
Interview of Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin to Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Crimes with no statute of limitations



Crimes with no statute of limitations

Alexander Bastrykin: Investigation Committee investigates cases of genocide committed by fascists

The Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin told Rossiyskaya Gazeta about reasons why, decades after, investigation of offenses committed by fascist invaders doesn't stop.

Alexander Ivanovich, today is the anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Leningrad. What emotions does this evoke for you?

Alexander Bastrykin: The Day of the total lifting of the siege is a special event for the residents of Leningrad and for all those who liberated the northern capital. And for the entire Soviet people as well. The city survived, and my family had a direct hand in that. My mother was caught up in the war in Leningrad. Her stories about her experiences are impossible to forget. And it's not just the scale, it's the details - my mother remembered them all her life.

During the siege, she, like most people in Leningrad, worked at a factory. The Germans periodically bombed the way people went to work. Weary from the cold and hunger, Leningraders knew this, but they still went to work every morning - after all, they had to supply the front. On one of these days, my mother also came under fire.

The shells thundered one after another, people fell in the snow, frozen in terror... Unexpectedly, figures in black overcoats appeared, as it turned out later, they were very young sailors - yesterday's conscripts.

They helped wounded and frightened people get to shelter. My mother was one of the saved. She recalled how she later discovered that her coat was literally completely riddled with tiny shell splinters. But the view of the Palace Square shocked her even more - a lot of figures in black overcoats, most of them lay motionless. The young and fearless guys sacrificed themselves to save the citizens.

My mother also told me a lot about how she fought in the coastal units of the Baltic Fleet of Red Banner on the famous Oranienbaum Fork, which the Germans could not take during the siege. Her anti-aircraft battery consisted of 60 people, three of them men: the battery commander, deputy sergeant and petty officer, the rest were young girls, 18-20 years old.

The Soviet people managed to break the siege, thanks to their solidarity and dedication: both men and women kept the defense almost equally. Each anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Leningrad is not only a feeling of respect and inordinate gratitude to those who fought for the homeland, but also a call to honor the feat of the Soviet people.

Leningrad was defended. But the Nazis captured part of the Leningrad region. What was going on in the occupied territories?

Alexander Bastrykin: The Luga frontier must not be forgotten. Luga was an important strategic point on the outskirts of Leningrad. In 1941 there were fierce battles there, and the Soviet soldiers managed to significantly slow down the German forces, delaying the siege of Leningrad. Unfortunately, the city still could not resist the onslaught of large enemy forces, and the area was occupied. The atrocities committed there by the occupiers are well known and documented.

The killing and extermination of civilians before or during war constitute crimes against humanity and have no statute of limitations

The prisoners were brutally tortured and held directly on the ground in the open air, regardless of the time of year. Hundreds of people were dying of disease and starvation there every day. There was not a blade of grass left in the place where people were kept - the vegetation was simply eaten by hungry people.

Excavations have confirmed that bodies were simply dumped into huge pits, some were shot and some were buried alive, judging by the location of the bodies. Among the victims of the invaders were people of different views, beliefs, nationalities, and genders. The Nazis spared neither the elderly nor children.

After the final liberation of Luga, it was estimated that little more than 10 percent of the local population remained compared to pre-war times.

All of this illustrates once again the horrors of the treacherous invasion by the Nazis and the consequences of spreading such an ideology, and the importance of unity of the people in the face of threats to sovereignty. It is important to know and remember this, especially for young people, the future of Russia. We know the true events, backed up by plenty of evidence. It is our duty to pass on this memory in the same minute detail that we learned from our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, without allowing our heroic history to be libeled.

Are there more crimes committed during the war for which no one has been held accountable?

Alexander Bastrykin: The Investigative Committee is investigating a number of criminal cases of genocide committed during the Great Patriotic War. A probe launched by the Russian Federal Security Service basing on the study of declassified archival materials about the October 1942 murder of children from the Yeisk orphanage is among them. This crime was committed during punitive operations by members of the SS-10 "a" Sonderkommando. The bodies of 214 murdered children were found after the liberation of the Krasnodar Territory from the German Nazi occupation. Some of the soldiers were convicted, but some were never punished for their atrocities against Soviet civilians.

In the spring of last year in the area of the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka in the Novgorod Region searchers discovered the graves of the Great Patriotic War times with the remains of civilians. Medical and forensic experts determined that these people were victims of punitive operations committed by the occupiers in 1942-1943. We also qualified these actions as genocide.

What consequences might such investigations have three-quarters of a century after the crimes?

Alexander Bastrykin: According to the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the killing and extermination of civilians before or during war constitute crimes against

humanity, and such crimes have no statute of limitations. In accordance with the norms of international law and national legislation, the Investigative Committee of Russia has every reason to investigate the above mentioned facts.

A new form of international cooperation will emerge this year as the Second Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters has been ratified in the summer of 2019. According to this document, it is possible to create international investigative teams to investigate criminal cases on common topics.

The additional protocol entered into force in our country on January 1. A mechanism for implementing its provisions and cooperating more closely with the Central Office of Justice of Germany for investigation of National Socialist crimes in Ludwigsburg is now being worked out. I am confident that such cooperation will give additional impetus and accelerate the work of investigating the full range of crimes.

The facts of illegal activities motivated by ideas of racial supremacy or Nazism must remain unnoticed and unpunished after any length of time.

On May 9, 2020, Russia and the whole world will celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. You are a member of the Presidential Victory Organizing Committee. How is the Investigative Committee involved in preparing for the festivities?

Alexander Bastrykin: On the eve of the Victory Anniversary one of our most important tasks - moral and patriotic education of young people on examples of heroism of the Soviet people during the Great Patriotic War, the perpetuation of memory of Defenders of the Fatherland.

In order to preserve the memory and legacy of the Great Victory, on November 8, 2019 in the Hall of Fame of the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, the Investigative Committee gave the official start of the All-Russian youth patriotic Relay of good deeds dedicated to this most important event.

In this initiative we have the support of the president, on whose orders the events of the Relay of good deeds of the Investigative Committee are included in the federal plan of events to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Victory.

We provide assistance to veterans of the Great Patriotic War, families of fallen veterans of combat operations and fallen young heroes of the Fatherland. We have rolled out an active work in putting in order the obelisks and memorials of soldiers who fell in battles for their homeland, providing patronage assistance to nursing homes and orphanages, conducting search squads activities, promoting of exploits of children and adolescents, and much more.

Representatives of the interregional Young Investigator Youth Union public organization, youth organizations, and associations of the entities of the Russian Federation, public organizations of

veterans of wars, military conflicts and veterans of the investigation, staff of investigative bodies and members of their families take active part in the Relay.

Natalya Kozlova

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