

The victims and fallen soldiers in Zabrze in the war year 1945

Summary

75 years after the painful events of 1945, the next generation of Zabrze residents took the trouble to commemorate those who died during that turbulent period. Until now, these painful events have only been written about in the context of military operations, with a mild reference to the fact that no more than 82 Soviet soldiers and 250 German soldiers and members of the civil defence died in Zabrze during these events. No mention was made of the murders of civilians at that time, only laconically stating that they also suffered during military operations. This book aims to break this silence. After all, many of them died as innocent people and only because they were blamed for the crimes of the Nazi war machine. In accordance with the maxim: he who remains silent is also to blame... It is difficult, however, to speak of them as victims of the war, as sacrificial offerings to atone for the faults of the fascist system.

The aim of the book is not only to count the exact number of victims of January and February, and ultimately the victims of the whole of 1945 from the area of today's Zabrze: both civilians and soldiers of both fighting formations, because creating a complete list of the dead is already impossible today. Despite this, the authors were very keen to record as many as possible of those who died in 1945 by name. The main source of information was based on sources deposited in central state archives in Poland and Germany, as well as data found in church records of Zabrze parishes. We also used the accounts of the still living witnesses of those dramatic events.

The main author of the monograph invited several historians to contribute to it, who supported him with some of their texts (25% of the work). The work itself was divided into four parts. After a substantive introduction to the subject, ordering the chronology of the January events from the perspective of the preserved reports, a picture of Zabrze (Hindenburg) at

that time and the localities which are today part of the city's organism is outlined in general terms (part I). Parts II and III of the study are a very thorough analysis of the events of 1945 in individual districts of today's Zabrze, including the presentation of lists of names of the killed and victims of those dramatic events during the storming of the city and in the following period. Apart from civilians, prisoners of war buried in Zabrze cemeteries were also found, who worked in the industrial plants which were gradually put into operation. Part IV is devoted to the Red Army soldiers who fell during the January Operation in 1945 and later in Zabrze and its vicinity. Soldiers of the People's Army of Poland were not forgotten. Their presence in 1945 was connected with the introduction of the new administration. Many of them died on duty, e.g. during the demining of the city and the disposal of abandoned weapons. The text by Fr Oscar Golombek, the pre-war parish priest of St Andrew's and dean of Zabrze, is a kind of historiosophical reflection on the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is also a reminder that we, the people of Zabrze living today, owe a debt of memory to its previous inhabitants.

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The monograph shows that bloody fights took place in the city centre, as well as in Zaborze, Biskupice and Mikulczyce. In other districts the fighting was somewhat calmer. In total, 573 civilians (including members of the civil defence and other paramilitary formations), as well as 89 German soldiers, 9 Hungarian soldiers, 7 Italians and 2 Ukrainians died on the territory of the then city of Zabrze (Hindenburg) in the last days of January and the first days of February 1945. In other districts of today's Zabrze 137 civilians and members of the civil defence and at least 24 German soldiers were killed during the same period. On the Soviet side, at least 282 soldiers were counted dead, and the target number may have been as high as 400. This gives a total of 710 civilians, 131 German soldiers and their allies, and 282 (400) Soviet soldiers – a total of 1123 (possibly 1241) dead and fallen. The parish books also record those people who died in the later months of 1945 in what is now Zabrze. Among them are: 117 civilians, 40 Polish soldiers, 62 German soldiers, who died mostly in death transports, and 84 prisoners of war. Occasionally, those who died as internees in the USSR were also recorded (300 such cases in total). In this way, it was established that during the whole of 1945, at least 1726 people were killed, murdered or caused to die (and, taking into account the larger number of Soviet dead, 1844 people). These figures, although horrifying, are certainly much higher, as one must also take into account those who died as a result of subsequent illnesses and the widespread famine. In a way this can be seen by following the statistical summaries of individual parishes. In every case, the number of parishioners who died in 1945 was more than double that of previous and later years. Although the scope of the work concerned victims who died in 1945, individual chapters also take into account those who died in later years: either as prisoners of war (over 200 people) or as internees deep into the USSR (over 300).

Successive generations of Zabrze residents, while building a new and better tomorrow, want to remember especially those who died as victims of the Silesian tragedy of 1945: “May they rest in peace”.

Keywords: Second World War, Silesian tragedy of 1945, Zabrze, victims of 1945, fallen soldiers, prisoners of war, internees, lists of names of the killed and victims of 1945 from Zabrze.