

Chapter 10. The “Katyn Massacre”

What Really Happened?

Anticommunists claim that there is an historical consensus about the “Katyn massacre” issue. This is not true. Rather, “Katyn” has become a shibboleth, a marker of historical partisanship. Anticommunists accept without question the version that blames the Soviets for all the shootings and demand that everybody else do so as well — or the anticommunists will call them bad names. Critics of this version often call it the “Goebbels” version since taking this position means assuming that the Nazi report of 1943 tells the precise truth.

It is almost impossible to have a rational discussion about the “Katyn massacre.”¹ I would appear even-handed, neutral, and therefore objective if I could honestly lay the blame for this state of affairs equally on both “sides:” those who think the Soviets shot 14,800 to 22,000 Polish POWs, and those who think the Germans did it. But that is not the case. In reality it is the “Soviets-did-it” side that has declared the matter “settled” and demonizes or ridicules anyone who dares to question this position.

This makes political sense: Why acknowledge your opponents and thus bring them to public notice when you have a monopoly on public opinion concerning this issue? But from the historiographical point of view it is irresponsible.

In normal historical discussion it is considered essential to outline the disputes and disagreements among the experts. In the case of Katyn it is just the opposite. Proponents of the “Soviets-did-it” position normally refuse to acknowledge the viewpoint they oppose. This is Snyder’s practice. Or, in a few cases, they insult and belittle those who think that the Soviets did *not* “do it”, or call them “communists.” This is not scholarship but political propaganda —

¹ I use scare quotes — “Katyn massacre” — to remind the reader that the “official version” is certainly incorrect.

as though communists cannot be trusted while, by contrast, anti-communists, including the German Nazis, can be. Under such conditions it is already a declaration of partisanship to acknowledge and discuss the controversy at all.

The only objective way to approach the historical dispute about the "Katyn massacre" is to begin by acknowledging that such a dispute actually exists. Anyone who studies the "Katyn massacre" dispute carefully, in detail, and over a long period of time, and tries their best to do so without predetermining their conclusions, will see that there is indeed more than one "side" to the dispute.

The Historical Dispute

There is a very important historical debate concerning the question of the "Katyn massacre." Unfortunately for those who want to know "what really happened" this debate is divided along purely political lines.

The viewpoint that the Soviets shot all the Poles and that the Nazi report of 1943, aside from its anti-Semitic statements, is entirely truthful, is accepted without question by all anticommunists everywhere, including in Russia.² The viewpoint that the Germans shot all the Poles and that the Soviet Burdenko report of 1944 is the accurate one is accepted by communists and pro-communists (except for Trotskyists) and by many Russian nationalists.

A few researchers tend toward a more nuanced position something like the following. First the Soviets shot some of the Polish POWs, perhaps because they were found guilty of anti-Soviet or anticommunist crimes. This is the version that Lazar' Kaganovich, a former Politburo member very close to Stalin, reportedly told

² Russian President Vladimir Putin has voiced a somewhat different version of this viewpoint. He does not question that the Soviets shot the Poles but has suggested that they may have done so "in revenge for" the tens of thousands of Russian POWs who died or were killed in Polish captivity in 1920-1921. "Putin dopuskaet, chto Katyn mogla byt' mest'iu Stalina za gibel' v Pol'she sovetskikh plennykh." (Putin concedes that Katyn could have been Stalin's revenge for the deaths in Poland of Soviet prisoners). Корреспондент.net 7 апреля 2010 г. <http://korrespondent.net/world/russia/1064467/print> Accessed March 23 2014.

military historian A.N. Kolesnik in November 1985.³ Then the Germans shot the rest of the Poles, obviously for very different reasons. Then in 1943 the Germans staged a "discovery" of bodies — really a propaganda stunt — unearthing corpses of Polish officers they had shot elsewhere (and so the location of which they knew) and bringing them for reburial and "discovery" to "Katyn" (in reality the small area called Koz'i Gory).

In 1990-1992 Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Eltsin claimed that the Stalin-era leadership of the USSR had indeed shot the Poles, confirming virtually all the details of the anticommunist Polish nationalist version. In 1992 Eltsin presented to Polish officials facsimiles of documents from "Closed Packet No. 1" which, if genuine, would put Soviet guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

But beginning in 1995 Russian researchers began to argue that these documents were forgeries. Analysis of these documents mainly by Russian researchers who reject the "official version" of Katyn has continued since, growing ever more detailed and sophisticated. These studies have shown there is at least a *prima facie* case for suspecting that the documents are forgeries. But long before this positions on both sides had hardened. Among those who believed the Soviets guilty very few changed their opinion on the basis of the new evidence. I count myself among the few since I changed my own view, shifting from thinking that "the Soviets did it" to an agnostic position.

Recent years have seen two dramatic developments in the Katyn issue. The first was in October 2010, when material evidence came to light that the documents in the famous "Closed Packet Number 1" may be forgeries. Documents were published that appear to be drafts prepared for the final forgery. This had long been suspected by some in Russia. But these revelations represent the first documentary evidence of such a forgery. Thereafter the question became, and remains: Which set of documents is genuine — those

³ See Sergei Strygin, "L.M. Kaganovich o Katynskom dele" (L.M. Kaganovich on the Katyn affair), "Pravda o Katyne" site. At <http://www.katyn.ru/index.php?go=Pages&in=view&id=936>

from “Closed Packet No. 1” or those disclosed in 2010 — and which set is a forgery?⁴

The Ukrainian Excavations

Since 2010 much more important evidence has come to the fore that casts the strongest doubt upon the “official version” of Katyn. In Volodymyr-Volyns’kiy, Ukraine, Polish and Ukrainian archeologists found evidence that at least two Polish policemen believed to have been shot by the Soviets in April or May 1940 in or near Kalinin (now Tver’), Russia, were in fact murdered by the Germans and their Ukrainian Nationalist allies in the second half of 1941, after the fascist invasion of the USSR. This fact alone dismantles the “official” version of the “Katyn massacre” narrative.⁵ The present writer has endeavored to describe and examine this new evidence and to explain just how it proves that the “official” version has to be false.⁶

These discoveries illustrate how corrupt the history around the “Katyn massacre” has become. The discovery of the badges of the two Polish policemen previously said to have been shot and buried sixteen months or more later and seven hundred miles away is by far the most important find at the Volodymyr-Volyns’kiy excavation. It is the most important development in the Katyn issue since the disclosure of the “forgery evidence” in October 2010. So why has it not received the publicity that it merits? Undoubtedly because powerful political forces in Poland and Ukraine do not want to publicize it — because it casts doubt on Soviet guilt.

Therefore it has been hushed up. The Polish archeological report mentions only one of the Polish policemen’s badges. Even that is buried in a footnote with only the most cryptic reference to Katyn

⁴ It is also possible that *both* sets of documents — those from “Closed Packet No.1” and the “draft forgery” documents and materials disclosed in October 2010, may be forgeries. It is not possible that both sets of documents are genuine. See the more detailed discussion at my web page “The Katyn Forest Whodunnit” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/katyn-the-truth>

⁵ Sergei Strygin. “Volynskaia Katyn’ okazalas’ delom ruk gitlerovtsev.” — Сергей Стрыгин. “Волынская Катень” оказалась делом рук гитлеровцев. At <http://katyn.ru/index.php?go=News&in=view&id=253>

⁶ Grover Furr. “The ‘Official’ Version of the Katyn Massacre Disproven? Discoveries at a Mass Murder Site in Ukraine.” *Socialism and Democracy* 27 (2) July 2013. 96-129.

— literally a "coded" reference, understandable only to those who are extremely familiar with the Katyn issue. But at least the Polish report draws the obvious conclusion that the victims in this mass grave were shot by Germans and their Ukrainian nationalist collaborators in 1941. The Ukrainian archeological report does not mention the discovery of the Polish policemen's badges at all! Moreover, one of the Ukrainian archeologist explicitly said that this site could "cast doubt "on other shootings of Polish prisoners by Soviets" — that is, on the "official version" of the "Katyn massacre."⁷

The coverup began before this. The October 2010 revelations of the "draft forgery" documents were presented on the floor of the Russian Duma by Duma deputy Viktor Iliukhin. Yet this dramatic story was virtually blacked out of the mainstream Russian media. I was able to find only one article about it, and that was a snide dismissal. The mass media outside Russia has completely ignored the 2010 discovery of the "draft forgery" documents, while the mass media outside Poland Ukraine has ignored the Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy discoveries. I have been unable to find any articles about either of these discoveries in Western European or American mass media. The left-wing and Internet media did cover it, a fact that makes the absence of coverage in the mainstream news media all the more noteworthy.

Judging from early media reports on this excavation it appears that they believed the victims had been shot by the Soviet NKVD.⁸ It is safe to assume that Poland and Ukraine would never have proceeded with the excavation of the mass graves at Volodymyr-

⁷ Furr, Official version 127.

⁸ See, for example, "Volyn's Own Katyn." *The Ukrainian Week*, October 3, 2011. At <http://ukrainianweek.com/Investigation/32076> ; "Poland will finance the excavation of NKVD victims' graves in Volyn." Day (Den', Kyiv, Ukraine). <http://www.day.kiev.ua/en/article/society/poland-will-finance-excavation-nkvd-victims-graves-volyn> (both accessed 03.14.2014); "Mass Graves in Ukraine Hold Polish Victims?", Polish Radio August 4, 2009. At <http://www.polskieradio.pl/thenews/international/?id=113330> (accessed 01.15.2010; no longer online here); at <http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=156119> (accessed 03.15.2014).

Volyns'kiy if either had thought for a moment that the results would cast doubt upon the "Katyn massacre."

There is good evidence that OUN (Ukrainian Nationalist) forces participated in the mass murders of the victims at Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy. The OUN is honored in Western Ukraine. Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy even has a street named after OUN leader and Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, whose men participated in the mass murders there.⁹

Soviet guilt in the "Katyn massacre" is literally constitutive of post-1990 Polish nationalism. Poland has transformed "Katyn" into an anticommunist and anti-Russian orgy of veneration for its victims. Polish governments have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on hundreds of monuments and memorials to "Katyn." Hundreds of ceremonies, some very large in scope, have been devoted to "Katyn," as have hundreds or thousands of publications and the efforts of dozens of scholars. The "official version" of Katyn is taught in all Polish schools. In addition to the motive of anticommunism "Katyn" is kept alive as a weapon to beat Russia with, for Russia is the heir to the Soviet Union. Poland continues its years-long struggle to have "Katyn" declared "genocide" and make Russia pay reparations to the families of the victims.

Yet now we know that there was no "Katyn" — no single chain of events during which the Soviets shot all the Polish POWs. But Poland, Ukraine, and anticommunists generally do not want to acknowledge this. Much less do they want their own citizens or the world at large to doubt Soviet guilt at Katyn.

The story of "Katyn" is a fascinating historical conundrum. Any similar event in, for example, American history would have long ago attracted the attention of scores of researchers, professional and amateur. But in Poland it is "taboo" to question even for a minute the "official", "Soviets-did-it" version of "Katyn." Hence the coverup and the denial.

⁹ It is marked as route P15 on the Googlemaps map but shown clearly on Ukrainian maps, such as the map at [OpenStreetMap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org) - <http://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/2101524#map=19/50.84526/24.31109> (Accessed 03.14.2014)

The "Katyn Massacre": What Really Happened

We don't know what really happened, at least not in any detail. There are a number of reasons for this. First, according to one of the documents from "Closed Packet No. 1", the "Shelepin letter" dated March 3, 1959, thousands of relevant documents have been destroyed. Whether the "Shelepin letter" is genuine or a forgery those documents were certainly destroyed; the only question would be by whom and when.

Second, a great many Soviet-era documents concerning controversial historical matters are still classified in Russia today, inaccessible even to trusted historians. Russian scholar Sergei Strygin claims to have learned of many such documents that disprove the "official version" of Katyn. He enumerates some of them in his now-famous "voluntary confession" of December 6, 2012.¹⁰ Among the most interesting of these: a report of an inter-agency commission that supposedly worked in 1952-53 as a response to the U.S. Congressional Madden Commission on Katyn that held hearings in 1952. According to Strygin the archival materials of this Soviet commission, still kept secret, confirm German guilt in the mass murders at Katyn and the findings of the 1944 Soviet Burdenko commission.

Strygin also claims that more bodies wearing Polish policemen's uniforms were discovered in the Koz'i Gory / Katyn area in March 2000 but the finding was covered up. This claim is echoed in a recent Polish book (which, naturally enough, assumes these are victims of the Soviets). If these documents alleged by Strygin do indeed exist they would definitively prove Soviet innocence.

Our ignorance about "what really happened" is also in large part the fault of Polish historians. They continue to pretend that the "official version" of Katyn is seamless, without contradictions, and unquestionable. In short, they "do not want to know" anything that might cast doubt on this foundational myth of right-wing Polish

¹⁰ "Координатор "Правды о Катыни" Сергей Стрыгин направил в ФСБ России "Заявление о явке с повинной". ("The Manager of 'Truth about Katyn' Sergei Strygin has sent to the Russian FSB a 'Declaration of Voluntary Confession'") At <http://katyn.ru/index.php?go=News&in=view&id=224>

nationalism. If archeologists at the dig in Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy should uncover evidence of more victims thought to have been shot at one of the three sites where the "official version" of the "Katyn massacre" says they were shot, we will surely never learn about it.

There is no reason to think that only two of the Polish POWs are in these mass graves just because — at least, as far as we know — only two badges have been found. Parts of Polish policemen's uniforms and other Polish military relics, along with many other Polish artifacts, have been found there. For all we know there could be hundreds of "Katyn" victims buried in these same mass graves, shot by German troops and their Ukrainian Nationalist allies collaborators in late 1941. A thorough excavation of the hundreds or thousands of mass graves in the former Soviet Union would surely turn up more evidence of Polish POWs.

Although the Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy discoveries definitively refute the "official" Polish version of Katyn they do not tell us what really happened. The hypothesis that most closely fits the evidence we have today is that the Germans and/or their Ukrainian Nationalist allies shot most of the Polish POWs. It is likely that the Soviets shot some Poles too. Even those Russian researchers who have long argued that the official version of the "Katyn massacre" is false this it is likely that some of them were executed by the Soviets for some crimes or other. But all the evidence we now have suggests that the Germans and Ukrainian Nationalists, not the Soviets, shot the Polish officers whose corpses the Germans exhumed at Katyn in April-June 1943.¹¹

Therefore there was no "Katyn massacre" in the sense of the event known to history by that name. The Polish POWs, officers and others, were killed, but probably in different places where their bodies have never been recovered, as the Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy site was unexcavated until a few years ago.

¹¹ Strygin, "Volynskaia Katyn" - Сергей Стрыгин. «"Волынская Катынь" оказалась делом рук гитлеровцев». Katyn.ru 06 Январь 2013. At <http://katyn.ru/index.php?go=News&in=view&id=253> (Accessed 03.14.2014); Furr, Official Version.

It is possible that we will never learn any more. Neither Poland nor Ukraine — nor, at this time, Russia — wants to find any evidence that casts doubt upon the "official version" of Katyn.

Meanwhile, where are the 14,800+, or 22,000, or whatever the number of missing Polish POWs? Those executed by the Soviets may well be buried at Mednoe (near Kalinin / Tver') and/or Pi-atykhatky (near Khar'kov / Kharkiv) as the "official version" claims. But all are under the earth somewhere in the Western part of the former Soviet Union — Russia, Ukraine, Belarus. They are among the millions of victims of fascist¹² aggression, both soldiers and civilians, who were slaughtered and whose bodies were never recovered. Indeed, the 22,000 Polish POWs are a very small percentage of all the missing victims of the war in the Soviet Union.

The Katyn Shell Casings

The Polish officers whose bodies were unearthed at Koz'i Gory, near Katyn, near Smolensk, Russia, by the Germans in April-June 1943, then again by the Russians in October — January 1943-44, were almost certainly shot by German and/or Ukrainian nationalist forces, for German shell casings were found in these mass graves. The official German report contains photographs of the shell casings. In a telling omission, these photographs are side views of these casings. There are no photographs of the "head-stamps" or ends where the percussion cap and identifying marks are located. Most German bullets of the era had date stamps, just as most of those found at Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy did. If any of those had been stamped 1940 or earlier the Germans would surely have photographed them, since they would have been excellent proof of Soviet guilt. The fact that they did not suggests that the head-stamps contained numbers or codes indicating manufacture in 1941. This is consistent with the other circumstantial evidence now available that points strongly to German, not Soviet, guilt.

¹² I prefer the term "fascist" rather than "German" invasion, advisedly, for it was not Germany alone that invaded the USSR on or shortly after June 22, 1941. The armies of Italy, Romania, Hungary, and Finland did as well. Among the fascist forces were units from almost every European country. Ukrainian Nationalist forces were involved in the Volodymyr-Volyns'kiy murders. It is more accurate to say: "Europe invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941."

Snyder's Account of Katyn

It is the duty of an honest historian to explain this important and polarized historical dispute to his readers. Snyder cannot possibly be unaware of it. But he fails to inform his readers about it. Once again, Snyder commits the fallacy of "assuming that which is to be proven" — in this case, that the Soviets shot the Poles in question.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote that no one interested in swaying the public should ever tell the truth — only what benefits one's own cause. Those who take the position that the Soviets shot all the Poles tacitly assume that *in this one case* the Nazis' investigation told the pure truth (except for blaming the Jews). Under any other circumstances to accept a Nazi propaganda report as an honest piece of research would be considered a risky thing to do. But in the case of "Katyn" it is a leap that anticommunists insist that everyone make. World public opinion has followed them, but only because the arguments against it have been excluded from public consciousness.

In the case of the "Vinnitsa massacre", the other large-scale disinterment staged by the Nazis of what they claimed were victims of Soviet mass shootings in which they followed their "Katyn" script very closely, it appears that the Germans insisted upon "gilding the lily" by burying some of the bodies of Soviet citizens they themselves had killed, then later digging them up, putting them with buried corpses of victims of NKVD shootings during the *Ezhovshchina* of 1937-1938, and blaming the Soviets for everything. But even this is not certain — nothing about these hotly contested events is "certain."¹³

It is interesting that anticommunist Ukrainian nationalists, who once paid a great deal of attention to the Vinnitsa massacre, just as the anticommunist Poles had always done with Katyn, have not written much about it in recent years. The "Holodomor" has be-

¹³ See "Erwin Bingel. Eyewitness to Mass Murder at Uman and Vinnitsa in the Ukraine." At <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/einsatz/bingel.html> This is an abbreviated version of the article "The Extermination of Two Ukrainian Jewish Communities. Testimony of a German Officer." *Yad Vashem Studies* 3 (1959), 303-320.

come one of the two cornerstones of right-wing Ukrainian nationalism.¹⁴ Vinnitsa has received much less attention.

Snyder is closely aligned in sympathy with contemporary anti-communist Polish nationalism. He supports the anticommunist myths of the Ukrainian nationalists only when they do not clash with those of the Polish nationalists. This is not the only form of Polish nationalism. Pro-communist Poles had and still have a competing form of pro-socialist nationalism.¹⁵

But with the end of the USSR the anticommunist brand of nationalism has become hegemonic in Poland. This ideology bans any overt expression of doubt about the "Katyn massacre." Soviet guilt is literally constitutive of anticommunist Polish national identity. No discussion of Katyn as an historical controversy is tolerated. Questioning Soviet responsibility for Katyn is virtually outlawed in Poland, as well as in anticommunist circles, including academic circles, in the rest of the world. Polish nationalists and anticommunists generally make none but the most derogatory reference to the alternative versions.¹⁶

The Case of the Two Sets of Siblings: Snyder's Nazi-Soviet Parallel Again

Snyder's main purposes in *Bloodlands* is to draw as many parallels between the Nazis and the Soviets as possible, in order to suggest that these regimes were more similar than different.

¹⁴ The other "cornerstone" issue for today's rightwing Ukrainian Nationalists is their claim that the "Ukrainian Insurgent Army" were "freedom fighters" and opposed both the Soviets and the Germans. In reality the UPA was comprised of Ukrainians who worked under the Germans and took a personal oath to Adolf Hitler. There is a huge literature about the UPA. A good, objective article is Per Anders Rudling, "'The Honor They So Clearly Deserve': Legitimizing the Waffen-SS Galizien," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 26:1 (2013): 114-137.

¹⁵ See the essay by the late Professor Ryszard Nazarewicz, "Kontrowersje Wokół Najnowszej Historii Polski" (ca. 1998). At <http://smp.republika.pl/polemiki/Nazarewicz.kontrowersje.htm> A veteran of the Warsaw Uprising Nazarewicz worked for Polish communist security and then became a noted historian in socialist Poland.

¹⁶ The present author has created an extensive web page on this controversy: "The Katyn Forest Whodunnit", at <http://www.tinyurl.com/katyn-the-truth>

Some of the people going to their deaths in the AB Aktion were thinking of family who had been taken prisoner by the Soviets. Although the Soviets and the Germans did not coordinate their policies against the Polish educated classes, they targeted the same sorts of people. The Soviets acted to remove elements that they regarded as dangerous to their system, on the pretext of fighting a class war. The Germans were also defending their territorial gains, though also acting on their sense that the inferior race had to be kept in its place. **In the end, the policies were very similar**, with more or less concurrent deportations and more or less concurrent mass shootings. (149, Emphasis added)

This is false. The Nazis AB-Aktion¹⁷ was explicitly aimed at murdering members of the Polish elite. Snyder would like to be able to prove that the Soviets did the same thing, and so were in this way like the Nazis. But there is no evidence of this, so he simply asserts it.

It is true that the Soviets “removed elements that they regarded as dangerous to their system” — but through arrest and deportation, not murder. Nor does a class war have anything in common with murderous racist violence. The Polish government too had “removed dangerous elements”, mainly communists, when they took control of Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine after the Treaty of Riga in 1921. Snyder never compares this policy to the Nazis. Indeed, he never mentions it.

Snyder claims that “In the end, the policies [Nazi and Soviet] were very similar.” In reality there is no similarity at all between them. If there is any similarity it is between the racism of the Polish nationalists, who refused to consider Jews, Ukrainians, or Belorus-

¹⁷ There is a Wikipedia page on AB-Aktion in English and in Polish, though not in Russian. Both these pages include the deliberate lie that the Nazis “discussed” these murders “with Soviet officials during a series of secretive Gestapo-NKVD Conferences.”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AB-Aktion>) In reality there were no such conferences, even though there is a Polish nationalist Wikipedia page about them. See О.В. Вишлёв, «Миф об ‘антипольском соглашении’», Накануне 22 июня 1941 года. М.: Наука, 2001, сс. 120-122. On the web at <http://militera.lib.ru/research/vishlev/04.html>

sians as "Poles" even if they spoke Polish and were citizens of Poland, and Nazi racial doctrines that refused to consider Jews as "Germans" even if they were culturally German and were German citizens. In contrast, all citizens of the Soviet Union regardless of nationality were considered equally part of "the Soviet people."

Snyder then turns to the "case of the two sets of siblings", which we will now briefly investigate.

In at least two cases, the Soviet terror killed one sibling, the German terror the other. (149)

Set #1: The Wnuk Brothers

The Wnuk brothers, who hailed from a region that had once been in east-central Poland but was now quite close to the German-Soviet border, met the same fate. Bolesław, the older brother, was a populist politician who had been elected to the Polish parliament. Jakub, the younger brother, studied pharmacology and designed gas masks. Both married in 1932 and had children. Jakub, along with the other experts from his institute, was arrested by the Soviets and killed at Katyn in April 1940. Bolesław was arrested by the Germans in October 1939, taken to Lublin castle in January, and executed in the AB Aktion on 29 June 1940. He left a farewell note on a handkerchief: "I die for the fatherland with a smile on my lips, but I die innocent."⁷⁵

Source:

n. 75 *Zagłada polskich elit*, 77.

Snyder took the case of the two sets of siblings directly from this book without informing his readers that this is merely a catalog of an exhibition. It contains a photograph of Bolesław's farewell note. But it offers no evidence about who killed Jakub, about the "Katyn massacre," or about anything.

Jakub Wnuk is number 4121 in the German list, page 272 in the official German report *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von*

Katyn. But the question is not whether he was killed, but rather by whom — the Soviets or the Germans?

He is on the Soviet transit list of prisoners sent on April 2, 1940 from the Polish POW camp at Kozel'sk to the NKVD at Smolensk. Aside from the German — that is, Nazi — report of 1943 there is no evidence that he or any other Polish POWs were shot by the Soviets. Recent archeological discoveries have proven that the "transit" lists are not lists of Polish POWs being sent to execution, as has long been assumed. As of this writing the evidence is that the Soviet Burdenko Commission report of January 1944 was correct: the Polish POWs disinterred at Katyn were shot by the Germans.¹⁸

Set #2: The Dowbor Sisters: The Legend of Janina Lewandowska

Snyder writes:

Janina Dowbor was the only female among the Polish officers taken prisoner by the Soviets. An adventurous soul, she had learned as a girl to hang glide and parachute. She was the first woman in Europe to jump from a height of five kilometers or more. She trained as a pilot in 1939, and enlisted in the Polish air force reserve. In September 1939 she was taken prisoner by the Soviets. According to one account, her plane had been shot down by the Germans. Parachuting to safety, she found herself arrested by the Soviets as a Polish second lieutenant. She was taken to Ostashkov, and then to Kozelsk. She had her own accommodations, and spent her time with air force comrades with whom she felt safe. On 21 or 22 April 1940, she was executed at Katyn, and buried there in the pits along with 4,409 men. Her younger sister Agnieszka had remained in the German zone. Along with some friends, she had joined a resistance organization in late 1939. She

¹⁸ See Furr, Official version.

was arrested in April 1940, at about the time that her sister was executed. She was killed in the Palmiry Forest on 21 June 1940. Both sisters were buried in shallow graves, after sham trials and shots to the head.⁷⁴ (149)

Sources:

n. 74 - Dunin-Wąsowicz, "Akcja," 22-25; Bauer, *Dowbor*, 217, 241; *Crime of Katyń*, 33; *Zagłada polskich elit*, 73.

Snyder asserts that Janina Lewandowska was shot at Katyn by the Soviets. This allows him to further assume that her fate parallels that of her sister Agnieszka, shot by the Nazis. For some reason Snyder says that Janina had a "sham trial." Even in the version of Katyn that blames the Soviets for all the shootings there is no talk of any "trials", "sham" or otherwise.¹⁹ Moreover, there is no decent evidence that Janina Lewandowska was shot by the Soviets at all.

The Mystery of Janina Lewandowska, Part 1: Khar'kov

During the period 1990 to 1992 retired Soviet NKVD man Mitrofan Vasil'evich Syromiatnikov gave six interviews to Soviet (1990-1991), Polish (1991), and Ukrainian (1992) investigators, and one to Polish journalist Jerzy Morawski (1991). Syromiatnikov had been a guard at the NKVD prison in Khar'kov where, he testified, he had participated in the execution of Polish officers and policemen in the spring of 1940.

In two of these interviews Syromiatnikov testified that one female was among the prisoners. During his third interrogation, on May 15, 1991, Syromiatnikov referred briefly to the female prisoner:

Pamiętam. ze do budynku więzienia wewnętrznego
UNKWD wśród polskich wojskowych była
dostarczona jedna kobieta. Teraz nie przypominam

¹⁹ Snyder may have been thinking of the end of the "Beria letter", which talks about a review of 14,800+ files by an NKVD "troika." This is the main "smoking gun" document from "Closed Packet No.1." Its bona fides are in serious doubt. For much more detail about this fascinating matter see the account on my "Katyn Forest Whodunnit" page at <http://www.tinyurl.com/katyn-the-truth>

sobie dokładnie, kto to był, czy była wojskowym, jednakże dobrze pamiętam, że wśród dostarczonych Polaków była kobieta. Jej dalsze losy nie są mi wiadome, najwidoczniej także została rozstrzelana.²⁰

I remember that to the building of the internal prison of the NKWD among Polish military men one woman was [also] delivered. I do not remember now exactly who it was, whether she was military, but I remember well that among the Poles brought there was a woman. Her fate thereafter is unknown to me, apparently she was also shot.

The Polish editor of this interrogation attached a note to this passage explaining that this must have been Janina Lewandowska, as she was the only female among the Polish prisoners.

Jedyna znana kobieta jeniec wojenny, zamordowana na podstawie decyzji z 5 marca 1940 r., to ppor. Janina Lewandowska z obozu kozielskiego, nr 53 na liście śmierci 040/1 z [20] kwietnia 1940 r. (481)

The only known female military prisoner, murdered according to the decision of March 5, 1940, was second lieutenant Janina Lewandowska from the Kozel'sk camp, number 53 on the death list 040/1 of [20] April 1940.²¹

This should have raised a problem for the editors of these confessions. Syromiatnikov was in Khar'kov, where Polish POWs from the Starbelsk camp were sent. Smolensk, where the Kozel'sk prisoners were sent, is about 700 Km (= 450 miles) from Khar'kov.

²⁰ *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni, Tom 2, Zagłada. Marzec-Czerwiec 1940* (Warsaw, 1998), 480-481.

²¹ The list number refers to the Russian transit lists given to the Polish government and published in Jędrzej Tucholski, *Mord w Katzniu. Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk. Lista ofiar*. Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1991. Lewandowska is indeed listed on p. 703, number 53, though the list in Tucholski does not specify April 20. As mentioned above, we now know that these lists were *not* "death lists" but merely transit lists, lists of what POWs were being sent where, when, and in what convoy (Furr, Official version).

Syromiatnikov gave more detail about the female prisoner in his fourth interview on July 30, 1991. Now he is certain that the woman was shot.

Syromiatnikov: Tak. Była wśród nich kobieta.

Ubrana zwyczajnie, w płaszczyku.

Przywieziono ją z Polakami. Ją także rozstrzelano.

...

Trietiecki: Czy jest Pan pewien, że kobieta również została rozstrzelana?

Syromiatnikov: Mogę z całą pewnością powiedzieć, że była rozstrzelana, dlatego że sam ją prowadziłem. Rozumiecie. Uściślam swoje poprzednie zeznania. Wiem, że jej palto zostało rzucone pod wiatą. Podniosłem je, był tam pierścionek miedziany lub złoty. Pokazałem go komendantowi, on powiedział, abym odniósł Karmanowowi magazynierowi.

Translated:

Syromiatnikov: Yes. Among them was a woman.

Dressed casually in a coat.

They brought her with the Poles. She was also shot.

...

Trietiecki: Are you sure that the woman also was shot?

Syromiatnikov: I can say with complete certainty that she was shot dead, because I myself accompanied her. Understand. I am refining my previous testimony. I know that her coat was thrown in the carport. I picked it up, there was a copper or gold ring. I showed it to the commander and he told me to bring it to Karmanov the quartermaster.

In his 1991 interview with Polish journalist Jerzy Morawski Syromiatnikov changed his story again. He now claimed that he did not know whether the woman had been shot or not, and said she might have been a Russian, not a Pole.

— Czy pan potwierdza, że wśród polskich jeńców znajdowała się kobieta?

— Kobieta? Tak, widziałem ją, jak przechodziłem przez podwórze. Właśnie ją prowadzili. Tak, tak.

— Co stało się z nią?

— Nie wiem, czy to była Polka czy Rosjanka. Akurat wychodziłem z komendantury, a ją prowadzili.

Translated:

- Can you confirm that among Polish prisoners was a woman?

- A woman? Yes, I saw it as I walked through the yard. They were just leading her. Yes, yes.

- What happened to her?

- I do not know if it was a Pole or Russian. Just left the headquarters, and they were leading her.

Here Syromiatnikov retracts the most important details of the previous confessions. He says “they were leading her”, and he did not know whether she was a Pole or a Russian. There’s nothing about execution, and he no longer claims that he himself accompanied her.

There are many such contradictions and inconsistencies in the confessions of the three aged NKVD men. However, instead of carefully studying these confessions and parsing the contradictions in and among them, the Polish and Russian researchers of the “Katyn massacre” have just neglected them entirely. We do not even have the Russian originals of their statements — only Polish translations. This neglect may be due to the Polish attempt to make the “official version” appear seamless and unproblematic.

The Mystery of Janina Lewandowska, Part 2: Katyn

Nevertheless as of 1991 it seemed that the question of Janina Lewandowska’s fate was somewhat confused. Supposedly she had been brought to Khar’kov prison where she was then supposedly

executed along with an undetermined number of other Polish POWs and buried in the Piatykhvatky forest outside Khar'kov.

Sometime in the late 1990s, a new story is created that contradicts this story while leaving the Lewandowska story as mysterious as ever. We are told that Lewandowska was buried at Katyn and her skull identified. We are told that she was shot not at Khar'kov but at Katyn in April 1940. This explanation is confidently stated in Polish sources. But a careful study reveals that there is no evidence for it at all.

Snyder's source, the exhibition catalog-booklet *Zagłada polskich elit* states that Lewandowska's body was exhumed by the Germans:

Zwłoki Janiny Lewandowskiej odnaleźli Niemcy podczas pierwszej ekshumacji katyńskiej. (73)

Translated:

The Germans discovered the remains of Janina Lewandowska during the first Katyn exhumation.

But there is no evidence at all for this statement. Lewandowska's name does not appear in the German list of names of identified corpses at Katyn. At least Jacob Wnuk's name does appear in this official German propaganda report.

Some Polish accounts offer the explanation that the Germans were confused or embarrassed by finding the body of a single woman and so they never mentioned it. But there is no evidence for this explanation. Nor is it likely. The whole purpose of the German disinterments at Katyn was to embarrass the Soviets and hopefully drive a wedge between the Soviets and the rest of the Allies. Reporting the body of a woman would not have interfered with German propaganda. Ideed, it would probably have made Soviet actions seem even more heinous.

Lewandowska's presence in the Soviet camp for Polish officer POWs at Kozel'sk, near Katyn, was supposedly attested by two Polish officers, Rafał Bniński and Wacław Mucho, who themselves

survived this camp.²² Mucho is identified at the Griazowiec camp (Tucholski 528). Tucholski also mentions Mucho as a doctor at Koziel'sk (19). Rafał Bniński is named at Kozel'sk by Tucholski (77) but is not named in any of the "transit lists." How he got out of Kozel'sk is unclear. Perhaps he was never there in the first place. Evidently Tucholski includes him only because he is *said* to have been there.

These two men claimed Lewandowska had assumed a false name to hide her identity. But this is not true either. The Soviet "transit list" of prisoners shipped from Kozel'sk to Smolensk, as printed by an official Polish source, lists her by her real first and last names but with a false name for her father and an age 6 years younger than her real age:

53. ЛЕВАНДОВСКОЙ Янины Марьяновны 1914
г.р.²³

Either Soviet records are in error or Lewandowska tried to conceal her father's identity and, for some reason, her own age. This is a poor means of disguising one's identity! It would only work if there were multiple people with the same first and last names, so that the only way of distinguishing among them was by age or patronymic. That was clearly not the case here. Did she give some false information in a private act of defiance? But wouldn't her military identification papers record accurately her patronymic and, at the very least, her year of birth?

Lewandowska's skull was supposedly one of six skulls from Katyn saved by the German medical chief Dr. Gerhard Buhtz that after his death passed into the hands of a Polish scientist, Dr. Jerzy Popielski. Supposedly Popielski did not reveal the existence of these skulls until 1997, "before he died." We are not told why he waited so long; pro-Soviet Poland had come to an end in 1990. We are told that the skull, or fragments of it, were identified as Lewan-

²² This account was evidently first published in *Zbrodnia Katyńska w świetle dokumentów*, preface by General Władysław Anders. The first edition was in 1948; I have checked the third, enlarged edition: London: "Gryf", 1962, pp. 30-31.

²³ Jędrzej Tucholski. *Mord w Katyniu. Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk. Lista ofiar*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1991, l. 703.

dowska’s by “computer analysis”, not by DNA analysis.²⁴ To our knowledge there is no process that can do this.

The Mystery of Janina Lewandowska, Part 3: The Falsification

Lewandowska could not have been shot at Khar’kov, as Syromiatnikov suggested, but buried at Katyn, near Smolensk. That means that somebody — or everybody — is in error.

There are various possible scenarios:

* Bniński is said to have told Lewandowska’s family that she was flying a Polish plane when she was shot down and captured by the Red Army.²⁵ However, Polish-American historian Professor Anna Cienciala, a leading expert on Katyn, recently rejected this story:

Please note that the brief information on Lewandowska in the 2007 edition of the Katyn book, is wrong. She was not shot down, but was evacuated to eastern Poland by train and taken prisoner there. This corrected information is in the revised reprint of the book issued in 2009 (see Lewandowska in Index for pages).²⁶

Cienciala does not state where she has learned this new information. It may come from the booklet *Zagłada polskich elit* used by Snyder, which says more or less the same thing. However, it directly contradicts what Bniński reportedly told to Lewandowska’s family in January 1941. The only way Bniński could have learned that Lewandowska had been shot down was from Lewandowska herself or from others at the Kozel’sk POW camp. If Lewandowska had not been shot down, why would she tell Bniński that she had been?

²⁴ These details come from a number of sources, mainly the article by Kamila Baranowska, “Jedyna kobieta wśród ofiar Katynia: Janina Lewandowska” *Rzeczpospolita* April 22, 2008.

²⁵ Zbrodnia Katyńska, 31.

²⁶ Cienciala, post to the H-POLAND list of August 15, 2012. At <http://tinyurl.com/lewandowska-1> (original URL: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Poland&month=1208&week=c&msg=It7PC1MnEdGRd9URRqycvQ&user=&pw=>)

The Russian record reproduced in Tucholski's book is good evidence that Lewandowska was indeed at Kozel'sk and was shipped to Smolensk, near Katyn. As we have argued elsewhere, recently discovered evidence makes it next to impossible that she was shot by the Soviets.²⁷

* But if Syromiatnikov was telling the truth, then Lewandowska was shot at Khar'kov and buried outside the town at Pi-atykhatky. In that case the story about her being disinterred by the Germans, her skull taken by Buhtz, its rediscovery and identification in Poland, etc., is a fabrication.

* Perhaps Syromiatnikov was mistaken. Then Lewandowska was not shot and buried at Khar'kov. Instead she was taken to Katyn, and shot and buried there — from the evidence we now have, by the Germans.

* Perhaps Syromiatnikov was telling the truth about the "one female" among the prisoners, but the Polish records are wrong — there were at least two female Polish prisoners. The one shot and buried at Khar'kov was not Lewandowska. The problem is that the Soviet transit records of Polish P.O.W.s shipped from Starobelsk P.O.W. camp to Khar'kov do not record any other female prisoners.

We have no idea what Syromiatnikov was told informally. It is possible that he told the very brief story about the "female prisoner" in order to provide closure to the Polish story about Lewandowska and so to please his interrogators. In 1991 the "skull at Katyn" story had not yet appeared. But it is also possible that he told the truth as he remembered it. He said himself that he had a poor memory of those long-ago events and he contradicted himself on some points, including this one.

With the appearance in the late 1990s of the version that Lewandowska was shot by the Soviets at Katyn, disinterred by the Germans who never mentioned it, and finally identified through a skull that had ended up in the possession of a Polish scientist, Syromiatnikov's confession has been forgotten. None of the histor-

²⁷ See Furr, Official version.

ians and writers on the Katyn question mentions it or the problem of falsification that it raises. Snyder does not mention it either.

The significance of this is that it casts further doubt upon the confessions of the three NKVD men who, in the early 1990s, were important evidence of Soviet guilt in the Katyn massacre. Russian researchers of the Katyn story have long doubted these confessions. This would be further evidence that they are indeed corrupted, at least partly false, probably an attempt to tell the Polish and Russian interrogators what they wanted to hear.

Why spend all this space on the question of Janina Lewandowska and Katyn, which occupies few pages in *Bloodlands*? One reason is to show that what we have called the "official version" of the "Katyn massacre", the "Soviets-did-it" story, is not a simple matter. The fascinating complexity of the Janina Lewandowska story highlights the fact that Snyder is uncritically repeating the official Polish nationalist version not only of Lewandowska but of the whole Katyn question without acknowledging — informing his readers — that he is doing so.

The "Janina Lewandowska" story shows that the "official version" — really, the anticommunist and Polish nationalist version — of Katyn is very far from the seamless narrative, devoid of contradictions, that its proponents pretend it is. And it does not even help Snyder's "numbers game." Given that his goal is to make the Soviets into mass murderers on almost the Nazi scale, Katyn is scarcely relevant. Even if the Soviets had "done it" — shot all the Polish POWs — that would be 22,000, scarcely a drop in the bucket compared to the millions of mass murder victims he needs in order to make his Soviet-Nazi comparison even remotely credible.