

The Death of Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin, second leader of the Soviet Union, died on March 5, 1953. It was announced on Soviet radio the next day. Not everyone mourned his passing.

Twenty-eight year old Polish defector Jan Hajdukiewicz reported that more vodka was consumed throughout Poland than any other time since the end of World War II. The police had to close the bars and nightclubs to curb the celebrations.

In Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Latvian immigrant Heinrichs Dedumets, 32, was found guilty of public drunkenness and given 10 days in jail and \$31.60 in court costs. He knew just enough English to plead guilty.

Dedumets' supervisor at work interceded with the county attorney, who was receptive after hearing the story of a refugee from a prominent milling family, who explained that he lost everything because of Joseph Stalin. He stopped after work for a few celebratory drinks. The verdict was reversed and the guilty plea was withdrawn: he received a suspended sentence.

Closer to home Aleksandrs Ozols and Ernests Nagelis worked at the Illinois Gear Company. They began celebrating after work and at some point, decided to take a road trip to Joliet. They were stopped by police on Route 66 west of Joliet and charged with operating a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol.

Ozols, who is variously misidentified in the press as Zola, Zols and Gola explained to Justice of the Peace Anthony Mackay that

he lost a leg fighting the Soviets. Both defendants explained that they were celebrating Stalin's death. They admitted to consuming a fifth of apricot brandy. Nagelis was fined \$200.00 and Ozols \$25.00. Ozols' fine was suspended, as he was not driving. Mackay made it a point to tell them they were not be being punished for celebrating but for endangering others.

Ozols was immediately released while Nagelis remained in custody. It is reported that Nagelis told Ozols through prison bars that, "it was worth it".

– Artis Inka, 2023

The Gazette (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) · 8 Mar 1953

Hartford Courant Hartford, Connecticut 08 Mar 1953

The Plain Speaker Hazleton, Pennsylvania 01 Oct 1953

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