Murder in the Katyn Forest

An eyewitness to the massacre of Polish officers
Swianiewicz’s report

Prof. Stanisław Swianiewicz, a prisoner of the Kozielsk camp, was withdrawn from the transport just before his execution. He was taken to the NKVD prison in Lubianka. The Russians decided that it could be useful to them, as he was an outstanding economist, an expert in the economies of the USSR and Germany. The Soviets sentenced him to 8 years in a labor camp for espionage. After his release in April 1942, he joined General Anders’ army. There he submitted a report on his stay in Kozielsk. He saw prisoners transferred from Kozielsk to cars and taken to the Katyn forest. In 1944, he presented his testimony to the British ambassador to the Polish government. This testimony became part of the book “The Katyn Massacre in the Light of Documents”, published in 1949, accusing the Soviet Union of murdering Polish prisoners of war. In the People’s Republic of Poland, Katyn could not be spoken of about 11,000 Polish officers and the Germans end up being blamed. In the mid-90s, he became First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, handed over to Poland some of the Soviet documents relating to this matter.

Moscow’s lie about the genocide in Katyn

The first information about the Katyn massacre was reported by the German press in 1943. A special commission of the International Red Cross was established to prepare a report. It showed that the murder had taken place before the Germans attacked the USSR.

TheRussians insisted that it was the work of the Nazis. The Katyn case was even supposed to be brought before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The prosecutor from the USSR, Roman Rudenko, brought an indictment of genocide from work. Children were not admitted or written in history. In the People’s Republic of Poland, Katyn could not be spoken of.

Hidden truth

It is forbidden to talk about the Soviet crime

Until the end of the 1980s, the authorities made sure that the Soviet crime did not come to light, and the Germans ended up being blamed. In the People’s Republic of Poland, Katyn could not be spoken of or written in history.

The families of the murdered were harassed, widows were fired from work. Children were not admitted to universities. Until 1989, it was forbidden to mention the Katyn massacre as a Soviet crime. For the first time, the murders committed in Katyn were mentioned during rallies in October 1956, as opposition activists mention. The fight against the Katyn lie was started by the second-circulation press in the mid-1980s. From the 1980s, Fr. Stefan Niedzielski celebrated holy masses for the victims of the Katyn massacre in the Warsaw church of St. Charles Borromeo. An epitaph appeared on the church: “To the Fallen in the East”.

He fought for the memory of murdered Poles

Chaplain Peszkowski

Zdzisław Peszkowski, a participant in the September campaign in 1939, was one of the few survivors of the POW camp in Kozielsk. He left for the Middle East together with the army of General Władysław Anders. He walked the entire combat trail, settled in Great Britain after the war and was ordained a priest. He returned to Poland in 1989. He devoted his life to the Katyn cause. In the mid-90s, he became the chaplain of inter alia, Katyn Families. He was the founder and president of the “Golgota of the East” Foundation. Thanks to him, military cemeteries in Katyn, Kharkiv and Miednoje were created, as well as numerous monuments and memorials in honor of Polish officers. He emphasized that the flower of the Polish intelligentsia was buried in the Katyn forests. In January 2009, the Seym supported his candidacy for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Among the victims of the Katyn Massacre were 12 generals, one admiral, 82 colonels, 265 lieutenant colonels, 563 majors, 1,521 captains, 18 naval captains, 1,630 lieutenants, 4,189 other officers, and 21 clergymen of various denominations. Reserve officers, called to the army at the outbreak of the war, were also a large group. They represented the Polish intelligentsia: doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, writers, political activists, and officials.

Among others executed, there were officers, doctors, lawyers, officials, and clergy that were murdered in Katyn by the Third Reich. In its judgment issued in 1946, the Tribunal ignored the case of the murder of Polish officers due to lack of evidence. The USSR Authorities admitted responsibility of Soviet Russia for the Katyn massacre only after 50 years, calling it one of the most serious crimes of Stalinism. The NKVD commissioner Lavrenty Beria and his deputy Vsevolod Merkulov were indicated as guilty. In 1990, Mikhail Gorbatchev, the then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, handed over to Poland some of the Soviet documents relating to this matter.

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