

There are without doubt, somewhere in the world several persons, octogenarians who may have witnessed what transpired in early March of 1940; who may have even heard the crack of the rifles or the chatter of automatic weapons as thousands of lives were extinguished. Though the date of the event's occurrence cannot be targeted with precision, the date of its being ordered and its grisly product are beyond denial.

As reported in the press on April 13th of 1943, a mass grave was discovered in a forest near Katyn, Russia, some 12 miles west of the city of Smolensk. When the grave was opened, the stench was said to have been intolerable. For buried in that grave, along with others, were the bodies of some 4,000 Polish army officers. As for those responsible for the deaths of these men, there had been but questions, accusations and denials.

Let it be said however, and before proceeding further, that 4,000 is but a fraction of the multitude murdered at that location and at the suggestion of Laverentiy Beria, then the head of Stalin's Secret Police, the NKVD. Generally cited in connection with this event is the number 21,768, a number that must of necessity be viewed as a mockery of score keeping.

The victims of this sanguinary harvest included an admiral; 2 generals; 24 colonels; 79 lieutenant colonels; 258 majors; 654 captains; 17 naval captains; 342 non-commissioned officers; 85 privates; 7 chaplains; 3 landowners; a prince; 43 assorted officials; 131 refugees; 20 university professors and 300 physicians. Along with them were hundreds of lawyers, engineers, teachers and writers. And in addition there were some 200 pilots.

It is reported that when the grave was discovered, the Soviets accused the Germans of having committed the massacre, and subsequently they refused to participate

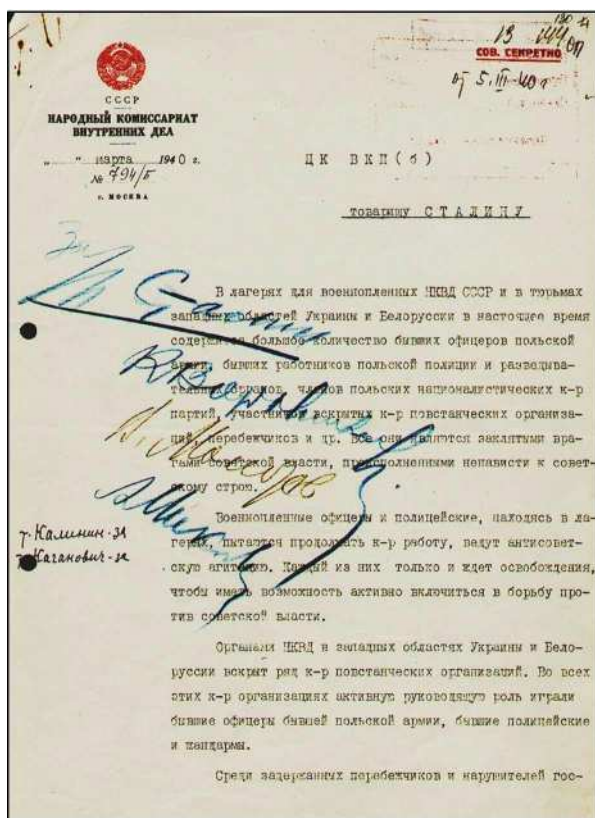
in an international investigation, their claim being that the matter was closed; the men had been killed by Germans. And it was thought that perhaps the claim was true, for it was determined that the shooters – whoever they were – had used German ammunition.

On the other hand, a German inquiry witnessed by Polish officials had concluded that the atrocity was the work of the Russians, and cleverly disguised by their having used German ammunition, which of course was alleged to have been stolen.

It may be said in retrospect that even then the Germans may have had the better argument. Because the exiled Polish government in London, of which General Wladyslaw Sikorski was the Prime Minister, had been wondering since 1939 about the disappearance of an entire Polish army.

Thus in December of 1941, when Sikorski had undertaken a visit to Moscow where he met with Premier Joseph Stalin, he had asked Stalin directly why these men, and others like them, had not been released according to an existing amnesty agreement. Stalin had responded by saying they had all escaped. Upon Sikorski asking to where had they escaped, and presenting a list of some 4,000 missing officers' names, he was then told by Stalin – the story now becoming patently plastic – that they had been released and had probably not yet returned home. According to the said agreement, however, Russia actually *did* release some of their Polish prisoners in 1941, but these were transferred to Iran, in order to prevent their subsequent fighting against Soviet forces in Poland.

Upon their arrival in Iran, British officials were staggered to find no officers among these Polish soldiers. British and American authorities of the time, therefore, had little doubt that the Katyn affair was the work of Moscow.



At left is an authentic copy of page one of the Soviet's execution order issued on March 5, 1940. It authorizes a massacre of some 4,000 Polish officers and other intellectuals. It is signed by Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, and Anastas Mikoyan. It was published on April 28, 2010 to show Russia's "absolute openness" in telling the whole world what really happened. Evidently Russia felt it was politically useful after sixty-five years.

Ergo, it may be seen that the Nazis were not alone in their ability to commit such consummate and unthinkable atrocities; and that history would record objective analysts as attributing to Russian authorities the unconscionable slaughter of those thousands of Polish officers, soldiers, and civilian citizens some three years earlier.

Nevertheless, and with what many would contemptuously call a hypocritical looking away, there was to be no incrimination of their Soviet partner, by the allied forces. Indeed, one British official is quoted as having said, "There's nothing to be done." And no less a personage than Sir Winston Churchill is reported to have remarked unfeelingly, "There's no use prowling morbidly round the three year-old graves of Smolensk."

And thereby yet again is the ancient observation by Aeschylus reaffirmed: "In war, truth is the first casualty."

So, while the guilt for the massacre of the Polish citizenry remained officially unassigned, that is until Russia's involuntary and compassionless confession in 1990, there were other similar atrocities for which the responsibility was in no way a mystery. And Victor could remember such with painfully undiminished clarity.

He could recall, for example, that in the local dialect of Italy they were called *foibe*, the word being an Italian corruption of the Latin *fovea*, meaning a pit or chasm. The particular foibe at issue were rugged, yawning crevasses in the Carso Mountain range of the Eastern Italian Alps. But *foibe* was to become a dark word, a sinister word. It would become a word which, to those living at the time, would pulsate with terror. Later the word would come to signify the countless thousands of Italians who, after being forcibly wrested from their homes by Yugoslavian Communists, were thereafter bound into helplessness, brutally tortured and – were they to be so fortunate – *shot before* being dumped into any one of such rocky chasms. As inhumane as it sounds and was, as often as not such victims were *still alive* when dropped to the bottom of such a cavern. And there, wounded broken and bleeding, they died an agonizing death by starvation, sometimes in complete darkness.

There are as usual, variances as to the number of victims. But if a historian from the University of Trieste is to be believed, and there is little if any reason to doubt, the most conservative number of such victims is said to be rounded off at 3,500. According to the surviving citizenry, however, and according to the more than 350,000 expatriated refugees and their descendants, the murdered victims are claimed to be over 15,000.

It was then with uncomfortable ease that Victor could remember such horrors; such unspeakable mistreatment of his fellow countrymen during the years of 1943

through 1946, and some as late as 1949. He remembered also that as the war staggered on into its closing months, Yugoslavs had entered Trieste and the Istrian peninsula, an area that Italy had previously annexed following World War I, and which had thereafter been harshly Italianized under Mussolini's fascist rule.

Resultingly, thousands of ordinary citizens were tortured and killed for being hostile to an attempted annexation by Yugoslavia, or simply because they were Italian. Hundreds had been killed after the fall of fascism in 1943, and an additional tsunami of murdering came with the war's end, and continued some years afterward. Untold tens of thousands had also died after being deported to Slovenian detention camps. Perhaps due to a feeling of national shame and over a period of many decades, Italian Communists had tried to cover over the matter. And as it would later prove so with the Nazi war criminals, there were some few minor personages who were tried and convicted after the war. But that was to be little if any consolation for those whose family members or friends had become victims of the *foibe*.

Added to that, Victor realized, was the fact that the *pro-western* parties that governed Italy, NATO's member nation during the Cold War, were at least reluctant if not totally disinterested in aggravating a Yugoslavia that was independent of the Soviet Union. Consequently, and despite all of its justifiable and undeniable right to notoriety, for those same many decades the foibe killings continued to be overshadowed by the Nazi Holocaust. Few indeed are the histories that mention the foibe massacres.

But the Cold War ended and Yugoslavia disintegrated. And back around 1998, Victor had seen the debate intensify over the Italian Fascist collaboration with the Nazis, and the attacks by Italian resistance fighters that had resulted in Nazi retaliation. Thus,

while it may have appeared good for some to shed light on this unconscionably brutal part of history, Victor knew in his heart that these old European animosities, these *vendette*, would never be settled.

Doubtlessly then, Carlo Perantoni had also been correct when he viewed Hitler and Stalin as two dogs arguing over a bone, the “bone” itself being Poland.