

Institute of National Remembrance

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Completion of this year's exhumation works related to the victims of the Volhynia Massacre in Ostrówki and Wola Ostrowiecka







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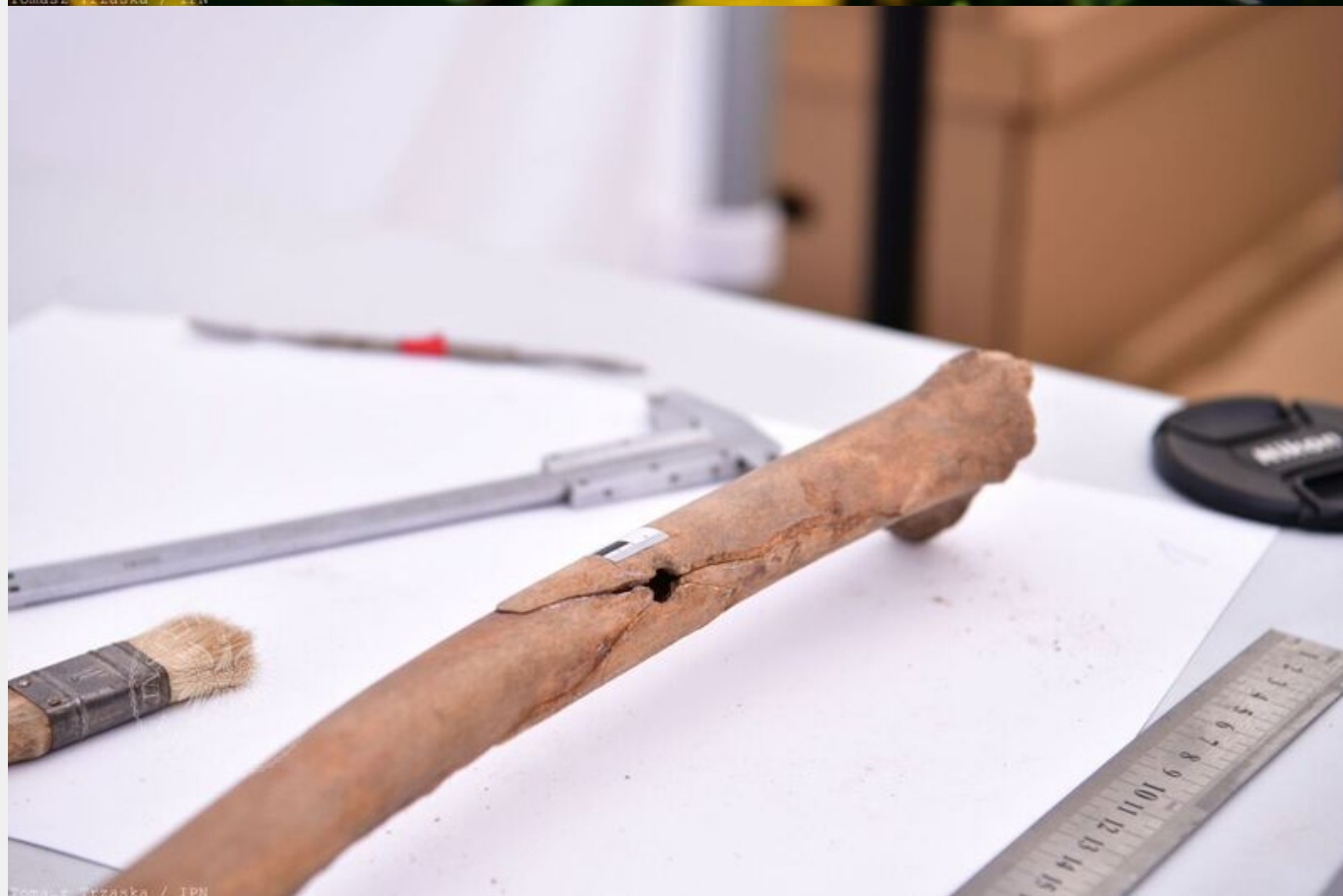
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From 13 July to 7 August this year, experts from the Institute of National Remembrance, in cooperation with the Ukrainian Volhynian Antiquities (Wołyńskie Starożytności) and a forensic medicine expert from the Medical University of Wrocław, with the participation of representatives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, carried out the exhumation of the victims of the Volhynia Massacre in the area of the former villages of Ostrówki and Wola Ostrowiecka in Volhynia. The burial sites were identified during search operations in April this year.

On 30 August 1943, Polish civilians living in both villages fell victim to the attack of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), carried out with the participation of the Ukrainian inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. The Poles were murdered and their homes pillaged, looted, and razed

to the ground. Today, the site is covered by forests and farmland.

An interdisciplinary team of specialists recovered the remains of 55 people (including 26 children), found and secured over 300 personal belongings. Search activities were also conducted in previously unexplored areas.

The results of the works are as follows:

- 1.The exhumation works were carried out at three locations, identified during the search operations in April: a mass grave at the former farm of Aleksander Strażyc in Wola Ostrowiecka, a death pit in Ostrówka near the former school, and a single grave in the vicinity of the Ostrówki cemetery.
- 2.In total, the remains of 55 people were exhumed, including 26 children. All the victims were recovered separately and subsequently examined by Polish and Ukrainian specialists.
- 3.At all locations, the victims had been buried in makeshift graves, without coffins.
- 4.Bone samples were recovered from the remains, in order to conduct the genetic testing.
- 5.The majority of the remains revealed signs of injuries, particularly on the victims' skulls. These injuries are consistent with descriptions of the methods used to kill during the August 1943 massacre, as well as with the results of the forensic medical examinations carried out during previous exhumation works in the area.

6. More than several dozen personal belongings (mainly devotional medals, crosses, and rosaries) and several hundred civilian clothing items (mainly buttons, buckles, clasps, belts, and shoes) were found next to the victims' remains.

7. As the burial sites of more than 300 people remain unknown, further search operations were conducted at additional locations in the so-called Trupie Pole ("Field of the Dead"). These searches did not reveal any further human remains.

Wola Ostrowiecka – the mass grave

The works were carried out at the former farm of Aleksander Strażyc – a place where the remains of 243 victims were recovered during exhumations in 1992. This year's search covered the area located just over a dozen metres from the first mass grave discovered in April this year.

The exhumation works resulted in the recovery of the remains of 48 individuals, including 24 children, 17 women, and 3 men. Due to the advanced state of skeletal decomposition, the determination of the sex of the remaining four victims was not possible during the preliminary examination. The vast majority of the children buried at the site were under the age of 12, with the youngest being barely a few months old.

The remains were found buried in multiple layers and in haphazard positions; this is corroborated by witness accounts stating that, following executions carried out in a barn, bodies were tossed

indiscriminately directly into nearby pits. Injuries to the back of the skull were observed on the majority of the recovered skeletons. These findings align with the recollections of survivors, who reported that victims were ordered to lie on the ground and were then killed using farm implements, including cattle-slaughtering hammers. The injuries documented during the examination are fully consistent with the results of forensic analyses performed on remains recovered from the site in 1992.

Numerous religious items were also found alongside the deceased, including small crosses, rosaries, Marian medals, and scapular medals bearing Polish inscriptions.

Ostrówki – the isolated forest grave

On the first day of the exhumation works, the remains of one victim (a woman, originally discovered during forestry work) were recovered. Their presence had been confirmed by the search conducted in April. The skeletal remains were incomplete and bore signs of disturbance, likely caused by the aforementioned forestry work.

Ostrówki – the mass grave

The mass grave in Ostrówki, located near the former school, revealed the remains of 6 people, including 2 children and 2 women. The victims had been buried face-down, laid side by side. The number of victims, as well as their age and gender, corresponds to one of the accounts

about the murder of the forester's family – along with other individuals – by Ukrainian nationalists.

The examination also revealed gunshot wounds, seen on – among other things – the victims' skulls and one femur.

To date, the Institute of National Remembrance has received only one permit to conduct exhumation works of the victims of the Volhynia Massacre.

Conclusion:

The remains of 55 victims were recovered during the exhumation works. Anthropological and medical forensic assessments confirm the presence of numerous injuries that are consistent with the accounts of executions carried out by Ukrainian nationalists against the Polish civilian population of the villages of Ostrówki and Wola Ostrowiecka, as well as with the findings of previous exhumations and forensic examinations. Bone samples were collected for DNA analysis, in order to provide genetical identification of the victims. According to a list of victims compiled by historians, ca. 300 individuals remain to be found.

Journalists from 21 news outlets, many of which were international (e.g. Wall Street Journal, Le Monde, Le Figaro, Deutsche Welle, ADR, Arte, Czech Radio, Czech TV), arrived at the site. Numerous live reports were broadcast, and experts working on-site gave dozens of interviews to Polish and foreign media (including Ukrainian outlets).

On 30 August 2026, the 83rd anniversary of the massacre, a funeral ceremony will be held for the victims whose remains were recovered. They will be laid to rest in the UPA victims' section of the cemetery in Ostrówki.

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