
Interview of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia to RIA Novosti informational agency



The Investigative Committee of Russia is investigating probes into murders of civilians in Great Patriotic War years. In the interview to RIA Novosti the head of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin told, how and by whom these offenses were committed, according to what laws the responsible persons will be brought to justice, how the evidentiary base is collected on crimes of such prescription, about work with archives and living witnesses, and also why it is important to fight the glorification of Nazism.

- The Investigative Committee continues to publish information on the investigation of a number of criminal cases into murders of civilians during the Great Patriotic War. What events does it concern? These are completely new facts, aren't they?

- In this case, we are talking about previously not investigated facts or about crimes for the commission of which not all the guilty persons had been identified and brought to justice. We learn about them after the excavation of the search teams, as well as the analysis of declassified archival documents. These are tragic events in the Novgorod Region, Krasnodar Territory, Rostov Region,

associated with the mass murder of civilians by the German invaders. According to the available archival data, more than two million civilians were deliberately exterminated on the territory of the RSFSR during the years of occupation. Last year the Investigative Committee of Russia launched probes into extermination of over 30 thousand Soviet citizens. And not all the details of these crimes and the persons involved in their commission were known, therefore, now our task is to investigate all the circumstances deed and draw conclusions unswervingly following the principle of inevitability of punishment for crimes against humanity, which was approved in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg and gave rise to international criminal law.

- By whom and how were those offenses committed?

- The mass murders of the civil population were committed by participants of criminal SS organizations, the security police and the SD of Nazi Germany. For example, in the Novgorod region, where more than 500 human remains were found, the "Tailkommando" of the security police and SD operated, which shot and maimed civilians, women, children, as well as prisoners of war.

In the Rostov region, SS units killed at least 27 thousand people in the area of the village of Zmievskaia Balka during one punitive operation. Among the dead were party activists and people of Jewish nationality. Mass arrests of Soviet citizens were carried out in the city of Shakhty, where miners and their family members were mainly among those arrested by the Nazis. People were taken to the area of the Krasin mine, shot, and the bodies were thrown into the shaft of the mine. At least 3.5 thousand civilians were killed this way. Even children were not spared - there is information that on the territory of the Georgian Village Council of the Morozovsky District of the Rostov Region, the occupants, along with 400 civilians, killed 72 pioneers, and in the Krasnodar Territory, 214 pupils of the Yeysk orphanage and children with incurable diseases became victims of one of the punitive operations.

- What is the goal of this work?

— We have several tasks set before us. Not all criminals were convicted by the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg and other post-war trials: many Nazis guilty of committing atrocious crimes, unfortunately, managed to flee from justice and escape punishment. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to identify all the perpetrators, realizing, as already noted, the principle of the inevitability of punishment. Whether they are alive or not, we must give these names and show what these individuals have done.

At the same time, we see many attempts to present history in a completely different form, when, for example, officials of Western countries, summing up the results of World War II, talk only about the contribution of the United States and Great Britain, deliberately ignoring the key role of the USSR in the victory over fascism, trying to revise the results of the Nuremberg tribunal. We also see attempts, especially in the Baltic countries and in Ukraine, to present as heroes those who committed atrocious crimes against the civilian population without regard for the truth. Therefore, countering the

glorification of Nazism is also one of the goals of our work, the results of which should become a great legacy for future generations.

- Was this work done before?

— The work to identify and search for persons involved in the murders of civilians during the Great Patriotic War never stopped. Since the post-war period, several thousand people have been convicted, the last trials took place in the 80s. And now, when the archives are being declassified, we learn new facts of crimes and the names of those who fled from the investigation and the court. Our investigation will undoubtedly help to fill in individual fragments of the atrocities of Nazism, to reveal new, previously unknown facts of massacres, persons involved in them, to show the systematic destruction of the innocent population of the occupied territories and the whole monstrous essence of the ideology of National Socialism.

- Under what laws should these persons be responsible for?

— The Russian investigation is based on the norms of national legislation and international law. In terms of national legislation, it should be noted that criminal responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi invaders and their accomplices was established by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1943 "On measures of punishment for German fascist villains guilty of murder and torture of the Soviet civilian population and prisoners of the Red Army, for spies, traitors to the Motherland from among Soviet citizens and their accomplices". For the organizers and perpetrators of crimes, the Decree provided no alternative to the capital punishment - the death penalty by hanging. The Criminal Code of Russia contains a norm on responsibility for crimes of genocide (Article 357 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation - Ed.), which provides for milder types of basic punishment than allows the application of retroactive force of criminal law. Therefore, the Investigative Committee will actively continue to identify the facts of criminal acts based on the ideas of racial superiority, Nazism, and give them a proper legal assessment, including under Article 357 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. In accordance with the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, killings and extermination of civilians before or during war constitute crimes against humanity, in Article 1 of the Convention on the Inapplicability of the Statute of Limitation to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity of November 26, 1968, the statute of limitations does not apply to these crimes. In turn, Russia, as the legal successor of the USSR, assumed obligations to prosecute Nazi criminals.

- What is the main evidence of the commission of such crimes?

— An important source of evidence is the materials of archival criminal and search cases, court sentences over the fascist invaders and their accomplices from among the traitors to the Motherland. In their testimony, the convicts name their accomplices, describe their roles and actions during the execution of punitive actions. A lot of witnesses were questioned in the cases, whose testimony was given a legal assessment by the courts for reliability and compliance with all the requirements of the

current procedural legislation. By studying these documents, it is possible to identify persons who have escaped criminal liability. In addition, declassified archival materials and documents of the Extraordinary State Commission, reflecting the consequences of the occupation and explanations of direct eyewitnesses, are of great importance. The remains of the victims with traces of violent death, their personal belongings and documents, found in mass graves during the Great Patriotic War, are also of great evidentiary value. It should be noted that work is being carried out with classified archives, which are inaccessible to a wide range of researchers and representatives of the scientific community. At the same time, the search for the listed archival materials, criminal and investigative cases is facilitated by the modern capabilities of information banks of data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other departments. As you can see, there are many ways to establish new circumstances and faces. This is exclusively search and investigative work.

If we talk about the testimony of witnesses and victims, then there is information that in some regions there are a large number of former concentration camp prisoners who are direct witnesses of the atrocities of the Nazis. Now we are painstakingly installing them for further work.

- How to establish the time of origin of the remains?

— First of all, this is the production of forensic medical examinations, within the framework of which experts decide the question of the limitation of death, information from archival documents about the places where burials were discovered also contribute to work in this direction. At the same time, objects found in burials can help, for example, belt buckles, flasks, cartridge cases, cartridges that could relate to certain periods of their use.

- Is it possible now to establish the identity and lifetime of the remains found during excavations, what is required for this?

— If we are talking about the lifetime of the victims, it can be established in the course of expert research. For example, as part of the investigation of the criminal case on the genocide in the Novgorod region, the remains of more than 500 people were found in a mass grave near the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka, of which 188 are children of various ages, 113 women and 146 men. Only a little more than 70 remains remained unidentified by sex and age due to their significant destruction. It is much more difficult to establish an identity, this requires an analysis of archival materials, a search for documents and samples for the production of comparative examinations. During the investigation, genetic material is also collected, which can later be used for identification.

- Do your foreign colleagues somehow help in the investigation of these crimes?

— Interaction with foreign colleagues is organized within the framework of existing legal assistance mechanisms. Such requests have been sent to Germany, Canada and a number of other countries; some of the responses to requests with documents of interest have already been received by the investigation and are being studied as part of the investigation of already initiated criminal cases.

- How many other facts of Nazi atrocities do you think we do not know about?

— Based on the materials with which we have already worked, we think there is a lot. We are only at the beginning of the path and have studied only a small part of what is available. Of course, every year it will be more difficult to establish this. There are still a lot of classified materials on which we work together with colleagues from other law enforcement agencies. But gradually we will study them, identify specific persons involved in the commission of crimes, and name them.

- Almost every family has those who took part in the Great Patriotic War in one generation or another. What motivates young people who post photos of Hitler and other criminals during the "Immortal Regiment" action on the Internet?

— Their motives are low. How else can you explain such actions when Internet users display photographs of Nazi criminals disguised as Soviet soldiers at the Immortal Regiment rally? Someone did it for the sake of an inappropriate joke, as they themselves explained, someone could not explain the motive of their actions. If an adult knowingly posts such photographs to a wide audience, he must be held accountable by law. And such persons do not even have the courage to admit their deeds. At the same time, the facts are fully supported by the evidence collected by the investigation.

- How many such facts have already been established?

— At the moment, criminal cases are being investigated against residents of Perm, Samara, Kazan, Ulyanovsk, Volgograd, Tula and a number of other cities. According to the investigation, the defendants entered the "Immortal Regiment Online" application, created to post photographs and information about the participants in the Great Patriotic War who fought against Nazi Germany. Then they made applications for posting photographs of Nazi criminals or traitors to the Motherland for a wide audience. The investigation qualifies such actions as approval of the crimes established by the verdict of the International Military Tribunal, or the dissemination of information expressing obvious disrespect for society about the days of Russian military glory associated with the defense of the Fatherland. And we will continue to work to establish each fact. They must be given a criminal legal assessment!

- In some regions, there were facts of desecration of monuments to war heroes. How to counteract this?

- Yes, unfortunately, such facts have happened and are happening periodically. In this regard, the changes in legislation that took place in April this year are very timely.

This is a tougher criminal liability for the destruction or damage of military graves and monuments dedicated to the defense of the Fatherland and the days of Russia's military glory. I am sure that the adoption of this law will be of great preventive value for vandals. The first case initiated under this article is related to the damage to the obelisk in the Moscow region, erected in honor of the Victory

in the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, we learned about this thanks to the media, promptly identified and detained the suspect. This is exactly the case when everything was done deliberately, demonstratively, in order to damage the monument, to demonstrate disrespect for the historical memory of our people, for the symbols of the military glory of our country.

There are other cases, for example, in St. Petersburg, local residents cooked food at the monument "Eternal Flame over the Common Grave of Workers and Sailors" in Kronstadt. We believe that it is necessary to speak publicly about such facts, causing a wide public resonance, and measures of criminal law against such persons.

And it is important that conclusions are drawn not only by vandals who have desecrated monuments dedicated to the fight against fascism and have already "distinguished themselves" by unworthy actions, but also by other people who, perhaps, do not know our history well. Our people paid too high price for the freedom of the Fatherland.

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