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Lietuvos lenkų sąjungos Šilutės skyrius

MACIKAI MEMORIAL TO POLES WHO PERISHED

This year is the 10th anniversary since the Association of Poles in Lithuania immortalised the memory of Poles imprisoned in Macikai prisoner of war (POW) camp in WWII. The Polish memorial is to be found among many other graves in a standing of pine trees in Macikai. The memorial consists of a large oak cross beside an upright memorial stone that bears an inscription in the Polish and Lithuanian languages.

In August 1999, the magazine *Kultūros gyvenimas* [Cultural Life] featured an article about the German POW camp Stalag Luft VI that had been set up in the village of Macikai near the town of Šilutė.

The news prompted me to take more interest in it and to look for more information and documents about the Poles imprisoned in Macikai.

After Klaipėda region was annexed to Germany, it was obvious that war was imminent. Therefore, construction of a barracks for future captives started in the village of Macikai. According to witnesses, as early as September 1939, Poles, who were the first prisoners of Macikai, carried out construction work. Later, the Germans sent prisoners of war of other nationalities here. After the war, the German POW camp became a Soviet Gulag. It is not known how many Poles perished in Macikai. Historian Arvydas Anušauskas from the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania identified 14 names.

Upon receipt of all permits and financing from the Association of Poles in Lithuania, the implementation of the idea to build at least a cross in memory of the Poles who perished, started in July 2005.

The memorial was unveiled on 6 November 2005.

On that occasion, Janusz Skolimowski, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic Poland to the Republic of Lithuania, accompanied by Cpt. Czeslaw Karczewski, Defence Attaché of Poland in Lithuania, Stanislaw Cygnarowski the Polish Consul General in Vilnius, and Michal Mackiewicz, chairman of the Association of Poles in Lithuania visited Macikai. Poles residing in Šilutė district, many war veterans and young people also took part. Their singing could be heard far and wide.

Vilnius chaplain Dariusz Stanczyk together with Rev. Juozas Vaičius of Šilutė Holy Cross Catholic Church celebrated Mass and consecrated the memorial in Macikai cemetery.

The ceremony was also attended by Stanislaw Slepikowski from Poland with his son. Stanislaw's father is buried in Macikai. He expressed his gratitude for being able to find his father's grave after a long search. District Mayor Arvydas Jakas with other representatives of the district government thanked all those who gathered to pay their respects to those who had perished. Mention was also made of the failed attempts to destroy this sad place.

A decade is a short period of time, but already many fellow citizens both from Lithuania and Poland have managed to visit the site. Every year representatives of the Diplomatic Corps come here to meet the local Polish community. All visits begin with the laying of flowers at the memorial.

We, who live here, try to tidy and maintain not only the Polish graves, but we also light candles on adjacent graves.

It is our duty to convey to our descendants these sad but important moments in the history of the Polish nation. The nation that does not know its history and does not nurture it is doomed.

This memorial, which is a reminder to every visitor that this is a place commemorating the memory of Poles and other nations, is but one among thousands of similar sites of pain and suffering in the world.

A few years ago I received a document from Mr Slepikowski stating that his grandfather had been unlawfully deported and imprisoned. But the wheel of history cannot be turned back...