

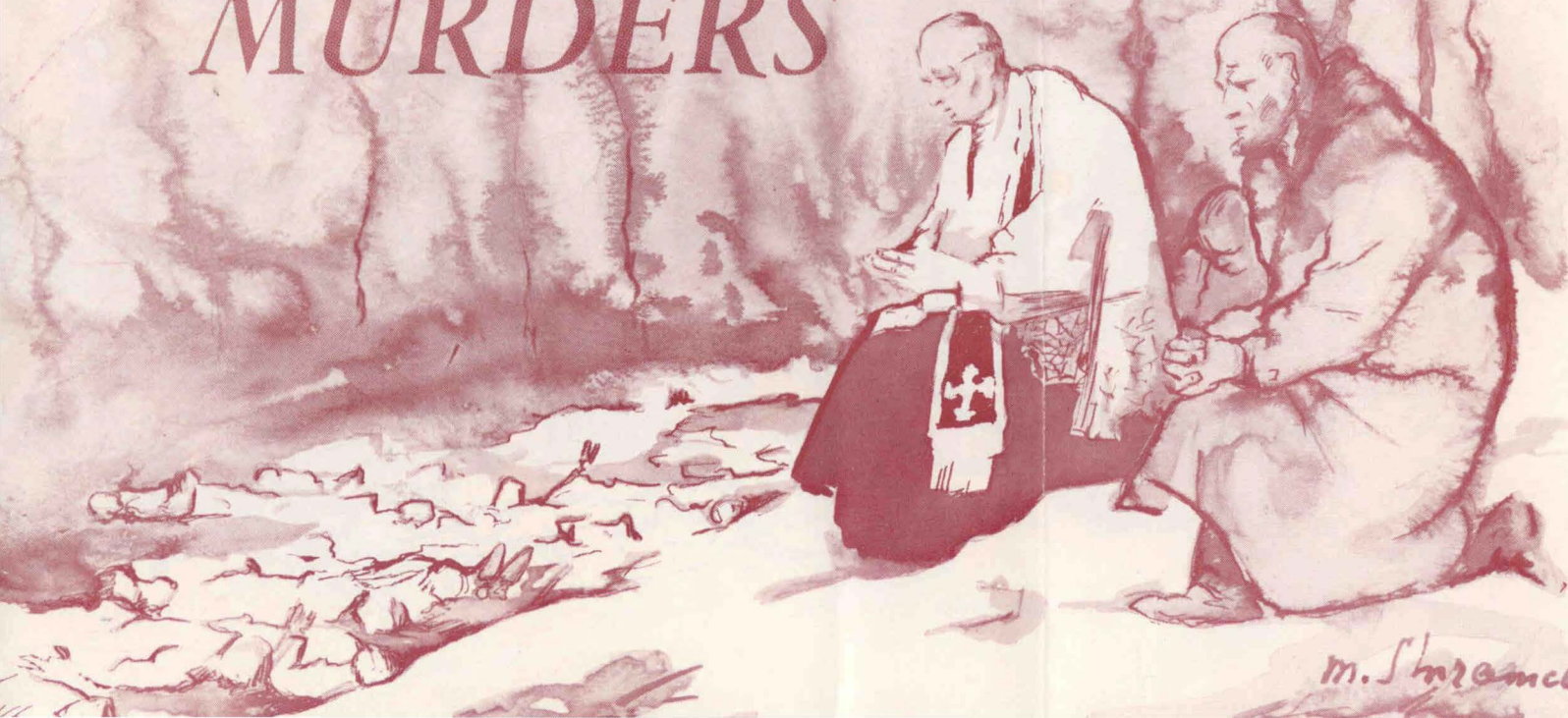
The
Katyn' Forest
MURDERS



REPUBLICAN NATIONAL
COMMITTEE

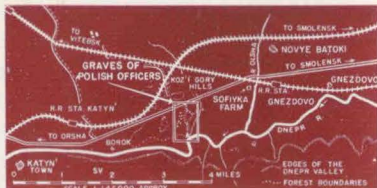
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Katyn' is a small wooded area near Smolensk, in Western USSR. In April, 1943, a carefully hidden secret was unearthed with the discovery of mass graves in Katyn': the bodies of several thousand Polish soldiers, killed by expertly aimed pistol bullets in back of the neck. The graves were discovered by German troops who occupied the area. The bodies were those of Polish officers who had been captured by the Red Army of the USSR. The Germans accused the Soviet Union of the crime; the Soviets accused the Nazis.





WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and swiftly overran the Polish Army. On September 17th, the Soviet Union, in fulfillment of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, struck Poland from the East, capturing about 250,000 Polish soldiers who were fleeing the Nazi offensive. Over 15,000 of these Poles were officers who were separated from their comrades and held in three Soviet prisoner-of-war compounds, at Kozel'sk, Starobel'sk, and Ostashkovo. Their families heard from them for several months, but after April, 1940 there was silence. Mail addressed to these men was returned unopened with the notation "Retour — Parti". (Return to Sender — Addressee Departed). Only 400 of the Polish officers out of the 15,000-odd prisoners-of-war continued to correspond.

When the Soviet Union renewed diplomatic relations with the Polish Government-in-exile in the summer of 1941, Polish diplomats made repeated inquiries to the USSR regarding the prisoners-of-war. These men were needed to rebuild the Polish Army, which was now allied with the Red Army in the battle against the Nazis. Each request resulted in the same general answer: all Polish officers had been released, and were on their way to rejoin their countrymen.



THE EVIDENCE

On one occasion the Polish Ambassador to the USSR, Stanislaw Kot, asked Stalin personally about the missing men. Stalin replied that the men had been repatriated, but then in Kot's presence he relayed the request by telephone to NKVD headquarters. After receiving a reply from the NKVD, Stalin dropped the subject, and refused to discuss it further with Kot.

Lavrenti Beria, chief of the NKVD, was also asked about enlisting the captured Polish officers into the new Polish Army. Beria brushed aside the question, telling the Polish representative: "We have committed a great blunder. We have made a great mistake."

Soviet Minister of State Security Mirkulow answered a similar question with: "We have committed an error. These men are not available. We will give you others."

The fate of these men remained unknown while the tides of World War II shifted back and forth. Germany, once the ally of the Soviet Union, invaded the USSR in June, 1941. The area known as Katyn' Forest, near Smolensk, was captured by Nazi troops in July-August of 1941. This area had been in Soviet hands since September, 1939.

In April, 1943 the Germans announced the discovery of mass graves in Katyn' Forest. The graves, declared the Germans, contained the bodies of 11,000 Polish officers. When the Polish Red Cross asked the International Red Cross to investigate the murders, the Soviet Union refused to cooperate in such an inquiry, and broke off diplomatic relations with Poland. Instead, the Soviet Union, which for 18 months had insisted that the Polish prisoners had been released, now changed its story. Yes, agreed the Kremlin, these bodies were undoubtedly those of the Polish officers, but the Nazis killed them. Actually, only 4,143 bodies were exhumed, but the Soviet Union accepted the German figure of 11,000. Neutral observers concluded that the 7,000 men still missing were somewhere in the Soviet Union.



After the discovery of the graves, the Germans invited a group of 12 international scientists to examine the bodies. These men were aware of the fact that the Germans hoped to use Katyn' as a propaganda weapon, hence they were on their guard. Among these scientists were experts in forensic medicine (medical jurisprudence), criminology, law, pathology, and related fields. They included a Dane, a Belgian, a Bulgarian, a Finn, an Italian, a Croat, a Dutchman, a Bohemian, a Rumanian, a Slovak, a Hungarian, and a Swiss. Although some of these men came from Nazi-occupied areas and might have testified under duress, they are no longer under such compulsion and can talk freely. Only those scientists who are now living in Soviet-dominated countries have repudiated their original testimony. One scientist, Professor Francis Naville of the University of Geneva in Switzerland, has never had his statement regarding Katyn' questioned or doubted.

This is the protocol signed by the 12 scientists: "It appears from the testimony of witnesses, and from letters, newspapers, and documents found on the bodies, that the executions took place in the months of March and April, 1940."

According to the scientists, young spruce trees growing on the graves were five years old. Scientific evidence proved that these trees had been transplanted there in the spring of 1940. Not one of the letters, diaries, or newspaper clippings found on the bodies bore a date later than April or May of 1940. *The Red Army was in complete control of the Katyn' area until the middle of 1941.*

Although the Soviet Union accused the Germans of executing the Polish officers in August of 1941, the corpses were clad in winter clothing, including woolen socks, sweaters, scarves, and heavy underwear — proof that the men had been killed during the winter months. The international investigating panel found no traces of insects on the bodies, additional evidence that the burial had taken place in the winter or spring, prior to the emergence of insects.



An American army officer, Lieutenant Colonel John H. Van Vliet, who was a prisoner of the Germans, was taken to Katyn'. Colonel Van Vliet was struck by the fact that the boots on the bodies of the Polish corpses were relatively unworn. To him, this was an indication that the Poles had been prisoners-of-war only a short time before they had been murdered. Since they had been captured in September, 1939 and the Soviets held Katyn' until mid-1941, Colonel Van Vliet deduced that the Soviet Union had committed the crime.

The mass of evidence continued to accumulate from many sources. A Pole named Jerzy Lewszecki reported a conversation he had with Stalin's eldest son (by Stalin's first marriage), Yacob Dzhugashvili, when both were prisoners of the Germans. Lewszecki said he discussed the disappearance of the Polish officers with Yacob Dzhugashvili who frankly admitted that the Poles were executed by the Soviets. "Why, those were the intelligentsia, the most dangerous element to us. They had to be eliminated," Lewszecki quoted Stalin's son as saying.

At the Nuremburg war crimes trials, the Katyn' murders were presented to an international tribunal. But after German witnesses had been interrogated by the Soviet prosecutor, and it seemed that a comprehensive investigation might take place, the Soviet prosecutor failed to mention Katyn' in his courtroom summation. In the face of this Soviet attitude, the Katyn' charges were allowed to drop out of the indictment under which the Nazi leaders were eventually found guilty of war crimes.

Only one eyewitness to the crime was found. In order to protect his family which is still behind the Iron Curtain, this Polish witness testified anonymously before a special committee of the United States House of Representatives. Together with a priest and another Pole, this witness escaped from a Soviet prison camp in Pavlishchev Bor, near Smolensk. In their escape they came upon the execution site in Katyn'. From a nearby tree they watched Soviet soldiers lead





Polish officers up to a large pit, bind their hands behind their backs, stuff their mouths with sawdust, and shoot them in the back of the neck. Their bodies were then tossed into the pit.

More recent events have been equally damning. In January, 1947, the Polish Minister of Justice, Henryk Swiatkowski, ordered a Cracow lawyer to conduct another investigation of Katyn'. The investigation and trial, the Communists hoped, would exonerate the NKVD. But the trial was never held. The Cracow lawyer, Roman Martini, was an honest man. Not only did he confirm the findings of the panel of 12 international scientists, he actually named and identified the members of the Minsk NKVD who, he said, directed the executions. Two days after Roman Martini presented his findings to Minister of Justice Swiatkowski, he was murdered in his own home.

