

A Slaughter of Jews in Ukraine

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Who perpetrated the Lviv pogrom of July 1941?

The day after the proclamation of Ukrainian nationalist leader Yaroslav Stetsko's state of Ukraine, on July 1, 1941, the [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists](#) (OUN) pasted posters around Lviv with Mykola Mikhnovsky's slogan, "Ukraine for Ukrainians," printed in white letters against a red background. On the same day in Lviv and in many other localities of Galicia and Volhynia, another poster appeared, authored by Ivan Klymiv sometime earlier; it instructed Ukrainians: "People! Know! Moscow, Poland, the Hungarians, the Jews are your enemies! Destroy them!" These posters issued a clear signal as to what non-Ukrainians in Lviv could expect. And under the conditions of Nazi occupation, the only non-Ukrainians who could be targeted with impunity were Jews.

But much more incendiary than any posters of the new nationalist state was the discovery of the hundreds of prisoners murdered in Lviv by the NKVD in the last days of Soviet rule. Emotions ran high—rage, outrage, grief. Some people went inside the prisons to look for missing relatives. Famously, Roman Shukhevych discovered his brother Yurii's body in a mass grave in the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street. When the corpses were exhumed and laid out in courtyards so that the public could search for relatives among the victims, a strong stench of rotting flesh permeated areas near the prisons. Photographs from the time show people with kerchiefs over their mouths and noses to blunt the stomach-churning smell. Isolated incidents of anti-Jewish violence escalated into the Lviv pogrom of July 1, 1941.

The word "pogrom" has a number of meanings. The term originated with the incidents of anti-Jewish violence that erupted in cities on Ukrainian territories within the Russian Empire in the early 1880s. These pogroms included much looting of Jewish businesses, beatings and rapes of Jews, and some murders. The pogroms of 1903-06 on the same territories were similar. But the pogroms in Ukraine of the civil war period, largely perpetrated by soldiers, were marked by great numbers of murders. Pogroms initiated by the Nazis, as when they seized Vienna in March 1938 and throughout the Reich in November 1938 (the November pogrom, often called Kristallnacht), primarily involved the destruction of Jewish property, the humiliation of Jews, and assaults, although there were also some murders.

The Lviv pogrom of 1941 combined many features of the preceding pogroms: There were beatings, sexual assaults and humiliations, murders by the urban crowd, shooting by soldiers, and ritual humiliations; Jewish apartments were robbed, but not their businesses, if we can speak of the businesses nationalized by the Soviets as in some sense still Jewish.

The main stages of the pogrom were three prisons in Lviv where bodies of the NKVD victims were exhumed, although anti-Jewish violence and humiliations also occurred in other areas of the city, particularly in the central town square (*rynok*), but also near the opera house and near the seat of the Greek Catholic metropolitan's residence, St. George's hill. Two of the prisons were close to largely Jewish neighborhoods: the Brygidky prison and the prison on Zamarstyniv street. As numerous Jewish survivors' accounts make clear, members of the Ukrainian National Militia entered

nearby apartment buildings and rounded up Jews, men and women, and took them to the prisons. The other prison, the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street (now a museum) was closer to the center of the city, outside the Jewish neighborhood. For this prison Jews were rounded up off the street by militiamen and volunteers from the urban crowd. They were marched with their hands up, sometimes on all fours, to the prison.

How did the pogrom start? It grew out of a general policy of the Wehrmacht to force Jews to do repairs and cleanup after war-related damage. German troops made Jews repair streets in Lviv that had been damaged by bombardment. Not infrequently, the impressment into labor was accompanied by physical harm or even death. On June 30, 1941, Czeslawa Budynska, her sister, and a neighbor girl were put to cleaning up battle sites in the city. The women were beaten and pushed as they carried out their tasks. Men were also drafted to the work, but according to Budynska, they were drowned later in the day.

When the Germans entered Lviv, they discovered many hundreds of corpses in the prisons, heaped up or hastily buried in mass graves. Someone had to exhume the bodies, and it was not surprising that the Germans assigned Jews to this task, a nasty one, since the bodies fell apart as they were retrieved and the stench was unbearable. Outside Lviv, too, Jews were routinely assigned to exhumation work in localities where NKVD victims were found. Thus Jews, whom both the Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists identified as carriers and beneficiaries of Bolshevism, were placed at the forefront of the NKVD crime, in a position that appeared to be punishment for their own criminal responsibility. Moreover, this was in a context in which Ukrainian public opinion was being influenced to regard the Jews as the main perpetrators of the refined tortures and mass killings that the numerous decomposing corpses indicated.

Impressing Jews into work at the prisons posed a problem: finding and assembling Jews. As Dieter Pohl correctly noted:

One should not underestimate the practical problems these SS men faced when they entered the Western Ukrainian towns. They did not know the population, the topography, and of course neither did they know the language. Thus, they were totally dependent on interpreters, local administrations or the militias that surfaced in June 1941.

In Lviv, it was the Ukrainian National Militia that rounded up the Jews and participated in the violence against them. There is a photo from the time showing a uniformed militiaman pulling the hair of a half-undressed woman at the gate to the prison on Zamarstyniv street. There is a film that shows a militiaman with his armband beating a Jew with a truncheon inside one of the Lviv prisons. Numerous survivor testimonies and memoirs describe the arrests and brutality of the militiamen. The militia rounded up many more Jews than could be put to use in the exhumation project. Jewish women were rounded up primarily for misogynist sport. The extra men just huddled in the courtyards of the prisons, trying to avoid additional assault.

Although the militia played a major role in the pogrom of July 1, it was not the only OUN contributor to the anti-Jewish violence on that day. Some part in the pogrom activities was also taken by a military unit in German service commanded by Shukhevych. This was the Nachtigall ("Nightengale") battalion, one of two battalions of what the nationalists called the Legion of Ukrainian Nationalists, although contemporaries also called it the Ukrainian Bandera legion. The place of Nachtigall in the pogrom has been confused by a campaign launched in 1959-60 by the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union aimed at taking down the government of Konrad Adenauer in the Federal Republic of Germany. Because Adenauer's Minister for Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Victims of War Theodor Oberländer had been a liaison with Nachtigall back in 1941, the East Germans and

Soviets tried to blame the Lviv pogrom entirely on the nationalist unit. Many manufactured testimonies were collected to prove the case, and although the evidence was flimsy, Oberländer was forced to resign from Adenauer's cabinet. In February 2008 the Security Service of Ukraine (the SBU) released a number of documents that showed how the KGB had concocted the evidence against Oberländer, leaving no doubt about the falsity of their accusations against Nachtigall.

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