

## **Katyn – crime we cannot forget**



**“I was paid 5 Rubles for removing blood from the trucks,” recalled Pyotr Klimov, an NKVD officer.**

In the spring of 1940, Klimov was in Smoleńsk and witnessed the murder of Polish officers held in captivity. Many years later in a letter to the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Repression Victims in the Smoleńsk District, he described the ‘burial’ of those executed in the cellars of NKVD headquarters.

” The corpses of the dead Poles were loaded onto trucks, 30-40 bodies per truck. They were covered with tarpaulin and taken to the burial pits. There were 2-3 people and commander, apart from the driver. There was a whole team in the Kozie Góry. I remember Bielkin, Ustinov; they were digging and filling up the pits,” wrote Klimov. The Soviet officer one of many executions that the Soviets had carried out that spring.

The murder of about 22,000 Polish officers, soldiers and policemen interned in Soviet prisons and camps following the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland is considered as one of the was one of the most heinous crimes of WW2.

The mass killings are referred to as the Katyń Massacre, the name deriving from the town of Katyń - one of several places where Polish officers were murdered. The murdering was prepared and executed by NKVD functionaries; as many as 2 thousand people are purported to have been involved in the killings, 143 of whom were later rewarded.

### **What was the reason behind this crime?**

A note by Lavrentiy Beria to Joseph Stalin of 5 March 1940, requesting the maximum penalty to be imposed on the Polish prisoners of war: “They are all sworn enemies of Soviet power, –filled with hatred towards the Soviet system. The POW officers and police in the camps are trying to continue counter-revolutionary work and are engaged in anti-Soviet agitation. Each of them is just waiting for liberation so as to actively join the struggle against Soviet power.”

To put it simply the Soviets were afraid that the Polish military elite could pose a threat to them in the future. The problem was solved by shooting in the back of the victim’s head, which became a symbol of the Katyń Massacre.

85 years ago, today the first execution lists were delivered to the Kozelsk camp. On 3 April 1940, the Soviets set about eliminating Polish Army leadership, as well as thousands of intelligentsia, which was A CRIME OF GENOCIDE – for the executed were targeted not just as a social class but also as a national group, a CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY – for a vast number of the victims were civilians, and a WAR CRIME – for it was an act of

violence against POWs and civilians and both these groups are protected by international law at the time of armed conflict.

The place of execution and burial of 4,400 of prisoners of war from Kozelsk was a forest near the town of Katyń, near Smolensk. Their brothers-in-arms from Starobelsk (3,700) were taken to Kharkov and deprived of life in the building of the local NKVD Board. Their corpses were buried near the Piatichatka settlement near Kharkov. 6,300 prisoners from the Ostashkov camp were murdered in the NKVD Board building in Kalinin. Their corpses were transported to the forest near the village of Mednoye near Kalinin and buried there. Thousands of the most valuable representatives of Polish society fell victim to the mass murder which has remained an irreparable loss. The executions went on until mid-May 1940.

The mass graves were discovered by the Germans in 1943 who put the blame on the Soviets and used the tragedy in their propaganda hoping to create a rift between the USSR and the West. As a result, the USSR broke off relations with Poland. Stalin responded to German accusations of the Katyń Massacre with a lie stating that the Poles had been massacred by the Germans in July 1941, after the Red Army withdrawal.

The Soviets obscured or distorted the truth for 50 years. In the USSR, the lie was upheld until the end of the state's existence, and it was not withdrawn until April 1990 when the Russian authorities admitted that the crime was committed by NKVD. To this day, however, individual Russian epigones maintain the lie about the massacre.

**Source:** IPN Poland - #Katyń #KatyńMassacre #SovietCrimes #History #PolishHistory #NKVD #PolishArmy