

Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden. In total, in the spring of 1943, the graves in Katyn were visited by a few hundred civilians and over 30 thousand Wehrmacht soldiers. The sight of the bodies of Poles murdered by the NKVD was supposed to encourage them to fight more courageously against the Red Army.

*Was the report of the International Katyn Commission signed by all the doctors?*

Yes, all of them, and it wasn't forced by the Third Reich. The Germans gave this document the widest possible publicity by bringing it out in the form of a book in Germany and occupied France. Furthermore, each member of the commission talked about the crime in their own countries — giving interviews, writing articles, or participating in scientific conferences.

*The scholars also took from Katyn things such as fragments of ropes with which the hands of the officers were tied, their shoulder pads and buttons, and Dr. Helge Tramsen, a Danish surgeon, took away the skull of one of the murdered...*

Dr Tramsen of the Copenhagen Department of Forensic Medicine obtained permission from the Danish resistance movement to travel to Katyn, and on his way back to Denmark, he smuggled the shot-through skull of one of the victims, Major Ludwik Szymański. The skull remained at the Department, and only after sixty years did they manage to find the son of this officer, Jerzy Szymański, who resided in Australia. Upon his request, the remains of his father were buried in the Katyn Chapel of the Field Cathedral of the Polish Army.

*If the blame of the USSR had been confirmed by specialists, what was the purpose of sending a delegation of allied prisoners of war to Katyn in May 1943?*

Most of the doctors and journalists came from European countries occupied by Germany, so they could be unreliable for the United States or the United Kingdom. To confirm that Polish officers were killed by the Soviets, the Germans forced a group of English-speaking prisoners to attend the exhumation of the mass graves of Polish officers. The eight-person group comprised officers from Great Britain and its subordinate dominions, and two American officers: Lieutenant Colonel John Van Vliet Jr. and Captain Donald B. Stewart. Before going to Katyn, both of them were certain that the Germans were behind the murder.

*What convinced them that the Germans were not lying?*

The documents found in the graves, as well as the barely worn out shoes and uniforms. Of course, the findings of the doctors and the talks with delegates of the Polish Red Cross, who at that time were also staying in Katyn (the Red Cross organization, as one of the very few legally existing Polish institutions, was permitted to operate in the areas of Central Poland occupied by the Germans), also contributed to that. Shortly afterwards, the American officers were sent to Oflag (POW camp for officers) No. 64 in Szubin near Bydgoszcz, on the Polish lands incorporated into the Reich, from where they would send encrypted messages concerning the Katyn massacre to the US military intelligence service, confirming the Soviet crime. After the liberation of the camp in May 1945, Van Vliet filed a report with the Pentagon, in which



*The corps of Polish officer exhumated by the Germans in Katyn in 1943. On the left, an arm of a person supporting the corps for picture taking*

he reiterated that the Soviet Union was responsible for the Katyn massacre. The document in question was classified by the American authorities.

*The Germans also organized visits to Katyn for journalists and writers from occupied Europe, who were later to spread information about the crime in their countries. Józef Mackiewicz, a Polish writer and publicist, who had been previously sentenced to death by the Polish underground court, was among them.*

He was accused of collaborating with the Germans. Mackiewicz allegedly wrote a few anti-communist articles in 1941 for the German-controlled Polish-language gutter newspaper published in Vilnius, called *Goniec Codzienny* (the Vilnius Region, which today belongs to Lithuania, was a part of Poland before the war; in 1939-1940 it was occupied by Lithuanians, in 1940-1941 by Russians, and from June 1941 by the Germans). However, Siergiusz Piasecki, the head of the underground cell executing sentences, refused to follow the order, because he had doubts as to Mackiewicz's guilt. Then, Lieutenant Colonel Aleksander Krzyżanowski, Commander of the Vilnius District of the Home Army [Polish underground army], reviewed the case file and decided to revoke the sentence. In the spring of 1943, with the consent of the Polish underground authorities, Mackiewicz traveled to Katyn. At that time, the Technical Commission of the Polish Red Cross under the direction of Dr. Marian Wodziński also worked at the crime scene, exhuming and identifying the murdered. After Mackiewicz's return to Vilnius, *Goniec Codzienny* published an interview with him under the title "I Saw It with My Own Eyes," declaring the guilt of the Russians. Another delegation, supported by the Government Delegation for Poland, that is the underground government, acting in agreement with the Polish Government-in-Exile, was also attended by Ferdinand Goetel, a well-known Polish writer, who, after his

return, also produced a report. It is worth noting that the reports prepared from the Soviet crime scene were sent to the Polish government in London quite promptly by the authorities of the Polish Underground State.

*The graves of the Polish officers were also seen by Robert Brasillach, a French poet and prose writer.*

During the German occupation, Brasillach wrote for the collaborative Parisian daily "Je suis partout." The Germans asked him to visit Katyn, hoping for his involvement in proclaiming the guilt of the Russians. In fact, many of his texts on the subject were later published in the French press. Not only his texts, for that matter. In general, we can say that Katyn was a "smash" of the Parisian 1943 spring season. Brasillach was arrested after the liberation of Paris and sentenced to death by shooting in January 1945 for collaborating with the Third Reich. He was executed on February 6. There is an opinion that he was killed in an act of revenge of the communists for proclaiming the truth about Katyn, which is not entirely accurate. I believe that his entire attitude presented during the war may be considered reprehensible. He supported fascism and was fascinated with Hitler. Moreover, he believed that only the National Socialist Germany could save Europe from Bolshevism.

*After the war, the participants of visits to Katyn became inconvenient witnesses for the Russians.*

In Denmark, Dr. Helge Tramsen was harassed and accused of collaborating with Germany. Nevertheless, he did not revoke his statements. He wrote articles on Katyn and was a guest of the Polish Section of Radio Free Europe. He also testified about Katyn to a U.S. Congress committee. But he always feared Soviet revenge. In 1970, his daughter Elizabeth arrived at the Chopin Festival in Warsaw, where she died in a car accident. Tramsen claimed that she had been murdered by Soviet agents, which seems likely. The fate of Vincenzo Palmieri

and François Naville was similar, although not so dramatic. Their research careers in Italy and Switzerland were for some time hindered by communist intervention.

*Were other members also repressed for having been on the Katyn Commission?*

Yes, almost all of them, to some extent. After the war, some of them, including a Czech, František Hájek, and a Bulgarian, Marko Markov, ended up in countries occupied by Russia. Both of them, accused of collaboration and threatened with the death penalty, withdrew their signatures from the minutes of the International Katyn Commission and declared that the murder had been committed by the Germans. František Šubík of Slovakia refused to change his decision despite being imprisoned for two years and, after his release in 1952, fled abroad. Professor Ferenc Orsós, President of the Hungarian Medical Chamber, also fled his country. He then abandoned his medical profession and became a painter, using motifs connected with the case of Katyn as a basis for his paintings.

*What happened to Mackiewicz and Goetel?*

They both fled to Italy. The Peer Tribunal of the Association of Polish Journalists cleared Mackiewicz of the accusation of collaborating with the Germans. In 1948, the writer participated in the edition of the publication *Katyn Crime in the Light of Documents*, and a year later he published his own book on the crime in German. The attempt to publish the work in the USA was unsuccessful. Both positions played an important role in spreading the truth about the Soviet Union's responsibility for that murder. Goetel wrote many articles on the subject and carried out an invaluable interview with Ivan Krivoziercew, a Russian peasant living near Katyn, who in the spring of 1940 witnessed the NKVD bringing Polish officers to the Katyn forest in trucks; he also heard from the local people about digging holes in the forest, and he fled with his family to the West in 1944. He was murdered in 1947 in Great Britain. Both writers also testified before a special investigative committee of the American Congress established in 1951 in the USA to investigate the Katyn Massacre [precise name: The Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre]. In total, the committee, chaired by Congressman Ray Madden, interviewed several hundred witnesses, including both officers from the USA and a number of doctors: Tramsen, Orsós, Naville, Palmieri. In 1952, it published a final report on its work, in which it indicated that the Soviet Union was responsible for the Katyn murder. ■

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