrzyków. The Gestapo men from Wieluń, together with gendarmes from the station in Janki, evicted the residents of the village and replaced them with German settlers. During the operation 21 farmers who refused to leave their farms were killed. The rest were transported first to Pajęczno, and from there to the labor camp in Brzeg. The official reason was that the residents helped partisan units (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 55).

Towards the end of 1944, the German authorities – including police officers and gendarmes from all levels of service – were evacuated to Częstochowa, which was the westernmost (and at the same time largest) city in the Radom District. Such a large concentration of representatives of the German administration and rear-echelon forces worsened the situation of Poles in the region. Unpremeditated and uncoordinated acts of murder, often against single individuals, were repeatedly committed by the scattered Wehrmacht troops, marauders, and wandering German soldiers and gendarmes. In January 1945, a man was shot in Grabarze (Lipie commune), and another in Lgota Murowana (Kroczyce commune) (*Rejestr miejsc i faktów*, 1986, p. 55).

The Germans carried out their last operation in the Częstochowa area on 8 January 1945 in the village of Przyrów (Przyrów commune). At dawn, the village was surrounded by Vlasov Army troops commanded by SS officers. All men over 16 years of age were forced from their homes and marched towards the school. Some were killed already along the way. The rest were interrogated and tortured. In total, 43 men were murdered (some were burned alive). The surviving populace was taken by the Germans to dig trenches at the frontline, while the village itself was almost completely burned down. The pacification was conducted because residents had been suspected of killing a Vlasov Army soldier and providing help to the partisans (Fajkowski 1972, pp. 371–375; Fajkowski, Religa, 1981, pp. 85–86).

## Summary

The German occupation in the Częstochowa area caused heavy losses among civilians. As we can see, although the intensity of terror fluctuated in accordance with the current situation, its overriding aim was to bring the conquered nation to heel. The specific forms of repression employed by the Germans were intended to prevent local residents from providing assistance to underground organizations, and also to deter them from helping the Jewish populace. Round-ups, arrests, imprisonment, deportations to concentration camps, mass executions and pacifications of villages were the primary tools used by the Germans to force Poles into submission.

The German administration also implemented a policy of total economic exploitation of the Polish lands. Tax burdens and quotas increased year by year, turning into open pillage towards the end of the War. Further, the enslaved Polish nation was exploited as forced labor. It is estimated that during the conflict some 3,000,000 people were deported for labor from within the prewar borders of the Second Polish Republic. Of all the countries occupied by Nazi Germany, none suffered as acutely or sacrificed as much as Poland.

(transl. by Aleksandra Arumińska)

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