

Herzog—A Failed Popular Revolt

In 1919 we had another very abundant harvest. It would have been enough grain and seeds for the next ten years. But in the cities people were already starving. Now Lenin attacked the farmers. He took everything from them: grain, cattle, seeds, absolutely everything, and with this he and his followers claimed to be very intelligent. About this terrible development the simple farmers said, “If you fill up a spring (with dirt and stones), you will die of thirst. If you destroy the farmers, people must starve to death.” But no one dared to say a word openly; otherwise one would be labeled “enemy of the people” and executed.

In 1921 corpses of victims of starvation were lying along the road sides. Now it was quite clear that everyone would starve, and this led to a revolt against the Communists in the German villages along the Volga.

In Marienthal a group of farmers gathered together, from whom the Communists had taken literally everything. In one night they killed the Communists along the high banks of the Great Karaman River and threw the bodies into the deep water. Obviously this was a very stupid thing to do, and not justified! On the next day our village Herzog also revolted. In the neighboring village Graf all of the Communists were captured and a new village governing body—a village committee—was elected. All the young men were obligated to join in the fight against the Communist bands of thieves.

And so the revolt spread: from Marienthal, Herzog and Graf to Rohleder, Urbach, Reinhard, and from Reinwald to Krasnojarsk. But there the Communists were already lying in wait with machine guns in place. When the rebellious farmers approached, they were brutally shot. The survivors scattered.

The two villages Marienthal and Graf defended themselves to the end. Barricades were constructed in the streets using wagons, harrows and plows and other farm equipment. This was done with no planning, and was a great stupidity which would cost numerous young men their lives. In Marienthal many protesters finally gathered together in a large building in the center of the village. They were all shot by the soldiers. The dead were then piled up together. There were 60 bodies. The Communists then held three trials. All of them ended in a sentence of death by firing squad. Seventy-two persons were shot down along the edge of a mass grave, and there were several other such mass graves.

Afterwards the court also came to Herzog, and here too the victims were shot down next to their grave, right next to our vegetable garden. I saw it all, and it will always be in my memory. They brought the condemned men from prison between two rows of soldiers. In front two officers marched, and a wagon followed behind. The poor victims knelt down and prayed out loud. They had to strip down to their underpants. Then they placed the first row along the edge of the grave and shot them, then the next, and so all of the rows. Next another officer shot at the corpses with a revolver.

The clothing of the dead men was taken the village on the wagon. Later the soldiers divided all the articles of clothing among themselves. The murder-company accomplished everything calmly and in cold blood, because it was their everyday duty. They had no human conscience, because these Communist executioners had no use for one.

They must never be forgotten, these innocent victims, shot by Communists animals on April 7, 1921, and buried in a mass grave. Their names were:

Appelhans, Martin
Beier, Peter
Brungardt, Johannes
Dinkel, Johannes
Dinkel, Stanislaus
Dreiling, Johannes
Dreiling, Nikolaus
Dreiling, Nikolaus (shot on his own property)
Dreiling, Peter
Junker, Anton
Junker, Johannes
Kuhn, Joseph
Riedel, Andreas
Riedel, Alexander
Romme, Ferdinand
Romme, Franz
Romme, Joseph
Schemberger, Peter
Terre, Anna
Terre, Peter
Weigel, Adam
Windholz, Andreas (shot on his own farm)
Windholz, Johannes
Wittmann, Joseph
Wittmann, Peter

When nothing more moved in the grave, the head Communist of our town—a German—examined the dead bodies carefully. Then he said, “One is missing! Where is Berac?” Father Berac was our Catholic priest in Herzog. He had had nothing to do with the uprising, and at the time he was in another village. The father was brought in, made to dig his own grave, and was then shot as well.

Source: Von der Wolga über Sibirien nach Osnabrück: Erinnerungen des Russlanddeutschen Johannes Riedel. Pg. 35