

# The massacre of Anarchists and Maximalists at Sandormokh



A short account of the murders of revolutionaries at Sandormokh

I've touched on the killing fields at Sandormokh on previous occasions, with my biographies of the anarchists [David Edetkin](#) and [Nikolai Silvestrov](#). As I said in the article on Edetkin, "*On the 3rd November 1937 David was shot with several hundred other prisoners including anarchists and Maximalists at the gorge in the Sandormokh forest near Medvezhyegorsk in the Karelian republic. This killing place was the scene of the murder of several thousand prisoners during 1937-1938*".

On November 10, 1937, the NKVD executioner Captain Matveyev wrote : "*I'm informing you that on the basis of the order of the NKVD Head of Management - Commissioner of State Security 1st rank comrade Zakovsky of October 16, 1937 under No. 189852 ...I have executed 1,111 people,*" referring to the shootings from October 27th to November 4th.

Almost all of those shot over the course of these terrible days were murdered by Matveyev himself. On one day alone he killed 180 to 265 people. Sometimes he was assisted by junior lieutenant Georgi Alafer, but most of the killings were Matveyev's personal work.

As well as Edetkin and Silvestrov, here are some of the others killed on November 3rd, listed as being involved in counter-revolutionary activity, espionage and sabotage and membership of Social-Revolutionary and Anarchist organisations, and armed columns.

*Lidia Nikolaevna Aksenova*, born in 1889 in Vilnius, Latvia. An anarchist communist since Tsarist times. In the 1920s, Aksenova worked in the Anarchist Section of the All-Russian Public Committee for Perpetuating the Memory of P.A. Kropotkin and in the All-Russian Black Cross. In 1930-1933 she was serving a sentence in Petropavlovsk, participating in the activities of a group of exiled anarchists. Arrested in 1934, she and her partner Gerasimchuk were sentenced on charges of belonging to the underground anarchists and plotting the murder of Stalin to imprisonment in the Solovki concentration camp.

*Pavel Petrovich Gerasimchuk*, born in Ukraine in 1891. A typographer and anarcho-syndicalist from the beginning of the 1910s, he took an active part in the work of the Union of Russian Workers in the United States and Canada. Upon returning to Russia, he was a member of the Voice of Labour group. He took part in battles with German troops as part of the partisan detachment of Volin. in the 1920s he was in charge of the Voice of Labour printing house. From 1918 he was subjected to numerous arrests. In November 1927 he was arrested and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment for 'anti-Soviet

agitation'. Following his release, he was sentenced to internal exile in 1930. In 1935 he received a sentence of 5 years in the gulags and with Lidia was sent to the Solovki concentration camp.

*Ananii Semenovich Semenov.* He was born in 1889 in the village of Izbebi Urmara in the Chuvash region. A member of the Bolshevik Party, he left it in 1921 "due to disagreement with the general line of the Party". He worked as a cook at the sanatorium of Ukrainian scientists in Kizlovodsk. From 1924 he was constantly harassed by the State authorities as an anarchist and arrested for his political beliefs the following year. He was one of the organisers of the group of exiled anarchists in Archangelsk. He was again arrested on July 23rd, 1935 and sentenced on November 16th to seven years imprisonment. He escaped from an NKVD prison on August 17th, 1936, using a passport with the name Shakhov. However, he was arrested two days later. He then served a prison sentence in the hell hole of the Solovki prison on the White Sea. Here he took part in several hunger strikes and other protests, and as a result spent most of his time in solitary confinement. He was sentenced to death by the NKVD on October 9th, 1937.

*Nikolai Grigorievich Vladimirsky.* Born in 1907, in the village of Urlaika in Saratov province. A sawmill worker, he joined the anarchists in the mid-1920s, and was a member of underground anarchist groups in Saratov and Leningrad. Arrested in January 1927, he was sentenced to 3 years internal exile in Perm. He was again arrested in 1932 for "counter-revolutionary activity" and sent to Frunze for three years. In October 1935, he again was sentenced, this time to a gulag for 5 years, and sent to Solovki.

*Grigory Fedorovich Volkov* (pseudonym *Grisha*) was born in 1888, the son of peasants from the town of Vyazma in Smolensk oblast. Becoming an anarchist communist in 1905, he took part in the December armed uprising. He received a sentence of katorga (hard labour) for a lengthy period in 1909. He escaped three times from this in Nerchinsk, and ended up in shackles from which he was only released with the February Revolution of 1917. In the Civil War, he participated in the partisan movement against the Kolchak regime. During the White occupation of Tomsk, he hid his revolver in his son's cradle. By the end of the 1920s, he ceased active participation in the anarchist movement, probably because of his family commitments, with three sons and two daughters. He was a member of the board of the All-Union Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles. In 1932 the family moved to Moscow.

*Andrei Martynovich Shaykevich.* Born in 1908 in Moscow to a Jewish family. He worked as a chemistry teacher in a school. He was first arrested in 1927 for belonging to the anarchist underground and exiled to Tambov for 3 years. He was arrested again in 1932, from which time he served his sentence in Solovki, where he was involved in several hunger strikes.

*Vasily Yakovlevich Grechenkov* (aka *Vasily Matveyevich Petrovsky Vasily Matveyevich*), was a Left Social-Revolutionary born in 1883. He was arrested in 1919 after the bomb attack on the Bolsheviks organised by Anarchists, SR-Maximalists and Left SRs. He was arrested a second time for attending a conference of the Left SRs. In 1934 he was sentenced to 5 years at Solovki.

*Viktor Vasilyevich Baryshnikov,* born in 1889 at Borisovka in the Kursk region, joined the revolutionary movement in 1906. In 1907 Baryshnikov he took part in the creation of the Parisian group of Socialist-Revolutionary Maximalists. He then returned to underground work in Russia, led propaganda among peasants and workers of the Kursk and Chernigov provinces. He was arrested in 1908 and served 5 years of hard labour and 4 years of exile. After 1917 he joined the Left Social Revolutionaries. As a former SR, he was sentenced in 1936 to 10 years in the camps. He was shot along with his associates Vladimir Aleksandrov, Mikhail Borisenko, and Vasily Melnikov.

Others murdered on November 3rd included a number of Armenian Dashnyaks (Left nationalists). On other days it was the turn of Ukrainian intellectuals and artists and Catholic priests, as well as intellectuals and artists from Circassian, Cossack, Karelian, Tatar, and Udmurt backgrounds.

Altogether, between August 11th and November 27th, 1938, a total of 6,241 people were murdered by the Chekist butchers.

Those to be executed were first of all severely beaten at a detention centre, and some died during these beatings. On the first day of the shootings, one prisoner attacked the Chekists with a knife. As a result, those shot from then on were stripped down to their underwear. They were then forced to dig large pits deeper than six feet. They then were ordered to lie face down in the pits and shot in the back of the neck. In one pit, those murdered were laid down in several layers.

Anarchists murdered on other days included *Pavel Pavlovich Raspopov*. Born in Samara, into a family of nobility in 1898, he was shot on December 12th, 1937. Three days later, it was the turn of *Nikolai Ivanovich Fershtudt*. Born in 1907 in Leningrad, to a German-Russian family, he was arrested in late May, 1930 and shot on December 15th.

Matveyev had been a Cheka executioner since 1918. On November 10th, 1937, he handed over the leadership of the killings to another Chekist, Ivan Bondarenko, and his deputy Alexander Shondysh.

Whilst Bondarenko and Shondysh were themselves executed two years later when the head of the NKVD, Yezhov, was replaced by Beria, Matveyev himself was sentenced to 10 years in 1939 for “*exceeding official authority*”. However, he was released within a short period, and resumed his gory activities in the NKVD internal prison. He retired in 1949, dying in 1971 and never having been brought to justice for his crimes.

Nick Heath

**Sources:**

Volkov, Alexander. Memories about father, A.G. Volkov:

<https://www.philol.msu.ru/~alumni/memories/volkov/>