

Berezhany

(Pol., Brzezany), town in Ternopol Oblast (district), Ukrainian USSR, 31 miles (50 km) west of Ternopol. Between the two wars, Berezhany was part of Poland, and in September 1939 it was incorporated into the Soviet Union, together with the rest of eastern Poland. On the eve of World War II, Berezhany had a Jewish population of over four thousand.

On July 7, 1941, two weeks after the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans occupied Berezhany. The Ukrainians lost no time in attacking the Jews; on the morrow of the German entry, they killed three Jews, and a few days later, several dozen more, twelve of them in the Christian cemetery and others in the large municipal park. Various anti-Jewish measures were enacted, such as a dusk-to-dawn curfew, a ban on leaving the city, and the wearing of a Jewish badge (a band with a Star of David on the right arm). At the beginning of August 1941 a Judenrat (Jewish Council) was set up, consisting of twenty-four members, and its first task was to collect a fine of 300,000 zlotys from the community. The Judenrat also had to supply men for forced labor and to collect and hand over to the Germans valuables, goods, furniture, and household appliances owned by Jews.

On the eve of the Day of Atonement (September 30, 1941), all male Jews aged eighteen to sixty-five were ordered to assemble on the following day in the central town square. A Selektion was made that resulted in 700 men being taken to a nearby forest and murdered. On December 18 of that year, 1,200 Jews were moved out of the city, on the pretext that they were being transferred to nearby Podgaitisy. Along the way the German and Ukrainian escorts stopped the convoy and machine-gunned all the Jews to death. Toward the end of 1941, young Jews were seized and sent to labor camps in Zborov, Kamionka, and Hluboczek Wielki. Most of them met their death there, from hard labor, starvation, and the treatment meted out to them.

On February 17, 1942, several dozen Berezhany Jews were murdered in a place outside the town. In the spring of that year, Jews from neighboring villages were brought into the town. Additional dozens of Jews were murdered in June 1942. In a mass Aktion that took place on the Day of Atonement, September 21, fifteen hundred Jews were rounded up and deported to the Belzec extermination camp. On October 15, the remaining Jews of Berezhany were confined in a ghetto. Another Aktion took place on December 4 and 5, after which several hundred Jews were sent to their death in Belzec. In that period a growing number of attempts were made to go into hiding in the ghetto or take refuge in the nearby forests.

In March 1943, twelve women were shot to death for having left the confines of the ghetto. At the end of that month and the beginning of April, the Germans and their Ukrainian helpers murdered two hundred men in the Jewish cemetery. In May, four hundred men were put into a work camp that was set up in the ghetto area. On June 12, 1943, the last of the Jews in the work camp and in the ghetto were murdered. Only a handful of the community members had remained in hiding and lived to witness the town's liberation in the summer of 1944.