

GENOCIDIUM ATROX

GENOCIDE IN THE SOUTHEAST OF INTERWAR POLAND

From 1939 to 1947 the Poles living in the prewar Second Republic of Poland in the regions of Wołyń (Volhynia), Eastern Lesser Poland (voivodeships of Lwów, Tarnopol and Stanisławów) and in the voivodeships of Lublin and Polesie fell victim to an atrocious genocide perpetrated by Ukrainians, members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army/Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (UPA/OUN) run by Stepan Bandera. Other Ukrainian formations, including the division of SS-Galizen, were helping the UPA/OUN with their war crimes. Ukrainians followed in the German Nazis' footsteps and decided to lay the foundations for their future state by exterminating non-Ukrainians. An OUN brochure clearly stated: „DEATH TO ALL NON-UKRAINIAN INHABITANTS OF THE UKRAINIAN LAND. DEATH TO ALL OUR HISTORIC ENEMIES – POLES, HUNGARIANS AND JEWS”.

The biggest mass murders took place in 1943. The killing spree began with an attack on the Parośle I Polish settlement in the Wołyń region, with the total of 173 Poles killed. In the time of Easter celebrations approximately 1300 Poles were killed in at least 57 different locations. The intensity of the murders reached its zenith on July 11, 1943 when Ukrainian nationalists attacked 99 Polish towns and villages. On the so-called „bloody Sunday” Poles were murdered even in churches during Holy Masses.

The number of Polish victims is estimated at 130,000. UPA would use an element of surprise by rounding Poles up in one place and surrounding them. Then, UPA members would begin the slaughter. Poles were killed by firing squads, burned alive, drowned in rivers and wells, stabbed to death with knives, massacred with rifle butts and chopped with axes. The victims would often be brutally tortured first: they had their bones broken, eyes gouged out and breasts cut off. They were cut up into pieces, flayed, tied with barbed wire, dragged by horses and raped. Their corpses were profaned.

Entire Polish families were killed. Even children and women were murdered in a barbaric and repugnant way. Mixed Polish and Ukrainian families also fell victim to this „purging operation”, as Ukrainians called it. Valuables, cattle and food were confiscated. UPA tried to erase all traces of Polishness by burning and razing entire Polish villages, churches, cemeteries, small manor houses, monuments and homesteads to the ground. They also burned makeshift mass graves to dispose of any evidence of the genocide.

All Polish attempts to reach an agreement, made, inter alia, by the representatives of the Home Army and Bataliony Chłopskie (Polish Farmers' Battalions), ended in a fiasco. The talks would not take place at all or the Poles would be treacherously murdered. The Ukrainians who did not agree to the brutal crimes and helped Poles in an active or passive way risked their own lives. Even so, many Poles survived because Ukrainians helped or warned them about the forthcoming pogroms.

Poles defended themselves in various ways. They would spend nights in woods and cellars to make the village appear deserted and avoid being taken by surprise while asleep. They would also gather in one homestead and establish guard duties. They would move to bigger towns. In 1943, Poles started to organize self-defense posts (Polish settlements with self-defense parties) and centers (bases) composed of Polish villages and settlements with a common self-defense system. The existence of such posts and centers was possible only in the towns and villages where Poles constituted the substantial majority of the population. The self-defense bases lacked weapons, ammunition and people with military experience because from 1939 to 1941 local elites were pre-

dominantly murdered or deported deep into Soviet Union by the Soviets. The Polish underground Home Army fought mostly Germans. Nevertheless, its soldiers became organizers and leaders of the self-defense posts.

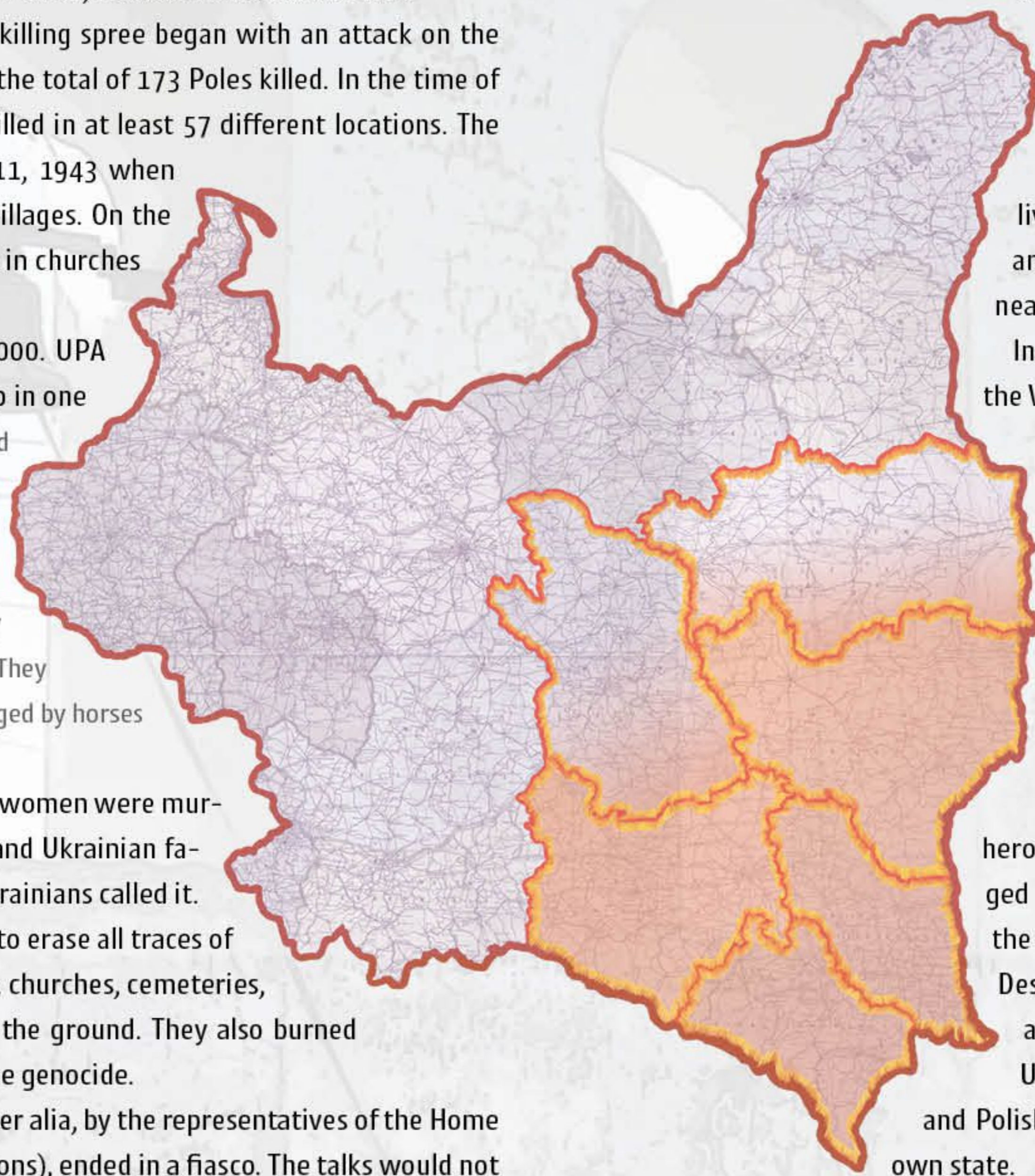
Self-defense bases protected the Polish families living in the vicinity and coming from afar. The posts and bases would manage to hold out from one month to nearly a year.

In July 1943, there were approximately 100 Polish posts in the Wołyń region, constituting the highest number of the simultaneously active self-defense points. The strongest ones were located in: Przebraże (led by Henryk Cybulski aka „Harry”), Pańska Dolina, Huta Stara, Huta Stepańska-Wyrka, Zasmyki, Rożyszcze, Antonówka Szepelska, Bielń-Spazyczyna and Jagodzin-Rymacze.

The bases were overcrowded (giving shelter to even several thousand of Poles), with poor sanitary conditions and prevailing hunger, but they provided the most valuable thing – the hope of survival. Despite the heroic defense, only a dozen or so self-defense posts managed to hold out until 1944 when the Soviet army took over the Wołyń region.

Desperate retaliatory actions were occasional and the leaders of Polish self-defense posts forbade them – unlike Ukrainian leaders who sought total elimination of Poles and Polishness in the territory where they wished to form their own state.

Deserted villages in Ukraine bear silent witness to the massacre. Tens of thousands of victims have not been given proper burial or commemoration.



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