

IN THE WALLS OF THE ZHITOMIR NKVD

by
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In 1937, the 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, there was a blood bath in Ukraine and all of the Soviet Union. The older people called it the year of "Blood on the Ice," as much of it happened in the winter months. In all of the villages and cities large numbers of "politically unreliable persons" were arrested, exiled and executed.

This horrific crime perpetrated on mankind did not bypass Zhitomir. In the latter part of 1937, Comrade Shatov, head of the Zhitomir NKVD Headquarters, received a large important-looking envelope from the Supreme Soviet office in Moscow. It was marked "Very Urgent" and "Top Secret." In it were orders from Stalin and Yeshov, head of the Secret Service, "to shoot 30,000 people and exile 150,000 people to concentration camps."

That same day, at seven o'clock in the evening, Shatov summoned a large contingency of NKVD officers to his plush office on Mikolayivskaya Street. After apprising the officers of the communication he had received from his commander, he ended with these words, "The fifth column is to be destroyed. Use any methods of interrogation in your investigation and court sessions to carry out Yeshov's orders."

The orders were put into motion immediately. The Cheka, arrested people day and night, in their homes, on the street and at work. "Barefooted, half naked, hungry and intimidated -- barely able to survive -- few people had the courage to speak out. Many were called to the local police station, where passports were confiscated and it was proposed that they voluntarily place their children in an orphanage and leave the city."

Leaders of the Bolshevik Party openly wrote about the atrocities that took place in the NKVD basements. "It was equal to a victory over a battle," they said. Within ten days, the Zhitomir prison, engineered to accommodate 1,200 persons, overflowed with 30,000 prisoners. Black-tinted trucks (so called Black Crows), delivered people to the prison. "Tens of loaded trucks were lined up at the prison, waiting their turn to enter. Poor, innocent people were also lined up, knee-deep in either mud or snow, without the right to raise their heads. All around was heard the shuffle of rifles, vulgar language of the soldiers and commands of the guards. Before people were thrown into a cell, their names were read out loud. Like a bottomless pit, the prison swallowed thousands and thousands of newly-arrived prisoners."



In due time, a black truck approached the NKVD facilities. "It was an iron truck, without windows, having four small compartments, isolated from each other. The security men circled the truck, removing the men, one after another, and taking them to the investigators office. The investigation process moved very quickly. The accused was given a pre-prepared protocol of accusation, with an order to sign it, without an opportunity to read it. If the advised procedure was not followed, the prisoners were tortured: teeth were knocked out, jaws were broken, fingers were clenched in door jams and needles were inserted under the fingernails. The result was that the frightened people agreed to sign anything that was put before them, even though they were innocent, just to avoid the tortures, which cannot even be compared with those in the time of the Inquisition." While they were in their cells, the prisoners were watched like hawks through a little peephole in the cell door. They dreaded the ominous footsteps at the end of a long, dark corridor that marked the beginning of the end.

But the most difficult experience was still before them. The imprisoned ones, whose fate had already been sealed, were brought into special cells in the dark cellar where the execution took place. Shortly thereafter, a large number of trucks arrived and hauled away the dead bodies. According to the newspaper account, "Two trucks appeared on Lot 15 on Lipski Street on September 8, 1937 and pulled up to a dug hole. Four images in white gowns appeared and began to throw the corpses into the hole until it was filled up. Similar night tours took place until the end of September. Each night three or four trucks showed up with the bodies of dead people. Beginning with October 16, every night from two until seven in the morning, another six to seven

trucks filled to capacity arrived.”

On one occasion the writer heard the barking of dogs, followed by the sound of truck engines in a couple of minutes. “Five-ton trucks with their lights on, loaded with corpses, approached a prepared hole on the front of Lot 15 of Lipski Street. Soon three other trucks brought additional corpses. In the moonlight night, I saw the silhouette of trucks driving on the rain-soaked ground. Checka officers, with spades in hand, circled the men with white gowns, helping them to get as close as possible to the holes. There were two men standing on each truck. They grabbed a corpse, one at the head and the other at the feet, and swung the body into the hole. When the task was finished, two other men got on the truck, took the tarpaulin from both sides and poured the human blood in the hole.”

One horrible night followed another until July 1938. A five- hectare field was turned into a cemetery for ten and a half months of those shot. A total of 406 trucks delivered approximately 12,000 bodies to the mass burial place

As far as those who were exiled, crowds of people were brought to the railway stations. There were bars on the small windows of the gray trains. In the process, hundreds of thousands of people were sent to concentration camps. The number of those exiled in the USSR surpassed 15 million.

This is a summary of an article entitled, In the Walls of the Zhitomir NKVD by D. Biloshitsiy, which originally appeared in the newspaper “Ukrainian Word” No. 7, dated August 24, 1941. It was summarized by Donald N. Miller.