

= Katyn massacre =

The Katyn massacre ( Polish : zbrodnia katyńska , mord kатыński , " Katy? crime " ; Russian : ?????????? ?????????? Kаты́нский расстрел , " Katyn shooting " ) was a series of mass executions of Polish nationals carried out by the NKVD ( " People 's Commissariat for Internal Affairs " , a Soviet secret police organisation ) in April and May 1940 . Though the killings took place at several different locations , the massacre is named after the Katyn Forest , where some of the mass graves were first discovered .

The massacre was prompted by NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria 's proposal to execute all captive members of the Polish officer corps , dated 5 March 1940 , approved by the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union , including its leader , Joseph Stalin . The number of victims is estimated at about 22 @, @ 000 . The victims were executed in the Katyn Forest in Russia , the Kalinin and Kharkiv prisons , and elsewhere . Of the total killed , about 8 @, @ 000 were officers imprisoned during the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland , another 6 @, @ 000 were police officers , and the rest were arrested Polish intelligentsia that the Soviets deemed to be " intelligence agents , gendarmes , landowners , saboteurs , factory owners , lawyers , officials , and priests " .

The government of Nazi Germany announced the discovery of mass graves in the Katyn Forest in 1943 . When the London @-@ based Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile asked for an investigation by the International Committee of the Red Cross , Stalin immediately severed diplomatic relations with it . The USSR claimed that the victims had been murdered by the Nazis in 1941 and continued to deny responsibility for the massacres until 1990 , when it officially acknowledged and condemned the perpetration of the killings by the NKVD , as well as the subsequent cover @-@ up by the Soviet government .

An investigation conducted by the office of the Prosecutors General of the Soviet Union ( 1990 ? 1991 ) and the Russian Federation ( 1991 ? 2004 ) confirmed Soviet responsibility for the massacres but refused to classify this action as a war crime or an act of genocide . The investigation was closed on the grounds that the perpetrators of the atrocity were already dead , and since the Russian government would not classify the dead as victims of the Great Purge , formal posthumous rehabilitation was deemed inapplicable .

In November 2010 , the Russian State Duma approved a declaration blaming Stalin and other Soviet officials for having personally ordered the massacre .

= = Background = =

At least 111 @, @ 091 people were executed during the Polish Operation of the NKVD ( 1937 ? 38 )

On 1 September 1939 , the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany began . Consequently , Britain and France , obligated by the Anglo @-@ Polish military alliance and Franco @-@ Polish alliance to attack Germany in the case of such an invasion , demanded that Germany withdraw . On 3 September 1939 , after Germany failed to comply , Britain , France , and most countries of the British Empire declared war on Germany , but provided little military support to Poland . They took minimal military action during what became known as the Phoney War .

The Soviet invasion of Poland began on 17 September in accordance with the Molotov ? Ribbentrop Pact . The Red Army advanced quickly and met little resistance , as Polish forces facing them were under orders not to engage the Soviets . About 250 @, @ 000 to 454 @, @ 700 Polish soldiers and policemen were captured and interned by the Soviet authorities . Some were freed or escaped quickly , but 125 @, @ 000 were imprisoned in camps run by the NKVD . Of these , 42 @, @ 400 soldiers , mostly of Ukrainian and Belarusian ethnicity serving in the Polish army , who lived in the territories of Poland annexed by the Soviet Union , were released in October . The 43 @, @ 000 soldiers born in western Poland , then under German control , were transferred to the Germans ; in turn , the Soviets received 13 @, @ 575 Polish prisoners from the Germans .

Soviet repressions of Polish citizens occurred as well over this period . Since Poland 's conscription system required every nonexempt university graduate to become a military reserve officer , the

NKVD was able to round up a significant portion of the Polish educated class . According to estimates by the Institute of National Remembrance ( IPN ) , roughly 320 @, @ 000 Polish citizens were deported to the Soviet Union ( this figure is questioned by some other historians , who hold to older estimates of about 700 @, @ 000 ? 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 ) . IPN estimates the number of Polish citizens who died under Soviet rule during World War II at 150 @, @ 000 ( a revision of older estimates of up to 500 @, @ 000 ) . Of the group of 12 @, @ 000 Poles sent to Dalstroy camp ( near Kolyma ) in 1940 ? 1941 , mostly POWs , only 583 men survived ; they were released in 1942 to join the Polish Armed Forces in the East . According to Tadeusz Piotrowski , " during the war and after 1944 , 570 @, @ 387 Polish citizens had been subjected to some form of Soviet political repression " .

As early as 19 September , the head of the NKVD , Lavrentiy Beria , ordered the secret police to create the Main Administration for Affairs of Prisoners of War and Internees to manage Polish prisoners . The NKVD took custody of Polish prisoners from the Red Army , and proceeded to organise a network of reception centers and transit camps , and to arrange rail transport to prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camps in the western USSR . The largest camps were located at Kozelsk ( Optina Monastery ) , Ostashkov ( Stolobny Island on Lake Seliger near Ostashkov ) , and Starobelsk . Other camps were at Jukhnovo ( rail station Babynino ) , Yuzhe ( Talitsy ) , rail station Tyotkino ( 90 kilometres ( 56 mi ) from Putyvl ) , Kozelshchyna , Oranki , Vologda ( rail station Zaonikeevo ) , and Gryazovets .

Kozelsk and Starobelsk were used mainly for military officers , while Ostashkov was used mainly for Polish Scouting , gendarmes , police officers , and prison officers . Some prisoners were members of other groups of Polish intelligentsia , such as priests , landowners , and law personnel . The approximate distribution of men throughout the camps was as follows : Kozelsk , 5000 ; Ostashkov , 6570 ; and Starobelsk , 4000 . They totaled 15 @, @ 570 men .

According to a report from 19 November 1939 , the NKVD had about 40 @, @ 000 Polish POWs : about 8 @, @ 000 ? 8 @, @ 500 officers and warrant officers , 6 @, @ 000 ? 6 @, @ 500 police officers , and 25 @, @ 000 soldiers and non @-@ commissioned officers who were still being held as POWs . In December , a wave of arrests resulted in the imprisonment of additional Polish officers . Ivan Serov reported to Lavrentiy Beria on 3 December that " in all , 1 @, @ 057 former officers of the Polish Army had been arrested " . The 25 @, @ 000 soldiers and non @-@ commissioned officers were assigned to forced labor ( road construction , heavy metallurgy ) .

Once at the camps , from October 1939 to February 1940 , the Poles were subjected to lengthy interrogations and constant political agitation by NKVD officers , such as Vasily Zarubin . The prisoners assumed they would be released soon , but the interviews were in effect a selection process to determine who would live and who would die . According to NKVD reports , if the prisoners could not be induced to adopt a pro @-@ Soviet attitude , they were declared " hardened and uncompromising enemies of Soviet authority " .

On 5 March 1940 , pursuant to a note to Joseph Stalin from Beria , six members of the Soviet Politburo ? Stalin , Vyacheslav Molotov , Lazar Kaganovich , Kliment Voroshilov , Anastas Mikoyan , and Mikhail Kalinin ? signed an order to execute 25 @, @ 700 Polish " nationalists and counterrevolutionaries " kept at camps and prisons in occupied western Ukraine and Belarus . The reason for the massacre , according to historian Gerhard Weinberg , was that Stalin wanted to deprive a potential future Polish military of a large portion of its talent :

It has been suggested that the motive for this terrible step [ the Katyn massacre ] was to reassure the Germans as to the reality of Soviet anti @-@ Polish policy . This explanation is completely unconvincing in view of the care with which the Soviet regime kept the massacre secret from the very German government it was supposed to impress . ... A more likely explanation is that ... [ the massacre ] should be seen as looking forward to a future in which there might again be a Poland on the Soviet Union 's western border . Since he intended to keep the eastern portion of the country in any case , Stalin could be certain that any revived Poland would be unfriendly . Under those circumstances , depriving it of a large proportion of its military and technical elite would make it weaker .

The Soviet leadership , and Stalin in particular , viewed the Polish prisoners as a " problem " as

they might resist being under Soviet rule . Therefore the decision was made that the prisoners inside the " special camps " were to be shot as " avowed enemies of Soviet authority " .

= = Executions = =

The number of victims is estimated at about 22 @, @ 000 , with a lower limit of confirmed dead of 21 @, @ 768 . According to Soviet documents declassified in 1990 , 21 @, @ 857 Polish internees and prisoners were executed after 3 April 1940 : 14 @, @ 552 prisoners of war ( most or all of them from the three camps ) and 7 @, @ 305 prisoners in western parts of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSRs . Of them 4 @, @ 421 were from Kozelsk , 3 @, @ 820 from Starobelsk , 6 @, @ 311 from Ostashkov , and 7 @, @ 305 from Byelorussian and Ukrainian prisons . The head of the NKVD POW department , Maj. General P. K. Soprunenko , organized " selections " of Polish officers to be massacred at Katyn and elsewhere .

Those who died at Katyn included soldiers ( an admiral , two generals , 24 colonels , 79 lieutenant colonels , 258 majors , 654 captains , 17 naval captains , 85 privates , 3 @, @ 420 non @-@ commissioned officers , and seven chaplains ) , 200 pilots , government representatives and royalty ( a prince , 43 officials ) , and civilians ( three landowners , 131 refugees , 20 university professors , 300 physicians ; several hundred lawyers , engineers , and teachers ; and more than 100 writers and journalists ) . In all , the NKVD executed almost half the Polish officer corps . Altogether , during the massacre , the NKVD executed 14 Polish generals : Leon Billewicz ( ret . ) , Bronisław Bohatyrewicz ( ret . ) , Xawery Czernicki ( admiral ) , Stanisław Haller ( ret . ) , Aleksander Kowalewski ( ret . ) , Henryk Minkiewicz ( ret . ) , Kazimierz Orlik @-@ ?ukoski , Konstanty Plisowski ( ret . ) , Rudolf Prich ( murdered in Lviv ) , Franciszek Sikorski ( ret . ) , Leonard Skierski ( ret . ) , Piotr Skuratowicz , Mieczysław Smorawiński , and Alojzy Wir @-@ Konas ( promoted posthumously ) . Not all of the executed were ethnic Poles , because the Second Polish Republic was a multiethnic state , and its officer corps included Belarusians , Ukrainians , and Jews . It is estimated that about 8 % of the Katyn massacre victims were Polish Jews . 395 prisoners were spared from the slaughter , among them Stanisław Swianiewicz and Józef Czapski . They were taken to the Yukhnov camp or Pavlishtchev Bor and then to Gryazovets .

Up to 99 % of the remaining prisoners were subsequently murdered . People from the Kozelsk camp were executed in Katyn Forest ; people from the Starobelsk camp were murdered in the inner NKVD prison of Kharkiv and the bodies were buried near the village of Piatykhatky ; and police officers from the Ostashkov camp were murdered in the internal NKVD prison of Kalinin ( Tver ) and buried in Mednoye .

Detailed information on the executions in the Kalinin NKVD prison was provided during a hearing by Dmitry Tokarev , former head of the Board of the District NKVD in Kalinin . According to Tokarev , the shooting started in the evening and ended at dawn . The first transport , on 4 April 1940 , carried 390 people , and the executioners had difficulty killing so many people in one night . The following transports held no more than 250 people . The executions were usually performed with German @-@ made .25 ACP Walther Model 2 pistols supplied by Moscow , but Soviet @-@ made 7 @. @ 62 × 38mmR Nagant M1895 revolvers were also used . The executioners used German weapons rather than the standard Soviet revolvers , as the latter were said to offer too much recoil , which made shooting painful after the first dozen executions . Vasily Mikhailovich Blokhin , chief executioner for the NKVD ? and quite possibly the most prolific executioner in history ? is reported to have personally shot and killed 7 @, @ 000 of the condemned , some as young as 18 , from the Ostashkov camp at Kalinin prison , over a period of 28 days in April 1940 .

The killings were methodical . After the condemned individual's personal information was checked and approved , he was handcuffed and led to a cell insulated with stacks of sandbags along the walls , and a heavy , felt @-@ lined door . The victim was told to kneel in the middle of the cell , and was then approached from behind by the executioner and immediately shot in the back of the head or neck . The body was carried out through the opposite door and laid in one of the five or six waiting trucks , whereupon the next condemned was taken inside and subjected to the same fate . In addition to muffling by the rough insulation in the execution cell , the pistol gunshots were also

masked by the operation of loud machines ( perhaps fans ) throughout the night . Some post @-@ 1991 revelations suggest that prisoners were also executed in the same manner at the NKVD headquarters in Smolensk , though judging by the way that the corpses were stacked , some captives may have been shot while standing on the edge of the mass graves . This procedure went on every night , except for the public May Day holiday .

Some 3 @,@ 000 to 4 @,@ 000 Polish inmates of Ukrainian prisons and those from Belarus prisons were probably buried in Bykivnia and in Kurapaty respectively . Lieutenant Janina Lewandowska , daughter of Gen. Józef Dowbor @-@ Mu?nicki , was the only woman executed during the massacre at Katyn .

= = Discovery = =

The question about the fate of the Polish prisoners was raised soon after Operation Barbarossa began in June 1941 . The Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile and the Soviet government signed the Sikorski ? Mayski agreement , which announced the willingness of both to fight together against Nazi Germany and for a Polish army to be formed on Soviet territory . The Polish general W?adys?aw Anders began organizing this army , and soon he requested information about the missing Polish officers . During a personal meeting , Stalin assured him and W?adys?aw Sikorski , the Polish Prime Minister , that all the Poles were freed , and that not all could be accounted because the Soviets " lost track " of them in Manchuria . Józef Czapski investigated the fate of Polish officers between 1941 and 1942 .

In 1942 , with the territory around Smolensk under German occupation , captive Polish railroad workers heard from the locals about a mass grave of Polish soldiers at Kozelsk near Katyn ; finding one of the graves , they reported it to the Polish Underground State . The discovery was not seen as important , as nobody thought the discovered grave could contain so many victims . In early 1943 , Rudolf Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff , a German officer serving as the intelligence liaison between the Wehrmacht 's Army Group Centre and Abwehr , received reports about mass graves of Polish military officers . These reports stated the graves were in the forest of Goat Hill near Katyn . He passed the reports to his superiors ( sources vary on when exactly the Germans became aware of the graves ? from " late 1942 " to January ? February 1943 , and when the German top decision makers in Berlin received those reports [ as early as 1 March or as late as 4 April ] ) . Joseph Goebbels saw this discovery as an excellent tool to drive a wedge between Poland , the Western Allies , and the Soviet Union , and reinforcement for the Nazi propaganda line about the horrors of Bolshevism , and American and British subservience to it . After extensive preparation , on 13 April , Reichssender Berlin broadcast to the world that German military forces in the Katyn forest near Smolensk had uncovered a ditch that was " 28 metres long and 16 metres wide [ 92 ft by 52 ft ] , in which the bodies of 3 @,@ 000 Polish officers were piled up in 12 layers " . The broadcast went on to charge the Soviets with carrying out the massacre in 1940 .

The Germans brought in a European Red Cross committee called the Katyn Commission , comprising 12 forensic experts and their staff , from Belgium , Bulgaria , Croatia , Denmark , Finland , France , Hungary , Italy , the Netherlands , Romania , Sweden , and Slovakia . The Germans were so intent on proving that the Soviets were behind the massacre that they even included some Allied prisoners of war , among them writer Ferdynand Goettel , the Polish Home Army prisoner from Pawiak . After the war , Goettel escaped with a fake passport due to an arrest warrant issued against him . Jan Emil Skiwski was a collaborator . Józef Mackiewicz has published several texts about the crime . Two of the 12 , the Bulgarian Marko Markov and the Czech Franti?ek Hájek , with their countries becoming satellite states of the Soviet Union , were forced to recant their evidence , defending the Soviets and blaming the Germans . The Croatian pathologist Eduard Miloslavski managed to escape to the USA .

The Katyn massacre was beneficial to Nazi Germany , which used it to discredit the Soviet Union . On 14 April 1943 , Goebbels wrote in his diary : " We are now using the discovery of 12 @,@ 000 Polish officers , murdered by the GPU , for anti @-@ Bolshevik propaganda on a grand style . We sent neutral journalists and Polish intellectuals to the spot where they were found . Their reports now

reaching us from ahead are gruesome . The Führer has also given permission for us to hand out a drastic news item to the German press . I gave instructions to make the widest possible use of the propaganda material . We shall be able to live on it for a couple of weeks " . The Germans won a major propaganda victory , portraying communism as a danger to " Western civilization " .

The Soviet government immediately denied the German charges . They claimed that the Polish prisoners of war had been engaged in construction work west of Smolensk , and consequently were captured and executed by invading German units in August 1941 . The Soviet response on 15 April to the initial German broadcast of 13 April , prepared by the Soviet Information Bureau , stated that " Polish prisoners @-@ of @-@ war who in 1941 were engaged in construction work west of Smolensk and who ... fell into the hands of the German @-@ Fascist hangmen " .

In April 1943 , the Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile led by Sikorski insisted on bringing the matter to the negotiation table with the Soviets and on opening an investigation by the International Red Cross . Stalin , in response , accused the Polish government of collaborating with Nazi Germany and broke off diplomatic relations with it . The Soviet Union also started a campaign to get the Western Allies to recognize the pro @-@ Soviet government @-@ in @-@ exile of the Union of Polish Patriots led by Wanda Wasilewska . Sikorski died in an air crash in July ? an event that was convenient for the Allied leaders .

= = = Soviet actions = = =

When , in September 1943 , Joseph Goebbels was informed that the German army had to withdraw from the Katyn area , he wrote a prediction in his diary . His entry for 29 September 1943 reads : " Unfortunately we have had to give up Katyn . The Bolsheviks undoubtedly will soon ' find ' that we shot 12 @,@ 000 Polish officers . That episode is one that is going to cause us quite a little trouble in the future . The Soviets are undoubtedly going to make it their business to discover as many mass graves as possible and then blame it on us " .

Having retaken the Katyn area almost immediately after the Red Army had recaptured Smolensk , around September ? October 1943 , NKVD forces began a cover @-@ up operation . A cemetery the Germans had permitted the Polish Red Cross to build was destroyed and other evidence removed . Witnesses were " interviewed " and threatened with arrest for collaborating with the Nazis if their testimonies disagreed with the official line . As none of the documents found on the dead had dates later than April 1940 , the Soviet secret police planted false evidence to place the apparent time of the massacre in the summer of 1941 , when the German military had controlled the area . A preliminary report was issued by NKVD operatives Vsevolod Merkulov and Sergei Kruglov , dated 10 ? 11 January 1944 , concluding that the Polish officers were shot by German soldiers .

In January 1944 , the Soviet Union sent another commission , the Extraordinary State Commission for ascertaining and investigating crimes perpetrated by the German @-@ Fascist invaders to the site ; the very name of the commission implied a predestined conclusion . It was headed by Nikolai Burdenko , the president of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences ( hence the commission is often known as the " Burdenko Commission " ) , who was appointed by Moscow to investigate the incident . Its members included prominent Soviet figures such as the writer Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy , but no foreign personnel were allowed to join the Commission . The Burdenko Commission exhumed the bodies , rejected the 1943 German findings that the Poles were shot by the Soviet army , assigned the guilt to the Nazis , and concluded that all the shootings were done by German occupation forces in autumn of 1941 . Despite a lack of evidence , it also blamed the Germans for shooting Russian prisoners of war used as labor to dig the pits . It is uncertain how many members of the commission were misled by the falsified reports and evidence , and how many actually suspected the truth . Cienciala and Materski note that the Commission had no choice but to issue findings in line with the Merkulov @-@ Kruglov report , and that Burdenko himself most likely was aware of the cover @-@ up . He reportedly admitted something like that to friends and family shortly before his death in 1946 . The Burdenko commission 's conclusions would be consistently cited by Soviet sources until the official admission of guilt by the Soviet government on 13 April 1990 .

In January 1944 , the Soviets also invited a group of more than a dozen mostly American and

British journalists , accompanied by Kathleen Harriman , the daughter of the new American ambassador W. Averell Harriman , and John F. Melby , third secretary at the American embassy in Moscow , to Katyn . The inclusion of Melby and Harriman was regarded by some at the time as a Soviet attempt to lend official weight to their propaganda . Melby 's report noted the deficiencies in the Soviet case : problematic witnesses ; attempts to discourage questioning of the witnesses ; statements of the witnesses obviously being given as a result of rote memorization ; and that " the show was put on for the benefit of the correspondents " . Nevertheless , Melby , at the time , felt that on balance the Russian case was convincing . Harriman 's report reached the same conclusion and after the war both were asked to explain why their conclusions seemed to be at odds with their findings , with the suspicion that the conclusions were what the State Department wanted to hear . The journalists were less impressed and not totally convinced by the staged Soviet demonstration .

Some Western Communists propagated Soviet propaganda , e.g. , Alter Brody ( introduced by Corliss Lamont ) published a text Behind the Polish @-@ Soviet Break .

= = = Western response = = =

The growing Polish @-@ Soviet tension was beginning to strain Western @-@ Soviet relations at a time when the Poles ' importance to the Allies , significant in the first years of the war , was beginning to fade , due to the entry into the conflict of the military and industrial giants , the Soviet Union and the United States . In retrospective review of records , both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt were increasingly torn between their commitments to their Polish ally and the demands by Stalin and his diplomats .

According to the Polish diplomat Edward Bernard Raczynski , Raczynski and General Sikorski met privately with Churchill and Alexander Cadogan on 15 April 1943 , and told them that the Poles had concrete proof that the Soviets were responsible for the massacre . Raczynski reports that Churchill , " without committing himself , showed by his manner that he had no doubt of it " . Churchill said that " The Bolsheviks can be very cruel " . However , at the same time , on 24 April 1943 , Churchill assured the Soviets : " We shall certainly oppose vigorously any ' investigation ' by the International Red Cross or any other body in any territory under German authority . Such investigation would be a fraud and its conclusions reached by terrorism " . Unofficial or classified UK documents concluded that Soviet guilt was a " near certainty " , but the alliance with the Soviets was deemed to be more important than moral issues ; thus the official version supported the Soviets , up to censoring any contradictory accounts . Churchill asked Owen O 'Malley to investigate the issue , but in a note to the Foreign Secretary he noted : " All this is merely to ascertain the facts , because we should none of us ever speak a word about it . " O 'Malley pointed out several inconsistencies and near impossibilities in the Soviet version . Later , Churchill sent a copy of the report to Roosevelt on 13 August 1943 . The report deconstructed the Soviet account of the massacre and alluded to the political consequences within a strongly moral framework but recognized there was no viable alternative to the existing policy . No comment by Roosevelt on the O 'Malley report has been found . Churchill 's own post @-@ war account of the Katyn affair gives little further insight . In his memoirs , he refers to the 1944 Soviet inquiry into the massacre , which found the Germans responsible , and adds , " belief seems an act of faith " .

At the beginning of 1944 , Ron Jeffery , an agent of British and Polish intelligence in occupied Poland , eluded the Abwehr and travelled to London with a report from Poland to the British government . His efforts were at first highly regarded , but subsequently ignored by the British , which a disillusioned Jeffery attributed to the treachery of Kim Philby and other high @-@ ranking communist agents entrenched in the British system . Jeffery tried to inform the British government about the Katyn massacre , but was as a result released from the Army .

In the United States a similar line was taken , notwithstanding two official intelligence reports into the Katyn massacre that contradicted the official position . In 1944 , Roosevelt assigned his special emissary to the Balkans , Navy Lieutenant Commander George Earle , to produce a report on Katyn . Earle concluded that the massacre was committed by the Soviet Union . Having consulted with Elmer Davis , director of the United States Office of War Information , Roosevelt rejected the

conclusion ( officially ) , declared that he was convinced of Nazi Germany 's responsibility , and ordered that Earle 's report be suppressed . When Earle formally requested permission to publish his findings , the President issued a written order to desist . Earle was reassigned and spent the rest of the war in American Samoa .

A further report in 1945 , supporting the same conclusion , was produced and stifled . In 1943 , two U.S. POWs ? Lt. Col. Donald B. Stewart and Col. John H. Van Vliet ? had been taken by Germans to Katyn for an international news conference . Documents released by the National Archives and Records Administration in September 2012 revealed that Stewart and Van Vliet sent coded messages to their American superiors indicating that they saw proof that implicated the Soviets . Three lines of evidence were cited . Firstly , the Polish corpses were in such an advanced state of decay that the Nazis could not have killed the Poles , as they had only taken over the area in 1941 . Secondly , none of the numerous Polish artifacts , such as letters , diaries , photographs and identification tags pulled from the graves , were dated later than the spring of 1940 . Most incriminating was the relatively good state of the men 's uniforms and boots , which showed that they had not lived long after being captured . Later , in 1945 , Van Vliet submitted a report concluding that the Soviets were responsible for the massacre . His superior , Major General Clayton Lawrence Bissell , General George Marshall 's assistant chief of staff for intelligence , destroyed the report . Washington kept the information secret , presumably to appease Stalin and not distract from the war against the Nazis . During the 1951 ? 52 Congressional investigation into Katyn , Bissell defended his action before the United States Congress , arguing that it was not in the U.S. interest to antagonize an ally ( the USSR ) whose assistance was still needed against the Empire of Japan . In 1950 Van Vliet recreated his wartime report . In 2014 , a copy of Van Vliet 's 1945 deposition was discovered .

= = At the Nuremberg trials = =

From 28 December 1945 to 4 January 1946 , seven Wehrmacht servicemen were tried by a Soviet military court in Leningrad . One of them , Arno Düre , who was charged with murdering numerous civilians using machine @-@ guns in Soviet villages , confessed to having taken part in burial ( though not the execution ) of 15 @,@ 000 to 20 @,@ 000 Polish POWs in Katyn . For this he was spared execution and was given 15 years of hard labor . His confession was full of absurdities , and thus he was not used as a Soviet prosecution witness during the Nuremberg trials . He later recanted his confession , claiming that he was forced to confess by the investigators .

At the London conference that drew up the indictments of German war crimes before the Nuremberg trials , the Soviet negotiators put forward the allegation , " In September 1941 , 925 Polish officers who were prisoners of war were killed in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk " . The U.S. negotiators agreed to include it , but were " embarrassed " by the inclusion ( noting that the allegation had been debated extensively in the press ) and concluded that it would be up to the Soviets to sustain it . At the trials in 1946 , Soviet General Roman Rudenko raised the indictment , stating that " one of the most important criminal acts for which the major war criminals are responsible was the mass execution of Polish prisoners of war shot in the Katyn forest near Smolensk by the German fascist invaders " , but failed to make the case and the U.S. and British judges dismissed the charges . It was not the purpose of the court to determine whether Germany or the Soviet Union was responsible for the crime , but rather to attribute the crime to at least one of the defendants , which the court was unable to do .

= = Cold War views = =

In 1951 and 1952 , with the Korean War as a background , a congressional investigation chaired by Rep. Ray Madden and known as the Madden Committee investigated the Katyn massacre . It concluded that the Poles had been killed by the Soviet NKVD and recommended that the Soviets be tried before the International Court of Justice . However , the question of responsibility still remained controversial in the West as well as behind the Iron Curtain . In the United Kingdom in the late

1970s plans for a memorial to the victims bearing the date 1940 ( rather than 1941 ) were condemned as provocative in the political climate of the Cold War . It has also been alleged that the choice made in 1969 for the location of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic war memorial at the former Belarusian village named Khatyn , the site of the 1943 Khatyn massacre , was made to cause confusion with Katyn . The two names are similar or identical in many languages , and were often confused .

In Poland , the pro @-@ Soviet authorities covered up the matter in accordance with the official Soviet propaganda line , deliberately censoring any sources that might provide information about the crime . Katyn was a forbidden topic in postwar Poland . Censorship in the Polish People 's Republic was a massive undertaking and Katyn was specifically mentioned in the " Black Book of Censorship " used by the authorities to control the media and academia . Not only did government censorship suppress all references to it , but even mentioning the atrocity was dangerous . In the late 1970s , democracy groups like the Workers ' Defence Committee and the Flying University defied the censorship and discussed the massacre , in the face of arrests , beatings , detentions , and ostracism . In 1981 , Polish trade union Solidarity erected a memorial with the simple inscription " Katyn , 1940 " . It was confiscated by the police and replaced with an official monument with the inscription : " To the Polish soldiers ? victims of Hitlerite fascism ? reposing in the soil of Katyn " . Nevertheless , every year on the day of Zaduszkis , similar memorial crosses were erected at Pow?zki Cemetery and numerous other places in Poland , only to be dismantled by the police . Katyn remained a political taboo in the Polish People 's Republic until the fall of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 .

In the Soviet Union during the 1950s , the head of KGB , Alexander Shelepin , proposed and carried out the destruction of many documents related to the Katyn massacre in order to minimize the chance that the truth would be revealed . His 3 March 1959 note to Nikita Khrushchev , with information about the execution of 21 @,@ 857 Poles and with the proposal to destroy their personal files , became one of the documents that were preserved and eventually made public .

= = Revelations = =

From the late 1980s on there was increasing pressure on both the Polish and Soviet governments to release documents related to the massacre . Polish academics tried to include Katyn in the agenda of the 1987 joint Polish @-@ Soviet commission to investigate censored episodes of the Polish @-@ Russian history . In 1989 , Soviet scholars revealed that Joseph Stalin had indeed ordered the massacre , and in 1990 Mikhail Gorbachev admitted that the NKVD had executed the Poles and confirmed two other burial sites similar to the site at Katyn : Mednoye and Piatykhvatky .

On 30 October 1989 , Gorbachev allowed a delegation of several hundred Poles , organized by the Polish association Families of Katy? Victims , to visit the Katyn memorial . This group included former U.S. national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski . A mass was held and banners hailing the Solidarity movement were laid . One mourner affixed a sign reading " NKVD " on the memorial , covering the word " Nazis " in the inscription such that it read " In memory of Polish officers murdered by the NKVD in 1941 . " Several visitors scaled the fence of a nearby KGB compound and left burning candles on the grounds . Brzezinski commented that :

It isn 't a personal pain which has brought me here , as is the case in the majority of these people , but rather recognition of the symbolic nature of Katy? . Russians and Poles , tortured to death , lie here together . It seems very important to me that the truth should be spoken about what took place , for only with the truth can the new Soviet leadership distance itself from the crimes of Stalin and the NKVD . Only the truth can serve as the basis of true friendship between the Soviet and the Polish peoples . The truth will make a path for itself . I am convinced of this by the very fact that I was able to travel here .

Brzezinski further stated that :

The fact that the Soviet government has enabled me to be here ? and the Soviets know my views ? is symbolic of the breach with Stalinism that perestroika represents .

His remarks were given extensive coverage on Soviet television . At the ceremony he placed a



bouquet of red roses bearing a handwritten message penned in both Polish and English : " For the victims of Stalin and the NKVD . Zbigniew Brzezinski " .

On 13 April 1990 , the forty @-@ seventh anniversary of the discovery of the mass graves , the USSR formally expressed " profound regret " and admitted Soviet secret police responsibility . The day was declared a worldwide Katyn Memorial Day ( Polish : ?wiatowy Dzie? Pami?ci Ofiar Katynia ) .

= = Official investigations = =

In 1990 , Russian President Boris Yeltsin released the top @-@ secret documents from the sealed " Package ? 1 . " and transferred them to the new Polish president Lech Wa??sa . Among the documents was a proposal by Lavrentiy Beria , dated 5 March 1940 , to execute 25 @,@ 700 Poles from Kozelsk , Ostashkov and Starobelsk camps , and from certain prisons of Western Ukraine and Belarus , signed by Stalin ( among others ) . Another document transferred to the Poles was Aleksandr Shelepin 's 3 March 1959 note to Nikita Khrushchev , with information about the execution of 21 @,@ 857 Poles , as well as a proposal to destroy their personal files to reduce the possibility that documents related to the massacre would be uncovered later . The revelations were also publicized in the Russian press , where they were interpreted as being one outcome of an ongoing power struggle between Yeltsin and Gorbachev .

In 1991 , the Chief Military Prosecutor for the Soviet Union began proceedings against P. K. Soprunenko for his role in the Katyn murders , but eventually declined to prosecute because Soprunenko was 83 , almost blind , and recovering from a cancer operation . During the interrogation , Soprunenko defended himself by denying his own signature .

During Kwa?niewski 's visit to Russia in September 2004 , Russian officials announced that they were willing to transfer all the information on the Katyn massacre to the Polish authorities as soon as it became declassified . In March 2005 the Prosecutor @-@ General ? s Office of the Russian Federation concluded a decade @-@ long investigation of the massacre . Chief Military Prosecutor Alexander Savenkov announced that the investigation was able to confirm the deaths of 1 @,@ 803 out of 14 @,@ 542 Polish citizens who had been sentenced to death while in three Soviet camps . He did not address the fate of about 7 @,@ 000 victims who had not been in POW camps , but in prisons . Savenkov declared that the massacre was not a genocide , that Soviet officials who had been found guilty of the crime were dead and that , consequently , " there is absolutely no basis to talk about this in judicial terms " . 116 out of 183 volumes of files gathered during the Russian investigation were declared to contain state secrets and were classified .

On 22 March 2005 , the Polish Sejm unanimously passed an act requesting the Russian archives to be declassified . The Sejm also requested Russia to classify the Katyn massacre as a crime of genocide . The resolution stressed that the authorities of Russia " seek to diminish the burden of this crime by refusing to acknowledge it was genocide and refuse to give access to the records of the investigation into the issue , making it difficult to determine the whole truth about the murder and its perpetrators . "

In late 2007 and early 2008 , several Russian newspapers , including Rossiyskaya Gazeta , Komsomolskaya Pravda , and Nezavisimaya Gazeta printed stories that implicated the Nazis in the crime , spurring concern that this was done with the tacit approval of the Kremlin . As a result , the Polish Institute of National Remembrance decided to open its own investigation .

In 2008 , the Polish Foreign Ministry asked the government of Russia about alleged footage of the massacre filmed by the NKVD during the killings , something the Russians have denied exists . Polish officials believe that this footage , as well as further documents showing cooperation of Soviets with the Gestapo during the operations , are the reason for Russia 's decision to classify most of the documents about the massacre .

In the following years , 81 volumes of the case were declassified and transferred to the Polish government . As of 2012 , 35 out of 183 volumes of files remain classified .

= = Further court hearings = =

In June 2008 , Russian courts consented to hear a case about the declassification of documents about Katyn and the judicial rehabilitation of the victims . In an interview with a Polish newspaper , Vladimir Putin called Katyn a " political crime " .

On 21 April 2010 , the Russian Supreme Court ordered the Moscow City Court to hear an appeal in an ongoing Katyn legal case . A civil rights group , Memorial , said the ruling could lead to a court decision to open up secret documents providing details about the killings of thousands of Polish officers . On 8 May 2010 , Russia handed over to Poland 67 volumes of the " criminal case No.159 " , launched in the 1990s to investigate the Soviet @-@ era mass killings of Polish officers . The copies of 67 volumes , each having about 250 pages , were packed in six boxes . With each box weighing approximately 12 kg ( 26 @.@ 5 lb ) , the total weight of all the documents stood at about 70 kg ( 154 lb ) . Russian President Dmitry Medvedev handed one of the volumes to the acting Polish president , Bronislaw Komorowski . Medvedev and Komorowski agreed that the two states should continue their efforts in revealing the truth over the tragedy . The Russian president reiterated that Russia would continue declassifying documents on the Katyn massacre . The acting Polish president said that Russia 's move might lay a good foundation for improving bilateral relations .

In 2011 , the European Court of Human Rights declared admissible two complaints of relatives of the massacre victims against Russia concerning adequacy of the official investigation . In a ruling on 16 April 2012 , the court found that Russia had violated the rights of victims ' relatives by not providing them with sufficient information about the investigation and described the massacre as a " war crime " . However , it also refused to judge the effectiveness of the Soviet @-@ Russian investigation because the related events took place prior to Russia ratifying the Human Rights Convention in 1998 . The plaintiffs filed an appeal , however the 21 October 2013 ruling essentially reaffirmed the previous one , noting that Russian courts failed to adequately substantiate why some critical information remained classified .

= = Polish ? Russian relations = =

Russia and Poland remained divided on the legal description of the Katyn crime . The Poles considered it a case of genocide and demanded further investigations , as well as complete disclosure of Soviet documents .

In June 1998 , Boris Yeltsin and Aleksander Kwa?niewski agreed to construct memorial complexes at Katyn and Mednoye , the two NKVD execution sites on Russian soil . In September of that year , the Russians also raised the issue of Soviet prisoner of war deaths in the camps for Russian prisoners and internees in Poland ( 1919 ? 1924 ) . About 16 @,@ 000 to 20 @,@ 000 POWs died in those camps due to communicable diseases . Some Russian officials argued that it was " a genocide comparable to Katyn " . A similar claim was raised in 1994 ; such attempts are seen by some , particularly in Poland , as a highly provocative Russian attempt to create an " anti @-@ Katyn " and " balance the historical equation " .

On 4 February 2010 , the Prime Minister of Russia , Vladimir Putin , invited his Polish counterpart , Donald Tusk , to attend a Katyn memorial service in April . The visit took place on 7 April 2010 , when Tusk and Putin together commemorated the 70th anniversary of the massacre . Before the visit , the 2007 film Katy? was shown on Russian state television for the first time . The Moscow Times commented that the film 's premiere in Russia was likely a result of Putin 's intervention .

On 10 April 2010 , an aircraft carrying Polish President Lech Kaczy?ski with his wife and 87 other politicians and high @-@ ranking army officers crashed in Smolensk , killing all 96 aboard the aircraft . The passengers were to attend a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre . The Polish nation was stunned ; Prime Minister Donald Tusk , who was not on the plane , referred to the crash as " the most tragic Polish event since the war . " In the aftermath , a number of conspiracy theories began to circulate . The catastrophe has also had major echoes in the international and particularly the Russian press , prompting a rebroadcast of Katy? on Russian television . The Polish President was to deliver a speech at the formal commemorations . The

speech was to honour the victims , highlight the significance of the massacres in the context of post @-@ war communist political history , as well as stress the need for Polish ? Russian relations to focus on reconciliation . Although the speech was never delivered , it has been published with a narration in the original Polish and a translation has also been made available in English .

In November 2010 , the State Duma ( lower house of the Russian parliament ) passed a resolution declaring that long @-@ classified documents " showed that the Katyn crime was carried out on direct orders of Stalin and other Soviet officials " . The declaration also called for the massacre to be investigated further in order to confirm the list of victims . Members of the Duma from the Communist Party denied that the Soviet Union had been to blame for the Katyn massacre and voted against the declaration . On 6 December 2010 , Russian President Dmitry Medvedev expressed commitment to uncovering the whole truth about the massacre , stating " Russia has recently taken a number of unprecedented steps towards clearing up the legacy of the past . We will continue in this direction " .

Still , the Communist Party of the Russian Federation , as well as a number of other pro @-@ Soviet Russian politicians and commentators , continue to deny all Soviet guilt , call the released documents fakes , insist that the original Soviet version ? Polish prisoners were shot by Germans in August 1941 ? is the correct one , and call on the Russian government to start a new investigation that would revise the findings of the one concluded in 2004 .

= = Memorials = =

Many monuments and memorials that commemorate the massacre have been erected worldwide .

There are several Katyn memorials in the UK , the best known of which was unveiled on 18 September 1976 at Gunnersbury Cemetery in London , amid considerable controversy . During the period of the Cold War , successive British governments objected to plans by the UK 's Polish community to build a major monument to commemorate the massacre . The Soviet Union did not want Katyn to be remembered , and put pressure on Britain to prevent the creation of the monument . As a result , the construction of the monument was delayed for many years . After the local community had finally secured the right to build the monument , no official government representative was present at the opening ceremony ( although some politicians did attend the event unofficially ) .

Another memorial in the UK was erected three years later , in 1979 , in Cannock Chase , Staffordshire . A memorial tablet by Ronald Sims has also been installed in the Airmen ? s Chapel within Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire ( there is a large Polish community in the county and each year a service is held to remember the massacre ) . There is also a Katyn memorial in Manchester 's Southern Cemetery .

In 2000 , the memorial at the Katyn war cemetery was opened in Russia . Previously , the site featured a monument with a false dedication to the " victims of the Hitlerites " .

In Ukraine , a memorial complex was erected to honor the over 4300 officer victims of the Katy? massacre murdered in Pyatykhatky , 14 kilometres / 8 @.@ 7 miles north of Kharkiv in Ukraine ; the complex lies in a corner of a former resort home for NKVD officers . Children had discovered hundreds of Polish officer buttons whilst playing on the site .

In Canada , a large metal sculpture has been erected in the Polish community of Roncesvalles in Toronto , to commemorate the killings .

In South Africa , a memorial in Johannesburg commemorates the victims of Katyn , as well as South African and Polish airmen who flew missions from southern Italy to Poland in order to drop supplies over Warsaw during the Warsaw Uprising .

In the United States , a golden statue known as the National Katyn Massacre Memorial is located in Baltimore , Maryland , on Aliceanna Street at Inner Harbor East . Polish @-@ Americans in Detroit erected a small white @-@ stone memorial in the form of a cross with a plaque at the St. Albertus Roman Catholic Church . A statue , the Katy? Memorial , commemorating the massacre has also been erected at Exchange Place on the Hudson River in Jersey City , New Jersey . Other memorial statues are located in Doylestown , Pennsylvania and Niles , Illinois .

Many cities in Poland now have memorials to the massacre in public spaces as well as within churches and cemeteries . For example , in Wrocław , a composition by Polish sculptor Tadeusz Tchórzewski is dedicated to the Katyn victims . Unveiled in 2000 , it is located in a park east of the city 's centre , near the Racławice Panorama building . It shows the ' Matron of the Homeland ' despairing over a dead soldier , while on a higher plinth the angel of death looms over , leaning forward on a sword .

= = In art , entertainment , and media = =

The Katyn massacre is a major element in many works of film , the fine arts , literature , and music .

The 1999 Academy Honorary Award recipient , Polish film director Andrzej Wajda , whose father , Captain Jakub Wajda , was murdered in the NKVD prison of Kharkiv , made a film depicting the event , *Katyn* ( 1999 ) . It focuses on the fate of some of the mothers , wives and daughters of the Polish officers killed by the Soviets . Some of the Katyn Forest executions were re-enacted . The screenplay is based on Andrzej Mularczyk 's book *Post mortem ? the Katyn story* . The film was produced by Akson Studio , and released in Poland on 21 September 2007 . It was nominated for an Academy Award in 2008 for the Best Foreign Language Film .

U.S. filmmaker Steven Fischer produced a public service announcement titled *Silence of Falling Leaves* ( 2000 ) honoring the fallen soldiers , consisting of images of falling autumn leaves with a sound track cutting to a narration in Polish by the Warsaw-born artist Bożena Jędrzejczak . It was honored with an Emmy nomination .

The Polish composer Andrzej Panufnik wrote an orchestral score , called *Katyn Epitaph* ( 1967 ) , in memory of the massacre . The work received its premiere on 17 November 1968 .

Nancy Van de Vate 's *Katyń* ( 1989 ) is a piece composed for chorus and large orchestra in 1989 .

Polish poet Jacek Kaczmarski has dedicated one of his sung poems to this event .

British historian Laurence Rees produced a six-hour BBC / PBS television documentary series entitled *World War II Behind Closed Doors : Stalin , the Nazis and the West* ( 2008 ) . The Katyn massacre was a central theme of the series .