

March Events of 1949 in Deporters' Reports by the Example of Tartu

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The March deportation of 1949 is undoubtedly one of the most thoroughly investigated issues in Estonian near history. It is quite understandable that attention has mainly been paid to the lists of deportees as well as the role of the Communist (Bolshevist) Party of Estonia and N. Karotamm, the first secretary, in the preparation of this major crime. The organizational and technical sides of deportation as a concrete operation have found less coverage. The explanation for this is simple: these are things that cannot be reflected in the memories of the deportees, and in archives the corresponding documents have often not been preserved. The more should we value the materials kept in the Party Archives, the subsidiary of the Estonian State Archives, collection No. 17/ 1 of the central apparatus of the Ministry of the Interior of the Estonian SSR. The voluminous items No. 139 and 140 of the aforementioned collection include much interesting information about the operation Priboi (Breakers) and this is the material the article is mainly based on. A more thorough survey has been given of the reports from the chiefs of the Tartu loading site and troop trains, which yield essential information about preparing and conducting the operation as well as its initial results.

On March 25 – 30, 1949, 3385 people were deported from Tartu County in the course of the operation Priboi (Breakers), and from all over Estonia 20,723 civilians were sent to special exile; 20,600 of them reached the destination. The total number of people deported to Siberia from all the three Baltic countries amounted to more than 92,000, whereas the number of those included in the implementation of this extensive operation exceeded 76,000.

Although the story of the Tartu deportees and deporters constitutes only a small fragment of the March events of 1949, it still helps to shed some more light on the execution of this major crime and its systematic planning.