

NEIGHBORS' BLOOD.

GENOCIDE

IN VOLHYNIA AND GALICIA

1943–1945



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REMEMBRANCE

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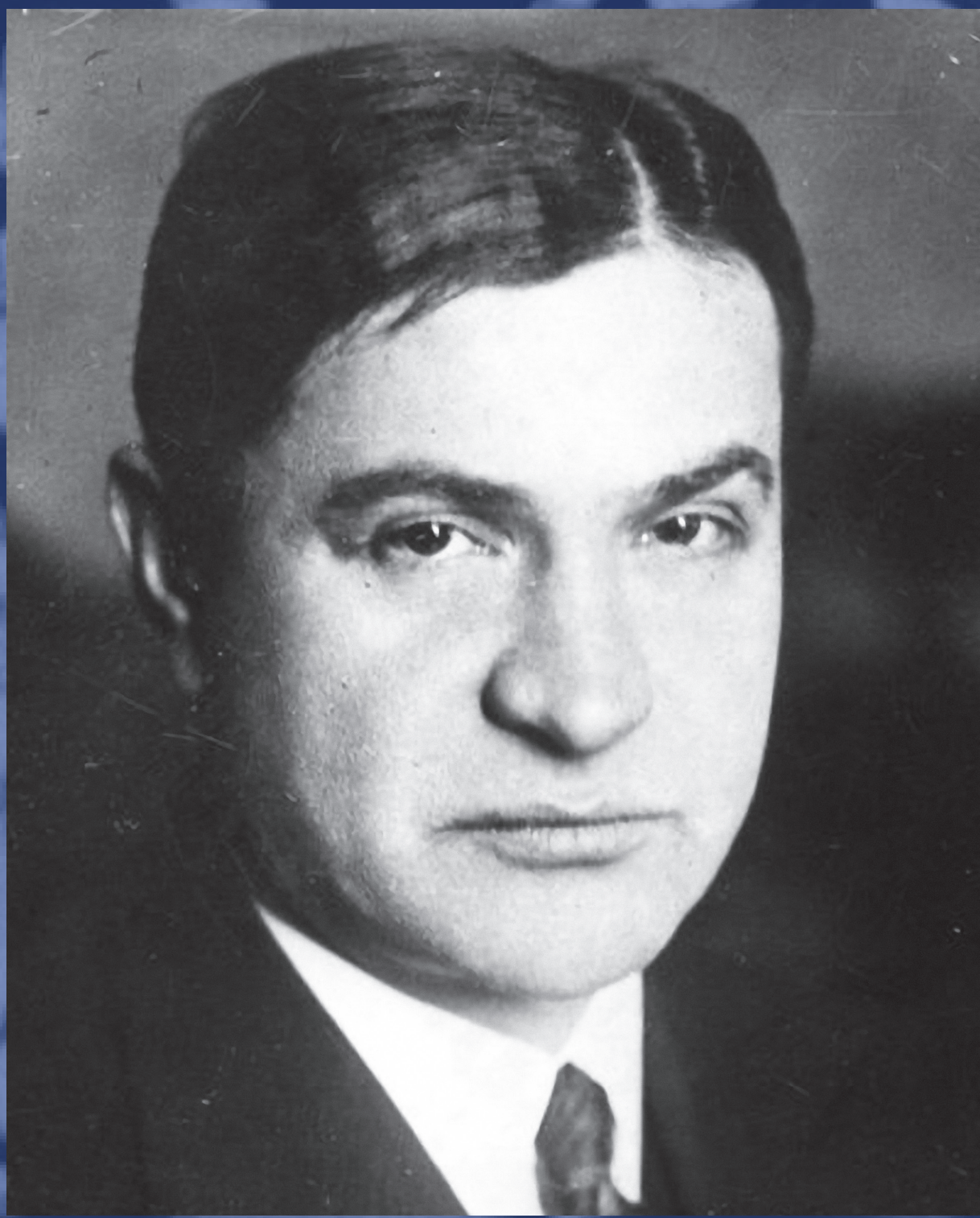
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In the picture: Former village

of Ostrówki.

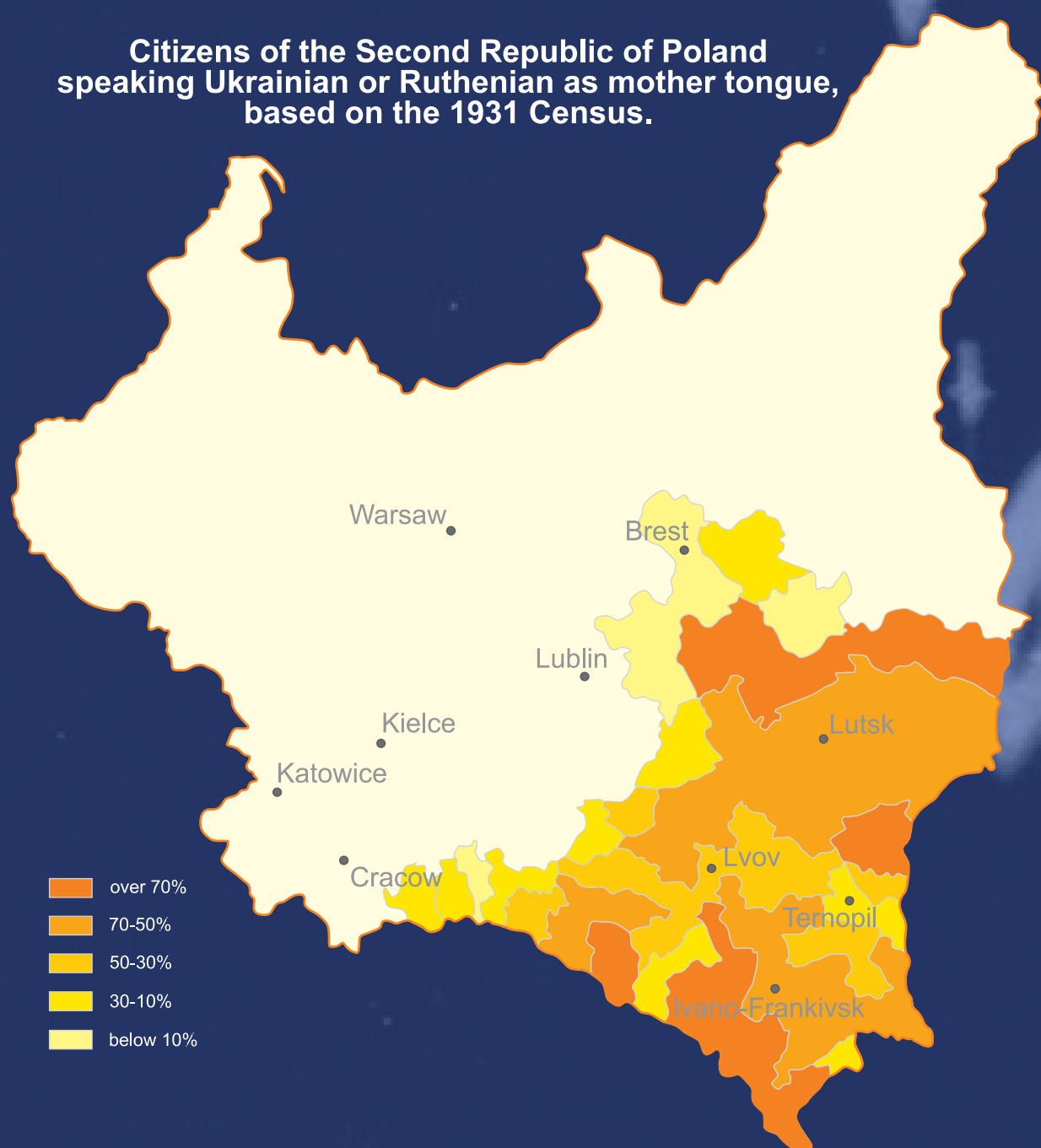
Photograph by M. Ślądka.



Bronisław Pieracki, Minister of Internal Affairs, advocate of a consensus with the Ukrainian population, killed by an OUN member in 1934. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

The Second Republic of Poland was a multi-national and multid denominational country. A significant percentage of its population was made up of Ukrainians, Jews, Belarussians, and Germans. The eastern part of the country was inhabited by a few million Ukrainians, who constituted 14–16 percent of Poland's entire population. In Volhynian and Ivano-Frankivsk Provinces the Ukrainians were a vast majority. The Polish state's ethnic policy ranged from national assimilation (Polonization) to civic assimilation (representatives of ethnic minorities were to become conscious citizens of Poland). Neither option prevailed for good. In September 1939 the Polish territory was seized and divided by two totalitarian super-powers: Germany and the USSR.

Citizens of the Second Republic of Poland speaking Ukrainian or Ruthenian as mother tongue, based on the 1931 Census.



Map by: Anna Łukasik.



Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish children from a multi-national class from the elementary school in Kisielin posing with a Catholic priest and an Orthodox one, 1938. Photograph from Leon Popek's collection.

SECOND REPUBLIC OF POLAND



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CONFLICT'S BACKGROUND

The Ukrainian pro-independence tendencies became a marked motivation for action during 1918–1920, when the Ukrainian political forces were trying to create an embryo of independent Ukraine. Depending on the circumstances, they fought against the reborn Polish state or allied with it against Bolshevik Russia. Due to geopolitical considerations the Ukrainians did not manage to establish their own state. That served as background for the Polish-Ukrainian conflict, which intensified during the following years. The Second Republic of Poland's flawed national policy contributed to the growth of the anti-Polish sentiments, but it was the ideology of Ukrainian integral (active) nationalism that was the main force behind the anti-Polish campaign.

The radical views promoted since the late 1920s by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) put the nation in the center as the highest good and envisaged acquisition of the Ukrainian state's territory by any means necessary.

The most radical nationalist faction was Stepan Bandera's OUN-B, from which comes the broad term Banderites.



The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) militants who attacked a post office in Gródek Jagielloński during their trial before the District Court in Lviv, December 1932. NAC.

The Soviet and then the German occupation of the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Republic of Poland led to repressions against the individual national groups. In 1941 the Germans set up Ukrainian auxiliary formations, for instance, sabotage units. Formed later, the auxiliary police had taken part in pogroms and mass executions of Jews since mid-1941. In early 1943 a few thousand armed deserters from those formations reinforced the Banderite detachments.



Women wearing Ukrainian folk costumes during a ceremonial farewell to volunteers to the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, 18 July 1943, Lvov. KARTA Center.



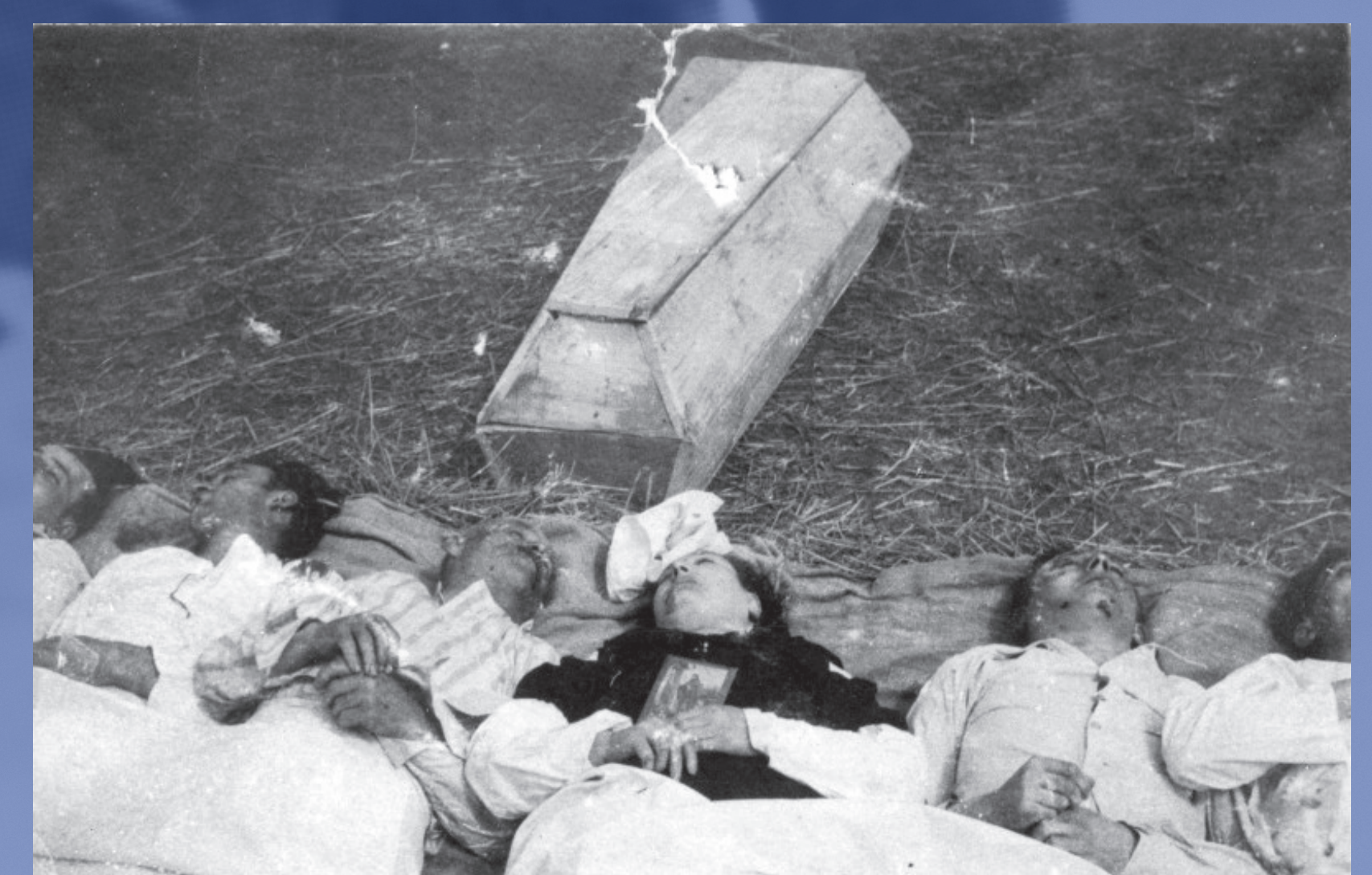
VOLHYNIA – THE BEGINNING

At the turn of 1942 and 1943, the OUN-B formed its first regular detachments, which began to use the name Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which was popular in Volhynia. On 9 February 1943 a detachment commanded by Hryhoriy Perehinyak 'Dovbeshka-Korobka' killed over 150 inhabitants of the Parośla Colony. This date is regarded as the beginning of the Volhynian Genocide.

Representatives of the OUN-B and UPA leadership in Volhynia, 1943. Photograph from the catalogue of the Poles-Ukrainians 1943–1945 exhibition, IPN.

■ ■ ■ *the commander came in looking very content, followed by a few bandits in their shirts. [...] He ordered us to lie face down and the bestial murder began. They hacked our heads with axes. The murderers were numerous because they were murdering us almost all of us at the same time. The murderers stayed in our home, feasting.*

**Witold Kołodyński, born in 1930,
witness of the first mass murder
in the Parośla Colony**



Czechs killed by the UPA, Cholepcze, 1943. Photograph from Leon Popek's collection.



Dwie mnie Matki-Ojczyzny wyuczyły mowy –
W warkocz krwisty plecionej jagodami ros –
Bym się sercem przełamał bólem w dwie połowy –
By serce rozdwojone płakało jak głos...

Zygmunt Jan Rumel's 1941 poem.

VOLHYNIA



In early July 1943 Zygmunt Rumel, an emissary of the Polish Underground State, went for negotiations to the local UPA headquarters. In a gesture of good will he set out unescorted, with only two companions. The three men were arrested and killed. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.



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The rectory in Kisielin today. Photograph by Magdalena Śladecka.



Włodzimierz Sławosz Dębski's painting depicting the massacre in Kisielin on 11 July 1943. Polihymnia Music Publishing Company.

In June 1943, Dmytro Klyachkivsky 'Klym-Samur', the OUN-B director for Polesie and Volhynia and one of those who led the genocide, transferred to UPA commanders the official order to exterminate Poles in western counties of Volhynia.

The apogee of the Volhynian genocide came on 11 July 1943, which is referred to as the Bloody Sunday. It affected mostly the localities in Volodymyr-Volynsky, Horokhiv, and Kovel counties. OUN-UPA members were aware that they would find the largest number of Poles in churches. The Sunday attacks were launched simultaneously on 99 localities, such as Poryck, Sądowa, Zagaje, or Kisielin. On 12 July the Ukrainians attacked another 50 Polish villages. The number of Poles killed in July alone amounts to at least 10,000.

The Orthodox priest is praying. And the people, mostly men, are all holding some objects: axes, knives, scythes, and pitchforks. [...] The Orthodox priest is praying. He then turns to those gathered and says: 'Ukraine! Pryjszoł czas twojej własti'. He instructs them in that way and at last he says: 'Bery kosu, bery nyż i na Lacha i ryż...'. That meant that they were to go and slaughter the Poles.

Anna Szumska, born in 1919

VOLHYNIA – APOGEE



The church in Poryck (nowadays Pavlivka) in the interwar period. Photograph from Leon Popek's collection.

Column fragments — the last remains of the church in Poryck. Photograph by Magdalena Śladecka.

●●● *destroy all Polish houses where Poles used to live (if Ukrainians currently live in these buildings, the constructions must be disassembled and substituted with dugouts); if this is not done, the houses shall be burned and the people who live there will have nowhere to spend the winter in. Consider yet again that should anything Polish remain, then the Poles shall lay claim to our lands.*

Fragments of the Volhynian OUN-B leadership's instruction concerning "liquidation of traces of Polishness," autumn 1943.



**VOLHYNIA
"SHOULD
ANYTHING POLISH
REMAIN..."**



The Jasiończak family from Wola Ostrowiecka; most of the individuals in the photograph were killed in 1943. Photograph from Leon Popek's collection.

A model Polish settlement built near the State Basalt Quarry, Janowa Dolina was burned down on 22 April 1943. Approximately 600 of its inhabitants were killed. NAC.



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Funeral of the Jaremowicz family killed by the UPA, Żeżawa (nowadays Zelenyi Hai), 11 November 1944. KARTA Center.

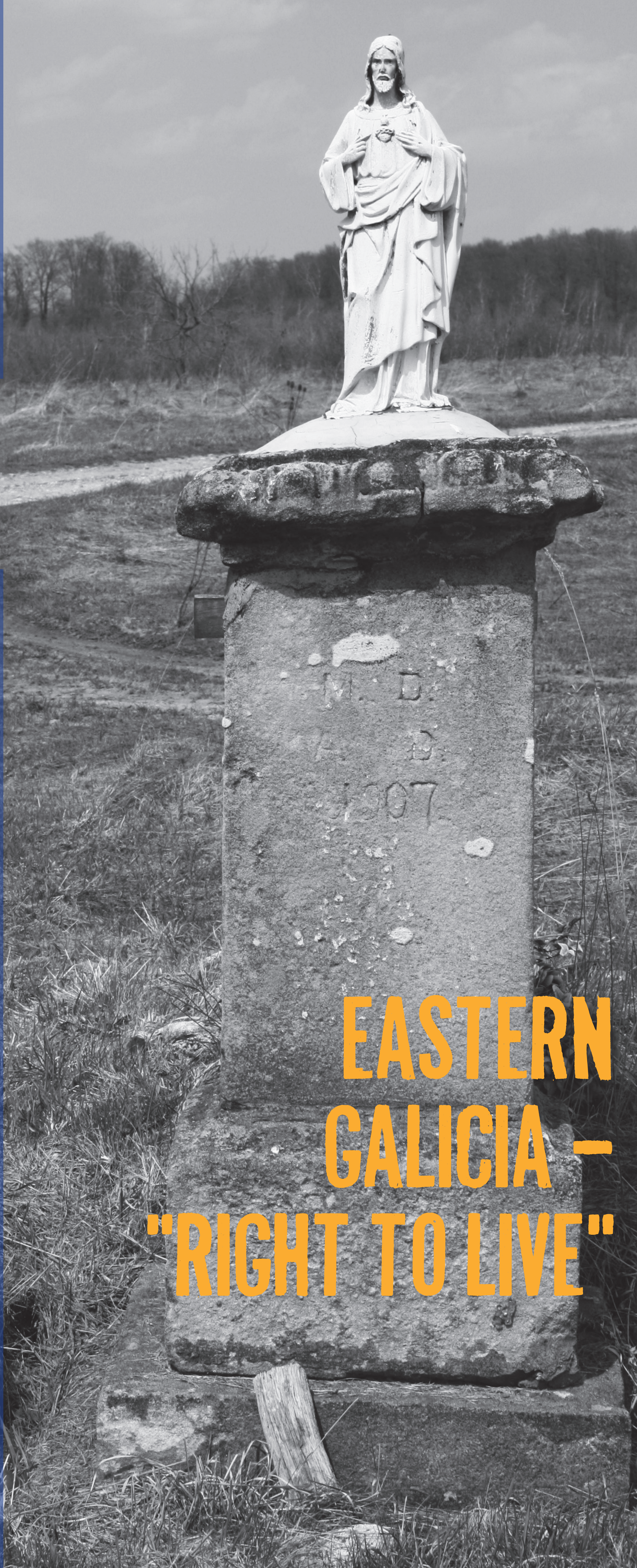
We should negotiate with Poles [...] when we become as powerful as they are. Only then are they going to respect our right to live.

Fragment of an article about Ukraine and Poland published in the summer of 1943 in the Banderite periodical *Ideja i Czyn*, penned by *Vasyl Mudryi*, a Ukrainian activist and the Deputy-Speaker of the Sejm (lower chamber of the Parliament) during 1935–1939.

Huta Pieniacka. Photograph by Magdalena Śladecka.



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**EASTERN
GALICIA –
"RIGHT TO LIVE"**

In March 1944 OUN-UPA groups began to move to the Lublin region, announcing that the eastern parts of that territory were ethnically Ukrainian. There had already been instances of mutual pacifications and attacks on those terrains. A few thousand Poles and Ukrainians, mostly civilians, perished in combat.



The village of Sahryń on fire after an attack mounted by Polish units, 10 March 1944. IPN.



A victim of a UNS (Ukrainian Self-Defense)–UPA attack on Tarnoszyn carried out on the night of 17–18 March 1944. Regional Museum in Tomaszów Lubelski.



Polish passengers of a train killed on 16 June 1944 by members of a UPA company near the village of Zatyle. IPN.

LUBLIN REGION



Member of the Chełm Ukrainian Self-Defense Legion, 1943. IPN.



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Initially, the Poles did not take the possibility of a mass extermination seriously. Consequently, a large number of them were taken by surprise by the attacking UPA members and their helpers. Many Poles found it difficult to abandon their entire life's work. They feared wandering in the war-stricken country, particularly that the axmen were rampant also on the roads. In most cases the German occupier remained passive, fortifying himself in larger localities. Consequently, the Poles acquired weapons in various ways and attempted to protect their major centers. Detachments of the Polish underground joined the defense efforts, including the 27th Volhynian Infantry Regiment of the Home Army and the Peasants' Battalions (Lublin region).

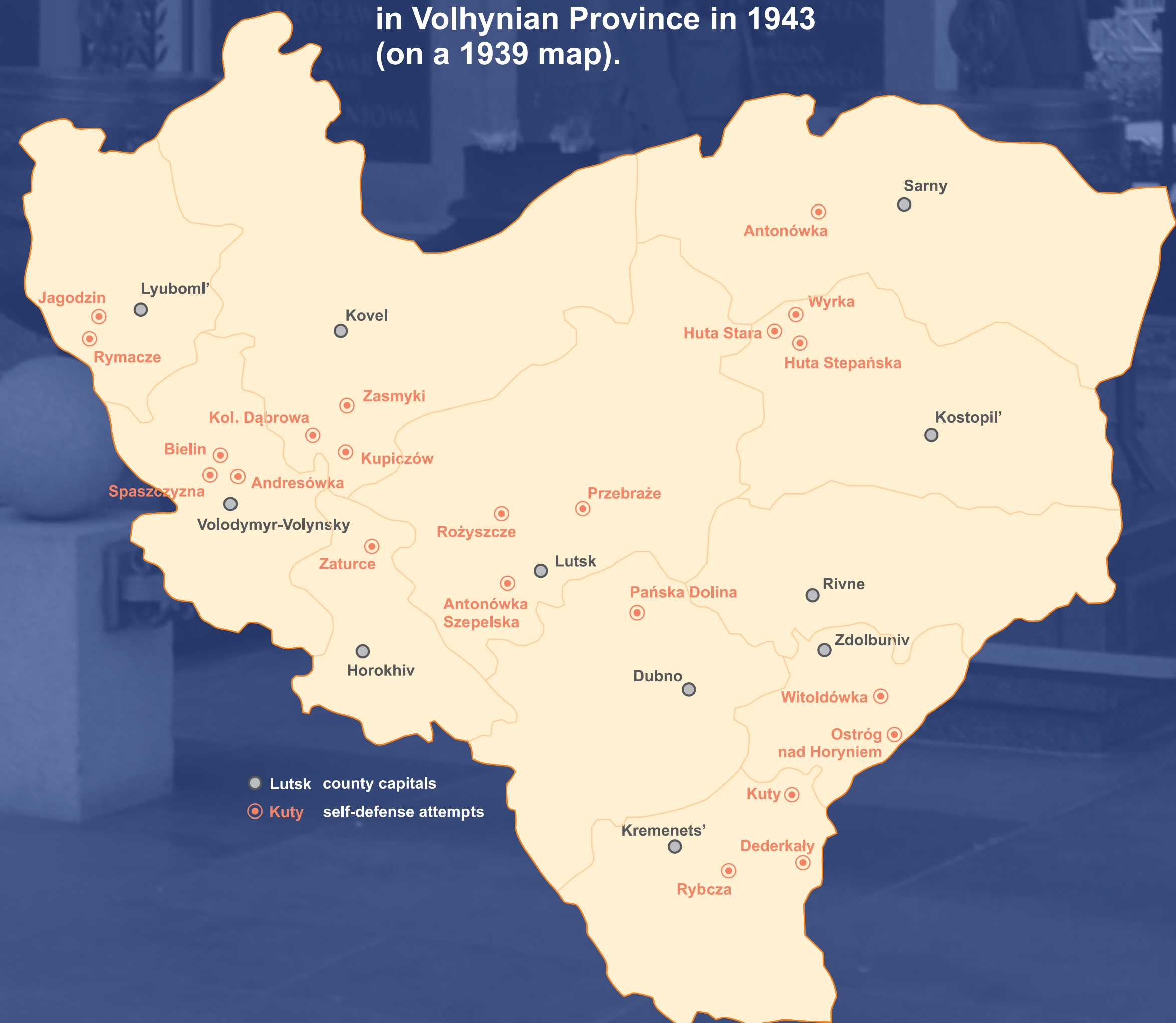
Unfortunately, the self-defense centers and partisan units were formed too late and were too weak to put an end to the massacres.



Detachment commanded by Władysław Kochański 'Bomba', which protected the Polish population of Volhynia from the UPA, vicinity of Huta Stepańska, 1943. KARTA Center.

The main bastion of the Polish resistance was Przebraże and the neighboring villages. Organized by a group of Polish activists led by Henryk Cybulski 'Harry', those localities sheltered 10,000–20,000 escapees and fought off 3 UPA attacks (including the largest one on 30 August 1943, when approx. 1,200–1,400 self-defense members and Soviet partisans faced 6,000 UPA and 6,000 axmen).

Self-defense centers in Volhynian Province in 1943 (on a 1939 map).



Of the approx. 130 Polish self-defense centers in Volhynia only a small number of the largest and best organized ones survived the 1943–1944 period. Map by Anna Łukasik.



DEFENSE ATTEMPTS

Mykhaylo Potockii from Arsenowicze. His father Ivan saved Franciszka Popek from Gaj from being killed by the UPA.
Photograph by Leon Popek.


Both shameful and heroic stances manifest themselves in the face of a direct threat of death. The Ukrainian Righteous risked their life warning their neighbors and family members of the planned massacres, sheltering the refugees, providing medicine and food to those in hiding, or bringing up the orphans.

The scale of that help is difficult to assess. Approximately 1,300 Ukrainians aided the Poles, saving a few thousand lives. A few hundred Ukrainian Righteous were killed as enemies of Ukrainian self-determination and ethnic purity. Failure to comply with an order to kill a member of one's family was also punished by death.

THE UKRAINIAN RIGHTEOUS



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The Poles who survived the pogroms often rejoiced at what under normal circumstances could not inspire their enthusiasm. Now, however, spotting a Soviet partisan or German soldier often heralded rescue. But a lot of the Poles who avoided death at the hands of the Ukrainians one day were deported on the next to perform forced labor in Germany. That fate befell some of the defenders of Huta Stepańska.

Massacre survivors, Przebraże, 1943. IPN.

In Kupiczów [...] there were quite many children of Polish survivors. We used to play on the sandy dirt roads. For instance, we would make small sand cemeteries and straw crosses. I still cannot understand why we did not build some sand houses, ponds, and streets. Why did we make those graves [...]?

Waldemar Michalski, born in 1938.

MEMORY

Monument in Pavlivka (formerly Poryck) unveiled in 2003 by Presidents of Poland and Ukraine. Photograph by Magdalena Śladecka.

The shared memory of those tragic events is not easy. Although historians increasingly often manage to agree on facts, it remains impossible to properly commemorate most of the victims.



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GENOCIDE

In **1943–1945 80,000–120,000 POLES WERE KILLED** within the framework of the OUN-B and UPA's anti-Polish campaign in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, and the Lublin region. The exact number of the victims remains very difficult to determine, but the historical knowledge about those tragic events increases with every passing year.

The villages where the Ukrainians lived next to their Polish neighbors for years, the neighborly farms, and the Polish-Ukrainian households ran with blood.

A SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND POLES WERE FORCED TO FLEE from the territories which they inhabited. **THE KILLINGS, RAPES, ROBBERIES, AND FIRES AFFECTED APPROX. 4,000 LOCALITIES. FROM A FEW TO ABOUT A DOZEN THOUSAND UKRAINIANS.** died as a result of the defensive and retaliatory actions.

A distinguishing feature of the anti-Polish campaign in Volhynia was the large number of civilian participants. Forced or incited by OUN activists and UPA members, the Ukrainian neighbors, family members, and also the rural poor did some of the killing. The terrified Poles called them killers (rezuni) or axmen, because the Ukrainians murdered the men, women, and children using farm hand tools.

Since 2017 on **11 JULY** Poland has celebrated the **NATIONAL DAY OF MEMORY ABOUT THE VICTIMS OF THE GENOCIDE CONDUCTED BY UKRAINIAN NATIONALISTS ON CITIZENS OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC OF POLAND**

The National Day of Memory is to serve as a reminder about the killed Poles, Jews, Armenians, Czechs, and representatives of other national minorities as well as about the Ukrainian Righteous who refused to partake in the killings and rescued the persecuted.

The remains of approx. 90 percent of the killed Poles still lay in mass graves without crosses.

