

In the footsteps of prisoners of war from special NKVD camps in 1939–1940. Selected figures related to the Vilnius region

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The NKVD murder of the defenders of the Polish borders, in accordance with the decision of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the All -Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union of 5 March 1940, is still an open topic, full of secrets. Despite the passage of 85 years since the crime, many documents have not yet been handed over to the Polish side. First of all, there are no archives that would allow us to establish the names of all those murdered and indicate the location of the burials of all the victims. So far, the names of all those detained sent from the NKVD camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov for investigation, from which they did not return, and those whose lives were spared, have not been established either. In all these groups there were people of different nationalities, religions and professions. In Soviet documents, many inaccuracies concern people who are of Lithuanian nationality in various censuses. Despite the passage of time, we can only speak of traces of some of them, who were recorded in the statistics of camp records and among the survivors. It should be remembered that although it is important to determine the number of victims of the Soviet authorities' policy, the most important thing is what was experienced, the fate of the citizens of the Second Polish Republic murdered in violation of all international laws and those few who were spared their lives, who remained under the supervision of the security services until the end of their days.

Keywords: Katyn, Katyn massacre, victims, Vilnius region.

Katyn

Katyn is a word with many meanings. Poles associate it primarily with the Katyn Forest and the death pits where the victims of the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 5 March 1940 are buried. This burial site of the victims was discovered first, and knowledge of the NKVD crimes was made public, as early as 1943. However, it should be emphasised that the word Katyn, like the Katyn massacre, refers to all places of execution and burial of victims covered by this criminal decision. It signifies the shooting of prisoners of war grouped in NKVD camps, commonly referred to as special camps, in Kozelsk (in the Katyn Forest), Starobelsk (killed and buried in Kharkiv), Ostashkov (killed in Tver and buried in Mednoye), as well as those held in prisons in the so-called areas of Western Ukraine (killed in Kiev, buried in Bykivnia near Kiev, in Kharkiv, in Kherson) and Western Belarus (killed in Minsk and probably buried in Kurapaty). It symbolises the Soviet murder of over 22,000 Polish citizens, 60% of them reservists who, in September 1939, rushed to fight against the invaders: Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. It meant not only demographic losses but also the annihilation of the Polish intelligentsia of over 44 professions, including patriots who had fought against the Soviet onslaught as early as 1920, the murder of fathers, sons, mothers and daughters. Among the murdered were 55 women, as identified so far, and minors such as 17-year-old Aniela Krotowilówna¹ and 17-year-old Staś Ozimek.² All of them died as opponents of Soviet power, Polish patriots with no prospects for improvement. The vast majority³ of this mass of people were Poles, but there were also representatives of other national minorities living in the Second Polish Republic, Catholics, and people of other faiths and religions.⁴

The above-mentioned topics now have a vast literature. The Soviet massacre, its mechanisms and its victims are recorded in documents collected in Russian archives, such as

¹ Ewa Kowalska, "Women in the Police Service – Selected Fates of Female Officers and Police Wives Repressed by the Soviets in 1939–1941", [in:] *Women in the State Security System*, ed. Aleksandra Gasztold, Kornelia Oblińska, Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2021, pp. 33–34.

² *Ubyty w Kalininie, zachoroneny w Miednom. Kniga pamiątki polskich wojennoplennych – uzników ostaszkowskiego łagieria NKWD, rasstrielanych po reszeniu Politburo WKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 goda*, t. 2, Moskwa, 2019, s. 135 [Killed in Kalinin, taken ill in Medno. A book of Polish wartime memories – the Ostashkov gulags of the NKVD, executed after the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on March 5, 1940, Vol. 2, Moscow, 2019, p. 135]; Tokarev likely spoke of Staś in his testimony years later: "In my opinion, he was bareheaded. He came in and smiled, yes, a boy, a perfect boy..." *Katyn. Crime Documents*, Vol. 2, *The Holocaust, March–June 1940*, ed. W. Materski [et al.], Warsaw, 1998, p. 452; E. Kowalska, *Minor Prisoners of NKVD Special Camps (1939–1940)*, "Contemporary History", No 2, 2019, pp. 287–306).

³ 5 March 1940, Moscow – Excerpt from Minutes No 13 of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Decision on the murder of Polish prisoners of war and Katyn prisoners. Crime Documents.

⁴ Ewa Kowalska, "Clergy among prisoners of many denominations and nationalities of the NKVD camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov (1939–1940)", [in:] *Vinctis non Victis. In memory of clergy, victims of the Katyn massacre*, ed. Ewa Kowalska, Danuta Jastrzębska-Golonka, Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (further IPN), 2025, pp. 34–50.

the Russian State Military Archive (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvenni Voennyi Arkhiv – RGWA), Polish archives, such as the Central Military Archive, the Archive of the Katyn Museum of the Martyrdom Department of the Polish Army Museum, the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance, the Archive of the Polish Institute, and Western archives such as the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. Based on research conducted in these archives, multivolume publications have been created, including *Katyn. Documents of the Crime ...*, publications containing short biographies of victims, such as the Books of Polish War Cemeteries, and electronic databases containing information about the repressed and murdered, including <https://indeksrepresjonowanych.pl>; <http://ksiegiementarne.muzeumkatynskie.pl>; <https://katyn.miejscapamieci.gov.pl>. To some extent, these sources are supplemented and further detailed by presenting the fates of individual groups and individuals, including various studies, conference proceedings, articles published in the press and magazines, and memoirs, especially by survivors of the Katyn Massacre. All these sources, as listed at the end of the text, were used in this article. It should be emphasised that, due to its limited length, this is necessarily a selection of sources, additionally provided in footnotes with abbreviations explained at the end of the article.

Vilnius Region

Those exterminated, in accordance with the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 5 March 1940, came from various regions of Poland. Some of them were connected with the Vilnius region by birth, residence, education or professional work, including service in the army or police. This administrative area, after being incorporated into the Second Polish Republic in March 1922, first functioned as the Vilnius Land and then, in the years 1926–1939, it was transformed into the Vilnius Voivodeship with its capital in Vilnius.⁵ It included eight counties: Brasław, Dzieńia, Mołodeczno, Oszmiana, Postawy (in 1926 transformed from Duniłowickiego County), Święciański, Vilnius and Vilnius-Trakki (the counties were merged 1923/1924). It bordered Latvia to the north, the USSR to the east, the Nowogródek Voivodeship to the south and the Białystok Voivodeship to the southwest.

Prisoner of War Records: NKVD camps in Starobelsk, Kozelsk and Ostashkov

From the outset of the establishment of the three special NKVD camps, the Soviet authorities placed considerable emphasis on maintaining records of Polish prisoners of war. The very first directives from the Prisoner of War Administration addressed to camp commandants regarding record-keeping principles emphasised that registering prisoners was a responsible task, ensuring both an overview of the number of prisoners held, their transfers between camps or to hospitals and, in the event of any escapes, immediate action

⁵ The terms Vilnius Region, Vilnius Land, Vilnius Voivodeship are used interchangeably in the text.

to liquidate them. It was also envisaged that the establishment of a range of personal data would be used in the operational work of the Special Department of the USSR NKVD.⁶ The directive of 1 October 1939 specified the operating principles, including entering prisoners into the registration book and then completing, in accordance with the instructions, the personal records (No 1), general records (No 2) and special records (No 3). The latter was intended for members of political parties, officers, gendarmes, policemen and people considered class enemies, e.g. landowners and merchants.⁷

The numerical strength and ethnic structure of Polish prisoners of war in individual camps, before the so-called Katyn decision, are best reflected in the statistical reports that Major Pyotr Soprunkienko sent to Moscow at the end of February 1940. They also include the military and police ranks and civil offices held by those held.⁸ In mid-March, as preparations were underway to carry out the executions based on the Katyn decision, the Prisoners of War Board again compiled a compilation of the national and territorial composition by voivodeship of the Second Polish Republic, distinguishing the positions held by prisoners in the police, gendarmerie and army. It also compiled a statistical summary by military rank and civil administration office.⁹ It should be emphasised that the statistical data submitted by the camp authorities to the Prisoners of War Board are riddled with inconsistencies. This begs the question: why was it impossible to accurately estimate the national composition of the camp prisoners?

References in Soviet archival documents suggest several reasons. The primary reason, however, is that records in camps managed by the NKVD were kept based on information provided to officers by the detained, who did not always carry identification documents, or they deliberately concealed the truth. This information was then verified by a special department based on information provided by fellow prisoners during interrogations.¹⁰ In the report of the inspector of the JW Management A. Makarov to I. Maklarsky about the

⁶ 25 September 1939, Moscow – Directive of the Military Unit Management Board to the commanders of POW camps regarding the principles of maintaining operational records, [in:] *Katyn. Documents of the Crime*, Vol. 1: *Prisoners of the Undeclared War*, ed. Wojciech Materski, Bolesław Woszczyński, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 1995, p. 106.

⁷ 1 October 1939, Moscow – Directive of the Military Unit Management Board addressed to the commanders of POW camps on the need to keep accurate records of POWs, *ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

⁸ 28 February 1940, Moscow – information on the nationality of prisoners of war in the Ostashkov camp, *ibid.*, p. 446; 28 February 1940, Moscow – information from the Military Unit Board on the number of prisoners of war divided by rank and relationship to service, *ibid.*, pp. 447–451; 28 February 1940, Moscow – information from P. Soprunkienko on the nationality of prisoners of war – officers from the camps in Starobilsk and Kozelsk, *ibid.*, pp. 451–452.

⁹ 16 March 1940, Moscow – information from the Military Unit Board on the number of prisoners of war, policemen and gendarmes held in the Ostashkov camp, [in:] *Katyn. Documents of the Crime*, Vol. 2, *The Holocaust*, ed. Wojciech Materski, Ewa Rosowska, Bolesław Woszczyński, Natalia S. Lebiediewa, Nelli A. Pietrosowa, Warsaw, 1998, pp. 65–67; 16 March 1940, Moscow – information from the Military Unit Management Board on the number of prisoners of war held in three special camps, *ibid.*, pp. 67–73.

¹⁰ 16 October 1939, Ostashkov – report from the Ostashkov camp command to the Military Unit Board on the camp's condition, [in:] *Katyn. Documents of the Crime*, Vol. 1, p. 195.

progress of the POW registration process in Ostashkov in November 1939, we read about insufficient thoroughness resulting from the lack of appropriate action by the camp authorities: "The records according to the personal questionnaires are confusing. The general inspection carried out did not yield results, i.e. there was a discrepancy of one person. In accordance with the order of Comrade Borisovets, POWs are being sent to Ostashkov (for farm work in the camp) without the knowledge of the 2nd Department. Please influence Borisovets to prevent any movement of POWs within the camp without the knowledge of the 2nd Department. In addition, POWs were also registered during work, and therefore movement, i. e. transferring POWs from one barrack to another, confuses the entire record".¹¹ Kabanov's report to I. Maklarski on the state of records in the Kozelsk camp in December 1939 also indicates problems resulting from a simple mess: "The POW records, as well as cards No 2, were scattered across tables in all three rooms, which made it impossible to accurately count the completed POW personal questionnaires". Meanwhile, A. Tishkov's report¹² to the head of the Military Unit's Management Board on the state of the Ostashkov camp shows who the guards receiving and supervising Poles were 85 years ago. He recalls that the officials at the NKVD headquarters themselves had problems with them, as their subordinates were unable to properly fulfil their assigned tasks: "The prisoner-of-war registration is in a chaotic state. No one can say exactly how many prisoners of war there are in the camp. [...] The current status does not match the number of registration files. A certain number of prisoners of war have avoided registration, but it is not known who did so, as there was no comparison of the actual situation with the registration files yet. [...] The personal questionnaires were filled out by people with low qualifications (registrars, Red Army soldiers). The special unit, disregarding the directive of the Narkom, avoided this matter, and the instructor of the political department, Ivanov, assigned to register prisoners of war, was exceptionally negligent in preparing the personal questionnaires, filling out the questionnaires so unclearly and incorrectly that he significantly hindered and stopped the work of other employees. People who had completed at least ten classes should be recruited for this job, but in fact the registrars among those assigned turned out to be simply semi-illiterate, unable to fill out the questionnaires correctly".¹³

Based on these accounts, we can conclude that the data collected by the Soviets regarding the number and nationality of the Katyn massacre victims should be considered as only estimates. Considering and analysing all archival data will also not yield an accurate result. To illustrate the problem of nationality assigned to prisoners of war, let us use the

¹¹ 21 November 1939, Ostashkov: Report of the inspector of the Military Police Headquarters, A. Makarov to I. Maklarsky on the progress of the work of registering prisoners of war, *ibid.* p. 275.

¹² December 1939 [not earlier than 1], Kozelsk – Report by D. Kabanov for I. Maklarski on the state of records in the Kozelsk camp, *ibid.*, p. 289.

¹³ 9 December 1939 (no place of publication) – A. Tishkov's report for the management of the Military Unit Board on the condition of the Ostashkov camp, *ibid.*, pp. 316–317.

example of individuals who declared Lithuanian nationality. According to the post-inspection report on the Kozelsk camp from 15 October 1939, there were 59 Lithuanians among all the prisoners gathered in the camp.¹⁴ According to the report from 28 February 1940, on the nationality of the officer prisoners of war from the Starobelsk and Kozelsk camps, there were only eight Lithuanians in the Kozelsk camp, while in the Starobelsk camp only one person declared such nationality,¹⁵ while in the Ostashkov camp there were none.¹⁶

Determination of the number and selected profiles of the victims of the Katyn decision related to the Vilnius region

According to the report of the Head of the Prisoners of War Directorate regarding the number of prisoners from Lithuanian territory held in three special NKVD camps, the number of prisoners by rank was as follows: 428 military personnel, 7 gendarmerie officers, 31 police officers and 1 prison officer. According to the document, a total of 467 people from Lithuanian territory were held in Kozelsk, Starobelsk, and Ostashkov in February 1940.¹⁷ According to findings published by, for example, Tomasz Bożerodzki, 287 officers were murdered from the Kozelsk camp, 218 officers from the Starobelsk camp and 183 from the Ostashkov camp.¹⁸ Due to the lack of access to documents from Soviet archives and discrepancies in the determination of the number of Second Polish Republic citizens associated with the Vilnius region, research remains ongoing. Keeping in mind that the precise number of victims of Soviet policy is not the most important factor, but the fate of this mass of people murdered in violation of all international law, let us make a selection from the collective portrait of the victims identified so far. It should be added that the article considers prisoners of war connected with the Vilnius region to be those born, resident, connected through education, work and service in the military or police. As examples, among those buried in the Katyn Forest, the following individuals can be cited:

– “in battle, the bravest of the brave”, decorated with the **Virtuti Militari** order, representing military personnel from many formations. Because of their merits, devotion to their

¹⁴ 15 October 1939 Moscow – Post-inspection report on the condition of the prisoner-of-war camp in Kozelsk, *ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

¹⁵ 28 February 1940, Moscow – Information by P. Soprunkienko on the national composition of prisoners of war – officers from the camps in Starobelsk and Kozelsk, *ibid.*, pp. 451–452.

¹⁶ 27 February 1940, Moscow – Telegram from S. Nekhoroshev to V. Korolev regarding the transfer of several copies of the registration and personal files of prisoners of war, *ibid.*, p. 446.

¹⁷ 10 February 1940, Moscow – Information from the Military Unit Management Board regarding the number of prisoners held in the camps in Ostashkov, Starobelsk and Kozelsk – with a division according to rank and territorial origin, *ibid.* pp. 414–420.

¹⁸ Tomasz Bożerodzki, *Vilnius traces of the Katyn massacre*, “Kurier Wileński”, No 14(40) 04-10/04/2020; Surwiło Jerzy, *We do not close accounts*, Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2007.

homeland, and their role models of steadfast character for generations of Poles, it is fitting to briefly recount their path to the death pits.¹⁹

Reserved Lieutenant Colonel Witold Chmielewski, son of Franciszek and Cezaryna née Markowski, born on 4 August 1892 on the Piktusza estate in the Vilnius Region. A graduate of the Vilnius Trade School and the Pavlovsk Military School in St. Petersburg, he served in the Russian Army, was a soldier of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia, and commandant of the town of Berezina. He joined the Polish Army in 1918. He took part in the 1920 War as a company commander in the 77th Infantry Regiment (Pułk Piechoty – PP). He was awarded the Virtuti Militari (VM) 5th Class. In 1932, he was transferred to the reserves. He also worked as Mayor of Kleck. As a result of the Soviet aggression in 1939, he was taken prisoner. From 28 October he was held in the Kozelsk POW camp. On 4–5 April 1940, he was placed at the disposal of the head of the NKVD Directorate of the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list without a number, dated 1 April 1940). He was shot between the 4th and the 7th of April 1940.²⁰

Zdzisław Goszczyński, Captain in the Senior Corps, son of Witold and Stanisława née Kossowska, born on 31 August 1897 in Janowice, Kielce Voivodeship (hereafter: province). He lived in Vilnius. Soldier of the Puławy Legion and the 1st Polish Corps in Russia. Member of the Polish Military Organisation. In 1920 he served in the 55th Infantry Regiment, then in the 17th Battalion of the Border Protection Corps (Korpus Ochrony Pogranicza – KOP) "Davidgrodz". In 1932 he retired (hereafter: senior military officer). He was awarded the VM 5th Class and other orders. After being captured by the Soviets, he was initially imprisoned in the Putyvl POW camp, and then in November 1939 transferred to the camp in Kozelsk. On 3 April 1940, he was placed at the disposal of the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (deportation list without reference number dated 2 April 1940). He was shot on 4–5 April 1940.²¹

Major Bronisław Hołub, son of Józef and Alina, was born on 23 November 1890, in Minsk. He completed the sixth grade of high school in Minsk and a military school in Kiev. From 1919, he served in the Polish Army. In 1920, he fought in the ranks of the 31st Infantry Regiment and was wounded twice. From 1931, he was commander of the District Recruitment Command (hereafter: Powiatowa Komenda Uzupełnień (PKU) in Volodymyr-Volynskyi. He retired in 1936 and lived in Vilnius. Before the war, he commanded the 11th Battalion of the Junior Labour Corps. After being captured by the Soviets in 1939, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 15–17 April 1940, he was placed at the disposal of the head of

¹⁹ The most comprehensive study on this topic to date is *Knights of the Order of Virtuti Militari in the Katyń Massacre*, ed. Kazimierz Banaszek, Wanda K. Roman, Zdzisław Sawicki, Warsaw: Kapituła Orderu Wojennego Virtuti Militari, 2000. However, the biographies included in the article go beyond the aforementioned book. They include additional findings by the author, the primary sources of which are provided in the footnotes. Abbreviations used are expanded at the end of the article.

²⁰ CAW, AP 7260; MiD WIH, LW from 5 April 1940; MOSZ-35; JT-85; KKC-72; UwK-782.

²¹ CAW, AP 5897, 10248, 10262; MiD WIH, LW from April 2, 1940; AM-4128; CC-177; UwK-277.

the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (deportation list No 032/1 of 14 April 1940). He was shot between 16th and 19th of April 1940.²²

Lieutenant Colonel Wacław Iwaszkiewicz, son of Jan and Maria, born 3 December 1894 in Vilnius. Participant in World War I. Soldier of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia. In 1920 he served in the 41st Infantry Regiment, then in the 17th and 13th Infantry Regiments. He was awarded the VM 5th Class and other medals. In September 1939, he commanded a battalion of the 3rd Podhale Riflemen Regiment. After being captured by the Soviets, he was imprisoned in the Kozelsk POW camp. From 4–9 April 1940, he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (deportation list No 015/2 of 5 April 1940). He was shot between the 4th and 9th of April 1940.²³

Major Kazimierz Krahelski, son of Henryk and Tekla, born 21 February 1890, in Vilnius. Pharmacist. Dowborczyk. He fought on the Ukrainian and Bolshevik fronts, and served in the 29th and 57th Infantry Regiment, then in KOP units in Kleck, Nowe Trakai and Sejny. In 1938, he was transferred to the senior regiment and settled in Krzeszowice near Krakow; he was awarded the VM 5th Class and other decorations. After being captured by the Soviets, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 7–9 April 1940, he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list No 017/2 of 5 April 1940). He was shot between the 9th and 11th of April 1940.²⁴

Captain Łukasz Kralczyński, son of Paweł and Anastazja, born 19 October 1896, in Grójec near Warsaw. Soldier of Polish formations in Russia, Dowborczyk. In 1920, he participated in the Kiev offensive and the Battle of Radzymin; he was an officer of the 25th Infantry Regiment and the 6th Infantry Regiment Legienów, and from 1934 treasurer in the 3rd Engineer Battalion, later in the 6th Vilnius Legions Regiment. He was decorated with the VM 5th Class and other awards. After being captured by the Soviets, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 19–21 April 1940, he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list No 036/4 of 16 April 1940). He was shot between 20th and 22nd of April 1940.²⁵

Reserve Lieutenant Stanisław Rymkiewicz, son of Alfons and Leontyna, born 30 July 1895 in Vilnius, graduated from high school in Bobruisk, completed flight training while serving in the Russian Army, graduated from a flying school in Pau, France, and the Warsaw University of Technology. He graduated from the School of Aviation Mechanics and participated in World War I. He was a soldier of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia and in 1919, he joined the Polish Army. He served in the 10th Air Squadron–Intelligence and the 1st

²² CAW, AP 4505, VM 64-5513; MiD WIH, LW 032/1 of 14 April, 1940; MOSZ-71; JT-118; KKC-206; UwK-786.

²³ CAW, AP 303; MiD WIH, LW 015/2 of 1940; AM-467.KKC-214; UwK-354.

²⁴ CAW, AP 12112; MiD WIH, LW 017/2 z 1940.KKC-304, UwK-422.

²⁵ CAW, AP 2287, 16632, 19498, 22571, MiD WIH, LW 036/4 of April 16, 1940. KC 304.

Air Regiment and from 1936, he was a member of Corps District No IX (OK IX). He was awarded the 5th Class of the Military Medal and other decorations. After being captured by the Soviets, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 19–21 April, 1940, he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list No 035/4 of 16 April 1940). He was shot between the 20th and 22nd of April 1940.²⁶

Adolf Wojdat, Captain in the Senior Infantry Regiment, son of Józef and Stefania, born on 26 September 1882, on the Lelarwiszki estate, in Kaunas County. He was a bookkeeper in the Tax Chamber in Kovel. In 1920, he was a soldier in the Kaunas Rifle Regiment, served in the KOP and the 61st Infantry Regiment, and from 1929 in the Senior Infantry Regiment with assignment to the OK III cadre. He was decorated with the VM 5th Class and other awards, and lived in Vilnius. After being captured by Soviet troops, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 3–5 April 1940 he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list dated 1 April 1940). He was shot between the 4th and the 7th of April 1940.²⁷

Józef Zawadzki, Lieutenant of the levy (common military), son of Antoni and Barbara, was born on 24 November 1898, in Daugavpils and was a participant in World War I. In 1920, he was commander of a company of the 51st Infantry Regiment and verified at the rank of lieutenant on 15 May 1920. In 1925 he was assigned to the cadre of the common military, OK III. He worked in the State Forests of the Augustów district and in 1934, he was registered with the Vilnius PKU. He was awarded the VM 5th Class and other decorations. After being captured by the Soviets, he was imprisoned in the NKVD camp in Kozelsk. On 19–21 April 1940, he was delivered to the head of the NKVD Directorate in the Smolensk Oblast (NKVD deportation list No 035/3 of 16 April 1940). He was shot between the 20th and the 22nd of April 1940.²⁸

Chaplains of the Polish Army, to whom the Vilnius region was particularly close:

– Priest Lt. Col. Antoni Aleksandrowicz, born in Mińsk Litewski, who was the chaplain of the Antakalnis prison;²⁹

Fr. Szymon Fedorońko, who was associated with the city from February 1939, when he participated in the Easter retreat of military chaplains held in Vilnius;³⁰

²⁶ CAW, AP 5989, KW 103-1778, MiD WIH, LW 035/4 of April 16, 1940; KKC-545, UwK-656.

²⁷ CAW, AP 5773, VM 56-4734; MiD WIH, LW from April 5, 1940; AM 158; KKC-700; UwK-231.

²⁸ CAW, AP 294; MiD WIH, LW 035/3 of April 1940; AM 3538; KKC-726; UwK-333.

²⁹ CAW, AP 578; Music Catalogue according to WRK data, year of birth 1894; IPN BU 2904/507; KKC, p. 4; UK, p. 140; WoB, pp. 16–23.

³⁰ Throughout the retreat, the military chaplains enjoyed the hospitality of the Bishop of Vilnius, Mateusz Siemaszko. On 10 February the clergy, led by the Protopriest of the Polish Army, Lieutenant Colonel Szymon Fedorońko, went to the Rasos Cemetery. *Pastoral retreat of the Orthodox military clergy in Vilnius*, "Przegląd Prawosławny", 1939, No 3, pp. 27–28. CAW, AP 3455; IPN BU 2904/507; AM 271; KKC, p. 134; UK, p. 754; WoB, pp. 64–71.

Father Major Jan Mioduszewski, chaplain of the KOP Sejny in 1939;³¹

Fr. Lt. Col. Andrzej Niwa, chaplain of the KOP Polesie brigade, chaplain in Pruzhany 1931–1936;³²

Fr. Col. Dr Edmund Nowak, parish priest of the military parish of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Nowa Wilejka in the years 1927–1934;³³

Fr. Lt. Col. Józef Skorel, born in Nowogródek, with a connection to Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius;³⁴

Rev. Brigadier General Kazimierz Suchcicki, who was the dean of DOK No III Grodno;³⁵

Rabbi Baruch Steinberg – graduate of Arabic languages at the Stefan Batory University;³⁶

Rev. Brigadier General Czesław Wojtyniak, chaplain of the KOP Nowogródek brigade 1929–1930. His connection with Vilnius is best evidenced by the words of a prayer composed in the camp, in which he mentions Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn as his helper;³⁷

Father Lt. Col. Jan Leon Ziółkowski, chaplain of the 5th Legions Infantry Regiment fighting during the Polish–Bolshevik War, among others, against the subordination of the Vilnius region to Soviet Russia.³⁸

Representatives of many professions of the Second Polish Republic³⁹

– Teachers who graduated from teachers' seminaries in the Vilnius region, e.g. Antoni Duchnowicz, born on 2 January 1905 in Rytenia in the Vilnius region, graduate of the teachers' seminary in Święciany (1928); teacher at a primary school in Podbrodzie, Święciany district, Vilnius province.⁴⁰

– Municipal employees, among whom was Antoni Odyniec, born on 2 December 1890, in Powiąza, Oszmiana County. He graduated from the municipal school in Oszmiana and worked as a municipal clerk in Oszmiana. In 1934, he was registered with the PKU, Vilnius.⁴¹

– Officials of the Polish State Railways, e.g. Henryk Pakulnis, born on 6 April 1913 in Werki near Vilnius. He was a student of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences of the USB

³¹ IPN BU 2904/508; WoB, pp. 122–137; MKC, Vol. 2, p. 585; UKZM, Vol. 2, p. 59.

³² IPN BU 2904/509; WoB, 138–155; CHKC, p. 372.

³³ IPN BU 2904/508, 2894; WoB, pp. 156–167; MKC, Vol. 2, p. 625; UKZM, Vol. 2, p. 639.

³⁴ IPN BU 2904/508; WoB, 204–213; UKZM, Vol. 2, p. 335; MKC, Vol. 2, p. 815.

³⁵ CAW, AP 30643; IPN BU 2904/507; Mus. Corner.; WoB, pp. 218–227; UK, p. 725; KKC, p. 603.

³⁶ CAW, AP 24493. Rejected. 12 W 1936; IPN BU 2904/507; WoB, pp. 214–217; CC, p. 597; UK, p. 842.

³⁷ IPN BU 2904/508; WoB, pp. 256–261; MKC, Vol. 2, p. 1015; UKZM, Vol. 1, p. 269.

³⁸ CAW, AP 917, KZ 13–1059; IPN BU 2904/507, 3087/1; AM 487; WoB, pp. 278–273; CC, p. 736; UK, p. 354.

³⁹ It should be emphasised that among the victims of the Katyn massacre known so far, who were connected with the Vilnius region, no fewer than 89 were graduates of the Stefan Batory University (author's findings are pending).

⁴⁰ CAW, AP 1465; MiD WIH, LW 017/1 of 1940; AM 282. Mosz-48; JT-96; KC-119; UwK-318.

⁴¹ CAW, AP 4353, 3625, 4036; MiD WIH, LW 054/3 of May 5, 1940; AM 4083; UwK-551.

in Vilnius, and a student of SPR Piech. In 1934, he registered with PKU Wilno-miasto, and was an employee of PKP Nowa Wilejka.⁴²

– Foresters, employees of the State Forests Boards, e.g., Władysław Brzozowski, born on 1 January 1886 in Vilnius. After graduating from the Agricultural and Forestry Academy in Dublany, he worked at the State Forests Board in Vilnius, and from 1929 at the District Land Office in Gąbokie, Vilnius Voivodeship.⁴³

– Lawyers, e.g., Adam Felczyński, born 15 July 1902 in Warsaw. He graduated from high school in Włocławek. A graduate of the Faculty of Law at Stefan Batory University (1933), he worked in the judiciary and lived in Vilnius.⁴⁴

– Pharmacists, e.g., Jan Mućko, born on 27 January 1892 in Vilnius, studied at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the USB in Vilnius and belonged to the reserve staff of the 3rd district hospital in Vilnius.⁴⁵

– Doctors, headed by Prof. Włodzimierz Godłowski, world-renowned associate professor of neurology and psychiatry at the Stefan Batory University and director of the Vilnius psychiatric clinic of the Institute for Brain Research.⁴⁶

Although nationality is not specified on the death lists, the sound of their surnames suggests it. Beyond the statistical data, discussed later, this wording suggests with great probability that the prisoners represented many nationalities and religions. They were mostly Poles, but also Belarusians, such as cadet Vyacheslav Piekar, a mechanical technician living in Vilnius;⁴⁷ Jews, such as reserve 2nd Lt. Dawid Godel, a pharmacist born in Vilnius; reserve 2nd⁴⁸ Lt. Izaak Guttman, registered with the paramedic group at the Vilnius City Police Headquarters; and Lithuanians, such as Captain Stanisław Smejlisur, born on the Kojrańce farm in Lithuania. He attended high school in Vilnius and, after completing a three-year course, became an assistant surveyor at the Vilnius Land Administration. He was a member of the Polish Military Organisation (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa – POW), and in 1918, a participant in the Vilnius self-defence movement.⁴⁹

⁴² CAW, AP 6774; MiD WIH, LW 032/4 of April 14, 1940; AM 3609; KC-461; UwK-572.

⁴³ CAW, AP 9177; MiD WIH, LW 032/4 of April 14, 1940; ROR 1934; AM 1697.KC 57; UwK-168.

⁴⁴ CAW, AP 1639, 3306; MiD WIH, LW from April 5, 1940; MOSZ-52; JT-100; KC-135; UwK-755; LCVA, 139/1/3222/2-5, 32, 38, 39, 62, 74–78, 150, 157.

⁴⁵ CAW, AP 6250; MiD WIH, LW 052/3 of April 1940; AM 2497; KC-417; UwK-528.

⁴⁶ MiD WIH, LW 015/1 from 1940 and Personal file, letters D–K; AM 502; KC 170; UwK 267.

⁴⁷ MiD WIH, LW 032/1 of April 14, 1940; KC-477; UwK 579.

⁴⁸ CAW, AP 2286; MiD WIH, LW 025/2 of April 9, 1940; AM 668; CC 169; UwK 267.

⁴⁹ CAW, AP 8807, 13709, KZ 17-1230; MiD WIH, LW of 2 April 1940; KC-577; UwK 692. More on the number of Polish citizens of many nationalities later in the article.

On the way to the truth

Despite the passage of 85 years since the NKVD murdered citizens of the Second Polish Republic, Poland has still not been provided with all Soviet documents exposing the actions that led to the crime. Until all death lists are submitted, especially those executed in Belarus as a result of the Katyn decision, a final conclusion to the list of victims of the Vilnius region is impossible. According to archival documents, they contain the names of over 3,000 people. This number of those executed is indicated in Beria's order No 00350 of 22 March 1940. According to this order, within 10 days, 1,500 people from the prison in Brest, 550 arrested from the prison in Vilnius, 500 from the prison in Pińsk and 450 from the prison in Baranavichy were to be transported to Minsk prison, supervised by the 15th Brigade of NKVD Convoy Troops.⁵⁰ To date, the Polish side has not been provided with documents containing information on the number of detainees at the intended execution sites, who were awaiting execution before the arrival of transport carrying those sentenced to death. There is also no dated confirmation of the execution of the task, i. e. the murder at all crime scenes, or the location of the remains of all the victims.

A memo containing a proposal to destroy records of those murdered under the Katyn decision, prepared on 3 March 1959 by Alexander Shelepin, Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB) of the USSR, for Nikita Khrushchev⁵¹, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, indicates that 14,552 prisoners of war were shot,⁵² as well as 7,305 persons held in prisons in so-called Western Belarus and Western Ukraine. A collective list of persons executed in the Ukrainian SSR, the so-called Ukrainian list, was submitted to Polish authorities on 5 May 1994, by General Andrei Khomich, Deputy Head of the Security Service of Ukraine. It contains 3,435 names. If the number of executed prisoners provided in Shelepin's memo (7,305) is accurate, then the "Belarusian list" should contain 3,870 names, including individuals from the Vilnius region. The first attempts to reconstruct it

⁵⁰ 22 March 1940, Moscow, Order No 00350 of L. Beria on the unloading of UNKVD prisons in the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR and the BSSR, [in:] *Katyn. Documents of the Crime*, Vol. 2: *The Holocaust March–June 1940*, ed. W. Materski [et al.], Warsaw, 1998, pp. 83–84. It should be added that, according to the order, in so-called Western Ukraine the convoy troops of the 13th Division had a similar task. They were responsible for transporting, within 10 days, 3,000 arrested people from the prisons: Lviv (900 people), Rivne (500 people), Volhynia (500 people), Ternopil (500 people), Stanisławów (400 people), and Drohobych (200 people) to the execution sites in Kiev, Kharkov and Kherson. *Ibid.*, p. 83. To date, the Polish side has not been provided with documents indicating the names and numbers of arrested people transported from a given prison to each of the three NKVD torture chambers mentioned in the decision.

⁵¹ A note from the chairman of the KGB of the USSR, A. Shelepin, to the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, N. Khrushchev, proposing the destruction of records of Polish prisoners of war murdered in 1940, *ibid.*, pp. 416–420.

⁵² According to Pyotr Soprunkienko's "Information on Polish prisoners of war held in the NKVD camp system" of the USSR of 3 December 1941, 15,131 people were sent to the NKVD Directorates in April and May. The higher number of people sentenced to death than in A. Shelepin's note to N. Khrushchev from March 1959 may indicate that it also included officers and policemen revealed during the operation, who were in the Krivoy Rog and Rivne camps, as well as prisoners shot in the Kharkov UNKVD, *ibid.*, pp. 411–412.

were made in 1994–1995. Prosecutors Stefan Śnieżko and Aleksander Herzog, along with Jędrzej Tucholski, then deputy director of the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, compiled a list of approximately 670 probable victims. Another list was published in 2000 by a priest, Father Zdzisław Peszkowski, and Stanisław Zdrojewski.⁵³ The latest list, authored by Maciej Wyrwa, included 908 names and was published in 2015.⁵⁴ According to the death lists reconstructed by Father Z. Peszkowski and S. Zdrojewski, during the period of execution of the Katyń decision, transports of prisoners from prisons in Białystok, Baranowicze, Nowogródek, Mołodeczno-Wilejka, Vitebsk, Mogilev and Gomel were sent to the prison called "American", located at 13 Lenin Avenue in Minsk.

Uncommemorated burial sites

The bodies of victims murdered in accordance with the Katyń decision in Belarus were buried in mass graves, probably in Kurapaty. This burial site is indicated by objects of "foreign origin" discovered with the remains during work carried out by the Belarusian prosecutor's office in 1988–1989. Their Polish origin is confirmed by, among other things, medallions with the Virgin Mary of Częstochowa, shoes from Polish companies: Gentlemen, Rygawar and Pepege, toothbrushes such as "Popular Luxus", metal mugs such as those from the "Wulkan" company or with the inscription "Made in Poland" and combs manufactured by companies such as "Tip Top". A particular example is a man's comb, on which the following inscriptions are carved on both sides: "Tough times as a prisoner. Minsk, April 25, 1940. The thought of you drives me mad ... On April 26, I burst into tears – a hard day".⁵⁵ Without access to documents and exhumation work, it is difficult to determine whether Kurapaty was the only burial site of Katyń Massacre victims in Belarus. Belarusian researchers also point to other burial sites of individuals deemed enemies of the Soviet system.⁵⁶

⁵³ Calendar for the year 2000-Miński, ed. Peszkowski Zdzisław, Zdrojewski Stanisław Zygmunt, Łódź–Warszawa–Orchard Lake: Fundacja NOM, 2000.

⁵⁴ Maciej Wyrwa, *Unfound Victims of Katyń? List of Missing Persons in the North-Eastern Voivodeships of the Second Polish Republic from 17 September 1939 to June 1940*, Warsaw, 2015.

⁵⁵ Ewa Kowalska, "Unknown burial places of the victims of the Katyń massacre and disappearing signs of memory of the murdered", [in:] *Katyń Massacre. New aspects*, ed. S. Kalbarczyk, W. Wasilewski, Warsaw: IPN, 2025, pp. 299–331.

⁵⁶ I. Kuznetsov, "Sites of mass murder and burial in the Kurapaty forest – problems of searching for and commemorating the victims of Soviet terror", [in:] *Traces of crime, faces of memory. Katyń–Łagczka–Ravensbrück*, ed. E. Kowalska, K. Sachnowska, Warsaw: IPN, 2021, pp. 85–112; see also: Paźniak Z., Szymałowa J., *Kurapaty – the road of death, "Litaratura i Mastactwa"*, 3 June 1998; Paźniak Z. [et al.], *Kurapaty. Articles, naukowaja Sprawazdacza, photo-dymki*, Minsk, 1994; Gorelik J., *Kuropaty. Polish trace*, Warsaw, 1996; *История Беларусь в документах и материалах*, сост. Кузнецова И. Н., Мазец В. Г., Минск: Амальфей, 2000; *Partridges Collection materials*, ed. W. Areszka, S. Sacharay, I. Žychar, L. Ramanczyk, A. Kastyka, J. Andrejewa, Minsk, 2002; *Материалы по археологии Беларусь*, Минск, 2019; Tarnawski G., Sobolew W., Gorelik, *Kuropaty: investigation prodlorzajetsa*, Moscow, 1990; *Resolution on prekrashchenia ugolovnogo dela*, 1 December 1995, Minsk, p. 7, copy kept at the Institute of National Remembrance Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (IPN K SZpNP).

Those murdered in Minsk were Polish citizens of several nationalities. Most of the victims were Poles, but the reconstructed Belarusian list also included Jews, Belarusians and Lithuanians. Because NKVD officers did not record nationality, only surnames can indicate it. Many people associated with the Vilnius region were murdered in the "Amerykanika" prison. Among them were individuals with Lithuanian-sounding surnames, such as Lieutenant Jan Pažusis, born in 1913, an agricultural instructor from the village of Taboryszki in the Šalčininkai district;⁵⁷ Sergeant Bronisław Jonkajtys, born in 1917, resident of Mołodeczno,⁵⁸ reserve sub-army Zygmunt Indrunas, born in 1899, a teacher from Pińsk.⁵⁹

In addition to the uncommemorated burial sites of victims of the Katyn decision in Belarus, remains located outside the boundaries of the established Polish Military Cemeteries await a proper burial. One example is Grave No 9, located by Russian workers in 2000 in the Katyn Forest. Russian President Vladimir Putin informed Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski of its discovery in a telephone conversation.⁶⁰ The discovery of a new death pit containing the remains of Polish officers, dubbed Grave No 9, was confirmed in a letter from the Smolensk Oblast Prosecutor's Office dated 5 July 2000, signed by Prosecutor A. P. Kovalev. It is possible that the remains of a small group of Polish officers transported for investigation and to a psychiatric hospital may lie there. Among them were those associated with the Vilnius region: Reserve Second Lieutenant Eugeniusz Piotrowicz, 9 March 1940 sent for investigation to the NKVD in the Smolensk region⁶¹ and Reserve Second Lieutenant Antoni Abramowicz, who was admitted to the Smolensk psychiatric hospital on 22 November 1939. The discovered pit may also be part of a larger grave, which currently holds the remains of the last two unexhumed death transportees.⁶² The IPN's Office of Search and Identification – with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – submitted applications to the relevant authorities of the Russian Federation in February 2021 for permission to conduct search, archaeological and exhumation work at the designated locations. However, it should be added that the Polish side was not granted permission to conduct these activities and provide a dignified burial for the remains of citizens of the Second Polish Republic.

The names of all those who died in the NKVD camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostaschkov are also awaiting disclosure. Due to incomplete lists of the deceased, it is difficult to determine whether, and how many of them, were connected to the Vilnius region. Only the memory of burial sites remains, passed down by the children of the victims, who located

⁵⁷ Calendar for the year 2000, Minsk, ed. rev. Z. Peszkowski, S. Zdrojewski, Łódź–Warsaw–Orchard Lake 2000.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Putin called Łomża, "Kurier Poranny", Białystok, 13 April 2000.

⁶¹ CAW, AP 793; MiD WIH, LW from 3 April 1940; MOSZ-149; JT-191; KC-483; UwK 591.

⁶² CAW, AP 6; MiD WIH, LW 052/3 April 1940; CC 1; UwK 138.

them according to the tip offs of the local population. At the Starobelsk cemetery, where in the 1990s it was still possible to find the graves of those who died in the local NKVD camp, this is no longer possible. Visible mounds of earth near the conspicuous, largest tree in the cemetery have been occupied by secondary burials. Also, at the so-called old cemetery in Kozelsk, the resting places of those who died in the camp, have been occupied by secondary burials. According to the incomplete lists, among those buried there is Tadeusz Madaj, from Szczelników, located in the Wołożyn commune in the Ostashkov district, who died on 19 May 1940. The burial site of those who died in the Ostashkov camp⁶³ is somewhat different. They were buried in the cemetery in Głuboczyca. In the area known locally as "Polish Hill", there is an almost symbolic commemoration of 45 people who died in the camp, whose names are engraved on two plaques. The names match the list of those who died in the Ostashkov camp in 1939–1940, signed by Major S. W. Shalamayev. This site was identified by Boris F. Karpov who, as a witness to those days, courageously and at his own expense, commemorated the burial site of the Poles who died in the camp at the nearby forest cemetery known as Troyeruchitsa. To date, no exhumation has been carried out at this site, and the identities of those buried there have not been confirmed. It is possible that, according to the indications of witnesses of those days, citizens of the Second Polish Republic may also be buried next to the commemoration. Those held in the camp died at various intervals, and it can be assumed that they were buried in single or multiple graves.⁶⁴ Time to conduct a search and exhumation at this site is rapidly running out, as the area may soon be occupied by secondary burials. The exhumation is all the more important because it is possible that the faces of prisoners buried here, whose names are not included on the plaque, could be recovered. Accounts from survivors indicate that the death rate in the camp was high due to the particularly difficult working and living conditions compared to other camps, and therefore, many more people may be buried here. The memories of, for example, nurse Mera Mejer,⁶⁵ prisoners of war Justyn Siemienas⁶⁶ and J. Żubr,⁶⁷ testify that no fewer than 92 people died in the camp. Accounts can be found in the archives of the Polish Institute and the General Sikorski Museum in London⁶⁸ and the archives of the Katyn Museum of the Martyrdom Department of the Polish Army Museum.⁶⁹ It should be added that, in June 2019 the Institute of National Remembrance's Office

⁶³ <<https://indeksrepresjonowanych.pl/szczegoly/c4207053-a16a-4075-8553-afc300feb165>>.

⁶⁴ Boris F. Karpov's memoirs in: Harry Duda, *On the Trail of Crime. Ostashkov, Tver, Mednoye*, Opole: Firma "MW", 1994, p. 154, 164.

⁶⁵ Account by Mera Majer, [in:] P. Żaroń, *Camps of Polish prisoners of war in the USSR in the years 1939–1941*, Warsaw: Unicorn Publ. Studio, 1994, p. 195.

⁶⁶ *I was a prisoner of Ostashkov, Siemienas J.*, "Military Historical Review", No 1, 1991, p. 53.

⁶⁷ See Peszkowski ZJ, Zdrojewski SZ, Kozielsk–Kosogóry–Katyn, Łódź–Orchard Lake, 1999.

⁶⁸ Memoirs of Boris F. Karpov, [in:] IPiMS, Col 12/15a, Ostashkov POW camp, p. 3, 9.

⁶⁹ Katyn Museum, report – hereafter: MK, R. 4053.

(BPiI IPN) requested permission to conduct search, archaeological and exhumation work at this previously unexamined burial site of Polish citizens. They cited the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 2032); the requests submitted by the Police Family 1939 association and the Federation of Katyn Families; and the results of research into available documents. However, the request submitted by the Institute of National Remembrance, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the competent authorities of the Russian Federation remains unanswered.

Survivors

The names of some of the individuals appearing in archival documents depicting daily life in the three special NKVD camps are nowhere to be found on the various lists of those murdered, pursuant to the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 5 March 1940. Some Second Polish Republic citizens survived due to the actions of higher Soviet authorities who took into account, among other things, the requests of the German Embassy and the Lithuanian mission. According to information from the Head of the Prisoners of War Administration, Piotr Soprunkienko, dated 28 February 1940, these NKVD camps held 14,466 Polish prisoners of war of several nationalities. The list of survivors, published by Jędrzej Tucholski in 1991, includes 432 names of individuals imprisoned in the Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov camps.⁷⁰ In the Starobelsk camp, according to this report, of the 3,908 prisoners, approximately 102 escaped execution. The Kozelsk camp held 4,486 prisoners, of whom approximately 200 escaped death. In the Ostashkov camp, of the 6,072 policemen and gendarmes, only about 130 survived. All survivors were deported to Pavliszczew Bor in the spring of 1940, and then to Gryazovets. Those who declared themselves citizens of the Third Reich were handed over to the Germans. The remaining majority, after the change in the international situation, i.e. after the signing of the Sikorski–Majski Agreement, joined the Polish Army commanded by General Władysław Anders in 1941.

The list of survivors does not include information on who each person owes their life to. Such references can be found in a copy of the *List of Prisoners of War Held in the Jukhnov Camp*, which contains 395 names.⁷¹ The list, signed by the Head of the Prisoners of War Administration, Piotr Soprunkienko, dates from May 1940 and is kept in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance. Thanks to this, it can be concluded that their survival was justified, among other things, by international interventions: those of the German Embassy, for example, Józef Czapski and Georg Stegeman, as POWs declaring German

⁷⁰ Jędrzej Tucholski, *The Katyn Massacre. Kozelsk–Ostashkov–Starobilsk. List of Victims*, Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1991, pp. 527–537.

⁷¹ Signature a document titled: List of Prisoners of War Held in the Jukhnov Camp, AIPN BU 2210/58.

nationality, and those of the Lithuanian mission, for example, Julian Michniewicz. The decision to save others was made by the 5th Department of the GUGB (Glavnaya upravleniye gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti) NKVD of the USSR (intelligence) or by orders from Vsevolod Merkulov, head of the GUGB NKVD and deputy People's Commissar for Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR. These interventions could be justified by the POW's perceived ability to provide intelligence-relevant information, for example, S. Swianiewicz, who was not only an experienced military man but also a renowned scientist, associate professor at Stefan Batory University in Vilnius, a specialist in Eastern affairs, a lawyer and an economist. Another reason could be susceptibility to indoctrination, or the POW's perceived potential future exploitation for Soviet policy, for example, Zygmunt Berling. There remains a group of individuals identified by the reference "procze" – others – whose motives for survival are difficult to surmise given the deliberate actions of the Soviet authorities. There is no doubt, however, that due to their time in the camps, these individuals remained under the special scrutiny of the relevant authorities until the end of their days, for example, Zdzisław Peszkowski.

It should be noted that several of the survivors later became heroes in the fight for the truth about the fate of their colleagues. They searched for missing persons in Soviet Russia, and after discovering the mass death pits, they wrote about everyday camp life. Among them was Józef Czapski, held in the NKVD camp in Starobelsk (number 205 on the Jukhnov list of survivors), who authored the memoir *On Inhuman Land*.⁷² Others included Adam Moszczyński (No 207), who compiled the *Katyń List* ...⁷³ and Bronisław Mlynarski (No 217), who wrote the book *In Soviet Captivity*.⁷⁴ The previously mentioned prisoners of the Kozelsk camp such as Stanisław Swianiewicz left memoirs *In the Shadow of Katyn*.⁷⁵ Zdzisław Peszkowski, (No 324), later a priest, prelate, chaplain of the Katyn Families and the Polish Scouting Association abroad, was the author of many articles and studies, e.g. *Memoirs of a Prisoner from Kozelsk*.⁷⁶ Jan Bober, a prisoner of the Ostashkov camp, listed as number 231 on the survivor list, left a memoir entitled *Behind the Wires of Soviet Camps*.⁷⁷

It should be emphasised that these lists of those who survived the Katyn massacre primarily illustrate the scale of the massacre and illustrate how few of the defenders of the Second Polish Republic's borders, detained in 1939, were spared their lives. The survivors constituted only about 3% of those imprisoned, and were people of various profes-

⁷² Józef Czapski, *Josif, On the Inhuman Land*, Paryż: Inst. Literacki, 1949.

⁷³ Adam Moszczyński, *The Katyń List. Prisoners of War from the Kozelsk, Ostashkov and Starobelsk Camps Missing in Soviet Russia*, London: Agencja Omnipress, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 1989.

⁷⁴ Bronisław Mlynarski, *In Soviet Captivity*, London, LTW 1974.

⁷⁵ S. Swianiewicz, *In the Shadow of Katyn*, Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1976.

⁷⁶ Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a prisoner of war from Kozelsk*, Warsaw, 1989.

⁷⁷ J. Bober, *Behind the barbed wire of Soviet camps. Memories*, ed. K. Halicki, Łódź, 2016.

sions, religions and nationalities. According to the *Statistical Information of I. Maklarski* prepared in July 1940 concerning 386 prisoners of war held in the Gryazovets camp who were spared their lives – representing six nationalities – there is mention of a group of six Lithuanians, without mentioning their names.⁷⁸ It is likely that among the people who declared Lithuanian nationality and for whom the Lithuanian mission requested the grant, were:

– Reserve Second Lieutenant Julian Michniewicz, son of Marcin, born in Vilnius in 1910. He was a prisoner of war in the Kozelsk camp and co-organised the escape from the camp planned in December 1939. The escape was thwarted due to a denunciation. He is listed as number 11 on the survivors' list.⁷⁹

– Corporal Antoni Balulis, son of Karol, born in Ratkužniki, Vilnius Voivodeship, in 1906. He was a teacher accused in the Second Polish Republic of intelligence activities for Lithuania. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison, serving his sentence in Holy Cross Prison. Following the outbreak of World War II, Balulis was evacuated to the prison in Baranowicze, where he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. On 22 September 1939, he was transported to the camp in Kozelsk. Due to his participation in the failed escape from the camp on 7/8 December 1939, along with Julian Michniewicz (mentioned above), he was transferred to Ostashkov. From there, he was sent to Jukhnov and Gryazovets. He was listed as number 78 on the survivors' list.⁸⁰

– Aleksander Waweris (Wawioris), son of Adam, born in 1919, was arrested while illegally crossing the Lithuanian–Soviet border in 1939. He was listed as number 79 on the list of survivors.⁸¹

– Corporal Leon Demkowski, son of Piotr, born in 1909, was recognised as an agent of Lithuanian intelligence and was listed as number 93.⁸²

– Reserve Second Lieutenant Jan Rodziewicz, son of Antoni, born in Vilnius in 1890 or 1891, (No 28), was an employee of the Chamber of Weights and Measures in Vilnius. He was held in the Kozielsk camp and then transferred to Juchnów-Gryazowiec.⁸³

⁷⁸ July 1940, Moscow. Statistical information by I. Maklarsky about prisoners of war held in the Gryazovets camp, [in:] *Katyn. Documents of the Crime*, Vol. 2, p. 399. *Regarding the identification of the names of persons who declared Lithuanian nationality*; the author thanks Dr Aleksandr Gurjanow for his assistance.

⁷⁹ RGWA, f. 1, op. 4e, d. 13, l. 124; J. Tucholski, *The Katyn Massacre. Kozelsk–Ostashkov–Starobielsk. List of Victims*, Warsaw, 1991, p. 536; AIPN, BU 2210/58, When the Silent Graves... Vol. 2, p. 176; Vol. 3, pp. 162–163.

⁸⁰ RGWA, f. 1, op. 4e, d. 13, l. 157; J. Tucholski, *Murder in Katyń*, p. 533 – gives the spelling of the surname [Balulis]; AIPN, BU 2210/58; Kol 12/58–78, APN BU 2210/58; Kol 12/58, p. 11; *Katyń. Crime Documents*, Vol. 1, pp. 31, 322–324, 354.

⁸¹ RGWA, f. 493, op. 1, d. 1, l. 51; J. Tucholski, *Murder in Katyń*, p. 536 – gives the spelling of the surname [Wawiórski]; AIPN, BU 2210/58; Kol 12/58, p. 11.

⁸² RGWA, f. 493, op. 1, d. 1, l. 51; AIPN BU 2210/58; Col. 12/58, p. 3.

⁸³ RGWA, f. 1, op. 2e, d. 9, l. 400; J. Tucholski, *Murder in Katyń*, p. 530; AIPN, BU 2210/58; Kol 12/58, p. 5.

– Kazimierz Żołdak (Żądak), son of Józef, was born in the Nowogródek Voivodeship in 1911. He was a student living in Vilnius. He was recognised by the NKVD as a member of the *Kultura* organisation and a collaborator with intelligence. He was stationed in Ostashkov, from where he was transferred to Jukhnov-Gryazovets. He was listed as Żądak, number 77,¹ on the list of survivors.

To summarise the above observations – intended to draw attention to the victims of the Katyn Massacre associated with the Vilnius region – it can be stated that although 85 years have passed since the crime committed by the Soviet authorities, we are still on the path to fully documenting it. We do not know all the causes that led to it or the mechanisms by which it was carried out, including the inconsistencies evident in the documents provided so far, including the number of people murdered. The personal files of the prisoners, containing information that likely contributed to their death sentence or survival, have not yet been provided to the Polish side. Remembering that the precise number of victims is not the most important factor, but the fate of this mass of people, selected individuals associated with the Vilnius region were extracted from the collective portrait of the repressed. This highlighted the identity of the victims, their nationalities and the individuals who were later missing from many families within the newly established borders of Poland and Lithuania.

So far, the Polish state has managed to dignify some of the remains of the victims of the Katyn decision at the Polish War Cemeteries in Katyn, Kharkiv, Mednoye and Bykivnia. Those murdered in the torture chambers of Kherson and Minsk await a proper burial. Until Russia hands over all Soviet archival documents to Poland, the Katyn massacre will remain an open topic, not only in terms of historical research, but also in terms of human experience: social, national and above all, family, for thousands of loved ones of the murdered, who for 85 years have been unable to bury their ancestors with dignity.

Conclusions

– Article Summary: Following the decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 5 March 1940, NKVD officers exterminated approximately 22,000 citizens of the Second Polish Republic. The murdered were mostly Poles, but also included representatives of other nationalities, various religions and people of over 40 professions. Although 85 years have passed since the crime committed by the Soviet authorities, many documents have not been transferred to the Polish side, including the personal files of prisoners held in the NKVD camps in Kozelsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov, and lists of all those saved and murdered. Based on the assumption that the most important thing is not the exact number of victims, which is still missing, but the fate of this mass of people, those associated with the Vilnius region were selected and extract-

¹ RGWA, f. 1, op. 1e, d. 10, l. 392; J. Tucholski, *Massacre in Katyn*, p. 537; AIPN, BU 2210/58; Kol 12/58, p. 10.

ed from the collective portrait of the repressed. The personalisation of the bureaucratisation of the crime, using the example of individuals connected to the Vilnius region, allowed for the identification of the victims, the identification of their movements between camps and the determination of approximate dates of murder and burial sites, including those where exhumations have not yet been carried out. Despite the passage of decades, the Katyn massacre remains an open topic, not only in a historical sense, but above all in a human sense – for all the families of the victims within the borders of Poland and Lithuania redefined after World War II.

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Abbreviations used in footnotes

Archives:

AIPN, BU – Archiwum IPN, Biuro Udostępniania [IPN Archives, Office of Access].
AM – *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn*: im Auftrage des Auswärtigen Amtes auf Grund urkundlichen Beweismaterials, Berlin, 1943.
CAW, AP – Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, Akta Personalne [Central Military Archives, Personnel Files].
ChKC – *Charków. Księga Cmentarna Polskiego Cmentarza Wojennego*, Warszawa 2003 / Kharkiv. [Cemetery Book of the Polish War Cemetery, Warsaw, 2003].
IPiMS – Instytut Polski i Muzeum im. gen. Sikorskiego [Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum].
JT – J. Tucholski, *The Katyn Massacre. Kozelsk–Ostashkov–Starobelsk. List of Victims*, Warsaw, 1991.
KKC – *Katyń. Księga Cmentarna Polskiego Cmentarza Wojennego*, Warszawa, 2000 [Katyń. Cemetery Book of the Polish War Cemetery, Warsaw, 2000].
MKC – *Miednoje. Księga Cmentarna Polskiego Cmentarza Wojennego*, t. 1–2, Warszawa, 2005 [Miednoje. Cemetery Book of the Polish War Cemetery, Warsaw, 2005].
Muz. Kat. – Muzeum Katyńskie [Katyn Museum].
MiD WiH, LW – Materiały i Dokumenty Wojskowego Instytutu Historycznego: Materials and Documents of the Military Historical Institute, LW – Lista Wywózkowa: list of people transported [called the death list].
RGWA – Rossijskij Gosudarstwiennyj Wojennyj Archiw.

UK – *Ubyty w Katyni. Kniga pamiątki polskich wojennoplennych – uzników kozielskogo łagieria, rasstrieiannych po rieszeniu Politbiuro CK WKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 goda*, red. A. Guryanov, Moskwa, 2015.

UKZM – *Ubyty w Kalininie, zachoronieny w Miednom. Kniga pamiątki polskich wojennoplennych – uzników ostaszkowskogo łagieria, rasstrieiannych po rieszeniu Politbiuro CK WKP(b) ot 5 marta 1940 goda*, red. A. Guryanov, t. 1–3, Moskwa, 2019.

WoB – *W obliczu Boga ślubuję Ojczyźnie. Rzecz o kapelanach katyńskich [In the sight of God, I pledge*

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Eva Kovalska

1939–1940 m. NKVD specialiųjų lagerių karo belaisvių pėdsakais.

Su Vilniaus kraštu susiję atrinkti skaičiai

Santrauka

NKVD įvykdytas Lenkijos pasienio sargybinių nužudymas, remiantis 1940 m. kovo 5 d. Sovietų Sąjungos komunistų partijos (SSKP) Centro komiteto (CK) politbiuro sprendimu, vis dar išlieka atvira, paslapčių kupina tema. Nors nuo nusikaltimo praėjo 85 metai, dauguma dokumentų dar néra perduota Lenkijos pusei. Visų pirma néra archyvų, kurie leistų nustatyti visų nužudytyjų vardus ir pavardes, visų aukų palaidojimo vietas. Iki šiol taip pat néra nustatytos visų sulaikytujų, išsiųstų tyrimui iš NKVD lagerių Kozelske, Starobilske ir Ostaškove, iš kurių jie negrįžo, ir tų, kurių gyvybės buvo išsaugotos, pavardės. Visose šiose grupėse buvo įvairių tautybių, religijų ir profesijų žmonių. Sovietų dokumentuose yra daug netikslumų, susijusių su įvairiuose gyventojų surašymuose nurodytais lietuvių tautybės žmonėmis. Nepaisant praėjusio laiko, galime kalbėti tik apie kai kurių iš jų, kurie buvo įtraukti į lagerio statistinių duomenų registrą ir išgyvenusiųjų sąrašus, pėdsakus. Reikia prisiminti, kad svarbu nustatyti sovietinės valdžios politikos aukų skaičių. Tačiau svarbiausia yra tai, kas buvo patirta, Antrosios Lenkijos Respublikos piliečių, nužudytų pažeidžiant visas tarptautinės teisės normas, ir tų nedaugelio, išsaugojusių gyvybę ir iki savo gyvenimo pabaigos likusių saugumo tarnybų priežiūroje, likimas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Katynė, Katynės žudynės, aukos, Vilniaus kraštas.