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## DISCOVERING THE FOURTH KATYŃ CEMETERY AT BYKOWNIA

An Interview with Prof. Andrzej Kola,  
Professor Emeritus at Uniwersytet Mikołaj Kopernik (UMK),  
Toruń, Poland (Zakład Archeologii Podwodnej)  
Regarding His Leadership of the Polish Government  
Sponsored Exhumations at Bykownia  
Between 2001-12 (Wednesday 23 February 2022)  
and the Fate of my Great-grandfather  
Major Rudolf Wizimirski (1883-1940)<sup>1</sup>

Musimy zatem wiedzieć

Policzyć dokładnie

Zawołać po imieniu

Opatrzeć na drogę

(Zbigniew Herbert,

*Pan Cogito o potrzebie ścisłości*, 1974)

The Katyń massacre of 22.000 (perhaps as many as 25.000) Polish officers but also policemen, border guards, civil servants and others deemed dangerous by the Soviets in April and May 1940 at the hands of Soviet NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) is by now well known, not just in the collective memory of Poles, where it is, as a President of

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<sup>1</sup> Alongside Prof. Kola, my thanks go to Hubert Zawadzki of Wolfson College, Oxford and my relatives Barbara and Zbyszek Wizimirscy of Falenica, as well as librarians and curators in the Biblioteka Narodowa and at the Muzeum Katyńskie, for their help and time discussing these painful issues in preparing this text for publication. The Leverhulme Foundation grant RF-2020-411 has provided financial support for the research leading to this publication, for which it is gratefully thanked.

Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski (1995-2005), pointed out, ‘a great sore, which we have to talk about ceaselessly – just so that it can be healed.’<sup>2</sup> The crime has spilled over as a historical subject into different, popular media: it is the title of one of the award-winning Polish director Andrzej Wajda’s powerful later films *Katyń* (2007). The story of how news of the massacre unfolded in the West, and the difficult political position it put Stalin’s nominal western Allies into, is itself specifically the subject of another cinematographic adaptation, *The Last Witness*, produced in 2018 by the British-born Piotr Szkopiak.

The forest of Bykownia, to the east of Kiev, although now incorporated within the city’s administrative boundaries, is not a household name connected to the massacre of Polish officers, and the rumours of the corpses buried there had rather to do with victims of the Stalinist NKVD terror in the 1930s. Yevhen Swerstiuk (1927-2014), head of the Ukrainian literary PEN Club and former dissident, who was one of the first to commemorate this place, always insisted that besides the Polish contingent, the number of those buried at Bykownia were thought to range from ‘several dozen’ to as many as three hundred thousand people’. Meanwhile, books like *Katyń. Genocide, politics, morality* produced by the Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa in conjunction with the Budapest Terror Museum in 2010 do not so much as even mention Bykownia. There were plans in 1971 to build a bus station over the site, to effectively conceal any uncomfortable truths.<sup>3</sup> And yet this plan was not realized, instead five times since 1971 have the corpses lying there been dug up, some more secretly than at other times, so as to understand who lies there. The problems of identification were compounded – as at other sites of mass burials like in Bełżec – by locals raiding the graves at night in search of valuables, so-called *poszukiwaczy skarbów*.

The search for the missing was aided by the historical thaw in the late 1980s (‘Glasnost’) and 1990s: first the recognition of ‘direct responsibility’ in a famous TASS wire of 13 April 1990 and two boxes of documents that Gorbachev handed over to General Jaruzelski on 13 April 1990. Then in October 1992, the famous dossier officially known as ‘closed package no. 1, comprising the so-called Katyń decision’. Here was the resolution of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dated 5 March 1940 ordering the execution of Polish POWs. In October 1992 it was brought by the head of the State Archive of the Russian Federation Rudolf Pikhoya, at the request of President Boris Yeltsin, to Poland’s President Lech Wałęsa. An important role was played by NGOs like ‘Memorial’ and individual researchers like Andriy Ivanovič Amons, a Russian judge, Ukrainian navy prosecutor, and son of an NKVD officer who did everything to enable the opening of the KGB’s secret archives.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Speech at the military cemetery in Kharkiv, 27 June 1998, as cited in G. Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940. Truth, Justice and Memory*, London–New York 2005, p. vii, *BASEES/Routledge Curzon Series on Russian and East European Studies*, vol. 20.

<sup>3</sup> MAW, *Leśne gólgoty Kijowa*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 9 VIII 2006, no. 185, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> His books include *Bikivnânska tragediâ. Dokumenti i materiali* (Kiïv 2006) and *Bykivnjanski žertvy abo*

Officially sponsored excavations were the next step. In 2000, even Russia started to open cemeteries dedicated to ‘victims of repressions.’<sup>5</sup> History seemed to be moving with these excavations. In 2010, Bykownia was famously announced as, the fourth Katyń cemetery’ (*cmentarz Katyński*).<sup>6</sup>

My interviewee today, on 23 February 2022 [as it transpired, the day before the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, itself a rude re-acquaintance with the realities of the World War Two era], is Prof. Andrzej Kola, an emeritus university professor and Director of Underwater Archeology at Toruń’s Uniwersytet Mikołaj Kopernik, who has spent his life excavating on commission for the Polish government. He was himself five times in Bykownia following an official appointment to lead excavations there in 2001. Kola’s work has got a lot of press exposure, the Grand Press Photo competition of 2012 was won by a photo of Maksymilian Rigamonti (of *Newsweek Polska*) detailing Kola’s archeological work.<sup>7</sup> The work concluded with the formal opening of the cemetery there, which was presided over by President Komorowski on September 20-21, 2012.<sup>8</sup>

Also in 2012 a public exhibition was held in the Town Hall in Toruń with a commemorative theme (70 years anniversary of Katyń) and a catalogue published.<sup>9</sup> Kola’s work is publicly acknowledged in the Polish Muzeum Katyńskie (not to be confused with the museum established on the site of the Katyń massacres in Bielorrussia), which was initially founded in 1993 as an initiative of the Military Museum, and on the impulse of victims’ families. It initially occupied the site of the ‘Czerniaków’ fort in Mokotów, and was organised to contain findings from the excavations on all cemetery sites, as well as photographs, souvenirs and various *archivalia*. Then in April 2010 a public competition was completed for the construction of buildings on a new site in the caponier of the Warsaw Citadel, a project which has received recognition in the shape of prizes like the East Centric Architecture Triennale Award in the category of best public building in East-Central Europe. A large commemorative wall of victims’ names was erected outside, and at the corner of Krajewskiego and Wisłostrady Streets, the Katyń Bell of one and a half tons, was installed on a special structure. The bell has a hole after being shot through, and its display assumes illuminating the whole with a beam of light from the symbolic pit of death at the foot of the structure.<sup>10</sup>

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*Jak pracowała “Vjšča dvijka” na Ky-ivščyni. Dokumenty ta materialy* (Kyiv 2007). See also M. Wojciechowski, A. Amons, *Klucz do prawdy leży w Moskwie*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 14 VIII 2006, no. 188, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> J. Rogoża, M. Wyrwa, *Katyń. In the Footsteps of the Crime Kozelsk–Smolensk–Gnezdovo–Katyn Forest*, Warszawa 2020, chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> M. Wojciechowski, *Czwarty cmentarz katyński*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 27 IX 2010, no. 226, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> M. Rigamonti, *Bykownia. Archeologia zbrodni*, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>8</sup> A.K. Kunert, A. Siwek, Z. Walkowski, *Polski cmentarz wojenny w Kijowie-Bykowni (czwarty cmentarz katyński)*, Warszawa 2012, *Nekropolie Narodowe*, vol. 4.

<sup>9</sup> S. Grochowina, *Charków–Katyń–Twer–Bykownia. W 70. rocznicę zbrodni katyńskiej* [exhibition catalogue], Toruń 2012, *Biblioteka Fundacji „Archiwum Pomorskie AK” w Toruniu*, vol. 60.

<sup>10</sup> S. Frątczak, *Muzeum Katyńskie. Oddział Muzeum Wojska Polskiego 1993-2003*, Warszawa 2003.

There have been some problems of late reported with hooliganism and graffiti vandalism on the Bykownia memorial site. Prof. Kola thinks this is only to be expected. And the future? Kola notes how the important Moscow-based NGO, 'Memorial', which in 2016 published the so-called 'list of executioners' with the names of nearly 40.000 NKVD officers from the 1930s is now unresponsive [which I can confirm from personal experience of writing to them in 2021] and since 2013 has been assigned the status of 'foreign agent' and increasingly harrassed by the Soviet authorities who in April 2018 opened their own museum at Katyń expounding 'the imperialist vision of Polish-Russian relations'.<sup>11</sup> Now with 'Putin's War' 'Memorial' will be dismembered. For example, the tireless Soviet crime researcher, Aleksandr Gurjanow, was detained in Moscow on 3 March 2022.<sup>12</sup> In late August 2022, reports emerged that the Polish World War II memorial at Surkonty in Belarus had been 'levelled' (*zrównano*) by the authorities there.<sup>13</sup>

Kola thinks a fifth *cmentarz polski* will be found in Kuropaty near Minsk<sup>14</sup>, while the researcher and former navy prosecutor, Andrij Amons, recently suggested at a 2020 conference of the Federation of Polish Organizations in Ukraine (FOP) that 3700 more Polish bodies from western Ukrainian prisons are to be found in the Kherson and Mikołajew districts according to archival evidence.<sup>15</sup> Maria Siwko of the Polski Dom in Kiev added, pointing out that: "It has been 80 years, however thus far historians, political scientists and archeologists haven't been able to create full lists and burial locations of all killed Polish citizens. A fantastic information base has been gathered, however many questions remain for the brand new, fourth generation of researchers".

Kola interjects that it will be too expensive to conduct DNA on every individual body at Bykownia, at least currently, and the procedure would be very complicated as there is no blood left, just bones to analyse. The Sejm proposed bringing all the Katyń victims (*Katyńczyków*) to rest in Poland. Kola was asked what he thought about this back in 2013. But again it was decided that the costs were too great and the remains too mixed up.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> J. Rogoża, M. Wytrwa, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> See Aleksandr Gurjanow *zatrzymany w Moskwie przez policję!*, Muzeum Katyńskie's Facebook feed, [on-line:] <https://www.facebook.com/MuzeumKatyńskie> – 2 VII 2023.

<sup>13</sup> R. Szoszyn, *Zniszczony cmentarz żołnierzy AK na Białorusi. Łukaszenko chce wymazać pamięć koparką*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 25 VIII 2022, [on-line:] <https://www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art36935451-zniszczony-cmentarz-zolnierzy-ak-na-bialorusi-lukaszenko-chce-wymazac-pamiec-koparka> – 2 VII 2023.

<sup>14</sup> S. Popowski, *Prawda o Kuropatach*, „Polityka”, 20 X 1988, p. 13; D. Boćkowski, *Kuropaty – Białoruski Katyń*, [in:] *Zbrodnia katyńska. Pytania pozostałe bez odpowiedzi*, ed. M. Tarczyński, Warszawa 2002, pp. 61-65.

<sup>15</sup> Polish News, [on-line:] [www.polishnews.co.uk](http://www.polishnews.co.uk) – 25 XI 2020; *Nowe dokumenty i tropy w sprawie zbrodni katyńskiej*, „Liczba rozstrzelanych Polaków jest większa”, TVN24, [on-line:] <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/zbrodnia-katynska-nowe-dokumenty-i-doniesienia-byly-prokurator-wojskowy-andrij-amons-ofiar-moze-byc-wiecej-4759946> – 25 XI 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Proszę o dodanie następującej treści przypisu nr. 16: The costs of DNA analysis have not prevented the impressive 'Powracamy po Swoich' programme currently run by the IPN and which in 2022 saw the locali-

**1. Dear Prof. Kola, please recap what your archaeological mission was, and what you found at Bykownia?**

The principal motivation of the initial reconnaissance works, carried out in 2001, was the verification of the supposition that the victims of the Katyń massacre were buried in the cemetery in Bykownia. At the same time, the archaeological research consisted in determining the full range of burials, discovering all graves, and obtaining as much information as possible, particularly from so-called “movable sources” (*źródeł ruchomych*), which could shed light on the events of 1937-1940. During our work, a total of 217 graves were examined, in 70 of them sets of objects were found indicating that Polish victims of the Katyń massacre were buried there.

More than 4000 artefacts were recovered. These objects, from research conducted in 2001, 2006 and 2007, were grouped into artefacts from individual graves and kept in an appropriate arrangement, as they were found. Then there were objects found in the so-called “deposit cavity”, marked as No. 1/01. The items from the excavations conducted in 2006 come from 21 Polish and 7 Ukrainian graves and from the so-called “Guards”, and the finds from 2007 were excavated from 33 Polish graves. As mentioned above, the entire collection consists of over 4,000 items or their fragments and has been donated to the Muzeum Katyńskie in Warsaw for display. It consists of elements of military uniforms and equipment, decorations, fragments of civilian clothing and footwear, personal and souvenir items, items related to religious worship (see Figures 4a & b on p. 87).

**2. My great-grandfather Rudolf Wizimirski is on the funerary wall at Bykownia as announced buried there. Before we discuss if we can be sure this is true, and what his last movements from the time of the second great *akcja*, which began on the night of 9-10 February, might have been, let me present a recap of his life.**

Rudolf was born in April 1883, and was thus not quite 57 years old when he was arrested. He was a military officer, climbing the ranks in the Austro-Hungarian army to Lieutenant, becoming the Commander of the Third Company XI Regiment of the 30th Field Rifle Battalion of the XI regiment of the Austrian army, which consisted of Ruthenians and Poles. He took part in the battles of Halych (August 1914) and Stanisławów (August 1916). Later, once Poland had become independent, he climbed the career ranks of the state police (*gendarmierie*), serving as a provincial commander in Tarnopol (deputy commander of the Eastern Małopolska, i.e. Lwów and Tarnopol), then Toruń and Łódź.<sup>17</sup> He

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sation of 111 war time bodies from work conducted in 111 different localities and 372 separate biological analyses, see <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/dla-mediow/komunikaty/177568,TEKST-AUDIO-quotPowracamy-po-swoichquot-Podsumowanie-dzialalnosci-Biura-Poszukiw.html>.

<sup>17</sup> J. Suliński, *Żandarmi zamordowani na Wschodzie w latach 1939-1940*, Warszawa 2012; B. Sprengel,

had changed his family name from Berger (his father Ignacy had moved to Galicia from the village of Stratzing in Lower Austria, where the family had a vineyard) to Wizimirski (his mother's maiden name) in 1919. He had married a tax advisor's (radcę skarbowego in Polish) daughter, Emilia Pękalska, which meant she could not muster the appropriate dowry for an officer's wife, and thus Rudolf was obliged to move to the reservists in 1907 with the rank of lieutenant. They had three children: Marysia, b. 1910 (my grandmother), Władysław, b. 1914 and Zbigniew (Adam) b. 1920. Rudolf retired early (after political pressure, but almost certainly to do with Pilsudski's coup in 1926) in 1927 at the age of 44 and gone to live in Brody. The repression of adherents of Dmowski's 'Narodowa Demokracja' movement (Endechs) was quite well known. My aunt explains: "Odszedł na skutek intryg politycznych (wszedł w konflikt z wojskiem na tle nieruchomości), mimo zasług podkreślonych w annałach policji i dbania o podwładnych". We have an official photographic portrait of him made in 1935 where he is wearing six medals, as well as epaulettes (*pagony* PL.) denoting the rank of major (responsible for 100 men, or 3 platoons). From investigation with the help of samples advertised on Antykwariat.pl, these medals were:

- a) Cross of Valour (*Krzyż Walecznych*) in 1921.
- b) 1926, a gold Cross of Merit (*Złoty Krzyż Zasługi*) for his contribution in the field of organization of the police (a red ribbon a red fluted cross with monstrance effects on the diagonals and a white ceramic/enamel bullseye sometimes with insignia, later PRL).
- c) 'Order Wojenny Virtuti Militari', the one tied up in the *sznur galowy*. This was a medal rewarding *virtuti militari* specifically for the defence of Lwów between 1918-21 (*obrony Lwowa*) and was known as *oznaka Orłata*.
- d) Medal from the War of Independence (*Wojna Niepodległości*). Depiction of three Hydras (symbolising three partitioning Powers) smitten with two swords and surrounded by the 'Bojownikom Niepodległości' motto.
- e) 'Medal Dziesięciolecia Odzyskanej Niepodległości' (blue ribbon, head bust of Pilsudski, gold colour).
- f) *Medal za wojnę polsko-sowiecką*, 1919-21 (ribbon is blue with red and white banding, a gold medal with an eagle).

He had gone to live in Brody probably because – as my uncle Zbyszek suggests – he was related by marriage to the owners of the Castle in Brody, the Molodecki family.<sup>18</sup> But Brody had also played a strong role in Rudolf's personal history. After graduating from the Lwów cadet school (that educated officers) in 1903 with a very good result, he was assigned *at his own request* to the 30th field rifle battalion in the garrison town of Brody, which then

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Wizimirski Rudolf Marian, [in:] *Toruński słownik biograficzny*, vol. 2, ed. K. Mikulski, Toruń 2000, pp. 272-274.

<sup>18</sup> T. Halikowska-Smith, *A Memoir of Childhood and Youth / albo pamiętnik dzieciństwa i młodości*, Mar-ki 2022 (forthcoming), p. 5.

bordered the Russian partition. In Brody, Ensign Berger served as a platoon commander and instructor at the non-commissioned officer school. Mainly Ruthenians studied there (Rudolf knew Ruthenian and German) alongside other nationalities.<sup>19</sup>

Rudolf Wizimirski was arrested by the NKWD in February 1940 at a time constituting the second ‘peak’ of four waves of deportations of Polish citizens into Soviet Union. The timeline and scope of the four waves of deportations has been broadly sketched by Keith Sword.<sup>20</sup> It was a coordinated *akcja* which embraced Ukraine and Bielorrussia, began on 9-10 February, and saw whole families deported with their belongings. This is what happened with Józef Naglik and Bronisław Szczyradłowski, two who are formally identified from a comb and dog tag and who lie (probably alongside Rudolf) in the fourth Katyń cemetery in Bykownia. Over 10% died during this *akcja* given the cold and hunger alone. The justification seems to have been that he was either considered belonging to the category of military colonists (*osadnicy wojskowi*), rewarded (decorated) for service in 1920 war against Bolsheviks, or because he was politically active (from 1933 as secretary of the Brodski Powiat Council and the President of the Independent Block of Cooperation with the Government in Brody [BBWR] from 1935). Beria’s note to Stalin dated 5 March, 1940 speaks of a ‘succession of k-r organisations bent on uprising’, where ‘k-r’ stands for counter-revolutionary.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, he was never heard of again. Rudolf’s wife, Emilia, and daughter, Maria, (who also had her own daughter Nulka with her at this time), fearing for their own arrest and deportation to Siberia (or rather Kazakhstan as was typically the case with wives and families of the convicted) had to spend every night in a different location with friends in Brody.<sup>22</sup>

Now there is the task of identifying Rudolf’s movements from the time of his disappearance. For this endeavour, we turn to the substantial and specific book used by Polish historians, *Śladem zbrodni katyńskiej* (On the trail of the Katyń Crime)<sup>23</sup> which was published by Centralne Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych (Central Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). There are two volumes of documentary anthology,

<sup>19</sup> P. Piegat (with the help of B. and Z. Wizimirscy), *I wojna światowa, front wschodni. Losy pradziadka Przemka Piegata, dziadka Zbigniewa Wizimirskiego*, a research project (*referat*) for his Gimnazjum in Radość, V 2018, in personal possession. For Brody in Habsburg times, see B. Kuzmany, *Brody. Eine galizische Grenzstadt im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, Wien–Köln–Weimar 2011; during the Polish II Rzeczpospolita, see Z. Kościów, *Brody. Przypomnienie kresowego miasta*, Opole 1993.

<sup>20</sup> K. Sword, *Deportation and Exile. Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*, Hampshire 1994 (later: New York 1996). See also P.H. Kosicki, *The Katyń Massacres of 1940*, SciencesPo, [on-line:] <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/katyn-massacres-1940.html#title3> – 2 VII 2023.

<sup>21</sup> *Katyń: dokumenty ludobójstwa. Dokumenty i materiały archiwalne przekazane Polsce 14 października 1992 r.*, ed. E. Wosik, transl. W. Materski, Warszawa 1992, item 9, pp. 34-37.

<sup>22</sup> Typed, unpublished memoir of Prof. Bogusław Halikowski, 1990, 7 pp., in family possession.

<sup>23</sup> *Śladem zbrodni katyńskiej*, eds. Z. Gajowniczek, G. Jakubowski, J. Tucholski, Warszawa 1998.

alongside older ones published shortly after the conclusion of World War 2, *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*<sup>24</sup> and *Zbrodnia Katyńska w świetle dokumentów*.<sup>25</sup>

The documentary point of departure is the two-page 'Notatka szefa NKWD ZSSR Ł. Beria dla J. Stalina', dated 5 March 1940.<sup>26</sup> What this revealing document states in considerable accuracy is that there were 14,736 prisoners-of-war or *jenców* (of which 97% Poles) in Soviet camps, at the same time as 10,685 Polish *aresztowanych* in the prisons of western Ukraine and Bielorrussia. Wizimirski, given his *stan nieczynny*, would fall within the second of these two rubrics. It would seem that, alongside other victims of those deportations from other provincial centres like Stanisławów (today Ivano-Frankivsk) or Włodzimierz Wolyński (today Volodymyr), Wizimirski would have been taken to a regional holding centre. This would have probably meant being held in Lwów for some time; at least statistically we know that of the 3000 prisoners later moved from western Ukraine to central Ukraine and thereafter executed, 900 came from Lwów.<sup>27</sup> In Lwów there were primarily three prisons: the Brygidki prison, the Lontsky St. (Łąckiego in Polish) prison and the prison on Zamarstyniv Street (Zamarstynowska in Polish).<sup>28</sup> Wizimirski's name does appear as number 460 on the 'Ukrainian Katyń List', one of the 3435 Polish citizens identified for execution on the document (a.k.a. Tsvetukhin list, [*Lista Cwietuchina*]), a list the Head of the 1st Special Department of the NKVD of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic [USSR], the senior lieutenant of state security Tsvetukhin, sent to the head of the 1st Special Department of the NKVD of the Soviet

<sup>24</sup> *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 1: *Jeńcy niepowiedzianej wojny: sierpień 1939 – marzec 1940*, eds. W. Materski [et al.], Warszawa 1995; *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2: *Zagłada: marzec-czerwiec 1940*, eds. W. Materski [et al.], Warszawa 1998.

<sup>25</sup> *Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle dokumentów*, foreword by W. Anders, 12 facsimile editions between 1948-1989.

<sup>26</sup> *Katyń: dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, item 9, pp. 34-37.

<sup>27</sup> See G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, p. 110. 500 prisoners were taken from Równo, 500 from Volhynia, 500 from Tarnopol, 200 from Drohobysz and 400 from Stanisławów.

<sup>28</sup> During the so-called 'NKVD murders' during the last eight days of June 1941, 1681 prisoners were killed in the Lontsky St. prison, 971 in Zamarstyniv and 739 in Brygidki. See J.P. Himka, *The Lontsky St. Prison Memorial Museum. An Example of Post-Communist Negationism*, [in:] *Perspectives on the Entangled History of Communism and Nazism. A Commaz Analysis*, eds. K.G. Karlsson, J. Stenfeldt, U. Zander, Lanham 2015, pp. 137-138; K. Kiebuszinski, A. Motyl, *The Great West Ukrainian Prison Massacre of 1941. A Sourcebook*, Amsterdam 2016. Tadeusz Riedl adds a fourth Lwowian prison and a site of Polish martyrdrom (męczeństwa) at Jachowicza, 3, Chodząc po Lwowie, Pelplin, 2007. To judge from the personal history of Władysław Jaworski, gunner, arrested in Lwów between 7 and 8 January 1940, prisoners were moved from Zamarstynowska, 9 during the summer of 1940 to alleviate desperate overcrowding. Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, file 800/1/0/-/47 (online at: <https://www.zapisyterroru.pl/dlibra>), a testimony database of the Witold Pilecki Institute of Solidarity and Valour, Warsaw). We know from the personal testimony of Józefa Puzkar, a hospital nurse from Złoczów, that all contact with family was denied whilst in prison. Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, file 800/1/0/-/48.



Union, Major of State Security Leonid Bashtakov). It was passed on by the Soviets to the Polish authorities on May 5, 1994 accompanied by 3435 files in five bags.<sup>29</sup>

Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 2002), which is the first work to make extensive use of the County Reports and the 40.000 depositions (answers to a ten-question questionnaire) from the 120.000 strong Anders Army held in the Hoover Institution in California, highlights the condition in Soviet prisons, the overcrowding (in Brygidki, there were 56 prisoners in cells designed for 17), the pitiful hygiene and reduction of the inmates, as well as the tensions among the inmates along lines of class and political antagonisms. One memorandum in the Hoover Institution Anders Collection explains how 'policemen, to make up for their past bureaucratic subordination, cursed county prefects; there were even fist fights between rank-and-file policemen and officers.'<sup>30</sup> Aleksander Wat in his memoir *Mój Wiek* recounts how his 'hair stood on end' on entering his cell at Zamarszynów jail, not just the crowded numbers but the 'old, pale, emaciated and unshaved with long beards [...]. I couldn't tell the difference between a 40 year-old and a 70 year-old man'. Inmates fainted from the thirst, and struggled to find a patch of floor to sleep on.<sup>31</sup>

But where was Rudolf Wizimirski killed? His name stands of course on the commemorative granite wall at Bykownia itself, although this is essentially supposition: individual bodies were not identified, while Cieniała and Materski (2007) remind us that of the 3435 on the Ukrainian list, only 2000 burials have been identified, and the NGO 'Memorial' has estimated that some 800 burial sites have been catalogued on the territory of the ex-Soviet Union with 'what appear to be remains of Poles' found in nearly all of them.<sup>32</sup> KGB Head Shelepin wrote in a note to N. Krushchev (9 March 1959) that 7.305 (of 11.000 arrested) were shot in the prisons of western Ukraine and western Bielorrussia following the decision of 5 March 1940.<sup>33</sup> However, Head of the NKVD Lavrentij Beria's communiqué 00350

<sup>29</sup> There is an original copy of the 'Ukrainian list' at the NGO Headquarters of Karta in ul. Narbutta, Warszawa. It was published as *Listy katyńskiej ciąg dalszy. Straceni na Ukrainie. Lista obywateli polskich zamordowanych na Ukrainie na podstawie decyzji Biura Politycznego WKP(b) i naczelnych władz państwowych ZSRR z 5 marca 1940 roku*, ed. Z. Gajowniczek, Warszawa 1994. See also T.S., *Lista Cwietuchina*, „Rzeczpospolita”, 2/3 V 1998, no. 102, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Hoover Institution, Stanford: California, Anders Collection, #8027.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wat, *Mój wiek*, London 1977, vol. 1, p. 324.

<sup>32</sup> *Katyń: a Crime without Punishment*, eds. A.M. Cieniała, N.S. Lebedeva, New Haven–London 2007, fn. 329, p. 529; *Annals of Communism; Katyń. State-Sponsored Extermination. Collection of Essays*, ed. M. Szonert-Binienda, Cleveland 2012, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> Shelepin's note 'Proposing to Destroy Documents of the Operation Sanctioned by the Politburo on 5 March 1940, 3 March 1959' is reproduced as document 110, [in:] *Katyń. A Crime...*, p. 332, and originates in the Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiskoi Federatsii, Moscow, f. 3, sealed packet no. 1, handwritten original; P.R. Gregory, *Lenin's Brain and Other Tales from the Secret Soviet Archives*, Stanford, Calif. 2008, pp. 7-8 publishes extracts from (one of?) Shelepin/Szelepin's 1959 memo without (frustratingly) formally referencing it. This is not the 'Wyciąg z protokołu Politbiura (decyzja z 5 marca 1940 r. – kopia

dated 22 March, 1940, specifically clause §2, informs us of the evacuation of 3000 arrestees taken from the western prisons to the prisons of central USSR – specifically Kiev, Kharkhiv and Kherson, and Sanford thinks the delays in the delivery of the Starobelsk POWs, who started to leave their camp on 5 April, was specifically because of the need to exterminate the western evacuees first.<sup>34</sup> If the second of these scenaria holds, then my great-grandfather would most probably have been shot in the cellars of the NKVD prison which at the time was the October Palace in Kiev, or in the nearby prison of Lyukanivka (Łukianowka in Polish), the name of a part of one of the city's districts, formerly a village. His arms would have been taken by two officiants, and a single shot to the back of the head administered at close range, various videos of re-enactments circulate widely on the internet.<sup>35</sup> Around 130-150 bodies were then transported daily to the woods of Bykownia for burial between the dates stipulated for the special operation, that is April 3 and May 19, 1940.

### 3. If Wizimirski was murdered in one of the three Lwów prisons, where would his body most likely be today and why is there a plaque in his name at Bykownia?

There are around 500 Polish bodies at Kharkhiv which are unaccounted for. We know they are Polish from the boots, uniforms, caps and accompanying relics. But we don't (yet) know how they got there. Other Polish bodies may be lying under the earth in Mikołajew in Ukraine, and elsewhere (see page 76).

At Bykownia there are only 1.980 Poles, and four intact skeletons. Kola insists: 'nie będzie można żadnych szczątków zidentyfikować imiennie, jak to mogło mieć miejsce w Katyniu czy Miednoje' ('It will not be possible to identify remains by name as was possible at Miednoje or Katyń', transl. by the author). But the 'Ukrainian list' contains 3435 names to be precise. So these bodies must be somewhere else, perhaps again in the forests surrounding Kharkhiv or the steppes around Kherson.

**We have already presented my great-grandfather's official portrait, which shows him wearing six medals won between 1918-1927, all of which have been identified from photographic evidence. One of the family mysteries is what happened to them?**

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dla A. Szeleпина z 27 lutego 1959 r.], reproduced as *Katyń: dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, item 7, p. 29. G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, p. 1 and 82 is one of the texts working on the assumption of 7,305 deaths in Ukrainian and Bielorrussian prisons. He too fails to reference satisfactorily accrediting only 'Shelepin's 1959 figures, in the documents handed over in 1992.'

<sup>34</sup> *Communiqué 00350*, [in:] *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2..., pp. 83-84. There is a translation in *Katyn: a Crime...*, doc. 53, p. 154. The communiqué is dated 22 March, 1940. Shelepin's note is in *Katyń: dokumenty ludobójstwa...*, pp. 26-27. The text has been (partially) translated into English in J. Adamska [et al.], *Katyń. Genocide, Politics, Morality*, Warsaw-Budapest 2010, p. 19. G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, p. 110 deals with the delays.

<sup>35</sup> Techniques developed and applied by the NKVD since 1936, see testimony of Mitrofan Vasilevich Syromatnikov in 1990-2 as recounted in *Katyń. Dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. 2..., pp. 472-500.

The family is very indignant when I suggest they might have been sold to survive the war. The family left their house in Brody in 1944 before the officially proclaimed evacuations of 1945-6, and travelled by train west. They had time to pack. So it would have been unlikely that they would just have been left there. Could he have had his medals when he was deported, or even executed?

No, unlike the Kharkhiv death pits, there were no medals discovered at Bykownia. We only found one or two *nieśmiertelniki*, or dogs-tags in Bykownia, and a few pendants (*przedmioty kultu religijnego*). Although more than 5000 objects, Polish objects, were found at Bykownia. Things like plastic combs, toothbrushes, shoes, *rogatywki*, (those four-cornered Polish military caps), coins of 50 *groszy*. They have been handed over to the Muzeum Katyńskie and exhibited in the perspex displays on the lower level of the museum there.

**4. Isn't it amazing that there is not a single primary historical account of this tragedy, no witness or account of these crimes?**

The operation was carried out in the highest secrecy. There were to be no witnesses. Apart from those directly involved in the massacre, no one else was to survive. But in the 1990s judicial investigators did manage to bring people forward. Dmitry Tokarev, former head of the Board of the District NKVD in Kalinin was forced to testify, if half-senile.<sup>36</sup> Or General Piotr Soprunenکو, blind, defended to the last by his daughter Yelena, who died of cancer in 1992.<sup>37</sup> At Miednoje one 85 year-old NKVD officer was found and interviewed. When I, Andrzej Kola, was invited to give a talk in Szczecin, an old member of the public informed that he had escaped from the internment complex which was the monastery at Starobielsk.<sup>38</sup> This is not the same as the fate of the few, four hundred or so, like Józef Czapski, who were sent on to the luxury internment camp at Gryazovets because they were thought pliable, or useful in some way to the Soviet regime (Czapski was himself born in St Petersburg).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, pp. 78, 90.

<sup>37</sup> *Katyn Massacre: General Soprunenکو's Role*, House of Lords Debate, 17 VII 1990, „Hansard” 1990, vol. 521, pp. 753-754; I. Parchimowicz, *Czy mogę rozmawiać z panem Soprunenکو*, „Polityka”, 12 VIII 1990, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> No escape attempts from Starobielsk are noted by Sanford, unlike Kozelsk (7 December 1939 foiled escape of Michniewicz and Rymaszewski, then five POWs who escaped on 16 March 1940 but were betrayed) or from Ostashkov (two escaped but re-captured 15 miles away). However, it had been relatively easy to escape from the collection camps during the first two-three weeks of captivity, G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, p. 57, fn. 107. We have the survivor Jan Bober's account (from Ostashkov) in the Instytut Polski i Muzeum Generała Sikorskiego, Kol. 138/276.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy Snyder, in writing his Introduction to J. Czapski, *Inhuman Land. Searching for the Truth in Soviet Russia 1941-1942*, New York 2018 provides very specific details about the methods of execution of the inmates of the three Soviet internment camps at Starobilsk, Ostashkov, Kozelsk. How were these details then obtained if not from testimonial evidence?

[Kola fails to mention the story of Parfijon Kiselow<sup>40</sup>, a guard at the NKVD complex in Katyń, or Ivan Krivoziertsev<sup>41</sup> (sometimes Krivozertsov), a collective farm worker and local resident who testified before various committees and groups of Poles and western representatives brought in by the Germans for propaganda purposes, or indeed the testimony of Titkov<sup>42</sup>, albeit dismissed by Sanford as ‘unnecessarily sensationalist’].

## 5. What were the differences between working at Kharkhiv and at Bykownia?

I conducted the Kharkhiv excavations before those at Bykownia. In 1994, 1995 and 1996 to be exact (three seasons of digs). In Kharkhiv a sanatorium for NKVD officers had been built on the site of the cemetery. In Bykownia the area had been merely fenced off with a high, wooden fence (what the Ukrainians call *parkan*).

In Kharkiv the bodies were well preserved in the clay, whilst in the sandy soil of Bykownia this was not the case. While the cut graves preserved their regular forms, the corpses inside them were all mixed up: only four intact bodies were discovered. Still, the bones were recoverable, so that we could count the number of buried there, unlike the case in other digs I have been involved in, such as the Nazi death camp at Belżec, where bodies were disposed of at great depth (3.6 meters) and in wax-fat transformation, or else as crematory ashes mixed with charcoal.<sup>43</sup>

In Bykownia we found one pit (*jama*) around 3.5 by 3.5 metres at a depth of 2.3 metres, which contained exclusively Polish artefacts dating from the end of the interwar period of officer class.

Ukrainians are more open about their past than Belorusians. It is no chance that we knew about the infamous ‘Ukrainian list’ long before the ‘Belorusian list’ [of Polish victims], on which the exact numbers of victims are still unclear, and that Minsk has stalled efforts to learn more about this period from 1996. Even though I have never formally learned the Ukrainian language, I was invited to speak on local radio programmes for up to half-an-hour.

## 6. The IPN (Institute of National Remembrance, or Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, founded in 1998) has produced six mighty tomes of ‘cemetery books’ (Księga Cmentarna) on Kijow-Bykownia, the last an iconographic tome.<sup>44</sup> I tried to use it to find an

<sup>40</sup> J. Trznadel, *Rosyjscy świadkowie Katyń (1943-1946-1991)*, „Zeszyty Katyńskie” 1992, nr 2, pp. 85-86, 113; *Parfien Kisielew*, Wikipedia, [on-line:] [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parfien\\_Kisielew](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parfien_Kisielew) – 2 VII 2023.

<sup>41</sup> See J. Rogoża, M. Wyrwa, *op. cit.*, p. 54 and *Zbrodnia katyńska w świetle dokumentów*, foreword by W. Anders, London, 12 facsimile editions between 1948-1989, pp. 202-205.

<sup>42</sup> P. Żaroń, *Agresja Związku Radzieckiego na Polskę 17 września 1939. Los jeńców polskich*, Toruń 1998, p. 289; G. Sanford, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> See details for grave pit #32, A. Kola, *Belżec. The Nazi Camp for Jews in the Light of Archeological Sources. Excavations 1997-1999*, Warsaw–Washington 2000, p. 38, *Biblioteka „Przeszłości i Pamięci”*.

<sup>44</sup> *Polski cmentarz wojenny Kijów-Bykownia. Księga cmentarna*, vol. 1: A-B, eds. A.K. Kunert [et al.], Warszawa 2015. The IPN was created for ‘the purpose of confronting the times of the Second World War

official write-up of my great-grandfather. But there was no text, just photographs of him. Can you please explain the idea behind these volumes and their execution.

I have been sent all of these volumes and, to be honest, have still not unwrapped them from the plastic film they were sent in. [We proceed to do just that and to inspect the volumes' contents] Volumes four and five have not been produced yet, although confusingly volume 6 has already come out as an 'iconographic' volume, in other words exclusively photographs. There have been changes in both the government and the agencies responsible for investigating crimes against Poles in World War Two. The Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa does not exist for more than five years [it was abolished August 1, 2016]. So it is not sure under what form the remaining volumes will come out.

**7. One of the documents in the so-called 'closed package no. 1, comprising the Katyn decision' is a note from the President of the KGB, Alexander Shelepin, dated 1959, with his recommendation to Khrushchev that the personal files of the Katyn victims should be destroyed. Can you tell me if individuals killed as part of Katyn still have their personal files somewhere in Moscow, or were these files destroyed?**

It is true that the above *Księga cmentarna* on Kijów-Bykownia reproduces so-called 'karta ewidencyjna więźnia NKWD', identity cards evidencing internment in NKVD camps, for example that of Kladiusz Wojakowski, dated 25 November 1939 imprisoned in the transit camp at Juchnow (Yukhnov), the site of a former tuberculosis sanatorium Pawliszczew (Pawliszew) Bor.<sup>45</sup> But this is the exception, not the rule. Otherwise Sovietologists like Paul Gregory have followed closely the fate of the Politburo Memorandum (the Katyn decision) across the generations of Soviet leaders through Khrushchev and Andropov up until Gorbachev, who was sheepish and uncomfortable in the presence of Stalin's guilt, without going so far as to admit it.<sup>46</sup> But Gregory does not pursue the individual files of victims, only suggesting vaguely that a lot remains lying around in Soviet archives. Sebastian Karwat, *kustosz* at the Muzeum Katyńskie in Warsaw, believes the contrary: that personal records of the victims of the Katyn Massacre were purposefully destroyed, most likely after the Shelepin note of 1959.<sup>47</sup> Materski and Cieniało refer to a 'decision made in 1959 to destroy the personal files of the Polish prisoners who had been murdered in Spring 1940'.<sup>48</sup>

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and communism, first and foremost, from the perspective of oppression and social resistance', E. Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland. Contested Pasts and Future Identities*, London–New York 2013, pp. 13-14, *BASEES/Routledge Curzon Series on Russian and East European Studies*, vol. 88.

<sup>45</sup> Original in Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (CAW), Kartoteka polskich jeńców wojennych z 1939 r.

<sup>46</sup> P.R. Gregory, *op. cit.*, chapter entitled 'Scurrilous Provocation'. *The Katyn Massacre*.

<sup>47</sup> Interview of 21 III 2022.

<sup>48</sup> *Katyn: A Crime...*, p. 240.

What I, Andrzej Kola, would say is that Polish and Russian historians, united through associations such as the Polsko-Rosyjskiej Grupie do Spraw Trudnych (Российско-польская группа по сложным вопросам), as well as members of the 'Memorial' Society in Moscow, which has recently been shut down by the Russian authorities, have been searching for them for many years in Russian and Ukrainian archives, but so far without success. We are still hoping to find some copies somewhere, in spite of the orders for their destruction, but the chances are slim.



Figure 1. Prof. Andrzej Kola with a team of Polish and Ukrainian archeologists leading the exhumations in 2011



Figure 2. Rudolf Wizimirski 'w mundurze galowym', around 1935



Figure 3a, b. Former Lyukaniwka prison, Kiev where Polish officers were murdered



Figure 4a, b. Polish artefacts discovered during the exhumations conducted at Bykownia in 2007

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