

Resume

The victims of Katyn massacre from the area of former Czechoslovakia

This publication summarizes the results of a long-term research lasting from the autumn 1989 at the former workplace of Silesian Department of The Academy of Sciences of Czechoslovakia and later in Silesian Museum and at Silesian University in Opava. The research concerned the persons born or shortly before the war living and working in the area of current Czech Republic and who became the victims of so called Katyn massacre. These people were mainly Polish coming from nowadays Czech part of Czieszyn Silesia (so called Zaolzie) which was joined to Poland in 1938. When the World War II broke up, the local men participated in defence against the German attack. After the retreat of the army to the East of Poland, the men were taken prisoners by Soviet Army. The Polish officers and police members were deported to prison camps and in spring 1940 were on command from Moscow executed. The total number is estimated at about 22 000, including almost 500 people from Czech lands. The village of Katyn near Smolensk became the symbol of this crime and already in 1943 German soldiers uncovered the first mass graves. The graves contained at about 4 and half thousand Polish officers including also a hundred officers from Czech lands. The victims were mainly reserve officers, members of Polish intelligentsia – teachers, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, civil servants. For instance, the second lieutenant JUDr. Andrzej Rieger, born in Ostrava- Vítkovice, was the head of personnel department of Mining-metallurgical company in Czieszyn. He wrote a diary about his stay in captivity which ends in the train taking him to Katyn Forest. The diary was discovered during the exhumations and nowadays, it is one of the fundamental sources concerning the relations in the camp in Kozelsk. The second camp for Polish officers was situated in Starobelsk in Ukraine. From the camp, the prisoners were taken to Charkov to be shot and buried at the edge of the town. Among about 4 thousand victims there were 33 persons from Czech lands, e.g. major MVDr. Adolf Wöllersdorfer from Mosty near Czech Czieszyn who, after left the army, worked as a vet in his home town. His son became in 1991 the first chairman of “Katyn” association in the former Czechoslovakia; however, in 50’s the Czech authority did not allow him to study at university in Prague arguing that his father as a “fascist Polish officer” fought against Soviet Army. Another victim from Charkov was the second lieutenant JUDr. Józef Markiel from Orlová, the Jablunkov district court judge. He had married shortly before the war and his wife had been waiting for his return for 21 years in vain before she married the second time.

The Polish policemen were imprisoned in a prison camp in Ostashkov, from where were taken to Tver (former Kalinin) to be shot and were buried in the forest by Mednoje village. There are buried at about 6 and half thousand victims, among them 347 Polish from Czech lands. There were two groups of them. The young men who were born there, passed the compulsory military service in Czechoslovak army and many gained uncommissioned office formed the first group. They worked often as craftsmen and workers but shortly after the annexation of the Czech part of Czieszyn Silesia to Poland, took up on a job offer and became the civil servants of Polish state. Then, they joined police forces or frontier guards troops. For example Karol Dominik, native of Lazy, gained sergeant in Czechoslovak army and was employed in custom service in Bata Company in Zlín. After he returned home, he could not find any job thus he joined Polish police. He had been married only for three months when the war and evacuation to East began and he was taken prisoner and eventually shot. He never learnt that his daughter had been born; she is now a member of association Katyn Family. The second group comprised mostly senior policemen who were in 1938 sent from Poland to enforce the local police troops. For instance, chief sergeant Józef Pilich, who had already been fighting in Polish Legions during World War I, had been in service of Polish gendarmerie and police from its origin. Finally, he was transferred from Mikołów to search department in Frystat. He did not return from Russia but his family settled here and his son is the chairman of present association “Katyn Family in the Czech Republic”.

In April 2011, the exhumation works in the forest of Bykovnia town, the suburb of Kiev, were resumed. The found archive documents testify that the Polish from so called Ukraine list of

victims including at about 3 and half names were presumably buried here. Among them, six persons coming from Czech lands have been found so far, e.g. division general Rudolf Prich born in Opava. In September 1939, he returned from superannuation back to active service and became renowned as defence commander of outskirts of Lviv where he was later imprisoned and eventually deported to Kiev to be annihilated. All information indicate that he was buried in Bykovnia as other victims from Czech lands. Kuropaty, the suburb of Minsk in Belorussia can be a similar place but the Belorussian list of victims has not been found yet. On file, there still remain 56 Polish from Czech lands who disappeared after the Soviet conquest of eastern Poland and whose further fate is not known. On separate file, there are other five persons who did not die in immediate connection with Katyn case but were shot or executed under different circumstances. For example, evangelic military chaplain major Karol Banzel, born in Czieszyn and former parson in Orlova was murdered in prison during evacuation of Soviet authorities from Lviv before German attack in June 1941.

The number of discovered victims from current area of the Czech Republic thus totals 485 people, together with unverified cases 546 people. Less than a half of them, together 230 persons, are those who were born here, the rest are people who moved here shortly before the war or were assigned here because of their job. The book portrays biographies of all victims, verified in archive sources, literature and during contacts with relatives; the photographs of almost one half of the victims are present. It contains also information about history and results of existing research in this field, about used archive sources and literature, about criteria of registration of the victims, their origin and structure.

Briefly, the book mentions also other not well-known Czech (or Czechoslovak) connections with Katyn massacre, e.g. inconsistent witness of international medical committee members MUDr. František Hájek and MUDr. František Šubík of the exhumation in Katyn, similar to witness of František Kožík, participant of the delegation of European writers to Katyn in 1943, witness of former Wehrmacht soldiers who saw graves in Katyn or Polish officers and policemen from Czieszyn Silesia who were lucky to escape from deportation to Soviet prison camps.

The publication closes with an outline of ways of commemoration of victims of Katyn massacre in the Czech Republic. It portrays the history of local association “Katyn family” and some actions held in Czech Republic to honour the memory of victims (book publications and articles in newspapers and magazines, radio and TV programmes, documentaries, document expositions, scientific conferences, lectures and meetings for public, memorial plaques of massacre victims etc.) are reminded. This book is also intended to commemorate the victims of Katyn massacre, is published in Polish on the occasion of unveiling the memorial plaques with names of victims on the World War II memorial on Olza riverside in Czech Czieszyn.