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# Population Losses in the Wola Area During the Warsaw Uprising 1944 A Review of Research and an Attempt at Balance

**Summary:** This article reviews the research of Stanisław Płoski and Ewa Śliwińska, Adam Borkiewicz, Hanns von Krannhals, Maria Turlejska, Antoni Przygoński, Joanna Hanson, Maja Motyl and Stanisław Rutkowski, Piotr Gursztyn, Norbert Bączyk and Grzegorz Jasiński and Hubert Kuberski, which indicates that there were between 10,000 and 57,600 victims of the Wola massacre. A comparative analysis of mass executions in Rumbula near Riga, Babyn Yar near Kyiv, and executions carried out as part of the 'Ertnefest' operation has shown that the German forces in Wola were sufficient to exterminate even up to approximately 60,000 people. It was also demonstrated that the Wola district covered the area west of Towarowa and Okopowa streets, composed of 14 statistical districts belonging to 7 police districts. The estimated population of Wola in the summer of 1944 was approximately 100,000 people – potential victims of mass executions. The above findings indicate the need to develop a new methodological proposal and conduct further research on the number of population losses in Wola in 1944.

**Keywords:** Warsaw Uprising of 1944, massacre of Wola, mass executions, population

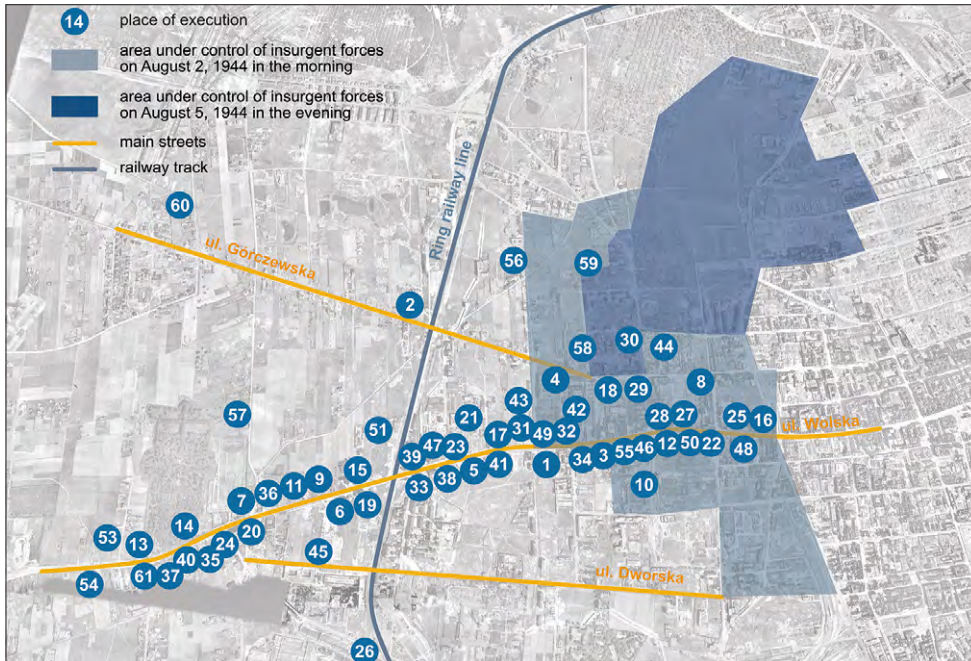
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I consider absurd the claim of the Polish side that on 5 August 1944, in the Wola district alone, 38,000 Poles were killed. I doubt whether Poles were able to provide the correct data on the losses in Warsaw at all. As far as I am aware, most of such data is based on estimates resulting from the comparison of the population numbers at the beginning and end of the uprising. (...) In fact, I would point out that under



the existing conditions, killing 38,000 people in one day seems to me even technically impossible. Besides, such an event could not be hidden from other services and would have been reflected in the sources I have analysed. Finally, according to my knowledge of conditions in Warsaw, it seems very doubtful whether there were 38,000 people living in Wola district at that time.

Hanns von Krannhals, 23 September 1958.<sup>1</sup>



1 – 6000, August 5; 2 – 4500, August 5–8; 3 – 4000, August 5–8; 4 – 2500, August 5–7; 5 – 2000, August 6; 6 – 2000, August 5; 7 – 1500, August 5; 8 – 1200, August 5; 9 – 1000, August 5; 10 – 1000, August 5; 11 – 700, August 5; 12 – 600, August 1–10; 13 – 500, August 5–8; 14 – 500, August 5; 15 – 500, August 5; 16 – 500, August 5–7; 17 – 500, August 5; 18 – 500, August 5; 19 – 500, August 5; 20 – 400, August 5–6; 21 – 400, August 5–17; 22 – 300, August 5; 23 – 100, August 5; 24 – 100, August 5; 25 – 100, August 1–10; 26 – 100, August 9–11; 27 – 100, August 5; 28 – 100, August 5; 29 – 100, August 5; 30 – 100, August 5; 31 – 100, August 3; 32 – 100, August 5; 33 – 100, August; 34 – 100, August; 35 – 65, August 5; 36 – 50, August 5; 37 – 50, August 5; 38 – 50, August; 39 – 50, August 4; 40 – 45, August 5; 41 – 40, August–September; 42 – 36, August 3; 43 – 30, August 5; 44 – 30, August; 45 – 23, August 5; 46 – 20, August 3–8; 47 – 20, August 2–9; 48 – 15, August 6; 49 – 15, August 5–7; 50 – 15, August 5; 51 – 11, August 5–6; 52 – 7, August 2; 53 – 6, August 1; 54 – 6, August 1; 55 – 5, August 3; 56 – 4, August 5–6; 57 – 2, August 6; 58 – 2, August 5; 59 – 1, August 5; 60 – unknown, August 1; 61 – unknown, August 6

**Fig. 1.** Executions of civilians in Wola during Warsaw Uprising in 1944 with estimated number of victims in each place of execution (source: Author's own work, based on: Motyl M., Rutkowski S. 1994)

<sup>1</sup> LASH, quote from: Marti P. 2016, 165.

In many respects, the author of this article does not share the position of the German historian Hanns Krannhals presented in the introduction to this paper and formulated 65 years ago, and is aware of the possible ethical objection to placing the aforementioned figure in the role of a kind of arbiter in matters of the mass murders committed against the Polish population by the German pacification forces during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Despite the above-mentioned reservations, in the author's opinion, the quoted excerpt very aptly captures the issue of the state of research on the number of victims of the 1944 Wola Massacre, both in relation to research conducted several decades ago and to that undertaken today. Krannhals points to three key issues regarding the study on the number of victims: first, the methodology of calculation, second, the technical feasibility of the execution of the assumed number of individuals, and third, the reference of the estimated number of victims to the number of inhabitants of Wola in that period. All of these issues, although at varying degrees for different periods, are reflected in the academic discussion that has been going on for almost eight decades.

In the first part of the paper, the author will carry out a review of research on the number of victims of the Wola massacre in 1944, taking into consideration the methodology adopted by individual researchers from the 1950s until the publications from the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second part of the paper will be dedicated to a comparative analysis of the ratio of the perpetrators' forces to the number of victims of the most numerous mass executions from World War II. The third part will present the current state of research on the area of Wola district in the pre-war period and the population of this area. The paper will conclude with a summary of findings in the above areas of research and a presentation of the most important conclusions and research proposals. The spatial distribution of the analysed events is illustrated in the attached map (see: Fig. 1).

### **Review of research**

At the beginning of this section, the author of this paper hastens to explain that he is aware of the vastness of source resource material and the abundance of literature on the 1944 Warsaw Uprising,<sup>2</sup> including the events in Wola<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the comments presented here should be read with the proviso that they concern only selected publications in this area of study. The criterion for their selection was the matter of presenting calculations made by their authors or – in the opinion of the author of this paper – their important contribution to the discussion regarding the number of victims of the 1944 Wola Massacre.

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2 Utracka K. 2018, 33–67.

3 Utracka K. 2020, 95–104; Jerzak M. 2017, 89–106.

The first publication presenting data on the number of victims of mass executions of residents of Wola is a list of places and numbers of victims of individual mass executions in Warsaw in the years 1939–1944 published and edited by Stanisław Płoski and Ewa Śliwińska on the basis of records containing witness accounts collected by the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (Polish: *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce*).<sup>4</sup> Although this publication does not provide the total number of victims for Wola from the period of the Warsaw Uprising, it contains data for 43 locations of mass executions from August and September 1944 in the Wola area.<sup>5</sup> In the case of 6 items on the list, the number of victims was determined to be unknown, and in 7 cases – probably according to witnesses – was described using unspecified numerals ‘several thousand’, ‘several hundred’, and ‘several dozen’. Based on dictionary definitions contemporary to the discussed events<sup>6</sup> as well as contemporary linguistic analyses,<sup>7</sup> we may legitimately assign specific ranges of numerical values to the above-mentioned expressions, i.e., ‘several thousand’ = 2–10 thousand, ‘several hundred’ = 200–900, and ‘several dozen’ = 20–99. Given the average values of the indicated numerical ranges, i.e., respectively 2,000–10,000 = mean value of 6,000, 200–900 = mean value of 550, 20–99 = mean value of 60, it will be correct to use the average values adopted by Maja Motyl and Stanisław Rutkowski, i.e., respectively: several thousand = 5,000, several hundred = 500, and several dozen = 50.<sup>8</sup> After recalculating the number of victims according to the assumptions presented above, we obtain a figure of around 24,450 victims from 36 execution sites and an unknown number of victims from 6 execution sites.

In 1957, in the wave of the 1956 political thaw, the first monograph on the Warsaw Uprising, written by Adam Borkiewicz,<sup>9</sup> was published. It estimated the number of victims of the Wola Massacre as ‘over 38,000’.<sup>10</sup> Adam Borkiewicz was the first author to name a certain number of victims of the events that took place in Wola in August 1944 but unfortunately, he did not provide any specific sources or methodology used by him to calculate the number of the assumed victims. We can only assume that the basis for his assessment could have been the archival resources of the former Home Army Headquarters, to which Borkiewicz had access during the period of work at the Institute of National Remembrance between 1946 and 1949, before they were confiscated by the organs of the communist terror apparatus.<sup>11</sup>

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4 Płoski S., Śliwińska E. 1951, 81–97.

5 For the determination of the Wola area, see part 3.

6 Szober S. 1948, 131, 312.

7 Duszkin M. 2010, 13, 18, 41 *et seq.*

8 Motyl M., Rutkowski S. 1994, 11.

9 Borkiewicz A. 2018.

10 Borkiewicz A. 2018, 287.

11 *Adam Józef Borkiewicz...*

In 1960, the third volume of Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski's *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864–1945* was published in London, which described the events in Wola in 1944 as a 'monstrous slaughter of the population'. Pobóg-Malinowski, writing in exile, did not provide his own estimate of the number of victims in Wola in 1944, but referred to the number of 38,000 victims provided by Adam Borkiewicz, noting that these calculations may have been 'slightly overestimated'.<sup>12</sup>

Two years later, the first monograph of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising in German was published by Hanns von Krannhals in western Germany.<sup>13</sup> The author, who was involved in the post-war trials of Nazi dignitaries and who was aware of the state of research at the time, argued on various issues with the findings of Polish researchers, including the figure of 38,000 victims of the Wola Massacre indicated by Adam Borkiewicz.<sup>14</sup> Krannhals refers to Pobóg-Malinowski's scepticism with regard to the number of 38,000 Polish victims in Wola and, as an objection, named the failure to indicate sources constituting the basis for calculating this number. The German historian reduces the number of victims of the Wola Massacre to 'over 15,000' but also does not indicate any specific sources on which he based his estimates.<sup>15</sup> The only element of the revealed methodology of Krannhals' estimation is the reference of the number of victims of the Wola Massacre compared to the total number of victims of the Warsaw Uprising. The German author assumes that war crimes committed by the pacification forces of the Third Reich in Wola accounted for 10% of the total number of civilians murdered in August and September 1944, accepted to be 150,000 based on the data given by Polish researchers.<sup>16</sup> However, Hans von Krannhals does not give justification for the reason why the figure of 15,000 he adopted in his work and the percentage of 10% of the total number of victims in Warsaw is more appropriate than the figure of 38,000 estimated by Borkiewicz, giving a percentage of 25% of the total number of victims.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the magazine "Polityka" published an article by Maria Turlejska presenting excerpts from 2 reports from August 1944 prepared by Hauptsturmführer Adolf Feucht, the first commander of Einsatzkommando in Wola.<sup>17</sup> In this article, Turlejska analyses a fragment of the report from 11 August 1944, which says that 450 executions were carried out (German: *Erschiesungen*) in the period from 6 to 10 August 1944. She points out that the figure refers to

12 Pobóg-Malinowski W. 1960, 679.

13 Krannhals von H. 1962.

14 It should be noted that Krannhals' polemic with the position of Polish researchers regarding the number of victims of the Wola Massacre in 1944, presented in his book from 1962, has been significantly mitigated against the criticism presented in the testimony given before the prosecutor's office in Flensburg in 1958, a fragment of which was presented at the beginning of this paper.

15 Krannhals von H. 1962, 307–308.

16 Krannhals von H. 1962, 214.

17 Turlejska M. 1974, 27. See: Dunin-Wąsowicz K. 1988, 35.

‘450 executions’<sup>18</sup> and not to ‘450 executed’.<sup>19</sup> The author’s interpretation is supported by the fact that the term is applied in this sense today to the events in question.<sup>20</sup> On the basis of the number of 450 executions, Turlejska estimates the number of victims of the Wola Massacre in 1944 as ‘around 20,000 people’. She based the above estimate on the product of the number of 450 shootings and the number of victims of individual shootings ranging from 20 to over 500 people. However, she does not indicate the average number of victims of individual executions she adopts for her calculations or where she draws information in this respect.

Six years later, Antoni Przygoński published a new monograph on the Warsaw Uprising of 1944,<sup>21</sup> in which he described the number of victims of the Wola Massacre as 59,400 people murdered in mass executions, for a total of more than 65,000 people when counted together with other victims.<sup>22</sup> This estimate of the amount of population losses was calculated on the basis of separate estimates of the number of victims of individual mass executions on 5–7 August 1944, amounting, according to Przygoński, respectively, to 45,500 people, 10,100 people, and 3,800 people per day. It should be noted that according to the data provided by Antoni Przygoński, in the case of 1,800 people, mass executions took place in places located to the east of Towarowa Street – and thus in the area of the Northern Śródmieście. This way, the number of victims of the Wola Massacre should be reduced to 57,600. Przygoński drew the above-mentioned number of victims for the period of 5–7 August 1944 from three sources: the already mentioned article by Płoski and Śliwińska from 1951,<sup>23</sup> the publication of the Civic Committee for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites in the city of Warsaw (Polish: Obywatelski Komitet Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa w M. St. Warszawie) from 1966,<sup>24</sup> and the publication of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (Polish: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa) of the same year.<sup>25</sup> These publications are not only completely devoid of references to specific sources but also for some locations give only approximate data while in other cases they give different, divergent figures. Unfortunately, Antoni Przygoński did not address the issue of the

18 This term was interpreted in the same manner by a team of translators and editors of the source edition published under the supervision of Emilia Borecka. See: Borecka E. et al. (eds) 1994, 42–42. In this sense, they are also quoted by Piotr Gursztyn. See: Gursztyn P. 2015, 223.

19 Norbert Bączyk and Grzegorz Jasiński present this position stating that 450 people were shot. However, the authors do not refer to the views of Maria Turlejska, Emilia Borecka, and Piotr Gursztyn on this issue. See: Bączyk N., Jasiński G. 2020, 52, footnote 37.

20 The announcement of the German administration in Lublin of 21 April 1944 uses the following phrase: ‘despite public warnings and threats to shoot people (German: Erschiessung von Personen)’. See: USHMM.

21 Przygoński A. 1988.

22 Przygoński A. 1988, 320. In footnote 146 on page 320, the author refers to key publications for the state of research on the number of victims of the 1944 Wola Massacre.

23 Płoski S., Śliwińska E. 1951.

24 Kur T. (ed.) 1966.

25 *Przewodnik* 1966.

reliability of the data sources he used in his work, nor did he indicate the methodology he applied when converting them into specific numbers mentioned in his book. Furthermore, to the aforementioned numbers of victims of 5–7 August 1944, he adds over 5,000 more victims of individual executions, bombings, fires, etc. between 4 and 15 August 1944, but without indicating the basis or method of making such estimates.<sup>26</sup>

In 1989, a book by the British historian Joanna K.M. Hanson on the fate of civilians in the Warsaw Uprising was published in Poland<sup>27</sup> which described the number of victims of the Wola Massacre as ‘between 30 and 40 thousand’.<sup>28</sup> In her book, the author draws attention to the low probability of finding sources containing reliable information giving directly the total amount of population losses in Wola in 1944, as well as the expected incompleteness of the preserved accounts and testimonies of witnesses in relation to all events that took place at that time, as a result of the fact that in the case of some of the executions there were no surviving witnesses. Despite these reservations, the author presents her own calculations based on figures from witnesses’ testimonies. Hanson estimates that the total number of victims of mass executions to be ‘as high as 30,000’, which, together with several thousand victims of other shootings and fires, in her opinion adds up to a figure ‘ranging from 30 to 40 thousand’. However, the author does not indicate the specific collections of accounts on which she bases her calculations, nor the basis for estimating the number of victims as several thousand apart from mass executions.<sup>29</sup>

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the work of Maja Motyl and Stanisław Rutkowski was published in which the authors presented, in alphabetical order, a list of addresses, places of mass and individual executions of civilians during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Although the authors did not summarise the number of victims in the Wola area, after extracting data for 176 locations located in Wola and calculating the approximate data,<sup>30</sup> we reach the number of approximately 40,000 victims and 9 other locations for which the analysed sources did not provide even an approximate number of victims. Among the literature published to date, Motyl and Rutkowski’s publication stands out due to the extensive archival search in the resources kept by the contemporary Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Polish: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu) and numerous

26 Przygoński A. 1988, 290–320.

27 Hanson J.K.M. 2004. Originally published in English in 1982, see: Hanson J.K.M. 1982.

28 Hanson J.K.M. 2004, 48.

29 Hanson J.K.M. 2004, 47–48. The author quotes numerical findings from selected publications on the state of research at the time on the number of victims of the 1944 Wola Massacre.

30 Motyl M., Rutkowski S. 1994, 13. According to the methodology proposed by the authors, the following method was used to convert unspecified numbers into numerical values: ‘several’ = 5, ‘dozen’ = 15, ‘tens’ = 50, ‘hundreds’ = 500, ‘several thousand’ = 5,000. See: the remarks in the third paragraph of part 1 of this paper.

court archives. In terms of the list of locations where events took place, this is in fact the first publication of a strictly scientific nature, indicating the source basis for each of the presented locations. Although Maja Motyl and Stanisław Rutkowski did not carry out a detailed analysis of the collected source information, they provided subsequent researchers with valuable material for further studies.<sup>31</sup>

On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the first synthesis of the history of the 1944 Wola Massacre was published by Piotr Gursztyn. Based on a wide range of researched materials and written in an accessible manner, it has significantly contributed to the popularisation of the history of these tragic events among a wide audience, competently presenting a broad spectrum of research issues.<sup>32</sup> Piotr Gursztyn refers to the existing differences between researchers' positions on the number of victims of the 1944 Wola Massacre. Gursztyn rejects the figure of 15,000, arguing that its author Hanns von Krannhals is not very reliable, and at the same time points to the work of Antoni Przygoński as the most plausible calculation, despite the fact that it is partly based on the accounts of people who were not direct witnesses to the events. In Piotr Gursztyn's opinion, the number of 59 thousand victims given by Przygoński 'should be slightly reduced', but he expresses doubts about the possibility of finding a more precise method of calculation.<sup>33</sup>

In 2020, a book by Norbert Bączyk and Grzegorz Jasiński dedicated to German special weapons used to suppress the Warsaw Uprising was published. Its authors consider the previous estimates of the number of victims of the Wola Massacre to be 'significantly overestimated' and, based on Reinefarth's testimony, are inclined to accept a figure of 'over 10,000 people', supporting the proposed estimates with the fact that 'Wola during the war was inhabited by 30 thousand people'. However, they do not provide the source on which they base this claim, nor do they specify the area of which administrative units they consider to belong to the Wola district during this period. In addition, the authors – taking the calculations given by Bączyk and Jasiński literally – state that a significant part (20,000 people) of the inhabitants of the area in question 'hearing about the murders fled to Śródmieście' or 'to the countryside'. In this respect, the authors also failed to indicate the source basis or methodology they adopted in their calculations.<sup>34</sup>

In 2021, Hubert Kuberski published an article presenting the participation of Dirlwanger's unit in the mass executions of Wola's population in August 1944, in which the number of victims of the Wola Massacre was estimated to be about

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31 The data from the study of Maja Motyl and Stanisław Rutkowski served for the author of this to visualise the spatial distribution of the analysed events. See: Fig. 1.

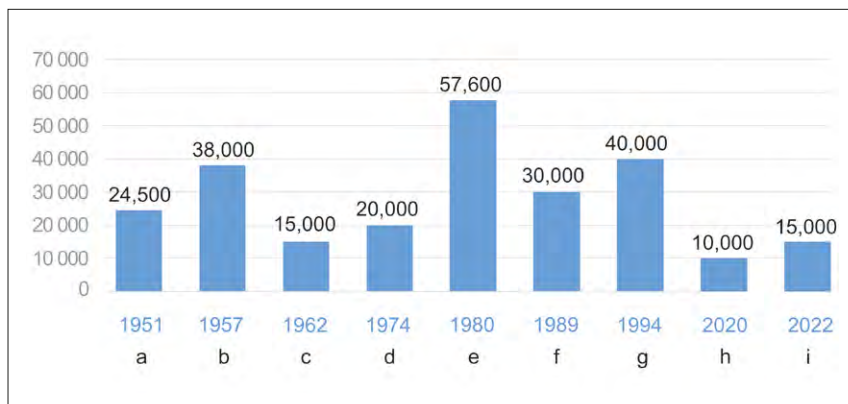
32 Gursztyn P. 2015.

33 Gursztyn P. 2015, 305–306.

34 Bączyk N., Jasiński G. 2020, 52, including footnote 37.



15 thousand people. Kuberski relied on calculations compiled by Marek Strok based on an extensive source search, but did not explain the methodology adopted by the author he quoted.<sup>35</sup>



a – Płoski S., Śliwińska E. 1951; b – Borkiewicz A. 1957; c – Krannhals von H. 1962; d – Turlejska M. 1974; e – Przygoński A. 1988; f – Hanson J.K.M. 1989; g – Motyl M., Rutkowski S. 1994; h – Bączyk N., Jasiński G. 2020; i – Kuberski H. 2022

**Chart 1.** The estimated number of population losses in the Wola district during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 (source: Author's own work)

In view of the presented discrepancies (see: Chart 1), in the opinion of the author of this paper, it seems reasonable to analyse the question of the 'technical feasibility' in terms of the postulated numerical estimates and to clarify the understanding of the territorial extent of Wola, as well as to estimate the population of the area in the period before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. These issues are presented in the next part of this paper.

### **'Technical feasibility' of the execution of the assumed number of victims and the number of German forces**

It is not determined in numbers. To this day, it is not known exactly which troops carried out the shootings. I don't believe in 35,000, because it was even technically impossible, there weren't enough people on our side, and after all, they were fighting there and these people were not waiting, they would have had to be captured.

Heinz Reinefarth, Sylt Island, winter 1973.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Kuberski H. 2021, 173–174.

<sup>36</sup> Kąkolewski K. 1975, 98–99.

The above-quoted declaration by the commander of the group of German pacification forces responsible for the war crimes committed against the inhabitants of Wola in August 1944 details the issue of the ‘technical feasibility’ of the extermination of the postulated number of victims raised by Hanns von Krannhals in the statement cited at the beginning of this paper. Leaving aside the analysis of SS-Gruppenführer Reinefarth’s attempts to relativise the scale of the perpetrated crime and thus reduce his personal responsibility in this regard, it is worth focusing on the issue raised here concerning the purported inadequacy of the German forces to carry out the execution of 35,000 victims in 2 days.<sup>37</sup> When considering this issue, it is worth conducting a comparative analysis of other mass executions of civilians carried out by the German occupation forces in Central and Eastern Europe during World War II.

On 29–30 September 1941, in Babyn Yar near Kyiv, German forces carried out mass executions of the Jewish population deported from Kyiv. The direct executors were members of a group of about 50 men from Sonderkommando 4a together with part of the Einsatzgruppe C staff. About 1,500 policemen and SS men from the Police Regiment South consisting of Police Battalions 45,303, and probably 314 were responsible for ensuring the security of the execution site and the deportation route.<sup>38</sup> According to the official report on the activities of Einsatzkommando in the USSR, which Reinhard Heydrich handed over to Joachim Ribbentrop on 25 November 1941, the number of victims was 33,771 individuals.<sup>39</sup>

On 30 November and 8 December 1941, German forces exterminated Jews from the ghetto in Riga, deporting and murdering about 25,000 people in the nearby village of Rumbula. The German forces involved in this action consisted of about 70 members of the Sonderkommando and Einsatzkommando 2, from among whom a squad of a dozen or so men were selected to carry out the executions directly. There were also about 1,700 German and Latvian policemen securing the execution area and the deportation route and separating the remaining 4,500 Jews into the ghetto.<sup>40</sup>

In turn, as part of the operation ‘Ertnefest’, on 3–4 November 1943 the German occupation forces exterminated Jewish prisoners from the main camp in Majdanek and its sub-camps in Lublin, Poniatowa, and Trawniki. In this case, the number of victims is estimated at about 42 thousand people.<sup>41</sup> The German forces participating in the mass executions included about 100 SS men and policemen directly carrying out the shootings and 500 members of the 101<sup>st</sup> Reserve Police Battalion securing the camp

37 Reinefarth’s statement quoted in this paper was made in response to Krzysztof Kąkolewski’s question about 35 thousand victims executed on 5–6 August 1944. See: Kąkolewski K. 1975, 98.

38 Berkhoff K. et al. (eds) 2018, 63; *The Order Police...; Mass shootings...*

39 DHM, 18.

40 Gładysiak Ł. 2012, 131–138.

41 *Operation ‘Harvest Festival’...*

grounds and deportation routes. The total number of SS and police forces in Lublin and the surrounding area at that time amounted to about 2 thousand people.<sup>42</sup>



**Chart 2.** Comparison of selected mass executions in Central and Eastern Europe during World War II (source: Author's own work)

The examples cited above (see: Chart 2) prove that, with the involvement of groups of direct executors of 50 to 100 people and the support of a security force of 1,500 to 2,000 people, it was technically feasible to exterminate between 25,000 and 42,000 people in 2 days.

It should be noted that the number of German pacification forces operating in Wola in the first days of August in 1944 was respectively 1,000 people on 4 August and 2,297 people on 5 August, on 6 August these forces were further strengthened by additional several hundred people, and on 8 August they numbered 2,640 people.<sup>43</sup> Hubert Kuberski believes that the forces directly involved in the mass executions on 5 August numbered 497 people.<sup>44</sup> Although in order to finally determine this question a detailed research of the extremely extensive archival resources will have to be carried out, there are some premises indicating that other German units were also involved in the war crimes in Wola.<sup>45</sup> In summary, it should be stated that between 2,297 and 2,640 German

<sup>42</sup> Browning C.R. 2001, 142; Chmielewski J.

<sup>43</sup> Kuberski H. 2021, 144. On 6 August 1944, German troops were joined by the second battalion of the Dirlewanger Brigade and the 6 companies of field gendarmerie and battalion from 608<sup>th</sup> security regiment kept in reserve. See: Krannhals von H. 1962, document no. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Kuberski H. 2021, 144, footnote 15.

<sup>45</sup> The Peterburs battalion of 497 people and Col. Schmidt's battalion of the 608<sup>th</sup> security regiment with up to 618 people (as of 20 August, See: Krannhals von H. 1962, document no. 40). See: Gursztyn P. 2015, 354–355; Mierecki P., Christoforow W. (eds) 2007, 685. Hubert Kuberski presented

forces were operating in the Wola area on 5–8 August 1944, of whom at least 500 were directly involved in the extermination of the civilian population.

Being aware of the differences in the conditions in which mass executions were carried out in specific places,<sup>46</sup> it can be stated that in comparison with the German forces from Kyiv, Riga, and Lublin numbering 1,500–2,000 people who executed 25,000–42,000 civilians in 2 days, the German pacification forces in Wola in the period 5–8 August 1944 numbering 2,297–2,640 people were more than 25% more numerous and had at least twice as much time at their disposal, and thus the thesis that it was not ‘technically feasible’ to execute 35,000 or even 65,000 individuals should be considered unjustified. An important element of the analysis of the possible amount of population losses in Wola district in Warsaw is the question of the number of inhabitants of this district on the eve of the discussed tragic events. Thus, the next part of this paper is dedicated to this issue.

### **The area of Wola district and its population at the beginning of August 1944**

In the past, until 1945, Wola, in accordance with the administrative organisation of previous years, was defined as the area between Towarowa and Okopowa streets from the east and Budziszzyńska and Bodzanta streets, the western border of the Wolski Cemetery, Olbrachta and Księcia Janusza streets from the west, stretching from the cross-city railway line in the south to the Tatarska and Powązkowska Streets in the north.

Karol Mórąwski, 1994<sup>47</sup>

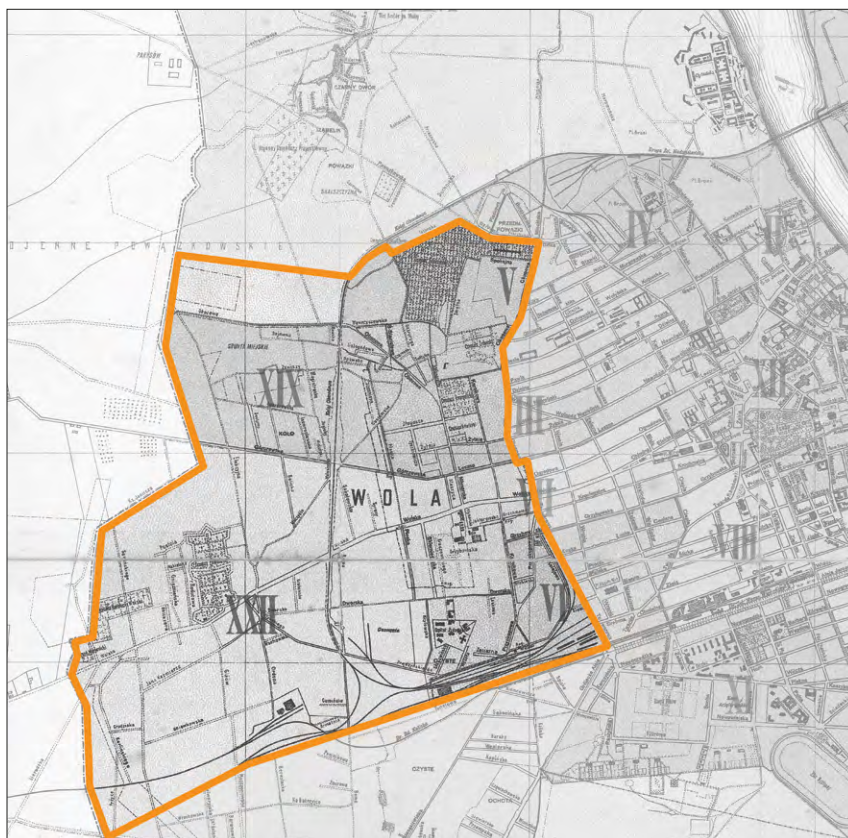
This fragment of the study by Karol Mórąwski, a Varsavianist and long-time director of the Wola Museum, does not claim to exhaust all complex issues related to the history of the village of Wielka Wola and the later Warsaw district of Wola, but only serves to answer the question of its area in the period preceding the outbreak of

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a hypothesis that 2.5 of the Schutzpolizei companies in the number of 341 people and 1 Gendarmerie company in the number of 155 people may be the same as the 497 people of the Peterburs battalion, but apart from the convergence of numbers, Kuberski does not provide any additional arguments in support of this thesis. See: Kuberski H. 2021, 144, footnote 15.

<sup>46</sup> The question of determining the impact of individual elements on the possible number of victims of mass executions requires a separate study, but it should be noted that some of the conditions prevailing in Wola in the first days of August 1944 certainly favoured an increase in the number of victims. These were, among others, the greater number of hours of daylight, making it more difficult for the victims to hide, the lack of necessity to separate the victims from the rest of the population, the lack of necessity to transport the victims to the place of execution due to the fact that executions were carried out in the victims’ place of residence or in the immediate vicinity, the dispersed nature of the buildings, especially in the western part of this district, making it easier to surround the houses and making it more difficult for people to hide and escape, etc.

<sup>47</sup> Mórąwski K. 1994, 9–10.



**Fig. 2.** The boundaries of Wola district projected on the plan of the Capital City of Warsaw from 1919 showing the division into State Police commissariats (source: BN 1919)

the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. The indicated course of the eastern boundary of the area of Wola, along Towarowa and Okopowa streets, corresponds to the location of Lubomirski's trenches that marked in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the boundary between Warsaw and its western suburbs,<sup>48</sup> constituting in the pre-war period the demarcation of Wola, located to the west, and Śródmieście Północne (northern city centre district), located to the east of this line.<sup>49</sup> A visible indicator of this division were the former Rogatki Wolskie (Wola Tollhouses), located at the intersection of Towarowa and Chłodna streets, historically associated with the Śródmieście district<sup>50</sup> and Wolska Street (belonging to Wola). The territorial scope of the Wola district outlined above

48 Tyszkiewicz J. 2000, 8.

49 Móravski K. 1994, 10.

50 Gursztyn P. 2015, 305.

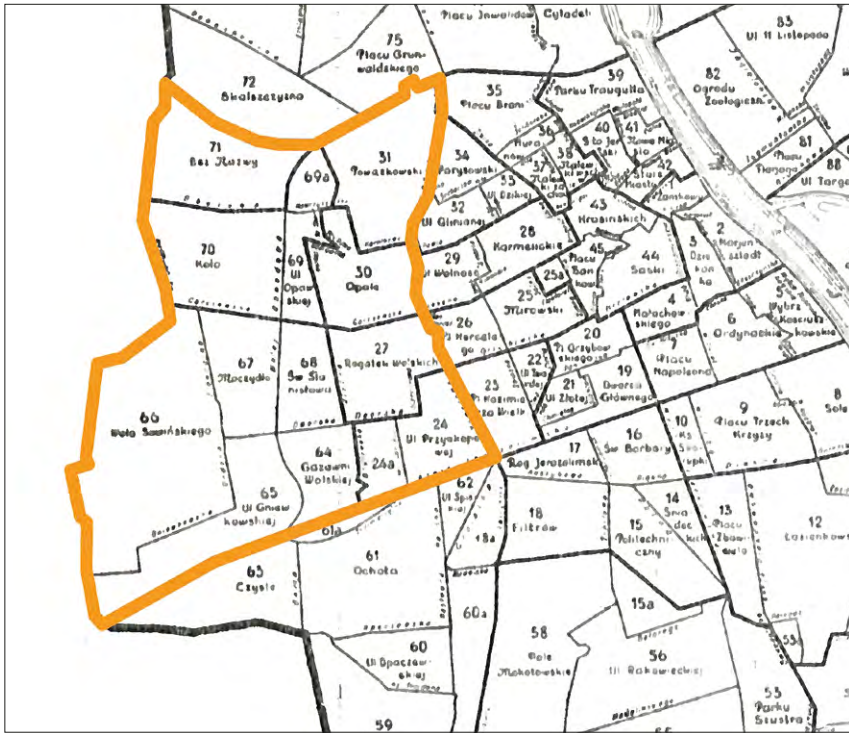


Fig. 3. The boundaries of Wola district projected on the plan of the Capital City of Warsaw from 1938 showing the division into statistical districts (source: *Rocznik 1938, 125, Podział Warszawy*)

was also reflected in the area of four pre-war Roman Catholic parishes, i.e., St Stanislaus (św. Stanisława), St Adalbert (św. Wojciecha), St Lawrence (św. Wawrzyńca), and St Joseph (św. Józefa).<sup>51</sup> Before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the territory of the Warsaw Wola district included the area of 7 State Police stations: III Leszno (in part), V Powązki (in part), VI Towarowy (in part), VII Mirowski (in part), XIX Koło, XXII Wola, and XXVI Marymont (in part). The boundaries of the pre-war Wola district are illustrated by the plan of pre-war Warsaw, with the marked location of individual police districts – police stations (see: Fig. 2).<sup>52</sup>

This area corresponded to 14 statistical districts: 24 ‘Przyokopowa’, 24a ‘Przyokopowa’ (name the same as the previous district), 27 ‘Rogatki Wolskie’, 30 ‘Opole’, 31 ‘Powązkowski’ (in part), 64 ‘Gazownia Warszawska’, 65 ‘Gniewkowska St.’, 66 ‘Wola Sowińskiego’, 67 ‘Moczydło’, 68 ‘Gazownia’, 69 ‘Opawska St.’, 69a unnamed, 70 ‘Koło’, and 71 unnamed. The designation of the Wola area on the grid of statistical districts is illustrated by the fragment of the city plan (see: Fig. 3).<sup>53</sup>

51 Koprowska M. 2022, map: *Parafie warszawskie w 1944 roku*.

52 BN 1919.

53 *Rocznik 1938, 125, Podział Warszawy*.

**Table 1.** The population of Wola area by statistical districts as of January 1, 1938

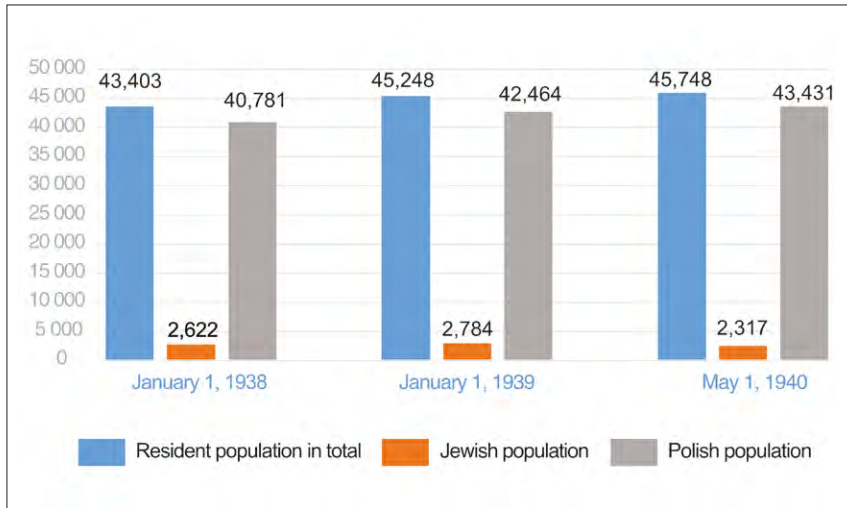
Lp.	District No.	District name	Circuit No.	Circuit name	Residential population	including the number of Jews	including the number of Poles	Comments
1.	III	Leszno	30	Opole	11,444	927	10,517	
2.	V	Powązki	31	Powązkowski	6,738	1,375	5,363	northern part of the circuit 31 outside Wola
3.	VI	Towarowy	24	Przyokopowa Street	5,524	133	5,391	
4.	VI	Towarowy	24a	Przyokopowa Street	3,660	205	3,455	
5.	VII	Mirowski	27	Rogatki Wolskie	26,657	4,265	22,392	
6.	XIX	Koło	69+69a	Opawska Stret, no name	5,118	154	4,964	
7.	XIX	Koło	70	Koło	7,741	248	7,493	
8.	XXVI	Marymont	71+72	no name, Skalszczyzna	6,654	586	6,068	district 72 outside Wola
9.	XXII	Wola	65	Gniewkowska Street	3,757	41	3,716	
10.	XXII	Wola	66	Wola – Sowiński Street	11,149	970	10,179	
11.	XXII	Wola	67	Moczydło	6,567	493	6,074	
12.	XXII	Wola	68+64	St. Stanisław, Gazownia Wolska	9,071	717	8,354	
					<b>104,080</b>	<b>10,111</b>	<b>93,969</b>	

Source: *Rocznik 1938*, 125–131

Detailed information on the population of the Wola area as outlined above is provided by *Rocznik Statystyczny Warszawy* from 1938 (see: Table 1).<sup>54</sup>

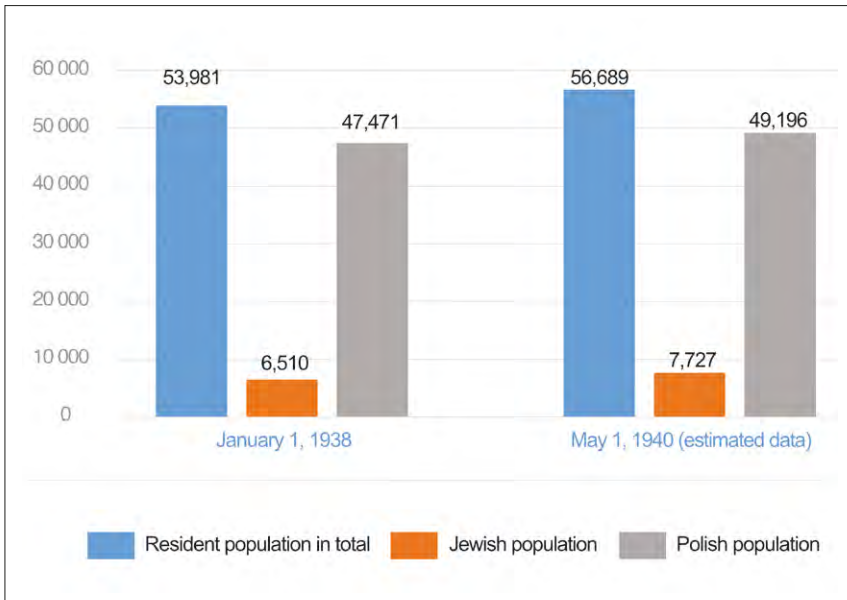
Given that part of the 31 Powązki district and the 72 Skalszczyzna district were outside the Wola area, some of the population included in items 2 and 8 were not residents of Wola. By subtracting an estimated 50% of the value of these items, i.e. 6,700 of the resident population, including around 1,000 Jews and around 5,700 Poles, we obtain a figure of around 97,380 of the permanent population of Wola, including around 9,000 Jews and around 88,500 Poles.

<sup>54</sup> *Rocznik 1938*, 125–131.



**Chart 3.** Population of Wola for the police districts XIX Koło and XXII Wola – statistical districts 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 69a, 70

Source: Kula W. 1984, 216–217; *Rocznik 1938*, 125–131



**Chart 4.** Population of Wola for parts of the police districts III Leszno, V Powązki, VI Towarowy, VII Mirowski, XXVI Marymont – districts 24, 24a, 27, 30, 31, 71

Source: Kula W. 1984, 216–217; *Rocznik 1938*, 125–131



Due to the limited volume of the article, it is not possible to present all the components of the population change at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, which include the fatalities of the bombing of the city in September 1939 and the internal and external migration of the city's residents. The state of affairs after these changes was documented in a census conducted by the Municipal Board in May 1940. Due to the inclusion of data on the level of police districts, a detailed numerical comparison is possible with respect to the police stations XIX Koło and XXII Wola, covering 8 out of 14 statistical districts of Wola, corresponding to approximately 44.57% of the population of the entire Wola district (see: Chart 3).<sup>55</sup>

The data visualised above show that for the area of police stations XIX Koło and XXII Wola from January 1938 to May 1940, the total population increased by 2,345 people, the Jewish population decreased by 305 people, and the Polish population increased by 2,650 people.

The remaining part of Wola was part of the police districts III Leszno, V Powązki, VI Towarowy, VII Mirowski, and XXVI Marymont, for which between January 1938 and May 1940 the total population increased on average by 5.02%, the percentage of the Jewish population increased by 13.02%, and the percentage of the Polish population decreased by 1.32%. The calculation of the estimated population of this part of Wola based on the average for the entire area (see: Chart 4).<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the population of the entire area of Wola in May 1940 can be estimated at approximately 102,000 permanent residents, including about 10,000 Jews and about 92,000 Poles.

A detailed numerical balance of the displacement of the Jewish population to the ghetto and the displacement of the Polish population from the ghetto area in the second half of 1940, broken down into individual districts, is not known. However, if one were to assume that for Wola the ratio of Polish to Jewish population did not deviate from the average for the whole of Warsaw of 0.8/1,<sup>57</sup> the number of about 10,000 Jews displaced from this district to the ghetto corresponded to about 8,000 Poles displaced from the ghetto to Wola. Thus, at the beginning of 1941, the estimated population of Wola was about 100,000 people.

For the years 1941–1944, we do not have data on changes in the population at the level of individual statistical districts or police districts, but if we were to assume that they did not deviate from the average for the whole of Warsaw<sup>58</sup> – showing a sustained similar number of Polish population – it can be estimated that the number of people living in Wola before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising was around 100,000 individuals.

55 Kula W. 1984, 216–217; *Rocznik* 1938, 125–131.

56 Kula W. 1984, 216–217; *Rocznik* 1938, 125–131.

57 138,000 Jews displaced to the ghetto and 113,000 Poles displaced from the ghetto. See: Szarota T. 2010, 238.

58 About 955,000 Poles in March 1941, about 950,000 in September 1943, for 1944, there are no detailed figures. See: Szarota T. 2010, 61–64.

Based on the calculation presented above, the allegations of a lack of sufficient population in Wola in view of the number of 38,000 or more victims postulated in the literature must be considered unjustified.

## Summary

On the basis of the reviewed research results, it must be concluded that, despite the passage of almost 80 years, not only is there no consensus on the number of population losses in Wola during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, but the existing discrepancies in this regard are even greater, currently ranging from 10,000 to 57,600 victims.

The comparative analysis with other mass executions has shown that the theses put forward by Krannhals and Reinefarth about the lack of ‘technical feasibility’ of executing 35,000 or 38,000 people due to the inadequacy of the German forces should be regarded to be unfounded, and considering only the question of ‘technical feasibility’, the number of victims of the Wola Massacre could have been even higher.

As a result of the analysis of the area and population of the Wola district, it was demonstrated that in the pre-war period, Wola covered an area of 14 statistical districts comprising 7 police districts (including 2 in whole and 5 in part). In the period preceding the outbreak of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, the population of this area can be estimated at about 100,000 people, which allows us to consider as unfounded the allegations that it was impossible to carry out mass executions of 38,000 or more victims.

In the light of the findings presented above, it must be concluded that, despite the passage of almost 80 years since the tragic events discussed in this paper, the question of the amount of population losses in Warsaw’s Wola district remains unresolved and it is necessary to develop a new methodological proposal and conduct further research that would allow reaching a reliable estimate in this regard.

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