

Mass killings suspect 'still alive'

Six bodies unearthed from postwar grave in Moravia

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The mass grave in Budinka, south Moravia, contained six bodies, which are thought to be of Germans massacred after World War II.

Police investigating the discovery of a mass grave in south Moravia say one of the suspects in the alleged postwar killings is still alive and living in Bohemia.

Archaeologists have recovered six bodies from the grave, which is suspected to contain the remains of Germans murdered by Czechs in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Excavations at the site - located at Budinka, near the village of Dobronín in the Vysočina region - were completed Aug. 19, police said.

The remains are to be identified based on a DNA analysis, which is to be carried out by anthropologists based in Brno. The DNA of the victims will be compared with that of their supposed relatives, in a process that is expected to take at least two months.

Chief police investigator Michael Laška has emphasized that charges may never be brought in the case due to the statute of limitations and the remit of the controversial Beneš Decrees. The decrees pardoned excesses committed by Czechs against Germans in the immediate postwar period and led to the expulsion of many ethnic Germans from the country, with their citizenship revoked and their property confiscated.

However, in theory, genocide charges could be brought if sufficient evidence exists in what is a "complex legal issue," Laška told daily *Hospodářské noviny*.

The investigator said the living suspect is a man who had been named by German author Herma Kennel in her book Bergersdorf, a partially fictionalized historical account of the Dobronín massacre. Kennel, who traveled to the grave site Aug. 17-18, told The Prague Post that the case was a big step forward.

"Each step of the Czechs to pose questions on the dark sides of their past will be appreciated by the relatives of the victims," she said. The author said the issue of atrocities committed by Czechs after the war ended remained "a delicate matter." "The elder generation usually does not want to talk about this subject; some argue all Germans at that time were criminals, so that everything they had to suffer is justified," she said. Kennel said younger Czechs were interested in knowing the truth of the matter, even if it was shocking. She cited David Vondráček's documentary Killing, the Czech Way - broadcast on Czech Television earlier this year - which showed archive footage of Germans being shot on the streets of Prague in 1945. While acknowledging the fact that the Nazi occupation of the Czech Republic was "brutal," Kennel pointed out that many Gestapo and SS personnel who were responsible for the violence had time to escape the country after the war ended. "The revenge hit many innocent Germans whose ancestors had lived peacefully together with the Czechs for centuries," she said.

Locals have meanwhile erected a 3-meter-high white wooden cross near the site of the grave, where excavations were conducted by experts from Brno's Masaryk University after the grave's location was pinpointed using a special radar device.

The investigation began last September after reports by journalist Miroslav Mareš based on materials from German archives. According to the materials, some 15 German civilians who were to be deported after the war were massacred by locals and buried at the site in late May 1945. Mareš said he was surprised by the low number of bodies found at Budinka but added he had full confidence in the police investigation. The reporter said the most important task was to now identify the dead to find out if they really were local Germans or others, such as Russian prisoners of war.

While local archives make no mention of the alleged massacre, it has been suggested that locals could have run across the mass grave during drainage works carried out at the field in the 1970s.

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