



INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

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Photo: Katyn Mother of God,
Linocut by Danuta Staszewska
"Madonna of the Murdered"

THE KATYŃ MASSACRE OF 1940. EXTERMINATION OF THE POLISH ELITE

German-Soviet military parade in
Brest-Litovsk on 22nd September 1939
Photo by: IPN

Excerpt from the order of Marshal Edward Smigly-Rydz, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, issued on 17th September 1939 in Kutry, concerning the Soviet invasion of Poland:

"The Soviets have invaded. (...) Abstain from provocative operations, only fight back when attacked or if they tried to disarm our detachments".



The meeting of Joseph Stalin and Joachim von Ribbentrop in Moscow on 23rd August 1939
Photo: public domain

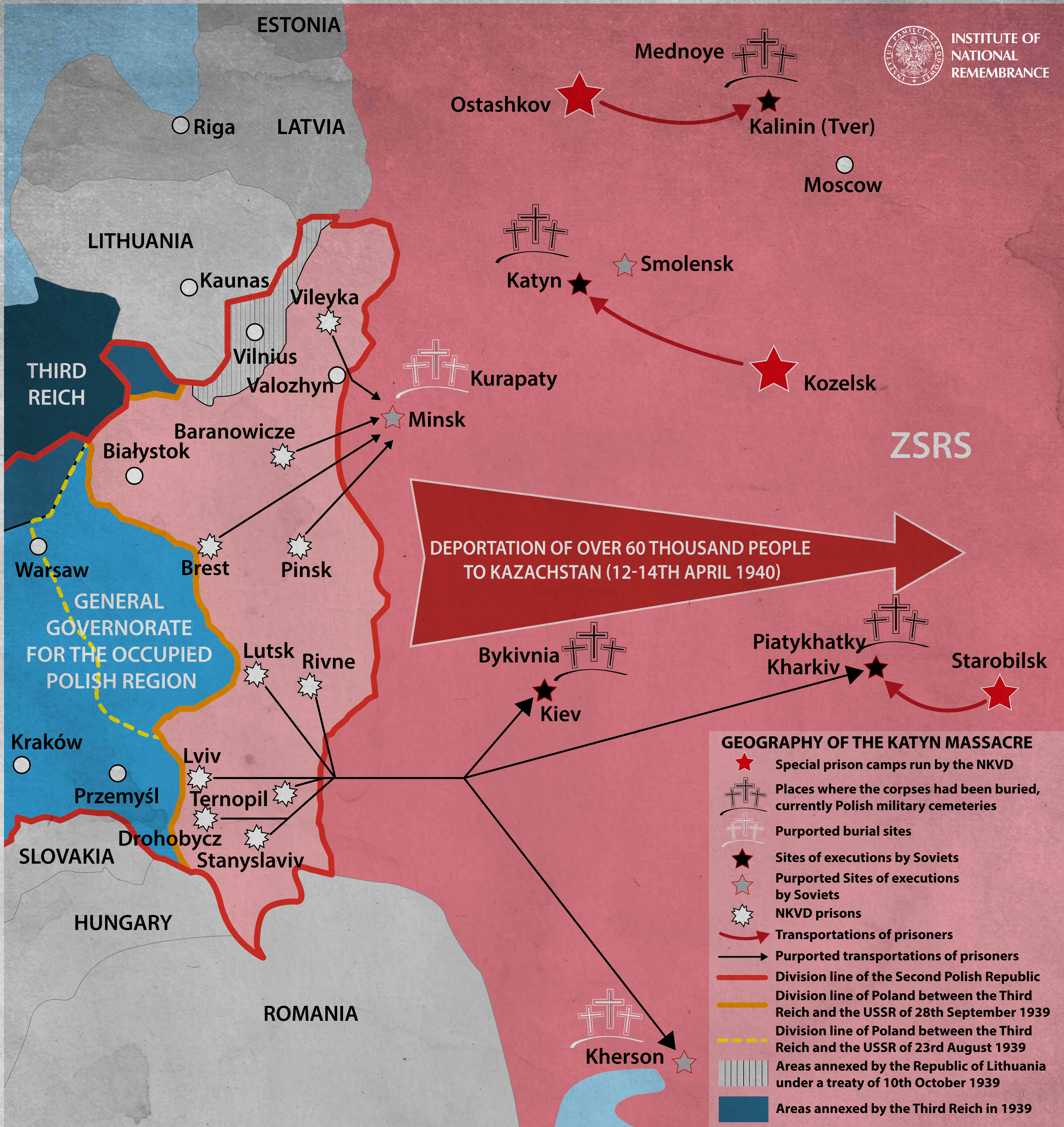
Excerpt from a note by Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, passed to Waław Grzybowski, the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, on 17th September 1939:

"The war between Germany and Poland has revealed the bankruptcy of the Polish state. The Soviet Government have directed (...) the High Command of the Red Army to order the troops to cross the frontier and to take under their protection the life and property of the population of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus".

THE SENTENCE ON POLAND

On 23rd August 1939, the USSR and the Third Reich signed a non-aggression pact, which was named the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact after its signatories, the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries. According to the confidential protocol of this non-aggression pact, Poland's territory was partitioned along the Narew, Vistula and San rivers. The Red Army invaded the territory of the Second Polish Republic on 17th September 1939. This was a "stab in the back" of the Polish army fighting the Germans since 1st September 1939.

A map of the Second Polish Republic presenting the division line (fourth partition) of Poland between the USSR and the Germans, signed by Józef Stalin and Joachim von Ribbentrop
Photo: public domain



NKVD CAMPS AND PRISONS

Approximately 250 thousand soldiers, military officers and policemen were detained by the Soviets as prisoners of war and held captive in temporary concentration camps. Some of the privates were released in October 1939. Over 8 thousand officers of the Polish Armed Forces were detained in special NKVD camps in Kozelsk and Starobelsk; over 6 thousand policemen, the soldiers of the Border Protection Corps and court officials were transported mainly to Ostashkov. NKVD also captured around 18 thousand prisoners in the eastern part of the Polish Republic, including military officers, clerks, political and social activists. Around 11 thousand of them were Poles.



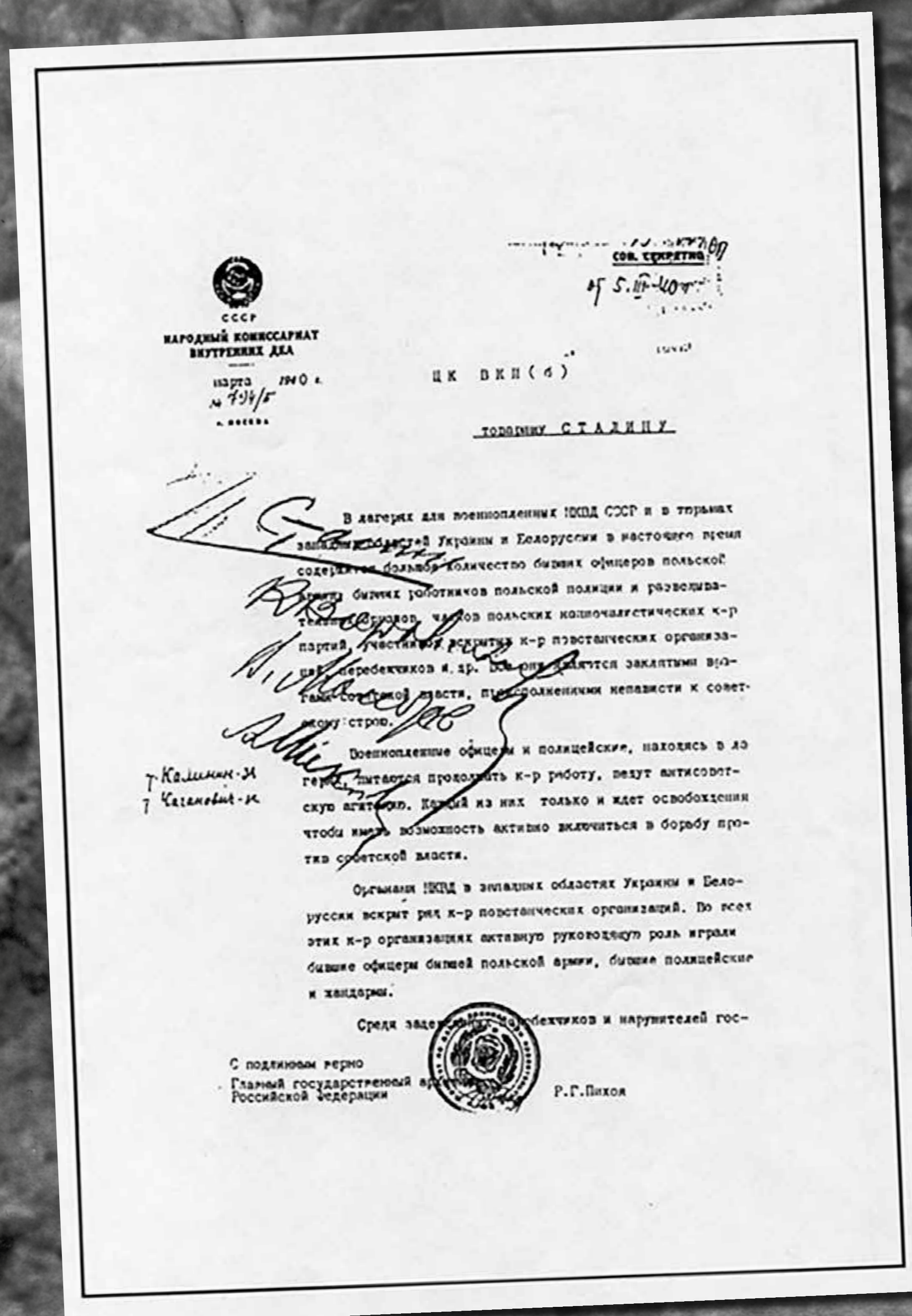
Lavrentiy Beria, head of NKVD
Photo: public domain

In 1939 Beria was promoted to the deputy member of Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union KC WKP(b). On 19th September 1939, Beria appointed a special Board for Prisoners of War and Internees of NKVD and ordered the establishment of a network of camps.

As the chief of the Soviet NKVD security service, Beria supervised the Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence, and was responsible for the Gulag labor camps and repressions against hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens living in the territories of the Polish Republic occupied by the Soviet Union in the period 1939–1941.

THE CRIMINAL DECISION

On 5th March 1940, representatives of the Political Bureau of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) signed a decision to execute over 14,700 Polish prisoners of war detained in Kozelsk, Starobilsk and Ostashkov, as well as 11,000 Polish prisoners from the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic. The decision was signed by Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Lavrentiy Beria, head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), and members of the Political Bureau: Kliment Voroshilov, Vyacheslav Molotov, Anastas Mikoyan, Mikhail Kalinin and Lazar Kaganovich.



Decision of the Political Bureau of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 5th March 1940
Photo by: IPN

of 5th March 1940

"Instructions to the NKVD: 1) The cases of 14,700 prisoners of war – former Polish officers (...), 2. and the cases of 11,000 persons arrested and accommodated in prisons in the western oblasts of Ukraine and Belorussia (...) – should be examined under special proceedings and the highest penalty – shooting – imposed."

Exhumation of the corpses of Polish officers in Katyn in 1943.
Photo by: IPN

THE MECHANISM OF CRIME

In April and May of 1940, the prisoners of three camps were killed with a shot to the back of the head by NKVD. Officers held captive in Kozelsk were shot to death in a villa occupied by the NKVD or executed over open pits in the Katyn Forest. Captives from Ostashkov and Starobilsk were transported to NKVD headquarters in Kalinin and Kharkiv, respectively. The bodies of victims were transported to burial pits near the village of Miednoye and in the suburbs of Kharkiv. Prisoners from the eastern regions of the Second Polish Republic were transported to prisons in Kiev, Kharkiv, Kherson and Minsk. The number of people sentenced to death has changed – 7,305 persons were murdered (there are 3,435 names of people on the so-called Ukrainian Katyn List, and 3,870 names on the so-called Belarussian Katyn List). Corpses are also believed to have been hidden in Bykivnya near Kiev and probably also in Kurapaty near Minsk.

The Katyn Forest with tombstones at the burial site of the Polish military officers
Photo credited to K. Samsonowska



Villa in the Katyn Forest
Photo by: IPN

A letter by Pyotr Klimov, former officer of the NKVD prison in Smolensk, to the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Repression Victims in the Smolensk District:

“Polish military officers were shot in 1940 in Koze Gory. The shootings were conducted by the group of Iwan Ivanovich Stelmach, the commander of NKVD in the Smolensk District. I was in Koze Gory accidentally and I saw a burial pit extending to the swamps, and in the pit there were layers of bodies of the Poles covered with earth, executed directly over the pit. I myself saw the bodies (covered with earth). Ustinov, the driver who drove Poles to the shooting site and saw everything, told me about the circumstances of the shootings. They took them directly to the pit and shot them, some of the victims were killed with a bayonet”.



NKVD headquarters in Tver
Photo by: IPN

Excerpt from the manuscript of the interrogation of Dmitry Tokarev, head of NKVD Management in Kalinin (currently Tver) before Anatolij Jablokov, in charge of Russian Chief Military Prosecutor’s investigative team, in Volodymyr-Volynskyi on 26th March 1991:

“... the shooting method was invented by (Vasilij) Blochin and Rubanov, the commander of our district. They ordered the door to the corridor to be covered with a thick layer of felt for the shots not to be heard. Then they took the victims (...) through the corridor and turned left to a red room. In the red room, the victims were identified according to a list (...) Once identified, they were handcuffed and led out to the neighboring cell where they were executed”.



NKVD headquarters in Kharkiv
Photo by: IPN

Excerpt from the manuscript of the interrogation of Mitrofan Syromiatnikov, a former NKVD functionary in Kharkiv, of 30 July 1991 in a Katyn investigation held by the Russians:

“They were transported to Kharkiv by rail, in special railway wagons, then by road vehicles, 15 people each, to NKVD prison in Kharkiv. In the prison, the victims were strip-searched, their belongings and Russian money were taken from them in exchange for a receipt, and they were taken to NKVD cellar and executed (...)”.

foto. domena publiczna



IVAN STEPANOV



DMITRIJ TOKARIEV



GRIGORIJ ZIUSKIN



TIMOFIEJ KACZIN



FIODOR ILIN



ANDRIEJ RUBANOV



GRIGORIJ TIMOSZENKO



WASILIJ BŁOCHIN

THE PORTRAIT OF EXECUTIONERS

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. Over the course of 1990-1991, the Chief Military Prosecutor Office of the USSR interrogated a number of still surviving executioners of the decision of 5th March 1940, including Dmitry Tokarev, NKVD commander in the Kalinin District, and Piotr Soprunienko, head of the NKVD Directorate for the Prisoners of War. None of them was held criminally responsible.

Excerpt from the manuscript of the interrogation of Dmitry Tokarev, head of NKVD Management in Kalinin (currently Tver) before Anatolij Jabłokov, in charge of Russian Chief Military Prosecutor's investigative team, in Volodymyr-Volynskyyi on 26th March 1991:

"When I mentioned that people were needed to dig graves, they laughed at me. Naive weirdos. We needed an excavator. (...) Blochin has found one in Kalinin. They brought the vehicle to the burial site in Miednoje (...)."

Excerpt from the manuscript of the interrogation of Mitrofan Syromiatnikov, a former NKVD functionary in Kharkiv, in July 1991 in a Katyn investigation held by the Russians:

"You are investigating the case as if some innocent people have been hurt. These were 'high society' people. Writers, academics and the like. They decided to go to war against the Soviet Union, despite all their wisdom.

A letter by Pyotr Klimov, former officer of the NKVD prison in Smolensk, to the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Repression Victims in the Smolensk District – description of 'burial' of those executed in the cellars of NKVD headquarters of the Smolensk District:

"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 Gory, I remember Bielkin, Ustinov; they digging and filling up the pits. I was paid 5 rubles for removing blood from the trucks."

Exhumation of the corpses of Polish officers in Katyn in 1943. Photo by: IPN

IN SEARCH FOR THE MISSING OFFICERS

The last pieces of news that the families received from the prisoners were from early March 1940. On 30th July 1941, the Sikorski-Majski Pact was signed, under which a Polish army was to be formed. General Wladyslaw Anders was appointed the commander of Polish Armed Forces in the USSR. A search began for the missing Polish military officers, coordinated by Cavalry Captain, Jozef Czapski, who was appointed a representative on the matter of the missing people by the Polish government-in-exile in London. All interventions in the USSR failed and the responses of Soviets were elusive.



Soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR in 1942.

Photo by: NAC



Józef Czapski, Cavalry Captain
Photo: public domain

J. Czapski, "Wspomnienia starobielskie" [Reminiscences of Starobyelsk], Warsaw 1989:

"Anders began forming Polish Army in the USSR in September 1941 in Tatiszczew near Saratow and in Totskoye on the Kuybyshev-to-Chkalov line. (...) From the first moment I began asking every Pole if they worked with any of our companions from Starobyelsk, Kozelsk and Ostashkov. We still believed our fellowmen would arrive any minute... From the moment Anders started to form the army, he persistently demanded information about the missing officers from the Soviets. He continued to receive kind but vague promises (...).



General Władysław Anders
Photo: public domain

Excerpt from a conversation between General Władysław Anders, General Władysław Sikorski and Joseph Stalin of 3rd December 1941:

General Sikorski: I have a list of around 4,000 military officers who were forcefully relocated and are still held captive in prisons and labor camps; the list is non exhaustive as it contains names recalled from memory. (...) These people are still here. None of them returned.



General. Władysław Sikorski
Photo: public domain

Stalin: That's impossible. They must have escaped.

Anders: Where did they escape to?

Stalin: Well, to Manchuria.

Anders: All of them could not have escaped, especially that their families did not hear from them since they were relocated from POW camps to labor camps and prisons (...).".



On 13 April 1943, the radio in Berlin announced that:
 "A report has reached us from Smolensk to the effect that the local inhabitants have mentioned to the German authorities the existence of a place where mass executions have been carried out by the Bolsheviks and where 10,000 Polish officers have been murdered by the Soviet Secret State Police."

Information published in propaganda press after discovery of the remains of the Polish military officers.
 Photo by: IPN

DISCOVERY OF THE KATYN MASSACRE

After the corpses of Poles were discovered in the Smolensk region, the Germans decided to use this fact for the purposes of German propaganda in an attempt to drive a political wedge between the Allies. On 13 April 1943, the radio in Berlin announced that mass Polish graves had been discovered in the Katyn Forest. In response, on 25 April 1943, the USSR government decided to break off the relations with the Polish government. Meanwhile, the Polish government and the Third Reich approached the International Red Cross with a request to investigate the case. Stalin used this as an excuse and accused Poland of collaborating with the Third Reich.



Exhumation of the corpses of Polish officers in Katyn in 1943.
 Photo by: IPN

Statement of the Polish Government of 28th April 1943 concerning the breaking off of diplomatic relations by the USSR:

"In a public statement of April 17, 1943, the Polish Government categorically denied to Germany the right to abuse the tragedy of Polish officers for her own perfidious schemes. They unhesitatingly denounce Nazi propaganda designed to create mistrust between Allies."



Excerpt from a report by the Technical Committee of the Polish Red Cross of June 1943:

"(...) During the work of the Technical Committee of the Polish Red Cross in the Katyn Forest which began on 15th of April 1943 and ended on 7th June 1943, 4,243 bodies were exhumed in total, 4,233 of whom were removed from the seven graves which were situated close to one another and uncovered in March 1943 by the German military authorities. The Committee concludes (...) the cause of death to be a shot in the skull. Based on the documents found on the bodies, the shootings were established to take place from the end of March to the beginning of May 1940."

*Exhumation of the corpses of Polish officers in Katyn in 1943.
Photo by: IPN*

EXHUMATION IN KATYN IN 1943

The Germans had been carrying out exhumations in the Katyn Forest from the beginning of June 1943. An International Forensic Medicine Committee was also working in Katyn, composed of twelve forensic medicine experts (28-30 April 1943). The Technical Committee of the Polish Red Cross was established in April 1943, which was also involved in the exhumations. The corpses were being identified on the basis of documents and items found, which were later transported to Krakow.

Report of the International Forensic Medicine Commission of May 1943:

"The Commission has examined the mass-graves of Polish officers in Katyn Forest. So far seven of these graves have been opened. Up to the present a total of 982 bodies has been exhumed and examined. Some of them have been submitted to a detailed post-mortem examination. Seventy per cent of the bodies have been identified. The death of all these victims was caused exclusively by a shot in the nape of the neck. From statements made by witnesses, as well as from letters, diaries, newspapers, etc. found on the bodies, it follows that the executions took place in March and April, 1940."

*Exhumation of the corpses of Polish officers in Katyn in 1943.
Photo by: IPN*



Cross erected by the Zygmunt Berling troops at the mass grave of the victims of the Katyn Massacre in January 1944. The inscription "In Honour of the Fallen" dated 1941, in line with the Soviet propaganda. Photo by: CAW WBH



Wanda Wasilewska
Photo: public domain

Excerpt from an article by Wanda Wasilewska published in "Wolna Polska" [Free Poland] periodic on 1st February 1944, accusing the Germans for committing the murder of the Polish military officers in Katyn:

"(...) The Germans uncovered the bodies of their own victims and shouted their dastardly lie to the whole world. They fabricated witnesses by beating, torture and bribery. They destroyed documents that stacked against them (...)"

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE KATYN LIE

After the Germans publicized the discovery of the mass graves in Katyn, the Russians set off to spread propaganda to shift the blame for the murdering of Polish officers to the Germans. After the Smolensk district was recaptured by the Russians, Stalin established a Special Committee under the leadership of Nikolay Burdenko in January 1944. The Committee went to Katyn to carry out "re-assessment" and stated that the Germans were responsible for the massacre. Polish communists also supported the Soviets in spreading out the Katyn lie.



Komisja Burdenki w Lesie Katyńskim
fot. domena publiczna



Waclaw Kruk
Photo: public domain

Excerpt from a diary by Waclaw Kruk, 8th April 1940:

"In the first days of April convoys began to leave, at first small ones. (...) Yesterday a convoy of senior officers left: three Generals, 20-25 Colonels and about the same number of Majors. Because of the way they departed we were in the best spirits. Today my turn has come."



Adam Solzki
Photo: public domain

Excerpt from a diary by Adam Solzki:

"They believe we are prisoners of war, but we were not at war. (...) Only God knows how long we will stay here."

THE VOICE OF THE VICTIMS

22 diaries which were found on the bodies of the victims of the Katyn Massacre. They provide a unique testimony of the daily life of prisoners in the camps, their moods, plans, dreams and unawareness of their future fate. There are also letters sent to their families in Poland occupied by the Germans and the Soviets. This correspondence suddenly stopped in the spring of 1940.

Reminiscences of Alicja Patey-Grabowska – a daughter of Kazimierz Grabowski:

"We only received one letter from my father. It was dated 26th November 1939 in Kozelsk and it arrived a few weeks later. My mother used to read it to us many times. My father notified us he was alive and healthy; that he worried about us and missed his family. He sent us love and kissed my mother on her feet. He asked us not to worry about him as there would come a time when we'd be together again."

Ukochani Moji!
Nawiazanie jesiennego dzieła Bogu zdaniem, przybliżeniu w tym procentach, co mi lepiej niżby niegdziś jak tam zdrowie dopisuje, a przede wszystkim dorozumieć te kilka wotów które moją, a także i moją miłą myśl że mi mogą iść tam dorozumieć cierpienie gród i niedostatki i że myśli oprost mi być nie dają, a czuję się w tym wypadku bezsilny mój z niewyobrażalnego bólu, nadzieja was oczynia duszy w niedostatku i moim niedole. —

O miłe mi myślenie w sobie, jedyne, proście w mojej kondycyjnej pacierkach, abyście szczęśliwie i zdrowo przetrwali do Was. —

Konieczność wasze pro miliony wasz P. Prodomitkovej uwadzenie przez decyzję waszą —

P. Prodomitka irod naszej czeredy miłości i nie o miłomiarze —

Pawliszewe Bor dnia 15.8.39r.
pociesz Siatkarskiego
oblast Smoleńska



JANINA LEWANDOWSKA

Lieutenant, Pilot of the Polish Military Forces, murdered in the Katyn Massacre



GENERAL MIECZYSLAW SMORAWIŃSKI

Member of the Polish Legions, General of the Polish Military Forces, murdered in the Katyn Massacre



GENERAL KONSTANTY PLISOWSKI

Brigadier General of the Polish Military Forces, murdered in the Katyn Massacre



BARUCH STEINBERG

Chief Rabbi of the Polish Army, murdered in the Katyn Massacre

PORTRAIT OF THE MURDERED

The people murdered in Katyn were the elite of the Polish Armed Forces and the civil society. Among 21,857 victims, there were 12 generals, around 8,250 officers of the Polish Armed Forces, over 6,300 State Police and Military Police officials, soldiers of the Border Protection Corps and the employees of the Prison Guard, secret service and counter-espionage officials of the Second Polish Republic, and 7,305 prisoners held captive in NKVD prisons. Apart from military officers and policemen, there were many reserve officers practicing civil professions. There were 920 physicians and pharmacists, 770 scientists and teachers, 650 engineers, 450 lawyers, politicians, representatives of self-government authorities, clerks, landlords, priests and military settlers.



JAN LEON ZIÓLKOWSKI

priest, Chaplain of the Polish Army, murdered in the Katyn Massacre



JAN ŚLASKI

politician, Member of the Senate, Major, murdered in the Katyn Massacre



JAN POZNAŃSKI

teacher, social activist, member of the Parliament, murdered in Kiev



MARIAN KONIECZNY

policeman, murdered in Tver

A note by Lavrentiy Beria to Joseph Stalin of 5th March 1940, requesting the maximum penalty to be imposed on the Polish prisoners of war:

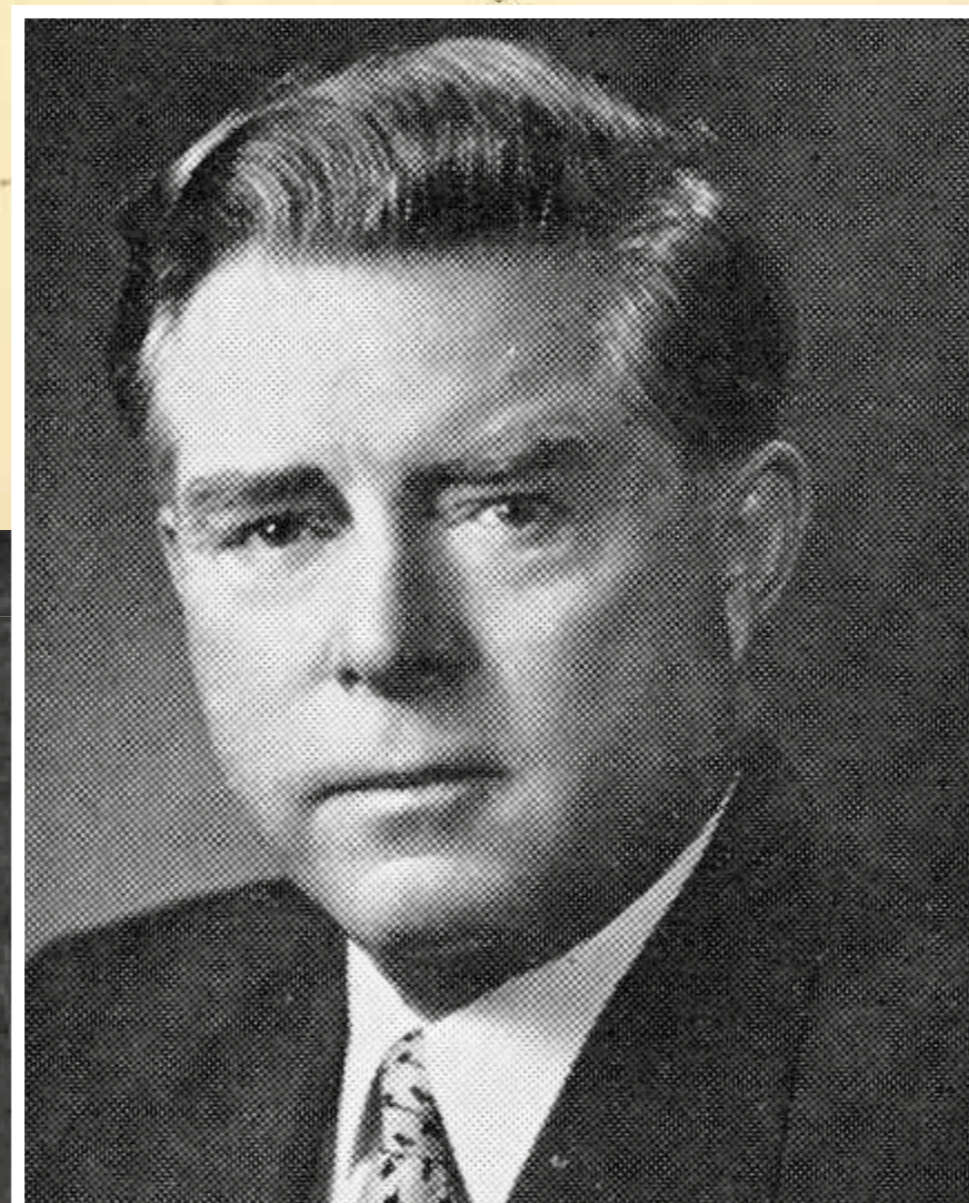
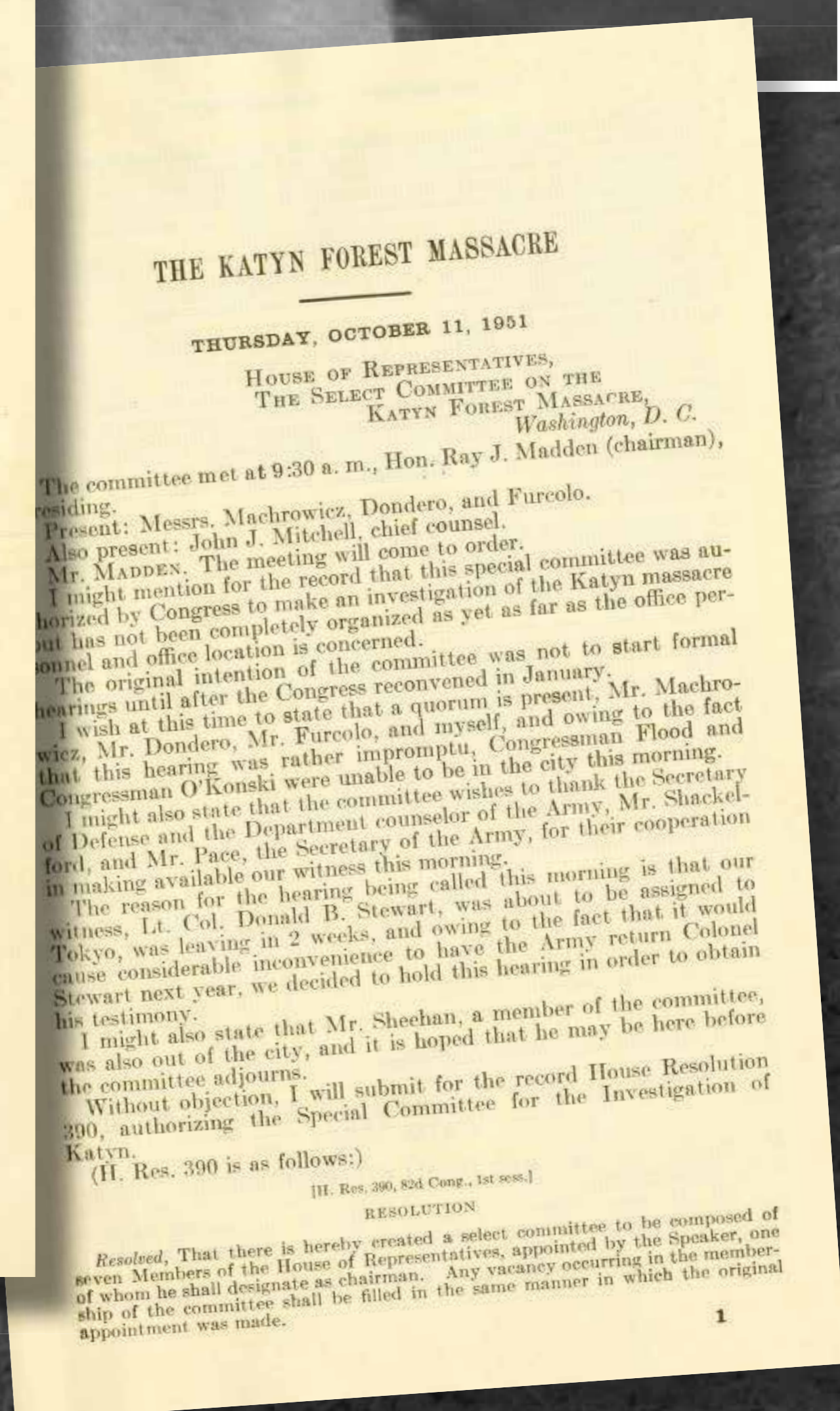
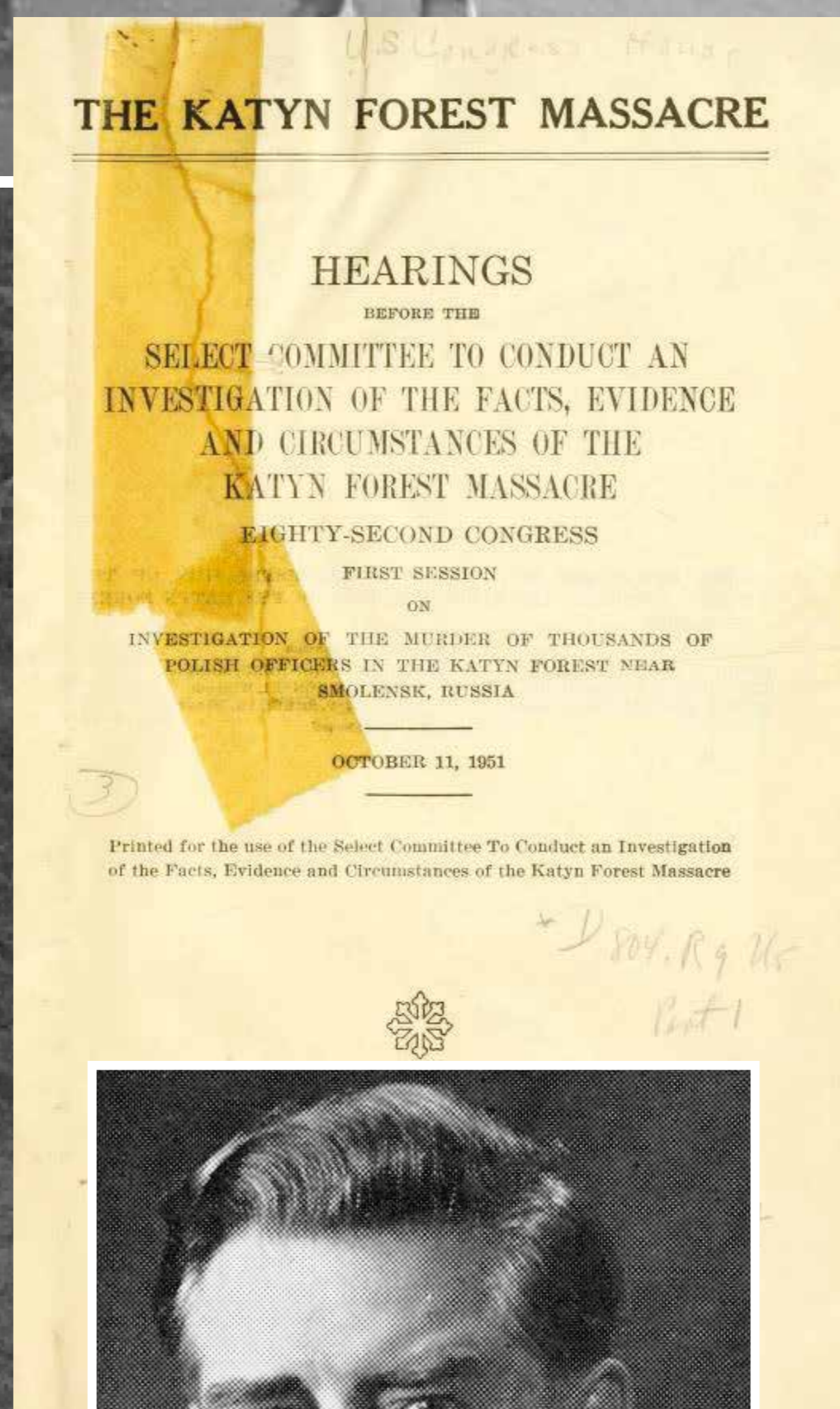
"They are all sworn enemies of Soviet power, filled with hatred towards the Soviet system. The POW officers and police in the camps are trying to continue counter-revolutionary work and are engaged in anti-Soviet agitation. Each of them is just waiting for liberation so as to actively join the struggle against Soviet power."

Manifestation in Gdańsk in the spring of 1988 to commemorate the crime committed by Russians on the Polish military officers in Katyn
Photo by: IPN



THE FIGHT FOR THE TRUTH

In 1951, the US House of Representatives established a Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre, known as the Madden Committee after its chairman. The report issued placed the blame unambiguously on the Soviets. The truth about Katyn was promoted by Józef Mackiewicz, Stanisław Swianiewicz, Ferdynand Goetel in exile, and by representatives of an independent Katyn Institute operating in Poland during the communist era. On 21st March 1980, Walenty Badylak, a former soldier of the Home Army AK, set himself on fire in protest against concealing the truth about Katyn.



Ray Madden
Photo: public domain

Excerpt from a report of the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre:

"This committee unanimously finds, beyond any question of reasonable doubt, that the Soviet NKVD (Peoples' Commissariat of Internal Affairs) committed the mass murders of the Polish officers and intellectual leaders in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk, Russia. The evidence, testimony, records, and exhibits recorded by this committee through its investigations and hearings during the last 9 months, overwhelmingly will show the people of the world that Russian is directly responsible for the Katyn massacre."



The plaque commemorating Walenty Badylak in Krakow
Photo by: IPN



The official TASS statement issued on 13th April 1990:

"The disclosed archive materials justify the conclusion that Beria, Merkulov, and their aides bear direct responsibility for the crimes in the Katyn Forest. The Soviet side, expressing deep regret in connection with the Katyn tragedy, declares that it constituted one of the gravest crimes of Stalinism."

Priest Zdzisław Peszkowski preys over the bodies of those murdered in Katyn
Photo by: IPN

KATYN CEMETERIES

The cemeteries in Katyn, Kharkiv-Piatykhatty and Mednoye were officially opened in the year 2000. Cemetery in Kiev-Bykivnia was opened in 2012. On 10th April 2010, 96 people, including the Polish president Lech Kaczyński and government representatives died in a plane crash near Smolensk. They were on their way to Russia to participate in a ceremony commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. The Katyn Massacre has not yet been recognized as genocide by the international community; Russian still refuses to admit it was a war crime.



Cemetery in Katyn
Photo by: IPN



Opening of cemetery in Bykivnia
Photo by: IPN

THE KATYN MASSACRE IN NUMBERS

Uniform of a major of
Light Horse Józef Pił-
sudski's Regiment follo-
wing exhumation
Photo by: IPN

KATYN
4421

KHARKIV
-PIATYKHATKY
3820

TOTAL VICTIMS
21 857

Victims from
the Ukrainian
Katyn list

MEDNOYE
6311

BYKIVNIA
3435

Victims from
the Belarusian
Katyn list

KURAPATY
AND OTHER SITES
3870

CAMP
SURVISORS
395