

ZEUGENSCHRIFTTUM

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GERSDORFF, Rudolf-Christoph Frhr.v.	47 3447	<u>III</u>	
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Sachkatalog:	Gersdorff, Rudolf-Christoph Frhr. v. Jaekel, Clemens Dr. (Gen.Stabsarzt) Nebe, Arthur (SS-Brif.)		
Katyn			
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THE TRUTH ABOUT "KATYN."

Source: Genmaj. Rudolf von GERSDORFF, onetime G-2 of Central Army Group on Russian Front.

The Russian prosecution in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial has stated that the 10,000 Polish corpses dug up in the Spring of 1943 in a wood near Katyn constitute a crime on the part of the German Army. As evidence depositions of Russian peasants and members of a German engineer battalion, apparently Russian prisoners of war, are offered.

It is not my purpose to cast the slightest doubt on the wealth of evidence against the Nazi terror which has been offered during this trial, since I have at all times been convinced of the guilt of the National Socialist regime. On the other hand it would depreciate the value of the evidence offered so far if an obvious untruth like the Russian account of Katyn were to remain uncontested. The Nuremberg Trial is too important an event to be burdened with an open lie.

I was G-2 of the Central Army Group from 1942 to 1943. At the beginning of September 1941 the HQ of the Army Group was moved from Borisov to Krasny Bor near Smolensk. A neighboring village to Krasny Bor is Gniezdovo. In the beginning of 1943 a grave was accidentally discovered in a forest about 2 Km away from Gniezdovo. Nazi propaganda later preferred to refer to "Katyn" as a name easier to remember, although Katyn is a larger place some 4 to 5 Km away. It was also feared that the fact that there were prehistoric Hunnic graves near Gniezdovo might provide material for counter-propaganda as casting doubt on the facts. The little forest lay along the bank of the Dnieper river. In it was a wooden villa which, according to the statements of the local population, had been a rest home for political Commissars from Smolensk, and which, since September 1941 had been HQ of the Army Group's Signals Regiment (commanded by Col. Ahrens). The HQ of the Army Group was in occupation of the Gniezdovo area uninterruptedly until the late summer of 1943. It is absolutely impossible for the crime to have occurred during this period, as it would have been committed under the very noses of our Group. Even if it had been committed during the short period between the capture of Smolensk and the movement of the Army Group to the Smolensk area, the commission of this crime could not have been kept a secret from the supreme military authorities, especially if it had been the work of a German army unit, as the Russians claim. The so-called SS police raiders (EINSATZKOMMANDOS) were, to my knowledge, withdrawn on orders from the Army Group, at the time of the taking of Smolensk. The SS and Police commander in the region of our Army Group was the then SS Brigadefuehrer Nebe, a former officer and criminal law official who had been taken into the SS when all police functions were transferred to them and whose antipathy to their methods and ideology appears from the fact that he participated in the 20 Jul 44 plot against Hitler, after raising many objections to SS atrocities. He was later dismissed from office. Nebe would never have countenanced such a crime as the shooting of thousands of Polish officers. In any case we should have had to hear about it.

In the Spring of 1943, if I remember correctly, in March, the Secretary of the Military Police (FELDPOLIZEISEKRETAER) Voss, who was responsible for the protection and counter-intelligence security of the HQ, reported to me the following circumstances: Some Polish volunteer auxiliaries had just arrived at the Eastern Front and marched through Gniezdovo. They enquired of the Russian population, as they always did, about the fate of Polish prisoners-of-war from the 1939 fighting. Some inhabitants of Gniezdovo then told them

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told them that early in April 1940 several trainloads of Polish prisoners-of-war had arrived at Gniezdovo station and were marched by GPU men from there to the woods along the Dnieper. This whole area was strictly barred to outsiders and was known as an execution ground of the GPU. Shots were heard all day long and nothing was ever seen of the Poles afterwards. The Polish volunteers went into the wood and dug under the younger trees (about 3 year growth). They dug up a mass grave, full of corpses in the uniforms of Polish officers. As they had to proceed with their march they said prayers, threw the earth back into the grave and set up a tall birchwood cross.

I had the inhabitants then interrogated under oath. Their statements fully confirmed the data already received. I personally saw many of these Russians and they repeatedly described the affair in such a way that there was no question but that the GPU had been responsible for the shooting. The case was reported on through military channels and the Armed Forces High Command (OKW) decided that the mass graves should be opened in order to identify the dead and inform their relatives. The Polish Red Cross in Warsaw was to take the main part. If it turned out that the statements of the inhabitants were true then the case was to be exploited for its propaganda value. The Army Group entrusted the work of exhumation to the coroner (GERICHTSARZT) in the Supply Services (OBERQUARTIERMEISTER) Division, whose duty it was to investigate alleged violations of the Geneva Convention. I forget his name at the moment but he was a professor at Breslau University who was a leading physician in the Breslau Court Clinic before the war. His name can be discovered by questioning the then Army Group doctor, Generalstabsarzt Dr. Jaekel, now in the PW camp at Allendorf in Hessen. This professor had an assistant and a commission of four or five people from the Polish Red Cross, including one or two doctors. The site was cordoned off and guarded by Polish volunteers. Then a mass grave was opened for inspection in which were 5000 to 6000 corpses in 12 layers, one on top of the other. All the corpses had from one to three pistol-bullet holes in the back of the head. There were bodies of two generals, a few staff officers and enlisted men (clearly orderlies) and all the rest were captains and lieutenants of the Polish Army. The corpses were all decomposed but because of the dry sandy soil and the uniforms they had held together and could be carefully exhumed, examined and identified. The legal-medical examination showed beyond doubt that the cause of death must have occurred about three years earlier. This was confirmed by the tree-growth (BAUMWUCHS) over the graves which was established indisputably by Russian and German forestry experts as three years old. On the corpses were found all their papers and a large amount of paper money (zlotys). No valuables were found except amulets under some of the shirts, a general's cigarette case and a few rings. Among the papers discovered were letters from relatives which the officers had received during captivity, and numerous diaries. The letters dated from 1939 and the beginning of 1940. If the Nuremberg International Tribunal wants to question the relatives of the victims of "Katyn" they can ask them when their postal contact with the prisoners was interrupted. The diaries recounted the daily life of the dead in detail. All these papers were either preserved by the dry sand or made legible by the application of chemicals. From these diaries it appeared that these officers were the bulk of those taken by the Russians when they marched into Poland in 1939. After several intermediate stops they were brought to a former monastery in Kosiolisk where they seem to have received correct treatment. They thought of nothing of course but their future release and return to Poland and thought their release was imminent when at the

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when at the end of March 1940 they suddenly entrained and moved westward towards Smolensk. Some of the diaries continue until a few minutes before the shooting and state they stopped for a long time at a little station behind Smolensk (Gniezdovo) were discharged from the train and taken in black closed vehicles to a nearby wood. They still did not suspect what was in store for them until their valuables were taken from them, when diary entries show they knew they were going to be shot. All these diaries end in the first April days of 1940.

Two more graves were discovered, also by looking for places where the tree-growth was three years old. In one grave many bodies were found with the hands tied behind their backs, and others with clothing pulled around their heads. These men were clearly people who had been guilty of resistance.

The propagandistic exploitation of the case was entrusted to the propaganda detachment under Major Kost, who came under the command of the commander of the communications zone behind the Center Army Group, General von Schenkendorff. Deputations and commissions came to Smolensk to view the site, without any special explanation or accusation being given. Among the visitors were the Archbishop of Cracow, a commission of neutral news correspondents, a commission of neutral legal-medicine experts, a Red Cross commission, deputations of Polish PWs, officers and EM, and deputations of British and American PWs.

Special importance and evidential value attached to the visits of the legal physicians who voluntarily made dissections of the bodies. For all its horror the event was an opportunity never likely to be repeated, for scientific study. They all concurred that the deaths had occurred three years previously. The commission comprised members from Switzerland, Holland, Hungary, Norway, France, Finland &c (sic). The only name I remember is that of the Swiss representative, who was called either Prof. Niville or Miville and came from Berne. The White Book published at the time by the German Foreign Office will give all the names. The Nuremberg Tribunal could at any time summon these foreign doctors to testify. Of the PW deputations I remember only that one of the Englishmen in Smolensk was member of the British football eleven.

All the visitors to "Katyn" were clearly impressed and completely convinced by the abundance of testimony that the shooting had occurred at the beginning of April 1940 and was the work of the GPU. Even those who came fortified against being fooled by smart propaganda found it impossible to explain away the evidence as based on any possible trickery.

Everyone who saw the bodies and the moving documents of these men can have no doubt that the shooting of these Polish officers occurred long before the German invasion of Russia.

A total of 4000 to 5000 bodies were identified. The warmer weather made it imperative, for reasons of hygiene, to suspend the work, which was to be resumed in the fall. By that time circumstances on the front had changed, Smolensk was too near the enemy and the Army Group HQ was moved to the region of Orscha. The two generals were buried in two single graves. The rest of the bodies were properly re-interred in new graves. Meanwhile another mass grave was discovered about as large as the first, so that the estimation of 10,000 to 12,000 bodies is certainly not too high. The entire handling of the case was conducted along military and scientific lines. No National Socialist Party or SS authority had at any times any influence over the proceedings.

I repeat in closing that I am aware that the crime of Gniezdovo-Katyn has been surpassed many many times by the murders of Jews and other Nazi crimes, in particular the concentration camps, but I am equally sure that the Polish officers were never shot by German hands, still less by members of the German Army.

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RG 84
Veröffentlichung
in
Hamburg
PolAD
817/1
Verhandlungen?